

TINY BUT MIGHTY - THE EUROPEAN GREEN CRAB INVASION:

One of Prince Edward Island's newest wildlife species will probably mean some significant changes in the populations of native species. The European green crab (*Carcinus maenas*) is a shore crab with adults measuring about 7.5 cm (3") across. Their native distribution is along the coasts of the North and Baltic Seas. This predatory species has earned the nickname of coyote of the crab world because of its ability to adapt and spread. It eats more than 150 different types of animal and plant life, can withstand freezing temperatures, and can survive three or more months without food.

The green crab thrives in both fresh and salt water. Despite its name, the shell (carapace) color can actually vary from dark, mottled green to orange or red, with yellow patches on the dorsal carapace. It is a very effective forager learning and improving upon its food-gathering skills. Studies have revealed that this crab species is quicker and more dexterous than most crabs. It opens bivalve shells in more ways than other crabs and has a very good appetite with a single adult reportedly being capable of eating 40 half-inch clams per day. They are reputedly quite pugnacious and can devour crabs as large as their selves. As green crabs prey on numerous types of organisms, these crabs are potential competitors for the food sources of native fish and bird species. Their other traits combined with a reproductive capability of 200,000 eggs in a single breeding means a strong potential to displace native species.

The green crab has already invaded numerous coastal communities outside of its native range, including South Africa, Australia, and both coasts of North America. An able colonizer and efficient predator, this small shore crab has the potential to significantly alter any ecosystem it invades. It has been blamed for the collapse of the soft-shell clam industry in Maine and losses of Dungeness crabs on parts of the West coast. Introduced to San Francisco in eel grass used to pack crates of lobsters from the north eastern United States, it spread from there to Coos Bay, Oregon in only eight years.

[Adapted from web articles by Washington Sea Grant program, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, and "Tiny Crab Could Pose Big Problem" by D. Williams on the green crabs invasion in the Pacific North-west.]

THE SOCIETY LOSES A FRIEND; PLOVERS LOSE A CHAMPION: by Island Nature Trust Staff

Cousin's Pond Beach has been a very busy home to as many as three plover pairs for many years. Never far away, Neil and Sally Bennett watched over the beach, spending hundreds of hours putting up signs, passing out information, letting the throngs of beach users look at the birds through their scope and binoculars and so much more. From their cottage just yards away, they would intercept human intruders at the drop of a hat. Their efforts to protect the Island's only endangered species were not restricted to just this beach. They often visited and reported on the plovers at several beaches in eastern Prince County.

In February, Neil Bennett passed away suddenly. He is survived by Sally, his wife and partner of 40 years. Amongst many community and volunteer activities, Neil was a member of the Board of Directors of the Island Nature Trust and an active participant in his local watershed enhancement association in addition to his plover guardian work. Neil was provincial coordinator of the plover guardian program for P.E.I. for three years, an underappreciated and thankless job. He toiled and troubled and got volunteers on to beaches across the province.

Neil will be so greatly missed and very dearly remembered by all.

[*Editor's Note:* Neil was a frequent contributor of sightings to the *Island Naturalist* and both he and Sally shared many an hour with us at our meetings or on field trips. In memory of his efforts, the Autumn Birding Classic has been renamed to the Neil Bennett Autumn Birding Classic. His work will live on through the new sightings and stories that are generated from these outings and from the contributions to this fund raiser which will support the creation of new natural areas on the Island.]