

# The Swallow



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Some call it a Zig Zag Spider, some call it a Zipper Spider, but whatever you call it, it makes an impressive web pattern. This is a female *Argiope aurantia* - Black and Yellow Garden Spider, aka Black and Yellow Argiope or Writing Spider. Photographed at Biederman Park on August 5, 2006 by Christian Renault.

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Membership in the Pembroke Area Field Naturalists is available by writing to: the PAFN, Box 1242, Pembroke, ON K8A 6Y6. 2006/2007 dues are: Student \$5, Senior \$5, Individual \$7, Family \$10, Individual Life \$150, Family Life \$200.

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a colour copy of the Swallow is available for download (.pdf) at:

PAFN web site: <http://www.renc.igs.net/~cmichener/pafn.index.html>

## ● E v e n t s & T r i p s ●

### **Kiwanas Walkway Birdwalk - in Pembroke along the Ottawa River**

Date: Saturday, September 23 at 8 AM.

Place: Riverside Park Beach parking area.  
This is at the west end of the walkway.

The Walkway is a mini bird 'trap' for Fall migrants. Western Kingbird, Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Connecticut Warbler have occurred along the walkway in the past few years.

Organizer: Chris Michener: 625-2263.  
cmichener@renc.igs.net



Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Oct 16-23, 2004, Kiwanas Walkway, found by Mark Dojzeman.  
video capture, Chris Michener

### **Lake Dore Birds**

Date: Oct. 28 at 9 AM

Place: Meet at the Wilberforce Twp. beach & picnic park. From the intersection of Hwy 41/Lake Dore Rd., go south on Hwy. 41 over the Snake River Bridge and make the next right.

The focus of this trip will be water birds, but a few songbirds may still be frequenting the riparian habitat. Some species that have been seen on Lake Dore at this time of year are Red-throated Loon, Tundra Swan, Brant, the three grebes, the

three scoters and the three mergansers.

Organizer: Chris Michener: 625-2263;  
cmichener@renc.igs.net

**Please note that the following two event dates are reversed from previous years**

### **Eganville Christmas Bird Count**

Date: Saturday, Dec. 16

Place: Eganville circle includes Augsburg, the town of Golden Lake, Green Lake, Lake Dore, Mink Lake and more. To view the Count circle map and download forms, go to the PAFN web page. (see front cover)

After the Count, participants are invited to gather at the home of the compiler, Chris Michener, and partner Jean Brereton at 5PM to go over results. They are at 1311 Burchat Rd. Please contact Chris to confirm participation and presence at compilation (buffet). p.H. 613-625-2263; email: cmichener@renc.igs.net. Cost: \$3.00 for field participants

### **Pembroke Christmas Bird Count**

Date: Sunday, Dec. 17

Place: Within a traditional 15 km. diameter circle. Feeder watchers count birds in their yards, while field participants drive, ski or walk a pre-designated area keeping track of the numbers of birds. Reports are given to the compiler, Manson Fleguel, after the Count.

Participants are invited to meet at Manson & Judy's around 5 PM to go over results and enjoy pizza courtesy of the Club.

To view the Count circle map and download forms, go to our web page. (see front cover of The Swallow for URL) Please contact Manson to confirm participation. p.H. 613-732-7703; email: mfleguel@nrtco.net.

Cost: \$3.00 for field participants

## Trip Reports

### **Bellow's Bay Field Trip - April 22, 2006**

by Manson Fleguel

Spring had come earlier than usual; the snow had been gone for a few weeks and the northern waters were already swelling our riverbanks. No ice was on the river, which, when present, tends to concentrate the migrating ducks, so any waterfowl were spread over large areas of the open water. However, 26 hardy birders showed up at the marina ready to bird and were rewarded with a total of 39 species!

Southerly winds were set to blow in the forecasted rain but we were able to spend a few minutes looking over the Ottawa. Very few species were present so we proceeded towards Westmeath and the Bay. A few stopped briefly in town to listen for Northern Cardinals (no luck) before joining the rest of the convoy. At a large flooding in a farmer's field, lots of puddle ducks and Geese were present. Northern Shoveller, Mallard, American Black, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail and Canada Goose were scoped before we moved on. A Greater Yellowlegs teetered along the muddy shoreline.

