

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

Monday, December 4, 1961, at 8.15 p.m.
at the
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Speaker: DR. DONALD R. GUNN

Subject: BIRDS, WILD FLOWERS, AND PEOPLE OF BAFFIN ISLAND

Dr. Gunn spent several weeks last summer at Frobisher Bay, and will present to us in his own dynamic fashion the sights and sounds of Baffin Island as recorded by him on tape and film.

DECEMBER OUTING Sunday, December 10, at 9.30 a.m. - Glendon Hall (York University)
Meet at the entrance gates, 1275 Bayview Ave. Take Davisville bus to Sunnybrook Hospital, then walk north on Bayview, or take Lawrence bus east to the corner of Bayview and St. Leonard's, right at the gates.

Leaders: - Mr. Robert Taylor - Birds
Dr. Margaret Heimburger - Botany

BOTANY GROUP There will be no meeting of the Botany Group in December.

JUNIOR CLUB The Junior Field Naturalists' Club will meet on Saturday, Dec. 2, at 10 a.m. in the Museum theatre. The Mineral Group will present interesting talks, and three films. No new enrolments can be made this year as all study groups are full. Anyone who could assist the leader of the Insect Group is asked to call the director, Mr. Robert MacLellan, HU 8-9346.

F.O.N. CHRISTMAS CARDS F.O.N. Christmas Card designs have proved very popular this year. Also available are Hasti-Notes with attractive Water Lily design. On sale at the December meeting, \$1.55 per box of 12.

WE RECOMMEND Lecture on Saturday, Dec. 9, at 8.15 p.m. at Convocation Hall, University of Toronto, by Mr. Richard Pough, entitled "Nature Protection". Mr. Pough, author of the Audubon Field Guides, has for many years been associated with the U.S. Nature Conservancy. No admission charge.

ENCLOSED WITH THIS NEWSLETTER (1) Sample copy of The Young Naturalist. One subscription (11 issues) costs \$1.00. Six subscriptions only \$5.00. We heartily recommend it as a gift for your young friends.
(2) A list of books and other items of interest to naturalists, with special discount allowed.
All orders should be sent direct to the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, Edwards Gardens, Don Mills, Ont.

FEES Fees for 1961-62 are now overdue. After the December meeting we must regretfully remove from the mailing list all those who have not paid. A renewal form is provided on the last page of this Newsletter. Why not us it now, before the Christmas rush overtakes you?

President - Mr. Fred Bodsworth Secretary - Mrs. H. Robson,
49 Craighurst Ave.
HU 1-0260



NO LUCK AT ALL

Usually, stories of bird-finding trips have a heady aura of success, much the same as the old Horatio Alger novels or the Frank Merriwell sport stories. They may be stirring accounts of colourful excursions where exotic species are discovered at every turn. Or, possibly the narrator builds his story to a climactic crescendo at which point, after a day's tiring travel in search of some elusive species, it is finally found just as the weary watchers were walking woefully to their cars to start their sorrowful sojourn homeward.

In pitiable contrast to such happy reports, there now follows an account of the saddest series of dismal failures in the birding world since Noah's first feathered messenger failed to return to the Ark.

Ten years ago, I took stock of my lifetime bird list and decided it was time to concentrate on adding certain species which, up to then, had eluded me. Two of these were the spruce grouse and the yellow rail.

Knowing that other observers found both these birds with ease any time they wished, I was aware that all one needed to do was to drive to a certain spot, look around, listen a little, and the bird would be found within minutes.

Advice on the spruce grouse made the quest sound so simple that it was hardly a worthwhile challenge. You drove to a place near Bat Lake in Algonquin Park, walked for a few minutes, and a spruce grouse (or likely several of them) would appear, walk around your feet, peck at the eyelets of your shoes and generally make foolish nuisances of themselves. "Fool hens" they were called because of their fearless actions. The yellow rails, it was admitted, were hard to see. However, if you drove to Holland Marsh at the correct spot, their distinctive call note, sounding like the tapping of two pebbles, would be heard. Then, a little sharp-eyed searching might reward the observer with a look at the bird.

