Flowers follow spring birds

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Two weeks ago, we listed some of the early spring birds that had returned to us after their long vacations in the south.

Not far behind them has come our early spring flowers, the first of which have pushed through the earth and come into glorious bloom.

The crocus have been with us for some time now, but the first of the wild species was probably the coltsfoot.

On April 7, a patch of its yellow blooms was seen in the ditch along-side Beaverbrook Boulevard, below the underpass.

At first glance, these blooms can be mistaken for dandelions, although they would represent somewhat dwarfed specimens of them.

However, closer examination would reveal they are quite different — the stems and leaves in no way resembling those of the dandelion.

Whereas the dandelion has a smooth, hollow stem, the coltsfoot has a stem which is covered with long, pointed scales — the scales all pointing upward and being either green or reddish in color.

And, whereas the dandelion has long, deeply-serated leaves; the coltsfoot has leaves resembling small, roundish maple leaves — that is, when they are out, for at this time of the year they have no leaves at all — the leaves appearing only after the flowers have died.

During most of the summer, all that is seen of the coltsfoot is a patch of green leaves emerging from the ground — in some cases quite lush.

It thrives in moist, barren locations — places such as roadside ditches where the topsoil has been scraped off leaving only the sub-soil.

In the *Miramichi Leader* of April 6, Desmond Dolan's article is about the bloodroot; and, he requests information as to its occurrence here on the Miramichi.

The bloodroot can be found growing on the flood plains of our rivers — in similar habitat to that in which we find fiddleheads — perhaps in somewhat shadier locations than the fiddleheads, and generally a little farther back from the water's edge.

Bloodroot found

It is most easily seen while canoeing during the spring run-off.

At this season of the year — the snow having barely disappeared from these shady places — the bloodroot's green leaves and white flowers contrast sharply with the otherwise dark and lifeless forest floor.

In my notes, which are very incomplete and scattered, I have managed to find two references to the bloodroot. They are:—

May 15, 1976: while canoeing the Barnaby, bloodroot, spring beauty, wood anenome, and yellow violets all in bloom.

May 8, 1982: while canoeing the Barnaby, bloodroot and Duchman's breeches in bloom, lots of catkins on the trees, lush green stalks of Indian poke on the river's bank.

Although these are the only notes I can find on the bloodroot, I am sure I have seen it while canoeing some other branches of the Miramichi.

Indian poke

The Indian poke (or false hellebore) mentioned in the above note, is another plant which stands out conspicuously along our river banks in spring.

Although not in bloom during the canoeing season, its foliage at this time is unmistakeable — its sturdy, leafy stalks having reached the height of a foot or more before the surrounding plants have started to show any green whatsoever.

The stalks are surrounded by clasping, round, deeply-veined leaves.

The plants occur singly or in small scattered groups.

The flower spikes which appear later are never very noticeable — the flowers being green or greenish-yellow in color.

On March 28, while looking for birds at the Strawberry Marsh, a clump of bird-nest fungi were discovered. They were growing on pieces of bark on the bark pile.

These tiny, persistent fungi had survived the winter — still remaining intact and in good condition.

They consisted of tiny white or cream-colored cups within which lay several similarly colored eggs or peridioles.

The cups varied in size. In diameter, they ranged between 1/8 and 1/4 of an inch. In depth, they would also be in this range.

The eggs or peridioles were flattened dishes about the size of pin heads, and their number per cup varied from three to eight.

I have never before seen this particular species, but have seen two other species of bird-nest fungi growing in our area. I find them to be curious and fascinating little plants.

Biologists classify the bird-nest fungi as being related to the puffballs — the tiny eggs inside the cups being like miniature puffballs.

When ripe, these eggs consist of an external skin inside of which is a countless number of microscopic spores.

Improvements are a must to preserve birds

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The following is one of the periodic guest columns on wildlife by Tom Greathouse.

On April 9, I joined Morrill Sisk on a trip west to Sunny Corner.

Morrill, an electrical engineer with the provincial office of Research and Productivity, is an ice sculptor extraordinaire and a lifelong resident of the Miramichi.

He wanted to check rumors the deer population had fared poorly during the winter.

I had additional goals: to become familiar with the road system and to check for the first signs of breeding-bird activity.

I had volunteered to help Harry Walker, Luc Lemieux (Chatham), John Lockhart (Bath) and others make a breeding-bird census in the Miramichi area.

A relative newcomer in New Brunswick, I needed to learn how to find two areas assigned to me to census.

It was a gray, misty day, but Morrill's sharp eyes separated the forms of several deer from the background of tree trunks and branches.

At one point he spotted a ruffed grouse, also known as "Gelinotte huppee", "partridge" and "hooter".

As we drove up a ridge, then parked and walked off the road, a spruce grouse, (a.k.a. "Tetras du Canada" or "fool's hen"), flew up almost from under his feet. It sat in a tree for several minutes before flying a short distance away.

The species has never learned to be afraid of man.

In "Birds of Canada", W. Earl Godfrey says the species is "now gone from most southern parts of its former range where man has thickly-settled".

Another authority on birds, Roger Tory Peterson, in his "Field Guide to Birds East of the Rockies", asks if the spruce grouse "is a diminishing species?"

The number of spruce grouse in Miramichi's forests is expected to continue declining, even if pollution and population (by man) do not increase.

This will be due to extensive harvesting of spruce fir forests which destroys their protective cover and principal source of food: coniferous buds and needles.

Of course, the use of pesticides has the potential for wiping out the two species of grouse in local forests almost overnite.

Besides resident species, we saw two which come south to the Miramichi to winter: common redpolls and snow buntings. They will soon leave for their circumpolar breeding grounds in the Arctic or Sub-Arctic.

Although not seen that trip, other wintering species such as the Bohemian waxwing, snowy owl, northern shrike and American tree sparrow also go north and west to breed.

A third category of birds involves species such as the golden eagle, greater yellowlegs and black-bellied plover. They are not normally seen in New Brunswick except during spring or fall migrations.

Haiti connection

A fourth, large group includes species that winter in warmer climates, such as in Haiti where I worked for three years, and breed in the Miramichi.

The red-tailed hawk that we saw earlier in the day fits in this group, as does the white-throated sparrow, robin and many insectivorous species such as the warblers, vireos, flycatchers and swallows.

While in Haiti, I spent many hours observing birds from sea level to about 8,000 feet (2400m) in the La Selle mountains.

This area seems, and is, very far from the Miramichi, geographically and environmentally, but events in Haiti are influencing the future of N.B. in many respects.

At low elevations in Haiti, pollution, intensive cultivation and harvest of woody vegetations for fuel and other purposes is reducing the wintering habitat for water birds such as the great blue heron, black-crowned night heron and American bittern, which breed in New Brunswick.

Direct killing of water birds for food also reduces the numbers available to return to Canada.

In the mountains of Haiti, it was depressing to see the relentless destruction of the small areas of centuries-old pine forests and with them the winter home of thousands of birds.

I was struck by the need for global cooperation in protecting the earth's fragile environment.

Population decrease

Evidence of decreases in populations of birds is not a personal opinion.

It is based on information from research by wildlife biologists, from the continent-wide breeding-bird atlas surveys being co-ordinated locally by Harry Walker, from Christmas bird counts and other sources.

What can Miramichi residents do to change this trend?

First, we can become better informed on the type of environmental degradation taking place locally and internationally.

We can support agencies which are trying to reduce or stop this degradation while implementing better resource management practices.

Lastly, we can use our knowledge to persuade ourselves and industry to adopt practices to minimize pollution and waste of resources.

If improvements are not made in management of environments in both wintering and breeding areas, future Miramichiers may never hear the spring song of the white-throated sparrow: "Oh, sweet! Canada, Canada, Canada."

P.S.: A thank you to Jean-Claude Clavet, 212 Harkins, Newcastle Industrial Park, for help in locating a great horned owl for reporting in Breeding Bird Atlas in 1988.

A call from anyone knowing of owls in the Miramichi would be appreciated to Tom Greathouse, 622-8889.

Allard thinks the birds hit the power lines and bridge

Harry Walker

May 6/88

WILDLIFE

Guy Allard of the Bathurst Highway has an explanation for the nine dead gulls that were counted in the vicinity of the Morrissy Bridge in late winter.

He believes their deaths resulted from collisions with the power lines which cross the river just above the bridge.

He speculates many other gulls are also killed in this way, but are never found because when the river is open, they would be carried away by the current. Also, many killed during the winter would soon be buried by snow.

The superstructure of the bridge may also be part of the problem for it may cause low-flying gulls to rise and fly higher, thus increasing their chances of hitting the power lines.

Allard says he has been observing birds at the Centennial Bridge and has noticed, that high as this bridge is, few birds fly under it. They apparently prefer to rise and fly over it.

Gulls are continually flying up and down the river and Allard's explanation sounds logical.

He suggests if the power lines were flagged, fewer birds would be killed.

On April 21, Carol White of Lower Newcastle reported she had a flock of about 24 red crossbills at her feeder and also two purple finches. The crossbills had been coming regularly for about two weeks.

I cannot recall ever before receiving a report of crossbills coming to a bird feeder.

Carol says when at the feeder they are close enough the cross in their bills can be seen.

The red crossbill and the white-winged crossbill are the only species in our area in which the upper and lower mandibles cross.

This, apparently, is a special adaptation for removing seeds from the cones of evergreens. These are the mainstay of their diet.

Crossbills are peculiar in that they may nest at any time of the year and frequently do so in mid-winter, feeding their young on regurgitated, partially-digested seeds.

They are also peculiar in the way they move about in trees while feeding. Using their feet and bill, they crawl about like parakeets, often clinging upside down on twigs as they do so.

Both species are about the size of the house sparrow.

Red crossbill: the male has blackish wings and tail, while the remainder of the plumage is dull red, brightest on the rump. In the female, the red is replaced by dull yellow, this again being brightest on the rump.

White-winged crossbill: both male and female are similarly colored to their corresponding sex in the red crossbill except both of them have two conspicuous white wing bars. Also, the red of the male is a more pinkish shade than that of the red crossbill.

Two-headed siskin

A two-headed pine siskin — the one head non-functional — has been reported as visiting the feeder of Jean Patenaude of Douglastown.

John K. Terres in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds* tells of a number of abnormalities in birds, but he makes no mention of any bird having two heads.

Some of the abnormal birds on Terres's list are those having four legs and others having four wings.

One green-winged teal had four wings and was well able to fly, one pair of wings being normal, the other pair being small, non-functional, and situated underneath the normal pair.

A flock of 24 snow geese was reported at Black River Bridge on the morning of April 27. It was first reported by Everard MacLean; and, about an hour later, a second report was received from his neighbour, Roscoe Mault.

These geese had spent the previous night in a field and were still in the same general area the next morning when reported.

They were said to be rather tame, several people having approached quite close to them, and Wayne Vineau of Chatham having photographed them.

The main migration route of the snow goose lies well to the west of New Brunswick. According to Squires, a few of them pass through our province each year — either in small flocks or as individuals mixed in with flocks of Canada Geese.

Five years ago, about the end of April, Father Vincent Donovan reported a flock of 28 snow geese at Renous.

Squires has recorded that a blue-phase snow goose was shot on the Miramichi River on Oct. 17, 1939.

The usual white-phase snow goose is white with black wing tips.

The blue-phase is mainly blue-gray, with white head and neck.

Until recently, the blue-phase was considered to be a separate species and was known as the blue goose.

Variety of birds shows increase

Harry Walker

April 29/88

WILDLIFE

As the season advances, the variety of birds being reported increases.

On April 4, Mary Rawlinson of Newcastle reported she had three purple finches at her feeder. Later, purple finches were reported at several other feeders.

This bird is not really purple. Rosy Finch would be a more appropriate name for it.

It is the size and build of a house sparrow.

The male is reddish, or rose colored, on the head, breast, and back.

This reddish color shades into dark brown on the wings and tail, and into white on the belly. The female looks like a brownish or grayish, striped sparrow.

Mourning Doves are on the move.

Although in recent years, some of these birds have been overwintering with us, reports indicate that in winter they congregate in flocks and stay close to a reliable food supply — a well-stocked feeder or granary.

Greg Bell of Chatham reports some of them have been feeding at the Miramichi Feed mill in the Industrial Park.

Now that the snow has gone, mourning doves are showing up elsewhere.

On April 4, a mourning dove was reported on the Warwick Road; and, on April 9, Mrs Edward O'Donnell reported having two of them in her yard in Chatham.

On April 18, Mrs Roy Saunders of Millerton reported having three Mourning Doves at her place.

They had been coming regularly each day for the previous two weeks — coming early in the morning, and again, late in the evening.

The mourning dove has only recently extended its range north to include the Miramichi.

It has been attracting much attention judging from the number of calls that I have received asking about it.

Like a pigeon

The mourning dove is built like an ordinary pigeon or Rock Dove; but, it is smaller and slimmer, with a long, wedge-shaped tail.

It is generally brownish in color, with some black spots on its back, and one black spot at its ear.

Along the edges of the tail are some white markings which are noticeable in flight.

The head and bill are obviously pigeon-like.

Its name comes from its mournful call — usually four coos, the last one having less volume and carrying a shorter distance than the first three.

On April 2, the first Woodcock of the season was reported by Vivian Comeau of Oak Point.

Then, on April 16, Leslie Jardine of Whitneyville found a woodcock setting on a clutch of 4 eggs.

Early nester

The woodcock is one of our earliest nesters. It makes no nest, but merely lays its eggs on the ground — on dead leaves where the setting bird is almost invisible.

The young birds, like young partridge and young Killdeers, are mobile as soon as hatched.

At this time of year, the woodcock performs an aerial song and dance that is unique among birds and quite spectacular.

However, the aerial display does not start until late in the evening when it is getting quite dark. As a result, few people witness it.

If you would like to witness it, park your car on the side of a quiet road beside an old wet field with alders growing in it.

The display is preceded by the woodcock repeating a call of "peent-peent-peent-, etc. — like that of a nighthawk.

This call is given while the bird is still on the ground.

Following this, the woodcock climbs quickly to a great height, circles several times, then drops almost like a stone.

While aloft, some of the sounds heard are produced by air passing through the birds wings. Other sounds are oral.

This dance is repeated over and over during the evening.

Eagle, sparrow

Another bald eagle has been reported — this one on the Northwest Miramichi above the fish hatchery. It was repoted by Anna Marie Goodfellow of the South Esk Road on April 13.

The fox sparrow, a bird which pases through our area only during migration, was reported by Louis Sippley of Baie Ste. Anne on April 14.

This is our largest sparrow, and as its name implies, much of its plumage is the color of a red fox.

It has a very blotchy or speckled breast and a white belly.

It usually passes through our area very quickly and therefore it is not often seen.

When seen, it is usually scratching in the dead leaves under some shrubbery, and is rather elusive.

It keeps flitting about, always managing to keep some of the shrubbery between itself and the observer.

Persistence is needed to get a good look at it.

Lei a symbol of Hawaii

Harry Walker

May 13/88

WILDLIFE

The following was received from Gladys MacLean in March when she was still in Hawaii. At that time, she expected to leave there on April 21.

"I had just entered the church when a local spotted me as a newcomer. As he shook my hand, I commented on his beautiful garland of golden mums.

"'We have one for you,' he said, as he gently placed a lei of orchids and milkweed flowers around my neck, and gently kissed my cheek, which is the Hawaiian custom of welcome.

"Leis are a symbol of the Hawaiian way of life, and add daily delight to life here.

"n the first Polynesians came here from Tahiti in their small home-made craft, they were very poor, lacking the simple essentials which we consider necessary.

"As they explored the islands, they found beautiful flowers growing everywhere; so flowers became the love-gift for all their celebrations. They make them from sea shells also.

"These lovely wreaths mark the milestones from birth to death. Leis made from delicate pink roses are sent to welcome a newborn babe. Graduates in black caps and gowns are smothered with leis.

"Almost everyone wears leis. Preachers wear them in the pulpit. Politicians wear them when they are campaigning; and strikers wear them over their sign boards.

"In fact, one isn't in Hawaii long before you realize that flowers are big business here. They are brought in, in abundance from the outer islands.

" You may pass shops where local girls clad in their long, colorful muumuus work with flexible, steel needles deftly stringing carnations, red and white ginger, orchids, tuberoses, and hundreds of other flowers.

"Hawaiis most ubiquitous lei flower grows on a tree. In India we knew it as the temple tree. Here it is called the plumeria.

"It has an exquisitely sweet perfume. The individual blossoms look like little pin wheels, with yellow centres whirling out to cream, pale pink or deep rose.

"Although I misted my orchid garland, and put it in the fridge, it lasted only a few days. To me, an avid lover of flowers, I experience a sadness in their short-lived loveliness.

"Perhaps God gave us flowers as a reminder of the brevity of life. In 11 Cor. 4:19 the inspired apostle wrote: 'The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.'

"It is a comfort to know that although 'the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away'

"'The Word of the Lord endureth forever' 1 Peter 1:24-25."

House Finch

■ On the morning of April 25, a house finch appeared at Tom Greathouse's feeder in Newcastle. It was accompanied by four purple finches.

To my knowledge, this is only the second record for the house finch on the Miramichi.

Five or six of them visited Doris Carter's feeder in Chatham several years ago. Then, as in this present case, the house finches were in company with some purple finches.

The house finch and purple finch are quite similar; but, when viewed side by side, their differences become apparent.

The red on the house finch is not as extensive as on the purple finch, it being confined to the breast, the rump, and a stripe over the eye.

Also, the red is of a slightly different hue — somewhat on the orange side.

Further, the house finch has noticeable dark dashes along the sides of its white belly. These are absent in the purple finch.

We can probably expect to see more house finches in our area in the future; for, since 1940, when a few of them were released on Long Island, New York, they have rapidly multiplied and expanded their range.

The house finch first appeared in New Brunswick about 10 years ago, and last year it was found nesting here for the first time — in the St. Stephen area.

On April 30, Harry Miller of Hill Top Road reported that he counted 15 osprey on the Northwest Miramichi above the Johnston Bridge — many of them perched in dead elm trees.

He suggested that perhaps they were feeding on smelts or some other fish that was concentrated there.

It is very unusual to see so many osprey together — perhaps they were in migration. Usually they are seen singly or in pairs.

The next two months important for survey

Harry Walker

May 27/88

WILDLIFE

We are now in the third season of the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas project and the next two months are the most important ones for gathering information for it.

For purposes of this project, the Maritime Provinces have been divided into squares 10 km x 10 km (six miles by six miles), the idea being to determine which species of bird nests in each of these squares.

Obviously, this is a big project for there are approximately 2,000 such squares to be covered, and some of them are quite remote — it is not even possible to drive into some of them.

For these reasons, every fourth square has been designed as a priority square, the plan being we should concentrate on these squares first and ensure they get done.

Then, if there are sufficient volunteers with sufficient time and resources to do it, the rest of the squares will be covered also, or at least, as many as possible will be.

This is a five-year project, so there will be two more breeding seasons after this one in which to complete the project.

Already this year, data on early nesters has been and is being gathered and the tempo of this activity is picking up.

The great horned owl's breeding season began away back in late February, the raven's about the first of March, and the barred owl's and the bald eagle's in late March.

By mid-April, about 25 of our native species had begun breeding.

At present (late May) there are about 120 New Brunswick species engaged in some aspect of the reproductive process — nest building, incubation or rearing of young.

However, by late June, when they have reached the peak of this activity about 180 species will be thus engaged.

Canoe trips during spring run-off produced a significant amount of information on early nesters, and this is an excellent way to get information on certain species — common mergansers, black ducks, drumming ruffed grouse, etc.

Other early nesters are woodpeckers, jays, woodcock, certain hawks, etc.

Local volunteers

During the first two years of this project, the following volunteers have been involved in the Miramichi Region:—

Moira and Mrs Benjamin Campbell of Upper Blackville, Norman Stewart of Blackville, Earlene Hunter of Sunny Corner, Vernon Goodfellow and family of South Esk, Joan Mahabir and family of North Esk Boom Road.

Mary Rawlinson of Newcastle, David Tweedie of Douglastown, Dennis Mazerolle of the Bathurst Highway, Vivian Comeau of Oak Point, Luc Lemieux and Sara Lounsbury of Chatham, David and Cathy Lounsbury of Fredericton, Dr. John and Mrs. Alice Lockhart of Bath, my son, Ian, and myself.

New volunteers recruited for this season include Greg Bell of Chatham, Rodney Currie of Fredericton, Tom Greathouse and Madeleine Morissette of Newcastle and Carol Mekling of Vancouver.

For purposes of this project, birds may be classified as possible, probable, or confirmed breeders depending on the kind of evidence obtained.

All of this is explained in the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas Handbook — a handbook provided to all volunteers. Also provided is a breeding season chart indicating the breeding season for each species and other necessary materials.

Some of us have been finding it difficult to confirm breeding, but relatively easy to find evidence of possible or probable breeding.

Recently, at an atlasser's meeting, a tip was received which may help in this respect,

Wear dull-colored clothing, hide, then make unhuman-like sounds — squeaks and whistles.

This arouses the curiosity of many birds which then come to investigate.

Some of them arrive carrying worms or insects in their bills and for most species, this confirms breeding.

This procedure is most effective in late June and throughout July after most young birds have hatched.

On May 22, Greg Bell reported that one large spruce tree in Chatham cradles three active bird nests — grackle, robin, and mourning dove.

Earlier, on March 7, Greg also reported he located two great horned owls after hearing them hooting.

Book I Pollution Control H. S. Mines Dec 76
Envir Course - Not anti industry Apr 77

① Book IV ~~text~~ article He not only watches birds, he keeps a running tally

② Book X. Birds move back to Burned Areas

③ Book XVII (first page) last Red Bank Survey

④ Book XIII last Christmas Bird Count

New snake spotted locally

Harry Walker

May 20/88

WILDLIFE

Good news for snake fanciers!

A new species of snake has been found living on the Miramichi — the ring-necked snake.

For those who are less fond of snakes, this is not a fearsome creature. It is quite handsome — slim, neat, and adroit.

On May 11, I accompanied my sons, Ian and Bruce, as they explored some of the bush country up the Fraser-Burchill Road.

At the top of the cliff above the Cruikshank Pool, on the north side of the North Sevogle River, Bruce spotted this snake. It was lying on top of the moss and dead needles which covered the ground there.

At first, Bruce wondered if it was alive. Although it appeared in good condition, it made no effort to escape, and even when handled, it was limp.

However, as the boys held it, the warmth from their hands quickly revived it, and it was soon writhing and squirming energetically, and even exhibiting surprising strength for such a small, slim creature.

The weather was cloudy and there were still small patches of snow about. Since a snake runs mainly on solar energy, its original lethargy was no doubt due to lack of heat in its body. Perhaps it had just emerged from hibernation.

From the start, it was recognized as a rare discovery; for, around its neck, was the unmistakeable bright, yellow-orange ring which marked it as the ring-necked snake.

Its belly was of this same bright, yellow-orange color while its back and head were of a uniform dark gray — these two sharply contrasting colors meeting abruptly at a sharp dividing line.

The ring on its neck was also very sharply defined, but only about one 16th of an inch wide.

We tried to measure the wriggling snake and determined it was between 15 and 16 inches in length and at its thickest point only about 5/16 of an inch in diameter — little bigger than a lead pencil.

This snake reminds one of the smaller and more common red-bellied snake which is normally brown on the back and red or reddish-orange on the belly.

Secretive snake

Roger Conant, in "A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians", describes the ring-necked snake as "a secretive woodland snake".

He speaks of it as favoring rocky, wooded hillsides, and also, cutover areas with plenty of litter under which to hide — logs, bark slabs, stones, etc.

In his booklet "The Amphibians and Reptiles of New Brunswick," Stanley W. Gorham says,

"The ring-necked snake is secretive in its habits and is probably widely distributed in New Brunswick, but as yet we have specimens from the southern counties only."

Gorham describes it as varying in length from 10 to 20 inches, and as living in "dry wooded areas."

He says little is known of its food habits in New Brunswick, but in captivity it will eat insects, earthworms and small salamanders.

Judging from what Gorham says, I expect many bush workers have seen this snake, but never recognized it as being unusual. If you have seen it, I would like to hear from you.

Three other snakes

Besides this ring-necked snake, there are three other species of snake here on the Miramichi.

They are the garter snake, the smooth green snake (grass snake), and the red-bellied snake.

The garter snake is very variable both in color and in color pattern. This could lead one to believe there are more species of snake here than what there really are.

Some specimens of the garter snake have a striped pattern while others have a checkered pattern.

Flicker fight

Carol White of Lower Newcastle reports a pair of flickers, which had nested in a hole in a tree at her place last year, returned to find it already occupied by starlings.

They fought over the nest site for several days, but the starlings eventually won out.

According to the literature, despite the flicker's larger size, this often happens and starlings have been blamed for causing a decline in the flicker population.

Carol suggested perhaps she should have plugged the hole until the flicker's returned. This may have been a solution to the problem.

Whip-poor-wills

Every year, whip-poor-wills are heard in the vicinity of Doug Underhill's home on the MacKinnon Road back of Douglastown.

Doug reports they were first heard this spring, on the evening of May 15.

This is 12 days earlier than last year when they were first heard on May 27.

Observers needed for Feeder Watch

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

June 3/88

We have received a letter from Erica H. Dunn of the Long Point Bird Observatory.

Accompanying her letter, is the following enclosure which she requests I bring to the attention of local bird watchers. It reads:— "Calling all bird feeder watchers!"

"Have you ever wondered where the birds at your feeder come from, where they go when they leave, and why bird numbers change from year to year?

"Do you want to know what birds come to feeders in different parts of North America?

"**Project Feeder Watch**" is a new continent-wide survey of bird feeders designed to help answer questions such as these, and you are invited to join.

"Project Feeder Watch is a cooperative research venture of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and Canada's Long Point Bird Observatory, and is in the midst of a successful pilot year with 4,000 participants from all across North America.

"Black-capped chickadees are found in low numbers when evening grosbeaks are abundant, and numbers of many species at feeders parallel those found on Christmas Bird Counts.

"Sound interesting? Project Feeder Watch needs thousands of additional observers across the continent to help answer questions about feeder birds on a broad geographic scale.

"You need not be an expert birder to take part — the project concentrates on common species, and baffling rarities can be ignored.

"Although counts are made over a one to two-day period of your choice every other week from November through March, you are not obliged to watch every time, nor must you watch continuously on count days.

"All observations are recorded on computer-readable forms so that detailed summaries can be provided to participants promptly each season and to insure that the data are readily available for further analysis.

"In return for your observations, Project Feeder Watch will send you an annual newsletter and report on the season's results, plus two issues of 'Birdscope,' the laboratory of ornithology's research newsletter.

"If you can't take part but would like to receive these publications anyway, you may subscribe to them separately.

"Project Feeder Watch requires an annual registration fee of $9 (Canadian), which helps to pay for data forms, analysis and preparation and mailing of reports and newsletters.

"To join, write to Erica Dunn, coordinator, Project Feeder Watch, Long Point Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 160, Port Rowan, Ontario NOE 1MO.

"Include your name and address, state whether you wish to contribute observations from your feeder or just receive reports, and enclose your cheque for $9 (made payable to Project Feeder Watch).

Partridge-like bird

A peculiar partridge-like bird is reported in the Newcastle area.

It was observed to walk very slowly (like a puffed grouse) across a local resident's yard and then proceed to eat the blossoms from a blueberry bush.

The bird was estimated as being slightly larger than a puffed grouse, and as having a more rounded chest.

It had a short, pointed tail which was held in an erect position and it had a ridge of raised feathers along the top of the head.

It was beautifully colored, similar to a puffed grouse — brown with barring on the back, tan on the chest, and with a row of brown spots along the sides just below the wings.

The person reporting this bird said it more closely resembled a prairie chicken than it did any other species shown in *Peterson's Field Guide*.

We can only guess as to where this bird came from.

One possibility is it is an escaped bird. Someone in our area may be raising some exotic fowl.

Busy for ducks

Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne reports that on May 24, a brood of 10 young ducklings was observed coming down the road in front of his place. In a short time, the mother duck appeared flying over and circling above them.

Retirement has become full-time job

Harry Walker

June 10/88

WILDLIFE

At this time of year, the forest is alive with warblers, but how many people notice them?

Get up early, take a walk along a bush road or walk along the edge of a field. You will hear warblers singing from every tree.

Pick a cool, clear morning, for then the flies and mosquitoes won't bother you.

If you pick a warm, humid morning, you may be eaten alive. It is surprising what difference a day makes in this respect.

Of course, I am one of those privileged people who are retired and therefore able to do such things.

Retirement is a full-time job, but our schedules are more flexible.

22 species on Miramichi

There are about 22 species of warblers that regularly appear here on the Miramichi.

"*Squires*" lists 31 species for New Brunswick, but some of these are very rare or accidental.

Warblers come in a great variety of color patterns and combinations — yellow, orange, blue, green, black, white, and brown and all shades in between.

Warblers are small and, since they usually remain hidden among the leaves of trees and bushes, they are not readily seen. But, their constant singing announces their presence.

Warblers live almost entirely on insects, and therefore, they time their arrival here to coincide with the emergence of them.

This also coincides fairly closely to the time the new leaves unfurl. Seed-eating birds, such as sparrows, arrive earlier.

Now you see it now you don't

Warblers never sit still. They constantly flit from twig to twig in their never-ending search for insects.

You see it. You raise your binoculars, but it is gone. It often takes considerable persistence to get a good look at it.

Recently, two of the less commonly-seen warblers were reported — the parula and the chestnut-sided.

On May 22, Frank Garrish of Douglastown reported the parula warbler.

He described it as having a yellow breast, a blue head, and bluish upper parts except for a greenish-yellow patch in the middle of the back.

This bird would be a female for Frank said it had no necklace.

The male looks like the female except for the two colored bands — one black and one red — which run across its yellow breast.

The parula warbler has a song which one can easily learn to distinguish from that of other birds. It ends very abruptly with a "zzzip".

Builds peculiar nest

This bird builds a peculiar nest, always forming it inside a large clump of Usnea Licken, or Old Man's Beard — those pale green, hair-like growths hanging from the limbs of trees and especially in evidence on the dead branches of conifers.

The chestnut-sided warbler was reported by Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne on May 24.

The most noticeable features of this bird are its bright yellow cap, its sharply contrasting black and white facial pattern, and the conspicuous crescent of chestnut on the sides, below each wing.

Its breast and belly are white, and its back striped — a mixture of black and dull yellow.

The female is marked similar to the male, but the colors are less bright.

Carol White of Lower Newcastle, who earlier reported starlings had driven a pair of flickers from their home in a hollow tree, now reports the flickers have returned — the starlings having already raised their brood and vacated the place.

Rare visitor

Carol's neighbor, Father McKendy, had a rare visitor — a bluebird.

Don't confuse it with the blue jay.

The bluebird is a little bigger than the ordinary house sparrow. The male has a reddish breast, the same shade as that of a robin.

Its belly is white and the rest of its plumage is of a uniform rich blue color throughout. The female has some brown feathers mixed in with the blue ones.

Father McKendy made an interesting observation.

He said it seemed to be attracted to blue objects. It landed on the pump which has been painted about the same shade of blue as that on the bird.

Also, at one point, it landed on a bird feeder, the roof of which had been tied on with some blue material.

Last summer, there were three individual reports of a bluebird in the burned over area back of Douglastown.

Swallows just swallow their food

Harry Walker

June 24/88

WILDLIFE

What do swallows swallow?

They swallow flies, mosquitoes and the likes.

They have no teeth. They can't chew therefore they just swallow their food. That's why they are called swallows, I think.

If you knock down, or dig out, a swallow's nest, you pay the price of having to scratch more flybites and more mosquito bites.

So, there are practical reasons as well as aesthetic ones for protecting swallows and encouraging them to nest near your home.

No other birds have such smooth contours, or fly so gracefully and with such agility.

It is while in flight, that they catch the small insects they feed on.

There are six species of swallow which nest in New Brunswick, but only four of these commonly nest on the Miramichi.

They are the tree swallow, the barn swallow, the bank swallow, and the cliff swallow. Nests seen under the eaves of the Lo-Tide building in Newcastle are those of cliff swallows.

Cliff swallows nest in colonies, sometimes very large and dense — at times, as many as several hundred nests being placed side-by-side under the eaves of a single building.

Their nests, like those of the barn swallow, consist of an outer casing of dried mud pellets and an inner lining of grasses and feathers.

However, whereas the barn swallow's nest is a simple cup open at the top, the cliff swallow's nest is generally closed at the top.

Entrance to the nest is made through a small hole or narrow slit.

Sometimes a passageway is extended from the entrance forming the equivalent of the neck on a bottle, and through this the bird must pass in order to enter the nest.

This neck may be as much as five or six inches long, or it may be absent. It usually turns downward at the end.

Cliff swallows originally plastered their nests on the sides of cliffs, hence their name. Now, few of them nest in such places.

They have switched to man-made structures, usually placing them under the eaves of buildings or on beams underneath bridges.

In this latter location, their nests are often found in close proximity to those of their cousins, the barn swallows.

Serious threat

As a boy, I was greatly pleased when some cliff swallows came and nested on our barn, but I was greatly perturbed when the house sparrows drove them out and took over their nests.

House sparrows often do this. They constitute a serious threat to cliff swallows. Frequently they take over their nests before they are complete — when they consist only of a convenient ledge on which the house sparrow can build its nest.

We always had barn swallows nesting inside our barn — on the beams above the stables and pig pens; nesting in such locations, they were never molested by house sparrows. Furthermore, barn swallows are more aggressive than cliff swallows.

