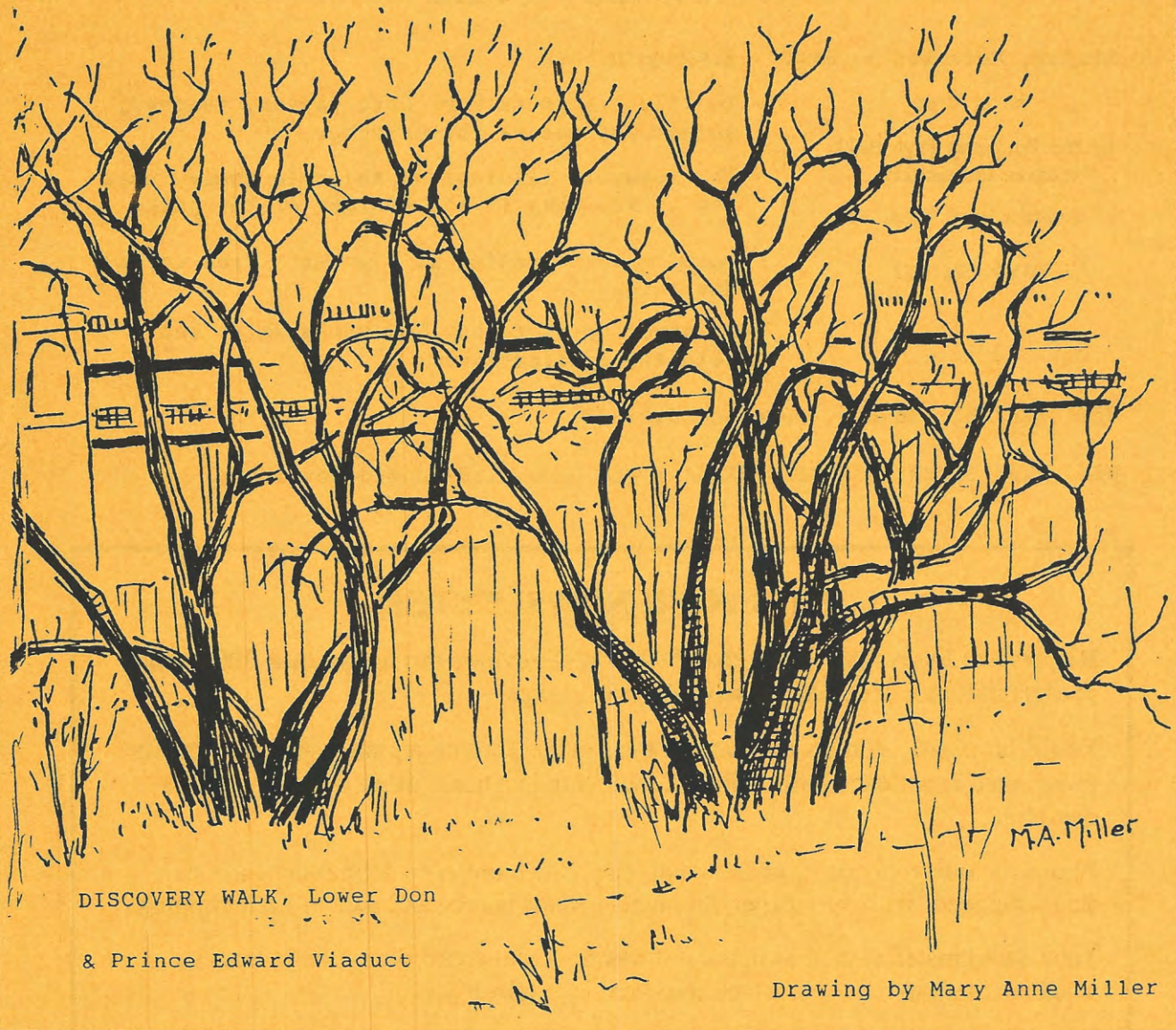
TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 495 November 2000



DISCOVERY WALK, Lower Don

& Prince Edward Viaduct

Drawing by Mary Anne Miller

Inside

TFN MEETINGS

Sunday, November 5, 2000 - ALGONQUIN PARK

at 2:30 pm

in the Northrop Frye Hall
Victoria University

73 Queen's Park Cres. East

VISITORS WELCOME!

- an illustrated talk by Dave Taylor, teacher, author and nature photographer
- The speaker will look at the role moose, bear and wolves play in the ecology of the park.

+ "social hour" beginning at 2 pm with free coffee and juice
+ an opportunity to buy TFN memberships and selected publications

NEXT MEETING: Sunday, December 3, 2000

NEXT NEWSLETTER: DECEMBER/JANUARY (to be mailed in mid November)

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, including locations, dates, and any sources consulted.

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
2 Carlton St., #1519
Toronto, Ont. M5B 1J3

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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 Nov. 1 10:30 am — HUMBER BAY PARK - birds — waterfront, Etobicke
Leader: Carol Sellers
Meet at the park entrance on the south side of Lakeshore Blvd. West at the foot of Park Lawn Rd. Bring lunch and binoculars. This park can be very cold so dress warmly. Waterfowl are arriving at this time to spend the winter on Lake Ontario.

Saturday Nov. 4 11 am — GALLERY HOPPING - nature arts — Toronto
Leader: Mary Cumming
Meet at the Cumberland exit of the Bay Subway station. Following the outing we will go to a food court for lunch. This is a tour through the galleries of Yorkville so anyone is welcome to attend.

Sunday Nov. 5 2:30 pm — TFN MEETING (See page 2 for details.)

Wednesday Nov. 8 10 am — FINCH HYDRO CORRIDOR - nature walk — East Don, North York
Leader: Alexander Cappell
Meet at the northwest corner of Finch Ave. East and Leslie St. Bring lunch.
This walk will introduce members to some surprising views and hidden ravines.

▷

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE NATURE RESERVE BUS TRIP?

As usual the bus was ordered months in advance and paid for weeks in advance, a pattern we have used successfully for decades; however, this time (Sept. 30) the bus arrived early but left quickly without taking on anyone. Phone calls to PMCL (the bus company) revealed that they had made a mistake. Many thanks to Murray Seymour who volunteered to lead a walk in the adjacent Don Valley. PMCL has promised to refund our payment, and we will refund members who paid for the trip.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OCTOBER NEWSLETTER?

As usual the TFN newsletters were placed in the post office for mailing mid-month. Although many members received their newsletter within a few days, many others did not receive theirs until two weeks later -- too late to know about the October meeting. So next time you don't receive your newsletter by the first of the month, please call the post office (General and Delivery Inquiries: 1-800-267-1177) as we had to. Perhaps if they are bombarded by calls they will improve their delivery service.

