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T O R O N T O   F I E L D   N A T U R A L I S T S '   C L U B

D E C E M B E R   M E E T I N G S

Royal Ontario Museum:

Monday, 1st December, 1947 - 8.15 p.m.

Speaker - Mr. R. L. Peterson,  
Curator of Mamals,  
Royal Ontario Museum.

Subject - Moose (Illustrated)

Rotunda Display

The use of natural materials in handicraft.  
A display of yarns dyed from bark, lichen, berries,  
and other vegetable dyes; also costume jewellery  
made from acorns.

Note: Have you any handicraft, using natural materials, to display? If so, bring it early to the next meeting.

Saturday Afternoon Hike

Tree Walk - Mount Pleasant Cemetery

Saturday - December 13th at 2.30 p.m.

Leaders - Mr. A.C.Cameron & Mr. L.T.Owens.

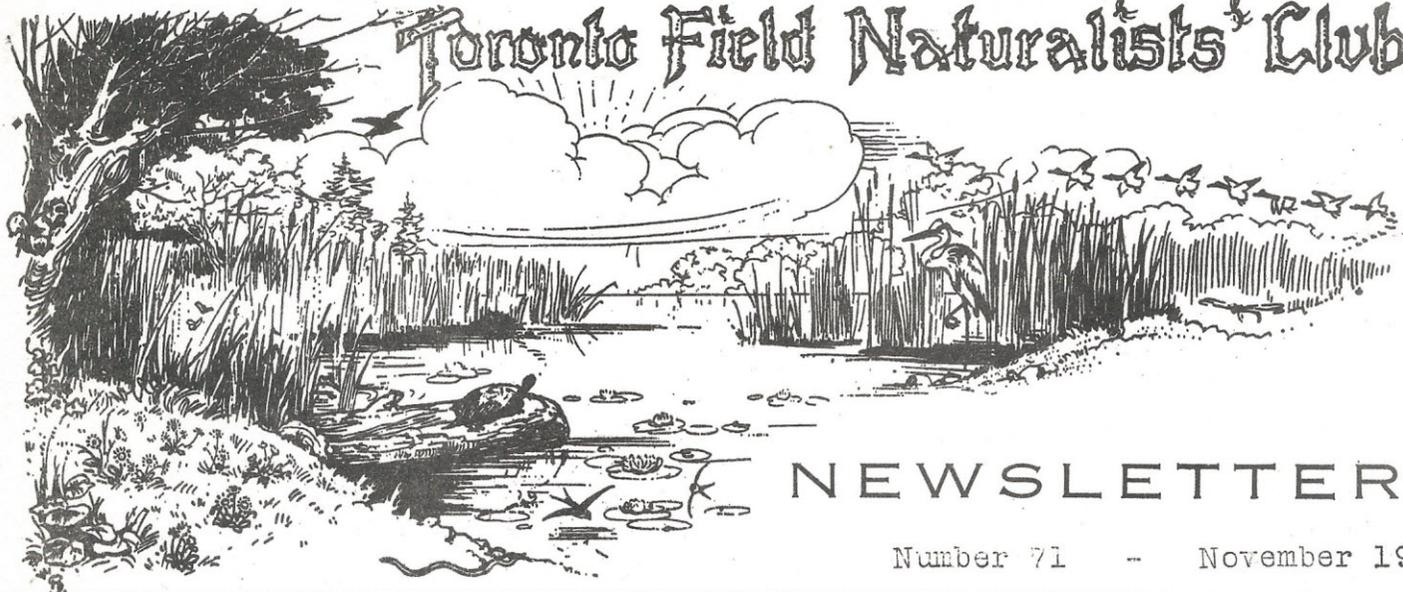
Meet at Yonge Street entrance.

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Fees are due, and payable NOW

News letter will hereafter be sent to paid-up members only.

# Toronto Field Naturalists' Club.



Number 71 - November 1947

It was raining hard this morning (October 30th) at 6, when I wakened. By seven it had slowed to a drizzle. Mrs. Saunders wondered if the Aurora women, who had arranged to come in today for a birding trip would come. Knowing their fervor I had no doubts myself. Promptly at 8.30 they arrived, undaunted by the first really rainy day of October. Mrs. Sisman, Mrs. Wilcox, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Devins, and Mrs. Knowles made up the party. Their aim was to tour the waterfront for there they could hope to see birds that they miss in Aurora.

