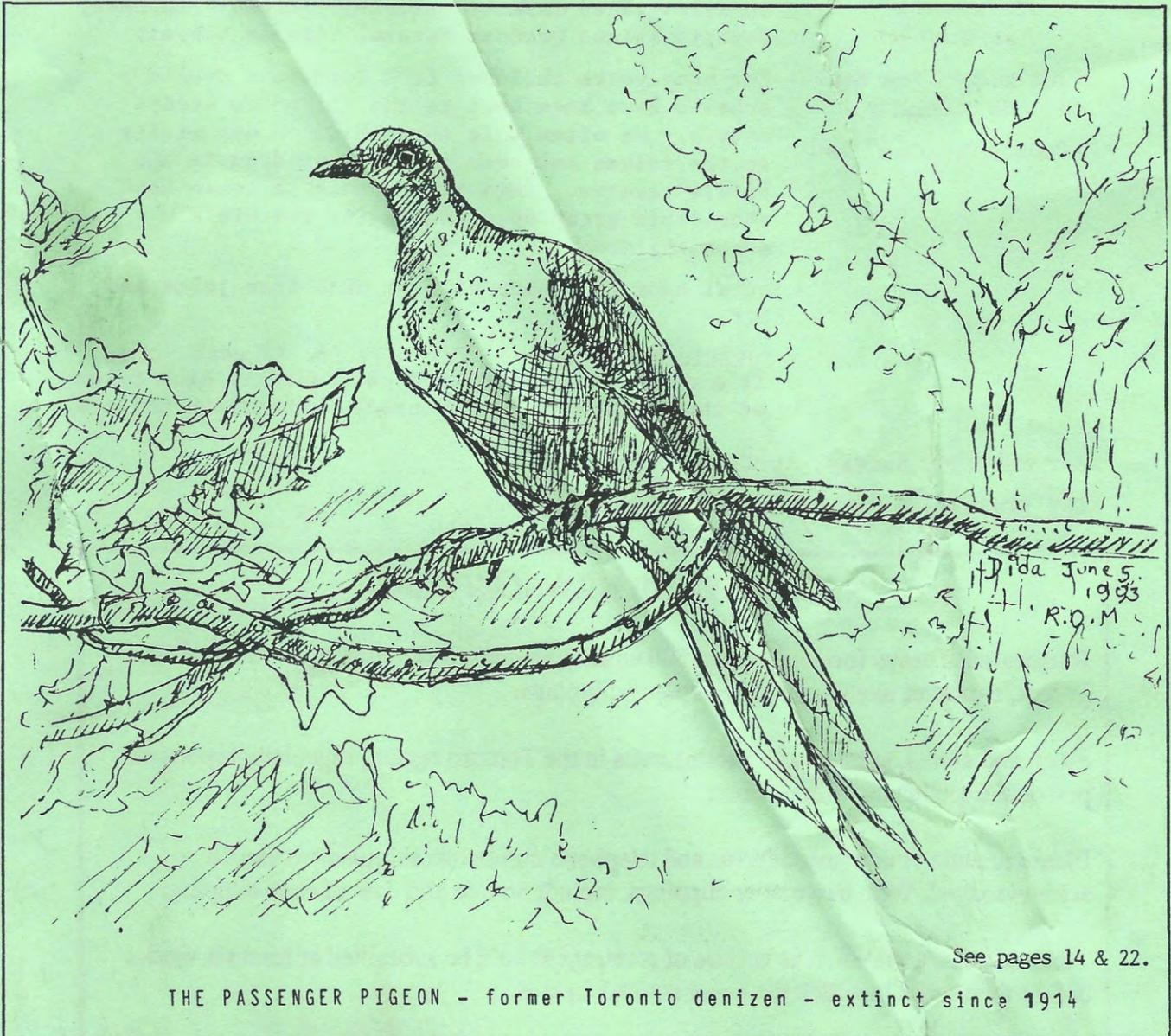


TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 482

March 1999



See pages 14 & 22.

THE PASSENGER PIGEON - former Toronto denizen - extinct since 1914

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TFN MEETINGS

Sunday, March 7, 1999 - TORONTO ISLAND SCHOOL OUTDOOR EDUCATION PROGRAM
an illustrated talk by Christer Nilsson, Principal,
Toronto Island Outdoor Natural Science School.
at 2:30 pm

in the Northrop Frye Hall - For many years children from Toronto's public
Victoria University schools have been sent to the island to study
73 Queen's Park Cres. East nature. We often pass the school on our visits
to the island and even see the children in the
nature reserve. This is a chance to learn more
about this great opportunity for Toronto's
schoolchildren.

+ Social hour beginning at 2 pm with free juice and
coffee

+ TORONTO ROCKS will be for sale for \$8 each. This
is a new book, written and published by Nick Eyles
of the University of Toronto's Scarborough College.

NEXT MEETING: Sunday, April 4, 1999

NEXT NEWSLETTER: to be mailed in mid March

IT'S YOUR NEWSLETTER

Requested: Essays (no longer than 500 words), reviews (no longer than 300 words),
poems, cartoons, sketches and newspaper clippings.

Subjects: plants, animals and natural areas in the Toronto region, especially reports of
personal experiences with wildlife.

Please include your name, address and telephone number so submissions can be
acknowledged. With newspaper clippings, include source and date of each clipping.

Time dated material such as notices of meetings should be submitted at least six weeks
before the month in which the event is to take place.

Send material to: Toronto Field Naturalists
605 - 14 College St.
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1K2

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Toshi Oikawa and Jenny Bull.

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TFN OUTINGS

REMEMBER: Children and visitors are welcome on all outings but please, **NO PETS!**
 To get to outings on time, check TTC routes and schedules by calling 393-4636.
 Check the weather by calling 661-0123 so you will know what to wear on outings which go rain or shine.

- Wednesday
 March 3
 2 pm DEER PARK LIBRARY - nature photography Toronto
 Leader: Robin Powell
 Meet in the 2nd floor meeting room of the library which is on the north side of St. Clair Ave. East, one block east of Yonge St.
 Bring your own nature photos, as many as 20, or just come and enjoy. A projector and screen will be provided. If you have questions, please call Robin Powell at 928-9493.
- Saturday
 March 6
 2 pm UNDERGROUND TORONTO - geology Toronto
 Leader: Ed Freeman
 Meet at the Sheraton Centre (in the lobby, on the north side of the waterfall). The hotel is on the south side of Queen St. West opposite Toronto City Hall.
 This walk will be through Toronto's underground where we will learn about the material with which our city is built.
- Sunday
 March 7
 2 pm TFN MEETING (see page 2)
 Social hour begins.
- Wednesday
 March 10
 10:30 am CENTENNIAL PARK - nature indoors and out Etobicoke Cr., Etobicoke
 Leader: Ann Millett
 Meet at the greenhouses on Elmcrest Rd. just north of Rathburn Rd. Bring lunch.
 First we will have a tour of the greenhouses, then we can visit the nearby valley to look for signs of spring such as returning song sparrows or robins.
- Sunday
 March 14
 1 pm GERRARD RAVINE - nature walk Toronto
 Leader: Ken Cook
 Meet at the northeast corner of Coxwell Ave. and Gerrard St. East opposite Fairford Ave.
 We will follow remnants of the ravine south toward Lake Ontario, watching for signs of spring.
- Wednesday
 March 17
 10:30 am ALLAN GARDENS - exotic flora Toronto
 Leader: Mary Kemp
 Meet inside the greenhouses which are on the south side of Carlton St. just east of Jarvis St. Morning only.
 This is always a lovely place to visit at any time of the year with its fine collection of southern flora. It is also worth admiring the fine collection of trees in the park around the greenhouses. ▷

MARCH OUTINGS (cont'd)

Sunday LOWER DON VALLEY - nature walk Don, East York
March 21 Leaders: Aarne & Helen Juhola
2 pm Meet on the west side of Broadview Ave. at Pottery Rd.
(opposite Mortimer Ave.).
This is a joint outing to celebrate the beginning of spring with the North Toronto Green Community.

Wednesday EARL BALES PARK - nature walk West Don, North York
March 24 Leader: Carol Sellers
10:30 am Meet at the community centre at the north end of the park,
on the east side of Bathurst St. just south of Sheppard Ave. West.
Bring lunch.
This large valley park has a number of habitats for us to explore -- meadows,
woodlands, riverside, etc. Bring binoculars and notebooks.

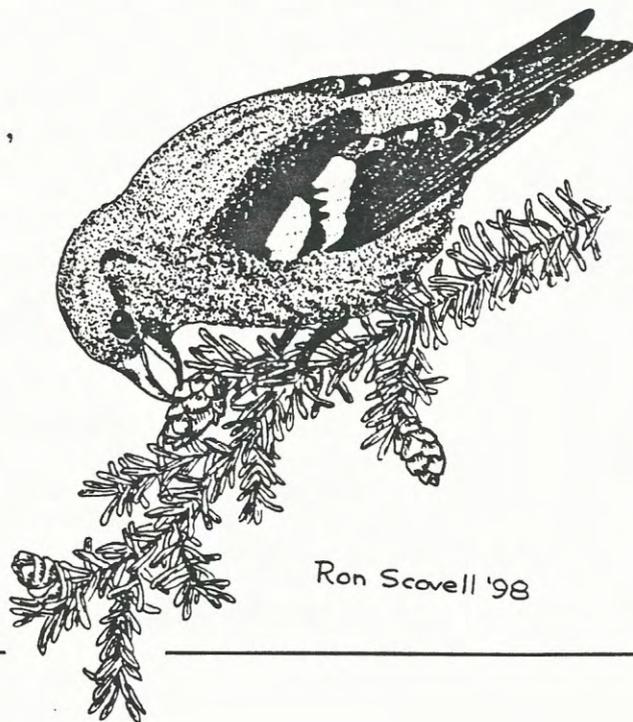
Sunday BELTLINE - WESTERN LOOP - heritage walk Toronto
March 28 Leader: Ian Wheal
2 pm Meet at the southwest corner of St. Clair Ave. West and
Keele St.
This walk will be through parks, laneways and streets.

