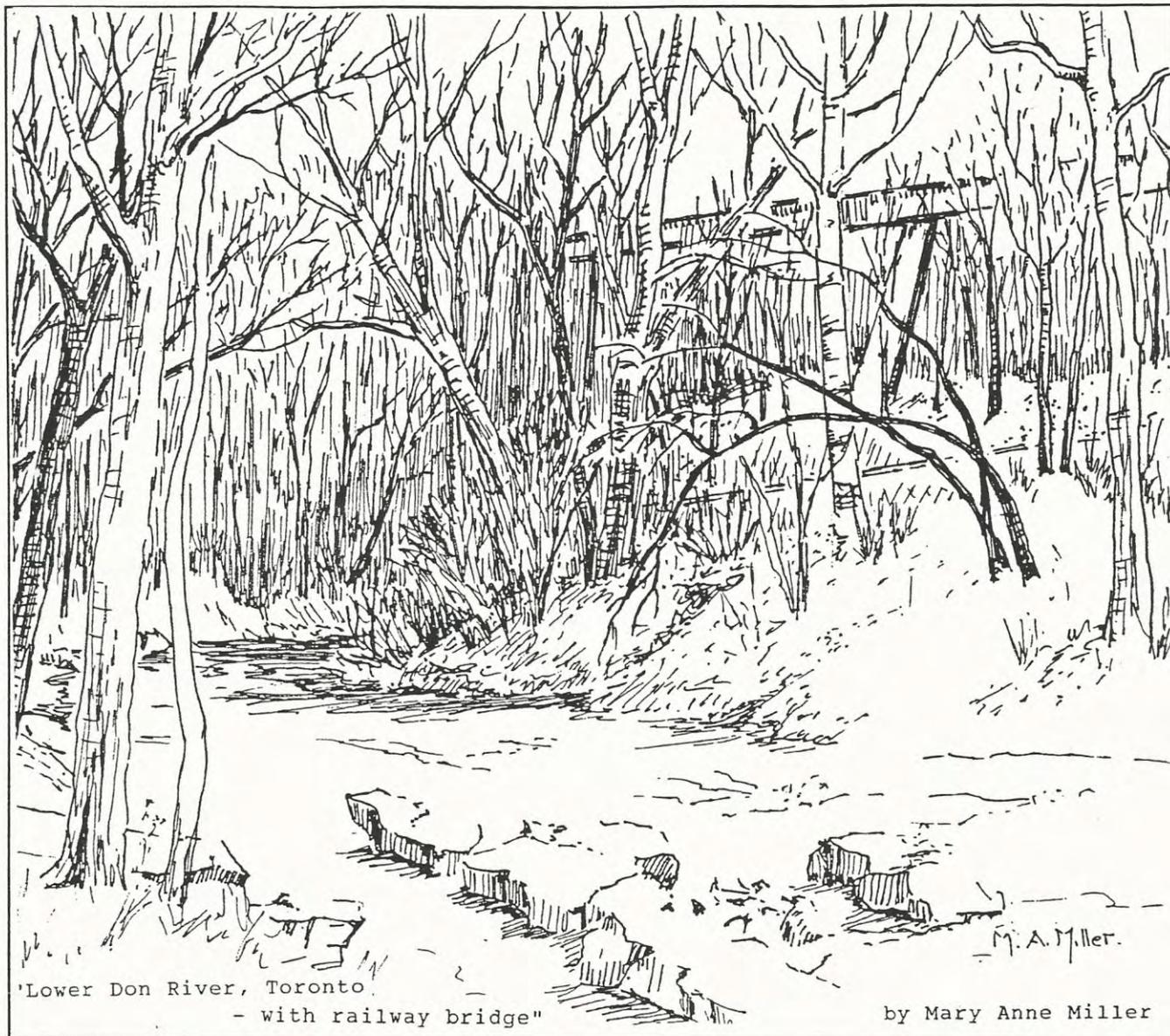


TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 513

February 2003



'Lower Don River, Toronto
- with railway bridge'

by Mary Anne Miller

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TFN MEETINGS

Sunday, February 2, 2003 - SPIDERS OF ONTARIO, an illustrated talk by
Tom Mason, Curator of Invertebrates, Toronto Zoo
at 2:30 pm
in Emmanuel College
75 Queen's Park Crescent East

VISITORS WELCOME!

- Using slides and, possibly, live specimens, Tom Mason will show us how these fabulous animals, generally feared or ignored, are actually an important part of the ecosystem and unique in their methods of entrapping prey.
- + social hour beginning at 2 pm with free juice and coffee
- + memberships and selected publications for sale

NEXT MEETING: Sunday, March 2, 2003

TFN OFFICE - open Friday mornings 9am to 12 noon

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, Marilynn Murphy, Robin Powell

Printer: DM Printing

Mailer: Perkins Mailing Services

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 416-393-4636.
 Check the weather by calling 416-661-0123 so you will know what to wear on outings
 which go rain or shine.

- Saturday
 Feb. 1
 10:30 am LOBLAWS - nature arts
 Leader: Nancy Anderson
 Meet at the entrance to the store on the north side of St. Clair Ave. West just east of Bathurst St. (St. Clair West subway station). 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.
- Feb. 2 TFN MEETING - See page 2 for details.
- Wednesday
 Feb. 5
 10:30 am BELT LINE - nature walk & winter birds
 Leader: George Bryant
 Meet at the Davisville subway station.
 Walk will be through Mt. Pleasant Cemetery and the Belt Line in Moore Park Ravine. Walk will end at Castle Frank subway station. Washrooms in cemetery. Bring lunch and binoculars.
- Thursday
 Feb. 6
 10:30 am DON MILLS - nature walk
 Leader: George Bryant
 Meet at the southwest corner of Leslie St. and Lawrence Ave. East. Bring lunch and binoculars. We plan to walk an abandoned railway line and explore Moccasin Trail Park. Washrooms at Lawrence & Don Mills. [See page 14.]
- Sunday
 Feb. 9
 11 am PINE POINT PARK - nature walk
 Leader: Roger Powley
 Meet at the northeast corner of Wilson Ave. (Walsh Ave.) & Weston Rd. Bring a snack, binoculars and warm clothing.
- Tuesday
 Feb. 11
 10 am SAM SMITH PARK - nature walk
 Leader: Doug Paton
 Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd. West and Kipling Ave.
 Bring lunch and binoculars and dress warmly.
- Sunday
 Feb. 16
 2 pm DENISON CREEK - urban ecology
 Leaders: Peter Hare & Ian Wheal
 Meet at the southeast corner of College St. and Dovercourt Rd. This is a joint outing with the North Toronto Green Community.

FOR MORE OUTINGS AND MEETINGS, SEE PAGES 24-25.

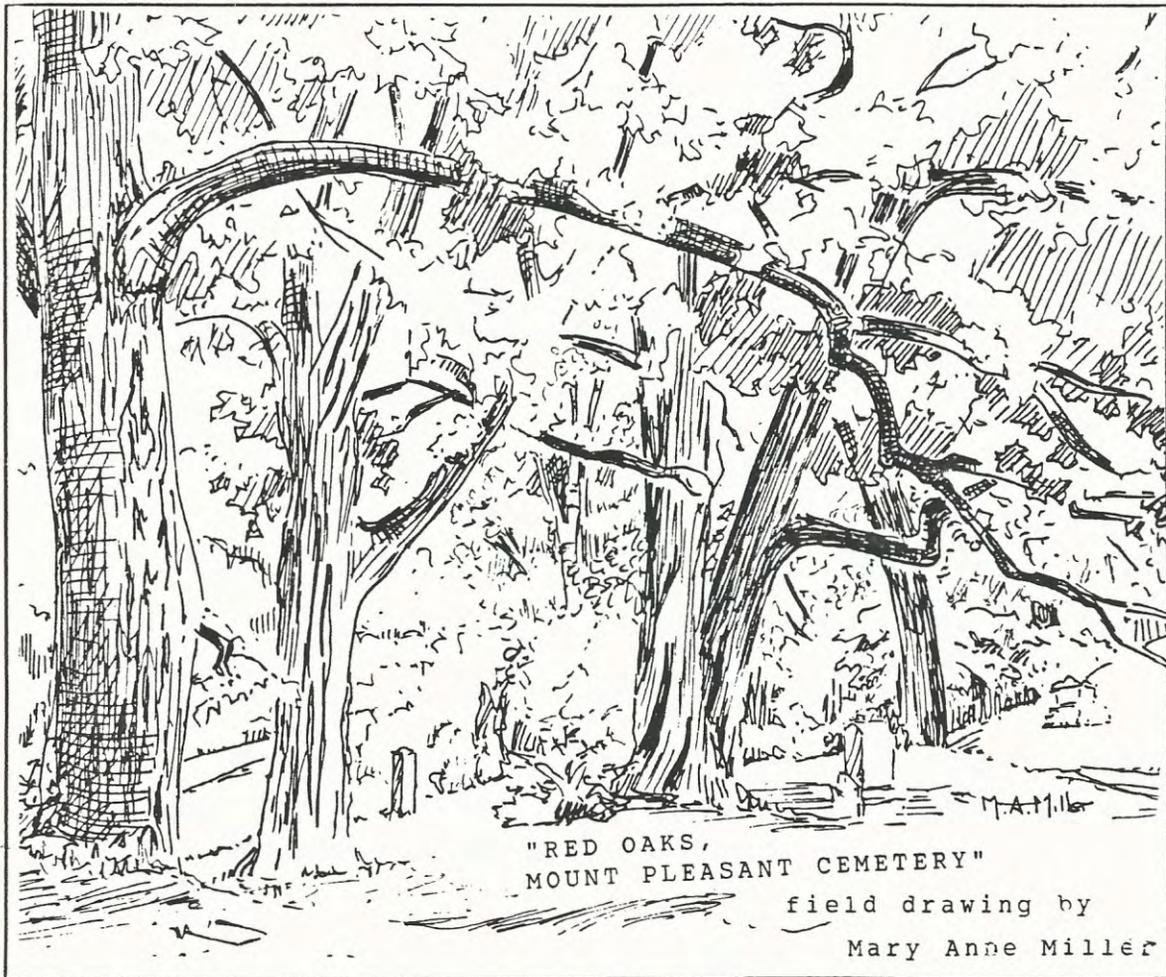
FEBRUARY OUTINGS (cont'd)

