

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

MARCH MEETING

Royal Ontario Museum, Monday, March 4, 1946 at 8.15 p.m.

TREES

By Mr. A.W.Galbraith, Toronto

Mr. Galbraith is a professional photographer who has photographed hundreds of distinguished people. He is an enthusiastic photographer of trees and has addressed many meetings using his beautiful slides.

ROTUNDA DISPLAY

Some of Mr. Galbraith's photographs of trees will be on display.

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March Outing

Saturday, March 9, 1946 at 2.30 p.m.

Humber Valley, Old Mill district. Meet at Bloor and Jane Streets.

This is a good area for early spring migrants.

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The motion proposed by Prof. McIlwraith and seconded by Mr. Alexander Cameron, that the fees for this club should be \$2.00 per year, was carried by an overwhelming majority. The fee of \$2.00 will be due in September next.

THE NEWSLETTER

of the Toronto Field Naturalists' Club

Number 58

February, 1946

The third of February was another, cold, clear, crisp winter's day. Greer Roberts picked up Bill Smith and me at my home at eight o'clock; and we proceeded to get Ott Devitt and Doug. Miller on the way north. By nine o'clock we were trying to get through the cedar swamp on the West Franklin road to Pefferlaw Creek.

The icy grade of the first hill stopped us, however, as there were no chains on the tires. We had to get out, push the car a little, and walk back whilst Greer backed up a good part of a mile to find a place where he could turn around. It seemed extremely cold when we got out of the car. There was a "burning" sensation on the cheeks as we walked along, and ears began to feel the nip in a moment or two. A bit of northerly wind added zip to the temperature. We guessed that it might be about 10 or 12 degrees below zero. Only the next morning did we learn from the paper that it was about thirty below zero in that region Sunday morning! This is the coldest that any of us have ever been out birding, but it was no less interesting for that; more so in a way to see what would be around. Even on that coldest mile, the glass went up to about 10 above before the morning was out - we saw redpolls, and heard a bunting calling far off. Sound travels well on such a clear cold day.

We were lucky to extricate ourselves so easily from the untravelled back road for we saw many cars in drifts and in ditches during the day. Fortunately we could get to Pefferlaw Creek on travelled roads, and we kept to these thenceforth. Here and there it was hard going, where drifting snow had blown in since the snow plough last passed; but we suffered no further mishap. Just as we reached the edge of the Pefferlaw Creek woods we spied a snow plough coming toward us down the hill from Sandford. Like some great Atlantic liner heading into high seas it came hurtling toward us throwing a "bow wave" of flashing snow high into the air. We stopped, not daring to try and pass this monster, and wondering if the driver could see us through the snow screen. On nearer approach we could detect a turret or cage from which the driver could survey the road ahead. Upon discovering us he slowed the monster, manoeuvred carefully alongside our car, and resumed his spectacular course up the road. We drove on the bridge and parked in our favored spot over the creek.

Only Greer and I had been to this area before. We were delighted that it was so lovely a day to introduce the others to the new region; almost as beautiful as the first day we "discovered" Pefferlaw Creek. True, there had been no ice storm to work its fantastic artistry, but all the wood was decorated with a blanket of fluffy, fresh-fallen snow that set every evergreen, and the whole forest floor agleam under the brilliant sunshine. The spotless blue sky overhead added a further exhilarating touch to the glistening world.

We had left the car when many squeaks and shrill peeps told us of the presence of a flock of chickadees nearby. We found them working along a line of cedar trees on the north side of the road just across a clearing. South-facing, and full in the sun, these trees were as warm a place as could be had on this zestful morning. Accompanying the chickadees were some unexpected bird friends, a number of lively pine siskins. All the birds were busy feeding on the cedar cones, or on the dormant insect life (probably the food of the chickadees) on the twigs and leaves. They kindly displayed themselves before us at convenient range for as long as we cared to look. Shortly after we quit that spot and had entered one of the woods' trails we heard siskins again, and retraced our steps to the road to find another flock of 18 or more similarly busy with cedar trees. It is worth noting that the typical shree - ee note was not used once whilst we were in hearing of either flock. There was a constant, subdued chatter going on all the time, and this was punctuated infrequently by calls resembling the per - ee notes of the goldfinch and the redpoll, but somewhat shriller and heavier in quality. These notes were halfway between shree - ee and per - ee. Only two or three of the birds showed strong yellow wing markings. The rest were a singularly drab-colored lot.

