TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 554 March 2008

Deer in winter. Watercolour by Diana Banville

REGULARS

FEATURES

Toronto Field Naturalist is published by the Toronto Field Naturalists, a charitable, non-profit organization, the aims of which are to stimulate public interest in natural history and to encourage the preservation of our natural heritage. Issued monthly September to December and February to May. Views expressed in the Newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or Toronto Field Naturalists.

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IT'S YOUR NEWSLETTER!

We welcome contributions of original writing, up to 500 words, of observations on nature in and around Toronto, reviews, poems, sketches, paintings, and photographs of TFN outings (digital or print, include date and place). Include your name, address and phone number so submissions can be acknowledged. Send by mail or email. Deadline for submissions for April issue: March 7, 2008.

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Please note: TFN does not give out its membership list.

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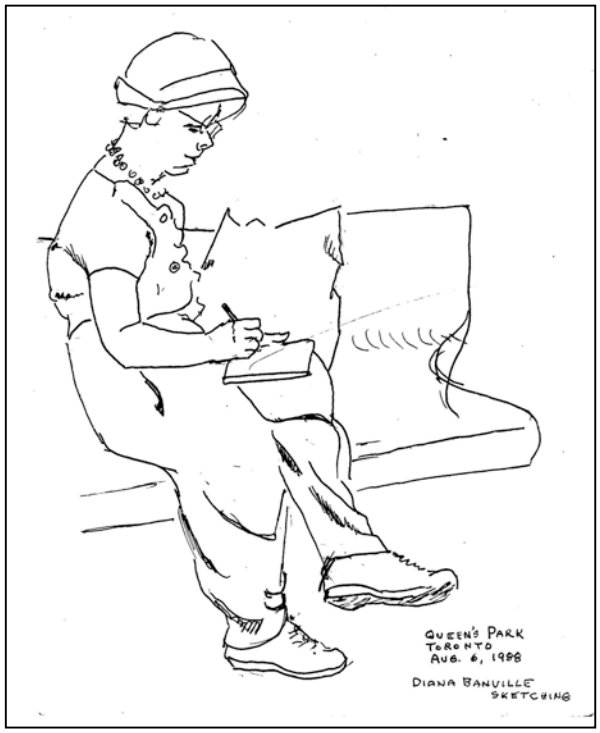


Drawing of Diana Banville by Lenore Patterson

We are featuring Diana Banville's artwork throughout this issue.

Dog Rose drawn by Diana Banville

TFN MEETING

Sunday, March 2 at 2:30 pm

The Galapagos and Ballestas Islands

Peter Money, TFN member,
retired geologist, amateur naturalist and photographer

VISITORS WELCOME!

SOCIAL: 2:00 - 2:30 pm

Room 001, Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, 75 Queen's Park Cres. East

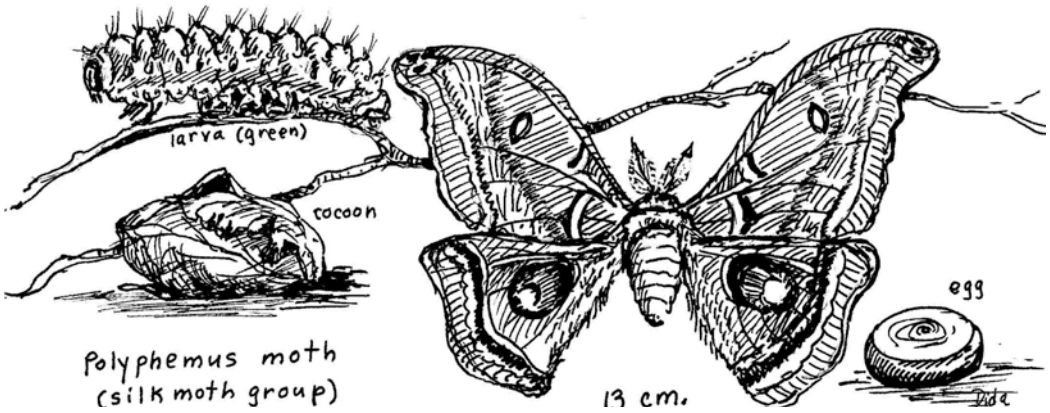
Emmanuel College is just south of the Museum subway station exit (east side of Queen's Park). Enter at south end of building, down a few steps on outside stairwell. **Wheelchair entrance**: Second door south on Queen's Park (no automatic opener). Elevator inside to the right. Room 001 is one floor below street level.

For information: call 416-593-2656 up to noon on the Friday preceding the lecture.

Upcoming TFN Monthly Meetings

Apr. 6 *Flying Whimbrels and Soaring Spirits:*
An examination of Presqu'ile and Petroglyphs Provincial Parks
David Bree, Naturalist, Ontario Provincial Parks

May 4 *Fathom Five National Marine Park*
Lisa Tutty, University of Toronto



Diana Banville's interpretations from field guides

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.

Saturday, March 1
2:15 – 4 p.m.

NATURE IMAGES BY TFN MEMBERS – Nature Arts
Leaders: Peter Money and Margaret McRae
Meet at the Northern District Library, Room 224BC, 40 Orchard View Blvd. (west of Yonge St., 1 block north of Eglinton Ave.) Bring your images (see details on page 5) or come to enjoy the show.

Tuesday, March 4
10:00 a.m.

COLONEL SAMUEL SMITH PARK – Birds
Leader: Doug Paton
Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Kipling Ave. Bring binoculars. Morning only.

Saturday, March 8
10:30 a.m.

LAKE IROQUOIS SHORELINE – Geology and Nature
Leader: Ken Cook
Meet at Blackthorn Ave. and Eglinton Ave. W. Not a circular route. Walk will end about 12:30 p.m. No planned lunch stop.

Tuesday, March 11
1:30 p.m.

DON VALLEY – General Interest Walk
Leader: Ed Freeman
Meet at the southwest corner of Broadview Ave. and Pottery Rd. We will walk down to Riverdale Farm.

Saturday, March 15
10:00 a.m.

COLONEL SAMUEL SMITH PARK – Waterfowl
Leader: Kerry Adams
Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Kipling Ave. Bring binoculars. Morning only.

Sunday, March 16
1:30 p.m.

HUMBER RIVER – World Water & International Rivers Day – Lost Rivers Walk
Leader: Ed Freeman
Meet at the northeast corner of Eglinton Ave. W. and Scarlett Rd. Not a circular route. Walk will end at St. Phillips Road in Weston.

Tuesday, March 18
10:00 a.m.

