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IN WITH THE TIDE

Gulliver's Cove Trail Clean Up



Jonathan Riley Photo

By Jonathan Riley, the Trails and Open Space Coordinator with the Municipality of the District of Digby.

The Gulliver's Cove trails should be a lot easier to find and follow, thanks to the work of a great group of volunteers.

Wanda VanTassel, chair of the Gulliver's Cove Trails Association (GCTA), organized a trail clearing party for Oct. 14 and an enthusiastic group of 23 volunteers spent the day clearing the upper trail of alders and errant branches and brush. The Bay of Fundy Discovery Centre Association provided brush cutting equipment for the project. The Trailgate party was held in conjunction with the Municipality of the District of

Digby, the Fundy Erratics hiking club, Hike

Nova Scotia, and the Government of Canada through the Canada 150 fund.

The federal funding paid for hotdogs and cake and some of the money left over was spent on signage to indicate parking areas and signs showing the way to the upper trails. The GCTA plans to add more signage and maps as they continue to develop and improve the trail system.

There are now a few parking spaces cleared at the end of the Gullivers Cove Road where the old fish sheds used to be. The lower trail (~800m) follows the shoreline to a rest area and look off with picnic tables and benches. The trail surface is mostly grass, mown regularly but in a few small sections there are roots, rocks and some small puddles.

Another smaller parking space has been mowed out on the right of the gravel road leading up the hill for people wanting to access the newly cleared upper trail. It is a steep strenuous climb of about 1 km to reach the upper trails. From the start of the trail itself, it is another 1.2 km through the woods to

the upper look off. The trail surface is wide and clear with many roots and rocks. The look off gives a breathtaking view eastward along the wild shoreline of Digby Neck. Directly below is a lower look off and further southwards one can see the beach and some of the houses of Gulliver's Cove.

The GCTA was officially formed in August this year to develop, maintain and manage a network of trails in and around the Gulliver's Cove area for hiking, walking, snowshoeing and cross country skiing. The GCTA is in the process of formalizing agreements with the private landowners who have graciously agreed to allow the trails on their land. The group hopes to see you out and about on these community trails, enjoying the views, the fresh sea air and getting a little exercise too.

For more information, see www.digbytrails.ca/gullivers-cove.html.



Jonathan Riley Photo

Plant of the Cove – Alder (Magnificent Plant)

By Roger Outhouse (for the Bay of Fundy Discovery Centre Association)



This photo is of our Downy Alder (*Aldus viridis*). The attached round golden balls are the female cones and the old brown round cones represent last year's dead empty ones that dropped their seeds on the snow last winter. To the right are elongated catkins representing the male reproductive structures. Our other most common species is the Speckled Alder (*Aldus incana*) which have cones attached to the twig by stalks and hanging yellow catkins.

Alright, I know this title is not going to set well with lots of folks far and wide but if you will just read my case to elevate the reputation of this shrubby little devil you might change your mind. Everyone seems to have unkind words about the pesky plant that invades their lands, is difficult to subdue and returns with a vengeance once your back is turned. When I ask young children what they have heard about alders they reply with words like my parents hate them and they are no good for anything.

First of all these plants were here before us and to think of them as invasive is incorrect. Secondly they have wonderful roles to play in nature including enrichment of soils, support wildlife and supply us with even food and medicinal benefits. It turns out that the alder is one of the first plants (pioneer species) to successfully establish in an idle field, a swamp or a boggy area. Alders have special little bumps on their roots (called nodules) that produce nitrogen to nourish their own growth

and enrich the soil for a series of other plants to grow. In a single year it is estimated that one square mile of alders can extract over 80 tons of nitrogen from the atmosphere promoting healthy growth of other plants. The forests of our region owe their success to the earlier pioneer alders; they paved the way! It would be a mistake to think that other more "likable" plants could do the same thing. Alders will thrive in oxygen deprived wet areas where other trees and other shrubs cannot. Root rot will set in on these other species and even trees that seem to grow well at first will eventually crash to the

ground in a windstorm because of root rot from excessive water. Alders have air ducts made of cells that allow oxygen to circulate down into the roots. Deep sea divers with air hoses connecting them to the surface survive in a similar manner.

