

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB NEWSLETTER

218

Visitors welcome!

March Meeting

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Monday, March 7, 1966 at 8.15 p.m.
at the
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

The Toronto Guild for Colour Photography, affiliated with the Photographic Society of America, will present the Nature Division of its first International Exhibition. The pictures, from outstanding photographers of many countries, will feature mammals, birds, insects, plants, and other aspects of nature. Comments by Mr. Russell Gee will accompany the presentation.

March Outings

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| Sunday
March 13
9.30 a.m. | Rear of Boyd Conservation Area - Birds (horned larks in particular)
From the intersection of Hwys. 400 and 7, travel west about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles on #7. Turn north at the sign pointing to Mart Kenney's Ranch. Drive north about 2 miles, as far as possible without turning east or west. Park on the side of the road. Bring lunch. |
| Saturday
March 26
9.30 a.m. | <u>High Park - Birds</u>
<u>Leader: Mr. John Dex</u>
Meet at Bloor St. and High Park Ave. at Park entrance. Morning only. Note to drivers: It may be necessary to drive in as far as the skating rink to park, as most parking areas are not opened until 10.00 a.m. |
| BOTANY GROUP
Thursday
March 17
8.00 p.m. | Meet at Hodgson School, Davisville Ave. just east of Mt. Pleasant. Parking entrance from Millwood Rd., one block north. Mrs. Mary Ferguson will give an illustrated talk on "Wild Flowers of Western Australia". Everyone interested in botany is welcome. |
| | Chairman - Mr. Joseph Millman (425-0696) |
| BIRD STUDY
GROUP
Monday
March 21
8.00 p.m. | Meet at St. James Bond United Church, on the west side of Avenue Rd. two blocks north of Eglinton. Speaker: Mr. Don Baldwin, of the Department of Ornithology, ROM. Subject: "Nesting Habits of Some Ontario Birds". Everyone welcome.
Secretary - Mr. Gerald McKeating (293-8643) |
| JUNIOR CLUB
Saturday
March 5
10.00 a.m. | Junior TFN'ers will meet in the theatre, Royal Ontario Museum. The Mammal Group will present a programme of films and talks. Contributions for Flight magazine should be handed in at this meeting. Note: The April meeting will be held on March 26.
Director - Mr. Robt. MacLellan (488-9346) |

CHICKADEES, The Department of Ornithology, Royal Ontario Museum, would appreciate ANYONE? receiving records pertaining to the movement of black-capped chickadees that occurred during October and November, 1965. Date, place, and time of day, if possible, when flocks were noted should be included. Even negative records are of value. Any specimens picked up and prepared during that time should be sent to the Museum; these would be returned.

"INHERIT THE WILD", the final lecture of the Audubon film series, will be held at Eaton Auditorium on Tuesday, March 22, at 8.15 p.m. D. J. Nelson will present intimate studies of wildlife including such rarities as the whooping crane, manatee, everglade kite, and Ross' goose. Tickets \$1.50, at the Auditorium.

President - Mr. Ronald F. Norman

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



NEWSLETTER

Number 218

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February 1966

A Rare Bit of Good Luck

Did you ever have a day when everything went right? This was what happened on January 15th, when we set out to see some of the more unusual wintering species of birds in the Toronto area.

Usually, visiting a feeding-station to see a rare bird is an unrewarding experience. When you arrive, you learn that the bird was there for over an hour but has just left. "It sat in the sun right outside the window for over an hour," they tell you. You wait for three hours and ten minutes in a cold car. The bird arrives and stays for one short minute, but this is at exactly the moment you upset a thermos of coffee into the glove compartment, so you miss seeing it. When you get home, a 'phone call awaits you. The message says, "Tell Mr. Bennett the bird came just after he left and stayed for ten minutes right on the feeder."

January 15th, 1966, was the exception. Our first stop was Maxome Drive in Willowdale to look for a hawk owl. The bird was right there in a tree. We didn't even have to stop the car.

Next target was the Markham-Pickering township line just south of No. 7 highway to look for a red-bellied woodpecker at Mr. Barkey's feeder. Just as I arrived, so did Alf. Bunker in his Land Rover leading a twenty-vehicle caravan of TFN members on a winter outing. With so many pairs of eyes to assist, it took less than five minutes for someone to spot the bird and we were off to our next appointment.

Next was a stop at J. M. Speirs' on Altona Rd. to look for an Oregon junco. Almost immediately we found it, practically on Speirs' doorstep.

