

Volunteers assist in bird atlas project

Now that I am back home again, it seems the logical place to begin is to give you a brief summary of my summer's activities.

I will be expanding on these in later articles.

Last week's article on the porcupine was one I had been holding in reserve--one I figured I could use to plug a hole, so to speak, whenever I was pressed for time.

Before proceeding, I would like to thank Sara and David Lounsbury for continuing this column during most of my absence.

Before leaving, I had indicated to them I would be back earlier than turned out to be the case--hence the break.

On Jan. 1, I was officially retired from Heath Steele Mines after 22 years of employment there.

One would think retirement would bring lots of spare time, but "it ain't necessarily so."

About a year ago, I volunteered to work on the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas (a five-year project) as coordinator for the Miramichi region.

Work on this project, together with shore bird surveys for Dr R.I.G. Morrison of Ottawa, occupied much of my time during spring and early summer.

Divided into squares

For purposes of the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas project, the Maritime Provinces have been divided into squares 10 km x 10 km.

The idea of the project is to determine which species of bird nest in each of these squares.

There are 88 such squares in the Miramichi Region alone, and there are 23 regions.

Many of the squares in the Miramichi Region are difficult to atlas as they are situated in the interior and there are few good roads running into them.

There are varying degrees of evidence of birds breeding in a square.

A species can therefore be classified as either a possible, probable, or a confirmed breeder depending on the kind of evidence obtained.

The atlaser looks for clues such as,--birds singing in the same location on more than two occasions a week or more apart; or, birds carrying nesting material or food; etc.

Atlasers are provided with an instruction book which tells them what signs to look for and how to interpret these.

Volunteer helpers

A number of people have volunteered to work with me on

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this Atlas. Their names and the squares that they are atlasing are as follows,--

Moir Campbell of Fredericton and her mother, Mrs Benjamin Campbell of Upper Blackville--the Blackville Square.

Vivian Comeau of Oak Point--the Oak Point Square.

Vernon Goodfellow of South Esk Road--The North and South Esk Square which straddles the river at Whitneyville.

Earlene Hunter of Sunny Corner--the Sunny Corner-Red Bank Square.

Luc Lemieux of Chatham--The Little Black River Square, south of Bay du Vin.

Dr John and Mrs Alice Lockhart of Bath--The Holmes Lake Square.

Sara Lounsbury of Chatham and son, David Lounsbury, of Fredericton--The Weldfield Square.

Ray, Joan, and Krishna Mahabir of North Esk Boom Road--The Whitney Pond Square, up the Mullin Stream Road.

Dennis Mazerolle of the Bathurst Highway--the Chatham Square.

Mary Rawlinson and Fraser Simpson, both of Newcastle--the Curventon Square.

Norman Stewart of the Lockstead Road--The Renous and The Pineville Squares.

David Tweedie of Douglas-town--The Bartibogue Square.

Wedding, vacation

On July 8, our second son, Lyle, married Ann Kennah of Bathurst, and our whole family came home for the wedding.

Lyle and Ann are now living in Peace River, Alberta; but they are to be transferred to Jumping Pound, Alberta, in the very near future.

Jumping Pound is situated a few miles west of Calgary.

There is a Shell Oil gas plant there at which Lyle will be working as a Chemical Engineer. Ann is a lab technician and is working at the Grimshaw Hospital, about 15 miles west of Peace River.

On July 28, Winnie and I left for a car trip to western Canada and the northwestern States.

We visited Lyle and Ann in Peace River; our third son, Ian, in Vancouver, and Expo.

We were two months on the road, visited seven provinces and 12 states, and arrived back in Newcastle on Sept. 28.

We met railworkers "Depot" in B.C.

A headline in "The Province", a paper published in Vancouver read "Pooch plays wrong ball."

The date of the paper was Aug. 27, the same day we arrived at Kevin Woods' place in Squamish, B.C.

As it turned out, the setting of the dog story was Squamish and one of the main actors in the story was Kevin Woods.

Kevin will be familiar to many of you. He grew up on the Miramichi, and is the son of Ed and Carol Woods of Newcastle. He now works for the B.C. Railroad at Squamish.

The dog in the story was a black lab. It had originally been a stray and, when found by railroad employees, it was living in an old railroad coal shed.

This was in the winter time, when pickings were slim, and the dog was half-starved. It disturbed everyone and could not be approached.

However, by feeding it, the workers soon changed its behavior and it became very tame. Soon it was the pet of station employees and train crews alike.

Its place of residence was changed from the coal shed to the station house, and its new-found friends gave it the name "Depot".

It now fared sumptuously, dining not only on handouts from the employee's lunches, but also on leftovers from the dining cars.

It also received donuts and ice cream from the all-night donut shop.

But "Depot" got sick and had to be taken to the vet.

Operation needed

After an examination, the vet called the station house. He said, if "Depot" was to be saved, he must be operated on, and this would cost several hundred dollars.

Kevin, who was on duty at the time, told the vet to operate.

He then collected donations from B.C. Railroad employees and received \$450--enough to cover the operation, plus a few dollars left over.

Kevin took us to the railway station where we saw "Depot" and his new dog house. "Depot" is now in good health.

"Depot's" problem: a golf ball was lodged in his intestines.

Why "Depot" tried to eat a golf ball when he was being so well-fed is difficult to comprehend.

Kevin says some of the covering had been chewed off the ball, but otherwise, it was intact.

Everyone we visited in the Rocky Mountain regions had this same obsession.

They insisted on taking us to the highest point they could possibly get us to whether by car, chair lift, or whatever.

Kevin was no exception. He had a plan to take us up and over the Brome Ridge, then down the other side; and for this expedition, he had the proper vehicle--a land cruiser, with 4-wheel drive, and equipped with a winch in case of emergency. So we all climbed aboard--Kevin, Winnie and I, and our son, Ian.

The road up was rough in the extreme. It was paved with boulders from one end to the other. It was also narrow and crooked. It snaked its way up the ridge, rounding bends that



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took us to the edge of one chasm after another.

Kevin had his vehicle in 4-wheel drive, and in low gear; so we were just crawling over the rocks at a few miles per hour, but still we were pitching and tossing from one side to the other.

Winnie was sitting up front with Kevin while Ian and I were in the back, each of us sitting directly over a rear wheel--the rear seats being positioned longitudinally so we faced one another.

During this ride, our seatbelts were essential, as without them, we would have been bouncing around like popcorn in a popper.

Kevin kept reassuring us the road down the other side was good, and if we only persevered for a little longer, we would be there.

However, the road continued on and on without improvement, and eventually came to a dead end.

This was a perplexing situation. Nobody wanted to return over the tortuous road we had just traversed.

Fortunately, there was room enough to turn around and after returning a short distance we came to a Y.

It was decided we should take a chance on this other branch of the road, even though, at this point, it looked somewhat worse than the one we were on.

To our relief, it soon led us over the top and onto the good road--the one that Kevin had been promising us, and the one that led down the other side of the ridge.

While in the upper regions, we disembarked at a number of points and Kevin pointed out the landmarks down below--the various peaks and lakes, the town, and the inlet leading out to the salt chuck--a western term for the ocean.

The trip down was relatively uneventful, but it could have been otherwise had good fortune not been with us.

At the bottom, a gate had been erected to stop vehicles from going up into the ridge.

This was something new to Kevin, and something he had not counted on. But, at the moment we arrived there, a man was unlocking the gate in order to get his truck through.

This was the first vehicle we had seen since starting up the other side of the ridge; and, if we had not arrived at that moment, we may have had a long wait, or we may have had to walk out.

Presumably, the reason no gate had been erected at the other side of the ridge was the road up that side was considered to be impassable.

Agriculture Canada's National Pesticides Line Service can be reached toll free by calling 1-800-267-6315

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Ring-necked pheasant seen in Dg'town

A pair of ring-necked pheasants has been reported.

Sam Shirley of Douglastown said he saw them on the McKinnon Road on Sept. 23 or 24.

They were quite tame and he was able to approach to within a few feet of them before they flew off into the bush.

Since pheasants are often raised as domestic fowl; these were probably escaped birds.

Ring-necked Pheasants are not native to America. They were introduced from Asia and numbers of them have been released in many parts of Canada and the United States.

In some places, these birds have thrived and multiplied and are now well-established. In other places, they have died out.

The ring-necked pheasant is a non-migratory bird and generally stays within a territory of not more than one to two miles in diameter, and its preferred habitat is open farmland.

In his book "The Birds of New Brunswick", W. Austin Squires says during the 1930s and 1940s, the Fish and Game Protective Association stocked many areas of New Brunswick with ringnecked pheasants.

He goes on to say that since then illegal hunting and severe weather has greatly reduced their numbers.

I am told that some years ago there were wild pheasants in the fields around Newcastle. Since then, they have disappeared.

The deep snow around here would make winter survival difficult for them as they are ground feeders.

However, there are still wild pheasants in some parts of the province, notably, the Sackville area.

A bulletin released by the Canadian Wildlife Service in 1968 reads,--

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"Pheasants now occur throughout southern-most Canada from British Columbia to Nova Scotia wherever diversified farming occurs.

"In only a few places in Canada do they occur in great enough numbers to provide good hunting.

"The most extensive range is in Alberta and Saskatchewan, with limited areas of high density in British Columbia and in Ontario along the shores of Lake Erie."

Successful introduction

The above-mentioned bulletin gives the history of one exceptionally-successful introduction of ring-necked pheasants.

This took place on Pelee Island in Lake Erie where 36 birds were released in 1927.

By seven years later, they had multiplied to such an extent they were described as being present in "phenomenal numbers".

They reached a peak density of five birds per acre.

They now attract hunters and tourists to the island.

In hunting season, the shooting of both cocks and hens is allowed and in this way the population is kept below 40,000 birds. (In some places, hunting is restricted to cocks alone.)

Pelee Island is only 8 miles by 3 1/2 miles and the nearest point on the mainland is also 8 miles.

It is said that normally ring-necked pheasants would

spread out into surrounding territory before reaching such high population densities, yet here on this island, they apparently cannot or will not fly across the water to the mainland.

Reproduction

This same C.W.S. bulletin says cool spring weather has a restricting effect on the rate of reproduction of ring-necked pheasants.

Apparently, the hens start laying quite early in the spring, but until the temperature reaches a certain point, they will not incubate these eggs.

The result is that eggs laid during cool spring weather are wasted. They are either dropped singly or they are deposited in a dump nest.

One-such dump nest may be used by several hens, but these nests are left unattended and appear to serve no useful purpose.

Although the hen will continue to lay eggs until it has raised at least one brood of chicks, the first eggs are said to contain more nutrients and to hatch better. Also, the hen's vitality is lessened when she produces a lot of wasted eggs.

In summary, the beginning of the breeding season and therefore the beginning of laying depends only on the date--the length of daylight per 24 hours--while the brooding season depends on the temperature.

In a warm spring, the pheasant crop is good; in a cool spring, the pheasant crop is poor.

Since New Brunswick has relatively-cool spring weather, this is another reason why it is less than ideal habitat for pheasants.

Reports received on cormorants

Here are a few nature notes that have been received during the past month.

Norman Stewart of Blackville reports that this year double-crested cormorants (black shags) have regularly been seen flying up the Bartholomew River — something that has not been the case in previous years.

Norman also says one of these cormorants landed in the small duck pond beside his house and it stayed there with his ducks for most of the day.

Wild cucumbers

On Oct. 7, Anne McCosh of Douglastown reported she had been given some fruits or pods which she was told were wild cucumbers. She was curious to know more about the plant they came from.

The wild cucumber is properly named in that it belongs to the same family as does the familiar garden cucumber and, like it, is an annual vine which climbs by means of tendrils.

However, the two plants are very different and could not be mistaken for one another. Their fruits are likewise very different.

The foliage of the wild cucumber is of a noticeably paler green coloration than that of most other plants.

Its small white flowers are not as likely to attract attention as are the fruits, seed pods or burrs they develop into.

These fruits are oblong about two inches long and somewhat

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less in diameter — and are covered with weak prickles.

When they first develop, they are soft and pithy, and are pale green in colour.

Soon they dry out to be little more than bags of air with four seeds inside.

By this time, the outer papery skin has been bleached to a pale tan color.

These fruits have no value as food, but they can be used in dried flower arrangements or other crafts.

They also make interesting little objects for children to throw at one another while playing outdoors.

The wild cucumber is sometimes planted around homes where it climbs on fences, etc.

It is not native to our area, but it may occasionally be found in a wild state near homes where it has been planted.

Mystery creature

A resident of Halcomb reported that one evening after dark, an unknown creature appeared on the screen of her kitchen window — apparently

attracted there by the inside lights.

She described it as having large eyes and ears, and having a stubby nose.

It had short fur and it was larger than a flying squirrel.

She was unable to see its back or its tail, but its underparts were dark with blotches of tan.

She said it ran back and forth on the window sill, and in the morning, its muddy tracks could be seen there.

It was an unusual looking creature and she is wondering if it was an escaped pet of some kind. Can anyone solve the mystery?

Other sightings

Vivian Comeau of Oak Point reported that on Oct. 20 a shrike appeared in her yard.

She was able to observe it at close range, and since it lacked any barring on the sides, she believes it was a loggerhead shrike, rather than a somewhat more common northern shrike.

My wife reported that while I was absent on Oct. 26 she observed a northern mockingbird. It was sampling some hawthorn berries in our yard.

Terry Matthews of Whitneyville says for the past five or six summers, he has been seeing a kingfisher in the same location — the bird frequently sitting on the very same perch.

He wonders how long a kingfisher lives, and could it always be the same bird.

I have been unable to find anything about the life span of the kingfisher.

However, according to the literature, the kingfisher has one brood of young per year and the nest contains from five to eight eggs.

Also, the official statistics indicate the population of kingfishers has remained almost static over the past 15 years.

This being the case, it is apparent, that on average, out of a family of kingfishers (young plus parents) only two birds will survive to produce young during the following summer.

The older, more-experienced birds, have a better chance of survival than the young, but it is not likely it has always been the same bird Terry has been seeing.

I have observed this same phenomenon among other species of bird where the same species is seen in the same location year after year, and I have wondered about it.

Although he gives no age records for the kingfisher, John K. Terres, in his "Encyclopedia of North American Birds" has recorded this information for many other species.

For the robin: he says one that was banded reached the age of 11 years 8 months, while a captive one reached the age of 17 years.

View of prairies limited only by curvature of the earth

The prairies of southern Saskatchewan were a patchwork of colour, not the monotonous landscape I had expected.

Perhaps we were seeing the prairies at their best. It was early in August and the flax and Canola were in full bloom.

Also, the farmers told us the rains had come at the right times and so their crops were good.

I had heard others speak of the great distances to which one could see on the prairies — a phenomenon resulting from the scarcity of trees, the flatness of the land, and the clearness of the atmosphere. Now I was witnessing this for myself.

What an immense country! In all directions, field after field could be seen stretching out toward the horizon.

Our vision was limited only by the curvature of the earth.

The barley, wheat, and oats were all at different stages of maturity, and each had its own shade of green.

Interpersed among fields of these grains were blue fields of flax, bright yellow fields of canola, and dark earth strips of summer fallow.

Shrubs and poplar trees marked out ravines, and other trees formed shelter belts around homesteads.

The ruler-straight highway stretched for miles before and behind us.

White clouds passing overhead cast shadows on the fields below and added to the color contrasts there.

Noted for winds

The prairies are noted for their windy weather, and in the Saskatchewan pavilion at Expo where we visited later, this comment was made, — "If the

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wind ever stopped blowing in Saskatchewan, the people would all fall down."

As we crossed the prairies, we occasionally came upon very small, unpainted, weather-beaten homes — relics of the past that stood alone and had obviously been long abandoned. These we took to be the homes of early pioneers.

Seeing these, my interest in the history of the region was aroused.

These pioneers must have lived a hard and lonely life, but at least they had escaped from all superficiality.

Their over-riding concern must have been survival, and their energy must have stemmed from the hope of a better life — either here, or hereafter.

At one point, while crossing the province, we stopped, and I took a walk down a country lane. The lane led through a poplar grove and thence to a field.

Here I found two rusty old farm implements — a seed drill and a binder.

They were very small compared to the implements in use today, and I could see they had been held together with hay-wire.

Obviously, the farmer who had once used them had tried to keep them running long after they were worn out, probably during the depression.

This was another stimulous to my interest in history.

Before returning home, I purchased a book on the history of southern Saskatchewan — "Virgin Sod", by Konrad C. Istrati.

Western life

In his book, Istrati describes the homes, the lives, the hardships, and the personal experiences of the homesteaders.

The first homes were indeed crude — often only one room. Sod shanties were very common, and he indicates these were the most practical as they were warmer in winter and cooler in summer than were other homes.

Another common type of home was the adobe shack. The walls consisted of a wooden frame on both sides of which adobe plaster was applied.

The wooden frame was made of vertical pickets with horizontal slats attached at intervals to them, the purpose of the slats being to help hold the plaster in place.

The adobe plaster consisted of a mixture of clay and straw, and it was applied in layers, each layer being applied after the previous one had time to dry.

These homes were generally very small, and the furnishings in them were as crude as the homes themselves.

One amusing experience recorded by Istrati tells of a cat that fell through the roof of a sod shanty and landed in a pot of pork and beans.

The pork and beans were on a table around which a threshing gang was seated while eating their dinner.

Note: Canola was formerly known as rape and it is used to make cooking oil and margarine.

Scarlet tanagers are spotted in Halcomb

Field work for the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas project is finished for this year, but there still remains four more years to complete the project.

Next year's work will begin in late February when the owl's breeding season commences.

A complete summary of this project's 1986 findings is not yet available, but some of its highlights are known.

In the Halcomb area, during the month of July, three adult male scarlet tanagers were found, plus two females and one immature male.

The three adult males had staked out breeding territories adjacent to one another.

One occupied a territory in the vicinity of the new maple sugar camp on the Tomahawk Ridge Road.

Another had its territory on the north bank of the Little Southwest--just off the end of the Tomahawk Ridge Road.

The third one was located, more or less, mid-way between the first two.

This means that within the short distance of two km (1.2 miles), three male Scarlet Tanagers had set up their breeding territories.

Whether or not all three had mates was not determined, but at least one did; probably two; and possibly all three.

Five visits were made to the area, and my records indicate,--

On the first two visits, no Scarlet Tanagers were found.

On July 2, two male Scarlet Tanagers were found--one at the maple sugar camp, and the other on the river bank.

A week later, on July 9, the two males were again located, while a third one (in between the other two) was discovered.

Another two weeks later, on July 23, the one on the river bank was again found; and in addition, a female and an immature male were also found at this same location--all three of them being in a small, wild, raspberry patch on the river bank.

On this last visit, July 23, no Scarlet Tanagers could be found at either the maple sugar camp or at the location between it and the river bank.

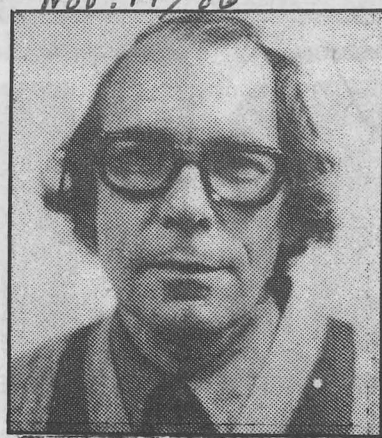
However, at an entirely new location, about two km west of lyttleton, a second female Scarlet Tanager was found.

Her mouth was full of insects and she was quite agitated indicating that there were young nearby.

It might be pointed out that by the date of the last visit, the male Scarlet Tanagers have almost ceased their singing and are therefore much more difficult to locate than is the case earlier.

Their raspy see-saw song is not difficult to recognize.

Since the females never sing,



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and since they are relatively inconspicuous, they are always difficult to locate.

Both give a "shick-burr" call that may alert one to their presence, and this is how the last female was found.

Other sightings

Besides those found in the Halcomb area, three other Scarlet Tanagers were reported by atlasers working in the Miramichi Region.

They were found at widely separated points.

Sara Lounsbury reported one at Weldfield, Vernon Goodfellow reported one on the South Esk Road, and the third one was found in the wilderness to

the east of Gray Rapids.

Going farther afield, atlasers in the Saint John area have added four new species to the list of birds known to nest in New Brunswick.

Two of these, the Glossy Ibis and the Gadwall, were found nesting on Manawagonish Island--near the entrance to the St. John harbour; the other two, the Greater Scaup Duck and the Wilson's Phalarope, were found nesting on Grassy Island in the St. John River.

The Glossy Ibis' nest, containing three eggs, was found by Jakko Finne, Don McAlpine, Mark Phinney, Scott Makepeace and Scott Gilliland--the discovery having been made while these five were banding Great Blue Herons and Double-crested Cormorants on the island.

The Gadwall's nest, containing nine eggs, was found by Mark Phinney.

Both of these nests were later found to have been robbed--presumably by either Great Back-backed Gulls, or by Crows.

The Glossy Ibis is a southern species which in recent years has been extending its range farther north along the Atlantic coast.

The Gadwall is a species of duck that generally nests far to the west of us.

The two Grassy Island dis-

coveries were made by Mark Phinney and Scott Makepeace.

Phalaropes

Here, a family of Wilson's Phalaropes was found--the family consisting of a parent bird and three little chicks.

When encountered, the old bird put on a distraction display attempting to lure the two intruders away.

Greater Scaup Duck nests were also found on this island by these two men; and subsequent investigation revealed that there were as many as 21 such nests there.

The Wilson's Phalarope is primarily a western bird.

It generally nests to the west of the Great Lakes, while a few nest in southwestern Ontario.

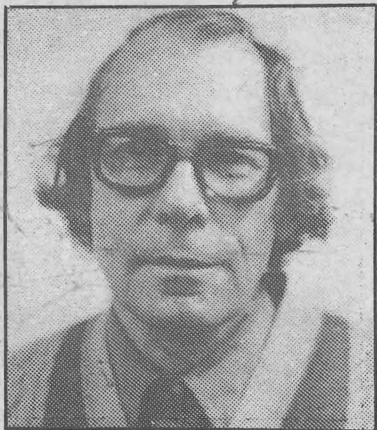
Godfrey, in his "Birds of Canada", 1966 edition, says they nest in the Holland Marsh (about 30 miles north of Toronto), but he makes no mention of them nesting anywhere to the east of there.

The Greater Scaup Duck nests in the sub-Arctic, and it also nests in a few other small, disconnected areas--one of these being on Anticosti Island, and another on the Magdalene Islands.

However, this latest nesting site, discovered on Grassy Island, N.B., is the most southerly location at which it has ever been known to nest.

Summer, winter birds sighted in Miramichi

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The birds reported of late fall into two categories — summer birds which have remained here long after they should have packed their bags and headed south; and winter birds which have returned again after a summer's absence.

In the first group are the red-winged blackbird, the rusty blackbird, the barn swallow, and the robin.

In the second group are the northern shrike, the snow bunting, the redpoll, and lots of bohemian waxwings.

On Nov. 7, Earlene Hunter reported two red-winged blackbirds had visited her feeder in Sunny Corner while on Nov. 22, a rusty blackbird was reported to be visiting a feeder in Newcastle.

Unlike most birds, the rusty blackbird is more easily recognized in the fall than it is in the spring.

In the fall, it lives up to its name, it having distinctly rusty-colored feathers covering its head and the front part of its body.

This rusty coloration gradually fades out and gives way to black at the rear end of the body — or, to slate gray, if it is a female.

In the spring, the rusty blackbird has no rusty feathers whatsoever; and, at such time of the year, it is easily confused with other blackbirds.

Late swallows

The barn swallows were reported by Raymond Morrison. On Nov. 6 or 7, three of them were flying about his place at the mouth of the Oyster River. However, on the morning of Nov. 8, one of them was found dead on his porch.

This is extremely late for swallows — birds which live almost entirely on flying insects, catching them on the wing.

Certainly the pickings must have been very lean at this late date. The one found dead may have been more a victim of starvation than of cold weather.

On Nov. 18, a robin appeared in our backyard; and, on the following day, Mrs. Robert Brander reported one in her yard in Strathadam. She inquired as to what to feed it.

Terres suggests the following foods for all thrushes, including the robin — ground meat, boiled eggs, small pieces of bread, grapes, and cherries.

The Northern shrike was reported at a bird feeder in Newcastle.

Apparently it sent the sparrows scurrying for cover, but the blue jays were unafraid of it, and even perched close by it.

Snow bunting

Snow buntings were recently reported at Maple Glen; while one lone individual was seen about six weeks earlier, on Oct. 12. It was on the Point aux Carr shore.

Snow buntings, each fall, tend to make their first appearance on beaches, or in salt marshes; and, contrary to popular opinion, are commonly seen in such places long before the snow comes.

Redpolls — a small flock of

them — were seen at Point aux Carr during our last shore bird survey there on Oct. 26.

Incidentally, this survey turned up more shore birds than expected on this late date — the count along a two-mile stretch of shore being 24 white-rumped sandpipers, 22 sanderlings, and two greater yellow-legs.

Waxwings

On Nov. 17, while taking a walk behind Croft School, I came upon a flock of at least 50 bohemian waxwings.

A few days later, Nov. 21, a flock of similar size appeared in our back yard; and on the following day, another Newcastle resident reported seeing a flock of at least 50 bohemian waxwings.

Possibility this was the same flock in each case.

However, out in Loggieville, James Kelly reported a flock of 35 to 40 waxwings visited his place on Nov. 9.

During recent years, the bohemian waxwing has become a regular winter visitor to New Brunswick.

It comes to us from western Canada, and apparently prefers our winter wonderland to sunny California.

It could reach California with less flying time than it takes to come here, yet here it comes.

Our delicious, organically-grown apples seem to be one selling point that has influenced them to come here; for when seen, they are often perched in an apple tree on which the apples have been left hanging.

Whether or not an apple has worms in it, scabs on it, etc., is of slight consequence to a bird.

Bald eagle

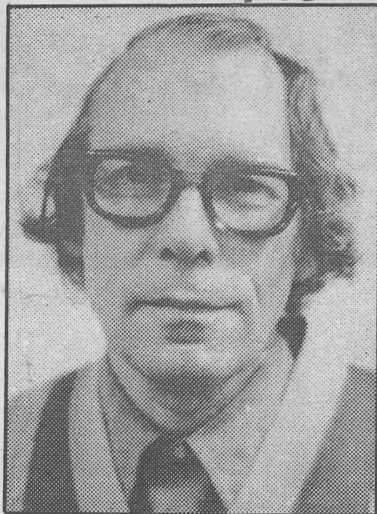
James Kelly reports he occasionally sees a bald eagle in the Loggieville area, and on Nov. 19, he saw it flying across the river there.

This summer, while working on the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas project, I met Ada and Cecil Savoy of Burnt Church. They informed me, that a few years ago, a pair of mockingbirds nested in their yard and raised five young.

W. Austin Squires in his book "The Birds of New Brunswick", published in 1976, lists only four nesting records for the mockingbird in N.B., and two of these were also at Burnt Church — both in 1969.

We sample habitats of west along the way

Dec. 5/86



Harry Walker

As Winnie and I travelled through the west, we periodically parked our car and took off on foot following along some pathway or hiking trail.

In this way, we were able to get a closer look at the things we were seeing through the car windows.

We were able to identify some of the plants and birds in our new surroundings.

In a sense, we were sampling the various habitats along the way.

As examples: we took a hike over some native prairie — prairie that had never been touched by the plough.

We also took a hike in the Cypress Hills — an anomalous piece of landscape on the Saskatchewan-Alberta border.

Another hike was taken in the alpine regions of Mount Baker in the state of Washington and another took us through the rain forest in the Pacific Rim National Park.

These are but a few of the hikes we took, and they added tremendously to our trip.

Some were taken on our own, while some others were taken in the company of friends or relatives who were able to help us in identifying plants.

Such hikes provided other dividends as well. They afforded us the opportunity to exercise our legs, and gave us a welcome break from driving.

Learn of plants

By the end of our trip, we had become quite familiar with at least some of the more common and characteristic plants of the west — the sage brush, meadow sage, wolf willow, gumweed, devil's club, arbutus tree, etc.; likewise for the birds — the black-billed magpie, stellars jay, Clarke's nutcracker, etc.

(I learned "magpie" is a shortened form for "maggot pie" — a name derived from the habit of the magpie which eats dead carcasses, maggots and all — not a very appetizing meal, but nonetheless, a valuable scavenging operation from our point of view.)

Grasshoppers

While crossing the prairies, we got to know the grasshoppers in a way that we had not known them before.

One morning, while having breakfast in a restaurant in Elkhorn, Manitoba, we observed that the sparrows were also having their breakfast.

Through the restaurant window, we could see them picking the grasshoppers out of the grill of our car.

A few days later, we observed something else — our car had taken on a peculiar odour, both inside and out.

We concluded that it must be the aroma of roasting or rotting grasshoppers.

We thereupon took our car to a car-wash and the operator assured us we had concluded rightly.

A seven-year-old girl, whom we met in the Cypress Hills, im-

pressed me greatly. She and her parents were walking along a hiking trail there.

Beside the trail at this point was a wild flower.

I asked the man if he knew what it was. He said he did not know, but he suggested I ask his little daughter, for she might be able to help me.

I asked her. She looked at the flower for a moment as though thinking, then answered very quietly, but quite positively "It's a bergamot."

Later, Winnie learned from the girl's mother that she had made a scrapbook of flowers and she had gained her knowledge of the subject from her grandmother.

Plant life differs

The plant life on the Cypress Hills is very different from that of the surrounding country; and, at a nature interpretation centre, we were given an explanation for this.

We were told these hills were untouched by the last ice age and, at the time of the Ice Age, they stood out as an island in a sea of ice.

The result was none of the soil had been scraped off of these hills as was the case for the rest of the country round about.

When one approaches these hills, it is surprising to see them so heavily-wooded when all around them, for miles in every direction, there is nothing but treeless ranchland and grain-fields.

Misnomer

The name "Cypress Hills" is a misnomer. We learned early explorers not very knowledgeable about trees, mistook the lodgepole pines for cypress trees — hence the name.

On the plateau on top of the hills, where some of the bush had been cleared, cattle were grazing in a pasture that was studded with clumps of blue lupines.

These lupines looked very much like the ones we grow in our gardens here, but they must have been a different species, for they were all in bloom, and this was early August — long after ours would have gone to seed.

Dickcissals may be seen mixing with sparrows

If you have ever seen a yellow-breasted sparrow among a flock of house sparrows, the probability is you have seen a dickcissal.

On the morning of Nov. 28, Winnie called me to the kitchen window. She pointed into the back yard.

There was a yellow-breasted bird. It was among the flock of house sparrows that had just landed at our feeding station.

It was about the same size and build as the house sparrows it was consorting with; but, it had a distinctly yellow breast.

Also, just above this yellow breast was a black v-shaped band crossing the breast.

And, a noticeable (white, or pale yellowish) stripe ran the length of the head above the eye.

From the back, it looked much like the sparrows it was with.

Knowing something about the habits and occurrence of the dickcissal, it was immediately suspected this was what we were looking at.

I got the binoculars.

Winnie got a bird book and looked up the dickcissal.

While Winnie read off the identifying characteristics of the dickcissal, I tried to pick these out on the specimen in our yard.

I distinctly saw the chestnut patch on the bird's shoulder. But, before any additional characteristics could be noted, it, and all the other sparrows, flew away.

I could not say definitely the bird had a blue bill as described in the book.

But, judging from the picture, this would not be very obvious — just a dark bill with a slightly-bluish tinge.

This was obviously a male since the female lacks the black band across the breast. (The female is less distinctly marked in other respects as well.)

Dickcissals are rare visitors to eastern Canada; but, when they do visit here, it is almost invariably in the fall.

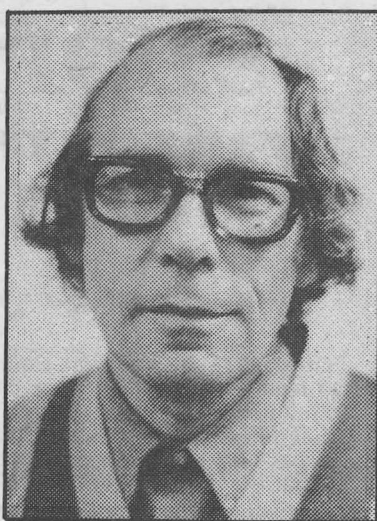
Also, when they come, they tend to show up individually — one here, one there — and, these seemingly lost individuals, then join the ranks of our flocks of house sparrows.

Nobody can say for sure why dickcissals choose to come here in the fall.

However, since they normally nest on the great Central Plains, and since they normally winter from central Mexico to northern South America, it would almost appear as though some dickcissals get their directions wrong during fall migration — some heading east and some even heading slightly northeast, instead of south.

Dickcissals are erratic in other ways as well. Apparently, they will sometimes nest in an area one year, then disappear for several subsequent years. In other areas, the opposite will happen.

I know of no previous records for dickcissals on the Miramichi. But, on Dec. 29, 1973, while running a Christmas Bird Count, Ian Ward and I saw a



Harry Walker

yellow-breasted bird among a flock of house sparrows at the old Chatham dump. It flew before we were able to observe it in detail.

At the time, we were puzzled as to what it could be; but, after returning home and searching through our books, we came to the conclusion it was probably a dickcissal.

W. Austin Squires in his book "The Birds of New Brunswick", published in 1976, says, that until 1951, no dickcissals had ever been recorded for New Brunswick, but that since then, about 100 individuals have been reported.

However, all of Squires reports are for the southern part of the province — mostly near the Bay of Fundy.

At St. Andrews, one of these dickcissals survived the winter and was seen there until April of the following spring.

In "The Birds of Canada", W. Earl Godfrey says the dickcissal has been recorded as far north as Newfoundland and also at Moisie on the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

At Moisie, a dickcissal was seen on three successive autumns, 1950 to 1952, and each time it was seen in the exact same small clearing. (Moisie is about 200 miles straight north of Newcastle)

Other sightings listed by Godfrey are for Gaspé, Anticosti Island, and P.E.I.

Tufts lists a number of sightings for Nova Scotia, while Peterson says the odd dickcissal winters on the eastern seaboard of the United States.

According to a news excerpt in "Awake" magazine, geese are now being used to replace guard dogs at some military installations in Germany.

Geese are said to have a keen sense of hearing and will sound an alarm when they see or hear anything unusual. This alarm consists of honking, hissing, and wing flapping.

John Quinney, speaking on the CBC radio program "Echoes", has another use for geese.

While advocating alternative and more ecologically sound methods of agriculture, he said geese and some other animals can be used to weed certain kinds of crops.

Walker recalls pleasant pre-Christmas time

Dec. 19/86

Sixteen years ago, at this time of year, I was in the town of Boliden in northern Sweden.

I was sent there in connection with some test work that Boliden Mines was conducting on Heath Steele ore.

I arrived there about Nov. 20 and left about a month later — just a few days before Christmas.

I went there alone. I did not know the language, and I did not know anyone in Sweden.

Boliden is not far from the Arctic Circle, and so, at this time of year, the days are very short.

The sun rises about 10 a.m. and sets again at about 1 p.m.; and, while it is up, the sun does not climb very high — it merely skims along just above the horizon.

While I was there, the town of Boliden presented a scene that might well be found on a Christmas card.

Snow covered the ground and snow clung to every tree. The outdoor rinks were in almost constant use, and little sleighs sped along the streets.

These sleighs were quite unique; I have never seen them outside of Sweden.

They were lightly built so as to be easily pushed about, and they were used by the people when doing their shopping.

Such a sleigh is pushed rather than pulled.

It has low sides but a high back — about waist high or a little higher — a comfortable height for a person to grasp when pushing the sleigh.

When going downhill, the person pushing, stands on the back extension of the runners and so gets a ride.

When on the level, he often stands with one foot on a runner while pushing with the other.

Up front, on the sleigh, is the load — often a bag of groceries and a baby or small child.

On the hard-packed snow of Boliden's streets, these sleighs sped quickly about, apparently with very little effort on the part of those propelling them.

White lights

Candles were very much in evidence in the windows of houses. Streets and trees were decorated with white lights, but never with colored ones.

