



Photograph taken on Souris River Road; courtesy of Judy MacDonald.

Souris & Area Watershed News

Souris and Area Branch
of the PEI Wildlife Federation

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ATLANTIC SALMON SURVIVAL RESEARCH IN NORTH LAKE CREEK AND PRIEST POND CREEK

Contributed by Jordan Condon, University of Prince Edward Island

Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation is collaborating on a University of Prince Edward Island Master's Project, led by Jordan Condon, that started collecting data in 2019. The study will examine the survival of juvenile Atlantic salmon in Priest Pond Creek and North Lake Creek. Survival will be measured by emergence and juvenile densities. Along with survival, certain instream and hyporheic (in gravel) environmental variables (temperature, oxygen, conductivity, turbidity, spawning habitat quality) will also be examined in each river system from the headwaters down to the estuary.



SAB's Mike Jacklyn and UPEI's Jordan Condon collecting Atlantic salmon eggs in North Lake Creek.

Each river system will have emergence traps placed on redds that were identified during Fall redd count surveys to confirm that the eggs are developing and emerging into the "fry" life stage. Later, during the Fall, electrofishing surveys will be conducted to quantify the densities of first- and second-year age class juvenile salmon. The relationship of the project to conservation is to determine what environmental conditions best suit salmon in the region. Stream restoration and rehabilitation can then be optimized for the conditions that support successful salmon survival.

RING-NECKED PHEASANTS

Souris and Area Wildlife Branch is pleased to report that we have had a successful winter with our feeding program for pheasants. We had approximately 27 households involved and without their efforts we probably would have lost many birds. Any heavy sleet storm creates a hard crust on top of existing snow, and this makes it exceedingly difficult for these birds to forage for food naturally. We would like to thank all feeders for your efforts. We would also like to thank all of the people who phoned, emailed and texted us in their observations during the winter; it was very helpful.

We seem to have sustainable pockets of populations in Lower Rollo Bay, Sheep Pond, Souris River, the South end of New Zealand Road, the South end of Souris Line Road and in Gowan Brae. We have smaller populations in Kingsboro, East Baltic Central, Souris Line Road, McKinnon Point Road and in Chepstow. Smaller numbers have been observed in South Lake /Bothwell, North Lake and Bear River. We have had observations of stragglers in other areas, especially last Fall.

We have heard reports of people dropping off seed on the brow of roads this Winter where there were known populations. We are sure of the good intentions of these people but please do not do this! It will lure the birds on to the road where they have a high chance of being struck by a car.



*A female Ring-necked pheasant in New Zealand.
Photograph courtesy of Judy MacDonald.*



*A male Ring-necked pheasant in Gowan Brae.
Photograph courtesy of Jane Hanlon.*

In partnership with the Provincial Fish & Wildlife Department, Souris and Area Wildlife Branch will be monitoring scientific recordings of pheasants calling in early May on specific routes in our area.

Nesting will begin in May with incubation (hatching) late May with a 23-day incubation period. So, in late June we should be observing our first hatch with an average of about 12 eggs.

We have nest predators which include foxes, racoons, skunks and feral cats. The adult predators would be foxes, coyotes, hawks and owls.

Pheasant's diet will change from seeds to insects from Spring into late Fall. If you would like pheasants to hang around your area next Fall, I would suggest plant a few rows of corn and leave it for them.

Souris Wildlife has plans of getting a population started in the Little Pond area in 2021 by bringing new birds in from off Island. This will increase the genetic diversity of our populations which will help prevent inbreeding with associated conditions.

PEI DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION PROJECT UPDATES

We have had conversations with senior officials at the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Energy (TIE) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to discuss the many local projects that were placed on the "backburner" in 2019.

A new bridge will be constructed at Black Pond by the end of the Summer of 2020, to replace the old causeway from the 1950s. A temporary bridge will be installed to eliminate the need for a detour. This bridge will have a longer span which should create better water flow between both sides of the bridge, in comparison to the culvert that is there presently. Black Pond is currently not tidal, but modelling carried out by an engineer specially brought in by TIE concluded that it likely will become tidal in the future due to water level rise from climate change. The bridge will therefore be a "climate proof" solution for the watershed and for the road network.



