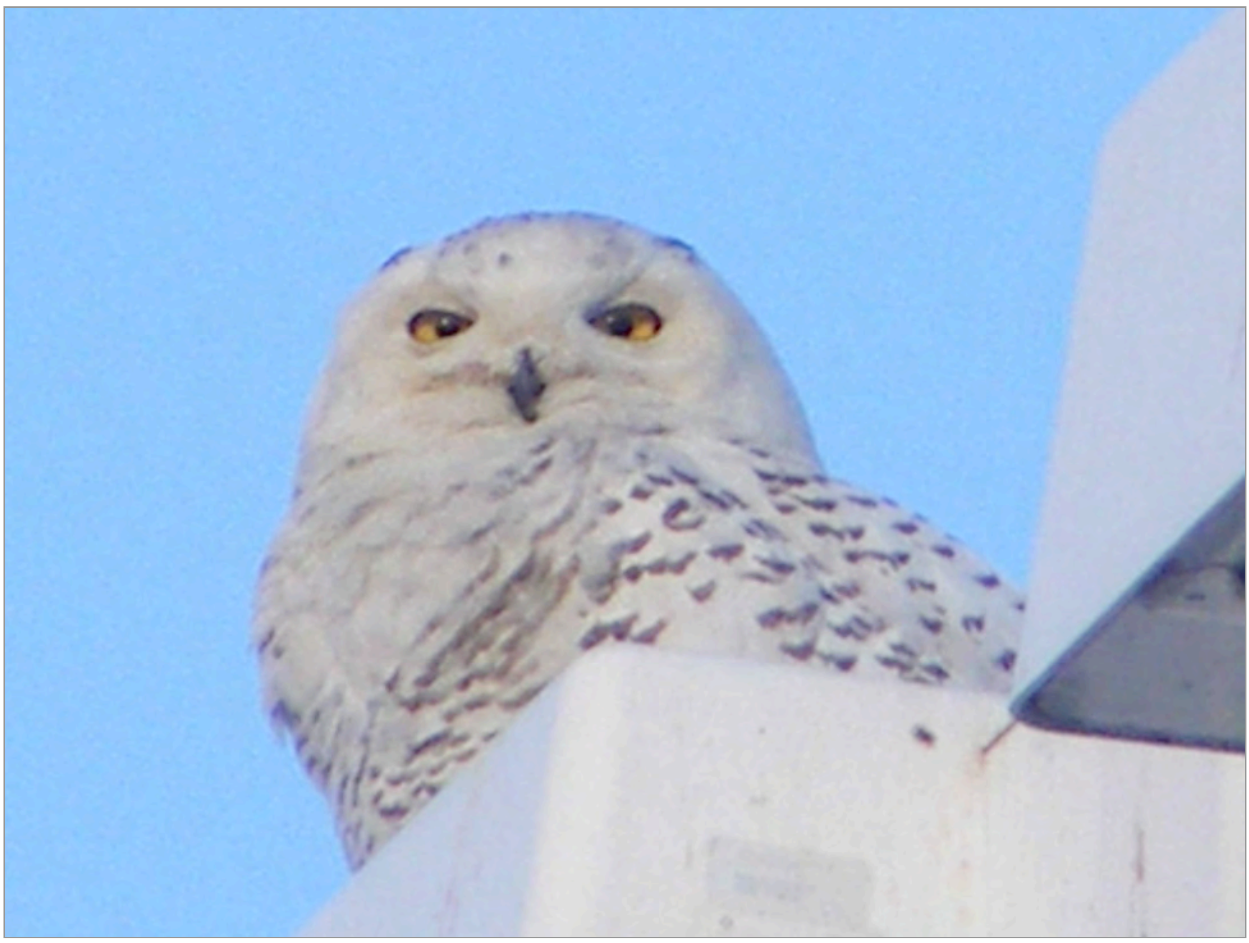
TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 561, February 2009



Snowy Owl on Leslie Street Spit photographed by Yoshie Nagata, December 2008.
See Outings Reports on page 10.

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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 March issue:** Feb 6.

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

Jenny Bull (co-editor), Eva Davis, Karin Fawthrop, Nancy Fredenburg, Elisabeth Gladstone, Mary Lieberman, Ruth Munson, Marilynn Murphy, Toshi Oikawa, Wendy Rothwell (co-editor).

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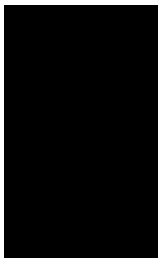

MEMBERSHIP FEES

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

No GST. Tax receipts issued for donations. Send membership fees and address changes to the TFN office.
Please note: TFN does not give out its membership list.

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Volunteer Opportunity

We are looking for a couple of people to compile the 2008 newsletter index. If you have a computer and have good attention-to-detail skills, and would enjoy reviewing the year's newsletters and compiling the list of subjects, please get in touch. We will provide guidance and review.

TFN MEETING

Sunday, February 1, 2008, at 2:30 pm

Understanding the life cycle of Ontario's hummingbirds

Cindy Cartwright, Coordinator of the Ontario Hummingbird Project

VISITORS WELCOME!

SOCIAL: 2:00 – 2:30 pm
Bring your own mug for coffee or tea if you wish.
Only paper cups provided.

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

March 1 ***Your home and native garden: Creating beautiful natural spaces in the places where we live, work and play***
Paul O'Hara**,** Blue Oak Native Landscapes

April 5 ***After the ice age*: *the First Peoples in Ontario***
Peter Storck, formerly of the Royal Ontario Museum
and author of *Journey to the Ice Age: Discovering an Ancient World*

May 3 ***The natural treasures of Carolinian Canada***
Lorraine Johnson, editor of *The Natural Treasures of Carolinian Canada: Discovering the Rich Natural Diversity of Ontario's Southwestern Heartland*

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.

Note: In winter, icers are recommended to prevent falls.

Sunday, Feb. 1, 2:30 p.m.

LECTURE – Understanding the Life Cycle of Ontario's Hummingbirds

Speaker: Cindy Cartwright, Coordinator of the Ontario Hummingbird Project

Emmanuel College, 75 Queen's Park Cres. E. See page 3

Tuesday, Feb. 3, 10:00 a.m.

ASHBRIDGE'S BAY – Birds

Leader: Doug Paton

Meet in front of Beaches Library on Queen St. E. just east of Lee Ave. TTC: Queen streetcar or bus 64 (south) from Main subway station. Bring binoculars. Lunch at a local restaurant after the walk.

Saturday, Feb. 7, 10:30 a.m.

HARBOURFRONT AND MUSIC GARDEN – Nature Arts (Photography)

Leader: Nancy Anderson

Meet at York Quay Centre, south exit, near the skating rink and Lakeside Café. In the morning, we'll look at the Harbourfront exhibits and skating rink area. Bring lunch or buy at the Lakeside Café. After lunch we will walk to the Music Garden. Last year it was a winter wonderland.

Tuesday, Feb.10, 10:00 a.m.

HIGH PARK – Birds

Leader: Doug Paton

Meet at the park entrance on the south side of Bloor St. W. at High Park Ave. Bring binoculars. Lunch stop at Grenadier restaurant.

Saturday, Feb. 14, 10:00 a.m.

ST. JAMES CEMETERY TO RIVERDALE FARM – Trees, Birds and History

Leader: Bob Kortright

Meet at the entrance to St. James Cemetery on the east side of Parliament St., 100 metres north of Wellesley St. E. We will visit the old cemeteries of St. James and the Necropolis, passing houses and gardens of Cabbagetown on the way. Bring binoculars and lunch or buy lunch and a hot drink at Riverdale Farm.