Helen Juhola

NOVEMBER OUTINGS (cont'd)

Sunday Nov. 12 1 pm	HIGHLAND CREEK - nature walk Leader: Joanne Doucette Meet at the southeast corner of Lawrence Ave. East and Beechgrove Dr. We will be exploring the lower Highland Creek valley -- a lovely deep, wild place.	Scarborough
Wednesday Nov. 15 10 am	HIGH PARK - nature walk Leader: George Bryant Meet at the park entrance on the south side of Bloor St. West opposite High Park Ave. Bring lunch. Many habitats including a large pond make this an interesting place to visit in any season.	Toronto
Sunday Nov. 19 2 pm	LOST CREEKS - urban ecology Leader: Ed Freeman & others Meet at the north end of Sherbourne St. North at South Dr. This is a joint outing with the North Toronto Green Community and the Evergreen Foundation. We will be looking at Mud Creek and the Don Valley Brick Works.	Toronto
Wednesday Nov. 22 10:30 am	TAYLOR CREEK - nature walk Leader: Gail Gregory Meet at the southeast corner of Woodbine Ave. and O'Connor Dr. Morning only. This will be a walk in Taylor Creek Valley where we may find some late-blooming flowers and a few over-wintering birds.	East York
Sunday Nov. 26 2 pm	TADDLE CREEK - urban ecology Leader: Eduard Sousa Meet in front of Hart House which is south of Hoskin Ave. and west of Queen's Park Cres. West. This is a joint outing with the North Toronto Green Community, the Toronto Bay Initiative and the Taddle Creek Watershed Initiative. The walk will be following the course of this long-buried creek.	Toronto
Wednesday Nov. 29 10:30 am $ ferry tickets	TORONTO ISLANDS - nature walk Leader: George Bryant Meet at the ferry docks at the foot of Bay St. Bring lunch. The islands can be very cold at this time of year so dress warmly. Be prepared to look at wintering waterfowl and lingering migrant birds.	lakeshore, Toronto

□

O, this makes up for
that dreary reputation,
November sunset!

Haiku by Diana Banville
17:05 November 18, 1998

TORONTO ISLAND Ink-and-wash by Larisa Zviedris

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Last month I mentioned seeing a newborn moose at Toronto Zoo. Actually, I witnessed the delivery of two other moose much closer to home. I was required to move my car on four occasions as two pure white bulky 'moose' (Melmoose, loose moose, moose in the city) were trundled into our hobby room for painting, then eased carefully out again to take their place among all the colourful oddities adorning our city this summer. Personally, I thought these moose were a lot of fun. The enterprise gave the cheerful young men who transported them a job, gave the corporations and artists an opportunity to work together to the advantage of both, and certainly seemed to pique the interest of many visitors to our downtown streets.

For a naturalist, of course, the preferred sighting is of animals in the wilderness. I had no encounters with moose or bear this year, but I did observe four deer in the woods of Morningside Park and three deer browsing in a dewy meadow on the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia. West of the Rockies deer have black tails, but are otherwise similar to our white-tailed deer. On the Georgian Bay islands I saw mink. They are quite common there and one regularly ate his dinner on the rocks outside my cabin during the night. I didn't spot any beaver, but plenty of signs of their presence: felled trees, lodges, and dams. There was a muskrat in the West Humber, little foxes near Wilket Creek, and many raccoons, their paw prints evident on every muddy bank. Porcupines and skunks--I wish I would see them alive, instead of those sad bodies beside the road. I know coyotes are around, but I have yet to see one. Wouldn't the ravines and parks seem empty without our acrobats, the chipmunks, red and gray squirrels? Now they are busier than ever, storing away acorns, cones, and seeds.

Those accomplished fishers, great blue herons, seem to be thriving in our area. They and a flight of sandhill cranes over Tiny Marsh were the largest winged creatures observed this year. What an astonishing variety of birds and insects one encounters even in our urban environment, everything from the heron's 183cm wingspan to the millimetre or two of a 'no-see-um'. Having our entomological friends along on a hike, we become more aware of the varieties of dragonflies, damselflies, butterflies, moths, beetles, bugs, and spiders. Many of our members are fascinated with amphibians and snakes, as witness the group that stayed after our October meeting to visit with Tom Mason's Vietnamese frogs and brilliantly-patterned rat snake.

Sometimes it is best just to pause and sit still in a quiet place. For half an hour, two Caspian terns wheeled over a pond at Colonel Samuel Smith Park, catching fish. Creatures may come to you, such as the meadowhawks (dragonflies) that found a basking place on my leg, allowing me to observe their scarlet bodies, gossamer wings, huge round eyes, and rotating heads.

Waste places and weeds: the unenlightened regard these with contempt, as they have no value and can just be eliminated to serve our human purposes. We can understand the pioneers' battle with overwhelming nature to clear the land and the farmers' struggle to maximize production. Now we need to work with our natural environment to transform a waste place into a meadow, a grove of trees, or a marsh, rather than a parking lot or a road. One

PRESIDENT'S REPORT (cont'd)

example of this is the wetland we visited at Spadina Quay, designed as a habitat for spawning pike and also attractive to birds and butterflies. The more we learn, the more we realize that many 'weeds', as well as their beauty, have a place of value in the ecosystem. While some non-native plants (eg. pale swallowwort, Japanese knotweed) are so invasive and aggressive we would like to eliminate them, I do not think it either desirable or possible to get rid of all our alien species (eg. Queen Anne's lace, tansy).

More important than all these musings is the need to be aware of recurring threats to environmentally significant areas such as Crothers' Woods. Again it is in danger from a proposal to extend Redway Road southwest along the edge of the valley to connect with Bayview, possibly with an extension northwest through industrial land to Leslie street, south of Eglinton. Throughout the last week in September, the Globe and Mail ran an excellent series of articles on the "Exploding City" and the hidden costs of urban sprawl. Halton, Peel, York, and Durham regions were included, as well as Toronto. Although houses in outer suburbia may be less expensive than those closer to the centre of the city, costs of services and highways are borne by all taxpayers. "More difficult to tally are the costs of air pollution, deterioration of the environment and traffic chaos". Prominent urban theorist Jane Jacobs warns that the cost of urban sprawl goes beyond money. "The loss of creativity and opportunities for future generations should also be considered. For instance, society should consider what more creative things might be accomplished with the time and resources wasted by thousands of people daily during long commutes by car", Ms. Jacobs said. She added: " The use of fuel should be considered a form of borrowing from the future", and proposed that the long-term environmental damage and health problems caused by air pollution should be considered in making decisions on growth. (The Globe and Mail, September 29, 2000, p.22)

One of the problems with controlling urban sprawl is that "Toronto and its regions have 17 separate municipalities independently making their own quirky rules and no one is co-ordinating them", Ann Joyner of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute said. Since 1995, the Ontario government has offloaded responsibility for planning to local municipalities, and for roads to the regions. As a result, "There is no longer anyone in charge", Ms. Joyner said. (The Globe and Mail, September 26, 2000, p.18)

This situation has many ramifications which I wish to discuss further in next month's report. Your input and comments would be welcome.

Phoebe Cleverley

Last leaves of autumn
perched there like tattered sparrows
unwilling to fly.

haiku by A. F. Wade

KEEPING IN TOUCH

September 1, 2000

While walking through Mt. Pleasant Cemetery at the end of August I came across a tree I had not noticed before, a "Turkish FILBERT"! Being curious, I went home and looked in my dictionary and encyclopedia. It is described as a cultivated hazel nut - called "filbert nut" because the nut ripens on St. Philbert's Day, which is August 22nd. I also found that Turkey along with Spain is a major producer and exporter of filberts. I remember as a child the nuts were called "Barcelonas". The squirrels in my area have found a hazel nut or filbert tree in the area, as, for the first time, the prickly fuzzy green casings of the nuts have been dropped along the road, sidewalks and gardens.

I have been unable to find any reference to St. Philbert or his country of origin.

