

Blomidon Naturalists Society



SUMMER 2009 NEWSLETTER

Volume 36 · Number 2

The primary objective of the Society shall be to encourage and develop in its members an understanding and appreciation of nature. For the purpose of the Society, the word “nature” will be interpreted broadly and shall include the rocks, plants, animals, water, air, and stars.

FROM THE BNS CONSTITUTION



The Blomidon Naturalists Society

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BNS Newsletter

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Contents

VOLUME 36 ❁ NUMBER 2

- 7 Editorial: Out & About *by Jean Timpa*

CLUB NOTES & NOTICES

- 9 Call for Photos: 2010 BNS Natural History Calendar
10 Nature Trust Seeks Photos *by Shannon McDonald*
11 Board of Directors Report – Summer 2009 *by Rick Whitman*
12 Upcoming Events

NATURE COUNTS

- 16 A Green Winter Bird List *by Bernard Forsythe*

FIELD TRIP REPORT

- 18 Wolfville Area Birds *by Jim Wolford*
21 Cape Split Hike No.1 *by Jim Wolford*
22 Blomidon Provincial Park *by Jim Wolford*
25 Fundy Shore Birds *by Wayne Neily*
27 Herbert River Canoe Trip *by Patrick Kelly*
29 Palmeters Woods *by Nancy Nickerson*
31 Herbert River Trail Field Trip *by Patrick Kelly*

YOUTH

- 33 BNS Regional Science Fair Awards *by John Belbin*

NATURAL HISTORY

- 35 Birding by Bike *by Andrew Steeves*
37 For the Birds *by Patrick Giffin*

BOOK REVIEW

- 40 Where Have the Birds Gone? *by Derek Allerton*

BIOGRAPHY

- 42 Fred J. Payne, 1931–2007 *by Peter Austin-Smith*
46 Dr. Carlyle Smith Beals, Canadian Astronomer *by Merritt Gibson*

WEATHER

- 48 Spring 2009 *by Larry Bogan*

ASTRONOMY

- 51 What's In The Sky? *by Roy Bishop*

BNS 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:

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Digital photographs should be submitted to
doug@fundymud.com

**Submission deadline for Autumn:
September 13, 2009**

Out and About

Jean Timpa, editor

This 2009 summer issue of the BNS Newsletter marks the end of our first year of printing by Gaspereau Press; thanks Gary Dunfield and Andrew Steeves and crew for continuing with us during this economic downturn. Treasurer Ed Sulis tells us that the Newsletter is currently secure financially. We mail out about 250 copies: 170 to paid-up members and the remainder to honorary members and complimentary recipients (such as schools and libraries). Several years ago we had about 215 paid memberships, so it would be wonderful if we could attract more members once again, as each person who joins brings fresh ideas and support to BNS.

We could use two more volunteers: one to collect and transport any historical material to the BNS archives at Acadia University, and another to search for people or businesses willing to place ads in the Newsletter. Neither position will take up a great deal of time but will make us a better organization. Please contact any of the executive if you can help out.

Here is some potentially good news: Premier Darrell Dexter has apparently promised to establish a community land trust that would be able to buy land or its development rights. According to a *Chronicle Herald* article, the trust “will ensure that communities can retain land that is important for their traditional economic, tourism, and recreational uses.” Better yet, it will be independent from government control. I have been wondering if the Nova Scotia Nature Trust could be a valuable and able recipient of such lands, as this is their specialty and they are already set up for such acquisitions.

The issue of chunks of natural habitat disappearing at an all-too-rapid rate reared its ugly head about two years ago with the

announcement by the J.D. Irving Company that it wished to divest itself of its timber holdings (approximately 69,000 ha) in southwestern Nova Scotia now that it is mostly cut over. It has been replanted with White Pine and Red Spruce, our provincial tree. Much of the seedling material is genetically modified, another very controversial subject. According to an astute scientist friend of mine it would take at least a thousand years to be rid of this genetic engineering *if* the area is left alone to evolve back into forests somewhat akin to what he and I knew and enjoyed so much when we were on wilderness trips with our parents in the great forest, following the routes of the Mi'kmaq who laid out the pathways. Now that same land is crisscrossed with very sturdy dirt roads and bridges and is ungated almost to the middle of the province. Where once we took all day to paddle and portage at least eight carries, there is now one portage to access the same point in the injured forest. No wonder our mainland moose are having a difficult time to survive as a species, among other problems. They need a lot of old-growth mixed forest in which to roam, and there is too little of it now.

Apparently some of the 69,000 ha has been sold, but to whom the article does not say. Our previous government bid on a mere 8,500 ha of this land, but I do not know if this action was successful.

We can hope that this will not become an empty election promise, but a new approach to our forest problems for all the critters who need its shelter and source of nourishment, and for people to enjoy in a caring manner. I suspect this legislation could also be used to secure our coastlines and islands against foreign investors. Other Maritime provinces have this sort of legislation, but we do not. This leaves us very vulnerable to unhappy situations such as nearly happened at Whites Cove on Digby Neck.

As outdoor enthusiasts we need to keep our eyes and ears on this issue to encourage the making of this proposed legislation and to bring other people on board to let the government know that we do care and want to secure this kind of protection for Nova Scotia. We can make a big difference here for future generations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A great many thanks to all of you who have done whatever you can to help the Blomidon Naturalists Society during this last quarter, when very discouraging economic news has taken up much of everyone's time and energy. Treasurer Ed Sulis reports that we are doing quite well financially. We are doing well in spirit, too, as a helpful number of you continue to volunteer to keep BNS rolling along happily.

NOTICE

Call for Photos: 2010

BNS Natural History Calendar

Photo submissions are invited for possible use in the 13th edition of our society's Natural History Calendar. Submissions should be in one of three forms:

- Electronic (JPEG format, file size between 300 KB and 2 MB)
- Colour slide
- Colour negative

Electronic images are preferred. If only a print is available, it should be at least 8 × 10 (inches). If a colour negative is submitted, it would be helpful to include a small print for an initial evaluation of the photo. Negatives, slides, and prints will be returned, so be sure to include your name, telephone number, and postal address.

Photos of natural history interest are preferred. Please submit no more than ten of what you consider to be your most suitable photos.

Suitability involves technical quality (sharp focus, not under- or over-exposed), composition (object of interest nicely positioned, no

distracting background), and content (a photo that calendar users will enjoy looking at for a month).

Send submissions to Roy Bishop by e-mail (roy@xcountry.tv) or by post (RR 1, Avonport, NS B0P 1B0). For more information, call Roy at 542-3992. Deadline for submissions: Labour Day, September 7, 2009. Calendar committee: Roy Bishop, Merritt Gibson, Sherman Williams

NOTICE

Nature Trust Seeks Photos

Shannon McDonald

The Nova Scotia Nature Trust is looking to expand its image library, and we're hoping you can help. We are looking for photographs of landscapes and habitats, particular species, and shots of people interacting with nature, as well as shots taken specifically on Nature Trust lands throughout Nova Scotia.

The pictures will be used in our communications materials, in funding proposals, and anywhere we need beautiful shots to get our message across. For a detailed version of our wish list, see our online brochure: <http://nsnt.ca/pdf/Photo%20Needs%20Flyer.pdf>

We are looking mainly for print-quality photographs, but web-quality photographs may also be useful. Please note that the Nature Trust cannot offer compensation for any photos taken; however, we can offer recognition and photo credit whenever we use your photos.

Please contact me with any questions or if you have photos you think we could use: Shannon McDonald, conservation projects assistant, NSNT, Tel: 902 406-3320, or e-mail: Shannon@nsnt.ca.

Board of Directors Report

Summer 2009

by Rick Whitman, BNS president

Your board met on May 28 for our last planned meeting before September. I was able to report that we have completed the formal documents that transfer the BNS archives to the Acadia University Archives. Our collection has been given a detailed listing, of which we have a copy, and is available for information requests through the Acadia archives/library system. We have given Acadia written permission to copy and send out requested documents. In other words, our publications are more available to the world than ever before. The board and Bill and Brenda Thexton deserve our thanks for this major accomplishment.

As a result of the archive process, we now have a collection of past newsletters that are surplus. These have been inventoried, and the board will carefully decide the highest use for them.

Ed Sulis reported that BNS finances continue to be sound and that we will support the Green Dragon youth program as planned. As I reported at the last evening meeting, a BNS member who wishes to remain anonymous has donated \$3,000 to the Green Dragon program. This is a wonderful contribution and may serve as an inspiration to others. The Green Dragon program also received \$3,500 from the TD Bank Friends of the Environment Foundation. Ed also reported that following the final notice in the spring Newsletter, 2009 membership is now 170 paid, only six below last year. It appears that membership is almost stable, but we would rather grow than decline, so members are encouraged to recruit likely new members.

The board also discussed a final home for six complete sets of the BNS Natural History Calendar (undertaken by Roy Bishop), the Annapolis Valley Schools Science Fair (John Belbin), informal summer program ideas, and liability issues.

Take advantage of our summer field trips and have yourselves a fine summer overall.

CLUB NOTES

Upcoming Events

MEETINGS

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings are held at 7:30 p.m., usually on the third Monday of each month, in the auditorium of The K.C. Irving Environmental Science Centre on University Avenue, Wolfville. Parking is available at Wheelock Dining Hall, along Crowell Drive immediately east of the Irving Centre, at the Acadia Arena, Festival Theatre, the Student Union Building, or on Westwood Avenue. Everyone is welcome. [At press time, the location for the October meeting is not yet confirmed.]

Monday, September 21, 2009 – TBA

Monday, October 19, 2009 – *Cultural and Natural History of Brier Island*, by June Swift. June is a resident of Brier Island, which is known for its beauty as well as being one of the birding hotspots in the province. Whether it is whale watching, wildflowers, birds, beaches, marshes, or rocky shoreline, all can be found on this relatively tiny island. June is an author, photographer, and naturalist. She is the author of *Brier Island's Wildflower Field Guide* (Westport, NS, 2002).