Ron Laderoute provided the access to the Bay for us again. Here the forecasted rain became a reality and it pelted the group as we walked the 0.75 kilometer to the edge of the field where the Bay was viewable. However, with the high water we couldn't get close to the shoreline for viewing so that approach had to be abandoned. The only species we could see through the trees was Ring-necked Duck, although lots of small flocks of ducks could be seen flying just above the water. A Hairy and Downy Woodpecker were observed here too.

Since it was still early, we decided to drive to the Westmeath dock and scope the river from this point. On our way, a lone Wild Turkey was spotted. After we arrived at the dock, once again the river was mostly unoccupied with only Bufflehead and Mallard observed. Here we could really see the extent of the high water. The dock and breakwater were completely under water with only the parking lot exposed.

With the disappointing bird observations and the need for some of the participants to get back for appointments, the trip ended here.

Here are the other species observed: Double-crested Cormorant, Wood Duck, Common Merganser, Merlin, Ruffed Grouse, Ring-billed and Herring Gulls, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Tree and (an early) Barn Swallow, American Robin, European Starling, Chipping, Savannah and Song Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark and Common Grackle.

Some interesting sidelights: First, one of the members had a brand spanking new Swarovski scope to try out and secondly, on a trip to Ottawa right after the field trip, a drive down Snake River Line near Cobden surprised us with 3 Great Egrets in the shallow water right beside the road! (Great Egrets occasionally overshoot their migration destination along the Great Lakes and delight birders in our area. However, it is the first time that 3 have been recorded in one flock)

Thanks to all who took part. I plan to have the trip earlier next year so water will be lower.



**Shaw Woods: Mother's Day Wildflower and Nature Walk – May 14, 2006**  
by Grant Bickel

Rain began upon arrival at Shaw Woods and the rain intensified as the walk progressed. Nevertheless, warblers were singing high in the canopy and Trilliums were blooming on the forest floor for the twenty intrepid participants to enjoy.

Along with the Trilliums (both Red and White), Blue Cohosh, Hairy Solomon's Seal, and Jack-in-the-Pulpit were in bloom. Rob Cunningham provided his expertise on trees and taught us how to identify Yellow Birch by smell.

Shaw Woods proved to be an excellent location for a spring walk in any type of weather. I wish to thank all who attended. Everyone's participation made this outing very rewarding.



Blue Cohosh flower. photo Chris Michener



**Pembroke Marina Walk August 19, 2006**  
by Ken Hooles

Eleven enthusiastic members were on hand for the club's annual Pembroke Marina Walk held on Saturday, August 19th. This group was so keen that they had already started birding even before I arrived to lead the group.

The weather conditions were ideal for this year's event. It was sunny with a slight breeze and hot during the later part of the excursion. This was dramatically different from the horrid conditions several years ago on this walk where only 14 bird species could be found.

Similar to last year, the group set out to break the old Pembroke Marina record of 58 bird species achieved in 1998. Last year, the record was almost surpassed when the group was only three bird sightings shy of the record. This year, we were also close with a very respectable 52 bird species.

The record could have been surpassed this year except for the fact that many of the fall migrating warblers had not yet arrived. In addition, the river level was high which limited the number of shorebirds. In fact, only one lone Spotted Sandpiper was observed on the excursion.



This year, seven waterfowl species were spotted on the walk. This included Mallards, Blacks, Goldeneye, Hooded Mergansers, Cormorants and two Common Loons.

Despite the lack of fall migrant warblers, the group was able to locate eight warbler species. These were Yellow, Yellow-rumped, Black-and-white, Nashville, Chestnut-sided, American Redstart and a possible rare Connecticut Warbler.

Some of the bird highlights of the outing included Osprey, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, House Wren, Gray Catbird, Philadelphia Vireo,

Northern Cardinals, Eastern Kingbird, and a Black-billed Cuckoo.

Notably absent this year besides migrant warblers and shorebirds were members of the sparrow and hawk families.

It is interesting to note that a total of 104 bird species has been located on this walk between 1995-2006. If anyone in the club has any old newsletters from the club prior to 1995, I would like to see them.

It should be noted how impressed I was with several of our junior members during the excursion. They were the first to identify some of the birds without even referring to the guides. We have some good birders coming up the ranks.

For me, the Marina walk is an enjoyable and challenging walk. Once again, the Marina bird species record remains intact just waiting to be surpassed.

