

Nova Scotia Birds



July 1989

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Spring Bird Migration	3
Field Trip Reports	27
Forthcoming Field Trips	32
Mskegooakade	33
Thoughts on Little Egrets	42
Letters to the Editor	44
Remarkable Raptors	46
Book Review	48
Birding Eastern Passage, Hartlen's Pt.-Part I	50
A Brief History of Terns in Nova Scotia	59

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SPRING MIGRATION 1989

The weather in April was unsettled in the Maritimes. The temperature in Nova Scotia was (generally) above normal for the period however, in the Yarmouth area the temperature was down a bit. It was also a little drier than usual though there were some significant amounts of snow in New Brunswick and Cape Breton with 44.8 cm at Ingonish Beach in the middle of the month of April.

I'm pleased to note that the number of bird reports contributors shows an increase with 111 reporters listed. Also an important fact is that reports from Cape Breton continued to come in. It was feared that with the death of Sara MacLean, reports from there would decrease.

Readers might be interested in the fact that we have a sea-going contingent who report on pelagic birds from the Bluenose between Yarmouth and Maine, from a scallop dragger on George's Bank, from several fishing areas along the coast and from Seal Island. One of our members, Ken Gregoire, who flies his own plane, keeps us posted on bird conditions from numerous out-of-the-way places around the province.

Keith Keddy has, again, supplied us with official weather data for the period and, a special tip of the hat to all the following who have sent in the reports.

Bob Dickie - Records Editor

Charlie Allen (CRKA), Mike Almon (MA), Diane Amerault (DA), Pearl Bay (PVB), Sherman Bleakney (SB), J.S. Boats (JSB), Larry Bogan (LB), Sandy Boler (SB), Gordon Collin (GC), E.F. Carey (EFC), Karen Casselman (KLC), Lana Churchill (LCH), Margaret Clark (MAC), Joe Clifford (JC), Pat Clifford (PC), Don Codling (DAC), Lois Codling (LC), John Cohrs (JLC), Shirley Cohrs (JSC), Cyril Coldwell (CC), Sheila Connell (SC), Donna Crossland (DC) Brian Dalzell (BED), Henrick Deichman (HD), Delisle d'Entremont (DJD), Raymond d'Entremont (RSD), Jerome D'Eon (JRD), Phyllis Dobson (PRD), Mike Dodswell (MD), Virginia Ellis (VE), Bernard Forsyth (BLF), George Forsyth (GF), Syliva Fullerton (SJF), Joy Gates (JG), Ellis Gertridge (EG), Jamie Getison (JG), Merritt Gibson (MG), Marion Graves (MG), Helen Hall (HJH), Hubert Hall (HGH), Jacinta Harvey (JH), Shawn Hawboldt (SH), Frank Hawkins (FH), Phyllis Hayes (PH), Sylvia Hemeon (SH), Ward Hemeon (WH), Don Keddie (DK), Joan Keddie (JK), Don Keith (DK), Fulton Lavender (FLL), Millie Lawrence (ML), Pat & Richard Lawrence (P&RL), Edie MacLeod (EM), Peter MacDonald (Pma), Donald MacKinnon (DM), Peter MacLeod (PM), Alana MacNeill (AM), Carol MacNeill (CDM), Don MacNeill (DAM), Jack MacNeill (JMa), Roslyn MacPhee (RCM), Elsie MacRury (EM), Freda Matheson (FM), Blake Maybank (BM), Reg Melanson (RM), Jane McConnell (JMc), Ian McLaren (IAM), Jean Morse (JM), Bill Morse (WM), Dale Mullen (TDM), Erick Muntz (EMu), Reg. Newell (RN), Ardythe O'Leary (AO), Linda & Peter Payzant (L&PP), Mary Pratt (MP), Lloyd Prossen (LP), G. Proula (GP), Joyce Purchase (JAP), Elizabeth Rand (ER), Joanne Robertson (JoR), Joe Robertson (JR), Peter Ross (PR), Barb Ruff (BR), Eric Ruff (ER), Beverley Sarty (BS), F. Schwab (FS), Betty Jean Smith (BJS), E.C. Smith (ECS), P. Smith (PCS), Sidney Smith SFS, Francis Spalding (FS), Richard Stern (RBS), Clarence Stevens (CSII), Meriam Tams (MT), Bernice Taylor (BT), Jim Taylor (JWT), Bill Thexten (RGT), Brenda Thexton (BET), Diane Thorpe (DT), Jean Timpa (JET), Gerry Trueman (GT), Gordon Tufts (GWT), Judy Tufts (JCT), Eva Urban (EU), Peter Voss (PV), Garnet West (GW), Sherman Williams (SW), Jim Wolford (JWW), David Young (DHY), Joan Young (JMY), Marion Zinck (MZ)

Many of the birding areas in Nova Scotia "crop up" regularly in the reports. To prevent repetition of the locations of these areas in the body of the text, we include this list of references:

Yarmouth Co. (Yar. Co.)	Arcadia, Pinkney's Point, Tusket, Cranberry Head, Eel Brook, Chegoggin, Melbourne, Overton, all the Pubnicos, Glenwood, Dayton, Quinan
Shelburne Co. (Shel. Co.)	Cape Sable Is., Cape Sable, Matthews Lake, Lower Ohio, The Hawk, Seal Is., Sand Hills
Queen's Co.	Port Joli, Port Hebert, Little Harbour
Lunenburg Co. (Lun. Co.)	Cherry Hill, Broad Cove, Petite Riviere, Green Bay, Crousetown, Crescent Beach
Halifax Co. (Hfx. Co.)	Three Fathom Hbr., Conrad's Beach, Lawrencetown, Cole Hbr., Martinique Beach, Hartlen's Point, Oakfield Park, Laurie Park, Powder Mill Park, Chezzetcook,
Colchester Co. (Col. Co.)	Economy, Glenholme,
Annapolis Co. (Anna. Co.)	Wilmot, Round Hill, Paradise, Sandy Bottom Lake Annapolis Royal, Clementsport, Eleven Mile Lake
Kings Co.	Wolfville, Greenfield, Canard, Black River Lake, Gaspereau, Grand Pré, White Rock, Starr's Pt., Lumsden Reservoir
Cumberland Co. Cumb. Co)	Lusby Marsh, APBS*, Lorneville, Lindon, Port Howe
Hants Co.	Shubenacadie, Noel Shore
Digby Co.	Brier Island
Guysborough Co. (Guys. Co.)	Hazel Hill
Cape Breton (C. B.)	Big Pond C. B. Highland National Park

*APBS-Amherst Point Bird Sanctuary
CBC-Christmas Bird Count

BIRD REPORTS

LOONS AND GREBES

RED-THROATED LOONS were reported by only two observers this spring. FS had 2 at Economy on March 26, and HH saw 1 in the Gulf of Maine "...flying a northerly direction 38 miles WNW of Yarmouth", from the MV Bluenose on May 15.

Many observers reported COMMON LOONS, with groups in the 20-30 range on salt water up to the end of March. By the first week in April, individuals were starting to appear on fresh water (Porter's Lake, April 2 and Rocky Lake, April 6: L&PP), even in lakes which were only partially open. A few, perhaps non-breeders, lingered on salt water far into May (e.g. Pond Cove, Brier Island, May 22: RBS).

All grebe numbers are down from recent years. The only PIED-BILLED GREBE was heard by those with Roslyn MacPhee on her field trip in Shubenacadie, on May 28.

A small concentration of HORNED GREBES in coastal waters south of Halifax was noted in two reports: DAM saw 52 at Black Point on March 4, "...and lots more smaller groups around the Aspotogan Peninsula that day", and GWT,JCT saw 70+ around the Blandford peninsula on March 9. PRD, CRKA had a single bird at Pinkney's Point on March 24.

There were only 16 RED-NECKED GREBES reported, in four reports. GWT, JCT saw 1 at Parker's Cove and 2 at Bear River, Annapolis County on March 12. L&PP had 1 at Seaforth on March 27, and DHY reports 12 at Hemeon's Head on April 7.

--LPMP, ed.

ALBATROSSES TO CORMORANTS

Our sighting of an Albatross is sensational. Fulton Lavender and Ian McLaren were mind-boggled when one flew directly over their heads as they walked the margins of the big pond on Seal Island! " It continued easterly across the pond, veering to give us good sightings and then, astonishingly, began to soar along the dunes on the east side of the pond. It coursed back and forth six or seven times along the beach, perhaps peering at the gull roost there". This was on May 29; what was presumably the same bird had been seen earlier by Charles and Wade Kenney on May 24, on the lobstering ground two miles west of the island. Ian's sketch, made at the time and without reference to any identification guide, shows a bird with a body the size of a Gannet and a wingspan much more than twice that of a Herring Gull. It had a long, dark bill and greyish head. The underparts were white. The underside of the short tail was black, with the dark feet apparently extending to the tail tip. The underwings were white, with NARROW black borders. Taken together, the greyish head, dark bill and narrow wing borders indicate a YELLOW-NOSED ALBATROSS, a small "mollymawk" whose nearest colonies are on Tristan da Cunha, and other godforsaken islands in the Subantarctic. This combination of characters seems to eliminate the Grey-headed and Black-browed Albatrosses, the two other mollymawks breeding in the South Atlantic, and Pacific species as well. The dark bill indicates an immature bird. This is the fourth Canadian record: the others--a specimen and two sightings--are also from the southern approaches to the Bay of Fundy.

NORTHERN FULMARS pale into insignificance after this, though they seem to have been unusually common. Hubert Hall, from MV Bluenose, saw 12 on March 16 off Cape Forchu, Yarmouth, in the Lurcher Shoal area--probably brought north by strong southerly winds. He saw 100-200 in the same area on March 21, "probably the most Fulmars I've seen in this area". Raymond d'Entremont estimated 200 on Georges Bank on March 28. He saw a CORY'S SHEARWATER there on May 27, the first he'd ever seen in spring. He saw his first SOOTY SHEARWATER of the year there on April 15. "By May 11, they were still very scarce and I was unable to record a GREATER SHEARWATER. This soon changed: there were 200 Greaters on the Bank on May 19". On May 29, the Sooties outnumbered the Greaters but, as he says, it will be the other way around by the middle

of June. He saw a MANX SHEARWATER on Georges on May 26. Fulton Lavender saw a single Sooty of Bon Portage Island on May 22.

Our only WILSON'S STORM PETREL report is Raymond d'Entremont's bird on Georges Bank on April 18; he saw a LEACH'S there on May 1. Hubert Hall saw his first two Leach's of the year from MV BLUENOSE, 27 miles WNW of Yarmouth, May 14. On May 20-22, Fulton Lavender put the breeding population of Leach's on Bon Portage Island at roughly 50,000 pairs.

The first NORTHERN GANNETS arrived on March 23: single adults on Georges Bank, and off Cape Forchu (RSD,HGH). The Ruffs saw 55-60 on April 30, from the West Light on Brier Island, "approximately 1 immature for every 10 matures". The first GREAT CORMORANT records are the ones that Gordon and Judy Tufts saw: a singleton near Blandford on March 9, and 2 at Parker's Cove on March 12--when the Cohrs saw 8 at Hartlen's Point. Michael Olsen saw one at Pictou Causeway on March 29, as did the Halls off Yarmouth Harbour on April 7. Francis Spalding saw 10 heading NE off Economy on April 6, and 6 on April 12. The first sighting of a DOUBLE-CRESTED was Michael Olsen's bird at Pictou Causeway on March 29; he saw 20-30 pairs there on April 10, and 40-50 pairs on April 15. Helen Hall saw one at Overton on April 2. At Eel Lake, Phyllis Dobson and Charlie Allen saw 1 on April 7, 3 on April 10 and 7 the next day; however, they seemed to be scarce this spring in the Eel Lake/ Tusket area. Brian Dalzell saw 15 at Ingonish Beach on April 15. Jack MacNeill says that the birds were "decorating buoys in Sydney Harbour" on April 16, and had moved into the Bras d'Or lakes in mid-April. Jerome K. D'Eon saw 8 at Port Joli Sanctuary on May 16. There were about 25 birds on nests in the colony at the tip of Cape Split on May 20 (RBS), and 18 on ledges off Blanche on May 28 (the Smiths).

--RGG, ed.

HERONS AND RELATIVES

Our earliest AM. BITTERN at Church Pt., Yar. Co., on April 21 (H&HH), was later than usual. Several more were seen before month's end. Don Keith sent an interesting account and sketch of a bittern displaying two large white plumes on the shoulders while strutting towards another, which flew off. According to Palmers (Handbook of N. Am. Birds, Vol. 1) this is an aggressive, territorial display, so presumably the fleeing bird was another male. GREAT BLUE HERONS were said to have turned up in "mid-March" in Yar. Co. (DM), but the first with specified dates were at Lr. W. Pubnico and Greenwich on March 22. Wintering individuals had not been recorded in either locality after February. By March 30, there were 13 on the Lawrencetown "circuit" (JS&JLC), and they reached Cape Breton by April 2 (JM).

First, but not greatest, among this spring's egrets were a number of GREAT EGRETS. The earliest was seen "throughout March" around Pinkney's Pt. (DM), reported specifically between March 24 and April 1 by others. Another on May 1, near Port Mouton (fide JWW) may have been the same as one reported later (no details) near Lunenburg. Presumably birds at E. Chezzetcook on May 11 (FLL, JR) and at Chebogue Pt., Yar. Co., on May 14 (JKD) were new, along with individual that attracted birders and hundreds of casual observers to Frog Pond, Halifax, between April 30 and May 2. It was very tame and became a photo-feature in both metro newspapers.

The excitement over LITTLE EGRETS was more justifiable. At least 3 occurred in the province this spring. The first was discovered by Peter MacLeod with Bev Sarty on April 16 and was closely studied by many observers until it disappeared after May 3. Local residents stated that it had been present since the beginning of April. A second bird found at Round Bay, Shel. Co., on April 25 (IAM, PM) was not seen subsequently. Finally, a third bird on Bon Portage Island on May 20 (FLL et al.), appeared to have taken up with the Snowy Egrets there. These important observations are discussed elsewhere in this issue. We cannot be certain that 3 small egrets at Three Fathom Hbr. in late March (fide C. & D. Willis) were in fact SNOWY EGRETS, but the 3 pairs on Bon Portage Island on May 20-22 certainly were. It should be noted that they were confirmed as breeding on the island last year. One subadult was at Brookfield, Col. Co., May 8-14 (Eliz. Forsythe et al.), and an adult was at Ingonish Hbr. on May 13

(FLL,IAM,PM). An adult at W. Lawrencetown Marsh from mid May was joined by two others on May 31 (Linda Conrad), all in high breeding plumage and colour. A CATTLE EGRET stayed around Petite Riviere from April 15 to May 26 (Cohrs, SJF,BH). Adult LITTLE BLUE HERONS were at Overton on April 9 (H&HH), on Cape Sable Island on April 21 (DAM,DCM) and for a week from April 22 at Crescent Beach (Cohrs).

The first reported BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERONS were two on Cape Sable on April 22 (DAM). The established breeding colony on Bon Portage Island was down to business on May 20-22, and a pair on Seal Island on May 29-31 might also breed.

--IAM, ed.

GEESE AND DUCKS

Eleven SNOW GEESE were reported from four locations. Edie MacLeod saw one at Glace Bay Beach on March 16, and a lone adult was present with about 4,000 Canadas at Chezzetcook Inlet in the last days of March (L&PP, JCT et al.). Many observers reported eight Snow Geese in a flooded field near Canning, from April 10 to about the 16th. These birds were also associated with a flock of Canadas. Finally, FS saw one immature bird in Economy Marsh on April 18. This one lingered until May 8. Fran reports that "2-3 others were said to be at Five Houses (Cobequid Bay) during the same period".

The BRANT migration showed two distinct peaks this spring. Starting with three at Little Harbour, Shel. Co., February 2 (DHY, JMY), and an unusual record of 17 in Bedford Basin on March 28 (BED), we suddenly have 190 at Little Harbour on March 30, and 355 at the same place on April 2 (DHY,JMY). Two days later, there were 150 at Freeport (RBS), and about 35 at Grand Pré on April 6 (many obs.). Nothing more is heard until April 23, when there were 150 at Wolfville (JWW), and 38 at Grosses Coques and Port George (DAM,CDM). By the 30th, there were about 450 at Brier Island (RBS), and 100 were at Grand Pré and Wolfville (RGT,RBS) on May 6. The last reports are of 17 at Economy on the 17th, and 60 at Brier Island on the 20th (IAM).

CANADA GEESE major flocks were reported as follows: 2,000-3,000 at Lower Canard and 2,000-3,000 at Grand Pré on March 20-24 (many obs.); 3,000-4,000 in Chezzetcook Inlet, March 27-April 2 (L&PP,DAM,PM); and 1,000+ at West Lawrencetown on March 27 (DAM,PM). MG fide JWW counted 1 443 near Canning on April 27. RCM reports a pair on a pond at Shubenacadie as early as April 9.

WOOD DUCKS were reported from Canning (2 males on April 9, and 1 male on the 12th: GCT,JWT, JWW), Shubenacadie (11 on April 9-RCM), the Tobetic Game Sanctuary, where there were three occupied nest boxes on April 20, containing 9, 9 and 1 eggs (RM fide JWW), and, less happily, Seal Island on May 29, where a nest box placed for them contained six Starling eggs (IAM).

GREEN-WINGED TEAL began to arrive in early March, with the first report being of a pair at Greenwich on March 11 (JWW). Twenty were at Canard on March 28 (JET,BET), and 31 at West Chezzetcook on April 29 (DAM,FLL). A couple of the EURASIAN RACE were at Greenwich from March 11 through to the 20th (many obs.).

BLACK DUCKS are "invisible" birds. Not literally perhaps, but they are so usual, so undramatic in every way that they are typically under-reported. Flocks in excess of 30 birds were only reported from three locations: Pictou Causeway (100 on March 25 - L&PP), West Chezzetcook (500 on March 27 - L&PP,DAM,PM), and Lawrencetown (100 birds, March 27 - L&PP). There must be many more such flocks throughout the province in early spring.

Paired MALLARDS were well reported. JMA mentions "Pairs commonly seen...around Sydney"; RSD had a pair at Lr. W. Pubnico on March 16 ("With all the tame Mallards in the area accounted for, I concluded that these were wild"); RCM reports 3 pairs at Shubenacadie on March 27, and FLL and IAM report 6-8 pairs on Seal Island on May 29 ("Have become depressingly common this year"). PR et al. saw a lone female on Sable Island on May 29.

The only notable gathering of NORTHERN PINTAIL was reported from the Lawrencetown "circuit": 32 birds on March 30 (JSC). Small numbers were reported from Canard, Greenwich and Grand Pré in the Annapolis Valley, the East River of Pictou, Lr. W. Pubnico, Amherst Marsh and Conrad's Beach. PR et al. had a brood of 5 in late May on Sable Island.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL were skimpy in the spring, with only seven reports of 46 individuals. Four birds at Grand Pré on April 12 were joined by another on April 15 (JCT); a single male was at the Canard Poultry Pond on April 12 (JWW); 20 at Amherst Marsh on April 25 (IAM) had decreased to 12 (paired) by the 28th (BED); there were two at West Chezzetcook on May 12 (JAP) and a pair at Upper Granville on May 18 (JM,WM).

A single male NORTHERN SHOVELLER was at Yarmouth all winter, until March 11 at least (BED). The APBS population was reported as 25 on April 25 (IAM), and 10 on April 28 (BED). There was a pair on Seal Island on May 29 (FLL,IAM, where a pair nested last year.

There was only one report of GADWALL. Two males were at West Chezzetcook on April 8 (DAM,FLL,PM).

AMERICAN WIGEON turned up in good numbers at APBS: 25 on April 25 (IAM). Other observers reported mostly ones and twos, for a total of 39 birds, many of which were paired as early as March 20 (Greenwich, GF fide JWW).

RING-NECKED DUCKS got off to a very early start when 3 showed up in Rocky Lake, Waverley on March 1 (L&PP), and in general they demonstrated encouraging numbers throughout the spring. The Rocky Lake crowd eventually built to 26 males and 3 females by April 1. There were 30+ in Drain Lake as of April 12 (JWW), and 90 at APBS on April 25 (IAM). There were numerous other reports in the 1-10 decade from various Annapolis Valley and Digby County locations, Shubenacadie and Loch Lomond.

BED and L&PP were treated to an impressive mob of about 1,000 GREATER SCAUP at the East River of Pictou on March 25, and just down the road at the Pictou Harbour Causeway were another 75. Over 100 were at the Annapolis Royal power dam on March 12 (GWT,JCT), and there were more than 230 at Langan Bay on April 15 (JMA). There were nine other reports of about 200 individuals, which altogether make this a very satisfactory recovery from the lean springs of 1987 and 1988. LESSER SCAUP were only reported by one observer: FLL and Paul Duval saw 8 at Three Fathom Harbour on April 27, in company with about 50 "greater".



One record, at least, indicates that COMMON EIDER had a good spring: there were about 5,000 in March near Sambro, and by April 23, the number was in the 12,000 range (CSII). Other reports were more modest but still satisfactory: about 800 at Martinique Beach on April 12 (JAP), 500 at Brier Island on April 30 (Ruffs), 200 at Conrad's Beach on May 5 (JAP--"very encouraging. More than we have seen in years"), and 528 at Seal Island on May 29 (FLL,IAM--"316 males, 212 females. Others flushed from nests. Broods (all very young) of 5,7,8,7,2,6,5,3,3").

A KING EIDER, "nearly full adult male flew by Cape Sable, 100 m. off beach" on May 28 (FLL,IAM).

