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*Relevant W
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Mr Frank Smith, a well-known member of the Club, has been kind enough to send in the following interesting account of how an unfavorable site for birds was converted into a little sanctuary. Mr Smith, who has exhibited his carvings of birds for our enjoyment more than once, is contributing a great deal to the study of nature in this region both through the distribution of his carvings, and through his willing help with the members of our Junior branch. Mr Smith writes:

Seven years ago, we built a summer cottage on Rice Lake. It so happened that there were no trees in the immediate vicinity of our lot and consequently very few birds of any description ever frequented our neighbourhood. This meant that our windows were always covered with spiders and other insects. To rid ourselves of these, it was necessary to take a broom or other instrument and brush the windows down each week-end. Next week it was as though this work had never been done previously, as the windows appeared to be in the same condition as they were before.

One Sunday we observed a Purple Martin flying out over the lake and, knowing the value of this beautiful bird as a destroyer of harmful insects, we decided to endeavour to coax these feathered friends to nest in our locality. During the ensuing week we built a six-room house and erected it on a 15-foot pole. On our next visit it was evident that the Martins were going to inhabit our house as four pair had already started to nest. With this success, we decided on making smaller boxes and erecting them on the fence posts for the Tree Swallows. This too, proved a decided success and we soon were aware of the necessity of building more houses. As the Martins hatched their young we built more houses and eventually we had accommodation for 36 pair of these birds. One box was temporarily put up on a fence-post 4 feet from the ground and much to our amazement the Martins took possession and immediately commenced to nest. These birds became so accustomed to their surroundings and us that they soon were very tame and each year, as their houses were cleaned and in the process of erecting, the Martins would fly into them whilst we were in the act of putting them up, and before the poles were in an upright position.

The presence of the Martins and Swallows soon attracted other birds to our fast-growing sanctuary, and Bluebirds began to look over the Swallow boxes. Realizing that these colorful creatures also fed on spiders and other insects, we enlarged the entrance of some of the Swallow boxes and now we have families of Bluebirds around our cottage each year. The presence of the Martins and other birds, of which there are many, has served a twofold purpose: our cottage windows are practically free of spiders and our grounds are cheerful because of their colors and songs.

During the Thanksgiving weekend we had the pleasure of being with Prof. and Mrs Sperrin Chant at their farm near Eden Mills. It is a fine old rambling stone house, now nearing the century mark in age. It stands atop a ridge in the midst of a morainal world of hills and dales, where dark green cedars fill the hollows and pasture-fields and hardwood bush dot the slopes and ridges. There is a far-flung prospect, and, as it proved, this ridge stands across a migration route for hawks and other birds.

There were many birds but three encounters stand out. Prof. Chant's son Donald was ferreting about in the rushes near the edge of a small pond trying to flush something when he excitedly announced that he had caught a wounded duck. When he brought over the bird it was a black duck which had been shot, probably early in the morning, and which had got away into the rushes with its broken wing and was hiding there until death should take it off. The only humane thing to do was to dispatch it, and that was done. A few minutes later Donald found another on the edge of the mud but it was dead and too rotten to salvage as food. So once more we had a demonstration of the wastefulness of a sport which involves the loss of from one-fourth to one-third of the birds shot.

Eden Mills

More pleasant an experience came one sunny morning when Prof. Chant, Donald, Robert and ourself were walking across the fields towards a yellow and orange hardwoods bush. We had just remarked on the absence of woodpecker signs on the trees when the sharp rattle of the pileated resounded from the woods. We ran towards the sound, got over a fence and into the woods, stopped to listen. The calling had ceased, but the low stolid thudding that is so characteristically the pileated drilling note could be heard not far away. By making a wide circle and coming up from the other side we were able first to glimpse the great red-crested bird on its tree, and then to force it to fly off in the direction of those who had remained standing at the first stop. Later, as we were again crossing the field, we heard the rattling call once more, and saw the woodpecker slip from the woodlot, fly across the field away from us, its broad wings flashing black and white in the sun. It visited various larger trees standing isolated along the edges of the fields -- a practice we had never associated with the pileated before, as this bird sticks closely to the deeper woods as a rule. Perhaps this is evidence of its greater adaptation to humanity which is given as the chief reason for its comeback in southern Ontario. This was a new spot for the species to be seen.

