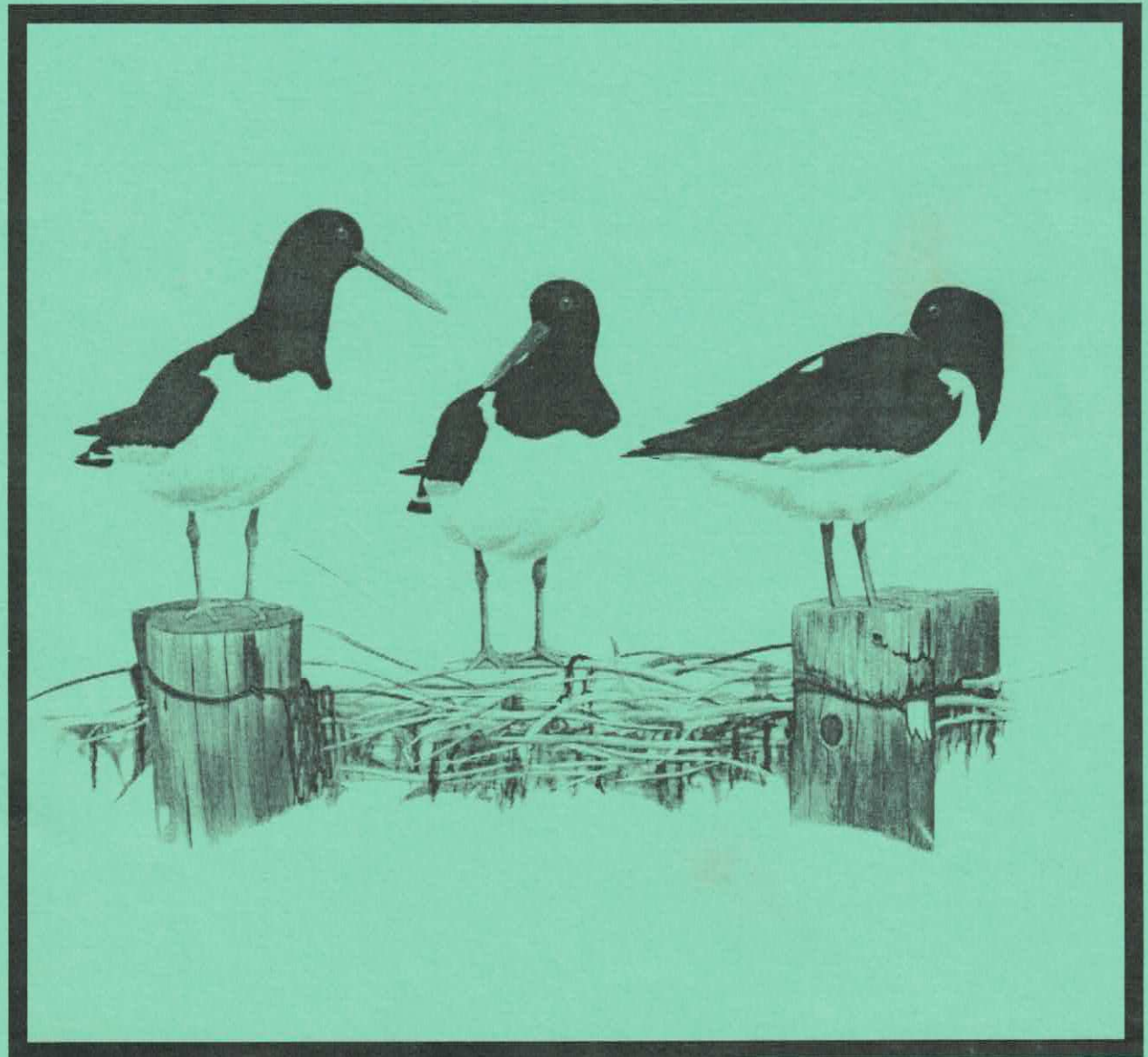


28 (1) Spring / printemps 2001

# ***N.B. Naturalist***

## ***Le Naturaliste du N.-B.***





## N. B. Federation of Naturalists Fédération des naturalistes du N.-B.

277 avenue Douglas Avenue, Saint John, N.B. Canada E2K 1E5

The Federation is a non-profit organization formed in 1972 to encourage an understanding of nature and the environment, and to focus concern for the natural heritage of New Brunswick.

La Fédération est une organisation sans buts lucratifs formée en 1972 pour encourager une meilleure compréhension de l'environnement naturel, et pour éveiller le souci pour le patrimoine naturel du Nouveau-Brunswick.

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Sincere thanks to our many volunteers who contributed to this publication.

Merci beaucoup à tous les bénévoles dévoués qui ont contribué à cette publication.

Please submit articles for the next issue by **June 1, 2001**

S.v.p., soumettre les articles à l'intention du prochain numéro avant le **1<sup>er</sup> juin, 2001**

to / à

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## President's Message – Mot de la Présidente

*Pierrette Mercier*

Several years ago, I attended my first NBFN AGM. I selected fields trips that would let me see mostly birds since that was my main interest. The exception was a field trip described in the registration form as a lesson in botany in a forested area leading to a bog. At the time, I found botany - well, less interesting. Plants didn't move, they were not exciting, but it seemed like a nice area to find my favorite birds - warblers.

However, something happened during that field trip. The trip leader described these plants with such passion and enthusiasm: Wow! Prehistoric plants and carnivorous plants, edible plants and poisonous plants; forget the birds, this was exciting. That trip leader was Rob Walker. And that's how Rob did everything, with such passion and enthusiasm that you had no choice but to be captivated with whatever he has doing or teaching.

Rob died in a tragic car accident on April 9th. That day, we lost a great man. He was 62 years old and very active in the naturalist community. In 1995, he had taken an early retirement from Parks Canada, where he worked as a park interpreter at Fundy National Park, in order to concentrate on his naturalist activities.

He was a very active member of the Moncton Naturalists' Club, a member of the NBFN for many years and an editor of the N.B. Naturalist for as long as I can remember. He still led many field trips to Fundy National Park and in other areas. He was also an active participant in NatureNB with his expert opinions on nature matters, recently alerting the naturalist community on plans to construct wind generators on Tantram Marsh and its potential effects on migratory birds.

He was an example and friend to us all and though Rob was taken from us far too soon, he will remain in our hearts forever.

Il y quelques années déjà, j'ai assisté à ma première assemblée générale annuelle de la FNNB. J'avais sélectionné des sorties en fonction de mon intérêt premier: les oiseaux. Il y avait une exception: une sortie botanique dans un boisé et marécage. Durant cette période, la botanique m'intéressait point; je trouvais cela ennuyant, les plantes ne bougeaient pas, elles ne faisaient rien, elles n'étaient pas excitantes; mais ça me semblait d'une bonne place pour voir mes oiseaux préférés.

Par contre, l'interprète nous décrivait ces plantes avec un tel enthousiasme et passion que je ne pouvais m'empêcher d'y être intéressé: des plantes préhistoriques, des plantes carnivores, des plantes comestibles, des plantes poisons; oubliez les oiseaux! Les plantes sont bien plus excitantes! L'interprète cette journée était nul autre que Rob Walker. C'était la seule façon que Rob savait faire les choses: avec passion et enthousiasme et cette passion, il s'avait la transmettre aux autres.

Rob est décédé dans un accident d'auto le 9 avril dernier. Ce jour là, nous avons perdu un grand homme. Il avait 62 ans et était encore très actif dans la communauté des naturalistes. Il avait pris une retraite anticipée de Parcs Canada où il travaillait comme un interprète au Parc National de Fundy, pour pouvoir concentrer ses activités en nature. Il était un membre très actif du Moncton Naturalists' Club, un membre de la FNNB depuis plusieurs années et un éditeur du Naturaliste du N.-B. depuis longtemps. Il était aussi très actif sur le réseau NatureNB avec ses connaissances au sujet de la nature, dernièrement nous alertant au effets d'un projet de construire des moulins à vent sur le marais de Tantram et les effets sur la route migratrice des oiseaux.

Rob était un exemple pour nous tous et même si je ne le connaissais pas bien, il était considéré un ami. Bien qu'il nous a quitté trop tôt, Rob vivra dans nos coeurs pour bien longtemps.

## Un migrant rare dans le bassin versant de la rivière de Bouctouche

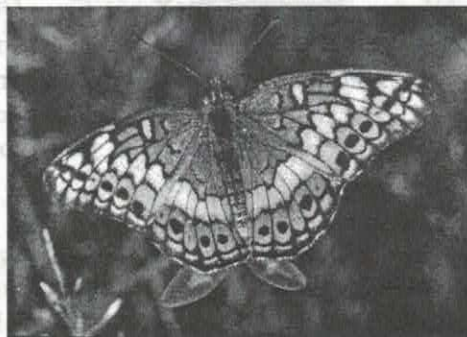
Jean Nowlan

Depuis que ma mère m'avait initié à observer la nature et à collectionner les papillons durant mon adolescence, j'ai toujours gardé un grand intérêt pour les activités en nature. Chaque année, le retour des papillons soulève toujours le même émerveillement que durant ma jeunesse et leur beauté demeure une source de contemplation. Or, pendant les deux dernières années, j'ai rajouté la photographie des papillons à mes observations de la nature.

Malgré des sorties d'observation plus nombreuses et plus longues durant l'été 1999, j'avais observé beaucoup moins d'espèces de papillons que durant l'été 2000. Parmi les espèces observées, les plus notoires avaient été le Monarque (*Danaus plexippus plexippus*) et la Vanesse du chardon (*Vanessa cardui*). Même avec l'absence de l'asclépiade commune dans l'est du Nouveau-Brunswick, j'avais photographié en juillet 1999 un Monarque femelle à Sainte-Marie. Le premier octobre de la même année, lors d'une expédition de canot au Parc National Kouchibouguac, j'avais aussi photographié une Vanesse du chardon à Pointe-à-Maxime.

Durant l'été 2000, je n'ai pas revu de Vanesse du chardon, mais j'ai photographié un autre Monarque femelle. J'ai constaté que durant cette saison estivale, les papillons étaient beaucoup plus nombreux. Entre autres, j'ai observé des Morios (*Nymphalis antiopa*) à en perdre le compte, alors que durant l'été dernier, j'en avais dénombré que trois ou quatre spécimens. Les papillons migrants étaient surtout du rendez-vous. En plus du Monarque, j'ai observé et photographié de nombreux spécimens de la Vanesse de Virginie (*Vanessa virginiensis*), de la Vanesse amiral rouge (*Vanessa atalanta rubia*) ainsi qu'un spécimen du Point d'interrogation (*Poligonis interrogationis*).

Cependant, ma découverte la plus remarquable et certainement la plus excitante est survenue le 23 août 2000 dans un grand champ abandonné, complètement entouré de forêt, sur la rive nord de la rivière de Bouctouche à la hauteur de Coates Mills. Lors d'une randonnée d'observation, j'avais déjà identifié deux Vicerois (*Limenitis archippus archippus*), trois Vanesses de Milbert (*Nymphalis milberti milberti*), une Vanesse de Virginie, quelques Colias au loin et quelques Argynnes. J'ai alors remarqué une Argynne



dont le vol et la coloration m'ont paru différents des autres. En m'y approchant, j'ai vite constaté que c'était une espèce d'Argynne que j'avais vu dans The Butterflies of Canada (Layberry, Hall et Lafontaine 1998). Sans me rappeler du nom ou du territoire précis que cette espèce devait normalement occuper, je savais déjà qu'il n'était pas normal de retrouver ce papillon au Nouveau-Brunswick. Avec trépidation, j'ai aussitôt pris une première photographie pour l'identification. Je me disais que sans cette photographie ou le papillon en main, personne ne me croirait. J'ai par la suite pris quatre autres photographies en m'approchant toujours de plus en plus près du papillon.

De retour à la maison, j'ai immédiatement consulté The Butterflies of Canada pour identifier la Fritillaire panachée (*Euptoieta claudia*). Or, comme je le soupçonnais, Layberry, Hall et Lafontaine ne rapportent aucune observation de ce papillon dans les provinces maritimes. Ce papillon migrant est observé régulièrement dans les provinces des prairies et dans le sud de l'Ontario. Quoique plus rare, il est quelquefois observé dans quelques localités du sud du Québec.

Lors de neuf visites subséquentes au même site, la dernière le 15 septembre, j'ai distingué jusqu'à quatre spécimens par visite. J'ai ainsi photographié plusieurs spécimens dont cinq sont facilement identifiables par la coloration et l'envergure des ailes. L'identification de tous ces spécimens laisse conclure qu'un couple de papillons ou tout au moins une femelle fécondée avait élu domicile dans ce champ pour l'été. Je devrai maintenant attendre à l'été 2001 pour vérifier si cette visite rare est unique ou si une petite colonie de *Euptoieta claudia* s'est installée dans le champ.

## Notes on Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) Nesting in New Brunswick

Rudy Stocek

The Great Northern Diver, a relic of 60 million years and the continent's oldest bird is now a common summer resident in New Brunswick. This wilderness favorite of many outdoor recreationists seems to have increased its breeding opportunities in the last three decades.

An indication of the annual life cycle and breeding biology of the loon appeared in "The Common Loon in New Brunswick" in 1989. Since then I have collected more loon breeding observations with the considerable help of many natural resource personnel and naturalists in the province. These will be summarized here and compared and augmented with the earlier 1980s data.

Observations on 149 Common Loon nestings during the 1990s showed that the great majority of breeding takes place on lakes (Table 1). The larger rivers also accommodate a few loon pairs. The use of marine waters for breeding is an unusual event; however, a pair of loons with one young were seen in July 1993 on salt water near Miramichi Bay.