YORK CEMETERY AND WEST DON VALLEY – Trees & Nature
Leader: Jack Radecki
Meet at the Reception Area of the Presentation Centre between Beecroft Rd. and Senlac Rd. (closer to Beecroft). Bring lunch and binoculars.

Saturday, March 22
10:00 a.m.

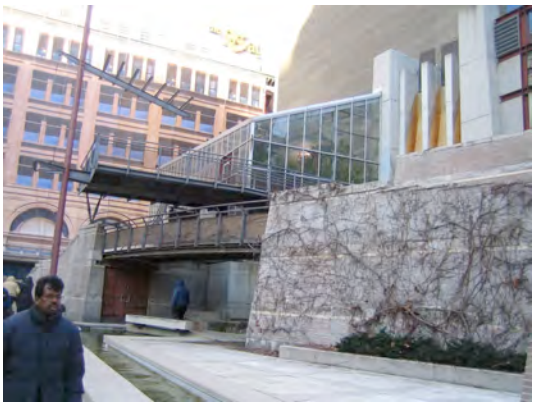
LESLIE STREET SPIT – Birds
Leader: Bob Kortright
Meet at the park entrance at Leslie St. and Unwin Ave. Bring lunch and binoculars.

Tuesday,
March 25
10:00 a.m.

ASHBRIDGE'S BAY – Birds
Leader: Doug Paton
Meet in front of the Beaches Library on the south side of Queen St. E., just west of Lee Ave. This will be a circular hike, ending with lunch in a Beach area restaurant (optional).

Saturday,
March 29
11:00 a.m.

LOWER AND WEST DON – Nature, Heritage and Landforms
Leader: Ed Freeman
Meet at the southeast corner of Bayview Ave. and Moore Ave. Walk will end at the Science Centre. Bring lunch and binoculars.



"Taddle Creek" running from Richmond St. to Adelaide St. and the location of its mouth near the Distillery. Photos sent by Martin Chen, Richmond Hill Naturalists with the note: "Please thank Helen and Ian for leading a very enjoyable Lost Rivers Walk (Market Creek, Taddle Creek)." This joint TFN-Toronto Green Community outing was led by Helen Mills on Jan. 20. For information on Lost Rivers see www.lostrivers.ca

SPECIAL EVENT!

NATURE IMAGES BY TFN MEMBERS

Saturday, March 1, 2:15 pm to 4 pm.

Northern District Library, Room 224BC,
40 Orchard View Blvd. (west off Yonge St., 1 block north of Eglinton Ave.)

Please bring your digital images, slides (transparencies), prints, paintings and sketches to share with fellow TFN members. Any natural history subjects will be welcomed. If you have nothing you wish to display at this time please come and enjoy the show.

We request that you select a **maximum** of 20 of your digital images or slides. You may also bring an additional set or two to be shown if time permits. Digital images must be brought as CDs so they can be projected. If possible, bring slides in Kodak Carousel trays or stack loaders. A spare slide tray will be available.

We would greatly appreciate volunteers arriving between 2 pm and 2:15 pm to aid in setting up.

Co-leaders: Peter Money and Margaret McRae

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

On behalf of the board and members of the TFN, I extend our condolences to the family and friends of Diana Banville. I would also like to thank those of you who have made donations to TFN in her memory. Throughout the years many members have made substantive contributions to TFN, but few would equal that of Diana. The files in the office are a testimony to her dedication … they are brimming with her drawings and handwritten records of the flora and fauna of Toronto. An illustration of Diana's commitment to accuracy is her copy of the Golden Press *"A Guide to Field Identification – Birds of North America."* Every single page in that 340 page book is annotated. I know because Diana gave it to me - and I treasure it. She also gave TFN a treasure – the legacy of her life's work as a naturalist.

Several TFN members attended a special meeting of the City's Parks and Environment Committee in January, 2008. Six climate change adaptation experts delivered the latest research on climate change and talked about the expected impact on Toronto. The experts agree that Toronto will be affected in a number of ways, including more frequent and severe weather events, extreme heat, urban flooding, drought, and the introduction of new and invasive species. They also agree that action is needed in a broad range of areas to protect human health, our environment and our economy. Each expert made recommendations on adaptation measures and priorities. The presentations, which are well worth reading, have been posted on the City's website www.toronto.ca/environment.

In this report I have often written of the pleasures of TFN outings, but I have given short shrift to the lectures. This oversight came to my attention last night, when I had the good fortune to hear Sid Daniels repeat his lecture on Reptiles and Amphibians while dictating the Monthly Meeting Report to my son. Once again I was enthralled by Sid's storytelling, his enthusiasm and depth of knowledge of his subject.

This is typical of the caliber of lectures that Nick Eyles has been organizing for us. Come and hear for yourself. Prepare to be inspired!

Pinky Franklin

MONTHLY MEETING REPORT

Reptiles and amphibians of eastern North America, Sunday Feb 3, 2008, Sid Daniels

Our speaker Sid Daniels, a lifelong naturalist and, among other things, a retired school principal, said he had a mission: to impress us with the enormous variety of reptiles and amphibians in North America, including Ontario. He contended that, of the 1,075 odd North American species and subspecies, most people could boast of having seen only 10 or fewer, of which they could positively identify perhaps 3 to 5 – a far cry from the bird world, where multiple times this number are recognized by many of us. How could this be? As Sid explained, these creatures are small, cryptic, secretive, subterranean or fossorial, aquatic, nocturnal, or a combination of the above. He wanted to nudge some of us from our apathy and get us "hepped up" about this extraordinary collection of nature's wonders.

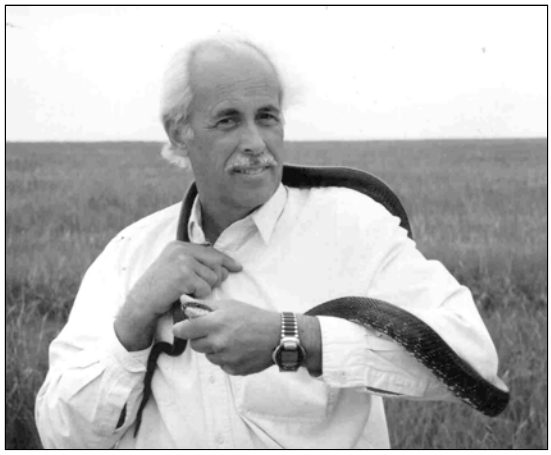
In his personal quest to uncover more of these beauties, he found it necessary sometimes to leave Ontario and travel further south. Most reptiles and amphibians, being cold-blooded, are intolerant of extremely cold weather. Consequently their species variety increases exponentially from Arctic regions to tropical ones. With much reptile activity peaking in April and May, and with school board employees unable to take time off mid-term, Sid and his herpetologically-inclined cohorts George Bryant and Bob Curry, made some wild dashing weekend forays to points south. Some round-trip, three-day weekends exceeded 3, 000 km.

