

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB NEWSLETTER

Visitors welcome!

APRIL MEETING

Visitors welcome!

Monday, April 4th, 1966, at 8.15 p.m.
at the
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

MEMBERS' NIGHT:

- Junior Club members - Daniel Lee - "Extinct Birds"
- Gregory Dovlet - "Ants"
- James Rice - "The Red Fox"

- Paul Catling - "Something About Owls" (Illustrated)

- Peter A. Peach - "Sitting on a Tuffet" (Illustrated)

- Walter M. Tovell - "Birth of an Island" (Surtsey, 1964) (Illustrated)

-oOo-

BIRD STUDY GROUP Meet on Monday, April 18th at 8 p.m. at St. James Bond United Church, on the west side of Avenue Rd. two blocks north of Eglinton. Identification, habits and habitat of Ontario warblers will be discussed by Mr. Jack Gingrich and Mr. James Woodford.

Secretary - Mr. Gerald McKeating (293-8643)

BOTANY GROUP There will be no more meetings of the Botany Group this season. Many botanical trips are listed in the Spring Outings booklet.

JUNIOR CLUB The date of the April meeting of the Junior Club has been changed to Saturday, March 26th. Meet at 10 a.m. in the Museum theatre.

Director - Mr. Robt. MacLellan (488-9346)

NOMINATIONS In view of elections to be held at the Annual General Meeting of the Club on May 2nd, the nominating committee have made the following recommendations: President - Dr. Peter A. Peach. Vice-President - Mr. John A. Gingrich. Executive members - Mr. Paul Catling, Miss Rosemary Gaymer, Mrs. Eva Parsons, Mr. Jack H. Saker, Mr. Kenneth Strasser.

In accordance with the Constitution of the Club, further nominations may be proposed in writing to the Secretary by any three members of the Club before April 10th provided that prior agreement of the nominee has been obtained. Such nominations will be published in the May issue of the Newsletter.

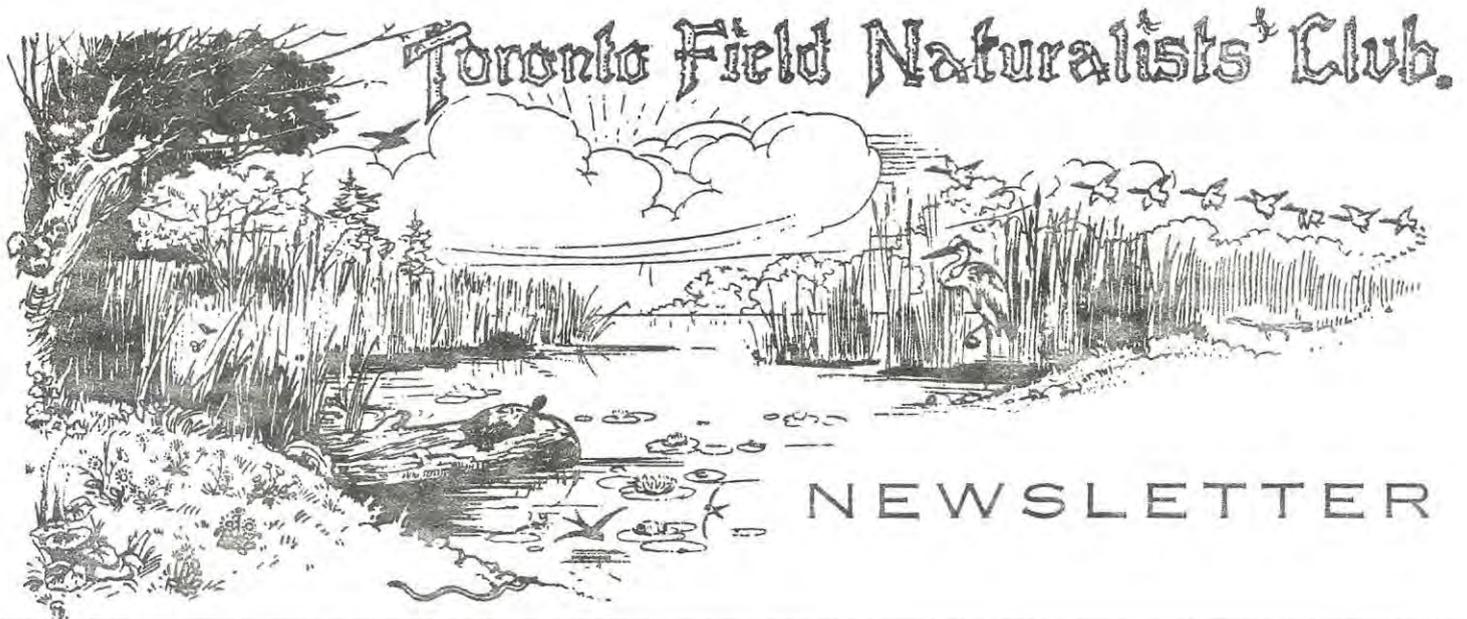
ATTENTION SYMPHONY LOVERS As Audubon Wildlife Films will be held on Tuesdays next season, those who subscribe to TSO concerts may wish to attend the Wednesday series in order to avoid conflict on their calendars.