It was Oct. 31st, 1952, when I made my first trip to Algonquin Park for the spruce grouse. To be sure there would be no chance of failure, I rechecked directions with other birders, bought a topographical map of the area, and studied it. It was one of those beautiful October days. The sky was cloudless. A light breeze sifted softly through the balsam boughs. Gentle, soft-eyed deer greeted the intruder and welcomed me to their shadowy haunts. Everything was perfect except one detail. The grouse didn't show up. Three hundred miles of driving for nothing! The only explanation I could think of was that the grouse, in a frivolous mood, had played a Hallowe'en prank on me. I resolved to select a different date next year.

Next year I visited the Park on Oct. 25th. At the gates I met a group of birders who reported several spruce grouse so this was cheerful news. Like last year, the day was perfect. Overhead, ravens soared and croaked in the cloudless blue. Both species of crossbills lined the road; evening grosbeaks were common; Canada jays shared my lunch with me. At a beaver pond I found an otter, a mammal I never expected to see in my life. So I could not call the trip a failure - except as related to the finding of a spruce grouse. I walked for four and a half hours through what is reputed to be one of the best areas in the Park for this bird. I looked in trees, under vast expanses of bracken, and along many trails. I decided to spend more time next year.

In 1954, Olive and I decided to take three days of our vacation in May and spend them at Algonquin Park. This would give us the necessary time, as one-day trips obviously left a little too much to chance. A three-day coverage with two pairs of eyes would eliminate all chances of failure. At least it seemed that way. Well, we had a wonderful time, etc., etc. But the number of spruce grouse seen during the three days added up to zero.

This quest was getting to be quite a pesky challenge. Constantly I heard other birders relating their experiences with this bird and they were all the same. A half-hour walk; a grouse sitting in a tree - or walking along a game trail; an attempt to make it fly away; the grouse would refuse to budge. The wildlife photographers complained only of the difficulty in getting far enough away from the birds to focus their lenses. The implication was obvious. I was a blind, dim-witted dullard who wouldn't see a spruce grouse if I tripped over it. Fool hen indeed! Fool bird-watcher!

The next year I went on September 9th. I saw ravens, evening grosbeaks and Canada jays.

On Sept. 2nd., 1956, an encouraging incident occurred. As we were walking into the Bat Lake area, we met Monty Wood and told him of our objective. Luck at last! He had seen one on the road, a minute earlier, just around the first bend. We hurried to the spot only to find that the grouse had been transmuted into a piece of brownish bracken. Spending the day trudging through the area resulted in spotting a grouse in a spruce tree but it turned out to be a ruffed.

On Oct. 13, 1957, I tried it again. The only noteworthy observation at Bat Lake was a flock of ravens eating some bear carcasses. The trip again turned out to be just another wild grouse chase.

In 1958, a stroke of luck came my way. Earl Stark invited me to join him on a week-end trip to his cottage at Paudash Lake, on the week-end of Oct. 25/26th. Plans included spending a day in Algonquin Park. Doug Scovell made it a threesome. He and Earl had found spruce grouse other years and assured me that we would see some on this trip. When I mentioned that this was my seventh attempt at finding the bird, they were polite and sympathetic. "Seven is lucky," one of them said, "we'll find one for you tomorrow." And they looked at each other knowingly. The next day, at the Park, we were joined by some Peterborough birders, including the late Frank Pammett and Doug Sadler, two seasoned grouse-finders. Two carloads of birders spent all day tramping through the woods, alert for the slightest movement of a partridge-feather. Our list for the day reflected a fine effort at bird-finding, but one species not on our list was s.g.

The next year, Earl again invited Doug and me for a late-October week-end. Bob Trowern also came along and this fact alone was an omen of success. Bob knows the spruce grouse by name. "You couldn't possibly miss them," he said. "Can I mark it on my card right now?" I asked facetiously. "Certainly. It's guaranteed for sure," Bob answered. So we were a confident foursome as we headed for Algonquin the next morning. We found pileated woodpeckers and Canada geese, boreal chickadees, Lapland longspurs and snow buntings, pine grosbeaks, ravens and Canada jays. I just forget how Bob explained the absence of grouse.

By this time, Doug Scovell had become personally interested in showing me my grouse. He attacked the problem by suggesting the Bat Lake area was worthless. I couldn't very well argue with that. So he contacted Norm Martin, who has done extensive biological research in the Park, and asked him for advice. Norm directed us to an entirely different area where a bridge crossed the Ox Tongue River on the edge of a heavy stand of spruce.

