



TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 568, December 2009



American tree sparrow enjoying goldenrod seed, photographed by Skip Shand,
Colonel Sam Smith Park, October 27, 2009

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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. The Newsletter is printed on 100% recycled paper.

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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 February issue:** Jan. 8

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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A Perfect Holiday Gift

Consider sharing the benefits of TFN membership with your friends!

We are confident that, once they discover the pleasures of our outings, lectures, newsletters and the companionship of other nature-lovers, they will want to renew.

So we are offering a Holiday Special – half the normal membership fee when you, a TFN member, give a gift membership to someone who was not previously a member. This covers newsletters for December thru May, which include outings lists to the end of August.

Alvar Specialty Plants of Central Ontario

At our November meeting, the speaker, Ron Reid, sold copies of this recently published book by Margo Holt. For those who missed the opportunity, it can be purchased from The Couchiching Conservancy, Box 704, Orillia, ON L3V 6K7, or 705-326-1620 or email gayle@couchconservancy.ca. The price is \$16.95 plus \$3.00 shipping. Proceeds support the work of the Couchiching Conservancy.

The book covers 53 species of shrubs, herbs, grasses and sedges commonly found on Central Ontario alvars, including Carden Plain, Bruce Peninsula and Manitoulin Island. It features colour photographs, descriptions and flowering times of each species.



Indanpanbrush,
photographed at
Carden Alvar
by Georga Shank

TFN MEETING

Sunday, December 6, 2009 at 2:30 pm

Aiming high (and dry): the Oak Ridges Moraine

*Mark Stabb, the Nature Conservancy of Canada
Program Manager for Central Ontario,
will describe current projects to protect the natural features
of this endangered ecosystem.*

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. 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.

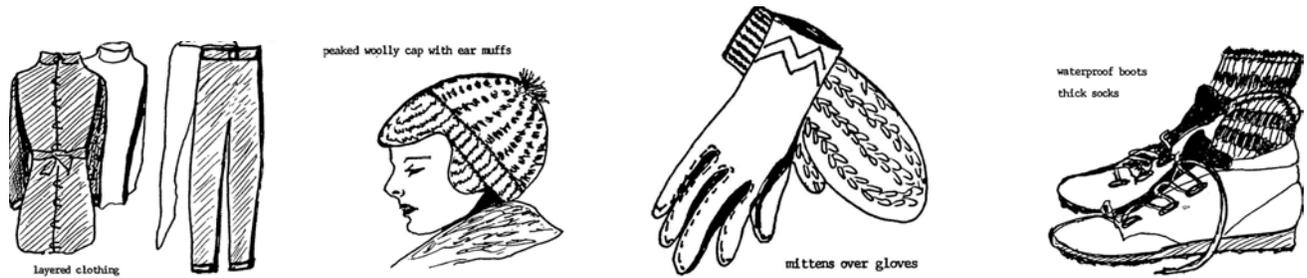
Upcoming TFN Monthly Meetings

- | | |
|------------|--|
| February 7 | <i>Toronto's Urban Forests</i>
Andy Kenney, Faculty of Forestry, University of Toronto |
| March 7 | <i>Towards a Bar-coded World</i>
Paul Hebert, Project Leader, Canadian Barcode of Life Network and
Director, Biodiversity Institute of Ontario |
| April 11 | <i>Disturbing the Disturbed:
Using Biological Control to Recover our Invaded Forests</i>
Sandy Smith, Professor, Faculty of Forestry, University of Toronto and
international expert on biological control |
| May 2 | <i>The Appalachians and Their Margins</i>
Peter Money, TFN member, retired geologist, enthusiastic nature
photographer and amateur naturalist |

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 (www.ttc.ca or 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.

- Tuesday,
Dec. 1
2:00 p.m. **WEST DON AND BURNETT CREEK – Great Rivers of North York**
Leader: Alexander Cappell
Meet on the south side of Sheppard Ave. W. on the bridge over the West Don, east of Bathurst St. Finish at Sheppard Ave. W. and Bathurst St.
- Saturday,
Dec. 5
10:30 a.m. **ALLAN GARDENS – Nature Arts**
Leader: Nancy Anderson
Meet at the entrance to the greenhouses at Carlton St. and Sherbourne St. Bring what you need for photography, sketching, or writing. Bring anything you wish to show the group after lunch at a nearby food court.
- Sunday,
Dec. 6
2:30 p.m. **LECTURE – Aiming High (and Dry): the Oak Ridges Moraine**
Speaker: Mark Stabb
Emmanuel College, 75 Queen’s Park Cres. E. See page 3.
- Tuesday,
Dec. 8
10:00 a.m. **ASHBRIDGE’S BAY – Birds**
Leader: Margaret Catto
Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd. E. and Coxwell Ave. Bring binoculars. Morning only.
- Saturday,
Dec. 12
1:00 p.m. **HASTINGS CREEK – Lost Rivers**
Leader: Joanne Doucette
Learn how to identify wildflowers in winter as we walk through old brickyards on this lost creek. Meet outside the Donlands subway station (Donlands Ave. and Danforth Ave.). Some stairs, steep hills. We will stop for a break to warm up, and there are washrooms along the way. Walk will end at Queen St. E. where people can take the streetcar or if they have cars, the Greenwood or Donlands bus back to their vehicles.
- Thursday,
Dec. 17
10:00 a.m. **PROSPECT CEMETERY – Trees**
Leader: Jack Radecki
Meet at the gates of Prospect Cemetery on St. Clair Ave. W. near Lansdowne Ave. Morning only.
- Saturday,
Dec. 19
10:00 a.m. **BIRKDALE AND THOMSON MEMORIAL PARKS – Nature Walk**
Leader: Orval White
Meet outside the Birkdale Community Centre, 1299 Ellesmere Rd. between Midland Ave. and Brimley Rd. A loop walk. Morning only.
- Sunday,
Dec. 20
2:00 p.m. **FORGOTTEN TRIBUTARIES OF GARRISON CREEK – Lost Rivers**
Leader: Richard Anderson
Meet at the southwest corner of Dufferin St. and Bloor St. W. We will explore the tributaries on the western branches of the creek. A joint walk with the Toronto Green Community.



