



The first issue of the New Brunswick Naturalist seems to have been well received. Each day's mail brings another two or three subscriptions, so that its future seems assured. Thanks go to all of you who have subscribed and/or sent observations; your participation makes this newsletter possible.

For those who might like to keep the record straight, there were two errors of omission in our first number: the 193 Blue Jays at Fredericton should have been marked with an asterisk (*) as a provincial record and the Am. Coot during the count period at Grand Manan should have had a double asterisk (**), for it was the first time that species had been recorded on one of our counts.

WINTER WEATHER

We commented previously on the very mild weather of December which, assisted by some rain, removed most of the snow that fell that month. January was just the opposite. It was one of the coldest on record, on the average some 6° to 9° below normal, depending on locality. The month was also extremely dry, so that the ground continued relatively snow-free, north at least to Chatham. Because of this, frost penetration was very deep. The dry, cold weather hardly could have ended more spectacularly than it did during the storm of February 2-4.

That storm saw the temperature rise to 51° and the wind to 60 mph while 5.59 inches of rain were falling at Saint John. Elsewhere the rainfall was also heavy, though less so, and there were severe flooding, washouts and ice jams. Only extreme northern New Brunswick escaped major damage. Much of the storm's effect on wildlife may never be known.

The remainder of February was near normal and, beginning about the middle of the month, some snow began to accumulate on the ground. However, total snow cover remained very light when compared to normal values for February and early March.

It is presumed that the lack of snow meant easy winter survival for Moose and White-tailed Deer and ground-feeding birds. The very deep frost penetration may have caused the death of animals hibernating in the ground and more "winter-kill" of plant-life than usual. We would appreciate receiving information concerning such effects.

WILDLIFE

In some areas Muskrats were apparently flooded from their homes during the February storm, for a flurry of reports were received, following it, of these animals feeding or travelling along highways and streets, for example at Sagwa, Kings County

(Mrs. Bentley King), Hampton (David Christie), Saint John (Frank Taylor) and Grand Harbour (Basil Stead). Writing at the end of February, Mrs. Marguerite Hope reports that a Muskrat had been living for some time in a barn at Chartersville, near Moncton.

In Gloucester County, Hilaire Chiasson reported seeing single Muskrats on January 18 at Shippegan and March 8 at St. Raphael-sur-Mer.

On February 3 two Star-nosed Moles were reported wandering abroad, probably because of flooding of their tunnels, at Saint John (Miss Florence Christie) and East Saint John.

The mild weather has probably had more Raccoons and Striped Skunks on the move in mid-winter than usual. Both were abroad on Caledonia Mountain (elev. 1200 ft.), Albert County on February 7-8 (Majka and Christie). They normally are not seen there between November and April.

Mice and shrews, very common in Albert County, were supporting a large hawk population this winter. The Museum has done some collecting, assisted by Chris Majka, and found that Meadow Voles in the fields and Masked Shrews and Red-backed Voles in wooded areas were the most common. Short-tailed Shrews and Deer Mice were also plentiful.

To appreciate their abundance one had to experience it. Stepping into a field started mice rushing away in all directions. During December, in the woods, the scurrying and rustling of mice was sometimes distracting when one was more interested in listening for the soft voices of kinglets, chickadees or creepers.

Concerning another population explosion, the number of Snowshoe Hares now seems to have declined considerably from their high of one to three years ago in southern New Brunswick. Alan Madden reports a decline in Restigouche County also, but Hilaire Chiasson says they are still very common on Miscou Island this winter. Madden suggests that Bobcats which are fairly common in Restigouche County probably will begin to decline soon due to the decreased food supply there.

Where do Gray Squirrels occur? In New Brunswick, their centre of abundance is the Saint John River valley between Woodstock and Oak Point but Dr. Squires, in 1955 (Nature News, Vol. VI, No. 1, p. 1), noted a report from Bathurst. He also had received reports north and east to Summerfield (Carleton Co.), Stanley, Jemseg and Moncton. Two years ago one was at Baltimore, Albert County (Mrs. C. Irving). Recently there have been a number of reports along the Kennebecasis River just east of Saint John. From November through February at least two have been at East Riverside (Joyce Golden, Mrs. Reg Brown) and one in the Torryburn-Renforth area (Greta & David Clark, Joan Henry). And on March 19 Al Smith saw one at Sackville, a new locality for the species. Unless you live in Fredericton where Gray Squirrels are very common, we would be interested in learning whether or not they have been seen in your area and if so, how frequently.

