

TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 544

December 2006



Watercolour by Eric Lin

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TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

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NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

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IT'S YOUR NEWSLETTER!

Send us your original writing (up to 500 words) of your thoughts and experiences of nature in and around Toronto. Do you have a favourite natural area in Toronto? Did a TFN outing introduce you to a new park? Tell us about it! Did you see any plants or animals that particularly interested you? Let us know! Tell us what, where and when, and any field guides or other sources consulted.

Also welcome are: reviews, poems, cartoons and sketches, natural history items in the news, and digital photos of TFN outings. Remember that photos will be reproduced in black and white photocopy. Please include your name, address and phone number so submissions can be acknowledged. Newspaper clippings should include source and date.

Unsigned letters or emails will not be read. Attachments to unsigned emails will not be opened.

Note the deadline for submissions of time-sensitive material, e.g., notices of meetings or events. Deadline for the February issue: January 4, 2007. Send by mail or email.

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TFN PUBLICATIONS

TORONTO FELD NATURAL STS CLUB TS H STORY AND CONST TUT ON 1965	\$2 00
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TORONTO THE GREEN 1976 Metropolitan Toronto's important natural areas are described and recommendations given for their conservation and management includes maps bibliography and index	\$10 00
TORONTO FELD NATURAL STS RAV NE SURVEYS	ea \$5 00
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Survey No 2 -- Brookbanks Ravine 1974	
Survey No 3 -- Chapman Valley Ravine 1975	
Survey No 4 -- Wigmore Ravine 1975	
Survey No 5 -- Park Drive Ravine 1976	
Survey No 6 -- Burke Ravine 1976	
Survey No 7 -- Taylor Creek - Woodbine Bridge Ravines 1977	
Survey No 8 -- West Don Valley 1978	
NDEX OF TFN NEWSLETTERS (1938 to 1978)	\$10 00
NDEX OF S NGLE YEARS FROM 1979	ea \$1 00
TORONTO REG ON B RD CHART 1983	\$5 00
A GRAPH C GU DE TO ONTAR O MOSSES 1985	\$5 00
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TORONTO SLANDS PLANT COMMUN T ES AND NOTEWORTHY SPEC ES 1987	\$5 00
TODMORDEN M LLS 1987	\$5 00
VASCULAR PLANTS OF METROPOL TAN TORONTO 1994	\$10 00
TORONTO CHECKL STS (birds other vertebrates butterflies other invertebrates mosses other plants)	ea 50¢
HUMBER FORKS AT TH STLETOWN 2000	\$5 00

Add \$2.00 *per item* for postage and hand ng; no GST.
Order from TFN off ce, see address be ow eft.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

\$50 FAMILY (2 adults – same address, children included)
\$40 SINGLE, SENIOR FAMILY (2 adults, 65+)
\$30 STUDENT, SENIOR SINGLE (65+)

No GST. Tax receipts issued for donations. Membership fees and address changes should be sent to the TFN office.

Please note: It has always been the policy of the Toronto Field Naturalists not to give out its membership list.

TFN MEETING

Sunday, December 3, 2006 at 2:30 pm

Diamonds: how they form and where to find them

Professor Dan Schulze, University of Toronto at Mississauga

Professor Schulze is an expert on processes occurring deep within the Earth's interior under enormous heat and pressure and he works extensively with industry on how diamonds form.

VISITORS WELCOME!

SOCIAL

2:00 - 2:30 pm

Bring your own mug for coffee or juice if you wish,
only paper cups provided.

For more information call the TFN office at (416) 593-2656

**ROOM 001, EMMANUEL COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
75 QUEEN'S PARK CRESCENT EAST**

Room 001 is one floor below street level. Entrance at south end of the building, down a few steps on an outside stairwell.

Wheelchair Entrance: Second door south on Queen's Park Crescent E. Door does not have automatic opener. Elevator is inside to the right.



Next Meeting, February 4, 2007:

Bon Echo, Sandbanks and Charleston Provincial Parks

David Bree, a naturalist with Ontario Provincial Parks since 1988. His theme is how the geology of these parks influences the scenery and wildlife in these diverse and very different ecosystems.

TFN OUTINGS

- TFN events are conducted by unpaid volunteers.
- The club assumes no responsibility for injuries sustained by anyone participating in our activities.
- Children and visitors are welcome at all TFN events. Children must be accompanied by an adult.
- If you plan to bring children in a stroller, be aware that there may be steps or other unsuitable terrain.
- Please do not bring pets.
- To get to outings on time, check TTC routes and schedules by calling 416-393-4636.
- Outings go rain or shine: check the weather by calling 416-661-0123 so you will know what to wear;.
- Wear appropriate footwear for walking on trails which may be muddy, steep or uneven.

- Sunday,
December 3
2:00 p.m.
2:30 p.m.
- MONTHLY MEETING** – see notice on page 3
Social
Lecture – Diamonds: How they form and where to find them
- Tuesday,
December 5
10:30 a.m. -
2:30 p.m.
- SERENA GUNDY PARK – Winter Birds**
Leader: Ann Gray
Meet at the park entrance on Leslie St., just north of Eglinton Ave. E. Bring lunch and binoculars.
- Saturday,
December 9
10:30 a.m.
- ALLAN GARDENS – Nature Arts**
Leader: Melanie Milanich
Meet at the entrance to the greenhouses on the south side of Carlton St. just east of Jarvis St. Bring what you need for photography, sketching or writing and anything you wish to share with the group after lunch in a nearby mall.
- Sunday,
December 10
10:00 a.m.
- THE LESLIE STREET SPIT – Birds**
Leader: George Bryant
Meet at the park entrance at Unwin Ave. and Leslie St. Bring lunch and binoculars. Dress warmly.
- Tuesday,
December 12
1:30 p.m.
- HIGH PARK – Nature Walk**
Leader: Pat Jones
Meet at the southwest corner of High Park Ave. and Bloor St. W. Bring binoculars. Afternoon only.
- Saturday,
December 16
10 a.m.
- THE LESLIE STREET SPIT – Birds**
Leader: Doug Paton
Meet at the park entrance at Unwin Ave. and Leslie St. Bring lunch and binoculars. Dress warmly.
- Sunday,
December 17
2 p.m.
- SOLSTICE EVENT & WALK ALONG THE TADDLE – Lost Rivers Walk**
Leader: Peter Hare and others.
Meet in front of Hart House. See the Taddle and historic University of Toronto buildings and points of interest with the U of T Senior Alumni. This is a joint outing with Toronto Green Community.
- Wednesday,
December 20
2 p.m.
- FISHERVILLE CREEK – Nature and Historical Walk – Great Rivers of North York**
Leader: Alexander Cappell
Meet on the west side of New Westminster Dr. at the railroad tracks a short walk north of Steeles Ave. W. (New Westminster Dr. is between Bathurst St. and Dufferin St.) Afternoon only.

