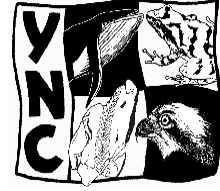


Young Naturalists Club (YNC)  
Final report to Habitat Conservation Fund  
Project year 2010/2011



<http://nature1st.net/ync>

October 2011

The YNC enjoyed a very successful fifth year, thanks to the generous, long-term support of the Habitat Conservation Fund! Thank you very much for enabling the YNC to attain its goal of bringing educational nature experiences to more Nova Scotian children.

The YNC is well supported by the Nova Scotian natural history community. The Museum of Natural History continued its support by providing a free monthly meeting space for the Halifax YNC. The Museum of Natural History organized an alternate meeting space for the YNC to meet at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic when the “Sue the Dinosaur” exhibit occupied all available space at the Museum of Natural History for part of 2010-2011. The Museum of Natural History also helped the YNC to obtain and organize free monthly meeting spaces for three new YNC chapters in areas of Nova Scotia outside Halifax. The other five supporting natural history organizations once again provided guest presenters for YNC meetings and leaders for YNC field trip. The supporting natural history organizations also provided the YNC board of directors with a representative from each organization. The YNC board of directors and leaders also assisted with editing grant proposals, planning meetings and field trips, and supervising field trips.

(1) Project goal and objectives

During our meetings and field trips, the children develop a sense of belonging. They look forward to seeing each other twice per month. They are excited to share their nature observations with their YNC friends. They all share an interest in nature and they really do have fond memories of participating in nature activities together.

**Host 10 monthly YNC meetings**

Ten YNC meetings were held at the Museum of Natural History and at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic (September to May). June's meeting was held at Saint Mary's University. Children shared their nature observations. They bring in drawings and verbal descriptions of things they have seen, digital photos they have taken, and sound recordings they have made. They listen to guest speakers and ask lots of good questions which show how much knowledge they are absorbing. They participate in hands-on activities such as building nest boxes and planting trees. They learned how to identify bog and wetlands plants, aquatic birds, algae, fungi, medicinal plants, trees and rocks.

The highest turn-out was in January 2011 for Wildlife Rehabilitation with veterinarian Dr. Helene Van Donninck (30 children). The lowest turnout was in December 2010 for Building Duck Nesting Boxes (14 children). This was because the meeting was two weeks before Christmas and there were a lot of events for children going on at the same time. This December's meeting is scheduled earlier in the month to avoid this. Our average meeting attendance is twenty children.

Eighty-two families have subscribed to the YNC group and receive regular emails. Fifty-seven different members attended at least one or field trip meeting in 2010-2011.

**Lead 9 monthly guided field trips**

Nine outdoor field trips to explore local natural habitats were held in and around HRM. The intrepid young naturalists braved wind, rain and frigid temperatures to participate in field trips! No field trips were cancelled due to weather. The children practiced identifying flora and fauna, skills they learned at YNC meetings, practiced using field guide. They also developed their desire to protect wild areas, including areas considered to be 'wastelands' by some, such as coastal barrens, bogs, ephemeral ponds, marshes... They learned that there is no such thing as a 'wasteland', because they learned about the organisms which live in each habitat.

The highest turn-out was for the September 2011 field trip to the Coastal Barrens (28 children). Despite temperatures between minus twenty-five and minus thirty degrees for the January and February 2011 field trips, we had very good turnout for Signs of Animals in Winter with two wildlife biologists and our Waterfowl Walk with two birders. The lowest turn-out was in November 2011 (14 children). This is likely because it is quite a long drive to the Natural Resources Education Centre (NREC) in Middle Musquodoboit. In general, the greater the distance to the field trip, the lower the attendance. I tried to mitigate this by driving six people to this field trip, and organizing car-pooling for other families. The NREC offers such interesting programs for children that it is always

enticing to take the YNC there once per year. It was between minus twenty-five and minus thirty degrees on that afternoon. Our average field trip attendance is twenty-one children.

**Provide opportunities for local naturalists to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with the next generation of naturalists.**

Twenty-one enthusiastic naturalists gave presentations and/or lead field trips in 2010-2011. They ranged from biologists, to hunters, to geologists. We also had our three regular volunteer assistants who are all biologists. One field trip leader was Sara Forde, a nature educator at the Natural Resources Education Centre. The YNC members really enjoyed learning from Sara because she is a dynamic speaker and the knowledge she shared was interesting and not readily available elsewhere.

