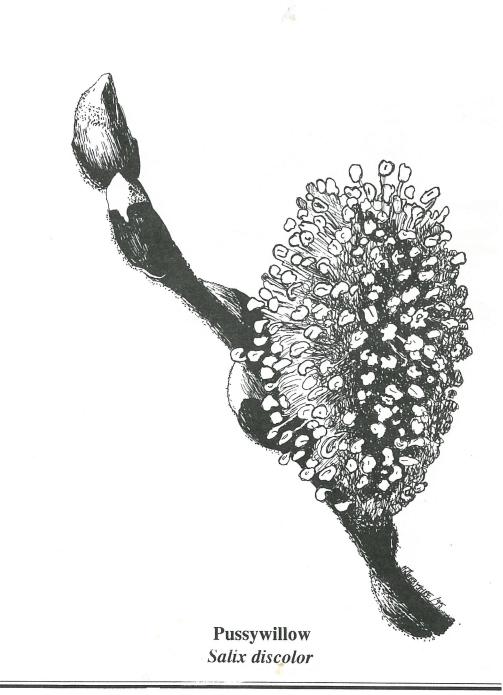
HALIFAX FIELD NATURALISTS' NEWSLETTER

March to June 1995

Robert McDonald 95 27 Warwick Lane Halifax NS B3M 4J3

No. 78





Return address: Halifax Field Naturalists c/o Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History 1747 Summer Street Halifax, NS B3H 3A6

HALIFAX • FIELD • NATURALISTS

To encourage a greater appreciation and understanding of Nova Scotia's natural history, both within the membership **Objectives** of HFN and in the public at large. To represent the interests of naturalists by encouraging the conservation of Nova Scotia's natural resources. Meetings On the first Thursday of every month at 8:00 pm in the auditorium of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History, 1747 Summer Street, Halifax. Meetings are open to the public. **Field Trips** Are held at least once a month, and it is appreciated if those travelling in someone else's car share the cost of the gas. Everyone, member or not, is welcome to take part in field trips. Membership Is open to anyone interested in the natural history of Nova Scotia. Memberships are available at any meeting of the society, or by writing to: Membership Secretary, Halifax Field Naturalists, c/o NS Museum of Natural History. New memberships starting from September 1 will be valid until the end of the following membership year. The regular membership year is from January 1 to December 31. Members receive the HFN Newsletter and notices of all meetings, field trips, and special programmes. The fees are as follows: Individual\$12.00 per year Family\$18.00 per year Supporting\$20.00 per year FNSN (opt.).....\$5.00 per year Executive 1995 Directors Deborah Burleson, Patricia Chalmers, Ursula Grigg, Bernice Moores, Linda and Peter Payzant, Rich Peckham Mailing Halifax Field Naturalists c/o Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History Address 1747 Summer St., Halifax Nova Scotia **B3H 3A6 Committees** Charlotte Lundgren Jennifer MacKeigan 883-9766 Newsletter Patricia Chalmers 422-3970 Shirley van Nostrand835-3673 **HFN** is incorporated under the Nova Scotia Societies Act and is a member organisation of the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists and of the Canadian Nature Federation. It is registered for federal income tax purposes. Official receipts will be issued for individual and corporate gifts. Illustrations (All illustrations not acknowledged are from copyright-free sources) This Issue (No. 78): Cover-H. Derbyshire; P.3-W. Schofield, Plaster Rock, reprinted from Journ. of Ed., June, 1958; p.4-W. Fulton; p.5-collection D. Butters; p.6-H. Derbyshire; p.7-K. Gosner, Peterson's Field Guide to the Atlantic Seashore; p.8-Cougar H. Derbyshire, Fisher CoNServation, Vol.18, #3; p.9-J. Schoenherr, North America, Time-Life Books 1964; p.10-B. Dodge; p.11 as p.7; p.12-H. Derbyshire; p.13/14-H. Derbyshire; p.15-tide table courtesy Dept. of Transport.

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HFN NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

EDITORIAL



The first sign of spring, usually a silverfish trapped in the bath in late January, has failed to appear this year. The house reeks of flea soap, which may be hurting the other insects and arachnids; it has certainly reduced dust mites.

The first False Scorpion, which hunts silverfish regularly, will not appear until March.

Predators have been in the news this winter, starting with a hawk outside the front door before daylight in November.

The mousing season reopened last week, with the capture of a gravid female; Nubs (the cat) watched the snow from an uncurtained window for a couple of nights before visiting the hunting grounds across the road.

There must be a visible movement of rodents around houses most nights. What else do we miss by shutting ourselves in at dusk?

A different kind of hunting is going on; coyotes have been taking cats on the edge of Dartmouth, and have also been reported from near Prince's Lodge on the Bedford Highway. It's time to consider a cat door, for pets tend to run home when chased, and are pinned against the door before it can be opened. A wild cat would climb a tree and be safe.

We also know that a small population of Eastern Cougars exists in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. This is the shy race with an occasional black specimen. Reports are being collected by the Canadian Wildlife Service; cougar sightings can be called in to the provincial Department of Resources. Nearest office to Metro - 861-2560 We have our own report, from Karla Moore, on p. 8.

There will soon be six new walking trails on Richard Uniacke's enormous estate. The grand opening will be on June 1st, but volunteers will be needed in May to make the paths look used. Watch for announcements or call Joan Waldron at 424-7398 in a month or so.

Thanks to contributers and all who have helped put this Newsletter together. It is much more fun in a crowd!

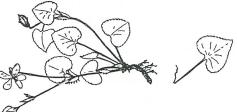
— Ursula Grigg

NOTICES AND VOLUNTEERS

Please write to federal and provincial politicians expressing approval or otherwise of bills being discussed.; e.g. gun control, parks and wilderness protection, trapping regulations. It only needs one sentence, and letters to Ottawa do not need stamps. Addresses can be got through phone numbers at the start of blue pages, but 'House of Parliament' or 'Province House' plus the appropriate city and province will get there. We all can't get to meetings but we all can still take part.