Monday, November 16, 2009 – *Sharing Our Environment with Bears*, by Tony Nette. Depending on the circumstances, an encounter with a bear can be instructive, fascinating, spiritual, or terrifying. Tony Nette is manager of wildlife resources for the Department of Natural Resources in Kentville.

Monday, December 14, 2009 – *Galileo, the IYA, and Our Place in the Universe*, by Roy Bishop. To commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first use of a telescope in astronomy, the International Astronomical Union and the United Nations have designated 2009 as the International Year of Astronomy (IYA). The central figure in this story is Galileo Galilei, renaissance physicist and the founder of modern experimental physical science. Galileo initiated telescopic astronomy, a quest that from his time to ours has revealed the universe to be far more strange and awe-inspiring than anyone ever imagined. Yet, paradoxically, most people today are probably less familiar with the night sky than were our remote ancestors.

Roy Bishop is a retired physics professor from Acadia University and, over 35 years ago, was one of the founding members of BNS. He has been both president and honorary president of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and the honorary president of the Halifax Centre of that society. He was the editor of the RASC *Observer's Handbook* from 1982 to 2000. Asteroid 6901 was named “roybishop” in his honour.

Monday, January 18, 2010 – TBA

Monday, February 15, 2010 – *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. Everyone is welcome.

Every Tuesday through the summer – *Acadia University Woodland Trail Biodiversity List*. Take a walk every Tuesday evening to look for flowering plants, nesting birds, fungi, butterflies, dragonflies, etc. This is a long-term project in cooperation with the K.C. Irving Environmental Science Centre to observe the changes in biodiversity over the seasons and over the years. Everyone is invited to participate. Come for one week or every week. You don't have to be an expert, but we need lots of people to show up to help spot and identify the different forms of natural history. If you would like to lead a walk or be on one with a particular emphasis, call Melanie at 585-1916. Meet at 6:30 p.m. at the main entrance to the Harriet Irving Botanical Gardens on University Avenue.

Sunday, July 26, 2009 – *Better Know a Backyard 1*. Last summer we had two backyard walks, which proved to be popular. If you would like to give a tour of your own property (in the fall or winter, if you wish), contact Patrick Kelly 472-2322. Our hosts for this event will be Richard and Liz Stern. Their home is at 317 Middle Dyke Road, north from the lights at the intersection of Belcher Street and the dyke road from New Minas, and just south of Chipmans Corner. The walk will start at 9 a.m.

Saturday, August 1, 2009 – *Better Know a Backyard 2*. Patrick Kelly will be hosting this one at his place: 159 Town Road in Falmouth. Turn off Highway 101 at Exit 7. At the T-intersection with Highway 1 turn left. Turn right on Town Road, which is opposite the Petro-Canada station. Park in the driveway or alongside the cemetery driveway next door. The back of the property has a seasonal "swamp" as well as a seasonal pond. From the adjacent cemetery bluff is an incredible view of the Martock area and the upper part of Pesaquid Lake.

Sturdy shoes are recommended. The walk will start at 10 a.m. Rain date is Sunday, August 2.

Wednesday, August 5, 2009 – *Moon Over the Water*. Many society members are likely familiar with the view from The Lookoff on the North Mountain. But how many have watched the Sun set and the Full Moon rise from that vantage point? Tonight, the Moon will rise around 8:30 p.m., about 10 minutes before the Sun sets and about an hour and a half from being full. The tide will be rising, although you will have to stay until after 1 a.m. to see the moonlight with the tide all the way in. We will likely hear lots of nature sounds as it darkens, and the brighter constellations will come into view. Come to The Lookoff (Hwy 358, 5.5 km north of Canning) about 8 p.m. and enjoy the evening – weather permitting, of course.

Friday August 21–Sunday August 23, 2009 – *NOVA EAST 2009*. Atlantic Canada's longest-running star party will be held at Smileys Provincial Park near Brooklyn in Hants County. Some of the presentations and workshops as well as the Saturday evening observing session are open to the public. NOVA EAST is hosted jointly by the Halifax Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada and the Minas Astronomy Group. More information can be found at <http://halifax.rasc.ca/ne>.

Saturday, August 29, 2009 – *Cloud Lake Wilderness Area Canoe Trip*. Patrick Kelly (472-2322) will lead a canoe trip in the Cloud Lake Wilderness Area. The trip will be at about five hours long, so be sure to bring a hearty lunch, water, drinks, etc., and, of course, lifejackets, canoe, and paddles. If you have access to a lifejacket but not a canoe, there will likely be extra room in one of the canoes. Check with the leader to be sure. The trip will cover Frog Lake *or* Cloud Lake. For those who may want more, if the water levels are high enough we can try going in to see East Allen Lake. Meet at 9 a.m. at the parking lot of Avery's Market on Highway 1 in South Berwick (about a 30-minute drive from Wolfville).

A Green Winter Bird List

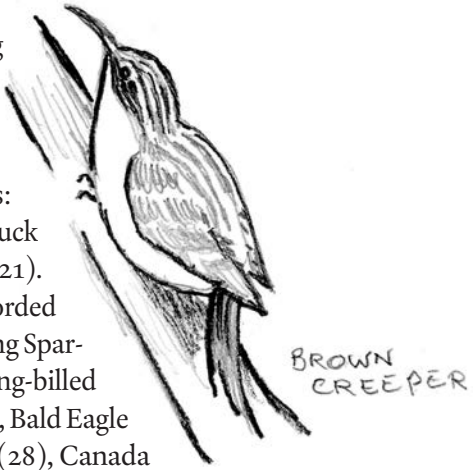
by Bernard Forsythe

[For technical reasons, this report was not published in the spring 2009 issue. We're pleased to include it here, and we offer Bernard our congratulations for a heroic effort and for showing us that birding on foot can be very rewarding. – ED.]

There are many ways to count birds, ranging from how many species have been spotted around your home (a yard list) to counts with more scientific value such as the Christmas Bird Count and the current Maritime Breeding Bird Atlas. Some birders like to see how many species they can find from December 1 to the end of February, known as the Winter Bird List. To get 100 or more species on a winter list requires a vehicle and burns a lot of gasoline. On December 1, 2008, I began a green winter bird list only counting species I saw walking from my home on Wolfville Ridge. During several hikes per week to Melanson, Gaspereau, White Rock, Greenwich, Wolfville, or Grand Pre, I hoped to find 50 to 60 bird species. The following results show why I was pleased to surpass my expectations, and with all the healthy exercise I am now in shape for the upcoming owl nesting season.

On December 1, 2008, the following were at our feeder and in our yard: Black-capped Chickadee (1), Mourning Dove (2), American Goldfinch (3), Blue Jay (4), Crow (5), Golden-crowned Kinglet (6), American Raven (7), White-breasted Nuthatch (8), Barred Owl (9), European Starling (10), Northern Flicker (11), and American Robin (12). Continuing on the same day, I saw a Northern Cardinal (13) in Jim Wolford's yard in Wolfville as well as a White-throated Sparrow (14), a Dark-eyed Junco (15), and a Downy Woodpecker (16).

The next day I saw an Evening Grosbeak (17) and Ring-necked Pheasant (18) on the Wolfville Ridge. At the Pleasant Street Reservoir, I added three new species: Herring Gull (19), Ring-necked Duck (20), and Pileated Woodpecker (21).



Down the hill to Oak Avenue I recorded Red-bellied Woodpecker (22), Song Sparrow (23), Swamp Sparrow (24), Ring-billed Gull (25), Hairy Woodpecker (26), Bald Eagle (27), Greater Black-backed Gull (28), Canada Goose (29), and Red-tailed Hawk (30). I found a Black Duck (31) at the Wolfville Harbour, a House Sparrow (32) on Front Street in Wolfville, a Mallard (33) at Elderkin's Pond, and to end off the day, a Rock Pigeon (34) in Greenwich.

December 3 started in the Neary Pines in Greenwich with four prizes: a White-winged Crossbill (35), a Red breasted Nuthatch (36), a Brown Creeper (37), and a Pine Warbler (38). A Tree Sparrow (39) appeared on Eden Row in Greenwich, and the count ended this day on Oak Avenue in Wolfville with a Great Horned Owl (40).

After this point it became more difficult to find new species, but it did prove possible in small increments. On December 6 I saw Purple Finch (41) on the Wolfville Ridge and on December 9 a Northern Mockingbird (42) at the Wolfville wharf. On December 13 I recorded a Peregrine Falcon (43) and Iceland Gull (44) at Wolfville Harbour, and by walking out onto the Wolfville dike, I found Savannah Sparrow (45) and Dunlin (46). I sighted a Ruffed Grouse (47) on the Wolfville Ridge on December 16, and on December 18 I ticked off Common Merganser (48) at the White Rock Pond and Bohemian Waxwing (49) at White Rock. The next day, December 19, I found my 50th species, Cedar Waxwing (50) in Wolfville, along with a Yellow-breasted Chat (51). The first day of winter, December 21, produced a Common Redpoll (52) on Kent Avenue in Wolfville.

On December 27 I walked to Melanson to find Common Golden-

eye (53), Barrow's Goldeneye (54), Red-winged Blackbird (55), Green-winged Teal (56), and Sharp-shinned Hawk (57). New Year's Eve day brought a Northern Goshawk (58) to our yard.

On January 3 I added an Eastern Towhee (59) at Jim Wolford's yard in Wolfville; on January 7, an American Pipit (60) and a Rough-legged Hawk (61) out on the Wolfville dike; on January 9, Pine Siskin (62) on the Wolfville Ridge and Ruby Crowned Kinglet (63) in Greenwich. Back on the Wolfville dike on January 11, I recorded Horned Lark (64) and Lapland Longspur (65). On January 13 a Baltimore Oriole (66) was in Wolfville, and my last observation for this cold, snowy month was a Snow Bunting (67) in Greenwich on the 14th.

