NATURE PEI

ISSUE #253

ISLAND NATURALIST

Oct. – Dec. 2024

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Quarterly newsletter for Nature PEI- the Natural History Society of Prince Edward Island

NATURE PEI – NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
P.O. Box 2346 Charlottetown, PE C1A 8C1

Cover Photo- Male Northern Cardinal by Ron MacDonald in Stratford on November 3, 2024.

Monthly Meetings
These take place the first Tuesday of each month from October through June at the Beaconsfield Carriage House in Charlottetown starting at 7:30 PM (the corner of Kent and West Street). There is a short introduction at the start of every meeting, followed by a raffle break and a presentation from a guest speaker. Both members and non-members are welcome to attend.

Membership
New members are always welcome; anyone with an interest in nature. If you would like to join as a member, please contact the Treasurer, Keisha Holmes at 902-393-1256 or keishaholmes2002@hotmail.com. There is an annual fee of $20 to join, and for current members, membership renewal fees are due in January of each calendar year. Please visit the website (www.naturepei.ca) if you wish to renew your membership online. Payment can also be made in person at a monthly meeting by cash or cheque, or through regular mail. Donations are always welcome for use in conservation projects. Those giving donations will receive a tax receipt. This non-profit organization is run by a volunteer executive, as listed below:

2024 Executive Committee Members:

Position	Name	E-mail	Phone Number
President	Jason Woodside	To reach members of the Nature PEI Executive, please email <naturepei@mail.com> and your message will be directed to the appropriate Director.	902-394-1833
Vice President	Rosemary Curley		902-569-1209
Past President	Gerald MacDougall		902-316-0837
Treasurer	Keisha Holmes		902-393-1256
Secretary	Robert W. Harding		902-313-1699
Director (Programs and Publicity)	Julie-Lynn Zahavich		902-213-7017
Director Field Trips	Sarah Hirtle		506-654-2900
Newsletter Editor	Morgan Olivia McNeil		902-324-2650

Newsletters are typically published 4 times/year; available in Acrobat Reader in colour through e-mail or hard copies on recycled paper in black and white sent by mail. Articles, reports, notes, plant records, bird sightings, pictures and other entry items can be sent to the Editor, Morgan McNeil. The next submission deadline is **March 15, 2025.**

Material from the Island Naturalist newsletter is the property of the photographer. However, it can be reprinted if permission is granted by the photographer, except if copyrighted. If material is being reprinted or shared, proper acknowledgements must be made to the newsletter and the photographer.

The organization's website is: www.naturepei.ca and a Facebook page is available at: https://www.facebook.com/NaturePEI. Nature PEI would like to thank the PEI Department of Education and Early Years for their help in getting the newsletter into many places across the island, including libraries and schools.

Science Fair 2024 : April 9, 2024
Eastlink Centre, Charlottetown

Nature PEI Executive Gerald MacDougall (Past-President) and Sarah Hirtle (Field Trips Director) had the pleasure of attending and judging entries in the 2024 Science Fair.

Gerald and Sarah awarding Diane Chong (and Kaelin Heyman absent from photo) on owl evolution, features, fun facts, etc.

Gerald and Sarah awarding Kelsey Arsenault, Grade 5, on her research project about the Canadian Lynx.

Sarah awarding Colton Rose, Grade 6, on his project about biodiversity in our ecosystems. He compared 4 types of habitats (rainforest, desert, arctic and plains).

Sarah awarding Penny Gordon, Grade 6, on her project about the biology of polar bears, their behaviour and habitat.

Nature PEI Fall Colours Walk Collage!
October 26, 2024

Bonshaw Provincial Park photo collage credits to Morgan Olivia McNeil

Note from the Editor:
-Morgan Olivia McNeil

October 29, 2024

Greetings Nature PEI Membership:

I hope your fall season went well, and that by the time you read this that the start of winter is going well too! I wanted to let you know that I have made the decision to step down from my role as Newsletter Editor at the end of my term in 2024. It will be a good opportunity to give someone else from the membership a chance to serve in the role. I have enjoyed serving as your editor for the last year and a half. I would like to thank everyone for their continued submissions to the newsletter. Thank you also for teaching me about various interesting nature topics during the proof-reading stages. Coming from an agricultural (soils) background, it has been fascinating learning about some of the integral connections between soil life and other natural processes in nature.

The Nature PEI Executive are going to find a new editor for the 2025 calendar year. I am confident that the next editor will put together a unique and polished newsletter with their own creative touch. If anyone from the membership is interested in serving as the next editor, please speak to someone from the Executive. I am able to help mentor a new editor into the position if it is helpful to them in the transitioning phase. Being involved on the executive is a great opportunity to hold a leadership role and contribute your time and efforts to an important organization. Please reach out if you have any questions. Thank you in advance.

I also wanted to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy, safe and blessed new year of 2025! Happy Birding!

Picture to Left:
Guest Speaker Jean-Jacques Strydom and Nature PEI President Jason Woodside at November monthly meeting on November 5, 2024.

November Nature PEI Monthly Meeting

By: Morgan Olivia McNeil

November 5, 2024

At the November Nature PEI monthly meeting, we had the pleasure of having Jean-Jacques Strydom (JJS) come as the guest speaker for the evening. He is a well-known amateur nature photographer in PEI, with a great eye and attention to detail. He is originally from South Africa with an education in zoology and botany.

Pictured on this page: Dark-Eyed Junco (top right corner), Hooded Mergansers (middle left), and oven bird (above) photographed by Jean Jacques Strydom in PEI.

He showed some beautiful photos of birds, insects and fungi that he captured with his camera throughout various locations in PEI. He emphasized the difference between going for a walk for the sake of going for a walk, vs going for a walk for the sake of finding something in particular. It was a mindset that has proven effective to witness some extraordinary observations in nature. Jean-Jacques tends to look for patterns and shapes, spotting abnormalities and it leads to interesting finds.

To note, JJS sits in the forest and looks around for things that peak his interest, often small things. Within 10 minutes he usually sees birds or other wildlife often curious about his presence. He mentioned that barred owls seems to be more commonly spotted in the daytime now.