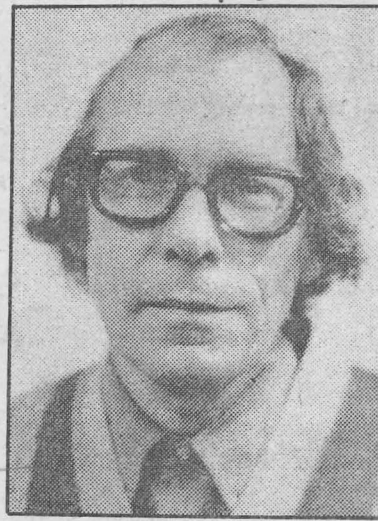
These lights were arranged in neat and orderly designs — sometimes forming arches over streets, sometimes forming the outline of stars, etc.

These white lights created an atmosphere quite different to that found here — perhaps less gay, but certainly more peaceful and relaxing.

Bird feeders were attached to the window ledge of many homes, and rose-colored bullfinches and some small yellow-breasted birds were frequent visitors at these.

One evening, shortly after arriving in Sweden, I took a walk.

Along the way, I came to a hall, and coming from within, I could hear the strains of an old familiar hymn.



Harry Walker

I tried to read the sign posted beside the building. The last word appeared to be the Swedish equivalent of "welcome", so I decided to go in.

I thought if I opened the door very carefully, I could slip in at the back without being noticed.

I tried it; but, as soon as the door started to open, a woman came to meet me.

She greeted me in Swedish; and, when I answered her something in English, she motioned for me to take a seat.

By this time, I could see I was in a Salvation Army service, for on the platform up front was a man in the familiar Salvation Army uniform.

The woman, after ushering me to my seat, immediately went to this officer and said something to him.

He turned to me, extended his arms toward me, and said in English —

"I would like to welcome our guest. We were about to break off for a lunch and we would be so pleased if you could stay and we could share it with you."

I was almost overwhelmed by this greeting. I had thought I was going to slip into this meeting unnoticed, but instead I was being welcomed as an honored guest.

This was typical of the way I was treated while in Sweden. Everywhere I went, people bestowed special kindnesses on me simply because I was visiting them from another country.

My many fond memories of Sweden have been renewed recently by a couple of visits from our friend, Anna-Len Wikstrom, and also by a Christmas card received from a family over there.

Contained with the Christmas card was a family photograph and a letter.

That is my Christmas story.

Spelled wrong

My wife has informed me I persisted in spelling Dickcissal wrong throughout all of last week's article. I used an "a" for the second last letter when it should have been an "e".

Bird count

Our annual Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, Dec. 27. If you would like to participate, call 622-2108.

Some species missed in this year's count

Jan. 9/87

Our 15th annual Christmas Bird Count for the Chatham-Newcastle area was conducted on Dec. 27.

This count takes place within a 15-mile diameter circle, the center of which coincides with the mid-way point of the Miramichi Centennial Bridge.

This means the count circle reaches to approximately the Bartibogue Bridge in the east and about the Anderson Bridge in the west.

On the day of the count, 14 field observers scoured roads, fields, and bush trails in their search for birds. Another 22 observers kept watch at their bird feeders.

By day's end, all of the birds recorded by these 36 observers were added together, and the totals obtained are listed below, beginning with the species found in greatest abundance, and ending with the species found in least abundance.

Common redpolls 686, starlings 662, herring gulls 279, evening grosbeaks 277, house sparrows 204, black-capped chickadees 187, great black-backed gulls 179, blue jays 134.

Ravens 70, rock doves (pigeons) 65, pine grosbeaks 35, mourning doves 23, crows 17, gray jays (moose birds) 12, tree sparrows 11, hairy woodpeckers 10, glaucous gulls 10; red-breasted nuthatches 10.

Downy woodpeckers 8, slate-coloured juncos 5, ruffed grouse 5, goldfinches 4, brown creepers 3, pileated woodpeckers 2, black-backed three-toed woodpeckers 2.

And, one each of the following,--bohemian waxwing, song sparrow, iceland gull, and white-throated sparrow (old tom peabody).

Seen during the count period (Dec. 18 to Jan. 4 inclusive), but not on the count day were,--snow buntings, a common grackle, and a northern mockbird.

Maybe no changes

Although redpolls came out as number 1 species this year, this does not necessarily indicate any significant change in their overall population.

Redpolls are known for their erratic winter wanderings and so, they may be plentiful in an area one year, but absent the next.

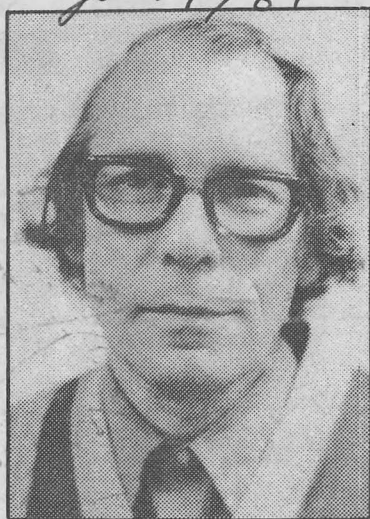
In one of our previous Christmas bird counts--1981--redpolls came out on top.

But, in our 1982 count, and again in our 1984 count we failed to record a single redpoll. Last year, we recorded approximately half as many as this year.

Redpolls are fond of birch and alder seeds, and it is often in these trees or shrubs that flocks of them are found.

They are also fond of weed seeds and are frequently found feeding in patches of weeds that are protruding out of the snow.

House sparrows and starlings have shown very significant trends during the 15 years Christmas Bird Counts have been taken in our area.



Harry Walker

For the first nine years, house sparrows topped the list and did so by a very wide margin.

Previous counts

During the last six years, they have topped the list only once--in 1984--and in that year, they did not have the margin they previously enjoyed.

This year, house sparrows are fifth on the list, and are outnumbered by both starlings and redpolls by a factor of more than 3 to 1.

Starlings increase

Starlings: Back in 1972 when these counts were started, only a few starlings overwintered here--most of these hanging out at the old Chatham and Newcastle dumps.

Now, they are a common winter species, last year topping the list, and this year being edged out narrowly by the redpolls.

Paradoxically, according to the U.S. Dept. of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife service, the summer population of Starlings in eastern Canada and the northeastern United States has been declining slightly during recent years.

Another species that is obviously increasing is the mourning dove.

When they first appeared in this area, they were reported only in summer. Now they are being reported throughout the year.

Phyllis Crowe of Chatham has 10 mourning doves coming regularly to her feeder, while Doug Underhill of Douglastown has had as many as seven at his. Linda Hartlen's feeder, located near Doug's, is also attracting them.

Missing

Noticeably missing from this year's count are the boreal chickadee, robin, and sharp-shinned hawk.

Waterfowl are also missing due to the scarcity of open water.

The northern shrike was not recorded; but, about a month earlier, on Nov. 25, Martina McCarthy reported one at her place in Nowlanville.

Gladys MacLean enjoys watching winter birds

Gladys MacLean while convalescing from a recent illness at a friend's home wrote the following article--

At any season of the year it is a joy to be awakened by the birds' singing, but when it happens in zero weather at the tail end of a blizzard it is positively enchanting.

My good friend, Sadie Crabbe, with whom I am staying here in Bristol, made a feeder from one of those big spools used for heavy wire. She covered it with durable white oil cloth.

Almost every day it is overflowing with flocks of gobbling grosbeaks.

They love sunflower seeds and are especially adept at shelling them, popping half of the shell out of each side of their beaks.

A big gray squirrel has paid us several visits. One day it sat in the centre of the table cracking peanuts with its beautiful, silvery tail draped in a semi-circle as if it were posing for a picture.

Once I watched breathlessly as a tiny, furry ball with a long tail skiddooed down the icy driveway, then scurried across the busy road and scaled the vertical snow bank on the far side. I hope it is as skilful in coping with cats.

Sadie has three shiny black lamp-posts, just like those painted on Christmas cards.

A generous farmer phoned that he was bringing us some suet. The next day when we looked out, we saw what looked to us like a side of beef, tightly wired to the top of the post.

The next morning it had disappeared. A dog? Into someone's soup pot? Yan, Ola, or who knows as our jungle people used to say.

A real feast

Sadie hung a supermarket ball of suet in a red, onion bag onto the post. A big hairy woodpecker came along and was having a real feast. The bag was swaying vigorously, while it hung onto the bottom with its claws.

Thinking it must feel seasick, we tied the bag firmly to the post. Back came Mrs Woodpecker, who took one firm peck and flew away.

She has been back since, but she ignores the suet, choosing rather to pick seeds out of the snow. Well, you can't please everyone!

Mark Twain was convinced jays could laugh and talk. Be that as it may, they certainly are experts at showing exactly how they feel.

One day the table was covered with an ice glaze. A jay came skidding in like an out-of-control jet.



Harry Walker

Looking properly humiliated, it ruffled its feathers, cocked its head to one side, and examined the table quizzically, as much as to say, "What kind of a trap is this anyway?"

Once we watched while one of them packed 24 sunflower seeds into its pouch. We have had only one gray jay which viewed us from afar, and one bedabbed starling which looked as if it had fallen into a stream.

Delightful surprise

Our most delightful surprise came when an unusually beautiful daffodil yellow bird flew in with some grosbeaks.

It was about the same size of a grosbeak only much more streamlined, the beak and feet were bright orange, and there was a white strip down each wing, with a small dark patch on either side.

We couldn't find it in any of our books, but I shall always remember it in my mind's eye.

Cheerful, cautious chickadees cheer us with their songs. Little pine siskins are here in abundance.

And, of course, the humble unassuming English sparrows, which seem content to eat the scraps the others leave.

When I see them, I am reminded of the words of our Saviour in Luke Ch. 12:6-7 "Are not five sparrows sold for a farthing and not one of them is forgotten before God?"

But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

Good-bye now, and may 1987 be the best yet.

Gladys Eileen MacLean, Bristol, Box 125, N.B. E0J 1G0.



Total species 29 + 3 in count period
" individuals 2899

Wilkinson spots rare birds on Isle of Wight

Our first report comes from far away--the Isle of Wight in England.

It comes from Audrey Wilkinson who is the daughter of Mr and Mrs Edmond Robichaud of Newcastle.

Audrey reports that while pursuing her birdwatching activities she has had a few rare encounters during the past year.

Two of these were with the serin and the red-breasted flycatcher--birds which she describes as continental species.

Lost, or otherwise, they somehow made their way to her island.

Audrey refers to a third species, a pallas warbler, as an Eastern Siberian delight--a bird which should have been in southeast Asia, rather than on the Isle of Wight.

She adds that she receives and enjoys reading this column.

It is interesting and gratifying to know that we reach such far off places,

Gold finches seen

This is the first winter that people in our area have been reporting goldfinches at their feeders.

These reports come from David Tracy, Jean Ullock, and an anonymous caller, all in Newcastle; and also from Penny Creamer in Derby Junction.

All have had goldfinches at their feeders during the past month.

Goldfinches, at this time of year, are not nearly so brightly coloured as they are in the summer.

Some of those reporting them have described them as being similarly coloured to the female evening grosbeak; but, of course, they are smaller.

Pine siskins

Some of those small cousins of the goldfinches the pine siskins, are also in our area.

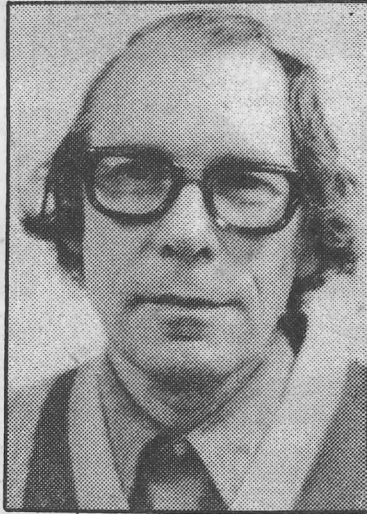
On Jan. 17, Earlene Hunter reported there were about a dozen of them at her feeder in Sunny Corner.

Accompanying them was one lone Redpoll--the first one seen at her feeder this winter.

Earlene says Pine Siskins have been coming for some time now.

They first appeared about a month ago; and, for the past three weeks, a few of them have been regular boarders.

Other regulars are three mourning doves, one of which lords it over the other two; and apparently, does not appreciate any company at its dining table.



Harry Walker

Frequently, I hear from people who have put up new bird feeders.

They want to know why there are no birds coming to it.

Usually all that is needed is patience.

Birds are creatures of habit and when they become accustomed to one feeding station they tend to keep returning to it, rather than visiting a new one.

Eventually the new feeder attracts some birds, and these first ones in turn attract others. Once they start coming, they usually keep returning.

Leona Shaw of McKinleyville did not have this problem.

She erected a feeder for the first time this fall, and before the day was over, had a flock of evening grosbeaks at it.

Since then the feeder has attracted blue jays, gray jays, black-capped chickadees, pine siskins, hairy and downy woodpeckers, and one big pileated woodpecker.

Recently, a small flock of six or eight unidentified birds came, and it is thought they may have been Purple Finches.

A Newcastle resident reports a mixed group of small birds has just arrived at his feeder.

It contains one redpoll, two goldfinches, four or five pine siskins, and some chickadees.

We recorded no pine siskins on our Christmas Bird Count; but, perhaps a careful scrutiny of the flocks of redpolls we found, would have revealed some of them.

Paul Stewart of Matthew's Settlement reports that in the fall, about Nov. 1, he, and the party he was with, came upon a bald eagle that was feeding on a deer carcass.

A few crows had also been attracted to it--the deer

seemingly having been struck by a vehicle.

This was about five or six miles up the Fraser-Burchill Road from Wayerton.

Report casualties

I have a note from Peter Pearce of the Canadian Wildlife Service in Fredericton. It reads,--

"The Canadian Wildlife Service is attempting to assess the potential of the Sharp-shinned Hawk as a biomonitor of toxic chemical contamination of the terrestrial environment.

"Specimens are needed. Sharpies occasionally collide with window panes near winter bird-feeding operations.

"A request is made that such casualties be labelled, placed in plastic bags, and frozen.

"Canadian Wildlife Service should then be called collect at (506) 452-3086 for shipment instructions.

"Potential contributors of specimens are thanked in advance for their support of this investigation."

Unusual whistles heard in regions of Baker

What was producing those peculiar whistles that reached our ears from the rocky slope below?

These whistles were not the kind one would expect to come from an animal or bird. Yet, where else could they come from?

We were in the unspoiled wilderness--far from the mechanical world of man's creating.

We were hiking in the alpine regions of Mount Baker, in the state of Washington.

We did not have to wonder long. Our son, Ian, was with us and he told us what we were hearing were the whistles of hoary marmots--animals that look like groundhogs except they are larger and are light-greyish in color. (The two animals are closely related).

We met another party of hikers, and one member described the marmot's whistle as being an electronic sound.

This was an accurate description. The long whistles started abruptly and ended abruptly--no build-up and no tailing-off. In fact, they continued at a uniform pitch and intensity throughout.

Whereas, the woodchuck's whistle imparts to the listener the unmistakable impression the animal has become suddenly alarmed; the marmot's whistle, in contrast, betrays not the slightest sign of emotion--a purely mechanical thing.

Besides the marmot's whistles, there were also some other shorter whistles or squeaks coming from the rock rubble.

Ian told us these were the calls of pikas.

We saw several of the marmots, but we failed to catch even a glimpse of a pika.

As we drove up the mountain before starting our hike, we passed one marmot that was perched on a large boulder beside the road.

We were within about 10 feet of it, and drove by it very slowly.

Long hibernation

Living at high altitudes where winters are long, the hoary marmot is forced to spend much of its life in hibernation.

According to Banfield, it is seen above ground for only about four months of the year.

The pika Banfield describes as "a small, stocky, tailless mammal, rather like a guinea pig."

The pika is closely akin to the coney whose name appears in the Bible in a few places.

Example--"The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks." Prov. 30:26.

The scenery here on Mount Baker was so different it almost seemed unreal to me. I had never seen anything like it before, except in pictures.

I felt we must have pulled off the same trick as "Alice in



Harry Walker

Wonderland," except that instead of walking through the looking glass as she did, we had walked into one of those beautiful murals you see on the walls in some homes.

Snow in August

It was August 23--in other words, late summer in most places--yet up here, it was actually early spring for the snow had just recently melted off most of the mountainside.

In places, our path took us over old snow that was still several feet deep.

The day was sunny and warm.

At this elevation the vegetation was sparse, but clumps of gayly-colored flowers dotted the slopes--red monkey flowers, yellow monkey flowers, Indian paint brush, mountain valerian, etc.

The plans tended to be small, but to have a lot of flowers relative to the small amount of foliage--an adaptation to the short growing season where the plants must bloom and produce seed quickly before winter catches up with them.

Although most of the area was completely devoid of trees, nonetheless they did exist in a few small, widely-separated clumps.

These trees were generally somewhat twisted, but in some cases, had reached large pulpwood size. Among them, Ian pointed out the Mountain Hemlock and Alpine Fir.

He explained the scarcity of trees as being due, not so much to the harshness of the climate, as to the fact, that in such regions, the trees that do get started tend to be torn out and swept away by avalanches.

The few groves we saw were no doubt growing in less vulnerable locations.

Birds scarce

Birds were also scarce. We saw a few Ravens and Water

Pipits and one Gray Jay. On our way up, before starting our hike, we saw some Oregon Juncos.

Ian said that in his experience he had never found many birds in alpine regions.

Ian's special field of study at Simon Fraser University deals with organisms found in alpine lakes, and so, he makes frequent excursions into alpine regions in order to gather material for his studies--generally water and sediment samples.

These excursions often involve hikes over very rugged and difficult terrain, which, of course, Ian enjoys!

On these trips, a certain amount of equipment must be carried--an inflatable boat, a set of oars that come apart in sections, and a sampling device--the latter to extract sediments from the lake bottom.

All this equipment is light and compact so as to be easily transportable--in all only about 10 pounds.

As a safety precaution, at least one partner usually accompanies him.

Ian selected Mount Baker for our hike because, as he said, the hiking here was easier than it was on the other mountains he has worked on.

Here, there was a path to follow; and, throughout much of its length, this path followed along a contour of the mountain so there was less than the usual amount of climbing involved.

Whip-poor-wills are local and nocturnal

Feb. 6/87

Whip-poor-wills are very local in their distribution.

They return year after year to certain locations, but are seldom, or never, reported from nearby areas of similar habitat.

It appears they simply get attached to their home area and so keep returning there.

Whip-poor-wills are nocturnal and so are seldom seen. However, their calls are loud and are endlessly repeated, so they always make their presence known.

If you happen to perch outside your window at night, you are likely to get very little sleep. This happened to me once when spending the night in a cabin on Manitoulin Island in Ontario.

In the August 1986 edition of "Blair and Ketchum's Country Journal", is an article by Charles Fergus, entitled "The Call of the Whippoorwill".

In it, Fergus says his neighbour timed a whip-poor-will and found it called continuously for 91 minutes without changing its position or tempo.

During this time, the number of calls per minute was also determined and was found to be almost constant at 56. In other words, the bird called out its name over 5,000 times non-stop.

John Burroughs apparently made a similar count and came up with a lesser, but still very impressive figure.

His whip-poor-will called 1,088 times "with only a barely perceptible pause here and there."

Other interpretations have been given to this bird's call, other than "Whip-poor-will". One of these is "purple-rib."

Nightjars

When it is considered the Whip-poor-will's call can be heard for about half a mile, it is obvious it can be disruptive to sleep.

It is also obvious why the name "nightjars" came to be applied to the family of birds to which it belongs.

The nightjars or goatsuckers, as they are more commonly called, include one other species found in these parts--the nighthawk. (Note the nighthawk is not really a hawk at all.)

Two other members of the family do occur in Canada. One of these, the Chuck-will's-widow has been recorded in New Brunswick, but, only once, at Saint John in 1916.

It does not regularly occur in Canada, but is occasionally reported in Southern Ontario.

The other species, the poor-will, is found in a couple of small pockets in western Canada, but most of its range, like that of the previous species, lies to the south of us.

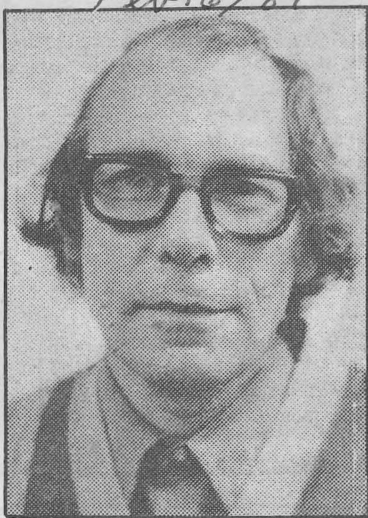
The poor-will, according to Terres, is the only bird known to hibernate. He gives no details as to where it hibernates, or for how long.

Among the goats

The name Goatsucker originated with a member of the family in Europe.

It was observed to fly about among the goats at night, and it was mistakenly assumed it was sucking milk from them. In reality, it was no doubt catching insects.

Goatsuckers have very small bills, but very large mouths.



Harry Walker

They have weak feet and they generally perch lengthwise along a limb rather than across it as do other birds.

They are considered to be very beneficial to man as they live almost entirely on insects. These are caught on the wing.

The whip-poor-will looks very much like the nighthawk, but it has shorter and broader wings--better for flying among trees.

Whereas the nighthawk hunts high in the sky, and is often seen flying high above Newcastle, the whip-poor-will hunts close to the ground--generally in the forest or in forest clearings.

Whip-poor-wills call more at dusk and at dawn than in the middle of the night and they are noisier on moonlight nights than on dark nights.

They make no nest, but lay their two eggs on the ground among dead leaves. Eggs, chicks, and brooding parent are so well-camouflaged as to be almost invisible.

On the decline?

In some quarters, there has been some concern expressed that the whip-poor-will is on the decline. Here on the Miramichi there is some evidence of this.

Paul Stewart of Matthew's Settlement says, that years ago, the call of the whip-poor-will was a familiar sound to those living on the Little Southwest.

However, during the last 25 years, or thereabouts, he has heard their calls on only two or three occasions--those two or three occasions being in the same breeding season about a year or two ago.

Ruth Somers (living between Lyttleton and the Johnson's Bridge) reports she has heard them each of the past five years--ever since she and her husband moved there. But, she hears them for only about a week in the spring.

Fred Green of Derby Junction says that up until 2 or 3 years ago a whip-poor-will could be heard in the bush near his place; but, for the last two or three years it has never been heard.

A number of people have reported whip-poor-wills in the McKinnon Road area, back of Douglstown. A check with Doug Underhill and Linda Hartlen revealed they are still coming there each year, and were still there after last year's forest fire.

P.S. We are on the northernmost edge of the whip-poor-will's breeding range. It winters from the southern United States to Central America.

Peace River district features Miramichi connection

Feb. 13/87

Prominently displayed on the front of a two-storey private residence in Fairview, Alberta, is a sign which reads "Miramichi House".

Below this, in smaller letters, is another sign which reads "The Loggies".

Our son, Lyle, had told us about this house. He and his wife, Ann, who were living in the town of Peace River, about 50 miles to the east, had discovered it while out driving one weekend.

When Winnie and I reached Fairview, we searched for, and found, "Miramichi House", for we wanted to try to solve the mystery as to how and when it had gotten its name.

However, there was no car in the driveway, and when we knocked there was no answer. Nobody was at home.

We took a photograph of the house, got back in the car, and were just about to drive away when a young woman pushing a baby stroller rushed across the street to speak to us.

She had no connection with "Miramichi House", but nonetheless she had noticed our New Brunswick licence plates, and being originally from Moncton, she wanted to speak to us.

In our conversation we learned her name was Judy Hay-Dechant and she was a niece of the late Huz Hay of Chatham.

Knowing Cindy Dlugos was living in Fairview, we inquired, and were able to locate her home. (Cindy Dlugos is the former Cindy Kelly, daughter of the late Burke and Pat Kelly of Chatham.)

Again, nobody was home, but one of her neighbours told us she was taking a business administration course at Fairview College and she would be home later in the afternoon.

least, being well into his 90s.

She said the house was supposed to be an exact duplicate of one that was, or is, here on the Miramichi.

She did not know exactly where this original was, or is, located.

Probably some of our readers can tell us that?

While talking with Cindy, she made mention of a Foley from South Nelson who is now living in Fairview.

So, this small town (population 3,250) which advertises itself as "The Heart of the Peace River Country", has become home to a number of people from this area.

Although the Rocky Mountains were new and excitingly different, nonetheless, I felt somewhat relieved when we left them behind, and drove out onto the flat open country of the Peace River District.

Here I felt more relaxed.

In the Peace River District, the land is very flat, but the Peace River has cut through it a deep valley.



Harry Walker

The river has easily done this for the whole country is underlaid with a great depth of clay — about 1,000 feet of it — and, of course, this erodes very readily.

(It is only at the very bottom

of the valley, that the odd small outcrop of bedrock can be found.)

With clay banks 1,000 feet high on either side of the valley, it is obvious, that through the ages, many mud slides would be sure to occur.

During these slides, huge chunks of clay have slid into the valley; and, in the process of time, these have become rounded and overgrown with vegetation.

Thus, the bottom and sides of the whole valley consists of a continuous series of mounds or hills formed in this way.

The tops of these mounds are too dry to support trees and so they are overgrown with grass.

The ravines between the mounds retain more moisture and so they have become wooded — mainly with poplars.

Intermediate areas are overgrown with patches of Wild Rose bushes, or with patches of Wolf Willows.

The result of all this is when you stand above the valley and look down into it, you see a net-

work, or patchwork of various colours.

In early September, when Winnie and I saw it, it was very beautiful.

The grass on the tops of the hills was brown, the poplars were still mainly green, but with a bit of yellow beginning to show.

The patches of wild rose bushes were a deep wine color, and the wolf willows were a silvery green, or silvery gray.

Also, down in this valley was the town of Peace River lying along the banks of the river of the same name.

A closer look at these mudslide hills revealed some of the other plants that were growing there. Scattered among the grasses was a lot of Meadow Sage; and, in at least one place, a few little cacti.

Among the poplars were Saskatoon berries — berries that are very closely related to our own wild pears or billberries, and which are used to make the famous Saskatoon berry pies.

We returned later and met Cindy, her husband, Craig, and their two children Kristen and Rory.

Miramichi House

Cindy was able to enlighten us somewhat on the history of "Miramichi House".

She said it was now owned by a Miss Loggie, and had been left her by her parents who had passed on fairly recently — both at an elderly age — he, at

Pink is exclusively associated with males

While visiting my friend, Ted Tramly, in St. Joseph's Hospital, nurse Maureen Doyle mentioned she had Redpolls coming to her feeder and she suggested the pink-breasted ones must be females.

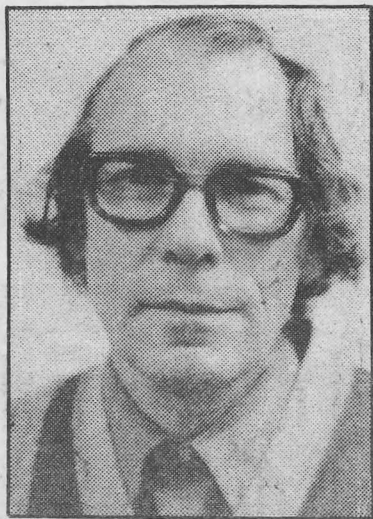
Maureen was probably just pulling my leg, but nonetheless she brings up a curious point.

Human convention has led us to think of pink as a feminine colour, and most men would never be caught wearing anything pink.

Yet, in the natural world, there seems to be no support for this notion.

In fact, among the birds of this country, pink is exclusively associated with the male sex.

We have plenty of examples of this, — Redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks, Purple Finches, White-winged Grossbills.



Harry Walker

I am not familiar with many of the birds of other parts of the

world, but two pink southern species come to mind.

They are the flamingo and the roseate spoonbill. In both cases, male and female are identical in plumage — both wear pink.

Redpolls plentiful

Redpolls are very plentiful in our area this winter and I have been receiving a lot of inquiries about them — most people wanting to know "What are those little birds with the red foreheads".

Both male and female have this red forehead — or rather, as a general rule they do.

But, the shade of red varies from one individual to another — the shade varying from bright red, through a deep wine to almost black.

So, in some cases, the red

forehead is either missing, or very nearly so.

Some of the male redpolls have pink breasts.

Why it is that some males qualify for this pink breast while others do not, I do not know.

In some species of bird, such as the pine grosbeak and scarlet tanager, it is the old males that are most colourful, but I have never found anything in the literature to indicate that this is the case with the redpolls.

It is my impression, that this winter, more redpolls than usual are sporting pink vests. Certainly, a lot of the ones coming to our feeder are so adorned.

It may be a sign of prosperity in the redpoll community.

Pine siskin

Another species which is common this winter, and which is very similar to the redpoll, is the pine siskin.

Both species like company and generally travel in large flocks; and both may be found in the same flock.

Both resemble goldfinches in many respects — their size, shape, habits, undulating flight, and their voice. Some notes of the pine siskin are harsher, however.

Both species are grayish or brownish striped birds, both on the back and on the sides — the pine siskin being somewhat more striped on the underparts than is the redpoll. Both have notched tails.

The pine siskin usually has a small yellow bar on the wing, and also a small yellow area on either side of the tail — these yellow markings becoming more obvious when the wings are extended and the tail is fanned out.

However, like the red on the redpoll, the amount of yellow on the pine siskin varies; and

occasionally, it may be missing altogether.

Two differences

When this is the case, you may experience some difficulty in separating the two species. But, there are two features you can always depend upon.

First, the redpoll has a small, rectangular, black chin patch. This is missing on the pine siskin.

Second, the bills of the two species are different — the bill of the redpoll being very short, stubby, and yellow — the bill of the pine siskin being longer and more pointed, and being dark in colour.

In the above discussion, we are talking about the common redpoll, — two subspecies of which are said to winter in the Maritimes.

One of these is supposed to be slightly darker than the other, but both are said to be so nearly alike they cannot be definitely separated in the field.

Hoary redpoll

Besides these two subspecies, there is also another closely-related species, the hoary redpoll, which occasionally shows up in the Maritimes.

The hoary redpoll differs from the common redpoll in that it is paler in colour and has a white rump patch.

One woman phoned recently to ask if she could have seen a hoary redpoll. This is possible.

I think we have been seeing the odd one at our feeder — at least, some have the white rump, and one even had a slightly pinkish rump.

P.S. My wife says I am away behind the times; and if I looked at this year's fashions, I would see that "pink" is now in style for men.

P.P.S. John Keating of Chatham reports he has been seeing the odd hoary redpoll at his feeder.

We got to see birds, wildflowers of Montana

Many of you will remember Don and Beth LeHeup who used to live here in Newcastle.

They left here over eight years ago; and, after spending a couple of years in Babbitt, Minnesota, moved on to Helena, Montana, where they now reside.

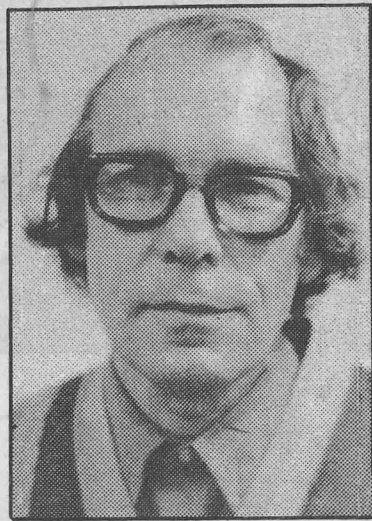
Their son, Bobby, is now through university and living in Virginia; and their daughter, Debbie, is attending university in Bozeman, Montana.

While visiting the LeHeups this summer, they told us the natives there could recognize outsiders by the way they pronounce Helena; for, while the natives pronounce it without any "ee" sound, outsiders pronounce it as "Heleena."

This reminded me of the story in the Bible, Judges 12: verses 5 and 6, where the Gileadites distinguished between insiders and outsiders by the way they pronounced "Shibboleth".

However, this is where the parallel ends; for whereas the poor unfortunates who pronounced shibboleth with an "sss" sound instead of a "shhh" sound were quickly dispatched; we, on the other hand, were given the opposite treatment—we were shown the greatest hospitality.

The day after our arrival, Don introduced me to a group of local naturalists and we all went on a tour visiting some favourite bird-watching haunts. Meanwhile, Beth took Winnie for a tour of the city.



Harry Walker

Three new species of bird were added to my life list—the western wood pewee, the long-billed dowitcher, and the mountain bluebird.

On top of this, another two species would have been added had professional ornithologists retained the old bird classification. These would have been the western grebe and the red-shafted flicker.

Slight difference

To explain: under the old classification, individual western grebes differed slightly in markings.

On some individuals, the white throat patch extended up

to a line slightly above the eye while on others, the white terminated at a line slightly below the eye.

In recent years, it has been determined that grebes with these differences in markings do not interbreed with one another, and therefore, they are really two separate species.

The ones in which the white extends to above the eye are now called Clark's grebes while the ones in which the white stops below the eye are still called western grebes.

My problem: I don't know which I saw. Before, I could have called it a western grebe.

The red-shafted flicker was lost in exactly the opposite way.

Again, to explain: since red-shafted flickers interbreed with yellow-shafted flickers, they are now considered as being one and the same species—the common flicker. Until recently they were considered as being two separate species.

In the far west, flickers are red on the underside of their wings while in the east, they are yellow.

In a narrow band at the junction of these two ranges, flickers are partly red and partly yellow on the underside of their wings.

A similar fate has befallen two other birds that Winnie and I saw in British Columbia—the Audubon's warbler and the Oregon junco.

Some years ago, ornithologists decided the Audubon's warbler and the myrtle warbler were the same species, so they combined them and they became the yellow-rumped warbler.

In like manner, the Oregon junco and the slate-colored junco were combined to become the dark-eyed junco.

The Audubon's warbler has a yellow throat, the myrtle a

white throat. The Oregon junco has a brown back and sides, the slate-colored junco a slate-gray back and sides.

Wild flowers

With Don's help and that of a western wildflower guide, I was able to get names for many of the wildflowers seen in the Helena area.

But, looking over this list now, I can visualize only a very few of them—a small purple spike called a gayfeather; a small shrub with yellow flowers and very common throughout much of the West, the pontonella and a very exotic looking plant with large white flowers, the ten-petalled Blazingstar—a flower which closes during the heat of the day.

Don pointed out one bad weed in the west, the spotted knapweed, which he explained, poisons the ground so competing plants cannot grow close to it.

The next day, we accompanied the LeHeups on a boat cruise up the Missouri River, back of the Holter Dam.

This cruise took us through a picturesque canyon, with steep rock walls on either side.

At one point, we disembarked and took a short hike up to a lookout and, it was during this hike that we saw another distinctive bird of the west—the Townsend's solitaire—a neat and dainty little greyish bird with rather a long tail. It is classified as a thrush, but does not look like other members of the family.

While with the LeHeups, we were introduced to a new taste treat—buffalo berry jam, which we had on our toast for breakfast.

Don says the bushes these berries grow on, are very thorny so nobody tries to pick them by hand.

Instead, they spread a sheet underneath and then beat the bush with a stick.

Birds must be best fed in world

Mar. 6/87

The following article has been written by Gladys MacLean, formerly of Whitneyville, and now living in Bristol, N.B.

In her first paragraph, Gladys answers a question which she posed in an earlier article that appeared here about six weeks ago; and, in order that you may better appreciate what she is referring to, I will first quote a short section from her earlier article.

At that time she wrote, —

"Our most delightful surprise came when an unusually beautiful daffodil yellow bird flew in with some grosbeaks.

"It was about the same size as a grosbeak only much more streamlined, the beak and feet were bright orange, and there was a white strip down each wing, with a small dark patch on either side.

"We couldn't find it in any of our books, but I shall always remember it in my mind's eye."

Now

Gladys now writes, —

"The mystery of the beautiful yellow bird has been solved. A bird lover who read my article in the *Woodstock Bugle* phoned to say that it stays near his place.

"He couldn't identify it, so he called an ornithologist who said it was an albino grosbeak (pine, not evening). If it lives out its life span, it will eventually turn white.

"I think the birds in Bristol

must be the best fed birds in all the world.

"McCains have their own dump site where they live high on the hog, besides nearly everyone cares for them in one way or another. Yesterday we visited two brothers who have twenty-five feeders.

"As we drove in we saw swarms of birds including mourning doves and shrikes. Twenty other people feed them in that village also. Is it any wonder they are fat and flourishing with fine feathers?

"The redpolls have found us. They look like plump little swamp sparrows, with a dab of bright red paint on the top of their heads, and some uneven pinkish strokes on their breasts.