Sunday, Feb. 15, 2:00 p.m.

MAYIM CREEK – Lost Rivers Walk

Leader: John Wilson

Meet at Pape subway station. Trace the course of a lost creek that ran past two Jewish cemeteries, hence the name Mayim – Hebrew for "waters". Walk ends at Leslie St. and Queen St. E. Moderate difficulty (streets and some alleyways). A joint walk with the Toronto Green Community.

Tuesday, Feb. 17, 1:00 p.m.

SHERWOOD PARK – Circular Walk – Restoration

Leader: Janice Palmer

Start and finish at the Sherwood Park main entrance at the east end of Sherwood Ave., 200 metres east of Mt. Pleasant (Mt. Pleasant bus 103). Walk this heavily-used urban ravine park containing a forest with 150-year-old trees; see what volunteers have done to protect the park's natural features. Wear suitable clothing and footwear for snow and slippery trails. Duration: 2 hours.

Saturday, Feb. 21 10:00 a.m.
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO GREENHOUSES – Botany
Leader: Nancy Dengler
Meet at the 33 Willcocks St. entrance to the Faculty of Forestry, Earth Sciences Centre, University of Toronto (Spadina streetcar, half a block east of Willcocks St. streetcar stop). Morning only.

Tuesday, Feb. 24 10:30 a.m.
LAMBTON WOODS – Winter Birds
Leader: Barbara Kalthoff
Meet at James Gardens parking lot on Edenbridge Dr., east of Royal York Rd. Bring binoculars. Morning only.

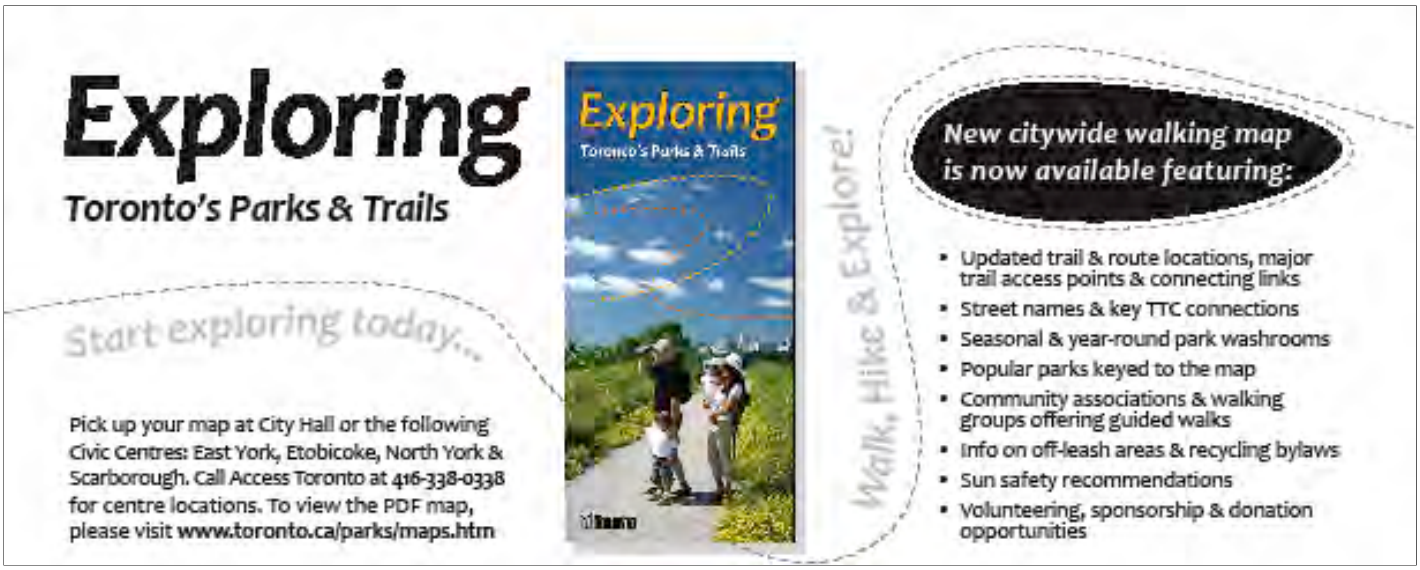
Saturday, Feb. 28 10:00 a.m.
ASHBRIDGE'S BAY – Winter Birds
Leader: Anne Powell
Meet at the southwest corner of Lakeshore Blvd. E. and Coxwell Ave. Bring binoculars. Morning only.

New Toronto Parks and Trails Map

The new *Exploring Toronto's Parks & Trails* map will be launched on the morning of Sunday, May 3, at Todmorden Mills Museum & Arts Centre, 67 Pottery Road. This event will coincide with the Toronto Region Conservation Authority's visually spectacular annual "Paddle the Don" event happening that day.

Come out that day to pick up a copy of the map, go for a spring walk along the Don River and enjoy the spectacle of hundreds of boats sailing down the Don River. Check your TFN newsletter closer to this time for up-to-date details on the launch event.

Ed: We are p eased that severa ove y photos by Margaret McRae are nc uded n th s pub cat on. Thanks to Jerry Be an, C ty of Toronto Parks, for send ng us th s not ce. At ast year s Padd e the Don event, the f rst Wa k the Don gu de map was re eased. Th s s a ser es of down oadab e se f-gu ded wa ks that suggest routes, show access po nts and descr be tems of nterest. V ew at www.trca.on.ca/wa kthedon.



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 Committee's report will be published in the May newsletter.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

As I write this report at the beginning of a new year, it seems an appropriate time to pay tribute to the many volunteers who contribute to the success of the TFN. It takes a great variety of talents to provide the benefits our members enjoy.

Thanks to Nick Eyles, we have heard 8 excellent lectures in the past year, and look forward to 4 more exciting prospects this winter and spring. I am happy to announce that Nancy Dengler and Corinne McDonald have agreed to take on the challenge of finding good speakers, starting with the fall 2009 season. We are very fortunate to have two such capable volunteers for this role. Nancy, who recently retired as a Professor of Botany at the University of Toronto, joined the TFN in 2005. Corinne, also a member since 2005, has a background in social work and human resources. They would be glad to receive any suggestions you may have for speakers or subjects you would like to hear about. See page 7 for Corinne's comprehensive write-up of the December Monthly Meeting. We are thankful to Barry Mitchell, who has done such an excellent job of writing these reports throughout the past year.

Outings leaders are perhaps the most visible of our volunteers, and we thank them for their dedication in sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm with current and prospective members. Behind the scenes, we appreciate the organizational skills of Gail Gregory, Margaret McRae and, until recently, Ruth Munson, who so efficiently line up these outings – 139 of them in 2008. As I write, Gail and her team are busy organizing an Outings Leaders' Workshop.

I know from members' complimentary remarks that Jenny Bull's efforts to produce a quality newsletter are appreciated. Thank you, Jenny, and also the faithful editorial committee whose names appear on page 2. We are grateful to TFN members who submit articles and those who write letters or send in photos to be shared in *Keeping in Touch*.

From recent articles, you will be aware that George Bryant and his team are working to ensure that our Nature Reserves are well looked after, and that members have opportunities to visit them.

Helen Juhola and Pleasance Crawford continue to work steadily on the task of cataloging our extensive slide collection, some of which they shared with us in their 85th Anniversary lecture in November.