Volunteers are needed to make tea at HFN meetings, or perhaps to organise a roster. It does not take long to do, and help can be co-opted on the spot.

The Wild Flora Society needs some more lively and energetic members. Photograph plants in the wild, grow them or curse them as weeds, they are beautiful, fascinating - and guiet! Phone Bill Graham 435-0041 or 421-3534.



WELCOME TO NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS

Alan and Mary Covert Patrice Shires Carolyn Crawford Yanko Andrade and Angelica Silva Katie Furhodde Doris V. Young Michael and Suzanne Lewis **Florence Chittick** Margaret Curcio Barbara Hay and Ira Redwood Anthony and Gillian Barlow



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HFN AGM, 2 MARCH 1995

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In the past year the HFN has been involved in many activities in support of the club's objectives. Here are the highlights:

Piping Plover Early in the year there were some administrative difficulties that the Directors resolved to Environment Canada's satisfaction. This led to the release of funds that has enabled us to progress with a number of activities. To provide for more long-term and stable administration the programme is run by a committee, chaired by Stephen Flemming of New Brunswick and with representation from PEI, NB, and NS. Etta Parker is the representative for NS and Cathy Fulton-Strugnell is continuing as a member. Colin Stewart and Roy John are acting as advisors. The committee has produced a new manual which will also appear in French, has arranged training sessions, and is developing a video.

Unfortunately last season's nesting record was poor. This was due to habitat damage by winter storms, increased predation by gulls and crows (these birds have less garbage and fish waste to feed on than before), and disturbance by people. We can only tackle the last problem effectively. The NS Liquor Commission has agreed to print two million bags with a "Help the Plover" message, and CBC Radio will air a plover presentation in the spring.

CNF Conference The HFN hosted an extremely successful CNF Conference. The presentations, field trips, auction, and other events received high praise from those attending, and the conference made a substantial profit. The organisers were even successful in having the Osprey proclaimed the provincial bird as part of the programme.

Parks and Protected Areas The HFN has made a formal submission to the Public Review Committee in full support of the DNR proposal. This support has also been expressed to the ministers of Natural Resources and Environment.

Endangered Species Together with the FNSN, we have supported the federal government's proposed legislation to protect endangered species. We have also met with Ministers Downe and Harrison and some senior civil servants to encourage the province to enact its own legislation.

To achieve the results outlined above, I received substantial support from several club members. These people and a summary of their achievements are listed here so you can all join me in giving them the thanks they so richly deserve.

The Programme Committee Jennifer MacKeigan, Cathy Fulton-Strugnell, and Charlotte Lundgren. We have had some superb presentations and great field trips. The whole process is well organised and the variety in the programmes is wonderful. And there is MORE to come!

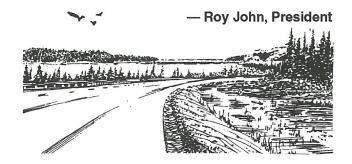
The Newsletter Committee Ursula Grigg, Pat Chalmers, Mary Primrose, Shirley van Nostrand, and Stephanie Robertson. We have an excellent newsletter, worth getting and worth reading. Some production problems appear to have been resolved by getting additional help and by good co-ordination with the Programme Committee.

The Tea Lady Regina Maas has made our meetings more social by providing tea and cookies.

The CNF Conference Committee A large number of people worked on making the conference a success. I will only mention one, Bob McDonald, by name because much of the success was due to Bob's hard work and tenacity. While he did not work alone Bob certainly did a huge share. The result is that HFN's reputation was greatly enhanced and we owe Bob and his team for that.

The Directors Five directors are resigning this year. These are Bob McDonald, Mary Primrose, John Newbery, Bonnie Saxton, and Shirley van Nostrand. The contributions by these people have been excellent. Mary Primrose will be presenting a list of five nominations for new directors. It says a lot for the strength of the club that we can draw upon such capable individuals.

I ask you all to join with me in thanking all the directors and committee members who have worked hard to make our organisation what it is today.



TREASURER'S REPORT

Halifax Field Naturalists	Assets	1994	1993
Balance Sheet	Cash	\$2,100	\$1,333
As At December 31, 1994	Accounts Receivable	4,801	1,000
	Investments(Schedule 5)	6,715	7,608
	Inventories	2,320	1,715
	Other	<u>440</u>	440
		\$16,376	<u>\$12,096</u>
	Liabilities and Surplus		
	Accounts Payable	\$359	\$330
Alter	Surplus	<u>16,017</u>	11.766
		\$16,376	\$12,096

HFN'S RESPONSE TO NOVA SCOTIA'S PARKS PLAN



The Halifax Field Naturalists made a presentation to the Government of Nova Scotia's Public Review Committee regarding the Proposed Systems Plan for Parks and Protected Areas on the evening of 7 February, 1995. There were about a dozen presentations made by groups and individuals that evening, of which ours was one. This meeting was only one of twenty-five public meetings held around the province in January and February. As we knew that the more technical arguments about ecology and biodiversity would be well made by our friends in the Canadian Nature Federation, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists, and the Ecology Action Centre's Wilderness Committee, among others, we decided not to repeat those arguments. Instead, we spoke for the ordinary person with an interest in nature. Our text was prepared after consultation with the Board and other HFN members. It was presented at the Public Review Meeting by our President, Roy John; while a slide show by Mary Primrose, showing HFN field trips, landscape views, and nature studies, played before the assembled audience. This is the text of our presentation:

"The Halifax Field Naturalists is a community organization which represents the interests of naturalists in Halifax and in the greater metropolitan area. For twenty years we have brought together



hundreds of people of all ages who are united by a curiosity about and an appreciation for the natural world, and our members include families with young children, students, people in the work force, retirees, and grandparents. While some of our members are trained in the natural sciences, most are interested amateurs. Our mission is to promote the enjoyment and preservation of Nova Scotia's natural history and natural areas through education, discussion, and fellowship.

