

THE NEWSLETTER

OF THE TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB
Number 16 September, 1940

Summer experiences are memories now, but so many of them are glowing memories, radiant pictures we shall want to return to in our minds again and again. Here is one of our own that we would like to share with you.

One morning late in August we were at Juddhaven in Muskoka. It was not the business of looking at birds which had brought us there, but we did have nearly an hour before the real business of the day began. But it is so easy to fill an odd hour when there are birds to be sought, and, of course, there always are. It was a pleasant day, sunny and warm, and birds like flycatchers, swallows, and sparrows were swarming over the golf course and along the fences. They were not the objects of our search, however. Rather it was the great pileated woodpecker, the logcock of the north, we hoped to find, as we had not seen it this year. Our hopes ran high for we were told a family of those large birds had been raised nearby during the summer and had been seen almost daily flying from one patch of woods to another. Certainly the evidence of their work was more common than in any region we had ever visited. Along the road from Port Carling, tree after tree and post after post were gouged and bored with the deep squareish and rectangular holes which mark the work of this woodpecker.

We turned our backs upon the fields and the golf course and headed across the bridge that leads onto Royal Muskoka Island, stopping for a moment to gaze down the marsh. A kingfisher rattled angrily away, annoyed at being disturbed from its fishing roost. On the island it was very quiet in the midst of the big hardwood trees. Off to one side a single red-breasted nuthatch called its thin nasal yank-yank. Otherwise only the sun filtering through the high blanket of foliage, the sparkling dew, and our own expectancy lent animation to the scene. For perhaps half a mile we wandered on. The nuthatch grew silent. Not even the squeak of a chipmunk, or the chatter of a squirrel broke the deep calm. Now we left the road and felt our way through the under-growth for a bit. Suddenly a low thudding sound brought us to a halt. Surely it could be no other than the bird we sought.

Carefully we peered about, scanning all the trees in view with no result. Cautiously we advanced, step by step, trying to avoid all dead twigs. A few steps brought into sight a large dead elm broken off about forty feet from the ground. Near the top of the shattered stub was a large square hole, probably recently used, judging from the marks on the lower lip, as a nesting hole, or a night roost by the very bird we were after--only he wasn't at home. Again we moved on a few steps, the dull thudding continuing. This time a pert little downy was seen busying himself on an oak hole. Many a time that little fellow has fooled us, drumming away on some resonant hollow limb. But not this time for we could still hear the dull tapping while the downy was merely exploring the bark. Directly in front of us the ground rose in a steady slope. It came to mind in a flash that we had been looking in the wrong places all this while. The bird must be on the ground. And so it was. As we lowered our eyes to the rising ground in front we looked straight at a magnificent logcock; not more than fifteen feet away, pounding for all it was worth on a decayed fallen log.

As we caught sight of the big bird we realized that it was a low squealing call, half heard, that had given us the inspiration to look on the ground. It was repeated at once and out of the shadows hopped a second logcock. Our hopes were surpassed. The second bird had only half a red crest--showing it to be a bird of the year. Immediately the youngster opened its beak to splitting width whilst the adult proceeded to ram its own beak into the little one's throat and to pump food into it with such vigor that we thought to see it destroyed before our eyes. But no, it survived a prolonged injection

with evident pleasure. It was no doubt long used to such moals for as these birds nest ordinarily in June, the young ones must have been out of the nest for some time. The meal finished, the adult returned to the matter of seeking for food, probably ants, in the old log. Though it drew itself up to full height, and drilled with the speed and force of a trip-hammer, it made no more noise than the dull thudding sounds which had enabled us to find it out. This was because of the decayed nature of the log. The young one, doubtless relishing the succulent product of its parent's drilling, set out to drill for itslef. It was a quaint and ludicrous sight. The weak, untrained muscles would not control the head which wobbled from side to side so that the beak hit on the side instead of on its point, and if by chance it came upon the point there was no strength so that the result was nil. In a little it stopped, and you could just see the puzzlement in the attitude of that youngster. It didn't scratch its head, but you could almost hear it say, "How the dickens do you do it? I'm getting absolutely no where at all!" But soon the efforts began again. So youth learns.