Promoting the TFN is something we can all do, by inviting a friend to attend an outing or lecture, welcoming newcomers, or posting lecture flyers in our local library or community centre. A special 'thank you' to Pinky Franklin and volunteers who help by making TFN visible at special events like Canada Blooms, the Green Living Show, etc. Our website is a very effective means of promoting the TFN, and we appreciate the excellent job Margaret McRae is doing as our web-master. It would be helpful to have someone with website expertise to share this responsibility. Until recently, Chris Girgulis has ensured that selected outings were publicized in local newspapers. Thank you, Chris, for your reliable service these past few years. We are looking for a volunteer (someone with e-mail access) to assume this task. If you are interested, please e-mail the TFN office.

We are indeed fortunate to have Corley Phillips, our exceptionally knowledgeable and diligent Treasurer. It would be beneficial to have a second person with accounting skills to assist Corley. Please contact the TFN office if you could help in this way.

Most members are probably unaware of the amount of work involved in maintaining membership records. While most of the activity occurs in the summer, this is a year-round task. Thank you, Nancy Fredenburg and Corley Phillips for handling this so efficiently. We also appreciate data entry support provided by Kathy Paidock and Valerie Mitanoff.

We are indebted to Sandy Cappell who so professionally handles all communications by phone or e-mail to the TFN office. He is meticulous in ensuring accurate messages are conveyed to the appropriate people, and goes out of his way to help everyone who calls looking for information.

Last but not least, I wish to thank the members of our board. Not only do they participate in monthly board meetings, but they give careful thought to all issues requiring decisions, give me wise advice, and pitch in and help in many ways. I am certainly grateful for the support of such able and hardworking individuals.

As we embark on this new year, I trust all members join me in thanking our volunteers for serving the TFN so well. I also hope that many of you will consider volunteering in various capacities. It's very rewarding and a lot of fun!

Wendy Rothwell

MONTHLY MEETING REPORT

Greening the Zoo…from invasive plant control to geothermal monkey exhibits,
Sunday, December 7, David Ireland

As Curator of Conservation Programs at the Toronto Zoo, David Ireland had many interesting stories that demonstrate how zoos are playing a major role in the fight against climate change and for sustainable development. The Toronto Zoo is taking a lead in this green movement. With 1.3 million visitors a year, who spend from 6 to 7 hours per visit, they have an ideal opportunity to educate people about conservation and biodiversity.

In 2007, the Toronto Zoo recycled 4500 cell phones in partnership with Eco-Cell™ (www.eco-cell.org). A substance called tantalum, used in the manufacture of electronic devices, comes from the metal ore, coltan, found in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mining disrupts the rainforest habitat of the lowland gorilla. The unlikely pairing of cell phones with animals draws huge crowds who can then be educated about the benefits of recycling and the threats to the lowland gorilla habitat. All funds from the recycled phones and other small electronic devices go towards gorilla protection projects.

Lion-tailed macaque
photographed by Ken Ardill

The Toronto Zoo has a 15-member Green Team and a Green Plan (see www.torontozoo.com/conservation). The zoo uses Bull Frog power and Zero Foot Print measures. In 2008, a 1200 square foot green roof was installed on the Australasia Pavilion; a 5000 square foot roof is in the works for the polar bear exhibit.

Some cold monkeys are about to benefit from a new energy efficient project. The lion-tailed macaques are a popular exhibit with a 1200 sq. ft. outside area where the animals like to go every day. In the winter, they are inclined to stay up in the rafters, warmed by radiant heaters. Rather than install 4 additional 1000-watt heaters, the plan is to utilize geothermal energy. Heat energy deep in the earth will be piped up via three 250 foot holes and a heat pump will convert the energy into radiant heat on the floor of the enclosure. This flooring will extend to a small area where visitors gather so that they can actually experience what is keeping the macaques' enclosure snow-free in the middle of winter...and, hopefully, the macaques visible!

The zoo hopes to be carbon neutral through the conversion of its animal waste into energy using an anaerobic digester. David explained that biogas is in use in Germany and The Netherlands. The zoo proposes to build a facility that could creatively manage the odour issue by having the trucks come inside the facility to be emptied and by sucking air into the building. The zoo has lots of organic waste which is currently trucked to a compost area close by. For environmental protection reasons, they can no longer give the resulting compost away. Converting it to biogas would reduce their carbon footprint by 100% as well as fuel the zoo and houses nearby. Such a facility could also convert some of the food waste that is currently trucked from Toronto supermarkets to either London or Michigan. This project is currently moving to the 'Request For Proposals' stage of development.

The story of the Ontario Road Ecology Group (OREG) was one I had not heard before. David, as group co-chair, is justifiably proud of their work to date. Championed by the Toronto Zoo, OREG is comprised of government and non-government scientists, educators, and transportation planners. Their goal is to

Continued on page 8.

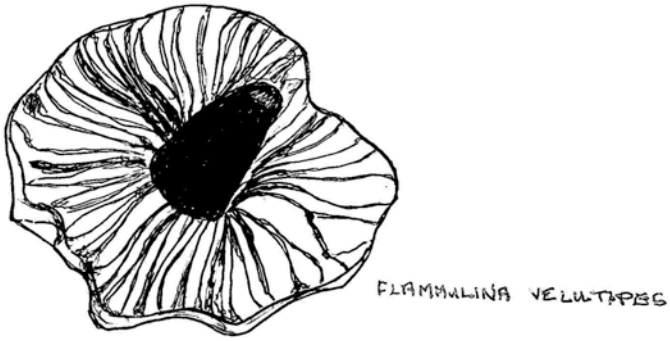
WINTER MUSHROOM AND ORANGE LOBSTER

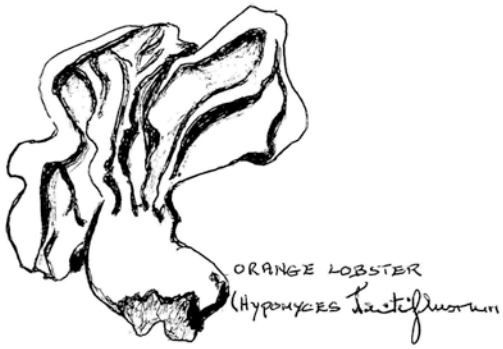
Mushroom enthusiasts hunt for morels in the spring, and in summer and autumn for nearly everything else. But there is one mushroom which only cold weather can produce: indeed, I have rejoicingly made its acquaintance, bursting golden through the snow in Sunnybrook Park, a gorgeous creature with yellow gills and a tough, velvety-brown stub supporting it. It has a cespitose habit (growing in groups) at the base of living trees, and its spore print is white. It is sometimes called *Collybia velutipes*, but is better known as *Flammulina velutipes*.

Another unlikely delight is the Orange Lobster (*Hypomyces lactifluorum*) which is not a mushroom but a parasite which attacks fungi, principally the Milk Mushrooms, turning them into enlarged, malformed, brilliant orange-red blobs. They are a striking sight and frequently found. According to one authority, they can be eaten. According to another, since it is not possible to be *certain* of the host's identity, they are better avoided.

The tiresome business of edibility aside, these are delightful finds and fascinating creatures in their own right.

Article and drawings by Eva Davis





Monthly Meeting Report *continued from previous page*.

raise awareness about the threat of roads to biodiversity in Ontario, and to research and apply solutions. They have taken environmental assessment data from a number of sources regarding the future 407 highway to show the developers the areas of greatest impact for the building of eco passages. OREG is currently involved in a proposal to obtain empirical data to show the possible effects of various mitigation measures (bridges, fences, culverts) and their combinations.

