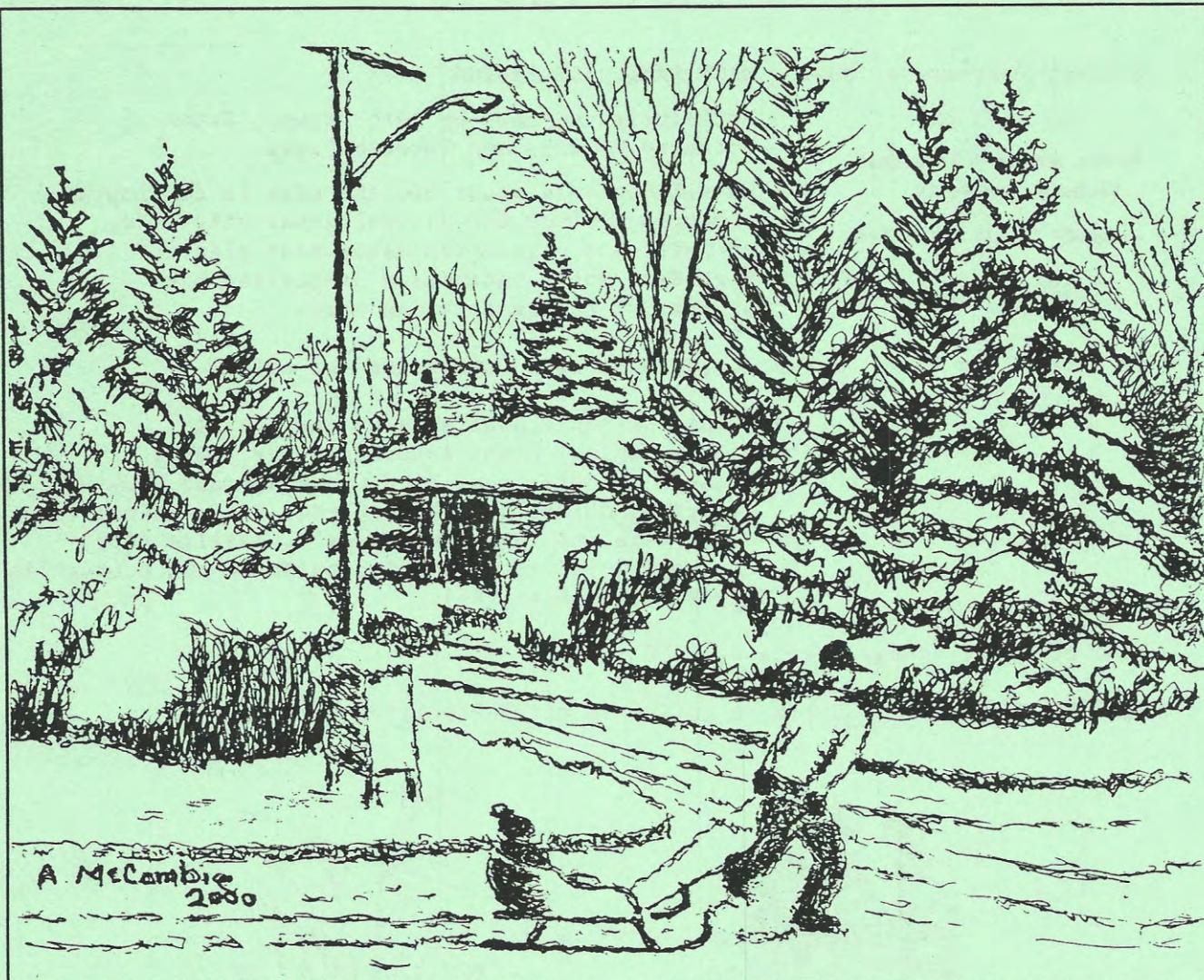


TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 497

February 2001



The Urban Forest - Bayview Village, Toronto

drawing by Alen McCombie

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TFN MEETINGS

Sunday, February 4, 2001 - HIGH PARK RESTORATION

at 2:30 pm

in the Northrop Frye Hall
Victoria University
73 Queen's Park Cres. East

VISITORS WELCOME!

- an illustrated talk by Beth McEwen, Urban Forestry Co-ordinator, Toronto Parks.
- We will be told about how the city is developing management plans for natural areas city-wide, as well as a vegetation management plan for High Park which includes a prescribed burn as part of the restoration work.

at 2 pm

- + social hour with free juice and coffee
- + a sale of books published by the Toronto Ornithological Club: Ashbridges Bay (\$20), Greater Toronto Areas Bird Checklist and [page 10] Reporting Guidelines (\$8), Birder Extraordinaire - the life and legacy of James L. Baillie (\$5), Visitors Guide to Oshawa Second Marsh and McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Area (\$6).

NEXT MEETING: Sunday, March 4, 2000

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



NORWAY SPRUCE can be distinguished from white spruce by its drooping branches as in this snow scene by Kittie Fells dating from 1966.

Both are planted in Toronto.

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.

- Thursday ALLAN GARDENS - exotic flora Toronto
 Feb. 1 Leader: Helen Juhola
 2 pm Meet at the entrance to the greenhouses (on the south side of
 Carlton St. just east of Jarvis St.).
 These historic buildings contain a fine collection of plants from all over
 the world.
- Saturday NORTHERN DISTRICT LIBRARY- nature arts (photography) Toronto
 Feb. 3 Leader: Robin Powell
 2 pm Meet at the library (on Orchard View Blvd.) just west of Yonge
 St., one block north of Eglinton Ave., on the second floor.
 Bring your own nature slides, as many as 20, or just come and enjoy looking.
 A projector and screen will be provided. If you have any questions, please
 call the TFN office at 593-2656. Snap shots are also welcome.
- Sunday TFN MEETING (See page 2 for details.)
 Feb. 4
 2:30 pm
- Thursday CENTENNIAL PARK - nature walk Etobicoke Cr., Etobicoke
 Feb. 8 Leader: Ann Millett
 10:30 am Meet at the entrance to the greenhouses (on the east side of
 Elmcrest Rd. north of Rathburn Rd.). Bring lunch.
 There's lots to see in the greenhouses and if the weather is right there's
 lots to see outside.
- Saturday TFN NATURE RESERVE - winter in the country northeast of Toronto
 Feb. 10 Leader: Joanne Doucette Bring snowshoes.
 10 am Call 461-6811 for more information. Carpooling. We will be
 back in Toronto by about 5 pm. Dress warmly and carry a lunch.
- Wednesday PINE HILLS CEMETERY - nature walk Taylor Cr., Scarborough
 Feb. 14 Leader: Karin Fawthrop
 10:30 am Meet at the northwest corner of St. Clair Ave. East and
 Kennedy Rd. Bring a snack.
 This property has a fine collection of trees and shrubs where many winter
 birds find food and shelter. Level walking on cleared roads.

FOR OTHER WALKS AND EVENTS, SEE PAGE 27.

FEBRUARY OUTINGS (cont'd)

- Sunday LOST CREEKS & WILDLIFE - urban ecology Toronto
 Feb. 18 Leader: Anne Marie Lewis
 2 pm Meet at the Sherbourne subway station.
 We will be wandering through the urban jungle looking for signs of lost landscapes and surviving wildlife. The walk will end at the Riverdale Farm where hot cider will be available. This is a joint outing with the North Toronto Green Community.
- Tuesday HUMBER BAY PARK - winter birds Lakeshore, Etobicoke
 Feb. 20 Leader: Margaret Catto
 10:30 am Meet at the park entrance on the south side of Lake Shore Blvd. West and Park Lawn Rd. Morning only.
 This can be a very cold place to visit so dress warmly. Bring binoculars and something warm to drink.
- Saturday ROUGE VALLEY - nature walk Rouge, Scarborough
 Feb. 24 Leaders: Murray & Carol Seymour
 10:30 am Meet at the Pearse House which is on the east side of Meadowvale Rd. north of Sheppard Ave. East. Bring lunch.
 This will be a walk through fields and woodlands. We will be looking for winter birds and mammal tracks. Some hills to climb.
- Sunday CLOVER HILL - heritage walk Toronto
 Feb. 25 Leader: Ian Wheal
 11 am Meet at the Wellesley subway station. Bring lunch.
 This walk will be along city streets. We will explore the grounds of St. Michael's College and the adjacent neighbourhood.
- Wednesday EASTERN BEACHES - heritage walk Lakeshore, Toronto
 Feb. 28 Leader: Boris Mather
 1:30 pm Meet at the east end of the Queen streetcar line at Neville Pk. Blvd.
 We will be walking west along the beach and/or city streets. There is much of interest for naturalists in this neighbourhood -- large oak trees and wintering birds, as well as much human history. □

A RARE BIRD

A recent TFN outing ended with refreshments at the restaurant in High Park. The waitress, no doubt noting our binoculars, asked if we had seen any rare birds on our walk.