In the woods we found many tracks. There was a surprising number of fresh deer trails, all converging on the centre of the main cedar bog. Snowshoe and cottontail rabbit runs were legion. One fox had wandered about, apparently following a rabbit spoor. The red squirrel, that we caught up to, and several mice trails added their patterns to the tell-tale snow. Amongst the trees, birds were not plentiful and our findings there were limited to chickadees, a few golden-crowned kinglets, and a creeper. From the road Doug saw two ruffed grouse fly up from the ground and into the woods, but the rest of us missed them. We had expected flocks of redpolls and pine grosbeaks to be flying and calling overhead, but in this we were disappointed. After eating lunch in the car we tried one more trail into the woods but found the early afternoon period to be quieter than the morning. I saw a single redpoll flying and calling chu - chu, chu - chu as if in search of its fellows who had gone off and left him alone.

On our way back to Newmarket we somehow got off the road and suddenly came into Vivian, that we had planned to miss. Since we were there we made a brief survey along the road that borders the Vivian Forest. We saw no birds but had a little visit with the huge St. Bernard that lives there. He looks most ferocious as he comes roaring down the entrance road but is really rather distressingly friendly.

We turned back to Vivian and then west toward Newmarket. It was well we missed our original road for within a few score yards from this turning, Bill Smith shouted, "Snow buntings." A large flock was flying across the road in front of us. It settled quickly in an adjoining field. Greer stopped abruptly. All the car's doors burst open simultaneously, and we all piled out, binoculars raised. A farmer by his house looked amazed while his two dogs barked uproariously. He turned and dashed into the house. Doug suggested he had gone for his gun to protect his family against the "gang." Maybe he took us for some of the armed robbers who have been touring the countryside recently. We stayed long enough to watch the bunting flock rise from the field, and see that no dark longspurs stood out from the snowbirds. We did hear another single redpoll calling, unseen, overhead.

Along this same road, farther on, we were vouchsafed the most unusual sight of the day. Again it was Bill who sighted a medium-sized bird carrying a burden nearly as large as itself. It was a northern shrike lugging a field mouse (microtus, probably), but a huge one. The bird's flight was labored but fast and energetic. Its wings were beating furiously as it sped past us and down across a field to a little cedar bog some 200 yards away! The last few yards were clearly very hard going but the shrike succeeded in reaching the cedars amongst which it vanished. Had the course

of its flight been down hill it is most unlikely that it would have been able to perform this feat. It would have been forced to alight much sooner for it was losing altitude all the way. That it could have carried such a burden so far even so, none of us would have considered possible had we not seen it happen. This episode is further evidence of the shrike's extraordinary vigor and tenacity.

We passed through Newmarket looking for evening grosbeaks on the Manitoba maples but found not a one, nor even a tree with any seeds left on. Crossing Yonge Street we explored the area of Mulock's Woods where we were distressed to see that the finer part of the trees is being lumbered out. This bodes ill for the pileated woodpeckers that have made their home hereabouts for many years. They were certainly not to be seen or heard. No doubt they have departed elsewhere. We were fortunate enough, though, to hear first, then to catch sight of a male pine grosbeak. It was perched atop a small shrub up a snowy slope to the west. As it was some distance away it registered only as a roseate-hued shape against the blue horizon before it dropped down into a little hollow filled with sumachs. We did not see it again though we heard it calling several times.

