

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB NEWSLETTER

203

APRIL MEETING

Monday, April 6, 1964, at 8:00 P.M.
at the
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

MEMBERS' NIGHT:

1. Speakers from the Junior Club, introduced by Mr. Robt. MacLellan.
Rita Johnston -- "Passenger Pigeon"
Mike Singleton -- "Boas"
Alan Morris -- "Man's Use of Rocks Through the Ages"
2. Mrs. Mary Gingrich -- "In Search of Nature"
3. Mr. Joseph Millman -- "Tree Flowers"
4. Mr. James L. Baillie -- "Some Interesting Birds of This Past Winter"

Items 2, 3, and 4, are illustrated with colour slides.

Selections from projects of some T.F.N.C. members will be displayed in the Rotunda.

Members' friends and visitors are welcome to all meetings of the Toronto Field Naturalists' Club.

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SPRING Please consult the enclosed folder. Thanks are due to
OUTINGS Mr. Jack Gingrich and his committee for this exciting and
carefully planned spring program. Copies of this folder
will be mailed to interested friends upon request.

JUNIOR The Junior Field Naturalists' Club will meet on Saturday,
CLUB April 4, at 10:00 a.m. in the Museum Theatre. A botany
program of special interest will be presented, and an
invitation is extended to T.F.N.C. members to attend.

Director - Mr. R. MacLellan - HU 8-9346

HASTI- Beautiful wild-flower hasti-notes will be available in a
NOTES limited supply at the April meeting. Twelve cards in a
package - three different packages each with four designs -
with plastic carrying case - \$1.00 per package.

BIRD R.O.M. Bird Checking Lists for your spring birding may be
CHECKING obtained at the secretary's desk at the April meeting.
LISTS Price - 5¢ each.

President - Dr. David Hoeniger

Secretary - Mrs. H. Robson,
49 Craighurst Ave.,
Toronto 12.
HU 1-0260

Toronto Field Naturalists' Club.



Number 203

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March 1964

At the end of the first week of March Toronto region looks far more springlike than it did a fortnight later last year. All along the highways scarcely a remnant of the winter's snow is to be found. The fields are brown and ready for the upspringing of new life. Horned larks are offering their tinkling songs in high flying ecstasy whilst crows caw lustily and perform their vernal aerobatics with all the vigor of rejuvenated youth. It is an expectant land.

When these first stirrings of the renewal of life commence those of us who have waited through a long long winter to see them begin to feel that if only one could hurry the nearing spring just a little it would be wonderful. So off some of us go to the Niagara area, trusting that this will be far enough south so that the signs of the next stage of spring will be evident. Sometimes this works out as we hope, sometimes it doesn't.

Last year we put off the going until March 15th when there was a bright sunny day with the temperature in the thirties and all seemed ready for the outburst of spring. When we reached the Niagara river we found its many willows resplendent in yellow and orange all along the river bank from Fort Erie to the Falls. Here, indeed, was a touch of spring. Yet, all across the land were piles of ice and snow so that it was evident that, in spite of blue water and yellow willows, spring was only just beginning to whisper over the land.

Indeed, the outstanding sight of that trip was the spectacular ice formation at the Falls. At the base, huge pinnacles and mounds, rising mysteriously in the spray or gleaming like polished metal in the sun, rose in places to the full height of the falls. Above, pile upon pile of white, glistening cliffs and hills of ice reared up from the lip of the falls, even projecting overhanging aprons in front of

the rushing water so that half or more of the usually visible plunging mass of water was sheathed in white or hidden from view. In places so massive were the precipitous cliffs of ice above the falls that they looked like a great glacier riding downstream, much as the towering Dome glacier rides over peaks in the Canadian Rockies. Occasionally a huge pile of ice would work loose of the main mass, tumbling over the falls with a thunderous roar as when a Greenland glacier lets loose an iceberg into the sea. The American Falls were almost wholly hidden from view, only a few rushing spurts appearing from vents at the lowest levels. The Canadian Falls were open at the westernmost end but from the nearer side of the horseshoe they were largely hidden, only rising mist, gushing up out of the snowy depths like some seething geyser, showed where the great falls plunged down as ever.

