TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 496 December 2000

"THE UBIQUITOUS DOWNY"

See page 26.

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TFN MEETINGS

Sunday, December 3, 2000 - EARTH'S CHANGING CLIMATE: CLUES FROM ROCKS

at 2:30 pm

in the Northrop Frye Hall
Victoria University

73 Queen's Park Cres. East

VISITORS WELCOME!

- an illustrated lecture by Carolyn Eyles, Professor of Geography and Geology, McMaster University
- This talk will examine evidence for climate change found in the rock record. Particular attention will be paid to evidence for past glaciation in rocks ranging in age from Precambrian to Wisconsin.

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

NEXT MEETING: Sunday, February 4, 2000

NEXT NEWSLETTER: February (to be mailed in mid-January)

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.

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If in doubt, call the weather number 661-0123 before getting ready.

FOR ENJOYMENT OF WINTER OUTINGS

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.

Saturday
Dec. 2
10:30 am

GARDINER MUSEUM - nature arts — Toronto
Leader: Diana Banville
Meet at the entrance on the east side of Queen's Park Cres. just south of Bloor St. West.
Bring what you need for photography, sketching or painting, and anything you wish to show the group when we compare our morning's work after lunch.

Sunday
Dec. 3
2:30 pm

TFN MEETING (See page 2 for details.)

Wednesday
Dec. 6
10 am

EAST DON HIGHLANDS - nature walk — East Don, North York
Leader: Alexander Cappell
Meet at the southeast corner of Sheppard Ave. East and Leslie St. Morning only.
We will be following tributaries of the East Don and exploring streets to get views.

Sunday
Dec. 10
1 pm

WATERFRONT - nature walk — waterfront, Scarborough
Leader: Joanne Doucette
Meet at the entrance to Col. Danforth Park on the south side of Kingston Rd. at Col. Danforth Trail.
This walk will take us through the lower valley of Highland Creek and along the shore of Lake Ontario east to the mouth of the Rouge River.

Tuesday
Dec. 12
10 am

HIGH PARK - nature walk — Toronto
Leader: George Bryant
Meet at the park entrance on the south side of Bloor St. West opposite High Park Ave. Bring a snack and binoculars.
This large park contains many habitats so there is much to see at any time of the year.

Sunday
Dec. 17
2 pm

HEADWATERS OF DOWNSVIEW - urban ecology — North York
Leader: Mike Peppard & others from Black Creek Project
Meet at the southwest corner of Sheppard Ave. West and Yukon Lane.
We will be walking from Dufferin Creek to Silver Hollow Creek to Black Creek, all in Downsview Park. This is a joint outing with the North Toronto Green Community.

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DECEMBER & JANUARY OUTINGS (cont'd)

Wednesday Dec. 20 10:30 am	CENTRAL DON PARKS - nature walks Leader: Louise Orr Meet at the south side of Eglinton Ave. East at Leslie St. Bring binoculars and a snack. Be prepared to stop, look and listen as we explore this large park system with its many habitats.	North York, West Don
Wednesday Dec. 27 10:30 am $ ferry tickets	WARDS ISLAND - nature walk Leader: Ann Gray Meet at the ferry docks at the foot of Bay St. in time to take the 10:30 ferry. Wear warm clothes; bring a snack and a drink, and binoculars. This is a great time of year to visit the island, looking for birds and even animal tracks.	waterfront, Toronto
Sunday Dec. 31 11 am $ferry tickets	WARDS ISLAND - heritage walk Leader: Ian Wheal Meet at the ferry docks at the foot of Bay St. Bring lunch. We will be told about the fishery that existed on the islands while we walk.	waterfront, Toronto

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Wednesday January 3 10 am	EAST DON HIGH LANDS - nature walk Leader: Alexander Cappell Meet at the southeast corner of Steeles Ave. East and Leslie St. This is a walk we haven't done before to a little known tributary of the East Don. Morning only.	East Don, North York
Saturday Jan. 6 10:30 am	CASTLE FRANK CREEK - nature arts Leader: Mary Taylor Meet at the entrance to the St. Clair West subway station on the north side of St. Clair Ave. West. Bring what you need for photography, sketching or painting, and anything you wish to show the group when we compare our morning's work after lunch.	Don, Toronto
Wednesday Jan. 10 10:30 am	CHERRY BEACH - nature walk Leader: Phoebe Cleverley Meet at the foot of Leslie St. (about a 20 minute walk south of Queen St. East). Morning only. We will be walking from the foot of Leslie Street to Cherry St., looking for winter birds.	lakeshore, Toronto
Saturday Jan. 13 10 am	LAMBTON WOODS - nature walk Leader: Diana Karrandjas Meet at the entrance to James Gardens on Edenbridge Dr. which runs east off Royal York Rd. Morning only. This lovely forest is a favourite place to find birds at any time of year.	Humber, Etobicoke

+

See next page for another outing for Jan. 13.

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JANUARY OUTINGS (cont'd)

Saturday Jan. 13 11 am	ROUGE VALLEY - mammals in winter Leader: Joanne Doucette Meet at the northeast corner of Sheppard Ave. East and Meadowvale Rd. Bring lunch, binoculars and field guides and dress warmly. We will be looking for tracks, dens, nests and scat. Walk ends about 4 pm. The walk will be long with steep hills and wet areas.	Rouge, Scarborough
Wednesday Jan. 17 10 am	BURKE RAVINE - nature walk Leader: Roger Powley Meet on the east side of Bayview Ave. at the CNIB stop which is north of Eglinton Ave. East. Morning only. This is a great place to view birds as we enter the valley via a little-known road. Many species find this large park area a great place to spend the winter.	West Don tributary, North York
Sunday Jan. 21 2 pm	YORK UNIVERSITY - urban ecology Leader: Helen Mills & others Meet at the southwest corner of Steeles Ave. West & Keele St. The York campus is located on the divide between the Don and Humber watersheds. At one time 15 tributaries of Black Creek flowed through the grounds. All but one have been buried. [a joint outing with the North Tor. Green Community]	Humber/Don, North York
Wednesday Jan. 24 10:30 am	JAMES GARDENS - nature walk Leader: Carol Sellers Meet at the park entrance on Edenbridge Dr. which runs east from Royal York Rd. Bring a snack and something to drink as well as binoculars. As well as woodland birds, we may see gulls and ducks along the river, if it is not frozen.	Humber, Etobicoke
Saturday Jan. 27 1:30 pm	R.C. HARRIS FILTRATION PLANT - heritage walk Leader: Ian Wheal Meet at the east end of the Queen streetcar line at Neville Park Blvd. We may have a tour of the buildings at the edge of Lake Ontario. Winter ducks may be seen offshore.	lakeshore, Toronto

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WE FOUND A SNOWMAN constructed by people who made creative use of natural objects: Goldenrod galls for buttons and ears, brown withered asters for a ruff, spky hair of cattail leaves, the mouth a line of buckthorn berries, chomping a cigar consisting of a narrow-leaf cattail head, and, most effective, eyes and nose of empty milkweed pods.

Allan Greenbaum

(from outing report of Cedarvale Ravine nature walk, January 3, 1999).

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Comments on my September report were mostly positive, for which I am thankful. However, my daughter, who makes no claim to be an expert birder, immediately found something missing in my account of our canoe trip to rocky islands in Malaspina Strait on the Pacific Coast. "You forgot the oyster catcher", she said. It's true; we had turned around and were paddling back to the mainland when I commented that the sea rocks were a likely place to see a black oystercatcher. Within minutes, one of these large black shorebirds with its bright red bill and reddish legs flew across our bow and landed on the nearest rock. We had a great view.

On one of those golden days of mid-October when it is a joy to be walking in the park, our group had a wonderful view for several minutes of a female eastern bluebird perched at the top of a spruce tree in Earl Bales Park. This was my best sighting of a bluebird in Toronto since I was a child.