At St. Andrew's Woods we followed a skier's trail among the tall, bare deciduous trees; again we searched for pileated woodpeckers. Though once more disappointed by this species, we were not without gain for Greer spotted a horned owl sitting beside the trunk of a tall maple tree, some 20 feet up. A downy woodpecker, working not far away, and calling constantly should have warned me of the predator's presence, but I did not heed the sign, putting the downy's performance down to exuberance, or to social feeling as there was a second downy a little distance off. The owl was a light grey fellow, very tame, or at least approachable, allowing me to run up to a spot nearly under its perch before it leisurely raised its wings, elevated its rear, and let loose a huge amount of white droppings almost on my head. It then slipped off the perch, glided a short distance to another tree, there to perch, glaring back at us in a most annoyed manner. We searched the snow for pellets, but found none.

Our final stop for the trip was just behind Mrs. Williams' house in Aurora. We were still on the lookout for evening grosbeaks. Just after we turned into the road, I spied a few of these finches in a well-laden Manitoba maple tree. When we were out on the road we discovered that there was a good-sized flock scattered through several trees. They kept moving about from tree to tree, and onto nearby roofs. At one breathless moment there were 17 black and golden males lined up along an eavestrough full of molted snow water, with the afternoon sun shining full upon them. Everyone remarked upon the astonishing brilliance of the plumage under these conditions. No color plate does it justice. There were 24 birds in the flock; 17 males was therefore a remarkably high percentage. As we watched, the flock assembled in the largest tree and became very quiet as if preparing for the night's rest. Only one bird uttered the sharp creaking note so common to these birds while we were there. Such a sight was a fitting close to an excellent trip.

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So many members have desired to see the paper read by Mr. Alexander Cameron at the January meeting that I asked him to allow me to publish it in the Newsletter. He has graciously consented to do so. I am very pleased to be able to offer it to you in this issue.

TREES

With Special Reference to Those in Queen's Park

In the whole field of botany, trees possibly have the most general appeal, for they are surely the crowning glory of nature's marvellous works. All forms of plant life appeal to me very strongly, but I love trees, and most people feel the same way towards them. It is possibly easier to arouse interest in trees than in any other branch of botanical study. One reason for this is no doubt the fact that like birds the large majority of trees have common names. All trees, whether they are growing in solitary splendour, or in the luxuriant wealth of the forest are equally beautiful. They are all so magnificently beautiful and are all so extremely interesting, each with its own special appeal, that it is very difficult to single out any as worthy of special notice or admiration. But just as there are certain human beings whom we take to more readily than to others, so there are certain trees that every one comes to look upon as favourites for one reason or another. There are a few trees, therefore, which have always appealed very strongly to me, and which may all be seen within the limits of our city.

When we moved up to the part of the city we now live in, a few years ago, one of the first things I did was to explore the district to see what there was in it of interest from my point of view. One evening I walked down Mount Pleasant Road, and had turned east on the south side of Heath Street, when I suddenly stopped and remained standing until I began to be afraid the people of the neighborhood might wonder what was the matter with me. This is what was holding me spellbound. On the opposite corner of the street stood a very fine specimen of the Cut-leaf Hanging Birch. There was a fairly stiff breeze blowing, and the long streamers, bedecked with their beautifully cut leaves, were swaying backwards and forwards in the most graceful manner. If you do not know this tree, then let me assure you it is well worth a visit. Even just now, when its branches are leafless, it is a sight worth going to see, but if you go on some summer day when it is in its full beauty and if you are lucky enough to choose a day when the wind is moderately strong, then you will see something worth going quite a distance to see - you will understand why I lingered there so long that I became afraid people might begin to question my sanity. The Birch has been called the fairy tree. If that is so, then this variety is the Queen of the Fairies.

On another evening I walked north on Mount Pleasant Road past the Northern Vocational School, and again I stopped, as I so frequently do when on walks, just to feast my eyes. This time, fine specimens of two of my favorite trees were in view. In the foreground were two Lombardy Poplars - emblems of uprightness, surely. These trees are a grand sight in their stately loveliness on a calm day, but they are a sight never to be forgotten when swaying and tossing in a gale - when the wind is making music in their branches.

