

FEBRUARY MEETING

Visitors
welcome!Monday, February 7th, 1966, at 8.15 p.m.
at the
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUMVisitors
welcome!

Speaker: DR. JON BARLOW, Curator of Ornithology, Royal Ontario Museum

Subject: AN URUGUAYAN EXPEDITION (Illustrated)

Dr. Barlow will speak about some of the special features (mammals and birds in particular) he and his companions encountered in 1963 during an expedition sponsored by the Department of Mammology, American Museum of Natural History. This was the first foreign expedition to be sent out to cover all sections of this small South American republic.

FEBRUARY OUTINGS

Sunday A Special Purpose Outing - Gray Partridges (Hungarian)

Feb. 13th This introduced species has become established in the Hamilton area, but
9.00 a.m. few TFNC members have seen them. Meet at 9.00 a.m. at the Palais Royale
parking lot on the south side of Lakeshore Blvd. just west of the footbridge
from the Sunnyside station (Roncesvalles & Queen). Rides will be arranged
there for those without cars. Cars will then drive to the high level bridge at
Hamilton, where Mr. John Miles of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club will direct the search.
Drivers are warned that many miles of driving may be required to find these birds.
Bring a lunch and be prepared for a long day.

Saturday Cedarvale Ravine - Birds

Leader: Mrs. Mary Gingrich

Feb. 26th From St. Clair Ave. W. and Spadina Rd. (a streetcar stop) go south and meet
9.30 a.m. at the south end of the bridge. Parking is available on Russell Hill Dr.
(One-way east) and on Walmer Rd. Morning only.

BOTANY GROUP

Meet in the library of Hodgson School, Davisville Ave. just east of Mt.
Thursday Pleasant. Parking entrance on Millwood Rd., one block north. Speaker:
Feb. 17th Dr. James Cruise. Subject: "By Their Fruits Shall Ye Know Them".
8.00 p.m. Illustrated by colour slides and specimens.

Secretary - Miss Edith Cosens (481-5013)

BIRD STUDY
GROUP

Meet at St. James Bond United Church, on the west side of Avenue Rd.,
two blocks north of Eglinton. Speaker: Mr. John Roberts. Subject:
Monday The sharp-shinned hawk with particular reference to the current migration
Feb. 21st studies at Point Pelee. Everyone welcome.

8.00 p.m.

Secretary - Mr. Gerald McKeating (293-8643)

JUNIOR CLUB

Meet on Saturday, Feb. 5th, at 10.00 a.m. in the Museum theatre. The
Insect Group will present the programme of talks and movies.

Director - Mr. Robt. MacLellan (288-9346)

FON NEEDS
VOLUNTEERS

The annual Sportsmen's Show will take place from March 11 to 19. The
Federation of Ontario Naturalists will again be presenting an exhibit.
Anyone willing to contribute a few hours to assist in manning the booth
should contact Mr. Gerald McKeating, exhibits chairman (293-8643) or
the FON officer (444-8419).

President - Mr. Ronald F. Norman

Secretary - Mrs. H. C. Robson,
49 Craighurst Ave.,
Toronto 12 - 481-0260



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January 1966

Sage and Sagebrush

Oh, I'd like to be in Texas,
When the bloom is on the sage.

The above lines, loaded with nostalgia for those who grew up in the west, immortalize the vast plains of North America carpeted with millions of acres of shrubby growth commonly referred to as sage.

Another bit of doggerel we recall from school days is a verse children used to write in each other's autograph albums:

May friendship and truth be with you in youth,
And catnip and sage cheer up your old age.

The sage referred to here as an adjunct to catnip is an entirely different plant from the Texas native. This one is a member of the mint family whereas the plant famed in cowboy songs is a low shrub belonging to the composites.

To be a little more precise, sage is a mint; sagebrush is a composite. Many easterners visiting the west for their first time, expect that sagebrush will resemble the salvia in their garden which is a very common kind of sage. All wild species of sage to be found in Ontario do belong to the genus Salvia. The word Salvia stems from the Latin verb, salvare, meaning "to save", in reference to supposed healing qualities of sage. Soper's list includes six different wild species of sage found in Southern Ontario.

