

No. 1 (Nov., 1975)

# **HALIFAX FIELD NATURALISTS NEWSLETTER**

**c/o Nova Scotia Museum  
1747 Summer Street  
Halifax, N. S.**

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NOVEMBER 1975

NUMBER ONE

Meetings are on the second Tuesday of each month, at 8 pm; in the lounge, fifth floor of the Biology building in the Life Sciences complex at Dalhousie University. See maps below.

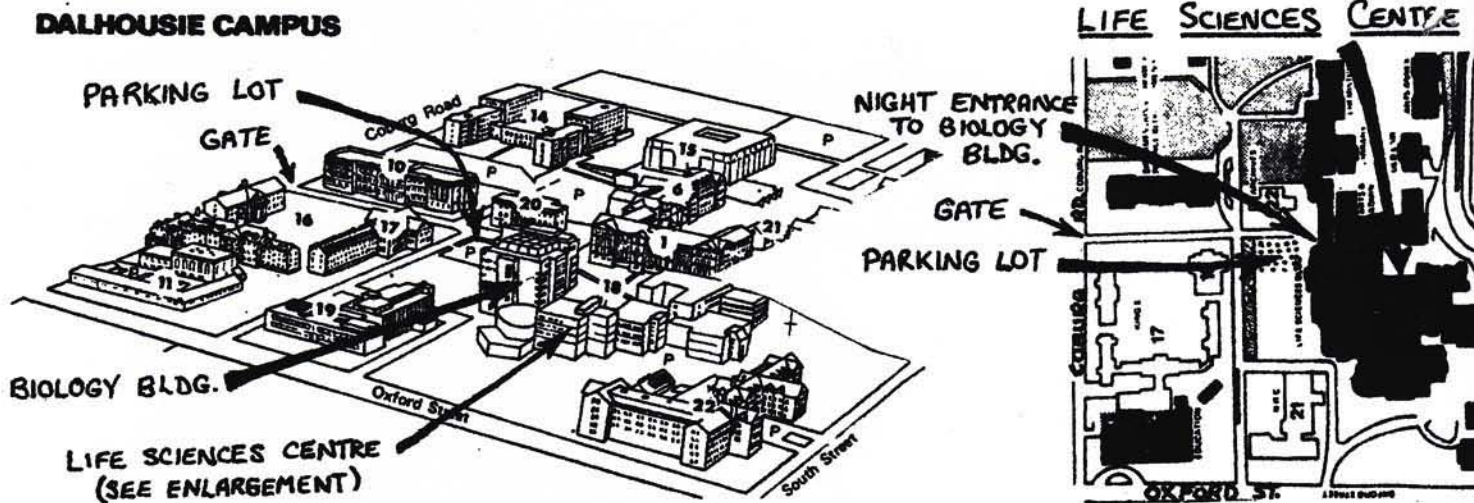
Field Excursions are held at least once a month.

Membership is open to anyone interested in the natural history of Nova Scotia. Membership is available at any meeting, or by writing the Halifax Field Naturalists, care of the Nova Scotia Museum in Halifax. Fees are two dollars yearly.

## Executive for 1975-76

President .....	Paul Keddy	422-7238 evenings
Secretary .....	Winnifred Cairns	455-9513 evenings
Newsletter .....	Debra Burleson	429-4610 daytime
Program Committee .	Scott Cunningham	
	. Anne Linton	
	. plus other executive members	

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Who Are the Halifax Field Naturalists?

Paul Keddy

In this, the first newsletter of the Halifax Field Naturalists, it is perhaps fitting to begin by reviewing the reasons for launching such an organization.

Nova Scotia is indeed blessed with a great biotic diversity--from sand dunes to salt marshes, cliffs to hardwood forests, lakes to the ocean, there is an abundance of life forms. They range in size from plankton to whales. Yet few among us are equipped to recognize or adequately appreciate this diversity. The first goal of the Halifax Field Naturalists was therefore felt to be education--of both our members and eventually the community at large--to increase our appreciation for Nova Scotia's natural history.

One means of attaining this goal is the monthly meeting, where guest speakers chosen for their experience in particular fields will visit the group. Fossils, birds, caves, astronomy, beach conservation, and regional parks are sample topics that have been suggested. At these meetings there will be opportunity for all to raise questions and chat informally with the guest.

The second important activity will be field trips to various locations in the province. Each trip will be joined by one or more knowledgeable people to act as informal guides and respond to questions. We plan all-day outings (for example, to Cape Split or Martinique Beach) and afternoon jaunts (Hemlock Ravine, Point Pleasant Park, Cole Harbour). These trips will give members a chance to share their own knowledge of natural history.

