

THE NEWSLETTER

OF THE TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB
Number 15 April 1940

Spring has come. It has come late, but now birds are arriving in numbers, insects are abroad, early trees are in blossom, and even a few flowers are in sight. Let us take a walk along one of Toronto's best-known trails and see what is to be seen this third week of April.

If we start at Bloor and Quebec streets, we will find a path winding down through the pines at the northwest corner of High Park. This we follow only a few steps to where a tangled gully plunges down into a wet spot covered with brush and brambles. As we stand on the edge of the last little dip towards the little bog, there is a startling movement as a woodcock whirrs from the very toes of our boots and sails whistling away to the further bank, a pattern of russet red and dark brown as it goes. As it settles we are astonished to see it disappear instantaneously amidst the leaves, for although our binoculars are on it, its mottled browns have merged completely with the fallen leaves. Unless it moves we shall have to flush it again to see it.

Getting down into the thicket, we cross the wet part towards the tangle at the west end just below the filling station. Old papers and cans, Bloor street refuse, have been hurled down this bank but we still should find...Yes, there they are! We stop to observe three large sparrows, literally bouncing up and down under the thicket, sending the leaves and dirt flying every time they bounce, and evidently finding good food in the cleared spots. They are big fellows with bright reddish tails and wings, with heavy lines of reddish spots along the sides, and a curious mixture of grey and reddish on the head. Of course, they are the fox sparrows. We wish they would stop just a moment to sing, for they are singers of note. No, they are too busy. It is always so. We have never heard them sing, but some day we shall be in the north when they arrive, and then we shall hear that rollicking song. It is a pleasure to anticipate--there are always such in watching birds.

Following now the path that accompanies the tiny stream that emerges from a pipe under Bloor street and pursues its short rusty course to Grenadier Pond, we pass through "pussy willows" where tree sparrows sing excitedly or scatter from our feet with high-pitched notes of alarm. A cardinal is pouring out melody above a house to the west. Song sparrows,

grackles, cowbirds, and bluejays, with one laughing, white-breasted nuthatch, provide a strangely harmonious accompaniment. Coming up onto the dump, now covered with weeds and grasses, we find juncoes rising ahead of us at every step, flashes of white in every direction. Some of them settle on the birches over the stream, and the mellow trill of the junco's spring song ripples through the air, punctuated now and then by a phoebe's plaint, a note so ridiculously matter-of-fact as to be humorous in contrast. We have now reached the little bridge at the north end of Grenadier Pond. This is a spot that sometimes holds a special surprise, as it did that day early this month when we found a Henslow's sparrow, ^{h.B} eating seeds through the edges of snow piles, quite content, just as if it wasn't quite a month early in appearing about these parts. Today, as we stand on the little bridge, there is no surprise. A few black ducks go quacking away, followed by the little green-winged teal that has been here all winter, the song sparrows dash in and out the reeds. We are not disappointed, but filled with a quiet satisfaction that spring has come at last, a feeling confirmed in us by the cheery conk-a-ree of the redwing which is filling the marsh to the south.

We meet a group of friends who have just been into Harvie's glen over there to the west of us, and they tell us that there is nothing there but the group of winter birds--chickadees, downies, white-breasted nuthatches, a hairy, and a creeper--which we have heard from a distance, so we decide to go on our way down the west side of the pond. As we near the end of the reed bed a crazy cackling among the reeds tells us of another spring arrival. Watching carefully, we catch a glimpse of a dumpy blackish bird with a red patch on its forehead, swimming jerkily across a little open spot. ^{h.B} This is the callinule, and there soon will be many others here. We have noted a few ducks on the pond but now that we are near enough to identify them we have a real surprise. ^{h.B} It's a find! A male shoveller right at the beginning of open water, hidden by the reeds until now. The shoveller's a rare bird at Toronto. Never have we had a chance to examine a fine male so closely. A strongly contrasted pattern of black, white, tawny red, and green makes a vivid picture. But what colour is the head? How can we say? For the sun strikes it at different angles from moment to moment, it flashes green and scarlet, maroon, purple, blue, and black, a puzzling entrancing iridescence. From the head stretches the extraordinary broad bill that gives the bird its name of shoveller. A strangely small, light-coloured eye peers out from very high up on the side of the head. He is not in the least afraid. As we keep quiet he proceeds with his dabbling for food. As head and upper part disappear under the water, tail, rump, and belly are raised high, a curious curved triangle of black, white, and tawny red, propelled by

vigorously beating orange feet. With some reluctance we decide to leave this fascinating bird. He is not alone on the pond, for there are horned and pie-billed grebes, ring-necked, black, mallard, golden-eye, and bufflehead ducks, and hooded mergansers, but for us he dominates the picture: we will remember this as the day on which we saw the male shoveller at Grenadier.

We can go no further with you on this walk, much as we would like to, but do you continue, please, by yourself, down to Sunnyside, along to the Humber, and up the east side of the Humber to Bloor street again, examining all the marshes especially. You will see old friends and new at almost every step, all telling you, each in his own way, spring has come

We are pleased to announce that one of our members, Mr Douglas Miller, has donated, as a prize for a competition, a fine photograph by Mr Lester Belden, of one of the late Fred Barratt's best paintings, that of a wood duck. All of you who saw the exhibit of Barratt's work at the last meeting of the club must have wished to have one of his paintings. He can never paint for us again, but Mr Miller had the happy thought that a good photographic reproduction of one of the best paintings would be something worth working for. And so it is. The picture will be awarded at the Field Day meeting on June 1, at Bond Lake. It will be given to that member of the T.F.N.C. who writes the best account of an experience with birds in the Toronto area (Burlington, Holland Marsh, Whitby, are the boundaries) during the period April 1 - May 20, 1940. The account must not exceed 250 words in length. The entry will be mailed to R. M. Saunders, 31 Kendal Avenue, and must arrive by May 25. All members of the club, including the junior members, (except those who are also members of the Toronto Ornithological Club and the judges) will be eligible for the competition. The judges will be the President of the club, Richard M. Saunders, James L. Baillie of the Royal Ontario Museum, and Douglas Miller, the donor. Who of you is going to get the picture? You have a chance.

Not only birds are about, but insects and flowers too. Mr L. T. Owens saw a Compton tortoiseshell butterfly at our famous sugar-bush trip on April 6. Our secretary, Miss Grace Anderson, and Mr E. R. Tucker saw two monarch butterflies in the Don valley at Leaside on April 7. Mourning-cloak butterflies are always the first of this group to appear. They were to be seen even this year by the middle of March. You may see one in your garden as Mrs Jaquith did this last week. The flowers aren't many yet but look for skunk cabbage, the first comer. The Humber bogs will show

you some fine specimens now, especially the bog on the west side just south of Bloor street. The red maples are in bloom, and the alders have catkins. So far we haven't heard of any hepatica, but look on wooded south-facing slopes where there are sure to be some soon.

The executive of the T.F.N.C. wishes to thank all those who helped to take junior members to the sugar-bush trip at Downsview on April 1 for their generosity. It was a great favour and everyone had a splendid time. Without the help of members of the senior club it would not have been possible for the junior club to have managed the trip. They are therefore deeply grateful.

The executive wishes to thank Mr W. C. Snider, the owner of the sugar bush at Downsview for his kindness in opening his property to us, and in giving us of his time. Mr Baker, the owner of the sugar bush at Thornhill, and Miss Mason who planned the trip of April 6, also merit our most sincere gratitude for making a very pleasant trip possible.

The officers and members of the executive council of the T.F.N.C. for the season 1940-1941 are as follows:

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