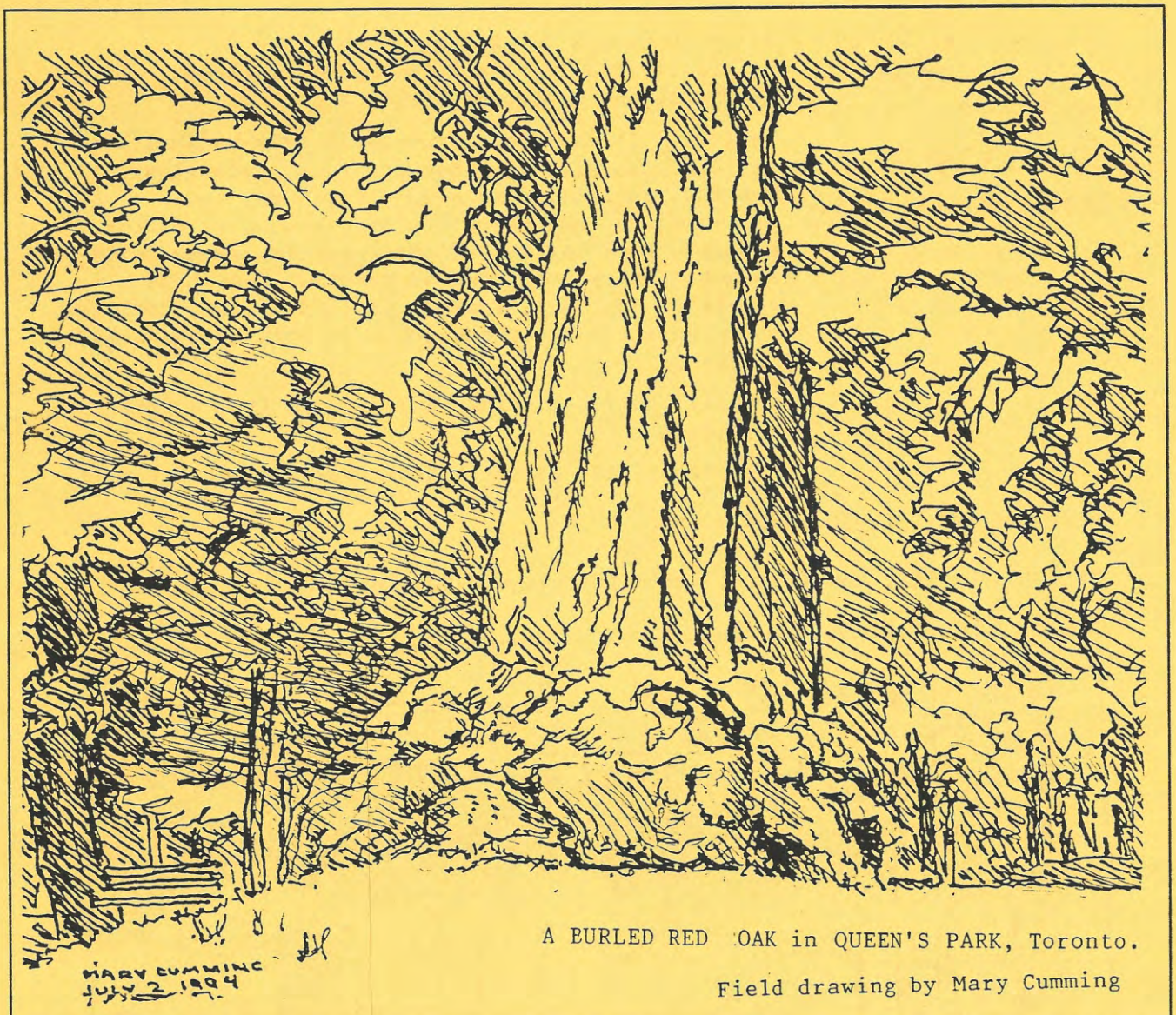
TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 518 October 2003



A BURLED RED OAK in QUEEN'S PARK, Toronto.

Field drawing by Mary Cumming

Inside

TFN MEETINGS

Sunday, Oct. 5, 2003 - AN INTRODUCTION TO NATURAL AUSTRALIA
at 2:30 pm
at Emmanuel College
75 Queen's Park Cres. East
VISITORS WELCOME!

an illustrated talk by Peter Money, retired geologist and member of TFN.

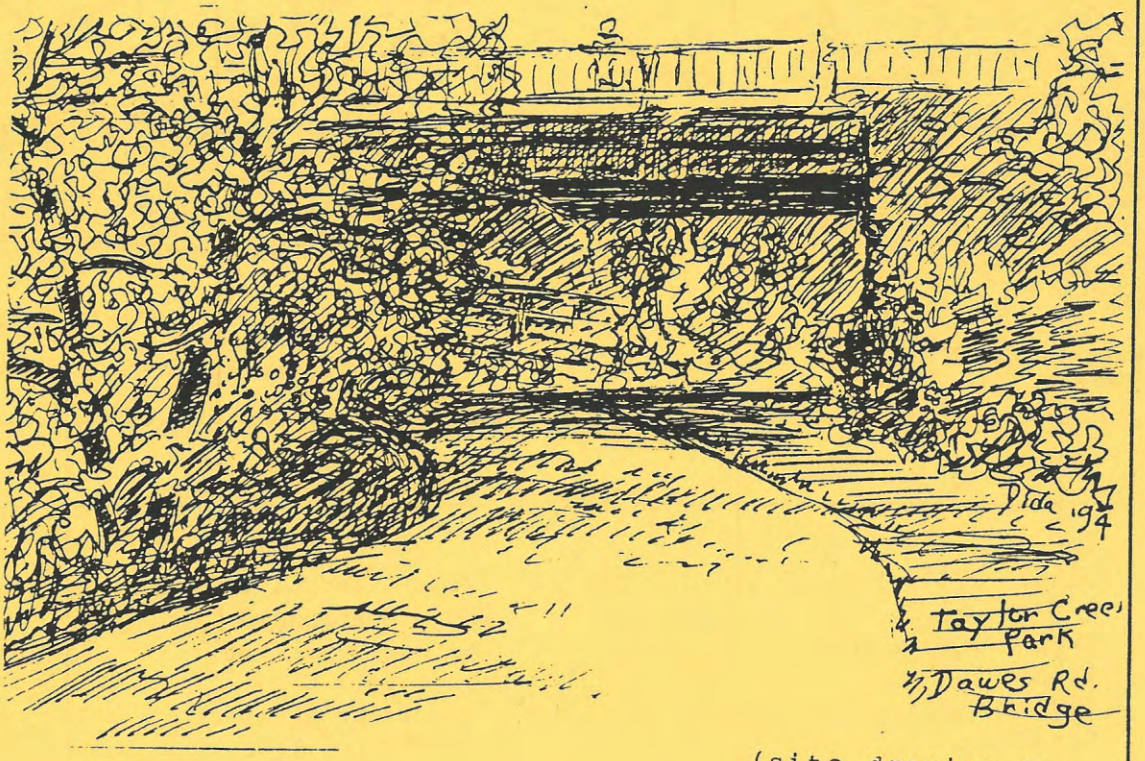
- This talk is based on a two-month trip to Australia in 2002. We will be shown potoroos, pademelons, possums, parrots, pimeleas, planigales, and paradoxes, a land where the magpie-lark is neither, a flying duck can be a flower, and the swamp daisy is not a daisy nor lives in swamps. These and a sample of Australia's other mammals, birds, reptiles and plants and their environments will be shown and discussed.

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

+ memberships and miscellaneous publications for sale

NEXT MEETING: Sunday, Nov. 2, 2003

NEXT NEWSLETTER: November (to be mailed in mid-October)



(site drawing by Diana Banville)

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 October 4 10:30 am	ST. LAWRENCE MARKET - nature arts Leader: Melanie Milanich Meet at the entrance near the southwest corner of Front St. East and Jarvis St. 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.
Oct. 5	TFN MEETING (See page 2 for details.)
Wednesday Oct. 8 2 pm	LAKE IROQUOIS SHORELINE - nature walk. Leader: Alexander Cappell Meet at the northwest corner of Bathurst St. and Davenport Rd. Walk will end at Yonge St.
Saturday Oct. 11 10 am	HUMBER BAY PARK EAST - birds Leader: Doug Paton Meet at the Humber loop of the Queen streetcar (west of the Humber). Bring lunch. (A bus from the Old Mill subway station ends at the streetcar loop.)
Wednesday Oct. 15 11 am	ROUGE VALLEY - nature walk Leader: Orval White Meet at the northeast corner of Sheppard Ave. East and Meadowvale Rd. Bring lunch & binoculars. This will be a 3 to 4 hour walk over hilly terrain.
Saturday Oct. 18 10:30 am	CROTHERS WOODS - environmental issue Leader: Robin Powell Meet on the west side of Millwood Rd. at Overlea Blvd. Bring lunch.