Canadians do like to talk about the weather. This year in southern Ontario we had many warm, sunny autumn days, with just enough moisture to keep the grass unusually green while the trees reached their peak of glorious colour. As we approach the winter solstice, we'll have an opportunity to hear about Earth's changing climate from the scientific point of view with Carolyn Eyles, who received her M.Sc. and Ph.D. in Geology from the University of Toronto and is now a professor at McMaster. She will share with us her research into the evidence for climate change found in the rock record in Scotland, Norway, and Australia, as well as our own region. (cf: p.2)

As naturalists we surely must care about our environment and share a profound commitment to find solutions for problems such as global warming and urban sprawl. Greater Toronto has become so huge and diverse, the problems seem monumental and never-ending. Yet there are many dedicated individuals and hard-working groups seeking to devise long-term plans in local situations which are both creative and practical, whether it be a proposed development on farmland between Oakville and Milton, which threatens natural features such as forests and wildlife habitat, or highway extension through fragile green space on the Oak Ridges Moraine.

While the TFN has no political agenda, I do hope our members will not only listen to the fine words of candidates (in municipal, provincial, and federal elections), but will question their sincerity and dedication, as well as their determination to follow through, if elected, on such matters as support for public transit, alternative energy sources, and effective legislation to protect endangered species.

Phoebe Cleverley

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KEEPING IN TOUCH

October 26, 2000

Re: FILBERT NUT AND St. PHILIBERT

In the TFN Newsletter No. 495, November 2000, you note that there was little you could discover about St. Philibert. The lives of Christian saints may be found in studies known technically as 'hagiologies'. Summarizing from such sources it is recorded that St. Philibert was born in Germany early in the seventh century A.D., the son of Philibaud, Bishop of Aire. He died full of years and was much admired for his administration of both religious and physical concerns of the communities that grew up around his foundations. Perhaps it is fitting then that, particularly in France, such a useful food item should be commemorated with his name. Philibert himself is believed to have died towards the end of the seventh century.

Roger Hyams and Richard Pankhurst, Plants and Their Names: A Concise Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 1995) speak of filberts as Corylus spp. in general, and in particular, Corylus maxima. Interestingly, A Dictionary of Plant Lore (Roy Vickery, Oxford University Press, 1995) makes no mention of 'Filberts', listing many folk tales from Great Britain under Hazel, Corylus avellana. Perhaps the insular inhabitants of the British Isles continue to disdain continental saints and their nuts alike.

Wes Porter

November 2, 2000

re STEALTH CROWS

At 8 a.m. on October 17, 2000, a sunless, overcast day, I was standing on my ground-floor balcony looking to the south. Suddenly, above the 15-storey apartment rooftops, I saw ghostly objects flying north. When they came into sharp focus, I saw that they were crows coming out of a light fog, in loose formations of twos and fives and tens, so slowly that I was able to count them (approximately 85) as they drifted noiselessly over my roof.

Sandy Cappell

Polished by waves, they
become objects of beauty,
broken bricks and glass.

haiku by Helen Juhola
Cherry Street Beach

THE CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS (CBC), 1999

The 75th consecutive Toronto Christmas Bird Count was held on Monday, December 27, 1999 under mixed skies. Once again, we succeeded in picking one of the coldest days of the Christmas season for our count, as the high was only -7°C and the steady northwest wind made it feel much colder, especially for those of us with routes in exposed areas rather than sheltered ravines.

Our grand total this year was 53,361 individuals of 83 species. An additional 6 species were observed during count week. While these numbers are down somewhat from last year, the 1999 count nonetheless ranks as one of the best in the long history of the Toronto CBC.

Two new species were added to the count in 1999. Thankfully the famous Heermann's Gull was reliable in its usual location in the Toronto port lands on the morning of the count. Similarly, the Tufted Titmouse that had been frequenting Steven Price's feeder in North York for weeks prior to the count was easily located.

Several other species were recorded in 1999 that have not been regular in recent years. The 3 Ring-necked Ducks on the Lower Humber route were the fourth record this decade; the Thayer's Gull on the Leslie Spit was the fifth record in the past ten years, the Saw-whet Owl on the Spit was the fourth record since 1990, and the third record of Rusty Blackbird this decade came from Lambton Woods. A Barred Owl behind the Science Centre was only the second one since the 1983 count, and the Fox Sparrow in North York was the second since 1976. The 2 Brown Thrashers seen this year tied the record high set in 1973 and 1976.

The 1999 count set new record highs for six species. The total of 5 Peregrine Falcons was a significant increase from the previous high of 2 in 1995. Equally dramatic, the 2,301 Redheads more than doubled the existing record of 1,108, set only one year ago. Other new highs included 179 Downy Woodpeckers (162 in 1958), 8 Pileated Woodpeckers

(6 in 1962 and 1994), 222 Whitebreasted Nuthatches (214 in 1997, and 14 Northern Mockingbirds (13 in 1998).

While not record-setting, several other species were present in unusually high numbers. The 59 Hairy Woodpeckers were the most since 1965, and the 49 Redbreasted Nuthatches was the third-highest count ever. These numbers reflect the fact that woodpeckers and nuthatches in general were incredibly numerous this winter. The 46 Hooded Mergansers were exceeded on only one prior count, and the total of 7 Canvasbacks was the second highest count of the decade. Dark-eyed Juncos made their best showing of the '90s with a total of 728, and the 90 Pine Siskins was the highest count since 1987.

As always, there were some notable misses. Despite the mild winter, nobody was able to turn up a Hermit Thrush, Brown-headed Cowbird, or a Yellow-rumped Warbler this year. ▷

THE CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS (CBC), 1999

Among the species with ten-year lows were 49 Redbreasted Mergansers (55 in 1991), 89 American Tree Sparrow (ties low of 1990), and 27 Song Sparrows (29 in 1993).

This year's count week birds were an Eared Grebe seen by many at Humber Bay East in the days following the count, a Harlequin Duck at the Eastern Gap, a Wood Thrush seen the day prior to the count beside Ron Tasker's house, and a trio of species around the Riverdale Necropolis: Red-headed Woodpecker, Merlin, and Common Grackle.

As always, the Christmas Bird Count was a true group effort, with 77 participants taking part.

from the TORONTO ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB NEWSLETTER, No.104, April 2000

"RIGID WILLOW"

- its leaves become more and more rigid as the season advances - note the stipule at base of leaf-stalk - a common Toronto native, and easy to identify.

As in Mary Cumming's field drawing, twigs are often capped by "THE WILLOW PINE-CONE GALL".

SHOPPING FOR BINOCULARS

For most people, price is an important limiting factor and, as with most high-tech toys, price largely sets the limits on quality and other features. For example, less-expensive binoculars are rarely very durable or waterproof, and some of them produce such a poor image they'll cause severe eyestrain if you look through them too long. With virtually all of the models we tested, price was an excellent predictor of overall quality, as assessed by our reviewers. But one of the refreshing surprises for us was the array of decent binoculars in the mid-priced and budget categories, which shows that manufacturers are finally rising to the challenge of producing good birding optics at an affordable price.

Other factors to consider, in addition to price, include magnification, weight, overall image quality, field of view, and minimum close-focus distance. Most of these factors present trade offs -- that is, making improvements in one factor usually entails making sacrifices in another. For example, if you demand high-quality lenses and a wide field of view, the binoculars you buy will most likely be very heavy. Conversely, if you go for a lightweight compact or even mid-sized model, you'll generally get a narrower and dimmer image, particularly when viewing in low light.

Surprisingly, no relationship appears to exist between the field of view and the minimum close-focus distance of a given binocular, although remarkably few models are designed with both features in mind. Also, for almost any given binocular design, the 7x or 8x models almost always have a wider field of view, brighter image, and closer focus distance than the comparable 10x models. It is no longer true, however, that 10x binoculars must always be heavier than models with less magnification. Among many top-of-the-line brands, the loss of field or brightness in 10x binoculars is barely discernible and is probably compensated for by the greater detail and resolution that the increased magnification provides. With budget binoculars, getting the maximum quality (acceptable image and field of view) usually requires going with 7x or 8x at the most. To choose the best binoculars for your needs, there's absolutely no substitute for testing a variety of models yourself. Another reason to test binoculars in a store is to evaluate the quality control -- sometimes a great deal of variation exists in the quality of individual binoculars, especially in the low-priced models.