adaptation

The third, and most exciting episode occurred on the higher ridge above the house. Hawks were flying over both Saturday and Sunday, migrating from the east. They were mostly large buteos--redtails, redshoulders, and roughlegs. On Sunday afternoon Prof. Chant, Donald and ourself were crossing this higher ridge when, glancing eastward we saw what appeared for a moment to be three planes in formation coming directly toward us. But they were, in fact, three huge birds. We waited for them, and they came straight over our heads. Just as they topped the ridge the afternoon sun caught the head of the leader, and the soft golden-brown of the golden eagle's head shone out in tawny glints. The three paused

to circle hardly a hundred feet above us and the great white spots in the broad wings, and the white dark-banded tails stood out in startling sharpness. It was a breath-taking, almost unbelievable sight. It seemed hardly possible in eastern North America, though a certain number of these magnificent birds is seen at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania each year. Certainly we do not expect to see such a sight again. Three golden eagles together is a sight of a lifetime for any bird-watcher.

On October 19th we made a tour of the city region with Art Smith and John MacArthur. Our first stop was at Eastern Gap about 9.45. Though the little pool there has dwindled much this summer it still remains and this morning there were two red-backed sandpipers--dumpy grey birds in the fall--probing in the mud with their long curved beaks. They are very tame, easily approached, and to be locked for even in November as they are one of the last shore birds to pass through this area.

There were no ducks in the Gap. Probably boats are passing there too frequently as yet to allow the wintering flock to gather. The greater scaups have started their winter raft near the Yacht Club on the Island. The two hundred odd gulls on the Island side of the Gap contained only herrings and ringtails. As we neared the lighthouse a small bird flew up from the platform floor and perched on the sill. The flash of white in the wings gave it away--the first snowbunting of the season. Out of nowhere six others appeared and the little flock whirled over our heads towards the bay. The Eastern Gap seems to be one of the places to see these birds early. Sometimes we have seen such an early flock there and then no others anywhere till January. Where these early arrivals go is a mystery. Out over the sun-spangled water there was little but bobbing gulls here and there, and a scattered lot of old squaw, their white heads glistening in the sun.

We headed for Ashbridge's Bay and parked in the willows at the end of Leslie Street. Again the lake was empty except for gulls and old squaw, and a trim corvette which was speeding along the horizon. Out over the marsh the customary marsh-hawk was beating close across the weed tops in search of mice. One or two song-sparrows 'chunked' and a myrtle warbler pronounced its alarmed 'sput', like the half-heard note of a distant out-board motor. By the time we had reached the willows at the edge of the jungle, we had seen little, but just as we were entering the large willow grove John shouted, 'An owl! A barred owl!' Sure enough, up some twenty feet was a rich brown owl, alert, its dark eyes fixed on us, and ready to move. In a moment he flew, his great size proving a surprise, for it is many months since we last saw one of these owls, and memories need refurbishing. We were to see him several times again. As we worked through the jungle he kept a few trees ahead of us, flying off at last towards Coatsworth Cut.

A great flock of small birds--kinglets, myrtle warblers, chickadees, two winter wrens, and a red-breasted nuthatch--was working along the lower level of bushes. At the bay end of the

jungle this flock was replaced by another made up of whitethroats, tree sparrows and juncos. We walked westward along the northern edge of the marsh--a reasonably clear path has been broken through the burs and reeds of the marsh, but the old path on the dyke is impassable because of its lush bur growth. The marsh itself is now covered almost wholly by as pure a stand of one plant as one is likely to see in any such large area, and all devil's pitchforks. This conquest has taken place in the last two years as the marsh growth used to be much more mixed. The bird population, even of migrant sparrows, seems to have suffered as a result. It used to be plentiful, notably at this time of year, but we saw only two pheasants on the marsh side. Along the dyke where a varied flora still prevails there were a number of sparrows, numbering among them two Lincoln's sparrows and several white-crowns. When we got back to the jungle we met Gordon Giles and a friend. They had seen a bald eagle fly over before we arrived. They went off hastily in search of the barred owl, and we did not see them again. The heavy growth of tomato plants along the jungle edge, product of rotten fruit thrown on the dump originally, but now of perennial growth in this part, is a curious phenomenon. They provide a plentiful food supply for the pheasants.