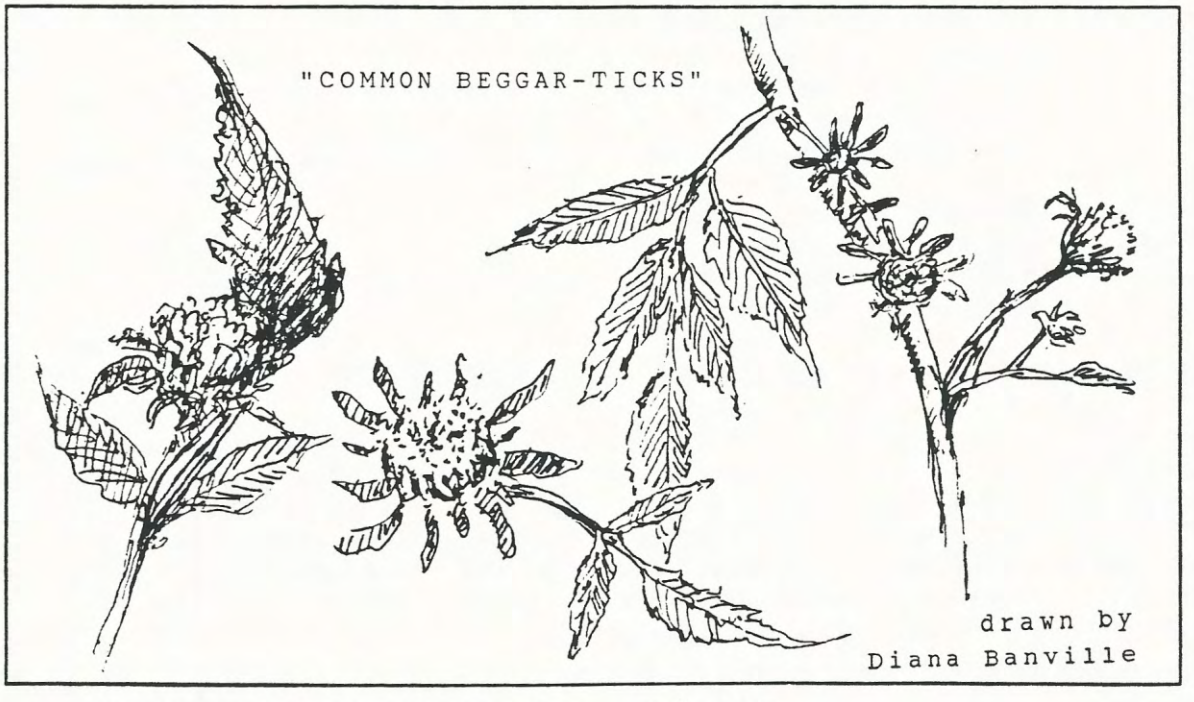
FOR MORE OUTINGS AND MEETINGS, SEE PAGES 28 & 29.

Records of the places you visit and the plants you find are always worth making for their own sake and to aid your memory. The more detailed they are the better; variations in the plants themselves are worth noting and so are fluctuations in the numbers from year to year. Times of flowering particularly in the early part of the year always seem to have a special appeal.

from PLANT LIFE by C.T. Prime, Collins, London, 1977

OCTOBER OUTINGS (cont'd)

Sunday Oct. 19 2 pm	HIGH PARK - urban ecology Leader: Ron Allan Meet at the northeast corner of the park -- the southwest corner of Bloor St. West and Parkside Dr. (Keele subway station). This is a joint outing with the North Toronto Green Community.
Tuesday Oct. 21 10:30 am	JAMES GARDENS - nature walk Leader: Marg Catto Meet at the park entrance on the south side of Edenbridge Dr. which runs east from Royal York Rd. Bring lunch and binoculars.
Saturday Oct. 25 10 am	GATES GULLY - nature walk Leader: Karin Fawthrop Meet on the north side of Kingston Rd. at Bellamy Rd. S. Morning only. Steep hill on this walk.
Sunday Oct. 26 10:30 am	MORNINGSIDE PARK - birds Leader: Carol Sellers Meet at the park entrance on the west side of Morningside Ave. (north of Lawrence Ave. East). Bring lunch, water and binoculars. This is an all-day outing.
Thursday Oct. 30 10 am	TAYLOR CREEK - nature walk Leader: Boris Mather Meet at the Victoria Park subway station. Bring lunch & binoculars.



Montgomery's Meadow - Sept. 1, 2000

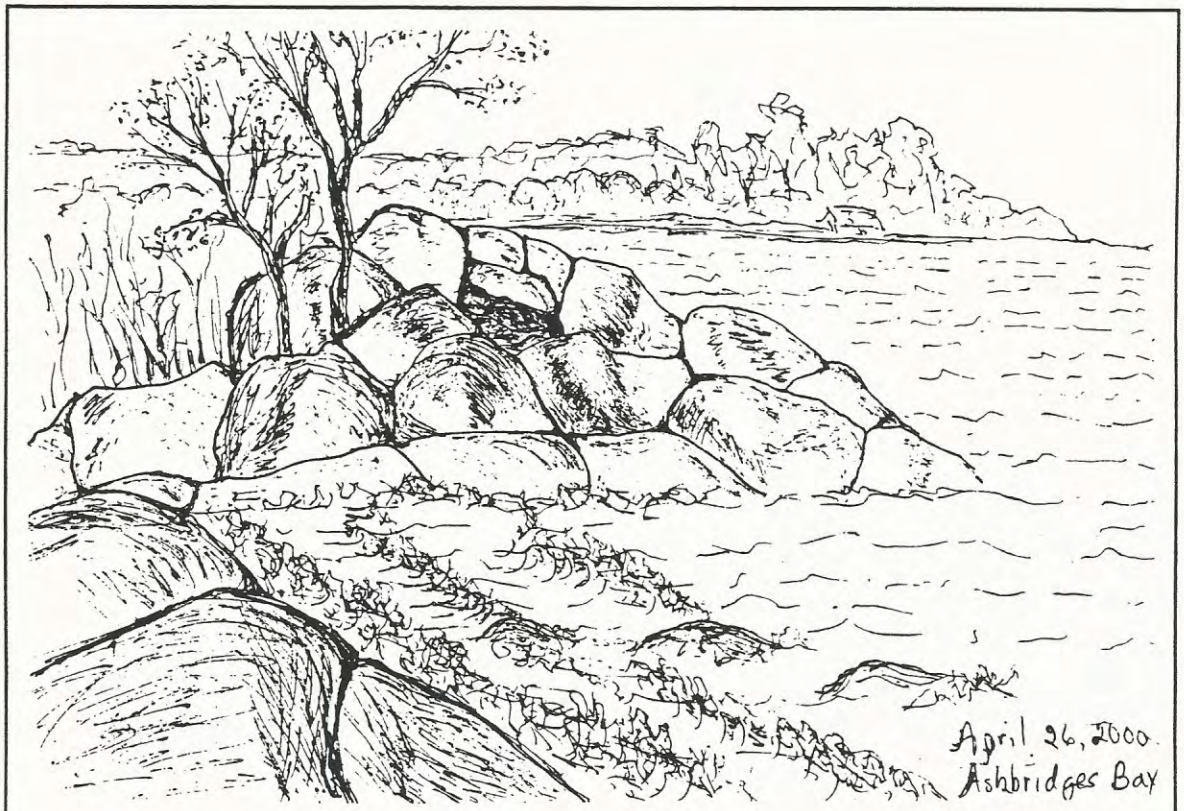
PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The recent power blackout was a startling reminder of society's vulnerability. Disasters get bigger, happen faster, and cost more as technology goes higher. The human element (power generators and transmission operators) probably made the disaster more severe. Fortunately, there appears to be no short-term environmental damage as a result. The longer term is another matter. We have yet to hear of the longer-term energy policy changes of the provincial government.

It's now clear that West Nile virus is endemic in the natural environment in south central Ontario. Fortunately, very few cases of the virus have so far been identified in humans. Let's hope it stays that way so that there's no need for aerial spraying. For the longer-term I'm concerned about the effects of extensive application of larvicide. Only time will tell.

Elections appear imminent, certainly municipal and very possibly provincial. There's no better time than now to corner your local and provincial politicians with your concerns about regional / provincial environmental issues. [See pages 7-10.]

Robin Powell



"ASHBRIDGE'S BAY" - site drawing by Melanie Milanich

KEEPING IN TOUCH

August, 2003

We have just returned from Oregon and brought an article [about a bird-watching outing beginning at 4:30 am to see sage grouse] thinking it might be of interest for the TFN. If I was ever tempted to "gripe" about the times of TFN outings, that is a thing of the past!! -- 4:30 am for birdwatching?!?!