It was intriguing how he might choose to focus on an object such as a tree branch and snap many pictures of it, anticipating a bird to land there eventually. Using this technique he captured many pictures without a bird, but it was the repetition that lead to his success given the quick movement and activity of them. He placed himself in good positions with potential to see his targeted organism.

His modesty, energy and passion for nature photography is contagious, and it was a pleasure to listen to him speak and share his fabulous work. He is an inspiration to many aspiring nature photographers: that you can see and capture anything you put your mind and creativity to!

BENNETT AUTUMN BIRDING CLASSIC:

Participants: Ray Cooke, Dan McAskill, Dwaine Oakley, Vanessa Bonnyman, Melanie McCarthy, Sharon Clark, Roberta Palmer, Linda Thomas, Sarah Bulman, Alexis Bulamn, Katie Rankin and Ethan Haakman

Submitted by: Dan McAskill

September 28th, 2024 marked the 30th anniversary of the Autumn Birding Classic. This event was designed as a long-term partnership with the Island Nature Trust's land conservation program as a bird migration monitoring count for early autumn. Nature PEI (the Natural History Society of Prince Edward Island) and the Island Nature Trust commenced the Autumn Birding Classic in 1995. It was renamed the Neil Bennett Autumn Birding Classic in 2000 in memory of Neil's significant contributions to the Trust and bird conservation. This year the group fielded six teams that birded much of central and northeastern P.E.I., Borden Carleton, and Malpeque. Thankfully, overall the teams had pretty good weather for it.

Ray Cooke, Dwaine Oakley, and Dan McAskill had a wonderful day birding from 3:00 AM to dusk at 7:45 PM. To start the day, they were greeted by a windless day and some clouds in the starlight sky. Within the first hour they encountered rain mist and then light to heavy intermittent showers. The showers largely cleared before dawn but were intermittent to mid-morning. The starting temperature was 12º C but the northeast winds that started at dawn at East Point made for nippy conditions with winds of 20 to 30 km/hr. The temperature rose to 16º C by afternoon and dropped to 13º C by the end of their birding day.

The team's bird highlights were: a pair of Barred Owls caterwauling in Donagh, a Parasitic Jaeger, a Red-necked Grebe, a Razorbill, and 2 Black Guillemot off East Point, a Hooded Merganser at North Lake and 2 at Black Pond, and a Hudsonian Godwit at Savage Harbour, and 3 Red Knot at Tracadie Harbour. While they observed and heard over 40 Yellow-rumped Warblers, they saw only 3 other warbler species. The team recorded only 1 species of woodpecker, but they saw no falcons or blackbirds. At East Point by the lighthouse, they saw no passerines. There were many crane flies on the south wall of the gift shop and there were about 50 gulls. Almost all of the gulls were Herring Gulls, on the lawn in a feeding frenzy on what they believed were the crane flies. By dusk, the team had discovered 72 species of birds, and had recorded a variety of information on other animal species and plants (see information below the species list). The team birded the area between Crossroads, Dromore, Peake's, East Point, North Lake, South Lake, Savage Harbour, Pigot's Trail, Pisquid, Tracadie Harbour, John Archie's Pond, and returned to Crossroads just after dusk. It covered 341 km by vehicle and they walked about 1.2 km on trails. It was a wonderful day to be exploring and they had a great time!

Melanie McCarthy and Vanessa Bonnyman birded as Team "Just Winging-It". They were the first off the mark for the day starting at 2:00 AM at Vanessa's on Horne Cross Road. They then birded together until they parted ways at 4:30 PM at Vanessa's. Vanessa then birded the Confederation Trail at Brackley from 4:50 PM to 5:20 PM and her place from 5:30 PM to 6:30 PM. Melanie subsequently birded Phillip's Feeds, Riverside Drive, her place at Stratford, Waterside Beach, and 1.4 km of the Mount Mellick Marsh Confederation Trail finishing at 7:30 PM. During the day, they drove 242 km, walked approximately 10.4 km, and stopped at some 13 sites covering the areas between Horne Cross Road, Barr Road, Greenwich National Park, Cable Head West, Shore Road, St. Peter's Pond and Lagoon, Mount Stewart Lagoon and Pigot's Trail, Tracadie Harbour, Stanhope, John Archie's Pond, Marshall's Pond, Cass's Pond, Brackley, and Horne Cross Road.

When they birded together, they picked up 71 bird species, but their additional birding after they left Horne Cross Road added another 10 species bringing their total to 81 bird species. Their highlights included: 4 Barred Owls at Horne Cross Road, 2 Bufflehead and a Black-legged Kittiwake at Greenwich National Park, a Red-throated Loon and 3 Wilson's Storm Petrel off Stanhope, 2 Northern Shoveler at Marshall's Pond, and a Northern Goshawk at Cable Head. Melanie saw a Killdeer at Riverside Drive and 7 House Sparrows at Phillips Feed, and 3 Northern Cardinals and a Purple Finch at Kinlock. In addition to birds, they recorded 1 Snowshoe Hare, 2 Red Fox, 5 Striped Skunk, 1 Raccoon, and 2 Seals as well as a domestic cat at the Mount Mellick Marsh Confederation Trail.

Sarah Bulman, Alexis Bulman, and Katie Rankin again formed team "The Knockers and Peckers" for this year's Bennett.

They started birding at 7:30 AM at Millcove and birded through to Tracadie, Dalvay, Covehead, Brackley Beach, Rackham's Pond, New Glasgow, Stanley Bridge, Devil's Punch Bowl, and South Granville ending their birding day at 7:00 PM. They saw or heard 46 species during their ~75 km by vehicle and 13 km walking. Their highlight was Ring-necked Ducks which were a lifer for all three. They were able to get great views through their telescope. In addition, they found 2 Osprey (1 each at Millcove and Tracadie), at least 2 Brown Creepers at Devil's Punch Bowl, an American Pipit at Tracadie Beach, a Fox Sparrow at Campbell's Pond, a Red-winged Blackbird at Brackley Beach, and a few Red-breasted Nuthatches and Dark-eyed Juncos. They did not see any fauna.