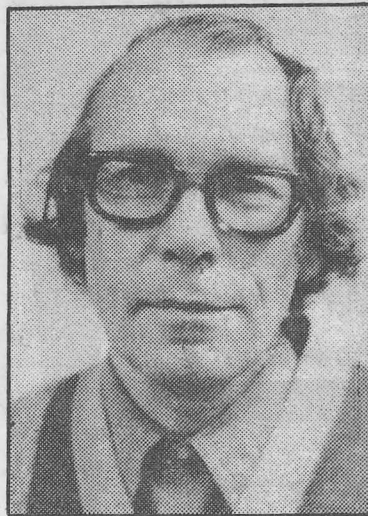
"This week I was away for several days. When I came back there was not one seed left.

"I brought out a bowl of sunflower seeds, and before I could get to the table two siskins jumped into the bowl and began gobbling up the seeds as if they were starving, while a third one perched on my wrist.

"Yesterday while driving along a bleak stretch of highway we came across a flock of snow buntings.

"Appearing as they so often do in some desolate wilderness, or even in a blizzard, they come and go in a flash but always leave one feeling better.

"For the past two weeks we have had a couple of purple finches. They are really the color



Harry Walker

of raspberry juice. When the late afternoon sun falls indirectly on them they glow with a velvety sheen and are like radiant living jewels hopping around in the glistening snow.

"One day in January when it was 20 below zero I had to go to Woodstock. The white smoke from the chimneys drifted effortlessly skyward. Not a twig moved.

"The snow frost sparkling, like billions of prisms transformed the wintery fields into a wonderland of scintillating diamonds.

"We came up over the brow of a hill and right there on the edge of the busy Trans Canada

Highway, a handsome cock pheasant was nibbling at a shrub. I think that is the only one I have ever seen in the wild.

"I recalled an experience I had had during my camping days in India. I was hiking through a wild mango grove when I came into a clearing and found myself face to face with five magnificent peacocks.

"Seemingly unafraid they strutted around with their iridescent plumes flashing in all their pristine glory. I watched breathlessly, feeling that I was indeed privileged to be in on such a unique fashion show.

"We never know what delightful surprises the Lord may have waiting for us just around the corner, but I think we all miss many of them because we are in too big a hurry, or because we are not looking for them.

"I do not know who wrote the poem entitled: *Overheard in an Orchard*. I would like to share it with you."

*Said the robin to the sparrow:
"I should really like to know
Why those restless human
beings
Rush about and worry so?"*

*Said the sparrow to the robin:
"Friend, I think that it must
be
That they have no Heavenly
Father
Such as cares for you and
me."*

Alberta House resembles Loggie Cultural Centre

Mar. ~~Feb.~~ 13/87

A few weeks ago, I wrote an article about the Peace River District of Alberta.

I mentioned that while travelling through those parts last summer, my wife and I saw a house across the front of which was a sign reading "Miramichi House."

That article prompted a couple of people to call.

They were Parker Manderson of Loggieville, and Mrs Lena MacKinnon of Newcastle. Both said "Miramichi House", in Fairview, Alberta, was built by the late Warren P. Loggie and it was designed after the Loggie Cultural Centre in Chatham.

Warren P. Loggie was a son of the late Mr and Mrs W. Stewart Loggie of Chatham—one of a family of 12 or 13 children.

Warren P. and his brother Leigh went to the Peace River many years ago, and there set themselves up in business.

Later, Leigh returned to Chatham, but Warren P. remained in Fairview.

"Miramichi House" is now owned by one of his daughters.

Parker Manderson's mother was a Loggie and he has compiled a genealogy of the Loggie clan going back to the time of the arrival of the first Loggie's from Scotland in 1779.

Mrs A.B. (Lena) MacKinnon's late husband was a first cousin of Warren P. Loggie.

Gene Gillis of Red Bank says during his early years as an R.C.M.P. officer, he was stationed in Peace River and while there, he used to play golf with Leigh Loggie.

More on poor-will

In my article on the whip-poor-will, (Feb. 6) mention was made of the whip-poor-will's cousin, the poor-will, as being the only bird known to hibernate.

I have some further information on this--

It appears the poor-will does not always hibernate, but may do so on occasion—at least for short periods.

In the "Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animal Life", (Greystone Press) it is recorded that a poor-will was found in the same rocky niche on a canyon wall in California during three consecutive winters.

Its temperature was about 65 degrees F and it could be handled freely without being disturbed. When a flashlight beam was shone into its half-opened eyes, it failed to respond.

However, the poor-will is a migratory bird—it does not rely entirely on hibernation to get it through the winter.

In summer, it ranges north into southern Canada--B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan.

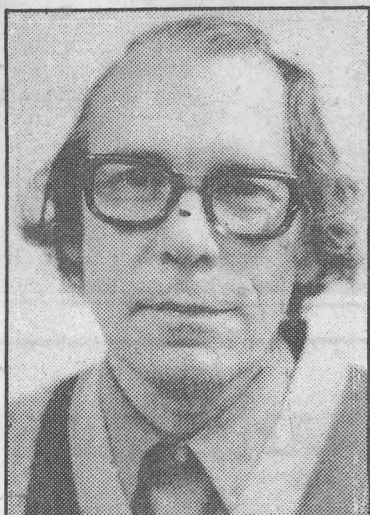
In winter, it is found no further north than the southwestern United States.

About the brant

I have been told that in times past large numbers of brant migrated through the Miramichi--the coast at Tabusintac being a main stop-over point.

Reasons for the rise and fall of the brant population can be found in the literature.

Samuel Cabot, in an article on "eelgrass" in the Nov. 86 issue of "Yankee" magazine



Harry Walker

gives one of these reasons.

He says eelgrass is the main food of the brant and, when it was struck by a blight in the late 20s and 30s, this was disastrous for the Brant.

This blight wiped out the eelgrass from vast areas of our coast; and, although the brant turned to other foods such as sea lettuce and irish moss, nonetheless, their numbers were reduced almost to extinction. When the eelgrass came back, the brant made a comeback.

Terres tells of another blow to the brant. He says on two successive breeding seasons--1971 and 1972--very few young were produced.

He does not give the reason for the breeding failure; but, nesting as it does in the Arctic, it may have been weather-related.

The brant is considerably smaller than the Canada goose and about the same size as the snow goose.

It does not fly on V formation but in wavy lines or disorganized flocks. Being a sea goose, it is seldom seen inland.

It is found in Europe and Asia as well as in North America.

It winters off both the Atlantic and the Pacific coasts of the United States--mainly south of Boston on the Atlantic side and its spring migration is later than that of the Canada goose.

According to Terres: in Europe, in the Middle Ages, someone came up with an interesting theory as to the origin of the brant.

Since they, like the closely related barnacle goose, nested on Arctic islands beyond the north coast of Europe and since these two species reached Europe from the sea, it was decided they hatched from barnacles.

Eelgrass affects

Going back to Cabot's article: two other things that were adversely affected by the disappearance of the eelgrass were scallops and the then prevailing insulation industry--insulation bats having been made from eelgrass.

After the blight was over and eelgrass again began to grow in quantity along our coasts, it was too late for the eelgrass insulation industry for new synthetic materials had been developed to replace it.

The industry never recovered as did the scallops and brant.

Some birds have special mechanisms for removing salt

Mar. 20/87

Back on the farm, I've heard my dad say "Never feed a chicken salt or you'll kill it".

John K. Terres in *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* modifies this somewhat.

He says too much salt will kill chickens and pigeons.

He says birds, like humans, must limit the amount of salt in their body fluids to about one per cent but that a bird's kidneys are much less efficient at removing excess salt than are a human's.

However, many birds, especially sea birds, have another mechanism for eliminating salt.

Salt glands situated in their heads remove excess salt from the blood stream and concentrate it into a clear, colorless liquid which dribbles out of their nostrils, or, in the case of petrels, is forcibly ejected from them.

Terres indicates all birds have these glands, but in some species, they are much better developed than in others. In some orders, including the songbirds, they are non-functional.

Recently, I received a call requesting information on how to remove salt from bacon fat and other salty fats before putting them out for birds.

I have no answer for this question--if you do, please give me a call.

It seems doubtful the salt in these fats actually poses any threat to the birds; but, here at our house, we tend to use only the less salty fats.

This may be an unnecessary precaution.

Nowhere in my books can I find any warning against using them.

In winter, some birds land on highways to pick up salt--evening grosbeaks, pine grosbeaks, purple finches, etc.; and some writers even suggest providing salt for these finches at our bird feeders.

Weasel caper

For a while this winter, a little weasel cut quite a caper at Joe O'Neill's place.

It was quite often seen in the house and it showed little fear of anyone. (Perhaps there was a family of them).

Detective work revealed it gained entry by tunneling under the snow, chewing through a screen, passing through a partially opened cellar window, and thence upstairs through a hole drilled for an electric cable.

The weasel apparently stole just about anything that was edible.

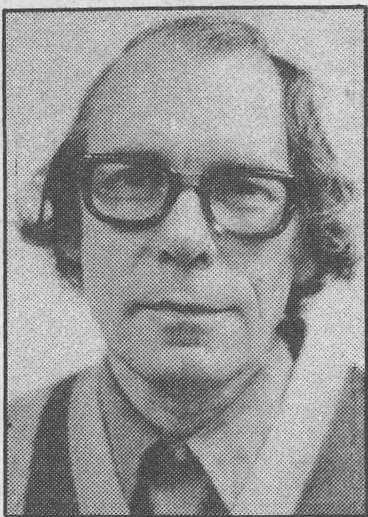
It took bread, but left the crusts.

On one occasion, it took a pork chop bone out of the garbage and was seen running down the hall with it.

At another time, some muffins disappeared, but later their paper containers were found in a pile at the weasel's escape hole to the basement.

When Joe left a piece of herring for it, it was gone by next morning.

In addition, the small paring knife which had been used to



Harry Walker

cut the herring was also gone.

It, like the muffin wrappers, was lying a the cable hole.

Outside, at the bird feeder, a weasel was seen to climb a tree, then proceed out onto a limb and thus reach a suet ball hung there for the birds.

Arriving, it clung to the ball and hung upside down while feeding on it.

Seeing this, curious chickadees came for a closer look, flitting ever nearer until some of them were only about a foot away from the weasel.

The weasel ignored the chickadees and eventually dropped to the ground and left.

Origin of siskins

Many of you have been seeing pine siskins at your feeders this winter, so you may be interested in learning the origin of its name.

According to Terres, the name siskin was first applied to a European relative and the name is derived, either from the Swedish name "siska", or the Danish name "siken", both of which mean "chirper".

This name hardly seems appropriate for our pine siskin, but perhaps it is appropriate for the European siskin.

Redpoll sightings

The bird reports I have been receiving recently have mainly been of redpolls which seem to be everywhere.

Earlier in the winter, a number of reports of bohemian waxwings and pine grosbeaks were received.

These latter two species are usually reported to be eating crab apples still hanging on trees.

These handsome birds never fail to elicit wonder and admiration, especially when seen for the first time.

Here in Newcastle, both Jackie King and Alma Smith reported having been visited by large flocks of bohemian waxwings--Alma estimating the flock at her place as numbering between 50 and 75 birds.

Out in Whitneyville, Hubert Sherrard also had a flock visit him. He also reported pine grosbeaks, as did Leah Whipple of Boom Road, and a couple of anonymous callers.

On March 13, Joseph Russell reported a Bald Eagle along the river at Lower Newcastle.

Twenty volunteers participate in bird atlassing

Mar. 27/87

The Maritime Breeding Bird Atlas project is a five year project, the first year of which has now been completed and the findings from it tabulated.

First, I will explain what this project is all about. Some of it was explained in an earlier article.

For purposes of this project, the entire Maritime Provinces have been divided into squares measuring 10km by 10km, the idea being to determine what bird species nest in each of these squares.

There are 88 such squares in the Miramichi Region alone--the Miramichi Region being only one of 23 regions comprising the whole of the three provinces.

Therefore, in total, approximately 2,000 squares must be atlassed in order to complete the entire project.

However, every fourth square has been designated as a priority square. This means special emphasis is being placed on these squares so if the task of atlassing all squares proves to be too big for us, at least the priority squares will be covered.

The coordinator of the whole project is Judith Kennedy, whose office is in the Nova Scotia Museum in Halifax.

On Miramichi

In the rest of this report, we will consider only the Miramichi Region.

Here, we have had 20 volunteers working on the project.

Some have been working alone, others have been working together on the same squares as a team; so, these 20 individuals actually represent 13 parties.

The 20 volunteers are Moira Campbell, Mrs. Benjamin Campbell, Vivian Comeau, Vernon Goodfellow, Earlene Hunter, Luc Lemieux, Dr. John and Mrs. Alice Lockhart, Sara and David Lounsbury, Ray and Joan Mahabir and Krishna Hahabir, Dennis Mazerolle, Mary Rawlinson, Fraser Simpson, Norman Stewart, David Tweedie, my son, Ian and myself.

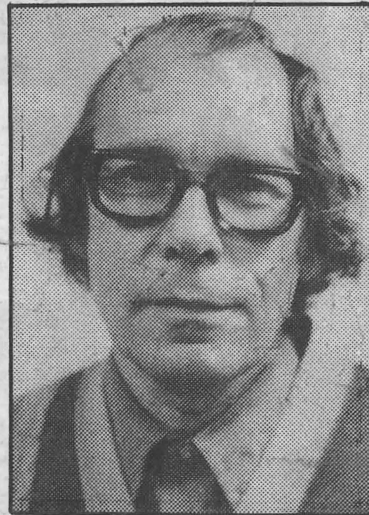
When working on this project, the atlasses looks for nesting clues such as occupied nests, birds carrying nesting material of food, male and female together in suitable nesting habitat, etc.

Depending on the evidence obtained, a bird may be classified as a confirmed nester, a probable nester or a possible nester.

Of course, some species are much easier to confirm than others.

Some species make little or no attempt to conceal their nests while others are extremely secretive about them.

For instance, it is easy to find the nests of robins, starlings, and swallows, however, it is very difficult to find the nests of Evening Grosbeaks, Red-eyed Vireos, and Ovenbirds even though they are common and abundant species.



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During 1986, the above-listed volunteers, did at least some atlassing on 19 different squares scattered throughout the Miramichi Region.

Work was not completed on any of these squares, but in a few of them, it was nearly so.

66 confirmed

Sixty-six species were confirmed as nesting in one or more of these 19 squares, another 37 species were found to be probable nesters, and still another 14 species were found to be possible nesters.

The robin topped the list as the species for which the most widespread evidence of breeding was obtained.

It was confirmed as nesting in 13 squares, found to be a probable nester in four others, and a possible nester in still another.

This gives a total of 18 squares, out of the 19, in which some evidence of breeding was obtained.

For the sake of brevity and simplicity, I will now list those species which were confirmed as breeding in our region--all probable and possible breeders being omitted.

The number following the species' name is the number of squares in which nesting was confirmed.

Barn swallow 14, robin 13, bank swallow 11, starling 10, killdeer 9, tree swallow 8, gray jay 7, common grackle (blackbird) 6, black duck 6, cliff swallow 6.

Ruffed grouse 5, chipping sparrow 5, common yellowthroat 4, American redstart 4, crow 3, bobolink 3, red-winged blackbird 3, yellow-rumped (myrtle) warbler 3, yellow warbler 3, ruby-throated hummingbird 3, common loon 3, downy woodpecker 3.

In two squares, each of the following--evening grosbeak, white-throated sparrow (old Tom Peabody), blue jay, cedar waxwing, dark-eyed junco, black-capped chickadee, eastern kingbird, common merganser.

Confirmed in one square--common raven, northern flicker, purple finch, alder flycatcher, song sparrow, veery, ruby-crowned kinglet, black and

white warbler, parula warbler, Tennessee warbler, goldfinch Canada warbler, Wilson's warbler, pine siskin, catbird, bay-breasted warbler, yellow-bellied flycatcher, yellow-bellied sapsucker, black-throated green warbler, house sparrow, woodcock, hairy woodpecker, black-backed woodpecker, American kestrel, mourning warbler, rock dove (pigeon), red-breasted nuthatch, American bittern (stake driver), pine grosbeak, scarlet tanager, common goldeneye, green-winged teal, great blue heron, northern oriole.

Many species, which although found to be widespread, were never confirmed as nesting.

For instance, the rose-breasted grosbeak was classified as a probable breeder in nine squares and a possible breeder in two others, but nesting was never confirmed.

The ovenbird and red-eyed vireo were both listed as probable breeders in eight squares and possible breeders one. Neither were confirmed.

Similarly, many species that were confirmed in only one or two squares were found to be probable and possible breeders in many others.

Upgrading from probable to confirmed status proved to be a problem for many atlassers.

Confirmation was most easily obtained late in the nesting season when parent birds could be seen carrying food to their young.

Return of birds, building of nests, heralds Spring

Stirrings in the bird world herald the approach of spring.

Winter birds are restless and are showing up in new locations; spring birds are returning; and at least one bird, is already setting on a clutch of eggs.

On March 23, Milton Stewart of Halcolm reported finding a gray jay's (moose bird) nest with three eggs in it.

It was found in Matthew's Settlement. It was situated in a small fir tree; and was estimated to be about eight feet above the ground, or much less than this, if measured from the top of the snow.

The mother bird was sitting on the nest when Milton approached, but flew off revealing the three eggs.

This nest was of modern construction; but, not necessarily better than the usual moose birds' nest.

It consisted of little sticks on the outside, and nothing but paper towels and Kleenexes on the inside.

The traditional moose bird's nest, as described in a Canadian Wildlife Service bulletin, consists mainly of sticks and leaves on the outside, followed by a thick layer of inner bark, and then a lining of fine grasses, hair from deer and snowshoe hare, and sometimes feathers or down.

The gray jay is one of our earliest nesters, but March 23, is especially early, even for it.

There are a few species--the rock dove (pigeon) and the red and white-winged crossbills--which may nest at any time of the year.

Other than these, the raven, the great horned owl, and possibly sometimes, the barred owl and bald eagle, are the only species that start nesting in March.

The great horned owl is the earliest, its breeding season beginning in late February.

Eagle returns

The Bald Eagle has returned to the stretch of open water below the Miramichi Pulp and Paper mill; but this year, there are two of them, instead of the usual one.

For years, a bald eagle has been showing up in this very same location at this same time of year.

In the past, this has been just a temporary stop-over--a short interval in its yearly routine.

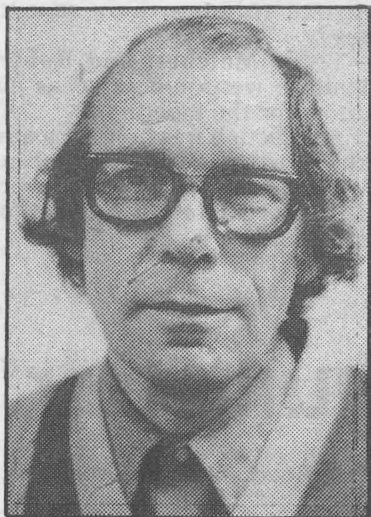
When the ice clears out of the rest of the river, it moves on.

Several people have reported on these eagles. An anonymous caller reported that the first one appeared there on March 13 or 14, and two of them were there on March 17. He also said ducks had returned to this stretch of open water.

On March 19, Eric Babineau reported seeing these two eagles--one of which was carrying a large eel.

On March 23, Robert Houlston reported that his father saw these eagles attack and kill a seagull.

One of the eagles struck the gull in the air, then the other one grabbed it when it fell to the ice.



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A few years ago, Philip Anson described a similar attack which he witnessed while visiting Cape Breton.

These eagles must have been hungry since the bald eagle normally lives on fish--most of which is scavenged, or stolen from other birds, rather than caught live.

Robins, blackbirds

The robins are back. They have been reported from several widely-separated points.

On March 20, Gilles Kenny reported two on the South Esk Road; on March 26, Theresa Ross reported one in Lower Newcastle; and, on this same date, John Russell reported two at Point aux Carr.

The red-winged blackbirds and the killdeer are back. On March 26, Robert Houlston reported the former in Newcastle while on this same date, a second caller reported the latter in the timber yard of the Miramichi Pulp and Paper mill. During the next few days, they were reported from other points in our region.

On March 27, Louis Sippley reported la tourterelle triste (English--the mourning dove) visiting his feeder in Baie Ste. Anne.

Snow buntings

In Loggieville, Parker Manderson has been getting both snow buntings and redpolls at his feeder.

He says one snow bunting appears to have a split personality.

Like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, it sometimes thinks it is a Redpoll and at other times thinks it is a snow bunting.

It often arrives with the redpolls, then joins the snow buntings when they arrive later.

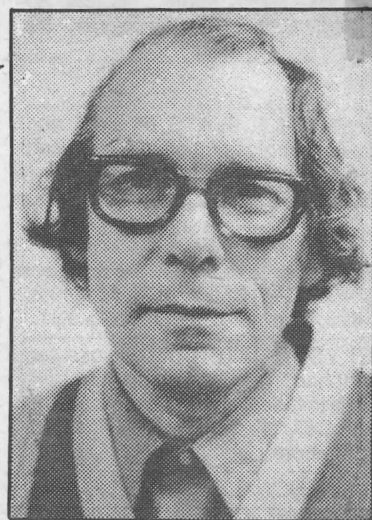
Parker also says, that in an earlier article, I gave him undue credit for compiling the Loggie genealogy.

He says he was only one of a number of people who worked on it, and much work had already been done before he made any contributions to it.

Don Cable reported a pure white fox at his place on the Weldfield Road--more on that next week.

Pronghorns are fast mammals

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The fastest North American mammal is the pronghorn.

On top of this, the pronghorn has other unique features that set it apart from all other mammals.

In fact, it is so unique biologists place it in a separate family of its own; or, more correctly, in a family in which it is the sole survivor.

In prehistoric times, this family, the Antilocapridae, is credited as having had many members, but these extinct species are known only from fossils.

They apparently exhibited a great diversity of unusually-shaped horns, and some species even had four horns.

It is again the horns--their shape, and more importantly, their construction--that are one of the most distinctive features of the pronghorn.

Whereas cattle, buffalo, sheep, goats, etc., have hollow, unbranched horns which they retain permanently; and whereas the various members of the deer family have solid, branched antlers which they shed annually; the pronghorn falls in an intermediate category.

Its horns have a small, hollow core which is permanent; but, superimposed on this is an antler-like sheath which is shed annually.

This sheath always has two points--one curved backwards over the head, the other pointed forwards.

Both male and female have horns, but the male's are longer and heavier. Occasionally the female has no horns.

In preparing this report, I have read over several articles dealing with the pronghorn--the two most complete accounts being one in "The Mammals of Canada" by A.W.F. Banfield, and the other in "The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animal Life", published by the Greystone Press.

Saw in west

I became curious about these animals after Winnie and I saw some of them in the West last summer.

The first of these were in ranch country in the southeast corner of Alberta, near a little place called Orion.

We stopped and got out of the car. The nearest of them was only a couple of stone throws away, but there were several others scattered here and there on the rolling prairie. We could also hear them bleating.

At first, the one nearest us simply stood there and watched us, then it started to run.

When this happened, we were surprised, for it ran, not like a deer as we had expected, but more like a trotting race horse.

It was not particularly frightened and so never got into high gear.

If it had, we wondered if it would have broken into a canter or some other gait. We have never gotten an answer to this question.

Later, we saw other pronghorns--one, right beside the road. It did not run even though we drove right beside it.

In Montana, while on a bird-watching trip with Don LeHeup (formerly of Newcastle and now living in Helena) we saw a large herd of them.

The pronghorn is about three feet high at the shoulder; and, according to Banfield, the males average 113 pounds and the females 92 pounds.

It has big eyes, and exceptionally good vision when compared to most hoofed mammals.

This is no doubt a great asset, living as it does on the open plains where there is little to obstruct the view.

The pronghorn has a large white rump patch; and, when sensing dangers, the long hairs on this rump patch rise.

This results in a white flash that can be seen for miles and this alerts other distant members of the herd.

This same message is also transmitted by a second method. When frightened, some glands in the rump area exude a peculiar odor and this is carried to others by the wind.

Fast runner

Banfield says the pronghorn can run at 50 to 60 miles per hour for a short distance, or it can run at 35 to 40 miles per hour for a distance of four miles.

The only mammal in the world that can run faster is the Cheetah of Africa.

It can exceed 60 miles per hour, but can do so for only a short sprint.

If it does not catch its quarry in the first few bounds, it goes hungry.

The pronghorn can easily execute a long jump, but it is incapable of executing a high jump. The result is, that over much of its range, fences have severely restricted its movements.

When a pronghorn comes to a barbed wire fence, it must either go under it; or, it must go between the strands.

When it comes to a woven wire fence, it is completely cut off.

Before the west was settled, northern pronghorns migrated south in winter.

Now, their migration routes are either cut off or made very difficult.

As a consequence, severe winters can take a heavy toll on these northern pronghorns.

Although this mammal is often called the pronghorn antelope, this name is misleading since the pronghorn is not an antelope.

The true antelopes of Asia and Africa are said to be more closely related to the mountain goat than they are to the pronghorn.

White fox seen near Wellfield home

A white fox has turned up at Wellfield.

On the evening of March 11, it came and looked in the kitchen window of Don and June Cable's home.

As Don explained, it was after dark and the lights inside the house were turned low. But outside, where the fox was, the yard was well lit-up with a bright yard light.

The fox was quite fearless and came up to within about three feet of the window and, as Don says, it could be seen as plain as could be.

The animal turned around so, both sides of it were seen, but nowhere were there any markings on it. It was just a uniform white with a slightly creamy tinge.

Don said it appeared to be a healthy animal with fur in prime condition.

It seemed a little small and short in the legs for a full-grown fox; but, nonetheless, he presumed it was just an albino red fox.

The only other white fox report I have ever received came from Cyril Mullin of Ferry Road.

He saw it about Oct. 18, 1979 while hunting partridge between Russellville and the Bathurst Highway.

At the time, Cyril said he was walking along a bush road when he happened upon it.

It was a rather small fox, and his first impression of it was that it was a domestic cat.

However, the animal, having little fear, allowed him to walk up to within about 25 or 30 feet of it, at which distance he could see clearly it was a fox.

For a time, it just stood there and looked at him; then it disappeared into the bush. It was all white, except for the eyes and nose, which were black.

Why in N.B.?

The occurrence of a white fox in New Brunswick has two possible explanations. It could be an albino red fox, or it could be an Arctic fox.

The Arctic Fox has never been officially recorded in New Brunswick; but, A.W.F. Banfield, in "The Mammals of Canada," says Arctic foxes often get on ice floes along the Labrador coast and sometimes get carried south on them.

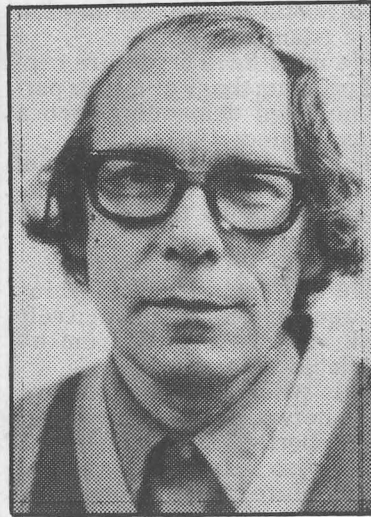
In this way they occasionally reach Newfoundland and other points for south of their normal range.

They have twice been recorded on Cape Breton Island, and at least once on Anticosti Island.

Also, in the spring of 1922, there was a "large-scale immigration" of these foxes to the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence according to Banfield.

The Arctic fox comes in two color phases—a white phase and a so-called blue phase—the blue phase really being grey.

Both phases turn brown in



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summer, and then become indistinguishable.

Burt and Grossenheider, in their "Field Guide to the Mammals", show colored pictures of both winter phases. The nose and eyes are black.

Otherwise, the coat is either pure white or an almost uniform grey.

The pictures indicate the nose is blunt, and the ears small and rounded when compared to a red fox. These authors say the Arctic fox is less shy than most other species of fox.

Banfield says the blue phase varies in color from almost blue-black to pearl grey, and that it fades considerably in the

spring as the amount of sunlight increases.

Banfield also indicates the proportion of blue phase to white phase foxes varies greatly depending on the location, and in Labrador, over 95 per cent of the Arctic foxes are of the white phase.

Banfield describes the Arctic fox as having short legs, and his weights and measurements indicate it is considerably smaller than the Red Fox.

Hawk photo

When Winnie and I visited the Fort Whyte Centre in Winnipeg last summer, we noticed a picture of flying hawk was pasted on each of its large windows.

Any object pasted or hung in a large window will help to protect birds from flying into it, and a realistic picture of a hawk may be more effective.

It might also tend to drive birds from the yard. Exactly how effective they are, I cannot say.

Also, dummy wooden hawks and owls are sometimes mounted on buildings to drive pigeons and house sparrows away.

How effective they are, I am equally unable to say.

But, Desmond Dolan recently sent me a picture showing a pigeon quite contentedly perched beside one of these wooden owls—the picture having been clipped from a Geneva, New York, newspaper.

Yes, pelicans are graceful in flight

If one knows the pelican only from its picture, it is hard to imagine this bird ever being described as graceful.

With its squat body and monstrous bill, it gives the appearance of a clown-clumsy, even ridiculous.

Designed as it is, one would think that, if carried aloft and dumped from a plane, it would tumble to the ground like a bag of garbage.

But, surprise of surprises, when seen in flight, this bird is indeed graceful.

Effortlessly and silently, it glides in broad sweeping circles, its black and white frame standing out against the blue sky.

First impressions can be misleading with birds, as with people, or anything else we may encounter in life.

There are five records for the white pelican in New Brunswick.

Squires lists four of these--all before the turn of the century--between 1860 and 1900. All were lone birds, all were seen in different places and at different dates, but all were in the southern part of the province.

Apparently, all four were shot dead on arrival.

Since Squire's book was published in 1976 there has been one more record--at Miscou Island.

This one stayed for some time--a couple of weeks, or perhaps a month. This was in August 1981, and was reported in this column at the time.

This one was not shot--at least, not so far as is known, so we seem to have progressed somewhat in this respect.

The white pelican is a western species, and when seen in New Brunswick, it is far outside its normal range.

Our first one

Winnie and I were driving along a quiet road that winds along the Missouri River, near Cascade, Montana, when we saw our first white pelicans.

We stopped our car and got out. Two of them were circling in the sky; and, although we were able to observe them for only a short time before they disappeared, nonetheless, it was sufficient for us to be impressed with the grace and ease with which they fly.



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At this point, my attention was drawn to a bird which kept calling, but which kept hidden in the grass. It was just beyond the barbed wire fence that ran beside the road.

I lay on my back and wiggled under. I then pursued the bird which did not fly but which kept running ahead of me while periodically calling. It seemed to be playing hide and seek with me.

When I at last saw it, it turned out to be just another Western Meadowlark.

I returned to the car, again sliding under the fence.

It was now that I became conscious of the many sharp and scratchy seeds that were sticking through my clothing--especially in my running shoes and socks.

These seeds had corkscrew ends which went through the clothing very readily, but which were very reluctant to come back out.

I spent the next 50 miles of our trip extracting seeds, while Winnie drove; and I was still working on them some days later. Fortunately, I did not have to have any cactus spines extracted from my back as could have been the case, for there were many little cactus plants in the field in which I chased the meadowlark.

At one point along the way (southern Saskatchewan) we saw a large, dark-brown bird sitting on the shoulder of the highway. We were almost past it before we noticed it; and, by the time we got the car stopped, and pulled over to the side, we were about an eighth of a mile beyond it.

I got out and started to walk back; but, as I did so, a large hawk started to dive-bomb me. The farther I went, the closer it came.

I deduced from this that the bird on the side of the road must be its injured mate, and I decided to turn back. This seemed to be the prudent thing to do as I did not want to take a chance on having it sink its claws into me.

During the dive-bombing attack, I was able to note in detail the bird's markings; and, with the help of our field guide, to identify it as a Swainson's Hawk--a common hawk of the prairies, but new to me.

As I learned from my books later, this species restricts itself to treeless areas, although it places its nest in a shrub--sometimes on the top of a thorny Buffalo Berry.

It nests throughout the open prairies; and to a very limited extent, on the northern tundra beyond the tree-line.

In fall, in order to find similar open country, it makes a very long migration going all the way to the pampas of Argentina, there to spend the winter.

Birdwatcher writes to Walker

Winnie and I have spent the past month in Ontario and during our absence, a considerable quantity of mail accumulated.

One letter is from Ville St. Laurent, P.Q.

It reads as follows,--

Dear Mr Walker,

Greetings! and thank you for your nice bird column in the "Miramichi Weekend".

I was intrigued with your spotting Miramichi House in Fairview, (originally named Waterhole), Alta.

My father, (Dr Stuart Loggie, Chatham, died 1941) was brother to Leigh and Warren Loggie.

When we "went for a drive", he never failed to have is heard to the song of "Old Tom Peebiddy, Peobody?"

When we "went for a picnic", we might spot the beautiful kingfisher, or find the incredibly delicate wind-flower, or even an Indian pipe.

My husband and I live in a second-storey duplex in a two-storey area which gives us an extensive sky and we have the neighboring roofs, tree-tops and Hydro wires at eye-level, which has given us the pleasant opportunity to see and identify with the help of "Godfrey's Birds of Canada," quite a long list of birds.

They would probably be run-of-the-mill to you with the possible exception of--

- A sparrow-hawk landing on the second storey windowsill carrying his prey, a sparrow. He proceeded to pluck it, the feathers making a little cloud; then he seemed to shake it around (draining it?) before eating it, after which he flew away. This was on a January mid-day.

- A mother robin who tugged up an especially long worm.



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She looped it into a wad in her bill, then proceeded to BANG it against the brick wall--to tenderize it?--before toting it home to the babies.

- Hearing the little goldfinch singing as he flew in his little scallops.

They loved to perch on a nearby T.V. aerial. With cable T.V. the aerials have disappeared which may be one reason we don't see much of them now. But of course, the outskirts of the city are getting farther away all the time.

- "Quick, quick, get up. There's a baby cedar waxwing at the back door". The little ball of fluff needed a rest during his first flying lesson, I think.

One more coming up!

- You! On Henderson Street in Chatham, walking with a male companion past Mrs Lounsbury's house, just as I was going into the apartment next door which faced Mrs L's. I recognized you from your column picture.

This was a few years ago. I was visiting my mother and we loved to watch the birds at Mrs L's feeders. One day

- Her big square plastic jug was almost empty--just some

seeds in the middle of the floor which couldn't be reached from the two lower-corner openings.

Sammy jay arrived; after some cogitation, he solved the problem by entering by the top, scooping up some seeds and gliding out by the lower corner, all in one smooth operation. Clever Sammy!

The three Miramichi papers are a great pleasure to me.

I particularly enjoy seeing the names of my old friends, i.e. Lena MacKinnon, Nint Anderson. I always send them a "telepathic" hello.

My compliments on your column.

See you next week,
signed: Molly Loggie Du Chene

Included in Mrs Du Chene's letter, were verifax copies of two pictures--one of Miramichi House in Fairview, the other of Warren Loggie on the verandah of Miramichi House.

Another incident (with a Miramichi connection) occurred last summer while my wife and I were in Vancouver.

We were standing at a bus stop in Burnaby waiting for a bus to take us to Expo--our first day there.

Also at the stop was one other person--a young woman from whom we asked directions.

She informed us she was going to Expo also and she kindly volunteered to take us in tow until we arrived there.

While travelling with her, we learned her name was Roxanne White and that both of her parents came from New Brunswick--her mother being an Arsenault from Rogersville, and her father coming from Saint John.

Roxanne, while growing up, had spent several summers at Rogersville, visiting her many relatives there.

White fox seen at Hardwicke

Another white fox (or possibly the same one) has been reported - this time near Hardwicke.

As you may recall, Don and June Cable reported that on March 11 they had a white fox turn up in their yard in Weldfield. (See Miramichi Weekend, April 10)

Now Jerome Robichaud of Baie Ste Anne reports he and his nephews, Gary Robichaud, came upon a white fox while they were skidooring last January.

This would be about two months before the white fox was seen by the Cables in Weldfield.

Jerome says their encounter with this animal took place after dark while they were coming out from a camp back of Hardwicke.

The animal appeared in the headlights of their skidoo, and their first impression was that it was a cat.

However, as they observed it closer, they could see this was not the case and that it was really a fox.

