Ruffled grouse makes a spectacular entrance

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The ruffed grouse often appears to be a dull, witless bird. At other times, it is one of the greatest exhibitionists.

Take the male grouse strutting and drumming on a log in the spring. There are few other local birds that engage in such a pompous performance.

Here is another example: a ruffed grouse in Maple Glen made the following, spectacular entrance into Barry MacKay's house, although it died as a consequence.

Nonetheless, it did not let its passing go unnoticed. It literally went out with a "bang".

At the time, the grouse must have been going with its throttle full open for when it hit the window it went through two sheets of heavy glass.

Pieces of glass were scattered all over the room and some pieces were thrown into an adjoining room. One triangular piece was imbedded in the wall.

The repair crew which replaced the glass said they had recently replaced the glass in two other windows broken in the same way.

Terres in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds* says in the fall when broods of young ruffled grouse reach maturity, they begin competing for territory. At this stage, they expend much energy chasing one another.

In this way, family groups are dispersed and this is what he calls the "fall shuffle."

It seems if this competition is prolonged the stress is too great for some individuals and they take off on "a crazy flight" — a flight that may take them anywhere.

This may explain why a large cod taken off Newfoundland was found to have a ruffled grouse in its stomach (an incident recorded by Terres).

However, this does not explain the episode at Maple Glen for Barry says it happened in April.

Another grouse, recently reported as having crashed into a window in a home in Lyttleton, may have been on one of these so-called crazy flights for it happened in September.

Ray and Jim Salt, in their book *Birds of Alberta*, say the first two weeks of a grouse's life are critical.

If the weather is wet during this stage, the chicks get wet and chilled and mortality is high.

From this it would follow that if we have a wet June here in New Brunswick, then the grouse crop will be low.

■ Another crash at Barry MacKay's house brings up an interesting point — bird-eating hawks are engaged in a hazardous occupation. In their mad dash to catch their prey, they can become injured or killed.

In this case, Barry heard two thumps against a window. He went outside and found two dead birds — one an evening grosbeak, the other a small hawk, probably as sharp-shinned.

Both birds had struck the pane with such force their bills were broken.

In other cases when pursued by a hawk, most small birds instinctively dive into thick underbrush or similar cover. Here they have a distinct advantage over the larger hawk.

In such places if the hawk is too wreckless in its pursuit, it may sustain injuries. This was made apparent to me from the following observation.

I found a northern harrier's body lying on the forest floor with a twig pierced through its body.

This puzzled me for a northern harrier does not live in the bush. Its long wings are not designed for flying among trees. It hunts in open fields and marshes and feeds primarily on mice.

However, the harrier does eat some birds and it appears this one must have pursued its quary into the unfamiliar environment of the bush.

Here it had become impaled on a sharp twing which had broken off allowing the harrier to fall to the ground. It was found within two or three stone throws of a salt marsh over which harriers are sometimes seen patrolling.

Northern harrier is the new official name for what was formerly called the marsh hawk.

P.A. Taverner, writing in the earlier part of this century, listed the food items found in the stomachs of many birds. Here is what he listed for the marsh hawk, —

"Of 116 stomachs examined, seven contained poultry or game birds; 34, other birds; 57, mice; 22, other mammals; seven, reptiles; two, frogs; and 14, insects."

By comparison, for the sharp-shinned hawk, he says, — "Of 107 stomachs examined, six contained poultry or game birds; 99 other birds; six, mice; and five, insects."

Godwit has remote breeding, winter ranges

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

To borrow a phrase from Aubrey Hutchison of Chatham, the hudsonian godwit is a stately bird. That is how he described it when reporting one a few years ago.

It is a tall, slim member of the sandpiper family (or snipe as many locals would call it). It is quite large with a wingspread of two feet or more.

It has long legs, a long neck, and a three-inch long bill.

This slender bill is slightly upcurved and is of two colors. The basal half is pinkish and the outer half is black. This is a good clue to identification.

The plumage is greyish-brown above and pale grey below. (Rusty breast in spring plumage.)

On Aug. 1, Tom Greathouse of Douglasfield reported a group of five hudsonian godwits on Portage Island.

Portage Island is one of the few places in New Brunswick where hudsonian godwits are seen with any degree of regularity.

I visited this island on only one occasion, Aug. 6, 1979, and on that occasion saw a small flock of hudsonian godwits.

W. Austin Squires in his book *The Birds of New Brunswick* also mentions hudsonian godwits on Portage Island. He says there was a flock of 50 there from July 27-29, 1951.

My records indicate there was a lone hudsonian godwit at the mouth of the Napan River on Oct. 11, 1975 and another lone individual at Strawberry Marsh in Newcastle on Oct. 12, 1981.

Not many years ago, the hudsonian godwit was thought to be threatened with extinction.

However, its apparent scarcity was due to the remoteness of its breeding and wintering ranges and also due to the fact that during migration it makes long, non-stop flights at high altitude.

In this way, most hudsonian godwits pass over the settled parts of North America without being seen.

It is now known that during the summer breeding season the hudsonian godwit is common throughout a large part of Canada's Arctic barrens.

Also during our winter, it is common in much of Argentina and Chile. But in between its summer and winter ranges, it is seen infrequently and then only in small numbers.

Migration pattern

Its fall migration starts early, about the end of July.

According to Terres, the route followed forms a long, eastward-bulging arc beginning on the west coast of Hudson's Bay and ending in South America.

From Hudson's Bay, the birds fly eastward, pass over the Maritime Provinces and the New England states and then head out to sea.

They then swing southward and after bypassing the rest of North America again reach land somewhere along South America's northern coast.

Terres says the adult birds make this journey first and about a month later the young birds follow them.

The young birds are by this time only about 10 weeks old and they follow this route without any parental guidance.

In the spring, their northward migration follows a more westerly route — roughly, up the Mississippi Valley.

Tree frog

On Aug. 23, Mary Muzzeroll of Douglastown reported that when she opened an outside door she found a small frog clinging to the glass.

Later, when she reached into her clothespin bag, the same little frog either jumped out of it or jumped from somewhere close by it.

She described this frog as being about 1½ inches long, rusty-orange in color and having a darker, diamond-shaped mark on its back. She also noted it had large toes, especially the first one.

This was undoubtedly a tree frog.

Tree frogs have suction cups on their toes which enable them to climb and to cling to smooth surfaces such as glass.

The only tree frog in our area is the spring peeper and the individual described here seems to have been a female.

Females are somewhat larger and lighter in color than are males. This one seems to have been especially light in color since spring peepers are generally described as being brown in color.

Spring peepers are quite common. They are often heard but seldom seen. Its voice is the high-pitched one that makes up most of the frog chorus each spring.

Canadian Racing Pigeon Association
519-652-5704 (in Ont.)
Dotson Hiking Trail
A. Edson Melanson, 71 Dunlop St., Moncton, N.B., E1C-6Y8
Tel (506) 855-5089

Wayne Thompson
Clayton Doyle
Earle Doherty
Steven Allen
422-6374

Northumberland News April 25, 1990

Susan Ballant, Co-ordinator of Miramichi Volunteer Services says "We can place as many volunteers as we can find. There are ongoing requests for people with time and skills to share with others."

The first step for potential volunteers is to call Susan Ballant at Miramichi Volunteer Services (773-9549). After completing the formalities non-profit agencies will be informed of a new volunteer and contact made.

Acting as a liason between volunteers and the organizations that need them is a prime function of Miramichi Volunteer Services, but there are others.

"We want to look at community needs and fill them where possible," Ballant says. "There are many needs in the community which we don't always see. When we discover them, volunteers make success possible."

"Whether people are interested in working with children, seniors, in literacy, or some other area we are interested in them," Ballant says. "A lot of people have some time and useful skills. We can match volunteers with the groups that really need them. Give us a call."

Arseneault spots an unusual duck

Sept. 22/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

A very unusual report is contained in a letter from Anne Marie Arseneault of Chatham. With her approval, I am quoting directly from her letter.

"I wasn't going to mention this, but on the off chance that someone else has something similar to report: I saw a fulvous whistling duck on two occasions.

"The first time I saw him (it?) swimming, noted the markings and identified it by these markings. I was sure I was mistaken (at first) and put the incident out of my mind and did not even mention it to anyone.

"On the second occasion, I saw the bird in flight. Besides the coloring, the thing that stood out was the trailing feet.

"I checked the 'Ducks in Flight' page in my field guide and was shocked to find that the fulvous whistling duck was the only one with such a characteristic.

"It was only then that I was fully convinced that I had seen this species on the first occasion."

Further details on these sightings were provided during a telephone conversation with Anne Marie.

e said both sightings were in early June and were within two weeks of one another.

The first sighting was made near the culvert where the old railroad to CFB Chatham crosses the headwaters of the Black Brook. The duck was swimming in a ditch there.

The second sighting was made in a marshy area between the town of Chatham and its industrial park — this sighting was made from the same old railroad bed as the first one.

The habitat in these two places suits the habitat requirements of the fulvous whistling duck as described by Terres. He says they frequent freshwater marshes and wet fields, especially irrigated ones where there are water-filled ditches.

This duck has never been reported on the Miramichi before, at least to my knowledge.

Squires, in his *Birds of New Brunswick* published in 1976, lists only two places in the province where it has occurred.

On Nov. 4, 1961, a flock of 21 were found on Grand Manan Island. Some of these birds were again seen on a couple of occasions later that month.

Also, during the duck-hunting season that same year, five fulvous whistling ducks out of a flock of six were shot at Evandale, Kings County.

This duck has a world distribution that is unique among waterfowl.

Terres says there are five distinct and separate world populations — one in the southern United States and Mexico; one in northeastern South America; one in southeastern South America; one in east Africa, and one in India.

He says this duck wanders widely and in recent years has extended its range in the United States.

Fulvous: I checked in the dictionary and learned this word refers to the color of the duck, deep yellow, tawny, dull or reddish yellow.

Whistling: This duck has a whistling call from which its name is derived. Its wings do not whistle as is the case with the common goldeneye which is sometimes called "the whistler".

Older books refer to the fulvous whistling duck as the fulvous tree duck.

However, this older name is misleading since the duck rarely nests in tree cavities and has no other obvious connection with trees.

It normally nests on the ground in wet fields or marshes.

The fulvous whistling duck has a peculiar build, relatively long legs and long neck, but a short tail. Hence, its feet extend well beyond the end of the tail when in flight.

Also, when in flight, a conspicuous white tail band followed by a dark terminal band helps to identify it.

This duck is said to feed mainly at night. It does this either in shallow water where it tips and submerges its head like other puddle ducks or in cultivated fields where it walks about picking up grain or grazing on vegetation. It is often found in corn fields or rice fields.

Lupine helps fertility increase in its soil

Sept. 29/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

A radio report tells us the lupine may become a commercial crop in the Maritimes.

It is high in protein and as livestock fodder is given a rating similar to that of the soya bean. More research is to be done on it.

Most of you probably recognize the lupine. It is grown in many flower beds here and has escaped into the wild in many places, especially on P.E.I.

There, about the first of July, it can be seen blooming in profusion along roadsides and in abandoned fields. The flowers, which are born in spikes, may be blue-violet, pink or white.

The lupine is a member of the pea family and, an examination of an individual blossom will reveal it is shaped like a pea flower. Furthermore, its seeds are contained in pods like those of peas.

Other members of the pea family (often called legumes) include the beans, the clovers and alfalfa.

The lupine, like the other members of the family, has nodules on its roots which contain nitrogen-fixing bacteria.

As a result, it increases the fertility of the soil in which it is grown — an important plus for a commercial crop.

■ Besides legumes, there are a few other plants which in association with bacteria have this capacity to add nitrogen to the soil.

Two common ones around here are the generally despised alder and the sweetfern.

Such plants being able to derive their nitrogen from the atmosphere ban grow in nitrogen-depleted soils.

The alders that line our streams have other virtues besides that of increasing soil fertility.

As it says in the federal government publication, *Trees of Canada*, they slow down the rush of waters during spring run-off and during flash storms.

If it were not for them, we would have more damaging floods and soil erosion.

Further uses for the alder, according to *Petrides*: deer, moose and muskrat browse its twigs.

The sweetfern grows in areas similar to those in which blueberries grow and I tend to associate the aroma of the sweetfern with the picking of blueberries.

It is not a true fern. It has a woody stem and branches, the true ferns do not. It belongs to the waxmyrtle family.

■ I have been asked, "What do moths eat?"

According to Borror and White, adult lepidoptera (moths and butterflies) feed mainly on nectar and other liquids and a few do not feed at all.

It is while in the larval stage most of their feeding is done and it is at this time that many species of moth are destructive.

■ Another grey squirrel has been reported, this one by Greg Bell of Chatham.

It was near the Morada Motel in an oak tree presumably after acorns — a likely place for a squirrel at this time of the year.

■ During the summer, several people have commented that chipmunks have become more plentiful. The latest one to mention this is Mary MacDonald of Barnaby River.

She says a number of them have holes around her home and she has noticed there are bunchberries lying about the entrances to these. It appears the chipmunks have been storing or feeding on them.

Bob Moore of the South Esk Road reports that one night a large owl hopped across the road in front of his car.

A closer look revealed a frog was also hopping in front of the owl.

Being dark, it was not determined whether or not the owl had ear tufts.

The literature indicates both the barred and great horned owls pill feed on frogs, but the barred is more likely to do so.

The great horned owl tends to take larger prey such as rabbits and game birds while the barred is content with smaller prey such as mice, squirrels, frogs, etc. Both of these owls will also occasionally take fish.

■ On Sept. 17, Harriet Willis-ton of Loggieville telephoned.

She informed me that after reading the Sept. 15 article on the hudsonian godwit, she was able to identify three birds she had seen a few days earlier at Kelly Beach, Kouchibouguac Park.

They were somewhat hidden in the grass there rather than on the bare beach.

She said she had watched them through her binoculars and had noted their distinctive characteristics, but at the time had been unable to identify them.

After reading the article, she recognized them as being hudsonian godwits.

Osprey makes threatening pass

Oct. 6/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Jack Howell of Oyster River has a camp on the Tabusintac River.

He is puzzled as to why an osprey there has suddenly become very belligerent.

He says all summer he has been seeing ospreys along the river near his camp and they have been paying no attention to him. But last weekend (Sept. 23-24), this changed dramatically.

Saturday evening about 6:30 p.m., he left his camp to get some water. An osprey which was a considerable distance down river, saw him and immediately started flying toward him.

As it came it kept squawking. It then made a threating pass just above his head. Jack took cover in the camp.

The osprey landed on the roof and then went to a nearby tree where it remained and squawked until dark.

He described this squawking sound as being quite different from the clear, high-pitched sound the osprey normally makes.

And, as it squawked, it pumped its head up and down and held its wings in a partially-extended position.

On Sunday morning when Jack went outdoors again, the same sequence of events was repeated and later that day it was repeated a third time.

Jack does not know where the osprey's nest is. He presumes it is over the hills somewhere for he has been seeing them flying over that way all summer.

The only possible cause I can suggest for the osprey's behaviour is that it may have a wounded mate or wounded young bird near his camp.

■ I was once threatened in similar fashion by a swainson's hawk.

At the time, I was walking toward a wounded bird on the ground. I presume this bird was its mate.

The closer I came to the wounded bird, the closer the dive-bombing hawk came to my head. I took the warning and ventured no further.

■ This summer a goshawk almost attacked me for a very different reason.

I was standing on a narrow, overgrown bush road and was making some high-pitched, squeaking sounds to attract songbirds.

I was having some success at this. A number of small birds were hopping about in the bushes around me.

Suddenly, there was a rustle of wings to one side of me. I turned to see the tail end of a large goshawk disappear into the bushes about 20 feet away.

The goshawk was obviously intent on making a meal of me, but it quickly changed its mind and changed its direction when it saw me.

■ On Sept. 2, Carol White of Lower Newcastle reported there were still two hummingbirds coming to her hummingbird feeders.

She had six of them earlier in the summer. She has three feeders.

Carol has observed that the hummingbird has a good memory.

She says the first one she saw this spring came and hovered at a place where she had a feeder the previous year. The feeder, however, was no longer there.

■ Two calls were received reporting a rare, exotic visitor from the far south — a scissor-tailed flycatcher.

Tom Greathouse of Douglasfield telephoned on Sept. 20 after hearing a report of it on the radio.

Later, David Christie of Albert telephoned about it. He and a friend were travelling all the way from Albert to Paquetville in hopes of seeing it. Paquetville is north of Tracadie.

I know this bird only from books. It has an extremely long, scissor-like tail, but the tail is usually folded. This tail is about twice as long as the body. The overall length of the bird is about one foot.

Peterson describes its color as being pale, pearly gray, with salmon-pink sides and wing linings. The tail is black with white edges.

Squires, in his *Birds of New Brunswick*, lists eight previous sightings of the scissor-tailed flycatcher. These have been spread over a period of about 70 years — the last one in 1973 at Point Lepreau.

These earlier sightings have been in the extreme southern parts of our province.

The normal summer range for this bird is south-central United States — mainly in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas.

Raven baffles couple with its behavior

Oct. 27/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The raven is a complex bird.

Many contrasting qualities have been attributed to it and there seems to be good reason for this.

It has been described as being intelligent, resourceful, cunning, bold and as having an incredible memory.

It is an opportunist, quick to turn any situation to its own advantage.

In the air, it is versatile. Sometimes it is an acrobat, diving and at times flipping over onto its back while in flight.

This latter feat is a rare one, seldom seen in the rest of the bird world.

At other times, it will ride on updrafts, soaring with ease at great heights.

The raven's vocabulary generally consists of coarse croaks, but on the other hand, it can make some pleasant sounds, including a unique, bell-like one.

When this is heard, it is hard to believe it's coming from this often raucous and rowdy bird. In fact, it is hard to believe it is coming from a bird of any kind.

Now, here is some raven behavior that has a couple of Miramichi residents baffled.

Ricky and June Gallant have been building a new home near Barnaby. They have been working on it in their spare time.

However, two ravens have been giving them a hard time.

The ravens seem intent on vandalizing their new home. They come and peck at the basement windows and have been doing this for months.

They have already broken the glass in two windows and have removed the rubber seals from around others. They have also scratched the picture window.

The ravens stay away while the Gallants are on hand, but return to the attack when the Gallants leave.

This has been the pattern for months now. The way June sees it, the ravens apparently want to drive them out of their neighborhood.

During their nesting season, territorial birds will sometimes try to fight with their own reflection, but this does not seem to apply to ravens.

Besides this, June said even when plywood sheets have been leaned against the house to cover the windows the ravens have gone behind these sheets to resume their attacks. Under these conditions, no reflections can be seen in the glass.

In literature can be found some strange accounts regarding ravens.

In the Bible we read that ravens brought food to Elijah in the wilderness — every morning and evening.

Whether this is the same species as is found here is unclear. Although the common raven here is also found in the Middle East, nonetheless *Smith's Bible Dictionary* says the Hebrew name translated as raven was applied to several related species. It was not reserved for one species only.

In an article in the Sept.-Oct. 1984 issue of *International Wildlife*, Fred Bruemmer says in earlier times ravens were regarded as symbols of death. They followed armies in order to feed on those that fell in battle.

Today, they follow herds of caribou for the same reason. They feed on those that die and share in the spoils when a caribou is brought down by wolves or by human hunters.

Bruemmer tells of a study done about the predation of gulls and ravens on murres in the far north.

The study was done by Richard Elliot of the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Elliott watched ravens steal eggs from a large murre colony. Some were eaten immediately, but most were stored for future use. The eggs were hidden under the mossy carpet that covered the tundra there.

Elliot believes one particular raven hid over 1,000 eggs in this way. He took note of where some of them were hidden and found all of these were later retrieved.

Presumably, the others or at least most of the others were also. This remarkable feat of memory was performed without the help of any apparent markers.

A few years ago when New Brunswick was picking its provincial bird, the raven received few votes province-wide.

However, according to our son Ian, it received a considerable number of votes in the Sackville area where a member of the naturalist club gave a impressive dissertation on the raven at one of its meetings.

■ According to some people, a black duck is never a black duck. It is always a dark-brown duck.

However, a black duck is always a black duck. It may be a common scoter, a surf scoter or any other species of duck that is primarily black.

Ospreys may take anything to nests

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Greg Bell of Chatham reports that when he was working at Baie Ste Anne this spring he saw ospreys carrying nesting material.

Sometimes they flew over with kelp leaves trailing behind them.

Kelp is a seaweed. When it washes up on our beaches, it consists of single, long, rubbery leaves — often 10 feet or more in length.

When it dries out, it shrivels up and becomes very light and crisp — not very good nest material.

I checked in Hal H. Harrison's book, *A Field Guide to Birds' Nests*, and was surprised to learn anything an osprey can lift may end up in its nest.

Harrison says one man found his rake, three shirts, a bath towel and an arrow in a nearby osprey's nest.

Other nests have contained bottles, tin cans, old shoes, fishlines, fishnets, barrel staves and hoops, rope, broom, toy boat, rag doll, etc.

We have another report of a duck coming down a chimney. This occurred at a residence on the South Esk Road.

The duck was in the chimney for the greater part of a day. The babysitter heard a scuffling sound in the chimney in the morning, but forgot to mention it when she left.

In the evening, it was heard again. This time an examination was conducted and a duck was found to be sitting on the damper above the fireplace.

It was extracted and released outside and it flew away apparently unharmed.

The identity of this duck was not definitely determined, but it was described as being mainly dark brown in color.

It was probably a black duck for this species has been known to come down chimneys before. (The black duck is not black, it is dark brown.)

We have had four other reports of black ducks coming down chimneys — one in Strathadam, one in Whitneyville, one in a camp on the Northwest and one in a camp on the Tobique.

In some of these cases, the ducks have come right down into the living quarters below.

In these earlier cases, it has been presumed the ducks were looking for nesting sites, but in this latest case, a different explanation seems to be needed for it occurred very late in the season.

The anonymous caller reporting it said this happened in September or August, but definitely not earlier than that.

The black duck is quite unpredictable in its selection of a nesting site. The nest may be close to water or it may be quite far from water. It is usually placed on the ground, but not always.

If placed on the ground, it may be in the bush; or it may be in a grassy field; or it may be on a slight elevation in a marsh.

Occasionally the nest is in a hole in a tree or sometimes built in a crotch of a tree or an old crow or hawk's nest is utilized.

Another duck story

From the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, comes another duck story and it was reported by Frank Dobson. It was sent to us by Desmond Dolan.

Dobson reports the duck — a mallard — was seen standing at the edge of a busy street in Rochester, N.Y.

David Kaplan happened to pass by and thinking the duck was in danger, tried to chase it away. It was reluctant to go.

Kaplan then heard some peeping sounds coming up through the grating of a manhole cover over which the duck was standing.

He, with the aid of another man, was able to lift the grating. They then rescued nine little ducklings from the storm sewer below.

The mother duck apparently had not counted the number in her recently-hatched brood or perhaps she was just confused and flustered by the experience.

Interpret it as you will, when five of her ducklings were returned to her, she started on her way.

The other four, upon being released, were sent scurrying after the rest.

After this harrowing experience, mother led her family to a nearby creek. The creek runs through a school yard across the street from where this episode took place.

The story says when ducklings follow their mother, they string out in single file behind her.

So, when the first one went through the grating the others followed suit.

Watch for house finches at your feeders

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Keep an eye open for house finches at your feeder this winter.

There were two of them at our feeder on Oct. 8. The following morning there were four of them.

They have been returning irregularly since then. Two were here this morning, Oct. 16, — a male and a female.

House finches have been expanding their range northward, southward and westward in spectacular fashion.

This range expansion has gone on continually since 1940 when a few birds were released on Long Island, New York.

Previous to 1940, they were not known in eastern North America. However, they were native to the southwestern United States. Now, they are increasingly being seen in New Brunswick.

Being non-migratory, house finches are as likely to be seen in winter as in summer.

In fact, they are more likely to be seen in winter for they are attracted to bird feeders where they are more likely to be seen.

The house finch is often mistaken for the purple finch, but the two species are readily distinguishable when one becomes familiar with them.

The red coloration of the male is less extensive in the case of the house finch, it being confined to the rump, breast, throat and a strip above the eye.

In the case of the purple finch, the red extends over the entire head and neck. There is also a reddish tinge to the back and much of the wings.

The tone of red differs slightly between the two species. The red on the purple finch is slightly to the purple side although hardly enough to justify the name purple finch.

Occasionally, individual house finches are encountered in which the red is replaced by orange.

On the house finch there are dark dashes on the white sides below the wings. These are lacking on the purple finch. This is a definite and helpful distinguishing characteristic.

The females of both species are rather non-descript. Both lack any red coloration.

The female purple finch has distinct dark and light bands across the side of the head. These are missing in the female house finch.

House finches and purple finches often visit feeders in the company with one another.

So, you may be lucky and get the opportunity to compare them side by side. This was the case when they visited Tom Greathouse's feeder in April, 1988.

Although at times it may associate with the purple finch, in habits the house finch resembles a house sparrow more than it does a purple finch.

Like the house sparrow, it prefers to live in towns and cities and to nest in nooks and crannies around buildings.

It has also been known to nest in bird houses, in hollow trees, in ornamental shrubs, in vines and hedges, in tin cans, among plants in hanging pots and, occasionally, on the ground.

According to the *Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas*, house finches raise two broods of young each summer.

Statistics show their population in eastern North America is doubling every 3.3 years.

In some places in the United States, they have even displaced the house sparrow to some degree.

During our trip down there last May, Winnie and I frequently heard them singing. They have a cheerful and lively song, somewhat like that of the purple finch.

We have another report of an indigo bunting having been seen this summer. It was reported by Norman Stewart of the Lockstead Road, north of Blackville.

■ For some time now, Canada Geese have been heading south for the winter. On Oct. 8, Robert Houlston of Newcastle reported a flock of 33.

They were on the river bank at the back end of John Whalen's lot and seemed to be settling in for the night.

Houlston expressed surprise they would stay in such a place — so close to human activity and almost in town.

My daughter-in-law, Ann, expressed the same feelings when on the same weekend she saw flocks of them alongside the highway near Bathurst.

Probably we are developing a less wily breed of geese now that so many of them are receiving free handouts in parks and game refuges.

They have become semi-domesticated in some places such as Toronto Island.

Bird leaves Millers after four-day stay

The scissor-tailed flycatcher which created such excitement among bird-watchers is gone.

It was last seen just before dark Oct. 26 after having spent four days at Harry and Jenny Miller's farmyard on the Hill-top Road.

While there, it gave a boost to local tourism attracting visitors from Moncton, Albert and Bathurst as well as from the local area.

Although late in the season, this flycatcher seemed to have found a good supply of flies.

As Harry Miller said, the old wooden shingles on the sides of the house provided flies with a good place to hibernate.

They crawl into the cracks and under the shingles to await warmer weather.

However, the past week has been unusually warm and when the sun comes out these shingles absorb heat and the flies come out and buzz about.

The flycatcher was taking advantage of this. It would sit on a perch and make frequent short flights to pick off these flies as they appeared.

It also made other short flights in the vicinity of the barn.

As anyone who has lived on a farm knows, a barn is a good incubator for flies and warm manure keeps them going in cool weather.

We hope this bird has headed south. The Miramichi is far north of its normal range even in summer and, of course, still farther north of its winter range.

It normally summers in the south-central United States, coming as far north as southern Nebraska. It winters from Mexico to Panama.

Second sighting

This is the second scissor-tailed flycatcher to turn up in New Brunswick this year.

The first was discovered at Paquetville, north of Tracadie. This was a little over a month ago *see article, Oct. 16.*

I have been told the one at Paquetville had no tail and, since the species' tail is extraordinarily long, this would have changed its appearance greatly. The one at Millers had its tail.

How or why these two birds came to New Brunswick is a matter for speculation. The one at Paquetville appeared on Sept. 20, shortly before Hurricane Hugo.

If it had appeared after the hurricane, we might have speculated they had been carried here by the storm.

The possibility of them being escaped pets, as suggested by one caller, is extremely unlikely. Birds that live on flying insects do not lend themselves to domestication.

Nov. 3/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Another unexpected bird was reported this week.

On Oct. 29, Luc Lemieux of Taintville called to say he and his wife, Yvette, had just seen two bobwhite in their yard. When last seen, they were running into the bush across the road.

I got into my truck and headed over. On the way I stopped at Greg Bell's home in Chatham. I thought he might like to come along. To my surprise, he said he had already seen them.

This was several days earlier, at which time there were three of them rather than two.

They were running along the old railroad bed not far from where Luc had reported them. He tried to phone me several times, but could not get an answer.

In the meantime, Greg found out where the bobwhite had come from. They were domestic birds which had escaped from someone who was raising them for use in training his bird dogs.

When I reached Luc's place, he took me to see some of the red berries the birds had been eating. While examining these, two bobwhite came running toward us.

They stopped about five or six feet from us and again started to feed. I believe the red berries were those of the wild lily-of-the-valley.

The northern bobwhite (or common bobwhite in some books) is a small, round quail with a stubby tail.

It is about nine or 10 inches long and is colored much like a birch partridge. It has distinctive white markings on the face.

It lives in open country such as farmland. It is non-migratory and its range extends from Boston south into Mexico. It is also found in the extreme southern parts of Ontario — Niagara and Windsor.

Snow buntings back

The snow buntings are back. Two were seen in a salt marsh at Point aux Carr on Oct. 22. Fred Butler reported two at his place on the Chaplin Island Road Oct. 28.

Bear vandalized Nepisiquit camps

A bear has been vandalizing camps along the Nepisiquit this fall.

It has broken into 12 camps within a five to 10-mile stretch along the river and some have been broken into twice, even three times.

It has been destructive, smashing windows, beating down doors, pulling cupboards off walls, etc.

This bear found a special treat in Chuck Kennah's camp — "warfarin" rat poison.

It had been placed there to rid the camp of any mice that might come in during the winter.

The bear relished it, licked it clean — a half pie plate full of it.

Days later, after the rat poison had been replenished and the windows repaired, the bear returned.

It again smashed its way in and again went for the rat poison — this time consuming twice as much as before — a whole pie plate full.

The bear has now been caught.

On Oct. 26, Department of Natural Resources personnel from Bathurst live-trapped it. It weighed 365 pounds.

The rat poison apparently had little effect for it was said to be a healthy-looking bear.

There was no doubt about this bear being the guilty party for it was covered with fluorescent-orange paint.

During one of its break-ins (Cletus Kennah's camp), it had bitten into a can of pressurized spray paint.

As you can imagine, paint was sprayed around inside the camp, the bear had left some orange paw-prints in the camp, and it got some of the tell-tale coating on itself.

■ Chris Von Richter says about mid-September he saw a great gray owl. It was in the bush not far from where he lives in Strathadam.

The great gray owl is the largest owl to be found in New Brunswick.

It has never been known to nest here and only rarely visits the province in winter. Mid-September is an early date for it.

Chris said what drew his attention to the owl was a large flock of crows pestering it. They were flying about the tree it was perched in. They were diving at it and were making a lot of noise.

He said the owl showed no fear of him. He was able to approach to within about 20 feet, giving him a perfect view and enabling him to identify the owl later from a field guide for birds.

According to Peterson, the great gray owl measures 24 to 33 inches in length. It has a round head — no horns.

Nov. 10/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

It resembles a barred owl except it is much larger and has yellow eyes instead of brown.

It has some distinct dark and white markings on the chin which are lacking in the barred.

"It probably visits New Brunswick slightly more often than our few records indicate, but as it stays in the deep woods and country districts it is seldom reported," Squires says of the owl.

■ Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne says this summer a rough-legged hawk was frequently seen to the east of Escuminac.

It regularly patrolled the sand hills along the shore there, and seemed to be a lone individual as no mate was ever seen.

He said two characteristics that helped to distinguish it from other hawks were the conspicuous white area at the base of its tail (seen from above) and its habit of hovering in mid-air above a fixed point on the ground, the same as a osprey does over water.

He said although the northern harrier (marsh hawk) has a similar white area at the base of its tail, this bird was quite different in its other physical characteristics and also in its pattern of flight.

The rough-legged hawk is large, slightly under two feet in length. Its name is derived from the fact its legs are feathered down to the toes.

It nests mainly on the northern tundra, but it also nests on Newfoundland.

In New Brunswick, it is uncommon at any season of the year, but does winter here in small numbers, at least in the southern parts.

It is more common in western Canada, being seen there during spring and fall migration. It is one of the many large hawks that are a characteristic feature of the prairies.

This open country, with its abundant supply of gophers and other small mammals, provides them with excellent hunting.

Also, the hordes of grasshoppers and crickets there are an important part of their diet.

Bald eagles known to nest in province

In New Brunswick, bald eagles are few in number but a regular occurrence and known to nest here.

They have been here for as long as we have records. Until 50 or 60 years ago, they were much more plentiful than today.

On the other hand, golden eagles are rare wanderers or transients in this province.

The only hint they may have at one time nested here is contained in W. Austin Squires's book, *The Birds of New Brunswick*, where he writes of this species.

"There is a set of three eggs in the Gordon Plummer collection in the Dartmouth College Museum, Hanover, New Hampshire, simply marked 'Grand Manan'.

"This collection was made between 1870 and 1900. It was still breeding in recent years in two counties in Maine."

Eagles' raid

At a meeting of the regional coordinators for the *Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas* in Sackville, we learned one or two golden eagles frequented the Perth-Andover area this past summer.

It seems they periodically raided a great blue heron colony there, each time carrying off a heron chick. The herons eventually abandoned the colony.

Here on the Miramichi, we also received a few reports of golden eagles, but details are scarce.

Certainly, a golden eagle is as likely to show up here as the scissor-tailed flycatcher that visited us recently or the sandhill crane that came here a year ago.

A mature bald eagle, with its distinctive white head and tail, is much easier to identify than a mature golden eagle. The golden eagle is all brown except for the golden sheen on the back of the neck.

The golden eagle and the bald eagle are about the same size. A large female of either species can have a wingspread reaching 7½ feet. In birds of prey, females are larger than males.

Golden eagles are said to be faster and better fliers than bald eagles. They flap less and soar more.

Apparently, they are impressive on the wing, soaring for hours over mountain ridges, spiraling to great heights on rising air currents or diving at tremendous speeds.

The habitat and feeding habits of the golden eagle are quite different from that of the bald eagle.

Whereas the bald eagle lives primarily on fish, the golden eagle feeds mainly on mammals — rabbits, marmots, ground squirrels, etc

Nov. 17/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

While the bald eagle is found primarily along seacoasts or near bodies of water, the golden eagle lives mainly in mountainous areas in the interior.

According to Terres, the two eagles are not closely related.

The latest reports of bald eagles come from Courtney Tozer of Sillikers. On Sept. 13, he reported having seen three of them together along the Fraser-Burchill Road near the Sevogle airstrip.

Two were adults and the other an immature. Another one had been seen at Matthews Settlement on the Little Southwest.

On Nov. 1, Ruth Somers reported seeing a mockingbird at her mother's, Mrs. Creighton, place in Whitneyville. This bird is non-migratory and may be seen at any time of the year.

If one shows up at your feeder, it is fond of raisins, cut apples, and other fruits.

One winter about 10 years ago, a mockingbird came regularly to our feeder in Newcastle.

Recently, while showing slides to Lois Wasson's kindergarden class, a picture of a garter snake came up.

One five-year-old, Adam Barker, said the scales on a snake's belly are like the treads on the tires of a tractor — they give it traction.

The mild fall weather seems to have thrown some plants off schedule.

In mid-October, Louise Girvan of the South Esk Road reported a large patch of pigeon berries or bunchberries were in bloom at McKendrick Lake and many wild strawberries in bloom near Libby's Brook.

A clipping sent to us by Jacques Richard and taken from the Oct. 31 *Times-Transcript* shows the picture of a scissor-tailed flycatcher.

The photo was taken at Blaine and Kathleen Spicers' farm at Apple River, N.S., 50 kms south of Amherst.

The write-up says the bird showed up on the weekend of Oct. 28-29.

The scissor-tailed flycatcher that spent four days at Harry and Jennie Miller's farm on the Hilltop Road was last seen there on the evening of Oct. 26. This makes one wonder if this is the same bird.

Step to the beat of another drummer

As in the human world, so it is in the bird world.

There are those who follow a course far removed from others of their kind — or as the poem goes, *who step to a different drummer.*

Lawrence Burns of Newcastle says this summer he watched a seagull feeding fish to crows. He witnessed this on a number of occasions while fishing near his camp in Sillikers.

Each time he witnessed this, it was near the same place and there was only one seagull involved. Presumably, it was the same seagull.

The seagull would wade out into the water, catch a small fish, return to shore and drop it in front of a crow. The crow would then eat it.

Sometimes there was more than one crow waiting to be fed. In this case they would all crowd forward, each trying to be the one to get the fish.

Sometimes one of them would take the fish right out of the seagull's mouth. It is thought the seagull was a herring gull.