In the gorge below only a narrow strip of open water was to be seen and this only to a point just above the south corner of the American Falls where it vanished beneath a vast mass of ice -- the famed ice bridge -- really a savage, tumultuous vista of white caps and frozen waves, the waste heap of a long, wild winter. Walking or picking one's way across this tumbled, jagged jam might be possible -- and some have tried it -- but no one in their right senses would contemplate such folly. The sickening swirl with which the last visible water swept beneath the "bridge" was a too suggestive indicator of what lay in store for the one who should put one foot through a weak spot amongst the whitened cakes.

Shudder as we might at such a prospect still it was fascinating to watch the ceaseless rush of water, the never-ending whirls, the froth thrown up where meeting swirls locked together. Down-spiralling black-green holes appeared in the midst of the spinning waters, disappearing only to reform immediately in some other place. At the edge of the narrow channel of turbulent water rose an ice wall, to a height of fifty or sixty feet, seeming like solid glacial masonry. When you focussed your binoculars upon it, however, you could see that, instead of this wall being formed of solid ice, it was in fact constructed of countless blocks of ice of all shapes and sizes like a rubble wall. Indeed, that is precisely what we were looking at, a wall made up of rubble ice. These were pieces that undoubtedly had come over the falls -- the ones we had seen breaking loose above and falling were examples of what had happened -- had been caught in the whirlpools below, been piled together and finally re-solidified as one great mass, the accumulation rising higher and higher as more and more blocks were added from underneath, until now the whole had become a massive wall.

The play of light and shadow amongst the wild icy mounds and precipices was as entrancing as the patterns in the swirling water down below. Over on the Goat Island bank all the trees and shrubs were encased in crystalline garb for the wind was from the west so that it was casting spray broadside in that direction. Nearer to us, in the rising mist a multi-coloured rainbow arched upward from the base of the Horseshoe Falls, curving its tinted arc above the icy turmoil to the glistening forest of crystal across the way. In the darker depths below blues and greens played with each other as momentary breezes shifted the billowing spume. From time to time a magnificent white-topped round appeared in the midst of the mounting billows, right at the foot of the thundering walls of green water. Like an immaculate throne, set in the middle of half-concealing, half-revealing smoke, it came and went from our sight. There was a mystery here. Could it be that we gazed upon the royal seat of His Majesty, the Manitou of the Falls?

Such was the picture on the fifteenth of March a year ago. This year we drove down on the seventh for with Toronto all so clear of snow why shouldn't we expect springtime in Niagara? It is true that when we stood by the Horseshoe Falls we saw much ice in the river and the throne was still there, white and imposing, only this

year there were two thrones side by side! Has there been a royal marriage at the Falls that somehow escaped attention? Nonetheless, the accent this time was, as we hoped, upon spring, not on ice and snow.

Even before we reached Hamilton Bay the tan-coloured fields began to exhibit mottled green, winter wheat and spring grass. A startling splash of vivid crimson against a bank showed where new life was coursing in the red osier thickets. And as we mounted the Burlington Skyway, feeling the impact of March winds, we suddenly met a huddle of robins beating their way upwind right over the top of the bridge. Then a few yards beyond came a flock of blackbirds -- redwings, incoming like the robins -- all heralds of Spring. As we drove along the Q.E. Way towards Niagara other migrants appeared, including, at Winona, our first grackle.

Except for a few sluggish streams all the brooks and creeks were open, the last evidence of the winter thrall being the shattered ice cakes along their banks. As always, as soon as the ice shows any sign of going out water birds come along to welcome the change. At Jordan Harbour a large open semicircle had been bitten into the ice. This was dotted with ducks and gulls whilst scores of others stood on the edge of the ice as if their weight or their warmth could help to send the old rotten covering on its way. Since we never fail to look in at the Henley Course at St. Catharines we made a stop there. To our delight this water was fully open and ducks were everywhere. Best of all, three-score canvasbacks displayed their silvery-white and russet elegance right at the foot of the slope below the highway bridge. The antics of spring-lusty gulls filling the sky with white strokes of grace above the beautiful ducks removed any slightest doubt that winter was going. Spring was coming in.

Over the new skyway at the Welland Canal and down to Fort Erie renewed with every passing mile this impression. Remains--glistening, dripping, fast-vanishing remains of drifts larger than any we've seen around Toronto this winter still sheltered in the lee of snowfences and ditches, their fate written in the gleaming sweeps of water that lay at their feet. Everywhere nearly the countryside was bare, open and greening brown. Quite a different picture in fact than that which had greeted us in this quarter a year ago at a later date.

