

## AFNS 2006-07 Winter Program Guide

### MEETINGS

Library of AWEC ; Champlain Drive, Annapolis Royal  
7:30 p.m. , 2nd Wednesday of the month.

January 10	" <b>Building a Nature Guide Book from Below Water Up</b> ". Local naturalist, photographer and author Scott Leslie will share his images from underwater videos in the Bay of Fundy to above water photos from all three of his books, as he describes the fun and challenges of working in nature.
February 14	" <b>Research in Treed Bogs</b> ". For the past two summers Donna Hurburt has been studying treed bogs in Annapolis and Queens Counties. She will describe her research and discuss whether forest harvesting is affecting these wetlands.
March 14	" <b>Native Plant Rarities - Adventures of a Reformed Gardener</b> ". We'll share Gini Proulx's adventures (and pictures) encountered while seeking out rare plants in Digby and Annapolis Counties.

### OUTINGS

December 29 (Friday)	" <b>Christmas Bird Count</b> ". Our annual census of our frigid feathered friends both in the field and at feeders. Volunteers needed to help out for both. Contact David Tinker ASAP at: 532-2916
January 27-28 (weekend)	" <b>Eagle watch weekend at Sheffield Mills</b> ". Travel on your own to see the spectacular concentrations of eagles and other raptors. For more information about the event visit: <a href="http://www.valleyweb.com/eagle">www.valleyweb.com/eagle</a>
February 10 (Saturday)	" <b>Great Annual White Out!</b> " A not-to-be-missed extravaganza of outdoor winter sports and indoor socializing. Bring along something tasty for the potluck ...and outdoor sports equipment - or not! Contact Art or Alice for directions to their Princedale homestead: 467-3380.
March 18 (Sunday)	" <b>Birding along the Fundy Shore</b> ". Sponsored jointly by NS Bird Society and Blomidon Naturalists. AFNSers welcome to participate. Meet 10:00 a.m. Cottage Cove Provincial Park near Middleton. Search there, to the Annapolis Causeway and to Digby Ferry Terminal looking for Basin seabirds. Contact leader Jim Wolford: 542-9204

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## ANNAPOLIS FIELD NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

December 2006 Volume 18 Number 3



### Journey Through a Wilderness — by Harold Clapp

The Toby, as we like to call it, is Nova Scotia's and the Maritime province's largest wilderness area. At a little more than 104,000 hectares, it accounts for roughly one third of the protected lands in the province. With five different landscapes and eleven distinct ecosystem types, much of the area is largely undisturbed. The remoter regions of the Tobeatic Wilderness Area provide challenging adventures for those who travel there.

The idea for a hike through the Toby actually started in Newfoundland, when Diane and I were hiking the Long Range Traverse in Gros Morne National Park. It is billed as one of the most challenging hikes in the area. Prior to the four to five-day hike across the trail-less Long Range Mountains, adventurers are required to watch a video and be interviewed by a warden to demonstrate their skills with map and compass. One also has to take along a radio transponder in order to be found if all else fails. Truly a rugged and spectacular hike .... but why not try such a hike here at home in Nova Scotia?

Back in Smiths Cove, I started thinking about such a hike and the idea of the Tobeatic Traverse was born. When you think about the Tobeatic and maps, the name Jim Todd springs immediately to mind. I was soon talking to him about routes, terrain and a possible starting point. It was not long before he was hooked on the idea of coming along too. Using maps, aerial and infra red photos, and satellite images, we plotted out what we felt was the best route to take us through the least travelled portions of the Toby. We also started planning the food, shelter and other things we would need for the ten day adventure, trying to keep it to the absolute minimum.

In retrospect, I think we had nearly as much fun planning the trip as we did doing it. In any event, by October 2006 we were ready to go. Andi Rierden joined us at the last minute, making a foursome with Jim , Diane and I. We planned on starting near Indian Fields at Upset Falls on the Roseway River and were able to get a friend to drop us off there early Sunday morning on October 15. It was a beautiful clear morning, with a bit of frost and lots of colour in the leaves, as we headed out on the Silvery Lake Road in high

spirits, despite our forty-pound backpacks. That night, we camped on the north side of the Roseway River, after covering nearly ten kilometres.