Wednesday ASHBRIDGES BAY - birds
Feb. 19 Leader: Don Burton
10 am to Meet at the south side of Lake Shore Blvd. East at the foot
12 noon of Coxwell Ave. Morning only. Bring binoculars.

Saturday GUILDWOOD - nature walk
Feb. 22 Leader: Boris Mather
10:30 am Meet at the Guildwood GO station (south side of Kingston Rd.
opposite Celeste Dr.).
Bring lunch and binoculars and dress warmly. Washrooms at GO station as well
as free parking.

Wednesday HUMBER BAY PARK EAST - birds
Feb. 26 Leader: Valerie Allen
10:30 am Meet at the park entrance on the south side of Lake Shore Blvd.
West opposite Park Lawn Ave.
Bring lunch, binoculars and warm clothing.

□



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

With a timely snowfall Christmas Eve and morning, Toronto had a white Christmas. I hope you had a safe and happy Christmas and New Year's Eve.

As never before, I read local/regional newspapers to help me get up-to-date on current environmental issues. It sometimes seems an emotional roller-coaster ride going from one planned assault on the natural environment to another. Two recent announcements, the Toronto Island airport bridge and the GO Transit bus route from Oakville to Pickering, are noteworthy.

Toronto City Council has approved the Island Airport bridge several times previously. I fear that with each approval the bridge is closer to reality. The bridge itself is not a concern, what could follow is. Should federal government approval be given, lake filling and runway extensions could soon follow. Noise and air pollution from aircraft will inevitably disrupt the Islands' bird colonies. A public access road from this bridge through the airport to Hanlan's Point might be all that's needed to initiate any of the recently announced commercial/residential development proposals. As the airport expansion requires federal government approval, I hope federal politicians will be so preoccupied with the Prime Minister's replacement and the latest/future revelations of fiscal mismanagement that they won't get around to serious consideration of the Island airport expansion for another couple of years. Perhaps sanity will return in the interim.

The board of GO Transit recently approved an ambitious plan called Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). This bus-only route, running from Oakville to Pickering would, its backers argued, do much to relieve gridlock in GTA. Billion-dollar-level funding would be required from the Province for this inter-regional transit infrastructure project. I'm concerned about the potential environmental impacts, as the proposed route would cross, within Toronto, the Etobicoke and Mimico Creeks and the West Humber and main Humber Rivers. Another competing proposal, Light Rapid Transit, would in part follow the same route. Although these are long-term projects with limited chance of provincial funding, we will still have to monitor them.

Last fall I led an uneventful walk along Etobicoke Cr. from Lakeshore Rd. to the QEW. Except for some beautiful fall colour late in the afternoon, this was going to be one of the duller walks I've led in recent memory. With little warning, things changed abruptly. In a desperate attempt to introduce some variety, I led the group onto a side trail. We approached a small clearing in which there was a large fir tree with its bark partially removed right up into the crown of the tree. This should have been a clue that there was something special here. Almost simultaneously we spotted movement in the tree. Two pileated woodpeckers were busy tearing at the bark. For added interest there was also a hairy woodpecker nearby in the same tree. I've only seen one pileated woodpecker in my life and that was in the Emily Hamilton Nature Reserve.

▷

PRESIDENT'S REPORT (cont'd)

We watched the three woodpeckers for quite a while. They seemed quite indifferent to our presence. Then suddenly from high in the tree, a squirrel scrambled down the tree trunk towards one of the pileated woodpeckers. In a dramatic threat display, the woodpecker stretched its wings as the squirrel approached. Although this exaggerated their size, these woodpeckers are still large birds. Nature intervened and saved my outing!

Last but not least, we've reached a significant milestone with our nature reserves. The purchase of the two 25 acre lots south of the Emily Hamilton Nature Reserve has been completed successfully. As well, major maintenance work has been finished at the Jim Baillie Nature Reserve. This maintenance work involved the replacement of the fence and gate on the north boundary of the property. All that remains now is to find a reliable bus rental company from which we can get a school bus at a reasonable cost. If we are successful, there'll be an outing to the Jim Baillie Nature Reserve this spring.

Robin Powell

□



PEDUNCULATE OAK - Mount Pleasant Cemetery
pen-and-ink site drawing by Mary Anne Miller

PROJECTS

WATCH THOSE GULLS

If you see a black-backed gull with a coloured band on its leg, please note as much of the following information as possible:

- . Colour Band (& leg that it is on)
- . Numbers & letters on colour band (including the colour of the text)
- . Location of sighting
- . Date of sighting
- . & any other pertinent details

Please let me know if you are only able to obtain part of the information listed above since we value any data.

Researchers at universities and CWS in eastern Canada have also used colour bands to mark great black-backed gulls; if you send me information on a bird that is not from the Great Lakes, I will forward it to them for their records.

Thanks in advance for any information.

▷ Cynthia Pekarik, Wildlife Toxicology Technician,
Canadian Wildlife Service, Environmental Conservation Branch,
867 Lakeshore Rd., P.O. Box 5050, Burlington, Ont. L7R 4A6
phone: 905-336-4665 fax: 905-336-6434
e-mail: Cynthia.Pekarik@ec.gc.ca

Canadian Wildlife Service-Ontario Region web site:
www.on.ec.gc.ca/wildlife_e.html

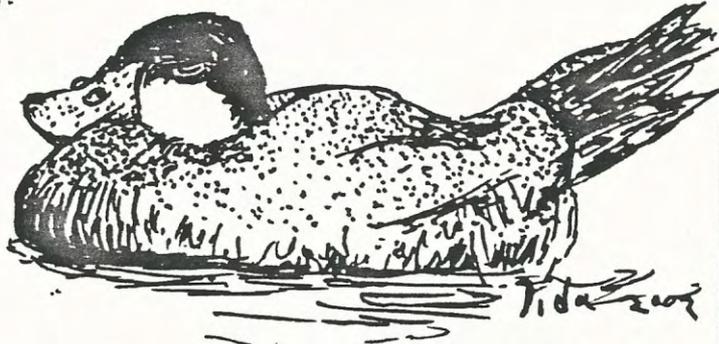
TFN BOARD NOMINATIONS INVITED

▷ 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.)

SUMMER MALE
RUDDY DUCK. Species
occurs all months
of the year in Toronto.

However, it breeds only
peripherally within the
Region.

Drawing by
Diana Banville
based on a photo
by Jim Flynn in
BirdWatch Canada
Summer 2002 #20
(Bird Studies Canada)



PROJECTS (cont'd)

YARD PEOPLE: DON'T BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDERS

Should we feed the birds? There are no absolute answers, but the fact is our "feeder birds" will flock together in concentrations wherever there is food, feeders or no feeders. Feeders encourage them to do so where we can enjoy their presence.

What is different are the feeders themselves. They are artificial constructions that can concentrate dirt and debris, including the detritus of seeds and seed shells. This can become a fertile environment for possibly harmful spores and bacteria. What we learned from the disease problems that some yard people encountered last year was the importance of occasionally cleaning out and sterilizing a feeder, using a mild bleach or some other disinfectant.