Tuesday CHESTERTON SHORES - nature walk Lakeshore, Scarborough
March 30 Leader: Karin Fawthrop
10:30 am Meet at the Rouge Hills GO station. Morning only.
This is a low section of the bluffs so we can get views of the lake and
gulls, geese and ducks on it. We may also see early migrating birds.

□

THE WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL,
though considered an
irruptive in Toronto
Region, has been reported
here every year in the
1990s, except for 1994,
according to TFN Records
at the end of 1998.

DB



Ron Scovell '98

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By the time you read this, Scott Jarvie's February 7th presentation on coyotes in the Greater Toronto area will have taken place, but now as I wait in anticipation, I'd like to share some thoughts with you concerning the magnificent creature we call the coyote and why I am attracted to it.

It was indeed a moving experience for me when I saw my first wild coyotes (five pups) on the Leslie Street spit in June 1996. I didn't see "mother" but I knew that she must be close by, probably watching us. I had heard tales of coyotes on the spit before but I had been skeptical. What a thrill it was to know for certain that wild predators of this size roam Toronto within sight of the CN tower.

Since then my friends and I have spent much time roaming the spit, the Downsview lands, the Rouge and other areas looking for signs of these illusive creatures. Often we count ourselves lucky to find a few pieces of scat and only seldom do we see an actual coyote. Sometimes I have asked myself -- why? Why am I and so many of my naturalist friends this fascinated by coyotes?

I can't speak for the others, but I think that one reason for my attraction to coyotes, particularly our urban coyotes, is that I can identify with them. The coyote was originally a creature of the wilderness, preferring the open spaces of the west, but it has been forced by circumstances to adapt and many of its kind have taken up life in the city where they find refuge in parks, ravines and so-called "waste places". Isn't that true for many of us naturalists as well? We would much prefer large wilderness areas and open spaces to roam around in but most of us have been forced by life's necessities (such as working for a living) to adapt to city life. We too survive by taking refuge whenever we can in parks, ravines and "waste places". Like the coyote, we are tolerated by society when we keep a low profile but just like the coyote who causes an uproar when he protects his territory by attacking an unleashed dog, we cause an uproar when we speak out loudly and take action to preserve the places we love. Indeed, the way that society responds both to the city coyote and the city naturalist may well determine how much, if any, of our urban green spaces will remain for future generations.

Turning to another matter, I am trying to put together a list of internet sites of use to Toronto naturalists. If you have any sites you think should be listed (e.g. local environmental organizations, government agencies, parks or reserves, resources for botany, birding or other natural history pursuits), please give me a call at 416-755-6030 or write me c/o the TFN newsletter. If I get enough response, I will make this information available to the members in a future newsletter article.

Congratulations to Jean Macdonald who was recently honoured by the Federation of Ontario Naturalists for her years of volunteer service. Jean is also one of our most faithful TFN volunteers and can usually be found in the office on Friday mornings!

President's Field Notes #13, March 1999

Ask most people what bird they associate with the arrival of spring and they would probably tell you the robin. I too enjoy the return of robins in the spring, particularly when I see one hopping about looking for worms on my lawn but the fact is that many robins are here all winter where they flock together in sheltered ravines (a good spot is Wilket Creek ravine) and feed on fruits which remain on trees or shrubs.

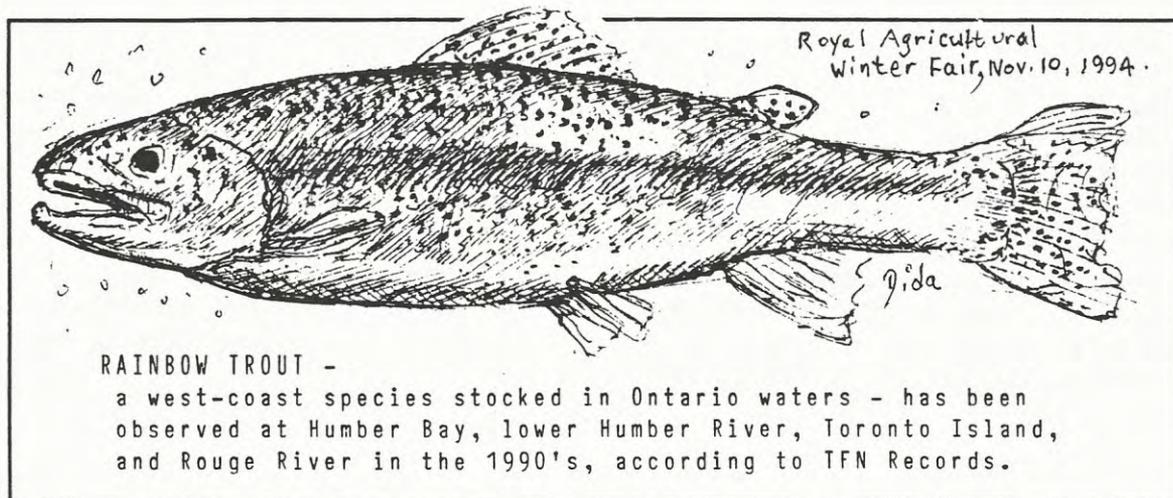
The occasional red-winged blackbird also winters in our area, especially near feeding stations such as those at Lynde Shores, but for the most part those in our area are migratory. The males, resplendent with their scarlet "shoulder patches" return first, usually by mid March or earlier to set up territories. They are hard to miss, not only because of their bright patches but also their loud calls of "oka-lee! oka-lee!" or as one naturalist friend of mine describes it -- "Hercules! Hercules!". The females which are somewhat smaller than the males and resemble large streaked sparrows usually do not return until early April.

Red-winged blackbirds are common throughout the Toronto area. They prefer to nest in cattail marshes or near bodies of water but will also adapt to dry fields. Last year I saw my first male red-winged blackbird on March 29th at Morningside Park but they were probably back at least a few weeks earlier than this. I just wasn't in the right spot. Other good locations include Thomson Memorial Park, Rouge Park and Wilket Creek. In the west end, try Grenadier Pond, High Park or Mimico Creek near Montgomery's Inn for early arrivals. In the central area, I've seen male red-wings on the islands very early in March and females very early in April.

That's it until next month. Please try to keep April 24th open for a very special TFN outing in High Park, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the first ever TFN walk!

Morris Sorensen

□



FOR READING

NATURE JOURNALING - LEARNING TO OBSERVE AND CONNECT WITH THE WORLD AROUND YOU by Clare Walker Leslie and Charles E. Roth, illustrated, hardcover art book, 181 pages, \$US26.95, Canadian \$34.95, Storey Books, Schoolhouse Road, Pownal, Vermont, 05261, or Toll-free, 1-800-441-5700

"Like a string of beads - or pearls - these little - or grand - episodes help us link to the larger strand. This stringing of images, thoughts, connections, helps us to have more understanding, reason, compassion, gratefulness," a journal entry by one author - Walker.

Anyone, for example, who keeps a lifetime species list could become inspired to expand to a journal. This new hardcover is a jewel of a how-to and makes it look easy - which it is.

There are sample journal entries of brief, handwritten text and lots of colour illustrations of flora and fauna by the authors. They offer tips on sketching and reason that one need not be a master artist. Especially helpful are the suggestions that Science, Art and English teachers will appreciate.

This writer-artist pair proposes an hour-by-hour, day-to-day, tree-to-tree record and that seems far too ambitious. One wonders why they do not discuss organized group outings such as field naturalists clubs, since these groups would be a most-likely target group for their encouragements.

I already keep a journal of TFN outings, recording locations and routes, leaders, dates, flora and fauna, which is practical for reference and is a priceless personal treasure for family posterity, along with the family photo album, slides, website, audio/videotapes.

Whether or not you seek out this particular book, once you start your own journal, you will be hooked.

Susan Weiss

□

A very good way to begin to understand taxonomy is to try and draw the flowers, even if you do not think you are able to do so, for drawing is the best learning tool. It makes you look at details that you would otherwise miss.

extracted from a book review of Cjris Czajkowski in WILDFLOWER, (13)3, Summer 1997



Sherwood Park

Field drawing by Mary Cumming, Aug. 24, 1994

HAWK HILL

Toronto is right on a major hawk migration route and there is a dedicated group of birders who count hawks that fly over each fall. Although I'll admit I have a great deal of difficulty identifying hawks flying overhead, I've enjoyed several outings at "Hawk Hill".