What to Wear on Winter Walks, artwork by Eva Davis

- Tuesday,
Dec. 22
1:00 p.m. **LOWER DON VALLEY – Nature and Heritage Walk**
Leader: Margaret McRae
Meet and end at the northeast corner of O'Connor Dr. and Beechwood Dr., west of Pape Ave. Bring binoculars.
- Tuesday,
Dec. 29
10:00 a.m. **HUMBER BAY PARK EAST – Birds**
Leader: Wendy Rothwell
Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Park Lawn Rd. Bring binoculars. Morning only.
- Saturday,
Jan. 2
1:00 p.m. –
3:00 p.m. **NATURE IMAGES EVENT AT S. WALTER STEWART LIBRARY**
Leaders: Gail Gregory and Margaret McRae
All TFN members are invited to participate in the annual showing of digital images, slides and pictures and enjoy the new year with light refreshments. Meet in the Library Auditorium at 170 Memorial Park Ave. at Durant Ave. See notice on page 6.
- Tuesday,
Jan. 5
10:00 a.m. **ASHBRIDGE'S BAY PARK AND EASTERN BEACHES – Birds and Trees**
Leader: Bob Kortright
Meet at the Woodbine bus loop on the south side of Lake Shore Blvd. E. at Northern Dancer Blvd. Ending on Queen St. E. Morning only. Bring binoculars.
- Saturday,
Jan. 9
1:00 p.m. **LESLIE CREEK – Lost Rivers**
Leader: Joanne Doucette
Enjoy trees in winter and learn about how trees came to be part of Toronto's streetscape as we walk along one of Leslieville's lost creeks. Meet at Leslie Grove Park (northwest corner of Jones Ave. and Queen St. E.) Take the Jones Ave. bus or Queen streetcar. Quite flat, no stairs, no hills. We will stop for a break to warm up, and there are washrooms along the way. Walk will end at Gerrard St. and Pape Ave. where people can take the streetcar or if they have cars, the Pape or Jones Ave. bus back to their vehicles.
- Tuesday,
Jan. 12
1:30 p.m. **NATURE IN THE CITY**
Leader: Ed Freeman
Meet at the northwest corner of College St. and University Ave. Walk will end near Union Station. We will walk on sidewalks and some stairs with a short stretch on the underground PATH system.
- Saturday,
Jan. 16
1:00 p.m. **DON VALLEY – Nature and Heritage**
Leader: Margaret McRae
Meet at the northeast corner of O'Connor Dr. and Beechwood Dr. west of Pape Ave. We will walk east along the river to the Forks of the Don, ending at Don Mills Rd. and Overlea Blvd. Bring binoculars. No washrooms.

Nature Images Event

Saturday, January 2, 2010
1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

S. Walter Stewart Library Auditorium, lower level
Wheelchair accessible.

All TFN members are invited to participate in the annual showing of digital images, slides and pictures and enjoy the new year with light refreshments. Bring up to 20 slides or your digital images on a CD, SD card or USB drive or photo albums to share with the group. Actual artwork and journals can also be displayed on a table.

Contact Margaret McRae at [REDACTED] for further information and to verify the compatibility of your media with our equipment.

To reduce waste, please bring your own mug.

The library is at 170 Memorial Park Ave. at Durant Ave., west of Coxwell Ave. between Cosburn and Mortimer. Take the TTC bus north from Coxwell station to Mortimer or Cosburn. Limited free parking available.

-
- Sunday,
Jan. 17
2:00 p.m. **YELLOW CREEK, MUD CREEK AND THE BRICK WORKS – Lost Rivers**
Leaders: Annie MacLeod, Evergreen, and John Wilson, Bring Back the Don
Meet at the Glen Rd. exit from the Sherbourne subway station. We will follow Milkmen's Lane to Park Drive Reservation, Moore Park ravine and the Don Valley Brick Works for warm drinks, winter tales and rambles through Brick Works Park. A joint walk with the Toronto Green Community.
- Tuesday,
Jan. 19
10:00 a.m. **ASHBRIDGE'S BAY– Birds**
Leader: Anne Powell
Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd. E. and Coxwell Ave. Bring binoculars. Morning only.
- Saturday,
Jan. 23
10:00 a.m. **COLONEL SAMUEL SMITH PARK – Birds**
Leader: Anne Powell
Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Kipling Ave. Bring binoculars. Morning only.
- Wednesday,
Jan. 27
2:00 p.m. **CHURCHES IN THE DOWNTOWN CORE – Heritage Walk**
Leader: Anne Scott
Meet at the northeast corner of Church St. and King St. E. (St. James Cathedral). We will go inside churches that are open (to get warm!) and continue northward, ending at Dundas and Yonge Sts. About two hours.
- Saturday,
Jan. 30
10:00 a.m. **HUMBER BAY PARK EAST – Birds**
Leader: Bob Kortright
Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd. W. and Park Lawn Rd. Morning only. Bring binoculars.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Good News! I am delighted to announce two exciting gifts Toronto Field Naturalists has just received.

We are very grateful to Autodesk Canada for a generous donation, and to TFN board member, Lynn Miller, for her part in arranging it. It is gratifying to receive, not only this financial support for our programs, but also recognition from a commercial enterprise of the value of what the TFN stands for. Autodesk is a world leader in 2D and 3D design software (see www.autodesk.ca).

The other gift is a very significant bequest from the estate of Arthur Dvorak, a TFN member from 1962 until his death in November 2007. His wife, Elizabeth, who predeceased him, was also an enthusiastic member. Perhaps some of you will remember them. It is heart-warming to realize how much the TFN meant to this couple, that they wished to provide ongoing financial support. This gift also reminds us of our responsibility to ensure that the TFN continues to play an important role, both in protecting and preserving nature in our city, and fostering a love of nature among its citizens.

This past weekend provided two very enjoyable TFN activities for me. On Saturday, David White led an enthusiastic group on a most interesting *Mushrooms* outing in Morningside Park. How wonderful it is that, in the lull between late summer wildflowers and the arrival of winter waterfowl, this amazing array of strange and beautiful fungi appears! We found mushrooms everywhere – under clumps of trees, in open grassy areas, on rotting logs and on overhead branches. I always take delight in seeing their great variety, though I'm afraid the complicated Latin names are beyond me. The other event was Ron Reid's fascinating lecture about the Carden Alvar. It had everything – an appreciation of this unusual habitat, stunning photos of the birds and wildflowers found there, an awareness of the importance of protecting this special place, and encouraging news of the progress being made by The Couchiching Conservancy. See Corinne's report on page 9.

You may have heard media reports in October of a seniors' group being informed they needed a permit to

walk in Toronto parks. To allay any concerns you may have, I'm pleased to report our Outings Co-ordinator, Margaret McRae, contacted Jerry Belan at City Hall, who advised: "There is no permit or fee charged for non-profit groups like TFN to walk and appreciate our public parks, ravines and gardens. TFN can use our parks as much as they wish.... with free access."