These procedures are probably of particular importance when the temperature is near or above the freezing point. So keep it clean, and don't use old seed stored from last season. Also, keep it simple. Sunflower seeds are great for a multitude of species. Many birds like raw, shelled peanuts. Niger and millet are favourites of small finches. Suet or vegetable shortening are favoured by woodpeckers, and are also eaten by nuthatches, chickadees and other species. Feeders need not be fancy, although you may want to try the hooded, squirrel-proof high-tech styles now available if feeding rodents does not appeal to you. Millet sprinkled under hedges and shrubs may attract more juncos and sparrows. Enjoy the birds.

from an article by Barry Kent MacKay, in THE TORONTO STAR, November 17, 2002

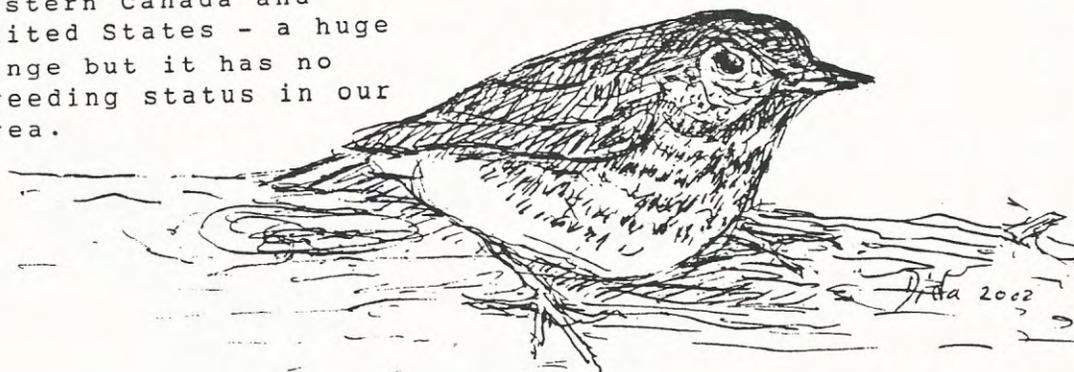
□

SWAINSON'S THRUSH

is a Toronto migrant.

It breeds on the Canadian Shield, and Alaska and far-western Canada and United States - a huge range but it has no breeding status in our area.

Drawing by Diana Banville is based on a photo in BirdWatch (Bird Studies Canada) Fall 2002 #21



Promotion Report

The members of the Toronto Field Naturalists Promotion Committee were active in raising the profile of our club in 2002. Chris Girgulis sent out notices of our lectures and selected walks to radio stations and community newspapers.

Art Drysdale of TALK 740 AM interviewed our speaker the day before each of our meetings. His garden programme is broadcast from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. on Saturdays in the winter months and from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. during the gardening season.

Toronto Field Naturalists were represented at a number of environmental and natural history events during 2002:

Earth Day in High Park in April (3 volunteers), International Migratory Bird Day at the Metro Toronto Zoo in May (5 volunteers), the celebration of the Toronto Bay Initiative at the music garden at Queen's Quay in July (1 volunteer), Simcoe Day at Todmorden Mills in August (4 volunteers), the Harvest Festival in High Park in October (3 volunteers), and a fall event hosted by TRCA in Etienne Brule Park in October (4 volunteers), Toronto City Hall in November (2 volunteers). These events allowed us to network with other environmental organizations and to promote our club to the public. We would like to thank the volunteers, without their help we would not have been able to participate in these events. Thanks also to those who assisted in delivering and picking up displays. We would certainly appreciate more help with these tasks in 2003.

Thanks to the Toronto Public Library a Toronto Field Naturalists display unit appeared for two-week periods during the past 15 months at the following branches: Agincourt, Malvern, S. Walter Stewart, Don Mills, North York Central, Deer Park, High Park, Urban Affairs, Eatonville, Long Branch, New Toronto and Richview. The Library has also distributed posters to all of its branches announcing our monthly meetings, and a number of members regularly supply the local branches with TFN applications. We need help with this and delivering applications to appropriate locations such as the Civic Garden Centre.

Finally, thanks to Elaine Farragher for creating posters announcing our meetings and the Toronto Field Naturalists website at www.sources.com/tfn. The website is still developing so we would appreciate suggestions for links to natural history, environmental and other appropriate organizations.

Andre Vietinghoff
416-232-9241

□

FOR READING

THE MAZINAW EXPERIENCE: BON ECHO AND BEYOND by John Campbell,
published by the Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc. Toronto, 2000

After an absence of nearly forty-five years I returned to the Mazinaw, camped at Bon Echo Provincial Park and climbed the rock again. I was so impressed by the interpretive cruise in the park that I became a member of the Friends of Bon Echo. Through them I met author John Campbell who was in the process of writing this easy-to-read, well-illustrated small book with twelve chapters.

In case you don't know where Lake Mazinaw is, it is located in typically Canadian Shield country well over one thousand feet above sea level, about one hundred kilometers northwest of Kingston. It is the headwaters of the Canadian Mississippi River. The twelve-mile-long lake is actually a rift valley and is one of the deepest lakes in Ontario after the Great Lakes.

The first two chapters deal with the first nations peoples and the mystery around the now fading pictographs painted by the early aboriginal inhabitants. The rock was very sacred to the early peoples.

Forestry practices in the mid-nineteenth century exploited the majestic white pines with slash cutting which later caused erosion and devastating forest fires. Settlement was difficult on the rocky shield, mining was unsuccessful, and transportation difficult. Wealthy visitors around the turn of the century led to the building of the Bon Echo Inn with its artistic and literary associations. The Inn lands were given to Ontario in 1958 and later other vast tracts were acquired, so that when Bon Echo Provincial Park opened in 1965 it was able to accommodate 170,000 visitors each year with 500 camp sites on 6,643 hectares.

I was fortunate to be able to attend Camp Mazinaw (1940-1990) for three summers in the late fifties, an outdoor camp for sixty boys for six weeks.

On the natural beauty of the Mazinaw, the last chapter of the book gives information on not only the flora and fauna but a lot about the geological and recent history. Bon Echo rock rises three hundred feet above the water; one can feel the deep spiritual mystery of the place as the first nations did.

Peter Iveson

□

A dazzling day this.
Will the groundhog have to squint
to see his shadow?

Haiku by Diana Banville,
February 2, 2000.

FOR READING (cont'd)

***Algonquin Wildlife* by Norm Quinn**, Published by Natural Heritage/
Natural History Inc. 2002, 213 pages, includes bibliography,
appendices, and index,\$24.95.

As naturalists we pride ourselves on getting out into nature whatever the weather, but for me, and I suspect many of you, one of the joys of winter is to curl up with a good nature book while the storm rages outside.

Algonquin Wildlife is just such a book. In this book Quinn, Park Management Biologist at Algonquin Park, treats the reader to a 'behind the scenes' glimpse of the scientists who have worked at the park and their subjects and research through the years.

Through the accounts of these frequently eccentric individuals we see how times have changed in the way we view wildlife. We learn, for instance, of a research project in the early 1960s in which Doug Pimlott took 106 wolves, removing tissues and organs in order to examine ages, condition, etc. and thus determine survival rates in wolves. This type of procedure, we are assured, would be unthinkable today.

We learn of the subtle language of the moose's antler movements and the shenanigans that went on to gain this knowledge. Imagine, if you will, a highly respected scientist prancing around in a swamp wearing one of his many moose head creations in order to get a rutting moose's reactions. On one occasion only a quick change to a moose head with a less formidable rack of antlers saved the scientist to tell the tale.

We hear of another biologist so caught up in his work that he seldom went home and in his desk, after his demise, was discovered a stack of uncashed paycheques.

While Quinn stays fairly objective, he often shows us his true feelings as, when talking of the effects of stress in animals, he refers to snowmobiles as "cursed things" (not allowed in the Park). I must say, however, I was troubled, that he listed beavers' importance to the fur industry among the reasons to try to bring them back from their current 50% decline.

Quinn has an easy style, the text just rolls along with one interesting anecdote following another, and the narrative is liberally sprinkled with his dry sense of humour and obvious compassion for wildlife and people alike.

Towards the end of the book Quinn makes the comment that he has, unfortunately, just one more tale to tell us in the Algonquin Wildlife story; after reading this fascinating book, I am sure you will echo that sentiment.

MEMORIES OF TODMORDEN

Next time you are down at the Todmorden Mills Park, take a look at the side of the paper mill facing the DVP. You will see a number of windows that have been bricked in. In the early 1930s, when my chums and I roamed that area on days off from school, those windows were still functional, although the mill had ceased to operate long ago and many of the panes had been broken. One day our curiosity got the better of us and we found a window at ground level with an opening big enough to let us crawl through into a basement room. The only thing we found to give us a clue to what went on in that great rambling structure were two large cylindrical vats made of bricks. They looked like truncated silos, 6 to 8 feet in diameter, and deep enough that none of us would take up a dare to climb in, for fear we would have trouble getting out again. I wonder what happened to those vats when the mill was subsequently converted to a stable for a riding school and more recently to an art gallery-theatre complex ?

