

Toronto Field Naturalists' Club

171

APRIL MEETING

Monday, April 4, 1960, at 8.15 p.m.
at the
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Speaker: Dr. J. Bruce Falls, assistant professor with the Department of Zoology, University of Toronto.

Subject: "Experimental Work with the Language of Birds" - studies of bird behaviour using a tape recorder, with slides.

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SPRING OUTINGS: Please consult the enclosed folder. Thanks are due to Miss Helen Lawrence and her committee for this exciting programme.

Re transportation on out-of-town trips: The Secretary would be pleased to hear, not later than the Thursday before each trip (if not accessible by bus), from drivers who can provide transportation, and from club members who require it. In this way we hope that many will be able to enjoy the trips who could not otherwise do so. We need not remind passengers that complete co-operation with drivers is essential.

BOTANY CLUB: There will be no meeting of the Botany Club in April. Please see Spring Outings folder for details of botanical trips.

Secretary - Miss Florence Preston - HU3-9530

JUNIOR CLUB: The Junior Field Naturalists' Club will meet at 10 a.m. on Saturday, April 2, in the Museum theatre. The botany group will be in charge. "Bugs and Blossoms" will be the intriguing subject presented by Mrs. Mary Ferguson, outstanding nature photographer. Mr. Alf. Bunker will show some of his fine slides of early spring flowers. Visitors of all ages are welcome.

Director - Mr. Don Burton - RU 2-2155

AUDUBON SCREEN TOURS: Lectures so far given this year in the Screen Tours series have been outstanding. Two more lectures are yet to come, and if you have not a series ticket we suggest that you attend one or both of these. Price \$1.25 per lecture.

March 29 & 30 - "The Right to Live" by Chester P. Lyons, of Victoria, B.C. Nature in five zones of altitude from the west coast to the mountain peaks.

April 27 & 28 - "Designs for Survival" by William Anderson, of Homestead, Florida. A striking film which reveals the wisdom of Nature in equipping animals to survive in their particular environments.

These lectures are held at Eaton Auditorium and begin at 8.15 p.m.

1959 BIRD CHECKING LISTS: For the convenience of our bird-watching members we have obtained a supply of Royal Ontario Museum check lists. Price 5¢ each, obtainable from the Secretary at the meeting.

President - Mr. A. A. Outram

Secretary - Mrs. H. Robson,
49 Craighurst Ave.
HU 1-0260



Number 171

March 1960

We are delighted to have for this issue of the Newsletter Dr. C. H. D. Clarke's article on recent events in the natural history of Queen's Park. Dr. Clarke, who is supervisor of Wild Life Management in the Division of Fish and Wild Life of the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, has an office right off one corner of Queen's Park. His daily peregrinations in and about the park have obviously provided both opportunity for observation and food for thought. Even in the heart of the city a naturalist can, it seems, exercise his talents.

Queen's Park

by C. H. D. Clarke

Both Torontonians and visitors, whose journeyings lead them to the heart of the City, cannot fail to notice that parts, at least, of one of our large open spaces, none other than Queen's Park itself, are taking a beating in the initial stages of the new University Avenue subway. Before the job is done there may be a much bigger dose. What the final result will be nobody seems to know. The planners can hardly tell us because they do not see things from our point of view. What we do know for certain is that the place will never be exactly the same again. How important is this likely to be, and has Queen's Park, in the literal rather than the figurative sense, had any significance for naturalists?

The aerial photograph so often used by the Province to illustrate literature on its venerable Parliament Buildings, shows, to the north, what a forester might describe as an open stand of overmature red oak, many of them degenerate, with human use of the forest floor inhibiting all natural regeneration. A number of smaller trees could be seen when one was in the park to be planted exotics. It could also be seen on the ground that a few of the oaks were rather sound-looking white oaks. I have to force myself into the past tense, because the photograph is only a little less recent than the earth-movers. Even I, however, who know myself to be merely a contemporary of some of the planted exotics, can bear witness that the park has not always been as it was when work started. It, like ourselves, and all the rest of our environment, has never stopped changing.

