

NOMINATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

Nominations for the Executive Committee of the Natural History Society of Prince Edward Island are now open. If you feel you would like to be involved with the delivery of our programs through volunteer efforts on the Executive Committee or know another Society who would, please contact Ray Cooke or Jim Jenkins (see page 2 for contact information).

NEW PLANT RECORD FOR PEI:

by Kate MacQuarrie

On July 27th of this year, I headed to Lennox Island in Malpeque Bay to do some preliminary floral surveys for the Lennox Island Band. As far as I could find, no 20th century floral surveys had included this 1,500 acre area and so I was very interested to learn what was growing there. I was surprised to find red oak (*Quercus rubra*) and beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), and pleased with some of the rare species such as white baneberry (*Actaea pachypoda*) and seabeach dock (*Rumex pallidus*). However, none of the 170-plus species identified was more exciting than ground nut (*Apios americana*), a plant never officially recorded for PEI!

Ground nut has been found in the St. John River Valley and in Kouchibouguac National Park in New Brunswick, scattered in southern and western Nova Scotia, and in Quebec, Ontario and the eastern United States right to the Gulf of Mexico. A member of the pea family (*Fabaceae*), it is a trailing/climbing vine with 3 to 7 leaflets and beautiful, dense, brownish-red flowers. Its name comes from the root, which is a series of swellings (tubers) on the rootstock. This root was a significant food for Aboriginal peoples and early European explorers, and so the North American distribution and history of the species is well-documented. Because of its importance, cultivation of ground nut was tried (unsuccessfully) in Europe in 1635 and again in the late 1840s, and research into this plant's potential as a commercial crop is ongoing.

I was especially excited to find this plant, as it confirmed a long-held theory of its presence on the Island. In 1846, Abraham Gesner -the 19th century geologist and inventor of kerosene -wrote a letter to the editor of *The Islander*. This was during the potato famine and Gesner was searching the islands of Richmond (now Malpeque) Bay for indigenous plants which could be cultivated as a substitute for the potato. He wrote of a plant found on Fish Island and his description was remarkably similar to that of ground nut. Despite Gesner's comments, no confirmed record of ground nut was found until this year.

Many individuals of the species were found behind a salt marsh on the northeastern end of Lennox Island, in an area known locally as "the cove". The plants were growing with some very vigorous poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), and climbing up nearby trees and shrubs. On a second visit to Lennox Island to photograph the plant, Jackie Waddell, Heidi Schaefer and I also found it growing in a ditch at the base of the "Welcome to Lennox Island" sign.

A sample of the plant was collected and mounted, and will be sent to the national herbarium in Ottawa for "official" entry into the list of Island flora. Slides and photographs taken by Jackie Waddell will remain on-file with Island Nature Trust.

AUTUMN BIRDING TRIP:

by Dan McAskill and Ray Cooke

The weather preceding the Autumn Bird Count Day of Saturday, September 11th was catastrophic for many communities in the Carribean and many coastal communities in the southern United States. A huge hurricane with winds of up to 240 km per hour and a wide circumference struck these communities. It was being followed closely by Hurricane Gert. Such storms often push birds from southern clines north and the possibility of such conditions for coastal birding brought out a small group of birders. Ray Cooke, Eric Marcum, and Dan McAskill arrived at