

# Nova Scotia Birds



July 1996

DICKIE

NOVA SCOTIA BIRDS  
A Publication of the Nova Scotia Bird Society

Volume 38 Number 3

July 1996

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Spring Migration 1996	1
Birding Far from Home:	
1. Alaska--Francis Spalding	27
2. Ireland--Blake Maybank	30
3. Cuba--Christopher Helleiner	32
Book Review - <b>Birding in Metro Halifax</b>	36
Profile	37
For Want of a Spoken Word - Pete Dunne	40
Field Trip Reports	43
Forthcoming Field Trips	48

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Cost of the publication of this periodical is partially borne by the Nova Scotia Museum.

ISSN 0383-9567

Publications Mail  
Reg. No. 4628  
Published four times a year

## SPRING MIGRATION 1996

## LOONS AND GREBES

RED-THROATED LOONS weren't mentioned before Apr. 2, when 3 were on St. Mary's Bay, near Marshalltown Marsh (BJA). One was seen at Broad Cove Apr. 6 (SJF) and 2 arrived off Economy Apr. 19; several remained in this area through the first two weeks of May FLS). The only other report was a singleton off Loch Broom, Pic. Co., May 5 (KJM,CGB). Once again COMMON LOONS appeared to be far from "common" with a maximum of 17 observed in March, 10 of these at the Canso Causeway (KJM,CGB). April brought only a small flurry of reports as loons returned to fresh water. The earliest of these was one on River Lake, Mooseland, Apr. 8, joined by its "better-half" four days later (KAT). Preliminary totals for the North American migration count (NAMC) held on May 11 add 85 Common Loons to our report (JCT, NAMC coordinator).

One of the PIED-BILLED GREBES noted in our April issue--the one at Pleasant Lake--successfully overwintered and was still present Mar. 22 (RSD). Other singletons were discovered at Lake Egmont on Apr. 28 (AJV) and May 11 on the Canaan Mt. Rd., King's Co. (GWT). The Amherst Point Bird Sanctuary yielded a count of 30 on May 5 (BLM,ALC,JOW). NAMC participants in Pic. Co. add 6 to our tally.

HORNED GREBES were reported by the handful at a number of South Shore locations. CJF noted a peak of 20 birds Apr. 13 East Chester. Fifteen were off Marshalltown Marsh Apr. 2 (BJA), while 10 (several close to full breeding plumage) were still on St. Margaret's Bay, Apr. 5 (CAC,KLT). The only sizeable spring gatherings of RED-NECKED GREBES were: 27, calling and displaying, at Purcell's Cove, Apr. 20 (CAC,KLT) and 28, mostly in breeding plumage, off Blanche, May 3 (DHY,SJF). A dozen other birds were counted in 3 reports, the latest being a bird lingering at Brier Is. to at least May 24 (DHY,SJF).

BDS, ed.

## FULMARS TO CORMORANTS

Surface seawater temperatures in offshore waters were well below average this spring, but food must have been available as numbers of tubenoses were reported and they were more or less on schedule. RSD saw 1 NORTHERN FULMAR on Mar. 14 on Brown's Bank and 100 were there on May 1. Dean Fiske spent May 9 to June 1, thirty miles NE of Sable Is. and he saw 200 or more feeding around the ship during the entire time he was there. He also captured the bulk of the shearwaters reported this spring: 18 GREATER SHEARWATERS were there on May 18, building to 350 by May 30. A lone bird was seen from Sable Is. on May 21 (ZOL). The earliest SOOTY SHEARWATER was 1 seen on May 2 on Brown's Bank (RSD). Dean Fiske watched them grow in numbers from 50 on May 11 to 150 by May 30 from his vessel NE of Sable Is. There were no reports of WILSON'S STORM-PETRELS but LEACH'S were back in their burrows on Bon Portage by May 4 (JCZ). Five Leach's were seen flying and vocalizing around and under buildings from Apr. 26 to May 3 on Sable Is. (ZOL). IAM says there are "vague 19th century references to nesting there, but none such in recent years."

The spring migration of NORTHERN GANNETS was either underreported or too far offshore to be seen from the usual vantage points. There were no sightings for March, but 12 adults were counted in a twenty minute period on Apr. 5 off Chebucto Head (CAC,KLT) and 1 adult was seen there on Apr. 8 (AJV). ZOL counted 50 on Apr. 5 flying past Sable Is.; RFL saw 30 on Apr. 22 off Mahoney's Beach; Cathy Murrant reported flocks of 5-25 on May 15 off Cape Morien, feeding in the fog and generally heading in a southerly direction. Usual numbers were seen off Brier Is., up to 100, mostly adults, on May 23 (DHY et al.). One of these days we may once again have our own breeding colony of Gannets and thanks will go to Ted D'Eon and his able assistants. Their efforts to re-establish a colony on Gannet Rock, ten miles south of Yarmouth, using decoys, began in 1994. It is an exciting venture and we look forward to progress reports.

GREAT CORMORANTS were scarcely reported. The first spring migrant was seen on Apr. 5 at the Pictou Causeway, with 5 there the next day (KJM). JAC saw 2-3 from Apr. 9 on in Sydney Hbr. DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANTS were somewhat tardy, earliest report being of 2 on Mar. 30 at Pictou Causeway, building to 60 by Apr. 10 (KJM). KJM notes that the North American Migration Count on May 11 produced a total of 1400 in Pict. Co. alone. Other reports include: 1 on Apr. 5 at Lockaber Lake (RFL,MAG); 3 on Apr. 6 in Truro (AJV); 5 on Apr. 7 on Boot Is., NE of Grand Pré, where they nest (JWW); 3-4 from Apr. 19 on in Ship Hbr. and Jeddore, with numbers still low by May 25 (WAT,KAT). Migrants were still moving past Brier Is. on Apr. 24 when CRH counted up to 200 in Westport Hbr.

SJF, ed.

## HERONS AND RELATIVES

Our first AM. BITTERN, Apr. 27 at Mid. Musquodoboit (BLM), was followed by another Apr. 29 at Churchville, Pic. Co. (KJM), both slightly later than average. Only two later birds were reported. A rare LEAST BITTERN (small size and buffy wing patches very evident) was on Sable Is. Apr. 29-30 (ZOL). Three GREAT BLUE HERONS, Mar. 14 near Glenwood, Yar. Co. (JKD) were presumably fresh arrivals. A subsequent progression seems evident in reports of individuals Mar. 28, near Avonport (SHW), Mar. 31 at Big Is. Pic. Co. (KJM), and Apr. 2 near Pomquet (RFL). They did not become widely reported until after mid-April. A notable 25+ were near Pt. Edward, C.B. Co., Apr. 27 (JAC). It has been the best spring in years for southern herons, and probably not all sightings were reported. A very early GREAT EGRET was on Cape Sable Is., Mar. 23 (JON et al.), and another was found Mar. 26-27 at Boutilliers Pt. Hfx. Co. (AJV et al.). Others were at Lr. LaHave, Apr. 9-17 (EHC), near Barrington, Apr. 12-14 (birdline), in the Pubnico area, Apr. 16 (2 birds, RSD), on Cape Sable Is., Apr. 21 (MUN et al.), on Caribou Is., Pic. Co., in early May (KJM et al.), in Queen's Co., May 2 (Ron Loucks), at Broad Cove, May 4 (SJF,BAH), at Matthews Lake, May 9 (DHY), and on Cape Sable Is., from May 19 (MUN et al.). Presumably the same LITTLE EGRET as last year's appeared at Louisbourg on May 8 and stayed through the month (sev. ob., fide DBM). I wonder if this was the same bird as the one seen well (grayish lores, two long head plumes) Apr. 27 at Baccaro, Shel. Co., by Russell Crosby, Mark Butler, and Carmen Williams? Individual SNOWY EGRETS were reported from Cape Forchu, Apr. 27-30 (birdline, Crescent each, Apr. 28 (LAC), Advocate Hbr., May 2 (JRM,MSM), Matthews Lake, May 6-11 (DHY), Brier Is., May 22 (DHY,SJF), and with (paired with?) the Little Egret at Louisbourg (fide DBM). LITTLE BLUE HERONS were not well represented: an early ad. on Cape Sable Is., 21 Mar. (JON), another at Barrington, Apr. 27 (SJC,JCT, et al.), and an apparent white imm. Apr. 28 at Chester (fide JCT). An early TRICOLOURED HERON was found Mar. 27 at Conrad's Beach (ALC,KAT WAT, et al.), and there were 2 there at the end of May (fide FLL). Two more were at Matthews Lake, May 9 (DHY), and another at Cape Sable Is., May 29 (JON et al.). A CATTLE EGRET was on Cape Sable Is., Apr. 11-14 (JON,MUN, et al.), and another at Three Fathom Hbr., May 26-29 (JWT). Individual GREEN HERONS were at Little Hbr., Shel. Co., Apr. 21 (sitting by road at mailbox, DHY!), L.W. Pubnico, Apr. 26 (JKD), and Brier Is., May 23-27 (SJF et al.). A freshly dead ad. YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON at L.W. Pubnico, Mar. 31 (RSD) had paid the price of early arrival. Another ad. was on Bon Portage Is., May 11 (JCZ). Disappointingly, no reports of BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERONS came the usual way. Fortunately, we know that they were in situ on Cape Sable Is. (first ca. Mar. 20, JON) and on Bon Portage Is., where several were evident during the NSBS field trip in late May. A stray was at Canning, May 21 (M. Gibson). It's been years since we've had as many GLOSSY IBSES. The first was spotted at a quarry pond near Clam Hbr., Apr. 12 (JWT), and savoured by NSBS field trippers next day. Others were at Matthews Lake, May 6 (DHY), Bon Portage Is., May 19 (NSBS trip), and Brier Is., May 11 (CRH et al.) and (same bird?) May 22-26 (SJF, sev. ob.).

IAM, ed.

## SWANS, GEESE AND DUCKS

Although it lacked any yellow spot and its vocalization couldn't be described as "classic", an adult swan on Sable Is. May 20-23, was most likely a TUNDRA SWAN. Trumpeters have been introduced in the east however, and must be considered a slight possibility. Perhaps forthcoming photos will enable a conclusive identification.

In a location more often noted for its large assemblies of the "black" goose, two observers were fortunate to see 5 "white ones"; these SNOW GEESE flew over The Hawk, CSI, on Apr. 19 (DHY,SJF). Here, the congregation of the more expected goose, the BRANT, numbered 3000+ by early March BAH's "Bird Watch"). No so far away, at Little Hbr, 52 were seen on Apr. 11 (DHY). The high count this spring at Brier Is., occurred Apr. 5-7: 120+ around Peter's Island and 100+ at Pond Cove (RBS); about 15 remained in the area until the end of May (IAM). No other areas reported Brant this spring.

Favourable weather conditions in March allowed the CANADA GEESE to move through without delay. Perhaps they went so quickly that no one saw them--in any case we received very few migration reports. In early March up to 10,000 had gathered in Chezzetcook Inlet (BAH's "Bird Watch"). On Mar. 20 200+ were at the mouth of the Habitant River (RBS) and on the opposite side of Minas Basin at Economy FLS counted 150. Lingering to mid-April were 50 at Canning and 30 at West Lawrencetown Marsh (JCT,EHC). Seal Islanders report a pair of Canada Geese breeding on that island and IAM saw 4 geese during his mid-May visit. A couple of pairs were closer to the mainland on Bon Portage Is. as well; by mid-May one pair had settled in at Flag Pond and had a nest with 5 eggs (JCZ). Bear in mind that there's a good chance that all of these "island-geese" escaped or were released from captivity on the mainland--we should be so lucky! Azor Vienneau saw a goose sitting on a nest in an inlet near East Dover, Apr. 25 and a pair a few days later at Lake Egmont--both known breeding locales. A goose wearing a white neck collar was fed by local people in Mahone Bay from about Jan. 15 to at least Mar. 17, by which time it was able to fly a bit. (JWW-Jim, let us know if you find out where the goose was banded and what became of it).

Eleven reports of WOOD DUCKS tallied 21 individuals. These included three pairs, one at each of the following locations: Belle Isle Marsh, Up. Musquodoboit and Hwy 333 between East and West Dover (RBS,BLM,AJV). Five drakes at Sullivan's Pond on Apr. 6 (CAC,KLT) had dwindled to 2 by May 17 (PLC). One of these is unable to fly so can now be considered a permanent resident of the pond.

The first arrivals of GREEN-WINGED TEAL were 6 m and 4 fe. at the Saxon St. Pond near Sheffield Mills, Mar. 26; by Apr. 13, 12 were at this location and the same number at Canard Pond (JCT). Two were at MacLellan Marsh, Pic. Co., on Mar. 30 (KJM), and a pair reached Economy by Apr. 6 (FLS). No one else commented on the spring migration of this duck except for EHC, who counted 16 at W. Lawrencetown Marsh, Apr. 14. A Eurasian race Green-winged Teal was at Chezzetcook Inlet, Mar. 31 and again Apr. 20--presumably, but not necessarily, the same individual (IAM). A second 1 was sighted May 7 at the DU Pond in Annapolis Royal (BJA).

AM. BLACK DUCKS must have been "as usual" through spring, although few obs. mentioned them. At Green Bay a pair tended a pond before the ice was out in March and on Apr. 27 had 11 newly hatched young (Cohrs). Several others observed pairs or nests but the only other brood mentioned was the brave (foolhardy?) "mom" who led her 10 ducklings from the pond at Morash Park, crossed Woodlawn Rd--all four lanes, and passed through Jim Taylor's yard, returning by the same route an hour later. By mid-April, most Black Ducks are settling down to tend to family matters; so Judy Tufts was surprised when on Apr. 13, a farm tractor flushed 200 from the marshlands at Sheffield Mills.

MALLARDS were reported mainly in King's Co., though surely they were present but ignored by obs. in other areas. The King's Co. birds were: 25 Mar. 18 at the New Minas Sewage Ponds, dropping off to 14 by Apr. 12; 3 pairs ushered in spring at Sheffield Mills' Saxon St. Pond; and Hennigar's Marsh pond had 6 on Apr. 13 (JCT). Pairs were also noted at Argyle and Monks Head Hbr (JKD,RFL). Mallards have fast become regular breeders on Sable Is.; 5 adults and up to 13 young were seen from Apr. 12 on into May (ZOL).

A more welcome breeder on that remote island is the NORTHERN PINTAIL. This spring approximately 5 pairs hatched up to 23 young (ZOL). Early arrivals on the mainland were sighted Mar. 10-- 4 at Conrad's Beach (BLM,ROF). This number climbed to 17 by Mar. 25; farther along the shore this same day at W. Chezzetcook, there were 14 Pintails, all of which seemed to be paired (BDS). On Mar. 31 KJM spotted a pair at Caribou Is., plus 2 others in the Pictou area. Our final report (except for an injured bird lingering at Sullivan's Pond in May-PLC) was 4 at Annapolis Royal (BJA).

BLUE-WINGED TEAL reports were even fewer than last spring. "A pair" was at each of these locations: Starr's Point, Sheffield Mills Marsh, Lockhartville, and Grand Desert, and 2 pairs on Sable Is. Only 4 additional birds were recorded and SJF comments that not one of either Teal was seen at Cherry Hill or Broad Cove this spring. This picture improves somewhat with a look at NAMC statistics which tallied 47 Blue-wings on May 11, which is a little better.

The first NORTHERN SHOVELER sighting this spring was a pair at Halfway River Cum. Co. (FLS) on Apr. 15. A lone female was near Vaughan, May 9-11 (fide JWW). The only others 3 were at APBS on May 11, a low count for the area (AJV). The only GADWALL was at Tuft's Cove, Mar. 10 (BLM,ROF).

Once again a drake EURASIAN WIGEON turned up Apr. 27 at Antigonish Landing (Peter Jackson), where one was found last November, and most likely is the same bird found at Pomquet Point during the winter. A drake AMERICAN WIGEON at Antigonish Landing and a pair at NSPC Trenton, Mar. 17, appeared to be spring arrivals (RFL,CGB,KJM). This species was scarce this spring. A pair was at each of these locations in April: DU Pond, Annapolis Royal; Canard Pond; and W. Lawrence town Marsh (BJA,JCT,EHC). In addition to these, the NAMC recorded 10 in Pic. Co. and 13 in Cumb. Co. Even if these 13 were all in the Amherst marshes, it is still a low count for that area.

The first RING-NECKED DUCK of the season arrived at Goose Creek Marsh (Glenwood), Mar. 23 and built to 21 by Apr. 5 (RSD,JKD). No one else mentioned any concentration of this species but smaller groups of 1-5 were scattered about the mainland through April, plus 4 landed out on Sable Is. The Cumb. Co. team counted 111 on May 11 for the NAMC. I can't be sure of the location, but you can be sure the Amherst area marshes had something to do with this high count. The Ring-necked and TUFTED DUCK reported last time around, successfully overwintered at Sullivan's Pond and were last seen Apr. 22 by IAM. A drake Tufted was easily picked out as it kept company with some scaup at Lyon's Brook, Mar. 31 (KJM), probably the same one that was in the area, Jan./Feb.

Good sized flocks of GREATER SCAUP were at a couple of Atlantic coastal locations: 350 on Mar. 12 at Bayport (EHC) and 300 in Pubnico Hbr, Mar. 29 (RSD). Smaller flocks, 40 and 60, were at Three Fathom Hbr. and Cape Sable Is. in March (BLM). The grand exodus came in April and very few were reported in May, although about 300 of the massive flock wintering in the Pictou area lingered until at least May 11 (NAMC). Eleven of the Eastern Passage LESSER SCAUP reported last time were still present Mar. 10 (BLM,ROF). In a repeat of last spring, Lesser Scaup showed up the Port Williams Sewage ponds Apr. 4-7: 1 m. and 3 fe. (RBS,JWW). During the last week of April pairs were reported at Glace Bay and on Sable Is. (DBM,JOM,ZOL).

The large rafts of COMMON EIDERS in the Halifax Hbr. approaches, about 4,000 in early March, were not to be found by Mar. 24. Had they all moved on?—there were no subsequent reports for that location. Also on Mar. 24, 250 eiders were off Peggy's Cove (EHC), and on Apr. 1, BJA counted 500 along the St. Mary's Bay side of Digby Neck.

Dozens of eiders were seen along the shores of Bon Portage Is., the first two weekends in May; several nests were observed along the west side but some showed evidence of predation. A count along the shores of Seal Is. in May produced 360 males, almost a 50% increase over last year, but females were about the same at 260 (IAM). The Tays noted 10 pairs at Grand Desert May 16, and double that at Taylor Head Prov. Park two days later. Noone remarked on seeing young.

Only one lucky person saw a KING EIDER this spring. Carl Spinney spotted a drake off the Tusket Islands the week of Apr. 15 ( fide TCD).

No HARLEQUIN DUCKS were mentioned though a few were likely around. Only a handful of obs. commented on OLDSQUAW and most mentioned small numbers, which is surprising since it had been a good winter for them. Best counts were up to 40 at E. Chester, Apr. 13 (CJF) and three flocks in Green Bay Apr. 2 held a combined total of 180 birds; 10 lingered off Crescent Beach for the NAMC May 11 (JLC, JSC)--"in incredibly peculiar plumages!"--I can just imagine.

As usual, BLACK SCOTERS were less frequently encountered than the other two scoters. Four were at Advocate Hbr., Mar. 25 (JRM, MSM) and the same number were off Chebucto Head the previous day; the latter were with a flock of 300 WHITE-WINGED SCOTERS (BDS). Double that number of White-wings were at Green Bay on May 11, and that's just the tip of the iceberg! SURF SCOTERS arrived in unprecedented numbers, even for Green Bay! Three hundred (300) there on Apr. 27 wasn't even a hint of what was to come. As the Cohrs describe it, numbers had been building up all day until by 4:00 p.m. "the bay was black", the assemblage was estimated to be 17,000 birds. At 4:30, they all arose and flew off seawards.. "What a sight!"--indeed! 2500 were still present May 21: 70% Surfs, 30% White-wings. On this date in Cape Breton, along the coast between Glace Bay and Port Morien, the Murrants counted 200 Black Scoters, 300 Surfs, and 500 White-winged. Elsewhere, scoters were scattered along our shores in more usual numbers, making it a good scoter spring.