"Yes", I replied, "we saw a great egret on a pond in the park".

"That is a rare bird", she replied. "I have a rare bird myself -- a mynah. I do, really -- and do you know what?" she asked. "My father-in-law has taught the mynah to whistle the Italian Communist Party anthem".

I had to laugh, and agree that she did, indeed, have a rare bird.

Doug Paton

KEEPING IN TOUCH

October 30, 2000

I took up golf last summer and started playing at the Don Valley Golf Course, situated at Yonge and highway 401. I chose this course because it is near public transport and because it is "tough and gruelling", as a newspaper article said. However, a surprise third attraction for me is the wildlife. I have seen red-tail hawks, great blue herons, myriads of dragonflies and damsel flies. Once, while fetching a ball near a rocky stream, I came across a large garter snake that had been enjoying the sun there. Red foxes abound. They come out of the woods and trot by the fairways for awhile before disappearing back into the woods. A couple of them are near the snack bar at the tenth tee. People have obviously been feeding them, because they will come as close as 10 ft. or so, looking very wary. They are a beautiful sight, seen close up! Now, if I could just get my eyes on the ball...

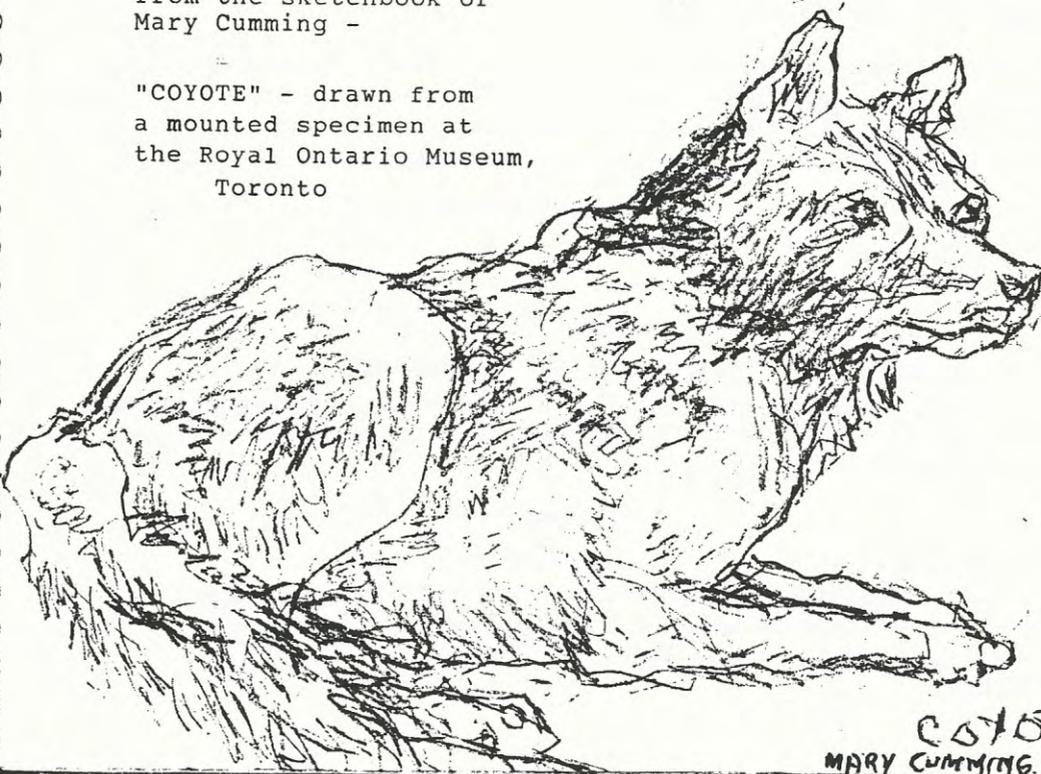
Ann H. Atkinson

▽

[See pages 16-17 for a Toronto coyote story.]

from the sketchbook of
Mary Cumming -

"COYOTE" - drawn from
a mounted specimen at
the Royal Ontario Museum,
Toronto



COYOTE
MARY CUMMING R.O.M.

KEEPING IN TOUCH (cont'd)

November 2, 2000

Re: PILEATED WOODPECKER, et al

At 3 p.m. on Friday, October 27, 2000 we (myself, Nancy Fredenburg, Helen Juhola, Mildred Maasland, Ruth Munson) were at the Donwood Institute (at the north end of Brentcliffe Rd.) looking down into the valley where Burke Brook meets the West Don. Suddenly, a red fox appeared, climbing up the ravine slope towards us, turning away before it got to us; as we watched the fox, a dragonfly flew over our heads and a red squirrel climbed up a nearby deciduous tree.

Then Helen heard, and identified the call of, a pileated woodpecker which we all saw flying a moment later, disappearing into the treetop foliage. We found it a few minutes later sitting in a Manitoba maple plucking with its beak and eating, one at a time, the fruits of a riverbank grape which had twined along the branch the bird was sitting on. The woodpecker ignored a red squirrel which climbed up the tree and clambered along the branches nearby. We were then standing under the tree, 15 feet below the woodpecker, which ignored us too.

Sandy Cappell

November 3, 2000

Re: MONARCH BUTTERFLY IN NOVEMBER

At 3 p.m. e.s.t. on November 3, 2000, we (me, Nancy Fredenburg, Helen Juhola, Ruth Munson, Marilyn Murphy) saw a monarch butterfly in flight in the East Don Valley, just east of the DVP, a few hundred yards south of Lawrence East. It was sunny and very warm (about 16 or 17°C).

Sandy Cappell

November 13, 2000

Re: FILBERTS AND St. PHILIBERT - more on the subject

...I'm sending an excerpt from Butler's Lives of the Saints on St. Philibert, a 7th-century monk of the south-west section of France which was at the time the Duchy of Gascony. Perhaps you can convey this information to Doris Tatay.

Margaret Banville

ed. note - We have forwarded to Doris the excerpt about St. Philibert... nothing in it about the nuts named for him. Still there had to be a connection since his homeland of Gascony borders on Spain where filberts are still produced (TFN 495-8, "Germany" should read "Gascony".)

▽

KEEPING IN TOUCH (cont'd)

November 7, 2000

Re: WATERFOWL ON THE WEB

On November 1, I went on the Humber Bay Park walk led by Carol Sellers. We saw many different kinds of ducks. When I got home I looked for waterfowl identification sites on the Internet for novice birders like myself. I found the following sites to be of interest.

Ducks of the World<http://www.utm.edu/departments/ed/cece/ducks.shtml>Ducks at a distance<http://www.npwr.usgs.gov/resource/tools/duckdist/duckdist.htm>Patuxent Tools for learning about Birds<http://www.mbr.nbs.gov/bbs/ident.html>Waterfowl Identification Images<http://home.earthlink.net/~dwin/image01.htm>Waterfowl identification in the Central Flyway<http://www.npwr.usgs.gov/resource/tools/waterfowl/waterfowl.htm>

The following site might be of interest to more advanced birders.

Species, age and sex identification of ducks using wing plumage<http://www.npwr.usgs.gov/resource/tools/duckplum/duckplum.htm>

For those who want to learn the scientific names, Humboldt University has a Waterfowl identification site that not only has pictures of the waterfowl but allows you to practice matching common with scientific names and visa versa.