■ One evening, Margaret Regan was walking her dog near her home on the Semiwagan Ridge when it picked something up from the side of the road.

It turned out to be an injured saw-whet owl, apparently struck a short time earlier by a passing car.

At first the owl appeared to be dead, but shortly as she held it, she felt it grasp her hand. Later, it was delivered to Luc Lemièux of Chatham and is now in his tender care.

If anyone can nurse this tiny owl back to health, it is Luc. He has the necessary training and experience as well as the interest.

When I last spoke to him, Luc said it was making good progress. No bones had been broken. It had sustained some bruises, including a black eye, but no serious damage to the eye.

For the first day he had it, it would not eat, but since then has had a good appetite. It has accepted the offered steak and hamburger without hesitation.

Luc expects it to be ready for release within a few days.

■ Joyce Regan, Margaret's sister, tells another story about a saw-whet owl.

While attending St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, she witnessed an attack by a crow on a saw-whet owl. The crow struck the owl and knocked it out of a tree.

It fell to the ground and was found to be dead, its neck broken.

Crows pester owls to no end when they find them during the day, but does this hostility extend to the tiny saw-whet which is incapable of harming a crow?

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Nov. 24/89

Or did the crow intend to eat the owl, but was frightened away by the people there?

The saw-whet is our smallest owl. In length, it averages little more than the larger species of sparrow and generally stays in the woods.

In winter, however, it is occasionally seen about buildings, or even comes into towns and cities. See Squires.

■ We have another wanderer from the south, one, so far as I can determine, that has never been reported here before. It is a lark sparrow.

It has been coming to two bird-feeding stations in Baie Ste Anne — Louis Sippley's and his mother's. It always comes in company with a flock of about 10 tree sparrows.

The lark sparrow has a distinctive facial pattern consisting of sharply contrasting stripes and patches of black, white and reddish-brown.

This, along with the white flashes on the outer edges of the tail (seen mainly in flight) makes it readily distinguishable from other sparrows.

Sippley first reported the lark sparrow on Nov. 15. Two days later, Tom Greathouse and I paid him a visit and on arrival were invited into his home and treated to a cup of tea.

From the comfort of his living room, we were able to view the sparrow through the window as it fed on the ground about 10 feet away.

It remained there for about a half hour in company with a tree sparrow and two mourning doves. Tom and I had plenty of time to check it in detail.

It was a first for me. Tom had seen one before in the western United States.

Mrs. Sippley was away, but we met Louis's daughters, Tanya and Marsha, who are learning to recognize and appreciate birds.

He said his mother, who lives next door, can afford to buy more bird seed than he can and as a result is stealing his birds from him.

Judging from what I have seen at his feeders and from what he has reported in recent years, he is still doing very well.

Chipmunk spent summer at Grays

Dec 1/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

A chipmunk spent the summer about the home of Helen and Roy Gray in Douglastown.

It had its burrow under a small tree in their yard.

It was first noticed during the strawberry season at which time it was sometimes seen eating strawberries from their strawberry patch.

The Grays started putting food out for it — first peanuts and later sunflower seeds.

It became tame and would climb into the lap and take food directly out of the hand.

Most of this food was carried away and presumably stored for winter.

e chipmunk would carry three peanuts per trip — one being stuffed into each of its cheeks and the third being carried between its teeth.

Since winter set in, the chipmunk has not been seen and the Grays would like to know how it copes during winter.

Here is the answer as contained in a booklet from the Queen's printer. The booklet was prepared by the Canadian Wildlife Service and written by David Sheppard.

"Near the end of July, chipmunks begin to collect large quantities of seeds and store them below ground. By October, each chipmunk has accumulated between one-half and one pint of seeds. With the aid of this food store, the chipmunk survives the winter.

"Unlike ground squirrels, chipmunks do not accumulate body fat during the summer months, although some may do so just before they enter hibernation.

"Consequently, while many ground squirrels are already hibernating in October, chipmunks are still actively storing food.

"With the onset of winter in November, chipmunks disappear below ground and hibernation begins.

"During hibernation, the body temperature, rate of breathing, and rate of heartbeat drop to low levels, reducing the amount of energy spent to maintain the chipmunk.

"Chipmunks are not deep hibernators and are thought to awaken periodically and consume part of their food supply. They have occasionally been seen above ground on warm winter days.

"A second view of chipmunk hibernation has more recently been suggested. According to this view, chipmunks do not actually hibernate until their food supply has been completely exhausted.

"Thus, hibernation may be an emergency survival measure. Only two chipmunks have ever been excavated in winter in a state of hibernation and neither of these animals had a supply of food.

"At present, it is not known which view of chipmunk hibernation is correct.

"With the first warm spring days of March, chipmunks begin to emerge, sometimes burrowing up through several feet of snow to reach daylight."

■ Last winter, we had few reports of bohemian waxwings. This winter, we have already received two reports of them.

On Nov. 25, Tom Greathouse reported a flock in Douglasfield and on the following day, Ken Sinclair reported a flock in Newcastle.

The latter flock was feeding on berries on shrubs near the Sinclair residence. Feeding along with the bohemian waxwings was a pine grosbeak — another species scarce last winter.

■ On Nov. 19, Greathouse reported a fox sparrow at his place in Douglasfield.

It was scratching in a pile of dead leaves which had been placed under a shrub as protection for the roots during the winter.

This habit of scratching in dry leaves is often what attracts a person's attention to this sparrow.

It is larger than other sparrows, is rusty in color like a fox and has a blotchy breast.

The fox sparrow is mainly a transient in New Brunswick. In settled parts of the province, it visits us only briefly during spring and fall migrations.

However, in the high north-central parts of our province — near the headwaters of the Miramichi — it nests sparingly. There it may be seen anytime during the summer.

■ Despite the wintry weather, we have received two reports of robins today, Nov. 27.

Maureen Doyle reported one in Chatham and Ingles Dunnett reported one in Sunny Corner.

Maureen would like to know what to feed a robin at this time of year. This is a question I have often been asked.

According to Terres, any member of the thrush family, of which the robin is one, will accept grapes, cherries, boiled eggs, ground meat, chopped greens and fine bread crumbs.

To this list, we could add chopped apple and most berries and fruits.

■ A fine gold chain was found at East Point before the snow came. If you have lost this, call 622-2108.

Birds often victims of nasty weather

Dec. 8/89

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

I goofed.

In my Nov. 17 column, I mentioned a scissor-tailed flycatcher reported at Apple River, N.S.

I also speculated this was the same bird that had earlier spent four days at Harry and Jenny Miller's farm on the Hilltop Road, 15 miles from Newcastle.

It had disappeared only two days before the sighting at Apple River.

However, Peter Pearce of the *Canadian Wildlife Service* in Fredericton set me straight on this.

He said the bird at Apple River was a fork-tailed flycatcher, not a scissor-tailed flycatcher. They are two different species.

After talking to Peter, I checked in my books. Most do not mention the fork-tailed flycatcher.

But, John K. Terres, in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds* does.

He says it is a native to the lowlands of southeast Mexico, South and Central America. It is quite similar to the scissor-tailed flycatcher. Both have extremely long forked tails.

The most obvious difference is the fork-tailed has an all-black head, except for a concealed yellow crown-patch. The scissor-tailed has a pale, greyish-blue head with a concealed scarlet crown patch.

The fork-tailed flycatcher is rare, even in the United States.

So far as I can determine, this is only the second record for Canada, the first one also being in Nova Scotia — at Halifax in September, 1970.

■ Ingles Dunnett of Sunny Corner says on Nov. 14 while returning from Sheephouse Brook a loon was found on the road. It was foggy and the road was icy.

The loon appeared to have no injuries, but of course, a loon is helpless when on land.

Its legs are situated far back at the tail and although they make excellent paddles for swimming are poor devices for locomotion on land.

Also, a loon cannot get airborne if it is on land. For take-off, it needs a fair-sized body of water for a runway, just like a float plane.

Ingles believes that in the fog the loon mistook the icy road for water. He put the loon into a box in the back of his truck, took it home and that night kept it in his heated shop.

Next morning, he took it to the Johnston Bridge where there was some open water. On being released, the loon immediately began swimming and diving, apparently unharmed by its experience.

Birds are often victims of bad weather — fog, hurricanes, hailstorms, freezing rain, unseasonably-cold, wet weather in spring, etc.

■ A former Newcastle resident, Fred Stiles, once described the following incident:—

He was a member of a group travelling in some freezing rain. The car went into a skid, left the road and went into the ditch.

While they were trying to get the car back onto the road, one of the party saw something fall into the snow some distance away.

They went to investigate and found it was a bufflehead duck that had crash-landed and broken through the crust on top of the snow.

The duck was cut about the face a little and was weighed down with ice.

Fred took it home and kept it in the laundry tubs in the basement for a while, then let it outside and it flew away.

■ A few years ago, a team of biologists from the Canadian Wildlife Service was stationed at Sevogle.

They were there to study the effects of the budworm spray on the white-throated sparrow.

The results of the study were reported in this column at that time.

They said after a hailstorm that summer they found many young birds dead in their nests. They thought the hail had frightened brooding parents off their nests.

Nests that were not well protected from above, filled with hailstones. The young birds were either pelted to death or were so chilled they died.

■ On Nov. 30, Mrs. Lorne Hare of Whitneyville was surprised when a large ring-necked pheasant cock turned up at her birdfeeder.

There are at least two people in the area who have released some pheasants into the wild.

Mourning doves spotted more often

Harry Walker

Dec 15/89

WILDLIFE

On Dec. 5, Mrs. Wilson Hare of Newcastle had a mourning dove at her feeder.

She called and wanted to know what she should provide for it.

I was able to give her some general information — it lived mainly on weed seeds and grain. Since then, I have been able to gather more details.

Terres says seeds constitute 98 per cent of the mourning dove's diet.

It eats enormous quantities of weed and grass seeds; eats waste grain, peanuts, cowpeas and seeds of pine trees.

The grains on his list include wheat, corn, oats, rye, barley, buckwheat and millet.

Terres does not mention sunflower seeds, however, an article in *National Wildlife* lists oil (black) sunflower seeds, cracked corn and millet as the preferred foods of mourning doves.

From this, it appears there are few, if any, seeds in most wild bird seed mixtures a mourning dove would not eat.

Terres says mourning doves will fly long distances daily in order to get water. Water is something we seldom remember to provide for birds in winter.

Another is grit. Grit is needed by all seed-eaters, including mourning doves.

Mourning doves are ground feeders, therefore, food for them should be spread on the ground.

Mourning doves are becoming more frequent visitors at bird feeders in our area, the latest call being on Dec. 10.

Gladys MacLean of Whitneyville said they had been coming to her feeder and were still coming to her neighbor's feeder, Mrs. Ralph MacDonald.

Mourning doves in our area have tended to stay out in the country. The one reported at Mrs. Hare's feeder is the first to be reported at a feeder inside Newcastle.

Not many years ago, mourning doves were unknown on the Miramichi.

Then, for the first few years they appeared here, they were seen only in summer. Now they are here year-round.

■ We have been running Christmas bird counts for Chatham-Newcastle since 1972.

For the first nine of these counts, no mourning doves were recorded. Then in 1981, four showed up.

Another four years elapsed before they were recorded again; then, in 1985, we got seven.

But during the last three counts, 1986, 1987, 1988, the number recorded have been 23, 19 and 23 respectively — a surprising increase.

The counts at Fredericton have shown an even more surprising increase.

Rudy Stocek, writing in the *New Brunswick Naturalist*, says until the late 1970s or early 1980s, mourning doves were rarely even seen there during the winter.

On their 1980 Christmas bird count, only one mourning dove was recorded, but on their 1987 count, 385 were recorded.

Since Stocek's article was written, we have obtained the results of their 1988 count.

The number of mourning doves is down slightly, but this number is almost identical with the number of rock doves, or common pigeons, recorded, 314.

■ Mourning doves generally nest in trees, usually in evergreens; but some individuals depart from this norm. One such case is described by Stocek.

It nested on the ends of two bolts of wood protruding from the side of a large pile of fuelwood.

He says the two young in this nest left it sometime between April 18 and 20 — an early date for young birds to fledge.

Later, another nest was built in a similar location on this same pile of fuelwood.

It was about 20 feet from where the first one was located. The young from this second nest were fledged by June 1.

In his book *A Field Guide to Bird's Nests*, Hal H. Harrison recorded that in Michigan, one mourning dove raised four broods of two birds each between June and Sept. of 1961, all in the same nest.

■ Desmond Dolan sent us a clipping from the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*.

In it, Frank Dobson tells of a pair of robins and a pair of mourning doves who built their nests on the same limb of the same honeysuckle bush, only 14 inches apart.

"It was comical to watch the incubating birds as they sat staring at one another during the entire nesting process," he said.

McKenzie spots bald eagles on ice

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE Dec. 22/89

If I were inspired I would write a Christmas story.

But, as it is, I will just carry on in my accustomed routine.

You may recall back in October that Courtney Tozer reported seeing three bald eagles up the Fraser-Burchill Road near the Sevogle airstrip.

On Nov. 19, Jack Tracy-Gould made a similar sighting. There were three eagles, two adults and an immature, the same as Courtney reported, and they were near the same place.

On Dec. 2, two more bald eagles were reported to be feeding on the remains of a small mammal that was lying on the river ice off Nelson-Miramichi.

Frank McKenzie who reported them said a crow also came and fed on the same carcass.

Although one of the eagles remained only a few feet away, it made no objection to sharing the meal with the crow.

■ On Dec. 10, Gladys MacLean reported a three-toed woodpecker had come and inspected a tree outside her home in Whitneyville.

There are two species of three-toed woodpeckers on the Miramichi. Since their official names have been changed a couple of times in recent years, there can be some confusion as to which species is referred to when speaking of them.

Gladys said hers had the barred or ladder back, not the solid black back.

When walking through the woods, it is easy to recognize trees that have been inspected by one or other of these two woodpeckers.

Their trunks will show many small patches of freshly-exposed, inner bark or wood. That's because these woodpeckers travel up the tree trunk flicking off flakes of loose bark as they go.

They do this in order to get at any insects or cocoons that may be hidden underneath.

They seem to be partial to dead or dying fir trees and have had plenty of such trees to work on in recent years.

A likely place to find the ladder-backed species, now officially, the three-toed woodpecker, is near the edge of a bog.

The black-backed species, now the black-backed woodpecker, is often seen among the blackened stubs in recently burned-over forest.

Neither of these species is as common as the hairy and the downey woodpeckers and neither has ever been reported as coming to bird feeders in our area.

In both species, the male has a yellow crown-patch while the females lack this adornment. Otherwise, they are black and white.

Although rare in southern Ontario, both species were reportedly more common following the Dutch elm disease epidemic.

I believe both species have been more common in New Brunswick since the start of the spruce budworm epidemic.

■ Alma Regan reports her father, Henry Arsenault of Semiwagan Ridge, has acquired a feathered friend.

On Nov. 22, a Canada goose landed at a small lake back of his place. At first it was wild, but quickly it became tame when Arsenault began feeding it bread and cranberries, etc.

It can fly and seems healthy, but it apparently has lost all incentive to continue its southward migration.

It is now being fed scratch food and oyster shells and occasionally budgie seed.

Until recently, it was not known where it spent its nights. Now its secret has been discovered. It takes shelter in the barn, passing in and out at will through a small opening.

The goose will now feed out of hand and even seems to enjoy being picked up. If allowed to, it will come right into the house.

Sometimes it comes to the doorstep of Henry's woodworking shop and honks to get his attention when he is inside.

■ The annual Chatham-Newcastle Christmas bird count will be conducted on Wednesday, Dec. 27.

Some squirrels able to swim up to 10 miles

Jan. 5/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

On Dec. 17, Father Grattan of Loggieville telephoned.

He said until recently he had at least 13 mourning doves coming to his feeder, but for the last few days he had no more than four.

He wondered if they would be back or if they had been unable to survive the extremely cold weather we had been having.

I was unable to give a definite answer, but both he and I believed if they were well fed, they would survive.

A few days later, Dec. 21, he phoned again, this time to report the doves had returned. He had 13 that day.

Grattan takes good care of his birds. He has built them an eating house where they can gain protection from the wind.

As he described it, it has an open door through which the birds can pass at will — otherwise it is completely enclosed.

The front consists of a basement window. This lets in the light and also enables people to observe the birds inside.

It is positioned in such a way they can be seen by looking out a window of Grattan's residence.

The birds were first enticed to enter the house by making a trail of grain which led from the outside through the door to the inside.

Birds coming to his feeder include starlings, chickadees and a nuthatch. He said it once happened he had 24 bluejays in his yard at one time.

Some of the items provided for the birds include crushed oysters, shells and salt — the salt being prepared as follows:

A brine solution consisting of two teaspoons of salt per quart of water which is poured over the snow. This leaves a thin film of salt to be eaten by those birds requiring it.

■ Chuck Kennah of Bathurst has a camp on the Nepisiquit River.

He said along the river near his camp he has seen flying squirrels glide across the river.

They do this by taking off from some tall pine trees growing on a high point of the river bank. But, he wonders, "How do they return?"

There is no place on the other bank that offers a comparable vantage point from which they can launch themselves for a return glide.

I can only speculate as to the answer to this.

My guess is: if these flying squirrels return, they glide as far as they can; if they don't make it, they swim the rest of the way.

In this connection, it seems reasonable to assume the distance a flying squirrel can glide will depend considerably on the strength and direction of the wind.

Almost all mammals swim to some entent. I have been unable to find any information on the flying squirrels' ability as a swimmer; since it is primarily nocturnal, there may be little known about this. If any reader can enlighten us, please give us a call.

■ It is known the red squirrel swims well. Winnie and I observed this once. We were on Mercury Island between Blackville and Doaktown at the time.

The squirrel swam across the full width of the Main Southwest Miramichi, passing near the upstream end of the island where we were standing.

It crossed the river quite quickly even though there was a current to contend with.

When it reached the other side, it did not stop but speedily scampered up the steep bank and disappeared.

It evidently suffered no exhaustion even though the river was quite wide at that point. It seemed, the swim had not slowed it down at all.

Banfield in *The Mammals of Canada* has this to say about the swimming ability of the red squirrel.

"It may frequently venture to cross lakes and rivers as wide as Lake Champlain. If met by a canoe in mid-stream, it will frequently climb up an offered paddle to rest in the boat."

From a map, I have determined Lake Champlain varies in width from about three or four miles to about 10 miles.

Our son, Ian, who lives at Kingston, Ontario, said in the nearby Thousand Islands grey squirrels swim from one island to another.

Banfield says of this species — "during pioneer days in southern Ontario, spectacular hordes of emigrating squirrels were occasionally seen in the autumn.

"There is a report of hordes of squirrels swimming across the Niagara River near Buffalo in the early 19th century."

Count of birds down: Walker

Jan. 12/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The number of birds recorded on our annual Christmas Bird Count was down drastically from a year ago.

There were only 1,400 birds this year compared to 3,902 in 1988.

The latest count was conducted on Dec. 17 — a cold day with a rather brisk wind, otherwise, it was not a bad day to look for birds.

Thirteen field observers and 26 feeder observers took part in the bird count.

The area covered in the count is within a 15-mile diameter circle, the centre of which is situated at the midpoint of the Miramichi Centennial Bridge.

The circle cuts the river at about the Bartibogue Bridge in the east and the Anderson Bridge in the west.

Birds seen in Newcastle, Chatham, Douglastown, Nelson-Miramichi and Loggieville and all points in between, are included in the count.

To do the count, field parties are assigned to different sections of the circle.

The parties drive along roads and streets and stop whenever birds are sighted. Some parties hike along bush trails.

Dumps and patches of open water, if there are any, are visited. Weed patches, brushy tangles and apple trees that still have apples on them are other places to be scrutinized.

At the end of the day, all birds reported by the field observers are added to those reported by the feeder observers. The grand total constitutes our count.

Beginning with the most abundant species, and ending with the least abundant, here is the result of this year's count:

Starlings 386, black-capped chickadees 217, snow buntings 123, rock doves (or common pigeons) 119, ravens 89, evening grosbeaks 81;

Common redpolls 76, house sparrows 73, blue jays 61, tree sparrows 27, mourning doves 22, bohemian waxwings 21, crows 18, downy woodpeckers 16;

Pine grosbeaks 14, herring gulls 12, hairy woodpeckers 10, red-breasted nuthatchs 10, great black-backed gulls 8, slate-colored juncos 5, boreal chickadees 4, ruffed grouse 2;

And one each of the following — glancous gull, brown creeper, cowbird, rusty blackbird, song sparrow and swamp sparrow.

Other species seen during the count period, but not on the day of the count, were: pileated woodpecker, barred owl, sharp-shinned hawk, northern shrike, gray jay and field sparrow.

The count period is the time during which a bird count can be run and be officially recognized as a Christmas bird count by the National Audubon Society.

This year the count period extended from Dec. 16 to Jan. 3.

Much of the decline in the bird population can be explained and isn't all bad.

For instance, the number of gulls almost dropped out of sight — 1,316 last year, 21 this year.

Most of these gulls fed at the Chatham dump, but now that the garbage is being buried quickly and regularly, there is little food available there to attract gulls. Presumably, the rat population has shown a similar drop.

The drop in the starling population — 744 last year, to 386 this year — is probably also partly due to this change in dump management.

Our figures show a big drop in the pigeon population, but a closer look reveals this is mainly artificial.

The downtown cores of Newcastle and Chatham, where pigeons concentrate, were largely bypassed during this year's count.

House sparrows again show a decline. This has been the general trend for many years.

The population of evening grosbeaks is down, but their numbers fluctuate widely from year to year. Their numbers are always unpredictable, as is the case with most winter finches.

Our provincial bird, the black-capped chickadee, is doing well. On this year's count their numbers were the second-highest ever — only 12 short of last year when they set a record of 229.

The swamp sparrow at Wilfred Walsh's feeder in Douglasfield was a first. We have run 18 consecutive Christmas bird counts in this area and never before had we recorded this species on one.

The osprey builds at highest points

Jan. 14/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Why does the osprey always build its nest right on the top of a tree or some other structure?

Clell Manderville of Millerton says he thought about this for some time and finally came to this conclusion.

When the osprey comes home with its claws clutching a fish, its feet are unavailable for grasping a limb.

It would therefore be awkward for it to land at a nest lower in the tree where branches might be in the way. There might also be danger of accidents.

Coincidentally, I just received a publication in the mail this morning showing a picture which goes along with this point. It shows an osprey's nest perched atop a rock outcrop.

Although built on the ground, the nest consists of the usual large bundle of sticks.

There are no obstructions around it, providing the osprey with an excellent pad on which to land with his load of fish.

■ On Dec. 16, Gary Mullin reported a northern shrike at his place in Newcastle.

The northern shrike is a robin-sized bird of prey, greyish, or pale greyish-brown with dark wings, tail and facial mask. It lives primarily on small birds and mice.

Unlike hawks and owls, it has no talons for grasping its prey. Its feet are no stronger than those of a songbird. Its only weapon, therefore, is its hooked beak.

■ Barred owls seem to be unusually abundant this winter.

In the past, reports of them have been few and far between, but, during the past month, we have received five separate reports of them.

In a couple of cases the owls were not positively identified as being barred, but from the description received, there is only a slight doubt about this.

The first report came from Margaret MacKinnon of the Moorefield Road. She said a barred owl had come and perched on a telephone pole in front of her place.

Surprisingly, it was on the same pole on which she had seen a barred owl two years earlier.

The second report came on the following day, this time from Georgia McLean of Douglastown. She had an owl perched at her bird feeder.

She had previously placed some scraps from her table there — chicken bones and bones from pork chops. Presumably these had attracted the owl.

When the owl disappeared from MacLean's place, a telephone call was made to Margaret MacKinnon about two miles away.

We were told the owl had reappeared there. So, these reports seem to have been of the same owl.

On the evening of Jan. 1, we received a call from Jenny Herbert of Newcastle. She described an owl matching that of a barred sitting in a tree outside her home.

On the same evening, Greg Bell reported seeing two barred owls near Chatham.

Finally, on Jan. 6, Louis Sippley phoned from Baie Ste Anne. He had a barred owl there. He said it was tame, so he was able to walk up to within three or four feet of it.

He also said he had a great abundance of squirrels, about 15, coming to his feeders. He wondered if the owl had been attracted by them.

The barred owl is large, one and a half to two feet high, is greyish brown in color and has a round head (no horns). It has dark brown eyes.

Most other owls have yellow eyes. It is a woodland owl and does not often come out into open areas.

■ We have two reports of rusty blackbirds.

Eleanor Bransfield has had one coming to her feeder in Douglastown and on Jan. 5, Jack Manderville reported one at his place in Derby.

The rusty blackbird should be far to the south of us at this time of year, but, like other species, the odd one gets left behind when the others migrate.

In winter it is more readily identified than in summer for it has the rusty-colored feathers from which its name is derived. In summer it does not.

In summer, the male is all black, including legs and bill. The only exception is the eye which is pale yellow. It has a square tail rather than a wedge-shaped tail as does the grackle. The female is slate-grey.

In winter, both male and female have rusty-orange feathers on the head, breast and back. The rusty feathers are paler (more yellowish) on the sides of the head and on the breast than on the back.

This rusty coloration gradually shades into the black or slate-grey of the summer plumage.

Snow geese visit out of their season

Jan. 26/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

With a name like snow goose, it seems appropriate for it to be reported at this time of year.

However, the ones reported at Black River Bridge are a first for the Miramichi region and possibly for New Brunswick.

Everard MacLean said his sister and brother-in-law, Agnes and Bill Fowlie, saw 13 fly over their place on Sunday, Jan. 7.

These geese came in low and appeared to be going to land, but then continued on. The first five flew over, then another seven and finally one lone straggler.

Snow geese have landed near here before.

On April 26, 1988, a flock of 25 stopped over on Ernest MacLean's land for more than 24 hours. It would be interesting to know if these latest visitors are some of the same birds.

According to *Peterson's Field Guide*, the snow goose normally spends its winters on the United States' east coast from around Philadelphia southward through Virginia and the Carolinas.

Squires in his book *The Birds of New Brunswick*, refers to the snow goose as a 'rare transient'. He gives its season in New Brunswick as extending from March 20 to June 4 in the spring and from Sept. 26 to Dec. 23 in fall.

■ Another species which should be far south of us at this time of year has also been reported. This is the northern harrier or marsh hawk.

It stopped outside Jeep Bosma's window in Newcastle on Jan. 11 and stayed for half an hour.

This gave him and his granddaughter, Mary Bosma, plenty of time to compare it to the pictures in their bird book.

Mary is only six, but her grandfather said she is already an enthusiastic bird watcher. With some help from her dad, she has built and erected her own bird feeder. Mary lives just east of Chatham.

During summer, the northern harrier is sometimes seen hunting over Strawberry Marsh, flapping occasionally, then gliding in wide sweeping circles.

It lives mainly on field mice, but also takes some birds. It usually confines its activities to marshes and open fields, but deep snow might have forced this one to seek food elsewhere.

Squires says: "When the snow is light a few may be found in winter." However, this winter hardly fits that category.

Squires also said although it undoubtedly nests in suitable habitat throughout New Brunswick, the only nest records are for the southern area of the province.

We can now update that a little for we now have at least one nest record for the north.

On June 16, 1988, Ronnie Jagoe of Chaplin Island Road led me to a northern harrier's nest situated in a small bog back of his home and not more than two miles outside Newcastle.

It was hidden under low, heath-type shrubs and was not located until the brooding female flew up.

At this time we were only a few steps from it. When we saw there were several eggs in the nest, we quickly retreated to minimize the time the eggs would be left unincubated.

■ Many people have been inquiring as to where the evening grosbeaks have gone this winter.

Last year they had lots of them, but this year there are few, or none at all, coming to their feeders.

When anyone asks about this, I draw their attention to the French name for this species, Le Gros — bec Errant, which means "wandering grosbeak".

This is a better name than the English one. It describes this bird's habits as unpredictable. It may be one place one year and somewhere else the next.

On our Chatham-Newcastle Christmas bird count, evening grosbeaks were down from 616 last year to a mere 81. A similar drop in numbers has also been reported in surrounding areas.

In Baie Ste Anne, Louis Sippley runs his own Christmas bird count. Last year he reported 100 evening grosbeaks, this year only 22.

In Sunny Corner, Joan Gallant reports the number of evening grosbeaks at her feeder to be down from a maximum of 80 last year to a maximum of 12 this year. The number of mourning doves is also down from 12 to four.

From Rogersville, George Casey sends a similar report. He had lots of evening grosbeaks last winter, but none this year.

The number of mourning doves is also down slightly. On one occasion last winter, he had 32 mourning doves in his yard at one time — this year the most he had is 15.

Cracker thieves strike

Feb. 2/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

A "robbery" took place in Lyttleton.

It happened in broad daylight and almost under the nose of the property owner.

The two thieves escaped by air with their loot which consisted of almost a full package of crispy crackers. Now the details.

Eight-year-old Krystal Somers went out to skate on the small rink beside her home. She took a box of crackers with her. She ate a few and placed the box on the porch.

As she skated, she forgot about her crackers, but when she returned, she discovered they were all gone. All that was left was the empty cracker box.

Where had they gone?

Later as Krystal played in her yard, she noticed her crackers were scattered here and there on the branches of the nearby spruce trees.

Who put them there?

About three days later, she solved the mystery when she saw two gray jays retrieving some of the crackers from the trees.

Krystal's mother, Ruth, knew all along what had happened. Through the window she had watched as the jays ransacked the cracker box and carried off the contents.

She said although they placed the crackers in the trees, they did not fed alone on them. Their cousins, the bluejays, helped themselves to the crackers as well.

■ Krystal's brother, Colin, phoned one day. A chickadee was flitting about inside the house. It had flown against a window and at first appeared to have given up the ghost.

However, when brought inside, it quickly recovered and was soon flying about as though nothing had happened.

It could not be caught, but by putting some seed on a window sill beside an open window it was enticed to leave.

■ The Somers are among the few people reporting redpolls this winter. They had about 30 one day and about 15 another.

The redpolls were eating seeds from a birch tree beside their home although none came to the nearby feeder.

■ Bo Quann, who works at the Chatham dump on weekends, says a bald eagle periodically visits the dump, but when it does, the crows give it a hard time.

■ Bohemian waxwings are being seen in the area.

On Jan. 22, Mary Hélène Bouchard reported a flock of about 30 of them. They were eating the red berries from a small, ornamental tree at her home in Taintville.

The following day, Jeep Bosma reported a flock of about 20 at his place in Newcastle.

■ A flying squirrel has appeared at Barbara Von Richter's birdfeeder in Strathadam. Too bad so few of us ever see this little night time acrobat with the big eyes.

■ Mrs. Perley Waye of Trout Brook described four birds perched in the top of a spruce tree beside her home.

Three of them were red with black wings, but with distinct white markings on the wings. The fourth had a yellow breast.

This description strongly suggests the white-winged crossbill — three mature males and an immature male.

The top of a spruce is a likely place to see them for they live mainly on spruce seeds.

Their crossed mandibles, which are designed for extracting seeds from cones, are not readily noticeable.

Surprisingly, this species frequently nests in mid-winter, although it may nest at almost any time of the year.

Unlike the young of most bird species which are fed primarily on insects, young crossbills are fed regurgitated, partially-digested seeds.

If it were otherwise, they would be unable to successfully raise their young in midwinter.

■ On Jan. 25, Tom Greathouse of Douglasfield reported a varied thrush.

It appeared twice during the day, each time feeding on seeds which he had spread in his driveway.

This species is a relative of the robin. It is a native of the west coast of North America and has rarely strayed this far east in the past.

Squires lists only four records for our province. However, his book was published in 1976 and there may have been other occurrences since then.

Of the four records listed by Squires, three occurred in winter. In two cases, the bird was a regular visitor at a bird feeder.

The last two cases are: one at Stanley in the winter of 1960; the other at Marysville in 1965. It has never before been reported on the Miramichi.

The varied thrush has a rusty-orange breast like the robin. However, unlike the robin, this same color is also found on the throat, on a strip above the eye and on two bars on the wings. There is also a narrow black band across the breast.

On Jan. 27, 11-year-old Chastity Allison of Trout Brook found a hairy-brown caterpillar. It was a sunny day and the caterpillar was just out for a stroll.

Tame foxes spotted in different areas

Feb. 9/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

During the last several months, there have been a number of reports of tame foxes.

These reports have come from around Manderson's Beach on the south side of the river and from around Bartibogue and Oak Point on the north side.

You may recall articles in the *Miramichi Leader* about a fox that was stealing shoes from campers at the Bartibogue Campground late last summer.

In mid-December, Helena Bowie reported there was a red fox at Oak Point which was acting more like a dog than a fox.

It was coming into her yard and picking up scraps of meat and bread she had thrown out for the birds.

It would play with the dog and it had been known to come up onto the porch of a neighbor's house and lay down there. Bowie wondered whether it posed any danger to children.

When I suggested the possibility it might have rabies and in such a case could be dangerous, she said there was no indication of poor health.

Quite the contrary, the fox had a beautiful fur and appeared in excellent condition. It just seemed to be playful.

Last summer, a pair of foxes set up housekeeping near Manderson's Beach and raised a family.

They learned to accept human handouts and a number of people were regularly feeding them.

It is said they become so tame they would almost eat out of hand.

Although these foxes looked well-groomed in early summer, some of them later became unkempt or mangy in appearance. The consensus was they were suffering from the 'mange'.

Webster's dictionary defines mange as "a skin disease of dogs, cattle, etc., caused by parasitic mites which burrow in the skin."

Some of this family of foxes may have crossed the river after freeze-up and this might account for the tame fox at Oak Point.

If so, this one must have escaped the mange or it must have quickly recovered from it.

The sneaker thief cannot be explained in this way as it was at Bartibogue before freeze-up.

Fox litters disperse in the fall. They leave the family group and each one looks for a place where it can stake out its own range.

According to Banfield, in his book *The Mammals of Canada*, young males tend to disperse more widely than do the young females.

He says through tagging experiments it has been determined that at this time some young males travel as much as 166 miles from their original home.

On the other hand, young females may stay in the vicinity of their parents' den and produce litters nearby.

Without trying to imply any of these foxes had rabies, here is some information on this subject taken from a booklet supplied by the Canadian Wildlife Service. The text was written by C. S. Churcher.

■ While naturally the red fox will shy away from man, the rabid fox shows no fear and often is seen in daylight.

Children should be warned against handling bold or "friendly" foxes.

Foaming at the lips, possibly with blood in the foam, shows a late stage of the disease.

■ If a person is bitten, he should cleanse the wound at once and immediately go to a doctor.

The nearest federal veterinary authorities, Health of Animals Branch, Canada Department of Agriculture, should also be informed at once.

■ According to Peter Reschke in an article in Nature Canada magazine, a fox only lives about three days to a week after manifesting the first symptoms of rabies.

He says the disease is more prevalent in fall and winter and suggests this is related to the dispersal of the young which carry it from one area to another.

The red fox is not always red. It comes in a variety of color phases, the most common of which is red.

Even within the same litter, all the pups are not necessarily of the same color. Cross or silver phases may occur along with the red.

Churcher compares this to a human family where brothers and sisters do not always have the same color hair.

Through selective breeding, silver foxes have been made to predominate in most domestic stocks. In the same way, the rare platinum fox has been developed.

Within the wild population, cross foxes and silver foxes are more common in some geographical areas than in others.

Purple martins found

Feb. 16/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Another year of the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas Project is over.

Those who have been involved in gathering field information for it have had many interesting experiences.

One finding will be of interest to those who have been erecting purple martin houses: Mark Phinney of Fredericton found a colony of them at Plaster Rock.

According to the Atlas Newsletter, this is the most northerly colony of purple martins known in the province. Previously, Aroostock held this distinction.

The only report of this species in the Miramichi Region this year came from Norman Stewart who saw one in a flock of mixed swallows near his home on the Lockstead Road north of Blackville.

He said this is the first time he has seen a purple martin since 1979. At that time, he saw a pair of them building a nest in a woodpecker hole in an apple tree. He does not know whether or not this pair produced young.

Years ago, Sterling Burchill had a colony of purple martins at his home in Nelson Miramichi. He said eventually starlings drove them out and they never returned.

We also have information indicating there may have been a colony at Loggieville at one time.

Almost all purple martins found in New Brunswick nest in multiple-roomed bird houses.

Occasionally they nest in woodpecker holes situated near water or in holes under the eaves of buildings.

Brian Dalzell of St. Stephen, atlasing in the Tobique Region last summer, suffered two flat tires.

One of these was caused by a live rifle cartridge which somehow penetrated the tire, but never exploded.

Among his most gratifying finds were two bald eagle nests; both occupied and both remotely located, but many miles apart.

He was disappointed to find so few ospreys and belted kingfishers along the Tobique River and he learned part of the reason for this. Trout pond owners were shooting them.

The atlas project has revealed eastern bluebirds are more widespread than previously realized.