AMPHIBIANS AND INVERTEBRATES

One normally doesn't expect to see amphibians in winter, and neither did Frère Léo Martin on January 11 when he walked across the bay ice to explore Shodiac Island. But he did! There, in an unfrozen spring, he discovered two active Wood Frogs. Although Dusky Salamanders are known sometimes to remain active in springs or wells in New Brunswick's winter months, this is the first time we've heard of such a thing for the Wood Frog. That spring deserves some more visits!

A more usual find was a brown woolly bear caterpillar that was clinging to a grass blade at Hammond River on February 21. Jim and Jean Wilson took it home and a few days later it pupated. They now await the emergence of the moth.

The only report we had of sea life being disturbed by the heavy surf during the February storm was from Mrs. Charles Laskoy who found the beach at New River, Charlotte County littered with hundreds of sea cucumbers. They had been tossed up from their habitat below the tidal zone.

BIRDS

The Saint John River, just downstream from Mactaquac Dam, is becoming known as an interesting area for birds. In late summer large numbers of gulls and herons have been seen there. This winter, after the river became largely frozen elsewhere, numerous ducks congregated in the open water below the dam. On January 31 Peter Pearce estimated 120 Common Mergansers as well as two of the rarer Hooded Mergansers. Kormode Parr reported seven Common Goldeneyes February 1 and Nettie Moore saw 20 Black Ducks on the 2nd. A few Great Black-backed and Herring Gulls also were present during this period. After the flood when the ice broke up in many areas the flocks dispersed but on March 7 small numbers of most of these species were in the area (Parr).

Relative to our discussion in the last number, the latest report received of Canada Geese on the way south was of 50 seen at Fredericton on January 3 (fide P. Pearce).

The Pintail is seldom seen in New Brunswick in winter. None were reported on the Christmas Bird Counts this year but Jim Wilson saw a female at Saint John on February 22. Another dabbling duck which is scarce in winter here is the Green-winged Teal. In addition to Christmas Count reports from Sackville and Saint John a male was reported at Waterside January 11 (Majkas and Christie).

Birdwatchers throughout the province are familiar with the Common Goldeneye, the "whistler" of hunters. Less common is the Barrow's Goldeneye which nests in Labrador and visits this area in winter. One of the best spots for seeing them is a persistent open patch of water in the Cocagne River. They are regular there through the winter in company with Common Goldeneyes. On January 22 there were four Barrow's at Cocagne (Christie) and on February 18 six were seen (Roy Hunter). Mr. Parr spotted 3 of this duck with about 50 Commons at Jemseg on March 8.

The concentration of hawks noted on the Riverside-Albert Christmas Count continued through the winter, with numerous Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks and an occasional Marsh Hawk being seen. These hawks were feeding on the many mice in the area. There were a lot of Rough-legged Hawks on the Tentramar Marshes where there also must have been many mice. Elsewhere, hawk reports were few in comparison.

An unusual bird near Bathurst in the first week of February was seen and photographed by Mr. Lawrence Powers who did not know what it was. From the picture, John Baird and Peter Pearce identified it as a Virginia Rail. We have had a report in December before, but never one as late in winter as this.

Amongst gulls, a seventh species appeared with the regulars at Courtenay Bay, Saint John. A Bonaparte's Gull, it was discovered by Cecil Johnston on January 11 and was seen by several observers at least until March. At times it associated closely with its similar European counterpart, the Black-headed Gull.

In the Campobello area each early winter there is a concentration of Black-legged Kittiwakes. This winter's Christmas Count had 6323. They were still present on January 25 when 2000+ were estimated around Deer Island Point (Majka, Wilson & Christie). On March 8 not a bird was to be seen (Wilson & Johnston). Probably the plankton population in the area crashes to almost nil in mid-winter. This would force animals higher on the food chain to disperse.

A Thick-billed Murre was seen at Letote Jan. 25 (Christie, Majka and Wilson) and another at Pt. Lepreau Feb. 7 (Wilson).