In the area of invasive plant species, David issued an invitation for TFN members to get involved in the annual garlic mustard pull on May 22, 2009. Last year, the zoo teamed up with Evergreen and pulled approximately 850 pounds of the invasive plant from the core wood area of the zoo. This year, plans are being made for a province-wide pull through the efforts of two groups, the Biodiversity Education and Awareness Network (BEAN) and the Education Alliance for Sustainable Ontario (EASO). See www.sustainable-ontario.org for more information on these two groups.

In answer to a question from the audience, David shared with us a hopeful development in the control of dog strangling vine. Sandy Smith, a researcher at the University of Toronto, has returned from France with two caterpillars and a beetle that seem to love to eat said vine. She is currently looking for federal funding for a bio-control project.

Who knew there was so much going on at the Toronto Zoo, much of which we can't see but all of which is very important to sustainable development?

Corinne McDonald

CARDEN ALVAR

In June 2008, twenty or so TFN members were among the 250 participants at the 2nd Annual Carden Nature Festival. Located just one and a half hours from Toronto, Carden Plain, whose main town is Kirkfield, offers some of the most distinctive landscape and richest biodiversity in southern/central Ontario, yet remains unknown to many GTA naturalists. The Festival, whose 3rd edition runs June 5-7, 2009, is attempting to attract ecotourism and promote education concerning its rare alvar habitat.

Almost 40% of the world's alvar is located in the Great Lakes Basin, principally in Carden, the Bruce Peninsula and Manitoulin Island. Consisting of shallow limestone sheets over the granite of the Canadian Shield, alvar is the product of the comings and goings of inland seas depositing billions of mollusk and fish skeletons as glaciers advanced and retreated over millennia. In appearance alvar presents treeless areas of flagstone-like limestone paving bordered by shallow soil. Alvar flora must be able to adapt to climatic extremes, including spring flooding and intense dry heat in summer. Indian paintbrush with its vibrant yellow, orange and red bracts is the most distinctive of the 30 or so alvar specifics. Prairie smoke is a unique, wispy presence in the alvar and surrounding grasslands. Both species received considerable attention in a wildflower photography workshop.

Although internationally designated an Important Bird Area and soon to be a provincial park, the survival of Carden's alvar remains in the balance. Some of the 60 or so events cast light on the area's economic, ecological and cultural dynamics. Gravel is the chief local industry. Dufferin Quarry, concerned to be a good corporate citizen, offered a tour of their facility, emphasizing the many facets of their minimum-impact approach. Speaking on the geology of the area, Brian Mould explained that, due to glacial action at the edge of the Canadian Shield, high quality pure granite gravel occurs only in a narrow band, one that passes directly through Carden Plain. The speaker foresaw a future in which expanded quarrying is buffered by ecotourism, thus preserving the most sensitive areas.

Bob Bowles, who led a workshop on dragonfly and damselfly identification, played a role in drawing attention to the area. In the 1980s he told American birding friends that Carden Plain was one of the premier birding sites in North America. Of the 150 species recorded in the area, Upland Sandpipers, with their eerily beautiful flight calls audible in open areas, have by themselves drawn many birders from afar. In the wetlands, Sedge Wren can be seen and heard fleetingly, while a rare Yellow Rail has been heard in spring. Workshops about breeding programs for Eastern Bluebirds and Loggerhead Shrikes offered participants a hands-on introduction to the intricacies of nesting box maintenance, competition and predator discouragement, etc.

Day trips from Toronto are quite possible. Workshops are spread conveniently throughout the day beginning at 6 a.m. and continuing into the wee hours for astronomy and nature-by-night walks. Food and washrooms are available on-site and local hospitality is warm and informal.

Visit www.CardenGuide.com/Festival for further information. Early registration is recommended, to ensure participation in your preferred activities.

Marcus Feak

Indian paintbrush (above left) and prairie smoke, photographed by Georgia Shank

EXTRACTS FROM OUTING LEADERS' REPORTS

West Don, Marcus Feak, Oct. 25
… a little brown snake was a highlight.

Nature Arts, Toronto Zoo, Susan Weiss, Nov. 1
Well worth the price of admission… In the entrance plaza, Mikita the male Bald Eagle, injured and unable to fly, came to Toronto Zoo in 1981 and enjoys protection and prominence as the first up-close sighting.

Drawing of Bald Eagle from Susie Weiss's journal.

Humber Bay Park East, Ann Gray, Nov. 6
We started on the west side of Humber Bay, as this location offered better light to study the ducks, particularly the Green-winged Teal, through the telescope… Butterflies were also present and it was warm enough (10°-12°) for 4 orange sulphurs, 2 clouded sulphurs, 1 white form of orange/clouded sulphur and 1 American lady to nectar. A real treat for each of us at this time of year.

Crothers Woods & Sun Valley, Margaret McRae, Nov. 9
Buckthorn, hawthorn and crab apple fruiting; goldenrod, New England aster and tansy blooming; beaver swimming. Noted old chimney from middle mill.

Leslie Street Spit, Bob Kortright, Nov. 22
A large group of American Pipits on the tablelands near the lighthouse repeatedly flew up to teach us their flight calls. A young Northern Harrier appeared and disappeared behind a ridge less than 20 m away. Just as we were giving up hope of owls at the end of the day, a Snowy Owl appeared on top of the light standard by the gatehouse in the middle of the road, capping a very pleasant 11 km walk. See Yoshie Nagata's photo on the front cover.

Col. Sam Smith Park, Doug Paton, Dec. 2
…At the pond east of the parking lot there was a single widgeon with a number of other ducks and out in the lake there was a single coot along with a huge flock of scaup. While we looked for a mockingbird we found instead a Northern Shrike and several Tree Sparrows. In the large bay, we found Common Goldeneye and Pied-billed and Red-necked Grebes.

Ashbridge's Bay, Doug Paton, Dec. 11
… The bird-of-the-day was a Ruby-crowned Kinglet – not seen by everyone but a good sighting by several of the birders. … Also noted in the pond at Ashbridge's was a blond and white coloured Mallard, a colour none of us had ever seen before.

Leslie Street Spit, Bob Kortright, Dec. 13
Although many paths were icy, we managed to get through the day without mishap, and participants were happy with excellent views of Northern Shrike, 2 Great Horned Owls, 2 Northern Harriers, a kestrel and 2 different accipiters… We also saw mink and muskrat.

Humber Bay Park East, Roger Powley, Dec. 16
All the common diving ducks, including the three mergansers, some shovellers, a Great Black-backed Gull, and some Redheads.

Beechwood Valley and Todmorden, Margaret McRae, Dec. 27
Large cottonwood tree in Beechwood wetlands with new (since October) extensive beaver damage. The river was very high with strong, swift flow. A foggy day with intermittent rain, 7°.

Col. Sam Smith Park, Anne Powell, Dec. 30
…highlights were a Snowy Owl on the marina docks and two mink scurrying among the rocks along the shoreline.

Correct ons: In the December ssue, page 14, mushroom p ctures were photographed by Anne Byzko; page 8, su phur she f mushroom s *Laetiporus sulphureus*.

FOR READING

Extreme Birds: The World's Most Extraordinary and Bizarre Birds

By Dominic Couzens. published by Firefly Books, November 2008, 320 pp, 10" X 11", 150 color photographs, index; $45 hardcover with jacket
ISBN: 1-55407-423-1/978-1-55407-423-5

Have you ever wondered which bird has the biggest mouth? Spends the longest time aloft? Fasts longest? Puts on the best avian soap opera? Is fairest to its chicks?