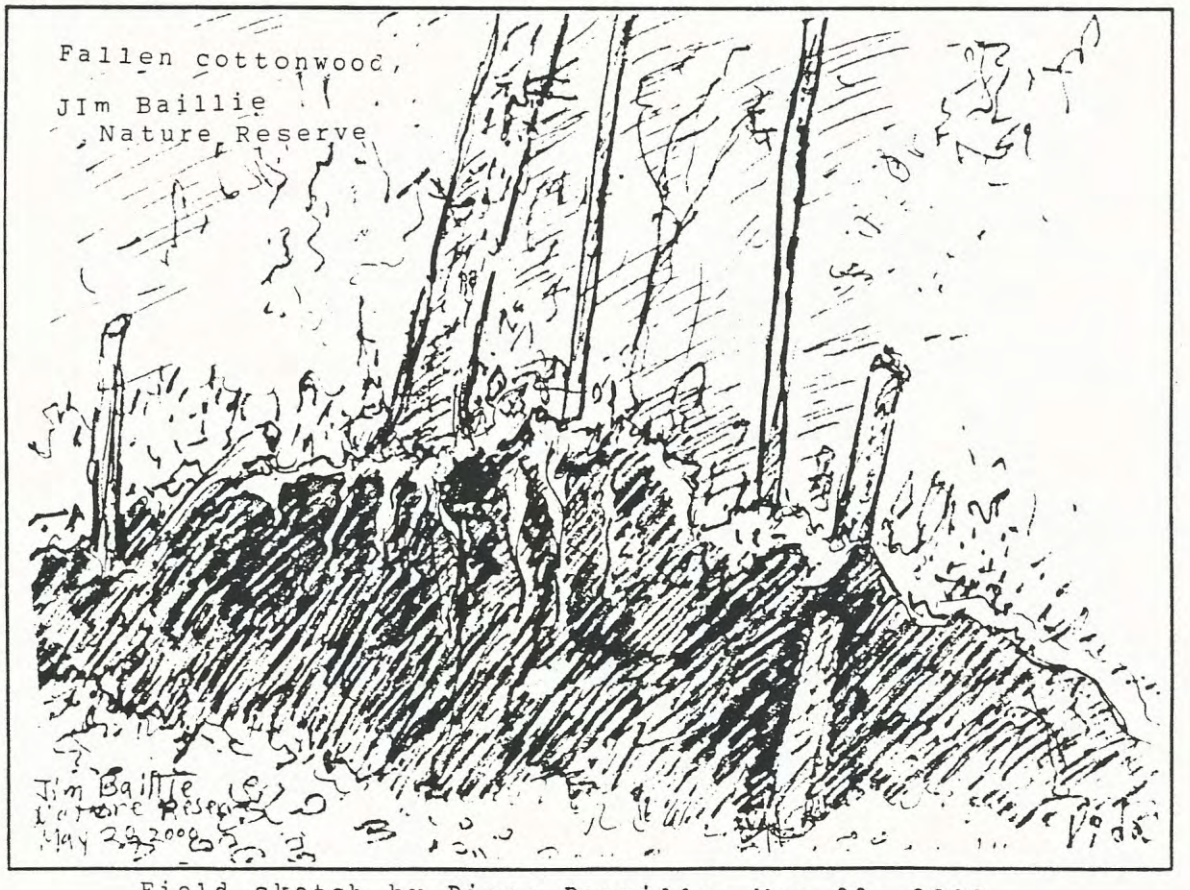
Joyce and Bob Given

August 19, 2003

The article in the September issue of TFN newsletter prompted me to send you photographs of beaver activities which I took in Morningside Park this spring.

A friend and I went to see the wildflowers, and what a surprise to see the flooded area where I used to photograph skunk cabbage and marsh marigolds. It was the wrong time of day to see beavers, but we saw their footprints in the mud. A mallard duck and her babies shared the pond.

Betty Greenacre



Field sketch by Diana Banville, May 20, 2000

PROJECTS

ISLAND AIRPORT EXPANSION

The most spectacular location for wildlife in the entire City of Toronto is the Islands. Song birds use the Toronto Islands on their annual migrations, many water birds make the islands their year round home and several species of Arctic waterfowl use the harbour as their winter habitat. There are beaver, fish, turtles, fox, and for those of us lucky enough to witness it, the annual migration of Monarch butterflies is a wondrous sight. Despite this the Toronto Port Authority is determined to expand the Island Airport and threaten this wildlife paradise.

The Port Authority's scheme calls for a bridge across the Western Gap and the expansion of the airport from approximately 50,000 passengers a year to 900,000 passengers a year, an increase of 1800%. This airport expansion will result in greater ground traffic in the adjacent neighbourhoods, increased air and water pollution across the densely populated waterfront and adjacent downtown, and the increased air traffic and noise cannons will be a significant threat to the wildlife populations on the Island.

Toronto City Council has already passed the expansion of the airport, and the federal government is hinting that they will go along with the scheme. An Environmental Assessment paid for and managed by the Toronto Port Authority, the same body that is advocating the expansion of the airport, is in the last stages. This EA is inadequate in numbers of different ways but perhaps the most disturbing deficiency is that it totally ignores the impact of the expanded airport on the wildlife population.

In the view of the Port Authority they are only seeking approval to build the bridge. They do not need approval to expand the airport and as a result they are totally ignoring the impact of an expanded airport on the wildlife population. This is distorted logic in the extreme. To the public an Environmental Assessment suggests that experts are going to evaluate the impact of the project on the environment. What is more important than the impact on wildlife? And yet this is being completely ignored in the process.

Two years ago when the politicians unveiled their plans for a revitalized waterfront they talked about a clean green waterfront. They described it as a magical place. "a waterfront full of parks and public squares, indoor recreation centers and outdoor theatres." All they have delivered is an expanded airport in the centre of the city that will ruin the waterfront and threaten the only haven of wildlife in the entire city.

Time is running out. Please, use your influence and power to stop this environmental nightmare.

Bill Freeman, spokesman
Community Air
www.communityair.org

RACE TO CONSERVE THE NIAGARA ESCARPMENT

The Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) is giving the development community a run for Niagara Escarpment land. In only 5½ years, 18 nature reserves have been created with 1,366 acres. Six of these are conservation easements, but most of the acreage is owned. EBC owns 300-acre reserves on both the Bruce Peninsula and Manitoulin (at the Cup and Saucer). EBC manages to conserve a new property almost every month, but spends less than 5% on staff and administration.

Several years ago the Conservancy decided that the Huron shore of the upper Bruce Peninsula was Ontario's most significant and most threatened land outside the Carolinian zone. Cottages are crowding out more orchids, alvars and ancient cedars every year. In the past year-and-a-half it has secured four properties on Lake Huron with 378 acres and 1.8 kilometres of shoreline. Another five projects are in progress with 388 acres and 1.8 kilometres of shoreline.

Well, it sounds easy said like that, but help is needed to keep up the momentum.

Here are some ideas which might appeal to you:

- You can help conserve an 18-acre island (with road access) which has a kilometre of shoreline, a whole lot of alvar and ancient cedars. The island has a very rustic cottage which you can enjoy for a week every summer for a one-time payment of $8,000.
- You can help conserve a 50-acre alvar on Manitoulin which has a rediscovered snail. It used to be only a fossil until it was found on this site. Only $12,000 more is needed to complete this project. If EBC can secure the land, the neighbour will put an easement on his 50-acre piece. Only $12,000 will secure 100 acres. That's only $120 per acre.
- You can save money on your long distance calls and contribute 20% to conservation. That's about $50 a year! Why are you spending more than 8 cents a minute for Ontario calls or more than 7 cents a minute to France? Join Escarpment Telecom and help 275 subscribers contribute $14,000 to charity every year. You get a tax receipt for your contribution. The Conservancy is buying land with the proceeds.
- Why not conserve your own rural land? With a conservation easement you can agree to protect your property from things like gravel pits, subdivisions, golf courses, clearcutting, commercial water-taking or hunting, and bind all future owners to do the same. For conserving your woodlot, farm or wetland you get a huge income tax receipt. How would you like a receipt for $85,000 or $202,000? Your land isn't on the Escarpment? No problem, we'll get you in touch with the closest land trust. Looking for rural land? EBC has a list of ecologically sensitive properties which need a good owner.

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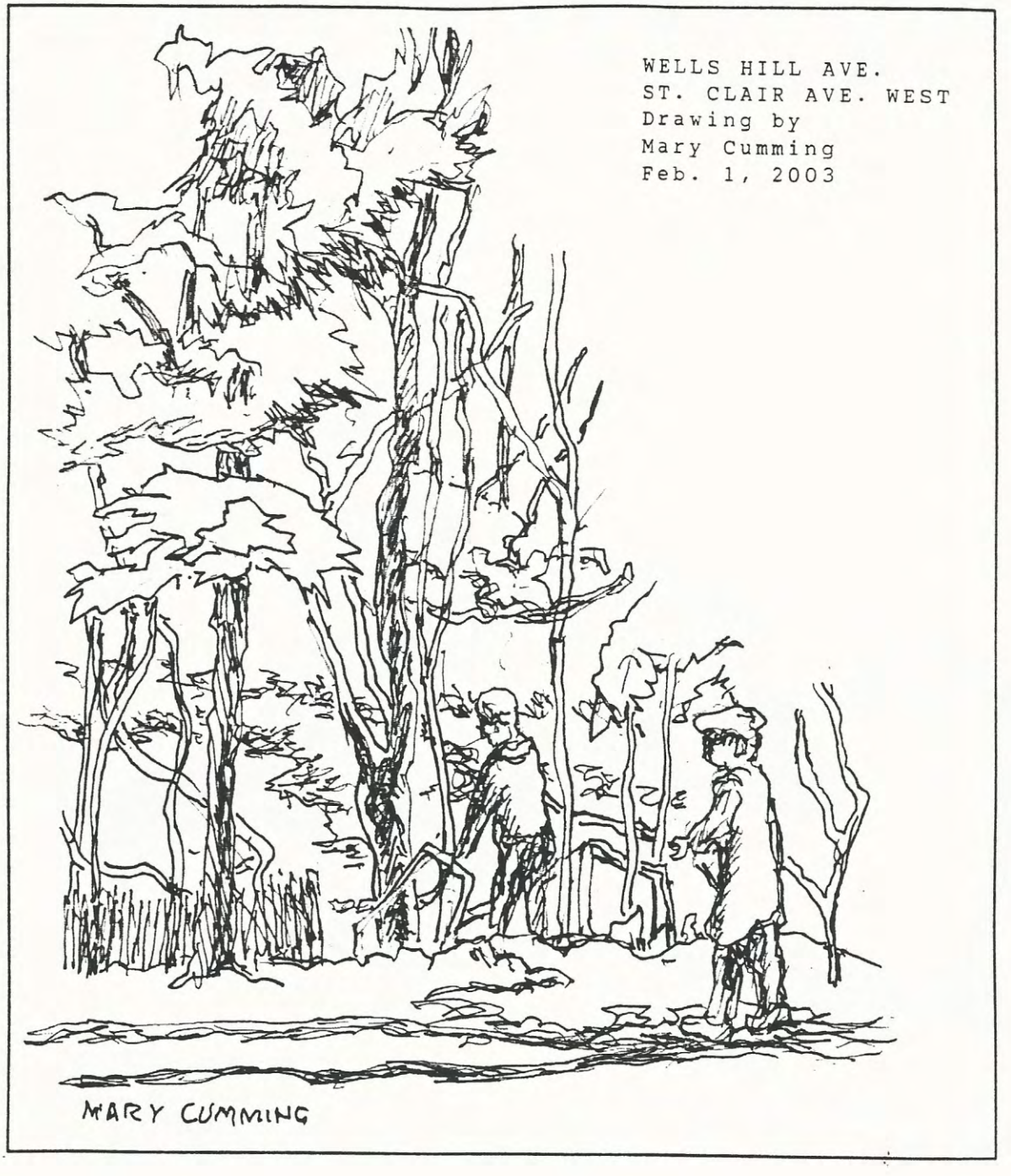
RACE TO CONSERVE THE NIAGARA ESCARPMENT- Project (cont'd)

Visit the EBC web site at www.escarpment.ca or phone Bob Barnett at 416-960-8121 for further information. Together we can provide our grandchildren with a chance to see the world we know. Each new reserve is a major victory.