They selected sites partially based on the distribution maps contained in the Peterson field guide *Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern North America*. These locations included the Red River Gorge of central Kentucky, western Tennessee's ReelfFoot Lake, and South Carolina's Savannah River Nuclear Power Plant. Reelfoot Lake, approximately 200 km^2, was created spontaneously at the time of the great North American earthquake of 1811, which destroyed the nearby town of Madrid. The Savannah River site is an 800km^2 parcel of land completely cordoned off, all inhabitants and towns having been removed in 1951 to provide space for the

Savannah River Nuclear Power generator. This land has reverted to its natural state and is a haven for reptile and amphibian research.

Of the 21 frog species presented, the 6 kinds of tree frogs were the hardest for the three researchers to locate. The Pine Barrens variety was the most stunning in appearance.

We were shown many species from the Great Smokey Mountains of North America, "the salamander capital of the world." Some species are restricted to one or two mountain peaks. Salamanders, being the most secretive family, are often sought after at night. Many emerge of their own accord from damp cracks and crevices totally inaccessible to people. The specialized toes of the green salamander, a highly nocturnal species, make it the only arboreal variety in Eastern North America. The Amphiuma and Hellbender are giant, 0.7m long aquatic salamanders. The former has a very nasty bite and may occasionally consume snakes and small turtles. Three hundred pound flat rocks in shallow but wide rivers may have to be gently lifted to reveal the magnificent (grotesque, to some) Hellbender.



Sid Daniels with 68-inch black Rat Snake, photographed by Marilynn Murphy

Most turtle species are prone to bask during certain times of the year, but not so much the Stinkpot Turtle, which often lives up to its name. Also native to Ontario, it is an almost entirely aquatic "beastie." Equipped with a foamy-looking tongue, reminiscent of a small mass of fish eggs, it may entice minnows into its mouth for a 'short visit.'

Snakes are a story unto themselves. They come in a huge variety of shapes, sizes, colours, temperaments and special behaviours. The secretive Blind Snake is only 6 cm long and eats only ant eggs. The much more ostentatious Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake may be 242 cm long and eats rabbits. Incidentally, no snake in the world is a vegetarian.

The Coachwhip Snake is said by some to be able to roll down a hill in the form of a hoop. This is not factual, but many such myths are attributed to our much maligned friends, the snakes. Ironically, however, the Hognose snake (a threatened species in Ontario) has a behaviour which probably exceeds the most bizarre tales attributed to its fellow family members. This stout, sometimes colourful snake with a horny upturned snout may get huffy if threatened or cornered. It puffs up to twice normal size, spreads out a cobra-like hood, and strikes repeatedly with its mouth closed. If all else fails, the Hognose will flip upside down, go through contortions, defecate on itself, rub its protruding anus and open mouth on the ground (they may bleed mildly) and finally become motionless with tongue hanging out and mouth gaping open. When the coast is clear (it could be an hour later) the limp "dead" body comes to life, rights itself and moves away, as on any other day.

Sid concluded his lecture with an array of Ontario Herps, not previously photographed, including the endangered species the Blue Racer (6 ft. long) and the now-extirpated (presumably) Blanchard's Cricket Frog, which he photographed in a nearby locale south of the Canadian border. He showed a photo of the most northerly ranged amphibian in all of North America, the Wood Frog, also native to Ontario. This champion of cold weather resistance reaches the 70th parallel north and has even more antifreeze (glycerol) than the Northern Tree Frog.

Sid finished by encouraging us to go out and find for ourselves the remaining 950 Herp varieties, as he had only had time to show us 117 species in his presentation.

TFN BOARD NOMINATIONS INVITED

The TFN is looking for people with initiative who are willing to devote time to working as members of the Board of Directors.

Please send your suggestions to the Chairman of the Nominating Committee, c/o TFN, 1519 - 2 Carlton St., Toronto, ON M5B 1J3. The report of the Committee will be published in the May newsletter.

EXTRACTS FROM OUTINGS REPORTS

Ashbridges Bay, Jan. 26.
Leader: Bob Kortright

Recent cold weather has frozen Coatsworth Cut and the bay within the park, concentrating the waterbirds right in front of the board ramps and at the narrows at the western end of the park for excellent opportunities for comparisons such as female mergansers (Common and Red-breasted), and female Gadwall vs Mallard. The Iceland gull gave a good view to some of us as it flew over, but too brief for all to see. Bird feeders just south of the parking lot accounted for most of the landbirds, although the redpolls were found on speckled alder on the southeast bay, and one of the cardinals was beautifully framed by sprays of bright orange sea-buckthorn (Oleaster rather than Buckthorn family!).

Ed.: See photo on back cover.

Humber Bay Park East, Jan. 12.
Leader: Wendy Rothwell.

A Northern Shrike and a Northern Mockingbird were the highlights for participants of this outing but it was disappointing not to see the pair of Harlequin Ducks which had been there the previous few days.

Northern Shrike drawn by Diana Banville

BIRD MOMENTS

While I lack the stoic fortitude to stand, whatever the weather, for indefinite periods in the hopes that such-and-such will fly by, that doesn't mean I disagree with David Attenborough's accolade to birds as "nature's most perfect creation." Philistine that I am (preferring the flora and fungi which co-operatively stand still to be admired), I too have had my Bird Moments …

As when I found myself in Wigmore Ravine years ago when what appeared to be the entire Toronto population of Blue Jays were massing for their journey south. It took the whole afternoon, and there was none of the martial precision of Canada Geese, with their final arrowed take-off (headed, I have read, by an elderly female since only they remember the ancient routes). This was an amorphous and inelegant leaving, and the noise was cacophonous. But the flashings of blue were breath-taking. The very air took on the hue of a sky-blue afternoon.

Another enchantment was finding myself in some northern woods near sundown and observing for a whole hour the creation of an Avian Evensong by a troop of Rusty Blackbirds. I sat in their midst and was totally ignored. Such to-ing and fro-ing, passing on the day's news, dropping by for a chat, renewing acquaintance – the happy busy-ness of it all! When finally everyone had settled beside the companions of choice and all was silent, I stole away. Alas, their paradise was doomed. The land was up for sale, as several billboards officiously proclaimed.

