

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB NEWSLETTER

207

DECEMBER MEETING

Monday, December 7th, 1964, at 8.15 p.m.
at the
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Speaker: DR. E. J. CROSSMAN,
Associate Curator of Ichthyology and Herpetology,
Royal Ontario Museum.

Subject: FISHES: THEIR NUMBER AND DIVERSITY (illustrated)

Many of us know in general terms that there are dozens of species, sizes and shapes of fishes distributed over a broad geographical area, that many require specialized habitats, and that certain species are capable of adapting to changing environments. Why is this? From where have they come? How? When?

Visitors Welcome.

December Outing

Sunday Bruce's Mill Conservation Area - Birds
Dec. 6th From Unionville (on Highway #7, six miles east of Yonge St.)
9.30 a.m. go north six miles and turn left at the M.T.R.C.A. sign.
If you miss this turn, the Gormley-Stouffville road is only
0.4 miles beyond. Morning outing, but lunch recommended.
Leader: Miss Ruth Marshall.

JUNIOR CLUB The Mineral Group will be in charge of the regular monthly meeting in the Museum theatre on Saturday, Dec. 5th, at 10.00 a.m. Visitors welcome.
Director - Mr. Robt. MacLellan, HU 8-9346.

F.O.N. CHRISTMAS CARDS Cards designed by T. M. Shortt for the Federation of Ontario Naturalists show a pair of redpolls, beautifully printed in full colour. Available without the greeting, for use as hasti-notes. Price \$1.50 per doz. plus 3% tax.
- Also calendars, daily reminders, and hasti-notes in wild flower designs. All at the December meeting for your Christmas needs. Every purchase is a contribution to our Club work.

CHECK LISTS R.O.M. bird checking lists for your winter birding available at the secretary's desk, December meeting. Price 5¢ each.

FEES! We urge prompt renewal by mail or at the meeting. After the December meeting the names of those who have not renewed will be removed from our mailing list.

Single - \$4.00 Corresponding (for those living more than
Family (adults) - \$6.00 20 miles from the Museum) - \$2.00

President - Mr. R. F. Norman

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

Toronto Field Naturalists' Club.



Number 207

Authorized as 2nd Class Mail by
The Post Office Department, Ottawa
and for payment of postage in cash

November 1964

A Naturalist's Holiday in Mexico

By Robert W. Trowern*

Last winter for our annual holiday, we decided on Mexico and so on February 18th, we embarked at 8 p.m. on the C.P.A. jet, Empress of Winnipeg, for Mexico City and after allowing for the difference in Eastern Standard Time to Central Time, arrived in Mexico City 4-1/2 hours later. We had been warned the thin air and high altitude of Mexico City might possibly play tricks on us and we found this to be so, tiring very easily and for a few days not feeling too well at all.

Many people do not realize that Mexico City is not only the oldest city in the Western Hemisphere but one of the biggest in the world. With a population of just under five million, it is only surpassed by Tokyo, London, New York, Shanghai and Moscow. And it is just this combination of size and age which makes it such a fascinating place. You can step out into the street from the most luxurious of modern hotels and in five minutes be in a quarter of the city where most of the buildings are hundreds of years old.

Our choice of Mexico, as in the case of many previous fine and exciting winter holidays in other places, was determined basically by the desire for a quiet and restful vacation and the prospect of seeing new birds and plants and new subjects to photograph.

*In the latter part of last winter two of our well-known Club members, Mr. and Mrs. R. W. Trowern, spent their annual holiday in Mexico. We are pleased that Bob has prepared an account of their trip that can be shared with other members of the Club. A good many of the Club members have gone to Mexico; after reading Bob's account I feel sure many others will plan to do so.

Long ago, however, we realized that we can never see everything and since, according to Peterson and Fisher, as of 1962, the number of full species of birds known to be alive on earth amounts to 8,580, we know that we will be fortunate to see 10% to 15% of that number in our lifetime. We have, therefore, reached a stage in our enthusiasm where we have learned to take new observations in our stride but still remain alert for the unexpected.