While enjoying the privilege of exploring the many natural areas in our city, as nature-lovers I think we have a particular obligation to be aware of larger environmental issues. I was reminded of this when I heard David Suzuki speak at the Royal Ontario Museum on October 16. As a scientist he understands well the interconnectedness of the natural systems of our planet, and the consequences of human activities which threaten them. As a journalist, he has an exceptional gift for explaining these things in terms non-scientists can understand. And, as an environmentalist, he speaks passionately for changes in our behaviour, at individual, national and international levels.



Mushroom outing, Morningside Park, Oct. 31, photographed by Wendy Rothwell

His talk prompted me to re-read *The Big Picture* by David Suzuki and Dave Robert Taylor. This is just one of many recent books written by environmentalists in an effort to alert citizens and governments to the importance of addressing issues of conservation, pollution and global warming. We tend to feel helplessly inadequate in the face of such enormous concerns. But surely, as members of an organization focusing on nature, we must make the effort to be informed, adopt wise choices in our everyday lives, and do what

we can to influence our neighbours and political representatives.

Thinking of conservation at a local level, I encourage you to attend our December monthly meeting to hear Mark Stabb's lecture on the Oak Ridges Moraine.

This being our last newsletter in 2009, I take this opportunity of extending best wishes for Hanukkah, Christmas and the New Year. Please note the nature arts event on January 2 – an opportunity for you to share your nature photos and/or enjoy those of fellow TFN members (see page 6 for details).

Wendy Rothwell

ONTARIO NATURE - LAKE ONTARIO NORTH FALL REGIONAL MEETING

Thirty-five people from 14 member clubs of Ontario Nature's Lake Ontario North region met on October 31 at Ganaraska Forest Centre (www.grca.on.ca/centre.html), about 25 km northeast of Bowmanville, for our semi-annual Regional meeting. These meetings give club representatives a chance to hear about issues of other clubs and how they deal with them.

Represented clubs, including field naturalists of Pickering, Durham, Kawartha Lakes, West Humber, Willow Beach (Port Hope), Richmond Hill, and Peterborough, plus Toronto Entomologists, Friends of the Rouge, Thickson Woods Land Trust, High Park Volunteer Stewardship Program, and Toronto Mycological Society, reported on recent achievements and issues. Board members Bob Kortright and Heide Tonna represented TFN. Common issues include ATVs in natural areas, unnecessarily paved or overbroad trails, and development. Friends of the Rouge are campaigning to enlarge Rouge Park and turn it into a National Park in which no development would be allowed. (It is now run by representatives of area municipalities.) Pickering Field Naturalists warned that proposed regulations/standards under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act could be damaging to natural areas unless the rules are modified.

The meetings also include guest speakers on items of interest, an opportunity to propose resolutions for Ontario Nature's Annual General Meeting, and a walk in a natural area.

Planning 101 - How to Effectively State Your Case on Natural Heritage to Your Local Municipality

Michael Wynia, Director of Planning, Clearview Township, explained that Planning in Ontario is governed by the Planning Act and its regulations, common law, case law, and the Provincial Policy Statements, 2005. The Planning Act requires municipalities to have an official (land use) plan with a 20 year planning horizon, and to review it every 5

years, with public consultation. Municipalities may develop a higher-level strategic plan, but they must have a zoning bylaw. Reviews of these must also involve public consultation. Finally, there may be site plan approvals for non-residential development, but this need not be public. Key advice:

- Request City Clerk to provide notice of matters you want to hear about, and copy the City Clerk on any representations you make on planning matters
- Get involved as early as possible in the process – particularly in reviews of the Official Plan, Zoning Bylaw and Strategic Plan.

Ontario Herpetofaunal Atlas Program

Joe Crowley, Ontario Herpetofaunal Atlas Project Coordinator, summarized reptiles and amphibians at risk in Ontario, discussed the new atlas program and how to get involved, and explained how to search for and identify local reptiles and amphibians. Look for copies of the brochure at the next TFN meeting or go to www.ontarionature.org/herpetofaunal_atlas.html for more information, and how to get involved.

Proposed Resolution for Ontario Nature's 2010 AGM

Kevin Shackleton, Lake Ontario North Regional Director, proposed that pressure for aggregate extraction, which is threatening the Niagara Escarpment and the Carden Alvar (mentioned by Ron Reid at the TFN November monthly meeting), could be reduced by measures to increase recycling of construction and demolition waste.

Ganaraska Forest

Ben Walters outlined his PhD thesis work on avian diversity and trail impacts on birds during a short walk through the Ganaraska Forest, originally a 10 x 3 km pine plantation on a mostly sandy portion of the Oak Ridges Moraine, planted over 60 years ago to rehabilitate eroded land.

Bob Kortright

SHOPPING FOR GIFTS?

Check out Bird Studies Canada's online store which offers nature-themed calendars, books, games and puzzles, CDs, clothing, bird houses, and the opportunity to adopt a bird in support of BSC's Project Recovery. See www.bsc-eoc.org.

MONTHLY MEETING REPORT

The Carden Alvar: A Rural Oasis

Sunday, November 1. Ron Reid, Founding President, recently retired Executive Director and currently Carden Program Coordinator of the Couchiching Conservancy

Considering Ron's extensive involvement in the Couchiching Conservancy (www.couchconservancy.ca), it seems prudent to start with a description. A registered land trust, begun in 1993, this charitable, non-government organization preserves natural lands by means of land ownership, land management, easements and stewardship initiatives. Ron's extensive involvement in the Conservancy and his creative work in developing new models of land conservation were much in evidence during his presentation to us.

For some of us, the term 'alvar' was unfamiliar. Ron described it as shallow, flat, limestone bedrock which is often wet in spring and very dry in the summer. Trees do not grow there and so the land remains as it, no doubt, looked some 10,000 years ago when the glaciers left. Globally rare, 75% of alvars are found in the Great Lakes Basin. It is estimated that approximately 90% of alvars are either lost or degraded. Alvars come in different types; Ron's examples included shrub alvars with fragrant sumac; an open alvar grassland in the Carden Plain named Little Bluestem Alvar; and open alvar pavement on which vegetation is patchy and barren with plenty of mosses and lichens. Ron brought copies of a recently published book on alvar plants – see page 2.