Breeding loons were observed on 60 lakes in 13 of the 15 counties. The 1980s results suggested that provincial lakes less than 20 ha were used for breeding only 2% of the time. This usage increases with lake size - those of 800 ha or more were used 100% of the time. The birds often nest on islands (Table 1), but they also use boggy shorelines (25%), freshwater hummocks (20%), or artificial nests (5%).

Common Loons typically arrive at their breeding areas in early to late April, depending on weather and ice conditions. The males arrive first, sometimes as the lake ice is melting.

Two-egg clutches seem to be most common by far (Table 1), and only a few three-egg clutches are seen. Average clutch size (about 1.8) seems comparable to the 1980's data. On the average, loons produce about two eggs to get one chick, so hatching success is not especially high. In fact, of thirteen nests observed throughout nesting seasons, only two had all the eggs hatch.

One chick appears to be the most common brood size. Three young are infrequently counted. Both sets of data show an average brood size of 1.4-1.5 (Table 1). Two broods of four young each were seen with

individual pairs in both studies for a period of time. Whether they were part of other broods is unknown, but they certainly were under the care of each loon family.

Common Loon breeding success (how many breeding pairs produced young), and productivity

	1980s	1990s
Loons nesting on lakes	95% (442)	96% (149)
Loons nesting on rivers	5% (442)	4% (149)
Loons nesting on islands	46% (93)	50% (20)
Mean clutch size	1.80 (97)	1.87 (23)
Clutch size:		
1 egg	22%	13%
2 eggs	76%	87%
Hatching success	46% (85)	48% (23)
Mean brood size	1.51 (295)	1.40 (106)
Brood size:		
1 chick	52%	61%
2 chicks	45%	38%
Brood mortality	48% (21)	100% (5)
June to August chick mortal-	32% (38)	56% (9)
Loon success	65% (81)	82% (137)
Young/Breeding pair	0.77 (61)	0.99 (149)

Table 1.

A comparison of Common Loon breeding results in the 1980s (from "The Common Loon in New Brunswick") and 1990s in New Brunswick. Numbers in parentheses refer to nest number, clutch size, egg number, brood size, or young number. Loon success refers to the number of breeding pairs producing young.

(number of young per breeding pair) are estimates that are often used for comparative purposes (Table 1).

The 1990s values seem to be rather high, but the 1986-88 estimates of 74% for success and 0.94 for productivity (53 nests) are also at that level.

Late season mortality of the young can affect the productivity. The number of chicks that survive the breeding season, and eventually fledge in the fall suggests that many of the broods are affected; of five broods tracked in the 1990s, all were reduced in number. The earlier results also show this (Table 1), where twenty-one broods were observed and ten of these were reduced in size. Nine chicks alive in June were reduced to four (56%) in August, and the earlier accounts of 38 chicks in June were reduced to 26 (32%) in August.

Table 2 shows the breeding schedule of the Common Loon in New Brunswick using the 1990s data. Earlier reports suggest that nests with eggs are first seen during the last week of May - first week of June, with a peak in egg laying seen during the third week of June. Viable eggs are still incubated in the last week of July but these are likely re-nests or late nests. Loon chicks are first seen after the 15th of June. Hatching times in the 1990s range from late June to the first week of August. Fledging dates usually occur from early September to late October. Downy chicks may be seen into late September and less-than-adult-



size young in mid-October. A twelve week period from hatching to fledging means those that hatch later in the season (later than early August) may not be able to fly before ice-up.

The above data illustrates some Common Loon nesting efforts that occur each year. They add to a better understanding of loon life history and reproductive success, especially in a species, such as this, that is compromised by human-related impacts such as chemical contaminants. Based on lake sizes in the province and loon densities and breeding success, a July 1988 population survey of the Common Loon, using 1569 named lakes (of the province's 3104) was a conservative 2793 adults and 587 young. Additional information over the years should produce more accurate and reliable estimates.

I certainly appreciate the efforts of those individuals who kindly passed along their Loon data for this report.

Time Frame	Eggs in nest (16 nests)	Hatching date (16 eggs)	Young on lake (106 broods)	Probable fledging date
Early June	X			
Late June	X	X	X	
Early July	X	X	X	
Late July	X	X	X	
Early August		X	X	
Late August			X	
Early September			X	X
Late September			X	X
Early October			X	X
Late October				X

Table 2. Sequence of Common Loon reproductive events during the 1990s breeding seasons in New Brunswick. Early and late refers to each half of a month.

## Results from Recaptured Birds at the St. Andrews Banding Station

Tracey Dean

In the Autumn issue of N.B. Naturalist, Becky Whittam introduced bird banding in Atlantic Canada. This article is a follow-up and presents some results obtained from birds recaptured at the St. Andrews Banding Station.

The St. Andrews Banding Station has been operating on grounds owned by the Huntsman Marine Science Centre since 1989. The Station follows a standardized protocol for collecting data, but does not qualify as a migration monitoring site as it does not operate every day. St. Andrews is the longest running active banding station in New Brunswick. In the 12 years since it first opened its mist nets, 8313 birds representing 86 species have been banded and released. Of these, 382 individuals of 30 species have been recaptured.

It is these recaptures that never cease to fascinate me. Officially, a "recapture" is a bird that is caught at the same place, in a year other than the one in which it was originally banded in. When a bird is recaptured the individual number from the band is recorded, while the band itself remains on the bird.

The Station's banding season starts in April and runs until the end of October and data is collected for a variety of projects. Spring on the seacoast is often slow, but at this time of year it is not uncommon to capture more birds with bands, than without. 16.2 % of birds banded during April are recaptured, this number drops to 6.8% in May as migrants move through, increases to 10.5% in June as birds settle down to breed, stays close to 7.5% in July as birds tend their offspring and drops to 2.6% and below for the fall months when hatch-year birds dominate the banding totals.

Birds are specific in their movements and return to areas they are familiar with year after year. Those that are caught in the Station's net lines at the top of the hill, return to the top of the hill, those that are captured in the Station's nets at the bottom of the hill, rarely seem to venture up the hill. Often the bird is recaptured in exactly the same net, somehow avoiding all the other nets, even though they are close by.

The mist nets used at St. Andrews are specifically designed to catch small passerines (songbirds). These birds live short intense lives and most of the juveniles will not survive their first year. Even though there is a high mortality every year, there are some individuals that beat the odds and become "old friends", returning year after year to the same area. One example is Black-capped Chickadee 1930-66211 who was originally banded as a hatch-year bird in September 1994.

The following outlines his recapture history

1995 - 26 April - net a9,	2 May - net a8
1996 - 26 May - net a1,	21 June - net a8
1997 - 18 May - net a8,	3 October - net a5
1998 - 19 April - net a5,	24 May - net a5
1999 - 2 May - net a1,	10 July - net a1
2000 - 28 May - net a9,	10 June - net a9,
12 Sept. - net a9	

I will be watching band numbers carefully to see if 1930-66211 turns up again.

While some birds seem to be net-happy, others appear to be net-shy. 1910-54362, a Black-&-white Warbler who was banded on 24 June 1992, was not seen again until 22 May 2000. A gap of eight years. Downy Woodpecker 1451-47573 was hatched during the summer of 1994, and was captured on 25 July of that year, then not seen again until 18 July, 1999, a gap of five years. One is always left to wonder where the birds have been in-between times. The Station recaptures 4.1% of its own birds one year after they were banded, but this percentage drops to 2% after two years, then to less than 1% after. Recapturing 1910-54362 was quite unique.

The Station's longevity record is shared by two Black-&-White Warblers, both of whom are over nine years old. This is all the more amazing when you consider a Black-&-White Warbler weighs around 10 grams, has a wing length of 66-69mm, and it flies back and forth to the tropics every year. Where exactly each of these birds spends the winter is not known, but as data bases build up connections are beginning to be made.

The odds of catching a bird not banded at your site are small to exceedingly small, but the St. Andrews Banding Station has two prominent links. One is a Yellow Palm Warbler which was banded 30 September 1994 as a hatch-year (born that summer), as it was heading south for the winter. On the return migration it was recaptured at Island Beach State Park in New Jersey, 944 km south of St. Andrews. But the most tantalizing record is that of Magnolia Warbler 1910-54698. He was originally banded 18 May 1993, seen once again in 1993, then recaptured 4-times in 1994, and then 5-times in 1995, the last being 17 September as he set off south. He was last seen on 28 March 1996 near Tocoa, Honduras (3720 km south in a straight line).

Do all Magnolia Warblers from New Brunswick pass through Honduras? How long did it take 1910-54698 to get there? Which route did he take? Only more patient data collection will help us answer these questions. Banding Stations in New Brunswick, and

Canada as a whole, are few and far between, but even fewer and farther between in Central America and the Caribbean. It may be awhile before we get any answers.

Visitors are welcome at the Station, if they let me know in advance.



## An Invitation from Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

Allison Wells

Greetings, New Brunswick birders-

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is gearing up for another season of our conservation project, Birds in Forested Landscapes. BFL would really appreciate the help of birders and wildlife professionals in New Brunswick (and throughout Canada). The project seeks to understand the relationship between birds and their habitats so that land managers can make informed decisions about forested landscapes and the birds which depend upon them. This year, we've expanded BFL to include some 50 species (in the past, we've focused only on thrushes and Cooper's and Sharp-shinned hawks.) Results from a similar study, Project Tanager, resulted in a publication now available from the Lab, "Land Manager's Guide to Improving Habitat for Scarlet Tanagers and Other Forest-Interior Birds," available at <http://birds.cornell.edu/conservation/tanager/>

Currently, two people in NB are already involved in BFL. If you are one of them, thank you! If you can get involved, email me privately for more info.

You can also learn more about BFL at <http://birds.cornell.edu/bfl> All project material is sent free of charge. BFL is a great way to gain field experience and can be easily worked into field work you may already be conducting. Please share this with other birders, biologists, and anyone else you think may be interested in helping out with BFL.

Thank you in advance for any help you can give!

Allison Wells

Communications and Outreach Director

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## New Brunswick Bird Watchers needed for North American Bird Feeder Study

Becky Whittam

Last winter, more than 15,000 people across Canada and the United States helped scientists monitor feeder birds - without ever leaving home! These people were participants in Project FeederWatch, a North-American-wide program that uses volunteer birdwatchers to monitor winter birds. These "FeederWatchers" tell scientists whether the numbers of birds at feeders in winter are growing or declining, and how bird distributions are changing — information that is crucial to effective bird conservation programs.

The project was founded in 1976 as the Ontario Bird Feeder Survey, but became a North America-wide endeavour in 1987. There are currently around 150 FeederWatchers in Atlantic Canada, including 50 from New Brunswick. Project FeederWatch staff and scientists would like to see more participants from New Brunswick to help monitor species such as Gray Jays, Pine Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls.

Last winter, FeederWatchers helped scientists monitor the arrival of large numbers of winter finches at feeders (especially Common Redpolls, which came to feeders in record numbers in Atlantic Canada), as well as the spread of a disease known as salmonellosis among Redpolls. Salmonellosis periodically erupts in songbirds, causes mass mortality, then quickly disappears. Project FeederWatch provided scientists with the tools needed to monitor this phenomenon at a continental level.

To become a FeederWatcher, just watch birds at your backyard feeder once every two weeks from November through March. Count the kinds and numbers of birds you see, record the information on FeederWatch data forms, and send the forms back to Bird Studies Canada in the spring for analysis. Or, enter your data through our interactive web page and, at the same time, keep track of everybody's results.

Participating in Project FeederWatch is easy, and for an annual \$25.00 registration fee, participants receive the FeederWatch instruction booklet, resource manual, data forms, a beautiful bird calendar, a poster of common feeder birds, and three issues of the newsletter BirdWatch Canada, as well as the Bird

Studies Canada Annual Report. Bird Studies Canada is an independent, non-profit research institute studying birds and their habitats for conservation. Project FeederWatch is a joint project of Bird Studies Canada, the Canadian Nature Federation, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. Bird Studies Canada gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada's Millennium Partnership Program.

Make the winter months a lot more fun by turning a backyard hobby into valuable conservation research by joining Project FeederWatch. There are several ways to register. Fill out our online form at <[www.bsc-eoc.org/national/pfwsign.html](http://www.bsc-eoc.org/national/pfwsign.html)>, write to P.O. Box 160, Port Rowan, Ontario N0E 1M0 (enclose a \$25 cheque to Project FeederWatch), e-mail us at [pfw@bsc-eoc.org](mailto:pfw@bsc-eoc.org), or call Bird Studies Canada toll-free at 1-888-448-BIRD (2473). In New Brunswick, you can contact the PFW Canadian Coordinator, Becky Whittam, in Sackville at 364-5047, or email her at [becky.whittam@ec.gc.ca](mailto:becky.whittam@ec.gc.ca).

*Top Ten Feeder Birds in N. B. in the winter of 1999-2000, according to Project FeederWatch*

Species .....	Percent of Feeders Visited
Black-capped Chickadee.....	100
Blue Jay .....	97
Common Redpoll .....	94
Mourning Dove .....	88
Downy Woodpecker .....	79
Hairy Woodpecker .....	79
Red-breasted Nuthatch.....	79
American Crow .....	76
Dark-eyed Junco .....	73
European Starling .....	70



## Perspectives

Ken MacIntosh

This feature is a collection of extracts from back issues of the N.B. Naturalist.

As this issue will be published shortly after the inaugural season of the New Brunswick Nocturnal Owl Survey, it seems appropriate to extract some owl sightings from the archives of the Naturalist. Luckily, some very interesting observations were reported in volume 3 (2), March 1972.