They are, however, sparsely distributed. Those found have often been in recent clear cuts.

Near Plaster Rock, another rare blue-colored bird, the indigo bunting, was confirmed as nesting. Yvon Beaulieu found a family of them there — a singing male and a female feeding an immature.

This species was also found at two locations on the Miramichi, but proof of nesting was not obtained. The two locations: one near Blackville, the other on the Bathurst Highway.

Tony Erskine of Sackville reported a rare find on the border region of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. A pair of blue-gray gnatcatchers were confirmed as nesting there last summer.

This species is described as resembling a miniature mockingbird, but smaller than a chickadee. It is said to often hold its tail in an upright position as does a wren.

In eastern North America, the house finch has been rapidly expanding its range and increasing its numbers.

Data gathered by Maritime atlasers indicates the vanguard of this host is now entering the western parts of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

House finches, like house sparrows, concentrate in towns and cities. Their habits are much the same and, in some places, the finches have in some degree replaced the sparrows.

In many communities in the United States and in Ontario, where only a few years ago they were unknown, house finches have become one of the most common birds.

For example, in the latest Christmas Bird Count run at Rochester, N.Y., (the results of which were sent to us by Desmond Dolan) 1,798 House Finches were recorded. This figure was said to be up 29 per cent over last year's.

In southwest Nova Scotia, atlasers and other outdoor people have an extra hazard to contend with — wood ticks.

One atlaser said on one of his outings he collected 50 wood ticks on each leg. Another said his highest count was 87. We will have more on these things in a later article.

The Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas Project is a five-year project.

In the four years completed, 197 species have been confirmed as nesting in the Maritimes while another 23 species have been listed as either possible or probable nesters. This adds up to 220 species.

It is hoped during the coming field season at least three more species will be confirmed and so reach to 200 mark.

To be l ted as possible or probable esters, some evidence of reeding must be found. Spr g and fall migrants do not co

Raccoons' diet varies

Feb. 23/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

On the evening of Feb. 17 while driving into Blackville along the Lockstead Road, Norman Stewart saw a raccoon.

It ran along the road and seemed reluctant to leave it. Like you and I, it preferred the ploughed road to the deep snow on either side of it.

We do not expect to see a raccoon in winter; however, a booklet in the "Hinterland Who's Who" series produced by the Canadian Wildlife Service reads:

"In winter, the raccoon lives off its stored body fat, although at times, it will seek out available food, scavenging on winter-killed deer, muscrats trapped in their lodges or even feeding on seeds from bird feeders.

"The fall diet is extremely important to the survival of the animal during the Canadian winter.

"Further south, raccoons are active and feed all winter long, but the more northern animals are forced to spend much of those long, cold and snowy months existing on the store of fat built up by autumn gorging."

The raccoon's diet is extremely varied. It does well on human garbage, eats many kinds of vegetables and fruits and is especially fond of corn.

It frequently hunts along streams feeding on such things as frogs, clams, fish, and crayfish — the latter being a favorite.

It eats snakes, bird's eggs, grasshoppers and other large insects. At times, it may be hard on nesting ducks because of its nest-robbing activities.

When we lived at Gould, Quebec, we saw raccoons catching night-crawlers on our lawn one early morning.

It was interesting to see how they suddenly clamped their paws on them so they could not withdraw into their holes.

Here on the Miramichi, the raccoon must go rather hungry for its favorite dish, the crayfish. Crayfish are found in some branches of our river, but not plentifully.

Probably the main reason for this is a deficiency of dissolved calcium minerals in the water for these are necessary if the crayfish is to produce a hard shell.

If you are unfamiliar with the crayfish, it is a freshwater crustacean that looks like a small lobster. Quoting again from the same booklet referred to earlier, we read:

"Unlike the groundhog, the raccoon does not truly hibernate in winter but merely becomes inactive. The body temperature does not drop and the animal's activity appears governed by the air temperature.

"In early winter, the raccoon will stay denned up during below freezing temperatures. Such a pattern allows the raccoon to conserve its valuable energy stores (fat) during periods when it is unlikely to find food.

"However, by the breeding season (Jan-Feb), the male raccoon will be up and about seeking a female even in below-zero temperatures providing the snow is not too deep."

The raccoon prefers to make its den in a large hollow tree with the entrance well above ground.

If this is not available it may utilize a hollow log, a culvert, a chimney, an empty barrel, an enlarged groundhog hole, etc.

In 1968, W. Austin Squires published his book, *The Mammals of New Brunswick*. At that time he wrote:

"In New Brunswick, the raccoon is at the northeastern limit of its range and while it has always been well-known in the southwestern part of the province it is only during the last few years it has been reported from northern areas."

Whereas most mammals have retreated before civilization, the raccoon has not. It thrives in many of the big cities farther south.

Timothy Foote, writing in the *Blair and Ketchum's Country Journal*, mentions a study in Detroit in which the raccoon population in the suburbs was calculated to average one raccoon for every 1.4-acres (.6 hectares).

Although many raccoons get killed by traffic in these cities, nonetheless the abundance of food more than compensates for these losses.

They relish potato chips and other scraps, scavenge in garbage cans, raid gardens and find refuge in city parks, ravines, and large shade trees.

The raccoon is a unique mammal. Not only is it intelligent, but having front paws that are almost like hands, it is capable of performing tricks beyond the capabilities of most other mammals.

Its dexterity with its 'fingers' is similar to that of a monkey.

In Canada, the raccoon is the sole member of the family of animals to which it belongs. Its closest relatives here are said to be the rs.

Its French name is raton laveur meaning "a rat that washes".

Mammals attracted

Mar. 2/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

A bird feeder at Bay du Vin is not only attracting a large number and variety of birds, but it is also attracting an assortment of mammals.

The owner of the feeder says he has seen as many as four flying squirrels at the feeder at one time and believes there are more.

Another frequent visitor is an unfortunate fox which has a snare around its neck and, under the illumination of a yard light, a coyote was seen there.

Flying squirrels bunk together during the winter months and in this way conserve much body heat.

Banfield says as many as nine adults have been found in a single winter communal nest.

This nest is normally in a tree cavity, whereas the summer nest is usually in the open, among the branches, and is made of bark and twigs.

Occasionally, birds may also huddle together for warmth in winter.

In New York State, Frank Dobson once reported a case where 12 bluebirds had packed themselves into one birdhouse for the night.

The fox is reported to be eating some bread along with the fat it is getting.

Its friend and benefactor, the one who has been feeding it, has borrowed a tranquilizer gun with which he hopes to tranquilize it and remove the snare from its neck.

Failing this, he may have to shoot it, for although it still looks to be in good condition, he feels it may be having some difficulty in swallowing and the snare has worn the fur off part of its neck.

Tranquilizing it does not appear to be an easy task as the gun will only shot about 40 feet. He has already been trying to live-trap it, but without success.

Perhaps you have some suggestions.

The coyote was not seen to feed and may have been just passing by. Recently, not far away, a group of five coyotes were seen travelling over the ice of the bay well out from shore.

Birds coming to this Bay du Vin feeder include about one dozen each of mourning doves, tree sparrows, and black-capped chickadees — this latter species feeding out-of-hand.

Also coming is one lone boreal chickadee, two red-breasted nuthatches, two white-throated sparrows, two redpolls, two hairy woodpeckers, a downy woodpecker and some bluejays.

A flock of about 40 snow buntings is reported to come periodically whenever the weather is bad. A pileated woodpecker, although it does not come to the feeder, appears in the yard at one or two-day intervals.

Pine grosbeaks have visited the feeder. Evening grosbeaks, which were coming earlier, have now disappeared.

One day a hawk killed a gray jay in the yard and, on one occasion, Nov. 28, a male cardinal came.

This is the first cardinal to be reported since last winter when Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne had a female coming to his feeder on a regular basis.

Only one report of pine siskins has been received this winter — different from two or three years ago when they were showing up at every feeder.

This report came from Courtney Tozer of Sillikers, on Jan. 30 when he had six at his feeder.

Also present, was a flock of about 40 snow buntings which he said were tame and were feeding all around him — on his doorstep and under his vehicles.

When travelling, snow buntings often follow rivers. Banding operations in western Greenland revealed the migration route of the one nested there.

In fall, they crossed the Davis Strait to Labrador, followed the Labrador coast to the Gulf of St. Lawrence where they split.

Some followed up the St. Lawrence to the Great Lakes region — others continued south to the Maritimes.

On Feb. 6, Emily Matheson reported both pine grosbeaks and bohemian waxwings were beeding on crab apples on the C.I. Road while on Feb. 18, Ben Robertson reported a flock of the latter feeding on crab apples in Newcastle.

On Feb. 11, Chris Rogers reported a mature bald eagle with full white head flying over Taintville.

Doug Underhill of the McKinnon Road reported on the evening of Feb. 16 at 8:30 p.m., that when completely dark, several ravens were heard.

They were noisy and were at first close at hand, then their calls faded into the distance.

Something must have disturbed them on their roosts — possibly a great horned owl which may attack almost anything of any size.

On Feb. 17, Lincoln Palmer reported a brown creeper was examining some balm-of-Gilead trees at his place in Tabusintac. This bird is not often seen its work compliments that of the nuthatch.

Woodpeckers reported frequently this winter

Mar. 9/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Pileated woodpeckers are being reported quite frequently this winter.

There seems to be more of them than usual, and there is obviously a lot of interest in them.

This interest is easily understood. Anyone seeing one of these birds is bound to be impressed by it.

The pileated woodpecker is by far our largest woodpecker. Two other North American species are larger, but their ranges are far to the south of us and both are near extinction.

One of these, the ivory-billed woodpecker, which resembles the pileated woodpecker but has more white on it, may in fact already be extinct.

But, there is still hope that a few individuals may exist in some remote swamps in the southern United States or in Cuba.

The still larger imperial woodpecker is found in Mexico. It is about five inches greater in overall length than the pileated. The pileated woodpecker is about the size of a crow.

It has a large, flaming red crest, and with its sharply contrasting black and white plumage, cannot be mistaken for anything else.

It resembles the cartoon character *Woody the Woodpecker.*

When at rest, most of the white plumage is hidden and at this time, it appears as a blackbird with some white stripes on its face and neck — with, of course, the red, pointed crest.

When in flight, the underside of the wings become visible and then we see they are largely white. But the trailing edge of the underside is still black.

Both male and female have the red crest, but on the male the red extends further down over the forehead.

Also, the male has an extra red stripe running back from the side of the bill — a drooping red mustache we could call it.

In recent years, the pileated woodpecker has been regaining some of its lost ground, increasing in numbers and returning to areas from which it had disappeared as European settlement advanced.

Hopefully, foresters will not again reverse this trend by cutting down all of the big, dead hardwoods which provided nesting sites for this and other species.

Dead trees play a role in the forest ecology.

An interesting note about the pileated woodpecker is contained in Hal H. Harrison's *A Field Guide to Bird's Nests.*

He says in the Everglades National Park in Florida, a photographer was able to photograph a female pileated woodpecker transporting her eggs in her bill.

The tree in which her nest had been located, had broken off at the nest cavity.

She thereupon flew off carrying her eggs, one by one, to an unknown destination. Each of the three eggs was carried lengthwise in her bill.

A few other species of bird have been known to do this.

According to Terres, the pileated woodpecker's diet consists mainly of insects, especially carpenter ants — but about 25 per cent of it consists of seeds, nuts and berries.

I have been asked how dangerous it is to eat berries from areas that have been sprayed with Vision herbicide, the spray used to kill hardwoods in recently planted softwood plantations.

I have obtained a data sheet prepared by the Monsanto Chemical Company.

It contains results from tests run on this product. I do not intend to go into this subject in detail, but will give you the results of two of these tests.

The data sheet contains the statement "Monsanto studies indicate the following:

- Oral L D_{50} (rat) 5,400 mg per kg, practically non-toxic."

This was Greek to me until a biologist, Tony Erskine of Sackville, interpreted it for me.

He says it means when rats are fed Vision herbicide at a rate of 5,400 mgs for each kg of body weight, this constitutes a lethal dosage for 50 per cent of the rats so tested.

According to Banfield, a Norway rat weighs anywhere from 195 to 485g. So, suppose we take a 400g rat, feed it 2.16g (0.54 per cent of its body weight) of Vision herbicide, then its chances of living or dying are equal.

- The data sheet also says, when single male and female dogs were orally administered dosages up to a maximum of 5.0 mg. per kg. of body weight, there was no mortality and the most common effects were vomiting and diarrhea — which occurred shortly after dosing.

According to my calculations, this maximum dosage would be equivalent to administering 0.45 g (or 0.016 ozs) of the herbicide to a 200-pound animal.

Should Canada ban shot?

Mar. 16/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Should the use of lead bird shot be banned in Canada?

In the United States, its use in hunting waterfowl is to be eliminated by next year.

The problem is it causes lead poisoning in the waterfowl. This has been known for over 100 years.

According to Terres, a lead pellet embedded in the flesh will not cause lead poisoning.

It is the swallowed pellets that cause the problems. Such pellets often remain in the gizzard for some time and they abrade there.

This gives rise to soluable lead compounds which enter the bloodstream.

Therefore, the lead pellets that miss the mark cause the lead poisoning.

They lay in the marsh where they are said to resemble the seeds of pond weeds — a favorite food of some of our waterfowl.

In 1964, Bellrose estimated two to three per cent of all waterfowl were dying of lead poisoning every year and if lead shot continued to be used, that percentage was bound to rise.

He said lead persists in the environment for a long time whether deposited on the land or in the water.

Therefore, even if the use of lead shot were discontinued, its effects would still be with us for some time.

Apparently, when a duck is suffering from lead poisoning, the lead concentrates in its internal organs.

The remaining flesh and the skin can be eaten. However, the duck is likely to be so emaciated it will not be worth eating.

Bellrose estimated in the United States, 6,000 tons of lead pellets were discharged into marshes annually.

He said an iron alloy pellet has been developed which had little or no effect on gun barrels.

Steven Allen, who runs a sporting goods store here in Newcastle, says he has both lead and steel shot, but most customers buy the lead.

He believes this is mainly a matter of habit, but one objection to the steel shot is that it tends to mutilate the carcass more.

For the last two years, the New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources and Energy has been conducting a study, the object of which is to try to determine the effects of lead shot on the waterfowl of this province.

Their interim report outlines the procedures followed in this study and it also set forth the results of the first year of the study.

It was prepared by Alan Hanson of the Fish and Wildlife Branch in Fredericton. To date, the study has consisted of three parts:

- Sediment samples have been taken from various marshes within the province and these have been examined for the presence of lead pellets.

Each sample consisted of a cylinder of sediments six inches (15-cms) in diameter and reached to a depth of six inches into the marsh.

Results: The percentage of samples containing lead shot varied greatly from marsh to marsh — from a low of zero per cent in one marsh to a high of 24 per cent in another. Most samples containing lead had only one pellet.

Terres said from earlier studies, it was found the number of pellets present in the surface sediments of a marsh depended not only on the intensity of the hunting there.

It also depends on the nature of the sediments — pellets falling into soft mud generally penetrate beyond the reach of the waterfowl, but those falling onto a sandy or gravely bottom remain near the surface.

- During banding operations, blood samples were taken from waterfowl and analyzed for lead. This testing was done on 444 birds, mostly black ducks and teal.

Results: eight per cent of the black ducks had elevated levels of lead, but none of the teal, either blue-winged or green-winged, had elevated levels. Overall, six per cent of the waterfowl tested had elevated levels of lead.

The species that appeared most vulnerable was the ring-necked duck. Of 177 gizzards examined from this species, 31 (or 18 per cent) contained lead pellets.

Of 370 black duck gizzards examined, 19 (or five per cent) contained lead pellets.

Again, the teal were lead-free. Gizzards from 120 green-winged teal and 67 blue-winged teal were examined and none contained lead pellets.

Other species in which one or more individuals showed evidence of lead poisoning, having either high levels of lead in the blood or having lead pellets in their gizzards, included wood ducks, mallards, pintail, common goldeneye, and great scaup.

However, the numbers of birds involved were too small for percentage figures to be meaningful.

Species in which no evidence of lead poisoning was found included wigeons, scoters, mergansers, eiders, buffleheads and Canada geese.

Weasel seen in town dragging its lunch

Mar. 23/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

A weasel was seen dragging a starling across a street in Newcastle.

The incident took place in front of Hudson Gremley's home. He reported it.

It is not known whether the weasel killed the starling or whether the starling was found dead, although a weasel is quite capable of killing a starling.

When I was a boy growing up on the farm, a weasel would occasionally get into our henhouse and kill hens. This was done at night while the hens were roosting.

Weasels do not usually venture into town. We have had reports of them invading country homes where they have become quite bold.

In some cases, they have been observed stealing scraps of food right out of the kitchen while the occupants were present. They are most active at night.

The common weasel found here is the short-tail weasel, the ermine, or the stoat — whichever you prefer.

A somewhat larger species, the longtail weasel, is rarely found here. The only reports of it have come from long-time trappers who have found it in their traps.

In winter, the short-tail's fur is almost all white, except for that on the tip of the tail which is black. Its eyes and tiny nose pad are also black.

In spring, the fur on the upper parts of the body becomes a rich cinnamon brown, but on the belly remains white while the tip of the tail remains black.

Interestingly, in the warmer parts of its range where there is little or no snow, the fur does not change color. The summer coat is kept year-round.

Although short-tail weasels live mainly on mice, according to Banfield, "practically no resting animal is safe from their attacks".

Pikas are small mammals about seven inches long. They are related to rabbits, but resemble guinea pigs.

They live in colonies in rock slides high up near the timberline on mountains where they make their homes in the cavities of the rock rubble.

A few years ago while on a mountain hike with our son, Ian, Winnie and I heard frequent calls which Ian said were those of pikas, but we never managed to see any.

At that time, Ian's work took him on frequent hikes to the alpine regions of the Rockies. As a result, he was familiar with much of the animal and plant life found there.

Banfield brings up an interesting point about his mammal's distribution. He tells us it inhabits three distinct and widely-separated regions of the world.

One of these is in Central Asia, another in Japan and the third in the Rockies of western North America.

The mountain beaver is not really a beaver. How it got its name is unclear. Two other names for it are aplodontia and sewellel.

It is described as weighing from two to three pounds and resembling a tailless muskrat.

It lives in loose colonies, the members of which dig extensive systems of underground burrows and tunnels — usually in wet ground.

Burt and Grossenheider speak of it as "the most primitive living rodent." Banfield calls it "a living fossil," because all its former relatives have long since become extinct and are now known only from fossils.

This means the mountain beaver is the sole survivor of the family Aplodontidae.

It inhabits a strip of land along the Pacific Coast from southern British Columbia to northern California.

Here it is found both at low and high elevations — on flood plains and on mountains up near the timberline.

A comparison of a distribution map for this species with that of a rainfall map for the same area, shows its distribution coincides with an area of high precipitation.

The amount of precipitation appears, directly or indirectly, to set the limits on its distribution.

Although it is an interesting curiosity to biologists, it is a pest to those who have to deal with it in everyday life.

It feeds on a great variety of plants and is especially troublesome to foresters and market gardeners.

Tom Greathouse, who worked as a forester in Oregon, says it preferred to live in forest openings rather than in mature stands and it did considerable damage in new forest plantations.

It did this by chewing off the roots from underground and girdling the trees above ground in winter. In some places, the mountain beavers debarked the trees to such a height, they appeared to have been climbing them.

In these cases, however, the animals had really been just feeding on top of the snow, which in that region, often piled up to great heights — sometimes over 10 feet.

Familiar red fox has adapted best

Mar. 30/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

There are five species of fox in North America, but the familiar red fox has adapted best to the changes since European colonization of this continent.

C.S. Churcher, in a pamphlet written for the Canadian Wildlife Service says, "It is thought there are more red foxes alive today in North America than ever before.

"This came about because the spread of the European settlers and their farms introduced an environment with both trees for cover and open fields for hunting areas."

The ranges of the five North American foxes are roughly as follows:

The Arctic fox occupies the band of barren tundra that extends across the extreme northern part of our continent.

Immediately south of this is the broad band of softwoods and mixed woods that is the home of the red fox.

Still farther south is the band of hardwoods wherein lives the gray fox.

Within these two forested bands, lies two restricted areas of specialized habitat which provide niches for the other two species of fox.

The swift fox occupies the treeless, grassland prairies to the east of the Rockies and the kit fox, the desert regions of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico.

These last two species are so closely related there is some doubt as to whether they should be regarded as separate species or whether they should be lumped together as the same species.

Within the ranges, there has always been a considerable amount of overlapping, and this overlapping has become even greater in recent times because of the alteration of the habitat by man.

In the north, the red fox ranges well beyond the treeline and into the traditional home of the Arctic fox.

It is found throughout almost all of the mainland portion of the Northwest Territories and even on Baffin Island.

On the other side of its range, the red fox has been pushing further and further south through the home territory of the gray fox. It has now reached the Gulf of Mexico.

"The gray fox prefers forests and marshes and is less at home in farm lands than the red fox," says Banfield in his book, *The Mammals of Canada*.

In the trees

We who are accustomed only to the red fox may find the idea of a fox climbing a tree rather strange. This is one curious difference between the gray fox and the red.

Banfield informs us the gray fox not only climbs up steep trunks of trees, but also, provided the branches are not inclined too steeply upward, jumps readily from branch to branch.

In this same regard, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animal Life* (Greystone Press) says if the tree has low branches, the fox will climb it by leaping from one branch to another rather than by clawing its way up the trunk.

It also says this fox is a slow runner and therefore takes to the trees in order to escape from dogs and other enemies. Further, it sometimes sleeps in the crotch of a tree.

The diet of the gray fox is said to be quite similar to that of the red fox except it includes more vegetable material. This vegetable material includes such items as corn, nuts, apples and other fruits.

The gray fox has slightly shorter legs and nose and a grayer fur than the red fox. It looks much like the cross-phase of the red fox.

Both species are practically the same size. The other three North American foxes are appreciably smaller.

Except for tree-climbing antics, the habits and actions of the gray fox are much like those of the red.

The gray fox has recently re-established itself in territory from which it has long been absent.

Banfield writes: "From early historical accounts and from archaeological excavations, it is know that gray foxes occurred in considerable numbers in southern Ontario, as far north as Midland and in southern Maine, in the middle of the 17th century.

"They have entered Canada at three points: extreme southern Quebec and eastern Ontario; southern Ontario just north of Lake Erie; and extreme southern Manitoba."

The gray fox's range extends from just south of our border, down through Central America and into South America.

The red fox's range includes not only most of North America, but also most of Europe and Asia and a strip across North Afr

Woods ticks simply wait for victims

Apr. 6/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

In an earlier article, mention was made of the wood tick which occurs in southwestern Nova Scotia.

Like the black fly and the mosquito, the wood tick is a blood-sucking creature that will attack any warm-blooded animal including man.

However, since it cannot fly and is extremely slow moving, it is much more easily avoided than are these aerial predators.

It succeeds by patience and perserverance rather than by open attack and manoeuvrability.

It simply lies in wait for a victim. It cannot chase after one or go looking for one.

It is easy to dismiss the wood tick as just another pest. However, even pests are marvellous!

When we examine their structure or anatomy, we are impressed to see how they are specially designed to fit their own way of life.

When we delve into their life histories, we are amazed any of them manage to complete their entire life cycle and reproduce the next generation.

All things large and small provide food for thought. Remember, in many of the psalms and parables of the Bible, we are instructed in spiritual things through parallels drawn from nature.

The wood tick has a dark, round, flattened body. This body is also very tough. You cannot squash it by squeezing it between the fingers. It has eight legs.

The fully-grown adult measures about five millimetres or about three-sixteenths of an inch.

At the ends of its legs are small hooks. These catch onto the fur of any animal that happens to brush against them.

Likewise, they catch onto the clothing of any person that happens to brush against them.

A leaflet obtained from the Nova Scotia Museum and written by Edward Claridge and Debra Burleson gives the life history of the wood tick and other pertinent information.

The leaflet also says: "Realistically, the wood tick is not a very serious pest in Nova Scotia. Most people who are accustomed to life with wood ticks feel blackflies and mosquitoes are far more of a nuisance."

Three hosts needed

It tells us the wood tick must have at least three hosts in order to complete its life cycle, but it may have more.

It begins its life as an egg deposited on the ground. Its first host after hatching is a small mammal such as a mouse.

After engorging itself on this host's blood, it drops off, digests the meal, moults, then climbs up onto some low vegetation.

From this higher vantage point, it usually obtains a somewhat larger mammal for its second host — a squirrel or rabbit perhaps.

Again, after feeding, it repeats the steps followed on the first host, but climbs higher — often on tall grass or weeds, sometimes on shrubbery in the bush.

From here, it usually catches onto a still larger host. It may be a deer, a man, a dog or a cow.

According to Lorus and Margery Milne in their *Field Guide to North American Insects and Spiders*, if the female wood tick has mated before her last meal, she lays her eggs — thousands of them. These are deposited on the ground and the cycle begins anew.

The tick does not bite immediately. Instead, it climbs upward on one's body until it finds a warm place such as an armpit. Then it settles down to feed. By this time, several hours have usually elapsed.

To feed, it buries its mouthparts under the host's skin, but apparently a mild anaesthetic released by the tick prevents one from feeling this penetration.

If a wood tick has attached itself to one's body, it is best not to forcibly remove it as the mouthparts and head may pull off and remain embedded.

A better procedure is to heat a knife blade or other metallic object and then touch it to the tick's body. This will force it to release its grip.

Our sons, Ian and Lyle, followed this procedure once while canoeing in Kejimkujik Park. It worked for them.

In Nova Scotia, ticks are worse in spring and by July 15 have practically disappeared.

When hiking in tick country during tick season, it is best to examine one's clothing and body periodically and remove any ticks before they become attached. Also, it is prudent to avoid patches of tall grass and weeds.

Last spring, I picked up some wood ticks in South Dakota and again in Manitoba — both times by walking through long grass.

Aunt Lou's articles from early 1900s

Apr. 12/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

This week, my Aunt Lou will fill in for me.

My grandmother's sister, she was born in 1876 and died in 1955.

She wrote articles for the *Stayner Sun* in Ontario and the two short articles presented here probably appeared in that paper.

However, this is uncertain for the copies I have were taken from typewritten sheets in one of my sister's scrapbooks. They were not newspaper clippings.

I had deduced this first article was written in the 1890s, my reason being it appeared to have been written before Aunt Lou was married — before June 1900.

On the other hand, my wife says bobbed hair came into style about the end of the First World War, in 1918.

Article one: At last I have done the deed, for the better or for the worse and at the moment of writing this, I can't see one ray of hope. But I must not keep you in suspense — I had my hair bobbed.

I had good hair too, and meant to keep it, regardless of fashion, but somehow curiosity got the better of me and I meant to see if I could wear the bob as well as others who are out of their teens.

But luck was against me. One day, when in town, I sneaked (that is the feeling I had) into the barber shop — but low and behold, the whole family was there ahead of me.

One was in the chair and another was waiting his turn.

I tried not to recognize them, picking up the daily paper and pretending I was reading, but with the paper for a shield, I was taking observation and trying to read the thoughts of those two I knew would be my worst critics.

One had a grin all over his face; the other had the expression of an Egyptian mummy, but they said nothing.

Finally my turn came, and I joined the ranks of the bobbed heads. Oh yes, I know how I look — no one is backward with his opinion on this farm! *Louise (Schell) Collins*

This next article was probably written about 1925. The baby referred to in it is thought to be Archie Culham and he will be 68 shortly.

He is the uncle of a Newcastle resident, Marianne Morby. His wife is Marianne's Aunt Ruby.

Article two — While baby gets a hair cut: You see, mother thought her darling would look and be much cooler with his hair shortened up a bit, and daddy said 'Well now's the time,' and went at it.

While visiting grandpa said, 'It will be done so quick, he won't know what's happening'.

But that youngster had vision. Some great calamity was about to befall him. It was time to put in a kick. He was the leading character in the play and no one blames the boy for it not being a howling success.

He was placed on the throne with a towel pinned around his neck. Just as dad got into action, he squirmed and kicked and uttered a howl that brought all the aunties on the run to see what was going on.

The dog was brought in when curl number one fell. With it went another howl. Next came the looking-glass. But who of us would have the nerve to sit and watch our head cut off?

It became necessary to bring in his musical uncle who had the bright idea of trying his violin with one of the latest tunes and a magnificent jig was given by grandpa.

A few more curls dropped. Another vigorous protest. Nothing could make this performance a real game. The latest idea was to have uncle number two stand on his head while the job was finished up.

No doubt, the boy was cooler, but that didn't apply to those who took part in the play. A prize awaits the genius who will invent something to keep the baby quiet while he gets his hair cut. *by Louise (Schell) Collins*

Some memories of Aunt Lou: When I was a boy growing up during the depression, farmers went to town on Saturday night. They went to shop, but, more importantly, they went to visit.

The grown-ups gathered in groups along Main Street. We kids gathered in packs that roamed up and down the street.

If I met Aunt Lou, she would stop me, dig into her purse, and usually come up with a nickel.

That was big money in those days — enough to buy an ice cream cone, a chocolate bar or a bottle of pop. She had no children of her own.

Aunt Lou always had rosy cheeks. There was always a dab of "rouge" on them. She applied make-up more liberally than did most women of her generation.

That is one trait she surely did not inherit from her Pennsylvania Mennonite ancestors.

What one perceives depends more upon internal make-up

April 20/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Winnie and I have just returned from Florida. It was our first trip there.

Previously, I had resisted the idea of going to Florida for I had felt it would be too crowded there. I am more attracted to out-of-the-way places where few people go.

However, with a little coaxing I consented and I am glad I did.

Much of the time, we avoided the crowded areas and when this was not the case, I was more comfortable than I had expected.

Many of you have no doubt been to Florida, but, nonetheless, I will tell you something about our trip.

Even if we followed the same route, we would each see different things and our impressions would be different.

We are like the 10 blind men who went to see the elephant. That story was in one of our readers when I was in public school. In case you are unfamiliar with it, it goes like this:

The 10 blind men approached the elephant. One of them came up against its side and concluded an elephant was like a wall.

Another found its ear and concluded an elephant was like a fan. Another found its tail and concluded an elephant was like a rope, etc.

We are all like them; we notice some things but miss others.

Our perception of things depends more upon our internal make-up than on the external stimuli.

Trip briefs

I will cover some parts of our trip in more detail in later articles.

When we left Newcastle on March 4, we headed in a generally southwest direction until we reached Lexington, Kentucky, then, went almost directly south to Panama City Beach in Florida's Panhandle.

On arrival, we spent about a week with my cousin and his wife, Archie and Ruby Culhan, and then went to my sister and brother-in-law's place, Hazel and Oscar Bellamy, at Sebring in central Florida.

This leg of the trip could have been done in a day, but we took three days because we frequently stopped to birdwatch or visit wildlife parks.

We next went to the Everglades in southern Florida and then to the Keys — Key West being the most distant point we reached on our trip.

Key West is an historic place, having been settled centuries ago and was a hangout for pirates in those early days.

On our return trip, we visited the old historic sections of several other cities — St. Augustine, Florida; Savannah, Georgia; and Charleston, South Carolina.

St. Augustine is said to be the oldest city in the United States and it is quite Spanish in its architecture. Savannah and Charleston are equally interesting but very different.

We also visited the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia. This is a vast wetland with stands of bald cypress trees interspersed with areas of grassy marshes. Alligators abound, as do large wading birds such as herons, egrets and cranes.

I won't claim we plunged into the swamp with only a map and a compass to guide us. We took the easy way.

We followed the elevated boardwalks provided for the public and also climbed a tower which gave us a wonderful overall view.

Later at Norfolk, Virginia, we crossed over the mouth of the Chesepeake Bay. This neck of water is spanned by a series of tunnels, bridges and causeways stretching 18 miles.

This led us onto the Delmarva Peninsula which we found to be refreshingly peaceful and quiet — contrasting markedly from the traffic jam we got into at Norfolk, having reached there at the peak of the rush hour on a Friday night.

On the Delmarva Peninsula, we visited two interesting game refuges — one at Chincoteague, Virginia and the other near Barrington, Delaware.

The name Delmarva is a composite name derived from the names of the three states between which the peninsula is divided — Delaware, Maryland and Virginia.

From here, we more or less hurried home, arriving in time for the Easter weekend. There was still plenty of snow around.

This year we had the pleasure of experiencing spring twice — once in the southern states and once in New Brunswick.

Many wildlife parks feature alligators

Harry Walker

April 27/90

WILDLIFE

"I never want to see another alligator."

This was my wife's reaction when we saw another wildlife park advertising this as one of their attractions.

It seemed that in every park we visited in Florida we had seen alligators and lots of them.

At Shark Valley in Florida's Everglades we counted over 50. Most were lounging on the flat rock bottom of an almost dried-up river bed.

The alligators always gave the impression of being lazy. However, we gathered this appearance was deceptive.

It is not recommended that anyone go about poking them with a sharp stick.

We were told, that although they tire quickly, they can be both fast and agile when they need to be. Winnie and my sister, Hazel, witnessed an example of this on one of our outings.

A large alligator, as usual, appearing to be in a torpid condition, suddenly sprang to life and plunged into the water.

This action was triggered by a small alligator which had been slowly swimming toward it and this was the big one's crude method of asserting its authority.

At the time this happened, I had wandered ahead having been distracted by a bird's song. I heard only the splash, but from this I judged an alligator is not a particularly graceful diver.

Despite this display, the literature assures us alligator attacks on humans are rare. Some people even engage in alligator wrestling, but before you take up this sport, it is advisable you know your opponent well.

One piece of information indispensible in this regard is that an alligator, although it has strong muscles for closing the jaws, has weak muscles for opening them. Therefore, so long as one has a firm grip around its snout, it cannot bite.

People are warned not to feed alligators because if they do the alligators will start following them and demand food. Such alligators can become dangerous.

Dogs as victims

Unlike humans, dogs are frequent victims of alligator attacks. We gathered this from a number of sources while in Florida and we heard more than one explanation.

Some thought the dog's bark somehow stimulated the alligator to attack it. My brother-in-law, Oscar Bellamy, who winters at Sebring, Florida, is of the opinion the dog's curiosity is its downfall.

The dog goes sniffing around the alligator. One snap and the dog is gone.

One alligator frequently lounged on the bank of a canal at the back of Oscar's lot and it eventually got his neighbor's dog. The alligator has since been disposed of.

Some people on the Miramichi may remember Oscar. As a young man he worked as a steeplejack erecting radio towers across Canada. One of those he worked on was CFAN's tower at Chatham Head. This was in the late 1940s.

He also worked on radio towers at Fredericton and Moncton and the first TV tower at Saint John.

Another project he worked on was the erection of the weather beacon on the Canada Life Building in Toronto — the same building my wife worked in before we were married.

A picture of this weather beacon appears daily in the top corner of Toronto's *Globe and Mail* paper along with the weather report.

Oscar says many of the men he worked with were Indians from the Brantford Reserve in Ontario and the Caughnawaga Reserve near Montreal.

His partner when he started in this trade was an Indian named Joe and Oscar says he was determined to do anything Joe could do.

He said in the winter it was very cold and windy up on the towers, especially out on the prairies in western Canada. They frequently suffered frostbite to their fingers, ears and nose.

He worked for 16 years as a steeplejack and during this time lost only 11 days due to sickness.

More about alligators

While visiting the Okefenokee Swamp in southern Georgia, Winnie and I were walking along a wharf at which tour boats were tied up.

A woman who worked there was standing in our path and she warned us an alligator was lying on a boat ramp just ahead.

She said a few days earlier this alligator had jumped up onto the wharf by curling its tail underneath itself and then releasing it like a spring.

The wharf had vertical concrete side that extended two or three feet above the water's surface

Exotic glossy ibis circles the marsh

Harry Walker

May 4/90

WILDLIFE

A glossy ibis made several circles over the marsh.

Each time it came to a certain point in its circle, it hovered there, then swooped around again only to come back to the same spot and hover again.

It was obvious it knew exactly where it wanted to land, but it was nervous about doing so with me close by.

Eventually, its attraction to this spot won out over its nervousness and it dropped down, legs dangling. It began to feed, poking here and there with its long, thin, down-curved bill.

What it was feeding on I do not know, but its actions showed it knew this marsh and it knew the food it was after could be found at that spot.

It was perhaps 60 feet away and as I watched I was impressed with its strangeness.

Having the sun on my back and the bird directly in front of me, its colors came out loud and clear.

I thought, "What a truly exotic bird this is!"

I had seen this species before on a few occasions, but never before under such good lighting conditions or at such close range.

We do not necessarily need to go to Florida in order to see a glossy ibis.

Overshoot the mark

In spring, they spread up the Atlantic coast of the United States and during migration, some of them overshoot their mark and land far beyond their destination.

It would seem as though the urge to fly north is so strong they become oblivious as to how far they have travelled.