(Answers: Tawny Frogmouth - Australia, Sooty Tern - tropical oceans, Emperor Penguin - Antarctica, White-fronted Bee-eater - Central Africa, Common Kingfisher – Eurasia).

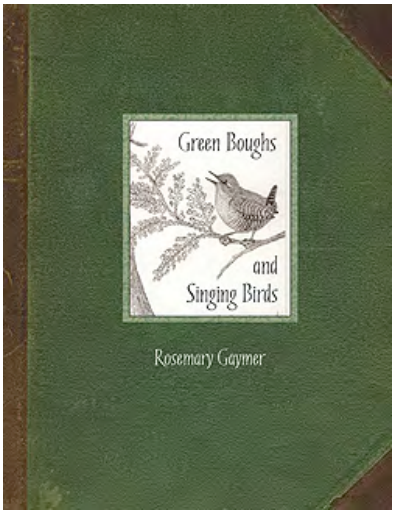
This beautiful, humorously written, coffee table book is crammed full of interesting facts about 150 birds from all over the world. For the birds it covers, it provides more information than would be found in a field guide. For birders who are acquainted only with their local birds, it provides a window on more exotic species. Each fact is given 2 pages: the first is a sharp, full-colour photograph of the bird, and the second, a description of the unusual feature, plus additional information on the bird, and similar birds.

This book would be of interest to anyone who loves odd facts or beautiful photographs, even if not previously fascinated with birds, and might appeal to teens and tweeners as well as adults. At 350 pages, it is well worth the $45 price. Dominic Couzens has written many books on birds and birding, leads specialized bird tours, and is a regular contributor to *Birdwatch* and *BBC Wildlife* magazines.

Reviewed by Rachel Gottsman

Green Boughs and Singing Birds

By Rosemary Gaymer, published by Shoreline Press (514-457-5733; www.shorelinepress.ca; shoreline@sympatico.ca). $22.95 plus GST and postage



This is a collection of essays by former long-time TFNer Rosemary Gaymer about special places she has visited across North America. Rosemary, who served as TFN president from 1972 to 1974, was featured in the "Beginnings" series in the newsletter in 1989. We have reprinted this article in "From the Archives" on page 16.

The Reluctant Mr. Darwin

By David Quammen, published by W.W. Norton.

February 12 is the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and 2009 marks the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Origin of Species*. A quote on the cover of this book from a review in *Science* says: "If you are going to buy only one book to commemorate Darwin, this could surely be it." What more can I say? David Quammen is one of my favourite natural history writers (I also recommend his book *Song of the Dodo)*.

Jenny Bull

Ontario Nature's 4th Annual Youth Writing Contest

"Every day we make choices that could help or harm our environment.
What are you doing that has a positive impact on our environment?"

- For Ontario grade 7 or 8 students.
- An essay, story, or piece of creative writing, maximum 700 words, typed and double-spaced, on the above topic.
- The top three entries will be published in *ON Nature* magazine and will receive cool prizes.
- Deadline for entries: February 25.
- For contest instructions and rules and for the winning essays from previous years, see www.ontarionature.org/events/youth_writing_contest.html

KEEPING IN TOUCH

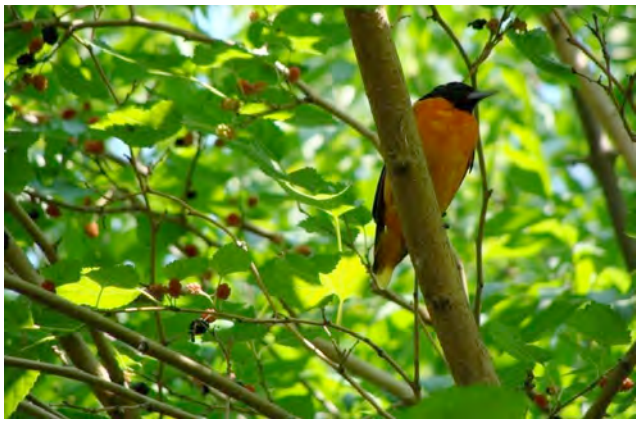
Minks galore!

Further to the article in the December issue (the sketch was from my backyard a few years ago) here is a photo of a mink taken at Toronto Island marina, last July.

Several appeared around the marina this summer, very bold and saucy. They could be seen, during the day, running along the docks, sometimes stopping to try and stare you down and then be on their way. The one in this picture is investigating a hole in the dock. He/she then popped into the hole for a few seconds, popped back out and loped off into the bushes at the end of a small land spit near our boat.

Apparently, City Parks is happy to have them around because they say the mink are keeping the rat population down around the ferry docks.

Adele Cassan



Baltimore Oriole in mulberry tree, photographed by Adele Cassan at Toronto Island marina in July 2008

Cooper's or Sharp-shinned Hawk

On November 1st, I saw either a Cooper's or Sharp-shinned Hawk in Mount Pleasant Cemetery – in the east side along the long straight avenue of trees on either side of the roadway at the north end of the cemetery. The bird passed low in front of me as I walked west, landing on a gravestone on the north side of the avenue. When flying I thought it must be a robin (thinking of largish birds this time of year) but I soon saw this was incorrect.

I had a clear view of it then, sitting on the stone, swivelling its head, looking for prey I assumed. What a great bird! I noted the red eye, the neat blue-gray plumage, rounded tail feathers with dark and light banding and the whole bird quite long and slim. Also rusty, broken banding on the breast which I could just see, as it had its back to me.

Cooper's Hawk,
watercolour by Cameron Coneybeare

I had my small digital camera, but I opted for observing the bird with binoculars rather than fooling with the camera and getting a poor picture, which it would only have been with my simple 3x Kodak. (I have permission to take pictures in the cemetery, which one needs, by the way.) I had the advantage of being able to use a large tree trunk far from me but close to the stone the bird was on as cover for myself, slipping out of view behind this in order to get out my binoculars - though I bet the bird knew I was

there, when I was in view. I felt lucky to have a few minutes to see this bird and with such a good view.

I looked away for a moment and when I looked up it had gone. Last year I got pictures of what I believe was a Cooper's Hawk, but the bird was far, high up in a tall tree.

Earlier I'd watched Cedar Waxwings, many of them, true to their name, feeding high up in eastern red-cedars. The descending sun still caught the tops of these trees and the birds seemed to relish this. They also seemed to be using a nearby deciduous tree as a kind of perch, flying back and forth from this to the cedars. Their black 'masks' and smooth plumage are unmistakable, and they were very quiet, as feeding birds often are.

Cameron Coneybeare

Our hawk returns

I wrote last year about the hawk captured on camera in my front garden, clutching a dead squirrel in its claws. That was in May.

We encountered the hawk again early in November. We were raking leaves in the back garden. Birds flitted back and forth, while squirrels scampered around. Suddenly, all went quiet and still. Being busy, we didn't at first notice the quiet. Then suddenly, there was a terrible commotion. Two doves flew over our heads, calling loudly and flapping their wings as hard and as fast as they could. The noise was incredible! As they disappeared beyond the oak tree, the reason for the silence and then the commotion became apparent: our hawk - we presume it was "ours" - landed in the branches of one of our two old yew trees. We looked up, admiring it silhouetted against the now needle-less dead branches and the sky. It paused there a while, then, silently and slowly, flew away.

