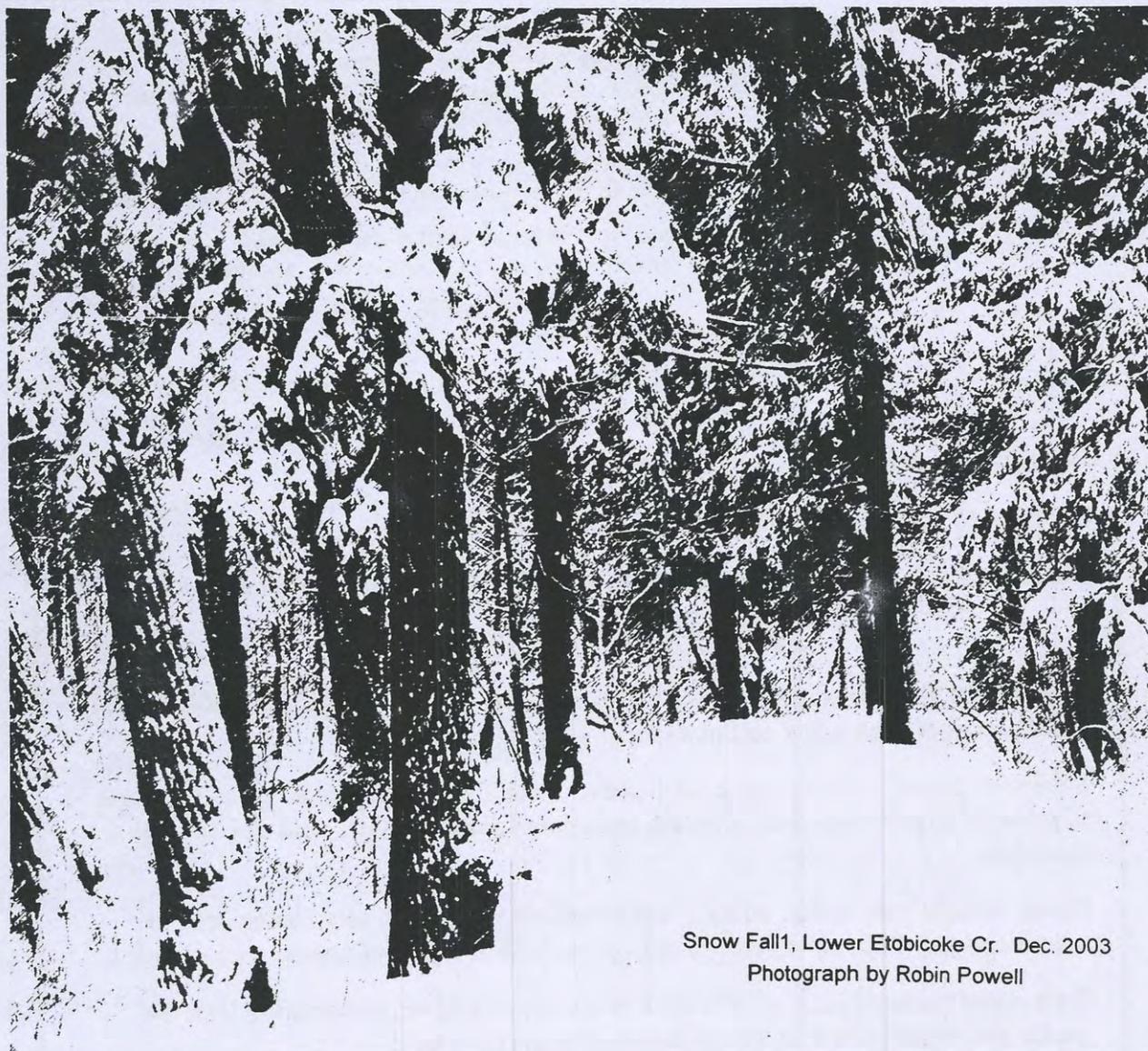


TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 521

February 2004



Snow Fall1, Lower Etobicoke Cr. Dec. 2003
Photograph by Robin Powell

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TFN MEETINGS

Sunday, February 1, 2004 - MANAGING THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF URBAN
STORMWATER RUNOFF IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO
at 2:30 pm
an illustrated talk by Nick Eyles, Professor
of Geology, University of Toronto
at Emmanuel College

75 Queen's Park Cres. East- The example that will be discussed is the
watershed of Frenchman's Bay in Pickering.

- VISITORS WELCOME!
- + Copies of TORONTO ROCKS (a revised and enlarged edition) will be for sale for about \$15.
 - + a "social hour" beginning at 2 pm with free coffee and juice.
 - + miscellaneous TFN publications will be available for sale.

NEXT MEETING: Sunday, March 7, 2004

NEXT NEWSLETTER: March (to be mailed in mid February)

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
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Toronto, Ont. M5B 1J3

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TFN OUTINGS

REMEMBER: Children and visitors are welcome on all outings but please, **NO PETS!**
 To get to outings on time, check TTC routes and schedules by calling 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.

- Feb. 1 TFN MEETING
- Thursday DON VALLEY - nature walk
 Feb. 5 Leader: Molly Campbell
 1:30 pm Meet at the southeast corner of Bayview Ave. and Moore Ave.
 We will be exploring winter woods and fields.
- Saturday COLLEGE PARK - nature arts
 Feb. 7 Leader: Nancy Anderson
 10:30 am Meet at the southwest corner of Yonge St. and College 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.
- Tuesday ASHBRIDGES BAY - birds
 Feb. 10 Leader: Marg Catto
 10 am Meet on the south side of Lake Shore Blvd. East at the foot of
 Coxwell Ave. Morning only.
- Sunday GARRISON CREEK TRIBUTARIES - urban ecology
 Feb. 15 Leaders: Ian Wheal & Helen Mills
 2 pm Meet at the southwest corner of Bloor St. West and Havelock St.
 (two blocks east of Dufferin St.)
 This is a joint outing with the North Toronto Green Community.
- Tuesday DEER PARK LIBRARY - urban ecology
 Feb. 17 Leader: Mark Cooper
 10:30 am Meet on the second floor of the library which is one block
 east of Yonge St. on the north side of St. Clair Ave. East.
 The leader is an information officer with the Toronto Works Dept. and will
 give us a media presentation or "virtual tour" of the Toronto Water Treatment
 Plant. Morning only.
- Saturday SAM SMITH PARK - birds
 Feb. 21 Leader: Douglas Paton
 10 am Meet on the south side of Lake Shore Blvd. West at the foot of
 Kipling Ave.
 Bring lunch, binoculars and warm clothes for this all-day outing.

FOR MORE OUTINGS AND MEETINGS, SEE PAGE 27.

FEBRUARY OUTINGS (cont'd)

\$ ferry tickets Tuesday Feb. 24 10 am WARDS ISLAND - birds
Leader: Doug Paton
Meet at the ferry docks at the foot of Bay St. Bring lunch and binoculars and dress warmly.

Saturday Feb. 28 1 pm EARL BALES PARK - nature walk
Leader: Alex Wellington
Meet at the southeast corner of Bathurst St. and Sheppard Ave. West.

□



Tree felled by beavers in Morningside Park
from a photo by Betty Greenacre

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I hope the recent snowfall lingers. Although I'm heavily dependent on my car for winter travel about Mississauga, I look forward to the first snowfalls of winter each year. The quiet and solitude of a winter walk after a fresh snowfall are almost unrivaled.