In those days the Helliwell house was still inhabited, as was the small house on the north side of Pottery Road hill opposite and a short distance uphill from the Park entrance. The latter, which is variously referred to as a workman's cotage or Colin Skinner's home, became the initial Fantasy Farm before it was demolished. And the brick road which runs past the mill and the Helliwell house, crosses a bridge, and terminates in a parking lot nowadays, continued on across the flood plain to serve the brick yard. Of course neither the Bayview Extension nor the DVP existed then. The flood plain was a veritable garden of long grass, golden rod, asters and milkweed. Occasionally my terrier would spook a pheasant there, giving me my first opportunity to witness their characteristic flight pattern. It begins with a rapid beating of wings to gain momentum for takeoff and ascent, reaches an apex, then ends in a glide to earth some distance away. The bird just sits still then to allow its pursuer to lose track and interest in it.

Another curiosity we came upon at the foot of Pottery Road was the remains of an old timber dam about a hundred yards upstream from the old rainbow bridge. All there was left was part of a log crib in the bank towards the railway, a sill log across the bottom of the river, and a spillway running in the direction of the paper mill. This spillway was a very conspicuous landmark for many years, but it is now almost entirely filled in and buried under the DVP.

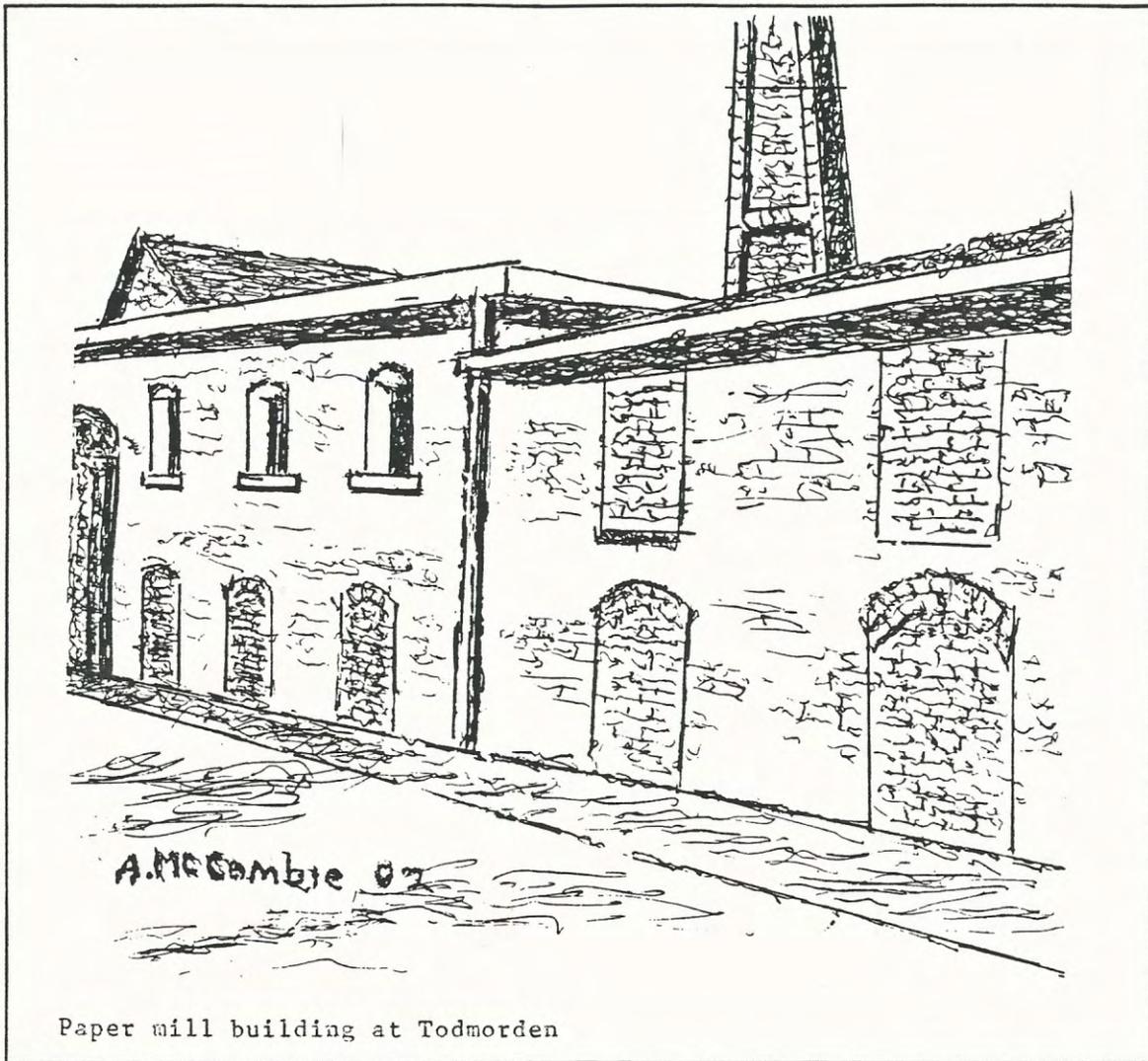
Even as youngsters we recognized that something very interesting and important must have gone on at Todmorden Mills, but the information about it was scattered in various archives, land records and old books not easily available to us. Happily, this situation has been rectified by the following fascinating books on the Todmorden pioneers and their industries :

- Guthrie, Ann 1986 DON VALLEY LEGACY - A PIONEER HISTORY The Boston Mills Press 219 pages.
 Herzberg, Louise & Helen Juhola 1987 TODMORDEN MILLS - A HUMAN AND NATURAL HISTORY
 Toronto Field Naturalists 46 pages
 Darke, Eleanor 1995 "A MILL SHOULD BE BUILT THEREON" Natural History/Natural Heritage Inc. 113 pages.

Alen McCombie



TODMORDEN (cont'd)



□

People dressed not according to the dictates of fashion but to be in harmony with their environment, and there were mass excursions to admire the effect of moonlight on lakes, or to paint flowering trees, or simply to admire them.

from THE GODDESS IN THE STONE by Norman Lewis, Henry Holt & Co. New York, 1991

TORONTO GETS NEW WALKING TRAIL

On a T.F.N. walk I discovered a new trail to walk or bike. I have always been frustrated when walking south from Sheppard along the East Don because of the Donalds Golf Course at York Mills. It is a long walk to Don Mills Rd. to get around this obstacle. A new route will take you over to an abandoned railway line running from Leslie and York Mills to Edwards Gardens and Wilket Creek. You have to walk a short distance west along York Mills Rd. from Don Mills to Leslie.

To get on the railway line you enter from a mall on the northeast corner of Leslie and York Mills. Walk southeast through the mall over to the railway line and you will find a spur line which is not used. This abandoned line runs almost to Eglinton with no danger of a train coming along. The tracks have been ripped up.

This is quite a long walk and it is mostly behind private homes so homeowners have planted many trees and shrubs to quiet the noise of the trains. This makes it quite green and pleasant. I saw only a few birds along the route but this could be explained by the weather and time of the year. [Feb. 6 outing on page 3 to walk part of this trail.]

If you do not want to cut over across Lawrence to Edwards Gardens, you can continue down the railway line to the Inn on the Park at Eglinton. If you take this route there is no real exit to the street at Eglinton. I went through a hole in the fence and ended up in the parking lot of the hotel.

Along this route you will find there are patches of forest and abandoned fields on the west side of the tracks. Most of this property probably will be developed in the near future so enjoy it while you can. Most of this trail is loose gravel so is not ideal for riding a bicycle. In time it should get packed down, and biking will become easier.

I like the idea of a new trail for Toronto but wonder why it was discontinued as a Go train line. It could become a necessity for commuters in the future. When I walked on this trail I did not see anyone else using it. It is a great place to get away from the crowds.