Many people confuse the names bank swallow and cliff swallow.

Bank swallows, like cliff swallows, nest in large colonies, but these colonies are very different — the nests being placed in tunnels which have been dug into the sides of gravel pits, or into exposed gravel or sand banks along rivers or streams.

These tunnels are usually placed just below the upper lip of the pit — where the grass and tree roots make the earth more stable. Placed thus, the tunnels are less likely to cave in.

Help, hindrance

Man has helped the swallows in one way. He has provided them with many nesting sites — by erecting buildings and bridges, etc., and by digging many gravel and sand pits.

Also, he has built bird houses for tree swallows and purple martins (which are a species of swallow).

But, on the other hand, man often destroys their nests, considering them messy and unsightly when placed under eaves or on verandahs.

Others take sadistic pleasure in digging out the nests of bank swallows, or in throwing stones at the nests of cliff swallows.

Robbie W. Tufts in his book "The Birds of Nova Scotia," makes this comment regarding cliff swallows, —

"To those who are so fortunate as to have these valuable and attractive birds still nesting about their farm buildings, it is suggested that during dry spells in early summer when nest construction is under way, a bucket of water be dumped from time-to-time on clay-like soil, where it will make a muddy spot near the scene of the bird's building operations."

Nests under Lo-Tide's eaves

■ **Birds:** The New York City of the bird world is Bonaventure Island, near Percè, Quebec. On the cliffs of this island, no piece of real estate is left unclaimed. **Page 23**

City for birds is Bonaventure Island

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The New York City of the bird world is Bonaventure Island, near Percè, Quebec.

Here, sea birds of many kinds nest together in one immense colony, the various species being segregated into ghettos — some large, some small — but all cramped for space.

On the cliffs of this island, no piece of real estate is left unclaimed.

Step outside the nest and you are either on someone else's property or else you are stepping off into space.

Why do these birds nest in such places? Apparently, some birds, like some people, find the noise and the bustle of city living stimulating and exciting.

One wonders that any creature would try to raise its young in a nest so precariously placed — on the merest rock ledge, or in a narrow rock crevice.

One mis-step and the youngster is plunging several hundred feet down to the sea below.

How can the sea surrounding the island support such a population of birds?

It has been argued that such colonies are self-perpetuating.

The droppings from the birds fertilize the sea water causing fast and luxurient growth of marine organisms, both plant and animal.

These organisms in turn provide abundant food for fishes and other marine creatures, and these, in turn, provide food for the birds.

Break the chain in this cycle at any point and the whole system collapses.

Take away the birds and the fish disappear. Take away the fish and the birds disappear.

Destroy any of the other links in this chain and all the rest of it is destroyed.

Impressive visit

Even if you are not particularly interested in birds, a trip to Bonaventure Island cannot fail to impress you.

The vast numbers of birds, the constant whirl of activity — birds plunging into the sea and disappearing, birds returning with fish and nesting material, birds on the cliffs, birds on the sea, and birds filling the air — the whole panorama and the activity is overwhelming.

Species found in this colony (the French name is given first since we were travelling in Quebec):— la marmette commune (common murre), le gode (razorbill), le guillemot noir (black guillemot), le mouette tridactyle (black-legged kittiwake), le grand cormoran (great cormorand), le cormoran à aigrettes (double-crested cormorant), le goéland argenté (herring gull), le goéland à manteau noir (great black-backed gull), and of course, le fou de bassan (gannet).

A small number of le macareux arctique (Atlantic puffin) also nest here, but we failed to see any of them.

The first five of these were new ones for me.

The name fou de bassan is interesting. It is a translation of the bird's scientific name **morus bassanus** — **morus** meaning "fool," and **bassanus** being derived from Bass Rock located at the mouth of the Firth of Forth in Scotland where these birds are known to have been nesting since 1447.

Five on trip

There were five in our party — Tom Greathouse, our son, Ian, and his friend, Carol Mehling of Vancouver, my wife, Winnie, and myself.

We were on a four-day trip which took us around the Gaspé coast and then through the Gaspé interior from Ste Anne de Monts to New Richmond.

Besides our boat trip around Bonaventure Island, other highlights of our trip were our visit to Forillon National Park, where we stayed in a youth hostel, and our passage through the Chic Chocs — the range of mountains forming the backbone of the Gaspé Peninsula.

A public meeting, at the Natural Resources Building on Pleasant Street in Newcastle, will feature a slide show and talk by Roland Sheffield of the Living River's Program, the meeting to start at 7:30 p.m. on June 23.

Subject of the talk will be the "Piping Plover," an endangered species which nests on sandy beaches in Kouchibouguac Park and a few other beaches in our province. All are welcome.

Beach-use threatens plovers

Harry Walker

July 1/88

WILDLIFE

"The piping plover", an endangered species nesting in our area, was the subject of a talk and slide show given by Roland Chiasson at the Natural Resources building in Newcastle on the evening of June 23.

He and Sabine Dietz, a student from Germany, are spending the summer at the Atlantic Centre for the Environment camp at Tabusintac. From this base, they are studying the piping plovers of our east coast.

For Chiasson, this study fulfills part of his requirements for a masters degree at York University in Toronto.

The piping plover nests on sandy beaches, the same kind of beaches that we humans frequent during summer months. This is the reason for the bird's decline.

Its nesting success depends largely on having quiet, undisturbed conditions during its nesting season.

Chiasson gave a brief outline of the history of this species.

He said it was a locally common shorebird back in the early 1800s. However, in subsequent years, due to unrestricted hunting, it, like many other species, showed a marked decline in numbers.

Then, for a time, after laws were enacted to protect migratory birds, the piping plover population rebounded.

Unfortunately, this recovery was short-lived, for in recent years, with the increased use of our beaches, their numbers have again been seriously declining.

100 pairs in N.B.

There are now about 100 pairs nesting in New Brunswick, 40 pairs in Nova Scotia, 40 pairs on the Magdallen Islands, and 20 pairs on Prince Edward Island.

Chiasson described the piping plover as resembling a killdeer, but as being only about half as big and as having only one black band around its neck instead of two.

He further described it as resembling even more closely the semipalmated plover (common on our beaches in late summer), but as having a pale sandy-colored back, rather than a brown one.

The piping plover's call, from which it derives its name, is very pleasing, and is uniquely different from that of other birds.

Its nest is a mere scrape in the sand and since its eggs and chicks are camouflaged to the extent they are almost invisible, it is easy to walk on them without even seeing them.

Further, when visiting beaches, we frequently bring all-terrain vehicles with us, and this greatly increases our chances of crushing eggs and chicks.

Even if we do not destroy them directly, our mere presence on the beach may be just as disastrous for the piping plover.

Nests in danger

If near the nest for more than a few minutes, the adult birds may leave their nests long enough to ensure nesting failure.

If it is a hot sunny day, the eggs may cook and never hatch; or, if it is a cool day, the eggs may get chilled with similar results.

There are other ways in which we may inadvertently harm piping plovers. We may leave scraps of food from our picnic lunches.

These attract scavengers such as crows, gulls, etc. These scavengers are also predators which eat piping plover eggs and chicks.

We sometimes bring dogs to the beach and they can destroy piping plover nests, or disburb the nesting birds.

Sabine Dietz says, although we have a number of endangered species, in Europe the problem is much worse.

In Germany alone, there are about 40 species of endangered birds, not to mention mammals, plants, etc.

Much of the problem stems from the dense human population. This has resulted in the destruction of most of the suitable habitat for many forms of wildlife.

Part of the problem also stems from the fact Europe is composed of many small countries with different traditions.

This makes it difficult to attain agreement on international laws for the protection of wildlife.

Avoid areas

In summary, this season, when visiting the beach, avoid areas where piping plovers appear to be nesting, obey posted signs in this regard, leave no garbage — not even garbage that is buried or that has been placed in a receptacle provided for this purpose. Do not let your dog run loose, and do not drive an ATV along the beach or on the sand dunes.

Many crows, robins found in Red Bank

Harry Walker

July 8/88

WILDLIFE

In the early morning hours of June 12, we ran our 15th annual Red Bank Breeding Bird Survey.

This survey is conducted along the same route and in the same manner each year.

(This is just one of nearly 2,000 such routes which are so surveyed annually in Canada and the United States.)

Our route starts at Connor's farm at the top of "The Lane" at Boom Road.

From here, it passes through Sunny Corner, Red Bank, Warwick, Quarryville, White Rapids, Gray Rapids, and Coughlan and ends up in the bush south of there.

Along this route, 50 stops are made. Stops are spaced at one-half mile intervals, and each stop is of three-minutes duration.

During these three minutes, an observer looks and listens for birds.

As he identifies them, he calls out their names while a second person records them.

There were three in our party. Our son, Ian, who was home from Vancouver, was our driver and time-keeper. Winnie was secretary and I was the observer.

Since, according to the rules, this survey is to start exactly one-half hour before sunrise, 4:58 a.m., we had to rise about 4:00 a.m.

This gave us time for a quick breakfast, drive to the starting point, make the necessary weather observations, and be ready to start on time.

When the survey was completed and the birds at the 50 stops were added together, the following totals were obtained — the most numerous species being given first, the least numerous last:—

Crows 55, robins 53, starlings 32, ovenbirds 28, bank swallows 21, redstarts 20, red-eyed vireos 19, chipping sparrows 18, grackles 18, alder flycatchers 17

Tree swallows 16, common yellowthroats 16, barn swallows 14, veerys 14, black-capped chickadees 14, ravens 13, magnolia warblers 13, ruby-crowned kinglets 10, white-throated sparrows 10.

Song sparrows nine, blue jays nine, cedar waxwings nine, yellow-rumped warblers eight, black ducks seven, swain's thrush seven, yellow warblers seven, parula warblers six.

Northern waterthrush six, evening grosbeaks six, gulls (species not determined) six, yellow-bellied sapsuckers five, least flycatchers five, hermit thrush five, bobolink five.

Yellow-bellied flycatchers four, Nashville warblers four, Canada warblers four, red-winged blackbirds four, killdeers three, spotted sandpipers three, red-breasted nuthatches three, warbling virios three.

Tennessee warblers three, blackburnian warblers three, rose-breasted grosbeaks three, wood pewees two, kingbirds two, catbirds two, solitary vireos two, chestnut-sided warblers two.

Black and white warblers two, juncos two, cowbirds two, baltimore orioles two, purple finches two, pine siskins two.

And one each of the following:— American bittern (stake driver), common snipe, common nighthawk, pileated woodpecker, flicker, cliff swallow, winter wren, bay-brested warbler, mourning warbler, and white-winged crossbill.

Individuals down

There are 66 species, and 570 individual birds in the preceding list. Compared with other years, the number of species is close to normal, but the number of individual birds is down by almost 100.

Some of this decrease may have been due to the wind being slightly higher than desirable. This results in some of the bird singing being drowned out by the trees clapping their hands.

However, there seems to have been some other factors involved for a number of species were recorded in especially low numbers — white-throated sparrows, purple finches, cowbirds, rose-breasted grosbeaks, magnolia warblers, and Tennessee warblers.

White-throated sparrows (old tom peabodys) have shown a steady decline over the 15 years we have been running this route.

During the first four years, their numbers varied between 45 and 50. Last year, 20 were recorded, this year, only 10.

On the other hand, this year, black-capped chickadees showed a sudden increase.

For the first 14 years, numbers recorded varied between zero and seven. This year, we recorded 14, twice as many as the highest ever previously recorded.

Acid rain effects felt in the forests

Harry Walker

July 15/88

WILDLIFE

The wisdom of the present trend in forest management — that of eliminating hardwoods and planting large areas in only one species such as Black Spruce or Jack Pine — is questioned in an article by Marc Belliveau in the Saint John *Telegraph-Journal*, April 19.

Belliveau was reporting on a meeting of the Richelieu Club at which George La Joie, manager of the North Shore Forestry Syndicate was the guest speaker.

La Joie is reported as saying that we should be "adapting our wood industry to the forest," rather than trying to "adapt the forest to an existing industry."

He affirms that by maintaining a mix of different species, hardwoods and softwoods, a better balance of nutrients is maintained in the soil.

La Joie accompanied members of the Federation of Woodlot Owners of Quebec when they inspected forests in Austria and Germany last fall.

This group found, that in these countries, where monoculture forests of Norwegian Spruce have been growing, the growth rate is poor, and this is attributed to the soil becoming depleted in essential elements.

Regarding acid rain, La Joie says that hardwoods are more resistant to it than are softwoods, and he gives this as another reason for growing them.

He says that the forests in southern New Brunswick and in parts of Quebec are feeling the effects of acid rain more than are those in northern New Brunswick.

And, forests at higher elevations are more susceptible to acid rain than are those at lower elevations.

Also, since fog is one of the worst carriers of pollutants (including acid rain), forests frequently blanketed by fog are more than averagely vulnerable.

Repap's new Alcell pilot plant may be good news for bird watchers as well as environmentalists. If the process proves out, paper companies may look more favorably on a mixed forest.

A mixed forest has a greater variety and abundance of birds than does a strictly coniferous one. This was brought out in a Canadian Wildlife Service report compiled by Anthony J. Erskine.

The report contains the results of a study determining bird population densities in different types of forest, and the species associated with each.

In this study, the two types of forest found to have the least numbers of birds were the open jack pine forest and the low bog forest — this latter forest consisting mainly of tamarack and stunted black spruce.

These two forest types had between 100 and 200 pairs of breeding birds per square kilometre.

A pure spruce forest had twice as many — 200 to 400 breeding pairs; a balsam fir forest three 3 times as many — 300 to 600 pairs; and a mixed coniferous-deciduous forest, four times as many — up to 800 breeding pairs per square kilometre.

Budworm infestitations resulted in a marked increase in bird populations — evening grosbeaks, tennessee warblers, bay-breasted warblers, and cape may warblers being especially influenced by them.

None of the other types of habitat studied had bird populations exceeding the maximum counts found in mixed forests; but, counts in pure hemlock stands reached a similar level.

Counts in stands of white and red pine were nearly as high, but variety of species was lacking.

Counts in maple stands varied from 400 to 650 breeding pairs per square kilometre; while counts in mature poplar and birch stands in eastern Canada were similar or slightly lower.

As might be expected, the bird population in a mixed forest was found to be a mix of the species found in a coniferous one and those found in a deciduous one.

But certain species apparently preferred a mixed forest to either a coniferous or a deciduous one.

Extensive pure stands of certain species of tree were difficult to find. As a result, counts were, in some cases, conducted in stands that were smaller than desireable.

Figures within each forest type varied considerably due to a number of factors.

These included latitude, maturity of the forest, dryness of site, extent and type of understory (shrubs and other plants on the forest floor) etc. This helps to explain the maximum and minimum figures given for each forest type.

Bird counts in towns yielded figures ranging from 200 to 600 breeding pairs per square kilometre depending mainly on the latitude and the age of the town — older towns presumably having more large trees and shrubs, etc., to provide cover and nesting sites for birds.

Counts in certain types of bogs rarely exceeded 100 breeding pairs per square kilometre.

Cecropia, Polyphemus found

Harry Walker

July 22/88

WILDLIFE

A few weeks ago, on the front page of the Leader, was a picture and a short news story about a Cecropia Moth found by Anne Brown of Newcastle. It was found on June 23.

As it so happened, on this same date, another very large moth — the Polyphemus was found by Cathy Martin while she was working at Kingston's Shell Service Station in Newcastle.

Both of these moths are members of the same family. They are known as Giant Silkworm Moths (Saturnudae).

To my knowledge, they are the two largest moths in our area. Certainly, the Cecropia is known to be the largest moth in North America north of Mexico.

According to the Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animal Life (Greystone Press), the Cecropia Moth can have a wingspread of 7 inches; however, 5 or 6 inches seems to be the more usual size.

The Polyphemus Moth is only slightly smaller — this difference in size not being apparent without measuring them.

Both are beautiful, brightly-colored moths. Both have conspicuous "eye spots" on their wings.

So called eye spots have nothing to do with eyes. Rather, they are large, showy circles which resemble eyes. They are said to be protection against predators.

After all, how could you eat one, while its large beautiful eyes are staring back at you.

Anne Brown and Cathy Martin are not the only ones who have been seeing these moths.

Back on June 10, Ralph MacDonald reported a Cecropia Moth at his store in Whitneyville.

And on July 8, an anonymous caller in Cassilis reported that he had seen three Cecropias and one Polyphemus Moth at his place.

This caller said that when he saw the first Cecropia, it was beating against the window pane.

At first, he thought that it was a bat, for on several previous evenings he had seen a bat catching moths in his yard.

He even knew where this bat spent the day — in a hollow birch tree — the entrance to its lair being only about 12 or 18 inches above the ground.

The encyclopedia mentioned earlier has some interesting information about the Giant Silkworm Moths.

- They feed only when in the caterpillar stage. They never feed after obtaining their wings.
- Males frequently fly several miles to find a female. Since he is guided by scent, these flights are generally made against the wind.
- Large members of the family are becoming rare in the United States because of collectors.
- Collectors sometimes collect their cocoons, then let them develop at home.

What emerges from the cocoon is often an imperfect specimen because the atmosphere was too hot or too dry. Also, as often as not, what emerges is a swarm of flies.

The reason is that half of the caterpillars are victims of parasites — chalcid and ichneumon flies.

- Although the Cecropia and Polyphemus Moths are large by our standards, they are small when compared to some other members of the family. The Hercules Moth of Australia and New Guinea has a 14-inch wing span.
- Although silk from the cocoons of some of these moths are, or have been, used for textiles, the true silkworm belongs to another family of moths.

The Cecropia Moth: The background color of its wings is dark grey to almost black.

Its body is a deep reddish-brown-almost red.

Its "eye spots" and the series of scalloped bands on the outer edges of its wings are of red and white together with various shades of grey.

Its caterpillar is about four inches long when fully grown. It feeds on a number of plants, but its favorite food is elderberry leaves.

We have two species of wild elderberry — the Red Elderberry and the Common Elderberry — the Red Elderberry being much the more common species here on the Miramichi.

The Polyphemus Moth: The background color of its wings, and also its body, is a light beige or tan color.

Its "eye spots" and the other decorations on its wings are white, yellow, black, red and brown.

Its caterpillar feeds on many kinds of trees including birch and oak.

Crane leaves Hilcheys

by Bonnie Sweeney

NEWCASTLE

It appears the sandhill crane which visited the Bill Hilchey family in Chatham earlier in the week has moved on, at least a few miles.

It left the Hilchey resident Tuesday evening.

Around noon Wednesday, John Gorman of the Bathurst highway telephoned the *Miramichi Leader* to report "a beaitufl, big bird near his home."

He still hadn't seen the photographs of the crane in the newspaper at that time, but his neighbors were confirming it was the same one, he said.

It stayed around until late Wednesday evening before taking off.

Gorman described it as being over four feet high, brown and has a red patch over its eyes and around its head.

Gorman lives about five miles out the Bathurst highway.

The sandhill crane is common to western parts of North America, but is not a native of this part of the continent.

Black Panther reported in C.I. Road area

Harry Walker

July 29/88

WILDLIFE

The latest report of a black panther comes from the Chaplin Island Road where Morrissey Waye says one passed through his yard on July 6.

Further, he says it has passed through his yard on three previous occasions, each of these visits being spaced about two months apart.

The last previous passage occurred during the last snowfall in May, the other two during the winter.

The animal is described as being about six feet long from the tip of the tail to the tip of the nose, half of this length being its long rope tail. The tail is estimated to be about two inches in diameter.

The animal is all black except for a narrow white strip on the chest — this strip being about six inches long by about two inches wide.

It has always been during daylight hours that this animal has been seen. Twice it passed through at about 7:30 a.m., once at about 1 p.m.

It has always passed through the yard at a leisurely pace. In this respect, it has acted just like a large domestic cat.

In one case, it was on the woodpile when first seen. It then jumped to the ground and walked unhurriedly into the bush.

Morrissey says not only he, but also his wife, his daughter, and his son have all seen it. It has come within about 100 feet of them, but has only been in sight for about a minute.

He says he is keeping his camera ready in hopes it will come again and he can get a picture of it.

Some of Morrissey's neighbors have also seen a large, black, cat-like animal; but, two that I spoke to, were uncertain as to its identity.

On July 13, while bird atlassing, I came upon a brown thrasher in the Doyles Brook area, across the river from Quarryville.

It excitedly scolded me for intruding into its territory. This was interpreted as meaning it probably had a nest nearby.

I quickly moved on for two crows seemed to have been attracted by the thrashers calls, and I did not want to give these nest robbers any assistance in finding its nest.

The habitat was typical of that in which the thrasher is usually found — dense shrubbery at the edge of an abandoned field.

The brown thrasher, the mockingbird, and the catbird, all belong to the same family, Mimidae. They are the only members of this family to be found in Eastern Canada.

Their relationship is shown in the French names for them — Le Moqueur Roux, Le Moqueur, Polyglotte, and Le Moqueur-Chat.

All are of similar build, but quite different in color. All have long tails.

The brown thrasher is the biggest and the catbird the smallest, but all are roughly robin size, or a little bigger.

The brown thrasher's upperparts are a bright rusty brown, its underparts white. Its breast and sides are heavily-streaked with short dashes of dark brown. It has a fairly long, slightly downcurved bill, a yellow eye, and two white wing bars.

It is a good singer; and, like the other two members of its family, its song is quite variable. Most bird books quote Thoreau's interpretation of it.

It apparently gave him this rather confusing advice while he was planting his garden, — "Drop it-drop it cover it up-cover it up pull it up-pull it up-pull it up".

As indicated in this interpretation, the brown thrasher always repeats each phrase — a good clue to listen for in its song.

There are only a few records of the brown thrasher nesting in New Brunswick — the closest to our region being at Penniac, just north of Fredericton.

The light brownish-gray mockingbird has conspicuous white patches on its wings and tail.

During nesting season, it always draws attention to itself with its spectacular singing and mimicing ability.

It is increasingly being reported here and is known to have nested in Burnt Church, Whitneyville, and Strathadam.

The catbird is much the most common member of its family here. It has a black skull cap and a small rusty area under its tail. Otherwise its plumage is of almost a uniform slate-grey color.

Although it nests throughout the settled parts of our area, it is not well known for it keeps hidden in dense shrubbery most of the time.

Sandhill Crane Visits Princess/Hill Streets

By Lois Martin

A very large bird, far away from its native habitat, was discovered in a field off Princess and Hill Streets in Chatham on Sunday. The visitor created quite a stir in the neighbourhood and had its picture taken by several people.

Naturalist Harry Walker paid a visit to the area just before dark on Sunday evening and identified the visitor as a sandhill crane. He was able to get very close.

Mr. Walker said that the crane is normally found far to the west on the Canadian prairies and the western states.

"I saw this crane in the Peace River District. They used to migrate through there and land in the stubble fields," he said. "They are also found in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon."

Mr. Walker said he did not know of a definite spotting of the sandhill crane in New Brunswick before this.

"The 1976 edition of the Birds of New Brunswick by W. Austin Squires makes mention of this crane and states that evidence submitted about their sightings in New Brunswick is not considered good enough even to give them a hypothetical listing," he said.

Mr. Walker could not hazard a guess as to why the crane had come down in Chatham. "It seemed healthy enough and it was so tame I wondered if it had come from a wildlife farm. Yet in that case it would have had to fly quite a distance," he said.

The crane was still in the same field on Tuesday morning.

The question is where did the sandhill crane come from and how long does it plan to stay?

First Seen On Sunday Morning

Bill Hilchey of Princess Street said he and his wife Lenora were out on their sun deck after church on Sunday morning when Lenora spotted what looked like a small deer in Harvey White's field behind their house. Close inspection showed that it was a long-legged bird.

"We kept walking toward it and I kept taking pictures, thinking it would move away but it just stood there and I got very close," Mr. Hilchey said. "It is very tame and is feeding and looking after itself, moving between the two fields."

He said the hay was just cut on Saturday so the crane could have been there before but wouldn't have been noticed.

"The Natural Resources office and the Canadian Wildlife people have been informed of the bird's presence here and the Magnetic Hill Farm is to be contacted as well, in case they know something about it. In the meantime, all the neighbours are taking a great interest in it and are being very protective," he said.

Lenora Hilchey tries to pet the sandhill crane which has taken up residence in a field near her home

(JKR Walls Photo)

■ **Crane relocated:** The sandhill crane that had been all but adopted last week by people in Chatham has been taken to an undisclosed location. Personnel from the regional Natural Resources office removed the crane from the field off Hill Street where it had been staying for a few days. Bernie Dubee of Natural Resources said the crane was relocated to a more isolated area for its own protection. Dubee said his department will keep an eye on the crane and will monitor the situation. Weekend Aug 5/88

The five different ways by which plants climb

Harry Walker

Aug. 12/88

WILDLIFE

By request, I am reprinting with some revisions, an article which appeared in the ***North Shore Leader*** *on Oct. 20, 1976.*

One day, Rev. Ches MacKenzie, pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in Newcastle, visited our home.

I had recently planted the garden and it was coming up. My pole beans were up, but had not started to climb.

MacKenzie told me pole beans always twist themselves clockwise around the string on which they climb. They will die if one twists them counterclockwise on the string.

I watched my pole beans. Sure enough, he was right. Every bean plant twisted itself clockwise around the string on which it climbed.

This started me thinking about other vines or climbing plants and I discovered there are at least five different methods by which plants climb, depending on the species. There may be other methods of which I am unaware.

First, there are plants that climb like the pole bean by twisting their stems around other plants. I checked dodder and hedge bindweed and found they also both twist clockwise.

Second, there are plants that loop their petioles or leaf stems around the supporting plant. The only examples I know of that belong in this group are the clematis and virgin's bower.

The virgin's bower is a wild vine that is scattered throughout our area. It has compound leaves, each leaf consisting of three leaflets.

It has clusters of white flowers, which in autumn, are replaced by clusters of gray silvery strands.

These somewhat resemble clumps of hair — hence the name Old Man's Beard by which the plant is sometimes known.

Third, there are species that send out tendrils that twist around other plants.

Examples of this type are squash, pumpkin, cucumber, grape and virginia creeper. Wild plants having tendrils are purple vetch, vetchling, and beach pea.

Fourth, there are plants that have tiny decurved spines or hooks along the stems or on the underside of the leaf veins and by means of these hooks the plant clings to anything it touches. Some members of the bedstraw or madder family belong in this group.

Bedstraws have square stems with slender leaves in whorls around the stem and clusters of tiny flowers.

Not all members of the family are equipped with hooks, but one member called cleavers does so. If you brush up against it, it will grab your clothing.

You can find it growing in our area, usually in vacant lots or roadsides or similar places. It has white flowers, and the leaves are usually in whorls of eight.

Fifth, there are species that grow appendages that will practically weld themselves to a smooth surface.

I know of no wild plants that climb by this method, but our son, Lyle, had a climbing philodendron that climbed by this method. He had it growing in a window this past summer.

When he tried to move the plant, he found these appendages had so welded themselves to the smooth window frame the bottom of these appendages tore off rather than let go.

I tried to remove the last traces of the plant by rubbing them with a wet cloth, but they would not come off until I rubbed hard enough to remove some of the paint along with them.

Bird atlasing can be challenging

Stamina, orienteering helpful for surveys

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Bird atlasing can be quite a challenge.

Sometimes it requires physical stamina and orienteering skills as well as a little experience in identifying birds.

For purposes of the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas project, the Maritimes have been divided into squares 10 kilometres by 10 kilometres. Every fourth one of these squares has been designated a priority square.

One of these priority squares, west of Big Bald Mountain, happens to lie in an area where there are no navigable roads.

In fact, there are no roads at all in it and never have been, except for one old abandoned and overgrown road which barely reaches its southern edge.

It actually penetrates the square for about 75 paces, but that's all.

The square can be reached by hiking along this old road, but it requires a long hike in order to do so.

Some of the road is so full of alders it is not much better than hiking through the bush, anyway.

We decided on the other option — that of travelling through the bush by means of map and compass — our starting point being the site of a recent cutting operation. This is located to the south-west of the square — near Lizard Lake.

On the evening of June 24, Greg Bell, my sons, Ian and Bruce, and I set out. We drove as far as we could — a little to the east of Lizard Lake. Here we camped for the night.

Rising at daybreak, we took a compass line, then marched on. Ian was the navigator.

By 7 a.m., we had reached the border of our priority square and the end of the old road running up from Sinclair Lake. Here we parted company.

Greg and I headed north following along the North Pole Stream. (Greg probably would have liked to have gone with the other two, but I needed a partner.)

Ian and Bruce set off on a compass line toward the north-east. They had a tent and supplies to last for a couple of days. They also had a large scale contour map of the area.

Greg and I atlassed throughout the morning, then returned via compass line to our truck.

Interesting find

Our most interesting find was a spruce grouse hen with a brood of very young chicks. We also met up with a couple of nice deer.

Tennessee warblers were singing everywhere, and evening grosbeaks were common.

Tony Erskine, in his report "Birds in Boreal Canada" says of these two sepcies "Evening grosbeaks, with Tennessee warblers, are one of the best biological indicators of the presence of spruce budworm, short of sampling the caterpillars themselves, as they start to build up before damage to trees is at all obvious, and are so conspicuous as to be easily detectable from a passing vehicle".

The next afternoon, with the truck, we picked up Bruce and Ian. As planned, they had hiked across to the Mullin Stream Road reaching it near the point where it crosses the South Nepisiquit River.

They were tired, fly-bitten, and soaking wet, for it had rained all that morning, but they were pleased with their accomplishment.

Also, they had a substantial list of birds they had identified in the priority square. Included in the list was a brown creeper that had been seen attending to her young.

Measuring on a straight line across the map (from the point where they began their hike to the place where they were picked up) is between 15 and 16 kilometres.

However, they changed direction on a couple of occasions and when you consider the wet holes and the many fallen trees they had to detour around, they must have travelled at least 20 kilometres and that over rough and inhospitable terrain.

They said, that after leaving Greg and I, they saw only two signs of man having ever been in the region before them.

One was a piece of flagging tape tied to a tree. It was seen shortly after leaving us.

The other was two flat-topped stumps, seen considerably later. They appeared to have been cut by a saw, but were so old and decayed this was uncertain.

During their hike, they had crossed the North Pole Stream, crossed two bogs near the upper reaches of Fish Brook, crossed Saddler's Brook, and visited a small lake which empties into the Lower North Branch Little Southwest Miramichi River.

From here, they headed north to a deep valley through which this river flows. Here they camped for the night. In the morning, they turned to the east and headed for the road where we picked them up.

Ian and I made one other trip to this square, but explored only a small area in the south-west corner of it.

During these two trips, we have listed 38 species of bird as either possible, probable, or confirmed breeders. That's not a lot, but they were hard-earned ones.

We hope to do further atlassing in this square, but not for a couple of years.

By then, forest operations may have extended a road into the square — this was indicated to us by a cutting crew in the Sinclair Lake area.

Robins can be found almost everywhere

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Usually it is the rare birds, the occasional strays, etc. that get reported in this column. This week, we will reverse that. We will talk about a very common bird — the robin.

Indeed, during the summer, it is probably the most common bird in Canada. Only one other species, the savannah sparrow, has a wider distribution in our country (see Godfrey's distribution maps in "***Birds of Canada***).

But, whereas the savannah sparrow is found only in grassy meadows, the robin is found almost everywhere — around our homes, in deep woods, in peat bogs, along stream banks, and more.

It is found from Bonavista to Vancouver Island, and from the U.S. border to well beyond the treeline.

The robin has no doubt benefited from man's interference in the natural order of things; for, although it is found in deep woods, it is, nonetheless, more plentiful in residential areas, along wood edges, and around other breaks in the woods.

Although its overall population remains fairly stable when compared to that of many other species; nonetheless, throughout much of its range, its numbers have increased. This increase may be due to a switch away from the more toxic pesticides such as D.D.T. (see U.S. Dept. of the Interior report on Breeding Bird Surveys).

The robin hardly needs a description. However, you may, or may not, have noticed some of the minor details of its plumage.

The two white tips on the outer corners of the tail are quite noticeable and are helpful in identifying the bird when it is seen flying away.

Plumage details

Have you noticed that it has a white throat with black stripes? Or that it has three white areas around the eye — one on top, one on the bottom, and one in front — these three forming an almost complete eye-ring?

Male robins have blacker heads and tails, and somewhat brighter, red breasts, than do females. Also, the males do all of the singing. They sing, while the females do most of the work.

Young robins have speckled breasts — dark specks on a nearly white breast, with only a bit of rufous-red showing.

This plumage lasts for only a very short time — a month or two — after which they experience what is called a "post-juvenal moult".

At this time, all the feathers — except those of the wings and tail — are replaced by new ones. After this their plumage is like that of their parents, but duller and browner on the back.

The robins bill is yellow in the spring, darker in the fall.

Nesting period

It has a longer nesting period than does most birds; and it is not unusual for a pair to raise three broods in a single season.

Extreme cases of early and late nesting in New Brunswick are a nest with eggs found at Fredericton on April 10, 1945, and another with eggs found at Musquash on Sept. 27, 1946 (see Squires).

According to R. Charles Long, writing in the Canadian Wildlife Service's "Hinterland Who's Who" series, the robin returns to the same area year after year, and even its offspring generally return to within a mile of where they were born.

A robin's eggs are usually the familiar robin's-egg-blue; but Long tells us they can be white, or on rare occasions, spotted with brown.

Robins have been known to nest in a variety of strange places.

Long gives the usual height above ground as being about 10 feet, but adds that this height may vary anywhere from 14 inches to 62 feet.

However, Robbie Tufts reports, that in 1933, one that nested in an apple orchard at Lower Wolfville placed its nest on the ground — in a slight depression.