Late last year we had a successful work party at the Jim Baillie Nature Reserve. Although the work party was small and there had been a recent snowfall, we were able to successfully remove all visible signs of the invasive weed pale swallowwort. This is not the end of our struggle to rid the nature reserve of this weed. I expect we'll need at least two more work parties this year, one in the spring and the other in the fall, to control this aggressive pest.

Bit by bit the remaining natural areas in the Black Creek watershed are being degraded or destroyed. We are troubled by the scale of the Tennis Canada development (at York University) right on the edge of the creek and one of its tributaries. As well, the expansion of a non-porous surface parking lot in the floodplain of Downsview Dells Park makes no sense. Recently a proposal by Oakdale Golf & Country Club for groundwater extraction from Downsview Dells Park only makes matters worse. I understand that the water the golf course is permitted to extract from Black Creek is too polluted to use. In one sense the golf course itself pollutes Black Creek with fertilizers and pesticides. The golf course claims that the use of municipal water for watering greens and fairways is unworkable because water might not be available in quantity when it's most needed during hot dry weather in the summer. This is just when the water table in Downsview Dells would be at its lowest.

Toronto Field Naturalists are completely opposed to the Conservation Authority facilitating the extraction of groundwater, a natural resource in a public park, by a private company to further its commercial activities. Why do they squander the public goodwill they have established by permitting such activities? [See also bottom of page 11 and top of page 21.]

Robin Powell

□

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 Carlton St., Toronto, Ont. M5B 1J3. (The report of the Committee will be published in the May newsletter.)

Winters' sins melting
 drip blackness into gutters,
 Were these once white snows?

Haiku by Arthur Wade

KEEPING IN TOUCH

November 24, 2003

FENCE YOUR FEEDER

A fence on the ground below your bird feeder will help to protect ground-feeding birds from cats. The fence should surround spilt seed or prevent cats from ambushing birds from cover.

I presently make my fence with 2-ft. chicken wire and 3-ft. x ½ inch reinforcement bars for posts. There are many other materials that would be suitable.

I install the fence during the winter, as this is when I feed the birds. If you feed birds year round, you would have to incorporate fence protection for the ground-feeding birds into your permanent garden design. I have found that the fence prevents cats from preying on feeding birds and seems to deter them from the feeder and fence area.

Albert Roffey

□



Snow Fall2, Lower Etobicoke Cr., Dec. 2003

Photograph by Robin Powell

NEW ONTARIO GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS ON NATURE PROTECTION AND FORESTRY

The following is extracted from a letter dated March 19, 2003 from Dalton McGinty (now Premier of Ontario) to the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society/Wildlands League, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, and the World Wildlife Fund.

"I strongly believe that protecting Ontario's unique natural spaces and wildlife is essential to the health and well-being of our future generations. It is also crucial for the conservation of biodiversity. I agree wholeheartedly that the government has failed to protect Ontario's natural areas and wildlife. The initial promise of Lands for Life is now giving way to proposals for roads, quarries, golf courses and "recreational reserves" in these supposedly protected areas. We will put Ontario back on the map as a world-class leader in environmental preservation and protection. Key natural heritage and wildlife protection priorities for our new government include:

- . We will initiate a full public review of Ontario's Provincial Parks Act. We will make natural protection the first priority for an updated Parks Act. We will also scrap the proposal to create meaningless "recreational reserves" instead of truly protected provincial parks. Ontario's parks are some of the most beautiful and environmentally significant lands in the world. They deserve to be protected for future generations.

- . We will update and strengthen Ontario's Endangered Species Act. Our new Act will put in place effective measures to protect species at risk, including a science-based process to list species and help them recover, and meaningful protection for habitats. Protection of species is virtually meaningless unless there are also protections for the areas where they live, feed and breed.

- . We will institute meaningful, broad-scale land-use planning for Ontario's Northern Boreal Forest before any new major development, including ensuring full participation by native communities. Land use planning must protect the ecological integrity of this natural treasure and help to provide a sustainable future for native people and northern communities.

- . We will end the policy of allowing unlimited size clearcuts in Ontario. These massive clearcuts cause irreparable damage to our forests.

- . There have been no efforts to determine wolf population numbers in Ontario or the impact of hunting on these numbers. We will implement a proper wildlife management program for Ontario's wolves. We will ensure that Ontario gets the vital scientific information it needs to protect and manage wolves.

In addition to the above commitments, many of the central elements of Growing Strong Communities, our plan to protect Ontario's environment, will provide significant protections for our natural heritage by:

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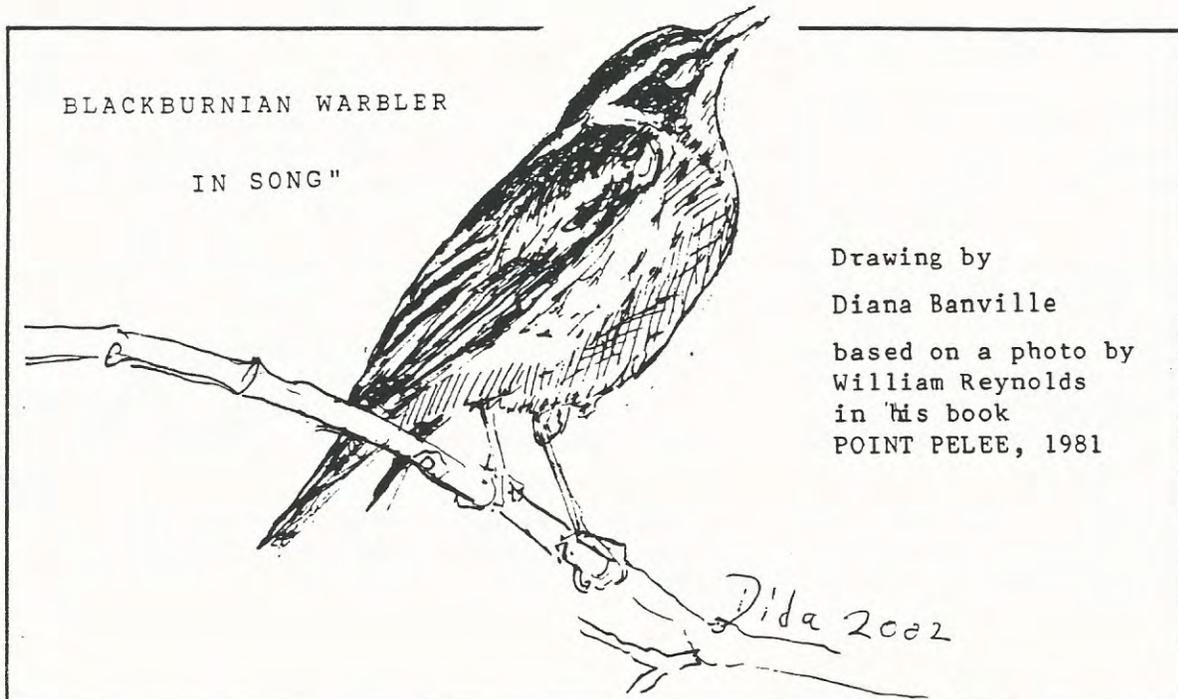
NEW ONTARIO GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS (cont'd)

- . Containing sprawl and protecting threatened vital natural areas by creating a Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt. The new Greenbelt will start by linking and giving real protection to the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine. It will also add important new areas, such as the Duffins-Rouge Agricultural Preserve, a Bronte Creek Provincial Park-Escarpment corridor and two-thirds of the provincially owned Seaton lands.
- . Protecting one million acres of greenspace and farmland to ensure that future generations have natural areas to enjoy close to our urban and suburban centres. To protect these lands from development, we will use a wide array of creative solutions, including tax credits, easements, land trusts, land swaps and new park designations.
- . Ensuring water source protection, including passing a law to enhance the protection of the lands and wetlands that surround our vital watersheds.
- . Changing the Planning Act to ensure that municipal planning and Ontario Municipal Board decisions are consistent with provincial rules to protect our natural spaces, wetlands and woodlands.
- . Creating an Environmental Youth Corps that will employ youth in areas such as protecting and rehabilitating natural habitats.