-
- Thursday,
December 28
10:00 a.m. **COL. SAM SMITH PARK – Birds**
Leader: Doug Paton
Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Kipling Ave. Bring lunch and binoculars.
- Tuesday,
January 2
10:00 a.m. **HUMBER BAY PARK EAST – Birds**
Leader: George Bryant
Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Park Lawn Rd. Bring binoculars.
Morning only.
- Saturday,
January 6
10:30 a.m. –
12:30 p.m. **DIGITAL SHOW AND TELL - Nature Arts**
Leader: Eric Lin
Meet at the Deer Park Library (40 St. Clair Ave. E.) 2nd floor Activity Room. The leader will share a slide show of digital nature pictures using a disc player and flat-screen TV. Bring your digital photos (-R type disc) or actual photos or artwork to share. Lunch will follow in a nearby food court.
- Wednesday,
January 10
1:30 p.m. **THE BELTLINE – Local history**
Leader: Ed Freeman
Meet at the Davisville Subway Station exit. The walk will end at Eglinton Ave. W. and Fairbank Ave. (the site of the Fairbank station). Afternoon only.
- Saturday,
January 13
11:00 a.m. **ETOBICOKE CREEK – Nature Walk**
Leader: Roger Powley
Meet at Rathburn Rd. entrance to Centennial Park (end of bus line). Short walk, no lunch break.
- Tuesday,
January 16
10:00 a.m. **MOUNT PLEASANT CEMETERY – Winter Birds and Trees**
Leader: George Bryant
Meet at the Davisville Subway Station exit. Morning only.
- Saturday,
January 20
10:30 a.m. **WESTERN LAKESHORE – Heritage and Nature Walk**
Leader: Boris Mather
Meet at the northwest corner of The Queensway and Windermere Ave. Walk will end at Humber Bay Park East. Bring lunch, binoculars and dress warmly.
- Sunday,
January 21
2 p.m. **THE DON, RIVERDALE FARM AND CABBAGETOWN - Lost Rivers Walk**
Leaders: Peter Hare, John Wilson & Ian Wheal
Meet at the Meeting House in Riverdale Farm. Some indoor activities and some short walks to see Riverdale Farm, lost streams in Cabbagetown and the channeled Don River. This is a joint event with Riverdale Farm and the Task Force to Bring Back the Don. Walk difficulty could be light to moderate, but in January we need to be flexible in case of adverse conditions. This is a joint outing with Toronto Green Community.
- Wednesday,
January 24
10:00 a.m. **LAMBTON WOODS – Winter Birds**
Leader: Barbara Kalthoff
Meet at the entrance to James Gardens on Edenbridge Dr. just east of Royal York Rd.
Bring binoculars. Morning only.
- Saturday,
January 27
10:30 a.m. **ASHBRIDGES BAY – Winter Birds**
Leader: Bob Kortright
Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd. E. and Coxwell Ave. Bring binoculars. Morning only.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Originally my involvement with the TFN was as director in charge of Promotion, which is basically everything we do to get and keep members. Perhaps that is why I am always intrigued to know how a person first heard of the TFN or what motivated them to become a member. When I asked Margaret McRae why she had joined, her story was so interesting that I asked if she would be willing to submit it to the newsletter for everyone to enjoy (see page 8). Margaret's introduction to the TFN set off a chain of events that literally changed her life. I recently heard another story of a young woman, new to Toronto, who joined and subsequently went on an outing to High Park. There she met a young man who kindly shared his binoculars with her. That introduction spawned a romance that resulted in the couple celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary this November! I'm sure there are many other unique stories about joining the TFN and we would like to hear them. If you want to share your story please mail it to the office or email us a [REDACTED]

In the meantime I would like to warmly welcome the 76 new members who have joined us since June 2006. I look forward to meeting them and hearing their stories.

Pinky Franklin



TFN members enjoying a winter walk in Moore Ravine, photo by Muriel Miville

MONTHLY LECTURE REPORT

The Ultimate Superorganism: The Honeybee, Sunday, November 5, 2006
Gard Otis, University of Guelph

Bees are four winged stinging social insects and are in the news. It was just recently reported for example, that scientists discovered in Burma, the oldest fossil of a tiny honeybee (*Melittosphex burmensis*) about 3 millimetres in length and some 100 million years old, more than 40 million years older than that previously known. Elsewhere, the northwards advance of modern African killer bees into Texas got widespread publicity. It is highly topical therefore, that Professor Gard Otis of the Department of Environmental Biology at the University of Guelph gave the November 5th Sunday lecture to TFN on the subject of the simple honeybee. Apparently, simple is not the right word because *en masse*, the bee colony is a sophisticated communal society that Karl Marx would have approved of. The bee colony, which might contain up to 80,000 individuals during the summer season, turns out to be the ultimate superorganism where the behaviour of the individual bee is regulated for the common good by chemicals exuded by the queen. Capable of foraging many kilometres away from the hive, individual bees use a simple system of behavioural codes such as waggles and other dances, to inform their fellow workers of the location of food sources. Similar codes trigger a sound signal called worker piping which in conjunction with waggle dancing helps scout bees lead massive swarms to new homes. Male drones are fed by the females and play

no real role other than to mate. Did you know that bee colonies might survive intact for several decades but that an individual bee lives only a few weeks in summer literally worn out by its exertions? Or, that individual colonies are capable of self-regulating their temperature to 35°C in winter and 25°C in summer, and thus surviving the harsh Canadian climate? The extent of communication within the hive and its ability to respond to external threats truly suggests a collective organism much greater than the mere sum of its parts.

Gard teaches apiculture insect behaviour and is internationally well known for his research on the Asian honeybee. He created quite a buzz by delivering a fascinating talk given enthusiastically to a highly interested audience who set a new record for the number of questions and comments. Unfortunately, following the lead of our President in making some introductory remarks about the hum of activity in the TFN office, and by the speaker following through on the reason why bees hum (they don't know the words...) the proceedings were bedeviled by a swarm of puns throughout. The lecture finished late following numerous questions from the audience on bee behaviour. We are beholden to Professor Otis for a beguiling lecture befitting a true superorganism.

Nick Eyles

FOR READING

Oak Ridges Trail Guidebook, 4th edition

From Ontario Nature Network News, August 15th 2006

The Oak Ridges Trail Association has published the fourth edition of its popular trail guidebook. Containing 30 pages of text and 12 detailed maps, the guidebook provides all the information needed to follow over 250 kilometers of trails in the Oak Ridges Trail network. It may be purchased from the Oak Ridges Trail Association for \$28.00, shipping included, and from many retailers across southern Ontario. For information visit www.oakridgestrail.org.

Endangered: Wildlife on the Brink of Extinction

By George C. McGavin, Acting Curator of Entomology at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, published by Firefly Books Ltd., November 2006, 192 pages, hardcover with jacket, \$35.00.

From the cover: “*Endangered* presents a thoughtful proposal for a world that will be safe for all species. More than 300 stunning photographs portray those animals and plants whose fate hangs in the balance.”

TFN MEMBERSHIP OPENED MY EYES AND MANY DOORS

I first encountered the TFN when I saw a local walk advertised in our community paper. My dog had died the previous year and I missed our daily walks, so welcomed the opportunity to join a group walk.

Subsequently, I enjoyed walks in areas outside my neighbourhood and gained an appreciation for all areas of the city which I got to know better.

I became a member so I would receive a complete list of walks in the newsletter and not be restricted to those that were advertised.

Through participation in TFN walks I met Helen Mills from the Toronto Green Community and had a Green Garden Visit which gave me encouragement to develop and enlarge my garden, now home to many birds and butterflies and a source of great enjoyment. My garden won a silver award from FODE in the “Another Yard

for the Don” program and I became involved with that organization and its offshoot the Taylor Massey Project. With my new fascination with gardening, I joined the Leaside Garden Society and the East York Garden Club and have enjoyed their garden tours and shows.

I now have so many involvements in gardening, nature walks, and nature photography that it keeps me very busy and has become an important part of my life. I retired this year so I can devote more time to walks and nature photography.

For all of this, I am grateful to the TFN for sponsoring and promoting the walks and for the knowledge gained from their leaders and knowledgeable participants. I have certainly received value from my membership.

Margaret McRae



American Goldfinch



Gray Catbird

Ed. As you can see from these photographs, Margaret is a talented nature photographer. To see more of her work, visit her web site, www.torontoparks.com.

THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS/HOLIDAY GIFT

- * doesn't need to be gift wrapped
- * is delivered directly to the recipient
- * comes 8 times in the year, not just in December
- * gives access to over 100 outdoor experiences
- * promotes good fellowship with like-minded people
- * is informative, educational and entertaining

GIVE A TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS MEMBERSHIP

RUST FUNGI

Although we often think of fungi as solid structures like the mushrooms we see above ground, fungi are mostly filamentous – that is, thread-like. Even mushrooms themselves are made up of rows and rows of filaments. The threads of fungi are called hyphae (hi-fee) and they are very good at worming their way into natural openings or wounds in plants, animals or other fungi. Because of this there are many kinds of fungi that are parasites.

One group of parasitic fungi is the rusts, so called because they sometimes look reddish brown like rust. There are thousands of kinds, most of which are only able to parasitize one or a specific pair of plant hosts.