We made directly for the Humber marshes. Number Three Marsh, I had been informed, was full of baldpates and when we stood on the northern bank scanning the water of this marsh I found that my informants had by no means exaggerated. There was a great flutter of wings and beating of feet on the water when we arrived as the baldpates were feeding in close to shore on the north side. Momentarily startled they scuttled away from us, but, thanks to the protection they receive hereabouts, they were not unduly frightened and did not go far. Soon we were busy studying every individual baldpate in an endeavor to discover a European widgeon. None has been reported but this is the company a widgeon keeps, and widgeons have been seen in this very marsh at this time of year in other seasons. All our diligence, however, could not reveal such a bird though there were some 150 baldpates to look over. The whole marsh was largely in possession of this species for there were besides them, only a few other ducks, -- blacks, and a single American merganser, a female -- along with some coots, and a pied-billed grebe.

We had been watching the ducks for some minutes when juncoes could be heard smacking their bills in the trees along the bank to the east. As they came nearer we could see that there was quite a little flock moving westward. In a few moments they were overhead, and then they dropped down into the garden that crowns the bank at the west end of the marsh. Turning our attention to this flock we watched them avidly feeding amongst shrubs and flowers, or restlessly chasing each other along the fence. I had in mind a report of a red-backed junco seen in Toronto within the last few days. It was not too great a surprise, therefore, when one of the juncoes that paused for a moment on top of the fence showed the fox-red back and contrasting black head of the Oregon junco. Mrs. Sisman spotted this individual as soon as I did, but before the others could get a good look it had been chased into the shrubbery by a belligerent slate-colored junco. Then followed fifteen minutes of scrambling along the bank, slippery from the rain, through burrs, weeds, and tangles in search of the red-backed fellow. Fortunately

the junco flock did not fly off, but kept to its feeding along the ground. The birds' restlessness, and a bit of squeaking on my part, caused quite a movement from ground to trees and back again. During these movements we did catch several glimpses of the bird we sought though it did not pause long enough at any one time to be thoroughly studied. When the flock finally took off most of the group had seen, at least briefly, one of the more uncommon bird visitors to this area. When I examined my records at home I found that it was on October 31st last year that I saw one of this species. Quite possibly the migrating junco flocks that are pushing southward at this period have far more of these red-backed juncos amongst their numbers than we ever see for they can easily be passed by. In identifying them one has to be careful not to confuse the brownish young of the year, and the light-colored females with these birds. The brownish or tan tints in the former are fairly evenly distributed whereas in the Oregon junco the black head and ruddy back is strongly contrasting.

The chase after the junco elicited the sight of an immature black-crowned night heron which was disturbed along the edge of the marsh, and flew off across the river to Number 4 marsh. We walked to the lookout over this marsh and raked the edge of the cattails along the open water with our binoculars in search of the heron. It or another was easily detected over in the northwest corner standing rigid, in the manner of its kind, its head cocked to one side awaiting some hapless frog or fish. Our hunt not only discovered one but three night herons -- a second on the south edge, and a third right in the midst of the cattails along the little channel which drains the marsh. As we were congratulating ourselves on these finds -- my latest record for the species, bar one -- a smaller heron rose clumsily from the midst of the rushes just across the river from where we stood. Its blue-green wings and way of flight showed it to be a green heron, -- an even more astonishing straggler than the night herons, and my latest record. It flew a short way and then fortunately alighted on a dead stick for several minutes so that we could all get a look, though, had we not seen it drop in the marsh we would scarcely have detected it so well hidden was this perch. And then a fourth night heron flew up the marsh! The others were all in their places. Quite a show. But we weren't through with Number 4 marsh yet for three rather nondescript ducks had appeared in the southeasterly corner of the water and were busy feeding near the cattails. They were immature wood ducks. It seems that wood ducks bred on this marsh during the summer as they have been seen here regularly during the season, and are staying late with other stragglers. This record equals my latest date. Marsh Number 4 had certainly done us proud.

Our next stop was at Number 2 Marsh, -- never as good as the other two for unknown reasons. There were some coots here and a few black ducks.

