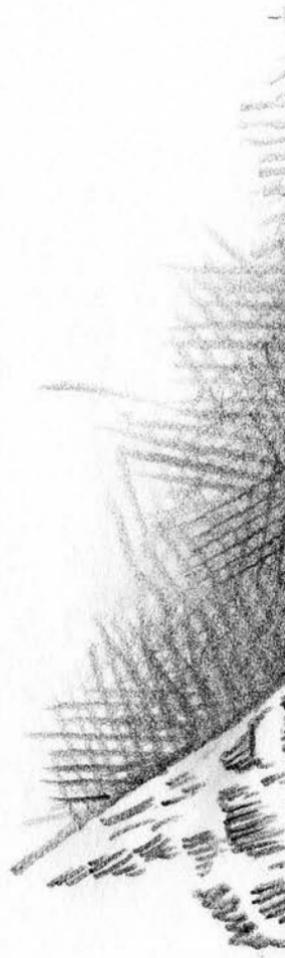


BLOMIDON
NATURALISTS
SOCIETY



WINTER 2015 NEWSLETTER
Volume 42 · Number 4





J. MCMASTER

❖ THE BLOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY ❖

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

FROM THE BNS CONSTITUTION

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The Blomidon Naturalists Society is a member of the 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. (Registration number: 118811686RR0001)

BNS NEWSLETTER

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Contributions to the BNS newsletter are always welcome. Articles may be reprinted with permission of the author or the editor. Credit the Blomidon Naturalists Society Newsletter. Unless otherwise stated, opinions are those of authors, not necessarily the Blomidon Naturalists Society. For subscription information, see the membership fees form at the back of this newsletter. If you change your address, please notify us at the address in the facing column.

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BLOMIDON
NATURALISTS SOCIETY

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:

1-25 GASPEREAU AVENUE
WOLFVILLE, NS B4P 2C5
jtimpa@ns.sympatico.ca

Digital photographs should
be submitted to
doug@fundymud.com

**Submission deadline for Spring:
February 29, 2016**

ENDANGERED SEAS

JESSE LILLFORD-BRIGHTON

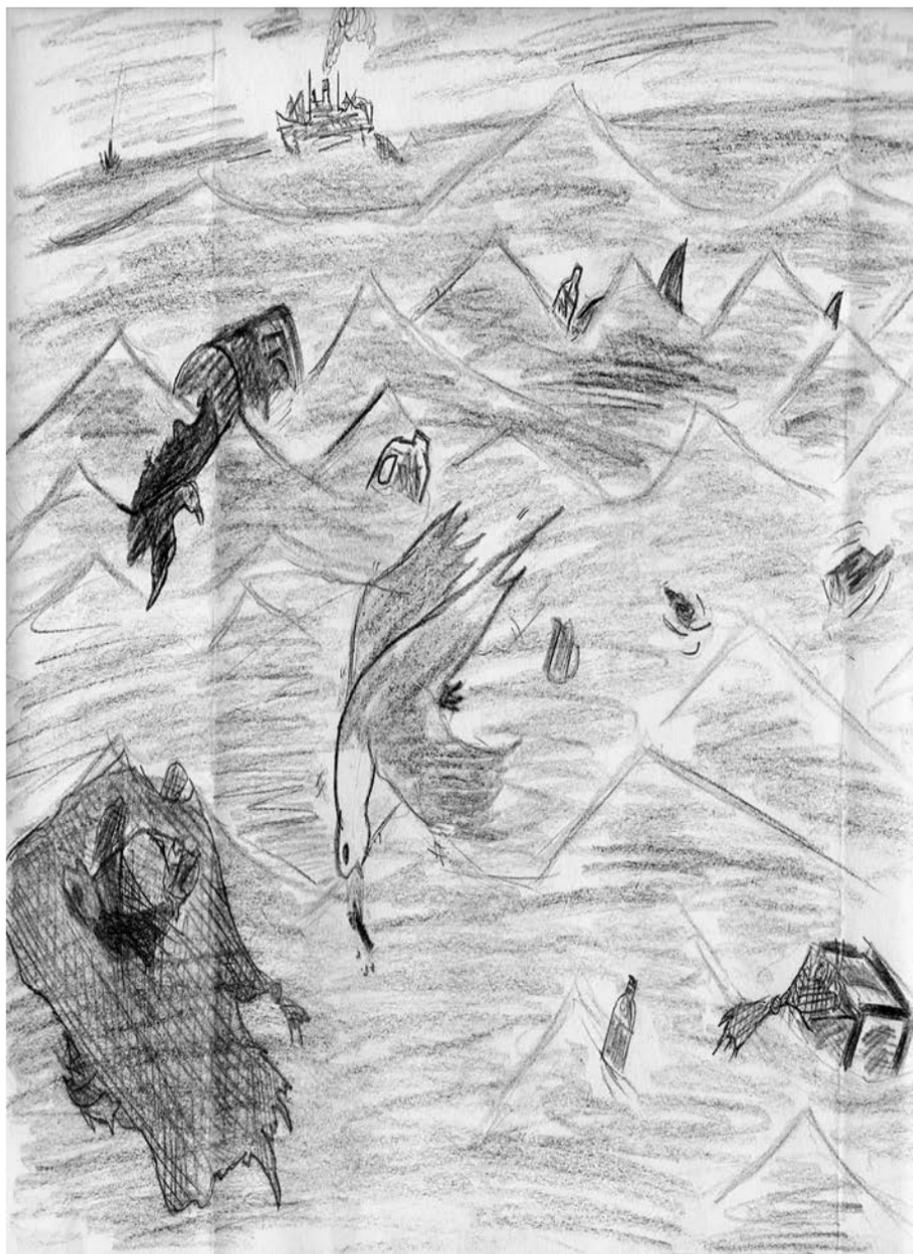
EDITOR'S NOTE: For the winter 2015 BNS Newsletter, we're pleased to be able to offer a guest editorial. As you will see elsewhere in this issue, the Young Naturalists Club of Nova Scotia invited young Nova Scotians (and, we hope, potential naturalists) to come up with writing or art on the subject of nature. We think that Jesse Lillford-Brighton (age 11) of Bridgetown brings to us in the following essay exactly the sentiment that Jean often expresses here. This piece won first place in the Junior writing category. Congratulations, Jesse. To accompany his essay, Jesse also did a drawing, for which he was given honourable mention in the Junior art category.

Some of the oldest creatures' bones are preserved in museums around the world. People pay a lot of money to see bones, shells, or the scaly skin of dead animals. But they're dead, just the remains of an age gone by.

The oldest known dinosaur fossil is around 240 million years old, but what I'm talking about is 3.8 billion years old – and it's still alive. Since it's that old we should be taking care of it, right? Well, 14 billion pounds of trash is dumped into it each year. I'm going to tell you about why I think our seas are endangered.

Have you been to Port Lorne beach in Annapolis County? Have you seen the trash on it? Tires, bottles, containers, lighters, fishing gear, people's household stuff they've just pitched down the slope onto the beach. Well, how much of that is swept into the ocean at high tide? And what will it do to sea life in the ocean? For example, what about plastics?

A plastic bag can take 20 years to decompose in the ocean, a plastic bottle 450 years, and fishing line 600 years. So a lost nylon fishing net could and does trap turtles, sharks and other fish, dolphins, penguins, and even whales, sometimes for a very long time. The nets



snare and kill millions of fish and sea mammals every year. As small pieces of netting break off, they may be mistaken for seaweed and be eaten by a passing turtle. That could be the last piece of “seaweed” the turtle ever ate.

Trash in the sea is not only a danger to life in the sea, it’s also a danger to sea birds, such as gannets. They may dive into the sea thinking a drifting piece of plastic is a fish and choke on it. A mother could feed it to its chick, and that would kill the next generation.

Scientists have opened up 50 carcasses of Northern Fulmars found on Sable Island beach, off the coast of Halifax. The carcasses of 49 of those 50 birds contained plastics, weighing up to 13 grams. These are some of the things that were found in one fulmar’s stomach: lobster bands, glass, wire, bark, rock, and 22 pieces of plastic. All that in just one bird’s stomach!

Texas is the second biggest state in the United States. In the Pacific Ocean, an island of trash has formed, and scientists say it is as big or bigger than Texas. In some parts of the island it reaches 90 feet deep. That’s like an iceberg of plastic. If there was going to be a list of the seven terrible things on the planet, surely that would be top of the list.

Our oceans are so enchanting, so wondrous, and yet so mysterious we should be taking care of them rather than destroying them. We know more about the moon than our planet’s seas and the life in them. They are in danger. But how can we help? We could go down to the beach and pick up rubbish or we could try not to drop our trash in the sea and on the beach. And, hopefully, we can make our oceans clean again.

But why is our ocean dirty in the first place? *Why* is there a trash island and four more like it in our seas? *Why* are we dumping 14 billion pounds of trash into our ocean every year? *Why* are we killing millions of sea creatures and birds that never even thought of hurting us? **WHY?**

2016 BNS NATURAL HISTORY CALENDAR

The 2016 Blomidon Naturalists Society natural history calendar is the 19th edition of this unique calendar, and as always it contains exceptional pictures by local photographers, daily tide times for the entire year, current and historical events, and lots of fascinating natural history information. Calendars are available at the following retail outlets:

WOLFVILLE: Herbin Jewellers, EOS Fine Foods, and Blomidon Inn
GREENWICH: Hennigar's Farm Market, Elderkin's Farm Market,
and Noggins Corner Farm
PORT WILLIAMS: Shur Gain Feeds & Needs
HANTS BORDER: R&G Family Restaurant

These outlets sell the calendar for our benefit at no profit for themselves, and we thank them for that and encourage you to patronize these fine establishments.