Mary Lieberman

Morris Sorensen's legacy

Many TFNers will remember past president Morris Sorensen. Morris was known as The Urban Naturalist and his philosophy was, as quoted in the Winnipeg Free Press, "to stimulate an interest in the outdoors with children and the general public, because we have a lot of pressures on the environment today. If people are going to preserve the environment, they have to gain an appreciation of it." Morris died in 2006, but his efforts to preserve the environment will continue through a legacy gift to Ontario Nature. His estate will be used to establish the Sorensen Boreal Fund to support initiatives to preserve Canada's boreal forest. You can still view Morris' website at www.wilds.mb.ca/urbanat/

Remembering Betty Greenacre

We were sorry to learn that Betty Greenacre, a TFN member since 1973, passed away in November. Betty was a keen nature photographer, and we are fortunate to have several of her photos in our slide collection. Her exquisite photo of fringed gentian appeared on page 14 of the December 2008 issue. See also the back cover of this issue for a photo she took at the Jim Baillie Nature Reserve. Her article entitled *Photographing Wildflowers and Fungi* in the April 1987 newsletter reveals Betty's expertise and her generosity in sharing it with fellow TFN members. It seems appropriate to repeat the closing words of her article at this time:

"Preserving the beauties of nature on film is a rewarding hobby. I think the following quotation from an old gravestone in Cumberland, England, sums it up:

'The wonder of the world, the beauty and the powers.
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades.
These I saw.
Look ye also while life lasts.'"

Ontario Nature 2008 Conservation Awards

Ontario Nature Conservation Awards recognize excellence by honouring individuals, groups, government agencies, and corporations who have worked to protect Ontario's nature.

Awards are published in the autumn issue of *ON Nature*. For descriptions of the ten awards and procedures see www.ontarionature.org or email info@ontarionature.org or phone 416-444-8419. Nominations deadline: March 6.

IN THE NEWS

Top Ten Winter Birds in Ontario, 2008

Bird Studies Canada reports in *BirdWatch*, Fall 2008, that the Top Ten birds for 2007-2008 in Ontario were:

Black-capped Chickadee
Downy Woodpecker
Blue Jay
Mourning Dove
Dark-eyed Junco
White-breasted Nuthatch
American Goldfinch
Northern Cardinal
Common Redpoll
Hairy Woodpecker

The list is based on the percentage of FeederWatch locations that hosted each species at least once during winter 2007-2008. Because of poor cone and seed crops, Ontario experienced near record numbers of redpolls… whereas siskins apparently left Ontario in search of large spruce and fir crops in other regions. Black-capped Chickadees are the most common visitor at feeders across Canada. They have a number of adaptations for winter: They hide food items for later consumption; they have dense winter plumage, they can go into regulated hypothermia at night, conserving a large amount of energy. The FeederWatch data also show that woodpeckers including Downy, Red-bellied, Hairy and Pileated, as well as Northern Flickers, are visiting more feeders each year. "It may be that forest cover is increasing, or that more dead trees are left standing."

Chickadee brains

In "A Source of Good Cheer" in the November-December 2008 issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest,* Elaine Friebele declares: "I could tolerate living without an automobile, without electricity and even without running water. But without chickadees, my life would lack one great source of cheer." Among the amazing adaptations that enable chickadees to survive the winter are seed caching and the ability to remember where they put the food. Apparently during the fall when most caching occurs, their brains generate new cells "in the hippocampus, the brain area associated with spatial memory, replacing about 2 percent of the neurons daily. This enables chickadees to remember the locations of storage sites 28 days after hiding food." Those extra cells die when no longer needed.

2008-09 Winter Bird Forecast

The Ontario Field Ornithologists' website has an interesting article dated 18 Sept. 2008 in which Ron Pittaway explains how the year's crop of seeds, cones and berries is likely to affect "winter finches" and other northern birds this winter in Ontario. Based on the availability of each species' preferred food, he predicts where they are likely to spend the winter. He suggests we watch for White-winged Crossbills on ornamental spruces and European larch and that "…it is uncertain whether the birch crop is large enough to stop the southward movement..." of redpolls, which are white birch seed specialists in the boreal forest in winter. "Some Common Redpolls, including a few Hoarys, may get south to Lake Ontario if birch seed supplies run low." Furthermore, since "small mammal populations have crashed across northern and central Ontario . . . southern Ontario may get Boreal Owls and other northern forest owls this winter. Check out the OFO's website at www.ofo.ca and click on "Reports and Articles" and "Winter Finches" to see the entire report.

White oak acorns

An article in the *Toronto Star*, "Where have all the acorns gone?" by Leslie Scrivener, featured TFN outing leader Jack Radecki, who reports that white oak acorns are nowhere to be found in Mount Pleasant Cemetery this year. Since acorn crops go through boom and bust cycles, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Natural Resources feels that this year's white oak acorn dearth is just part of the cycle. The article explains that acorn crops do well if there are warm temperatures during flowering, followed by cooler temperatures. But this year the second and third weeks of May were cooler than normal and were followed by several weeks of wetter and warmer than normal weather.

Growing Trees from Seed

This book by Henry Kock was recommended by the *North Toronto Town Crier* in their January 2009 issue. In addition to praise for this "beautifully" produced book, the article says that the Exotic Alerts are especially helpful, warning of "imported species that are invading our native habitats." Henry founded the Elm Recovery Project. His widow is the daughter of TFN members.

100th Consecutive Bird Count

The McIlwraith Naturalists of London reported in *The Cardinal*, Nov. 2008, that their 2008 Christmas Bird Count, held on December 20, would be the group's 100th consecutive bird count. Few, if any, other groups in Canada can top that!

Lake Simcoe Act Passed Unanimously in Ontario Legislature

Extracted from a Dec. 2 news release from Campaign Lake Simcoe, a partnership of Environmental Defence, the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition and Ontario Nature (www.CampaignLakeSimcoe.ca)

Environmentalists celebrated the unanimous passage of the Lake Simcoe Protection Act on December 1, marking one of the few times environmental legislation has enjoyed all-party support. Still to be released is the Protection Plan that will make clear the government's determination to protect wetlands, watercourses and shorelines. At Committee, deputation after deputation focussed on the need to green the shoreline with a robust 100-metre buffer around the ailing Lake. Several key amendments made it through to the final Act, including the obligation to monitor and report on the Act's progress every five years. Both the PC and NDP critics addressed the need to rely on the Scientific Advisory Committee's recommendations for structuring the Plan and emphasized the requirement for government action to protect citizens from SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation). Campaign Lake Simcoe's analysis document "What it Takes to Save Lake Simcoe" can be viewed at: www.environmentaldefence.ca/campaignlakesimcoe/pub/CLSFinalResponseDiscPaperAp08.pdf

Crothers' Woods

Leaside-Rosedale Town Crier, Nov 2008, reported that 40 nature lovers and sport cyclists had come together last fall to restore multi-use trails in Crothers Woods, which is an Environmentally Significant Area (ESA). Many small trails had degraded the parkland. The project included planting native species, protecting tree roots, and improving drainage.

World Wetlands Day, February 2

World Wetlands Day marks the anniversary of the signing of the international Ramsar Convention of Wetlands in 1971, in Ramsar, Iran, and aims to raise public awareness of the value of wetlands and the importance of the Ramsar Convention. The theme for 2009 is river basins (or watersheds) and their management, with the slogan "Upstream – Downstream" emphasizing the connections within river basins, and how we and our wetlands can be impacted by the activities of those upstream and how our activities affect those downstream. See www.ramsar.org/wwd/9/wwd2009_intro.htm. See Lost Rivers Walks in Coming Events.