Rusts are unusual because they produce several different kinds of spores. First, there are special spores for over-wintering that aren't damaged by cold or very dry weather. They start growing hyphae on the ground in the spring.

These hyphae then produce another kind of spore that gets blown by the wind onto the first host plant. In the case of one of the *Puccinia* rusts, the first host is a sedge. This second kind of spore grows hyphae that are specialized in invading the sedge. Scientists believe that rusts have an internal “map” of the surface of their particular host's leaf that helps the

newly germinated hyphae find the tiny holes through which plants exchange carbon dioxide and oxygen.

Once the rust is established inside the leaf, hyphae grow out onto the leaf surface and form bumps. These bumps mimic flowers in that they are coloured yellow, orange or white like petals, produce both sugar similar to nectar and a substance that's like pollen, and smell sweet! The bumps also produce another kind of spore. Insects are fooled into landing on these “flowers” and carrying off the sticky spores to other sedges! These kinds of spores and the hyphae that grow from them are good at multiplying the population throughout the summer.

Later in the summer, the hyphae grow out onto the underside of the leaf where they produce a fourth kind of spore that is blown away by the wind to the rust's second host, which in our *Puccinia* example, is a mountain-mint. Since the first host (the sedge) is fully grown in the early summer and the second host (mountain mint) in late summer, the rust enjoys a long season of growth.

It is the spores that the rust parasite produces on the second host that will have a special coat to protect them through the winter until it all begins again in spring.

Jenny Bull

Toronto Tree Portraits 2007 Contest Results!

Congratulations to Albert Fulton and Siobhan Montague who correctly identified the species and location of the tree photo which appeared in the October newsletter. It was a Crack Willow (*Salix fragilis*) located on Ward's Island. As promised, they will each receive a free calendar.

Ordering Information

As in past years, the 2007 *Toronto Tree Portraits* calendar is conveniently formatted as a self-standing desk calendar. It is square shaped, measuring 7” by 7”. The proceeds from sale of the Calendar support the Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation, a non-profit, charitable organization that works with the City of Toronto and community groups to enhance and preserve Toronto's parks and trees.

Reasonably priced at just \$15.00, *Toronto Tree Portraits* makes an excellent gift. To order, please e-mail lcolacc@toronto.ca, or call the Toronto Parks & Trees Foundation at 416-397-5178.

TWRC “MOUTH OF THE DON” SITE WALK

On Sunday October 14, Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation (TWRC) held a “site walk” to bring the public into the loop about their plans to naturalize the area at the mouth of the Don River. The effort is known as the “Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection Project.” What follows is an account of the event plus a summary of the information provided to participants.

In a fashion similar to previous events, participants were led through a boat cruise and a number of “information stations” where government and agency experts presented short lectures. Mother Nature was not on the speaker list but she was definitely heard from as walkers were treated to alternating doses of sun, cloud, rain, hail, snow, wind and calm all within the three hour duration of the event. Perhaps she was voicing her opinion on the current state of the Don.



The area covered by the walk. Image ♥ Google and others

The TWRC was particularly enthused that they had recently received provincial approval for their project terms of reference and gotten the go-ahead to prepare an environmental assessment. In familiar terms this means the Province is saying, “We like what you're thinking, now tell us how you're going to do it.” The goals they presented for the naturalization project are to restore as much of the Don mouth’s original, natural features and function as is possible in an urban setting and also to contain the effects of flooding, a natural and frequent occurrence for this part of the river.

The first station gave a historical review of how much has been lost. At one time the Don River flowed into marshlands covering 1,300 acres – one of the more significant for the region. These wetlands were largely intact until the 1850s when they began to fall victim to the classic cycle of “it seemed like a good idea at the time.”

For example, in 1870 the city installed a breakwater to protect harbour traffic from breakaway clumps of marsh. Unfortunately they failed to anticipate how the barrier would become an excellent container for the sewage, particularly cattle manure, which was being dumped into the river by valley activity. Responses to ensuing disease outbreaks plus the city’s hunger for industrial expansion meant that by the 1920s the entire rivermouth had been transformed into today’s paved and concrete gusseted portlands. Over the decades that followed, much heavy industry came and went including a shipyard, a steel mill and an oil refinery. In 1979 Gulf Oil sold their holdings to the city and the portlands have been derelict ever since.

One presenter was a Ministry of the Environment staffer who uses radio collars to monitor coyotes active in the valley. He related the story of an individual who was present in the lower Don for several seasons but disappeared abruptly. Later he made a brief appearance in Vaughan and then nothing was heard until a year later when it was learned that he had been shot by a hunter at Georgian Bay. Walkers were impressed that a city creature should travel so far into the country.

Another station discussed plans for the shape and path of the river’s final stretch. The current sharp turn into the Keating Channel is of particular concern because the velocity change causes the river to dump tons of silt yearly. This increases the flood risk and requires annual dredging. Approaches under consideration include a softening of the turn by realigning the river into the land north of the channel, the excavation of a new path southwards to the ship canal, or a combination of both, where one serves as a main path and the other supplies overflow relief. There is an intention to ease the transition from river to shore and to restore the sort of wetland plants that were once abundant here. The environmental assessment intends to set out what extent of restoration is possible and practical.

A third station related issues around pollution from the industrial years, especially the petrochemical period when minor oil spills frequently occurred. The TWRC feels the situation is not as bad as one might fear.

Continued on page 21

BACK TO THE BOREAL: A Closer Look at Canada's Bird Nursery

Extracted from an article by Gregor Beck which appeared in the Spring 2006 edition of *Bird Watch Canada*, reprinted with the permission of Bird Studies Canada

Every spring, billions of birds pass through southern Canada on their way back to the continent's vast boreal forest, which spans the breadth of northern North America. Along crowded boardwalks and trails, binoculars point skyward with hopes of catching a glimpse of a brightly coloured male Blackburnian Warbler – or perhaps the distinctive patterns of a Black-throated Blue Warbler. Comparatively few of us, though, ever venture north to the boreal forest, that insect-rich breeding ground where so many of our favourite migrants breed.

The boreal forest is home to over 250 species of birds, including 80% of North American waterfowl species, 63% of finch species, and 53% of warbler species. More remarkably, the region is home to virtually the entire global populations of Bonaparte's Gull, Palm Warbler, and Short-billed Dowitcher. In fact, the boreal forest is home to hundreds of millions, indeed billions, of birds and consequently it has been dubbed the continent's bird 'nursery.' Fortunately, relatively few boreal-nesting species are on Canada's species-at-risk list, but this should not be taken as reason for complacency since dozens are of conservation concern because of declining populations, based on Breeding Bird Survey data. For common and rare species alike the boreal forest remains vitally important habitat.

On this continent, the boreal forest region stretches 6000 kilometres from Alaska to Newfoundland and Labrador, encompassing 5.9 million square km. It is dominated by coniferous trees, such as black and white spruce, balsam fir, tamarack, and jack pine, and a few hardy deciduous species, such as poplar and birch. A cold northern climate, often coupled with relatively low levels of precipitation, characterizes the boreal, as does the prevalence of natural disturbance processes, such as forest fire, insect infestation, and large scale blow-downs.

Given the scale and significance of the boreal forest, it is not surprising that there is increasing public concern about its future. While the southern portions of the region have been extensively utilized for forestry, oil and gas development, and mineral exploration and mining, much of the northern boreal is still relatively undisturbed. Increasingly, though, there is pressure to look farther afield for natural resources, and biologists, conservation groups, and First Nations are among those voicing concerns about where development might occur, as well as how and when. Whenever a development activity is proposed, a myriad of questions come to mind. What will the impact be on birds and other wildlife? Will important bird habitat be lost or altered? Is there adequate suitable habitat left



Short-billed Dowitcher at Frenchman's Bay, photographed by Rick Lauzon, from www.torontobirding.ca – web site of the Toronto Ornithological Club. Used with permission



Chipping Sparrow, photographed by Jerry Spevak

for them in close enough proximity so that displaced territories, for example, can be re-established?

Can research be used to inform better commercial practices for industrial activities such as forestry? Is our knowledge of bird biology, behaviour, and population trends sufficient to even ask the right questions?

