

THE NEWSLETTER

OF THE TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB
Number 4 December 1938

To the observer who has been afield this fall and winter one of the outstanding features of the bird world has been the noticeable increase in the number of cardinals. A very short time past no one counted on seeing more than the odd cardinal in a few favoured spots about Toronto. Less than two decades ago the bird was virtually unknown hereabouts. Now they are appearing everywhere that the tangled brush and brier which they favour is available. In old favoured areas such as Cedarvale you may see as many as seven in a walk. (R.F.S.) Six of these grosbeaks were counted together at Centre Island recently. (T.Smith) The sharp, piercing alarm note should be learned by all who wish to find the cardinal, as it is the best indicator of the presence of a bird which is inclined to keep beneath the brush most of the time. A little patient waiting will usually gain one a sight, however, as the cardinal is very curious about intruders. Why is this species becoming so common here? At the present rate it will soon rank with the downy woodpecker in occurrence. Is there any relation in its spread to the current cycle of mild winters? Or is this seed-eating bird really affected by cold, or even deep snow? In the latter case it can resort to the sumachs and the deadly-nightshade vines for food. When you see cardinals, watch to see what they eat. It will help solve the problem of their rapid increase. Is this bird better able than some other kinds to survive in close association with human habitation? Experience in the South points to that conclusion. If so, it may join the robin as a dweller in our garden shrubbery. And the cardinal does not migrate like the robin. It is with us all the year round.

A very informative report of the effects of the long spell of warm weather this fall upon insect life has been sent to us by Dr. E.M. Walker. It will be of interest to all and is included in its entirety:--

The Indian Summer weather which prevailed during October and early November permitted various insects, notably dragonflies and grasshoppers, a longer lease of life than generally falls to their lot.

Two kinds of dragonflies are usually the last to linger after all other kinds have disappeared. These are a small red one, known as Sympetrum vicinum, and a larger dark-coloured one (Aeschna umbrosa) with greenish spots and two yellow stripes on each side of the body. Each of these dragonflies had already been recorded as late as November 1st, but this date was considered as very unusual, since they are generally gone by the second or third week of October.

This year the little red species has been found from time to time up to November 6th, when I saw a single individual at De Grassi Point, Lake Simcoe, and Professor Harkness reported

seeing one of each kind on the same day at Mono Mills on the estate of Col. Beardmore, 'Yellow Briar'.

Grasshoppers of two species were still plentiful near Thornhill on November 5th and a few of the small striped ground crickets (Nemobius fasciatus) could be heard feebly chirping on the same day. The grasshoppers were the common red-legged species (Melanoplus femur-rubrum) and the larger dusky grasshopper (Encoptolophus sordidus). A female of the latter species was actually seen and photographed in the act of egg-laying.

On the following day both species were observed in a sunny field, where they were sheltered on the south side of a stone wall along the edge of a wood. The males were still flying actively and making the crackling noise which they produce in flight.

The severe frost of the following week put an end to the dragonflies and nearly all the grasshoppers. In fact, I thought they had completely disappeared until, on Sunday morning, November 20th, I visited the Don Valley below Armour Heights. For some time I found no trace of grasshoppers but eventually discovered that in the warmest available spots, at the foot of southern slopes exposed to the sun, there were still a fair number of both red-legged and dusky grasshoppers, and a mating pair of the former species was actually found on this remarkably late date.

Young individuals of the green-striped grasshopper (Chortophaga viridifasciata) were hopping about in numbers among the dead leaves in the same situations. This species always winters over in the immature flightless stage and transforms into the winged adults in late May or early June. It was interesting to see these young grasshoppers of next year's brood associating with the last remnants of the late-maturing species of the present year. All had concentrated in the only spots left that were warm enough for active life.

The green-striped grasshoppers of 1939 will have run their course before the first red-legged and dusky grasshoppers reach maturity.

Water-striders (Gerris remigis) were still active on the surface of the small streams on this date.

Other interesting observations of insects during the past summer have come to our attention recently through the co-operation of Mr. Rutter, secretary of the Brodie Club. It seems that the Buckeye butterfly, a southern form, was unexpectedly common at Toronto last summer. (H. Southam) Unusual numbers of the curious praying-mantis were found in Prince Edward county by W.H. Lunn. At Point Pelee a number of rare mole crickets were collected by F.A. Urquhart of the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology.

Amphibians and reptiles also rewarded their observers this summer. Mr. R.V. Lindsay was astounded to discover in the stomach of a bull-frog two water-snakes, one of which measured twenty-three inches. Butler's garter snake was taken for the first time in Ontario by E.B.S. Logier of the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology. Mr. J. Bessin caught seven green snakes--six miniature ones from three to five inches in length, and a mature snake of about fifteen inches--in a vacant lot at the corner of Bathurst Street and Davenport Road. The green snake feeds chiefly on soft-bodied insects; the young ones mostly on young spiders. This is a noteworthy observation from the heart of the city.

As several members have asked for lists of birds that may be seen about Toronto in winter we are including here a list of birds seen in two recent walks by R.M.Saunders. One walk included the Eastern Gap and Ashbridge's Bay area east of Leslie street; on the other walk we started at Quebec and Bloor streets, went through High Park and 'Harcroft' to Grenadier Pond, down the west side of the pond, along Sunnyside to the Humber, and up the west side of the Humber to the Old Mill. This latter is probably the best winter walk in Toronto. The lists are reasonably typical of winter conditions. The number of species seen on any trip will remain about the same for each place visited, but a great many different species may be seen in a series of walks.

Species	Ashbridge's Bay, etc. December 11	High Park & Humber December 18
Mallard	x	30
Black duck	2	150
Baldpate	x	1
Redhead	x	1
Canvasback	x	1
Greater scaup	750	x
Golden-eye	100	50
Bufflehead	2	x
Old squaw	500	100
White-winged scoter	1	x
American merganser	2	x
Red-breasted merganser	x	1
Pheasant	x	3
Coot	x	4
Glaucus gull	1	x
Great black-back	1	1
Herring gull	200	150
Ring-billed gull	x	25
Bonaparte's gull	2	x
Screech owl	1	x
Downy woodpecker	3	6
Blue jay	x	10
Crow	x	2
Black-capped chickadee	20	20
White-breasted nuthatch	2	6
Winter wren	1	x
Golden-crowned kinglet	x	5
Starling	25	25
House sparrow	25	100
Cardinal	3	3
Purple finch	x	2
Goldfinch	1	x
Junco	10	10
Tree sparrow	10	40
Song sparrow	1	4

Please send observations for the Newsletter to the committee in charge: Dr. R.M. Saunders, 31 Kendal Avenue; or Mrs Helen Agnew, 17 Glencairn Avenue.