<http://www.humboldt.edu/~jmb7002/waterfowlid.html>

Many additional sites for waterfowl have been listed by Don Cowell and can be found at <http://home.att.net/~DanCowell/wflinks.html#>

I ended my search when I found:

Toronto and Southern Ontario birding<http://www.zoo.utoronto.ca/FUN/birds.html>

This site also links to the Toronto Field Naturalists and has up-to-date information on unusual sightings in Southern Ontario. It leads you to many other links including:

Bird Links to the world<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/links/links1.html>

which would take many hours to explore.

Mary McColl

▷

TFN BOARD NOMINATIONS INVITED

▷ The TFN is looking for people with initiative who are willing to devote time to working as members of the Board of Directors. Please send your suggestions to the Chairman of the Nominating Committee, c/o TFN, 1519 - 2 College St., Toronto, Ont. M5B 1J3. (The report of the committee will be published in the May newsletter.)

KEEPING IN TOUCH (cont'd)

November 20, 2000

My thanks to (you and) all who (continue to) work on the magazine; I always read it all. As I've mentioned before, I don't go on many outings with TFN, but I enjoy knowing they are happening because they are there to be enjoyed when I make the time to join in, and the sites mentioned reveal new spots where my husband and I can go whenever we can.

Thanks to all the volunteer leaders.

Anne Léon

November 28, 2000

FLAP rescuers have picked up over 14,000 birds since we formed the organization in 1993. Of the live birds we've handled many could not be released immediately. For some, a quiet rest at a wildlife rehabilitation centre was enough. But others required veterinary care, X-rays to determine the extent of broken bones, antibiotics to prevent infection and homeopathic remedies to speed healing. As you are well aware, all this costs money. That's why we're appealing to you today. Can you help with a donation of \$35, \$50, \$100 or more to offset the rehabilitation costs of caring for these unfortunate birds?

In the past your generous donation has enabled us to develop the Bird-Friendly Building program, publish our brochures, create a travelling display and educate people about the problem of daytime collisions with windows.

On behalf of migratory birds in jeopardy from our man-made structures, I am asking for your support today.

Carolynn Parke,
President,
Fatal Light Awareness Program
Ste.0116-207
65 Front St. Toronto, Ont.
M5J 1E6

□

Under glass, flowers
bloom, heeding distant seasons
Antipodean.

haiku by Arthur Wade
Allan Gardens, January, 1998

About my card for Christmas 2000*

As usual I have been slow in getting around to making my cards. I was stuck for a subject until an old chum from public school days said he thought the first one I drew several years ago was still the best. So I drew the scene out my dining room window again. Of course the trees have grown considerably since then. Actually they look higher than the hydro pole from my window. However, if I had drawn them that way, I would have had to shrink everything else down and the perspective would have seemed off. I added the figures from memory for fun. I've always admired wood cuts and wood engravings and I hope my technique with a fine black felt pen on white paper gives a similar effect. It has the advantage of only requiring a Xerox copier rather than a press.

Don't know whether the former owner of the house in my card got a discount from the nursery, but he rather overdid it with his tree planting. Hence the caption "*The urban forest*". He started with some pear and peach trees in his garden and then surrounded them with evergreens. You can imagine how little sunlight the fruit trees get nowadays. Folks do forget how big these evergreen trees can grow!

But the funny thing was that November and the first week of December had been very open in Toronto this year, as you know. When I made the drawing on Thursday, December 7th there was no snow in sight. Then on the night of Monday 11th we had that blizzard with 10 inches of snow. So friends have been teasing me, as though I were to blame for that somehow. But I really don't think I have that much influence on the Weatherman! If I had, I sure wouldn't pray for snow.

Alen McCombie

□

[This report refers to the drawing on the newsletter cover.]

... there can be few naturalists who don't long to express their passion for their subject. And if we don't have the courage or skill to put our feelings down on paper, we get immense pleasure from those who can.

from "Editorial" by R. Kidman Cos in BBC WILDLIFE, Vol. 18, No.8, August 2000

FOR READING

Toronto Ornithological Club - greater Toronto area bird checklist and reporting guidelines - 2000, by Glenn Coady and Roy B. H. Smith. 84 pages, 2 species illustrated. \$8.00 + \$2.00 for postage and handling. Available from: Toronto Ornithological Club, c/o Glenn Coady, 604 - 60 Mountview Avenue, Toronto, Ont. M6P 2L4

About half of this standard-letter-sized soft cover report is devoted to bibliography. It was like Christmas to me to see all those sources of Toronto bird records listed together at last! All very readable -- in good old black-and-white -- none of that tiresome print in unlikely colours superimposed on uncontrasting backgrounds we're being treated to these days. The introduction is a history of bird observation in the greater Toronto area. It includes a chronology, in table form, of checklists starting with 223 species in 1858 and ending with 390 species in 2000. Of course there is the cumulative element involved as well as a bit of the "apples-and-oranges" thing because not all lists cover the same area. The area has itself increased, surpassing the 30-mile (48 km) circle as well as the 50 km circle (deemed somehow more "metric") and broadening to take in all the rest of the municipalities in the four regions surrounding Toronto, thus abandoning the "circle" idea. A map compares these two concepts, as well as an explanation in the text.

Just a couple of unexplained items:

- (1) "Thick-billed Murre wreck" - meaning a flock of the species driven off-course? Try looking up the original meaning of the root of the word "wreck" in a good dictionary.
- (2) Barry Kent MacKay's illustration, on the title page -- my guess is "Greater Shearwater" -- it's on the checklist.

The tables of the checklist occupy 26 pages with headings and symbols accommodating the bird's name, breeding status, the numbers which are considered worthy of a report for the period and/or region in question (all tempered with common sense as recommended in the text) as well as documentation needed, existing peak numbers with dates, and note-number where applicable; twenty brief footnotes follow. A sample documentation form is included.

The Toronto Ornithological Club (TOC) itself has an interesting life-history. We're told it was established in 1934 which "provided yet another group eager to produce and document field work in the Toronto region." No doubt this was the case but none of it was published by TOC. It's astonishing that nothing was published by TOC for 50 years! Then came fledging time. Four reports were published in the last half of the 1980s, followed by the TOC newsletter in 1990 with regular reporting ever since. The GTA Bird Checklist and Reporting Guidelines -- 2000 is the next stage of the "opening-up" trend we're seeing within TOC. Anyone interested in the status of our birds will be needing a copy.

Diana Banville

▷

FOR READING (cont'd)

BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA by Kenn Kaufman, published by Houghton Mifflin, \$29.95.

The Kaufman guide is illustrated by photographs but is unlike any other bird guide using photos. The pictures have been manipulated by computer magic to produce an odd but effective result. Every beginning birder should read Kaufman's illustrated essay at the beginning of his book explaining just how much individual birds can vary within a species, in part depending on what plumage they are in and in part on how they are posed and the nature of the ambient lighting conditions. Kaufman has gone to great lengths to make his guide user-friendly. Species are arranged according to overall characteristics, not necessarily by their relationship. Text and range maps face the illustrations. The text is necessarily terse and descriptions of vocalizations and habits are not very detailed. However what is described is carefully chosen to help with species identification. The book covers all of North America. Compact and easy to use, this is a good guide by itself, or as a complement to more complete bird guides.

from an article by Barry Kent MacKay in the TORONTO STAR, Oct. 29, 2000

THE SIBLEY GUIDE TO BIRDS, written and illustrated by David Allen Sibley, published by Alfred A. Knopf, \$53.00.

The Sibley guide typically shows only one or two species per page, making it harder than necessary to compare similar species, though there are introductory pages to each family where figures are grouped for comparison. Sibley does illustrate more plumages than any other North American guide. I can't recommend this book for beginners but for experienced birders it does provide a wealth of information and tips on various identifying features not discussed in other books. If you are an ardent and experienced birder, you'll want this book to round out your collection and to provide some good reference to seldom-illustrated plumages. But if you want a field guide that you can use as a field guide, there are better choices.

from an article by Barry Kent MacKay in the TORONTO STAR, Nov.12, 2000

ALSO OF INTEREST:

Waterfalls: The Niagara Escarpment
by Jerry Lawton & Mikal Lawton
Boston Mills Press \$24.95

Nature Hikes: Near-Toronto Trails & Adventures
by Janet Eagleson
Boston Mills Press \$24.95

The other Map of Toronto
Green Tourism Association
Available free at Toronto City Hall, civic centres,
visitor information sites, and Heritage Toronto sites.