Ontarians deserve to live and work in communities where the environment contributes to our health and quality of life, not threatens them. I look forward to working with the Partnership for Public Lands in implementing these commitments as the head of a new Ontario Liberal Government."

from an article in EARTHWAYS (Samia), Nov. 2003

□



PROJECTS

GIVE A FUNGUS A NAME

In France and Germany, most large, distinctive fungi [have] long had accepted common names. This year Britain has published an approved list of common names for nearly 1,000 species of fungi.

Those fungi that are blessed with a name that everyone knows tend to be useful in some way, especially as food, or are notorious for being deadly poisonous or serious crop pests.

The Commission on Common Mushroom Names for North America, a body established in 2000 by the North American Mycological Association and the Mycological Society of America, is drawing up a list of recommended common (vernacular) names for mushrooms from North America. The Commission has set up a web site to gather information on preferences for common names. Go to <http://mushroomnames.org> where you will see an explanation of the project. To submit preferences for common names, visitors should click Enter and register (at least the name of their province). Your vote is not binding on anybody, but you may influence the outcome.

extracted from "Give a Fungus a Name" by Peter Marren in BBC WILDLIFE, Vol. 21, #10, Oct. 03 and MYCELIUM (Mycological Society of Toronto newsletter), Vol. 29, No. 4, Oct.-Dec. 2003

WAYS TO FIGHT RECKLESS USE OF PESTICIDES

Canada's federal environment watchdog announced recently that she was "appalled" by the government's feeble and slipshod job of regulating pesticides. There is a mountain of research suggesting widespread harm caused by the harmless-sounding POPs, or persistent organic pollutants. These POPs come from industrial chemicals and pesticides. No living thing on Earth can escape their silent and invisible occupation. Unlike medical drugs, these toxins are mostly not tested for toxicity before they are used, massively, in the environment.

Getting active, to prod our sluggish governments and negligent industries into tougher safeguards, can not only help to shift the picture, but makes you feel a heck of a lot better about your role as a parent and citizen.

You can support organic farmers and markets. You can let dandelions grow on your lawn. (Kids like them.) You can spend an evening checking out some lively Web sites: Sierra Club (www.sierraclub.ca), the Canadian Environmental Law Association (www.cela.ca) or two terrifically helpful children-specific U.S. sites, Children's Environmental Health Network (www.cehn.org) or the Center for Children's Health and the Environment (www.childenvironment.org). The last two sites will send you regular e-mails on how to protect your children from toxins.

Here's another thought: Women's Healthy Environments Network (www.whenvironments.ca), phone 416-928-0880, needs volunteers to help fund its documentary film, "If You Love Our Children: Children's Health and the Environment".

from an article by Michele Landsberg, in THE TORONTO STAR, October 25, 2003



FOR READING

Recently published:

CANADIAN WILD FLOWERS by Catharine Parr Traill, colour illustrations painted by Agnes Fitzgibbon (daughter of Susanna Moodie). First published in 1868, republished in 2003 by Algrove Publishing Ltd. The Canadian Museum of Nature receives a royalty from the sale of this book. Available for \$11.95 from Lee Valley Tools Ltd. Call 1-800-267-8767.

WINTER WORLD: THE INGENUITY OF ANIMAL SURVIVAL by Bernd Heinrich, Harper-Collins, 2003; 347 pages.

Inspired by the mystery of the golden-crowned kinglet's winter survival, Bernd Heinrich's eighth book conveys his sense of curiosity and wonder about the natural world. Integrating his extensive observations in the woods of New England with the work of many other scientists and naturalists, he succeeds in capturing the fascinating stories behind the facts. The 25 short chapters address both physiological and behavioral adaptations to winter weather, including such topics as: nests and dens, flocking and aggregating, food sources and storage, oxygen use, and temperature regulation. Aside from a few rather dense sections on physiology, this is a very readable book that will appeal to many TFN members. Those outing leaders searching for ways to add more interest to their winter walks will find it particularly valuable.

Theresa Moore □

"Ctenucha moth nectaring on spreading dogbane"

drawn by Diana Banville

based on a photo by
Bill McIlveen
in ONTARIO INSECTS
Vol. 9, No. 1, Sept. 2003
newsletter of Toronto
Entomologists' Association



CITY WILDLIFE

I usually go for a hike on my own if there is not a naturalists' walk. The most convenient is through Mount Pleasant Cemetery and down the Moore Park Ravine to the Don River. From there I can either return through Park Drive Ravine, or through Nesbitt Park Ravine, which is the old Pottery Road.

Today I went to the outlet of Mud creek where I have been seeing deer tracks and hoped I could see one. I usually hang around the river and pull up weeds while watching for herons or kingfishers. I saw a red-tail soaring over the brickworks and there were a few juncos, downys, and cedar waxwings, but nothing too exciting. [It was early December.]

I decided to head home and went north along the river to Pottery Road. From there I cut across Bayview and went into the Nesbitt Ravine. As I hiked up the hill I saw something dark brown ahead of me but could not make it out with my naked eye. I pulled out my binoculars and saw the most beautiful 6-point white-tailed deer standing in the middle of the path. He was watching me but he stood his ground. His tail stayed down and he wasn't moving. He was white on the chest, around the nose and eyes, and his back was golden brown. I decided to go around him as I didn't want to disturb him. I climbed the hill to the railway tracks and watched him for a while. There was a pedestrian walking towards me on the tracks and I thought I could show this person the deer, if the appropriate type. I judged the man coming towards me as not the type to appreciate nature as he was smoking a cigarette, and walking right on the tracks wearing headphones. I told him that this was very dangerous and people had been killed doing this. Of course he ignored me and kept walking on the tracks.

Another person appeared with six or seven large dogs, some were on a leash but half of them were running free. I asked her if she intended to go into the ravine and she did not. I persuaded her to keep the dogs away as there was a deer in the valley. She didn't seem too interested in seeing the buck and was more concerned with her dog-walking. People really surprise me sometimes. I hiked up to Bayview and Moore which took about five minutes. There I was in the heart of Toronto, with cars, buildings and concrete. How these animals survive is a miracle. Isn't it wonderful!

Roger Powley

□

... Earth is an island of the Blessed whose resources -- of which water is the most essential -- must be protected if the human experiment is to continue, if we are to have a chance to adapt to changing conditions brought about by natural climatic fluctuations and our own actions. Highly successful civilizations have collapsed for failing to do so.

from ISLAND OF THE BLESSED: THE SECRETS OF EGYPT'S EVERLASTING OASIS by
Harry Thurston, Doubleday Canada 2003

IN THE "HOW HAVE I MISSED IT BEFORE?" CATEGORY

I have encountered in just two places in my ravine travels this splendid plant which would do credit to any garden of exotics. Sometimes up to 8 feet tall with sturdy, greyish stalk red-veined, extending sculptural arms topped by a plethora of silvery, oval "pompoms", each knob intricately meshed as though fairy fingers had woven it. What was it and how have I never noticed it in all my perambulating years?