When I first came to Toronto, and was admitted to the exclusive circle of the Brodie Club, then obviously open to young and callow naturalists from the counties, in spite of the chaff still blowing from their trouser-cuffs, we used to mention the occasional unusual bird in the park, partly in jest, and partly in earnest. We invariably got a rise out of the late Hubert Brown, a veteran botanist who had known the park in the '80's. Then it was a true white pine forest, a really old stand. My impression may be wrong, but it is that the pines were not cut, but died quite rapidly as the park came into its recent form of use. In the place of the pines grew the red oaks.

Every forester knows that the red oak is a low-quality, rapidly-growing species fond of very open sites, especially old fields, which its cousin, the black oak, is the first to reclaim. It has little in common with Robin Hood's oak and long before a century is out it has seen its best days. I have looked at many a stump in the park, and they all must have grown up in the openings created by the death of the pines. The white oak is a much finer and also much longer-lived species, and I wondered if it might represent an earlier age. We are told by the Reverend John Doel, naturalist, son of a Methodist brewer who eschewed spirits, and by Doctor Brodie, that there were pumas in what is now downtown Toronto a little over a hundred years ago, and it would have been pleasant to think that one of these creatures might actually have lurked in the branches of a Queen's Park tree. No dice. The biggest and finest white oak stood near the 48th Highlanders' Memorial, right in the path of progress. In spite of threatening signs I sneaked a look at the stump. Though I did not get an exact count, I found that it was the same age as the red oaks. As if to emphasize the comparative recentness of the stand, there is a sessile English oak which must surely have been planted by some long-departed dignitary since the park achieved its present status, yet it is one of the most venerable trees there.

When I first saw the park there were still a few pines, which didn't last much longer. There was also a black cherry of noble proportions, which degenerated to a short hollow trunk with a few green shoots before it was removed some ten years ago. There were many more oaks than now, and the process of dying-off had already started, because there were several well-established exotics, including a couple of London plane trees, the sessile oak, and a pin oak, sources of leaves for student collections. One of the plane trees has since died, and the pin oak grew with astonishing rapidity until it was as large as the indigenous reds. Indeed, the reds themselves must have had a similar period of vigorous growth about the nineties. Now its tips are dying and it looks a little the worse for wear even as they do -- evidently it is even more ephemeral and short-lived than the red oak, and comparable to the blacks. One day, while a graduate student, I saw, in the distance, some workmen planting trees, and the late Doctor J. H. White, then professor of Forestry, in their midst. The trees were exotic lindens and ashes, now thriving, and Doctor White told many stories, from his experience, of the vulnerability of native trees to the city air, especially the pines, whose passing from the park he lamented. One wonders just which trees are doomed as the subway advances, and what will grow in their place, when, as we assume, the hole in the park is filled in.

The birds in the park have been the usual city-dwellers, the edge-of-the-forest types that find shade trees forest enough for their needs. The extra forest touch in the park was reflected in screech owls and nesting crows. There were no fields to give a sense of the countryside, though the last meadowlark back of Trinity stayed on until 1929. Over the years there has been a surprising list of transients, but anyone who has a shaded back yard and keeps his eyes open could probably match it. The one that used to be there and is conspicuously absent now is the red-headed woodpecker, but this absence is part of a much larger story. The park mammals are squirrels, but there have been several raccoons.

The best trees used to be on the edges. They went at the end of the last world war, when the Crescent was widened and rounded off. Since then there has not been much change but anyone can foresee the ultimate decay of native trees.