The following year, presumably the same bird, again nested on the ground — this nest being only a few yards from where it had nested the previous year.

Tufts also reports one robin nested on a railway tressel. This nest was placed only three feet below the tracks over which trains passed several times each day.

Long says robins have been known to nest in 56 species of trees, 21 species of shrubs and vines, and 21 different types of man-made sites.

However, its favorite trees for nesting are spruce and maple. Also, robins have been known to use old nests of other species, including those of the Baltimore oriole.

Birding creates friendships

This guest column was written by local naturalist Tom Greathouse.

Birding, the often exciting, always educational and sometimes dangerous or controversial hobby of studying birds in their natural habitats, changed my life.

It has been at least partly responsible for visits to or residence in many exciting places, including New Brunswick, Québec and six other Canadian provinces.

In the Miramichi, birding made it easy to become friends and share activities with such long-time residents as Harry Walker and family, all avid birders; journalist Cathy Carnahan and Boyd, her farmer/philosopher husband; farmers/environmentalists/geologist Ben and Vera Baldwin; engineer/ice sculptor/canoeist, Morrill Sisk and family; and many, many others.

All of them are working for an environment which will continue to provide suitable habitats for wildlife as well as humans.

Most birding enthusiasts spend the bulk of their hours watching their own backyards or on organized trips.

In the Miramichi this can be very rewarding, even in midwinter when the number of species is limited.

Exciting finds last winter included a single Dickcissel among a flock of 40 house sparrows, a northern shrike and a sharp-shinned hawk.

On one occasion the hawk caught, killed and ate an evening grosbeak in the backyard. In the spring a house finch appeared far from its normal range.

Such sightings, in addition to the first seasonal sightings of

Harry Walker

Aug. 19/88

WILDLIFE

returning species, tend to temporarily boost one's blood pressure.

Backyard feeding has the advantage of attracting birds close to the observer and permits an almost microscopic view of the variation between individuals within a species.

It is soon possible to recognize individuals by minor variations in color pattern, size and sometimes by degree of albinism.

Last winter Jean Patenaude observed a two-headed pine siskin at his feeder in Douglastown.

Some birding requires considerable planning and long trips.

To see pelagic birds, which only come ashore to nest, it is often necessary to visit an island near New Brunswick's Grand Manan Island or Isle de Bonaventure near Percé on the Gaspè Peninsula.

It is impressive to see thousands of Northern Gannets (fou de bassans), for example, nesting along cliffs overhanging the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

While the most dangerous part of many birding trips is the drive along the highway, some excursions offer more hazards.

If one wants to visit some islands on an individual basis it is often necessary to charter a small, open fishing boat and land on a beach without a wharf.

If the beach is rocky and exposed to strong winds, as is the Isle de Madeleine off Dakar, Senegal in west Africa, it may be necessary to jump into the water and risk a potentially serious injury.

When the prize is the sighting of a white-tailed tropic bird, many birders will take the risk.

Many birders become environmental protection advocates as they see habitats for certain species being destroyed by bulldozer, chemicals or saw.

Such persons bought the Isle de Bonaventure many years ago when the Gannet population began declining.

The Strawberry Marsh area at Newcastle is an area which should be cleaned up and set aside as a wildlife preserve before it is permanently converted to a garbage dump or an industrial site.

The development of algae growth near the river edge of the Repap landfill area is an indication of pollution of the river.

It is understood that Repap is taking action to stop this source of pollution.

If such action is not taken, it will adversely affect wildlife including fish, populations downstream from the sources.

The recent cat control law adopted by the town of Newcastle should reduce controversies between cat owners and people who feed birds in the winter.

This is a commendable development.

Dealing animal parts to countries in Asia

Harry Walker

SEPT. 2/88

WILDLIFE

A trade in wild animal parts — bear gall bladders, caribou antlers, animal reproductive organs, etc. — was the subject of a documentary that aired a week or two ago on the CBC's televison program "*The Journal*".

Many of these animal parts are obtained in Canada and the United States, then shipped to markets in Eastern Asian countries where they are used as ingredients in traditional medicines — medicines which are widely used in this part of the world.

According to the documentary, the demand for such medicines is so great, and the prices paid for the animal parts used in them are so high, many poachers are now cashing in on the trade. The result being the survival of some of our North American wildlife species is threatened.

Although it was probably not the intent of the producers of this program, nonetheless, after viewing it, I was left with the impression most Asians have little concern or feeling for wildlife.

Another side

However, a few days later, I picked up a copy of "The Christian Science Monitor Monthly" and in it was an article which painted another side to this picture.

The article was written by a Chinese man, Tang Xiyang, and was taken from his book "Living Treasures: An Odyssey Through China's Extraordinary Nature Reserves".

Xiyang was born in a small town in Hunan Province but lived most of his life in the city of Beijing. At the time of writing, he was editorial director of the magazine "Nature in China."

In his article, Xiyang's descriptions of nature are fresh and original. After reading it, I had the feeling he was strongly motivated by a purpose that transcended personal ambition.

Xiyang indicated he is far from being alone in his desire and his efforts to save China's wildlife.

The government is committed to the same goal, as are scientists, naturalists, and many ordinary Chinese citizens.

Xiyang said China now has 300 nature reserves and, by the year 2000, this number is scheduled to reach 500.

These reserves contain hundreds of thousands of acres, and the staffs who care for them "are charged with the mission of preserving for all mankind the unique heritage of rare and fascinating animal and plant life within China's borders".

These reserves contain a great variety of habitats, for this vast country spans a wide range of climatic and geographical differences extending from cold alpine plateaus to tropical islands.

One innovative measure: in some regions, farmers are compensated by the government for crops damaged by certain rare species. This takes away the incentive to kill such animals.

China's efforts have apparently reversed the fortunes for some species. The crested ibis which was almost extinct in 1960 is now said to be "inching" its way back.

However, Xiyang expressed concern for the future. He said "I felt the need to alert people everywhere to the precarious existence of many rare and precious creatures."

It is anticipated a very rare tree, the Cathay silver fir, may someday become commercially valuable.

This tree is said to be neither a fir nor a pine, but a species belonging to a family of its own intermediate between these.

It is thought a wasp found in another forest reserve may be utilized to control the aphids which severely damage much of their sugar cane each year.

Xiyang tells us some of the hazards he encountered while exploring some of China's nature reserves — impassable roads and paths, trails infested with pit vipers, mosquitoes and, in one case, being chased by a wild elephant.

However, for him, the rewards apparently far outweighed the hardships for he concludes:—

"I shall never forget the feeling that came to me on that cold fall morning as I followed the steep upward trail of the giant panda through a virgin forest ringing with birdsong. After spending most of my life in the city, I felt that at long last I had come home."

Puffballs pop up

Harry Walker

Sept. 9/88

WILDLIFE

The rains following our hot weather have provided the necessary stimulus causing many mushrooms and puffballs to pop up in our lawns.

On Aug. 30, Anne and Janice Morrison of Newcastle delivered a collection of these to our home. They said they had appeared in their yard overnight.

Included in their collection were some of the largest puffballs I have ever seen in our area — the largest one measuring about 4 1/2 inches across the longest diameter and about 3 1/2 inches across the shortest one.

These puffballs were light brown in color and somewhat irregular in shape. When cut in half, the flesh was found to be pure white and of a uniform texture. In the centre was an irregular-shaped cavity resembling the cavity that is sometimes found in the centre of a large potato.

This dissection and examination completed, it was concluded this was an edible species although this was the first puffball I had seen having a cavity in the centre of it.

The Morrisons, being uninterested in experimenting with them, left them with us and we ate them.

First we peeled and sliced them, then fried them in butter. When prepared in this way they tasted much like the ordinary mushrooms commonly found in grocery stores.

J.W. Groves, in his book "Edible and Poisonous Mushrooms of Canada" (published by the Dept. of Agriculture) says:

"The puffballs proper are generally regarded as one of the safest groups of fungi to use as food and one of the few groups in which it is possible to give a sort of rule of thumb for determining an edible species.

"It seems safe to say that any puffball that is white and homogeneous inside is good to eat."

Proceed carefully

However, he also advises us to proceed carefully if we are trying a new species — one which we have never eaten before.

There is the possibility that some individuals may find that some species do not agree with them.

The puffball should be cut in two to make sure it really is a puffball and not just the beginning stages of some poisonous, umbrella-shaped mushroom.

If this happens to be the case, then the outline of the developing mushroom will be seen in cross-section.

Also, if the interior of a puffball is turning yellow, this means it is ripening — turning into spores. In this case, it should be discarded.

When fully ripe, the interior will be a mass of powdery spores and the puffball when touched or stepped on will emit a puff of these — this puff of spores resembling a puff of smoke or dust.

At this point, it is of course far past the edible stage.

Puffballs also appear in the yard of Gladys MacLean's place in Whitneyville. Her description of them fit that of a common species found here — the gem-studded puffball.

These puffballs are pure white at first, but later become tan or pale brownish on top.

When the top is still white, it is studded with many tiny white spines resembling jewels — hence its name. These spines later drop off leaving a fine network of dotted lines.

They are small puffballs, often little more than 1/2 inch in diameter, but sometimes reaching a size of two inches in diameter.

People sometimes ask — "What is the difference between a mushroom and a toadstool?"

My Winston dictionary defines them thus:

Mushroom: Any of various forms of larger fungi, edible or poisonous, of which some are umbrella-shaped, some flat, and some spherical.

Toadstool: Any of various umbrella-shaped fungi; popularity, any poisonous or non-edible, umbrella-shaped mushroom.

Some species of mushroom appear in the spring, others in mid-summer; but it is in late summer and early fall that mushrooms are most abundant.

■ The latest bald eagle reports come from the Northwest Miramichi. Andrew Dunn saw one near his home in Cassilis. Also, this summer, Fraser Simpson has been seeing one at Craig's camps in Curventon. Another was anonymously reported between Newcastle and Sunny Corner.

Help save our environment

The following is a guest column prepared by Tom Greathouse of the Miramichi Environmental Society.

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

An open letter to Miramichi teachers as another school year begins:

Dear teachers:

Please help save our environment, the source of the Miramichi's wildlife, water, food, forests and general wealth.

You have a wonderful opportunity to point out to your students, our future leaders, the importance of having sources of edible fish and game, of water safe and fit to drink, and of life-supporting air and soil.

For example, there are portions of the Miramichi River system which are so polluted that they are no longer suitable for salmon to spawn and reproduce, so polluted that shellfish and crustaceans (lobsters, etc.) have disappeared or are not fit to eat.

Children of families who dependent on the river for essential needs know that 1,000 salmon plus toxic chemicals or plus water that is too warm or too acid equals zero salmon, with no money to buy food or clothes.

History books which speak of "the Rise and Fall of (various) Empires" often neglect to note that many empires fell from grace to oblivion because their natural as well as human resources were exhausted.

Today's history teachers have an opportunity to relate the parallel development between local environmental degradation and the fall of empires.

They can share with their students the fallacy in sacrificing long-range, natural resource values on the altar of temporary economic prosperity.

Today's teachers have evidence that big industrial development often results in two things.

One involves the degradation of natural resources. The second concerns the collapse of previously established, small-scale enterprises depending on products from non-polluted lakes and streams and from extensive forested areas.

These teachers read of millions of trees being planted, but wisely ask "How many of them will survive and how long will it take them to reach a merchantable size?"

Broad scope

Science teachers have an exceptionally broad scope for pointing out the effects of indiscriminate, indiscreet and often misguided dumping of pollutants, including toxic chemicals, into the air, on the soil or into the water.

Recent investigations by MES (Miramichi Environmental Society) have revealed irresponsible action by government agencies, large and small industries and individual residents.

While helping students develop communication skills, language teachers also have excellent chances for helping ensure a better Miramichi environment.

Students can be encouraged to research local as well as regional environmental problems. The information gained could serve as the basis for written or oral presentations.

Subsequent participation in debates, contrasting environmentally-sound with destructive practices, might reveal potential local or national leadership.

Such leadership is needed to obtain a better balance between industrial profits and improving present environments.

Our civilization, you and I, should not accept conditions which create areas favorable only to such birds as crows, gulls and house sparrows.

Neither should we accept environments suitable only for rats and for such insects as cockroaches, flies and mosquitoes.

We should also be upset by waste disposal sites from which toxic chemicals may have been seeping for 40 years.

Note: no one apparently checked until MES took samples containing PCP's in late spring, 1988 although patches of algae formation were observed at several points along the edge of the site and extending into the river.

Teachers of civic government, home economics and the manual arts can inform students of the need for care in handling and disposing of household chemicals and other waste materials.

As Miramichiers know from reading about problems at community and privately-owned dump (land-fill) sites in various parts of New Brunswick, drastic improvement is needed in managing many sites.

Sponsor essays

One possible solution is to sponsor student essay and debating contests, including university-level participation. Young, relatively unfettered minds might yield suggestions of value to government officials who seem to be groping for either solutions or initiative to take affective action.

Horror stories about careless or indiscriminate disposal of wastes, many of them toxic to various forms of life, can be seen routinely in publications at all levels — local, provincial, national and international.

Teachers and others who wish help in obtaining information in presenting it to students or in conducting field trips can contact federal and provincial environment officials or MES representatives by writing to: P. O. Box 516, Chatham, EIN 3A8.

Note: MES is a 100 per cent volunteer organization. It believes that volunteer action by industry, government and individuals should be taken to restore the local environment to a state wherein the Miramichi will support edible fish and crustaceans, as it did a few years ago, is safe for swimming and where the air is fit to breath and the soil is capable of producing contaminant-free food.

Hawk moths: active only in sunlight

Harry Walker

Sept. 23/88

The following is a guest column prepared by Tom Greathouse of the Miramichi Environmental Society.

Miramichi resident Aurélie Morris animatedly began by saying: "We have a winged visitor in our garden which flies and feeds like our ruby-throated hummingbirds (colibri à googe rubis), but it is much smaller.

When not gathering nectar from phlox flowers, the only flower it was seen to frequent near the Morris home on Newcastle's Beaverbrook Road, it perched so quietly its six legs could be counted.

A reference to Peterson's *Field Guide to Birds East of the Rockies* revealed it was a sphinx or hawk moth (sphinx de motor), about two-thirds the size of the world's smallest bird, the 2.5 inch bee humming bird.

Although most moths are nocturnal, feeding from dusk to dawn, the large sphinx moth is diurnal.

Aurélie and Zenon Morris noted it was active only in bright sunlight. It disappeared even when clouds temporarily obscured the sun.

The two names, sphinx and hawk moth, refer to physical features of this vegetarian insect. Its general appearance resembles an ancient Egyptian image in the form of a lion having a hawk's head.

Its forewings are long and more or less pointed at the ends, similar to the wings of falcons, which are members of the hawk family.

Otherwise, there was little resemblance to lions or hawks.

The moths showed no fear of man, non-descript in color, with patches of white, barely discernible on the light brown, gossamer wings, they could be photographed from a few inches away.

Two days after visiting the Morrises, a hawk moth with wings moving so rapidly they appeared to be blurred, triangular projections from the body, was seen in the garden of our new (built 1903) home in Douglasfield.

The phlox which attracted it had been planted by Mrs. Thomas (Frances Hartery) Flynn, who lived in the house 81 years. She and her late husband maintained bird feeders for many winters.

They had placed two nesting boxes in addition to a bluebird house given to them by Harry Walker.

For Madeleine and I, the first-ever sighting of the hawk moth plus the welcoming chorus of chickadees (mesange à t"te noise), bluejays (geai blue) and other birds seemed good omens for the years ahead in the Flynn house.

If other Miramichi residents saw the hawk moth in August or September, a phone call or card to Tom Greathouse, 622-8889 or P.O. Box 392, Newcastle, EIV 3M5 would be appreciated.

Information received on unusual sightings or general bird activities over the next three weeks will be passed on to Harry Walker when he returns.

Migrations

Miramichiers have an annual late summer/early fall opportunity to see some 200 species of birds changing environments.

Oceanic birds such as Atlantic puffins (macareux moine) and razorbills (petit pingouin) go to sea when their young are ready in July/August and do not come back until May/June to nest on offshore islands (Grand Manan/Marais, for example).

Many insect-eating land and shore birds began migration some weeks ago, but common night hawks (engoulevent d'Amerique) and spotted sandpipers (chevalier branlequeue) were still passing by last week.

Seven night hawks were seen hunting over a field about 10 miles north of Newcastle.

Some species of hawks, such as sharp shins (épervier baun), broad wings (petite buse) and kestrels (crécerelle d'Amerique) will soon reach a peak in daily migration numbers.

Thousands of birders will congregate at established hawk migration concentration points such as Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania and Cape May, New Jersey during the next three weeks.

Among the last species to go south will be those water birds such as Canada geese (bernache du Canada) who wait until there is imminent danger lakes and rivers will freeze over.

The last category in this list includes those species which come to the Miramichi to winter. Snowy owls (harfang des neiges) and common redpolls (sizerin flammé) are examples.

Last winter, a single dickcissel traveled east to the Miramichi and stayed for at least eight weeks.

Bird club

If there is enough interest, I will co-ordinate efforts to organize a bird club in the area.

The general objectives would be: share experiences in the field and at periodic meetings; listen to guest speakers; participate in such activities as Christmas bird counts and collection of local data for a continent-wide breeding bird atlas.

If interested, contact Tom Greathouse at the address above.

Jewel of the Miramichi

WILDLIFE

Sept. 30/88

The following is a guest column prepared by Tom Greathouse of the Miramichi Environmental Society.

Every year the Miramichi becomes the summer home of one of the world's most remarkable creatures, the ruby-throated hummingbird (olibri à gorge rubis)

The ruby-throat, weighing only two ounces (56 grams) and measuring only 3.4 inches (8.5 cm), is the smallest bird which breeds in the Maritimes. It can be seen in urban as well as rural areas.

In spite of its small size, it shows a napoleonic pugnacity when defending its territory and nest.

Its endurance while crossing the Gulf of Mexico during its annual migration to Mexico and Central America, about 800 kms (480 miles) of open water, stretches the imagination.

It seems miraculous that a two-ounce bird with a measured wing beat of 70-80 seconds would need only two grams of especially stored fat to sustain its flight for a reported 24 hours (Grier, below).

Speedster

Although not in a class with falcons, when compared with the world's fastest humans, the ruby-throat is a speedster. It can fly 60 feet per second compared to the Olympic contenders who covered 100 metres at a rate of 30 feet per second.

Furthermore, the ruby-throat can fly from flower-to-flower, feed while hovering with its 80-second wing beat and continue for several minutes before resting. A runner collapses after only 10 seconds of such effort.

Hummingbirds (colibois) are also unique in their flight patterns. No other bird species has the ability to fly backward and few can fly straight up and straight down. One encyclopedia, "Les Animaux," thought hummingbird flight capabilities so extraordinary that it included sketches for all but descent action.

The iridescent plumage of hummingbirds is another remarkable, even miraculous development. Feathers on the throat of the Miramichi's ruby-throat are iridescent.

The ability of such feathers to display all the colors of the rainbow is explained as follows by Katharine Grier in "Le Colibri," (the hummingbird), a book available at Carrefour library in Newcastle:

"The body of the ruby-throat is covered with small feathers which resemble the scales of a fish. Some feathers are iridescent. Their shimmering color varies according to the light and to the angle from which the feathers are seen.

"The (blue) feathers of the bluejay (geai bleu) are always blue. The iridescent feathers of a hummingbird contain several layers of tissue, each filled with microscopic bubbles of air. In the light these bubbles appear to be thousands of soap bubbles which show all the colors of the rainbow."

The color of a hummingbird changes with its position relative to light from the sun. The flaming red throat of the male ruby-throat, for example, can quickly change to violet or black if the bird's head moves or the obseroeis position changes.

The daily volume of food required by a hummingbird totals about one-half of its body weight. No other warm-blooded animal consumers proportionately as much.

If a human were to use up an amount of energy proportionate to that consumed by a hummingbird in flight, the person would have to run at a speed of 145 km/hr (85 mph).

Yet the ruby-throat is said to "store" only an extra two grams, about four per cent of its body weight, to fly non-stop for some 800 km across the Gulf of Mexico!

Hummingbird nests are works of art. Nest sites are selected and the nest constructed by the female. Blades of grass, parts of leaves, bark or roots and animal or vegetable "down" are used in construction. The inside is smooth and rounded, as in a small cup.

In about a week construction is finished and the female seeks a companion. The nuptial performance is spectacular as the male performs aerial acrobatics, creating a humming noise meanwhile with his wings and making squeaky sounds.

At one point he approaches the female in a manner which displays to her the brilliant colors of his throat. Shortly after two white eggs are laid.

Once the young leave the nest, the parents return to a solitary lifestyle for another year. Ruby-throats have a life expectancy of 5 to 10 years.

Hummingbirds are noted for taking nectar and insects from flowers, but they are important in perpetuating the species they "rob". As they feed, pollen grains adhere to their long, thin bills.

Several species of hummingbirds have thin, tublar bills as long as their body. Each species is adapted to collect nectar and insects from the inside of tublar shaped flowers.

With at least 319 species, the hummingbird family is the second largest in the bird world. The Miramichi's ruby-throat, often called "the little ruby" (Lepetit rubis), is the only species of the family which breeds in eastern Canada.

Although several other North American birds have the ability to hover at a fixed point in the air, only the hummingbirds are known to hover to feed on fixed objects such as flowers. Kestrels, kingfishers and other species hover to hunt for prey on the ground or in the water.

Hummingbirds feed largely on nectar (sugar water) from flowers, but they often eat small insects trapped in the nectar. The ruby-throat will come to Miramichi feeders which make sugar water available, whether colored or not.

Table sugar makes a more "natural" mix than honey and has other advantages. In the beginning, at least, it would be well to add a touch of red food coloring as this seems a preferred color.

Copies of articles on "Flowers for hummers" and feeding hummingbirds ("Some sticky solutions") can be obtained by calling 622-8889. The source is "Living Bird Quarterly", Spring 1985.

Wildlife inspires Grade 5 bilingual study

The following is a guest column prepared by Tom Greathouse of the Miramichi Environmental Society.

WILDLIFE

Oct. 7/88

Matthew Esson, a 10-year-old fifth grader at Newcastle's Croft Elementary, was first met while he was borrowing books on birds.

Matthew and classmate Philip Savoie were required to submit a report in French on "Birds Which People Eat".

To find information in French concerning Miramichi species such as the ruffed grouse (gélinotte huppée) and spruce grouse (tétras du Canada), Matthew had to go to the community library at Carrefour Beausoleil.

Impressed by his desire to develop a French vocabulary and to get accurate information on which to base his report, a follow-up was made.

While talking with his mother, Barbara Esson, it was learned his paternal grandparents, Miller and Joyce Esson of Millerton, keep a telescope near a window of their home overlooking the Southwest Miramichi River so they can watch both resident and transient birds.

Mrs. Esson noted that in the past few weeks they had seen bald eagles, many black ducks and cormorants and a few mergansers.

During the winter months, the Essons maintain one principal feeder and several satellite stations.

After some experimentation, they devised a feeder which prevented squirrels from quickly eating or catching all the seeds provided.

With this background, it was easy to understand Matthew's deep interest in the present project theme for his class.

If Matthew and Philip needed additional inspiration, it has been provided by Miss Avon Riep, their teacher.

When questioned about the selection of birds as one of the year's principal themes for learning French, it was obvious she had been inspired by a recent visit to West Germany's Waldsroder Vogel Park, the park is said to be Europe's largest bird sanctuary.

The grand finish to the bird project will require each team to present detailed information, all in French, to the class.

In addition to Matthew and Philip's "Birds You Can Eat" topic, eight other topics will be presented.

They are:

- Birds of prey (hawks, owls, shrikes), birds which eat other birds, mammals and insects.

If starvation threatens the larger (female) kestrel will even eat the male with whom she mated.

- Water or marsh-oriented species, such as ducks, cormorants and shorebirds which may eat vetetation, fish or other aquatic animals (crustaceans, worms).

- Small, open farmland species (robins, swallows, insect and seed eaters)

- Small forest or forest/pasture edge" species (warblers, thrushes, woodpeckers)

- Exotic species which have escaped from cages and have become nuisances (house sparrows, starlings, pigeons (rock doves))

- Exotic species which are domesticated (jungle fowl).

- Nesting and breeding patterns

- Anatomical adaptations.

When Matthew, Philip and classmates have completed their assignments, they will have developed a new respect for the birds whose existence is threatened by complete destruction (i.e., urban development, overcutting of forests, drainage or pollution of marshes, lakes, rivers and beaches) or partial destruction (by gradual pollution) of their required habitat.

Students fortunate enough to have such teachers as Miss Reip and Mrs. Laura Russell, another Croft teacher whose fifth grade class is following identical themes to those of Miss Riep, will be well prepared to live in a bilingual world and to work for preservation of an environment fit for Miramichi residents, whether humans, birds or other life forms.

Fantastic birds

At Carrefour Beausoleil School, where older students are also preparing for bilingual living, the walls of the art room are at present largely-papered with pencil and crayon sketches of "fantastique" birds.

Art instructor Carol Bernard recently gave his students an assignment to draw a "bird" they considered fantastic.

He was interested in the artist's techniques they have acquired rather than in having them attempt to copy someone else's bald eagle or mallard duck.

For example, among the most striking sketches, knowledge was demonstrated of evolutionary structural changes in animals. Ninth grader Jody Mazerolle and eighth grader Robert Forbes fantasized bird-like creatures of previous geologic periods.

Against a background of a treeless canyon rim, perched on the top of a dead tree which had grown from a protected point below a rim, Jody sketched a bird with the head, beak and feet of a falcon, the wings of a bat, a pre-historic tail and a lizard-type, or perhaps a superman-type, plated abdomen.

Robert's fantasy has the head of a harpy eagle, one bat wing opposed to a feathered one, large-nailed, webbed feet and a long, rat-style tail which terminates in a tuft of feathers.

Sketches by Renée Tremblay, Grade 9, and Nicole Comeau, Grade 8, depicted birds more likely to be seen in 20th century Maritimes.

Renées creature brings to mind a realistic combination of a ruddy duck (shape and color of head and bill) and a green-winged teal (wings, tail), with the outline mirrored in the supporting water surface.

Nicole envisioned, it seems, the head, body and legs of a razorbill (auk) and the forked-tail of an arctic tern.

Environmental awareness

Although stated objectives of the language and art classes did not include the creation of an increased awareness of the beauty, utility and, yes, fragility of Miramichi wildlife, it is heartening to have any form of our natural resources used as a tool or model to help learn and develop constructive skills.

For one who has devoted much of his time over 50 years to the protection and wise use of our natural resources, there is no doubt that for Miramichi students to get to know more about these resources is sure to result in development of greater respect and admiration for them, whether birds, bees, bears, fish, forests or streams.

We zig-zagged on truck trip from the west

Harry Walker

Oct. 21/88

WILDLIFE

First, a thank you to Tom Greathouse for continuing this column while I was away.

I have been travelling across the country with our son, Ian, who is moving from Vancouver, to Kingston, Ont.

My trip west was made by train. Our return trip was made in an old, beat-up truck loaded down with Ian's belongings. There was some doubt as to whether it could survive the entire journey.

However, it did survive, not only the trip from Vancouver to Kingston, but also the extra miles from Kingston to Newcastle. Once here, it was delivered to its owner — Ian's brother, Lyle.

Ian's moving arrangements involved a deal between the two boys, — Lyle, and his wife, Ann, recently moved from Calgary to Newcastle. Here Lyle has started work at the new Alcell pilot plant. Ian was to use the truck to move his belongings and in so doing bring Lyle's truck home for him.

The truck's main problems were:—

It was a little noisy and the noise grew in intensity along the way. This was diagnosed as being due to a cracked exhaust manifold.

It was very balky in the morning. It took a long time to warm up. At each stop, it was difficult to get it in motion again. It would either stall or lurch forward in a series of violent jerks. After it warmed up, these take-offs were smoothed out to a considerable extent.

Strangely, once it got going, it did not want to stop. When the ignition was turned off, the engine kept running with an unever clunkety-clunk sound. It then had to be stalled out by putting it in gear.

The engine had a habit of backfiring, especially during deceleration.

A leak in the radiator was fixed by adding a powder of some sort into the water.

Ian and I did not follow a direct course, but zig-zagged across the country visiting out-of-the-way places that most travellers do not see.

We stopped at times to look at birds and plants, etc., but the details of that we will leave for a later article.

At one point, travelling along a dirt road in the Cypress Hills of southwestern Saskatchewan, we were confronted by a sign which warned: "Impassable except with 4-wheel drive vehicle when wet." A mile or so further on another sign read: "Impassable when wet".

The weather was dry so we kept on going hoping the next sign would not warn of anything even more foreboding.

The truck had to struggle to make it over the crest of one hill, but nothing worse confronted us. From there we drove for many miles before we came to the first little town, Consul, Sask.

By this time, we were getting low on gas and both the gas stations in the town were closed. Also, the only restaurant was closed for the night and we had had no supper.

At the hotel's beverage room we were able to buy two subs that were heated for us in the microwave. Here, also, we were able to obtain a room for the night at a bargain price — $16 for the two of us.

Ian will be starting a new phase of his work at Queen's University in Kingston.

For the past five years, he has been working at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C. There he obtained his Ph D in biology, and in so doing, was awarded the Dean's Medal for Academic Excellence in the Faculty of Science.

He goes to Queens on a fellowship for two years. There he will be doing research work. His project — to obtain core samples of the sediments from the bottoms of various lakes across Canada; then, using the microscope, classify the insect remains found at various depths in them.

The kinds of insects found at these various depths will serve as indicators of the climate at various stages in Canada's history since the last ice age.

This is really just a continuation of the work he has been doing at Simon Fraser. It is also a continuation of some of the work he did earlier at the University of Waterloo and at Mount Allison University.

During the past summer, he has been teaching two courses at Simon Fraser — one on the animals of B.C., the other on the plants of B.C.

Turkey vulture makes a rare visit to the Miramichi

WILDLIFE

Oct. 14/88

The following is a guest column prepared by Tom Greathouse of the Miramichi Environmental Society.

A turkey vulture (vautour à tête rouge) was seen on Oct. 10 by Jean Patenaud, Douglastown artist, bird enthusiast and long-time resident.

Jean was on the new stretch of Highway 8, near the Warwick Road crossing, when he spotted the large, brownish-black migrant lunching on a freshly-killed procupine.

The turkey vulture continued to feed as Jean approached close enough to clearly see the red of the naked (unfeathered) skin on its head, upper neck and upper part of its bill.

The vulture's diet is one of its most noteworthy facets. Although the classic picture is one of turkey vulture feeding on the carcass of an animal freshly-killed by man, by another creature or other force, it has been observed that they also eat scraps discarded by man at fish cleaning stations and garbage dumps.

However, like other members of the falcon order, the turkey vulture can kill its own food when the situation is favorable.

The encyclopedia "Les Animaux" says turkey vultures hunt small vertebrates such as snakes, frogs and rodents and they take eggs from the nests of other birds. (In the tropics, they are also known to eat fruit obtained from palm-oil trees.)

Perhaps Jean's vulture read in the newspaper that there is a plentiful supply of rodents at garbage dumps in the Miramichi.

Large size

A second unusual feature of turkey vultures is their large size. Their body measures about 70 cm compared to 90 cm for a bald eagle.

The vulture's wingspread is about 175 cm (six feet) compared to 215 cm (seven feet) for the eagle, a species almost extinct in northeast North America until DDT was banned about 25 years ago.

When the turkey vulture's size is matched with a unique adaptation for soaring, such as the "V" shape of its wings, a vulture seen over the Miramichi becomes easily identifiable at considerable distance.

While a person's first, close-up impression of a standing turkey vulture is usually one of grotesqueness, the impression changes rapidly when it becomes airborne.

They are more graceful than ballet dancers as they spiral upward, riding thermal air currents.

Rarely do they need to flap their wings, even when ascending to great heights and remaining in the air for long periods.

Another unique trait of the turkey vulture concerns its preference for a nesting site with two exits (entrances).

They often nest in large holes (creuses) of trees, or in nests abandoned by other large birds of prey, but will nest alone in rock cliffs when possible. In this case, a home with two exits is at the top of their shopping list.

The relationship between time of nesting and latitude is illustrative of species which breed at many latitudes. In the tropics, nesting begins in February; in sub-tropical Florida in March; and along the USA-Canadian border, in June.

Bad map reading?

The presence of a turkey vulture in the Miramichi raises yet another question: most have the ability to make winter trips between New England and areas ranging from mid-east in the USA to as far south as the Falkland Islands and to Cape Horn, the southern tip of South America.

If so, how could Jean's turkey vulture have mistakenly read his maps at the end of the breeding period and turned northeast?

If, as National Geographic Society (NGS) researchers believe, birds are born with a built-in magnetic system for navigating up to 10,000 miles, spring and fall, what caused the malfunction in the turkey vulture seen on Highway 8?

One possibility is that we are seeing the confirmation of a theory expressed in the 1987 "Guide to identification of birds of North America," published by NGS: the range of the turkey vulture gradually expanding to the northeast, as is the range of the cardinal, the black vulture and other species.

This vulture may be one of the first to be seen regularly in the Miramichi. Thank you, Jean for sharing your observations.

Beluga whales

Miramichiers will be interested in the Fall 1988 issue of "Nature Canada".

One article tells of recent events in the effort to save the dwindling Saguenay/St. Laurence River population of beluga whales.

Estimated at 5,000 in 1900, at 1,200 in the early 1960s and at 450-500 in 1988, the numbers are descending rapidly.