Extra copies of the enclosed Spring Outings booklet are available for friends and prospective members, upon request to the Secretary.

Memo: Get FON Check Lists (5¢) for your spring birding at the April meeting.

President - Mr. R. F. Norman

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



Number 219

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

March 1966

It's That Time Again

In the Spring a fuller crimson comes upon the
robin's breast;
In the Spring the wanton lapwing gets himself
another crest;
In the Spring a livelier iris changes on the
burnish'd dove;
In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns
to thoughts of love.

Tennyson: Locksley Hall

Which is probably what he's been thinking about all winter anyway -- and speaking of winter reminds us that back in December we gave readers fair warning that in this issue of the Newsletter we intended to publish a composite list of all reliable records of birds noted in the Toronto area from Dec. 1, 1965 to Feb. 28, 1966.

Winter birding in Toronto is a fascinating pastime. We are far enough south to induce the odd catbird or towhee to winter here, and north enough to be visited occasionally by such strangers as a hawk owl or an Iceland gull.

The fact is, you never know what will show up. Earl Stark and Doug. Scovell go to Whitby in late February and find two Virginia rails that nobody else had reported, even though the spot is visited by experienced birders every winter week-end.

And you never know what won't show up. In the winter of 1964-65, purple finches were so common, people complained of the expense of feeding them. This winter there were a few records, but only a few, and no reports at all of large flocks.

This winter we were visited by great flocks of white-winged crossbills, yet not one red crossbill was reported during the whole winter season. This not only reflects erratic behaviour on the part of the crossbills but it indicates mighty careful identification by Toronto birdlisters.

We haven't made any attempt to match up birds found with birdfinders as this can become a little tricky. There is always somebody who saw a rarity two days before it was reported. We don't want to hurt anybody's finely-feathered feelings.

Our composite list totals 126 at time of writing. There are a few reports excluded, not because we doubt their reliability, but because the extreme rarity of the species concerned calls for more back-up information than we have at time of writing. For example, the ivory gull and Atlantic fulmar -- two birds never previously recorded in the Toronto area -- were both reported by competent and careful birders. We'd appreciate getting more details. Also, a broad-winged hawk was mentioned during the winter. As this species is extremely rare in winter anywhere north of the Rio Grande, more data re field marks, etc., would be welcome.

So, enough preamble -- here is the list.