OLDSQUAW were about as usual, showing up in moderate numbers throughout March and April before departing for their breeding grounds in the Arctic. There were 74 around the Blandford Peninsula on March 9 (GWT,JCT), 15+ at New Waterford on April 8 and 24+ at Main-a-Dieu a day later (JMA), 8 at Cherry Hill Beach on April 21 (GWT,JCT), and 2 at Pond Cove, Brier Island on April 30 (ER,BR).

BLACK SCOTERS were active, "paired up and calling" in Green Bay in March 4 (JSC). By April 22, there were 400-500, and numbers peaked at 3,500-4,000 around May 1. Only 20-25 stragglers remained on May 17. SURF SCOTERS peaked later, with over 1500 birds in Green Bay on May 17, most of which had departed by May 20. A smaller group at Little Bear River reached a peak of 60 on May 16. Most of the WHITE-WINGED SCOTERS were reported from Cape Breton, where JMA had 75 at South Bar on March 25, and 100+ at North Sydney on April 1 and 5. Other Scoter reports mention very much smaller numbers.

COMMON GOLDENEYE, while not particularly abundant (about 330 individuals) were widely distributed in 18 reports. The largest group was one of 100 birds in the East River of Pictou on March 25 (L&PP). The Pictou Causeway area held 50 birds the same day. Other reports were of 40 or fewer birds.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE occurred at five locations, for a total of about 18 individuals. Two females at the Chinatown Restaurant in Rockingham on March 3, started things rolling (JAP). They were followed by 5 at Pugwash Harbour on March 10 (JWT), 4 at the Annapolis Royal power dam (many obs.) on March 12, about 6 at the Pictou Causeway on March 25 (BED,L&PP), and a male in breeding plumage, 50 feet from shore at Crescent Beach on April 21 (JSC).

As usual, BUFFLEHEAD overwintered in numbers in the Annapolis Basin (162 at Bear River on March 12, and 150 at Annapolis Royal on April 4). However, splinter groups numbering up to 35 were reported from various locations in Yarmouth and Digby counties, the Eastern Shore and Cape Breton. The latest report was of 5 individuals at Three Fathom Harbour on May 5 (JAP).

Eleven HOODED MERGANSERS made the spring list, with single birds at the East River of Pictou and Rocky Lake (LL&PP). Pairs were at Clementsvalle on March 23 (GP fide JWW), the Tobetic Game Sanctuary (2 in nest boxes April 20- RM fide JWW) and Broad Cove in CBH National Park on May 13 (IAM,FLL,PM).

There were many reports of COMMON MERGANSERS, with the first fresh water record being March 9 at Waverley (L&PP). While most records were of 10 or fewer individuals, the Pictou duck paradise had about 100 in the East River and about 75 at the Causeway on March 25 (BED). Eight at West Chezzetcook on May 12, seemed "late to be on salt water" (JAP), and a single female was observed near a nest box on Loch Lomond from May 15 until at least May 25 (JAM).

RED-BREASTED MERGANSERS were also widely reported, with about 22 reports of about 210 individuals. They first appeared in Eel Lake, Yar. Co., March 23 (PRD,CRKA). Over 50 were present along the Eastern Shore on March 27, from West Chezzetcook to Lawrencetown, and JMA observed over 60 at Lingan, Edwardsville and Irish Cove on April 8 and 10.

--LPMP,ed.

DIURNAL RAPTORS

TURKEY VULTURES are well represented this spring. Two over Cole Hbr. on April 26 (PM,BS) had probably "overshot" in fine weather. Two at Arcadia on May 4 (HH), 3 at Dayton on May 15 (TDM), and 3 on Pubnico Pt. on May 19 (FLL), could have been the same group. Up to 4 were on Brier Island beginning in mid-May (sev. obs.).

The first reported OSPREY was at Argyle on April 11 (JKD), and they reached Dartmouth by April 14, Pictou Co. by April 15, and were widely reported on April 20-21. They were at East Bay, C.B., by month's end, but continued to move through, with one pausing on Sable Island on May 26. Hank Deichmann saw one that took a fish (a goldfish?) from the Halifax Public Gardens on May 4. The annual raptor count in the Wolfville area on Mar. 11, produced 29 ad. and 44 imm. BALD EAGLES (JWW). There were 23 around Sheffield Mills on March 18, 12 in one tree (JSC,JAP). Up to 8 wintered around Tusket Falls (fide CRKA). There were scattered spring reports from the usual places. N. HARRIERS were exceptionally well reported. A single male at Little Harbour, Shel. Co., on March 4 (DHY) had probably wintered, as might individuals (same one?) seen in S. Yar. Co., March 12-14 (sev. Ob). A bird at Conrad's Beach on April 15 (DAM) was probably a spring arrival, and there was a flurry of reports between April 21-24 from Yar. Co. to Cape Breton Island.

Six N. GOSHAWKS, spotted from Pubnico to Cape North, were as many as usually reported. There were very few reports of SHARP-SHINNED HAWKS and TDM rated them as "few" in Yar. Co. They were still on the move in late May, when 3 imm. were seen on Seal Island. We have 3 March and 3 May reports of N. GOSHAWK. Identification of a COOPER'S HAWK sailing N.E. over Cow Bay in fine weather on May 18 (PM), was based on its crow size, large head, and long, rounded tail.

An imm. buteo sitting close at hand and then being harrassed in flight by crows at Petite Riviere on March 23, had all field marks of a RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (Cohrs). This is about the time when migrants reach south-central Canada. Our first BROAD-WINGED HAWKS were 2 near Milford, Hfx. Co., on April 12 (BED), which is very early. Several more were seen by late April, and they were all over the province, including Cape Breton, during May. One reached Sable Island in late May. I think they are becoming more widespread and common with us. The Wolfville area had 29 RED-TAILED HAWKS on March 11 count, but only a few later birds were reported, probably because they are routine. A report of 5 dark phase ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS at Greenwich on March 20 (GF) closed out winter sightings; no later ones were reported.

A distant GOLDEN EAGLE was seen soaring near French Lake, C.B. H. National Park on March 24 (FLL,IAM), and 2 were circling high over nearby Pleasant Bay on April 16 (BED); one wonders if they breed in the fastnesses of the park? Was the AMERICAN KESTREL at Canning on March 26 (MZ) an arrival? Five others between April 7-13 (sev. ob.) certainly were, and a pair was at the nest near St. Croix, Hants Co., by April 28 (MAC). Three hustling MERLINS were seen in Shel. Co., April 25 (IAM,PM), but there were only 3 later reports. Our single report of a PEREGRINE FALCON comes from Economy on May 3 (FS). The dark phased ad. GYRFALCON around

Grand Pré reported in the last issue was seen up until March 1. What was probably the same bird reappeared there on April 4-6 (sev. ob.). On April 6, it made several attacks at a cock pheasant, which reared up and used its spurs to thwart the attacker! After this plucky effort, JCT was "glad he got away".

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS

Belated winter reports of GRAY PARTRIDGE from the Valley assure us that they hang on--up to 15 near Starrs Pt., and 5 near Windsor (var. ob.). Spring reports were of 4+ near Economy (FS) in March -April, a pair in late April near Little Bass R. (P&WH), and 2 at Hillaton, Kings Co., on May 8 (RBS). We had RING-NECKED PHEASANTS in the usual places, as well as a mildly regrettable number of broods on Seal Island from last year's introduction. There were 3 reports of SPRUCE GROUSE from Hfx. Co., and one from C.B.H. National Park. Thirteen reports of RUFFED GROUSE included a drumming male on Brier Is., where they generally can't survive the gunning. Two nests, one with 8 eggs on May 9, and another with 10 eggs on May 12, were found near Economy (FS). Another rogue NORTHERN BOBWHITE was seen, this one by Merville Steele at Scots Bay.

RALLIDS AND CRANE

A YELLOW RAIL was reported to the rare-bird alert to have been found at APBS on May 21 by BLF, who saw its white wing patches and heard its distinctive "song". A VIRGINIA RAIL and a SORA were calling at Hardwood Lands during the NSBS field trip there on May 28, and Soras were also heard on May 13 at Three Fathom Harbour and on May 16 near Shubenacadie.

Our only reported COMMON MOORHEN was at N. Amherst Marsh (FLL, BM). An AM. COOT was on Seal Is., May 29-31 (FLL, IAM).

A spring SANDHILL CRANE near Scotch Village, Hants Co. (SC) adds to the possibility they have or soon will settle down and breed.

--IAM, ed.

SPRING SHOREBIRDS

Four BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER were at Hartlen's Pt., May 10 (FLL). A week later as many as 60 were at Cole Hbr. (BD). Thereafter, a few were reported from the S.W. (Brier to Cape Sable), 28 at Cherry Hill, May 20 & 28 (SJF), and 37 at Economy, May 24 (FS). The only SEMIPALMATED PLOVER were singles May 4, at Pinkney's Pt. (JKD'E) and Cherry Hill, May 7 (SJF). The first four PIPING PLOVER were at Cherry Hill, March 25 (SJF), followed by one at Little Hbr., Shel. Co., March 29 (DHY) and 3 on April 2, at Sand Hills Beach (SS). All told, the number of pairs reported includes five from Baccaro Beach to Crow's Nest (SS), two at Cherry Hill (SJF), and one each at Round Bay and Grand Desert (IAM). One hopes there are others at unvisited beaches, e.g., Cadden Bay. The KILLDEER continues to thrive. First noted were a single at Lr. W. Pubnico (DJd'E) and 4 at Chezzetcook fide JAP) March 20, with several more reports by month's end. We have nesting reports detailed enough to suggest a not surprising south-to-north time lag: In Yar. Co., at the Brooklyn Rifle Range, four chicks were out of the nest and running free by May 16 (E&BR), suggesting the eggs were laid the fourth week of April. On the Wolfville Ridge a nest with four eggs was found April

24 (JT), while at Economy a clutch of eggs completed about May 2, hatched May 23 or 24, the young not running free until May 26 (FS). Another indication of nesting comes from Bass River, where P&WH were treated to the broken wing display.

About two dozen GREATER YELLOWLEGS were noted by 11 observers, most in April. The first were 4 at Cape Sable, April 21 (DAM,CDM), the others late in the month. One last was at Overton May 10 (HH). A SOLITARY SANDPIPER, qualified as "very probable" by JWW, was probably at Blomidon Park, May 14. Early precursor of the many WILLETS to come was one at Lr. W. Pubnico, March 30 (JKD'E). They were "noisy and obvious" around the Valley in early May (RBS), words that describe the situation in many of our salt marshes. Five pairs of SPOTTED SANDPIPERS were at Blanche Pt., May 28 (S&BS). Except for several near Shubenacadie, May 16 (RCM) only three singles were reported, plus a nest with 4 eggs, but no date, at Dartmouth (JWT).

A WHIMBREL of the European race at Hartlen's Pt., May 10 (FLL,PM,PD,BS) and MARbled GODWIT at Sand Pt. (where else?) May 25 (FLL,BM), are the season's most unusual records.

About 25 RUDDY TURNSTONES were noted, one April 9 at Cherry Hill (SJF), all the rest from May 21 to month's end.

The only SANDERLINGS reported were 10 that had managed to overwinter at Crescent Beach (JSC). A LEAST SANDPIPER was "singing" at Morien Bar, May 13 (FLL,IAM,PM), one of only 10 reported this spring, May 7-24. A PECTORAL SANDPIPER was seen at Daniel's Head, Cape Sable (no date-FLL et al.). Last of the winter's PURPLE SANDPIPERS were at Sandy Cove, April 18 (CS).

A RUFF in full breeding plumage was at W. Chezzetcook, May 11-13 (FLL,JR,D&LC), a Reeve at Tatamagouche, May 26 (FLL,BM). The COMMON SNIPE was first noted March 30, at Dartmouth (JWT) and, as often heard as seen, in many places from the second week in April, on. AMERICAN WOODCOCK are easy to see when they arrive as early as March 20 "because they walk on top of the snow", even as far south as Lr. W. Pubnico, where, nevertheless, a female was already supervising three chicks by May 14 (JKD'E). Territorial displays occurred as early as March 28, at Georfield (RCM), and "quite a few" were at Hardwood Lands, May 1 (DAM).

-FS, ed.



Richard Stern's photo of a young male Orchard Oriole on Brier Island in late May, is the first of this rare visitor to be thus exhibited in Nova Scotia Birds. Note its black chin and smallish beak.

PHALAROPES TO AUKS

Our only phalaropes were the WILSON'S--a male and female in breeding plumage--that Fulton Lavender and Blake Maybank saw on North Amherst Marsh. Raymond d'Entremont saw a POMARINE and 3 PARASITIC JAEGERs on Georges Bank on May 19.

Let's start the gulls with the last of the Arctic migrants. The most interesting of these was the IVORY GULL at Antigonish on April 22-25, seen by many people and reported by Ian McLaren. Fulton Lavender saw an adult THAYER'S GULL at Dartmouth Cove on May 10--but he gives no details. Hubert Hall saw an adult and a subadult GLAUCOUS GULL near Yarmouth on March 5, and 6 ICELANDS (type unspecified) and Glaucous feeding in the shallows off Cape Forchu on March 14; he saw an Iceland at the entrance to Yarmouth Harbour on May 14. Jim Wolford and others report that juvenile "whitewing" gulls were present at Canard Poultry from mid-March at least until April 9, but that it was often hard to separate the species. Don and Lois Codling note that the "last common appearance" of Iceland Gulls at Dartmouth Cove was on April 21, but there were occasional stragglers at least as late as May 10. Jack MacLeod says that there were still a few IceLands and a Glaucous at Glace Bay on April 22. However, Anonymous saw a couple of immature IceLands off Cheticamp as late as May 14.

We had HERRING and GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULLS in their usual abundance. The only note worth recording is Raymond d'Entremont's observation of several Great Black-backs nesting at Pubnico Point on May 14--the second year that he's seen them there. Our first LAUGHING GULL sighting was the Codlings' bird at Dartmouth Cove on May 10. There was an adult at South Harbour, NE Cape Breton, on May 13 (FLL,IAM,PM). Hubert Hall saw two from Bluenose on May 15, 25 miles WNW of Yarmouth.

COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULLS were regularly reported; it's odd how we take them for granted nowadays. Don and Lois Codling say that the birds' last common appearance at Dartmouth Cove was on April 17. However, Jack MacLeod saw 12 at Edwardsville, Cape Breton, April 29, and notes that odd birds were around at least as late as May 14. At the other end of the province, Brian Dalzell and Blake Maybank saw an adult in winter plumage in Yarmouth on March 11, while Richard Stern saw a summer bird on Brier Island on April 14. The only BONAPARTE'S record was of 17 immatures at Sand Point, Tatamagouche on May 26 (FLL,BM). Phyllis Dobson and Charlie Allen saw 15+ RING-BILLED GULLS feeding in Eel Brook on Marsh 27. Jack MacLeod saw 12 at Point Edward on April 12, and there were 36+ in Wentworth Park, Sydney, April 28, "still enjoying handouts there". Jim Wolford says that, as usual, there were 13 adults on Wolfville sewage ponds on April 23. Trisha-Lynn and David Nettleship found a newly dead BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE, in winter plumage, washed up at Head Harbour, St. Margaret's Bay on April 8, after a period of strong southerly gales. In outer Fundy, Hubert Hall saw 25-50 from Bluenose, west of Yarmouth, March 21--also after southerly gales. This was the most he's ever seen in this area. He also saw 5 birds near the Lurcher Shoal, west of Yarmouth, on May 14. Raymond d'Entremont saw 9 Kittiwakes on Georges Bank on March 24. There was a singleton off Bon Portage Island on May 22 (DAM, Paul Duval).

Our first definite COMMON TERN was the bird that Phyllis Dobson and Charlie Allen saw at Eel Lake on May 2; they saw 15-20 COMICS feeding actively off Ricco Point, Yar. Co., May 6. There were 2 Commons in Dartmouth Cove on May 5 (Codlings) and several off Edwardsville, Cape Breton, May 14 (JMa)--in both cases, "first" for the year. Hubert Hall saw about 50 feeding Comics from Bluenose, 20-25 miles WNW of Yarmouth, on May 15. The first definite ARCTIC TERN was the bird that landed on Raymond d'Entremont's boat on Georges Bank on May 8. The Smiths saw at least 15 terns, of both species, at the colony on Blanche Point on May 28. It was still too early for nest scrapes. At other colonies, there were about 200 commons and 250 Arctics at Wedge Island on May 17 (BED), and 250 Arctics at Three Fathom Harbour on

May 18 (FLL,BD). On May 20-22, IAN McLaren saw both species courtship feeding on Peters Island, Brier Island; he searched for, but couldn't find any ROSEATES. The only positive Roseate sighting was of 2 birds at Lr. W. Pubnico on May 19 (FLL,PD). There were at least 10 BLACK TERNS in the North Amherst Eddy Marsh area on May 26-27 (FLL,BM,JWT).

Our only ATLANTIC PUFFIN records are the singleton on March 5, and the couple on May 16, that Hubert saw from Bluenose. The Halls saw 7 BLACK GUILLEMOTS, all in summer plumage, near Cape Forchu on May 10. The Ruffs saw 3 Black Guillemots off Brier Island on April 30, and Ian McLaren and Fulton Lavender counted a total of 196 around Seal Island on May 29-30.

--RBBB, ed.

DOVES, CUCKOOS

After wintering at feeders widely throughout the province (e.g. 7-8 at Westport, Brier Island, 6 at Big Pond, C.B.), MOURNING DOVES scattered during April. A nest with 2 eggs was found in Wolfville on April 17 (BLF). The 7th Nova Scotia WHITE-WINGED DOVE turned up between May 18-20 at the Dartmouth feeder of Freda Matheson, who reported it to CSII, thus producing a lifer for several birders. The last visitor to see it was Norm Chesterfield of Wheatley, Ontario, for whom it was the 504th Canadian species! It was quite bright buffy on the throat and upper chest, and I believe that it might have been of the Caribbean and Gulf Coast race, *Zenaida a. asiatica*. Earlier Canadian records (including the one in Aug. 1979 on Seal Island, judging from photos), are of the grayer southwestern race, *Z. a. mearnsi*. I would like to see any photos taken of this bird so that we may make firmer judgements.

No cuckoos had turned up by the reporting deadline.

OWLS

There were 4 reports of calling GREAT HORNED OWLS, from Yar. Co. to C.B.H. National Park. A SNOWY OWL was on Grand Pré on April 11(GWT). At least a dozen BARRED OWLS were reported from throughout the province. BLF reported them as nesting early this year, with 5 boxes with eggs on April 2, and 8 boxes with a total of 22 eggs by April 17. RBS found two natural nest sites on April 15 (see photos). One aggressive bird routed a Great Horned Owl behind KLC's house at Cheverie at 4 a.m. on May 16. A calling LONG-EARED OWL was at North River, C.B. Co., on April 30 (CSII). This spring two pairs were on Bon Portage Island, where they have nested for some years, subsisting on Leach's Storm Petrel (P.C. Smith). Two reports of SHORT-EARED OWL in the Grand Pré area on March 15-16 (DAM,MZ) probably refer to the same individual. "Tooting" SAW-WHET OWLS were on S. Mountain on February 13 (BLF), near Harrietsfield on May 27, and through spring near Lockeport (Jean Adelson). An Atlassing coup was the discovery of singing BOREAL OWLS in northern C.B., where breeding had been anticipated but not confirmed. One answered a taped call at Neil's Harbour on March 24 and another responded vigorously by calling and "attacking" near Bay St. Lawrence on April 15 (BED,L&PP). The latter bird was well recorded. Another was calling near North River on April 30 (CSII,PS). It remains only to find the nests of these fine little owls; C.B. H. National Park staff have been alerted.

GOATSUCKERS, SWIFT, HUMMINGBIRD, KINGFISHER

The only reported COMMON Nighthawk was an exhausted female on Seal Island on May 29. A WHIP-POOR-WILL was calling in Harrietsfield, Hfx. Co., on May 26 (FLL, BM), and another alighted on a boat on Georges Bank (!) on May 28 (RSD).

The earliest CHIMNEY SWIFTS were 45 entering the University Hall chimney in Wolfville on May 7. On May 21, 546 were counted entering the Front St. chimney in Wolfville, and like numbers did so through month's end (BBLF, JWW, et al.). Another concentration is traditional at Annapolis Royal, where BED saw 500+ entering the Legion Hall chimney on May 27. Small numbers were seen elsewhere. Jim Wolford reports that "the Front St. chimney, attached to a dairy building, was about to be demolished for town developmental plans. Citizens' concerns (60 letters, mostly from Blomidon Naturalists) resulted in the town's decision to do its best to save the chimney and develop a mini-park as a tribute to Robie Tufts. Three cheers!"

The first male RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD was late on May 19 at Economy (FS), but in the next few days males and a few females were widely reported.

A BELTED KINGFISHER at Lr. W. Pubnico on March 28 (JKD) was presumably a spring arrival. One was at Three Fathom Harbour on March 30 (Cohrs), and another reached Big Pond, C.B. Co., on April 1 (JMa). They were reported in small numbers and later elsewhere, and JSC thinks they are decidedly scarcer than usual. We should try to assess them this summer.