For birders, one of the consolations of winter's approach is the hope that arctic air will deliver some cherished irruptive species from the north. Among the prizes, the Great Gray Owl must rank near the top of many wish lists. Could this happen to you?

"The Great Gray Owl at Sisson Ridge, near Plaster Rock, was seen till Jan. 6 (fide Laverne Rabatich). Another was seen at Brown's Flat Dec. 22 and 26 by Irenie Gorham. She was puzzled about what it was at the time but recognized it immediately when she saw its photograph on the cover of the Canadian Field-Naturalist which arrived early in January. Two records constitutes an invasion of this species in New Brunswick."

Apart from scanning favoured hunting areas for Short-eareds, it is difficult to search for wintering owls. As in the recently departed winter, it seems that wintering owls are found as often dead as alive (see, for example, Nature News in this issue).

"A Short-eared Owl was seen at Hammond River Feb. 27 (Wilson) and another was found dead at Saint John about that date (fide S. Gorham). The ice storm of early March was hard on Saw-whet Owls, wintering birds or perhaps returning migrants. At any rate they appeared in residential areas and a number were found dead. One was dead at Rothesay on March 4 (John Mather) and the next day they were reported in two areas of Saint John...and another dead one at Saint John (Marcel Dornan a Joanne Pearce). A Barred Owl was also found dead, Mar. 12 at St. Andrews (Willa MacCoubrey). All these dead owls, examined by Stan Gorham, had empty stomachs and were fairly thin, particularly the Short-ear."

But how often would you expect to see live and dead owls at once? "Mr. & Mrs. John Corbett had two at their house, one of which died. The second bird dragged the body into a bush and disappeared."

Nearly as unusual was the following observation of the last hours in the life of one owl, a hunter to the bitter end.

"Jack Crammond watched one capture a Starling at his bird feeder, then drag it out of sight near a fence. Fifteen minutes later the Starling reappeared, limping across the snowy yard with the owl in pursuit. The Saw-whet eventually killed its large prey, ate some and flew to the branch of a tree from which it later was seen to fall into the snow. Mr. Crammond picked it up and it died shortly after. Before this wildlife drama occurred the owl had flown against a window, but examination of it showed no injury that would have resulted in death."



One of the thrills of watching birds of prey is to see the hunter in action. Many of us have enjoyed the excitement of witnessing the moment of pursuit, and some of us have toyed with the idea of devising some mechanical trickery to lure the hunter. Did you ever consider rolling a puck down the street?

"Another (*Saw-whet*), in pursuit of unusual prey, was one that tried to capture a hockey puck where some children were playing in a street in Oromocto early in March (fide W.A. Squires)."

## Community mourns respected Naturalist

Yvon Gauvin

*(Reproduced from the Moncton Times & Transcript)*

ALMA - This tiny coastal community and gateway to Fundy National Park lost a valued resident but it's the scientists and nature lovers across the province who mourn most the death Monday of respected naturalist Robert (Rob) Walker, 62.

Walker was killed when his car skidded on slush and ice just before noon Monday while travelling north along Highway 114 towards Moncton. Hillsborough RCMP said Walker's car went out of control and crossed into the path of an oncoming half-ton truck driven by a 54-year-old Hopewell Cape man. The unnamed man was not seriously hurt, said police.

Highway conditions were definitely to blame, the officer said. The crash occurred at approximately 11am. at Edgetts Landing, about midway between Hopewell Cape and Hillsborough.

Both drivers were alone in their respective vehicles. Walker was pronounced dead at the Moncton Hospital.

Walker took an early retirement package in 1995 from Parks Canada and Fundy National Park where he had been park interpreter and later a media coordinator, ending 30 years with Parks Canada. But retirement was far from his mind.

Long-time friends and acquaintances had nothing but praise for the man who devoted his life to science and the outdoors and whose infectious enthusiasm about flora and fauna, and especially New Brunswick's bird species, inspired many to take up similar pursuits.

Walker was on his way to Sackville to pick up exhibits for the Cape Jourmain Natural Wildlife Area Project. Then he was scheduled to attend the Moncton Naturalist Club meeting of which he was an executive member Monday night.

It was a sombre meeting after members learned of Walker's death, fellow naturalist and close friend David Christie of Mary's Point said yesterday.

"The telephone hasn't stopped ringing" with people anxious for news or words of comfort, he said. "He was so well respected and had so many friends," said Christie.

Walker was a wealth of knowledge and had a deep passion for birds and for nature. He never stopped finding excuses to embark on field trips, go bird watching or lead nature tours just to experience New

Brunswick's natural beauty, said his friend.

Since retirement, Walker had been spending part of his summers giving tours for the Fundy Hiking and Nature Tours based in St. Martins.

He had a tremendous knowledge of natural history as well as flora and fauna, but was modest about his knowledge and never pushed himself onto others, said Christie. He could talk to anyone at any level.

His enthusiasm would be the spark for others. "He definitely loved what he did," said Christie.

Similar messages came from Barry Spencer at Kouchibouguac National Park in Kent County, who was a long-time colleague at Fundy National Park. Walker's love of the natural world will be carried on by those who looked and listened to his words, Spencer said.

Brenda Butland, administrative assistant at Fundy National Park, said Walker loved the outdoors and could make an entertaining and instructive presentation for different groups highly interesting. "The more he told you, the more you wanted to know." His was the greatest source of information about birds past and present in the province, she said. "I don't think he ever forgot anything he read."

Locally, he was a member of the Fundy Beautification and Historical Society. He was president of the Fundy Guild and member of the New Brunswick Federation of Naturalists.

Moncton Museum senior heritage officer Brenda Orr said Walker had agreed to speak at the Greater Moncton Museum Society meeting in February on the subject of friends and volunteer groups and she marvelled at his enthusiasm and the impact upon the audience. The evening was a complete success.

"He saw the value of what we were doing" and volunteered his time and knowledge," she said.

Nelson Poirier, naturalist and columnist with the Times & Transcript, another close friend, said Walker was the spark that ignited and kept the Moncton Naturalist Club going. At about 160 members, the club is the largest in the province, he said.

Walker was also an environmentalist, always on the lookout for environmental problems and issues. He was a terribly serious individual, and yet full of contagious enthusiasm, said Poirier.

## Tribute to Rob Walker, Friday April 13, 2001

*Vivian Beale and Friends*

Someone once told me that people are like the stars in the sky. Some people live their lives at an even pace like the steady glow of a familiar star, night after night. Other people live their lives like shooting stars. Their life only exists for a short time and then, they are gone. Ah, but what a life! The way shooting stars brighten the sky and make us marvel in awe; these people brighten, inspire and touch our lives with their passion, their enthusiasm, their energy, and their talents. Rob Walker was a shooting star.

It is no secret that Rob had a passion for nature. His enthusiasm and energy made it easy for him to share this passion with others. He was also very generous with his time. This combination of characteristics made him an awesome teacher.

Young and old, everyone who met Rob was inspired by his zeal for nature. When he worked for Fundy National Park as a guide, questionnaires were always passed out to the participants after. Rob usually received a perfect 10 out of 10. His educational talks were not contained within New Brunswick.

He once said that the height of his career was when he went to New York City and gave a presentation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He gave a slide show on the Bay of Fundy and the bay's influence on plants and animals. People afterwards said that it was the best presentation they had ever seen.

His dedication to educate and show the beauty of nature can be seen when he told us of the time he had a group of overseas tourists. The group had given him a long and impressive list of Canadian flora and fauna that they wanted to see. As many of you know, plants and animals are not reliable in showing up when you want them to, so this was quite a challenge. Thanks to Rob's ingenuity, knowledge and some luck the tourists saw everything on the list and more. It was as if the plants and animals wanted to help Rob out. Not only did they all show up, they practically performed.

Rob's love and dedication to preserving nature can be seen, when one day, someone had found a large moth (I think it was a *Cecropia*) and brought it into the Fundy National Parks office where Rob was. Rob explained everything there was to know about *Cecropia* moths and then asked the person where they had found it. Rob then gently took the moth and he returned it to the exact spot of origin. I know of very

few people who are this dedicated to the preservation of nature.

Like his inspirational talks, Rob's dedication had stretched beyond New Brunswick. Few people are aware that Rob was instrumental in setting up Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland, and that this humble, unassuming man was Gros Morne's first naturalist.

Rob's vast knowledge on flora and fauna was amazing, and was respected by all. One time I had given a talk on the introduction of various species to another country. Rob approached me after and said, 'Did you know that all species of earthworms in New Brunswick were introduced?' No I didn't know, and as bizarre as this earthworm fact was, I knew (as I'm sure you all do too) that it had to be true, because Rob Walker said so.

His vast knowledge allowed him to be flexible. If he was leading a field trip on birds, and due to weather there were very few birds to see, he was able to give a fascinating talk on virtually anything ... trees, herbs, fungus, or if anyone wanted to know, but were afraid to ask, the mating habits of spiders. He was forever increasing his knowledge. 'Give me a topic to speak on', he once said, 'and I'll research it and present it.'

I have various pet philosophies about life. One is how to measure success in your life. How successful you are is not based on how much money you make or what you own but if you leave this world a better place than when you arrived. Rob's enthusiastic zeal for nature that he passed on, has inspired thousands of people, including us. He has made this world a better place.

Rob, we miss you, and we'll never forget you. We will miss your boundless energy, your knowledge and enthusiasm. However, what is wonderful (thanks to a gift that you have given us) is that whenever we want to see you again, all we have to do is go outside. You continue to live on in the knowledge that you have passed on to all of us, of the beauty and splendour of nature. Thanks to you we see the trees, herbs, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and even the earthworms in a different way. On a clear, star filled night with every shooting star.

Presented by Vivian Beale

## New Brunswick Stranding Network – NBSN

Laurie Murison

Every year marine mammals come ashore for a variety of reasons along the shores of New Brunswick. The majority are single animals that died at sea (from illness, injury, entanglement or collisions) and washed ashore. Single live stranded animals are rare and are usually in poor condition and not likely to survive or have made a mistake such as caught by an out-going tide. Sometimes, seal pups have been orphaned but more likely are temporarily separated from their mothers.

As a group concerned with conservation of marine mammals the Grand Manan Whale & Seabird Research Station (GMWSRS) has volunteered to begin the development of a network to address marine mammal strandings in the province with the assistance of Dr. Donald McAlpine at the New Brunswick Museum.

The GMWSRS has responded over the years to strandings of dead harbour and grey seals, harbour porpoises, minke, finback, right, pilot, and humpback whales and we have donated a significant portion of the New Brunswick Museum's harbour porpoise skeleton collection. We have been able to document these occurrences and often perform detailed necropsies (dissections) for additional information about the animals. The GMWSRS also responds to entrapped harbour porpoises in herring weirs and large whale disentanglement efforts.

The New Brunswick Museum houses a large collection of skeletal material of marine mammals including rare items such as two right whale skeletons. They also have the skeletal remains of the second recorded pygmy sperm whale for New Brunswick. This carcass was only just recovered before being lost to a landfill site, despite washing ashore in Saint John where the Museum is located. None of these would be in the Museum collections if they had not been notified and been able to respond. Dr. McAlpine has also arranged for care of abandoned and sick seals.

The New Brunswick Stranding Network (NBSN) will endeavour to provide a reporting network and a limited response team for stranded marine mammals in the province of New Brunswick.

Members of the NBSN will try to attend as many strandings as possible but at present will be limited in

the extent to which a response can be made, especially in remote areas. We hope that by building a network of individuals and groups, more reported strandings can be investigated. Financial support for the New Brunswick Stranding Network was gratefully received from the New Brunswick Environmental Trust Fund. This grant provided seed money for organization, basic equipment and promotion of the endeavour. Because of this funding we are able to ask all interested parties to register with the fledgling New Brunswick Stranding Network indicating the level of involvement and commitment that can be expected. For those interested, pamphlets and posters with information on how to respond to a stranding, reporting, etc. can be provided. Long-term funding is necessary to keep this initiative going and donations can be made to the New Brunswick Museum or the GMWSRS.

The best procedure to follow if you find a beached or stranded marine mammal is to call the toll free environmental emergency number as soon as you can (1-800-565-1833, the number is located in the inside front cover of the phone book). Your call may be redirected. Be prepared to provide as much information as possible from the following items. Please be sure to give a contact number in case more information is required.

► Observe the animal(s) from a distance. Keep noise and crowds down. Do not allow pets to approach.

► How many animals are present? Are they alive or dead? If alive are they active or weak? Are there any wounds or bleeding? Are they entangled in ropes, fishing gear, plastic, etc.? Are they beached or in shallow water?

If dead are they fresh, partly decomposed (skin sloughing or not present), have exposed bones, are mostly bones? Note physical characteristics (Size, distinguishing characteristics such as type of teeth if any, hair, colour, fins, etc.), any tags and the animals' condition.

► Determine the exact location—nearest town, civic address, landmarks or any other information that will allow someone to find the site. How is the site accessible—foot, boat, auto, four-wheel drive? Precious time is lost if proper directions are lacking.

► Do not attempt to move live animals. Situations must be assessed by experts. Seals will bite. Whales, dolphins and porpoises may re-strand or die if pushed back to sea. Dead animals can be secured with rope to prevent them washing back to sea.

► Do not attempt to feed the animal.

► Stay on site if possible, particularly if the animal is alive.

It is important to report dead animals so that carcasses can be recovered and examined. The carcasses can provide valuable information about species that are often little known and difficult to study. Morphometrics (body measurements), parasites, body condition, disease, life history, diet, genetic analysis, changes in occurrence, habitat requirements or human interactions can be documented if the appropriate organizations are notified of the stranding.

