

*The
Lady's-slipper*



*Fall 1985
Vol 2, No 2*

THE LADY'S-SLIPPER

The Lady's-slipper is the official newsletter of the MacNamara Field Naturalists' Club, P.O. Box 94, Arnprior, Ontario, K7S 3H2.

Reprints of articles contained herein are granted without prior permission with the request that credit be given to source and author.

ILLUSTRATIONS AND LAYOUT

Leslie Cross

Typing: Courtesy of Sheila Thomson

Editing: Heather Runtz

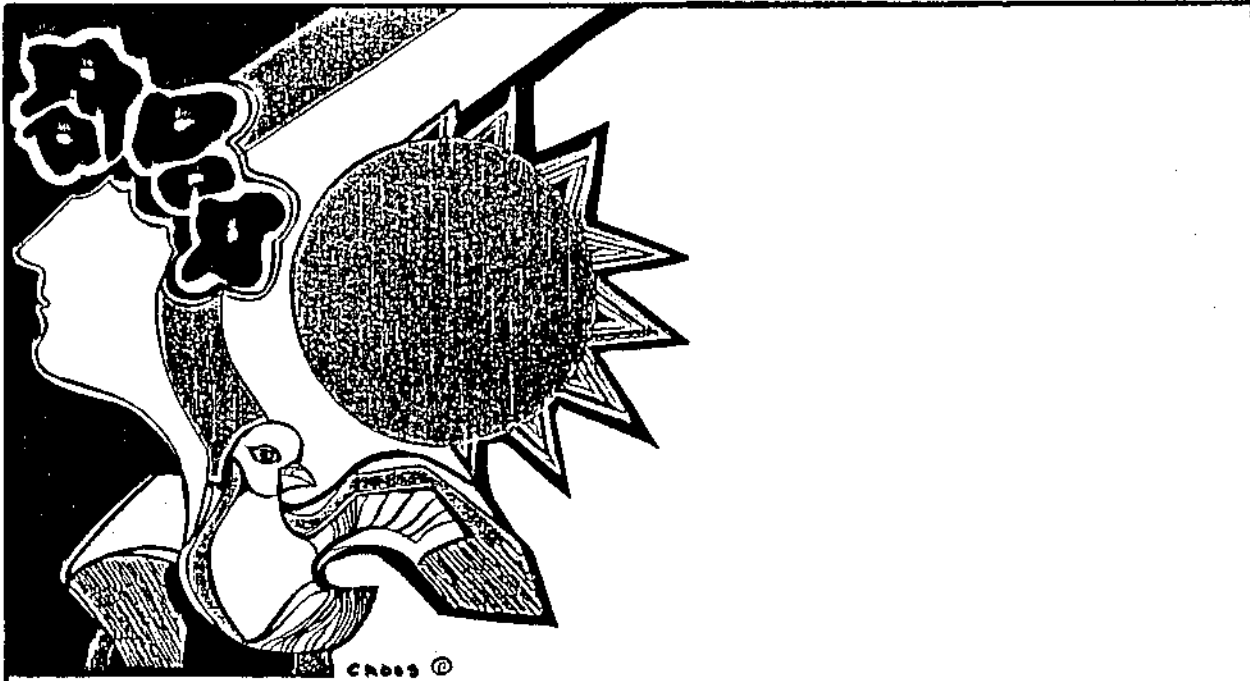
1985 EXECUTIVE

President: Michael Runtz Vice-President: Eric Ridgen
623-6975 623-5185

Programs: Adolph Vogg Field Trips: Donald Gordon
623-2572 623-4974

Treasurer: Kevin MacDonald Publicity: Leslie Cross
623-7006 623-2444

Special Programs: Sloan Watters
623-4193



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Winter's first marks are now upon us - the chilly frost coating on the backyard grasses has now been replaced by the occasional white blanket of snow, and naked branches of trees boldly display once-hidden nests of leaves and sticks. With this fresh and invigorating season arrive the northern visitors that have spent their summers well above the tree line. Snow Buntings mill about the fields, Redpolls chatter amongst the tall weeds, and perhaps a Snowy Owl gazes out from the top of a fence post. Ice toppings on ponds have forced our ducks further south, and the small warblers now pick off insects in some tropical haven.

For those of us who remain in this frozen land, winter brings a refreshing change. Cross-country skis and snowshoes can be pulled off the racks and prepared for the oncoming snows. Bird feeders begin to come alive with a flurry of feathers and colour.

Many feeders have been stocked up and active for some time now. Ones that offer a mixture of small fine seeds (like millet or crushed corn), the ever-popular sunflower seeds, and a side order of suet tend to attract the largest variety of birds.