The first YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER was at Paradise on May 21 (J&WM), and there were 3 reports of 5 individuals during the next 2 days. BLF finds that a Barred Owl call is certain to sucker sapsuckers, and he thus attracted a **flock** of 8+ on Melanson Mountain on May 5. A few DOWNY WOODPECKERS continued at feeders, but RSD at Lr. W. Pubnico waited in vain until one arrived at his suet on April 4. Breeding activities were reported from mid-April. Kim Allen reported a pair (?) of Downies at Molega L., Queen's Co., in which the white was largely replaced by yellow. She promises photos, which may help solve the mystery. There were only a few reports of HAIRY WOODPECKERS. The Tufts had a male all winter, but the female returned on March 22 after a 2 month absence, as in the past 4 years. A struggle on April 22, between Hairies and Downies for a dead tree in Shubenacadie was, as might be expected, no contest (RCM). BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKERS were seen on March 10 near Black River (BLF), at Bass River from April 27 (P&WH) and at Hardwood Lands on May 28 (NSBS). The Bass River pair was found nesting on a spruce on Maple Ave., May 22. NORTHERN FLICKERS during March in Dartmouth, between Chester and Windsor, and near Canard may well have wintered. Six widespread sightings between April 4-12 probably signal the first arrivals, and one was chiseling out a nest on April 26 near Argyle (CRKA). There were 10 reports of PILEATED WOODPECKERS, mostly in ones or twos. The ever-active JWW had "numerous sightings this spring" in Hfx. Co. and Cum. Co.

--IAM, ed.

FLYCATCHERS TO LARKS

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHERS turned up on time, with reports from near Crousetown, May 21 (JSC), and several around the province by the end of May, with at least one typical description for the species of calling "Quick, three beers" from the top of the highest tree (MAC). EASTERN WOOD-PEWEES arrived about the same time, with an obvious migration noted on Seal Island, May 29 (10 birds, IAM). YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHERS are infrequently reported, but are regular breeders, and one survived a brush with the D'Eon's window in Lr. W. Pubnico on May 26. The other Empidonax species, LEAST and ALDER FLYCATCHERS, easy to distinguish when they sing and extremely difficult when they don't, also arrived during the last week in May, from the 17th onwards in Kentville (RBS). By the 26th they were Chebeck-ing and Fee-bee-o-ing all over the province. EASTERN PHOEBES tend to return a little earlier, and this year

were widely reported from April 7 (Cape Forchu, H&HH) on. Last year's Kentville pair by the Cornwallis River was actively nest building under the same bridge by April 28 (RBS). A smattering of GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHERS occurs every year, and this spring, birds were seen in Birch Cove, Dartmouth (D&LC) and on Brier Island, May 22 (IAM). The first EASTERN KINGBIRD reported was on time, May 9, from Lawrencetown (WIM), but the main migration was perhaps a little later, with most reports coming around May 21-23, e.g. Middlewood, Lun. Co. (JL&JSC), Villagedale Rd. (S&BJS), Brier Island (RBS,IAM), Windsor (JAP) etc. HORNED LARKS had long gone by the time the flycatchers had arrived, and the latest flock mentioned was of 6 at Port Williams on March 18 (JET,BET).

SWALLOWS TO KINGLETS

PURPLE MARTINS are rare in the province away from their traditional haunts in Oxford and Amherst, but Jane McConnell and Pearl Kinsman observed a male around Falmouth for 3 days, April 8 to 10. After last year's anxiety concerning TREE SWALLOWS, this year they arrived plentifully and early. One was at Prospect, April 8 (BLM), 18+ at Pleasant Lake, April 12 (PRD,CRKA), 8 April 16, in the Yarmouth area (H&HH), etc. There were many reports from all areas by early May, with plenty of comments about nesting by then. A NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW was among 75 mixed swallows seen by IAM in the fog on Brier Island on May 20. Only 1 large flock of BANK SWALLOWS has been reported, 200+ at East Bay Sandbar (JMac), but I have noticed that by the end of May the numbers, at least in the Valley, seem normal. About 20 CLIFF SWALLOWS were exploring the Annapolis Royal bridge May 2 (RBS), and BED reported 150+ nests under construction there by May 26. An unsigned report, but with a good detailed description, of a possible CAVE SWALLOW (light chin, dark cinnamon rump, brownish upperparts) in the same spot on April 23, was received. The first BARN SWALLOW was on time, April 18, at Carleton (HH), then at New Minas, April 22 (RBS), and then plenty of reports into May. HH reported a lone straggler 32 miles NW of Yarmouth Light, from MV Bluenose, on May 17.

A GRAY JAY visited the Purchase's suet feeder, near Cole Harbour, every day from April 15-29, and by May 24, the Cohrs' saw a family group of 2 adults and 3 young at Green Bay. A smattering of other reports came from a variety of areas in addition. BLUE JAYS were still visiting feeders up to early April at least, but after that they had begun to slip into the woods.

Several people commented on AMERICAN CROWS coming to feeders. JKD had 10-15 coming, and mentioned that it was the first time Crows came to his, in Lr. W. Pubnico. P&WH fed Crows in Bass River, and PUB fed them in Stewiacke. Is this a new trend? COMMON RAVENS were found nesting in Economy (FS) and Shubenacadie (RM), and P&WH noted that as usual, they were "browbeating the Crows". BED found one in Dartmouth pulling strips of insulation from an office window for a week, but then left all the material there (?fussy about UFFI), and RBS had one that snatched a fledgeling Common Grackle off a lawn in Lr. Canard, flew off with it in its bill while the distraught parents tried unsuccessfully to browbeat it, and then came back and repeated the performance with a second Grackle. (?delusions of being a hawk).

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES were widely reported in small groups of between 2 and 8 birds from around the province, both in the woods and coming to feeders, all spring (DM,RBS,P&WH,RM,JAP, etc.). JWW reported at least 2 birds in the Annapolis Royal/Clementsport area, seen by several observers, with green plastic bands or tape on one or both legs. Further enquiry failed to reveal this type of banding by any "official" agency. Any ideas? RSD had 2 BOREAL CHICKADEES at his (Lr. W. Pubnico) feeder all winter, last seen March 8, and RCM had a flock of 15 at Shubenacadie on March 27.

The reasonable RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH winter continued into spring (RCM,PUB,JWT,J&WIM), and WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCHES seemed to be up in numbers from last spring, with reports from Paradise (J&WIM), Lr. W. Pubnico (JKD), Wolfville (RGT,BET,JWW--several nests found), Yarmouth (HH) and Barrington (BJS).

BROWN CREEPER sightings were sporadic, with reports from Wolfville Ridge (GWT), Lr. W. Pubnico (RSD), Overton (H&HH), and in 3 different places near

Shubenacadie (RCM), from March through early April.

There was, not unexpectedly, only 1 HOUSE WREN report, from D&LC at Mt. Uniacke on May 1. WINTER WRENS are more common, and one was singing early, March 27, near Brooklyn (Erich Muntz), with others being seen and or heard by RSD at Lr. W. Pubnico on April 1, FLL at Long Lake Park on May 1, JSC at Green Bay on April 22, etc. A MARSH WREN was on Seal Island, May 31 (FLL). The CAROLINA WREN reported in April Nova Scotia Birds at Tusket, was still there till April 11 (S. Bowler).

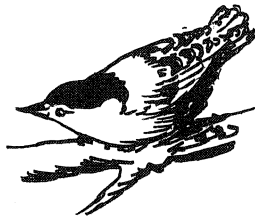
The huge numbers of GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLETS around last winter started to drop off as spring came. RCM reported fair sized flocks around Shubenacadie on March 27, and others were showing verbal and visual signs of breeding activity by mid-April (L&PP,JSC,MAC). RUBY-CROWNED KINGLETS were a few days late this year, with the first reported singing on April 20, in Kentville (RBS), then the next day on Brier Island (H&HH). Multiple reports then came in for the last week of April, from widely scattered areas.

THRUSHES TO STARLING

Are there no VEERIES or SWAINSON'S THRUSHES this year, or are they just not being reported? There is only 1 report of each (IAM,MO) and I have heard very few Veeries, normally one of the commonest Valley woodland sounds. In contrast, HERMIT THRUSHES were well reported, from April 21 onward (H&HH,JSC,MO,RCM,P&PP etc.). Is there now a real discrepancy developing between the relative abundance of these three species, and if so is it related to the more southerly wintering areas within Central and South America of the first two? I hope someone is tabulating breeding bird surveys, banding records etc., of Thrushes from year to year to find these things out. AMERICAN ROBINS, in contrast, are doing well, and there are many reports. Particularly noteworthy were 172 in Canning and 300 in Wolfville on February 19 (fide JWW)—obviously overwinterers. The first migrant was a probable nigrideus race bird on the early date of March 4 at Green Bay (JSC). There were 500+ migrating through Green Bay on the night of March 23 (JSC), and a big influx of breeding plumaged birds into the Valley, March 23-31 (RBS).

This year was definitely the spring of the VARIED THRUSH. One of these rare western vagrants was seen by many observers at Boutillier's Point, St. Margaret's Bay from March 9 through 24 (BLM,GW&JCT,MP, etc.), and another was seen by a lucky few at Reg and Ruth Newell's feeder in White Rock, Kings. Co. for a few days in late March too.

A GRAY CATBIRD seen in Wolfville by Marian Zinck on March 22, may have overwintered. Other than that, they seem to have trickled in from May 14 onwards. The NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD may be becoming more established in the province. This was a bumper spring for the species, with 2 at Arcadia, March 1 (PRD,CRKA), 1 at Tusket, March 10 (ditto), 1 at Second Peninsula from April 29 on (CC) etc. Furthermore, probable and confirmed nesting has already been observed by BED (4 different ones in the Metro area), D&LC and JWT (1 each, Metro area). Three BROWN THRASHERS were seen in Overton (H&HH—"singing voluptuously" (the Thrasher, not the Halls!), in Lr. W. Pubnico (JKD) and Ross Rd., Dartmouth (JAP).



The last WATER PIPIT reported departed from Pubnico Pt. on March 20 (RSD).

A very few late reports of BOHEMIAN WAXWINGS came in from Wolfville (fide JWW), but one record was from April 16 in Inverness Co., C.B. (BED). Reports of CEDAR WAXWINGS received late indicate that they were more numerous than reported in the April Nova Scotia Birds in Wolfville, with JWW reporting flocks of up to 70 from January 7 to April 26. EM reported approximately 100 on March 13 at Glace Bay.

The only comment on EUROPEAN STARLINGS was the "numbers seem to have increased over last year" (DM).

--RBS, ed.

VIREOS AND WARBLERS

An early date record was set by a bravely singing SOLITARY VIREO at Tusket on March 29 (PRD,CRKA). Nearly a month passed before the next report of this species. About 20 individuals, likely seasonal firsts, were noted from Port Joli to Pictou County, May 5-16. More than 10 were counted on May 14 alone, by Clarence Stevens at Sheldrake Lake, Hfx. Co. CSII also listed a WARBLING VIREO on Brier Island, May 22--our only rare vireo report. The RED-EYED VIREO influx was either late or went unnoticed, as only one reporter mentioned them--several were at Shubenacadie on May 26 (RCM).

Ian McLaren's late migration report of fair numbers of warblers arriving on Seal Island, May 28-29 (details with pertinent species) gives us some hope that those species which were hard to find on the mainland this season have merely been overlooked. Only three reports of the late-arriving TENNESSEE WARBLER were received, from May 21-24. An ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER attended a suet feeder at Tribune Head, Hfx. CO., March 8 (fideCSII). A first for the month of March, it may be more appropriate to categorize it as a record late date for winter, rather than a record early spring date.

Something appears to have happened to the NASHVILLE WARBLER migration. Roslyn MacPhee sent in a report of several singing near Shubenacadie on May 11, and that was it. The NORTHERN PARULA arrived on schedule, with the first one checking in at Overton, May 5 (HJH,HGH). Reports thereafter indicated an eastward progression to Pictou Co., by May 12, with Michael Olsen's first at Durham. The YELLOW WARBLER was well reported. The vanguard, not surprisingly, was observed at Yarmouth around May 11 (B&ER), with reports from May 15 onward from various points around mainland Nova Scotia. Michael Olsen reported "an explosion" at Durham on May 22, JAP encountered 12 singing along a half mile stretch of railway track at Grand Pré, May 23, and Seal Island yielded 20 late migrants on May 29 (IAM,FLL).

Bill Morse, as he did last year, bagged the first lovely CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER at Paradise. This one, on April 30, was a very early individual. Eight additional reports were received from across the mainland, beginning at the average arrival date of May 14, at Glenwood, Yar. Co. (JRD). MAGNOLIA WARBLER numbers appear to be down, with reports of only 5 individuals beginning on May 11, but IAM and FLL counted 30 on Seal Island, May 29. Reports were received of 11 CAPE MAY WARBLER individuals, May 18-24. JSC accounted for 9 of these around Green Bay, a "deluge" for that area, she says. She believed them to be transients, as she had never seen any indication of breeding. Allow me to mention two record late (male) BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLERS on Nov. 29, 1988, observed at a Canning feeder (MZ). Even with this belated but interesting information, the BTB picture is decidedly bleak, with only a male at Economy Pt. on May 9 (FS) and one at Kemptville, Yar. Co., May 18 (HGH) being reported.

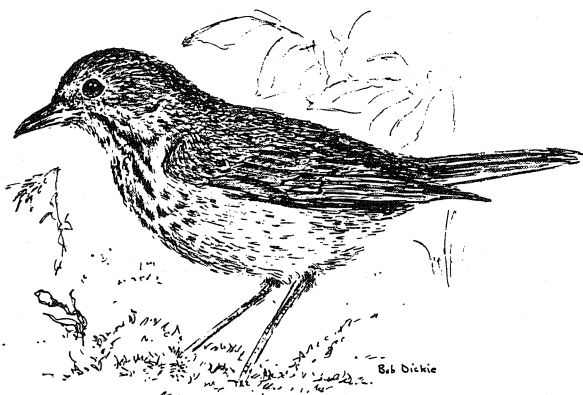
Despite fairly good coverage, YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER numbers may be down as well. (I always seem to write a book on this species, so please bear with me.) TDM writes from Dayton, Yar. Co., that although a number were noted during the winter, he had not seen any this spring. The odd late winter report did trickle in--BLF observed 2

on Wolfville Ridge as late as February 15, and one was seen at Blandford, Lun. Co. on March 9 (GWT,JCT). The next report was of a single at Lr. W. Pubnico, March 26 (DJD), then nothing until Michael Olsen's first at Durham on April 22. Most reports were in the April 30 - May 7 period, indicating that arrival was delayed by a week or two. Very welcome indeed were a few comments such as "abundant" (at Mt. Uniacke--DAC&LC) and "singing all over the place" (Waverley - L&PP). Also welcome was a Cape Breton report of "dozens" at Big Pond, May 6 (JMA). Twenty were counted on Seal Is., May 29.

An extremely rare BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER, only our sixth record, was studied by Peter Ross, Olaf Oftedal et al. on Sable Is., May 19 (fide IAM). Its much more common cousin, the BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER, reached our shores on its mean arrival date of May 9 up Economy way, with 5 or more observed (FS). By May 14, 20+ were in the vicinity of Sheldrake Lake, with several reaching Pictou Co., by May 16--not a bad spring for this species. The uncommon BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER appeared to be up to scratch as well, noted in Hfx. Co. on May 17 (JSC) and in Yar. and Hants Cos., the following day. By month's end reports of 17 individuals were received from all over, including Sable, Brier and Seal Islands.

After an unprecedented winter for PINE WARBLER sightings in Halifax/Dartmouth, it is heartening to see a few around during the spring. Could some of them have made it all the way through our winter? In any case, JWW reported a very drab immature at his Wolfville feeder on April 4, remarking that this species is "almost unheard of in these parts, unlike Metro". Metro managed a spring bird too, singing at that perennial hot spot, Hartlen's Pt., May 10 (FLL et al.). Two males on Seal Is., May 29-30 (IAM,FLL) rounded out the Pine Warbler reports. The PALM WARBLER did very well. First noted at Sambro on April 16, word of about 50 individuals followed swiftly, from Brier Is., to Canso, beginning on April 21. Around midday, April 25, a wave of about 20 arrived on Cape Sable Is. Interest generally dropped off after early May, or else birds were harder to find as they retreated to their boggy breeding areas, and reporting ceased. However, IAM saw "little waves of miserable migrants", predominantly Palms and Yellow-rumps, along the east coast of Cape Breton on May 13.

Except for a single BAY-BREASTED WARBLER on Brier Is., May 22, and 8 migrating through Seal Is., May 29, this species went unreported. Three single BLACKPOLL WARBLERS, May 19, 21 and 23 at Cape Forchu, Shubenacadie and Williams Lake Rd., Hfx. Co., respectively, were all I heard of save for the 30 (possibly residents) on Seal Is., May 29. There were two BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLERS at Green Bay, May 5 (JSC) and 10+ at Economy on May 9 (FS). Subsequent sightings occurred May 10-18 from Yar. to Pictou Cos.



The first AMERICAN REDSTART seen was at Glenwood, Yar. Co., May 14 (JRD), but May 18 seemed to be the day most observers, all the way up to Pictou Co., notched their first of the season. There seemed to be no shortage, thankfully, and besides those reported on the mainland, 40 (mostly young males) were cruising through Seal Is., May 29. The OVENBIRD migration was timely, beginning with a May 11 bird singing at Powder Mill Park (Cohrs), with its loud distinctive song heard in most of its usual haunts by May 22. Only 4 NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH were ferreted out- L, May 13 at Ross Rd., Hfx. Co., which stayed in the area (JAP), 1 near Shubenacadie, May 16 (RCM), 1 at New Ross, May 20 (yours truly) and 1 at Smiley's Park, May 27 (Mac's splendid Hants Co., Field Trip). FLL and BM prevented another recordless spring for the MOURNING WARBLER by scaring up 4 at Riverside, Col. Co., May 26.

The COMMON YELLOWTHROAT arrived a bit late this spring, with RCM again reporting first from Shubenacadie on May 16, but they settled in quite nicely. By May 18, JSC was able to count 6 or 7 at Green Bay. (JWW sent along a report of 13 December sightings in the Valley, the latest being December 17 at Canard poultry Pond.) The only WILSON'S WARBLER reported was at Lr. Three Fathom Harbour, Hfx. Co., on May 26 (FLL, BM). The CANADA WARBLER fared a bit better, with 5 individuals observed, beginning with one at Crousetown, May 19 (Cohrs).

--KNK, ed.

TANAGERS TO TOWHEE

A very early report of SCARLET Tanager was a beautiful male seen by Roger Balanger at Grand Desert on April 8 (fide LAP). It wasn't until May 6 that the next bird was found, a male at Lockeport seen by Russel Crosby (fide BED). Other reports were a male on Sable Island, May 20 (PR); a female on Brier Island, May 21 (IAM) and a male singing in Kentville on May 23 (CSII). Good news of a pair was chanced upon during the Morse's field trip in Paradise on May 27 (RBS).

At least three of the NORTHERN CARDINALS IN THE Yarmouth area made it through the winter. June Graves reports a pair and an extra male were in Yarmouth town at least until March 11. Other scattered reports are: April 21, a male at a feeder in Sydney River (fide JMA); April 26, a male seen by Elizabeth d'Entremont at her feeder in Lr. W. Pubnico and a male singing from an exposed perch on Chestnut Street, Yarmouth, during the last week of April. There were two reports for May--1 a female at the Hall feeder in Overton on May 5, and a pair near the lighthouse road seen by Don Sands in Digby on May 18. These overwintering and paired reports are encouraging indeed and if the trend continues, it will not be long before nesting is once again confirmed after almost 10 years.

It is difficult to predict the arrival dates for ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAKS as some years they arrive in numbers during mid-April and other years they aren't found until mid-May. The first record this spring was a female at the Hall's feeder in Overton on May 9. Other first were: May 17, one in Kentville (RBS); May 19 "several" at Durham, Pictou Co. (MO); May 21, 4 males on Brier Island (IAM) and a female was seen by Joy Gates on May 21, along the Sydney/Glace Bay Highway.

The Bridgetown BLUE GROSBEAK at the home of Marion Graves survived the winter and before its departure on or about April 13, it gradually molted into beautiful male plumage. The only other sighting was a first year male at a feeder in Halifax from April 14 to 22, seen by Dorothy Noseworthy (fide BED).

There were no tremendous "showers" of INDIGO BUNTINGS this spring; however, there were six sightings. Male birds were found May 4 at Wellington, Yar. Co. (CRKA); May 8 at Lr. W. Pubnico (ED); May 14 at Three Fathom Harbour (DW fide BED); May 20-26 on Sable Island (PR); May 27 at Kentville, seen and heard singing by Tim Vernon. A female was on Seal Island, May 30 (IAM, FLL).

A male RUFIOUS-SIDED TOWHEE was located by Jim Taylor on March 1 in Dartmouth. This bird likely overwintered in the area.

SPARROWS

TREE SPARROWS were not nearly as abundant as in other years this past winter and spring. Small groups of up to five birds were still coming to feeders until late April with reports coming from various and widely scattered areas. May 5 was the date when CHIPPING SPARROWS were first heard or seen in several areas from Yarmouth to Economy. The initial reports from most areas except Cape Breton, indicate a good showing for this species. The FIELD SPARROW which Harold and Bernie Forsyth had found in Greenwich, was successful in overwintering and was seen at least until March 19. One other sighting was one which turned up at Raymond d'Entremont's feeder in Lr. W. Pubnico, April 27. The Kingston area once again had VESPER SPARROWS singing on territory on April 30. Jim Taylor reports at least three there on that date. One other peculiar occurrence was one which was found atop North Mountain, C.B.H. National Park on May 14 (IAM,FLL,PM).

The LARK BUNTING which Joe and Joannie Robertson found near Kentville, May 22, was the 12th occurrence in the province and only the 4th spring record. Unfortunately, this bird knew it was in the wrong area and almost immediately headed west in search of others of its kind.