Ethan Haakman birded Greenwich, East Point, and China Point between 3:56 AM and 5:56 PM. He picked up 58 species of birds while covering a route of 356 km driving and 13 km walking. His highlights included a close up and personal encounter with a Palm Warbler at Greenwich, a Blackpoll Warbler at MacVane's Pond, 4 Red Knots and 25 Least Sandpiper at Covehead Harbour, 3 Northern Harriers and a Red-tailed Hawk at China Point. He saw 1 Red Fox and 1 Raccoon at Greenwich as well as approximately 5 Red Squirrels during his birding day. He saw a fallout of 10 Savannah, White-throated and Song Sparrows, 10 Yellow-rumped Warblers, a Palm Warbler, and 3 Common Yellow-throats in a small patch of pin cherry at Greenwich. He drove an estimated 250+ km.

Roberta Palmer and Linda Thomas started birding in Bonshaw at 6:15 AM and continued birding through to 8:00 PM traveling through Victoria, Borden, Malpeque, Cavendish. Chapel Creek, Brackley, Covehead, and John Archies Pond. They racked up 56 species of birds with the highlight being a Wilson's Storm-Petrel off Cavendish near the park entrance. In addition, they picked up a Sandhill Crane at Malpeque, as well as Greater Scaup, Black-legged Kittiwake, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, and a Barred Owl.

Sharon Clark from Team Dodo birded the Charlottetown (QEH, Hermitage Creek, and Agro Co-op), Tracadie Harbour, and Cymbria areas and picked up 15 species. Her highlights were a Merlin at the QEH, a few House Sparrows at Agro - Co-op, a Blue-headed Vireo at Heritage Creek, and a Northern Harrier at Tracadie Harbour. Rain restricted visibility at Cymbria and dog walkers reduced the number of birds at Tracadie Harbour. During her 3 hours in the field (9:00 to 9:30 AM, 1:30 to 3:30 PM and 5:00 to 5:30 PM), she drove ~84 km and walked about 1 km. She saw 1 domestic cat foraging at Heritage Creek.

The Trust again featured the Neil Bennett Autumn Birding Classic logo and established a special page on its website to allow teams and individuals to register. This page encouraged participants to post the Bennett Birding Classic on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and E-mail. Various posts were made to social media and The BUZZ carried an article on this citizen science and fundraising for conservation event (September 2024 issue, Nature column, page A22).

The Trust distributed its Bennett Birding Classic Corporate Fundraising Campaign to a variety of cities, towns, and businesses. Fitzpatrick & Co., Government of PEI, the City of Summerside, Nature PEI (the Natural History Society of PEI), and DCD Auto Electric contributed to the campaign. Over the past 30 years, this Nature PEI and Island Nature Trust partnership has raised over $66,108. Thanks to the generosity of this year's many donors, the Trust's pledge collectors and team members collected pledges of $3,611.

The full list of the 103 bird species observed or heard in American Birding Association Checklist 8.13 order is below. Numbers in brackets reflect number observed or heard by the three teams that recorded number of birds by species with a "+" symbol noted for occurrence noted without the number.

Canada Goose (600+)
Wood Duck (24)
Blue-winged Teal (11)
Northern Shoveler (2)
Gadwell (146+)
American Wigeon (28+)
Mallard (130+)
American Black Duck (650+)
Northern Pintail (16)
Green-winged Teal (175+)
Ring-necked Duck (25+)
Common Eider (40+)
Greater Scaup (1)
Surf Scoter (15+)
White-winged Scoter (38+)
Black Scoter (25)
Bufflehead (2)
Razorbill (4)
Black Guillemot (4)
Black-legged Kittiwake (2)

Hooded Merganser (10+)
Ruffed Grouse (3)
Pied-billed Grebe (52+)
Rock Pigeon (Dove) (26+)
Mourning Dove (8+)
Sandhill Crane (1)
Black-bellied Plover (80+)
Semipalmated Plover (105+)
Killdeer (2)
Hudsonian Godwit (1)
Red Knot (8)
Sanderling (65+)
Dunlin (53+)
Least Sandpiper (53)
White-rumped Sandpiper (2+)
Semipalmated Sandpiper (50+)
Lesser Yellowlegs (10+)
Willet (4+)
Greater Yellowlegs (22)
Parasitic Jaegar (1)
Bonaparte's Gull (270+)
Ring-billed Gull (120+)
Herring Gull (230+)
Iceland Gull (1)
Great Black-backed Gull (40+)
Caspian Tern (7+)
Common Tern (60+)
Wilson's Storm-Petrel (4)
Red-throated Loon (2)
Common Loon (1)
Northern Gannet (165+)
Great Cormorant (11+)
Double-crested Cormorant (375+)
Great Blue Heron (42+)
Osprey (3)
Northern Harrier (10)
Sharp-shinned Hawk (1)
Bald Eagle (9 adults, 6 immature)
American Goshawk (1)
Red-tailed Hawk (3)
Great Horned Owl (2)
Barred Owl (8)
Northern Saw-whet Owl (1)
Belted Kingfisher (9+)
Downy Woodpecker (5)
Hairy Woodpecker (4)
Northern Flicker (9)
Merlin (2)
Blue-headed Vireo (7)
Red-eyed Vireo (3)
Blue Jay (80+)
American Crow (240+)
Common Raven (14+)
Black-capped Chickadee (80+)
Ruby-crowned Kinglet (4)
Golden-crowned Kinglet (16)
Red-breasted Nuthatch (5+)
Brown Creeper (2)
Cedar Waxwing (20+)
Hermit Thrush (2)
American Robin (3)
European Starling (100+)
House Sparrow (9)
American Pipit (1)
Purple Finch (1)
Pine Siskin (2)
American Goldfinch (15+)
Chipping Sparrow (2)
Fox Sparrow (1)
Dark-eyed Junco (14+)
White-throated Sparrow (50+)
Savannah Sparrow (50+)
Song Sparrow (70+)
Swamp Sparrow (23+)
Red-winged Blackbird (2)
Common Grackle (2)
Common Yellowthroat (16+)
Magnolia Warbler (1)
Yellow Warbler (1)
Blackpoll Warbler (1)
Palm Warbler (2)
Yellow-rumped Warbler (75+)
Northern Cardinal (3)