Scientists have examined about 72 whales since 1982. All were washed up on the beach, the victims of pollution.

A few weeks ago a dolphin was washed up near Chatham. The body was removed with no attempt to analyze it for chemical content. There was an unconfirmed report of another dolphin dying in the river at the same time.

In the spring of 1988, unnatural numbers of smelt were found dead on the Southwest Miramichi and on the main river as well.

Several persons in a position to know said the mortality was significantly greater than normal. Yet government officers officially refused to admit chemical pollution had had any influence in the incident.

Mergansers

Now there is a move to shoot mergansers because they are eating too many small salmon. The individuals promoting the shoot reported that since 1984, when restrictions were placed on sport and commercial harvest of salmon, there had been large increases in 1985-86 and smaller increases in 1987-88.

It is difficult to understand how the mergansers can be blamed for the "smaller" increases (not declines) in 1987-88.

For many thousands of years there has been a balance between fish and birds. Even after the human population increased, the number of salmon was adequate until industry moved to the Miramichi, bringing with it many more people and more pollution.

Small trees found

Harry Walker

Oct. 28/88

WILDLIFE

Gladys MacLean of Whitneyville reported finding several small trees with small black berries on them.

They were not chokecherries, but were similar to them.

They were growing back of the Miramichi Mall and in the Strawberry Marsh.

What MacLean found was no doubt the European buckthorn for a number of these trees grow in that area.

These trees never grow very big — seldom reaching more than 10 to 15 feet.

The bark of young trees is noticeably speckled with white. The leaves are very smooth and shiny and of a deep green color.

They are untoothed and elliptical in shape and tend to stay green and remain on the tree late into the fall.

The berries are about the size of chokecherries, but each berry contains two to four flattened seeds rather than one large globular pit as in the case of the chokecherry.

As implied by its name, this tree is not native to Canada, but has been introduced from Europe. In some parts of the country, it is said to be spreading rapidly.

Oliver Perry Medsger, in his book "Edible Wild Plants" says the wood of this tree was reported to make "the best charcoal for the finest gunpowder".

I can find no definite information regarding the edibility of the berries of this particular species of Buckthorn, but in view of the dubious reputation gained by closely related species, they must be viewed with suspicion.

According to Harold R. Hinds, in his book "Flora of New Brunswick", there are three species of buckthorn in this province — the alder-leafed buckthorn (rhamnus alnifolia), the common buckthorn (rhamnus cathartica), and the one back of the mall, the European buckthorn (rhamnus brangula).

There is one other species of buckthorn in western Canada and others in the United States.

In their book "Edible Wild Plants of Eastern North America," Merritt Lyndon Fernald and Alfred Charles Kinsey say the berries of some species of buckthorn are poisonous while others "are said to be" palatable. They warn, however, that all are probably cathartic (act as a laxative).

They give two very colorful quotes regarding the edible qualities of the berries from the first two New Brunswick buckthorns listed above.

A small boy is said to have pointed to the berries of the alder-leafed buckthorn and said "Them is terrible things for the guts."

And, in the 16th century, someone named Dodoens is quoted as saying in reference to the berries of the common buckthorn, "They be not meete to be ministered by to young and lustie people of the countrie which doe set more store in their money than their lives."

This last quote at first puzzled me, but if I am not mistaken he is intimating these berries are a cheap laxative, but they should be taken only by people having a strong constitution, otherwise they could be fatal.

Velma MacMillan of Newcastle has drawn our attention to a plant growing in her yard. It has shiny, bright red berries which are oblong in shape and resemble little yelly-beans.

Earlier in the year, this plant had blossoms shaped like those of the potato and tomato plants.

These blossoms were, however, colored quite differently — the outer ring of petals being deep purple, the central beak bright yellow.

This plant is the bittersweet nightshade. It has peculiarly-shaped leaves, each having two, small, deeply-cut lobes at its base. Its berries, though beautiful in appearance, are not recommended as food.

Fernald and Kinsey report the berries can be eaten by some people, but are thought to be poisonous to others, and their juice is fatal to rabbits — this latter fact having been determined by experiment.

Both flowers and the berries, at all stages of ripening, have the same glassy appearance — first green, then orange, and then bright red.

Blossoms and berries of all three colors may be found on the same plant at the same time.

These plants can, however, become infested with potato bugs (or, more properly, Colorado potato beetles) — the same as potato plants.

The nightshade family, although containing some poisonous species, also produces some of our most valued vegetables — potatoes, tomatoes, and egg plants.

Both bittersweet nightshade and European buckthorn can be found growing on the bark pile at Strawberry Marsh.

First at new park

Harry Walker

Nov. 18/88

WILDLIFE

While travelling across Canada this fall, our son Ian and I visited a number of national and provincial parks.

One we found especially interesting was the new Grasslands National Park at Val Marie in southern Saskatchewan.

Upon entering the park office, we were impressed with the enthusiasm with which the staff welcomed us. They seemed especially eager to serve us. They loaded us down with literature about the park and invited us to sign the register.

We were told we could be celebrities for we might be the first official visitors to the park. The reason given was that day federal and provincial officials were expected to sign an agreement formally declaring this a national park.

This use of the word celebrity was a little curious. Ian and I, arriving with a clatter and a bang in our dilapidated truck, and being dressed as we were, looked like anything but celebrities.

Previous to this, we had been completely unaware of this being any special day in the park's history and it was mere fate we happened along at this particular time.

It is recommended park visitors take the precautionary measure of wearing high top boots as protection against rattlesnake bites.

We had no such boots with us — our hiking boots come only to the ankles. Ian claimed rattlers were not very active at this time of year so we went as we were. We saw none of them.

Much of the park consists of a high table-land which rises abruptly from the surrounding plains and through which the Frenchman River has cut a broad valley.

When we were there, the river was almost dried up. No water was flowing. It consisted only of a discontinuous series of shallow pools separated by stretches of dry river bottom.

Viewed from the higher ground, a thin line of shrubs and small trees marks the course of the river and a sparce growth of small shrubs dots the rest of the valley through which it flows.

The greater part of the park is completely devoid of trees and shrubs. The vegetation consists only of short grass and other low vegetation — meadow sage, ground juniper, prickly pears, etc.

In places the plateau has been eroded forming badlands on which practically nothing grows. It was the panoramic views seen in and from this park that most impressed me about it — the solitude, the vast plains, the wide horizons, the blue sky. ✶

No doubt this park does not support the number of birds and other animals one would find in one of our woodland parks, but the species are unique. This is equally true of the plants.

We saw pronghorns (antelopes) at several points, usually in small numbers, but in one case a herd of about 15. This beautiful animal is recognized as one of the fastest animals in the world and also a very long-winded one.

We visited one of the several prairie dog towns in the park. It was densely populated and extended for at least a quarter of a mile.

They were not unduly frightened of us. Prairie dogs were everywhere, running about or standing erect on the earth mounds that mark the entrance to their burrows.

In one case, four of them were standing close together on the same mound, all staring in the same direction. Apparently something was of more concern to them than we were. Perhaps it was the coyotes we could hear barking and howling in the distance.

This was not a good time of the year for birding, but a few birds of note were seen. These included some mountain bluebirds, a covey of partridge and six sage grouse — this latter species being a new one for both Ian and I.

A map given to us at the park office indicated where we should look for the sage grouse. A short walk through the sage brush in the Frenchman River valley was soon rewarded. First, one flew up, then a few minutes later, five more of them.

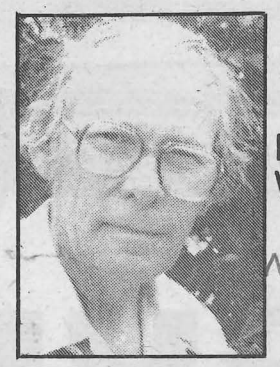
This grouse has a large black area on the belly that easily identifies it in flight. It is a large bird, much like a ruffed grouse but measuring about one and one half times longer.

And, if my mathematics is correct, this means it probably weighs about three times as much as a ruffed grouse.

The covey of partridge was flushed from the grass of the open prairie. They were likely Hungarian (grey) partridge but could have been very similar, but rarer, chukars.

That evening, when we turned on our truck radio, it was confirmed. The area we have just visited had indeed become a national park that day.

Two rare birds appear in area seeking hand-outs



Harry Walker

Nov. 25/88

WILDLIFE

Two beautiful and rare birds — at least, rare in our northern lattitudes — made an appearance this week. They are the cardinal and the house finch.

The former, a female, was reported by Louis Sippley of Baie Ste. Anne on Nov. 14; the latter, a male, was reported by Delta Steeves of Chatham on Nov. 18.

Both birds are at the northern limits of their ranges, but have been expanding their respective ranges in our directon. Therefore, it seems likely we will see more of them in the future.

The fact both appeared at this time is no coincidence. Both were probably here before, but now that winter is approaching and many bird feeders have been replenished, these birds have surfaced — lured from their former haunts by the free hand-outs being offered them.

The female cardinal, although not nearly so brightly-colored as the male, is nonetheless unmistakeable.

She has the typical cardinal shape including the prominent crest. She also has the black facial mask and the red bill of the male and a considerable admixture of red in her wings, tail, and crest. But much of her plummage is a relatively-dull, sandy brown.

The male house finch very much resembles the male purple finch. However, the red color is less extensive — being confined to the breast, the rump, and a band above the eye. Also the red is of a slightly different tone — more to the orange side of red.

As Steeves pointed out, its crown is more rounded than is the case with the purple finch.

Another feature which definitely distinguishes it from the purple finch is the dark dashes along the white sides below the wings. These are entirely lacking in the purple finch.

The female house finch is very non-descript — a greyish striped bird not likely to attract attention.

She lacks any distinct facial pattern and this distinguishes her from the otherwise similar female purple finch.

Winter food

Interest in birds has greatly increased in recent years, and during winter, many more people are now providing food for them.

The cardinal has moved north in response to this trend and it is unlikely it would have reached this far north without this help. Being non-migratory, it probably needed this extra boost to get it through our harsh winters.

The house finch is also non-migratory and the proliferation of bird feeders may also have helped to promote its expansion to the north.

However, the house finch was only introduced into eastern North America in very recent times — in the 1940s — and, they were not present in significant numbers before this trend in bird feeding developed.

The first house finches transplanted to the east were turned loose on Long Island. From there they have been rapidly spreading in all directions.

The house finch was originally native to the western United States and this original population, like the transplanted eastern one, has been expanding its range.

It appears the ranges of the eastern and western populations will soon join up.

In view of its easy adaptability to conditions in the east, the house finch probably would have eventually reached our area even if it had not been helped along by human intervention. It would have simply taken longer.

In winter, the house finch often accompanies the purple finch, but in habits it resembles the house sparrow.

In fact, it occupies nearly the same ecological niche as the house sparrow. In places where it has become plentiful, it has actually displaced the house sparrow to a significant degree — the house sparrows' numbers having declined since the house finch's introduction in the east.

Other sightings

A bald eagle was recently sighted at Baie Ste. Anne — again by Louis Sippley. This was an immature bird for it was dark all over. It lacked the white head and tail of the adult.

The pileated woodpecker (cock-of-the-woods to some people, and LeGrand pic to others) continues to be reported — the latest reports coming from Ted Mullin of Sillikers and Jack Manderville of Millerton.

This crow-sized woodpecker with the pointed, flaming red cape is obviously a favorite and quite naturally so, for it is indeed an impressive bird.

Without actually keeping score, I believe I have received more calls inquiring about pileated woodpeckers, bald eagles and mourning doves than has been the case with any other species.

The snow buntings arrived here a week before the snow. They were reported by Louise Girvan of the South Esk Road on Nov 14.

Merganser duck shoot begins Saturday

by Jim Stacey

THE MIRAMICHI

A Miramichi merganser shoot is scheduled to begin tomorrow (Saturday), the first day of duck-hunting season.

Columnist Bill Hooper in the Sept. 21 *Miramichi Leader* mentioned plans for a Miramichi merganser shoot.

There is a large population of merganser ducks on the Northwest Miramichi River. They are a fish-eating bird who love to eat parr, one or two-year old salmon, as well as other fish.

Hooper said past studies have indicated repopulating salmon streams is difficult unless merganser predation is controlled during the parr restoration period.

He said a Miramichi merganser shoot has a lot of support from anglers and angler groups.

The idea is that duck hunters seeking their six-duck quota, usually of black and teal duck, will now include mergansers in their quota.

Hooper said Percy Young from Sunny Corner is encouraging anglers and angler groups to participate in the hunt and report their kill to him.

Percy Young, however, did not wish to give any further details concerning the Miramichi merganser shoot.

The following stories feature comments for and against the Miramichi merganser shoot from a biologist, a naturalist, along with representatives of the Northumberland Salmon Protective Association and the Miramichi Salmon Association.

Sept. 30/88 Weekend

Stop shoot: Greathouse

NEWCASTLE

Tom Greathouse, a member of the Miramichi Environmental Society, takes exception to the proposed Miramichi Merganser Shoot, as outlined in the Sept. 21 *Miramichi Leader*.

The shoot was mentioned in Bill Hooper's "Gone fishing" column, "Merganser control should be sought".

The article is laced with half-truths, omitted information, a contradiction and the kind of information which caused humans to be killed for the practice of "witchcraft", Greathouse said.

"Please look in the proper direction, damage to the environment, to find the reasons for the decline, if this is true, in salmon and smelt populations," he said.

Greathouse said Hooper failed to mention that many Miramichi industries, government agencies (federal, provincial and local officials) and many individuals have polluted wilfully over the years.

They have been ignoring or improperly-considering the long-range effects of making streams and lakes more acidic or too warm for favorable salmon/smelt reproduction, he said.

"In too many cases, pollutants are discharged with complete comtempt for the human and other forms of life who will live and die on the Miramichi," Greathouse said.

On the other hand, for thousands of years common mergansers have inhabited northern portions of the three continents which occupy the northern hemisphere.

"Have they suddenly decreased in numbers? How accurate is this guess," Greathouse said.

"Hooper's use of numbers and a variation of "doubled or tripled" indicates guesses, not data from sampling. How accurate is the rest of the data?", said Greathouse.

The article also said "Unfortunately, one- and two-year populations, (the mergansers' favorite-sized food) have not shown such a marked increase."

It mentions having not shown a marked increase, but nothing about a decline, Greathouse said.

Did thousands of mergansers suddenly move into the Miramichi, or was it due to fisherman finding as Hooper said "alternate ways to catch more salmon, for example the expanded Newfoundland commercial and native food fisheries during the mid-1970s."

It won't have much effect: Currie

THE MIRAMICHI

If there is a Miramichi merganser shoot, it probably won't have much impact on the overall population of merganser ducks, said Bob Currie, a wildlife biologist with the provincial Department of Natural Resources.

Tomorrow is the beginning of duck-hunting season. Duck hunters are being encouraged to shoot some mergansers and report their kill to Percy Young of Sunny Corner.

There are many factors which have to be considered, Currie said.

The number of mergansers shot would not mean any substantial decline in the population, he said.

Nature always has a way of checks and balances. For example, he said, if five out of 20 does were shot in a certain square-mile radius, some of the remaining 15 does would have three fawns instead of the usual two.

If many mergansers were shot in the Northwest Miramichi, then mergansers would come from the Southwest or little Southwest Miramichi to feed in the new area now open for feeding because of the hunting, he said.

Hunters have to keep in mind that if they shoot any mergansers, they will have to be included in their daily bag limits.

Due to the migratory bird regulations, any mergansers shot have to be included in the limit, thereby reducing the number of black and teal ducks available to hunters.

Some hunters may not retrieve any mergansers shot, but they should keep in mind that RCMP and wardens will be watching to make sure hunters do not exceed their quotas.

Many people don't like the taste of merganser meat because if not cooked right away some of the oils in the feathers seep down into the meat along the breastplate and ruin the taste, he said.

The only way to effectively control the merganser population is to have a concerted effort in organizing a large hunt which could make a substantial decrease in the population, he said.

However, Currie said he is not recommending that a large hunt take place to remedy the concern about the merganser ducks.

It could save fish: Allen

THE MIRAMICHI

Steven Allen, a member of the Miramichi Salmon Association who resides in Newcastle, fully supports the efforts of the Miramichi merganser shoot planned for the beginning of duck-hunting season tomorrow.

"It could save a lot of fish," Allen said.

"A merganser eats his own weight in fish every day."

It would be good to see the amount of mergansers thinned out because they are devastating the salmon stocks, he said.

He does not want to see the ducks cleaned out, but he would like their numbers thinned out.

They used to control the merganser population back in the 1940s and 50s with regular hunts, he said.

He is not familiar with the hunts personally, but he has heard from other people talking about the merganser control programs which used to weed down the population of the unwanted bird, how successful they were, he said.

Goodfellow favors shoot

THE MIRAMICHI

Vernon Goodfellow, president of the Northumberland Salmon Protective Association, is in favor of the Miramichi merganser shoot.

But he is not in favor of outright annihilation of any species, he said.

"I'm a bit for the shooting of merganser ducks because the population is quite high right now," he said.

There are natural balances in the eco-systems which are not in place along there, he said.

The merganser population has increased because the natural predation has dropped substantially.

Minks, martins, otters and weasels are the natural predators of the merganser duck. Their numbers have probably depleted over the years due to over-trapping and other factors, he said.

Also hawks are natural predators of the merganser, he said.

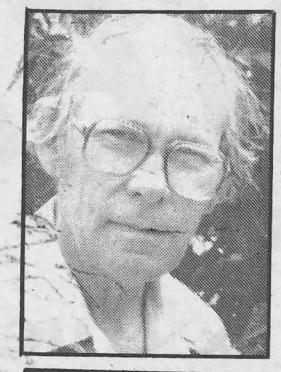
"Our own organization considered doing something along the lines of some form of merganser duck hunt a few years ago, but it didn't seem appropriate at the time," he said.

Goodfellow is also a naturalist, he said.

He would not like to see the massive shooting of the entire merganser species in any particular area.

The numbers are quite high in that area for the merganser population. And when the natural predation is influenced by external factors sometimes man is required to keep the balance of nature in check.

Emery Brophy spots white skunk



Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

A white skunk has been reported. It was seen by Emery Brophy of Blackville.

He says there were three skunks together, a mother and two kittens — the mother and one of the kittens being of the normal black and white coloration — the other kitten being pure white from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail.

They were seen on the Howard Road on the evening of Oct. 18.

Brophy said he was able to approach close to them and was able to get a good look.

The two kittens were nearing adult size, but were still noticeably smaller than their mother.

In the literature, I can find no reference to white skunks, but R.S. Miller in a Canadian Wildlife Service bulletin says the amount of white in a skunk's pelt varies considerably — the two white stripes on their backs being longer and wider in some cases than in others.

As a result, skunk pelts are divided into four grades depending on the amount of white in them — the darkest ones being the most valuable.

In the past, we have received reports of white deer, white foxes, white ravens, white robins, white swallows and white flycatchers. This is the first time a white skunk has been reported.

We have, however, received a couple of reports of brown skunks. In both cases, the skunks had the white stripes as usual, but the black fur was replaced with brown.

Snow goose

On Sept. 29, Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne reported there was a snow goose on Egg Island.

In the past, we have had a few other reports of snow geese in our area — most of them during spring migration rather than in the fall.

Bald eagles continue to turn up here and there on the Miramichi, the latest one being reported by Andrew Dunn in Cassilis on Sept. 1.

On. Oct. 18, Bill Hogan reported he had two golden-crowned kinglets in a tree outside his studio window in Chatham.

The golden-crowned kinglet is a very tiny bird — between a hummingbird and a chickadee in size, yet it spends the winter with us. One wonders how these little mites can survive the cold.

The golden-crowned kinglet is olive-gray on the back, pale gray on the belly. On its head is a brightly-colored crown which contrasts strikingly with its otherwise dull plumage.

In the case of the male, the crown is orange bordered by yellow with a second border of black. The female lacks the orange, its crown being golden bordered by black.

These birds are not often seen, but they may be seen at any time of the year. They were confirmed as nesting in a couple of places in Northumberland County this past summer, Mark Phinney of Saint John having discovered them attending to their young while he was working on the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas.

Golden-crowned kinglets live almost entirely on insects in the winter, finding insect eggs, pupae, and hibernating adults concealed in tree crevices and under flakes of bark.

In winter, they sometimes join company with other small forest species such as chickadees and nuthatches, but I have never heard of them coming to bird feeders.

On Oct. 29, John Bodenstaff reported a rare visitor at his farm in Whitneyville. A cattle egret was feeding in the pasture along with his cattle.

He further reports a cattle egret stayed with his cattle for at least two weeks last fall. It disappeared with the first snowfall.

The only other reports of cattle egrets in this area came in the fall of 1979. At that time, three of them were seen at a number of locations in and around Newcastle. It was presumed they were always the same birds.

The cattle egret was originally an Old World species, but somehow it crossed the Atlantic about 100 years ago and established itself in South America.

From there it spread northward reaching the southern United States about 1950. It now nests as far north as southern Maine. Before and after its breeding season, it sometimes wanders farther north, but heads south for the winter — southern United States and beyond.

This species seems destined to colonize most of the world, for besides crossing the Atlantic, it has also crossed the Indian Ocean and is now found in Australia.

Tufts speaks of one nestling cattle egret that was banded in Spain and captured one year later in Trinidad.

Certain plants stand out this time of year

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

At this time of the year, after the leaves have fallen, certain plants stand out. Among these are some species, which at other times of the year, are inconspicuous and so are passed by without notice.

Also, bird nests, wasp nests, etc., which before were concealed, are now exposed to our view.

On Oct. 21, our son Ian and I took a walk along the Tomahawk Ridge — on its south-facing slope, north of Halcom.

There, among the sugar maples and white ash, we found many ironwood trees growing. We had never noticed them on previous trips, but now, with the trees bare, their seed clusters drew our attention to them.

Also, along the road, at the entrance to the sugar camp, we saw a number of witch hazel — their yellow flowers showing up on their bare branches.

A check in Harold R. Hind's book *Flora of New Brunswick* reveals that these two species reach their northern limit appproximately here on the Miramichi.

No doubt the presence of ironwood on the Tomahawk Ridge is no news to many residents of the Little Southwest; and a local forester once tod me that there was a pure stand somewhere near Park's Brook.

However, on our river, ironwood trees are generally few and far between.

The ironwood bears it seed in light papery sacs each of which contains only one seed. These sacs are arranged in elongated clusters which look like the clusters of seeds on the hop vine, hence the other name for this tree, the hop hornbeam.

The ironwood gets its name from the very heavy, hard, tough quality of its wood. It is usually a small tree.

The federal government publication *Native Trees of Canada* gives its size as from 25 to 35 feet in height, and 6 to 10 inches in diameter.

However, this publication adds that in the best locations it can reach a height of 60 feet and a diameter of 2 feet.

Ian and I had found the witch hazel at only two other locations on the Miramichi — at the Blackville fire tower and at Mill Cove — the ones at Mill Cove having since been cut down.

The witch hazel is a peculiar plant in that its flowers open at about the same time as its leaves fall off.

These flowers, each consisting of a yellow center and four long, thin, straggly petals, grow in clusters of 3 or 4.

In winter, after the petals are gone, the yellow centers of the flowers remain giving rise to another name for this shrub — winter bloom.

Another characteristic of this plant, that of its seed pods suddenly splitting open and throwing its seeds about, gives rise to still another name — snapping hazel.

A week later, on Oct. 28, Ian and I canoed the Barnaby River — the first time we had done so in the fall. Growing along the river banks were many vines of the virgin's bower.

These vines were noticeable because of the fluffy grey tassels that are found on them in the fall. These develop from the clusters of white flowers which bloomed earlier — in summer.

Examination of the tassels reveals that they consist of long, silky hairs and at the base of each hair a seed is attached.

At one point on our canoe trip we saw a wasp's nest hanging low over the water — probably about water level during the spring run-off.

The finding of wasp's nests low to the ground has sometimes been looked upon as an indication of a light winter with little snowfall.

However, this belief is not supported by reason for these papery nests are only used for one summer. In the fall they are abandoned. All the workers die and the fertilized queend finds refuge in a crevice of some sort.

In spring she starts a new nest, then lays a few eggs. When these hatch and develop into workers, these workers enlarge the nest.

Also, they and subsequent workers take over all the domestic duties of the hive until fall returns again.

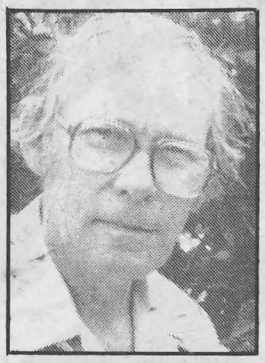
There were a number of fine beaver dams along the river. The condition of them contrasted markedly from what we have seen in spring along the same stretch of river.

It was concluded that the ice in spring tends to poke holes in them, leaving them in disrepair.

Another tree that stands out in the fall is the red oak. Its reddish brown leaves hang onto the tree after the surrounding trees are all bare.

Driving along the highway at this time of the year, it is easy to pick out these oak trees. A good example can be seen at the end of the Gum Road.

We enjoyed visit to home of giant



Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Our old truck had a greedy thirst for gas. Besides this, the gas gauge functioned in a manner that left us in considerable doubt as to how much was really in the tank.

Furthermore, on the back roads on which we were travelling gas stations were often far apart. As a result, we considered it prudent to fill up frequently.

After travelling across a treeless stretch of prairie, we came to a deep and beautiful valley wherein were trees and wherein lay the town of Willow Bunch.

I had heard of this town before. In fact, long before arriving here, my imagination had already conferred on it an aura of mystery for I knew it to be the home of the giant, Edouard Beaupré, whose feats of strength included the lifting of horses.

As usual, we pulled up to the gas station. While Ian shopped at the adjoining convenience store, I asked about the giant. The attendant immediately gave me a tourist brochure on the front of which was a picture of the giant. He was standing beside two other men whom he dwarfed.

The attendant told me many of Beaupré's relatives still live here. She pointed to a man who happened to be passing the window and said he was one of them.

The heading on the brochure read "Welcome Bienvenue to Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan, Home of the Giant." Inside, the following information was provided, —

Edouard Beaupré had been 8 foot 3 inches tall. He was born in 1881, and died in St. Louis in 1904 while working in a circus.

The brochure listed a number of tourist attractions and gave some of the history of the town.

Attractions include a museum, golf course and other sports facilities, nature trails and a well-treed camping park.

The town was settled by Metis and one room of the museum is devoted to the Riel Rebellion. Local historic figures include, besides the giant, Chief Sitting Bull and Jean Louis Legare.

I would have liked to spend more time here, but we were already behind schedule and had to move on.

Konrad C. Istrati, in his book "Virgin Sod" tells us more about Edouard Beaupré.

He was the first child in a family of 15, and all of the children that followed were of normal size. His mother is said to have been a rather small woman — only 5 foot 2 inches in height, but Edouard at birth weighed 14 pounds.

Willow Bunch was a remote place in those days and there was no doctor in attendance at this birth — only a midwife. Some local people had been predicting twins or triplets.

Despite his large size at birth, it is said, except for his "voracious appetite", he was "just an average child" until about six. Then he started to grow and by nine he was taller than his father.

According to Istrati, Edouard Beaupré was shy, good natured, a good worker and ever willing to help others. He was often called upon to do tasks which were easy for him, but which were difficult or impossible for others.

Being born into humble circumstances, he had little formal education, but he learned to speak in four languages — French, Cree, Sioux, and English.

Birds surprised

Returning to the Miramichi, the big storm on election day seems to have taken some birds by surprise.

Some that should have been far south were still here when it struck.

Herschell Stewart had a robin at his place in Trout Brook on Nov. 24. It was feeding on the soft, bare ground that surrounds the pond in his front yard and which remains unfrozen nearly all winter. Three other robins were seen at Forrest Corner on Nov. 27.

Louis Sippley had a grackle (blackbird) at his place in Baie Ste. Anne on Nov. 25 and, incidentally, the female cardinal was still coming to his feeder at that date.

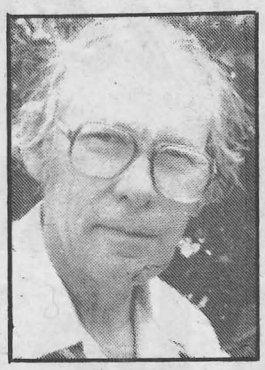
The most unusual report comes from Courtney Tozer of Sillikers. He has had two Baltimore Orioles coming to his place — a male and a female. They have been eating apples left hanging on the tree. He says they always peck at the underside of the apples where they are not frozen.

The male was last seen on the day of the storm, Nov. 21, but the female was there later — on Nov. 24, and again on Nov. 25. A robin was also there on Nov. 25.

Tree sparrows (or winter sparrows as some call them) are back — both Herschell Stewart and Courtney Tozer have reported them.

Tree sparrows have a rusty cap and one small dark spot in the center of an otherwise clear gray breast.

Great storm carries a little sea bird



Harry Walker

Dec. 9/88

WILDLIFE

The great storm which ushered in our winter carried with it a little sea bird. It was found dead and frozen at Chatham Head.

Tough as the dovekie is, it obviously lost out in its battle against the fierce winds that blew in from the ocean that day — the same winds that left many homes without power and which gave us the highest tides we have had in many years.

Probably many other sea birds suffered the same fate as the dovekie.

The bird was found by Bobbie Drisdelle and a friend while they were walking in the bush near the Douglasfield Road south of Chatham Head.

It was on top of the snow, sitting upright and frozen in such a natural position that it appeared to be alive.

Even when examined in the hand, not a blemish could be seen on it. Later, it was determined a bone in one of the upper legs was broken. Possibly it had struck a tree before coming to rest on the ground.

For many sea birds, including the dovekie, it is just as disastrous to be carried inland as it is for a perching bird to be blown out to sea. Once grounded, these birds are unable to get airborne again.

Their legs are situated at the extreme tail end of their bodies, the same as is the case with the loon.

Situated thus, their webbed feet are in excellent position for paddling in the water, but are not much use on land. To take off, the Dovekie must either be on water or on a cliff where it can jump off.

Even if it could get airborne, it is unlikely it would be able to maneuver among trees long enough to get above them.

The dovekie found at Chatham Head is now in the freezer at the Department of Natural Resources in Newcastle. Later, it will be turned over to the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John.

District biologist Bob Currie says one other dovekie was turned in to them about 10 years ago.

He also says, that in the early 1970s another strong easterly blow carried another sea bird, a gannet, much farther inland — to Ludlow.

It showed no signs of injury and apparently was only exhausted. It was captured, transported below Tabusintac and releasd.

The dovekie has a very compact build — an adaptation to the cold of the Arctic. It has a short, thick bill; a short, thick neck; and a stubby tail.

Its overall length is eight or nine inches. It is black above and white below with a few short, narrow, white stripes on the wings. Male and female are alike.

In summer, its throat and upper breast are black, but at this time of year both are white like the belly.

The dovekie has never been known to nest on Canadian soil, but nests in large colonies along the Greenland coast, especially that section near Thule in the far northwest.

It also nests in Iceland, Spitzbergen, Novaya Zemlya and other Arctic islands to the north of Europe.

In winter it moves south, but not too far. With its food being plankton, and plankton being plentiful only in cold waters, it follows that the dovekie is common only over cold waters.

If it strays out over the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, its food supply is more or less cut off.

During winter, it is commmon in the open sea off Newfoundland and the Maritimes, but it comes to land only by accident.

It is said plankton sinks deeper into the sea during rough weather and at such times dovekies go hungry.

Weakened by hunger, they become even more vulnerable to being blown ashore if the wind is from the east.

Both Tufts and Squires mention cases where large numbers of dovekies have ended up on shore, or inland — often dead or in a weakened condition.

In their book *The Arctic Years* (1958), Peter Freuchen and Finn Salomonsen give us a lot of information about the dovekie and other Arctic birds.

At one point they say, "When the dovekies arrive at the breeding places and the polar Eskimos hear the whistling and singing of Agpaliarssuk, as they call the dovekie, it brings great joy to their hearts."

Other names for the dovekie are bull bird, ice bird, little auk, pine knots and knotty — these last two names referring to the tough quality of this little bird. It is implied the bird must be as hard as a pine knot in order to survive the harsh climate in which it lives.

Its hardiness seems even more impressive when we learn there are millions of them in the Arctic despite the fact the female lays only one egg per year.

This egg is said to be very large in comparison to the bird itself.

Among the Thule Eskimos, according to Freuchen and Salomonsen, it was the custom to tie a dried dovekie foot around the neck of a new born baby girl. This was to ensure when she grew up she would have big babies.

The name dovekie can be rendered little dove. However, the dovekie has no relationship to the doves.

Snowy owl seen at Barnaby River

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Jan. 6/89

The first snowy owl to be reported this winter showed up at Barnaby River.

Ed O'Donnell called on Dec. 18 and said it had been coming to his place every couple of days for the last two weeks. It was being attracted there by a plentiful supply of moles.

These moles have been digging tunnels under his lawn and in spring when the snow melts, mounds of earth ejected from these tunnels are found on the surface. Also, dandelion roots are found scattered over the lawn.

Snowy owls vary in color. Some are whiter than others depending on age and sex — old males being whitest (sometimes spotless).

Although less common than some of our other owls, snowys are more readily seen for they like to perch in exposed open areas rather than in the bush.

Also, unlike most owls, they hunt during daylight and must of necessity do so since they spend their summers in the Arctic where at that time of year the sun never sets.