If, like me, you no longer dare to venture afield without wearing eyeglasses, choosing binoculars entails some special challenges. The good news is that nearly all binoculars are more eyeglass-friendly now than they were even five years ago. Some manufacturers seem to pay more attention to eye relief and eyecup design than others, however, making me wonder if the engineers at some companies wear glasses and others do not. No matter what you buy, get out there and find some good birds.

from an article by Ken Rosenberg in LIVING BIRD, Spring 1999

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Lake Ontario Mid-Winter Waterfowl Inventory

January 9, 2000

Compiled by: Bill Edmunds

Species	Kingston	Quinte	Presqu'ile	Port Hope	Durham	TORONTO AREA Route1	Route2	Route3	Route4	Route5	Route6	Route7	Subtotal	Hamilton	Niagara	TOTAL
Red-throated Loon	1													1		2
Common Loon	2											2	2	1	2	7
Pied-billed Grebe	1															1
Horned Grebe	22				1									8		31
Red-necked Grebe	2													1		3
Eared Grebe											1		1			1
Double-crested Cormorant														4	25	29
Tundra Swan	144		7			1							1	2	2	156
Trumpeter Swan	6		1		1	5	3				1		9	23		40
Mute Swan	2	2	80	1	10	2	4	9	46	12	64	5	142	90		327
Greater White-fronted Goose	1															1
Snow Goose						6							6			6
Canada Goose	13128	350	100	2862	1728	9810	458	249	33	551	912	2203	14216	2425	98	34907
Wood duck	1			1				1			2		3	1		6
Green-winged Teal	2													32		34
American Black Duck	1389	34	91	123	93	932	30	57	30	7	104	178	1338	271	16	3355
Mallard	10664	253	23	1207	412	2697	331	618	1142	564	1280	3015	9647	3107	372	25685
Northern Pintail	34	1		4		3						1	4	32		75
Northern Shoveler				1						1			1	34		36
Gadwall	342				42	1	14	291	265	72	289	349	1281	91	4	1760
American Wigeon	19							3	5	3	34	38	83			102
Canvasback	6		1						4				4	62	1	74
Redhead	760		600	96	12			1522	2074	105	399	347	4447	12	17	5944
Ring-necked Duck	6					2		2	3		1		8	31	1	46
Greater Scaup	8920		38	43	1070	115	1	5627	323	186	672	16	6940	20311	95	37417
Lesser Scaup	269					4			32	1	4	4	45	4415	1	4730
Scaup sp.	1420		70												21060	22550
King Eider														1		1
Harlequin Duck								1			1		2	1		3
Oldsquaw	155685	1682	863	79	63	285	7830	3387	1289	1472	585	309	15157	54549	647	228725
Black Scoter	2													3		5
Surf Scoter	4								1				1	166		171
White-winged Scoter	2681	74		9	2		10	3			13	3488	3514	45	4825	11150
Common Goldeneye	8011	996	1490	619	1394	753	216	921	159	43	1428	1434	4954	8839	1466	27769
Barrow's Goldeneye	1															1
Bufflehead	1442	232	349	144	387	469	95	142	364	95	361	547	2073	1316	626	6569
Hooded Merganser	34	2		1		4		3	1	19	12		39	25	1	102
Common Merganser	8282	13	68	42	92	183	35	19	144	20	53	12	466	1505	381	10849
Red-breasted Merganser	347			19	154	39	78	7	9	19	99	90	341	327	657	1845
Ruddy Duck	1			1							2		2	58		62
American Coot	2	2					1		1	2	10	7	21	175	3	203
Merganser sp.	2211															2211
Duck sp.	9643	651	305			1		1					2		20002	30603
Mallard X Black Duck								4	3	1		5	13	6		19
Total Birds	225487	4292	4086	5252	5461	15312	9106	12867	5928	3173	6327	12050	64763	97969	50302	457613
Total Species	34	12	13	17	15	18	14	18	19	17	23	18	30	33	20	40
Bald Eagle	34											1	1	2		37

LAKE ONTARIO MID-WINTER WATERFOWL INVENTORY

January 9, 2000 was warm (+5° C) ... calm and sunny in the morning with some afternoon drizzle. Visibility was generally excellent all day. There was no significant ice in bays, channels and inner harbours. All areas reported that they had a great day for viewing the waterfowl. As a result, record numbers were reported from all areas.

This is the 54th "Duck Count" for the Toronto Ornithological Club and 10th year that the entire Canadian shoreline of Lake Ontario has been covered. During the past 3 years, there has been a dramatic increase in the total number of waterfowl on Lake Ontario. This year we counted a new record of 457,613 waterfowl; in 1999 we counted a record 282,489 waterfowl, and in 1998 we counted a record 180,571 waterfowl. That's a 150% increase within 2 years!!! Since the early 1990's there has been a dramatic increase in the number of 'diving' waterfowl, which has been reflected in our ever-increasing totals. Record numbers were counted for Canada Goose, American Black Duck, Mallard, Redhead, Scaup, and Oldsquaw. High numbers of White-winged Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, and Bufflehead also contributed to this record count. Kingston had the highest concentration of waterfowl, including 155,685 Oldsquaw! They also had large counts of Canada Goose, Mallard, Scaup, Common Goldeneye and Common Merganser. Hamilton also had record numbers, including large counts for Scaup, Oldsquaw, and Common Goldeneye.

In the Toronto area, 64,763 waterfowl from 30 species were seen. This is a new record for individuals (the old record was 56,577 set in 1998), and ties the record for species seen. High numbers were seen for Black Duck, Gadwall (new record), American Wigeon, Redhead (new record), Oldsquaw, White-winged Scoter (new record), Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead (new record), Hooded Merganser (new record), and American Coot (new record). Rarities included the first-ever MWWI Toronto record for Eared Grebe at Humber Bay, 2 Common Loon, a Tundra Swan, 6 Snow Goose, 3 Wood Duck, 4 Northern Pintail, 4 Canvasback, 8 Ring-necked Duck, 2 Harlequin Duck, a Surf Scoter, 39 Hooded Merganser, 2 Ruddy Duck, and 21 American Coot.

Outside of the Toronto area, there were some excellent sightings. Niagara had 20 species including 2 Common Loon, 25 Double-crested Cormorant, and 2 Tundra Swan. Hamilton had 33 species including a Red-throated Loon, a Common Loon, 8 Horned Grebe, a Red-necked Grebe, 4 Double-crested Cormorant, 4 swan species (including their usual Whooper), a Wood Duck, 32 Green-winged Teal, a King Eider, a Harlequin Duck, 3 Black Scoter, 166(!) Surf Scoter, 58 Ruddy Duck and 2 adult Bald Eagle. Durham had a Horned Grebe. Port Hope had a Wood Duck, a Northern Shoveler, and a Ruddy Duck. Presqu'ile had 7 Tundra Swan, 80 Mute Swan, and a Canvasback. Quinte had 2 Hooded Merganser and 2 American Coot. Kingston had 34 species including a Red-throated Loon, 2 Common Loon, a Pied-billed Grebe, 22 Horned Grebe, 2 Red-necked Grebe, 144 Tundra Swan, a Greater White-fronted Goose a Wood Duck, 2 Black Scoter, 4 Surf Scoter, a Barrow's Goldeneye, a Ruddy Duck, 2 American Coot and 34 Bald Eagles.

from an article by Bill Edmunds in TOC NEWSLETTER #102, February 2000 □

GIFT AND VACATION IDEAS

"Wildflower" magazine

This quarterly publication is "dedicated to the study, conservation, cultivation and restoration of North America's native flora". Subscription: $35.00 per year to Wildflower, Box 335, Postal Station F, Toronto, M4Y 2L7

*Federation of Ontario Naturalists

Members receive the quarterly magazine "Seasons" which features articles on natural history and environmental issues in Ontario. Programs include wilderness canoe trips, young naturalists' camps, an annual 3-day conference, and "working for wilderness" projects on some of the F.O.N.'s nature reserves and elsewhere.
Memberships: individual $40.00, family $45.00, senior $35.00, student $25.00. Address: 355 Lesmill Road, Don Mills, M3B 2W8

**Canadian Nature Federation

This Canada-wide organization "focuses on conservation initiatives to protect birds, endangered species, and wildlands and oceans." Members receive twice-yearly the magazine "Nature Canada", 5 issues per year of the newsletter "Nature Matters", an income tax receipt and an invitation to the annual conference (this year's was 5 days in Newfoundland). Membership: individual $35, family $42. Address: 1 Nicholas Street, Ste. 606, Ottawa, K1N 9Z9

George Bryant's "Natural History Travel"
(A Division of Travel Helpers Ltd.)