Now we went to Ajax to look for owls. Near the dump was a flock of ten meadowlarks. Stopping to look for a barred owl, I noticed two other birders with the same objective. Although we failed to find this species, they directed me, in succession, to a saw-whet owl in the top of a hemlock; eight short-eared owls in the fields along the lakefront; and a wintering yellowthroat in the cat-tail marsh where Duffin's Creek meets the Base Line. These birds were all found with ease.

Also listed were a hooded merganser at Frenchman's Bay, a pileated woodpecker at Cherrywood, and a red-breasted merganser in Whitby Harbour. Only the barred owl kept us from a perfect score.

Not only does the above indicate that hard looking and clean living can occasionally lead to success but it also emphasizes the richness of Toronto's bird population.

Where else could an observer expect to see, in one morning, a hawk owl, a red-bellied woodpecker, and an Oregon junco, three birds which in order, bring the far north, the southern Columbian life-zone, and the western forests right into our midst?

G. Bennett

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We're indebted to Mr. Peter Iden and Miss Ruth Marshall for the following contributions to the Newsletter. Both contributors are well known to most TFN members.

Watching Birds and Birdwatchers in the Maritimes

by Peter Iden

The ingredients for a successful family holiday vary considerably from family to family. Our own recipe, tried out in the spring of 1965, is recommended to anyone who is interested in spending two most enjoyable weeks away from home, watching birds and getting to know birdwatchers in other parts of the country. Take one Volkswagen or similar conveyance. Fill it almost to the top with food, clothing, tent, and various camping gear. Squeeze two tiny tots on top of this. Add a driver and one wife. Somewhere there may even be space for a half-dozen field guides, binoculars, telescope, camera, lenses, notepaper, and numerous odds and ends.

There is one other item which seems to be of great importance when travelling. This is the map with the green line. It is supplied by people who say that they know all about the places where you are going. We were told that we must follow this green line all the way or else! During the first few days we strictly obeyed this rule. Later we became more daring and occasionally ventured a few miles away from the guiding line, always in fear that we would end up in some dark, uncharted corner of the Maritimes. How right they were to caution us against leaving our predestinated route! On our first side excursion onto what was advertised as a "most scenic route" we were lured so far away from civilization that our credit card was actually not recognized at a service station! Such are the perils of travelling far from home.

In spite of those great and beautiful obstacles known as the White Mountains we reached the promised shores of the Atlantic some two days and about 750 miles after we had left home on June 19th, 1965. The croaking of ravens was our first introduction to the avifauna of Acadia National Park in the State of Maine, but our welcoming committee was made up of thousands of mosquitoes. These pesky little creatures introduced us to our camp site at Seawall, where we put up our tent in a small forest of mature spruce and fir which is interrupted by man-made clearings and borders directly on the rugged seashore. There we were in the midst of birdlife of northern character: ruby-crowned kinglets, hermit and Swainson's thrushes, parula and myrtle warblers and slate-colored juncos sang everywhere. A short walk would bring us to the seashore, where great black-backed gulls and double-crested cormorants were the most common birds.

The tidal pools left behind by the receding water exposed fascinating cross-sections of life unknown to the Inlander. There were algae that went "pop" when we stepped on them. Others were so slippery they sent us slithering precariously close to the water's edge. We crunched our way across barnacles and periwinkles and thousands of small crustaceans, sadly unaware of their names and their ways of life because we had neglected to take along a guide book on life along the seashore. One pool of water held captive a huge fish almost two feet long and just as wide, flopping about helplessly in only a few inches of its native element. Forever scavenging, a black-backed gull spotted this lovely tidbit and proceeded at once to dissect it, while it was still very much alive. Such are the ways of nature.

The visit to Acadia Park was, without any doubt, the scenic highlight of our trip. The ascent by car along the side and to the top of Cadillac Mountain, with 1530 feet the highest mountain along the Atlantic coast of North America, is a thrilling experience surpassed only by the sweeping view from its bald top. There only a few scraggly bushes and lichens dare face the struggle for existence.

Those who come to Acadia at this time of the year to see waterfowl, seabirds or shorebirds, will be very disappointed. Most shorebirds and waterfowl have passed through the area much earlier, and you will have to seek out the oceanic birds close to their nesting grounds, the bird islands off the coast. We saw only a single black guillemot and one male common eider at Acadia, and no other birds of the ocean during the entire trip.