Value of the Greenbelt Eco-Services

Extracted from a Sept. 9, 2008 news release at www.davidsuzuki.org/latestnews/dsfnews09090801.asp

A report from the David Suzuki Foundation has found that Ontario's Greenbelt contributes $2.6 billion worth of non-market ecological services to the province each year, an average value of $3,487 per hectare. *Ontario's Wealth, Canada's Future: Appreciating the Value of the Greenbelt's Eco-Services* quantifies services such as the value of water filtration, flood control, climate stabilization (i.e. carbon storage), waste treatment, wildlife habitat, and clean air. Covering more than 1.8 million acres, the Greenbelt was established to safeguard key environmentally sensitive land, watersheds, and farmlands that provide essential ecosystem services and quality of life for this densely populated area. This protected region includes habitat for more than one-third of Ontario's species at risk. The report is at www.davidsuzuki.org/publications and www.ourgreenbelt.ca.

Ed.: Thanks to all who sent news items to the office.

JOIN THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT, February 13-16, 2009

Bird and nature fans throughout North America are invited to join tens of thousands of everyday bird watchers for the 12th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this free event is an opportunity for families, students, and people of all ages to discover the wonders of nature in backyards, schoolyards and local parks and, at the same time, make an important contribution to conservation.

Participants count birds for at least 15 minutes and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org. For information see: www.birdsource.org/gbbc/

FROM THE ARCHIVES

From TFN Newsletter #408, December 1989

This month we welcome back to these pages, after a long absence, Rosemary Gaymer. For 17 years Rosemary gave her time and talents to the TFN. After serving on and also leading, the Outings Committee, Publicity and Membership Committee, and Bird Group, Rosemary was our President from 1972 to 1974. Here is Rosemary's story:

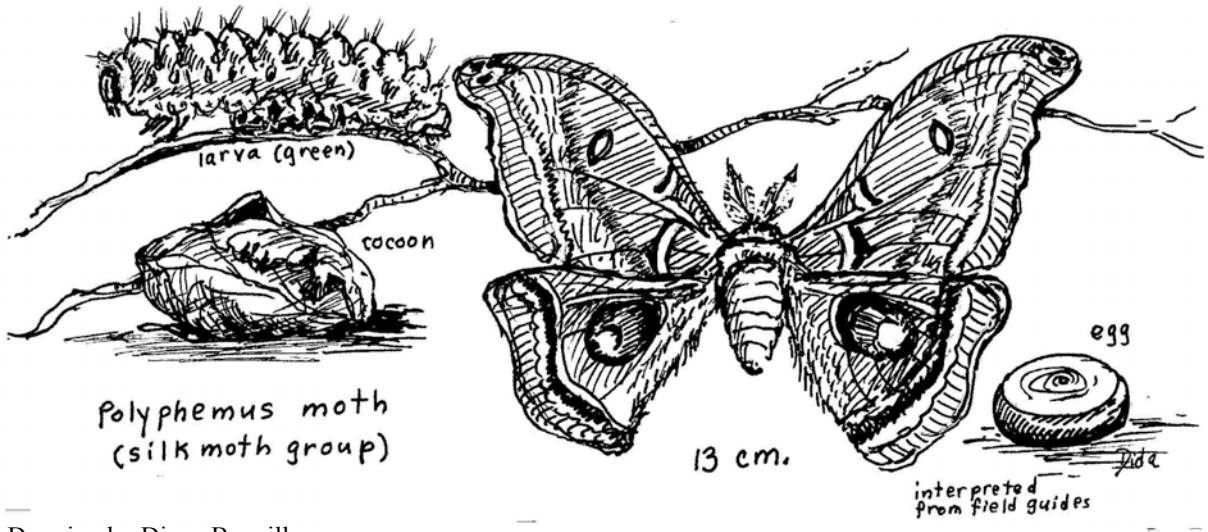
There was no known occasion when I became interested in birds. I don't think I ever wasn't! The family swore I was born watching birds and examining flowers and beetles….

We had a large garden in the country, near the North Sea in East Anglia, with at least 22 species of birds nesting most years. By age nine, I had a bird-feeding shelf on the *inside* window-sill of my bedroom-study, level with the canopy of a large old apple tree. Hours were spent watching birds in ultimate close-up, learning to look at every feather.

With a 3,000 acre mixed farming estate to roam over, plus adjacent heathland, miles of estuarine river banks and grass "marshes" behind the sea walls, it was a naturalist's heaven. For two years, from age nine to eleven, because of a combination of illness and outgrowing my strength, I neither attended school, nor had regular tuition at home, being on a generalized reading program but otherwise "running wild." I considered that my "work" was Natural History, with capital letters. We had a large "summer house" in the garden (like a half-open, thatched-roof gazebo) with lots of shelves. It was a busy collecting centre and laboratory, with open-air window-sills bearing glass jars with growing caterpillars and pupae, and rows of twigs and plants for various types of study. Every day, "rounds" were made in the garden and nearby to collect the correct fresh plant food for the caterpillars; and trees, hedges and flowerbeds were swept with butterfly net to collect new specimens.

My nature note books from age nine through twelve were full of behaviour watching, migration and nesting details for birds; bud, leaf and flower emergence dates, plus diagrams and sketches. Mother encouraged the recording and sketching, and broadened my reading to tie natural history into English literature and geography. Father's influence in particular steered me to see all aspects of nature as interrelated. As well as being a great agricultural manager, he was in many ways far ahead of his time in comprehending environmental problems, and the need for conservation. Nowadays, he would have been in the forefront of the battles to preserve the countryside.

Another great influence on me was short but intense: meeting writer and conservationist Grey Owl. I had read several of his books, over and over. Father took me to hear him during his lecture tour in 1937, and was somewhat dismayed afterwards as I fought my way, politely but with utter determination, to the *back* of the book-autographing line. My reward for being last was almost five minutes conversation with Grey Owl. I can still feel his incredible presence. While not fully aware of it until after arriving here 20 years later, I know that Grey Owl's influence was a large part of the eventual turning of my mind and life towards Canada.



Drawing by Diana Banville

Then there were no more weekends at home. I was sent to boarding school, the war years ensued, then career pressures in London. The naturalist in me had to be pushed off-stage and forcibly "sat down" in the wings. Bird-watching survived, but only on occasional home visits.

Once into Canada in 1955, there was a second beginning. The TFN was mentioned in a newspaper column…and I ran to a meeting at the Royal Ontario Museum. Jim Baillie very quietly became my chief mentor (as he was to some other people). Having always felt so keenly in tune with the countryside in England, it was agonizing to be so generally unfamiliar with the natural world here in those first years. Jim recognized this, and understood my frustration—no-one else did—and taught me how to study *quickly* , in order to fill up the worst gaps as fast as possible—and not only with birds, but general habitat knowledge, trees, wildflowers, butterflies and much else. Because of his very public specialty in birds, many people never realized what an outstanding all-round naturalist he was.

I had a job near Bloor and Avenue Road … so that I could slip into the Museum in lunch hours and study with Jim, who drilled me on identification and pushed me further and faster than I thought I could go.

Many years later in 1986, when I had to retire early from full-time employment, I realized that the "door to the cage" was finally open: I was free to work *outdoors* part of the time, if I so chose. The dyed-in-the-wool field naturalist could at last come out of the wings into centre stage. I did so choose!

And so there was a third beginning. Now, I'm busy doing more nature writing and very happily teaching other courses -- such as on wildflowers, trees and shrubs, and general aspects of ecology—in addition to the on-going Bird Study courses for Sheridan College's Continuing Education, and other short, more advanced courses on birds. And I'm having a marvellous time learning the flowers, trees and general natural history of other regions of North America, each time I prepare myself to lead nature tours to wonderful places.