The next day, however, we encountered a terrain of boulders and hardhacks. After eight long hours we had covered less than four kilometres. We arrived at Lost Lake exhausted and worried that maybe we had bitten off a little too much. This campsite, like all that we would find, was just beautiful, with an enchanting view of the lake. The next morning we set off again in renewed good spirits. The terrain became easier for walking and we stopped every hour for a short break. We also stopped to record moose and deer scat and signs of bear. We would send all of this information to DEL and DNR. The weather was good and we were soon into the routine of the hike and enjoyed seeing country that few people get to experience. There is a feeling of being part of the landscape when you hike without trails and you become aware of the country and conditions that surround you. There were glacial features, such as eskers, kames, drumlins, and many erratics, some as large as houses. There were swamps and bogs, some of which provided easy walking. The changing vegetation went from pines to fir, spruce, maples and oak ridges. There were beds of ankle deep mosses and lichens on the red maples and covering the boulders. Each day we knew the wind direction and closely watched the sky for changes in the weather. We consulted the map to find where we might next fill our water jugs. Every step of the way we watched our footing..... this was no place for a turned ankle.

We did have a few tense moments crossing the Shelburne River. We had to strip down to our shorts and put on river shoes, but we all made it across without getting wet above the knees. We each carried a hiking pole on the trip and these were particularly helpful in crossing streams and rivers. There was one day of rain, but we kept on going and our rain gear kept us fairly dry.

In the evenings we cooked our meals over an open fire. Several times we made bannock on a stick. All our food had been bought at the regular food stores, along with some dehydrated food that Diane had made specially for the trip. Setting up and taking down camp each day soon became an easy routine. Like the hiking itself, the whole trip took on a rhythm of shared experiences and an acute awareness of our surroundings.

Seven days and over sixty kilometres later we came out at Sixth Lake Digby County, a bit tired, but in good spirits and already planning the next hike.

woodland that would continue to develop into an uneven-aged, mixed-stand forest that is, and will continue to be, a haven for wildlife and understory plants.

A little further along the trail, the scene on a neighbouring strip was strikingly different. A vast extent of woodland, stretching as far as the eye could see to the brow of the hill, looked as though it had been obliterated by a meteorite strike. It was an absolute wasteland full of twisted, tangled slash, great water-filled ruts and eroded gullies. A few forlorn trees, in widely spaced mini clumps, had been left standing in token recognition of the pathetically inadequate guidelines of the Department of Natural Resources. These few trees are undoubtedly destined to be toppled in the first significant windstorm - thus completing the devastation. It was disheartening to think that this is what passes as forestry management in Nova Scotia and that there are government foresters harbouring the notion that this is an ecologically justifiable way to harvest woodlands. Sharon explained, that while it was Irving contractors who had undertaken the logging at the two sites it was, in the final analysis, the landowners who had made the fateful decisions about how it was to be done. "They had a choice", she insisted.

Somewhat depressed by this scene of environmental desolation, we slowly wended our way back to the cars, stopping briefly to watch a ruffed grouse perched high in a yellow birch feeding on the large oval catkins. We had also spotted a number of paw prints in the mud as well as the occasional small pile of "scat". Peter Hope declared that from the shape and fibrous consistency they were undoubtedly of wild canine origin and more that likely from a coyote. This remarkable observational talent and his seemingly limitless breadth of knowledge on the subject quickly earned him the inevitable soubriquet "scatman"! However, there was universal resistance to his suggestion that we would probably be able to tell for sure by collecting a sample, taking it home, putting it in water and whizzing it up in the kitchen blender to separate out the components. We were quite content to accept his judgment on the matter.

Our next stop, further down the mountain near the "hardwood line", was considerably more hopeful and aesthetically pleasing from a naturalist's point of view. After an initial gentle slope the woods road reared steeply to a fairly high promontory. From here we not only had an eagle's eye view of the nearby Belleisle Marsh but in the far distance, to the south, we could make out the glistening ribbon of water within the French Basin Trail, the grayness of the Annapolis Causeway..... and far out at the extremity of vision was the dark shadow of Goat Island, just offshore from the Habitation at Port Royal. This magnificent vista made the arduous uphill climb well worth it. The area is well wooded and comfortably sheltered from the cold November winds. So, if an autumn walk on the Belleisle Marsh proves too frigid, then backtrack to Youngs Mountain Road, hike the first woods road on the right and enjoy a spectacular view of the sprawling Marsh, in relative comfort. Who knows, you might still be able to hear the faint echoes of Peter's ultimately futile, but very realistic-sounding (to me at least, if not to the owls themselves), attempts at calling up some of the potential owls in the vicinity.

