

transported elsewhere, leaving behind a breach in the dune chain which may be washed over by spring tides.

As naturalists, we should not be alarmed by a breach in a dune system. If we look up and down the coast we will find barrier beach and dune systems at all stages of development, maturity and decline. A dune system along an outer beach cannot be preserved "intact" for posterity, for that would be to ignore the dynamics of the situation. Cyclic instability is an inherent component in the character of a coastal dune system. If we remove this element the system becomes stabilized, changed into something else; and we no longer have the dynamic dune system characteristic of the outer beach. To preserve such a system we must recognize and accept the "right" of the dunes on the outer beach to be breached, washed over, levelled and rebuilt as directed by the interplay of sand, wind and sea.

As ecologists we should be quick to note that a beach system of alternating dunes and washovers provides a more diverse habitat than a monoculture of marram on an uninterrupted dune chain. The habitat provided by washovers and adjacent sparsely vegetated dune slopes forms the preferred breeding ground of the Piping Plover. This species is currently declining throughout its range and at present numbers only about 300 to 350 pairs in eastern Canada, 50 to 60 of which nest on P.E.I. In 1978 ten of these pairs nested on Cavendish sandspit, an area which contains 12 washovers.

And so the point I wish to make is that dune systems should be permitted to operate according to their own dynamics, without the help or hindrance of human interference. If a dune does become breached, either through human or more natural causes, the sensible thing to do is to leave it alone. Past experiences have shown that efforts at dune restoration generally have little or no effect anyway. However, in adopting such a hands-off policy, it will be as important to effectively control human activities that might accelerate dune decline as to resist the temptation to plug the gaps and "save" the dunes. Although some of our efforts in management and mis-management of the barrier beach/dune complex may have improved habitat in certain ways, we know so little about this type of coastal engineering that at present we are best advised to leave the job to nature.

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The Story of Killey

The Sparrow Hawk (now known in scientific circles as Kestrel), a bird slightly larger than a robin, is the smallest of the four falcons which occur in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. They are noted and loved by many for their grace and prowess, and are said to be the fastest fliers in the avian world.

Late in the afternoon of July 10 1975 I was presented with a young Sparrow Hawk. It had been found squatting on the floor of a barn in the Berwick area about noon of the day before. The pattern of its plumage indicated it was a female and although it was almost fully feathered, it was sporting a very brief bob-tail and its head showed considerable natal down protruding. Her benefactor mentioned that he had been unable to induce her to eat and marvelled that she was still alive after a fast of approximately 30 hours. He seemed quite relieved when I said I would do what I could for the little waif.

The food of Sparrow Hawks is varied, ranging from mice, small birds, small snakes to large insects such as grasshoppers and crickets. The bird was not near death from starvation as she ferociously struck at me with her talons when given the opportunity. I placed her in my so-called "bird hospital" - a large airy wired enclosure in the cellar of my house and with little delay presented her with the still warm remains of an English Sparrow the feathers of which I had partially plucked in order to make the offering more palatable. But ravenous as she must have been, the food was spurned and was still untouched when I left her for the night. This was not wholly surprising, for the bird was still in a state of what might be called 'fear paralysis'. When I visited her early the following morning it was most gratifying to find that all that was left of the sparrow was its beak, legs and some flight feathers.