With a lot of added tramping, I added four more species in February, the last month of the Winter Bird Count: a Pine Grosbeak (68) on the Wolfville Ridge on the 2nd, a Northern Pintail (69) on the 3rd in Wolfville Harbour; a House Finch (70) in Wolfville on the 6th, and finally a very special Hoary Redpoll at my feeder on Wolfville Ridge (71) on the 13th.

FIELD TRIP REPORT

Wolfville Area Birds

by Jim Wolford

APRIL 26, 2009 – This joint Bird Society / Blomidon Naturalists trip was attended by 32 people, including lots of familiar and welcome faces. It was a very nice warm day, with light to moderate winds and alternate bright overcast and sunny skies, temperatures up to 19 °C.

At the Wolfville wharf area, besides the Rock Pigeons and an Iceland or Glaucous Gull, there were three Greater Yellowlegs (one more was seen later in Canning by James Hirtle et al.).

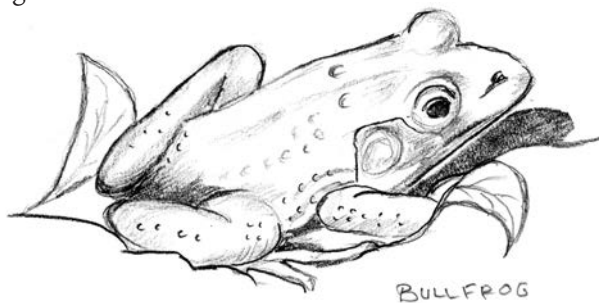
Our first caravan stop was on Starrs Point, at a Red-tailed Hawk nest in a woodlot adjacent to a house. There was no hawk on the nest, but the house occupant told us it was active again this year.

Then to Van Nostrand's Ponds, also on Starrs Point, where we did the usual slow walk around the two ponds, finding lots of stuff of interest and not just birds. In the newer Ducks Unlimited pond, there were two male Ring-necked Ducks, two Tree Swallows, several male Yellow-rumped Warblers. Pat Chalmers heard a Palm Warbler and a Swamp Sparrow. We saw an early female Red-winged Blackbird and a drumming female Downy Woodpecker. Mammals included Muskrat and a Porcupine, the latter (perhaps sleeping) up in a larch.

One small pond had a school of probable Banded Killifish that were disturbing the surface in the shallows as they were startled by us.

Herptiles (now known as herpes, courtesy of Don MacNeill), included calling Leopard Frogs and Spring Peepers and sightings of either Green Frogs or Bullfrogs (just their heads, and seasonally too early for them to be calling). We also saw a Painted Turtle basking.

Plants in bloom included Coltsfoot, Trembling Aspen, Red Maple, American Elm (an apparently healthy large tree was a rare sight), Speckled Alder, and unidentified willow species. The male willow bushes were attracting and humming with oodles of honeybees, which were clearly gathering pollen on their hind legs, and a Mourning Cloak butterfly that gave the appearance of not only basking with open wings but also feeding on the willow flowers (thus the latter probably produces nectar in addition to the pollen). We also saw a Cabbage White.



Next stop was northwest of Wellington Dike (Canard Valley), at the Canard Road Bald Eagle nest. I'm pretty sure they have tiny downy eaglets now, but we would have had to be very patient with good scopes to see them. We did see both adult eagles and Red-tailed Hawks nearby.

Just east of Jawbone Corner, we stopped at the home of Helen & Fred Archibald for a pit-stop and a bit of lunch. Another pair of Downy Woodpeckers was there, plus a flock of House Sparrows.

Then to Canard Pond, where we saw relatively very little, perhaps because a couple of people were walking along the pond bank when we arrived. There were a male Gadwall, one or two Northern Pintails flying over, two female Common Mergansers, two Mallards, a few Green-winged Teal, a bunch of the usual gulls, plus an immature Iceland Gull and a well-seen Swamp Sparrow.

Along Fred Thomas Road we found a Woodchuck (groundhog) at a burrow along the road. At the Canning Aboiteau (Habitant River) at high tide we saw 10 Canada Geese and about five Green-winged Teal.

Our last formal stop was in Canning at Harris Pond, just northwest of the United Church, where we observed two American Wigeon (alias baldpates), two female Common Mergansers, a small number of swallows, including at least one each of Barn and Tree Swallow, one Yellow-rumped Warbler, and a couple of Painted Turtles.

And, to finish off this trip, there was a roosting Raccoon up in a sugar maple and an Eastern Grey Squirrel (probably one of the three that occasionally visit Merritt Gibson's property nearby). Thus, some of us will remember this year's excursion as the one on which we saw several mammal species.

After the field trip, I checked a few other spots. At the Port Williams sewage ponds, a pair of Ring-necked Ducks. At Kidston's Pond (upper Church St), six male Ring-necked Ducks and two male Green-winged Teal. And at the New Minas Ducks Unlimited Pond (next to Cornwallis River), I could see a single Canada Goose on the island, which might signal the presence of an unseen mate on a nest.

Cape Split Hike No.1

by Jim Wolford

MAY 16, 2009 – A gorgeous sunny, calm, warm, and humid day, and only eight participants showed up: Sherman Williams and I were co-leaders.

Rocks/Geology Sherman showed everyone a geological map, pointed out cooled columnar basalt along the early part of the trail, and later on found an anomaly – a piece of granite in the middle of the trail that seemed out of place and possibly came from the Cobequids on the other side of the bay. Sherm mentioned that there had been multiple flows of lava sometime between 200 and 180 million years ago.

Flowers Downy Alder (*Alnus viridis*), Red Maple, Sugar Maple, Toothwort just starting to open its flowers (two plant forms, with normal leaves and with leaf teeth heavily indented into lobes), Spring-beauties in masses and carpets (The rust fungus on them was quite rare this year, perhaps because of a dry spring. Also, one plant had petals divided or torn into tatters, and other plants showed degrees of this.), Purple Trillium, alias red trillium or wake-robin or stinking Willy (We also saw several flowers with varying degrees of whitish petals and pink/red centres.), Dutchman's-breeches, Coltsfoot (one still in flower), common Dandelion, Blue Violets, and Wild Strawberry in profusion in the grass at the tip of the Cape.



Flowerbuds Red-berried Elder (aka red elderberry), Rose Twisted Stalk (aka rosy twisted stalk), Wild Sarsaparilla (*Aralia*), Fly-honeysuckle.

Ferns (mostly unfurling fiddleheads or young fronds): Northern Beech, Spinulose (one of the wood ferns), Christmas, Braun's Holly, Cinnamon, both green and red forms of Northern Lady; among the fern allies, we saw spore-producing stalks of common horsetails.

Insects Oodles of black flies, small biting mosquitoes, and just one Spring Azure butterfly.

Birds Blue Jays, juncos, and Purple Finches at the house at the trailhead; then, along the trail, we heard and saw fresh chipping signs of Pileated Woodpecker on a stump, White-throated Sparrow, Mourning Dove, Black-throated Green Warbler, Northern Parula (warbler), Blackburnian Warbler, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Least Flycatcher, Black-capped Chickadee, raven, robin, Swainson's Thrushes (at least three), Great Black-backed Gulls (65+ nests visible at tip of Cape, and nests seemed to be still in incubation of eggs), Herring Gulls on isolated nests on the cliffs, Double-crested Cormorant, unidentified scoters (25+ in a tight raft, diving and surfacing together), Common Eider. This year we didn't hear any Winter Wrens or see any Black Guillemots or Peregrine Falcon.

Mammals A Red Squirrel at the trailhead and two scats together on the trail loaded with hair (perhaps coyote or bobcat).

FIELD TRIP REPORT

Blomidon Provincial Park

by Jim Wolford

MAY 23, 2009 – This annual BNS / Parks Are for People walk was led by Jim Wolford, with help from Bernard Forsythe and Murray Colbo. It was a beautiful sunny day, nearly calm in the

woods, temperature warm (up to 17°C). The 15 participants were mostly from the eastern Valley area.

Flowers Toothwort, Clintonia, red or Purple Trillium, Hobblebush, Fly-honeysuckle, Red Baneberry, Red-berried Elder, Starflower, Blue Violets, wild strawberry in the open field where we parked, False Solomon's-seal with flower buds. (We also stopped briefly at Doug and Joanne Linzey's property west of The Lookoff to see their many Trout Lilies in bloom.)

Other plants Wild Leeks (onions) in abundance and in leaf at the beginning of the trail, Ostrich Ferns along the road in the corner of the campground, Christmas Ferns, Cinnamon Ferns. We tried for all four native maples but only found three for sure (Sugar, Striped, Mountain – and I'm sure we just missed Red Maple).

Fungi I pointed out a “witchs' broom” of deformed branches of a young Balsam Fir, and also the bumpy or cankered bark of a small beech tree.

Birds Many Blue Jays in the open picnic area by the registration building, raven, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, American Redstart, Black-throated Green Warbler, Ovenbird, Blackburnian Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Northern Parula Warbler, and one Dark-eyed Junco.

Pond life Found by dip-netting in the vernal (temporary) woodland pond (no inlet or outlet) along the Jodrey Trail, 2 km or less from the northeast corner of the campground: water level in pond very high, flatworms (planarians), snails, Fairy Shrimps (both sexes present, and some females had egg-sacs), lots of small red water mites, one small damselfly larva, no dragonfly larvae seen (but probably present in the bottom), one large adult backswimmer, some small water boatmen, two kinds or sizes of whirligig beetles, a mid-sized predaceous diving beetle (and one small larva of the same family), large larva of a phantom midge, small pupae of midges, larvae and pupae of mosquitoes, thousands of blackish tadpoles, many of them tightly clustered in very shallow water at the shoreline.