At St. Andrews, New Brunswick, we set up camp in the small town park, with eight species of warblers in listening distance of our tent. News of our visit had preceded us by mail, so that I was soon out birding with Dr. John Rigby, one of a small but active community of naturalists in this town. Anyone visiting St. Andrews should not neglect to chat with Miss Willa MacCoubrey. No one knows more about the birds and the birders along the north shore of Fundy Bay. A visit to the Atlantic Biological Station also was of great benefit, as many of the scientists there are active ornithologists. According to these birders, my total of 38 species in a little over a day was quite a good tally for that area in late June. Although nothing unusual was seen, American bittern, osprey, red-breasted nuthatch, hermit thrush, ruby-crowned kinglet, and parula warbler were the more interesting records of our short stay at St. Andrews. The excellent lobster available in this town should also not be passed by.

I have few recollections of birds seen en route to Fundy National Park, with the exception of a small family of common eiders, another American bittern and an osprey. On this day we ran into the only foul weather of the entire trip. This also was the day of the credit card incident. We tried to see Austin Squires at the New Brunswick Museum in St. John, but he was away on a field trip "up the river" to Fredericton.

At Fundy my concepts of rugged outdoor camping, acquired during many years of scouting and "roughing it", received a severe jolt. It may have been because of the rather cool weather, but I now found the hot showers, the heated swimming pool, the indoor cooking and the coin laundry facilities of the Park very much to my liking. David Christie, the newly appointed Naturalist at Fundy and one of the Province's most ardent birders, looked after our ornithological welfare. Kinnie Brook trail was to be my introduction to the Park's bird life. There we saw yellow-bellied sapsuckers, common ravens, boreal chickadees, red-breasted nuthatches, winter wrens, ruby-crowned kinglets, parula and bay-breasted warblers and slate-colored juncoes. Here, too, we heard, but did not see, the olive-sided flycatcher. Our most thrilling discovery appeared to be a mourning warbler, as this species was thought to be a rarity in that area. Later I learnt from David that as he grew more familiar with the Park he found the mourning to be one of the most common warblers there! About the campsite we always had a few ravens. Two gray jays once visited us briefly. The daily movements of evening grosbeaks along the shore were of particular interest. In one half hour during breakfast we counted no less than 200 flying over! A fairly reliable pair of eastern bluebirds, one of very few known to breed in that Province, were visited several times near the village of Alma. Three common scoters which I found in Alma Bay on the last day of our stay had never before been recorded on the Park's list of birds.

Packing and unpacking our gear several times a day had become most bothersome by this time. We therefore decided to make Fundy Park the "base camp" for our excursions into southern New Brunswick. Of these, one trip took us to Moncton, where we met Roy Hunter, then President of the Moncton Naturalists' Club. He took us through Acadian country to the lobster town of Cocagne, excellent shorebird territory in season but very dead at the time of our visit. On the return route we looked in on Charles McEwen at his private airport in Englishtown. If ever a sanctuary for birds has been created out of nothing, this is the one. There are very few trees and almost no bushes, for Charley McEwen is a swallow man. He started his cliff swallow colony by plastering mud under the eaves of his aircraft hangar. Now there are more than 150 pairs nesting, as well as several hundred barn swallows. His purple martin colony of some 50 pairs is one of the largest in the Maritimes, where his species has a somewhat patchy distribution and its colonies are treasured by birders. Tree swallows are also nesting in boxes put up for them. A most remarkable place to see! Apparently only the very strict control of house sparrows, starlings and cats keeps it that way.

A blitz birding trip into Nova Scotia was the result of a visit to Dr. Anthony Erskine in Sackville, a few miles from the provincial border. Amherst Point Bird Sanctuary was the objective. Highlight of this outing was a brood of pied-billed grebes, and we saw both blue-winged and green-winged teal and American widgeon on the sheltered pond. In the dense woods surrounding the ponds we met with Swainson's thrush, ruby-crowned kinglets and parula warblers. A few pine siskins

added to our enjoyment, but great hordes of mosquitoes kept us moving through the woods at a brisk pace. Finally, back at Sackville, I was treated to an outstanding sight: a pair of killdeer with young, the first such record for that area! (Editor's Note: The killdeer is not common in the Maritimes.)

Between Fundy Park and Moncton the road passes through great stretches of salt water marshes. We never failed to stop there to listen for the sneezy song of the sharp-tailed sparrow, which could be heard almost anywhere along the marsh roads.

