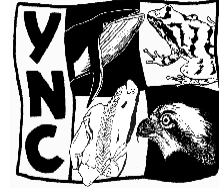




Young Naturalists Club (YNC)
Final report to Habitat Conservation Fund



<http://nature1st.net/ync/>
<http://picasaweb.google.com/YoungNaturalistsClub>

July 6, 2009

The YNC had a very successful third year, in part thanks to the support of the Habitat Conservation Fund!

The YNC is well supported and well loved by the natural history community of Nova Scotia. The Museum of Natural History continued its support by providing monthly meeting space for free. The other 5 supporting natural history organizations once again provide guest speakers and field trip leaders, and the board of directors and YNC Leaders assisted with writing grant proposals, planning meetings and field trips, and supervising on field trips.

(1) Project goal and objectives

- **Host monthly YNC meetings** – 8 meetings were held at the Museum of Natural History (no meeting in March). The highest turn-out was in September (Wetlands) = 24 kids. The lowest turnout was in October (Biodiversity) and January (Winter Adaptations) = 7 kids. The average number of kids per meeting = 14 kids.
- **Lead guided monthly field trips** - 7 fieldtrips were held in and outside HRM. The highest turn-out was for the September field trip (Belcher's Marsh) and April field trip (Montague Gold Mines) = 19 kids. The lowest turn-out was for January (Winter Adaptations) = 7. The average number of kids per field trip = 14 kids.
- **Provide opportunities for local naturalists to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with the next generation of naturalists.** Fourteen naturalists gave talks or lead field trips over the past year, including three DNR employees. All expressed their enjoyment with working with such keen kids. All were happy to share their natural history knowledge, and were also impressed by the knowledge that the kids already had.
- **Make the connection between wildlife preservation and conservation.** An emphasis was placed on each guest speaker or field trip leader describing some of the threats to the species or ecosystem they were speaking about, and what people could do to help conserve it. This worked well for many but not all of the topics (e.g., it was not possible to have a “conservation message” for the talk and field trip about historic gold mining in Nova Scotia). Children in the YNC often describe things they are doing at home to help wildlife. One member created an elaborate drawing of a forest with many, many species in it.

- **Showcase local outdoor opportunities to YNC families.** YNC families visited seven natural areas or natural history institutions in HRM, and one outside HRM (Wolfville). Many parents expressed being surprised and delighted to learn about great nature viewing and recreational areas close to or in the city.
- **Continue to offer educational programming regarding the natural history of Nova Scotia.** Everyone involved in the YNC, including parents, the board of directors, and YNC Leaders, learn interesting new things about the natural history of Nova Scotia each year. YNC Leaders often express that they enjoy learning natural history information while they are assisting with meetings and field trips. In addition, promotion of the YNC at conferences and other gatherings encourages others to get out into nature, get kids into nature, or think about starting their own nature club for kids.
- **Increase the number of chapters of Young Naturalists Clubs in Nova Scotia by two additional regional chapters.** It was not possible to start two new chapters of the YNC this year, due to funding and time constraints. It is a goal of the YNC to expand to additional chapters in the 2009/2010 year.
- **Enhance leadership and interpretation abilities of YNC leaders by providing opportunities for skills development, including leading nature-oriented activities, and assisting in managing the Club.** This was done in a minor way this year, with various YNC Leaders leading meetings, taking nature observations, and leading nature games during the AGM.

(2) Outline of the work completed

Planning for the 2008/2009 year began at the 2008 AGM. The board of directors and YNC began to map out which themes would take place during which months. The fall season's themes were determined, and over the summer guest speakers and field trip leaders were approached about leading a YNC event. In December 2008, a second planning meeting was held, and the winter and spring monthly themes were planned. Over the next few months guest speakers and field trip leaders were secured. And finally, the YNC Coordinator planned the AGM in the weeks leading up to June 20, 2009.