Bernard Forsythe told us an interesting historical anecdote about

this particular pond: Many years ago he happened to be there when a strong chorus of trilling American Toads was occurring. He noted that the colour of these calling males was very dark blackish, quite unlike their typical colours when encountered on land. He captured one and put it in something opaque with a lid and checked on it occasionally as he walked back to his vehicle. The toad gradually changed and faded its colour back to the light or olive brown that is normal for the species.

I then told them that in my experience the colour of calling male Wood Frogs in the water is very different from the colour of those found on land (and females); the males are quite dark in a very rich reddish-brown or brownish-red, so dark that the eye mask cannot be seen. Likewise, territorial calling male Spring Peepers are often dark brown on their backs, masking their normal pattern of tan or light brown with darker brown markings.

In light of the above, finding lots of blackish tadpoles and their aggregation in very shallow water suggests the possibility that these tadpoles are of American Toads, whose tadpoles are black and form dense schools as a warning that they taste bad. Now what we need is someone to follow their development and then be at the pond when the metamorphosing froglets or toadlets are emerging in their hundreds. Such young amphibians are quite identifiable when in this tiny stage, even the Spring Peepers, which then have suckers on their toe-tips. I wonder if anyone on NatureNS or the BNS list was at the pond earlier in spring when the fathers of these tadpoles were calling there.

Other animals Oodles of biting adult black flies, a smallish Maritime Garter Snake crossing the path at the pond (no coincidence, since garter snakes love water and hunt frogs and toads), one Red Squirrel.

A bit past the pond, we had good visibility at the lookoff spot along the cliff trail and were able to view Five Islands Provincial Park across the water from us.

Fundy Shore Birds

by Wayne Neily

MARCH 21, 2009 – The joint BNS, Bird Society, and-Annapolis Field Naturalists outing went very well, thanks to great weather and a good turnout of both people and birds.

We started out with 21 participants and about 12 vehicles, which limited our possibilities for stops, but the early high tide forced us to keep up a brisk pace in the morning anyway. I hope that everyone had a chance to meet one or more new potential birding friends, as well as getting some new birds – for the year or the county, at least. We were fortunate to have the presidents of two of the sponsoring groups along: Pat Kelly of the Nova Scotia Bird Society and Rick Whitman of the Blomidon Naturalists. I hope that any of you who are not members will consider joining one or more of the three groups; check out their websites.

For the day, we had 58 species (59 if we count the Fox Sparrow that Claire Diggins had at her Middleton feeder when she got home), none very rare but with a good representation of early migrants. At Audrey Wellwood's bird haven with ravine, pond, and feeders in Aylesford, we were able to start with most of the expected land birds from pheasants to finches, including Common Redpoll and singing Red-winged Blackbirds and Song Sparrows. On the way from there to Morden, we were able to add more migrants, including Northern Flickers, a flock of American Robins, and a few Common Grackles in a resplendent plumage belying their name.

Waterfowl were for most the highlight of the trip, with Canada Geese and 15 species of ducks, most of which allowed us good views. Sea ducks, including the three scoters, Common Eider, Long-tailed Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, and Harlequin Duck were at one or

more of the three ports visited: Morden, Margaretsville, and Port George. Most of the birds were in pairs, the males often displaying. Port George provided the only good views of Harlequins, but at least seven were quite cooperative there. We saw loons and both coastal grebes, but they were usually hidden by the wave action and their frequent dives, so not everyone got good views of them. A highlight for me was a close flypast of a Great Cormorant in breeding plumage at Morden – a species that has become quite scarce here. A Bald Eagle also gave us a good view, and at the Margaretsville pond a pair of Hooded Mergansers that we had seen through the scopes decided to give us a better look by flying low over us to get to the other side of the road.

After a stop at Middleton, where Clarence Stevens, Jr., managed to count six Northern Cardinals skulking in the thickets of the Lily Lake Brook ravine (and the rest of us were able to see or hear one or two), most of the group continued on down the Annapolis River. Most of the river was open and gave us a good variety of river ducks from Bridgetown to Annapolis: Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Common (and Hooded) Mergansers, and Greater Scaup. A few Red-tailed Hawks, three Bald Eagles, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk were seen – just a hint of a migration – but lots of Canada Geese and a few flocks of American Black Ducks and Mallards.

A brief stop at the Hawboldts' in Belleisle added a Savannah Sparrow and allowed some of our group better views than they had had of nuthatches, woodpeckers, and other feeder birds. By the time we finished at the wharf in Annapolis Royal, the tide was rising again and the Buffleheads and a Common Loon were putting on good shows there and providing a satisfying ending for our trip.

Special thanks go not only to Audrey Wellwood and the Hawboldts, but also to the experienced birders who helped us find the goodies and showed them to others or shared their knowledge, especially Richard Stern, Bernard Forsythe, James Hirtle, and both Clarence Stevens, Sr. & Jr. With that many participants, unofficial leaders are very helpful. And thanks to all who came out and so helped

us enjoy this second day of spring. I hope to see you again on more outings this year.

FIELD TRIP REPORT

Herbert River Canoe Trip

by Patrick Kelly

APRIL 25, 2009 – The weather seems to favour BNS canoe trips, and this one kept our record for good weather at 100%. The only mishap really occurred when I went downstairs to get the canoe ready and found that the casing of the water filter in the basement had cracked and the 16-foot canoe was full to the gunwales with water. There were several dozen gladiola bulbs, which looked like jellyfish with the roots sprouted, drifting around inside. I'm not sure what the mass of a canoe full of water is, but I couldn't even budge it. Half an hour of bailing got most of the water out, and tipping the canoe solved the rest of the problem. There are advantages to dirt floors!

The plan was to start the trip where Highway 14 crosses the Herbert River and come out where Highway 215 crosses it, just north of Brooklyn. There are two other bridges between these two, so it makes tracking progress a bit easier. While there is lots of water in the river in the spring, the river's drainage area extends almost all the way to Shubenacadie Grand Lake, so it has a good flow even in the summer. Given the speed of the water (one person had a GPS unit and clocked one section at 8 km/h), all the boats were rarely together. The only exceptions were for the tricky parts, where we would wait to make sure everyone made it through. Thus, I can really only report on what we saw from the canoe I was in.

One section goes through an area with steep cliffs on both sides. Two large pieces of rock were in the river here and had not been there the year before. I expect that would have made for quite the sight, if you weren't in the water when it happened! We saw and heard a number of birds, including a nice view of a Pileated Woodpecker, and a Bald Eagle, which we didn't know was there until we drifted under a large dead tree and it flew off ahead of us. A Snapping Turtle was sunning itself at the side of the river at one spot, and further downstream a groundhog was nosing around the bases of the trees at the shoreline.

We grouped together for a snack stop, and then it was on again. I had hoped to get everyone to stop where there was a geocache, but the instructions were not the best and some missed it. It is located in the lower part of the river, close to the end, where the banks are covered with Bloodroot at this time of the year. We reached the end and found that a few had already gotten their canoes up onto the nearby trail. Everyone had a good trip and were looking forward to next year.

UPDATE

After the trip I checked to see if either of the two crossings farther upstream from Highway 14 would be suitable as a starting point. The crossing at Highway 202 was quite reasonable; the one about 4 km further upstream is where a single-lane truss bridge is perched about 10 metres above the river, with a waterfall on one side and a lots of rocks on the other. About two weeks after the initial trip, Anne Strong and I ventured in at the Highway 202 crossing, planning to end in Brooklyn.

We did have one rough spot early on, where the canoe got caught up in a fallen tree and we both went for an early swim. The water was quite warm! From there we had a few more adventures. Having seen a Snapping Turtle in the same place as the first trip, we went back for a better look, but it had already gone back in the water. After circling a small grass-covered gravel bar, we noticed that a big

rock under water against one side of the “island” had a tail. We then encountered a second snapper that had flipped onto its back while trying to climb up the riverbank. We stopped and I used a canoe paddle to flip it back over. It was heavier than I would have thought and most unappreciative as it drew its head back and hissed several times before making its way back into the water. The most surprising encounter was with a large “rock” in one of the areas where the flow picked up. I saw the water going up over it, and made to steer to the right of it. The next time I looked it was gone, and that was when the seal stuck its head up again, right by the canoe. I barely had enough time to see the grey fur and big dark eyes and we passed it. Anne originally thought I was joking, but we looked back and it was still headed upstream. Given that we were at least 8 km from the tidal section of the river, it was a unique encounter. The trip next year will start at the new location, and while there may be some interesting sights, seals are not guaranteed!

FIELD TRIP REPORT

Palmeters Woods

by Nancy Nickerson

MAY 16, 2009 – Led by Judy Tufts and Nancy Nickerson, 11 participants spent this lovely spring morning exploring Palmeters Woods behind the Evergreen Home for Special Care at the west end of Kentville. The early arrivals watched a male Ruby-throated Hummingbird, American Goldfinches, Black-capped Chickadees, and Song Sparrows dart among the shrubbery near the parking lot. As we all gathered at the entrance to the trail, a pair of Gray Catbirds entertained us with their remarkably variable songs and calls. Several Chestnut-sided Warblers were in full voice and seemed to be follow-

ing us as we set out on our walk. We had stunning views of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak pair and heard many other males proclaiming territory. In the distance, Northern Waterthrushes were singing and Ring-necked Pheasants were calling.