Roger Powley

□

If you want to achieve conservation, the first thing you have to do is persuade people that the natural world is precious, beautiful, worth saving and complex. If people can't understand that and don't believe that in their hearts, conservation doesn't stand a chance. That's the first step.

from "It's a wonderful life" [an interview with David Attenborough] by Michael Bond
in NEWSIDENTIST, Dec. 14, 2002

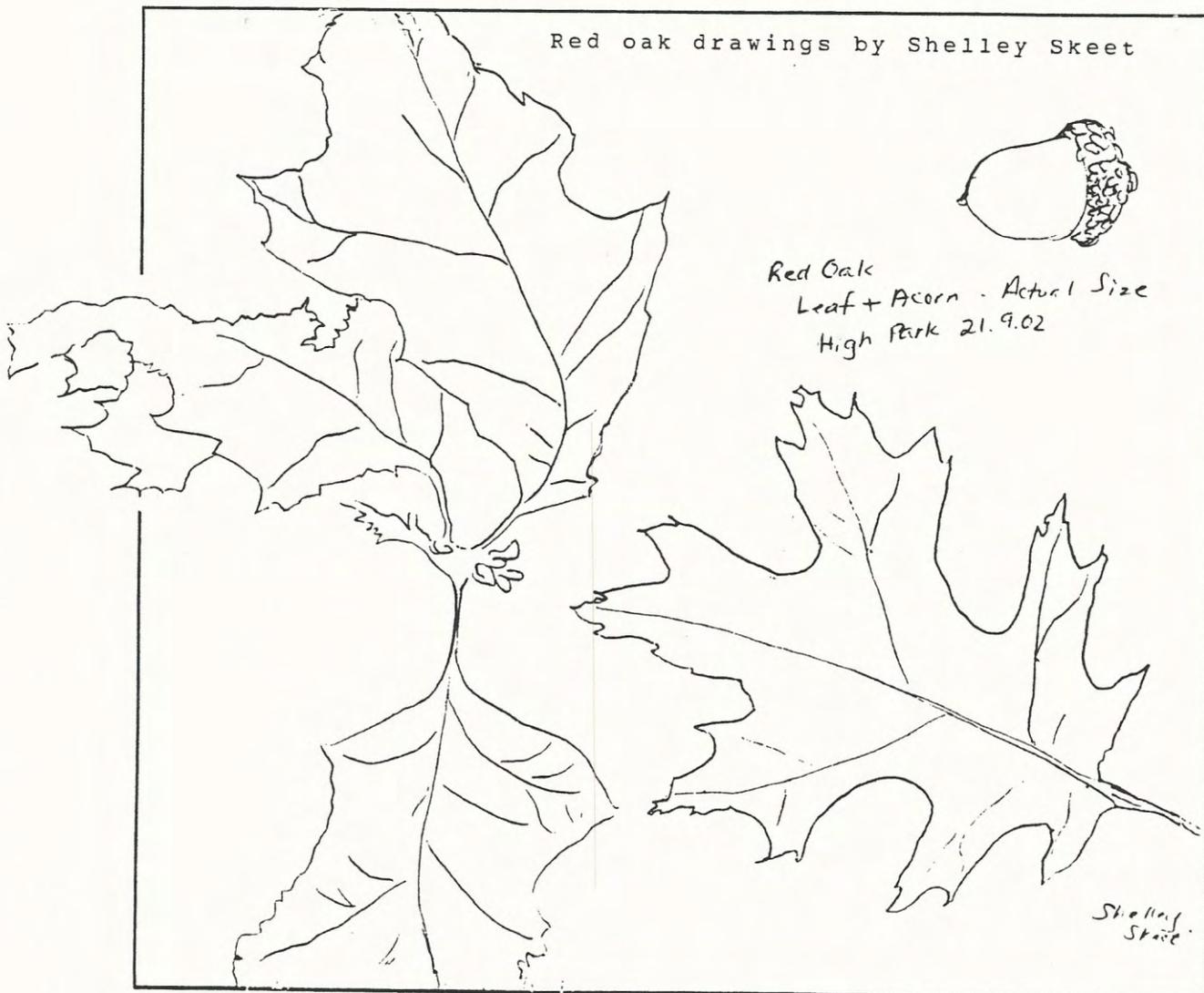
MYCORRHIZAE - THE FUNGUS ROOTS OF TREES

Many people believe that forest trees take up water and nutrients through hair roots. This belief is quite wrong. Forest trees are dependent for their survival on the fungi that are associated with their roots. Each tree has hundreds of thousands of kilometres of fungal threads (hyphae) associated with its roots. It is these mycorrhizal fungi that supply the tree with the nutrients and water essential for healthy growth. In exchange, the tree gives the fungus sugars that are manufactured through photosynthesis in its leaves. Using this sugar for energy, the fungus maintains a hyphal grid that permeates the soil to supply the tree. Some of the tree's sugars are also used to produce the fungal fruit bodies.

from MUSHROOMS OF ONTARIO AND EASTERN CANADA, George Barron, 1999

□

Red oak drawings by Shelley Skeet



IN THE NEWS

NEW ROOFTOP GARDEN REPORT OFFERING SMOG SOLUTIONS PUTS CITY ON SPOT

In October the National Research Council, Environment Canada, the Toronto Atmospheric Fund and others released a joint report on the City Hall gardens. For the first time, there's hard data and computer models to show rooftop flower power is a cool way to save lives, energy, water, money and space.

Soil and plants add a layer of insulation at the top of a building, helping to keep heat in during the winter and out in the summer. Owners of a typical high-rise can expect to see energy savings of about 25 per cent during the cold months, and at least that amount on air conditioning. More surprisingly, green roofs don't just act as passive insulation. They become living machines, breathing and sweating places that air condition the entire city. Standard city building materials like cement and asphalt store heat. That's why summer nights bring no relief. And it's the hot air hovering near roofs that has to be cooled by air conditioning units. Vegetation on building tops does what humans do -- sweat -- which cools them through the process of evaporation.

Plants also work as air filters, capturing some of the free-floating particles that otherwise go into the air soup known as smog. The higher up the plants are in the sky, the more likely they are to capture the particles that make up smog. As well, by reducing demand for coal-fired electricity to run air conditioners, green roofs reduce the sulphur dioxide that creates acid rain.

from an article by Wayne Roberts, in "NOW", October 31, 2002

DISEASE BUGS WILL THRIVE WHEN THE SMOG CLOSES IN

Smog not only loads your lungs with millions of irritating smoke particles -- it is also teeming with bacteria that could affect people's health. Particles of soot and dust in smog scatter UV light, so if less UV than expected is coming off a certain area of Earth, it's probably because there's a cloud of smog in the way. UV radiation from the sun kills airborne bacteria, including those that are pathogenic to humans. But smog scatters UV, protecting the bugs -- which is why more people get ill during smoggy conditions.

extracted from an article on Environmental Health, in the NEWSIDENTIST, Oct. 26, 2002

▷

Rafts of long-tailed ducks
Chattering like teen-agers
Just before diving.

Helen Juhola
Feb. 17, 2002

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

PLAGUE ON A NATIONAL ICON

In 2002 177 people died of West Nile virus. Even so, the biggest threat may not be to people but to millions of the continent's birds. While media coverage has exaggerated the public health problem, few people seem to care about the impending slaughter of millions of birds of many species. Some species may never recover, because of the way the virus spreads. West Nile virus, which is carried by mosquitoes and lives mainly in birds, arrived in New York in 1999 from Israel. It had never been seen before outside the Old World (Europe, Asia and Africa).

West Nile has ripped through North America's wild birds the way smallpox ravaged Native Americans. No-one knows how many birds are affected. In the worst-affected places, 90 per cent of the crows, the most sensitive species, are gone. The same may be true for crow relatives, such as blue jays. And this year, birds of prey, including species only now recovering from the DDT era, are dying in 10 times their usual numbers in several states.

Classically, a wildlife virus is supposed to become less lethal after its initial attack -- it is not in its interests to kill off all its hosts. But unusually, West Nile infects more than 100 known species of North American birds. And ominously, at least one -- the ubiquitous house sparrow -- carries the virus without falling ill. That means the virus can persist where there are sparrows, no matter how many birds of other species it kills off. House sparrows are probably immune because they also emigrated to New York in 1851 and, like most Old World birds they have evolved to resist West Nile virus.

The picture isn't completely bleak. If European birds evolved resistance to West Nile, perhaps American birds can too.

extracted from an article by Debora Mackenzie , in the NEW SCIENTIST, Oct. 26, 2002

BIRDS' LACKLUSTRE FALL SHOW WORRIES TALON SCOUT

Last year Don Barnett of the High Park hawkwatchers saw 8,000 broad-winged hawks; this year, not quite 2,000. Why? It's too soon to tell. It could be a number of things. One factor is the weather. The birds need a northwest wind and a rising barometer. If we don't get the weather, they'll go elsewhere. We had fewer days which produce the right conditions this year. The second factor is food; their movement depends on prey. There's really a very narrow band of migration they follow.

But it's the same story for all the birds. Last year, 16,455 raptors of all kinds flew past High Park; this year, there were less than half that number. Don isn't sure if there's a problem; patterns develop over time. One thing is certain. He will be on the hill next year. And you can bet he'll be watching closely.

from an article by Joe Fiorito, in THE TORONTO STAR, December 9, 2002

DON, HUMBER CONTAMINATED BY PESTICIDES, STUDY FINDS

Pesticides Toronto homeowners use on lawns and gardens are polluting urban rivers such as the Don and Humber, says a joint study released this month by Environment Canada, the province and city hall. Diazinon, a chemical most often used to control lawn insects, was the most common pesticide found. In 20 per cent of the samples taken, diazinon concentration exceeded levels recommended by the province for the protection of aquatic life.