We regularly host slide shows and lectures on natural history topics, and offer interpretive field trips on both land and water to explore and learn about the natural features of our province. We publish a quarterly newsletter with articles of interest to naturalists. Some of our dedicated members act as volunteers in the Piping Plover Guardianship Program, to help protect one of our endangered species. The Halifax Field Naturalists also awards prizes at regional high school science fairs, and encourages young people to take an interest in the natural world.

Our members all use parks and wild areas as individuals, for study and for recreation, and our club regularly schedules events in parks. The Halifax Field Naturalists cooperates each year with the Department of Natural Resources' Parks are for People Programme, and we co-sponsor events in our parks.

This Society speaks for naturalists in and around Halifax, an urban centre whose population

constitutes nearly a third of the population of this province. Unfortunately, the communities in the metropolitan area have not done an adequate job in preserving natural areas within its boundaries. Opportunities in the past to develop green belts around Halifax Harbour and Bedford Basin have been missed. The citizens of our communities therefore need to go further afield to reach unspoilt natural areas, and we particularly value those few that are still in our vicinity.

Recently, we asked some of our members to explain why they care about parks and natural areas, and why they use them. There were many answers, some very personal, but we are sure that they speak for many people in our community and in our province. In the first place, city dwellers need to be able to get away from the city, overcrowding and pollution, and the restricted movements of urban life, to be in a place with fresh air where one can go anywhere, at any time. Many of our members spoke of the therapeutic value of natural spaces; they restore our perspective on life, and if we live in an urban area, we particularly need places like these. We enjoy being in places that are completely natural and unspoilt, where we can share the world with the birds and plants and animals, and can observe them, even photograph them, in their native setting. We hate to see the world become nothing but concrete and asphalt. 1 ~

Our members repeatedly observed that parks and protected wild areas are a marvelous gift to bequeath to future generations, and we want to continue sharing nature with children. Our young families and community youth groups need more opportunities for outdoor recreation and learning.

It is becoming apparent that ecotourism is important to the Nova Scotian economy, and will become more so with time; so it is essential that we preserve significant natural areas that are representative of Nova Scotia for the future.

It should not be supposed that we value natural areas only for our own pleasure and benefit. While these reflections might suggest that we only value nature for what it can do for us, this is not the whole story. We also value places where we can see and study the interconnectedness of the natural world, and plants and animals flourishing in their undisturbed environment, independent of human intervention. We want to preserve our natural heritage: the geology, the flora and the fauna, the diverse ecosystems and habitats in all their wonderful richness and complexity. We cannot imagine life without these natural areas, and even if we could not use them ourselves, we would want them to exist. This is our natural heritage, as Haligonians, as Nova Scotians, as Canadians.

In our study and discussions of the Proposed Systems Plan for Parks and Protected Areas in Nova Scotia, the Halifax Field Naturalists have become convinced that this proposal will go far to preserve and protect natural areas in our province for future generations, and that species, landforms, and habitats can be permanently maintained in a natural state.

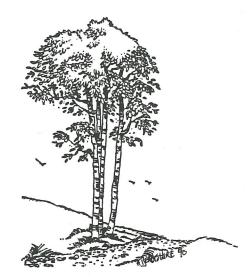
We are reassured that access to natural areas will be provided for the public, but not so as to deplete the resource. It is understood that access may be limited in order to protect fragile species and ecosystems.

The Halifax Field Naturalists think that this is the most progressive and forward-thinking proposal for parks that has ever been made in this province, and if, as we hope, it proceeds, this will be a model for other parts of the country.

The members of our organisation who have read and studied this proposal hope that it will go forward, and that this opportunity to expand our parks system and add to the protected areas in our province will not be lost, as previous plans to save natural areas in our community once failed. The Halifax Field Naturalists will gladly cooperate in any way within our power to assist with the management plan as the next step to this proposal.

We therefore urge the members of the Public Review Committee to approve this proposal, and trust that the Department will proceed as quickly as possible.

> - The Halifax Field Naturalists' Board of Directors February 7, 1995



SPECIAL ARTICLES

ROCKWEED, PART OF THE OCEANS' FORESTS



(In 1993), the federal government convened a scientific advisory committee to address two questions associated with a proposed Rockweed harvest in Southwestern New Brunswick: what impact will proposed harvesting rates have on the existing virgin standing crop; and what impact will the harvest have on finfish, shellfish, and other species?

Rockweed (Ascophyllum nodosum) is a long, multibranching, dark green seaweed that grows (up to 3 metres in height) in rocky intertidal areas, and each plant can have a lifespan of at least15 years. Rockweed is harvested by rake, hand, or mechanical means for processing into alginates. Alginates are widely used in cosmetics, pharmaceutical, and food products for their binding, thickening, and emulsifying properties.

Rockweed dominates the rocky shores of the Bay of Fundy. It forms three different habitats at various stages of its life cycle: onshore as attached plants; offshore as large drifting mats; aboveshore as part of the strandline. In the final stages, it contributes to the general productivity of the Bay. Onshore, Rockweed habitats are nursery grounds that provide food and shelter for many commercially important species. At high tide, thousands of hectares of Rockweed are resuspended to create forest-like surroundings that are important to numerous juvenile fishes including Herring, Pollock, Winter Flounder, Tomcod, Smelt, Gaspereau, White Hake, Mackerel, and Cod. In addition, other fisheries (e.g. Periwinkles, bivalves, crabs and Lobsters) and numerous species of birds (Eider and Black Duck, loons, cormorants, herons, Osprey and eagles) rely directly or indirectly on the intertidal zone for food.