SAVANNAH SPARROWS arrived on time with the first report from Brier Island on April 21. Hubert and Helen Hall had several at Pond Cove and at the southwestern end of the island. The main arrivals took place during the first week of May with several birds seen or heard in appropriate territory. the "IPSWICH" race of the Savannah Sparrow arrived at the end of March. However, only a very few birds were found. IAM had a single bird near Grand Desert on March 30; there were two at Hemeon Head on March 31, and more seen there later in the spring (DHY). Others were one at Cherry Hill Beach on April 21 (GWT,JCT) and one found at Hartlen's Point on May 11 (FLL,JR). SHARP-TAILED SPARROWS have just arrived in time to make it into this report. These late migrants were found first by Fulton Lavender and Blake Maybank on May 26 at Hartlen's Point where there were two birds. On May 29 to 31, three were located on Seal Island (IAM,FLL).

FOX SPARROWS were extremely well reported this spring. These large sparrows were found at feeders by the last week of March in all areas including the southern regions where they have traditionally been rare in spring. Pairs found on territory were located on the LaHave Islands on May 20 (SJF,BH) and on the Prospect Road, Hfx. Co., April 8 (BED,BM). There were numerous reports of SONG SPARROWS and the encouraging news is that their numbers appear to be back to normal after apparent decreases over the last few years. LINCOLN'S SPARROWS were found in three areas although it's known that they nest rather commonly in suitable habitat throughout the province. The first this spring was a bird singing near Shubenacadie on May 16 (RCM). On May 24 a male was watched closely as it sang near Kearney Lake by all on the NSBS field trip there. Lastly, two were seen at Long Lake near Spryfield, May 24 (FLL). An early SWAMP SPARROW arrived at Lr. W. Pubnico on April 9, this only three days later than the record. (DJD). Other firsts were April 16 at Shubenacadie (RCM); April 23 at Broad Cove (Cohrs); and 2 migrants at Cape Sable on April 25 (IAM,PM).

It is difficult to pinpoint a period when WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS arrived "en masse" and from the scattered reports and wide range in dates, it appears they arrived in small groups from April 1 to May 5. The first wobbly songs were heard in Waverley on April 1 with subsequent records from most parts of the province. There even seemed to be a slight increase this spring.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS were found in several areas. There were two visiting a feeder in Dayton, Yar. Co., during April, being last seen on May 6. Casey Baldwin saw an adult at Duncan's Cove on May 7, and an adult was found at Fort Lawrence on May 14 by Carol Currie. Another was visiting the feeder of Richard and Pat Lawrence in Halifax on May 15. A report of a HARRIS' SPARROW came too late for the April issue. Don and Joan Keddie had one of this species frequently during January and February in the Wilmot area. (fide JWW).

There was no shortage of DARK-EYED JUNCOS noted this spring. Fair numbers made it through the winter and many migrants arrived during March and April to join them. Raymond d'Entremont of Lr. W. Pubnico saw over one hundred in a single flock on March 19 at Quinan, Yar. Co. The earliest ever record of a nest and eggs was found by Jim Taylor on May 6 at Port Howe, Cum. Co.

There were no spring reports of LAPLAND LONGSPURS, although there were six seen regularly at Grand Pré until February 28. (J&GWT,RGT,BET,JET). SNOW BUNTINGS on the other hand, seemed to linger especially in the Grand Pré area and South Shore. Although there were no April reports there were several thousand seen on February 28 at Grand Pré (Tufts) and a notable "incurSION" of almost breeding-plumaged birds at Cherry Hill, Broad Cove, Crescent Beach areas on March 4 (Cohrs). The latest date was March 22, when the Cohrs saw 12 at Crescent Beach and 15 in complete breeding plumage at Cherry Hill Beach.

ICTERIDS

The first BOBOLINK arrived at Advocate on May 6 (GT). Then one was seen in Lr. W. Pubnico on May 9 (DJD), but it wasn't until mid-month that the first males with their bubbly song took up territories in most other locales. RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS began arriving as early as March 18, but the majority of first sightings were between March 24 and 31. There were a few reports indicating that the numbers were down compared with records of previous years.

The only report of MEADOWLARK (SP) came from David and Joan Young who found one at Ragged Island, Yar. Co., March 3. This bird likely overwintered in the area as the normal spring arrival date is mid April. There were numerous sightings of YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRDS in the valley from January through May and it is difficult to determine how many birds there actually were. Going back to January there was a female near Kingston seen by Frank Hawkins on January 2, then a male found at Middleton by Don and Joan Keddie on February 24. A male was located in Berwick on March 23 by Jacinta Harvey and Garnet West. From April 8 to April 16, there was a sighting of a male or males at Port Williams, Upper Canard, and Wolfville. The last report was of a male singing in Hantsport from May 6 to at least May 28, apparently calling a small duck pond home territory (Peter Voss et al.).

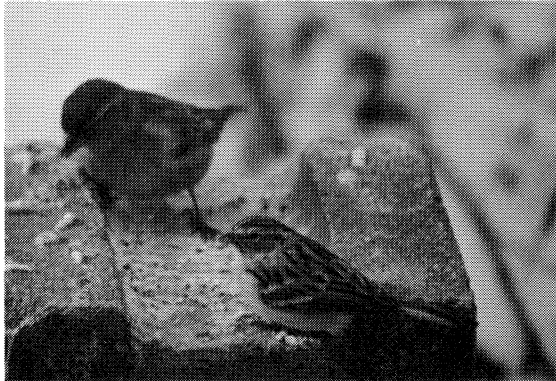
RUSTY BLACKBIRDS began appearing on schedule in late March, the first being at Little Harbour, Shel. Co., March 29 (DHY). By the end of April pairs were established near Canso, West Petpeswick and Georgefield. (RCM,FLL,DAM). The average arrival date for COMMON GRACKLE was March 20, although there were a few locations such as Economy, where there was a flock of 30 on March 17 (FS). From March 24 to April 10 they were building in numbers, resting periodically in large trees then continuing their journey. Although BROWN-HEADED COWBIRDS were noticeably absent in many areas and scarce in others during the winter months, they returned in full force to all areas by April 1. Typical first spring sightings were 6 at Big Pond, March 29 (JMA), 8 at Glace Bay, April 2 (Elsie MacRury) and about 30 at Durham, Pictou Co., April 10 (MO).

A total of seven ORCHARD ORIOLES were found in three different areas. On May 22,23 two young males and two females were seen by many observers on Brier Island and at the same time two immature males were seen on Bon Portage Island by several NSBS members. Sid and Betty June Smith saw the last bird, a young male, at Barrington on May 26-27. This is a very large number of these birds considering that for a period of thirty years the total number of individuals seen in spring is just over fifty. NORTHERN ORIOLES were well reported. The female which was at the Hayes feeder in Tusket Falls for most of the winter was still there March 6. The first spring males arrived in Lr. W. Pubnico and at Glenwood, Yar. Co., May 4. (DJD,HGH). Other reports came from the Kentville, Wolfville area, Dayton, Durham, Shubenacadie and Antigonish as well as several from the Halifax, Dartmouth area.

FINCHES TO HOUSE SPARROW

The BRAMBLING which caused all the excitement at the Hayes' feeder in Tusket Falls was still present on March 6, when several birders from the Valley made a successful journey to see it. PINE GROSBEAKS were extremely scarce throughout the winter but did begin to show up toward the middle of April. Roslyn MacPhee had eight in ones or twos in Georgefield on April 30 and a pair was seen on the NSBS field triip near Kearney Lake on May 24. PURPLE FINCHES were uncommon during the winter, but returned by mid March, gracing the feeders with their colour. Sightings were province-wide of single birds or pairs in March, but by the first week of April the numbers had built up substantially. PRD and CRKA had 20 or more at the feeder in Tusket on April 4. Judging by the recent records of HOUSE FINCH and by the eight occurrences this spring these birds will most certainly be found breeding in the next few years. The records are as follows:

- April 11 - female at Centreville (Joe and Pat Clifford)
- April 17 - male at West Pubnico (Jerome d'Eon)
- April 27 - male at Wolfville (Bill and Brenda Thexton)
- April 28 - male at Bedford (Clarence Stevens)
- April 29 - male at Yarmouth (Eric and Barbara Ruff)
- May 3 -- male at Durham (Michael Olsen)
- May 4 -- a apir at Clementsvale (Gini Proulx)
- May 21 -- a male singing at Port Williams and apparently a female was with it for a few days (Richard Stern)



A House Sparrow dwarfs an immature Chipping Sparrow at Richard Lawrence's feeder in Halifax, on May 15.

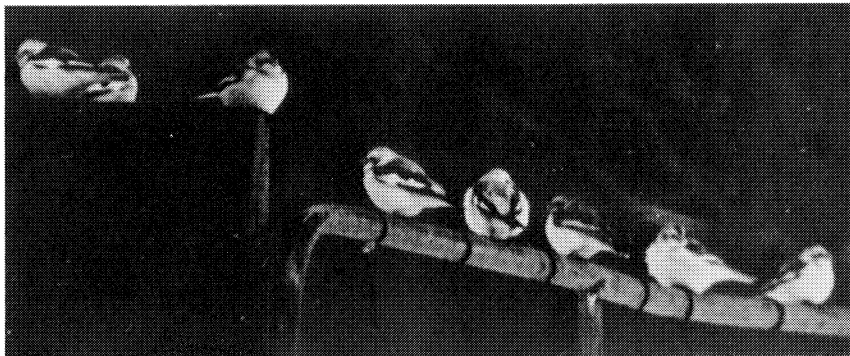
RED CROSSBILLS were found in each month, March, April and May. During March they were seen in Lun. Co., at The Forties, near Crescent Beach and on the LaHave Islands (KLK,D&LC,JSC). Larger roaming flocks were seen at Green Bay on May 23 (Cohrs) and there were about 25 at Annapolis Royal on May 27 (BED). The recently much more common WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL was well reported with breeding activities observed from March through May. At Five Island Park Francis Spalding watched a female feeding a fledgling on March 27, while only 60 feet away a nest was being completed by another.

There were two reports of COMMON REDPOLL this season. The first was one bird found at Glenwood, Yar. Co. by Jerome d'Eon and the other was of five birds on March 24 at C. B. H. National Park (FLL). PINE SISKINS were scarcer than in recent years. This is not to be unexpected as the wandering of these small finches takes them to other areas where they will stay indefinitely returning to our area if the mood should change. From late March to mid-April very small numbers were noticed and larger flocks of a maximum of 22 arrived in May. The last of the small finches, AMERICAN GOLDFINCHES filled the gap left by siskins and redpolls as they were very plentiful from March through to May. In Tusket 50-60 appeared at the feeder on March 18 (PRD,CRKA); 20 or more were seen coming to feeders in the Wolfville area during April (GWT,JCT); and in May there were small flocks in Barrington from the 15-29 (BJS,SFS).

EVENING GROSBEAKS are by nature very unpredictable in their travels. This year has not so far proved to be a year of abundance for this species, although a few members had large numbers regularly in their localities. The Hemeon's in Bass River had up to 150 at their feeder through February and March but as breeding season neared the numbers fell to 70 during April. Larger flocks were 60+ at Brier Island on April 30 (E&BR); 40+ at Wolfville Ridge during April (GWT,JCT) and about 130 in March dropping to about 30 in April in Durham. (MO).

Those mysterious HOUSE SPARROWS are still reported as decreasing in areas where they have normally been abundant. Joy Gates of Sydney writes that they have all but disappeared from their regular haunts. A note from Charlie Allen states that of two areas in Tusket and Eel Rive, where the House Sparrows had completely disappeared there are now small numbers, seemingly intent on rebuilding their once large flocks.

--DAC, ed.



Shirley Cohrs snapped these fence-sitting Snow Buntings, part of a regular blizzard of them at Petite Riviere on March 22.

DEADLINE FOR RECEIPT OF REPORTS

for

the JANUARY 1990 issue

NOVEMBER 15, 1989

Bird Reports to the RECORDS EDITOR

Mr. Bob Dickie,
43 Deepwood Crescent,
Halifax, N.S. B3M 2Y5

Articles, sketches and letters to the Editor

Mrs. Shirley Cohrs,
8 Rosemount Ave.,
Halifax, N.S. B3N 1X8

Photographs to

Dr. I.A. McLaren,
1755 Cambridge Street,
Halifax, N.S. B3H 4A8

The Robins arrived en masse on March 26. On the 27th there was an ice storm--no bare grass or tree leaves on which to hunt for worms or insects.

"Chopped apples are the thing," I said, so off we went to the store. Apples were very expensive that day, but there was a special on bananas. "Just as good--fruit is fruit," quoth my husband. So, we returned with **many** bananas, which were lovingly sliced and tastefully arranged in back and front gardens. The Robins were not particularly interested and the fruit remained untasted for a day or two. A curious neighbour (who **should** know better by now) queried, "Why all the bananas?" The off-hand reply was "we are awaiting the gorilla migration any day now!"

J. S. C.

SANCTUARY AND SCHOLARSHIP TRUST FUND

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT PROJECT

David Currie

The first Christmas Bird Count in Nova Scotia was carried out in 1913 when two birders, Harrison F. Lewis and E. Chesley Allen saw a total of twelve species. Since that time the specie total has reached 219; we have had as many as thirty-two counts and hundreds of people taking part in a single year.

For at least thirteen years, Ross Anderson enjoyed daily record keeping of not only counts held in Nova Scotia, but all counts held throughout Canada! This huge undertaking was done in the form of handwritten ledgers which are now safely stored in the Nova Scotia Archives and labelled **The Ross Anderson Collection**. With 76 years of wintering bird populations available it is only logical that this wealth of information should be used and made available to those whose research may require it.

Through a grant from the Nova Scotia Bird Society Sanctuary and Scholarship Trust Fund, I have begun to list this data with the use of a computer. At present, over thirty years of Nova Scotia Christmas Count material has been transcribed to the computer software. Each count, bird, hour, mile and participant can now be related to each other mathematically and graphically to show change.

At this time, a summary of the total individuals by species and year for the province from 1952 to the present is available. Likewise, each individual count in the last thirty-six years in this province can be accessed and printed almost immediately. Included on a database program is the highest number of a particular species seen, the year of that happening, the count in which it occurred, and the year in which that species was most numerous. These may be found in an instant. Once completed, this material will offer the efficient availability of interesting and worthwhile information on winter bird life and the growth of the "count" pasttime in Nova Scotia.

S A N D R A C . M Y E R S

1939--1989



Sandra was my dear friend. She was a friend to very many people. One could say that she was a friend of everyone who knew her. There was a warmth and enthusiasm about Sandra which communicated itself to others so that wherever she was, those around her felt happier.

To say that she will be missed is an understatement. She was such a special person that her absence leaves an emptiness that will last for a very long time.

Shirley Cohrs

Sandra Myers
Treasurer 1978-1982
Treasurer 1986-1987
Vice President 1987-1989

THE SEVENTH OF A SERIES ABOUT MEMBERS...

PROFILES...



Carin Alma Stein was born in Frankfurt/Main, Germany on 18 March, 1934. She emigrated to Canada in 1949.

Carin attended the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Halifax and received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the College of the Sacred Heart, Newton (Boston) Mass., in 1955, an M.A. from Dalhousie University in 1956, and a Bachelor of Library Science from the University of Toronto in 1961. She married Frank Somers in August, 1958.

Carin served as Registrar, then lectured in French at St. Mary's University from 1956-60. From 1958-1960 she was employed at the Halifax City Regional Library. She was assistant and then chief librarian at the Halifax County Regional Library and in 1973-1974, supervisor of Public Libraries, Nova Scotia Provincial Library. She was also an occasional lecturer at Dalhousie University's School of Library Science.

In 1953, she received the Governor General's medal and the Queen's silver jubilee medal in 1977. She has served on the executive of the Canadian Library Association and is a past-president of the Atlantic Provinces Library Association.

Carin became interested in birds while visiting Newfoundland but really "caught the bug" while on a field trip directed by Charlie Allen.

On November 3, 1973, Carin's world was shattered in a terrible automobile accident that took the life of two other people and left her with massive injuries that kept her in the hospital for almost two months. The accident damaged her hip so badly that the hip had to be replaced, forcing her to rely on a cane to get around. Eventually it forced her into an early retirement, but could not dampen her happy disposition and it could not make her give up her birding.

In 1986, Carin accepted a position as Director of the Nova Scotia Bird Society and this year she agreed to serve as the Society's Vice President.

Beside birding, Carin is an amateur photographer and an avid angler. She loves to travel and has birded in Jamaica, Florida, Barbados, Scotland, throughout New England, the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland. She has a "soft spot" in her heart for Newfoundland because it is so beautiful and because that's where she really developed her interest in birds and birding.

If you're out birding some day and about to give up because "the going is too tough" and then you meet a lady using a cane and sporting a great big smile, don't ask who she is, just say "Hi Carin".

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

March 25 - Glace Bay Sanctuary

Instead of the planned field trip members gathered to honour Sara MacLean who had always been their leader for this trip.

"BIRD WATCHERS HOLD MEETING (March 25, 1989, The Glace Bay Courier)

Members of the Cape Breton Branch of the Nova Scotia Bird Society met on Saturday afternoon in the Museum of the Lyceum Building on George Street instead of holding their planned monthly tour, which was to have been led by the late Mrs. Sara MacLean. Snaps and slides of previous tours and of various birds seen and photographed were shown by Andrew Gingall, along with snap albums from other members.

Mrs. Nancy More, President of the Old Sydney Historical Society, welcomed the group and a delicious lunch of tea and shortbread was served before adjournment.

The storm which engulfed Cape Breton with 35 centimetres of snow had already started before the meeting adjourned and continued until late on Easter Sunday."

Edie MacLeod

April 29 - Two Rivers Park, C. B.

It was sad to go bird watching without Sara MacLean, but we had a beautiful day on April 29. We met at Marion Bridge and went on to the Two Rivers Park. We went in to Cecil Hussey's and Frances showed us turtle eggs down by the shore. The Mira and Salmon Rivers were never more beautiful. We ate our lunch beside the Salmon, after a tour of the park. We had fourteen observers and identified twenty-four species.

Bertha Hopkins

May 17 - Halifax County Warbler Walk

We met at 0600 this year for the first time, and it was better. The weather smiled on us for once and lots of people (12) came for the show. Fortunately the migration smiled on us, too: as of the weekend previous, most of the warblers had not appeared, but they all came on Monday and Tuesday. On the day of the walk we expected it to rain, but it dawned weakly sunny. At least it kept the blackflies from eating us alive (as John Cohrs said, they were "just sampling the menu").

After a short walk past the occupied Tree Swallow boxes and barking dogs, we could hear ourselves and our prey above the traffic, and soon came upon a Solitary Vireo and Black-throated Green warbler, both first for the year for me. The Golden-crowned Kinglets and Purple Finches sang all around us, as did the Juncos and Song Sparrows and Whitethroats; we even heard a Winter Wren or two, but precious little did we see. The birds were curiously hard to budge from their perches, all about 100m from the road in the midst of dense trees.

However, one bird came out and gave us a good look at him (I think it was a him): a late Phoebe, pumping his tail on a small blossoming maple in the front yard of the last house in. He was the first I had seen for several years. Why there, and so late? I don't know.

We sharpened our ears for the "high wheedlers": Blackburnian, Bay-brested, Black and White, Cape May, and Blackpoll, and, over the course of the morning, saw or heard the first three. The Ovenbirds too, were singing (but not visible) from perches about fifteen feet off the ground. Only the Palms in the upland Tamarack bog were willing to sit in the treetops and serenade us. The Magnolia showed himself only once, but then did it beautifully, right beside a Ruby-crowned Kinglet which was literally shaking himself into a blur as he poured out his spring song.

It was a day of avian contention. We watched two male Whitethroats rolling in

the dust in their fight over an unconcerned female; later two Bay-breasted Warblers did the same in the air over our heads; so did the Purple Finches, which fought with their songs more than their bodies. The Pine Grosbeaks were a triangle, too, but sang their competitions like the Purple Finches.

We found rabbits and Swamp Sparrows in the upper bog, and two of us were lucky enough to glimpse a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, which then took a powder. On the way back, a pair of Ruffed Grouse appeared beside the road, unwilling to fly but happy to run as fast as we could pursue them. A big black shape drifted off a treetop and away into the woods behind-- we assume a Goshawk. It was a good morning and yielded a total of 30 species. However, who counts in the springtime?

Fred Dobson

May 24 - Early Morning Warbler Walk

Ordinarily it is futile to bring a telescope with tripod on a woodland walk, especially when the subjects of the venture are usually moving about far too quickly to allow you to aim the scope, let alone focus it. Although all 15 participants were equipped with binoculars, this day good fortune was with us and many of the 40 species were viewed through the telescope.

The wood road near Kearney Lake is a lovely leisurely walk which will always provide a variety of bird life that can be viewed with relative ease. The wide trail allows you the opportunity to see large areas without obstructions and ample time to see birds flying from one side to the other.

Of the twelve species of warblers seen, including such notable mentions as Black-throated Blue and Blackburnian, five allowed us all to see them more closely through the scope. The warm sun seemed to call "time out" for the birds to catch up on preening of feathers and voicing their territorial rights. Osprey to Winter Wren, each an unfamiliar bird for some, co-operated graciously and provided each of us with special mental pictures which will be recalled in years to come. A Lincoln's sparrow singing just 20 feet away allowed us unlimited viewing, likewise a Rusty Blackbird, Gray Jay, Hermit Thrush and Pine Grosbeak.

It was a pleasure to be a part of such an enthusiastic and appreciative group of birders and to have the birds take time from feeding forays for our benefit.