From the mass to the singular … I shall never forget the huge inert crow lying in the midst of morning traffic outside my house. I took it home without much hope, and went to work. My son called a few hours later. Crow had 'come to' and made such a to-do about confinement that my son had gladly opened the window and sent Crow on his way.

Finally, there was the Great Horned Owl I nearly strode past, fortunately seeing it at the last moment. Owl and I gazed long at eye-level. Even perched on a madly swaying branch in something of a gale, with one 'horn' blown drunkenly sideways, it displayed a massive dignity. I was the one who had to give up. Horned Owl was in its element, and I was solidifying from the feet up. I had to break the spell and move on.

Eva Davis

TRUE KATYDIDS—COMING TO YOUR BACKYARD SOON

Just as the deafening sound of the cicada is a feature of our warm summer days, so is the repetitious "Katy did—Katy didn't" of True Katydids on warm summer evenings in regions just south of Toronto. The November newsletter (TFN 551) referred to a Toronto Star article of September 26, 2007 in which the reporter stated "Mystery solved: the nighttime chirping in the oaks at Lawrence and Warden Aves. is definitely the sound of katydids in song." The apparent recent arrival in Toronto of these fascinating animals has prompted me to relate some personal experiences.

My first indication that this creature occurred in Canada was from an article written by Gus Yaki in 1968 about the nature highlights of the Queenston portion of the newly created Bruce Trail. Gus reported that True Katydids could be heard along the ridge of the Niagara Escarpment. I was delighted to confirm this several years later as we drove home one August evening from the Shaw Festival. With the car windows open as we descended the escarpment (QEW and 407 interchange) we could hear their distinctive buzzes emanating from the forest above us. True Katydids still reside there—we trod the Bruce Trail there recently and I heard the distinctive buzzes—in broad daylight, unusual for a katydid.

We have all seen katydids—they are the lime-green, long-legged members of the insect order *Orthoptera* which includes grasshoppers and crickets. *True* Katydids differ because their calls are readily transliterated to "Katy did—Katy didn't!" To me, their nocturnal calls are a loud, raucous, and repeated "buzz-buzz-buzz"—pause—"buzz-buzz-buzz". After you become familiar with this insect sound, you can then readily imagine it as "Katy did—Katy didn't".

Unlike the Bush Katydid, which we often see in grassy meadows in the summer, True Katydids are seldom seen because they inhabit treetops and do not fly to night lights. But if you are lucky enough to find one, you can readily identify it by its elliptic (not linear) wings and stiff (not lax) antennae.

The range of true katydids has been mapped as following the north shore of Lake Erie from Hamilton to Sarnia. With climate change, it is reasonable to expect them to move north into our area. Almost ten years' ago we had a True Katydid in our backyard in North York. I heard one for two consecutive summers, different individuals since adults don't successfully overwinter. High Park with its many tall oaks would seem to be a perfect location for them, but you need to walk in the park after dark which some people are reluctant to do!

One of my most astounding insect discoveries involved a Bush Katydid which I spotted on the Ojibway Prairie at Windsor about ten years ago. Instead of being lime green, it was a brilliant bubble-gum pink! For some reason about one out of a thousand katydids will assume this hue—certainly not a great survival strategy!

There are two recent publications which I can recommend to increase knowledge about True Katydids.

- *A Field Guide to Grasshoppers, Katydids and Crickets* by J.L. Carpinera, R.D. Scott, and T.J. Walker, Cornell University, 2004.
- *Insects Their Natural History and Diversity* by Stephen A. Marshall, Firefly Books, 2006 (a truly incredible work).

I am interested in the distribution of True Katydids in Toronto. Please email me [redacted] if you encounter any this summer—we will report further in a fall Newsletter.

George Bryant

Green fruit of horsechestnut found in Rosedale September, 1988.

Note drawing uses lines and - especially for cast shadow - dots. Only small areas of solid black are used as larger areas sometimes do not reproduce well.

NEWSLETTER MEMORIES

In honour of the Newsletter's 70th anniversary, we are doing a series of articles about its history. In February, we featured Richard M. Saunders' time as editor. Now we wish to acknowledge the valuable contribution made by Ilmari Talvila, who served as Editor from 1966 to 1976. See "From the Archives" on page 17 for an example of his wonderful sense of humour. Ilmari, who is still a TFN member, kindly offered to share these memories.

My job as editor of the TFN Newsletter actually started in our kitchen in Scarborough one morning in the fall of 1965. I was drinking my coffee when the Newsletter arrived. It asked for comments about the Newsletter. I was feeling particularly critical that morning about everything – which is my usual state – so I took paper and pen and wrote a long letter about what was wrong about the Newsletter and how it could be improved. Then I had another cup of coffee and felt better.

About a month later, Fred Bodsworth phoned me. "We got your interesting letter about the Newsletter and how it can be improved. Dick Saunders has retired as Editor, so we were wondering if you would like to take on the job." Talk about being hoist with your own petard!! Of course I had to take the job, and I did.

The coming year of the Newsletter was done by Gerry Bennett and his humorous sidekick, Slim Pickins. My first Newsletter was the October 1966 issue.

Two main criticisms that I had were: too many descriptions of hikes by Dick Saunders and Jim Baillie and not enough informative articles on natural history subjects. I also wanted a lot more articles by members, which I promised would always be published. So I started in.

I had many adventures along the way and met some interesting contributors, many of whom contributed regularly. I started a series of articles on plant families, wrote a monthly Astronomical Observations column and reported on coming events. We published many articles on bats and owls. [See From the Archives, TFN 544, Dec. 2006.] In April 1969 we did a special issue about nature in Toronto for the FON (Federation of Ontario Naturalists) annual meeting.

But all good things have to end. In May 1976 I produced my last Newsletter. I felt I could no longer find the time to do the job adequately. My consulting work took me every week to Vancouver, Victoria or St. John's, and I found myself writing articles for the Newsletter on the midnight flight from Vancouver. That was too much, so I resigned.

On looking back over these years, I remember them as some of the most rewarding and enjoyable of my life. Thank Heavens I was feeling such a curmudgeon on that morning long ago in 1965!

Ilmari Talvila

Short-tailed weasel in summer coat, from mounted specimen, R.O.M., drawn by Diana Banville

FOR READING

Hot Air, Meeting Canada's Climate Change Challenge

by Jeffrey Simpson, Mark Jaccard and Nic Rivers, McClelland & Stewart, 2007 (Hard cover, $29.99)

In recent years we have been inundated by books, articles and documentaries on the subject of global warming. This book, like the others, deals with evidence that climate change is occurring; proof that human activities are the cause; possible technical solutions; and the urgent need to change direction in order to avoid the anticipated consequences for us and future generations. So what makes this book different?