From Leslie Street we went up to York Mills and the cedar woods at the end of the Rosedale golf course. We had received reports of many owls in these woods. Starting about fifty feet apart, we worked carefully through the woods from the golf course edge, scanning all the evergreens from a distance, then peering up into their dark interiors from underneath, and if the tree was so large that the upper parts were still obscure, rapping on the bole with a stout club. It was some time before Art cried, 'Sawwhet!' The little fellow, one of our most delicately beautiful birds, was huddled against the trunk of a small hemlock, only fifteen feet up, with the remains of a small bird in his talons. When we had had a good chance to study his colour and marks, Art got a long pole and poked him off his perch--he refused to move otherwise--so as to see what he was eating. On examination this proved to be a hermit thrush, a surprisingly large bird for this small owl to capture. The owl had flown only a few feet and was perched on a dead birch. When scared from this perch he disappeared. Shortly afterward we met York Edwards who told us that several long-eared owls had been seen there earlier in the morning. So we searched minutely for these owls while he went after the sawwhet. We didn't find the long-eareds. Whether he found the sawwhet or not we do not know as he was still hunting when we left.

On our way to York Downs we met Robert MacArthur and a friend who had been visiting the sloughs on the downs. They hadn't had much success. Our survey in this quarter brought much the same result. We were looking for a short-eared owl in the fields near the airport but all we put up was a group of meadow larks and a savannah sparrow. The owl had been seen the week before but was absent today. We were perhaps not as thorough on the Downs as we could have been as York Edwards had told us that he had been just

behind us at the Eastern Gap and that he had seen four Canada jays! We were much taken aback by that, and decided to get down to the Gap again at once. They might still be around. So back we went.

From the lighthouse keeper's house we worked back toward Cherry Street, some distance apart. After a while we found ourself alone in the willows near the Keeper's house again. Then suddenly our eyes were caught by a large grey and white bird sitting silently near the trunk of a willow. We had only to note the shape, and the white forehead to know that for the second time in our life we were looking at a Canada jay, the first time for the Toronto region. Almost at once the jay slipped quietly away, followed by a second, unseen before, and alighted in a tree nearer Cherry Street. Dashing off at top speed, and shouting lustily for the others, we caused various passers to gape and stare, but that could be no deterrent to the announcement of the great discovery. Unhappily, before the others were found and brought back some time elapsed and the birds disappeared. If they had only consented to say something we could have located them again, but they didn't. We decided to go to the dried-up pond midway along Fisherman's Island with the hope that they might have gone that far and stopped. But no, they weren't there either. However, in scanning the lake from this part we did spot four surf scoters, two males, ebon and shining in the sun, with the white spots on their heads gleaming, and two dumpy brown females. As we watched them, four cormorants flapped along in a line low over the water, and a flock of ten woodducks wheeled over our heads and settled again on the water not far off. It certainly had been worth while coming. Still intent on the jays, we returned to the Keeper's house, and looked once more through the willows. This time it was Art who found one--and we other two missed it. Now it was close to dark. We just had to leave. John will have to go back again. It had been a good day, with the jays the highlight.

The Museum will be very pleased if all members will please keep a look-out for these Canada jays whenever they may go for walks. This bird comes out of the north only rarely. The last visit here was in 1929. The invasions are erratic, and rather inexplicable, though probably related to a lack of food as is the case usually in the migrations or wanderings of such northern birds. The Ottawa Naturalists notified the Museum here of the expected incursion, as the jays were then around Ottawa in numbers, and asked us all to keep tabs on the birds. Frank Smith saw the first invader at the Eastern Gap about a week before the October meeting. Two weeks ago (Oct.11) Gordon Giles saw one at Ashbridge's Bay, and the next day J.L.Baillie saw two. One was noted at Cedarwoods on Oct.18 by Robert MacArthur and others. On Oct.19 three of the jays were seen by L. L. Snyder at Summit. So please keep an eye open for these large grey and white jays. They may turn up anywhere.

Contributions such as that sent in by Mr Smith will be greatly appreciated. Please address them to R.M.Saunders, 9 MacMaster Avenue.