Who are these birders? Most belong to the Toronto Ornithological Club, but anyone is welcome. The leaders of the group love to explain everything from the classification of birds of prey to the finer points of distinguishing between similar-looking species. I was pleased one day seeing members of the group giving short seminars on birds of prey to classes of school children. The children were very intent on learning the different classifications -- hawks, eagles, falcons and vultures. Although eagles were the clear winner, hawks were neat, falcons were cool and vultures -- who knew we had real vultures in Ontario? -- and flying over Toronto! I had to chuckle at one small boy when three cedar waxwings flew by. "Mrs. Wilson, I just saw three hummingbirds!" he exclaimed. I smiled, but he was trying. He did see three birds that most didn't. It was a real start -- just needs to sharpen up the identification skills.

What do the birders do? They count each bird of prey or "raptor" which flies over their observation point. There are several observation points along raptor migration routes, each participates in the raptor count. Each hour, temperature, air pressure, wind speed and direction are noted and the count of each species seen during that hour begins. A detailed record of each day's count for each hour from about 6 am to 6 pm is kept. Of course, sometimes people can't be there or weather is a factor and birds are missed. But the count is only meant to be "as accurate as possible". Data from all the stations are forwarded to a central data base. If on any day, the flow of hawks slows down (which is frequent), blue jays, warblers and other "passerines" are counted. (The passerine -- perched bird -- is affectionately known as the "dickie bird" by the true raptor enthusiast.)

When does the count take place? Sept. 1 to the end of Oct. Raptors only fly over Toronto during the migration south and raptors never venture across the lakes in fall. They follow the north shore of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie to the Detroit River. There they meet up with other raptors from the northwest, for the short hop into the United States and a clear route to winter food sources in the south. In general, raptors rely on rising air currents (thermals) to aid them in their flight. Quite often, several raptors of different species form what is known as a "kettle". Here 5 or 6 to 25 or 30 spiral upwards on a thermal, then break off one at a time to glide as far as possible, using gravity as the propelling force. Sometimes they just fly by alone, sometimes they stream by in large groups of a single species. I saw a flight of more than a hundred broad-winged hawks soar past with everyone counting in disbelief. Sometimes they are so high that they are invisible to the naked eye (my naked eye), sometimes one of the "accipiters" drops into nearby wooded areas for a meal. But these sightings are all in the fall -- the migration is asymmetric. You have to go to the Niagara peninsula* to see migrating hawks in the spring.

* See page 29 (Beamer Hawkwatch).

Where is Hawk Hill? Hawk Hill is right in the centre of High Park. Yes, basically Keele and Bloor. And it is becoming a hawk watch station of considerable reputation. The "hill" is really just a knoll north of the Grenadier restaurant. A picnic table has been set on the top where records are kept. People carefully avoid the savanna grasses and prairie wildflowers which have been planted all around as they take their positions, peering at the eastern horizon (downtown Toronto) for the initial sighting of the next flow of raptors. It is interesting how it is conducted. Sometimes you can sit for two hours and, if you're lucky, see one hawk. Other times bedlam breaks out. Twenty or thirty people in small groups are milling about and then it starts -- hundreds of hawks in small and large groups start streaming past. The observers are informally split into four categories. The first category is the casual or very interested observer. They are there out of interest and basically to help if they can. The next category is the spotter. Spotters have unusually keen eyesight and can pick out hawks like (well, like hawks). They are the early warning system, sighting and noting hawks which will be counted when they are a bit closer overhead. The next category is the counter. Counters are experienced watchers that can tell with uncanny precision, through years of experience, the species of raptor they are observing. They sort through the large group and tally the numbers of each species. The final category is the transcriber. There is one transcriber at any one time who makes sure that there is no overlapping count. He can tell quite accurately if two counters have locked onto and are counting the same group of raptors. He then integrates the separate small counts into a neat, scientifically acceptable, report. All in all, it works quite well.

Last fall I got a very interesting view of Hawk Hill. Normally I would be on top, peering up, but one day I flew over High Park in a commercial aircraft. I got the perfect view of the hill and what the high soaring raptor must see. I could even make out some detail. Obviously raptors would see much more detail than I, and I began to wonder if, when I was down there, they could sense they were being watched.

Why do these people do this? Why, indeed. Foremost these people enjoy watching the flight of raptors and, of course, they are in constant anticipation of seeing the "big one". Bald eagles are sighted, along with Cooper's hawks and peregrine falcons, sure, but this group has made the next step -- conducting a serious scientific study. Basically this is one more station taking part in the daunting task of monitoring the health of the environment. Some people count birds, some estimate fish populations, some check on how the insect population is doing. Each person, group of persons, scientific organization, government, can only do a small part in the overall job, but each small piece of information is desperately important if we are to present a clear picture of what is happening to the planet to those who have the power to make a change.

How does a raptor count help? Well, since raptors are birds of prey, if there are a lot of raptors, there must be a lot of prey. This is why a raptor count is so important. The health at the top of the food chain reflects the health of the bottom. A different technique is used to estimate the health of fish populations in rivers. Fish are hard to count, but if

HAWK HILL (cont'd)

you get a clear estimate of the bottom of the food chain -- insect larvae under rocks in the riverbed -- you can draw accurate estimates of the health of higher life forms in the river.

There was an interesting TFN insect outing a few years ago on which the participants got to study the riverbed of Duffin Creek. Wouldn't you know it, scores of hawks decided to fly over in impressive swirling kettles. It turned out to be a first hand look at both ends of the chain of life. (I always find the term "food chain" a bit impersonal and, well, threatening.)

I mentioned "accipiter". Around here, we normally see soaring hawks. Red-tailed hawks are the most common in Toronto. They are known as buteos, a subfamily of hawks. Accipiters are the subfamily of woodland hunting hawks. Accipiters are by far the most numerous type of hawk and in the raptor competition the sharp-shinned hawk (an accipiter) is the clear winner. It is an adventure watching "sharpies" flying through wooded areas after their prey--small passerines. Sharp-shins, or sharpies (all raptors have nicknames) are fairly easy to spot with their long tail and flap-flap-glide flight pattern, but they look very much like the Cooper's hawk which is much rarer. I also mentioned that you could wait for hours for a bird to appear. Well, one morning, three hours went by without a raptor. You never want to leave after investing an hour or two because you know as soon as you leave, the sighting of the season will fly by, but pretty soon it was just Ron -- the transcriber with nothing to transcribe -- and me left. "I'm going for a coffee Ken, want anything?" "No thanks, I'll keep a look-out, but I'm leaving soon". As soon as Ron was gone -- a speck on the horizon, flap-flap-glide. Oh dear, I think we have one. It's all up to me. Okay, the tail is long and I recognize the flight pattern. It is, hmm, definitely an accipiter. (I learned that on the initial lesson). Now the end of the long tail, fan-like -- it's a Cooper's; flat, a "Shin". Let's get this straight. Okay, no doubt -- just a sharp-shinned. When Ron returned I explained all of this and -- he chalked up one more sharpie, the only tick mark of the morning -- another contribution to scientific study. I left having seen only one raptor, but I did feel like I had done something.

See also page 25.

Ken Cook

□

READING THE SKY

Jet condensation trails give an idea of upper air conditions and therefore of coming weather. If broad and fraying, there are high winds aloft and moisture and unstable air. If short and fading quickly, the upper air is very dry. If thin and undistorted, little wind and a sign of good weather. Or at least it's reassuring to say so. Otherwise I find the white streaks across my blue sky very annoying, and the sound intrudes on consciousness, reminding me of other places, other obligations.

extracted from WIND IN THE ROCK: THE CANYON LANDS OF SOUTHWESTERN UTAH by Ann Zwinger,
The University of Arizona Press, Tuscon, 1978

COMING SOON?

A new bird has landed on the continent, and it might be coming to your neighbourhood soon. FeederWatchers in Florida and other parts of the Southeast may already be familiar with the Eurasian Collared-Dove, but the rest of us ought to be on the lookout as well. A 1987 article in AMERICAN BIRDS (Vol. 41: 1370-1379) describes in detail the spread of this species in North America through the mid-1980s, so the following is just a brief sketch of events.

The story of the Eurasian Collared-Dove is captivating. A century ago, this species was found primarily on the Indian subcontinent, although its range extended slightly into Europe, in Turkey. In the early 1900s, however, the species began expanding its range significantly and by 1950 had reached the British Isles. Today, collared-doves are living above the Arctic Circle in Scandinavia.

While this activity proceeded in Europe, two things happened on this side of the Atlantic. First, a similar-looking species, the Ringed Turtle-Dove, was introduced in South Florida and other locations in the southern United States several decades ago. These introduced birds soon established feral yet seemingly human-dependent populations, so field guides began including pictures of Ringed Turtle-Doves. Second, collared-doves were introduced into the Bahamas in the 1970s, and their populations soon expanded around these islands.

What happened next is unclear. At some point in the 1980s, Eurasian Collared-Doves migrated, without assistance, from the Bahamas to Florida. And because they look much like turtle-doves, the collared-doves started to spread unnoticed. It wasn't until the mid-1980s that ornithologists realized the suddenly prolific and quickly spreading "turtle-doves" they were watching were actually Eurasian Collared-Doves.

The collared-doves haven't stopped expanding their range since they arrived in North America. One bird even spent last winter as far north as eastern Montana. Eurasian Collared-Doves may be spreading across North America in much the same way they spread across Europe earlier in this century.

