THE NEWSLETTER

OF THE TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

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All of you who were afield this spring will have noted how early the vernal season came this year, how early the birds were, the first flowers, trees, and insects, how quickly the ice went out of streams and lakes, how the farmers rushed to get in their crops. In general the season was from two to three weeks early, and some things came even more than that before the average time, notably the first group of migrant birds. Now this fall we are meeting a similar phenomenon. The great mass of the shore birds arrived in late July and early August; very heavy waves of warblers, vireos, and flycatchers passed through in mid-August; the result is that the bulk of the migrants had left Toronto by the second week in September or before, well ahead of schedule. Goldenrod and asters bloomed early, and from many members came reports of the trees turning at their summer cottage sites, a thing they had never seen there before at such an early date.

Certain questions arise in connection with this early fall. Is it to be correlated with the spring? It is as a matter of fact about two to three weeks early, like the spring. That is to say, is there a sort of fixed time-limit to the period of flowering and fruition, so that if it starts early it will consequently end early, or did the intense drought of the early summer hasten all the normal processes? One query that comes to the bird-watcher's mind is this, If, in a season like this, the birds leave so much earlier than usual, what happens to the heliotropic theory of migration? This theory states that birds start south, or north, on migration in response to the varying amount of daylight. Such a theory can hardly account for a mass departure a fortnight earlier than usual.

On one of the days when a great wave of migrants was passing south, J. L. Baillie, Arthur Smith, and R. M. Saunders made a tour of the eastern part of the Toronto region (Ashbridge's Bay to Whitby). This was August 17th. Starting about eight o'clock, we reached the Cherry Street lift-bridge at 8.30. There we found the bridge up and a squad of men leisurely painting it. A number of cars were waiting but as the men couldn't say when they would be done, we decided to forego Fisherman's Island, and so we turned round and headed for Ashbridge's Bay.

There we came upon a huge number of warblers and flycatchers moving through the willow trees despite the fact that many trees have been cut down to make way for the new spur line of the railway. It took us an hour and more to walk around to the inner bay, and we saw over fifty kinds of birds along that path.

One of these was quite a surprise. Near the entrance into the inner bay, a water thrush popped out from the tangled roots of a large willow. As it came into the light its large and very white appearance, notably the broad white stripe above the eye reaching well back into the nape, and the large bill, declared it to be a Louisiana water thrush. This bird is fairly common a little to the south, especially along the Lake Erie shore, but is rare in the Toronto area. A little stream in dark wet woods is a good place to look for it in the summer.

Round by the inner bay there were no shore birds on the boom as there sometimes are. Along the path in this part the nettles were ten to twelve feet high! And the burs!!! They were just beginning to stick, but they were bad enough to remind us of the day in September some years ago when we took a young Englishman along that path. He was a novice to walking here, and had no idea how gloriously the burdock, the cocklebur, beggars' lice, and devil's pitchforks flourish in America, and in particular at Ashbridge's Bay. He was wearing one of thosse soft English tweed suits. And when he emerged from that path after twenty minutes struggle with the burs, he looked just like a Texas cowboy wearing thick padded chaparrals! Not a square inch from his waist down but had a bur. It took us just one hour and a half to pick and comb him free. What with burs, mud, and smells Ashbridge's Bay is a great place. How the birds like it! Only this year with the drought the mud has largely dried up, even in the stream bed along the west side, so the shore birds have been much fewer. On this day they were lacking. But in the pond behind the dam were blue-winged teal and gallinules.

Our next stop was atHighland Creek. We went down to that lovely hidden marsh on the west side which one of the parties visited at the T.F.N.C. field-day last September. Today there was no one there but ourselves. It was a perfect spot with sun filtering down through the trees on to the dark waters of the pond. Just as we got to the northern edge of the pond, Jim remarked "What a grand spot for a green heron!" The words were hardly uttered before one of these beautiful birds started up from a log, flew first into a tree to the west, and then glided across the water to a low willow on the other side. Since this willow was mostly dead we had an excellent look at the heron sta nding rigid in alarm, with crest ruffled up, watching us intently, and,finally deciding it didn't like our company, go making off toward the river. We ate our lunch by the edge of the river under the willows. When we started to eat no warblers were about, but before we had half finished, warblers, vireos, and flycatchers were passing us on all sides. That lunch was much punctuated with jumps and darts to see a black-poll, a Canada, a chestnut-sided, and a dozen others.