In checking out the habitat benefits of alders it is common to hear that they are perfect places for birds and other wildlife to forage and hunt for food, seek protection, rest and raise their young. The Neck and Islands play an important role in the Atlantic Migratory Bird Flyway and alders are a major provider of the above essentials to make the perilous journey to and from Canada. Many birds including grouse feed on alder buds while seed eaters like juncos, sparrows, and crossbills enjoy eating the seeds that fall from the cones. Woodpeckers are often seen picking scouting along the bark for insects. Its bark and twigs are popular with muskrats, rabbits and deer. I was also intrigued to learn the special relationship between alders and beavers. As Canada's famous furry critters build dams that flood the surrounding banks of rivers and streams alders flourish in these forming wetlands. It turns out that the bark of alders is one of their main foods. Gathering food for their pantry close to the safety of water and their lodge means less danger from predators. Beaver dams have a natural role in conserving valuable water, maintaining rich wetland habitats and preventing extreme washouts by slowing water runoff from heavy rains.

On the food side it is important to note that the female flower cones and male catkins are both rich in protein but their bland taste makes them more of a survival food if you are very hungry or weak. The inner bark can be eaten raw, cooked or dried and ground into flour. The wood is also a preferred material to use when smoking fish or meat. On the medicinal side the Micmac have historically steeped bark in water to create a tea as a treatment for stomach cramps, kidney trouble, high fevers and pain. Other claims indicate that a bark and leaf poultice could treat wounds and even arthritic type symptoms. Some First Nations groups have used leaves as insoles so as to combat sore tired feet.

As a closing note I want to say that I realize the need for clearing land for agriculture, livestock, and other purposes but to simply view them as something to eliminate from our properties may result from our lack of understanding their true place in nature. Geology of this area shows that the ice age ended over 10,000 years ago and our top soil is at best 10 inches deep. That means it takes about 1,000 years to create an inch of soil and alders have been a huge contributor to that process. We owe them a lot! Think about it.

Creature of the Cove – Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*)

By Roger Outhouse for the Bay of Fundy Discovery Centre Association

At the end of September I was tending the BBQ in my yard at Lovers Lane in Freeport when flying ants started drifting down all around. Glancing up into the sky I noted a number of European Starlings, American Crows and even a few Herring Gulls flying in a variety of directions trying to make a fast meal of these insects in flight. Then two Common Nighthawks appeared and a true aerial show began. These birds are masters of darting, swooping and performing loops. Their slender bodies and long narrow wings with tapered tips allow



The Common Nighthawk can best be identified in flight by its white stripes under the wings.

them to turn and accelerate in a fraction of a second to hunt down flying insects including flying queen ants, caddisflies, flies, moths, mayflies, wasps, beetles, crickets, grasshoppers, other insects and especially mosquitoes. In fact they have earned the nickname of “mosquito hawk”. Any target between 500 feet up and near water or ground levels is fair game for this crafty flyer. These birds have a special structure in their eyes which enhance night vision so they can hunt earlier and later than we could imagine. This is why they play an important role in the balance of nature as they consume vast quantities of flying insects. They also can be seen frequently near street lights, stadiums, and other lit areas.



This aerial acrobat hunts mostly at dawn and dusk at times when many insects take to the air in numbers. They can be seen at other times as well but they do not hunt at night and in fact they are not related to the hawk family. The guides tell us that these birds nest primarily in the open areas such as sparse grassy fields, meadows, gravel pits, sand dunes, burned forest spots, beach areas and rocky ledges. Their feathers are a sort of dead leaf broken pattern that lets them camouflage on the ground in what we would consider as in full view. The female lays one or

two eggs that are about 2cm wide and 3cm long. The eggs hatch in about 20 days and it is an additional 17 days before the young leave the nest. Nest is a loose term when it comes to nighthawks as eggs are laid on bare ground, gravel, moss, lichens or other plant material.