In the woods we had excellent close-up views of both a male and a female Northern Parula, Ovenbirds, Black-and-white Warblers, Least Flycatchers, and a Hermit Thrush. Some participants also had good views of a Blue-headed Vireo, Northern Flicker, Purple Finch, Dark-eyed Junco, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Black-throated Green Warblers. Several of us tried unsuccessfully to locate what may have been a Blackburnian Warbler singing high in the treetops near the site where one was seen last year. Our attempts to hear the birds were sometimes thwarted by the sounds of intermittent gunfire (?) from Camp Aldershot across the Cornwallis River and, at one point, a low-flying helicopter.

Elsewhere along the trail a Belted Kingfisher flew overhead, a pair of Canada Geese were calling as they flew up and down the river, and a pair of ducks did a fly-by, too far away for us to attempt an identification. Near the bridge we saw a Hairy Woodpecker entering a nest hole, Common Yellowthroats, and a Swamp Sparrow. Other birds recorded were American Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, a Nashville Warbler, and a Chipping Sparrow (heard trilling). Several other species were seen only in flight.

Birds and humans were not the only fauna out and about. A shiny object far out on the river bank proved to be the carapace of a sun-bathing turtle. A Spring Azure butterfly flitted beside the trail near the stream.

Although we were a little early for the best display of spring-blooming wildflowers, there were enough to attract our attention. Near the beginning of the trail, before entering the woods, we observed flowering Shadbush (or Serviceberry), Apple, Blue Violet, Wild Strawberry, and Cuckooflower. We admired the delicate, columbine-like foliage of Tall Meadow Rue and noted Wild Cucumber seedlings with their tendrils already attached to nearby shrubs. In

the woods, American Fly-honeysuckle, Sessile-leaved Bellwort, Red Baneberry, Painted Trillium, a wood-rush (*Luzula* sp.), and Gold-thread were in full bloom. Wild Sarsaparilla, Nodding Trillium, Yellow Clintonia (or Bluebead), Starflower, and Wild Lily-of-the-valley were in bud.

Few fungi were in evidence this early in the season. There was a cluster of pink-spored mushrooms (probably *Entoloma* sp.) on the ground near the entrance to the woods. A few False Morels (*Gyromitra esculenta*) were found, but all were nearly unrecognizable due to slug damage. There were overwintered fruiting bodies of various bracket fungi on tree trunks and logs, notably the Birch Polypore (*Piptoporus betulinus*) and Turkey Tail (*Trametes versicolor*). Several of us examined cankers on Black Cherry caused by the black knot fungus (*Apiosporina morbosa*), and witches' brooms on Balsam Fir caused by the Fir Broom Rust Fungus (*Melampsorella caryophyllacearum*).

For many years BNS members and others have enjoyed the opportunity to observe and study nature in Palmeters Woods. Recently, parts of this area have been clear-cut, and we cannot help but wonder how such a loss of habitat will affect local wildlife.

FIELD TRIP REPORT

Herbert River Trail Field Trip

by Patrick Kelly

JUNE 13, 2009 – This is the third time this trip has been offered as a joint BNS / Nova Scotia Bird Society trip. There was a good turnout, including a couple from Texas who had e-mailed me several days before when they crossed over into New Brunswick. The walk

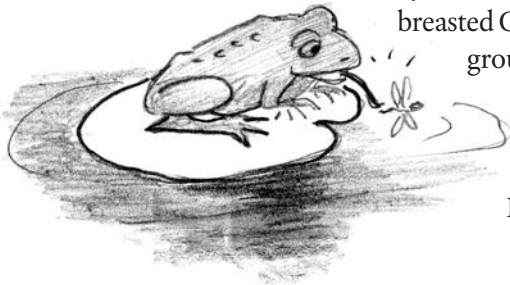
is along the abandoned rail line that formerly connected Windsor with Truro, via Kennetcook. Shortly after the walk, I learned that the entire route will become part of the Trans-Canada Trail in 2010.

At the start of the trail, we came across an area that looked as though it had been dug up and filled in again. The bank there was quite steep, so I ruled out turtles, except that up ahead John Harwood was standing guard over a large snapping turtle that must have been making its way back to the river. Everyone had a good look, and it was gone when we went past that area on our return. While not yet in bloom, the Canada Lily plants were just starting to poke up above the surrounding vegetation in the wet scrubby area.

In one of the large ponds there were two frogs, which no one seemed to be able to identify. One was mostly copper in colour, the other large with a bright yellow throat. In fact, it looked like a yellow water-lily with eyes.

If there were a theme for the birds on this trip it would have been waxwings and redstarts. They were everywhere. Since this was also an atlassing trip it was nice to see nesting material being gathered by the Cedar Waxwings, and a flicker flew by carrying food.

By my count we saw 29 species. Some highlights: A female Common Merganser was dabbling its way up the middle of the river. A catbird was seen and heard by many. This area and the section of trail just south of the bridge are very reliable for catbirds. We usually stop and turn around at the side path that leads to the water's edge. This is the location of the geocache mentioned in the canoe trip report. While we were there we heard a Great Horned Owl calling several times. A Broad-winged Hawk was also seen overhead. Part-way out to the main trail we heard a Rose-breasted Grosbeak singing, and one of the group was lucky enough to see the flash of colour when it flew off. Another surprise was the appearance of a Common Nighthawk. When we returned



to the road an Eastern Phoebe showed very nicely, sitting on the power lines on one side of the bridge, then flying to the phone lines on the other side. Anyone who was on the trip can contact me if they would like a full listing of the species seen.

YOUTH

BNS Regional Science Fair Awards

by John Belbin

Annapolis Valley Regional Science Fair, NSCC Middleton Campus, April 15–17, 2009 – Once again, BNS provided two awards in the natural sciences at the secondary levels. The secondary judging took place on Wednesday, April 15, elementary levels on Thursday, and the awards ceremony was on Friday, April 17. As there was a shortage of judges this year, I was asked to be one of the regular life sciences judges and took notes for BNS during that process. On the completion of the life sciences section, I returned to the floor and checked out all the other categories in the secondary levels. I interviewed some more students and completed the process for BNS. This is a long process but quite necessary, as you always find some science projects that have clearly been entered into the wrong categories.

As has happened before, I was unable to find a senior level (grades 10–12) that would be of significance to a majority of BNS members; there were relatively few projects of any kind at that level. With quite a number of projects at the junior level (grades 7–9), I again decided to award two junior BNS prizes as a more appropriate response. This might encourage further participation at higher levels in the future. BNS should congratulate the fine efforts of these junior scientists.

❧ BNS PRIZE WINNERS ❧
(*\$50 and a special BNS certificate*)

JAMES TREFRY-SWEENEY (*KES, ENG 307*)
“IS THERE A WAY TO REDUCE ROAD-KILL?”

James based his project on a BC study on the huge extent of road-killed animals and the effects that has on total population numbers. He decided to attempt a solution to keep animals away from roads where they are highly threatened. He designed and constructed a solar-powered electrical unit, which powered a small scent burner. It could therefore be placed almost anywhere there was an open space. He experimented with a number of natural scents and concentrated on one he made from the oil of hot peppers (capsaicin). He calls it “Scent Away.”

This was then tested in a farmer’s orchard, who had reported problems with the deer eating his apples. This was successful in keeping away not only the deer but a great deal of other wildlife as well. Even Raccoons were prevented from eating a number of the baits he employed to test the effectiveness of Scent Away. His method has real potential for some areas.

ROBERT CONNELL (*KES, LS-312*)
“SAVE THE BIRDS”

This was a study of the removal of oil from the feathers of birds that have been stained by oil spills. The critical aspect was the removal of oil without the substance itself being toxic or removing too many of the natural oils that sea birds depend on. A delicate balance! He concentrated on easily available materials and commercial products, as they would most probably be the only available options in an emergency. He tested a considerable list of non-toxic soaps. The results showed that “Dawn” actually lived up to its advertised capabilities, being by far the best. At the other extreme “Fast Orange” was easily

the worst substance tried, completely removing all natural oils in a destructive manner.

When judging at this level, you usually learn some surprising things and occasionally things you are not sure that you really wanted to know. This year as the TV series CSI seemed to have inspired at least half the entrants, and all kinds of things were being tested, especially if DNA could be built in there somewhere. One young lady who was testing the bacteria level of carrots somewhat horrified me. Several tests confirmed that the bacteria levels of washed mini carrots obtained from the supermarket were many times higher than those from local carrots that had simply been pulled out of the ground! When you think that many people add these things directly to a salad – it gave me the creeps to say the least. There was little doubt about the results. Her mother is a professional lab technician, and she had access to testing equipment.

It was very pleasant to see the wide range of projects at the Junior levels, and the real enthusiasm of the students for their projects.

NATURAL HISTORY

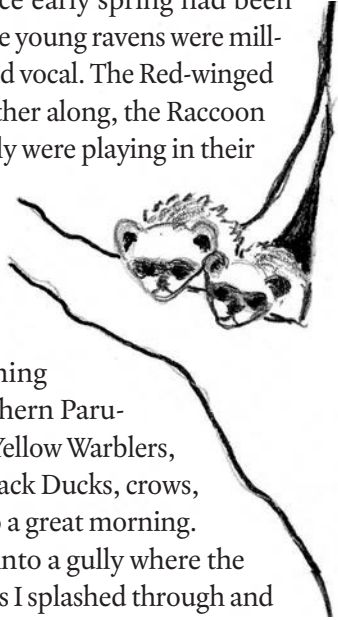
Birding by Bike

by Andrew Steeves

THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2009 – I've been biking to work from Wolfville to Kentville most mornings on a summer route I've cobbled together along the old railway line, dike roads, and sand pits that lie between the two towns. It's rough, but only 2 km longer than taking the main road (about 15 km). It usually takes me an hour longer, however, as the binoculars and notebook seem to slow me down. Each week I learn a new bird species or two, usually by remember-

ing and identifying the song. When you return to the same place at roughly the same time each day you can sort these things out by trial and error.