Calendars will also be available at BNS monthly meetings and from our treasurer, Ed, at edmasulis@ns.sympatico.ca. The price is still only \$15 each.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

BY KENT WILLIAMS, BNS PRESIDENT

Teach me to walk the soft earth as a relative to all that lives. Sweeten my heart and fill me with light. Give me strength to understand and the eyes to see.

— BLACK ELK PROVERB

Wow, here we are, another calendar year is nearly past as we edge close to the winter solstice and the holiday season. Reflecting back

on my one year as acting president it has been a good year of activity with for BNS, with many great outings and valuable presentations by dynamic storytellers. On serving BNS, we have made valuable strides to continue to grow and ensure we will have the capacity and capability to be resilient moving forward. We have worked to improve our website to make it more user friendly and enable us to provide clear and efficient information and interaction for the membership. Also, we have looked at innovative programming that engages old and new members alike, focusing on nature educational themes that matter. Moreover, this is a great time to thank and give gratitude for all those who have made this possible in 2015, from the sitting board members in their various roles to the invited speakers and other volunteers with our numerous field trips – and most of all to our faithful membership, who make BNS the success that it is.

The board recently met in late November to continue to move toward building a positive BNS organization. The board dialogued on the following agenda items:

1. *Communications*: new website and protocol on ensuring that updates are efficient and timely, and that they deliver the information that is important to members.
2. *Board nominations*: who is leaving and what positions need to be filled. This process is being led by past-president John Owen.
3. *Financials*: Ed Sulis gave the state of the union on our financial shape (picture looks solid).
4. *Future programming*: led by James Churchill, we discussed program themes for the coming year, with themes around nature and kids and getting informed on open pit mining and its effects on habitat, etc.
5. *Atlantic nature conference*: the board agreed we would submit an interest to host this spring conference in Wolfville. So stay tuned.

We have such strong dedicated members at BNS, many of whom have served for a long time with unswerving dedication – so hats off to them. Jean Timpa, after many years as Newsletter editor, is

stepping down in the new year, so we are looking for someone to take on this dynamic role with BNS. Also, there are other potential opportunities with the board, so if interested please feel free to contact John Owen or me. I want to end by thanking three individuals – Roy Bishop, Sherman Williams, and Patrick Kelly – for producing another brilliant calendar in record time and amazing quality – 2016 version. Don't forget to get your calendar for the start of the year!

As I write this today, in Paris the countries of the world are signing off on the COP21 climate change agreement. It will be interesting to see what the commitments will be and what actions will actually happen from this global agreement. I believe that the mission of BNS in co-inspiring education on the natural history of the area is an important connecting piece to acting for climate change initiatives on a local level, to connect to the sacred land that surrounds us and all the other creatures that share this land. So I leave you with this thought: How can each one of us live more thoughtfully and act differently to create and imagine the world we want to live in –one that is based on fairness, prosperity, and sustainability?

Happy New Year 2016!

— *Club Notes* —

BOB DANSON IS 100

BY SHERMAN WILLIAMS

Robert L. Danson, a BNS member and active contributor to our Newsletter, has recently celebrated his 100th birthday. He was born September 8, 1915, in Saint John's, Newfoundland. To quote Bob, "I was so anxious to get out to see the world that I was born on a mat in front of a fireplace."

Bob currently is enjoying his retirement at Melville Heights in Halifax, where he has an independent living suite. The photo included here was taken during a special celebration held in his honour at Melville Heights on September 8.

Bob spent several years of his youth closely connected with farm-



ing, which exposed him to the ways of the land, the wonders of nature, and the appreciation of hard work. He was always interested in how things worked. This led to a productive and satisfying career of several years as an instructor in the trades and mechanics field. His last years of teaching were at the Nova Scotia Teachers College in Truro, from which he retired in 1975.

The retirement years allowed Bob and his wife, Hazel, time to explore life's other interests: more time to enjoy family and friends, more occasions to travel, and best of all, more days to spend at Big Oak, their beloved retreat at Lake Peter in southwestern Nova Scotia. He reports having recently spent special days with family at Big Oak, celebrating his 100 years.

During his retirement, Bob has spent several pleasant hours writing. As he puts it, "I was writing a record of family history and nature stories for the younger members of my family. I want them to experience something about life at the time when I lived it, especially during the earlier years when life went hand in hand with working close to the land, with a respect and love for nature."

The Blomidon Naturalists Society is pleased to have Bob as a participating member and extends congratulations on his special achievement. Best wishes, Bob, for continued health and happiness as you make your 101st trip around our star, on good planet Earth!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Meetings

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings are held at 7:30 p.m., usually on the third Monday of each month (note exception for December), in Room BAC241 of the Beveridge Arts Centre of Acadia University on the corner of Main Street and Highland Avenue, Wolfville. Parking is available off Highland Avenue, on Acadia Street, and at the parking area around the Robie Tufts Nature Centre. Everyone is welcome. For more information on any events contact us at info@blomidonnaturalists.ca.

✎ MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2016 – *The Impact of Free-roaming Cats on Wildlife and Suggested Solutions to Keep Both Cats and Wildlife Safe.* Helene Van Doninck will discuss the science of the impact of free-roaming cats on wildlife and the activities of the Bird Conservation Committee to help address this issue. The committee has two ongoing projects aimed at keeping both cats and birds safe by encouraging owners to keep cats indoors or in enclosures, or supervised when outside. The committee is seeking to engage cat rescue groups, veterinarians, naturalists, agencies, and other interested parties to find common ground.

Helene is the co-founder and volunteer veterinarian of the Cobequid Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre (CWRC) in Hilden, NS. She is also the lead scientific advisor and provincial partnership development coordinator for the Bird Conservation Committee, which comprises members from the Ecology Action Centre, NS Bird Society, Bird Studies Canada, and CWRC. She regularly sees the impacts of cats on wildlife and the dangers faced by cats that are free-roaming. Concern for these two groups made her actively seek a solution for this complex issue.

✂ NOTE: *There is no February meeting this year at the BAC. Our February BNS meeting – traditionally our Show and Tell night – is being replaced by Kids Nature Night (next item). If you were looking forward to participating in Show and Tell, consider sharing at the Kids Nature Night, in the BNS Newsletter, or at the beginning of a regular monthly meeting.*

✂ MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2016 – *Kids Nature Night!* All ages, all welcome; sponsored by BNS, the Young Naturalist Clubs, Valley Family Fun, and the Town of Kentville. Note time and location: 5:30–8:30 p.m., Kentville Recreation Centre, 354 Main Street, Kentville. Activities include:

- Gear Giveaway! (everything must go!) Tables of free equipment, gear, field guides, etc. for helping kids explore the natural world.
- Booths, Displays, and Demos! Find out what local nature groups are out there, what creatures you can find in your own backyard, or sit and participate in a hands-on nature project.
- Talks By Kids For Kids! Short and sweet presentations by kids about their own, personal nature projects, photographs, or experiences.
- Presentation: benefits of connecting kids and adults with nature.

Kids: let us know if you would like to present. There are no judges. *Former kids:* please let us know if you have items to donate, or if you would like to register to do a booth, demo, or hands-on project. E-mail us: BNS@valleynature.ca

✂ MONDAY, MARCH 21, 2016 – *Perspectives on Nova Scotia's Sand Barrens*, with a panel of local sand barrens experts. Sand barrens are one of the most rapidly changing, disappearing, and endangered ecosystems in Nova Scotia. "As recently as the 1960s, mile after mile of the Evangeline Trail was surrounded by extensive open heathlands with scattered Red Pines. In presettlement times the actual area of heathland is believed to have encompassed an area of approximately 200 km². Today it appears that less than 3 percent of the original

heathland remains” (Catling et al. 2004: http://www.cba-abc.ca/bulletin/vol_37_1.pdf). Sand barrens are home to a number of the province’s plant and animal species at risk, including Rockrose (*Helianthum canadense*, endangered in NS), Wood Turtle (threatened in NS), and Vesper Sparrow (rare in NS). A panel of local experts will provide perspectives on the history, geology, biodiversity, threats, and conservation of these rich but troubled systems.

✈ MONDAY, APRIL 18, 2016 – *Maritimes Butterfly Atlas Wrap Up*. John Klymko, zoologist for the Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre, and director of the Maritimes Butterfly Atlas will give a wrap up of the spectacular findings of the first comprehensive and systematic survey of butterflies in our region.

✈ MONDAY, MAY 16, 2016 – *The Fascinating World of Lichens*: a look into what these extraordinary organisms are and some tips on how to identify them, with Frances Anderson.

Frances is a coauthor of the field guide *Common Lichens of Northeastern North America*, published in February by the New York Botanical Garden Press, and has been studying lichens for over 10 years. This talk will be followed up by a lichen field trip in May.

✈ MONDAY, JUNE 20, 2016 – *Monarch Butterflies*, with Phil Schappert

Field Trips and Other Nature Events

Visit the BNS website for field trip maps and directions.

✈ BNS MAPPING INITIATIVE – Maps can be valuable navigational resources, but they also tell powerful stories about the past, present, and future of our natural world. Did you know that BNS now has a licence for mapping software and a subscription to an online mapping portal (ArcGIS online)? We do! Are you interested in geography, maps, or collecting and mapping nature-related data? Then let the mapping begin.

One of the first expressions of the Mapping Initiative might be

a Mapathon: a fleet of us compiling geographic datasets; exploring the region with GPS units, cameras, and notebooks; and using our artistic nature to make posters, web maps, or web applications that we can host on the BNS website. Don't have GPS skills or experience in map making? Not a problem – it's easy, and we can hold some workshops if need be. If you're interested in being part of this initiative, or have ideas for a map BNS should create, contact James at info@blomidonnaturalists.ca.