Thanks Sharon for an informative, congenial and energetic walk through the varying habitats of the North Mountain..... and thanks too for protecting your little part of it for future generations.

**FIELD NOTES** The *Quarterly Newsletter of the Annapolis Field Naturalists' Society*

**Editor:** Jon Percy

**Contributions always welcome.....**

**Mail to:** AFNS, Box 576, Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia B0S 1A0

**E-mail:** jpercy@auracom.com; **Phone:** 532-5129

**Contribution Deadlines**

Spring - March 1st

Summer - June 1st

Autumn - Sept. 1st

Winter - Dec. 1st

**Membership:** Single \$12, Family \$18 [optional: Federation of NS Naturalists \$5 more]

## Woods Road Ramble

— by Jon Percy

On a pleasant Sunday afternoon in early November, seven intrepid field naturalists followed carefully in the muddy footsteps of leader Sharon Hawboldt as she navigated amongst the rocks, puddles and logging debris littering the woodland scar that was a fairly fresh logging road. We were high atop the North Mountain, more or less at the level of Belleisle Marsh - we had parked our cars just where the logging road intersected Youngs Mountain Road. As we trudged along, it appeared that we were the only wildlife atop the mountain at this type of year..... no birds, no squirrels and mercifully no mosquitoes.



*High atop North Mountain,  
on a muddy logging road(?).....*

Sharon explained that her main purpose in bringing us to this particular location was to show us the difference between a woodlot that had been clear cut and one that had been selectively logged, both within the last year or two. The landholdings in this area are in the form of very long narrow strips, a few hundred yards wide and originally stretching from the Annapolis River to the south, all the way to the Bay of Fundy to the north. With such an arrangement of neat parallel strips the effects of different woodcutting techniques on adjacent strips were blatantly obvious to even the most obtuse observer - not that there were any such individuals on this trip! One selectively cut strip of land that we passed through just happened to belong to the Hawboldt's. While there was clear evidence of logging activity and some slash amongst the trees, it was nevertheless still a reasonably intact forest with a good canopy that had been opened a bit by the thinning. There was a good mix of deciduous and coniferous trees, including a few old snags for cavity nesters, in what was clearly a



*.....surveying hacked-up habitat!*

## Meet the Blobfish (a.k.a. *Psychrolutes microporos*)

This bizarre creature inhabits the deep waters near Australia and Tasmania. Its flesh is primarily a gelatinous mass with a density slightly less than water, allowing it to float above the sea floor without using energy on swimming. A face only a mother blobfish could love!!!



## Merritt Gibson's inspiration

— by Andi Rierden

Author Merritt Gibson, a former professor of developmental biology and microscopic anatomy at Acadia University, has spent years educating individuals to understand and work to ensure the survival of natural habitats within their communities. A scientist, educator and steward, his lyrical style of nature writing has produced two Canadian classics: "*Nature Notes for Nova Scotians: Seashores*" and "*The Old Place: A Natural History of a Country Garden*". An expanded version of Nature Notes entitled "*Seashores of the Maritimes*" was published in 2003. Gibson's "*Guide to Bird Watching & Conservation*" was published earlier this year. Throughout much of his work, Gibson has cultivated a stewardship ethic by describing how individuals and local governments can work together to restore and conserve natural places.

As we discovered during his talk at our October AFNS meeting, Gibson's evolution as a naturalist and conservationist stemmed largely from the words and actions of one person, Robie Tufts. It began one rainy afternoon when a young Gibson was walking by Tufts home on Highland Avenue in Wolfville. Tufts called for Gibson to come out of the rain and sit by the fireplace. For the next several hours," Gibson recalled, "I sat there in Tuft's living room entranced by his stories. He had this amazing ability to inspire. When I left I was a confirmed bird watcher."

Over the years, Gibson continued, the setting of Tuft's living room and study would serve as the atmosphere, "Where Robie's enthusiasm generated appreciation for birds in young people."