The number of Mourning Doves in New Brunswick has increased dramatically in the last ten years. Large flocks have been seen in fall, some remaining into early winter when they apparently die as a result of the snow or cold. Usually there are no reports after early January. Sightings this year suggest that the snow cover must be the important factor for despite the cold the following were seen between the last week of January and the beginning of March: 3 at McGowan's Corner (Nettie Moore), 5 at Hauger-ville (Helvin Moore), 4 at Moncton (Doug Whitman), 1 at Albert (Ford Alward) and 5 at Upper Woodstock (Mrs. Rowena MacDonald).

1969-70 was not a good winter for Snowy Owls. Since the one on Sackville's Christmas Count we have heard of only three, one at Moncton Jan. 25 (Whitman) and 2 at Albert Mines in late January (vide Mary Majka).

Two woodpeckers missed by the Christmas Count have been reported. Doug Whitman saw a Yellow-shafted Flicker, a rarity in winter, at Turtle Creek on January 25. The regular Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker was reported three times in February: 1 at Stewart Mountain, Albert Co., Feb. 2 (Mary Majka), 1 near Scotchtown, Queens Co., Feb. 21 (vide Lionel Girouard) and 6 at Havelock on Feb. 7 (Dr. Charles Doyle). The latter report is somewhat unusual because of the number seen in a small area. It suggests a plentiful supply of bark beetles or other food there.

It was quite surprising to hear from Mrs. Carl Small that she had seen a Tree Swallow on the very late date of December 7 at White Head, Grand Manan. It was not the only such occurrence, for word comes from Nova Scotia (via the N.S. Bird Society News-letter) that several were seen in that province until late November, one on Dec. 26, and another till at least Jan. 25!

Murray Watter's Brown Thrasher at Perth-Andover was last seen January 17 and a cat is suspected of being involved with its disappearance. The thrasher at St. Andrews disappeared December 27 but another or the same was seen in that town in February (vide Willa MacCoubrey).

In some winters Bohemian Waxwings make considerable invasions to eastern parts of the continent. Often there will be a smaller "echo" invasion in the year following. Last winter was one of the biggest incursions ever. This year there are records from the Moncton and Fredericton areas, e.g. 11 at Fredericton Jan. 1 (N. Moore), 30 there Jan. 7 (Miss Dorothy Sleep, vide Parr), 5 at Riverview Jan. 15 (Whitman) and 40 at Moncton Jan. 24 (Doyle). Very often the birds are found feeding on multiflora rose hips. Cedar Waxwings have also been seen: 1 at Saint John West Jan. 25 (Doris Johnston), 1 at Belmont, St. John Co. Feb. 8 (Eldon Fletcher), 1 at Fredericton about Feb. 20 (Theresa Pearce), and about 20 there Feb. 26 (Mrs. J.N.B. McFadgen, vide Parr).

Warblers were not recorded on the Christmas Counts, but a Myrtle Warbler was seen at a feeder in Fredericton Jan. 7 (Peter Pearce); one in poor condition was taken indoors at a Marysville feeder in the first week of February, but it died (Mrs. John Peterson, vide Parr). Mrs. Carl Small had a Yellow-breasted Chat visiting her feeder at White Head, Grand Manan from Dec. 19 till at least Jan. 1.

Brown-headed Cowbirds survived quite well in areas where they were visiting feeders, but Baltimore Orioles were affected by the cold. Three at Willa MacCoubrey's in St. Andrews met the following fates: 1 caught by a cat Dec. 27, 1 believed to have died from the cold Jan. 6 or 7, and 1 taken indoors on Jan. 9 (put out of misery on Feb. 25; autopsy showed severe frostbite damage to the legs).

Single Rusty Blackbirds, as scarce as orioles in winter, were reported at Fredericton Dec. 27 (Nettie Moore), Nashwaaksis to Feb. 3 (Beverley Schneider), East Riverside Dec. 15 (Joyce Golden) and Renforth Jan. 7 (Joan Henry).

A Dickcissel survived the winter at St. Andrews (MacCoubrey) as did one at Saint John West (Janice Dexter). Another at Cummings Cove, Deer Island (seen March 8 by Wilson & Johnston) probably did too.