He says it did not appear to be very frightened of them. As a result, it afforded them the opportunity to see it close-up.

They even saw the entrance to the den where they believed it to be living - a hole in the snow leading under a dead fall.

Jerome's description of this fox resembles closely the description given by Don Cable regarding the white fox seen at Weldfield.

It had no dark markings whatsoever so far as could be seen.

It seemed a little short in the



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legs, and small overall, for a full-grown red fox.

Since these two white fox sightings were at least 15 or 20 miles apart, it seems doubtful they are of the same animal.

In his book "The Mammals of Canada," Banfield says, "The home range of a single fox or family has been estimated to be between 1.4 and 3.14 square miles".

On the other hand, he says, that in the fall when the young disperse, the young males have

been known to travel as much as 166 miles from their place of birth - their average distance of travel being 43 miles. (The young females do not disperse as widely.)

Pheasant seen

On April 23, Marie Brophy reported a male ring-necked pheasant staying near her place in Howard.

I expect it is an escaped domestic bird.

Pheasants were introduced to these parts some years ago, and for a time, survived in the wild.

They can still be found in the wild state in some parts of our province.

Recently, Ian Ross of New Ross, N.S., gave me a couple of bits of information on owls.

Horned owl

He says Cyril Caldwell of Wolfville, N.S., nursed an injured great horned owl back to health, then released it.

It disappeared as expected, but, after three weeks, returned with a mate.

Seeing this, Caldwell erected a platform in a tree beside his house. The owls accepted it, and nested on it.

Ian's other story.

He says a man named Bernard Forsythe found a number of fish tags underneath a barred owl's nest.

These tags were ones that had been attached to the fins of trout by wildlife researchers.

Did the owls catch the trout live, or did they merely pick up dead ones? That question is unanswered.

A check through the literature reveals that barred owls and some of our other native owls have long been known to eat fish, but only as a very minor constituent of their diet.

Taverner, in his "Birds of Canada," (1937), notes that out of 189 barred owl's stomachs examined, two contained fish.

Also, out of 110 great horned owl stomachs examined, one contained fish; and out of 212, screech owl stomachs examined, again only one contained fish.

Pronghorn down to 20,000, rebounds

A few weeks ago, this column dealt with the pronghorn, a peculiar mammal of our western plains. It's a mammal which is classified as falling between the deer family on the one hand and the cattle tribe on the other.

Here is a continuation of that story--A.W.F. Banfield's account of this species in his book "The Mammals of Canada" being the main source of my information.

Banfield indicates that when the white man first came to America the pronghorn was probably as plentiful as the buffalo.

However, by 1908, their numbers had been reduced to a mere 20,000 individuals--these being spread over their entire range--northern Mexico, western United States, and the southern part of our Prairie Provinces.

This low point in the pronghorn's population was reached after two very severe winters had taken a heavy toll of them.

Previous to this, over-hunting and the encroachments of civilization--mainly in the form of fences erected by farmers and ranchers--had already depleted their numbers drastically.

Numbers rebound

Since 1908, due to strict enforcement of game laws and the creation of reserves for



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them, pronghorn numbers have rebounded.

Now, their population is such that a limited amount of hunting is again allowed in some areas.

According to Banfield, despite its original abundance, the pronghorn was not much hunted by the Indians.

The reason: it was difficult to stalk and its hide was of poor quality.

During most of the year, pronghorns live in herds ranging in size from a few individuals to several hundred of them.

When the doe is about to give birth, she separates herself from the herd, finds a well-vegetated valley, and hides her kids there--usually twins--the two being hid in separate places some distance apart.

The doe then separates her-

self from her kids, feeding far enough away from them as not to attract predators to them.

At the same time, she remains in such a place as to be able to keep an eye on their hiding places.

She then comes to them only when it is necessary to let them nurse.

The kids weigh only four or five pounds at birth, and are apparently odorless for the first few days.

Banfield describes them at this stage as having "enormous, luminous eyes."

After three days, they are quick and agile enough as to be difficult to catch, but not until about a month do they begin to follow their mother.

After four months, they are weaned, and after almost a year (or shortly before the next young are born) the mother and her kids separate.

Co-operation

In the herd, the members cooperate for the common good. Bucks will lure dogs and coyotes away from kids and does.

In like manner, does will act as decoys when kids are threatened; or, will fight to protect them--spearing at their attackers with sharp hooves. In this way, they sometimes kill coyotes.

Does also act as babysitters for other does, caring for their

kids while their mothers go for water.

Pronghorns often mix with domestic cattle and sheep. Since pronghorns prefer sagebrush and other plants which these domestic animals do not eat, they do not, to any large extent, compete with them for food.

They exhibit much curiosity--a quality that may be largely due to their keen eyesight.

They are attracted to unfamiliar objects, and they often approach for a better look at the strange activities of humans.

The kids are described as being very playful, and spend much time romping with one another.

Another fox

We have yet another report of a white fox--this one being seen at Horton's Creek, about one-eighth of a mile from the new Bayside High School. It was reported by Tim Chiasson of Eel River Bridge.

He says he and Arthur Martin were returning home from the boxing match in Newcastle last Friday night, May 8, when they saw it.

It was either tame, sick, or hurt, for the men were able to park their car alongside it--the fox making no attempt to run.

It was a dirty white all over, its fur being badly soiled, but it had no other markings.

Bald eagle attracts crowd

On the evening of May 13, a bald eagle attracted a small crowd of spectators on Radio Street in Newcastle.

Cars pulled off and stopped, their occupants curious to see what was the attraction.

The eagle, which was perched near the top of a large tree, ignored the cars and the people and remained almost motionless.

It seemed more concerned with a pesky crow which kept diving at it.

The crow, which was obviously perturbed about the eagle's presence, could not keep still.

It kept jumping from limb to limb and darting at the eagle, but never coming quite within its reach.

I suspect the eagle had committed some crime against the crow.

This was an immature bald eagle for it had not yet developed the white head and tail.

Its plumage was dark brown all over except for the underside of the tail which was somewhat whitish. The legs were bright yellow and the bill dark.

About two hours previously, Al Kingston telephoned to say that earlier that day while cutting trees at South Nelson, he saw a large bird being pestered by crows.

His description of this bird matched that of an immature bald eagle, so presumeably this was the same bird as that seen on Radio Street which Stephanie Donovan reported.

Four years

A bald eagle requires four years to develop the full white head and tail, these parts becoming progressively whiter during this time.

The bird we were watching was probably born last spring.

The average age to which a bald eagle lives is probably not known, but Terres does give the ages of a few, the oldest one being still alive at age 48.

On May 16, while out at Point aux Carr, Wayne Taylor said he had seen a bald eagle there about two weeks earlier.

As we talked, three ospreys coasted on the breeze above our heads.

New York State's program of bringing young bald eagles from Alaska and transplanting them in the east, shows signs of success.

An article in the Rochester, N.Y. "Democrat and Chronicle" (courtesy Desmond Dolan) says the number of bald eagles in wintering in New York State has risen from 41 to 84--the greatest increase being along that stretch of the St. Lawrence River that separates New York State from Ontario.

Here, the wintering population has risen from four to 23.

Although there are only three known nesting pairs in the state, this is up from only one pair known to nest there in the 1960s.

About the loon

The following letter is addressed to the Miramichi Naturalist Club, but there may be other readers as well who



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might be able to supply some of the information requested.

The letter reads,--

"I am conducting research on the common loon and would like to ask for the assistance of your naturalist club.

"The Common Loon is a bird that we often take for granted--it's always there.

"Yet we have little past or present information on its life history and reproductive success in the province.

"There has been concern over the declines of some populations of breeding loons, particularly those in the north-eastern United States.

"Much of this has been attributed to human disturbances especially in the form of recreational lakes use and lake-side development.

"Lake and reservoir water level fluctuations, the indirect effect of acid rain and water pollution (pesticides/heavy metal contamination) have all been implicated in reduced loon abundance and reproductive success.

"This year I will be collecting information on this bird to determine its current status in New Brunswick. The World Wildlife Fund (Canada) is lending financial support.

"Would it be possible for your club members to check their logs, notes and memories for past data on loon numbers and nestings? Specifically I require:

- number of loons seen by waterway, month and year,

- number of loon nests seen by waterway, month and year,

- number of breeding pairs with number of young by waterway, month and year, and

- any information on nest destruction or loon mortality.

"Additionally if your members would keep this project in mind during the upcoming field season, I need similar information for 1987.

"Thanks for your consideration and help.

Sincerely,

Rudy Stoczek, Program Director, Fish and Wildlife Management, Maritime Forest Ranger School, RR. No. 5, Fredericton, N.B. E3B 4X6.

"P.S. My Bald Eagle research continues; any reports of old or new nests in New Brunswick would be appreciated."

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Birds return

The leaves unfurl, the hordes of insects emerge and the insect-eating birds return.

These three events coincide for obvious reasons.

The seed eaters, the scavengers, the birds of prey, and the waterfowl have all returned earlier--their return corresponding more or less to the disappearance of snow and ice.

One of the last seed-eaters to return was the white-crowned Sparrow.

Three of them were reported on May 11 by John MacKenzie of Bushville.

They were eating the grass seed he had just planted.

These handsome sparrows stay with us for only a brief period during migration.

They may be quite plentiful for a day or two, then they are gone.

They nest farther north from Labrador to Alaska.

During spring migration, the males do much singing and their distinctive song is likely to attract attention.

During fall migration, they are silent and so they are more likely to pass through unnoticed.

Like other sparrows, the white-crowned is not strictly a seed eater for it, like the others, feeds on insects to a considerable extent as well.

But, seeds constitute the bulk of its diet.

Chimney swift

One of the strictly insect-eating birds that has recently returned is the chimney swift.

Its rattling voice was first heard on the evening of May 21. It, as usual, was flying high above town, clear of all obstructions such as buildings, trees, and wires.

Its rattling call, high flight, peculiar shape and strange wing beat all combine to make the chimney swift easily identifiable.

Once known, it cannot be confused with any other bird--at least none that is native to our area.

The chimney swift is dark in color, and someone has very aptly described it as looking like a flying cigar.

When seen in flight, its body is rounded at both ends, and its wings are long and pointed.

Its wings also curve backwards like the blade of a sickle--this may be a slight exaggeration, but I can think of no better description.

Some observers have gained the impression the Chimney Swift was beating its wings alternately rather than in unison.

This is not true, but at times it may appear to be the case.

When seen, chimney swifts are invariably in flight, for they never alight on the ground, nor even in a tree, nor on a wire.

When entering a chimney, they do not land on the rim, but drop directly into it, then cling to the vertical sides like a bat.

Even the twigs gathered for nesting material are reportedly broken off while the bird



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hovers in flight. These are glued to the inside chimney walls using the bird's saliva.

The chimney swift originally nested in hollow trees and rock crevices, but very few do so now.

Most nest in chimneys while a few use old buildings or attics.

A prospector once told me he found them nesting in an old, abandoned mine shaft.

The chimney swift is sometimes called the chimney swallow, but it is not a swallow, nor is it closely related to them.

When they roost for the night, chimney swifts enter a chimney and then cling to the vertical walls.

Ton de Joode and Anthonie Stolk, in an article in Blair and Ketchum's "Country Journal", say, that before entering the chimney, they may circle it for as long as an hour.

They report that one observer in Pennsylvania saw 10,000 swifts enter one huge factory chimney; in which, they then roosted in overlapping rows.

Closer to home

Coming closer to home: in a recent issue of the New Brunswick Naturalist, Peter Pearce reported seeing a large flock of chimney swifts at Fredericton last spring.

He estimated that 2,200 of them entered a chimney at the Maritimes Research Centre, on the U.N.B. Campus.

In summer, Chimney Swifts are often seen flying above Newcastle and, at times, they may be seen anywhere in our area.

They are likely to be seen in twos or threes--not in the large numbers reported above. Such flocks are seen only during migration.

Some years ago, Martin Busse brought a Chimney Swift to our house.

It had come down the chimney and had gotten trapped inside the Busse's house.

We placed it on the brickwork of our fireplace, and our son, Lyle, took its picture.

Then we released it outside. The bird fully co-operated in getting its picture taken--no doubt exhausted.

The picture was sent to Austin Squires who included it in the 1976 edition of his book "The Birds of New Brunswick."

As a result, Lyle was given an autographed copy of his book.

Domestic cat saved from coyotes

From Upper McKinleyville comes an account of how a domestic cat was saved from the jaws of two prowling coyotes.

On the evening of May 26, Ruby Walsh was seated on her front steps when the neighbour's cat raced by.

She then saw that two coyotes were in hot pursuit of it--one following on its tail, the other circling around in front of it.

Ruby says she barked like a dog and the two coyotes froze. She barked again and they took off into the bush.

These coyotes were described as being creamy tan in color.

According to wildlife officials, New Brunswick's coyotes vary greatly in color--more so than in other parts of its range.

There have been reports, that in some western U.S. cities, coyotes have been taking pets right off city streets--the coyotes living in ravines and other undeveloped areas by day, then roaming nearby streets at night.

Whip-poor-wills

The whip-poor-wills are back. We have two reports of them.

On the evening of May 27, Douglas Underhill of Douglas-town reported hearing one. This was the first time that he had heard it this spring.

When he phoned, my wife took the call and she said she could hear it over the telephone. The following night it was calling again.

Doug has been reporting Whip-poor-wills at his place for several years now.

The second report comes from Eldon Rogers of Tyrrell's Point Road (between Chatham and Loggieville.)

His report came on May 30, but he said the Whip-poor-will was first heard about 1 1/2 to two weeks earlier.

He said each summer ever since he moved into his present home (1979) he has been hearing whip-poor-wills.

Dolan's letter

Last week, when I delivered my article to the "Leader" office, a letter was awaiting me there. It was from Desmond Dolan.

It contained a number of newspaper clippings, among which, was a story about the Vaux's swift.

As it so happened, the article I had just written was about the chimney swift--a species almost indistinguishable from the Vaux's swift.

The Vaux's swift lives only in western North America, the chimney swift only in the East.

Unlike the chimney swift, the Vaux's swift usually nests in a hollow tree; but, it will also use a chimney.

It is found mostly in forested areas, but during migration can be found elsewhere.

The article, published in the



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"Los Angeles Times", said that during migration, 2,000 Vaux's swifts came down the chimney of a private residence in Sylmar, California.

The swifts did not stop in the chimney, however. They emerged through the fireplace, flew up onto the walls, and clung there in typical swift fashion.

Thus roosted, they apparently were intent upon spending the night there.

The householders had other ideas. They called for the assistance of city workers to remove them.

First attempts were not entirely successful for some of the birds, upon being carried outside, simply returned by re-entering the chimney.

After this, the birds were packed in boxes and trash cans and taken some distance away before being released.

Housewife Wendy Glover said, that with all the bird droppings, it would take her a week to clean up the mess. A wire mesh was placed over the chimney the next day.

The Glover's parrot is said to have acted quite normal during this episode. It kept telling everyone to "shut up".

The article indicates this is not a usual habit of the Vaux's swift, but rather, a "once-in-a-lifetime" event.

Sunbury workshops

Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre will be conducting a variety of workshops during the summer months. They have programs for children and adults alike and they are very economical.

Here are the titles of some of the workshops--Between the Tides; Wind, Eaves, and Sailing Ships; Snakes, Frogs, Toads, and Tracks; Songs and Flowers; In an Octopus's Garden; A Tale of a Whale; Camp Scuba; Birds, Birds, Birds; Astronomy; Identifying and Cooking the Wild Mushroom; Insects of Southern N.B.

There are also courses in drawing, painting and acting.

If you are interested, I can give you some further details, or you can write to--

Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre, P.O. Box 100, 139 Water Street, St. Andrews, N.B., E0G 2X0. Telephone (506) 529-3386.

Several exotic birds are spotted

We have an array of exotic birds to report — a green-backed heron, pileated woodpecker, northern mockingbird and scarlet tanager.

Earlene Hunter, my wife, Winnie, and myself saw the green-backed heron. It was seen during an early morning walk at Earlene's place in Sunny Corner on June 3.

We were down on the river flats below Earlene's house when Winnie spotted it. It was perched in an old dead elm.

Looking into the sun, which was shining brightly, we could see only the bird's silhouette — none of its colors or markings.

From this, we could tell it was a small heron or bittern of some kind, but one having a very short neck.

I circled around to get the sun on it, but it took off.

It flew to another dead tree leaving a swamp and a tangle of underbrush between us and it.

Thus situated, it was difficult to approach, but now the sun was shining on it. With the aid of our binoculars, we could now see its colors. It was darker than most herons — slate grey-blue on the back, rust-colored throat, dark bill, and bright orange or reddish legs.

After making these observations, the bird flew again — this time crossing the river. By following it in our binoculars, we were able to see that it landed in still another dead tree — this one situated between the Red Bank United Church and Schenkel's barn.

From its size, shape, color, and habit of perching in trees, we were able to identify it as a green-backed heron.

This species formerly went by the shorter name of green heron. Why its name was changed, I do not know.

The books confirm that it is more blue than green despite these names. Unlike other herons, it generally nests singly, rather than in colonies.

Other occasions

Earlene has since informed me that another Sunny Corner birdwatcher, Jane Mullin, saw this bird on a number of occasions last summer, and also saw what she thought was an immature one.

I have never before had any reports of this species in the Miramichi area, but it comes regularly to the Red Head marsh to the east of Saint John.

Sunny Corner is getting more than its share of unusual birds, for on June 7 one of Ear-



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lene's neighbours, Sherman Sherrard, telephoned and reported a mockingbird.

Perched high on the top of a tall spruce tree, it had poured forth a volley of song that was long, loud and impressive.

It had imitated the songs and calls of robins, blue jays, and many other birds — the songs following one another in quick and easy succession.

During this concert, the bird made frequent leaps into the air, apparently catching flies; or perhaps this was just a further manifestation of the same exuberance that was evident in its song.

Like gray jay

As Sherman described it, the Mockingbird looked much like a gray jay, but it was of a paler gray color, and it had white markings on its wings and tail.

It is the Mockingbird's song, rather than its grab, that is likely to attract attention.

Sherman also reported a scarlet tanager — the only one reported this spring. It was back in the bush somewhere.

Usually, during their spring migration in late May and early June, a number of reports of scarlet tanagers are received.

The male scarlet tanager, in its breeding plumage, has jet black wings and tail. Otherwise, it is a flaming red all over.

Blyn McLenaghan of Napan has had a pileated woodpecker coming to a tree near her place.

It has been making some alterations to an old dead elm, gouging out huge holes and turning the wood into chips — some of the chips being surprisingly large to have been made by a woodpecker.

The pileated is much larger than any of our other woodpeckers, being about the size of a crow. It looks like "Woody the Woodpecker", has a big red crest, and a sharply contrasting black and white body.

More Mockingbirds reported in area

After the Mockingbird was reported at Sunny Corner last week, others began showing up elsewhere.

On the morning of June 13, while running our annual breeding bird survey, Winnie and I saw two mockingbirds in the Gray Rapids area — the two birds being separated from one another by a distance of about 1 1/2 miles. On the same date Marion Kethro reported one at Oak Point.

Also, Gladys MacLean reported that two of her neighbours, Mrs. Marie MacDonald and Mrs. Lorne Hare, each saw a mockingbird at their places in Whitneyville recently.

Mrs. Hare also saw a bluebird — a bird that is ever rarer in our area than is the mockingbird.

The bluebird, like the robin, is a member of the thrush family. It is not much bigger than a sparrow.

The male has a rusty breast and a white belly, but is otherwise a uniform shade of blue all over.

The female is considerably duller, having some brown inter-mixed with the blue.

Gladys MacLean reported seeing a brown duck leading a brood of eight little ducklings across the highway at her place — the duck family evidently headed for the river.

Ducks sometimes nest far from water, and after hatching, the mother duck is then forced to lead her newborn offspring on a long and hazardous trek to the nearest water.

Another tanager

Last week, I reported that the scarlet tanager seen by Sherman Sherrard of Sunny Corner was the only one reported this year.

Since then, Jean Behrens phoned to say she had seen one here in Newcastle early in June.

Young grackle

Wilson Treadwell of Newcastle says, when his son, Edwin, was a boy, he once brought home a young grackle that was just learning to fly.

He put it in a cage and hung it in a tree in their yard. Very shortly, an adult grackle was seen to stop at the cage, then fly away.

Soon a great flock of grackles, at least 50 of them, were congregated about the cage and creating an awful racket.

The young grackle was then released. It flew into some nearby bushes and was followed by all the rest.

Wilson says it appeared as though the first grackle to find the fledgling in the cage went and told all the other grackles in the neighbourhood.

Tree swallows

Les James of Newcastle reports, that in his yard last year, three adult tree swallows seem to have occupied one very small bird house.

However, before the young fledged, all three adult birds



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abandoned the house and disappeared.

Les then opened the bird house and found eight young birds, all dead, in the nest.

He surmises that one male bird had two mates and both of the females laid their eggs in the same nest.

He further concludes the nest was too crowded. Some of the young smothered, and this in turn led to the death of the others.

According to Hal H. Harrison, the tree swallow lays from four to six eggs, so Les is probably right in presuming this was indeed a triangular arrangement.

It is the first such case to ever come to my attention, but Harrison describes a similar one.

He says the two females took turns in incubating the eggs and they successfully hatched eight young.

He does not tell us what the final outcome was, so we can probably assume the young birds were also fledged.

Shared nests

Terres tells of a number of cases of shared nests, the strangest one being shared by a pair of robins and a pair of purple finches.

In this case, after the eggs had hatched, all of the young purple finches were smothered by the larger robins.

However, even after this had happened, the pair of purple finches continued to help in feeding the young robins.

These young robins must have received a somewhat different and more varied diet than most other young robins receive.

Starlings

Gerald Lloyd of Hardwicke says, that for the last few years, starlings have nested in the street light in front of his house, and they also nest in the other street lights around there.

These street lights have a hole at the back of them through which the birds enter.

The nest is placed in the metal enclosure between this hole and the glass globe. (Some nesting material can be seen inside the globe of the one in front of Mr. Lloyd's house.)

He suggests the starlings like the heat from the light.

I would have thought that they would find the light disturbing — having it on all night long.

Mourning Doves spotted in Miramichi area

A bird, which in recent years, has generated much interest among Miramichiers is the Mourning Dove.

A few years ago, it was practically unknown here, but now it is increasingly being reported throughout our region.

Although these reports are received year round, an extra flurry of them come in the early spring.

This year, on March 27, Louis Sippley reported one in Baie Ste. Anne.

Two days later, Dick Somers reported two in Ferry Road and the following day Kathy Robichaud reported two in Neguac.

More recently, Mary O'Shea reported one in Newcastle while Winnie and I saw one on the Warwick Road and one near Loggieville.

Bobby Hutchison saw one on the McKinnon Road and Louis Sippley again called to say that he now has two Mourning Doves—a male and a female—showing up at his place in Baie Ste. Anne.

Further, he says his father saw one of them carrying nesting material.

According to Hal H. Harrison, the Mourning Dove normally lays only two eggs to a clutch but it raises more than one brood per year.

In one case in Michigan, he says, during one summer, four broods of Mourning Doves were raised in the same nest.

The Mourning Dove is smaller than the Rock Dove, or common pigeon, and differently colored. Also, unlike the Rock Dove, the Mourning Dove has a long, pointed tail.

Despite these differences, the Mourning Dove's shape and bearing are such that it is readily recognizable as a dove or pigeon of some kind—it looks like a long, slim, brownish-colored pigeon.

When the Mourning Dove flies, some white shows on the edges of its tail feathers.

Mature birds have a few black flecks on the back and one small black patch below the ear. Males have longer tails than the females.

Mourning Doves frequently perch on hydro or telephone wires and when they take off, their wings make a very noticeable whistling sound.

They fly in a direct line and very fast.

Their name comes from the mournful, cooing sound they make.



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The Mourning Dove is the closest living relative of the now-extinct Passenger Pigeon, whose immense flocks were one of the wonders of America when the early European settlers first arrived here.

According to history, some of these immense flocks could be seen right here on the Miramichi. This would be about two hundred years ago.

The last record of a Passenger Pigeon in New Brunswick was in 1899 when one was shot at Scotch Lake (see Squires).

The Passenger Pigeon looked very much like the Mourning Dove, only it was larger.

Unlike the Mourning Dove, which nests singly, the Passenger Pigeon nested in huge colonies—an important factor in contributing to its demise.

On June 16, a call was received from Bartibog inquiring about the possibility of seeing a Long-billed Dowitcher here in these parts.

The Long-billed Dowitcher has been recorded in New Brunswick, but only rarely. It is a western species.

However, the Short-billed Dowitcher, which is difficult to separate from it, is a fairly common migrant here.

Both species nest in the far north and are seen in most settled parts in Canada, only during migration.

The name Short-billed Dowitcher is misleading for it has an exceedingly long bill and the name was given to it simply because its bill is, on average, slightly shorter than that of the Long-billed Dowitcher.

Both of these Dowitchers resemble the Common Snipe except that in their spring plumage they have rusty breasts. In late summer and fall, they have plain gray breasts.

Whereas the Common Snipe feeds in wet meadows and mar-

shes, dowitchers feed on soft, bare, mud-flats.

Here, they can be seen probing the soft mud with their long bills.

On the Miramichi, Dowitchers are commonly seen in late July and early August, at which time they are already on their southward migration and they are already in their gray

fall plumage.

Saturday, July 4, has been proclaimed as Bird Atlas Day.

If you are interested in identifying song birds, we will meet at the junction of the Rennie Road and the McKinnon Road, back of Douglastown, at 6:00 a.m. We will return there again at 7:30 a.m. to pick up late sleepers.

Fancy woodpecker spotted at back door

The following letter is from a former Miramichier—Molly Loggie Du Chene. She now lives in Ville St. Laurent, P.Q. An earlier letter from her appeared in this column about two months ago (May 1). She now writes,—

Dear Mr Walker,
Greetings!

Not long ago, I wrote you about some of our Bird Sightings from a second-storey window. It was fun being accredited a "Bird Watcher"; so, flushed with success, I report on THREE hitherto unseen from this post.

April 20—afternoon—spotted movement down in hedge; mostly dullish gray—couldn't make "head or tail" of him until he most obligingly alit on the bare ground at the foot of the hedge. Then, I saw a squarish tail which looked to be accordion-pleated. Rush to Mr Godfrey! An olive-sided Flycatcher! Fancy that!

April 23—9 a.m.—Husband announces a VERY fancy Woodpecker in Willow at back door. "Oh yes, isn't he fancy! But he's not pecking. Nor flitting. Just resting, I guess."

He was on the open part of the tree and the horizontal morning rays of the sun

showed up his scarlet head and throat in fluorescence. THEN, he BACKED UP (down)! Not right, left, right, but keeping both feet together, he took a little 3-inch hop downwards (backwards) without moving a feather.

When he moved to the back of the trunk, I consulted Mr Godfrey for "which Woodpecker?" You know already, don't you! He was a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker!!

Well glory be!

In the Audubon Nature Encyclopedia (a set of 12 little books) there is an illustration of a tree trunk perforated with a ring of holes around the bole (sometimes they are vertical). The parents carry sap in their bills to the baby bairds until they are large enough to be weaned onto insects. Isn't that delightful?

I would presume that the Indians learned from these birds how to tap trees for sap; then the colonizers learned from the Indians how to make Maple Sugar.

May 12—A Blue Jay in the magic Willow Tree! While not a Rara Avis, we had never had one before in our sighting area.

I find it amazing that these little creatures come to call on



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us. Could it be that birds are secret "People Watchers"?

Signed—Molly Loggie Du Chene

All three birds mentioned in Molly's letter can be seen here on the Miramichi.

The first one, the Olive-sided Flycatcher is generally found in remote areas, very seldom showing up in town. The one Molly saw was undoubtedly in migration, for during migration, birds often stop in places where they would not normally be found.

The Olive-sided Flycatcher likes to perch in dead trees—

ones having few branches. These can be found around beaver dams, where trees have been killed by flooding; or, in recently burnt over areas. These are favourite haunts of this bird.

It is also found in recently cut-over areas, provided the area has now been clear-cut. Some scattered trees are needed for perches.

The Olive-sided Flycatcher is easily recognized from its call which is loud and clear. When in suitable habitat, listen for it—"Quick-Right Here"—it is unmistakable.

At a distance you may not be able to hear the "Quick"—the "Right Here" being louder, clearer, and carrying farther than the "Quick".

Another of its calls is "Quick-Quick"—the two "Quicks" coming in quick succession.

Remember the bird hike tomorrow, Saturday, July 4, weather permitting. Anyone interested in bird identification is welcome. We will meet near the junction of the Rennie Road and the MacKinnon Road back of Douglastown at 6:00 a.m. We will return again to this starting point at 7:30 a.m. to pick up the late-comers.

Black ducks seem to love chimneys

Black Ducks possess a strange predilection to examine the inside of chimneys.

The latest examples of this occurred at Doug and Margaret Chase's camp on the Northwest.

Steve Savoie was cutting the grass around the camp when he heard something banging on one of the windows.

Examination revealed that the cause of this was a Black Duck trapped inside. With the aid of a fish landing net, it was captured and released outside.

At first Doug and Steve were puzzled as to how the duck managed to get into the camp, but then they saw that the screen in front of the Franklin stove had been knocked over.

Furthermore, there were tracks in the ashes and feathers stuck in the stove-pipe leading into the stove.

How long the duck had been trapped inside the camp is unknown.

But in any case, it was still lively enough as to be difficult to catch and it flew away promptly when released outside.

Apparently, this is not the first time this has happened at this camp. A previous owner found a dead duck in one of the beds in the camp some years ago.

Others

Earlier reports of such antics by Black Ducks:

In Strathadam, shortly after

their house was built, Margaret Russell heard a rustling noise in the chimney.

When her husband Keith returned from work, he decided to investigate. He opened the damper above the fireplace and a duck's foot appeared. The duck was extracted and released unharmed.

In Whitneyville, on Sunday morning, June 11, 1978, Hubert Sherrard was standing in his living room looking out over the river when he heard a scraping noise in the chimney.

He turned around and saw a Black Duck plop down into the ashes of the fireplace.

The duck started to fly, but slammed into a wall.

The patio doors were opened and the duck made its exit, but not before it had roughed up one of Laura's choice house plants and had left soot marks here and there about the room.

Up on the Tobique, Black Ducks have been known to pull this same stunt.

Bill Miller of Nictou reported that a Black Duck came down a chimney there. It too came out into the room below.

What makes these ducks come down chimneys?

The Black Duck normally nests on the ground, but occasionally picks other sites, including the old nests of crows or hawks, the fork in a tree, or a hole in a tree.

Since the two instances above, for which I have dates, are in the nesting season (Mar-



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garet Chase reported the first incident on June 22); it seems they are looking for nest sites, rather than trying to escape from hunters.

Rare neighbor

About five years ago, Robert Lisk of Ferry Road made a bird house from a section of a hollow cedar log. He was hoping to attract a woodpecker.

Instead, he got something much rarer in these parts--a Great Crested Flycatcher.

He says that ever since he erected this house, these birds have been returning to it. They have successfully raised at least four broods of young.

The male always returns about three weeks before the female--the female returning in early June--and their reunion is always marked by loud cheers from the united pair.

This year the male returned as usual, but not the female. When Robert called June 15, he said the female should have been back by then.

The Great Crested Flycatcher is slightly smaller than the Robin.

It has a slight crest on its head, an olive-gray back, pale gray throat, yellow belly, and a rusty tinge to its tail and the outer edges of its wings.

Its loud calls can at times be heard for a quarter of a mile, and it often chases crows and hawks, like its cousin the Kingbird.

Mockingbirds

More Mockingbirds have been reported.

On June 29, David Shatford reported that one had been singing in the vicinity of Farrier's Trailer Park in Newcastle for the past four or five days.

And, out in Whitneyville, a pair built their nest in a shrub beside Ralph MacDonald's house. Unfortunately, they abandoned it after laying three eggs in it.

Early in June, James Mutch reported a Bald Eagle at Sillikers. This is further up river than most of our reports of Bald Eagles come from.

On June 18, Ruth Coughlan reported a bear in her garden in South Nelson; and, on July 4, Nancy McAllister reported a white heron near the mouth of the Napan River.

This latter sighting is probably that of a Snowy Egret.

Birds move back to burned areas

What species of bird have re-established themselves in the burned-out areas where we had forest fires last year?

To try to answer this question, a quick survey was run on the Keefe Road back of Douglas-town.

On the morning of July 6, about a half-hour stop was made at each of six different locations in the burn.

During each stop, the immediate area was scouted, and the birds seen and heard were tabulated.

Species that were widespread and plentiful were the hermit thrust, robin, common yellow-throat, junco, and white-throated sparrow.

Also noticeably present were Lincoln's sparrows, mourning warblers, and nighthawks.

All seemed to be more prevalent than elsewhere in our forests.

The area of the burn is by no means a uniform habitat.

In some parts, the scorched skeletons of burned trees still stand.

In other parts, they have been harvested, leaving no perches for birds. In some areas the new growth is taller and much more dense than in others.

There are also islands of trees which were untouched by the fire, but an effort has been made to discount birds that were associated with these.

In areas where the charred trees still stand, woodpeckers are active — especially black-backed woodpeckers (formerly called black-backed three-toed woodpeckers).

Last year, it was found that these woodpeckers moved into burned areas almost as soon as the fire was out.



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Other woodpeckers recorded in the burn were flickers - heard at three stops - and a hairy woodpecker seen at one stop.

Additional birds found were — cedar waxwings and pine siskins at two stops; and an olive-sided flycatcher, a killdeer, a raven, and a male bluebird.

Rare find

This last named species was the surprise of the survey, for it is now an extreme rarity here.

Ruth Kierstead says that she also saw a bluebird in this burn. However, when I returned a week later, July 13, I was unable to find it.

The bluebird is a little bigger than a sparrow. The male has a rusty breast and a white belly, while the rest of his plumage is a uniform, bright blue. The female is duller, having some brownish feathers mixed with the blue.

Next year, when the growth in the burn has been greater, the variety of species found there should also be greater.

While picking berries on the mine road, I came upon some domestic garbage which had been carelessly dumped in a gravel pit about five miles above Wayerton.

Garbage

Growing among the garbage were four or five potato plants apparently sprouted from potato peelings contained in the garbage.

These potatoes were in blossom, and on them were some potato bugs; or, more correctly, some larvae of the Colorado Potato Beetle.

It is marvellous, even if it is often annoying, that insects can find the plants they are after.

In this case, the closest potato patch was probably in Wayerton.

However, potato bugs will also eat at least one of our native wild plants — the Bittersweet Nightshade, and some of this plant may have been much closer.

The Bittersweet Nightshade belongs to the same family of plants as the potato and the tomato, and it has blossoms shaped just like them.

But, these blossoms are deep purple in color rather than white. The beak in the centre of the blossom is bright yellow.

Later, these flowers produce smooth, shiny berries, which are green at first, but which ripen to a bright red.

She says that at first she thought that it must be a Northern three-toed woodpecker, but its markings did not fit.

Later, she saw another hairy woodpecker feeding it; and also, she read in a book that a young hairy woodpecker sometimes has a yellow crown patch.

Where do wasps spend the winter?

Ritchie MacRae has made the observation that the papery nests of wasps are deserted during the winter.

He would like to know where the wasps spend the winter.

According to "The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animal Life", only a few mated queens survive the winter and these hibernate in such sheltered places as hollow logs, etc. The rest of the colony dies with the first severe frost.

In spring, each queen starts building a new nest.

Her first eggs develop into workers which continue this job and which also take over the duties of caring for the young.

There are many different species of paper-making wasps, and the above-mentioned encyclopedia divides these into three groups, — those that hang their nests in the open — from tree limbs, or from the eaves of buildings, etc.; those that build in sheltered places — inside hollow trees, inside the hollow walls of buildings, etc.; and those that build underground.

A colony of wasps belonging to the second group has taken over one of George Johnston's bird houses here in Newcastle.

The papery nest can be seen through the bird house entrance.

The names "hornet" and

"yellow-jacket" have been applied to certain species of paper-making wasps.

In addition to the paper-making wasps, there are also other families of wasps commonly known as mud daubers, potter wasps, etc.

Unlike bees, wasps feed primarily on other insects; but, as most of you have found out, some species like to join us at our picnics and try other taste treats as well.

Black groundhog

A groundhog that is all black, except for a small brown area around the nose, has been reported from Strathadam. It was killed by a dog there.