Our return trip took us through the center of New Brunswick into Quebec, to Riviere du Loup and back along the mighty St. Lawrence. We watched dozens of white whales far out in the middle of the river, but except for the many double-crested cormorants over and on the river there was not much to remember, birdwise. We had to cover too many miles and there was little time for birdwatching during our short rest stops. Back on the green line, we were on the fastest way home. It had been a most enjoyable trip, enhanced by perfect travelling weather and good companions along the way. We had made no outstanding bird observations, and the total of 98 species recorded by us was also not very impressive, but we did see a number of species which do not make their summer home in the Toronto region. Above all, we had lots of fun and a healthy change in climate and scenery. And this alone would make it a trip well worth recommending to others.

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As for Winter...

by G. Ruth Marshall

As we swayed over the three swinging planks which bridged the river, I could not fail to note the poise of the pines which keep graceful guard on the height of land back o' beyond the cottage with its Cardinal totem. In the tree world, the pine epitomizes for me the freedom and the wonder of Nature--whether it be stunted and twisted as it is on the wind-swept islands of the St. Lawrence, or whether it be in its lofty, statuesque grandeur in the northerly areas of this Province. The pine has a ruggedness, a strength, and a surety that is inspiring--an ability to "cope" with life despite many difficulties. In the first instance one might venture to say it is a resourceful tree, and refuses to give in, and in the second that it "rises" to the occasion when environment permits.

As for Winter--who can say it is a bleak, forsaken period of the year, with nothing of beauty or of sympathy of spirit, without a feeling of tranquillity or of the explosive unexpected--or even of sudden adventure?

I can be cold, bitter, and unrelenting, yes, with even the trees outlined with a stark, forbidding aura of gloom; then comes a shaft of cheerful sunshine which highlights the snow sculptures on rocky ridge, on tree bough, on drift high-piled, on frozen lake, or in deep depression. There is colour in Winter, in the varied hues of the evergreens, the shadings of bark of trees and bushes, in the changing blues and grays of the sky, the whiteness of cloud as compared with that of snow. There is colour, for instance, in the tiny rainbows formed when icicles melt and drip from

bulrushes or low marsh plants, when Sammy Jay suddenly flashes from pine to hemlock,, or when the gay, friendly wee Chickadee suddenly appears on a branch overhead.

Life there is, too, for those who want to see it and hear it. I have often just stood quietly, deep in the bush, and listened to the faint whisper of wind high up in the trees, or to the slight sigh as a seed or two fell near my feet--from a cone on a lofty spruce. I have thrilled to the cry of the handsome Pileated that is about to get his meal from an adjacent grub-infected tree, and I have caught many a quick glimpse of a scurrying mouse scooting into one of his snowy runways. Then there is the deep booming of the ice in the northern lakes--one wonders if the underworld spirits are preparing for a curling bonspiel below water level....

Winter? Yes, thank you!

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Dissa and Data

More Winter Wild Flowers

In last month's issue we suggested that it appeared quite possible to compile a list of wild plants in the Toronto area with actual flowers blooming in the month of December. The unseasonably mild weather in the current season made this observation more prophetic than we expected.

A stalk of Erysimum cheiranthoides (wormweed mustard) was still flowering in our front yard when a heavy snow fell just before Christmas. Then, on Christmas Day, more snow came with biting winds and heavy drifts. Milder weather in the final week of the year chased the snow and there was the wormseed mustard with flowers still intact.

On New Year's Day we hoped to record our first January flower ever in Ontario. Sure enough, it was still healthy and continues so through the first week of the year.

The challenge of finding still more January flowers, coupled with forty-degree days resulted in discovering a stalk of shepherd's purse (Capsella bursa-pastoris) with one small flower at Merton and Yonge Sts. on January 3rd. Likely, with enough time and diligence, more flowers could be found in December and on into 1966 as, by Jan. 7th, there still had not been any heavy frosts.

In fact just after writing the above paragraph, the following message arrived in the mail from Eva Parsons of Bristol Ave., Toronto. Those who attend TFN outings regularly have come to know Mrs. Parsons as a very keen observer: She says:

"You may be interested to know that I found a species of speedwell (Veronica chamaedrys) on December 15 at Ajax, and creeping buttercup (Ranunculus repens) was still in flower at James Gardens on December 31.

"There was plenty of common groundsel (Senecio vulgaris) around here

throughout December (including my garden) and in January, and in several places lemon-yellow goatsbeard (Tragopogon dubuis). This, as you probably know, is the later goatsbeard, with bracts extending beyond the flowers, as in the purple variety. On January 1, I found this still in bloom on Ellis Avenue, and also common dandelion (Taraxacum officinale) in a number of places."

Does anyone else have December or January flower records for the Toronto area? Please let us know.

In Case Anyone Asks . . .