It is often difficult to identify dead marine mammals if they are badly decomposed or scavenged. Whales

lose their skin quickly after death exposing the blubber layer which is very fibrous and may be white or cream coloured. These carcasses may resemble similarly decomposed large marine vertebrates such as bluefin tuna or basking sharks. To prevent the carcass from washing away either move it above the high water mark if small or secure it to a tree or large object with rope. Heavy equipment is necessary to work with large whales. Covering with old tarps or similar disposable material to prevent scavenging or mutilation is helpful until someone can respond. Small animals can be kept on ice or if necessary frozen until they can be picked up. Standardized data collection techniques and forms are available to collect valuable data from these animals. Photographs or video can be very useful. If a carcass can not be retrieved there are various ways to dispose of it—burying is most common. If in remote areas, carcasses can be left and will be quickly scavenged leaving only bones.

## NEW BRUNSWICK FEDERATION OF NATURALISTS

### HELP BUILD A STRONGER VOICE FOR NATURE

#### MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership fee for the current year is \$16 annually in Canada and \$21 in other countries. Fees should be directed to the membership secretary, Jim Wilson, 2 Neck Road, Quispamsis, N.B., E2G-1L3

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Telephone.....e-mail.....

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#### GIFT MEMBERSHIP

Recipient Name.....

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.....Postal Code.....

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.....Postal Code.....

A note will be sent announcing your gift and welcoming the new member to the Federation.

Live strandings are more difficult to deal with. Few resources are available in the province to deal with strandings of sick, injured or abandoned seal pups or live strandings of whales, dolphins or porpoises. Resources are extremely limited for rehabilitation. In the past individuals have taken on the task of caring for abandoned harbour seal pups and undernourished yearling hooded seals, often housing the individuals in bathtubs or small pens until they were strong enough to be released. Some companies have been very generous in donating fish and milk products to care for these individuals. The Maritime Atlantic Wildlife Centre does have limited resources to deal with a few seals. It is important that individuals are aware that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) is responsible for marine mammals. Permission from DFO to care for marine mammals is necessary.

That said, if the animal is a seal—don't get too close or crowd the animal. Keep pets clear. Seals can bite. Marine mammals carry a variety of bacteria, fungi and viruses. Risk of disease is low but precautions should

be taken to avoid bites, skin contact with wounds, etc. Do not attempt to drive it into the water. If it goes by itself do not follow it. Seals may want to be ashore. It is best to watch the animal for 48 hours before acting.

If the animal is a whale, dolphin or porpoise—keep the animal upright. Clear away sand or debris from eyes and blowholes. Shade it from the sun if possible. Do not attempt to push it back to sea—it will probably restrand or die. Support the animal with foam or dig a pit around the flippers and fill with water. Keep the animal moist with fresh or salt water, especially fins and tail. Try not to get water down the blowhole. Stay clear of the flukes/tail and head as much as possible. These animals are powerful even when ashore.

For more information or if you want to help, please contact:

Grand Manan Whale & Seabird Research Station  
24 Route 776, Grand Manan, NB, E5G 1A1,  
Ph. 506 662 3804, Fax. 506 662 9804  
Email:  
gmwhale@nbnet.nb.ca

## LA FEDERATION DES NATURALISTES DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK

### TOUS ENSEMBLE POUR LA SAUGARDE DE LA NATURE

#### Formulaire de Membre

La cotisation pour l'année 2000 est annuellement de \$16 au Canada et \$21 pour les autres pays. La cotisation doit être envoyée à la préposée aux abonnements: Jim Wilson, 2 Neck Road, Quispamsis, N.B., E2G-1L3

#### .....Réabonnement

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Une note de bienvenue et de souhait sera envoyée au nom ci-haut mentionné en votre nom et celui de la

## Gulls: Tough Birds for a Tough World

Mike Lushington

"Aw, it's just an old seagull!"

"A MacDonalds gull."

"A rat on wings!"

"Boy, you see them everywhere - and they're always looking for something to eat."

Many people don't appreciate gulls. I include most birders in this observation. We will be out on a field trip and encounter a flock of gulls. I want to stop and study them, but my companions complain: "It's just a bunch of seagulls. Let's go find some good birds!"

"Good birds!" By that, most birders mean, "rare birds" or "pretty birds" or something else that makes them special in that rather convoluted value system that pervades the hobby.

What they really mean is, "Let's go find some birds that don't remind us of human beings".

Why is it that we disparage those creatures which most closely imitate our own successes in this world? We despise rats, think little of "pigeons" (Rock doves) and starlings, hate crows and gulls and otherwise disdain those creatures which manage to succeed in a world dominated by ourselves. We have little room in our own psyches to admire tenacity, resourcefulness, adaptability and intelligence, especially when those qualities are blended with independence.

Well, I have to confess: I admire gulls.

A Ring-billed gull in the parking lot of a fast food outlet is an opportunist. Over the past fifty or so years, this species - the archetypal "MacDonald's" gull - has spread dramatically in eastern North America. This spread is attributable largely to its ability to take advantage of new food sources. The Ring-billed gull looks very similar to the Herring gull except for the black ring around the bill of adult birds (hence its name) and its considerably smaller size. In the natural world, it is dominated by its larger, more aggressive cousin. As a result, it is not often found in any numbers around fish processing plants or wharfs frequented by Herring gulls.

But it is also a very resourceful bird, one that does not mind the near proximity of human beings. It is also rather more comfortable away from the immediate presence of water than is a Herring gull. In short, it is almost a "designer" bird for food outlets, for school parking lots and other places where people often eat outside.

The adult Ring-billed gull is also an attractive bird, something which becomes evident when one puts aside prejudice long enough to take a good, close look. In its formal attire of pure white, soft grey and crisp black, it is a picture of cryptic neatness. There is something almost delicate about the bird; one realizes that it is not nearly as large as it might appear at first. This delicate cast extends to its rounded head which gives it altogether a gentler expression than one finds in the larger gulls. Young birds, those dark brown ones that are seen in late summer, are actually engaging as they toddle around after their parents begging for food.

Worldwide, there are some forty-five species of *Larus* gulls. This genus of birds is among the more successful, adapting to changing conditions and opportunities and spreading into niches which did not exist even a century ago. The Ring-billed gull is a North American bird. Originally it was found in the western part of the continent, but as I mentioned above, it has spread dramatically within the past fifty or so years. However, it is not the only gull to do so.

The Great black-backed gull is another North American species. Unlike the Ring-billed gull, which sometimes gives an impression of size that belies its true, rather petite stature, the Great black-back is huge. In fact, it is the largest gull in the world, with a wing span of over two meters and a solid, hefty body.

When I was a kid growing up, first along the New Brunswick shore of the Bay of Fundy and later on along the Eastern shore of Nova Scotia, Great black-backs were rare enough to warrant comment when they appeared inland. They were a marine species,



common enough offshore, but to see them in numbers, one had to go out in fishing boats or search out their rookeries, usually rocky, offshore islands. Then they discovered that human beings were creating large garbage dumps on the outskirts of towns and cities and they began to move in. They have done so in such numbers that they are often the most numerous gulls at landfill sites. Because they are so large, and have a temperament to match their size, they immediately dominate the scene whenever they arrive.

Great black-back gulls win no personality prizes. There is nothing cute, engaging or entertaining about them. They are aggressive and ruthless opportunists, successful predators as well as scavengers. They are also magnificent birds. An adult bird, in new winter plumage of black and white, standing on a rock, surrounded by snow and ice, is simply beautiful. Aloft, sailing and gliding in the winds or coursing effortlessly along a rocky coastline, it is a consummate master of its environment. At such times, judgements based on a misplaced sense of social values become irrelevant.

But when all is said and done, the Herring gull is the quintessential "seagull", the bird that we associate (sometimes erroneously) with garbage dumps, fast food outlets and seaside wharfs. Unlike either of the two previously mentioned gulls, the Herring gull is found across Europe and Asia as well as North America, down to about the forty-fifth parallel in the south and north into the high Arctic. Within this enormous range, it takes advantage of a great many habitat opportunities, restricted only by the need to be relatively near the water and on some rocky ground. The Herring gull is almost as large as the Great black-back, assertive enough to be able to co-exist in many rookeries and intelligent enough to adapt to the presence of its larger cousin.

In several rookeries with which I am familiar, Great black-backs arrive first in the spring and claim the choice nesting sites; only after they have done so, the Herring gulls arrive to take up what remains. From then on, relative peace prevails.

Of the three, Herring gulls seem to be the most opportunistic and adaptable to varying food sources. I have seen them competing successfully with Great black-backs on fishing wharfs and at landfill sites. The two species will also predate tern and alcid colonies. Herring gulls, and Ring-bills, will follow a farmer's plow or manure spreader in the spring, or investigate

the latest leavings of a shredded garbage bag by the side of the road. I have even seen them, these large birds of the sea, perching precariously in Mountain ash trees in falls of large berry crops for the clumps of fruit. Herring gulls are the most likely of the three species to be seen dropping mussels and clams onto rocks - or the asphalt of parking lots and quiet stretches of highway - to break shells, a trait they share with crows and ravens, but only occasionally with the other gulls.

I have seen them tipping up like marsh ducks to forage in shallow water and take short dives like terns or kittiwakes after small fish; in short, I am hard pressed to remember what I have not seen them do on one occasion or another.

And they are magnificent fliers themselves. Like Great black-backs (and unlike Ring-bills, at least in my impression) they often seem to fly for the joy of it, in storms and high winds and when there is no obvious food source for them to exploit. On many an occasion I have watched them playing in the wind, drifting, sailing, soaring, twisting, tacking for minutes on end without moving a wing, consummate masters of the air.

In everything they do, gulls give us the very strong impression that they are quite willing to take advantage of what we might have to offer, but they will do so to their own advantage. If we decide to withdraw our favours, they will adapt. It is, I believe, this very independence that causes much of our resentment.

This prejudice is unfortunate because it interferes with an opportunity to study some of the more remarkable bird species in our area. Consider the following, without bias:

► They are large, plentiful, and conspicuous; one never has to search very far to find them.

► They are social colonizers and often gather to breed, nest and raise families in areas that are easily accessed for observation. In our area, we have several colonies which I can study at my leisure from the warmth and comfort of my truck. As is the case with all such colonizers, they have very complex social interactions, both in relation to other species and within their own. Although they are wary and aggressive toward intruders, they tolerate the near presence of quiet observers, thus affording wonderful opportunities for observations that one would otherwise have to expend considerable time, effort, and finances to experience.

► They are intelligent, adaptable generalists. It has often struck me that no other group of birds in the world (that I can think of) does all three natural modes of locomotion as well as they do.

They fly magnificently, of course and swim as buoyantly as any duck or alcid. And they also walk very well, about as well as any bird other than the more

specialized land foragers - the various grouse and wild fowl species and the large, flightless land birds.

► They are beautiful, remarkable survivors in a world which we make increasingly difficult for creatures other than ourselves to flourish. At the very least, they command our acceptance and our respect.

## **Right Whale Calving and Bay of Fundy Connections**

*Laurie Murison, Grand Manan Whale and Seabird Research Station*

For the past three years the Bay of Fundy has been without right whale calves in the summer - an area known as a right whale nursery! During these years only eleven have been born with none of the mothers being traditional Bay of Fundy mothers, i.e. the females do not bring their calves to the Bay the year of their birth. Right whales seem to have very strong matrilineal associations and while many return to the Bay of Fundy, a small proportion of the western North Atlantic population returns to historical areas each year such as the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Newfoundland, Labrador and Iceland. These are areas where whaling pressure was the heaviest and right whale populations were quickly decimated. Often these whales go unreported, in part because observers are unsure of what they are seeing, not aware of the importance of reporting or to whom or the whales are in areas where they go unobserved. Small numbers of right whales are surprisingly difficult to see if they are on long dives and moving about an area.

The lowest number of right whale calves in the approximately twenty years of monitoring occurred last year when only one was found. Always optimistic that this year had to be better than the last the aerial survey research teams along the Georgia and Florida coasts began work in December. Most right whale research in the winter is from aircraft because of the large areas that must be surveyed. Immediately right whales were seen, a good sign. When few females are pregnant, few whales are seen in these winter areas. Reports started coming in of new born calves and the number climbed slowly until mid-April when the final number stood at 30. This is the highest number of calves in the last two decades and a good proportion

are Bay of Fundy mothers. The next highest year was 1996 when 22 calves were born. While the number of calves sounds promising it is only just making up for previous low calving years, the high number of fatalities during the 1990s and the long inter-calf interval that has become the norm in the 1990s. Right whale females usually space their calves approximately every three years - one year pregnant, one year nursing a calf and a resting year. Most of the females who had calves this year had not done so in four, five or more years. There were also eight new known-age mothers, the oldest was 21 followed by one each at 18, 15, 14, and two each at 12 and 10 years of age. These are all females that were observed as calves and an accurate age is known for them. It is interesting to note that while most right whale mothers have their first calf at an average ten years or older, the youngest mother was only five years of age. The right whale population along the western North Atlantic is, of course, almost completely photo-documented and catalogued so this type of information is possible to obtain.

This wonderful year of many calves was not without its sorrows. At least three calves are dead, one could not be recovered until it was badly decomposed so a cause of death could not be determined and another died as the result of a ship strike. This calf (a male, already 7.7m or 25' in length) was discovered in March with long gashes including one which penetrated the abdomen. This type of injury is only caused by boat propellers. These calves can be matched to their mothers through genetic fingerprinting or by observing females known to be mothers this year, now without a calf. Genetic

material from these calves can be compared to the genetic catalogue that exists for right whales. Over 75% of the whales have been biopsied for genetic fingerprinting so although carcasses are often not individually recognizable, genetics may pinpoint the identity.