□

WHO'S WATCHING OUR WATERS?

When the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) decided that it would no longer produce its annual report of water pollution violators, Sierra Legal Defence Fund sought this important information through the Freedom of Information process. In early 1997, Sierra Legal requested the 1996 waste water discharges data. The Ministry responded by demanding almost \$20,000 to produce the information. Sierra Legal appealed that decision, and the Information Commissioner ordered the Ministry to release the data free of charge. The Commissioner ruled that this information on Ontario's worst polluters is central to the Ministry's mandate and its obligation to keep the public informed about health and safety issues.

It took the MOE nearly 1½ years to provide Sierra Legal with the raw data on Ontario's worst polluters for 1996. Although the task of creating the Waste Water Discharge Violations Report from the data was extremely arduous, Sierra Legal released the 1996 report in March, 1998, and garnered enormous public interest.

In response to the detailed Sierra Legal report, and our renewed Freedom of Information request for the 1997 information, the MOE produced a useful report for 1997, paralleling the format of the Sierra Legal report. MOE also created a new internet web page and released a report on air polluters as well. It looked as though the MOE was planning to keep the public informed about water pollution in Ontario. In response to Sierra Legal's request for the 1998 records, the MOE negotiated an arrangement to release the information under an agreed upon timetable. Contrary to that agreement, however, the MOE held onto the 1998 information for 5 months after the agreed upon release date and then provided only an extremely over-simplified summary. The MOE 1998 report, which can be viewed on the MOE web site, fails to provide the reader with any of the information necessary to know just how serious the infractions by any of the polluters are, just how frequently they are failing to meet the various parameters, and just what the Ontario government is doing to ensure that the pollution stops.

It was in light of the inadequacy of the 1998 summary produced by the MOE, that Sierra Legal decided it must provide the public with the whole story. This report represents several months of work by Sierra Legal's scientist, combing through the raw data and filling out that information with phone calls and letters to MOE staff across the province. The findings are astounding.

The preceding is the "Introduction" to WHO'S WATCHING OUR WATERS? A copy of the full report may be obtained by contacting the Sierra Legal Defence Fund, 106 France St. E, Ste. 300, Toronto, ON, M5A 1E1 (416) 368-7533 Website: www.sierralegal.org A copy is also available at the TFN office (Friday mornings from 9 am to 12 noon).

WALL-TO-WALL BIRDS

We have a very small back yard in North Toronto but fortunately it is beside Sherwood Park which provides a large area from which to attract birds. We have made use of every square foot of our yard to try to make it a magnet for the birds. We have mountain ash, mulberry and service-berry trees and the house is covered with Boston ivy. There are dense cedars to provide a hiding-place from predators and a small heated pool where the birds drink and bathe all year.

Every fall I put together a feeding station from a variety of materials from the garage and each year it is different. I think this time I have fallen upon a perfect combination. I mounted a wooden platform on an eight-foot long piece of one-inch metal pipe and secured a cone-shaped squirrel guard half way up the pipe. On the platform I mounted a small wire cage to hold the unshelled peanuts and force the blue jays and crows to pry them out from between the wires (no point in making it too easy for them). Around the edges of the platform I have driven in three-inch nails from which hang my tube feeder for the niger seed, a large house-shaped plastic feeder for the sunflower seeds and a slab of fat for the woodpeckers and chickadees.

The summer of 2000 gave us the greatest fruit crop since we moved here 25 years ago. The mountain ash was so loaded with berries that the branches were bent down to the breaking point. At the time of writing the mulberries and serviceberries were long gone but there were still lots of mountain ash berries and the house was covered with the dried-up fruit of the Boston ivy.

On November 21, with the morning free, I pulled up an armchair just inside the patio windows overlooking the yard. The leaves had gone and I had a perfect view of the yard. There was a skiff of snow on the ground, the temperature was -5°C and there was a strong north-west wind. The ivy on the walls of the house was alive with starlings all busily harvesting the unappetising-looking dried fruit. I counted 30 birds as they flew off in alarm as a neighbour appeared in his yard.

Most of the mountain ash berries from the top and far side of the tree had already disappeared but there were still good bunches of berries in the low branches close to the house. Four species were feeding on the mountain ash berries: robins, house finches, cedar waxwings, and several starlings who were moving back and forth between the Boston ivy and the mountain ash.

The cedar waxwings were feeding on the large clumps of berries just three metres from where I was sitting, two adult birds in their immaculate soft brown, grey and yellow plumage, and three streaky grey young birds. To my surprise one of the adults flew over and perched beside the other, and the two began billing. Then one picked a berry and fed it to the other. The breeding season was long past and I took them to be a mated pair maintaining their pair bond. However, the sexes are so similar I could not be sure; maybe they were just good friends. ▽

WALL-TO-WALL BIRDS (cont'd)

As the morning went on more and more birds arrived to take advantage of the berries and the feeder. Soon a mourning dove landed on the wooden deck outside the window and began picking among the berries that had fallen from the tree. A pair of downy woodpeckers took turns at visiting the fat. Two blue jays and a crow came for the peanuts. A pair of white-breasted nuthatches and three black-capped chickadees hauled away sunflower seeds, the goldfinches vied for perches on the tube feeder. On the ground under the feeder were a pair of cardinals, two juncos and five house sparrows.

At 10:00 a.m. I went for a cup of tea and when I returned there was not a bird in sight. They did not return for over an hour when the chickadees began making tentative trips to the feeder. Little by little the birds returned until we again had wall-to-wall birds. No doubt we had had a visit from a sharp-shinned, or Cooper's hawk.

None of the birds that visited our yard on that November morning were rare or unusual birds. They were species that could be expected in any Toronto yard in winter. Still, they provided a great show. And we still (hopefully) have the northern finches to look forward to!

George Fairfield

□

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

Editor: Helen Juhola

Poetry, Art and Nature Observations: Diana Banville

Assistants: Patricia Brind, Eva Davis, Karin Fawthrop, Nancy Fredenburg,
Toshi Oikawa, Marilyn Murphy, Robin Powell

Printer: DM Printing

Mailer: Perkins Mailing Services

THE RED SQUIRREL

One of my favourite local animals is the red squirrel. In my youth it was very unusual to see this animal in built-up areas of Toronto. It seems to be making a comeback. My friend who lives on Laird Dr. has had three red squirrels coming to her back porch for peanuts. I have also spotted them on many of our walks in the forests where there are hemlocks and spruce trees. The larger grey squirrels are not as appealing as they don't seem as wild and shy. The speed at which red squirrels move always amazes me and their scolding chatter is a delight to hear.

The red squirrel always struck me as a cross between a chipmunk and a grey squirrel. This is not only because of its size but because of its habits as well. It hoards food and goes underground like a chipmunk, but has runs high in the trees like the grey squirrel.

The number of coyotes (I saw three in Mt. Pleasant on November 21), beaver, mink, foxes and deer seem to be on the increase in Toronto. Some of these animals people object to, but no one can say anything detrimental about that beautiful little squirrel.

Roger Powley

□



STRIPED SKUNK CASUALTY. This drawing accompanied the report of the outing to the Leslie Street Spit on April 29, 2000. Joanne Doucette drew it from memory the following day - the sad scene of an animal meeting its death through entanglement in fishing-line carelessly discarded.

COYOTE COUNTRY

Long before the current coyote craze I kept hearing about their presence in the Etobicoke Creek-Centennial Park area. But despite the fact that I criss-crossed it almost daily walking my dogs, I had never seen one. A retired prospector who lives nearby told me of one day walking through the leaf-composting area when he came face-to-face with one. He stared at it in disbelief when it lifted its head skyward and howled and then trotted away. A dog-walking friend told of seeing a pair of scrawny pups playing in the leaf mould and he presumed them to be coyote pups. Within the past year a birder told of seeing a coyote regularly in the woods apparently hunting for squirrels. Still I had never had one cross my path although I had met red fox from time to time.

Then one snowy day in January 2000 I noticed what seemed to be a German shepherd dog sitting down in the middle of the field looking at the skiers coming down the Centennial Ski Hill. Moving closer I realized that I was at last looking at my coyote. He looked at us with only a cursory glance as we passed by about 30 yd. from him.