Beginning in May and peaking in September, portions of the Rockweed plant begin to break off and drift out to sea forming extensive mats (some as long as a kilometre). These mats provide food (large quantities of zooplankton that collect under the mat canopy) and shelter for larval Lobsters and larval and juvenile fishes such as Lumpfish, Sticklebacks, Four-bearded Rocklings and Red Hake. They also attract such seabirds as phalaropes and terns which feed on the fishes and zooplankton.

Within a few weeks Rockweed ends up back on

shore as part of the strandline in the form of wrack beds, where it undergoes a process of decomposition similar to that of leaves. In a period of 28 days (one lunar cycle) these wrack beds are invaded by a variety of insects and amphipods which break down the wrack into particulate and dissolved organic carbon, or brown sludge. The very basic element of this decomposition process (dissolved organic carbon) helps to prime the nutrient pump that is so vital to phytoplankton production. It is the high levels of (this) production in the Bay of Fundy that determines the existence of every fish, invertebrate, bird, and whale in the Bay, and establishes it as one of the most productive ecosystems in the world.

The document produced by the scientific advisory committee identified and acknowledged six major gaps in scientific knowledge regarding Rockweed. For example, while it is known that 22 species of fish (some of commercial importance such as Herring, Pollock, and Winter Flounder) utilise rockweed during some part of their life cycle, no-one has defined the degree of dependence these species have on the Rockweed habitat. Although it is well known that Rockweed substantially contributes to the total primary productivity of coastal areas, this too has not been quantified.

What the document does not address is that if a species has such a pivotal role to play in an ecosystem as Rockweed does, its loss could have economic as well as ecological implications. For example, on the Northwest Atlantic continental shelf. overfishing has led to significant changes in species dominance among fish. During the 1960s, Atlantic Mackerel and Herring populations declined due to overfishing, and, as a result, the commercially less desirable Sand Lance population has increased. Similarly, 20 years of heavy fishing on Georges Bank has resulted in a decrease in Haddock, Cod, and flounder populations. Today, dogfish, another commercially less desirable species, now fulfils the role of dominant fish predator on Georges Bank. This information raises an important question: how will the removal of Rockweed affect the existing fisheries?

- Inka Milewski, from an article in EcoAlert Nov/Dec 1993. N.B. Conservation Council

Some animals associated with Rockweed -

Fish

Dogfish: Squalus acanthias? Gaspereau: Alosa pseudoharengus Herring: Clupea harengus Smelt: Osmerus mordax Four-bearded Rockling: Enchelyopus cimbrius Cod: Gadus morrhua Haddock: Melanogrammus aeglefinus Tomcod: Microgadus tomcod Pollock: Pollachius virens Red Hake: Urophycis chuss White Hake: U. tenuis Stickleback: Apeltes quadracus, Pungitius

Sand Lance: *Ammodytes* spp. Mackerel: *Scomber scombrus* Lumpfish: *Cyclopterus lumpus* Winter Flounder: *Pseudopleuronectes americanus*

Birds

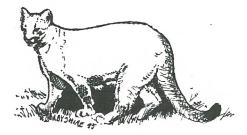
Heron: Ardea herodias American Black Duck: Anas rubripes Eider Duck: Somateria mollissima Osprey: Pandion haliaetus Bald eagle: Haliaeetus leucocephala Phalaropes: Phalaropus spp. Terns: Sterna spp.

Invertebrates

Common Periwinkle: Littorina littorea Northern Lobster: Homarus americanus

— Ursula Grigg

pungitius



A COUGAR OF A STORY

Two summers ago, I was sitting at my kitchen table having a cup of tea before going to work when I noticed a beige animal walking on the road. At first I thought it was one of the neighbours walking his dog. I couldn't see it very clearly as there are a lot of trees between my house and the road. As it came nearer my house, through clearings in the trees I noticed there wasn't a man following the animal and it walked 'like a cat'. It had a long tail and was a bit larger than myself in weight (it weighed approximately 130 lbs). I thought it was a bobcat. As I drove out of my driveway a few minutes later, the animal, which was sitting on the side of the road just down from my house, jumped gracefully and powerfully into the woods. In telling this story to friends, according to the description I gave a few believed that what I actually saw was a Cougar *(Felis concolor)*. Some people believe that Cougars do not exist in Nova Scotia, yet I am absolutely sure of what I saw.

By the way, I live in the Waverley Game Sanctuary.

- Karla Moore



RE-ESTABLISHING FISHER IN NOVA SCOTIA

The Fisher (*Martes pennanti*) is native to mainland Nova Scotia, but there are no historical records of its occurrence on Cape Breton Island. By the early 1900s, this species was greatly reduced throughout its North American range. Unregulated hunting and trapping, as well as habitat loss due to fires, settlement, and logging, are reasons for the demise of the Fisher. In Nova Scotia, the last-known specimen was taken in 1922.

In 1947 and 1948, Fisher were reintroduced to Nova Scotia. 12 ranch-raised Fisher were released in the Tobeatic Game Sanctuary. Between 1963 and 1966, 92 wild Fisher from Maine were introduced to the eastern mainland of Nova Scotia. Both reintroductions appeared to be successful, although Fisher numbers remained small.

Today, data indicate there are still two separate Fisher populations in Nova Scotia. The eastern one is centred in Cumberland, Colchester, and Pictou Counties. The second, smaller population is located in the interior of the southwestern end of the province. Both populations appear stable. Over the past two to three years, the eastern population has increased substantially. This is based on the numbers of accidental captures by trappers, and the relative abundance as reported by trappers, hunters, and Department of Natural Resources staff. However, the western population remains low. In an attempt to increase the western population and ultimately their overall abundance. Fisher from the eastern mainland were live-trapped and relocated to the New Ross area of Lunenberg County.