*Black Pond causeway in April 2020.
Drone footage courtesy of Luke Chaisson.*

A project to lessen the amount of sediment entering Black Pond from the Greenvale area will also take place. A series of sediment traps will be created to catch sediment entering from roads and fields.

Work will take place on the Little River Road (Fortune Watershed) which will involve crowning the road and diverting sediment into a series of ditches before entering the stream on the upper end of Big Brook.

In conjunction with the Provincial Fish & Wildlife Department, an entryway off of the Whitty Road with a boat launching ability to St. Charles Pond will be constructed this year. This entry will be in the area where the existing fish ladder exists. The walking trails in this area will be groomed and made available to the public.

We are looking forward to getting this work completed and we hope it results in better conditions for our local river systems.

HAY RIVER ATLANTIC SALMON PROJECT

Souris and Area Branch (SAB) of the PEI Wildlife Federation is once again conducting extensive field monitoring in our Hay River watershed thanks to a \$25,000 grant awarded to us through the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation (ASCF). We are very appreciative of this funding. The many years of funding that we have received from ASCF has allowed SAB to increase our resources towards enhancing Atlantic salmon habitat in our management area, which we strongly feel has directly contributed to increased Atlantic salmon numbers in our region and especially in Hay River. Hay River was chosen because it is a small, manageable watershed making it feasible to conduct an Atlantic salmon population baseline watershed survey through various monitoring activities. Atlantic salmon are considered a keystone species for watersheds as the abundance of salmon indicates a healthy ecosystem with good water quality and excellent habitat conditions. Good habitat for Atlantic salmon is a benefit to the entire ecosystem.



SAB Field Supervisor, Mike Jacklyn, holding an Atlantic salmon caught in our Fall fyke net.



Atlantic Salmon Federation's Kris Hunter and PEI Watershed Alliance's Watershed Ecologist Mary Finch offering their help and macrobenthic expertise to SAB's Keila Miller and Madelyn Stewart in Hay River.

In 2020, we will again be compiling key Atlantic salmon benchmark data, focusing on monitoring initiatives that will help us to validate and challenge previous assumptions of populations numbers based on established formulas and data. The monitoring we will be doing this year includes; installing six data temperature loggers in various reaches within Hay River, stream habitat enhancement with a 500 meter extension in the Western branch of the river, a habitat assessment survey, Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network

(CABIN) or macrobenthic invertebrate sampling, electrofishing or fish density surveys, an adult salmon survey and monitoring site for returning Atlantic salmon in the Fall and redd count surveys. Compiling and analyzing all of the data collected (temperature, habitat assessments, CABIN, electrofishing, fall fish trap and redd surveys) through this monitoring is used to help validate assumptions of population numbers. We can use this valuable data to help us more completely understand watershed health and what effects this may have on salmon production and survival in all of our salmon rivers in Northeastern Prince Edward Island. We want to address direct links between environmental and limiting factors in which will aid us in retaining and improving salmon stocks in our management area through more targeted and efficient future restoration and enhancement work.

SAB is also using recommendations set out in Daryl Guignon's 2019 publication, **"A Renewed Conservation Strategy for Atlantic Salmon in Prince Edward Island"** by annually dedicating efforts to fully restore and remove blockages, focusing on planting more Acadian forest tree species along Hay River's riparian buffer zone, as well as leaving temperature data loggers in for a 12 month period (versus the standard 6 month period) to gain greater temperature knowledge regarding trends, that may aid in future enhancement work in this watershed system. Analyzing the movement patterns and behaviour of Hay River Atlantic salmon through various life stages will allow us to gain insight as to how they thrive in small stream ecosystems based on correlated environment initiatives.

Our final project objective, through collection of multi-year data from Hay River as a whole, is to write an Atlantic salmon habitat restoration management plan, **"PEI Atlantic Salmon Small River System Management Guide"**, to be used as a reference document for all of Prince Edward Island. Continual monitoring activities in Hay River ensures vital baseline data is collected and analyzed for creating a habitat restoration management plan. This document can be used to guide restoration activities in Hay River and in other watersheds on Prince Edward Island.