A short stop at the Rouge River mouth showed us more people than birds. Even the marsh was filled with fishermen though we did manage to hear a Virginia rail, and to see two gallinules and a pied-billed grebe.

Frenchman's Bay came next. We drove down the west side to the beach. Along the shore was nothing, and the bay was covered with boats and fishers. But on the bits of muddy edge on the bay side we found a bittern, a snipe, and some semi-palmated sandpipers. The snipe is a rare bird this year, as it was last. We wonder whether the hunting restrictions should not be tightened for this species. A couple of common terns circled over the bay, a black duck sought to come down but found no suita ble spot and turned back to the lake. Across the bay to the west a duck was spotted swimming near the reedy edge. It was too far to see clearly, but we all guessed what it could be, and wagered five cents on it. A scaup, a ring-neck, and a black were the guesses. When we drove around and walked down to a place close to the duck we found that it was indeed a ringneck, a male in "eclipse" plumage, an early record. On the north side of the bay Art Smith, whose experience of rural driving is infinite, drove us across a hayfield until we reached a fence. There we got out, made our way over fences, and through the thickest, toughest and most hummocky marsh grass I have seen in ages. It wasn't so bad for long-legged people but for the short-leggers it was just plain floundering, with a fall every six steps. In the end we were stopped by a wide, impassible ditch, and the birds we meant to see went unseen. A short-billed marsh wren relieved our annoyance on the way back to the car.

At Dunbarton shore we spied a group of 29 ducks some distance out on the lake. After some argument and long observation we decided that they were red-breasted mergansers, another early arrival. Along the back road to Whitby we found ourselves forced to detour to the main highway because of new munitions factories. Near the Ontario Hospital at Whitby we found a number of shorebirds on the harbor side, and several terns, including two black terns. Most of the last have left this area by this time. We followed the back road as far as we could westward on the way home. There are some lovely little marshes along it, but we saw nothing until Art spotted a mourning dove on the telephone wires on one side of the road, As we crossed the railroad on the way to the highway, a migrant shrike was perched on the wires, another very rare bird this year. Our tour was finished with a visit to the sewer outlet at Leaside where we added a greater yellow-legs to the day's sights. In all we saw 104 kinds of birds, showing how much movement there was among them that day.

There follows an account of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists' Summer Nature School, contributed to the Newsletter by Mrs L. E. Jaquith.

Field trips, comradeship and laughter were the keynotes of the Third Annual Summer Nature School held by the Federation of Ontario Naturalists from June 29 to July 12 at Limberlost Lodge near Huntsville, Ontario.

Enthusiasm, inspiring co-operation as well as technical knowledge were contributed to the success of the enterprise by our leaders, Mr A.J.Lehmann (Botany), Mr J.L.Baillie Jr. (Ornithology) and Dr F.A.Urquhart (Entomology).

A plant list of well over two hundred vascular plants was counted only a beginning. Silvery spleenwort (Asplenium acrostichoides),maidenhair fern (Adiantum pedatum), oak fern (Phegopteris dryopteris) and rusty woodsia (Woodsia ilvensis) were included in the twenty-four ferns and six club mosses found. Pipewort, Lobelia Dortmanna, pitcher plants, sundew, rose pogonia, and the round-leaved orchid were items of interest on the list.

Yellow birch and hemlock were dominant in this wood and some grew to an impressive size. Choice logs of yellow birch from last winter's lumbering were being shipped to England for use in the manufacture of aeroplanes.

Birds of all sorts surrounded the camp; eighty-one species were observed and nesting evidence for twenty-eight species was obtained. A thicket of spruce and shrubs at the very door provided nesting sites for mourning warblers, magnolia,and chestnut-sided warblers. On the ground nearby were the nests of white-throated sparrows, black-and-white warblers and oven-birdd. Scarlet tanagers sand rose-breasted grosbeaks sang from the tree-tops. At dawn and at dusk the woods echoed with the songs of the thrushes; hermit, wood, olive-backed, and veery.