Doris Tatay

ed.note: All we could find was:
"Filbert - (for "fill-beard" because the nut just fills the cup made by the beards of the calyx). The fruit of a cultivated variety of hazel; a nut of Filbert, maturing about August 22, St. Philibert's Day".

from "THE LARGE-TYPE CONCISE ENGLISH DICTIONARY" by Charles Annandale
BLACKIE & SON LIMITED, LONDON AND GLASGOW, c 1920

Sept. 24, 2000

On Sept. 4, 2000, in the East Don parklands south of Finch Ave. East, I saw the following:

- in the beaver pond -- 7 blue-winged teal
- running along the bank in the vicinity of the footbridge (below the railway overpass) -- a mink. It went into the water for a while, but I couldn't see if it had caught anything.
- on the asphalt walkway, near the beaver pond -- a small (4 inch) ring-necked snake. It had an ant hanging onto its tail and didn't seem to be doing very well. I rescued it and put it in the grass on the riverside of the pathway where it seemed to recover a little.

Merle Young

Strange November day,
saw white squirrel and sundog...
Friday the thirteenth!

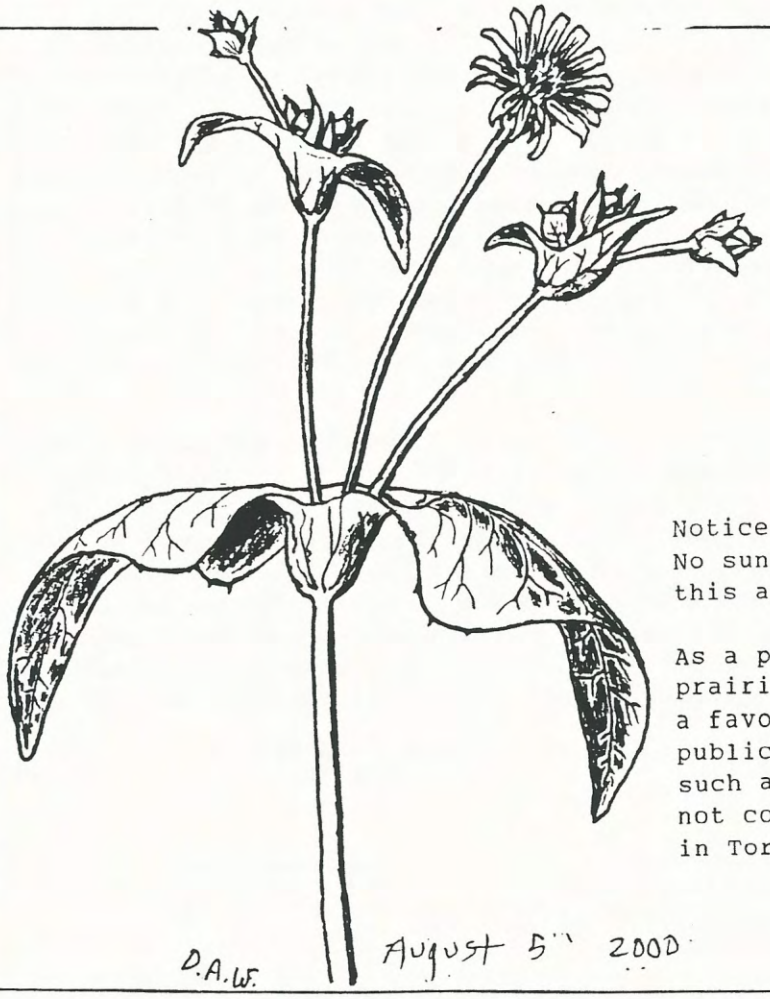
haiku by Helen Juhola
1998

REMEMBERING PAUL McGAW

TFN member Paul McGaw (who assisted with the Toronto Junior Field Naturalists in the 1980s) died on August 31, 2000 after a short illness. He was 63 years old. He was a Director of the North American Native Plant Society (formerly the Canadian Wildflower Society), Director of the Toronto Wildflower Society, Director with the Toronto Entomologists' Association and many other naturalist organizations.

Paul, who retired from teaching six years ago, was an accomplished nature photographer and a native plant gardener; his front yard was a wildflower meadow full of tallgrass prairie species.

adapted from a submission by Joanne Doucette and "Paul McGaw cared for nature" by Penny Laughren in the TORONTO STAR, Sept. 11, 2000



"CUP PLANT"

a field drawing by
D. Andrew White

in the gardens at
Montgomery's Inn,
Mimico Creek.

Notice the "cup" feature. No sunflower of ours has this arrangement.

As a provincially rare prairie flower, it is a favourite in planned public wildflower plantings such as High Park's. It's not considered established in Toronto.

DB

TFN PROMOTION REPORT - NOVEMBER 2000

By the time you read this article (or a few words thereof!), the High Park Harvest Festival will have taken place. As in 1999, TFN was asked to staff a booth at Colborne Lodge and to sit in the company of other organizations; some of these, like TFN, are concerned with nature and the environment. An event at which organizations like ours and all those that further the cause of a green city are actually thanked in public will have taken place on the evening of Oct. 4th. This is "Thank you Green Toronto".

Thanks to Elaine Farragher, TFN is now on the internet. Our website, www.sources.com/tfn, is indeed a very welcome addition to our promotional and informational toolkit.

There were many opportunities for our volunteers in the past year. TFN was invited to participate when the Leslie Street Spit was declared an IBA (Important Bird Area) lastsummer, and a number of TFN volunteers guarded the spotting scopes at the tern nesting site and offered views and explanations to passers-by. There will be plenty of opportunities to volunteer in the year to come. If you are interested in helping out, call the TFN office at 416-593-2656 to allow your name to be added to a list of volunteers who can be phoned when events crop up or simply to volunteer for a specific event. Better yet, call one of two directors responsible for TFN promotion, Sandy Cappell at 663-7738 or Andre Vietinghoff at 232-9241. Yes, we do need YOU! The longest event will probably again be the "Heritage Days" celebration in February. It usually starts late Friday afternoon and goes to late Sunday afternoon. There are five or six shifts with a need for two volunteers per shift. We will be phoning volunteers in January and we would certainly be grateful to you for any time you could donate.

Events that require volunteers can be lots of fun: you get to talk to your fellow volunteers and to those who visit the booth; with two volunteers, you can take breaks and visit other booths. If you pride yourself on thinking globally, now is your chance to act locally. However, if you can't volunteer, perhaps you know someone who can. Ask them first, of course! Or perhaps you would be interested in submitting an article, a review, a poem, a letter, a newspaper clipping, a cartoon, or a sketch to our newsletter. Meanwhile, thank you for being a member, and please do enjoy nature in all its splendour at all seasons in whatever way you can.

Andre Vietinghoff
232-9241

Parliament of crows
assembled in the tree-tops
noisily confer.

Haiku by Therese Paradis
November, 1999

TIPS TO DEAL WITH COYOTES

Do not approach or feed the animals; secure garbage - coyotes will return if they discover a good food source; keep pets on a leash at all times, especially in ravine areas; build fencing around your property; frighten the animals if they intrude on your property— this can be accomplished through loud noises or motion-sensitive lighting; educate yourself on how to deal with coyotes before coming into contact with them— this includes keeping an eye on small children; an umbrella that can be opened quickly in the face of an aggressive animal makes an excellent scare device; in extreme cases, those who are extremely worried can carry pepper spray, which is legal to use on animals.

extracted from an article by Jeffrey Lund in the FOREST HILL TOWN CRIER, March 1999

"BAH HUMBUG"

As a child I never encountered the brightly-coloured snails we see all over today. For this reason I assumed this had to be an introduced species. If that fact was true then someone would have given it a common name.