We have found many tourists and holiday-seekers tend to exaggerate their knowledge of the places they visit, no matter how brief their stay in a particular spot may be. How much can you see of a country that spreads over 760,000 square miles, where more than 30 million people live and work? The obvious answer is that you can never see all of it no matter how much time you spend.

The Republic of Mexico is divided politically into 29 states, two territories and a Federal District. Geographically, it is divided into deserts and mountains, cool mile-high plateaus and jungle tropics. Mexico is a land of many climates and the best of them is the nearest to perfection that the planet offers. Cold winters as we know them do not exist. In high places like Mexico City (1-1/2 miles above sea level) and in passes 10,000 feet high, snow and sleet have been known to fall and fog may appear. These are rare aberrations and they retreat hastily, as if knowing that here they are out of bounds.

Climate everywhere is determined more by height above sea level than by distance from the equator. In Mexico you can change your climate simply by taking a short drive. For example, from Mexico City (7,500 feet) you can go to Cuernavaca in less than two hours (5,000 feet) where it is June almost the year round.

Originally we had intended to visit a few of the better-known towns and cities and also the sea resort of Acapulco but not being a tourist at heart and preferring quiet, comfortable out-of-the-way places, we decided to visit first the highly recommended spa, Balneario at San Jose Purua in the province of Michoacan. We hired a car to drive us the two and one-half hour trip from Mexico City, passing through serried fields of magueys, then climbing through pine-clad mountains to Toluca, which has an altitude of 8,800 feet, the highest of any town in the country. A few miles on our way we could see the snow-clad 15,000 foot-high extinct volcano, Nevado de Goluca. Continuing by way of winding roads through green forests we turned off at the village of Zitacuaro and plunged into the valley of San Jose. As previously mentioned, not being a tourist at heart, we were unprepared for the size and extent of the Balneario; however, after being shown our room and the balcony looking down into the valley 1,000 feet below, in a day or so we became acclimatized and then manana set in. Finally, we decided to forego even Acapulco and just stay put. San Jose Purua has an ideal all year climate situated at an altitude of 4,300 feet; the average temperature is 71 degrees, varying less than 10 degrees throughout the year. The nights are cool and it was rare when you did not need at least one blanket on your bed. The hotel encompasses 165 acres and is famous for its radio-active baths. It is situated on the edge of a valley, the bottom of which is quite tropical even having large tracts of bananas and citrus fruits growing there. The whole acreage is a vast garden of flowers and exotic trees and shrubs, with extensive well-tended paths and benches set out at short intervals. We found the benches to be particularly practical on the steeper paths because the thin air made it necessary to rest frequently.

Although at the outset we had determined not to be too eager in our pursuit of seeing new birds and plants, etc., we had come prepared with a copy of Emmet Reid Blake's Birds of Mexico. Although this book is in no way comparable with our familiar "Peterson's Guides" we found it an excellent book and rather excitingly challenging. Not all species are illustrated and the others are only in black and white. The book is based on the assumption that the observer will be experienced enough to identify the

family and from then on an extensive "key" system is used. We carried a small notebook and when required, we jotted down the salient points of the bird and in some cases made a crude sketch, drawing lines such as Peterson uses in his Guides to the main distinguishing marks. Then, when we returned to our balcony, we had an enjoyable time keying down the identification. Of course, in many cases we were unable to reach a satisfactory conclusion. Long ago we learned not to expect to identify every exotic species, seen only briefly and usually in a tangle of jungle. One thing that pleased us about Blake's book was his emphasis of the fact that while Mexican birds have been studied intensively for years and scores of thousands of specimens are preserved in museums the world over, little more is known about Mexican birds today than was known about those of the United States three-quarters of a century ago and, therefore, one should not be too definite about the habitat, wintering areas, etc., of species.