A long-time member and leader of many TFN walks, George leads trips throughout North America and further afield to study birds, botany and all aspects of natural history. For further information, contact Travel Helpers, 75 The Donway W., Ste. 104, North York, M3C 2E9
(416) 443-0583

Ontario Field Ornithologists

This organization is dedicated to the study of birdlife in Ontario. It publishes a journal (Ontario Birds) and a newsletter (OFO News), each three times per year. There are field trips year-round in various parts of the province and an annual general meeting.
Membership: single $22.00, family $27.50
Address: Box 455, Station R, Toronto M4G 4E1

* Annual General Meeting & Conference - June 14 - 17, 2001 in Toronto

** Annual General Meeting & Conference - June 7 - 10, 2001 in Saskatoon

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and don't forget THE TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS (See page 30 for details.)

EVENSONG (Avian Style)

I live on the fourth floor of an apartment tower, facing east, and look down on a long stand of honey locusts, now turned to autumnal gold. Every evening, between sundown and darkness, the air vibrates with the chatter of birds and I can watch them below me, a source of wonderment and warmth and conjecture -- dozens upon dozens of starlings and sparrows settling down for the night. The operation begins with that marvel of avian symmetry, the great massed wheelings and swoopings of countless birds flying as one, after which they separate, to perch like brown fruit amongst the branches. Then follows the constant changing of position, the tireless flitting to and fro. Do birds, apart from mated pairs, form preferences amongst neighbours, as we do? Or is one starling companion as acceptable as another? Is it, instead, location of tree or branch which governs the final selection? I know I am indulging probably unanswerable anthropomorphic musings, but I find the avian world mysterious and self-sufficient and supremely functional, unlike our own. Is this nightly sifting process the equivalent of a Round-Robin (sans robins) of neighbourly Goodnights or the winding up of a talk fest? It seems such a joyous event!

Eva Davis

FIELD SOW-THISTLE

in bud, with one dandelion-like flower-head beginning to open.

This Europen plant, established in Toronto, made an excellent subject for Andrew White's botanical drawing.

...look familiar?

A NATURE STROLL AROUND THE BLOCK

The neighbourhood lawns are well-manicured. The flower displays are breathtaking. We stop, applaud and enjoy. However, at our feet, encroaching upon the lawns and hugging the sidewalks, is another display of low invasive plants. Their hardiness, stubbornness and prettiness deserve a close look and perhaps our admiration.

The first one showing off its yellow rayless flowers and finely-cut leaves is the pineapple-weed of the composite family. It could reach one foot or more under ideal conditions and is very attractive in a flower arrangement. When broken, the plant gives off a pineapple aroma. Now, here is the common groundsel also of the composite family. The leaves are coarse and toothed. The rayless flowers are yellow. The minute fruits, equipped with silken down tufts, fly off at the whim of the wind. Next we come upon the black medic of the pea family. The tiny pea-like yellow flowers are soon replaced by black seed pods. This weed is considered bothersome and is not easily eradicated. Further along, in a shady spot, the yellow sorrel of the wood-sorrel family grows tenaciously. Its underground runners can grow up to two feet. The delicate flowers and the clover-like leaflets which fold at night are very lovely.

The shepherd's purse of the mustard family now comes into view. It is indeed prolific. The clusters of dainty white flowers, which bloom through three seasons, are quite pretty as are the heart-shaped capsules which fill with reddish seeds. Then the common plantain of the plantain family makes its appearance. Slender stalks topped with greenish flowers rise from ground-hugging rosettes. It is said that the leaves contain more vitamins than spinach. The tiny seeds are relished by birds. But to the lawnkeeper, it is just another troublesome weed. Next on our list, the prostrate knotweed of the buckwheat family is widespread and aggressive. It grows in dense spikes which bear miniscule pale green flowers decorated with pink tips.

Those are some of the weeds we observed on our journey around the block. Upon close examination, we found beauty in these humble plants. Undoubtedly there is a purpose for their existence, if none other than to test the gardener's mettle.

Therese Paradis

□

STAIRS CAN SAVE

"Take the stairs" -- a common exercise tip -- can help keep off pounds and even extend your life. One study showed covering two flights of stairs daily can result in a loss of up to 10 pounds a year. Other findings indicate using the stairs 10 minutes per day can add one to two years to your life. However, when people were given a choice between riding an escalator or taking an adjacent flight of stairs, 95 per cent of people take the escalator.

from an article by Michael Kesterton in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, August 17, 2000