The Nature PEI team heard a few Spring Peepers at various stops during the night. This year, it observed 9 raccoons which was the highest number observed during a single Bennett Autumn Birding Classic since our team commenced 30 years ago. In addition, there were 2 Red Squirrels observed or heard, 3 Red Fox; one of which approached team members to within 2 meters at East Point, Coyotes calling, 1 Gray Seal, and a small Northern Leopard Frog. No domestic cats or flushes of mushrooms were observed, although some other teams did report one. There were a few Sulphur and Cabbage White Butterflies flying and, during the night, a few moths were flying. The team noted that the significant blowdown areas from Post-tropical Storm Fiona in September 2022 had been harvested in the Maple Hill area. There was a good crop of European Mountain Ash berries, but a small crop of White Spruce cones, American Mountain Ash, and wild apples in the Eastern Kings area. There were many New England Asters in flower as well as other plants in flower including Ox-eye Daisy, Hawkbit (Fall Dandelion), Evening Primrose, and Lupin.

BENNETT AUTUMN BIRDING CLASSIC Pictures:

Top: Crane Fly photo by Dwaine Oakley in East Point.

Bottom Left: Palm Warbler photo by Ethan Haakman in Greenwich.

Bottom Right: Ruby-crowned kinglet photo by Vanessa Bonnyman in Cable Head West.

Recap of Nature PEI's 2024 Member Engagement Survey

By: Julie-Lynn Zahavich, Nature PEI Programs and Publicity Director

Submitted: December 11, 2024

In February-March 2024, Nature PEI conducted a membership engagement survey. We appreciate the time that our members took to participate in the survey and wanted to share some results. The goals of the survey were to (1) understand the current level of participation and satisfaction with Nature PEI's programming, and (2) gather thoughts on future engagement opportunities. The survey was sent to 216 email addresses on the Nature PEI mailing list, and 35 individuals responded.

Most participants had been members for two or more years. Many participants said that they attend our monthly meetings and bird courses. We were encouraged to hear that many members had visited our travelling species at risk exhibit! Overall, most participants indicated that they are satisfied with the quality and variety of programming from Nature PEI.
When asked about future events, most survey participants said they would like to see more guided nature tours and workshops on how to participate in citizen science initiatives. Members provided some other excellent ideas for future engagement opportunities, including birding field trips for various levels (e.g., beginner to advanced), tree identification workshops, events where members get to meet and interact, and presentations on zoonotics and parasitology.

Our survey also provided some great insight into how Nature PEI can make our events and offerings more accessible, particularly by being diligent about microphone use at our monthly meetings! We also heard that several participants were tuning into the Facebook live recordings of our monthly meetings. We hope to continue offering this option.

A few survey respondents indicated that they may like to become more engaged in Nature PEI, by becoming an executive member, leading a field trip, or becoming a guest speaker, and a couple of participants said they would like to learn more about engagement opportunities. If this is you, please reach out to a member of our executive! We would be happy to have your support and can answer any questions you may have.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the 2024 Nature PEI Membership Engagement Survey! Over the winter season, Nature PEI is undertaking a strategic planning exercise to chart a path into the future for our organization. These survey results will provide a valuable foundation for our planning activities.

Above: Dale Murchinson beside Eastern Hemlock tree in Glenmartin in November 2024.

Beach Pinweed (*Lechea maritima*)
Species at Risk on Prince Edward Island
Status: Special Concern

by Chris Ortenburger,
Nature PEI Species-at-Risk Project Coordinator

Paraphrasing St. Thomas Aquinas, “How many botanists can dance on the head of a pin?” We may never know for sure, but not many botanists have even seen the Beach Pinweed (*Lechea maritima* var. *subcylindrica*). Other pinweeds – called such due to the flower’s resemblance to the head of a pin -- are found in other parts of North America, but the Beach Pinweed has been identified only in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island and is endemic to the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It is named Gulf of St. Lawrence Pinweed on iNaturalist. On P.E.I., this woody perennial grows along the sheltered dunes of local areas of Malpeque Bay and Cascumpec Bay, Cabot Park and PEI National Park. It is recognized as “an endemic variety of global significance” and its status is listed as Special Concern by COSEWIC, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. An updated Status report is in preparation.

Above: *Lecha maritima* var subcylindrical (Beach Pinweed) showing basal leaves, from Kouchibouguac National Park NB. Photo by Sean Blaney.

Beach Pinweed often grows in a rosette, flattened, with tell-tale hairy white undersides to its basal leaves. Its fruiting stems grow straight up, about 30cm tall, with flowers

Above: Photo of Beach Pinweed by Ken Sanderson near Cabot Beach Provincial Park.

appearing in mid- to late-summer, and fruit developing in late-summer and early fall. The flowers are subtle, with three reddish brown petals, looking like the aforementioned head of a pin.

Indeed, it is tricky to spot this plant due to its drab nature, but once one establishes a search image, it cannot be overlooked. Beach Pinweeds are primarily self-pollinating. The fruit capsule is about 2 millimeters (mm) long and the tiny little seeds, about four or five, are about 1mm long, and uniquely smooth among the pinweeds. The seeds likely do not disperse very far. With about 180,000 estimated plants in 16 groupings on PEI, there is probably not a lot of genetic exchange. These pinweeds are estimated to live about 8-10 years.

An interesting project that Nature PEI has been working on, with funds from the Wildlife Conservation Fund and the PEI Forests, Fish and Wildlife Division, is attempting to identify the various fungi that have associations with Beach Pinweed and the coastal dune Beach-Heather, *Hudsonia tomentosa.* These mycorrhizal associations may be important for the plants’

success, helping in the uptake of water and nutrients, which overall increases their resilience in a tough environment. Look for a report on the fungal identities in late Spring 2025.