On December 8, 1993, one male Fisher was released. On March 14, 1994, two males and two females were relocated. Hopefully, as these animals become established and spread, they will serve as a stepping stone between the two existing populations and allow for interbreeding and expansion of both groups. Because the number of animals relocated was low, the project is continuing this fall.

- 1 - 2

The goal of these relocations is to increase Fisher numbers to historical levels, when the animals were much more numerous than at present. With good management and a little luck, perhaps we can achieve this for the Fisher and for present and future generations of Nova Scotians.

> — John Mills, from 'CoNServation', Fall 1994 p.13,Vol. 18, #1

FIELD TRIPS

SHUBENACADIE WILDLIFE PARK

DATE: Sunday, 6 November 1994 WEATHER: cold, with a chilly wind INTERPRETER: Bert Vissers, Park Director PARTICIPANTS: about 20

You know the great thing about being on the Programme Committee for HFN? Getting to arrange field trips that are close to your own heart!

On November 6 we met Bert Vissers at the Shubenacadie Wildlife Park and he gave us a private tour. Critter by beast, we were treated to an in-depth discussion about the lives of the park animals. While space keeps me from writing about ALL the animals we saw, I shall mention the highlights and interesting points...

Our first stop was at the Groundhog (*Marmota monax*) mound. Unfortunately they had all hit the hay, literally, having hay provided as bedding. They are Nova Scotia's only true hibernators, so of course we did not see them.

Bert explained that education is now the main focus for the Park, and that new, friendlier enclosures are gradually being provided for all species. The latest is the new enclosure for the Cougars (*Felis concolor*). By spring their new home will be finished and the two Cougars will move in. Western and Eastern Cougars are so similar, they can only be distinguished by examining their skulls.

Our guide also told us that all the animals have been captive-bred or hand-raised, and are adapted to captivity, not having known another lifestyle. The Mink (*Mustela vison*) are actually domesticated fur ranch beasts, physically identical to wild ones, but without the self-mutilating behaviour that wild Mink display when captive.

As we stopped by the Gray Seal (Halichoerus grypus) pond, a Muskrat, (Ondatra zibethica) swam over looking for a hand-out. Bert said he was not theirs, but had moved in on the Park, liking what he had found there.

Several species of local and exotic geese and ducks are residents, being unable to fly because wing tendonectomy has been performed on them. This operation allows for the maintenance of feather integrity for warmth, but prevents flight capability. Several kinds of wild fowl stop by during migration as well. The Park is an excellent place to study them and note field marks for future reference.

Sable Island horses (*Equus caballus*) are a breed unto themselves; four of these sturdy horses reside at Shubenacadie.

Three Coyotes *(Canis latrans)* have been handraised by Bert himself. Naturally secretive



creatures, these were very nosey about us and we got an excellent look at them.

The Timber Wolves (*Canis lupus*) were handraised too, at the wolf compound close by, and now reside next door to the Coyotes. All the canine males have been neutered to avoid unwanted pups and inbreeding.

Two male Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) kittens were discovered in a den destroyed by forestry, and were hand-raised by Bert. A female was found wounded and has been rehabilitated. The wound resulted in the loss of a fore-leg and she could not be released, so she keeps the males company.

Two Canada Lynxes (*Lynx canadensis*) were obtained from another zoo in Canada. Truly beautiful specimens of cat!

None of these cats will breed, though still fertile, due to the stress levels produced by close proximity to humans, even as well treated as they are.

Grey Squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) were released several years ago in the Public Gardens in Halifax, by persons unknown. Because of their aggressive nature, and the fear that they would multiply and reduce the native squirrel numbers in Nova Scotia, they were captured, neutered and given a home.

Moose (Alces alces), a male and female, share a huge enclosure. The male, a two year old, becomes quite aggressive during rutting season. He gave us a sample of this, as he followed us along the fence, pushing and butting it as a warning to stay away from his mate. Bert told us that the large deer lose their fear of humans when raised by them, and will actually look upon their keepers as rivals for the affection of the cows. Moose are very expensive to feed through the winter; luckily, excess Christmas trees are available as food for them.

Three Red Foxes (Vulpes vulpes) were very hard on the trees that were planted — and dug up weekly in their area. Now the trees are just stuck in the ground; I guess the foxes are winning the battle of wits. The Arctic Foxes (Alopex lagopus) are pure white now for winter. Mostly fur, they look much bigger than they are.

Fishers (*Martes pennanti*) are rare in Nova Scotia. There is an Eastern and a Western population in the Maritimes, and efforts are being made to release animals somewhere in the middle, both to expand gene pools and increase numbers. Three Striped Skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*) were comical as they waddled about in single file. After digging a hole, two of them popped up their heads and looked at us with dirty faces. Very endearing.

Two Beavers (*Castor canadensis*) reside in the old bear pen and are constantly busy constructing a lodge which is partially removed by the wardens in order to give them 'something to do'. Beavers never stop growing, and they can become quite large.

Two two-year old Black Bears (Ursus americanus) were hand-raised and are quite affectionate. They licked our hands through the fence and made contented throaty purrs. Real teddy bears!

Birds of prey that have been wounded and nursed, but could not survive if released, are kept here too. They include Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*), Barred Owls (*Strix varia*), Snowy Owls (*Nyctea scandiaca*) and Great Horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*). Beautiful to see, it is hard to accept that some of these birds have been wounded deliberately by humans.

When we visited the barns out back we saw several Snowshoe Hares (*Lepus americanus*) that had been delivered to the Park by cat owners whose pets had captured or wounded them. Plans are underway to build them an enclosure and add them to the species on display. A baby Cougar is being raised there too. About seven months old now, she is playful but has claws that could tear you wide open.

From start to finish our tour lasted three hours! We all had a grand time and learned much. Bert is very well informed and was happy to answer questions — and there were lots of them. I have never enjoyed the Wildlife Park so much, and will visit in the future with renewed respect.