Many of the presenters are so inspiring that they immediately influence the present behaviour and future goals of the children. We ask presenters to share not just knowledge but also what steps we can take to reduce negative impacts caused by humans. Laurie Lacey motivated children to identify and protect indigenous plants. Christine Ward-Paige made kids want to take the practical steps she listed to protect endangered sharks. Helene Van Donninck motivated the children to take steps to protect wildlife.

Naturalists enjoy sharing their knowledge with children who are so interested in nature. They are also impressed by what the YNC children already knew about the natural world.

**Make the connection between wildlife preservation and conservation.**

We asked presenters and leaders to teach YNC members about habitat and how to conserve it, as well as about organisms which live in habitats. We asked presenters to teach about threats to habitats and how to reduce threats. We have twenty to thirty minutes of questions after each presentation and the children invariably ask guests what they can do in their daily lives to conserve habitats. The children bring this knowledge back to their classrooms and share it with their classmates and teachers.

YNC children created habitat by planting two hundred trees (native species cultivated in a local nursery) in an urban park which lacked habitats for birds and other animals. The children also helped to create habitat by building nest boxes for mergansers and golden eyes. They had a lot of fun with the volunteers from the NS Federation of Hunters and Anglers. They would like to build bat boxes in the future, because they learned about bats from a Dalhousie researcher in 2010. They also learned which plants they can grow in their yards to create habitats for pollinators and birds.

**Showcase local outdoor opportunities to YNC families.**

YNC families visited ten different natural areas in or around HRM from September 2010 to June 2011. Families tell us that they frequently return to these areas with friends and family members after being introduced to them by the YNC. They love to discover little

known gems such as Birch Lake Blue Mountain Wilderness Area, Suzie's Lake, the 200 year old hemlock on Old Coach Trail in Bedford, untouched old growth forest in Waverley-Long Lake Wilderness Area in Lake Echo, Micou's Island in St Margaret's Bay which we walked to at low tide. The YNC provides very detailed directions to ensure everyone can discover these beautiful areas. We include directions for access by bus whenever possible.

YNC members have positive experiences in these natural areas. Therefore they want to preserve them for the future.

The YNC also disseminates information to YNC families about all other nature education opportunities. We advertize our events on many local websites and list serves, such as Sustainable Maritimes, Environmental Educators and NS Environmental Network. When we see other events which would interest YNC members, we pass the details along by posting to our list serve. For example, the YNC promoted DNR's Kids in the Forest Day, Hope for Wildlife events, Sackville Rivers Association events, events offered by the Museum of Natural History and many other organizations.

**Continue to offer educational programming regarding the natural history of Nova Scotia.**

Everyone involved in the YNC - including children and their adult family members, members of the board of directors, volunteer leaders - all learn interesting new things about the natural history of Nova Scotia each year. All these people learn from the designated guest presenters and field trip leaders. They also learn from all information shared by participants in YNC events. Everyone brings interesting bits of knowledge and experience with them and they happily share it with others. YNC leaders like the fact that they get to learn about nature while they are volunteering.

The YNC coordinator promoted opportunities for the public to learn about nature at teachers' conferences, in-services, academic and community volunteer fairs at Dalhousie, St Mary's, Mount Saint Vincent and Acadia Universities. The YNC coordinator also promoted nature activities at community Youth Days, Youth Fairs and festivals related to the environment across the province in order to raise awareness about the YNC. She encouraged local people to start thinking about the possibility of creating YNCs in their communities. The YNC recruited three new volunteer leaders in Halifax. They are graduate students in resource management and biology. The YNC recruited and trained three new volunteer leaders in Pictou County, two in Sydney, two in Truro, three in Wolfville, two in Lunenburg County, three in Stewiacke, and one in Hubbards.

**Increase the number of chapters of Young Naturalists Clubs in Nova Scotia by two additional regional chapters.**

Thanks to generous financial support from the Habitat Conservation Fund, the YNC laid the groundwork for seven new chapters of the YNC. Five new chapters are now operating successfully. Two are almost ready to start hosting their own events. There are more

communities interested in creating new chapters. We want to ensure all the new chapters are well established. We created “Start-up Kits” to show people how to create and run a YNC chapter. The kits were not distributed, as originally planned, through the NS Museum’s school loan kits network because this program ended. Instead, the coordinator researched and engaged local people to find willing and capable volunteer leaders. Local natural history clubs helped the YNC make connections in each community. The coordinator offered workshops in communities that wanted to start a local YNC chapter. The coordinator provided practical support in finding free meeting spaces, speakers, leaders, free ways to promote events in the community, as well as how to recruit members and how to communicate with them.