Unfortunately, Ringed Turtle-Doves are common cage birds; thus, escaped turtle-doves could appear almost anywhere in North America. This is the challenge for FeederWatchers who have a potential collared-dove at their feeder. Compare the size of the new dove with Mourning Doves. Eurasian Collared-Doves are larger than Mourning Doves; Ringed Turtle-Doves are smaller.

extracted from "Anatomy of a Range Expansion" by Wesley M. Hochachka in BIRDSCOPE,
Vol. 12, No. 4, Autumn 1998

▷

Moving the curtain
the mourning-dove did not flee!
Took ME by surprise.

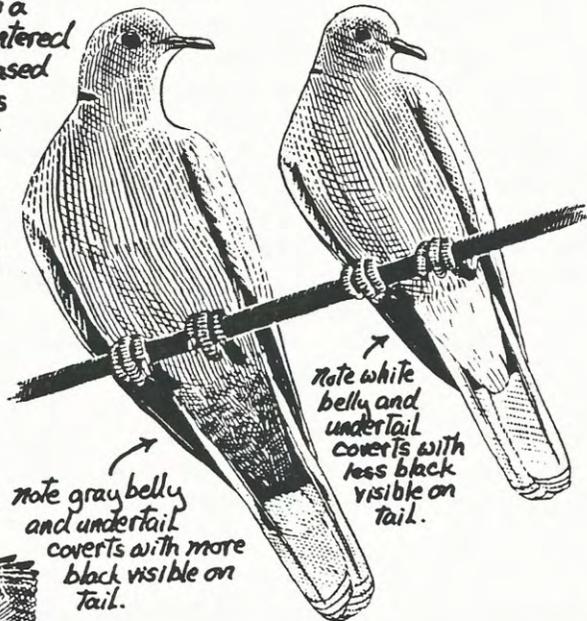
haiku by Diana Banville
Crescent Town, May 9, 1998

COMING SOON (cont'd)

Feeder Watchers' Notebook *by John Schmitt*

The recently introduced and rapidly increasing Eurasian Collared Dove will most likely be confused with the very similar Ringed Turtle Dove which is a popular cagebird often encountered in the wild as an escaped or released bird. Their respective songs are quite different: the Collared Dove's song is a coarse rapidly delivered three-part cooing which contrasts with the hollow rolling two-part cooing of the Ringed Turtle Dove.

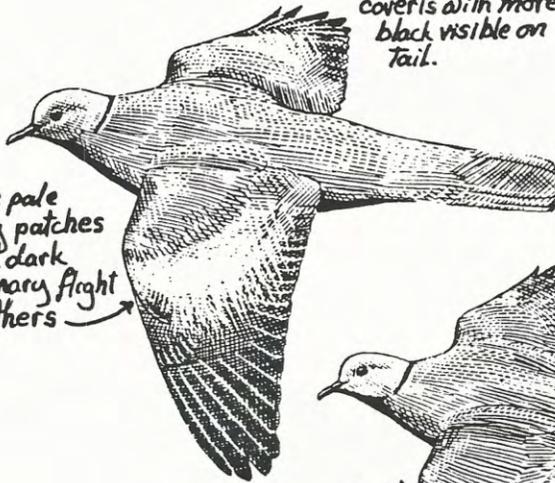
In addition to their vocal differences, a few external traits are illustrated here that will aid in distinguishing between these two doves.



note gray belly and undertail coverts with more black visible on tail.

note white belly and undertail coverts with less black visible on tail.

note pale gray patches and dark primary flight feathers



The Eurasian Collared Dove is distinctly larger than the Ringed Turtle Dove.

note plain pale brown and gray upperparts of Ringed Turtle Dove



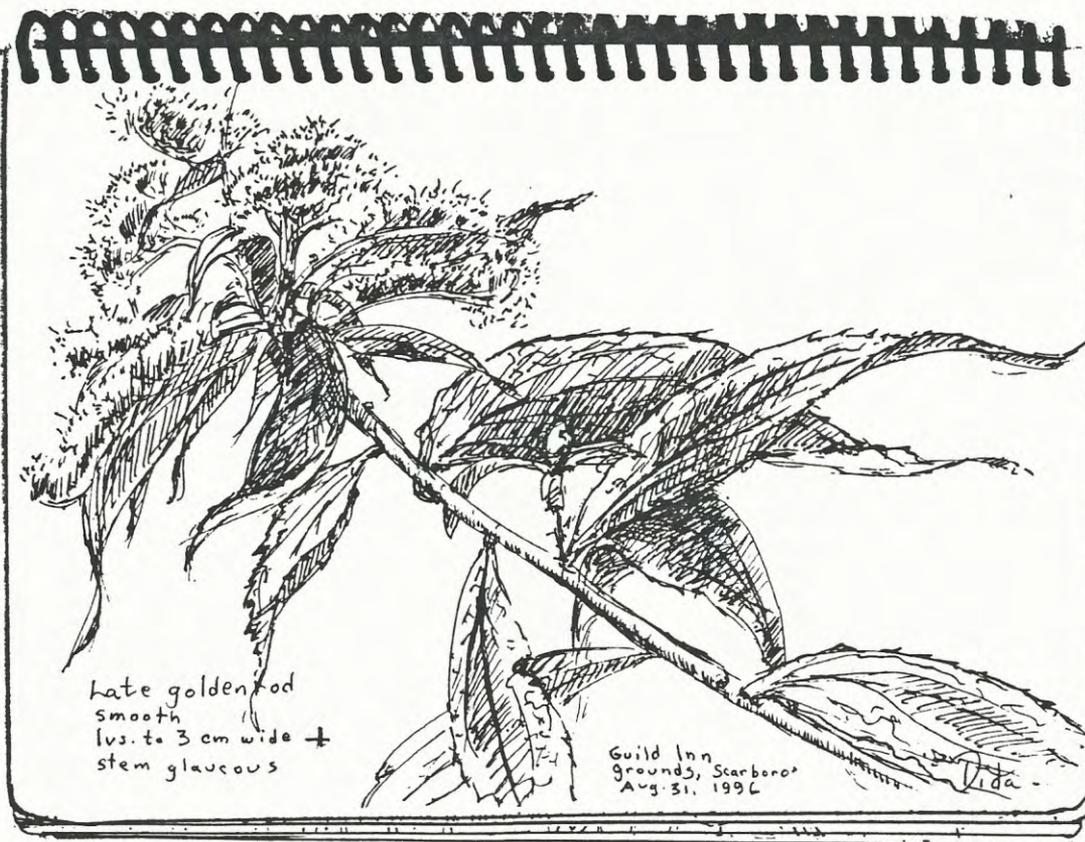
J. Schmitt

THE PASSENGER PIGEON IN TORONTO

Most historical references to the passenger pigeon in our area concern the spectacular flocks which took hours to pass. Not only did this passenger pass through and utilize our lakeshore (in some places) as a staging area, but nested here as well. Peck & James in BREEDING BIRDS OF ONTARIO: NIDIOLOGY AND DISTRIBUTION (R.O.M. 1987) includes a map showing the breeding distribution of this extinct species; on this map Toronto is indicated with a symbol for a sight record or breeding evidence. Neighbouring Durham rates the symbol for the same sort of evidence but, in this case, documented by a photo or specimen. The text indicates this Durham colony was huge - thousands of birds - their loosely-built nests of broken twigs, each containing one or two eggs, on horizontal limbs of deciduous and coniferous trees.

According to A.C. Bent's LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN GALLINACEOUS BIRDS (Smithsonian Bull. 162, 1932), migrant passenger pigeons arrived in Toronto as early as April 13. Those thousands who did not pass right through migrated in fall as late as October 22. How long this pattern continued is not clear. When was the last nesting in or near Toronto - small or large? Was it before or after 1890? If you happen to have any such information handy, please write down your source and send it in to the TFN Office. After all, we do have a file on this extinct Toronto breeding bird and we'd like to continue to compile local data on it... in memoriam.

Diana Banville □



A TWISTED TAIL FROM WARDEN WOODS

It was a week after The Great Snow Storm of '99 and we were walking on the wild side of Taylor creek, way up near the top of the old bank, high above the valley. A couple of years ago the land to the left was a fox's dinner table, filled with mice and voles and bugs of all flavours. Now it's filled with a brand new housing development.

I was trying to kick some steps into the side of a little ravine we were crossing and Carol was a few feet behind. She hissed my attention over a few feet to the left where a black squirrel was struggling about on the surface of the snow, but not going anywhere. We watched for a moment and then went over to get a closer look. The squirrel struggled again. I went right up to it and could see that its tail disappeared below the surface of the snow. Breaking the crusted snow away, it soon became apparent that the tail was wrapped around a small plant stem, about one finger width in diameter. The tail was frozen to the stem.

My pocket knife wasn't big enough or sharp enough to cut the stem. Carol observed that what we needed was some warm water. Some of the houses in the new development were occupied already. There was no path from the ravine to the development; the snow was literally knee deep.

Imagine yourself, sitting quietly reading your Sunday paper, enjoying a cup of coffee, in a brand new housing development with only a few other houses occupied, when you hear the door bell ring. There in front of you is a dishevelled figure, dressed in green, with snow up to his knees, saying "I wonder if you might have a pot of warm water I can use to thaw a squirrel."