David Currie

May 27 - Sand Lake and Mira Area, C.B.

Nine members of the Cape Breton Branch of the N.S.B.S. met at Dearn's Corner for the May field trip. We hoped to see many of the first warblers but the weather did not co-operate. Most of the previous days that week had been beautiful with warm sunny conditions, but this Saturday dawned cool and damp. One hoped it would improve later but it did not. There was fog and a damp, bone chilling atmosphere. However, we walked down to the sanctuary area at Big Glace Bay Lake where there is always something to see. We were fortunate that the tide was low and there were several Great Blue Herons probing the mud flats. There was also a good population of Willets and Common Terns flying gracefully overhead. Cormorants and Cliff Swallows were also sighted in the area, as well as Herring Gulls. Black Ducks were also there as they always are. We were not able to linger as long as we would have liked as everybody was feeling chilled so we moved to what we hoped would be warmer areas.

We made our way along the coast road but did not see anything as the fog was too thick. We went into the Black Brook cemetery which is more sheltered and was less foggy. This is a charming little cemetery which borders on the water and is quite old. It is still in use and well kept but without the manicured look of newer cemeteries. Wild flowers, such as mayflowers, are allowed to creep over the ground and there are many nice native trees. They are are many unusual headstones with various quotations on them, dating back a hundred years. Edie MacLeod and myself had travelled the area a couple of days before and she spotted a hole in a dead tree stump which was obviously

a woodpecker's home under construction. When we arrived on Saturday, the hole was considerably deeper and was thought to be the work of a flicker. Later on, when I returned to the car to collect my field guide I disturbed the bird at work on the hole--very definitely a flicker. We roamed this area for a while and there were more herons and Willets in the water--this seems to be a good year for the Great Blue Heron in Cape Breton. In the trees was an Olive-sided Flycatcher, robins everywhere, Song Sparrows and chickadees. A junco was heard but not seen.

We could have stayed in this attractive area longer but decided to move away to enable the flicker to return to his work undisturbed. The next stop was at Homeville, where there is a creek and often a rewarding area for shore birds. However, there were fishermen there so there were not too many birds. We did see our first warblers in some spruce trees--Yellow-rumped Warblers. We also saw a Sharp-shinned Hawk chasing something, probably another warbler. There were Blue-winged Teal here as well, in the shallow water.

This area was chilly and damp too, so we moved on to the provincial camp and picnic ground at Mira, where we enjoyed our lunch. This is a lovely park which borders on the beautiful Mira River. It was much warmer here and the trees were lovely in their delicate spring leaves and blossoms. Here there were more birds in the shrubby areas--White-throated Sparrows, Blue Jays, Goldfinches, more Yellow-rumped Warblers and Grackles. A kingfisher was spotted by the river. There were also several red squirrels scampering around on the grass. White-winged Scoters were seen just before arriving at the park.

Altogether a good day if somewhat disappointing with the weather and the lack of warblers, which was probably due to the low temperature. We enjoyed meeting old friends and look forward to the June trip. Other birds seen were Red-winged Blackbirds, Tree Swallows, Crows, Starlings and House Sparrows. The House Sparrows are no longer abundant in this area, but one person had them at her feeder before leaving home.

Joy Gates.

May 27 - Hants County Field Trip

The early morning fog and rain of Halifax merged with the fog and drizzle of Hants County to form the "frazzle" (not to be found in the dictionary) that greeted the twenty birders at Mount Uniacke. Birders and birds were slow to respond to this type of weather with a slight breeze blowing, so the first two stops at the Picnic Park and Uniacke Grounds were disappointingly quiet. However, the Hummingbirds were spotted heading for the flowering quince. Then just after sighting a Downy Woodpecker, the sound of a female Hairy Woodpecker drew our attention to a partially dead apple tree where we discovered her nest and listened as the brood within noisily demanded to be fed.

As the morning progressed so did the weather and birds--very favourably. The hills and vales of the Hillsvale area brought forth the songs of the Red-eyed and Solitary Vireos; Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees' Ruby and Golden Crowned Kinglets as well as numerous Redstarts and Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Checking out the area to be covered prior to the Field Trip Day, I'd decided to include a new spot which turned out to be a Birders' Paradise. As we stepped out of our cars we were greeted by a singing male Rose-breasted Grosbeak whose robin-like song was soon drowned out by singing Kinglets, warblers such as Magnolia, Parula, Tennessee and more and more Redstarts. This stop brought the sighting of the second Pileated Woodpecker. It was a lifer for more than one that morning and a thrilling sight for everyone!-- not one Pileated Woodpecker but two for the day!!

We reluctantly left this new area with the hope developers won't discover it, and drove on to our regular pond stop where a Snipe was flushed into view and where the Bobolinks sand from field, fencepost and tree top. At our lunch break, the Northern Waterthrush sang continually.

The afternoon brought sun and hot temperatures as well as our first sighting of a Red-tailed Hawk, an Osprey (carrying a fish to its nest), a pair of Ring-necked Ducks, Spotted Sandpipers, Killdeer and Willets.

The day's total came to 73 species, a satisfying count for those who had their first experience birding on the back roads of Hants County, as well as for those who have been on them many times previously.

Margaret A. Clark

May 27 - Paradise/Bridgetown (Anna. Co)

May 27 dawned cloudy, but mercifully all the rain had fallen during the night and we enjoyed a good day weatherwise. It was also a good day from the standpoint of companionship and birds. The high point of the trip was a pair of Scarlet Tanagers, apparently nesting on the side of the South Mountain. The male's colours were breathtaking, and we all saw him and heard his song.

During the morning walk in the woods we identified many warblers. The leaf cover kept **them** covered, but we heard lots of song. We had one mystery song, which remained a mystery in spite of using tapes and records to identify it.

In the afternoon we checked out sewage ponds and marshes. A kindly farmer penned up his cattle so that we could view the sewage ponds without their company. We parted about 4:00 p.m. For us the day brought a sense of nostalgia--leading our last trip in this area. I believe there have been seven in all, each rewarding. A big thank you to all who have been in Paradise with us on these walks.

Jean and Bill Morse



Peter MacLeod snapped this feeding frenzy of Greater Shearwaters last summer on Emerald Bank.

LATE FIELD TRIP REPORTS

May 7 - Amherst Point Bird Sanctuary

The annual NSBS field excursion was held as planned. However, rain and wind dampened the enthusiasm of the 15 members who showed up for the event. The morning was spent examining the lakes and marshes of the Sanctuary, but the afternoon excursion to the salt marsh was cancelled. Despite the miserable viewing conditions, a good variety of waterfowl species were observed including Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, and American Wigeon.

--Al Smith

May 20, Warbler Walk, Yarmouth, County

A total of 27 enthusiastic novice and experienced birders assembled at Carleton School for our nine o'clock departure.

The day was splendid weatherwise and from a warm-up tour of the planned route we knew that a good variety of birds would be seen. This year a new route was chosen--a departure from the traditional Perry Road. The route started on the Mink Lake sub-division road and then led through a neighbouring property, through mature hardwood land and mixed forest. This route has better visibility than the heavily treed Perry Road and features the warbler family in respectable numbers. A total of 9 species of warblers was seen on this route.

A splendid break for lunch was enjoyed at the home of Charlie Allen. It is always a treat to share his warm hospitality. After lunch we headed back to the area of the power-generating station at Tusket Falls, where we saw 4 more warbler species.

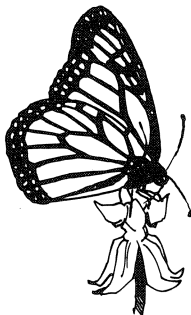
Warblers seen include Northern Parula, American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, Magnolia Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Ovenbird, Palm Warbler, Black and White Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, and American Redstart.

Other interesting species included a Red Crossbill, Catbird, White-breasted Nuthatch and 3 Osprey circling the hardwood ridge east of Mink Lake. An unusual encounter with 2 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers was certainly the show stopper! As about 20 of us watched a nest hole in a hardwood tree, first one, then two Sapsuckers flew in. Very soon after they both flew out, one landing on a nearby limb, followed by the second which turned out to be the male. They then proceeded to mate in what was surely the most public event in this pair of Sapsuckers' lives.

Tantalizingly heard but not seen were calls of Winter Wren, Barred Owl and Black-throated Blue Warbler.

A total of 42 species was seen for the day. My thanks to all who participated and helped.

Hubert Hall



FORTHCOMING FIELD TRIPS

REMINDER: Please be sure to continue phoning the field trip leader or contact person ahead of time. All trips have names and phone numbers listed for your convenience.



- Saturday July 29 CRESCENT & CHERRY HILL BEACHES--a focus on the more common migrating shorebirds. Leaders: John & Shirley Cohrs (H) 477-6036 (Cottage) 688-2131. Meet at the entrance to Crescent Beach at 0830 hrs. Be prepared for a short walk at Crescent in the morning and a more rugged walk at Cherry Hill in the p.m.
- Saturday August 12 YARMOUTH AREA--shorebirds. Leader: Eric Ruff (H) 742-8145 (W) 742-5539 at the CPR rail station at 0900 hrs. Bring a lunch and suitable footwear for rocky and wet walking.

- Sunday August 13 FULLER'S BRIDGE C.B.--Leader: Hedley Hopkins (562-0405). Meet at Marion Bridge at 0800 hrs.
- Sept. 2,3 & 4 SEAL ISLAND WEEKEND--Leader: Peter MacLeod. Passage and accommodations are limited and a fee will be required. All arrangements can be made by contacting Peter MacLeod at 477-4539. Be sure to make your reservations early for this rewarding excursion. Please note that unfavourable weather conditions may make it necessary to use Bon Portage Island as an alternate.
- Saturday Sept. 16 LOUISBOURG AND KENSINGTON COVE C.B.--Fall migrants. Meet at Marion Bridge at 0800 hrs. For more information call Andrew Gingell at 564-8298.
- October 7,8 & 9 THANKSGIVING ON BON PORTAGE ISLAND--Leader: Peter MacLeod. Passage and accommodation are limited and a fee will be required. Always an interesting time of year for late fall migrants and storm blown strays for which Bon Portage lies haven. All arrangements can be made by contacting Peter MacLeod at 477-4539. Please make reservations early.
- Sunday Oct. 29 EASTERN SHORE-MARTINIQUE BEACH --Leader: Bob Dickie (443-0993). Meet at the shopping centre at the end of the Porter's Lake Rd. at 0900 hrs. We will visit several locations from Martinique to Lawrencetown.
- Sunday Feb. 25 SEWER STROLL--Leader: Bill Caudle (465-3977). This all day trip begins at Herring Cove from where we will work our way into the city of Halifax then around Bedford Basin and several stops in Dartmouth before ending at Harten's Point. Meet at 0830 hrs. in the Spryfield Town Centre parking lot (Zeller's).

Please direct any comments, questions or suggestions to Jim Taylor, 69 Woodlawn Rd., Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, B2W 2S2 or call 434-8516.

MSKEGOOAKADE*

by C. R. K. Allen

ED. Note: Reprinted from N.S.B.S. Newsletter, Vol. 19, No. 2, May 1977 for all those who have asked and for newer members to enjoy.



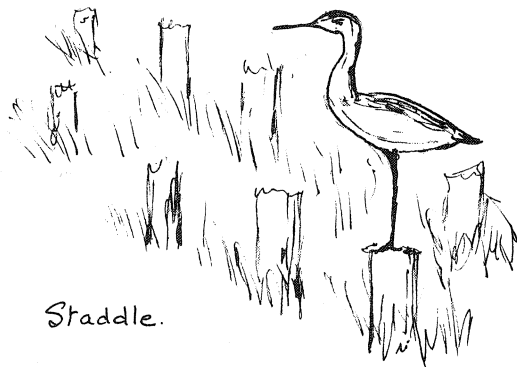
Woodland edges of the Salt Marsh.

The salt marshes which fringe the estuaries of the Chebogue and Tusket rivers in southwestern Nova Scotia are among the few remaining undisturbed 'natural' areas in this part of the country. They are numerous and vary greatly in area from a few acres to several square miles; but though differing in size, they are uniform in character and in the harsh and challenging nature of their environment, and very few plants and animals have succeeded in adapting to their exacting conditions. Those which have done so however, have filled the marsh with teeming life from spring to late autumn.

The principal cover is grass, three species, all members of the genus *Spartina*, and all going by the common name "cord grass". Each favors an area of different salinity so that their stands are distinct and can be distinguished at a distance by height and shade of green. In some places, the salinity is too high even for these grasses and such places are sparsely occupied by plants with very high salt tolerance, for example sea blite and samphire, the latter eagerly sought by "wild-food" gourmets as one of the choicest of the native pot herbs.

Although relatively undisturbed now, the sea marshes were in the past regularly invaded by men who cut one of the species of cord grass every summer as "marsh hay"—greatly prized as livestock fodder. Unlike the upland hay, this was not stored in barns but built into stacks right on the marsh. To prevent them from being carried away by high tides, these stacks were built on groups of posts driven into the mud and standing several feet high with a tall pole in the centre around which the stack was constructed. This structure was called a "staddle", a word of obscure derivation, and the marsh is still dotted with them, although this sort of haying is almost obsolete today. Now the staddles serve as perches for crows, hawks, Willets and other birds which live or visit the area.

*Marshlands (Micmac)



Staddle.

These marshes play a vital role in the economy of the neighboring sea--they are great processing plants which receive their raw materials from the land via the rivers, and pour out their finished products as rich nutrients through the estuaries on the ebbing tides.

The resources of the marsh are shared by many creatures from the surrounding territory--creatures of all sizes and many species. Predatory insects like dragonflies, robber flies and tiger beetles feed on the hordes of midges and mosquitos. There are no amphibians nor reptiles in our northern salt marshes but a number of mammals either visit or make their homes there. Meadow voles and shrews of several species live in the drier portions and venture out into the cord grass saltings at low tide; raccoons and mink roam freely over the whole area, otters hunt along the creeks and foxes smell out the runways of the shrews and voles.

These mammals, like their kind everywhere, are seldom seen, but leave the record of their movements and activities by their prints in the mud. Much more visible and audible are the birds. The bird population of the marsh varies from near-zero in the dead of winter to a high point reached when the throngs of south-bound waders touch down for food and rest during late summer and early fall. Between these extremes will be the lesser flow of spring migrants including a trickle of waders; the summer birds of the surrounding area who visit the marsh for food, and the true residents who also raise their young there.

The summer bird population of the salt marsh in terms of full-time residents is sparse compared with that of most upland natural habitats. In fact, the only one supporting fewer types is probably a peat bog. Because of this and because of the kinds of birds which live there the salt marsh is not a melodious place.

When the dawn mists lift their curtain along the woodland edges the soft chorus of the upland songsters begins. In the marsh, the reveille is loud and clear; the ringing challenge of newly arrived Willets resounds from upland fringe to seaward dunes. Though modest and quiet on the ground, when awing in their flashing colours, their far-carrying din makes up in volume at least, for the scarcity of other vocalists.

Once the tumultous establishment of territories and the wooing of mates is over, family cares continue to keep their emotions at fever pitch. Willets never do things by halves, and this includes defence of eggs and young; any birder who is curious as to how an owl feels when mobbed by a flock of crows need only walk out onto a marsh somewhere in the general neighbourhood of a Willet's brood, to find out.

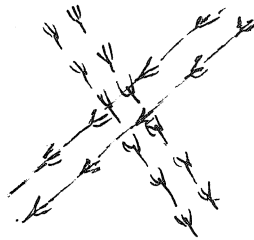
Evening does, however, bring respite from the Willet's din. Then as sunset fades to gloaming, there can be heard the call of another of the true marsh dwellers, the gurgling thump of the Stake-driver, the Thunder-pumper, the Bittern. The calls of some birds so closely resemble those of other species that tyros are confused and discouraged. Not so the lovelorn Bittern; as a vocalist he stands alone. Those uncouth strangled gulps, like bubbles rising from the much are the true and fitting voice of the ancient marsh. Perhaps a pterodactyl once sang thus and bequeathed its melody to this distant descendant.

There is, by bird-watchers' standards, just one true songster among the inhabitants of the salt marsh. This, the last on our short list is the Sharp-tailed Sparrow. Smallest of our local sparrows and latest of the spring arrivals, it follows the other laggards, such as the Nighthawk and the Red-eyed Vireo, by more than a week, reaching its marsh some time after the first of June. From then on its brief wheezing ditty can be heard throughout the summer, continuing long after most of the other singers have fallen silent.

Unlike Victorian children, this little mouse of a sparrow is more often heard than seen. Occasionally it will favour the viewer by giving its solo from the stake of a "staddle" (the rack for a marsh hay stack), but mostly it lurks in the short grass leads which are its preferred home, and when flushed flies only a short distance before dropping again into hiding.

Although a late arrival, the Sharp-tail is in no hurry to leave. The birder who prowls the proper places in fall can usually add it to his record cards well into November.

Willet, Bittern, Sharp-tailed Sparrow--these three then are the only true bird dwellers in our northeastern salt marshes.



Some walk, some hop.

There are many others however, which live along the fringes, and spend most of their active time feeding on the bounty of the shallow pools, the tidal creeks, the open flats and the cord grass meadows. Some come from a considerable distance; from early April on, Great Blue Herons, whose rookeries lie some miles inland, commute regularly to the tidal creeks, and during the period of high tide stalk the killifish which swarm in the pools of the grassy marsh. For them the little fish are merely appetizers, nibblings to fill in between the main courses, but for a number of other species they are an important item of diet.

These marsh pools form a large proportion of the whole area; they are very shallow, with bottoms of soft ooze over which lies a rich culture of bacteria or algae. Most unattractive they are in appearance and also odoriferous when the hot summer sun releases bubbles of marsh gas from the black muck, but the pools support a fantastically high population of minute animals. They swarm with fundulus minnows, known variously as mummichugs, killifish or in these parts simply "minnows" which is a misnomer, for they are not even distantly related to the rightful owners of that name. They bask in large schools in the lukewarm water, and when disturbed dash off through the shallows, darkening the water like a miniature squall and sounding like a heavy shower. These little fish which average between two and three inches in length are by far the most abundant vertebrates in the salt marsh and foragers come from near and far to harvest them.

Hérons and Bitterns are their chief predators in spring and early summer but these are later joined by other fishermen: Common Terns released from family responsibilities begin to wander in from their colonies on the offshore islands by late July, and their grating calls vie with those of the Willets as they hover and dive into the shallows. Yellowlegs of both species begin to appear in numbers at about the same time and are surprisingly skillful at capturing the lively alert little fish. They appear to be the only shorebirds which hunt this sort of food.

The smaller species of gull are also ardent killifishermen. In the fall and again in spring after the little fish come out of hibernation in the mud, they are eagerly sought by Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls en route to and from their breeding grounds.

A rarer visitor to the marsh pools is the Hooded Merganser, smallest and spriteliest of its family, which chivvies the shoals of killifish in the salt ponds which are much too shallow for the fishing techniques of its larger relatives.

A food resource of the salt marsh sought by larger birds is the flotsam carried in on the flood tides and left for the various species of scavengers. At the beginning of the ebb they come, crows in straggling flocks from the distant black spruce uplands, to join the Black-backs and Herring Gulls which seem to appear magically out of the clear sky. With them come the Starlings, most versatile of scroungers, in hundreds during the summer, thousands in autumn, descending in dusky clouds on the low grass reaches, wickering and wheezing and probing, leaving nothing edible behind them. Once in a great while if any substantial carrion is stranded by the ebbing tide, the marsh will be favoured by a visit from a Bald Eagle, largest of the raptors, but a scavenger by choice.

Other raptors patrol the marsh regularly for living prey. From early spring to fall Marsh Hawks quarter the grassland slowly, methodically tacking on uptilted wings just above the grass tops. Rarer but with the same hunting methods is the Short-eared Owl, which unlike its relatives, is by preference a daytime hunter. Like a great pale brown moth it flaps slowly over the grass tops, ready to drop on a meadow vole or shrew, but always with an eye out for an unwary sandpiper. Both the Marsh Hawk and the Short-eared Owl will strike an unwary or sickly shorebird if the opportunity presents itself, but alert healthy birds have little to fear from them.



Summer - fall.

The first of these shorebird migrants appear in the marsh in the early days of July. These will almost certainly be a "skein" of a dozen or so Dowitchers, the Robin Snipe of the old market gunners, and aptly named, for their beaks are as long as those of the true snipes, and their breasts in summer plumage--soon to be lost--are a rich russet brown. Their little flocks multiply and their numbers swell from hundreds to several thousand as July merges into August. Other species come close on their heels, the little "peep", the Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers and Semipalmated Plovers are next, with a scattering of flashily dressed Ruddy Turnstones, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and a handful of Knots with breasts of a colour similar to that of the Dowitchers but rather more pink.

The marsh now begins to reach its peak of activity. Flocks of Golden Plovers drop in for a few hours or a day during late July and early August but do not tarry as do most of the others. The Black-bellied Plovers also appear late in July and their numbers grow through August to early September. Later comers are the Dunlins and White-rumped Sandpipers; never very numerous, and difficult for the tyro to recognize, their small 'peaks' are in September. Latest of all is usually the Sanderling, the peep of the open beaches, which comes to the marsh only to rest and preen between the tides.

Most of these species in fact do little feeding on the marsh. It is for them a resting place after the last long leg of their southward journey, a place to wait out the flood tide period when only the Least Sandpipers seem able to find food along the high water mark.