**Engage YNC members more through an improved and more interactive website.**

The coordinator tried to make the current website more interactive and use it to connect members. The YNC is very grateful to have a free website, but is also limited by the free platform. It is very challenging to use and there are many things which it cannot do. We learned through our member surveys that once people become members of the YNC, they mostly rely on regular emails to stay up to date with YNC activities.

(2) Outline of the work completed

1. Planned meeting and field trip themes for the fall season, arranged for guest speakers and field trip leaders.
2. Created “Start-up Kits.” Developed promotional materials.
3. Administered the YNC.
  - a. Contacted families about meetings and field trips
  - b. Updated website regularly
  - c. Supervised monthly meetings and field trips
  - d. Thanked guest speakers and field trip leaders
  - e. Promoted the YNC through word-of-mouth, websites, community calendars and other opportunities such as conferences, symposia, meetings of nature organizations.
4. Distributed “Start-up Kits” and promotional materials.
5. Contribute to improvement of website. The YNC did not receive funding to improve it.
6. Planned meetings and field trips for winter and spring seasons, arranged for guest speakers and field trip leaders.
7. Conducted workshops for communities interested in creating local chapters of the YNC.

8. Launch new website. The YNC did not receive funding to launch it.

### Planning and organizing (# 1. and 6.)

The YNC coordinator read all member surveys, then discussed with the representatives of naturalist organizations on the YNC Board which themes would be interesting and possible in 2010-2011. The themes were determined, and guest presenters and field trip leaders were sought out, contacted and it was explained to them how the YNC functions. The coordinator planned the June 2011 AGM, including a nature presentation about the use of native plants on green roofs. The YNC successfully attained its outcomes of hosting educational presentations and field trips which were well planned, promoted and attended.

Administration of the Club was carried out throughout the year. This included: responding to emails and phone calls from new families, potential new club leaders, potential new volunteers, potential guest speakers; posting to the YNC list serve; updating the website; advertizing YNC events in magazines, newspapers, bulletin boards, electronic community calendars, radio public service announcements; tracking YNC spending; writing grant proposals; writing reports to funders; coordinating guest speakers and field trip leaders; coordinating carpooling for field trips; organizing and attending environmental education meetings; promoting the YNC at conferences and community events; attending workshops in order to develop contacts in communities across NS;

### Created and distributed YNC “Start-up Kits” and promotional materials (# 2. and 4.)

The coordinator researched materials created by YNCs in New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia and nature organizations in the USA. She corresponded with coordinators in other provinces, consulted regularly with environmental and nature education leaders in Nova Scotia. Resources were compiled and evaluated. New promotional materials (including posters, pamphlets, business cards...) were developed. The and new promotional materials. The outcomes will be evaluated by on-going verbal and written feedback from members, parents, and guests, and year-end surveys of YNC member families. So far the YNC has received very positive feedback on a regular basis and on year-end surveys.

### Administration (# 3.)

The coordinator regularly communicated with the public and YNC members regarding meetings, field trips and other opportunities related to nature. The coordinator regularly updated the YNC website. The coordinator regularly supervised monthly meetings and field trips, and car-pooled members to events. The coordinator thanked guest speakers and field trip leaders and sent thank you cards signed by the children. The coordinator regularly promoted the YNC through word-of-mouth, websites, community calendars and other opportunities such as teachers' conferences, environmental educators' symposia,

adult nature club meetings, community events attended by children and families – including newcomers to Nova Scotia.

The coordinator regularly updated the contact list of people interested in YNC activities, updated accounts, updated the website, answered emails, wrote grant proposals, answered questions of guests, arranged resources and planned activities, made promotional materials, represented the YNC at environmental education-related workshops and conferences, represented the YNC on the Environmental Education Caucus of the NSEN, on the board of Nature Nova Scotia. The coordinator wrote the year-end report to the Habitat Conservation Fund, to demonstrate how HCF funding enabled the YNC to meet its goals. We achieved the outcomes of running an organized club where members are eager to learn about nature.

#### Start-up Kits (# 4. and 7.)

The coordinator researched, created, promoted and distributed Start-up Kits to potential leaders who were interested in creating a free nature club in their community. Follow-up discussions and ongoing interactive learning sessions continue with local leaders. The support each club receives is tailored to meet its specific needs. It also recognizes and respects the local leaders' skills and their knowledge of their community.

### (3) Results

Five new chapters of the YNC were created in Pictou County, Lunenburg County, Kings County, Hants County and Hubbards. Each new chapter will offer presentations and field trips monthly from September to June. Chapters in Sydney and Indian Brook should be running regular programming soon. There is strong interest among residents of Annapolis County and Queens County. This expansion has been designed to be sustainable over the long term. The new chapters were created slowly and carefully, paying attention to the local conditions in each community. This expansion would not have been possible without the generous support of the Habitat Conservation Fund. Our goal is to foster a spirit of habitat conservation, based on knowledge, across the province.