The Couchiching Conservancy protects the Carden Alvar, 20 minutes east of Orillia, which contains special communities, grassland birds, species at risk and rural landscape. In 1998, the Carden Alvar was designated as an 'Important Bird Area' by Birdlife International. Carden Plain has played a large role in helping species at risk. Although eastern loggerhead shrikes are largely gone from eastern North America, the Carden Alvar is one of two strongholds, with 16 pairs in its captive breeding program this year. Volunteers build nests around hawthorn trees where

the captive birds are brought to nest. Their young are then released into the wild.

Ron spoke of the challenges in preserving this natural land. There are, of course, other parties with competing interests who must be engaged. The biggest threat comes from the aggregate industry which views the Carden Plain as part of the GTA supply corridor. Already, thousands of acres are owned by quarries. Landowners are sandwiched between these two interests and don't know whom to trust. Many landowners are generally antagonistic to government control in any form and feel powerless in the face of

external forces. The only feasible way to maintain the grasslands is to use cattle grazing but economic forces are causing marginal lands to be abandoned. Nature lovers have also proved to be part of the problem leading to increased traffic on local roads, the invasion of locals' privacy and increased suspicion and fear that birders will find an endangered species, leading to more intrusion.

Ron's solutions are beautiful in their inclusivity and good will. Nature lovers are encouraged to show respect and courtesy to local people; to park on the shoulder and let people pass. New trails improve the public's access;

parking areas and pull-off areas give space to nature lovers. Local people are involved in events and reap economic benefits from their success. Going forward, solutions include developing partnerships with the quarries, improving knowledge of the existing wildlife, and raising funds through innovative and fun means.

We can all be part of the solution. The 3rd Carden Nature Festival (June 6-8, 2010) is highly recommended by past attendees. Ron also dropped a challenge for the TFN to send a team to the fun Birdathon in mid-June. Anyone interested?

Corinne McDonald



Golden-winged warbler,
photographed by Larry Kirtley

EXTRACTS FROM OUTINGS LEADERS' REPORTS

Serena Gundy Park, October 1. Leader Ann and Brian Gray. Despite a low count of birds (18 species), the day was beautiful as some of the sumac and maples had started to turn colour. Everyone had a good study of a white-breasted nuthatch and we watched a kettle of turkey vultures form. (A black vulture was seen by one of the leaders.) Many crane flies were abundant on the vegetation. We saw an American toad.

Nature and Heritage, Humber River, October 6. Leader: Madeleine McDowell. We saw lots of salmon leaping and a salmon nest at Old Mill Bridge. We explored Fisher's or Millwood Mill ruins – I had some historic photos to show. At Lambton House we saw Agnes Fitzgibbon's Canadian Wildflower illustrations. Looked at some fossils at Baby Point. A variety of insects and other invertebrates – bees and wasps, yellow sulphur butterfly, auburn banded woolly bear crossing Dundas Bridge, damselfly, large brown spiders and spiral (native) and striped (European) snails.

Urban Nature and Sugar Maples, Don Valley to the Brickworks, October 15. Leader: Tom Atkinson. White ash were in full colour and sugar maples with some colour. Overall, the leaves were not as advanced as I had expected. My old rule-of-thumb was that peak maple colour would be Oct. 9-12. Now it is at least a week later. A few beech were showing yellow and brown leaves in patches. The asters along the Bayview Extension were quite abundant and lovely. Alas, very abundant invasives were Japanese knotweed, pale swallowwort, purging buckthorn, and Siberian elm. We looked for salmon but saw none.

Birds and Nature, East Humber Bay, October 20. Leaders: Ann and Brian Gray. A northern mockingbird perched in a dead tree (found by Derek) was the highlight for us all and it stayed put for several minutes. We saw two monarch butterflies – very fresh individuals on New England asters. We viewed ducks through the 'scope: American widgeon, mallard, green-winged teal, hooded merganser. Other birds included killdeer, one dunlin, flicker, phoebe, kinglets, yellow-rumped warbler, robins, song sparrow, white-throated sparrow, and white-crowned sparrow.

Taylor Massey Creek watershed, October 28. Leaders: Pleasance and Charles Crawford. For TFN, this was perhaps a longish route (4 miles in 3 hours). However, after an early-summer exploration

based on the map in *Exploring: Toronto's Parks and Trails*, we liked its variety. Our route includes a pioneer cemetery, a railway corridor, a brown field, a hydro corridor, carefully manicured school grounds and surrounding neighbourhood, Scarborough's best arboretum, as well as St. Clair Ravine Park and Warden Woods. We discussed and showed pictures of the chimney crayfish and their chimneys previously recorded in the St. Clair ravine. We were concerned about trenches that have been dug that drain into the creek and wondered whether the wetland to the north, which has had an ESA designation, is being drained by this action.

Mushrooms, Morningside Park, October 31. Leader: D. Andrew White. The main fungus of interest was the elm oyster, *Hypsizygus tessulatus*, a white tree fungus also known as fall-oyster. Taxonomists are arguing whether there are two species or one.

We found 13 agarics, 2 funnel caps, 7 types of bracket fungi, 2 jelly fungi, a crust fungus, and one slime mould (or myxomycete) called *Lycogala epidendrum* or wolf's milk slime but, surprisingly, no honey mushrooms (*Armillaria* spp).



Elm oyster, photographed by Margaret McRae



Probably mature turkey tails with green algae growing in the hairs on the top side, photographed by Augusta Takeda

BIRD OF THE MONTH – PILEATED WOODPECKER

The very impressive-looking pileated woodpecker resides in Toronto year-round. About the size of a crow, black and white with a wild-looking red crest, reminiscent of Woody Woodpecker, this bird is easily recognized, in Canada anyway. If you happen to be deep in an Arkansas swamp, hoping desperately to find the possibly extinct ivory-billed woodpecker, there could be room for confusion. While both male and female pileated woodpeckers have a red crest, in the male the red extends down the forehead and he also has a red “moustache” stripe which is black in the female. Some years ago I was thrilled to find a pileated nest hole with two young birds hanging out, waiting for their parents to deliver breakfast. Even those unfledged young sported startling red caps.

The pileated woodpecker was once thought of as a shy resident of the forest interior. Luckily for us, however, this remarkable bird has adapted to life in urban environments where there are enough large trees to provide for feeding and nesting needs. Dead, declining and fallen trees are particularly important for them.

I first saw a “pileated” during a TFN outing as our large group strolled through a tiny Scarborough woodlot. While we all gathered and watched for several minutes, the woodpecker, seemingly oblivious to the crowd he’d attracted, continued to work at a tree right beside the path. More often all we see is a pile of large wood chips at the base of a tree and big squarish holes. If those chips and holes look fresh, the tree may be part of a pileated woodpecker’s current route (he runs a sort of trap-line). That area could be worth checking whenever you have time. Those holes are a boon to various species of birds and mammals which depend on woodpeckers, including the pileated, to provide them with nesting and roosting places.