✂ SATURDAY & SUNDAY, JANUARY 30 & 31, 2016 – *Eagle Watch Weekend 1*. The Sheffield Mills Community Hall will host its annual pancake and sausage breakfast with naturalist displays, videos, crafts, and art show. A short drive around the area in the morning will possibly offer a good views of many Bald Eagles and hawks. Maps and directions can be obtained at the hall or any time at the information post on Middle Dyke Road. For more information, check the website www.eaglen.ca or contact Richard Hennigar (902-582-3044, hennigar@xcountry.tv).

✂ SATURDAY & SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6 & 7, 2016 – *Eagle Watch Weekend 2*. A repeat at the Sheffield Mills Community Hall.

✂ SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2016 – *Winter on Snowshoes*. Snow transforms the landscape into stories that unfold as we follow tracks of foxes, mice, and other mammals. A Snowshoe Hare hops along and is pounced on by a Great Horned Owl. Without snow to show us the tracks, wing marks, and perhaps a drop of blood, we would not have known the drama took place. Soren Bondrup-Nielsen (902-582-3971) will lead this hike on snowshoes or skis, and we will explore the properties of snow (its insulative value, for example). By studying the characteristic imprints made by different organisms we will interpret the various stories that have unfolded. Meet at the Wolfville waterfront at 10 a.m. for a two-hour, non-strenuous hike at a nearby location to be determined by weather and snow conditions.

✈ SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2016, 10:30 A.M. TO 4:00 P.M. – *Orchid Display and Sale*, the Valley Orchid Group’s annual display of orchids in the conservatory of the K.C. Irving Environmental Science Centre, Acadia University. Orchids will be available for purchase with specialized materials and instructions on how to help them grow well. This is a sure cure for the winter blahs, with only the very best of the best orchids brought for this occasion. You will see plants that you will not believe are real – they are so beautiful, perfect, and complex in their structures. Photographers are welcome and encouraged.

✈ SUNDAY, MARCH 13, 2016 – *Valley Birding*. Leader: Patrick Kelly (902-472-2322, patrick.kelly@dal.ca). This will be a joint trip with the Nova Scotia Bird Society. Meet at 9 a.m. at the Wolfville waterfront. We will be looking for nesting raptors (they like to get an early start!), lingering winter visitors, and rarities in and around Grand Pré and Canning. We will end the day at Miner’s Marsh in Kentville. If you have never been there, now is a great time to learn where it is, as it’s a very active birding spot during the breeding season. Dress warmly and bring a lunch.

✈ SATURDAY, APRIL 9, 2016 – *Avon River Canoe Trip*. Leader: Patrick Kelly (902-472-2322, patrick.kelly@dal.ca). The Avon River offers a few advantages over the Herbert River; it is closer to most BNS members; you start and stop at the same location so no time is needed to get cars to the other end; and on the way back you are going downstream – you can turn around whenever you like! The trip will be four to five hours long, depending on our pace. Bring life jackets, canoe or kayak, and paddles, and you may need rubber boots to get into the river. If you have access to a life jacket but not a canoe, there will likely be extra room in one of the canoes. Check with the leader to be sure. LIFEJACKETS MUST BE WORN ON THIS TRIP! Meet on the connector road between Exit 7 (Falmouth) and Highway 1 at 9 a.m. The plan will be to put in at Sangster’s Bridge in Upper Falmouth and proceed upstream. Participants should register with the trip leader so they can be notified if there is a change of plans.

✦ APRIL, 2016 (date and location to be announced) – *Citizen Science Expo II*. Have you caught the buzz about citizen science? Citizen scientists are dark-sky mappers, supernova hunters, butterfly chasers, Chimney Swift counters, bird-feeder watchers, milkweed planters, bat reporters, water-quality monitors, phenology trackers, GPS mappers, big-data crunchers, and DIY nature nerds. There are now hundreds of ways the average Maritimer can easily contribute to exciting and important scientific research while on a computer, in a workshop or in the field.

So how do you know what projects you or your family could get involved in and who (or what) could benefit most from your passion, time, and observations? A good first step is to join us at our second annual BNS Citizen Science Expo for an afternoon of displays and presentations by organizations leading citizen science projects. This is a great opportunity for individuals of all ages to find a niche for their passions, and for organizations to promote their projects and recruit volunteers. If your organization would like to set up a display or give a presentation at the event, please let us know (BNS@valleynature.ca).

✦ MAY 25, 29; JUNE 2, 6, 2016 – *Maritimes SwiftWatch Spring Migration Roost Counts*. Individuals are encouraged to count Chimney Swifts at roost sites during spring migration on the above dates (and earlier at major roost sites if swifts arrive earlier). These counts are part of a national monitoring effort to understand Chimney Swift population trends. Nova Scotians are asked to continue searching for, and reporting, active nests and roosts in both anthropogenic sites (e.g. chimneys) and natural areas. To share a Chimney Swift sighting, report a new roost or nest site, or help monitor an existing site, please contact Maritimes SwiftWatch (marswifts@birdscanada.org, 1-506-364-5196) or consider sharing your sightings and roost counts on their Facebook page (www.facebook.com/MaritimesSwifts; omit specific address information if posting here), on NatureCounts (http://www.birdscanada.org/birdmon/mar_swift/), or

via eBird. For more information, see <http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/acswifts/>.

✈ OTHER EVENTS TO WATCH FOR IN 2016: Great Nova Scotia Pick Me Up ... National Moth Week ... Marsh Madness III ... Tree Swallow Nest Monitoring ... Mapping Initiatives ... “Demystifying eBird” workshop ...

— Field Trip —

WALLBROOK FALL COLOURS, LATE WILDFLOWERS, AND A BEAUTIFUL VIEW

BY GEORGE FORSYTH

With apologies to everyone who read the announcement more carefully than I did, who met no one at the waterfront, while those who had read the announcement were waiting at The Nature Centre – I’m sorry.

OCTOBER 18 – Have you ever seen the view of Melanson and the Minas Basin from the Wallbrook Tower?

Many people have seen this tower when driving through Gaspareau and Melanson, but few have been near it or even inside. Well, George had the key.

Thirty five diverse participants of all ages, and a dog who walked her owner, enjoyed a Sunday afternoon stroll. The weather was as diverse as the participants; we saw the sun, the clouds, and the first snow of the season! The walk up the hill on an old farm road lined with mature maples and oaks set the stage for the crest of the hill. At the peak of the hill we entered a plantation of pine and spruce planted by the Stirlings. The grass fairways of Ralph’s golf course create a park-like setting, the Norway Spruce so dense that the ground is literally devoid of green plants and it is easy to see the many fungi and cone piles of the squirrels. A lone apple tree growing among the conifers, in quiet juxtaposition to the fame of the Stirlings immense orchards surrounding the hill, had a crop of worm-riddled fruit that

had the flavour of apple but not the sweetness of recent cultivars, Honeycrisp it weren't!

Further along Trenholm Hill is the cemetery of the Trenholms (former owners of the property) and Stirlings (present owners of the property). The lichen crusts on the old stones hint at the age of some of the memorials without reading the inscriptions, and the polished recent stones show living and deceased members of the extended Stirling clan.

The Trenholm Tower was the focus of the afternoon. A commentary of the tower's story was published in the *Kings County News* in 2013, reviewing an earlier article from *The Advertiser* in 1992 (see www.kingscountynews.ca/Opinion/Columnists/2013-09-24/article-3401430/Purpose-of-Trenholm-Hill-Tower-a-mystery/1).

Harry Trenholm, who is buried in the adjacent cemetery, had Havelock Brown build the tower very early in the twentieth century. The interior construction is interesting, with 50 steps to the top, all attached to a centre pole that is just a tree without the bark. Four windows looking to the compass directions, each with a different view, await anyone who treks to the top. Any view in the Valley is a view of home to those of us lucky enough to have grown up here, but some in our group literally were looking at home as they viewed their house across the ridge.

Each of us had our reasons and interests in wanting to visit "The Tower." Three generations of one family in the group were sharing an experience that each had had in their turn and were now sharing together. Some had seen the tower from the road and wanted, as the title of the walk's advertisement, to finally get inside. Some had been here "years ago" and wished to refresh an earlier memory. Two long-time members of BNS attended because they had not been able to attend last year, and the walk was repeated as a very small reflection of the great respect I have for both of them and the turns that life can take.

Henry David Thoreau wrote: "I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least – and it is

commonly more than that – sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements.”

Hopefully we were able to spend a couple of hours “free from worldly engagements,” as we too sauntered and refreshed our spirits. The trifling apple tree among the conifers, the diminutive fungus on the forest floor, the petite tower in the Valley, the first of 50 steps to the tower’s top all represent something small but no less important.

— *Field Trip* —

FUNDY ROCKS

BY DAVID E. SHEPPARD

This autumn, two very successful treks were enjoyed by members of Blomidon Naturalists Society and Fundy Rocks, an educational and guiding organization headed by Chris Sheppard and David E. Sheppard.

LITTLE SPLIT COVE, OCTOBER 24, 2015 – We had perfect weather for a trek to Little Split Cove, on the shore beneath Cape Split. Unfortunately, Fundy Rocks mixed up the start time, which had been set for 9:30 a.m. When only one hiker showed up at 8:30, we were disappointed but hiked out to Little Split Cove anyway, arriving at high tide, and began searching for agates. About 90 minutes later, a group of ten or so members of the Blomidon Naturalists Society climbed down the ropes to the beach, asking us if we were the Sheppards of Fundy Rocks. How embarrassing to discover we had messed up!

Nevertheless, everyone joined in for instruction in how to look for agates. Later, just after noon, the pinch point cleared, and eight intrepid souls headed for the Cape Split Spires, about a kilometre away. Three of the BNS hikers had to return home, but all the rest headed across the slippery, boulder-strewn shoreline, including one slightly older lady, whose gutsy trek out to the spires impressed me, especially since I waited alone on the beach for over two hours. When they returned and I heard they had gone past the spires to

the edge of the Minas Channel, I was so pleased that she had done it that I told her what a wonderful feat that was, especially since she was 82 years old. Her answer, “Oh, I’m not 82 – until Monday.” Apparently, she was very happy to have made the effort, as were the others, despite its being strenuous.