Eight other pesticides were detected, as were nutrients such as ammonia, large concentrations of which can cause fish to suffocate. The results of the study will be used by Health Canada, the provincial and municipal governments and other decision-makers to determine what action needs to be taken to reduce or control the use of pesticides in Toronto and other cities.

extracted from an article by Jonathan Fowlie, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, Dec. 19, 2002

DEADLY PEST LURKS IN FORESTS

The emerald ash borer is believed to have arrived in Detroit by hitch-hiking on wood-packaging crates from Asia sometime during the last decade. The pest went undiscovered until this summer, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture identified the borer as the cause of the mysterious decline and death observed in large numbers of Detroit-area ash trees.

Canadian authorities were alerted in July, and subsequent field surveys found the pest had reached the greater Windsor area. Since then, Canadian and U.S. authorities have been working feverishly to try to contain the pest within the current boundaries of the infestation.

As an initial action, the two governments slapped a quarantine on the movement of ash tree nursery stock and wood outside the infected area. The next, and most dramatic action involves the planned creation of what authorities are calling a "firebreak," a five-to-six-kilometre-wide swatch around the infested zone where all ash trees will be razed to eliminate the bug's food supply. In Canada, it will likely stretch 30 kilometres from Lake Erie to Lake St. Clair, with the two water bodies acting as natural barriers to further spread.

The borer kills ashes during the larval stage, when it feeds under the bark on sapwood and the other plant tissues which move nutrients through the tree. The serpentine tunnels created by the 2.5-centimetre-long bug are deep enough to cut the flow of nutrients within the tree by girdling the trunk. This causes the infested tree to slowly starve to death over a two-to-three-year period. The borers are not considered a pest in Asia, where they're native to China, Mongolia, Korea and Japan, and are well adapted to survive the winter climate found in the middle latitudes of North America.

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

Researchers say natural controls for the bugs aren't sufficient to stop it. The larvae are eaten by woodpeckers but there are not enough of the birds to contain the outbreak. There are about a billion ash trees in Ontario where they line many city streets.

extracted from an article by Martin Mittelstaedt, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, Dec. 23, 2002

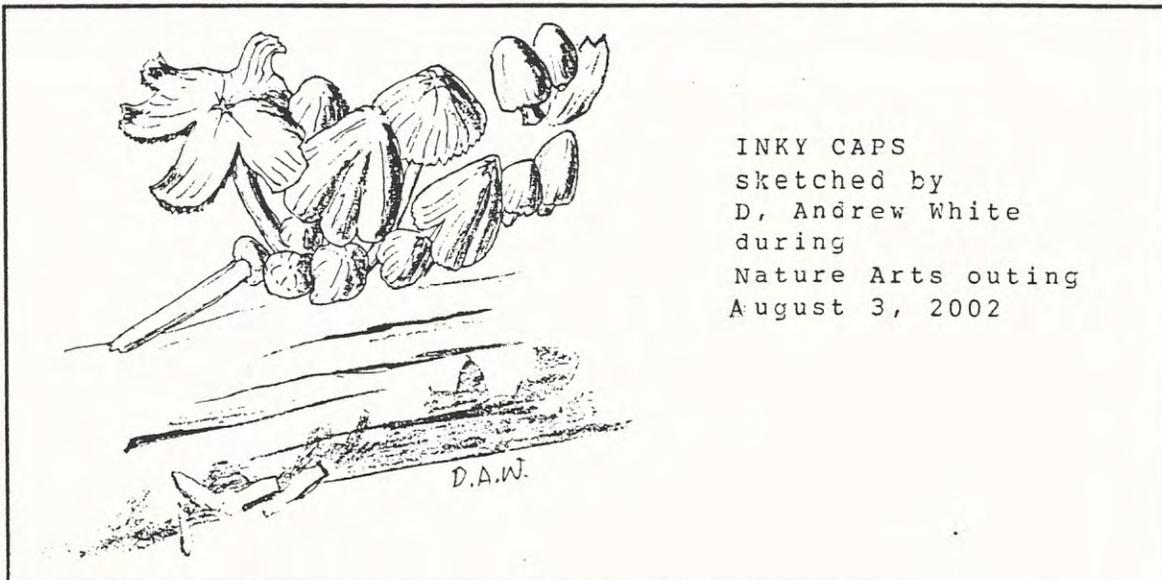
SEWER PIPE A THREAT TO ROUGE

Local environmentalists and politicians are preparing for a fight with York Region over a proposed sewer line that would cut a destructive swath through the Rouge Valley, home to Canada's largest urban park. As part of the York-Durham pipeline project, the York Region plans to run a nine-foot sewer line south from Steeles Avenue near the Little Rouge River to Finch Avenue and across to the Pickering Townline to connect with the Durham septic system. The project is to be completed by 2006.

York Region maintained the pipe is needed to accommodate the massive urban sprawl that has been occurring in the region as well as anticipated future growth over the next three decades. North of Steeles, large portions of the pipe are being laid in tunnels that are bored underground. But for technical reasons, the job requires an open pit dig in Scarborough -- essentially a massive trench -- which could not only disturb the fragile ecosystem of the Rouge River Valley, but dry up the ground water supply.

In addition to facilitating and promoting sprawl, the pipe poses an environmental threat in that sewage from as far north as Newmarket will be drained into Lake Ontario. An alignment that would have kept the pipe out of Scarborough was abandoned because it was too costly and had taken too long to build. Opponents said they will take the fight to block the line to the Ontario Municipal Board if necessary.

extracted from an article by Stuart Green, in THE SCARBOROUGH MIRROR, Dec. 1, 2002



INKY CAPS
sketched by
D, Andrew White
during
Nature Arts outing
August 3, 2002

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

TREE FARMS WON'T SAVE US AFTER ALL

Forest soils and the organic matter buried in them typically contain three to four times as much carbon as the vegetation above. When ground is cleared for forest planting, rotting organic matter in the soil releases a surge of CO₂ into the air. This release will exceed the CO₂ absorbed by growing trees for at least the first ten years. Only later will the uptake of carbon by the trees begin to offset the losses from soils. In fact, some new forests planted on wet, peaty soils will never absorb as much carbon as they spit out.

Europe's forests are absorbing up to 400 million tonnes a year, or 30 per cent of the continent's emissions. Researchers once assumed that most of this came from young forests, since old forests were thought to be in equilibrium with the atmosphere -- sucking up as much gas as they spew out. But old forests actually accumulate more carbon than young plantations. This suggests that conservation of old forests is a better policy for tackling global warming than planting new ones.

extracted from an article by Fred Pearce, in the NEWS SCIENTIST, Oct. 26, 2002

LATE COLOURS A CRY FOR HELP

According to Environment Canada, the June-September period was the warmest since record-keeping began in 1840. There was a period from August 8 to September 13 where there wasn't a drop of rain in Toronto. That has a lot to do with why the leaves took so long to change. In dry weather, leaves will spend more time on the branches, sucking up every last drop of water from the soil and staying green longer to process the sugar and starch they need to survive.

from an article by Nick McCabe-Lokos, in THE TORONTO STAR, November 13, 2002

CHRISTMAS TREES CARRY MOTHS INTO SASKATCHEWAN

Gypsy moth eggs have been found in Saskatchewan, carried from Ontario on Christmas trees. The gypsy moth is a non-native species that feeds mainly on oak leaves, but will hungrily strip a variety of trees bare.

from an article in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, December 20, 2002

CHRISTMAS TREES

Christmas trees, especially artificial ones, can trigger allergy symptoms, says the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. Artificial trees can be covered with mould and dust after a year of basement storage. As for real trees, in rare cases the sap can cause an allergic rash.

from an article by Michael Kesterton, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, November 28, 2002

