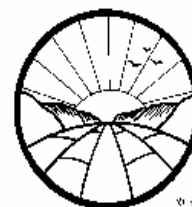


**ANNAPOLIS
FIELD NATURALISTS' SOCIETY**

December 2008 Volume 20 Number 4



Celebrating 20 Years Appreciating Nature

On Saturday November 8th AFNSers and Friends assembled in the Granville Ferry Hall for an evening of celebration and reminiscence to mark the 20th anniversary of the naturalist group. After a pleasurable prologue of schmoozing and wining (no, there was no whining!) the sell-out crowd settled down at tables tastefully decorated by Millie in a natural autumn berries theme. Co-President Jerri warmly welcomed everyone to the dinner and introduced the honoured guests present; namely, several of the founding board members of AFNS, including Alice White, Steve Hawboldt, Gini Proulx and Ken Maher. Board members Clarice and Phil Muntz, now living in Wolfville, sent their regrets and expressed the hope that they would be able to make it to the Sunday tea. Board Member Karl White, who is convalescing from surgery, also sent regrets. Here's to a speedy recovery Karl!!!! The final original Board Member, Alison Thomson, had sadly passed away this past January and was fondly remembered by all those who knew her.

Chef Chris Pateman served up an wonderful Italian-themed meal comprising scrumptious antipasta, delectable chicken parmesan and decadent cheesecake dessert followed by generous helpings of cheeses and crackers. There was more than enough food for the assembled crowd. Later, over coffee, Art in his inimitable wacky style entertained the assembled guests with sometimes humorous,



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sometimes tearful reminiscences of AFNS and its members over the years gone by, as well as a few selected readings from past issues of Field Notes that also triggered many fond memories.

The wonderful evening drew towards a close with the presentation of a commemorative framed certificate from the Annapolis County Recreation Department and a congratulatory card from our good friends The South Shore Naturalists. Founding President Alice White then drew tickets for several door prizes, many donated by Deb Ryan of the County Recreation Department, as well as an autographed copy of Scott Leslie's book on Wetland Birds. Serendipitously, Alice won the latter book.....a well deserved stroke of good karma for all her efforts on behalf of AFNS and nature NS over the past 20 years.



*The AFNS “founding fathers and mothers”
Phil and Clarice Muntz, Alice White,
Ken Maher, Gini Proulx.*

The Sunday (on the official founding date) afternoon tea at Hillsdale House was a bit more intimate (~25 people, mostly long-time AFNS members and most of the current shakers and movers in the Society) and informal. We were particularly delighted that Clarice and Phil Muntz were able to be present to share this special occasion with us. There was a great deal of fond reminiscing about past AFNS events and personalities and much raucous laughter over remembered events and pratfalls. The assembled throng rapidly decimated a copious array of highly calorific cookies and squares along with tea and coffee. A wonderful anniversary cake, artistically decorated by Millie, featured a natural wetland scene complete with a duck,

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

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Contributions always welcome.....

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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]

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bullrushes and trees as well 20 taper candles. The original board members present participated in the ceremonial blowing out of the candlesfortunately, they still had enough wind between them to accomplish the task in one breath! Founding President Alice then skillfully wielded the knife for the official cake cutting. Within minutes an entire wetland ecosystem was devastated and reduced to crumbs and smears of icing.

The entertainment continued with a digital slide show of pictures taken over the past 20 years and contributed by many members..... a few of the photos had been slightly doctored in Photoshop! These slides served to stimulate many more memories of past trips, meetings and events....such as Brier Island botanizing, cruise to Ile Huate, canoing on Lake Joli, walks and potlucks in Keji to name just a few memorable occasions. The afternoon culminated with the showing of some remarkable video clips taken by Robbie Bays of local wildlife, including herons fishing, owls catching and devouring squirrels and baby woodpeckers poking their heads out of a nest hole and seemingly lip synching to an artfully selected sound track.