By the time April and May arrive, N.S. obs. must be tired of looking at ducks. In any case, we only received 4 reports of COMMON GOLDENEYE and five for BUFFLEHEAD. Goldeneye numbers were "as usual" but a total of only 15 Bufflehead seems low, and eight of these were at one location, the DU\* Pond at Annapolis Royal, Apr. 2 (BJA). This small sampling isn't enough to draw any conclusions. The drake BARROW'S GOLDENEYE was still present at Sydney River in March and had been joined by an imm. male (JAC).

Even HOODED MERGANSERS drew little comment this spring, which is unusual. Twelve were on Pleasant Lake, Mar. 8 and had dispersed, leaving only 4 by Mar. 22 (JKD, RSD). A drake was at Abercrombie Mar. 31 (KJM). The only others were 2 pairs on Drain Lake by Apr. 24 (BJA, JCT). I anticipate that the fall numbers will paint a different picture. Ditto for our other two mergansers; there were very few reports, but the ones we did receive, reported average numbers. Randy Lauff had our best count on Mar. 30 at Captain's Pond, Ant. Co., of 70 COMMON and "dozens" of RED-BREASTED MERGANSERS. On Apr. 20, BJA observed 4 pairs of Commons on Drain Lake. Two of Bernard Forsythe's Common Merganser nest boxes at Methals Lake had eggs, 1-10, the other had 5. His box at Black River Lake held 12 Common Merganser plus 2 Hoodie eggs with the female Common looking after the incubation. Let us know how things turn out.

BDS, ed.

\*DU--Ducks Unlimited

\*NAMC--North American Migration Count

## DIURNAL RAPTORS

Two TURKEY VULTURES were over Brier Is., Apr. 1 (BJA), and presumably more were about, as up to 6 (Apr. 29, CRH) were present on subsequent dates (var. ob.). Other sightings included 1, Apr. 29 at Donkin, C.B. Co. (DBM,JOM), 3 on the same date at Advocate Hbr. (JRM,MSM), and individuals near Barrington in early May, at Glenwood, Yar. Co., May 6 (both JKD), and at Linden, Cumb. Co., May 10 (fide JWT).

The first OSPREY of the year was rather late (per Tufts) on Apr. 14 (birdline), but at least 10 more were seen Apr. 18-21. Others did not report their first until later in the month, and JAC did not see one, as she normally does, during April around Sydney this year. I don't know if this signals a trend. BALD EAGLES were copulating and "housecleaning" near Pomquet, Feb. 22 (RFL). King's Co. had "quite a few around the usual spots" (JCT) in mid-April, left over from the winter gatherings. About 6 continued to roost on the North Mtn., beyond Canning, in mid-May (J. Harwood). A new nest at White Rock fell (with at least one egg) after a heavy snowfall, Apr. 14; the adults had built another nearby by early May (BLF). An adult was incubating on another new nest at Gaspereau during March on a platform fittingly established near the late Cyril Coldwell's house in 1990 by BLF. The older King's Co. nests at Greenwich and Wallbrook continued active (fide JWW). Another bird was incubating near Economy, Apr. 12 (FLS).

A male N. HARRIER managed to kill a Starling and a Mourning Dove on Mar. 6 near Avonport (EVU). Males at Advocate Hbr. on Mar. 26 (JRM), Hartlen's Pt., Mar. 31, and near Wolfville, Apr. 2 (JCT), probably represented first arrivals. "More than usual" were thought to be around King's Co. this spring (JCT), although only a few more were reported from other localities. With only four reports of SHARP-SHINNED HAWKS, no patterns or trends can be discerned; doubtless many more were seen. The more glamorous, and more elusive, N. GOSHAWK was presumably more fully reported: Mar. 23 near Hammond's Plains (AJV), Apr. 27 at Hardwood Lands, Hants Co. (BLM), Apr. 28, Near Chester (CJF), and on Brier Is., May 23 (DHY). The earliest reported BROAD-WINGED HAWK was at Economy, Apr. 26 (FLS), and others were at Black River L., King's Co., Apr. 28 (BLF), and near New Glasgow next day (KJM,CGB). They were widely noted thereafter. Although RED-TAILED HAWKS are certainly common enough along our highways and byways, there were only two spring reports (by RLF, EHC). Spring sightings of ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS included individuals near Antigonish, Mar. 31 (RLF), at Grand Pré, Apr. 1 (dark morph, JCT) and Apr. 7 (2 light morph, JWW), and a late 1 on Brier Is. May 23-26 (light ad. m.; SJF, sev. ob.). It is uncertain if 3 sightings of GOLDEN EAGLE on the Eastern Shore were of the same individual. One was first reported (AJV) as a subadult at the mouth of Cole Hbr., Mar. 28. It or another was seen over Lawrencetown Beach (BJA,JWT; "immature...white band on tail easily noted"). The consensus was that the bird seen by NSBS field trippers next day at Martinique Beach was a near-adult (see its description in field trip report).

An AM. KESTREL on Apr. 4 near Antigonish was RLF's and our "first of the year". They were slow to appear elsewhere: Apr. 10 near Wallace (KJM), and a flurry of sightings Apr. 15-23 (var. obs.). Two clear migrants were on Seal Is., May 14 (ROF et al.). A few MERLINS wintered, and individuals near Sydney, Apr. 11 and at Wolfville, Apr. 14-15 (AJV, JWW) may stand as first spring arrivals. Among several May sightings, 1 on Brier Is., May 25 (sev. ob.) was presumably still on the move. Settled pairs or nests were noted near Lockeport (DJC) and at Wolfville (JWW) from late April, at Steilarton, May 5 (KJM), near Pictou, May 26 (KJM), and in Halifax in late May (IAM). The Wolfville birds seemed to have more success catching Chimney Swifts in early morning than in evening (JWW). PEREGRINE FALCONS were reported from Sable Is. (2 during April, ZOL), Big Island, Pic. Co., Apr. 11 (birdline), Mooseland, Hfx. Co., Apr. 21 (WAT,KAT), and near Chester, Apr. 28 (fide JCT).



## GALLINACEOUS BIRDS

A paltry 2 GRAY PARTRIDGES were reported from King's Co.--at Starr's Pt. in mid-April (fide, JCT, JWW). A report (via JCT) of a Bald Eagle taking one of these birds seems unlikely to explain the overwinter decline from an initial 12-14 in that area. However, this introduced species is certainly in trouble in the province. Two more were noted Mar. 22 at Economy (FLS). By contrast, RING-NECKED PHEASANTS flourish, so that few found them worth reporting; none were noted in new places or unusual numbers. Five SPRUCE GROUSE were found Mar. 25 along a trail near Lansdowne, Col. Co. (KJM,CGB), and RFL conjured up a tame male for his field class May 8 near Antigonish. Eight reports of at least 25 RUFFED GROUSE from late March through May support last issue's conclusion that they are at a peak. An oddly curious and approachable individual was near Kingsport in late April (fide JWW). Nests were found in Lun. Co., May 7 (6 eggs, JSC) and in King's Co., May 25 (11 eggs, BLF). A male N. BOB-WHITE at a Falmouth feeder May 9 was road-killed on May 19. I doubt this terminated the recent unsanctioned introductions.

## RALIDS

VIRGINIA RAILS were heard May 5 at APBS (2 birds, NSBS field trip), May 11 near Athol, Cumb. Co. (AJV), and near Churchville, Pic. Co. (KJM), in late May near Brookville, Pic. Co. (CGB, KJM), and on the NSBS trip to Bon Portage Is. A SORA, Mar. 29 at Pubnico Head (RSD) and another Mar. 31 at the edge of Lawrencetown Lake (IAM--same bird there Apr. 7 by EHC?) supplied our earliest records of other than dead or moribund birds. Both were feeding in the open, perhaps indicating some stress. Indeed, a dead bird was found on Cape Sable Is., Apr. 4 (birdline). Some 15 were heard during the NSBS field trip to APBS, May 5, and 2 at Cape John, Pic. Co., May 11 (KJM). An AM. COOT near Lunenburg, Mar. 1 (JBM) was either an abnormally early migrant or had wintered locally. Another at APBS, May 5 was thought to be on a nest (NSBS trip).

IAM, ed.



This Lesser Black-backed Gull spent a second winter at the Barrington, Shel. Co., dump.

Photo, Blake Maybank, Mar. 23, 1996.

## SHOREBIRDS

A BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER at Martinique Beach, Apr. 14 had probably overwintered (IAM); another early bird, on Sable Is., Apr. 24, was a new arrival (ZOL), but may have come from the nearby mainland. Regular migrants were first noted May 11 (Spring Census) with 52 at Avonport (SHW), 25 on Long Is. (BLM et al.) and 1 each at Cherry Hill (SJF) and Economy (FLS). Brier still had 25+ May 19 (RBS) and 19 next day (SJF) at which time there were 9 near Tatamagouche (KJM). There were still 47 at Economy May 29 (FLS). Eight SEMIPALMATED PLOVERS were at Brier, May 20 (SJF), 3 at Waterside P. P. that day and May 25, along with 6 on Caribou Is. on the latter date (KJM). Two were at Windsor May 26 (BJA). The first PIPING PLOVER was seen at Lockeport Apr. 21 (DJC); 8 were at Pomquet Beach May 28 (RFL), with only that many reported province-wide in the interval. The KILLDEER was well reported, but the eighteen slips sent in amount only to about 40 birds. First was one dead on Sable Is. Mar. 14 (ZOL), with 3-4 later in the month on the mainland. The first week of Apr. 20 arrivals were noted (good coverage!); Nests with chicks were found May 16 at Wolfville (fide JCT), May 20 at Dan'l's Head (JON et al.), and May 24 in Pic. Co. (KJM).

The BLACK-NECKED STILT continues to wander our way. This year "a probable female, brownish black above" was on Sable Is. Apr. 17-18 (ZOL, e-mail to IAM, who adds that it was definitely not of the Eurasian race).

A GREATER YELLOWLEGS on Sable Is., Apr. 22 (ZOL) and 12 on the North Shore (e.g. 5 at Wallace) Apr. 28 (KJM) make one wonder what route these early migrants followed. On Brier 8 were present May 1 (CRH) and the Spring Census May 11, there and on Long Is., produced 50 (SJF, BLM et al.), 10+ remaining until May 19 (RBS). LESSER YELLOWLEGS followed the Greater's pattern: 1 on Sable, Apr. 22-24 (ZOL) and 17 in C.B., Apr. 26-27 (JAC), then 15 on Long Is., May 11 (BLM et al.). The first WILLETS arrived in the southwest--at Argyle Apr. 23 (JKD) and Pubnico Apr. 27 (RSD), but another 1 was at Wallace Bay Apr. 28 (KJM). At Cherry Hill 16-18 were present during the second week of May (SJF), after which smaller numbers were noted settling in. An early SPOTTED SANDPIPER was already at Pt. Edward, C.B. Apr. 23 (JAC). Two were at Pubnico May 6 (RSD); 5 in King's Co. May 15 suggest the main inflow was underway (JC&GWT). In all about 25 were counted this spring. An UPLAND SANDPIPER was at L. W. Pubnico May 21 (fide TCD).

Two RED KNOTS, presumably overwintering, were at Cherry Hill Mar. 14, 1 (still) there Apr. 16 (SJF); 6 were at Three Fathom Hbr. Mar. 31, 5 (still) there Apr. 13 (IAM, NSBS). One was on Sable May 8 (ZOL). The only report of SANDERLINGS also comes from Sable, where there were about 210 from mid-March to mid-May (ZOL). Three SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPERS were on Caribou Is. May 25 (KJM) and 30, a large number for spring, were at Windsor May 26 (BJA). Thirty (30) LEAST SANDPIPERS were on Brier May 11 (BLM et al.), where there were still 15 on May 20 (SJF). Only 12 were seen elsewhere, the last 3 at Economy May 29 (FLS). Unusual in spring, 5 WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPERS were on Caribou Is. May 25 (KJM). Only 8 PURPLE SANDPIPERS were noted this winter, all in March (AJV, BJA), but 35 were still present in the period May 11-23: from 18 at Crescent (J&SC), 4 at Economy (FLS) 10+ at Brier (RBS) to a last 3 at South Bar, C.B. (DBM). The only DUNLIN reports are of 2 on Big Is., Pic. Co. Apr. 29 and 1 in "very bright breeding plumage" on nearby Caribou Is. May 25 (KJM, CGB).

Two or 3 COMMON SNIPE at Marion Bridge (JAC) and Economy (FLS) in late April and several at New Ross in mid-May are the only reports--summer sightings would be welcome news. AMERICAN WOODCOCK did much better, with 20 sighted, the first 3 on Mar. 12 near Guysborough (JWT). Among others were 4 at Centerdale, Apr. 1 (KJM) and 5 at South Side Hbr. Apr. 21 (RLF). An adult and 4 almost fully feathered young were found at Sherbrooke Lake May 24 (fide JWW).

## PHALAROPES TO ALCIDS

Phalaropes are scarce spring migrants in our waters and usually seen offshore so it is not surprising that we have no reports for this cold spring of 1996.

The only jaeger reported was 1 adult POMARINE, right on schedule, on Apr. 30 on Brown's Bank (RSD). Fast becoming our skua specialist, Zoe Lucas reported a GREAT SKUA on May 13 on Sable Is. Amazingly, she was able to get within 1.5 M of the bird and noted "uniformly dark brown with some reddish streaks on back; reddish axillaries, otherwise only slight reddish tone on underparts." Dean Fiske described 3 SOUTH POLAR SKUAS he identified on May 18 and 1 on May 31 on his trip NE of Sable Is.

A FRANKLIN'S GULL was reported on May 26 from Sable Is. (ZOL). It was a first winter bird, seen feeding with Herring Gulls. Its small size, extensive dark half hood, white breast and flanks were all noted, thus distinguishing it from the similar Laughing Gull. Unfortunately the diagnostic tail pattern was not described.

Fifteen RING-BILLED GULLS were still present on Mar. 10 at Three Fathom Hbr (BLM,ROF). A "new arrival in spring plumage" turned up on Mar. 30 at the Pictou Causeway (KJM). Other migrants included: 18 on Mar. 30 at Glenwood (JKD); 1 on Apr. 12 at Little Hbr. (DHY); 4 on Apr. 13 at the Wildlife Sewage Ponds in King's Co. (JCT); 21 Apr. 16-20 at Pt. Edward (JAC); 1 subadult on May 26 at Lockeport's Crescent Beach (DJC) and 20 diminishing to 12 from May 11 to 18 at Economy (FLS).

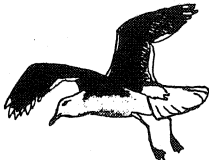
A MEW (COMMON) GULL was present on Apr. 7 at the East River Pollution Control Area in New Glasgow. KJM and CGB were able to compare it with an adjacent Ring-billed Gull and noted that it was "slightly smaller, with noticeably darker mantle; thin bill with less gonial bulge, basically yellow in colour with very little trace of black at tip; eye dark; legs greenish-blue; moderate white windows in 1st primary; head with few dark flecks in comparison to immaculate white of the Ring-bills." Photos should confirm this as a Common Gull as opposed to the North American Mew Gull, **when** there is a "split".

There were surprisingly few reports of BLACK-HEADED GULLS, perhaps the bulk of the wintering birds having already left. Reports included: 20 on Mar. 10 at Three Fathom Hbr. (BLM,ROF); 3-4 in breeding plumage on Mar. 30 on Lawrencetown Lake (RBS); 6 on Apr. 5 at West Lawrencetown (EHC); 12-24, mixed with Bonaparte's from end of March through April, at the North West Arm, Pt. Edward (JAC).

A first-winter LITTLE GULL was reported on the N.S. Bird Information Line on May 22, present along Shore Road in Chezzetcook, but no details have reached this editor.

Our usually scarce spring BONAPARTE'S GULLS were well distributed: 1 on Mar. 15 at Lobster Bay, off Yar. Co. (JKD); 1 immature which spent the winter at L. W. Pubnico and was still there Mar. 20 (RSD); 1 on Apr. 12 at Little Hbr. (DHY); 1 adult on Apr. 5 at Canal St. (IAM); 3 on Apr. 28 at Watson Creek, Pt Edward (JAC); 18 on May 25 at Lyons Brook (KJM).

Only one observer bothered to comment on HERRING and GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULLS: JAC noted that in March and April there were fewer Herrings than previously seen in Sydney and North Sydney Hbrs. and that Black-backs were much more plentiful. Only 1 LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL was reported, an adult on Mar. 23 at the Barrington Landfill (BLM,IAM).



ICELAND GULLS remain common in winter and early spring around Halifax and in Cape Breton. Four adult-plumaged (Kumlien's) and 3 second-year birds were at Pt. Pleasant Park on Mar. 24 (JSC); 18 were at the New Glasgow Pollution Control Area on Apr. 6 (KJM); 2 second-year birds were seen on Apr. 8 flying past in a NE gale at Green Bay (JSC); 2 were at the Wolfville Sewage Ponds on Apr. 13 (JCT). Late birds were 60 on May 10 at the east spit on Sable Is. (ZOL) and 6 immatures on May 23 in Wentworth Park in Sydney (DBM). The latter were lingerers from the 200-300 birds which had been present since mid-April. GLAUCOUS GULLS, uncommon compared to Icelanders, were sparse: on Jan. 2 at the sewer treatment area in Shel. Co., were "the most I've ever seen" reports DOE; 1 on Mar. 23 at the Barrington landfill (BLM,IAM); 1 subadult from Mar. 12 to Apr. 9 at Broad Cove (JSC,BAH,SJF); 1 on Apr. 13 at the Wolfville Sewage Ponds (JCT) and 3 immatures from May 20-24 at Sable Is. (ZOL).

Only a few reports were received of BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKES: 2 on Mar. 10 from Chebucto Head (BLM,ROF); 1 on Mar. 14 on Brown's Bank (RSD); 40 on Mar 15 on Sable Is. (ZOL)--and the good news is Cathy Murrant's report of Apr. 2 of at least 300 individuals back at their colony at Cape Perce.

A rare tern in spring, a CASPIAN TERN, was sighted on May 11 at East River Beach near Blandford (CJF). It was standing on a rock about 15 M offshore, its large size, red bill, full black cap and black under-primaries in flight were all noted. Ted D'Eon's laudable efforts on behalf of the terns in L. W. Pubnico, not only in providing nesting cover for Roseates but by raising awareness of the need for protection of all tern species, is paying off. Robert Nickerson, Edouard D'Eon and Douglas Surette, lobster fishermen in the area, report on May 2 the return of up to 200 mixed species to Northern Brother Is. (fide TCD). By the next day "hundreds of terns were milling around" (JKD,RSD). TCD's first ROSEATE TERN was spotted there on May 11. Eighteen COMMON TERNS arrived on May 4 in Lyons Brook (KJM); 4 terns, sp. were at Lr. Lahave on May 8 (EHC); 25 on May 11 at Mader's Cove (JBM); 3 on May 26 at MacDonald Cove, St. Margaret's Bay (AJV); 25 arrived at Sable Is. on May 13, building in numbers from then on (ZOL). AJV reported the only early arriving BLACK TERNS, 3 on May 11 at Eddy Marsh.