Some land in New Brunswick, but after a few days, seem to realize their mistake and head south again.

Such an occurrence took place recently. On April 26, Margaret Russell phoned to report there was a glossy ibis at her place in Strathadam.

It was feeding on some waste bird seed that had been gathered from under her bird feeders and discarded near the edge of a stream.

The glossy ibis is about two feet long from the tip of the bill to the tip of the tail. It has long legs and a long neck and its long, sickle-shaped bill is distinctive.

In flight, it stretches its neck out to its full length, thus exaggerating the length of it.

When it alights, its attention is directed toward the ground, frequently pecking as it examines it for food.

At a distance, it appears to be entirely black, but as we get closer it is seen to be a deep chestnut color with only the legs and bill being truly black.

The feathers are iridescent giving rise to greenish and purplish reflections like those of a grackle (blackbird).

The glossy ibis has been expanding its breeding range northward for the last 50 years and it has now been found nesting in New Brunswick.

Four years ago on June 14, 1986, a nest containing three eggs was found on Manawagonish Island off the Saint John harbor.

It was first recorded on the Miramichi 18 years ago, May 2, 1972, when a flock of 11 spent a couple of days in an open field at Craigville.

Since that time, they have visited us on at least two other occasions, not counting the latest case at Strathadam.

Other species

Two other species of ibis found to the south of us are the white ibis and the scarlet ibis.

Both are similar in size and outline to the glossy ibis, but are different in color.

There is one report of the former for New Brunswick — at Saint John airport on July 1, 1968. See *Birds of New Brunswick* by W. Austin Squires. The latter is rare even in the southern United States.

The white ibis's plumage is white except for the extreme tips of the wings which are black.

The legs and bill are bright red as is a small featherless area at the base of the bill and about the eyes.

When in Florida, Winnie and I saw many white ibis. On two mornings, one was seen feeding on my sister's front lawn at Sebring. Its prying actions indicated it was extracting morsels partially buried in the lawn.

Oscar, my brother-in-law, said it could not be fish worms it was extracting for these were non-existent in his lawn.

The scarlet ibis of northern South America has a black bill, black eyes, and black wing tips. Otherwise, the bird is entirely bright, scarlet color.

In Virginia, on our way home, we saw several large flocks of glossy ibis. Some of these were in salt marshes, others in open fields.

The Birder's Handbook, by Ehrlich, Dobkin and Wheye says the glossy ibis' diet consists of aquatic inverts, especially crayfish, insects and water snakes

Snow goose visits

May 11/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Snow geese are occasionally reported here, but normally the reports are of migrating flocks which stop over only briefly.

On April 20, Mrs. William Herbert of Nelson-Miramichi reported that for about three weeks one had been frequenting a field behind her home.

During the first week of its stay, a second one was seen with it on a few occasions, but after that it was alone.

The snow goose winters along the Atlantic coast from around New York City southward. In summer, it nests in the Arctic and along the shores of Hudson Bay.

Latest information is that this goose has disappeared. Perhaps it was slightly injured or in poor condition and had to drop out of a migrating flock in order to recuperate before continuing on its spring migration.

Harlequin duck

On April 27, Don Cabel of Weldfield reported a harlequin duck at Taylor Creek in the Napan Bay settlement.

This is a rarely-reported species and one which I have yet to see. Pictures indicate the spring male of the species is a gaudily-decorated bird.

This is suggested by the name, harlequin. A harlequin, according to the dictionary, is a party comedian who dresses in a colorful costume.

It has bold black and white stripes and circles on a blue-grey background, chestnut-colored sides, a blue speculum (wing patch) and a yellowish crown stripe.

The female's appearance is much more subdued, but nonetheless distinct in markings of white on an otherwise drab, dark-brown plumage.

The harlequin duck has not, as yet, been confirmed as nesting in New Brunswick, but has been confirmed as nesting in the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec.

Some winter along the coast of the Bay of Fundy and on two or three occasions have been reported at Indian Falls on the Nepisiquit River in summer.

One came down in Newcastle in the dead of winter, Jan. 31, 1989. It was in a weakened condition and was turned over to the Department of Natural Resources which delivered it to the game farm at Magnetic Hill near Moncton.

In *The Birds of New Brunswick*, W. Earl Godfrey tells us the harlequin duck spends its summers on fast-running streams and rivers. At other seasons, it is often found on rough waters along rocky coasts.

A pair of black-crowned night herons was reported by Mike Doyle of Nelson-Miramichi on April 28.

This heron is smaller and of a much stockier build (shorter legs and neck) than the better known great blue heron.

A mature black-crowned night heron has a black crown, but a white lower half to the head. Its back and wings are also black, but its belly is white.

Two or three long, thin, decorative white feathers stream backward from the back of the head.

The immature bird is different. It is of a striped brownish color throughout and lacks the long, thin plumes found on the back of the head of the adult. It resembles an American bittern or stake driver.

The black-crowned night heron generally nests in colonies and there are known colonies of them in northeastern New Brunswick. I know of none here on the Miramichi.

No doubt it would be seen often if it were not for its nocturnal habits and its tendency to nest in remote, inaccessible locations — on islands and in swamps, etc.

However, it is not entirely nocturnal and is sometimes seen feeding during the day.

It is occasionally seen at the Strawberry Marsh in Newcastle and in the marsh at the mouth of Murdock Creek at East Point near Loggieville.

Its nests are usually placed in trees, sometimes at great heights; but they may also be on the ground in marshes.

Hal H. Harris in his book, *A Field Guide to Birds' Nests*, tells of one colony at Cape Cod, Mass., which had 2,536 active nests in it. These nests were in low-pitch pines.

This heron generally feeds on small fish, but according to John K. Terres, in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds*, it is not a stickler in this respect and will turn to many other types of food if readily available.

Terres also says it has been known to feed almost exclusively on meadow mice when these were abundant.

In the *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Ontario*, we read the black-crowned night heron was hard hit by some of the insecticides used in the late '60s and early 70s, but its numbers have since been recovering.

The number of nests in one colony near Kingston, Ont., is said to have dropped from 78 in 1968 to only 15 in 1973 and many of their colonies showed similar declines during that period.

Finches move here

May 18/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Many of those who were feeding birds in the winter have now stopped for the summer.

However, those who have continued have been reporting big influxes of spring migrants at their feeders.

Recently, many finches, especially purple finches and pine siskins and various sparrows, have moved into our area.

On May 11, Ruth Somers of Lyttleton reported a purple finch at her feeder as well as juncoes.

She also reported during the latter part of the winter, from February onward, redpolls were regular visitors there.

Also on May 11, Louis Sipley of Baie Ste Anne, reported purple finches, white-throated sparrows, white-crowned sparrows and pine siskins at his feeder.

There were about 30 of the latter and they had been coming for about two weeks. The three or four white-crowned sparrows first appeared on the previous day.

An anonymous caller from Newcastle reported purple finches and pine siskins at his feeder. He also reported a weasel had been living in his woodpile all winter.

The previous winter he had some trouble with rats in the woodpile, but this year, with the weasel living there, the rat problem was gone.

On May 12, Carol White of Lower Newcastle reported she had as many as 30 purple finches at one of her feeders. Also present were three or four goldfinches. Such a large flock of purple finches is unusual.

On May 12, Gladys MacLean of Whitney reported a great array of birds at her place. The most unusual was a beautiful little Cape May warbler that came and purched on her windowsill.

After leaving for a short time, it reappeared there again, and seemed to be pecking at something on the windowsill.

Being an insect eater, it would not be attracted to a bird feeder, but perhaps it was finding some insects at the window.

Coming to Gladys's bird feeder were chipping sparrows, a white-crowned sparrow, a pair of goldfinches, lots of pine siskins, flocks of purple finches and a house finch.

She also reported hearing a bobolink. In April, she and her neighbor, Marie MacDonald, saw a mockingbird.

The chipping sparrow is a dainty little bird. With its clear breast, bright reddish-brown cap and distinct eye stripes (white stripe above the eye, black stripe through the eye), it is easily distinguishable from other species.

This sparrow is likely to be seen in our yards all summer. It frequently builds its nest in trees or shrubs close to our homes. Its chipping song gives it its name.

There are three other species of sparrow having rusty caps which are sometimes seen here — the tree sparrow, the swamp sparrow and the field sparrow. However, there should be little confusion between them.

The tree sparrow is far to the north of us in summer. It is seen here only in winter or in late fall or early spring. It has a dark spot in the centre of its breast.

The swamp sparrow is less common, is darker in color and less distinctly marked (cap not so bright) as the chipping sparrow. Also, it is retiring in its habits.

It confines its activities to swamps and marshes and is very seldom seen about our homes. I have never seen one in town.

The field sparrow is a rarity here. I have yet to see one on the Miramichi.

However, there are two reports of them appearing at bird feeders in the fall — one at Margaret and Parker Wheaton's feeder a few years ago, the other at Maxime and Lawrence Tozer's feeder last year.

As a boy growing up on the farm, I sometimes found chipping sparrow's nests about our home. They were always as neat as the little builders themselves and as a result, I was much impressed with them.

Invariably, these nests were lined entirely with horse hair which was wound around and around inside the cup.

The outer part was made of dried grasses with nests usually in spruce trees at no great height.

About a month ago, April 14 to 20, several people phoned to report mourning doves in their yards. This happens every year about this time.

Winter flocks are dispersing or new doves are arriving from the south and they show up in places where they have not been seen before.

Those reporting mourning doves at that time were Mrs. Zamko of Douglastown, Bun Worrell of Newcastle and Martin Kerr of Chatham.

On April 15, Lincoln Palmer reported a flock of Bohemian waxwings feeding on rose hops at Tabusintac. On April 27, Art Matchett reported a mature bald eagle at Beaubear's Island.

Mammals swim to some degree

May 25/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Pratically all mammals swim in some degree, but some are seldom seen doing so.

Joe O'Neill reports on Saturday, May 12, while with a group of boaters travelling down the Main Southwest from Boiestown to Blackville, a fox was seen swimming across the river.

When it had reached a point more than half-way across, it turned around, apparently frightened by the boats and returned to the side from whence it came. It shook itself like a dog and ran off.

One member of this party, Dale Vickers of the Cain's River Road, said two weeks earlier he saw a coyote swim across the Cains River.

Bill Wyton of Taymouth reported seeing a porcupine swimming in the river there.

Bruce Walker and Heather Brewster reported seeing a porcupine swimming in the North Pole Stream near the Palisades last fall.

Orioles visit

A couple of orioles have been frequent visitors at the bird feeders of Joan and Andy Galatis of Boom Road.

The first arrived about May 12. It had peculiar markings — a black ring around its neck, but not a complete black head as does a mature male Baltimore oriole.

Such markings did not correspond with any of the pictures of orioles in the bird books we consulted.

I tentatively classified it as a cross between a Bullock's and a Baltimore oriole although this sounded a little far-fetched.

A few days later, by which time the second oriole had arrived at the Galatis's, Tom Greathouse came up with a more plausible explanation. He classified both as immature male Baltimore orioles.

I am told the second oriole's markings were also a little confusing, but they more closely matched those of a mature male than the first one.

As it now stands, we are agreed they are two male Baltimore orioles at different stages of change — from immature to mature plumage.

Strictly speaking, the two species, Baltimore and Bullock's, no longer exist. In 1973, they were officially reclassified and combined.

Each is now considered as simply being a sub-species of the same species. The new species name for both is the northern oriole.

The Bullock's range covered the Rocky Mountains regions of the United States and the southern parts of British Columbia and Alberta. The Baltimore's range covered the eastern United States and Canada.

Along their common border, they hybridized freely and this was the reason for their reclassification.

Orioles are primarily insect eaters, but are also fond of fruit.

However, because of the early date of their arrival and the scarcity of such food, the two in question were first attracted to the Galatis' by the seeds provided in their feeders.

When fruit was later provided, it was more to their liking. Halved oranges have now been hung in the trees and grapes have also been offered.

The first oriole accepts only the oranges and Joan says it is a tidy eater, thoroughly cleaning out one section of the orange at a time.

The other is described as a messy eater, but accepts both oranges and grapes. The two go their own separate ways and are not very compatible when they meet at the feeder.

The northern oriole is one of the few birds that habitually eats tent and other hairy species of caterpillar. We could use a few more of them.

Its nest is unique — a woven sock hung from the outer twigs of some large tree. It swings and sways with the slightest breeze. Being five or six inches deep, there is little danger of its contents being spilled.

Orioles will accept pieces of yarn and string for use in nest-building.

A couple of years ago, I was shown an oriole's nest built in a shade tree at Keith and Margaret Russell's home in Strathadam. It was constructed entirely from strips of clear plastic woven together.

Cold hurts

Long periods of cold, damp, spring weather can be hard on early-arriving, insect-eating birds. They are unable to find sufficient food.

This was probably the cause of death of a male scarlet tanager found by Clell Manderville of Millerton on May 21.

He said it was still alive when he found it, but it was very weak and soon died although it showed no signs of having been injured.

Humans threaten loons

June 1/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The following press release comes from Christopher McCall, Canadian Lakes Loon Survey coordinator. It was forwarded by Desmond Dolan.

"The haunting symbol of Canada's wilderness, the loon, may be suffering from human activities.

"The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey seeks to answer questions about the loon's future in Canada by building a network of volunteers across the country to study loons.

"Since 1981 the Long Point Bird Observatory has been coordinating the Ontario Lakes Loon Survey. It is designed to study the effects of acid rain and other human disturbances on common loons in that province.

"The survey discovered that on lakes susceptible to acid precipitation, loons may not be as successful producing young. On severely affected lakes, loon chicks may have starved to death because of low fish numbers.

"However, it is clear information is needed from all regions of Canada, from both disturbed and undisturbed habitats, in order to monitor the health of Canada's loon population and the aquatic ecosystems that support it.

"For example, Quebec is home to a large proportion of Canada's loons, yet 82 per cent of its lakes are considered acid sensitive.

"Are loons in Quebec being affected in ways similar to those in Ontario? What about other provinces? Hence an expanded Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is needed.

"Hundreds of volunteers have surveyed lakes in Ontario and provided important information on nesting, loon behavior, and the effects of pollution, development and human disturbance.

"Now, volunteers are needed across Canada. The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is interested in people who can visit lakes at least three times during the summer — June to watch for resident adults, July to look for newly-hatched chicks and August to record the number of chicks surviving the summer.

"Some lakes do not support any loons, but information from these lakes is just as important as that from lakes where loons do breed.

"People wishing to register as volunteer surveyors should send their name, mailing address, and the name and location of the lake (or lakes) they will be surveying to:

"Canadian Lakes Loon Survey, Long Point Bird Observatory, P. O. Box 160, Port Rowan, Ontario, N0E 1M0, tel. 519-586-3531.

"The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is a project of the Long Point Bird Observatory, an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to research, conservation and education.

"The CLLS is funded by LPBO, the Wildlife Toxicology Fund (World Wildlife Fund), the Canadian Wildlife Service, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Northern Reflections stores and CLLS participants."

In this connection, I would like to remind boaters the wake from their crafts can destroy loon nests, particularly true during June and early-July.

Since loons have difficulty manoeuvring on land, they commonly build their nests on the edge of the water, often on islands. The wake from passing motor boats sometimes washes their eggs away.

According to Hal H. Harrison in his book *A Field Guide to Birds' Nests*, loon eggs have a long incubation period — commonly 29 days.

Usually there are two eggs to a nest, but frequently only one, and rarely three. Only one brood is produced during a season.

Gannet on land

About May 10, Jody Nason and Peter Richardson made an unusual observation while travelling on a bush road between Beaverbrook and Bartibogue.

A gannet, which is normally seen only at sea, was down on the road. As they approached, it took off, but had considerable difficulty getting airborne. Once in the air, it soon disappeared over the trees.

Here on the Miramichi, this is the first report I have ever received of one of them being seen inland.

However, looking out to sea, some can often been seen off Escuminac Point or off the eastern tip of Miscou Island.

The gannet is a large sea bird, having long, pointed wings, and weighing about six or seven pounds. It has a wingspan of about six feet.

Its body, and the inner half of its wings are white. The outer half of its wings are black. And, there is a yellowish wash on its head.

According to John K. Terres in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds*, there are only six colonies of gannets in North America — three in Quebec and three in Newfoundland.

The closest of these is on Bonaventure Island off the Gaspé Peninsula. They nest on cliff ledges from whence they can easily launch themselves into the air.

Man-of-war birds conjure up images of Keys' old pirates

June 8/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Before we set out one morning in the Florida Keys, Marge said we might see it.

I already had a strange feeling about it — this "man-of-war-bird". I had seen pictures of it and knew about its thieving habits.

Its black color and scrawny appearance and that wicked hook on the end of its bill combined to give me the impression it was something like a witch.

On top of this, that bare, bright red pouch on the throat of the male reminded me of blood.

The pictures I had seen also showed this pouch could be blown up like a balloon. What a weird piece of ornamentation — definitely eye-catching, but in a grotesque way.

It was easy to imagine these birds might be the embodied spirits of the old pirates who inhabited the Keys centuries earlier.

At last we saw it. It was high in the sky — too far away to see in detail, but there was no mistaking it. Its outline, its deeply-forked tail, its long, narrow wings and its slim body are unlike any other bird.

We saw it dive and wheel and then it was gone. Later in the day, we saw it again but it was still high in the sky and in view for a short time. We had hoped to get a better look.

It looked like a master in flight. Perhaps my prejudgment of it had been a little off the mark. Speed, grace, and daring were suggested during my viewing.

These attributes are reflected in another name for this bird, its official name, the "magnificent frigatebird".

It is also called the "hurricane bird" for it is frequently seen in flight during and after hurricanes.

Marge Brown was our nature guide and it was she who first spotted this bird. Some of you will know her. She and her husband, Page, have been spending their summers on the Miramichi for many years.

They have a camp at Mercury Island on the Main Southwest, near Blissfield. Their permanent home is on Summerland Key in Florida.

According to John K. Terres in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds,* frigatebirds have greater wing area proportionately to their body weight than any other species.

The magnificent frigatebird has a body weight of only two to three pounds yet has a wingspread between seven and eight feet.

It lives on fish which it plucks from the surface of the sea, or which it forces other fish-eating species to drop or disgorge. It also catches flying fish.

It cannot land on the water; if it does, it is unable to rise again. It has similar difficulties if it lands on level ground.

It therefore roosts on rocky crags, man-made structures, trees or mangroves found along the coast.

Shoeless alligator

While in Florida, Winnie and I were told the following story about two New Brunswickers who visited that state.

As they were travelling along, they came to a store in the window of which was a sign advertising alligator shoes.

This was a novel thing to them so they decided to each get a pair to take back to New Brunswick with them.

When they inquired, they were told the shoes sold for $250 a pair. This sounded awfully steep to them so they told the store keeper they could get their own alligator shoes.

They would go out into the swamp and catch an alligator for themselves.

After they left, the storekeeper began to worry. He figured the two fellows knew nothing about alligators and feared mishap would befall them if he did not stop them. He went out to find them.

When he reached the edge of the swamp, he heard a lot of splashing. He looked out and there were the two of them wrestling with an alligator.

One had his arm locked around its snout, the other had his arm around its tail.

At this moment, the two gave a big heave lifting the alligator clear of the water. One was heard to exclaim: "No shoes on this one either!"

Red Bank survey shows another drop

June 29/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

On June 13, Winnie and I ran our annual Red Bank Breeding Bird Survey.

Accompanying us was a bird watcher from the Isle of Wight in England, Audrey Wilkinson. She was interested in learning how the survey was conducted.

She is on a two-month vacation visiting with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Edmond Robichaud of Newcastle.

This survey is conducted by car. Stops are made every half mile for the purpose of counting birds.

All those that can be identified by either sight or sound are counted, but those seen between stops are not. Each stop lasts about three minutes.

The route begins at the top of the lane at Boom Road.

From there, it runs through Sunny Corner, Red Bank, along the Warwick Road, across the bridge at Quarryville, through White Rapids, Gray Rapids and Coughlan, ending in the bush south of there.

This route is 25 miles long and 50 stops are made. The survey begins at exactly one-half hour before sunrise or at two minutes before 5 a.m.

My job is to identify the birds while Winnie drives the car, keeps track of the mileage between stops, times me and records the results of the survey.

At the beginning, end and at every 10th stop, weather observations are made. These include temperature, wind speed, cloud cover and precipitation, all of which can affect bird activity and the observer's ability to see or hear them.

■ The following list gives the results of our survey, the birds being listed in order of abundance:

Crows 52, robins 50, starlings 43, bank swallows 32, American redstarts 26, ovenbirds 23, magnolia warblers 22, red-eyed vireos 21, common yellowthroats 21.

White-throated sparrows (old Tom Peabodys) 18, chipping sparrows 18, common grackles (blackbirds) 17, barn swallows 15, tree swallows 14, song sparrows 14, cliff swallows 11.

American goldfinches 11, alder flycatchers 10, ruby-crowned kinglets 10, ravens 8, yellow-bellied flycatchers 6, black-capped chickadees 5, winter wrens 5, Swainson's thrushes 5.

Northern waterthrushes 5, brown-headed cowbirds 5, least flycatchers 4, solitary vireos 4, Tennessee warblers 4, yellow warblers 4, rose-breasted grosbeaks 4.

Red-winged blackbirds 4, common flickers 3, blue jays 3, cedar waxwings 3, parula warblers 3, chestnut-sided warblers 3, yellow-rumped warblers (Myrtle warblers) 3.

Bobolinks 3, house sparrows 3, killdeers 2, belted kingfishers 2, veerys 2, hermit thrushes 2, warbling vireos 2, blackburnian warblers 2, Wilsons warblers 2, purple finches 2, and evening grosbeaks 2.

Also, one each of the following were recorded: American bittern (stake driver), common merganser, osprey, spotted sandpiper, common snipe, chimney swift, ruby-throated hummingbird.

Downy woodpecker, eastern wood pewee, great crested flycatcher, red-breasted nuthatch, Nashville warbler, Canada warbler, scarlet tanager, Savannah sparrow, northern oriole, and pine siskin.

Winnie and I have been running the survey for 17 years. It is always run in June about the same date.

This year, the total number of birds is down as it has been for the past three years — 551 this year compared to 669 for our 17-year average.

Species showing noticeable declines include the veery (Wilson's) thrush, Tennessee warbler, purple finch, white-throated sparrow and bobolink.

On the other hand, the number of redstarts is at an all-time high — 26 this year and 27 last, compared to a 17-year average of 18.

For many other common species, including the robin, crow and starling, numbers have remained reasonably stable.

Of those species whose numbers have declined, I can give an explanation for only one of these — the Tennessee warbler.

Its numbers rise and fall in any given area depending on the intensity of the spruce budworm epidemic.

This was determined by Anthony Erskine, Tony the birdman, of the Canadian Wildlife Service in Sackville.

He found it could be used as a good indicator of budworm build-up, Since it sings long and loud and has a distinctive song, this might be a handy tool for foresters.

The puddle duck features a peculiarly-shaped bill

June 15/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

On May 24 Janet Gallant reported two pairs of shovelers on a pond back of her home at Ferry Road.

The shoveler is a puddle duck with a peculiarly-shaped bill — it is wider at the tip than at the base. This suggests a shovel.

No other species of bird found in Canada has a bill like this. However, the roseate spoonbill of Florida has a bill of similar shape.

Most shovelers live far to the west of us, but a few now nest in New Brunswick. The species is said to be expanding its range in a northeasterly direction.

The male in breeding plumage has bright, chestnut-colored sides with a glossy, dark green head and neck and a white breast.

The female is a mottled brown. In either sex, the long, broad bill is distinctive.

The bill is not really used as a shovel. It is serrated along the edges, on the upper and lower mandibles.

The serrations enable the duck to strain tiny organisms from the surface waters of the small, shallow lakes and ponds on which it lives.

While feeding the shoveler seldom tips-up as do other puddle ducks. Instead, it skims the surface with its head half submerged.

■ Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne says when the tree swallows arrived back at his place this spring, he found the birdhouse they had occupied last season was taken over by a pair of chickadees. The chickadees had already produced a clutch of three eggs.

When Louis realized this, he erected a new birdhouse nearby and the displaced tree swallows have now accepted it.

■ Florence Gilks of Newcastle says her son erected some birdhouses about his camp some years ago.

He also hung up two lunch buckets — one of plastic, the other of metal. In the ends, he drilled holes for the birds to enter.

She says the tree swallows have preferred the lunch buckets over the regular bird houses and they are easily cleaned out in the fall.

■ A wave of ruby-throated hummingbirds appears to have arrived from the south about May 27.

On that date and for several days after, two of them were almost constant visitors to the pink blooms of a bleeding heart in our backyard.

The next morning, Eileen Bransfield reported a hummingbird was feeding from the flowers of a maple tree at her home in Douglastown.

Also on this date, Herschel Stewart reported seeing one at Trout Brook. He set up his hummingbird feeder and soon had four of them feeding at it.

Two days later, May 30, Dorothy Taylor reported finding one in an almost unconscious condition at Nelson.

It was sitting on the clothesline, curled up in a ball, making strange moaning sounds.

She picked it up, took it into the house and prepared some sugar solution for it — one part sugar, three parts water and a drop of red food coloring. This she placed in a dessert dish.

The hummingbird came around, drank some of the solution and seemed content to remain inside. It flew about and frequently perched on her daughter's arm.

Valerie was wearing a red sweater and, as is well known, the red attracts hummingbirds.

The first time it was taken outside, it refused to leave and remained perched on Valerie's arm. Later, it was taken out again and flew away.

■ The last few days of May or early June always bring reports of scarlet tanagers.

On June 1, Danny Corcoran reported one at Napan and Mary Rawlinson reported one in Newcastle.

When scarlet tanagers arrive in the spring, they may appear in our backyard, but soon they set up housekeeping in a more secluded place.

A maple bush is a likely place to find them. Also, as a nest tree, they are partial to oaks.

■ Mervin Waye reports a crow has been beating at the windows of his home in Wayerton.

This is reminiscent of a similar case at Barnaby where a raven persisted in beating at the windows of a home there.

Osprey perform aerial manoeuvring and acrobatics

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

An interesting performance of aerial manoeuvring and acrobatics was reported by Chester (Happy) White of Bartibogue Bridge.

The two actors in the drama were a pair of osprey.

He says he was first alerted to this by the call of one of the osprey. It was calling to its mate on a nearby nest.

The incoming osprey, presumably the male, was carrying a large fish in its claws. As soon as he called, the female left the nest and came to meet him.

When they met, she flew along with him, but directly beneath him. He dropped the fish and she caught it; then she flew back to the nest with it.

Apparently such an aerial transfer of food is not unique to the osprey.

In 1981, Bob Simmons described the same sequence of events when a male northern harrier carried food home to its brooding mate.

He said, in the case of the northern harrier, this was not an unusual occurrence, but rather a normal procedure.

Bob Simmons studied the northern harriers (formerly the marsh hawk) of the Tantramar Marsh as a major requirement for his masters degree in biology at Acadia University.

Bears, mosquitoes

Various people have said bears are especially plentiful this year, others that blackflies and mosquitoes are unusually abundant.

I have no statistics to prove either statement.

Brian Dalzell said he met a bear on a bush road at Island Lake near Plaster Rock. It was eating the yellow blooms from a patch of dandelions and had cut a broad swath through the patch clipping off every head.

At Black River, Donald Wilson left some smoked herring in the trunk of his car one night. In the morning he found bear tracks, including dirty paw prints on the car's trunk.

If you have trouble with mosquitoes getting into your home, perhaps you need to attach a "loser" room onto it.

Stuart McIver describes the function of such a room in his book, *True Tales of the Everglades.*

In outlining living conditions at Flamingo, Florida at the turn of the century, McIver says every shack had a room called a "loser".

That was where you brushed off the mosquitoes before entering the living quarters or, in other words, where you lost your mosquitoes.

A palmetto fan was standard equipment in such a room. It was used for brushing off the mosquitoes. McIver says every house had a smudge pot to help keep these pests at bay.

This spring, Greg Bell of Chatham has been working on a fishing boat with Eldric Martin of Baie Ste Anne.

He says about 5 a.m. when they get out onto the water they see long strings of gannets flying in from the north.

Later, these strings break up into smaller groups and can be seen flying in any direction.

Since they all come from the north, Greg wonders if they are coming from Bonaventure Island, the closest nesting colony of gannets. If so, they must get up early in the morning.

On a map, I found Bonaventure Island is about 170-kms or 100 miles from Escuminac Point.

Greg also said when the gannets are fishing they tend to follow in line, each diving after another into a school of herring.

Further, there is a brightly-colored moth of yellow and pink which inhabits the bogs around Baie Ste Anne.

Pheasants

On June 17, Edna McLeod of Nelson-Miramichi was surprised to find a ring-necked pheasant cock walking along beside her rhubarb patch.

Pheasants are occasionally reported here, but they are semi-domesticated birds. Some people in our area raise them and those seen in the wild have probably escaped or have been released for the summer.

Mockingbirds

There are a few mockingbirds around again this year.

Earlene Hunter and Sherman Sherrard have reported one in Sunny Corner and Hazen Sweeney has reported one in Chatham.

Still snow!

Despite the warm weather, there is still some snow in the woods!

A Newcastle man reported that on June 15 he walked on a snowbank that was about 400 feet long and about 50 feet wide. In places, it was four or five feet deep and most of it was as hard as ice.

It was inside the bush along the edge of a clearcut north of Big Bald Mountain. He showed us some snapshots of it.

Screen ripped apart by raven's claws at C.I. Road home

July 6/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

We have another report of a raven vandalizing houses, this time on the Chaplin Island Road.

Fred Butler Jr. says at the time of the raven attack he had a cabinet maker working for him.

They were both standing in the kitchen and Butler was saying how a raven had torn the screens out of the windows of a neighbor's house.

Suddenly, a raven landed on the screen of his kitchen window; and demonstrated what Butler was talking about only moments before.

With its claws dug into the screen, the raven grasped the screen in its bill, threw its head back and tore a broad strip out of it.

Butler ran outside, but the raven moved faster than he was. He arrived in time to see the screen in his door being shredded in similar fashion.

Butler ran to get his 22-calibre rifle. When he arrived back, the raven was trying to peck the chrome off of his car.

He could have shot the raven, but he would also have shot a hole in his car so he held his fire.

After the raven left, Butler walked around his house and found all the screens in his basement windows had been torn out, leaving only the frames.

Also, a screen in a window of the nearby home of his parents had been similarly destroyed.

At his car, he found a piece of the raven's bill was lying there, having broken off during its attack on the chrome.

So the raven's destrictive behavior brought about some self-destruction as well. I suppose this is always the case.

This raven is further blamed for having torn the rubber from a windshield wiper blade.

Potato bugs

Paul Foran of Sevogle says the potato bugs are so plentiful this year they are not only devastating potato plants, but are also attacking tomato plants.

I have never heard this before, but it is interesting to note the tomato and potato are closely-related. Both are members of the nightshade family.

A few years ago at Strawberry Marsh, I found some plants of another member of this family, the bittersweet nightshade, infested with potato bugs.

You may have noticed the blossoms of all three of these plants are shaped exactly alike. All have long, pointed petals surrounding a long, pointed beak.

Before potatoes were planted in North America, the potato bug (properly, the Colorado potato beetle) was confined to a much smaller area.

At that time, it had never tasted potato plants, but lived on another plant, the sandbur, which grew in Colorado.

Bird's nest

A bird's nest delivered by Donald Gordon of Maple Glen appears to be that of either a ruby-crowned or a golden-crowned kinglet.

This conclusion has been reached by comparing this nest with the pictures and descriptions of nests given in Hal H. Harrison's book *A Field Guide to Bird's Nests.*

According to Harrison, both these kinglets place their nests near the outer ends of conifer branches — usually in a spruce.

Here, it is fastened to the twigs like a hammock and is composed mainly of mosses and lickens.

The delivered nest was especially thick and well-insulated for a hammock-type nest — in this respect, matching Harrison's pictures.

He says the ruby-crowned kinglet may place its nest anywhere from two to 100 feet from the ground, the golden-crowned anywhere from six to 60 feet.

Gray squirrel

Greg Bell reports having seen a gray squirrel in Chatham. It was at the ball park on Wellington Street.

The Miramichi is slightly north of the gray squirrel's recognized range as given by Burt and Grossenheider in their book *A Field Guide to the Mammals*. However, it is periodically reported here.

It prefers hardwood bush with nut trees. However, according to these authors, it also feeds on a wide range of other things including seeds, fungi, fruits and the cambium layer under the bark of trees.

They speak of it as a reforestation agent because it buries nuts singly, many of which are never reclaimed.

Bird resembles hawk

July 13/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

A request has been received for information on the whip-poor-will.

Robert Buckley of the Chaplin Island Road said he often hears this bird, but has not yet seen it. Probably many others could say the same thing.

The best way to describe the whip-poor-will is to compare it to the more familiar nighthawk which it resembles. Both belong to the goatsucker or nightjar family.

Although caprimulgidae, the official Latin name for the family, means goatsucker, nightjar is a more meaningful, if somewhat less colorful, name.

The name goatsucker originated from an old superstition in Switzerland where it was believed a member of this family sucked the milk out of goats during the night.

On the other hand, their calls do jar the night. Anyone who has a whip-poor-will living near his or her home can vouch for this. Anyone who is familiar with the harsh calls of the nighthawk and its sonic booms can vouch for it, too.

I call them sonic booms, but, of course, they are not breaking the sound barrier. This loud noise is produced by the males during flight.

It comes at the end of a dive and is produced by wind rushing through the wing feathers. It is also produced to impress the females.

The nighthawk, mosquito hawk, or bull-bat, as it is variously called, is not a hawk and is not related to the hawks.

It may resemble one in flight, but that is where the similarity ends. When viewed at close range, the nighthawk is seen to lack both the hooked beak and the talons of a hawk.

In fact, it barely has a beak at all because it is so small and its feet and legs are considered to be relatively weak for a bird.

This equally applies to the whip-poor-will and other nightjars. Although their beaks are small, their mouths are large traps in which flying insects are caught during flight — moths, beetles, mosquitoes, etc.

Because of their large mouths, some Australian nightjars are referred to as frogmouths.

The whip-poor-will and the common nighthawk are the only goatsuckers normally found in New Brunswick. However, there is one record of another species, the chuck-will's window having visited our province in 1916. (See *Squires: The Birds of New Brunswick*).

Both the whip-poor-will and the nighthawk are of a mottled brownish coloration that blends well with the bare ground or with the forest floor on which these birds usually rest.

For purposes of distinguishing between them, physical appearance is probably of less importance than some of their other differences such as voice, habits, habitat and flight pattern. These differences are so marked there is little likelihood of confusing them.

The wings of the whip-poor-will are shorter and broader than those of the nighthawk — better for flying among trees. Wing tips are rounded.

The nighthawk has long, pointed wings designed for flying in open country. It also has a white bar across the wing quite noticeable in flight. The whip-poor-will lacks this.

The whip-poor-will monotonously repeats its name over and over again, without a break. It does this so clearly even those who have never heard the call before are likely to identify it correctly.

While in flight, the nighthawk utters an occasional, loud, harsh "peent". The call is almost identical to one given by the woodcock while it is at rest on the ground in early spring. It is in late spring and summer we hear the nighthawk.

While the whip-poor-will is strictly nocturnal, the nighthawk to some extent flies about both day and night, but is most active at dusk and at dawn.

The whip-poor-will flies and hunts close to the ground, while the nighthawk usually hunts well above treetops and buildings.

According to John K. Terres in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds,* the flight of the whip-poor-will is smooth, unlike the fast but jerky flight of the nighthawk.

The whip-poor-will is a forest bird that comes out into small clearings only at night. The nighthawk is a bird of the open country and of urban areas.

We often see and hear nighthawks as they fly about over Newcastle and Chatham, usually high overhead. Their long, pointed wings and their erratic flight make them readily recognizable.

They lay their eggs on the flat, graveled roofs of buildings in town or on the ground in clear cuts — no nest.

You will hear the whip-poor-will only if you live close to the forest. It lays its eggs on the forest floor — again, no nest. Its distribution is spotty.

Maritime Bird Atlas reaches final year

July 20/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

First and foremost, the news from this household is that we have a new granddaughter — born at the stroke of midnight — so close there is doubt as to whether her birthday should be July 14 or July 15.

Ann Walker, the baby's mother, says according to her watch, the baby was born two seconds before midnight, but according to the nurse's watch it was six seconds after midnight.

Officially, her birthday has been set as July 15 — that was the date she was due to arrive. She almost arrived before her birthday; or in fact, she may have.

At this time, the little one has not been given a name, but Emily has been suggested. Her parents had a boy's name picked out but not a girls.

For Winnie and I, it is our fourth granddaughter — no grandsons yet.

Stewart and Luc-Anne have two, Harriet and Amieke; and now Lyle and Ann have two, Lindsay and ? (Emily perhaps).