Our role in conservation activities is under considerable discussion. It is clear that as naturalists we have a vested interest in the protection of wildlife and their habitats. Two avenues of approach need be considered: one, the creation of wildlife reserves; and two, an attempt to change the destructive aspects of our current technological society which make such reserves necessary. Clearly, both methods have advantages and disadvantages. I hope members will give some thought to our position in this matter. It was most gratifying at the first meeting to see that all members agreed that conservation must be an eventual role of the Halifax Field Naturalists.

For the time being, though, education and the building of a strong organization will have to be our highest priorities.

I hope that you all will feel free to suggest visitors or outings. And as mentioned at the first meeting, we have set aside time each month for short announcements or reports from members. Symposia you attended, good television shows, government policy, a fantastic piece of woods or a four-toed salamander--we want to hear about your experiences. Don't feel you need be a professional biologist. If you want to learn more about your world, then you are a naturalist.

October Field Trip -- Martinique Beach

Martinique is one of the finest sand beaches on the eastern shore of the province. It consists of a long series of dunes stretching across Musquodoboit Harbour. These dunes protect the less stable sands of the beach, and the Martinique Beach Game Sanctuary, from the waves of the open Atlantic.

On this hike, we walked out to Flying Point, the island at which the beach terminates. The island itself is covered with heath plants and spruce forest, but for most of the walk we kept to the dune and marsh areas. Birds were noted all along the way, each in its own chosen habitat. The pectoral sandpiper, for example, was hiding in marsh vegetation. Snow buntings were seen on the open beach.

Thanks to Eric Cooke for leading this excursion.

Here follows a partial list of sightings. Not all of the 33 bird species and many plants are individually named.

Birds

Dovekie  
 Sanderling  
 Black-bellied Plover  
 Snow Bunting  
 Horned Lark  
 Savannah Sparrow  
 Loon  
 Canada Goose (flight of 400)  
 Great Blue Heron  
 Widgeon (30)  
 Surf Scooters  
 Red-breasted Merganser  
 Black Duck (12)  
 Pectoral Sandpiper  
 Herring Gull  
 Crow  
 Raven  
 Teal  
 Black-capped Chickadee

Plants

seaside goldenrod  
 sow thistle  
 oyster plant  
 sandwort  
 goose foot  
 sea rocket  
 evening primrose  
 New England aster  
 Labrador tea  
 creeping juniper  
 crow berry  
 laurel  
 marram grass  
 Carex  
 glasswort  
 beach pea  
 bayberry  
 salt marsh plantain  
 sea blight  
 chickweed  
 eelgrass

Various members also rejoiced in the seaweeds, lichens, and mushrooms found. Probably the crowning glory of the trip was the one (dead) sperm whale aground.

October Meeting -- Dr. Paul Brodie

Marcus Waddington

Dr. Paul Brodie, a biologist specializing in the whales of the Arctic region, inaugurated the first meeting of the Halifax Field Naturalists with a slide talk. Dr. Brodie dealt with the Arctic as a whole, providing glimpses of its animal, plant, and human life. The slides were captivating, especially for one who had never before seen colour photos of the region. These included close-ups of lichens, aerial photos of the Mackenzie delta, action shots of dog-teams, and portraits of the Inuit people.

The talk was quite informal and offered a stimulating first look at the northernmost parts of Canada. Most notable, perhaps, was the deep feeling Dr. Brodie showed as he recalled his experiences in the Arctic. He frequently alluded to the aesthetic beauty and power of the landscape, qualities not lost on the audience.

What I myself most enjoyed were the photos of the Inuit people and Dr. Brodie's attitude toward them. He evidenced great respect for their abilities and remarked that "their perceptions as behaviourist experts on animal life are unsurpassed". He stressed also the uniqueness of the Inuit with regard to hunting methods, style of life, and reaction to the traumatic changes posed by the invasion of our technological society. So Dr. Brodie's subject was not pure biology, but rather how a very human biologist might respond to a new environment. He was not, as are some scientists, alienated from this environment; he became part of it.

In conversation with Dr. Brodie after the slide show I learned, to my astonishment, that much of the research on marine mammals in the U. S. originated with the military-industrial complex in the paranoid atmosphere of the McCarthy era. Spectacular research on marine mammal intelligence (such as that of John Lilly) was funded to the neglect of much needed population management studies. The media has popularized an image of marine mammal life which is badly distorted. Ironically, whales in Hudson Bay are endangered not by direct hunting so much as by indirect effects. For example, mammoth hydro projects like Churchill Falls and James Bay bring about water temperature changes. The mouths of these river systems are breeding grounds of the white whale and, given traditional breeding habits, radical changes in water temperature could lead to their extinction.

Perhaps Dr. Brodie could be persuaded to return to speak on a more specific theme, such as the life history of the white whale. His presentation on the Arctic was certainly an enjoyable beginning for the Halifax Field Naturalists.