Our warm thanks to our wonderfully welcoming hosts Val and Paul for opening Hillsdale House to us for this memorable event. It was the perfect, cozy surroundings for this coming together of old friends and dedicated lovers of nature. **Happy 20th Birthday AFNS!!!!**

Photographing Nature Digitally

— Jon Percy

Early on a cool, late October, Saturday morning (8 a.m. on October 25th to be precise) nine warmly dressed AFNSers joined Scott Leslie at Mickey Hill to explore some of the finer points of nature photography. We certainly couldn't have found a better, more qualified teacher. Scott's many books on nature (ranging in habitats from beneath the Bay of Fundy to woodlands to wetlands) and his well-illustrated articles and photographs in numerous prestigious magazines have cemented his reputation as a dedicated and exceptionally talented photographer, writer and naturalist.

With Scott leading, the enthusiastic group ambled along the autumnal woodland trails looking for photographic opportunities. A large fractured glacial erratic boulder - grey and very solid looking, with a group of vertical leafless small tree



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trunks in the foreground made for an interesting composition. Scott discussed the art of working such largely monochromatic backgrounds into the composition to complement and highlight the foreground objects. However, he cautioned one has to be careful that the background doesn't unduly distract from the foreground interest. Scott took several pictures of the rock-trees composition to illustrate some of his techniques. Thanks to the wonders of digital photography we were immediately able to see and appreciate the points he was making - a huge advantage over film cameras. Digital photography is particularly useful for appreciating the subtle effects of changes in camera settings - with no cost in wasted film.



Smile!!!!

A bit further down the trail Scott discussed aspects of macro photography - using as an example a clump of small ferns still vividly green beside trail. He noted that the shooting angle is important - one should try to get at the level of the subject, rather than simply shooting down on it from a standing position. This usually results in a more effective and impressive composition. Scott revealed that this is what he does when photographing ducks or shorebirds; he tries to get the camera at their level by using a floating blind. This is a U-shaped raft of styrofoam sandwiched between plywood. With this device, and wearing chest waders he is able to float along with his camera safely supported just inches above the water. If stalking ducks or other skittish aquatic wildlife he covers the raft and himself with a camouflage fabric cover and just floats right up to the unsuspecting subject. Back on land, Scott does most of his photography using a tripod; this not only stabilizes the camera and permits longer exposures, but more importantly it makes him slow down and think more carefully about the composition and possibly distracting elements. Unlike most point and shoot photography "It forces you to take time to look through the lens".

On a rocky point overlooking a meandering brook Scott noticed a small maple tree still clinging tightly to its brilliant red leaves. Just below it, the dark tannin-stained waters were dotted with alabaster flecks of foam that drifted lazily in the current. Scott thought the juxtaposition of the bright maple against the dark water would make an interesting composition, and maybe made even more memorable by using a long exposure to allow the background foam flecks to lengthen into artistic background streaks and swirls. He used a neutral density filter to reduce the amount of light entering the lens and this allowed him to increase exposure time to 30 seconds without overexposing the picture. Everyone was impressed with the resulting photograph and many tried their own versions of the shot with some excellent results. (*Editor's*

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note: unfortunately the great colour photos resulting didn't translate well into the greyscale that we are forced to use in Field Notes!!) Scott reiterated that in framing any such composition you should look particularly carefully around the periphery of the frame to make sure that there are no distracting elements present. He suggested it is better to try to take a picture properly the first time rather than to try to manipulate it in Photoshop later (*except for minor adjustments in brightness and contrast that would occur in normal film developing.*) Yet another composition of the same red maple viewed from further along the trail contrasted its pastel softness with the hard solidity of the grey rocky outcrop behind it.

Scot discussed the advantages of some of the digital image capture formats, such as RAW, JPEG and TIFF. He nearly always shoots in RAW format, as it captures more digital information and allows for more effective smoothing of pictures later, thus reducing any graininess. JPEG, results in a compression of the data and a loss of information about the image; but it does result in smaller files that are more suitable for transmission. TIFF is also a good format to use as it involves less compression of data. Scott also talked about shooting modes. He mostly uses his camera at the manual setting and selects the shutter speed and aperture himself, particularly when he has fairly motionless subjects. In shooting active wildlife, however, he normally uses a semi automatic setting, where he selects one or the other setting and the camera then selects the optimum setting for the other parameter. He also usually likes to focus the picture himself rather than rely on the camera autofocus.....that way he knows it is focused on exactly what he wants and not what the camera thinks he wants.