With the topic now on birds, it seems appropriate to mention the annual Pakenham-Arnprior Christmas Bird Count. Each Boxing Day

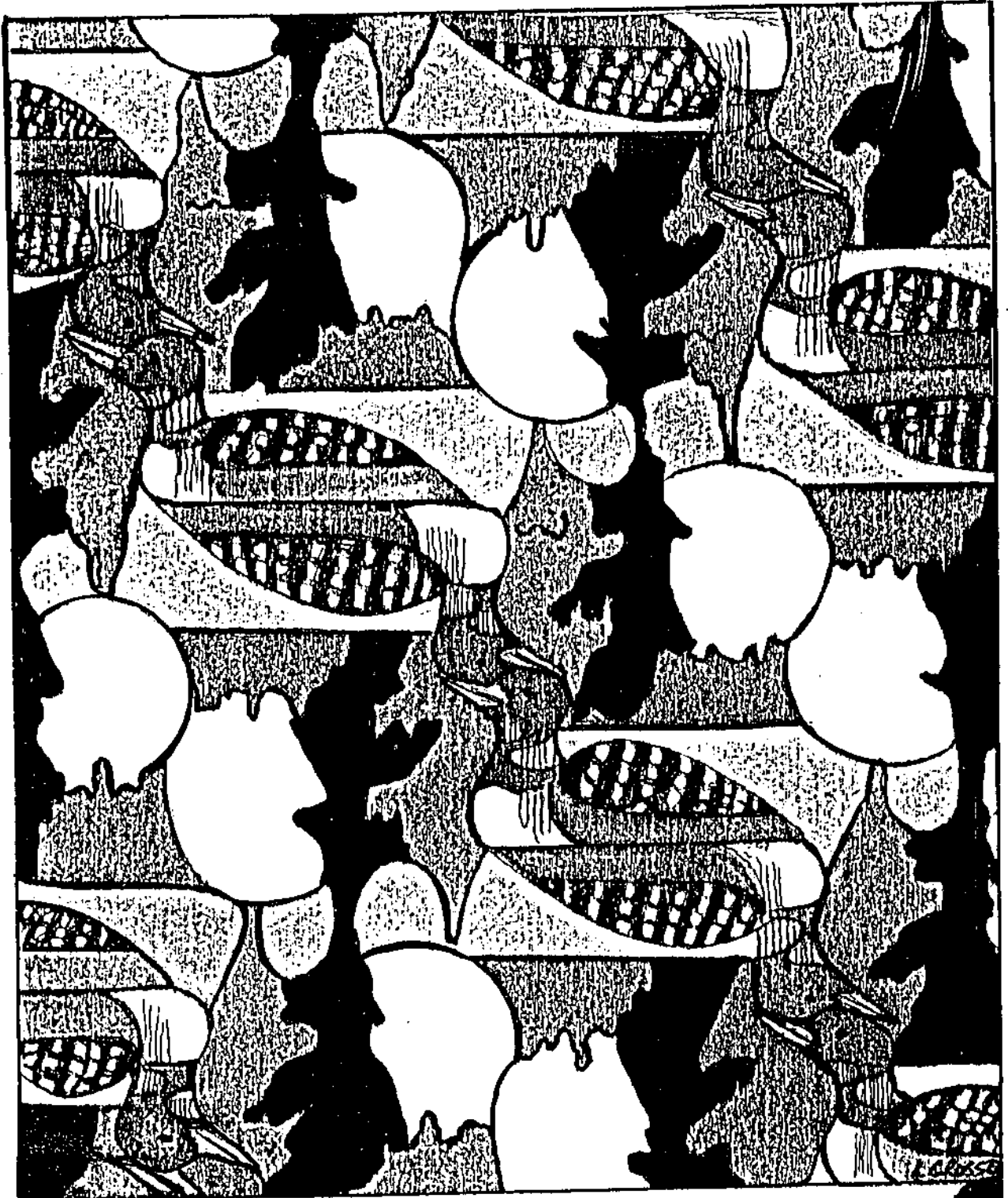
(December 26), those with an interest in tallying the birds in this area, venture out for the day. Small groups (each with an experienced birder) set out to record any bird that can be found. When the sun disappears at the end of the day, the group reassembles for a hot meal and a grand tally. Anyone is welcome to participate, either by joining one of the small groups, or by merely keeping track of the birds visiting the backyard feeder. Anyone wishing to take part in this year's count should contact any of the executive as soon as possible. A day of fun is had by all, and an amazing list of birds is usually tallied, often with a few surprises.