Prince Edward Island streams and rivers are much smaller than the other Atlantic provinces, so it can be assumed that salmon behavioural characteristics and habitat sites may vary. This new reference document will aid in salmon habitat conservation and management for all age classes in watershed systems, especially smaller ones, across Prince Edward Island.



A juvenile Atlantic salmon (bottom) in comparison to a juvenile Brook trout.

STRIPED BASS



Fishing Striped bass became an immensely popular recreational fishery on PEI in the summer of 2019. Many people got excited and involved after getting set up with the needed equipment, at very little cost. In the evenings, most beach access roads were lined with numerous vehicles where many people were fishing off of the beach, with plenty of large fish being caught. This is a relatively new fishery for this area, but the Striped bass is native, and they have been caught in many rivers across PEI throughout the past decades. In recent years, we seemed to have a population explosion after a commercial fishery was closed in all areas in Eastern Canada by the late 1990s due to population declines.

The Striped bass is a large bodied fish with a greenish back, silvery sides and a whitish belly with six or seven horizontal stripes on each of its sides. They have a wonderful taste with white flakey meat. The Canadian record is 59 lbs caught in East Bay in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

The Striped bass populations are grouped into three geographical areas: the St. Lawrence River, the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence (SGL) and the Bay of Fundy. There is a possibility a fourth region could exist within the Bras d'or Lake region. These fish are similar but with a slightly different genetic strain and spawn in different areas. We are in the SGL region, as fish tagged in Pictou Harbour and Cheticamp area have been recaptured spawning in the Northwest Miramichi River.

Striped bass in the juvenile and adult stages are found in the saltwater environment along coastal areas and estuaries of rivers. In late Fall, they enter estuaries of rivers and go to freshwater where they will overwinter. They do not feed when the water drops below 10 degrees Celsius. In the Spring, they return to the Northwest Miramichi River to spawn. They average 50,000 eggs per/kg (2,2 lb). Anglers fear because they are very vivacious feeders that they are having a large impact on other recreational fisheries such as the Brook trout and Atlantic salmon smolt. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has very little data on this problem and what they have appears to be only concentrated on larger rivers like the Miramichi.

Souris and Area Wildlife staff have attended regional and provincial meetings with DFO and have requested funding to assist us in this area to get a handle on the number of fish being caught, the sex, their size, and how many are actually being released or taken. We would also like data on overwintering fish. Where do they overwinter exactly? What are the water temperatures during winter in our estuaries, etc.? At this particular time, we have not noticed that anything different will take place in the coming 2020 season.

IN MEMORIAM - FAN MACINTYRE

The Board of Directors and staff for the Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation (SAB) were deeply saddened to receive notice of the passing of Fan MacIntyre. Fan served as a Board of Director for our organization for many, many years and he eventually was conferred into an **Honourary Board of Director** with two other long-term Directors, Justin McKinnon and Fred Ward. Fan was a fantastic individual with a great sense of humour who loved fishing, hunting and had a general appreciation of getting outdoors and enjoying what nature had to offer. Fan was an instrumental part of the foundation of SAB, as he was involved in the formation of the Souris Fish and Game Association in 1954, which eventually became Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation, as it is today. Over those 60 plus years, he played a vital part in the conservation and protection of our local habitats and wildlife. Fan had a great relationship with young people and highly encouraged our organization to do everything we could to get young people involved with the outdoors, a role that we continue with now and will do well into the future.

It has been an extremely rough year for Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation. We lost some truly wonderful people who assisted in making our organization better throughout the years. We lost Ronnie Campbell, Kevin MacPhee, Lenny Savoie, Kevin Robertson and Velma Ward.





An American Three-toed woodpecker, taken near Souris by Wanda Bailey.

or photographed compared to our more popularly photographed woodpecker species, the Downy or Pileated woodpeckers. The American Three-toed woodpecker, also the size of a robin, is usually found in the Northern boreal forests year-round and are not known to migrate South but one was spotted and photographed near Souris by Wanda Bailey just a couple of years ago.