Humans, however, are not always happy with the holes. In adapting to changing habitats, pileated woodpeckers developed a liking for hydro poles, presenting a challenge for Hydro One. Replacing poles weakened by large woodpecker holes is very

expensive. An article last February in OFO News, newsletter of The Ontario Field Ornithologists, explains several innovative ways in which Hydro One is dealing with the problem. One method involves attaching fake metal woodpeckers to poles, a kind of “occupied” sign. In other cases poles have been wrapped in black plastic or replaced with steel poles. The effectiveness of a recent strategy is yet to be determined: “when a cavity is found, the original pole is cut to a smaller length and bolted adjacent to the new pole at the same height...In order to keep any potential contents of the nest safe, this procedure is completed with the pole still held vertical...This solution preserves the new hydro pole while maintaining habitat for the birds.” Hydro One would like the public to report any activity observed at these new structures to Christine Vance, [REDACTED]



Pileated woodpecker, photographed by Norah Jancik at Lambton Woods

Pileated woodpeckers seem to be thriving. The *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario 2001 - 2005* reports “almost a 50% increase in the probability of observation in the province” compared with findings in the previous atlas 20 years earlier. Thanks to forest regeneration and protection from hunting, since the 1940s pileated woodpecker populations have been recovering from historic low levels. The atlas

map shows confirmed breeding evidence in several parts of the Greater Toronto Area and possible or probable breeding throughout the rest of the GTA.

Since a pileated woodpecker pair retains its territory throughout the year, you could spot one in any season. Furthermore, although their diet consists mainly of ants and other wood-dwelling insects, they also consume nuts and fruit and will visit suet feeders. The Fall 2009 issue of *BirdWatch Canada*, published by Bird Studies Canada, reports that last winter Quebec FeederWatchers observed record numbers of pileated woodpeckers which visited nearly 20% of that province’s FeederWatch sites. For me, seeing a pileated woodpecker is a treat that doesn’t come along often enough, but just seeing the evidence that they’re living in our megacity is very satisfying.

Marilynn Murphy

Note: For information about the following organizations, their publications, projects, or membership, contact Ontario Field Ornithologists, Box 455 Station R, Toronto M4G 4E1 (www.ofo.ca), and Bird Studies Canada at 1-888-448-2473 (www.birdscanada.org)

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Raining robins

After two lovely sunshine weeks, the weather had returned to gloom. Two days of wind and rain. I took time to look over the garden from my bedroom window. The old Hopa crabapple tree, bereft of most leaves, was bedecked with ruby and slate jewels sheltering from the weather – 18 robins with grey puffed-up sparrows and hunkered-down mourning doves. Fall brings shiny apples and fat orange pumpkins, but nothing to compare to the glory of those gifts. My thanksgiving!

Sheila Ryan

New trail in Toronto

You may have noticed articles in the media (Christopher Hume in *Toronto Star*, Oct. 30, lots of photographs in *Now Magazine*, Nov. 5-11) about the new Toronto Railpath Park which was officially opened on Oct. 30. This new park is a 2.1 km linear space that follows a railway track northwards from just west of the junction of College St. and Dundas St. W. and ends north of Dupont St. There are plans to continue the trail southwards along the railway line to Wellington St. The Railpath is “a hybrid model: it’s

part path, part garden,” says landscape architect James Brown in the *Star* article. The trailside has been planted with trees, native roses, ferns, grasses and vines.

TFNers Roger Powley, Alexander Cappell and Ian Wheall have walked the path. Roger says “The path passes old factories and abandoned buildings but is quite green on the west side. A lot of trees and bushes have grown up on the side of the tracks.” It’s a paved path good for walking and cycling with several large sculptures made with industrial-type materials and signage on old rusted steel.

A Gray Day

Leaden waves

Lunging for the land

Their sound muffled

By the sinking sand.

Poem by Ann Hayes

Ann shared this poem with the Nature Arts outing on the waterfront, October 3.

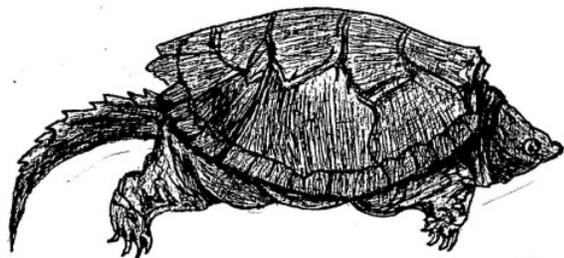


Cherry Beach by Joanne Doucette, computer generated from a photograph

HOW TO RESTORE TURTLE HABITAT BY SITTING AT YOUR COMPUTER

By Lisa Webster and Julia Phillips, originally published in *Amphibian Voice*, Summer 2009, newsletter of the Adopt-A-Pond Wetland Conservation Programme, Toronto Zoo. www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond

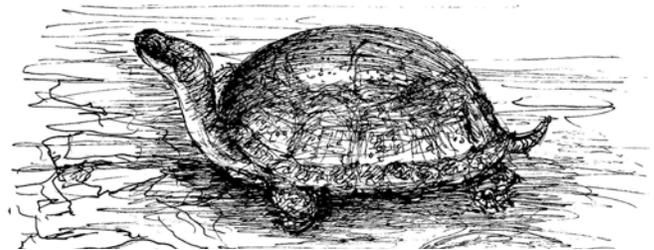
In partnership with Rouge Park and Environment Canada's Habitat Stewardship Programme, the Toronto Zoo Adopt-A-Pond Programme launched the Urban Turtle Initiative (UTI) in 1999, a long-term urban research project designed to help protect turtles and preserve critical habitat within the Rouge Valley. The major goal of the UTI is to determine the population size, distribution and habitat use of turtle species in Rouge Park and the greater area of the Rouge River watershed in order to make recommendations for the conservation and management of turtle populations. Between 2000 and 2008, Adopt-A-Pond researchers tracked the movements of three different turtle species (Blanding's Turtles, Northern Map Turtles, and Snapping Turtles) to determine what type of characteristics each species was using to select nesting and overwintering sites. Once we had pinpointed common habitat selection criteria among each turtle species, it was then possible to look for other areas within the watershed that fit these same criteria. More importantly, it became possible to search out ideal sites situated in good turtle habitat where wetland restorations, or the creation of new ponds, could truly benefit turtle populations by increasing habitat quality, and availability.