In March 2000 I was walking my dog on the Etobicoke Civic Golf Course when I turned around and to my surprise saw that we were being stalked by a coyote. Holding my dog on a short leash I turned to face him and he dropped to the ground with his front legs folded under him. He was no more than 20 ft. from us and we stared at each other for quite some time. He showed no sign of hostility -- no fangs, growling or hackles up -- but was quite intent with his gaze. He was a healthy-looking animal with a very thick coat of fur. Although he did not look threatening, I was quite concerned for my aging Afghan hound who must have been aware of the danger as she kept close to my leg and made no noise. Finally I started to move away from him very slowly and he immediately got up and loped off in the opposite direction. I was relieved but somewhat perplexed at the reason for this confrontation. Then I realized that we were in proximity to the high voltage hydro transmission lines and this was his hunting territory. Over the years I have found the remains of many birds lying near these wires including mallards, Canada geese and on one sorry occasion a great blue heron that I had enjoyed observing regularly in the nearby Centennial Pond. These birds were always gutted, with nothing left but the feathers. Originally the tracks in the snow from these birds leading back to the woods were those of a red fox but in recent years they were those of a larger animal, presumably a coyote. No doubt he patrols this line regularly and the reason for our strange encounter was that he looked on us as potential competitors.

With the arrival of the "coy-oats" as we used to call them in some old songs, the red fox has all but disappeared from this area which had previously supported quite a number of them. The wolf, the coyote, and the fox, though all members of the Canidae, rarely share the same territory with the larger members driving out their smaller cousins.

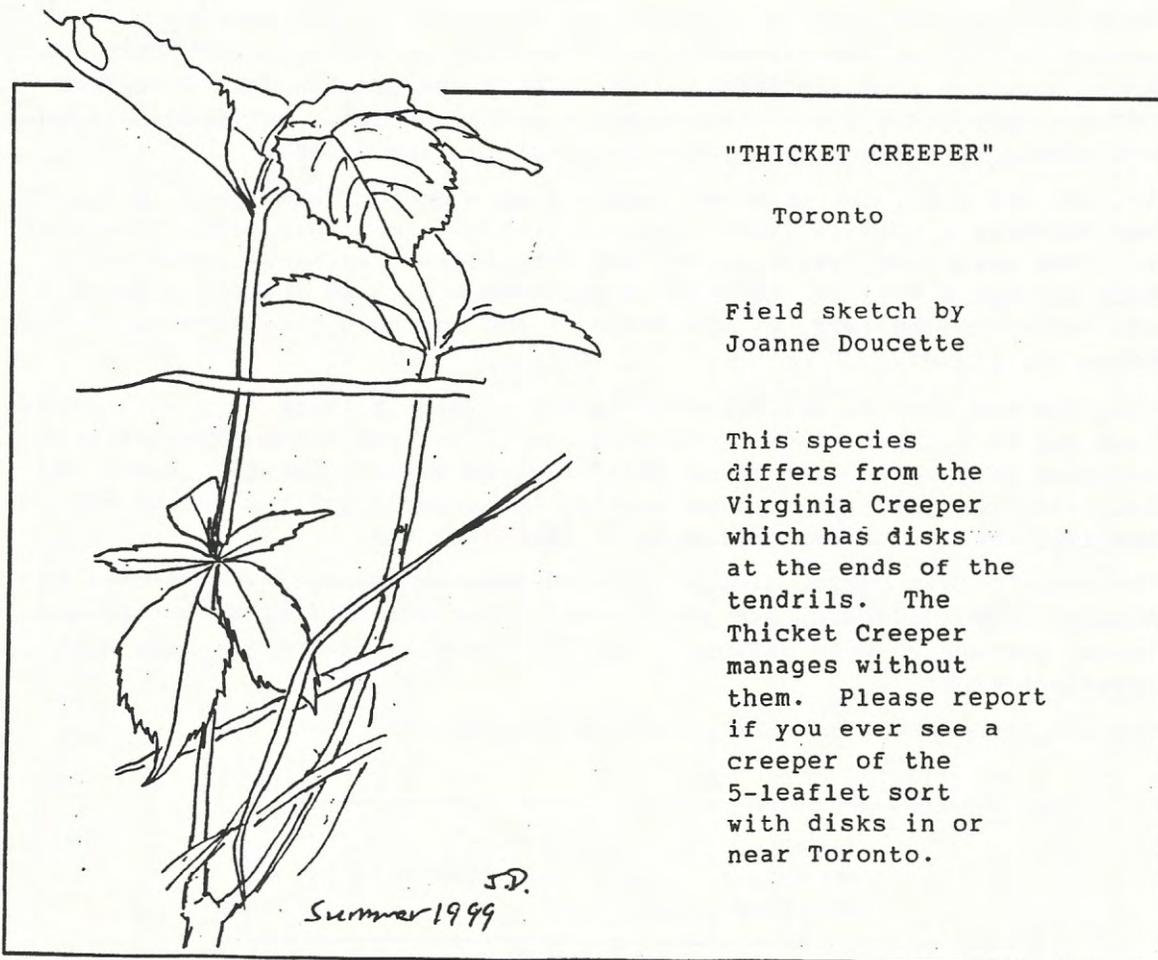
COYOTE COUNTRY (cont'd)

Since my brief encounter there have been two incidents in the area involving coyotes operating in a pack. The pattern in each case was identical. One coyote manoeuvred a loose dog into a wooded area where three others were waiting in ambush. In one case the owner was able to drive them off and pick up his small dog. The other was not so fortunate with a large German shepherd dog being mauled before the owner was able to drive the coyotes off. The dog required 130 stitches at the vet's to treat his wounds. In neither case did the coyotes menace the humans but continued their attack upon the dogs. The message to dog-walkers should now be clear. Do not go into wild or wooded areas with your dogs and keep them leashed.

Naturalists should not be afraid to go into the Etobicoke Creek valley alone to observe the northern mockingbirds or the large flocks of wintering robins feeding in the hawthorn trees as the coyotes should pose no threat to them.

David Mather

□



GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET

The golden-crowned kinglet is an aristocrat by name and by nature. The Latin or scientific name for this diminutive bird is *Regulus satrapa* meaning "king wearing a golden crown".

Both sexes are brightly crowned, the female in yellow, the male in orange with a possible red flash through the centre. In both males and females, the crown is encircled in a wreath of black. The back is olive-green to grey, the wings marked with two white bars and the underparts are pale grey. The eyes are smudged in black and punctuated by a whitish eyebrow stripe. The bill is black and slender, the tail is short and stubby.

At 3½ inches from tip to tip, golden-crowned kinglets are smaller than warblers. Also unlike warblers they flick their wings, giving the impression of being constantly in motion. These active little birds have high caloric demands and seem to eat constantly. They often hover beside twigs or leaves to snatch up aphids or bark beetles. Like tiny search missiles they can zero in on winged insects, dodging pine needles and making their capture in flight. They can also be seen hanging precariously from the ends of branches in search of insect larvae.

Golden-crowned Kinglets are widespread throughout North America. They winter in Florida and the Gulf Coast, but travel north in the spring to breed anywhere from southern Alaska to northeastern Canada. Evergreen forests constitute their traditional breeding grounds, but golden-crowns are slowly expanding their range into spruce plantations.

In June and July, the male and female form a co-operative pair to build and maintain a globular nest of moss, lichens and spider webs. The nest is lined with down feathers, fur and soft bark. The birds enter and exit through a hole in the top. Golden-crowned nests are often found nestled among the twigs of coniferous trees anywhere from five to 60 ft. above the ground.

Kinglets are spectacular breeders laying as many as nine eggs each year. Each egg is elliptical (13 x 10 mm), non-glossy and cream-coloured with brown or grey spots, and takes 14-15 days to hatch. Emerging naked and helpless from their protective shells, by summer's end the chicks have acquired the bright crown plumage of their parents.

The song (seldom heard, even during the breeding season) is a series of high-pitched, ascending see-see-see-see notes followed by a similar but louder descending note pattern. The call note is commonly a very high tsee-tsee-tsee.

from an article by Deborah Buehler in TOUCHING DOWN, Fall 2000

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Snow falling in the
sunshine! I don't suppose there
could be a snow-bow.