The Halifax YNC continued to flourish. Sixty-three youth members attended at least one or field trip meeting in 2010-2011. Ten nature presentations and nine field trips were successfully planned, coordinated, and led by the YNC coordinator, volunteer leaders and naturalists. Many YNC youth and parents or guardians completed our detailed written surveys and suggested topics and locations to learn about in the future. We analyzed their feedback and incorporated it into our planning in order to improve future events. We try to honor the requests of children for specific nature topics whenever we can find a naturalist willing to teach about it.

The YNC was promoted on television, in magazines and newspapers, on bulletin boards, on electronic community calendars, in public service announcements on radio, at environmental education events, through email lists, homeschooling networks, and displays at conferences. Most people attend our events with friends or via word of mouth.

Many families discover the YNC via the link to our website from the Museum of Natural History's website.

We provided positive experiences and learning opportunities related to nature in Nova Scotia. These experiences and excitement about nature support the development of a conservation ethic in participants. YNC members demonstrate concern for the environment through their questions and actions to reduce their environmental impact. Children draw pictures, take photos and write about their experiences.

The objectives of carrying out meetings and field trips were achieved. Participants appreciated the wide range of nature topics discussed, and being introduced to nearby natural areas which they continue to visit after YNC field trips. Naturalists invested a great deal of creativity, energy and time in appreciated the very real and important opportunity to share natural history knowledge with the next generation (and have fun while doing it).

The Habitat Conservation Fund was recognized in the YNC Start-Up Kit, on the YNC website, on the display board at conferences, in postings to subscribed members, on YNC promotional brochures and posters.

(4) Assessment of achievements, measured against project goals and objectives.

We surpassed our goal of hosting eight meetings and eight field trips by hosting ten presentations and ten outdoor field trips. We received useful suggestions, positive verbal and written feedback from participants, guest speakers and trip leaders. We also received positive feedback on our annual survey of children and guardians. Behan Crowell, Curator of Education at the Museum of Natural History, commended the YNC for its engaging programs, welcoming environment, and prolific public promotion in media frequented by parents. She appreciated the enthusiasm of our members!

We made and distributed fifteen Start-up Kits. There were eleven subsequent requests for information, as a result of the kits. Seven of these led to requests for meetings or workshops. Five of these requests led to the creation of new chapters. After workshops, content was added to kits or modified, based on the needs of workshop participants. Feedback to date on the usefulness of the Start-up Kits shows the kits contain information and documents which are helpful to new leaders, but they really appreciate having access to immediate responses from the full-time coordinator via phone or email. It was very encouraging to each new chapter to have the provincial coordinator attend each chapter's first meeting or field trip in order to reassure them that everything was proceeding as it should. The content of the Kit generates discussion and questions from prospective local leaders. Summative feedback will be collected and analyzed at the end of the first year of operation, in June 2012. It will be used to improve future Kits.



## (5) Recommendations for follow-up

Representatives of nature organizations on the YNC board of directors recommended guest presenters for the Halifax chapter from 2006 to 2011. This still leaves a lot of work for the coordinator since speakers and trip leaders need support in the months leading up to events. We cover a wide range of nature themes, so every meeting and field trip has different requirements. HCF funding resulted in at least six chapters of the YNC. All these local volunteer leaders need guidance regarding how best to recruit guest speakers, attract participants, organize meeting spaces and trip locations. It was very efficient to have a full-time, paid coordinator in 2010 to 2011.

The Halifax chapter will continue to function as it is. It is recommended that there be an emphasis and active, participatory learning. Halifax was the model for the newly created chapters. Yet it is important to listen to the wisdom and experience of local leaders and parents when planning events in other communities. Fortunately, some local leaders and families are very eager to suggest guests, themes and nature areas to explore. It is recommended that local leaders continue to be provided with vital ongoing support.

It would be useful to have a 'members only' sharing section on the YNC website where local leaders and the coordinator could exchange information and ask questions. If information helps one local leader, then it will likely also benefit the other leaders. If queries are posted in a central accessible location, then the coordinator only needs to answer a question once, rather than up to six times from six chapters. Another reason for such a place is that knowledge will be generated during this first year of operation (2011-2012) which will be invaluable to chapters which start in 2012-2013 or later. A common sharing site would archive institutional knowledge so that it is available to future volunteer leaders.