Tuesday was an interesting day. That morning I discovered that the raven nest I'd been watching since early spring had been blown to bits in Monday's winds. All the young ravens were milling about in nearby trees, very upset and vocal. The Red-winged Blackbirds seemed to be gloating. Further along, the Raccoon kits I've also been checking in with daily were playing in their tree, undisturbed. Most of the avian residents were present in the neighbourhoods where I usually encounter them: flickers, Blue Jays, Killdeer, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Red-eyed Vireos, Song Sparrows, Mourning Doves, chickadees, goldfinches, Northern Parulas, Common Yellowthroats, grackles, Yellow Warblers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Mallards, Black Ducks, crows, Bald Eagles, etc. It was shaping up into a great morning.



Part way to work I turned my bike into a gully where the trail I was following crosses a stream. As I splashed through and came up the other side, I found myself face to face with a young buck. This deer and I started at each other for about a minute, both of us frozen in place with no more than a canoe-length between us. He flinched first, sauntering off, deciding I was nothing to worry about I suppose. Nice healthy looking animal, it's antlers just starting to push up.

Later that evening I finally got round to taking my youngest son in to see the raccoons in their tree den. All the way in he nattered Star Wars and stunt bike trivia at me, which I listened to with as much interest as I could manage and punctuated by telling him the names of the birds that I was hearing and the flowers and trees we were passing. But when we got into the White Pine in question and he looked up to the cavity some 40 feet off the ground and saw the masked faces staring down at him, he was fully there in that place and understood

that he was seeing something special. For the next 15 minutes there was nothing else in the world but him and me and the plants and creatures in that magic little corner of wilderness.

For the Birds

by Patrick Giffin

JUNE 2, 2009 – Six Red Crossbills continue to visit the black oil sunflower seed feeder throughout the day: an adult male and female, two first-year males, and two juveniles, one often fed by an adult female, although it seems to manage on its own, too.

Recently, a juvenile crossbill hit a window when all were threatened by an approaching grackle. It was breathing when I covered it with a cardboard box near the foundation. Four hours later I went to check on it and it flew about 50 feet at low altitude into a honeysuckle. Yesterday it was with the group being fed by an adult female. It appeared to be moulting, tiny bits of downy feather sticking out here and there, and was very energetic. Flight was vigorous, appetite gluttonous!

In response to my request for guidance, Helene Van Doninck, DVM, replied, “First off, the best advice possible for prevention of window strike can be found at www.flap.org, follow the “being bird friendly” links. As for increasing survival afterwards, it depends on how severe the collision was. Even if I get one that was briefly knocked unconscious, I always keep them for several hours in a box to allow them to gain their wits back. I will often test them in an aviary to make sure their flying is coordinated, as if they are released in a subnormal state they are easy prey for predators on release even if they fly off.”



MALCOLM UHLMAN

Bernard Forsythe with one-month-old Barred Owl chick

We recently spoke with Bernard Forsythe regarding the Barred Owl sightings and sounds near our home and the adjoining woodland. Based on this information, Bernard decided to help us install nestboxes in this area and provided us with his plans for a Barred Owl box. Bernard's visit was coordinated with his meeting with Malcolm Uhlman to band any Barred Owl offspring in nestboxes being monitored in this area. This meant investigating the possibility of a suitable nestbox site and accompanying him for the banding of this year's offspring. Arriving shortly after 9 a.m., it took very little time for Bernard to decide on a suitable site and acknowledge that the two nestboxes that our son Michael and I had built, although a little weighty, met the requirements of our barred friends. We then met with Malcolm, and proceeded into woodlands to determine the precise contents of Malcolm's nestboxes.

En route, Bernard and Malcolm identified Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Waterthrush, Veery, Ovenbird, Magnolia Warbler, White-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Parula, Black-and-white Warbler and Blue-headed Vireo.

To date, a Great Horned Owl sighting had been our most memorable owl experience. Several years ago, in a conservancy in Florida, we were advised to look for the GHO's nest in an enormous tree in the centre of the property. Too easy! In the crotch of this unique tree, looking like rugby-ball-sized fluff balls were four baby GHOS. After getting used to the presence of these beautiful little creatures, I began slowly scanning the remainder of this enormous tree: wow! A parent sighted, she or he was glaring at us with an unforgettable, unmistakable, ferocious message: Do Not Approach My Babies! It was frightening, causing goose bumps. No doubt an upset Great-horned Owl could inflict serious damage.

Arriving at the first site with Bernard and Malcolm, we almost immediately became aware of the two incredibly beautiful parents, whose four watchful, magnificent, very fierce glares were directed at us and simultaneously on "their" nestbox. Bernard, with amazing agility and strength, was soon alongside the box. He lifted the lid, reached inside to retrieve and show us the first of two exquisite baby Barred Owls. Malcolm and Barbara took several photos of Bernard in action and of the baby owls and parents. Bernard was, as were we all, pleased that the parents, ready to attack, did not leave their posts, which meant that Bernard was unharmed except for some significant scratches from the youngsters' talons. We surmised that the presence of so many humans may have caused the adults to restrain themselves, to everyone's advantage. The second nestbox contained one equally vigorous offspring.

Buoyed by these significant results, we decided to proceed to Arthur Uhlman's property, where we knew from Arthur's reports that he expected his Barred Owl and duck nestboxes had equally interesting occupants. Another exhilarating success! Two more Barred Owls, which Bernard banded in some comfort, using an exceptionally well-designed, lengthy, folding ladder that Arthur made available. Unfortunately, in the duck nestbox Bernard found five or six very cold Hooded Merganser eggs. Arthur surmised that the brooding parent was dispatched by a fox, coyote, or hawk.

Mission accomplished, we returned for lunch and to help (watch)

Bernard install a nestbox in a position near where Barred Owls have been seen and heard many times over the years. We remain optimistic, at the same time realizing that over the years we have not found evidence of a natural nest site.

We learned many things from being with Bernard; for example, why it is so important to place owl and other nestboxes in our woodlands. Our forests no longer contain the essential old-growth trees that are fundamental sources of natural nest sites for the Barred Owls. Therefore, their survival relies on man-made accommodation. In other words, Barred Owls and other species are not equipped to create a nest cavity of any kind and must rely on natural processes such as aging and rotting of very large trees to provide a suitable nest site. Clear-cutting our forests, harvesting without reforestation, means that trees never get old enough to provide natural nest sites. Many thanks to Bernard and Malcolm for an exceptional and rewarding birding experience.

BOOK REVIEW

Where Have the Birds Gone?

by Derek Allerton

Bridget Stutchbury, *Silence of the Songbirds* (Toronto: Harper-Collins Canada, 2007).

Once the chaos of the morning has calmed, I am drawn to watch the birds at my backyard feeders – often with a cup of fair-trade coffee in hand. And while winter brings many resident birds to my window, spring beckons the return of the songbirds from their winter homes in the tropics.

Unfortunately, songbirds are on the decline. Thanks to the work

of ornithologists and many dedicated volunteers, such as Blomidon Naturalist Society members, a troubling picture is emerging. As outlined in Bridget Stutchbury's *Silence of the Songbirds*, the songbirds we enjoy during the summer in the Annapolis Valley are facing multiple challenges that threaten their long-term survival.

While many of us create a little avian oasis in our yards, the larger picture is becoming bleak for songbirds. As Stutchbury points out, habitat loss and fragmentation in both Latin America and Canada, pesticide use, non-essential lighting of our towns and cities at night, predatory pressures, and climate change are stressing songbirds on multiple fronts. *Silence of the Songbirds* is a must-read for bird lovers and environmentalists alike, as it is a well-researched and well-written appeal for change.

Stutchbury does not leave her readers wondering the most important question: What can they do to help save the songbirds? While I am sure some of these actions (p. 221) have become part of our regular routines, together they provide individuals and communities the power to make a difference:

- Buy organic, fair-trade coffee (this is usually shade grown, but when in doubt, ask your retailer).
- When buying produce from Latin America, such as bananas, buy organic.
- When buying the following North American crops, buy organic: alfalfa, Brussels sprouts, blueberries, celery, corn, cotton, cranberries, potatoes, and wheat.
- Buy wood and paper products that are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.
- Buy disposable paper products (toilet paper, paper towels, tissues) that are made from recycled paper and not bleached with chlorine.
- Turn off lights at night during peak migration periods.
- Keep your cats indoors.

On top of this list, I would recommend any actions that reduce your

household impact on the environment, such as replacing incandescent lights with compact fluorescent lights or using cloth grocery bags. The sooner we all start making acts of green, the better off songbirds – and the lives of our children and grandchildren – will be. I encourage you, as nature lovers, to keep this in mind when enjoying the whirl of the hummingbirds, the aerial acrobatics of the flycatchers, or the melodious calls of the songbirds this summer.

Bridget Stutchbury is a university professor with York University in Toronto. All proceeds from her book are donated to research on migratory songbirds.

BIOGRAPHY

Fred J. Payne

1931–2007

by Peter Austin-Smith

Fred didn't want to fiddle around! As a boy, he was reluctantly learning to play the violin, but one day, much to his parents chagrin, he rebelled and put down the violin, saying that he never wanted to play it again. He said that he much preferred to spend his time outdoors, fishing and hunting with his grandfather in Michigan or just tramping through the hardwoods of upstate New York. Fred's early adventures in the forests, swamps, and meadowlands of his childhood were eventually to lead him into a career that would ultimately benefit hunters, fishermen, birders, hikers, indeed all who value the wild places and wildlife of Nova Scotia.

Fred Payne, whose father was a psychiatrist and mother a keen birder, was schooled in upstate New York, served in the US Navy during the Korean War, and then obtained his forestry degree from

Syracuse University. After a short stint as a forester in Pennsylvania, he returned to school, graduating with an MSc in wildlife management from the University of Maine, having completed his thesis on Woodcock.