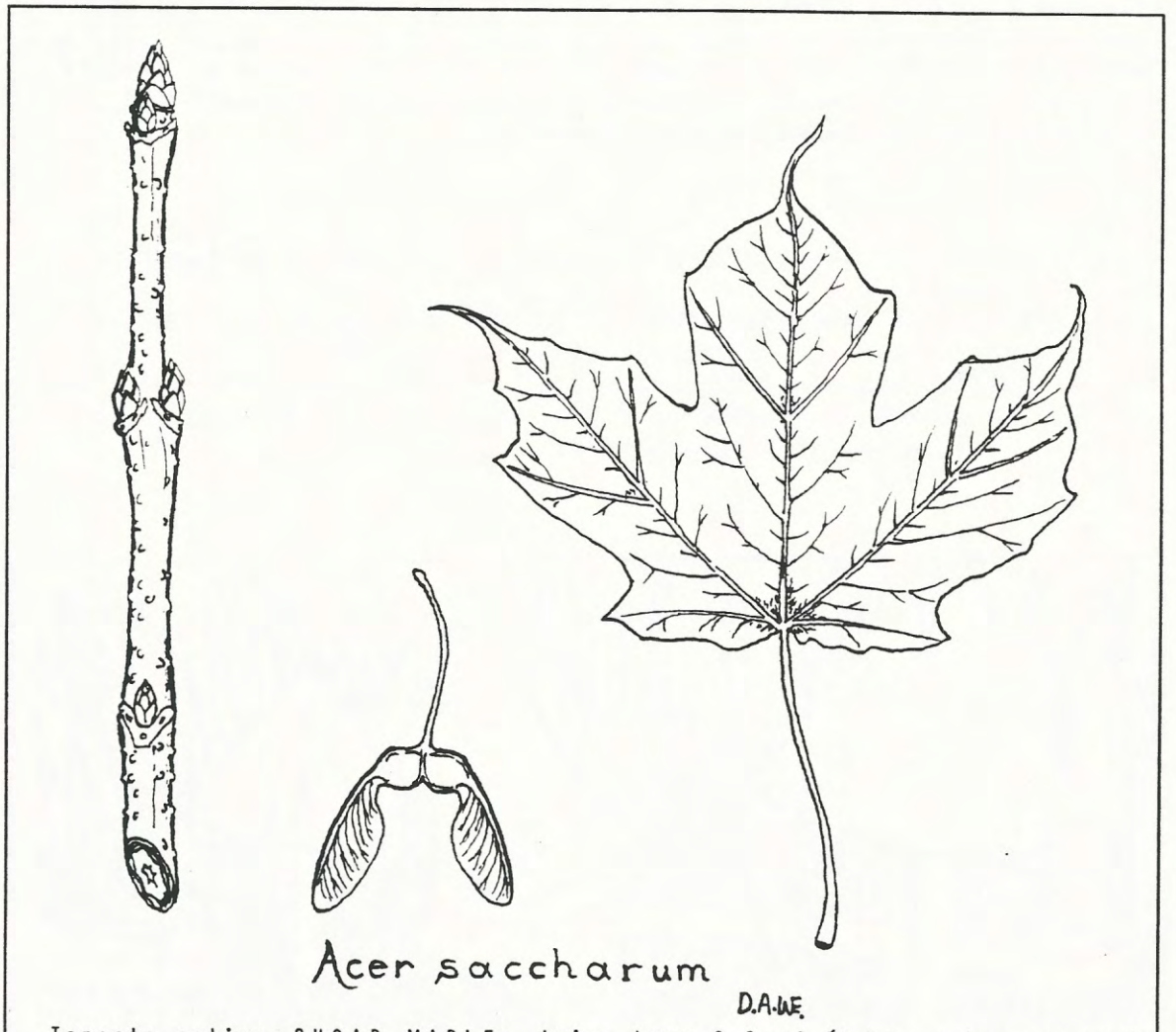
THE TREES OF MOUNT PLEASANT CEMETERY

The Sakhalin fir (Abies sachalinensis) is one of the more unusual trees found in Mount Pleasant. It comes from a Russian island which almost connects to Japan. The needles are notched at the end and have two white bands on the underside. This gives the foliage a beautiful tone. It is apple green on top and bluish white underneath. The tree found in the cemetery is very large, possibly 50 feet high and the bole is about a foot in diameter. It is located in Section J. It is surprising to me that such a rare tree in this country was planted so long ago. I am assuming this because of the size of the tree. The British discovered this tree in 1879 so it could not have been widely available for more than 100 years. This is a tree you will not find planted on lawns very often, although it seems to thrive here and is very attractive.

Roger Powley

P.S. The common name may also be spelled with a "c" although the island is spelled with a "k" in my atlas. This indicates the "c" is hard and the "ch" is not the common English pronunciation.

R.P. □



Toronto native SUGAR MAPLE: twig, keys & leaf (by D. Andrew White)

WHICH IS WHICH - BROWN SNAKE OR RINGNECK?

We thought we had a northern ringneck snake for our Toronto records (TFN 495:8:NOV 2000) but after looking it up, our reporter decided it was, in fact, a young northern brown snake which has a pale neck-ring - differing from the belly-colour. The northern ringneck, whether adult or young, has a bright yellow or orange neck-ring matching its belly.

The only illustration we could find of a young brown snake, with its collar, was in the PETERSON FIRST GUIDE TO REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS, Houghton Mifflin 1992, though all our books on reptiles of Ontario and of Toronto mention it in the text. However, not all of them treat it as an identification pitfall and it may not make enough of an impression to be recalled years later in the field. (More use of the phrase, "not to be confused with", or some such expedient in the text would be of help in a case like this.)

We have no recent sightings of the shy, nocturnal northern ringneck snake in Toronto; the habitat of the snake and its salamander prey has dwindled. It's a case where amphibian decline can result in reptile decline. Another reason to hope that, with enough awareness and vigilance, our wetlands can still recover.

Diana Banville

Ref.: AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES IN METROPOLITAN TORONTO by Bob Johnson, TFN 1983
FAMIILIAR AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES OF ONTARIO by Bob Johnson, Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc. 1989
ONTARIO SNAKES by Barbara Froom, a 1967 Ontario Government booklet
THE SNAKES OF ONTARIO by E.B.S. Logier of the Royal Ontario Museum, U. of T. Press 1958.

IN THE NEWS

LOONS AT THE MERCY OF MERCURY

Ontario's loons have become less common in southern Ontario. Last fall, hundreds of dead loons and thousands of red-breasted mergansers, another fish-eater, washed up on the shores of Lake Huron. Even in Ontario's more pristine northern areas, 30 per cent of the lakes have fish with mercury concentrations that impair loons' reproduction, according to Canadian Wildlife Service researchers. After a sharp decline in the early 1990s, Ontario's mercury emissions are trending upward again because the province has doubled its use of coal to generate electricity in the past few years. Mercury emissions from coal power have jumped 21 per cent from 1995 to 1999.

Emissions, usually in the form of elemental mercury, return to earth as precipitation -- mercury rain. It ends up in aquatic ecosystems hundreds and even thousands of kilometres away. Northern areas, the Arctic in particular, are prime collection areas. Bacteria transform the elemental mercury particles into a highly toxic organic form called methyl mercury. Organisms at the bottom of the food chain become contaminated and mercury works its way up the food chain, with fish acquiring high levels of methyl mercury in what's called bioconcentration.

Lead poisoning from sinkers and jibs -- Canadian scientists estimate that about 500 tonnes are lost every year -- is an ongoing problem. Fishing line and commercial fishing nets are also significant causes of loon deaths. And they get shot as well.

Premature deaths in a species that lives 20 to 25 years has long-term implications for the entire population. Loons are not prolific breeders -- a pair usually hatches one or two young and mortality can be high. Mercury-laden loons suffer from immune system suppression, loss of genetic diversity and endocrine disruption -- all known mercury side effects. Mercury is also inherited. A mother loon passes some of her mercury to her embryonic chicks. Those that survive are born with mercury in their muscles and bones -- and are then fed fish containing mercury. Chicks born with high but sub-lethal doses of mercury act differently: excessive preening and less riding on their parents' backs.

There are scrubbers that would reduce mercury emissions from coal-fired generating plants by 90 per cent. Or plants could be converted to burn natural gas. The only thing preventing either course of action is money and the political will.

extracted from an article by Stephen Leahy in THE TORONTO STAR, September 16, 2000

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On a branch high up,
no shelter from this cold breeze,
leaves like unwise birds.

Haiku by Arthur Wade

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

DON RIVER ISN'T MUCH CLEANER, REPORT SAYS

The state of the Don River is murkier than ever. Few improvements have been made in the quality of the river in the past three years says a new report. The Don Watershed Regeneration Council released an assessment of the Don River called A Time for Bold Steps: The Don Watershed Report Card 2000. The report analyzed 18 aspects of the river, ranging from water quality to protection efforts, and found improvements in just four categories since the last study in 1997:

- Efforts to reduce stormwater runoff into the river.
- The addition of nearly four kilometres of new riverbank vegetation.
- Regeneration projects -- 130 in the past three years, involving 9,000 volunteers -- that ranged from tree plantings to the restoration of the Don Valley Brick Yard.
- Spotty but progressive municipal programs, such as Toronto's new sewer use bylaw that will reduce industrial pollution.

The report revealed two failures:

- The inability to control the flow of the river because of quick runoff in urban areas that causes serious erosion damage.
- Continued high pollution levels, making it unfit for swimming and made worse by provincial cuts that eliminated water quality testing for E.coli bacteria, found in human and animal waste.