The top buds gave the clue -- they sprouted purple tufts -- and, of course, the Peterson Guide solved the riddle: woolly burdock.

Now I've been aware of common burdock and giant burdock for years. They are those growths with large, dark green leaves and prickly green burs supporting purple-tufted flowerheads, whose seed-pods become the well-nigh undetachable bracts which hitch a ride on everybody's clothing. But woolly burdock has hitherto escaped me and, given its appearance, I can't think why. Is it rather scarce -- the Peterson makes no mention of this -- or have I just been looking the other way? Yet here it grows side by side with the "ordinary" burdock and provides a commanding colour contrast.

Whatever -- those silvery-grey latticed buds will never again go unnoticed. Definitely the aristocrat of the family.

Eva Davis

Ed. note:

Woolly burdock is a Eurasian plant which in Toronto is known only from Centennial Park, Etobicoke Creek watershed, according to our checklist, 1994 edition. D.B.



A LUNAR ECLIPSE

As I stood with a group of friends in my city back yard watching the moon pass through the phases of its eclipse on November 8, 2003 I could not help remembering a similar phenomenon under very different circumstances fifty-five years earlier.

I had spent the winter of 1948-49 at a remote Ontario Hydro survey camp at the headwaters of the Mississagi River eighty miles north of Blind River. I was part of a survey crew cutting lines through the bush in preparation for the huge land-clearing project for the flood area above the dam that was under construction at the outlet of Rocky Island Lake. In early April the working conditions had become impossible. The deep snow cover was melting rapidly and our snowshoes broke through the crust at every step. The Mississagi River and Rocky Island Lake that had provided us with roads all winter were breaking up. The ice was no longer strong enough for snowmobile traffic nor open enough for boat travel. By April 12 all work on the survey had come to a halt. This suited the crew fine because we were ready to take an Easter break and spend a few days and some of our hard-earned money back in civilization.

Our camp was at the northeast end of Rocky Island Lake where the Mississagi River entered the lake. The closest usable road to town ended at the southwest end of the lake where the Hydro was building the dam. Since the lake ice was not safe for vehicles we were faced with walking across the eight miles of the lake to the construction camp.

After a hearty dinner, five of us started out across the lake. We followed the route of a winter road where the ice had been thickened by the addition of water during the winter. Even on the road site the ice was getting soft so we traveled in single file at intervals of a few yards. The lead man carried a long pole for testing the ice for soft spots.

Not long after we started down the lake the sun dropped below the western horizon and we were pleased to see it replaced by a bright full moon.

Then, to our amazement our full moon started to darken. A small dark bite appeared out of the edge of the moon. It gradually spread, covering more and more of the moon's surface. We had not expected a lunar eclipse. We had seen no newspapers and our radio had quit weeks before when the battery ran out of juice so we had no idea an eclipse was imminent.

As we hiked along the winter road the moon was moving farther and farther into the earth's shadow until when it reached totality the whole surface took on a dark reddish hue. The wide stretch of frozen lake darkened down but we were still able to see enough to follow the winter road.

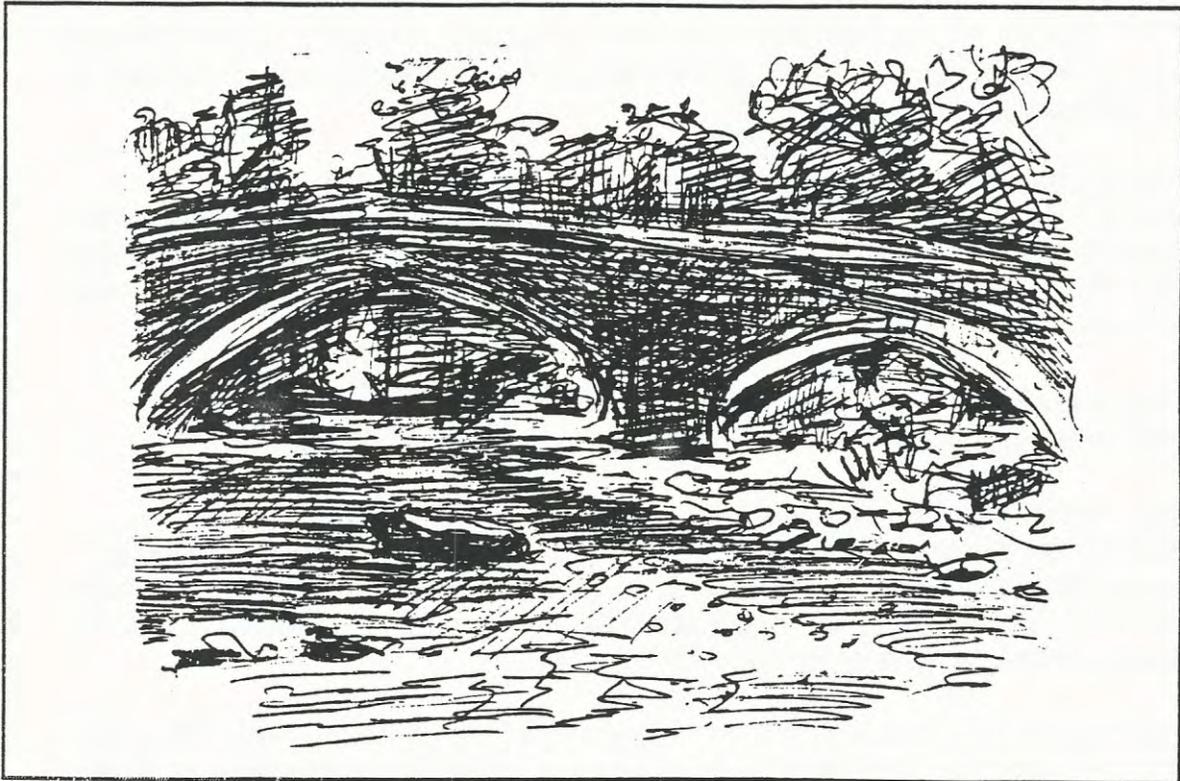
A LUNAR ECLIPSE (cont'd)

We carefully made our way along the road as it headed toward the southwest shore of the lake. We did not run into difficulty until we arrived at the spot where the road reached the shore and continued on through the bush. Here we found open water between the ice and the shore. The gap was not wide but we did not relish a swim through the icy water with our packs on our backs. Fortunately for us there were a few loose pieces of ice floating in the gap and with our long pole we managed to capture a floe that was large enough to bear the weight of two people. By taking turns at poling each other across the gap we soon had the crew safe on dry land.

From there it was a short walk along the road into the construction camp. We found the camp kitchen still open and a pot of hot coffee on the back of the stove. A cup of coffee had never been more appreciated.

As we left the cookhouse to search the bunkhouses for empty beds the moon was beginning to emerge from the earth's shadow. It had been a weird and wonderful experience. This was one lunar eclipse none of us would forget.