According to Banfield, both melanistic and albino groundhogs are not uncommon.

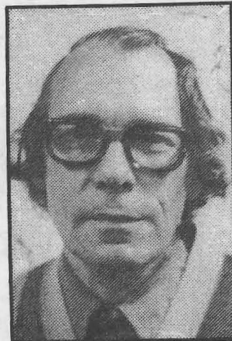
However, this melanistic one is the first of either I have ever heard of.

Killdeer

A number of people have been finding killdeer nests.

Joan Mahabir showed us one that was situated on the shoulder of a gravel road and only a few feet from one of the car tracks.

The killdeer remained on its eggs as we drove by; and, some three weeks later, it was still sitting on them.



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A check in Hal H. Harrison's book, "A Field Guide to Birds' Nests," provided the following statistics, —

A killdeer's eggs require from 24 to 26 days of incubation — twice as long as those of a robin — 12 to 14 days.

A general rule is that eggs which hatch into active young require a considerably longer period of incubation than do eggs which hatch into helpless young. (Young killdeers can run about and feed themselves as soon as they dry off after hatching)

Harrison says both male and female killdeers share in the incubation job, while in the case of the robin, the female does it all.

In a few species, such as the spotted sandpiper, the male does all, or almost all, of the incubating.

Courtney Tozer found a killdeer brooding its eggs in a gravel pit in Halcomb.

Later, when he again visited the nest, he found the eggs had been moved for a distance of two or three feet, but the birds were still incubating them. Tracks indicated a vehicle had passed close by.

It is not known whether the eggs were moved by the birds themselves, or by humans.

Both nest sites looked the same, just smooth places in the gravel where the larger pebbles had been pushed aside.

Harrison indicates that at

least one species of bird has been known to move its eggs.

He says a female pileated woodpecker was photographed carrying each of her three eggs from a nest in a stub — the nest having become exposed when the stub broke off at the nest cavity.

The eggs were carried lengthwise in her bill. Where they were taken to is not known.

Lloyd Wormell reports a brood of pheasants has been raised in the fields back of his place in Napan this year.

The cock and hen were first seen there in the spring.

The hen disappeared for a time; and when she reappeared, she had a brood of chicks with her.

Red Bank survey counts 73 kinds, 754 birds

On June 13, Winnie and I ran our 14th annual Red Bank Breeding Bird Survey.

Our survey route is 25 miles long.

It starts at the top of the lane at Boom Road and from here it runs through Sunny Corner, Red Bank, along the Warwick Road, across the bridge at Quarryville, through White Rapids, Gray Rapids and Coughlan, and ends up in the bush south of there.

Along this route at every half-mile interval, the car is stopped. For three minutes, all birds that can be identified by either sight or sound are recorded. In total, 50 such stops are made.

Counting begins at the first stop above Boom Road at exactly one-half hour before sunrise, or at two minutes before 5 o'clock.

At the beginning and the end of the survey, and at every 10th stop along the way, weather observations are made.

These include temperature, wind speed, cloud cover and precipitation, all of which can affect bird activity or the observer's ability to see or hear them.

The list that follows gives the numbers of the various species recorded during the survey — species being listed in order of decreasing abundance:—

Species recorded

Bank swallows 66, robins 58, crows 55, ovenbirds 40, starlings 38, common yellowthroats 27, red-eyed vireos 24, barn swallows 22, American redstarts 22, white-throated sparrows 21.

Chipping sparrows 21, tree swallows 20, magnolia warblers 19, common grackles 18, alder flycatchers 16, ruby-crowned kinglets 14, purple finches 13, swainson's thrushes 12.

Tennessee warblers 11, yellow-bellied flycatchers 10, veeries 10, song sparrows, 9, evening grosbeaks 9, bobolinks 8, myrtle (yellow-rumped) warblers 8, Nashville warblers 8.

White-winged crossbills 8, cedar waxwings 7, goldfinches 7, house sparrows 7, black-capped chickadees 7, double-crested cormorants (black shags) 6.



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Ravens 6, brown-headed cowbirds 6, pine siskins 6, northern waterthrushes 6, Lincoln's sparrows 6, rose-breasted grosbeaks 5, blue jays 4, least flycatchers 4.

Canada warblers 4, common flickers 3, gray catbirds 3, yellow warblers 3, parula warblers 3, red-winged blackbirds 3.

Two each of the following: belted kingfisher, red-breasted nuthatch, winter wren, hermit thrush, chestnut-sided warbler, blackburnian

warbler, mourning warbler, Baltimore oriole and northern mockingbird.

One each of the following: killdeer, common snipe, night-hawk, yellow-bellied sapsucker, hairy woodpecker, eastern wood pewee, olive-sided flycatcher, great-crested flycatcher, eastern phoebe, gray jay, solitary vireo, black-throated green warbler, bay-breasted warbler, Wilson's warbler, black and white warbler, Savannah sparrow.

In addition

In addition, 34 gulls were seen including one herring gull and one ring-billed gull. The rest were not identified as to species.

The count on bank swallows (66) is admittedly not very accurate.

One of our stops is located right beside a bank swallow colony, and with so many birds flying about in all directions it is impossible to make an accurate count of the birds here.

This is especially true under the light conditions prevailing at 5:20 a.m. — about 10 minutes before sunrise.

The 40 bank swallows estimated to have been seen at this stop is thought to be on the conservative side.

No comparable problem was encountered at any other stop or with any other species.

The list includes 73 species, and 754 individual birds — a higher than normal count.

This high count is thought to be mainly due to the excellent weather conditions prevailing at the time — very light winds, clear skies, and no early morning fog.

This is the first year we have recorded either double-crested cormorants or mockingbirds during this survey.

Double-crested cormorants have been steadily increasing in recent years, and they are increasingly being seen farther upriver.

There seems to have been an influx of mockingbirds into our area this spring.

Besides those reported earlier in this column, Mary Muzeroll reported one at her place in Douglastown on July 8.

It was still singing there a few days later. Also, a mockingbird (perhaps the same one) has been seen and heard at various locations in Nordin.

Avocet another first for the Miramichi area

An avocet, reported by Margaret Wheaton, is another first for the Miramichi.

Margaret says she and her husband, Parker, saw it at the Strawberry Marsh about April 1--it being on the mud flats near the causeway.

The Avocet is a large shore bird, having a sandpiper-like build, but with a body almost as big as a seagull. Its build and coloration make it unmistakable.

It has very long legs, a long neck, and a long bill.

This bill, in addition to being abnormally long, is abnormal in other ways as well, it being extremely slender, flattened laterally, and curved upwards--the degree of curvature varying noticeably from one individual to another.

Its head and neck are of a pale cinnamon color, its back and wings of a contrasting black and white pattern, and its underparts white.

All in all, it is an eye-catching bird, for which, even those having little interest in birds, would stop for a better look.

The avocet is a western bird normally found around alkaline sloughs in the Prairie Provinces, and in the western United States. It winters mainly in Mexico.

When seen here in the Maritimes, the avocet is far outside its usual range.

Only 10 before

W. Austin Squires, in his book "The Birds of New Brunswick" (Published 1976) lists only 10 avocets as having been known to have visited our province.

Five of these came more than 100 years ago--1880 or earlier--and all of them were shot as soon as they were found here.

In those times, that seemed to be the usual treatment



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meted out to all creatures that were new and different.

The other five came in relatively modern times--1964 to 1971. Two of these were together, the other three were lone birds.

All were seen in either the Saint John area, or in the Sackville area--none in the north. In addition, Tufts lists four records for Nova Scotia.

According to Ray and Jim Salt, the avocet uses its peculiarly-designed bill in two different ways in gathering food.

Firstly, it sweeps it back and forth through the water, apparently straining out aquatic organisms as it does so.

Secondly, it is used to probe the soft mud on the bottom of the slough for worms, etc.

On Aug. 9, John Hawkes of Bay du Vin reported seeing a bluebird in the burn back of Douglastown.

Earlier in the summer, there were two other reports of a bluebird being seen in this burn.

Therefore, it seems possible bluebirds have nested there this year.

The bluebird and the blue jay are two very different birds, but their names are often confused with one another.

The bluebird has a rusty

breast like a robin, and for this reason, it is sometimes called the blue robin. It is, however, smaller than a robin.

The male's plumage, except for the rusty breast and a white belly, is of an almost uniform blue throughout--a very beautiful and unmistakable bird.

There is no other small bird, except possibly the purple martin, that has gathered such a large and devoted support group of people--volunteers who are willing to expend time and effort to save it and to help re-establish it in areas from which it has disappeared.

Trail committees

Across the country Bluebird Trail Committees have been set up to make and maintain nesting boxes for these birds.

The boxes are set up at intervals along a trail, some of which, are hundreds of miles long.

Bluebirds like open areas, closely cropped pastures and blueberry plains being favourite nesting habitats.

Nest boxes should be set up close to the ground (on posts about three feet high) and away from buildings and trees so there is less likelihood of house sparrows and starlings driving them out.

The latest issue of "Nature Canada" tells of an interesting research project that a Dr Richard Rounds is conducting.

He has built 50 nesting boxes and has painted them in different colors, the idea being to determine which color is preferred by Bluebirds.

He has used 10 colors including a blue to match the male bluebird and a rusty color to match his breast.

So far he has results from only one nesting season. During that season, he says houses of naturally-weathered wood and those painted the rusty colour of the Bluebirds' breast have been the clear favorites.

Fly provides services

When you eat your blueberry dessert, remember to thank the black fly for it.

Why? Because it is one of the main pollinators of blueberry flowers.

In addition to this, Dan Strickland, in an article entitled "In Defence of Black Flies", lists a number of other useful services provided by these maligned little creatures.

He says their larvae, which are attached to rocks and vegetation at the bottom of streams, remove large quantities of bacteria from the water.

These larvae, in turn, become food for fish. The adults are an important food item for swallows, flycatchers, and other birds.

So, let us no longer think of the black fly as being merely a plague. It has good points as well as bad.

Strickland's article appeared some years ago in an Algonquin Provincial Park publication called "The Raven".

Hérons decrease

Stirling Burchill of South Nelson has informed me the number of great blue herons at Hay Island has decreased greatly.

He says up until two years ago one could count up to 30 of them there at low tide. They would be standing in the shallow water on either side of the causeway.

But, he says during the last two summers, a maximum of six or seven herons is all that is ever seen there, and sometimes, there is only two or three. This summer they have been even scarcer than last.

Stirling wonders if anyone else has noticed a decline in the heron population.

I cannot account for the disappearance of herons at Hay Island, However, Des Ken-



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nedy, writing in the summer 1986 issue of "Nature Canada," says great blue herons abandon established heronries, then build new ones in new locations.

He says this is sometimes caused by too much human activity in the vicinity of the heronry, but in other cases, there is no obvious reason for the birds making such a move.

I have no up-to-date information on the overall population of great blue herons.

Hoever, a report issued by the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service indicates, that during the years 1965 to 1979, their numbers increased significantly in the Northeastern United States and in New Brunswick. The highest concentrations of them were found to be in Prince Edward Island and in the State of Florida. The only state showing a significant decrease was Illinois.

This same report says the two areas of greatest abundance for the evening grosbeak were New Brunswick and the part of the Cascade Mountains running from Oregon to British Columbia.

Penny Creamer reports a second golden-crowned hairy woodpecker appeared at her

place in Lower Derby.

She reported the first one about a month ago. It was being fed by a male hairy woodpecker wearing a normal red crown patch.

Now, she has witnessed this same thing again, but this time it must be another young bird that is being fed, the earlier one having by now graduated from needing such parental care.

In "Birds of Canada", Godfrey says young hairy woodpeckers, not long out of the nest, often show reddish or yellowish spots on the crown, but young males do not have red on the nape.

Pine warbler

The pine warbler is not normally found here in New Brunswick. The northern limit of its breeding range reaches only into southern Maine.

However, wanderers of this species are occasionally reported in this province; on July 25, Earlene Hunter of Sunny Corner reported one of them had flown into a window of her house and had killed itself.

She also said a day or two earlier one of them had flown into the same window but had recovered.

To my knowledge, the only other record of a pine warbler on the Miramichi was one reported by Jeep Bosma on Dec. 17, 1983, the day of our Christmas Bird Count that year.

We later learned there had been a sudden and unexplained incursion of these warblers into the province at that time.

The pine warbler is a little smaller than a sparrow. It has an olive-green back, yellow-throat and breast, and two white wing bars.

Another black groundhog has been reported. This one was seen at East Point by Mr. and Mrs. Stirling Burchill.

Carey's Chickens stray from home

This spring, some of Mother Carey's chickens strayed far from their ocean home.

Two or three of them turned up at Millbank where Bill Currie saw them while tending the fisheries research station there.

Bill says this is the first time he has seen any of these birds for about 20 years.

Before that, they were occasionally seen as far up river as Millbank, but never in numbers of more than about half a dozen.

He says they are about the size of a Robin. Although they look as though they should be land birds, they are really sea birds. They land on the water or fly about near the surface.

According to Terres, all members of the storm petrel family are referred to as Mother Carey's Chickens.

Family members

Terres describes the various members of the family as ranging from sparrow size to robin size.

He says any small, black bird having a white rump patch, and seen hovering near the surface of the ocean far out at sea is a storm petrel.

The Latin name for this family "hydrobatidae" can be translated as "water treaders". They usually travel in scattered flocks, but they may be seen singly.

Although there are 22 species of storm petrel worldwide, only two are found along New Brunswick's coasts.

These are the Leach's storm petrel and the Wilson's storm petrel. The former is the same species that Ryan Green calls "George's chickens" (reported in an earlier article).

I have never seen either of these species so must rely entirely on my books.

Differences

For the benefit of sailors and fishermen, here are the differences in the two species.--

The Leach's storm petrel is eight inches long, has a forked tail, and has dark webs on its feet.

The Wilson's storm petrel is smaller, seven inches long, has a square tail, and has yellow webs on its feet.

Both have generally dark bodies, but the tone is more brownish in the case of the Leach's.

The two species are also said to fly differently--the Leach's flying erratically like a bat, the Wilson's smoothly like a swallow.

Like other members of the family, both species have the white rump patch, rather long, slender legs, and a short neck--like a songbird.



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Although the two species are closely related and look very much alike, their life histories contrast markedly.

The Leach's Storm Petrel stays in the North Atlantic year round.

It nests on islands from southern Labrador to Massachusetts (also on islands in the Pacific).

In winter, it expands its range southward to as far as the equator or somewhat beyond.

The Wilson's storm petrel nests on islands in the Antarctic Ocean and off the tip of South America. This nesting is done during our winter.

It then comes north to our shores only as a summer tourist with no family ties.

Terres says some ornithologists believe this species to be the most plentiful bird in the world.

After nesting, it ranges over most of the oceans of the world.

Like other sea birds, storm petrels mature slowly and have a low rate of reproduction, but they live long lives.

Striking contrast

The following figures show a striking contrast between the Leach's storm petrel--a sea bird; and a similarly sized land bird--the Robin.

■ Number of eggs laid: Leach's Storm Petrel 1, Robin 4 (average).

■ Number of broods per year: Leach's Storm Petrel 1, Robin 2 (sometimes 3).

■ Incubation Period: Leach's Storm Petrel 41 to 42 days, Robin 12 to 14 days.

■ Days from hatching to leaving nest: Leach's Storm Petrel 63 to 75 days, Robin 14 to 16 days.

■ Age at which they first breed: Leach's Storm Petrel 2 years at least, Robin 1 year.

■ Ages: Not much data is available, but the Leach's storm petrel has been known to live to 24 years, the robin to 17.

Over 100 whoopers reach wintering ground

The following article is reprinted by permission from Canadian Nature Federation Almanac,--

Whooping it up!

Ernie Kuyt, a Canadian Wildlife Service biologist, was the only non-American among the 25 recipients of the 1987 Chevron Corporation Award.

Named for his work in the study and protection of the endangered North American whooping crane, the Edmonton native has had a momentous year.

As a decades-long friend of the whooping crane, Kuyt was elated this past winter when at least 110 of the birds reached the Aransas Refuge northeast of Corpus Christi.

It was the first time over 100 whoopers reached the Texas wintering ground, a very encouraging sign that Kuyt admitted had him gloating a little.

Kuyt was part of a small team that banded 18 chicks in Wood Buffalo National Park last summer, and located two others.

"To our great joy," he said, "17 of the 18 chicks we banded as well as the two unbanded chicks arrived at Aransas.

"They were joined by a

third, unbanded chick" making a total of 20 chicks that arrived safely at the refuge, another record.

Kuyt was not surprised that the last, lost banded chick had not made it.

"It was, by far, the smallest chick banded in August."

But in January Kuyt received "incredible news". The missing chick had been seen with a flock of 250 sandhill cranes in Oklahoma.

When Kuyt speculated on the outstanding survival rate in 1986, he cited a number of reasons: good numbers of breeding pairs; an increase in production in 1975, 1977 and 1978; and excellent habitat in the last three years.

But he also described a method whereby biologists lent Mother Nature a hand—a method of testing the viability of eggs left in the nest.

"We did this by the simple method of floating eggs in a container of luke-warm water. The egg (if alive at the time of pick up) showed rocking or rotational movements when suspended in the water."

Twenty-three of 26 eggs left in their original nests hatched. Twenty-one chicks survived, a number that Kuyt said was "fabulous".

Some background informa-



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tion will help explain some points brought out in the preceding article,--

Whooping cranes normally lay two eggs, but usually only one of the hatched chicks survives.

Therefore, in order to increase production, Kuyt and other biologists have, in recent years, been removing one of the eggs from each nest, and have been placing these collected eggs in either incubators or in sandhill crane nests.

Chicks hatched from the eggs placed in incubators are raised in captivity--the plan being to build up a captive

population that will be used to produce chicks which can be released into the wild--thus augmenting the wild population.

Sandhill cranes

Eggs placed in sandhill crane nests are placed there only after the sandhill crane's own eggs have been removed.

The sandhills then raise the young whoopers as though they were their own offspring.

The sandhill cranes being used for this purpose nest in an area far removed from that of the present whooping crane population. They also overwinter in a different area.

It is hoped, that by raising whoopers in this way, two entirely separate whooping crane populations can be built up--populations whose paths will not cross.

The reasoning is that if some natural disaster should befall one population, then the other would be unaffected.

In other words, biologists are playing it safe. They don't want to have all their whooping crane eggs in one basket.

Whooping cranes do not reach maturity for several years; and, when Kuyt mentions the increased production of chicks in the years 1975, 1977, and 1978, as one of the reasons for last year's success,

he seems to be implying these chicks are now old enough to mate and rear young themselves.

In small area

The entire breeding population of whooping cranes now nest in a small area in Wood Buffalo Park in the Northwest Territories. It winters in the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas Coast.

The whooping crane has been teetering on the brink of extinction for many years now. Its lowest point was reached in 1941 when only 15 of them remained. Originally, it had a very extensive range covering much of western North America.

Neither the whooper, nor any other species of crane was ever native to New Brunswick; but the great blue heron, which is native here, is often incorrectly called a crane.

Cranes and herons are similar in build and appearance; but cranes fly with their necks straight out, herons with their necks doubled back in the form of an S.

The whooping crane is larger than the great blue heron and is the tallest Canadian bird.

It is mainly white in color, with black wing tips and a bare, red face.

Mystery bird is the flicker

Through the years, I have received a number of calls from people asking the same question.

They have seen a bird foraging on their lawn and they would like to know the identity of it.

Their description of the bird goes something like this: it is colored like a partridge, but it is smaller—about the size of a robin.

It has a red crescent on the back of its head and has a black patch across a pale speckled breast.

It is always about this same time of year—after the nesting season is over—that I receive such a call.

What these people are seeing is the common flicker or what in older books is called the yellow-shafted flicker.

This bird is a species of woodpecker, but when seen probing the lawn for food it is acting in a very unwoodpecker-like-fashion.

This is the only woodpecker that acts in this way.

It has even been known to nest on the ground, but this is rare.

It, like other woodpeckers, also forages on trees and, like them, is often seen working its way up the side of a hydro or telephone pole. Ants are the mainstay of its diet.

Differs in flights

The flicker when in flight looks very different than it does when at rest.

When in flight, a large white rump patch is very much in evidence, as is also the bright, yellow undersides of its wings.

When it alights, the white rump patch is covered by the wings and, of course, the undersides of the wings are not visible.

As a boy, when learning to identify birds, I remember the flicker, when seen in flight, had me puzzled for some time.

I recognized it when at rest, but failed to recognize it when in flight. In flight, it looked like an entirely different species.

Actually, once one is familiar with it, the flicker is one of the easiest birds to identify in flight.

The most common call of the flicker is a quickly repeated wick-wick-wick, etc.

This call is easily distinguishable from all other bird calls except for a similar one given by the pileated woodpecker—cuck-cuck-cuck...

One reason we are more likely to notice this species at this time of year than at others, is this:

When it nests

During the nesting season, the flicker forages near its nest which is excavated in a large dead tree or placed in a hollow fence post.

Most of us do not leave large dead trees standing in our yard, nor do we provide other suitable nesting sites for the flicker.

Also, any flickers that do try nesting near our homes are often driven away by starlings-



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even though the starling is considerably smaller in size.

As a result, during the nesting season, flickers tend to stay in more remote locations. But, once the nesting season is over, they may be seen elsewhere—our lawns, for instance.

The cluster fly

The cluster fly: most housewives know this insect, but probably not by this name.

It looks like a house fly, but its habits are different.

It does not appear in our homes until late summer or fall when it crawls through cracks around windows etc. in search of a place to hibernate for the winter.

An informative article on this insect, written by freelance science writer Lorraine Brown, is contained in the August-September issue of "Century Home" magazine.

She says there are three or four generations of these flies each summer, but it is only the last generation that tries to gain entrance into our homes. This happens when the nights start to get cold.

These slow-moving flies often get trapped between the storm windows and the inside windows. Here they often die.

They also commonly enter attics and congregate there.

Their habit of sometimes gathering together in clusters on walls or window frames gives them their name.

Those that get right inside our homes may be roused from their lethargy by the heat there.

In winter, when this happens, they may buzz around lights continually bumping into the light shade.

Fortunately, they are not attracted to our food as are house flies.

Brown describes their life cycle. She says they are parasitic or earthworms.

The female lays her eggs in the soil. When these hatch, the maggots find earthworms and enter them.

They feed on these for two or three weeks, killing the earthworms in the process, then turn into pupas in the soil.

From these emerge the adult cluster flies, and the cycle repeats itself.

Brown's suggested means of defense against these flies include sealing all cracks, putting screens on attic vents, vacuuming up those that get in, hanging insect strips or ultraviolet bug-zappers in attics.

Unusual numbers of American kestrels have been spotted

An unusually large concentration of American kestrels (sparrow hawks) was reported by Reg Bowes.

He says on two different occasions during the same day (about Aug. 28) he counted a total of 18 of these birds near his home in Strathadam.

They formed a loose flock that was scattered over about 40 acres, most of them perched on hydro wires, others on trees, etc.



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Reg also reported seeing a large flock of nighthawks, or mosquito hawks—about 50 of them—on the outskirts of Newcastle.

They were high in the sky, diving and flying in all directions as though catching flies.

This sighting was also in late August.

Presumably both the kestrels and the nighthawks were in migration. This is rather early for kestrels, but right on schedule for nighthawks—at least according to the information I have on the subject.

Smallest hawk

The American kestrel is our smallest hawk, it being little bigger than a robin.

More specifically it is a falcon, having the typical falcon build—long, pointed wings and a rather long tail.

Both male and female have a rusty back and tail. Whereas the male's wings are blue-gray on top, the female's are rusty—the same as the back and tail.

Unlike most hawks, the kestrel nests in a tree cavity, or sometimes in a bird house. Its common call is killy-killy-killy.

Although it lives mainly on meadow mice, and to a lesser extent on small birds, at this time of year, it feeds largely on grasshoppers.

Not a hawk

The nighthawk is not a hawk at all. It lacks the talons and the hooked beak of a hawk, and it lives entirely on insects caught on the wing.

Earlier this summer, Harold Daley reported that a pheasant appeared in his yard in Chatham and remained for much of the day.

He said this is the first pheasant he has seen for about 20 years.

Large caterpillar

Recently, Bruce Parks of Newcastle, a budding naturalist and junior member of our community, arrived at our door carrying a cardboard carton. Inside was a caterpillar along with some grass and leaves.

The caterpillar was exceptionally large and completely hairless. It was of a bright chartreuse—green color with a few short alternating black and white stripes on its sides, and

had a long black spine on its posterior end—a very impressive caterpillar.

A few days later the caterpillar had turned into a dark brown pupa bearing no resemblance to the caterpillar.

Beside the pupa was the dried crumpled up skin of the caterpillar, it also having turned into a dark brown color.

I believe this caterpillar, or hornworm, is the larvae of one of the hawk or sphinx moths; and, if the pupa lives, it will develop into such.

Transformations like this are commonplace in nature, and therefore are commonly ignored.

But they are nonetheless amazing—a seeming miracle when we think about it.

Surely there is some hope for us, when a lowly, earthbound worm can be transformed into a winged creature.

Hawk moths

The hawk or sphinx moths have heavy, pointed bodies and relatively small wings.

They are strong fliers and they fly with a rapid wingbeat. Some of them can hover in front of flowers like hummingbirds.

Their wings are long and narrow compared with those of other moths, and their hindwings are much shorter than their front ones.

When I worked at Heath Steele Mines, hawk moths were sometimes attracted to the lights there. What their larvae ate I do not know.

Two of the best known hawk moth larvae are the tomato hornworm and the tobacco worm.

Anyone who has gardened in southern Ontario will be familiar with the tomato hornworm, but personally, I have never seen one on our tomato plants since coming to New Brunswick.

According to the "Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animal Life" (Greystone Press) there are over 900 species of hawk moths in the world. The smallest has a wingspread of one and one half inches while the largest has a wingspread of nine inches.

Allen was artist, poet, outdoorsman

This article is dedicated to the memory of the late Bob Allen who passed away recently after spending the last 48 years in Newcastle.

Although he was a mechanical engineer by profession and was interested in sports, especially hockey, he was best known to me as an outdoorsman.

He enjoyed fishing, canoeing, birdwatching, and nature in general.

He wrote poetry about his experiences, and drew pictures of what he saw.

Most of his sketches were in black and white, but he sometimes added color with crayons or colored pencils.

He left behind many sketch pads filled with his drawings.

His memories were recorded in them, or as his son, Gary says, "There is a story behind each of them".

Many of them are of places where he fished along the river, others feature his dog "Shadow" in different moods and postures. Also, sailing boats seemed to be a favourite theme.

What follows is a few verses from one of his poems, along with a couple of his sketches,--

Renous

This gentle stream, first love of all

I've known its bars from spring to fall

From North Branch down to Quarryville

Canoeed it all, without a spill.

From Guegas down to North Branch bridge

There's many a rock and stoney ridge

And places where you'll say in pain

I'll never come back here again.

The Bathtub Sobey knew of yore

Became our secret spot, and more

The turns above are just as fine

When freshet on, you cast your line

Some fish we caught most got away

With Amos there one rainy day

But there were grilse by every rock

That leaped and most our flies did mock.

The branch junction down below

All who fish here, get to know

Herb Shephard got there many fish

Now Jeep takes them where they wish.

Even to the top deadwater

Home of moose and mink and otter



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Far upstream the salmon make

I saw one caught above the lake;

Once Colter's mill stood by the bridge

Their scaler's camp, our privilege

At Branch Pool ten grilse we caught

Arch Cole and Feld swore some I bought.

In those days more fish were there

There were less anglers to share

The trout and salmon that did run

Up this fair stream to give us fun.

Downstream from here there's many spots

From Matchett's Bridge to Hoddinnot's

There's Colepaughs and the Big Rock Pool

The Norton Place and Big Spring Cool.

From McGraw Brook down to flatland

We canoed, paddle in hand

And noon time on some beach we cooked

A grilse or sea trout we had hooked.

Fresh in the pan how good they tasted

With sweet fat of bacon basted

Bread toasted brown upon a stick

And after that, your lips you'd lick.

And swear to all no finer fare

Was found to eat in the fresh air

As rippling water by us swirled

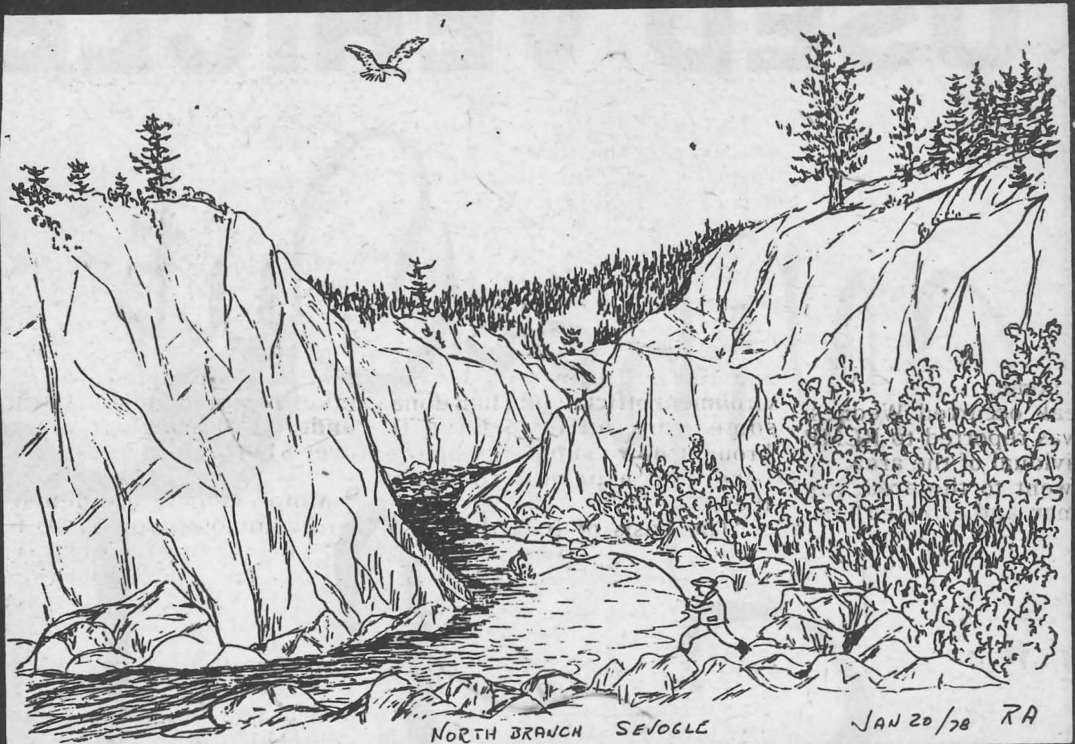
Sweetest music in all the world.

Oh clear Renous, how great you've been

There now, the fiddleheads in spring

Remind me of the long gone joys

We spent upon it with the boys.



Crane, few birds bring letter, calls

We received a letter from our friend, Mrs Du Chene of St. Laurent, Quebec, and enclosed was a wildlife stamp bearing the image of the rare whooping crane. Her letter reads as follows:-

Dear Mr Walker,
Greetings!

Your whooping crane column was special to us, as husband Andy has kept a scrapbook since 1962 on their struggle to survive and increase in numbers. He welcomed the good news.

The gist of his first clipping (from Montreal Star, Oct. 13, 1962) is:-

Ottawa: Wildlife officials say little hope any baby whoopers survived 1962 nesting season; last count wild adults, 88.

Re: enclosed stamp--had you noticed how BIG the Canadian Wildlife whooper is? A real WHOPPER, what? (I believe that painting is by Fenwick Lansdowne.)

New sighting

I had a new "exciting sighting" on August 7--a pair of birds flying side-by-side right at me. They were just skimming our flat roof and so VERY close.

Black above with a most delicate corn-colored breast. Mr Godfrey said they were Eastern Phoebe's!

By the way, re: "Birds of Canada," I keep a cardboard marker at every illustration and there have inked in the description-page number of every bird. It makes for a presto identification.

I notice in your birdcount 754 (in my scrapbook) ONE each of my Summer Bonanza of olive-sided flycatcher, yellow-bellied sapsucker and eastern phoebe. No wonder I feel so privileged to have seen them!

Signed
Molly Loggie Du Chene

Thank you Mrs Du Chene

Eastern phoebe

According to Godfrey: In spring, the eastern phoebe's under parts are white with a yellowish tinge; but in autumn, they become decidedly yellowish.

Here on the Miramichi, the Phoebe is rather scarce for we are at the extreme northeast limit of its range. Further south it is more common.

The much more common alder flycatcher, or trails flycatcher, can easily be mistaken for the phoebe, partly because of their similarity in appearance, but even more so because of the similarity of their calls. For, when a bird says "fee-bee", we can easily be tricked into assuming it is a phoebe.

However, the calls of the two birds can be distinguished.

The phoebe draws out and rolls the "fee" part of its call, and cuts the "bee" short. The alder flycatcher places equal emphasis on both.

On the birdcount which Mrs Du Chene refers to, 16 alder flycatchers were recorded



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compared to the one lone Phoebe.

The phoebe is fond of small wooden bridges and often places its nest on a girder underneath one.

It also nests in sheds and abandoned buildings in a country setting; also on projections under eaves, etc.

The nest may be placed on top of a beam, or it may be plastered to the side of it--the grass and other plant material in it being well held together with mud.

The phoebe's nest is not concealed and, like a barn swallow's or robin's nest, it is very easily found.

The alder flycatcher, by comparison, lives in quite different surroundings and makes a very different nest.

It is usually found in thick growths of alders, or similar tangles.

Its nest is cradled in a crotch of a shrub, not far above ground; and it is attached to twigs by means of plant fibers.

The nest contains no mud and, being located as it is, it is difficult to find.

A number of people have commented on the scarcity of birds this fall.

Don Adams says in other years, he has had to resort to the use of bells, pans, etc., to keep the birds from devouring all of his rowan berries. (He prefers to keep some of them on the trees because of their color.) This year, the birds are absent.

Elizabeth Irlam has a similar report. She says her yard is full of fruit-chokecherries, haws, etc., but the birds haven't touched them. They haven't even made an appearance.

Somewhat earlier, Frank Garrish of Douglastown, commented on the obvious death of birds around his place; and my wife has noticed a lack of activity around our bird bath. (It is usually most active at this time of year.)

I cannot explain this. Perhaps the great crop of blueberries (which hung on the bushes late this year) kept the birds in the bush.

Out on the Chaplin Island Road, Jim Waye said he had a flock of about 150 robins around his place recently; and Norman Stewart of the Lockstead Road commented on the abundance of flickers this year.

Bald eagles reported

Bald eagles have been reported from various quarters during the past few months.

James Mutch reported an immature one on the Little Southwest during the latter part of May.

John Barry reported a pair at McGraw Brook on May 27.

During the summer, Earlene Hunter saw one at Sunny Corner, and Percy Mountain saw one at Curventon.

David Tweedie reports he saw two together in the same tree near Russellville

Winnie and I saw one at Loggieville in August, and Terry Tenass reported one at Red Bank on Sept. 14.

You may recall that earlier we reported two bald eagles spent the latter part of March in the vicinity of the Miramichi Pulp & Paper mill, and also, that an immature one stopped on Radio Street in Newcastle on the evening of May 13.

The latter one was also seen near South Nelson earlier in the day.

In recent years, at a number of locations in the Maritimes and in the state of Maine, winter food has been provided for bald eagles. This, apparently, is especially helpful to inexperienced, immature birds, many of whom die of starvation, or suffer from malnutrition, during winter.

Rudy Stoeck, in an article in the New Brunswick Naturalist (fall 1985) says in order to increase the population of bald eagles in the Maritimes, it is more important to increase the survival rate of immature birds than it is to increase the production of young eaglets.

Bald eagles live primarily on fish, when available. However, in winter, they will turn to any kind of meat -- offal from slaughter houses, road-killed deer, etc.

J. A. (Sandy) Burnett, in an article entitled "Robbie Tufts: The Complete Naturalist", tells of a little incident in Tufts' life which had big consequences for two boys -- a case in which a little patience on his part won him two life-



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long friends and associates.

At the time, Tufts was the chief federal migratory birds officer for the Maritime Provinces -- the first person to ever hold this position.

It was his duty "to enforce the migratory bird laws and to educate the public in the importance of conservation".

One spring day, in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley, he came upon two boys who were shooting songbirds with slingshots and he caught them before they were able to run away.