Huge ice cakes there were at the head of the Niagara river in Lake Erie but all along its length they were few until we reached the head of the falls. Instead, we rolled along beside sparkling blue water dotted with ducks and gulls. Not far from Baker's Creek outlet a new bird came swinging in across the river. As it dropped to rest upon a willow one look showed us the brilliant yellow and black of a meadowlark, another migrant arriving. Scarcely a mile more and we were brought again to a halt as we saw eight heavily-built birds winging downstream near the middle of the river. What brings more poignantly the message of spring than a line of Canada geese heading north? There they were, right out of the south, taking a course that, if the waters of Niagara did not entice them down, would take them almost straight over Toronto, our home. On we went, enheartened by such a sight and hardly hoping for more when a mile or two above Navy Island there came into view the loveliest of all the avian reminders of arriving spring. There, riding the blue ripples, were six snow-white swans, the very epitome of grace. Hundreds of miles away on the Carolina coast lay their winter resting quarters, but for them winter was a forgotten episode. New life, new dreams and hopes were moving them on to their summer homes on the Arctic tundra. Today they adorn the blue waters of the Niagara, tomorrow perhaps those of Long Point Bay, thence flight by flight onward. Three more we were to find just at the tip of the island, then seven at the Chippewa outlet. Who now could say that the feel of spring was not in the air?

By the time that we reached the Dufferin Island Nature Trail, a spot we had never stopped before to investigate, we were saying to ourselves, "With all these signs of spring, with the snow so nearly gone, there just could be, really there could." And with that encouragement we turned in and began to walk the trail. Surely, it was just the right kind of a spot, wet, swampy, sheltered, for what we sought. It had to be there, and sure enough there it was, right as we came to the divide in the path. Under some alder bushes, beside a little brook, out of the dark black ooze appeared a wine-red point, the spathe of a skunk cabbage, the first flower of spring. Soon we were seeing numbers of such spears, and with them the slender green darts of the rising leaves. In one place they were rising alongside old grey ice and laughing in its face; for them the arriving spring, for it the vanishing winter. Flowers to add to birds; our docket of this changing season was complete.

We could see a redwing sitting in a shrub beside a stream, and a wonderful V of geese crossing the highway as we drove back. These sights could only add exclamation points to our now unshakeable conviction, Spring is on the way. We had come from Toronto to Niagara to find the spring. We had found it; we had been caught up in it, and now, birds, flowers and all, we were a part of the joyful tide.

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Two of the recent Nature Bulletins, Nos. 743, 746, of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Illinois, deal with subjects of interest to our readers. We are pleased to include them here.

Domestic Animals That Go Wild

The domestication of animals began far back in prehistoric times. We can imagine that it started when primitive man or his children captured wolf cubs and made pets of them which became the ancestors of our dogs. Other kinds which he found useful or which appealed to his fancy have been fed, sheltered and protected with almost as much care as the human members of his household.

Living generation after generation under man's control, these tended to change their habits and become tamer than their wild relatives. By the artificial selection of breeding stock, these domesticated animals have been greatly modified to fill man's needs for better food, clothing and work animals. Others have been bred merely to satisfy his whims for unusual colors, sizes and shapes.

This is the question. Have these animals become so dependent on man over the ages that they are unable to survive and multiply in the wild?

Almost all of the livestock and poultry in this country are descended from breeding stock imported from the Old World where our most important kinds were domesticated by prehistoric man. These include cattle, sheep, goats, hogs, horses, asses, dogs, cats and chickens. Within historic times rabbits, ducks, geese, guinea hens, peacocks and pigeons have been added. The turkey is the only domestic animal native to this continent.

On his second voyage to the New World in 1493 Columbus brought sheep, goats, cattle, horses and hogs. It is supposed that from his eight porkers sprang all of the swine that populated the West Indies and ran wild through the jungles and canebrakes. The Spanish invaders scattered them widely as meat on the hoof for their expeditions. These and other hog immigrants have made themselves at home in the swamps, lowlands

and forests of the Gulf Coast and lower Mississippi Valley.

Barnyard swine became adapted to man's meal hours, feeding by day and sleeping at night. When they go wild they return to the schedule of their untamed ancestors, lying in a shady lair all day and foraging at night.