It has not been a DOVEKIE year and only one sighting was received: 1 on Mar. 23 in Advocate Hbr. (JRM). Murres are particularly vulnerable to oil spills and late in March, numbers of both species began washing ashore along the South Shore and as far north as Cape Breton, oil-coated, some dead, some dying. Four COMMON MURRES were found alive and photographed at Crescent and Cherry Hill Beaches by Bob Steele on Mar. 15. Three succumbed shortly after and in spite of the efforts of Nellie Snyder to restore it to health, the fourth died within three days. The cause of the disaster is being investigated by the Canadian Wildlife Service. A more positive report is 1 discovered stranded on the rocks in St. Croix Cove in the Bay of Fundy on Apr. 13, apparently well and perhaps only storm-driven. Anne McCurdy and her children rescued it and returned it to the water, not without her son first having received a bite from its sharp bill. Thanks go to the intrepid McCurdys! Many reports were received of THICK-BILLED MURRES, perhaps driven inshore weakened by oil ingestion. Donna Ensor and C. Holmes report one on Jan. 23 at Little Port Le Herbert only twenty feet from shore, affording an excellent view of the "black eye extension, like a wind-swept tear." Two birds seen on Mar. 17, 1 at Hemeon's Head and 1 at Ferguson's Cove appeared in good health (DHY,AJV). Two birds were at Lockeport's Crescent Beach on Mar. 22, 1 dead, 1 oiled (DJC). Twelve were counted on Mar 23 from Purcell's Cove to Horseshoe Park along the Northwest Arm and at least 1 appeared to be oiled (CAC,KLT). Other reports: 2 on Mar. 24 off Pt. Pleasant Park (Cohrs); 4 on Mar. 25 at the mouth of Herring Cove (AJV); a resting bird, perhaps ailing, on Mar. 30 in Halifax Hbr and 1 dead on Mar. 31 at Mahone Bay (PLC); lastly, 2 were still in the North West Arm on Apr. 11 (BJA).

RAZORBILLS were seen on four occasions: 2 on Apr. 7, 1 at Cow Bay and 1 at Mill Cove, reported to the N.S. Bird Information Line, but no details received by this editor. Another was seen on Apr. 27 off the west side of the causeway to Cape Sable Is. (DJC, Dean Fiske); 4 were recorded on May 11 on a pelagic trip out of Brier Is. (BLM, JOW, CRH).

BLACK GUILLEMOTS are common inshore all winter: 2 were in Mader's Cove on Feb. 28 (JBM) and 2 were at Advocate Hbr. on Mar. 25 (JRM, MSM). Our nesting birds first appeared in numbers on Apr. 22 with 20 being counted at Gannet Rock (TCD, RSD); 120 were tallied on May 11 off Brier Is. (BLM et al.); 40 were counted around Seal Is. in mid-May, with numbers considered lower than usual (IAM).

There is encouraging news of the possible re-establishment of breeding colonies of ATLANTIC PUFFINS in Yar. Co. Two adults were seen on Apr. 20 on Noddy Is. by Paul Shand; 4 were reported by fishermen on the same day on Round Is. (fide TCD); 2 adults were spotted on Apr. 22 on Gannet Rock (TCD, RSD).

SJF, ed.

#### DOVES TO KINGFISHER

JAC suggests that there are 100+ ROCK DOVES around Pt. Edward, C.B. Co.; perhaps we ought to have a province-wide accounting. MOURNING DOVE reports do not reveal trends or patterns, although CRH thought them particularly common during May on Brier. Three reached Sable Is. between Apr. 4 and May 20 (ZOL). A nest with 2 eggs was found at Mid. W. Pubnico, Apr. 28 (JKD). The description of an "albino" Apr. 11 at a feeder in E. Advocate ("pointed tail..., sandy, gray...some faint markings"; JRM) might not exclude a possible escaped Ringed Turtle-Dove. The season's only reported BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO reached Sable Is., May 23 (ZOL).

An injured SNOWY OWL, Mar. 10 near Canard (BLF) was sent for rehabilitation by the Kews. A migrating imm. bird stayed on Cape Sable Is., Apr. 7-11 (JON et al.). Four reports of GREAT HORNED OWLS included successful nests, each with 2 young: near Little Hbr. (DHY), and near Sydney (fide DBM). Eight pairs of BARRED OWLS laid clutches in BLF's nest boxes in the Wolfville area during April. At least 4 pairs were found in Ant. Co., by RLF and colleagues, and FLL called out 2 birds during a Apr. 26, "owl prow!" at Mt. Uniacke. A gratifying number of SHORT-EARED OWLS were noted, including a nest on Cape Sable Is. in early April (MUN et al.) and another at W. Pubnico with 7 eggs Apr. 29 and 4 newly hatched young May 19 (fide TCD). A least 9 birds were reported from other localities, mostly by KLF et al. in Ant. Co. One reached Sable Is., Apr. 24-25 (ZOL). All our reports of N. SAW-WHET OWLS are for March-1 "tooting" in King's Co. (RBS) and at least 4 in Ant. Co. (RFL et al.). They were doubtless more widely encountered.

A flying goatsucker seen briefly from the car May 7 near Sackville was thought to be a COM. NIGHTHAWK (JWW). Two over Chester, May 10 were well seen (LAC). We had only two subsequent reports. Alas, we must remove our 1994 and 1995 records of CHUCK-WILL'S WIDOW on Sable Is. These birds were heard, but seen only as impressions in the dark, in late spring of both years (ZOL); Leach's Storm Petrels, previously unknown as nesters on the island, but evidently at least "honeymooning" this spring, were established (ZOL) as the source of the "songs"--indeed somewhat like those of this southern goatsucker.

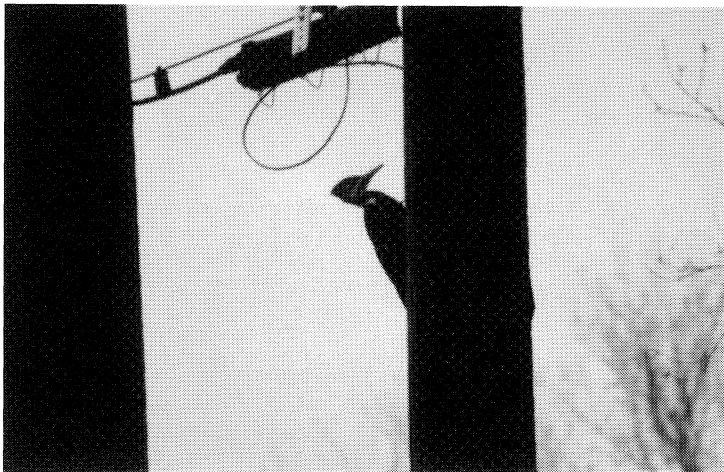
Our first CHIMNEY SWIFT was over Butler Rd., King's Co., May 9 (RBS), and there were 7 on Brier Is., May 11 (BLM et al.), after which they were widely reported. There were no reports from Wolfville chimneys, but ca. 300 entered New Glasgow's Temperance St. chimney May 14 (KJM), and spectacular 380+ poured into the Middleton High School chimney late evening May 23 (JWW). The first RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD appeared at Black River Lake, May 6 (fide JCT), and 2 were on Brier Is., May 11 (BLM et al.). There were 11 reports of some 15 later birds, most at feeders.

Three BELTED KINGFISHERS Apr. 18 at Westmount, C. B. Co. (where 1 had wintered, JAC), were apparently this year's (late?) vanguard. Others were first noted Apr. 26 in Lun. Co. (JBM) and Shel. Co. (GWT,JWT), and widely thereafter.

#### WOODPECKERS

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKERS made brief visits to Jenny and Henry James' Wolfville feeder, in Tatamagouche, Apr. 12, at Summit St., Dartmouth, Apr. 14, and to two feeders between Apr. 19 and May 2 (fide JCT). Will they settle down here? Individual RED-HEADED WOODPECKERS were at Round Hill, Ann. Co., Mar. 20 (Sue Flewelling), Westmount, C.B. Co. (no date, JAC), and L. W. Pubnico, May 23 (JKD). A fem. YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER was early at L. W. Pubnico Apr. 7 (RSD), and there were a half-dozen more reports from Apr. 21 through May. Eleven reports of some 20 DOWNY WOODPECKERS, and eight of some 10 HAIRY WOODPECKERS were fewer than usual for spring. No spring BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKERS were reported, but I understand that a pair nested near White's Lake, Hfx. Co. March reports of N. FLICKERS were probably of overwintered birds. Four in Pic. Co. Apr. 7 were probably spring arrivals, and 2-3 in Westmount, C.B. Co., Apr. 10-16 (JAC), were assuredly so. Six reports for Apr. 20-28, including 1 on Sable Is. (ZOL), probably signalled the main arrival. Eleven reports of 12 PILEATED WOODPECKERS, including a nesting pair, May 26, in Caribou Prov. Pk. (KJM), were about as usual.

IAM, ed.



Joyce Chalmers sent an unusual photo of two Pileated Woodpeckers (one barely showing its back on the right side of the pole) near the Chalmers residence in Bedford, Apr. 12, 1996.

## FLYCATCHERS THROUGH SWALLOWS

Just 2 OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHERS have so far been reported on territory, at Stanley and Methals Lake, King's Co. (BLF), and there were also 2 reports on migration, from Brier Is., May 22 (SJF,DHY), and Sable Is. two days later (ZOL. EASTERN WOOD-PEWEES were on Brier, Sable Is. Economy and Advocate Hbr. around the same time. Presumably these were still migrants.

A single YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER was reported, singing, from Publicover Lake, May 19 (JSC). IAM sent in an intriguing report of an "Empid." whose description is certainly consistent with an ACADIAN FLYCATCHER, which would be only the fifth or sixth record for the province. Despite his suggestion that the description be condensed for this report, I am appending it in full, so that readers can judge for themselves, and also see what a rare bird description SHOULD look like! The photos, which will hopefully appear in a forthcoming issue, should help, but unfortunately the one absolute clincher was missing--namely the song.

The bird was found mid-morning by Roger Foxall, who recognized it as an Acadian Flycatcher, left son Andrew to monitor it, and went to alert others. It was then observed for a half hour by Ian McLaren, James McLaren, Carl Haycock and others, and recurrently through the day by Ian McLaren. The following are notes made prior to consultation of publications.

**Size, shape, etc.** A decidedly large *Empidonax*, with long, almost unnotched tail, and notably long primary extensions. The primaries reached to the end of the undertail coverts, themselves seemingly quite long. The bill was exceptionally long and wide-based for the genus.

**Colour.** The bird was notably greenish above. Most felt that the back was more olive-green and the face more purely green--to me the colour of unripe olives. Also to me, the colour seemed underlain by a grayish, rather than brownish cast. The upperparts were very uniform in intensity of pigmentation from the bill to the end of the upper tail coverts. The flight feathers and tail did not appear sharply darker in tone than the back, as they do in Least and Alder Flycatcher. Both appeared dark brownish, rather than blackish. Both wing bars were prominent, the middle coverts bar quite buffy, the greater coverts bar whitish. The underparts were pale, without much apparent upper-breast darkening. Yet the throat in direct light was contrastingly whiter than the upper breast. The belly, the thighs, and especially the undertail coverts were suffused with pale lemon yellow. The eyering was narrow, complete, but not very prominent; most thought it yellowish, and I thought it had a greenish cast. The mandible was dark and the maxilla pale to the tip. Roger Foxall thought the latter yellowish, I thought fleshy-yellow.

**Behaviour.** The bird seemed lethargic and tame, flitting to and from perches at heights of 1-2 m. This behaviour might have been attributed to recent arrival, but it continued through the day, even after much feeding. It often sat with wings drooped, emphasizing their length and long primary extension. It seldom flicked its tail, usually only immediately after landing, and then only rather slightly and slowly, some thought with downward emphasis.

The only book consulted in the field after the above notes were made, was the **National Geographic Field Guide**. In that work, the illustration on p. 293, for contrast with Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, is very similar to the Brier Island bird, except that ours was less dusky across the upper breast, had a whitish posterior wing bar, and was less emphatically yellowish below. The bird answers perfectly to more detailed descriptions of a spring adult, especially in Kaufmann's field guide to **Advanced Birding** and sources therein. Potentially diagnostic photos were taken.

The first reported ALDER FLYCATCHER was May 15 on Seal Is. (IAM), with others noted May 21-25 in several areas. Migrating LEAST FLYCATCHERS were noted on Brier and Seals Islands on May 11, 14, but by then were already singing on territory in the woods in Kentville (JCT).

In contrast to last year, there were just a handful of EASTERN PHOEBE reports, with the first being at Brookfield, Apr. 27, already nest-building (KJM). Another was in a traditional nesting site at White Rock, May 5 (JCT). There were 12 reports of EASTERN KINGBIRD, trickling in to the southern half of the province from Apr. 20 (Lr. E. Chezzetcook, IAM et al.) on. In general this species seems to have arrived in similar numbers to, but about ten days earlier on average than 1995.

Only a few HORNED LARKS remained into spring, with only one small flock reported--12 on Brier Is., May 21 (SJF et al.).

There were a few more PURPLE MARTINS around this year than last. Ones and 2s were seen on Sable Is. (ZOL), Seal (ROF) and Brier (RBS) Islands in May, while AJV found 2 at Amherst Marsh and 5 at their traditional site in Oxford, nearby, on May 11.

TREE SWALLOWS were widely reported this spring. The first sighting was about average, Apr. 14, with 14 at Glenwood (JKD), building up to 100+ there four days later. Fifty were over Drain Lake, near Halifax on Apr. 22, increasing to 200+, May 6 (EHC). About 1000 were estimated there on the 11th (RBS). Numbers at the New Minas sewage plant were astonishing-- 8-10,000 there on May 10, "filling the wires, on fences, on the grass and in the air, feeding on a massive hatching of Mayflies" (JCT). Next day numbers there were down to about 2,000 (JCT,JWW). Two pairs had reached Marion Bridge by Apr. 30 (JAC). Most BANK SWALLOWS had probably not yet returned by reporting time but 1 was over Seal Is., May 14 (IAM), and 10 were near L.W. Pubnico, May 21 (TCD). A few CLIFF SWALLOWS were reported trickling in, but one of the larger known colonies--on the Air Canada hangar at Halifax International Airport, could be in trouble, because of putting up sheet metal to discourage the birds from building nests. Eighty birds appeared there by reporting time, and some appeared to be trying to build nests anyway (DHH). Hopefully they will find a nearby alternative site. The first BARN SWALLOW appeared on Apr. 23, at Little Dyke, Col. Co. (FLS), and thereafter numbers increased in the usual way, till they seemed well established in appropriate habitat by the end of May.

#### CORVIDS THROUGH GNATCATCHERS

Both GRAY JAYS and BLUE JAYS continue to be reported in expected numbers at expected locations.

Several nesting COMMON RAVENS were seen, with a pair that built a nest at University Hall, Acadia University, then abandoned it but built another 50 m. away (JWW), and another nest with 2 young on Apr. 28, location not specified, was also reported (RFL,MAG). Noisy courting pairs were prominent as usual in the Valley in early spring (RBS). The species was "well represented" in Cape Breton (JAC). Despite the fact that the AMERICAN CROW is one of the most abundant species in the province, only three people (JAC,WAT,KAT) reported any! The huge wintering Kentville flock was well dispersed by early spring.

There were just seven reports of BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE, although most were of 8-20 birds, mostly at feeders. Three more noteworthy records were of a pair investigating a nest box on the early date of Feb. 10 at Lr. Ohio (DOE), a nest with 6 eggs in BLF's yard on Wolfville Ridge, May 18, and a flock of 55 leaving the northern tip of Brier Is., May 27 (IAM). BOREAL CHICKADEES were represented by just five reports, with no large numbers or unusual occurrences.



Small numbers of both NUTHATCHES were reported, with, unusually, WHITE-BREASTED slightly outnumbering RED-BREASTED. Perhaps this is because they are more unusual, and therefore get more reported. We should watch for any trends in the next few years. A White-breasted nest was found on May 24 in Kentville (RBS), with both adults bringing food. There were six BROWN CREEPER reports, of 10 birds altogether, from various locations.

A HOUSE WREN, described by JCZ et al., as being lighter and larger than a Winter Wren, with a bigger tail, was on Bon Portage Is. in one of the banding lanes May 20. In contrast to 1995's twenty reports of WINTER WREN, this year there were just eight, including 4 singing on Seal Is., May 14-15 (IAM), 3 along the Cape Split trail, May 10 (SHW), and 1 back in its old haunts at Pubnico Pt., Apr. 25 (RSD).

As usual a smattering of GOLDEN-GROWNED KINGLETS was noted, including 1 in full song on the early date of Mar. 24, in Pt. Pleasant Park (Cohrs). There were no apparent large spring migratory movements. The same could be said about RUBY-CROWNED KINGLETS, with no large movements, and no clear cut dates for first obvious singing, in the woods.

#### BLUEBIRDS THROUGH STARLINGS

There was an EASTERN BLUEBIRD noted in one of the traditional spots, near the cemetery in Westport on Victoria Day--no other reports.

There were just 5 VEERY reports, all from mid-May on, and 3 on Sable Is. May 22-23 (ZOL) were presumably late migrants. Now that BICKNELL'S THRUSH has been officially separated as a species from GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH, we should all be on the lookout for the subtle and difficult field marks and song differences that separate the two. Presumably any Gray-cheeked singing on territory, e.g., in coastal Cape Breton, in June, is likely to be the former. Only IAM and ROF reported 1, (no date or location), and felt it was a true Gray-cheeked rather than a Bicknell's, on the basis of largish size and flesh-coloured distal maxilla. IAM recently wrote the definitive article on field identification of these two species in *Birding* magazine, well worth reading for anybody interested, and showing just how difficult it can be! A few SWAINSON'S THRUSHES were also noted, all in May. Apparently birders throughout N.E. North America have noted exceptional numbers of this species this spring. Apr. 20 was the first date for migrant HERMIT THRUSH on Sable Is. (ZOL), and also for the first bird singing on territory (Hopewell, RFL,CGB), about average for this species. After that, there were 6 further reports of birds seen or heard around the province.

WOOD THRUSH (no details) were reported on Sable (1 each of two dates in May and Seal (2 May 14-16).

There did not seem to be a definite concentration of migrating AMERICAN ROBINS, but smaller numbers seemed to drift in. Thirty "looking newly arrived" were in Wolfville, Mar. 8 (fide JWW), 30-50 "travelling fast on #7 highway" (in a car, or flying over?-ed) near Spry Hbr, Mar. 20 (KAT),-50 new arrivals at New Ross, Mar. 21 (KNK), and ~100 at Gaspereau, Mar. 30 (JWW).

The first GRAY CATBIRDS were on Sable Is. on the early dates of Apr. 18 (1) and 19 (3) (ZOL). After that, all the reports were from around the province, but all in May. Ten NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRDS were present this spring, including "a permanent resident" in West Side, New Glasgow (KJM,GGB), 1 still present in Eastern Passage from over-wintering (JWT), 1 in Lockeport for at least two weeks (DJC), and a pair nesting in Port Williams (GWT). BROWN TRASHER numbers were a little better than usual, with 3-4 being seen--all between May 19 and 23, at Westport (RBS, and the same bird three days later, SJF), Economy (FLS) and Mooseland (fide KAT).

There were only 3 AMERICAN PIPITS reported, on Sable and Seal Islands, and no large flocks, such as are sometimes seen in winter.

Lots of people continued to see BOHEMIAN WAXWINGS, with the large flocks of winter largely thinning out by the end of March. A few stragglers stayed on, with the latest report being of ~15 birds in Parrsboro on Apr. 15 (FLS). When will they start to stay and nest? A striking albinistic bird was seen by JET, BLF et al. in Greenwich in early April, with white crest, collar, nape, undertail coverts and lower belly. The rest was generally washed-out looking, and the tail band was yellow. There were only a couple of CEDAR WAXWING reports, but unusually, 2 were on Sable Is., May 23-24, and RBS saw several flocks of 20+ in Richmond Co., C.B., Jun 7-8.