In the case of calves, the mother can be determined and with advances in genetic analysis fathers can also be identified. Right whale calves are born without developed callosities so although the mother is known, it takes a couple of months before the calves can be identified individually. There was one exception this year when a right whale calf was born with all white flukes and white-rimmed flippers - certainly identifiable even without developed callosities. There were several other close calls with ships which were documented and one of the mothers managed to survive a collision with a gruesome series of propeller cuts tracking across about 10'-12' of her back, probably from a vessel with twin screws. Although serious, the injuries are not thought to be life-threatening.

Many more right whales may have died this winter without the years of conservation efforts and financial support of the U.S. government in this area to make shipping companies, pilots, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard, dredging companies and others aware of right whales and their vulnerability to ship strikes. The aerial surveys are an intricate component of this conservation effort. The right whale calving area is located among some of the busiest commercial shipping channels on the eastern seaboard. As Chris Slay from the New England Aquarium notes: "I suppose, many years ago, this was an ideal place for birthing and nursing a calf - moderate water temperatures, few predators, shallow and somewhat protected from the worst the Atlantic has to offer-- as far up on the continental shelf as a whale can get and still be fully immersed. Now it seems somewhat dangerous".

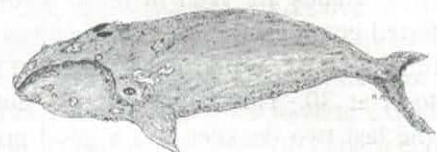
It is interesting to note that of the 26 mothers, one was identified from photos taken off South Carolina and not the Georgia/Florida coast. It is suspected that some right whales give birth outside of the heavily surveyed area since most years one or two young whales are photographed that do not match any in the catalogue. The survey teams were also able to pinpoint the approximate time of some of the births since a number of females were seen before and after

giving birth, although the birth of a right whale has never been observed in the North Atlantic.

The extreme fluctuation in the number of calves from year to year is puzzling and no one has "the answer" if indeed there is only one answer. Because reproduction in right whales, and marine mammals in general, is energetically demanding for the mother, food availability is a contributing factor to whether a female becomes pregnant or not. The calves are large and precocious when born and are nursed a rich milk high in fat for up to a year. Historically the whalers referred to nursing mothers as "dry backs" because of the thin blubber layer. The mothers convert their blubber into milk for their calves for several months when they are in zooplankton-poor wintering areas. It seems that the Bay of Fundy right whale females compared to the non-Bay of Fundy have been most affected by zooplankton fluctuations. The reproductive rate in non-Bay of Fundy females has not been as irregular as Bay of Fundy females. Research conducted by Dr. Michael Moore of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in the Bay of Fundy has shown that blubber thickness has been much less than southern right whales, although last year the blubber thickness was much improved.

Blubber thickness is a good indication of body condition and the ability of a female to have a successful pregnancy and wean a calf. He measures blubber thickness with an ultrasound probe on a long pole which he gently touches to the back of the whale for less than a minute. Why zooplankton biomass has been fluctuating in the Bay of Fundy/Gulf of Maine is of course the next question in this complex issue.

This summer there will be increased interest in whale watching in the Bay of Fundy because of the number of calves. It is hoped the mother-calf pairs can be given a wide berth, although this will be difficult given the amount of time the calves spend at the surface and their often exuberant behaviour. Hopefully there will be similar numbers of right whales as previous years which will give everyone an opportunity to watch right whales without concentrating on mother-calf pairs.



## Answer the Call!

*Reprinted from a Canadian Nature Federation information flier*

The Canadian Nature Federation (CNF) and Environment Canada's Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network (EMAN) would like to thank all the volunteers who helped get the Frogwatch program off to a hopping start. As spring approaches, it is time to get ready for a new season of frog-watching. For those of you who missed out on the fun last year, now is your chance to get involved!

### About the program

The aim of Frogwatch is to encourage Canadians to take interest in the health of our environment. Because frogs spend part of their life in water, and part on land, they have been chosen as an indicator species to monitor changes to our ecosystems.

They appear to be telling us something is amiss, as their numbers have been declining world-wide since the 1980s. Currently, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) lists three populations of frogs as endangered, while six others are categorized as threatened or of special concern. Additionally, there have been unexplained population declines in species not normally considered at risk. In order to identify the causes of these declines, scientists must first determine the extent of frog population reductions. That's where Frogwatch participants can help.

We are looking for volunteers of all ages who are willing to monitor frog calls at their local wetland on a number of evenings over the calling season. By gathering information on which frogs are calling at a particular site, when they call, and under what conditions, you can help scientists collect the data they need to identify threats to our natural environment.

### Get involved now!

The earliest spring frogs begin calling in late March or early April. Regardless of where you live, the species you are likely to hear first is the wood frog, which is the only frog found in every province and territory in Canada. To listen to its duck-like quack, as well as the calls of other frogs and toads in your region, visit the National Frogwatch Web site <<http://eqb-dqe.cciw.ca/emanops/intro.html>> or call 1-888-31FROGS.

Pictures and descriptions of Canada's frogs and toads can be found on the Frogwatch ID poster. A printed copy is available free-of-charge from the Canadian Nature Federation, while an electronic version can be viewed on CNF's Web site. Although a survey form is included with the poster, volunteers are encouraged to submit their observations electronically via EMAN's Web site to save both paper and data processing time (see addresses below).

### More information

We will be publishing a semi-annual newsletter to keep Frogwatch participants up to date and provide further information. Enter our limerick contest in the April 2001 inaugural issue to win a Frogwatch prize package. In addition, we'll be launching a new Frogwatch educational package for teachers this fall. Keep an eye on the CNF Web site <[www.cnf.ca](http://www.cnf.ca)> to find out when it will be available.



### Contact us

For more information on how you can get involved, check out the EMAN Web site at <http://eqb-dqe.cciw.ca/emanops/intro.html> or the CNF Web Site at <http://www.cnf.ca/frog/inclex.html>. To receive printed copies of the national Frogwatch identification poster (available in English or French) and the Frogwatch newsletter--or to be added to our electronic Frogwatch newsletter distribution list--contact:

Canadian Nature Federation  
1 Nicholas Street., Ste. 606  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1N 7B7

phone: (613) 562-3447  
fax: (613) 562-3371  
e-mail: [frogwatch@cnf.ca](mailto:frogwatch@cnf.ca)

## The Frustrations of a Plant Lover

Sabine Dietz

Maybe early spring is the most difficult time for any plant lover (at least for me) during the whole year. It's great to hear the first white-throated sparrow singing through the open window in the early morning (although they sound a bit off key). Binoculars are posted all around the house in strategic locations to spot that one new spring arrival. If it is warm enough (and even if it is not), the window in the office is open to be able to react quickly to any new song from the outside (a rush to the window, grab binoculars, out one goes). Yes, I admit, it is hard not to be enthusiastic about this. Especially when plants just take a bit longer to show up in the spring (too long in my opinion)! Snow is still deep in the woods, and is still covering my (hm?) corn lily patch!

Ah, the frustrations of a plant lover. We start peering into all corners, under the snow, up in the air (the direction of tree buds), and wish we could draw that



plant out of the ground, or get that tree to open its buds just a bit more quickly. Of course, seeing the maples in bloom elsewhere doesn't really count. Spring is only really here, when it arrives around our house! I start dreaming about our driveway once the birch leaves come out, so fresh, so green. Coming home becomes a treat. And I still have to wait? Where is that lily of the valley? That first one coming up along the driveway? Can't it hurry up a bit? Why can't that snow just move away, and let the plants come out of the ground? Why does it take so long????

The frustration and impatience just can't be kept in. As a small consolation, I start garden plants indoors - one way to stay sane at this time. I suspect many plant lovers are also gardeners, and this might be our excuse to be able to handle greenery before the snow has even left.

To make matters even worse, I live in a coastal area... Patience.

## Canadian Nature Federation & Nature Saskatchewan Conference Prairie to Pine, June 7-10, 2001

*Donna Bruce, Conference co-chair*

University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon  
Hosted by the Saskatoon Nature Society

Join us at the University of Saskatchewan, in its beautiful setting on the South Saskatchewan River. Symposium presentations will introduce you to some of Saskatchewan's special places, including the Qu'Appelle Valley, the Athabasca Sand Dunes, the Frenchman River Valley and the waters of the Elbow. Pre- and post- conference field trips will take in such sites as the Turtle Lake Sanctuary, Grasslands National Park, Cypress Hills, Chaplin Lake Important Bird Area, Batoche, Prince Albert National Park, the Porcupine Hills and Last Mountain Lake Bird Sanctuary.

For information and registration package:

Write to: Conference 2001,  
Saskatoon Nature Society,  
Box 448, RPO University,  
Saskatoon, SK S7N 4J8

Call Hilda or Bruce Noton at 306-374-0674

Email: [conference@saskatoonnaturesociety.sk.ca](mailto:conference@saskatoonnaturesociety.sk.ca)

Check our website: [www.saskatoonnaturesociety.sk.ca/cnf\\_ns](http://www.saskatoonnaturesociety.sk.ca/cnf_ns)

## The Birds of Spring

Sandy Burnett

*(Editors Note: This is one in an ongoing series of articles written by freelance writer and naturalist J.A.. (Sandy) Burnett, under the sponsorship of the Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada.)*

If ever a bird was a master of public relations, it must be the American Robin. With the coming of spring to Atlantic Canada, close to 200 different avian species begin the annual ritual of reproduction. They come in all sizes, from tiny Ruby-throated Hummingbirds to soaring Bald Eagles. Cliff Swallows and Ovenbirds build elaborate, enclosed shelters for their eggs; Killdeers nest on the open ground. Some, like Piping Plovers, are rare and solitary; others, such as Gannets, Puffins, and Murres, gather by the tens of thousands to raise their young in raucous colonies. And if their names don't quite cover the alphabet from A to Z, the range from Bittern to Yellowthroat falls short by only one letter at either end.

Still, in the midst of all this amazing variety, which bird gets the attention? Which bird is watched, counted, reported on, and interviewed by CBC as the one and only official harbinger of spring? Right! - it's that irrepressible bully with the black back, red breast and yellow legs who hops about your emerging lawn, beating up on earthworms. It's that noisy roisterer who wakes you before sunrise with his incessantly whistled claim to absolute ownership of your backyard maple tree. It's that best-known member of the Thrush family, the American Robin.

Now, I hold no grudge against Robins. Their arrival in large, sociable flocks brightens the gloom at the tail end of March, and their cheerful song is music to the ear, at any hour after six-thirty in the morning. But when I think of the birds of Spring, I'm afraid Robins just aren't in the running.



Certainly they're not the earliest birds to arrive. Each year it seems, a few more Robins winter over in sheltered areas where food is plentiful, but those eccentrics have no valid claim to be numbered among the spring migrants. The honour might better be accorded to the gregarious little Horned Lark which may occasionally turn up, often in company with Snow Buntings or Longspurs, foraging for weed seeds in the snow-bound fields as early as the end of February.

Another legitimate contender for the title of first arrival is the common Crow. Like the Robins, some Crows stay year-round, but there comes a gusty day around the first of March when a skein of them blows in from the south, looking like ragged, wind-tossed scraps of black paper, to land with much cawing and flapping of wings in the bare branches of a farm woodlot. To many people that spells spring. And while we're on the subject, the first flocks of Canada Geese for 1988 have already been sighted, winging their way northward over the Maritimes.

Perhaps it's not the earliest bird arrivals, though, but the first bird songs, that truly signal the reawakening of the year. To tell the truth, despite its melodious whistle the Robin fares no better in this category among the birds of spring. The sweet twitter of the Horned Lark is heard long before the Robin's call. Towards the end of winter, too, the Black-capped Chickadee abandons its familiar "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" in favour of a two-note "zese-zee" call which stakes its claim to nesting territory. And no list of early spring songsters would be complete without the much-maligned European Starling whose rooftop repertoire of squeals, whistles, cat-calls and imitations of other birds ranks it among the most versatile of performers.

Can the Robin take credit for early nesting, then? The last week of April is about when Robins start to nest in the Atlantic Provinces. In the breeding sweepstakes, the Great Horned Owl is apt to be first off the mark, scouting out nest sites in February and often having eggs to incubate by early March. Other species that start to nest in March include the Bald Eagle, Barred Owl and Common Raven, followed around the first of April by Gray Jay, Black Duck, and Long-eared Owl. A long list of other species - Great Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Common Goldeneye,

Common Merganser, Northern Goshawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, American Woodcock, Horned Lark, and Crow - all beat the Robin to the nest by a week or more, on average.

But just watch. Any day now, you'll find reports of spring birds on the radio, in the papers, and on TV. And you can bet there won't be pictures of the first

Woodcock of spring, either. No one will record the gurgling notes of the Raven for the evening news. There'll be no cute photos of baby cormorants on the cover of the weekend supplement. Against all factual evidence the myth will live on, and the Robin will once more be hailed (mistakenly) as first among the birds of spring.

## Field Marks – for Individuals as well as Species

*A.J. Tony Erskine*

Watching birds started from understanding behaviour, seeing what birds were doing - particularly so they might be caught, as food. Now, for many people, "watching birds" means little more than identifying them to species, using field-marks codified and set out in guide-books. Distinguishing males from females, adults from immatures, are also covered in some field-guides, for certain species. More advanced levels of "identification" may call for bird-watching as intensive as needed for study of behaviour.