Bob Barnett



FOR READING

SMALL WONDER by Barbara Kingsolver, Harper Collins, 2002

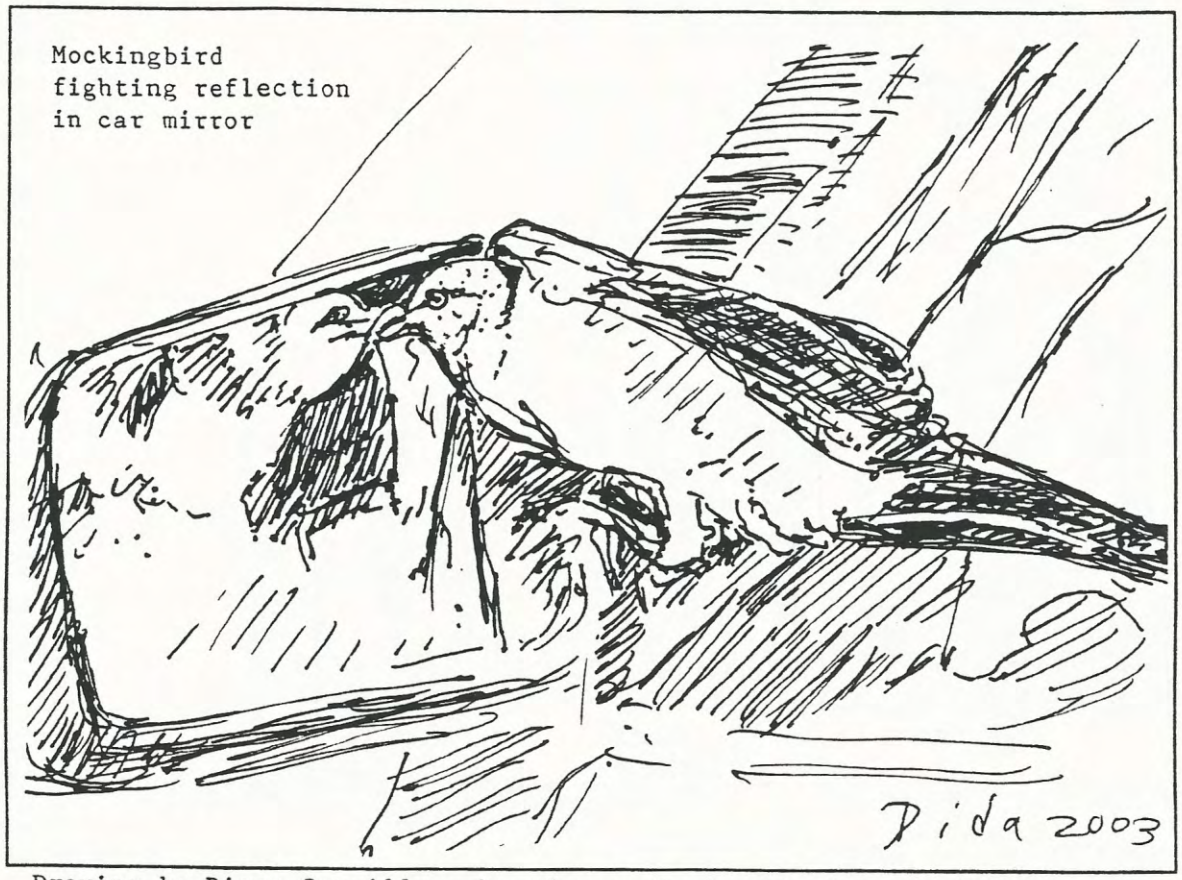
Essays mostly relating to nature including an excellent one on genetic engineering of plant life. Kingsolver won a National Humanities Medal c 2000. She and her husband (an ornithologist) "live globally, act locally" including choosing seasonal foods, whether they're at their summer home in Kentucky or their winter home in Arizona. Essays range from Costa Rica to Japan but mostly of life in the United States including a fight between environmentalists and the U.S. Army over a very small river in the south-west.

Jean McGill

Also recommended:

Reference: RED-TAILS IN LOVE: A WILDLIFE DRAMA IN CENTRAL PARK by Marie Winn, Vintage Books, N.Y., 1998/1999 [See article on page 11.]

H.J.



Drawing by Diana Banville - based on a Maslowski photo in NATURE NEWS, 1987

BIRDING IN NEW YORK CITY

I was born and bred in New York, but I wasn't a birder then. Now that I am, when I was in the city during migration season last year, I wanted to go birding.

In New York there is nothing equivalent to the Toronto Field Naturalists and our plethora of nature and bird walks. The Audubon Society there gave me a website of an ornithologist who leads walks in Central Park and other places.

I went on two walks with Birding Bob, one in Central Park which is a major migrant stopover, and one in the Bronx Botanical Gardens where Bob had found a nest of Cooper's hawks. The day we were there the fledglings made what may well have been their first foray out of the nest. We also saw a pair of wood ducks -- on the Bronx River!

I now know that for Central Park birding, all you have to do is show up in the morning at one of the regular places where birds and birders go -- the Ramble -- or the Turtle Pond. You will find birds, as well as other birders who will tell you what they have seen, what other people have seen, and where. Notes of sightings are also left at the boathouse on the Rowboat Lake. Members of the Central Park birding community, though not I think formally organized, seem to be as well known to each other as are the regular participants in TFN walks.

This year, that is what I did. I showed up at Turtle Pond at 8 am or so and saw great white egrets, a green heron, swifts, warblers, catbirds, etc. People pointed out nests of Baltimore and orchard orioles, although a bad storm the night before had damaged the nests badly so there were no orioles to be seen.

And I was directed to the statue of Romeo and Juliet in front of the theatre box office. The couple are about to kiss with him bending over her, she bending back. On her upper chest was a nest of robins!

I was told to go to the conservatory water (known to me from childhood as the sailboat lake), where I would find a man watching the resident red-tailed hawk known as Pale Male. Sure enough he was there and so was Pale Male on the railing of an apartment balcony on Fifth Avenue. The observer was happy to let me look through his scope. I was able to see Pale Male's mate and two fledglings who had flown the nest that very morning. [For further reading, see reference on page 10.]

Central Park is not what it was in the bad old days. I still wouldn't go walking there after dark -- certainly not alone! -- but during the day it is full of people birding, jogging, biking, playing frisbee, walking their dogs, sketching, fishing, pretending to fish, or just doing nothing. There are maps posted here and there, and there are washrooms.

One of the highlights of my visit this year was a group of school kids -- junior high, I think -- on their first Central Park nature walk. I and other birders had the pleasure of introducing them to cardinals, blue jays, and downy and red-bellied woodpeckers.

Elizabeth Block

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THE LESSON

My friend Anna has a marvellous summer cottage on a beautiful island in Lake Muskoka. Early one morning in July, we were about to have breakfast when through the trees I could see a flotilla advancing down the still waters of the bay. We hurried along the path--pine needles, cones, ferns, blueberry bushes, mosses, lichens, rocks--as the sun began to slant through the trees. A mother mallard was marshalling her ten ducklings, teaching them to skim the surface for their breakfast of insects as they swam along. She brought them close to the shore, then stood tall on a rock, supervising her little ones as they foraged. She was like an old-fashioned schoolma'am; quiet, but definitely in charge.

She let them paddle about in the shallows, then led them in a long curve as they swam up to the old dock, its timbers low above the water. These were no fluffy newborns; they were getting stronger. Each one followed mother duck, hopping onto the low dock, waddling up the rocks, then, with a mighty effort and flapping of tiny wings up onto the big dock. All but the smallest duckling, who came at the old dock time after time, then swam all around the big new dock, which was at least 30 centimetres above the surface. It found its way around to the other side, where some rocks made a more gradual passage out of the lake. At last, with a huge effort, the smallest duckling made it onto the new dock with its siblings, while Anna and I cheered. The lesson continued with strengthening exercises and flight training. The ducklings would run as fast as they could along the dock,flapping their tiny wings, which had not yet developed flight feathers. Then all turned around and repeated the performance. After ten minutes or so, mother indicated that it was rest time and all lay down in a heap where a patch of sun was warming the end of the dock. I went to get my camera, fearing I had missed the best of the show. Soon Mama jumped off into the water, followed by her brood, and the whole process began again: out onto the low dock, up the rocks, jump up to the higher dock, run up and down with wings flapping. One was left behind, not the smallest this time. It became agitated, swimming around, looking up at its siblings. After several failed attempts, it made a prodigious leap, landing on the high dock among the others. We cheered again! Mother Mallard was unperturbed and soon led her family off the end of the dock and back out of the little bay, continuing their never-ending search for food.