On May 1st, 1960, Bob Trowern, Earl Stark, Doug and I headed northward with new hopes. A flat tire at Huntsville seemed to presage bad luck. A second flat a few miles farther on cheered us very little. When we arrived at our destination, we found there wasn't any bridge. In fact I was surprised the river was still there. Some time since Norm had done his research, the bridge must have been washed away. Our only hope was to go on to Bat Lake. As we drove along No. 60 highway, a real live spruce grouse flew across the road in front of the car. It flew at slightly less than the speed of light, then pitched in just as quickly, and disappeared. I saw it for about two full seconds, and that, after ten years of trying, is still my one and only look at this bird.

Although I have made more trips since then, all have been unsuccessful.

Looking for yellow rails proved even more frustrating. Whereas the grouse could be sought in the fall when insects are not a serious menace, the rails are to be found (so they say) in late May and June when all the mosquitos in Ontario hold their annual convention in Holland Marsh. These mosquitos are not a bit snobbish; they will associate with all visitors to their marsh. Whereas the grouse are active in broad daylight, the yellow rails are most likely to be discovered at dusk, when the murky marsh mist enwraps the birdwatcher in a damp, shivery shroud.

I first visited the Marsh in June of '52. The fact I went alone expecting to find rails easily, indicates what a naive and innocent tyro I was in the art of rail-trailing. Two more trips that year, one alone and one with Jim Baillie resulted in finding some short-billed marsh wrens but very little else.

The next year, visits to the Marsh in May and June were in vain. Later in the summer, Jim Baillie and I rented a boat at Bradford and rowed up and down the river for miles. Caspian terns, marsh wrens, least bitterns and Virginia rails made the trip well worthwhile.

Each year, the story repeated itself, just like the grouse episodes. Other birders returned from the area with nothing but success. The rails were heard; they were seen; one party actually tracked one down after dark by flashlight and caught it by hand!

In May 1958, Jim Baillie, Dick Saunders, Earl Stark and I had great luck. We found Henslow's sparrows, snipe, woodcock, golden-winged warblers, both species of marsh wrens, whip-poor-wills, and many other interesting birds. This seemed to be our lucky day so we really gave the rails an all-out effort. The yellow rail's call sounds like a sequence of taps, made by clicking two pebbles together - tick-tick, tick-tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick-tick. Imitating this by using real pebbles is supposed to be successful in decoying the rails and making them respond to the simulated calls. So, long into the night, we walked up and down the edge of the marsh, clicking pebbles and flailing away at millions of mosquitos, looking to any onlookers, like a band of epileptic contortionists with the seven-year itch. We should have stayed home. No rail called, clicked, clucked or clacked.

So, my trips over the years began to add up in the dozens. Finally, one June evening, with Doug Scovell, Bob Trowern and others, we were going through the usual rock-rattling rituals when a yellow rail answered from across the fog-wrapped river. Tick-tick, tick-tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick-tick.

I've continued to pursue this elusive marsh-dweller, visiting the area two or three times each summer, always with experienced observers, and still haven't seen a yellow rail. In fact I have never even heard one again.

So, after ten years, dozens of tries, and thousands of miles of driving, the score is one spruce grouse seen for two seconds, and one yellow rail heard at a distance. At least I tried.

The point of this story, if it has one, is directed to those observers who believe that other birders are always finding rarities and that they themselves never see anything worthwhile.

We have met beginners, and a few seasoned observers too, who feel that an all-day outing is a failure unless some rare bird, flower, or so on, is discovered.

This approach to the enjoyment of the outdoors will result only in constant disappointment. Occasionally, perhaps once every two hundred outings, an alert observer may find something truly rare. He should first realize that most people won't believe it anyway, so it is wise to keep one's elation well under control. He should also realize that credit for finding a rare bird should be distributed about 2% to the birder and 98% to the bird.

Rarities should be accepted as unexpected bonuses and left at that. There is enough to be enjoyed and appreciated in our common flora and fauna without letting the quest of the unusual become the all-important theme.

ARMCHAIR BOTANY

The field naturalist, on first venturing into the study of wild flowers, is quickly mystified by the endless variety of queer-sounding words by which the plants are known and catalogued. Often, the language of botany is a deterrent to the bewildered novice who, awe-struck and discouraged by words like tetradynamous, indehiscent and malpighiaceus, closes his Flower Guide and gives up in despair.