Two woodpeckers that are often mistaken for each other, as they look so much alike, are the Hairy and Downy woodpeckers. At first glance, they are simply both black and white woodpeckers and seem to be about the same size. However, there are a quite a few subtle differences in telling these two birds apart. Firstly, the Hairy woodpecker is larger than the Downy, almost twice its size. There size difference can be tricky to see, except for when you happen to see them side by side maybe at a feeder or on a tree. This siting does not happen very often though. The Hairy woodpecker has a railroad spike for a bill while the Downy's bill is much smaller and dainty, about one-third of the length of its own head. Another sly clue differentiating the two would be that the male Hairy woodpecker's red patch head marking is often split in two and around its eye while the Downy's is not. The Hairy woodpecker has all-white tail feathers but there are distinct black spots on the outer tail feathers of the Downy woodpecker. Confusing, huh? These two birds are really extraordinary to see in person, especially if you are lucky enough to see them side by side, so that you can cue in all of the different features each bird has to stand out from one another!

Woodpeckers are arboreal birds of wooded habitats. They can be found excavating out a hole or many holes in hollow trees to build their nests or to bore for insects to eat. Woodpeckers are perfectionists as to how they carve out their entrance holes. They will peck at the entrance until it is almost a perfect circle. Pileated woodpeckers' entrance nest holes are oblong shaped. Northern Flickers are also known to nest in old burrows of Belted Kingfishers or Bank Swallows. Woodpeckers will dig out many holes in trees and over time this creates many nest holes that are used by secondary cavity nesting birds such as chickadees, nuthatches, bluebirds, owls, and swallows. These secondary cavity nesters can not excavate a nest for themselves but prefer these habitats for rearing their broods.

Woodpeckers are monogamous, as in they mate for life, and the female lays between two and five eggs, between March and May each year. They can live to be over ten years old. Woodpeckers dine mostly on insects, nuts, fruit, berries, sap, and pine needles. Northern Flickers do not act like typical woodpeckers as they mainly forage on the ground, sometimes among sparrows and blackbirds. Often you will see Downy woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied sapsuckers or Northern Flickers trying to grab a snack from a neighborhood bird feeder as they love seeds and particularly suet. The Downy woodpecker has been known to quench its thirst in local Hummingbird feeders too! Woodpeckers have extremely long tongues, usually about twice the length of their bills. Their bills are designed to absorb and distribute shock throughout their skulls when pecking, meaning they never get headaches. They also have furry noses. Seriously! Their nostrils are covered in feathers to keep splinters and dust out while pecking.

Woodpeckers are exceptionally unique in coloration and in behaviour, so it is always a treasure to see one, to hear one or to be able to photograph one in the wild.

WOODPECKERS OF PEI

Let's talk about woodpeckers! These birds are wonderful, colorful sightings that we can usually hear before we can see whilst out for a walk in the woods or along a marshy meadow. Did you know that there are more than a half a dozen woodpeckers that can be found on Prince Edward Island? Some of these sightings are common woodpecker species such as the lookalike Hairy and Downy woodpeckers, the Pileated woodpecker, the Yellow-bellied sapsucker, and the Northern Flicker woodpecker. These birds are between the size of a Common sparrow up to the size of a large Crow, with the Pileated being the largest of the woodpeckers. These woodpeckers can be found living on PEI year-round.

Other woodpeckers that have been spotted on Prince Edward Island but are quite rare finds includes the Black-backed woodpecker and the American Three-toed woodpecker. The Black-backed woodpecker is about the size of an American robin and lives on PEI year-round, but they are hardly ever seen



*Left photo: Hairy woodpecker
Right photo: Downy woodpecker
Photographs courtesy of Marcy Robertson.*

THE ANNUAL LITTER PROBLEM

The snow is melting and soon our ditches will become bare with visible signs of winter's litter. Faithful community citizens concerned about the beauty of each of our districts will climb up and down our ditches picking up trash caused by many careless individuals.

Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation (SAB) has been trying to get the message out to the public to keep your trash in your vehicle and when you get home place your garbage in the appropriate bins. That is exactly what your tax money is paying for and most of the problem will be solved if you simply do that.

We have talked to the many volunteers who annually take on this unnecessary chore and feel their frustration as it seems endless. We do presentations in schools with children and they seem to get it, so the problem appears to be adult driven. We seem to get a spike in litter (especially coffee cups) in the Spring during fishing and planting season. We encourage all employers to speak to their staff and encourage them to take their litter to a bin somewhere for proper disposal. Coffee cups are deemed to be compostable, but they are not, they contain a plastic rim at the top and a fine mesh in the paper that does not break down easily.

We would encourage all employers (fishers, farmers, contractors, truckers and anyone else) to speak to your staff and encourage them not to dump their litter out the window.

SAB with the assistance of the GIS Division of the PEI Fish & Wildlife Division has formulated us a huge wall map where we will track sections of highway with volunteers in an attempt to keep our communities clean and beautiful. We have already started to compile a list of volunteers who have been doing sections of roads for years. We are afraid to list names in case we neglect someone, but anyone that undertakes a stretch of road, please notify us, either by email at sourisareawildlife@gmail.com or call our office at 902-687-4115, and we will apply your name to a stretch of road.

2020 FUNDERS

We'd like to kindly thank the following funders; you have made our work over the past year possible! Thank you!!



Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada



Fisheries and Oceans Canada / Pêches et Océans Canada

Wildlife Conservation Fund



Agriculture and Fisheries



Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation Membership & Donation Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/Province: _____

Postal Code: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Payment

Please check one or both:

- Membership (\$10)
- Donations

Amount enclosed: \$ _____

Note: An official tax receipt can only be issued for the value of the donation and will not include the \$10 membership fee.

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS: NATHAN CHEVERIE

The COVID -19 virus and pandemic has had a tremendous effect on the health of our population and global economy. It has affected every individual in some manner. The Board of Directors of the Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation has decided to cancel this year's lobster fundraising dinner. It was felt with the shortened season, and the uncertainty of markets for lobster that we would be requesting too much of the fishers that have been so supportive of our environmental efforts. This dinner had evolved into a community event that was also supported by farmers, restaurants, local businesses and, of course, by the many people who bought our dinners.

This dinner has been our only fundraising effort for the past number of years, and it allowed us to attain memberships which gives us leverage in accessing other funds.

COORDINATOR'S COMMENTS: FRED CHEVERIE

These are uncertain times, with the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff at the Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation (SAB) are very uncertain as to how exactly our field season for work crews is about to unfold. We must think positively and operate on the assumption that this crisis will end, and that things will be back to normal at some point in early Summer. To apply for a job with SAB a resume (well written) is mandatory and apply online to the PEI job registry as well. We find that if your resume is self delivered to our office (regarding all social distancing practices in place of course), so that we get the opportunity to ask and answer a few general questions, is to your advantage. The people we like to hire are not scared of hard work in extreme heat and difficult conditions. We require staff to have a winning attitude, endure heavy lifting and be a team player. If you are missing some of the above qualities, it is probably best that you don't apply.

ABOUT US:

The Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation is a non-profit, environmental organization dedicated to the conservation, protection and enhancement of watersheds in north eastern Kings County. Our management area accounts for approximately 62,000 hectares representing about 9.6% of PEI, including 27 individual watersheds.

The goals of our organization include:

1. To establish North Eastern Kings County as the "Sports Fishing Capital" of Prince Edward Island.
2. The management of natural resources and enhancement of fish, wildlife and their habitat through watershed planning, protection and restoration initiatives
3. To become the model watershed group on Prince Edward Island
4. To bring unprecedented environmental awareness to our stake holders to create a more informed general public capable of eliciting progressive environmental action
5. To promote our management area as one of the most pristine natural areas in Prince Edward Island through ecotourism ventures to attract visitors to the local area

We meet the 2nd Wednesday of every month at the Souris Wildlife Lodge, 1358 Souris Line Road.

Meetings start at 7 pm and all are welcome to attend.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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