It is a rare privilege to be present at just the right time to observe such a tender few moments of life in the wild. I shall long remember this incident with the flotilla of mallard ducklings and their mother instructing them in Survival 100.

Phoebe Cleverley □

The best nature photography can convey, as well as any painting, the spirt of a moment or place.

from BBC WILDLIFE, Vol. 21, No. 4, April 2003

SOME LEAVES GATHERED IN COTTAGE COUNTRY

SEE PAGE 14.

drawing by Mary Anne Miller

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SOME LEAVES GATHERED IN COTTAGE COUNTRY (cont'd)

Did you guess?

We guessed. They match the leaves of

black alder (7 pairs of leaf-veins)

red oak variety

red maple

Siberian elm (so-called "Chinese elm")

European white birch

striped maple

native hawthorn (partly hidden)

black cherry

trembling aspen

All these trees and shrubs are also native to Toronto or commonly planted here, except for striped maple.

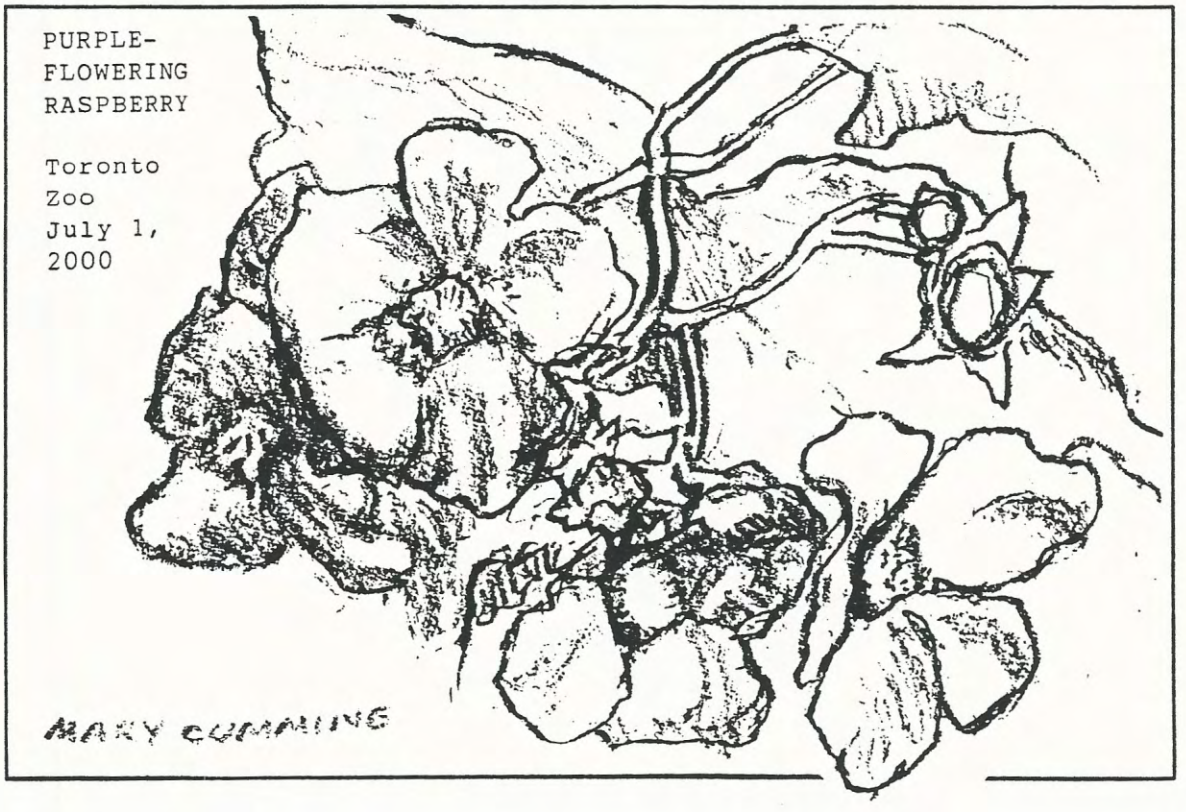
D.B.

References:

KEY TO THE NATIVE TREES OF CANADA by T.C. Brayshaw

TREE LEAVES by Morsink & Smith

SHRUBS OF ONTARIO by Soper & Heimburger



A FOX SPARROW WINTER

Fox sparrows are always chancy birds to get on your year list. They are not uncommon during their migration but they go through in such a short time that it is easy to miss them. The Toronto Field Naturalists' TORONTO REGION BIRD CHART shows that they usually come through in mid-April and from mid-October to mid-November, but the chart is a conglomeration of many years of records, including some early and some late records. In the writer's experience there is only a window of a very few days in spring and fall when you are likely to see fox sparrows and unless you are out on those days you may have to wait until another year to see the species. Last fall was the exception.

We usually have a few fox sparrows visit our back yard in North Toronto each fall along with the white-throated and white-crowned sparrows. Last fall (2002) our first bird turned up on October 12. He hung around longer than usual, obviously enjoying the brush pile I had built at the back of the yard and the seeds I spread around the pile. To our surprise on October 26 there were three fox sparrows present and on November 10 the flock increased to five. The number dropped to two on November 14 and to zero on the sixteenth. We were happy to have had them with us for over a month and looked forward to seeing them again next fall. To our surprise a fox sparrow turned up at the brush pile on November 27. When he settled in and was present throughout December we spread the news and enjoyed visits from several birders who were compiling winter bird lists. "Our" bird remained throughout the winter along with two white-throats and several juncos.

Our fox sparrow was joined by a second bird on March 25. On April 3 two more fox sparrows joined the group and on April 4 the number was up to five. The numbers varied from then until April 20 when we saw our last bird.

Our birds were not the only ones in the area last winter. A check of the Toronto Ornithological Club's GREATER TORONTO AREA BIRD RECORDS for the winter of 2002-2003 reveals that fox sparrows were seen in December at Brampton and Scarborough; in January, at Scarborough; and in February, at Durham.

How unusual are winter fox sparrow records? A. Jaramillo (1990) examined the Toronto Christmas Bird Counts from 1925 to 1988 and found that fox sparrows were seen on only 11 counts (average number 0.2).

Roy Smith provided a list of all the fox sparrow winter records for the Greater Toronto area in the Toronto Ornithological Club database back to February 1989. These records are for December, January and February only, because as Roy pointed out, many of the March birds may be spring migrants.

The writer went through Roy's report and eliminated those records which appeared to represent repeats of the same bird. Here are the results:

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A FOX SPARROW WINTER (cont'd)

The fox sparrow is an uncommon winter visitor but appears to be over-wintering more often in recent years. Does this reflect a peak in population numbers, more people with back yard feeders, global warming? Whatever the reason, our fox sparrow this past winter added interest to what, with no winter finches, would have made for rather dull back-yard birding.

WINTER	NUMBER OF FOX SPARROWS
1988 - 1989	1
1989 - 1990	4
1990 - 1991	2
1991 - 1992	1
1992 –1993	2
1993 –1994	1
1994 –1995	2
1995 – 1996	0
1996 –1997	0
1997 – 1998	1
1998 –1999	1
1999 – 2000	1
2000 - 2001	5
2001 -2002	3
2002 -2003	4

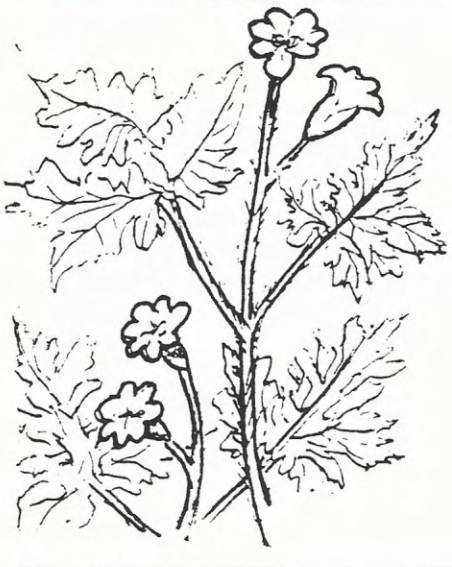
References:

Jaramillo A. 1990. TORONTO BIRDS 1987 and TORONTO CHRISTMAS COUNT SUMMARY (1925-1988) p.110. Toronto Ornithological Club, Toronto.

Parker B. 1983. TORONTO REGION BIRD CHART, p.26 Toronto Field Naturalists, Toronto.

Worthington D. GREAT TORONTO AREA BIRD RECORDS, December 2002, January 2003, February 2003, Toronto Ornithological Club Newsletter, Nos. 130, 131, and 132, Toronto.

George Fairfield



Herb Robert (Geranium family)

Fern-like leaves, divided into 3 to 5 lobed and stalked segments.

Paired, ½ inch pink flowers. Stems hairy, reddish and scented. (May to October)

(Eurasian - established in Toronto)

Environmentally sensitive woodlot, Brampton

A PASSION FOR BIRDS: VICTORIAN NATURAL HISTORY

Birdwatching today is one of the fastest growing recreational activities in Canada, with millions of participants purchasing birding equipment, travel tours, and bird paraphernalia. Prior to the development of light-weight field guides, cameras and binoculars, birdwatching involved predominantly shooting, stuffing, and displaying specimens, as well as sketching and describing live birds.