George Fairfield □



HUMBER RIVER with OLD MILL BRIDGE
sketched in pencil by Larisa Zviedris

A BUTTERFLY ADVENTURE

Once upon a time, on one fine October day (Sept. 26/02), Earl Dillan and his brother-in-law Lyle Swain were driving along in their 1997 Chevy truck near their home town of Reedsville, Ohio (in the extreme south-east part of Ohio near the border with West Virginia).

While Lyle drove along at 50 mph, a monarch butterfly struck the truck's antenna and the force of the wind held the butterfly in place on the antenna. Earl spotted a "white dot" on the butterfly's wing and asked Lyle to pull over. Earl collected the butterfly and later mailed the tag to the address printed on the tag: University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66045.

It was later discovered that this particular tagged monarch - #BGR 303 - had been released during the Thickson's Woods Festival near Whitby, Ontario on September 21/02 by Monarch Watch tagger Don Davis. The total distance travelled by this butterfly was 359 miles, or about 72 miles per day.

Don Davis

Monarch Watch 2002 Season Recoveries for Don Davis of Toronto, Ontario

Tag Number	Tag Location and Date	Reporter	Report Location and Date	Miles
AAR518	Presqu'ile P.P. 8/27/01	L. Martinez	El Rosario, Mx 3/7/03	2251
AAR670	Presqu'ile P.P. 9/1/01	M. Mondragon	El Rosario, Mx 3/3/03	2251
AAR555	Presqu'ile P.P. 9/1/01	C. Jesus	El Rosario, Mx 3/6/03	2251
AAR702	Presqu'ile P.P. 9/1/01	R. Hernandez	El Rosario, Mx 3/7/01	2251
AAR872	Presqu'ile P.P. 9/2/01	L. Gonzelez	El Rosario, Mx 3/7/03	2251
AAR833	Presqu'ile P.P. 9/2/01	V. Garcia	El Rosario, Mx 3/24/03	2251
BGQ531	Presqu'ile P.P. 8/31/02	M. Mondragon	El Rosario, Mx 3/3/03	2251
BGR362	Cobourg, ON 9/12/01	M. Gonzalez	El Rosario, Mx 3/6/03	2110
AAS433	Toronto, ON 9/12/01	M. Gonzalez	El Rosario, Mx 3/6/03	2053
AAS229	Toronto, ON 9/12/01	R. Hernandez	El Rosario, Mx 3/7/03	2053
AAS580	Toronto, ON 9/13/01	J. Gonzalez	Sierra Chincua, Mx 3/3/03	2053
BGQ604	Toronto, ON 9/6/02	D. Kust	Sierra Chincua, Mx 3/26/03	2053
BGQ904	Cambridge, ON 9/14/02	D. Milan	El Rosario, MX 3/24/03	2001
BGR303	Whitby, ON 9/21/02	L. Swain, E. Dillan	Reedsville, Ohio 9/26/02	359

Gorges on milkweed.
Jewel hangs on blade of grass.
Monarch flies away.

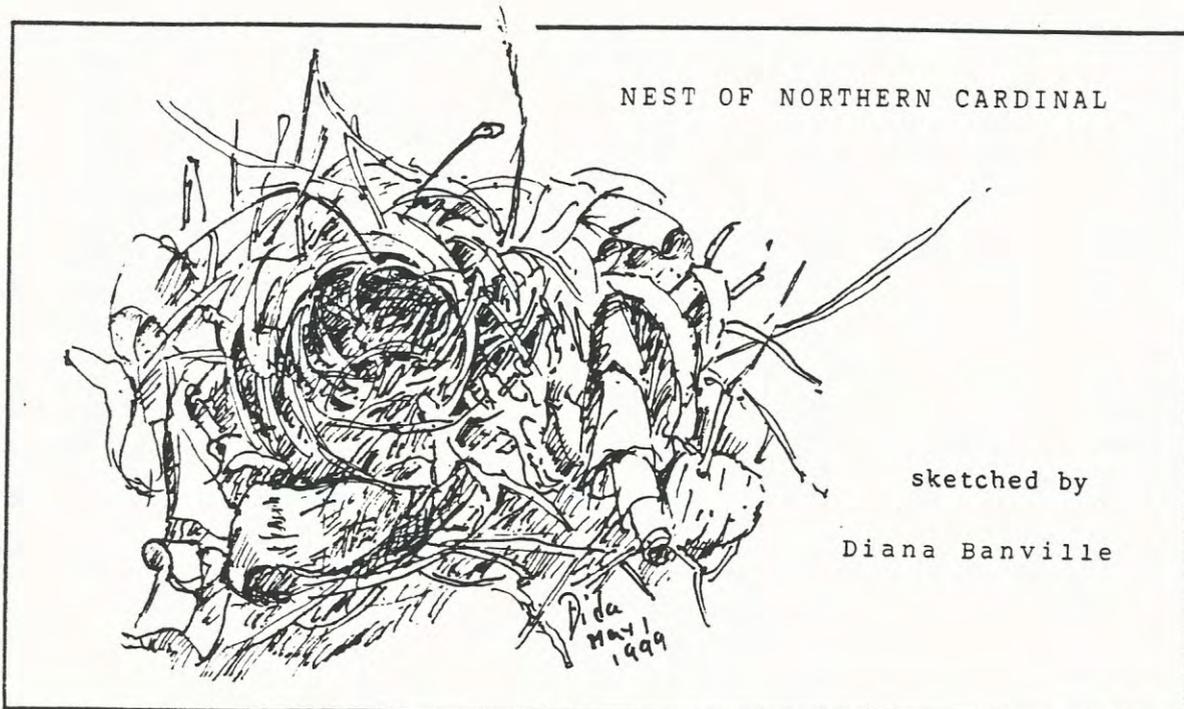
haiku by Therese Paradis

BIRDS AND WINDOWS

Towards the end of last summer a female hummingbird appeared in our garden in eastern Scarborough, checking out the bee-balm and hanging fuchsia baskets. Once the obedient plant started blooming the hummingbird appeared several times daily. On September 11th, around 3 pm I was watching her feed, and seconds later there was a light thump on our window. There she was on the patio, lying on her back with wings outstretched. I rushed outside and as I approached she flipped herself over just like a windup toy and sat upright. I was able to pick her up without any struggle and put her into the shoebox that is always handy. About 20 minutes later noises from the box told me it was time to release her. I opened the box away from the house and facing the trees. She looked at me and then took off like a bullet. For a few seconds she sat in the spruce tree preening herself, and then left.

On September 29th, again there was the now familiar thump on another window. I had to search for this bird in a bed full of ferns and ivy. It was an immature female yellow-bellied sapsucker. She screamed at me while I tried to pick her up. Even though she seemed in good shape I decided to keep her in the shoebox for a while. I called my neighbour who had never seen a sapsucker and we released the bird in her yard. Some of our window hits have not been so successful, so these two incidents made up for the ones with unhappy endings.

Karin Fawthrop



NEST OF NORTHERN CARDINAL

sketched by
Diana Banville

IN THE NEWS

FLUSHED

Just when you thought you'd become so jaded about assaults on the natural environment that you'd heard it all, along comes a story that manages to stir shock, depression and outrage anew. Thousands of miles out to sea, in a remote region of the North Pacific Ocean where even sailors seldom venture, is a vast floating mass of plastic junk, stretching across an area the size of Texas. Plastic bleach bottles, tops of spray cans, discarded TV picture tubes, polypropylene lines from fishing nets, plastic cigarette lighters, even toy "rubber duckies" have collected in a huge mass of slowly rotating seawater known as the North Pacific subtropical gyre, which -- if you'll forgive the metaphor -- has come to resemble a giant toilet bowl of swirling waste.