To all, thanks for another successful year for the Macnamara Field Naturalists' Club. Good luck in the upcoming year and, as always,

Good Naturalizing!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Runtz". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Michael Runtz



Nature Notes & Quotes



NATURE NUGGETS

The largest flying bird in the world was a fossil bird found in Argentina. Argentavis magnificens had a wing span of between 23 and 25 feet (7-7.6 metres).

The Sea Otter differs from other marine mammals in that it lacks thick layers of fat for insulation against the cold water. Instead, it has an inch-thick coat of underfur that serves this function.

Our eastern Monarch Butterflies migrate to Mexico to overwinter. In western Canada, the Monarchs migrate to California.

47,500,000 eggs were found in a single fish - a relative of the Swordfish family.

It has been estimated that a single porcupine has 30,000 quills.

Great Horned Owls cannot hear Ruffed Grouse drumming. The lower limit of the owl's hearing is 60 Hz, while the grouse drums at 40 Hz.

A cave-dwelling bird, the aptly named Oilbird, is still collected by man, and boiled down to give oil for cooking and lighting. The oil is derived from the bird's diet of oily fruits of palms and other trees.

The most numerous type of animal in the world is the beetle; almost 300,000 types have been identified.



CAPSULES OF WISDOM

"Who never walks save where he sees men's tracks makes no discoveries." ... J.G. Holland

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes." ... Marcel Proust

"If greater attention were given to the universal laws which govern all forms of life we would naturally mature with a respect for the guiding agencies which reveal themselves in the operation of nature." ... Manly Hall

*"The essence of science is to discover identity in difference."
... F.S. Marvin*

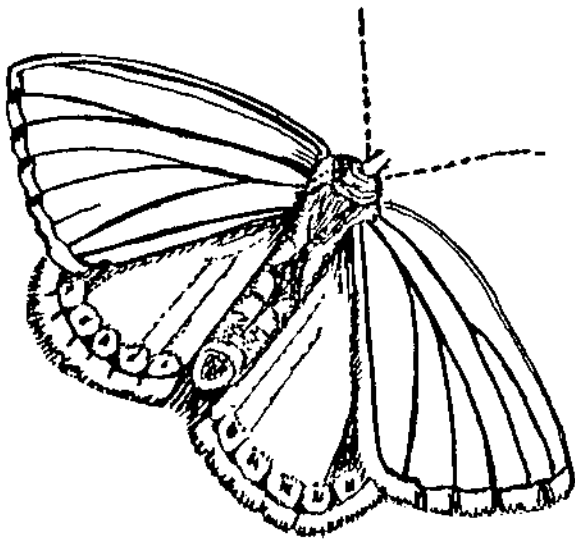
*"Youth is a work of nature but old age is a work of art. Age is a matter of mind. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."
... unknown*

*"You don't know much, and that's a fact." ... The Duchess in
Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland*

*"Life in all its fullness is Mother Nature obeyed."
... Weston Price*

*"Learning is a treasure
which follows its owner
everywhere."
... Chinese proverb*

(Compiled for The Lady's-slipper by Eric Clark)



PHANTOMS OF THE NIGHT

BY MICHAEL RUNTZ

While the sun slowly sinks below the horizon, producing an aura of colour that captures our eyes and imaginations, much smaller eyes begin to penetrate the increasing veil of darkness. Tiny bodies begin stirring, restless to begin the nightly foray for food and mates. As the softened glow of twilight weakens and finally succumbs to the night, a multitude of flying forms leaves the protective shelter of leaves and bark and silently moves through the dark. Night is the realm of the moth.

Almost everyone knows a moth. It is the creature that on warm summer nights circles the porch light continuously. Or perhaps we encounter one eye to eye as we peer through the kitchen screen window early in the morning. Possibly we have encountered the caterpillar stage devouring the leaves of the backyard fruit tree, or even the clothes in our closets. Certainly a moth is something with which we all are familiar, but do we really know much about these creatures of the night?

One of the most frequently asked questions about any group of living organisms is "how many?". The answer is simply "lots!". Butterflies and moths belong to the Order Lepidoptera. This group is far more numerous in the tropics, but even so, North America north of Mexico



boasts over 11,000 species (types). Of these, only about 760 are butterflies, which means that there are over 10,000 species of moths!

Moths can generally be told from butterflies by having more plump and furry bodies, by usually holding the wings flat or roof-like over their backs, and by having antennae that lack a club-like tip and are often feathery.

Moths vary greatly in shape, size, habit and colour. However, they all share the same four life stages: egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa, and adult. These amazing states through which a moth passes are collectively termed a 'complete metamorphosis'.