Several kilos of agates and other stones were lugged back along the Cape Split Trail to be taken home.

AMETHYST COVE, NOVEMBER 7 – Two weeks later, the more-than-once-cancelled trek to Amethyst Cove finally happened. Thirty people showed up, about half from the Blomidon Naturalists Society. The others, invited by Fundy Rocks, included about six geocachers. As usual, we asked hikers to set up a buddy system and to report any early departures.

To emphasize the risks of the trek, when I did my cautionary informational talk I was able to refer to the vehicles of Valley Search and Rescue in the parking lot, who, with the Canning Fire Department, had just successfully rescued a father and a son from Ontario, who had been down to Amethyst Cove the day before but couldn’t find the ropes to climb out as it darkened. They spent the night on the shore, but were equipped well enough to be able to light a fire and keep warm and were brought up safe and sound in the morning.

Although I personally did not go down to the shoreline, I was there when hikers returned and was excited to look at their “finds” and to hear of their experiences. Although no huge chunks of amethyst were found, everyone seemed to have had a great time, although a couple of folks said they probably wouldn’t do it again, because of the difficulty of the climb. Not everyone made it all the way southward to Amethyst Cove proper, but they enjoyed their time on the beautiful, rugged shoreline.

Fundy Rocks looks forward to further shared adventures with Blomidon Naturalists.

ANNAPOLIS VALLEY MILKWEED SURVEY

BY LARRY BOGAN

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2015 – The Monarch butterfly must have milkweed to breed, since it is the only plant that the Monarch larva can consume. In Nova Scotia, it uses Common Milkweed and Swamp Milkweed.

The population of Monarchs has been decreasing dramatically in recent years, and to understand their abundance, we must know where they are breeding. Scattered reports are received from the nature networks, but it would be better to be able to survey milkweed plots for Monarch activity.

As part of this October 31 field trip, BNS members discussed the process to be used to survey milkweed growth in the Annapolis Valley area. Plans were made to encourage members to report locations and sizes of plots of Common and Swamp Milkweed. From this information, maps will be produced so members can survey the milkweed in the summer when Monarchs are likely to be present. We hope to get more accurate information about the breeding activity of the Monarch in our area .

A set of survey maps and report forms has been created and posted on a new website created to provide space for such reports – <http://valleynature.ca> – and other maps and results are to be reported on the BNS website (<http://blomidonnauralists.ca>) in the future.

During the past summer, I and other BNS members looked for milkweed, and the results of that survey are shown on the valleynature.ca site (valleynature.ca/index.php?id=milkweed-common-locations). No Swamp Milkweed was reported, but Common Milkweed was most common in the Waterville, Cambridge, and Coldbrook area. Surprisingly, very little was found outside this area, but more surveying is needed. BNS members are encouraged to report information on milkweed to me (larry@bogan.ca) or to info@valleynature.ca.



LARRY BOGAN

Milkweed pod

This autumn, Common Milkweed was made easily visible in fields by its prominent seed pods and white seed floss. Much of the pods are gone this late in the year, so it will be better to restart the survey in early summer next year when milkweed will be growing again.

— *Field Trip* —

BRIER ISLAND RAPTORS

BY RICHARD STERN

I gave a talk on identification of birds of prey at the regular BNS meeting in late September, and the idea was to follow this up with one, or possibly two, field trips to Brier Island to put what we have leaned into practice. Unfortunately, nobody was available on the first planned weekend, and the weather forecast was not good for the second planned Saturday, but it did look promising for the Sunday, so we went ahead with that day. Three of us had gone down the previous afternoon to stay at my cabin and scout things out, and several other BNS members and guests arrived at the appointed time and place in Westport on the Sunday morning.

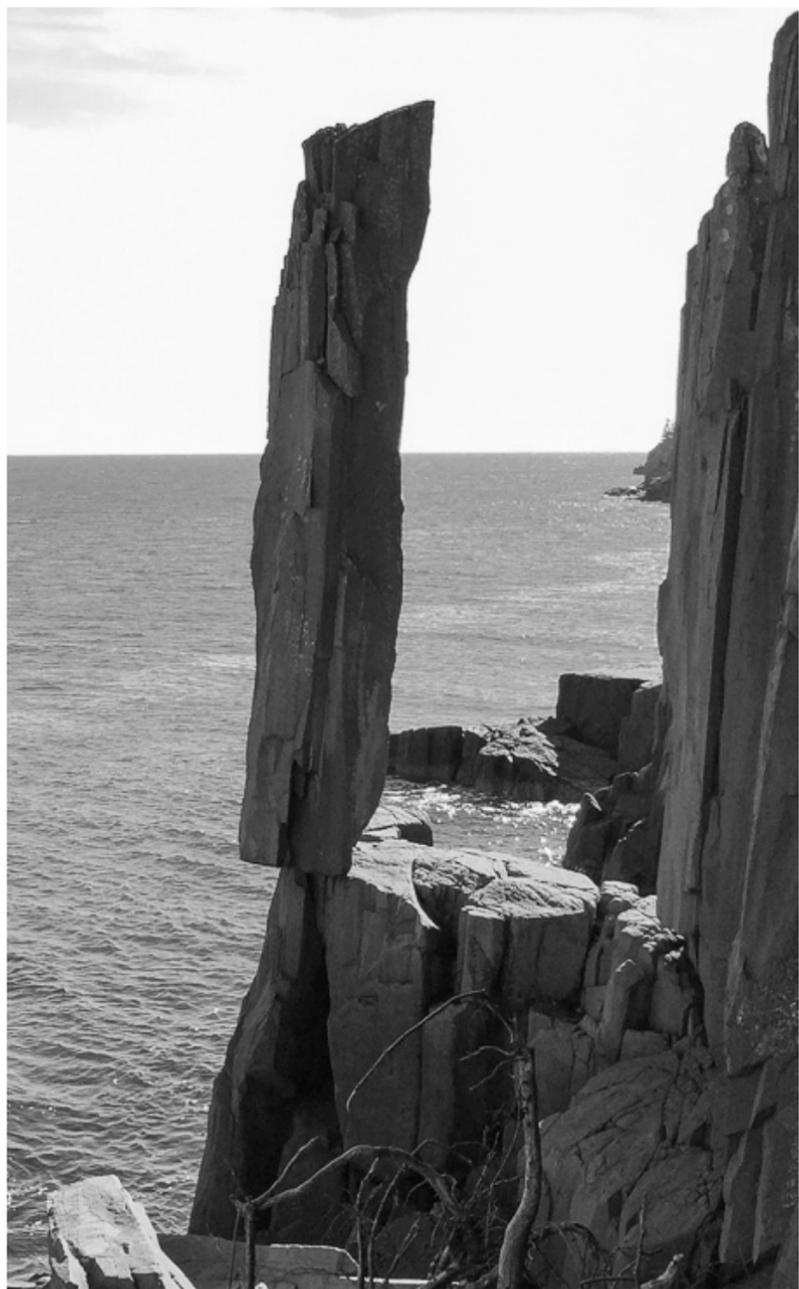


Sharp-shinned Hawk

The early (human) birds had already been at Northern Light since dawn, and the others arrived in time to still catch the tail end of an incredible migration spectacle. The bushes, trees, and sky were alive with birds – nearly all heading out to sea on migration. We estimated at least 1,000 Yellow-rumped Warblers, together with many Palm Warblers and a smattering of others, in the first few hours after dawn. There were many flickers, flocks of Blue Jays, Cedar Waxwings, and goldfinch, and seaward was a constant stream of gulls, cormorants, and gannets.

But we were there primarily for the raptors, and they didn't disappoint. Also at Northern Point, the Sharp-shins were cruising around between the bushes, looking for passerine prey, as well as obviously migrating offshore. We could hear the occasional cry of yet another flicker or Blue Jay behind a bush as a Sharpie dived in to catch it. A nice adult Bald Eagle cruised overhead.

After Northern Point we drove up to the Lighthouse Road, and made our way slowly to Western Light, stopping to look along the way. The highlight was the appearance of a kettle of about 80 Broad-



R. STERN

Balancing rock, Long Island, NS

winged Hawks, slowly drifting high in the sky against the daytime moon. Several Turkey Vultures flew by, and there were kestrels on the wire. There were Sharpies all over the place. There were more kestrels flying around at Western Light. We all stopped at the small grassy campground after that, and had a picnic lunch, to the accompaniment of kestrels, Sharp-shins, Broad-wings, a Red-tail, a Peregrine, and more Yellow-rumped and Palm Warblers in the bushes.

After that we did a beach walk at Pond Cove and saw a lovely immature Northern Harrier drift by at close range. In the distance was another kettle, this time of about 200 Broad-wings. The only shorebirds we could find were a few Sanderling on the beach, and one cooperative Pectoral Sandpiper, which seemed to follow us.

After this, most people went their own way. Several of us went to the Balancing Rock, on Long Island, on the way home. There were more Broad-wings and Turkey Vultures flying over the trail.

The whole day was cool, clear, and sunny, with a moderate breeze. Everybody enjoyed the trip, not just for the great birding, but for the whole ambience of a day on Brier Island.

— *Seen in the Wild* —

NO ORDINARY ROADKILL

BY GINI PROULX

On June 24, 2015, while driving along Highway 1 in the west end of Deep Brook, Annapolis County, I saw a lifeless brown body on the pavement under the Highway 101 overpass. My first thought was, “One less raccoon to raid my gardens!” As I swerved slightly to avoid it, I realized that this was no ordinary roadkill. I pulled over, parked, and went back for a closer look. Just as I saw that it was a raptor, but before I could retrieve it, a half-ton appeared over the crest of the hill. I stayed close to the edge of the pavement and the truck obligingly moved over and missed the dead bird.