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**Ken Hooles**, a past President of the Pembroke Area Field Naturalists, received the Natural History Day Award in appreciation of his many years of writing on nature related topics. Ken writes a column in a Pembroke paper.



The recipients of these Natural History Day awards, Michael Runtz (Arnprior), Jim Ferguson (Renfrew) and Ken Hooles (Pembroke), continue to write about our flora and fauna and are voices in our communities for the appreciation of nature.

Ken received the award at our Annual Meeting in April. Bob Poulsen of Renfrew, seen here on the right, a NHD committee member and a Renfrew County Stewardship Committee member, presented the award.

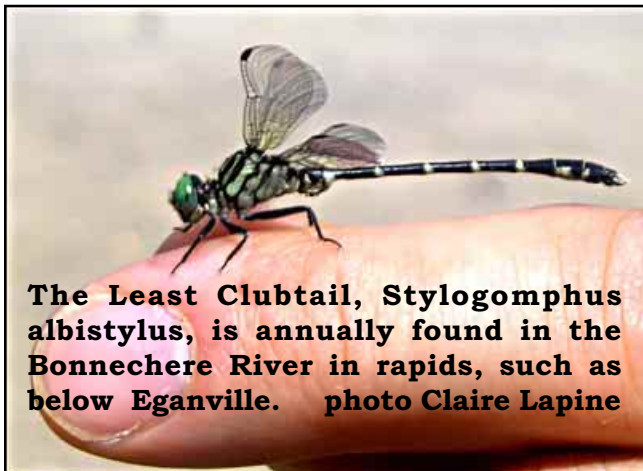
## Butterflies and dragonflies of the summer

by Chris Michener

There were two butterfly counts and one dragonfly count this Summer. The Lake Dore Butterfly Count, held on July 1st, was the 18th such Count, the first being in 1988. One year was missed. Twenty-three species were identified with 646 individual butterflies being counted. High numbers of Eastern Comma (10) and Broad-winged Skipper (9) were seen. Monarchs were average at 35 seen. There were 6 participants.

On the Hog Island Count (15th annual), held on July 15, 32 species were seen with 409 individuals being counted. There was a high count of Mourning Cloaks at 6 and Monarchs were at the second highest total at 97. There were 3 participants.

The Lake Dore Odonate Count, held on August 5th, had 9 enthusiastic participants. Twenty-five species were seen and 310 individuals. Halloween Pennants were found at Biederman Park on Lake Dore for the first time.



**The Least Clubtail, *Stylogomphus albistylus*, is annually found in the Bonnechere River in rapids, such as below Eganville. photo Claire Lapine**



**photo Christian Renault**

Band-winged Meadowhawks



Ode participants. Front row: Jansen Campbell, André Renault and McKayla Campbell, Back row: Claire Lapine, Chris Michener, Leo Boland, Chris Renault, Lauren Trute, Benita Richardson. photo: Claire Lapine



### **Species in Focus – Blanding’s Turtle**

photos by Lauren Trute

One of the species of turtle that is often observed on the roads of Renfrew County during nesting season is the Blanding’s Turtle. Blanding’s Turtles are a species at risk, and we are fortunate to have some prime habitat in our little part of the world.

#### **What do they look like?**

Blanding’s Turtles are a mid-sized pond turtle, with adults averaging 12.5 – 26.0 cm in length. The carapace (top shell) is domed and smooth. Some people say that the shape of the shell reminds them of an army helmet. The colour of the carapace is dark brown or black, and often has beige or yellow flecks. The plastron (bottom shell) is creamy yellow in colour, with irregular black markings. There is a hinge 2/3 of the way up on the plastron, allowing the turtle to tightly close its shell for protection. Female Blanding’s have a flat plastron; the male’s plastron is concave. The main identification feature for the Blanding’s turtle is the bright canary yellow chin and neck.



Blanding’s Turtles are one of the longest-lived species of aquatic turtle, living well beyond 25 years. A long term study in Minnesota marked an adult turtle in 1926, relocated it in 1946, and again in 1988. That turtle was at least 77 years old!