Hot Air is written from a specifically Canadian point of view. Having described the impacts of global warming on our own country, and drawn attention to Canada's responsibility as part of the global community, the authors focus attention on our abysmal failure to take appropriate action due to lack of political will. As evidenced by the Conservatives' "Green Plan" in 1990, and the Liberals' decision to sign the Kyoto Accord in 1997, the approach of our governments has been to make impressive-sounding promises while failing to implement the policies necessary to fulfill them. Reluctant to upset anyone – particular industries or regions of the country that might be adversely affected by regulations – and fearful of the dire economic consequences being predicted if serious measures are taken against climate change, governments have relied on education, wasteful ineffective subsidies and voluntary behaviour modifications in the vain hope that these would miraculously enable us to meet unrealistic objectives.

"The easiest course for politicians has been to speak earnestly about long-term targets while avoiding difficult short-term steps that might cost political support. That way, politicians can be rewarded for their apparent virtue without imperiling their re-election prospects. That way has been the Canadian political way since climate change was first discussed at home and abroad." (page 32)

Having diagnosed the problem, the writers go on to prescribe solutions. They draw attention to policies which have worked effectively in other countries – command-and-control regulations, carbon taxes and emissions cap-and-trade systems – and demonstrate how these might be adopted in Canada in ways which are economically practical, politically acceptable and easy to administer. Whatever policies we adopt, they stress that compulsory requirements are essential in order to guarantee action. To help overcome our reluctance to adopt such measures, the writers compare their cost with the economic implications of continuing "business as usual."

Now that the Canadian public is finally becoming aware of and concerned about climate change, the time is ripe for our government to show leadership in addressing the issue. It is important that citizens (especially people like TFN members who care about the environment) familiarize themselves with the types of economic policies which would be best, and bring pressure to bear on politicians to take effective actions. I believe reading *Hot Air* is a good place to begin.

Wendy Rothwell

Photo tracing of Red-winged Blackbird by Diana Banville

THE TROUBLE WITH KITTY

A special report by Elaine Secord in *BirdWatchCanada*, summer 2007. Reprinted courtesy of BirdStudies Canada.

There are many good reasons for cat lovers to control the movements of their pets outdoors, or to keep cats indoors entirely. Indoor cats have significantly longer lifespans and enjoy better health than those permitted to wander freely. Indoor cats have increased protection from injury, disease, parasites, getting hit by cars, and becoming lost, stolen, or poisoned. Those concerned with bird conservation have an additional motive for keeping cats indoors. Experts have identified domestic cats as a major threat to wild bird populations.

Numerous human impacts, such as habitat loss, pollution, and pesticides, are harming wildlife populations. Cat predation is an additional challenge for native species of wildlife already struggling to survive. According to the American Bird Conservancy, which has taken a leading role on this issue, "Loss of wildlife habitat and fragmentation due to human development are the leading causes of declining bird populations. However, scientists now list invasive species, including cats, as the second most serious threat to bird populations worldwide."

Cats are not native to North America. European settlers introduced *Felis catus*, a domesticated descendent of European and African wild cats, to this continent. Native wildlife did not evolve alongside these predators, and have few defences against them. Cats also compete with native predators, preying upon the small animals that are important food sources for hawks, owls, foxes, and others.

Cats kill common species of small animals and birds, but also species that are in danger of extinction. Cats destroy nests and kill newborn animals. Nestlings, fledglings, and birds that nest or feed on or near the ground are especially vulnerable to cat predation. Outdoor cats kill animals from instinct – even if they are well fed, have bells on their collars, or have been declawed. Scientific studies have shown that cats with bells on their collars still stalk and kill wildlife. Bells offer no protection to inexperienced young animals. Meanwhile, most cat owners are oblivious to the killing sprees that their pets engage in while out prowling the neighbourhood.

In Canada, there are about 5 million domestic cats. It is estimated that they kill about 140 million birds and other small animals every year. The U.S. domestic cat population is estimated to exceed 90 million or perhaps even 100 million animals. According to the American Bird Conservancy, only 35% of pet cats in the U.S. are kept exclusively indoors, leaving the majority to roam outside at least part of the time. In addition, estimates for the number of stray and feral cats in the U.S. range between 60 to 100 million.

All told, scientists estimate that free-roaming pet, stray, and feral cats kill hundreds of millions of birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians in the U.S. each year, including rare species. A 1992 Virginia study closely monitored five cats over a period of 11 months, counting confirmed kills for each animal. They conservatively estimated that each domestic cat killed about 26 birds a year in urban areas, and about 83 birds a year in rural areas – representing over 26 million birds a year in Virginia alone. In another example, a four-year cat predation study estimated that rural free-roaming cats kill at least 7.8 million and perhaps as many as 219 million birds a year in Wisconsin. In some parts of the state, free-roaming cat densities reach 114 cats per square mile, outnumbering all similar-sized native predators. It has been suggested that cats should be covered by animal control regulations similar to those already in effect for dogs. In the U.S., some cities and counties have already passed laws requiring cat licensing, vaccination, control, and mandatory spaying and neutering.

How can you help? Simply keep your pets indoors and spay or neuter your cat as early as eight weeks old, before an unwanted litter is produced.

- For more information on the American Bird Conservancy's "Cats Indoors!" Campaign visit www.abcbirds.org/cats.
- A Canadian site, [redacted] aims to educate people about cat predation.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Swamp Sparrow at Cranberry Marsh, photographed in December 2007 by Norah Jancik

Responding to a letter in the January newsletter, Northern Shovelers come in good numbers (6 to 40) to Grenadier Pond in November and stay throughout December, and very often into January depending on ice conditions. They are also found on the lake near Mimico. I have seen winter shovelers since 1952 in Toronto, and regularly on Grenadier Pond for the last ten years.

Ilmari Talvila

Greater Scaup (female), photographed at Humber Bay Park East on January 30, 2008, by Norah Jancik

Frances and Peter Money passed on this e-mail received from friends: We read with interest your letter in the TFN magazine about shade grown coffee. We have been drinking it for several years now, but purchase the Creemore Coffee Company product - an organic, fair trade, shade-grown coffee from such locations as Costa Rica, Peru, Colombia and Guatamala. It is available, either ground or as beans, medium or dark roast, from Wild Birds Unlimited. Creemore donate a portion of each sale to Bird Studies Canada. See www.creemorecoffee.com.