A little further back from these poplars is one of the grandest specimens of another of my favorite trees that I know. It is a native, and for that reason often overlooked in our search for beauty. I am speaking of the White Elm, so common in our city and everywhere in our region. What would our Ontario landscape be without the White Elm? What would our Ontario landscape artists do without the White Elm? It figures so prominently in so many of their pictures. With its graceful, sweeping branches, it is one of the most beautiful features of our landscape. Even in winter, when its limbs are gaunt and bare, it is a lovely sight. On the night when I saw this particular tree for the first time, it was silhouetted against a sunset sky, and presented a picture worthy of any artist's brush.

The other tree I wish to single out for special mention is the Weeping Willow. This tree, on account of its striking beauty, is also frequently introduced into pictures. Its long drooping branches and long narrow leaves are suggestive, to some, of sorrow and weeping, and for this reason we frequently see this tree in cemeteries, but it never suggests sadness to me. It is its extreme beauty that appeals to me and gives me a thrill of joy. Again, when this tree is enlivened by a breeze, its beauty is greatly enhanced. Its scientific name is Salix Babylonica, suggested by a passage in the 137th Psalm. "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof."

Trees live to a great age. Possibly the oldest living things in the world are trees. Men grow to love abiding things, and that is, no doubt, another reason why most people love trees. At Niagara-on-the-Lake last summer, along with some friends, I saw a huge and venerable oak tree. Its trunk was approximately nine feet in diameter, and it branched out, about fifteen feet above the ground, into five stems, each of which would have been considered a good-sized tree. What interesting things this tree could tell us if it had only the power of speech!

They say there are Cedars on Lebanon to-day, which were spared by the axes of Solomon's woodmen when he was building his temple. There are gnarled old olive trees on Olivet that might have rustled their leaves in the ears of the Master and His twelve disciples, and that might have listened to the music of His voice as He taught them, and to His agonized prayer on the night of His betrayal. There are ancient oaks and beeches in Sherwood Forest which have tingled to the horn of Robin Hood, and have listened to the merry laugh of Maid Marian.

Just try to think of the Cedars in Syria, and giant Sequoias on the Pacific slopes that are as old as history. John Muir, the naturalist, tells us that he counted the rings of one Sequoia which was more than 4000 years old, and still in vigorous health, showing no signs of senile decay. Can we get an adequate conception of the age of such trees? It is nearly two milleniums since Christ was born. That is a long time according to human reckoning. Yet at that time those trees had already lived half of their lives. They were then fully matured trees. We humans strut around in our self-conceit, and call ourselves Lords of Creation, but just stop and think how many generations of men have come and vanished into oblivion since those trees were seedlings.

You may think that there is little for a botanist to see in winter-time. That is quite true with regard to many branches of botany, but it does not apply to the study of trees. It is in winter when the deciduous trees have shed their leaves, that the real beauty of their form and of the branch and twig tracery is fully revealed. A tree in winter is the very symbol of aspiration, lifting the soul as it lifts the eye to the Infinite. Again, on a sunny winter morning, when the branches are covered with a silvery incrustation of snow or brittle ice, trees can fill the soul with rapture. The iridescence of the glistening branches is one of the loveliest sights in nature, and can stir the most unresponsive heart to its depths. It is something we are not privileged to see very often, possibly only once in a winter, and this only adds to our appreciation. A spruce decked with a mantle of snow is a sight we all comment upon. Such displays of beauty almost make us gasp in wonder and admiration.

The study of trees can be pursued as readily and as profitably in winter as in summer. With one or two exception of very closely related species, it is possible to tell what trees are, even in winter, by their form and their branch and twig systems, and when you come to closer range and study their bark and winter twigs, identification can be, in the majority of cases, comparatively easy, and it is a most interesting and fascinating study. It is in winter that we really realize the marvellous variety of form, to say nothing of detail, which trees possess.