This generation is following the opposite pattern to the last. We had four sons before we were blessed with a daughter.

Bird atlas

The Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas project is in it final year.

After this present nesting season is over, the information gathered during the past five years will be compiled in a book — primarily a set of maps showing the breeding distribution of all species found nesting in the Maritimes.

A few of the interesting discoveries made in our area during this nesting season have been two confirmed eastern bluebird nestings; indigo buntings at two locations; both sora and virginia rails at two locations; scarlet tanagers at at least five locations, and vespra sparrows at Laketon.

One of the bluebird nests was in a clear-cut well up the Mullin Stream Road beyond Estey Lake.

It was in an old woodpecker hole in a bare stub about five feet from the ground. A bluebird was observed carrying food into the cavity.

The other bluebird nest was in a bird house back of Neil MacKinnon's house on the back lots behind Douglastown.

He had erected seven birdhouses, all on poles, about 10 to 15 feet from the ground.

These were of various colors and were scattered throughout his orchard.

Among them was one that was bright red, not quite as bright as a fire engine, but almost. Surprisingly, the bluebirds chose this one.

On learning of this, I recalled an experiment I had read about. Somebody had erected bird houses of different colors in order to determine the preference of bluebirds.

The conclusion was, they preferred either a dull, weathered one or one that was the same color as the male bluebirds breast — a rusty red, like that of a robin's breast.

When I told Brian Dalzell of Moncton about this, he said someone in the south of our province erected a number of bird houses, all of which were white except for one.

This odd-colored house was partly pink and partly blue and this is the one a pair of bluebirds chose to nest in.

Blue robin

The eastern bluebird is sometimes called the blue robin. It is smaller than the robin.

The male has a reddish breast and a white belly like the robin, but the rest of its plumage is of a uniform, bright blue.

The female's colors are duller and there is some admixture of brown with the blue.

A male indigo bunting has been singing along Highway 126, about half way between Newcastle and Rogersville and has been seen there on at least three occasions.

Another one was seen on the North Black River Road, near Howard and Peal Wilson's place.

The indigo bunting is about the size of a small sparrow — smaller than a bluebird.

The male's plumage is of an almost uniform blue except for a small amount of black in the wings and tail. The female is of a uniform brown throughout.

The indigo bunting usually builds its nest in a shrub or other low vegetation. It normally does not nest in a tree cavity or bird house.

Frank Dobson, writing in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, mentioned one instance of an indigo bunting nesting in a bird house.

New centre looking for public support

July 27/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

We have received a letter regarding a proposed nature centre to be set up in New Brunswick's Acadian Peninsula.

The letter comes from Roland Chiasson and Sabine Dietz of Tabusintac and is sent on behalf of the Acadian Field Naturalists and reads as follows:

"For the last three years, we have been educating the public, especially school children, about the piping plover and coastal habitats.

Our project has been supported by numerous groups over the years, and our list of funders continues to grow.

We have worked diligently on the protection of this endangered species in New Brunswick and today we are getting closer to one of our aims — to build up a nature centre on the Acadian Peninsula with local Acadian field naturalists and other groups and members of the public.

This centre will address a variety of environmental questions, in particular, coastal habitats and the piping plover.

We are presently negotiating the purchase of an island — Pointe à Bouleau beach — a major part of the proposed nature centre and home to approximately eight nesting pairs of piping plovers.

The beach will hopefully be purchased this fall, thus becoming a sanctuary for the piping plover and other birds, particularly waterfowl.

The centre has been proposed as part of an economic development plan for the Acadian Peninsula.

Only eight projects will be accepted by the commission on the economic development for the Acadian Peninsula.

We would like to ensure this centre, with its focus on education, will be included in the plans for this area. Presently, we are looking for support from all interested groups and organizations.

We believe a written letter of support will aid the approval of the project enormously and you will find enclosed, a copy of the application prepared by the Acadian Field Naturalists.

Please feel free to contact us if you would like more information.

■ Title — Pointe à Bouleau Nature Centre (Centre Ecologique de Pointe à Bouleau); location — Acadian Peninsula; rationale — more and more people are demanding clean, natural environments.

In order to reach this objective, we must individually modify our consumer lifestyles and must become more informed about natural laws that sustain the natural environments in order to respect them.

It is often the misunderstanding of global ecology and the interrelationships between living organisms and their environments that causes the ecological disasters we hear about daily.

■ Proposal: Pointe à Bouleau is an ideal natural site for a nature centre because of a large concentration of an endangered species, the piping plover.

In addition, the nature centre would interpret the flora and fauna and the geology of the Acadian Peninsula.

An arboretum dealing with the trees and wildflowers of the peninsula, self-guiding nature trails along the shore, observation towers, all in line with the concepts of sustainable development, will be part of the nature centre.

■ Objectives: The aim of the nature centre would be to educate the Acadian population about their environment and would play an educational role for the schools on the Acadian Peninsula as well as for universities.

In addition, as a tourist attraction, visitors can learn about the natural environment of the Acadian Peninsula.

■ Socio-economic impact: The nature centre will serve to educate the population of the Acadian Peninsula about their environment as well as offering a major attraction for green tourists. The economic and social gains will be great.

■ Costs: For the first year, spring 1991, $50,000 for study and in the second year according to terms set down by the study.

■ Nature of application: This application seeks funding for the acquisition of lands, feasibility study and initial operating costs.

■ Promoting group: Le Club Naturaliste de la Péninsule Acadienne.

For more information, contact Roland Chaisson or Sabine Dietz, general delivery, Tabusintac, N.B., E0C 2A0, or call 779-8208.

Letters of support should be sent as soon as possible to: Arthur William Landry, president Le Club des Naturalistes de la Péninsule Acadienne, C.P. 421, Lameque, N.B., E0B 1V0, 344-2226."

Whistling attracts scarlet tanagers

Aug. 3/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

While working on the *Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas* project this summer, I discovered scarlet tanagers were attracted when I whistled in a certain way.

I could use this as a tool for finding them.

These whistles were in no way an imitation of a scarlet tanager's song.

The tanagers did not reply and they did not appear to be excited or agitated. They simply seemed to be curious.

When I discovered this, I was working in an area beyond the Tomahawk Ridge, near Shore Camp Brook west of Halcolm.

It was a hot, sunny day and about noon — a time when bird activity is at a low ebb. There was not a sound.

At the time, I was walking up a long slope which looked like good habitat in which to find a wide variety of birds.

There was a good mix of trees — different species at different stages of growth.

Included were a generous sprinkling of large maples and a plentiful supply of ripe, red elderberries. Yet there was not a bird.

I gave a few sharp whistles hoping to stir something up. I looked around and there was a yellow bird perched on a dead limb close by.

At first I did not recognize her, but then she gave the scarlet tanager's characteristic "chick-burr" call as though to introduce herself.

As I watched, her mate came out of the bush and sat right beside her. There they were, a handsome couple, sitting side by side with the sun shining directly on them.

She was in her modest, but attractive, yellowish and olive dress; he, in his spectacular scarlet coat with its sharply contrasting black wings and tail.

A week later, I was back at the same place. As on the previous visit, it was a hot day with a bright sun and again near noon with little bird activity.

After giving a few sharp whistles, the scarlet tanagers appeared again. As before, the female was the first to appear, but the male was not far behind. Everywhere she went, he followed.

On this visit, a surprising array of other birds was also stirred up — some of them almost as colorful as the scarlet tanagers.

There were a Canada warbler, a parula warbler, a wood pewee and a rose-breasted grosbeak, plus some of the more common varieties.

The red elderberries were obviously a drawing card for some of them. Rose-breasted grosbeaks are especially fond of them.

On a later outing, this time on the ridge south of Matthew's Settlement, another pair of scarlet tanagers was located. Again, they appeared only after I had given a few whistles.

In this case, it was the male that was first to arrive. He had again disappeared before the female arrived.

The bush here again had a lot of large maples and this is an essential element in attracting scarlet tanagers.

According to Hal H. Harrison in his *Field Guide to Bird's Nests*, oaks are still more attractive to them. However, on the Miramichi, we have few stands of oak in our bush.

A pair of house finches has shown up at Colin Somer's bird feeder at Lyttleton. His mother, Ruth, reported them on July 25.

This is the first time this species has been reported on the Miramichi during the nesting season. Since both male and female were there together they can be considered as "probable breeders".

This report will therefore be sent to Halifax, to the Nova Scotia Museum, to be included in the soon-to-be published *Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas*, the first such entry for this species from this region.

Finches at feeders

We have a few earlier reports of house finches at bird feeders, but they were for winter rather than the nesting season.

If anyone else has similar reports for rare species, we would be glad to receive them for the atlas.

Striped maple never grows big

Aug 10/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

While passing through Newcastle, Brian Dalzell of Moncton delivered an abnormally large tree leaf which he had found here in northern New Brunswick.

It was from a striped maple, or moose maple as it is often called.

The leaf measured almost one foot across. When measured from the middle of the base to the end of the central tip, it was about ¼-inch over one foot.

Normally the leaves of a striped maple measure only about four or five inches across.

Brian reported all of the leaves of the young sapling from which it was taken were of a similar size. The tree was a wild one growing along a bush road.

The striped maple is a common tree in our New Brunswick forests. It never grows very big, seldom reaching a height of more than 10 to 12 feet.

It grows only in the shade, under thick stands of other larger species — never in the open.

The bark is smooth, generally green in color, sometimes reddish brown and with conspicuous white stripes running like cracks up the trunk.

The leaves have only three points rather than the five found on most species of maple. It bears winged seeds much like the seeds of other maples.

The twigs are obviously a favorite food of moose and deer for we frequently find they have been browsed by these animals.

Heavy-bodied moth

A heavy-bodied moth with an interesting pattern of browns and tans was delivered to us by Mary O'Shea of Newcastle.

She said she picked it off a stone wall at the Miramichi Senior Citizens Home in Chatham.

The body is about 1½ inches long, thicker than a pencil, and pointed at the rear end. The wings are narrow and small relative to the size of the body.

This is one of the sphinx or hawk moths. Their wings beat fast and they are strong fliers.

Like hummingbirds, they feed on the nectar from flowers but do this at night or at dusk, rather than during the day.

Stinkhorn plant

A clump of strange fungi were found growing on Clayton MacTavish's lawn in Newcastle.

It consisted of several white stalks with red tips and reminded one of a group of small candles with flames at the top. These were stinkhorns, or carrion fungi.

When examined, they had little odor, however. When mature they have a repulsive odor — repulsive to humans but attractive to some species of flies. They smell like carrion.

Flies attracted by their odor, walk over them, feed on them and then fly away. Stinkhorn spores are thereby distributed and these grow into new stinkhorns.

The spores may be attached externally to the fly or they may pass through the fly and be deposited in its droppings.

In either case, if deposited in the right place and under the proper conditions, they will grow.

Despite their foul odor, stinkhorns, like most other fungi, perform a useful function.

They help to break down organic matter and reduce it to a form where it can be used by other plants. In other words, they are small recycling plants.

We have two more reports of eastern bluebird nestings.

Brian Dalzell reports finding a pair nesting in a tree cavity near Lagaceville.

Mary Rawlinson reports a pair nested in a birdhouse at her parent's place in Newcastle. They have now matured and left the nest.

Earlier, we had two other reports of bluebird nestings, one back of Douglastown, the other, in a clearcut on the Mullin Stream Road.

Perhaps we are witnessing a return of the bluebird.

■ Rawlinson also reports there has been a pair of great-crested flycatchers frequenting the vicinity of her home in Newcastle for the last five summers.

On one occasion, she saw them examining a tree cavity and although unable to confirm they nested, it seems almost certain they did.

She says she has become familiar with the loud, distinctive calls of this species.

■ Last, but not least, Mike Marsh of Taintville reports a pair of red-headed woodpeckers nested near his place and raised one young bird.

This is the only species of woodpecker in which the entire head and neck are red. Several others have some red on their heads. The rest of the body is black and white.

Constituents affect colors of flowers

Aug. 17/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Constituents in soils affect the color of some flowers. This was demonstrated to us recently.

Our son, Lyle, bought six cleome plants (spider flowers). He gave two of them to his mother and planted the other four himself.

As the plants grew, there were noticeable differences.

Lyle's plants were smaller, had less foliage, bloomed earlier and the blooms were pink in color.

Winnie's plants looked healthier, but they bloomed considerably later and the blooms were paler in color — almost white.

When I mentioned this to her, she informed me the color of hydrangea flowers could be changed by adding certain ingredients to the soil.

I went to the book *How to Grow Almost Everything* by Stanley Schuler.

There it was said by dissolving aluminum sulphate in the water used to water hydrangeas, blue flowers could be produced. By adding a cupful of superphosphate to the soil and watering it in, pink flowers could be produced.

Waterfowl celebration

I have received two brochures which have information that may be of interest to you.

The first is an invitation to join the Atlantic Waterfowl Celebration to be held at Sackville next weekend, Aug. 23 to 25.

The second is from the Nature Trust of New Brunswick. It explains the work they are doing and invites us to join.

The first brochure says, "The general purpose of the Atlantic Waterfowl Celebration is to support environmental education and the preservation and enhancement of wildlife habitat.

"Sackville is situated at the head of the Bay of Fundy, one of the world's great gathering points for waterfowl and shorebirds, an area recognized internationally for its importance to wildlife.

"And we're determined to keep it that way by caring for it and by sharing an understanding of it with others who care".

In reference to Sackville's recently established waterfowl park, it says, "Last year, Sackville won a national Environmental Achievement Award for this unique, 55-acre preserve where visitors can learn more about nature by meeting wetland wildlife face to face."

Winnie and I have visited this park. It has elevated boardwalks which enable visitors to walk comfortably through the wetlands. Although the waterfowl are wild, they obviously feel safe for they are easily approached.

Regarding activities, we read, — "Visitors to the Atlantic Waterfowl Celebration can expect a non-stop, family-oriented program, featuring action for every age and interest.

"At press time, many events were still in the planning stage. Here's a partial listing of activities: bus and walking tours, conservation exhibits, live bait theatre, retriever demonstrations, hayrides, duck races, duck calling, decoy auction, clay pigeon shoot, outdoor market, and street dance.

"Special kids' events are featured daily at the celebration, — Maritime Marionettes, Ronald McDonald, informative nature tours, clowns and street buskers will provide on-the-spot fun!

"Over 100 top wildlife artists from Canada and the United States have been invited to take part in a truly outstanding exhibition of wildlife paintings. Top decoy carvers and other craftspeople will demonstrate their skill and offer their wares for sale."

Costs: adults day pass $10; three days $20; children 6-15, day pass $5; three day $10; children under 6 free. Some activities (e.g., dinners, theatre) will cost extra.

Nature Trust

The brochure from The Nature Trust of New Brunswick outlines its objectives as follows, —

"It identifies and classifies areas that have distinctive flora or fauna, populations of plants or animals or rare natural features.

"It acquires such areas and maintains them in trust for present and future generations of New Brunswickers.

"It establishes local committees of volunteers to supervise and manage the sites under its control."

"All members of the Nature Trust are volunteers."

Individual membership is $25, family membership $35, their address, — The Nature Trust of New Brunswick, c/o Biology Dept., University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, N.B., E3B 5A3.

Eastern kingbird defends territory

Aug. 24/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

We have received a couple of calls about the eastern kingbird.

Louis Sippley of Baie Ste. Anne said this summer he has been seeing a pair of them at Hardwicke in Phillip Lloyd's yard.

Margaret MacKinnon of the Moorefield Road said she has identified a bird about her home as being this species.

On July 28, I came across a family of eastern kingbirds. They were at Charlie Harris' place in Ferry Road and he said a pair of them had been there all summer.

Four of them were together on the evening of my visit. Allhough the young birds could not be distinguished from their parents, they were undoubtedly all members of the same family.

Kingbirds are territorial and it is highly unlikely more than two of them would be together in mid-summer unless they were members of the same family.

The eastern kingbird is slightly smaller than the robin. It is dark, slate-gray above and white below.

A white band across the end of the tail is useful in identifying it. It has a tiny orange crown patch, but this is so small and so seldom seen it is of little help in identifying it. Male and female are alike.

It is a member of the tyrant fly-catcher family. The tyrant originated from the fact some members of the family are very aggressive in defence of the nest territory.

The eastern kingbird is a prime example of this. It will pursue any large bird that comes near its nest. It is frequently seen chasing crows and hawks, etc., while dive-bombing them from above.

It is amusing to watch such large birds fleeing from these pesky little sentinels who are ever on guard.

Policing services

Despite its aggressive behavior towards large birds and known nest-robbers, the eastern kingbird pays little attention to smaller birds which are evidently regarded as harmless.

In fact, it would even appear some of them may purposely nest near the kingbird in order to make use of its policing services.

Hal H.H. Harrison in his *Field Guide to Birds' Nests*, says the northern oriole and the eastern kingbird often nest in the same tree.

He tells of one case where he found both of these species and a yellow warbler nesting in the same tree.

He also said he had a report of an eastern kingbird and a robin nesting within 14 inches of one another.

This reminds me that Anne Marie Arsenault reported finding a northern oriole's nest high in a tree at Chatham early this summer.

The most likely place for an eastern kingbird to nest is in a shade tree around a country home, or in an orchard.

As a boy growing up in southern Ontario, we almost always had a pair of them nesting in our apple orchard.

Like other flycatchers, it picks most of its food out of the air. According to P.A. Taverner in his *Birds of Canada*, it swallows a few bees along with the many other insects it captures.

Personally, I would not like to snap a bee out of the air with my mouth. However, I have never seen anything in the literature to suggest birds get stung while doing this.

The eastern kingbird is not a songster. It is fairly noisy, especially when chasing an intruder. However, its calls are difficult to describe — often a short, rapidly repeated note, almost a rattle.

Feeding hummingbirds

Recently, Alex Fekeshazy of Blackville phoned to inquire as to when one should stop feeding hummingbirds.

Not knowing the answer, but aware Herschell Stewart of Trout Brook had been feeding them for several years, I consulted with him.

He said, according to what he has read on the subject, we should not feed hummingbirds beyond the last week in August.

Otherwise, it may encourage them to delay their departure for the south until it is too late.

He said in the spring he had eight hummingbirds coming to his feeder. Then for about two weeks, near the first of July, they all disappeared.

Lately, there have been at least four, and probably more, coming to his feeder.

Turnstone spotted

A ruddy turnstone was reported at Quarryville on Aug. 8.

Lawrence Connick of Nelson saw it while fishing.

The ruddy turnstone is a shorebird. It derives its name from its habit of flipping stones over in its search for food.

It also roots through piles of washed up seaweed for the same reason.

It is a little smaller than a pigeon and its body, except for the bill, is similarly proportioned to that of a pigeon. The bill is straight, pointed and of medium length.

In breeding plumage, it is a colorful bird with its sharply divided areas of black, white, and rusty-red plumage, and its bright-orange legs.

Despite this vivid color pattern, it blends in quite well with the pebbles, shells and seaweed of the beaches it inhabits.

Afer the breeding season is over, most of the black and rusty feathers are replaced by greyish-brown ones and the legs turn to a less-conspicuous yellow. Immature birds are of this duller coloration from the time they fledge.

The ruddy turnstone nests in the Arctic, some as far north as land can be found. In fall, it migrates along our Atlantic coast, but in spring, few migrate along the same route.

When in New Brunswick, it is rarely far from salt water and prefers rocky shores to sandy ones.

It winters further south, again on the coast, some going as far south as Tierra del Fuego in southern Argentina and Chile.

Others go no further than Long Island, New York, and some will be found scattered along the coast anywhere in between.

There is a similar pattern along the Pacific Coast and along the coasts of the Old World. In winter, some reach Australia, New Zealand and other oceanic islands.

Beach visitors

So, there are few salt water beaches in the world not visited by these birds at one season or another.

Peter Freuchen, in his book *The Arctic Year*, says some ruddy turnstones cross the Atlantic Ocean during migration.

Birds banded in Europe in winter have later been found nesting in northern Greenland and on Canada's Ellsmere Island.

Some migrate across the interior of North America. W. Earl Godfrey in his book *The Birds of Canada* says during migration they congregate on the shores of the Great Lakes.

These birds probably make long, non-stop flights at high altitude, and have regular stop-over points just like aircraft.

Aug. 31/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Recent studies have shown this to be the case with a number of species of shorebird.

On the Miramichi, ruddy turnstones occasionally come upriver to Newcastle, but I have never before received a report of one being as far upriver as Quarryville.

It is a regular visitor to Point Aux Carr and other points further out toward the open sea.

While doing shorebird surveys at Point Aux Carr, I have noticed the first turnstones to arrive during fall migration are in the bright breeding plumage. As the season advances, the duller-colored birds soon predominate.

Early migration

Fall migration begins early, the first ones having reached Point Aux Carr by late July.

Numbers soon build up to a peak in August, then trail off, with some stragglers still being there in late October some years.

The earliest date I have recorded them there is July 26, the latest date, exactly three months later, Oct. 26. The greatest number recorded on any one survey was 75.

Although I have also run many surveys there during the spring migration period, I have never yet recorded a ruddy turnstone on any of them.

However, on July 31, 1986, seven of them were recorded at Strawberry Marsh in Newcastle. This was the greatest number I had ever seen there and one of the few occasions I had ever seen any of them at the marsh.

When the southward migration begins in the Arctic, the adult females are the first to leave.

They leave before their chicks have fledged leaving their slightly smaller mates to complete the task of caring for the young until they can take care of themselves.

John K. Terres, in his *Encyclopedia of North American birds* says one banded ruddy turnstone flew from an island in the Pribilof to one in the Hawaiian group.

This was a distance of 2,272 miles in 3½ days — an average of 649 miles a day.

A canoeing dream finally comes true

When we wrapped our canoe around a rock, I thought the canoe was finished.

However, it was made of ABS plastic. When we got it pried off the rock, it sprang back into shape leaving only a few wrinkles on either side.

It was a hot day so the dunking was no hardship; quite the contrary, it was refreshing.

However, it was tricky and strenous trying to empty and right the canoe while standing in the swift current and trying to balance on the uneven, boulder-strewn bottom.

We then gathered our floating paddles, our floating thermos jug and our soaking pack sack and continued on our way.

There were three of us, my sons, Bruce and Lyle and myself.

We had put in at the outlet of Grover Lake and were headed for Smith's Forks on the upper reaches of the Little Southwest Miramichi.

Lyle said ever since he was 16 he had dreamed of canoeing this section and now it was coming true.

It was July 29 and for several days there had been heavy rains so the rivers had risen considerably.

The river here consists of a series of deadwaters separated by a series of rock ledges, making the water tranquil most of the time. However, it becomes violent when plunging over the ledges.

We canoed over some of the ledges, but others we thought it best not to attempt.

In such cases we got out, wading, stumbling and guiding the canoe as best we could through the pile of boulders over which the water was hurtling.

While attempting to canoe over one of the ledges, we piled up on the rocks.

One stretch of the river, about 1½ kilometers long, was different. It was an almost continuous set of rapids throughout.

I go overland

When we came to this, the boys gave me a compass and suggested I hike through the bush while they dragged the canoe down the river.

We were to meet again at a point called the Upper Forks where the Main Branch of the Little Southwest meets the West Branch.

I covered the overland route without incident other than the black flies and the many deadfalls over which I had to climb.

I reached the forks in time to have a good feed of blueberries before the boys arrived.

They reported they came upon a great horned owl feeding on what appeared to be a muskrat. This it dropped when flying off.

Sept. 7/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Further on, we came to a camp which Lyle recognized as one of Pratt's camps. He had visited it years ago when he was in the Boy Scouts.

The door was open so we went in and made an entry in the log book. Later, I wished I had paid more attention to what was in this log book and obtained a few tidbits for this article.

Soon we passed Lyle's Mountain and wondered how it got this name. Shortly after, we reached our destination of Smith's Forks where I had parked my truck.

Trees, birds

Along much of the route we had covered, especially the early part, the land was boggy and forested with spindly black spruce.

The most prominent birds were olive-sided flycatchers, cedar waxwings and osprey.

The olive-sided flycatchers were met singly and were frequently perched at the top of one of these gaunt, towering spruces or just as often on the top of the dead skeleton of one.

From this vantage point, they would make short flights, snap up a passing insect and return to their perch.

These are the birds that call out in a loud, clear voice, "quick right here," the last two syllables being louder and carrying farther than the first one.

However, being late in the nesting season and late in the day, these calls were seldom heard. More often, they simply said, "quick, quick, quick."

The cedar waxwings were hunting at lower elevation. They were in small groups and were perched in trees and shrubs near the water's edge.

From here, they would make brief forays out over the water to catch insects attracted there.

We met several ospreys along the route and saw one of their bulky, stick nests high atop one of the highest trees in the area.

One osprey was carrying a surprisingly large fish — too big, I presume, for it slipped from its grasp and fell back into the water.

Acorns popped like popcorn

Sept. 14/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The acorns on the oak trees were popping like popcorn says my cousin, Archie Culham of Wasaga Beach.

Winnie and I were on vacation in Ontario when he described this unusual spectacle.

He said it had rained the day before and there were still clouds on the eastern horizon the next morning.

However, when the sun rose above these clouds and began shining on the oak trees, it happened.

Acorns began flying out of their caps.

This barrage lasted for about 15 or 20 minutes and stopped. The following morning, it happened all over again. Again, it lasted for only about 15 or 20 minutes.

Many of the flying acorns struck the brick patio beside his home causing them to split open. This created still more popping.

He took us out into his yard and showed us the many green acorns lying about the lawn and on the patio. He said he had never before seen this happen to his oak trees.

For an explanation, he surmised that perhaps moisture had been trapped between the acorns and their caps. When the hot rays of the sun struck them, the moisture was vaporized.

This, in turn, could have caused the acorns to pop out of their caps like corks out of pop guns.

Nesting habits

Archie told us of another small drama enacted this spring.

He had erected a small bird house designed for tree swallows. However, instead of attracting tree swallows, it attracted a pair of great-crested flycatchers.

For three days, they examined the house and tried to get into it, but the entrance hole was too small. Finally, Archie took the house down, enlarged the hole and erected it again.

The next morning, the flycatchers began taking in nesting material. After building their nest, the female appeared to be brooding some eggs. Then, after about 10 days, the flycatchers disappeared.

Looking for a cause, Archie again took down the house and examined the contents.

There were four eggs in the nest, but each egg had one small hole in it. The holes were so small they could have been made with a darning needle.

In each case, the contents of the egg remained — they had not been sucked out.

About eight to 10 feet from the birdhouse was a hummingbird feeder at which hummingbirds were accustomed to feeding. He wondered if they could have done this deed.

When I suggested it was more likely house wrens, he said he was aware house wrens would do this but had never seen one about his place.

House wrens are cavity nesters. If another cavity-nester takes up housekeeping too close to the wrens' nest, it will puncture its neighbor's eggs.

It may do this regardless of whether its neighbor is a member of its own species or some other species.

Rare in N.B.

Although found in southern Quebec and Ontario, the house wren is a rare bird in New Brunswick.

One summer some years ago, a pair frequented the yard of the late Eddie MacIntosh here in Newcastle and may have nested. That is the only record of them I have for the Miramichi area.

Except for its habit of destroying other birds' eggs, the house wren is an attractive little sprite — a little brown ball of energy slightly smaller than a chickadee.

As it flits about the yard with its tail held in a stiffly-erect position, it presents a rather saucy appearance.

Its rapid, chattering song adds to this. This song soon becomes familiar to anyone about whose home it happens to nest.

Another habit of this bird is to plug all cavities in the vicinity of its nest. This it does to prevent other birds from using them as nesting sites.

I learned this while living at Gould, Quebec. There, I erected two bird houses. House wrens nested in one of them, the other they plugged entirely full with small twigs.

Even the house in which they nested was largely filled with twigs. Only a small, round cavity was left open for their nest, it being surrounded on all sides by twigs.

Hal H. Harrison in his book *A Field Guide to Bird's Nests*, says house wrens have been known to nest in a variety of unusual places — boots, shoes, flower pots, an empty cow's skull, an unused car radiator, pocket of a scarecrow, etc.

Hill sights plover

Sept. 21/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

On Sept. 10, Paul Hill reported seeing a golden plover.

It was on the exhibition field in Chatham. He said last year a flock of from 20 to 25 landed on the same field.

The only previous Miramichi record I have for this species is three of them seen at Strawberry Marsh, Newcastle, on Sept. 11, 1976.

This is a bird whose numbers were sadly depleted by market hunters in the 1800s.

Audubon, writing in the 1840s, reported 48,000 of them had been killed in a single day at New Orleans.

In 1866, at which time most people's interest in birds seemed to revolve primarily around their culinary qualities, Major W. Ross King spoke of the golden plover as an "excellent bird".

This contrasts sharply with what he said of its relative the killdeer — "Its flesh is not esteemed."

In the 1930s, P.A. Taverner, in his book *Birds of Canada*, wrote of the golden plover:

"Within the memory of living sportsmen large flocks were regularly seen in the east, but now only occasional birds are met. It is doubtful if it was ever numerous in the west, either in the interior or on the west coast."

In recent years, its numbers are said to have been increasing.

The golden plover can best be described by comparing it to other, more familiar, members of the plover family — the killdeer and the black-bellied plover.

The first two are about the same size — about 10 inches long while the black-bellied is slightly larger.

All three are of the same, typical plover, build — fairly long legs and blunt bill.

The three are sometimes lumped together with other plovers and sandpipers (collectively called shorebirds or locally, snipe).

However, such a classification may be misleading for they are often far from shore — in short grass or ploughed fields.

In all three species, male and female look alike. Whereas the Killdeer retains the same plumage year-round, the golden plover and the black-bellied plover have a change of plumage.

The breeding plumage is much more colorful and distinctive than is the fall and winter one. Birds in either plumage may be seen here.

The coloration of the killdeer is different from that of the golden and black-bellied plovers so there is no difficulty in distinguishing it.

However, distinguishing the golden from the black-bellied plover requires a little more attention.

In breeding plumage both have a black belly, breast, throat, and chin.

In the case of the black-bellied, this black color ends near the legs leaving the rear part of the belly white.

In the case of the golden, the black color continues right through to the tail. This black is as black a blackbird.

In both species, there is a conspicuous, broad, "S"-shaped, white patch sandwiched between the black throat and breast and the mottled crown and back.

It begins at the forehead, runs across the head, then down the side of the neck and curves around in front of the wing.

After the fall moult, both species become rather nondescript. They both lose their black bellies, their white "S" mark disappears and their backs become duller.

However, they can still be separated. The golden is browner, the black-bellied more grayish.

Also, the golden lacks the black armpits and the broad, white rump of the black-bellied. Both characteristics are apparent in flight but hidden when the bird is at rest.

Immature birds resemble their respective parents in their fall and winter plumage.

The golden plover nests on the Arctic tundra and it can be expected in New Brunswick only in late summer and early fall.

In its spring migration, it travels up the Mississippi Valley and thence northward on the west side of Hudson Bay.

In the fall, a good percentage of them travel southward along the Atlantic Coast.

These birds, after reaching Nova Scotia or New England, make a direct flight over the Atlantic Ocean to South America where they spend the winter.

Birds nesting in western Alaska join those nesting in Siberia. They head for southern Asia, Australia, and other Pacific islands for the winter.

When in Churchill, Manitoba, in June 1989, Winnie and I saw a number of these birds on their breeding grounds and frequently heard them calling. We thought them one of the most interesting and colorful birds of the tundra.

Feeding finches costly

Sept. 28/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Some Miramichi birdwatchers have been participating in a project called Project Feederwatch.

We have a report from the coordinator of the project, Erica H. Dunn of Aurora, Ont.

Her report summarizes results from the 1989-1990 season of the project. It must be born in mind that the results are averages for the United States and Canada and do not correspond closely to what we saw at our feeders here.

Here are exerpts from her report:

"For folks who feed birds, hordes of hungry finches certainly put a dent in pocketbooks last winter.

"According to Project Feederwatch, a continent-wide survey of birds at backyard feeders, one of the biggest seed guzzlers was the pine siskin.

"This boom-or-bust species periodically leaves the boreal forests of Canada to invade the southern United States in spectacular numbers and the winter of 1989-90 was definitely one of the boom years.

"Siskins were sighted at 64 per cent of feeders across the continent, compared with only 30 per cent of feeders the winter before.

"Red-breasted nuthatches joined the invading finches; feeder watchers reported twice as many as in the previous winter.

"Pine grosbeaks and common redpolls also visited feeders in large numbers, mainly in northern regions, while purple finches were abundant in the south.

"All these invasions were documented by the 8,000 birdwatching volunteers who participate in project feederwatch, sponsored by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in Ithaca, New York, and the Long Point Bird Observatory in Ontario, Canada.

"'We had a big finch year in 1987-88, the first Feederwatch season', says project coordinator Erica Dunn, 'but the next winter was pretty much a bust as far as feeder watching goes. In addition to a dearth of finches, we recorded low numbers of many sparrows.

"Perhaps the widespread drought caused population declines. Happily, sparrows and finches made a good showing during our third and most recent season.

"The bird seen at the most feeders across North America was the dark-eyed Junco, which visited 83 per cent of all Feederwatch sites.

"The house sparrow was spotted at fewer feeders, just 67 per cent, but this pesky, exotic species was still the most numerous of all birds recorded, reaching an average abundance of nearly nine birds per feeder per week.

"What causes the periodic, dramatic increases in feeder visits from northern finches and nuthatches? The answer in a nutshell: they're searching for food.

"In the wild, these birds eat seeds — not garden-variety sunflower or niger, but the seeds of trees, especially conifers such as spruce and fir.

"Conifers produce a bumper seed crop every few years and a paltry supply in the intervening ones.

"Scientists speculate that this pattern represents a clever reproductive strategy for the trees — in the 'off' years, pickings are slim for seed-eating animals.

"They have few offspring and their numbers remain low. Then, in a good year, the seed eaters are overwhelmed.

"They can't possibly gobble up all the seeds produced, and as a result, the seeds are left lying around to germinate and grow.

"The significance to bird watchers? During a year of plenty, more birds have babies and more baby birds survive.

"The following year, when seeds are scarce, many young birds head south and end up perched on well-stocked feeders.

"The 1990-91 season begins soon. From November through April, Feederwatch participants will observe their feeders on one or two days every two weeks.

"They'll record their sightings on computer-readable forms, so that results can be compiled and analyzed quickly at the lab of ornithology.

"After sending their data to the lab, they'll read about results in *Feeder Watch News*, a twice-yearly newsletter that provides mid-season and annual summaries and population analyses.

"*Feeder Watch News* also includes tips on feeding birds, reports of unusual and amusing sightings, and information on the behavior and ecology of common feeder species.

"If you can accurately identify the birds at your feeder, you're invited to join Project Feeder Watch for the 1990-91 season. A $12 subscription fee covers the cost of data analysis and newsletter production.

"To sign up, or for more information, write to: Project Feeder Watch, Long Point Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 160, Port Rowan, Ontario, N0E 1M0."

A lone duckling survives summer

Oct. 12/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Young ducklings can sometimes survive even if orphaned or abandoned when only a few days old.

On July 30 while bird atlasing on the Plaster Rock-Renous Highway, I dropped in at the Half-Way Inn.

Sonny Hare, the proprietor, led me to a small pond beside the inn. There was a young black duck, almost mature now.

It was dusk and the duck seemed to have settled down for the night. It did not even move when a pebble was tossed into the water beside it.

Sonny told me this duck had first appeared at the pond this spring when it was just a small duckling.

It was all alone at the time and had remained all alone throughout the entire summer.

How had this lone duckling found its way to this pond?

Black ducks frequently nest far from water and when the eggs hatch the mother duck leads her newly-hatched young to the water.

This journey can be long and arduous with many obstacles along the way.

It is quite possible the duckling that turned up at the Half-Way Inn became separated from the rest of its brood during this trek to the water.

On June 8, we received a call from Black River Bridge. A duckling had appeared under a bird feeder. Again, it was all alone.

Since female black ducks readily adopt ducklings from other broods, it was recommended this stray be placed in a pond where there were other broods of black ducks.

Failing this, it could be placed in a pond where there was a supply of mosquito wigglers on which it could feed.

In a report dealing with merganser in the Maritimes, H. C. White of the Fisheries Research Board tells a similar story about another duckling, but in this account the duckling is of a different species.

A female common merganser brought a brood of 10 ducklings to the river. Two days later, in early June, she and nine of her ducklings were shot.

The one surviving duckling was observed on different occasions during the following summer — always in the same general area. It always dived and hid at the first sign of danger.

It lived all alone and grew until it was also shot in early September.

If there had been another family of mergansers in the neighborhood, no doubt this duckling would have attached itself to it. Female mergansers, like female black ducks, commonly adopt ducklings from other broods.

Hummingbirds

Most hummingbirds seem to have left our area by early September, but on Sept. 18 Earlene Hunter of Sunny Corner met up with one on the golf course at Bushville.