During our stay we observed 114 species including 44 more new species for our life list. From our balcony, we looked down into a valley about 1,000 feet below where a fairly large river meandered, with periodic waterfalls. House finches and Cassin's finches were abundant nearby whilst below in the orange trees nearly every morning bands of warblers fed on the insects. Tanagers and orioles were also numerous. The dining room of the hotel was large and shaped in a circle overlooking the valley. Outside the windows were several ziranda trees, reminiscent of our sycamore. Each morning we endeavoured to obtain a table by the window as it was excellent for seeing birds for they liked the zirandas. From here we watched warblers, western tanagers, white-winged and red-headed tanagers and numerous orioles. One morning we heard a commotion among the small birds and there within six feet of us sat a pygmy owl. We watched it for nearly a minute before it plunged off after one of its tormentors.

We made several trips down into the valley and, while probably we did not cover more than three miles up and down, the round trip usually took about three hours and the benches mentioned previously, spaced about every hundred yards, were certainly appreciated. We had hoped possibly to see a dipper in the stream but this hope did not materialize. However, we found a russet-crowned motmot and a bat falcon by the stream-side. One of the more popular walks, made obviously for senior citizens, was a gradual incline about a mile-and-a-half long, rising to a small park. This walk was around a mountainous cliff with a tremendous drop to the valley below on the other side. Flowers, shrubs and cactus were abundant and these, of course, attracted many birds, including hummingbirds.

One morning we heard a wren chattering but could not get a good enough look at it to identify it, so the next morning we went up the path again and we found the wren again excitedly chattering. Vera gasped, "Look, an elf owl", and there sitting in the open, being pestered by the wren, was this tiny owl, certainly an unexpected thrill. On this path we also found several species of hummingbirds, including the tiny bumble-bee (aptly named) hummingbirds. It was here also that the only parrot appeared but due to the height of the cliff and the difficulty of looking into the sun, we could not identify it.

Each evening, sitting on the balcony, we watched the vultures and thousands of swifts circling over the mountain on the opposite side of the valley where promptly, just before sundown, the white-throated swifts would literally pour into a chimney in the cliff. One evening, as we were about to leave the balcony to prepare for dinner, we heard a plover-like call and about a dozen large swifts swooped down the valley in a formation like shore-birds. These birds were easily identified as white-naped swifts, about 9" long. Subsequently, we watched as many as 50 of these birds circling very high amongst the smaller white-throated species.

For a change we hired a car and driver to take us to Morelia, along a road reported to be the most beautifully scenic route in the nation. We deliberately hired a

native, whose name was Julian, so that we would not be pressured by the usual tourist jargon. Julian could not speak English, we could not speak Spanish, so we got along fine. This trip was fascinating, passing through lush valleys and along mountain ridges nearly two miles high. On the way we stopped at Mirador de las Mil Cumbres where an awe-inspiring view is found. This view of a thousand peaks is a turn-off in Atziamba National Park. It is as though you were actually on top of the world. The forest is composed of firs, large pines and oaks. We proceeded on this trip to Morelia, where the oldest university in North America is located. We were shown the museum, the usual cathedral, etc., but our hearts were set on spending a day in Atziamba National Park. In the meantime, Julian had realized our interest in birds so we arranged for him to take us again and we found him indeed an excellent guide. It was on the second trip that we found such species as red warbler, black-and-blue jay, hermit warbler, several hummingbirds, yellow and black-headed grosbeaks, fork-tailed flycatcher, brown-backed solitaire, tufted flycatcher and others.

We found Julian and Mexicans of all classes, including the humble Indians, to be friendly and courteous. If you are simpatico--well disposed and understanding--you will get along with them famously, for there never was a people more susceptible to a friendly smile. All in all we had a splendid holiday and can heartily recommend San Jose Purua.

Buenos tardes y Viva Mexico.

Birds observed in Mexico, February 19th to March 18th, 1964, during our stay at San Jose Purua, Province of Michoacan, including three days in Mexico City and environs, and two trips--one to Morelia and one to Mirador de las Mille Cumbres (a thousand peaks) at Atziamba National Park. (L) indicates a new bird for my lifelist.