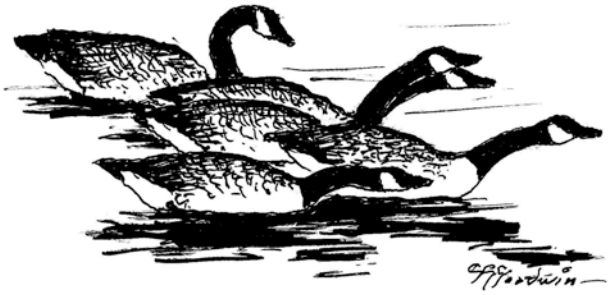
I have often got into debates with people over wildlife in our city. I am at odds with many because they think wildlife in our cities is a problem. I on the other hand find it wonderful.

Over the many years I have studied biology I have seen a drastic reduction in populations of wild birds and even insects. This is what I am concerned about. Should we be concerned over species that are doing well or should we be trying to protect species under threat? I am definitely not concerned about increases in native birds such as Cormorants, Ring-billed Gulls, or Canada Geese. Most of these populations are just getting back the numbers that preceded the coming of the white man. These are the birds people complain about. They don't seem to be worried about life that is in danger of becoming extinct. They only get upset when a species is doing well, although these are in a small minority.

Most of the wildlife on this planet is decreasing in numbers. Why are not people concerned about that situation? I have often thought what would happen if by some miracle all the Passenger Pigeons reappeared. People would get guns out and make them extinct all over again. They would claim there are just too many of them and they are defecating on my nice clean automobile. Even European birds like House Sparrows and starlings are becoming less and less common.

It drives me crazy when I hear people talk about our Canada goose problem. I say, "What's the problem?" They are not a problem to me. They are just a beautiful majestic bird that is not going extinct. If these people put their passion and energy into worrying about rare animals, not common species, we could improve things.

Roger Powley



Drawing of Canada Geese, by Geraldine Goodwin

REMEMBERING DIANA BANVILLE

Diana Banville on a TFN outing at Wigmore Park in May 2002. Photographer unknown

I was introduced to Diana by Jack Cranmer-Byng in the fall of 1976. She had joined the club in 1975. They were working on a ravine study of the West Don Valley near Bayview and Lawrence (published in 1978). Diana was about to leave for Africa (Nairobi, Kenya) to see the countryside and visit her brother who was working there. I had just started working on the newsletter, so was thrilled to get a letter and illustrated article about the birds Diana was seeing. Because she was an active member serving on a waterfront planning committee, I decided to share her submission with others who knew her by publishing it. Apparently she was thrilled.

When she returned to Canada she immediately volunteered to help with the newsletter. She had lots of ideas. One of the first things she did was name it *Toronto Field Naturalist*. It was to be by and for members about Toronto's natural history. We certainly weren't going to call it *The Starling* or *The Dog Strangling Vine*.

Then she got serious about illustrations and began attending every outing of the Nature Arts group (led by Mary Cumming). At these she would ask individual participants to provide her with copies of their sketches. (That's right, rarely does anyone voluntarily donate work without being asked.) Eventually all the sketches were filed in order in loose leaf binders, which are still being used by the newsletter committee.

Along the way she decided we needed checklists of Toronto's flora and fauna. This involved a lot of research, which she loved to do. She examined all outing reports submitted, and asked members to donate their lists, which she used to compile information about the state of Toronto's plants and animals, and she was generous about sharing this information.

She was responsible for editing all the poetry and haiku received. And, of course, she was continually sketching. On outings she would make careful notes and drawings, and encourage others to do so.

She did the layout for the newsletter for about 15 years. When her eyesight began to fail she let others do that, but until 2005 when I retired, she would still make a final check of the newsletter before it went to the printer. TFN misses such a productive and precise member. She was indeed a good friend!

Helen Juhola

To me, Diana was more than a very talented artist, a devoted naturalist and a dedicated TFN Nature Arts Group leader. She was a good friend whom I will miss and who will always be dear to me in my heart.

Melanie Milanich

Diana Banville was a longtime member of the Editorial Committee. As a meticulous proofreader, prolific contributor of articles and artwork, and for many years compiler of the annual newsletter index, she made an enormous contribution to the newsletter. Despite her failing eyesight, Diana enjoyed being involved and, until only a couple of years ago, continued to help in many ways. I marveled at her quiet determination. Even now, when we need an illustration of a particular bird, animal, plant or whatever, it is so often a lovely piece of her work, usually signed "Dida", that is just right. I'm sure those of us who had the privilege of knowing Diana, as well as newer members who didn't, will continue to enjoy her beautiful artwork in our newsletter for years to come.

Marilynn Murphy

Diana's research on plants in Toronto, mentioned by Helen, resulted in the TFN publication *Vascular Plants of Metropolitan Toronto* which was reissued as a second edition in 1994. Documents such as this, that are compiled by local naturalist groups, are often used as a basis for regional checklists, and Diana's contribution in compiling the records of TFN members is acknowledged by her being named as one of the authors of the Ministry of Natural Resources (unpublished) *Distribution and Status of the Vascular Plants of the Greater Toronto Area*, 2000.

To obtain a copy of either *Vascular Plants of Metropolitan Toronto* or the West Don Valley ravine study mentioned by Helen, see TFN Publications on page 2 of the February newsletter.

Jenny Bull

NATURALISTS' NEWS

Rally to Save the Dunlap Observatory

Four TFN members participated in the rally at Queens Park on Jan. 16 to save the David Dunlap Park and Observatory in Richmond Hill from being sold to developers. It was a good turnout considering we only had one day's notice of the rally after stumbling onto the information accidentally. Unfortunately the University is more interested in big money than in preserving environment and heritage and their Feb. 15 deadline for receiving bids doesn't give environmentalists much time to amass a commitment of millions of dollars to make a bid. Only government action can save the property.

Photograph by Margaret McRae

Report by Margaret McRae. For background and updated information visit www.savetheddo.org and Richmond Hill Naturalists website: www.rhnaturalists.ca/save-the-observatory

From the *Newsletter* of Friends of the Spit (November 2007):

- TRCA has announced that a second full-time staff member will be working on the Spit during van-operation months (May to October).
- Friends of the Spit is now 30 years old! The Spit would be very different without Friends: "In a bad dream, imagine the Spit and Baselands with an industrial subdivision, nine sailing clubs, parking lots, car traffic to the tip, Discovery Centre, historic boat mooring, air strip, golf academy and driving range, wind turbines, etc., etc. Friends and our allies have saved the Spit from these!"

