

T H E N E W S L E T T E R

of the Toronto Field Naturalists' Club

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The coming of the end of the war is deeply meaningful to naturalists as naturalists. The general great release from strain is accompanied for them by a marked renewal of freedom of movement. Not only is this a matter of more gasoline. There is also a sense of moral relief. No longer is it necessary to raise the question, should we use our quota of gasoline in this way? Then, too, many places which have been associated with war purposes, places often of considerable importance to naturalists, are rapidly being re-opened to the public. The feeling of being able to go where one wants, and when, is a real post-war pleasure, and one that is being widely enjoyed by naturalists as well as other people. In this there is no harm and no wrong, but there is a certain danger. There is the chance that we may revert to a trend that was growing unpleasantly common before the war, to an inclination to forget the attractions and the needs of our own home communities.

There is no doubt that the restrictive influences of the war have had the effect upon naturalists and others of making them conscious to an unaccustomed degree of the possibilities for enjoyment, entertainment, study, and self-education near to home. That this has been a beneficent influence few would deny. Attachment to the home community is only one step removed from the home itself. Our interest and our emotions should naturally be more closely entwined with our community than with any wider commitment. Naturally too, we would feel a deeper sense of obligation to our community. Unhappily, before the war, many influences combined to make people less attached to their home communities, with the result that their enjoyment of life lessened, their emotional life was impoverished, and their sense of social obligation was gravely weakened. It is to be hoped that in our relief from restrictions we will not go unheeding as far and as fast as we can, for in so doing, we shall be abetting just those influences that have been undermining community life, and in so doing, bringing barrenness into our own personal lives.

How does all this apply to the naturalist? For it does apply, not only in a negative, but in a positive way. On the one hand, he should not seek his pleasure as naturalist always, even usually, outside the home areas. That leads to an alienation of the naturalist from his home community. He forgets it, deserts it, isolates himself from it, eventually comes to look down upon it. In this he hurts himself, weakens the community, and becomes a poor citizen. On the other hand, there is something more than remaining in the community and just enjoying its attractions. A naturalist can contribute constructively to the development of his community, to the enrichment of its life and his own. He can, for instance, use every effort to make its natural riches and attractions known to his friends and associates. In this way he can spread interest in the study and enjoyment of nature, and can show how easily this interest may be cultivated close to home. The wider the public that is awake to such natural attractions, the greater the chance of preserving them, the greater the possibility of making them of value to the community as a whole. Pride of community will grow in a healthy way for these people, and the social life of the community will undergo a vitalizing influence.

One of the most positive contributions that naturalists can make in this respect is to encourage their communities to include the preservation and the development of their distinctive natural attractions among the plans for reconstruction

Every town, village and community has such natural attractions, though they may not now be recognized as such save by a few naturalists. A wood, a marsh, a bit of lake shore, a stretch of river, or any of a score of other types of territory might be selected by any community. Such an area could be designated as a nature reserve. In it not only would naturalists be free to pursue their hobbies, but school children, boy scouts, or others could mark out nature trails under the guidance of the naturalists. On such trails, trees, bushes, flowers, geological phenomena, and other things could be indicated on signs. Lists of birds of the region, even with illustrations, might be placed in frames at suitable spots. These endeavours could be linked with school work, with boy scout and girl guide activities, and with the social work of other organizations. The readiness with which so many young people take to an interest in nature is certainly an invitation to those who are concerned about some of the less happy actions of young people today, to find in the study of nature a more suitable counter interest. Socially conscious naturalists should consider seriously getting after their local nature clubs, town councils, Rotary clubs, Kiwanis or any other organizations that can be interested in the furtherance of such community projects. The release from the war can be for naturalists a chance to serve both the cause of their hobby and the life of their community in a more constructive way. May they seize their opportunity.

I have been asked to include in this issue of the Newsletter a fall migration chart for the shorebirds. This chart will serve as a complement to the spring chart for this group of birds which was published in a previous number. It is made on the same plan as previous charts. My records (marked S) are based on 12 years of observation for arrival dates, 11 years for departures. Mr. Baillie's records (marked B) represent a 25 year period. Other abbreviations used are Su (summers) and Occ.Su. (occasionally summers).

A perusal of the chart will show that, whereas shorebirds are amongst the latest of the spring migrants, they are the earliest of the southward bound fall migrants. Many of them apparently make the long journey from their winter abodes in South America for a stay of scarcely a month in the summer breeding grounds in our Arctic regions. Certainly the first of this group appears in Toronto on the return flight by the second week in July. Adult birds are the first to come, with the young birds being among the latest of the groups to go through. This curious fact has been one of the standing puzzles for those who try to explain the working of bird migrations. How do the young birds find their way? It will be noticed from the chart that, if the shorebird migration starts early, it also continues over a prolonged period, the last individuals lingering until the latter part of November. The height of this group's migration occurs from late August to late September. If you compare the fall chart with the spring chart, you will see that shorebirds are more likely to be seen in the fall than in the spring. There is probably a certain variation of routes used during the two periods. This explains the difference in part. Also the additional number of new young birds greatly increases our chances of seeing shorebirds on the return migration.