Snapping turtle, drawn by Eva Davis

Enter Geographic Information System (GIS) technology! GIS is a mapping and analysis tool which allows the user to view and interpret ecological data in ways that reveal patterns and trends across landscapes. In 2009, GIS was incorporated into our UTI project to help identify ideal sites for wetland restoration. Specifically, we were interested in finding spots where good quality turtle nesting and overwintering sites already existed, or spots where these features could

easily be added to a wetland. We also wanted to locate areas that had historically been known to hold water (e.g. deep farm field depressions, oxbows along river beds, etc.).



Blandings turtle, drawn by Diana Banville

By using GIS technology, common criteria that define known turtle habitats in Rouge Park can easily be applied to the rest of the landscape. Similar habitats in areas outside of the park can then be mapped and located. For example, the type of soil a turtle chooses for nesting is important for the incubation and health of that turtle's eggs. Using soil type data from areas that contain soil properties turtles have chosen in the past, we can locate other areas within the watershed that have similar soil types to select wetland restoration sites that lie in close proximity to appropriate turtle nesting soils. This same principle can be applied to any other criteria common throughout a species' selected nesting and/or overwintering sites. Once "ideal" habitats are identified through GIS, individual sites are examined at a finer scale (i.e. via field study) by our wetland biologists, Victoria and Jenn, to verify whether these locations are truly suitable for turtles.

Ultimately, this project will help secure the future of turtle populations in the Rouge River watershed by improving habitat connectivity throughout the landscape and ensuring that turtles are provided with high quality habitat near restored wetlands. In 2009, we celebrated the first physical manifest of our longstanding desire to build more habitats for turtles – we created #1 of what we hope will be a series of many "turtle-friendly" ponds to come!

FUNGI TO THE RESCUE

Gypsy moths are the long-term consequence of a business venture which failed. Natives of Eurasia, they were introduced to Boston and its environs around 1869 when a scientist brought eggs to the United States to hybridize with a native silk moth. The caterpillars escaped through a window. Alas, no-one was then aware of the moth's capacity to demolish the leaves of over 300 species of tree, the needles of conifers included. It is estimated that one gypsy moth caterpillar can consume a square metre of foliage during its brief lifetime. Some trees may survive a single attack, but will eventually succumb. Broadleaf trees can be destroyed in just one season of defoliation.

We have all seen them: trees draped in the silvery tents of the gypsy moth caterpillar. I recently wrote (# 566, October 2009) of my strong memory of passing an elderly tree in North York which was covered, from crown to root, in the net tents of this moth. The setting sun had turned the tents a deep pink. This netting was alive with descending caterpillars bent on continuing their life cycle on the ground and were crawling down, under, and over each other. It was a sight both beautiful and repellent in its fecundity.

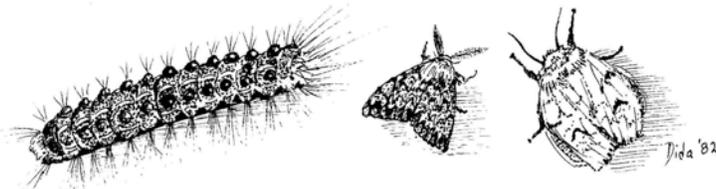
The gypsy moth had been present in Japan for a very long time and it was understood that a specific fungus

was a vital natural control. This fungus, *Entomophaga maimaiga*, was introduced to the U.S. northeast in 1910, but failed to take hold. Gypsy moths had the field to themselves and in 1981 they defoliated five million acres of trees in the U.S. northeast. However, in 1989, it was found that gypsy moth caterpillars were dying off from a fungal disease. *Entomophaga maimaiga* had reappeared. The fungus infects the caterpillars, causing them to die, strangely but noticeably, in a head-down position on tree trunks. The fungus, not visible to the naked eye, spreads from short-lived spores dispersed from the dead caterpillar by the wind, as well as by long-lived spores which fall to the ground with the dead moth and remain to infect future colonies. Blue jays, chickadees and robins find both the caterpillars and spores enormously to their taste, but the main defender of trees remains the gypsy moth fungus, *Entomophaga maimaiga*, another example of the vital role of fungi in the ecosystem.

Entomophaga means "insect-eating" and "*maimaiga*" is Japanese for gypsy moth. "Mai" means "dance" in Japanese and probably derives from the fact that young caterpillars spin threads from which they dangle and are blown in all directions – thus "dancing" – as they are transported by the wind to nearby trees.

Eva Davis

With information provided by Tony Wright in *The Mycelium*, monthly newsletter of the Mycological Society of Toronto, to which I endlessly, if tiresomely, urge all TFNers to belong (www.myctor.org).



Gypsy Moth larva and male and female adults drawn by Diana Banville

Toronto Tree Portraits 2010 Calendar

In honour of Toronto's 175th anniversary as an incorporated city, the City's oldest and largest trees are featured. Toronto photographer Vincenzo Pietropaolo has provided images and accompanying stories for the twelve "heroic survivors" – trees that are as old as or older than Toronto itself. See www.torontoparksandtrees.org/portraits for a preview.

Cost is \$16.95 (\$15.00 plus tax). Add \$3.00 shipping and handling for orders fewer than three. To order phone 416-397-5178 or email parksandtrees@toronto.ca or mail a cheque or money order to: Toronto Parks & Trees Foundation, 157 Adelaide St. West, Suite 123, Toronto M5H 4E7. Also available at many retail outlets including Book City, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Sheridan Nurseries and Toronto Botanical Garden.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

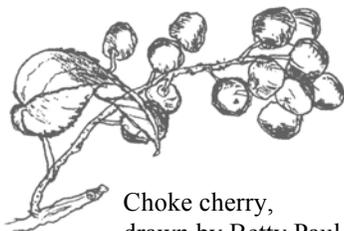
From Toronto Field Naturalists' Club Newsletter, number 112, December 1952

From Dr. Fletcher Sharp, one of the Club's botany leaders, comes the following pertinent reminder to the botanically-minded members of the Club that they need not, and should not, go into their cocoons and hibernate when the leaves fall and the snow descends.

Dr. Sharp writes, "To the person with organic sensibility who has an awareness of the subdued, quiescent beauties of nature, a winter's walk in the woods can bring as much joy and satisfaction as one in the height of our brilliant summer or autumn.

The herbaceous plants die but their interesting skeletons form weird outlines against the blue sky. Here is a brown cluster of goldenrod, a gray patch of asters, dead mullein stalks standing erect like walking sticks left by ghosts in the fields, the milkweed stems with open pods emitting seeds with silken threads, the evening primrose with its knobby capsules along the stem. They have lost their bloom and colour, but each is easily identified although in this sombre, mellow sepia-like form.