See Friends of the Spit's position on Lake Ontario Park at www.friendsofthespit.ca, click on newsletters. Join Friends of the Spit ($5 individual or $8 family) to receive their newsletter and to help save the Spit from unnatural development. See website or write to Friends of the Spit, P.O. Box 51518, 2060 Queen St. E., Toronto M4E 3V7.

Big News in the Boreal! report by Jen Baker, Ontario Nature's Conservation Campaign Coordinator, seen in *The Wood Duck* (Hamilton Naturalists' Club), Jan 2008.

The provincial government made several election promises regarding conservation of the northern landscape and it seems that some of these promises are moving forward:

- to purchase more Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified paper products beginning in 2008.
- to undertake land-use planning in the far north in consultation with First Nations communities and to protect caribou habitat within the commercial forest.
- to review the Mining Act. Discussions are underway about how this will proceed.

The annual report of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario (www.eco.on.ca):

- highlights the desperate need for land use planning in northern Ontario and the urgent need to protect caribou before they're gone from Ontario.
- talks about the need to reform both the Mining Act and the forestry system.

Naturalists' News *continued on next page*.

Save paper by refusing junk mail!

A note to your mail carrier will prevent unwanted advertising being left in your mailbox. Most of these items are printed in colour on glossy paper. "No unaddressed mail please" is all you need. Save trees! Reduce the weight of your recycling box!

Naturalists' News *continued from previous page*.

From *Precipice*, newsletter of the Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (Fall 2007):

Note: some TFN members have supported th s group by s gn ng up w th Escarpment Te ecom (see web.net/~cfre/ nks)

- EBC's nature reserves now total over 6,000 acres, spread over 65 properties including Great Lakes shoreline, Niagara Escarpment outcrops, alvars, wetlands, floodplains and hardwood forests. The EBC thanks its donors!
- Offset your carbon footprint with "Carbon Sponge" a program supported by EBC and the Biosphere Conservation Foundation.

For more information: visit www.escarpment.ca or email rbarnett@escarpment.ca or phone 416-960-8121.

From the Newsroom on Ontario Nature's website, www.ontarionature.org

Dec. 10, 2007

In the past four months, the Canadian government has announced protection for nearly 36 million acres in key areas of the Boreal Forest throughout Canada's Northwest Territories, including the Nahanni National Park Reserve, the Ramparts River and Wetlands in the heart of the Mackenzie Valley, and the East Arm of Great Slave Lake. Canada's Boreal Forest – North America's largest intact forest ecosystem – is the summer breeding ground for over 300 species of our most treasured birds, including the rapidly declining Lesser Yellowlegs and Olive-sided Flycatcher and the endangered Whooping Crane. This fragile area is home to some of the world's largest populations of caribou, wolves, and bear; sustains First Nations communities; and shields us from global warming.

Protection of these lands is a great step toward fulfillment of a commitment the Canadian government has made to protect Boreal Forest land in the Northwest Territories. **Send a letter today** thanking Prime Minister Harper for his recent actions to provide interim protection of critical Boreal landscapes in the Northwest Territories, and urging the Canadian government to continue with its commitment to permanently protect these lands.

January 29, 2008

A new atlas is revealing major trends about the health of Ontario's bird populations. Compared to just 20 years ago, many bird species have declined precipitously whereas others have made remarkable come-backs.

Many of the increases result from conservation activities. "For Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon and Merlin, news is pretty much all positive because these raptors are recovering well since pesticides like DDT were banned in the 1970s. Bald Eagles have increased four-fold province-wide - even more so in the south - and peregrines are back from the brink," said Mike Cadman, project coordinator for the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario*. "Most of Ontario's biggest birds have also increased dramatically in the 20 years since an earlier atlas was conducted. Three swan species, Bald Eagle, Sandhill Crane, Canada Goose and Wild Turkey have all increased."

"The future seems much bleaker for some other species," said Gregor Beck, Atlas board chair and co-editor. "For grassland species and birds that eat flying insects, the trend is very worrisome. Formerly widespread birds like Common Nighthawk, Whip-poor-will, Chimney Swift and 6 species of swallow are becoming scarce at an alarming rate. Most of these species have seen a 30-50% decline in two decades and the nighthawk and swift have recently been designated as "threatened" species in Canada. Birds of grasslands, wetlands, and scrublands are declining significantly in the Carolinian region between Toronto and Windsor."

"Results from the atlas will be put to use to help protect birds and ecosystems," said Caroline Schultz, Executive Director of Ontario Nature, a project partner. "The fact that the biggest overall declines are in southern Ontario highlights the need for conservation efforts here."

Another atlas survey will be conducted from 2021 to 2025. "Hopefully by then conservation actions will have helped some species currently in decline to rebound," concluded Beck.

* * *

A short piece in ***NOW Magazine*** (Jan 17-23, 2008), sent in to the office by one of our members, reported that 44 large trees at 1001 Queen West, the old mental health centre, will be cut down to make way for a massive redevelopment of the site by CAMH. It was only last month that we reported on the trees being cut for a new project at Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

BIRD ANTING by Ilmari Talvila first appeared in TFN Newsletter No. 256, January, 1971

The subject of bird anting offers a good example of how amateur bird watchers can make a valuable contribution to the science of ornithology.

Our story starts in April 1934 when an Australian schoolboy, Peter Bradley, watched some starlings acting in a peculiar way. The birds seemed to be picking up ants and stuffing them under their wings in a kind of frenzy. These actions so puzzled the lad that he wrote to an Australian bird expert, A. H. Chisholm, for an explanation. The expert had never seen or heard of this kind of bird behaviour before and, like any decent expert, doubted the boy's senses. However he did mention the observations in his book "Bird Wonders of Australia" and soon people all over the world were reporting bird anting; it became a popular subject for observation and speculation. How and why do they do it?

Here is the 'how' of it as Roy Ivor described a Blue Jay anting in one of his Erindale aviaries:

"Quizzically he cocks his head to eye the insects at his feet. Then with incredible swiftness he makes a darting stroke to pick up one of the ants. At the same instant he stretches out one wing and twists his tail awry beside his legs. Clutching the ant in his bill, he rapidly rubs it against the underside of an outer primary feather, stroking downward toward its tip.

"In quick succession he picks up ant after ant to caress first one wing, then the other, and stroke the underside of his tail feathers. Occasionally in his ludicrous contortions he steps on his own tail and tumbles backward like a comic acrobat. In this strange act of anting he seems to gain an exaltation that might almost be likened to the ecstasy of a cat over catnip."

Now, what about the 'why' of it?