She was at first startled when she heard the buzzing of its wings near her head.

She was wearing a bright pink jacket at the time and, of course, hummingbirds are attracted to such colors. To the hummingbird, Earlene probably resembled a big pink flower.

As reported earlier, indigo buntings were seen on a few occasions on the Miramichi during the breeding season this year.

One area in which they were found was near the bridge just north of Murray Settlement on the Newcastle-Rogersville highway.

Brian Dalzell of Moncton, upon learning of this, began stopping each time he passed along the highway there. He was hoping to find evidence they were nesting there.

He now reports that on July 26, he eventually found a female indigo bunting feeding a fledgling. To my knowledge, this is the first confirmed nesting for this species in the Miramichi region.

■ Last week's article, as it appeared in print, said the chokeberry contained one large pit. This is incorrect.

The chokeberry, like all true berries, contains a number of small seeds.

It is the chokecherry that contains one large pit — a characteristic it shares with all other cherries.

Try putting rubble through lawn mower

Here is a suggestion on how to deal with your garden rubble in the fall.

Pile your old beanstalks, tomato vines, cucumber vines, etc., in small heaps and run your lawn mower through them.

After doing this, rake the rubble into heaps again and repeat the process.

Do this several times. It is probably best to let the materials dry out a little beforehand.

By doing this, you will find the volume of rubble can be reduced to a small fraction of what it was before and at the same time decomposition is hastened.

The resulting, chopped-up rubble can either be raked up and thrown on the compost pile or it can be spaded into the ground as green manure.

Winnie and I chopped our garden refuse in this way when we cleaned up our garden. We could hardly believe the reduction in volume this accomplished. We wondered where our old vines had disappeared.

Last year, we chopped up our fallen leaves in this way and again the reduction in volume was surprising. The leaves occupied no more than a quarter of the space they had previously.

Chokeberry jelly

The chokecherry and chokeberry are two quite different fruits. They are unrelated. Both grow wild on the Miramichi and can be made into jelly.

Winnie and I have long been acquainted with chokecherry jelly, having known it since we were kids. It was only this week

Oct. 5/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

we had our first introduction to chokeberry jelly.

It happened this way.

Last week, I came upon some small chokeberry bushes growing along a roadside near Loggieville. They were loaded with lovely, big berries.

I immediately recalled something I had read about chokeberries in the book *Edible Wild Plants of Eastern North America*, by Fernald, Kinsey and Rollins.

These authors tell us the chokeberry can be made into "a splendid, heavy and sweet jelly, dark-carmine and very solid."

They say these berries are high in pectin and deplore the fact so many go to waste every year. They could, at the very least, be utilized for their pectin.

Of course, I was curious to check out what these authors had written. I picked the berries, brought them home and Winnie made them into jelly.

She has much more knowledge and experience in this department than I, but had no recipe.

She judged from the previously-mentioned account that the natural pectin in the berries would make the addition of Certo unnecessary so she dispensed with it. It's something she had never before done in making jelly.

The next morning she found the juice had not jelled so she dumped it back into the pot and began boiling it again. It suddenly began to thicken so rapidly, there was difficulty in pouring it back into the jars.

Now, it has the consistency of toffee and requires considerable effort to extract it from the jar. But it tastes good, the main thing.

Winnie thinks had she used Certo in the first place, the results would have been similar to those she usually gets.

Most people are familiar with the chokecherry, but not so many with the chokeberry which contains one large pit.

Chokeberry bushes usually grow to about waist-height and are commonly found in bogs but not confined to them.

In bogs, they frequently grow side by side with huckleberries which they resemble considerably.

In fact, the bushes and berries are so similar if one is not careful when picking huckleberries, one is likely to get some chokeberries mixed in with them.

This, however, is no serious error unless the berries are to be eaten raw.

The chokeberry, like the chokecherry, has an unpleasant, puckery taste that disappears when cooked.

In contrast to the chokeberry, the chokecherry is reputed to be deficient in pectin.

Large squirrel seen in area

Oct. 19/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Ross Mault of Black River Bridge reports that while cutting wood recently he saw an unusually large squirrel.

He said although it was colored like the normal red squirrel, it was about three times the usual size for one. Except for color, it reminded him more of a gray or a fox squirrel than a red one.

Mault grew up in the southern United States where both the gray and the fox squirrel are found and is familiar with both.

The squirrel he saw could be a gray squirrel of the rare red phase.

The fall is the time of year gray squirrels are most likely to appear in new locations.

This is the time most of the young ones become independent of their mothers and disperse. When this happens, they may travel many miles before settling down to begin a new life.

Spectacular mass migrations of gray squirrels have also occurred in the fall.

None of these have been reported in recent years, but some of the early pioneers left vivid accounts of them.

Migration of '33

In 1933, one of these migrations was observed, an account of which is contained in the *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animal Life* (Greystone Press).

According to the account, the migration was first reported in eastern Connecticut in late September. From here it headed westward. As it did so, it was augmented by the addition of more squirrels.

After travelling the length of this state, it passed across the southern part of the adjoining state of New York and on Dec. 10, reached the Hudson River.

This formidable barrier, however, did not change its course, for it is said most of the squirrels swam the river. Hundreds of others crossed by way of a bridge and a few scrambled aboard ferries.

After reaching New Jersey on the opposite bank, we are told all traces of the mob was lost.

There is no mention of squirrels drowning in this incident, although some earlier accounts indicate many squirrels drowned while crossing torrential streams.

Nobody knows for sure what caused these migrations, but it has been suggested they may have been sparked by population pressures — when the number of squirrels in a region became too great.

Obviously, gray squirrels tend to become restless in the fall. It is interesting that most reports of them on the Miramichi have come in the fall and most of the others in early or mid-winter.

The gray squirrel comes in three color phases — gray, black and red. Various combinations of the three phases occasionally occur.

In some geographical areas, including southern Ontario, the black phase predominates and in such areas is commonly called the black squirrel.

The red phase, on the other hand, is rare in any part of the gray squirrel's range.

The fox squirrel is similar to the gray squirrel, but is still larger and more southerly in range.

Last spring, while returning from Florida, I was fortunate enough to see two delmarvan fox squirrels on Assateague Island in Virginia.

This is one of the few locations where this rare and endangered sub-species of the fox squirrel is found.

Of course, I had to be told what I was looking at as I could not have identified it on my own.

■ Mary Rawlinson of Newcastle reports that on Oct. 9 she had five eastern bluebirds in her yard. They stayed there all morning and seemed to be eating some late-blooming raspberries she has in her garden.

This summer, a family of eastern bluebirds occupied a birdhouse at her parents' place, Bill and Monica Vickers, next door.

However, they disappeared shortly after the young left the nest and have not been seen for about two months.

Atlas help needed

Oct. 26/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

We are now completing the fifth and last season in which to gather information for the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas.

You may be able to help fill in some of the blanks.

For this project, the Maritime Provinces have been divided into squares measuring 10-kms by 10-kms — 6-miles by 6-miles and we have been trying to determine which species of bird nest in each of these squares.

Birds observed in the squares during their breeding seasons may be classified as possible, probable, or confirmed breeders depending on the nature of the observations.

We now have plenty of information on common species. It is information on many of the uncommon ones that is still needed.

Here are a few things that would be especially welcomed by the atlas committee:

■ Confirmed nestings of hummingbirds. Hummingbirds are found throughout the Miramichi Region and we have them listed as possible or probable nesters in most atlas squares, but the nests are hard to find.

We have only four confirmed nestings for this region. They are in the Blackville, South Esk, Red Bank and Upper Derby squares.

■ Whip-poor-wills: If you hear them calling at night in your area, let us know. At present we have them listed as probable nesters in the Douglastown, Newcastle and Red Bank squares; and possible nesters in the Pineville and CFB Chatham squares.

■ Cardinals and house finches: Although these are considered non-migratory and both have occasionally turned up at bird feeders in winter, there is still only one record for each during the breeding season.

These are a male cardinal seen on one occasion in Newcastle this summer and a pair of house finches that appeared at a bird feeder in Lyttleton (Colin Somers) this summer.

■ Mockingbirds have been confirmed as nesting at only two locations on the Miramichi — at Burnt Church and Whitneyville.

■ Confirmed nestings of most of the owls, hawks, ducks and the common loon could be useful.

■ Other species for which we have limited information include the American bittern, the black-billed cuckoo, the great-crested flycatcher, the white-breasted nuthatch, the brown thrasher, the Eastern meadowlark, the horned lark, the Eastern bluebird, the phoebe, the indigo bunting, the three-toed woodpecker, the black-backed woodpecker, the brown creeper, the Northern oriole, the sora rail and the Virginia rail.

Rails frequent large marshes, especially cattail marshes, and are difficult to see. When approached, they seldom flush. Instead, they run through the tall marsh vegetation and keep out of sight.

Their bodies are compressed like those of angel fish, deep in the vertical plane, but narrow in the horizontal.

This body design specially adapts them for slipping silently among the cattails, bulrushes and sedges without imparting any telltale movement to them.

They are eight to 10 inches long, and their stubby, triangular tails point upward. Young rails are covered with black down and they leave the nest shortly after hatching.

According to Robie W. Tufts in his book *The Birds of Nova Scotia*, Virginia rails, not infrequently, get caught in muskrat traps.

Soras generally escape this fate as they head south before the start of the muskrat-trapping season.

Rails are often heard at night. The sora gives a whinney, which except for volume, reminds one of a horse.

The calls of the Virginia I am unfamiliar with, but according to Tufts, one of them is "a gutteral 'cut-cut-cutta-cutta-cutta'."

Soras are sometimes heard, and occasionally seen, in the Strawberry Marsh at Newcastle.

This summer, Brian Dalzell of Moncton found both the sora and the Virginia rails in a marsh in the Weldfield area.

This he accomplished by playing taped calls of rails which attracted them. These are the only records for the Miramichi Region.

Normally, all rails go south for the winter. However, W. Austin Squires in his book *The Birds of New Brunswick*, has recorded that a Virginia rail "was photographed near Bathurst during the first week of Feb. 1970."

The sora and Virginia rails are both known to nest in the Tantramar Marshes at Sackville as is a still more secretive species, the yellow rail. Soras are common there.

If any of you have information that might be helpful for the atlas project, call 622-2108.

P.S.: Confirmed nestings of mourning doves are needed for many squares.

Use old railway beds for recreation trails

Nov. 2/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

"Prince Edward Island — Rails to Trails" is one of the reports in newsletter 6 of the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas.

It was published at Ottawa in July. The following are excerpts from the report:

"CN railways has terminated its rail service on Prince Edward Island and wants to abandon all of its rights-of-way. While this is greeted with gloom by those who favor the use of rails for passenger and cargo transport, there is a silver lining in the cloud.

"An opportunity has been created to have the rail lines become recreational trails that stretch the length of the island. In a province where 90 per cent of the land is privately owned, this represents a golden opportunity, the like of which we are unlikely to see again.

"Due to the lack of wilderness and publicly accessible land, recreationists have been quick to recommend to the provincial government that the rail lines be kept for public use.

"These would service resident recreational use as well as become a major tourist attraction. Link-ups could be made with scenic heritage roads, provincial parks and designated natural areas.

"While the Prince Edward Island Chapter of Rails to Trails is the newest conservation/recreation group on the island, it has gained membership rapidly and has citizen support throughout the province, resulting in a high public profile.

"The next move rests with the provincial government as it will decide whether the rights-of-way will be used as public trails or be turned over to adjacent landowners."

Here's hoping the railroads do not all go the way of the dinosaurs. If they do, let us at least retain ownership of their rights-of-way.

After all the labor and expense that has gone into building the railroad beds — obtaining ownership of the land, grading hills, blasting rock-cuts, building bridges, filling in swamps, and building firm roadbeds — it would be a shame to let all this go down the drain.

Who knows what undreamed of mode of transport may in the future need these. Even if this never happens, they can still be put to good use.

I would like to call to your attention a recently-released consultant's study dealing with New Brunswick's Provincial Parks. Their report is "The Provincial Parks and Heritage Sites Master Plan".

Among other things, it recommends the creation of strip parks along old railroad beds and utility rights-of-way. In these, there would be hiking trails and camping sites.

The United States has already acted to save its old railroad beds.

You may recall one of Desmond Dolan's articles (*Leader*, March 28, 1990) in which he speaks of a 1983 United States law which prohibits any private person or corporation from taking over or molesting any abandoned railroad beds.

Bicycle trails

Old railroad beds would be especially suitable as bicycle trails for on them there are no steep hills to climb.

A few years ago, I read sales of bicycles had been substantially increasing for several years and I suspect this is still the case.

In the summer holiday season, I see many recreational vehicles on the highway that have bicycles strapped to them.

However, there is little provision made for bicycle travel. Our highways are designed for cars and trucks.

I have bicycled between Newcastle and Chatham, but it is rather nerve-racking.

With the narrow, gravel shoulders and the heavy traffic, it is none too safe and motorists generally consider bicycles a hazard.

If proper trails were available, bicycling would be much more pleasant and relaxing and it is reasonable to expect more people would use them.

More coyotes sighted in area

Nov. 9/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

More and more we are hearing stories of how bold and plentiful coyotes are becoming. Here are two such reports.

■ On the night of Oct. 15, residents of the Centennial Park Subdivision in the Ferry Road area were awakened in the early morning hours as a pack of coyotes invaded their neighborhood.

Our daughter-in-law, Ann Walker, said although none were actually seen, there must have been at least three or four of them. At times they seemed to be right in their yard.

One of them kept up an incessant howling while others yipped and barked. This commotion was not at all conducive to sleep for man or beast.

The dog next door, owned by Dave and Andrea Pickard, is said to have reacted in an extremely emotional way. This is an indication how many of the other animals in the neighborhood probably reacted.

Ann and her husband, Lyle, are familiar with coyotes having lived in the outskirts of Calgary as well as in Peace River, Alberta.

While at Calgary they were sometimes awakened by coyotes howling in a park area behind their home. Also, from their home they could sometimes see them on a ridge that ran through the park area.

■ The second coyote encounter was reported by forest ranger Richard Kingston of Whitneyville who was on night patrol up the Northwest at the time.

He was concealed on a roadside and was facing toward the lights on a nearby building. As he hid there, seven coyotes passed along the roadway in front of him.

They passed by one by one within about 50 feet of him and were all spaced about three minutes apart.

They were obviously aware of his presence for they proceeded warily and kept looking toward him as they passed.

Richard admits he had a rather eerie feeling by the time several of the coyotes had passed in this way.

Experts assure us coyotes will not attack humans, but despite this, there are few of us who would feel at ease in such a situation.

Squirrels, heron

Two more gray squirrels have been reported. Again, it was Ann Walker who reported one of them. It was seen on King Street in Chatham.

The other was reported by Otis Tilley of Newcastle who on Oct. 23 said it was seen gathering acorns from the oak tree around the Old Manse Library.

On Oct. 20, Greg Bell of Chatham reported he saw a small white heron fly overhead while he was in Baie Ste Anne.

Hhe said a resident of Baie Ste Anne, Marven Martin, told him he had seen it there on a number of occasions. The exact species is uncertain.

On Oct. 21, Dick Jebbink reported that for three days recently, a bald eagle was seen along the river in front of his place on the South Esk Road.

It was an immature bird having only a few white feathers in its head and tail. Apparently, it had been seen periodically during the summer as well.

Racing pigeon

Out at Point aux Carr, John Russell saw his cats pawing at something behind the grill of his truck and upon closer examination it was found to be a dead pigeon.

When extracted, it was seen to have a band on each leg — a green plastic band on one leg and a metal band bearing the number CV 90 34128 on the other.

Upon calling the Racing Pigeon Association's headquarters in Ontario, it was determined the pigeon belonged to Andrew Skrobot of RR 2 Bathurst.

Strangely, before the cats found the pigeon, John and his wife, Jessie, were unaware they had struck a bird of any kind.

Again at Point aux Carr earlier this summer, Bliss MacDonald said he saw a small hawk strike a small shore bird from a flock flying over the water.

The stunned shore bird fell to the water and floated there as though dead.

The hawk stayed in the vicinity for a while, but was apparently reluctant to try to pick it up from off the water.

After the hawk left, the little shore bird suddenly revived and flew away.

The small hawk was no doubt a merlin (formerly known as the pigeon hawk). These hawks habitually follow flocks of migrating shore birds.

Snow sends birds seeking handouts

Nov. 16/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

On the morning of Nov. 7, we awakened to find a blanket of snow on the ground.

This sent many birds to bird feeders looking for hand-outs.

Colin Somers's feeder in Lyttleton had a great array of birds that morning.

His mother, Ruth, reported there were 20 evening grosbeaks, 10 gold finches, five blue jays, three gray jays (moose birds), three hairy woodpeckers, two purple finches, two grackles (blackbirds) and one cowbird as well as uncounted chickadees and nuthatches that come every day.

On this wintry morning, a flock of 12 bohemian waxwings appeared on Heath Court in Newcastle. They were not seen to feed although there was a well-laden mountain ash tree nearby. Mountain ash berries are an important food for this species.

On Nov. 2, Mrs. Herbie Hay of Chatham reported she had seen a blue jay gathering acorns and wondered if this was a common practice.

On the following day, I was talking to Mary Smallwood of Maple Glen. She has a hardwood bush back of her home in which are both oak and beech trees and she says blue jays come every fall to gather acorns and beechnuts.

On Nov. 3, Delta Steeves of Chatham reported the mountain ash tree in her yard was still laden with fruit. In other years, it has usually been stripped by birds by this date.

On Nov. 6, Tom Greathouse of Douglasfield had a flock of red-winged blackbirds at his feeder. He counted 40 and said there was a great variation in plumage between individuals.

The young males were changing from their immature plumage to adult plumage and were at all different stages of this change.

School memories

These reports brought back memories of a story in one of our public school readers when I was going to school in Ontario.

It was about a blue jay gathering acorns and dropping them into a knothole in the roof of an abandoned house.

Later, I got the old reader and reread the story. It was written by Mark Twain and in it he attributes all sorts of human characteristics to blue jays.

"Yes, sir; a jay is everything that a man is. A jay can laugh, a jay can gossip, a jay can feel ashamed, just as well as you do, maybe better," Twain wrote.

"And there's another thing — in good, clean, out-and-out scolding, a bluejay can beat anything alive."

The excited calls of the blue jay when it has seen some real or imagined danger are familiar to many.

I recall reading in an article in *Nature Canada* where an observer spotted a fox in a marsh. It was sneaking up on a duck which was dozing at the edge of the water.

Suddenly, a blue jay flew over and started screaming just above the duck.

The blue jay's warning alerted the duck which quickly took to the water, thus foiling the fox.

Bald eagles

We have two more reports of bald eagles.

On Nov. 2, George Hogan of Sunny Corner reported his son, Michael, and a friend, Andrew Harris, saw one fly overhead recently.

It was said to be a mature bird with full white head and tail and to be flying up the Little Southwest toward Lyttleton.

The other report comes from Peter Matergio, who, on Nov. 7, said for the past two weeks he had been seeing a bald eagle out over the river in front of his apartment on Hamilton Street in Newcastle.

On Oct. 19, Gladys MacLean reported there were two brown-eyed susans, two lupines, both white and pink rose mallows, wild asters, yarrow, evening primrose and red clover still blooming about her home in Whitneyville.

On Nov. 3, I noticed there were still a few tansies topped with yellow blooms in Newcastle.

You may recall on Oct. 19 we had abnormally-high winds. News reports told of a building being blown down in Bathurst and severe wind damage elsewhere in the province.

The next day the winds had moderated, but were still strong. However, as the sun rose on the morning of Oct. 21, the sky was clear and the winds calm and there was frost on the ground.

As I stood looking out the window at our birch tree, its yellow leaves were falling ever so gently to the ground.

They were falling almost continually, but only one or two at a time. It was a peaceful scene and I thought, "There must be some message here."

The gale-force winds had failed to loosen the grasp of these leaves yet they were quietly falling of their own accord.

Somers reports doe with spike horns

Nov. 30/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Two reports come from Dennis Somers Jr. of Lyttleton.

First, this fall, a female white-tailed deer having spike horns six to eight inches long was shot in the Camp Brook area, up the Little Southwest.

Second, while he and Richard Kingston of Whitneyville were working in the Guagas Lake area they came upon a great-horned owl that had a merganser duck in its clutches.

He said even when they walked up to within a few feet of it, it did not loosen its grip on the duck although it jerked sideways dragging the duck slightly away from them.

It was obviously determined not to turn over its duck dinner to them.

It was about 100 feet from the riverbank and it is presumed the owl somehow managed to move the duck that distance.

When they returned three days later, the duck had been practically all eaten. Nothing but feathers and the bare carcass remained.

I believe great-horned owls often hunt along rivers. Last summer while canoeing, our sons, Lyle and Bruce, reported seeing one with a muskrat in its talons.

It is not unusual while canoeing to flush large owls from trees along the riverbank.

However, at such times, it is generally difficult to say whether it is a great-horned or a barred owl that has been flushed.

On Nov. 13, we received an anonymous report that a ring-necked pheasant cock was seen on the Curtis Road about halfway between Maple Glen and the junction of the Curtis Road with the Newcastle/Sunny Corner Road.

Cardinals spotted

Earlene Hunter of Sunny Corner reports there have been two sightings of cardinals in that area during the past year.

The first was seen this spring in Sunny Corner, the other, or perhaps the same one, was seen recently at Cassilis, just across the river.

From James Kelly Sr. of Loggieville, comes the report that while he and his sons were fishing in the river off Sheldrake Island, they landed a albino sand eel.

Its head was white while all the rest of its body was of a pale pink or rose color.

He said all the many years he has been fishing there he has never before seen a creature like this one. It was about 18 inches long.

You may recall earlier in the fall Ross Mault of Black River Bridge reported seeing a large squirrel which, except for color, resembled a grey squirrel. It was reddish brown like the common red squirrel.

Since then, on Nov. 12, he has reported a grey squirrel of the normal grey phase which was seen within 40 feet of where he had seen the earlier one. He speculates there is a family of them thereabouts.

In this connection, we might add, grey squirrels tend to live in colonies whereas red squirrels are loners.

Cormorant, heron

On Nov. 6, the day on which we awoke to find a deep blanket of snow on the ground, a late-lingering cormorant was seen sitting on a piling in the river.

Its wings were outstretched in that characteristic pose that it takes when drying itself off.

In the bitterly cold wind of the day, this looked like self-flagelation carried to suicidal extremes.

Later still, on Nov. 24, a great blue heron was reported to still be fishing in a creek in the Napan area.

Some people are reporting a scarcity of birds at their feeders this year while others are reporting an abundance of them.

On Nov. 14, Gladys MacLean reported she had had 16 or 17 different species about her home in Whitneyville since the onset of winter on Nov. 6.

Included among these feathered visitors were a robin, a hoary redpoll and a northern shrike. When this latter species appeared, all others disappeared.

This is usually the case for the northern shrike is a fierce predator that frequently kills and eats small birds and will sometimes attack birds larger than itself.

It is only the size of a robin and its only weapon is its hooked beak for it lacks the talons of the true birds of prey.

I once saw a robin which when attacked by one stood up to it and dueled with it. The final outcome is unknown, but when last seen the shrike had been unable to overpower it.

Junior citizens save wounded hummingbird

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Last spring in Newcastle, a ruby-throated hummingbird was rescued from a cat and cared for until it was able to fly again.

The good samaritans in this case were two of our junior citizens, the brother and sister team of Jeffrey and Angela Morris.

When first rescued on May 19, the bird was missing some tail feathers, but had no other obvious injuries. Nonetheless, it could not fly.

The rescuers found a box which they prepared as a convalescent home for it.

In it they provided all the furnishings which they thought a hummingbird would desire — grass on the floor, twigs on which it could perch, cotton balls to form a nest for it and fresh flowers picked every day.

They also prepared a honey-water solution and put a few drops of red food coloring in it. This was placed in a cut-off Dixie cup and offered to the tiny bird.

For some time it would not drink without help. But when its little, needle-like bill was pushed into the solution, it drank readily.

During the time it was in Jeffrey's and Angela's care, it never attempted to fly out of its box and seemed content to stay there. But each day it was taken outside for a test flight.

For the first few days, it would continually lose altitude and crash land. But each day it grew stronger and was able to fly farther. On May 25, it flew into the trees and took off for places unknown.

Its former benefactors were able to follow it across a couple of town lots, but then lost track of it.

Hummingbirds normally include small insects in their diet as well as nectar. However, so far as is known, this one had nothing more than the honey-water solution supplied during its stay.

It's possibile it could have caught some small insects from the flowers that were brought to it. If it did, it was never seen doing so.

If the flowers provided no nutrition, we feel it safe to presume they provided a healing atmosphere that speeded the hummingbird's recovery.

Angela and Jeffrey's parents are Cindy and Gerry Morris.

Never before have we had so many reports of goldfinches so late in the year.

On Nov. 11, Louis Sippley of Baie Ste. Anne reported he had 10 coming to his bird feeders. Word of the good fare being provided soon spread. By Nov. 20, he reported as many as 40 there at a time.

Others reporting goldfinches at their feeders were Margaret Wheaton and Lem McDonald, both of Newcastle; Ruth Somers of Lyttleton; Earlene Hunter of Sunny Corner; Tom Greathouse of Douglasfield; and Gladys MacLean of Whitneyville.

Besides these reports, others described birds that seemed to match that of the goldfinch.

Many who recognize the goldfinch in its summer plumage may not recognize it in fall and winter.

Gone is the male's bright yellow coat, it having been replaced by a much more subdued one.

Like most finches, goldfinches are unpredictable in winter.

They now seem to be wintering farther north than previously. It is only in recent years that we have received reports of them on the Miramichi during winter.

Boom Road reported a tree swallow flew into a shed where he was working with the doors open.

About 10 years ago we had a similar report of a late barn swallow at Loggieville. These are the only two reports we have on record of swallows here in the late fall.

Marianne Morby of Newcastle reported employees working in the Cadogan building at the Newcastle Industrial Park were startled by a weasel that ran out among them the morning of Nov. 20.

In the flurry of excitement that followed, some were reported to have mounted the tops of tables.

When last seen, the weasel disappeared among a pile of mail bags.

The weasel was mainly white, with a black tip on its tail and a few brown spots indicating it was changing into its winter coat.

Don't freeze turtles for babysitting purposes

David Cadogan

"So, Dave, what do you know about freezing turtles?" asked Carl Savoie, joining the coffee klatch at Joe's.

"Huh?" I rejoined brightly.

"Well, a friend gave my sons, Corey and Mark, a turtle," Carl explained. "A couple of my friends say not to worry if we're going away. Just cool the turtle off in the fridge and then leave him in the freezer. Reverse the process when we get home and he'll be fine."

"Huh?" I explained.

A lively discussion ensued around the table. It reviewed the idea that amphibians do hibernate (and that bears do not) and revealed the fact none of us really knew what hibernation is.

That led, as such situations always do for me, to a panic call to Harry Walker, our nature columnist and walking encyclopedia.

"I don't think so," said Harry in his calm deliberate way as he always does when asked a foolish question. He never says, "That's a foolish question".

"Our local wood turtles do hibernate on the bottoms of streams or ponds, but they go well below the ice so they're under the frost line. What kind of turtle is this?"

"Huh?" I thought.

Back to Carl.

"Well, I don't know. It's a pet store turtle. It's brownish green on top and yellowish orange underneath with brown dots all around the edges and a large orange stripe behind each eye. It's three or four inches across."

Carl told me the turtle had come from Ricky Gray so I called his home. His mother, Muriel, went into peals of laughter when I explained my quest. She wasn't sure whether I was putting her on or Carl was putting me on.

Anyway, she told me the turtle came from The Pet Stop in Chatham so I called Gerry Hubbard.

"Oh my God, no!" Gerry exclaimed when I asked her if turtles could be safely frozen for baby-sitting purposes.

She went on to explain that the turtles are called red ears and they come from the U.S. south.

"They do hibernate," she said, "but they certainly never even run into frost in their native habitat. Anyone who even tried to induce hibernation here would be responsible for the murder of a lot of turtles!"

She said hibernation can be induced by professionals, but it is an exacting procedure and the turtles require constant attention.

They must be kept moist and stored in a medium like peat moss and at a precise temperature. In other words, do not try this trick at home.

Too bad really. If it worked on turtles, I know people who'd like to use it on the kids from time to time — or maybe husbands — or wives.

Anyway, apparently Rosella Mazerolle and Paul Hannah insist it can be done (on turtles, not kids) so maybe you can straighten us out.

Knows Fokkers

Carl may not know a whole lot about turtles, but he does know his Fokkers.

I complained to him that the Inter Canadien Fokker that now serves our airport is the most cramped airplane I'd ever sat on.

"Sitting near the front, weren't you?" he asked.

"Huh?" I clarified.

"For some reason, the space between the seats gets wider as you go farther back in the plane," he went on. "The engines are at the very back so it isn't noisy. If you need more leg room, ask for a seat a little further back."

Huh!

What bird can fly about 27,000 feet?

Dec. 7/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

What bird flies at 27,000 feet?

This question came up after Kathrine (Tassie) Matheson of Douglastown returned from Ottawa after attending a wedding there this fall.

While there, she and some friends were involved in a discussion while a radio played in the background.

From the radio, they heard some species of bird flew at a height of 27,000 feet. However, nobody caught what species it was and they were left wondering.

To my knowledge, the red knot is the high-flying champion of the bird world.

But, as the saying goes, records are made to be broken and perhaps some other species has been found to fly even higher than it.

For the story of the red knot's migration, I will refer to an article, "Unraveling the mysteries of migration" in the *Christian Science Monitor* March 6, 1981. I clipped and saved the article written by Scott Armstrong.

"This tireless voyager, a type of sandpiper, is one of the longest migrating birds in the world. It hopscotches from the stony tundras of the Arctic to the bleak stretches along the southern tip of South America," he said of the red knot.

"Slightly larger than a robin, it also boasts the rare feat — or foolishness depending on your feeling about heights — of carrying out its long-distance journeys at altitudes of up to 20,000 cloudy feet. Most normal migrants are content to plod along at a mere 3,000 feet."

The article says at this altitude, the red knot will fly nonstop for distances of 2,000 to 3,000 miles.

From this it appears these birds understand flight economics, that is, it pays to fly high when flying long distances.

On a long distance flight, the amount of energy required to climb to a high altitude is more than offset by the savings in energy resulting from flying in the rarified atmosphere up there.

Regaining losses

In the 1800s, market hunters almost wiped out the red knot, as was also the case with several of its relatives in the sandpiper family.

Since then, it has been gradually regaining some of its losses.

In late summer or early fall during its southward migration, a few red knots may be found along New Brunswick's coast.

However, in spring it is rarely seen here for its northward migration follows a more westerly route.

Many birdwatchers have trouble distinguishing between the many different species of sandpiper.

In spring, the red knot with its rusty red breast is fairly distinctive, but in fall it is not.

It has lost its rusty coloration and has become an average, non-descript sandpiper, so much so our American friend, L. Page Brown, has devised this formula for distinguishing it.

He says all other sandpipers have some feature, however obscure, by which they can be distinguished whereas the red knot does not. Therefore, if it is not anything else, it is a knot.

Page Brown and his wife, Marge, spend their summers at Mercury Island near Blissfield.

Yes, cedar waxwings

My apologies to those who recently reported seeing cedar waxwings and whom I have tried to convince were seeing bohemian waxwings.

On Nov. 29, I saw a flock of waxwings fly into a heavily-ladden mountain ash tree and begin eating the berries.

Until they were closely examined, I assumed they were bohemians, but they were indeed cedar waxwings. I counted 21.

This tree has frequently hosted starlings who are obviously fond of its berries. On Nov. 20, three pine grosbeaks were feeding on them.

A similar report comes from Loggieville where on Nov. 19 James Kelly reported a flock of 75 cedar waxwings eating mountain ash berries in a tree near his home. Again, starlings were also eating them.

He said in previous years the robins have stripped this tree early in the fall, but this year they never came.

Another observation he made was a lot of mourning doves coming to Father Grattan's feeder next door. On one occasion, he counted 38.

They apparently roost in a grove of evergreens and travel back and forth between it and the feeder.

Feeding takes place mainly in the early morning and again late in the evening with a few coming during the rest of the day.

Ken Sweeney tells about high-flyers

Since writing last week's article, we have gathered more information on high-flying birds.

First, Ken Sweeney of Exmore called. He had found an account of the migratory exploits of the blackpoll warbler.

It was contained in a book, "Life — How did it get here," a publication of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

This account says each fall these three-quarter ounce birds gather along the eastern coast of Canada and the New England States. Here they gorge themselves and store up fat for their journey.

They wait for a cold front and when it comes they climb to heights of up to 20,000 feet and head towards Africa.

At this altitude over the Atlantic, they are able to catch a prevailing wind that turns them and carries them to South America where they spend the winter.

Sweeney's call sparked me to do a further investigation. I not only found the account he was talking about, but also a number of other high-flying records contained in John K. Terres' "Encyclopedia of North American Birds."

It says on Nov. 29, 1973, a commercial aircraft collided with a large bird while flying at 37,000 feet over Abidjan on the Ivory Coast of Africa. This is almost seven miles up.

One of the plane's engines was damaged, but it was able to land safely.

The bird was identified as a Rupell's griffon, a species of vulture which can have a wingspread of seven to eight feet and can weigh up to 18 pounds.

This is the highest flying bird record on Terres' list.

Local species

However, here are two other reports of interest since they involve familiar local species.

The first involves two evening grosbeaks encountered by an aircraft while flying at 12,500 feet near Boulder, Colorado.

The second involves a mallard duck struck by a Western Airlines L-188 Electra at 21,000 feet, near Elko, Nevada, July 9, 1963.

In the latter case, the bird's identity was not known until a feather, which had stuck to the plane, was sent to an ornithological laboratory.

E. T. Gilliard, in *Living Birds of the World*, says alpine choughs, crow-like birds inhabiting Europe and Asia, have been found nesting on Mount Everest at 27,000 feet. This is a little over five miles above sea level (eight kilometres).

Dec. 14/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Two rare birds have been reported recently, a cardinal and a field sparrow. Of the two, the cardinal or redbird is the more colorful and spectacular. However, the field sparrow is just as rare and significant.

The cardinal, a male, has been coming to two feeders in Quarryville, Edith Jardine's and her son's across the road. She reported it Dec. 3.

The field sparrow is being hosted by Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne. It first appeared at his feeder Nov. 13.

This is only the third record for this species on the Miramichi. All three have appeared at bird feeders in the fall after the nesting season was over. This seems odd for the species nests far to the south of us.

Apparently, a few individuals head north about the same time as most of their kin head south for the winter.

This peculiar aberration is found in another sparrow, the dickcissal, a few of which have been showing up here in the fall in recent years. None have been reported this year.

The field sparrow is a newcomer to New Brunswick. W. Austin Squires in his book, *The Birds of New Brunswick* does not even mention it.

This indicates that up until then it had never been officially recognized as having occurred in the province.

In recent years, a few of them have been recorded on Christmas bird counts at various localities in New Brunswick.

If you have a field sparrow at your feeder, you could mistake it for a tree sparrow.

However, here are three simple differences by which it can be distinguished from it.

It is a little smaller, has a pinkish bill and lacks the dark spot in the centre of the breast.

Margaret Wheaton of Newcastle had a field sparrow attending her feeder in 1980 and Maxime Tozer of Newcastle had one at her feeder last year.

Hunter, Hare spot bald, golden eagles

Dec. 21/90

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

We have two species of eagle reported, two of the bald and one of the golden.

On Nov. 27, Earlene Hunter reported seeing a bald eagle at Sunny Corner.

On Dec. 16, Hubert Sherrard was reported to have seen a bald eagle at Whitneyville.

In the latter case, the eagle was out on the ice of the river feeding on something, possibly a dead gull.

The golden eagle was reported at Exmoor where it was said to have spent three days feasting on the remains of a butchered beef.

Derrick Hare said at first it was mistaken for an immature bald eagle, but after viewing a TV documentary on the golden eagle he became convinced it was one of them.

Reporting it Dec. 17, he said it was quite fearless and he was able to approach to within about 150 feet of it. He could see the golden color on its back. It was big and looked exactly like the bird on TV.

Both the bald and the golden eagles will eat carrion of this nature although the bald eagle lives primarily on fish and the golden primarily on mammals.

Late blue herons

Some great blue herons have remained in the frozen north late this year. Earlene Hunter reported one at Sunny Corner on Nov. 27 and Louis Sippley saw one at Baie Ste Anne on Dec. 12.

What follows are some extracts from Gladys MacLean's bird feeder notes, plus some comments of my own:

"Nov. 18: Overnight our world turned from green-brown to white. Looking at the sudden transformation, it could be January.

"I went out three or four times to brush the snow from the seeds. Grosbeaks and finches act so clueless; a flock of them can be sitting on an icing of snow. A simple scratch would bring them food, but no, I have to come to the rescue.