Runoff flowing into storm sewers includes lawn fertilizer, salt and greases from roads, cancer-causing benzene from vehicle exhausts, illegally dumped oils and paints, and animal waste.

extracted from an article by Brian McAndrew in THE TORONTO STAR, October 12, 2000

MEGA MUSHROOM

A huge record-breaking mushroom was found near the city of Mayres in south-east France by three amateur mushroom specialists. The whopping Sparasis crispa weighed in at 28.8 kg, breaking the previous record of 13.5 kg. Sparasis crispa is a parasitic forest mushroom also found in the U.S. Pacific Northwest.

extracted from Earthweek: Diary of the Planet by Steve Newman in THE TORONTO STAR, October 14, 2000 ▷

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

BOAT PEOPLE

Toronto wants to limit the number of "live aboard" residents of yachts, cabin cruisers and houseboats in Toronto marinas. If the city has its way, only 10 per cent of the marina slips will be used year round. Bluffer's Park marina has about 90 boats of various kinds used as year-round residences. The 10 per cent cap would cut the live-aboards to 42. The city staff is concerned about emergency access to the docks in case of a fire or accident, as well as the environment and public health. The residents have to use the pump-out facilities of the marina for waste disposal. Bluffer's Park marina's waste is pushed through its own pumps uphill into the city sewage system. A portion of the residents' rents goes to taxes as they would for a tenant in an apartment building.

extracted from an article by Larry Johnston in the BLUFFS MONITOR, October 2000

TOXIC CHEMICALS FOUND IN URBAN GRIME

Trace amounts of long-banned toxic contaminants such as PCBs have been found on dirty windows and urban roads and these toxins are affecting our environment and our health. Not enough attention has been paid to toxins in urban areas and the role impervious surfaces such as sidewalks, roads and windows play in the distribution of toxic chemicals. These grimy layers trap more than what you would suspect. This discovery has widespread implications for the ecotoxicity of urban areas. It would make one more cautious about growing vegetables downtown and ensuring that soils are relatively new and clean in children's playgrounds. In the future, greasy film on windows could be used as a cost-effective method of monitoring air pollutants.

from an article by Sue Toye in the UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO BULLETIN, Sept. 11, 2000

ERIE FISH, BIRD DIE-OFFS NATURE'S BALANCING ACT

Botulism is the suspected cause of a bird kill that followed massive fish fatalities on Lake Erie near West Lorne in August, 2000. Dozens of birds -- mostly gulls, plus some herons, ducks and Canada geese -- were found dead or dying Tuesday beside thousands of fish that had washed ashore after a large storm. The birds feasted on the smorgasbord of thousands of dead and rotting fish. The fish, accustomed to warm, oxygenated water near shore, evidently died when the lake "turned over" – in effect, they drowned when storms replaced their habitat with cold, less oxygenated water. After they washed ashore they were exposed to air,which can accelerate the growth of a toxic botulism bacteria that lies dormant in some fish. Some of the dead ducks and geese probably became infected from eating the insects and parasites that fed on the fish. This die-off is similar to an incident almost a year ago, when more than 1,000 dead ducks and loons washed up on the shores of Lake Huron near Ipperwash and Lake Erie near Erieau. Tests on those birds showed they died of type E avian botulism.

extracted from an article by Debora Van Brenk in the LONDON FREE PRESS, Aug. 18, 2000

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

EARLY ENVIRONMENTALIST [RECEIVES] TOP HONOURS

Naturalist (and TFN member) Murray Speirs, 91, was appointed to the Order of Canada for his life's work on November 6, 2000.

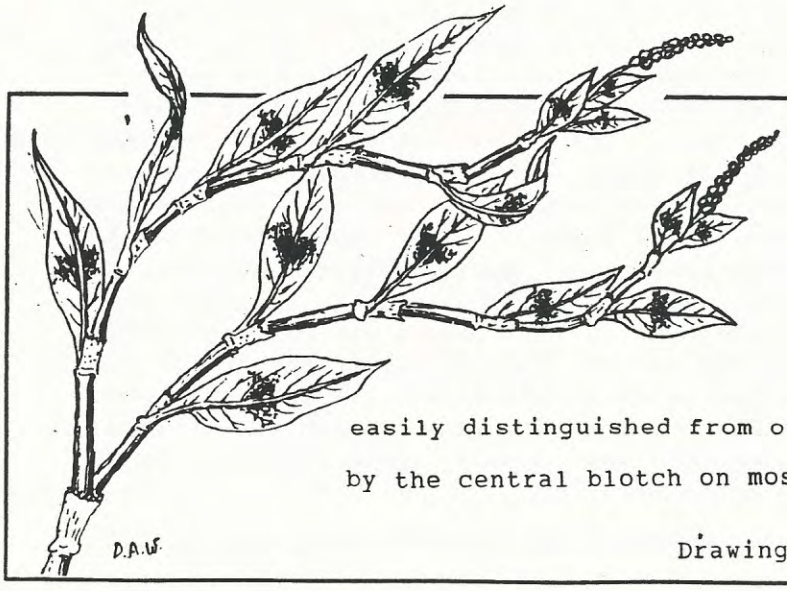
Speirs' passion for the environment and all things living blossomed at the age of 6, after he borrowed a bird field guide from his older brother. It was the first step in a distinguished career that culminated in publishing two major ornithology texts and donating his own land for ecological research.

During the war, he taught physics at a U.S. military school, did research at the Hopkins Marine Biological Station in Pacific Grove, California, and was a meteorologist for the transport department and Royal Air Force.

He did some of the early research into the effects of DDT and worked on ruffed grouse reintroduction programs for the Ontario government in the mid-40s. Eventually, he put down roots at the U of T in 1947, where he taught zoology until his mid-1970s retirement. But his true love remained the simple beauty of the outdoors and all the wonderful living creatures -- especially birds -- that filled it. "He was a protector of the environment long before it became an issue," says niece and retired Toronto Star reporter Rosemary Speirs. "When I was young, I remember him explaining the concept of ecology. He'd tell me: "'Ekos' means house in Greek, and one should never spoil one's own home.'"

In 1995, the Toronto-born Speirs donated his property as an ecological reserve. Now under the jurisdiction of the Toronto Regional Conservation Authority and part of the Altona Forest, the reserve is a site for year-round research on the environment.

extracted from an article by Paul Irish in THE TORONTO STAR, dated Nov. 6, 2000



The familiar

"LADY'S THUMB"

from Europe, established in Toronto,

easily distinguished from our native "smartweeds" by the central blotch on most leaves.

Drawing by D. Andrew White.

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

ROUGE PARK GROWS WITH ADDED ACRES

The Rouge Park became a little larger in mid-October. Nearly 40 acres of land adjacent to the park has been purchased for $2.2 million from the developer who had planned to build more than 30 homes on the parcel. Money for the purchase came jointly from the provincial and city governments. The northern eight acres of the land in question had been pegged for a 34-house subdivision. It is situated on the south side of Old Finch Avenue between the Toronto Zoo and an abandoned highway right-of-way that the province is transferring to the Rouge Park Alliance. The balance of the 38.9 acres of land is either in the valley or is too isolated to be developed. With publicly-owned land on all four sides of the proposed development area, environmentalists, zoo officials and the park alliance said it makes more sense to bring it into public ownership as well.

extracted from an article by Stuart Green in the SCARBOROUGH MIRROR, Oct. 18, 2000

ROUGE PARK PROJECT DENIED; CONSERVATIONISTS CELEBRATE

After months of protest by conservation groups, the Ontario Municipal Board last week rejected an appeal by a developer to build two condominium towers and 70 bungalow units beside the Amos Ponds in Pickering, at the eastern edge of Rouge Park. Opponents, including representatives of the Town of Pickering and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, testified in the OMB hearings that the 8.5-hectare site north of Finch Avenue is important to the health of Rouge Park and for wildlife that use the forest as a migration route. The developer said he did not intend to appeal the decision. A coalition of environment groups is now calling for the site, as well as about 400 hectares of privately-owned land between Rouge Park and Altona Forest along Duffin's Creek to the east, to be protected permanently by adding them to the park.

extracted from an article by Wallace Immen in the GLOBE & MAIL, Oct. 30, 2000

NIAGARA ESCARPMENT

After sitting on the file for over a year, the Ontario Cabinet has completely rejected the proposal for a major winery resort (proposed by the Niagara Land Company) at the edge of the Niagara Escarpment forest near Vineland! The surprise decision came at the end of June. It was a surprise because two of the components of the proposal -- a winery and a restaurant -- are already permitted by the Niagara Escarpment Plan, and because both the Niagara Escarpment Commission and an independent hearing board supported the proposal. However, the proponent wanted the resort idea treated as a single package, and he lost it ALL at Cabinet. It's a great victory for Escarpment-watchers. The Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment (CONE) led the charge against the resort. Ric Symmes wrote a letter to Premier Harris congratulating Cabinet for making the right decision. Sometimes we DO make a real difference, and it feels great!