I picked up the still-warm bird and the first thing I noticed was a gaping hole in its skull. When I recognized the distinguishing black

“mustache” and the brilliant yellow eye-ring and cere, I realized, with a jolt, that I was holding a mature, but very dead, Peregrine Falcon.

Saddened though I was by this revelation, I was excited to see that there were bands on both legs. Perhaps some good would come of this unfortunate accident, after all. My first thought was that this bird might have been released from hack boxes in the upper Bay of Fundy back in the 1990s.

When I returned home (a few hundred yards away), I double bagged the bird and stored it in my refrigerator. The next day, after taking numerous photos and recording the information on the leg bands, I delivered the falcon to the Wildlife Division, NS Department of Natural Resources, in Kentville. I asked them to let me know when they heard anything back about the history of the raptor.

A few days later, when I had time, I phoned the North American Bird Banding Program toll-free reporting number that I had found on the right leg band. I spoke with “Joe” in the state of Maine and gave him the identification number that I had recorded from the band. To my disappointment, I was missing the last digit of that ID number, and Joe could not help me. I realized that the last digit must have been covered with blood and I had missed it. I would have to wait to hear back from DNR.

My summer flew by, and it was late October when in Kentville I stopped by DNR Wildlife Division to see if there had been any word on “my” Peregrine Falcon. Kim Huskins, wildlife technician, was not there at the time, but she phoned me soon after and said that she would follow up on my request. Soon after that, I received a phone call from Fiep de Bie, a wildlife technician with the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative (CWHC), Atlantic Region, at the Atlantic Veterinarian College in Charlottetown, PEI. The falcon had been sent there for necropsy. Ms. de Bie wanted to ascertain the exact location where it was killed. She also gave me the feedback from the North American Bird Banding Program that I’d been waiting for all summer. The Peregrine Falcon with right leg band #1807-84771, left band green/black OOOO EEEE, was a “bird too young to fly

when banded on May 31, 2002; female, Maine, USA.” There was no information about whether the banded chick was from a natural nest or a hack box; nor was there any available when I called the Banding Program later with the complete band number.

Ms. de Bie asked if I would like to have a copy of the necropsy report. Of course I said, “Yes!” She said that they were quite busy and it might be awhile before that report would be ready. However, when I told her that I had promised to write an article about the falcon for the BNS Newsletter and a deadline was looming, she offered to try to speed up the process. She e-mailed me the next day and said that Dr. Pierre-Yves Daoust, the pathologist, would perform the necropsy the following week. (Such obliging people!) I think I might also have mentioned that I was 78 years old and wanted to live to see this mystery solved.

Just two working days after the necropsy, Dr. Daoust’s Wildlife Diagnostic Report was in my inbox. In short, this adult female Peregrine Falcon had died of “multiple acute trauma, including broken bones in multiple sites and internal hemorrhage.” She was “in good body condition (well developed pectoral muscle mass, good fat reserves).” Her crop and stomach were full, which may have led to her demise by weighing her down and lessening her ability to maneuver away from an oncoming vehicle while under the overpass. Considering her presence under the overpass, it was not surprising that her crop contained “remnants of a recent prey, more specifically a nestling (pigeon?) (muscle tissue, very small unfeathered wings, legs with very soft feet).” The bird’s ruptured stomach contained “feathers and small bones.”

The following statement in the necropsy test results prompted me to question Dr. Daoust about its significance regarding the breeding history of this female Peregrine: “The ovary includes what appears to be a large (approximately 1 cm in diameter) inspissated ovum.” He explained that any unfertilized ova in a given season are resorbed and possibly, in this older bird, that process might have been slower. He felt that she had probably successfully bred in the past and would have continued to do so for a few more years had



GINI PROULX

A Peregrine falcon, tagged

she lived. (Peregrine Falcons have a life expectancy of about 16–20 years, although some western North American statistics consider three to four years an average survival rate.)

If she was a breeding female, that raises questions: On June 24, 2015, where was her nest? Did she have chicks and would her mate continue to feed and raise the young? Normally, both parents feed the chicks in the nest for six to seven weeks and continue to support them for another six weeks as they learn to fly and hunt for themselves. Peregrines usually mate for life, but if one is killed, the surviving bird will seek another mate. In a 1990s South African study, Peregrine Falcon females rarely ranged more than 8–10 km from their nest site. The Deep Brook overpass is barely within that distance southeast from Digby Gap and the Bay of Fundy basalt cliffs.

Like most overpasses, this one, adjacent to the Exit 23 eastbound ramp, has been a favorite Rock Dove nesting site for many years. An adjacent wooded area, at the time of the Peregrine's death, was home to a family of young crows. The adult crows tended to mob any raptor or raven that ventured within their territory. One of these



GINI PROULX

Close-up of a tag on a Peregrine falcon

mobbing events could have distracted the falcon. We'll never know for sure why this magnificent 13-year-old bird's life ended so tragically.

Thanks to a National Recovery Plan approved in 1987, captive-bred Peregrines were reintroduced to the east coast after the species almost disappeared due to the effects of DDT and other pesticides. 1995 saw the first known breeding pair return to Nova Scotia after an absence of 40 years. They are now known to nest mainly along the cliffs of the Bay of Fundy as far west as Digby county and on tall buildings in the Halifax metro area. Their diet consists mainly of medium-size birds (rock pigeons, marsh and sea birds). Peregrines are known as the fastest birds on the planet; when in a dive, they have been clocked at speeds of over 300 km/h.

During the past few weeks, I have had a number of cordial e-mail and telephone contacts with Dr. Daoust and Fiep de Bie at the Atlantic Region CWHC in PEI. They perform an admirable service that may not be well known. They provide diagnostic health services for wildlife, including marine life, in the Atlantic provinces. This

might include testing for White Nose Syndrome (WSN) in our Little Brown Bat population, West Nile Virus, or Avian Flu. They are part of a nationwide network of animal health providers coordinated by the national CWHC office in Saskatoon. It's worthwhile to check out their website (cwhc-rcsf.ca) to learn more about their important work. As an example of their ongoing endeavours, in addition to the necropsy and detailed report, my Peregrine Falcon will be tested for the presence of Avian Flu. As naturalists, it's nice to know that the health of our wildlife is being tracked by competent and caring professionals across the nation.

— *Into the Past with Robie* —

**WOODS, WATER AND SKY:
WRITINGS BY ROBIE TUFTS**

BY RACHEL COOPER

Robie Wilfred Tufts (1884–1982), of Wolfville, was Chief Migratory Birds Protection Officer for the Maritime provinces from 1919 to 1947. He was also founding president of the Nova Scotia Bird Society and author of the highly regarded *Birds of Nova Scotia*, first published in 1961. He held honorary degrees from Acadia and Dalhousie universities, and his papers are housed in Acadia University's archives.

From the early 1940s to the 1970s, Robie Tufts wrote a regular column, "Woods, Water and Sky," for the *Chronicle Herald*. A scrapbook of those columns (undated) was put together by Lloyd Duncanson, who joined the staff of the Nova Scotia Museum of Science in 1950 and later became its curator, and by Eric Dodge of Middleton, a young amateur ornithologist who died in 1955 at the age of 25. The scrapbook – now in the care of Mark Elderkin, Species at Risk Biologist, Wildlife Division, at the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources – is destined for the Acadia archives, but BNS has been given the opportunity to publish a sampling of Robie's columns.

This is the fourth in the sampling, believed to be from the 1940s (exact dates unknown). In the first excerpt, the backdrop of World

War II is affecting Canadian hunters. In the second, an invasion of Rough-legged Hawks at Grand Pré reminds Robie of a similar occurrence in 1899–1900, which he remembered well, including the reaction of local people at the time.



[1945]

Among the addresses delivered at the recent Provincial-Dominion Wildlife Conference in Ottawa was one by a representative of the Dominion Ammunition Company in which he dealt with the question of release of shot shells and rifle cartridges for sport purposes in 1945. We are able to report that, in the opinion of the speaker, the situation this coming autumn will be no worse than it was a year ago. Furthermore it might be somewhat improved depending upon the urgency of war demands for chemicals needed in the production of ammunition.

In referring to the paying of bounties by way of controlling the population of predators, crow, wolf or mountain lion, Dr. Gabrielson, Chief of the Fish and Wildlife Service in the USA, stated that his experience has proven (with the exception of wolf control in some areas) it to be ineffective and is now considered obsolete insofar as his Department is concerned....

[late 1940s (?)]

The next annual meeting of the Nova Scotia Fish and Game Association is scheduled for Jan. 22 and 23 and will be held at the Nova Scotian Hotel in Halifax. The 30-odd branches, representing every section of the province, have for the most part held their annual meetings, selected their delegates to the convention and adopted the usual number of resolutions dealing with a wide variety of subjects. Among those which have already come in we find one or more which tell of the misdeeds of Reynard the Fox and ask that a government bounty be placed on his scalp. So far none has asked for a bounty on hawks and owls and this is pleasing to note. However, since all hawks and owls (Goshawk, Sharp-Shinned Hawk and Great Horned Owl excepted) are now protected under provincial statute, along with eagles, a request for a general bounty on them would scarcely be in order...

Rare Hawks Now on Grand Pré

It seems pertinent to tell of an invasion of Rough-legged Hawks on Grand Pré meadows recently. They are large birds – about the size of a Herring Gull – and to most persons would be merely another “hen-hawk” – a name which is applied to all large hawks. But these are no “hen-hawks” in any sense of the word. They are expert mousers and are seldom seen in this corner of the continent. They are called “Rough-legs” because their legs are feathered to the toes. Not since the winter of 1899–1900 has there been an invasion of these hawks to this section. At that time, and we can recall it distinctly, they came in larger numbers than now (a dozen or more would be in sight at one time) and were tame, with the result that the local gun-toting fraternity of that period killed off practically all of them. No one knew why they were here or what they were eating. No one cared. They were just big “hen-hawks” so the sooner they were killed off the better.