In fact, the effect is a natural one. Rivers of plastic objects are carried by great ocean currents from North America, Japan, and other lands along the North Pacific rim into the gyre. There, much of the detritus, most prominently the plastic, becomes trapped until it can decay -- a process that, by some estimates, could take 500 years.

Worse, this environmental disaster is not merely an eyesore and a health hazard for seabirds, Japanese investigators have discovered that plastics can concentrate hydrophobic chemicals a millionfold. Those chemicals include such toxic substances as DDT, PCBs, and other oily poisons that have already been dispersed in the oceans. No one knows how such concentrations might affect plankton, fish or other parts of the food web, but it seems unlikely that any good will come of it.

from "Up Front" by Peter Brown in NATURAL HISTORY, Vol. 112, No. 9, November 2003

Comment: To find out more about this issue, read "Trashed" by Charles Moore in NATURAL HISTORY, Vol. 112, No. 9, Nov. 2003.

GROUNDHOGS SEEK MATES, NOT SHADOWS, EXPERT SAYS

Groundhogs that emerge from their dens in early February are probably looking for sweethearts, not shadows. And what's more, the female groundhogs invite the males in for a visit. The rodent ritual whimsically marked as Groundhog Day seems to be part of the mating ritual to see which females are available and where they are. Their scouting done, the groundhogs then return to hibernating until the March mating season.

from an article in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, February 1, 2003

RODENTS SEE SPRING HERE, WINTER THERE

The Groundhog Day tradition is rooted in a German superstition that if an animal casts a shadow on February 2, the Christian holiday of Candlemas, bad weather looms.

from an article in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, February 3, 2003



IN 'THE NEWS (cont'd)

WORRISOME FISH INVADES LAKE ONTARIO

Toronto conservation officials doing a routine survey of the fish population at the mouth of the Don River recently discovered a grass carp. The large, grey fish with black-edged scales is one of four invasive Asian carp species authorities fear could upset the delicate ecology of Canada's Great Lakes. None of the four Asian carp -- grass, bighead, silver and black -- are believed to have become entrenched, but authorities are on alert.

Ballast-water monitoring and an electrical barrier that repels fish in a canal connecting the Mississippi River to Lake Michigan are just two initiatives in place to protect the lakes against invasive species. Conservation authorities hope this latest grass carp was on its own, perhaps released into an area waterway by would-be diners who purchased it at a local market but opted not to eat it.

extracted from a Canadian Press article, in 24 HOURS newspaper, December 22, 2003

FISHY MURDER MYSTERY SOLVED

The sudden extinction of the lake trout in Lake Ontario has been a mystery for the past half-century. The huge salmon-like fish, which once numbered in the millions and occupied the top link of the lake's food chain, started becoming less numerous in the 1930s, suffered a population collapse in the 1940s and vanished by 1960. No one knew the exact cause, but the prime suspects at the time were heavy commercial harvesting and the spreading impact of the blood-sucking sea lamprey, an invasive pest from the Atlantic Ocean that had entered the Great Lakes through shipping canals.

But scientists now believe that neither explanation is correct and that Lake Ontario was the scene of one of the worst wildlife poisonings the world has ever seen. A team of U.S. researchers conducted a massive 15-year study, whose results were recently published in the journal *Environmental Science and Technology*, and concluded that the lake trout were driven to local extinction by exposure to trace amounts of dioxin, an industrial poison inadvertently dumped into the lake.

The scientists think that over-fishing and the lamprey played roles in cutting the numbers of lake trout -- a kind of one-two punch -- but that dioxin delivered the knockout blow. Sea lampreys had been in Lake Ontario at least since the 1830s indicating that the fish in the absence of other factors, could co-exist with the pests.

The US. team reconstructed the levels of dioxin in the lake from the 1930s onward, and compared them to findings on the sensitivity of young lake trout to the poison. The scientists determined that the levels of the pollutant were high enough to kill newly hatched lake trout for nearly half a century from the late 1930s to the mid-1980s.

During the worst period of dioxin pollution, from 1948 to 1976, the contaminant killed every lake trout egg laid. Without successful breeding, the fish died out.

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

Tighter controls and bans on dioxin have led to a gradual decline of the chemical in Lake Ontario since the peak reached in the mid-1960s. It wasn't until 1986 that stocked lake trout started reproducing again naturally. It then took until 1995 to have offspring healthy enough to survive to be one-year-old fish.

Dioxin isn't deliberately produced, but is an unwanted byproduct of waste incineration, pulp and paper making using chlorine, and some chemical processes using chlorine as a feedstock. Lake Ontario is downriver from the large chemical industry at Niagara Falls, N.Y. (made famous by the Love Canal) that was a source of some of the dioxin.

To test the theory that dioxin was at the root of the disappearance, researchers conducted laboratory tests on the sensitivity of trout eggs to the pollutant. They found that at the extremely small concentration of 30 parts per trillion, some of the newly-hatched fish started dying. The dioxin caused hemorrhaging and head malformations, among other things, in the newly-hatched fish. Researchers now believe that trout are one of the more sensitive fish in the world when it comes to dioxin. The team looked at deposits of dioxin in lake sediments to estimate the amount of the pollutant that would likely be in egg tissues. This work indicated that the 30-ppt threshold was reached around 1940. By the end of that decade, concentrations were high enough to kill all young fish.

Dioxin readings are currently around 5 ppt. A concern remains that this reduced level may be having sub-lethal effects on the fish, causing such defects as jaw deformities and impaired vision and harming the chances of creating a viable, naturally-sustaining population. Young trout just after fertilization were the most vulnerable to the chemical. Adult fish were seemingly immune to concentrations that were killing their offspring, and it would require tissue levels far higher -- perhaps as much as 1,000 ppt -- to kill them.

from an article by Martin Mittelstaedt, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, November 15, 2003

CONSERVATIONISTS DONATE FARM WITHIN OAK RIDGES MORaine

Robert MacMillan, a retired doctor, and his wife Lyn MacMillan, a long-time conservation activist, are giving their 120-acre farm, near Dufferin Street and Major Mackenzie Drive in Vaughan, to the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

The Nature Conservancy says the farm, which is inside the 8 per cent of the 160-kilometre-long moraine where development is still allowed, will be a "natural oasis", forming one of the largest preserved areas on the moraine's southern slopes.

from an article by Jeff Gray, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, October 28, 2003

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

LAZY URBAN BEARS

A new study reveals that black bears living in and around urban areas are up to a third less active and weigh up to 30 per cent more than their wilderness counterparts. According to scientists the metropolitan omnivores are abandoning their natural diets, which can range from berries to adult deer, for the convenience of fast-food cuisine. The bears choose to forage through garbage containers behind restaurants, shopping centres and suburban homes, allowing them to eat their fill in far less time than it would take to forage in the wild or hunt down prey. The authors of the study recommend that local governments mandate bear-proof garbage containers for homes and businesses to prevent the bears from becoming dependent on humans for food.

from "Earthweek" by Steve Newman, in the TORONTO STAR, November 29, 2003

THE TERNS' TURN MEANS WINDMILLS STILL NOT TURNING

The vast exposed beaches and wild gales of Sable Island made the North Atlantic sandbar an ideal location for \$800,000 worth of windmills -- until a group of birds shut down the federal pilot project.