Many upper- and middle-class men and women decorated their homes with stuffed birds or collected them as souvenirs of their travels during a time when natural objects emerged as commodities for mass consumption.

An exhibit at the Museum of Mississauga this past summer examined the historical and cultural development of birdwatching and bird collecting in southern Ontario, with a focus on the Harris family and the Mississauga area. It also analysed the ways gender influenced the activity as Victorian social norms shaped the recreational pursuits of many men and women.

Birdwatching and bird collecting originated from the British natural history tradition, with its emphasis on rational recreation and natural theology, as well as romantic and scientific traditions. As natural history emerged as a cultural phenomenon with the "discovery" of new lands, the activity became a fashionable activity for aristocratic gentlemen and ladies who collected natural curiosities.

By the 19th century, the activity had filtered down to the middle-class who adopted it as a defining feature of British middle-class society. The increasing popularity of natural history therefore not only affected Britons at home, but also the pastimes of their military officers, the travel patterns of tourists, and the recreational activities of British immigrants in North America.

In southern Ontario, upper- and middle-class men roamed the woods with gun in hand, a skilled eye, and competitive outlook, while they pursued the activity as sportsmen/naturalists, bird collectors, and taxidermists. The formation of professional natural history societies, local taxidermy shops, and museums encouraged interest in birds and egg collecting for many a gentleman interested in contributing to science. British settlers, such as Thomas McIlwraith (1824-1903) and former Lorne Park resident Ernest Thompson Seton (1860-1946), promoted the study of ornithology and established informal networks of collectors in Ontario. McIlwraith's BIRDS OF ONTARIO (1886) initiated widespread interest in the province's avifauna during a time when information on Ontario's birds was limited.

As middle-class women's approved social roles typically shaped their leisure activities within the domestic sphere, and discouraged them from participating in shooting birds or performing taxidermy, the thrill of the hunt, dissecting, and stuffing dead birds, lay outside women's experiences. (If they did perform these tasks, many omitted them from their journals and letters!)

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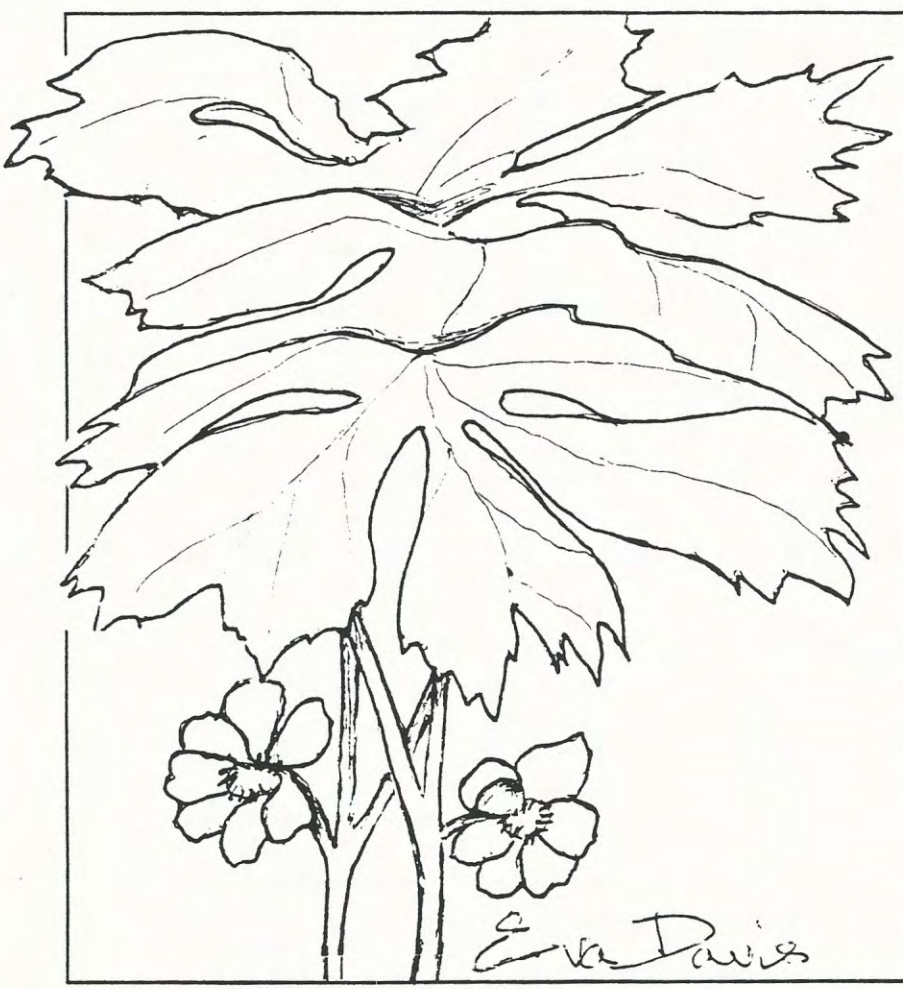
A PASSION FOR BIRDS (cont'd)

Women's role in ornithology therefore remained nominal as professional natural history societies limited their membership in southern Ontario until the 1890s. Women tended to observe birds more passively, which helped to polish their respectable feminine identities since "polite" activities were thought to improve the mind. Nest-watching, watercolour painting, and observing the moral behaviour of birds consequently allowed them to assert their moral and aesthetic authority in amateur ornithology.

extracted from an article by Kirsten Greer, Exhibit Curator, in MUSEUMS OF MISSISSAUGA NEWS & VIEWS Vol.2, 2003



May Apple
(Barberry family)

Waxy-white, 6 to 9 petalled flowers in the crotch below the 2 very large, divided leaves.

Fruit is a yellowish, edible berry (April to June).

[For more about May Apples, see page 20.]

The abundant rainfall of spring 2003 produced a veritable carpet of May-apple, its large umrella-like leaves hovering over its lovely, rosette-like flowers.

Another consequence were the many clumps of the small pink blooms of Herb Robert, with its filigreed leaves. The only other flower in the woodlot was a solitary yellow patch of winter cress. The muddied pathways were strewn with the snow of choke cherry petals, another prolific result of the wet spring.

Eva Davis

HARVEST IN THE GRASS

This perseveringly wet Spring brought forth a cornucopia of mushrooms. They popped up in ravines, in woods, in lawns, in flower beds, in sports fields, in grass verges. Particularly in grass verges. The three species below are edible. But not when picked from city grassland. If in gardens, public or private, they will probably carry pesticide residues. If in sports fields, they will certainly carry pesticide residues; if in grass verges lining roadways, both pesticide and vehicular contamination.

From left to right:-

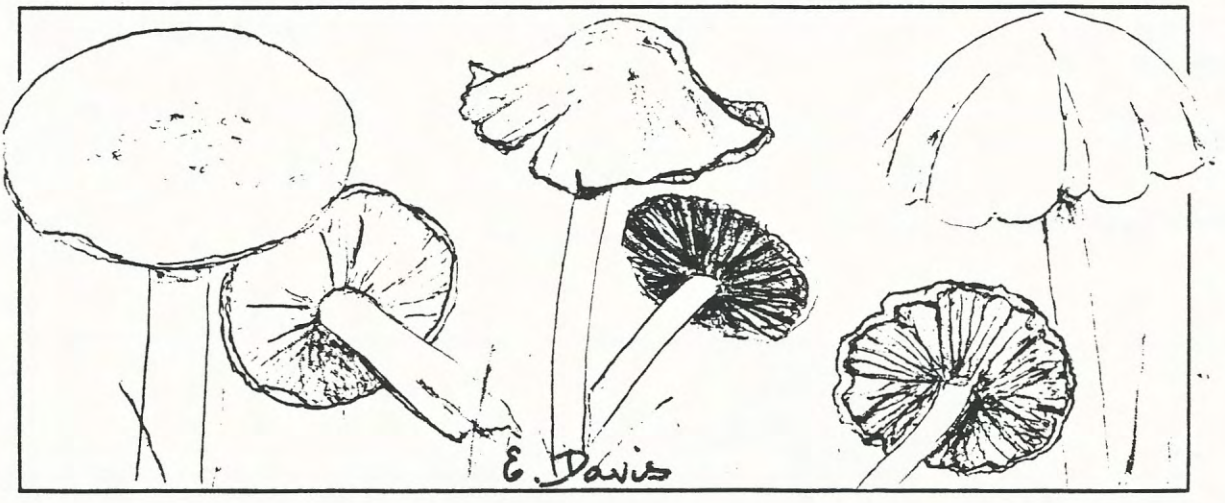
Meadow Mushroom A.K.A. by the splendid name of Pink Bottom (Agaricus campestris).

Mica Cap or glistening Inky cap (Coprinus micaceus)

Fringed crumble-cap (Psathyrella candolleana)

Ref.: Mushrooms of North America - Miller
Mushrooms of Ontario and Eastern Canada - Barron

Eva Davis



Since the 1960s, nature conservation has moved from worrying about species to worrying about their habitats to talking about the processes that cause habitat destruction. These are usually economic -- trade policy, international debt, farm subsidies and consumption of resources by developed, richer countries.

from "Ripening of the Greens" by David Nicholson-Lord in BBC WILDLIFE, Vol. 21, No. 4, April 2003

THE MAY APPLE

It is fascinating how much you can learn about a plant through a medical dictionary. I started by looking up the scientific name of the May apple in my medical book and found the following: "The dried rhyzome and roots of Podophylum peltatum contain podophyllotoxin a peltatin, b peltatin, and other constituents. Used in the form of an extract called podophyllum resin or podophyllin." Podophylotoxin is said to have cathartic properties, and when applied topically it is active against certain wart-like tumors.