"A sparrow is better versed in the art of survival. It knows how to scratch.

"Today, when the goldfinches sat close to a female grosbeak I was struck by the similarity. Some of the female grosbeaks have much more yellow tints as do the finches.

"If I didn't know differently, I could easily imagine the finches to be miniature female evening grosbeaks."

Comment: We have received a number of calls from people who have been confused by the goldfinches coming to their feeders this fall.

Goldfinches have been much more plentiful this year than ever been before at this time of year.

Most people recognize them in their summer plumage, but are not accustomed to seeing them in their dull-olive, winter plumage.

Some of those who have recently reported goldfinches at their feeders are Helena Colborne of Black River Bridge, Eldon Rogers of Nordin, Len Palmer of Tabusintac and Margaret Adams of Chatham.

Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne now says he has as many as 60 of them coming to his feeder.

Tom Greathouse of Douglasfield says they have been eating so much of his niger (thistle) seed he is contemplating switching them to some cheaper food.

"Nov. 19: A neighbor said it is the chickadee that sings the 'sweet weather' song. I didn't know it had such a song, nor have I ever heard it.

"Bennie MacTavish of Strathadam has a pet raven. It's been staying around his place for two years. He calls it Black Jack. He goes out, and it is nowhere to be seen, but as soon as he calls Black Jack, B.—, J.—, it appears out of the blue."

Comment: The chickadees' 'sweet weather' call, and also its 'fee-bee' call are more likely to be heard on calm, clear days in late winter or in spring than they are at this time of the year.

"Nov. 20: A fat squirrel was playing a game with itself in the willow. The first of the season. Last year I caught seven in the Ranger trap.

"I would leave them be, but they have found a way to get in between the walls of my old house, making it smell squirreley, and awakening me at 4 a.m. with their squirrel marathon in the ceiling over my head."

Our animal Christmas bird count will be conducted on Thurs., Dec. 27. Anyone interested in participating as a feeder observer or as a field observer, call 622-2108.

'Hello' crow lives in Ferry Road

Jan. 25/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

A crow that says "hello" lives in the Ferry Road area.

Mrs. Robert Lisk said it pronounces this so distinctly at times it has been mistaken for a person. She wonders if anyone knows anything about this crow.

It was around Ferry Road last summer and is still there. It apparently has learned that when it comes about the Lisk's home calling "hello" it usually gets fed. Perhaps this is why it did not bother to go south this fall.

Who taught this crow to say "hello"? If you can solve this mystery, give us a call.

■ Vicki Oland Mills of Blissfield said she is setting up a watering hole for her birds. She has ordered a heater designed to keep the water just above freezing.

She said although birds will eat snow when water is not available it is not good for them.

Extra heat is required to melt the snow and this must come from the birds' bodies. In severely cold weather, they can ill afford to part with this extra heat. Like you and I, they would prefer a warm drink.

She has promised to keep us posted on how her birds respond to this added attraction at her feeder.

■ Norman Stewart said a raven perches in a tree near his home on the Lockstead Road, north of Blackville.

From this vantage point, the raven watches his dog and seizes every oppoutunity to steal the bones and meat Stewart he places outside for it.

■ We have a report that a woodcock has been visiting a home at Bay du Vin. It comes about every second day and lands beside the cat dish placed on the deck.

Here it has been seen eating the roe from smelts and, although not definitely seen doing so, may also be eating cat food.

It is strange for a woodcock to be here in winter. It normally obtains most of its food by probing soft ground for earthworms, etc.

To survive in winter, it would need to change its lifestyle or possibly live around some underground springs or other source of heat that keeps the ground from freezing.

■ Last spring, when a spell of cold, damp weather made flying insects unavailable, many tree swallows started to build nests or to brood eggs and raise young but then disappeared.

Bill Olynyk, who lives west of Rogersville, has supplied some statistics on this.

He and his son, David, have erected a great many bird houses around their home and a long field running back of their home.

Bill said last year only eight pairs of tree swallows successfully raised broods in these houses while during the previous year 30 pairs did so.

A fox living near the Olynyks became tame. Eventually it would come and take food from the hand and was even known to walk into the house when the door was left open.

Another fox, presumably its mate, never became so tame. It would wait some distance away for the other one to bring it food.

These two foxes disappeared during the trapping season much to the vexation of the Olynyks.

■ You may recall that on our local Christmas bird count, a bald eagle was recorded.

John Keating of Chatham said this was reported on CBC Radio. At the same time, there were reports of one being seen at Bathurst and three others at Kouchibouguac National Park.

This latter report came from a former Newcastle man, Albert Crossman.

■ David Christie, associate curator of natural history for the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John, said this fall two new species were added to the New Brunswick checklist of birds.

These were a say's phoebe found at Miscou and a sulphur-bellied flycatcher found at Waterside. Neither bird stayed long.

Officially, this is the first occurrence of either species in the province.

Christmas bird survey conducted on Miramichi

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The Miramichi's annual Christmas bird count was conducted Dec. 27.

In compliance with regulations set down by the National Audubon Society, it count was conducted within a circle 15 miles in diameter (24-kms).

In our case, the centre was taken as the mid-point of the Miramichi Centennial Bridge. This is the same circle we have used on the previous 18 Christmas bird counts.

This circle reaches to about the Bartibogue Bridge in the east and to the Anderson Bridge in the west, including Russellville, Loggieville, Napan, Glenwood, Weldfield, Douglasfield, Nowlanville, Craigville, Nelson, Chatham Head, Nordin and Douglastown as well as Chatham and Newcastle.

It also includes the Chatham dump which always contributes a large number of scavenger-type birds such as gulls, ravens, crows and starlings. This year, it accounted for 80 per cent of the gulls sighted.

We had seven field observers scouting the out-of-doors for birds and 26 feeder observers who recorded the various species visiting their feeders that day.

When the birds from the 33 sources were added, we came up with the following list. It begins with the most abundant species and ends with the least:

The count

European starlings 403, American goldfinches 226, black-capped chickadees 211, evening grosbeaks 156, rock doves (common pigeons) 149, blue jays 69, mourning doves 63, ravens 60;

Great black-backed gulls 54, bohemian waxwings 51, herring gulls 47, red-breasted nuthatches 18, crows 16, hairy woodpeckers 13, downy woodpeckers 12, dark-eyed juncos 12;

Tree sparrows 10, house sparrows eight, gray jays eight, snow buntings eight, brown creepers four, ruffed grouse three, common redpolls three, horned larks three, glaucous gulls two;

Cedar waxwings two, and one each of purple finch, song sparrow, Iceland gull and bald eagle.

Another six birds were recorded as two gull species, two sparrow species and two grouse species for a grand total of 1,620 birds.

In addition to the 30 species above, seven other species were recorded during the count period between Dec. 15 and Jan. 2. This is the period during which the count day must be selected in order for it to officially qualify as a Christmas bird count.

The seven additional species were the robin, northern shrike, great blue heron, pine siskin, pileated woodpecker, mockingbird and northern harrier.

Sparrow drop

The most startling phenomenon revealed by our counts has been the precipitious drop in the house sparrow population.

This year we recorded only eight, last year 73, the year before 213, and in earlier years, over 1,000.

A few years ago there was a flock of them at almost every bird feeder. When the dumps were situated on the outskirts of Newcastle and Chatham, there was always a great crowd of them at each.

I am unable to give an adequate reason for such a decline. Although it may be reason for concern, it would be of more concern if this were a native species.

The house sparrow is a European import introduced into North America at New York City about 1850. It multiplied rapidly and soon spread throughout most of the continent.

It has been blamed for the decline of some of our native birds. It is a non-migratory species, or permanent resident, wherever found.

In natural phenomena, as in human affairs, a meteoric rise is often followed by an equally dramatic fall. Slow growth is generally healthier and more long-lasting.

For another introduced species, the European starling, the trend revealed by our count has been opposite the house sparrow. We are now recording about 10 times as many of them as in earlier years.

However, the starling is a migratory species and there is no indication we have more of them here in summer. It is only in winter that their numbers are up.

Why so many of them are now staying north for the winter is a matter of speculation.

Goldfinches were recorded in unprecedentedly high numbers this year. The highest previous count was 60 recorded in 1987 and on most of our previous counts none were recorded.

Each year has its surprises.

Area residents report a towhee, cardinal

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

When I started writing this column 14 years ago, I never expected so many rare birds would turn up on the Miramichi.

The latest to be reported are a rufous-sided towhee in Douglastown and a cardinal at Blissfield.

The towhee, a female, appeared at Leda Patenaud's feeder on the morning of Jan. 14. Since then, local bird watchers have been beating a path to her door in hopes of catching a glimpse of this large, colorful finch.

Its most striking feature is bright rufous-colored sides which contrast sharply with a white belly and dark brown upper parts. In the male the upper parts are black.

It is sometimes called the chewink because of one of its calls.

When Winnie and I arrived at the Patenauds, we were fortunate as within minutes the towhee arrived and began feeding.

It remained there for perhaps 15 or 20 minutes and was not more than 10 feet away in plain view through the glass doors that led onto the patio deck.

The towhee is a ground feeder. This one obviously preferred to gather the scattered seeds lying on the deck rather than go directly to the well-stocked feeder overhead.

This is a southern species which, like many other southern and western species, is increasingly being reported in New Brunswick.

However, most of these reports come from the southern and western parts of the province.

This is to my knowledge only the second towhee to be reported on the Miramichi, the first being a few years ago by Vivian Comeau of Oyster River, near Oak Point.

This species nests to the south of us and normally migrates still further south for the winter.

W. Austin Squires in *The Birds of New Brunswick* says it is most frequently reported here in the spring or fall — in the month of May or between October and January.

Other beneficiaries of the Patenaud's feeder include flying squirrels. These have a habit of coming about 11 p.m. each night.

We were told they never leave any tracks in the snow. When they arrive, they glide in from two tall pine trees on one side of the house. When they leave they glide across the backyard and disappear into the deep wooded ravine that runs behind the house.

The cardinal at Blissfield was reported by Vicki Oland Mills. It attended her feeder for about a week late this fall.

It disappeared for a time but reappeared and stayed for about a week at Christmastime. It was a bright red male.

Meanwhile, the male cardinal that in early December was coming to Edith Jardine's feeder in Quarryville disappeared shortly after and has not been seen since.

On the South Esk Road, Dick Jebink reports a female pheasant has been visiting his feeder regularly for the last month. It, like the towhee, feeds only on the ground.

Jabink said there is also a fox about his place and he hopes it does not get the pheasant.

and their neighbors, the Bowies. They have counted as many as 26 at a time.

Similarly, we recorded 51 bohemian waxwings on our count, but there were reports of much larger numbers on the days leading up to the count.

John Keating estimated a flock back of his place in Chatham numbered 200. He counted up to 50 and said he had counted not more than a quarter of the total flock. They were apparently attracted there by mountain ash berries.

A few days later he saw them again, this time the attraction being crab apples still hanging on the trees.

Others reporting large flocks of these fruit-eating birds were Tom Greathouse of Douglasfield, Sylvia Wilson of Nordin and Jackie King of Newcastle.

In the latter case, they were feeding on hawthorn berries.

Snow buntings

Though we only recorded three snow buntings on our Christmas Bird Count, we have since learned there are two feeders in the Kirkpatrick subdivision where a flock has been coming, Melvin and Mary Ripleys

Lack of sparrows a real mystery

Feb. 8/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

We have more information but still no explanation on the disappearance of the house sparrow from the Newcastle-Chatham area.

Traditionally in winter, it has been the most plentiful bird species in this area.

However, this year we recorded only eight of them on our Christmas bird count. Last year we recorded 73, the year before, 213, and in the earlier years, sometimes over 1,000.

Norma Weldon of Newcastle reported that until shortly before our count, flocks of them were coming to her bird feeder. They suddenly disappeared and she has not seen one since.

We received a report there were still lots of house sparrows out in Whitneyville. They were coming to Marie MacDonald's bird feeder, outside our Christmas bird count area.

On Jan. 29, Winnie and I drove out to MacDonald's to see for ourselves. Sure enough, there they were.

We did not count them, but there were more than the eight we got on our count. The MacDonalds told us at times there are at least 30 of them at their feeder.

These sparrows are seen only at feeding time and are thought to spend most of their time at John Bodenstaff's barn.

Many of our winter birds are nomads and therefore large fluctuations in their numbers from year to year or from month to month are to be expected.

But house sparrows are real stay-at-homes. They are non-migratory and non-nomadic, therefore, their disappearance from Newcastle, Chatham and surrounding towns is a mystery.

If we get further information on this we will let you know.

While at MacDonald's, a male brown-headed cowbird came to the feeder and we were told it is a steady patron there. Probably it also is finding shelter at Bodenstaff's barn.

Back in the early '70s, while McCoomb's barn was still standing on Strawberry Marsh, we always found a few cowbirds in the barnyard among the horses. This was a sure place to find them for our Christmas bird count.

Since this barn burned down, we have seldom recorded any cowbirds on these counts.

Exotic lunch

Before leaving the MacDonalds, their neighbor, Gladys MacLean, learned of our presence and invited us for lunch.

We accepted and were treated to an oriental plate which included tofu and palm hearts.

She said in the Orient where she spent many years as a missionary palm hearts were considered a delicacy. Whenever a palm tree blew down the heart was always salvaged for food.

Winnie and I had never tasted this treat before. It was sweet and tender and made an excellent vegetable.

When Winnie and I set out that morning in search of house sparrows, we could never have imagined it leading to such an exotic lunch.

As we ate our lunch, we sat in front of a picture window outside of which was a well-stocked bird feeder to which many birds were coming and going.

It was surprising that the birds at this feeder were so different from those at MacDonald's, they being so near to one another.

There were lots of goldfinches and chickadees, at least six pine siskins, two tree sparrows and a song sparrow, none of which were seen at MacDonald's.

On the other hand, the house sparrows, cowbird and two mourning doves that come to MacDonald's do not come to MacLean's.

Plenty of grosbeaks and some bluejays were present at both feeders.

First robin

The first robin of the year has been reported. It was spotted on Jan. 30 by Susan Hare of Nordin.

We are all glad to see our first robin. A robin in January is every bit as reliable in predicting the arrival of spring as is a groundhog in February.

We now have a new service for birdwatchers. It is the rare bird alert. Just dial 1-450-DUCK, that is 1-450-3825 and you will hear a recording to tell you what rare birds are to be found in the province at that time and where.

If you happen to be in the Fredericton area, it is a local call.

Berries plentiful despite fierce wind

Feb. 1/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The other day Winnie and I received a parcel from Churchill, Manitoba.

In it were two jars of jam, one black currant, the other gooseberries.

Also in the parcel was a letter from our friend, Vera Gould, explaining she had picked these wild berries in the barrens surrounding the town. She wrote:

"My friend, Hanna, discovered an old road where the black currants had grown in behind the bank. I couldn't believe my eyes there were so many bushes.

"It was late in fall and they were nearly ready to drop. We spent every minute we could picking them.

"The gooseberries were plentiful, also cranberries. I picked no blueberries as I didn't have time."

I was surprised to learn these berries would grow in such a harsh climate. There the trees are scarce and stunted because of the fierce winds that blow off the cold waters of Hudson's Bay.

When Winnie and I visited Churchill in early June 1989, there were still piles of snow on the ground and the bay was still covered with solid ice.

Nonetheless, on the barrens there was an abundant supply of cranberries and crowberries.

These berries were from the previous growing season, but had come through the winter in good condition. They were providing an important source of food for returning birds.

Here is another excerpt from our friend's letter:—

"A young polar bear broke into eight cabins out at Camp Nanuk and did a fair amount of damage to mine. Turned over my propane stove. Broke a door and five windows. Ate the red squirrel's peanuts in shell (shell and all) plus the package of Cheesies.

"Maybe if I had been there he would have expected me to make him a cup of tea. Anyway, I had bear insurance and except for a couple of hundred dollars it should cover the expense."

Churchill is known as the Polar Bear Capital of the World.

Fieldfare sighted

In Caraquet, an unexpected guest from either Greenland or Europe has made its appearance at Edith Robichaud's bird feeder.

This is a fieldfare, a bird in size, shape and habits much like an American robin, but its color is quite different. It has a greyish-blue head and rump, buffy throat and speckled breast.

It arrived on the morning of Jan. 23 and spent most of the day there. It was there again the next morning when David Christie of Albert phoned to inform us of it. We have had no further word since then.

So far as I can determine, this is the first time a fieldfare has ever been known to visit New Brunswick. However, there have been a few widely scattered reports of it having visited other parts of Canada and the United States.

The fieldfare was until recently confined to the Old World. According to F. Salomonsen, in a paper entitled "The Immigration and Breeding of the Fieldfare in Greenland," it was accidentally introduced into Greenland in 1937.

Salomonsen says in the fall of that year while migrating south across the North Sea some of them were caught in a strong gale which carried them to Greenland.

These birds apparently survived and by 1949 were commonly nesting along the southwest coast of this island country.

Since then, they have been living there all year around — not migrating as did their ancestors in Europe.

Since it would be a small jump from Greenland to northern Canada, compared to the jump from Europe to Greenland, there is a possibility the fieldfare will eventually establish itself in Canada.

Lost osprey

While fishing on the Renous, a fisherman said he saw an osprey dive into the water and never come back up. He wonders if perhaps it grabbed a salmon that was too big for it.

According to John K. Terres in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds* this can happen. He said large salmon and sturgeon have been known to take osprey underwater with them and the osprey have drowned.

He also said they have been known to strike the water with such force they have broken a wing.

Sherrard reports Bohemian waxwings

Feb. 15/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

On Feb. 6, Hubert Sherrard reported a flock of about 75 Bohemian waxwings at his home in Whitneyville.

He asked if these birds ever come to bird feeders.

I have never received any reports of them at feeders.

However, John K. Terres, in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds*, says they can be attracted to feeders by raisins, dried currants, minced prunes or other dried fruit or berries.

He says they rarely take sunflower seeds. They are tame and will sometimes alight on one's head or shoulder.

Judging from our experience with an injured cedar waxwing, which we boarded for a few months, it would take a lot of raisins and currants to keep a flock of waxwings satisfied. This is especially so if they became regular patrons at one's feeder.

The waxwing we boarded went through a lot of fruit or, more correctly, a lot of fruit went through it.

There seemed to be a short space of time between eating the berries and eliminating them.

Other than fruit, the only food we could get it to eat was small bits of cheese and it quickly became tame.

A wedding may be an unlikely subject for a wildlife column.

However, since a pair of love birds are involved, I use this as justification for its inclusion here.

I shall not attempt to describe how lovely were the bride and her attendant nor to describe the gowns they were wearing.

Suffice to say the bride was wearing the same gown her mother before her had worn.

The groom was wearing the same navy blue suit and silver tie I had worn on my wedding day.

Heather Louise Brewster, eldest daughter of Carl and Edna Brewster of Taylor Village near Memramcook, was united in marriage with our youngest son, Bruce Raymond, on Dec. 29.

The wedding took place in the home of the bride's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Taylor of Taylor Village.

The home was built in 1871 and had been in the family ever since.

It was built by the bride's great, great, grandfather, Alfred Taylor, a sea captain who sailed *The Robert Godfrey*.

Typically for a sea captain, he built his home on a high point of land from which an excellent view of the surrounding country could be obtained.

It was like the view from the crow's nest of a ship. In such a place, the house was well exposed to the winds much like a ship at sea.

The antique organ on which the wedding march was played had been the possession of this sea captain ancestor.

He took it aboard ship with him and there he was accustomed to play and to sing with the crew often joining in.

Bolt holes through the legs of the organ showed how it had been fastened to the floor to hold it firm in rough seas.

The ceremony took place at the front door at the end of the main hallway. This hallway being the landing for the upstairs staircase, the bride and the bridal party descended the stairway as the wedding march was played.

This central location provided guests seated in various rooms a view of the ceremony which was solemnized by the Rev. Kaj Binderup, originally from Denmark, now pastor of the Brentwood United Baptist Church in Moncton.

The bride's one attendant was her sister, Holly, and the best man was the groom's friend, Scott Trenholm of Amherst.

The soloist was the pastor's wife, Joan, who sang three selections - "For You Alone," "Because," "Oh Promise Me."

In keeping with the rest of the wedding, the reception was held at the Bell Inn in Dorchester, a building dating back to 1812.

Attending the wedding from this area, besides the Walker clan, were Ryan and Jeannie Green, formerly of Newcastle and Strathadam.

Incidentally, the bride's grandmother, Mrs. Beatrice Taylor, writes a column entitled "A small Chat," which appears in the *Sackville Tribune Post*.

She also contributes articles to another publication, *Rural Delivery* in Liverpool. She is a retired school teacher.

Sighting of woodpecker a memorable event

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Excitement is the normal reaction of most people on seeing their first pileated woodpecker.

In fact, any sighting of a pileated woodpecker is a memorable event.

I well remember the first one I saw. It was close to 60 years ago. I had gone with my father and older brother to cut firewood.

It was winter and we went with a team of horses and a sleigh. I had mainly gone along for the ride as I was still too young to be of much help in the bush.

While some trees were being felled and limbed, a pileated woodpecker appeared as though to protest our destruction of the forest.

To say the pileated woodpecker is unique is an understatement. It looks prehistoric.

When one appears in our back yard, as occasionally happens, we may well imagine something from the age of the dinosaurs has been suddenly resurrected.

You may never have seen a pileated woodpecker or you may have seen it only rarely.

However, it is widely, if thinly, distributed throughout New Brunswick as is indicated by the results of the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas project.

It is not seen more often because it seldom visits settled areas. Even in the bush, it is easily spooked and usually flies away before being seen.

However, when we become familiar with this bird and its habits, it is much easier to find. It prefers bush where there are large, mature hardwoods.

Its loud "cuk-cuk-cuk" call or its heavy hammering alerts us to its presence. Having been alerted, if we approach carefully and quietly we may get a good look at it.

Another way in which this woodpecker can often be identified is by spotting it as it flies overhead above highways. This it often does while passing from one area of the bush to another.

At such times, it is usually well above treetop level, but is easily recognized. Viewed from beneath, the front half of the wing is as white as a swan's while the back half is as black as a crow's.

This is unlike any other bird of comparable size, it being about the size of a crow. Also, this woodpecker's flight pattern and silhouette are distinctive.

Often when walking through the woods, we can see evidence the pileated woodpecker has been there.

The long vertical gashes in the tree trunks, sometimes two feet or more in length, show where they have been boring for carpenter ants or other wood-boring insects.

Both male and female have large, bright, scarlet crests, but can be distinguished from one another.

The male's scarlet cap comes down over the forehead to the base of the bill; the female's does not.

Also, the male has a long, thin, scarlet mustache which matches his cap while the female does not.

Both male and female have a white stripe up the side of the neck and on the side of the face. Otherwise when at rest with the wings folded, they appear to be all black.

There are few, if any, birds I get more calls about than this woodpecker.

Later in the fall, Edward Cando reported seeing a pileated woodpecker near his home in Millerton. About Jan. 1, George MacCallum, also of Millerton, reported there a pair of them on a hydro pole at her place, a male and a female.

On Jan. 18, we received a similar report from Linda Sweeney of Nelson. Again, there were two of them on a utility pole.

On Jan. 30, Theresa Fallon of Newcastle reported a large bird had flown in from the bush and made a short visit to her yard. Her description indicated it was a pileated woodpecker.

On Feb. 8, Steven Savoy of Loggieville reported having seen a pileated woodpecker while taking a walk on the East Point Road.

Recently, I met David MacDonald of east Bathurst who told me he grew up at Auburnville, near Bay du Vin, and had been watching birds since he was a boy.

One bird that interested him was the pileated woodpecker which he said he had seen on a few occasions.

Then, on Feb. 17, John McLean of Chatham reported a pileated woodpecker in the Gordon Road area.

Van Buskirk spots a northern shrike

Mar. 1/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Two predators that prey on small birds at feeders in winter are the northern shrike and the sharp-shinned hawk.

This winter we have received about the usual number of reports of the former, but fewer than usual of the later.

The latest report of a northern shrike comes from Jim Van Buskirk of Whitneyville who said it came and ate some smelt heads. This is new.

In all previous local reports, any feeding involved small birds they had killed at feeders.

However, John K. Terres in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds* says they will sometimes come to feeders for suet or hamburger.

A few years ago, we received similar information about sharp-shinned hawks when we visited David and Suzanne Hubley of Truro.

They said whenever a hawk appears in their neighbourhood, they set out pieces of raw stewing meat and the hawks take these instead of the birds.

Others reporting northern shrikes this winter are Louis Sippley of Baie Ste. Anne, Pat Wilson of the North Black River Road, Ruth Somers of Lyttleton and Gladys MacLean of Whitneyville.

We have had two reports of sharp-shinned hawks at feeders, one from John Keating of Chatham, the other from Louis Sippley of Baie Ste. Anne.

In the latter case, we are told the hawk got a few of the mourning doves that had been coming to his feeder. He has had as many as 28 mourning doves at his feeder.

Sippley said a pair of hairy woodpeckers were mating in his yard on Feb. 11. This is at least two months ahead of schedule.

He said he will keep his eyes open in an endeavour to find an early hairy woodpecker's nest in the trees around his home.

■ About two years ago, Sara Lounsbury moved from Chatham to a subdivision off the Hanwell Road west of Fredericton.

She reports last spring when her son, David, saw a mourning dove on the lawn he hurried to get some food for it. As he did, he said if they fed it, perhaps it would return.

Return it did, and apparently brought all of its friends and relatives for by fall they had 30 of them.

She has found they are not fond of sunflower seeds, but really enjoy millet.

■ We have received three separate reports of a male ring-necked pheasant on the Curtis Road between Maple Glen and Whitneyville.

On Nov. 13, an anonymous caller reported seeing one there; on Feb. 13, Leon McKelvey of Curtis Road reported it; and on the following day, Feb. 16, Chris Anderson of Nordin saw it.

This last caller said it was quite tame. He was able to approach to within about 20 or 25 feet of it and it did not fly, but simply ran into the bush.

This is probably an escaped domestic bird.

■ On Feb. 6, Pat Wilson reported an old tom peabody bird (white-throated sparrow) was singing near her home on the North Black River Road.

This was likely a sparrow that got left behind when the others of its kind migrated last fall. Feb. 6 was a spring-like day which may have inspired it to sing.

■ Last week's article on the pileated woodpecker precipitated several other reports on this species.

Gerry Barrieau of Douglasfield phoned to say there has been one of them staying around his camp about two miles back in the bush from his home. It has been there since Christmas.

He said it has practically demolished one tree, having drilled about 15 holes in it.

Marilyn MacKay of Maple Glen said for a few days last summer they had a pileated woodpecker at their camp in Boom Road.

Mary Wiseman said in November one of them was in the trees back of her home in Taintville.

In last week's column, it was Georgie MacCallum (not George) who reported the pair of pileated woodpeckers at Millerton.

This woodpecker is more common now than it was a couple of generations ago. Back in the 1930s, P.A. Taverner, in *Birds of Canada* wrote:

"In the east, on account of the wanton destruction, this once much more widely distributed bird is to be found only in the quiet of the more northern woods.

"Even there, visitors and deer hunters could not resist the temptation of taking so spectacular a trophy home with them, and it was being rapidly reduced in number until the provisions of the Migratory Birds Convention Act extended practical protection over it."

Eagles, snow buntings sighted

Mar. 8/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Using the following clues, identify the bird: it is sparrow-sized, it has crossed mandibles, it has uniformly-dark wings and tail, the remainder of its plumage consists of a mixture of small, irregular blotches of red and yellow.

On Feb. 28, a dead specimen answering the above description was delivered to us by Paul Barry of Newcastle.

It had been struck by his vehicle while he was travelling on the Fraser-Burchill Road.

It was one of two birds that had been down on the road getting grit. This one died in his hand after the accident. The other was unharmed.

As many will recognize, the second clue listed is sufficient to identify the bird as a crossbill; and, since we have only two species of crossbill in North America, we can immediately say it is either a white-winged or a red crossbill.

The third clue eliminates the former and so we conclude that it must be a red.

The piebald plumage given for the fourth clue may be confusing since few bird books show such a plumage. Therefore, in case the full answer eludes you still, here it is:

The bird is an adolescent, male, red crossbill in transition from immature to mature plumage.

Unlike other birds, crossbills have no definite nesting season. They have been known to nest in every month of the year, although there is a low point in breeding activity in the fall. They commonly nest in winter.

Because of this, a crossbill in transition plumage may be seen in any month of the year and any flock of crossbills may contain some of these birds along with mature males, females, and immature birds.

This makes for a very heterogeneous flock as far as color is concerned.

Winter nesting requires a well-insulated nest and also requires that the eggs be kept covered.

According to Hal H. Harrison in his book *A Field Guide to Birds' Nests,* the female seldon leaves the nest and while incubating, the male regularly brings her food.

Harrison says a good way to find the nest is to follow the male.

Most young songbirds are fed on insects which of course are in short supply in winter. However, young crossbills are fed on partially-digested, regurgitated seeds.

The nest is well hidden among the needles of a conifer, well out toward the end of the limb and may be at any height between five and 80 feet from the ground, Harrison says.

Crossbills live primarily on the seeds of conifers and, while gathering these seeds, their movements resemble those of budgies or parakeets.

Like them, they often cling in an upside down position to the underside of a twig; and, in this position walk out to the very tip of it.

Red crossbills are partial to pine seeds while white-wings are partial to spruce.

The bald eagles are back!

Every year in March, they appear on the river ice between Beaubear's Island and Vye's Beach. Here, the river opens up early because of the warm effluents being discharged by the pulp mill.

This year, the eagles are the earliest ever. The first one was seen on Feb. 20 according to Robert Houlston.

He says his father, Max has been watching the river and it was he who spotted it.

He also saw it again on Feb. 22 and on March 1, he saw two of them — presumably a pair.

Snow buntings have been reported at a couple of feeders.

On Feb. 21, Ilse Doepke reported that two to five of them were coming daily to her feeder in Riviere du Portage and, on one occasion, several dozen of them came.

Melvin and Mary Ripley of the Kirkpatrick sub-division have had a flock of snow buntings as regular visitors to their feeder since about Christmas.

Mary says they come three times a day, morning, noon, and night and the number of birds in the flock has gradually increased to the 36 they now have.

She says they prefer to feed on the ground and when stormy, will crouch down inside footprints in the snow for protection from the wind.

They are noticeably tamer now than when they first arrived. She can now move about on the deck beside the feeder without frightening them away.

Marten, tough animal not easily intimidated

Mar. 15/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The marten is a tough little animal not easily intimidated.

Some local people can testify to this.

Brent Sherrard of the Warwick Road said he was hunting at Rocky Brook, north of Boiestown, when he saw his first marten.

It was in a tree against the trunk at the base of a limb when he first noticed it.

He reached up and shook the limb. Immediately, the marten sprang to life, rushed out along the limb and appeared to be ready to leap onto him.

While doing this, it kept uttering some threatening sounds. He described it as resembling a small red fox.

Chris Hare and Darren and Larry Johnston, all of Newcastle, had an encounter with a marten which exhibited its fighting temperament.

They were on a bush trail in the Skid Lake area and a number of rabbit snares had been set up along the trail.

A rabbit which had been taken from one of these snares earlier was hanging in a tree.

As they approached the dead rabbit, they saw it was moving. On closer observation, they realized a marten was eating it.

The marten, on being disturbed, quickly descended, and ran along the trail in front of them. Shortly, it veered off and got caught in one of the rabbit snares.

The men decided to rescue it. Dressed in skidoo suits and wearing skidoo mitts, they had considerable protection from any possible bites it might try to inflict.

Chris had the unenviable job of holding the marten while Darren removed the snare.

He said he tried to grasp it by the back of the neck with one hand while holding its body with the other. The marten grabbed the thumb of one mitt and tore it, then grabbed the thumb of the other mitt and held on.

With the marten pulling at one end of the mitt and Chris pulling at the other, the marten's body was stretched to its full length. In this position, Darren was able to remove the snare.

Only after the snare had been removed and the marten's feet placed on the ground, did it let go its grasp. Then it sped off among the surrounding trees.

A.W.F. Banfield in *The Mammals of Canada* says in eastern Canada the marten inhabits black spruce forests and white cedar swamps. It is absent from logged and burned-over areas.

It spends most of its life in trees where it catches squirrels and these constitute a major item in its diet.

Mice, rabbits, grouse and other birds are also eaten. In summer, berries are added to its menu.

Like many other mammals, it is most active at night. It does not hibernate, but remains active all winter. It is said to be bold and curious, but never becomes tame.

The mother takes care of her young without help from her mate who associates with her only at mating time.

Aside from these family contacts, the marten is a solitary creature that apparently shuns the company of its own kind or any kind.

The marten is found from coast to coast in Canada, but, according to Banfield, it varies greatly in color from one geographical area to another.

For example, martens in the Maritimes are described as reddish; those in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon are greyish; and those in northern Quebec and in the British Columbia-Alberta border regions are almost black.

The marten is a member of the weasel family and is about the size of a mink.

Grey squirrel

Kim McDonnell of South Nelson is accustomed to seeing red squirrels at her bird feeder. However, it was with some surprise she happened to see a large grey squirrel visiting it on March 2.

Out in Strathadam, Barbara Von Richter has been entertaining some unusual squirrels, flying squirrels. Two of them regularly glide in from the nearby bush.

Earlier in the winter, Ruth Somers of Lyttleton, also reported flying squirrels at her feeder.

Flying squirrels seem often to be associated with large white pine trees, but Banfield says they are often associated with yellow birch and hemlock.

Beaver spotted crossing a road

Beavers are not normally out cutting trees at this time of year.

However, about 8 p.m. on the evening of March 10, Donald Gordon says while driving through his woodlot in Maple Glen a beaver showed up in the headlights of his truck.

It was dragging a small tree across the road. In order to get the tree to its dam, the animal had to drag it over the two snowbanks on either side of the road.

He said on two previous occasions he saw beaver tracks in the snow near this same place. Therefore, it appears the beavers in this colony have not stored sufficient food in their pond to take them through the winter.

A. W. F. Banfield, in his book *The Mammals of Canada*, has this to say about beavers in winter:

"Occasionally they may be seen in the open water frequently found near the dam overflow. Rarely are their trails seen across the ice to a new cutting on shore and regular outside feeding activity occurs only if the colony is faced with starvation beneath the ice. Then they may cut their way out of the top of the lodge."

A leaflet from the Canadian Wildlife Service's "Hinterland Who's Who" series says the largest tree known to have been cut down by beavers was 46 inches in diameter.

It does not say where this took place nor what species of tree it was.

It is well known that poplars are the preferred food of beavers. No poplars grow to such a size in eastern Canada, but there are species of poplar that can grow to that size in western Canada.

Spring birds

Despite the deep snow, some spring birds are already being reported.

On March 13, Clell Manderville reported seeing a male marsh hawk (northern harrier) near his home in Derby.

On March 15, Chester Creighton reported seeing two flocks of Canada geese flying over his home in Newcastle.

The marsh hawk was said to be circling about over a field as though searching for mice, the same as it commonly does in summer.

The geese were said to be flying high but in their characteristic V-formation.

Perhaps these birds have been in the south of the province where most of the ground was bare before the heavy snowstorm struck there this week. The storm may have influenced them to move on.

Mar. 22/91
Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The strange black and white bird that has at times shown up at Ralph and Marie MacDonald's bird feeder in Whitneyville is probably a partially albino grackle. He said except for its white markings it looks like a grackle (blackbird).

■ Mrs. William Arnoldus of Chatham keeps her canary near a window where it can see the birds at her feeder. The birds outside can also see it.

She said recently a northern shrike slammed into the window in an attempt to get the canary.

The shrike was somewhat stunned but soon flew into a nearby crabapple tree from which it could still eye the canary. It stayed about the yard for three days.

Apparently this canary has in earlier years attracted the attention of sharp-shinned hawks. On a couple of occasions, one of them has perched on the window sill in front of the canary.

The nervous actions of the canary have sometimes alerted the Arnoldus' to the presence of these predators.

■ Louis Sippley reports a northern shrike has been staying in the vicinity of his place in Baie Ste Anne. However, he said it has not been attacking the birds at his feeder, but instead eats the meat he sets out for woodpeckers.

There have been many mourning doves coming to his feeder all winter. He has found they are fond of cracked corn he has been feeding them because it is considerably cheaper than most bird seed.

■ Sherman Sherrard of Sunny Corner found a dead northern shrike in his woodshed and afterward did some research on the bird.

From Funk and Wagnall's *Wildlife Encyclopedia* he learned that in Alaska, a Tom Cade tamed some of them and did a study of their food habits.

Their diet included not only birds and small mammals, but also bumble bees, wasps, and beetles. Bumblebees were spotted and pursued while still beyond Cade's vision.

Turn a garden into bird haven

Mar. 29/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The following news release from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology may be of interest.

This is especially so if you are planning some landscaping this spring.