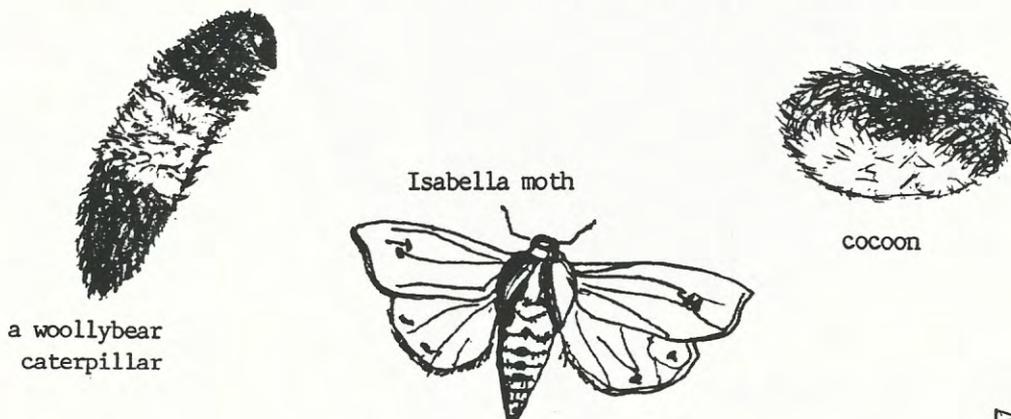
Haiku by Diana Banville,
Februsry 12, 2000

ON CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES

Humans aren't the only ones to receive these. Other creatures experience them just as inescapably -- the majestic, great 'V' formations of Canada geese flying south, the upstream leap of salmon to their spawning grounds, the pilgrimage of monarch butterflies returning to those Mexican forests which, thanks to us, stand in danger of disappearing. The urge to "move on", change residence, settle elsewhere according to the season runs throughout the natural world, and the caterpillar is no exception. I commented a while back on the urge which drives these fascinating small creatures (along with snakes and turtles) to cross a vast expanse of blistering, arid highway, in the conviction, apparently, that grass and homesteading are greener on the other side.

Today (late September, 2000) it was the turn of the banded woollybear, though what it was about this particular stretch of ravine which was so productive of them I have no idea; it looked no different from the rest of the surrounding foliage. I came across ten in the space of five minutes, plus one who had met the fate they all risk of encountering an unobservant human foot on asphalt. Not all were going in the same direction. They had, about evenly, decided to "change sides". There were the spry ones wriggling across the path at a gallop, the amblers, and the contemplatives who stopped dead periodically as though considering whether they were doing the right thing. I stood guard over the laggards until they all reached the grass verge -- to the puzzlement of passing schoolkids who doubtless viewed me as slightly lunatic. The banded woollybear, as guidebooks observe, is much better known than the Isabella moth which it becomes. The caterpillar is that nice, fat, furry black creature, some inch-and-a-half in length, with a splendid band of orange fuzz running around its middle. Its moth has about a two-inch wingspan and is yellowish, and although I may have seen many Isabellas, I have not been aware of that fact.

My most astonishing example of the Categorical Imperative was something I witnessed years ago in Toronto at a building site. Some elderly, stricken trees had been left in place and they were swathed -- all the

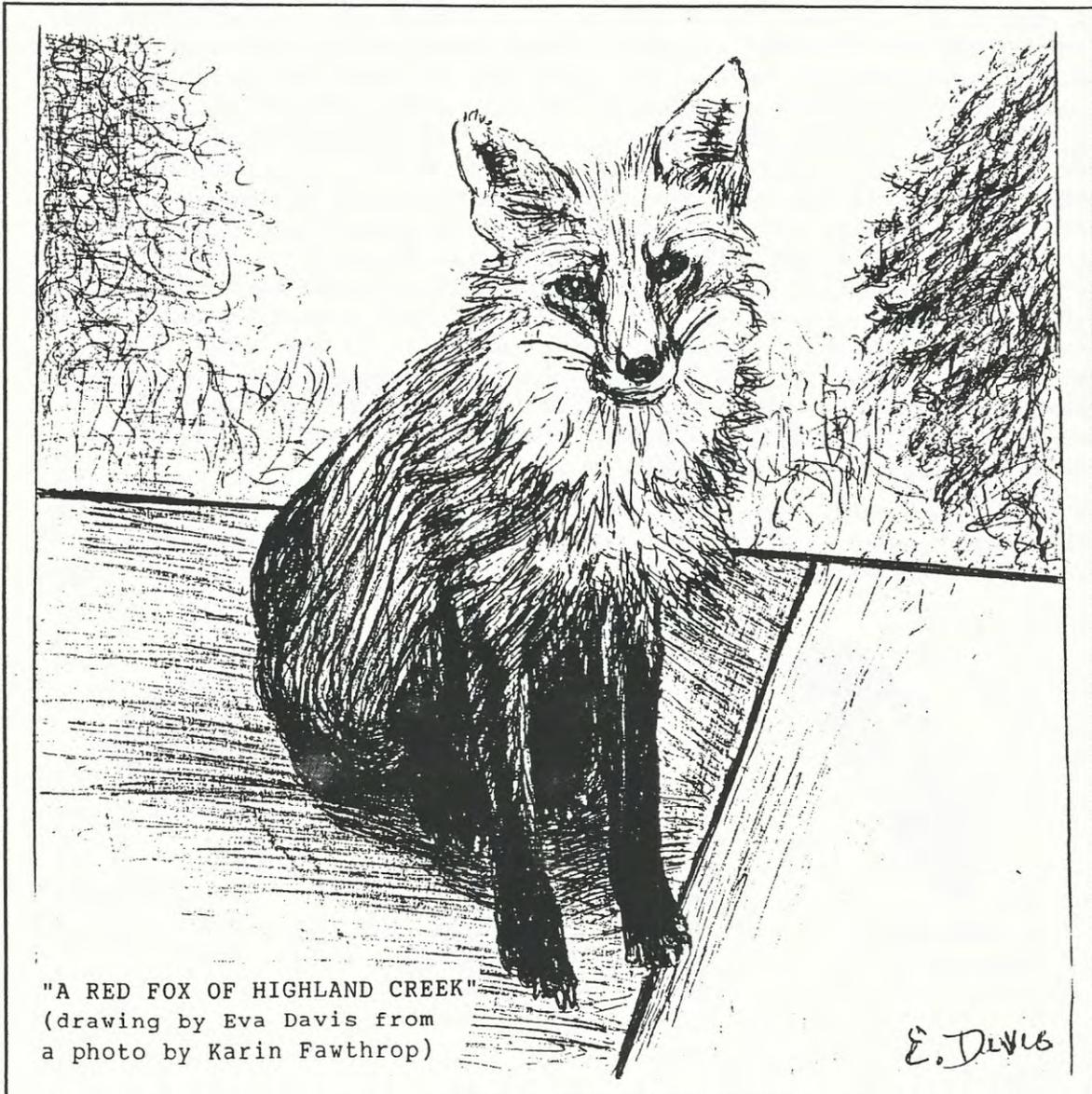


ON CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES (cont'd)

way to the ground -- in the gauze of tent caterpillars. Further, the evening sun had turned all this silvered netting to rose. And -- even more breathtaking -- I had arrived at the exact time when every last one of these caterpillars had received orders to leave home. They wrestled and writhed and wriggled over each other in a great drive to get down the branches, down the trunks, down to the grass, from which they fanned out and disappeared. I stood and gawked for a full five minutes and still this commando operation was not complete. It had been a "Tent Caterpillar Year", and the sheer overkill of all these thousands of clustered bodies breaking through their tents and splashed pink by the setting sun was at once horrifying and gaspingly beautiful.

Nature does, indeed, put on its own Show Biz Spectaculars.

Eva Davis



"A RED FOX OF HIGHLAND CREEK"
(drawing by Eva Davis from
a photo by Karin Fawthrop)

E. Davis

GONE FISHING

There's something very relaxing about watching "fishers". You don't have to mess around with smelly bait or go wading in freezing water; just find a comfortable spot on the bank in the sun and observe.