As one could surmise, threats to the Beach Pinweed include effects of climate change and storm surges, coastal development in unprotected areas (almost all are protected in PEI), motorized vehicles and on-foot trampling in sensitive areas. Pituamkek, the new National Park Reserve sheltering Malpeque and Cascumpec Bays, significantly increased the expanse of Beach Pinweed populations in protected areas on PEI, so the great majority of our known populations are secured in Provincial and Federal Parks. A few unprotected stragglers exist on the Darnley side of the Cabot dune. It is the degree of vulnerability of our dune systems to climate change that will determine the fate of Beach Pinweed in the long term.

Thanks to Sean Blaney, Rosemary Curley and Ken Sanderson for their assistance.

Resources:

COSEWIC. 2008. COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Beach Pinweed *Lechea maritima* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. vii + 33 pp. (www.sararegistry.gc.ca/status/status_e.cfm) .

Environment Canada. 2013. Management Plan for the Beach Pinweed (*Lechea maritima*) in Canada. *Species at Risk Act* Management Plan Series. Environment Canada, Ottawa. iii + 18 pp.

www.naturepei.ca Species-at-Risk on “PEI Resources”

NEW PEI RECORDS OF HEMIPTERANS ON iNATURALIST

By: Barry Cottam
Submitted: December 15, 2024

Among the many pleasures of posting observations on iNaturalist is the discovery that an observation is a new record for PEI. This usually means having the earliest of several- or many – observations of a particular species for PEI on iNaturalist that has been recorded elsewhere. Given how scattered Island biological records can be – as per Fiep de Bie’s 2014 report – it is impossible to know with certainty just how new one’s ‘new’ record may be. It’s great fun, nonetheless, to realize that whatever the case may be, a contribution has been made to our knowledge of a particular species’ range and natural history. This is, by the way, an opportunity open to anyone posting on iNaturalist – I’ve seen new records posted by observers who have just signed on with only a handful of observations.

Photos by: Barry Cottam
Top: *P. basilis*
Bottom: *C. anceps*

So herewith are a couple of observations of planthoppers, being insects that hop from plant to plant, and that are new to the Island. They are in the Order Hemiptera, Suborder Auchenorrhynca (True Hoppers), Infraorder Fulgoromorpha (Planthoppers). The two examples discussed here are in Family Delphacidae, Tribe Delphacini (https://bugguide.net/node/view/1924808/tree). The first species was observed on July 28, 2015, three years before I signed up for iNaturalist. I posted it at genus level on April 6, 2023, and two years later it was ID'd to species as *Pissonotus basilis* (https://inaturalist.ca/observations/153730572) by Rosemary Curley and confirmed by delphax, an expert in this group. According to BugGuide (https://bugguide.net/node/view/22524), *Pissonotus* contains 43 species, of which 35 live "in our area", i.e, North America. I found it a second time on July 9, 2023, posted on November 24, 2023. These are the only two records of this species for PEI.

It has also been recorded from NB and NS. My observations were both made on our land, fondly called The Farm, in Corraville, King's County. The genus has been recorded throughout North and Central America as well as the Caribbean.

The second species, *Conomelus anceps* (Yellowish Planthopper), was observed on July 30, 2022, and posted on iNaturalist that evening. It's a wonderfully odd creature that I've not seen it since. It's not a first record for Atlantic Canada, having been recorded from NB in October 2017. That record has a PEI connection, however it was found by PEI students participating in a NB Insect Bioblitz program (https://inaturalist.ca/observations/8557207). A record from NS was recorded on iNaturalist in early August; the only other Canadian records are from Denman Island, BC. One of the identifiers of my observation suggested I post it on BugGuide, and the two photos below are the only images for this genus and species there: (https://bugguide.net/node/view/2058835).

This insect is an old-world native, and only adventive here; a world search on iNaturalist turned up 110 observations, but fewer than half have reached Research Grade status. The five Canadian observations are the only ones for North America. The fact that it appears on both coasts of Canada suggests to me that it may have arrived through shipping, but that's only conjecture.

The life histories of insects such as these are not well known and online searches on the term 'Auchenorrhyncha' produced a number of specialized scientific papers but only scant information of a general nature. Much research focusses on hemipteran taxonomy and systematics; the monophyly of Auchenorryncha, a long contentious question, that was only settled in 2012. Worldwide, 382 species in the family Delphacidae have been reported on iNaturalist; only 5 of these have been reported so far from PEI. At one level, then, they are merely an interesting curiosity. Nonetheless, all contributions on iNaturalist have the potential to add cumulatively to our knowledge, particularly relating to range, and possibly life timelines and host plants. Several Nature PEI members are among the top eight observers of PEI's 59 species of Auchenorrhynca on iNaturalist, with almost 70% of 656 observations. Hopefully, this note will inspire more members to seek out these colourful tinier things in life.

Literature:

Cryan, J.R., & Urban, J.M., Higher-level phylogeny of the insect order Hemiptera: is Auchenorrhyncha really paraphyletic? Systematic Entomology, 37(1), January 2012, pp. 7-21. Abstract online at https://resjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-3113.2011.00611.x

de Bie, Fiep, Natural Science Specimens of Prince Edward Island: An Updated Inventory, PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation, 2014, https://www.peimuseum.ca/sites/www.peimuseum.ca/files/MHF_NSSPEI.pdf

Dietrich, Christopher H., "Auchenorryncha" in Resh & Cardé, *Encyclopedia of Insects*, Second Edition, Elsevier 2009, pp. 56-64

Planthoppers of North America, https://sites.udel.edu/planthoppers/

A Halcyon Day for Mushroom Hunting in Western PEI

By: Sarah Hirtle
Submitted: December 16, 2024

Near the end of the mushrooming season, Nature PEI members Rosemary Curley (R. Curley) and Sarah Hirtle (S.Hirtle) headed to the western woods to explore fungal diversity on behalf of the Mushrooms of PEI Atlas. The Atlas, a citizen science project for mushroom enthusiasts led by Ken Sanderson, aims to expand the historically limited knowledge of fungal diversity within the province. As with a paper atlas, the project divides Prince Edward Island into grid squares, each measuring 10 kilometers by 10 kilometers. The objective for the day was to identify and contribute 20 or more research-grade observations to iNaturalist within the grid square that includes Miminegash (Miminegash – 20MS09).