We had driven by the spot when I decided that it might be well to look over the river from the bank behind the Kingsway Club, as I had seen some ducks from upstream at the drainage outlet. We backed and drove in. No sooner were we out of the car than our ears were filled with the chup, chup calls of myrtle warblers. They were down the bank in the field to the south where there is a heavy growth of high weeds, a few shrubs and small trees. We could quickly see two myrtles

dashing madly through the tangle. Then there were others, perhaps six in all joining in the game. It was no longer raining but heavy clouds made the day dull. Because of this the yellow rumps shone in brilliant flashes as the birds flew about. The myrtles were only a few of a motley band of migrants as we now discovered. We must have spent almost a half-hour seeing bird after bird pop in and out of the tangles, take up temporary perches on bushes, and generally disport themselves just below where we were standing. It was a most convenient observation point since we could see down on the birds, and the shrubs in which they perched were mostly bare of leaves. All we needed was patience to see a parade, through one sumach in particular. Its grey branches had served as host to -- myrtle warblers, swamp sparrows, song sparrows, juncoes, tree sparrows, a ruby-crowned kinglet, a white-crowned sparrow, and a fox sparrow -- before we ceased to watch it! All of them were seen in perfect light under the best of conditions. The fox sparrow was my first this fall, and the white-crown my latest record for that species.

Sunnyside's waters were teeming with winter ducks. We all admired especially the beautiful colors and forms of the male old squaws, their long-pointed tails, riding high above the water, giving them a very jaunty appearance. There were many of them today, and they quite overshadowed the females -- dingy, without the proud long tails -- who hardly seemed to belong to the same family.

There were no great surprises along Sunnyside. The next astonishment did not arise until Mrs. Williams' keen searching of the breakwalls was rewarded by the sight of a largish dark bird standing on a wall. Spied through an aperture between two houses as we were nearing Exhibition Park it was a very good find indeed -- in fact a real discovery as we soon were to see, for when we had rushed to the lakefront we saw on the wall a double-crested cormorant diligently preening itself! After a few moments' observation I ran down the bank, waving my arms, in order to scare the bird into flight so that the others could see it go. The ruse worked -- that is the cormorant stopped preening, stared for a moment at my gyrations, raised its wings and dove off the wall on the lake side. I stopped on the beach waiting for it to reappear flying -- but I waited and waited and it did not come into sight. Puzzled I re climbed the bank, and found that it had simply taken a dive into the lake, and had started to swim away rather than fly. From where we stood it was quite visible, its long snaky neck held at a slight forward inclination, the bill and head tilted upward in the usual "snooty" manner. Again this was a latest record for me.

It was Mrs. Williams, too, who spotted a smaller bird standing at the end of a row of gulls on the breakwall near Stanley Barracks. Out of the car we could see there were two such birds, one on the upper level, and one on the lower level of the wall. The upper one was attending to its plumage, whilst the lower bird was sound asleep, head under wing. They were plovers, but it took us a full ten minutes of close watching before the preening bird would lift its wings to expose the tell-tale black axillars of the black-bellied plover. When the active bird had accommodated us then the sleepy one woke up, and put its wings up too -- much as to say, "Well, if you people are so curious I'll show you too. Now go away and let me sleep!" It also was a black-bellied plover. They might have been golden plovers. Hence our wait to see this performance.

By the time we reached Ashbridge's Bay it was the lunch hour. We settled down on the wide step of the refreshment booth, now closed for the winter, for a most sumptuous lunch, prepared by the ladies. The pièce de résistance was a wonderful pot of beans brought by Mrs. Wilcox straight from her oven where it had been cooking all night. The beans were served right out of the pot, steaming hot, here beside the lake where the waves, driven by an easterly wind were crashing on the beach a few feet away.

Lunch over we walked across Leslie Street to the marsh. Soon we were busy once more studying ducks. This time it was teal that held our attention. First of all a blue-winged teal flying across the water flashed his powder-blue badges. But it was two male green-winged teal, standing on a ribbon of mud not far out, that gave us the finest display when they leisurely extended their wings, holding them out for a long moment whilst we gazed in admiration at their exquisite green speculums.

Shorebirds also were much in evidence here. The trouble was they persisted in sticking to the farther stretches of mud. Most of them were identifiable by their calls, or during brief flights but for a long while they refused to come any nearer where we could get a good sight. This was disappointing and tantalizing. We did finally discover a greater yellow legs standing alone quite near our side of the marsh. It did not fly, when it saw us watching, though it began nervously to bob its head, and raised its wings a few times as if preparing to take off, when we approached as near as we could. At this point we were about 30 feet off its mud, and able to look down at it. Now we could see every detail easily. As we studied this yellow legs it commenced to whistle the hu-hu-hu call of its kind. I took up the refrain and answered it. Whether it was the bird's calling or our duet, I cannot say, but in the midst of this performance we were entranced when two dozen more yellow legs rose suddenly from a distant mud bank, circled over the water, and swept gracefully around until they were directly before our eyes, and as near as their standing kinfellow. All the flock was calling merrily, and their whistles filled the air. They dipped low to survey the lone bird we had been watching and abruptly dropped to land on a patch of mud only a little beyond. It was a thrilling sight, and now we had a whole flock to study right before our eyes. Both lesser and greater yellow legs were present though there were only two of the former species. The other shore birds, amongst which there was a white-rumped sandpiper, did not follow the yellow legs but we were satisfied even so. Ashbridge's Bay had been a very worthwhile stop.