Given the size and remoteness of much of the boreal forest, it is particularly difficult to conduct extensive field-based research on wildlife. Despite the challenges, Bird Studies Canada (BSC) has been actively involved in a number of large-scale projects that are attempting to answer key questions regarding bird populations and trends, and the effects of habitat changes. The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project, conducted over 5 field seasons at 20-year intervals, provides excellent information about breeding bird ranges, and, for many species, indications of relative abundance and population trends. Atlas fieldwork concluded in 2005, and scores of people, including many BSC staff, are now busy compiling, analyzing, mapping, and writing up the results. The Atlas book will be published in fall 2007, but preliminary results are already providing important information about boreal birds and population trends (see next page). For example, Atlas results are highlighting concerns about declining populations of Rusty Blackbird, Purple Finch, Common Nighthawk, and Olive-sided Flycatcher (and other aerial-foraging species).

In recent years, BSC has undertaken another large-scale research project to evaluate the impacts of commercial forestry on boreal landbirds. This work, led by Research Associate Ryan Zimmerling, seeks to understand how effectively some of Ontario's forest management policies, in practice, emulate natural disturbances (i.e. forest fire) in the boreal forest. The study has been conducted in five different ecological regions of the province and examined impacts of forestry at local and landscape levels, focusing solely on landbirds. The study has quantified the response of forest birds to young, immature, and mature forests that have re-grown subsequent to commercial forestry and to forest fires. Results to date highlight the complexity of bird population responses to the different types of forest and conditions that follow forestry and fire. When habitats are lost, fragmented, or changed, there are invariably 'winners' and 'losers.' Over time, as the forest matures, bird populations continue to change in response to changes in forest

structure and composition. Compared to forests that have been harvested, post-fire landscapes typically have a higher density of snags (i.e. standing dead trees), and in the years following a burn, these landscapes have a very dense shrub and understory vegetation layer. Both characteristics are very important for various species of boreal birds, from woodpeckers to warblers.

In most ecoregions, bird communities in young post-harvest forests were represented by open- and edge-habitat bird species, such as Common Yellowthroat, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Alder Flycatcher, Chipping Sparrow, and American Robin. In contrast, in young post-fire forests, open-habitat birds species were also present, but so too were bird species with a high affinity for snags and/or shrubs, such as Winter Wren, White-throated Sparrow, and Black-and-white Warbler. Bay-breasted Warblers, which favour closed-canopy habitat, are among the species that appear to do better in immature post-forestry landscape, whereas Black-capped Chickadees were more abundant in immature post-fire forests. Several species that favour snags (e.g. Brown Creeper) and downed woody debris (e.g. Mourning Warbler) were found to be much more common in post-fire forests than in post-harvested forests. Black-throated Green Warbler, Northern Parula, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Winter Wren were all most abundant in mature forests in several ecoregions.

The overall results of this research suggest that the extent to which commercial forestry is emulating natural disturbances varies between species and forest, highlighting the challenge of trying to emulate natural processes through forest management practices. This research has highlighted a number of specific management recommendations that could improve bird habitat on commercially-harvested forest lands, such as increasing the number of snags retained, leaving more downed woody debris, and retaining habitat 'island' patches, as well as the importance of retaining a broader range of older age-classes, especially mature forest, on the harvested landscape.

Birders across the country will continue to scan the tree tops for a colourful glimpse of flitting warblers and peer through emerging leaves to find an elusive thrush. Regardless of where people are birding, one thing is certain – some of the most sought after birds during migration are boreal-nesting species. And the future well-being of these birds is intricately tied to the health of the boreal forest region.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Sherwood Park Advisory Committee

Toronto Field Naturalists is being given the opportunity and responsibility by the City of Toronto to have a member and alternate member on the Sherwood Park Advisory Committee, a City Council-approved citizens' committee that works with Parks, Forestry and Recreation regarding the management of Sherwood Park. There are 10 meetings per year held in the Park's administrative building. For continuity and valuable input, both representatives are encouraged to attend all meetings.

Please give the natural world a voice in Sherwood Park, and consider volunteering for these positions. It is helpful and convenient if you live reasonably close to the Park. Interested volunteers should contact Janice Palmer at [REDACTED] for more information.

Looking for park treasures!

Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division welcomes input from TFN members in identifying special and unique wonders and sensory experiences found in Toronto's public parks, gardens and ravines. The intention is to develop an inventory of "the best of the best" of what one can experience by visiting certain parks at certain times of the year. The information gathered will be useful in promotional, educational and interpretive initiatives, to increase the public's awareness of our city's special and unique park treasures, and to foster community engagement and stewardship.

Please share your favourite park experiences and treasures. Your input is welcome in all of the categories below or any others you think are of interest. Do not feel limited to the sample questions listed.

LIFE SCIENCE:

What are the best park locations to experience:

Carolinian forests?
maple/beech forests?
outstanding specimen trees?
meadows?
migrating butterflies and song birds?
resident bird colonies?
horticultural displays?

EARTH SCIENCE

What are the best park locations to experience:

exposed bedrock?
glacial formations and features?
wetlands?
waterfalls?
rapids?

NATURAL PHENOMENA

What are the best park locations to experience:

sunsets?
crashing waves?
migrating fish?
spring thaw river ice jams?
panoramic views?

HISTORIC

What are the best park locations to experience:

aboriginal sites?
early European settlements?

CULTURAL

What are the best park locations to experience:

monuments?
sculptures?
impressive built forms?

You may submit your input by e-mail: parktreasures@toronto.ca; phone: 416-392-7264, or mail: Jerry Belan, Partnership Development Unit, Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation, 8 West, City Hall, 100 Queen St..W., Toronto, M5H 2N2. Be sure to specify location details such as park name, closest intersection and, for large parks, specific locations within the park. Also please include your contact information for any follow-up.

Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario 2001-2005

The atlas is available at special pre-publication prices substantially lower than the anticipated retail price of \$96. For orders placed by February 28, 2007, prices are, for Atlassers (people who participated in the atlas project), \$67, and for non-atlassers, \$79, include shipping, handling and GST. Order online : www.birdsontario.org, or by phone at 1-866-900-7100. Publication due September 2007.

IN THE NEWS

FLAP TORONTO CAMPAIGN

Extracted from *Touching Down*, Newsletter of the Fatal Light Awareness Program, Fall 2006. Reprinted with permission.

No one could have predicted that heavy migration would begin so early this year. This August FLAP saw an unprecedented number of warblers, including large numbers of Magnolias, Black and Whites and Ovenbirds, as well as less common species such as Mourning, Canada, Blackburnian and Wilson's Warblers (to name but a few). Vireos (Red-eyed and Solitary), Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Grey-cheeked Thrushes, even Red-breasted Nuthatches were found as well. Over 300 birds were picked up on the last week of August alone.



Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird, photographed by Jerry Spevak

This flurry of activity made the re-launch of the *Lights Out Toronto!*

Campaign – on September 19th – that much more vital. A media event was held at Metro Hall with Deputy Mayor Joe Pantalone and other officials. Two volunteer workshops were organized to ensure that beginner volunteers were prepared for the challenging task of bird rescue. TTC subway ads about *Lights Out Toronto!* are running for the duration of the migration season. All Toronto Public Service employees are receiving weekly migration alerts via e-mail as well.

FLAP, the City of Toronto and our 12 corporate, government and environmental group partners will be re-launching the campaign every spring and fall to rekindle interest in protecting birds. As part of the campaign we have developed a map of downtown Toronto rescue zones (bordered by the lakeshore, University Avenue, Bloor and Jarvis Streets). This goes far beyond the Financial District where we focused our downtown efforts in previous years. Six new zones have been created and volunteers have responded to our request for patrollers. More rescuers are always needed and would be most welcome.

An Opportunity to Share

Irene Fedun, the editor of FLAP's newsletter *Touching Down* is planning to publish an article highlighting TFN, and has asked for input from our members. She would like to include a story about TFN members' experiences with birds that have hit a window, either because lights were left on at night or because of the reflective nature of the glass. This might involve a window in their home, a car, phone booth, bus shelter, skyscraper, etc. It could be a story with a happy ending, or one where the bird died but its death had a profound effect on the rescuer(s).