The bumper NORTHERN SHRIKE eruption reported in the last issue continued into spring, with 13 further reports. The latest was an odd sighting, of a bird at Little Hbr, Shel. Co., on Apr. 20, eating peanut butter at DHY's feeder.

There were as usual only a few EUROPEAN STARLINGS reported, but a flock of 200+ at Pt. Edward, C.B., was noteworthy (JAC). PLC noted 2 different birds carrying straw, presumably for nesting, in Halifax, Apr. 25.

RBS, ed.



This somewhat piebald Red-breasted Nuthatch was at the Douglas feeder near Aylesford, Dec. 5, 1995.  
Photo by Judy Tufts.

## VIREOS AND WARBLERS

April 25 was the first date for the SOLITARY VIREO, as was the case last year, with 2 birds at Cape d'Or, Cumb. Co., on that date (JRM). The first week of May saw a total of 9 birds reported from King's, Pic., Lun. and Hfx. Cos., and spring firsts were noted until May 19. There were 5 on Brier, May 11 (BLM et al.), and 2 on Seal Is., May 15-16 (IAM). A well-described WARBLING VIREO on Brier Is., May 11 was observed by BLM, JOW and CRH. IAM found 4 on Seal Is., May 14, and managed to get some photos. His notes indicated "a small, stout vireo...very gray, dorsally weak eye line, pale lores, grayish cap. Only one bird had a bit of flank yellowish, others very 'cold' in tone. Very 'blank' faces". A new Rare Bird Report Form was completed by SJF for a PHILADELPHIA VIREO seen on Brier Is., May 22 (also seen by DHY, JOY and BAH). Part of her description follows: "A plump vireo, obviously smaller than the Red-eye; bill smaller--but a confirmed "vireo" bill. Gray cap; white supercilium and black eyeline extending through lores to eye...predominate yellow underparts: throat and breast yellow with some lighter streaking; undertail coverts bright yellow". This may have been the same individual IAM photographed on Brier, May 25, but a different bird was there on May 27. JKD had the first RED-EYED VIREO sighting, as he did last year, again on May 5: 2 at Kemptville, Yar. Co. The next reports were of 1 at Head of St. Margaret's Bay, Hfx. Co., on May 11 (CAC, KLT), 2 on Brier, May 12 and 1 on Seal Is., May 16. Four or 5 arrived in southwestern Lun. Co. on May 22 (Cohrs), but Red-eyes had not become widespread by the May 29 deadline.

Two male BLUE-WINGED WARBLERS were reported on May 11, 1 on Bon Portage Is. (JCZ, who remarked, "Getting to be a regular here!") and 1 on Brier (BLM et al.). Descriptions were received of 2 "beautiful male" GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLERS, one on Seal Is., May 16 (IAM) and one at Kentville, King's Co., on May 25 (AAM, RBS, GWT, BLF).

The late-arriving TENNESSEE WARBLER was just landing on our shores a week or so before deadline. One or 2 were observed on Brier each day between May 20 and 24 (SJF, DHY et al.). ZOL saw 2 on Sable Is. May 23, and 3 or 4 were "singing on territory" at Economy on that same date (FLS). First arrivals were noted in Hants Co. on May 25 (JSC) and in King's Co. on May 26 (RBS). KJM found our first spring ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER in three years at Caribou Prov. Park, Pic. Co., on May 26. Though this species is similar to the Tennessee Warbler, the distinguishing "yellow undertail" and "lightly streaked belly and sides" were noted. The brighter NASHVILLE WARBLER was first found (a pair) at Mooseland Rd., Hfx. Co., on May 6 (WAT). There were 2 at Lake Rd., Lun. Co., on May 10 (SJF), 8 on Brier, May 11 (BLM et al.) and 1 on Seal Is., May 14 (IAM). Later reports included 8 near Westville, Pic. Co., on May 17 (KJM).

Though the first NORTHERN PARULA was seen at Advocate Hbr, Cumb. Co., May 2 (JRM), only scattered singletons were noted through May 10 in King's, Hfx. and Lun. Cos. Though Parulas were slow to arrive, good numbers were eventually reported. Brier Is. tells the tale thus: 5 on May 11 (BLM et al.), 10 each day on May 21 and 22 (SJF) and 20 on May 27 (IAM). Ten had reached Pic. Co. by May 17 (KJM).

An early pair of YELLOW WARBLERS at Westport, Dig. Co., Apr. 27 (CRH) was the only report until May 11, and larger numbers did not appear until the middle of May. DJC saw her spring first in Lockeport, Shel. Co., on May 15, but "within a few days they were everywhere". There were up to 20 on Seal Is., May 15-16, and up to 30 on Brier May 25-27, with many males on territory (IAM). One had reached Pic. Co. by May 17 (KJM). The spring CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER migration consisted of 4 individuals: 1 on Seal Is., May 14 (IAM) and 3 on Fitch Rd., Lun. Co., on May 22 (Cohrs). This was our poorest showing for the Chestnut-sided in recent years. BLM et al. found the first MAGNOLIA WARBLERS (3) on Brier May 11. Though from 1 to a few were located in Pic., Hfx., Lun. and Cumb. Cos., May 17-21, substantial numbers were not mentioned until May 23, when 8 to 10 were counted on a one-mile walk along Somerset Rd., Lun. Co. (Cohrs). Reports of 9 CAPE MAY WARBLER individuals were received from western regions, the first being a singleton at Lake Rd. on May 7, and the last being 4 on Brier May 21 (both SJF). Single males of the BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER were found

on Brier May 11 and on Seal Is. May 14, but the first were not observed on the mainland until May 19, when JRM and MSM saw 5 males in the Cape d'Or-Advocate Hbr area. Singletons at Mooseland (KAT) and on Brier (DHY) May 22, and at Blomidon Prov. Park on May 23 (GWT); and 3 (2m., 1fe.) at Lewis Lake Fire Rd. off the St. Margaret's Bay Rd., Hfx. Co., on May 28 (AJV) were the lot.

A YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER survived to at least Feb. 25 at Pomquet Beach, Ant. Co. (RFL), and 45 were on Cape Sable Is., Mar. 23 (BLM et al.). The first spring arrivals were noted at Westport on Apr. 24 (CRH), with 100+ "in bushes, on ground throughout village". Otherwise, only small numbers were found in April, though 3 had reached Edwardsville, C.B., by Apr. 26 (JAC). Several obs saw their first of the spring in early May, and FLS stated that his May 2 date was late for a first sighting in Economy. CJF found a flock of 75 at E. Chester, Lun. Co., on May 4, with 40 singing on territory there a week later. Fifty were on Brier May 11 (BLM), and the adjectives "abundant", "common" and "numerous" were used by obs in Hfx. and Lun. Cos. between May 17 and 25.

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER reports were well down. One in Glenwood, Yar. Co., on Apr. 25 (JKD) tied the record early date for this species. Another early individual was found at White's Lake, Hfx. Co., on Apr. 28 (BLM). Two on Brier (BLM) and 2 in the Lake Rd-Fitch Rd. area (JSC) on May 11, 1 in Hammond's Plains, Hfx. Co., on May 16 (KNK) and several in New Ross, Lun. Co., on May 18 (KNK) were the only BTGs reported to deadline. The uncommon BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER, in contrast, was surprisingly well reported. The first date was May 11, when 1 male was spotted on Brier Is. (BLM et al.) and 1 female was found at Pubnico Point (RSD). Three were on Seal Is. on May 14 (IAM), while 8-10 per day were on Brier, May 20 and 21 (SJF,BAH et al.). JRM and MSM counted 5 males at Cape d'Or on May 19. Other reports of 1-3 birds came from Lun., King's and Hfx. Cos.

There was an error in the date for the YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER reported in the April issue to be at L. Canard, King's Co., in late July, 1995—the date should have been Nov. 23. JWT has taken great enjoyment from 1 male and 2 female PINE WARBLERS at his Dartmouth residence since February. Many other birders have seen them, and listened to the frequent song of the male. The first PALM WARBLER arrived at Westport on Apr. 19 (CRH), just about the average first date. April reports were also received from Hfx., Lun., Shel., Hants and Ant. Cos. Larger numbers were reported in May, and comments such as "O.K. in numbers", "rather common" and "common" were received. No news of the Palm Warbler was received from Cape Breton to deadline. A male BAY-BREASTED WARBLER on Bon Portage Is. May 11 (JCZ) was the first 1 reported, while another male was on Seal Is., on May 15 (IAM). Ten males per day moved through Brier May 20 and 21 (SJF,BAH et al.). The only report from the mainland was of 3 males at Red Rocks in West Advocate, Cumb. Co., on May 21 (JRM,MSM). May 11 was also the first date for the BLACKPOLL WARBLER, with 1 on Brier on that date and 2 there the next day (BLM). IAM found 7 new arrivals on Seal Is. May 16, and 10-15 per day were moving through Brier Is. May 20-24 (SJF et al.). Other reports of from 1 to 10 came in from Green Bay (JSC), Up. Sackville, Hfx. Co. (BJA), and Bayers Lake Park, Hfx. Co. (PLC).

The BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER was well reported, beginning with 1 on the early date of Apr. 26 at Lake Rd (SJF). Three (2 m., 1 fe.) were seen on Brier the following day (CRH). Before May 10, Pic., Hfx., Cumb. and Ant. Cos. were also heard from. However, reports were centred around May 11-12; e.g. 10 were on Brier May 11, with 25 there May 12 (BLM), and 12 were found in Lun. Co. on May 11 (JSC).

It was the poorest spring showing for the AMERICAN REDSTART since 1988, with only 8 individuals reported. The first 1 male, was timely, seen at "Swallow Hollow" on the Mooseland Rd., May 6 (WAT). The other 7 were observed in Hfx., Lun., Cumb. and Hants Cos., May 16-24.

"A glowing male" PROTHONOTARY WARBLER was discovered by Andrew Foxall on Seal Is., May 14 (IAM).

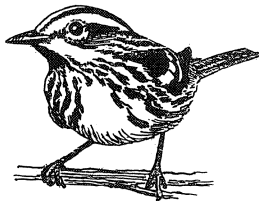
The first OVENBIRD was found by JCT in Kentville on May 10. Few reports were received, with only 2 on Brier Is., May 12, 1 in Hfx. Co. on May 16 and 2 in New Ross, May 18. Ovenbirds may simply have been slow to arrive, as JSC found 8 to 10 at Lake Rd. by May 20. It wasn't a bad spring for the NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH, though not quite up to the mean of the past three years. The first 1 reported was early--singing at the pond on the Ashburn Golf Course in Halifax on May 2 (JSC). At least 3 pairs were breeding around Lake Rd. (SJF). Others were reported from Timberlea, Hfx. Co. (1), Kentville (3), Brier Is. (2), Seal Is. (1) and Economy (1). BLM sent along a rare bird report for a LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH he observed on Brier Is. on May 12. His description included the following points: "large overall size, chunky looking, less sleek in appearance than N. Waterthrush; white-eye-stripe, twice as long posteriorly as anteriorly, remaining a constant width posteriorly; throat, breast and upper belly white, with lateral streaking/spotting (but not on throat), and brownish flanks contrasting sharply with the white underparts". This bird, according to BLM, was part of "one of the largest fallouts of migrant birds that local residents had ever seen" on Brier Is. (May 11-12).

An adult male CONNECTICUT WARBLER was discovered by JCZ on Bon Portage Is., May 12. The bird was found minutes later in a DNR bird bander's mist net. In her documentation, she mentions the complete, "startling white" eye ring, gray-black hood and lack of wing bars. Looks like the MOURNING WARBLER migration occurred after the May 29 deadline, except for a singleton on Sable Is. May 22-24 (ZOL).

Though the first sighting of a COMMON YELLOWTHROAT at E. Chester was on its average arrival date of May 11 (CJF), only 4 other individuals were found--3 males at Advocate Hbr. on May 22 (JRM) and a male at Bayers Lake Park on May 24 (PLC). The WILSON'S WARBLER migration was well reported, beginning with 1 male at Tantallon, Hfx. Co., on May 14 (AJV). One or two birds were subsequently reported from Seal Is., Hfx. Co., Brier Is., Cumb. and Hants Cos., but FLS found 10 at Economy on May 21, and remarked that this species, and "all warblers seem a week behind schedule". I tend to agree, and if this was the case, it is not surprising that only 3 CANADA WARBLERS were reported, as the Canada is one of the later warblers to appear. BAH et al. saw 1 on Brier Is. May 21-33, JSC found one on Lake Rd. May 22 and KJM had 1 at Priestville, Pic. Co., on May 25.

Thanks again to Judy Tufts for her North American Migration Count (NAMC) figures for May 11. I didn't get them in time to incorporate them into the report ( in any case, the overlap between this and the regular reports would be difficult to address). Numbers for many species, however, would have been significantly higher. Also, by virtue of the NAMC, May 11, became the first date for the Chestnut-sided Warbler this year (1 in Lun. Co.).

KNK, ed.



## TANAGERS TO TOWHEE

SUMMER TANAGERS appeared in several locations with the first arrival of a male bird having been seen at Cole Hbr. on Apr. 17 (JWT). By Apr. 27 there was a male at Cape Sable Is., gracing the NSBS Field Trip obs. with its presence (MUN). That same day there were 2 birds, a male and female at Westport as well (CRH). A fe. bird, possibly the same one was subsequently seen on Brier Is. regularly until May 8, and again on May 23 (CRH,DHY,HAH et al.). A male found its way to L.W. Pubnico being seen on Apr. 29 to May 1 (JKD) and a very tame female was found at Bon Portage Is., May 3 (JCZ).

With the exception of two, all SCARLET Tanager sightings were in the extreme southern parts of the province. The farthest afield was also the earliest, that of a female at Prime Brook, C. B. Co., Apr. 28, which stayed until at least May 17. A male arrived in the same location on May 26 (DBM). Of the dozen sightings, 3 of these vivid birds were found daily at Brier from May 12 through 23 (CRH,JOW,BLM,SJF). Other single birds were found at W. Pubnico (fide JCZ), Pubnico Point (RSD), L.W. Pubnico (JKD), Lockeport (DJC et al.), Seal Is. (IAM, RAF), Cape Sable Is. (JCZ) and Economy (FLS).

After so many years of very sporadic sightings and few nest records, NORTHERN CARDINALS have increased dramatically. We knew that the winter numbers were highest ever but by spring it became apparent that there were more than we suspected. With males singing loudly they became much easier to locate. Of the twenty reports I received, no fewer than 50 birds were represented. Although they are most numerous still in the southern parts of the province, there were up to 6 pairs in the metro Halifax area, as well as sightings in Amherst, Advocate, Economy, and several in the Wolfville area. Most impressive is a report of 2 young being well tended to by their parents in Dartmouth as of May 20 (JWT). Similarly, there are at least 3 pairs in Pubnico which perhaps will nest (RSD).

There is no question that there was a very impressive "fall-out" of ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAKS this spring. An unheard-of 110 were counted at Brier on May 12. with 20 more seen that day on Long Is (JOW,BLM,CRH). CRKA and KAS described two "flocks" of these birds on May 12 at Port Maitland, an unusual term for a bird that is most often seen alone. Up to 6 were found on Sable Is. from Apr. 19 through mid-May and 6 were seen at Advocate Hbr. on May 21.

BLUE GROSBEAKS were a rare find this spring. There were 2 females and 2 males at Louise Garron's feeder on Brier on May 20. One was observed in Port Williams on Apr. 27-28 (JCT et al.); 1 was found at Little Hbr., Shel. Co., from Apr. 17-20 (DHY) and there were 2 seen in Pic. Co. on the NAMC on May 11. INDIGO BUNTINGS on the other hand, were more evident, spotted alone or in twos. The exception was 5 birds at Argyle and Pubnico on Apr. 24 (JKD). The earliest was a pair found at Mooseland on Apr. 17. These two were still regular visitors there until May 4 (KAT,WAT).

Five RUFIOUS-SIDED TOWHEES were noted. The first was 1 found at Westport, Apr. 23 (CRH). The next was 1 in Yar. Co. on May 11, during the NAMC, then at East Green Hbr. during mid-May (fide DJC) and 2, a male and female were spotted on Seal Is. on May 15 (RAF,IAM).

## SPARROWS

AMERICAN TREE SPARROWS were found in small flocks throughout the winter, staying close to favourite cover and food sources. The later reports were 1 at Westmount, C.B. on Apr. 24 (JAC) and 3 at Economy on Apr. 26 (FLS). Although CHIPPING SPARROWS became quite evident by late April in most locations, there was a very early sighting of 2 at Avonport on Mar. 6 (EVU). The next was a brightly plumed bird at Wolfville on Apr. 14 (BLF). During the NAMC on May 11, 133 of these birds were counted with Pic. Co. tallying 54, and King's Co. next at 29. A rare find was of 2 FIELD SPARROWS on Brier, May 22 (SJF,BAH).

An early VESPER SPARROW was seen and heard singing at Broad Cove on Mar. 29 (JSC). More expected sightings included 3 at Williamsdale and 2 at Westchester Station Cumb. Co., May 5 (BLM,JOW,ALC). The regular spot near Kingston seemed to be holding 1 singing male on May 7 and May 27 (RBS,JWT). SAVANNAH SPARROWS seemed very late this year. The first sighting of spring migrants was on Apr. 27 at Economy (FLS). Soon after, on Apr. 29 up to 5 were found at Westmount, C.B. (JAC). Of the IPSWITCH race, 5 were discovered at Hartlen's Point on Mar. 31 (AJV), and 1 at Lawrencetown on Mar. 30 (RBS).

FOX SPARROWS were first noted on Mar. 19 in three separate locations. Two at Advocate Hbr (JRM,MSM); 1 at Wolfville (fide JWT) and 1 at Avonport (SHW). However, the majority of firsts were during the last few days of March, with individuals found in most areas of the province. It did appear from the reports that they were not as well represented this spring as in recent years. It seems that SONG SPARROWS really moved into the province on Mar. 26 which is the date most often given for first singing males. Earlier birds including 1 in Wedgewood Park, Halifax, giving its first feeble attempts at song on Feb. 27, were most likely overwintering birds (RBJ). A very noticeable migration of these birds was witnessed at Green Bay/Petite Riviere on Mar. 29, when 27 were counted along a one mile walk (JSC).

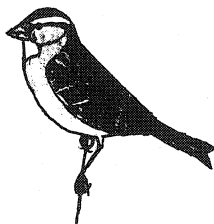
Single LINCOLN'S SPARROWS were found as early as May 12 on Sable Is. (ZOL) on Brier Is. (BLM,JOW,CRH). Two were seen on Seal Is. on May 15 (IAM,ROF): 1 at Tantallon on May 19 (AJV); and 1 at Priestville, Pic. Co. on May 25 (KJM). The first SWAMP SPARROW encountered this spring was 1 singing at Publicover Lake, Lun. Co. on Apr. 25 (Cohrs). One was seen at Elderbank on Apr. 27 (BLM) and 2 were found at Glenwood, Yar. Co. on May 4 (JKD) and 2 on Sable Is. on May 12 (ZOL).

First reports of WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS for spring came on Apr. 23-26 throughout the province. Large numbers began passing through after that and seemed to centre around May 8-12. Over 100 were seen at Sable Is. in early May and 50 were counted on Brier, May 12. The NAMC tallied a total of 553 on May 11, with Pic. Co. contributing 290 of those.