— Catherine Fulton-Strugnell



LICHENS AT CHEVERIE

DATE: Saturday, November 12, 1994 **PLACE:** Cheverie WEATHER: Perfect **INTERPRETER: Karen Casselman** AND: Jean Hill, Marion Sensen PARTICIPANTS: 19 adults, 2 children, 1 dog



Cheverie is just one of the many scenic jewels to be found in Nova Scotia, but the location for our outing was determined by the fact that the area of study was in Karen's back yard.

Forest cover consisted of mature to overmature spruce (Picea spp.) and Fir (Abies balsamea) with a mixture of Red Maple (Acer rubrum), White Birch (Betula papyrifera), alder (Alnus sp.), Yellow Birch (Betula alleghaniensis), and some Red Oak (Quercus rubra).

The geology in this area was of interest as well. It would best be termed as Karst Topography. It is characterized by numerous sink holes and caverns resulting from a collapsing surface layer due to the underlying soluble gypsum material being removed by the ground water (and mining?).

Ah yes, lichens, unique organisms! They actually consist of two symbionts - a fungus and an alga. Karen's (backyard) woodlot, like most that are left relatively undisturbed for a few years, was inundated with many types of lichens. A few of the many we encountered and tried to remember were Lobaria pulmonaria (lung-like), Hypogymnia physodes (on mature Fir) Evernia mesomorpha, and Usnea sp. (Old Man's Beard).

A rogue botanist heralding a rare orchid, the usual cacophony of the ornithologically-minded participants, and the soft hooting of a Barred Owl caused minor diversions from our outing's topic; but most of those attending made inroads into 'enlichening' themselves in an area of science in which I, personally, was always very weak.

The hot beverages and sweets offered by the Casselman's were very much appreciated.

I think that most of us look forward to another lichen outing!



ANNUAL SEWER STROLL

DATE: 22 January, 1995 PLACE: various spots around Halifax Harbour WEATHER: mild,+1, damp, overcast; freezing rain later **INTERPRETER:** Roy John PARTICIPANTS: 13 adults and one dog ('Jenny')

'Sewer Strolls' are a tradition for Halifax birders; we survey the spots where turbulent waters prevent ice from forming in winter, whether at a river mouth or a sewer outfall. The extra warmth and nutrientrich waters from the sewers are further attractants for waterfowl and gulls. There are over twenty of these outfalls in the Harbour, and many of them are regular wintering spots for interesting birds.

A visiting birder from Ontario who joined us for this outing was anxious to add to his life list, so we headed first to the mouth of the Sackville River, near Fish Hatchery Park in Bedford, one of the current hot spots for ducks. We were not disappointed. There were 6 female Greater Scaup (Aythya marila) in the cove by the bridge, together with Mallards, Black Ducks, (Anas platyrhynchos, A. rubripes) and the real draw, a female juvenile Tufted Duck (Avthya fuligula), an Eurasian species which infrequently turns up along the Atlantic coast in winter. It was difficult to see the small wispy crest on the back of its head. Herring Gulls soared above us.

We then walked around the neighbourhood, which has hosted several noteworthy birds this winter. First we turned up Fort Sackville Road, walking past Scott Manor House (the oldest building in Bedford, c. 1767). A Cardinal (Cardinalis cardinalis) has been seen at a feeder near here, but we did not see it. Next we turned onto Perth Street. where a few American Crows (Corvus brachyrhynchos) roosted in the cemetery shrubberies. A flock of noisy Black-capped Chickadees (Parus atricapillus) drew our attention, and we stopped to investigate them. Travelling with them were two Brown Creepers (Certhia americana), a Golden-crowned Kinglet (Regulus satrapa), and a Pine Warbler (Dendroica pinus). We also heard a Goldfinch (Carduelis tristis) and a Red-breasted Nuthatch (Sitta canadensis). At the foot of Wardour Street we looked for the Yellow-breasted Chat (Icteria virens) which has been reported at the feeder there, but no luck. It was too late in the morning to see birds at the feeders. We returned to our cars near the railway bridge, and scanning the water again saw an adult Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) perched in one of the tall pines on Spruce Island. We also saw the Mute Swan

(Cygnus olor), which escaped from a wild fowl collection about three years ago and has spent its time in Bedford Basin since then.

Our next stop was the Waterfront Development Park near Mill Cove in Bedford, where a large number of birds were close to shore. A cold wind off the Basin drew tears from our eyes as we looked out at both drake and duck Common Goldeneye (Bucephala clangula), as well as 3 drakes and 3 ducks of Barrow's Goldeneye (Bucephala islandica) bobbing about in the water with Herring, Iceland, and Greater Black-backed Gulls (Larus argentatus, L. glaucoides, L. marinus). It was a rare opportunity to observe both species and both sexes of Goldeneye at such close range. We all got really good looks at these diving ducks through the scopes which many people had brought along. The female Barrow's Goldeneye had a bright orange bill, a distinct fieldmark. At one point the Common Goldeneye drakes lined up and went into a syncopated courtship display, throwing their heads back upon their shoulders rhythmically. There were also Great Cormorants (Phalacrocorax carbo), male and female Red-breasted Mergansers (Mergus merganser), and more Black Ducks.

After a quick stop for coffee, we gathered at Tufts Cove, off Nootka Avenue in Shannon Park. We passed a huge flock of gulls on the grass, mostly Herring, but a few Ring-billed and Black-headed gulls (*Larus delawarensis, L. ridibundus*) as well. We were able to see the winter plumage of the Black-headed gulls distinctly; the head is mostly white, with a smudgy black 'ear' mark just behind the eye. In the Cove were Black-headed, Greater Blackbacked, Iceland, Ring-billed, and Herring Gulls. The next quick stop was at Dartmouth Cove, at the end of Maitland Street, where we had good looks at all five of these gulls, as well as more Black Ducks.