Common Loon	Cooper's Hawk
Horned Grebe	Red-tailed Hawk
Pied-billed Grebe	Red-shouldered Hawk
Great Blue Heron	Rough-legged Hawk
Black-crowned Night Heron	Golden Eagle
Whistling Swan	Bald Eagle
Mute Swan	Marsh Hawk
Canada Goose	Gyr Falcon
Blue Goose	Sparrow Hawk
Mallard	Ruffed Grouse
Black Duck	Ring-necked Pheasant
Gadwall	Virginia Rail
Pintail	American Coot
Green-winged Teal	Glaucous Gull
American Widgeon	Iceland Gull
Shoveler	Great Black-backed Gull
Redhead	Herring Gull
Ring-necked Duck	Ring-billed Gull
Canvasback	Rock Dove
Greater Scaup	Mourning Dove
Lesser Scaup	Screech Owl
Common Goldeneye	Great Horned Owl
Bufflehead	Snowy Owl
Oldsquaw	Hawk Owl
Harlequin Duck	Barred Owl
King Eider	Long-eared Owl
White-winged Scoter	Short-eared Owl
Surf Scoter	Boreal Owl
Ruddy Duck	Saw-whet Owl
Hooded Merganser	Belted Kingfisher
Common Merganser	Yellow-shafted Flicker
Red-breasted Merganser	Pileated Woodpecker
Turkey Vulture	Red-bellied Woodpecker
Goshawk	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Hairy Woodpecker

Downy Woodpecker
Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker
Northern Three-toed Woodpecker
Horned Lark
Gray Jay
Blue Jay
Common Crow
Black-capped Chickadee
Boreal Chickadee
White-breasted Nuthatch
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Winter Wren
Carolina Wren
Long-billed Marsh Wren
Mockingbird
Catbird
Brown Thrasher
Robin
Hermit Thrush
Swainson's Thrush
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Bohemian Waxwing
Cedar Waxwing
Northern Shrike
Starling
Myrtle Warbler

Yellowthroat
House Sparrow
Eastern Meadowlark
Red-winged Blackbird
Rusty Blackbird
Common Grackle
Brown-headed Cowbird
Cardinal
Evening Grosbeak
Purple Finch
Pine Grosbeak
Hoary Redpoll
Common Redpoll
Pine Siskin
American Goldfinch
White-winged Crossbill
Rufous-sided Towhee
Slate-colored Junco
Oregon Junco
Tree Sparrow
Field Sparrow
Harris' Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Lapland Longspur
Snow Bunting

- G. Bennett, Editor

* * *

* * *

* * *

The Case of the Gizzard-Guzzling Gastronomist

One of our 126 winter species listed above was a red-shouldered hawk which showed up at Mrs. D. S. Lyall's feeder at 103 Banstock Drive in the Finch-Bayview area. For any species of hawk to patronize a feeding-tray (except as a predator) is most unusual. We visited this bird on February 12th and found it perched right on the tray, and a most beautiful bird it was. But here, let's let Mrs. Lyall tell about it.

"This is going to be a long story. It begins with a chickadee.

"This little bird flew to my hand one morning early in January when I was putting out sunflower seed. It was nearly beakless. Of its upper bill, a few shreds, no wider than a pen stroke, stuck straight out. The lower mandible was broken off like a narrow shelf. It was shuffling through the seeds trying to find a few huskless bits.

"Quickly, I got some bird pudding and plastered it liberally all over the feeder. The chickadee perched on the spatula. While I 'iced' the feeder, it tucked into the pudding like mad.

"So enthusiastically had I applied the pudding that when a red-shouldered hawk landed on the feeder a few weeks later, it was able to find plenty to eat. When the bird hit the feeder, a chunk of pudding broke away. The hawk's instinctive grab for something moving caused it to fasten its talons into the stuff as it fell. It consumed every last crumb. This was on January 29th--a stormy day about a week after the Big Snow.

"Next day, I watched a goshawk take a one-legged grosbeak from the ground. Hoping to prevent more birds from 'getting it', I took out oily bread crusts to lure squirrels to the spot where the grosbeak had been. I was amazed to see the goshawk return, peck at the crusts, and fly off. It occurred to me that if the bread had been meat the goshawk might have taken it. After all, what did it return for?

"Sunday, the red-shouldered hawk came back. Five squirrels had been swiping corn from a board. It was fascinating to see the hawk marching back and forth scraping under the board to 'see' if any of the squirrels were hiding there. It explored both feeders, then flew to a cage containing suet for woodpeckers. My daughter said, 'Why can't we feed it?' So, on Monday I bought chicken giblets which I laid out on the feeders. Tuesday, the bird arrived and began eating as though it did it every day. It arrived at 10 a.m. and left at 12, having guzzled gizzards all that time. By 3 p.m. a second batch had gone. After a week of this, I decided someone had to be told.