Probably the agricultural department of the province did not keep records of notable mouse-outbreaks in those days, but if such records were now available it would be safe to make a 100 to 1 bet that the Grand Pré meadows were at that time literally crawling with mice. The Rough-legs, which prey almost exclusively on mice, came to help clean them up. How did they know they were here in unusual numbers? Well – that’s something else, but they knew. And now the Rough-legs have come again to help us, for as is only too well known among the agriculturists of the Annapolis Valley there is an alarming outbreak in the mouse tribes and the apple-growers are counselled to place poison mash about the bases of their young trees, hoping the mice will eat it instead of the bark of the trees. When we first saw the big hawks on the meadows a few weeks ago we suspected large numbers of mice, so were not surprised when told only a day or so ago of the plight of the farmers and of the advisability of putting out the poison. This they are doing at considerable expense in money and labour and yet how many of these very men who are so vitally interested would pass up an opportunity to shoot one of these hawks if given the chance to do so? You know the answer to that one as well as we do. They would kill them on sight because they lack knowledge of the ways and habits of the birds in question. The hope for the future seems to lie in educating the rising generation. Young folk have open minds and are impressed when facts concerning nature are properly presented to them. Much is being done in this field today.

Youth

WILD ROOTS SUMMER DAY CAMPS

BY MARINA MYRA

Thanks to BNS financial support, the Wild Roots Summer Day Camps were a complete success this summer. The funds supported wages for Jacquelin Bradbury, an Acadia co-op student in Biology and Environmental Science, and myself. The Town of Kentville handled



M. MYRA

Building baby bear's cave, Kentville Ravine

the admin portion of the project and provided financial support and additional leadership training sessions.

I would also like to sincerely thank the Town of Kentville Recreation for their forward thinking and support of this project. The Kentville outdoor day camps are the first in the Valley and are a huge step in the right direction for getting kids active and interested in nature.

Let me tell you about a typical morning at Wild Roots Nature Camp ...

The morning, still cool from the night, has blanketed Miner's Marsh in a wet layer of dew. Spider webs sag with the weight of hundreds of water drops like a string of tiny pearls. The weak early morning sun strains through the haze of another mid-summer morning. Shortly after eight, 20 or so sleepy-eyed kids, ages 6-9, are greeted by their leaders while sleepy-eyed parents initial the damp sign-in sheets. Leaders ask, "Does your child have sun screen on?" "Do they have bug spray? ... the mosquitoes are thick today." Most kids have packed all they need for the day, including water bottle, hat, lunch,

snacks, extra footwear and clothes, and maybe a towel. “Since it is going to be such a hot day, we will be getting wet!” the leaders say, with enthusiastic response from the kids.

As everyone arrives, the kids free-play in the woods around the picnic table and run on the bridge to the Cornwallis River, peering down to search for the giant snapping turtle, muskrat, and mallards below. The bridge bounces excitedly as the young feet pound along its length. Leaders call the kids in for Circle time to start the program. We all stick our elbows together in “Velcro Elbows” to make the circle-up process fun, and everyone makes the Velcro un-sticking noise, kind of like the disgusting sound of someone preparing to spit. With everyone’s enthusiastic attention focused on the circle, now we are ready to begin.

Through the Wild Roots camps, the kids learned about aquatic insects, marsh-life, plants, wild-crafting, weather, birds, tree identification, photosynthesis, light spectrum, and soils. They also were shown how to respect nature and each other during the camps.

The feedback from the camps was very positive, and the Town of Kentville would like to partner again next year to provide these nature camps to the residents of Kings County. Indeed, we had kids from all over the Valley coming to our camps. It was a fun and very busy summer!

— *Youth* —————

NATURE WRITING AND ART CONTEST

BY DOUG LINZEY

The results are in – and everyone is a winner.

The Young Naturalists Clubs of Nova Scotia this year sponsored a writing and art contest open to Nova Scotia youth. The contest was supported by Nature Nova Scotia and the Wildland Writers.

Response was very enthusiastic: 39 entries in the Junior writing category (ages 8–12), 40 in Senior writing (13–15), 167 in Junior art,

and 93 in Senior art. Entries were from all over the province. The entries were judged and prizes awarded. A number of winners are Valley residents, and we are very pleased to feature some of their work throughout this issue.

Special congratulations on a worthy idea and well-run contest go to YNC coordinator Robin Musselman and her crew of volunteer YNC branch leaders around the province. Robin tells us that there is already interest in doing it again. Meanwhile, a special event with the winning entries on display is being organized for later this winter, so keep an eye out for that.

For a full list of winners (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and honourable mentions), visit the YNC website: <http://nature1st.net/ync/winners-of-our-youth-nature-art-and-writing-contest/>.

The High Tides of Nova Scotia

by Elias Jones (age 11), Canning, NS

My home is the coolest and the most beautiful place in the world; the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia. It is so amazing because it has the highest of all tides in the world. It is so crazy to believe that my family and I live only ten minutes away from the Bay of Fundy.

The ocean waters move in toward the shore over 12 hours and fill up the beach and 12 hours later, the waters move out and leave an empty beach. You drive by the ocean and you see the boats sitting on the sandy ocean floor. Next time you drive by you see the boats in the water up level with the wharf.

The tides of Nova Scotia are the highest tides in the world because of the size and shape of the Bay of Fundy. It is just right for the natural gravitational pull cycle of the moon that causes tides to happen. The water rises 16 metres every 12 hours compared to most beaches, which will only rise one metre.

I learned about the power of gravity at school. Gravity is what causes all the tides in the world. All objects have gravity, which is a natural pull or attraction of objects toward itself. The gravity of

the moon is less than the gravity of the earth because the moon is smaller than the earth. As the moon moves around the earth, it pulls at the ocean waters and creates high and low tides.

The Bay of Fundy is also very popular for fishing. Some of the most common fish you would catch are the Mackerels, Pollack, Flounder, Cod, Haddock, Halibut, and the Porbeagle shark. These fish along with lobster, are fished from one of the local wharves, called Halls Harbour.

When my family and I go to Halls Harbour we like to have lobster or bonfires with our friends and have supper at the ocean. We stay all evening and we get to see the tides come in and sometimes we even have to back up our stuff as the water rises. When we want to go swimming at the beach we always have to check if the tides are low or high. The high and low tides were very important many years ago to the Acadian settlers.

A long time ago in 1605, the Acadians decided to move from France to Nova Scotia to search for new land. When they found Nova Scotia, they settled on the Bay of Fundy and they soon realized that they had a big problem: the Fundy tides. The tides got really high and all the water flooded out their crops. The Acadians discovered the use of dykes on the river to help solve this problem.

The Acadians found out about building dykes from the Dutch when they lived in Holland. What is a “Dyke”? A dyke looks like a hill of dirt that blocks the high tides. It has a small door that opens and closes. That is called an aboiteau. An aboiteau opens to allow fresh water to drain from the marsh. When the tidewater rises up, the aboiteau closes up to stop the seawater from coming on the farmland. The aboiteau helped the crops of the Acadians because when the cold water covers the farmland, it makes the soil rich as it brings lots of nutrients.

My Nanny is from an Acadian community in Cape Breton, called Belle Cote. Her ancestors were originally from France. I love the Nova Scotian tides, the beaches, the scenery, and the Acadian history. It’s been my family’s home for six generations!

“I wrote about the tides of Nova Scotia because it is the highest in the world and we only live 10 minutes way from it.”

[Elias was awarded honourable mention in the Junior writing category. Congratulations, Elias.]

Falling Like Leaves

Charlotte Thomas (age 13), Kingston, NS

The forest light streamed through the canopy of branches as I rose from the dirt below me. I gasped in the air of my world but was repulsed by the taste of plastic in my mouth. As soon as the oxygen hit my tongue I knew why The Great Yellow Birch Tree had woken me. The clearing I had risen in had plastic bottles and metal cans pummelled into the dirt and even as I stood there I could feel my energy slowly start to drain. I looked up out into the distance and saw the Yellow Birch towering in the distance. My life source. I started to walk toward it, scenes flashing through my head. A person dropping gum on the sidewalk, a young child throwing a bottle out of the car on the highway. A group of children partying, dropping empty plastic cups on the forest floor. A factory pumping out chemicals, harming the sky. With every scene my energy drained. With every scene I could sense a leaf falling off the Great Tree, the spirit of nature. As time passed, I kept walking toward the Great Tree with even more urgency. More scenes in my mind, a factory worker dumping waste. A landfill full of chemicals and garbage. A businessman wearing a suit and tie throwing a coffee cup on the ground and walking away. Images of littering, incorrect waste disposal, and chemical fumes infected my brain. Each step I took slowed my pace. My will and power being sucked out of me. I gathered up my remaining energy and started running. More scenes in my head. I stumbled and tripped over my own feet. Trying to get to the tree, trying to save it. I broke into the clearing in which the tree stood. I looked at the tree with sad eyes. I knew it was too late. Still, I tried to reach the tree. It only had a few leaves left stuck

to the limp branches. When I was three feet away, the last leaf fell. The Great Tree was dead. And I was soon to follow. As the last leaf hit the ground, I could feel the pull of the earth on my body. What I used to call my home, my very essence, would now be my prison. As I sunk deeper into the soil around me, I looked up at the sky, for the last time seeing the dark starry night that had fallen, trying to capture the image the keep in my mind. The starry night. I would never see it again. The sun and moon. The clouds and blue sky. Only memories to me. Still staring at the stars, the dirt engulfed me and enclosed my being into a shell of earth. That was the last the world has seen of me. My hope is only that the people who did this see what they have done. I wish only for them to notice my absence. I wish for them to realize their mistake.