There was a more interesting duck at our next stop, Sullivan's Pond, off Prince Albert Road. Here, while the ubiquitous Black Ducks, Mallards, and domestic ducks scrambled for Roy's bread crumbs, a shy but beautiful male Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) let us admire him. Our last stop of the morning, at the foot of Old Ferry Road, afforded us a close look at four female Red-breasted Mergansers, as well as Black Guillemots (*Cephus grylle*), and the usual gulls. While some went to the Woodside Tim Horton's, the rest of us ate our lunches at the Eastern Passage Park, where a boardwalk over a grassy mudflat gives a close view of Lawlor's Island. At the end of a nearby wharf we saw Black Guillemots (almost white in their winter plumage), three Common Loons (*Gavia immer*), and a Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegina*). As we pulled out from the parking lot a mink (*Mustela vison*) ran from out of the ditch across the road towards the water. At a pull-off picnic spot further along Shore Road we caught a glimpse of male and female Oldsquaw (*Clangula hyemalis*) below us in the surf.

Our last stop on the Dartmouth side of the Harbour was at Hartlen's Point. We walked out to the point of land opposite Devil's Island, and flushed a Song Sparrow (Melospiza melodia) from the grass. Jenny tried to dodge the puddles in the path and got her flowing mane caught in some brambles off the trail; it took a few minutes to work her loose. Four Common Eider (Somateria mollissima) rode the waves far out in the breakers; the absence of other sea ducks was striking. We expected to see Scoters (Melanitta spp.), for instance, but there were none. However, Rich Peckham reported later that he had seen a raft of about thirty Scaup at Eastern Passage. As the sky drew darker and a light drizzle was starting to fall, we decided to end the day at Fairview Cove. A Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus) has been seen sporadically here, but we saw only the Greater Black-backed, and the other common gulls.

We saw about thirty species of birds on this outing, some unusual, and many of them at close hand. Over half of the participants brought scopes, which they generously shared, so all of us were able to study these birds for a good while. This was an excellent outing for beginners. Last year the sewer stroll took place on one of the coldest days of the year, and while we visited most of the same places then, we saw perhaps only half this number of species.

Thank you Roy for an excellent field trip!

Patricia L. Chalmers

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ALMANAC

This almanac is for the dates of events which are not found in our programme: for field trips or lectures which members might like to attend; natural happenings to watch for such as eclipses or comets; average migration dates; expected blooming seasons; and so forth. Please suggest other suitable items.

"In this season the frogs at first out-sing the birds; only a few days after the plucked strings of the wood frogs, the first fluting calls of the spring peepers will be heard... A little later, however, after the Hermit Thrushes arrive, one may be lucky enough to hear one of the most movingly beautiful concerts the spring has to offer: a thrush singing against the shimmering, quavering accompaniment of a frog chorus, a little softened by distance. The pure bell-like tones of the solo instrument against the sound of muted strings is like the slow movement of a concerto."

- "Spring" in <u>A naturalist's notebook: Yarmouth County</u>, by C.R.K. Allen (1987)

NATURAL EVENTS

March/ April	Maple Sugar season - look for Maple Syrup Festivals at The Falls, 25 March; Dean, 8 April; Barss Corner, 22 April	
2 April	Daylight Saving Time begins - turn clocks ahead one hour	
5 April	return of Piping Plover and Osprey	
first week April	Coltsfoot in bloom	
15 April	return of Hermit Thrush, our finest songster	
mid-late April	Yellow-spotted salamanders return to ponds to mate and lay eggs	
mid-April/May	Mayflowers in bloom	
22 April	25th anniversary of Earth Day	
22-23 April	Lyrid meteor shower (rate: 10-15/hour)	
late April	Bloodroot in bloom	
late April?	Halifax Public Gardens reopen one day when you aren't looking	
1 May/mid-June	Gaspereau (alewives) ascend rivers to spawn in their headwaters	
first week May	Indian Pear (Amelanchier) in bloom - one of our earliest flowering shrubs	
1 May-15 May	many species of Warblers return	
5-6 May	Eta Áquarid meteor shower (rate: 20/hour)	
7-14 May	the first chorus (full mating call) of Northern Spring Peepers heard	
8-12 May	Environment Week	
12 May	return of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds	
mid/late May	spring ephemeral wildflowers in bloom; Trout Lilies, Dutchman's Breeches, Yellow Violets	
25-29 May	Apple Blossom Festival, Annapolis Valley	
28 May	last spring frost in Halifax (i.e., Environment Canada says that there is only a 1 in 10 chance	
	that a spring frost will occur after this date); look forward to 155 frost-free days	
11 June	Rhododendron Sunday at the Kentville Agricultural Research Station	
21 June	Summer Solstice	

Sources — Sue Brown, Frogwatch '95; Colombo's <u>Canadian Global Almanac</u>, 1995; Royal Astronomical Society of Canada's <u>Observer's Handbook</u>, 1995; Tufts' <u>Birds of Nova Scotia</u>, 1986; the personal observations of Gordon Yeadon and the compiler

SUNRISE AND SUNSET ON SPRING AND EARLY SUMMER SATURDAYS

4 March 11 March 18 March 25 March	6:47 6:35 6:22 6:09	18:06 18:15 18:24 18:33	2 April 9 April 16 April 23 April 30 April	5:56 6:43 6:31 6:19 6:08	18:41 19:50 19:59 20:08 20:16	
7 May	5:58	20:25	3 June	5:31	20:54	
14 May	5:49	20:33	10 June	5:29	20:59	
21 May	5:42	20:41	17 June	5:28	21:02	
28 May	5:36	20:48	24 June	5:30	21:04	