Some native elements show a resistance to change. Some years ago I was walking through the park shortly after having heard Doctor E. M. Walker discourse on the strong prairie element in the insect fauna of the dry, open, sandy pine-oak "forest" of High Park. It struck me suddenly that the grass I was walking on was not a turf, but a short, dry-soil inhabiting Carex, just like the floor of those areas in High Park. I'll admit right now that I never was sufficiently curious to get it identified. In the course of walking through the Park I could see that there was a lot of the stuff, plainly a survival of the original forest, because it became evident that the caretakers dislike it. One

of the unofficial paths that I often use passes over a knoll where Carex thrives. These paths are sodded periodically, and if there are any spare sods they are deliberately plunked on top of the Carex beds. The first time I saw this I foresaw a gradual encroachment, because the rich soil of the sod should favour grass and deny the ground to the sedge which belongs properly to the dry sands of the old Lake Iroquois bed. However, in a year or two I could see that the groundsmen were defeating their own purpose. Religiously and vigorously they raked and carted away every shred of dead organic matter until in a while they were down to sand again, and back came the sedge. This form of soil destruction is familiar in parks, and generally leads to the disappearance, rather than the survival, of native plants. The Queen's Park sedge was an exception. The recession of topsoil and humus through the years can easily be measured by the buttressing of roots of the larger trees. I should say it is at least two feet.

Inevitably one tries to expand one's perspective on such a familiar area and look into the past, unrecorded, but with a few clues to challenge the guesser. For one thing, the Park was never ploughed. In the early days of settlement the lands so close to Muddy York were grabbed by speculators close to the old Family Compact. The early settlers had to pass through woods in order to get from their farms to town. However, we want to go still farther back. A pine forest in Old Ontario is not a self-perpetuating entity. How did it originate? Some pineries grew in after fire. Farther north this was universal, but fires were not quite so common here. There is no trace of fire in the soil now being exposed. The red oak complex gives us another clue. What we have is an "old field" pine forest. But who was farming here? As soon as one looks hard at it, one sees that the Park fills all the requirements of aboriginal corn culture. The Indians used sticks and antlers for hoes, and could cope only with light soils. The park soil is ideal. They liked a good site within carrying range of a spring, or a creek. A few yards away, in the University grounds, is the Taddle Creek ravine. The early missionaries in Huronia said that it was easier to get lost in the corn fields than in the forest. At that time, however, there were large unoccupied areas, of which the Toronto region was one, but our archaeologist friends tell us that their finds show that not too long before it had been well occupied. It has been pointed out that there were, at the time of settlement, numerous pineries not originating from fire all over north-eastern United States, and that these are known to reflect a great depopulation just before the first settlements were made, possibly by diseases introduced by the very first ships to reach our shores. I suggest, therefore, that our Park is an Indian field, abandoned not too long before the white man came. In the old field the invading oaks grew, to be followed in time by an "old field" type of pine forest, which flourished until the city reached it. Some years ago, thanks to the late Professor R. B. Thompson, most of the park trees had metal labels, a big help to student leaf collectors. I have racked my brains in an attempt to remember whether there were any black oaks or red pines, as in the young stands at the Humber, but would guess that for them it would be necessary to go back some years. Maybe

there is still one that I have missed.

Left alone, there might finally have been a climax white oak forest. Instead, the demise of the pines threw the land open again to red oaks, which are now past their prime and due for replacement. By what? Until the machines went in it would have been easy to say that the Park would inevitably become more and more of an arboretum, as in fact it is now, with its European lindens and Kentucky coffee-trees, others that we have named and still more that we have not mentioned.

This may seem a long story for a poor pitiful remnant of park, but I am very suspicious of naturalists whose feet never touch the ground in their own door yards, even though my own record, as revealed here, is certainly not very good. In spite of it, for years Queen's Park has been a major part of my habitat, and a good place to get down to earth now. To me it illustrates a principle about nature. The values inherent in nature are found in some measure everywhere. We cannot confine our recognition of them to a few selected sacrosanct spots. Recognized for what they are, they should be weighed everywhere along with other values. If they are sacrificed needlessly, whether in Queen's Park or Jasper Park, we lose something. I don't think we are losing anything needlessly in Queen's Park, but I may be permitted to wonder who ever gave it a thought.

Here is a tabular history, for those who like such things. All the early part is conjecture.

