



BIRDS & WILDLIFE

On The Trails

Miramichi Cross Country Ski Club

by
Tom Greathouse
Naturalist
Douglasfield, N.B.
January 1999

At the request of Gerald Smith lists of **mammals and birds**, which may be seen during the 1998-99 ski season while skiing the Miramichi Ski Club's facilities, were prepared by Tom Greathouse, December 31, 1998, Birdville, Douglas field, Miramichi.

Information cited is based on four sources: "Mammals" a 1976 field guide to "Mammals of North America (north of Mexico)", by Burt & Grossenheider, 1976, (BUY). Other references used are: "Mammals of the Canadian Wild", A. Forsythe, 1985, (FOR); "Mammals of Canada", A.W.F. Banfield, 1977/8, (BAN); "Tracking and the Art of Seeing", P. **Rezendes**, 1992, (REZ).

The bird list order follows that of R.T. Peterson's Field Guide to "Birds of Eastern and Central North America", (RTP), 1980, 4th ed. Other bird references: Godfrey's "Birds of Canada", GOD, 1986; Terres' "Audubon's Encyclopedia of North American Birds", (TER), 1982; National Geographic's "Birds of North America", (NGB), 1987; and Erskine's "Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Maritime Provinces (of Canada)", (ERS), 1992.

Ski trail wildlife (mammals, birds)

The resident animals omitted from this summary are those which are not expected to be visible in Miramichi "skiing months", late December until late March.

The information is based on personal knowledge as well as knowledge from persons such as Harry Walker, a lifelong student of wildlife, and Bob Currie, at the provincial office, Newcastle, who have been of great help while writing wildlife columns for the last six plus years, and books cited below.

Principal references, used to gather facts on animals that I have never observed locally, such as shrews, are given. I have no reason to doubt data taken from these sources and will be pleased to provide exact quotations, if not given herein.

Sequence of presentation of mammal species is adapted from W.H. Burt and R.P. Grossenheider's "Mammals", a Peterson Field Guide Series, which covers "North America north of Mexico", 1976. 11

Shrews: (Burt): These bundles of energy are mouse size, have beadlike eyes not covered with skin; ears concealed or nearly so by soft fur; always have 5 toes on each foot. (Mice have 4 toes on front foot). Teeth usually pigmented, in part, with chestnut. Eat many insects, are neutral/ beneficial; no harm to environment (REZ, p. 51-52; BUR, 2-5, 12-16). They are active day or night, winter or summer, but change their diets in winter, dining on dormant insect larvae, pupae and small mammals such as voles, near the unfrozen areas of the soil surface.

Shews are the world's smallest mammals!

Masked shrew / *Sorex cinereus*. Found in moist places in forest , open country brush-land. Eats more than its own weight each day: mostly insects but many other small animals. **Unique fact: Heartbeat: 1200 times/minute** (BUR); Breed March to October. All of NB, in suitable niches.

Body grayish brown, tail bi-colored. Head, body plus tail : 3.25 - 4.5 inches. Some females may reach breeding maturity at 4-5 months. Nests of dry grass/leaves, in stumps, under logs.

Arctic shrew/ *Sorex arcticus*: Note: Banfield and Burt differ on range in NB, Forsyth does not show it in NB at all. Habitat: Tamarack and spruce swamps. **May not** live in Ski Trail area.

Size: Head, body plus tail : 4.0 - 4.67 inches . **Most brilliantly colored and attractive** shrew. Back, sides and belly contrast. In winter, tri-colored back blackish.

Smoky shrew/ *Sorex fumeus*: Habitat: Birch and hemlock forests, prefers deep layer of leaf mold on ground. **May not** be in winter ski trail area. Head, body plus tail 4.25 - 5.0 inches. A dull brown shrew except for bicolored tail, yellowish below, brown above.

Bats: Bats are the only true-flying mammals. All local species are nocturnal and hibernate or go as far south as southeastern USA during ski season. (WHB, p. 24-38). Thus they will not be discussed here.

Flesh-eaters, A.K.A. Carnivores. Animals in this category include bears, raccoons, weasels, skunks, dogs, wolves, foxes and cats.

Black bears hibernate during our coldest winter months so it is not a common experience to see them on ski trails during ski season. However, as December has not been very wintry, I would not bet that all local garbage-eating bears have already entered hibernation quarters (as of December 29).

If a bear or two is seen, on ski trails or otherwise in the Miramichi, they will not be looking for humans on which to dine. The principal rules to follow are: keep food of any kind out of reach of bears and wear clothing which is free of food smells.

Bears have an excellent sense of smell for food, whether fresh or a bit ripe.

Garbage of any description should not be left along ski trails nor around the ski club building to tempt bears, skunks, etc. which have missed signals that winter is here.