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

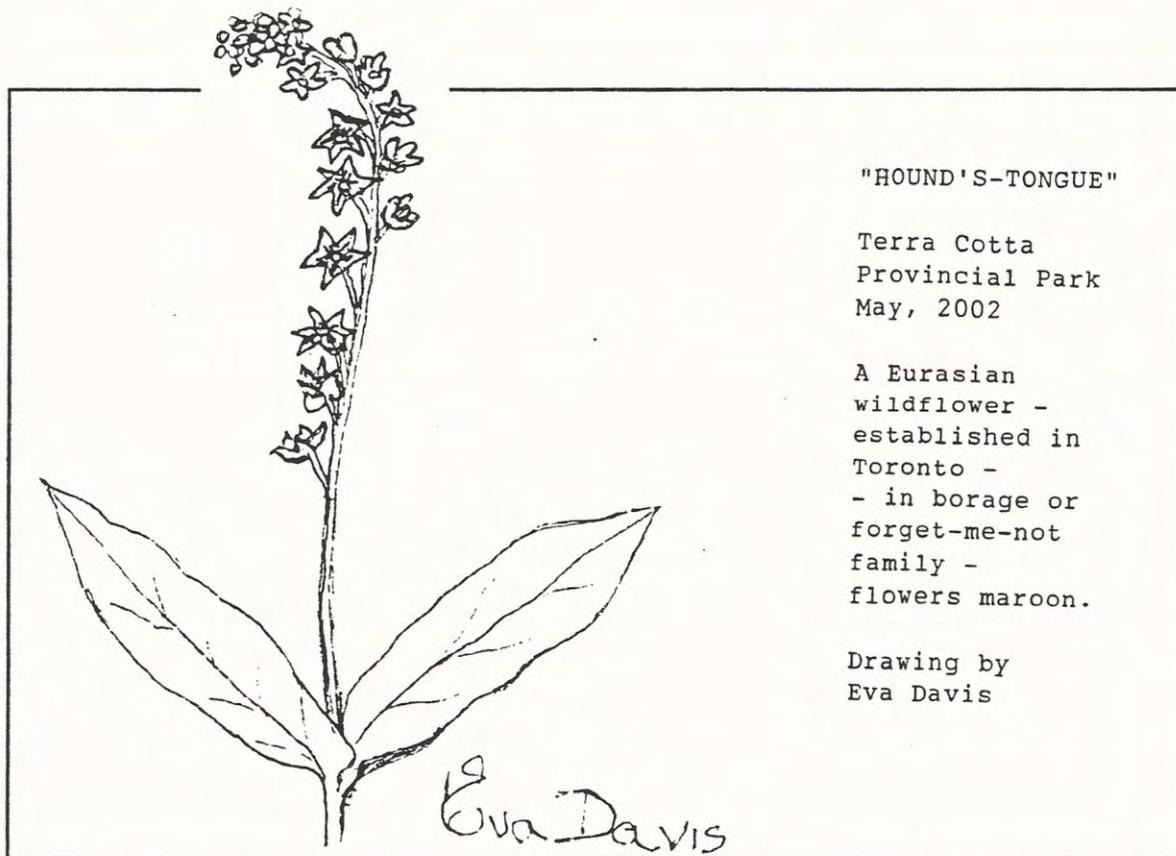
LATEST WASTE HAZARD IS CAST-OFF CELLPHONES

According to cellphone industry figures, cellphone use in the United States has surged to more than 128 million subscribers last year from 340,000 in 1985. Typically, each phone is used for 18 months before being dropped for a newer model. That is starting to add up to a huge amount of waste. By 2005, the report estimates, 130 million cellphones will be thrown out each year. Counting the phones, batteries and chargers, that comes to 65,000 tonnes a year. Although some phones may just stay unused in desk drawers, most will end up in landfills or being incinerated.

The threat of cellphone waste is not restricted to the United States. More than 1 billion cellphones are used worldwide. Japan and several European countries have started pressuring manufacturers to eliminate toxic chemicals. Companies can act to eliminate waste by creating take-back programs that offer discounts on new phones or phone service in exchange for returned equipment. If producers have to take back their cellphones, they have an incentive to make products that generate less waste and are easier to recycle.

from an article by Anahad O'Connor, in THE TORONTO STAR, November 2, 2002

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"HOUND'S-TONGUE"

Terra Cotta
Provincial Park
May, 2002

A Eurasian
wildflower -
established in
Toronto -
- in borage or
forget-me-not
family -
flowers maroon.

Drawing by
Eva Davis

Eva Davis

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

DECISION FOR WEST NILE CONTROL DELAYED

A board of health commitment to tougher pesticide bylaws and a plan to request money from the province has prompted a delay in approving a West Nile virus control program for next year. The city's medical officer of health said the city needs to have a plan, and that chemical spraying may be necessary, based on consultation with other public health units in our region as well as with the ministry (of health) that non-chemical control measures will no longer be sufficient to curb the risk. Chemical spraying, however, ~~should be a last resort~~, the board decided after asking for new restrictions on the use of chemical sprays. The board asked staff to draft a chemical pesticide bylaw that could be implemented as early as next spring. It would effectively ban pesticides for cosmetic purposes within the city and is similar to a law passed in Hudson, Quebec that was recently upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada. The move came despite a staff proposal to phase in a new bylaw with voluntary industry-led reductions of up to 90 per cent in three years.

extracted from an article by Stuart Green, in the NORTH YORK MIRROR, Nov. 22, 2002

PESTICIDE BYLAW DUE IN APRIL

The Toronto public health department will have a proposal ready by April for a bylaw to severely restrict the use of outdoor pesticides. Within three years, the department wants to reduce pesticide use around schools, hospitals and long-term-care centres by 100 per cent, 90 per cent on residential properties and by 60 per cent for commercial and industrial users, to protect the health of our residents and the natural environment of our city. The enforcement powers of a bylaw will only be used if those ambitious targets aren't met.

Landscape Ontario, which employs 16,000 people, will have difficulty achieving the city's proposed targets. But a coalition of health care providers, labour and environmentalists called the Partnership for Pesticide Bylaws, said the city's three-year timetable is too late. They want a bylaw now.

from an article by Bruce DeMara, in THE TORONTO STAR, November 9, 2002

Nature is enormously resilient ... But if we want life, we will have to stop depending on someone else to save the world. It is up to us -- you and me, all of us.

from LISTENING TO WHALES: WHAT THE ORCAS HAVE TAUGHT US by Alexandra Morton, Ballantine Books, N.Y., 2002

THE WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

February 2002, Toronto

By contrast with December and January, February was a little more winter-like. It was characterized by a quick succession of brief cold spells interrupting the milder pattern. True, we did hit a high of 14.5°C at Pearson on February 25th, the third-highest February reading there, but there were more freezing days, and it dropped into the minus teens on a couple of occasions. In comparison with the five-year mean from 1998 up to and including this year, February could be considered "normal" in just about every respect, including the meagre snowfalls of 7.0 cm downtown and 6.0 cm downtown. Note that February 1998 was considerably warmer than this month, that 1999 and 2000 were almost as warm, and that both February 1998 and 1999 had less than 5 cm of snow. Welcome to global warming!

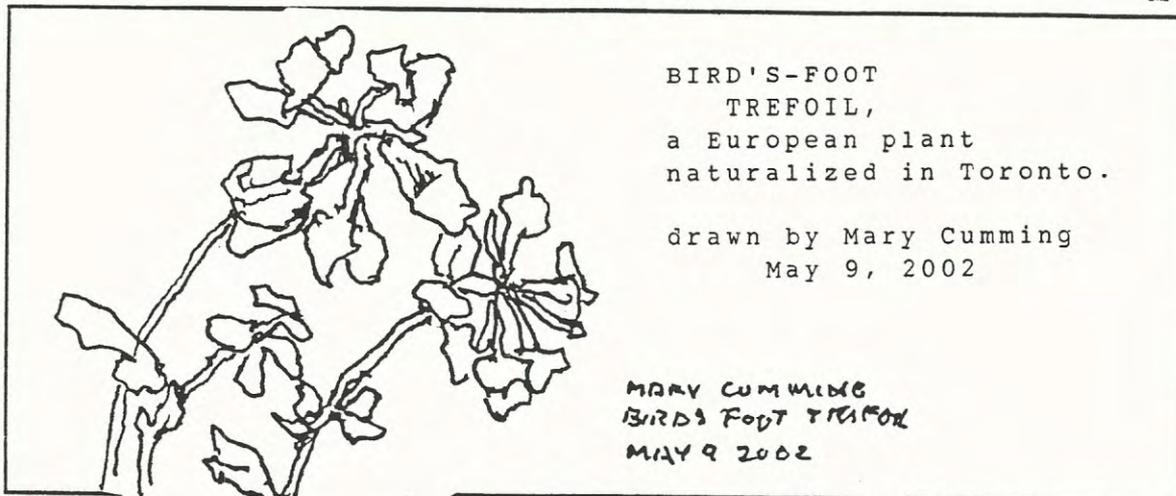
Along with the warmth of the past months, the southwesterly winds continued their pattern, as Pearson Airport had an average windspeed of 20.3 km/h, the highest since the 1971s 20.8 km/h (normal is 16.5 km/h), and Toronto Island had an average windspeed of 23.9 km/h, 3.6 km/h above normal and the highest since 1988.