Most easily found is our own species. There they stand in a long ragged row, downstream of a dam on the Humber, too high for any tired and dying salmon to ever hope to jump over. They remind me of herons in their single-minded concentration, but instead of striking suddenly, they rear back, making the line shimmer in the sunlight. Then the lucky individual watches his rod bend and traces where his line enters the water as it moves back and forth, up and down. No one else pays attention, each intent on his own efforts. Usually the line goes slack, but occasionally the fisher lands the dioxin-riddled prey.

Great blue herons exhibit the greatest patience, and also require the most of that rare quality from any observer. Long periods of absolute stillness are followed by an eye-blink fast dart of head and beak.

On the lake, and rarely on the rivers, we can watch gulls and terns: gliding, gliding then suddenly diving straight down. The terns are most spectacular: folding their wings and arrowing down beneath the surface.

The rattling call of belted kingfishers draws our attention to their swift, flitting flight along their river domain. They too plunge suddenly before rising to an old snag on the river bank to dine at leisure. As long as there's open, flowing water, even in winter's cutting cold, they will persist, finding food where it would seem impossible that anything could be swimming.

We don't have many fishing mammals in this part of the world. It may be just as well. I'd hate to round a bend on the Rouge and bump into a hunting grizzly bear. A few otters would be nice, but there are too many of us and our effluents to attract them to our streams. We do have raccoons though, up to three hundred per square kilometre in the city, some estimate. I have never seen one fishing as such, but I have watched them flipping over rocks and feeling around beneath submerged logs for crayfish. Unlike dace or salmon, crayfish can fight back, and a raccoon can execute a most interesting manoeuvre trying to shake off his bit of fast food, firmly attached to a paw by a surprisingly strong claw.

One day in late October I was idly looking at the top of a long slender plant when I noticed something moving at the top, and after a while glimpsed a long, tiny, shiny filament blowing out 4 or 5 feet down wind. Looking closer, I could see that the 'something' had taken a stance reminiscent of the crane position in kung fu: all appendages raised in the air except the tip of one leg. My "fisher" was bright green and a quarter of an inch across, waving her arms and moving her line back and forth. I had heard of fishing spiders before, but had never seen one. In late October there isn't much time left for a little "fisher". I never saw her catch anything. I guess fishing can be like that.

Murray Seymour

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IN THE NEWS

NEW FINDS ON FUNGI FRONT

Fossils dating back 460 million years show that plants may have had friendly allies, in the form of fungi, helping them make the move to land from the sea. Virtually all green land plants have partnerships with fungi today. Threadlike fungi grow in and around the roots of plants, helping them absorb minerals and water. A professor of botany and environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and her students examined shale taken from a road cut. Etching them with acid, they found tiny structures that looked like fossilized fungal spores. Further examination turned up imprints of the threadlike hairs of fungi. This dates fungi to the same time that land plants first started appearing. They may have been waiting, ready to form their alliance, and soon started working together. The fossils were found in a shale marine setting. It's not clear if they were growing on land or in the seas.

extracted from an article from Reuters News Agency, London, in METRO, Sept.15, 2000

ROOF GARDENS STUDIES TO CUT DOWN CITY HEAT

Green Roofs for Healthy Cities is run by a coalition of businesses to figure out a way to cool down our "urban heat island" -- what the city becomes in the summer when the sun heats up the tar and gravel roofs of the commercial and industrial buildings that cover at least 6 per cent of the land across Toronto. They act like hot plates, heating up the air around them. The \$1 million, three-year project is being funded by the city, the Toronto Atmospheric Fund, Environment Canada, and the National Research Council.

Covering the rooftops with gardens would cut the heat. The temperature of a typical commercial rooftop can reach 60°C during summer. But research has shown that the temperature can be held at about 25°C by covering the rooftop with a garden. Studies show one benefit is an insulating effect that would help cool buildings and lessen the demand for air conditioning. That means a reduction in demand on electricity from places like coal-burning power plants. The plants would also absorb rainfall. Slowing runoff from the roofs would ease the pressure on the city's sewers during heavy rainstorms when they fill and overflow into Toronto Harbour.

extracted from an article by Brian McAndrew, in THE TORONTO STAR, Nov.3, 2000

...Our history has been remarkably free of the bitter bloodletting that has stained so many nations. Our major battles have been against the environment.

from MY TIMES, LIVING WITH HISTORY 1947-1995 by Pierre Berton, Doubleday Canada Ltd. 1995.

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

LAND TRUST RECEIVES 17 ACRE WINDFALL

An Uxbridge landowner has been one of the first to throw his support behind a new organization dedicated to protecting the Oak Ridges Moraine. Mr. Ken Purvis donated 17 acres of land on the edge of the Glen Major Forest. Citizens from across the Oak Ridges Moraine have been gathering around kitchen tables and at local town council chambers for the past several months to create an Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust. After much input and deliberation over details, goals and objectives have been established.

The Land Trust is a non-profit, non-government organization that says it will work locally or regionally to permanently protect critical open space or heritage land. The land trust is to be run by local people who the group says best know their communities. The Land Trust is suggesting to landowners who wish to get involved, that they consider donating the land or a portion of the land to the Land Trust either as a charitable gift or bequest. Additionally, they suggest a landowner could also help by keeping the land, but protect all or part of it by agreeing to a conservation easement. This customized agreement between the landowner and the Land Trust will place limits on how the land can be used and protect the property according to the wishes of the present landowner even when it passes to future owners.

The Land Trust is also looking for people to assist them in identifying critical land areas to be preserved and to help build the holdings of the Land Trust by getting land, property, cash, bequests, securities, life insurance, gift annuities or charitable remainder trusts. The organization is committed to working with community groups to reforest the land and create trails for public use.

extracted from an article by Todd Hamilton, in the UXBRIDGE TRIBUNE, Oct. 20, 2000

WORLD SEED BANK

Millions of seeds from at least 24,000 species of plants have been banked in underground bomb-proof and flood-proof vaults in England's newly-opened Millennium Seed Bank. The move to protect plant species for future generations against extinction is the largest conservation project of its kind and the first attempt at conservation that keeps pace with the current rate of plant extinction. When the bank reaches its goal of collecting seeds from 10 per cent of the world's seed-bearing plants, it will house the widest example of biodiversity on earth.

extracted from an article by Steve Newman in THE TORONTO STAR, Dec. 2, 2000

FRESH WATER

If the Earth's water were put in the proportional equivalent of a five-litre container, fresh water would account for less than a teaspoonful.

from "Social Studies" by Michael Kesterton in the GLOBE AND MAIL, Oct. 30, 2000

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

PROPERTY TAX PROGRAM REINSTATED

A critical property tax benefit for land trusts, conservation authorities and some other landowners is about to be reinstated. After three years in limbo, the Ministry of Natural Resources has now re-named and refined the criteria of the "Community Conservation Lands" (formerly "Other Conservation Lands") category under the Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program (CLTIP). Community Conservation Lands (CCL) will be exempt from property taxes when owned by conservation charities such as land trusts and conservation authorities. The program is designed to help conservation organizations protect lands that contribute to provincial conservation and natural heritage protection objectives.

Without notice in 1998, the MNR put the program under review and suspended this property tax category. This meant that conservation charities had to pay full taxes, sometimes in higher tax rate categories, for new lands acquired during the 1997, 1998, 1999 and now 2000 tax years. Some properties were later shifted to other categories under the CLTIP (i.e. those that are provincially significant wetlands or Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, Niagara Escarpment Natural zones, or endangered species habitat) or the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program. Once Environmental Bill of Rights Registry consultations and final approvals are completed, and the CCL program is formally reinstated, conservation charities will need to apply to MNR in order to enrol their new lands for the property tax exemption.

from THE BLUESTEM BANNER, Vol. 2, Issue 3, October, 2000

REFORESTATION'S CRITICAL FLAW

Research concludes that old, wild forests are far better than plantations of young trees at ridding the air of carbon dioxide, which is released when coal, oil and other fossil fuels are burned. It turns out that the soils in undisturbed tropical and temperate rain forests, Siberian woods and some German national parks contain enormous amounts of carbon derived from fallen leaves, twigs and buried roots that can bind to soil particles and remain for 1,000 years or more. When such forests are cut, the trees' roots decay and soil is disrupted, releasing the carbon dioxide. Centuries would have to pass until newly-planted trees built up such a reservoir underground.

extracted from an article by Andrew Revkin, New York Times, in THE TORONTO STAR, Fall, 2000.