There seems to be no connection between the noun "sage" and the adjective meaning wise and discerning. The adjective traces back, also in Latin, to the infinitive sapere, meaning "to be wise".

Although the cultivated Salvia in our gardens is one of our showiest flowers, our native wild species are rather modest and obscure. There are at least 500 species of Salvia throughout the tropical and temperate world and these include herbs and shrubs, both annual, biennial and perennial. Being of the mint family, many sages have value as seasonings and we are all familiar with sage stuffing in our Christmas turkey. The plant used in Canada for seasoning is usually Salvia officinalis, a small shrub introduced to North America, originally native to the Mediterranean region.

The showy red salvia in our gardens originated in Brazil. It is Salvia splendens and it seems strange that a tropical native adapts so well to our climate as this plant continues to bloom even after our first frosts. A related plant, Salvia patens, native to the mountains of Mexico, having flowers of a pure blue shade, is very common in gardens from Philadelphia and New York south.

The housewife in Britain is likely familiar with a different species of sage in her herb garden. This is Salvia sclarea, called clear-eye, or sometimes clary. This is used not only as a seasoning but as a base for a very pleasant wine. To make wine, the blossoms are picked and boiled with sugar and water, then combined with chopped raisins and yeast.

The sagebrush of the west, the shrub referred to in cowboy songs, belongs to the genus Artemisia. Although we normally think of the south-west when we talk of sagebrush, the genus is well represented throughout the world. In the western hemisphere it grows from Alaska to Argentina. In Eastern Canada we are not as familiar with sagebrush although the common Artemisia frigida is shown on Soper's list as occurring in Southern Ontario. Most of the Artemisiae in Ontario are referred to in English as wormwood.

In the summer of 1963 we toured the sagebrush country of Wyoming and Northern Colorado. This is ranchland where an uninitiated easterner finds it almost impossible to believe that both wildlife and domestic animals can survive in large numbers in such a sparse landscape. But wildlife there is. Pronghorn antelope abound in some areas. In one afternoon of driving from Lander to Rawlins in Wyoming we counted sixty-five pronghorns, all easily visible from the road, mostly lone individuals plus one group of nine browsing in front of a deserted house. Ranchers are not happy with such a heavy antelope population as it spells competition for their hungry cattle. White-tailed deer are also very common.

Birds abound in the sagebrush. Songs of sage sparrows and sage thrashers are to be heard when a lull in the eternal western wind allows their melodies to reach the ear. White-necked ravens and turkey vultures soar overhead viewing the arid, cracked earth dotted with intermittent rosettes of sagebrush, tamarisk and prickly pear. If there is a waterhole or slough, a drake cinnamon teal or an unmusical chorus of yellow-headed blackbirds might be found. Other birds, common in this country in summer are loggerhead shrikes, mourning doves, western meadowlarks, Brewer's blackbirds, magpies, vesper sparrows and horned larks. Wherever a rancher's cabin appears, so too will house finches, starlings and house sparrows.

In Nevada, Artemisia tridentata, another typical sagebrush, is the state flower. The "bloom" is a silvery coating on the leaves, not the flower. In fact most North American species of sagebrush have a rather inconspicuous florescence. The western rancher constantly strives to replace his sagebrush with a more nutritious crop such as alfalfa. Using a railroad rail as a drag, the pioneer farmers cleared thousands of

square miles of sagebrush. However, thousands still remain as preferred habitat of the handsome sage sparrow. In the south part of the western states, roadrunners may be seen cavorting through the brush.

Many species of sagebrush have household uses. One named southernwood is used to keep moths away and to force newly-swarmed bees to move into the hive as the bees have an antipathy for the herb. Absinthe is the base for a celebrated liqueur. Tarragon is used for seasoning both alone and in vinegar solution.

In ancient times (circa 400 B.C.) King Mausolus of Caria married his sister Artemisia and it is in her honour that this genus of plants was named. When Mausolus died, Artemisia erected a magnificent tomb considered as one of the seven wonders of the world. The word mausoleum perpetuates the memory of the tomb and Artemisia commemorates its sponsor.