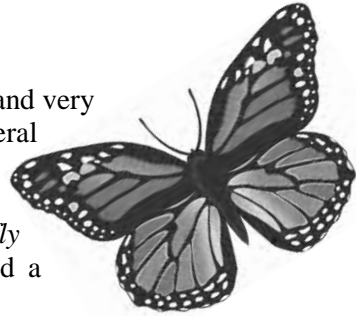
Further along the brook Scott demonstrated another use of slow shutter speeds to give flowing water (especially when tumbling over rocks) a very smooth, almost ethereal, quality. In this case he used a polarizing filter to reduce reflections as well as the neutral density filter. Another interesting shot, taken with the camera pointed directly upwards to the canopy of leafless trees, probably would have been even more effective if the sky had been a brilliant blue - but it worked well with the available misty grey morning sky. Because of the relative brightness of the sky, the converging lines of the tree trunks were darkly and dramatically silhouetted against the pale sky.

After a few more hours of ambling, learning and slowly chilling, everyone agreed that it had been a most rewarding morning and that they had mastered a variety of new techniques that would definitely enhance their photographs. Scott suggested that at some future date we might try an all day photography workshop, concluding with an informal session of showing and critiquing each other's photographic efforts. There was a clear, enthusiastic consensus in favour of this..... ***program committee please take note!!!!***

Seasons Greetings from AFNS

Monarch Mania

The first part of our November meeting consisted of a delightful and very well-prepared presentation on Monarch butterflies by several students from Clark Rutherford Memorial School in Cornwallis. Lauren Kaiser narrated a colourful PowerPoint presentation entitled "*Monarch Mania: How to create your own butterfly garden!*" She described how students had designed and created a wonderful butterfly garden at the school that was very popular with both students and butterflies alike.



She also gave us an excellent, well-researched overview of Monarch ecology. She noted that they are a species at risk, with many different factors threatening their survival, hence the need for butterfly gardens to help them along. The adults are attracted to various types of flowering shrubs and other plants, so the students made sure that they planted a good variety in their garden. Because the larvae (caterpillars) are pretty fussy and eat only milkweed plants, swamp milkweed was planted to provide tasty (???) meals for them. Lauren also explained that you can tell male and female monarchs apart because only the male has two black spots on the hind wings - something that most of the adult naturalists present didn't know!! The fascinating presentation, including many wonderful pictures of butterflies in various stages of their life cycle, was put together as an enrichment project by Lauren with some help from her grade 4 PowerPoint mentor, Jordan Powell, and with guidance from resource teacher Jane McNulty.

Students Griffin Bartlett and Jessica Theriault then told us about the school's butterfly club and showed us what you get in the membership kit when you join. The kit includes a membership card, a package of swamp milkweed seeds, tips on butterfly gardening, a monarch postcard and a monarch identification sheet. Amazingly, the club already had over 430 members!!!! It was a real treat for AFNS members to have these talented and enthusiastic young naturalists come and share this special project with us. Thanks to the students who participated, to the parents who brought them along and to teacher Lisa Proulx for helping us organize this exceptional program.



Griffin Bartlett, Jessica Theriault and Lauren Kaiser show us what you get when you join the school's popular Butterfly Club

Stamping Out Nature

The provocative title of the presentation for the second half of our November meeting gave pause to many of our members - "*Stamping Out Nature*". You could almost see the puzzled minds working - "*I thought that was what the province's department of Natural Resources was actively engaged in - not something that naturalists' organizations like ours should be promoting!*" Fortunately, Patrick Kelly our speaker quickly dispelled any notion that a nefarious plot was afoot by assuring us that his topic was in fact postage stamps - particularly those with a nature theme. Patrick who is a member of the Blomidon Naturalists Society (*and their representative to Nature NS*), is also an avid birder (*coordinator, area 16 of the Breeding Bird Atlas Project*) as well as an active member of the Royal Astronomical Society. It shouldn't come as any surprise, therefore that he has a particular passion for bird and astronomy stamps.