#### **Why are they crossing the road?**

To get to the other side, of course! For the most part, turtles that are roaming the roads in June are females, and

are looking for a place to nest. Female Blanding's Turtle don't begin to lay eggs until they are 14-20 years old, lay only one clutch per year, and often don't nest in two consecutive years. Blanding's Turtles chose nesting sites with little or no vegetation, well-drained soils, full sun and good visibility. Approximately 8 eggs are laid and the hatchlings emerge in about 85 days. The sex of the hatchling depends on the temperature of the nest. Warm nests produce mostly females, and cooler nests mostly males!



### **Where do they live?**

Typical Blanding's Turtle habitat consists of clean, quiet, shallow bodies of water with abundant aquatic vegetation and soft organic substrate. This can include rivers, lakes, ponds, marshes, and streams. Abundant aquatic vegetation, both emergent (e.g. *Carex*) and floating (e.g. *Potamogeton*) are important habitat components.

Blanding's Turtles use different parts of their habitat at different times of the year. The areas can be separated into springtime pools (to warm up), nesting areas with re-hydration pools, summer re-hydration areas (to cool off) and over-wintering habitat.

They like to spend time basking (power tanning!) on rocks, logs, muskrat houses and beaver lodges.

Blanding's Turtles make some long distance trips, often travelling several kilometres between habitats.

### **What do they eat?**

Blanding's Turtles are omnivores and will feed on crayfish, insects (e.g. Odonata, Tricoptera, Diptera,), minnows (e.g. golden shiners), small fish (e.g. brown bullhead), fish eggs, frogs, snails, leeches, other vertebrates and plant material such as pondweed. When they are on land they will feed on leaves, grass, berries, worms, grubs, and insect larvae. Basically, any thing that moves more slowly than them!

### **What about this species at risk thing?**

One of the questions I'm asked most frequently is "how can they be at risk when we have so many of them?" A good question, but it is important to look at the big picture.

The global distribution of Blanding's Turtle is centred on the Great Lakes region of North America and has been given some sort of 'at risk' status throughout its range. Blanding's Turtles are listed as Endangered in Maine, Indiana and Missouri, South Dakota, Threatened in Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, New York, Minnesota and Wisconsin, and are a species of Special Concern in Michigan and Ohio. It was recently designated as a Threatened species in Canada (COSEWIC, May 2005). The Nova Scotia population is designated as Endangered (COSEWIC, 1993). Here in Ontario, Blanding's Turtle is designated as provincially Threatened, and is classified as a Specially Protected Reptile under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act.

The main threats to Blanding's Turtles are habitat destruction and alteration and road mortality. Wetland draining, impoundments and water drawdown result in degraded or unusable habitat. Late season water drawdown results in winter kill as the turtles freeze on the bottom.

Road mortality is a concern for all turtle species. Mature females are generally the



victims, as they are travelling between habitats while looking for nesting areas or they are nesting on or adjacent to roads.

Predation isn't a big concern for adult Blanding's Turtles since they are able to tuck in their arms and legs and tightly close part of their shell due to the hinge. Hatchlings and juveniles are vulnerable to predation from a variety of birds and mammals. Nest predation is common for most turtle species, and the usual predators include skunks, foxes, and racoons.

The combination of threats (which are increasing) and the nature of the species (late to mature, lay only one clutch per year, don't nest annually, etc.) make them unable to sustain increased losses of adults in the population, and are at risk throughout their range.

So, even though we appear to still have a healthy population here, keep in mind the amount of development near wetlands and also the number of turtles you see dead on the road each spring. All of these losses of adults, and adult females, takes a toll, and inevitably, our Blanding's Turtles will face the same difficulties as populations to the south of us.



## **Birdwatching Trip to Virginia, March 2006**

by Christian Renault

During last winter, I told my wife Jill to choose a destination for a vacation for the March Break, to go as a family, with her own choice of schedule. She is homebound, and just needed a break from taking care of her mother, who needs nursing care with her advanced senile dementia. She chose to go to Virginia, and thinking of me, scheduled time to birdwatch there. She likes the occasional birdwatch, but doesn't have the passion. She planned Chesapeake Bay, and asked me where to go for birdwatching. Several web sites mentioned Chincoteague and Assateague island on the Atlantic, easily accessible by bridges, as excellent spots to focus on birdwatching.

We decided to splurge and make the trip worthwhile by purchasing a good spotting scope, influenced by the good use made by Chris Michener and Manson Fleguel. Of course, I brought my precious digital reflex camera to record new species, unknowns and oddities.