I usually use standard and sometimes medical dictionaries to determine what the scientific name means and this in turn helps me to remember it. I determined that podo means foot and phyllum means leaf. Peltatum means shield referring to the shape of the leaf. Peltatum also has a botanical definition which means attached to the leaf in the centre. A good example of this is the nasturtium. The leaf is like a tiny umbrella.

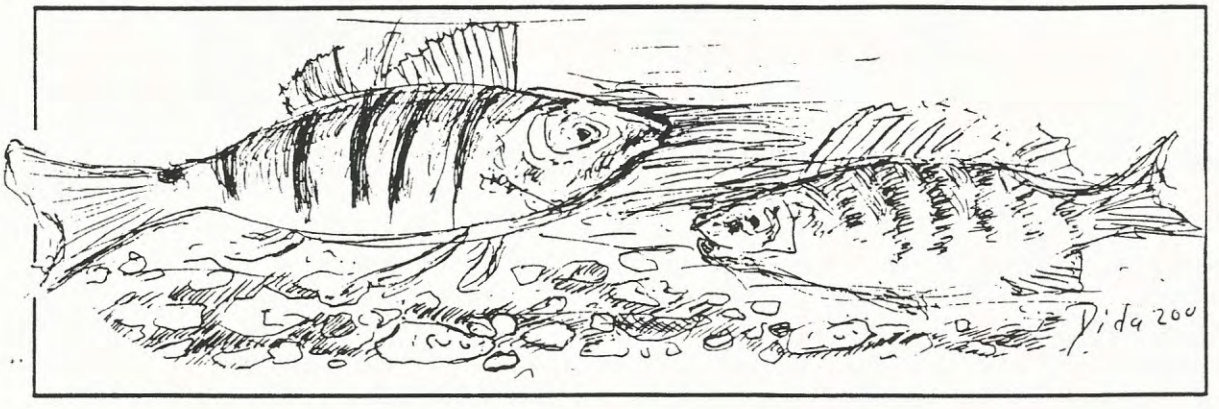
The May apple is also interesting in that it has been used to commit suicide. The only part of the plant which is edible is the ripe fruit. Even a tiny amount of juice taken internally can cause severe diarrhea. Do not bite into the fruit unless you have determined it is soft and ripe.

The May apple comes in two different forms. One has a single stem and is sterile. The other has a forked stem and produces a flower and fruit. The May apple is in the barberry family, although it does not resemble the shrub we all know.

It is interesting to find that common plants we are all familiar with are used for treating cancerous warts, and could save your life one day. It is amazing how closely connected botany and medicine really are.

[See illustration on page 18.]

Roger Powley



YELLOW PERCH. This colourful native Toronto fish is not uncommon in the Don Watershed. Grenadier fishers are acquainted with it. Drawing by Diana Banville from photos on file.

THE HOUSEBIRDS

The house finch has been nesting in Toronto since about 1980, soon after its arrival in Ontario in the 1970's. It (grudgingly at first) shared nesting space in conifers near houses with the house sparrow, but is not so colonial as that species in their choice of man-made ledges and niches, we find. The presence here of both species was the result of releases in New York City -- but many years apart. Perhaps the house sparrow's beak is out-of-joint as it got here first -- beating the upstart by about a hundred years!

I was surprised to learn from the 34th report of the Ontario Nest Records Scheme that their first nest card for the house finch was not received until 2002 in neighbouring Peel Region which has as good a record as Toronto Region for reporting. There have been over 300 nest cards received throughout Ontario since the bird arrived. For the house sparrow over 1500 cards have been received since the scheme began in 1956. However, only 5 were received for 2002, while 7 were received for the house finch.

The house sparrow has another (dubious) distinction: it has become Ontario's 89th cowbird host! There are 18 references in the TFN newsletter index over the years for the house sparrow, and 10 for the house finch.

Diana Banville

"HOYA or Wax Plant" -

a successful house plant for Mary Cumming - is a member of the same family as milkweed, as you may be able to recognize from Mary's drawing, though this tropical plant has a trailing habit of growth.

IN THE NEWS

TINY CLUES TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The kinds of algae called diatoms exemplify the beauty, complexity and elegance of nature. The remains of dead diatoms offer a faster and simpler way than anything that currently exists to track how fragile Arctic ecosystems respond to a gradual environmental stimulus, such as climate change.

A research team from Queen's University published comprehensive evidence of parallel ecological changes over the past 150 years to lakes across a vast Arctic region, stretching 750 kilometres from Yellowknife almost to Bathurst Inlet on the Arctic Ocean. Researchers measured a change in the relative populations of the diatoms in 50 Arctic lakes in three different ecological regions: tundra, forest tundra and the boreal forest. The before-and-after snapshots were consistent with how the organisms would react to earlier spring thaws, later freeze-ups and warmer water in the lakes -- in other words, to Arctic climate change.

Now we have hard evidence that this is happening and it's happening at the base of the food chain, at the level of the primary producers -- the organisms that depend directly on photosynthesis.

extracted from an article by Peter Calamai, in THE TORONTO STAR, April 12, 2003

LAST OF VANCOUVER'S CRESTED MYNAS KILLED BY TRAFFIC

Recently, some birders in North America have been quietly mourning the passing of the last two crested mynas known to be living in the wild on this continent. It has been reported from Vancouver that the first bird was hit by an automobile while foraging on the street. Its mate repeatedly returned to the spot and suffered the same fate.

Native to China and Indochina, the crested myna was introduced to Vancouver in the 1890s -- perhaps arriving as stowaways or as pets released by immigrants. By the 1920s, approximately 20,000 of the birds inhabited the Vancouver region, but their population had begun to decline by the 1930s, and by 1960 their numbers had dropped to an estimated 2500.

Why the decline? Among the most commonly accepted theories are: modern buildings didn't offer warm nesting cavities as older ones once did; European Starlings proved too formidable as nest site competitors; automobiles replaced horses and the insect-rich dung that mynas partially depended on; urban sprawl reduced the fields and orchards that mynas frequented for insects and fruit; and, the population was genetically weak because it was descended from a small number of original birds. Whatever the reasons, and despite the fact that this was an exotic introduced species, we are still a little saddened by this loss to the avifaunal community.

from an article in BIRDWATCH CANADA, Number 23, Spring 2003

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

INTOXICATED BIRDS

Every year about five million tonnes of salt are spread on Canadian highways, roads and sidewalks... A five-year study by Ministry of the Environment, released in December, 2001, found that birds are particularly sensitive to the toxic effects of road salt. They often eat salt, mistaking it for the grit that helps them 'chew' their food, and become intoxicated. It's perhaps responsible for them not getting out of the way of traffic.

from an article in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, December 2, 2002

COLD WINTERS AHEAD?

The chilly winter that blasted the eastern part of the country, in particular, this year might be a taste of things to come. The ability of the Gulf Stream to "sink" when it hits Arctic waters, thus drawing warmer currents northward, has been hampered by the fresh water triggered by glacial melting; freshwater is less dense than salt water. It's not clear how much freshwater it will take to stop the Gulf Stream. But if it happens, the nations of the North Atlantic could face a so-called little ice age in under a decade.

from an article by Michael Kesterton, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, March 31, 2003

THIS GEOLOGICAL ERA

The chemist Paul Crutzen has proposed the term Anthropocene to represent the present age of Earth's history, in which human artifice is the dominant geological force. The Anthropocene Era can be said to have started in the latter part of the 18th century when air trapped in arctic ice shows the beginning of growing global concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide and methane -- products of human industry.

from an article by Michael Kesterton, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, April 17, 2003

CRANE MIGRATION A WHOOPING SUCCESS

The arrival of 14 whooping cranes at a Wisconsin wildlife refuge has signalled success for a Canadian outfit that has devoted itself to using ultralight planes to teach the giant white birds how to follow forgotten migration routes. Last October, the young birds were led from Wisconsin to the species' ancient wintering grounds in Florida by a team of ultralight pilots. The 1,900-kilometre trip took nearly two months. Their return has proven that the migration route is "imprinted" on the birds.

from an article by Michael Kesterton, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, April 18, 2003

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

SYNTHETIC TREES COULD PURIFY AIR

A scientist has invented an artificial tree designed to do the job of plants. But the synthetic tree does not much resemble the leafy variety. It looks like a goal post with venetian blinds. The synthetic tree would do the job of a real tree. It would draw carbon dioxide out of the air, as plants do during photosynthesis, but retain the carbon and not release oxygen. A synthetic tree would act like a filter. An absorbent coating, such as limewater, on its slats or "leaves" would seize carbon dioxide and retain the carbon. There are a number of engineering issues which need to be worked out.

from an article by Molly Bentley, BBC NEWS web site, 21 Feb. 2003

IN THE NEWS

A regular survey of plants that has been going on for more than 350 years at Rome's Colosseum has shown that as the site changed from a slum to a major tourist site, the variety of its greenery also declined. In 1855, 420 species of plants were found at the former site of gladiator games; by 2001, this had fallen to 242.

from an article by Stephen Strauss, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, March 8, 2003

THE POWER OF DUCK

After more than 20 years of weeding his rice paddies by hand, a farmer in Japan wondered if organic farming was worth the trouble. Then something changed his life. Ducks. The wild fowl, floating in his fields, inspired him to try an old Japanese technique of raising ducklings alongside the rice. The results surprised him. The birds ate the weeds he'd worked so hard to eliminate. And their droppings nourished the rice, raising the yields. Since then he has started rotating crops and has added fish to flooded fields. His system is spreading to other Asian producers.

from an article by Michael Kesterton, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, February 25, 2003

RANDY RUDDY DUCKS SENTENCED TO DEATH

Thousands of ruddy ducks in Britain are to be exterminated in the cause of wildlife protection. The problem is that they hybridize with white-headed ducks. The ruddy ducks were brought to Britain from North America as ornamental birds, but have successfully adapted to the wild and spread into mainland Europe. The white-headed duck is native to Spain, and is a seriously endangered species. The only other colony, ominously enough, is near Basra in southern Iraq.

from an article in the GUARDIAN WEEKLY, March 6-12, 2003 ▷

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

LONG BATH NEARLY OVER FOR FLOTILLA OF RUBBER DUCKIES

Thousands of rubber ducks are expected to wash up any day on the coast of Nova Scotia or New England -- after more than a decade at sea.