An incredible occurrence happened on Brier, when on May 12 a total of 530 WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS were counted. The first 1 seen was on April 19 at Westport, then 1 was found on Sable Is. Apr. 25. The storm of May 11 brought with it large numbers not only on Brier, but in smaller numbers along the southern coastal areas. Sable Is. held at least 54 on May 11-12. The last report was 1 still at Cape Sable Is., May 24 (JCZ).

The first gentle trilling song of DARK-EYED JUNCO was heard on Mar. 5 in Halifax (PLC). Although some areas seemed not to have usual numbers, most reported large flocks starting by the last week in March. Over 1000 were witnessed along roadsides near Economy during the first week in April (FLS). Over 500 in flocks of 40 or more were found at feeders and roadsides in Pic. Co. on Apr. 15 (KJM).

DAC, ed.



## SNOW BUNTINGS TO GRACKLES

Large flocks of SNOW BUNTINGS (200-300 at the Halifax International Airport, Mar. 2) decreased to 8 at New Minas on Mar. 18, and afterwards to singles Apr. 5, at Prospect and May 10 on Sable. Is. (DHH,JCT,CAC,KLT,ZOL).

An unusually early BOBOLINK, a male in breeding plumage, was seen consorting with Red-winged Blackbirds on Apr. 28 at Smiley's Park, Hants Co. (PLC). A male arrived on Sable, May 8, but the real migration appeared to be from May 11 to 21. No reporters mentioned large numbers and from a personal viewpoint, I feel they are decreasing, at least in some areas of the province. Reports and opinions as to this theory would be welcome.

Apart from an over-wintering RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD at Middle Ohio (DOE) ones and twos arrived from Mar. 15 onwards. No large concentrations were mentioned. The first birds reached Cape Breton on Apr. 30 (JAC). By the end of April, they seemed to be settled in their usual numbers in their marshy habitats.

An early RUSTY BLACKBIRD was at Economy, Mar. 23 (FLS). The first to reach Pic. Co. was on Apr. 1 at Centerdale (KJM). By Apr. 5 there were 3 at Ferry Rd. Marsh (Pic. Co.), 2 at Advocate Hbr and 5 at Economy. From then on they were seen at Pockwock (1 on Apr. 9, 3 on May 3), Hammond's Plains, Apr. 25, Broad Cove and Middlewood on May 11, New Ross, May 18 and Brier on May 24 (BJA,AJV,SJF,KNK).

A well-documented sighting of a male BREWER'S BLACKBIRD on Brier, May 12, was sent by BLM et al.

Except for Indigo Buntings, the highest number of reports made to this issue was of the spring appearance of the COMMON GRACKLE--23 (tied with White-crowned Sparrows). Obviously these noticeable and noisy characters are eagerly awaited each year.

Eva Urban at Avonport reported 2 on Mar. 6, but stated that they had overwintered in the area. A single (new?) bird was at Portuguese Cove on Mar. 10. The real "arrival" took place in the last week of March with 20 at Economy on Mar. 22 (FLS), 40 at Caribou Is. on Mar. 24 (KJM) and 24 at Conrose Field, Halifax, on the same day. A flock of 30 was present at Up. Sackville on Mar. 28 (BJA) and from then on they were HERE. They may have been unevenly distributed, for Jackie Cretien in Pt. Edward wrote that they were "extremely plentiful" there while Keith Keddy in Hammond's Plains felt that numbers were down there. A partially albino bird was near New Ross Rd. King's Co. on Mar. 27 (JCT).

There were nine reports of BROWN-HEADED COWBIRDS in ones and twos from March to May. The only significant flock was 20 on Mar. 17 at Up. Canard (JNW).

## ORIOLES

On May 11, an adult male ORCHARD ORIOLE appeared on Brier (BLM). On May 15 there was an immature male there (CRH). On May 18 came 2 females, dropping to 1 on May 19-24 (this one well described by SJF). A first year male was seen by IAM on Seal on May 26.

Sixteen people mentioned BALTIMORE ORIOLES (Yes, Baltimore!) The not-so-old nomenclature Northern Oriole has once more been split into the old Baltimore and Bullock's. No longer is the only Baltimore Oriole a ball player. After a good fall showing in 1995, Orioles arrived at widely spread areas during May. The earliest was a male, Apr. 20, in Yarmouth town (ARP). After an hiatus of a couple of weeks, they began to crop up in ones and twos and threes in Little Hbr., L.W. Pubnico (where a pair nested last year), Advocate Hbr, Sable, Avonport, Kentville, Economy, Plymouth, West Head and Jordan Bay. As if this were not enough, there was a major fallout of orioles on Brier and Seal. On May 12 there were 10 on Digby Neck and 130 on Brier (BLM). There were still 100+ at Westport on May 19 (RBS). Meanwhile IAM had 15 on Seal on May 14.



Just to make things interesting and possibly confusing to some, another species of oriole the BULLOCK'S was seen on Brier, May 23 by David Young: "pale oriole, grayish back, pale yellowish-green breast and white belly all clearly seen".

#### PINE GROSBEAKS TO EVENING GROSBEAKS

The PINE GROSBEAK picture continues to be hopeful. A few small flocks appeared, mostly in the Valley and the more easterly counties. On Mar. 21, the Tays had 10 on Mooseland Rd. and 7 were at Wallbrook near Grand Pré the same day. On Mar. 24 there were 8 at Pt. Edward and on Mar. 26 the Tufts had a flock of 20 on their property at Wolfville. The Wallbrook flock had fallen to 4 by Apr. 1. The only others seen were 15-20 at Mader's Cove, Apr. 30 (Morses) and 1 bird at E. Chester, May 4-11 (CJF).

On Mar. 1, Jackie Cretien saw 8 PURPLE FINCHES at Westmount, C.B. These were the first reported after a poor winter showing. They arrived at Economy on Mar. 23--3 birds which soon "became abundant" (FLS). By Apr. 12, they had progressed eastward to the Tays at Mooseland--there were 20 there mixed male and female. A small flock of 14 were on Sable from mid-April to mid-May (ZOL). A second wave moved in on Apr. 28 with 20 on Brier, also "becoming abundant" forthwith. From then on they were in Mader's Cove, S. Ohio and E. Chester (Morse, JKD,CJF).

One pair of the many HOUSE FINCHES which frequented the south-end of Halifax last winter were seen by Gladys Keddy carrying nesting material to the Tupper Medical Building on University Avenue--perhaps they should have gone to the Grace.

Nine members sent in reports of RED CROSSBILLS in flocks of from 10 - 100, from late March to the end of May. Sightings came from Wolfville, Kentville, Avonport, King's Co., Hfx. Co., Pic. Co. and Cape Breton. Unusually, many birds were seen at feeders rather than in coniferous woods.

Several of the contact birders whose telephone numbers are given by the Museum to enquiring members of the general public were inundated by questions about "these odd birds", "pink", "scarlet", "yellowish", "greenish" or "streaked brown and white" at the feeder. Obviously there were many more around than were reported by members, but why they should suddenly arrive in an area where a poor cone crop forced them to feeders is unanswerable.

WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS, on the other hand, after such an excellent showing at Christmas, moved on. We received only six reports of 271 individuals. Working east to west, they were 15-20 at Port L'Hebert, Feb. 16 (DOE), 100 Mar. 24 on Caribou Is. (KJM), 25 at Lochabar, Apr. 5 (MAG), 100 at Westmount, Apr. 28 (JAC), 25 at George's River, C.B., May 25 (DBM) and a female on Sable, Mar. 14 (ZOL).

The winter of 1995-96 was NOT a redpoll winter and few COMMON REDPOLLS lingered to be counted in this period. The 4 at Avonport, Mar. 6, 12 at Three Fathom Hbr, Mar. 8, 4 on Sable, Mar. 14, 3 at Greenwich and 1 each at Port Williams and Economy on Apr. 7, were all that turned up (EVU,JWT,ZOL,BLF,JWW,FLS).

Noisy PINE SISKINS seemed "about normal" to many observers who entertained flocks of 8-25 from west to east in the province. Large flocks were 100, Feb. 16 in Wolfville, 1-6 dozen at Westmount from March onward to report date, 50 + at Westport, May 8 (JET,JAC,CRH).

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH reports were few but enthusiastic: DOE had 20+ all winter and spring at Lr. Ohio and area; there were "lots" all April and May at Westport (CRH); CJF had 20 regularly from March to May in E. Chester, while PLC noted a similar flock in the south end of Halifax. Francis Spalding found them low in Economy in late winter but "especially abundant" in May.

Predictably, the number of EVENING GROSBEAKS dropped as spring advanced. However, more than usual seem to be still hanging about after mid-May. There were still 20 at E. Chester and 10 on Seal on May 15, 3 newly-arrived birds were seen on Sable, May 20 and 6 stayed on Brier, May 27. The Cohrs report having seen several sets of pairs in and near Petite Riviere in late May, including a pair carrying nesting materials far up a logging road near Petite.

I wish we could have a better picture of the state of HOUSE SPARROWS. Some birders ignore them altogether and other reports are sporadic. Are they increasing, decreasing or remaining steady in your area? Please let us know.

JSC, ed.

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Many thanks to all those who contributed reports for this period.

We **did**, however, have a problem this time with late reports--not a day or two, but a week or more. Do please understand that the Records Editor, Seasonal Editors, and Editor-in-Chief are all **VOLUNTEERS**, who must complete their part of the process on time in order to have **Nova Scotia Birds** come out on time. We publish the deadline well in advance. Please help us by marking it on your calendar.

JSC,WAT.

**DEADLINE FOR RECEIPT OF REPORTS**

for

the **January 1997** issue

**November 27, 1996**

**Bird Reports to the RECORDS EDITOR**

Wendie Tay  
5 Berwick Street  
Dartmouth, N.S. B2Y 3B6

**Articles, sketches and letters to the EDITOR**

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8 Rosemount Ave.,  
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Young, Joan	JOY

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, Eel Brook, Melbourne Overton, all the Pubnicos.
Shelburne Co. (Shel. Co.)	Cape Sable Is., Cape Sable, Matthews Lake, Lower Ohio, The Hawk, Seal Is., Little Harbour, Port L'Hebert W.
Queen's Co	Port Joli, Port L'Hebert.
Lunenburg Co. (Lun. Co.)	Cherry Hill, Broad Cove, Petite Riviere, Green Bay, Crousetown, Crescent Beach, Publicover Lake.
Halifax Co (Hfx. Co.)	Three Fathom Hbr., Conrad's Beach, Lawrencetown, Cole Hbr., Martinique Beach, Hartlen's Point, Laurie Park, Powder Mill Park, Chezzetcook, Mooseland
Colchester Co. (Col. Co.)	Economy, Glenholme
Annapolis Co. (Anna. Co.)	Annapolis Royal, Clementsport.
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*, Linden, Port Howe
Hants Co.	Shubenacadie, Noel Shore
Digby Co.	Westport (Brier Island), Brier Island
Cape Breton (C.B.)	Big Pond, C.B. Highland National Park (C.B.H.N.P.) Westmount

\*APBS-Amherst Point Bird Sanctuary  
CBC - Christmas Bird Count  
CSI - Cape Sable Island

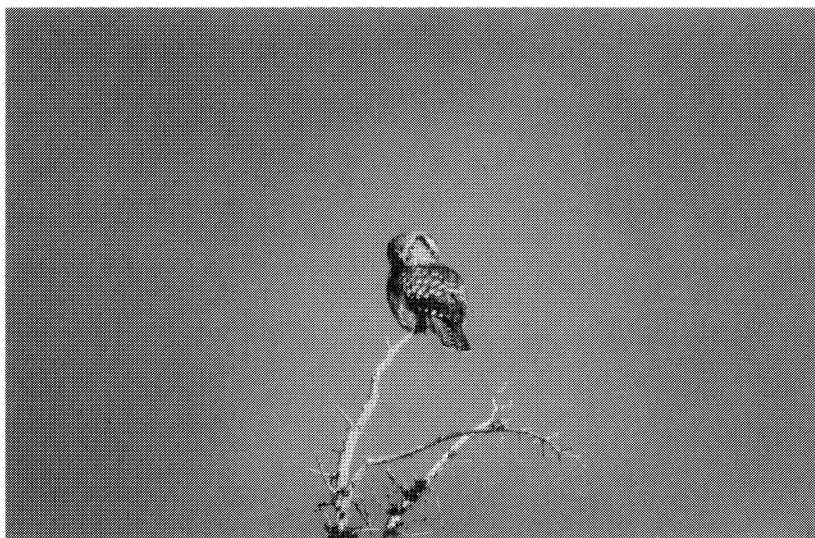
## A SPRING TRIP TO ALASKA

by Francis Spalding

On the envelope that came in response to my inquiry about birding on the Pribilofs, the name Sean Smith was written in above the return address. It couldn't be the same Sean Smith who had gone to school with my son Edgar in Truro and been on an Economy Christmas Count—but it was. I had thought first of the Pribilofs because it was there that one could best photograph some of Alaska's alclids, as well as the Red-legged Kittiwake, a species not likely to be seen anywhere else. Sean, a true Nova Scotian, was enthusiastic about the prospect of hosting people from home, asked that the latest newspaper be brought (and maybe a pack of Players Light), and promised us unlimited transportation and guidance. Not only that, but he insisted we stay at his house in Anchorage the night of our arrival. I say we because Edgar, a day back in Wisconsin, after a conference (and birding) in Hawaii, reversed his jet lag and came along. Sean himself was on Saint Paul, but his wife Nancy, who had been on an Economy Field Trip, took care of us that first night. Some rumbling in the night, which I took to be the dog, was diagnosed by Edgar as an earthquake, correctly as it turned out—about 5 on the scale, we learned later.

Next day, before the flight, we walked in a light drizzle to a pair of connecting lakes across from the airport. Though lined with seaplanes and laying claim to being the busiest seaplane port in the world, the area held lots of birds: most surprising were the Arctic Terns nesting a few feet from a repair shop, some in the tracks of heavy machinery. Red-necked Phalaropes twirled in a road-side strip of water, sharing it with Scaup, mostly Greater, Wigeons and Mallards. Mew Gulls were nesting on the odd hummock, as well as in the scrub at the edge of parking areas. On our return to Anchorage we planned to return to this improbable oasis with cameras.

The plane, it turned out, was not going directly to Saint Paul, where weather conditions were said to be marginal. First stop was Sand Point, a little east of the Aleutians. We'd be there thirty or forty minutes, they said, so we walked the three or four hundred yards to the water and were rewarded by good, though brief looks at a Black Oystercatcher and some Harlequin Ducks flying by. As we returned, we noticed the plane's propellers whirring and the ramp had been pulled away, though a fuel hose was still attached near the tail end. Fortunately, we were spotted as we dashed the rest of the way, and a yellow school bus wheeled out to take us across the fifty yards



Hawk Owl

to the plane, easily out-distancing the poor soul charged with pushing the ramp back into place across the same distance. No one seemed to find the incident unusual, but we would have been there three days, as it turned out, had we missed the plane. At Cold Bay, where the weather was worse, we took no chances; still, since people had disembarked at Sand Point, they had to undergo a security check, managed by two ladies of a certain age with very blond hair. Somehow the small room, with a desk, a partition and non-functioning detection booth, became a maze, with one of the ladies tapping to be let in from beyond the locked exit door. A couple of hours later we reached Saint Paul and after a long time circling in wait for a break in the weather, we returned to Anchorage. Nancy, forewarned by Sean, was at the airport. By phone from Saint Paul, Sean suggested that we head for Denali (formerly McKinley) Park, several hours' drive north of Anchorage, but be ready to return if a late-day call to the airport indicated that a flight would go tomorrow. In fact, the flight was cancelled, and would be the day after as well.

The next day was generally clear as we entered the park; we were heading for the Savage River, where Nick Lethaby's Guide suggested we climb Primrose Ridge in search of alpine species (i.e. White-tailed and Rock Ptarmigan, Surfbirds, Long-tailed Jaegers). Along the way we stopped for pictures of caribou, and at the river itself, found several people watching a large grizzly bear rooting around on an island below the bridge. The ridge looked high but worth a try. So, parking by the river, we started up along a little stream. Two hours later we were still perhaps a third of the way from the top and I was beginning to take more rest stops than Edgar. It was agreed that he would go on ahead, with me following at a more leisurely pace, pending a report from the summit. We were moving through an expanse of tangled dwarf birch and alder--the world of Wilson's Warbler, Tree, Fox and White-crowned Sparrows, while still above us we had glimpses of Golden Eagles, Ravens, a Merlin and improbable Harrier. While I was contemplating the chances that the alders in which I was hidden would soon give way to open talus, came a shout from an invisible Edgar, and news that the outlook was unpromising. The rise he'd reached was separated from the main ridge by quite a dip and there was still no prospect of the plateau we were looking for. A few Dall sheep listened as we decided to cut short our ascent.

Far below, a pale spot indicated reassuringly that the grizzly was still on his island. Back at the river, we found a pair of Harlequin Ducks by the bank; they allowed us to approach within range of our long lenses before easing into the stream and being whirled away by the current. We drove on. As the road climbed, we realized it had



Willow Ptarmigan

been foolish to start our climb from the river, but weren't inclined to take the longer, less steep trek we now saw would have been better. The bird that made the day memorable was the Willow Ptarmigan. Several times one would appear by the roadside, quite fearless in the safety of the park—once Edgar sat talking to one on a snow bank so convincingly that it walked up to him.

The Denali Highway, a gravel road 134 miles long and closed in winter, was next day's objective. A small lodge midway and another near the far end were almost the only visible habitations. The many ponds along the way contained virtually every species of duck native to Alaska, and a bright male Eurasian Wigeon to boot. Memorable was a shallow lake with twenty Trumpeter Swans, across which a moose was hurriedly splashing. A pair of Oldsquaw in a small pond complete with floating ice allowed us to approach close enough for photographs. Behind them was a mating pair of Lesser Golden-plover. In the same area Whimbrels were fending off one of the birds we'd climbed Primrose Ridge for—the Long-tailed Jaeger, a life for both of us. While we were getting out of the car, a curious jaeger made a low circle above us, only Edgar managed to use his camera for a shot he knows will be a blur. Its curiosity satisfied, the jaeger resumed its more wary, or at least indifferent ways. We looked unsuccessfully for Smith's Longspur, small bits of whose favoured habitat exist along the Highway; we did not bother to look for Arctic Warblers, which don't arrive until mid-June. On the return to Anchorage via the Glenn Highway, an encounter with one of the two Hawk Owls we saw, provided many photos though not, unfortunately, of the Gray Jays that pestered him persistently. Next day, on the way to Seward, we made another fruitless sortie into alpine habitat along the Cabin Creek Trail near Girdwood. Although this time there was a trail cut into the ridge sides, it was covered with snow, and we were in effect, creeping along the sides of some very steep snowbanks. Only American Pipits showed themselves on the talus, but on the plus side, we found a Golden-crowned Sparrow building its nest and, circling low above the parking area, a Golden Eagle, who seemed to know there was a ground squirrel in the rocky island in the middle of it. The barely traversable road to the trailhead (maintenance to begin June 1) passed through Sitka spruce; there we had splendid views of singing Townsend's Warblers.

The boat trip out of Seward was to be an all-day affair, exploring not only Resurrection Bay but also the Chiswell Islands, where most of the alcids breed and where we could hope for pelagic species. In the bay we approached close to cliffs where Red-faced Cormorants, Black-legged Kittiwakes and Common Murres were nesting. In the calm water of its inlets, Marbled Murrelets and Pigeon Guillemots swam close to the boat, and in the high spruce of an island we saw our first Northwestern Crows; though said to be common around Seward, we saw very few—perhaps because of the nesting season. Closely related to American Crows, in danger, perhaps of being relegated to subspecific status, in these grand surroundings they seemed very different and, to a connoisseur of caws, distinct.