This season is proving an unusually good one for shorebirds. Not only are they coming through in numbers, but rare members of the group are more in evidence than for many years. One new factor is affecting the situation at Toronto. That is the presence of the Island airport. We have discovered this summer that this area is regarded by migrating shorebirds with high favour. One day late in August (27th) Mr. Baillie and I found 2 buff-breasted sandpipers, 3 Hudsonian curlews, 9 upland plovers, 8 black-bellied plovers, 2 ruddy turnstones and a Baird's sandpiper in this area. A few days later there were 4 buff-breasted sandpipers, 3 golden plovers and 17 black-bellied plovers with a large number of commoner birds. Up until August 27th this year Mr. Baillie had seen but two individual buff-breasted sandpipers in his life. I had never seen the bird in Canada, and had seen but one individual before this elsewhere. Golden plovers and curlews are very rarely seen in the fall;

golden plovers at any time. You can understand the excitement that these discoveries have caused amongst the bird watchers. Observers from Hamilton even have come to see the shorebirds in Toronto, a reversal of the older days when Torontonians journeyed to Hamilton Bay and Dundas Marsh to get a look at shorebird migrants.

The airport's attractions for these birds appear to be several. Firstly, it is free of people over most of its extent. The birds do not seem to mind the planes, any more than birds mind autos, boats, or other mechanical conveyances. Observers know how easy it is to approach closely to birds in such contrivances, and how quickly the birds vanish when humans emerge from the auto or boat, or move obviously inside them. The shorebirds fly off a little when a plane lands or uses the runway, and return immediately it is gone. Secondly, the airport's short grass is swarming with grasshoppers and other insects. These birds all consume great quantities of such insect food, so that this is a tremendous free lunch counter for them. Thirdly, they like to roost on the runways. This taste they share with the gulls which are there by hundreds. It is possible that not only the relative lack of disturbance enters into this preference, but also the fact that the runways, being made of a black substance, absorb heat from the sun, and so are comfortably warm for roosting birds.

Of course there are other places to see shorebirds around Toronto. The Island beaches from Hanlan's Point to Centre Island, especially Gibraltar Point and Centre Island Cove, are good spots if not too many people are about. Sunny-side Beach, notably the wet area from Ellis Avenue to the Humber, is a very good area. There have been knots, stilts and pectorals there already. The Don River bed from the Leaside sewage outlet north to beyond the Todmorden station always has a fair number of shorebirds in the fall. Recently, the Humber River from Bloor Street to Dundas Street has had a considerable group of these birds feeding along its shores. The beach along Fisherman's Island from the Eastern Gap to Leslie Street has not been very good this season, probably because the shore pools have largely dried up. Frenchman's Bay, both east and west of the lake entrance is a good area. It might be well to explore the wet fields near the York Downs Golf Club. There is no reason why many of the sorts of shorebirds that appear on the airport should not be there.

		<u>SHOREBIRD CHART</u>				
<u>FALL MIGRATION</u>		<u>TORONTO REGION</u>				
<u>Name of Shorebird</u>	<u>Average Arrival Date</u>	<u>Average Departure Date</u>	<u>Earliest Fall Date</u>	<u>Latest Fall Date</u>	<u>No. of Years Recorded</u>	
Piping Plover	S Occ. Su.	-----	-----	-----	0	
	B " "	June 13	-----	Aug.5	12	
Snowy Plover	S -----	-----	-----	-----	0	
	E -----	-----	-----	-----	0	
Semipalmated Plover	S Aug.11	Oct.8	July 12	Nov.7	12	
	B Aug.11	Oct.1	July 7	Nov.7	23	
Killdeer Plover	S Su.	Nov.4	Su.	Nov.30	12	
	B Su.	Oct.31	Su.	Nov.22	25	
American Golden Plover	S Sept.7	Oct.16	Sept.2	Oct.30	4	
	B Sept.21	Sept.26	Sept.10	Oct.6	8	
Black-bellied Plover	S Sept.8	Oct.13	Aug.6	Nov.1	12	
	B Sept.13	Oct.17	Aug.6	Nov.10	20	
Common Turnstone	S Aug.23	Oct.7	July 27	Oct.20	10	
	B Sept.4	Sept.27	July 30	Oct.27	15	

