COMPASS

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

THE QUEBEC-LABRADOR FOUNDATION/ATLANTIC CENTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT | FALL 2017

Promoting global leadership–one person at a time–through conservation and stewardship of natural resources and cultural heritage. Inspired in the Atlantic Region, shared worldwide.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dr. Kathleen Blanchard is widely recognized by regional and international organizations for her pioneering work in community-based conservation, and is renowned for her noted success with QLF's flagship program, Marine Bird Conservation, established in 1978 to address the rapid decline of seabird populations along the North Shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Serving as the Program Director, throughout its 20-year duration, Dr. Blanchard developed, implemented, and tested a variety of conservation strategies that were consistent with the philosophy of QLF Founder, Robert A. Bryan and the QLF approach of working with people. Outcomes were measured quantitatively and qualitatively. Over time, Dr. Blanchard demonstrated the impact of education and stewardship in achieving conservation objectives. The program framework involving extensive up-front research, planning, implementation, and evaluation served as a model for conservation programs across the globe.

More than 100 QLF Interns and locally hired staff have worked on the program, gaining practical experience and perspectives that are proven valuable in their professional work. With Interns and staff, Dr. Blanchard encourages local communities to take an active role in managing natural resources and promoting initiatives for sustainable development, and provides hands-on experiential training for the next generation's conservation leaders and practitioners. Many of these community-based projects are recognized in-region as successful models for Biodiversity Conservation.

Continuing in the spirit and legacy of community-based conservation, Dr. Blanchard manages a series of projects under the umbrella of the Biodiversity Conservation Program. Dr. Blanchard is a Senior Consultant with the Quebec-Labrador Foundation through a collaborative relationship with Intervale Associates Inc., a not-for-profit organization incorporated in Newfoundland and Labrador. Its program mission is to conserve biodiversity, interpret heritage, and protect the integrity of rural livelihoods. Intervale conducts programs that focus on fish and wildlife conservation and the recovery of species at risk, working with regional networks of communities, industries, indigenous organizations, universities, government, and citizens.

I know you will enjoy the read.

Elizabeth Alling
President
November 2017

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Biodiversity Conservation

Article by Dr. Kathleen Blanchard
QLF Senior Program Consultant
Biodiversity Conservation

Over the past several years, QLF has renewed its commitment to biodiversity conservation in the Atlantic region with a surge of new programs that benefit migratory birds, marine mammals, sea turtles, and the habitats that support them. The response from the region has been an outpouring of support by local communities, partnering organizations, and government funding programs. By 2015 the programs had achieved several outcomes for conservation, with promising signs of longer-term impact. In this brief overview, I hope to give readers a glimpse at how I approach program planning for biodiversity conservation. It is with the same perspective that has characterized my

QLF's team of intrepid wildlife researchers conduct a survey of endangered shorebirds along Newfoundland's southwest coast, 2017 ~ PHOTOGRAPH BY RUSSELL WALL

Minke whale in the early morning fog off Deer Island, New Brunswick. Minke and Humpback whales are often spotted in the Labrador Straits. PHOTOGRAPH BY GREIG CRANNA

life-long work in conservation more generally: focus on achieving conservation outcomes, while simultaneously working to ensure that the conservation initiatives benefit the communities most affected. After all, community-based conservation is my vocation!

Many species that frequent the Atlantic and Gulf of St. Lawrence regions desperately need the kind of help that nonprofit organizations such as QLF provide, namely, engaging people in positive conservation action. Populations of several North American shorebird species, whose southbound migration routes traverse wilderness areas and seascapes of eastern Canada, are declining at a rapid rate. Seabirds that breed on islands are being impacted by changes to marine ecosystems stemming from climate change. The endangered North Atlantic right whale has become a regular visitor to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where it encounters threats of collisions with ships and entanglement in fishing gear. Meanwhile, the marine and terrestrial ecosystems that support these species are being degraded by pollution, disturbance, and loss of habitat. People are observing signs of change, for example, this past summer's five-week delay in the arrival of capelin, a small forage fish and a crucial species to marine food chains. They react with

MAP ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN ENGLE

concern over issues such as plastic marine debris and the possible damage it may be causing to marine fisheries.

