

MARCH MEETINGS

Royal Ontario Museum, Monday 3 March, 1947, at 8.15 p.m.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREAT LAKES SYSTEM

by

Professor A. MacLean, Professor of Geology, University of Toronto.

This address will be illustrated with lantern slides.

ROTUNDA DISPLAY

Water colours by Henry S. Saunders. This display is a selection from the great number of sketches which Mr. Saunders has produced in the last two years.

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SATURDAY AFTERNOON HIKE

High Park, Saturday 8th March, 1947, at 2.30 p.m.

Meet at the Howard Park Avenue Entrance at the end of the Carlton Car Line.

Leaders: -

Mr. Doug Miller	BIRDS
Mr. Bill Emery	BIRDS
Mr. A.C.Cameron	TREES

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Toronto Field Naturalists' Club.



NEWSLETTER

Number 66 - February, 1947.

Beginning a birding trip in a pouring rain would seem to most people the acme of absurdity, but the ardent bird watcher's faith is ever strong. Little daunts him. Poor start, fine ending is his motto. Such was the spirit in which four of us embarked upon a long-projected trip to the Provincial Forestry Station at Angus on the morning of January 26th.

Water streamed across the dirty, grey ice, and rain drummed upon the car as we drove northward from Toronto. It let up only briefly all the way to Barrie, and for long stretches the rain was reinforced by dense fog. It is hardly necessary to add that we covered the whole distance without seeing more than a few bedraggled starlings, house sparrows and pigeons.

At Barrie we called on Dr. Brereton, that community's most eager bird observer, and found him just getting up. Considering the weather he had thought we would be later; but there we were. In order to give him a chance to dress and eat we drove charily through Barrie's drifts out along the Cemetery road, the rain still beating its tattoo on the gleaming ice. We were impressed with the cliffs of snow that lined the road. Of birds we could not find a single one. When we returned Dr. Brereton was ready. He took us over to the grounds of Ovenden School for Girls, beautiful even now with the rain dripping heavily from sombre evergreens, and with the vista of endless grey ice on Lake Simcoe. There is a feeding station at the school which is usually well-patronized, but on this sodden day we could find but two black-capped chickadees enjoying the suet. We were fortunate enough, however, to see five pine grosbeaks slip silently out of the top of a tall spruce tree and fly away. None of their lovely melodic whistles today. A second feeding station near the school produced only house sparrows.

It was now getting near dinner time, and we were all expected at the Forestry Station for dinner. So we quit rain-drenched Barrie and drove straight to Angus, eleven miles distant. On the way the rain at last stopped. As a result we saw red-polls, bluejays, and more chickadees along the road.

At the Forestry Station Mr. R.S. Carman, the superintendent, greeted us cordially as we drove up beside the main building. He took us at once to his house nearby - an exquisite, white, colonial type home set in the midst of lawns and gardens. Today all was snow-covered. Out of the white mantle of snow rose pyramidal cedars and other attractive evergreens. Back of the house stands a magnificent grove of towering white pines, the pride of the station. How many members of the club who are housewives will envy Mrs. Carman the long wide window in her kitchen that permits her, even as she works, constant entrance into the mystery and beauty of the pines.

As we still had a few minutes before dinner we walked around this noble grove, coming to a halt before Mrs. Carman's eminently successful feeding station close to the house. I use the word "eminently" with assurance, for certainly no weaker word could be applied to a feeding station that for weeks had as a regular visitor so distinguished a bird as a Hudsonian chickadee. True this chickadee had the ill grace

to depart before the Toronto visitors arrived, but then I have known far too many birds like that to worry overmuch about it, or to think less highly of Mrs. Carman's feeding station because of it. She tells me that the Hudsonian first arrived on October 26th. On November 6th she was able to get within arm's length of the bird whilst it continued to feed upon a pine tree. From early in December it came to the feeding station every day, and became so tame it would take suet from the hand. Its special favorite amongst the manna spread here, appeared to be the marrow of bones hung up in the trees. It stayed on until January 12th, when it seemed restless and disappeared.