I have a wonderful book called "Book of the British Countryside". In this publication they have pictures of fifteen of the most common snails in England. The first snail pictured is the grove snail, Cepaea nemoralis. This was obviously the common land snail found in Toronto. I heard Betty Roots mention this snail when she spoke at our monthly meeting. This confirmed my suspicions about the grove snail.

Please stop calling this snail the humbug snail. That is not the proper name. Common names can only be useful if they are universal. If you have a difficult time remembering "Cepaea", it can be called the grove snail. Our reports and sightings can be a wonderful contribution to science, but only if we do not make up names out of the blue and then accept them as fact. Besides, humbugs are square and snails are round. "Bah Humbug."

Roger Powley

□

These grove snails (referred to by many members as humbug snails) are very common in Toronto.

FOR READING

James E. Garratt. The Rouge River Valley: An Urban Wilderness. Toronto: Natural History Books, 2000, $24.95

The Rouge has been the focus of technical studies since 1956. The number has increased exponentially from the late 1970s, paralleling the rise of public interest in preserving the Valley's natural heritage values. James Garratt offers a welcome, long-overdue addition to this literature that is both personal and closely observed.

Garratt uses the four seasons to organize his raw material. He is at his best when he combines highly detailed field studies with clear, crisp prose and a sense of why the Rouge is so environmentally significant. Garratt excels at setting off extraordinary experiences – like an encounter with a singing woodchuck – against the Rouge's seasonal "norms." How the exceptional and the ordinary affect the human senses is also strongly conveyed. We discover how highway noise in the park interior varies with the weather and the time of year.

The book is less successful when it tries to combine natural history with conservation history. Garratt's literary device – anchoring the storyline in seasonal rhythms, creating a composite year out of 12 years' worth of experience – is fundamentally ahistorical. But as an activist, Garratt insists on inserting and jumbling together events and personalities associated with saving the Rouge from urban development. This story, addressing the history and politics of environmental protection, deserves a book in its own right.

One specific historical shortcoming merits note. Readers are left with the impression that the Rouge Park began with the Ontario government's announcement in 1990. In fact, Metro Parks and the MTRCA had already spent over 20 years acquiring 2,050 acres below Steeles Avenue. Ironically, these are the same lands which figure most prominently in Garratt's book; his access to the Hogback and the Finch Meander reflects enlightened action at the municipal, not provincial, level.

Better production values could have improved this book. While some of the large-format photos are spectacular, many do not reflect their seasonal theme or are repetitive in content. Copyediting is absent in the "Afterword." The two maps lack a scale bar and park boundaries, and the second is both redundant and strangely placed. Nonetheless, the main text alone will reward armchair ramblers for having The Rouge River Valley on their laps.

Wayne Reeves

Concealing leaves fall,
those high aery choirs revealed,
the bright songsters flown.

Haiku by Arthur Wade

FOR READING (cont'd)

THE BUTTERFLIES OF THE TORONTO REGION compiled by Barry Harrison, published by the Toronto Entomologists' Association, 1999, $2 at TFN meetings, $2.50 by mail from Alan Hanks, 34 Seaton Dr. Aurora, Ont. L4G 2K1

"The Butterflies of the Toronto Region" is a checklist of 101 species of butterfly seen in the Toronto area since 1867. The checklist was compiled by Barry Harrison, a long-time member of the Toronto Entomologists' Association. The data for the checklist came from Barry's 20 years of personal records supplemented by input from friends and extensive research of the Royal Ontario Museum's butterfly collection.

For each species there is a bar chart describing its flight period in detail: early and late dates, start and end of normal flight season, and height of season. For the less common species there is also a status indicator; for example, rare, local, and whether the butterfly is known to migrate.

The checklist is certainly of great value to keen butterfly watchers and should also be helpful to those just starting out.

Carol Sellers

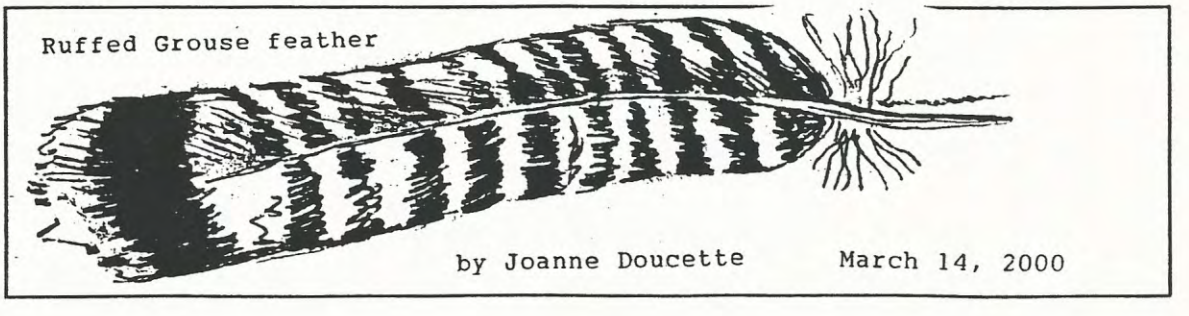
BUTTERFLIES OF PRESQU'ILE AND SOUTHERN ONTARIO by Friends of Presqu'ile and Ontario Parks, 2000, $4 (Presqu'ile Park Visitors' Centre)

"Butterflies of Presqu'ile and Southern Ontario" is a small (10 cm X 18 cm) spiral-bound photographic guide to our butterflies.

It is intended to be an introductory guide, using photographs to describe the butterfly. For each butterfly there is a high-quality photograph and brief description including host plant, habitat, status and Presqu'ile flight season. For many butterflies and all skippers there are photographs of both upper and under sides. With the exception of the skippers, all photographs are of living butterflies and they are excellent close-up shots.

Unlike most introductory guides, this one is very completein its coverage of butterflies, including species seen in southern Ontario but not yet recorded in Presqu'ile. This coverage along with the quality of the photographs makes it useful both to beginners and also to more experienced enthusiasts as a quick reference.