On the first Friday of the Break, we left snowy Pembroke as soon as school was over, and traveled to the Ivy Lea Bridge. As we approached it, we drove along the St Lawrence River, and saw our first Red-winged Blackbirds near the road. There was no snow to be seen there, but very soon, we saw a beautiful mature Bald Eagle land on the ice, and try to pry some food from the ice. We could see the eagle very well with that new scope, and made us smile in anticipation.

We drove on to Scranton, Pennsylvania that night, and slept in a motel room. In the sunny morning, we were awakened by various songbirds. We saw our first Tufted Titmouse there. We drove on towards Williamsburg, our destination for the next three days, with a worthwhile detour to see Luray Caverns. We saw a few buteos, and numerous Black and Turkey Vultures along the highway. Once we found our hotel, it was too late for birdwatching. We went to bed early to see if the early birds get their worm. In the morning, the birds were plentiful: Northern Mockingbird, Carolina Chickadee, Fish Crow,

vultures, Red-bellied Woodpecker (excavating a nest hole?), Purple Finch, Northern Cardinal... my youngest son André loved it.

Williamsburg is the cradle of the United States. It is where the ideas of independence from England were first proposed, back in 1775. A few km. south is Jamestown, founded in 1607, named after the English king of the time, and known to be the first successful British settlement in North America. It is also the birthplace of the real Pocahontas. A few km. north of Williamsburg is Yorktown, on the Atlantic coast, where the final battle between the United States and Great Britain occurred, with the French army helping the U. S., thus avenging its loss of Canada in 1781. These 3 sites were very interesting to visit, historically and ornithologically speaking. Driving from one city to another, we stopped a few times to observe Ospreys preparing their nest on trees, platforms, and hunters' cabin roofs. Also abundant were gulls, ducks, and Canada Geese.

Part of Williamsburg has been restored to its 1775 British colony looks, spread out with houses and large yards. It was also a good birding spot for passerines such as Northern Mockingbirds, Brown Thrashers, Northern Cardinals, Carolina Chickadees,



Tufted Titmouse, Purple Finch, House Finch, as well as doves, Fish Crows, Black Vultures, and Eastern Bluebirds.

After 3 days, we headed off to Chincoteague, on the north side of Chesapeake Bay. To cross it easily, there is a series of toll bridges and tunnels. The crossing starts with a bridge. We can park on the first island, before the first tunnel section, to stop for the restaurant, or a view of the sea. We took the scope in the strong wind, and had to hold the tripod to make sure our new acquisition would not become shattered glass. We scanned the high waves with little hope, but it was worth the effort.

In a few minutes of scanning the horizon, we saw a Northern Gannet, a Skimmer (just back from holidays in south), all 3 species of scoters, gulls, eiders and cormorants. Seeing birds there was no effort. I just wish there had been less wind, to have a better view (without tears and vibrations). Did I mention we saw a submarine headed for the sea?

We arrived in Chincoteague at dusk, and found our reserved motel room, conveniently located at the outskirts of the town, on the road heading towards the Assateague Island, a prime bird watching spot in North America. To add to our blessings, the motel owner was our receptionist that night, and an avid birdwatcher herself, enthusiastically gave us tips about the best birding spots. Early in the morning, I took André with me to check the town's shore. The powerful wind reduced our enthusiasm, but we went to the ponds suggested by the motel owner, and saw some Red-Breasted Merganser, but no shorebirds nor geese.

After breakfast, we headed towards Assateague Island, a national park, but nobody was at the booths so entrance was free. We went to the visitor center to get some info and a map. This place is really well organized for nature lovers. There is a road that travels to the other side of the narrow island, along deep ditches and a dike that keeps the pond water level at an ideally controlled level to see waterfowl. At the end of the road, there is a marshy area, a sandy beach, and an intersection to go around that huge pond. Just before the intersection, there is another visitor center, focussing mostly on birdwatching. There, we could checkmark the bird species we had observed, see what others had seen,

and the list was refreshed every day.

Among the interesting species we easily observed were Great Egret, Tundra Swan, Snow Goose, Northern Shoveler, teal, American Widgeon, Wood Duck, and Brant. We were the second group to report on the newly arrived Glossy Ibises. At one point, a Bald Eagle suddenly appeared above the bush in the pond, causing great commotion and dispersal of ducks.