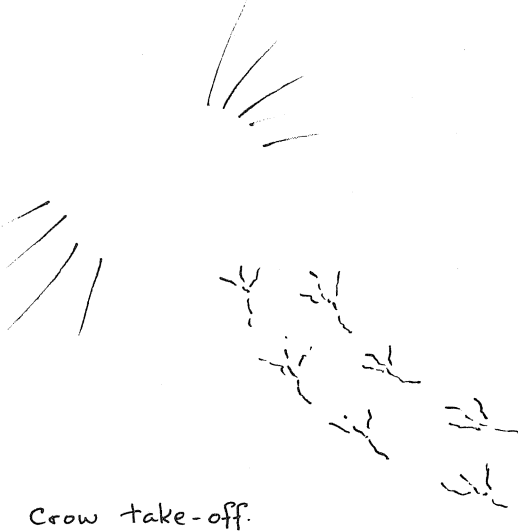
These roosts are in the same place in any marsh year after year, and one wonders how many centuries they may have served the southbound migrants. As the tide ebbs, the roost is deserted, but at half flood the birds begin to appear again, so that by high water slack there seems to be 'standing room only' in the favoured spots. There may be as many as a dozen species of 'peep' and larger species present at any one time. Most of them are at rest with beak tucked into the back feathers, but there are always a few moving about restlessly as if in search of a more comfortable spot, or picking in an aimless desultory manner. The exceptions are the two species of Yellowlegs. The tides do not seem to govern their daily timetables. They continue to pursue the killifish and other prey without break, perhaps taking their rest at night.

It is easy to see why these roosts are favoured by the small waders--they are open, low, gravelly ridges, well away from the tall cord grass stands, with little growth except for scattered sea lavender, samphire and sea blite. Approaching peril can be seen at a distance. Any four-footed predator such as a mink would stand little chance of getting within pouncing range. Their principal danger comes from the air, literally on the wings of the wind. The little Merlin, speediest and deadliest of the small bird-eating hawks attends their flocks during the southward journey, and its swift low level attacks are made with such savagery and precision that one wonders how an intended victim ever escapes.

Now and then an even more fearful enemy arrives in the shape of a Peregrine, probably from a Greenland aerie as they are said to be extinct in eastern Canada. As long as the big falcon stays in the vicinity the whole population of the marsh is in a state of restless tension--the birds feed in half hearted fashion and if at the roosts, frequently take to wing in panic false alarms.

In late summer the salt marsh can be literally teeming with life: Willets are restless, numerous and still vociferous, flying hither and thither on flashing wings like big black and white butterflies; terns, equally noisy, are everywhere zig-zagging over the open areas, hovering over and diving in the shallows; at least one or two flocks of shorebirds seem to be in the air constantly--the silvery stippling of their bellies flashing in the sun as they bank and turn. Barn and Cliff Swallows from the adjacent farmlands and Bank Swallows from their colonies on the islands close in shore, hawk low to harvest the flies and mosquitos which shimmer like heat haze over the grass tops; Nighthawks, drifting southward in great loose flocks, take their toll of the higher flying insects.

As summer moves toward early fall, changes in the bird life of the marsh can be dramatic and sudden. Today it will be throbbing with life, tomorrow almost drained, but the following day, alive again. The flow of migrants becomes intermittent and arriving flocks gradually more and more widely spaced. In late August the swallows gather in enormous flocks of many hundreds made up of all species and rest on the bayberry bushes, the low spruces and on the gravelly ground itself along the edge of the marsh. They will be there in their hundreds one day, and on the next there is hardly a swallow to be found. Similarly, great mixed flocks of blackbirds — Redwings, Grackles, Cowbirds and a few Rustys will work over the drier stretches along the spring tide level, and after a day or two vanish as suddenly as they appeared.



The ebb of the shorebird flocks is more gradual and less noticeable. First of the regulars to disappear are the Dowitchers, Lesser Yellowlegs and Turnstones whose numbers drop off sharply in late August and have for the most part departed by mid September. Resident Willets also leave at about this time. Numbers of the smaller peep begin to dwindle next and the Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers and Semipalmated Plovers are scarce by late September. The rest, Black-bellied Plovers, Greater Yellowlegs, White-rumped Sandpipers, Dunlins and Sanderlings do not seem to have any strict schedule and so frequently linger on well into November. None of course, follow hard and fast rules, individuals of all species often lag weeks behind their fellows so that it is not surprising to find a few Semipalmated or Least Sandpipers still puttering around in puddles in early November.

As the shorebird flocks dwindle and before the leaves of the hardwoods in the uplands begin to change, autumn colours come to the salt marsh. *Spartina* beds in summer are varying shades of green depending on light, weather and stage of growth. After mid summer comes the first suggestion of warmer hues—a faint wash of yellow over the tall grass tracts which deepens to russet, gold and even orange as the fall advances; the sea lavender is covered with minute pale mauve blooms, the seaside goldenrod bears curved bright yellow plumes, the fleshy little samphire plants on the sterile mud turn blood red, and the orach along the pebbly seaward ridges is brilliant madder pink. Under a clear late September sky, the marsh is a glorious sight to behold.

Although it has lost many of its summer birds, replacements are moving in. The Water Pipit flocks arrive with the equinox—small flocks at first but increasing rapidly in early October. They trade freely back and forth between the seashore and marsh and the air is full of their thin musical flight calls as flocks of from a dozen to fifty or more twist and turn over the gravel ridges and grassy flats. They forage slowly and carefully, like gleaners over the same territory as that covered by the great Starling and blackbird flocks and seem to find sufficient leavings to justify the hunt. Their stay is brief, almost bounded by the month of October, and their arrival and departure lack the tapering periods of most migrants. Numbers build up quickly from the vanguard flocks and late stragglers are few.

Shortly, in October, the Horned Larks arrive, and from the middle to the end of the month steady streams of Snow Buntings pass by. The majority continuing farther south, but a few flocks remain to face the winter here. With them are usually a goodly sprinkling of Lapland Longspurs, almost all of which will be transients. They are easily distinguished from the buntings even in flight by their darker colour, smaller size and distinctive dry chattering call when on the wing.

The larks, buntings and longspurs tend to remain along the drier margins of the marsh and are not therefore strictly marsh birds. However, they are very much a part of the autumn pageant in the great estuarial lowlands and are last of the small birds to be found there as winter sets in.

In November, the colours fade and the marsh takes on its winter tawny brown. The Great Blue Herons come less and less frequently, but the migrant ducks begin to drop in to feed in the tidal creeks. Greater Scaup and Common Goldeneye, bands of bouncy little Buffleheads, popping up and down in the murky water like jack-in-the-boxes, and Red-breasted Mergansers all feed amicably together, each species to its own taste with apparently little competition. The scaup and most of the goldeneyes move on, not reappear again till late winter, but the Buffleheads and Mergansers remain to form part of the scanty winter population.



And last, but far from least of the regular winter residents to arrive, the Rough-legged Hawk appears, a little ahead of the first snows, and includes the drier parts of the marsh in its vole patrol.

Once in a long while there will be a Snowy Owl Year in the south and the marsh will have its share of visits from the big white mousers. Like the Short-eared Owl, they are daytime hunters and ground-perchers, and their large white forms and unsuspecting nature make them ridiculously easy targets for the sportsman who has an irresistible urge to lay low any large living wild thing, however beautiful and appealing it may be.

The marsh is a sombre, brooding place in November--and silent. Only the tinkling notes of the buntings and the plaintive calls of the larks overhead break the stillness. The clouds hang low, and the level horizon is infinitely far away.

When the first snow flurries whiten the land the marshes remain brown--the light snow is quickly melted by the salt or washed away by the tides. Later as the cold increases, ice forms over the shallow pools, and the mud congeals. Then, after a snowfall, the marsh becomes a part of the winter landscape, but more lifeless and desolate than even the upland burns and barrens. Vertical ice cliffs form along the creeks and the incoming tide spreads miniature floes and bergs helter skelter over the mud-stained white expanse.

Though lifeless, the marsh surface is in a state of constant change from wind and tide, like a young planet in its early formative aeons. Here and there in the memory of the teeming life that was, tufts of cord grass project above the frozen surface and tiny pointed drifts of blown snow form in their lee.

Spring and the first heron are long weeks away.

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S AN CTU A RY A N D S C H O L A R S H I P T R U S T F U N D

This is a photo of the new Quiet Recovery Room for Raptors funded by the Sanctuary and Scholarship Trust Fund at the practice of veterinarians Dr. Ian MacKay and Dr. Jack Cameron in Dartmouth.



BIRD EXHIBIT

A very fine bird exhibit is coming to the Nova Scotia Museum late this year. Birds of Prey, produced by the Royal British Columbia Museum, contains mounted specimens in natural poses of all the 35 birds of prey species native to Canada. Labels, photographs, and sounds interpret adaptation, feeding, distribution, voice, breeding and legal protection.

Birds of Prey is bilingual. It provides a special opportunity to see in one place all the native Hawks, Vultures, Falcons, Owls, Eagles and Osprey.

Birds of Prey will be at the Nova Scotia Museum in Halifax from September 30, 1989 to January 1, 1990. The Museum Staff expect to supplement it with programs for all ages, and special school classes too. Anyone with an interest in birds of prey who might like to volunteer to help with public programs or school classes during the exhibit would be very welcome. Contact Debra Burleson, Chief Curator of Education, Nova Scotia Museum, 429-4610 or at 1747 Summer St., Halifax, N.S. B3H 3A6.

THOUGHTS ON THE LITTLE EGRETS

by Ian McLaren

The story on the province's first Little Egrets, wanderers from the Old World, is far from complete, but here is what we have learned. Shortly after midday on April 16, Peter MacLeod and Bev Sarty found a small egret on a pond at Sambro. Peter noted the bird's two long head plumes, immediately thought of Little Egret and rushed home to check his books and spread the word.

Thereafter, many people came to admire the bird until it was last seen on May 3. Local residents stated that the bird had been present since the beginning of April.

Even apart from its striking, long head plumes, it differed from Snowy Egrets in a number of ways. It did not rush about in the manner of most Snowies, but generally moved sedately, stirring the bottom by foot-shuffling and only occasionally darting after a prey item. (Bernard Forsythe actually saw it flycatching on May 3!) It was a "rangier" bird than the Snowy; some thought that it was more like a Little Blue Heron in build, or even a miniature Great Egret. It adopted a less "hunched-up" pose than is characteristic of Snowies at rest. Its bill was thicker, and it appeared to have a heavier head, with more extended "chin" than the Snowy Egret's. Its lores were very pale yellow (not bright like those found even in immature Snowies), apparently fading and becoming greyish anteriorly towards the end of its stay. The yellow of its feet did not at all extend up the leg, as it often does in Snowies.

Although sometimes illustrated otherwise, lores of the Eurasian race, Egretta g. garzetta, are said by authorities (most recently J. Hancock and R. Gilmour in, **British Birds** 1984, v. 77, pp. 451-457) to be blue/grey, becoming reddish during the breeding season, while those of the West African race E. g. gularis are more persistently yellow. The pale yellow feet on very black legs of our bird matched those of the European race, rather than those of the West African birds, which are said to have brighter yellow soles on the feet and browner legs. Its bill was not deep black, like the legs, but very dark grey, with paler lower mandible, especially near its base. The bill of European birds is said to be black at all times. That of West African birds is said to have a paler, browner, thicker, more decurved bill. The East African and Indian birds of the race schistacea are said to have yellow lores and even paler, thicker bills. I think that these differences are by no means settled. Fulton Lavender has seen TV footage of yellow-lored birds in the Danube Delta, and far-eastern birds (e.g. in **A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan**) are illustrated with black legs and yellow lores during the outside the breeding season.

A final complication is the fact that birds of the races gularis and schistaces have been until recently considered a separate species, the Western Reef Heron, more commonly found in the dark form. Such a dark individual turned up in Massachusetts in spring 1983. Our heron appeared to be a classic Little Egret in the narrow sense, that is E. g. garzetta, in spite of its yellow lores.

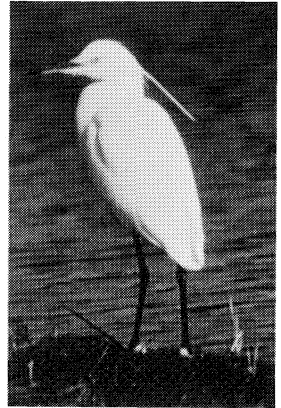
On April 25, Peter MacLeod and I found another Little Egret at Round Bay, Shel. Co. It also had two head plumes, somewhat shorter, and the same rangy shape and foot-shuffling feeding behaviour of the Sambro bird. We tried to approach the bird, but it was very wary. Neither Peter nor I could see any yellow in its lores with the 'scope', but in retrospect, I am not completely certain that the lores were grey.

Finally, yet another bird was found by Fulton Lavender and Jim Taylor on Bon Portage Island, May 20-22. This bird was associating with a group of (about to nest?) Snowy Egrets. However, the paleness of its yellow lores, its head plume (only one remaining), rangier appearance, paler bill, and different headshape satisfied Fulton and others that it was indeed a Little Egret.

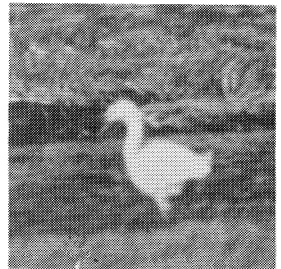
So, what do we make of all this? There have been only three previous North American records of the Little Egret (excluding the Massachusetts Reef Heron)—two spring birds in Newfoundland and a summering one in the lower Gulf of St. Lawrence. However, they may well have been overlooked in recent years among our more regular Snowy Egrets, especially

out of breeding season, without their give-away head plumes. Indeed, I was told by Louise Garren of Brier Island that she had seen a small white egret with two distinct head plumes during spring last year! Where might they have come from? Although the Newfoundland birds, at least, seem good candidates for North Atlantic displacement from Europe, I speculate that ours originated from the Caribbean region where there have been several records of the Western Reef Heron, Little Egret and Gray Heron in recent years. Evidently these birds arrived there from West Africa, but records of the latter two species have banded in Europe (Smith and Smith, **American Birds**, 38: 254-255). European Little Egrets are strong migrants, many crossing the Sahara to West Africa (Cramp and Simmons, **Handbook of the Birds of the Western Palearctic**, Vol. 1, p.292). It is noteworthy that their northward migration is "well under way in March" (Cramp and Simmons, *op. cit.*). Could it be that our birds migrated northward, just as they would have from Africa, stopping with us because we are at the latitude of southern Europe?

Whatever their origin, it is clear that never again can we look casually at small white egrets. The Caribbean record of European Gray Herons suggest that we also look for these pale grey birds among our Great Blues, and I feel that Old-World races of the Great Egret are not beyond possibility. It adds to the fun, I think.



The photos of the Sambro Little Egret show its diagnostic head plumes. Note also its rather long "chinned" appearance, the pale gray basal two-thirds of the lower mandible the lack of any extension of the yellow of the feet up its legs, and its rather "rangy" appearance, not "hunched up" at rest in the manner of most Snowy Egrets. The very poor picture of the individual at Round Bay on April 25, nevertheless serves to show its head plumes, waving in the rather stiff wind. Photos-Ian McLaren



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor, Nova Scotia Birds:

Thanks for your informative editorial (**NSB31** (2): 23-24) in which you summarized reports and impressions of decreases in land bird numbers in Nova Scotia. I believe that such collective impressions are as reliable as most quantitative surveys, although the apparent statistical precision of the latter tends to give them greater credibility among people who don't "know birds".

I recently finished summarizing results of a 10-year winter count here in Sackville (one minor feature of the study was published in **NSB** in 1980, as "A House Sparrow die-off"). An obvious feature of the long term comparison was the lower numbers during the last two winters of the study (apparently continued this past winter, when no counts were made). Most of the regular species were affected, and reports of other feeder watchers in town and in Moncton also pointed to lower numbers in the last three winters. Your account makes it evident that a larger area than Sackville/Moncton experienced an apparent decline in those winters. I considered at some length some of the factors that might have produced lower counts in Sackville, and concluded that my fading eyesight and hearing, and the process of urbanization, may have contributed to the decline, and "normal variation" might also be involved; there was no single, obvious explanation—and you reached the same conclusion. I will probably be sending an account of my study to American Birds for possible publication, and I am glad to be able to quote your editorial as bearing on the same questions.

There have been a number of alarm signals raised regarding numbers of summer birds recently, particularly with reference to those that winter south of the U.S.A. ("neotropical migrants"). In the next few weeks I expect to be undertaking a series of analyses of data from the Canadian Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS), and I hope to look at this question as well. Nevertheless, most analyses of BBS data thus far have suggested more species increasing rather than decreasing, even if the neotropical migrants may be down. Monitoring numbers of so many species over such large areas is not easy, and the BBS coverage in Nova Scotia has declined considerably from former times—only 12 surveys completed in 1988 vs. 20-23 in most years 1967-78. Our long-time veterans have provided noble support for the BBS, but we need more people to pick up the routes that have lapsed in the last decade, especially near the ends of the province.* Running a BBS will not reverse declines in numbers, but it will help to confirm which species may be affected—in a way that will be convincing to "the powers that be".

A. J. Erskine

* my underling—Ed.

The Editor, Nova Scotia Birds:

A comment on numbers of birds in central Nova Scotia:

Birding has its "ups and downs", and much depends upon luck—the birds may be where the birders are; or perhaps the two groups are not in the same places at the same times. Every breeding season it seems some species are fewer, others more plentiful; five years hence, for the same species, the opposite may be true.

For example, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet has seemed to be singing from the tops of many, many trees this spring—a reversal of the trend in recent years. Today my garden harbours three Blackpoll Warblers when usually I am happy to have only one of these little squeakers. During the last few days, there has been almost an inundation of Northern Orioles; yet I have seen only the occasional one of these brilliantly coloured birds in the last half dozen years. The Winter Wren has become quite numerous this year.

Many people mourned last winter about having very few birds at their feeders. Glennys Hutton, who has a feeder at the edge of the bird-filled wood, had many birds in attendance. The same is true, in a similar location, of Joan Jarvis' feeder. The forests in central Nova Scotia were veritable treasure troves of bird food, so the birds had no need to come out to the bird feeders.

In my nearly thirty years of bird watching, I have never seen so many birds in the forest as I saw in the winter of 1988-89. There were thousands (possibly millions) of White-winged Crossbill, many of which were breeding. Our area had more Boreal Chickadees than I have ever seen in winter. The same is true of Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Canada Jays, and Pileated Woodpeckers. Red-tailed Hawks were frequently seen, and there were even some N. Harriers, which I very rarely see in winter. We had quite a number of Mourning Doves, as we did the winter before. I could go on and on.

Last summer, I did think that Oven Birds and Red-eyed Vireos were in short supply: and the situation seems to be the same this year. So far, I have seen no diminution of numbers of Solitary Vireos. We seem to have had few Least Flycatchers throughout the last few summers; however, the Alder Flycatcher was as numerous as usual in the summer of '88.

Barn Swallows had a very bad time last year—two weeks of cold, heavy rain in May, and their numbers seem to be down this year.

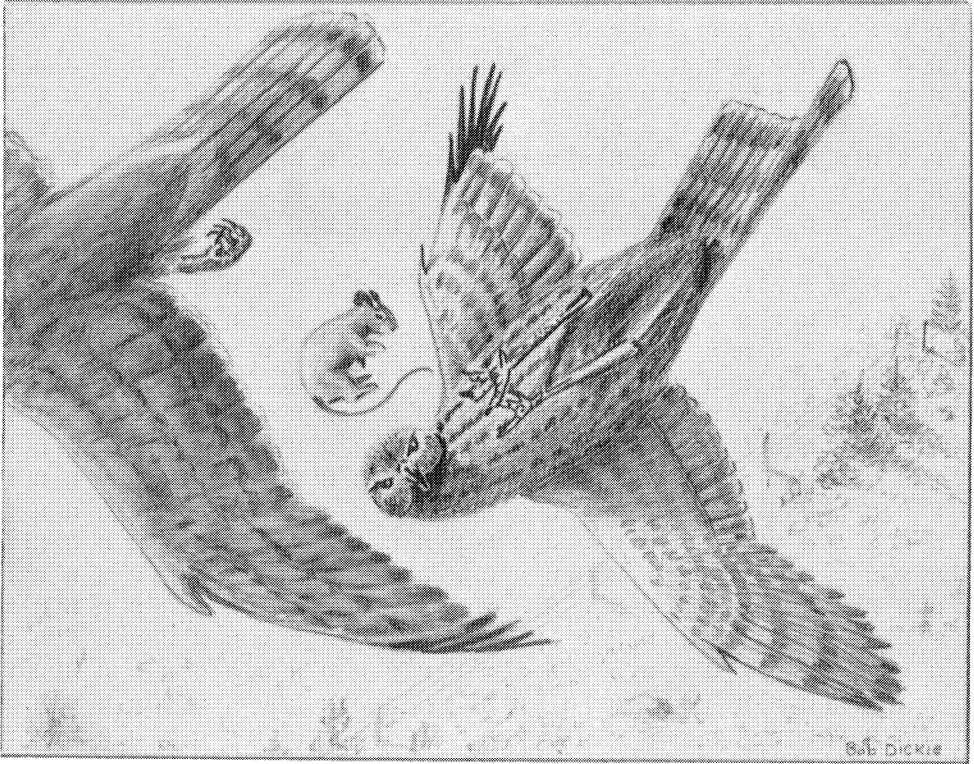
I speak only of my own area—in and around Shubenacadie—where I watch what transpires in the wilderness. I have also found much the same conditions in the Guysborough area last summer and in April of this year.

Roslyn MacPhee

Any more comments from readers? Ed.