With his wife, Barbara, and growing family, he came to Nova Scotia in the early 1960s as the first waterfowl and wetlands biologist in the newly established Wildlife Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forests, now Natural Resources. One of his first assignments was to assess the importance of the 2,400-ha Missaquash Marsh on the border between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to waterfowl and other wildlife, a project which helped convince Ducks Unlimited to establish an office in Nova Scotia to service Atlantic Canada.

During his career, he undertook many projects, including several Black Duck studies, experimented with nutrient enrichment of wetlands as a management tool, introduced and studied the development and production of wild rice in impoundments, began an eider-nest shelter project to protect nests from gull predation, and conducted other management projects such as controlling plants in wetlands, flooding coastal cattail marshes, and liming rivers and lakes upstream to help reduce the effects of acid rain. He initiated a province-wide wetlands inventory, work which persuaded other Maritime provinces to undertake similar programs. This was a significant venture because it led to wetland habitat management plans that now benefit a wide array of wetland species.

Fred spearheaded the establishment of several wildlife management areas in the province, including the Tobetic and the Eastern Shore Wildlife Management Area, a region of more than 20 offshore islands set aside for the protection of the Common Eider and other colonial nesting birds. In cooperation with DU and landowners, Fred helped to acquire many important wetlands, including the Amherst Marsh, the Maccan Marsh, the Belleisle Marsh, and Allain's Impoundment, as well as numerous other wetland areas. He was also involved in the planning of several wildlife sanctuaries, thereby greatly increasing the amount of land for wildlife in Nova Scotia.

Fred's published and unpublished reports have contributed much valuable information to our understanding of waterfowl biology and wetlands management. He also wrote the definitive handbook on the propagation of wild rice in Atlantic Canada as well as assisting with many other natural resource and wildlife reports.

Fred's training as a forester allowed him to enter into knowledgeable discussions regarding forest wildlife with the forestry section of the department. In these endeavours, Fred, in his affable manner, won over many supporters to his view that forests were for more than just the production of wood fibre. He often met with agricultural department representatives and the farming community to point out the benefits of wildlife in attempts to have wildlife habitats considered as integral components of farmlands.

During his years with the division, he served on several committees as a voice for wildlife. Fred's duties also involved working with the Canadian Wildlife Service and Atlantic provincial wildlife agencies as well as on the international scene in support of the Eastern Flyway Council. Many university students came to Fred for advice and direction, which he gave freely, believing that his help would not only aid the students but lead to furthering the cause for natural resource conservation.

Fred often expressed the view that as a civil servant he was working for the taxpayers and therefore they deserved full value for paying his salary. His work habits clearly supported this view, for he was often at his desk a full hour before the office opened. And in the field, he worked alongside his technicians, only resting when it was dark or the job was completed.

Although his 30-year government career ended with formal retirement in 1991, Fred continued to be involved in waterfowl and wetland studies as a consultant long afterward. In recognition of his achievements and experience, he received the Merit Award from the Atlantic Society of Fish and Wildlife Biologists, and Acadia University appointed him as a research associate in the Department of Biology. Retirement gave him the time to become more active as a hunter of both waterfowl and upland game, as well as to indulge his

passion for fishing, a hobby at which he was quite skilled. Fred regularly attended fish and game meetings and so brought both expert advice as well as much experience to these gatherings. He was also a member of Ducks Unlimited.

Not many people knew that Fred was a keen birder, an interest passed on from his mother. He took great delight in identifying and observing the birds he encountered while working in the field or later in retirement, while fishing, hunting, or just walking or riding through the countryside. His observational skills were excellent, having been honed, of course, through years of fieldwork. Fred was also a proponent of natural foods, convinced that edible wildlife and wild plants were to be preferred over highly processed food, although it was difficult for him to indulge this preference on a continuous basis.

In late November 2006, Fred was honoured by his colleagues and peers when a cairn was placed on the Missaquash Marsh to recognize his outstanding achievements. During the ceremony, he was noted as being a leader in the field of wildlife biology and wetlands conservation and for his efforts to support Nova Scotia sportsmen. He was lauded for his concern for the future of our natural resources. Fittingly, the cairn is inscribed with these words: "Fred J. Payne, Biologist, Sportsman, Gentleman, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to wetland and environmental conservation in Atlantic Canada." All who knew Fred would add "Loyal Friend." A motion was passed in the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly on January 8, 2007, that recognized his significant contribution to the people of Nova Scotia in waterfowl management and wetlands protection as well as in the wider field of natural resource conservation.

Fred was a man of integrity, an original thinker who seldom accepted, without question, conventional views. On April 8, 2007, shortly after completing a paper in which he expressed his concerns over the present state and possible future of humans, their societies, and natural resources, Fred Payne died from leukemia. His legacy lives on in the wildlife and wildlife habitats he worked so diligently to conserve for future generations to enjoy.

Dr. Carlyle Smith Beals, Canadian Astronomer

by Merritt Gibson

Dr. Carlyle Beals, who became the Dominion Astronomer of Canada, grew up in Canard and later lived briefly in Wolfville. His sister, Professor Helen Beals, formerly head of Acadia's Department of Art, is fondly remembered by many residents of this area.

Carlyle Beals was born in Canso, Nova Scotia, in 1899, and moved to Canard when his father, the Rev. Francis (Frank) Beals, became minister of the Baptist Church there. Carlyle attended school in Canard. In 1924 his family moved to Wolfville and lived on Central Avenue, now Hillside, but perhaps better known at that time as Vinegar Hill.

Carlyle specialized in mathematics and physics at Acadia, graduating in 1919. He continued on to graduate studies at the University of Toronto (MA, 1923), and the Imperial College of Science and Technology at the University of London (PhD in physics, 1926). Dr. Beals taught physics for one year at Acadia, during which year stories by neighbours told of his interest in astronomy. The Beals' house was two and a half storeys with a peaked, 45-degree-slope roof. On stormy days neighbours watched him climb the slippery roof and walk along the peak to take photographs of the lightning. They also recalled that he was an expert chess player.

In 1927 Dr. Beals joined the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory in Victoria, BC. He quickly became noted for his innovative ideas and inventive abilities. He developed such items as new instruments for the telescope at Victoria and a highly efficient spectrograph. While at Victoria, Beals became interested in the emission lines in the spectra

of very hot stars and the gases in interstellar space. He developed a more accurate method to determine the temperatures of these bodies and later was the first to demonstrate that interstellar gases are not uniformly distributed but condensed into high-speed clouds. He was so interested in this topic that he returned to the University of London, wrote another thesis, and received a second doctorate (DSc, 1934).

In 1946 Dr. Beals moved to the Dominion Observatory in Ottawa and was appointed Dominion Astronomer in 1947. He continued his studies of gaseous emissions and became a world authority on the emission lines from the Wolf-Rayet and P Cygni-type (hot) stars. He also continued developing new or improved instruments, established new seismological and magnetic laboratories, upgraded the equipment at Dominion Observatories, and established the Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory at White Lake in the Okanagan Valley.

After becoming Dominion Astronomer he organized a study of meteorite craters, especially on the Canadian Shield. These studies showed that the impact of meteorites were important to the development of the Earth's surface and that of other planets. As the US space program expanded and photographs of the Moon's surface became available, Beals extended his studies to include lunar craters. His work made a major contribution to the US programs designed to explore and land on the Moon. In recognition, a lunar crater was named Beals in his honour.

Dr. Beals received recognitions, honours, and medals from many institutions and countries. He received honorary doctorates from Acadia (1948), the University of New Brunswick (1956), Queen's University (1960), and the University of Pittsburgh (1963). He was elected president (1951) and honorary president (1967) of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and was president of the American Astronomical Society from 1962 to 1964. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1933 and became a Fellow of the Royal Society of London in 1951. The Royal Society of Canada presented him with its Henry Marshall Tory Medal in 1957 for outstand-

ing achievement in science. In 1966, in recognition of his studies of meteorite craters, Dr. Beals received the Frederik Leonard Medal presented by the Meteoritical Society, and in 1958 he was presented with the Professional Institute Medal by the Public Service of Canada. In 1966 Dr. Beals was appointed a Companion of the Order of Canada, the Order's highest rank.

Dr. Beals died in Ottawa on July 2, 1979, at the age of 80. Further recognition of his career came after his death with the naming of Asteroid 3314 Beals. He was one of Canada's outstanding scientists.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION: Locke, J.L. 1979. "Carlyle Smith Beals 1899-1979." *Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada*. 73: 325-327. ♣ Virtual Museum of Canada, Canada under the Stars. *Carlyle Smith Beals (1899-1979)*. [Online] http://astro-canada.ca/_en/a2204.html.

WEATHER

Spring 2009

by Larry Bogan

There was quite a change in the weather at the beginning of April this year. The temperatures warmed and the snow on the ground disappeared. March was a colder month, while April and May were warmer, making the season as a whole warmer than average. Actually, a very pleasant spring in which growth was "ahead" by a week or two.