Eastern Gap was bare of ducks today, but on the Ward's Island wall was a goodly congregation of roosting gulls. Amongst them were two great black-backs which was pleasing to us as one or two of the ladies had never seen this gull before. We walked out to the lighthouse and searched the heaving lake for other birds. They were there but very far out. Close to the horizon we could see flock after flock of ducks -- scoters and squaws -- migrating eastward low over the waves. Unfortunately, the scoters were too far away to tell what species were represented. I would have liked to know, especially as I have not seen either American or Surf Scoters this year. But today we had to pass them by as simply scoters, species unknown. Back on the beach at the gap were two sanderlings. In running around them to try and get on the other side so as to force them to run towards the ladies, I nearly trod on four snow buntings feeding amongst the low bidens plants. These are my first buntings of the season. It is about the average time for them to appear, and this is the place where I have most commonly seen the first comers. I

believe that many buntings customarily pass through this region towards the end of October, along with other winter birds, and go on further south. Our own winter residents do not usually appear until later, towards the end of November, or even later.

Our final visit of the day was to York Mills (Cedar Woods) where we tried to get sight of a long-eared owl seen there on Sunday by Bill Giles. In this hope we were disappointed, but, as so often happens, we saw other birds that compensated for any disappointment -- in this case a flock of magnificent fox sparrows which we disturbed from beneath the hemlocks and cedars where they were feeding. For a little the darkening woods, where the rain was beginning to fall again, was filled with bright flashes of tawny red as these beautiful birds fled before us.

The day which began with rain, over which dark clouds had lowered all the while, was ending with rain. None the less this day had provided us with the sight of 55 kinds of birds -- my best end of October daily list around Toronto -- and many of them under ideal observing conditions. In addition I had made some interesting late records. Six of the species seen constituted my latest observations, e.g.: green heron, wood duck, gallinule, white-rumped and semi-palmated sandpipers, white-crowned sparrow; four species -- black crowned, night heron, double-crested cormorant, blue-winged teal, and black-bellied plover -- were my latest observations. All these late observations indicate that the prolonged warm weather is having the effect of increasing the number of late stragglers amongst the birds. The bulk of the migrants, of course, have kept very well to their regular time schedule despite the weather.

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Early in September Dr. E. L. Brereton, Barrie's most ardent bird watcher, had certain interesting encounters with birds along Lake Bernard. He has been kind enough to share them with the readers of the Newsletter. In his letter he writes,

"September 1st Mrs. Brereton and I went north for a week's holiday. Finding very comfortable accommodation at Hotel Bernard, Sundridge, we decided to remain there for a few days. The following morning I walked down to the shore of Lake Bernard and, being under orders to rest, sat down on the soft side of a large hard rock at the water's edge. I had only been there a few minutes when I noted a shore bird sailing in toward me. It lit about ten feet away from me. It was a turnstone, an immature I thought. It looked me over very carefully wondering, no doubt, what kind of a rare species I was. Having decided that I was harmless, it started looking for food and came within three feet of me several times but showed no sign of fear. For half an hour I watched it as it worked back and forth never more than thirty feet from me. Sometimes it waded out in the shallow water picking invisible (to me) objects off the surface of the water. Most of the time it remained on shore turning over stones and small chips; there too it picked up many bits that I could not see. Once it picked up a medium sized earthworm which it tried to break up but finally got hold of by one end and the worm disappeared. Another time it turned up the remains of a six or seven inch fish. Through the binoculars I could only see skin and bones but it spent several minutes picking at it and appeared to be finding particles of flesh. Finally it turned up something different about ten feet from me. I was surprised to discover through the glasses that it was working on a peanut. It soon opened up the shell, then pecking hard at the water-soaked kernels, broke them up and swallowed the

pieces. It immediately turned up another peanut out of the damp sand and following the same methods, soon had the second peanut well on the way to being transformed from peanut to turnstone. After finishing it the bird moved up in the dry sand, drew one leg up, let its head settle down on its breast, then blinked its eyes as though ready for a nap. I quietly moved away and left it.