If you have had such an experience, could you please pass on the details to Irene, either by e-mail:

████████████████████ or phone: ██████████? You may write the story yourself (subject to editing) or Irene will write it based on the information you provide. The TFN newsletter would also be interested to hear about and share these stories, so please send a copy to ██████████.

YARD BIRDS

Most satisfying and least demanding—that's backyard bird watching! Whether you have a postage stamp yard in Cabbagetown or a country estate in Terra Cotta, it's fun to record the birds in your yard. The list rules are endless (and a very personal decision). Feeder activity, early and late migration dates for regulars, or gull, heron, hawk and swallow counting while having morning coffee on the patio are only a few of the possibilities.

Over the years, I have kept cumulative yard lists from several houses in and near Toronto. As I reviewed my records for this article, I was intrigued by the changes in bird populations and pleased by the memory of some of the bird sightings.

During the 1970's we lived north of Hamilton and although our road was lined with houses, we backed onto fields and a swamp. We enjoyed seeing and hearing woodcock displays from March to May right in our backyard. That swamp has now been drained—I'm lucky if I see woodcocks displaying once a year.

Evening Grosbeaks were always welcome guests. When the snow began to accumulate, voracious flocks descended on our feeders. We put sunflower seed on the window ledge and rearranged the living room furniture to be a comfortable viewing gallery; sometimes a dozen brilliant gold, black and white "winter parrots" would gobble up seeds, only inches away. They showed no loyalty—as soon as the sunflower seeds were gone, so were they! One winter we had a ton of sunflower seeds delivered in an attempt to appease! Well, actually they weren't all for our feeders! Nowadays, both nesting and wintering ranges of these colourful birds have retracted to north and west—you are lucky to see even one Evening Grosbeak anywhere in southern Ontario during the winter. During our five years in that house, we had 89 species; some of the more interesting included Red-headed Woodpecker, Northern Shrike, Tundra Swan and Green Heron.

Our next house was in Willowdale in a rather noisy neighbourhood near Hwy 401. For twenty-five years, we kept three lists: birds that visited our backyard, feeder birds and those which actually nested on our property (a short list, only five—Northern Cardinal, American Robin, House Sparrow, House Finch and Common Grackle).

On 12 April 1975, a cock Ring-necked Pheasant strode through the backyard, perhaps the most memorable bird to visit us. This bird always evokes childhood memories for me. In the 1950's, Ring-necked Pheasants calling was a common background sound in the Don Valley. Although an introduced species and therefore not protected as their population declines, pheasants still add colour to our landscape.

Our property was bordered by shrubs but provided good views of the sky. The usual amount of gardening was required, so over the years I observed a wide variety of birds. These included all five species of the brown-backed thrushes, many warblers (often heard while doing spring clean-up) and most sparrows. Perhaps the two most interesting species were Northern

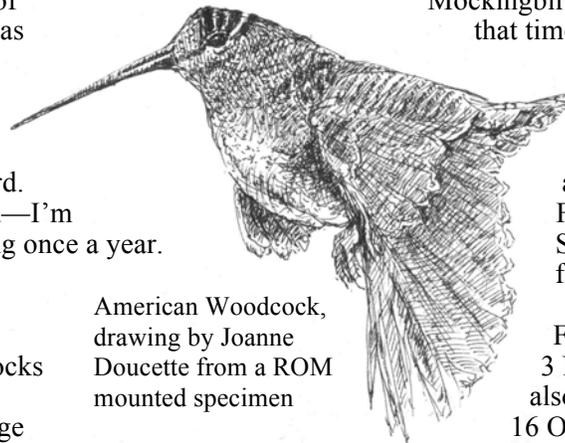
Mockingbird on 22 May 1976 (very rare at that time) and Clay-coloured Sparrow on 17 May 1975. Feeder birds of note included Red Crossbill on 12 March 1988, Common Redpoll on 19 February 1978 and Cooper's Hawk on 1 February 1999 (it devoured a Starling at the base of the feeder!).

Flyover birds included Merlin on 3 November 1979 (at that time also my late date), Water Pipit on 16 October 1976 and American Woodcock, just at dusk, on 8 April 1990.

Six years ago we moved again, this time close to High Park. Perhaps it is all the large black oaks and silver maples, but the neighbourhood is delightfully quiet. On early spring mornings I often hear several robins and cardinals singing in concert.

Our most interesting observation so far occurred following the massive snowstorm of 2 April 2002. My wife Stephanie spotted a round brown object at the back of the yard. Through binoculars we could see it was a woodcock, the poor bird puffed up for protection against the snowy blasts. It sat there for about ten minutes, and then flew off. Later that day I saw tracks from the front yard through the side drive. Not every house in Toronto has a woodcock walk by the door!

continued on page 20



American Woodcock,
drawing by Joanne
Doucette from a ROM
mounted specimen

ECOLOGY TIDBITS

City Birds: Do birds (and other animals) belonging to urban populations differ from those of the same species that inhabit rural areas? Since urban and rural populations would tend to be subject to different selective pressures, we might expect urban animals to evolve different traits. German researchers have recently found evidence that city-born European Blackbirds are, at least during some parts of the year, less stressed by contact with humans than are their forest-born conspecifics.

The European Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) is unrelated to our blackbirds but is a close relative of the American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*). Like the American Robin, the European Blackbird is a forest bird that has become a common city dweller over the past 200 years. Previous research has found that urban blackbirds are tamer, longer-lived, less migratory, have longer breeding seasons and higher breeding population density than do forest blackbirds. The German scientists (Partecke et al. 2006) were interested in whether they exhibited a different physiological stress response to humans. They took 10 baby blackbirds from nests in downtown Munich and 10 from woodland nests and raised both groups of birds in captivity. They then measured the effect of handling on the levels of the stress hormone corticosterone in the birds' blood. They found that in the winter the city-born birds had a significantly lower stress response than the forest-born birds, and that this difference persisted to a lesser extent (and in male birds only) into the spring. Perhaps the forest blackbirds (especially the females) got used to being handled eventually, so that by the spring the differences in stress response between the two groups were less marked.

Since both groups of birds were captured shortly after hatching and raised in identical environments, it would seem likely (though not certain) that the observed differences were genetic. The authors of the study speculate that, just as domestication involves artificial selection for tameness, adaptation by wild animals to urban conditions involves natural selection for "tameness"—in other words, for a reduced propensity to be stressed out by contact with people. In cities, it's a matter of "survival of the calmest".

Country Birds. Although forest and wetland habitats tend to attract more conservation attention, in recent years North America's grassland birds have been declining more rapidly than those of any other habitat. For example, Henslow's Sparrow and Loggerhead Shrike have almost vanished from Ontario. Meadows, pastures, old-fields, scrublands and natural prairies are being lost to urbanization, forestation and agricultural intensification.

Grassland bird habitat is certainly getting scarcer in Toronto. In the valleys, succession has transformed many old fields and old orchards into young closed second-growth woods—a loss of habitat for some species and a gain for others. In recent years much of the city's remaining tableland meadows (such as those around the York University campus, which used to ring with the songs of Meadowlarks, Savannah Sparrows and Bobolinks) have been gobbled up by urban development.

In order to assess the effects of land use on grassland bird populations, Veech (2006) analyzed two decades of Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data from the U.S. Midwest and Great Plains states. Veech compared the proportions of different land uses around BBS routes where grassland bird populations were increasing, stable and decreasing. Not surprisingly, landscapes with healthy grassland bird populations had a higher proportion of rangeland and of former cropland restored to natural grassland than did landscapes with declining populations. Landscapes with declining grassland bird populations tended to have a higher proportion of urban and forested land. For most species, the amount of rangeland was at least as important as the amount of renaturalized grassland, although the latter appeared to be more important for Eastern Meadowlark and Upland Sandpiper. Surprisingly, the proportion of the land in crops didn't seem to make a difference.