When you sing,

The sage in bloom is like perfume
Deep in the heart of Texas,

you're referring to Artemisia.

G. Bennett

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Dissa and Data

Wild Flowers in Winter

In the December, 1961 issue of the Newsletter we published a list of wild plants which members of the TFN had found in flower in the Toronto area during the month of November.

At first we thought this would be a rather exclusive list. However, due to the avidity and knowledge of our observant botanists, plus the cooperation of the plants themselves, this list included 112 species and is likely still growing.

It becomes apparent that a more difficult and demanding task would be to compile a list of wild plants in flower in the Toronto area in December. Some naturalists may think it absurd to look for wild flowers in December. However, our own notes record dandelions blooming as late as December 17th. We recall that Prof. Coventry has, by extreme diligence, found plants growing and flowering in midwinter in certain select microclimatic conditions. Also, Dr. R. M. Saunders has found Erysimum inconspicuum (treacle mustard) in flower in winter. This year, we had its close relative, Erysimum cheiranthoides (wormseed mustard) in flower in our own front yard on Dec. 12th and found another one on Dec. 23rd at Roehampton Ave. and Yonge St.

Clearly then, a December flower list is feasible and we'd enjoy hearing about additional records from our botanists.

More About Grindelia squarrosa

We received the following interesting comment from Mary Devitt of Richmond Hill relating to the status of Grindelia squarrosa in Toronto:

"When I was a child, this plant grew along Elmbank Sideroad which bordered the north side of our farm and was still there within the last twenty years. However, the eastern 100 acres of the farm and, I believe, the road itself have been absorbed by Malton Airport.

"The farm was bisected north to south by the Etobicoke River and it is possible that the plant may still persist on the western hillside near the road.

"My oldest sister says that she played with the sticky buds on her way to school (as I did). This was in the same general area in which you found it. I can't recall having found it anywhere else."

Early Bird Records

Last month we referred to a 1945 column by Jim Baillie which mentioned activities of Andrew Graham who, around 1768, collected zoological specimens on the Ontario shore of Hudson Bay.

From a later article, also by Mr. Baillie, we now learn the identity of some of the birds collected. These were the Eskimo curlew, boreal chickadee, white-crowned sparrow, blackpoll warbler and great gray owl. At that time, these species were all new to science.

Graham was an officer of the Hudson's Bay Co. and was succeeded by two more nature-minded officials. One of these was Dr. Thomas Hutchins who took the first recorded specimens of the Hudsonian curlew.

The small race of Canada goose which used to bear the name Hutchins goose was named after Dr. Hutchins but, contrary to some opinions, it was not discovered by him. Actually, Sir John Richardson first noted this small race of goose in 1831 and named it for the Hudson Bay Co. official.

In Case Anyone Asks . . .

. . . A can of dog food on a bird-feeding tray makes good eating for wildlife, especially for stray dogs. . . . The width of a rabbit's burrow is a mere hare's breadth. . . . One of the most ridiculous bits of advertising we've ever seen was an electric sign in December at Jane & Wilson which read, "I Am Dreaming of a White Christmas and Robbie's Pizza." . . . Enjoyment is a long walk along the Humber on a clear February day. . . . In a half-day in Toronto one can easily find a dozen spelling errors on signs and billboards. . . . The Toronto Field Naturalists' Club welcomes new members. Tell your friends. . . . Whatever happened to gingerbread, headcheese, apple dumplings and bread pudding? . . . Be sure to attend as many TFN outings as possible. . . . If you can remember the R-100, butterfly skirts, Eb and Zeb, and Gray Dort cars, you're about my age. . . . A bird in the bush is worth two in the hand. . . . The meek may inherit the earth but that's the only way they'll ever get it. . . . Have you been to High Park lately? A winter walk there is well worth while. . . . Growing old isn't so bad when you consider the alternative. . . . Telling a lesser scaup from

a greater scaup is a matter of a pinion. . . . Brush wolves and deer are much commoner around Toronto than most people think. . . . A noisy flock of crows gives caws for alarm. . . . Patronize the Royal Ontario Museum.