Close-up and frequent views of the pileated woodpeckers were thrilling. One cherished memory was of the first funny flights of young winter wrens attended by excited and jubilant parents.

A jaunt to Billy Bear, a few miles from Limberlost, gave us a chance to see the magnificent evening grosbeaks in their summer haunts. Another summer we may be able to discover a nest, that nest that has eluded so many observers.

Dr Urquhart's discovery of the two-lined salamanders in Nelson's Creek was one of real interest. All previous Ontario records had been for points farther east (except Temagami)--Algonquin Park and Haliburton being the nearest.

The amphibians were represented by eleven species. Only two reptiles were found, the garter snake and the ring-necked snake. The absence of turtles was remarkable.

Deer, porcupine, mink and weasels were seen on several occasions. Beaver dams were inspected, but alas! no beaver were seen. The most abundant smaller mammals were the white-footed mouse and the short-tailed shrew. In all, evidence of the presence of eighteen species of mammals was secured.

A trip to Algonquin Park was most profitable. Professor J.R.Dymond, our host and guide, gave an excellent talk on the physical features of the Park and the prerequisites for abundant fish in a lake.

It was very apparent that the spruce-bud worm was causing widespread damage in this district, but it was encouraging to find that the bud-worm larvae had been parasitized by Brachonid, Ichneumon and Tachinid flies.

Two rare grasshoppers were abundant: Melanoplus islandicus and the wingless grasshopper Zubovskya glacialis canadensis. It was unusual to find the coral-winged locust in the clearings in such a heavily-wooded area.

On three occasions the astonishing egg-laying performance of the large ichneumon flies, Megarhyssa, was witnessed. Megarhyssa lunator was the commonest species of which four males were found, indicating the unusual abundance of the species. The larva of the wood-borer Tremex, that the ichneumon flies were parasitizing, was dug out of the maple log and examined.

Visitors to our laboratory were interested in the insect eggs and larvae being reared in many glass jars. In one jar were caterpillars found on pearly everlasting, with a supply of their chosen feed. These developed into Pyrameis huntera butterflies. In another jar, eggs found on a maple leaf hatched, and the larvae were identified as Anisota rubicunda. This project proved an easy and profitable method of studying insect life.

Rosy Maple Moth

The school ended on the note of "Next Year". "Next year I want to study the grasses and sedges." Next year we should find both Sorex cinereus and Sorex fumeus." "Next year!" Will you be with us next year?

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Those in attendance at the Summer Nature School were:

Mr W.M.Knowles
Miss M.Willson
Miss M.Light
Miss E.Boissonneau
Miss L.J.Payne
Miss M.Conner
Miss R.Penwarden
Miss E.Boyd
Mr F.Kroeger
Miss E.Black
Dr L.E.Jaquith
Mrs L.E.Jaquith
Miss A.C.McGowan
Miss G.Malkin
Miss E.G.Ross
Miss L.Morlock
Miss V.I.Nichols
Mr J.R.Wilkinson
Miss E.Price
Miss M.Price

Miss F.Burgess
Miss H.Lawrence
Miss V.Gunn
Mr D.Young
Miss M.Vanderburgh
Mr J.A.Bosman
Mrs I.Metcalfe
Miss V.Kohler
Miss B.Makins
Miss R.Carter
Miss N.Corrigan
Miss M.Boissonneau
Miss B.Metcalfe
Miss W.Chute
Miss S.Caldwell
Miss M.Ramsay
Miss E.D.Bawden
Mr C.Hallam
Miss L.White
Miss G.Martin

Miss J.B.Wilton
Mr E.D.MacInnes
Miss M.Millar
Miss J.Sickles
Mr E.McKone
Miss A.Rutledge
Mr & Mrs H.Halliday
Prof. ~~& Mrs~~ T.F. McIlwraith
Mr ~~& Mrs~~ D.B.Murray