Allan Greenbaum

References:

Partecke, Jesko, Ingrid Schwabl and Eberhard Gwinner (2006) "Stress and the city: urbanization and its effects on the stress physiology in European Blackbirds." *Ecology* 87(8): 1945-1952. Veech, Joseph (2006) "A comparison of landscapes occupied by increasing and decreasing populations of grassland birds." *Conservation Biology* 20(5): 1422-1432.

DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES

Dragonflies and damselflies are ancient insects which evolved about 400 million years ago. They belong to the order *Odonata* and, unlike the more recently evolved insects, they can't fold their wings. Also, their four wings operate independently, not in pairs like modern insects. However, they are superb flyers as anyone who has tried to follow their flight with binoculars can attest.

Their life cycle is simple metamorphosis: egg, nymph, adult; there is no resting (pupal) stage. The eggs are laid in water and the nymphs are aquatic. When they are ready to transform into adults, they climb up onto a support to emerge. You can sometimes find the nymphal case on cattails: it's usually brown and can be up to 2 inches long. If you're really lucky you may spot a newly emerged adult; its wings will be glittery until they harden.

Like all insects, the main purpose of the adult life stage is reproduction. Since the eggs have to be laid in water, that's where most of the action is. Some males patrol a territory and chase off other males; some just look for females anywhere. Dragonflies often mate on the wing and fly around in the wheel position: the male's terminal claspers hold the female behind the head, and she curls her abdomen up to attach to his. Some males stay attached while the female drops her eggs, some release her momentarily to lay and then re-clasp, and some males just leave the female to lay on her own.



Meadowhawk , painted by Eva Davis

The eggs hatch into highly predacious nymphs. They have a large lower lip that shoots out to grab prey: other aquatic insects, tadpoles and even small fish. However the nymphs are also prey, especially to larger fish. So a pond with fish is generally bad news for dragonflies. When the Brickworks first opened, dragonflies were varied and abundant. Now that fish are well established there, dragonflies are pretty scarce.

Dragonfly adults are very efficient predators due to their flying prowess and almost 360-degree vision. They devour other insects, including butterflies and smaller dragonflies. They in turn are an important food source, especially for birds. Kingbirds, Great Crested Flycatchers and Merlins are known to be particularly partial to dragonflies, but many other birds eat them too. Smaller dragonflies get caught in spider webs.

The amount of time spent in each of the life stages varies by species and can also be affected by things like water temperature. Some dragonflies go from egg to adult in a single season; others may spend a few years in the nymph stage. The common green damner actually has two strategies: some nymphs over-winter and then emerge as adults in mid-summer while others emerge in late summer/fall and fly south for the winter. These migrants don't return the following year but their progeny do. They return in early spring to mate and lay eggs. So that's why we see green darners from spring to fall; it's two different populations.

Green darners are not the only dragonflies to migrate: more than a dozen North American species migrate at least to some extent, including the familiar twelve-spots and saddlebags. The wandering glider is sometimes seen in Toronto moving in very large groups. Hawk Hill in High Park is a good place to see migrating dragonflies in September.

Interest in dragonflies has grown exponentially in the last few years. For decades the only reference book on North American odonates was the 3-volume set, *Odonates of Canada and Alaska*, by E.M. Walker. Walker was a University of Toronto professor and specialist at the Royal Ontario Museum' who traveled extensively in the early 1900s and amassed a large collection for the ROM. Volumes 1 and 2 were published in the 1950s, Volume 3 in 1975 (posthumously), and the books were out of print for

many years. In 1998, the Toronto Entomologists' Association reprinted the books. Even at \$200 for the set, demand was brisk.

Now books aimed at the more general population of dragonfly watchers are being published. Several American states have published books on their local dragonflies. My personal favourite is the Stokes *Beginners' Guide to Dragonflies*. Despite the title, it also covers damselflies, and you don't have to be a beginner to learn from it. It's small, inexpensive and full of great photographs and useful information. Get one now, study it on those horrible winter days, and you'll be ready for spring and another cycle of dragonflies.

Carol Sellers

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Practising Patience and Observation

On the shore of the Ottawa River, 7:30 a.m. That's a.m. In the morning. You start early when you're with birders. Worth it though, for this first vista alone. Morning sun shone pink on mists rising from the river. A line of purple clouds – promising rain later – hid the mountains we knew were there. On the far side a pylon hovered in mid-air, lacking its lower half. A distant silver spire overcame the mist to remind us of the importance of the church.

Four pipits piped across the sand to remind us of our purpose. A birder's scope focused on a faraway Osprey, filling the lens with feathers. A magical Merlin surveyed our group from high on a bleached dead tree

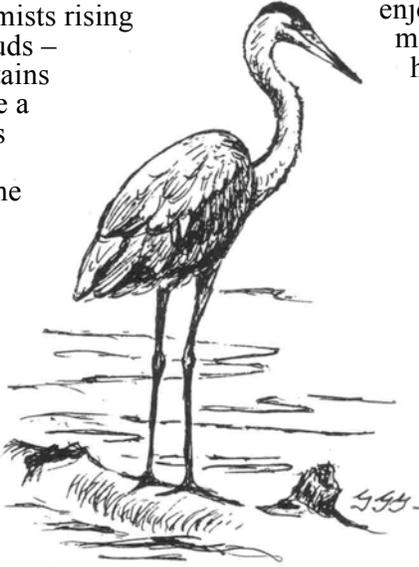
A cold morning, this last day of September in the nation's capital. Our car roof was pebbly with ice, the windows demanded five minutes of defrosting.

I am not a birder, but on this day of the Ontario Field Ornithologists Annual Meeting, I resolved to work on two attributes birders must possess: patience and careful observation. Neither is my particular forte. After a few words from the leaders, we moved off toward the rifle range. Rifle range? Yes, in a crazy Canadian anomaly, the Shirley's Bay Nature Reserve shares a boundary with the DND/RCMP practice range. During our birding morning, the pop of pistol shots and the double bank of rifles backgrounded the calls of geese and ducks.

A few outings with birders give you admiration for something besides their patience and acute observation skills; they also know vast numbers of many-syllabic bird names and species, and can apply them to the correct bird. I love the Great Blue Heron, with its vivid colouring and regal stance, as much for the fact that it stays still long enough for me to see it as for its dramatic poses.

Blue skies and bright sunlight accompanied us through a small wood of alders and cottonwood, the occasional maple and sumac adding a dash of red.

A Hairy Woodpecker and sociable chickadees flew nearby. The path through the wood led us to a small bay filled with Canada Geese and many kinds of ducks. When the water is low, other shorebirds enjoy the mud flats. We continued along a man-made causeway, built in the 1960s to help clean and clear the effluent from the sewage lagoon upstream - a less than romantic history, but the causeway, now with mature trees and ground-cover, and the bay packed with waterfowl, are success stories - nature helping man.



Great Blue Heron drawn by Geraldine Goodwin

Hérons, Horned Grebes, Blue Teal and a long distance view of one whiter-than-white Snow Goose, third from the right in a V of Canada Geese. Nothing too exciting for experienced birders this day, but quite a satisfying list for me.

Behind me, a man asked his wife, who was scanning the sky with her binoculars, "What was that?" "I saw a black dot," she told him. Ahhh ... my observation exactly!

Jean Paton

New Hikes in Toronto

The Toronto Lakefront Trail has been extended from Highland Creek to the Rouge Hill GO station, which is about 2 km. It is mostly cobblestone along the shore, and mowed grass, but should be better when the planted trees grow. A bridge has been constructed to hook up with the trail running north on Highland Creek. One could also continue along the lakeshore through East Point Park. I remember some cottages just east and south of the GO station that have been purchased and torn down. Congratulations to our Parks Department for keeping the shoreline accessible to the public!

Another great thing the Parks Department has done is put bridges at Etobicoke Creek south of Eglinton Avenue. This makes it possible to hike from Centennial Park to Burnhamthorpe Road without climbing on steep hillsides and fording the river.