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| 1500 A.D. | Corn fields? (Possibly of Indians once living near the Taddle Creek, traces of whose dwellings would be obliterated by buildings, such as the Museum, Arena, Trinity and Hart House, and by roads such as the Crescent.) |
| 1600 | Oak forest invaded by pine. |
| 1880 | Mature pine forest invaded by city people and city air, both lethal to pines. |
| 1930 | Open red oak stand aged, probably prematurely, because of city gases, above, and damage to roots by raking and impacting, below. |
| 1960 | Remnant of red oak stand, with exotics added as replacements, being invaded by subway. |

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Moved by Dr. Clarke's remarks about the "surprising list" of transient birds seen in Queen's Park over the years and the possibility of matching it in some city back yard, I publish here the list of birds seen in or from my own back yard at 9 McMaster Avenue (near Avenue Road and Cottingham Street) since 1940. This list includes, of course, birds

passing over during migration. There are 124 species on the list. Other city back yards and gardens can, no doubt, offer lists of similar number and variety.

Loon
Great Blue Heron
Canada Goose
Black Duck
Turkey Vulture
Goshawk
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Bald Eagle
Marsh Hawk
Osprey
White Gyrfalcon
Duck Hawk
Sparrow Hawk
Killdeer
Spotted Sandpiper
Herring Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Rock Dove
Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Black-billed Cuckoo
Screech Owl
Horned Owl
Barred Owl
Saw-whet Owl
Whip-poor-will
Nighthawk
Hermit Thrush
Olive-backed Thrush
Gray-cheeked Thrush
Veery
Bluebird
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Cedar Waxwing
Northern Shrike
Starling
Blue-headed Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Philadelphia Vireo
Warbling Vireo
Black and White Warbler
Tennessee Warbler

Chimney Swift
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Belted Kingfisher
Flicker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Hairy Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Kingbird
Crested Flycatcher
Phoebe
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
Alder Flycatcher
Least Flycatcher
Wood Pewee
Bank Swallow
Barn Swallow
Purple Martin
Blue Jay
Raven
Crow
Black-capped Chickadee
Hudsonian Chickadee
White-breasted Nuthatch
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
House Wren
Winter Wren
Catbird
Brown Thrasher
Robin
Pine Warbler
Palm Warbler
Oven-bird
Northern Water-Thrush
Louisiana Water-Thrush
Connecticut Warbler
Mourning Warbler
Northern Yellow-throat
Wilson's Warbler
Canada Warbler
American Redstart
English Sparrow
Bobolink
Red-wing
Baltimore Oriole
Grackle

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|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Orange-crowned Warbler | Cowbird |
| Nashville Warbler | Scarlet Tanager |
| Parula Warbler | Cardinal |
| Yellow Warbler | Rose-breasted Grosbeak |
| Magnolia Warbler | Evening Grosbeak |
| Cape May Warbler | Purple Finch |
| Black-throated Blue Warbler | Goldfinch |
| Myrtle Warbler | Towhee |
| Black-throated Green Warbler | Slate-colored Junco |
| Blackburnian Warbler | Oregon Junco |
| Chestnut-sided Warbler | Chipping Sparrow |
| Bay-breasted Warbler | Clay-colored Sparrow |
| Black-poll Warbler | Field Sparrow |
| White-crowned Sparrow | Lincoln's Sparrow |
| White-throated Sparrow | Swamp Sparrow |
| Fox Sparrow | Song Sparrow |

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Pleasant memories of past experiences at the F.O.N. Camp and High hopes for a renewal of similar pleasures are expressed in Professor David Hoeniger's description of Camp Billie Bear as he saw it last year.

Camp Billie Bear: Reminiscences and Expectations

by F. D. Hoeniger

The Barrie highway, Gravenhurst, the dreary landscape between Bracebridge and Huntsville, the tourists and the Lake of Bays are behind us, now we have turned north from the Algonquin road towards Billie Bear itself. The road is rougher. We seem almost there, forgetting that at the reduced speed it will be a good half hour more--hardly in time for dinner. With the roadside trees crowding more closely, evening seems to have suddenly dropped upon us. We watch curves and hills, and honk just in case a car meeting us overconfidently takes the centre of the road. Thus occupied and expectant, we almost miss the owl--a barred owl?--fluttering silently across our path. The motor in low gear is too noisy for much song other than the faintly rasping calls of blackthroated greens and the wistful notes of whitethroats to reach our ears. At last the turn off the Longhouse road onto gravel, a few more curves at 20 or 15, a clearing and we are there. We leave the car in the ample parking lot, and dash for the dining hall. Only one long table is as yet occupied: tomorrow night (Saturday), the whole hall will be afire with conversation. A few quick and cheerful recognitions and introductions to new faces, and we are seated, with a plate of magnificent roast beef in front of us, placed there by last year's charming waitress.