■ On Dec. 21, Louis Sippley ran a Christmas bird count in his community of Baie Ste Anne. All birds counted were within about two miles of his home. Here are the results:

Evening grosbeaks (Le Grosbec errant) 100, blue jays (Le Geai bleu) 15, black-capped chickadees (La Mésange à tête noire) 10, tree sparrows (Le Pinson hudsonien) 10, gray jays (Le Geai gris) 6, mourning doves (La Tourterelle triste) 6.

Common crows (La Corneille américaine) 3, downy woodpeckers (Le Pic mineur) 2, and one each of the following — hairy woodpecker (Le Pic chevelu), common raven (Le Grand Corbeau), brown-headed cowbird (Le Vacher), song sparrow (Le Pinson chanteur), and female cardinal (Le Cardinal).

Seen about five days earlier was a flock of about 10 common redpolls (Le Sizerin à tête rouge) and one golden-crowned kinglet (Le Roitelet à couronne dorée).

The above list contains 13 species, plus two others during the count period (Dec. 16-Jan. 3) — a good count for a one-man effort.

Regarding the mourning doves, Louis says they have been in the area all fall and as many as 20 have been seen in a flock.

Such reports are becoming increasingly common.

This species has greatly extended its range to the north in recent years; and, among North American birds, it now has one of the most extensive ranges.

It nests from coast-to-coast, from southeastern Alaska to New Brunswick and southward to Panama and the West Indies.

The northern part of the population has generally migrated south for the winter, but more and more they are remaining north throughout the year.

■ An article by Frank Dobson in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* (forwarded to us by Desmond Dolan) says the mourning dove is found in every state except Hawaii. It is considered a game bird in many of them — 32 states having an open hunting season on them.

Dobson further says, "Some 50 million are taken by hunters each year, far more than any other North American game bird."

He speaks of the high rate of reproduction of this species — it making as many as five or six nesting attempts per year in southern areas.

This more than makes up for the high mortality rate of the young — seven out of 10 not making it through the first year, according to him.

The mourning dove lays two eggs per clutch. The nest is so flimsily constructed it is said the eggs sometimes drop through the bottom of it and therefore are lost.

This species is a close relative of the extinct passenger pigeon whose numbers in pioneer days gave rise to many, almost unbelievable accounts.

■ Next week, we will bring you the results of the Newcastle-Chatham Christmas Bird Count.

■ P.S.: A second snowy owl (Le Harfang des neiges) has been reported. It was seen in Douglasfield on Dec. 24, Tom Greathouse having reported it.

COMING UP

■ **Wolves:** How do you tell a wolf from a coyote? A local couple and a naturalist have discovered it's not as easy as you might think. We'll have more in the *Leader Weekend.*

Coyotes: a mixed lot

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Jan. 20/89

The coyotes of New Brunswick are a mixed lot.

Individual characteristics are said to vary considerably.

In color they may be grizzled grey, fawn, or occasionally, red like a fox.

They are bigger than the coyotes of the west, in fact, bigger than the coyotes found anywhere else throughout their vast and expanding range.

A few years ago, Gary Moore of Fredericton spoke on this subject when he was guest speaker at a meeting of the Miramichi Trapper's Council.

At that time, he expressed the opinion that the coyotes found here had interbred with wolves.

This, however, should not be interpreted as meaning they have recently interbred with wolves. Rather, such admixture of wolf blood may have occurred many generations ago and many miles to the west of us — while the coyotes were moving eastward from the Great Plains through Canada and the northern United States.

Also, it is known coyotes sometimes interbreed with domestic dogs and the resulting hybrids are known as coy-dogs.

These things considered, it is somewhat doubtful the animals referred to as coyotes here in New Brunswick represent a pure species.

In Ontario, these animals or similar ones are popularly-called bush wolves — a name that's a little misleading as it seems to imply they represent a distinct and separate species.

Recently, at Curventon, a large male coyote came into the yard of Brent and Beth Matheson and there it was killed by their dogs.

The Mathesons have three dogs — one, a pit bull; the second, part German shepherd and part elk hound; and the third, part German shepherd and part great dane.

All three dogs are males and all were tethered at the time they killed the coyote.

The Mathesons, including their two young daughters, Jessica and Sarah, were away at the time. They left home on Jan. 5 and returned the following day.

It was only after they arrived home and found the dead and torn carcass of the coyote that they pieced together what had happened.

As soon as they arrived, they noticed the dogs were excited and their chains were badly tangled. By the position of the dead coyote, it was apparent the pit bull had not killed it, but the other two dogs had done so.

These two dogs are tethered together while the pit bull is tethered separately and its chain does not allow it to get closer than about three feet from the other two.

And, contrary to the pit bull's reputation, Brent says his pit bull is quite mild-tempered.

It seems rather strange a coyote would allow itself to get into a fracas with tethered dogs and get killed as a result. It may have been the Matheson's hens that attracted it.

Brent says there is an opening in the hen house which allows them to pass in and out as they please and recently he has lost four of his 10 hens, possibly to this coyote. He says they frequently hear coyotes howling at night.

Both Brent and Beth are familiar with the western coyote. Beth grew up in the country east of Edmonton and Brent spent six years out there.

The dead coyote in their yard looked bigger and different.

We took A.W.F. Banfield's book "*The Mammals of Canada*" and read over his description of the coyote, then compared it with the animal at hand. We did the same with Banfield's description of the wolf.

We took various measurements and compared them with Banfield's. One measurement especially puzzling was the animal's black muzzle or nose pad.

Banfield says a coyote's nose pad is less than one inch in diameter and a wolf's is more than 1¼ inches in diameter. On our specimen, this nose pad measured 1½ inches horizontally and 1⅛ to 1¼ inches vertically.

When this was mentioned to district biologist Bob Currie, he said his department had found similar discrepancies in specimens they had examined.

He sai Banfield's work was done before we had coyotes here in New Brunswick and his measurements were no doubt based on western specimens.

According to W. Austin Squires, former curator of natural history at the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John, it requires an expert to definitely identify a coyote.

He also says in his book "*The Mammals of New Brunswick*" — "the skull is needed to separate the coyote from a similarly-colored police dog."

Gray Squirrels (Cont.)

? June-~~July~~ /90 at Chatham
- Greg Bell

Oct. 7/90 Black River Bridge
- Ross Mault ? - Red in color

Many worldwide once knew of conservationist Miner

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The name Jack Miner is not as well known today as it was when I was a boy.

At that time, everyone knew who Jack Miner was. He and his bird sanctuary at Kingsville, Ontario, had gained international recognition.

I can remember my dad taking me as a small boy to one of his lectures.

It was given in the town hall of Stayner, Ont. — the small farming town where I grew up. Accompanying the lecture was a silent movie showing Canada Geese being trapped and banded at his sanctuary.

Recently, I was given a book about Jack Miner's life — *The Story of Wild Goose Jack* by James M. Linton and Calvin W. Moore. It was published in 1984 by CBC Enterprises.

It is a story that seems rather old-fashioned today, but is nonetheless relevant.

It tells of a man who overcame the obstacles of poverty and a lack of education to become a very influential person — meeting with heads of state and helping to mold the thinking of a generation of people.

Jack Miner was born in 1865 at Dover Center, Ohio, but moved with his family to Kingsville, Ont., when he was 13. He was one of a family of 10 children.

In his early days, he, like his father before him, made a living as a brickmaker. He died in 1944.

Although he was an indiscriminate market hunter in his early years, he was later acclaimed as "the father of conservation on this continent" and was given the Order of the British Empire for his work in that field.

Although he had only three months of formal education and did not learn to read until he was 35, he became a successful lecturer, radio personality and writer in later years.

Miner started his bird sanctuary in the early 1900s at which time very few migrating Canada Geese passed over the Kingsville area.

He tried to attract them by putting live decoys on a pond and by sprinkling corn on the surface of it.

For the first few years he had no success — no geese came. Eventually, a few came and thereafter their numbers increased year by year. Before long they were eating him out of house and home.

In order to pay for the corn for his geese, he started giving lectures on wildlife conservation. He proved to be such an engaging speaker that soon he could not keep up with the demand for them.

He was especially fond of children and they, of course, responded in kind. His energy and enthusiasm readily sparked in them a similar energy and enthusiasm.

He encouraged them to build bird houses for, as he said, "If I can get a child to build a birdhouse he becomes a conservationist."

He often spoke to children in school during the day and to adult audiences at nigth.

At one period during the winter of 1927, it is said he lectured as often as five times a day for 40 days in succession.

At the time of his death in 1944, he left 4,000 invitations for speaking engagements which he had been unable to accept.

His talk shows on radio proved similarly popular. In 1930, a series of these talks was carried on three stations and extra secretaries had to be hired to handle the resulting mail.

The following year he gave a similar series and the number of stations carrying it jumped to 78.

One radio authority spoke of him as being "the greatest drawing card a Canadian radio station ever had by many times."

A great many articles, either written by Jack Miner himself or by his son, Manly, who wrote down what his father dictated, appeared in a wide range of publications across the continent.

Miner was a religious man and after receiving help from the daily Bible verses written on a Salvation Army calendar, he decided to reproduce Bible verses on the leg bands of the Canadian geese he was banding.

Such a project undertaken in our day and age might seem naive and attract little attention, but in the less sophisticated age in which Jack Miner lived these Bible verses apparently had a storng impact on many of the people into whose hands they eventually landed.

Miner's banding project therefore had a two-fold purpose — to bring help and inspiration to people and to determine the migration routes of the geese.

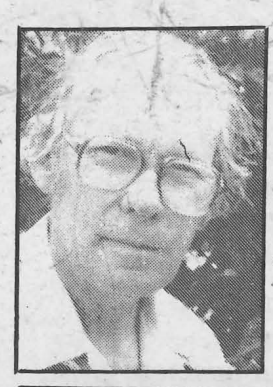
Although Miner's work centered around Canada geese, his interests were wide-ranging. His grounds were kept beautiful with many flowers.

He grew trees and erected birdhouses to attract songbirds. He raised pheasants to stock the fields in his local area, etc.

In the 1950s, Rev. Bruce Suitor is said to have questioned a group of school children in Korea about their knowledge of Canada.

To his surprise, they had a detailed knowledge of Miner and his work, but could not name any other prominent Canadians including the prime minister.

Miner used to visit here



Harry Walker

Dec 23/88

WILDLIFE

This week, we have a variety of reports.

First, from Don Whalen of Lower Newcastle we learn Jack Miner, who was the subject of last week's column, had a Miramichi connection.

Whalen says back in the late 1920s and early '30s, Miner was a regular visitor to his parents' camp at Point aux Bouleau near the mouth of the Big Tracadie River.

Each year, he would come there in late summer or early fall and stay for about two weeks.

At that time, before the eel grass died off, ducks and geese of all kinds were very plentiful there and Whalen says his father, who owned the land around it, kept it more or less as a private reserve. The camp was destroyed by vandals about 20 years ago, but the family still owns the land.

He says his mother came from Charing Cross on the outskirts of Chatham, Ontario and she knew Miner before she was married. That is how he happened to become a friend of the family.

Don Whalen's father was Thomas Hebert (T.H.) Whalen who was Crown prosecutor here in Newcastle. He was also a member of the militia being a captain in the cavalry.

While at militia camp in Kingston, Ont., he met the future Mrs. Whalen who at that time was a music and school teacher in London, Ont.

■ A bear in the Maple Glen area has been rather late denning-up.

On Nov. 20, Donald Gordon reported that after the big storm its tracks could be seen in the snow in an apple orchard and there was other evidence it had been back for another feed of apples.

■ Coyotes are appearing in the very outskirts of our town. Annie Simpson reports they have been coming to the backyard of their place in Nordin.

■ Grey squirrels are again showing up on the Miramichi.

On Dec. 9, Penny Somers of Sillikers reported a pair of them had been frequenting the area around her home for the last three months.

Grey squirrels are established in Fredericton and have occasionally been reported here before.

We have eight previous reports covering a period from Nov. 1976 to Nov. 1984, but none since then. All of these reports have come in the fall and winter.

Possibly they have all been young squirrels for in the fall they leave their mothers and disperse.

■ Warblers should be far to the south of us by this late date, but two stragglers have been reported.

Tom Greathouse of Douglasfield says he has seen a yellow-rumped (myrtle) warbler at his bird feeder on four different occasions this month — the last being Dec. 16. It has always fed on the ground below the feeder.

He wonders if it is eating the sunflower seeds or whether it is getting the insect larvae which he knows has infested some of his seed. Such seeds might be discarded by other birds and end up on the ground.

A check in Terres' *Encyclopedia of North American Birds* reveals a few species of warbler do eat seeds and he specifically mentions the yellow-rumped as eating sunflower seeds.

The second straggler was a warbler of the confusing fall variety. It had a yellow breast and white tail flashes. It was reported by Vivian Comeau of Oyster River on Dec. 17.

■ Greg Bell of Chatham reported that during the third week of November he saw a flock of mourning doves feeding in a farmer's field near Loggieville. He counted 23 birds in the flock.

Two or three days later they were there again. This time he counted 17 of them.

■ During this same week, Greg said he saw two bald eagles at Mullin Stream Lake. A week later, he saw one at Whitney Pond — this one presumably being one of those he had seen at Mullin Stream Lake.

■ On Dec. 11, Ross Mault reported seeing another bald eagle flying overhead at Black River Bridge.

■ Here, in the Walker backyard, a dickcissel appeared on two consecutive days — Dec. 1 and 2; and a male cowbird on Dec. 10.

The dickcissel, as usual, had joined itself to a flock of house sparrows, but with its yellow breast was easily picked out from among them.

■ Our annual Christmas Bird Count will be held on Dec. 28.

If you would like to participate either as a member of a field party or as a feeder observer, give us a call at 622-2108. A pot luck supper will follow at 276 Heath Court, Newcastle.

Gray Squirrels

Early Nov./76 at Doaktown
- Audrey Shaddick

Oct. 7/79 at Nelson
- Stirling Burchill

Sept. 22 or 23/81 at Strathadam
- Perley Hare

Oct. 25/81 at Millerton
- Ron Parks

Feb./84 at Nelson
- Bert Woulds

Winter/84 at Chatham
- Doris Carter

Feb./84 at Douglastown
- Asoyuf

Nov/84 at Nelson
- Stirling Burchill

~~Summer~~ Fall/88 at Chatham
- Clinton Hayward

Dec 9/88 at Sillikers
- Penny Somers

Starlings top bird count

Harry Walker

Jan. 13/89

WILDLIFE

The annual Chatham-Newcastle Christmas bird count was conducted on Dec. 28.

This count takes place within a 15-mile diameter circle with the centre at the midpoint of the Centennial Bridge.

It therefore covers an approximate area extending from the Bartibogue Bridge in the east to the Anderson Bridge in the west.

Participants in the count included 17 field observers and 23 feeder observers.

The field observers scouted the area looking for birds while the feeder observers kept an eye on their bird feeders at home.

When all of the birds reported by the 40 observers were added together, we obtained the following totals:

Starlings 744, great black-backed gulls 649, herring gulls 641, evening grosbeaks 616, rock doves (common pigeons) 299, black-capped chickadees 229.

House sparrows 213, ravens 150, pine siskins 62, blue jays 52, common redpolls 43, red-breasted nuthatches 34, crows 34, glaucous gulls 25.

Mourning doves 23, golden-crowned kinglets 17, hairy woodpeckers 11, gray jays nine, tree sparrows eight, snow buntings seven, downy woodpeckers six, boreal chickadees five, dark-eyed juncos five, grackles (blackbirds) five.

Brown-headed cowbirds four, ring-billed gulls three, brown creepers two, pileated woodpeckers two, and one each of the iceland gull, yellow-rumped warbler, northern shrike, and snowy owl.

Extra species

Extra species seen during the count period, but not on the count day (between Dec. 16 and Jan. 3) were the robin, pine grosbeak, house finch, ruffed grouse and barred owl.

In the above tabulation are 3,902 individual birds representing 32 different species, plus another five species for the count period.

Of course, figures like 3,902 imply a much higher degree of accuracy than is actually the case. Sometimes the number of birds in a flock can only be estimated.

Missing from this year's count were the apple-eating Bohemian waxwings that have become regular visitors to the Miramichi in recent winters; the 60 gold finches and two black ducks that were recorded last year; and the cardinal, white-breasted nuthatch, great horned owl and the three assorted hawks that made the list last year.

This is the 17th consecutive year we have run these counts.

By comparing this year's results with those of previous ones, we see the number of blue jays is very low while the number of black-capped chickadees and red-breasted nuthatches is an all-time high.

Another species whose numbers are high is the golden-crowned kinglet. Although on a previous count we recorded more of them (31 in 1983), on all other counts we recorded either none or recorded them in very low, one-digit figures.

When found, they are never at bird feeders, but only in the bush — scattered among the small, loose flocks of chickadees and nuthatches.

On eight of our previous counts we have recorded robins — usually only one or two.

This year we found none on count day, but Bill McKay reported two of them on Railway Avenue a day or two before the count.

In Sunny Corner (outside our count area), Monica Vanderbeck reported one of them visited her yard on Dec. 23 and again on Jan. 6.

By the day of our count, most of the Miramichi River was solidly frozen over. The few remaining patches of open water failed to produce any waterfowl.

Gulls were recorded in exceptionally-high numbers, most of them being concentrated at the Chatham dump and at a few roosting areas on the river ice.

Bathurst count

As reported in the Bathurst newspaper, *The Northern Light*, by Sonia Simard-Cormier, a Christmas bird count was being conducted on the same day as ours.

It took place in an uninhabited, mature forest area along the south-east Upsalquich River — an area described as being a major wintering ground for white-tailed deer.

The count was run by a team of six led by a forest ranger, Ron Gauthier. This is the 10th year for the count. The article gives only the kinds of species found — not the numbers.

Species recorded were: pine grosbeaks, pine siskins, redpolls, black-capped chickadees, nuthatches, brown creepers, ruffed grouse, ravens, Canada jays, hairy woodpeckers and pileated woodpeckers.

Gauthier was reported to be pleased with the count and said the large numbers of birds found as being directly related to the increase in the cone and seed crops this year.

David Christie of the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John, further relates this increase in cone and seed production to a decrease in the spruce budworm population — trees in earlier years being unable to produce much seed when their energies were barely sufficient for survival.

Gauthier also said in their count area there has been an increase in the number of pileated woodpeckers during the past 10 years.

Lacking the variety of habitat and the bird feeders, etc., that we have here on the Miramichi, this forest count could not be expected to yield the variety of birds recorded here.

Warbler winters in region

by Tom Greathouse

GUEST COLUMNIST

Jan. 27/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE Jan. 27/89

A yellow-rumped ("myrtle") warbler, (Pauline à croupion jaune) has been coming to our feeder in Douglasfield this winter.

As warblers normally feed on insects, they begin migrating southward in August.

Although some winter as close as New Jersey, the majority travel to sub-tropic areas such as the southeastern U.S., the Caribbean and Panama. (Note: three other local birders, John and Gwen MacKenzie and Luc Lemieux, also saw the bird at our home.)

Harry Walker has said in the past 15 or so years reports of this warbler were included in two Christmas bird counts. Peterson's "*Field Guide to Eastern Birds*" says "a few try to winter north to Nova Scotia and the southern Great Lakes".

Since the warbler's diet consists primarily of insects which overwinter in cold climates as larvae in locations unavailable to warblers, a person wonders how a "winter warbler" can find enough food to survive.

Since our visitor was still coming to eat suet, sunflower and smaller seeds on Jan. 22, it seems obvious a food supply is a more critical survival factor than the ability to withstand cold temperatures.

There is a question in mind if this warbler is surviving by eating sunflower seed embryos, or if he is finding adequate numbers of insect larvae in the seeds.

A cutting test of sunflower and millet seeds is planned to determine if this is a possibility.

One could speculate that the presence of a "winter" warbler in the Miramichi is evidence of a warming trend in eastern North America, a trend which began when the thick coat of ice covering the area started metling some 10,000 years ago.

It must have been hardy individuals such as this warbler which have again repopulated the glacier-covered areas of the last Ice Age.

Unexpected daily visits to the feeders by a pair of hairy woodpeckers has also raised the question of whether they are coming for seed embryos or for insect larvae inside the seeds.

However, it would not be suprising that the winter resident woodpeckers are eating the seed kernels.

For example, in the western portions of the U.S. and Mexico, acorns form a major part of the diet of the acorn woodpecker (Pic glandivare).

In the fall, Gladys MacLean inquired about the identity and toxicity of a shamrock spider which had been seen in considerable numbers in a grassy area near her home in Whitneyville.

A review of literature at the science library in Fredericton and the purchase of an Audubon Society *Field Guide to North American Insects and Spiders* revealed the identity of the spider, a member of the "orb weaver" spiders.

The female grows to a diameter of ⅜ to ¼", a relatively large spider for New Brunswick.

It characteristically spins a web between tall grass stems at night, then waits for prey to become enmeshed.

Each night it spins a new web after eating the previous web, strand by strand. Large numbers of shamrocks are often conspicious at sunrise covered with dew.

As for toxicity, almost all spiders use a venom to subdue their prey before eating it.

However, in the Maritimes, neither the shamrock nor any other spider contains enough venom to cause a serious problem for anyone unless they are especially allergic to the chemicals found in the venom.

Since small insects are the staple of most spider diets, the quantity of venom they maintain is minute.

Also, spiders, like most forms of non-human life, seldom bite a person unless trapped in some way.

Cave cricket

A question from Elva Rousselle concerned the dark brown spotted camel cricket ("cave cricket"), which lives in dark places, including damp basements and in the soil.

While they look grotesque, they are not dangerous to humans. These insects are not in the same family as the true crickets and do not produce sounds.

The nest, the egg and the bird

An outstanding 1988 publication written by David Burnie in association with the British Museum of Natural History in London, and published in both English and French, is now available in French.

It's a reference book at the Carrefour Beausoleil community centre library under the title "Le nid, l'oeufs el l'oiseau".

The photographic presentation of nests and eggs, skeletons and feathers and mating displays is very well done.

Tips on feeding, observing and photographing birds are given. The book can be used at the library.

Avid bird watcher

Feb. 10/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Colin Somers is only 11 years old, but already he has a considerable knowledge of birds. He is the son of Denis and Ruth Somers of Lyttleton, and has a little sister, Krystal.

Although he is in a wheelchair, this does not hinder him from getting close to the birds. In fact, he has them eating right out of his hand — at least, Chickadees and Pine Siskins will do so.

He says that the Chickadees only alight long enough to select a seed, then they flit away to eat it elsewhere. Soon they are back for another one.

On the other hand, Pine Siskins will stay and feed while in his hand.

Sometimes he is able to stroke the chickadees — this being done with the thumb of the same hand in which the bird is sitting. He has never been able to do this with Pine Siskins.

Pine Siskins have not come to his feeder this winter, but they did last winter. He has lots of Chickadees, and also Evening Grosbeaks, Blue Jays, and Red-breasted Nuthatches.

Another bird coming to his feeder is a White-throated Sparrow — one that got left behind when the rest of its kind left for the sunny south. It is the only White-throat to be reported in our area this winter and we did not get any on our Christmas Bird Count. Colin was able to identify it with the aid of his bird books.

It has an injured wing and so it cannot fly very well. This, of course, explains why it did not go south.

Apparently, it spends its nights under the patio, near the drier vent. Here, it is probably taking advantage of the small amount of heat that escapes through the vent.

On one occasion, a big Pileated Woodpecker visited the Somers' home and Colin was able to get a good look at it as it hammered at the base of a tree near the house.

Other birds seen during the summer included Baltimore Orioles, a Catbird, and a family of Kildeers. A Whip-poor-will was often heard in the evenings. Deer are plentiful and they commonly come out to feed in the fields about the house.

Colin has a pretty, blue Budgie, but it is not very tame. He asked me how he could tame it. I could not answer his question. If any of you have a suggestion, let us know.

This may seem an unlikely season for ducks to be on our river, but two have been reported.

On Jan. 30, Greg Bell of Chatham reported that a Merganser is frequently seen in the small patch of open water below the Chatham Power Plant.

The following day, Theresa Aube of Newcastle phoned about another duck. It had just walked across her backyard on Station Street. It was only about a foot from the house and on the south side of it. This suggests that it was seeking warmth and shelter.

This was a strange place to see a duck at any time of the year and most especially in the dead of winter. (There is no water anywhere nearby)

The duck was dark brown, almost black. It flew away when Theresa went out for a better look.

One day later, Feb. 1, Carl Perry of Bartibogue Bridge called. He had a Harlequin Duck, either a female or an immature. It had been given to him by a fellow worker at Acadia, Ray Lynch, whose wife, Rhonda had picked it up in her yard on the upper end of Jane Street — no doubt the same duck that had visited the Aubes.

The duck showed no signs of injury. Apparently it was just weak from hunger. Carl offered it a variety of food including hamburger and shrimp pellets, but it refused to eat.

It has since been turned over to our chief wildlife protection officer, Hayward Sturgeon, who in turn has delivered it to the Magnetic Hill Wildlife Park. The staff there are now trying to raise it back to health.

Hayward says that this is the second time that a Harlequin Duck has been delivered to him in this condition. The first one was picked up at the outlet of the sewage treatment plant at Strawberry Marsh about 10 or 11 years ago — again in the wintertime.

The female Harlequin Duck is plain dark brown, with three small white patches on the head. The immature, and the male in eclipse plumage, are similar; but the male in breeding plumage has a very striking color pattern. The plumage is mainly dark, greyish-blue; but, against this background, are bold, white stripes and circles, each bordered with black. Its sides are rusty red.

This color combination gives the impression that it has been painted by someone accustomed to painting totem poles, or witch doctors' masks. However, this should be qualified, for the effect is a neat, or slick, little duck, not a grotesque one.

According to Squires, the Harlequin Duck winters on salt water off our coasts, especially in the Bay of Fundy; but, it is rarely seen inland in our province.

Feb. 24/89

A kinglet visits

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

On Feb. 16, Gail Delano of Cassilis left a door open in order to let in some fresh air. She then went upstairs.

When she returned, she found a tiny bird sitting on the floor.

It showed no fear of her and did not attempt to fly. It hopped over beside the stove.

When she put her hand in front of it, it hopped onto a finger. It was tamer than their pet cockateel.

Later, it was determined the bird could not fly although there was no sign of injury except one of its wings drooped slightly.

How it got in the house is a matter for speculation. Perhaps it injured itself after flying in.

The little bird was a golden-crowned kinglet, a bird that lives almost entirely on insects; in winter, on insect eggs and on hibernating insects and their pupae which are found in bark crevices, etc.

Living on such a diet, it is difficult to feed such a bird by hand in the wintertime.

Gail tried a few substitutes such as hard-boiled egg and cottage cheese, but with no luck. It would not eat.

Next morning, the bird was shivering. New attempts were made to feed it.

A check in *Terres' Encyclopedia of North American Birds* revealed the golden-crowned kinglet drinks sap. He does not say how it gets it, but presumably it would mostly be from sapsucker holes. (Many species of bird visit sapsucker holes for this purpose.)

This bit of information led to the idea that perhaps the kinglet would drink unsweetened apple juice. This was offered to it. It refused to drink it from a saucer, but it would drink it from a straw.

The straw was filled with apple juice. One end was blocked with a finger. Then the straw was tilted slightly above the horizontal with the open end in front of the bird. With the straw in this position, the bird started to drink.

Before long, it stopped shivering and became quite lively. It accepted a small amount of tropical fish food moistened with apple juice, but again, only when offered at the end of the straw.

When a house fly was found, the kinglet became excited and quickly grabbed it and devoured it. This suggests if a proper supply of insects had been available, the bird probably would have survived. As it was, the bird was found dead the following morning.

Delano has learned the pet store in Chatham has freeze-dried red grubs in stock and she wonders if these could be used to feed such a bird.

Golden-crowned kinglets are much more common than usual tnis winter as was discovered on our Christmas bird count.

Being tiny and quiet and since they seldom leave the forest and generally remain hidden in trees, their presence usually goes undetected.

■ Phyllis Crowe of Taintville recently reported one at her place. She also reported a pileated woodpecker had almost chopped down one of her spruce trees. For three days, the woodpecker came and worked at this task.

Although at times such acts may appear to be destructive, no doubt the woodpecker was getting carpenter ants or other wood-boring insects that were destroying the tree from the inside.

Crowe tells us the woodpecker not only mutilated the trunk of the tree, but also tore into the large exposed roots radiating out from it.

She also said a red squirrel was a very excited observer of this whole operation — it raced around in circles about the woodpecker while it made the chips fly.

■ Another snowy owl has been reported, this one by Robert Goguen of Chatham Head.

It was seen in open fields near Billy Daley's place at Barnaby River. It is reported to have been as white as the snow, having no dark markings anywhere. This would indicate it was probably an old male.

■ Back on Jan. 26, Mike Jamieson reported that while on a surveying crew near Bayside, he and two others saw a large bird whose identity they were curious about.

It was about the size of a raven and was black like one except there was a narrow white strip running longitudinally down the middle of the underside of the wings.

If anyone can identify this bird, let us know. There is the possibility it was a partially albino raven.

■ Goldfinches are reported to be visiting Marcia Smith's feeder on the South Esk Road.

Here in Newcastle we had one of them visit our feeder on a couple of occasions. These are the only goldfinches to have been reported this winter.

Feb. 3/89

The bluebird makes a modest comeback

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The bluebird, with its beautiful colors, gentle disposition and soft, unhurried song, has become a symbol of happiness and is often used on greeting cards.

Fifty years ago the bluebird was much more common than it is today, at least country-wide it was. Here on the Miramichi, it was never more than a rarity so far as I can determine.

Recently, the bluebird has been making a modest comeback in some parts of our country.

This has been largely due to the tireless efforts of persons and organizations who have been erecting and maintaining bird houses for them.

Some local citizens have taken up the cause and there is some indication the bluebird might be induced to live here. More about that later.

There is some confusion between the bluebird and the blue jay. They are not the same. They differ greatly, both in appearance and in behavior.

Actually, there are three species of bluebird in Canada, but it is only the eastern bluebird that is ever seen in New Brunswick.

The eastern bluebird has been known by other names in the past — azure bluebird, red-breasted bluebird, blue robin, etc. These names help to describe it.

It is built much like a robin, but is smaller — not much bigger than a sparrow. Like a robin, it has a red or rusty breast and a white belly.

However, its back, head, wings and tail are a rich and uniform shade of blue — this describes the male.)

The female is duller, some greyish-brown being mixed with the blue on her back and head and her breast is paler. The young bluebird has a spotted breast as does a young robin.

The bluebird likes to live in open areas, not in thick brush, nor in towns.

It lives mainly on insects and worms, but also eats wild berries.

What caused the earlier decline of the bluebird?

In the *Birder's Handbook* by Ehrlick, Dobkin and Wheye, we read "Felling dead trees and removing dead branches reduces nest holes and increases competition with other cavity-nesting species (especially house sparrows and European starlings). Nest boxes now maintain populations that have declined by up to 90 per cent this century."

The *Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas* points to another problem, severe winters in the bluebird's wintering area — an area that extends from about Boston, south through the southern states and into Mexico.

Another change that eliminated many nesting sites for bluebirds occurred about the time tractors came into common use on farms.

Fields were made bigger, many old fences were taken down — often replaced by temporary electric ones. Many of the old fences had hollow posts in which bluebirds and other species nested.

The house sparrow was introduced to this continent in the 1850s and the starling in 1890. Old reports indicate that before these two species had spread throughout the continent, bluebirds were very common or even abundant.

Here are a few bluebird reports received during the past summer:—

Newcastle police officer Dewey Gillespie says he had a pair of them nest in a bird house on his property near Cole's Island.

Mark Phinney of the New Brunswick Museum reported seeing one enter a nest cavity near Holmes Lake.

Don Kimball of Fredericton sent us two reports. He found a pair (male and female) near Holmes Lake. He also found a bluebird's nest with young in it near the west branch of the South Nipisiquit River (west of Heath Steele Mines).

The summer before last, several people reported seeing a bluebird in the burnt-over area north of Douglastown.

In previous years there have been scattered reports of bluebirds at Newcastle, Chatham, Oak Point, South Nelson and Bay du Vin. In two of these cases, they were examining bird houses.

Last spring, John MacKenzie of Bushville built and distributed 19 bird houses.

They were specially-designed for bluebirds and were erected in suitable habitat. To date their only tenants have been tree swallows, but there is another season coming up.

When I recently spoke to Herschell Stewart, he said he had a set of instructions for building a bluebird house and he was building two of them to erect near his home in Trout Brook.

Terres gives the following dimensions for a bluebird house. Floor space 5" x 5", height 8", entrance hole 1 1/2" in diameter, height of hole above floor, 6", height of birdhouse above ground 5 to 10 feet. House should be of dull, inconspicuous color.

Loon's wail attracts lovers of wilderness

Mar. 3/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The long, drawn-out wail of the loon is a sound that stirs the soul of those who love the wilderness.

Unfortunately, it is a sound being heard less frequently today. The inroads of civilization are slowly taking their toll on this famous and distinctive bird.

Rudy Stocek of the Maritimes Forest Ranger School in Fredericton has been collecting information on the common loon to determine its status in New Brunswick.

If any of you have anything to contribute, call 622-2108 and I will pass the information on to him.

Information of interest would include such things as lakes on which you have seen loons in recent years, dates on which you have seen them (as close as possible), any evidence of nesting and their success in raising young.

Also, take note this coming summer so we can collect further information, but always keeping in mind we should not disturb nesting loons.

A letter from Stocek reads in part:

"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 northeastern United States.

"Much of this has been attributed to human disturbances, especially in the form of recreational lakes use and lakeside 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."

Stocek is program director, fish and wildlife management. In addition to his loon program, he has also been involved for several years in gathering information about the bald eagles of our province.