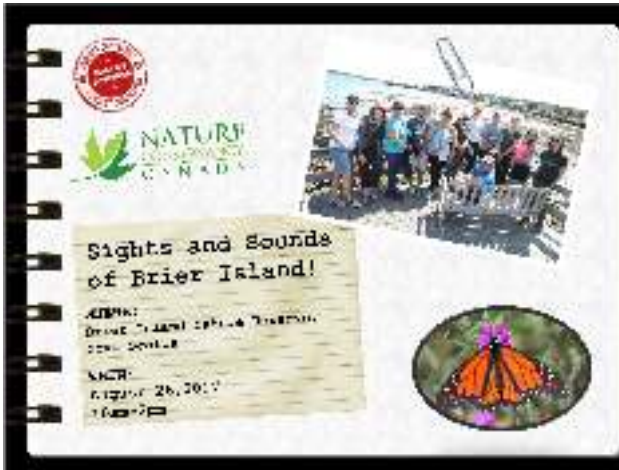
This is a positive story in that a BBQ the following night had four of these individuals cruise the sky for over an hour as they chased their insect prey. Back in the 90s I often fished for trout in the Freeport Brook behind Islands Consolidated School and was able to see as many as 20 nighthawks at one view as dusk approached. It has been over fifteen years since I have seen one in this area. Although they can be found in many areas throughout North America its estimated population has dropped by 60% in the US and 50% in Canada. While mammals and birds like crows, ravens and gulls will at time steal their eggs the biggest threats are pesticides which wipe out much of their food supplies and habitat loss to human development. Some efforts to create open spaces like gravel areas and burnt areas have allowed populations to find nesting sites. These birds are most remarkable as their breeding grounds are in North America but they all migrate to southern South America for the winter and return in the following late spring to breed and raise young. Just maybe we can better understand how this creature survives and hope that a rise in population can be fostered. With a population at risk it gives cause to wonder how we can help. The Common Nighthawk has a fossil history dating back 400,000 years; it would be a true shame to lose them now!

Digby Neck Ready to Welcome Summer

Digby Pathfinders and Rangers spent a Thursday late afternoon and evening in early June cleaning the garbage from the ditches along the Middle Cross Road and the following Saturday worked with Digby Neck residents and RBC staff members on and RBC Blue Water Project collect a mountain of garbage from Sandy Cove Beach on the Bay of Fundy. This was the most garbage collected in the there years the girls have worked to clean the beach. YUCK!



Thank-you From the Nature Conservancy of Canada



Such a beautiful day- too bad it had to be spent collecting unnecessary garbage. But, a warm thank-you must go out to the many volunteers who work to make our community a welcoming place.

Bay of Fundy Discover Centre Association (BoFDCA) October 2017

The communities along Digby Neck and Islands are buzzing with activities throughout the year but especially during the summer and autumn seasons. On Digby Neck, the bringing together of representatives from all villages to form the Digby Neck Collective has seen the opening of the Schoolhouse Café, music jam nights, a variety of workshops from painting to sorting recyclables to making household and personal cleaning products using natural ingredients. There is also a variety of music concerts sponsored by Cove Music and author visits and readings in Sandy Cove.

On the Islands, the Big Bog Restoration Project and Eastern Mountain Avens Preservation Projects on Brier Island are important activities bringing scientists and environmentalists to the Island. The BoffDCA works closely with the Freeport Development Association on projects to maintain trails and signage along the trails. The Breaking Waves Music and Film Festival promotes local talent and invites artists from near and far with film submissions.

Our hiking trails both on the Neck and Islands continue to be destination points for increasing numbers of visitors and local residents through all four seasons- just to enjoy the beauty of the colours each season brings or to collect cranberries, to snowshoe, or to take in the breathtaking views and feel the salt air on one's face.

With all these wonderful activities, the projects embarked on by the Bay of Fundy Discovery Centre Association to maintain and promote our natural environment (see attached report) are so important.

It is once again the time to renew your membership to continue to support our association and the many activities we work on or support each year. Please take a few moments to send in your renewal and encourage others to join. We are also looking for fund raising activities so we can continue to do what we do best- promote our Bay of Fundy along Digby Neck and Islands. If you have a creative fund raising idea, please share with us!

Interested in becoming a member of the Bay of Fundy Discovery Centre Association? Please send your name, address, telephone number and email address along with the appropriate payment to the address listed. Memberships are renewed annually

Individual membership: \$10.00

Family Membership: \$25.00

Patron: \$500.00

Business Membership: \$100.00

Association/Organization: \$50.00

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We welcome your stories and photos of your adventures along Digby Neck and Islands and the Bay of Fundy.