from WEST HUMBER NATURALISTS Newsletter September 2000

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

CAWTHRA RECEIVES WETLAND STATUS

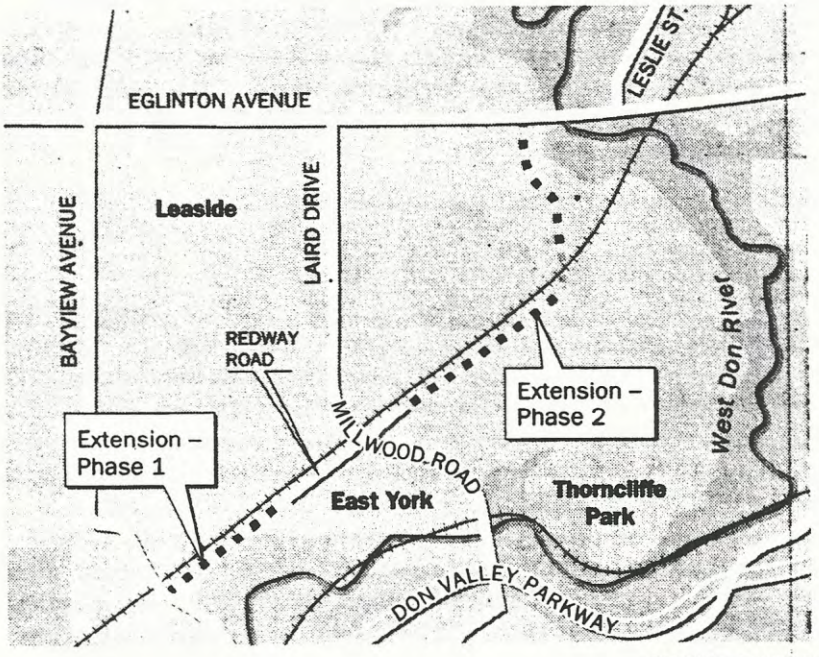
The Cawthra Woods is also the Cawthra Wetlands. After a review by an environmental consultant, Ministry of Natural Resources has determined that the Cawthra Bush, south of the Queen Elizabeth Way and east of Cawthra Rd., is a provincially significant wetland. That means it joins Rattray Marsh and Creditview Wetlands as areas with a score high enough, based on its ecosystem, flora, fauna, and social value to be called provincially significant. The evaluation indicates that the dozen small wetlands in the woodlot, which are a combined 6.75 hectares in size, deserve the protection that goes along with the provincially significant wetland designation. Mississauga's City Plan prevents development of any kind in provincially significant wetlands larger than two hectares in size.

from an article by John Stewart in THE MISSISSAUGA NEWS, August 31, 2000

PLANS FOR LESLIE STREET EXTENSION SCALED BACK

Support has fizzled for a road extension that many said would be the first leg in the construction of the controversial Leslie Street Extension. A plan for an environmental assessment to study the impact of extending Redway Road southwest to connect with Bayview Avenue has met such opposition that the area councillor said she has scaled down her proposal and is now asking only for a traffic study. Environmentalists have argued the extension would cut a swath through Crother's Woods, an important woodlot.

extracted from an article by Gay Abbate in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, October 7, 2000



The Globe and Mail

PROJECTS

NEED FUNDING FOR YOUR BIRD PROJECT?

The James L. Baillie Memorial Fund offers two types of grants:
(1) projects that involve research or education or that contribute to the preservation of Canadian birds; or
(2) a special 5-year program (1999-2003) supports migration monitoring stations that monitor Canadian landbirds during their migrations. The Fund supports projects that involve volunteers in education, research or data collection. Support of graduate student research projects is not a priority. Individuals or organizations can apply. Grants range from $200 to $3,000 and average about $1,000. Next deadline for applications is January 26, 2001.

Applications (in PDF format) and information about the James L. Baillie Memorial Fund can be found on Bird Studies Canada's website at: www.bsc-eoc.org/jlbmf.html
For more information contact: Jane Wilson-Kendrick, Secretary, James L. Baillie Memorial Fund, Bird Studies Canada, Box 160, Port Rowan, Ontario N0E 1M0 (Tel: (519)586-3531 ext. 217 e-mail: jwilson@bsc-eoc.org).

TRUMPETER SWAN RESTORATION

A vital component of this program is the prompt recording and reporting of wing tag numbers on these birds. Many birders and naturalists have contributed in this way, so if you see a trumpeter swan with a numbered wing tag, please report the number, the date and location to Harry G. Lumsden, 144 Hillview Rd., Aurora, Ont. L4G 2M5 or call him at 905-727-6492.

GOOD NEWS SHOULD BE ACKNOWLEDGED.

There has been considerable good news on environmental issues recently. (See NEWS section, pages 22 to 24.)

Please acknowledge this in writing to your elected representatives. Don't forget to send a copy to the appropriate mayor, premier or prime minister as well. □

FROM THE PAST

WELLS POLLUTED, TESTS SHOW

Nearly 40 per cent of the wells tested in a survey of drinking water in rural Ontario are so polluted with farm chemicals and bacteria that the water is not fit to drink. The results are from Ontario's first comprehensive groundwater-quality survey, which sampled 1,300 rural wells in heavily cultivated areas of the province last winter.

from THE GLOBE & MAIL, Nov. 5, 1992 □

Comment: Yes, the date was 1992! We found this in our files!

THE UBIQUITOUS DOWNY

We have been fortunate enough to have a pair of these birds frequent our feeders over the past two or three years. They tolerate human presence to within a few feet, ideal for an artist such as myself, who keeps the feeders stocked and his "models" and their families quite happy!

Brat-at-at-at-at-at! A familiar sound to many who frequent the ravine systems and woodlands that surround us here in Toronto, and thankfully (as in North America as a whole) a familiar sight is the downy woodpecker. Up to 30 beats can be hammered out over the course of a few seconds, the length depending on the individual. This "drumming" is used as a means of communication within the species and has both breeding and territorial uses (as well as giving us humans a good idea of where the bird is!), a long-distance invitation or warning if you like, depending on who is at the receiving end.

In summer, the downy feasts on a diet of insects and larvae. I have watched one of these industrious workers chipping away at an infested snag for 30 minutes... boring incessantly into the same spot in search of the destructive brood lying buried beneath. You can almost feel the determination of the bird, as crevices are explored and dead bark dislocated until he finally finds his reward! During the winter, they will happily frequent our feeders (often travelling with a group of chickadees) taking particular advantage of any suet that is offered and enjoying the occasional treat of peanut-butter.

Picoides pubescens is their scientific name. Picoides refers to the Picidae family, so named after Picus, who in Greek mythology was the son of Saturn, and god of the forest. As it is told, the enchantress Circe fell head over heels for Picus, but unfortunately the feeling wasn't mutual, and Circe, aggrieved at being rejected, turned Picus into a woodpecker... so maybe that is where our vivacious downy inherited his noble characteristics! Pubescens probably refers to the soft, downy appearance of the bird's feathers and its teenage happy-go-lucky attitude, going about its day-to-day routine... a mischievous characteristic I hope to have captured in my drawing of the ubiquitous downy.

Alan W. Power

How late this first snow!
A young child investigates -
seems new to me too.

Haiku by Diana Banville
December 17, 1998

THE WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

December 1999, Toronto

December was another quiet, mild, uneventful month, perhaps 2°-3°C above the long-term normal but close to the normal of the past ten years. It was in many ways a repeat of the previous year with a long period of mild temperatures and abundant sunshine followed by some colder weather around Christmas. It was not quite so sunny or mild as 1998, however, and Pearson Airport had the highest mean wind speed since 1988. The sunshine total of over 100 hours was still impressive for December.

While most of the earlier part of the fall had near-normal precipitation, dry conditions returned in December. Snowfall of 8.6 cm at Pearson was comparable to last year, while downtown only recorded 3.8 cm -- just over one-tenth of normal and the lowest since 1993. Total precipitation was in the 30 mm range, less than half normal. Pearson's 26.5 mm was the lowest since 1989.