Our luck held; that is to say, the sortie to the Chiswells was cancelled. We could make it all right, said the captain, but it would be rough and besides, some of the passengers were already seasick (and of course there was a cold rain). So we had to be content with passing looks at Horned and Tufted Puffins and forego the rest. On the way back we passed mountain goats feeding on the cliffs, young kids in tow. They favour these areas in spring as a way of protecting their young from black bears; how they themselves get there is hard to imagine. Back on shore we birded the Seward area. Highlights were three fully fledged Northern Shrikes (May 29) and four Wandering Tattlers (lifer).

The return to Anchorage next day in pouring rain was largely uneventful. Summing up—bad weather had forced us to improvise and to drive greater distances than we'd planned. A week makes for a very brief introduction to this mighty region but on the other hand, two weeks would have been exhausting, especially as the days are eighteen hours long. Except for the lure of May rarities, it would have been better to have planned a June trip to Saint Paul, including Nome and, if with a tour, Gambel in the itinerary, leaving the south (Seward, Homer, Dutch Harbor) for another day. However, be prepared to improvise: across the aisle on our ill-fated flight to Saint Paul was a Florida birder who had got within seven miles of Attu, that ultimate mecca of Alaskan birding, only to be turned back to Cold Bay. There he waited four days before the trip was called off altogether and then decided to try for Saint Paul. Still, on one of those days he hopped over to Dutch Harbor and, in very rough seas in a very small boat, managed to see well a Whiskered Auklet, as well as hundreds more not so well.

## BIRDING NORTHERN IRELAND

by Blake Maybank

Northern Ireland has not ranked high on most people's list of desired vacation spots; it's time for that to change. Despite the media's violent portrayal of the country during the recent "troubles", Northern Ireland has always been a safe destination for travellers. It is even more so now, due to the current peace process.

In August, 1995, Martine and I travelled to Northern Ireland to spend two weeks birding and hiking, and arrived near the end of their worst heat wave in centuries. Although the weather was unexpected, we were otherwise well prepared with advance material supplied by the Northern Ireland tourist board, as well as information we downloaded from the World Wide Web on the Internet. This material included an excellent pamphlet on birding in Northern Ireland, and to supplement this we had the RSPB bird guides for Belfast and the rest of the province.

Flying to Belfast was easy, as there are direct flights from Toronto and Montreal; if you must travel via London, there are numerous daily flights between London and Belfast. Internal travel is best done by rental car (bus coverage is comprehensive, albeit slow), and being Europe, rental cars are roughly twice the price of North America, as are gas prices. Costs for accommodations and meals however, are slightly less than you would pay in Canada, making Northern Ireland a very affordable vacation. Two couples in one vehicle would be an ideal and cost-effective way to explore.

What of the country's birding appeal? Northern Ireland (as well as the Republic of Ireland) has no endemic species, and is therefore unlikely to attract the world lister, but there are advantages to birding here: year-round opportunities; many well-established and interesting birding sites; no crowds (unlike England); diverse birding spectacles; no foreign languages; and you can enjoy a fresh pint of stout at day's end.

For our visit, we concentrated on the Belfast area and the north and east coasts. While we were too late in the year to enjoy the breeding season, shorebird migration was well underway, and we enjoyed studying species that are seldom, if ever, encountered on this side of the Atlantic, such as Common Redshank and Eurasian Curlew. The unusual drought conditions provided more than the usual amount of shorebird habitat, so waders were in evidence both at inland sites as well as coastal estuaries.

Lough Neagh, the largest body of freshwater in the United Kingdom, was a key stop. The Lough hosts hundreds of thousands of waterfowl in winter, although in late August smaller numbers were present. All the same, we enjoyed a good variety of ducks from the blinds (hides) provided at Oxford Island, a national nature reserve. None of the species was new for me, but it was fun sorting through thousands of Tufted Ducks, Common Pochard, and Greater Scaup. Two Ruddy Ducks were new for my Western Palaearctic List.

The original native forests in Ireland are long gone (there are no resident species of either nuthatch or woodpecker!), but the modern clumps of forest and brush that remain are still worth checking. At Oxford Island a nice system of trails links the different hides and the interpretive centre; along them I found my life Willow and Sedge Warblers.

Belfast highlights included leisurely studies of Gray Wagtails and Long-tailed Tits along the Lagan Valley, and a huge roost of shorebirds and gulls at the Belfast Harbour Ponds (soon to have RSPB hides). At the latter site there were hundreds of Eurasian Oystercatchers, and the rarest bird of our trip, a Ring-billed Gull (already on the local birdline, of course).



The coast of County Down provided a variety of habitats, from the mudflats at Dunbrum to a sea-watch at St. John's Point. New species for me here included Spotted Flycatcher, Eurasian Linnet, European Shag, and Meadow Pipit.

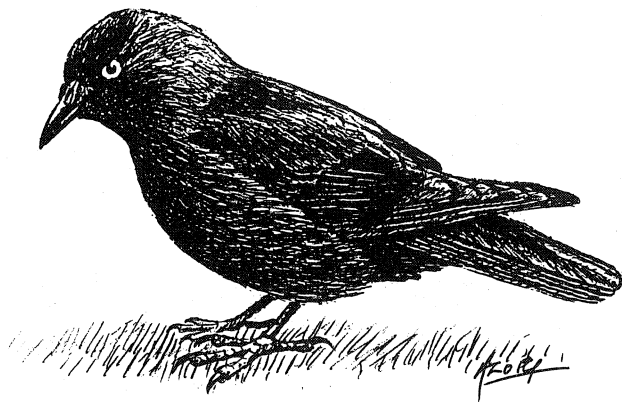
One unforgettable incident occurred in front of a hide at the mouth of the Bann River, when an adult Peregrine Falcon blind-sided an unsuspecting Black-tailed Godwit. The falcon then fed at leisure on the mud, where the godwit had been foraging just moments earlier.

The highlight of the trip was unquestionably the coast of County Antrim, the "north" of Northern Ireland. The spectacular cliffs hosted countless Northern Fulmar, which filled the air as we drove along. Here I found my life Rock Pipit, and saw six of the possible seven corvids (European Jay, Black-billed Magpie, Eurasian Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion (Hooded) Crow, and Raven), missing only Red-billed Chough.

No trip to this area would be complete without a visit to the Giant's Causeway. The geology of the famous spot was almost diverting enough to make us forget about birds. Instead, we combined both interests by exploring Carrick-a-rede (not far to the east of the Causeway), a sea-bird colony on a sea-stack, accessible by a sturdy (but frail-looking) rope bridge.

One species I had hoped to see on the trip was Corncrake, but these are now extirpated from Northern Ireland, unfortunate victims of modern farming practices. To have a chance to see this species, it is now necessary to visit isolated islands off the coast of County Donegal, to the west of Northern Ireland, in the Republic of Ireland.

Despite this one miss, we were thoroughly satisfied with our visit to this unheralded corner of Europe. For an affordable, uncrowded, safe, and rewarding introduction to European birding, you can do no better than Northern Ireland.



EURASIAN JACKDAW

## A BIT OF BIRDING IN CUBA

Christopher Helleiner

It was advertised by Canadian Airlines as an Eco-Tour, so we didn't expect a beach holiday. In fact, it proved to be a fairly vigorous trip. For a week, twenty Canadians were shown around the interior of eastern Cuba, including visits to farms, sugar-cane fields, some wild-life preserves and the wilder parts of the countryside. Of course one of my objectives was to see the birds. Since the tour was not specifically geared to birders (in fact I was the only person who showed much interest in birds) the guides were able to give me only rather general directions. When I found a particularly productive spot, I drew it to their attention, but I'm not sure that they were very interested. I had the second edition of James Bond's **Birds of the West Indies**; one of the guides had the fifth, which I heartily recommend, mainly because it has a lot more coloured pictures than the earlier one.

Quite a lot of the birds in Cuba were familiar ones from eastern North America. There were many warblers, mostly already in full spring plumage in mid-February, though not yet singing. The commonest were Black-throated Blue and Redstart, but Black-and-White, Parula, Cape May and Palm were also around. Some warblers of more southern distribution were also on their wintering grounds, including Yellow-throated and Louisiana Waterthrush. These "ordinary" warblers were mixed with a couple of specialties: the Olive-capped Warbler, a permanent resident of the Bahamas and Cuba, and the Oriente Warbler, endemic to eastern Cuba — a real rarity in world terms, but a common bird there, easily seen and identified because it seems to prefer to forage at eye level.

Like most islands, Cuba has fewer species of birds than corresponding latitudes on the mainland, but as compensation for the birder, there are some endemics, species found nowhere else in the world. The Cuban Tody ("Cartacuba" in Spanish) is found only in Cuba, and the tody family, which consists of five species is limited to the West Indies. These are tiny birds, the size of a small sparrow with almost no tail, glittering iridescent green above, and white and red below. They spend their time flycatching near the ground, and are tame and easy to see. Much more elusive was the Cuban Trogon ("Tocororo", Cuba's national bird). Once you learned its call, a far-carrying "to-co-ro-co", repeated over and over, one realized that it wasn't really rare, but getting to see one was not easy. Like other trogons, it spends a lot of its time sitting still in dense forests; in fact, I saw it only once, the morning of our last day, in a pine forest at an elevation of around 1000 feet. Eastern Cuba has only a single species of hummingbird, the Cuban Emerald; as its name suggests, it is green all over, back and front. It was very common in all kinds of habitats. The Bee Hummingbird, which we had been hoping to see, is apparently limited to the western part of the island, so we did not get a chance to put that one on the list. Two species of Grassquits (small brightly-coloured finches, but by no means limited to grassy areas) were common and easy to see. The Yellow-faced Grassquit is also found in continental Central American, but the Cuban Grassquit is another Cuban endemic.

Like most of the other West Indian islands, Cuba has its endemic parrot, but like other such parrots, it is now rare and limited to remote areas. One of the big beach hotels near Santiago de Cuba has a pair of them clambering around the palms in the grounds. They really were Cuban Parrots, not some imported species — I checked their markings with the book. I am not sure if they were pinioned, or if they were just behaving as parrots do, moving around by holding themselves alternately with their beaks and their feet. They were probably captured as nestlings in the wild, and were fully adapted to life amongst the tourists, taking bits of fruit out of people's hands. Why are the parrots so particularly vulnerable, when other brightly coloured endemic species seem to be thriving? Perhaps it is related to their ability to become tame like these two.

Among the other West Indian specialities we saw was the Great Lizard Cuckoo. It is much bigger than either of our North American cuckoos, and a very striking bird. I never saw it eat a lizard, but I did see other birds feeding on them, including a Cattle Egret, a Green Heron, and a Red-legged Thrush -- The West Indian counterpart to our robin, with similar habits, but rather more colourful, and as the name says, bright red legs. The Black-cowled Oriole is not as bright as the Northern Oriole; the Cuban race is in fact almost entirely black, with just a flash of yellow in the wings, most apparent when the bird flies. The West Indian Red-bellied Woodpecker hardly differs from the Red-bellies so many of us saw in Nova Scotia this past winter. I often wonder what persuades academic ornithologists to declare that a bird like this is a separate species, when others are just called "races". Tanagers are a feature of the American tropics, and the West Indies have several species. The Stripe-headed Tanager, like so many of this family is brilliantly coloured, and was fairly common in the part of Cuba we visited.

Although the number of species of birds in Cuba is not as great as that in Costa Rica or northern South America, a visit can be very rewarding for the birder. I was able to identify 53 species without a knowledgeable guide, and without being taken to any known hot spots. Seeing the familiar northern warblers on their wintering grounds in their vivid spring plumage makes a winter holiday that much brighter. And, if life-listing is your thing, there is no alternative to visiting these islands in the sun; you'll never see any of the endemics unless you do. There are certainly enough of them to make the trip worthwhile.



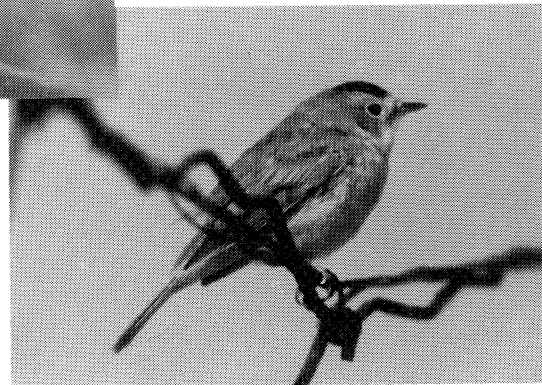
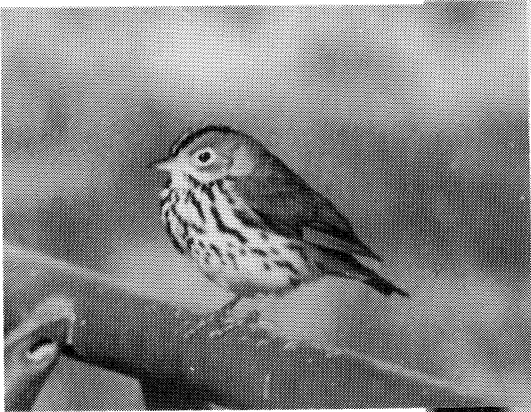
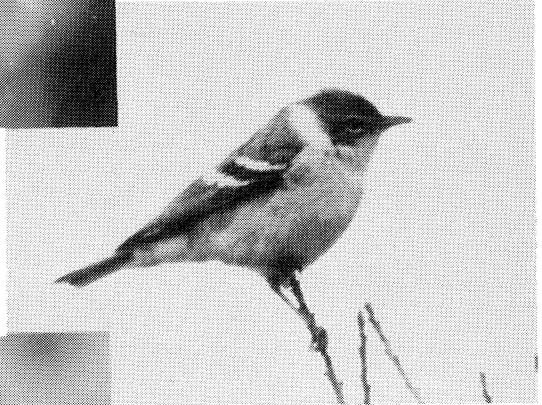
FLASHLIGHTS AT NOON

Eric Cooke

Why would birders need a flashlight at high noon in the middle of a desert?

On a birding tour in Arizona, we had been driving through desert country, stopping from time to time for some excellent birding. About midday the tour leader, who was driving, stopped the van at a spot no different from the miles we had been driving through--dry, flat country, partly covered with brush. Leaving the rest of us in the van, he took a large flashlight and walked away into the brush. Shortly he returned and motioned the rest of us to follow. About a hundred yards into the brush, he stopped beside what turned out to be a dry, abandoned well, partly covered with old boards. Removing a couple of boards, he shone the flashlight down into the well. To our astonishment, there, fifteen feet down, was a pair of nesting Barn Owls!

So if you are ever birding in the desert at high noon, be sure to take along a flashlight. You never know what you'll find!



Some had the impression that Wood Warbler numbers were almost like old times this spring. Blake Maybank's fe. Am Redstart is perhaps the least identifiable in black-and-white (but note the broad, pale margins of its rather "cocky" tail). Ian McLaren's Ovenbird, Wilson's Warbler, and fe. Bay-breasted Warbler (all photographed on Sable Is. in late May, 1995) are easier.

## O B I T U A R Y

ROSS H. BAKER

With the death of Ross Baker in late May, Nova Scotia has lost one of its most outstanding birders. He was not only a bird watcher, but also a naturalist with broad interests. He studied flowers and knew where many rare species grew. Above all, he was interested in the environment and in promoting knowledge of the natural world around us.

After his retirement from the world of accounting and finance, he generously contributed his time and his talent for photography to furthering education in the province by taking his extensive slide show wherever it was requested. He showed slides of birds, animals, and flowers to delighted children in the schools; to adult education classes, who were just as fascinated by his pictures and lectures; to friends and neighbours who loved both the program and the provider of it. He rearranged, adjusted and adapted his presentation to each audience. He brought the features of our wonderful natural surroundings to thousands of people.

Ross wrote and published a book--**Reflections of a Bird Watcher**--which came out in 1979. This volume remains as a testimony to the beauty of a soul which loved the world of nature in which we live.

Ross Baker was a true gentleman.

Roslyn MacPhee

## BOOK REVIEW

Title: **Birding in Metro Halifax**  
 Author: Clarence Stevens  
 Published by: Nimbus Publishing Limited  
 P. O. Box 9301 Stn A  
 Halifax, N. S. B3K 5N5  
 (902) 455-4286

Price: \$14.95 + GST--so far there is no PST on books.

The author, Clarence Stevens, manager of the Wild Bird Company (WBC) has been a member of the Nova Scotia Bird Society since 1979. He joined us at the Annual General Meeting held in a church basement somewhere along the eastern shore. Clarence has an extensive knowledge of Nova Scotia birds. His work in one of the two stores operated by the WBC brings him into daily contact with people with questions, experiences or tidbits of information about the daily happenings in the bird life of the Halifax area.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section, pages 1 to 232, is a month by month review of the birds to be seen, and where to go to find them, during that month. For example, in the January chapter, a step by step description is given of a "sewer stroll", a field trip organized by the Nova Scotia Bird Society. He gives details of the important stopping places, how to get to them, and what birds to expect.

The second section, pages 233 to 264, is called 'places', and describes some of the better "hot spots". It again gives details on how to get to them, where to park and what birds to expect to see when you get there. For this section, Halifax Metro is expanded to include good places in Halifax County. Clarence even includes Taylors Head Provincial Park, probably a one hour drive east along highway 7.

The third section is the smallest, pages 271 to 296, it includes a check list of the birds to be found in the area. 'Resources' contains a list of naturalist organizations their addresses and phone numbers.

The book is four and one half inches by eight inches and is about three quarters of an inch thick. It is not an illustrated field guide, but it will easily fit into a purse or pocket. It is the sort of book to carry along with you to read in a spare moment--on a bus, an aircraft, or even in a waiting room.

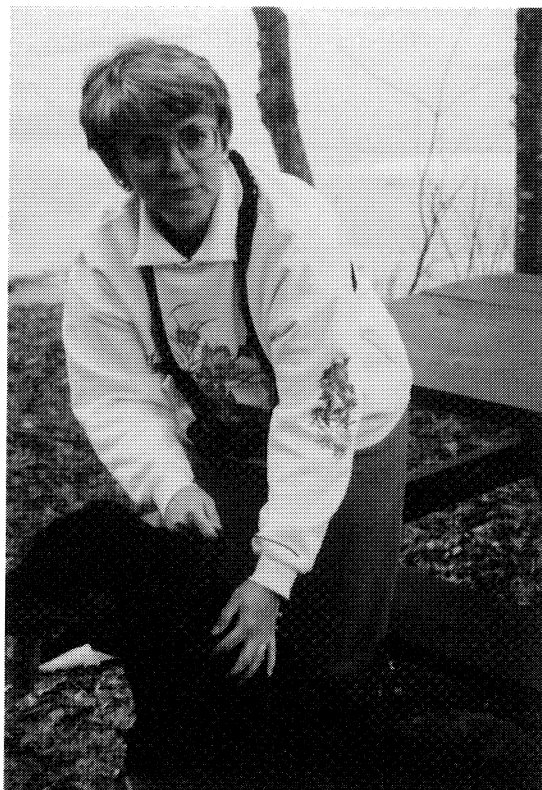
The book gives descriptions of the birds in general terms, but gives detailed analysis of look alike birds in narrative style. One can put the book down and then take it up later without worrying about losing one's place; each article is a story in itself. As can be expected, there are no doubt errors in which the critical reader will delight. For myself, the error I found could be attributed to the computer's word processor; the item on the Thayer's Gull was not on page 11. The word Thayer's was the first one on page 12. My computer also moves things around without telling me.

The release date for this book should have been December. Its size makes it an ideal stocking stuffer. The main text starts with January; what a Christmas combination. Get it anyway, you can always start to read it again next January.

--Bill Caudle.

PROFILE.....

### CHRISTINE ROSS



The face may not be familiar, but our society would be "in the soup" without our conscientious and hard working Membership Secretary, who keeps track of old and new faces throughout the year.