. . . According to Soper's list, there are over 35 species of wild asters in Southern Ontario plus hybrids and minor varieties. . . . Snowflakes make lakes . . . A laughing gull nests in the mud, eats garbage, and spends most of its life all wet. So, what is it laughing about? . . . There will be two full moons in August, 1966. . . . Whatever happened to four-buckle galoshes, jam sandwiches, Zig Zag cigarettes and small boys rolling hoops along the sidewalk with a stick? . . . The Toronto Field Naturalists' Club welcomes new members. Tell your friends. . . . If you think you're superior, just try to outstare a cow. . . . Now is the time to make a few birdhouses and put them up. Tree swallows, bluebirds, crested flycatchers, need homes. . . . If you don't know how to cook artichokes, there's no sense asking me. . . . Try to attend as many TFN cutings as possible. . . . The hardest part of preparing black beans is painting the darn things. . . . Don't forget to visit Long Point around the end of March to see swans. . . . Is there anything that contributes less to society than litterbugs, ice storms, hangnails, or motorcycles? . . . You'll be seeing your first groundhog of the year around April 1st. The bit about the Feb. 2nd shadow hunt is a myth. . . . The girl in the next apartment has a very singular voice. Thank goodness it isn't plural. . . . The FON Bookshop, 1262 Don Mills Rd., is a good place to buy your gifts.

Winter Birds

In the December issue of the Newsletter we stated our intention of compiling a composite list of all birds noted in the Toronto area this winter. From various observers' reports plus the Birdfinding Bulletin we've kept track of most of our winter birds and will publish same in next month's Newsletter. There are several species that occasionally show up in winter which nobody has reported so far. If anyone has listed the following species, please drop a line to the TFN office, 49 Craighurst Avenue, or to G. Bennett, R. R. #2, Woodbridge: wood duck, common scoter, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, Bonaparte's gull, red-headed woodpecker, red crossbill, fox sparrow, Lapland longspur. Also, no winter shorebirds have been reported whereas killdeer, snipe, sanderling or purple sandpiper are all possibilities.

To qualify for addition to our list, these observations should be between Dec. 1, 1965 and Feb. 28, 1966 and be within a 30-mile radius of the Royal Ontario Museum.

What's Around?

by Slim Pickins

Hi, folks. Last week Claude Hopper and I went birding for a few hours. Claude was telling me he heard two men talking the other day. One said, "How's your wife?" The other said, "Compared to what?"

We went up Bayview Ave. and there were some pretty good spots. Try it yourself by making a half-day of it. Start at Steeles Ave. and spend a few minutes in the two little woodlots on the north-east and south-east corners. Drive north up Bayview and you'll soon see the big white Markham Township water tower in the distance. On your left or west you'll see the Toronto Ladies' Golf Course. Walk in here and watch for crossbills and grosbeaks. If it's golfing weather, watch out for lady golfers.

Between the water tower, and No. 7 Highway there's a woods on each side worth ten minutes each.

Now at No. 7 (at the traffic light) take a speedometer reading. One mile north of No. 7 there are two more woodlots, one of each side, also some good fields on the right. Walk in these if you feel like it. When you've gone 1.6 miles from No. 7 you'll find a cedar grove on your right that sometimes has long-eared owls. Please be careful of the farmer's fence. He's got an awful temper. On your left, the woods behind the Observatory should be explored if you can figure out how to get over the link fence.

When you see the Richmond Hill town sign just below Palmer Ave., there'll be a white pine woods on your right. If it's not too muddy, walk over to it.

Now, keep going north on Bayview through Richmond Hill and on past the Elgin Mills Side Road and on up another mile or so. At 19th Ave. there's a dandy woods and here this winter there was a goshawk and siskins and a northern three-toed woodpecker. You have to look hard or you'll miss the "19th Ave." sign because some character has bent it so you can hardly read it.

Well if you do all these places around the last half of March you should get the usual winter stuff plus spring birds like robin, killdeer, horned lark, redwinged blackbird and grackle. If you're lucky you might see a bluebird.

At Elgin Mills, Claude and I stopped to chat with Len Danear. Len not only watches birds but makes his living off them. He has a chicken farm and started to mix sawdust with his chicken feed to cut expenses. After a while the hens we were laying eggs with cork centres instead of yolks. Finally he was giving them pure sawdust and they didn't know the difference except they started laying knot-holes instead of eggs. Len put 15 knot-holes in the incubator and 14 hatched into chickens with wooden legs. The other was a woodpecker. He had to stop when 35 of his best birds died of shingles.

Hasn't the weather been awful?

Yours truly,

Slim Pickins