A provincial natural area accessible from the Old Palmer Road was selected for the survey. The site's northern margins were dominated by red maple (*Acer rubrum*), white birch (*Betula papyrifera*), trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), white spruce (*Picea glauca*), and balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*). Young red oak (*Quercus rubra*) were encountered as progress was made into the natural area, with pockets of tamarack (*Larix laricina*) and black spruce (*P. mariana*) appearing in wetter areas closer to the Miminegash River. The forest floor was carpeted with leaf litter and patches of mosses and ferns. Naturally downed and decaying logs and tree stumps proved to be excellent substrate for the many mushrooms noted throughout the afternoon.

Above: Silvery-violet cort (*Cortinarius alboviolaceus*) collected from leaf litter substrate. Photo by S. Hirtle, on October 3, 2024.

Despite a slow start upon first entering the woods, the day's natural history goal was comfortably met in about 2 hours. R. Curley and S. Hirtle contributed research-grade observations for the following species: *Amanita muscaria*, *Artomyces pyxidatus*, *Chlorociboria aeruginascens*, *Cortinarius alboviolaceus*, *Dacrymyces chrysospermus*, *Fomes excavatus*, *Fomitopsis betulina*, *F. mounceae*, *Galerina marginata*, *Gymnopus dryophilus*, *Leccinum scabrum*, *Lycogala epidendrum*, *Peniophora rufa*, *Phellinus tremulae*, *Psathyrella piluliformis*, *Pycnoporellus fulgens*, *Ramaria stricta*, *Russula brevipes*, *Trametes ochracea*, and *Trichaptum subchartaceum*. These specimens belong to a wide variety of fungal taxonomic groups including the amanitas, boletes, bracket and shelf fungi, brittlegills, brittlestems, coral fungi, cup fungi, jelly fungi, polypores, slime molds, webcaps, and the mixed bag of "little brown mushrooms". Another 14 records await expert identification on their way to becoming research-grade observations.

Some serendipitous nature sightings presented themselves as the afternoon sunshine shifted overhead. A hermit thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) flitted through the canopy, lingering late into the fall and showcasing its flute-like song. While bushwhacking back to the clay road, R. Curley and S. Hirtle photographed a grey comma (*Polygonia progne*) that landed neatly on a nearby fern. In Prince Edward Island this butterfly species is assigned an S3 subnational conservation rank to reflect its vulnerable status[1]. Altogether, the day amounted to a successful adventure in the name of fungal conservation.

Reference:

[1]deMaynadier, P.G., Klymko, J., Butler, R.G., Wilson Jr., W.H., Calhoun, J.V. (2023). Butterflies of Maine and the Canadian Maritime Provinces. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 310-311.

Above: Brown birch-bolete (*Leccinum scabrum*) collected from *Sphagnum* substrate. Photo by S. Hirtle on October 3, 2024.

Left Top: Grey comma (*Polygonia progne*). Photo by: S. Hirtle, on October 3. 2024

Above: Western Kingbird photo by Dale Murchinson taken in Bellevue on November 8, 2024 (4th record for Prince Edward Island)

Left Bottom: Joan Murchinson with Yellow Birch tree in Glenmartin in November 2024.
Submitted by Dale Murchinson.

Right Bottom: Red Fox by Ron MacDonald in Stratford on November 17, 2024.

About News: Species Update

By: Rosemary Curley

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada recently released results of its November 2024 Meeting. Of interest to us, the status of the Least Bittern was revised to Special Concern From their news release:

- Least Bittern

Scientific name: *Botaurus exilis*
Status: Special Concern
Assessment criteria: Not applicable

Reason for designation: This small, secretive member of the heron family relies on semi-open wetlands with emergent plants and relatively stable water levels. In Canada, the centre of its range is in southern Ontario and Quebec. Population size is estimated at 4300 mature individuals, an increase since the previous assessment which likely reflects improved survey coverage and techniques rather than an increase in numbers. Ongoing regional surveys over the last 10 years suggest that the Canadian population is currently stable. Nonetheless, given its specialized habitat requirements and low numbers, the species is vulnerable to future declines in Great Lakes water levels, loss of non-breeding habitat, and habitat conversion by invasive plants; it may again become Threatened if threats are not effectively mitigated or managed.

Range: Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Saskatchewan

- **Status history:** Designated Special Concern in April 1988. Status re-examined and confirmed in April 1999. Status re-examined and designated Threatened in November 2001 and in April 2009. Status re-examined and designated Special Concern in November 2024.

It is rarely seen in Prince Edward Island.

Nature PEI Strategic Planning

By: Morgan Olivia McNeil

The Nature PEI Executive met with Beth Hoar on December 9, 2024 to brainstorm the current strengths, challenges and opportunities for the future direction of Nature PEI. Beth has a wealth of experience in Strategic Planning and has connections with the Island Nature Trust and the Woodlot Owners Association. It was a productive and thoughtful session to generate a list of each topic for discussion.

The executive are going to compile and review a list before planning a session open to the Nature PEI membership to get their input as well. The executive see many benefits such as an affordable membership fee, a decent membership size covering a significant age range, the high-quality newsletter every 3 months, and regular monthly meetings throughout most of the year to stay connected and learn from each other.

Challenges may include getting more younger members who will take on executive roles, capacity to do all the project work of interest to the group, and funding constraints as a non-profit organization.

Opportunities could include increasing engagement with current members to get more involved, expanding reach to others in the general public, and finding additional funding to cover other incentives or projects.

Stay tuned in the new year for more details. This initiative to do Strategic Planning is set to be completed before the end of March 2025. It will be a great opportunity over the winter to contribute your ideas and confirm that the documentation is thoroughly reviewed and updated to keep it current and relevant to the needs of Nature PEI.

December Bird Photo Collage:

Top Across: Rough-legged Hawk by Donna Martin taken at PEI National Park on December 18, 2024.
Middle Left: Grey Partridge by Sharon Clark through PEI National Park CBC Event December 15, 2024.
Middle Right: Northern Mockingbird by Donna Martin PEI National Park CBC Event December 15, 2024.
Bottom Left: Dark-eyed Junco by Jodi Arsenault at PEI National Park CBC Event December 17, 2024.
Bottom Right: Long-billed Dowitcher by Roberta Palmer in South Lake December 10, 2024.

