

In addition to the 97 bird species seen on the two days, a couple of other species were heard but not seen. They were: Winter Wren (we did see a Merlin catch a small bird that was probably a wren) and Hermit Thrush. Vernon saw 4 Baltimore Orioles. There was also a probable Cooper's Hawk (or possibly a world record size Sharpie?).

I had to leave the group in mid-afternoon on Thursday and so don't know how things went as Vern and Dwayne headed into the National Park. I got a call from Dwayne to tell me that they had picked up a Little Gull at Tracadie Harbour and Downy Woodpecker in the Park. Two excellent days of birding, made so largely through the birding skills of Vern and Dwayne.

## UNDERGROUND FIRE:

By Sharon Neil

One "crisp" morning early last month, I noticed steam rising from a manhole at the corner of Edward and Fitzroy Streets. That night I had a vivid dream of the underground fire that I had witnessed as a child at our summer cottage in 1958. Behind a row of cottages, fronting on the harbour, was a woods, mostly spruce, what I would call the typical woods of those days, old trees and young, moss and lots of tree roots running along above the ground. One summer day, we children discovered smoke, occasional small flames, and crackling noises at the edge of these woods, directly behind the cottages. The ground was warm to very, very hot. The underground burning eventually spread to an area several hundred yards in length. The fathers put it out, though they said it would have to be watched. It was they who told us it was an underground fire; my memory of the explanation was that it was a fire that would have started spontaneously and, because it was spreading underground, would appear to start up in different spots many yards apart.

As if the woods didn't hold enough mysteries already to keep us enthralled!

The fathers, of course, are all gone now. The woods was destroyed in May 1986 in a massive fire (started by someone burning garbage a long distance away).

*Editor's Note: The phenomenon of underground fires in forests is actually quite common especially in coniferous forests like black spruce. One of the problems with the Portage fires of 1960 which burned around 8,000 ha was the underground spread of fire. There are a variety of types which include underground peat fires, fires travelling in root channels, holdover fire from a previous land clearing fire which acts like a banked fire in a root system, etc. Normally it requires certain conditions such as a long dry period or drought but it can occur in other conditions such as land clearing operations before the root systems are removed from the ground.*

*Lightning fires are a very common cause of fire especially in the boreal forests and in some pine forests. There are historic records of lightning being a cause of deaths to farmers and livestock in the 1800s on the Island. Even though we have lots of lightning here, it is normally associated with rain. In the past 26 years I have been fighting forest fires here, we only have records of three fires caused by lightning out of the hundreds of fires for which we have records. One of the three was rained out. Almost all fires in recent years are human caused and the written records I have been able to access to date suggest that this recent trend reflects fire causes here in days of old.*

## NEWS FROM ABOUT:

Compiled by Dan McAskill

The tall flower stocks of evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*) are quite fragrant and, around dusk, emit a phosphorescence that helps to attract moths to the nectaries. (adapted from Nature Canada's Nature's Night Life by Diana Beresford-Kroeger Vol. 33:2)

The emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*) was inadvertently introduced to Michigan from Asia about a decade ago. Native ash species have no resistance to this pest and, if this outbreak in the Windsor, Ontario area is not contained, the future survival of the five native species of ash in Canada could be threatened (adapted from