At the table's opposite end is the cheerful face of T. F. (Prof. McIlwraith), the director, projected from his familiar woolen shirt. We can complete the portrait with the help of last year's memories:

running shoes, army-trousers, a pipe and pouch in the pocket (very handy in case I run out of tobacco again), and a posture so incredibly relaxed that it is hard to imagine this man leading a group on a ten-mile walk through forests and quaking bogs. But don't you underestimate T. F.! And watch carefully his instructions: not to step too closely to the red-eyed vireo's nest and thus attract scavengers! It will be wise to listen to his experienced counsel in the woods and on the lake.

How handy that Ruth Stewart should sit on our right, and Jim Simon on our left! Mrs. Stewart is the camp mother, which means that she is the busiest and most efficient person in camp--the cook not excepted. "You don't mind moving into Brother again, David and Judy?" "Of course not"; so convenient for hot water. She arranges the accommodation, becomes the clearing house for complaints by naturalists or our hosts, the Atkins's. Extremely friendly people, the Atkins's are, with a real sympathy for the naturalist, and the kind of practical business sense which expresses itself in well-equipped cottages, clean grounds, good meals, extra entertainment (though of course no T.V. set, a convenience we miss gladly, and no motorboat except one reserved for emergencies), very reasonable charges, so that clients will return. Yes, Ruth is the clearing-house for complaints, for even among naturalists, served with both comfort and proximity to the heart of nature, there will be those who need, or think they need, extras--and often they will get them, within reason. This is a holiday, after all. Mrs. Stewart thus finds time for hardly a single walk; an awful pity, for she is more knowledgeable in the field than many a less unassuming naturalist.

Jim Simon on our left will be Judy's co-leader on botany walks. Judy provides the scientific lore, if called for; Jim the identification of a host of species and subspecies in the field, with an occasional bit of instruction about plant photography, or a dash into the woods, from which he almost always returns with a new specimen for the plant-press or the lab. Jim has an amazing knowledge of plants, in the company of which he spends a large part of his life.

An hour later, we are settled comfortably in Brother, with a view over the lake and the spring peepers piping around us. Our friend, the chipmunk, is there. We have lit the stove, for the night is cool, with the ample chopped wood provided. Our warm and cool clothes, shoes and rubber boots have been tucked away in the chests and cupboard. We have cheerfully noticed new conveniences in the bathroom, hung up our binoculars, and placed Judy's botanical library and my Peterson Guide on the shelves. All is ready for a first look around the grounds, where we notice purple finches and two evening grosbeaks pecking among the pebbles of the parking lot. We dash down the narrow path, five minutes, to Mud Lake. In spite of its name, this lake is heaven to me, as it will be to most campers. The silence is deepened by a few last bird songs of a yellow-throat, perhaps a swamp sparrow, and the chatter of frogs. We notice two beavers and--we almost would have missed it--a great blue heron fishing in deadly quiet. Judy is quite as much thrilled by a patch of rose pogonia. Not far beyond the hills at the lake's other end must be

the border of Algonquin Park. A mere five miles, perhaps, though no one as yet at Billie Bear has risked the direct route across boulders and swamps. With our binoculars, we carefully examine the dead tree in the water, which last year held an Arctic woodpecker's nest: no activity there now. Content we return and sleep better than for many months.