At the sandy beach, we saw a grackle, which serenaded us with its strange song. Also, there were some strange gulls that looked like Herring Gull, but on closer observation, they looked more like California Gull. I took good pictures of them, but no guidebook was able to help me to accurately identify them.

The second day, we saw more of the same, but we tried to do better in the number of different species, since we knew the area better. We saw the resident pair of Peregrine Falcons fly in front of us. We also were able to see 3 species of mergansers, Bufflehead, scaup, Brant and a Canvasback. We used the scope extensively to identify some distant birds, which I could not do with mere binoculars. It was much appreciated when we wanted to identify small shorebirds. We had to go to nearby smaller marshy ponds and beaches to see shorebirds. We were pleased to see Piping Plover, Semi-palmated Plover, Killdeer and Willets.

The third day, we had to leave, but we took most of the morning walking on a trail in Assateague Island. We happen to see Sika deer and Fox Squirrels. It is a fat version of the Gray Squirrel, that is so unafraid of cars that its future is uncertain. We also saw the famous semi-wild horses, which are rounded yearly to sell some, so to protect the island from overgrazing. The horses are kept in some parts of the island in huge fenced enclosures.

Truly, this national park is a birdwatcher's paradise. It's a good spot to see lifers, and a maximum number of species quickly.



Semi-palmated Plover. photo, Chris Michener

Sadly, we had to head home. Jill suggested we stop at another park on the north side of the Chesapeake Bay. There we saw more Osprey, and about 600 Tundra Swans, with a continuous clamor of their eerie sound. Nearby were over 60 scaup, several Bonaparte Gulls, and a female Canvasback. A little trail from a parking area was heading through high grass towards the Bay, and finished at a blind, allowing us to observe waterfowl. We watched a Marsh Hawk searching for prey from there. We were glad we brought a spotting scope, it proved invaluable there, as much as in Assateague, to identify ducks in the rafts.

We slept in a small motel nearby, and came back the morning after, but saw the same birds. We also saw a man installing bluebird houses, his pick-up truck full of them. Indeed, we saw some bluebirds around. It gave me the incentive to build and install some in our area. We drove back home in one shot, arriving in the middle of the night, but pumped up with the experience. I would be happy to go back there, and check out more spots that we didn't take the time to check.



These photos of fungi are offered by Sue Cappel. Sue is from west of Renfrew and is an enthusiastic naturalist and is passing the zeal on to her daughters. She is particularly interested in edible wild food. A few comments by her in emails shows that she is cautious about eating fungi, though.

“The orange corals are so similar they are hard to identify, some are edible, but I've never tried them as there are poison ones that look so similar I don't trust that I could distinguish them apart.”

"I found my first "Hen of the Woods" this year. And it is huge! Actually there are two of them, one a baby and the other I've gaffed to eat, they are great! The botanical name is *Grifola frondosa*, but that's questionable, as I have seen it listed as a Polypore, somewhere, so maybe they changed the name along the line.... The Hen of the Woods, tasted wonderful!! One of the best mushrooms I have eaten! I froze some, shared some with friends, and still had a lot. I have searched and searched for more in our bush, but can find nothing. I am told, it comes back year after year in the same place, so I am hoping it does this. It grows at the base of large, ill oak trees."

"I also have found and harvested "hedgehog mushrooms", *Hydnum...umbilicatum* or *vepandum*, not sure which. Also Bear's Head Tooth, *Hericium americanum* and *Hericium coralloides* (comb tooth) mushrooms. I found quite a few Parasol mushrooms (*Lepiota procera*), and some Bolete's, though not sure which one, though I'm leaning towards *Boletus subglabripes*, also apparently known as *Leccinum subglabripes*. Why do they make this so confusing? Who are "they" anyway, and why do they keep changing the names?" (ed. taxonomists just wanna have fun!)



This Cackling Goose is a new species for our checklist. In October of 1977, Vic & Chris Harmer were hunting on the Snake River near the Snake River Line when this irresistible goose was flying by. One thing led to another and Vic decided to have it mounted. With the recent taxonomic split with Canada Goose, this is our first official record for the area.

Here is Vic's friend, Ron Bertrand, taking some measurements to document its small size.



photos: Chris Michener