The caterpillar stage is familiar to many for various reasons. The Spruce Budworm caterpillar thrives on the foliage of spruces and firs, and millions of dollars are spent on spraying programmes to try to control this moth. The famous fabric silk is produced by unravelling the spun cocoons of the Asian Silk Moth. The single strand of one cocoon may be close to 3/4 of a mile long! The Isabella Moth may be a stranger to you, but its caterpillar, the Woolly Bear, is probably no stranger. And who is not familiar with the humping movement of the Geometer caterpillar - the inchworm or looper.

The adult moth really shows the most amazing features of all the life stages. For example, bats use ultrasonic sound for locating moths. Many moths are able to hear this frequency, and have evolved escape strategies. If the moth hears a distant bat, it merely flies away. If the bat is close, the moth might close its wings and drop to the ground where it crawls under litter. Some moths have evolved an even more amazing method of avoiding becoming dinner for a bat. Some tiger moths can actually jam the bat's echo-locating system by producing clicks from a noisemaker on the chest!

Some moths have incredible smell capability. The silk moths use pheromones (scent molecules) to locate potential mates. The female releases these into the air, and the male's fuzzy antennae pick them up, from as far away as one mile. He merely tracks her down by following the trail of scent!

Most moths have very short lifespans as adults. Their only purpose is to mate and produce offspring. Some moths do not eat in the adult



stage. In fact, our most beautiful moths - the Cecropia and Polyphemus - have no functional mouths as adults and starve to death in time.

Other types do feed as adults. Some types, in particular the Sphinx moths, have a coiled-up proboscis for unfurling into the deep necks of flowers and sucking up the nectar. Some species hover around the flowers, resembling hummingbirds or bees.

Moths have evolved ways of hiding during the day. With the wings closed, the moth blends into a background of bark or leaf with the help of matching colours and patterns. For example, the White Underwing shows a pattern of white with black dashes that blends perfectly with the bark of White Birch. Some moths resemble dead leaves or twigs. Many birds are sharp-eyed and find these resting moths. If a peck only brushes or slightly wounds the moth, often the bird is in for a startling surprise. As the moth opens its wings to fly, large eyes or a blazing pattern of bright colour may suddenly appear, shocking the bird and allowing the moth to escape. When the forewings are closed, the hindwings are hidden from view. Some species have large eyespots (as in some Sphinx moths) or bright patterns (the Underwings) to achieve this shocking effect.

Not all moths fly by night. Some are active in the daytime. In fact, one of the rarest moths in Canada is found at White Lake, and it is active during the day.

Some moths may not move very far during their short lifetime, but others may travel thousands of miles. A famous wanderer from the tropics is the Black Witch. In late summer they often wander north to Texas, Florida, and even the northern states. Occasionally the odd one even makes it to our part of the world. This summer, one showed up at Levy's Hill near Dow Badische in Arnprior.

Collecting moths can be a fascinating pastime. One can make a net easily with a broom handle, a coat hanger, and a cone made from veil material. Moths can be captured at bright street or house lights, or can be enticed in to unlit areas. Portable black lights that run off a car battery can be purchased. A white sheet hung in front of the light provides a resting site for moths. Another interesting method of catching moths, particularly Catocala (Underwings) involves painting



a bait onto a tree trunk. A mixture of beer (really!), molasses, sugar, and a bit of rotten banana can provide truly amazing results. A number of moths, drawn by the odour, rest to feed on the sweet mixture. A flashlight is used to spot the feeding creatures, and collecting can be discriminate. The moths can be displayed after drying with the wings pinned open.

The world of moths is truly an amazing one. Many excellent books are now available. I recommend the following for anyone interested in learning more about these fascinating animals:

A Golden Guide to Butterflies and Moths (Mitchell/Zim)

A Field Guide to the Moths (Covell - a Peterson Field Guide)

The Cutworm Moths of Ontario and Quebec (Rockburne and Lafontaine)

Legion of Night: The Underwing Moths (Sargent)



THE GULL'S NEST

Although it's soon Autumn
'Tis pleasant to reflect
Upon bright plumage
And eggs in the nest.

Perched on a lofty boulder
Parent gulls kept watch,
No need to incubate
The sun's rays were hot.

Warily approached the nest
To click the angle which was best
It was a reassuring fact
Neither parent flew to attack.

Their vigilance kept in sight
The feathered relations
Many rods to the right.
THEY could be the predators
If given half a chance.