When De Soto crossed the Mississippi in 1541, his men either abandoned or lost some of their horses. It is believed that these formed the nucleus of the bands of wild horses, or mustangs, which are still found in some western states. In like manner, the present herds of wild burros may trace back to the pack animals used by the Spaniards while mining for gold and silver in the Southwest. Texas longhorn cattle which once roamed the western ranges were extremely hardy beasts descended from a 15th century breed brought from Spain.

The so-called San Juan rabbit is a "Belgian hare" which has reverted to type and threatens to become a serious pest. A lighthouse keeper in Puget Sound released a few on his island as a source of fresh meat. Eventually they stripped it of vegetation, spread to other islands of the San Juan group, and multiplied enormously. When sportsmen began to ship these animals into the Midwest for training their hunting dogs, farmers became alarmed because this is the same European rabbit that ruined grazing lands in Australia and New Zealand.

When carp were introduced into the United States in the 1870's about two-thirds of them were of the cultivated "mirror" and "leather" varieties which have few or no scales. Since that time, these strains have been almost completely crowded out by wild-type fish. The ornamental goldfish which has overrun many of our streams and lakes, loses its bizarre shapes and colors within a few generations.

The honeybee, having been associated with man for over 4000 years, is frequently regarded as a domestic animal. The bee submits to life in a hive but, left to itself, readily deserts it for a hollow tree.

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Wheat

"Give us this day our daily bread." That simple plea is included in the Lord's Prayer because bread, made from wheat, was the "staff of life" in Palestine -- as it is for us today. Wheat bread is a source of energy that contains the food elements essential for the growth, health and upkeep of a human body. It is a staple food that is not only inexpensive but, uniquely, one which we never become tired of.

The three most important grains used by mankind for food are wheat, rice, and Indian corn or maize. Next in importance are barley, rye, oats and millet. The white races of people prize wheat far above any of the others. All seven -- known as cereal grains -- are the seeds of grasses descended from wild plants.

We know that rice originated in the rainy tropical East Indies; and corn in the tropics of Central or adjacent South America; but no one knows for sure where the various kinds of wheat -- used to make bread -- originated; nor when; nor from what wild plants. They were produced and cultivated in prehistoric times.

Our bulletin about Bread (No. 175) related that in the sunken homes of Swiss lake dwellers, who lived perhaps 10,000 years ago, have been found hard-baked little cakes

of coarsely-ground grains: barley and a kind of wheat -- probably a spelt. Archaeologists tell us that wheat was being cultivated for food when the earliest civilizations existed, more than 6,000 years ago, on richly fertile deltas at the mouths of three great rivers: the Nile in Egypt, the Euphrates in Mesopotamia (now Iraq), and the Indus in India. The oldest known graves in those deltas contained seeds of wheat and barley.

Wheat flour contains an optimum amount of gluten, a protein which is valuable not only as a food but for another property. It makes bread dough so sticky and elastic that bubbles of carbon dioxide gas, from fermentation of the yeast mixed with it, are trapped and held, causing the dough to expand and rise. When baked, the bread is porous and fluffy. Flours made from rye, barley and rice do not have that property and some wheat flour is usually added.

Wheat is the best of all grains for handling and storage. The rounded oblong seeds flow like quicksilver and mingle so closely that a bushel of wheat will make more than a barrel of flour. Verily, they pack a wallop! And wheat keeps so well that it can be stored for years or shipped around the world.

Being a plant of the grass family, wheat will grow where rainfall is scanty, or where it is abundant, if the spring is cool and moist and the summer is hot and dry. It does best on deep well-drained loam and clay soils. There are many races, varieties and hybrids grown from northern Canada and Russia to Argentina, Chile and New Zealand.

A grain of wheat is covered with several thin layers of epidermis -- the bran. Inside, at one end, is the germ. The rest of it is starch and gluten. The germ contains oil and vitamins. The bran contains minerals and vitamins. In milling, to make white flour, the germ and the bran are removed. Consequently, nowadays, most white bread is "enriched" by the addition of synthetic vitamins and minerals. That is not necessary in whole wheat, rye, and corn breads.