I must not give the impression that the Hudsonian chickadee was the sole visitor, for even as we talked a parade of other birds was going ceaselessly on before our faces. Black-capped chickadees, white-breasted and red-breasted nuthatches vied with each other for choice bits from the suet stick. The stick, about two feet long and two inches square, hung from a branch over the path near the house, and head high. It had holes bored part way through it which were stuffed with suet. Though we stood within two or three feet of the sticks still the procession of little birds flashed past our faces to partake of this rich food. Later we found that they would come even when the stick was held in the hand. Close by, a covered tray standing on four legs some five feet high, was having its customers too. The tray was roofed and had glass panels along three sides, with the fourth side which was well sheltered open toward the house. Also the floor of the tray had an opening so that the birds could fly up through as well as entering by the side. As I turned to look at this part of the feeding station a redpoll dashed into the shrubbery in one direction whilst a junco left in another. The offerings on the tray were: greased bread, bones, and seeds. Mrs. Carman informed us that previously there was a support for the legs upon which the tray stands at half their height. This had been removed because the cat developed the custom of using this support as a ladder by which to climb onto the tray. There it would lie in wait for the unsuspecting birds with unhappy results. Now with the support gone the cat is foiled, and the birds are safe. Bill Carrick had brought his camera with him and he did not fail to take full advantage of this wonderful chance to get pictures of so many birds in intimate poses. Indeed we could hardly entice him in to dinner. Lucky not many of us have such successful feeding stations or there wouldn't be much work done, I fear.

Just as we were finishing an excellent and very substantial dinner the sun came out, setting the stage for a pleasant afternoon. Indeed when we were ready again and came outdoors we found that the grey, wet morning had given way to a perfect winter's day; perhaps I should say to a foretaste of spring for it was 37 degrees as we started on our walk. Now the sky was everywhere blue save for high, fleecy cirrus clouds. And the distant hills took on those shimmering shades of blue, mauve, and purple so beloved by painters of the winter scene. Making our way midst the evergreens to the banks of the frozen Nottawasaga River we started up juncos from clumps of weeds. Redpolls, at first but a soft chatter in the sky, came flying downstream directly over our heads. Most exciting, Greer discovered a splendid grey goshawk dashing out of the white pine grove and across the fields. This great hawk, I fear, may well have met disaster for a few moments after we saw it the sound of a gunshot rang out on the crisp air from the direction in which the hawk had disappeared.

In a cedar bog we came upon two or more elusive golden-crowned kinglets calling amongst the cedars. They kept us busy some time. Numerous tracks of animals, marked the snow all through the bog, most of them being those of snow-shoe rabbits. We could follow them about with little trouble, for though the snow was often deep it was well crusted, holding us everywhere except where weeds and small bushes were thick, and near to logs.

Upon mounting a bank which brought us out into a field studded with fire-burned stumps I saw a foxtrack leading into the open. Following it Jim Baillie and I soon came to a place where the snow was strewn with fluffs of rabbit fur. The story was easily read. The fox had found a cottontail holed down in the snow, smelled it no doubt, and pounced upon it, killing it then and there. The hole, where the hapless bunny had burrowed into the snow, was still well-shaped. Evidently, in view of the morning rain,

the killing had taken place very recently for otherwise the sides of the hole would have caved in and lost their shape. The raw look of the bits of furred skin, and of the entrails left near the hole also bespoke a recent occurrence. As I gazed down on the entrails I realized that I had just seen another such remains in the cedar bog, and had not recognized it for what it was. The fox must have got two rabbits on his prowl, or else two foxes had been hunting the area together. Indeed there were enough fox tracks to justify the latter supposition.

Recent pileated woodpecker workings on the stumps scattered about the field were numerous. It was after I became separated from the others that I almost caught up with one of these "workmen". I fancied that I heard the characteristic heavy tapping near the Carman house. Upon investigating I found a large old stub rising some twelve to fifteen feet above the snow. Upon this a pileated woodpecker had patently been working this afternoon for fresh chips were spread all around the base of the stub atop the snow. Yet try as I would I could detect no further sound, and get no sight of that woodpecker. How it could have evaded me in that open wood I cannot see but, having had the same trick played upon me elsewhere by other pileateds, I am ready enough to admit it can be done. No bird is more adept at such vanishing acts than the huge, showy pileated woodpecker. From the number of cuttings in the vicinity this must be a favorite area for this fellow, and this but a few yards from the Carman house!

A fitting symbol of this sunlit afternoon that combined winter with a foretaste of spring came to Bobby Carman and me just as we were leaving the railway line to enter the forestry station grounds. A redpoll flying up from the river valley settled suddenly on a telegraph wire immediately ahead of us. Perched so that the westering sun fell full upon the delicate pink flush of its breast it was winter at its most beautiful. Yet just below its perch was a willow tree thrusting forth soft white pussy willows, harbingers of spring.