There have been several beginnings, but the circle is now delightfully complete.

Rosemary Gaymer

Sugar maples in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, drawn by Mary Anne Miller

WEATHER (this time last year)

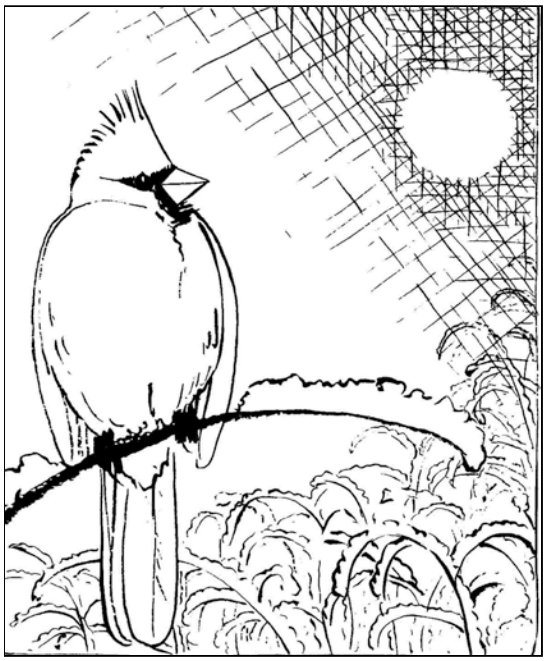
FEBRUARY 2008

February had near-normal temperatures but record-setting snowfall. Somewhat parallel to January 1999, most of it fell during the first two weeks as a series of storms relentlessly dumped on Toronto. Slightly lower snowfall amounts, slightly greater spacing between storms, and a less excitable city administration meant that the army wasn't summoned to clear the roads, as happened in 1999. It did relegate the drought of 2007 to distant memory as snow piled up dramatically and only slowly melted. Rainfall was also somewhat (not dramatically) above normal but was enough to make February the wettest on record regarding total precipitation as well.

Here are the relevant stats…

- Pearson airport snowfall 76.8 cm – highest on record (since 1938); third snowiest month of any on record after Dec. 1951 (86.6 cm) and Jan. 1999 (79.6 cm).
- Pearson airport snow cover peaked at 48 cm on 13th-18th. Highest for Feb.
- Toronto City snowfall 74.4 cm – 8th highest on record for Feb. and most since 1924 (82.3 cm). Most of the higher amounts were in the 19th century period of the record.
- Pearson Airport and downtown both had highest precipitation records for February: 107.6 mm and 133.4 mm respectively. (It is possible the City's total was a bit lower depending on the reckoning used.)
- Monthly temperatures were within 0.2° of normal, -3.5° downtown and -5.3° at Pearson. It was close to or a bit below freezing most of the time without huge swings. A couple of brief moderate thaws and rainfalls were enough to reduce the snow cover from time to time but not by any means clear it.
- Heaviest snowfalls were in the first half of the month. Storms on the 1st, 5th-6th, and 12th were noteworthy. The storm on the 5th-6th brought two bouts of snow and thunder, with over 30 cm of snow at Pearson Airport. It was an unusually violent system, which bred tornadoes in the southern USA.
- The latter half of the month was more tranquil. It was more often sunny with normal or colder-than-normal temperatures.

Gavin Miller



Northern Cardinal perched on a snowy branch, etching by Owen Fisher

February chill
Through the silent grey white world
A cardinal calls

Haiku by Elisabeth Gladstone

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.

Jim Baillie Memorial Bird Walks – Toronto Ornithological Club

These outings are aimed at the intermediate birder but beginners are also welcome. Information: torontobirding.org

- Sun. Feb. 8, 9 am – early pm. Winter Birds, Durham Region. Leader: Rayfield Pye. Meet at the southwest corner of the Pickering GO station parking lot (Bayly/Liverpool) to car pool if necessary. Bring lunch and dress warmly.

Toronto Entomologists' Association (TEA)

Room 206, Victoria College, University of Toronto. Info: www.ontarioinsects.org

- Sat. Feb. 28, 1:15 pm. Dragonflies and Damselflies of Algonquin Park, Colin Jones

North American Native Plant Society (NANPS)

Toronto Botanical Gardens, 777 Lawrence Ave. E. Members: $5.00. Non-members: $10.00
Information: www nanps.org, 416-631-4438

- Tues. Feb. 17, 7:30 pm. Gardening Trends, Dennis Flannigan and Charles Kinsley

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 walkingtours@highpark.org or www.highpark.org

Science on Sundays

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

- Feb. 1 – Echos of Historical Supernovae, Doug Welch, Ph.D. (co-sponsored by the RASC)
- Feb. 8 – Protein Biomarkers: Their Use in Cancer Diagnosis and Prognosis, K.W. Michael Siu, Ph.D.
- Feb. 15 – The Benefits of a Noisy Brain, A. Randal McIntosh, Ph.D.
- Feb. 22 – Why are Songbirds Disappearing? Bridget J. Stutchbury, Ph.D.

The Market Gallery

South St. Lawrence Market, 2nd floor, 95 Front St. E. Free. Note: Gallery is closed Sundays, Mondays and holidays.

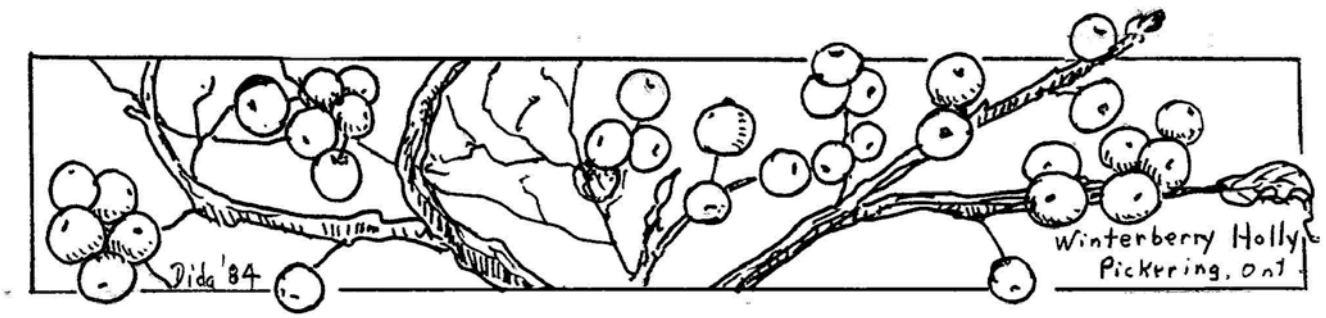
- Until Feb. 22, 2009. Over Any Distance Imaginable. An exhibition chronicling letter writing and the postal system in Upper Canada.

Lost Rivers Walks

- Mon. Feb. 2. An event to mark World Wetlands Day. Information: www.lostrivers.ca

Ian Wheal Walks

- Sun. Feb. 8, 1:30 pm. Dallimore's Swamp, Don River. Meet at the northwest corner of Broadview Ave. and Gerrard St. E.
- Mon. Feb. 16, 1:30 pm. Family Day in High Park. Meet at the entrance to High Park, Bloor St. W. and High Park Ave.
- Tues. Feb. 24, 1:30 pm. Humber River Marshes. Meet at Old Mill subway station.



Drawing by Diana Banville

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Jim Baillie Nature Reserve, April 1987, photographed by Betty Greenacre