

THE NEWSLETTER

OF THE TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

Number 2

October 1938

The enthusiastic reception accorded the first issue of the Newsletter has been very gratifying. It seems to meet a real need. May it continue to arouse your interest in the Club, and in the world of nature about us all.

Two additional observations of birds this summer command our attention. On July 23 O.E.Devitt saw young Leconte's sparrows, just out of the nest, at Holland River Marsh in King township. This shy little bird, lovely with its delicate collar of claret and ochraceous breast and throat, is one of the most difficult of our local birds to get a look at. It lives among tall grasses and weeds, running beneath them like a field mouse when frightened, coming rarely into view, and then only for a moment. Its voice is almost inaudible to most people, and, when heard, so like an insect as to be easily mistaken for one. Until last year it was regarded as a bird of the prairies, there being but one record for this region. Then, suddenly, it was observed in numbers around Toronto, and in all the appropriate regions between here and its usual haunts. It was here again this year. And now, you see, we have a breeding record for this bird. Is the Leconte's sparrow spreading its range from west to east? Have these visitors fled drought conditions in the prairies? Have they been here before and been overlooked?

Another visitor of past years has come to settle among us-- the mockingbird, perhaps the loveliest of all the avian songsters of America. No bird could be more welcome to any of us. Anyone who has listened to the rapturous chorus of mockers and cardinals in the South will be happy to know that the trim grey and white singer has joined its brilliant colleague as a local resident. A pair of these birds successfully raised four young on the farm of J.A.Brodie in Markham township, just east of Langstaff, this summer. As mockingbirds wander but little from their breeding area in the winter, any one of you may come upon one or more of them this winter in your garden or in one of the ravines. Keep looking. These discoveries bring the total of breeding birds in the Toronto area to 131.

Murray Speirs, and several other members, added another bird to the local list on September 18, when they picked out from amongst the gulls on the Sunnyside breakwater the strikingly-patterned Little Gull (*Larus minutus*). This is normally a European bird, but wanderers have been increasingly noted on American shores.

Is the bluebird coming back? They have been noticeably common during the migration, especially this month. Reports are widespread. A typical instance is that of Miss Freya Hahn who saw two considerable flocks from her garden on Dunbar Road. Another query that naturally follows is this: Are the starlings, enemies and rivals of the bluebirds, decreasing? Observers are reporting fewer flocks, less numbers, fewer and smaller roosts. Are they taking other routes of migration, migrating along a wider front, dying off for some reason, or what? What are your observations on these two species?

Many members walk through High Park by Grenadier Pond. How many of them know that the smallest flowering plant known (*Wolffia punctata*), one of the duckweeds, is to be seen there? This tiny plant has leaves but 3 mm. long. On the pond now may be seen many round, green, slimy balls. These are bladderwort plants in the resting stage. Early next spring they will develop rapidly into plants a foot or so long. (J. Simon) As you go walking in the woods these days watch for the witch hazel blooms--bright yellow clusters of tiny flowers, like bits of foam against the very dark bark of this shrub. This fall a fine colony of the all too uncommon fringed gentian was found within the city limits. Like some deep-bowled chalice of rich blue, with fine-toothed brim, stands this noble flower on its straight stem. If you find it, contemplate its loveliness, but leave it for another to see. It is rare. How many flowers are still in blossom! Asters, golden-rods, harebells, bushy cinquefoil, mullein, strawberries, chicory, grass-of-Parnassus, viper's bugloss. And how many more?

Do you make use of the reading-room of the Royal Canadian Institute at 198 College Street? All members are invited to do so. Many interesting natural-history journals are to be found there: Nature; Natural History; The Canadian Field Naturalist; Roosevelt Wildlife Bulletin; Bulletin of the New England Museum of Natural History. The last is perhaps the most interesting. See the article entitled "We need more realism in Conservation" in the April, 1938, number.

Several of the Institute's winter lectures, given in Convocation Hall on Saturday evenings, are of special interest to our members. We recommend:

- Nov. 5 "We Visit the Moon" by Dr. Millman of the University of Toronto Department of Astronomy
- Nov.12 "Anthropology and Human Behaviour" by Clarke Wissler of the American Museum of Natural History, a world authority on the subject.
- Nov.19 "Hot Springs and Volcanic Activity in New Zealand" by Dr. A.L.Day, Geologist of the Carnegie Institution of Washington
- Nov.26 "Wilderness Woodlands" by Earl A. Trager, Chief of the Naturalist Division, National Park Service, Washington

The lectures are popular in nature, illustrated, and given by excellent speakers, authorities in their fields. You will enjoy them.

A study group is being formed for the study of mosses and related plants. This group will have the services of Mr. Moxley, an internationally known expert on this subject. Owing to the great variation in mosses it is desirable to have a number of people collecting specimens to compare. Members of this group will have the pleasure of assisting Messrs. Cameron, Brown, and Simon, expert botanists interested in the mosses. If you wish to join the group send your name and address at once to Mr. Bruce Murray, 198 College Street, Toronto. There will be both field trips, and meetings for purposes of identification. After the work has started it may be difficult to add new members.

It is a pleasure to announce that Mrs. Bruce Metcalfe would be glad to have T.F.N. members visit her sanctuary on the Humber, at Thistletown. Phone Weston 204w2. Another generous member, Miss C.Mason, would like members to enjoy the country around Richmond Hill and Bond Lake. She will be glad to act as guide, to arrange a time and place, if you will drop her a card at Richmond Hill.

The following new members have joined the T.F.N.C.:

Mrs. B. Barratt	Miss E. Baskerville	Miss I. Caldwell
Mrs. M. G. Carman	Miss E. J. Caverhill	Miss J. I. Cross
Mr. C. J. Cuddy	Miss D. P. Farthing	Mrs. M. Halliday
Dr. R. E. Haist	Mrs. R. E. Haist	Mrs. C. R. Hill
Miss N. Hodgins	Miss D. S. Hooper	Miss A. Kingsley
Dr. L. C. Langstaff	Miss F. Laidlaw	Miss V. Lee
Mr. C. A. G. Matthews	Mr. S. Matthews	Miss B. McCoig
Mr. G. A. McGillivray	Miss A. McIntyre	Miss E. A. McLachlan
Miss G. F. Malkin	Miss M. Millar	Miss M. C. Needler
Mrs. C. A. Playle	Dr. F. Sharp	Mr. C. D. Stacey
Miss K. Stratford	Mrs. R. W. Thomas	Miss D. W. Thomson
Miss H. Tumelty	Miss E. B. Wilson	Miss M. Wilton
Miss E. A. Wishart		

The T.F.N.C. extends its thanks to Mr. Colin Farmer for the excellent display of his photographs on the bulletin board at the October 3rd meeting. The secretary also wishes to thank the large number of members who so promptly paid their dues in September and early October. It has aided materially in planning an interesting programme for the season.