1. Black vulture - *Coragyps atratus*
2. Turkey vulture - *Cathartes aura*
3. Sharp-shinned hawk - *Accipiter striatus*
4. Ferruginous hawk - *Buteo regalis*
5. Red-tailed hawk - *Buteo jamaicensis*
6. (L) Road-side hawk - *Buteo magnirostris*
7. Prairie falcon - *Falco mexicanus*
8. (L) Bat falcon - *Falco albigularis*
9. Sparrow hawk - *Falco sparverius*
10. Rock dove - *Columbia livia*
11. (L) Band-tailed pigeon - *Columba fasciata*
12. Inca-dove - *Scardafella inca*
13. (L) Groove-billed ani - *Crotophaga sulcirostris*
14. (L) Northern pygmy owl - *Glaucidium gnoma*
15. (L) Elf owl - *Micrathene whitneyi*
16. (L) Lesser nighthawk - *Chordeiles acutipennis*
17. (L) White-collared swift - *Streptoprocne zonaris mexicanus*
18. (L) White-naped swift - *Streptoprocne semicollaris*
19. White-throated swift - *Aeronautes saxatalis*
20. (L) Violet sabre wing hummingbird - *Campylopterus hemileucurus hemileucurus*
21. (L) Dusky hummingbird - *Cyanthus sordidus*
22. (L) White-eared hummingbird - *Hylocharis leucotis*
23. (L) Amethyst-throated or cazique hummingbird - *Lampornis amethystinus*
24. (L) Plain-capped star-throated hummingbird - *Heliomaster constantii*
25. (L) Lucifer hummingbird - *Calothorax lucifer*
26. (L) Bumblebee or Heloise hummingbird - *Atthis heloisa*
27. (L) Russet-crowned motmot - *Momotus mexicanus*
28. (L) Bronzed-winged woodpecker - *Piculus aeruginosus*

29. Acorn woodpecker - *Malanerpes formicivorus*
30. Gray-breasted or gila woodpecker
31. (L) Golden-cheeked woodpecker - *Centurus chrysogenys*
32. Ladder-backed woodpecker - *Dendrocopos scalaris*
33. Black phoebe - *Sayornis nigricans*
34. Say Phoebe - *Sayornis saya*
35. Vermilion flycatcher - *Pyrocephalus rubinus*
36. Scissor-tailed flycatcher - *Muscivora forficata*
37. (L) Fork-tailed flycatcher - *Muscivora tyrannus monachus*
38. Brown-crested or Pied flycatcher - *Myiarchus tyrannulus*
39. (L) Western flycatcher - *Empidonax difficilis*
40. (L) White-throated flycatcher - *Empidonax albigularis*
41. (L) Tufted flycatcher - *Mitrephanes phaeocercus*
42. Horned lark - *Eremophila alpestris*
43. Rough-winged swallow - *Stelgidopteryx ruficollis*
44. Barn swallow - *Hirundo rustica erthrogaster*
45. Tree swallow - *Iridoprocne bicolor*
46. Violet-green swallow - *Tachycineta thalissinus*
47. Common Raven - *Corvus corax sinuatus*
48. White-necked raven - *Corvus cryptoleucus*
49. (L) Black-and-blue jay - *Cissilopha sans-blasiana*
50. Steller jay - *Cyanocitta stelleri*
51. (L) Gray-sided or Mexican chickadee - *Parus sclateri*
52. (L) Band-backed wren - *Campylochynchus zonatus*
53. (L) Brown-throated wren - *Troglodytes brunneicollis*
54. Canon wren - *Catherpes mexicanus*
55. (L) Brown-backed solitaire - *Myadestes obscurus*
56. Eastern bluebird - *Sialia sialis*
57. Western bluebird - *Sialia mexicana*
58. Mountain bluebird - *Sialia currucoides*
59. Blue-gray gnatcatcher - *Polioptila caerulea*
60. Black-tailed gnatcatcher - *Polioptila melanura*
61. Golden-crowned kinglet - *Regulus satrapa*
62. Spragues pipt - *Anthus spragueii*
63. Cedar waxwing - *Bombycilla cedrorum*
64. Loggerhead shrike - *Lanius ludovicianus*
65. (L) Black-capped vireo - *Vireo atricapillus*
66. White-eyed vireo - *Vireo griseus*
67. Hutton vireo - *Vireo huttoni*
68. (L) Gray vireo - *Vireo vicinios*
69. Solitary vireo - *Vireo solitarius*
70. Red-eyed vireo - *Vireo olivaceus*
71. Warbling vireo - *Vireo gilvus*
72. Orange-crowned warbler - *Vermivora celata*
73. Nashville warbler - *Vermivora ruficapilla*
74. (L) Colima warbler - *Vermivora crissalis*
75. Olive warbler - *Peucedramus taeniatus*
76. Yellow warbler - *Dendroica petechia*
77. Magnolia warbler - *Dendroica magnolia*
78. Myrtle warbler - *Dendroica coronata*
79. Audubon warbler - *Dendroica auduboni*
80. Black-throated gray warbler - *Dendroica nigrescens*
81. (L) Hermit warbler - *Dendroica occidentalis*
82. (L) Grace warbler - *Dendroica graciae*
83. MacGillivray warbler - *Oporornis tolmiei*
84. Pileolated (Wilson) warbler - *Wilsonia pusilla*
85. Painted redstart - *Setophaga picta*

