

THE NEWSLETTER

OF THE TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB
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Visiting naturalists who come to Toronto are astonished at the ease with which we are able to step from the midst of the city into the natural wildness where birds sing and flowers grow. They are shown the walks along the Humber and the Don, and more often than not are heard to remark, "Why, you would never know that you were near a great city!" These visitors would be still more astonished if they knew how few Torontonians know of the existence of these walks, even those who watch birds and love nature. These dwellers in Toronto have the big-city complex. They think of the country as miles away, so they go miles to see birds and flowers that they might see as well, or better, within a few minutes of their homes. Of the birds that hide in the 'jungle' at Ashbridge's Bay, of the flowers that bloom in the dingles along the Don, of the life of the Humber marshes, they know naught. The naturalists of many a small town may well envy Toronto its variety of habitats of easy access to all. The variety of birds to be seen in any region is in direct proportion to the variety of habitats available. If you want to understand Toronto's wealth in that regard, compare the annual lists of birds seen about places like Peterborough or Fergus or Aurora--places which Torontonians consider to be in the country--with those seen about this city. So many Toronto naturalists need to explore Toronto.

But there are those who know. They know where the sloughs are on York Downs; they know where the winter roost of the short-eared owls is to be found; they know the ridge where the hawks fly so low that all their markings can be told; they know where cardinals can always be seen; they know the secret spots. Yet when they visit these places of treasured sights how many of them stop to think upon what a precarious foundation rests their continual enjoyment of these things? Have they seen the bird refuge disappear from the north end of Grenadier Pond, its swamp filled in, its thickets uprooted? Have they noticed the disappearance of underbrush from High Park and Cedarvale ravine, the opening up of their little streams? Birds, of course, and many prized plants prefer or require underbrush and boggy, reedy, thicket-filled stream-beds. It is the parklike, manicured forests of Germany that are so nearly birdless. Have they seen the houses encroaching upon York Downs? Have they heard of the projected sewage-disposal plant for Ashbridge's Bay? And of the possible speed highway for the Don Valley? They may have smiled at such plans. But they are the sort of changes that suddenly happen, or happen unseen like the filling-in of the west side of Grenadier Pond now under way. Then where are you, my naturalist

friend? One more walk, one more treasured spot has been taken away from you. Perhaps you, or your children at any rate, will have to ride for miles to see what you and I have prized. Or you may find it difficult to interest them in nature for lack of places easy to visit.

Many of these changes, we must admit, cannot be avoided. They belong to the march of time, to the creation of a metropolis. But some of them may be averted if we want them to be. Is it not time that we let the city authorities know that there are hundreds of people who would like to see a part of High Park preserved in a wild state? And why should there not be wild spots, tangles of brush and bits of swamp kept in other parts of the city too? There might be those among us who would contribute berry-bearing bushes to make such a spot more attractive to birds. Kilgour Park (Sunnybrook Farm) was given to the people of Toronto by a generous-minded person. Have we not some other friends who would be glad to set aside some bit of their land for a nature refuge in or near they city if we explained to them how much it would mean to so many? Should we allow natural treasures to be snatched away from us without raising a voice, or don't we really prize them? The plain fact is, if we don't take steps to conserve what we now have, we shall soon enough be living in a wilderness of bricks and mortar, punctuated by a few polite parks.

If you will visit the waterfront these days you will find that the first contingent of the wintering ducks has arrived. Old squaw, with their white heads and streaming tails, are flying about beyond the breakwater at Sunnyside. The immaculate buffle-head, the white-patched golden-eye, and the dumpy scaup are all in attendance. There are the migrant ducks, too--ring-necks on Grenadier Pond, hooded mergansers on Catfish Pond, and quite a variety on the Humber marshes. The Humber is being patrolled daily by a pair of ospreys. Flocks of pipits may be found in the fields--York Downs is a good place. Rusty black-birds are along the streams and in marshes. Look for migrant owls in the thickets and evergreens--saw-whet, long-eared, and great-horned especially. The last wave of southbound sparrows is just going through: you can see white-throats, white-crowns, fox sparrows; you may find a Harris's or a Nelson's sparrow. Examine the burdock thickets, for there you may come upon small birds caught by the burs. We chanced on two golden-crowned kinglets so ensnared last week, and had the pleasure of freeing them; otherwise they would have starved to death. We have seen several goldfinches killed in that way.

Now is the time to get your winter-feeding stations set up and in operation. Winter residents set their feeding routes early.