Bev Sarty's photo of the White-winged Dove, at the Matheson's feeder in Dartmouth on May 18, serves to confirm the record of this very rare vagrant



REMARKABLE RAPTOR

by Bob Dickie

We had spent the day birding in the Musquodoboit Valley and were on our way home. As we rounded a bend we noticed a large, gray bird flying in our direction. It was about thirty feet off the ground and passed directly in front of us clutching something in its talons. It appeared not to notice us as we pulled over and watched. Dropping lower as it passed over a clump of alders, it was suddenly met by a second bird that rose up out of the shrubs and flew directly beneath the first bird, which let go of the object it had been carrying. The second bird rolled over on its back and grabbed the object in mid air, continuing its roll until it righted itself and returned to the spot in the shrubs whence it came.

We had just witnessed a male Northern Harrier transferring food to the female to feed the young hidden on the ground. The Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus hudsonius*) is a species of Harrier of which there are ten, world wide. There are two sub-species of Hen Harrier, the *Circus cyaneus cyaneus* of Europe, Asia and North Africa and the *Circus cyaneus hudsonius* of North and Central America.

Once known, and still occasionally called Marsh Hawk, the Harrier is a large raptor, characterized in flight by its long wings and tail, moving low across open areas with a slow, gliding flight. With its wings slanted upwards, it turns and glides back and forth, eventually showing a white rump patch which marks it as this species.

Harriers are migratory, though a few winter over in this province, particularly along the coast. They have been known to eat fish, frogs, snakes and insects, as well as quail, ducklings and barnyard chicks for which they earned the name Hen Harrier and, unfortunately a bad reputation among farmers. Their overwhelming preference however, is meadow mice and rats.

The species nests on the ground in open marsh or meadow, frequently near taller shrubs or grass. The nest is made of sticks and lined with grass. A normal clutch is from four to six pale blue eggs. The brown female alone incubates the eggs and tends the young while the gray male brings food to her.

The ferocity of the female while protecting her nest is legendary. She will attack other birds such as Red Tailed Hawks and even Bald Eagles that have come too close to the nest and have been known to go after people for the same reason, flying directly at, but missing the person's face. There have been reported cases of people having their hats knocked off by the sharp claws.

Ignorance is a terrible master and Harriers have fallen victim to hunters in the mistaken notion that they kill large numbers of young chickens. Actually they kill large numbers of rats that do kill chicks and eat hens eggs. So, Harriers are actually a help to the farmer.

On the suggestion of Ken Gregoire, a Director of our Society, I visited the Mason's Point Raptor Rehabilitation Centre to see a young female Harrier that had sustained a gun shot wound but had been treated and was recovering. The spectacular beauty of the bird left a lasting impression on me.

Three years ago I led a field trip to Conrad's Beach, sponsored by the Nova Scotia Museum for beginning birders. We spotted several species, including sparrows, plovers, sandpipers, gulls, terns, ducks, herons and even a Snowy Egret but the bird that aroused the greatest interest and sparked the most "oohs" and "ahs" was a male Northern Harrier.

BIRDING TRIVIA

1. What is the only North American duck with entirely black plumage?
2. Which female warbler has a small white wing spot?
3. What bird is sometimes referred to as a "skunkhead"?
4. How many accipiters are found in Nova Scotia? Name them.
5. How many species of Eider are found in North America? Name them.
6. What is the western equivalent of the Ruddy Turnstone?
7. What birds in a group of three were spotted considered unlucky in folklore?
8. Who was the first female President of N.S.B.S.?
9. Which small sandpiper forages in deeper water than the other "peeps"?
10. What small passerine is often found (with careful looking) amongst a flock of House Sparrows

(Answers on page 62)

BOOK REVIEW

Title: Birding in Atlantic Canada. Nova Scotia
 Author: Roger Burrows
 Publisher: Jespersion Press, 26 Flavin St., St. John's
 Newfoundland, A1C 3R9
 No. Pages: xii plus 163 pages.
 Price: \$14.95

I have used a number of bird-finding guides in Britain and in various parts of North America. They are generally in a tried-and-true format: plenty of information on how to find local "hot spots" and how to bird them most efficiently, often with details of footpaths, vantage points, times of day and tides. A few site-characteristic species are generally mentioned. Specialties or rarities may be also noted where they are almost certain, but they are often dealt with in annotated lists so that visiting "tickers" may plan their itineraries.

Roger Burrows' book is different. It does have some useful information as a local site-guide, but it is overwhelmingly an account of bird sightings in various parts of the province, partly based on his own observations in earlier years, but largely gleaned from the pages Nova Scotia Birds. Numerous bird species, all in boldface, are mentioned on every page. The unfortunate impression is given that rare visitors and vagrants are "regular" at many sites. Some of these are mentioned for areas from which they have not been reported, and a few have never reliably been seen anywhere in the province. There is also much odd concreteness about numbers, especially of shorebirds -- 40 of this, 400 of that, 4000 of another, etc.

Virtually every page has wrong or misleading information about birds that have been seen, as well as some very improbable associations of species and places. Here are examples from 10 pages chosen by my mindless computer's random number generator. I believe this absolves me from bias. I used the first 5 pages to illustrate bad information and the next 5 for improbable associations.

On p. 29: In Shelburne County "some of the more notable rarities have included . . . a flock of Lark Buntings in winter . . ." The "flock" was three birds at a feeder in early January 1968; there have been no subsequent county reports. Also, our atlasers will be surprised to find that "Greater Yellowlegs have nests not too far away" from Matthews Lake.

On p. 107: We are misinformed, possibly through a grammatical lapse, that the redoubtable Harry Brennan has included nests of Cooper's Hawks and Boreal Owls among his finds in Pictou County.

On p. 4: During fall migration "Nashville and Pine Warblers, Summer Tanager, Dickcissel, Indigo Bunting and Whitecrowned (sic) Sparrow are all regular in Yarmouth town," which will surprise many. (Sorry about the "sic", but throughout hyphens are dropped from "official" bird names; you can find your own examples in subsequent quotes.)

Page 62: At Grand Pré, "Yellowcrowned Night Heron and Franklin's Gull in early-mid September are quite normal sightings." In fact, only about 8 individuals of the gull have been reported in Nova Scotia, only one of them from Grand Pré!

On p 85: "Little Blue Heron, Least Bittern, King and Clapper Rails have also appeared" at Grand Desert, Halifax Co. The heron might be

classed as a rare visitor, and there are single sightings of the bittern and Clapper Rail, but the province's only record of King Rail was one seen on far-off Cape Sable in 1957!

Now for some odd associations, possibly driven by a need for narrative, however fanciful, in which to embed the overwhelmingly excessive bird names.

On p 99: In Amherst, "A late **Pine Warbler** probably regretted its decision to winter, but **Yellowrumped Warbler**, **Whitecrowned** and **Chipping Sparrows** are better candidates for survival if they can avoid the wintering hawks and local cats."

On p. 83: "Lawrencetown Lake to the east often has ducks at high tide, as a count of **22 Bluewinged Teal** in late September and **Lesser Scaup** in mid November indicate." None at low tide?

On p. 24: On Bon Portage Island, "small parties of **Saw-whet Owl** and **Mourning Dove** have made use of the limited cover in mid-late October when early **Roughlegged Hawks** might have designs on them." Can we picture these big, clumsy hawks dashing after doves and owls?

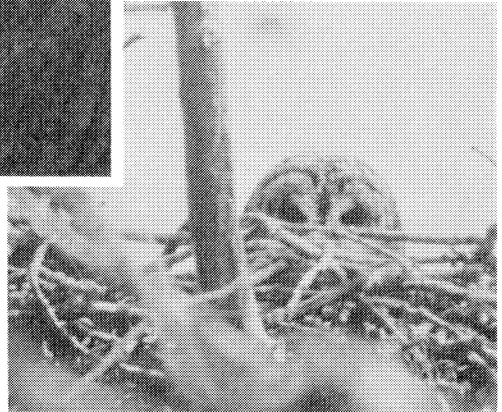
On p. 139: At Lingan Bar, Cape Breton Island, "**Saw-whet Owls** also rest up here at times, perhaps drawn by the restless flocks of **Water Pipit**, **Horned Lark**, **Lapland Longspur**, **Snow Bunting** and sparrows." Would the little mousers really be attracted to the open beach?

On p. 54: On Brier Island ". . . the shrieks of **12+ Ringnecked Pheasant** in mid May must have been a little disturbing -- enough perhaps to explain the **Turkey Vultures** that appear overhead at this time." Can the author be serious about this?

Perhaps I have quoted enough so that negative closing comments would be superfluous. So, on a positive note, the book is clearly a labour of love, a great enthusiasm for birding shines through, and the price is right.



-- Ian McLaren



Richard Stern sends photos of two very different Barred Owl nests this spring--one in an old Goshawk's nest in Kentville, and another in a hollow tree in Centreville.

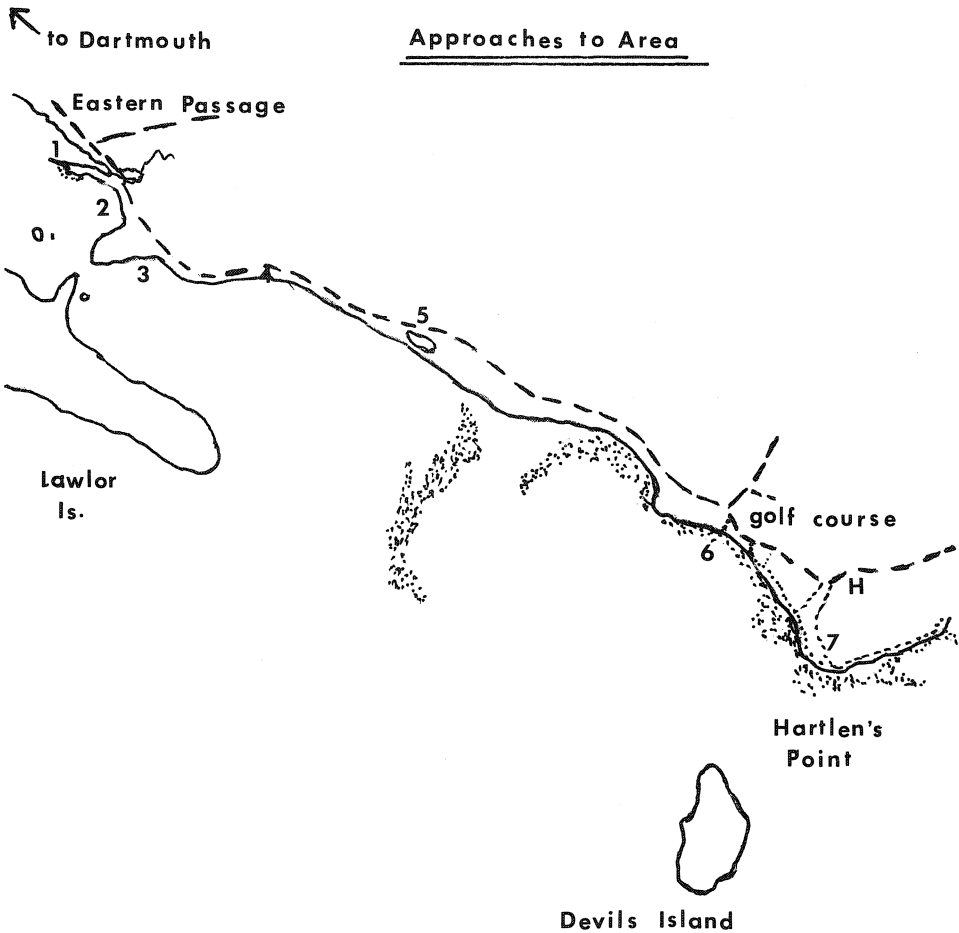
BIRDING--EASTERN PASSAGE, COWBAY, HARTLEN'S POINT

Part I

Fulton L. Lavender

Nova Scotia provides many resting and refueling spots for migrant birds along its stunningly picturesque shores. None could be more unique in its atmosphere and composition than the Halifax County coastline from Eastern Passage to Cow Bay.

This avian-rich stretch of seaside terrain boasts a tremendous variety of habitats, each yielding unexpected rewards for both the accomplished and novice birder.



The starting point for our exploration of this region is a small fisherman's marina at Eastern Passage. It comprises a breakwater road and wharf, dividing the shoreline into two adjacent coves.

The cove to the northwest and righthand side of the road entrance is a deep waterway and boat shelter.¹ At the mouth of this cove strong tidal flow creates a rich feeding zone. Check the cove over well for alcids, loons grebes and ducks. At low tide the back of this cove is fed by the outflow from a freshwater stream, located at the end of a pond directly across the road from the marina. Look the pond over for a Kingfisher and check the bridge at the outflow for Night Herons.

The cove on the southeast and lefthand side of the road entrance is essentially a mudflat, fed on the inland side by a drain pipe, a drainage ditch and the runoff from a fishing shack.² It is on this mud flat that large groups of gulls gather to feed. Carefully scrutinize them all, looking for the more uncommon types. Shorebirds also use the flat as a feeding zone. A thorough search through these lively sprites is highly recommended as well.

To the southeast the mudflat is bordered by a spit of land formed from tidal beachrock and sand overgrown with weeds and bushes. Check this area carefully for sparrows and snipe. The outer half of the spit is comprised mainly of sand dunes and marram grass. Here again, check for sparrows, buntings and larks. The southeast innerhalf of the spit is a beachrock shorebird roost. The birds are well camouflaged against the gray stones and might go undetected if great care is not taken to look thoroughly. To the southeast of the dunes and beach rock, running the length³ of the spit is a sand beach. Look for shorebirds feeding here before and after high tide.

Directly southwest of the sand spit lies Lawlor Island. The mainland of the island is separated from the spit by a narrow fast-moving channel of water which serves as the entrance and exit point for the fishing boats at the marina. On the southwest side of this channel, the beachrock extension of Lawlor Island has created another hightide shorebird roost. Beyond this beachrock barrier is a small field surrounded by heavy woods. The woods themselves cover three quarters of the island. This forested section should be scanned for hawks and owls. The southeastern most portion of Lawlor Island houses a thriving Osprey population and a noisy Great Blue Heron colony. Both Osprey and heron can be viewed at one's leisure from the parking lot opposite the church.

After leaving Eastern Passage, Beach, just beyond the first turn in the road, we notice a parking area on the right.⁴ (this area may be obscured or hidden during winter by heavy snow) It is usually very worthwhile stopping here to scan for loons, grebes and ducks. Also, the beachrock below the parking area should be checked for shorebirds, pipits and sparrows.

The rest of the road leading to Hartlen's Point is undergoing rapid urban transformation. However, next on our right is a small pond that in the right season yields shorebirds, ducks, herons and bitterns.⁵ For this reason it's worth stopping for at least a quick look. Also check the roadside to and from Hartlen's Point as the seaside location makes it an ideal landfall for avian travellers of every type. Where good views of the ocean are permitted, one should stop and search diligently for loons, grebes, ducks, gulls and alcids.

Arriving at the entrance to Hartlen's Point, we make the transition from pavement to gravel road. On the left is the clubhouse road and golf course. To the immediate right is the first of five cart tracks leading to the water's edge.

The first track is overgrown with grasses and is normally travelled solely on foot.⁶ An excellent view of South Cove is afforded one here. Sea and bay ducks should be looked for at both high and low tides.

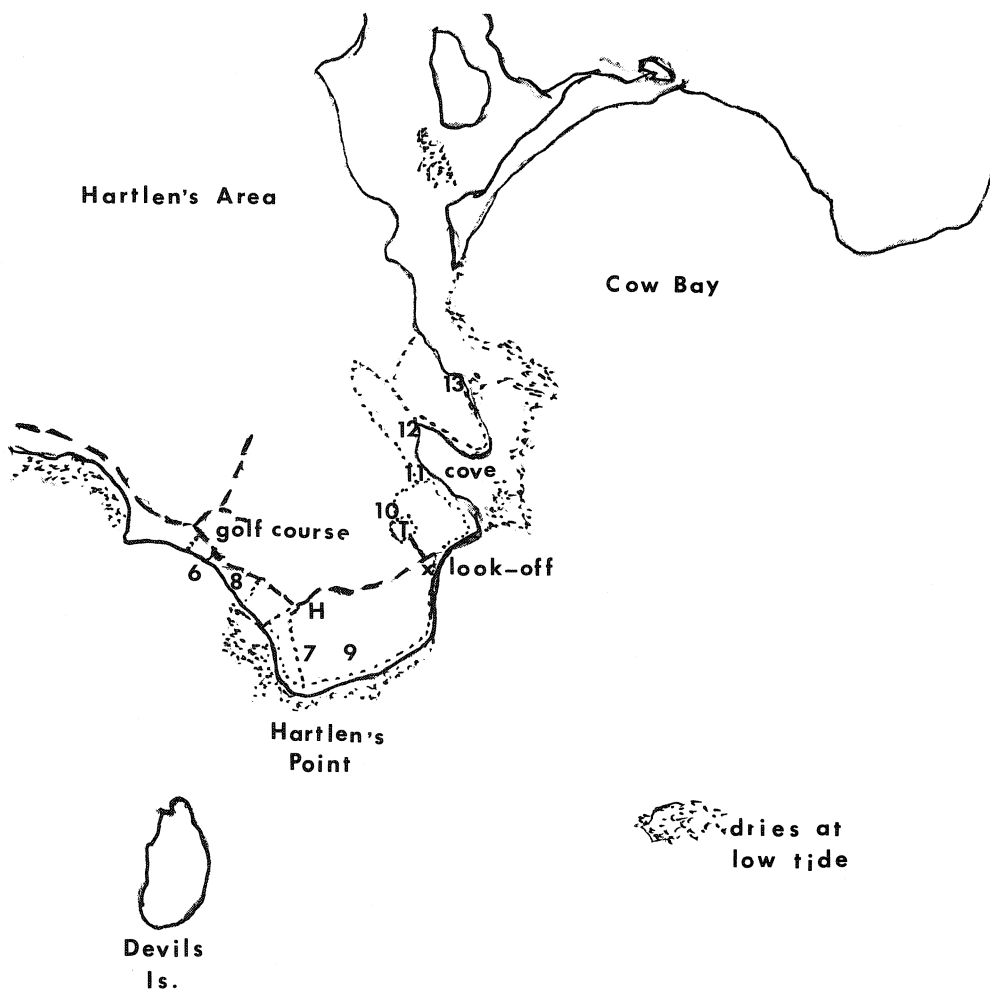
The second track is the best of the five. It is fairly level, but permits only one or two car parking.

The third track is full of potholes and rocks, but is driveable nonetheless if skill and caution are exercised.

The fourth track should not be used except on foot or by a four wheel drive vehicle.

The fifth and last track, being the most often used, is badly torn up. However, with a little care it is passable and at its end one has an excellent view of Devil's Island. The other branch veers westward past a large clump of Japanese knotweed and intersects another path running southeast to northwest along the water's edge.

The seaside path runs the length of the beach, joining the end of track number one near the entrance to Hartlen's Point. At about its halfway point, the seaside path is interrupted by a freshwater stream which flows into South Cove.



Running the entire length of the Southside Beach parallel to the path is a nine-year buildup of rotted kelp and seaweed. It is here that the shorebirds come to feed during migration.

Between the main road and the⁸ seaside path, extending outward from the freshwater stream is a large wet meadow. The meadow is bordered on the northwest by track number two and on the southeast by track number five. The meadow is driest at its northwest end. It can be checked from the path's edge as can the stream and the kelp pile. However, where possible the meadow should be walked. A diligent search of the meadow should produce rails, wrens, sparrows, blackbirds, cuckoos and even warblers. The kelp pile, stream and exposed tidal pools at low tide need to be checked and rechecked periodically because the turnover of species between tides here at Hartlen's Point is quite remarkable. Look for vagrant gulls, shorebirds, passerines and even alcids.

The outer shoreline of Hartlen's Point consists mainly of a group of rocky shoals. Here loons, grebes and sea ducks gather to feed on crustaceans and mollusks. Remember to check the water repeatedly as water birds are constantly coming and going with the tide.

To the south of Hartlen's Point lies Devil's Island. From time to time this small island provides a surprise bird or two. Check the island carefully looking for owls, hawks and roosting seabirds.

Running southwest to northeast from the southeast tip of Hartlen's Point is a small tide wracked wall of beachrock. Extending from the southeast tip of Hartlen's Point towards Devil's Island is a large rocky shoal which is exposed at low tide. Between these two a large number of tidal pools form on the ebb. The beachrock barrier should be checked for small plovers and peeps and the tidal pools and rocky shoal for large plovers, gulls and large waders.

After a thorough check of all these areas, return to the main road opposite the entrance to track number five. Here there is an excellent view of the golf course. Look hard for shorebirds on the greens and fairways. Also check the edges of the golf course for hawks and owls.

Opposite the golf course near the junction of the main road and track number five there is a helicopter pad. Behind this is a rather extensive section of high grass, alders, boreal spruce and berry bushes. Beyond this running in a southwest to northeast direction is a small cranberry/crowberry barren.⁹ There are paths through the spruce/alder/berry bush thickets and one skirting the entire edge of Hartlen's Point along the barren. Both the barren and the thickets are best done in the early morning as they are the first stop off on the point for passing migrants. Check the thickets for small passerines and the barren for hawks, owls and shorebirds.

Travelling along the road past the helicopter pad we come to the end of the headland. Here we have reached the point overlooking the open ocean. From the lookoff during migration one has spectacular views of gannets and alcids and acceptable views of gulls, hawks, shearwaters, petrels and jaegers. Below the lookoff a kelp covered beachrock barrier attracts shorebirds and passerines for a timely seaside meal.

