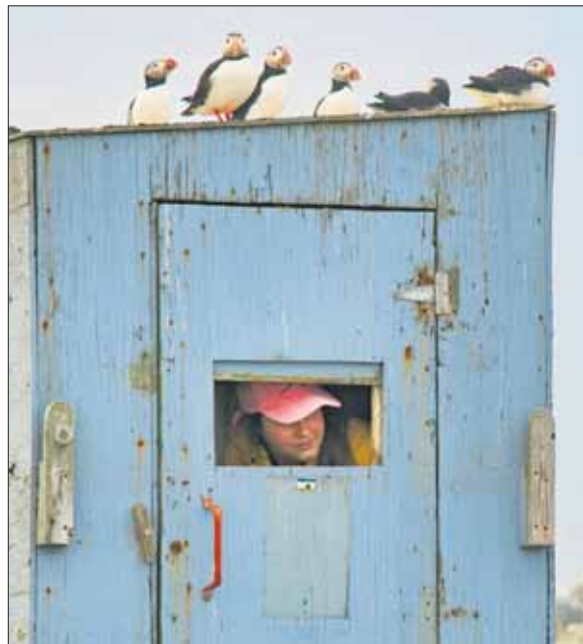


FARMLIVING



The reflection of the photography blind and lighthouse can be seen in this bird's eye. | ARLENE AND ROBIN KARPAN PHOTOS



Bird blinds are used to allow photographers to get close to birds without disturbing them.

Canadian-American disputed island where puffins rule

TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

Recent rhetoric about the United States taking over Canada reminds us that we have been through this before. Border conflicts that erupted over the years were resolved long ago — except for one.

Last summer we travelled to the site of the last remaining land dispute between the two countries, one that has been going since the War of 1812 when the United States tried unsuccessfully to invade Canada.

Tiny 20-acre Machias Seal Island lies in remote waters where the Bay of Fundy meets the Gulf of Maine. It's part of New Brunswick, and everything about the island is purely Canadian. It's staffed by the Canadian Coast Guard, a sign welcomes visitors to a Canadian Migratory Bird Sanctuary and the only flag flying is the Maple Leaf.

Despite this, the U.S. considers the island part of the state of Maine.

The Treaty of Ghent ended the War of 1812 and re-established borders to their pre-war posi-



Visitors access Machias Seal island by tour boat.

tions. Both sides claimed that Machias Seal Island was theirs, though for many years this desolate chunk of rock was not considered important enough to fight over.

New Brunswick built a lighthouse here in 1832 and one has been operating ever since.

The island has a population of

two — the lighthouse keepers.

While almost all other lighthouses in Canada have been automated, this one continues to be manned, not so much to keep the light burning but to maintain a presence for Canadian sovereignty.

The island's importance grew with the advent of tourism and

the expansion of the lobster fishery.

Both nations have taken an "agree to disagree" position and have an amicable arrangement that has kept conflicts at bay. For example, a small area around the island is known as the Grey Zone, where lobster fishermen from both countries operate.

Something similar happens with tourism, which was the reason for our visit. The island is an important seabird colony and is world-famous for its nesting puffins.

It's the only place in North America where visitors are allowed to land on a puffin colony and spend time in a viewing blind to watch and photograph these fascinating birds at amazingly close quarters. It ranked among the top wildlife trips we have taken anywhere.

To minimize disturbance to the birds, visits are carefully controlled.

Sea Watch Tours from New Brunswick's Grand Manan Island operates a trip once per day during the short summer nesting season from late June to late July. Only 15 people per day are allowed on the island, so trips are booked far in advance.

We left Grand Manan in thick fog that stayed with us for most of the 1.5-hour trip. But once we approached the island, the skies cleared. The 45-foot boat anchored offshore and a small skiff transferred us to shore, where we disembarked onto a slippery seaweed-covered ramp.

Getting to the photography blinds was quite an operation.

Our guide, Glen, gave us each a stick about a metre long to hold over our heads for protection.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >>



A skiff transfers visitors from the tour boat to the island.

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

The puffins and other seabirds didn't seem to care that we were there, but arctic terns, on the other hand, can get very upset. The theory is that if they dive-bombed us they would hit the sticks rather than our heads.

We made the short walk to the blinds without incident.

Resembling oversized outhouses, the blinds hold four people standing, with small openings on each side to watch and photograph. We spent a mesmerizing hour amid the bustling nesting colony with thousands of birds all around us.