“I chose this topic because I felt that littering is a serious injustice that not only affects Nova Scotia but also the rest of the world. I did not state it in the story, but the piece is written in the point of view of Gaea, the Greek primordial of the earth. I thought it might have been interesting to directly look at the trouble of pollution through the eyes of ‘Mother Earth.’ I didn’t want to make my point blatantly obvious. In the story, Gaea is racing toward a tree. The tree symbolizes all of nature and the fact that if we kill it, it can never grow back. There is no happy ending. If we as people do not change our ways than we will destroy the only place we can call home.”

[Charlotte was awarded 3rd place in the Senior writing category. Congratulations, Charlotte.]

— *Natural History* —

MINAS BASIN STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

BY RICK WHITMAN

In 2012, I was asked to form a stewardship committee for the shorebirds in the Minas Basin. We took the name Minas Basin IBA



R. WHITMAN

Stewardship Committee (IBA stands for Important Bird Area). This designation was already in place for the southern portion of the basin and is also a term used around the world. It provides recognition to a defined area, but it does not imply that formal protection is in place. In reality, the greatest protection of the Minas Basin is the huge tidal range, which to date has prevented mankind from seriously harming the vast tidal mud flats.

Richard Stern, Jim Wolford, and Roy Bishop have served on the committee from the start. Donald Sam, biologist—Western Region, NSDNR, joined us in 2014. Sue Abbott, with Bird Studies Canada, is our advisor and also keeps our minutes.

In 2015, we continued our activities much as they have been reported for the previous three years. At our committee meeting in November we agreed that overall shorebird numbers seemed to be lower this year; peak numbers were somewhat later than normal and then declined quickly. The peak numbers of Semipalmated Sandpipers estimated were 20–25,000 on August 17–18. These peak numbers would be comparable to recent years, but the delayed arrival of large numbers and the quick departure leaves some unanswered questions.

At least 70 reports were filed on eBird this year (July–November) for Avonport Beach, Horton Landing, East Point or The Guzzle, and Evangeline Beach, by Richard Stern and myself. Almost all of them have specific shorebird numbers that will be available forever. At least 21 species of shorebirds were seen around the Minas Basin this year, many of them in very small numbers. The only somewhat common species that can be seen with a moderate effort are Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Spotted Sandpiper, Sanderling, Dunlin, Least Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, and Semipalmated Sandpiper. Jim Wolford again provided shorebird reports as well as direct outreach to beachgoers at Evangeline Beach.

This very smart-looking juvenile Black-bellied Plover (p. 45) was photographed at Horton Landing this year.

— *Natural History* —

A POND WITH NO NAME

BY JIM WOLFORD & RICHARD STERN

On October 1, 2009, Jim Wolford writes to the NatureNS e-mail forum: I think that the pond that is 0.6 km south of Chipmans Corner (see yesterday's wood ducks) needs a name, and I'd like to suggest "Gesner's Pond," since there is a mini-park and Gesner monument just across the road from the pond. Similarly, the Ducks Unlimited pond north of New Minas adjacent to the Cornwallis River has been called "Stella's Lake" in the past – why don't we call it "Stella's Pond" from now on? Are there any serious objections? And does anyone know who Stella is/was? Of course, this is not for any geographical purposes other than a convenience for us birders.

Richard Stern responds: A few comments about these ponds – The pond that Jim wants to call Gesner's is a few metres from my house. It's actually a part of a system of creeks, springs, and ditches that flow from a moderate-sized lake that is up a dirt road off Church St to the east of Middle Dyke Rd. It's the largest lake in the immediate area

but can't be seen from any main road. The area to the east side of the road at the edge of an orchard has good mixed bird habitat, including some swamp and marshy areas. The pond is always muddy and, other than the odd D-C Cormorant, is usually birdless. However, the south and west sides are now part of the new Eagle Creek subdivision. There are still woods along the edge, but they are steadily being cleared to make room for the spreading subdivision. This spring the woods held a pair of Barred Owls and a Red-tail's nest plus a number of passerines. There are thick tangles of bushes, and I'm pretty sure that the cardinals that come to my feeder breed there. The southern boundary is the edge of the Municipality of Kings County North Kentville Growth Centre, and the area to the south and west will presumably continue to be developed.

The Ducks Unlimited pond by the Cornwallis River has already been called Stella's Pond by some local people, but usually when I call it that, people generally don't know where I'm talking about. DU has also created a network of ponds between it and the Town of Kentville to the west of the bridge, and access by walking trail, from Kentville, is supposed to start next year. It's also close to the New Minas sewage plant as the duck flies, and so the whole corridor between New Minas and Kentville is becoming quite a good little wetland.

Personally I don't mind what people call these two ponds, as long as people know where we're referring to. But maybe if the county recognized a pond with a name, it might be a help in preserving that wetland habitat, so I'm all for it.

[Any other opinions on this? Let us know. -ED.]



FALL WEATHER 2015, EASTERN ANNAPOLIS VALLEY

LARRY BOGAN, CAMBRIDGE STATION

	TEMPERATURE			PRECIPITATION
	Max (°C)	Min (°C)	Mean (°C)	Total (mm)
SEPTEMBER 2015 (30 yr. average)	22.9 (19.5)	11.1 (9.5)	17.0 (14.5)	114 (85)
OCTOBER 2015 (30 yr. average)	13.4 (13.7)	3.0 (4.9)	8.2 (9.4)	99 (89)
NOVEMBER 2015 (30 yr. average)	8.5 (7.8)	1.6 (0.3)	5.0 (4.1)	140 (122)
SEASON (30 yr. average)	14.9 (13.7)	5.2 (4.9)	10.0 (9.3)	353 (296)

Source: Environment Canada data for Kentville, NS (<http://weatheroffice.gc.ca>). 30-yr. averages: 1981–2010.

As we transition from summer to winter, the days get not only colder but wetter. Normal monthly precipitation increases from about 85 mm in the summer to 120 mm in November and December. This autumn (2015) was a wetter and a warmer one, except for the cooler month of October.

Temperature

We experienced a wide range of temperatures this fall. There were hot days in September that touched 30°C and cold, clear nights in November down to -7°C (see the accompanying temperature

Max, Min, Mean Daily Temperature Kentville, Sept, Oct, Nov 2015

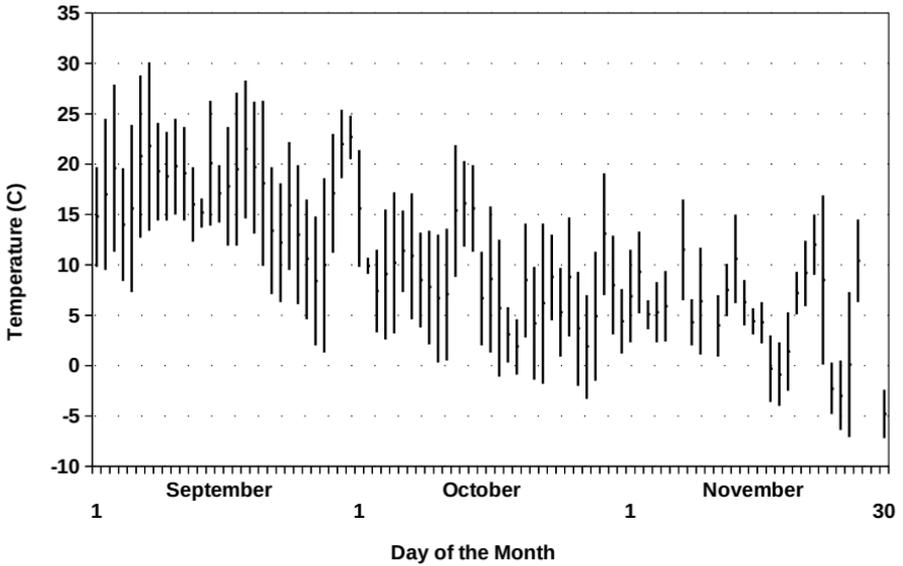
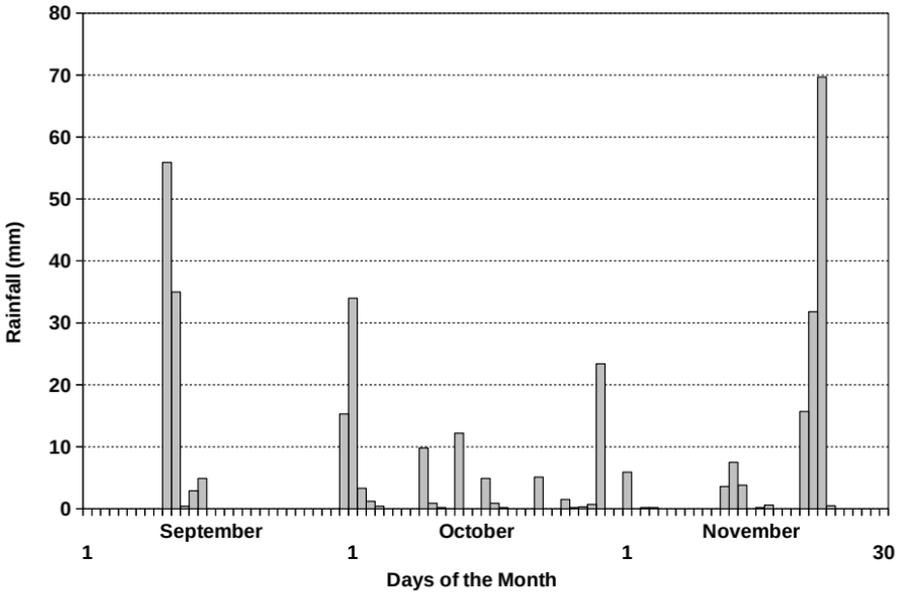


chart). September was very summer-like, with temperatures 2.5°C above the 30-year average, but then the days of October cooled to below normal. October was interesting because the maximum temperatures were near normal but the minimum temperatures were nearly 2°C below normal and pulled the mean down. November was just the opposite, with high temperatures 1.2°C above average and the minimum temperatures nearly normal, giving an above average mean temperature for the month. Overall, the mean temperature for the season was 0.7°C above the 30-year average.