- courtesy David Lane, Burke-Gaffney Observatory, St. Mary's University

ORGANIZATIONAL EVENTS

	aturalists — Meets third Monday of the month, 7:30 p.m., Acadia U., Wolfville
20 March	"Bird Nests" - Bernard Forsythe; meets in Elliott Hall (Chemistry Bldg.), Rom 221
? April	Amphibians field trip - Jeff Frankin
17 April	"Reflections on Natural History" - Harry Brennan and Ross Baker; meets in Elliott Hall (Chemistry Bldg.), Rom 221
23 April	Wolfville Area Birds - Judy Tufts; meets at 10 a.m. at the R. Tufts Nature Centre
15 May	"The Tides of Fundy" - David DeWolfe
19 June	Dragonflies

Cole Harbour Heritage Farm

25 April Local Wildlife - Etta Parker; this meeting at the Cole Harbour Library, 7:30 p.m.

Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists

2-4 June Annual Meeting at Acadia University (see notice elsewhere in Newsletter for details)

Friends of McNab's Island Society

Plans to hold a number of trips to the Island. No dates have been set yet. For more information call Dusan Soudek at 422-1045.

Friends of the Public Gardens— meets annually at the Nova Scotia Museum, 7:30 p.m.30 MarchAnnual General Meeting and presentation "Victorian Gardens in a Modern City" -
Peter Klynstra, Patricia MacDonald, Susan Guppy

Maritime Museum of the Atlantic— all programmes usually on a Tuesday at 7:30 p.m.4 April"The Preserving of George's Island" - Ron McDonald



Nova Scotia Bird Society — Meets fourth Thursday of the month, 8 p.m., at N. S. Museum.

15 April Eastern Shore and Martinique Beach - Ian McLaren; meet at the ScotiaBank Parking Lot, Bridge Plaza, Dartmouth, at 8 a.m.

30 April 6 May 14 May



Amherst Point Bird Sanctuary - Alan Smith; meet at APBS parking lot at 9:30 a.m. Eastern Shore - Fulton Lavender; meet at the golf course entrance, Hartlen's Point, 7:30 a.m. Lunenburg County - Bill Caudle; meet at Exit 11 off Hwy 103 at 7:30. This is aimed at beginning birdwatchers. Phone the N.S.B.S. Bird Information Line at 852-CHAT (i.e. 2428) to hear news of what birds are around, province-wide, and any other Society news of note such as field trips, meetings, etc. Contribute your own reports of sightings! This line is usually updated at least twice a week.

Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History

mid-late April Salamander Meander; John Gilhen. Phone 424-7353 to register before 15 April. You will be contacted the day before the outing.

19 April Gardens at Home and Abroad - Alex Wilson; 7:30 p.m.

Orchid Society of Nova Scotia

24-25 June Spring Orchid Show, City Centre Atlantic

Photographic Guild of Nova Scotia:

22 April Spring Show, Burke Education Centre, St. Mary's University, 8 p.m.

Wild Flora Society — Meets fourth Monday of the month, 7:30 p.m. at the N.S. Museum. 27 March Annual General Meeting



AND A FINAL WORD ON SNOW (AGAIN)

Last year I asked if anyone was familiar with the names for what a friend of mine called "the last three Snows of Spring". Ursula Grigg's daughter Rosemary, has drawn my attention to this passage in Marion Robertson's <u>The Chestnut Pipe: Folklore of Shelburne County</u>: "The 'robin's snow' that comes late in the spring following the arrival of the first robins, is nature's way to moisten the earth and entice the worms upward into the waiting beaks of the robins." Now, does anyone know what the other two Snows of Spring are called?

— compiled by Patricia L. Chalmers

TIDE TABLE



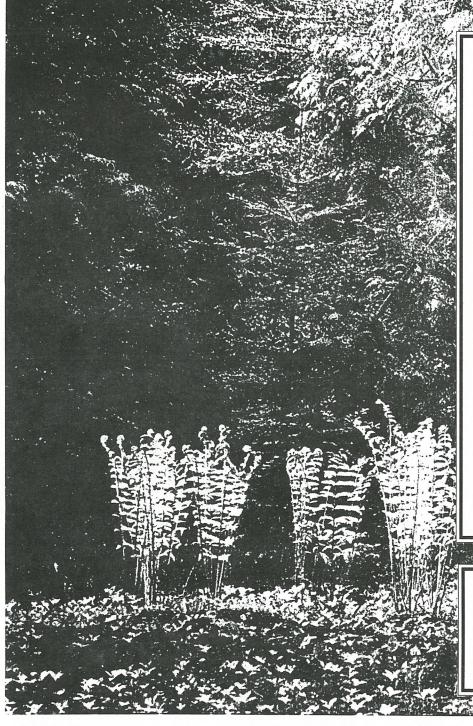
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Hosted by the Blomidon Naturalists Society

Theme: Nature's Ark - who's at the Helm?

Naturalists from across Nova Scotia are invited to Wolfville for two days of talks, displays, field trips, a country banquet, and a barbecue.

Speakers include Sherman Boates, Alex Colville, Graham Daborn, and Harry Thurston. Details of the programme and a registration form are included with this Newsletter. If you require further information, please call George Alliston at 542-3651.



Nature Notes

Coyote near Princes Lodge, on the Bedford Highway-catownersbeware!

Roy John says Fin Whales are scarce off Portuguese Cove this winter; fishing boats are common, however Ursula Grigg saw Ravens starting aerobatics at the end of January; they are displaying and nesting now

Great Horned Owls have eggs already. Song Sparrows started singing in the last week of February; Starlings started imitating migrants at the same time

Maple buds swelling, encased in ice; other plants dormant

Correction: the orchids found near the Shubenacadie Canal were Ladies' Tresses *(Spiranthes* sp.), not Whitefringed Orchids as stated in the Winter issue.

! NEXT DEADLINE ! 5 May for June Issue Contributions to the Editor, HFN c/o NS Museum Please phone 455-8160 to alert the Editor.