At the end of our walk Mr. Carman kindly showed us through the seed-extracting plant, but upon that intensely interesting part of our visit I must not elaborate for Mr. Carman has promised to prepare an article upon this very important government service, of great concern to all naturalists, which will be published in some future Newsletter.

Constantly am I amazed by the birds that may be seen in the heart of the city. For me this means the area between my residence on McMaster Avenue and my office on the University Campus opposite the Reference Library. If one keeps eyes and ears open there seems almost no limit to what one may see over a period of time. Yet I will not say anything about observations long past. Within the last month ample has been seen to warrant my generalization.

Only this morning (Feb. 8) while crossing the campus I saw a blackish bird flapping stolidly along behind Hart House, my first crow of the year. The crow is an uncommon winter visitor in Toronto, and whilst there clings rather closely to the neighborhood of dumps and garbage heaps. This fellow may have been such a one travelling from one dump to another, or it may have been an incoming migrant, tricked by the warm weather, which has been prevailing on the Atlantic coast, into making a false start inland. He was coming from the east - and horned larks have been arriving from that direction in numbers for over a week, the first being seen on January 31st.

The other day just after lunch I stepped out of Hart House en route to my office when the sound of redpoll chatter struck my ear. Glancing quickly up I spotted four of these finches, just rising up to get over University College.

Then for two weeks and more there was a barred owl spending every day in a large tree behind Simcoe Hall right beside the parking lot. The people working in the Univers-

ity Department of Extension on the second floor of Simcoe Hall could look the owl right in the face. They couldn't miss it; yet on the ground hundreds passed that tree every day but only those who were bird observers already saw it to my knowledge. How hard it is for the uninitiated to notice an unwonted "bump" on a tree I found out when I took two or three people, not bird watchers, to see this owl, and had the greatest difficulty pointing it out to them though it is a huge bird and they were but a few yards from it. I would much like to know if this barred owl is the same one that perched in this same tree the greater part of the winter some years ago. The pellets gathered then showed that owl to have been eating pigeons and rats. No pellets were gathered from this one, but undoubtedly the pigeon flock which lives at Knox College is the main attraction. Since the owl has now disappeared I suppose that flock has been reduced to the point where the hunting elsewhere is easier. Predators like the barred owl rarely, if ever, clean out the food supply upon which they exist. In that they show much more sense than some human hunters.

On the afternoon of January 31st I was walking to my office when I was stopped at Avenue Road and Tranby Avenue by a truck. During the pause I looked overhead to see if perchance some bird was flying. Great was my satisfaction when I saw a large gull bearing down upon the spot. I held my breath while it sailed up the west side of Avenue Road just over the housetops, hoping that it would not veer further westward and be lost to view. I had heard some days before of a glaucous gull that has been seen by T.M. Shortt and others over the Museum. This might well be the same bird. Fortunately the gull held to its course, and sweeping straight on, breasted the last housetop and dipped down obligingly directly above my head, thus giving me a perfect opportunity to see the immaculate white plumage of the burgomaster or glaucous gull. It may well be that this is the only individual of this species around Toronto this winter for to date I have not heard of more than one glaucous gull being seen at any one time.

Yesterday (Feb. 7) when I was working in my study at home my wife excitedly called me to a window. At first I could see nothing. Then from the area of the yard where we feed sparrows and starlings - perforce, since we want to feed birds in this area - rose a speedy little sparrow hawk. The falcon shot down the garden and swerved sharply upward to alight upon the telephone wire at the south end of the yard. It had caught no prey though it had dashed into the flock on the snow, and had itself stood in the snow for a long moment after missing. Now it watched eagerly for some foolish sparrow or starling to come out of the shrubs into which they had dashed. The hawk's vigil was to be in vain for the starlings stayed perfectly quiet for several minutes, then flew quickly away, one by one. The falcon watched each one fly off but never offered to tackle one on the wing. What he wanted was to see one walk out on the snow looking for food. Then he would have gone into action with lightning speed. The sparrows were far from the stolidity of the starlings. They danced up and down in the bushes, chirping and chattering. A few bold ones hopped about under the shrubs, picking up crumbs, venturing to the very edge of shelter but never coming out far enough to offer themselves as targets. Cunning fellows the sparrows! Throughout all this the little falcon kept craning his head, twisting this way and that, trying to find a victim.