They were ordered to appear at his office a few days later. When they arrived, instead of being punished or reprimanded, they were taken to his study where they had a friendly chat.

Tufts' study was furnished with bird books, bird paintings, and mounted birds, which apparently impressed the boys greatly.

By the time their visit was over, the boys had been won over as allies, and both later became famous ornithologists.

One of these boys was W. Earle Godfrey who became the author of "The Birds of Canada", and who also became the curator of the National Museum of Natural Sciences of Canada in Ottawa.

The other boy was Austin L. Rand who became chief curator of zoology at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, and president of the American Ornithological Union.

Black panther reported from Black River

We have a report of a black panther. It comes from two Black River men — Roscoe (Ros) Mault and Darren Taylor.

As Ros described the event: Darren and he were working in the field in front of his house, at the end of the field next to the highway. Darren was sitting on the tractor and he was standing beside it.

Across the highway, and running at right angles to it, is a new drainage ditch which has recently been slashed out of the bush.

It is perhaps 50 feet wide, has gently sloping sides, and is completely devoid of vegetation.

Darren, from his tractor seat, happened to look up and there walking up the ditch toward them was this animal.

Darren pointed it out to Ros who recognized it as being a panther.

At the time, it was broad daylight, 1 p.m., on Sept. 25.

The animal was in no hurry. They were able to watch it for several minutes, and to view it from all angles.

There was no obstruction to

their view — not even a blade of grass.

Ros says it had a long rope tail and was as black as his two black Labrador dogs.

He believes it was only half grown, for he estimates it would weigh about the same as one of his black labs — about 45 or 50 pounds.

Ros says the panther walked along the edge of the ditch, detoured around a wind-fallen spruce, and then disappeared into the bush.

Tracks deer

Later, while visiting Ros, we paced the distance that separated the two men from it, and found it to be about 100 yards.

The animals tracks were quite clearly visible, but the ground was hard and the tracks insufficiently complete to warrant taking a plaster cast of them.

Ros Mault says he has only seen one other panther in his life and it was seen in the Sudbury district of Ontario. It was a normal deer-colored one — not a black one.

After talking with Ros, we vi-



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sited Darren. He described the event in much the same way.

He said he did not know what kind of an animal it was, but it was different from any other animal he had ever seen, except perhaps, in a Tarzan comic.

He described it as walking like an ordinary house cat, and as being built very much like one; but as being much larger.

He estimated its back would reach to about his knee. It was entirely black - no markings at all.

He said, when he pointed it out to Ros, Ros was obviously much surprised and he told him to take a good look at it for he would probably never see such an animal again.

Extremely rare

The eastern panther is an extremely rare animal.

It comes in two color phases — the ordinary deer-colored phase, and the much less common black phase — the black phase occurring more frequently in some parts of its range than in others.

A litter of kittens may have one black one, while all the others are of the usual deer color.

According to Banfield, the average litter size is two to four kittens, but as few as one or as many as 6 have been known to occur.

There is no definite breeding season for the species so the young may be born in any month of the year.

The eastern panther is the small eastern subspecies of the

cougar, and it is now almost extinct.

The several western subspecies are faring better, for the cougar is still fairly common in much of the west.

The cougar formerly had a very extensive range, occurring from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the Patagonia in southern Argentina to the southern parts of Canada.

The cougar or panther, has been given many different names including mountain lion, puma, catamount and Indian devil.

Ros Mault suggested perhaps there is a connection between the recent forest fire north of St. Margarets and their sighting of the panther. The fire may have forced it to move into new territory.

The cougar avoids man. Although it is a powerful animal, reports of it attacking humans have been very few and far between.

The few such attacks that have been reported are said to have been caused by small and starving individuals; or, in one case, by a rabid one.

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Shorebird reserve established Shepody

At a dedication ceremony held at Mary's Point on August 8, Shepody Bay became Canada's first Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve.

Attending were members of the New Brunswick Federation of Naturalists, whose annual general meeting was held in conjunction with the event, together with government officials, representatives from national and international conservation groups and officials from the government of Suriname.

First listed as a Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance in 1982, Mary's Point is a small part of the Shepody National Wildlife Area.

It has long been recognized for its value as a stopover on the migratory path of shorebirds.

After nesting in the Arctic, one-third of Canada's shorebirds funnel into this unique New Brunswick region.

Here on the mudflats of the upper Bay of Fundy, they feed on tiny "mud-shrimp" which multiply astronomically just in time for the shorebird's arrival.

The birds fuel up for the 10,000 kilometre non-stop flight to Suriname on the north



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coast of South America where they spend the winter.

The Suriname representatives expressed an interest in establishing a shorebird reserve similar to Shepody Bay in their country.

Canadian Nature Federation executive director Paul Griss, who attended the ceremony as part of his participation in the New Brunswick affiliate's annual meeting, was enthusiastic about the possibility.

"On conservation issues of a transboundary nature," he said, "international cooperation is vital for success.

A similar reserve protecting the coastal lagoons and mar-

shes of Suriname would ensure a safe wintering ground for the shorebirds and add a critical link to the migratory network."

The preceeding has been reprinted, by permission, from the Canadian Nature Federation Almanac.

Many shorebirds

Anyone who has visited Mary's Point at the peak of the fall migration will attest to the tremendous numbers of shorebirds to be seen there at that time.

At low tide, these birds spread out over the exposed mudflats.

Here, they feed on the mud-shrimp.

Then, when the tide comes in, they roost and await the coming of the next low tide so they can get back to feeding again.

It is while they are roosting one can best observe them; or, it is at this time, one is most impressed with the immensity of their numbers.

While roosting, they all congregate in a relatively small area — the beach at that point being a solid mass of birds.

If, at this time, they are disturbed — as by a marauding

hawk — they rise "en masse" and it is only because of their perfect formation flying that collisions on the wholesale level are avoided.

This formation flying by such a large number of birds is marvellous to behold.

The whole flock twists and turns, to this side, then that, as though moved by one mind.

The most abundant species at Mary's Point is the Semipalmated Sandpiper.

During fall migration, its numbers generally peak at between one and two hundred thousand.

Non-stop flights

Research headed by Dr. R.I.G. Morrison of the Canadian Wildlife Service in Ottawa has shown that these small shorebirds gather on the shores of James Bay in northern Ontario; and, from here, make a non-stop flight to Mary's Point or other nearby areas around the Bay of Fundy.

Here, they feed until they have built up enough fat reserves to fuel themselves on their still longer non-stop flight to South America.

Other species that stop over

at Mary's Point in large numbers are short-billed dowitchers, at times estimated to number up to 2,000; sanderlings and black-bellied plovers, each estimated up to 600; dunlin, up to 450; semipalmated plover, up to 400; least sandpiper, up to 250; white-rumped sandpiper, up to 100; and red knot, up to 75.

Marsh mud flats

The mud flats at Strawberry Marsh — those exposed at low tide — may appear to be barren and useless, but, nonetheless, they provide food for many species of bird.

These include ducks, shorebirds, and herons; as well as the scavengers, gulls and crows.

In years past, at times the number of "peeps" (semipalmated sandpipers, plus Least sandpipers) seen feeding on these flats, has been counted and found to approximate 400.

During the last two years, the maximum recorded there has been about 175 — these peak numbers always coming in early August.

These "peeps," being small and well camouflaged have no doubt escaped notice from many passers-by.

Yellow-billed cuckoo found dead in area

A yellow-billed cuckoo has been found dead at Sunny Corner. It was reported by Earlene Hunter on Oct. 10.

This is a southern species. It does not normally occur here.

Its only other record for the Miramichi is Sept. 24, 1983 at which time, two of them were seen together near the end of the Point Aux Carr road.

You will notice these two reports came at about the same time of year--early fall.

W. Austin Squires in his book "The Birds of New Brunswick," published 1976, has this to say--

"The yellow-billed cuckoo has on several occasions been found in small numbers in New Brunswick in late summer and fall notably in the years 1930, 1954 and 1964.

"Apparently in these years, fall hurricanes caught the species in migratory flight and scattered them over the northeastern seaboard and some distance inland."

So, we can presume this Sunny Corner cuckoo was carried off course by the latest hurricane to come up our coast.

Squires also indicates there is one record of the yellow-

billed cuckoo having nested in New Brunswick.

This occurred nearly a century ago--in 1899--the nest, with eggs in it, having been found near Saint John.

The yellow-billed cuckoo is very similar to its cousin the black-billed cuckoo which ranges somewhat farther north and which nests (in small numbers) throughout New Brunswick.

A large hawk-like bird, slate-gray above and white, or nearly so, below, was reported by Terry Tenass of Red Bank. He identified it as probably being a goshawk, but he was uncertain of this.

I might add the male northern harrier (marsh hawk) is similarly colored, and only slightly smaller in size. It, however, is very different from the goshawk in both habits and flight.

The goshawk feeds mainly on grouse and snowshoe hare and it, therefore, lives in wooded areas.

It flies in a direct line. It beats its wings rapidly for a short distance, then glides and, when it glides, it holds its wings on the horizontal.



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By contrast, the northern harrier lives mainly on meadow voles and other small rodents.

It hunts over meadows and open fields, continually gliding in circles as it does so and, while gliding, the wings are held above the horizontal, forming a shallow V. This flight pattern is quite different from that of other hawks.

In color, the female northern harrier is distinct from the male. Her upper parts are a dark brown, the male's a pale slate-gray.

Both male and female have a very noticeable white rump-patch, and this makes for easy identification. It separates them from all other hawks.

Neither the goshawk, nor the northern harrier are high fliers. Both generally hunt between ground and treetop level.

Bob Simmons, a native of Britain, working on his Ph D at Acadia University, studied the life history of northern harriers on the Tantramar Marsh at Sackville. Some of his findings were--

Females outnumber males by a factor of 2 to 1--at least that is the ratio by the time they have reached maturity--the females apparently having a much better survival rate in the early stages than do the males.

The reason for this is uncertain, but the females are somewhat larger and this may give them an advantage.

To make up for the imbalance between the male and female population, some males, but not all, become polygamous.

But, it is the male's first mate that receives most of his atten-

tion. He helps her gather food for the family.

His next mate runs a poor second, but she does receive a little help.

Easily misled

Tufts, in his "Birds of Nova Scotia", gives a good example of how dangerous it is to jump to conclusions, and how easily we can be misled when it comes to evaluating the effects of one form of wildlife or another.

He says a group of sportsmen in the southern United States demanded that something be done to reduce the numbers of northern harriers because they were destroying too many quail.

A study was made by collecting the regurgitated pellets of northern harriers and analyzing their contents.

It was found they did occasionally eat quail, but it was also found they fed very extensively on cotton rats--a rodent that was known to destroy many quail eggs.

It was concluded, that in balance, the northern harrier was in fact very beneficial to the quail population.

Chatham birdfeeders attract rarities

About two weeks ago, John Keating of Chatham started filling up his bird feeders, and already he has attracted two rarities--a loggerhead shrike and a dickcissel.

The loggerhead shrike came on only one occasion, about Oct. 17. The Dickcissel arrived on Oct. 20 and has been coming every day since.

Both birds are outside their normal range. Both nest well to the south and west of New Brunswick.

However, in the case of the dickcissel, it is well known that each year a few individuals exhibit abnormal behaviour.

When the main body of the species heads south for Central America, these peculiar individuals head in a northeasterly direction instead.

They end up being widely-scattered over an area to the northeast of their breeding range.

Butcher bird

The loggerhead shrike is a predator and is sometimes called the butcher bird.

It usually places its nest in a thorn bush and often impales its victims on the thorns. Barbed wire sometimes substitutes for this purpose.

It eats mice, small birds, frogs, snakes, etc., but, when available, it lives primarily on large insects such as grasshoppers, crickets, and dragon flies.

Many years ago, I remember my grandfather telling me of an incident that took place while he was working his farm in southern Ontario.

He said in one place he turned up a lot of white grubs.

A butcher bird, finding them, proceeded to impale them on a nearby thorn bush and ended up with a well-stocked larder.

Terres speaks of finding such a larder containing 15 small snakes.

The butcher bird has a hooked beak, but lacks the talons of a hawk.

It is slightly smaller than a robin and displays a contrasting pattern of black, white, and gray.

Gray is the predominant colour, but its wings and tail are primarily black, and it has a black robber-mask across the eyes.

There is a white flashing on the edges of the tail and a small, white area on the wing.

Other shrike

The loggerhead shrike is



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very similar to its cousin the northern shrike which is found in New Brunswick in small numbers during winter.

But, John says the one in his yard was identified as a loggerhead because its black robber-mask extended right across the bird's forehead rather than ending at the beak as is the case with the northern.

According to Squires, the loggerhead shrike has, in the distant past, nested in New Brunswick.

Two nests were found nearly a century ago--one at Upper Woodstock in 1888, and one at Saint John in 1900.

Since then, there have been

two instances of adult birds being seen with young, but that is the only indication of breeding.

One of these instances was at Sussex in 1939, the other at Saint John in 1946--about 40 years ago.

A report prepared by the U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, indicates the loggerhead shrike population has been on a long decline.

It attributes this to a variety of causes--the increased use of insecticides, the clearing away of fencerows and thorn bushes, and decreased acreage left to pasture--the loggerhead's favourite habitat.

According to Peterson, the loggerhead shrike has disappeared from much of its former range, especially in the northeast.

The dickcissel is about the size and build of a house sparrow.

The male has a yellow breast with a black bib--the bib sometimes lacking in the winter. It also has a rusty patch on each shoulder.

The female looks like a house sparrow with a touch of yellow on its breast.

The dickcissel is a bird of the

grasslands; but, when it appears in our part of the country, it seems to lose its identity.

It joins itself to a flock of house sparrows and acts like one of them.

The one that has been coming to John's feeder has been coming with a flock of House Sparrows. One that appeared at a couple of feeders in Newcastle last winter also came with a flock of House Sparrows.

Geese are passing through on their way south. A flock of 15 stopped for two days in a recently-harvested potato field at Mary MacDonald's place at Barnaby River.

She says they were very tame--she being able to approach to within about 25 feet of them.

She further says they varied noticeably in size--six of them being distinctly smaller than the others.

This makes me wonder, if perhaps, there were two subspecies of Canada Goose present.

I believe the honker is the subspecies that usually migrates through here, but Godfrey lists nine others, some of which are smaller than the honker.

Hawk watches clear-cutting

While working at Lyttleton this spring, Claude Stewart's woodcutting crew came upon a broad-winged hawk's nest.

It had been built in the main crotch of a large yellow birch tree — perhaps 30 feet from the ground.

The men spared the tree, leaving it standing alone in the small clear-cut they had created.

One might expect the hawks, seeing all this activity and destruction in the vicinity of their nest, might have abandoned it, but this was not the case.

They were not particularly aggressive, but they kept a close eye on the operation as it proceeded.

I visited the clear-cut on a couple of occasions and, with the aid of my binoculars, viewed the nest from a distance.

On June 10, one of the hawks was sitting on the nest apparently incubating the eggs, but, since only the head was visible, it was not possible to identify it as to species.

On July 17, the fuzzy white head of a chick protruded over the rim of the nest, while two adult birds circled above.

As they soared, they frequently gave their long, drawn-out, "tu-keeee" call — a call that is quite distinctive to the broad-winged hawk.

The adult broad-winged hawk's upper parts are chocolate brown.

Its underparts present a rather intricate pattern — a light background with many, fine, irregular, rusty bands running across it — these bands being most heavily concentrated on the breast.

This pattern, of course, can be seen only at close range, but its broadly banded tail is noticeable from a distance.

Lives in bush

The broad-winged hawk lives in the bush and frequently perches and hunts below tree-top level.

But, at other times, it soars high in the sky, riding the air currents on motionless wings.

At such times, its distinctive silhouette will distinguish it from all other species normally seen in this area.

Its wings are broad and rounded at the ends. Its tail is short, and widely fanned out.

This shape, plus the broadly-banded tail — three light bands, and three dark bands — is what to look for.

The broad-wing's larger cousin, the red-tailed hawk, also soars in the same manner, and it has a very similar silhouette. However, its tail has only one band — a fine, and less obvious one, at the end of it.

A red-tailed hawk, flying away from an observer at low elevation, displays a very noticeable rusty-red tail which



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distinguishes it from all other hawks.

Return unlikely

The nesting season for the broad-winged hawk is now long past. Since it usually makes a new nest each year, it is unlikely it would return to the nest at Lyttleton, even if the forest there had been untouched.

The pair that nested there have probably departed for the south; and by now, they may be winging their way over Hawk Mountain as they head for their winter home in the tropics.

Hawk Mountain

Hawk Mountain, in eastern Pennsylvania, is a peak in the Appalachian Mountains. Over it, many hawks pass during migration.

The hawks follow along ridges, flying low over them, so as to be buoyed up by the winds that are deflected upwards by them.

In this way they conserve much energy during their long trip south.

Besides Hawk Mountain, there are many other well-known hawk observation points along the Appalachians.

These points are like bottlenecks through which hawks pass like cars on a highway.

According to Roger Tory Peterson, the ideal time to go to Hawk Mountain is in October.

Go there one or two days after a low pressure area has passed by farther north.

This generally brings a strong north, or northwesterly flow of air which produces a favourable updraft for the hawks.

Never go when the wind is from the south or east for the hawks will not be flying. Also, days on which little puffs of cumulus cloud are forming are not favourable, for such clouds indicate thermal updrafts, and the hawks may be riding these rather than the deflective updrafts caused by the mountain.

When this is the case, the hawks will not be concentrated in the bottleneck; and further, they may be flying so high as to be barely visible.

What should be done at Sable Island?

What would you do?

That question was repeated by Tony Lock a number of times while he was outlining some of the problems faced by the administrators of Sable Island off the south coast of Nova Scotia.

Tony Lock works for the Canadian Wildlife Service and has been studying the ecology of Sable Island.

He was guest speaker at a meeting of the Chignecto Naturalist Club held at Sackville on Nov. 5.

Sable Island has no permanent residents and is under the administration of the federal Department of Transport (coast guard). For the future welfare of this island, three questions need to be answered:

What to do with the horses?

What to do with the gulls?

And, what to do with the seals?

Let us first consider the horses: Most of us, not knowing the ecological consequences of our decision, would probably say — "Let the horses be. Just leave them alone, and let nature take its course."

We would think it a shame to suggest anything else. Tony himself refers to them as charming creatures.

However, if we look ahead into the future and see the consequences of such a course, we may be forced to accept some other alternative — management of the herd in one way or another.

According to Lock, the horses are gradually destroying the vegetation on the island, both by feeding on it and by trampling over it.

If allowed to continue, all the vegetation will disappear and, along with it the horses themselves and the island's unique Ipswich sparrows, etc.

He says the horses have been responsible for reducing the vegetated area of the island from 54% in 1952, to 39% in 1984.

The vegetation consists mainly of heaths, grasses, sedges, and cranberries without which the island would become nothing more than a mass of shifting sand.

Lock says as it is now, the horse population goes through a seven or eight-year cycle — the population building up to a maximum of about 400 individuals, then crashing to about 150 — the crashes coming during winters of heavy snow-fall.

During such winters, the horses starve for they are forced to expend more energy in digging for food than they are able to derive from eating it.

The horses were originally introduced to the island by man and, as so often happens, the introduced species has upset the balance of nature.

Alternatives

Some of the alternatives Lock suggested for solving the horse problem, were cull the herd periodically; sterilize part of the herd. (This apparently can be done by means of an injection administered from a dart fired into the animal and ship the herd, or part of it, to the mainland.

Lock did not pick any solu-



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tion as being the one he preferred. He simply left it as an open question for us to decide.

He said in earlier generations Sable Island horses were shipped to the mainland to work in mines and many of them arrived dead, injured or in otherwise poor condition.

Also, he said these horses are of poor quality; and, anyone who is willing to pay \$250 per month to board a horse, wants to have a high quality one.

Most owners would be dissatisfied with a Sable Island horse. Many might end up as mink feed, or be similarly disposed of.

Gulls and waste

The gull problem has also been created by man, by his wastefulness and his carelessness. Gulls thrive on what man throws away.

The result is that in recent times the gull population worldwide has greatly increased.

Gulls first started to breed on Sable Island around 1920. Now there are about 6,000 pairs breeding there including herring gulls and great black-backed gulls.

These gulls are now rapidly displacing the large tern colony there.

They rob the tern nests, devouring both eggs and chicks. Horses also trample some of them.

The result is the annual rate of tern population is only one chick for every 10 nesting pairs.

There is no accurate count of the number of terns in the colony previous to the arrival of the gulls, but one authority estimated it at 1,000,000 birds. That was in 1903; now there are only 2,600 left.

There seems to be only two alternatives here. Either let the gulls remain and wipe out the tern colony, or eliminate the gulls. What would you do?

The seal question revolves around a growing population of grey seals. Now, 7,000 pups are born each year on the island. The question is — should this growing population be controlled.

Fishermen object to grey seals because of the fish they eat, the nets they destroy and, most importantly, because they are hosts to the adult form of the cod worm, the immature stage of which is found in the flesh of cod and certain other fish. This renders these fish less saleable.

It is uncertain, however, whether or not, the elimination of this grey seal herd would result in any significant reduction in the incidence of cod worm.

Some strictly winter birds have returned to Miramichi

Last week's snow brought a few birds to feeders and a few of our strictly winter birds have returned.

In the latter category is a northern shrike reported by Louis Sippley in Baie Ste. Anne on Nov. 2; and a tree sparrow seen in Newcastle on Nov. 9.

Also, on Nov. 12, two bohemian waxwings arrived in Newcastle in an apparent state of exhaustion.

They were reported to Edmond Robichaud by one of his neighbours. One was dead and the other nearly so.

It was only when Edmond picked up the live one, that he knew for sure it was alive. It was warm in his hand, but it made no effort to escape.

Edmond took it home, fed and watered it.

After two days, it appeared to be well and healthy, so he released it outside. It flew for only a short distance, then fell to the ground.

Edmond now has it back in his house, but plans to release it whenever it gets stronger.

It is active and appears to be healthy, and it is eating well—raisins, chopped apple, bread, and bird seed.

Terres recommends ground meat, as well as fruit and bread crumbs, as food for injured waxwings and this information has been passed on to Robichaud.

Terres also recommends any kind of insects, but they are rather hard to come by at this time of year.

Salt from fat?

How do you remove salt from kitchen fat before feeding it to birds?

This question was posed by a reader last winter. Since then we have received an answer. It comes in the form of a newspaper clipping received in the mail.

The clipping is of a letter



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addressed "Dear Heloise" and signed "Wilma Swanson".

The writer says she puts the fat in a kettle and then covers it with water. She then brings it to a boil and this causes most of the salt to come out into the water.

To the desalted fat, she adds raw oat meal, bread crumbs, and bird seed; then forms bird cakes out of this mixture.

Protection at feeders

David and Suzanne Hubley of Truro, N.S., have a new idea for protecting the birds at their feeders from hawks.

While visiting them recently, they told us that whenever a hawk appears in their neighbourhood, they set out pieces of raw stewing meat for them.

Apparently, the hawks take these in preference to birds.

Partridge visitor

Last winter, Paul Bogaard of Sackville had a partridge as a regular visitor to his feeder.

A few weeks ago, a partridge again appeared, but Paul was not ready. He had not yet started feeding the birds.

He thought it must have come earlier this year but when he checked his notes, he found it to be right on schedule.

He concluded the partridge had a better memory than he did.

New policy

In last week's *Leader*, a reporter, after interviewing Barry McKay, woodlands superintendent for Miramichi Pulp and Paper, wrote as follows,—

"McKay said stubs, or stumps, are among the most dangerous causes of accidents which have, in the past, severely injured and killed woodsmen.

"That's why every woodsman should make sure their site is cleared out and stubs are cut prior to cutting green trees", he said."

I have no experience in woodcutting operations, and I would not advocate jeopardizing the safety of woodcutters, but, some operations apparently deal with stubs in a different manner (or, at least they have, in the not very distant past).

A back issue of Audubon Magazine (Jan. 1976) gives an account of a new forest management policy being followed in one region of the northwestern United States.

A forester, Theodore A. Schlapfer, instituted the policy which gives priority to the preservation of old snags and dead trees on the grounds they are essential to the survival of many wild creatures including at least 43 species of birds and 11 species of mammals.

The account does not give many details, but does say,— "the policy does not simply mean leaving old snags standing, but involves long-term management of an adequate number of live trees which will eventually become habitable snags for cavity-nesting animals."

Here on the Miramichi, the number of cavity-nesters is less—perhaps half the figures given above.

Many birds are seen at feeder

A good variety of birds is being reported at bird feeders — many of them being summer birds left behind when the rest of their kind headed south.

Tom Greathouse of Newcastle reported a white-throated sparrow on Nov. 11, a cowbird on Nov. 13, and a dickcissel on Nov. 15 — the dickcissel, as usual, coming as a member of a flock of house sparrows.

This is the second dickcissel reported in the area this fall — the first one having been reported by John Keating of Chatham about a month ago.

John now reports it came regularly to his feeder for about two or three weeks, but has not been seen recently.

Also, at John's feeder were a couple of goldfinches about a week ago, and a redpoll a few days ago — the first one of the season.

Doris Carter has two white-breasted nuthatches coming to her feeder in Chatham, and Louise Girvan reported a male red-winged blackbird at her place on South Esk Road on Nov. 22.

James Kelly reported a flock of about 50 waxwings feeding on rowan (mountain ash) berries in Loggieville on Nov. 17.

Also in Loggieville, at Lorna Mattinson's place, a great black-backed gull crash landed in the dark of night.

Why the gull would be flying in the dark is a mystery. Perhaps something had disturbed it from its sleep. Perhaps it was flying in its sleep, just as some people occasionally walk in their sleep.

The crash came during high winds, at 9:45 p.m. Nov. 21. Lorna suggests it may have been somewhat blinded or disoriented by the yard light.

Fortunately for the gull, it crashed in a good place as Lorna is accustomed to taking in destitute and unfortunate animals.

She is now caring for this gull. It is recuperating well and is expected to be on the wing again shortly.

Among the ruffed grouse (birch partridge), there are rare individuals which exhibit an inordinate attraction toward man and his machines.

Other, equally-rare individuals, exhibit the opposite feeling. They display an intense displeasure with such things and will attack with vigor both man and machine.

Two extremes

Terres, in his writings, gives a number of accounts of both of these extremes. Here are two others that could be added to his list.

A few years ago, our son Bruce and a friend Rick Daley, were canoeing on the Renous; but, because of low water, were forced to abandon their canoe and hike across country.

During this hike they took a short break, at which time a ruffed grouse flew out of the bush and landed near their feet.

Throughout their break, this grouse remained close by them — all the while uttering peculiar peeping sounds as it did so. When the boys left, the grouse



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followed for a short distance, but was soon left behind.

They were in a hurry to get out of the bush before dark and therefore were not able to observe it as long as they would otherwise have done, but Bruce was quite baffled by its behaviour.

The second incident took place last spring while Winnie and I were visiting her brother and his wife — Murray and Marj Stewart of Canal Lake in Ontario.

At dusk one evening as I was removing some luggage from the trunk of the car, I heard a peeping sound behind me.

I turned and there was a ruffed grouse. It was on the driveway and only a step or two from me.

I stood there and started peeping back to it. This conversation between me and the grouse continued for possibly 15 or 20 minutes.

During the conversation, the grouse kept walking back and forth but always remaining near my feet.

I don't know exactly what I said to it, since I don't understand their language very well, but I tried to reassure it, and I wanted to let it know I felt honored to have it place such trust in me.

Meanwhile, Winnie, Murray, and Marj, who were seated some distance away, heard scraps of our conversation. I don't think they considered it to be at all intelligible.

Winnie and I did not see this grouse again, but this marked the beginning of a close association between it and Murray. We did not witness this as we had to return to Newcastle.

Since then we have been informed that after this incident the grouse frequently appeared in Murray and Marj's yard. It became a real pet, following Murray around like a dog.

It would follow him as he cut the grass with the power lawn mower, and it would follow a neighbor as he was using his whipper snipper.

It seemed to be drawn by these noises — perhaps they reminded it of a drumming grouse.

One evening when some company came and set up tent, the grouse appeared in their midst, walking about and taking note of the whole tent-erecting operation.

Unfortunately, this relationship has ended for the grouse was struck by a car passing in front of the house.

First snowy owl of season has been reported

The first snowy owl of the season has been reported.

It was spotted by Joan Legere as she approached the Morrissy Bridge on the morning of Nov. 24.

After a brief stop in Newcastle, Joan returned to find the owl still perched in the same place — on a low stump, in the grassy area along the river, on the Nelson side from the bridge.

She parked her car and set out on foot for a better look.

In this way she was able to approach close enough to see its eyes before it took off and flew to another stump not far away.

Joan described it as being entirely white, except for the eyes. It had a round head — no ear tufts, was very large — much larger than a gull.

This description suggests it was probably a mature male.

All snowy owls are primarily white, but most have some dark barring, especially females and immatures.

The snowy owl looks very large, being about two feet long and has a wingspread of about five feet.

However, it is not correspon-

dingly heavy — the largest ones weighing only about five or six pounds. Most of the bulk is just feathers.

The females, as with many birds of prey, are somewhat larger than the males.

My wife says a few days before this local snowy owl was reported, she had heard other reports of them on the radio. They were seen at Truro and Shubenacadie.

Incursion winter?

Such early reports of these owls makes me suspect this is going to be a snowy owl incursion winter.

These incursions occur every four or five years. They coincide with the low point in the Arctic lemming population cycle in which their numbers build up gradually over several years and then crash precipitously.

A check through the literature reveals there was a snowy owl incursion in the winter of 1978-'79 — nine years ago, or approximately two cycles ago.

So, perhaps we can expect more snowy owl reports this winter.



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In normal years, when the lemming population is adequate, few snowy owls come this far south.

A research note in *Nature Canada* says each snowy owl requires four to seven lemmings per day in order to keep alive.

The number of eggs laid by the snowy owl varies greatly depending on the food supply. If food is too scarce, it may not nest at all.

Tufts suggests this simply means well-fed owls lay more eggs than poorly-fed ones.

A bulletin prepared by the Canadian Wildlife Service says snowy owls sometimes nest within colonies of snow geese, and the snow geese actually gain some protection from them — the owls helping to keep predators away.

Since an owl's eyes are fixed in their sockets, and since they are located in the front of the head rather than on the sides as is the case with most birds, the owl must therefore turn its head in order to see in another direction.

For this reason, we often see an owl with its head swivelled around, looking in the opposite direction to which it is perched.

Daylight hunter

Unlike most of our owls, the snowy normally hunts in daylight, and this must of necessity be so since most of its nesting is done inside the Arctic Circle where in summer the sun never sets.

When the snowy owl comes south, it is usually found in marshes, along shores, or in farmers fields — places that resemble the Arctic tundra from which it comes.

It avoids the bush which is foreign to it, but it sometimes enters towns where it may be seen perched on the roofs of houses, on the tops of poles, or on TV antennas.

Snowy owls normally swallow their prey whole, then later, regurgitate the indigestible parts in the form of pellets.

However, when small mammals are not available, they must resort to other game such as ptarmigan and Arctic hare, and these, quite obviously, cannot be swallowed whole.

Examination of owl pellets, as reported by the Canadian Wildlife Service, indicate when they visit southern Canada, snowy owls feed mainly on meadow voles (field mice).

Lead shot has also been found in these pellets, and this is interpreted as indicating the owls have been feeding on ducks wounded during the hunting season. Such ducks would no doubt be easy prey.

P.S.: We have another snowy owl report. It comes from Dave Green of CFB Chatham.

When he reported it, on the morning of Nov. 27, it was standing on one of the airport runways.

More snowy owls, waxwings are sighted on the Miramichi

More people are seeing snowy owls.

On Nov. 28, an anonymous caller reported that for about two weeks now, one has been coming regularly to a favourite perch near the Miramichi Pulp and Paper timber yard.

On Dec. 1, Mrs. Inglis of Nordin reported one was in her garden above the bank of the Miramichi River.

The first caller also said that every year weasels and their tracks are seen in the timber yard — the weasels apparently patrolling the passages between the sticks of pulp wood and living on the mice found there.

Bohemian waxwings continue to be reported. In Chatham, Bill Hogan had about 50 to 100 of them in his yard — attracted there by some nearly mountain ash berries.

In Newcastle, one struck a window in Manford Wasson's house, and a flock, estimated at between 150 and 200 birds, stopped in Margaret Wheaton's yard.

Meanwhile, the bohemian waxwing which Edmond Robichaud picked up in an extremely weakened condition about three weeks ago, has regained its strength and flown away.

Robichaud kept it for about 10 days feeding it raisins, bread crumbs, bird seed, and hamburger. He also provided it with water. It was especially fond of raisins.

Edmond says before he let it go it had become very active and obviously quite strong again. However, it remained



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very tame allowing itself to be stroked or picked up and made no effort to avoid such contact.

It appeared to be reluctant to leave, but eventually flew off with a mixed flock of other birds including evening grosbeaks and house sparrows.

Feeding chickadees

Talking of tame birds: as I passed by my neighbour's place recently, Lem McDonald was feeding two chickadees.

They would land on his hand, select a seed from it, flit to a nearby perch and then return shortly for another one.

Bill Hogan, who feeds his birds from a porch outside his studio, says recently when he held out a hand containing bird seed, three evening grosbeaks landed on him.

Last winter, Bill was able to feed a number of species from his hand — chickadees, evening grosbeaks, redpolls, and pine siskins — the latter spe-

cies being especially tame.

Once, for identification purposes, Bill dabbed some "white-out" on one pine siskin's toenails. A few days later it returned to him.

Winnie and I have been finding water is very popular with the birds at this time of year — more popular than in the summer, for now, most water is frozen over.

Winnie puts water in the bird bath every morning, and the birds not only drink it, but also bath in it.

It is being used mainly by house sparrows, evening grosbeaks, and blue jays; but, on Dec. 4, a white-throated sparrow was seen bathing in it.

Lem McDonald has also been providing water for the birds and he is getting similar results.

Pair of flickers

Carol White of Lower Newcastle reported a pair of flickers nested in a hole in a tree in her yard last summer. They raised two broods of young; and, in late summer, they often fed on the lawn — as many as eight flickers at a time.

In early fall, they disappeared and were presumed to have gone south, but, on Dec. 2, one was back.

This is a very late date for a flicker, and two broods is the exception rather than the rule for this species.

A number of writers say it is the male, rather than the female flicker that does most of the incubating.

Robbie Tufts ran an experi-

ment on this when a pair of flickers nested in a tree in his garden.

During the incubation period, he tapped on the tree 100 times. The male appeared at the hole 60 times, the female 40.

The male can be distinguished from the female by its black mustache stripe. Otherwise, male and female are identical.

Back on July 16, Mary Watling reported that a small, tame pigeon had turned up at their cottage at Oak Point.

It stayed around for a few days, sometimes even trying to get in through the windows, then it left.

A band on its leg bore the number C.R.P.U. 1987-23496.

Mary wrote to the Canadian Racing Pigeon Union in London, Ontario.

After a long period of silence, she received a letter from Andrew Scrobot of Bathurst.

It was his pigeon and it had flown away after a cat had gotten into his pigeon loft and had killed some of his birds.

This pigeon has never returned and may still be in our area.

Stephen Adams reports that this fall up until about two weeks ago he has been seeing a bald eagle periodically along the stretch of river near his home on the South Esk Road.

On the morning of Dec. 8, Bill Hogan reported the pine siskins were back at his feeder for the first time this season. One was there yesterday, and three this morning.

A couple of peculiar birds are sighted

This morning, Dec. 14, a call was received from Barbara Digdon of Chatham.

She had a peculiar bird at her feeder which she believed to be an albino evening grosbeak.

It had come there with a flock of evening grosbeaks, and it looked and acted like one of them, but its color was very different — more like that of a snow bunting.

She described it as being of a general off-white color and as having a yellowish tinge around the neck.

The head and wings were brownish, and darker than the rest of the body. The feet were pink, and the beak yellow.

A second peculiar bird, presumably also an albino, but of unknown species, was reported by George Hubbard of Newcastle.

He described it as being all white, except for its bill which was yellow, and a patch on its breast, which was red or maroon — this red area extending from either side of its chin to a point in the middle of its lower breast.

George said for a while this fall it came regularly to his feeder, but, when the snow came it disappeared. It has not been seen since.