We awake the next morning to the song of chestnut-sided warblers and the sewing machine drill of a chipping sparrow. This first Saturday is a busy day. The students arrive, sixty of them--a few familiar faces from last year, but most of them new; boys of 18 and men and women of 30 or 70; from Ottawa and Port Hope and Toronto and Timmins. Some seem for the first time to have slung binoculars around their neck, others look impressively experienced: teachers, bankers, typists, mechanics, high school students, carpenters, one doctor, and just naturalists; some with a life list of ten who have just been introduced to the barn swallows on Mr. Atkins' telephone wires, others with one of 300, intent upon rarities; some who only know birds and no plants, others who know flowers but not birds. Camp will teach them all, how desirable it is to study nature not in parts but wholly. On her toes, Ruth Stewart makes sure that all are happy.

The other leaders unpack the camp library, the jars, microscopes, electric bird - and plant identification charts in Pell and Court House. For many, these two houses will become the centres of Billie Bear activity. There they find the simplest flower guides and the most advanced books on taxonomy, lists of birds and plants seen last year at Billie Bear, and traps and jars for snakes and mice, all of which will, of course, be released on the final day of camp, after their temporary abode in Billie Bear's nature museum. Later, the leaders drive off in twos or threes with their notes taken the previous year, in search for those rare orchids or patches of royal fern or hummingbird's nest, which they hope to show off as prizes to their groups on Monday or Tuesday. Evening comes soon, and T.F. at dinner announces the first thrush walk, led by Helen Lawrence in green beret, red shirt, dark blue slacks, short rubber boots--that most patient of all teachers. This walk, to be often repeated during the coming weeks, is cherished by all, experienced and inexperienced. Barely half a mile from camp, we stop in the midst of the forest and yes! the name "cathedral forest" is proper. As the dusk spreads, first the wood and olive thrushes begin their piped chorus, and then the now rarer hermit thrush joins with its high, more flute-like song. Helen repeatedly describes the different songs in terms of contrasting spirals, the safest help in identification. But some campers need longer time for their ears to become attuned to differences in bird-song. On the way home, luckily, a goshawk flies across our path, so quickly as to be recognized only by a few.

Similar activities on Sunday are followed by a good swim in Bella Lake and, in the evening, a witty chat by T. F. on bird-identification, the first of a series of talks by leaders and visitors on various aspects of nature study, to which the "Covers" (Prof. Coventry) lecture, illustrated with breath-taking slides, will form the climax. They are all of them

pleasant and instructive, these lectures, whether on the geology of central Ontario or on birds in English literature. By Monday the six groups of ten are ready to set forth. The beginners at first stay close to the camp-grounds, the more advanced drive two miles to the New Trail or even to the East River, whose beautiful loneliness is only occasionally interrupted by the flight of a spotted sandpiper or the knocking of the pileated among the stumps left by a forest-fire. The Calopogon bog, that most exquisite spot for plantlife (bog rosemary, dwarf mistletoe, pitcher plants, the calopogon orchid) is reserved for the second week, so as to prevent it from being trampled down by nature enthusiasts. After the midday meal, we all meet on the veranda for announcements and for brief reports by the various groups about their morning's discoveries and adventures. I value these meetings after lunch. As one attends them day after day, one becomes increasingly conscious of the variety of excitement nature around Billie Bear offers, and of how everything of plant and animal life in a particular habitat is closely interdependent; certain shrubs grow on certain soil, and certain birds will only be found near these same shrubs. How silly it seems then (as I did for a long time) to limit one's source of pleasure in nature by concentrating on birds alone!

Afternoon is spent in various ways: some sleep and some swim. Others go to the books and the lab., examining their morning's finds more scientifically; others again return to the woods. Dinner, another thrush walk, or perhaps a fern-walk with Judy, a lecture, an ice-cream cone or hot chocolate in the canteen, and evening seems almost over, when T. F. speaks up: "What about a game of "Oh Hell", Frank (Dr. Frank Cook) and David?". More are soon found, only to discover that the mysterious card game is much simpler than the study of plants though hardly less exciting, for the director himself may be heard swearing appropriately, outwitted by luck or by a newcomer to the game.