In recent decades, study of bird behaviour depends more and more on marking birds for individual recognition, using various coloured devices - or even miniature radio-transmitters - attached to each bird. Miniature radios are very costly, and nearly all markers require trapping the birds that are to be marked, which is allowed only under permit. When volunteers make time for bird study, cost and permit regulations may discourage them from any but the simplest of projects. But people recognize other people, by sight, as individuals, and many individual birds differ even without special marking. Most of us are not in the habit of really "watching birds", but even a few minutes may reveal distinctions among birds of one species.

For several winters my wife and I have fed pheasants in our driveway. We recognized occasional dark ("melanistic") birds in past years, but this winter (1998-99) we tried to sort out other individuals by "field-marks". The pheasant flock built up through November until four males were seen at once, when I listed their field-marks. One male was dark, an easy call. The others included one ("Big Red") that was larger, with reddish iridescence below his white collar, contrasting with the bright coppery colour of two smaller males. One smaller cock ("White") had more extensive white flecking on back and shoulders than

the other. A "peck-order" had been established, Big Red being the dominant bird, and White gave way to all other cocks. Another cock joined them a few days later, also small, coppery, with minimal white flecking, thus not readily separable from the others. We needed more field-marks.

The next week pecking and chasing were again apparent among the cocks; new birds had joined the flock undetected. Soon we noticed that some coppery cocks had white "eyebrow-lines" (actually white edges of pale-gray crown-patches), not present among the original group - in which crowns were dark green like the rest of the head-feathering. Field-marks to separate individual coppery cocks (several each with and without eyebrow-lines) remained problematic. White flecking on flanks below the folded wings, unlike that on the back, was restricted to two reddish birds, "Big Red" and "Little Red". Whether the white collar was continuous all round, or broken in front, behind, or both, might help - but apparent breaks at back of collar sometimes disappeared when the bird stretched its neck. We're still studying the coppery cocks, I'm looking at them while Janet sketches them.

Later more dark females appeared, with more of the usual blond ones, building by March to at least eighteen hens. Once or twice a dark cock looked different from the original one, but we never saw two at once. Among the dark females, at first we thought the original "Dark Lady" was larger, with head and neck of rusty cast, contrasted to two others (smaller, and faces darker, hardly any rusty); a month later we could see no differences. The blond females all seemed remarkably uniform, with very minor variation in size, overall colour, pinkish on neck, and white around eyes. In late December, one hen lacked all tail-feathers, but a month later one had a half-length tail, probably the same, with tail partly re-grown.

Light has an effect on colours, and unfortunately the best time to watch our pheasants is early morning, starting before sunrise. We watch from the breakfast table, 5-8 metres from the birds breakfasting on the lawn, so the field-marks noted above were easily seen - but not all unambiguous.

Repeated watching revealed plumage differences that hadn't registered on first "spotting". That of course happens also when a "rarity" is encountered; without a field-guide listing field-marks to look for, one focuses on only two or three, or one, distinction among a suite of possible differences. Watching also may reveal slight differences in behaviour, but you may have to count events to prove they are different. We had an impression that the original dark cock and hen were less spooky than their "normal" companions, but we never counted frequency of particular birds staying at the feed when others ran away. Other

differences were more obvious; one bird flew up to the feeding tray for small birds (1 m off the ground) several times, and it was always a coppery male with white eyebrows- the same one each time? [We don't get more of those sightings, after I "pigeon-proofed" the feeding tray - adding a roof and a suitably spaced "fence". The pheasants still feed on the ground, but the pigeons continued trying the tray - very trying.] We've seen cock pheasants on elevated feeding trays in neighbouring yards also, the first time with two others staring up at it, as if saying "What the ---- do you think you're doing up there?" There's more to feeding birds than just identifying them...

[The above MS was drafted and submitted two years ago, but was lost in the mails. We've since watched pheasants through two more winters, with few important differences, so the MS is sent along, as is.]



### Rare Sightings

Allen Madden

#### SWIMMING EAGLES

A live immature eagle, which I guessed was a Bald Eagle, floated downstream, upright and alert, 200 m offshore opposite our property in Tide Head during the spring flood in May, 1996. The bird's wings were extended on the water surface, and it drifted approximately 200 m after I had spotted it. The bird made no effort to fly. I was about to launch my canoe in an attempt to prevent the eagle from drowning, but noted that the bird was approaching a stump protruding from the water. Only when it was within 10 m of the stump did the bird use its wings to swim to it. Upon reaching the stump, the eagle simply climbed

about a half meter to its top and sat there, not even making an effort to shake itself. The whole incident left both of us stumped! I assume that the eagle had dived at a smelt, a chief prey item for the several staging Ospreys which feed heavily among the Tide Head Islands each May.

Apparently, floating eagles are not so rare as I first thought, for there was a similar incident on the St. John River at Fredericton reported in this newsletter a couple of years ago. Subsequent to the latter report, and in August, 1999 I saw from our home, two Bald Eagles (an adult and an immature), flying about 50 m above the water's surface and obviously hunting. Suddenly, the adult tipped downward and slowly

glided at a 45 degree angle and entered the water, which was approximately 1 m in depth. That eagle made no attempt to rise from the water and its companion then flew to one of the cribs 100 m from the bird in the water. As in the incident three years earlier, the eagle in the water, half submerged, floated about 200 m downstream until it was nearly crosscurrent and about 30 m from an old pulp log which protruded above the river's surface. Again, only then did it make any effort to extricate itself from the water. The eagle swam by propelling itself with its wings and navigated the distance with apparent ease, even swimming slightly upstream as it approached the log. Upon reaching its destination, the bird easily climbed up the log, dragging a large dead fish. I assumed the latter to be a salmon that died from furunculosis, a bacterial disease common on the Restigouche. As soon as that eagle got onto the log, the other eagle, the immature, suddenly swooped in apparently out of nowhere, for I hadn't even seen it coming, and landed on the fish while the first bird was still on it. This forced the latter off its prize. The adult quickly flew to one of the cribs, while the pirate commenced consuming the fish.

#### AN OSPREY FLOCK

While angling about 4 acres upstream (local expression) from home inside the South Booming ground in Tide Head one mid-May day ca. 1993, I watched a group of three, then five Ospreys diving upon what could only have been a school of smelts on its spawning run. The birds were hovering over a spot where the water was only 1 m in depth and relatively clear. Within a couple of minutes those birds were joined by several other Ospreys obviously attracted by the activity of the flocklet. Never had I seen more than four ospreys in a group in the upper estuary, but now I was watching 12 - yes, 12 Ospreys, all feeding on the one school of smelts. One could readily detect the direction in which the smelt school moved by noting a shift in the location of the flock of Ospreys- at first 150 m downstream from me, then 50 m farther downstream, then 30 m crosscurrent from there. The birds were hitting the water within 10 m of one another, and this activity lasted only 10 minutes or so. Since that day I have not seen anything similar, although I've spent many days on the water there at the same time of year.

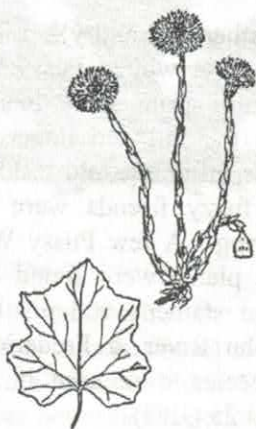


In March, 1996, I saw through our kitchen window an adult Goshawk strike a Rock Dove five metres above the ground, knocking several feathers from the dove. The hawk swung around and this time caught the dove in its talons and flew approximately 40 metres, landing on the snow behind a clump of spruces. I grabbed my camera, waited fifteen minutes for the hawk to settle down, then began to stalk. When about eight metres from the hawk, still hidden from my view behind the spruces, it took off. I examined the depression it left in the snow, saw a pigeon feather, and reached to pick it up. To my surprise, the feather was stuck solid to its owner beneath the snow! Yes, the dove was still there, fully alert, with only a drop of blood on its breast. I tossed it in the air and it flew away strongly.



## Botany Quiz

Gart Bishop



Coltsfoot line drawing - T. Hofmann

### Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*)

This Eurasian perennial has become very much a part of our naturalized flora. The English herbalist Culpeper listed Coughwort, Foals's-foot, Horse-hoof, and Bull's Foot as alternate common names. It is often found where seasonally wet, such as along the gravelly banks of brooks and rivers, roadside ditches throughout the province.

The yellow dandelion-like leafless flowers are perhaps the earliest blooms of the season. Upon close examination, one can see that the flowerhead is made up of yellow female ray florets surrounding the yellow to orange male disc florets. New Brunswick naturalist Cecil Johnston has a special location he checks every year, and has found plants in bloom as early as the second week of March! As the flowers mature to a white seed head, the rounded leaves, loosely dented or scalloped around the edge with a heart-shaped base, appear. These basal leaves have a woolly texture (especially underneath) when young. The plant reproduces through its downy parachuted seed, as well as through hardy underground runners.

Boiling the fresh leaves and adding sugar to the extract makes a cough-medicine for which Coltsfoot is famous, and it has also been made into delicious candy. The herbalist Pliny, who lived in the first century, wrote "The smoke of this plant is said to cure, if inhaled deeply through a reed, an inveterate cough,

but the patient must take a sip of raisin wine at each inhalation." The dried leaves can be steeped to make a fragrant tea, or burned and the residue used as a salt-like seasoning. The leaves were also an important ingredient of an English pipe mixture called 'British Herb Tobacco'. While considered an unwelcomed weed by many, in 1971 Czechoslovakia issued a commemorative postage stamp in this plant's honor.

The Botany Quiz question for this issue is ... what other spring time plants first send up a flower or fruiting form which is followed by leaves or a vegetative, sterile plant?

Some of the references consulted for this article include:

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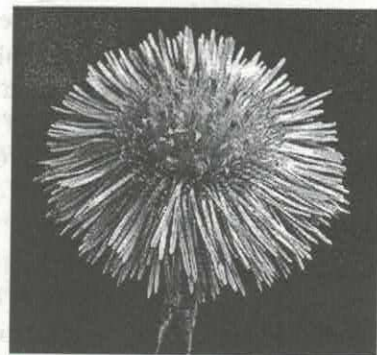
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Coltsfoot photo - G. Bishop

## Nature News: Botany Ramblings March 1 to April 28, 2001

Jim Goltz

### Non-native Species

Cecil and Doris Johnston were delighted to find a single bright yellow bloom and four swelling buds of **Coltsfoot** (*Tussilago farfara*) on March 15 on a south-facing embankment at Dipper Harbour. For many years, Cecil has been New Brunswick's veritable "early bird" of wildflowers by spotting the first Coltsfoot blooms of the season. Imagine his chagrin this year, when he learned through the *Telegraph Journal* that Brigitte and Peter Ledermann had discovered Coltsfoot in bloom at Hampton on March 7. Better luck next year, Cec! Margaret Gallant Doyle found Coltsfoot in flower near the hospital at Campbellton on April 1. In most years, there would be many more reports of this species from southern New Brunswick before they showed up in the north, but this year its flowering throughout much of the province was delayed by an unusually slow spring melt, sustained deep snow cover and multiple heavy spring snowfalls. While waiting for the first spring wildflowers, botany enthusiasts no doubt shared Margaret's opinion that it would be "nice to see a colour other than white". Additional reports of Coltsfoot in bloom included April 17 on a steep west-facing slope at Riverside-Albert (David Christie), April 17 near the boardwalk at the Fraser Marina by the Madawaska River (Pierrette Mercier), one on April 20 on a south-facing embankment near the Experimental Farm at Fredericton (JPG), many on April 23 at multiple sites along Wilsey Road at Fredericton (JPG), and April 23 along the road in St.-Gabriel (LeB).

**Common Dandelion** (*Taraxacum officinale*) was found in bloom on April 20, along the basement wall of a house in St.-Maurice (LeB). A single plant of this species was seen in bloom on April 24 in the crack between a paved parking lot and the wall of a building at the Experimental Farm at Fredericton (JPG).

### Woody Plants

**Pussy Willows** (*Salix discolor*) were already conspicuous at Welch Cove by March 18 (JPG, SS), were "in full force" at St. Gabriel by March 19 (LeB), had appeared in a swampy area at St. Andrews by March 23 (Tracey Dean) and were out at Deer Island

on March 27 (Katherine Landry). Like many of our "spring" birds that overwinter, Pussy Willows are not always a sure sign of spring since, in some years, they may show up in the fall and linger throughout the winter. However, after the old-fashioned winter of 2000-2001, our fuzzy friends were most welcome harbingers of spring. A few Pussy Willows (3 male plants, 1 female plant) were found in bloom, with well-differentiated stamens and pistils, on April 24 along the St. John River at Fredericton, and many plants of this species were seen in bloom near St. Andrews on April 25 (JPG).



Pussy Willow

By April 4 at Fredericton, the developing catkins (also called 'aments') on a few **Trembling Aspen** (*Populus tremuloides*) had reached the stage at which they resembled large Pussy Willows (JPG), attesting to the close taxonomic relationship between poplars and willows. At least one tree of this species had elongate male flowers in bloom along Wilsey Road at Fredericton by April 23, while many were already in bloom near St. Andrews and several were flowering near Prince William on April 25 (JPG).

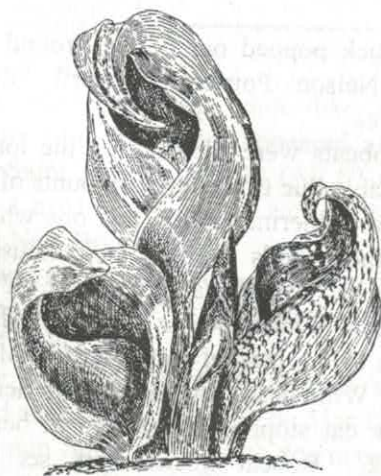
On a few plants of **Speckled Alder** (*Alnus incana*), the male catkins had already elongated by April 11 at Fredericton, but they did not start to shed pollen until April 16 (JPG, SS).