Carol Sellers

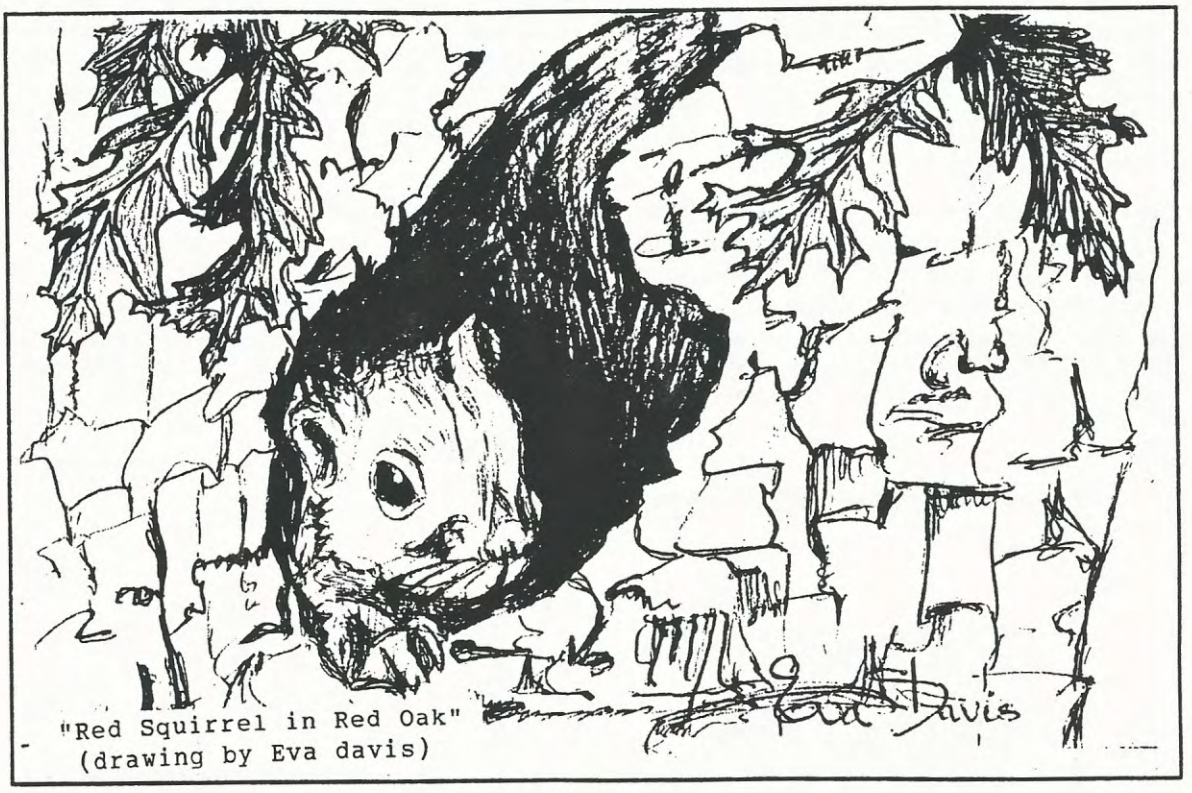


SQUIRREL CONTROL

One winter day in downtown Toronto I sat down by my kitchen window to eat lunch. Suddenly, a fox dashed out from the corner of the house to the base of the bird feeder. In a flash he had a limp black squirrel firmly in his jaws. He stood motionless for thirty seconds or so and then trotted to the base of a nearby shrub. There he tore apart and consumed most of his lunch. The remnants were carried to the back of the garden, and he disappeared behind the fence.

Mary Anne Miller

□



"Red Squirrel in Red Oak"
(drawing by Eva davis)

To make spirits rise,
the balloons arose?
MY spirits froze!
O, no, Nagano! You, too,
don't seem to know
just what this practice buys
and, being spent,
what dies.

Diana Banville,
February 7, 1998

ANOTHER RACCOON STORY

The world always has room for another raccoon story.

I went down to Lake Ontario to help a friend ready his sailboat for the new season. It was early morning in early May. The boat was moored about 300 yards out along one of a number of branching docks, perhaps four feet wide: a goodly way from the nearest garbage can, far from the nearest tree. It would be sunny later on, but at this hour the air was hazy with moisture and a heavy dew covered the boat's decks. And there, plainly visible, were the muddy little paw prints of a visiting raccoon He or she had hopped aboard (about a two-and-a-half-foot hop), walked up to the bow along the starboard side, then back to the stern along the port. Our visitor had also left calling cards in a groove in the deck close to the boarding ladder. Mystery: was this a comment on the condition of the boat?

I know that in the woods, a raccoon may choose a fallen log as its favourite latrine, and it's sometimes possible to see scats two or three years old. I've been around boats longer than I've been around racoons, and I've never come across a performance like this before. I won't be surprised if there's a story this summer about a boat sailing through the fog, flying the Jolly Roger, with a little guy in a coonskin coat at the helm. Yo Ho Ho!

Murray Seymour

□

Toronto native...

drawing by
Geraldine Goodwin

PROJECTS

REDWAY ROAD REVISITED

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don continues to watch with concern, the proposal to build an extension of Redway Road through the Don Valley. At the time of our publication deadline, the issue is apparently alive, but still unresolved.

Last fall, City Council approved funds for a traffic study on the advisability of extending both Brentcliffe and Redway roads in Leaside. The purpose would be to create a continuous bypass route for traffic that now uses residential streets in the neighbourhood. While the study has not been released at this time, we have reason to believe that it will recommend proceeding with the Redway section of new road and studying further the Brentcliffe section.

We have three concerns with such a road. First, all of the suggested routings of the Redway extension take it directly into the Don Valley, through Crothers' Woods, a provincially designated Environmentally Significant Area. We do not see any way that we could support such a road.

Second, the proposed extension would be the first phase of a road-building project that has no fixed end-point. We know that the bigger plan is to create an arterial link from Leslie and Eglinton to the downtown. However, we don't know what the next phases might be. And we doubt that the new road would actually alleviate traffic on the residential streets of Leaside. We are concerned that other parts of the Don Valley might be compromised in the future, especially if Bayview were expanded in the valley to accommodate added traffic.

Third, we are generally opposed to building new express roads, because they don't just accommodate existing traffic. They actually increase the volume of traffic by attracting drivers. It has been well established that vehicle emissions are a major contributor to smog and greenhouse gases, and that roads add to the burden of polluted storm-water run-off. We believe that Toronto should be looking for ways to reduce traffic, not increase it.

If you agree that building new roads in the Don Valley is a step in the wrong direction, please let your City Councillor know how you feel. This proposal may be getting public scrutiny for the first time this fall.

from an article by John Wilson in "BRING BACK THE DON", Fall 2000

Note: Councillors and mayor may be contacted by writing to Toronto City Hall, 100 Queen St. West, Toronto, Ont. M5H 2N2.

Limited car parking means visitors are encouraged to use public transport to reach the centre.

from "Wild in the City" by Stephen Moss in BBC WILDLIFE, Vol. 18, # 1, Jan. 2000

PROJECTS (cont'd)

BEAVER DAMNED TO DEATH ON EDGE OF ROUGE PARK

Environmentalists are outraged that a complaint made by a developer has resulted in the killing of all beaver living in the Amos Ponds, a provincially significant wetland found mostly within the borders of Scarborough's Rouge Park.

The complaint was made against the beaver to protect some maple trees located on a 20-acre property, a piece of land the developer hopes will soon be approved for two eleven-story high-rises and a 70-unit townhouse complex. The real threat to the trees is not beaver but eleven-story apartment buildings. If you build a high-rise next to a woodlot -- as this developer wants to do -- you destroy its ecological function. Although the beaver dams were on the edge of Scarborough's Rouge Park, they were located on a strip of land designated for the York-Durham sewer pipe, so York Region responded to the developer's complaint by agreeing to hire a trapping company. There appear to be no beaver left anywhere in the ponds, on either side of the park boundary.

▷ Anyone who is outraged by the beaver killing is encouraged to call MPP Janet Ecker (Tel: 905-420-0829) or any MPP, and ask the provincial government to support buying the Map property and adding it to the Rouge Park so that the Amos Ponds will be completely protected.

extracted from an article by Ramona Wall in the BLUFFS MONITOR, August 2000

ROOTING FOR LEAF IN TORONTO

If you want to make sure you have a large tree on your property in 15 years, you'd better be planting a sapling now. That's the message from Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF), a non-profit organization dedicated to "protecting and improving Toronto's urban forest" by encouraging people to plant trees in their backyards. For $35 to $55, LEAF will send a representative to your property to discuss planting and maintenance; it will recommend a species from a list of eight; it will plant a sapling, 120 to 180 centimetres tall; and a representative will visit your property a year later to see how the tree is doing. In addition, if you're worried about the health of your sapling, you can call LEAF for advice. Backyards are really valuable spaces for trees to reach their maximum.