In the United States we raise "hard" wheat, "soft" wheat, bearded wheat, smooth wheat, and, in North Dakota and Minnesota, durum wheat used to make macaroni, spaghetti and noodles. In our northern States, including northern Illinois, we raise spring wheat. Elsewhere -- about 60% of our total acreage -- we raise winter wheat. It is sowed in mid-autumn, sprouts, "stools out", lies dormant during winter and resumes growing in spring.

We use white wheat flour to make biscuits, dumplings and gravy at our house but eat little light bread. We prefer pumpernickel mit ripe limburger.

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The inclusion of two poems about the hepatica in the last issue of the Newsletter evoked an unexpected response in the spirit of the second poem. Mr. Pike, the author of that poem will, I am sure, like the editor, feel pleased that his poem should bring so apt a rejoinder. The authoress of the present poem prefers to remain Anon. but she is one of the livelier members of this Club whom we hear from with pleasure ever and anon. Here is the poem:

Unless you're like a sprattica,
Or thinner than a slattica,
You shouldn't pick and sittica.
Alas, the poor hepatica!
How did it get so flattica?
I think you ought to quittica!

We wish to bring to the attention of members of the Club the fact that a club member, Mr. Peter Iden, 26 Bloomington Crescent, Downsview, Ontario, is preparing a field guide to birdfinding in Canada. This is intended to be the Canadian equivalent of Olin Sewall Pettingill's A Guide to Bird Finding in the United States which many local people have used with great profit on their journeys south of the border. That such a work for Canada would be of tremendous value to all birders goes without saying. Mr. Iden informs us that he will be circularizing a number of the active birders with a letter explaining this project, and a questionnaire requesting information that will be of use to him in the preparation of such a work. No doubt there will be many who will wish to cooperate in the project.

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We also bring once again to the bird-watching members of this Club the opportunity to take part in the Continental study of migratory birds which has been going on for several years. This is a work of major importance for a fuller knowledge of North American birds, and one that requires a large number of participants. Any observer can start his cooperation in this project at any time. Also, it is not necessary to send in observations on all the birds on any one record sheet, only on those for which the observer feels there is suitable data. The form, when sent in, should go to Chandler S. Robbins, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland.

Richard M. Saunders,

Editor.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
PATUXENT WILDLIFE RESEARCH CENTER, LAUREL, MARYLAND
COOPERATIVE MIGRATION STUDY - SPRING OF 1964

STATE: _____ COUNTY: _____ LOCALITY: _____ LAT: _____ LONG: _____

OBSERVER: _____ ADDRESS: _____

Species	Code		First Migrant		Peak		Peak		Peak		Last Noted	
	No.	Date	No.	Date	No.	Date	No.	Date	No.	Date	No.	
Whistling Swan	180	64										
Canada Goose	172	64										
Mallard	132	64										
Pintail	143	64										
Marsh Hawk	331	64										
Killdeer	273	64										
Common Snipe	230	64										
Mourning Dove	316	64										
Common Nighthawk	420	64										
Chimney Swift	423	64										
Ruby-t. Hummingbd.	428	64										
Yel-shaft. Flicker	412	64										
Eastern Kingbird	444	64										
Gt. Dr. Flycatcher	452	64										
Eastern Phoebe	456	64										
E. Wood Pewee	461	64										
Barn Swallow	613	64										
Purple Martin	611	64										
Common Crow	488	64										
House Wren	721	64										
Catbird	704	64										
Brown Thrasher	705	64										
Wood Thrush	755	64										
E. Bluebird (male)	7664	64										
E. Bluebird (fem)	7665	64										
Red-eyed Vireo	624	64										
Black & Wh. Warb.	636	64										
Tennessee Warb.	647	64										
Yellow Warbler	652	64										
Myrtle Warbler	655	64										
Blackpoll Warb.	661	64										
Ovenbird	674	64										
Am. Redstart	687	64										
Bobolink	494	64										
Redwinged Blackbd	498	64										
Baltimore Oriole	507	64										
Scarlet Tanager	608	64										
Rose-br. Grosbeak	595	64										
Indigo Bunting	598	64										
Am. Goldfinch	529	64										
Slate-col. Junco	567	64										
Chipping Sparrow	560	64										
White-Cr. Sparrow	554	64										
White-thr. Sparrow	558	64										

Please send reports either to Chandler S. Robbins, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Md., or through your Audubon Field Notes Regional Editor.

Chandler S. Robbins, James H. Zimmerman.