To the northeast of the lookoff, we see a foot path winding downhill along the edge of the headland. This path descends to the base of the hill and then northwest around Hartlen's Cove and along the outer edge of the entire northeast portion of the golf course.

To the northwest of the lookoff we see a dirt road running toward a transmission shack. At the end of this road a trail descends through a furrowed area which has had most of its soil removed for road fill.¹⁰ However, these furrowed strips have grown over in high grass, berry bushes, thorn bushes, alders and small saplings. This new growth provides an ideal feeding habitat for passing migrants. One would be shamefully remiss in not checking the area well for all passerine type birds.

At the base of this stripped zone we join the Hartlen's Cove trail running southeast to northwest from the base of the lookoff hill.¹¹ More of the same variety of birds will be encountered here. However, backtracking a short distance toward the base of the lookoff hill, we find an old powerline. Check the posts and wires for hawks, owls and shrikes.

The Hartlen's Cove trail opens to the cove at many points along its course allowing easy access to the beachrock border that surrounds its outer edges. Check the near southwest edge at high tide for roosting shorebirds.

The back of the cove at¹² its most northwest point is a deposit zone for decaying layers of kelp which over a period of years have produced a variety of marsh grasses, sedges, rushes and cattails. Along the edge of the marsh bordering the path a section of alders, birches, maples, small firs and spruces provide an excellent wind break and feeding spot for vagrants and regular birds alike. At low tide the cove becomes a silt-filled mudflat, and its mouth a patchwork of tidal pools. Check the woods around the cove for small passerines, the marsh for snipe, woodcock, bitterns and rails and the cove at low tide for gulls, herons and all types of shorebirds. The best place to enter and leave the cove lies directly opposite the stripped zone--Hartlen's Cove trail junction.

Continuing on from this point cross a small stream overlain by a stout log blocking the trail. At this point the trail becomes more woody and special care should be taken to watch for birds moving among the leaves and needles of the trees above and thick brush at the trail's edge. The Hartlen's Cove trail passes two other trails leading into the heart of the golf course before exiting beside a putting green. Take care to wait for any golfers to complete their approach shots to the green--self preservation is the first rule here. After a safety check, continue along the path to the outer tip of the northeast side of Hartlen's Cove.

Once around the tip, looking northeast, we are able to scan Cow Bay.¹³ Here a search for rafting loons, grebes and alcids is a must. The woods at the tip sometimes hold migrating warblers and other passerines which have followed the coastline down to the cove's edge. A check of the tidal pools if the tide is low may produce a large wader or two. Hawks and eagles may also be seen soaring over Cow Bay or hunting the fairway to the northwest of the point.

The Hartlen's Cove trail itself continues along the edge of Cow Bay to the northwest ending at a small stream. Birding along the edge of this fairway can be rewarding, but once again note any golfers and what they are doing, for in working counter clockwise along the fairway, you are going against the golfing flow.

Having covered all the territory from the entrance at Hartlen's Point to Cow Bay, the chances are pretty good that upon your return the tide will have changed enough to warrant another look at the kelp pile on the Southside Beach and also a second look over the fairways opposite the helicopter pad is certainly not out of order.

Ideally one would like to cover all these areas thoroughly. However, it is likely that time prevents one from doing this. Therefore we must plan our trip so that we can cover the very best of the hot spots in the shortest amount of time possible. In keeping with this plan I recommend the following, in the given order: the Southside beach and golf course; the stripped zone and Hartlen's Cove; the Lookoff.

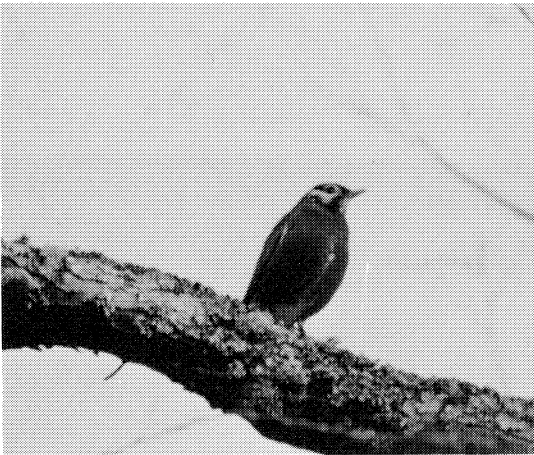
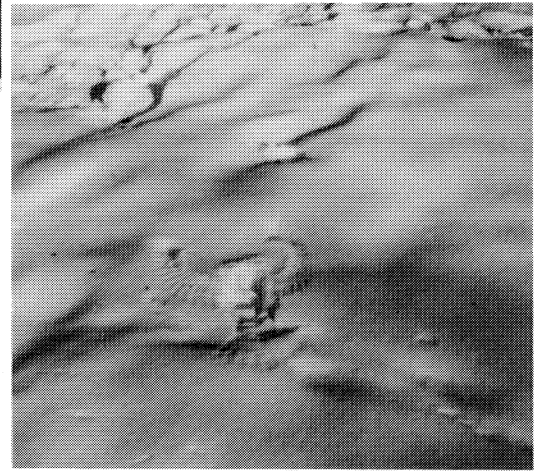
Don't forget to report any rare finds for the region to the local rare bird alert--Phone 477-4539 or 477-6036.

FEEDER PHENOMENA AND BACKYARD BAFFLEMENTS



This photo of an Am. Goldfinch, taken at her feeder by Joy Gates of Glace Bay, looks normal enough. However, you may see that its tail is congealed in ice--a result of a February freezing rain storm. Heat from its body presumably kept the rest of it ice-free. Feeders help keep up the heat!

This remarkable imprint in the snow of Don and Joyce Keddie's back yard in Middleton looks for all the world like a sign and portent from a visiting thunderbird or other avian deity. However, the Keddies assure us that the agent was merely a Blue Jay



This photo of a partially albino robin in Truro was sent by Winnie Kettleston. Such individuals are commonly noted among our backyard birds and sometimes can be difficult to identify. Generally, partial albinism is not heritable, but results from a mutation in a body cell during early development.

NOVA SCOTIA BIRD SOCIETY COMPETITION

AT THE

PHOTOGRAPHIC GUILD OF NOVA SCOTIA

Patrick Wall is the first winner of the Nova Scotia Bird Society Competition at the Photographic Guild of Nova Scotia. The competition took place on February 27, with two judges from the Guild and one from the N.S.B.S. Mr. Wall's photo of Common Terns won 14 out of 15 possible points.

The competition originated with the Sanctuary and Scholarship Trust Fund, who saw it as a means of expanding the Society's slide collection and encouraging progress in bird photography in Nova Scotia. A trophy, consisting of a carving of a swimming Puffin was presented to Mr. Wall by Richard Stern at the Guild's annual banquet on May 29. This trophy will be awarded annually.

The competition is open to all members of the Photographic Guild of Nova Scotia. Entries are judged on technical excellence, originality, scientific interest, aesthetic appeal and artistic composition.

The terns were photographed in the spring of 1988, at Margaree Harbour, just before sunset, with an Olympus OM-4 camera and Kiron 100mm macro lens, on Kodachrome 64 ASA film. The exposure was 1/125 second at f/4.

Mr. Wall has been involved in photography for about twenty years, "seriously" for the last ten. He enjoys nature photography and would like to specialize in birds and mammals. Although he normally works from a blind, the photo of the terns was taken in the open. On the subject of blinds, he says that the best ones are made from natural materials which blend into the surroundings. There is the obvious advantage that the blind is less disturbing to the subject, but there is another advantage; the blind is less likely to be seen by people. Among the blinds which Mr. Wall has had damaged was a timber construction 40 feet up in a tree on an island, opposite an Osprey's nest; it was carefully taken down and burned. This hasn't deterred Mr. Wall, however, and we look forward to seeing his work in future competitions.

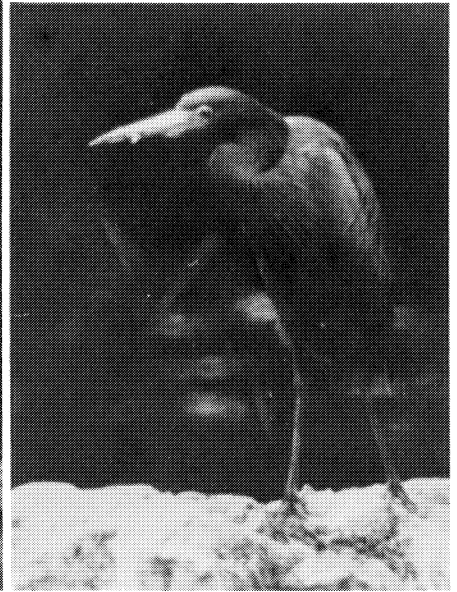
Peter Payzant



Common Terns, Patrick Wall, **winner**, Nova Scotia Bird Society Slide Competition

SOME SOUTHERN HERONS

It was a good spring for southern herons. Here is a sampling of photos of three of them, each seemingly true to its name. Peter MacLeod's Great Egret, at Frog Pond in Halifax on May, is trying to be as great as possible. Shirley Cohrs' Little Blue Heron, at Crescent Beach on Apr. 22, looks rather blue to me, and her Cattle Egret, at Petite Riviere on Apr. 25, appears to be grazing contentedly.



SPECIAL NOTICE

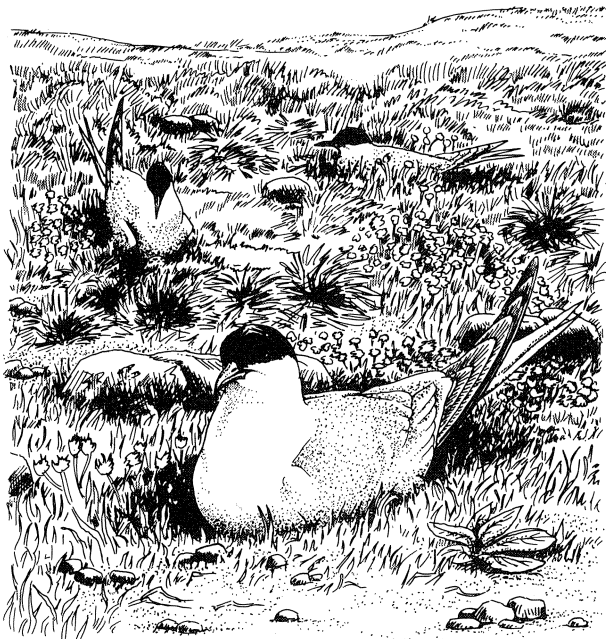
More and more Nova Scotians are watching, feeding, and becoming interested in birds

To launch the fall season, the Nova Scotia Bird Society and the Nova Scotia Museum are inviting seasoned and new birders alike to visit a **BIRD FAIR** on our regular meeting day, Thursday, **September 28 at 7:00 p.m.** **Members note the time FOR THIS MEETING ONLY.**

As well as presentations in the auditorium, a variety of booths will be set up in the Museum, featuring everything you should know about binoculars and telescopes, feeders and feeding, field guides, books and magazines, raptor rehabilitation, seabirds, bird study skins, woodland birds, hawks and owls, and winter bird feeders.

The national travelling exhibit **Birds of Prey** from the Royal British Columbia Museum will also be on display at the Museum and will be available for viewing that evening.





A BRIEF HISTORY OF TERNS IN NOVA SCOTIA

Anthony Lock

In 1971, I attempted a census of the breeding seabirds of Nova Scotia. I did this by examining the coastline and islands of the province from a lowflying aircraft to find colonies, then I carried out ground censuses in many of the colonies that I found. I was chiefly interested in getting some estimate of the size of the breeding gull population, but I was also able to locate cormorant, heron, tern and a few alcid colonies. Tern colonies can be found with some reliability from a low flying aircraft (it is usually necessary to pass over them at about 100 feet altitude in order to scare them up to estimate their numbers) and on the Atlantic coast of mainland Nova Scotia, I documented some 40 tern colonies. I flew this coast again in 1982, using the same technique and found 22 tern breeding sites; in 1988, I found only 15. I probably missed some small colonies on each of these surveys, but the indicated decreases in the number of colonies is real and alarming.

Since the settlement of North America by Europeans, there have been great changes in the numbers of many wild animals but for the most part, these are imperfectly documented and understood. Certainly we know the extreme cases--the extinctions of some bird species and the introduction and expansions of European or Asian species--but most population shifts are undocumented. It is certain that in eastern North America many species of coastal birds were reduced to very low numbers in the late nineteenth century. At that time large numbers of people occupied the coasts and islands of the Atlantic provinces, winning a subsistence existence from fishing, but exploiting all the resources of the coast, including seabirds.

In New England, an area for which good historical population data exists, we know that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century huge numbers of gulls and terns were shot for the millinery market. By the century's end gull/tern numbers were greatly reduced and eiders were nearly gone from the coast. We have few data on numbers of birds of birds remaining in eastern Canada but it is likely that the situation here was not greatly different from that of New England. There, some 16,000 pairs of terns and 11,000 pairs of Herring Gulls are estimated to have bred at the turn of the century.

The unrestrained slaughter of birds in both Canada and the United States and the consequent decline in numbers of many exploited species demonstrated the need for controls. In 1916, the Migratory Bird Treaty between Canada and the United States was negotiated, and in the following year enabling legislation was passed in both countries. In Canada, the Migratory Birds Convention Act, a very pragmatic document, was passed to give protection to those species of birds which, at the time, were considered to be "useful to man or harmless". Non-useful birds, raptors, cormorants, kingfishers, crows, etc., were given no protection and because of their exclusion from the MBC act responsibility for these species has fallen to the provinces.

However, both gulls and terns were given protection under the Treaty, as were herons, eiders and alcids--in fact, all the seabirds except cormorants. The Migratory Birds Treaty really worked and in New England both gull and tern populations responded immediately. It is estimated that by the early 1940's terns had increased three fold and gulls fivefold.

Although we have no data on tern numbers in Atlantic Canada as a whole at the turn of the century we do have one astonishing estimate of the population of terns breeding on Sable Island in 1903. Harold St. John, the botanist, quoted W. Saunders as estimating, based on the area of the island and the density of breeding terns, that there were not far short of a million terns breeding there. Certainly the diaries of the Superintendants of the island and published accounts of visitors to the island provide anecdotal support to this estimate. However, even if Saunders was wildly optimistic and there were perhaps only 100,000 pairs there rather than half a million pairs, this single colony was ten times larger than the entire population of New England at that time. Following the introduction of protection to tern colonies in New England, many observers commented on the gratifying rate at which tern numbers were increasing. I suspect that an important factor in the increase of the New England population was immigration of terns from Sable Island.

However, the increases in tern numbers didn't continue in New England. After the 1940's, terns began to decline and by the early 1970's, numbers had declined by 30% and the decrease continues. Parallel decreases have been noted in the Great Lakes, in Europe and, as my aerial colony counts indicate, in Nova Scotia.

Gulls present an interesting contrast to terns. While terns are behaviourally inflexible, specialised feeders, gulls are flexible, opportunistic foragers, able to thrive in an increasingly human-dominated environment. They have been able to enhance their reproductive success feeding on the wastes of the fishing industry and they have decreased their winter mortality by feeding at dumps (the Halifax-Dartmouth dump supports about 2000 gulls, 500 crows and a lesser number of pigeons over winter). Gull numbers have increased hugely and they appear to be one of the main causes of the decline of terns. Gulls reduce tern breeding success by excluding terns from traditional and preferred breeding sites and by preying on tern eggs and chicks. It is interesting to note that gulls began breeding on Sable Island in the 1920's; by 1969, some 4,400 Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls bred there and tern numbers had been reduced from "not far short of a million" to around 2,600 birds. We do not have, at present, good estimates of the breeding tern population in Nova Scotia. On the Atlantic coast of mainland Nova Scotia I know of only 15 other tern breeding sites on which I counted about 1,400 birds. I have made aerial estimates of around 1,000 birds coming off 8 other colonies in the remainder of the province. Aerial estimates of tern numbers are not very accurate but these data are sufficient to demonstrate that our present tern population is small and declining rapidly.

In the eastern United States the National Audubon Society has undertaken the task of managing declining or extinct tern colonies by the simple expedient of removing breeding gulls. Terns which have been forced off prime nesting islands by gulls have

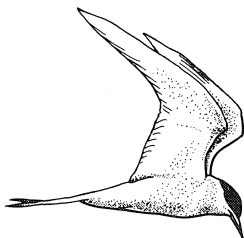
returned to breed in abandoned colonies once gulls have been excluded. On Petit Manan Island in Maine, for instance, terns, which had abandoned the island in 1980, returned immediately to the colony after the United States poisoned the breeding gulls in May of 1984. About 860 pairs returned to breed immediately and numbers of breeding terns increased regularly until in 1988, when 1,435 pairs bred there. Their breeding success also increased in this period from 0.8 chicks per pair to 1.6 chicks per pair.

In Canada, the Canadian Wildlife Service is alarmed at the rate of decline of terns and we are framing a survival strategy for terns in the Atlantic Provinces which is based on the preservation of 'core' colonies. Terns breed in a large number of relatively small colonies and a smaller number of large colonies. It is not possible to give protection to more than a few breeding sites, but it has been shown that a relatively small number of colonies produce most of the fledglings which maintain the population. The C.W.S. tern survival strategy plans to ensure the protection and management of a limited number of the most important tern colonies; colonies which are sited close to abundant food and which have, in the past, been large and productive. Some colonies such as Machias Seal Island and Tern Island in Kouchibouquac Park in New Brunswick are already protected and managed. Others, like Peter Island, which is owned by the Nova Scotia Bird Society, are protected but not actively managed.

That protection can work is shown by the Petit Manan project and by the remarkable growth of the Kouchibouquac Park colonies. In 1971, 1,500 pairs of Common Terns bred in the Park; by 1983, the population had increased to over 7,000 pairs, becoming the largest tern colony in eastern North America. This rapid increase was due mainly to immigration of terns from more disturbed colonies elsewhere in northern New Brunswick and it demonstrates the need for another protected colony on that coast so that all our eggs will not be in one basket.

There are no actively managed tern sanctuaries in Nova Scotia. Peter Island is one of the largest colonies in the province and merits closer attention as an Arctic Tern colony of major importance. The only large Roseate Tern breeding site is in S.W. Nova Scotia; this colony is being carefully monitored by a member of the Bird Society and the Nova Scotia Department of Land and Forests has expressed interest in giving this site protected status. However, the most promising site in Nova Scotia for a managed tern sanctuary is Sable Island. The island already has been granted Federal Migratory Bird Sanctuary Status, food is abundant there, and if gulls were excluded, they would not be able to attempt to re-colonise this offshore island as rapidly as they could a coastal site. Sable Island has the potential to become the most important tern colony on the Atlantic Coast of Canada.

However, even if such major colonies were to be managed as tern sanctuaries, most tern breeding sites remain unmonitored and protected. Furthermore, while the Canadian Wildlife Service has legal stewardship of terns, many other organisations are involved in one capacity or another. The provinces have control of habitat, organisations such as NSBS own sanctuaries, National Parks manage colonies and many interested amateurs are doing useful work monitoring colonies. There is an obvious need for some organisation to bring these people together, to pool resources, to coordinate efforts and to share expertise.

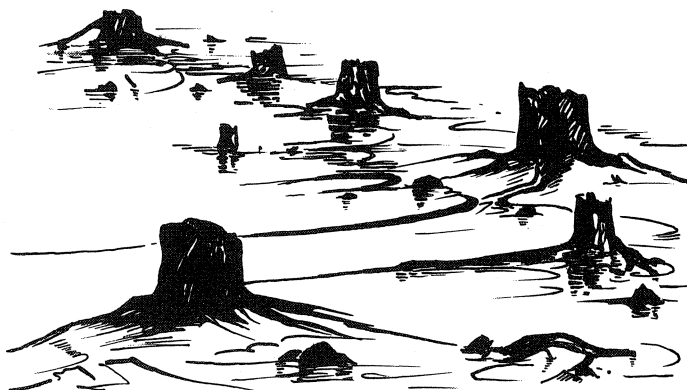


Last year such a group was formed; in October, 30 people from all over the Atlantic Provinces met in Halifax to form the Atlantic Canada Tern Work Group (ACTWoG). Most of those attending this meeting were representatives of government agencies or of the executives of naturalist groups. Unfortunately, only a few independent amateurs attended. Such a group can only be useful if it serves as a focus for, and an assistance to, interested amateurs. At present we only plan one meeting a year and the next one will be in September. At this meeting we hope to be able to attract the National Audubon Society workers from Maine and Massachusetts. They have more experience in tern colony management than anyone in Atlantic Canada.

So, if you have any interest in, or knowledge of, tern colonies, or if you would like to help with colony monitoring, please get in touch with me at:

Canadian Wildlife Service,
Bedford Institute of Oceanography,
P.O. Box 1006
Dartmouth,
Nova Scotia B2Y 4A2

Phones: 426-6052 (office)
479-2520 (home)



Answers to Birding Trivia quiz on page 47

1. Black Scoter
2. Black-throated Blue Warbler
3. Surf Scoter
4. Three: Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk (rare) and Goshawk
5. Four--Common, King, Spectacled and Steller's
6. Black Turnstone
7. In Scotland, to see "Twa Corbies"(crows) was an omen of death
8. Margaret A. Clark
9. Western Sandpiper
10. Dickcissel

NOVA SCOTIA BIRD SOCIETY
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Spring Bird Migration	3
Field Trip Reports	27
Forthcoming Field Trips	32
Mskegoakade	33
Thoughts on Little Egrets	42
Letters to the Editor	44
Remarkable Raptors	46
Book Review	48
Birding Eastern Passage, Hartlen's Pt.-Part I	50
A Brief History of Terns in Nova Scotia	59

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