To set the stage, he gave a brief overview of the origin of postage stamps in general, starting with Sir Rowland Hill's famous penny black (no perforations or glue) in 1840 that heralded the beginnings of low cost postage. A novel concept that Canada Post has been battling ever since!!! The first Canadian stamps, designed by Sir Sandford Fleming, inevitably focused on various natural subjects - particularly the ubiquitous beaver - given the country's long-standing reputation as a land of wild, untamed nature. Countries typically issue "*definitive stamps*", which are the run-of-the-mill variety produced and sold year after year for general postal use. They also have "*commemorative stamps*" that are available for only a short period and feature a seemingly infinite array of subjects. The number and diversity of stamps produced around the world has skyrocketed over the years, forcing most collectors to specialize in one or more reasonably manageable subject areas - in other words, topical collecting.



**Canada Post's recent stamp sheet
Commemorating endangered species.**

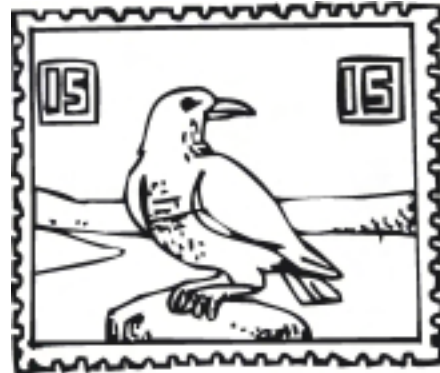
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Topical collectors tend to pick stamps for their chosen category by one of several criteria. Patrick outlined these criteria with examples from the topic of space and astronomy.

- **Main theme** - the subject of the stamp is clearly the topical theme, such as the Australian stamp commemorating the International Year of Space.
- **Secondary theme** - the topical feature is secondary to the main focus of the stamp, such as the Canadian Stamp commemorating St. Mary's University but with a picture of their telescope on it.
- **Graphic element of design** - the topic is merely one graphical design element in the image, such as the New Zealand stamp with the stars of the Southern Cross.
- **Coincidence** - the topical interest is quite accidental, such as the Canadian stamp with a picture of a ship, which just happens to be named Neptune.
- **No obvious theme connection** - there is no obvious connection to the topic on the stamp, such as the Icelandic stamp with a picture of the Titanic. The astronomical link is that the ship belonged to the White Star line!

Patrick then went on to awe the audience with an incredible slide presentation of stunning astronomical stamps from around the world, featuring galaxies, constellations, solar eclipses, famous astronomers, comets, and space probes. Just to prove that he knows that there is more to nature than astronomy, he also showed a diverse array of stamps featuring national and provincial parks, mushrooms (*the ones from Belgium even came with tiny knife and fork or skull and crossbones symbols to indicate palatability or otherwise*). Yet other stamps portrayed beautiful images of invertebrates such as slugs (*beauty is in the eye of the beholder!!!*), snails, spiders, beetles and butterflies. Patrick was particularly intrigued by a sequence of five stamps from Britain that showed a kestrel flying. He wondered if they were sequential images of the same bird in flight. Sure enough when he arranged the sequence and projected them rapidly the bird actually appeared to flap its way across the screen.



Pressing onwards, there were stamps about the oceans and about mammals. Many countries now issue artistic sheet stamps in which the individual removable stamps are actually part of a larger background image on the sheet..... such as the Canadian set, showing birds against a habitat backdrop. In concluding, Patrick noted that Canada post is now producing the ultimate unique designer stamps - ones created by you, using your own digital images great for Christmas postage... the only catch? ...they cost at least twice as much as normal postage. But think of the great topical collection that only you could own!!!! Priceless!!!!