Roger Powley

KEEPING IN TOUCH continued



White-throated Sparrow, painted by Eva Davis

As a summer resident in Quebec, I grew up believing white-throated sparrows sang "Oh Canada, Canada, Canada," without expressing their love for our country, as wrote Helen F. Smith in a 1977 TFN Newsletter (quoted in Newsletter 542). Friends here have given me a bilingual bird book, and what should be my surprise when I learned that Quebec birds sing "Où es-tu, Frédéric, Frédéric, Frédéric?" They put the accent on the first syllable, it seems. And am I right in believing that American birds sing "Farmer, sow your seed, sow your seed, sow your seed?" These birds must be multilingual!

Brydon Gombay, Rivière-du-Loup, Québec

Peter Money wrote to say that, after seeing David Meyler's report of a barnacle goose at Humber Bay, he remembered photographing this unusual goose there in June 2002. He says it was larger than the nearby Canada geese. After much "googling" he thinks it must be a cross between a Canada Goose and either a domestic goose or Greater White-fronted Goose. What do our readers think? *Ed.*



Goose, photographed by Peter Money



Photo by Helen Juhola

During the fall of 2006 another bridge appeared near the mouth of Highland Creek. Now there's the railway bridge, a walkway under the tracks and a footbridge over the creek. Anyone visiting East Point Park can now walk either east to Port Union Road or north along the west side of Highland Creek to Lawrence Avenue East. This is particularly good news for those traveling by public transit, as East Point can be reached from the Rouge GO station. It also gives visitors a chance to explore Toronto's most recent lake-fill park at the foot of Port Union Road.

Helen Juhola

Thank you for notifying me about my lapsed membership. I wish to renew. Please send me copies of both Newsletters I missed. I enjoy reading every issue from cover to cover, and would not wish to miss even one. Thank you for your service in bringing us all this information on Toronto's natural history.

Margaret Banville, OSsR, Esopus, NY

FROM THE ARCHIVES

OWLING

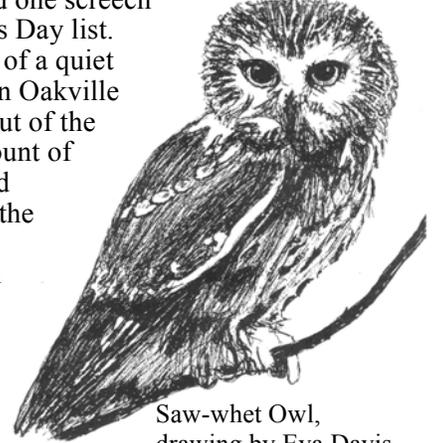
This article by Elmer (Ilmari) Talvila, editor from 1966 to 1976, was originally published in the TFN Newsletter no. 303, December 1976.

Owling is not for everyone, including me. I have hunted for owls now for 25 years and have rarely seen any. Last year however, I had remarkable success: 30 live owls of 6 species, 1 dead owl, 1 half dead one, and one imposter. This record is nothing much for the wizard owlers like Red Mason, who probably see as much or more --- on any Saturday morning. But for me it was remarkable.

There are many ways of finding owls and we owlers all have our favourite approaches. Let me tell you about some of them and perhaps help you to find owls on some future trips of your own. My most successful method is not to go looking for owls at all. I set off on my birding trips firmly determined not to look for or at owls or even to think about them. This indifference frequently brings results. Owls pop up from bushes; they look at me longing for a look. Some even hoot plaintively. But I don't give a hoot! I just pretend to be looking for a chickadee or examining mouse droppings. I have trouble hiding my glee as I check off another owl on my list.

More often -- alas! I take a positive attitude: I set out firmly determined to get an owl. Then success is more difficult. One method I've used is the following. I seek out a likely owl haunt and plunk myself in the middle of it. Then I start spinning slowly like a chicken on a spit. As I spin I keep looking through my binoculars gradually moving from ground level to the very tops of the trees. The usual result? Vertigo! A much better approach is the name and address one. First find a birder who has seen an owl in broad daylight in a resting position and can accurately describe where he saw it. Then all you have to do is go to the address and stare at the owl. I can remember vividly how successfully five of us used this method

many years ago to add one screech owl to our New Year's Day list. We pulled up in front of a quiet tree on a quiet street in Oakville and tumbled noisily out of the VW. Then a quick count of trees and branches and there was our owl: in the fourth tree from the corner, second branch up on the right side. The lady peering at us in astonishment from behind her curtains quickly pulled down the blinds; we hurried off before she could put the dog on us.



Saw-whet Owl,
drawing by Eva Davis

But the best approach and the one which I recommend is the psychological one. Turn yourself mentally into an owl. Think like an owl and act like an owl and you're bound to find other owls doing the same. You become a birdbrain, so to speak. One of my birding friends is remarkably successful at it. Why I remember last October on the Islands when he turned himself mentally into a Saw-Whet Owl. He headed straight for the centre of a low bush where I had no trouble at all finding 3 of his fellow Saw-whets. Using this method we discovered 12 Saw-whets that morning on the Islands. It's not an easy technique; I've always had trouble with the pellets.

Now to finish off, here is a short owler's guide to help you locate and identify your owl. (It can be used by tall owlers too.)

continued on next page

YARD BIRDS continued from page 15

Because our neighbourhood is heavily treed, we have little view of the sky. However, from our back patio we can look to the southeast. On summer evenings, we watch several species of swallows and Chimney Swifts flycatching overhead. We often see Black-crowned Night Herons traveling from the Leslie Street Spit nesting grounds to the Humber River to feed. And in fall the migrating hawks which are observed at Hawk Hill in High Park also pass over our house. I have seen

kettles of Broad-winged Hawks overhead while Red-tailed Hawks, Turkey Vultures and Peregrine Falcons are almost ubiquitous. My total bird list for our current address is only 70 species, a far cry from some yard lists, which I know can be up to 200 species! We still have time to see ours grow—one of the greatest pleasures in a yard list is to see how it develops over many years.

George Bryant

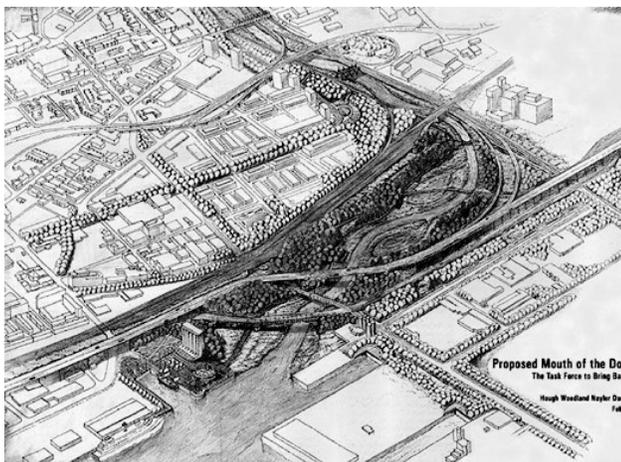
Short Owler's Guide

1. Saw-whets are impossibly small owls even when they are large. They are usually found in migration in low bushes about five feet off the ground and are most readily located using the "birdbrain" approach.
2. Great Horned Owls always appear to be calling noisily "caw-caw-caw". However, don't be fooled -- it's just a symbiotic relationship between owls and crows. And that's the best way to find crows: locate your owl, and crows will gather around it in flocks.
3. Screech Owls are impossible to find but once found are impossible to miss. They are always at the same address except on Christmas Census Days or when you are trying to show off your owling skills. They can be easily lured with a tape recorder. I have tried "wailing" in Lambton Woods but have had no success except for two stray dogs and a policeman.
4. Snowy Owls. If you see a large lump of snow on a fence post it is very likely a Snowy. If the lump flies off, it's almost certainly a Snowy unless you're a very poor birder when it will turn out to be a Herring Gull.
5. Barred Owls only have voices and hence are called 8-hooters. They rarely materialize into bodies but when they do they are found in such unlikely places as the College St. Y.M.C.A. and the Ford Automotive Plant.
6. Short-eared Owls are always found keeping company except once when the bird was obviously lost. They are sort of communal farmers and are never far from fields except once when the bird was flying over Lake Ontario and was obviously confused.
7. Long-eared Owls are always in evergreens. They love company too. To find them use the psychological approach but at a higher plane -- usually 10 feet up the tree.
8. Boreal Owls are always dead and when they are not they're never here or even there.
9. Hawk Owls. Who?
10. Great Gray Owls. Impossible.

