

Volume VII October 2013

The season is fast approaching!

MTRI has beautiful blank holiday greeting cards for sale that depict marine species at risk. Elkpen (<http://www.elkpen.com/>) painted the stunning images. The cards are sold for \$3 each, or a full set for \$15. Discounted prices for bulk orders of more than 12 sets. To order, please email info@merseytobeatic.ca or call 682-2371. Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute 9 Mount Merritt Road, Kempt, Nova Scotia B0T 1B0 www.merseytobeatic.ca



Don't forget about our Annual Open House and Christmas Dinner! All members of MTRI are invited to our annual Open House and wreath-making workshop at MTRI on December 6th at 2pm as well as Christmas dinner at Mersey River Chalet's Cascades Restaurant at 5pm. To reserve your spot at either event, please email info@merseytobeatic.ca. The wreath-making costs \$10 for materials to make your own wreath. Call MTRI for dinner ticket prices or keep an eye on the website. Space is limited and it's first-come, first-served so let us know right away!

Second Annual Science Conference

MTRI is hosting its Second Annual Science Conference on November 1, 2013. This event aims to bring together the community of researchers, land stewards and conservation enthusiasts in southwest Nova Scotia.

The public is invited to attend! Those involved in research, monitoring or stewardship in the biosphere reserve are invited to share their work through an oral or poster presentation. This is a great opportunity to learn about current projects, collaborate with researchers, and engage in discussions about future work. The conference is taking place at the NSCC Lunenburg campus in Bridgewater.



There is still time to register! If you would like to attend the conference, please fill out a registration form and return to jen.randall@dal.ca by Monday October 21st. Registration forms are available on the MTRI website. Cost to attend is \$30, or \$20 for students.

Have you seen a Ribbonsnake?

Ribbonsnake sightings this time of year are particularly valuable as they provide important clues to where these threatened snakes may be spending the winter. We know that, like other snake species, they need to go to underground sites where they can avoid freezing. However, we know very little about where these sites are located, how far they are from the wetlands where snakes spend the summer, what types of habitat they need, and how many snakes use each site. You can help by reporting any sightings of ribbonsnakes to our toll-free reporting line at 1-866-727-3447 or filling out our online form at www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings.



Blanding's Turtle Hatchlings are Emerging!

Each fall Blanding's turtle hatchlings dig their way up from their nests in the ground and start their life's journey. These toonie-sized turtles face many threats as they make their way to their overwintering habitats. If they are lucky enough to survive their first several years of life, they grow larger and become increasingly safe from predators. It takes approximately 20 years before they are mature and they can live over 70 years!

Every year a team of dedicated volunteers protects Blanding's turtle nests in the three known populations in Nova Scotia. Volunteers return in the fall to monitor the nests and check for hatchlings. This year emergence started on September 2, relatively early, but the season has progressed slowly, with long gaps between nests emerging. Hatchlings were still emerging over the Thanksgiving weekend and as of October 15, there are still several nests yet to hatch. The cooler summer may have influenced hatchling success and incubation time. As well, heavy rains shortly after nests were laid caused some nests to flood and may be a factor in low nest success at some locations.



Loon Update!

MTRI staff and volunteers have completed this summer's loon fieldwork, including productivity and survivorship surveys and water quality testing. Territorial pairs nested, however high water levels resulted in many eggs being addled by flooding. Environment Canada's historical weather data puts last year's June/July rainfall at 162.0 mm, whereas this year's June/July rainfall amounted to 318.5 mm! A total of five chicks were observed on the surveyed lakes, with three chicks surviving the summer.

This summer introduced the loon crew to a new research focus on adult survivorship. To study this, we used spotting scopes to identify banded loons. In previous years, each banded loon was given a unique combination of coloured leg bands in addition to a numbered Canadian Wildlife Service metal band. Banding enables researchers to identify and monitor information about individuals such as a territory, site and mate fidelity, and productivity. A total of 28 separate banded loons were observed out of the 58 loons originally banded. All but one loon was sighted on the lake where it was originally banded, and one loon that was banded in 1995 as an adult female was sighted again on the same lake! We were also able to confirm that at least one loon was paired with a different loon than in previous years.



Lakeside dwellers and cottagers who are interested in becoming Loon Watch volunteers are encouraged to visit the MTRI website for Loon Watch volunteers at <http://www.merseytobeatic.ca/projects-freshwater-loonwatch.php>

Nova Scotians help com'bat' White-nose Syndrome!

As you may have seen over the past few months MTRI partnered with Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources to launch a website and hotline where people could submit their bat sightings. It was an unprecedented success! Over 2536 people visited the web page and 900 of them submitted over 1000 observations of bats in every corner of the province. This information has given us new insight into bat populations in Nova Scotia and indicates that bats in Cape Breton may not be affected by White Nose Syndrome yet.



Bats in Nova Scotia are threatened by a European fungus called *Geomyces destructans*. Overwintering bats on the Nova Scotia mainland have faced huge population declines where the fungus is present (95%). The collective knowledge and effort of Nova Scotians to report bat locations this summer surely set a precedent in conservation for Nova Scotia and beyond. Thank you and congratulations on your efforts.

Brad Toms, Wildlife Biologist, MTRI

Community Forest Update!

Following the flurry of excitement and community consultation last fall and winter, things may have seemed quiet over the summer on the community forest front, but several individuals from Annapolis, Queens and Lunenburg Counties, including MTRI staff, have been busy putting together a proposal for a working forest on 15,000 hectares in what was formerly known as the Medway District on the Bowater lands. Although community forests are a relatively new concept in Nova Scotia, they have been around in B.C., Ontario and Quebec for decades.

The province made a commitment to support community forests in their natural resources strategy for 2011-12, "The Path We Share", and in December 2012 called for an expression of interest for community forests in south west Nova Scotia.



The proponents of the Medway Community Forest Co-operative are proposing to work with the province on collaborative management of a working forest that is governed locally; that has multiple uses such as harvesting wood and non-timber forest products, recreation, eco-tourism, research and education; that returns benefits and any profits derived from the forest back into the community; and demonstrates truly sustainable and ecologically-based forest stewardship.

The proposal was submitted on the due date of August 22nd, and we are eagerly awaiting the government's response!