When the idea first came up within Environment Canada, officials hoped to reduce the \$80,000 fuel bill at a weather station it operates on the island and reduce the risk of diesel fuel spilling when it is airlifted to run the generators on the fragile ecosystem. An environmental assessment done in the late 1990s showed that more than 2,000 Arctic and common terns were nesting in the central part of the 35-kilometre-long island. None of them were on the eastern end where the windmills would be set up.

But by the time the windmills were flown out to the island last year, a determined breakaway group of about 100 terns had located near the site where the windmills were to be erected. Environment Canada has multiple responsibilities. One of them is climate change and encouraging wind energy and another one is protection of migratory birds, which in this case creates a little conflict.

Officials are looking at measures such as shutting down the windmills when the birds are nesting during the summer months or only operating the devices in the evening, when the birds are not as active.

from an article by Kevin Cox, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, November 20, 2003

Comment: For another point of view, see "Putting Wind Turbines in Perspective" in TFN 520 (pages 17-18). ▷

...civilization is suffering from a several vitamin deficiency, because it cannot draw its strength directly from nature, eternally young and eternally true. Humanity has lost itself in the unnatural and in speculation.

from A WOMAN IN THE POLAR NIGHT by Christiane Ritter, (translated by J. Degras), George Allan and Unwin Ltd., London, 1954

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

YEAR-LONG BAN PLACED ON EXTRACTION OF WATER

The Ontario government has put a temporary ban on any new commercial plans to extract water from the province's aquifers and watersheds, making it the first province to grapple with the emotional issue of whether Canada's groundwater ought to be for sale by the bottle. In its announcement, the Environment Ministry called the current system a "reckless giveaway of Ontario's precious resource". The ban is aimed primarily at the growing bottled-water industry, but will affect industries ranging from canning to ready-mix concrete manufacturing. It will not affect agriculture or municipal water supplies.

During the year-long ban, the province will try to figure out how much groundwater exists in the province, where it is located, and whether there is enough for the level of water extraction that is going on now. Once the research is complete, the government intends to begin charging companies if they take water. The move affects 13 applications for permits that are in the works and stops the taking of an extra seven million litres of water a day. It does not affect the roughly 5,800 permits to extract water that have already been approved.

A permit to extract groundwater is necessary in Ontario to take more than 50,000 litres a day. Conservationists and lawyers representing Ontario communities concerned about groundwater extraction praised the government's move.

from an article by Alanna Mitchell, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, December 19, 2003

BEDBUGS: COMING SOON TO A SINGLE-FAMILY HOME NEAR YOU

The University of Toronto released a research bulletin by urban entomologist Tim Myles confirming that local homeless shelters are infested with bedbugs -- and reminding those who had forgotten or never knew anything about these "wingless, bloodsucking parasites" that they are, indeed, disgusting.

It is only a matter of time before the pest escapes from its shelter-based "reservoir" to infest nursing-homes, hospitals, hotels, apartment buildings and "eventually detached single-family homes". Many entomologists have suggested it's because we no longer use strong enough chemical pesticides to keep traditional vermin down.

from an article by John Barber, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, December 20, 2003

LATE SQUIRRELS

For squirrels, October may be the cruellest month. In some leafy neighbourhoods, dead squirrels lie two or three to a block. Squirrels born in late summer are now making their first independent forays into the world... A squirrel can live for more than a decade if it's lucky, but with cars and such predators as red-tail hawks many don't last a year. It takes them about 10 to 14 weeks to learn 'squirrel wisdom'. They may not be as leery of cars as adults. The younger ones may not have caught on to crossing streets over the phone wires.

from "Social Studies" by Michael Kesterton, in THE GLOBE AND MAIL, October 28, 2003

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

WHEN SONGBIRDS DON'T COME BACK

For decades, conservationists in North America have been asking the question with rising urgency: Where have all the songbirds gone? And not only songbirds, but many of the 200 migratory species that breed and raise their young in Canada and the United States and then fly south for the winter. Four out of five species of birds in Ontario are migratory. Their disappearance would indeed mean a silent spring.

Surveys point to accelerated declines in the breeding populations of many well-known species. In Ontario, for example, a breeding bird count carried out by volunteers every June has recorded a 2 per cent annual drop in the relative abundance of scarlet tanagers since 1968. Between 1993 and last year, however, the decline was almost 7 per cent a year. Some estimates put a score of species at no more than 10 and 20 per cent of historic levels, although scientists caution that the numbers are far from firm.

Conservationists have suggested many possible causes -- climate change, pesticides, loss of southern habitat through intensive coffee plantings, loss of northern habitat through urban sprawl and forest fragmentation. Yet no one really knows which of these potential causes plays the biggest role and should get the most attention.

Bird researchers consider breeding environments to be either sources or sinks. Large swaths of forest are usually "sources", meaning birds breeding there more than replace themselves. But nesting studies suggest fragments or patches of forest are "sinks", with fewer birds coming out than went in.

extracted from an article by Peter Calamai, in the TORONTO STAR, December 27, 2003

Bird migration — by the numbers

- Longest Canadian tropical migrant: red knot — 16,000 km from Arctic tundra to Tierra del Fuego
- Journey for most migrating songbirds: 1,000 km to 5,000 km
- Songbird flying speed: 25 km/h to 70 km/h
- Songbird flying altitude: 150 metres to 600 metres
- Highest migrant: mallard that hit an airplane at 6,400 metres
- Average distance covered daily: American redstart, 30-160 km; barn swallow, 150 km; Swainson's thrush, 200 km
- When: songbirds and shorebirds in night's cooler, calmer air; hawks, other soaring birds on daytime thermals
- Setting their compass: birds use star patterns, Earth's magnetic field, prevailing winds, polarized light from setting sun, topographic features
- Migration champs: blackpoll warblers — non-stop, 72-hour flight from Maritimes to South America covers 1,000 kilometres a day; equivalent to a human running four-minute miles for 80 consecutive hours

Source: The Smithsonian Institute



IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

FINE-FEATHERED FLAP

Taxpayers have funded experimental use of a technique far more efficient than any cull to reduce the risk of plane-bird collisions. Results are contained in a 2001 report, Efficacy of The Suppression and Conditioning Apparatus and The Consequent Behaviour Modification in Birds, written by Rhonda Millikin. This new, high-tech, environmentally friendly, non-lethal approach was tested to see if it could teach birds to avoid airports. It could be adapted for use anywhere wildlife isn't wanted. It worked, spectacularly. And Transport Canada has been ignoring it ever since.

Put simply, loudspeakers focused aircraft engine noises at birds and then fired water under high pressure in their direction. The noise was no big deal to the birds, but they hated the water, although even the few that were hit were quite unharmed. Depending on the species, the birds soon (in the case of crows, very soon) or eventually (in the case of geese, after several applications) learned that when they heard the noise the water was about to come. The birds fled, and eventually the sound alone deterred them.

This method also seems to work for some mammals (deer, black bears, possibly moose) and can be connected to detection devices that make it automatic. If an animal of a certain size enters the restricted area, the noise is activated, followed by the water. Trained sheepdogs, trained falcons, the oiling of eggs, the use of plywood cutouts, special laser devices, pyrotechnics, noise deterrents, goose repellent, helium balloons, habitat modification and change of ground cover (geese graze on tender grass) are all non-lethal methods with varying degrees of success and various price tags. The trick is to mix and blend methods to suit local circumstances. Lethal culling satisfies blood lust, but only leaves room for more geese. So long as temperatures are above the freezing point, the water cannon aversion process appears to work better than any other method, and once birds are conditioned, the water isn't used anyway.

extracted from an article by Barry Kent MacKay, in NOW, August 7, 2003

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DOES FEEDING GARDEN BIRDS MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?