About 15 minutes after moving around the shore away from the turnstone I noted three ospreys sailing around over the bay. They came in near where I was standing. I of course, got a real thrill as I watched their graceful sailing, circling and gliding. Sometimes one of them would stop and fluttering its wings would remain stationary, no doubt watching something in the water. To me they appeared to be one adult and two immatures. Finally the 'adult' turned down and gliding swiftly to the water, plunged in. It came up with a fish and started down toward the far end of the lake with the other ospreys following.

The next morning I went down to the shore and soon saw one osprey circling about. It made a dive and a catch and then had to try some six or seven times before it was able to get out of the water with its catch. It had more difficulty getting under way. In both cases the fish was held head forward and body of fish horizontal or in line with the body of the bird. The first fish was about 12 inches. I thought the second one was nearer 18 inches. Later I was informed that there is an osprey nest in that area at the far end of Lake Bernard."

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One of our members, Alan C. Telfer, has been far afield this summer. Like a good bird watcher he has found much to look at in his travels. In a recent letter from Cape Town, South Africa, he encloses a list of birds seen on "only half a day's jaunt, and of course right in the middle of the South African winter."

The list was so remarkable for so short a trip even to the South African bird watcher, Mr.C.H.F.Woolley, who took Mr. Telfer around, that he published it in The Countryman. I reprint it here from that journal.

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|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Southern black-backed gull | Double-collared sunbird  | Cape Coly             |
| Pied starling              | Red bishop bird          | Olive woodpecker      |
| Glossy starling            | Laughing dove            | Cape canary           |
| Red-winged starling        | Emerald-spotted dove     | Bontrokkie (sparrow)  |
| Cattle egret               | Bar-throated warbler     | Apalis (white eye)    |
| Little egret               | Sombre bulbul            | Black cuckoo shrike   |
| Grey heron                 | Black tit                | Hammerkop             |
| Fiskaal shrike             | African hoopoe           | Black-shouldered kite |
| Fiskaal flycatcher         | Greenshank               | Dabchick              |
| Cape wagtail               | White-breasted cormorant | Burchell's coucal     |
| Crowned lapwing            | Reed cormorant           | Half-collared sunbird |
| Drongo                     | Cape darter              | Boubou shrike         |
| Black-headed oriole        | Dikkop (water)           | Turtledove            |
| Masked weaver              | Shelduck                 | "Neddergy" wren       |
| Brown-hooded kingfisher    | Egyptian goose           | Black stork           |
| Pied kingfisher            | Night heron              | Layard's bulbul       |
| Giant kingfisher           | Caspian tern             | Wood hoopoe           |
| Dusky flycatcher           | Fish eagle               | Hadada.               |
| White-flanked batis        | Yellow-billed duck       |                       |
| Malachite sunbird          | Black duck               |                       |

I expect the black-headed weaver will be queried--but three of us had an

excellent close-up view of a pair of these birds -- incidentally a species which I have not hitherto seen south of the Zambesi.

C. H. F. WOOLLEY.

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In case the readers are too astonished at the foregoing list I would bring their attention back to the home area by including here another list. This is one of birds seen in and about Toronto on October 12th and 13th during a survey conducted by several of the most active younger Toronto bird observers. They were Jim Calladine, George Gibson Neil Field, Ian Halliday, Chris Helleiner and Fred Helleiner.

Their report reads as follows:

WEATHER: The weather was generally clear and very warm for this date except for the early part of Monday morning during which the temperature remained the same but a brief rain was followed by fog (visibility 250 yds). This lifted at 11 o'clock and the only area being covered then was the Humber.

AREAS COVERED: The Islands, Cedarvale, Rosedale, Don valley, Donwoods, York Downs, Mount Pleasant Cemetery, Humber valley, Sunnyside, Lower High Park, Donlands, Sherwood Park, Strathgowan Woods, Bayview fields, Other areas were scheduled but time did not allow us to keep to our schedule.