PLANT AND ANIMAL SIGHTINGS: (Mostly Spanning October 15, 2024-December 15, 2024)

Compiled by Morgan Olivia McNeil

Each list is provided in alphabetical order based on common name of the sightings provided.

PLANTS:

Bittersweet Nightshade- October 26, 2024 in Bonshaw (MOM); **Bunchberry-** November 20, 2024 in Corraville (BC); **Canada Bunchberry-** October 26, 2024 in Bonshaw (MOM); Climbing False Buckwheat- September 30, 2024 in Maximeville (DG); **Crisped Pincushion-** October 26, 2024 in Bonshaw (MOM); **Eastern Hemlock-** October 26, 2024 in Bonshaw (MOM); **Hay-scented Fern-** October 26, 2024 in Bonshaw (MOM); **Tamarack-** October 26, 2024 in Bonshaw (MOM).

FUNGI:

Bird's Nest Fungus- November 26, 2024 near Popular Grove (KS); **Birch Polyphore-** November 20 and 26, 2024 in Corraville (BC); **Black Knot-** November 26, 2024 in Corraville (BC); Hope River, November 6, 2024 near Trout River Park, November 26, 2024 near Popular Grove (KS) and November 26, 2024 in Corraville (BC); **Brick Cap-** October 26, 2024 in Bonshaw (MOM); **Brittlegills-**November 26, 2024 near Popular Grove (KS**); Conifer Mazegill-** November 28, 2024 near New Argyle (SH): **Crimped Gill-** October 26, 2024 in Bonshaw (MOM) and November 28, 2024 near New Argyle (SH); **Crowded Parchment-** November 6, 2024 near Trout River Park (KS); **Curry Milkcap-** October 31, 2024 near Hope River (KS); **Caps-** October 31, 2024 near Hoe River (KS); **Fir Broom Rust-** November 26, 2024 in Cardigan (BC); **Late Oyster-** November 6, 2024 near Trout River Park (KS); **Northern Red Belt-** October 26, 2024 in Bonshaw (MOM); **Ochre Bracket-** October 26, 2024 in Bonshaw (MOM), November 20, 21 and 26, 2024 in Corraville (BC); **Orange Jelly Spot-** November 28, 2024 near New Argyle (SH); **Orange Moss Navel-** November 26, 2024 near Popular Grove (KS); **Red Tree Brain-** November 20, 2024 in Corraville (BC); **Shaggy Mane-** October 15, 2024 near Cardigan (JH); **Silverleaf-** November 20, 2024 in Corraville (BC); **Tinder Polyphore-** November 20, 2024 in Corraville (BC); **Witch's Butter-** November 6, 2024 near Trout River Park (KS).

ANIMALS:

INSECTS:

Eye-spotted Lady Beetle- October 19, 2024 in Carleton (JJS); **Isabella Tiger Moth-** November 25, 2024 in Corraville (BC); **Saint John's Wort Beetle-** November 4, 2024 near Stratford (JLZ); **Seven-spotted Lady Beetle**- October 27, 2024 near Stratford (JLZ); **Spongy Moth**- October 19, 2024 in Albany (JLZ).

AMPHIBIANS:

Spotted Salamander- November 5, 2024 in Millvale (JJS).

ARTHROPODS:

Ground Crab Spider- October 23, 2024 in Charlottetown (MOM).

MAMMALS:

Common Minke Whale- November 26, 2024 near Popular Grove (KS).

BIRDS:

