

CBC puts blame on man

BY GARY SCHNEIDER



The double-crested cormorant is a bird that has taken a lot of criticism on Prince Edward Island over the past two years, and so it was with great interest and anticipation that I watched CBC's The Nature of Things program on Feb. 4. "The Sea Raven" painted a much different picture of the double-crested cormorant, "a bird with a reputation it doesn't deserve".

Instead of dark, dirty, stinky rats of the bird world, we saw a lot of wonderful underwater shots of cormorants swimming and feeding, and the birds in flight with great shots of Prince Edward Island as a backdrop - the Department of Tourism couldn't have done a better job as a promotion for the Island.

The show made the point that double-crested cormorants are blamed for eating salmon and trout, but all studies show those species are only a tiny part of their diet, and that they mostly feed on fish of no commercial value. On the other hand, cormorants are victims of gulls eating their eggs, pesticides sprayed on potato fields above their colonies that are absorbed by fish and then affect young feeders, and of course, man.

The host told about a colony in Mahone Bay that had a healthy population five weeks before filming, and then we were treated to recent film at the colony, the ground littered with dead cormorants and shotgun shells and only two birds that escaped the killing. Some of the conclusions reached were that with the pressure to reduce the population, the cormorants face an uncertain future, partly because even though they're protected, law enforcement is lax, and that people, not cormorants take the largest catch of fish and have caused serious depletions of some commercial species.

David Suzuki closed the program with the following observation: "We're forever looking for scapegoats to blame for the damage done by human activities. Destroying innocent wildlife won't solve complex economic and environmental problems. The roots of those problems are much closer to home."

Migration study

now available

The Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation has produced a Short Study on the spring bird migration on P.E.I. The study, done by NHS recording secretary Geoff Hogan, includes why and where birds migrate, behavioural differences, keeping records and a suggested reading list.

The back page is a table on when to expect new species as spring progresses. The study is well-illustrated and designed (by Reg Vessey and Cheryl Cudmore, respectively) and hopefully is the first in a series. We look forward to Short Study 2. The study is available from the Foundation, or by writing to Short Study Series, 2 Kent St., Ch'town C1A 1M6.



Short Study

Spring Bird Migration on P.E.I.

Introduction

One of the most exciting times of the year for bird watchers (or "birders", as many prefer to be called) is the spring bird migration. After the long winter it is uplifting to see and hear familiar species that departed from Prince Edward Island for southern climes during the previous fall. Approximately 100 of the Island's bird species participate annually in a migration entailing hundreds or thousands of miles. Many, including the majestic Great Blue Heron and the jewel-like Ruby-throated Hummingbird, spend the winter months in the Caribbean or beyond. Migration exposes the birds to many hazards and is physically stressful as well. Nevertheless, the advantages evidently outweigh the disadvantages, for the behaviour has evolved over thousands of years and is still evolving.

The expected spring arrival period to the Island is remarkably consistent for

each species from year to year, although unusual weather patterns may occasionally shift the schedule slightly. Beginning in early March with the arrival of the Canada Geese, until the final two weeks of May, when many of the woodland warblers, vireos and flycatchers return, it is an exciting time for anyone who is "tuned in" to one of nature's greatest marvels.

The Migration Mystery

Bird migration has always fascinated mankind. One cannot help but wonder where the birds go and how they get there. At one time people believed that birds flew to the moon or, in the case of swallows, spent the winter hibernating in the mud beneath ponds. We now know a great deal more about the seasonal movements of birds as a result of