After weeks of monitoring the swollen buds of **Silver Maple** (*Acer saccharinum*), a number of trees of this species were found in bloom on April 16 along the St. John River between Fredericton and Sheffield (JPG, SS).

Gart Bishop found female flowers of **Beaked Hazel** (*Corylus cornuta*) in bloom under a powerline just north of Sussex on April 16, but the male catkins had not yet elongated or begun to shed pollen. At Fredericton, a few male catkins had already begun to elongate by April 18, but there was no sign of pollen shedding or female flowers there until April 23 (JPG). Take time to check the Beaked Hazel in your area for its inconspicuous female blooms with bright red-purple "tentacle-like styles".

A few plants of **American Elm** (*Ulmus americana*) were in flower by April 27 at Fredericton (JPG).



Skunk Cabbage

### Native Non-Woody Plants

**Skunk Cabbage** (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) continues to thrive at Upper Cape (near Port Elgin), its easternmost known location in New Brunswick. On April 14, the Chignecto Naturalists' Club and a few Moncton area naturalists saw the "lobster claw"-like blooms of this rare species in columnar holes in the snow, even though the snow was 1.5 feet deep! Skunk Cabbage is well known to generate heat and help speed up the spring thaw, and apparently had first emerged in that area almost three weeks previously (Helen Lines).

A few speckled leaves of **Trout Lily** (*Erythronium americanum*) were seen at two sites off Wilsey Road in Fredericton on April 16 (JPG).



Trout Lily

Jessica Robinson saw many **Spring Beauty** (*Claytonia caroliniana*) and a few **Bloodroot** (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) in bloom on Keswick Ridge on April 24.

By April 27, many leaves and tight green buds of **Red Trillium** (*Trillium erectum*) were found near the Experimental Farm at Fredericton (JPG).

Peter and Theresa Pearce found the first **Round-lobed Hepatica** (*Hepatica americana*) bloom of the season on Currie Mountain on April 28.

### Summary

Phenological records indicate that botanical events for the Fredericton area in late winter and early spring of 2001 were about two to three weeks behind the previous year, but were almost on schedule for an average year (JPG). These things can change quickly and dramatically if periods of unusually warm or cool weather ensue.

Abbreviations: LeB Mike and Bern LeBlanc, JPG James P. Goltz, SS Shirley Sloat

## Nature News: Mammal Report Late winter to spring, 2001

*Mike LeBlanc*

A fairly Brown snowshoe hare (*lièvre d'Amérique*) was seen by Bernadette LeBlanc not far from the Pines Trail at Kouchibouguac National Park on April 10th. A positive sign of spring after a long winter.

On March 29th Nelson Poirier saw a fit and pleasingly plump chipmunk (*Suisse*) in his yard feeding. Ida Adair had two Northern Flying Squirrel (*Grand Polatouche*) that had taken up residence in a back shed in Shepody 27 Dec. Doreen Rossiter had one coming to a peanut butter-suet mix. Nelson Poirier had three coming to his house in Shédiac Bridge (January 5). They only came to one favourite feeder containing black-oil sunflower seeds, out of a dozen available. Norm Arsenault had two coming to his suet feeders in Shédiac Bridge Jan 18th. Ida Adair had five take over a shed and her feeders along with Red Squirrels (*Écureuils Roux*) at Adair's Wilderness Lodge in Shepody, on Feb 4th. The Moncton Naturalist Club feeder tour stopped at Nelson Poirier's feeders and saw them around for a brief appearance Feb 17th.

A young Raccoon (*Raton Laveur*) was seen by Bill Mountain wandering in a stream close to UNB in Fredericton 30 Jan. Monique Boudreau-Rogers had nightly visits by one in Calhoun Feb 26th. Two were seen in Jemseg by Pierre Champigny on March 31. One was on a porch in Bouctouche on April 6th (Lisa Gauvin). Two were in the yard in Jemseg April 11th (Dany Gaumond). One was crossing the road in Shepody April 12th (Gilles Bourque).

On March 7th, Bob and Gail Gallant spotted a mammal moving along the edge of the wooded area behind their house in Riverview. The mammal was brown to black in colour, about 30 inches long with very small ears and a bushy tail like a fox. Nelson Poirier went to check out the sighting and identified the mammal by the description and tracks to be a sometimes-elusive Fisher (*Pékan*).



On January 31st Ida Adair had Short-Tailed Weasel (*Hermine*) appear and saw the squirrel population decrease at the Adair's Wilderness Lodge. Bob Cotsworth had a great encounter of an Ermine (*Hermine*) at the #2 feeding station at the Dobson Trailhead in Riverview on February 4th.

On December 7th Stuart Tingley and Rose-Alma Mallet watched a Mink drag a "frozen stiff" muskrat across the road in St-Edouard-de-Kent. The muskrat seemed to be flattened and they thought it was road kill. There was a muskrat sitting on a chunk of ice 2 km east of the Burton bridge, April 15th (Dany Gaumond).

One Striped Skunk (*Moufette Rayée*) was seen in Upper Dorchester April 9th (Gilles Bourque). One was in St-Gabriel-de-Kent on April 11th (Mike LeBlanc).

A woodchuck popped out of the ground and was spotted by Nelson Poirier on April 8th in the Dorchester area.

Lots of Bobcats were seen during the long winter months, probably due to the large amounts of snow we got. Mike and Catherine Sharpe saw one while taking a walk in the woods behind their house around Moncton. It had caught a house cat, a common occurrence this winter across a large part of the province due to the lack of food because of the deep snow. Janet Whitehead saw one from her window when a large cat stopped to peek in at her in Saint John Jan 22. Bobcat tracks were seen along a snowmobile trail off the Pine Glen Rd in Riverview Jan 23 (Chris Antle). Jim Brown and his sister Anthea saw the best daytime observation of a Bobcat from the patio door just outside Sussex on Feb 8th. It spent

about a half an hour in an orchard before it went over a hill in the woods. Mike and Bernadette LeBlanc almost hit one with their car on Feb 14th in St-Gabriel de Kent. At dusk on Feb 25th David Baldwin saw a bobcat at the edge of a field across from his home in Second Falls. Jackie and Lloyd Decoste spotted a Bobcat in a clump of trees April 7th just past the Curryville church on the Albert Mines road.

A Coyote was spotted patrolling a frozen pond just outside Bouctouche on March 5th Mike LeBlanc. Two Coyotes were noticed along the Memramcook river by Francis and Jules Cormier on March 26th. Coyotes have been spotted in that area many times, which made them wonder if this was a couple that had a territory.

Gale and Bill Gallant had a pleasant surprise Christmas Morning when a Red Fox (*Renard Roux*) showed up in their yard in Riverview and was quite interested in a flock of starlings. On January 2nd Dale Gaskin saw two together at the Bridgedale tourist bureau, then saw two on Jan 3rd along the Moncton side of the Peticodiac River, and on January 5th saw three in the same area. Two were in Chris Antle's scope when she was watching some deer along the Moncton riverbank, March 29th. Lisa Gauvin saw another April 7th in Bouctouche when it passed by her

house. One was spotted at McGowan's Corner on April 8th (Pierre Champigny). On April 12, Dany Gaumond watched two in Gilchrist Cove, Washademoak Lake. One was seen on the ice then moved to the land to meet the other.

Rob Walker observed a Harp Seal at Alma Beach on March 11th. Another of that species was found dead at Fundy National Park on March 16th (David Christie).

A fisherman reported to Laurie Murison that a whale was between Ingalls Head and Ross's Island on Grand Manan's east Coast. She took out her binoculars and spotted the Humpback Whale (*Baleine à Bosse*) which was an unusual sighting in the Bay of Fundy at that time of year (March 27th).

On January 10, Jackie Decoste saw a White Tailed Deer (*Cerf de Virginie*) come to her house to check on some mountain-ash berries that she put out for grouse. Chris Antle commented on March 30th about the activity of deer around the causeway on the Moncton side and they were seen consistently all that week. Jackie and Lloyd Decoste on April 7th spotted five on the Albert Mines Rd. Lisa, Maria and G  rald Gauvin spotted seven along the road in Coles Island on April 8th. Dany Gaumond saw one on Cherry Hill Rd, April 11th.

### Nature News: Birds March 1 to April 20, 2001 Rose-Alma Mallet

Despite the continuing winter-like conditions, a Glossy Ibis (*Ibis Facinelle*) appeared at Saints Rest Marsh in Saint John on Mar.14 (AR,CLJ). According to David Christie this is the earliest record of the species in New Brunswick.

There was a Cooper's Hawk (*Epervier de Cooper*) in Fredericton, Mar.3 (RS). A second one appeared there on Mar.14 (BJS).

A male Eurasian Wigeon (*Canard siffleur*) was discovered at Saints Rest Marsh on Mar.18 (JPG,SS).

A Common Snipe (*B  cassine des marais*) wintered at Sugar Loaf in Campbellton and was still in good health on Mar.23 (MGD).

A Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Go  land brun*) was seen in Moncton, Mar.21 (AC).

There were not many reports of White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitelle    poitrine blanche*) at feeders this winter. On Mar.10, one was in Jemseg at a feeder (DGa).

An unusual event happened on Mar.9 when black and white birds were falling from the sky in southeastern New Brunswick. Several Thick-billed Murres (*Guillemot de Br  nnich*) were found grounded on the Tantramar Marsh near Sackville, and at various locations along the Bay of Fundy. David Christie explained that they could have been blown in off the Gulf of St. Lawrence by the strong northeast winds that accompanied a passing storm. David added that it is possible that a dark road in the snowy landscape might appear like a lead of open water in a sea of ice.

Thick-billed Murres were also found dead on the Tantramar Marsh, New Horton (PM), Waterside (DSC), on the Cape Enrage Road (GYB), and two truckers picked up what seemed to be dead Thick-billed Murres near Elmdale (Nova Scotia), at the border between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and near Moncton (fide JGW). In that period many Thick-billed Murres were seen close to shore: five near Sackville on March 9 (KP), five at Alma and one at Fundy Park on Mar. 11 (DSC,EMM), two at Waterside on March 12 (RAM) and 15 at White Head Island on Mar. 15 (BED,PAP). Mary Majka and David Christie successfully released a Thick-billed Murre they had rehabilitated at the wharf in Alma.

During the winter there were several reports of Boreal Owl (*Nyctale de Tengmalm*) and Saw-whet Owl (*Petite nyctale*) found dead, including a probable Saw-whet on Mar.8 in Taylor Village near Memramcook (AC).

A Carolina Wren (*Troglodyte des Caroline*) visited a feeder briefly in Islandview, just west of Saint John, Mar.21 (MN).

The Fieldfare (*Grive litorne*) was still present in Fredericton on Mar.15 (DGG). This species was very cooperative and many birders from throughout Canada and the USA had great views of the bird, thanks in large part to the efforts of Don Gibson.

A partial albino American Robin (*Merle d'Amérique*) was spotted in Memramcook on Apr.13 (FL), and even made the front page of The Moncton Times. Partial albino Evening Grosbeaks (*Gros-bec errant*) were observed on the Pine Glen Road and in Dawson Settlement, Albert County (SB,DG).

A Northern Mockingbird (*Moqueur polyglotte*) was observed in Moncton on Mar. 14, eating Virginia Creeper berries to survive (JE). A Brown Thrasher (*Moqueur roux*) regularly visited a feeder in Moncton all winter and was still present on Mar. 25 (JD).

A Lapland Longspur (*Bruant lapon*) was observed near Edmunston on Mar.26 (JDB). Lapland Longspurs are rarely reported in Madawaska.

A female Eastern Towhee (*Tohi à flancs roux*) was still visiting a feeder in Riverview on Mar.12 (KS).

In Dorchester, an Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnelle des près*) was still appearing under a feeder Mar.17 (B&GG). A second one was reported in Bouctouche on Mar.4 (ML,GM).

This winter had very few Pine Grosbeaks (*Durbec des sapins*) in the province, but a flock of 35 were noted on Caledonia Mountain on Mar.9 (DSC,EMM).



## SPRING ARRIVALS

It is always exciting to observe the first migrants pass through the province. As the weather warms up, waves of migrants arrive from their wintering grounds to announce our summer. Here is a list of these first arrivals:

Pied-billed Grebe (*Grèbe à bec bigarré*) under a culvert at Lancaster Lagoon in Saint John, Apr. 8 (MJC) and another in salt water at Waterside beach, Apr. 11 (SIT +); 5 Great Cormorants (*Cormoran à aigrettes*) at Cape Tormentine, Mar. 17 (BW); Great Blue Heron (*Grand héron*) at Point Lepreau Mar.24 (JGW); American Bittern (*Butor d'Amérique*) at Daly Creek near Mary's Point, Apr. 8 (GIB); Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Bihoreau gris*) at White Head Island, Mar. 28 (Richard Brooks fide BED); 3 Snow Geese at Taymouth, Mar. 15 (MP); 22 Brant (*Bernache cravant*) at Waterside, Mar. 13 (GB) and 5000 Brant at White Head Island and 5000 on Grand Manan Mar. 15 (BED,PAP); 5 Canada Geese (*Bernache du Canada*) at Waterside Mar. 15 (DSC,EMM); A Wood Duck (*Canard branchu*) on the Saint John River, Mar 22 (J&BE); Eurasian Green-winged Teal (*Sarcelle d'hiver*) at Marsh Creek in Saint John, Apr. 9 (JGW); Northern Pintail (*Canard pilet*) at Marble Cove in Saint John, Mar. 12 (JGW); Blue-winged Teal (*Sarcelle à ailes bleues*) at Saints Rest Marsh, Mar. 16 (DGG,SS,BJS); a male Northern Shoveler (*Canard souchet*) at Saints Rest Marsh, Mar. 23 (MJC); an American Wigeon (*Canard d'Amérique*) at Waterside, Mar 13 (RAM); Ring-necked Duck (*Fuligule à collier*) at McLaren Pond in Fundy Park, Mar. 16 (DGG,SS, BJS) and at Hanover Street in Saint John, Mar. 16 (JGW); a flock of 200 Common Eider (*Eider à duvet*) at Beaumont, Mar. 15 (KP); an Osprey (*Balbusard pêcheur*) at Jemseg, Apr. 7 (DGa,PC); a female

Northern Harrier (Busard St-Martin) at Grand Manan, Mar. 2 (LDM); 37 Red-tailed Hawk (Buse à queue rousse) at New Horton Ridge, Albert Co., Mar. 20 (SIT+); an American Kestrel (Crécerelle d'Amérique) at Hillsborough Wetland Park, Mar. 18 (RJW); A Peregrine Falcon (Faucon pèlerin) at Alma, Mar. 29 (DSC, EMM).