Temperatures March was, on average, a degree below normal, but both April and May were nearly 2 °C above the long-term average for the month. At the Agricultural Centre in Kentville, where the records are taken, the last frosts were on the 26th (min $T = -1.2$ °C) and 29th (min $T = -0.7$ °C) of April, with no minimums below zero

	Temperature			Precipitation		Bright
	Max (°C)	Min (°C)	Mean (°C)	Total* (mm)	Snow only (cm)	Sunshine (h)
March	2.7	-6.3	-1.8	202	23	152
(48 yr. average)	(3.3)	(-5.2)	(-0.9)	(103)	(42)	(133)
April	12	1.5	6.7	119	0	203
(48 yr. average)	(9.3)	(0.0)	(4.6)	(83)	(13)	(154)
May	18	6.8	12.4	58	0	160
(48 yr. average)	(16.2)	(5.0)	(10.6)	(80)	(2)	(187)
Season	10.9	0.7	5.8	379	23	514
(48 yr. average)	(9.6)	(-0.1)	(4.8)	(267)	(57)	(474)

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

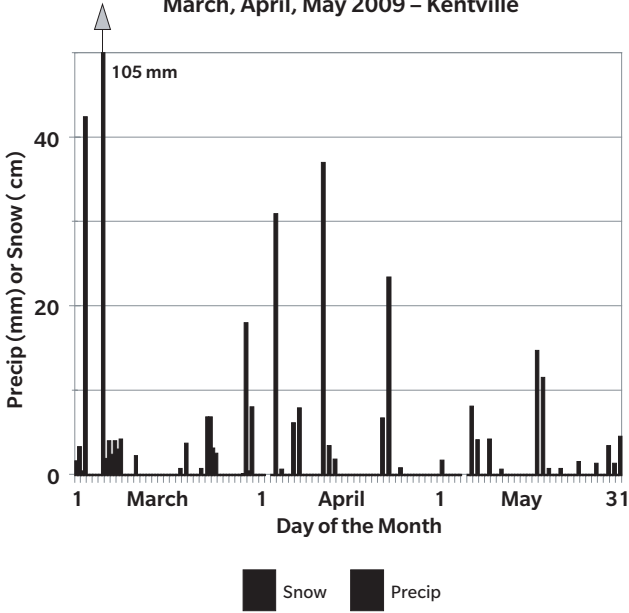
*Precipitation includes melted snow (1 cm snow equals approximately 1 mm water)

in May. That is earlier than usual to have no frost. It depends where you are, because in Cambridge on April 29 the low was -4 °C and on May 10 it got to -1 °C while Kentville was +0.6 °C.

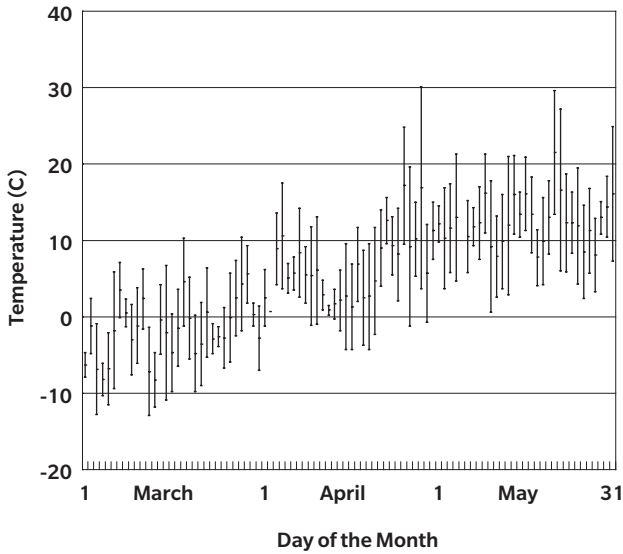
Precipitation The ground was snow covered the whole month of March, with an average of 25 cm, more than the average 11 cm of mean snow cover. This cover was maintained by the colder temperatures plus some snowfall (23 cm for the month, about half the average). There was a lot of rain that month, with nearly twice the average 104 mm falling. The amazing thing is that in the first five days of March there was over 150 mm of rain, most of the month's accumulation. April had no snowfall but abundant rain, 119 mm compared to the average 83 mm. May was a bit dry with only three-quarters of the average rainfall. The season overall was above average for precipitation by 40 percent.

Sunshine Amazingly enough, despite the precipitation in the early spring, it also had above average bright sunshine hours. Usually

**Daily Snowfall and Precipitation
March, April, May 2009 – Kentville**



**Daily Temperatures - Max, Mean, Min
March, April, May 2009 - Kentville, NS**



there is an inverse relationship between the two, but as we saw in March the rain came in sudden falls rather in long rainy periods. April was by far the sunniest with 202 hours of bright sunshine, more than in May. May was cloudier than average but had lower rainfall. In this case the rainfall came frequently in small amounts with more cloud cover. In fact, March had nearly as many sunny days as May did. Overall, the season was about average, with only 8 percent more bright sunshine than the long-term average.

What's In The Sky?

by Roy Bishop

It Was in the Sky – Did You See It? The last installment of this column (and the April page of your BNS Natural History Calendar) describe the spectacle that took place on April 26 in the western evening twilight – the slender crescent Moon beside the Pleiades star cluster, with Mercury directly below. The sky was clear that evening and the view in binoculars was memorable.

Solstice to Equinox Summer in the Northern Hemisphere begins officially with the summer solstice (on June 21) and ends with the autumnal equinox (on September 22). “Solstice” means “Sun stands still” and refers to the Sun’s reaching its extreme position in the sky – furthest north in June, furthest south in December. From late December to mid-June the Sun moves northward day by day, and after June 21 it moves southward day by day, having stopped its northward movement on the “Sun stands still” (solstice) moment (at 2:47 a.m. on June 21 this year). By September the Sun will be moving southward most rapidly, crossing the equator at 6:20 p.m.

on September 22. On that date night is of equal duration (12 hours, including twilight) at all latitudes, hence “equal night” (equinox). The decrease in hours of daylight from one day to the next begins to become smaller after September 22, providing the first hint of the spring of 2010!

Jupiter Replaces Saturn Saturn was well placed in the evening sky during the spring of 2009, but during this summer it drops lower in the western evening twilight, vanishing from sight during August prior to passing behind the Sun on September 17 (in astronomical jargon, Saturn is in conjunction with the Sun on that date). Saturn’s ring plane intersects Earth on September 4 and its rings vanish from sight, such is their incredible thinness. Ring plane crossings are fairly rare, occurring only every 15 years (twice in one Saturn 30-year orbit). Unfortunately, Saturn will be unobservable on September 4 because it will be too close to the Sun in the sky, less than two weeks from conjunction.

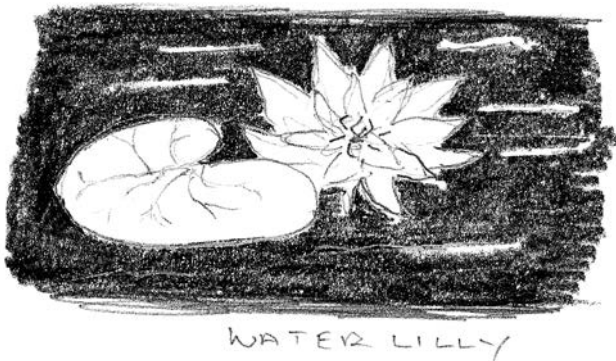
As Saturn vacates the evening sky, Jupiter enters that portion of the night. Jupiter is at opposition (opposite the Sun in the sky) on August 14, when it rises at sunset and is highest in the sky around 1 a.m. Jupiter remains in the evening sky for the rest of the year. Binoculars will show one or more of its four large moons. It was 400 years ago this coming winter that Galileo, using a small telescope he made, discovered the four “Galilean” satellites.

The Morning “Star” Venus entered the morning sky last March and continues to be the “morning star” for the summer of 2009 and into the autumn. Venus is the third brightest object in the sky, after the Sun and Moon, and is unmistakable. Venus passes by the Hyades star cluster during July 10 to 15, a view that is best seen in binoculars, between 4:00 and 4:30 a.m.

August’s Meteor Shower The best-known meteor shower is the Perseids of August 11–13. These meteors are caused by debris scattered along the orbit of Comet Swift-Tuttle. Every year in the second week

of August Earth passes near the orbit of the comet and collides with some of the fragments. The shower will be at its best on the nights of August 11/12 and 12/13, with the most activity between midnight and dawn. Perseid meteors enter the atmosphere at a speed of 60 km/s (about 1,800 times faster than traffic on highway 101!) and burn to gas and dust between altitudes of about 130 km to 80 km. Thus there is no danger of being hit by a Perseid meteor. Unfortunately, 2009 is not a favorable year to see the Perseids. Natural light pollution of the waning gibbous Moon will hide all but the brighter meteors.

A Star Party “Nova East” is Atlantic Canada’s largest annual star party. Hosted by the Halifax Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC) and by the Minas Astronomy Group (MAG) of Wolfville, Nova East is held in late summer near the time of the new Moon at Smileys Provincial Park near Windsor. This year Nova East occurs on August 21, 22, and 23. 2009 is the International Year of Astronomy, marking 400 years since Galileo first turned a telescope toward the sky and forever changed our view of the universe. The public is invited to attend talks and view the Sun and the nighttime sky through telescopes on Saturday. If you wish to attend all events, check the website <http://halifax.rasc.ca/ne/> for more information, registration, and for reserving a campsite at the park. Families with children are especially welcome.



SOURCES OF LOCAL NATURAL HISTORY

Compiled by the Blomidon Naturalists Society

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	Jim Wolford	H: 542-9204
Astronomy	Roy Bishop	H: 542-3992
	Sherman Williams	H: 542-5104
	Larry Bogan	H: 678-0446
Birds – General	Bernard Forsythe	H: 542-2427
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	Gordon & Judy Tufts	H: 542-7800
	Jim Wolford	H: 542-9204
	Jean Timpa	H: 542-5678
Butterflies & Moths	Jean Timpa	H: 542-5678
Fish & Wildlife	NS Department of Natural Resources	O: 679-6091
Flora:	Ruth Newell	O: 585-1355 H: 542-2095
Fungi:	Nancy Nickerson	H: 542-9332
Hawks & Owls	Bernard Forsythe	H: 542-2427
Indian Prehistory & Archeology	James Legge	H: 542-3530
Mosses & Ferns	Ruth Newell	O: 585-1355 H: 542-2095
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*A Sound Like Water Dripping:
In Search of the Boreal Owl*

BY SOREN BONDRUP-NIELSEN

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