Poinsettias

In order to give this article a little touch of Christmas, I will pass on some information about poinsettias — those plants which are so popular at this time of year.

Poinsettias belong to the spurge family, and it is not their flowers that make them so bright and colorful.

Instead, it is the leaves (or, more properly, bracts) surrounding the flowers which provide the color — these bracts generally being a flaming red.

However, in recent years, new varieties have been developed so now they come in a range of colors — white, yellow, pink, as well as the original red.

Some history of the Poinsettia is provided in an article in the Dec.-Jan. '84 issue of *National Wildlife Magazine* — the article being written by a botanist, Maryanne Newsom-Brighton.

She says the poinsettia originally grew only in a small area south of Mexico City, and there it was called the "flame flower" by the natives.

It was found growing there by Joel R. Poinsett, the first U.S. minister to Mexico. He, being a horticulturist, had some of the plants sent to his home in Charleston, South Carolina, to be planted in his garden.

Apparently, these wild poinsettias were quite different from the ones we see in our stores today.

They were long, spindling, unkempt plants reaching a height of from six to 20 feet.

Furthermore, their red bracts were much smaller than the ones we know, and they dropped within a week of their turning red.

By comparison, Newsom-Brighton says with proper care present-day, cultivated varieties should hold their red bracts for several months.

Much of the credit for this remarkable transformation of the wild poinsettia is given to Paul Ecke, Sr. who started working on it in 1919.

He and his son, Paul Ecke Jr., have been growing and improving the plant ever since.

This has grown into a very big business, so now their ranch in Encinitas, California, is said to produce several hundred thousand plants per year.

Suggestions for care

If you happen to get a poinsettia for Christmas, the article has some suggestions for ensuring it blooms as long as possible.

■ Place it where it will get lots of light.



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■ Keep the soil fairly moist. On the other hand, if the soil is too wet, the lower leaves will drop.

■ Avoid sudden changes in

temperature, therefore keep it away from drafts and heat vents. Low 70s F. during the day, and low 60s at night is said to be fine.

■ If the humidity goes below 50%, spray it with a water mist.

The article also gives details on how to keep your poinsettia for next year. However, it appears, it would require considerable dedication to do so properly.

Suet Suggestions

Louise de Kiriline Lawrence has a suggestion on how to provide suet or fat for woodpeckers, chickadees, and nuthatches, without having it taken by starlings.

First, fasten the suet inside a

container, then invert it, and hang it in this position from a limb or fasten it to the underside of a limb.

Now the bird must feed in an upside down position. This comes natural to woodpeckers, chickadees and nuthatches, but is difficult for starlings.

An onion bag may help in holding the suet in place.

Bird count

The annual Christmas Bird Count for the Chatham-Newcastle area will be held on Jan. 2

If you would like to participate either as a field observer, or as an observer at a bird feeder, call 622-2108.

A pot luck supper will be held after the count at 276 Heath Court, Newcastle.

Starlings spotted the most in the annual bird count

The annual Christmas Bird Count for the Chatham-Newcastle area was conducted on Saturday with 18 field observers and 24 feeder observers taking part.

The area covered in this count is that contained within a 15-mile diameter circle, the centre of which is situated at the mid-point of the Miramichi Centennial Bridge.

In other words, it covers the area from about Bartibogue Bridge in the east to just beyond the Anderson Bridge in the west.

During this exercise, field observers drove along roads and streets, stopping whenever birds were sighted or hiked along bush trails, scanned salt marshes, searched through weed patches and brushy tangles, etc., anywhere that a bird might be found.

At the end of the day, all birds identified by these observers, plus the birds reported from the 24 participating feeding stations, were added together.

The grand totals thus obtained are listed below — the birds being listed in order of decreasing abundance:—

The count

Starlings 997, evening grosbeaks 421, house sparrows 225, rock doves (pigeons) 190, snow buntings 163, herring gulls 140, redpolls 136, black-capped chickadees 128.

Ravens 117, blue jays 110, great black-backed gulls 110, goldfinches 60, pine siskins 37, crows 32, tree sparrows 24, bohemian waxwings 19, mourning doves 19.

Slate-coloured juncos 15, downy woodpeckers 10, gray jays (moose birds) 8, red-breasted nuthatches 7, hairy woodpeckers 6, boreal chickadees 3, pine grosbeaks 3, black ducks 2.

And, one each of the following:— white-breasted nuthatch, glaucous gull, brown creeper, cardinal, great horned owl, sharp-shinned hawk, Cooper's hawk, and another hawk of unspecified species.

The preceding list contains 32 species, and 2,989 individual birds.

However, this total could be considerably in error for when large flocks of birds are encountered and when the birds in them continually shift about it is difficult to make an accurate estimate of their numbers.

This is our 16th consecutive Christmas bird count, and the greatest number of species recorded on any one of them was 33 — this number having been reached on three occasions — 1976, 1981, and 1985.

According to the regulations, our count could have been held on any one day between Dec. 17 and Jan. 3 inclusive.

Extra species seen during this count period, but which were not seen on the count day, were:—



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Pileated woodpecker, red-winged blackbird, grackle, northern shrike, white-throated sparrow, and mock- ingbird.

First for owl

Although the great horned owl is well known to reside in our area, this is the first time that anyone has been able to come up with one on our Christmas bird count.

It was spotted by Frank Garish of Douglastown while he was on a hike in the bush back of the town.

The cardinal, a female, was reported from Bud and Phyllis Jardine's feeder on the Shore Road east of Chatham. Phyllis said it had been coming there regularly of late.

A neighbor, Phyllis Crowe, said a female cardinal had also visited her feeder earlier — on Dec. 18, and 19.

She also said a male was seen last summer in the vicinity of the Baptist Church on Wellington Street — again, not far away.

Cardinals have been recorded on three previous counts — one each, on the 1978 and 79 counts; and two on the 1981 count.

Separate counts

Louis Sippley, who lives in Baie Ste Anne outside our count area, ran a count on his own, around his place. He recorded:—

Evening grosbeaks 50, black-capped chickadees 20, blue jays 15, house sparrows 2, raven 1, hairy woodpecker 1, and mourning dove 1.

Luc Lemieux of Chatham joined a groups of bird watchers in Caraquet, and participated in their count on Dec. 28.

He reported they recorded 28 species — the most unusual being a junco of the Oregon subspecies.

Luc also reports counts were carried out at Miscou Island where 32 species were found; and at Tracadie where approximately 30 were found.

Counts in these areas have one advantage over our area — they have open water.

Luc says it was awfully cold on the beach peering through a telescope, but a number of sea birds, such as eiders and scoters, were picked up.

Robins miss count, but have appeared

The robins failed to show up for our Christmas Bird Count.

However, since then, two have appeared. They were reported by Mrs Ralph Harrigan on Jan. 9.

These robins were seen among apple trees and thorn bushes on Dan Lyon's farm at Ferry Road—a likely place for them since past reports indicate they live mainly on apples and hawthorne berries at this time of year.

About a month ago, Barbara Digdon reported a partially albino evening grosbeak at her feeder in Chatham.

Since then, two other reports of this, or of similar evening grosbeaks, have been received.

Penny Creamer of Derby Junction reported one at her feeder on Dec. 5 (about two weeks before Barbara Digdon's report); and Bunny Vye reported one at her feeder on Jan. 15.

Bunny described it as being of a generally creamy white colouration, but with a pale yellow breast, a yellow area on the back of the neck, and a few black pencil lines on the outer part of the wings.

An evening grosbeak dressed in even more unorthodox fashion was reported by Louis Sippley of Baie Ste. Anne.

He said it had the color and markings of a female, except about half of the normally white area on either wing was pink.

This bird came to his feeder on two consecutive days, Jan. 3 and 4; and it was seen by himself, his wife, and his daughter.

It was within 10 feet of them, and they had no doubt as to its identity.

I have heard of one other case of evening grosbeaks having pink markings. They were seen in Truro (see Ross Baker's book "Reflections of a Bird Watcher"). They had been artificially painted with food coloring as a prank.

If this is the case again, then the artist has done a good job, for Louis says the pink markings are symmetrical on both sides and they blend in naturally with the rest of the plumage.

Snowy Owl

During the last week of November there was a flurry of snowy owl reports. Since then, only a belated report of one seen even earlier—approximately Nov. 1—has come in.

It was seen near Patterson's Siding on the Beaverbrook Road and was reported by Frank Garrish of Douglastown.

These early snowy owls must have moved on. The hunting here could not have been very good—perhaps the snow was too deep.

Frank Garrish says 10 or 12 years ago, when he was living in Brampton, Ontario, he saw ab-



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out 100 Snowy Owls—all of them concentrated in a 10-acre hayfield. They were scattered all over it.

He explained, that during the previous summer, the hay on this field had not been cut.

This had provided field mice with plenty of cover, and their numbers had increased phenomenally.

For a period of days or weeks, these owls remained in the field; then, when the mice were gone, the owls dispersed or moved on.

Such a concentration of owls is rare indeed, but not unknown.

An article in the winter 1980 issue of *Nature Canada* describes a similar occurrence.

It took place on Amherst Island, near Kingston, Ontario, during the winter of 1979.

This island of about 20 square miles is mainly farmland; and the article indicates its meadow vole (field mouse) population is known to go through periodic cycles—a high in the cycle having been reached in the winter of 1978-79.

Being situated near the end of Lake Ontario, Amherst Island is probably on a natural flyway for many birds.

Winter, many migrating owls and hawks simply terminated their flight there—there being no point in continuing their journey when an abundant supply of food was at hand. As a result, their numbers climbed to unusual heights.

This, in turn, led to another migration of a different sort. Birdwatchers came from far and wide to see the birds.

Ten species of owl, and six species of hawk, in greater or lesser numbers, were found on the island that winter.

These included Snowy Owl, Great Grey Owl, Hawk Owl, Long-eared Owl, short-eared owl, great horned owl, saw-whet owl, boreal owl, barn owl, screech owl, rough-legged hawk, red-tailed hawk, marsh hawk, American kestrel and gyrfalcon.

One one occasion, seven great grey owls were found in one tree; on another occasion, 29 long-eared owls were found by two birdwatchers during one afternoon.

Coyote is an old resident of N.B.

The Coyote is generally considered to be a very recent arrival here in New Brunswick.

It is supposed to have made its first appearance here about 40 years ago, more or less.

However, recent archaeological findings indicate otherwise.

They show the coyote is really an old inhabitant of New Brunswick which has only recently returned — it having been here in prehistoric times.

An article in *Nature Canada* says in 1975 Frances L. Stewart of the Archaeological Survey of Canada found definite evidence of this along the shores of Passamaquoddy Bay. There, at several locations, she found the jaw-bones of coyotes in Indian shell middens.

Shell middens are really old Indian dumps.

Indians living along the coast fed heavily on shellfish and in some cases used the same camping sites for hundreds, or even thousands of years.

As a result, some of their shell middens became very extensive, and any bones buried in them became preserved indefinitely.

Why? Because the calcium carbonate in the shells neutralized the natural soil acids which otherwise would have destroyed the bones.

Without this protection, bones left on the forest floor generally disintegrate within 50 years although this time period varies widely depending on soil conditions and other factors.

The date at which these early coyotes were here is not clear. The article only indicates they were here sometime during the period extending between 1000 B.C. and the early 1600s A.D.

The walrus

Another mammal which was formerly resident in New Brunswick, but which has disappeared and has never returned, is the walrus.

Banfield gives its original range as including both the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Bay of Fundy, and as extending as far south as Boston.

He says in 1534 Jacques Cartier found large colonies of walrus on Sable Island, Cape Breton Island, and the Magdalen Islands.

Coming still closer to home, an article in *Nexus*, a publication of the Quebec-Labrador Foundation, speaks of walrus on Miscou Island. It says these walrus were wiped out as early as 1650, and that by 1750, they had been wiped out of the entire Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Since then, walrus have been recorded in New Brunswick on two occasions — these two occasions being separated by a period of 200 years.

Squires mentions the first of these — a walrus killed in the Shediac River in 1761; Banfield mentions the other — it having been seen in the Bay of Fundy in 1963.



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The walrus were killed for their tusks and hides as well as for their meat and oil.

Today, most of us think of the walrus as an Arctic species, for it now lives far to the north of us — beyond the northern tip of Labrador.

The walrus' two tusks are really elongated teeth, and these it uses as tools for digging clams from the shallow sea bottom.

Its mustache consists of sensitive, bristle-like hairs, and these are thought to be an aid in detecting food while the animal is digging.

Although its food consists primarily of clams, mussels and other mollusks, it also eats annelid worms, sea cucumbers, star fishes, sea urchins, shrimps, and other such organisms found in, or on, the sea bottom. Surprisingly, free-swimming fish seem generally to be missing from its diet.

The walrus must in some way shell its shellfish before swallowing them for shell fragments are very seldom found in its stomach.

Although the walrus looks clumsy and unsuited to land travel, nonetheless Banfield says it has been known to travel as much as 15 to 20 miles across land — on the snow.

Subspecies

There are two subspecies of walrus living in North American waters around Baffin Island, the western coast of Greenland, and the Hudson's Bay.

The western subspecies occupies the northern and western coasts of Alaska, as well as the eastern part of Siberia.

Separating the ranges of these two subspecies is a vast stretch of the Canadian Arctic in which there are no walrus at all.

So, the two subspecies, seldom if ever, come into contact with one another.

Members of the western subspecies are larger than those of the eastern subspecies.

According to Banfield, an average eastern male measures 10 feet in length and weighs 1,650 pounds.

As in the east, so in the west, overhunting has eliminated the walrus from the southern parts of its range.

Originally, it was found along the southern coast of Alaska, as well as along the western and northern coasts.

Retired

Forester to write for nature column

I would like to introduce you to a couple who have recently taken up residence in Newcastle.

They are Tom Greathouse and his wife, Madeleine Morissette. They moved here from Montreal last October.

Tom is a retired forester and Madeleine is the librarian at Carrefour Beausoleil. She also works for the York Regional Library.

One reason for introducing this couple at this time: Tom has agreed to contribute articles for this column. So, you will be hearing from him in the near future.

This will not be anything new for Tom, for back in the early 1950s he wrote a similar column for a weekly newspaper in Oak Ridge, Oregon.

The column was called "Game Trails"; and although, at the time, he belonged to a Rod and Gun Club, Tom says he wrote, not so much about hunting and fishing, as he did about conservation, birds, game laws and various wildlife activities.

At times, he has also contributed articles to other publications.

Tom was born in Maryland, but grew up in southern Illinois, and later, in Birmingham, Alabama.

He spent over four years in active service in the U.S. Navy and another year in the reserve--most of his war experience being in the Pacific.

For 25 years he was active in the Boy Scout movement, both as a member and a leader.

He graduated from Berkley, California, in electrical engineering; and after a brief career in this field, went on to study forestry at Ann Arbor, Michigan.

FAO work

For 18 years, he was a forester in Oregon and Washington. Then, he joined an international organization known as the F.A.O.--Food and Agriculture Organization--forestry being a part of its concern.

With this organization, Tom spent four years in Malaysia and 3 1/2 years in Turkey.

After retiring from the U.S. Forestry Service, he spent three years in Haiti working for the U.S.A. Agency for International Development.

In Turkey, his job was to grow conifers to start a pulp and paper industry; in Haiti, to increase the supply of fuelwood.

It was in Haiti Tom and Madeleine met--their meeting occurring when Madeleine came to Tom for scuba-diving lessons.

After teaching her scuba diving, he also gave her lessons in canoeing.

Africa, Haiti

Madeleine was born and raised at Rivière Trois Pistoles, Quebec and graduated in



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library science from the University of Montreal.

With the Canadian International Development Agency, she spent five years in two former French colonies in Africa, and another five years in Haiti, establishing libraries in these countries.

After leaving Haiti in early 1985, Tom and Madeleine spent that summer paddling down the Mississippi River in a canoe, camping out on the river bank most nights.

In this way, they covered the entire length of the river from Lake Itasca in northern Minnesota to Pilottown, Louisiana--a distance of 2,300 miles--this trip being made when Tom was 63 and Madeleine 53.

To top this, during the following summer, Tom and Madeleine took on an even tougher challenge and embarked on a still greater adventure.

They canoed the Slave and Mackenzie Rivers from Fort Smith on the Alberta-Northwest Territories boundary to Tuktoyaktuk on the Arctic Ocean--1,300 miles of almost uninhabited wilderness. This trip started on June 24 and ended in early August.

Bird watchers

Tom and Madeleine are bird watchers and therefore this hobby was indulged as an integral part of these canoeing trips.

Both took part in our recently conducted Christmas Bird Count for this area and they maintain a bird feeding station in their back yard. For pets they have two Haitian parrots and a dashhound.

Tom has three grown children and Madeleine has four and Tom says their telephone bill looks like the national debt.

Tom has now volunteered to work on the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas project--gathering information for it in the field.

He will begin this in the spring working in some of the most remote areas to be covered by this project--in the western parts of Northumberland County.

Meanwhile, Madeleine will be working in the library, but will probably join him on weekends.

Wilkinson writes about fulmars

I have in hand "The 1986 Bird Report" of the "Isle of Wight Ornithological Group".

In it is an article written by one of the daughters of the Miramichi, Audrey Wilkinson. The title of her article is "The Fulmars of Gore Cliff".

I have never seen a fulmar, but Audrey sent us some close-up photographs of one of them sitting on its nest--also a photo of a downy chick.

These photos indicate the fulmar looks much like a herring gull except for the shape of its bill and the dark color of its eyes.

The bill is heavier than that of a gull, and it has a pronounced bump on the top side of it, at the base.

This bump could be called the bird's nose for it encloses two long nostril tubes running along the top of the bill and terminating at a point half-way out to the end of it.

This bill conformation is characteristic of all shearwaters, albatrosses, storm petrels, and fulmars--all of which are members of the same order of birds.

Collectively these birds are sometimes referred to as "tubenoses." They are all strictly sea birds, coming to land only to nest.

Despite its superficial resemblance to a gull, the fulmar is not related to the gulls.

Apparently, its flight pattern is very different from them--its flight being fast, and consisting of alternating periods of rapid wing beats and long glides--the glides being performed with the wings held stiffly on the horizontal. It usually flies low over the water.

Peter Freuchen, in his book "The Arctic Year," says the fulmar flies best in a gale and he describes some of their aerial feats in such weather.

They sail effortlessly for long distances along the crests of the huge waves and utilize the updrafts produced on the windward side of them.

The history

In her article, Audrey Wilkinson traces the history of the northern fulmar in Great Britain.

She says that until 1878, only one nesting colony of these birds was known to exist there.

It was situated on the small, remote island of St. Kilda, far off the northwest coast of Scotland.

Since then, it has gradually moved southward, establishing colonies at suitable locations along both the east and west coast. Now it has reached the southern coast.

For Audrey, the culmination came in the summer of 1986 when four pairs nested on the Isle of Wight--on cliffs near her home.

She says each of these four pairs hatched an egg, and three chicks were fledged. (The fulmar lays only one egg per season.)

However, 1986 was not the



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first year Audrey observed fulmars on these cliffs.

For several years previous to 1986, she had been watching with interest the increase in Fulmar activity there.

These activities included courtship and a couple of eggs had been laid. But, 1986 was the first year in which chicks were fledged.

Audrey's article was written just prior to the 1987 breeding season and at that time the fulmars were back, but it was too early to report on breeding success.

The literature indicates, that at sea, the northern fulmar is common and widespread, ranging over the North Atlantic, North Pacific, and Arctic Oceans.

North of here

Squires says it is seen in the Bay of Fundy and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

However, it's only nesting colonies on this side of the Atlantic seem to be far to the north of us--along the coasts of Baffin Island and Greenland.

The fulmar comes in two color phases--the normal light phase, described earlier; and a dark phase in which the whole plumage is of a uniformly dark gray color. Birds of intermediate plumage are also reported by Godfrey.

Freuchen says the dark phase is uncommon over much of its range, but that in other places it predominates--the Arctic colonies on Baffin Island and Spitzbergen being composed almost entirely of dark phase birds.

As he points out, this is the reverse of the norm for most Arctic birds and mammals tend to be white or lighter in color than those farther south.

The fulmar is reported to be quite tame sometimes approaching to within arms' length of people on board ship.

But, when attacked or threatened, it spits a foul-smelling oil onto its attacker.

From this habit comes its name, for according to Terres, Fulmar is Icelandic for "foul gull."

In Newfoundland, the Fulmar is called the noddy, but this should not be confused with the West Indian term which is also called the noddy.

Mr and Mrs Edmond Robichaud of Newcastle are Audrey Wilkinson's parents.

Purple martins are well

Purple martins spend their winters in South America and, last winter, some of you may have heard a report about a massive die-off of these birds while they were down there.

Fortunately, this report was incorrect. The reported die-off was not nearly so serious or extensive as was at first believed.

In fact, the purple martin is doing very well.

This is explained in an article by Frank Dobson which appeared in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* of Rochester, N.Y.

The article was sent to us by our well-known friend, Desmond Dolan.

The article says the faulty report originated in the city of Ribeirao Preto, Brazil where one night purple martins were seen falling from their roosts in trees, and 100 dead ones were found.

The next two nights, the same thing happened — about 300 dead birds in total being counted.

From this incident, erroneous conclusions were reached.

It was assumed the birds were dying from insecticide poisoning and further the same thing was happening all over the country.

From this reasoning, a wildly-inflated figure representing the total number of dead martins was calculated.

Later, investigation revealed the martins had not died from insecticide poisoning, but were victims of a parasitic round worm, and that the die-off was confined to a small local area.

Climbing steadily

The article goes on to say, that although there are local ups and downs, the overall purple martin population in North America has been climbing steadily for many years.

It attributes this to the increase in the number of multi-



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compartment bird houses being erected for them.

Local setbacks are often caused by long spells of wet weather while the young are still in the nest.

Flying insects are scarce at such times, and many birds starve — both young and adults.

Lapland longspur

An anonymous caller reported seeing a Lapland longspur near Tuadook Brook on Jan. 20.

He said the bird was very tame and landed close by him and this enabled him to see its markings very clearly.

This species is occasionally seen here during spring migration, but I have only one other winter record for it.

It was seen in a flock of snow bunting in Strawberry Marsh during one of our Christmas bird counts.

Eric Jardine of the Warwick Road has had a blackbird (common grackle) coming regularly to his feeder for most of the winter.

It disappeared for a few days during a cold snap and Eric thought it must have frozen to death.

However, on Jan. 29 — when Eric called it was back at his feeder again.

Many people are reporting a scarcity of birds at their feeders here in Newcastle, but Courtney Tozer reports an abundance of birds at his feeder in Sillikers.

These birds include black-capped chickadees, blue jays, pine siskins, evening grosbeaks, tree sparrows, snow buntings, and bohemian waxwings — the latter being attracted by apples on a tree in his yard.

Courtney says many of these birds are quite tame.

He has had snow buntings feeding on the ground within six feet of him, pine siskins frequently feeding within inches of his feet, and some of his chickadees alighting right on him.

Courtney also reported he had on about three occasions this past summer seen a mature bald eagle near his camp at Park's Brook. He has never seen it there in previous years.

Albino evening grosbeaks continue to pop up here and there.

One was reported at a Newcastle feeder on Jan. 21 and another was reported at Louis Sippley's feeder in Baie Ste Anne on Feb. 8.

This latter one was described as having pure white wings and a body that was mainly white but also partly gray.

Last winter, bird feeders were attracting large numbers of redpolls and pine siskins. This winter, redpolls have been absent and pine siskins few.

But, this morning two reports of redpolls were received.

Jean Ullock had a small flock and Tom Greathouse, one.

A fair number of goldfinches have been travelling with the pine siskins. They have become more common in winter during the past two or three years.

Extinct mammals lived here

Palaeontologists tell us that for a period which ended about 10,000 years ago, a surprising variety of large mammals roamed the forests and plains of North America — their variety seemingly rivaling that of present-day Africa.

Among these mammals were moose, deer, caribou, and almost all of the other native wild mammals we have today.

But, existing alongside these, were woolly mammoths, mastodons, elephants, camels, yaks, horses, long-horned bison, stag moose, musk ox of a non-Arctic type, giant beaver, saber-toothed cats, ground sloths, etc.

Why did so many large mammals disappear from our continent at almost the same time?

Nobody knows for sure. One theory is they were wiped out by hunting by the first wave of immigrants to arrive here — man's arrival and the disappearance of these mammals coinciding more or less.

These people are believed to have crossed into America via a land bridge which at that time connected Alaska with Siberia at the Bering Strait.

Some of these extinct mammals lived here in New Brunswick. How many, is another question.

The bones of a mastodon were uncovered in a sink-hole at Hillsborough — see "Glacial and Caternary Geology" by Richard Foster Flint (published 1971).

Both the woolly mammoths and the mastodons were in general shaped like elephants — both having long trunks and tusks like them; and, there were several species of each in America.

The woolly mammoths are considered to have been more closely-related to the elephants than were the mastodons — the mastodons being placed in a different and separate family.

Flint says the wooly mam-



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moths occupied the same type of habitat as the caribou — both living in open tundra-like areas.

However, not all mammoths lived in this type of habitat, according to the *Book of Knowledge* for it describes a southern species, the Imperial Mammoth, as living in Florida, Texas, Mexico, and up the U.S. west coast.

It is said to have been largest of all mammoths, reaching a height of 14 feet — taller than any present-day elephants.

Mastodons

Flint describes the mastodons as preferring the boreal forest-type habitat like that occupied by the moose.

This habitat they also shared with another strange beast — the ground sloth.

The mastodons appear to have been browsing animals living on evergreen twigs. The ground sloth is described by E.S. Moore in his "Elementary Geology of Canada" as being "gigantic", and he says they pulled down, or dug up, trees in order to eat the leaves.

However, Flint and Moore could be writing about different species of ground sloth even though they are both writing about mammals of North America at approximately the

same geological time period.

Nature has preserved some specimens of woolly mammoths for us — these having been found frozen in ice and gravel in Siberia — their flesh still edible after thousands of years.

The *Book of Knowledge* describes one of these specimens, found in 1901, as having hair up to 18 inches in length, and having a dense underfur of about two inches in thickness — the color of the coat — a rusty brown.

The mastodons found in the eastern United States, many of whose remains have been found, are said to have been about the size of a small, full-grown Indian elephant.

In the Nov. 1987 issue of *Quaternary Research* is an article written by David W. Steadman and Norton G. Miller.

They describe some of the animal remains that have been dug up at the Hiscock Site in western New York State.

A great vareity of animal bones have been recovered there including many that belonged to mastodons.

Of particular interest to these two researchers are some California condor bones which apparently became buried there shortly after the retreat of the great glacier ice sheet — about 11,000 years ago.

This indicates the California condor was not always a warm climate bird as was previously believed.

It is suggested the bird withdrew from the northern part of its range after the extinction of the great mammals which we have been talking about.

Being a vulture, it may have depended on these mammals to provide carcasses on which to feed.

The California condor is our largest North American Bird its wingspread sometimes reaching 9 1/2 feet. It is now on the verge of extinction, existing only in two sanctuaries in southern California.

Degrees not needed to decide

When does a human foetus become a human being?

When does a human foetus have the right of a human being?

Such questions are a smokescreen designed to confuse and becloud our thinking, for in them is the subtle suggestion that their answers are something other than the obvious.

Also, being posed as questions, they have the added effect of making the one posing them appear to be a thoughtful and reasonable person, rather, than of being a schemer, or of being someone who is trying to ram something down our throats.

We do not need to be experts to answer these questions. We do not need a string of degrees after our names to answer them. We do not need so much as a day's schooling to answer them.

I will put these questions another way, —

If your mother or my mother had decided to abort us, what difference would it have made to us if they had aborted us in the first month of pregnancy, in the last month of pregnancy, or whether they had strangled us at birth?

Nonetheless, I have sympathy for many women who have abortions. Often, it is a desperate solution to a desperate



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ate situation. No doubt, many are haunted by fear and guilt.

Being under pressure from husband, boyfriend, or parents, some may be afforded little opportunity to decide for themselves; and, if destitute, may have no other viable option.

Dilemma

According to an article by Floyd King writing in the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle (a clipping sent to us by Desmond Dolan), efforts to re-establish the Peregrine Falcon is creating somewhat of a dilemma.

Some years ago, this falcon was extirpated from much of its range as an indirect result of using D.D.T. as an insecticide.

Since then, biologists in Canada and the U.S. have been endeavouring to re-introduce it into some parts of its former range, (including Fundy National Park).

However, in Wisconsin, these efforts have been frustrated by Great Horned Owls — these owls picking off the young falcons before they leave the nest. This has been such a problem that practically no young falcons have been fledged.

To counter this, biologists are now shooting all Great Horned Owls found in the vicinity of Peregrine Falcon nesting sites. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has given its go-ahead on this, even though this agency is supposed to protect all owls throughout the country.

Apparently biologists have run into this problem in New York State as well. They are now endeavouring to establish Peregrine Falcons among the sky scrapers in the city of Albany — the idea being that Great Horned Owls do not live in such places.

The writer seems to be suggesting that the Great Horned Owls are more desirable than the Peregrine Falcons. He quotes an old bird book "Birds of America" as stating, —

"The toll of life taken by the strong we accept as part of the

scheme of things, but wanton destruction revolts us and the Peregrine Falcon is sometimes so carried away by the lust of slaughter that it will strike bird after bird from a flock of sandpipers and leave the victims where they fall."

Formed in 1982

In the mail this morning is the following announcement addressed to the Miramichi Naturalist Club, —

"The Society of Canadian Ornithologists (SCO) was formed in 1982 in conjunction with the Canadian hosting of the XIX International Ornithological Congress in Ottawa in June 1986. Since its inception, our membership has grown to over 150 members and the Society now publishes *Picoides*, the *Bulletin of the SCO*, twice a year.

The objectives of the SCO are to promote ornithology in Canada, whether it is enjoyed by amateurs or professionals, and to provide a common voice and information exchange for persons interested in birds.

Please give your support to this organization by taking out a membership. Send your remittance (\$10.00) to Philip Stepney, Provincial Museum of Alberta, 12845-102 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T5N 0M6."

Hawaii beautiful, says MacLean

In this morning's mail was the following letter from Gladys MacLean of Strathadam:—

'What would the world be once bereft of swamps and wilderness. Long live the weeds and wilderness yet.'

G.H. Hopkins

Aloha from Honolulu, the land of leis and flowers. Truly Hawaii is as beautiful as the tourist brochures portray it.

My friend took me for a drive through a rain forest where spectacular waterfalls cascaded over sheer cliffs.

Away down below we could see beaches of white sand cooled and caressed by the emerald sea.

The roadsides were tangled with vines, wild red ginger, bougainvillea of all colors, trees of bell flowers, deep yellow, and as big as cups.

The state flower is the hibiscus, worthy of an article about it alone.

From our basement apartment, I can see a huge mango tree, bananas, grapefruit, oranges and sour sop, and a magnificent breadfruit tree.

There is a frangi pangi tree with its exquisite perfume, a gardenia shrub and an unusual variety of wild ginger.

There are no snakes here. I have seen a few green lizards or iguana, and geckos, a small lizard which gobbles up insects. Since they are transparent you can view the whole cannibalistic procedure.

Striped zebra doves are everywhere, as are squaking mynah birds.

Tiny green and yellow Japanese white eyes sing in our mango tree, Brazilian cardinals pay us visits. They have a deep pinkish red head, grayish breast and dark back.

Because of the rapid growth in population, many birds are now extinct. The state bird, the nene, a handsome black and tan goose, is seldom seen anywhere except in the zoo.

Lest you think I am living in paradise, may I add this is the land of Pearl Harbour, earthquakes, tidal waves, hurricanes, floods and erupting volcanoes.

A six-lane freeway passes our door. Tires pound the pavement non-stop. I try to imagine it is the music of the waves thundering on the rocks three miles away.

Sky high

Most of the people in this 50th state live in high-rise condominiums. They have to cope with traffic jams, squabbles over zoning, droves of mos-



Harry Walker

Mar. 4/88

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quitoes, and above all the very high cost of living. They save on heating bills, but everything else is sky high. We watch the sales and thrift shops.

The locals (which is what they call anyone born here) are gentle and friendly. Most of them are the color of golden wheat. There does not seem to be any racial discrimination.

I have found a caring, compassionate church. I often try to guess whether the person next to me is of Polynesian, Malaysian or Oriental roots.

'When the roll is called up yonder

We'll be filled with joy and wonder

When we see that blood bought number

Some from every tribe and nation will be there.'

It is my privilege to share God's message of redeeming grace with many here.

This is a valuable learning experience for me; and I am filled with gratitude to my former colleague, with whom I am staying for bringing it about.

The heat is helping my costochondritis, and I'm able to walk a mile or so daily without being loaded down with gear.

But for retirement my heart is in New Brunswick with its exciting change of seasons, wide, open spaces, meadows of wild flowers, and choirs of birds.

I would rather be in my own field of buttercups and daisies and red clover, than peer through my neighbour's barbed-wire fence at his perfect orchids. Or as Thoreau so aptly stated, 'I'd rather sit on my own pumpkin than on my neighbour's velvet cushion.'

My address is 1032, 3rd Ave., Honolulu, HI, U.S.A., 96816.

I shall be looking for a letter. Stamps cost .43 cents. Some of you have been paying more.

I forgot to tell you the day temperature stays in the 80s.

Sincerely and sweetly yours"

Gladys Eileen MacLean

Canoeing the Mackenzie

GUEST COLUMN

This column was written by local resident Tom Great-house.

June 24, 1986 was warm and sunny on the west shore of the Slave River at Fort Smith, Northwest Territories.

The turbulent water roaring over the Rapids of the Drowned was both audible and visible. Some white pelicans could be seen near the rapids.

It was a perfect day to begin our canoe trip via the Slave River to Great Slave Lake and then via the Mackenzie about 1,100 miles to Tuktoyaktuk on the Arctic Ocean.

Our planning, which covered three years, had included a 2,300 mile odyssey down the entire Mississippi River, a trip which started about 100 miles south of the Manitoba/Minnesota border and ended where the Mississippi becomes the Gulf of Mexico, 100 river miles south of New Orleans.

Maps of the Mackenzie, Canada's longest river, had been acquired from Ottawa.

Books detailing Alexander Mackenzie's canoeing exploits in the Northwest Territories and others featuring "Les Voyageurs", Mackenzies' source of power, were read closely.

Jacques and Ruth van Pelt, owners and operators of Subarctic Wilderness Adventures (in Fort Smith) and friends from a previous 170 mile canoeing trip in 1981, were consulted.

(Dan and Lina Rae of Newcastle are also friends of the Van Pelts.)

The 1986 trip was over seven times longer than the previous trip.

It began just downstream from the last (Rapids of the Drowned) of a series of class 5 rapids between Fort Fitzgerald and Fort Smith.

Years before, freight and passengers were brought from central Alberta by steamboat down the Peace and Slave Rivers to Fort Fitzgerald, then portaged to the point where we began our trek.

One of our principal planning problems had been to sort out reality from the myths. Would we be eaten by bears? Would the black flies and mosquitoes dispute rights to our blood?

Brushing aside these possibilities, we agreed our greatest danger would be ever-present when we were on the waters — the simple act of capsizing our canoe.

We planned to begin paddling as soon as the ice had gone. We knew from scuba diving experience that we would have difficulty surviving if we had to be in the icy water more than 10 to 15 minutes.

Even though we are both good swimmers, the thought of 2-5° water made it easy to wear our vest-type life jackets and to refrain from sudden movements.

The latter is not easy on the Mackenzie when, after paddling for hours, lulled to the spectacular scenery of the nearby mountains, your first caribou or peregrine falcon is seen.

Bears. Mosquitoes. Blackflies. Wolves.

Was there real danger? If so, how could we prepare ourselves to minimize factors



Harry Walker

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which could bring the trip to a sudden end?

Should we heed advice from several persons and take a sawed-off shotgun?

Suppose a bear approached the tent at night. Might it not be more dangerous to try to shoot it than to make noise and use a light to scare it away?

We chose to prevent an attack by some strict rules: no food in the tent; no left-over food around the camp or in the canoe; all food in water (air)-tight bags except that being prepared; all left-over food to be burned, with any remnants buried.

Although there were bear tracks, sometimes fresh, at almost every one of 37 campsites, only one bear was seen.

While walking to a small lake near the river to see loons, I was fortunate to see a black bear who had been feeding on berries. As for grizzlies, only one track seen was large enough to qualify.