Name of Shorebird		Average Arrival Date	Average Departure Date	Earliest Fall Date	Latest Fall Date	No. of Years Recorded
American Woodcock	S	Su,	Sept.28	Su.	Oct.29	7
	B	Su.	Aug.28	Su.	Sept.12	3
Wilson's Snipe	S	Su.	Oct.14	Su.	Nov.21	10
	B	Su.	Oct.2	Su.	Nov.7	22
Hudsonian Curlew	S	Aug.26	Aug.28	Aug.6	Sept.9	3
	B	Aug.25	Aug.27	Aug.6	Sept.8	4
Eskimo Curlew	S	----	----	----	----	0
	B	----	----	----	----	0
Upland Plover	S	Su.	Aug.15	Su.	Aug.27	2
	B	Su.	June 22	Su.	Sept.5	15
Spotted Sandpiper	S	Su.	Oct.5	Su.	Nov.7	12
	B	Su.	Sept.13	Su.	Nov.7	25
Solitary Sandpiper	S	Aug.9	Sept.18	July 16	Oct.6	11
	B	Aug.19	Sept.7	July 15	Oct.5	19
Willet	S	----	----	Aug.7	Aug.7	1
	B	Aug.15	Aug.19	Aug.7	Aug.23	2
Greater Yellow-legs	S	Sept.6	Oct.22	July 26	Nov.11	12
	B	Sept.10	Oct.11	Aug.2	Nov.29	18
Lesser Yellow-legs	S	Aug.2	Sept.30	July 12	Nov.3	11
	B	Aug.14	Sept.13	July 15	Nov.5	23
Knot	S	Aug.25	Sept.1	Aug.10	Sept.23	5
	B	Aug.31	Sept.1	Aug.21	Sept.6	8
Purple Sandpiper	S	Nov.1	Nov.1	Oct.23	Nov.16	3
	B	----	----	Nov.16	Nov.16	1
Pectoral Sandpiper	S	Aug.24	Oct.6	July 22	Nov.10	11
	B	Aug.28	Oct.7	July 4	Nov.21	23
White-rumped Sandpiper	S	Aug.30	Sept.24	July 27	Oct.29	6
	B	Oct.6	Oct.20	Aug.24	Nov.4	10
Baird's Sandpiper	S	Aug.22	Sept.10	July 23	Oct.23	10
	B	Aug.30	Sept.19	Aug.7	Nov.9	17
Least Sandpiper	S	Aug.11	Oct.3	July 12	Oct.16	12
	B	Aug.9	Sept.12	July 15	Nov.5	23
Curlew Sandpiper	S	----	----	----	----	0
	B	----	----	----	----	0
Dunlin	S	Sept.28	Oct.25	Sept.9	Nov.8	10
	B	Oct.4	Nov.2	Sept.5	Dec.31	20
Dowitcher	S	Aug.20	Aug.21	July 26	Sept.21	5
	B	Aug.10	Aug.24	July 20	Sept.9	5
Stilt Sandpiper	S	Aug.27	Sept.11	Aug.5	Sept.30	4
	B	Sept.5	Sept.17	July 25	Oct.15	7
Semipalmated Sandpiper	S	Aug.8	Oct.2	July 16	Oct.27	12
	B	Aug.10	Sept.26	July 4	Oct.27	24
Western Sandpiper	S	Aug.18	Sept.12	July 16	Oct.13	7
	B	----	----	Aug.26	Sept.1	1
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	S	----	----	Aug.27	Sept.6	1
	B	Aug.28	Aug.31	Aug.27	Sept.5	3
Marbled Godwit	S	----	----	----	----	0
	B	----	----	----	----	0
Hudsonian Godwit	S	----	----	----	----	0
	B	----	----	----	----	0
Ruff	S	----	----	----	----	0
	B	----	----	----	----	0
Sanderling	S	Aug.28	Oct.25	July 23	Nov.12	11
	B	Aug.18	Oct.11	July 20	Nov.12	23
American Avocet	S	----	----	----	----	0
	B	----	----	----	----	0
Red Phalarope	S	----	----	Oct.4	Oct.4	1
	B	Oct.24	Oct.24	Oct.3	Nov.13	2
Wilson's Phalarope	S	----	----	Aug.11	Sept.30	1
	B	Aug.14	Aug.22	July 20	Sept.9	2
Northern Phalarope	S	----	----	Sept.8	Sept.8	1
	B	----	----	Sept.8	Sept.8	1

On September 9th the first fall field day of the club was held at Fisherman's Island. Over a hundred members turned out and thoroughly enjoyed the warm sunny afternoon by the lake shore. Right at the start, Messrs. Southam and F. Smith released a number of banded shorebirds - sanderlings, semipalmated plovers and sandpipers. This was an exceptional chance for many, to whom shorebirds are among the most difficult birds to recognize, to learn their field marks and actions. Most noticeable was the tameness of the banded birds, many of which refused to go away but started to feed right at people's feet as soon as released.

True, there were not many birds to be observed by the three bird parties when they went off on their hikes. There was a curious lack of migrants in the willows. But then, that wonderfully tame yellowlegs at the eastern pool gave everyone who saw it a thrill. The cormorant flying along the lake, the cliff swallows migrating overhead, the whip-poor-will flushed from the ground; oh yes, there were plenty of good sights even for the bird people.

The botany group had an unusually fine day. No wonder, when there were all those sedges, asters, goldenrods, a fine group of ladies' tresses, vast areas of purple gerardia, and wild lettuce 12 feet tall! Anyone who was there will tell you, if you missed this first trip, that you really must get out to the next field day.

Don't forget the October meeting in the Royal Ontario Museum on Monday, October 1st, at 8:15 p.m. The subject is Photographing Ontario Birds and the lecturer is Dr. W. W. Hughes of Embro, Ontario.

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Editor