Precipitation

The rainfall this autumn was not evenly distributed except in October (see the precipitation chart). In September, 99 mm of rain (87% of the month's total) fell in five days in the middle of the month, and

Daily Precipitation
Kentville, N.S. - Sept, Oct, Nov 2015



in November, 118 mm (85% of the month’s total) fell in three days around the 22nd of the month. The six days with the heaviest rainfall (over 20 mm) accounted for 70 percent of the total rainfall for the season. All three months of the season were above the 30-year average, and overall, the seasonal rainfall was 20 percent above average.

— *Astronomy* —

WHAT’S IN THE SKY?

BY ROY BISHOP

Highlights for January through May 2016

- JANUARY 2: Latest sunrise of the year (07:56) and Earth closest to Sun
- JANUARY 3: Quadrantid Meteor Shower 4 a.m. tomorrow

JANUARY 9: New Moon

JANUARY 19: Moon occults Aldebaran (see below)

JANUARY 23: Full Moon

A Star Vanishes – As a result of Earth’s eastward daily rotation, the Moon rises in the east and sets in the west. The Moon also moves slowly eastward in its “moonthly” orbit relative to the background stars, which is why it rises about an hour later each succeeding night. The Moon’s orbital motion will be obvious on the evening of January 19 as the dark limb of the Moon creeps up upon the bright star Aldebaran. Use binoculars and note the position of Aldebaran to the left (east) of the Moon as darkness falls that evening, and make sure your watch is accurate. Then look carefully at 10:40 p.m. For observers near Wolfville, four minutes later Aldebaran will suddenly vanish!

FEBRUARY 8: New Moon

FEBRUARY 25: Zodiacal Light (see below)

FEBRUARY 22: Full Moon

The Zodiacal Light – Every evening from the 25th of February until March 10, after the end of evening twilight in the western sky, is an apparition that few people have seen. The sky must be both clear and transparent (no haze or thin cloud, with stars visible right to the horizon). In addition, you must be far from the light pollution of towns and yard lights. Also you must be dark-adapted. (If you step outdoors for a minute or two after looking at TV, a smart-phone, or a computer screen, you will not see the zodiacal light. Full dark-adaptation takes half an hour.) The zodiacal light is a huge, glowing pyramid of white light, rising up from the western horizon high into the sky, slanting toward the left. It is sunlight scattered by the layer of comet dust that fills the inner Solar System. Look between 7:45 and 8:00 p.m.

MARCH 8: New Moon

MARCH 8: Jupiter at opposition (36 light-minutes distant) (see below)
MARCH 10, 11, 12: Large tides
MARCH 13: Daylight Saving Time begins
MARCH 20: Equinox, spring begins at 01:30 ADT
MARCH 23: Full Moon

Jupiter Dominates the Night – Jupiter, the largest of the planets, is at opposition (opposite to the Sun in our sky) on March 8. Thus during March, Jupiter is nearest Earth (36 light-minutes away), brightest (magnitude -2.5), and largest appearing (44 arc seconds in diameter). Also, it rises in the east near sunset and is visible all night. Relative to the background stars, Jupiter lies below the eastern portion of Leo and a few degrees north of the celestial equator. Jupiter is in the south and highest above the horizon (for the best telescopic views) at 1 a.m. early in March, at 12 midnight by month's end, and in the late evening during April. Good-quality binoculars will show the disk of Jupiter and one or more of its four large satellites, the "Galilean moons," three of which are larger than Earth's Moon.

APRIL 7 TO 17 (9:00 p.m.): Mercury well placed low in the WNW
APRIL 7: New Moon
APRIL 9: Extreme tide (see below)
APRIL 22: Full Moon

Tides, the 18.6-year Cycle, and Weather – As happened last September 29, on April 9, 2016, celestial music involving the phase of the Moon, the eccentricity of the Moon's orbit, the turning of the major axis of the lunar orbit, and the wobbling of the plane of that orbit, again reaches a crescendo in the form of another largest Minas Basin tide in many years. The predicted extreme high tide level on April 9 matches that of last September 29, although it occurs in Minas Basin near 3 a.m. instead of in mid-afternoon (the afternoon tide is not quite as high). Such extreme tides occur on an 18.61-year cycle, and will not happen again until the year 2034. However, long-term tide predictions are (and can only be) based on the astronomical influ-

ences. Tide heights are also affected by the weather, specifically wind and barometric pressure, but the weather cannot be predicted more than a few days ahead. Such “storm surge” effects can add a metre or more to the predicted height of a tide.

MAY 6: New Moon

MAY 6 TO 9: Large tides again

MAY 9: Transit of Mercury (see below)

MAY 21: Full Moon

MAY 22: Mars at opposition

MAY 30: Mars closest to Earth (4.2 light-minutes distant)

A Transit of Mercury – You might recall that in 2004 Venus passed in front of the Sun, and again in 2012. Such events are rare, with more than a century separating 8-year pairs of Venus transits across the solar disk. Transits of Mercury (the only other planet that can pass between Earth and Sun) are uncommon, but not rare. For example, there were 14 transits of Mercury in the 20th century, but none of Venus. On May 9 this year, Mercury will again pass in silhouette across the Sun. The transit begins at 08:13 and ends at 15:41. (Safety warning: To see the transit, you need a telescope that has a proper solar filter. Mercury’s tiny, black disk is too small to see without magnification, and a telescopic view of the Sun without using a specially designed solar filter will permanently damage a person’s vision.)



AUTUMN'S FALLING

BY ANGELINA KETTLE, CANNING, NS

AUTHOR'S NOTE: For my poem, I wrote about fall because autumn in Nova Scotia is beautiful. The colours are so vibrant and happy that I couldn't resist writing about it. The forests are covered in crisp smells and warm breezes and crunchy leaves. For my art, I painted our view at Northeast Kings Education Centre. We see North Mountain right outside our window and day by day we can see the seasons change on it. It's a breathtaking sight.

I inhale, the scents of pines and wet leaves and dry wood fill my nose.
I smell clear air and something that can only be described as forest.

I smell the trickling, bubbling creek.

I smell the wind, my eyes are closed but I know that when I open
them I will see the canopy of orange that dominates the ground.

I see the squirrels dancing at the tops of spruces and birds twirling
through the spotless forget-me-not sky.

If I stand still, so very still, I can see deer grazing contently on the
ferns that grow here and there.

I feel the crackle of the forgotten leaves and watch as they swirl
before me.

I pull out my thermos and savour the last few swigs of hot cocoa.

I am warm to the bone, and the high grasses wave me on, as if to
guide me.

One leaf on the path ahead of me catches my eye.

I bend down to pick the slight thing up, its veins are still green but
they are encased in bright sunset colours, orange and red and
yellow and gold.

[Angelina (age 13) took second place in the Senior writing category. Congratulations, Angelina.]

BLOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY 2016 Membership Fees & Order Form

Members receive four issues of the BNS newsletter annually.
As a registered charity, BNS issues receipts for all donations.
Members may also join Nature Nova Scotia through BNS.
(Neither BNS nor NNS membership is tax deductible.)

NAME _____

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In signing this membership application, I/we hereby waive & release the Blomidon Naturalists Society, its executive committee and members, from all claims for injury and/or damage suffered at any function or field trip organized by the Blomidon Naturalists Society.

SIGNATURE _____

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No.	Description	Price	Total
_____	Individual/ Family Membership	\$30.00	\$ _____
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	Postage: (calendar \$2) (parcel \$6)		\$ _____
	Tax-deductible Donation		\$ _____
	(Registration number: 118811686RR0001)		

TOTAL \$ _____

Address cheques or money orders to Blomidon Naturalists Society for membership and other purchases to: Ed Sulis, 107 Canaan Avenue, Kentville, NS B4N 2A7. Due date is January 1 of current year.



SOURCES OF LOCAL NATURAL HISTORY

Compiled by the Blomidon Naturalists Society

Amphibians & Reptiles	Sherman Bleakney	H: 902-542-3604	
	Jim Wolford	H: 902-542-9204	
Astronomy	Roy Bishop	H: 902-542-3992	
	Sherman Williams	H: 902-542-5104	
	Larry Bogan	H: 902-678-0446	
Birds – General	Bernard Forsythe	H: 902-542-2427	
	Richard Stern	O: 902-678-4742	H: 902-678-1975
	Gordon & Judy Tufts	H: 902-542-7800	
	Jim Wolford	H: 902-542-9204	
	Jean Timpa	H: 902-542-5678	
Butterflies & Moths	Jean Timpa	H: 902-542-5678	
Fish & Wildlife	NS Department of Natural Resources	O: 902-679-6091	
Flora	Ruth Newell	O: 902-585-1355	H: 902-542-2095
Fungi	Nancy Nickerson	H: 902-542-9332	
Hawks & Owls	Bernard Forsythe	H: 902-542-2427	
Indian Prehistory & Archeology	James Legge	H: 902-542-3530	
Mosses & Ferns	Ruth Newell	O: 902-585-1355	H: 902-542-2095
Mammals	Tom Herman	O: 902-585-1358	H: 902-678-0383
Rocks & Fossils	Geology Dept., Acadia University	O: 902-585-2201	
Seashore & Marine Life	Sherman Bleakney	H: 902-542-3604	
	Jim Wolford	H: 902-542-9204	
	Michael Brylinsky	O: 902-585-1509	H: 902-582-7954