In watching him I found myself seeing something I had never noticed before about a sparrow-hawk. He was facing me and every time he bent forward to look down I could see the top of his head. It was a bright red, of a vermilion hue; not the rusty red of the breast at all. This vermilion cap was bordered below by a circle of smoky blue. And then began the "side burns" that mark the falcon. But to my astonishment these were not merely the ordinary face-markings of this species but a complete chaplet of alternating black and tan surrounding the head! Moreover when the head was lowered towards me so that I saw it nearly skull top on, then the angular face front was hidden, with the result that I saw a tubular-shaped head with a red cap, a blue circle, and a black and tan circle. This was the weirdest effect imaginable. It seemed as though some fantastic hood had been placed over the hawk's head completely altering its appearance. I watched fascinated until it abandoned its vigil and flew off to seek a meal in other quarters. Thus, though the sparrow hawk is a relatively common bird, and though I have been looking at birds for many years now, yet today in my own garden I saw something quite novel to me - and I may

say really stirring - about this common bird. There is probably no bird about which even the most experienced observer cannot learn something new.

One of our most active members is Mrs. Lois Sisman of Aurora. Recently she has driven from Aurora to New Orleans and Mississippi, and has proven by her newsy letter from Edgewater Park, Miss., that birding can be practised anywhere and everywhere. The bird watcher never is at a loss for interest, amusement, and inspiration. I take great pleasure in giving Mrs. Sisman's letter to you in these pages.

She writes: "On January 31st we left Aurora for New Orleans and Edgewater, Miss. Shortly after leaving Detroit the snow had disappeared and the highways were clear. It was almost impossible to believe we had left snowdrifts behind and icy pavements. The weather being so delightful we made rapid progress and were soon in Springfield, Ohio. Every little while a bit of heavenly blue would dash across the highway and soon I realized bluebirds were numerous. Presently another color was added, the bright red of the cardinal.

After lunch we reached Cincinnati, the temperature climbed to 68 degrees and bird life mounted also. Cardinals were everywhere, dashing in and out of the shrubbery. Many sparrow hawks were sitting on the wires; and song sparrows were singing in the distance. I was so busy noting bird life, in fact I had made so many notes I was almost singing when robins and meadowlarks appeared in the Blue Grass of Kentucky. One blue heron was standing at attention in a roadside marsh. Numerous mourning doves flew overhead, and the odd brown thrasher went darting into the bushes. All the while bluebirds and cardinals added their bit of color.

Next day we reached Tennessee and here the daffodils and forsythia were in full bloom. Every other bird was a shrike sitting on the wires, with just one kingfisher, and as always the cardinals. To see these tumbledown shacks, unpainted, with half a dozen or more colored babies clinging to the front porch and then a pair of cardinals flit past to settle in a shrub at the back door made me realize they after all have a bit of sunshine.

Alabama was the next state and everything appeared more tropical. The black vultures were circling overhead, Spanish moss covered many trees, Azaleas and hibiscus are in bloom with the odd palm growing along the highway. By 5 p.m. we had reached Mississippi and the highway ran parallel with the water (Gulf of Mexico). On one pier I counted fifty-five cormorants, six brown pelicans and one blue heron.

We arrived at Edgewater shortly after 6 p.m., glad to rest as our entire trip was 1400 miles, but early next morning I was on the job again. Did not take time to unpack my trunks as I heard the mockingbirds singing at daybreak. They are all over the lawn, just as common as our robins in early spring, very friendly. They stand for minutes with their tails erect then fly off to a nearby shrub showing such a pretty grey and white pattern, not unlike our shrikes.

A short distance behind our hotel the gardener has made a mound of dead leaves while all around are low shrubs with a few southern pines towering overhead. From these pines I heard a twitter, and looked up to see four brown-headed nuthatches searching the bark for their breakfast. This looked a likely spot for bird life so I waited. Presently the leaves appeared to be moving, dozens of whitethroated sparrows were digging and scratching for food. From the underbrush towhees appeared along with brown thrashers, robins, cardinals; not just one but half a dozen of each species. And in these same pines overhead a red-bellied woodpecker was digging. But the highlight of it all was a tufted titmouse. This lively little fellow with his tuft or crest so erect and brown flanks was singing all the while, whistling a series of phrases, high notes followed by lower ones. He never once stopped to look at me, but oh did I ever have a good look at him. I was so intent on bird life I had not noticed the blue mass of violets growing at my feet with shell pink camellias as a background.

In all I had been out one hour since breakfast and had seen so much I just had to write and tell you, and especially when I walked into the hotel lounge, saw all the people playing bridge. I then knew my morning had been well spent.