When he caught two boys shooting birds in a local orchard, Tufts first scolded them, then invited the boys to his home where he gave them a long talk about conservation. Both youngsters later became distinguished wildlife



**Robie Tufts Nature Centre in Wolfville, named in honour of the renowned ornithologist.**

(Continued on page 4)

conservationists; one of whom, Earl Godfrey, became the curator of the Museum of Natural Science in Ottawa and author of *"Birds of Canada"*. Other protégés of Tufts included Austin Rand, long-time chief curator of zoology at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History, Ronald Ward Smith, curator of the Natural History Museum, Queens University, and, of course, Merritt Gibson.

Tufts own inspiration came from his mother, a botanist who took her son on many field excursions. While studying plants, he also developed a passion for birds that would last his entire life. As a young man he sold stocks and bonds until the passage of the Migratory Birds Convention Act in 1917. Tufts subsequently became the Chief Federal Migratory Birds Officer for the Maritimes in 1919, responsible for enforcing the new act. The first 13 years on the job, he laid 679 charges/convictions. Unfortunately, Gibson added, the government's commitment to the Act has waned to the point where, "It hasn't been enforced seriously for 75 years."

Tufts retired from the organization that would later become the Canadian Wildlife Service in 1947, but through his writings and volunteer work, he continued to educate about the nature of migratory birds in Canada. He was the first president of the Nova Scotia Bird Society and held offices in the Nova Scotia Fish and Game Association. He earned honorary degrees at Acadia and Dalhousie Universities. And he wrote two birding masterpieces, *"Nova Scotia Birds of Prey"* and *"Birds of Nova Scotia"*.

Tufts died in November 1982, a few months short of his 99th birthday. In keeping with his lifelong passion, Gibson said, one of Tufts' final requests was to have a friend drive him up on the North Mountain to observe a pileated woodpecker.

In 1990, the Robie Tufts Nature Centre was constructed in downtown Wolfville by the Blomidon Naturalists Society to preserve a rare home for the chimney swifts. The center promotes awareness of local and natural history and the environment. "The influence this man had on shaping the attitudes of conservationists in Canada looms large," Gibson said.



## Finally, a Website for Spiders!

Check out [www.bugguide.net](http://www.bugguide.net) for identifications, images, and information about insects, spiders and their creepy crawly kin from North America. This is an online community of naturalists who enjoy learning about and sharing observations about these fascinating and often misunderstood creatures that are all around us.

## Maritime Bats

— by Peter Hope

At our November meeting, Dr. Hugh Broders, a bat specialist and faculty member in the biology department at St Mary's university, talked to us about Maritime bats. He began his presentation by surprising us with the tidbit of information that of the 4500 species of mammals on earth, 1000 of them, nearly a quarter, are bats. They feed on many things; insects, nectar, fruit, fish and blood!



We know that all bats have the ability to "see in the dark". Hugh explained that the echo of their calls they use to locate objects is termed echolocation. As a bat flies it emits high-pitched sounds. Then, as it detects an insect and homes in on it, the calls become so rapid they become a buzz. Finally the bat uses its tail membrane to capture the food like a net. Hugh said he loves to study them, largely because "Because bats are cool".

In the Maritimes, Sherman Bleakney studied our bats in the 1950's until the mid 1960's. Until 1999, little was done until Hugh began his studies and he has since worked in all three Maritime provinces. His studies have confirmed that seven bat species can occur in NS, but three, the hoary, red and silver-haired bats, are migrants, and appear here mostly in the fall.

Three species breed in Nova Scotia in good numbers. Our most common one, the little brown bat, constitutes about 60 % of the NS bat population and is easily seen as it feeds in open areas. Female little brown bats enter the attics of houses to raise their young in a warm environment, while the males roost on their own in the woods. Our next most common species is the northern long-eared bat. It is similar in size and general appearance to the little brown bat, but has longer ears. These bats live and feed in our woodlands, roosting in tree cavities. The females may roost in colonies, but the males roost singly. At dusk, on a narrow wooded trail or road, you might see one flying. Our third native species, the eastern pipistrelle, is our smallest bat, weighing a mere eight grams. It is a unique and mysterious animal, and the subject of much recent research, it is now known to inhabit inland Annapolis, Queens, Lunenburg and Kings counties.

It was determined that eastern pipistrelles, usually feed over water at heights of 10 to 15 meters, somewhat higher than our other bat species feed. From feeding areas it might be five kilometers or more to the site where the bats roost, in a tight cluster of several bats, hanging onto lichens under the branches of softwood trees.

.....And so the evening continued until we were all convinced that, "bats are cool!"