On the brown earth in patches of fresh green, one sees the basal leaves of next year's plants. Here they will rest beneath the snow until the lengthening rays of the sun and April showers set them to growing anew.



Choke cherry,
drawn by Betty Paul

Then there are the woody plants or shrubs which are not dead but have merely lost their foliage. The choke cherry and the pin cherry, shadbush, wild plum, elderberry and viburnum line the

fences and skirt the edges of the woods. Across old pasture fields one sees briars and hawthorns (hips and haws) holding their deserted birds' nests. These so-called "weeds" of the forest have greatly increased since man has made clearings for them. Lilac bushes and old apple trees are evidence that a house has at one

time stood nearby. The greenish white berries of the poison ivy stand up most attractively, but how dangerous they are.



Poison ivy, drawn by
Diana Banville

Near the marsh one sees the feathery willows, the alders and elders, the green and red dogwoods, and if lucky, a bush of winterberry, red with fruit. There is a stand of white cedars and beyond some black spruce with their small cones at the top, and probably some tamarack.

Entering the hardwoods one encounters the sugar maple – its rugged coarse bark

contrasting with the smooth unwrinkled gray of the beeches. The paper birch

stands out surprisingly against the snow. The yellow birch growing from old stumps makes one wonder what it used as a starting point before men cut the trees and made stumps for it to grow on. One tastes the twigs and, sure enough, it has the identifying flavour of wintergreen. The bare limbs and perfectly designed branches of the ash remind us of candelabra. Over there is an isolated black cherry with its black curled bark, leading its typical lone-wolf existence. The prolific basswood has as usual her offspring grouped about her.

In another bush are the evergreens. The white pine is recognized by its dark trunk and its cluster of five needles, the red pine by its reddish bark and its two needles. The hemlocks, spruce and firs beckon us on into the woods and challenge us to identify them.

These mysteries of nature are only some of the pleasures given to anyone who will take a winter's walk in the country."

*Still winter morning
Suddenly chickadees flit
Crows flap to treetops*

Haiku by Karin Fawthrop

IN THE NEWS

Swift action

We've reported in previous issues on the decline of chimney swifts (95% in the last 40 years) and efforts of some naturalist groups to either prevent the destruction of chimneys in our built environment or to build simulated chimneys to provide nesting habitat. In *Action for Habitat and Health*, spring 2009, newsletter for Trent-Severn Waterway Wildlife Program, Judy Kennedy, project coordinator for Species at Risk with the Kawartha Field Naturalists, reports that Kawartha FN and Peterborough FN have built five new chimney swift towers. A scientist from the Ministry of Natural Resources will use the towers to research swift nesting preferences and patterns. He will play a recording of swift calls to attract the birds to the towers.



Chimney swift on nest, drawn by Diana Banville from a Maslowski photo

The report also says that “Little was known of the swifts’ wintering grounds until a group of scientists discovered a remote tribe of aboriginal people in the Amazon Basin of Peru wearing jewelry, adorned with the coloured, numbered metal leg bands from North American chimney swifts.”

Chilling costs of development disputes

Extracted from a news release from the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario website, www.eco.on.ca, Oct 6, 2009.

Citizen groups fighting to protect natural areas need some protection against intimidating legal tactics,

warned the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario in his new annual report. As Commissioner Gord Miller noted, “The land use planning system is hugely weighted in favour of the development industry. Citizen groups wanting to protect natural heritage can face enormous legal costs at hearings; it can be a frightening prospect.” A variety of legal manoeuvres such as SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) can create a chill on public participation. The Report cites a recent case before the Ontario Municipal Board where citizens faced a claim for costs of \$3.2 million – which was fortunately denied by the Board. “There’s a clear need for provincial legislation that would put the parties on more equal footing and reduce the threats of SLAPP suits and similar tactics,” said Miller (pp. 23-24).

The report also draws attention to the vulnerable status of amphibians, which are in decline world wide. A number of Ontario frog, toad and salamander species are officially at risk, and face an uncertain future due to threats like habitat loss, chemical pollution, invasive species and changing climate. “Even protected places like Point Pelee National Park have lost some amphibian species since the 1970s,” Miller commented, “so we need to pay closer attention.” (pp. 44-50)

Downsview Park

An article in the *Toronto Star* on Nov. 2 reported on plans for development within the Downsview military base lands to pay for the new Downsview Park. As many as 10,000 housing units would be built around the periphery. The park would end up being High Park-sized rather than Central Park-sized and would include playing fields, a man-made lake, community allotment gardens, and wooded areas. The article quoted Downsview Lands Community Voice Association president, Rino Cipolletta: “We’ve lost the battle to save the whole site as parkland. So we’ve gone to the next stage, which is to try to minimize the impact on the existing neighbourhoods.” Issues include increased traffic, water and sewer systems, and more amenities for residents. The plan will be presented to North York community council in January before going to city council for a final decision.

Dunlap Observatory update

Richmond Hill council has passed a motion to ask for provincial and federal help to preserve the David Dunlap Observatory and surrounding land by designating it as a cultural heritage property of provincial and federal significance. A bylaw designating the property under the Ontario Heritage Act was drafted by the town in support of the request but this draft is likely to be substantially changed after Richmond Hill Field Naturalists presented a revised bylaw "in which numerous additional recommendations and clarifications were added," reported YorkRegion.com news (www.yorkregion.com). "Naturalists' president Marianne Yake gave a 20-minute presentation regarding the draft bylaw, standing in the shadow of a laminated Jesse Donalda Dunlap portrait she brought along, honouring the woman who donated the lands as research and green space to the University of Toronto in 1935." Three public meetings are being held as part of a Planning and Conservation Management Study. For further information and to sign a petition to preserve the observatory and its lands from development go to www.rhnaturalists.ca/save-the-observatory/petition.

Eye-catching red-tailed hawks

University College's *Alumni Magazine*, Fall 2009, reports that red-tailed hawks perching, soaring and quarrelling in and around the college on U of T's St. George Campus have caught the eye of students and faculty. The hawks' identity was confirmed by Professor Jim Rising of the Dept. of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology who stated: "...finding predatory birds in the downtown core is not unusual... In the past, they have nested in Queen's Park and also in other places in or near campus."