Ruth Charbonneau

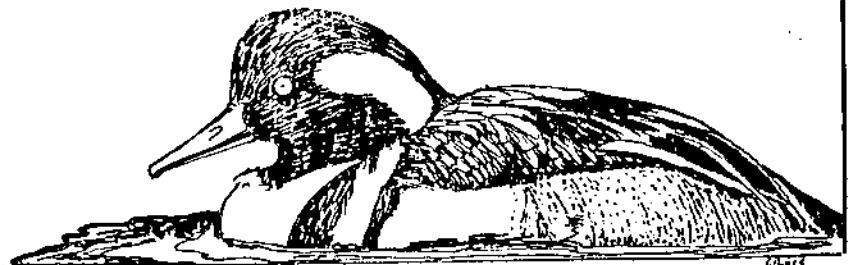


Life at Poison Ivy Acres

As I write, it is the first of August at Poison Ivy Acres, our home in Admaston Township, near Renfrew. We live on a 250 acre property which has a wide variety of habitats, including hardwood bush, conifer plantations, open fields, swamp, creek and pond. Because of this environment we have a great assortment of birds, mammals, insects, ferns, flowering plants, trees and mushrooms here. Some of these things we have learned a lot about, while others remain a mystery for the moment.

Each year there is some different nature project on the home front. In 1985, I am assembling data for the breeding bird atlas, while Don is assembling a slide collection which will show different aspects of the flora and fauna here. Perhaps, at a later date, we can share this collection with club members.

Already he has recorded some interesting items. Each evening we see white-tailed deer close to the house. There are several does, two bucks, and the occasional fawn. Last year, one of the does had twin fawns, which were amusing to watch. Three species of turtle nest here (painted, Blanding's and snapping) and although we often watch them laying the eggs, we seldom see the result of their efforts. All too often we find broken egg shells, left by marauding animals. Some weeks ago I watched a painted turtle placing her eggs in the sand beside the pond, so I was delighted when Don found miniature turtles swimming in the water last week!



Next we found a gray tree frog, a handsome creature in shades of gray and pale green, with the underside of its legs a startling orange. These frogs are nocturnal, so we were lucky to be able to photograph it. We have been invaded by other nocturnal creatures (brown bats and flying squirrels) and we have not been able to photograph those.

This week we have had young hooded mergansers on the pond. Their comical antics, as they try to swallow some very large crayfish, have been enjoyed by both of us. Hooded mergansers have nested here for several years. In the spring, we usually catch a fleeting glimpse of the drake, which is a strikingly handsome bird. "Handsome is as handsome does", as my grandmother used to say; the drake disappears after a time, leaving his mate to do all the work of brooding the eggs and feeding the fledglings.

My main hobby is birding, and, since I walk each day, I'm often able to watch the progress of a bird family from the nest-building stage to the time of fall migration. This evening, for example, I saw a red-tailed hawk giving flying lessons to a juvenile bird.

Such hawks have been nesting here for years, and we know that spring is here when the red-tails return. They always arrive when we're working in the sugar shack, and they circle around us, screaming, as if in greeting. Last year they accepted a pile of pine boughs, cut down by Don, and they built a nest in a tall pine within sight of the house. Here a solitary youngster was raised, although the previous year there were two. Before this bird left the nest, I would occasionally go to look at him. When mother was there to shriek her displeasure, this young bird would cower back into the nest, but as soon as she left it would peer at me with great interest.

This year the red-tails built a new nest, and their old home was taken over by great horned owls. These birds are with us all through the year, but we have never before been able to find their nest. This year I was able to observe the two white juveniles, and one evening I found them on the end of a branch, squealing happily. Young great horned owls sound rather like hawks, quite different from the familiar hooting voices of the adult birds. The parent bird beat the youngsters with her wings and they walked back to the nest, using their wings as

a means of balance, while they took very exaggerated steps, like a circus tightrope walker.

One doesn't have to go outside to study birds, of course. From the upstairs windows I often see a great blue heron, standing hopefully on the dock and gazing into the pond. My typewriter is beside a window, and I often break off from work to watch birds in the trees outside. Recent visitors have been bluebirds, vireos and waxwings. The most exciting birds to fly past the window this year have been an osprey, a green heron and a bald eagle. The osprey and the green heron are regular visitors, but the bald eagle was a rare visitor, back in the early spring! As the crow flies we are only 10 or 12 miles from Mountain Chute, where club members watched bald eagles earlier this year.

Unfortunately a number of birds fly into the downstairs windows, betrayed by the reflection of some nearby maples. Casualties so far this year have been sapsuckers, rose-breasted grosbeaks, veerys, ovenbirds, several warblers and a waterthrush.

As I conclude this article, the whippoorwills are starting up outside the window. Once in a while a little whiskered face will peer inside. Every day I tell myself how lucky we are to live in a situation where we can enjoy the world of nature to this extent. On a daily basis we get to see things which many people only rarely experience on their annual holiday.

Carol Bennett