MOUTH OF THE DON continued from page 10

The presenter said hydrocarbons tend to flow downwards until they reach the water table, at which time they cease their movement and collect into a kind of underground lens. After all this time the topmost meter of formerly contaminated land seems to be so free of petrochemicals that it might go untreated into landscaping. Beneath that is the accumulated oil which

is unhealthy but stable – there is little or no lateral movement even though there is groundwater flowing across the site. Because of this, they say it's unlikely the trapped oil will leach into the surrounding ecosystems. The agency's feeling is the cleanup will probably involve mechanical extraction that doesn't require removal of that lowermost soil.



There were other presentations relating plans for flood control, public transit, a new grand boulevard and the film studio being constructed, but the preceding covers the nature-related aspects of the tour. The project is doing a lot of communication, including more walks and presentations, which you can learn about on the web. Their URLs are a mouthful but start at www.trca.on.ca, select "Protecting Our Water" and then "Don River." The Naturalization Project's page is visible from there.

Watch your newsletter for updates.

George Nassas

WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

December, 2005

The first two thirds of the month were very cold, with temperatures remaining almost consistently below freezing. Under this regime of Arctic air, temperatures fell as low as -15.2° on the 13th.

The final third of the month saw a return to the continent-wide warmth that dominated most of 2005, but not before we were able to score a definitely wintry month with below-normal temperatures and above-normal snowfall – the most wintry December in five years. The monthly mean temperature downtown was -2.2° (1.3° below normal) and at Pearson Airport it was -3.5° (0.6° below normal).

Snowfall was 41.8 cm at Pearson (about 13 cm above normal) and 32.0 cm downtown, almost exactly normal. The most significant snowstorm of the month (and it later turned out for the whole winter) was on the 9th, with 12 cm at the airport and 17 cm downtown. It was the snowiest month at Pearson since January 2004. Because of relatively light rainfall, mostly in the final mild ten days of the month, total precipitation was slightly below normal (58.9 mm at the airport and 55.2 mm downtown). Snow cover persisted more-or-less the whole month, with a white but somewhat soggy Christmas (slushy snow and rain).

As is often the case, cloud cover exacerbated this darkest month of the year, with 66.3 hours of sun recorded. This is just slightly below normal.

January, 2006

January was one of the warmest winter months ever recorded across North America, as the Arctic vortex was pushed aside by such a strong Pacific flow that bitterly cold air was restricted to the Old World. Record warmth extended from north-central Canada to Texas.

On the other hand, it was not a spectacularly warm month globally. Severe cold in Russia extending into eastern Europe and Alaska made it globally the coolest January in about 5-7 years (which isn't saying that much, really given that all recent years have been warm).

Pearson Airport's monthly mean temperature of 0.2° broke the record of -0.5° set in 2002. However, downtown's record warm January of 1932 remains standing. In 2006, downtown had a mean temperature of 1.1° , while January 1932 had a mean of 1.9° , fully 0.8° warmer. Given recent trends, it is only a matter of time before the 1932 record will be broken too. In any case, the warm anomaly this month was in the range of 2 standard deviations.

Overall, the pattern was similar to January 2002, just slightly more intense. It was more a matter of persistently above-freezing temperatures than of spectacular spikes into the teens as has happened occasionally in January going back to the 19th century. It reached the 10° - 12° range on three days, and there was only one moderate cold spell, on the 14th-16th. The coldest reading was -12.4° downtown and -13.1° at Pearson, on the 16th. However, this was still slightly colder than the lowest readings of January 2002, the other near-record warm January of recent years.

Snowfall was extremely light as might be expected: 7.6 cm downtown and 7.8 cm at Pearson. These were close to, but not quite record-low amounts. In January 1988, Pearson had only 4.8 cm of snow, and downtown had 5.3 cm in 1933. Sunshine was 92.4 hours, which is fairly close to average.

Unlike January 2002, this month was preceded by a fairly cold December. Pond surfaces remained mostly frozen, and there were isolated snow patches remaining in sheltered places.

Gavin Miller

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Extracted from the Spring 2006 issue of *BirdWatch* and reprinted with permission from Bird Studies Canada

The first-ever Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Christmas Day in 1900. It began as an alternative to the "side hunt," an event wherein a series of teams went out and shot as many birds as possible. The team that shot the most birds won the event. As an option to the "side hunt," and recognizing that bird populations could not be sustained forever, Frank Chapman, a famed ornithologist at the American Museum of Nature, organized the CBC with fellow ornithologists and friends. Now, 106 years and 60,000 volunteers later, the renowned CBC tradition is one of the largest annual collective bird counts in North America.

COMING EVENTS

Peterson Field Guide to Mammals of North America

Launch of the fourth edition, written and illustrated by Fiona A. Reid. Friday, December 15, 5 – 7 p.m.
ROM Theatre, Royal Ontario Museum. Free.

- 5:30 – 6:00 p.m. Author Presentation “Painting Mammals from Life”
- 6:00 – 7:00 p.m. Book signing and display of original artwork

Books from the ROM’s Ontario Field Guide Series will also be on sale and authors will be on hand for signing.

Science on Sundays

Royal Canadian Institute, J.J.R.Macleod Auditorium, Medical Sciences Building, U of T, 1 King’s College Circle.
Information 416-977-2983

A Little Light Relief – Science of Photo Medicine. Holiday Season Stoicheff Lecture by David Phillips of UK
Sunday, December 10 at 3 p.m. All welcome especially ages 13-18 and over.

Toronto Ornithological Club

- “Waterfowl” West Toronto Lakeshore. Saturday, December 9 at 8:30 a.m. (all day). Leader Dave Milsom. Meet in the parking lot at Humber Bay Park East. Bring a lunch. Carpool if necessary.
- “Gulls and Waterfowl” Sunnyside. Sunday, January 28, 2007. 1:30 p.m. to Sunset. Leader: Glenn Coady. Meet in the Sunnyside parking lot at the foot of Windermere Ave. Dress warmly.

The Market Gallery – Building Blocks: Queen Street West 1847-1890

October 7, 2006 – February 25, 2007, South St. Lawrence Market, 2nd Floor, 95 Front St. E. Free. Photographs, maps, plans and drawings illustrating the building of Queen St. W. from University Ave. to Dufferin St. For further information call 416-392-7604.

Ian Wheal Walks

- Russell Creek on Saturday, December 2. Meet at Bathurst Subway Station entrance at 2 p.m. Free
- Hastings Creek on Saturday, December 23. Meet at Donlands Subway Station entrance at 1:30 p.m. Free
- Toronto Islands on Monday, January 1. Meet at entrance to Ferry Docks at foot of Bay St. at 1 p.m. Free. Bring money for ferry.
- Wigmore Pond (North York, East Don) on Saturday, January 27. Meet at northeast corner of Eglinton Ave. E. and Victoria Park Ave. at 2 p.m. Free

Toronto Entomologists’ Association (TEA)

A Journey into the Jungles of Monteverde, Costa Rica. Speaker: Jessica Grealey. Saturday, January 27, Room. 113, 1 p.m. Northrop Frye Hall, U of T. www.ontarioinsects.org.

Rouge Valley Hikes (free)

- Sunday, Dec. 10, 1:30 p.m. Winter in the Valley. Meet at Rouge Valley Conservation Centre, 1749 Meadowvale Rd. north of Sheppard Ave. E.
- Sunday, Jan. 14, 1:30 p.m. Winter Wonderland. Meet at RVCC (as above)
- Sunday, Jan. 28, 1:30 p.m. Nature Hike – meet at the parking lot at the Finch Meander just before the traffic lights at the Bailey Bridge on the south side of Old Finch Rd, west of Reesor Rd.

For further information call 416-282-8265.

High Park Walking Tours

For information phone 416-392-1748 or 416-392-6916 or visit www.highpark.org

Winter’s here again
Cold wind blowing hard and fast
Dead leaves migrating.

Haiku by Aarne Juhola

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Rouge Valley in autumn, photograph by Yoshie Nagata