▷ If you want a sapling call LEAF at (416) 413-9244, or look at its Web site at www.web.net/~leaf

extracted from an article by Cameron Smith in THE TORONTO STAR, March 25, 2000 □

It is our disconnection from our natural, biological roots that seems to have fooled us into thinking that we can "improve on Mother Nature."

from "Editor's Note" by Marilyn & Ross Archibald in THE VICTORIA NATURALIST, Vol. 57.2, Sept./Oct. 2000

IN THE NEWS

HUNGRY HUMMINGBIRDS

Hummingbirds get most of their energy by sipping nectar from flowers and a typical hummingbird needs seven to 12 calories a day. It's the equivalent of a 180-pound human having to scrounge up 204,300 calories a day, or about 171 pounds of hamburger. To keep itself alive, a hummingbird must manage to find as many as 1,000 flowers and drink almost twice its weight in nectar daily.

extracted from an article by Michael Kesterton in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, August 31, 2000

SILVER SECRETS OF A LITTLE BROWN BIRD

Darwin and his countrymen knew "our Winter Wren" simply as "the Wren", or more affectionately as the "Jenny Wren" of English folk tales and nursery rhymes, but, in fact, it is the same species that we have here. The curious thing is that all but one of the 63 species in the world is confined to the New World and, even there, mostly to warmer areas in and near the tropics. Only one species, our northern Winter Wren, is also found in the Old World as well. There it occurs in an incredibly vast range, stretching from eastern Siberia west across Asia including Japan, China, India, the Middle East, virtually all of Europe (including the British Isles, of course), and even down into northwestern Africa. It doesn't take much of a leap to imagine that, sometime in the past, a few of the Alaskan Winter Wrens managed to get across into nearby Siberia -- and, once there, to spread unimpeded all the way west to the Atlantic shores of Europe. This would explain the huge, present-day range of the Winter Wren but it does nothing to tell us why the other 62 species of wrens are all confined to much smaller areas of the New World.

extracted from an article in THE RAVEN, Vol.41, No.3, July 6, 2000

FOREST FORAY YIELDS ASTOUNDING VARIETY OF MUSHROOMS

The Mycological Society of Toronto was founded in 1973. Each year it holds a series of forays (group outings). Most members are primarily interested in gastronomic mushrooming, seeking specimens for the pot, after making sure that the species collected are edible. There are many toxic properties found in fungi, and some species, if eaten, can be fatally poisonous. Others, however, are delicious and safe. Most folks carry baskets, in which to put specimens, a knife to dig out the base of the plants, a hand lens, and a field identification guide. Moderation is exercised in collecting. Only the fruiting body is collected; the mycelium, hidden in the earth or rotting wood, can produce more. If a plant is rare, it's left alone.

The society's Web site is: www.myctor.org or call HI-FUNGI.

extracted from an article by Barry Kent MacKay in THE TORONTO STAR, Sept. 10, 2000

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

TREE-RING RECORD HOLDS SECRET TO ANCIENT DISASTER, SCIENTIST SAYS

Something catastrophic occurred on Earth 1,500 years ago, and it may be linked to the onset of the Dark Ages. The event also coincided with the end of the Roman Empire and the death of King Arthur. It could have been a bombardment of cometary debris or the eruption of a super volcano. But whatever it was, it is clearly etched in the chronology of tree rings from around the world. The global environmental event that occurred around the year 540 is not recorded in any history books. But the tree-ring chronologies compiled from samples of trees, some preserved in bogs, which date back thousands of years, single out something that was quite extraordinary. It was a catastrophic environmental downturn that shows up in trees all over the world.

extracted from an article from Reuters News Agency, London, in the GLOBE AND MAIL, September 9, 2000

FOOD CHAINS START GETTING ORGANIC VIBES

- Only 1 per cent of pesticides reach their target. The remainder can affect birds, beneficial insects and other life forms, including us.
- Even with pesticides, farmers suffer the loss of 20 per cent of their crops, the same percentage that they lost 70 years ago, before the use of pesticides.

extracted from an article by Cameron Smith, in THE TORONTO STAR, September 2, 2000

ALTERED CORN A THREAT TO BUTTERFLIES

A second scientific study has suggested that genetically modified corn is threatening the lives of fragile Monarch butterflies, re-igniting the debate over whether Canada's biotech corn crop is safe. Entomologists from Iowa State University have published a new study in the respected scientific journal OECOLOGIA saying that Monarch caterpillars are seven times more likely to die if they eat milkweed plants covered in pollen from genetically modified corn. About 35 per cent of Canada's corn crop is genetically modified to be resistant to a harmful bug called the European corn borer. Most of the corn is grown in Southern Ontario and Southwestern Quebec -- major destinations or rest spots for Monarch butterflies when they migrate north from Mexico for the summer. Monarch caterpillars feed only on milkweed plants, which often grow in meadows or untilled fields but also tend to grow in or near corn fields. In Canada, GM corn is not segregated from conventional corn. So any processed food containing corn-based ingredients probably has some genetically modified content -- from cereal to corn chips to desserts with corn syrup and sauces containing corn starch.

extracted from an article by Heather Scoffield, Parliamentary Bureau, Ottawa, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, August 25, 2000

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

TRACKING DEVICES EXPOSE SECRET LIFE OF ALBATROSS

Scientists have longed to know where the wandering albatross -- one member of the albatross family -- goes after it rears its young, disappearing for a year before returning to its breeding site near the Antarctic Circle. Researchers attached small tracking devices to the legs of nine albatrosses. Four tags worked, tracking two male and two female birds. The females headed for balmy tropical and subtropical waters south of Madagascar, while the males preferred chillier climes, spending the winter just north of the pack ice in Antarctica. The findings have important implications for the efforts to ensure the survival of the wandering albatross. The four birds ended up spending their sabbatical year in waters being developed for long-line fishing for tuna and toothfish. Tens of thousands of wandering albatrosses are killed each year when they get snared on baited hooks set by long-line fishermen. The toll is especially dismaying because a mating couple produce only one chick, which takes a year of nurturing before it can fend for itself.

from an article in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, dated August 31, 2000

HOUSE SPARROW NUMBERS PLUMMET IN BRITISH CITIES

The house sparrow is actually native to Eurasia, but can be found in towns and cities and farmlands throughout much of the world, including North America, the result of being relocated by humans. In Europe, house sparrows in London and other British cities have nearly vanished. The number of house sparrows in Britain has declined 64 per cent between 1972 and 1996, according to current estimates. The starling, another species that was introduced into North America in the 19th century -- subsequently to become an extremely abundant species across the continent -- is also native to Britain and Europe. It is estimated that British starlings have declined by 56 per cent between 1973 and 1997. The declines in both species seemed to accelerate in the 1990s and there appears to be no mutually agreed upon cause.

from an article by Barry Kent MacKay in THE TORONTO STAR, dated September 3, 2000

TIPS TO PRODUCE SUCCESSFUL SIGHTINGS

In the U.S., 540 million kilograms of pesticides are used annually. An estimated 67 million birds are killed by pesticides each year on U.S. farmlands alone... Pesticides will also kill birds via contaminated prey, inhalation and absorption through the skin. They can also lead to thinning of eggshells (see our bald eagle and peregrine falcon problems of 10-20 years ago from the use of DDT), embryo mutations or slow growth. Think before you spray; it's hurting all of us.