Mystery of black wolves solved

From a University of California - Los Angeles news release at newsroom.ucla.edu

Why do nearly half of North American wolves have black coats while European wolves are overwhelmingly gray or white? The surprising answer, according to teams of biologists and molecular geneticists from Stanford University, UCLA, Sweden, Canada and Italy, is that the black coats are the result of historical matings between black dogs and wild gray wolves. Scientists used molecular genetic techniques to analyze DNA sequences from 150 wolves, about half of them black, in Yellowstone National Park, which covers parts of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho. They found that a novel mutated variant of a gene in dogs is responsible for black coat colour and was transferred to wolves through mating.

The biologists believe it was not a recent occurrence as the black coat could not have spread as widely as it has throughout North America in just a few hundred years. They suspect the transfer took place sometime before the arrival of Europeans to North America and involved dogs that were here with Native Americans. Apparently, natural selection has increased the frequency of black coat colour dramatically in wolf populations across North America. "It must have adaptive value that we don't yet understand," said Robert Wayne, a UCLA professor of ecology and evolutionary biology and co-author of the Science paper. "It could be camouflage, or strengthening the immune system to combat pathogens, or it could reflect a preference to mate with individuals of a different coat colour." This is the first example where a gene mutation originated in a domesticated species, was transferred to and became very common in a closely related wild species.

TORONTO ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

This year's Toronto Christmas Bird Count will take place on Sunday, December 20th.

If you are interested in taking part, visit www.torontobirding.ca and e-mail the TOC Outings Councillor, Sarah Box.

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: www.torontobirding.ca
Sat. Dec. 5, 8 am (all day). Waterfowl and Winter Birding, West Toronto Lakeshore & Beyond. Leader: Dave Milsom.
Meet in the parking lot at Humber Bay Park East. Bring lunch. Carpool if necessary.

Toronto Entomologists' Association (TEA)

Sat. Jan. 23, 1:15 pm. Room 206, Victoria College. The Gall in the Middle: the goldenrod gall fly, its host and enemies.
Speaker: Art Weis, Director of U of T's Koffler Scientific Reserve Centre and director of the Canadian Institute for Ecology and Evolution. Information: www.ontarioinsects.org

Rouge Valley Guided Nature Walks

Sun. Dec. 13, 1:30 pm – 3:30 pm. Winter in the Valley. Leader: Stephen Kamnitzer. Meet at the Rouge Valley Conservation Centre, 1749 Meadowvale Rd., east on the Toronto Zoo on-ramp. No charge, but donations welcomed. Information: www.rougevalleynaturalists.com/upcoming_events or 416-282-8265.

High Park Walking Tours

2nd and 4th Sundays of each month, 10:30 am - noon. Meet at the benches across the road south of Grenadier Café. Donation requested. Information: 416-392-1748 ext. 5 or walkingtours@highpark.org or www.highpark.org

- Dec. 13. Structures We Love. Led by Walking Tours Committee.
- Dec. 27. Holiday Hike and Brunch. Hosted by the Walking Tours Committee.

Science on Sundays

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

- Dec. 6, 3 pm. The Stoicheff Lecture: From Einstein's Intuition to Quantum Bits. Alain Aspect, Ecole Polytechnique, Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, France.

The Market Gallery

Until March 13, 2010. The St. Lawrence Ward – a pictorial view of Toronto's oldest neighbourhood. South St. Lawrence Market, 2nd floor, 95 Front St. E. Free. Gallery closed Sundays, Mondays and holidays.

BAILLIE FUND GRANT DEADLINES

Bird Studies Canada is now accepting applications to the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund for Bird Research and Preservation (the Baillie Fund) for 2010. A portion of funds raised through BSC's annual Baillie Birdathon fundraiser are allocated to the Baillie Fund to provide grants to individuals or groups for projects that further BSC's mission. Priority is given to projects that engage the skills and enthusiasm of amateur naturalists and volunteers to help us understand, appreciate, and conserve Canadian birds in their natural environments.

Applications are due:

for Regular Grants	Dec. 15, 2009
for Small Grants	Jan. 15, 2010
for James L. Baillie Student Award for Field Research	Feb. 15, 2010

For more information about these grant programs, past grants, and how to apply for a grant for your project, go to Bird Studies Canada at www.bsc-eoc.org, or call 1-888-448-2473 ext. 166, or contact the Baillie Fund Secretary at aheady@birdscanada.org.

WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

December 2008

Winter wasted no time getting going this year. After a fairly lengthy cold snap in mid-November followed by a half-hearted recovery, December moved in with snow beginning early in the month. Storms, each with 10–20 cm of snow, came in quick succession on the 8th, 16th, 19th, and 23rd. Rain was mixed in with the snow on the first and last of these storms. By Christmas, snow cover was in the 30 cm range, although temperatures were rising at that point.

Record warmth on the 27th–28th brought a high temperature of 15.9° at Pearson Airport, though it was a couple of degrees cooler downtown. The Pearson high beat the daily record for the 28th set in 1984. This intense thaw reduced but did not eliminate the very heavy snowpack.

December ended with a total of 59.9 cm of snow downtown and 64.8 cm at Pearson Airport. This was the third heaviest December total at Pearson, and the heaviest since 1970. Rainfall was also above normal, yielding total precipitation in the vicinity of 100 mm. Pearson's total precipitation of 99.8 mm was the 5th highest since records began in the late 1930s.

Monthly mean temperatures were close to the long-term normal but a little cooler than the average for recent years: downtown was -1.8° and Pearson -3.1°

January 2009

The winter of 2008-2009 seems to be following a severe pattern by recent standards, at least so far. Temperatures for January were below normal by about 3° and snowfall was above normal. By the end of January, we had already exceeded the 30-year average snowfall for an entire winter, though still well short of last year's final total.

Monthly mean temperatures were -8.8° at Pearson and -7.0° downtown, making it the coldest January since 2004. There were only brief periods when it rose above freezing, and the warmest it got all month was 3.6° at Pearson and 4.0° downtown. It was very cold from the 14th-17th, with temperatures in the suburbs falling below -20° .

Snowfall was 51.6 cm downtown and 45.2 cm at Pearson. Normal is around 30 cm, so this was high but less extreme than in December. Significant snowstorms hit on the 6th–7th, 17th–18th and 27th–28th, with about 8–15 cm each time. There was virtually no rain this month, and total precipitation was therefore near or just slightly below the long-term average. Snow cover was continuous through the month; being light early in the month due to the late December thaw, but rising over 30 cm accumulated depth again late in the month.

Gavin Miller



Peniophora rufa, photographed by Augusta Takeda, at Morningside Park, October 31

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Flammulina velutipes, photographed by Augusta Takeda during TFN mushroom outing at Morningside Park, October 31