Christine Ross was born to Clair and Marie Hiltz in The Forties, a village just west of New Ross in Lunenburg County. The Hiltz family can trace their ancestry back to the original pioneers who were given land grants in the mid 1700s. The village is called The Forties because forty lots were allocated for settlers. Chris works as a medical secretary in the Valley Professional Center at Kentville, and resides in Aaldersville, a small sprawling village ten kilometers north of New Ross.

When the Maritime Breeding Bird Atlas was first started in 1983, her husband Ian became the coordinator for Area 17. They had been feeding the birds during the winter for a number of years and it was not long before Chris was a BIRDER. This means that in order to find an owl in a priority square, she would be out in that square before dawn playing a tape of owl calls, and then go back to that square at dusk just in case the owl had been busy in the morning and had not responded to the tape.

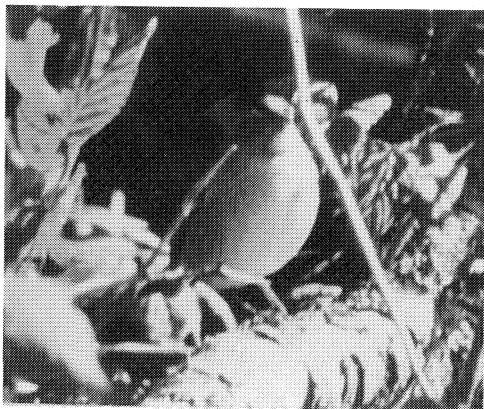
The Atlas is over, but the interest in birds is as strong as ever, in fact, neighbours have been heard to say that there are more birds at their feeder than in the whole of New Ross put together.

Chris is a member of the Anglican Church of Canada, and serves on the council of the Parish of New Ross and is a lay reader and a director of The Prayer Book Society. She is also secretary/treasurer of the St. Margaret's Bay region and compiler of their "News and Views".

What does she like to do in her spare time?--Go birding!

## FOR THE RECORD

Azor Vienneau snapped the Glossy Ibis during the Society's Field Trip near Clam Hbr, Apr. 12, 1995. Blake Maybank photographed the Cattle Egret and friends near Lunenburg, Apr. 28, 1991. Two very rare sightings on Seal Is. are confirmed by Blake Maybank's photos--the Golden-crowned Sparrow on Oct. 2, 1993, and the extremely early Townsend's Warbler on Sept. 3, 1995.





## BIRD FOOD

Nowadays our choices of poultry and game to serve on festive occasions is small—duck, turkey, goose, game hens or maybe pheasant (all raised on farms). If there is a hunter in the family, perhaps a Canada Goose or Black Duck might be available. In the Middle Ages things were different; the following is only part of the banquet in question. It would seem that all the birds mentioned were wild rather than raised. Several years of eating like this must have put considerable strain on wild bird populations.

The inauguration of Archbishop Nevill during the reign of King Edward IV (1461-83) was documented in great detail. The actual bills of fare, since a feast of this size would have extended over several days, were interspersed throughout other details in the account. The bill of fare was divided into courses: one or two dozen dishes were brought out and set on the table for the first course and these were subsequently removed and replaced by another collection of dishes which formed the second course. Similarly with the third, fourth, fifth and sixth courses. Most courses included an elaborately decorated confection, known as a "suttletie"; this frequently represented a relevant feature of the occasion. The following is the dinner at the Archbishop Nevill feast and represents a typical collection of medieval dishes.

## THE FIRST COURSE

A suttletie of Saint George  
 Viante Cipress Potage  
Partridge in brasill  
Pestels (haunches) of Venison rost  
 Swan rost  
Capons of gease

Teals roast  
 Pyke in harblet (herbs)  
 Woodcocks baked  
Partriche leiche (sliced)  
 A Dolphin in foyte (a suttletie)  
 Hart for a suttletie

## THE SECOND COURSE

Brent Tuskin to Potage  
Crayne Potage  
 Cony rost (rabbit)  
Herenshaw rost  
Curlewe rost

Breame in harblet  
 Venison baked  
 A Dragon (a suttletie)  
 A Porke Payne (with bread)  
 Lech (a sweet with wine, sugar,  
 dates and spices),  
 Damaske (perfumed water) and  
 Sampson (a suttletie)

## THE THIRD COURSE

Dates in compost (preserve)  
Pecocke with gylt neb  
 Reyes rost  
 Rabits rost

Partridge rost  
Redshanks rost

Quayles and Styntes rost  
 Item Wafers and Ipocras (highly spiced liquor) when dyner was done.

Larks rost  
Tenche in gelly  
 Venison baked  
 Petypanel a march payne (almonds,  
 rose water and sugar baked like  
 small loaves  
 A suttletie, a Tart  
 Leche Lumbard gylt, partie jelly  
 suttletie of St. William with his  
 coat of armour betwixt his hands

## FOR WANT OF A SPOKEN WORD

Pete Dunne

(printed with the permission of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and of the author)

Illustrated by Bob Dickie

At the very heart of birding is communication--the art of projecting matters of consequence to birders who might care.

"Merlin! Going past the lighthouse! NOW!"

"Got IT!"

Or . . . Beeeeeeep. "Hello, Tim. Pete. Hey, I just left a Ruff in the east pool. If you get this message before sunset you've got a good chance of seeing it."

But all too often--to the hilarity (or sorrow) of those involved--communication is transmuted into its dark twin: **miscommunication**, whose only redeeming grace is an ensuing story.

At the top of anyone's list of communication anecdotes is the tale recounted by Brian Bland, a British birder and local guru for residents of Cley-by-the-Sea. It seems that a woman called one day to inquire about a strange bird at her feeder, one "that has red about the face."

Few feeder birds in the United Kingdom have red about the face. European Goldfinch was the most likely candidate and one that Brian suggested strongly.

"No," the woman asserted. She was quite certain it wasn't a Goldfinch.

After several more minutes of fruitless discussion Brian decided to visit the caller's home to see the bird for himself. And there, pecking at the woman's feeder, was not the expected Goldfinch but a Sarus Crane.

"She neglected to mention the bird's size," Brian explained, which--when discussing the differences between a five-inch finch and a six-foot crane--is a very salient distinction.

This incident turned out for the best. Miscommunications that become immortalized as stories usually do not. Representative of this genre is the story related by birder Keith Seager of Cape May, New Jersey. At the conclusion of a program he was presenting to a local garden club, a woman asked for some information concerning a large, white wading bird. . . one that was feeding with other herons and egrets in the marsh behind her farm . . . one that had an oddly shaped bill.

"Odd in what way?" Keith asked.

"Well . . . spoon shaped," the woman replied. "It's gone, now," she added, preempting Keith's next line of inquiry (which would have been something akin to "WHERE DO YOU LIVE?") "But it was around most of the summer," she said. "Are there any herons with spoon-shaped bills?"

Point of fact: Yes, there is one.

Second point of fact: That species has never been recorded in New Jersey.

These sightings-after-the-fact happen all the time (and what birder doesn't have anecdotes relating to tardy reports concerning "reddish hummingbirds" coming to eastern feeders and "all-white owls" that spent all day (yesterday) sitting atop church steeples. But perhaps the most poignant example of miscommunication heralds, once again, from the United Kingdom.

As the story goes, four avid British birders awoke at 0-dark-thirty to chase some mega-tic that had been sighted five hours' drive from where they lived in the London area. They arrived shortly after dawn, happily ticked off the bird on their life lists, and headed home.

,,,cut for pix

When they got there, one of them found a message on his answering machine relating to yet another mega-tic--a bird located mere minutes from one they'd pursued that morning. Undaunted by the 10-hour drive behind them and the 10-hour round-trip chase ahead, the tic-driven foursome jumped back into the car and retraced their steps, arriving at the designated coordinates just before dark.

Scanning the field, first one, then another, and another of their binoculars came to rest on the bird, huddled in the grass a mere stone's throw from the group.

The culmination of a successful chase is sometimes too sublime for words, so the weary foursome stood silently watching as the daylight faded quickly away. Five minutes passes . . .ten . . . then, lowering their optics from their bloodshot eyes, the quartet nodded tiredly to each other and walked slowly back to the car.

Silence ruled the drive home--silence prompted by exhaustion and ruminations concerning the fortunes of the day. It wasn't until the group was nearly halfway home that one of the quartet gave voice to a thought that pressed heavily upon his mind.

"I guess it must have flown," he lamented, as the others turned to him in astonishment.

I ask you, how would you respond to that?

Or would you?



????

## PUZZLE

For mathematically-minded members

After five hours of sea-watching Dave and Richard left the Northern Light on Brier Island somewhat irritated. When they met Ian, they complained that the only noteworthy birds seen were Black Guillemots, of which they had single-figure totals during each of the first three twenty-minute periods.

"And we might as well have stopped watching then", grumbled Richard, "for if we had taken the product of those first three periods we would have had the same total as we got after all those hours."

"And the average rate of passage was the same as the first hour's total", added Dave.

"But how many Guillemots did you see altogether?" asked Ian.

"You can work it out from what we've said," replied Dave and Richard.

"I can't", retorted Ian.

Could he?

?

Answer pg. 54



Scrutiny of and debate about some distant shorebirds at Three Fathom Hbr. The Apr. 13 NSBS Field Trip to the Eastern Shore  
Photo—Azor Vienneau

## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

March 3 - Prospect and Terence Bay - Snowed out

March 22 - Owl Prowl C. B. - No Report

April 13 - Eastern Shore

Nineteen people came on this trip, which started with an invigorating walk along Martinique Beach to Flying Pt. and back, and ended with a car safari to hot spots from Clam Hbr. to Dartmouth. Our beach walk seemed a bit dull, with a handful of skittish "Ipswich Sparrows", until we returned to the parking lot. Someone spotted another probably ignorable eagle, but Roger Foxall electrified us by recognizing it at some distance as a near-adult Golden Eagle. All of us had great looks at it overhead, with its still whitish tail base, and golden nape as it wheeled in the sun. Then we rushed to Clam Hbr., where a Glossy Ibis had been reported at a gravel pit. It was still there, and supplied a handsome second "lifer" for a number of participants. The rest of the trip could hardly be expected to keep up such standards. We managed a paltry 44 species, among which were very few spring migrants. Five Red Knots and 6 Sanderlings at Three Fathom Hbr. (presumably wintered birds) stirred some interest, and some were able to get a last study of the female Tufted Duck on Sullivan's Pond, before going our separate ways.

-Ian McLaren

April 14 - Wolfville Area

On a very cool Sunday, 32 of us set out shortly after 9:00 a.m. from the Robie Tufts Nature Centre in Wolfville, in a caravan of 14 cars to look for waterfowl and early migrants. The sky was overcast but at least we were spared the rain which had fallen on and off through the previous few days. We headed to Canard Pond, finding Green-winged Teal, Black and Mallard Ducks and a pair of Common Mergansers. On we went to Saxon Street pond and more Teal and Blacks, and the highlight here was a pair of Killdeer on the lowered-water exposed mud flats. At Sheffield Mills marsh ponds, a flock of Bohemian Waxwings cheered everyone up with their buzzy twittering from trees beside the larger pond, while a lovely pair of Blue-winged Teal glided into view rather apprehensively on seeing us but remained long enough to be admired by all.

Our route to Van Nostrand's pond took us through the Wellington dykes, where we were delighted to find that the winter resident Rough-legged Hawk was still around and on territory...another stop to 'admire' situation...this bird has a beautiful golden-toned buffy head and has been seen in the area for at least two winters now. The pond when reached, held the pair of Buffleheads, where they had taken up temporary residence. Porter's Pt. held virtually nothing visible from shore so we proceeded to Canning Aboiteau where very few Canada Geese were seen—we found out later that they were farther up stream, about 350-400 of them—and on to Kingsport, passing at least three very magestic, (and looking cold). Great Glue Herons in one of the tidal inlets. From the vantage spot up on the bluffs beside the cottages in Kingsport overlooking the Minas Basin we endeavoured to keep our scopes and binoculars focussed on the tidal swells fighting stiff breezes by this time, to spot waterfowl bobbing up and down among the waves. Black and White-winged Scoters, C. Eiders, and C. Mergansers were seen before we headed back to Canning for lunch at the Front Porch Cafe, overlooking Harris' pond (a very quiet pond at present), where outdoor picnic tables were available for the hardier souls of the group and warm food and shelter indoors for the less inclined.

The best birding area was left until the afternoon when we headed to Port Williams sewage ponds. Leaving our vehicles outside the gate, and armed with key and permission to enter, everyone was happy to see the mixed variety of waterfowl awaiting us: a pair of A. Wigeon, 2 C. Goldeneye, 6 Ring-necked Ducks, C. Mergansers, Green-winged Teal, Mallards and Blacks. Then, on we went again, to Greenwich, this time to see a pair of resident nesting Bald Eagles on an enormous long standing nest among the mature pines behind Noggins Corner Farm. For many this was a first sighting of an

eagle's nest so they were fascinated by the sight of an adult bird sitting on the nest. Light rain began to fall at this point (3:00 p.m.) so most of the participants decided to head home as they sky was turning darker. However, a few participants expressed interest in seeing the Ring-billed, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls, still lingering at the Wolfville sewage ponds, so Gordon, my husband, took them there and the gulls were found.

Although this trip was primarily for waterfowl, other migrants were seen, such as Merlin, Northern Harriers, N. Flickers and Red Crossbills. Considering the wet, cold spring we had been experiencing, this trip turned out to be reasonably successful and everyone enjoyed the outing.

Judy Tufts

FOOTNOTE: For those of you who have forgotten, April 14th was the day when we had that nasty 'surprise' SNOWSTORM (8"-10" here in the Valley) which hit us around late afternoon and continued throughout the night.

April 27 - Cape Sable Island--see "The Southwest Birders"

April 27 - Lingering Winter Birds, C. B.

According to the weather forecaster, this was to be a day of high winds and rain. This "may" have accounted for the low showing of three people.

At 8:00 a.m. the skies were dark but the rain was holding off. We decided we would have to move relatively quickly in order to observe any amount of species. Before leaving the parking lot we saw two of the first Killdeer recorded in this area this year, and heard several N. Flickers. We continued on to the Glace Bay Bird Sanctuary. Here we viewed Great Blue Heron, Gr. Yellowlegs, and several species of duck, including Green-winged Teal and Red-breasted Mergansers.

(An earlier scouting of the area showed that most of the wintering sea birds had moved on and the few that remained were well spread out and difficult to find.)

Just as we got in our vehicles the skies opened up and it poured. The next stop was Schooner Pond. In between showers we saw a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Am. Kestrels and two Woodcock. The only true lingering winter birds recorded this day were Common Redpoll, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, White-winged Scoter, and both Mergansers--it must be spring!

Other highlights included Pileated Woodpecker, Osprey, Willets, White-throated Sparrows and Kingfishers.

Despite the weather, the birds didn't disappoint and we tallied up 50 species.

John McKay

May 5 - APBS - No Report

May 12 - Prospect Area -- Rained out

May 15 - Halifax County Warbler Walk

Eleven of us left the parking lot at the end of the Prospect Road at 6:00 a.m., bound for the United Church parking lot in Goodwood. There we met up with a few more and on a glorious, crisp, sunny morning we set out down the N.S. Power road to Big Indian Lake. By the time we got to the beginning of the road, we had already made an excellent start: an Ovenbird and Yellow-rumps singing in the parking lot, a Sharpie flying over, and Crows and Ravens and gulls on the road on the way. A White-throat gave his clear, haunting whistle as we entered the church lot, Purple Finches burred from the trees nearby, and a Black-and-white Warbler sang, stationary for once, from the top of a dead snag. As we reached the first house, Tree Swallows greeted us on the wires above the greensward, making their liquid calls to each other as they prepared to use the wealth of nesting boxes provided.

Once on the woods road, we put up a Ruffed Grouse (as usual), heard a Winter Wren sing in the distance, heard what we took to be a Flicker (but more on this later), saw lots of White-throats, Yellow-rumps, Purple Finches, Pine Siskins and Black-capped Chickadees, but not the expected wealth of warblers. Why? They were expected because some in our party had been out in our woods and heard lots, and some had been literally inundated with the migration at Briar Island the previous weekend. We trudged on through the sun-dappled woods, our hands rapidly cooling on unused binoculars. By the time we reached the "T" which to the left leads to the lake, we were aware that we were faced with digging them out--and dig we had to. The lake yielded its usual pair of Common Loons, calling through the mist on its unruffled surface. No Golden-crowned Kinglets; no Bay-breasted warblers, no Blackburnian. We had to work to find the Boreal Chickadees and the Palm Warbler (a full-plumaged male in his accustomed bog, busy collecting nesting material). We found a Magnolia Warbler sitting quietly on top of a spruce tree, a Hermit Thrush came out from his deep woods to calmly regard us and fly noiselessly back into the gloom. A pair of Solitary Vireos(?) did serenade us with their full repertoire from a maple tree, rosy with new blossoms. When it comes to singing, vireos never let you down. Bluets and white and purple violets were underfoot beside the chuckling brooks.

Our walk home was interspersed with the calls of at least two woodpeckers: the aforementioned Flicker, sounding now quite loud, and either a Hairy or a Downy, drumming nearby. As we passed the farthest house in on the road, three of us fastened our binoculars on some movement beside a homemade nesting box on the trunk of a large dead tree within 50 yards of the house. To our astonished eyes a large bird left the trunk, and as it flew through a shaft of sunlight, its head flashed that brilliant, unmistakable red: a Pileated Woodpecker! It quickly disappeared in the deeper woods behind the house, and a frantically barking Irish setter strongly urged us to move on, so move on we did--and as we did, the bird called again: our Flicker! Now I'm not sure I'll ever be sure of a Flicker call again.

We walked out of the road then, putting up another grouse and seeing more of the same small birds. The overall impression was of a low level of singing, a high level of excitement, and a general satisfaction with such a wonderful walk in the woods--and there were no flies, except the Mayfly.

Fred Dobson

May 17-20 - Bon Portage -- No Report

May 18 - Lunenburg County -- Rained Out

May 19 - Hopewell Area, Pictou County

Nellie Snyder and Hamish spent the night in the parking lot of St. Columba Church, just outside Hopewell, Pictou County, but were joined by 17 others just before 8:00 a.m. to begin the Annual Brennan Field Trip. A good mix of beginner and more experienced birders were represented, but a couple of "regulars" were present in spirit only. Marg Kenny was recuperating from a serious leg fracture and many present had been to the funeral of Ross Baker the previous day. Our minds were on both at several points through the day.

After arranging carpools, the group consisting of representations from Halifax, Colchester, Cumberland, Lunenburg and Pictou Counties set out to the big marsh between Hopewell and Lorne. The day was damp and wet, much like the previous days and the 'back roads' were greasy, but we all managed to get our vehicles down the marsh road to be greeted by Yellow and Common Yellow-throat Warblers, Grackles, displaying Red-winged Blackbirds and the sound of Swamp Sparrows busily defining their territories. Distant Tree and Barn Swallows seemed to be finding a few insects despite the cold. Several Black Ducks flew off and the group was surprised by the sight of a Canada Goose (one of three seen that day) which flew down the marsh. This is normally an uncommon bird in Pictou County this time of year, but sightings in Pictou County appear to be above normal this year. The resident Northern Harrier pair made several flights

over the marsh and several of the "newer birders" managed to put a bird name (Common Snipe) to the sound coming from the sky as necks craned back to focus on the long-billed aerial performers. Only the Bunns, the last to leave the marsh, heard the American Bittern pump.

As we made our way back to the main road, stops to hear warblers were not successful as the damp, cool, breezy weather was keeping the woods silent. Upon reaching the paved road again, we parked our cars and walked a considerable distance into a flood plain of a tributary to the East River of Pictou. A pocket of warblers including Black-throated Green, Chestnut-sided, Parula, as well as Ruffed Grouse and Solitary Vireo were encountered.