"It was exciting to receive so many birders. My eleven-year-old daughter, who had measles at the time, gave up her bedroom, to provide a 'looking-room' for the birders. We were greatly stimulated by the contact with so many people.

"Thinking hawks needed hair and bone for regurgitation, I got our ratty poodle dandied up and sewed her wool into the gizzards with a carpet needle. It bothered me to see the bird extracting the wool and piling it neatly to one side. It just wasn't eating that stuff. I've read since that diurnal raptors don't usually need to regurgitate bones and wool.

"Another scheme backfired when I scooped up a run-over rabbit from a roadway and tried to lure the hawk with it. It gave the rabbit a long, cold, hard stare; then it flew off.

"The hawk came regularly from January 29th to March 14th. After that we had it wheel in and circle over us on two occasions.

"I'm told that no one has ever fed a wild hawk this way before. Now I'm interested in the possibility that hawks return to the scenes of their 'crimes' (perhaps to make sure they got all the victims). I'm hoping we can repeat this experience.

"Here ends the tale of our 'first careless raptor'.

"By the way, the chickadee's bill grew in. It's the shortest one I've ever seen but it's pointed and useful!"

-- Elizabeth M. Lyall

* * *

* * *

* * *

Ah! Welcome, Welcome Spring

I believe it was Pogo who said, "Winter is the first sign of Spring."

Our mild winter seemed to just grow into spring without any ringing of bells or fanfare of any kind. In fact it was almost impossible to say where fall ended or spring began.

Dr. R. M. Saunders found skunk cabbage in flower at James Gardens on February 15th, a remarkably early local date. Dr. Saunders has now found at least one species of flower in the Toronto area in every month of the year.

Joe Millman sent in a catkin from a quaking aspen tree found in flower near the Caledon Hills Conservation Area on February 26th.

Then Eva Parsons matched these with records of pussy willows at the Island on February 27th and more skunk cabbage at James Gardens on the 28th.

In the Purpleville area, we saw two groundhogs on February 28th, and a chipmunk on March 6th. On March 13th we found mouse-ear chickweed in flower at Niagara.

Mrs. Parsons salutes the first robin as follows:

The First Robin

We have a welcome visitor --
First robin of the year!
He's running gaily o'er the lawn,
Our wintered hearts to cheer.

Now every day, at crack of dawn,
His penetrating whistle
Will echo from the oaktree near;
If aught will wake us, this'll!

So Robin, dig your worms each day
In peace upon our lawn;
But take it easy now, old chap,
When you tune up at dawn!

* * *

* * *

* * *

News of Recent TFNC Outings

by J. Gingrich

One of the interesting aspects of bird-watching in the Toronto area is the irregular wandering of "winter" finches into southern Ontario during the winter months.

Accordingly, an outing was scheduled for Dec. 11 to attempt to show some of these finches, particularly crossbills, to TFNC members. One of the best places for seeing these finches has been the area between Purpleville and Boyd Conservation Area. The many hemlock trees, with their small cones, seem to be the attraction.

The outing was partially successful: a small flock of white-winged cross-bills was located and observed. However, the redpolls and the black-backed three-toed woodpecker (which were there a few weeks before) could not be found. Although redpolls and pine grosbeaks remained reasonably plentiful throughout the winter, TFNC outings were not favoured with good observations of either. And the earlier indications of an excellent winter for finches proved to be somewhat exaggerated.

On Jan. 15, the chairman of the outings committee attended an outing to what he thought would be an area previously unknown to him. The name "Petticoat Creek" used in arranging this outing with the leader, meant nothing to him. He was surprised to find that Petticoat Creek is the pleasant little stream that empties into Lake Ontario about one mile west of Frenchman's Bay, which he had visited several times before. Land has been acquired by the MTRCA for the establishment of a conservation area including the outlet of this stream. Thus the outing was a preview of a future conservation area. Few birds were seen; there were a few black ducks and common golden-eyes on the lake. Many members continued on to where a red-bellied woodpecker was regularly visiting a feeder, and a short search located it, in the woods west of the feeder.