January 2000, Toronto

The new millennium arrived on a continuing mild and dry note, but within two weeks there were some surprises in store.

Temperatures of 12°+C (on January 2nd) were in record-breaking territory, but Torontonians were by now so inured to much milder-than-normal conditions that these temperatures did not attract too much attention. The huge ridge over the continent which had supported these conditions began to show some weakness after the first week of January, and the long-forgotten Arctic showed some signs of life. The first sign of the intensifying weather was unusual January thunder on the afternoon of January 10th. The cold weather moved first into the Prairie provinces, with the first pulse reaching southern Ontario on Jan. 13th. Three days later, a positively fierce Arctic outbreak moved in, and readings below -20°C occurred throughout the city on Jan. 17th and Jan. 21st. It was almost as cold on Jan. 27th. High wind chills occurred intermittently. Snowfall was light but frequent, and included some lake effect on Jan. 18th. Temperatures rose above freezing for only a few hours in total after Jan. 12th, making for the most extended spell of decidedly cold weather since 1994, though it would not have been considered noteworthy in the 1970s or 1980s.

The cold weather almost cancelled out the effects of the earlier record warmth, making monthly averages near or just a hair above the 30-year average (1971-2000). Pearson Airport's mean minimum temperature of -10.5°C was actually 0.1°C below the thirty-year average, thus being the first below-normal monthly temperature statistic there since November, 1997! Ice covered Toronto Harbour and most of Lake Erie, an event which used to be normal.

▷

THE WEATHER (cont'd)

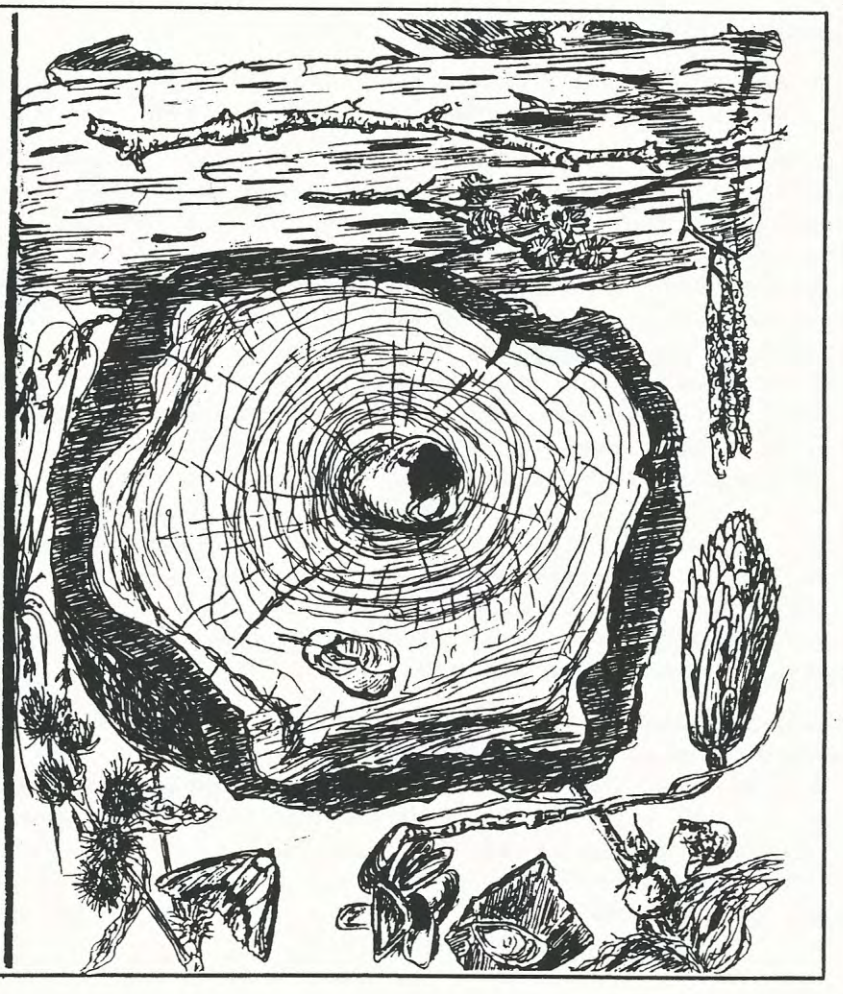
January was dry by any account. Total precipitation downtown was 28.4 mm, the lowest since 1981, while at Pearson it was 29.2, the lowest since 1989. Both rain and snow were relatively modest, in spite of the thunderstorm on Jan. 10th and the frequent light snows later on. Pearson Airport's 17.6 cm of snow was the lowest since 1990. Downtown got a bit more from the lake effect on Jan. 18th. There was a very thin but continuous snow cover from Jan. 13th on, which barely provided protection for the ground from the cold weather. The quick freezing of the ground actually produced peculiar noises in parts of Ontario. Great Lakes levels continued to decline.

In keeping with most of 1998 and 1999, sunshine was abundant, with 117.6 hours downtown being the highest since the same value in 1973.

Gavin Miller

□

A BLACK CHERRY LOG with shell of robin's-egg and maple key form the centre of this collage-style drawing by Joanne Doucette of natural objects found around Toronto - from bark to twigs to fruit of tulip-tree, burdock and rose - to fruiting twig and male catkins of black alder, woolgrass sedge, pods, shells and a moth.



COMING EVENTS

Toronto Ornithological Club - Jim Baillie Memorial Bird Walks - aimed at the intermediate birder. Beginners also welcome. Free.

- Sat. Dec. 9, 2000 - Waterfowl - West Toronto lakeshore or beyond from 8:30 am (all day) with Jean Iron. Meet in the parking lot at Humber Bay Park East. Bring a lunch, Carpool if necessary.
- Christmas Bird Count (Dec. 30). Call Alfred Adamo at 905-238-5166 for details.
- Winter Waterfowl Count. Call Bill Edmunds at 905-731-7551 for details.

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

- Dec. 3 - Young people's science show: fun with physics
- Jan. 21 - to be announced
- Jan. 28 - to be announced

Call 977-2983 for more information.

Toronto Entomologist's Association meeting - Sat. Jan. 27 at 1 pm in the Northrop Frye Building, 73 Queen's Park Cres. East, Room 113 - Butterflies of Costa Rica with Richard Tanner. Call Alan Hanks at 905-727-6993 for information about membership.

Toronto Wildflower Society meeting - Jan. 24, 2001 at 7:30 pm in the Beaches Recreation Centre, Williamson Road. Call 222-5736 for details about program and membership.

Ian Wheal Heritage Walks

- Jan. 6 at 1 pm at the Rosedale subway station entrance. (Rosedale Springs)
- Jan. 20 - Centennial Park greenhouses at 1 pm. Meet at the northeast corner of Rathburn Rd. and Elmcrest Rd.

□

WILLOW "PINE-CONE" GALL on WILLOW TWIG

drawn by D. Andrew White, August 5, 2000, Seaton Trail

A fly which deposits one egg into a terminal bud causes this gall which is surrounded by aborted leaves. In fact, the fly is specifically named "strobiloides" because of the strobile, or cone, produced.

Ref. A. Cosens, "A contribution to the morphology and biology of insect galls" in TRANSACTIONS OF THE CANADIAN INSTITUTE No.22, Vol. IX Part 3, November 1912.

TFN 496 - 30

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OTHER PUBLICATIONS

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB:
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CHECKLIST OF PLANTS IN FOUR TORONTO PARKS;
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Metropolitan Toronto's important natural areas
are described and recommendations given for
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TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' RAVINE SURVEYS..... ea $ 4.00
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Survey #2 – Brookbanks Ravine, 1974
Survey #3 – Chapman Valley Ravine, 1975
Survey #4 – Wigmore Ravine, 1975
Survey #5 – Park Drive Ravine, 1976
Survey #6 – Burke Ravine, 1976
Survey #7 – Taylor Creek-Woodbine Bridge Ravines, 1977
Survey #8 – West Don Valley, 1978

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