While there are other species

on the island, most notably a huge number of razorbills, it's puffins that steal the show. Known as "clowns of the sea," they have an endearing nature with their kaleidoscopic bills and comical dispositions.

They were constantly scurrying around, heading out to sea to fish, running in and out of their nesting burrows and just hanging out on the rocks.

Some were so close that we could get photos of a puffin's head where a reflection of the blind and the island's lighthouse was visible in the bird's eye. Others seemed to be dancing on the roof of the blind.

As our boat rounded the island

to return to Grand Manan, we saw another boat approaching far in the distance.

Part of the concession to the disputed nature of the island is that one tour boat per day can also come from Maine. It operates under the same conditions, with only 15 people allowed. Though it comes from the U.S., passengers don't need passports to land on this Canadian island.

It's an innovative compromise to an international political quandary that seems to be working — so far.

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Razorbills are some of the other birds that can be seen on the island.



Machias Seal Island is world-famous for its nesting puffins. It is also claimed by both Canada and the United States.

Mental health counselling offered to producers

Family and Community Support Services in Coaldale, Alta., serves 16 rural municipalities in southeastern Alberta

BY GREG PRICE
WESTERN PRODUCER CONTRIBUTOR

Given the physical demands that agriculture has with the weighty responsibility of feeding the world, sometimes the mental weight of such a huge responsibility can be pushed aside.

However, help is available for farmers who need it.

"(Our) counselors have a clear understanding of the struggles that are specifically related to those who work in the agriculture industry. The stressors that impact farmers are somewhat different than the average person," says Michael Fedunec, a counselling services supervisor/counsellor for Family and Community Support Services, located in Coaldale, Alta.

"Most people's identities are not attached to what they do for a living, whereas farmers, it is their whole way of life. There is the old adage, you can try and take the farm out of the farmer, but you can't take the farmer out of the farm. You can't just say with their

stressors, 'oh, just quit your job.'"

FCSS offers an array of services to 16 rural municipalities in southeastern Alberta and works collaboratively with AgKnow and its team of therapists and counsellors.

Eighty per cent of its funding comes from the provincial government and the other 20 per cent comes from participating rural municipalities.

Fedunec said many factors can affect farmers' mental well-being, such as work/family balance, sufficient manpower, economic pricing of commodities and government regulations.

"Farming couples are trying to balance a healthy family life versus certain times of the year. Seeding time and harvest, they are working 16 to 18 hours days, and how do you maintain that family connection in the home?" he said.

Fedunec has worked with clients who have had to deal with the mental and spiritual anguish of suffering a death on their farm.

Most farmers have a suck it up, move on, get over it, or even have difficulty acknowledging their mental or even physical health issues.

MICHAEL FEDUNEC
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES

"There have been deaths on the farm as a result of farming accidents, so they are dealing with grief and loss and guilt and all those other things because they feel responsible for insuring their hired hands or whoever it may be are safe," he said.

Farmers can often suffer in silence with the "tough guy" persona that has been romanticized in western cinema but that at times can lead to tragic consequences.

"Most farmers have a suck it up, move on, get over it or even have difficulty acknowledging their mental or even physical health issues," said Fedunec.

"In fact, statistically, the rate of suicide among the agricultural industry is extremely high, much higher than I think the average person would even recognize. A lot of that has to do with often that they don't have a way out because they don't know who to talk to. They are the ones who have the most accessibility to the means to end their lives. They have containers full of chemicals, they have guns."

Some farms in Canada have been in the family tree for multiple generations, and there are doubts those roots will continue to grow.

"Transitions are the huge ones. There are generations that don't want to let go and the younger generation may not want to necessarily take over. So where does that leave the generation that started the farm?" said Fedunec, who holds a master's degree in counselling and is a certified professional counsellor, Canadian certified counsellor, certified professional counsellor supervisor, Canadian certified

counsellor supervisor and a registered member of the Association of Counselling Therapy of Alberta.

With more than 30 years of counselling experience working with adult individuals, couples and families, he is familiar with the challenges and struggles that many people in the agricultural field experience.

But in the end, it will be the farmer who will know deep down inside when to take that first step to getting help with counselling services.

"The moment the advice of your friends and family is no longer working, it is now time to seek out and find an unbiased, objective opinion or listening ear because continually going to family and friends, you are going to get a subjective response and also if you find the situation you are in is impacting your day-to-day life. It's impacting your day-to-day relationships, your productivity, then it's time to reach out."

For more information, visit agknow.ca.