The ducks and other bathtub toys fell overboard from a container ship en route from China to Seattle during a storm in 1992. During their long voyage through three oceans, scientists have tracked their progress -- and say it has taught them valuable lessons about currents.

After drifting in circles with many tonnes of other lost cargo, in an area known as "the great garbage patch" of the Pacific, they eventually floated north through whale pods to the Bering Sea. It took three to four years for them to inch their way through the ice packs of the Arctic Ocean before emerging into the Atlantic.

During their voyage, some of the ducks broke away and headed for Europe. Others have surfaced in Hawaii.

These ducks are now heading south after passing eastern Greenland and making their way past Labrador, according to a retired oceanographer who has been tracking their voyage. They should be off the coast of Nova Scotia.

from an article in the TORONTO STAR, July 13, 2003

ONTARIO TO PROTECT KAWARTHA HIGHLANDS

A rugged 36,000-hectare area of wilderness in the Peterborough, Ont. area would be protected from development under legislation introduced yesterday by Premier Ernie Eves. The bill would set the ground rules for the management of the Kawartha Highlands park. It would be the largest protected area in Ontario south of Algonquin Provincial Park.

from an article in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, June 18, 2003

BIRD CUISINE

. Eggs? In an effort to reduce my cholesterol, I started separating the egg white from the yolks and eating only the whites. One day, instead of discarding the yolks, I fried them up into a 'yolk pie', let it cool and put it in a suet feeder to see what would happen. Much to my surprise, three species of woodpecker and a variety of other birds were immediately attracted to the yolks.

. Bacon? According to the New York Times Second Book of Science Questions and Answers, some birds can smell just a trace of a substance that might lead them to food. For example, bacon fat poured onto the surface of the ocean has been known to attract black-footed albatrosses from more than 18 miles away.

from "Social Studies" by Michael Kesterton in the GLOBE & MAIL, Mar. 21, 2003

Comment: One of my friends in England fed a robin in her garden regularly with morsels of fried bacon -- I was lucky enough to witness it!

Marjory Tilley [TFN member]

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

BLADE RUNNERS

[From Navarre, in Spain, where nearly 1000 wind turbines have been installed beneath a major bird-migration route came the following recommendations:]

- choosing sites away from hilltops and off bird migration routes;
- stopping turbines during migration periods and hours of darkness;
- increasing the distance between turbines;
- burying electricity cables.

from an article by Richard Weyndling in "News of the Earth" in BBC WILDLIFE, Vol. 21, No. 7, July 2003 □

THE WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

October 2002, Toronto

The big story this month was the major pattern change. Summer warmth and humidity continued the first four days of the month, with a maximum of 29.5°C on October 1st at Pearson Airport and 29.0°C downtown. These were not records for the month, but were within one to two degrees of October's record highs. It was downhill from there. Starting on October 4th with the passage of the remains of Hurricane Lily, a series of cold fronts scoured out a deepening trough over the Great Lakes. Temperatures dropped by stages -- it took a long time to exhaust the warm pool over southern Ontario and its lakes; until by the final ten days of the month, it was consistently cold, cloudy, and windy with temperatures in the single digits. October ended up being exactly on the 30-year normal for Pearson Airport and marginally below-normal downtown. It was the coolest October since 1993.

Ironically, with all the warm water in the Great Lakes and the major pattern change, October was not particularly marked by storminess or rain. Not even a trace of snow fell, and rainfall was fairly light, about 40 mm or two-thirds of the long-term average. This was evenly distributed through the month, with Hurricane Lily contributing only about 4 mm. Sunshine was 137.8 hours at Pearson Airport or just marginally below-normal. The resurgence of cool air was associated with above-normal wind speeds, however: 16.0 km/h at Pearson Airport and 17.8 km/h at Toronto Island, which was the highest there since 1996.

One unusual feature of the fall of 2002 that the author has never noted before was the persistence of leaves. While spring phenology is notoriously variable depending upon temperature and to some extent precipitation, autumnal leaf colour-change and drop is usually much more tied to photoperiod. With reduced day-length, leaves age at a fairly set time: early-to-mid October for native deciduous trees such as ash and sugar maple, late October for Norway maple. There is some natural variation within individuals of a species, and marked variation in colour intensity depending upon sunshine and moisture; but the date range is usually predictable. However, the fall of 2002 saw sugar maple and ash retaining their leaves with little colour change until the last week of the month, when cold windy weather gradually nipped them off. The reason for this unusual behaviour has been ascribed to the late summer drought which made trees "hang on" until there was enough soil moisture to achieve late-season root growth before going dormant; and to exceptionally high temperatures in September (fully as warm as a normal August). At other times, a dry summer has led to early leaf-fall, so the full cause is really not known.

In any case, the fall of 2002 was very strange, with summer heat and greenery lasting until October, followed by an abrupt about-face to chilly, grey, windy conditions.

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. Oct. 4 from 8 am (all day) with Herb Elliott. Meet at the Toronto Islands ferry docks at the foot of Bay St. to catch the 8:15 am ferry to Hanlan's Point. Bring a lunch.

Next walk will take place in December.

Rouge Valley Conservation Centre (416-282-8265)

- Oct. 30 at 7:30 pm at Pearse House - Fish Migration and Hatcheries
- Oct. 12 at 1 pm starting at the Pearse House - Fall Colours & salmon run (a guided walk)

Save the Rouge Valley System (416-282-9983)

- Oct. 26 at 1:30 pm beginning at the Woodland campground, on Reesor Rd. south of Steeles.

North Toronto Green Community (416-482-3032 or 416-781-7663)

- Wed. Oct. 22 at 1:30 pm - the Beltline West with Dick Watts & Madeleine McDowell. Meet at the Eglinton West subway station.
- Sun. Oct. 26 at 2 pm - Mimico Creek geology . Meet at Royal York Rd. & Coney Rd. Leaders: Ed Freeman & Richard Anderson.

High Park Sunday afternoon walking tours

TFN display

- Sun. Oct. 5 from 12 noon to 4:30 pm - Harvest Festival at Colborne Lodge [no walk today]
- Sun. Oct. 19 at 1:15 pm beginning at the south side of the Grenadier Restaurant. $2 donation requested.

Call 416-392-1748 or 416-392-6916 for more information.

Citizens Concerned About the Future of the Etobicoke Waterfront

- Sun. Oct. 5 from 9 am to 11 am at Col. Sam Smith Park with Glenn Coady

All walks are free and take place regardless of the weather. Please meet in the south parking lot. Call 416-252-7047 for more details.

Thickson's Woods Land Trust Art Auction - Sun. Oct. 19 from 2 pm to 5 pm at Heydenshore Pavilion, 589 Water St., Whitby. $10 admission (wine and cheese reception). For more information call 905-655-3895, or 905-373-1202 or 905-433-7875.

Leslie St. Spit - bird banding demonstration - Sat. Oct. 4 from 9 am to 11 am. Free. Meet at foot of Leslie St. (a Toronto Bay Initiative event - call 416-358-0443 or 416-661-6600, ext. 5660 for more details.

It seems to me that naming a plant is a gesture of respect towards its unique individuality, its distinction from the generalized green blur. You wouldn't do anything less for a friend. And the process of learning that identity brings you closer.

from "Nature Cure" by R. Mabey in BBC WILDLIFE, Vol. 21, No. 8, Aug. 2003

COMING EVENTS (cont'd)

Royal Canadian Institute - Sunday afternoon lectures on science - free
- Sun. Oct. 19 - Health Care in the Post-SARS World
- Sun. Oct. 26 - Seeing can be Deceiving: How the Brain Creates Movement from Static Images

Lectures begin at 3 pm and are held in the JJR Macleod Auditorium, Medical Sciences Blvd., 1 King's College Circle. Call 416-977-2983 for more information.

Toronto Entomologists' Association meeting - Sat. Oct. 25 at 1 pm in Northrop Frye Hall - Rick Beaver, natural heritage coordinator with the Alderville First Nations will talk about the black oak savanna tall grass prairie. Call 905-727-6993 for more information.

Ian Wheal Heritage Walks (416-570-6415)
- Sat. Oct. 4 - Garrison Creek. Meet at the Christie subway station. Walk begins at 1:30 pm.

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IT'S YOUR NEWSLETTER

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

Subjects: plants, animals and natural areas in the Toronto region, especially reports of personal experiences with wildlife, including locations, dates, and any sources consulted.

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

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

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Weeds are plants living in a relationship with man, opportunists of the turmoil he brings to the places in which he makes his living.

from "Weeds by Rail" by Walter Meagher in WILDFLOWER 19(3), Summer 2003

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