Should the budding botanist, however, clear his first few adjectival hurdles, he will quickly find this new language rich in delightful and descriptive titles having origins and meanings as elegant and edifying as the very flowers they describe.

The persistent student studies his flowers and learns to call them by name - snapdragon, monkshood, nightshade, larkspur. What imaginative titles! Tofieldia, solidago, calopogon, echnium. How did these curious names originate?

Wanting to know more about the meanings and history of these words, he finds that, instead of being a stubborn stumbling-block, this new-found language is, instead, the gateway to a whole new landscape of learning. He discovers that the derivation of botanical nomenclature is a colourful combination of romance and legend, science and folklore, fantasy and fable.

Surnames of botanists are perpetuated in the names of many plants. This is one of the commonest sources of generic titles, literally hundreds of flowers being named in this fashion. Claytonia, our spring beauty, is named for Dr. John Clayton, an early American botanist of Virginia. Listera, the generic name of our twayblades, honours Martin Lister, a 17th century English naturalist. The memory of Andreas Dahl, a Swedish pupil of Linnaeus, is reflected in our dahlia, and the Castilleja, or painted cup, immortalizes Don Castillejo, a Spanish botanist. There is disagreement as to whether the camellia is named for G. J. Kamel, a botanist, or Camellus, a Moravian Jesuit missionary.

DeWitt Clinton, who was governor of New York State, was a proficient botanist, as indicated by the naming of the Clintonia in his honour. He is better remembered for having been a power in the building of the Erie Canal which was referred to, derisively, by his political enemies, as "Clinton's Ditch." Also in derision, Thoreau once objected to the naming of the Clintonia, saying, "What does the Governor of New York mean to the flower-lovers of Massachusetts?"

Persons other than botanists have had flowers named for them. Comptonia is named for a Bishop of Oxford, Henry Compton. Joe Pyeweed bears the name of an Indian medicine-man of New England, Joe Pye, who was said to cure typhus diseases with concoctions made from this well-known plant. Our bog-dwelling pitcher-plant, Sarracenia, was named after Dr. Michel Sarrasin, who sent some specimens of this insect-eating plant to Europe.

The derivation of Herb Robert seems obscure. Some say that, as the flower often comes out around April 29th, the day dedicated to St. Robert, a Benedictine monk, it was named after him.

There is a touch of humour in the naming of the dayflower or Commelina. This flower has two showy petals and an inconspicuous and seemingly worthless one. Linnaeus named this after three Dutch brothers names Commelyn, two of whom were brilliant, the other lazy and not likely to amount to anything.

Foreign and archaic languages are reflected in many English names of plants. Latin influence is abundant. Aster is the Latin word for "star". Delphinium is derived from the word meaning "dolphin" and this flower is seen by some imaginative observers to resemble the classical figure of the dolphin as it leaps from the water. Campanula means "little bell." Convolvulus means "entwining".

The lupin was thought to exhaust the soil on which it grew as it was frequently found in waste places. This reputation of preying on the soil accounts for its name being derived from lupus - the wolf. This presents a curious paradox, as we now know that the lupin, being a legume, actually enriches the earth in which it grows.

The Greeks gave us many of our flowers' names. Cosmos is a Greek word meaning orderliness, hence beauty. Cypripedium, the botanical name for the exquisite lady's slippers, is derived from Greek words meaning "Venus's shoe." Pogonia is from a Greek word meaning "bearded" in reference to the hairy lip of the flower. The flower of the corydalis has a spur at its base which evidently reminded the ancients of the crested lark, as the old Greek word for this bird was pronounced like "Corydalis."

Words of French ancestry are common. The toothed leaves of the dandelion gained this flower the name, "dent de lion" or lion's tooth. Corruption of the pronunciation gave us "dandelion." The common French word for head is, of course, "tête." However, an alternate word with the same meaning is "caboché." This, again corrupted, gave us our "cabbage." Caboché is in turn derived from the Latin word "caput." So when you cut the head off a cabbage in your garden, you might say it has been de-cabbage-tated.

The word "hepatica" links botany with chemistry. Ancient chemists used to refer to various brown liver-coloured compounds of sulphur as "hepar". Hence words like hepatic, hepatitis, and hepatology, are found in many languages, all referring to the liver. The hepatica's leaf, with its brown blotches, appeared to early botanists, to resemble a liver, hence hepatica! An alternative English name for this flower, still in common use, is liver-leaf.