Icy northwest wind,
oblique icicles forming
jewel-like daggers.

Haiku by Therese Paradis

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

DOWNSVIEW SCIENTIST WARMS UP WIND CHILL

Exhaustive research by a federal defence department scientist demonstrates that reported wind chill temperatures are too low, exaggerating by 5 to 10°C the actual cooling effect on people from wintry blasts. There isn't a simple ratio between the old wind chill temperature and the new warmer temperature. The size of the difference varies depending on wind speed and ambient temperature. In practical terms the research means that Canadians should soon have a much more accurate idea of how much to bundle up to avoid frostbite and other cold weather hazards. Wind actually packs a double-whammy in making you feel colder. First it sucks away your outermost natural insulation, that thin layer of air warmed by your body and trapped by clothing. Second, it evaporates any moisture from your skin, also drawing away heat. These effects increase with wind strength so the fiercer the wind, the colder you feel.

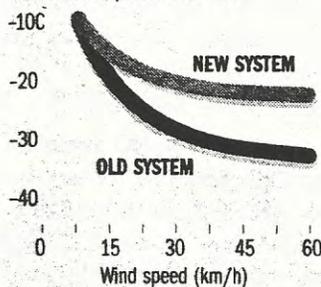
extracted from an article by Peter Calamai in the TORONTO STAR, Dec. 15, 2000.

Softening the wind chill factor

When it's windy, it won't feel so cold anymore. Wind chill factor calculations have been revised downwards because the current system exaggerated how much colder it felt, scientists say.

The new calculation

Perceived temperature when air temperature is -10C



How it feels at -10C

Wind speed	OLD SYSTEM	NEW SYSTEM
0 km/h	-10 C	-10 C
15	-18	-13
30	-26	-18
50	-32	-22

SOURCE: Department of National Defence

WORLD O'FERTILIZER

In just the past few decades, industrialization, population growth and the intensive use of chemical fertilizers have doubled the amount of nitrogen in circulation among living things. By contrast, human changes to atmospheric carbon dioxide -- blamed for global warming -- represent an increase of no more than 10 per cent in Earth's natural supply. Some signs of over-supply:

- . Frequent, thick blooms of deadly algae in coastal areas.
- . Historic and once-teeming fishing waters now devoid of oxygen and life.
- . Drastic declines in underwater beds of sea grasses and critical coral reefs.
- . Widespread damage to far-flung grasslands and forests. Even in remote areas, from Minnesota to the Netherlands, the rain is so laden with fertilizer that it overwhelms delicate native plants.

extracted from an article by Michael Kesterton in THE GLOBE & MAIL, Oct. 20, 2000

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THE WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

February 2000, Toronto

Winter weather continued for the first three weeks of February before the well-nigh irresistible trend to record warmth of the past couple of years reasserted itself. It was nonetheless the coolest February since 1997, being just over two degrees Celsius above the long-term (1971-2000) average.

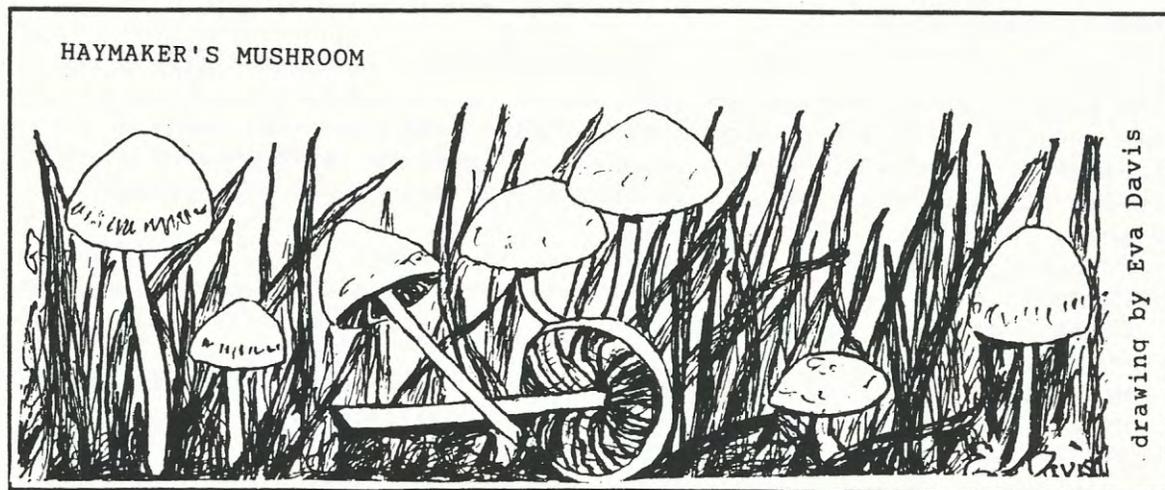
A bland beginning gave way to a markedly snowy period on Feb. 10th-18th when a series of systems dumped over 30 cm of snow -- a welcome addition of moisture. The snowfall of 38-39 cm for the month was the highest since 1993 downtown and since 1988 at Pearson Airport. Through the first twenty days of February, temperatures hovered near normal with only modest forays above freezing.

The mid-continental warm ridge which reappeared after Feb. 20th brought a quick end to the snow cover which had lasted more than a month. In parts of southwestern Ontario, temperatures rose freakishly over 20°C on Feb. 26th-27th. Toronto Pearson Airport peaked at 14.8°C, just shy of the all-time record for February of 14.9°C set in 1984. Some shower activity brought monthly rainfalls to near normal. The final two days of February brought modest cooling. The area of extreme warm temperature anomalies was huge. There were reports of above-freezing temperatures and even rain as far north as Churchill, Manitoba.

Total precipitation was about 48 mm both downtown and at the airport, being close to normal. In spite of the snowstorms and later fogs associated with the thaw, sunshine was slightly above normal at 119.5 hours downtown. February was also a little windier than normal. Winds have averaged above normal since July at Pearson Airport, although this is not the case at Toronto Island.

Gavin Miller

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COMING EVENTS

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

- Sat. Feb. 10, at 9 am (all day) with Garth Riley - Winter Birds of Durham Region. Meet at the Pickering GO station to form a car pool if necessary. Bring a lunch and dress warmly.

Toronto Entomologists' Association meeting

- Sat. Feb. 24 at 1 pm in Room 119 of Northrop Frye Hall - Biological Control of Dutch Elm Disease, a talk by Martin Hubbes of the University of Toronto. For more information, call Alan Hanks at 905-727-6993.

High Park Winter Walking Tours

- Sunday, Feb. 11 at 1:15 pm - Photography in the Park
 - Sun. Feb. 25 at 1:15 pm - Identifying Trees in Winter
- Meet just south of the Grenadier Cafe and Teahouse in the park.
For more information call 392-1748 or 392-6916.

Royal Canadian Institute - free lectures at the J.J.R. Macleod Auditorium Medical Sciences Building, 1 King's College Circle at 3 pm

- Jan. 21 - New Results in cosmology
 - Jan. 28 - Photonics: Revolutionizing our daily lives
 - Feb. 4 - Talking
 - Feb. 11 - More from Loess: Battling soil erosion in the loess plateau of Northern China
 - Feb. 18 - Facing the climate challenge in Southern Ontario
 - Feb. 25 - Fusion energy research: What? Why? When?
- Call 977-2983 for more details.

Royal Ontario Museum - free admission every Friday night from 4:30 pm to 9:30 pm. Call 416-586-8000 for details.



TFN office - open Friday mornings from 9 am to 12 noon. Publications available as well as pins, decals, badges and hasti-notes (new!).

Ian Wheal Heritage Walk - Feb. 3 at 1:30 pm. Meet at the southwest corner of Dixon Rd. and Royal York Road. We will be exploring Chaffey's Creek (a lost creek). See page 4 for another heritage walk. □

The U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration reports house plants, especially those which grow in low light, extract more than 80 per cent of pollutants within 24 hours. In fact, as little as one potted plant per 30 square metres will have a beneficial effect.

from "Fight off pollutants with house plants" by Ruth Zavitz in the LONDON FREE PRESS, Dec. 28, 1996

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