OBSERVATIONS

|                               |     |                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|
| Horned Grebe.....             | 3   | Great Horned Owl.....         | 1   |
| Pied-billed Grebe.....        | 5   | Belted Kingfisher.....        | 5   |
| Black-crowned Night Heron.... | 6   | Yellow-shafted Flicker.....   | 33  |
| American Bittern.....         | 1   | Yellow-bellied Sapsucker..... | 1   |
| Mallard Duck.....             | 15  | Downy Woodpecker.....         | 25  |
| Black Duck.....               | 112 | Eastern Phoebe.....           | 7   |
| Baldpate.....                 | 40  | Horned Lark.....              | 8   |
| Lesser Scaup Duck.....        | 171 | Barn Swallow.....             | 1   |
| Old-squaw.....                | 3   | Blue Jay.....                 | 68  |
| Hooded Merganser.....         | 1   | American Crow.....            | 126 |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk.....       | 1   | Black-capped Chickadee.....   | 29  |
| Cooper's Hawk.....            | 3   | White-breasted Nuthatch.....  | 3   |
| Red-tailed Hawk.....          | 1   | Red-breasted Nuthatch.....    | 1   |
| Marsh Hawk.....               | 4   | Brown Creeper.....            | 8   |
| American Sparrow Hawk.....    | 4   | House Wren.....               | 1   |
| Common Pheasant.....          | 16  | Winter Wren.....              | 14  |
| Common Gallinule.....         | 10  | Long-billed Marsh Wren.....   | 4   |
| American Coot.....            | 50  | Short-billed Marsh Wren.....  | 1   |
| Semipalmated Plover.....      | 3   | Brown Thrasher.....           | 3   |
| Killdeer Plover.....          | 29  | American Robin.....           | 285 |
| American Golden Plover.....   | 1   | Hermit Thrush.....            | 19  |
| Black-bellied Plover.....     | 4   | Wilson's Thrush.....          | 2   |
| Wilson's Snipe.....           | 1   | Red-breasted Bluebird.....    | 7   |
| Dunlin.....                   | 8   | Golden-crowned Kinglet.....   | 122 |
| Semipalmated Sandpiper.....   | 1   | Ruby-crowned Kinglet.....     | 87  |
| Sanderling.....               | 1   | American Pipit.....           | 10  |
| Herring Gull.....             | 43  | Cedar Waxwing.....            | 57  |
| Ring-billed Gull.....         | 300 | Common Starling.....          | 664 |
| Rock Dove.....                | 92  | Solitary Vireo.....           | 2   |
| Black-billed Cuckoo.....      | 1   | Orange-crowned Warbler.....   | 1   |

(over)

|                                |     |                               |                    |
|--------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Nashville Warbler.....         | 1   | American Goldfinch.....       | 18                 |
| Cape May Warbler.....          | 1   | Eastern Towhee.....           | 7                  |
| Myrtle Warbler.....            | 87  | Vesper Sparrow.....           | 1                  |
| Black-throated Green Warbler.. | 2   | Slate-coloured Junco.....     | 54                 |
| Palm Warbler.....              | 4   | Chipping Sparrow.....         | 4                  |
| Ovenbird.....                  | 1   | Field Sparrow.....            | 3                  |
| Maryland Yellowthroat.....     | 1   | White-throated Sparrow.....   | 171                |
| English Sparrow.....           | 178 | Lincoln's Sparrow.....        | 2                  |
| Eastern Meadowlark.....        | 2   | Swamp Sparrow.....            | 19                 |
| Red-winged Blackbird.....      | 20  | Song Sparrow.....             | 93                 |
| Rusty Blackbird.....           | 12  |                               |                    |
| Crow Blackbird.....            | 5   | TOTAL NUMBER OF SPECIES -     | 85                 |
| Cowbird.....                   | 35  | " " " INDIVIDUALS             | 3,217              |
| Cardinal.....                  | 30  |                               |                    |
| Evening Grosbeak.....          | 1   | Total number of hours afield, | 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ . |

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Miss E.H.Weinert, another member of this club, has sent me a letter she received from Mr. A.E.Shirling of Kansas City, Mo. containing an account of a bird incident in Estes Park, Colorado last June which the readers of the Newsletter will find full of interest. Mr. Shirling says:

"Dr. Conn forwarded the booklet Canadian Birds to me here in Estes Park. It was very kind of you to send it to me. It is well written, and the sketches are good. It has helped me to clear up the identification of a little bird that I see along a roadway here in the Park, in a dry, short-grass pasture land. The bird is Sprague's pipit.

We had a heavy snow here June 11. Birds came around the cabin hunting for food. I put out food for them in a coffee can suspended in by the window, also on a tray on a stump near by. The birds came in numbers, fluttering before the window and perching on the can to feed. The day before the snow the landscape was dotted all over with blooming wallflowers. The heavy wet snow weighted them down but a hummingbird found one that was not quite covered and hovered over it getting nectar during a heavy snow fall.

Many of the Canadian birds mentioned in the booklet are found here in the high altitude of Estes Rocky Mountain National Park."

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R. M. Saunders,  
Editor.