Ehrlich, Dobkin, and Wheye, in their *Birder's Handbook*, claim the increased number of boats on lakes is responsible for the loss of many of the common loon's eggs.

Nesting loons are inadvertently frightened off their nests by passing boats.

Crows, ravens, gulls and other predators, ever on the watch for an opportunity, are quick to act when they see a loon slip into the water from its nest or when they see an unguarded nest.

These authors tell of a study on the effects of lake acidification on the loon's reproductive success. It was done by Robert Alvo and it covered 84 Ontario lakes.

He found 62 per cent of the loon chicks on acidified lakes died, whereas only 14 per cent of them died on healthy lakes.

He says these chicks simply starved to death, but nonetheless loons continued to try to raise broods on these acidified lakes.

The common loon winters mainly on salt water along both coasts. It is found from Newfoundland to the Gulf of Mexico on the Atlantic coast and from Alaska to Mexico on the Pacific.

Here, they are subject to other man-made hazards — oil spills, fishermen's nets, etc.

A large kill of loons along Florida's west coast in 1983 is thought to have been connected to mercury poisoning.

The *Birder's Handbook* tells us of one device that has proved of value to the loon. It is a small, floating mat, or platform, filled with vegetation.

This is anchored in a quiet part of a lake as a nesting site (most loon nests are on islands).

Such mats are especially beneficial behind dams or in reservoirs where water levels fluctuate.

A nest placed on one of these rises and falls with the water, whereas a nest placed elsewhere may be flooded out or it may be stranded far from water.

The loon is very awkward on land, its legs being positioned far back on the body. This renders them effective as paddlers while swimming, but inefficient for walking on land.

Like most fish-eating birds, loons tend to catch more slow-moving fish than fast ones.

These slow-moving fish, such as suckers and perch, eat the eggs and young of what are considered more valuable species. As a result, it is unlikely loons have any detrimental effect on fishing.

The common loon cannot take off from land. In order to get airborne, it must be on a body of water of sufficient size to provide it with a long runway and enough room to clear the tops of surrounding trees.

It takes off into the wind. Occasionally, it gets trapped when the water freezes over at night.

Other calls

In addition to its long, drawn-out wail, the loon has a variety of other unique calls including what has been aptly called a "yodel" and another as a "maniacal laugh".

All help to create that atmosphere of mystery, the compelling attraction the wilderness holds for many people.

P.S.: A bulletin published by the Canadian Wildlife Service says that since the loon nests so close to the water, the wake from passing motor boats sometimes destroys its eggs and nest.

Goshawk seen near Chatham

Greg Bell, who frequently snowmobiles in the bush to the east of Chatham, says he has seen a goshawk there on several occasions.

The name goshawk was originally goose hawk, but why it was given that name is unclear. Perhaps its size and color gave rise to the name.

It is a large greyish-blue hawk, dark above, and light below. Immatures are brown.

It is about the size of a red-tailed hawk; but, unlike the red-tail, it does not soar aloft. Rather, it hunts at low elevations — about tree top level and lower.

The goshawk is an uncommon hawk, but one having a very wide distribution, it being found in both the old and the new worlds.

Although not confined to the north woods, that is where its main stronghold is. It may be found in New Brunswick at any season of the year.

It is, generally speaking, a permanent resident wherever found, but, periodically, and at widely-separated intervals, it becomes involved in a migration of sorts.

This happens when its main food items, snowshoe hare and ruffed grouse, become scarce — a thing that cyclically happens.

At such times, goshawks move south and become more common than usual in southern parts of Canada.

■ The first robins of the year have been reported — five separate reports — also a song sparrow and some purple finches.

Sounds like spring, but these reports are probably of birds that have been overwintering with us rather than of ones that have arrived from the south.

Robin no. 1 was reported by Paul Stewart of Matthew's Settlement. He said it was sitting in an apple tree in Johnny Matthew's yard on Jan. 25 and, at least up until that date, it had been coming there periodically to feed on apples.

Feb. 17/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

About 30 miles away as the crow flies, robin no. 2 was reported. It was spotted by Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Williston of Black River on Feb. 7.

On Feb. 9, robin no. 3 was reported. It was eating frozen apples in a tree at Little Branch.

The following day, Feb. 10, Joan Taylor reported robin no. 4. It was in her yard at Black River and it, too, was eating apples.

Finally, on Feb. 11, Mrs. William Currie of Millbank reported robin no. 5. Recently, it has been visiting their yard every day.

■ The song sparrow is a steady boarder at John and Gwen MacKenzie's feeder in Bushville. It first appeared about two weeks ago and since then has been coming morning, noon, and night.

■ The purple finches have been coming to Marcia Smith's feeder on the South Esk Road. She apparently has been getting a great variety of birds including juncos and redpolls as well as purple finches.

Bert Woulds of South Nelson also reports redpolls at his feeder.

The following is reprinted by permission from "Nature Canada Almanac".

The material of choice for shotgun pellets has traditionally been lead. Now, however, there is a growing campaign to support the use of steel shots.

Lead, of course, is toxic and all those shotgun pellets discharged by hunters every season have to land somewhere.

As a result, tons of lead fall into wetlands and lakes every year.

Because bottom-feeding waterfowl can ingest this spent shot, millions of birds die each year from lead poisoning.

Lead poisoning is certainly not the major cause of waterfowl mortality. It is, however, easily avoidable simply by changing to the use of steel shot.

The use of lead shot is already banned in Great Britain and will be banned by all states in the USA within two years.

Canada has made no such effort. Although debate has been ongoing as to whether lead shot poisoning is a serious enough problem to warrant a ban, Canadian sportsmen's groups have been noticeably quiet on the issue.

Naturalists' organizations have been concerned about the use of lead shot for some time.

Many of the Canadian Nature Federation's affiliates and the International Council for Bird Preservation (Canada), which is a committee of the CNF, have been working quietly on the subject.

Now, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, in an article in its *Seasons* magazine, has publically called for a ban on lead shot.

Whether lead poisoning is a major cause of waterfowl mortality in Canada is irrelevant.

By continuing the use of lead shot, a toxic substance is being knowingly and unnecessarily introduced into the environment in large quantities.

An acceptable alternative is available, so let's get the lead out and get on with it.

March 10/89

Bald eagles appear as river ice thins

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Newcastle's bald eagles have returned. They are a little earlier than usual this year.

On March 1, Robert Houlston reported two of them were standing on the river ice between the Domino Club and Beaubear's Island.

Further, he said on the previous day, Feb. 28, his father had seen one a little farther upriver — off Vye's Beach.

Every year in March, one or two bald eagles appear at this same place on the river.

Their return coincides fairly closely with the melting of the ice here — this stretch of the river opens up earlier than elsewhere because of the warm discharge entering it from the Repap mill.

This year the eagles are back before this development has taken place. However, as Robert reports, a dark area on the ice indicates it is getting thin.

■ Another robin has been reported — this one at Lower Newcastle where Mrs. Gerald Ross had a visit from one on March 2.

■ Bohemian waxwings from western Canada, have, during the last 10 or 15 years, become regular winter visitors to the Miramichi.

This winter, not a single bohemian waxwing has been reported.

Perhaps these western birds have at last got their directions straight and have started heading south, rather than east, for the winter.

We hope this is not the case for these exotic birds have been adding color and interest to our winter season.

■ New Brunswick is not the only place being plagued with an increase in the coyote population.

A clipping sent to us by Desmond Dolan tells of a problem posed by coyotes around the Rochester, New York, airport.

The article, written by Jonathan Saltzman, appeared in the *Rochester Democrat* and *Chronicle*.

Saltzman says it is only during the last two years that coyotes have been seen on the rumways there.

Since then, they have at times delayed landings and departures of aircraft and coyote pups have been run over by taxiing planes. Other coyotes have been shot. Five were killed at the airport last year.

The coyotes reportedly have been tunneling under the fence which surrounds the airport.

Although generally very wary creatures, they apparently have become accustomed to the noise at the airport and pay little attention to taxiing planes.

■ Last summer, a new species was added to the list of birds known to nest in New Brunswick. This is the solitary sandpiper.

The discovery was made by David Christie of Albert while he was doing field work for the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas project.

The solitary sandpiper is unique in its nesting habits. Unlike other sandpipers which nest on the ground, it nests in trees taking over the abandonded nests of robins, blackbirds, jays, etc.

Since the young are precocious, they leave the nest as soon as they are hatched. This results in a fall to the ground, sometimes from considerable heights.

They then run about in search of food as do young killdeer or partridge. Apparently most young birds make the tumble without serious injury.

Christie did not find the solitary sandpiper's nest, but he found three young birds in company with a couple of adults. They were located on the edge of a bog lake somewhere in northern New Brunswick.

Christie suggests that since there are many remote bog lakes in the province, other solitary sandpipers could be nesting at many of these.

According to Godfrey (see *The Birds of Canada*), the known breeding range for this species lies far to the north of us in Labrador and northern Quebec.

■ Liz Archibald-Calder of the Chatham Conservation Council has informed me she welcomes opportunities to speak to groups of people, even if that group consists of no more than four or five members.

She said she is prepared to speak on a variety of environmental topics depending on what the group is interested in.

These topics include such things as acid rain, depletion of the ozone layer, solid waste management, ground water contamination and air pollution.

She said she can tailor her talks to suit the age group she is talking to or to the scientific understanding of its members.

These talks will zero in on how the various issues affect us on the Miramichi as well as delve into their effects globally.

She illustrates her talks with color slides and other visual aids.

Maple tree shows some individuality

Mar. 17/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Maple trees have individuality.

This is probably true of all living things for when we get thoroughly acquainted with them the various members of any group seem always to take on individuality.

This often is forgotten for most natural history studies are studies of species, rather than of individuals within that species.

This idea reminds me of Anne Marie Hartford and her team of "I'm Thumbody" volunteers.

Their message in a nutshell: you are special because you are unique. You have the potential to do for this world what nobody else can for there is nobody else like you.

Getting back to the maple tree, here is a piece of information that was shared with us by Art Taylor when my son, Lyle, and I visited him at his maple sugar camp on the Tomahawk Ridge near Halcomb.

Art says he has one tree that produces much sweeter sap than any of his other trees.

This tree is of medium size, is of the same species and grows on the same ground as his other trees.

However, the sap from this tree is so sweet only 18 gallons of sap is required to make one gallon of maple syrup.

By comparison, 32 to 45 gallons of sap is required from any of his other trees in order to make one gallon of syrup — the amount again varying, depending on the tree.

Art would like to have a sugar bush in which all of the trees would produce sap of the same quality as this special one.

Art said the maple syrup season can be over in one day or it may continue for three weeks depending on the year.

However, as soon as the buds on the trees start to open up, the sap becomes bitter and therefore unsuitable for making syrup.

■ The ring-necked pheasant was originally brought from Asia and attempts have been made to introduce it into many parts of North America.

In some cases, these attempts have been successful; in other cases, they have not been.

The pheasant is non-migratory and if it is to be successfully introduced, it must be able to survive in winter.

Experience shows it can withstand severe cold, but, being a ground-feeder, deep snow can bring starvation to it.

Some years ago, pheasants were introduced to the Miramichi. They survived for a few years, then disappeared.

This disappearance may have been caused by deep snow, or it may have been caused by over-hunting.

Another possibility is suggested in an article sent to us by Desmond Dolan — that of over-predation. More likely it was a combination of all three.

The received article is by Floyd King and has been clipped from the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*.

King introduces his article with the statement, "There is no doubt about it, until something is done to control predators there will be no pheasant comeback in New York state."

He then tells of some of the experiments conducted by biologists hired by John L. Wehle who operates an 800-acre wildlife research centre in Genesee County, N.Y. This centre is said to be situated on ideal pheasant habitat.

Experiments conducted here have included that of planting certain species of grass to improve the summer habitat for pheasants and other species to improve the winter habitat for them. Such species will provide them with adequate food as well as cover and protection from predators.

However, none of this has worked. The pheasants are always picked off by predators. This has been proved by equipping some of them with radio transmitters to follow their movements.

When 450 pheasants were released in the fall of 1987, 24 of the hens were equipped with transmitters. None made it through the winter.

All were taken by predators, 41 per cent by birds of prey, mostly red-tailed hawks and great horned owls; the remainder by foxes and other mammals.

In the spring of 1988, 27 more hens were released with transmitters. All were taken within a month, almost all by foxes.

Another robin has been reported, this one by Bill Dunnett of Derby Junction. It was seen on March 8. It, like many others seen in winter, was feeding on apples.

People can also rise from deep despair

Mar. 23/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

This week I am going to drop my usual subject of nature and try to write on something more in keeping with Easter.

The news media seems to be continually bringing us stories about prominent people falling into dishonor.

With all these exposures, we may be tempted to become cynical and imagine nobody can be trusted.

To counter this, it is important we keep things in proper perspective.

Just as there are people falling from favor, there are also those who are rising out of pits of despair, disgrace, and mediocrity.

Many such people are attaining goals which previously they thought to be impossible of achievement.

These transformations require time, struggle, and hard work, therefore they are not as sudden and spectacular as are the scandals.

They generally do not attract a lot of media attention, but this does not mean they are less common than the scandals.

Even a fall into dishonor is usually a positive development. If we have built on the sand, it is well our foundations crumble so we can get on with the task of rebuilding our lives on more sound principles.

If we have fallen into dishonor, there is no good reason for us remaining there.

You and I, like everyone else, have things in our past that we would prefer to forget.

Christ Jesus demonstrated it is possible to overcome all difficulties, all evil, even death itself.

■ In the March-April issue of *Queen's Alumni Review*, Bonny Walford, an inmate of the prison for women in Kingston, tells her life story — the culmination of which, is reached, at the Convocation Ceremonies at Queen's University. During these ceremonies, she is conferred with a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology.

She is serving a 14-year term for second degree murder.

Her story is touching and inspiring. Here are some brief excerpts from it —

"Suddenly I was no longer prisoner to either the past or the walls which had surrounded me the past six years.

"Even though I will spend at least five more years in prison, I felt free."

And —

"As the procession was leaving my mother hugged me and exclaimed, 'I'm so very proud of you!'

"Those were words I never thought I'd hear again. I had made her the mother of a murderess.

"But I'd risen from the living dead to create a new life — soaring above the past, spreading my wings to lift me high above the prison walls."

■ Last fall, on Nov. 5, I attended the annual meeting of the John Howard Society at the Wandlyn Inn. John Trevors, a member of the National Parole Board, spoke on the parole system.

He mentioned the bad publicity the parole board receives as a result of the few bad decisions it makes, but he pointed out little is known about the thousands of good decisions that it makes.

When something goes wrong, news reporters are always on hand to get the latest information. When things are going good, there are no reporters.

He reminded us the parole board has nothing to do with the original verdict or sentence.

Their sole function is to get the prisoner back into society and their primary consideration in doing this is to do it in such a way as to pose the least possible risk to the public.

This usually boils down to the question: Is it better to let the prisoner serve his full term and then release him without any restrictions; or, is it better to ease him into society earlier and have some supervision over him during his readjustment to society?

Before a decision is made, the case history of the prisoner is carefully reviewed.

Information considered will come from a variety of sources such as the prisoner himself, the prison staff, the police, his family and friends, the victim and others associated with him in the past.

Trevors contends he has never been associated with a more dedicated and conscientious group of people than those on the parole board; and although they have made some bad mistakes, their overall record is exceptionally good.

March 31/89

Geese have curious migration routes

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The ways of nature are curious. When the various threads in her complex fabric are unravelled, many are found to run in unexpected directions. Take the migrations of the snow goose:—

The snow goose nests in the high Arctic. When fall comes, those snow geese which have nested on Baffin Island (directly north of Quebec province) head in a southwesterly direction thus passing over Manitoba.

Those that have nested on the islands of Somerset and Prince of Wales (directly north of Manitoba) head in a southeasterly direction thereby passing over Quebec province.

In other words, the migration routes of these two populations of snow geese cross one another, rather than running in parallel.

Biologists recognize two subspecies of snow goose — the greater snow goose, and the lesser snow goose.

The entire greater snow goose population is said to stop over at Cap Tourmente, 30 miles east of Quebec City, and this is the case for both the spring and fall migrations.

These birds have black wing tips, but otherwise their plumage is pure white. First year, immature birds are slightly greyish on the back, but not noticeably so. Therefore, flocks of these birds appear to be almost homogeneous.

In contrast, the snow geese that migrate through Manitoba are a motley group indeed.

They vary greatly in color, some being identical with those in Quebec, others being of a dark, sooty grey all over (almost black), and still others being of all variations in between these two extremes.

The reason for this: these birds are lesser snow geese and they come in two color phases — the normal white phase and the blue phase.

On top of this, some individuals are intermediate between these two color phases.

Furthermore, first year immature blue-phase birds are noticeably darker than adult birds. They lack the white head, neck, and lower back of blue-phase adults.

Apparently as one goes still farther west, beyond Manitoba, the number of blue-phase individuals decreases rapidly, so that far western flocks resemble those seen in Quebec. These, nonetheless, are still lesser snow geese, the same as those in Manitoba.

In recent years, the number of blue-phase birds is said to have been increasing.

Some strays here

Here in New Brunswick, we get a few stray snow geese — mostly white-phase ones, but occasionally a blue-phase goose is reported. In fact, the only snow goose I have seen here was an adult blue-phase one.

As reported in this column, small flocks of snow geese have visited the Miramichi in recent years.

For anyone but an expert, a white-phase lesser snow goose would be indistinguishable from a greater snow goose. Even for the expert, the bird would need to be in hand and measurements taken in order to determine which subspecies it belonged to.

Early ornithologists took the blue-phase snow goose to be a distinct species and so they named it the blue goose.

Therefore, if you have an old bird book, such as Taverner's *Birds of Canada*, it may be described therein as the blue goose.

The adult blue goose has a white head, neck and lower back. Otherwise, it is of a dark, sooty, blue-grey color.

Last year, in late September, while our son, Ian, and I were travelling across Manitoba, we saw large flocks of snow geese and we were surprised at the great variation in their colors.

In two places, we came upon flocks feeding in open fields. These flocks contained countless numbers of birds and were spread over many acres of land. We were able to park our truck and view them at our leisure.

Later that day, as we approached Anola, Manitoba, we telephoned Rudy and Millie Dufort, former residents of Newcastle.

They were not home. They were on their way to Newcastle. However, their daughter, Michelle, invited us to spend the night there.

When we arrived, we were greeted by a huge St. Bernard pup — playful as any pup, but almost as big as a pony.

That evening we had a pleasant visit with Michelle, her husband, Chuck Dewey Jr. (formerly of Chatham), and their little daughter, Danielle.

In the morning we were treated to a delicious breakfast, then rolled up our sleeping bags and headed on for Thunder Bay.

Bald eagles return

April 7/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

According to the birds it's spring; but, according to the weather that's questionable.

Bald eagles have been back for some time. They always bring an enthusiastic response from those fortunate enough to see them.

As reported earlier by Paul Houlston, for two days back on Feb. 28 and March 1, a pair of them were seen on the river ice below the Repap mill.

The river ice had not opened up by that time, and so the eagles apparently left.

Paul reports they returned about two weeks later. Other people have also seen them.

On March 13, Mike Doyle reported seeing one of them out on the river ice in front of South Nelson. It was feeding on the carcass of a small mammal, possibly a rabbit or a cat.

The following day, March 14, an anonymous caller reorted two bald eagles — again near the open water below Repap.

Then, on March 16, Bud Jardine reported there was one of them below the power plant at Chatham. It was flying about the patch of open water there — its interest having been aroused by a fish which had broken the surface there.

Finally, Jane Wood saw a bald eagle flying upriver in front of Douglastown on March 21 as reported in her column in the *Northumberland News*.

A purple finch, on March 22, made an appearance at Linda Hartlen's home on the MacKinnon Road back of Douglastown.

The following day, two more purple finches were reported by Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne.

They were at his bird feeders along with a variety of other birds including six or seven red-winged blackbirds — red wings having first arrived there about five days earlier.

About 30 tree sparrows and about 12 mourning doves have been coming to his feeders all winter.

Later, during the same day, Louis phoned again, this time to report that a male house finch had arrived at his feeders.

This house finch was not in its normal red plumage, but in its less common orange plumage. (The house finch comes in two color phases.)

A house finch of either color phase is very rare here on the Miramichi. We have only two or three previous records.

In appearance, a house finch of the normal red phase resembles a purple finch, but in habits the house finch more nearly resembles a house sparrow.

This species is probably destined to become more common here for its numbers have been increasing to the south of us.

The first indication that the house finch was nesting in New Brunswick was found two years ago.

In July, 1987, Brian Dalzell observed two groups of recently-fledged young in the St. Stephen area. Since then, similar observations have been made at Moncton and on Grand Manan.

On March 27, Theresa Ross reported two red-winged blackbirds at her place in Lower Newcastle. This is the same day I first saw them in Newcastle.

Also on this date, a song sparrow was pouring forth its song from a clump of bushes at the entrance to Strawberry March.

In the marsh itself were a killdeer, a black duck, and four common mergansers. By March 31, there were lots of black ducks at the marsh.

Robins apparently moved north during the night of March 27-28.

On the following day Norman Stewart reported seeing four of them at Blackville, Mrs. Robert Masters reported one in Newcastle, and Winnie and I also saw our first one of the year that day.

Grackles had returned to Newcastle by the morning of March 28, and cowbirds by the following morning.

However, a few members of these species apparently stayed all winter for Lester MacCallum reported that both had been visiting his feeders earlier in the year.

Four or five horned larks were seen in a field south of Domtar on March 29.

Earlene Hunter reported that on March 31, she and Jack flushed a woodcock when they approached a spring below their house in Sunny Corner.

Also in the vicinity of the spring was a flock of approximately two dozen robins.

Although slate-colored juncoes have been reported at a few feeders this winter, including Earlene's, they were obviously becoming more plentiful by month's end.

On March 31, Doug Underhill reported seeing one in Newcastle and another one at his home on the MacKinnon Road. Since then, he has seen two or three in his yard every day.

On April 1, Colin Somers reported [illegible] and tree sparrows had recently showed up at his place in Lyttleton.

Apr. 28/89

Birds come to feeders due to winter weather

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The wintry weather of last weekend brought a lot of hungry birds to bird feeders.

On April 23, among the crowd of birds at Theresa Ross's feeder in Lower Newcastle was a pair of eastern bluebirds, male and female — the first bluebirds Theresa says she has ever seen.

In one of my articles in early February, I gave the dimensions for a bluebird house. But, more important than the dimensions for such a house is the habitat in which it is erected.

The bluebird likes to live in open areas. It will not nest in town, nor in the bush, but it will nest along bush edges that border on fields.

It favors habitats where the vegetation is short or sparce — grazed pasture fields, orchards, golf courses, cemeteries, clear—cuts.

Bluebirds take well to bird houses so long as competitors such as house sparrows, starlings and tree swallows can be kept out.

Since these competitors are more plentiful around houses, barns, and other buildings, it is best to place the house some distance away from such structures.

Fence posts between open farmer's fields make good standards for them. They are about the right height as well as being in suitable habitat.

■ Out in Baie Ste Anne, an unexpected bird turned up at Sam Sippley's. Sam provides meat for crows and ravens during the winter, the meat being placed on a board about 25 feet from his house.

On April 23, a female northern harrier, or marsh hawk (le busard des marais) came for this feast.

While there, it had the table all to itself, the crows and ravens preferring to keep plenty of distance between themselves and this powerful and well—armed intruder.

The harrier enjoyed a leisurely repast, remaining there for about an hour and giving spectators plenty of time for detailed observation.

■ Lem McDonald reports that on April 13 a woodcock came down on his lawn in Newcastle and remained there for about two hours. He also told of an earlier experience he had with a woodcock.

While travelling the Mines Road, he and his companions passed a bird that was fluttering as though injured.

It was on the pavement near the shoulder of the road and it was at first thought to be a partridge that had been struck by a passing car.

When they stopped and walked back to the bird, it was found to be a mother woodcock performing a distraction display.

With her were four tiny chicks, and these chicks were standing motionless on the bare pavement with their eyes closed.

Lem says they remained thus even when they were nose to nose with them. They did not move until they were touched, and even then, they only ran a few feet, then froze again and closed their eyes.

■ Last week, I said I never had any reports of pileated woodpeckers coming to bird feeders.

Since then, Jim MacKenzie of Napan informed me he had a pileated woodpecker coming for fat which he hangs in an onion bag outside his camp. This camp is located in the bush back of his home.

Jim also reports that on April 21 a flock of 11 snow geese spent the day resting in a field of Leon Bremner. About a week earlier, one lone snow goose was seen resting in a salt marsh at Point aux Carr.

Jim tells me, that years ago (about the early 1950s) bald eagles were seen every spring along the Napan River and they frequently perched in some large pine trees near the mouth of the river.

Also, at that time, they were commonly seen at Black River.

■ Danny Corcoran of North Napan says for several years during deer hunting season a bald eagle was seen at the same small lake roughly in the vicinity of Heath Steele Mines.

Whether or not it still comes there is unknown as he has not been hunting there for the last few years.

Also while hunting, he saw a bald eagle feeding on the carcass of a dead moose. The moose was lying in the middle of the Northwest Miramichi River about one mile above "The Elbow".

■ We have a mystery. Derrick Flanagan of Chatham reports there have been a few white birds flying up and downriver with the black shags (cormorants).

He says they align themselves in the flocks of black shags as though they were black shags themselves. If anybody has further information on these birds, please let us know.

Local people spot pileated woodpeckers

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The pileated woodpecker, cock of the woods or le grand pic, call it what you will, this bird holds a fascination for people that is equalled by few others.

Some of the people reporting it in recent months include Burns Adams of Black River; Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne; Greg Bell of Chatham who saw two of them together; and Barry Estey of Craigville who also saw two.

When one becomes familiar with it, this monster-sized woodpecker can easily be identified even when flying at considerable heights and it frequently does fly high.

A good proportion of the pileated woodpeckers I have seen have been crossing over highways flying well above tree-top height.

When seen under these circumstances, the bird's large size, its peculiar, undulating flight and the distinctive black and white color pattern on the underside of its wings mark it as a pileated woodpecker.

While walking through the woods, we are more likely to see the carpentry work of this woodpecker than we are to see the woodpecker itself.

Its handiwork is readily distinguishable from that of other woodpeckers.

Its chiseled holes tend to have somewhat squared corners and it frequently chisels long vertical slits — slits that may be a foot or more in length and three inches wide.

If the tree happens to be a spruce or fir, these holes and slits are usually found near the base of the trunk.

The holes drilled by other woodpeckers are smaller and rounder and the resultant chips are finer.

Here on the Miramichi, I have never received any reports of pileated woodpeckers coming to bird feeders, but according to some authors, they sometimes do so.

Terres says they will eat suet and the meat from nuts. His breakdown of their diet is 75 per cent animal and 25 per cent vegetable — the animal portion being largely carpenter ants, the vegetable portion being nuts and berries of various kinds.

The pileated woodpecker is non-migratory; and, unlike many species, it defends its territory year long. (Most birds defend a territory only while they are nesting.)

This species originally had an extensive range. It was found from coast to coast in Canada, ranging as far north as were found trees big enough to provide nesting cavities of sufficient size for it. It was also found throughout most of the United States.

By the early part of this century, it had disappeared from much of its former range, but since then it has again re-established itself in much of its lost territory.

A final remark: one writer, Hoyt, said of the pileated woodpecker-"a glimpse of it remains a thrill for most who see it for the first time or the thousandth."

■ Early in March, I wrote an artricle about another obviously popular bird — the commom loon and in that article, I requested information about its distribution during summer.

I would now like to thank the following people for responding, Louise Girvan of the South Esk Road, Burns Adams of Black River, George Caissie of Rogersville, June Gallant of McKinleyville and Mike Doyle of South Nelson.

Tom Greathouse of Douglasfield reports about 4 p.m. on March 26, in the midst of a snowstorm, he heard the honking of geese, but could not see them.

He ran into the house and got his binoculars. When he came out a flock of 15 snow geese flew by. They were only a very short distance off to the side of him and flying at an altitude of only about 100 feet.

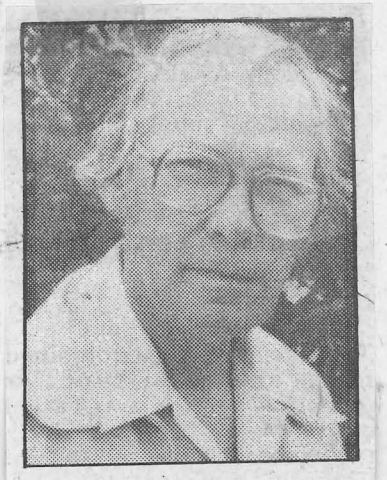
■ As reported earlier, Tom had a yellow-rumped (Myrtle) warbler coming regularly to his feeders early in the winter. He now reports it was last seen on Feb. 7.

This is the latest date that we have ever had a warbler of any kind reported here on the Miramichi.

On a couple of previous years, we have had warblers (myrtle and pine) reported on our Christmas Bird Count, but never have we had them reported later than that.

■ The double-crested cormorants or black shags have returned. On April 13, groups of them were observed riding on small ice floes in the river at Chatham.

Clumped closely together and sitting erect on their tails, they resembled black 10-pins as they rode their ice rafts downriver.



■ **Bird:** The pileated woodpecker, cock of the woods or le grand pic, call it what you will, this bird holds a fascination for people that is equalled by few others. **Page 23**

Wayerton selected area for association project

by Bonnie Sweeney

NEWCASTLE

The Miramichi Valley Fish and Game Association has chosen an area in Wayerton for its "adopt a stream" project, said president Mike Doyle.

Doyle hopes to have a group of people and at least 10 canoes when they clean the river banks from the Miners' Bridge to the Wayerton Bridge.

Last year a section of the Southwest Miramichi River was beautified by another fish and game association, he said.

"We've chosen between the Wayerton and Miners' bridges because it is an area which is heavily populated by fishermen during the fishing season. We'll be cleaning some of the areas or walkways leading to the pools as well.

"After we've cleaned it up, there will be signs posted saying our association did it and this will hopefully encourage others to keep it that way.

"Some of the areas we'll be cleaning will be private property. The property owners have allowed people to pass on their land to fish in the river. This is our way of saying thanks to those property owners, also," Doyle said.

Everyone is invited to take part in the cleanup. It's not necessary that they be members of the newly-formed fish and game association, Doyle said.

"The group will devided into crews of two and given a certain area to clean. Perhaps some people would like to make it a family affair. They can enjoy a day out, bring along a lunch and have fun at the same time," he said.

The wildlife federation had recommended rod-per-day waters be cleaned.

"Our members feel it important to clean the rod-per-day waters, but we opted for the open waters," Doyle said.

Doyle sees this project mushrooming.

"If we set the example, who knows, maybe every fisherman will get into the habit of taking along a garbage bag with him each time he goes fishing.

"If everyone did that, in no time our river banks and wooded areas leading to the pools would be enhanced and beautified," Doyle said.

There is no date set yet for the project, but it is tentatively scheduled for a weekend in June.

Training of CMHA helps

The following was written by Fidele Goguen Jr. of Chatham Head to express the benefits he received through assertive training. The course was given by the Canadian Mental Health Association, Chatham. For information on the course call 773-7561.

Class

We are taking a course and it is not straining
This thing we call assertiveness training
We are learning about the rights that we share
And to be happy and make life more fair
It's nice to know our life is under our control
When we know this to be true, our troubled minds we can console
It's nice to know it's sometimes good to give in
To be free from our pride and let the other person win
When we speak our minds to do so with care
Because we may have assumed things which are not ever there
To say thank you when someone finds pleasure in us
And feel good about ourselves without making a fuss
To listen to the feeling behind this spoken word
And see things that could never even otherwise be heard.

Karen

In our teacher we have met a kindred soul
with her guidance she has helped us to reach our goal
it was a privilege to have been a part of her class
a growth experience that will be hard to surpass
she is understanding and challenging at the same time
and her personality sparkles like the sunshine
she comes across as a friend and makes it easy to learn
that our worth as a person does not have to be earned
we thank you very much for your time and your love.
God bless you and good luck, you are pure like a dove.

Pheasants spotted in the wild

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

During the last few summers, we have received scattered reports of ring-necked pheasants in the wild.

These reports have come from Howard, Douglastown and the Beaverbrook Road. Now, on April 7, comes another one, this time from the Weldfield Road.

Colleen Savoy described in detail the bird which she saw on the side of the road. It was undoubtedly a ring-necked pheasant cock.

Since receiving this report, I have learned at least one person in our area keeps semi-domesticated pheasants which he releases each spring.

These pheasants return to him in the fall and he keeps them in his barn for the winter.

Apparently, one brood of pheasant chicks is known to have been raised while they were in the wild a couple of summers ago.

The pheasant cock is 2½ to 3 feet long, about half of this length being accounted for by its long, pointed tail.

Its body and tail are of a variegated brown color, somewhat rufous on the back. It has red wattles on its cheeks like a rooster.

There is usually a thin white ring around its neck and above this ring the neck is iridescent green.

The hen is smaller and shorter, about two feet long. Her tail is shorter and she lacks the bright colors seen on the head and neck of the male. Also, the rest of her plumage is somewhat duller and paler, not rufous tone on the back.

The ring-necked pheasant is a ground feeder and lives in long grass or weeds, etc., never in the bush. It runs fast, but if flushed, has a noisy take-off.

The chicks are mobile as soon as hatched and follow the hen like a brood of chickens or young grouse. It's non-migratory.

■ Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne, who last week reported having a house finch at his bird feeders, now reports there are two of them coming there regularly.