Administration of the Club was carried out throughout the year. This included: responding to emails and phone calls from new families, updating the website, tracking YNC spending, writing grant proposals, coordinating guest speakers and field trip leaders, coordinating carpooling for field trips, and attending environmental education meetings and conferences.

The website was upgraded in the past year, for free, by an outstanding volunteer in the natural history community. The YNC Coordinator worked with the website volunteer to create a site that is simple to understand, and simple to update. Although it was not

possible to create the “Start-up Kits” this year, there is a plan to create and distribute them in 2009/2010.

(3) Results

Forty-five “active” YNC families (i.e., have attended at least one meeting or field trip in the year) took part in the meetings and field trips. Seven meetings and eight field trips were planned, coordinated, and lead by the YNC Coordinator and Leaders, and natural history volunteers. Many families and YNC members provided positive verbal and written feedback about the field trips, including that they were educational, fun, and well planned.

Guest speakers and field trip leaders sincerely enjoyed sharing their knowledge and passion for natural history topics with the YNC members, often commented how knowledgeable and keen the kids are already.

Promotion of the YNC was done through monthly Environmental Education caucus meetings, and through having the YNC display at two conferences. The YNC is also promoted through the Museum of Natural History’s website.

(4) Assessment of achievements and lessons learned, measured against the project goals and objectives

The goal of the Young Naturalists Club is to provide positive experiences and learning opportunities for children related to natural history, primarily of Nova Scotia. These positive experiences in nature, and excitement regarding natural history knowledge, lead to the development of an environmental and conservation ethic in children. This goal is being achieved through the Club... kids often described positive experiences they have in nature outside of the Club, and describe using the skills they have learned in the Club in other places. YNC members also express their concern for the environment, through questions they ask, or solutions they suggest. Many also describe actions they are taking at home to reduce their environmental impact. Some members were inspired to produce artwork, or take photos (see our online photo albums) based on their experiences in the Club.

The objectives of carrying out meetings and field trips were achieved. Families appreciated the diversity of topics covered, the short driving distances, and being exposed to natural areas they can return to. The naturalists who were involved appreciated the very real and important opportunity to share natural history knowledge with the next generation (and have fun while doing it).

It was not possible this year to create the “Start-up Kits.” It would have taken more time and money, but preliminary work this year will lead to a success in this area next year. The demand for growing the Club is definitely present.

Other measures of success include media coverage about the YNC: an article in SNAP Halifax, an appearance on Breakfast Television, a letter in Chronicle Herald, and a D250 Medal for citizenry (coverage in SNAP Halifax). These are important for promoting the Club, but also indicate that the Club is valued by the community.

Also, the YNC Coordinator attended a conference of YNC groups from across Canada in November 2008 (in Ottawa). This focus-group style session (which included both YNC leaders and youth who had experienced YNC clubs), helped provide the basis for a report and action plan Nature Canada is preparing for getting kids into nature. Nature Canada appreciated the participation and suggestions from the YNC of Nova Scotia.

(5) Recommendations for follow-up

Promoting the Club is best achieved through word-of-mouth, followed by the YNC website and Museum website, then by the YNC display at events and media coverage. This is an important consideration when thinking about using posters or other print media to advertise the Club... how effective is it? It may be useful to develop a marketing strategy, since it is important to recruit new members each year.

The current model involving participation by natural history organizations on the board is going fairly well. This does not totally remove this task from the YNC Coordinator's workload, since all guest speakers and field trip leaders seem to ultimately need to confer with the Coordinator before leading an event. It is very helpful to have YNC Leaders to share the supervisory duties, and to help out with grant writing and occasional other administrative projects.

It is recommended to continue to run the Halifax chapter as it is, and use it as a model to start other chapters in other Nova Scotian communities. This will increase the workload for the central YNC Coordinator, so a part time or full time salary is needed to cover this additional work.

The Habitat Conservation Fund was recognized on the YNC website, in the newspaper story about the YNC in SNAP, and at the YNC's Annual General Meeting. A copy of the newspaper article was send early this year to the Habitat Conservation Fund secretary.