It is surprising how much of interest a keen naturalist can find without travelling very far from home. We are particularly fortunate in this respect in the city of Toronto. We have very beautiful parks and ravines and woodlands, not too badly spoiled by the encroachment of civilization, where a surprising number of interesting and beautiful natural objects can be found. Sunnybrook has been taken away from us, where most of us have spent many happy days, and we have grave misgivings as to what will happen to the old belt-line track when the new speedway is built, but still many worth-while places remain. For instance, in Mount Pleasant Cemetery we have an arboretum of no mean order. It is a veritable tree-lover's paradise. In High Park and some of the other parks you will also find many interesting trees. In the Queen's Park and the adjoining University grounds, one can spend a very interesting afternoon studying the trees which are to be found there. It is of little use merely to give you a list of those trees, but I advise you to get a copy of the check-list of trees which our club has just published, and which has been so ably prepared by our fellow-member, Mr. Owens. In it you will find a list of the more interesting trees to be found in Queen's Park, as well as several other locations. In the Queen's Park you will find a few real aristocrats of the realm of trees.

On entering the park from College Street at University Avenue, you will find a Ginkgo tree at the west side of the road. This tree was quite a good specimen, but several years ago it was moved, at considerable expense when they were widening the street, and it has suffered badly from the experience. The Ginkgo tree is sometimes called the Maidenhair tree because the fan-shaped leaves resemble, in shape, those of the Maidenhair fern, although much larger. It is an extremely interesting tree, a native of China, but now found only in temple gardens. It is of erect habit, with sparlike branches. This tree is a gymnosperm, and is closely related to the coniferous trees, but it bears a small plum-like fruit, with a comparatively large stone, which is white and shaped somewhat like a small filbert. The trees are dioecious and there are specimens of both sexes in Mount Pleasant Cemetery so that you may see both staminate and pistillate catkins there. If you have never seen these catkins, here is something interesting to look for next spring. There are trees there also that bear fruit. The Ginkgo has the distinction of being the solitary surviving species of its order.

Quite near the Ginkgo you will find the Ohio Buckeye, and right alongside the common Horse Chestnut for comparison. Even at this time of year you can notice the difference in the bark, the twigs and the shape of the tree generally.

Near Simcoe Hall you will find specimens of the Constantinople Hazel Nut, which hangs out its catkins in winter. It is an arresting sight to see these trees decked with their long, yellowish male catkins and well worth a trip to see them.

Further up the Park you will find specimens of the Amur Cork tree. The bark of these trees is extremely beautiful, being corky and marked with a very decided and pretty pattern. The leaves are compound, the leaflets long-pointed, with the margins fringed with hairs, and they are aromatic. The flowers are yellow, very small and inconspicuous, in terminal panicles. The fruit is a small berry which smells of turpentine when crushed. These trees belong to the rue family and come from North China.

On the path leading from Hoskin Avenue to Bloor Street you will find the Varnish Tree of Pride of India. It belongs to the order Sapindaceae, and, therefore, is a close relative of the Horse Chestnut. The leaves are both pinnate and Bi-pinnate

and the flowers are yellow, in large terminal panicles; the fruit is inflated, with papery walls, containing three black seeds. This tree also comes from China.

You will also find specimens of the Hackberry or Sugarberry here. This is a native tree which possibly reaches its northern limit about the Milton escarpment where I have seen a fine specimen. The specimens in the Park, however, have been planted. This tree belongs to the elm family and resembles the elms in many ways. Possibly the most interesting thing about it is the pith in the twigs. If you split a twig down the middle with a knife, you will find a white, beautifully chambered pith. The bark is very different from that of an elm. It is frequently covered with wart-like ridges, which often extend well up into the branches.

In a bed of shrubs and small trees on the east side of the Park you will find the Cornelian Cherry - Cornus was a dogwood from Europe. It has clusters of small yellow flowers in early spring, before the leaves come out, and in the autumn has large, oval, shining red berries which are suggestive of cherries and very beautiful.

My advice to you, if you wish to add a new joy to your life, is to get a copy of the new check-list of trees, and make a tour of Queen's Park and some of the other locations listed, and see how many of the worth-while trees you can identify. It will be an entirely new thrill, for up to now only our bird enthusiasts have been able to mark off a check-list when on an outing. And it is surprising how quickly an enthusiastic beginner can learn to know most of the trees to be found in the Toronto region.

Alexander Cameron.

R. M. Saunders,
Editor.