I think it the height of cool for someone in this situation to say in return, "Why yes, of course, just a moment please," and return a few minutes later with a giant juice jug half full. "It's OK, you don't have to return the bottle."

A little warm water is poured on the tail, the squirrel is picked up and moved around the stem a couple of times, et voila, one exhausted but free squirrel. Note: exhausted squirrels with wet tails don't climb and jump all that well, but they do climb and jump.

Question 1: how does a squirrel get its tail twisted around a stem four inches beneath the crusty surface of the snow?

Question 2: *How did said tail become frozen?*

After having derived so much pleasure from watching squirrels playing and cavorting through the trees all these many years, it was wonderful to be able to give a little in return. But the mystery remains: how? how?

Murray and Carol Seymour

□

Most species [of birds] migrate at night, their movement triggered by sweeping cold fronts. If you step outside on a clear, cool night, you can often hear the frail queries of passing warblers and the nasal "yelp" of thrushes. Just before dawn, migrants seek shelter in woodlands and woodlots. On mornings following heavy flights, the understory bustles with birds.

extracted from "The Silence of Migrants" by Pete Dunne in the Kawartha Field Naturalists Newsletter, Number 37, Fall 1998

MOUNT PLEASANT CEMETERY

More has been written about the ginkgo tree than any other. The oldest fossils of this tree date back to the Permian period, about 250 million years ago. At this time all the continents were joined in one big super-continent called Pangea. This was just prior to the age of dinosaurs, the Mesozoic. The ginkgo tree was discovered in China in 1730 and brought to America in 1784. It is a valuable tree for cities as it is impervious to insects, disease and pollution. The leaves are unique: they are fan-shaped and have the texture of pine needles glued together. The fruit is like a small plum, but has a foul odour. To me it smells like vomit. For this reason most of the street trees are male clones which do not produce fruit. Ginkgo has long been regarded as medicinal, a cure-all for practically everything from tuberculosis to kidney infections. Research indicates it may be effective against asthma and senility, but this is not yet conclusive. The ginkgo was thought to grow wild in Chekiang province in China, but recently botanists believe that even these trees were planted. To me, its appearance is primitive. I can imagine a giant herbacious dinosaur nibbling on a branch.

It is also known as the maidenhair tree because the shape of the leaves is similar to that of maidenhair fern.

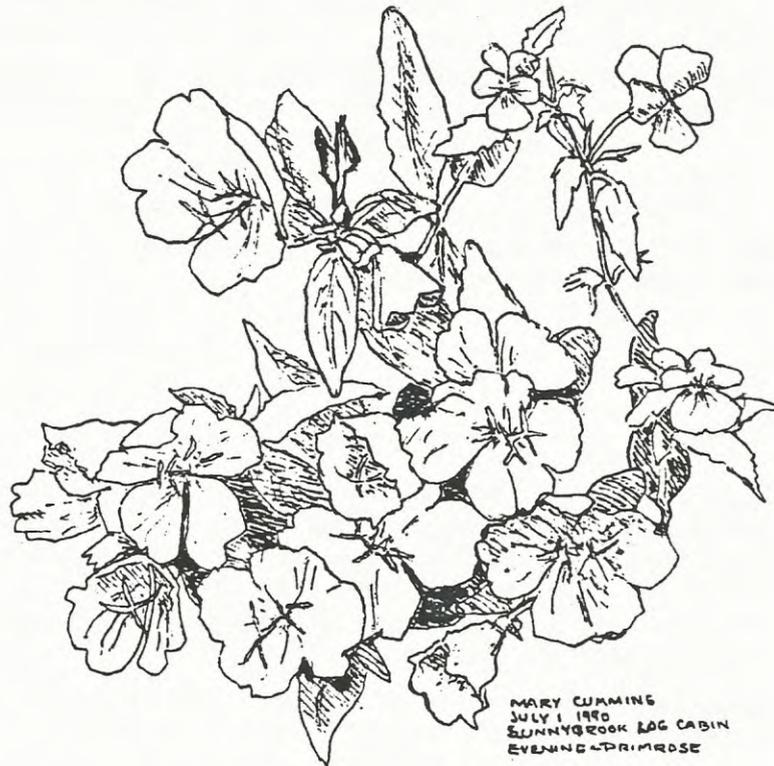
This tree is planted throughout the cemetery, but there are some large female trees in section U in the northwest corner.

Roger Powley

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EVENING-PRIMROSE is usually hyphenated since it is not of the primrose family. It is a New World family of plants, some of which are day-flowering. It was introduced to Europe and there many forms were developed for the garden and re-introduced into North America long ago, to the great confusion of to-day's botanists. Our common evening-primrose, is a biennial. A perennial evening-primrose is popular in gardens .

Ref.: GRAY'S MANUAL
OF BOTANY, Fernald 1970,



MARY CUMMING
JULY 1, 1990
SUNNYBROOK LOG CABIN
EVENING-PRIMROSE

Field drawing by Mary Cumming

THE MORNING NEWS

When I took the dog outside one day at the end of December, she sniffed at the newspaper enclosed in a plastic bag on the lawn. After I picked it up it smelled skunky, and so did my hand! The scent wasn't as strong as skunk, so it must have been from a fox. Vinegar removed the stench (instead of tomato juice).

THE NATURE OF FOXES by Rebecca Grambo offered an explanation. This time of year a musky odour from the scent glands under the tail mixes with a small amount of urine to mark various objects. It coincides with the period when the fox and vixen are becoming attracted to each other again. Actually "red foxes have an assortment of scent glands that leaves additional aromatic messages".

In his book RED FOX, by J. David Henry points out that they use scent marking to communicate their "sex, age, dominance status, and sometimes even the individual identity of the marker". It is also used to mark territory or to signal that no food cache is available at that location. Other canines such as coyotes and dogs can interpret this information as well.

Joan O'Donnell

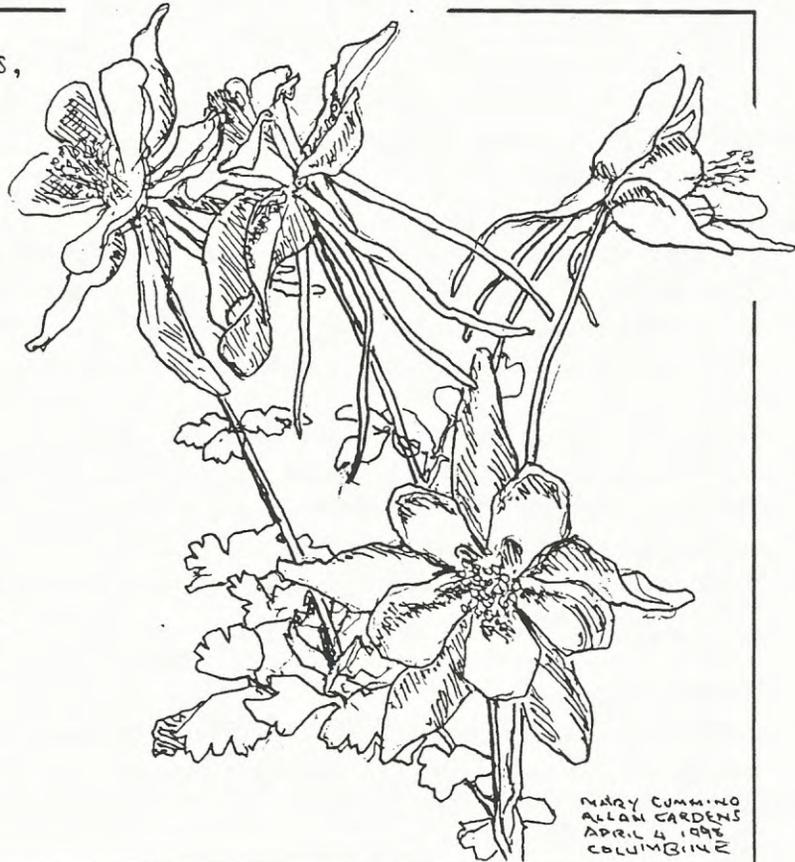
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LONG-SPURRED COLUMBINES,

such as in this drawing by Mary Cumming at Allan Gardens, are species and hybrids which are not part of our Ontario Flora. Flora.

The European Columbine has escaped or persisted in several wild locations in Toronto - with strongly hooked spurs. Our Toronto native Wild Columbine has knobbed spurs (as shown in a drawing by Eva Davis in TFN 464:5 Dec. 1996).

DB



CONSIDER THE LOWLY EARTHWORM...

Elongate and segmented, the earthworm is a member of the class Oligochaeta, meaning "worms with few bristles." The familiar dew worm or night crawler, *Lumbricus terrestris*, has four pairs per segment, which enable it to crawl. It may be only a few inches long but is vital to earth's well being. It has no lungs, oxygen reaching its blood vessels through its moist, thin skin. It has no eyes but can tell light from dark. It does, however, have no less than five pairs of hearts, and can instantly feel the smallest of vibrations.

It is a hermaphrodite. Every earthworm can mate with another and produce eggs. A cocoon is formed by the clitellum, a band around the worm's body. This cocoon slides forward onto the ground, its ends seal, and one or more of the enclosed eggs develop. They hatch from the cocoon as tiny replicas of their parents and manage the business of growing up by themselves.

