

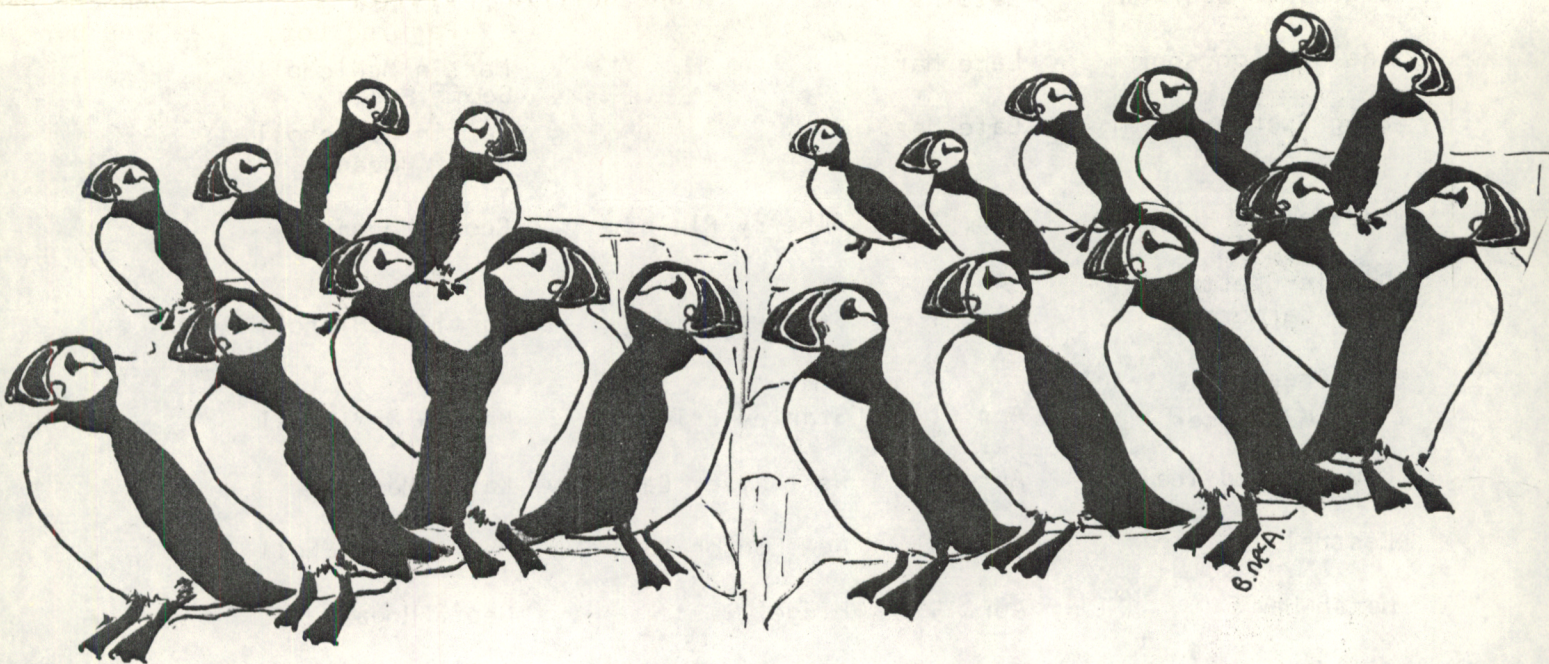
BIRD CITIES

Where to go on this summer's vacation? Instead of heading for peace and tranquility in the country, why not try for an ornithological adventure in a "city". Along the coasts of Atlantic Canada lie a chain of seabird metropolises, where summer turns a rocky island or cliff into a bussle of traffic and commotion. Raucus residents of these cities establish their own private lots with much complaint and clamour, and each comes and goes with no regard for traffic rules or neighbours' heads. Newly hatched youngsters, as they quickly learn not to stray over the neighbour's fence, add to the uproar.

Such is a typical scene on breeding grounds of Gannets, Murres, Razorbills, Kittiwakes, and Puffins. These are the "primary seabirds" - that spend most of their lives far offshore, and come to land only to breed on precipitous cliffs and bare islets. On Prince Edward Island we lack this kind of habitat, but have instead numerous small colonies of cormorants, gulls, terns, and Black Guillemots: All inshore birds which don't readily venture out of land's sight.

To see colonial nesters of the high seas, we betake ourselves elsewhere - perhaps to the most famous seabird colony of them all: Bonaventure Island on the Gaspé coast. Here, tour boats cruise under the towering red sandstone cliffs, while gannets wheel and turn, coming and going from their ledges high above. A gannet can be told from a distant gull by its awkward, stiff-winged flight, as much as by its larger size. Black-legged Kittiwakes (of which some 30,000 nest on Bonaventure), have a gulls' basic coloration, but more bouyant and dainty flight.

Manoeuvring through the flocks, with their whirring buzzy flight, Common Murres and Razorbills reach narrow ledges and crevices to feed their young or trade incubation duties with their mates. One bird you may not see on Bonaventure is the Common Puffin; but this small, sadeyed auk with the clown beak still nests in good numbers on Bird Island not far from Sydney, Cape Breton Island. Again, access is easy through regular boat tours.



Elsewhere along the Maritimes Coast, bird cities tend to be rather more like villages. Seabirds nest in small numbers along the south shore of Nova Scotia