from an article by Tom Hayman, in THE LONDON FREE PRESS, May 13, 2000

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

SIMPLE METHOD FOUND TO INCREASE CROP YIELDS VASTLY

In a stunning new result from what has become one of the largest agricultural experiments ever, thousands of rice farmers in China have doubled the yields of their most valuable crop and nearly eliminated its most devastating disease -- without using chemical treatments or spending a single extra penny. Under the direction of an international team of scientists, farmers in China's Yunnan Province adopted a simple change in their rice paddies. Instead of planting the large stands of a single type of rice, as they typically have done, the farmers planted a mixture of two different rices. With this one change, growers were able to radically restrict the incidence of rice blast -- the most important disease of this most important staple in the world. Within just two years, farmers were able to abandon the chemical fungicides previously widely used to fight the disease. In fact, many researchers have long argued that planting a diversity of crops should lead to benefits like greater productivity and the suppression of disease, compared with single variety plantings known as monocultures. Yet the use of diversity and other ecologically based cures for agricultural ills have tended to be viewed as more politically correct than economically viable. Scientists say that this latest study shows that such environmentally friendly methods can be highly effective, even more effective, in this case, than standard chemical pesticides. Those studying natural ecosystems also welcomed the new work, saying it closely paralleled findings for the role of species diversity in reducing the incidence of disease in the wild.

What scientists found was that farmers garnered even more benefit from the mixtures than expected. Resistant plants did block the airborne spores in a field, but as more and more farmers became involved in the study, these positive effects began to multiply across the region. Not only were disease spores not blowing in from the next row, they were no longer coming from the next farmer's field either or the next or the next, rapidly damping the spread of the disease on a grand scale. In addition, scientists found that the sticky rice plants, which poked up above the shorter, standard rice plants with which they were grown enjoyed sunnier, warmer and drier conditions than they would have in a stand of tall, sticky rice plants. These conditions appeared to discourage the growth of the fungal rice blast in the sticky rice plants. The study is of particular interest for organic farming as it involves the application of no chemicals. Researchers say the study's implications extend to prairies, rainforests and other natural ecosystems. An increased diversity of plant species decreases the incidence of disease. In natural ecosystems, when there is a greater diversity of plants, it is simply more difficult for disease to spread.

extracted from an article by Carol Kaesuk Yoon, in THE NEW YORK TIMES, August 22, 2000

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

ON STANDBY TO SWAT AT WEST NILE THREAT

Anyone who is concerned, and plans to be where there are lots of mosquitoes, should use a repellent. To be specific, using repellents that have the DEET insecticide is advised if you're camping, outside in cottage country or walking through a park in the hours between dusk and dawn. The insect that transmits the West Nile virus is a night-biting mosquito. Added precaution is to wear light-coloured clothing with long pants and long sleeves when outside in the evening and early dawn hours.

extracted from an article by Ellie Tesher in THE TORONTO STAR, Summer 2000

WEST NILE VIRUS: MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

According to virus experts, West Nile virus which was first identified in Uganda in 1937 and flares up sporadically in Africa, Europe and the Middle East, appears ensconced in the New World. Most important, will West Nile virus pose a major threat to public health in the United States and Canada? The answer to this question, at least so far, appears to be no. House sparrows -- ubiquitous, dust-coloured, one-ounce crumb-snatchers -- are probably a principal reservoir here. West Nile virus is closely related to several other mosquito-borne viruses found around the world, including Japanese encephalitis virus and St. Louis encephalitis, which have a similar cycle in birds and mosquitoes and occasionally strike people across the U.S. South and Midwest. But far greater numbers of people bitten by infected mosquitoes never know they have been exposed. Over all, scientists say, human illness from the virus is likely to remain rare, a result of unusual confluences of mosquito-friendly weather, chance bird movements and other influences that cause the virus to "amplify" enough to pose a threat beyond its normal hosts. Of growing concern to some biologists is the virus's potential effect on North American wild birds, including species like whooping cranes, eagles and ravens, which seem susceptible. An analysis of past outbreaks in temperate zones in its previous range shows some patterns. It is usually passed from birds to humans in late summer, in cities more than the countryside and in weather or in places that mosquitoes enjoy.

extracted from an article by Andrew Revkin, New York Times Service, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, August 22, 2000

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What are you finding
in the folds of my lampshade ?
- not much, spiderling.

Haiku by Diana Banville,
November 19, 1998

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

ZEROING IN ON THE BIG ZAPS

For example, 12 summer days in 1998 accounted for more than half the lightning strikes in the Great Lakes region.

Plotting the time of lightning in the Toronto area for 1998 and 1999 revealed two peaks -- one in late afternoon and early evening, and a second smaller peak around 3 a.m.

extracted from an article by Peter Calamai, in THE TORONTO STAR, September 3, 2000

HUMMINGBIRDS

A Wisconsin woman gave her husband a new red baseball cap for his birthday. After a brief spell in a lawnchair, he complained that the cap was too hot. She cut several holes in it and gave it back. "Minutes later, I heard him holler: "Ouch ... Ouch ... Oouuch!'" Hummingbirds had left a nearby feeder and were poking at the holes on her husband's head. "I quickly gave my husband his old blue cap, and the hummers promptly returned to their feeder."

extracted from an article by Michael Kesterton in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, April 18, 2000

BLACKFLIES GETTING WORSE?

If you think blackflies are getting worse, you're dead right. A study has found that the "pestiferous and poisonous little demons" -- as a French missionary called them 375 years ago -- are being unleashed on Algonquin Park in numbers 100 times greater than 50 years ago.

The reason: acid rain. Blackfly larvae love it. As lakes and rivers turn more acidic, they flourish, because they tolerate acidity better than predators and competitors.

from an article by Cameron Smith, in THE TORONTO STAR, July 1, 2000

DOWNTOWN SKUNKIFICATION RAISES A STINK

Torontonians have become accustomed to the city's raccoons, more than 30 of which populate every square kilometre of our concrete canyons, but in my neighbourhood it is the skunks that rule the night. There is basically nothing you can do about getting rid of skunks, according to all the experts whose job it is to do something about skunks. Trapping is illegal, and new provincial legislation also bans the relocation of wild animals. Even if a citizen did attempt to move a skunk out of the neighbourhood, another one would quickly replace it. If it's not that skunk it's going to be one of 20 other skunks or one of the 35 coons per square kilometre in Toronto. One tip: [if your dog is "skunked"], toothpaste works better than tomato juice.

extracted from an article by John Barber, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, September 19, 2000