Couldn't they get along fine without it?

In fact, gardens are becoming an ever more crucial habitat for birds, because land-use changes in the countryside mean populations of even some of our commonest birds are in rapid decline.

As global climate change begins to take hold, our garden birds face great uncertainty, and they need all the help they can get.

But it's not only birds that benefit from feeding. You will learn more about their behaviour and habits, and if you aren't already a keen birder, feeding birds may help you become one.

from "Natural Choice Bird-feeding" by Stephen Moss in BBC WILDLIFE, Vol. 21, No. 11, Nov. 2003

EVERY LITTER HURTS -- HELPFUL QUICK SUGGESTIONS

- . Take More Than Pictures
When entering a park, large or small, many of you have heard the plea. "Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints". Consider going one step further. Take a plastic bag and collect any small items of trash you find along the paths you follow. Leave the bag in a park waste receptacle or take it home for your own waste collection.
- . Call Ahead
When you organize a clean-up of a ravine or park, whether it involves your family, your neighbourhood, or a much larger community group, it is your responsibility to communicate your plans with whatever city department has the equipment and staff to haul away your accumulated pile(s) of trash. It may be the Parks or Works Department. Tell them the area in which you will be working. Ask where they suggest you pile the collected items. After the event, call the appropriate person and describe exactly what you collected, where the material is located, how much, and in what form, i.e. bags or loose material.
- . It's Not All Trash
Many of the items collected during a clean-up are recyclable in your local program. Have each collector use two separate bags for recyclables and trash, assign specific people to pick up only recyclables, or organize a sorting procedure at the end of the event. When you call the appropriate person about where the collected items are located, tell them about the separated recyclables and label these materials clearly.
- . Save Money and the Environment
Domestic beer bottles and cans are returnable for a deposit. Keep these items separate from regular items acquired during a clean up. Your group can use the money. It's much better to have those bottles re-used than recycled or worse yet, treated as garbage. The recycling of beer cans is more efficient than regular can recycling.
- . Become Sherlock Holmes
Take the time to do a detailed audit of collected material. If there is a lot of paper, try to find letterheads or addresses to provide clues about the source of these items. Contact businesses which are careless about their own waste storage and collection and make positive suggestions. If the materials appear to be waste from products purchased at local stores, suggest that they provide special waste receptacles on their property and empty them regularly. Audit results can also be used to help your volunteers assess their own purchase habits.
- . Start Early
It's never too early to teach children not to litter. It's ugly, it's dangerous to humans and wildlife, and it's wasteful. Always set a good example for children and adults alike.
- . Only a Start
It's a good start but only a start when people stop littering. Lots of people do not litter and yet are not making really good environmental choices. The more serious issue of waste reduction cannot be avoided. No waste should be discarded as litter but also very little waste should have to be put out with the trash. ▷

LITTER (cont'd)

- There's No "Away"
People generally recycle some items and are happy when their trash is taken away. Most have never really thought about where "away" really is. With a few changes in attitudes and actions we can reduce our need for "away".
- "Biodegradable" Does Not Always Mean "Good for the Environment"
The fact that some items biodegrade is no excuse for throwing them on the ground, on streets, or in parks and ravines. If wildlife is attracted to these items, we often complain and then seek ways to kill them. Simply do not provide food. The worst place to discard biodegradable waste is in rivers and streams. As they decompose they use valuable oxygen needed by aquatic animals.

from an article by Janice Palmer, in ON THE DON, Vol.10, No.2, Spring 2003



VIRGINIA WATERLEAF

(Waterleaf family)

Pale mauve
or white
flowers.

Lobed leaves
sometimes look
as if they've
been drenched
in water.

ESA woodlot
Brampton ravine
June 2002

Drawing by
Eva Davis

a native
Toronto Region
wildflower

Eva Davis

THE WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

February 2003, Toronto

February was fairly cold, with near-normal precipitation (circa 50-60 mm across the Greater Toronto Area) and sunshine (112 hours), and continuous snow-cover throughout the month. It was the coldest February since 1995 with a mean of -5.1°C downtown and -7.0°C at Pearson Airport. This is close to 2°C below the long-term average (1971-2000). Snowfall was just slightly above-normal in the 24-30 cm range, much above that of 2002, but below that of 2001. However, it was well-distributed through the month and very persistent. Snowfall was somewhat lake-enhanced so actually heaviest near the waterfront. None of the snowfalls was very intense. Thaws with rain did occur this month, but they were brief.

Temperatures dropped to or below -20°C away from the city core and the lakeshore on a couple of occasions, notably on February 11th, when there were even some local ice crystals in the morning.

In short, February continued the trend of January to follow a more 1970s/early 1980s pattern of a "real" winter for Toronto.

Gavin Miller

□



Snow Fall, Lower Etobicoke Cr., Dec. 2003

Photograph by Robin Powell

COMING EVENTS

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

- Sat. Feb. 7 from 9 am (all day) with Garth Riley to see winter birds in Durham Region. Meet at the Pickering GO station to car pool if necessary. Bring a lunch and dress warmly.

Toronto Entomologists Association meeting - Sat. Feb. 28 at 1 pm in Rm.113 in the Northrop Frye Building, 73 Queen's Park Cres. East. Steve Marshall will give an illustrated talk on "Special Places, Special Bugs". Call 905-727-6993 for more information.

Citizens Concerned About the Future of the Etobicoke Waterfront -
Sat. Feb. 21 from 9 am to 11 am with Don Burton to look for birds at Sam Smith Park. Call 416-252-7047 for more details.

Ian Wheal Heritage Walks

- Sat. Feb. 7 at 1:30 pm - Lost ponds and wetlands of Parkdale. Meet at the entrance to Parkdale Community Health Centre, 1279 Queen St. West at Gwynne Ave.
- Sun. Feb. 29 at 1:30 pm - Leslie St. Spit. Meet at the entrance to the Spit at the foot of Leslie St.
Call 416-570-6415 for more information.

Royal Canadian Institute - Sunday afternoon lectures on science - free lectures begin at 3 pm in the Medical Sciences Building, 1 King's College Circle. Call 416-977-2983 for more details.

- Feb. 1 - Banff National Park in Cardiac Arrest: the Need to Defibrillate
- Feb. 8 - Mission: Mars
- Feb. 15 - Making Antimatter
- Feb. 22 - Snow and Ice Research in Canada's Far North
- Feb. 29 - How Does Nature Compute?

Canadian Nature Federation - Annual General Meeting and Conference - May 27 to 30 at Edmunston, Madawaska, New Brunswick. For more information call 1-800-267-4088.

Natural History Travel (with George Bryant) - small group nature travel to a variety of destinations. For more information, call 1-800-371-7779.

Mycological Society of Toronto - meeting - Feb. 16 at 7:45 at the Civic Garden Centre (now the Toronto Botanical Centre), 777 Lawrence Ave. East. Mushroom adventure stories and fungi collected in Thailand will be the topic of an illustrated talk. Call 416-444-9053 for more details. □

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