Grizzly and polar bears can be seen in western/northern Canada, but if you see one in the Miramichi, it would be a good idea to have your glasses checked.

Raccoons range throughout the USA and southern Canada, from Nova Scotia to British Columbia, including the Miramichi. They thrive in populated areas and live well around sympathetic humans.

Adrian Forsyth, in 'Mammals of the Canadian Wild', notes that **raccoons do not hibernate in winter months**, but they put on considerable fat in late fall which is used before spring. **In bad winter weather they den up in hollow trees, rock crevices, caves, culverts and abandoned buildings, for example.**

Everyone recognizes raccoons and knows about their habits so will pass on.

Weasels, skunks, martens, mink etc.

The Mustelidae family includes martens, fishers, weasels, mink, otters and striped skunks. Each of these species is said to be found in the Miramichi and could possibly be seen in ski season along ski trails.

Burt notes "**martens live in areas remote from civilization**". Are ski club trails remote?

Fishers are said by Burt to "require extensive mixed hardwood forests, cutover wilderness areas". Does the ski area meet these conditions in winter?

Striped skunks inhabit Douglasfield area and probably travel ski trails, but not personally seen there.

Dogs, wolves, coyotes and foxes are in the Canidae family. Dogs, coyotes and foxes are to be seen in the Miramichi now. Persons who travel the ski trails frequently in winter probably see them there.

As of 1999 wolves are not expected to be seen in the province. However, programs reported from New York and Maine are said to be trying to reestablish wolves there. If successful, this species will no doubt be seen in New Brunswick not many years after, but in the ski area?

Burt states that gray wolves are "found only in wilder parts of its range". He also notes that wolves are most active at night.

If the ski area one day qualifies as potential wolf habitat, would that mean moonlight skiing would no longer be safe?

Forsyth would say: It is safe. On page 119, "Mammals of the Canadian Wild", we read. "Wolves that have attacked humans almost certainly suffered from rabies, since **healthy wolves**, made cautious by centuries of wolf hunting, **tend to avoid humans**."

Coyotes moved into the Canadian Maritimes when wolves were exterminated many years ago. Should skiers be concerned if coyotes choose to share the ski trail?

Forsyth gives no evidence that coyotes attack humans. Rather he states that coyotes do not attack big game.

Their diets focus on any mammal they can kill - "usually ground squirrels, rabbits, and more rarely, deer, but also mice, voles and even fruit and insects."

Red foxes are easy to identify, at least at short range. One approached within 50 feet of my home, following the scent of caged rabbits. They surely roam the ski trail area summer and winter, tracking snowshoe hares, but never have plans to attack humans.

The Cat (Felidae) family in the Miramichi contains only two members, bobcats and lynx. Trappers caught individuals of both species near St. Margarets, N.B. in 1993 and 1996

Mountain lions (a.k.a. cougar, puma, panther and many other names) were present until about 60 years ago, when the last one was killed and its pelt salvaged.

Since then there have been reports of sightings, but only one produced evidence, a scat which contained cougar hairs. Note: The scat was found in 1992 when an employee of the wildlife unit in Fredericton, Rod Cumberland, was following tracks reported a few hours earlier.

. Had a cougar been released there hoping to establish a breeding nucleus in NB?

Woodchucks (Groundhogs, marmots) are said to come out of hibernation in March. If

so, they might be seen in open woods, brushy or rocky ravines near the ski trail, mainly in daylight, although they often wander at night in early spring, before ski season ends.

Eastern chipmunks also like "deciduous forests, brushy areas". They hibernate, but may come out in mid-winter.

It seems that they should also occupy ski trail country. They are smaller than fox squirrels, larger than red squirrels and, in the Miramichi, maintain such a small population that many persons have never seen one.

Birds which may be seen on the Club's ski trail, in skiseason, are believed to include:
(Sequence is from Peterson's "Field Guide to Eastern Birds").

Grouse:	ruffed; spruce.	Nuthatch:	white-breasted red-breasted
Hawks:	sharpshinned; northern goshawk;	Kinglet:	golden-crowned
Owls:	great horned , barred, great gray, snowy, boreal, saw whet, hawk owl.	Robin:	American
		Shrike:	northern
		Waxwing:	Bohemian cedar
Woodpeckers:		Junco:	northern
	pileated, downy, hairy, black-backed three-toed northern three-toed.	Bunting:	snow
Crows:	American	Crossbill:	red white-winged
		Redpoll,	common
		Finch,	purple
Raven:	northern	Grosbeak,	pine evening
Jay:	blue gray , (moose bird)	Goldfinch,	American
		Siskin,	pine
Chickadee:	Black-capped, boreal.	Sparrow,	tree