The habitat of some flowers has given them their name. Ranunculus (the buttercup genus) is Latin for "little frog." Buttercups usually grow in wet spots where frogs are common. Our magenta-flowered fireweed is known to thrive in areas recently burned over, although some botanists insist that the "fire" refers to the eye-catching blaze of colour displayed by a patch of this lovely flower.

Mythology and legend are reflected in many flowers' names. A species of anemone in the Orient, having crimson flowers, was believed to have sprung from the blood of Adonis, whose Semitic name was Naman. Anemone is believed to be a derivative of "Naman." This is one story. Another is that the flower was named in honour of Anemos, the wind. Anemonella (the rue anemone) means "little anemone."

Arethusa, the delicate little orchid found in our sphagnum bogs, reminds Linnaeus of a maiden in the midst of a bubbling spring. Legend has it that Diana changed the nymph Arethusa into a fountain. The Goddess Calypso is also the namesake of one of our rarer orchids. Another genus of orchids - Serapias - is named for the Egyptian deity, Serapis.

Turtlehead, the name of a late summer flower, common in our area, has an interesting origin. Look at the flowers and you will see that each one resembles the triangular head of a turtle. When a bee alights on the lower part of the corolla, its weight causes the lip to open and close, like a turtle slowly chewing its food.

Boneset is so called because a strong tea made from this plant has sedative properties, and was used to dull pain when setting bone fractures.

Reference to birds is also found in botanical titles. We have already mentioned the crested lark image in the name of the corydalis. Celandine, our common "gold-poppy" flowers in early spring about the time swallows first appear. The generic name, Chelidonium, is from the Greek word for swallow. Some books give an alternative English name of swallowwort.

St. John's wort got its name from a superstition that dew collected from the plant on the eve of St. John the Baptist Day (June 24th) had medicinal uses of almost magical proportions. "Wort" means "plant."

Another old superstition was that God had given plants signs by which man could interpret their intended uses. One plant, which had a stem mottled like the body of a serpent, and seeds shaped like the head of a viper, was called viper's bugloss. This is one of our commonest weeds.

Our flower borders, hedges, lawns and flower gardens, are filled with plants named from every branch of literature, superstition and science. Your barberry hedge derives its name from the Arabic, Bêrberys. The spinach on your table owes its name to the Italian language, coming from the same word-root as spine and spindle. And, to end this etymological exercise, if you own "the biggest aspidistra in the world" you may know that its stigma is shaped like a small, round shield, which, in Greek, was called, "Aspidistra."

G. Bennett,

Acting Editor.

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WHAT'S AROUND?

By Slim Pickins

There are lots of birds around in December but the trick is to find them. One good spot is the Don Valley below the Glendon Hall Estate. Maybe you should take a thermos of a warming drink with you, and a sandwich. You can get to Glendon by T.T.C. if you haven't got a car. It's on the east side of Bayview just below Lawrence. Go in through the big iron gates which have signs on them saying, "York University." If you're driving you can park in the grounds. Be sure and wear warm clothes for hiking.

Walk east through the Estate and you'll come to a steep slope. Go down there and along to the river. When you get to the Don you can follow it either way. I usually walk down river, that is, south. You'll see chickadees, nuthatches, juncos, tree sparrows, downy and hairy woodpeckers, cardinals, goldfinches and blue jays.

There should be some winter finches around too but they're so hard to predict that I can't say which ones you might see. But some that might be there are evening grosbeaks, crossbills, redpolls, pine siskins and pine grosbeaks. Almost every winter there are field sparrows and Carolina wrens in the valley and if you're lucky you'll see a pileated woodpecker.

At least three kinds of owls live there - horned owl, screech owl and long-eared. But if you see one once every ten trips you're going some.

This will make a nice two-hour outing and the only part you won't enjoy is climbing back up the hill. But when you get back up your sandwich and thermos will make it worth it.

Twenty species is par for the course here for two hours on a December day. See if you can beat par with a birdie.

To: Mrs. H. Robson, Secretary,
Toronto Field Naturalists' Club,
49 Craighurst Ave., Toronto 12, Ont.

Date _____

I) wish to renew membership in the T.F.N., and enclose 1961-62 fee as indicated
We) (please check):

_____ Single \$4.00	_____ Family (adults) \$6.00	_____ Life \$100.00
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