An earthworm spends most of its time tunnelling and hunts for food at night. It always keeps its rear end anchored in its tunnel, however, elongating its body as only a worm can, and retracting immediately if threatened. It can work through loosely packed soil, but makes progress in hard soil by swallowing earth as it burrows. This results in the surface castings so beneficial to the soil.

Though it breathes through its skin in moist conditions, it shrivels if trapped in bright sunshine. We have all seen sidewalks littered with dead earthworms after sudden weather changes.

If caught and tugged from its tunnel, the front of the animal will often come apart. This section has the ability to grow a new tail and once more become a whole worm. (I understand that in Australia some earthworms grow from four to twelve feet long — an awesome thought, particularly in terms of reconstitution!)

In an acre of good soil there may be as many as three million earthworms. Considering how they enrich the earth by bringing deep soil to the surface, by creating countless tiny runnels which allow rainwater to permeate rather than run off the surface, and by oxygenating that soil and enriching it with their castings, the earthworm is surely one of the great unsung Movers and Doers of the planet.

Eva Davis

References:

Worms by Lois and Louis Darling, William Morrow and Co., New York, 1972
Hungry Hollow, The Story of a Natural Place by A. K. Dewdney. Illustrated by Christie Lyons and Roman Szolkowski. Copernicus, Springer-Verlag, New York, Inc., 1998

□

SO YOU WANT TO BE A BIRD WATCHER?

1. Get binoculars (7 X35, wide angle recommended).
2. Go on outings. Get out.
3. Make notes including sketches and don't forget to include date and location.
4. Use a field guide.*
5. Set up or visit a feeding station. It's a great way to get a close look at birds and their behaviour.
6. Find a favourite place to visit regularly and keep records -- throughout the year.
7. Read and visit your local library.
8. Support your local club and even join other clubs.
9. Help with surveys.
10. For your next holiday, take a natural history tour.

adapted from "Focus on Birds" by Stephen Moss in BBC WILDLIFE, Vol. 15, No. 3, March 1997

* Recommended Field Guides for Birds:

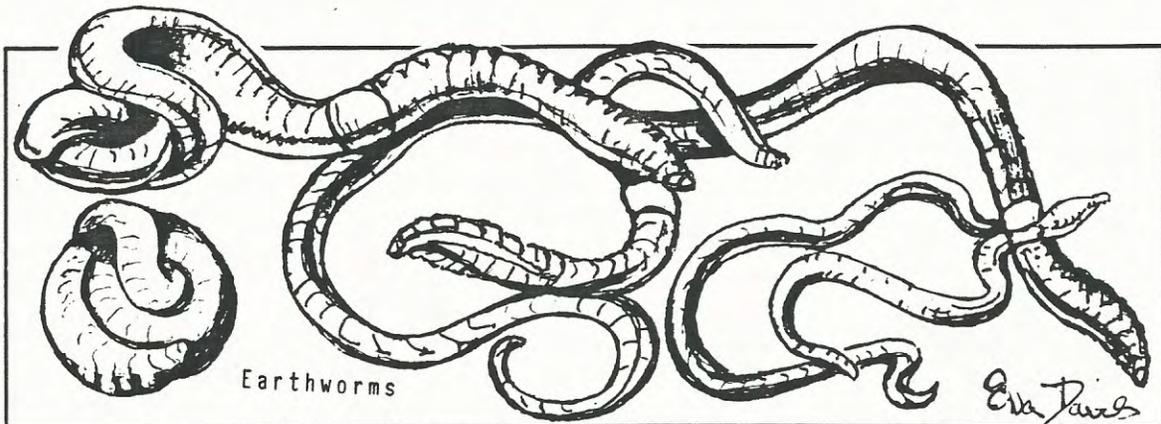
A Field Guide to the Birds by Roger Tory Peterson, Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston, 1934...

Birds of North America by C.S. Robbins et al, Golden Press, New York, 1983

Stokes Field Guide to Birds by D. & L. Stokes, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1996

Field Guide to the Birds of North America, National Geographic Society, 1983

□



BEAR WITH ME

Some 50 kilometres east of Winnipeg I left the golden August prairie behind and soon was driving past the trees, rocks and myriad lakes of the boreal forest. Returning from a conference in Minnesota and a visit in Minnedosa, Manitoba, I stayed in Kenora and Thunder Bay, revelling in a leisurely drive with many side trips through this country north of Lake Superior that I love so much. Just past Nipigon I turned up a winding road to a picnic spot that promised a fine lookout over the lake. Morning fog had lifted and brilliant sunshine filtered through the trees. I parked and picked up my lunch bag and ever-handy binoculars. I was about to start up the lookout trail when a slight noise caused me to turn my head to the right. A young black bear ambled out of the woods, mounted a large garbage pail and groped for its contents. Not sure if he/she was alone, I stayed in the car and rolled up the windows. The bear, disappointed at the slim pickings, bounded over and peered in my passenger window. I had heard on the car radio that bears had been infiltrating Thunder Bay, hungry as a result of drought (El Nino?) that had dried up the summer berry crop. My egg sandwich must have looked very tempting; he circled around and soon was looking in my window, his shiny black nose just inches from my face. I'd gladly have given him half my sandwich and apple, but felt a shared picnic might not be the wisest plan. Trying to find out how to get in, the agile bear leapt onto the hood and peered at me through the windshield. What a beautiful creature -- but this was a close encounter I had bearly anticipated (sorry)! The bear then tried the roof and the car vibrated as he batted at the aerial. I thought it was time to bring his explorations to an end and started the motor. The bear (probably about one-and-a-half years old) slid down the back of my little blue GEO Metro and proceeded to investigate the other garbage container, while I went on my merry way, quite treasuring the paw-prints on my windshield.

I had missed that view of Lake Superior, but at the next pull-out a man from Minnesota who had seen my bear encounter kindly offered to send me a picture if it turned out. If you'd like to see it, just ask me.

Phoebe Cleverley

□

COMMON GRAY TREE FROG. My only close encounter with this Toronto Region native was up in Killarney Provincial Park where my find was anything but common or gray. She was in what I am assured was her "green phase" an incredibly delicate blue-green. She was hugely gravid, sitting dozing in the heat on a wooden step. But for the sharp eyes of my youngest, we would all have trodden on her for she wasn't about to budge for us. Even when I picked her up to put her out of harm's way, she made no protest beyond opening a lambent amber eye and languidly revealing the orange inside of one of her large padded feet.



EVA DAVIS

PROJECT

Recruits Needed for Marsh Monitoring

The deep “pump-er-lunk” of the American Bittern and the chuckling snore of the Northern Leopard Frog are common sounds in marshes within the Great Lakes basin. Unfortunately, these calls have become less common over the last several decades as marshes across the basin have been drained, filled and polluted. More than two-thirds of the wetlands in populated areas of the Great Lakes basin have been lost or degraded. Many species of birds and amphibians depend on healthy wetlands for breeding and several of these species are thought to be suffering population declines. The

Marsh Monitoring Program (MMP) provides an opportunity for volunteers to become part of the effort to clean up the Great Lakes ecosystem and to help direct wetland conservation and management by monitoring some important wetland wildlife.



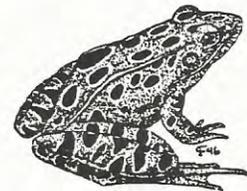
The MMP, a joint effort of Bird Studies Canada and Environment

Canada, was initiated in 1994 to monitor wetlands and their wildlife in Ontario and the Great Lakes states. The program is supported by grants from Environment Canada and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and depends upon the efforts of 300+ volunteers throughout the basin. Volunteers with the MMP survey two or three evening visits each spring. Their observations are used to answer important questions about the health of Great Lakes wetlands and their wildlife populations.

Naturalists with an interest in wetlands and their inhabitants are invited to take part in the MMP. Upon registration, all volunteers receive a Training Kit containing: written instructions for surveying marsh birds, amphibians and their habitats; data forms; and an instructional tape with examples of the songs and calls of the birds and amphibians most likely to be encountered in the Great Lakes basin.

Participants may choose to survey amphibians, marsh birds, or both groups. Because only 13 species of frogs and toads occur in the Great Lakes basin and their calls are well described in the Training Kit materials, the amphibian survey is most suitable for novice naturalists. Although volunteers do not need to be ace-birders to conduct the marsh bird survey, the bird survey is not suited to beginning birders. As a general guideline, participants should be able to correctly identify about 50 species of common birds by sight and sound, especially those living in and around marshes. The training tape provided will help volunteers refresh their memory and fine-tune their identification skills.

The Marsh Monitoring Program offers everyone — from amateur naturalists to professional biologists — a unique and rewarding opportunity to contribute to the understanding and renewal of wetlands, one of North America's most threatened ecosystems.



If you would like to participate in MMP surveys, please contact us at the address below.