He said the female cardinal, which he first reported last fall, is still coming. She has been a steady boarder at his feeders all winter. He is now hoping she will find a mate for the summer.

■ Also from Sippley comes the first spring report of a great blue heron. He saw two of them near the Auburnville Road on April 5.

Three days later, Greg Bell of Chatham reported seeing four great blue herons near Hardwicke.

■ Sippley brings us yet another observation. He said he watched an otter trying to subdue a large eel. The otter would land the eel on the ice, but then it would get away and get back into the water. He watched this struggle for about 15 minutes and it was still going on when he left.

■ On April 10, Fidele Goguen of Chatham Head reported a very peculiar bird. It was evident from his description that it must be some exotic visitor from the tropics.

He said on its head was a bright green, pointed crest. Across its head was a strip of red or orange. It was grey on the back and had a long grey tail. A broad white band ran along the edge of the wing.

This report puzzeled me, but before the day was over a second report had been received which confirmed the first one.

Parker and Margaret Wheaton had seen the same bird the night before for they described it in very similar terms as had Fidele.

At the time of this earlier sighting, it was on the opposite side of the river, near the Anglican Church in Newcastle.

The Wheatons recognized the bird as being a cockatoo and realized the it was sombody's escaped pet. They gave its length as being about 12 to 14 inches.

They said it was calling so they tried to imitate it hoping this would bring it to them. No luck.

They feared that night-time temperatures might be too cold for it and would have liked to have given it shelter.

■ We have a belated report of another turkey vulture. Lloyd Wormell of Upper Napan said last fall while travelling along the new Millerton by-pass, he came upon a very large, black bird feeding upon a dead porcupine.

The bird had a bare, featherless, pink head and somewhat resembled a turkey.

This description, plus its scavenging habits, indicates it was a turkey vulture.

■ Bald eagles continue to attract attention.

On April 8, Joey Doucet of South Nelson reported seeing one flying along the river and Kerry Casey of Lower Newcastle reported seeing one at the Chatham dump last November.

He said when he and a companion arrived at the dump, they wondered why there were no gulls.

The answer was soon discovered, for over in one corner of the dump was a bald eagle feeding on a gull. It flew off carrying the dead gull.

In the past, we have received a couple of other reports of bald eagles killing gulls.

People question location of birds

May 5/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The following press release from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology explains some of the questions I have been asked during the past winter.

It certainly answers questions regarding pine siskins and although common redpolls are not specifically mentioned they would belong to the group referred therein as northern finches.

In the United States where this press release originated, pine siskins would be of more interest than common redpolls.

Pine siskins commonly winter throughout almost all of the United States whereas common redpolls stay farther north being found only sporadically in the northern states.

Ithaca, N.Y.

This past winter left people all across the eastern United States wondering where the birds were.

Feeders went unoccupied and bags of seed bought in anticipation of flocks of winged guests gathered dust in garages and back hallways.

But, for the first time ever, North American ornithologists can answer "Where are the birds?" even as the winter snows linger on the ground.

According to data compiled for Project Feeder Watch, a continent-wide bird survey run by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and Canada's Long Point Bird Observatory, many birds appear to have stayed north this winter in the boreal forests of Canada.

However, bird numbers at feeders across the continent's midsection and in the west were on par with last winter.

The biggest gap in feeder attendance occurred among the aptly named "winter finches".This group includes such popular feeder visitors as the evening grosbeak, pine siskin and purple finch

Both evening grosbeaks and pine siskins showed decreases of 75 - 100 percent at feeders in the northeastern and southeastern United States where last winter flocks of hundreds stretched the bird-seed budgets of many families.

These decreases, however, were offset by dramatic increases in the numbers of pine siskins in the northwestern U.S. and Canada and of evening grosbeaks in the northern Great Plains.

"Both siskins and grosbeaks are boom or bust species that wander nomadically across the continent, stopping wherever food is plentiful," says Erica Dunn, co-ordinator of Project Feeder Watch.

"This winter they have definitely stayed north in Canada where there appears to have been an excellent supply of the tree seeds they feed upon.

"The relatively mild, snowless winter experienced in much of the east also probably contributed to these birds remaining farther north than in other years."

According to Dunn, "Last winter there were enough siskins for an average of seven to be counted at every feeder in North America throughout the winter.

"But what a difference a year makes. A few people in the northeast who were entertaining flocks of over 300 siskins every day last winter had none this year."

With some surveys estimating that 80 million people in the United States feed birds, the presence or absence of these winter finches attracts a great deal of attention.

And, with annual birdseed sales now topping $1 million, winter finches even produce economic reprecussions for seed companies and farmers!

Project Feeder Watch is already enlisting participants to help monitor feeder birds in the winter of 1989-90.

Participants pay a $9 annual fee to cover the cost of data forms, newsletters, and postage, and must be able to identify the common birds at their feeder.

To include the birds at your feeder, write to Project Feeder Watch, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, New York, 14850; or call 607-254-2414.

Some residents of Newcastle have noticed a lot of gulls flying about town lately. Most of these are ring-billed gulls.

They have returned for the summer. Unlike the very similar herring gulls which remain here year round, ring bills leave our area for the winter.

Ring-bills were back before the end of March. They were definitely identified on March 31 when two of them were seen picking up garbage at Harkins Elementary School.

Here, the black ring on their bills and the greenish-yellow color of their legs were seen — proof they were not herring gulls.

Herring gulls have pale pinkish legs and lack the black ring on the bill. Also herring gulls are slightly larger than ringbills.

Owls very common in New Brunswick

May 12/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Owls! These eerie birds of the night are found in greater variety here in New Brunswick than they are in most other parts of eastern North America.

This information is contained in the 1989 winter issue of the *Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas Newsletter*.

According to this newsletter, in New Brunswick during 1988, evidence of breeding was obtained for eight species of owl.

They include the great horned owl, the barred owl, the short-eared owl, the long-eared owl, the Hawk owl, the screech owl, the saw-whet owl and the boreal owl.

This last species provided one of the most interesting and unexpected discoveries in this regard. It was made by Hilaire and Rose-Aline Chaiasson of Lameque.

The Chiassons found in the peat bogs of northeastern New Brunswick when the taped calls of owls were played, boreal owls would answer; and, they would answer to both the calls of boreal and saw-whet owls.

Recently, two local bird watchers, John and Gwen MacKenzie of Bushville, decided to try the same thing in the bog between Point Sapin and Escuminac. They got similar results.

On the evening of May 4, between nightfall and mid-night, they conducted their experiment. They drove through the bog stopping periodically to play their owl tape.

On it was recorded the calls of the the great horned owl, the barred owl and the saw-whet owl.

The calls of the first two owls elicited no response; but, at one location, the call of the saw-whet owl brought responses from two different boreal owls — one far off, the other close at hand.

The response of the boreal owls was recorded and later compared to the boreal owl calls on a record back at their home. The two matched exactly.

As the MacKenzies described the evening, it must have been a very memorable one. From the throats of millions of frogs came a great cacophnony of sound while dancing in the sky above them was a spectacular display of northern lights.

Until now, the boreal owl has been considered to be a very rare species in New Brunswick, its main breeding range being far to the north of us — in northern Quebec and Labrador.

Although one or two pairs have for some years been known to nest at Grand Manan, this has been seen as an isolated pocket of such activity.

Other than at Grand Manan, the boreal owl has been regarded as only a winter visitor to New Brunswick and a very rare one at that.

Now, it appears it is more common and widespread than was previously thought — its preferred habigtat being the large peat bogs of our province.

Incidentally, as mentioned in an earlier column, another bird species whose breeding range was previously thought to be far to the north of us was last year found nesting in one of our peat bogs. That was the solitary sandpipers.

The boreal owl (La nyctale Boréale) is small, but not as small as the saw-whet (La petite nyctale). The boreal is 9 to 10 inches long, the saw-whet, 7 to 8½ inches long.

These two little owls are similar in color and appearance. Both are generally brownish and speckled and both are without ear tufts. But, the range of the boreal is much more northerly than that of the saw-whet.

Besids the eight species of wol mentioned previously, and for which there is breeding evidence, there are also three other species which are known to visit our province.

These are the snowy owl, the great grey owl and the barn owl.

■ Greg Bell of Chatham reports that while snowmobiling at Escuminac in March, he saw three snowy owls — all three spaced about one-quarter mile apart. One of them was pure white, the other two grey or somewhat spotted.

Local residents told him there had been four snowy owls staying in the area all winter.

Greg also reported, that on top of the snow in the peat bogs, he saw a lot of mice tracks of some kind. He suspected the owls were feeding on the mice.

Greg has been hearing great horned owls near Chatham and Burns Adams says for many years now there has been a great horned owl living at the exact same location along the Black River.

The dangerous goshawk pays visit to Newcastle

May 19/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

On April 6, Mary Rawlinson of Newcastle reported receiving a visit from a goshawk.

She says it perched in a tree beside her house remaining there long enough for her to study it in detail.

She noted the banding on the tail and the white stripe over the eye.

The goshawk is a two-foot long hawk, dark grey above, light grey beneath. It is uncommon, but may be seen in New Brunswick at any time of the year.

You may recall earlier in the winter another goshawk was reported by Greg Bell of Chatham.

The goshawk is reputed to be the most dangerous bird in Canada. However, it is dangerous only during the breeding season and only when one is in the vicinity of its nest.

When these conditions are met, it apparently does not hesitate to strike a human intruder on the head, inflicting injury with its claws.

According to the Canadian Wildlife Services "Hinterland Who's Who," this attack may be preceded by loud warning cries or it may come without warning.

According to Terres, the female is much more dangerous than the male. He describes her as the "completely dominant partner."

Fortunately, few people come near its nest for when it nests it retreats to the wilderness and selects a site free from human disturbance.

I know of only one person who has been attacked by a goshawk. That was Anthony "Tony" Erskine of Sackville.

He narrowly escaped injury, but the incident apparently impressed upon him the danger of intruding on the goshawk's territory.

Tony has spent most of his life studying birds and in his job with the Canadian Wildlife Service has written many reports about them.

Therefore, at the time of the attack, he was no doubt aware he was in the danger zone.

As I recall his account: he said as he approached the goshawk's nest, he could see no hawk on the nest nor any hawk anywhere about it.

However, as he reached the base of the nest tree, the hawk suddenly flipped over the edge and plunged swiftly and directly at him.

The breeding season for the goshawk extends from early April to about the middle of July.

■ On April 26, Gordon Lenehan reported there were two Bonaparte's gulls in the pond in the hollow beside the Douglastown sewage treatment plant.

They remained there most of the day for they were there at noon and were still there at dusk. At that time, they were dabbling in the water at the entrance to the culvert.

The Bonaparte's gull is small, dainty, and graceful. It is very attractive and noticeably different from the other gulls. It resembles a tern more than a gull.

In spring and summer, it has an all black head and bill except for a thin, white eye-ring.

In fall and winter, it has a white head with a black ear-spot. Its legs are red. Otherwise, its coloring is much like other gulls, grey on the back, white below.

This gull is most likely to be seen here in spring or in fall. However, in recent years, more and more of them have been spending their summers at certain locations in our province, mainly along our east coast.

Those remaining for the summer appear to be non-breeders. They have never been known to nest here.

■ The fox sparrow is our largest sparrow. Its rusty red coloration, which is especially pronounced on the tail, gives rise to its name.

Its white breast is heavily blotched and speckled with reddish-brown.

It would be mistaken for a small thrush, but its stubby bill marks it as a sparrow rather than a thrush.

On April 25, Doug Underhill of the MacKinnon Road reported a fox sparrow at his feeder along with a white-throated sparrow.

On the following day, his neighbor, Linda Hartlen, reported two fox sparrows and a white-throsted sparrow at her feeder.

In New Brunswick, the fox sparrow is a migrant, and is likely to be seen only during a few days in spring.

Its habit of scratching noisily among dead leaves, often under shrubbery, will sometimes alert our attention to it.

It is often tricky to observe. It tends to flit about keeping a bit of shrubbery between itself and the observer.

However, at Linda's feeder, they were clearly observed as they fed on the ground outside a set of large glass doors.

■ On May 10, a raven's nest with two young almost ready to fledge was reported by Lloyd Jardine of the Warwick Road.

The raven's breeding season begins about March 1. Approximately two months are required from start of incubation to the time the young are fledged.

Bird watching proves best during spring

by Tom Greathouse

GUEST COLUMN

Spring months offer an excellent opportunity to become closely acquainted with the many, often brightly colored bird species which nest in or migrate through the Miramichi.

During the rest of the year, some nesting species are absent or hard to see when hardwood trees are covered with leaves.

A favorable environment can be created by having bird feeders, by planting flowers and shurbs which will produce food and shelter for locally nesting species such as hummingbirds, swallows and chickadees. Encouraging natural vegetation will also help.

Typical plumage in the spring, as shown in the bird guides, simplifies identification of new species.

Male goldfinches, a dull green in fall and winter, are now a bright yellow as pictured.

Breeding display of special tracts of feathers by the ruby-crowned and golden-crowned kinglets, and by the red-winged blackbird shows clearly the colors for which the birds are named.

Without this display, in the fall the ruby-crowned kinglet flitting through the branches of a maple tree looks much like an immature bay-breasted or chestnut sided warbler.

Most species are found in or adjacent to typical habitats in the spring. This also simplifies identification.

For example, the Miramichi's hermit thrush, an extraordinary songster, is found "in conifer or mixed woods, on forest floors" (Petersons Field Guide).

Unique habits of some species are helpful. As Peterson notes, "the mocking bird is often heard at night" in the breeding season.

Last week a mocking bird was also seen in Douglasfield by John Keating of Chatham. This species is expanding its range north.

Spring songs are often the easiest key to identification, a rewarding aspect of spring birding. There are three Miramichi species of flycathers, for example, which "when breeding are readily separated by voice, habitat and way of nesting." From Hal Harrison's *"A Field Guide to Birds' Nests."*

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

In migration or on wintering grounds, these species are lumped into a class named "empidonal flycatchers."

Knowing bird songs often eliminates the need to search out a bird identified only an hour before in a different location.

Although total number of species seen in a day is not a goal in itself, a variety of obswervations adds to birding enjoyment.

If desired, bird songs can be studied by listening to tapes before going into the field.

Courtship activity is often an impressive activity and is always unique. In the case of the ground nesting American woodcock and the common snipe, both of which nests in the Miramichi, their springtime aerial courtship displays and sounds are in sharp contrast with their highly effective camouflage.

Last spring a gentleman from Sunny Corners spent two to three minutes describing the location of a woodcock on its nest, while the bird remained motionless only ten feet away.

The sight and the sounds accompanying the male woodcocks aerial courtship activiey are spectacular.

The bird first climbs almost straight up, high in the semi-darkness where it does a peculiar sky dance, then plummets back to earth.

He pulls out of the dive just above the earth. (Godfrey's *"The Birds of Canada"*,1986). The memory of seeing this display in May 1950 is still clear.

The courtship and breedding habits of sea birds which nest in large colonies, such as the 50,000 or so northern gannets (fous des bassan) which breed and nest on some cliffs on L'isle-Bonaventure near Perce, Quebec, are probably best known.

Beginning about mid-June, the provincial park on L'isle-Bonaventure is open and the breeding gannets can be viewed from a distance of 10-20 feet. Several other sea birds also nest on L'isle.

Spring birding is usually rewarding because the birds are in typical habitats and because the parents fly to and from the nest several times per day.

Their songs are frequent and unique at this time, and their colors are brightest.

To help with indentification at this time, two books are recommended: Robert W. Stokes *"A Guide to Birding Behavior,"* (Little, Brown & Co. Toronto 1979) and Colin Harrison's *"A Field Guide to the nests, Eggs and Nestlings of North American Birds"* (Collins, Toronto, 1984).

Teamwork did it

May 5/89

TEAMWORK did it.

Newspapers owned by Cadogan Publishing Ltd. won a series of awards at the Atlantic Community Newspaper Association's annual competitions this year.

The awards were announced on the weekend in Halifax.

The *Miramichi Leader* was judged the best paper in its class in the Atlantic provinces. The *Miramichi Weekend* was second. There were 13 papers competing.

The *King's County Record* was second in its class. There were 11 papers competing.

The *Dalhousie News* came second in its class with 10 papers competing.

There were also a number of special awards given out — the *Miramichi Weekend* was judged to have the best front page, composition and layout, advertising, and news and features in its class.

The *Miramichi Leader* had the best editorial page.

The *Miramichi Weekend* had the second best Christmas section among all papers in the Atlantic provinces with 24 papers competing.

The *Miramichi Weekend*, *Kings Country Record* and *Dalhouise News* all won best advertising awards in their classes.

Reporter Cathy Carnahan placed second for the best resources story and Harry Walker placed third in the specialty column category.

It's a long list. And it points to one thing. Hard work by a dedicated team of people has made us one of the best newspapers in the country.

Hard work by people in every department — office, sales, editorial, production and printing — is needed to make that true.

We're proud of what we've done and intend to keep doing.

You should be proud too. The people doing it are members of your community and others like it.

— Rick MacLean

Bird survey ignores boundaries

by Tom Greathouse

GUEST COLUMN

June 2/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

May 19/89

For several years, hundreds of Canadian and U.S. residents have ignored political boundries in censusing bird species which breed in North America.

No Meech Lake Accord was necessary for Quebecers to join their fellow countrymen in censusing birds which nest in Canada.

No "free trade" agreement was required for cooperation between residents of Canada and the United States.

Some provinces have completed the field work and published the results.

Others, such as New Brunswick, have not had sufficient numbers of volunteers to collect data from some of the more remote areas. Another year will probably be required here.

Donald Gordon is an excellent example of part-time local participation. He practises multiple-use management on his forest land in the Maple Glen area.

Among his activities are the production of Christmas trees and the development of an environment suitable for native wildlife species.

For instance, he has developed some small ponds around which he shares upkeep with a family of beavers (castors).

Tree swallows (hirondelle bicolor) nest in boxes placed on the front of his pondside house.

Based on the frequent trips to and from the beach area at his largest pond, spotted sandpipers (hirondelle des granges) are nesting nearby.

Last week, while shearing some balsam fir (sapin baumier) trees for sale at Christmas, he found the nest of a blue-winged teal (Sarcelle à ailes bleues) some 300-400 yards from the nearest pond.

The nest containing 10 dull white eggs was well hidden from man and other predators. It was within three inches of a small fir tree not large enough to be sheared.

While Gordon was shaping a nearby tree, the duck became nervous and left the nest.

One hundred or so yards away he found the nest of a northern junco (junco ardoise) with four brown spotted white eggs. These four observations will be recorded in breeding bird atlas records for the appropriate square of land.

If other readers note breeding activities in the Miramichi or on islands in Miramichi Bay, a telephone call to Tom Greathouse, 622-8889 would be appreciated prior to June 17.

After that date, either Harry Walker or Greathouse would be pleased to receive the information.

A number of species continue to breed, having a second or third clutch of eggs in summer months. The goldfinch (chardonmenet jaune) is reported to breed as late as August.

For species such as the robin and house sparrow, which are very numerous, adequate information is on record.

May 30 was a typical, rewarding day for collecting data for the breeding bird survey.

The six-mile "square" is located roughly in a block beginning with McGraw Brook campground and DNR fire station on the Renous-Plaster Rock road. This is the northwest corner.

Blackville is approximately the southwest corner. Principal access is via a road from Blackville to the Dungarvon River, then north through the block for several miles.

The various habitat types, such as swampy areas, heavily forested and open areas, are sampled.

After crossing the Dungarvon, some good logging roads permit adequate sampling. These roads are not shown on any available maps.

Highlights of the day included the following:

- 5 a.m.: Reveille. Robins (merle d'amerique) had been singing since 4 a.m. in Douglasfield.
- 5:40 a.m.: Departure by Highway 8 to Renous, then Highway 108 towards Plaster-Rock.
- 6:25 a.m.: 17 km west of Renous, had to brake sharply. A woodcock (bedcasse d'amerique) and five very young chicks covered ⅔ of the highway.

My front tires stopped inches short of two chicks. They were no larger than tennis balls when huddled down in fear. Two of the chicks had to be chased off the highway before a large truck passed in the opposite direction.

- 7 a.m.: Just past junction of highway 108 and 420, a stop was made to listen. Robins were almost as thick as blackflies. The white-throated sparrow was singing "Oh sweet, Canada, Canada, Canada." A downy woodpecker was imitating an automatic rifle.
- 7:10 a.m.: Kestrel (crecerelle d'amerique). A bird seen around the world in the northern hemisphere; tree and barn swallows.
- 7:25 a.m.: Yellow warbler (Parulinejaune) singing beside a stream; hermit thrush (Garvè solitaire) one of the most beautiful, plaintive songs in the bird world.
- 7:45 a.m.: The surprise of the day, a scarlet tanager (Tangara ecarlate.) *Birds of Canada*, 1986, notes "New Brunswick: Breed sparingly: Fredericton, Saint John." Both male and female were present.

When the area was left at 9:30 a.m., the male was singing as if he had established his territory. Also saw yellow throat (Paraline Masquée), a warbler, and chickadee (Mesange a tete noire) here.

- 9:45 a.m.: Pileated woodpecker (grand pic), magnolia warbler (Pauline a tete condrée and tennesee warbler (paruline obscure).
- 10:10 a.m.: Evening grosbeaks (Gros-bec errant).
- 10:35 a.m.: McGraw Brook campground. Ovenbird (paruline coutonnée), northern junco, kingfisher, (Martin-Pechew d'Amerique) and yellow-billed sapsucker (pic macule).

Three small plants which grow across Canada and northern U.S. were flowering; wild strawverry, blueberry and low flowering dogwood (bunchberry).

- 1:45 p.m.: On road west from Blackville to Dungarvon saw a deer and porcupine, as well as fresh beaver cutting. No new species of birds observed here.
- 3:45 p.m.: Left Blackville for Douglasfield.

In summation of the day, the observation of the tanagers made it all worthwhile.

The significance of the observation cannot be evaluated on the basis of such meager evidence.

However, it fits into a pattern noted for the cardinal, the turkey vulture and other species: "Extending range Northward."

This has been occuring for a number of years for species which commonly go to feeders, such as cardinals. However, tanagers seldom go to feeders unless special food is placed there and unless dense forests are nearby.

If the tanagers continue to move north, it may be an indication the greenhouse or warming trend in the northern hemisphere is taking place at a rapid rate.

Monitoring population changes of peregrine falcons and bald eagles led to discontinuance of DDT.

The breeding bird survey results may reflect something which should be changed, but it may also reflect something beyond man's control.

In any event, the breeding bird survey is adding to man's knowledge of his environment.

It seems the survey is justified, especially since most of the work is done by volunteers who receive no pay for their time nor compensation for their expenses. Meanwhile, it creates good will between two neighboring countries.

Attracting many birds popular hobby on river

by Tom Greathouse

GUEST COLUMN

June 9/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Attracting birds to their homes was found to be Americans' second most popular hobby in the early 1980s.

In the Miramichi, this is also a popular hobby. This conclusion is based on facts such as recent large increases in the sale of bird feeders, bird houses and feed for birds.

For example, in early June, one supplier of Alberta-grown sunflower seeds had only two 20-kg sacks on hand. Last year, a smaller inventory was sold out in late May.

Two local suppliers of humming bird feeders had none in late May. Two other shops had one feeder left.

This article suggests an important, long-term method of increasing the numbers of birds our grandchildren can see.

It involves habitat management to improve stands of woody plants and perennial herbaceous species so they will support greater wildlife populations than today.

Destruction of forest habitat is recognized as the cause of 20th century extinction or near-extinction of North American species such as the passenger pigeon and two woodpeckers, the ivory-billed and red cockaded.

Each person can contribute to a better habitat for birds by protecting or restoring those trees, shrubs and, yes, weeds which are vital to some species.

For example, in *Birds of Canada* Godfrey writes the American (and Miramichi) goldfinch "inhabits weedy and cultivated fields, roadsides and other open, weedy places not far from edges of woody areas, tall shrubs and orchards. In nesting, the goldfinch requires open patches of deciduous trees or shrubs."

Where these conditions no longer exist, we can often restore them.

Two books obtained locally give details on which plants attract each species of bird likely to be seen here and how to establish these plants.

In Andre Dion's *A Garden of Birds*, 1988 (available in English and French), we read "A bird garden should contain sunflowers to attract the rose-breasted grosbeak (grosbec a poitrine rose) and ruby-throated hummingbird (colibri a gorge rubis).

When the seeds mature, at least nine other Miramichi species listed in *How To Attract Birds*, an Orthobook edited by Ken Burke, 1983, prefer them to most other seeds found in bird feeders.

The Ortho book, obtainable through MacCallum's in Chatham Head, is recommended.

It contains information on how to protect fruit trees from birds while still enjoying the pleasure of having the birds on one's property.

In addition, it has chapters on providing food, water and nesting sites, birds in the wild, and a final chapter on habitat needs, range, food and nesting preferences of 49 species of birds likely to visit Miramichi gardens.

Although not listed in the table indicating seed preferences, common redpolls and pine siskins prefer thistle (niger) seed to any other.

■ Three other species rarely seen in New Brunswick were sighted near Kouchibouguac in early May by Barry Spencer, chief of visitor services at Kouchibouguac National Park: Wilson's phalarop (phalarope de wilson), shoveler (canard souchet) and lesser scaup (petit morillon).

Since he had seen the birds at a well-maintained sewage treatment lagoon in Saint-Louis-de-Kent, not far from the park boundary, it seemed fitting his observations be shared at an Environment Week program designed by the Carrefour Beausoleil Community Centre to encourage environment protection practices.

Spencer has been seeing phalaropes for three years in the same location. In 1987, there were eight pairs in breeding plumage; in 1988, four pairs, in early May 1989, only a single bird was seen.

This species, which breeds mainly in western Canada, feeds on land and aquatic insects. It is especially fond of mosquito larvae and likes brine shrimp and small crustaceans such as sand fleas.

Its method of feeding in shallow water is unique. It spins rapidly in circles while riding lightly on the surface. Bits of food, churned up with the silt are seized in lightning movements of its long, narrow bill.

As with the other members of the phalarope family, but contrary to the pattern with most bird species, the female is more brightly colored than the male.

The latter also inherits the chores of building the nest, incubating the eggs and caring for the young.

Mallard drake the Dapper Dan

The following article on a Canadian duck study was written for us by columnist Desmond Dolan.

Harry Walker

June 23/89

WILDLIFE

This study involved two species of ducks: the American black duck (anas rubripes) and the mallard duck (anas platyrhynchos).

There can be matings between the two species and these matings are usually black duck (female) X mallard (drake) because this drake makes a better show at courtship and is more spiffy and dapper in his plumage.

It has gotten to the point that if the female black duck does not return to mating with the male of her own species the black duck may become extinct.

It could all happen because the mallard drake is better at the art of love.

The black duck drake isn't much to look at. He is about as non-descript as ducks come. He has a mottled, brown body and a faded tan head.

In this species, a male and female look very much alike. When a female black duck sees a male of her own species, she doesn't even turn her head.

He is the Dapper Dan of the waterfowl world. His head is a gorgeous green.

His neck has a sparkling white collar and a greenish-yellow bill with a black nail at the tip — and what female duck could resist his orange feet.

A view of the mallard drake from the upper side shows a chestnut-brown vest, a white body, a purplish-blue speculum and a brown back that becomes progressively darker until at the rump it is glossy black.

If that coloration is not enough, one should see his motions as he lets the female become aware he's around.

He is very assertive in his wooing, while the male black duck will swim away and not fight for what presumably should be his own mate.

He tends to give up too easily and admit the mallard is much more attractive than he.

Devotion

After the mallard drake has mated with the black duck hen, he becomes a picture of devotion. The courtship continues through the whole northward migration.

The mallard drake's and black duck hen's mating tactics begin on the water. They swim around each other periodically stopping to face each other.

The drake then raises his head high and extends his wings to full length. Then, he reaches back with his bill to preen a spot just behind his wing. This exposes to the hen all his beautiful wing colors.

Folding his wings again, he dips his bill in the water and then with a quick sideways flip of his bill, he creates an arc of mist.

He does it so gracefully, it appears as though he is sprinkling her with holy water. Perhaps the hen says "Asperges me".

When the sun is shining, the arc of mist around the hen becomes a rainbow. The hen then lets him know of her admiration by touching her bill to his.

150 common names

One can hardly blame a drab female black duck for succumbing to this mallard dandy.

Over the world in every language, the mallard species has been recognized as the most prestigious of all ducks. People of various languages have given the species, 150 common names.

The Canadian researchers wrote: "The aggression and later devotion of the mallard drake are not without purpose. They give the little hen a message that he will be a better protector during the critical egg-laying, nesting and fledgling periods."

However, the mallard soon forgets about his mating promise.

When the pair arrive in the north, the hen selects the nest site and she does all the nest building.

She lines it with down from her breast. Then she lays 8 to 12 blue-green eggs and begins the incubation chore for 26 to 29 days.

As nesting begins, the mallard drake takes off to join the other males and he molts. Losing both feathers and attractive wing quills leaves him helpless for any emergency duty.

The female black duck's dream of a protector has gone with his feathers.

The black duck hen rears her young and protects them from predators.

The Canadian researchers say they are not yet clear on whether or not the mallard drake rejoins his family.

Along the lower Genesee River near Rochester, people feed the ducks.

There, one can see both mallard and black duck drakes, both mallard and black duck hens and both types of ducklings swimming around together.

Sandpiper easy to recognize

by Tom Greathouse

GUEST COLUMN

On a Sunday morning early in June, I met Donald Gordon of Maple Glen and revisited his forest land nearby.

The day before he had reported finding a nest of trespassers, a pair of spotted sandpipers (chevalier branlequiue), near the northwest corner of his pondside cabin.

Gordon's feathered guests belong to a common species which breed along sparsely-populated shores of the Miramichi's lakes and streams and all across North America from the northern edge of the United States' "deep south" to the Arctic Circle.

It is one of the easiest sandpipers to identify because it constantly bobs its tail up and down ("teeters") as it runs or walks along the beach.

The look-alike male and female can be readily identified in the breeding season, late spring to mid-summer, by the large, round, dark brown spots on their white breasts.

Before they migrate to the southern U.S., the Caribbean and South America to winter, the spots have gone, but the white wedge of feathers which extends from the breast up to the shoulder separates the species from all other shorebirds.

In any plumage, another aid to identification is that this species will allow a person to get fairly close before it flies along the beach a short distance.

It characteristically beats its wings in a unique, shallow arc, giving a stiff bowed appearance ("Peterson).

Contrary to the most prevalent pattern in the bird world, the female spotted sandpiper takes the lead in territory formation, defence and courtship.

In the spring, she arrives at the nesting site first, usually returning to the same area where she established her territory the previous year.

June 16/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

During courtship, it is the female who displays, extending her neck and ruffling her throat feathers in the same fashion as a male ruffed grouse (gélinotte huppée) struts during courtship. Copulation occurs a day or two after pairing and nest-building.

Not realizing he was about to interfere in the reproductive affairs of his squatter guests, Gordon had started to clear ground to add a wing to his cabin.

The plaintive cries of a sandpiper took him off his tractor to investigate.

Under a small pin cherry tree which had been pushed over last year and is now growing horizontally, he discovered a nest with three eggs.

The tree had formed a solid screen of green leaves impenetrable to human eyes.

This typical situation is tersely described in *Stokes Nature Guides*, Vol. 11, as "nest site shaded by low vegetation".

The guests had followed the standard sandpiper prescription for building a nest: find a shallow depression located near water, shaded from the sun and line it with grass twigs and similar vegetative materials (Colin Harrison's "A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of North American birds").

As with many species which nest on the ground, the nest is simple, but engineered and constructed to successfully raise a new generation.

So long as the eggs are protected during egg-laying and incubation (about four weeks), the structure meets all specifications.

In this nest, a fourth and possibly a fifth egg could have been laid after our visit.

However, as Stokes reports that some females have their eyes on another male even while laying the third egg, this clutch may be limited to three.

Stokes and Harrison both report some females are known to consort and produce clutches with up to five males in a season.

In such cases, the female leaves total responsibility for incubation and tending of the young chicks (nestlings) to the male until they can fly.

Within a few hours after the last chick is hatched, this involves movement of the family away from the nest toward water or more open space.

Two signals are used in these three weeks. One causes the fledglings to remain motionless when danger is imminent. Another results in their gathering close to the parent.

During the pre-flight movement at nightfall, the parent may make a shallow depression in the soil where the chicks gather. When they can fly, the male is free.

This story could not have had a beginning except for the sharp eyes and ears of Gordon and his willingness to share his environment with both the birds and mammals which were resident on his forest land for centuries.

■ Gordon's tolerance and appreciation of wildlife leads him into a repeated struggle with a family of beavers.

The beavers want to raise the level of his lower pond some six inches which would cause a road over the dam he constructed to wash out.

The beavers plug the culvert while Gordon clears it in a mental tug-of-war.

Morning calm: Ideal time for bird survey

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE July 7/89

On our arrival home from Churchill, one of the first jobs that awaited Winnie and I was our annual Red Bank breeding bird survey.

This was done on the morning of June 20 — a clear, calm morning, and ideal for our purposes.

This is the 16th consecutive year that we have run this survey; and, for seven years previously, it was done by other observers.

This survey is run along a 25-mile route. It starts at the top of the lane above Boom Road. From here, it runs through Sunny Corner and Red Bank, then down the Warwick Road to Quarryville.

Beyond here, it passes through White Rapids, Gray Rapids and Coughlan; then ends up in the bush further south.

Along this route, we make a three-minute stop every half mile, during which we identify as many birds as possible.