There a lots of theories. I will call the important theories by the unscientific names of:

- the Flying Pantry theory,
- the Bug theory,
- the Lady Ponds theory, and
- the Pot theory.

The Flying Pantry theory says that ants are stowed away under the feathers to be used for snacks during migration flights. Probably taken with a grain of salt.

The Bug theory says that the ants, or the formic acid secreted by them, help rid the birds of parasites. Roy Ivor doesn't believe this since the birds seem to put the ants in the wrong places.

The Lady Ponds theory says that the secretions contain 'ingredient X' which is so soothing to the bird's skin and plumage. Presumably different species of ants are good for dry, oily or normal skin.

The Pot theory, a modern one, says the birds are 'high' on ants. They do seem to go into a kind of trance and ecstasy and lose their fear of man. If this is true the hippy is more bird-brained than I had thought.

Now another amateur, a housewife, Mrs. Eloise Potter, enters the scene. For 5 years she watched birds and ants from the glass-paned back door of her home in Zebulon, North Carolina - presumably while doing other things as well.

And she thinks birds ant because they itch! And they itch because they are growing new feathers or molting their old ones. And they itch real bad right after a rainstorm. So it looks like the Lady Ponds theory is the best one of all. Her evidence seems pretty conclusive. In fact, right up to scratch.

For the intriguing details on this ticklish subject, see:

Potter, E. F. *Anting in Wild Birds*. Auk Vol. 87, Oct. 1970
Ivor, H. R. *Antics of Bird Anting*. Nature Jan., 1946.
Lane, F. W. *The Mystery of Bird Anting*. Animal Wonderland 1962.

Ed. The Birder's Handbook by Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin and Darryl Wheye, 1988, favours the Bug theory over Lady Ponds, while acknowledging "the purpose of anting is not well understood". Even today, 37 years after Ilmar's article, the 'why' of anting still seems unclear. Whatever the purpose, it is a fascinating aspect of bird behaviour and reports of such observations by our members would be welcome.

WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

March 2007

March was typically variable with a temperature range of over 40° C. The first half of the month continued generally very wintry, with a major winter storm on the 1st followed by an Arctic airmass which brought -22°C temperatures on the 6th.

Thereafter, there was a warming trend with active frontal passages. By the 13th, it hit 15.8°, followed by another less intense cold spell, and then temperatures peaked at 20.3° on the 26th. In the U.S.A., March was actually a very warm month (the second-warmest on record after 1910), but a local cold anomaly over northeastern Canada influenced southern Ontario, so it was on the border between the two anomalies.

All this variability added up to a month that was close to the long-term average. Monthly mean temperature at Pearson was 0.4°, 0.8° above the 30-year "normal" over the period 1971-2000, but actually 0.5° below the super-warm 10-year period from 1998-2007. The variability is ***not*** a sign of global warming; rather, it is more in character with the usual North American climate, which is affected by no significant east-west mountain barriers between the arctic and the tropics. Thus, when the jet stream whips around, contrasting air masses have free rein. (My hunch is that, if anything, global warming is tending to reduce variability as the contrast between the equator and poles declines, and long monotonous warm spells go on for weeks as they did in early winter 2006-2007. However, I have no scientific analysis to back this up.)

Strangely, March was relatively dry in spite of all this action. Precipitation totals were in the 30 to 50 mm range in the Greater Toronto Area, with a slight favouring of rain over snow: thus, rain, snow and total were slightly below normal. About half the month's precipitation fell on the 1st. Sunshine, at 167 hours, was about 10 hours greater than average.

Gavin Miller

White Snakeroot drawn by Diana Banville

COMING EVENTS

If you plan to attend any of the following events, we recommend that you contact the organizing group beforehand to confirm time and place.

Toronto Entomologists' Association (TEA)

Sat. March 29, 2008 1:15 p.m. Annual Student Symposium (graduate students from Ontario universities present short talks and display posters relating to their work in entomology). Room 432, Ramsey Wright Bldg., 25 Harbord St. (southwest corner of St. George St. and Harbord St.). Information: www.ontarioinsects.org

Science on Sundays

Sundays at 3 pm. Royal Canadian Institute, J.J.R. Macleod Auditorium, Medical Sciences Bldg., University of Toronto, 1 King's College Circle. Free. Information: 416-977-2983, www.royalcanadianinstitute.org

- Mar. 2 Three Centuries of Leonhard Euler (History of Mathematics). Speaker: Craig G. Fraser, Ph.D.
- Mar. 9 Science fun for kids ages 6-12. Speaker: Russell Zeid.

Rouge Valley Guided Nature Walks

Sundays, 1:30 pm. Meet at the Rouge Valley Conservation Centre (Pearse House), 1749 Meadowvale Rd., Scarborough. Information: 416-282-8265, www.rougevalleynaturalists.com/news

- Mar. 9 Leader: Steve Gahbauer.
- Mar. 30 Leader: Robert Marshall.

High Park Walking Tours

2nd and 4th Sundays, 10:30 am to 12 noon. Meet at the benches across the road south of Grenadier Café. Free Information: 416-392-1748 ext. 5 or www.highpark.org

- Mar. 9 Myths and Legends of High Park. Leader: Catherine Raven, Colborne Lodge Staff.
- Mar. 23 Winter Tree Identification. Cara Webster, Urban Forestry.

High Park Volunteer Stewardship Program

1st and 3rd Sundays, 10:30 am to 12:30 pm. Information: www.highpark.org

- Mar. 2 Heritage Trees of High Park, Talk and Walk. Leader: Bohdan Kowalyk. High Park Tennis Club, 430 Parkside Dr.

The Market Gallery

To Mar. 2, 2008. Wed.-Fri 10-4; Sat. 9-4; Sun. 12-4. In Praise of Cities. Works by Enid Robbie. South St. Lawrence Market, 2nd floor, 95 Front St. E. Free.

Ian Wheal Walks

- Sat. Mar. 15 East Point Park. Meet at Rouge Hill GO Station at 2 pm.
- Fri. Mar. 21 Sam Smith Park. Meet at Kipling Ave. and Lake Shore Blvd. West at 2 pm.
- Sat. Mar. 29 Corktown to Don Pinnacle, Irish Heritage Walk (Irish Immigrant Trail, 1847). Meet at corner of Queen St. E. and Power St. at 2 pm.

Red yellow and blue
Cardinal willow branch sky
Brilliant March morning.

Haiku by Elisabeth Gladstone

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TFN walk at Ashbridges Bay, Jan. 26, 2008. Photograph by Norah Jancik