American Pipet- December 1, 2024 in Borden (DMa); **American Wigeon-** November 8, 2024 in Hyde Pond (KH); **Bald Eagle-** October 30, 2024 in Head of Cardigan (JH); **Barrow's Goldeneyes**- November 3 and 20, 2024 in Cornwall (SC) and November 8, 2024 in Hyde Pond (KH); **Black Scoter**- October 29, 2024 in North Cape (DMa); **Blue-Grey Gnatcatcher**- October 15, 2024 in East Point (RP); **Blue Jays**- November 10, 2024 in Summerside (DMa), November 29, 2024 in Roseville (JA) and December 3, 2024 in Summerside (DMa); **Bonaparte's Gull**- November 4, 2024 in Rollo Bay (KH); **Boreal Chickadees (5)-** November 7, 2024 in Chelton (DMa); **Bufflehead**- November 4, 2024 in Rollo Bay (KH); **Canada Geese**- October 27, 2024 in Charlottetown (SC) and November 29, 2024 in Summerside (DMa); **Common Eider**- October 29 and November 28, 2024 in North Cape (DMa) and November 4, 2024 in Rollo Bay (KH); **Cormorants**- October 28, 2024 in Charlottetown (ML); **European Starling**- December 3, 2024 in Charlottetown (MOM); **Dark-eyed Junco**- November 30, 2024 in Malpeque (DMa); **Gadwell**- November 18, 2024 in Rustico (RWH); **Golden Crowned Kinglet**- October 20, 2024 on Confederation Trail (WB) and November 29, 2024 in Clermont (DMa); **Greater-White Fronted Goose**- October 24, 2024 in Borden (MM); **Greater Yellowlegs**- October 26, 2024 in Charlottetown (SC); **Green Winged Teal**- November 8, 2024 in Hyde Pond (KH); **Grey Partridge**- November 18, 2024 in Anglo Rustico (RWH), December 3, 2024 in Summerside (DMa) and December 10, 2024 in Valleyfield (DMu); **Harlequin Ducks-** October 29 2024 in North Cape (DMa) and December 2, 2024 in Victoria (DMa); **Hooded Mergansers**- November 3 and 20, 2024 in Cornwall (SC) and November 8, 2024 in Hyde Pond (KH); **Herring Gull**- October 28, 2024 in Charlottetown (ML); **Horned Lark**- October 29, 2024 in North Cape (DMa); **Long-tailed Ducks**- October 26, 2024 in Point Prim (SC), November 3, 2024 in North Cape (DMa), December 1, 2024 in Wood Islands (DMu) and December 2, 2024 in Victoria (DMa); **Mallards**- November 3, 2024 in Cornwall (SC), November 18, 2024 in Rustico (RWH) and December 3, 2024 in Summerside (DMa); **Merlin**- October 15, 2024 in East Point (RP); **Mourning Dove**- December 3, 2024 in Summerside (DMa); **Northern Cardinal**- November 12, 2024 in Stratford (AA) and December 6, 2024 in Roseville (JA); **Northern Gannets**- October 26, 2024 in Point Prim (SC); **Northern Harrier**- November 30, 2024 in Malpeque (DMa); **Northern Pintail**- November 4, 2024 in Rollo Bay (KH) and November 18, 2024 in Rustico (RWH); **Northern Shovelers**- December 3, 2024 in Summerside (DMa); **Orange Crowned Warbler**- October 15, 2024 in East Point (RP); **Peregrine Falcon**- October 15, 2024 in East Point (RP); **Pie-billed Grebe**- October 18, 2024 in Pisquid (RM); **Pine Grosbeaks**- November 7, 2024 in Wilmot (DMa), November 17, 2024 in O'Leary (JA) and November 29, 2024 in Clermont (DMa); **Pine Siskins**- October 27, 2024 in Borden (DMa); **Purple Carrot Seed Moth**- November 12, 2024 in Montague (JH); **Purple Sandpiper**- October 29, 2024 in North Cape (DMa); **Red-breasted Merganser**- November 4, 2024 in Rollo Bay (KH); **Red Fox**- October 20, 2024 in Brackley Point Road (RM); **Red Knot**- September 15 and 17, 2024 in Conway Narrows (DG); **Red Squirrel**- December 3, 2024 in Summerside (DMa); **Red-tailed Hawk**- December 9, 2024 in Cornwall (SH); **Red-throated Loon**- October 26, 2024 in Point Prim (SC) and October 29, 2024 in North Cape (DMa); **Ring-billed Gull-** November 18, 2024 in Rustico (RWH); **Semi-palmated Plovers**- October 27, 2024 in Borden (DMa); **Semi-palmated Sandpipers**- October 27, 2024 in Borden (DMa); **Snow Bunting**- October 29, 2024 in North Cape (DMa) and November 30, 2024 in Borden and Malpeque (DMa); **Surf Scoter**- October 3, 2024 in Percival River (DG), October 26, 2024 in Point Prim (SC), and October 29, 2024 in North Cape (DMa); **Western Kingbird**- November 8, 2024 in Bellevue (DMu); **White-rumped Sandpipers**- October 27, 2024 in Borden (DMa); **White-throated Sparrow**- December 3, 2024 in Summerside (DMa); **White-winged Crossbill**- October 27, 2024 in Borden, October 29, 2024 in North Cape and November 30, 2024 in Malpeque (DMa).

Thanks to the following contributors who provided records for this listing, namely: AA- April Adams; JA- Jodi Arsenault; WB- Wanda Bailey; SC- Sharon Clark; BC- Barry Cottam; DD- Daphne Davay; DG- Denis Gallant; JH- Jake Harding; RWH- Robert Harding; KH- Keisha Holmes; SH- Sarah Hirtle; ML- Michele Lawlor; JDM- Dan McAskill; DMa- Donna Martin; RM- Ron MacDonald; MM- Mark Macdonald; MOM- Morgan Olivia McNeil; DMu- Dale Murchinson; RP- Roberta Palmer; KS- Ken Sanderson; JJS- Jean-Jacques Strydom; JLZ-Julie-Lynn Zahavich.

ENVIRONMENTAL CALENDAR:

- **Project FeederWatch 2025**- Register online through Birds Canada. Runs from November 1st through to April 30, 2025. Submit donations, count birds that you see, and submit your counts online.

- **Tuesday, January 7, 2025** – Nature PEI Annual General Meeting with Election of Executive Board Members and Regular Monthly Presentation with guest speaker UPEI PhD student Eleanor Glahn on "Assessing the status of cotton-wool disease in brook and rainbow trout in PEI rivers". The AGM starts at 7:30 PM, with speaker at 8:00 PM. All are welcome. Location: Beaconsfield Carriage House, 2 Kent, Charlottetown (corner of Kent and West Streets). For online streaming on Nature PEI Facebook, tune in at 8:00 PM to catch the speaker.

- **Saturday, January 18, 2025-** Macphail Woods Ecological Forests Project Beginner's GIS Mapping half-day course. Visit the Macphail woods website to register.

- **Saturday, January 25, 2025-** The 2025 Winter Woodlot Tour at 992 Rustico Road, North Milton, PE. Event runs from 9:00AM- 1:00PM. A free family event to celebrate Island wildlife, forest ecosystems and sustainable woodlot use. There will be snowshoeing, hot apple cider, sleigh rides, forest management, nature walks, and kids activities. Storm date is set for February 8, 2025.

- **Tuesday, February 4, 2025** – Nature PEI Members' Night. Show us Your Shots! Starts at 7:30 PM. Gerald MacDougall will be hosting Nature PEI's Members' Night. Members are welcome to send 1-5 slides with subject line "Members' Night Photography" to Gerald MacDougall (eagle.dynasty@gmail.com) and join us on February 4 to share the stories behind your nature photos. Meeting starts at 7:30 PM at Beaconsfield Carriage House, 2 Kent, Charlottetown (corner of Kent and West Streets).

- **Tuesday, March 4, 2025-** Nature PEI Monthly Meeting with guest speaker Daphne Davey discussing topic "Photos and Stories from a Recent Trip to Cape Breton". Starts at 7:30 PM with speaker at 8:00 PM. All are welcome. Location: Beaconsfield Carriage House, 2 Kent, Charlottetown (corner of Kent and West Streets). For online streaming on Nature PEI Facebook, tune in at 8:00 PM to catch the speaker.

- **April 25-28, 2025**- Nature PEI City Nature Challenge is a worldwide iNaturalist event with local input in the Greater Summerside Area and Charlottetown Area. Please determine identifications up to and including May 4, 2025.