The overarching threats to biodiversity — loss of habitat, marine pollution and debris, impacts of climate change, and lack of awareness — and their impact across the globe was echoed by impassioned contributions of 30 participants representing 11 countries at the Biodiversity & Nature Conservation Workshop at the QLF *Congress* in Barcelona (November 2016). The challenges faced by conservation leaders, many of whom attended the *Congress*, are increasingly complex. How does QLF determine where to focus its efforts, and what strategies to implement, particularly given the modest financial resources that are available?

We begin by examining the list of endangered and threatened species in the region, i.e. those which scientists have determined to be at risk of imminent extinction, or those likely to become endangered if factors affecting vulnerability are not reversed. These species require immediate attention. We also review the list of other species whose populations have declined to the point of conservation concern or which risk further decline to the point at which they would be listed as endangered or threatened. We then examine the known threats to these species, and the priority actions that have been recommended jointly by scientists and other experts working through Recovery Teams. In most cases, one priority action is public engagement, specifically, participation by interest groups whose guided actions may result in improvement towards recovery. This is where QLF has an established track record of accomplishment. Laws and enforcement, when working alone, will not solve the problem for every species, nor will there be adequate financial resources that economic incentives would demand. Biodiversity conservation requires a growing generation of leaders and an informed, active citizenry that possess the knowledge, skill, and motivation for

Kiragu Mwangi, Senior Capacity Development Manager, BirdLife International, Cambridge, UK, with Dr. Blanchard at the QLF *Congress*, Barcelona, Catalonia, 2016 - PHOTOGRAPH BY GREIG CRANNA

Atlantic puffin *(Fratercula arctic)* - PHOTOGRAPH BY GREIG CRANNA

wise decision-making and collaboration among many interest groups.

Next, we consider the landscapes and seascapes in the Atlantic and Gulf regions where QLF has gained the trust and support of community members and organizations. From that base of support, we may be able to build a sustainable program. Sometimes, however, the conservation imperative requires working in an area where we are meeting people for the first time. Regardless of program history, building trust is an ongoing process; it cannot be taken for granted and it always requires time. An essential first step is to consult the people who interact with the species — fish harvesters, foresters, or farmers, for example — and to develop working relationships whereby they become partners in the initiative. If, for example, we want to find meaningful solutions to the threat to marine mammals and turtles caused by entanglement in fishing gear, we ask harvesters for their help. QLF's project on marine debris has been working with lobster harvesters in western Newfoundland to identify ways to reduce the threat of plastic ingestion created by improper disposal of plastic bait box liners at sea. Positive action includes engaging whole communities in beach clean-ups and quantifying waste so that people can monitor and celebrate their progress.

For many species of migratory birds, we need to broaden our knowledge base about where they breed and the habitats they use during long migrations, including intertidal flats, beaches, and heath barrens of our region. QLF Interns participate in population surveys led by Intervale, which track the timing and movements of shorebirds and seabirds, as well as studies into the nesting success of the endangered Piping Plover. During the annual index count of Piping Plover each June, QLF Interns receive training in shorebird identification and the use of binoculars — skills which they apply to other projects in the region. For example, this past summer, Mégane Déziel led a group of Interns conducting bird surveys on properties owned by the Nature Trust of New Brunswick. The Interns, some of whom had never previously conducted biological field work, helped fill knowledge gaps for a baseline considered essential towards conservation planning in that province.

> *"Conservation practitioners the world over have been arguing for a focused approach on reducing threats and measuring conservation outcomes."*

Conservation practitioners the world over have been arguing for a focused approach reducing threats and measuring conservation outcomes. While we may not be able to reduce the myriad threats encountered by migratory birds during their entire cycle of migration, we can focus on known threats within our region and work collaboratively with conservation authorities in other geographic areas of the species' ranges, including the southern hemisphere. QLF Interns working with Intervale on Piping Plover conservation, for instance, learn to identify and document threats on nesting beaches, such as dogs off leash or ATVs. As they collect data useful to conservation planning, they also contribute to conservation action by intercepting and informing beach users about what they can do to help plovers. Thus, QLF Interns, who make important career-related decisions soon after their Internships, experience the practicalities of field biology and conservation. In the *Compass Supplement, Taking the Long View*, Fall 2017, I describe some of QLF's work in seabird conservation, and what is currently being done to help protect nesting puffins, razorbills, and murres at Ile aux Perroquets on the Quebec Lower North Shore.