The two weeks pass quickly: on the New trail, the Bobcaygeon trail; in the lodge listening to Dr. Cook's clear introduction to botanical taxonomy or, on the one day it rains, to T. F. on Canadian Indians and how they responded to their environment; at the campfire on the second Tuesday, munching wieners and singing songs; in Algonquin on the second Wednesday, hearing a report about the research that is conducted at the Wildlife Station; or just visiting lookouts for birdnests; or swimming or "oh helling"; finally at the camp party, where skits offer all the opportunity one might desire of mocking the various leaders' idiosyncrasies or failings--though to no effect except for the laughter of all. Only two weeks, and we have become a closely knit community. The day arrives too soon when we pack our boots and warm shirts into the car, and reluctantly return to civilization. But wherever that may be, we have discovered new joys to share with those at home.

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More astonishing even than the grasshopper sparrow reported in the last Newsletter is the appearance of a female smew (Mergellus albellus)

on the Niagara River. From information now received it seems that this bird has been around most of the winter, being first seen by Buffalo observers in Buffalo harbor and after staying there some weeks disappearing to be rediscovered on February 21st by a party of Toronto observers (Rosemary Gaymer, J. L. Baillie, W. W. Smith, J. Keenleyside) in the Niagara River, near Miller's Creek, a few miles below Fort Erie. Other Toronto observers (R. W. Trowern, E. Stark, D. and R. Scovell, R. M. Saunders, D. Pace) saw the bird at the same site on February 28th. In the meantime it had been photographed by Dr. Donald Gunn, and seen by George North and Don Perks on February 22-23.

The fact that this bird has been seen by so many observers, and also photographed, is of importance since no satisfactory record of its appearance in North America has ever before been made. The status of this Old World bird on this continent is stated in the A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds (Fifth Edition), p. 646, in these terms: "Audubon's sight record of this Old World species, and several other alleged occurrences in America, are unsatisfactory."

The bird, though a female, is perfectly distinctive in its markings. Our impression was of a small, delicately-formed duck, approximately half the size of the goldeneyes with which it was associating. Most conspicuous was the white face and throat which were very sharply defined, contrasting strongly with the reddish-brown head. The short, thin, darkish bill was typically merganserish. When the bird flew the elongated, narrow-bodied look was again that of a merganser, similar to our hooded merganser, though the whitish underparts and white face, coupled with the darker cap, gave it an appearance all its own. We have no duck that has this general pattern, and if we had not known that it was in the neighborhood we would certainly have been halted by the sight of so different-looking a bird.

It slept a little, while we were watching, and in the sleeping position, head tucked under wing so that the white face was hidden, it could have been mistaken for a hooded merganser by a hasty observer, though the shade of coloring on the head is not the same. It also did a little feeding, diving easily and gracefully. Mostly it kept to the outer edge of the flock, a little apart, and appeared to be taking things easy. There was no indication that it was in anything but excellent condition.

How did it get here? That is the major question. Its breeding range is in northern Scandinavia, Finland and Russia. In winter it is to be found from Southern Scandinavia south and west through England to Spain and the Mediterranean. Since it is a diving duck of the merganser group it is unlikely to have been carried westward on a boat as a land bird might be. At the same time to see how a small bird like this could have fought its way across the Atlantic against prevailing winds is hard to imagine though this might have been managed from northern Scandinavia by way of Iceland and Greenland. Since, however, this species frequents

"lakes, reservoirs, and rivers," and is occasionally to be found "in estuaries along coasts" I would suggest that the easiest route for it to make so long a journey would be to travel along the northern coast of Siberia to Alaska, thence Southeastward to our area, perhaps in the company of goldeneyes or old squaws from the North American Arctic area. No great body of open water would have to be crossed on this route and normal habitat conditions for the species would be found almost everywhere. Also it would be helped rather than hindered by the prevailing winds. Why this individual should choose or be forced to wander so far will always remain a mystery. Its appearance in Southern Ontario is the most unusual avian occurrence in many years and is likely to go unchallenged as the ornithological highlight of 1960.

R. M. Saunders,
Editor.