The outing scheduled for Wilket Creek on Jan. 30 quickly altered its course for two reasons: the snow from the big storm the week before made walking difficult; and the leader of the outing was one of the discoverers of the boreal owl (Richardson's owl) the week before. Thus a cavalcade of cars proceeded to Squires Beach Road in spite of the threatening weather. The boreal owl could not be located, but two saw-whet owls were found. Also, there was a snowy owl down the road, and some saw long-eared owls. In the afternoon, the two remaining carloads of bird-watchers found two more saw-whet owls and three long-eared owls at Ajax.

The attempt to find gray partridges (Hungarian partridges) on Feb. 13 was a failure. It was foggy much of the time, and snowing almost all of the time. Some of the cars drove as much as 150 miles! About all that was achieved was losing six of the nine cars early in the afternoon! Don't worry, they found their way back to Toronto all right. A field of horned larks was found, however. This early sign of spring was most welcome. What was the best bird of the day? A swan! Where was it seen? At the starting point near Sunnyside, before the outing got on its way. Several members saw the swan as it flew west low over the breakwater, and agreed that it was a whistling swan. We saw no orange on the bill. However, a mute swan has been seen on the lake, and perhaps that is what we saw. Perhaps we should have stayed there for the day. The swan might have returned for positive identification.

Two robins were found in Cedarvale Ravine on Feb. 26. Several cardinals brightened the day. An interesting botanical discovery was the seed capsules of dodder. One of Toronto's youngest naturalists attended this outing. He rode in style on an aluminum and canvas chair strapped to his father's back. He showed keen interest in the view facing backwards, although the species Homo sapiens seemed to draw his attention more than Turdus migratorius or Richmondia Cardinalis. Perhaps this is because he forgot to bring his binoculars. His only comment at the end of the outing was "da-da-coo-coo".

* * *

* * *

* * *

Toronto Region Field Notes

Beginning with the May Newsletter the Bird Group plans to compile a regular summary of bird observations in the Toronto Region. This is not meant to be an up-to-the-minute report, but rather a compilation of important observations and events, such as invasions, new birds for the area, migration observations, nesting records, etc.

If this is to be successful we will need the co-operation of all members of the TFNC who are interested in birds. Please send in your observations on the form included at the end of this issue. Remember all interesting observations are wanted - not just reports of rarities.

From the observations submitted, together with other sources, it is hoped that a composite list of bird records over a long term can be compiled and eventually published.

Please send completed forms to Mr. John Woods,
69 Firwood Cres.,
Islington, Ont.

* * *

* * *

* * *

What's Around?

by Slim Pickins

Well, I haven't been doing much, just sitting around watching the squirrels eat sunflower seeds at 15¢ a pound. I still think they've got as much right to them as the birds, but Mary says what good are they because they don't sing. Well you don't sing any too well either, I told her but she had some smart answer to that one too so I gave up.

Cedarvale Ravine is still a mighty good spot for birds. I took my dog, Cummarunning, for a walk there the other day and between the two of us we found 20 species of birds. Without the dog, I might have got 25.

What you do is drive south from St. Clair Ave. along Russell Hill and then turn sharply on to Roycroft Drive. There's a place to park just as Roycroft swings south. Lock your car and walk towards Spadina Rd. You can walk under the Spadina bridge and up to Bathurst St. They call this Sir Winston Churchill Park now according to the latest map.

You used to be able to walk under St. Clair and on up to Forest Hill but somebody stuck St. Michael's College in the way so that's not possible any more. However, you can get to the north part of this ravine by driving north on Spadina from St. Clair. After you go through the village, watch for Strathearn and turn left, then left again on Millbank. Stop at Glenayr and the ravine is right there.

Next time I take the dog we'll go to this part and walk up under the Bathurst St. bridge. The dog looks smart but is awfully stupid. I finally taught him to play euchre but I can still beat him four games out of every five.

Yours truly,

Slim Pickins