We had read several horror stories about clouds and "blankets" of mosquitoes/blackflies.

As a result, we bought mosquito jackets and a good supply of Muskol (95 percent "deet")-type repellants.

The jackets are soaked in repellent and are truly "wonderful". They make camp life pleasant even when there are clouds of insects.

If such repellants come in contact with nylon, with the finish on binoculars or on canoe paddles, they damage the finish, so care is required.

No reaction was noted with exposed parts of the body.

Another good investment involved a canoe cover. It is a bright yellow, which would have been useful if we needed help and wanted to be seen.

It came into almost daily use, however, as protection from cold north winds and from a few rainstorms.

Our last two major planning projects concerned food and communications.

Communications, in case of an accident, seemed a more formidable problem. The RCMP helped solve both.

We gave them an itinerary at Fort Smith and they informed us that we should check in at each RCMP post along our route.

If we were 48 hours late, they would look for us. This eliminated the need for carrying a radio.

They also said that we could mail food ahead to their post at Port Norman.

When we arrived on Saturday, the post office was closed. The good news was that the postmistress, wife of the RCMP officer, gave us our boxes plus coffee and cookies.

One in a series.

Dry camp sites were hard to find

GUEST COLUMN

This column was written by local resident Tom Greathouse.

■ Part 2 of a series

When we waved goodbye to friend Jacques van Pelt and a reporter from the *Slave River Journal* at Fort Smith, my spouse, Madeleine Morissette and I were exhilarated.

With the first thrust of our paddles, we pointed the canoe in the direction of the Arctic Ocean, confident we could cope with an environment new to us.

After all, Mackenzie and his intrepid voyageurs had made the trip successfully in birchbark canoes and with very little knowledge of the obstacles ahead.

As we paddled, it was easy to picture the jaunty, red-hatted voyageurs, singing as their "pagaies" (paddles) flashed about two times as fast as ours.

Although slower, we averaged about 6.5 km (4 miles)/hour while pushing our 16-foot canoe and its contents of some 270 kg/600 lbs.

At put-in, the Slave was about 2 kilometres wide, about 170 metres (0.1 mile) above sea level. Occasionally it would narrow to about 0.5 km before passing through its delta into Great Slave Lake.

Although paddling would have been easier if we had followed the channel, we often travelled close to one shore in order to see wildlife and the vegetation and rock formations at close range.

Following the shore at a distance of 50 to 100 feet was also useful when looking for a source of clean water, when wave action in the channel made paddling inefficient or when there was serious danger of capsizing.

Our reward the first day was to see three bald eagles and several broods of ducklings at close range.

About 1 p.m. we passed Bell Rock, named for the shape of the rock outcrop.

We traded greetings with two men repairing the roof of one of the few buildings left in the community.

We would talk with only two other persons in the next five days while paddling some 150 miles.

Although we would pass the Salt Plains Indian Reservation meanwhile, it was not visible from the river.

That afternoon a tropical-type thunderstorm developed quickly. To avoid the high winds, we beached the canoe at the best available spot.

Thanks to good advice I had purchased hip-length boots to match the reputed depth of mud along our route. Without them it would have been even more difficult to pull the loaded canoe above the breaking waves.

As suddenly as it developed, the storm was gone. Experiencing such a violent storm while in a canoe or on the edge of the water, with no protection from the elements, always leaves us with a renewed respect for the natural forces around us.

We had paddled 37 miles



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when we made our first camp at 9 p.m. We had found the site on a high bank because hunters had nailed a board between two trees to serve as a table/shelf.

The camp was immediately upstream from an elongated oxbow named "Grand Detour". There was a small opening between the spruce trees as well as a ring of stones, where fires had been contained, and a few thousands mosquitoes.

The latter were kept just beyond our noses by the wearing of our repellent-treated mosquito jackets, a must for non-resident, short-term visitors to areas "North of 60" (degrees latitude).

Later that night after we entered the tent and eliminated some 20 to 30 stowaways, we could hear the hum of thousands of pairs of moving wings.

Readers may ask why we slept under the trees? We had looked for a dry camp site for about two hours, a major task almost every evening on the trip.

Alternatives were to put our tent on wet mud or stretch our fatigue tolerance and keep looking.

Choosing a camp site was perhaps our greatest source of confrontation on the trip.

By compromising on such decisions, we were able to complete the trip together and even enjoy sharing life afterwards.

The following day dawned bright and warm. After a good breakfast prepared by Madeleine, a great camp (and domestic) chef, we had paddled only a short mile when we saw our first great gray owls.

Shortly after we saw three bald eagles. As we are both keen birders, such sightings make any such day a memorable one.

Before completing the canoe portion of our odyssey, we listed 55 species. Some are household names across most of North America.

These include the kestrel, American robin, common loon and spotted sandpiper. Others are principally Canadian breeders, such as the Canada goose, mallard and boreal chickadee.

A few species observed, such as the parasitic jaeger, willow ptarmigan and Arctic (Pacific) loon are seldom seen in sub-Arctic Canada.

Our next camp was unique in that it had a fast-flowing source of water and a thick bed of moss for easy sleeping.

Environment lifts cares

GUEST COLUMN

This column, *Canoeing the Mackenzie*, was written by local resident Tom Greathouse.

■ Part 3 in a series

We had been warned that while paddling through the land of the Midnight Sun we would have trouble sleeping.

This did not pertain to us after paddling 30 or more miles a day and living under the open sky.

By our third day, the environment of the river had listed the cares of civilization from our minds and bodies, much as the morning sun lifts the fog from the valleys of the Mackenzie.

Paddling was once again becoming as routine as walking. Our minds were free to react to the beauty around us.

Madeleine, Canadian by birth but a newcomer to the Mackenzie, could be pardoned for her ecstatic, nationalistic praise of the scenery which greeted us at almost every bend in the river.

We had no radio, so we used the sky and the water to predict the weather.

Our only real surprise came less than 10 miles from the end of our journey, within sight of Tuktoyaktuk, when a bank of fog off the Arctic Ocean enveloped us for about 30 minutes.

On the fifth day, having passed through the Slave Delta, we paddled to Moose Deer Island. (At one time it was noted for its Hudson's Bay (The Bay) Trading post.)

About 10 p.m., we noted a clearing with some tent platforms and small storage buildings. As the wind was increasing and two miles of open water lay ahead, we made camp there.

The most spectacular sunset of the trip began about 8 p.m. and was still on display when a strong wind caused me to get up at 2 a.m. to check the canoe mooring.

In the morning we paddled around a stretch of Slave Lake to Fort Resolution to end the first leg of the trek.

After two days in Hay River, we put in at Dory Point, the beginning of the Mackenzie. Like most of the days, it was sunny and comfortable for paddling.

As we passed Fort Providence, we saw a white, picturesque church built on a prominent site visible for several miles in each direction.

That night we camped at one of our most pleasant sites on Lake Mills. It was a petite island, with gravel surface and low shrubs on the north portion which housed at least four different species of nesting birds.

Our next superlative camp was at Browning Point, a former sawmill site with a million dollar view of the river. We spent a day in Fort Simpson just to apply for a lease to develop a small commercial facility and a residence. If the government had been responsive, we would probably be there today.

Fort Simpson, the oldest settlement still occupied along



Harry Walker

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the river, was once the hub of fur-trading activities of The Bay.

It is still an excellent fur-producing area, as well as being the "Garden Spot of the Mackenzie" due to its stone-free, silty loam soil.

While discussing our trip with Ben Baldwin of Douglassfield, it was learned his geology career had taken him to the Mackenzie mountains and such historic spots as Fort Simpson and Norman Wells.

In 1985, Ben returned to the Miramichi to pursue geology, farming and environmental protection interests.

Downstream from Fort Simpson, we camped at places named Root River, which had a delta strewn with uprooted trees; River-between-Two-Mountains; Ochre River, with tannin-colored water, delightful to drink; Willowlake River, where we met George Roots and marveled at his generator and gasoline-driven lawn mower (now 75, he is as agile as many men at 35);

Police Island, our terminus after paddling 77 miles in 13 hours, our greatest one-day travel; Fort Norman, where the postmistress opened the office on Saturday to give us our food shipment;

Great Bear River, with crystal clear water; San Sault Rapids, not difficult along the west bank; The ramparts, home of peregrine falcons and swift water; Fort Good Hope, where the motel is functioning well under local ownership;

No-Name lake, where the only bear was seen; Reindeer Station, summer home of Mary and Buster Kalik as they catch, filet and smoke fish in traditional ways;

Inuvik, our destination the night I paddled as if in a dream for three hours, and where we were interviewed by radio and The Drum, the local paper;

Kittigazuit, one-time whaling station, where we arrived at 4:30 a.m. and were invited in to hot tea, caribou soup and hot, fluffy rolls by the Billy Day family, who had just finished processing a whale as their ancestors had done for generations.

Our tensest moments came in the short-lived but violent storm on the first day and when the fog enveloped us only 10 miles from our goal.

Positive emotional moments were numerous. Perhaps the last stroke of the paddle at "Tuk" will be longest remembered, but the help of dozens of people along the way will live as long as my memory.

To Madeleine and all others, I will be eternally thankful.

Robins and other spring species have returned

Good news! The robins are back.

Also, the bald eagles and a few other spring birds have returned.

And, we have received more reports of black panthers at Black River.

Now for the details:

Possibly the first spring bird was a rusty blackbird which appeared at a Newcastle bird feeder on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14. On the other hand, it may have been one that failed to go south last fall.

The same may be said of a brown-headed cowbird that visited this same feeder on Feb. 27.

On March 16, common mergansers — about a dozen of them — were swimming in the small patch of water that had opened up below the Miramichi Pulp and Paper mill.

On March 20, Tom Great-house reported the first bald eagle. He said it was seen amid a flock of circling gulls which rose from the ice of the river in front of Newcastle.

By March 23, this eagle had been joined by another one, for two were sitting side-by-side on the ice beside the open water below the mill.

On March 26, Rick Miller phoned and reported a bald eagle had flown along the river at the eastern end of Newcastle.

All of these eagles were fully mature birds with complete white head and tail.

As many of you are aware, a bald eagle has been coming to Newcastle every year in March, arriving as soon as the water opens up below the mill. Last year, there were two of them.

Generally, these eagles are not seen in the immediate area of Newcastle after the ice goes out of the rest of the river or shortly thereafter.

On March 25, Mrs. Robert Brander of Strathadam reported there had been red-winged blackbirds at her place during the week.

First robins

The first robin was reported by Norman Stewart of the Lockstead Road north of Blackville. That was on the morning of March 26.

The next robin report came close on the heels of the first. About a hour later, Theresa Ross of Lower Newcstle called. She had three robins on her lawn, and before she hung up the receiver, she had upped that count to four.

Also, on March 26, there were five black ducks at Strawberry Marsh, and a grackle (blackbird) showed up in our backyard.

As you may recall, last fall, a black panther was reported in the Black River area — Roscoe Mault and Darren Taylor reporting it.

Now, it is in the news again.

Black panther

Mrs. Shirley Miller reports that on March 1, she looked out



Harry Walker

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through an upstairs window and saw this large black animal. It was crouched low to the ground on a snowbank beside a building on the opposite side of the road.

It was broadside to her and in full view. It was 9 a.m. and therefore fully daylight.

She estimates it was about five feet long, was entirely black, and had the long rope tail characteristic of a panther.

Upon seeing it, she quickly telephoned the Hexham Ranger office, but the line was busy. She then checked to see if the animal was still there. It was, so she phoned Mel Adams. He immediately came to investigate. However, by the time she had finished calling him, the animal had disappeared.

Investigation revealed scratch marks on the snowbank indicating an animal had been there, but the snow was hard and no good paw prints were to be found.

Across the river, Mrs. Hans Weber reports, that two days later, March 3, a large black animal with two small ones in tow were seen crossing the river on the ice.

After reaching the west bank, they proceeded along beside a fence bordering the field which lies between their house and the river. This route led them to some bush where they disappeared from sight.

She says at first glance these animals were thought to be a mother bear and her cubs, but it soon became apparent this was not so. Besides, it was not the time of year, nor the kind of weather, for bears to be out of their dens.

She described them as having long rope tails and stubby noses — not being built like either bears nor dogs.

Further, they did not walk like dogs, and the big one was bigger than a dog.

Most of the time, they were jumping and playing, rather than walking or running. All three were either black, or a very dark brown.

On March 20, this scene was re-enacted, except this time only one small animal accompanied the big one.

Weber says she took a photograph of them, but the photograph is still in the camera.

This photograph was taken at rather long range, and therefore it may not be possible to identify the animals in it.

Early spring plant has white flowers

One of the many plants, named for Canada, is *Sanguinaria Canadensis*.

Its common names are blood-root, blood-dragon or sang-dragon.

I have never seen it in N.B., but it is quite common in P.Q., wherever there is deciduous forest and a relatively rich soil.

It must have a loose soil, because it produces many thick, horizontal rhizomes.

The rhizomes have reservoirs that contain a red dye, which was used by the Indians to color their skin — the war paint. The species belongs to the poppy family.

It blooms early in the spring and produces a mass of white flowers. It has large, deeply lobed leaves that may grow to a diameter of 15 to 30 centimeters.

In the spring the deeply-lobed leaves are curved around the flowering stem as though to shelter it from the cold spring weather.

The flowers spring up in clumps and patches, that cover the surface of the forest floor.

The flowers spring up from the perennial rhizomes, which have survived under ground, through the winter.

The plants are only eight to 16 inches tall and they always grow in a moist habitat.

The flowers are worthless for a bouquet, because their petals are not persistent. The petals drop almost immediately, after the flowers are picked.

The leaves are thick and appear as though they had been cut from a sheet of gray-green rubber.

The so-called "blood" is all in the rhizome and it has given the plant the name "Indian red paint", "red root" and "red puccoon."

Old herbals give a variety of medicinal uses, both internal and external.

Internally, it must be used in



Desmond
Dolan

TECHNOLOGY

very small doses, because an overdose may be fatal. It is claimed effective for external skin sores, exzema etc.

Some researchers believe that a cure for such diseases as cancer, may some day be found in a plant extract, similar to the rhizome blood. Apparently, it is a plant known all over the world, because the Chinese have used it as a cure for anemia.

Cancer cure?

Margaret B. Kreig in her book "Green Medicine" has written: "When the late U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles was dying with cancer, he received more than 600 letters, carrying suggested treatments. Blood-root was frequently mentioned among the 57 plants recommended."

Her book also quotes Dr. Jonathan Hartwell of the Cancer Research Division of the U.S. National Institute of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, as saying: "There actually is evidence of anti-tumor activity when extracts from blood-root are administered to cancerous experimental animals."

As far as I am concerned, My French botany book "Flore Laurentienne" by Father Marie Victorin, is my bible for

plants of eastern Canada. It states:

"Plants known for a horizontal rhizome, containing a red latex, the leaves are basal and borne singly. Each leaf has 5 to 9 lobes. Each flower has 8 to 16 white petals, that shed early. The flower may be 25 to 40 millimeters in diameter.

"It is one of the most remarkable plants indigenous to Canada. It is known for the beauty of both leaves and flowers and the red latex.

"An extract of the rhizome, has been used to stop bleeding and it was probably used by the Indians to make signatures in blood.

"In the pharmacopea Americana, the extract from blood-root is classed as a purgative, an inducer of vomiting, and in small doses as a diaphoretic, stimulant and expectorant. In large doses, it is an aerid, narcotic poison.

"The reservoirs, which contain the latex, are forms of elements super-imposed in series, so as to make a network with the other series. One can observe these in fresh cuts of the same width, made in the rhizome.

"The flowers open wide in the morning, but in mid-afternoon, the petals turn inward, getting ready to close in the evening.

"The flowers are protergy-nous, that means, the stigmas are receptive, before the pollen is shed.

"The flowers during the 8 to 9 days of their blooming, are visited by domestic bees for pollen. One can see the bees leaving the woods with their feet loaded with enormous pellets of bright yellow pollen."

I hope you woods travellers of the Miramichi will be on the look-out for the early-spring blooming blood-root and if you find it, let me know the type of habitat in which you found it.



■ **Puppets:** Puppeteering is a hobby right now, but Luc-Anne Walker of Sackville would like to see it work into a full-time job. Page 7



Walkers practise puppet show

Puppets

She's hoping for full time

by Myrna Dawson-Hovey
NEWCASTLE

Puppeteering is just a hobby right now, but Luc-Anne Walker of Sackville would like to see it work into a full-time job.

And her husband, Stewart, is helping her get started by putting life into a variety of puppets.

Stewart is originally from the Miramichi and it was his link here that brought the two to the Carrefour Beausoleil in Newcastle last Friday.

They were at Stewart's father's home (Harry Walker) during Christmas when they met Madeleine Morissette, the school librarian.

When Morissette found out what Luc-Anne did, she immediately asked them to put on performances at the library. The puppeteers put on three performances Friday at the school.

The show was written in English, but when interest was shown in a French version, the couple got a student at Mount Allison University to translate the play.

Stewart works in the physics department there designing electronic and computer equipment.

The play *Little Twilight* was written by Luc-Anne. Neither person is bilingual, but say the play, in its French version, is giving them a beginning in the second language.

"It's taken me about a year to write the play and it's still not really finished," Luc-Anne said.

"Every time we perform it, I change something or add something, we keep revising it according to the feedback we get from the audience," she added.

Luc-Anne began her career as a puppeteer when she was studying in Ottawa a few years ago. She had no summer job and decided to be a puppeteer. She apprenticed for three years in Toronto.

The scenes they use in the play as well as all the puppets and props are made by the Walkers.

And although puppeteering is a hobby right now, "I would

like to see it work into a full-time job," Luc-Anne said.

"Stewart is helping me until it can be that, a paying sort of thing," she added.

After each performance at the Carrefour Beausoleil, the Walkers let the children ask questions about puppeteering and explained how the difference puppets were operated.

"It takes a lot of energy to perform in this type of thing," Stewart said. They stand up behind a wall during the whole performance.

As Luc-Anne is shorter than Stewart, they designed platform shoes she wears to bring her up to the height needed.

Puppeteering can take up to 50 hours a week for the Walkers, depending on what's going on. "We practice at the university where we use video equipment and tape our rehearsals," Luc-Anne said.

"Then we can sit back and decide what needs changing or what we're doing wrong," Stewart added.

The Walkers were to perform at the Moncton Library this week.

Walkers Perform Puppet Show At Carrefour Beausoleil

By Jane Wood

Madeline Morissette, librarian at Carrefour Beausoleil, is trying to make people aware that the library at the school which is part of the York Library is open and available for use by the general public.

To that end she persuaded Stewart and Luc-Anne Walker to bring their puppet show to Town last Friday. They performed a play titled "Little Twilight" which was written by Luc-Anne. The script has been translated into French by a student at Mount Allison and the Walkers perform it in both languages.

Madeline met Stewart and Luc-Anne Walker at Christmas when she attended a bird count also attended by Stewart's father, Harry Walker. "When I heard that they were puppeteers I persuaded them to come and do a show at our library," said Madeline.

The Walkers gave three performances on Friday for the students at Carrefour Beausoleil, which were very well received. The students were fascinated by the puppets and how they worked.

Luc-Anne has been interested in puppets for the last nine years and has informally apprenticed with a company in Toronto. She said she would eventually like to make a career of puppetry and spends from zero to fifty hours a week practicing.

The Walkers make all the props and puppets themselves. Luc-Anne schedules practice and designing new puppets around her full time job of mother to an eight-month-old daughter.

Stewart is employed full time designing electronic equipment for the Physics Department at Mount Allison.

Luc-Anne said they often use the video equipment at Mount Allison to record a performance of their show to allow them to see the puppet show as the audience sees it and make necessary changes.

"It allows us to see if a puppet is leaning sideways or if it is cut off," she said. "Because we are working from behind the scene it's hard for us to be sure what the audience sees," she said.

The Walkers hope to expand their number of performances in the future but for now are content to have a few jobs ahead.

Madeline Morissette said she was pleased with the response of the students to the show. She hopes by informing the public about all the things happening at the Carrefour Beausoleil Library to make them aware that it is the Regional French Section of the York system and is there to be used by area residents.



Puppet Show In Progress

Stewart and Luc-Anne Walker work behind the scenes to present their puppet show titled "Little Twilight" at the Carrefour Beausoleil Library.

Cumming wants the board to be more representative

We have received a letter from Bruce Gordon Cumming, professor of Biology at the University of New Brunswick.

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of another letter which he has sent to Morris Green, Minister of Natural Resources.

In his letter to Green, he protests that the Wildlife Advisory Board is not representative. (It was set up while Green's predecessor, Malcolm McLeod, was minister)

Cumming said the Board is composed almost entirely of hunters, trappers, and fishermen — people who kill wildlife.

People who enjoy wildlife without killing it — birdwatchers, photographers, canoeists, hikers, campers, and the general sightseeing public — are barely represented, he said.

You might like to protest the composition of this board as he had done.

Here is his letter to the Minister, —

The Honorable Morris Green,
Minister of Natural Resources and Energy,
Hugh John Flemming Forestry Complex,
P.O. Box 6000, Fredericton, N.B., E3B 5H1

Dear Mr Minister;

In a letter of December 2, 1985, addressed to the New Brunswick Federation of Naturalists, the director of the Fish and Wildlife Branch stated "As you are aware, the premier has requested formation of a Fish and Wildlife Advisory Board relative to the following background.

'Consistent with a stewardship responsibility, the Department of Natural Resources manages to provide social and economic benefits from our province's fish and wildlife resources. The Department would like to ensure that these benefits satisfy the



Harry Walker

Apr. 8/88

WILDLIFE

needs of New Brunswickers. Various individuals and groups with an interest in fish and wildlife matters have requested a better way to communicate with Government.

The former Minister of Natural Resources (Premier Richard Hatfield) has given a commitment to form an advisory board as a mechanism for public consultation.

'A board would provide an improved understanding of the views of citizens and an opportunity to inform others on management programs undertaken by the Department.'

A Wildlife Advisory Board was formed during Malcolm MacLeod's tenure as Minister of Natural Resources with representation from the following organizations: Atlantic Salmon Federation, N.B. Council (three representatives); N.B. Outfitters' Association (two); Caraquet Fish and Game (one); N.B. Trappers' Association (one); Region 5 Action Committee (one); N.B. Wildlife Federation (two); University of New Brunswick (one); N.B. Federation of Naturalists (one); no indicated affiliation (three).

With the exception of the N.B. Federation of Naturalists, all of the foregoing organizations appear to support the killing of wildlife through hunting, trapping, fishing, or

collection of specimens.

It is not apparent that the three unaffiliated board members differ from the "consumptive" viewpoints of the large majority of the rest of the board.

In 1983, a study sponsored by federal-provincial authorities and entitled "The Importance of Wildlife to Canadians — A National Survey", was published by Environment Canada.

This study gauged the importance of wildlife to Canadians. Non-consumptive wildlife-related activities, such as feeding, observing or photographing wildlife were the most popular — with 82.8% of the sampled population expressing some or great interest in these activities.

An estimated \$4.2 billion was spent by Canadians involved in these activities.

In contrast, only 26.9% of the sampled population expressed some or great interest in the consumptive use of wildlife. An estimated \$1.2 billion was spent on hunting wildlife.

Thus, a large population majority and citizen expenditure favoured non-consumptive activities related to wildlife. In other words, wildlife can be more valuable to society alive than dead.

In view of the foregoing, there are sound reasons for suggesting that the composition of the board does not represent the legitimate concerns of the population regarding wildlife conservation, protection, management, and related legislation.

This is a request that you, as the responsible minister, give serious attention to this matter to ensure that the composition of the board will reflect a broader perspective.

Yours sincerely,
Bruce Gordon Cumming
(Professor of Biology)

Whitetailed deer are frequently infested with the worm *Parelaphostrongylus tenuis*

My wife and I were interested in your article in the July 22, 1987 issue of the Leader concerning moose brain worm kills.

This is a serious matter in the Rocky Mountains where whitetail deer are moving in to what was formerly only mule deer habitat.

Whitetails can always displace mule deer, the popular explanation being that a whitetail buck is more aggressive than a mule deer buck. It is likely that the parasites tend to tip the scales.

We thought you would be interested in the enclosed excerpt for "Mule and Black-Tailed Deer Of North America", a Wildlife Management Institute book of 1981.

Parelaphostrongylosis

Cervids in western North America face a potentially hazardous parasite if white-tailed deer continue to expand their range westward. White-tailed deer frequently are infected with the meningeal worm, *Parelaphostrongylus tenuis*. The adult of this parasite inhabits the cranial venous sinuses and the subdural space. Eggs generally are deposited in venous blood and carried to the lungs, where they hatch into first-stage larvae. These larvae pass up the respiratory tract, enter the mouth, are swallowed, then are eliminated with feces. Larvae must penetrate the foot of terrestrial molluscs (which are common on most deer ranges), to develop

GUEST COLUMN

George B. Johnston

to the infective stage (three to four weeks in summer).

White-tailed deer become infected by accidentally ingesting snails carrying infective larvae. Once ingested, larvae are released, migrate to the spinal cord, and develop to the young adult stage in dorsal horns of gray matter. They migrate from the neural parenchyma into the spinal subdural space, and from there move to the cranium. The entire life cycle in white-tailed deer—from infective larvae to appearance of first-stage larvae in feces—is almost exactly three months. White-tailed deer tolerate the nematode well; apparently only two cases of clinical disease have been reported (Prestwood 1970; Eckroades et al. 1970).

In moose, woodland caribou, elk, reindeer, mule deer, black-tailed deer, fallow deer, and probably other exotic cervids, the meningeal worm causes excessive trauma to the central nervous system. Even small numbers may result in neurologic disease, often leading to paraplegia and death. All the forenamed mammalian species seem unusually susceptible to neural invasion and show little resistance to infection.

Currently, the meningeal worm has not been reported in



western North America. However, because agricultural and forestry practices favor white-tailed deer, this animal is moving westward. While vanguards may not be infected, some of the animals that follow undoubtedly will carry the infection and, if a suitable snail intermediate host is present, westward expansion of this parasite problem will occur. Unfortunately, *Discus cronkhitei* serves as an intermediate host for the mening-

eal worm, and this terrestrial mollusk is found in Colorado and, no doubt, in other geographic regions of the West. It would not be surprising if other species of terrestrial molluscs serve equally well.

Anderson (1972) remarked that there is concern in North America about the introduction of exotic species. But he also said there is insufficient concern about the dangers of relocating native animals. Two classic examples supporting this statement are transplants of elk to Pennsylvania and black-tailed deer to Tennessee. Elk imported to Rachelwood Wildlife Preserve, Pennsylvania, share their range with white-tailed deer and as a consequence have suffered morbidity and mortality from meningeal worm (Woolfe et al. 1977). Black-tailed deer were sent to Tennessee from Oregon during 1966 and 1967. The objective was to determine if these deer would thrive in urbanized areas of east Tennessee where restocking with white-tailed deer had failed. The animals were released in a large enclosure. The population increased but hybridized with local whitetails. In early 1973 the first instance of neurologic disease was observed. In subsequent years, despite good reproduction, the blacktail population steadily declined while the white-tailed deer population increased (Nettles et al. 1977).

Another example is that of fallow deer imported to a game

ranch in Georgia, where they were maintained in captivity for three years. White-tailed deer, together with other wild and domestic species, also were present in the enclosure. During autumn 1971, two mature male fallow deer developed neurologic disease. Postmortem examination confirmed that the meningeal worm was responsible (Kistner et al. 1977).

Considerable concern has been voiced by parasitologists and wildlife biologists in western North America over the potential invasion of white-tailed deer, especially the possibility that the meningeal worm will accompany the whitetails' encroachment on the Rocky Mountain region. Consequently, an experiment was initiated at Colorado State University to determine if mule deer were susceptible to infection with this parasite. Of 8 deer experimentally infected at low levels, 7 succumbed, showing classic signs of this disease. In addition, one prong-horn was infected experimentally, and it too succumbed to meningeal worm infection (Tyler 1977).

R.C. Anderson's report, "The Ecological Relationships of Meningeal Worm and Native Cervids in North America" (1972) should be required reading for every student of wildlife biology in North America. It is especially valuable for those students studying movements of native or exotic wildlife across the continent.

Birds that hedge their bets

WHEN nature's economy strengthens in April, a surplus of food, and therefore of energy, becomes available to birds for investment in reproduction.

The mallard invests that surplus energy — the biological equivalent of currency — in one long-term debenture. The robin invests in consecutive short-term deposits. And the barn owl gambles in commodity futures.

Waterfowl incubate as many eggs in a clutch as the female can accommodate comfortably beneath her body. After about 28 days of incubation, the mallardatches 10 to 12 ducklings. The ducklings are precocious and alert, with their eyes already open and their bodies insulated with water-repellent down. Within 24 hours of hatching the entire brood is led away to water where each duckling feeds itself — on a high-protein diet of aquatic insects.

But since precocial young grow slowly, juvenile mallards remain with the duck for a period of several months. Throughout that period the ducklings remain vulnerable to predators. To rear just one or two offspring through to maturity, a mallard must first invest in a large clutch of eggs and then in a protracted period of parenthood.

In contrast, the robin hatches four or five young after just 14 days of incubation. The nestlings are altricial, which means they are naked, sluggish, blind, and helpless when first hatched. Both parents must feed their brood until the young robins leave the nest as fledglings.

The vital difference between precocial ducklings and altricial robins is the fact that young songbirds race very quickly through the vulnerable period of dependent infancy. A juvenile robin will attain its adult weight — often 30 to 40 times its hatching weight

— just three weeks after hatching. Ducklings hatch in a more advanced stage of development, but are not able to fly until they are six to eight weeks old.

Before their first brood is completely independent, a pair of robins will often start to build a second nest.

Before the summer is over a second brood of speckled young robins will have been fledged.

The barn owl has adopted yet another strategy for investing its energy in



reproduction. It gambles that a number of young can be reared successfully in a given breeding season. Depending on the abundance of their prey, a pair of barn owls may incubate more eggs and hatch more young than the food supply of rodents can support.

In a year when the population of meadow voles peaks, for example, all five or six young barn owls in a clutch will survive. But when hunting success is poor, only the larger and stronger owlets survive to fledging.

Since the barn owl gambles on the future abundance of its prey, it hedges its bet by starting incubation soon after the first egg is laid. As a result, the oldest and the youngest owlets in a single brood are often 10 to 14 days apart in age, strength, and body size.

Should a pair of barn owls win their bet, all young in the nest are fed adequate rations and leave the nest in due course. But if the bet is lost, the parents will sacrifice their younger and weaker offspring in order to feed the larger and more vigorous ones. □

Solution to sawdust pile

I am still thinking about what could be done with the Nelson sawdust pile.

A few days ago, I read about how a husband and wife team organized their own company to transform plant and animal waste to compost.

Previously, I have described how to build a back-yard compost pile, but this family company each year, processes 100,000 cubic yards of bio-waste.

The Metski family by going into debt and working 10 hours per day, 6 days per week, has quietly achieved what has eluded a small army of public officials, who were supported by public funds, but were too confused, ill-informed, inept and lethargic to conduct such a project to final success.

The Metskis built a huge compost heap.

They controlled fermentation, so that spontaneous combustion was completely avoided.

Following the example of the Metskis, various U.S. municipalities, including Philadelphia, Baltimore and Los Angeles are composting their organic disposals, including wood waste.

Hempstead, Long Island and Oyster Bay, L.I. are paying to have their leaves trucked to a compost heap which is 850 miles removed from these two populous towns.

East Moriches, N.Y. is on the south shore of Long Island about two-thirds of the way from Rockville on the West, and Montauk Point toward the east.

It is just a few miles west of Eastport and about seven miles west of Westhampton.

The Metskis are running a composting operation on 10 of their 47 acres at East Moriches, Long Island, N.Y. They were formerly in the sand and gravel business.

Two years ago they stopped digging in the natural hill and began accepting bio-mass for fermentation.

Contractors needed a place to dump tree stumps and heavy debris, that was a by-product of land-clearing operations.



Desmond Dolan

TECHNOLOGY

Poultry farmers, especially duck raisers, needed a disposal site for manure.

The new company assumed the name "Metski Enterprises" and advertized itself as being adept at the complete recycling of wood.

Sources of bio-mass

Each year, M.E. Incorporated accepted 100,000 cubic yards of tree stumps and 10,000 cubic yards of duck manure.

The stumps were ground up by a chipping machine.

The chips were then mixed with the duck manure and the mixture stacked in two parallel rows.

The two rows were 75 feet apart. Each row was 50 feet wide at the base and 20 feet high. Each row was called a windrow.

Each pile is provided with adequate water and the contents turned over frequently. The fermentation process is constantly monitored.

In both 1986 and 1987, Metski Enterprises turned out 8,000 cubic yards of fine potting compost.

This is sold to plant-growing nurseries. Contractors pay a fee for deposition of the bio-mass.

M.E. Inc. strips the soil from all incoming tree roots and this is sterilized, bagged and sold as potting soil.

M.E. Inc. says it has already made a profit from the operation, before it has sold a pound of potting soil.

M.E. Inc. manages to do all this work with \$1 million worth of tractors, bull-dozer and heavy equipment.

Mrs. Metski keeps the books, manages the office staff (one person), handles sales, marketing and community relations.

The latter is an important function.

Composting in the past, has been given a bad reputation. This resulted from composting's connection with the neighbors and the public sector.

Banishing odor

Duck manure, delivered daily is immediately mixed with the wood chips.

The fermentation in every windrow is checked periodically and every stage of the fermentation process is monitored.

Any bad chemical reaction, that might produce an odor or excessive heat is headed off.

Mr. Metski was reared on a farm and there he learned the fundamentals of compacting.

Occasionally nitrogen fertilizers are added to the pile.

It is important to have the proper micro-organisms and the nitrogen speeds the multiplication and growth of these bacteria.

If the pile becomes either too hot, or too cold, fermentation may be retarded, or completely halted. In such cases, odor problems may develop.

Touring the main 10 acres of M.E. Inc. operations, one detects no unpleasant odor.

The success of M.E. Inc. might induce a few municipalities to try composting of bio-mass.

The procedure protects the environment and is relatively inexpensive.

At least 50 or 60 municipal employees would be needed to do what three Metskis have done.

I recommend this procedure to the mayor of Nelson and I hope it suits my cousin in Connecticut, who has been reading the ML, hoping that I shall eventually present a solution for the Nelson pile.

I can deal with real world: Lewis

Dear editor;

I really enjoyed the column in the *Miramichi Leader* on June 10 (*Can one cope with life after years in prison?*).

I got out of prison into the real world as you call it with \$500 in my pocket after doing 12 years, three months of time. I was on parole at the time I completed my sentence and was on a form of parole called mandatory supervision.

I was told after doing 12 years in May of 1985 I had three months to get ready for the street. I was at a home helping the handicapped people in Pugwash, N.S. I enjoyed working there. I would take the people for walks and push the people who couldn't walk around Pugwash area.

I was not out on the street looking for a way back into the pen. I

can deal with the real world as you call it and I do have a very uncontrollable problem, I hate sharp knives being waved at me.

I was under attack and being threatened and there is no doubt in my mind that I acted in self defence at the time.

I cannot say too much as I have filed my appeal papers on conviction and sentence on June 30 and as for victims and victims families, what about my family? You think they don't suffer over something like what happened? I got 26 nieces and nephews, a 71-year-old mother.

In a way, I have mixed feelings about capital punishment. It is never right to take a life by anyone, but it happens doesn't it?

Personally, rather than do 20

years and then some I would sooner be hung or put to sleep or whatever method they could or would use probably like a Mr. Tom Kennedy the grandfather of the young girl there who was killed.

If he had his way he would get a few bullets and end the issue. Maybe that would be a good idea, but I did not see or hear about him shooting the man who took his granddaughter's life.

I think before you people print comments by people you should cover all sides and not just the victims as we are all victims in one way or other.

I have done 29 years in prison as you said in your column, but I have been in prison all my life. I think of a poem I seen one time.

Walls and bars do not a prison make.

How many people in the community are in their own self-made prisons. Be it self-made or a way of life they cannot seem to change out of it. I think if you took a poll it would be quite a few.

There are two sides to every story written and I want to thank you for yours as you certainly have a right to your opinions.

It was well put together and I enjoyed reading it. It was one of the very reasons that I decided to appeal, so I want to thank you for helping me to make up my mind.

Joseph Earl Lewis
Atlantic Institution, Renous