86. (L) Red warbler - *Ergaticus ruber*
87. House sparrow - *Passer domesticus*
88. Brown-headed cowbird - *Molothrus ater*
89. Boat-tailed grackle - *Cassidix mexicanus*
90. (L) Slender-billed grackle - *Cassidix palustris*
91. Bullock oriole - *Icterus bullocki*
92. Scott oriole - *Icterus parisorum*
93. (L) Black-vented or wagler oriole - *Icterus wagleri*
94. Hooded oriole - *Icterus cucullatus*
95. (L) Streak-backed oriole - *Icterus pustulatus*
96. (L) White-winged tanager - *Piranga leucoptera leucoptera*
97. Western tanager - *Piranga ludiviciiana*
98. (L) Red-headed tanager - *Piranga erthrocephala*
99. (L) Yellow grosbeak - *Pheucticus chrysopheplus*
100. (L) Black-headed grosbeak - *Pheucticus melanocephalus*
101. Blue grosbeak - *Guiraca caerulea*
102. Cassin finch - *Carpodacus cassinii*
103. House finch - *Cardopacus mexicanus*
104. Lesser (or dark backed) goldfinch - *Spinus psaltria*
105. (L) Chestnut-capped brush finch - *Athapetes brunnei-nucha*
106. (L) Collared towhee - *Pipilo ocae*
107. Brown towhee - *Pipilo fuscus*
108. Lark bunting - *Calamospiza melanocorys*
109. Lark sparrow - *Chondestes grammacus*
110. (L) Rusty sparrow - *Aimophila rufescens*
111. Gray-headed junco - *Junco caniceps*
112. Mexican junco - *Junco phaeonotus*
113. Clay-coloured sparrow - *Spizella breweri breweri*
114. Lincoln sparrow - *Melospiza lincolnii*

x x x

x x x

x x x

Blueberries

By A. A. Outram*

On our way to our maritime provinces, on October 5th, 1964, Mrs. Outram and I were driving easterly across the State of Maine. We had gone through miles of dry, uncultivated, rolling country, sparsely populated, with few trees or fences. The soil seemed to be poor. But the scenery was beautiful. For miles on each side of us, the desolate country was closely covered with a low growth of a brilliant red colour, interspersed with bright yellow, all sparkling and shimmering in the light of the morning sun. This was blueberry country.

Stopping the car, we wandered along the edge of the unfenced right of way, and found the bushes to be from three to eight inches high, in most cases, and laden profusely with large tasty berries. By walking only a few feet we were able to eat our fill. The yellow we had seen was from some of the bushes, only partly turned from green to red. It surprised us to see some sections lightly covered with straw. At one place we had seen a man scattering straw by hand.

*On a recent trip to the Maritimes our one-time president and his wife were much struck by the beauty of the "blueberry plains". It is, indeed, one of the great sights of this northern land.