Of course, most of us do not have the land or the funds to make the elaborate changes described here.

However, at little or no cost, we might be able to adapt some of their ideas to suit our taste and circumstances.

Better birds and gardens: Days are growing longer and now is the time to start thinking about turning your garden into a haven for birds.

You can receive a free copy of an article from *Living Bird* magazine that tells you how to get started.

Living Birds is a quarterly publication of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, a membership organization for the study, appreciation and conservation of birds located on a 200-acre wildlife sanctuary in Ithaca, New York.

The lab recently remodelled its bird feeding area to create a state-of-the-art garden that exemplifies the techniques you can use to attract birds to your property.

Using a design by Cornell landscape architect Marvin Adelman, funds from generous sponsors, bulldozers and a lot of thought and sweat, lab staff transformed a glorified mud puddle behind the observatory into a veritable avian mecca.

First, they replaced the straight-edge shore of the pond with a more attractive and accessible curving line.

Then, they planted trees, vines, shrubs and groundcover to attract and feed birds year round: conifers, juneberry, bush honeysuckle, winterberry, trumpetvine.

Finally, they added new, squirrel-resistant feeders, a birdbath and a waterfall.

The garden now contains all the elements of an ideal bird-attracting garden. It provides a range of elevations for perching and nesting.

It produces a variety of seeds, grains and fruit and food is present every month of the year.

Edges between different types of plants and between water and land are extensive and curved — the edge attracts birds and gives the best viewing for observers.

Already, they have noticed an increase in the number and variety of birds visiting the garden — a goose-ravaged wasteland has become a treat for lab staff and visitors.

In fact, at least one pair of American robins took advantage of the renovations before they were completed. It built a nest in an unplanted conifer.

Your budget may not permit you to hire a bulldozer, but for a self-addressed, stamped envelope you can learn more about landscaping for birds, including suggestions of plants, birds they will attract, and sources for detailed plant lists and gardening ideas.

Write: Cornel Laboratory of Ornithology, EIS Department N1, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, New York 14850, U.S.A.

■ My wife said the stamped, self-addressed envelope would require U.S. postage, rather than Canadian. Since this news release came for 40 cents U.S. postage, I presume that is what would be required.

The juneberry mentioned is the same as the serviceberry or what many on the Miramichi call wild pears.

One of these small trees grows wild in our backyard and its fruit attracts many birds especially purple finches, cedar waxwings, robins and starlings.

One year we planted a row of mixed budgie seed in our vegetable garden. Four species of plants grew from it, but we were able to identify only two of them, oats and millet.

The millet grew well and in late summer after the grain had ripened, it attracted house sparrows and purple finches which fed directly from the standing grain.

■ On March 7, Walter Cormier, who is caretaker at the Chatham dump, reported the bald eagle had returned.

It sometimes comes to scavenge at the dump, but this was the first time it had been seen since last fall.

■ On March 17, Robert Whitney of Taymouth phoned to report that while returning from his mother's home in Whitneyville on the previous day, he had seen three horned larks on the Warwick Road.

They had come down on the road either to get grit and salt or to gather seeds from the weed tops that were projecting out of the snow along the roadside.

Consider the burdock's hook

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

How can burdocks be removed from one's hair?

Last fall, I was faced with this problem. The burdocks became stuck in my hair while I was gathering litter from a patch of tall weeds.

The more I tried to untangle them, the more entangled they became. Eventually I simply grasped the burdocks and pulled.

Of course, I had to say goodbye to any hair that came with them, but there seemed no other solution.

After this experience, I took a magnifying glass and examined a burdock and this is what I found:

There is just a single hook at the end of each spine on the burdock. Other than this the spine is perfectly smooth — no barbs at all.

I deduced a burdock's tenacity when embedded in the hair results from the fact it is anchored in all directions.

However, if one of these little hooks were detached from the rest and had to act on its own, it would be quite ineffective. This would not be the case when hooked into clothing.

I concluded if one were to cut out the central core of each burdock, the remaining unattached hooks would brush out of the hair with little resistance.

Since I haven't much hair left to experiment with, I haven't checked out this theory.

Other hitchhikers of the plant kingdom are the tickseeds, beggar ticks or sticktights whichever you prefer to call them.

These are dark, oblong seeds which, like pitchforks, have prongs at one end. In most species there are two prongs; in some there are four.

These prongs, properly called awns, are finely barbed so they penetrate clothing more readily than they can be withdrawn.

These tickseeds are produced by burmarigolds and some related species of the composite family. They are smaller and finer plants than burdocks.

During the summer, they bear small, yellow, daisy-like flowers. In the fall after the flowers have gone and the seeds have ripened, these seeds acquire their hitchhiking capabilities. It is then that they cling to our pant legs, stockings and shoelaces.

The burmarigold is common on the Miramichi. If in the fall you happen to tramp through a weedy vacant lot, you are likely to end up with the tedious task of plucking its tickseeds from your clothing.

They don't brush off readily and generally have to be pulled out one by one. They are plentiful on the top of the old barkpile at the Strawberry Marsh in Newcastle.

■ A few years ago while our son, Ian, and I were hiking about in the grasslands of our prairie provinces we came in contact with a plant whose seed pods clung to us.

These pods were like small pea pods except they were covered with hooked spines like those on burdocks. Inside each pod were a few hard, smooth seeds.

We inquired of local people as to the name of this plant. We were told their pods were known as 'porcupine eggs' — an appropriate name we thought.

Later we consulted *Budd's Flora of the Canadian Prairie Provinces* and learned the plant was wild licorice — a name give it because of its sweet, licorice-flavored roots said to have been chewed by Indians. The plant was classified as being a member of the pea family.

While attending the March meeting of the Miramichi River Environmental Assessment Committee, I learned some of the complicating factors involved in trying to assess the impact of Heath Steele's mine water spill.

For instance, the toxicity of copper and zinc in water does not alone depend upon their concentrations, but also on the temperature of the water, the hardness of the water, the acidity or alkalinity, etc.

Apparently a spill that would be toxic in warm water can be relatively harmless in cold water. Also, the harder the water into which the spill takes place, the less harmful it is to the fish and other organisms.

A bird gizzard combines grinding mill, stomach

April 19/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

I am not a biologist, but as I understand it, a bird's gizzard is a grinding mill and a stomach combined.

It is a stomach enclosed in a strong muscle which alternately contracts and relaxes like the beating of the heart.

However, it beats at a much slower rate — about two or three beats per minute. This beating can be heard with a stethoscope provided there is hard material in the gizzard at the time.

Describing the inside lining of the gizzard, John K. Terres, in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds* says:

"It is very thick and horny, is shed regularly in most birds, and secretes a fluid that hardens into plates and ridges — the 'millstones' for the mechanical grinding of food."

The pulsating of the gizzard can crush things such as mussel shells and grind up hard foods such as seeds.

Birds have no teeth, but the grinding action in their gizzards compensates for this. "As scarce as hen's teeth" was an expression my dad often used.

By swallowing grit, the grinding action of the gizzard can be enhanced and the bird's digestion improved.

Terres recommends mixing grit with bird seed to the extent of 5 per cent by weight before putting it into a bird feeder.

Apparently, grit tends to bypass the crop in species which have crops. Rather than being discharged with the food wastes, it tends to be retained in the gizzard.

This has been demonstrated. Terres says after feeding chickens grit and then depriving them of it for three weeks, their gizzards have been found to still contain some.

It is said birds may at times substitute hard materials such as chokecherry pits for grit. The gizzard then becomes a small ball mill. For information on ball mills, ask your friends at Heath Steele.

A second function of grit is to supply the bird with minerals, the most essential one being calcium or lime.

This is especially needed during the egg-laying period. At this time, broken egg shells are sometimes appreciated by birds and can be provided at your feeder.

Apparently, the gizzard and the whole digestive system of birds varies greatly in their development depending on the species and the type of food it eats.

■ Some birds, such as partridges and pigeons, have a crop as well as a gizzard while others have practically neither.

The crop acts as a storage bin from which it is fed into the gizzard. Birds with a crop eat more at a meal, but do not need to feed as often.

■ Some birds have much simpler digestive systems. Terres speaks of some tropical, fruit-eating birds who have little more than a gullet and intestines. This is all that is necessary to digest the soft fruit they eat.

Nature sometimes shows desperate cruelty

April 12/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Picture a wild horse racing across an open plain with its mane and tail streaming in the wind.

Years ago, I remember reading an article by a woman who said at one time the above picture was the ultimate picture of freedom.

However, later in life, she had the opportunity to get to know wild horses and she discovered they were nervous, frightened animals.

She came to the conclusion that a domesticated horse is better off than a wild one.

This conclusion rather surprised me. I had never really thought about it, but I had simply assumed the reverse would be true. Wasn't freedom of supreme importance?

Recently, Sterling Burchill of South Nelson loaned me a book entitled *Mustangs and Cow Horses.*

It is a collection of many articles written by various authors and compiled by J. Frank Dobie, Mody C. Boatright and Harry H. Ransom.

This book gives us reason to believe the wild horses of America were nervous, frightened animals.

Certainly, when the west was tamed, these wild horses were relentlessly pursued by men, their purpose being to capture, break, and sell them. Indians often ate them and panthers also had a taste for horse-flesh.

But, they were also subject to despots of their own species. Only the strongest stallions in the prime of life and, to a lesser extent, their lead mares held any status in their society.

The strongest stallions might have as many as 50 mares in their harems although most harems were much smaller than this.

The young, the old and the weak stallions wandered alone and were referred to by frontiersmen as dog soldiers, a name used by some Indian tribes for outcasts of their society.

Most stallions bore many scars for at any time a dog soldier might challenge a stallion with a harem or a stallion with a harem might try to steal mares from another stallion's harem.

These battles were fought with hoof and tooth and sometimes ended in death for one of them.

A stallion apparently kept his mares from leaving his harem by biting them or by threatening them if they ever started to stray.

■ Over 100 years ago, in 1888, J. W. Moses in the following paragraph describes a scene in which several harems were herded together and chased to wear them down and drive them into a corral. Black Kettle is one of the stallions in the herd:

"Presently a young colt fell and dropped behind and when the mother tried to turn back to it, Black Kettle put her back in her place and kept her there.

'As I cast my eyes down the line, I could see the little colts dropping behind. The studs paid no attention to them, but kept the mares in the bunch by simply shaking their heads at them with their ears back."

Elsewhere in the same article we are told the stallion did not lead his harem, the lead mare did. The stallion's usual position was in the rear where he could keep an eye on things.

He dashed forward only when he deemed it necessary to drive off a dog soldier or to put a mare in her place.

■ We hear naturalists use such terms as "the natural order," or "the balance of nature," etc., as though they described some idealistic state, almost sacred. But surely we are ignoring what is actually out there.

True, there is much that is beautiful in nature, but there is also much that is desperately cruel as well.

Doesn't the story of Noah and his ark suggest salvation is for all of creation and not just a part? Genesis chapter 7.

What did the writer of the Book of Job mean when he spoke of "the soul of every living thing"? — see Job 12 verses 7 to 10.

What did Jesus mean when he commanded his disciples "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"? Mark 16 verse 15.

And consider the millenial estate pictured in Isaiah 11 verses 6 to 9.

Spiritual light must penetrate to every corner of the universe and every aspect of our lives must eventually be transformed by it.

Residents watch moose, calf

April 26/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Recently, a carload of people travelling up the Curtis Road from Whitneyville to Maple Glen saw a cow moose nursing a calf.

Those in the car were Mary, Beulah, Hazen and Doug Smallwood and Tommy MacLean, all of Maple Glen.

When first seen, the two moose were on the road; when approached, they simply ambled along in front of the car and showed no fear of it.

Except for the interval in which the cow stopped to nurse her calf, the two of them continued on in this fashion for about three miles. It was only when they were nearing Maple Glen that they took to the bush.

Although there were a number of logging roads running off to the side, the moose passed these by. No doubt they were reluctant to leave the firm footing of the road — plunging through the snow of the bush being an unattractive alternative.

During this episode, the car had to be either driven very slowly or stopped entirely as when the cow nursed her calf.

The calf was said to be a yearling and both animals were described as being in poor condition.

After hearing of this incident, I consulted a booklet dealing with moose. The booklet is one in the Canadian Wildlife Service's "Hinterland Who's Who" series.

In it, we read the moose calf stays with its mother for a full year or sometimes longer. The calves are born in late May or early June.

Further, it says in a given year only about 50 per cent of the cows produce calves and about one-quarter of these have twins. Most of the remainder have single calves, but a few have triplets.

It is said a single calf will weigh between 25 and 35 pounds while a twin calf may weigh only 13 or 14 pounds (6 to 6½-kgs).

In any case, it gains weight quickly. For the first month, it may add a pound or two per day and for a period later in the summer may gain as much as five pounds per day.

Apparently, the calf is helpless at birth and is kept hidden for a couple of days. However, within a few days it can outrun a man and swim readily.

As might be expected, breeding success is said to be improved by a good food supply.

Eastern bluebirds

On April 7, Dorothy Taylor reported she had a pair of eastern bluebirds in her yard at South Nelson.

In recent years, we have been receiving encouraging news about this beautiful, and at one time, much more plentiful bird.

Last year, we know of at least four nestings in the Miramichi area — one at Newcastle, one back of Douglastown, one at Lagaceville and one in a clearcut up the Mullin Stream Road.

Writing in the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas newsletter, Brian Dalzell says since 1983 the eastern bluebird has dramatically increased throughout New Brunswick.

He tells of one case last summer where a banded male was found nesting at Upper Springfield, 20 miles west of Fredericton.

The bird was recaptured to get the information from the band. It was determined it had been banded the previous year near Philadelphia 675 miles from where it was recaptured. When banded, it had been a fledgling.

Robert Houlston of Newcastle reports a lone snow goose spent several days, April 2-7, on the shore of the Miramichi River behind John Whalen's place near Vye's Beach.

Last April, a lone snow goose stayed about three weeks back of William Herbert's place at South Nelson. In this case, a second one was seen with it on a few occasions when it first arrived there.

One wonders if this could be the same goose.

■ Brian Tozer of Sillikers reports an immature bald eagle wintered near Halcomb where it lived on deer carcasses.

Of course, there have been many reports of spring birds — too many to list here.

Bluebird sighting a first for area

May 3/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Last week, a pair of eastern bluebirds was reported. This week, a mountain bluebird has been reported.

This is a first for the Miramichi. In fact, the mountain bluebird has never before been officially recorded anywhere in New Brunswick.

George W. Johnston of the King George Highway in Newcastle said on April 23 he looked out of the window and there were two birds at the bird feeder.

One flew away immediately allowing him no opportunity to identify it. The other hopped toward him giving him a front and side view.

Although he saw it for only a few seconds, he had a good look at it. It was within 20 feet of him.

It was 9 a.m. on a bright, sunny day providing good lighting conditions.

The bird did not feed and it may have been mere coincidence it landed at the feeder.

He described it as being sparrow-size, or a little longer, having a pale blue breast and a white belly. The rest of the plumage was all blue, but of a deeper shade than the breast.

When he checked in his bird book, Roger Tory Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds East of the Rockies,* he found the bird matched exactly the picture shown for the male mountain bluebird. He was confident this was the bird he had seen.

After receiving this report, I checked in W. Austin Squire's *The Birds of New Brunswick,* published in 1976.

The mountain bluebird was not mentioned indicating it had never been recorded in the province.

Thinking perhaps it may have visited our province since the publication of Squire's book, I phoned David Christie, associate curator of natural history for the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John.

When asked about this, his reply was that the museum has no records of the mountain bluebird having visited New Brunswick.

The mountain bluebird is found in western Canada and in the western United States.

Peterson has this to say regarding its range:

"Rare wanderer east of 100th Meridian on the Great Plains. Accidental in southern Ontario and eastern United States."

The 100th Meridian of longitude slices through western Manitoba and western Texas.

In the United States National Museum Bulletin 196, we find an interesting quote from a report written by Norman Criddle of Treesbank, Manitoba in 1927.

Describing the antics of mountain bluebirds while selecting a nesting site, he writes:

"The male bird is an extreme optimist and nearly any hole meets with his approval, but his mate is not so easily satisfied and many of his selections are discarded as worthless.

"It is interesting to watch this home seeking, to see the male put his head into a hole followed by the female. Should she enter it, he flutters his wings in the height of enthusiasm, but should she turn away unsatisfied, as she does nine times out of 10, then he appears dejected for a few moments, but speedily recovering, endeavors to entice her into other holes, the whereabouts of which he appears to have discovered beforehand".

From the above quote, no doubt many people will see a marked resemblance between their own domestic lives and those of mountain bluebirds.

Colorful it is, but today's scientists discourage such subjective reporting.

Morning bird chorus

The morning bird chorus in Newfoundland is markedly different from that in New Brunswick. This was one of the first things I noticed on visiting Newfoundland some years ago.

The fox sparrow is one of the most prominent singers there, whereas here it is seldom heard. It nests throughout Newfoundland.

Here, although a few nest in the north central interior highlands of our province, in settled areas it is just a transient.

About the only sounds it makes during its brief stopovers, are those produced by its scratching among dead leaves — a characteristic habit of it.

Fox sparrows

Recently, Tom Greathouse of Douglasfield and Doug Underhill of the MacKinnon Road, both reported fox sparrows visiting their yards.

These sparrows were no doubt on their way to Newfoundland, Labrador or northern Quebec.

Bell spots great egret

May 10/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

At this time of year with birds returning and migrants passing through, we get many bird reports.

We will comment on a few of these, but time and space are insufficient to include all.

During migration, birds often turn up in unexpected places. They may be seen in habitats far removed from that in which they are normally seen.

Woodcocks may be seen in flowerbeds, forest birds at feeders in town and a few may wander beyond their normal range.

A great egret has appeared in our region. It was first observed by Greg Bell of Chatham.

On May 2, he telephoned to say a pure white heron or egret had flown overhead while he was at Baie Ste. Anne.

He said it was smaller than a great blue heron, but he was unable to determine the color of the legs or the bill. These would have been important clues for identification purposes.

A couple of days later, a Baie Ste. Anne resident, Louis Sippley, reported he had also seen a pure white heron.

When first seen, it was standing with a group of five or six great blue herons, all of which were feeding along the Portage River back of his home.

As he approached, the great blues took off while the white one remained. He was able to approach the white one until he was within about 300 feet when it departed.

By this time with the aid of his binoculars, he was able to get the details needed to identify it as a great egret. It had the diagnostic black legs and feet and yellow bill.

There are several species of white egret or heron living to the south of us in the United States. Any of them can, and do, stray north to New Brunswick.

Nonetheless, this is the most conclusive report we have ever received of a great egret on the Miramichi.

Other white egrets that have visited us in the past are the snowy egret and the cattle egret.

American scoter

On April 29, Paul Stewart of Matthew's Settlement reported an American scoter on the Little Southwest.

This is a fairly common species of duck along our coast and in the lower estuary of the Miramichi, but is seldom seen upriver.

The male American scoter has a conspicuous yellow-orange bump on the top of the bill, but otherwise, it is as black as a crow.

This has earned for it the nicknames "butterbill" and "butternose". The female is a dull, dark brown with a pale area on the head and neck.

In some bird books, this species is called the black scoter, and in others, the common scoter.

It and its relatives, the surf scoter and the white-winged scoter, live primarily on shell fish, especially blue mussels, and these are swallowed whole.

The shells are evidently soon digested through the amazing grinding action of the gizzard, plus very acidic gastric juices.

The mussels, clams, and oysters taken are generally small in size. However, John K. Terres, says in his *Encyclopedia of North American Birds* that blue mussels and oysters up to two inches long are occasionally swallowed.

Shell fish are obtained by diving, sometimes to considerable depths, 25 feet or more, to retrieve them from the bottom.

Gulls also eat shellfish such as clams and oysters, but when they do so, they remove them from their shells.

This is sometimes accomplished by carrying them aloft and dropping them on rocks, pavement or other hard surfaces.

On a recent trip, my wife, Winnie, was in a metal-roofed building at Mystic, Connecticut, when she heard a loud "bang". She was told it was just a gull dropping an oyster or a clam on the roof.

More ducks

Two other species of duck were reported by Brian Tozer. A hooded merganser was seen in the river in front of his Sillikers home when the ice ran out and a pair of ring-necked ducks at Brander's Cove in Strathadam.

On April 23, Margaret MacKinnon of the Moorefield Road reported a pair of American kestrels seemed to have taken up residence at Ferry Road.

Tom Greathouse of Douglasfield reported another one was frequenting an area near the overpass at Chatham's County Fair.

These small colorful falcons often perch on utility wires.

They feed largely on meadow mice, but in late summer consume large numbers of grasshoppers and crickets. When food is scarce, they take small songbirds.

Indigo buntings add to the blues

May 17/91
Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

Blue is in fashion in the bird world this spring.

First we had eastern bluebirds, then a mountain bluebird and now indigo buntings.

Unlike the two species of bluebird, the indigo bunting has a blue underside as well as being blue on the upper parts. Other than its black tail and black wing margins, its plumage is a solid blue throughout.

Of course, what we are describing here is the mature male in full breeding plumage. Bluebirds have no black markings.

On April 29, a male indigo bunting appeared at one of Sandy Mullin's bird feeders in Newcastle.

It shared the feeder with a flock of purple finches and both enjoyed the niger seed it contained.

On May 3, Lillian Coughlan of Grey Rapids described a little bird in her yard as being of the most beautiful blue color, but as having some black on its tail.

This description was sufficient to identify it as being another male indigo bunting.

Then, on May 8, Art Ronan of Newcastle telephoned to report he had had a male indigo bunting coming to his feeder for about two weeks. It had been eating both niger seed and sunflower seeds.

All of the indigo buntings here reported were males. This is readily understandable as the female in her modest brown attire does not attract people's attention.

Fortunately though, she does attract the male indigo bunting's attention. He obviously finds her quite attractive.

In late summer, the male loses most of his blue plumage and becomes almost as inconspicuous as his mate.

Older males are generally bluer than are those born during the previous summer.

David Christie, associate curator of natural history at the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John, informs us reports of indigo buntings have been quite widespread this spring.

He says this has been especially true in our sister province of Nova Scotia. There, in some cases, as many as seven or eight have been reported at a single feeder.

We are on the northern fringe of the indigo bunting's range and this is another southern species that seems to be moving into our region. It has been reported more frequently during the past two years.

Intense forest harvesting in recent years has created much habitat that would encourage this species to settle here. It prefers second growth forest to mature.

It also likes old, abandoned fields that are partially overgrown with shrubs and small trees.

■ Another eastern bluebird has been reported. On May 13, Colin Somers telephoned to say a male had spent the day about his home in Lyttleton.

We hope it nests there. The habitat is suitable with plenty of open grassland.

Concerning the mountain bluebird reported here a couple of weeks ago, David Christie did some research for us.

He says there are no official reports of mountain bluebirds for any of the Maritime Provinces and only two for the New England States.

One visited Grand Isle in Vermont and the other landed on a research ship off Nantucket Island, Massachusetts. Both sightings occurred in April, the same as the one reported here and both occurred in the 1980s.

He said because of the recent increase in the mountain bluebird population, chances of seeing these birds are increasing.

This increase has resulted from the erection of many bluebird houses along bluebird trails in the prairie states and provinces.

Another interesting note from David Christie concerns a male mountain bluebird that spent the summer of 1985 at Port Stanley, Ontario.

This bird appeared to be mated with a female eastern bluebird. However, when the young birds matured, they had all the features of eastern bluebirds which suggests the male mountain simply assumed the role of stepfather.

The moose bird, or gray jay, is one of our earliest nesters.

On May 1, a woodsman in the South Nelson area led me to one of their nests situated in a small fir tree only about six feet from the ground.

It was a cool, damp day and an adult bird was on the nest. Two heads protruded from under it and they were obviously well developed even at this early date and would be leaving the nest shortly.

Children resemble animated flowerbed

May 31/91
Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The flowers were romping and playing in the bright morning sunshine.

I had never before seen such an animated flowerbed.

It was really just the children at play in Croft Elementary schoolyard.

However, viewed from a distance and with the children dressed in the psychedelic colors so popular this year, the group reminded me of a flowerbed.

This year, more than ever, children are a part of spring's burst of color.

Another unique touch of color that has been added this spring is the influx of indigo buntings.

Apparently this phenomenon has been noted throughout the Maritimes. In some parts, it is reported that accompanying these beautiful blue birds there has been a sprinkling of another blue species, the blue grosbeak.

Although both species are similarly colored, the latter is about a half again larger than the former.

Also, the blue grosbeak has two broad chestnut-colored wing bars which are distinctive.

None of the blue grosbeaks have been reported in the local area. We have three more reports of indigo buntings in addition to the three previously reported.

On May 14, Clyde and Lorna Williston had an indigo bunting at their bird feeder near the Miramichi Rural School.

On the following day, Monica Charnley of Chatham and Janet Young of Black River Bridge reported indigo buntings at their feeders. The latter two remained for several days.

■ The Willistons also had another visitor equally worthy of note. On May 16, a northern mockingbird was singing from the top of their chimney.

This bird with its great repertoire of songs is incomparable as a vocal artist.

For a podium, it selects some high and prominent perch and from here it sings long, loud and clear. It is bound to catch the attention of everyone on the block.

Its concerts always consist of medleys of many different songs and noises and may include some elements resembling rock and roll.

They may include some unmusical sounds and often some visual effects along with the auditory ones. The bird often jumps or flips into the air as part of its performance.

These public exhibitions may even be staged in the middle of the night, sometimes to the annoyance of its human neighbors.

On the other hand, it has endeared itself to many people of the south where it is a common bird. This is evidenced in the old familiar songs "Mockingbird Hill," and "Listen to the Mockingbird".

A few years ago, during the breeding season, one of them spent some time on our street and frequently sang from the top of a TV aerial.

One winter we had one come regularly to our feeder. There it fed on a suet ball containing nuts and raisins, etc.

In an article by Beverly J. Letchworth, in "Wildbird" magazine, Jan. '89, the author speaks of one mockingbird in Boston that was credited with the ability to imitate 39 different bird songs, 50 different bird calls and the songs of a frog and a cricket.

She says mockingbirds learn to imitate such sounds as a squeaky gate, a dog's bark or a postman's whistle.

■ Anna LeBelle of Loggieville reports that about three weeks ago a large pheasant hen visited her yard and was seen there for three days.

During this period, it was also seen in James Kelly's yard, a couple of blocks away.

Many birds have a regular yearly routine as well as a daily one. This was recently demonstrated to James Kelly who reports that last spring, a blackbird whose right wing was mostly white, appeared at his place. This spring it reappeared there.

■ Fellow columnist, Desmond Dolan, after reading my article on burdocks and beggar ticks (April 5) wrote to us. His letter includes the following statement:

"It is interesting that whoever wrote the most recent edition of *Gray's Manual* visited that side of the Miramichi, near Newcastle, and saw that unusual botanical variety of arched beggar tick which he gave its own special name — Bidens hyperborea var arcuans."

Douglastown woman sights golden eagle in Rexton

A large bird with a wingspread of at least six feet swooped low over the road in front of their car.

They stopped and got out as did the occupants of another car that happened to be passing along the highway at the time.

As they watched, the bird wheeled, made another low pass over the highway, circled and climbed high above the trees.

Linda Hartlen of Douglastown said it was entirely brown in color except for the golden sheen that showed up clearly on its head and shoulders.

This was seen as it banked and circled in the sunlight close by them. She is convinced it was a golden eagle.

This incident took place on April 29 as the Hartlens were passing Rexton's "Welcome" sign on the north side of the community.

The golden eagle is sometimes referred to as "the king of birds". According to Peterson, it has a body length of about three feet and a wing-

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

spread of about seven feet.

Although reports of it are few and scattered, it may be seen in this province at any time of the year.

David Christie of Albert said one of them is seen every winter in Albert County. I have yet to see my first one.

It is believed this eagle was always rather rare in New Brunswick. It is more common in the Rocky Mountain regions of western North America.

The golden eagle lives primarily on mammals, unlike the bald eagle which lives primarily on fish. However, a bald eagle reported near Escuminac was the exception to this rule.

It was seen on May 5 by Louis Sippley of Baie Ste Anne, and was feeding on a deer carcass half buried in the sand.

As he approached, the eagle was apparently reluctant to leave its meal.

It flew away a short distance, but he was able to come within about 50 feet of it. When he started moving away, the eagle returned to its meal.

It was an immature bird. Its age and inexperience probably help to explain the lack of caution.

In recent years, at a number of locations in the Maritimes and in Maine, winter food has been provided for bald eagles.

This, apparently, is especially helpful to inexperienced, immature birds, many of whom die of starvation or suffer from malnutrition during the winter.

Rudy Stocek, in the *New Brunswick Naturalist*, fall 1985, said to increase the population of bald eagles in the Maritimes, it is more important to increase the survival rate of immature birds than it is to increase the production of young eaglets.

On May 13, Greg Bell of Chatham also reported an immature bald eagle in the Escuminac area — no doubt the same one as was reported earlier.

He was working on a fishing boat with Eldric and Mervin Martin and Billy Thibodeau.

He reports they have been catching a lot of herring. As a result, they have been seeing many gannets because these birds follow the schools of herring and plunge into the water like missiles to catch them.

■ Displaying the bright orange and black colors of Lord Baltimore, for whom it was originally named, the first northern (Baltimore) oriole arrived on May 12.

It was reported by Carol White of Lower Newcastle who caught sight of it in her yard.

■ Within a period of about 24 hours, May 16 and 17, ruby-throated hummingbirds were reported in three different localities.

Evidently they all must have arrived from the south at the same, or almost the same, time.

Following the instructions which came with her hummingbird feeder, Mrs. Ralph Porter of Sunny Corner filled and erected it about a week before the first hummingbirds, a male and female, appeared at it on May 16.

Eddy Cando of Millerton also has hummingbirds, one pair or more, coming to his feeders. They apparently have good memories.

He fed them last year, but when they arrived at the same location this year, his feeders were still not up. He quickly filled and erected them and the birds quickly made use of them.

On the following day, my wife, Winnie, saw the first hummingbird in our yard in Newcastle. It seemed to have been attracted by the bright red and yellow tulips blooming there.

Curtis finds crayfish near White Rapids

Crayfish (crawfish) look like small lobster, but live in freshwater.

Recently, George Curtis of Gray Rapids found a crayfish in the Main Southwest about a half mile upriver from White Rapids.

He reported it to be about two inches long — full body length not including antennae.

This is a small crayfish although they normally do not grow to more than three or four inches.

Crayfish are somewhat of a rarity in New Brunswick, but are common in southern Ontario.

The main reason for their preference for southern Ontario over New Brunswick can probably be traced to the differences in their underlying rocks.

The water a crayfish lives in should not be acidic and should contain dissolved calcium salts (lime). Otherwise, the crayfish will be unable to develop a strong and healthy shell.

In New Brunswick, the soils and the underlying rock generally contain few soluable calcium minerals. As a consequence, the streams are acidic and contain little dissolved calcium.

In southern Ontario, the underlying soils and rocks contain much limestone (calcium carbonate). Enough of this dissolves to neutralize the acids in the water and to load it with dissolved calcium.

In this way, the groundwater is so modified as to become a suitable medium for crayfish habitation.

June 7/91

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

The shell of a crayfish or lobster is composed of the same substance as is our fingernails. It is called "chitin", and chitin increases in hardness proportionately to the amount of calcium impregnated into it.

Despite the close resemblance between crayfish and lobsters, their life-cycles differ greatly.

A female lobster lays thousands of eggs in a season (maximum 40,000) and these eggs hatch into tiny larvae having no resemblance to their parents.

A female crayfish lays no more than 200 eggs and these hatch into miniature crayfish which are exact replicas of their parents.

H. C. White, in a 1957 report for the Department of Fisheries said there was only one species of crayfish in New Brunswick.

It was to be found only in parts of the three main river systems — the St. John, the Restigouche and the Miramichi — and, in the case of the Miramichi, was found only in the Southwest branch.

He said it was not known to inhabit any of the lower tidal tributaries of these river systems, nor any of the smaller coastal streams.

Contrary to White's report, we have one record for the Northwest Miramichi.

In April 1986, the Rev. John (Bonner) Long, of Newcastle, reported finding two crayfish in a spring-fed stream near Jack's Lake. This stream's source was high up on a mountain ridge.

From there, it flowed along the surface for a short distance, then went underground disappearing under broken rock and rubble before reappearing further down.

From here, it ran into a bogan through which it eventually joined the Little Southwest Miramichi.

The crayfish were above the underground section of the stream, and only about 300 or 400 yards from the stream's source.

Surprisingly, these two crayfish were reported to be of entirely different colors — one being the normal dark muddy green, the other an unusual light orange.

How do crayfish get transported to such out-of-the-way places?

Perhaps Gregory Clark has the answer. I once read an article in which he expressed the opinion that mud pont (brown bullhead) were inadvertently transplanted from one pond to another by birds such as herons.

They did this by tramping about in the mud and shallow waters of one pond, then flying off to another one with some of the mud stuck to their feet. Embedded in this mud could also be some of the eggs, or tiny fish, of the mud pont species.

In the past we have gathered a few other reports of crayfish hereabouts.

Murray Curtis of Blackville reported they are found in the Black Brook downriver from the mouth of the Cains.

In the spring of '85, Norman Stewart caught one in a dip net while dipping smelts out of the Renous at Pineville.

In September '84, Les McKinnon reported finding crayfish in a spring beside his home in Chelmsford.

Steven Landry of Douglastown reported seeing them in the small stream that flows by Burchill's mill.

Sterling Burchill of South Nelson reported seeing them on several occasions, one being in the Semiwagon River at the bridge on the old South Barnaby Road.

Post hosts variety of birds

Harry Walker

WILDLIFE

June 14/91

Great crested flycatchers are noisy birds

As a boy, I remember the first time I looked into a great crested flycatcher's nest.

I was startled and surprised to see a snake's skin in it.

It had nested in a large, hollow anchor post which supported a wire fence.

This post had through the years been the home for a variety of birds. Tree swallows and starlings had nested in it.

Also, there was evidence a flicker, a species of woodpecker, had at one time nested there or had intended to do so as it had drilled a hole into the side of the post about two feet from the top.

This provided the central cavity with a second entrance. There already had been one that ran straight up through the top of the post, the central core of which had rotted out.

The tree swallows and the starlings nested well down in the cavity, below the woodpecker hole. The great crested flycatcher arched its nest across the cavity above the woodpecker's hole.

This left an empty space below the nest which could be accessed through the woodpecker's hole.

This new arrangement caused me to wonder. Perhaps the flycatcher was leaving the basement apartment for some other bird to nest in. If this was so, there were no takers.

Years later, I found another great crested flycatcher's nest located in a hollow, horizontal fence rail about three feet from the ground.

Great crested flycatchers are few and far between in the Miramichi region.

However, Joyce Atkins of Douglastown reports that for about a week and a half, a pair of them appeared in her yard every morning. Unfortunately, they have not been seen for about a week.

While these birds were coming, they were obviously interested in a purple martin house which Joyce's husband, Al, had erected in the yard. They were seen going into and out of this house and hopes were they could nest there.

The Atkins have been replacing the roof on their home and Joyce thinks perhaps the birds were frightened away by all the hammering involved.

In the mid-'80s, Robert Lisk of the Centennial Park Subdivision had a pair of great crested flycatchers that for several years nested in a birdhouse he had made from a section of hollow cedar log.

He said they raised at least four broods of young in it.

The great crested flycatcher is slightly smaller than the robin. Its crest is quite noticeable, but is not sharply pointed as is the crest of the bluejay or waxwing.

Two important identifying marks are its yellow belly and its rusty-colored tail which contrasts markedly from its dull, olive-gray back.

It is a noisy bird, so if you have a pair of them about your home they are likely to make their presence known. Their calls are louder and clearer than those of most other birds.

Modern day great crested flycatchers often substitute cellophone for the snake skin traditionally found in their nests.

Snakes shed their skins periodically and it is these skins that find their way into the flycatcher's nests.

■ Many ducks nest far from water and when the ducklings hatch they must be led to water.

During this trek, a mother duck is sometimes seen leading a string of ducklings across a busy highway or street or is seen in some other place where she would not normally be.

Such was the case on June 5 when a brood of ducks crossed Perry Delano's yard in Newcastle. At this point, a dog disrupted the march and scattered some of the ducklings.

Later, three stray ducklings were found, but by this time the mother and the rest of her brood had disappeared and could not be located.

The Delanos kept the three ducklings for a few days feeding them chick starter and during that time grew quite noticeably. They were released into a pond where other ducks were living.

Mother ducks will readily adopt ducklings from other broods, therefore, the most appropriate way to deal with stray ducklings is to release them into a pond with others.

Even without parental care, small ducklings have been know to survive on their own. Young puddle ducks live primarily on mosquito larvae and other acquatic insect larvae, therefore, ducklings should be placed in a pond where these are available.