As I do so, I call their names out to Winnie who records them. Identification may be made by either sight or sound.

Weather obersvations are made after every ten stops and counting at the first stop, begins at two minutes before 5 a.m. — that is exactly one half hour before sunrise. This year, we finished our last stop at 9:04 a.m.

What follows is the result of our survey — the most frequently identified species being listed first, the least frequently identified last.

Starlings 55, robins 39, crows 36, white-throated sparrows (old Tom Peabodys) 29, American redstarts 27, chipping sparrows 27, ovenbirds 23, red-eyed vireos (preacher birds) 21.

Bank sparrows 20, common yellow-throats 18, song sparrows 17, magnolia warblers 16, tree swallows 14, barn swallows 13, alder flycatchers 13.

Northern waterthrush 12, veery 10, ravens 10, gulls (species undetermined) 10, cedar waxwings 9, Swainson's thrush 9, yellow warbler 8, black-capped chickadee 8.

Least flycatcher 7, red-winged blackbirds 7, purple finches 6, goldfinches 6, winter wrens 6, grackles (blackbirds) 6, ruby-crowned kinglets 5, rock doves (common pigeons) 5.

Savannah sparrows 5, pine siskins 5, house sparrows 4, solitary vireos 4, killdeers 3, red-breasted nuthatchers 3, gray catbirds 3, parula warblers 3, myrtle (yellow-rumped warblers) 3.

Bobolinks 3, white-winged cross-bills 3, evening grosbeaks 3.

Two each of the following: black duck, spotted sandpipers, mourning dove, yellow-bellied sapsucker, yellow-bellied flycatcher, olive-sided flycatcher, yellow-shafted flicker, hermit thrush, Tennessee warbler, rose-breasted grosbeak, and brown-headed cowbird.

One each of the following: osprey, pileated woodpecker, wood pewee, great crested flycatcher, blue jay, warbling vireo, Philadelphia vireo, Nashville warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, Canada warbler, dark-eyed (slate-colored) junco, and Baltimore oriole.

There are 66 species and 568 individual birds in the above list.

This year, starlings came out on top, and it is only the second time in the last 16 years they have done so.

This high starling count was no doubt due to the late date on which the survey was run — it having been run about a week or ten days later than usual.

The explanation: starlings are early nesters; and many young starlings have left the nest by June 20 — the date of our count.

These young starlings are very noisy and tend to perch in prominent places such as telephone and hydro wires. They swell the starling count.

The same does not apply to the robin count although it also is an early nester.

In fact, if anything, the reverse seems to be the case — that is, a late count results in fewer robins being recorded, at least that has been my experience.

Again the explanation: young robins tend to be relatively quiet after leaving the nest; and most of them keep hidden in the brush or in shrubbery, etc., so that few of them are detected.

Also, the male robins tend to sing somewhat less as the season advances.

This year Tennessee warblers were in short supply. Their populations are known to fluctuate widely, and results on this route bear this out.

According to Tony Erskine of the *Canadian Wildlife Service* in Sackville, Tennessee warbler populations build up in areas of high spruce budworm incidence; and a build-up of these warblers is a good indicator of a build-up of spruce budworm.

This year we recorded only two Tennessee warblers. In 1983, we recorded 36.

However, there are other areas of the Miramichi where there are still lots of Tennessee warblers, and presumably lots of spruce budworm.

Great birdwatching

June 30/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

To begin, I would like to thank Tom Greathouse for writing my column while Winnie and I were away on a trip.

I would also like to thank Desmond Dolan for the article he contributed on the interbreeding between the mallard and black duck.

Our trip took us to Churchill, Manitoba. Our reason for going there? Winnie's friend, Vera Gould invited us to come and visit her. Besides, it sounded like an interesting place to see, expecially for a birdwatcher.

We were not disappointed. It lived up to our expectations.

We drove most of the way, then left our car at The Pas and took the train the rest of the way. There is no road into Churchill.

In driving to The Pas, we did not follow the most direct route. Rather, we followed a broad arc south of the Great Lakes, passing through Amish country in southern Pennsylvania, then westward through northern Missouri and eastern Nebraska. From there we travelled almost directly north to The Pas.

Our return trip followed a more direct route eastward to New Brunswick.

When we arrived in Churchill on June 1, it was cold. We had been warned of this, but actually experiencing it was many times more convincing than the warning.

Gale-force wind

Although it was a little above freezing, this is no proper guage of how cold it felt. It was cloudy with occasional light drizzle.

On top of this, there was a gale-force wind whipping off the ice of Hudson's Bay with not a tree to break its force.

The next day, I was better prepared. I put on winter underwear, a heavy sweater, a windbreaker, a pair of mitts and two knitted toques, one on top of the other. Now I was comfortable.

The weather gradually warmed up as we were there and the winds gradually abated. When we left Churchill on June 8, it was a lovely day, warm, sunny and with little wind.

However, there were still many big snowdrifts left to melt. These relics of winter remain late for the fierce winter winds pile the snow high and pack it hard.

I have given you the most negative aspect of Churchill first. It has other redeeming features and most people seem to enjoy living here.

A modern complex houses under one roof the high school, public school, hospital, cafeteria, theatre, swimming pool, hockey arena, children's playground, rest area, etc. This is undoubtedly a great asset during the long, cold winters.

On our second day, while watching a pie-throwing contest in this complex, Winnie and I discovered the woman standing beside us was originally from Doaktown.

Her name is now Meghan Church — Meghan Jones when she was growing up in Doaktown. She has lived in Churchill for the last 12 years.

Tundra experience

It was a new experience to walk over the boulder-strewn tundra. The sights and sounds were so different. This was what I most enjoyed about Churchill.

Snow geese were abundant. They were the most noticeable form of wildlife. Great flocks of them spread over the tundra.

Others flew overhead in "V"- or line-formation — their honkings continually drawing our attention to them.

Canada geese were sometimes mixed with them. Most were in migration for they nest far to the north.

A great variety of wild ducks were present. They were seen on almost every small lake and pond that was open. (Many lakes and ponds were still ice-covered.)

Shovellers, pintail, wigeon, oldsquaw and green-winged teal were especially common.

The wild and previously unknown calls of wimbrels, godwits and golden plovers added much to the mystery and charm of this tundra habitat.

The golden plovers were especially beautiful when seen with the sun shining on them.

Spectacular jaeger

The most spectacular bird seen was a parasitic jaeger. My attention was drawn to it by its loud cries as it flew high aloft.

When almost directly overhead, it made a sudden and precipitous plunge toward the earth.

When only a few feet from the ground, it just as suddenly flattened its course while travelling at great speed.

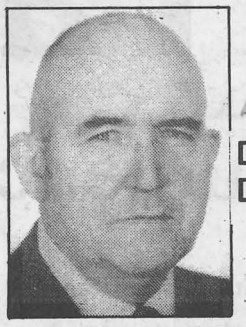
I was impressed and was left wondering what had prompted this awesome exhibition of strength and dexterity.

Peterson describes jaegers as being hawklike seabirds that harass gulls and terns, forcing them to disgorge.

He says they winter at sea, but in summer are found along coasts and over tundra as well as at sea.

Two central tail feathers extending well beyond the rest of the tail gives the jaegers a profile that is unique among birds.

Nest of young birds spotted for first time



Desmond Dolan

TECHNOLOGY

On July 9, while working on the *Maritime Breeding Bird Atlas* project, I chanced upon a ruby-throated hummingbird's nest with two young birds in it.

It was a first for me.

The nest was in solid bush beside a narrow dirt road which runs from the new Millerton bypass to Crocker Lake. It was in a maple sapling at a height of about eight feet from the ground.

It was on a bare limb — no attempt having been made to conceal it. But it was so well camouflaged it appeared to be only a knot on the limb.

What drew my attention was the adult female bird which was feeding the young. When I first saw her, I wondered why she was hovering there since there was no flower of any kind to attract her.

Then, I noticed the small bump on the tree branch in front of her and I wondered if it could be a nest. I raised my binoculars and confirmed this.

Two tiny, needle-like bills were pointing upward out of the nest. Also, the tops of two tiny heads showed above the brim. Their pin-head eyes peeked over the edge.

■ When returning from Crocker Lake, I met Jack and Winnie Kelly of Millerton who were hiking into the lake. Jack said a family of loons was raised on the lake last year.

When I inquired about motor boats, he said there are seldom any motor boats on the lake.

Motor boats are responsible for destroying a lot of loon eggs and are a contributing factor in the decline of our loon population.

Since the loon generally nests right at the water's edge, the wake from passing motor boats often washes their eggs away.

■ On July 24, Mrs. William Fitzpatrick of Boom Road reported a bald eagle is sometimes seen along the river there and sometimes perches along the riverfront of their property.

She also reported an eastern bluebird had recently been seen across the river at Cassilis.

Earlier in the spring Earlene Hunter also reported one there. Perhaps it has set up housekeeping there.

■ On July 13, another blue bird (that is blue in color, but not blue in name) was seen on the Bathurst Highway. This was a male indigo bunting.

It later flew into a dead tree where, with the morning sun shining directly on it, its beautiful color showed up to best advantage.

A week later, July 20, this bird was again seen at this same location. It was singing in the same clump of popals as it was the week before — an indication it may have a mate there.

The male indigo bunting, in breeding plumage, is handsome indeed — a rich, deep blue both above and below.

Except for the edges of the wings and the tail, which are black, the blue color is uniform throughout.

By contrast, the male eastern bluebird has a rusty breast and a white belly. Otherwise, it also is blue.

It also is larger than the indigo bunting — the bluebird being larger than a sparrow, the indigo bunting the size of a small sparrow.

To my knowledge, this is the first indigo bunting reported in our area in the last 16 years. In 1973, two were reported — one near White Rapids, the other at East Point.

The female indigo bunting shares none of the glamor of her mate. She is a modest brown color, lighter below, darker above and with no distinct markings.

In fall, the male exchanges most of his blue feathers for brown ones like the female's.

■ A pair of hairy woodpeckers nested in Vincent Somers's yard in Lyttleton. One of the pair was killed when it hit a picture window and its mate then disappeared.

Somers thought the young birds would starve. He cut the tree down at the woodpecker hole, took the young birds from the nest and his family fed them by hand for two days.

When the parent bird was again seen in the yard, the birds were returned to the nest and part of the tree reattached above the hole.

The surviving parent, with the apparent help of a grackle, and possibly a robin, then raised the three young woodpeckers to maturity.

It does sound strange to have a grackle help in this feeding in view of the fact grackles are known nest robbers.

However, Mrs. Somers says on different occasions the grackle was seen to pick up things from the ground and take them to the nest.

It is known that the mothering instinct in some birds is such they will occasionally feed birds in the nest of other species. Such an occurrence is more common when the bird has lost its own brood.

Churchill, Manitoba home of the polar bear

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Churchill, Manitoba is known as the polar bear capital of the world.

While we were here, Winnie and I saw no bears. We were told that few of them are seen until the ice melts on Hudson's Bay. Then they come ashore.

By June 8 when we left, the bay was still covered with ice. The ice extended for as far out as the eye could see.

The only exception was a small ribbon of open water that stretched out from the mouth of the Churchill River.

The strong current here and the slightly warmer water from the river combined to melt the ice much earlier here than elsewhere in the bay.

We were told the first polar bears would probably not show up before the first of July.

After that date, their numbers tend to increase until they reach a peak in September or October. They arrive singly, or as a mother with cubs.

Apparently, the bears spend the winter on the ice where they feed on seals. When the ice breaks up, the currents are such that the floes drift southward carrying the bears with them.

When they come ashore, the bears slowly trudge north, some of them wandering right down the streets of the town.

People have horns to blow to scare off the bears. Also, Churchill has a unique institution — their *polar bear jail*.

It sometimes gets quite crowded by the time that summer is over.

In the town, there is what is called *the polar bear alert*.

At each telephone is the picture of a polar bear with a telephone number under it. Any citizen seeing a polar bear is supposed to call this number.

Upon receiving the call, natural resources personel are sent to drive the bear out of town. If it returns, then it is placed in jail.

Normally, the jail is cleared every fall when the bay again freezes over. At this time, the bears are taken out onto the ice and released.

While in jail, the bears are fed nothing but water. Substantially, this is all they get in the wild anyway, for they live on their fat during summer.

Another reason for not feeding them is nobody wants to encourage the bears to return to the town. In fall, when seals are again available to them, they again fatten up.

The jail will hold 70 polar bears. One year, the jail was full before the bear season was over. In this case, in order to make room for others, some bears had to be released early.

The natural resources department keeps statistics on each jailed bear.

A numbered tag is clipped into its ear, a tooth is extracted to determine its age, and weights and measurements are taken.

Many bears are repeat offenders and a high percentage of those incarcerated are said to be adolescents.

Churchill's claim as *polar bear capital of the world* is justified for this area has the highest concentration of polar bears in the world.

Not only is it on the pathway of an annual northward migration of these bears, but also, not far from the town, is a denning area where females retreat when they are ready to give birth to their young.

That normally occurs every second year and usually two cubs are born.

Although Churchill is relatively free from polar bears throughout much of the year, the odd stray may appear at almost any time.

Dianne Erikson, who has a couple of greenhouses on the outskirts of town, said that last April 1, a bear crashed through the top of one of her greenhouses.

It then walked out through the side of it leaving two large holes to repair.

She wondered, when she reported it, whether it would be considered an April fool joke, but apparently two other people had reported a polar bear that same day.

Our friend and hostess while in Churchill, Vera Gould, said she once looked out her window and there was a polar bear walking through her yard.

Her son, Donnie, was once frightened by a mother with two cubs. He was 16 at the time and had no gun with him.

He was out on the tundra removing parts from an old wrecked vehicle and did not notice her until she was almost upon him. Probably he had startled her as she had startled him.

As he looked up from his work, she made a threatening run toward him.

According to his account, he went out through the open windshield, the most direct line of escape, and was off and running straight through water, mud, and swamp, and all else that stood in his path.

Polar bears are said to be unpredictable, but like many wild animals, they are more likely to cause problems when they are startled, or when they feel their young are threatened.

Roland gives big welcome

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Winnie and I rolled into Roland, Manitoba, on the morning of May 26, 1989. Neither of us knew anyone nor anything in particular we wanted to see here.

Nonetheless, we both had a certain curiosity about this town for we had heard of it since we were kids.

My dad had worked for a farmer here about 80 years ago. Winnie had had relatives who farmed here, although she had never met them, but her mother and sister had gone out by train and visited when she was only seven.

Seeing the post office, we pulled up in front of it for we had a film to post. We were too early. It was only 7:45 a.m.

Winnie suggested we drive around town and find something to take a picture of while waiting for the post office to open. Then, we would move on.

After a short drive, Winnie decided to take a picture of the main street — the only paved street in town.

While she was snapping the picture, I spoke to the only other person on the street at that time. His name was Ralph Welch. He invited us to have a coffee with him.

He led us into the coffee shop and there introduced us to a number of his friends.

We were told this coffee shop was a joint project. Eighty-nine citizens of the town had gotten together and purchased it from a nearby town.

They then moved it — everything except the cook — to Roland. Previous to this the people of Roland had no such place in which to gather.

When our friend learned of our interest in birds, he said we must meet his brother, Clinton Welch.

He said Clinton always had lots of birds around his place and he would be sure to show us one we had never seen before. This later proved to be the case.

We now went to the post office to post our film. The postmistress, Mrs. Smith, informed us Roland was the birthplace of the 4-H movement and a plaque in recognition of this could be found a short distance down the street. (We later visited it and took a picture).

She also said we should visit Edgar Van Wyck, who, a few years earlier, had grown the world's champion pumpkin.

It now appeared we were going to have a full day in Roland. It was fortunate we were on no fixed schedule.

We next visited Clinton and Doreen Welch. While the women chatted, Clint and I took a walk down a back lane.

Soon we had located an orchard oriole and I had a good look at it — the first one I had ever seen.

The Welchs then invited us out for dinner and took us to the Bonanza Restaurant in Winkler, about 15 miles away.

Upon returning, we were introduced to Edgar Van Wyck. He had grown his world champion pumpkin about 15 years before. It weighed 353 pounds.

Since then, he has grown a pumpkin weighing 560 pounds. But since the size of the world's largest pumpkin has risen dramatically, this latter pumpkin was not large enough to obtain the prize.

(According to Van Wyck, it takes about one pound of pumpkin to make a pie.)

How does he grow such pumpkins?

First, he pointed out a windbreak of trees and shrubs surrounds his garden. This, he said, traps the heat and increases growth.

Next, the water used in watering it passes through a long length of black hose. This hose lies in the sun, thus ensuring the water is warmed considerably before leaving the nozzle.

He gives his plants plenty of room — four plants to a plot about the size of our town lot here in Newcastle.

The ground is thoroughly prepared, three times over with his tiller and commercial fertilizer is applied.

In addition, a four-foot by four-foot bed where each plant is first set out is worked to a depth of one foot with peat moss, manure and fertilizer being worked into it.

Each plant was in a large plastic tent open at both ends. On this day, a cloth had been thrown over the sunnyside of these to protect the plants from the hot afternoon sun.

■ We are now back in Newcastle. Above our fireplace, painted on hardboard, is a Canada goose in flight. We have had a number of comments on how appropriate it looks there.

It is a gift from Clinton Welch of Roland. He has been a "keeman" for Ducks Unlimited for the last 24 years.

In our library is a book on the canoeing adventures of Gary and Joanie McGuffin. This was given us by Ralph Welch who runs a small machine shop in Roland.

These are mementos of a town we entered as strangers on our way to Churchill, Manitoba, this spring.

We hope the Welchs will someday visit New Brunswick and will be given as warm a welcome as was accorded us in Manitoba.

Advised to avoid fly season, so we did

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

When Winnie and I were planning to go to Churchill, we were advised to go before the fly season. We took that advice and had a very enjoyable visit.

But now, we would like to go back when the flowers are in bloom and the tundra is greener.

The first insectivorous bird was seen on June 7, the day before we left for Churchill.

On that date, we saw one lone tree swallow. On the following day, many tree swallows were seen in the town, and also yellow warblers in a few locations.

The insect eaters were arriving and presumably the onslaught of the insect hordes would soon follow.

In contrast to Churchill, here on the Miramichi, tree swallows usually arrive on May 1, and the odd one may arrive as early as April 23.

We were surprised at the great abundance of berries on the tundra — mainly cranberries and crowberries. They were still on their vines after the long winter and they were still in good condition.

These berries are an important source of food for many returning birds.

Large dogs are evident everywhere in Churchill. Tethered in front of many of the homes is a Labrador, a Husky, or some similarly-large dog.

Also tethered on the outskirts of town we saw two or three teams of Huskies.

One evening, while we were exploring on the rocks above the town, the silence was broken by the howling and wailing of the dogs.

It was explained to us that the curfew siren had just sounded and that the dogs always join in and add their voices to it.

All these dogs help to give warning of polar bears, but that is probably not their reason for being there.

The main streets of Churchill are broad but have only two lanes of pavement down the middle.

From the edge of this pavement, to the front of the buildings, is generally just a wide expanse of gravel.

Some homes have a sparse growth of tundra grasses around them, but no lawns as we know them.

When we visited the port facilities, a pair of rough-legged hawks showed considerable annoyance with us. We soon saw the reason for this.

They were building a nest high above us. It was on a projection from the structure that encloses the conveyor belt which takes the grain from the elevator to the boats.

The economy of Churchill is based mainly on the grain elevator; and, at the present time, little grain is being shipped through the port. So, the economy is at a low ebb.

Churchill is a supply and service centre for many small communities farther north. It is also used as a jumping off point for expeditions into the north.

Formerly there was a large American military base here, and at that time, the town was much larger.

The population consists of a mixture of races, cultures, and languages — two tribes of Indians — Crees and Chipewyans; Eskimos; and both English- and French-speaking Canadians.

The languages of the Crees and Chipewyans is said to be quite different; and of course, the language of the Eskimos is different again.

The non-native population comes from all across Canada, and there is a fair sprinkling of Maritimers among them. One of these is Mike Boudreau, formerly from Petit Rocher.

He used to deliver for a cleaners here in Newcastle and Chatham. We also met a number of French Canadians from Quebec.

While in Churchill, we enjoyed two dishes that we had never eaten before.

Our friend, Vera Gould, treated us to a dinner of Arctic char and wild rice; and, on another occasion, her daughter, Annie Gerardin, prepared us a large pot of caribou stew. Both were delicious; but, if we had not been told otherwise, I would not have know that the Arctic char was not Atlantic Salmon, nor that the caribou meat was not beef.

At the mouth of the Churchill River stands Fort Prince of Wales. It was built in the 1700s to guard the harbor.

As Andrea, our Parks Canada interpreter explained, the cannons of the fort could shoot about half a mile and not very accurately at that. The recoil on the cannons was about 40 feet.

It was found that the walls of the original fort were much too narrow, for whenever the cannons were fired, they fell off of the walls and into the inner court. Later, the walls were made thicker to prevent this from happening.

It seems it was as dangerous to stand behind the cannons as it was to stand in front of them.

Maritime Breeding Bird Atlas

Harry Walker
Aug. 4/89

WILDLIFE

During the last 6 weeks, I have spent much time working on the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas. I, like many other volunteers, have been out in the field gathering data for it. This activity has taken me into territory previously unfamiliar to me. The country around Dam Camp and Adam's Camp on the Northwest Miramichi River belongs in this category.

On June 21, I arose at 4 a.m., had a light breakfast, packed a light lunch, drove out the Chaplin Island Road and then up the Fraser-Burchill Road. When I came to a road labelled Fuelwood Area, I followed it without knowing where it led.

After crossing the Stoney Brook and driving about a mile beyond it, I parked my truck then took off on foot.

I left my lunch in the truck thinking that I would soon return. However, the singing birds and my curiosity led me farther and farther away. I could not turn back without seeing what was over the next hill or around the next curve in the road.

At one point, far in the distance, the raspy, see-saw song of a Scarlet Tanager could be heard. The notes came from the bush on the other side of the clear-cut. I went to investigate. I found it and also a Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

As I walked along the road through a hardwood forest, several of the less common warblers were found — Black-throated Blue Warblers, Black-throated Green Warblers, and Blackburnian Warblers.

Later the road decended and entered a spruce-fir forest. With this change in forest came also a change in forest inhabitants. Bay-breasted Warblers, and Boreal Chickadees were added to my list.

At last my wanderings brought me to a clearing on the banks of the Northwest Miramichi and therein lay a group of buildings. On the side of one was the name "Dam Camp".

As I passed the kitchen door, Byron Waye appeared in the doorway. I knew Byron from years back when we both worked at Heath-Steel Mines.

Byron came out and we sat on the porch and talked. By and by, a woman came to the door and invited me in for coffee. This was a very welcome invitation for I had had only a very light breakfast and that was over 4 hours ago. The lunch I had packed was back in the truck, and by now, that was miles behind me.

Thanks to Pat Baisley and Phyllis Waye, I left Dam Camp with a full stomach, and I might add, a warm heart. Two cups of coffee, a large ham sandwich, two cinnamon rolls, and two doughnuts had been tucked away.

I now set out for Adam's Camp. Byron had told me that it was only six miles upstream. I could get there by following the trail along the river, and from there, I could find roads leading back to my truck.

Along the river trail, the most prominent singer was the Solitary Vireo. It, like most vireos, tends to sing in the heat of the day when other songsters have quieted down. Another interesting find on this trail was a Brown Creeper.

About 11:45, and before reaching Adam's Camp, I met up with a fisherman. It was Jack Fenety. He told me to continue up the trail a little ways, and I would find the other members of his party. He said they were preparing lunch, and he invited me to stay and have some tea with them.

I did as he instructed. Donnie Baisley was piling some kindling for the fire and Coburn Copp was setting out the food. I stayed and had some tea. I was also offered sandwiches, but I refused for I had no need of further nourishment.

I soon reached Adam's Camp and there I was again refreshed with a couple of glasses of cold water for it was now a hot day. George Copp then instructed me on how to get back to my truck and I proceeded on my way.

Soon I flushed a Ruffed Grouse. She uttered a squeal and went through her accustomed injury-faking act. Obviously her chicks were not far away and we had another confirmed nester for the atlas.

I arrived back at my truck before 5 o'clock. I figured I had walked at least 15 miles.

Since early May, five visits have been made to this area, 68 species of bird recorded.

Cicadas buzz loud, but harm nothing

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE Aug. 25/89

Those long, drawn-out, buzzing sounds coming from trees during the hot, sunny days of August are cicadas.

Cicadas are large insects, different species of them varying in length from one inch to 2 3/8 inches, according to Lorus and Margery Milne.

The little sirens that emit the buzzing sound are situated on the bottom side of their abdomens. Only the males have these. The females are silent.

Superficially they resemble huge flies, but entomologists classify them as belonging to the same order of insects as the aphids and spittlebugs.

Although often heard, they are seldom seen. They do not bite, nor sting, nor molest man or beast in any way. In fact, during the adult stage, they are not even known to feed.

This adult stage is of short duration. The nymphs live underground feeding on the sap from tree roots.

■ In last week's *Miramichi Leader*, we read there is to be an American plaice exploratory fishery in the Point Escuminac Cove in mid-September after the herring has spawned.

Being ignorant as to what an American plaice was, I decided to find out.

From my research, I learned it is a species of flatfish, those curious, pancake-shaped fish which lie and swim on one side rather than on their belly. Their eyes are situated in a very unsymetrical fashion on one side of the head.

W. B. Scott and S. N. Messieh, in their book *Common Canadian Atlantic Fishes,* list seven species of flatfish, six of which have their eyes and pigmentation on the right side of the body; the others have the eyes and pigmentation on the left side.

These seven species vary in maximum size from 18 inches for two of the species, to eight feet in the case of the Atlantic halibut. (An eight-foot halibut weighs about 400 pounds, but most halibut are less than 50 pounds).

The American plaice is described as having a maximum size of 24 inches. It is reddish to grayish-brown on the upper surface and white to bluish-white on the bottom side.

It is a bottom species and is found at depths ranging from 120 feet to 2,340 feet. (I thought this great variation in depth to be quite surprising.)

■ I hope everyone gets behind the Miramichi Anti-Litter Campaign.

Litter is a very clear-cut issue, one we can all understand and do something about. When we go for a walk, let us take a shopping bag with us and fill it with garbage.

Soon the area around our place will be looking neater. Not only this, but we will feel better about ourselves for having done so. We will have increased our self-esteem.

Above all, let us not throw anything out of our car windows, not even a gum-wrapper.

Apparently, for some visitors to our province, the thing that has stood out most in their minds has been the amount of litter lying around.

Let us change this. It is a very simple thing. You and I can help.

■ The annual meeting of the New Brunswick Federation of Naturalists will be held at Sackville the weekend of Sept. 1-3.

Activities begin at 6 p.m. Friday evening at St. Paul's Anglican Church Hall. At that time, you can register and there will be refreshments, exhibits, slides and a book display.

Also, you can take part in a walk through the Sackville Waterfowl Park next door. This will be followed by the annual business meeting.

On Saturday and Sunday, there will be a variety and a choice of field trips to the following places: Ram Pasture, Tantramar Marsh, Cape Jourimain, tip of Fundy-Amherst Point-Joggins, Dorchester Cape-Rockport and Sunken Island Bog.

On Saturday evening, the guest speaker will be George Finney, director, Canadian Wildlife Service, Atlantic Region. His topic, "C.W.S., the public and caring for our natural resources."

Registration is $5 per person or $7 per family. You can preregister by sending your cheque to Chignecto Naturalists Club, P. O. Box 1590, Sackville, N.B., EOA 3C0.

To reserve a box-lunch for noon Saturday and a buffet dinner Saturday evening, send an extra $15 per person.

■ In closing, remember Woodsy Owl and his saying: "Give a hoot, don't pollute."

Spiders not insects, belong to arachnids

Harry Walker

July 28/89

WILDLIFE

Spiders are not insects. They are arachnids.

An insect has three body segments — a head, a thorax and an abdomen.

An arachnid has only two body segments — a cephalothorax and an abdomen.

In other words, in an arachnid, the head and the thorax are combined to form what is called the cephalothorax.

If this is not clear, catch a spider and an insect — an ant or a fly — and compare them.

Insects have six legs, arachnids have eight. Insects, at least most of them, have wings and antennae in the adult stage; arachnids do not.

Also, unlike most insects, arachnids do not go through a larval or a pupal stage. This means, that except for size, young arachnids look like their parents.

They do not hatch as caterpillars, then go into cocoons and later emerge as adults, as do most insects.

Other arachnids (besides spiders) are daddy-long-legs, mites, ticks, scorpions and pseudoscorpions.

The following letter comes from Mrs. M. O'Connor:—

Dear Mr. Walker:

At the end of June I was visiting my sister at Nelson-Miramichi. One day on the deck we saw a very, very bright yellow spider.

I went inside to get a jar to put it in so I could look at it better and my sister hates spiders and she killed it.

It was approximately 1.5 cm. long and 1 cm. plus wide. Along the lengthwise of its body right at the edge on both sides was a dark stripe. I thought they were black, but at second glance they were a dark reddish brown.

I receive the *Miramichi Leader/Weekend* so will look for an answer. Thank you. — Mrs. M. O'Connor

The spider described by Mrs. O'Connor is so distinctive in its color and markings one would expect it to be easily identified. However, this is not the case as I discovered.

In my attempt to identify it, I used the Audubon Society *Field Guide to North American Insects and Spiders* by Lorus and Margery Milne.

This guide contains excellent color photographs and written descriptions for about 60 species of common spiders.

However, as the guide points out, there are about 3,000 known species in North America (35,000 worldwide); and, to quote directly, "probably most species are still awaiting identification".

As if this were not complicated enough, male and female of the same species can differ greatly in size and color. Females are usually much larger than males — often two or three times as large.

Also, in some species, immatures differ in color from adults. On top of this, in some species, individuals of the same sex and age can vary widely in color.

For example, in describing the green lynx spider, the Milnes give its color as being — "bright leaf-green, ivory-white, or tan".

I do not wish to imply it is impossible for a layman to identify any spider, but I do want to give you some good excuses for me not being able to identify this one.

No doubt, some species are much easier to identify than others — just as is the case with birds.

We generally think of spiders as spinning webs in which to entangle their prey. But there are many species of spider that do not spin webs.

Many species simply run about hunting for their insect prey and when they have found it, they pounce on it.

They hunt their insect prey in much the same way as foxes and coyotes hunt rabbits and mice.

Some spiders hunt by day, others by night. Some spiders hunt on the ground, others on the trunks and branches of trees, and still others on grasses, flowers and other plants.

Spider webs are of many designs and each species spins a web characteristic of that species. Even the threads used to make the webs differ from species to species.

Some oddities of the spider world are trap-door spiders, spitting spiders, jumping spiders and crab spiders.

Jumping spiders do not spin webs, but when they jump on their prey, silk comes from their spinnerets forming a dragline on which to entangle their prey.

Crab spiders can run forward, backward, and sideways.

Muskrat uses instinct, intuition

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Sept. 1/89

Intelligence, instinct, and intuition: where does one end and the other begin? Or are they all different facets of the same thing?

Often it seems the most intelligent thing for us to do is to rely on our instincts or to be guided by our intuition.

Biologists tend to explain all animal behavior as being motivated by instinct, even when similar actions by man would be explained as being due to intelligence.

So, there seems to be a very fuzzy dividing line between intelligence, instinct, and intuition, if indeed we can separate them at all.

Take the muskrat.

It has never been regarded as a particularly intelligent animal, but it can be very adaptive and innovative.

For example: if, when it builds a home, there is a sufficiently steep bank composed of suitable material nearby, it will utilize this.

It digs a tunnel into the bank, starting the tunnel below the water surface.

It then turns its tunnel upward, and after reaching a point somewhat above water level, enlarges it into a living room.

From here, it digs another tunnel to the top of the bank — this one being open to the air.

This latter opening is now covered with sticks and vegetation thus camouflaging it and ensuring there will not be too much cold air entering the living quarters.

This hole provides ventilation and an emergency exit.

A bed of vegetation is placed in the living chamber and this bedding material is changed periodically as it becomes soiled or musty.

If the muskrat lives in a pond where there is no suitable bank to burrow into, then it makes an artificial bank, or a muskrat hut as it is called.

In this case, the muskrat piles mud and vegetation together forming a mound, the base of which is underwater. The top which is high enough above water level that it can accommodate the living chamber.

Despite this careful preparation, the muskrat may be forced out of its home during the winter and this really puts this little mammal to the test.

This forced abandonment of its home is most often caused by severely-cold weather or lack of snow cover, resulting in deep freezing.

Here is one such case described in Angus and Bernice MacIver's book, *Churchill on Hudson Bay.*

In the fall, Angus shot a caribou and for several weeks left it where it had fallen. Later, he returned and brought it home.

When cutting it up, a live muskrat fell out of it. The muskrat had made a nest of caribou hair inside the lung cavity of the caribou and had been living on the meat from it.

The muskrat is normally a vegetarian, but when necessity dictates, it will feed on almost anything.

MacIver and his partner kept this muskrat as a pet giving it the free run of their cabin. They called it Billie and within a few days it would come whenever its names were called.

It gathered mitts and socks and made a nest under MacIver's bunk, but when grass was given to it, it used this instead. It ate bits of everything the men ate.

MacIver says it had one special job. It would gather moss and bits of bark from the woodbox and use these to chink the cracks along the bottom and up the sides of the door to keep the cold draft out.

It would continue doing this until it had chinked up the sides as far as it could reach.

This done, it would then drag as many sticks as it could manage from the woodbox and pile these against the door as though barring it against intruders.