For fifteen minutes I watched that unforgettable scene. Through the undergrowth sometimes one was in sight, sometimes another, sometimes both--always the young one stayed to the rear. Filtering rays of sunlight would catch the brilliant crests and for a moment the green bush would be pierced with crimson flashes. Again they would be in the dark, shadows upon shadows. Without warning they ceased work and as quietly as owls, flitted away, up into the tree tops out of sight. No cries, no swish of wings--how easily they could hide themselves in their deep woods. I went forward to the log, and searched its length for a sign of their food but with no result. For a moment I was able to recall them by pounding on the log, but only for a moment, for as soon as they detected my presence they were off for good. Straight and far down through the trunks they went--quite beyond reach. Behind them they left the unforgettable scene, my cherished memory.

Surely some of the members of the club have similar memories of their summer's experiences with nature which they would be glad to have others enjoy. Send your account of them, please, to R.M. Saunders, at 9 McMaster Avenue that they may be included in the next Newsletter.

NOTICES

Once again we wish to call your attention to the journal Canadian Nature. This magazine is now appearing in a popular form at \$1.00 a year, or \$2.50 for three years. It is issued in January, March, May, September, and November. Members are urged to send in their subscription through our secretary, Miss Grace Anderson, at Simcoe Hall, University of Toronto, since the Club will receive a discount of twenty cents and thirty cents respectively on these subscriptions for its treasury. A sample copy may be had upon request. Many of you have children or young relatives whose interest in nature you would like to develop. For them this would be an ideal birthday or Christmas present. Most of our members are interested in nature as a hobby, an avocation. They are amateurs not professionals. For all such Canadian Nature will be of interest and of service.

THE TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB FIELD DAY AT HIGHLAND CREEK

September 28th, 1940

Committee in Charge:

Miss Grace Malkin
Mr. D. Bruce Murray
Mrs. L.E. Jaquith
Dr. L.E. Jaquith

Place of Meeting: Highland Creek School which is about a quarter of a mile north of the Kingston Road on the first road at the east end of the bridge over Highland Creek.

Time of Meeting: 2.30 p.m. Eastern Daylight Saving Time at the School.
Please register at the desk in front of the School.

Transportation: It is suggested that members owning cars who will have extra space for passengers, get in touch with other members who will need transportation. For those who desire to go by bus, the regular Oshawa bus leaves the Bay and Dundas terminal at 1.30 E.D.S.T. Those taking the bus are advised to go to the main terminal to get on so that the bus company may provide additional transportation without delay, if it is necessary.

Groups & Leaders: Botany - T.M.C. Taylor: Wade Watson: A.J. Lehmann
Birds - R.M. Saunders: Stuart Thompson: T.F. McIlwraith
Geology - E.S. Moore
Pond Life - Norma Ford: Mary Pettigrew
Insects - F.A. Urquahart
Reptiles - E.B.S. Logier
Photography - Hugh M. Halliday
General - E.M. Walker: J.R. Dymond: A.F. Coventry.

Field Trips

There is a great variety of habitats in this region from marsh to gravelly hillsides to meadow low-lands and densely wooded areas. Dr. R.M. Saunders will lead a group of those who come prepared to travel through the rougher part around the mouth of Highland Creek. Heavy boots or at least a change of footwear, in case of wet feet, is advised. There should be ducks and marsh birds in this area.

Mr. A. Lehmann is a specialist in algae and the lower forms of plant life, an interesting and often neglected part of Botany.

Dr. E.S. Moore will lead a group interested in the geology of the region, explaining the physical features as well.

Dr. Ford and Miss Pettigrew request those interested in aquatic organisms to bring a glass jar for the examination of specimens and, if possible, a dip net. Rubber boots are an advantage if you have them.

Mr. Hugh M. Halliday has consented to give some practical hints to those interested in photography of natural history subjects. Bring your camera.

Picnic Supper: Each one will bring his own picnic supper. The groups will return to the school at 6 p.m.
In case of inclement weather, supper and the evening meeting will be held inside the school building.

Evening Meeting: 7.15 p.m.

Chairman - Mr. F.C. Hurst

(1) Reports by the leaders of the field groups.

(2) Informal talks given by Dr. E.S. Moore.

Dr. E.M. Walker,

Head of the Department of Biology,
University of Toronto.

WILD MUSHROOM (FUNGI) TRIP

Saturday, September 21st

Mr. Garnett Bell will lead a trip to study mushrooms (fungi) on this date. This is a remarkable year for fungi as the continued rains have brought up a luxuriant crop including many of the rarer varieties. This is the time to make their acquaintance. All interested will meet with Mr. Bell at the gates of Sunnybrook Park (the east end of Blythwood Road) on Saturday afternoon at 2.30 o'clock. Those wishing to collect specimens will bring paper bags or baskets.