If registering for the program, we will need to know:

- Where you would like to survey (nearest city or town, and state or province)
- “Who” you would like to survey (amphibians, marsh birds or both)
- How we can get in touch with you (address and phone number)

Marsh Monitoring Program

Bird Studies Canada

P.O. Box 160, Port Rowan, Ontario, Canada N0E 1M0

Phone: (519) 586-3531, Toll-free: 1-888-448-BIRD, Fax: (519) 586-3532

Email: aqsurvev@bsc-eoc.org, Webpage: www.bsc-eoc.org

IN THE NEWS

PLEASE DON'T FEED PIGEONS

Electrical outages left more than 11,000 Southern California Edison customers in the dark in Santa Paula, Oxnard, Camarillo and Ventura, but the weather wasn't entirely to blame. Pigeons had a hand in it too. Work to remove heavy accumulations of pigeon droppings from electrical lines triggered three Santa Paula blackouts that left almost the entire city in the dark sporadically. About 7,000 customers were affected. The cleanup work was done during the day, and rain may have contributed to further problems.

extracted from an article entitled "Puny storm brings end to dry spell" by Jim McLain in the VENTURA COUNTY STAR, Jan. 21, 1999

DOG TAX

Dogs living in the Russian city of Chelyabinsk, about 1,550 km east of Moscow, will be charged "rent" for the privilege of enjoying the city's water and electricity. Dog owners have been asked to pay a monthly fee for the privilege of having canine companions. The city's large population of dogs made the law necessary.

extracted from "Earthweek: Diary of the planet" by Steve Newman in the TORONTO STAR, Jan. 23/99

ON A FOOL'S VISIT TO MARTHA THE PASSENGER PIGEON

Martha died Sept. 1, 1914, in the Cincinnati Zoological Park. She was the very last passenger pigeon. Her skin, artfully mounted, now resides in the Smithsonian Institute. There were plenty of other stuffed and mounted pigeons on display. After all, it was once by far the continent's most abundant bird species. Surely people were justified in thinking there were far too many. One flock, estimated to be about 385 kilometres long, was also estimated to consume at least 17,424,000 bushels of nuts and acorns per day. Talk about an environmental impact! Had any people worried about killing pigeons, I'm sure they were told "Don't be foolish!" There were just billions too many passenger pigeons to justify concerns about species survival.

extracted from an article by Barry Kent MacKay in the TORONTO STAR, Jan. 24, 1999

BUSSIN HAS CONCERNS OVER ISLAND BRIDGE

In December, Toronto City Council endorsed a proposal to allow the Toronto Harbour Commission, operator of the Toronto Island Airport, to build a bridge across the channel near the foot of Bathurst Street. Currently passengers reach the airport via a five-minute ferry ride. The commission is expected to finance the bridge by charging aircraft passengers an additional \$5 to the existing user fee. City Council also voted to lift a long-time ban on jet powered commuter aircraft using the airport. The ferry service has a capacity to carry 400,000 passengers per year -- currently only about 138,000 use the airport.

extracted from an article in the BEACH METRO NEWS, Jan. 12, 1999

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

TURNING OFF THE LIGHTS SAVES MIGRATING BIRDS

FLAP (Fatal Light Awareness Program) is a small organization that has tried to publicize the danger posed by illuminated buildings for birds migrating at night. Many birds die. Some fall to the ground to be scavenged alive by gulls. Others, given care and attention, can survive. When the birds take off at dusk, they go to a high altitude. As they tire, they start to lose altitude, usually in the hours after midnight, when most people are in bed. That's when the nighttime collisions tend to occur. FLAP's volunteers patrol in Toronto, Mississauga, North York and Markham in the early morning during migration periods, picking the birds up and helping potential survivors. Across North America, it's estimated about 100 million birds collide with structures each year, and only about half survive. People don't realize that we're not talking about gulls or Canada geese or house sparrows. They're learning to adapt to man's world. The birds being picked up are vulnerable species, including endangered species. Volunteers in Toronto have collected 126 different bird species, including warblers, thrushes, sparrows and woodpeckers. The smallest are hummingbirds, and the largest, an American woodcock. White-throated sparrows are the most frequent victims claimed by the buildings, while ovenbirds, whose population is in long-term decline, is the species of warbler that FLAP volunteers find most often. These migratory birds are among nature's best defences against insects. As part of its campaign to save the birds, FLAP has encouraged managers of Toronto's office towers to shut off their lights at night to help prevent bird collisions. MIGRATIONS typically run from MID-MARCH to MID-JUNE and from MID-AUGUST to MID-NOVEMBER, but FLAP recommends the lights be turned off at night year-round. What should you do if you want to make changes in your condo? You can invite FLAP to talk with your condo board, and assess your options for action. If you are in the market for a condo, you can ask developers to build bird-friendly buildings. FLAP's Web site is linked to the World Wildlife Fund's site, where there is information on bird-friendly building programs for residences and schools. You can contact FLAP at 905-831-FLAP (3527), or visit its Web site at (www.flap.org).

extracted from an article by Erin O'Connor in the TORONTO STAR, Sept. 13, 1998

A CELEBRATION OF MIGRATORY BIRDS

International Migratory Bird Day has several goals:

- to raise public awareness of neotropical migratory birds;
- to inform people that many of these bird species are declining in numbers;
- to encourage bird habitat protection projects;
- and to renew understanding of North America's biological and economic connection to the people and lands south of the United States/Mexico border.

extracted from BIRDSCOPE, Vol. 8, No. 4, Autumn 1994

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

SCRUBBER FOR DURASHIELD

Durashield, the Raleigh Avenue factory that coats frying pans, should have a scrubber for its exhaust fumes by spring. The new environmental equipment, to cost \$100,000 US, will be installed inside the plant. The manufacturers claim it eliminates 99 per cent of emissions of hydrogen fluoride and particles. The factory came to the attention of the ministry and the board of health in 1996 after a neighbour complained about dead birds. Durashield coats frying pans and skillets with Teflon, which emits hydrogen fluoride gas at extremely high temperatures, and is fatal to birds. Durashield increased the height of its stack twice and also installed a new electronic thermometer that provided print-outs of the temperature inside its bake oven. It appeared from the print-outs that the birds had died on days when skillets were coated in the factory which required higher heat than the electric frying pans that are Durashield's main product. The board of health became concerned about complaints of illnesses in the Raleigh Avenue area where residents are near the mix of auto body and paint shops, a cabinet manufacturer, a bakery and the CN Rail line. Residents were asked to participate in a day-by-day survey to determine if fumes in the area might be making them ill.

extracted from an article in the BLUFFS MONITOR, Oct.: 1998

ONTARIO TO PHASE OUT USE OF PAPER-MILL WASTE

The use of paper-mill effluent as a dust suppressant on rural Ontario roads is being phased out by the Ministry of Environment because the material contains dioxin and other contaminants. About 100 million litres a year of the brown syrupy waste, known as Dombind, is spread on roads in about 70 rural municipalities near Trenton and St. Marys. The practice has been permitted since 1956. The decision was made because of an increase in the amount of waste the company has been producing and because ministry scientists thought its use had the "potential for long-term environmental impairment". Environmentalists and many people in rural areas have been lobbying the province to end the spreading of Dombind, saying it would pollute wells, was harmful to wildlife, and left an oily film on vehicles.

extracted from an article by Martin Mittelstaedt in the GLOBE & MAIL, Dec. 9, 1998

PROVINCE TO CANCEL BEAR HUNT

The Ontario government is set to cancel the spring bear hunt this year. The hunt is unethical because cubs that are orphaned are too young to survive in the wild.

extracted from an article in the GLOBE AND MAIL, Jan. 15, 1999

Comment: Do write to the Honourable John Snobelen, Minister of Natural Resources, 6th Floor, Whitney Block, 99 Wellesley St. West, Toronto, Ont. M7A 1W3 or call his office (416-314-2301) about this issue.

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

OTTAWA LOOSENS RULES ON HUNTING WITH BIRDS OF PREY

Environment Canada has just dropped regulations that outlawed falconry hunting, as it's called, for migratory birds including ducks and geese. The change has concerned some animal-rights groups. There have been problems with falconry because some of the birds of prey are illegally captured from the wild or raised from eggs taken from endangered species. Some provinces allow falconry hunters to catch two birds of prey a year from the wild and train them for hunting. Falconry is regulated by provincial governments through their hunting rules. However, migratory birds are protected by federal law. Until now falconry hunting of migratory birds was allowed only in British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Falconry is a small but growing sport in North America. The sport is big business in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, where it has been around for thousands of years. Breeders can earn as much as \$5,000 for some birds, such as the gyrfalcon. Canada has about five breeders, and most sell their birds internationally. Typical hunting birds in Canada cost around \$800 and include several species of hawks or falcons. Environment Canada said the federal rules were changed because falconry has little impact on bird populations. That's because birds of prey usually have a success rate of 10 to 15 per cent.

extracted from an article by P. Waldie in the GLOBE & MAIL, Nov. 13, 1998

IVOR ROAD

Ivor Road, near Yonge Street and Lawrence Avenue, bears the name of Roy Ivor, who established what was probably Toronto's first and only bird sanctuary, the Green Meadow Club in 1920. Ivor set up his haven for insectivorous (insect-eating) birds on his five-acre farm south of the Rosedale Golf Club. Ivor and his family moved back to Toronto in 1897 when young Roy developed a stone and marble business. His love of birds had developed on a farm in Saskatchewan. Here, any spare time was spent building birdhouses (painted blue) and feeding his birds. Owners of the adjoining ravine lands offered to preserve the woods for birds, allowing the sanctuary to be extended to fifty acres -- along the Don Valley from the end of Snowden Avenue to Lawrence Avenue. Ivor built feeding stations throughout the valley. Winter birds fed on the many hemlock cones in the area. By 1923, with the sanctuary housing over 160 varieties of birds, the Canadian Government recognized the Green Meadow Club as a bird sanctuary. In 1928, Ivor moved to the Credit River, near Streetsville, where he established the Winding Lane Bird Sanctuary.