Snow cover from the storm on January 31st did last half-way through the month, and frigid Arctic conditions moved into the Prairies starting in the second half of January; but that did not stop this from being the warmest winter on record across Canada, let alone in the Great Lakes basin. Toronto's December to February mean of 1.3°C easily eclipsed the 0.4°C of 1931-1932. It was also notable for the absence of lake ice not only on the Great Lakes, but also on most lakes of any size in southern and central Ontario. Only smaller kettle lakes and ponds had any significant ice, and on these it wasn't thick enough to be safe.

Precipitation was slightly below normal with 35.2 mm downtown and 38.4 mm at Pearson. This was entirely due to the shortfall of snow. Hydrologically, much will depend on early spring conditions.

Gavin Miller

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BIRD'S-FOOT
TREFOIL,
a European plant
naturalized in Toronto.

drawn by Mary Cumming
May 9, 2002

MARY CUMMING
BIRD'S FOOT TREFOIL
MAY 9 2002

COMING EVENTS

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

- Sat. Feb. 8 from 9 am (allday) with Garth Riley to look for winter birds in Durham Region. Meet at the Pickering GO station to car pool if necessary. Bring a lunch & dress warmly.

Royal Canadian Institute - free Sunday science lectures - in the Macleod Auditorium, Medical Sciences Building, 1 King's College Circle.
Call 416-977-2983 for details.

- Jan. 26 at 3 pm - Random Knotting with Stuart G. Whittington
- Feb. 2 at 3 pm - Red Sky at Night: The Scientific Basis of Weatherlore with David Phillips [David Phillips will be speaking at the TFN May meeting.]
- Feb. 9 at 3 pm - Fish that Climb Waterfalls: Experiments in Development and Evolution with Brian K. Hall
- Feb. 16 at 3 pm - Facts, Myths and Chemophobia: Finding Dioxin in the Environment with Ray Clement
- Feb. 23 at 3 pm - Alexander von Humboldt: Mapping the Earth with Joan Steigerwald

Toronto Entomologists' Association meeting

- Sat. Feb. 22 at 1 pm in Room 119, Northrop Frye Hall, 73 Queen's Park Cres. East - Marvin Ganderman of McMaster University will show us Ontario's Common Insects captured on film instead of pins.
Call 905-727-6993 for more information.

Citizens Concerned about the Future of the Etobicoke Waterfront

- Sat. Feb. 15 from 9 am to 11 am - Humber Bay East with Andrew Keaveney
Call 416-252-7047 for more information.

Canadian Nature Federation - Annual General Meeting and Conference in Medicine Hat, Alberta - June 19-22. See the prairies, choose from more than 20 field trips and enjoy great speakers and guides. For registration information contact Box 2491, Medicine Hat, AB, T1A 8G8 or phone (403) 529-6225 or E-mail: grassnat@meplane.com

Federation of Ontario Naturalists - Annual General Meeting & Conference - May 23-25 at Port Elgin. For information about talks and trips on the Bruce Peninsula contact Jennifer Baker, FON, 355 Lesmill Rd. Don Mills M3B 2W8 or call 416-444-8419.

Rouge Valley Conservation Centre

- Sunday, Feb. 9 - Wildlife in the Rouge from 1 pm to 3 pm - walk begins and ends at Pearse House on the east side of Meadowvale Rd. north of Sheppard Ave. East. Call 416-282-8265 for details.

Book reading & signing - Sun. Feb. 23 from 2 pm to 4 pm at Mirvish Roostore on Markham St. just south of Bloor St. West -- The Last Island: a naturalist's sojourn on Triangle Island [R.C.] by Alison Watt. Call Kelley at 416-533-6798 for more details.

COMING EVENTS (cont'd)

Toronto Reference Library - Audubon's Birds of America - opens Feb. 22 at 789 Yonge St. - selected hand-coloured plates from the rare first edition of this book, celebrating Canada Post's first issue of a series of Audubon stamps, beginning in February.

Ian Wheal Heritage Walks

- Sat. Feb. 1 at 1:30 pm. Meet at the northeast corner of Victoria Park Ave. and Eglinton Ave. East to visit the lost Wigmore Pond.
- Sun. Feb. 23 at 1:30 pm. Meet at the southwest corner of Ellesmere Rd. and Pharmacy Ave. to visit Trout Creek.

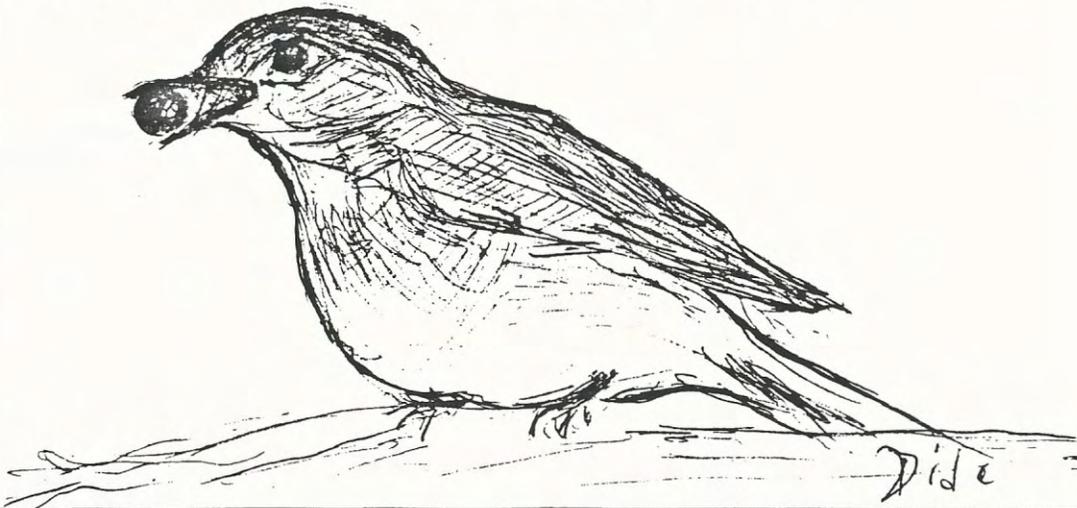
High Park Sunday afternoon walking tours at 1:15 pm

- Jan. 26 - How birds and mammals survive the winter
 - Feb. 9 - Identifying trees in the winter
 - Feb. 23 - Photo opportunities in the park - bring your camera
- Walks begin just south of the Grenadier Cafe and Teahouse in High Park. Call 416-392-1748 for 416-392-6916 for more details. \$2 donation. □

FEMALE BLUEBIRD
WITH DOGWOOD BERRY

According to BENT'S LIFE HISTORIES - chapter on the Eastern Bluebird - its most important vegetable food is wild fruit of which 38 species were identified but not listed. According to Harry Krueger in NATURE SOCIETY NEWS the bluebird stores dogwood berries. We have plenty of dogwoods in Toronto.

Drawing by Diana Banville is based on a photo by Harry Krueger in NSN October, 1991.



TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS

2 Carlton St., #1519
 Toronto, Ontario M5B 1J3
 416-593-2656
 Web site: www.sources.com/tfn

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OTHER PUBLICATIONS

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| TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB: ITS HISTORY AND CONSTITUTION, 1965\$ 2.00 | TORONTO REGION BIRD CHART, 1983.....\$ 4.00 |
| CHECKLIST OF PLANTS IN FOUR TORONTO PARKS; WILKET CREEK, HIGH PARK, HUMBER VALLEY, LAMBTON WOODS, 1972\$ 2.00 | A GRAPHIC GUIDE TO ONTARIO MOSSES, 1985\$ 4.00 |
| TORONTO THE GREEN, 1976 Metropolitan Toronto's important natural areas are described and recommendations given for their conservation and management; includes maps, bibliography and index\$ 8.00 | GUIDE TO TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' NATURE RESERVES, 2001\$ 4.00 |
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| Survey #3 - Chapman Valley Ravine, 1975 | TORONTO CHECKLISTS (birds, other vertebrates, butterflies, other invertebrates, mosses, other plants)each 50¢ |
| Survey #4 - Wigmore Ravine, 1975 | TORONTO ROCKS, 1998.....\$ 8.00 |
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| Survey #6 - Burke Ravine, 1976 | |
| Survey #7 - Taylor Creek-Woodbine Bridge Ravines, 1977 | NO G.S.T. |
| Survey #8 - West Don Valley, 1978 | All publications may be ordered from Toronto Field Naturalists, 2 Carlton St., #1519, Toronto, Ontario M5B 1J3. (Add \$2.00 per item for postage and handling). |
| INDEX OF TFN NEWSLETTERS (1938 to present).....\$10.00 | |

*Please note: It has always been the policy of the Toronto Field Naturalists
not to give out its membership list.*

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\$30 FAMILY (2 adults - same address, children included)
 \$25 SINGLE, SENIOR FAMILY
 \$20 STUDENT, SENIOR SINGLE
 Tax receipts issued for donations