The smallest of actions by QLF Interns can mean the difference between whether an endangered Piping Plover or leatherback turtle survives or perishes that summer. In August of 2016, a leatherback turtle was found washed ashore on the east coast of

QLF Staff Member, Mégane Déziel, with Interns, conducts a bird survey on a preserve owned by the Nature Trust of New Brunswick, 2017 - PHOTOGRAPH BY MEGAN LALLI

Newfoundland. Its cause of death was determined to be a large plastic garbage bag, which researchers found in the animal's stomach during an autopsy. Leatherback turtles are particularly vulnerable to plastic bags drifting in the ocean currents, which the turtles mistake for their preferred food — jellyfish. Since 2014, teams of QLF Interns have been picking up plastic bait box liners along shorelines particularly receptive to marine debris — at an approximate average rate to be an astonishing 80 per hour! This will soon be changing, as our pilot study involving strong support from local lobster harvesters resulted this summer in a redirection of approximately 2,000 liners to a regional landfill site. This is only the beginning, as we work to increase that number, broaden our effort to include more harbors, and work with industry to explore alternative products to those made with plastic.

How do we make our conservation effort sustainable? With funding from the International Grenfell Association and support from local and regional partners, QLF has embarked on a multi-year program of engaging youth from the Great Northern Peninsula, Labrador Straits, and southern Labrador in a series of workshops called, *Training Youth as Citizen Scientists & Community Leaders through Changing Times*. The goal is a new generation of local leaders who possess the knowledge, skills, values, and positive spirit that will make communities vibrant and the fish and wildlife resources sustainable. The program teaches youth to identify, monitor, and conserve the terrestrial and marine species that are essential to local ecosystems and that need citizen support. Thus far, workshops have been held in regional schools and youth centers of at least nine communities of the Northern Peninsula and the Labrador Straits.

In July of this year, a three-day workshop was held for forty youth from southern Labrador, the Labrador Straits, and the Quebec Lower North Shore. Situated at the beautiful Point Amour Lighthouse Provincial Historic Site, youth were trained in using binoculars to observe and record their observations of whales and seabirds, thereby contributing as citizen scientists to a growing knowledge base. They learned also about impacts of climate change, every-day actions they could do to prevent pollution, and how to have fun and be safe in the outdoors. Special events included a tour of the lighthouse and a workshop on fly tying by Dutch angling expert Hans van Klinken. The lighthouse, school, and youth center workshops are made possible in part by the generous support of partnering organizations, businesses, and governmental departments. These include Intervale, the Community Youth Network, Provincial Historic Sites, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Department of Fisheries and Land Resources, Tuckamore Lodge, and several others.

Nature enthusiasts identify whales and seabirds, near Point Amour Lighthouse, L'Anse Amour, southern Labrador, 2017. PHOTOGRAPH BY HANS VAN KLINKEN

Adrean Ojoleck, Biodiversity Conservation Intern from Dalhousie University, participates in a beach cleanup as part of the Marine Debris project, Newfoundland, 2015.
PHOTOGRAPH BY DR. KATHLEEN BLANCHARD

The impacts of climate change on marine and terrestrial ecosystems is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity in the region. QLF is addressing that threat with a new project, beginning in 2017, which aims to reduce the release of methane and other greenhouse gases caused by the decomposition of organic waste at landfills on the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland. Within the project's first two weeks, we distributed 21 compost bins and led three workshops on composting organic waste. By the end of two years, the project hopes to achieve a reduction of more than 28 tons of organic waste entering landfills, which Canada's Department of Environment and Climate Change calculates as representing a reduction of over 38 tons of greenhouse gas emissions. We encourage everyone to participate. Small efforts by individuals do make a difference!

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