Noticing a very small restaurant, we stopped, ate rolls filled with fresh lobster, and made enquiry. We were told that certain areas, where straw was placed, would be "burnt over" next spring. Here, there would be no crop for a season, but then two good years of berries. There is generally a season of about six weeks of good picking, which varies from year to year, and may be anywhere between late July and September. Although past the commercial season, we had stopped at a point where there was still a luxurious crop, but such conditions were not general.

We were further informed that care must be taken to burn at just the right time, when dry enough to be effective, but not so dry as to enable the fires to get out of control. Instead of using straw, there had been some spraying with oil. Some people considered this to be poor practice as the fires burned too fiercely and deeply in spots. Furthermore, the ash from the straw has a fertilizing value.

When picking is to start the land is laid out in a grid, with strings marking the area for each worker, so that the bushes may be "picked clean" and the pickers not wander aimlessly about.

Later, similar conditions were noticed in parts of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. We heard the term "blueberry plains" used to describe such land. To some, such sections might seem desolate and uninteresting. We found brilliant beauty. I am sure that all with eyes to see would find the same.

x x x

x x x

x x x

Wild Flower Preserve in Toronto

The creation of a wild flower preserve in the James Gardens area is one of the most forward-looking steps being taken by the Parks Department of Metropolitan Toronto. It deserves and should receive the full support of this club and its members for it is a project that falls directly within the center of their interests. It is as well a venture of long-reaching cultural and educational value to the general public of this region.

The Wild Flower Committee of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, of which Mr. Marshall Bartman is chairman, is keeping in close touch with this development and is doing everything it can to aid it. Since we are a member club of the F.O.N. and since, moreover, the project is being carried out within our area the T.F.N.C. is directly involved and is expected to help wherever it or its members can do so.

One of the ways in which this has become possible is in connection with the obtaining of suitable wild plants for planting in the new wild flower garden. No doubt some of our members will know where building developments, road-building or other construction projects are going to result in the destruction of considerable quantities of wild flowers of the sorts being requested. If so, it is highly desirable that some of these plants should be saved by being transported to the new garden to form a nucleus for it.

The following letter which was sent from the Metropolitan Parks Department to Mr. Bartman as chairman of the Wild Flower Committee gives instructions as to the type of plants being sought and the address to which information about them should be sent.

"Dear Mr. Bartman:

"Further to our discussions and our visit to the James Gardens area in connection with the establishment of a wild flower preserve, I wish to submit the following list of common wild plants which might be considered as a nucleus of the plantings. Using common names wherever possible, these will be:

White Trillium
Red Trillium
Marsh Marigold
Hepatica acutiloba
Hepatica americana
Jack-in-the-Pulpit
Spring Beauty
Blue Cohosh
Solomon's Seal
False Solomon's Seal
Foam-flower
Bead Ruby
Adder's Tongue or Dog Tooth Violet
Various ferns
Dentaria - two species
Bulbous Lilies - two species

"If you can arrange to bring this list to the attention of any of the member clubs of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, and they in turn can notify our Mr. Hambly at 487-5291 of the location of any sizeable groups of the above plants, it would be a great help. In order to avoid any confusion, the member clubs should ascertain who the owners of the land in question are, and obtain permission for removal of the plants. If the locations are within or very close to Metropolitan Toronto, it will be much easier to take advantage of these offers, and I am sure that many locations do exist within Metropolitan Toronto where the imminent construction of subdivisions will annihilate some very desirable wild plantings.

"If anyone wishes to deliver plants, they should be sent to Mr. J. Burns or his representative at the James Gardens on Edenbridge Drive, at Edgehill Road, Etobicoke.

"The transplanting time is rather critical, because most of these species would be best transplanted during their dormant stage, but cannot be located unless one is familiar with the area. Therefore, it may be necessary for us to delay action in connection with certain species in order to wait for the optimum time to move them. Each case will have to be judged on its own merits.

"I would appreciate it very much if you would bring this letter to the attention of the various associations with which you are connected, in order that they may bring our needs to the attention of their members."

R. M. Saunders,

Editor.