There were decreases of most finches as winter progressed and as the supply of tree seeds became reduced. Pine Grosbeaks were reported as numerous in the Fredericton (Pearce, Parr) and Salisbury (Mrs. B.F. Mundle) areas during January while White-winged Crossbills were conspicuous about Saint John (various observers) in the same period. Both species declined in February. Red Crossbills were not reported after early January in the southern areas where they were in December but one was seen on March 8 at Shippegan in the northeast (Chiasson). Evening Grosbeaks, however, remained relatively steady in numbers throughout the winter.

The Common Redpoll was the finch this winter. It is a species which in New Brunswick normally feeds mostly on small tree seeds, such as those of the alders and birches. The supply of these was small this winter and the birds fed commonly on grass and weed seeds in fields and marshes and at roadsides. In a winter of normal snow depth this food source would become unavailable by mid or late December but this year it served well until at least mid-February in the southern part of the province. Some large flocks were reported, e.g. 1000+ at McGowan Corner Jan. 18 (Pearce), 500 at Sheffield Feb. 8 (Parr), 200 at Lake Utopia Feb. 7 (Mrs. M.C. Morehouse), 125 at Memramcook Feb. 7 (Reid McManus). When the snow finally began to accumulate Redpolls began to visit feeders. Between Feb. 22 and the middle of March several calls were received at the Museum from persons who had never noticed the birds before. The first reported at a feeder was on Feb. 18 (Christie). Most homes in Saint John had from 3 to 15 birds, but at least one had a flock of 40. They were also visiting feeders in Fredericton, Moncton and St. Andrews. Pine Siskins and Am. Goldfinches which were generally scarce all winter appeared with the Redpolls at some feeders.

The good numbers of sparrows reported on Christmas Counts wintered fairly well, at feeders at least. Rufous-sided Towhees generally do not survive long into January but of this year's birds at least four were reported much later. Two which appeared at Ketepec, St. John County about December 10 were seen until the last week of February (Mrs. Neil Sparks), a female was seen at Spruce Lake, St. John Co. on Feb. 9 (Mrs. Richard Nelson) and another female first seen at Salisbury on Dec. 9 was still present March 2 (Mrs. B.F. Mundle).

THE MARITIME PROVINCES NEST RECORDS SCHEME

The Maritimes Nest Records Scheme was begun in 1960 under the direction of Dr. A.J. Erskine of the Canadian Wildlife Service. It is one of a number of cooperative regional programs for gathering nesting information, for example in Canada there are also the Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario, Prairie and British Columbia schemes. Here are the answers to some questions you may have about such an organization:

1. What is a Nest Records Scheme? It is a means for assembling in one place information on bird nests and broods which otherwise might be unrecorded or scattered through the field notebooks of many workers, and which might never become available to other bird students.
2. How does the scheme operate? The central office sends out forms, about the size of a postcard, upon which observations may be recorded. Once a year, all completed cards are sent in to the central office for filing, and a report, summarizing the year's contributions, is sent to all cooperators.
3. What use will be made of the cards in the Scheme? Persons interested in studying a given species can write in to this Scheme, as well as to those operating elsewhere, to request the loan of the cards for that species. Thus, much larger amounts of information are available for breeding studies than might be collected by one person. Furthermore, each card filled in is a permanent record of breeding distribution, and the Scheme may very rapidly provide more information upon actual nests of a species than is published in all the literature to date.
4. How can I, as one interested in birds, help in the Scheme? You write in to the central office requesting cards, which are mailed out to you. You fill in details in the appropriate places for each nest found or brood seen, and send the completed cards to the office by October 1st each year, together with a request for the number of cards you expect to require for the next year. You only need to be able to identify the birds you see nesting, and to accurately record what you see, to participate in the Nest Records Scheme.
5. Should I fill out cards for all nests, even those I visited only once? Yes, a single nest record card should be filled out for every nest of which the species is identified. Even where only one visit is made to a nest, that report is a permanent record of that species having nested in that locality, besides providing information on nesting chronology. It is, of course, preferable to visit nests more than once, when that is possible, though precautions should always be taken not to attract undue attention to the nest, lest predators destroy it.
6. Where is the office? All correspondence and requests for cards and other information should be addressed to the Maritimes Nest Records Scheme, New Brunswick, 277 Douglas Avenue, Saint John, N.B. Your participation would be welcomed.

David S. Christie
COORDINATOR