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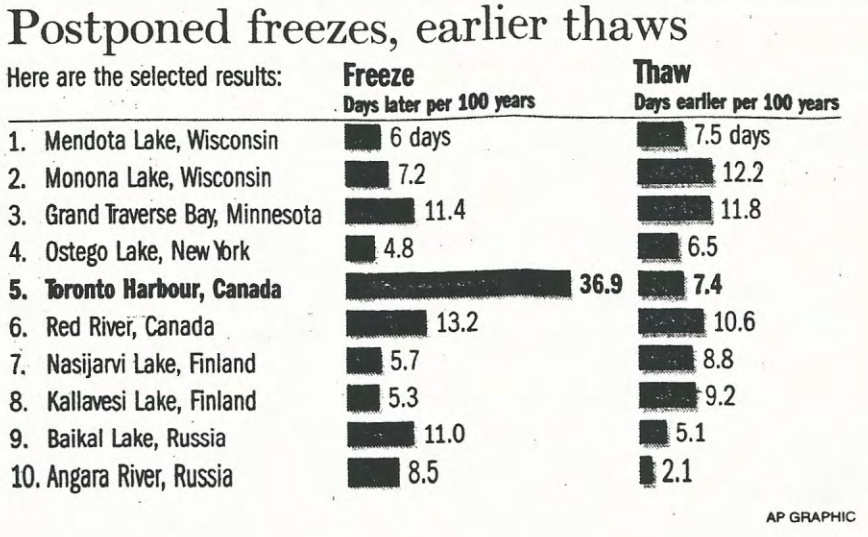
IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

OUR HARBOUR POSES A MYSTERY

Big shifts in the yearly freezing and thawing of Toronto harbour over 100 years have climate-change experts scratching their heads. A study published by an international research team finds Toronto harbour had the largest delay in winter freeze-up out of 26 lakes and rivers investigated around the Northern Hemisphere. Between 1822 and 1920, the date of harbour freeze-up crept backward by more than a month, compared to an average delay of about six days for all the other bodies of water. But over the same period, the timing of the harbour's spring break-up came forward by only a week, roughly the same as the average, overall. No other river or lake in the study showed such a big difference between the shifts in freezing and thawing. In most cases, there was only a few days disparity between the size of the changes. The length of ice cover shortened by almost three weeks -- an average of 19 days -- during the past 150 years, the period studied for most of the locations. Several scientists speculated that the Toronto findings were so extreme because harbour development changed aspects such as water circulation and depth during the 100-year period. Sewage outflow could also be a factor, one said. But no one could offer an explanation why changes to winter freeze-up were four times larger than for the spring thaw.

extracted from an article by Peter Calamai, in THE TORONTO STAR, September 8, 2000



First hesitant flakes,
scrolling grey November sky,
unsure of welcome.

Haiku by Arthur Wade
November, 1999

THE WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

November 1999, Toronto

November was unequivocally warm with only brief incursions of colder air as a huge ridge of warm air covered most of the interior of the continent. Precipitation was confined to a few occasions. Pearson's 5.8°C was the warmest since 1975 and the fourth warmest on record, while downtown it was the warmest since 1994. Total precipitation was near or above normal -- but most of it, including the barely 1 cm of snow, fell in one event on Nov. 2nd-3rd.

The interior of North America had consistently summer-like weather with daytime readings well into the twenties until near the end of the month. Toronto was far east enough that a few brief cold outbreaks sliding down the east side of the ridge affected us. On Nov. 2nd, heavy rains turned to snow early on Nov. 3rd. This storm was accompanied by thunder and gusts of up to 95 km/h, enough to do some damage to trees and a few structures -- and to maintain the month's fierce reputation in the Great Lakes. Rainfall exceeded 50 mm.

Record warmth of 22°C arrived by Nov. 9th, with temperatures oscillating between seasonably cold and the balmy teens thereafter.

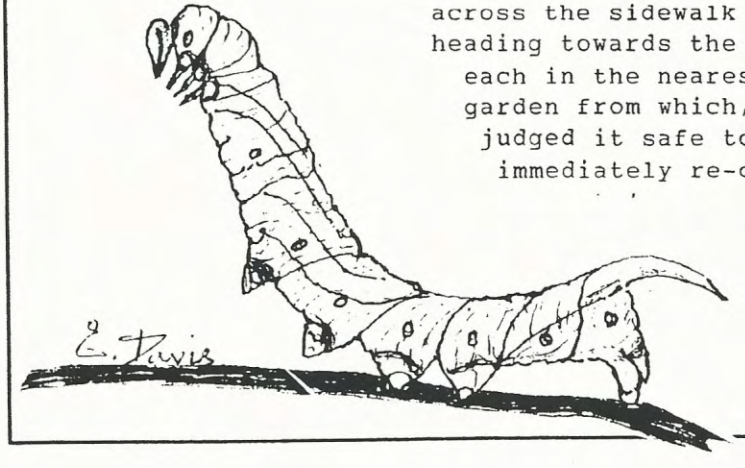
Consistent with our recent pattern, November was sunny with 119.3 hours of sunshine downtown. This was the highest since 1986 and within the top five.

Gavin Miller □

"GREAT ASH SPHINX MOTH CATERPILLAR"

Sphinx moths are impressive and so are their caterpillars. Large, bright-green, gorgeously roly-poly, delicately ringed and patterned. And - like turtles and garter snakes - determined to cross the road! At least the three I have found in the last couple of years have been struggling across the sidewalk (dangerous itself) heading towards the highway. I have put each in the nearest grass verge or garden from which, as soon as they judged it safe to uncurl, they immediately re-directed their suicide attempts!

Eva Davis



COMING EVENTS

Royal Canadian Institute - free science lectures - Sundays at 3 pm in the Macleod Auditorium, Medical Sciences Bldg., 1 King's College Circle

- Nov. 5 - The Biodiversity Crisis in Vietnam - Robert W. Murphy
- Nov. 12 - Beyond Hubble: the next generation space telescope - Simon J. Lilly
- Nov. 19 - The genetics of dementia - Peter St George-Hyslop
- Nov. 26 - How do we see and move at the same time? - Laurence R. Harris

Call 416-977-2983 for information.

High Park Walking tours - Sunday afternoons at 1:15 pm beginning near the south side of the Grenadier Cafe and Teahouse; $2 donation suggested

- Nov. 12 - The restoration of High Park
- Nov. 26 - Bringing back Grenadier Pond

For more information about tours and volunteer programs, call 392-1748.

Toronto Entomologists' Association meeting at 1 pm on Sat. Nov. 25 in Room 113, Northrop Frye Hall, 73 Queen's Park Cres. East.

- Columbia and Cecropia silkmoths: new research and discoveries - an illustrated talk by Lester Kohalmi
  Call Alan Hanks at 905-727-6993 for more information.

Citizens Concerned about the Future of Etobicoke Waterfront - guided birdwalk - Nov. 11 from 9 am to 11 am with Glenn Coady. Meet in the parking lot of Humber Bay Park East. For more information call Michael Harrison at 255-9718.

Ian Wheal heritage walks

- Sat. Nov. 4 - Grog Lane and vicinity - Meet at the northeast corner of Queen St. West and John St. at 1:30 pm.
- Sat. Nov. 11 - Tomlin Creek (a lost creek) - Meet at St. John's Norway Churchon the northwest corner of Kingston Rd. and Woodbine Ave. at 10:45 am. Bring lunch. A walk will follow the Remembrance Day service.
- Sun. Nov. 26 - Russell Creek - Meet at the entrance to Bathurst subway station on Bathurst just north of Bloor St. West at 1:30 pm.

The Market Gallery - Time Present and Past - an exhibition of drawings and photographs focusing on urban development and preservation issues of the 1970s in Toronto. Nov. 4 to Mar. 4, 2001. Call 392-7803 for more information.

The Treasure of the Eastern Waterfront - Sun. Nov. 5 from from 1 to 3 pm at the south side of the Guild Inn, 191-201 Guildwood Parkway (near Morningside Ave.) For more information call the Waterfront Regeneration Trust at 943-8080, ext. 229. □

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