an article by Jeanne Hopkins in the North Toronto Post, Nov. 1998

<p>Flocks of gulls flying like poorly-chipped arrowheads straight for the waterfront.</p>

haiku by A. O. Juhola
August 23, 1997

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

SWEET DEAL PRESERVES HISTORIC SUGARBUSH

After marathon negotiations with town council, Sugarbush Developments Ltd. has agreed to sell the 30-hectare woodlot for \$2.25-million, down from its original demand of more than \$7-million. Used for maple-sugar production since 1820 by the Baker family, the bush, located just north of Toronto on the northwest corner of Highway 7 and Bathurst Street, is one of the tallest and healthiest woodlands in the region. But many local residents feared that it would be destroyed when the Baker Farm was sold for development. Most of the farm will soon be turned into a residential subdivision. But the developer's original plan called for a road to be built through the bush and for its northeast corner to be devoted to commercial uses. However, preservationists demanded much wider buffers between the bush and the planned subdivision than the agreement achieved, leaving them unsure if they will continue their appeal before the Ontario Municipal Board. Local officials are also unsure which public body will pay for the bush. A regional plan from the 1970s obliges the provincial government to buy the bush if it is threatened by development.

extracted from an article by John Barber in the GLOBE & MAIL, Jan. 29, 1999

ONTARIO WORKING TO PROTECT MORE CROWN LAND

The Ontario government is expected to increase the amount of land in Northern and Central Ontario protected against development under the controversial Lands for Life process. The target is to protect 20 per cent of the Crown lands involved, a goal set by some environmental groups. The government believes this goal has widespread public acceptance. Much of the additional protected land is expected to be in the Great Lakes St. Lawrence section of the process. The challenge for the government will be getting both environmental groups and logging interests to agree to the compromise. After an 18-month process, the round tables produced separate reports that were consolidated and released Oct. 31, 1998. The government received 14,000 public submissions on that report in the ensuing month.

extracted from an article by Richard Mackie in the GLOBE & MAIL, Jan. 12, 1999

MOUNTAIN BIKES?

Many people seem not to know how to conduct themselves sensibly and safely or without harming the surroundings. They have not developed an eye for, or interest in the wilderness scene, except to act out fantasies inspired by television and movies. They often seem disappointed that nature is not as neat as photographs can make it seem. They may pass by without seeing what is there, or do harm without realizing it.

from ELORA GORGE: A VISITOR'S GUIDE by Kenneth Hewitt, A Boston Mills Press Book, 1995

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

NEW SPECIES OF DRAGONFLY

Paul Burnelle, a Nova Scotia dragonfly expert, recently discovered on the St. Croix River a new species of dragonfly which is almost entirely nocturnal. This broad tail shadow dragon is called Michael after his son. The male has distinctive mustard coloured eyes and the female has darker eyes.

from "Rarity seen on NHS Field Trip" by Alma Steeves in the ISLAND NATURALIST, # 150, Jul.-Dec. 1998 (Prince Edward Island)

GENE TAMPERING

The Canadian Forestry Service is one of a handful of research organizations worldwide that is genetically engineering conifer species. They have successfully "injected" trees with the gene that allows the tree to develop the insecticide Bt in its tissue and thus kill spruce budworms [adapted from Solutions fall.winter 1998] This development will lead to some interesting debates as naturalists and scientists debate the development of trees which do not support certain insect growth as the insect plays an important role in feeding young birds and other animals.

from "News from About" compiled by J. Dan McAskill in the ISLAND NATURALIST, # 150, July-Dec. 1998 [Prince Edward Island]

FLIRTING CURBED?

Songbirds in Britain are losing their tunes. A study has found that traffic noise has rendered many of the birds tone-deaf, turning their beautiful songs into harsh cackles. The effect has been catastrophic for some species. Birds near roads cannot hear one another, which leads to difficulty in learning songs and communicating with potential mates.

extracted from an article in the GLOBE & MAIL, Jan. 15, 1999

DREAMS OF SONG FOR THE BIRDS

Sleeping birds not only dream, they probably dream about the songs they sing during the day. Researchers noticed that when zebra finches were asleep, their brains showed a burst of activity in an area known as the robustus archistratalis (RA), which is known to be involved in singing. It's possible that songs learned during the day affect the bursting patterns of the RA at night, serving to solidify the newly learned songs in the animal's mind.

extracted from an article in the GLOBE AND MAIL, Jan. 12, 1999

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<p>Gulls in falling snow, aimless wheeling and weaving, caught in winter-spring.</p>
--

haiku by Arthur Wade

THE WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

March 1998, Toronto

A very changeable month was March, marked by three dramatically different weather regimes. The first nine days continued the pattern of unbroken El Nino mildness, with generally cloudy skies and temperatures above freezing. This was broken as a powerful low pressure system approached on March 8th, bringing heavy rain.

On March 9th, the associated cold front swept into southern Ontario, bringing the only extended cold period of the winter. Temperatures bottomed out on March 11th with -13.9°C at Pearson airport. The wintry period of the month lasted from March 10th to March 23rd culminating in a snowstorm on March 21st to mark the first day of spring. About 18-24 cm of snow fell across the city.

Then came a record warm spell, which lasted an entire week, and included full summer heat and even thunderstorms. Six of the last seven days of March had maximum temperatures above 20°C , culminating in an unbelievable 25.7°C on March 31st, just prior to a cold front that lowered temperatures to slightly above normal for early April. This was Toronto's second-warmest March reading on record exceeded only by 26.7°C in 1946.

It was really in this heat wave that the freakish warmth of 1998 became almost eerie. Toads began calling. Fruit trees began blossoming, bringing worries about vulnerability to late freezes. Crocuses appeared in the earlier El Nino warmth and were basically finished before April even began. Buds of native deciduous forest trees had not broken, but were definitely swollen and on the edge. Areas far enough north and east to have even received any significant snow pack this winter experienced some flooding from sudden melting.

Overall, March was warm and wet. It was the warmest March since 1987 downtown with a mean of 3.5°C , although the mean maximum was the highest since 1995 and the minimum since 1973. At Pearson the mean was the highest since 1977 when the mean was the same 2.2°C degrees. Rainfall was the most since 1991; snowfall was above normal at 40.2 cm; and the total precipitation of 101.2 mm was the highest since 1991. Sunshine at 148.5 hours was near normal but the lowest since 1993. March 3rd to 8th and March 18th to 22nd were almost completely overcast.

Over Canada as a whole, the winter of 1997-98 was the second warmest on record, exceeded by 1980-81. (Ironically, 1980-81 brought record cold to Toronto in late December and early January.)

Gavin Miller

□

Welcome, Spring, welcome,
welcome Spring with snow!
Welcome, even so.

haiku by Diana Banville
March 21, 1998

COMING EVENTS

Toronto Ornithological Club - Jim Baillie Memorial Bird Walks - aimed at the intermediate birder, but beginners are also welcome. Free.

- Sun. March 14 at 9 am (all day) with Glenn Coady - Waterfowl from Toronto to Burlington. Meet at the southwest corner of Grenadier Pond at Ellis Ave. and the Queensway to form a car pool. Bring a lunch and dress warmly.

High Park Walking Tours at 1:15 pm, starting at Grenadier Cafe (\$2 donation)

- March 14 - Colborne Lodge inside and out
 - March 28 - The birds of winter
- For more information call 392-1748.

Willowdale Gem and Mineral Show - Sat. March 20 from 10 am to 6 pm and Sunday March 21 from 11 am to 5 pm. Free admission. Show is at Armour Heights Community Centre, Avenue Rd. and Wilson Ave.

Royal Canadian Institute - Sunday afternoon lectures on science at the J.J.R. Macleod Auditorium, Medical Sciences Building, 1 King's College Circle - free

- March 7 - Dolly's dilemma: the science and ethics of human cloning
 - March 14 - The Y2K problem: facts, fictions, forecasts
 - March 21 - The deception of perception
- Call 928-2096 for more information.

Canada Blooms - a gardener's getaway - flower and garden show - March 10-14 at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre.

Environmental Task Force governance meetings:

- Air - Wed. Feb. 24 at 7 pm
- Land - Tues. March 23 at 7:30 pm
- Water - Thurs. March 25 at 7 pm

Call 392-9365 for details and to register. Help write Toronto's first environmental plan.

Beamer Hawkwatch - The Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch takes place at Beamer Memorial Conservation Area on Ridge Road on the escarpment above Grimsby (just a little west of Mountain Road). This takes place from March 1 to May 15.

Urban Naturalist Workshops and Fieldtrips for beginning naturalists or those who wish to improve their proficiency in a particular area

- Winter Weeds - March 6 - Thomson Memorial Park
 - Early Birders - March 13 - Thomson Memorial Park & March 21 - High Pk.
- To register, call Morris Sorensen at 755-6030. Cost is \$10 each or \$8 for TFN members.

Public meeting about changes to Milne Hollow (Lawrence & Don Valley Pkwy) - Feb. 23 from 7:30 pm to 9:30 pm at 888 Lawrence Ave. East at Don Mills Rd. (Don Mills library).

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS

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