Warkworth or Capistrano?

Brigitte Teleki of the Richmond Hill Naturalists' Club had the following article in the June issue of the Club's Bulletin and we have permission to reprint it here.

"My husband's family owns a farm near Warkworth, Ontario. Every spring they are besieged by birds, quite a few nesting close to the house. But six or seven pairs of barn swallows are regular "guests". During the winter months everything is locked up since our parents spend the winters in the States. This spring they returned somewhat later than usual (at the beginning of May) and were very surprised to see twelve swallows sitting on the garage. The birds greeted them with wild excitement, almost touching them in their dives, and would not stop diving and chattering loudly until my father-in-law opened the barn door. The swallows rushed in and immediately started building.

"We feel the swallows had been waiting for approximately ten days, since this is the extra time the Telekis stayed away. We were told that they had never been greeted so noisily before. I find it particularly interesting since there are several other farms in the vicinity, yet the swallows chose to wait for their usual 'home'."

Misnomers Unlimited

If you have trouble learning birds' names maybe this is why. -- A horned grebe has no horns. The upland plover is a sandpiper. Screech owls do not screech. The nighthawk is not a hawk. A hairy woodpecker doesn't have hair. The ladybird is an insect (apologies to Mrs. L.B.J.). A warbling vireo's song doesn't sound at all like a warbler's. The palm warbler is at home in the black spruce forest. Cape May warblers are almost never seen at Cape May. The prairie warbler inhabits many different habitats but is practically non-existent on the prairies. Evening grosbeaks are not a bit nocturnal. Tree sparrows nest in the far north where there are no trees. The house sparrow is not a sparrow. You would never see a water pipit in the water. A meadowlark is an icterid, not a lark.

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What's Around?

by Slim Pickins

Last month I told everybody that three-toes woodpeckers could be found in Wilket Creek Park. One guy 'phoned saying he saw quite a few woodpeckers all right but they wouldn't sit still long enough so he could count their toes. I always seem to get mixed up with somebody like that.

We had a pretty good Christmas except I got a tie from my brother that I gave him two years ago. We never were very close anyway.

A lot of people looking for birds don't spend enough time in the city. They're always off to Niagara or West Virginia or some place like that. In winter you can see all the birds you can handle in a day by visiting High Park and Sunnyside. Be sure to take a few loaves of bread for the ducks.

First, drive along Bloor St. and, just west of High Park, turn south along Ellis Park Rd. Park the car just at the north end of Grenadier Pond and walk in to the point where the creek joins the pond. In the cat-tails you should find song sparrows or maybe a swamp sparrow. There'll likely be some open water with black ducks and mallards. Watch for other ducks in with them such as green-winged teal or widgeon. Then drive down to the extreme southwest corner of Grenadier Pond at Ellis Ave. Here, unless the weather's been below zero for a few days, there'll be a spot of open water. Black ducks and mallards will be here by dozens. In fact, it is the motion of their webbed feet that keeps the water from freezing. Take about half your bread and feed them. Again, watch for other species. If it's slippery, stay back near the sidewalk. Every once in a while somebody slides into the Pond. The ducks prefer bread.

Now at Sunnyside, park in the area east of the Bathing Pavilion. Take the rest of your bread and walk in behind the Pavilion and feed the rest of the ducks, also the gulls.

You'll notice that some of the ducks here won't eat bread. These are the diving ducks like scaup, oldsquaw, and goldeneyes that eat animal matter, not vegetable. In addition to ducks and gulls, there may be a few geese ready to eat your handouts.

Well, back at the car, you can now drive east and turn off in behind the Canoe and Rowing Club just past the Boulevard Club. Watch for canvasbacks and buffleheads here. Continue east along the Exhibition Grounds watching for a narrow one-way road which takes you right along the water. Take your Bird Guide and learn your ducks.

Have a good time. Be careful of all the one-way streets and two-way drivers.

Yours truly,

Slim Pickins