An American Coot (Foulque d'Amérique) at the Sackville Waterfowl Park, Apr. 13 (KP); a Piping Plover (Pluvier siffler) at Bancroft Point on Grand Manan, Apr. 13, this being the earliest record ever for Grand Manan (BED); a Killdeer (Pluvier kildir) at Grand Manan, Mar. 13 (PAP); a Greater Yellowlegs (Grand Chevalier) at Waterside, Apr. 10 (DGa, PC, RL); a Common Snipe (Bécassine des marais) at Fredericton, Mar. 3 (BJS); an American Woodcock (Bécasse d'Amérique) at Dipper Harbour, Mar. 15 (CLJ).

Ring-billed Gulls (Goéland à bec cerclé) at Mary's Point, Mar. 11 (DSC); a Black-headed Gull (Mouette rieuse) at Black's Harbour, Mar. 18 (JPG).

Common Nighthawk (Engoulevent d'Amérique) were heard in Fredericton, Apr. 11 (BM, LM) and one seen Apr. 14 at Mactaquac (D&LG), these being exceptionally early sighting of this species which normally first appears in mid-late May; a Belted Kingfisher (Martin-pêcheur d'Amérique) at Shediac River, March 18 (NP).

An Eastern Phoebe (Moucherolle phébi) at Castalia Marsh on Grand Manan, Apr. 11 (BED); Tree Swallows (Hirondelle bicolor) at Queestown, Apr. 5 (SM). Barn Swallow (Hirondelle rustique) at Waterside, Apr. 11 (SIT+).

Brian Dalzell predicted a massive movement of American Robins (Merle d'Amérique) on the 4th or 5th of April, based on his observations at Grand Manan. As predicted, Apr. 5, en route from Alma to Sackville there were more than 10,000+ American Robins (RJW). A Hermit Thrush (Grive solitaire) at Saint John, Apr. 12 (FK).

A Palm Warbler (Paruline à couronne rousse) at Moore's Mills, Charlotte Co., Apr. 13 (BN); a Savannah Sparrow (Bruant des prés) at Mary's Point Apr. 12 (DSC).

#### Birds Studies

Kathy Popma and Ruth Miller monitored birds on the Tantramar Marsh from November to mid-April.

This year their species count was down slightly, with 53 species, compared to 56 last winter.

Kathy Popma continued to monitor the passage of migrating ducks at Cape Jourimain to determine the affect of the Confederation Bridge on the birds' migration patterns.

Bird Studies of Canada organized an owl survey throughout the province this spring.

Mike LeBlanc coordinated this spring's Seabird Superwatch, which took place on Apr. 21st. The results will be published in the N.B. Naturalist/Le Naturaliste du N.-B.

#### Abbreviations

AC Alain Clavette; AR Aldei Robichaud; BED Brian Dalzell; B&GG Bill & Gail Gallant; BJS Bev Schneider; BM Bill Mountan; BN Bill Nelson; BW Becky Whittam; CLJ Cecil Johnston; DG Dale Gaskin; DGa Dany Gaumont; DGG Don Gibson; D&LG Dedreic & Lorelei Grecian; DR Doreen Rossiter; DSC David Christie; EMM Mary Majka; FK Frank Kelly; FL Francis Leblanc; GB Gilles Bourque; GIB Gilles Belliveau; GM Gilles Martin; GYB Gisèle Belliveau; J&BE Jim & Betty Evans; JD Jackie Doucet; JDB J. Denys Bourque; JE Jim Edsall; JGW Jim Wilson; JPG Jim Goltz; KP Kathy Potma; KS Kate Shefford; LDM Laurie Murison; LM Linda Mountan; MGD Margaret Gallant-Doyle; MJC Merv Cormier; ML Marc Leblanc; MN Murray Nelson; MP Margie Pacey; NP Nelson Poirier; PAP Peter Pearce; PC Pierre Champigny; PM Paul Meunier; RAM Rose-Alma Mallet; RL Roger Leblanc; RS Rudy Stoczek; RJW Rob Walker; SB Steven Bannister; SM Scott Makepeace; SIT Stuart Tingley; SS Shirley Sloat.



## Le registre des oiseaux du sud-est

Donald Cormier

Depuis la fondation du club Les Ami.e.s de la Nature du Sud-Est inc, nous inscrivons dans un registre, communément appelé le grand livre, les différentes espèces d'oiseaux observés dans le sud-est de la province. Les membres qui le désirent présentent leurs fiches d'observation. Ces observations leur permettent d'obtenir des certificats. Voici le nombre de nouvelles espèces rapportées annuellement au Régistre des oiseaux du Sud-Est: 1989 (79), 1990 (92), 1991 (54), 1992 (18), 1993 (12), 1994 (14), 1995 (12), 1996 (07), 1997 (02), 1998 (04), 1999 (10), 2000 (06). Un total de 310 espèces d'oiseaux furent observés dans notre milieu, c'est-à-dire du parc Kouchibouguac au parc Fundy.

Jusqu'à présent, 49 membres ont soumis des rapports d'observation pour le registre totalisant environ 5 500 observations inscrites dans le grand livre. De ces observations, 35 espèces de nos oiseaux communs ont été rapportés par plus d'une quarantaine de membres. Par contre, d'après les rapports soumis, 41 espèces d'oiseaux sont venus nous visiter qu'une seule fois, soit pendant quelques heures ou quelques jours. Voici ces oiseaux très rares en ordre chronologique de leur visite:

Vanneau huppé, 29 mai 1991  
 Troglodyte de Bewick, 22 sept 1991  
 Engoulevent bois-pourri, 2 juin 1992  
 Tyran à queue fourchue, 9 oct 1992  
 Fuligule à dos blanc, 1 nov 1992  
 Tyran à gorge cendrée, 24 nov 1992  
 Albatros à nez jaune, 24 mai 1993  
 Traquet motteux, 5 sept 1993  
 Paruline à ailes bleues, 13 sept 1993  
 Mouette de Franklin, 10 juin 1994  
 Bécasseau cocorli, 20 juin 1994  
 Bécasseau d'Alaska, 7 août 1994  
 Phalarope à bec large, 11 août 1994  
 Paruline à capuchon, 15 oct 1994  
 Tyran à longue queue, 1 nov 1994  
 Passerin nonpareil, 7 mai 1995  
 Cygne chanteur, 15 mai 1995  
 Oie de Ross, 1 juin 1995

Râle jaune, 17 juil 1995  
 Paruline des prés, 20 sept 1995  
 Oie rieuse, 18 nov 1995  
 Bruant à face noire, 23 nov 1995  
 Chouette lapone, 1 fév 1996  
 Guillemot marmette, 18 mars 1996  
 Guillemot de Brunnich, 23 mars 1996;  
 Urubu à tête noire, 20 mai 1996  
 Troglodyte à bec court, 3 juin 1996  
 Hirondelle à ailes hérissées, 5 juin 1996  
 Tohi à flancs roux, 12 oct 1996  
 Viréo à gorge jaune, 1 sept 1997  
 Pic tridactyle, 7 sept 1997  
 Labbe parasite, 13 sept 1997  
 Barge marbrée 9 nov 1997  
 Mouette blanche 3 fév 1998  
 Combattant varié 17 juil 1998  
 Hibou moyen-duc, 19 août 1998  
 Petit pingouin, 28 oct 1998  
 Paruline à gorge jaune, 29 mai 1999  
 Bécasseau de Baird, 17 sept 1999  
 Coulicou à bec jaune, 11 oct 1999  
 Colibri circé, 20 oct 1999

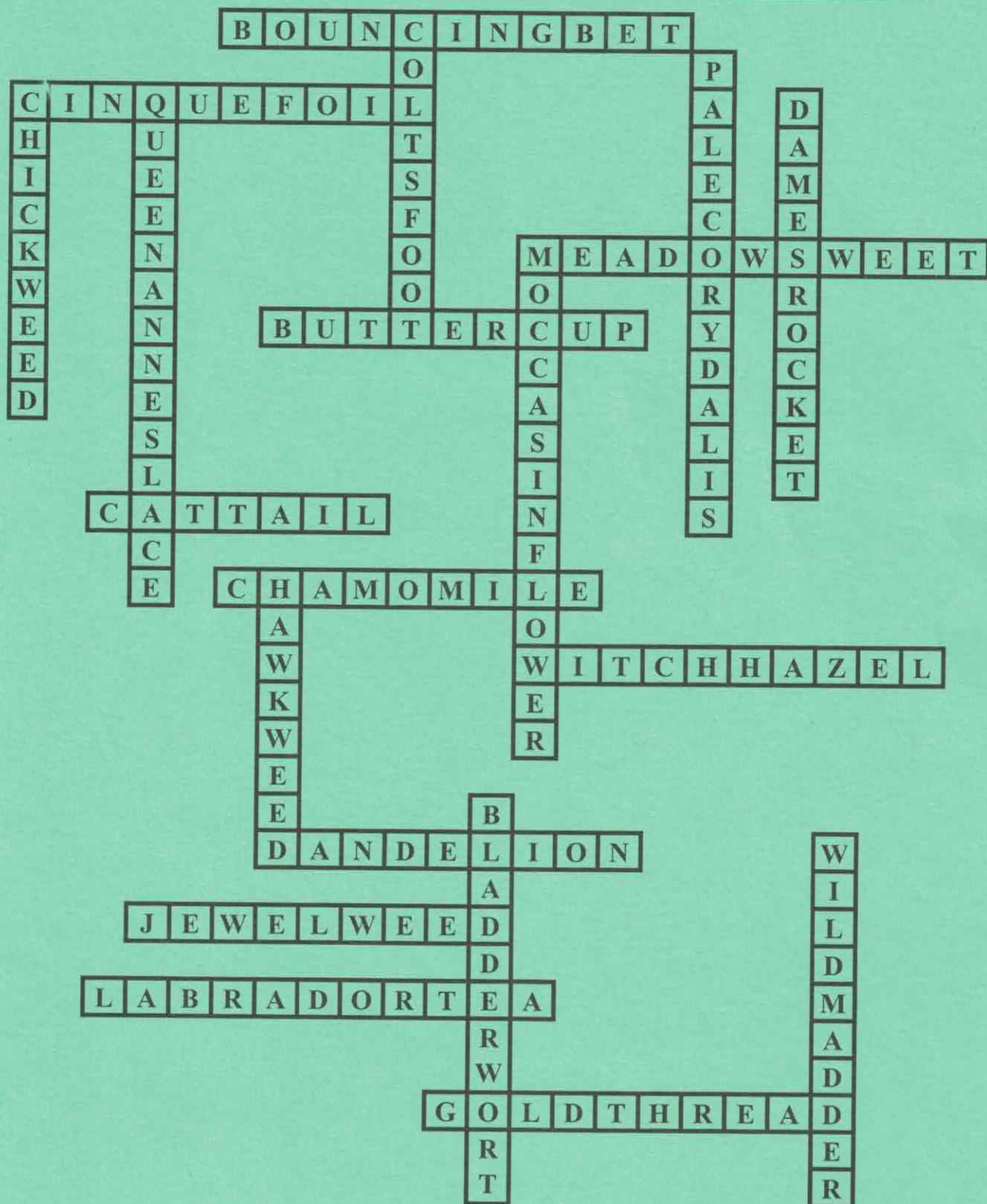
En plus de ces espèces très rares, nous avons dans notre registre 17 espèces plutôt rares qui n'ont été vues que par quelques observateurs. Ce sont: l'Héron garde-boeuf, la Phalarope à bec étroit, le Bécasseau roussâtre, la Mouette pygmée, la Mouette atricille, la Mouette tridactyle, la Sterne arctique, la Sterne caugek, l'Aigle royal, le Tyran de l'ouest, le Tyran tigré, le Gobe-mouche gris bleu, la Grive à joues grises, le Solitaire de Townsend, la Paruline grise, la Paruline polyglotte, et le Bruant sauterelle.

Jusqu'à présent, nous avons enregistré à notre grand livre 18 espèces de bruants, 30 espèces de canards et 30 espèces de parulines. L'information compilée dans notre grand livre pourrait, un bon jour, être utile et importante pour les ornithologues ou pour les scientifiques qui voudraient mieux connaître les oiseaux de chez nous.

Merci à tous et toutes pour la collaboration.

# Answer to Botany Quiz from last Issue

Gart Bishop



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