The whole floor of the flood plain was ablaze with the blooms of flowers such as Trout Lilly, Bloodroot and Spring Beauties, to name a few. One felt guilty even taking a step. Harry made a gentle tap on a very precarious old dead tree trunk, but it failed to bring the resident Sawhet Owl to the entrance of the hole--not wanting to disturb the bird, we decided not to proceed any farther, but were more successful only a few meters away, when a Pileated Woodpecker emerged from its nest hole. A Kestrel in the area also probably had a nest hole and Harry has since said he has found a Wood Duck nest here. As we left this stop, many remarked about how beautiful the area was and of the necessity to preserve the integrity of the complex arrangement that nature had provided for us.

The caravan then moved on to Grant's Lake, where we puzzled over a cormorant deemed to be a Double-crested. Also seen was a Common Loon. Stops in Centredale produced Nashville Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Boreal Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Purple Finch. A short trek into the woods here led us in front of a large nest box. Richard Murphy climbed the tree and opened the front door to the box revealing the large brown-eyed Barred Owl, who sat tight, keeping her young concealed. We then retired to lunch, feeling very satisfied with the morning's sights.

After lunch, those who remained were treated to scope views of a Great Horned Owl on a nest platform Harry had built. Some exploring through the Trafalgar area produced Palm and Yellow-rumped Warblers as well as good views of Rusty Blackbirds and singing Hermit Thrush. Osprey on a nest was the concluding bird of the trip which produced about 60 species, down considerably from the normal, because of the adverse weather conditions. As we said our goodbyes and thank yous to Harry and Jean for another spectacular and successful field trip, the weather started to clear.

"It can truly be said that the experiences of yesterday created the reflections of today; therefore, the material for further memories and reminiscences must be amassed by observations of current happenings."--words taken from the book **Reflections of a Bird Watcher** by Ross H. Baker.

Ken McKenna

#### May 25 - Hants County Field Trip

The Hants Co. Field Trip took place Saturday, May 25. Twenty-one birders met at the crossing in Mount Uniacke, generally dressed for October weather in warm jackets, hats and gloves. The Osprey (our provincial bird) flew over the lake on our first stop, another was seen at a later stop. Fifteen different species of warblers were seen with good views of most of them. The loon was on the lake at the Uniacke grounds and a pair of Downy Woodpeckers alternated feeding young in a tree cavity.



Although some stops didn't produce the birds expected, a feeder stop provided easy sightings of Evening Grosbeaks, Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, Grackles, Red-breasted Nuthatches, American Goldfinches, and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. The bird of the day was the American Woodcock, a pair plushed from a nesting site. This is a first recorded for the Hants County Field Trip.

Lunch, as usual, was at Smiley's Park, where eighteen huddled in the lee of the park headquarters and three had sense enough to eat lunch in the cars!

It took keen birding to identify both an Eastern Wood-pewee and an Eastern Phoebe. The male Rose-breasted Grosbeak was beautifully dressed and flitted about for all to see. Spotted Sandpipers were seen on the bank of the river at the Century Farm and a female Baltimore Oriole bathed in the water.

We were not disappointed in hearing and seeing the Northern Waterthrush, nor the Bobolinks that always bring their joyful songs to our field trips.

Included in the 21 birders were two from Maryland, so we were delighted to help them add at least two lifers to their list. This will go on record as the windiest and coldest Hants County Field Trip--yet 67 species were recorded.

Margaret A. Clark

#### May 26 - Shubenacadie Area

The windy, cool weather which greeted 18 birders who met at 7:00 a.m., in central Shubenacadie, did not detract from enthusiasm for a day spent on back roads, looking at birds. As the day advanced, the weather became warmer and a bit less windy. Black flies proliferated.

The first stop yielded a Blackpoll Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Least Flycatcher, Grackles, and "lesser" birds. At the second halt, a Warbling Vireo, who refused to put in an appearance, at least called repeatedly and sang once to prove his presence. During the day, four different species of flycatcher--Alder, Least, Yellow-bellied and Olive-sided were located. Eighteen species of warbler were seen and heard.

At one stop, several Catbirds (near two nests) vied with at least two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks for attention. The same stop produced a beautiful, soaring Bald Eagle, many warblers, two Spotted Sandpipers, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, a Gray Jay, Blue Jays, two Golden-crowned Kinglets, flycatchers and a Hummingbird. Although some die-hards looked long and hard for a Black-throated Blue Warbler, none was found.

On the return trip, the pond which had abounded in three species of swallow in the early morning, hosted a family of Canada Geese, a pair of Ring-necked Ducks, a Common Loon, a Great Black-backed Gull, and a Ring-necked Pheasant, by its shores.

Notwithstanding the short supply of woodpeckers, the day's total of 80 species was quite respectable.

Roslyn C. MacPhee



## FORTHCOMING FIELD TRIPS



Reminder: Please phone the field trip leader or contact person ahead of time to register for the trip. In this way no trip is oversubscribed, and you can be contacted in case of cancellation.

Leaders are encouraged to submit a field trip report to the editor.

Please send reports to:

Shirley Cohrs  
8 Rosemount Ave.  
Halifax, NS, B3N 1X8

## JULY

- Sun. 21 Wallace Bay Area: Jim Taylor (434-8516). Meet at Wallace wharf at 8:30 a.m. A variety of habitats including shoreline, woodland, riverside and marsh are covered. Nesting eagles for a grand finale! No registration is necessary. Bring a lunch.
- Sat. 27 President's Field Day, Crescent Beach: Lisé Cohrs (477-6036). Meet at 8:45 a.m. at the western parking area at the entrance to Crescent Beach, Lunenburg County for a shorebird bonanza.

## AUGUST

- Sat. 10 Birding Pictou County: Ken McKenna (752-7644). Meet at the Blue Acres Esso off Exit 25 on the Trans Canada Hwy. 104 at 8:30 a.m. We will explore a variety of habitats including the Middle River Dyke and Powell Point Park. Bring a lunch. Boots may be helpful.
- Sat. 10 Yarmouth Area: Eric Ruff (H 742-8145 or W 742-5539). Meet at the former DAR station at 8:30 a.m. Bring a lunch and suitable footwear for rocky and wet walking.
- Sat. 24 Matthew's Lake: David Young (656-2225). Meet at the parking lot at Hemeon's Head at 11:30 a.m. To get there, proceed down Hwy. 103 to exit 23. Go south for 2 miles (3.6 km) until the "Lighthouse Route" turns left at the Little Harbour sign. Proceed down this road for about 6 miles (9 km) to a stop sign. Continue straight about 2 more miles (3.6 km) until the end of the road is reached at Hemeon's Head (approx. 2 1/2 hrs. from Halifax). Wear waterproof boots or be prepared to wade barefoot for a short distance. Walking distance is about 5-6 miles in 3-4 hours.
- Sat. 24 Point Michaud, C.B.: Billy Digout (535-2513). Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the Department of Transport building, Hwy. 4 and Point Michaud turnoff, St. Peters. It is a good idea to wear boots if it is rainy. (Alternate weather day Sun. Aug. 25).

## SEPTEMBER

- Fri. Aug 31-Mon. Sept. 2 Bon Portage Island (Labour Day Weekend): Fulton Lavender (455-4966). Check with the field trip leader for departure times. There is a fee for the boat trip and accommodations on the island. Bring your own food, drinking water, sleeping gear, suitable clothing and footwear, flashlight and a sheet for the mattress.
- Sun. 8 Hartlen's Point: Peter MacLeod and Bev Sarty (W 852-1228 or H 852-5209). Meet at 8:00 a.m. Species are likely to include flycatchers and early warbler migration. (Alternate weather day Sat. 7).
- Sat. 14 Minas Basin, Ponds and Woods: Richard Stern (678-1975). Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the gate at the lower end of Blomidon Provincial Park. Bring a picnic lunch. The trip will end at dusk. Hopefully some late or resident woodland species, waterfowl, and late migrating shorebirds.
- Sun. 22 Northumberland Shore: Stu Tingley (506-532-0885). Meet at 10:00 a.m. in Tidnish at the bridge over the Tidnish River (Rte 366). The trip will end at Port Howe at approximately 4:00 p.m. Bring a lunch.

## OCTOBER

- Sun 6 Hartlen's Point: Peter MacLeod and Bev Sarty (W 852-1228 or H 852-5209). Meet at 8:00 a.m. Enjoy shorebirds and late warblers. (Alternate weather day Sat. 5).
- Fri. 11-Mon. 14 Bon Portage Island (Thanksgiving Weekend): Peter MacLeod (W 852-1228 or H 852-5209). Check with the leader for departure times. There will be a charge for the boat trip and accommodation on the island. Bring food, sleeping gear, drinking water, appropriate clothing and footwear, flashlight and a sheet to cover the mattress. Pre-registration is necessary.
- Sat. 12-Mon. 14 Brier Island (Thanksgiving Weekend): Fulton Lavender (455-4966). Meet at the parking lot of the Brier Island Lodge at 7:00 a.m. Saturday morning. Enjoy fall migrants, hawk-watching, and owling if weather permits.
- Sat. 12 Changing of the Yard, C.B.: Junior Metcalfe (849-5054). Meet in the parking lot of the former Heavy Water Plant in Glace Bay at 8:00 a.m.
- Sun. 20 Prospect, Terence Bay: Peter MacLeod and Bev Sarty (W 852-1228 or H 852-5209). Meet at the Royal Canadian Legion in White's Lake at 8:00 a.m. This will be a look for late warblers, sparrows, seabirds, and early sea duck migration. (Alternate weather day Sat. 19).

## NOVEMBER

- Sat. 9 Northern Head, C.B.: Alan Murrant (737-2684). Meet in parking lot of the former Heavy Water Plant at 8:00 a.m. Be prepared for a 1 1/2 hour rugged hike, dress warmly.

- Sun. 24 Prospect, Terence Bay: Peter MacLeod and Bev Sarty (W 852-1228 or H 852-5209). Meet at the Royal Canadian Legion in White's Lake at 8:00 a.m. Enjoy returning Harlequin Ducks, other sea ducks, early alcids, finches, and possible surprises. (Alternate weather day Sat. 23).
- Sat. 30 Hartlen's Point: Fulton Lavender (455-4966). Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the old entrance to the golf course. This will be a look for late fall migrants and early winter surprises. (Alternate weather day Sun. Dec. 1).

## DECEMBER

- Sun. 8 Prospect, Terence Bay: Peter MacLeod and Bev Sarty (W 852-1228 or H 852-5209). Meet at the Royal Canadian Legion in White's Lake at 8:00 a.m. Look for Red-throated Loons, grebes, alcids, sea ducks, winter finches and more! (Alternate weather day Sat. 7).

Christmas Bird Counts. Watch for announcements of the count(s) in your area. Organisers are always happy to have new participants.

## JANUARY

- Sat. 11 Sewer Stroll I: Fulton Lavender (455-4966). Meet at Hartlen's Point at 8:00 a.m. This is an all day trip and ends at Herring Cove via Bedford. Look for Christmas Bird Count specialties. (Alternate weather day Sun. 12).
- Sun. 12 Prospect, Terence Bay: Peter MacLeod and Bev Sarty (W 852-1228 or H 852-5209). Meet at the Royal Canadian Legion in White's Lake at 8:00 a.m. 40+ Harlequin Ducks possible plus winter gulls, alcids, and winter surprises. (Alternate weather day Sat. 11).

Any questions or suggestions should be directed to the Field Trip Coordinators, Christine Cornell and Kevin Tutt (479-7667), 232 Purcell's Cove Road, Halifax, NS B3P 1C1.

NOTE: The following trips are sponsored by the Parks are for People program. Bird Society members are welcome. There is no charge for these trips.

## JULY

- Sat. 20 Dollar Lake: Peter MacLeod and Bev Sarty (W 852-1228 or H 852-5209). The Sixth Annual Outdoor Recreation Festival. Walks begin at 8:00 a.m. and are offered every 45 minutes until 4:00 p.m.

## AUGUST

- Sun. 11 Conrad's Beach: Peter MacLeod and Bev Sarty (W 852-1228 or H 852-5209). This trip for early shorebirds begins at 8:00 a.m.
- Sun. 22 Conrad's Beach: Peter MacLeod and Bev Sarty (W 852-1228 or H 852-5209). Begins at 8:00 a.m.

## A RAVEN'S MISFORTUNE

Bernard Forsythe

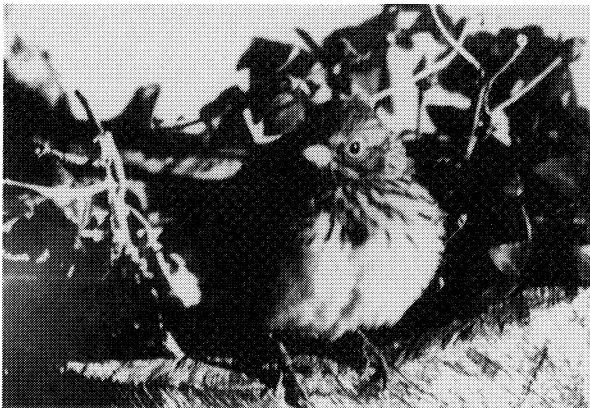
One of the joys of birding is to occasionally witness bird behavior that is seldom reported, different, or new to the beholder. Although I have watched ravens for many years, I recently experienced such an event with two of these interesting corvids. On February 18, 1996, I spotted a pair of ravens ahead of me in the middle of the Burns Road, Black River, Kings County. It was obvious that they were in the middle of a serious fight using bill and claws, tumbling over and over, with wings thrashing wildly about.

As I approached they spotted me and separated. One took wing and flew away. The other jumped the ditch and ran into thick coniferous woods dragging its right wing at an odd angle. Ravens often chase each other and play games in the air but what would cause an encounter as savage as this one? A couple of possible reasons come to mind but you, the reader, may have other explanations.

February is courting time for ravens and a mated pair would try to chase an intruder from their territory. Could the crippled raven have been a rival that injured its wing in the fight? This would be uncommon as the resident raven would have the advantage, while the rival would usually retreat before the encounter resulted in injury.

What if the wing had been injured previously so that this raven was forced to wander around on foot? The resident raven would still regard the newcomer as a rival, even though it could not fly, and attack immediately. Because the injured bird could not take flight, the resident bird would see this as resistance, put more force into its attack and a fight to the death could occur. However, I happened along, interrupting the battle.

On February 20, I was on the Miner Meadow Road and glanced across an open field. A raven was marching across the field dragging its right wing at the same angle as the one that ran into the woods two days earlier. Other than its wing, it looked like a healthy bird with its head held high. Checking a map, I found it was two miles from the site of the fight. It had wandered through woodlots and farmyards. I thanked it for the opportunity to ponder over its life struggles and wished it well although I knew its future prospects were not great.



This Vesper Sparrow was a prize at Polly Szantor's feeder in New Glasgow last winter.

Photo by Ken McKenna, Jan. 6, 1996.

## THE SOUTHWEST BIRDERS

Eric Cooke

The April meeting of the Bird Society, held at Barrington Passage High School, was well attended by almost seventy birders. Joan Czapalay, one of the organizers of the event, welcomed everyone on behalf of the 'Southwest Birders', an unofficial but enthusiastic group of birders in the area. The speaker for the meeting was Ted D'Eon, who illustrated his talk with some excellent slides. Ted spoke about his work with Roseate Terns which nest on the Brothers Islands and his efforts to reintroduce the Gannets which used to nest on Gannet Rock. After the meeting, refreshments were available, giving everyone an opportunity for a very pleasant social gathering.

Foul weather forecast for Saturday threatened the planned field trips, but while damp at first, the weather cleared nicely and we had good weather for the several trips that took place. Some lucky birders saw such rarities as Little Blue Heron, a Scarlet Tanager, an Indigo Bunting and a Razorbill, but the group I was with missed all of these. Still we had excellent birding. This is undoubtedly one of the best and most interesting birding areas in the province.

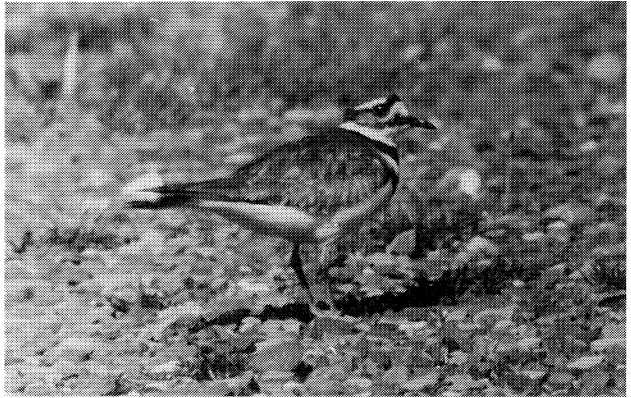
Altogether it was a wonderful weekend, thanks to the Southwest Birders.



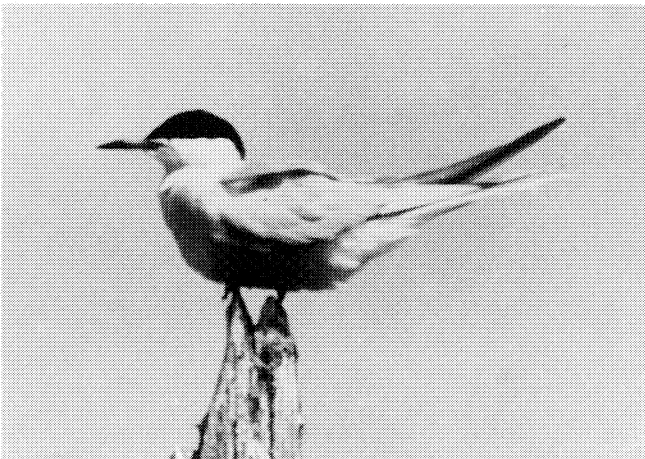
What could be more typical of a foggy July day in coastal Nova Scotia, with a Willet flying about, loudly protesting intrusion into its salt marsh domain? Photo Randy Lauff



Ken McKenna photographed an unusual concentration of Ruddy Ducks at Jimtown, Ant. Co., Nov. 4, 1995.



Randy Lauff sent us this picture of a sprightly Killdeer on territory



Leg length of this Common Tern is difficult to discern as a field mark, but its black-tipped bill is clear enough. Photo by Ian McLaren on Sable Is., late May, 1995

### BIRDS AT THE BOAT SHOW?

One may logically ask, what do boating and birding have in common apart from the letter "B"? Didn't the Ancient Mariner come to grief because he shot down the albatross? What is birding coming to when the Nova Scotia Bird Society decided to have a booth at this year's Halifax Boat Show? As a result of NSBS' reaching out policy to better represent its provincial mandate, and theorizing that boaters, like birders, are nature lovers, as the picture shows, that is indeed what happened.

Staffed by fourteen members of the society over a four-day period, the booth proved to be a very popular one and the two or three members on duty were kept very busy answering all manner of questions pertaining to birds and about the activities of the society. This resulted in a significant increase in our membership. Perhaps more importantly, society members were greatly impressed by the numbers of people who maintain feeders and who are interested in birds. They now realize that the active society membership only represents the tip of the bird-watching population. The success of the "bird booth" was such that birding and boating will watch and sail together again at next year's boat show.

--Doug. Roy



Photo Doug Roy

### PUZZLE SOLUTION

No. There are **two** possible answers to the numbers seen in the first three 20 minute periods: 3, 4 and 5, or 2, 5 and 7. Ian therefore could not tell whether they had seen a total of 60 guillemots or 70 guillemots, though he could be certain it was one or the other.







NOVA SCOTIA BIRD SOCIETY  
c/o Nova Scotia Museum,  
1747 Summer Street,  
Halifax, N.S. B3H 3A6

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