

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB NEWSLETTER

Bring a friend!

MAY MEETING

Visitors welcome!

Monday, May 1, 1967, at 8.15 p.m.
at the
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Annual Meeting and Election of Officers

SPECIAL FEATURE: "THE VOYAGEURS", courtesy of Mr. Grant Taylor, Supervisor, Park Interpretation, Parks Branch, Ontario Department of Lands and Forests.

This is a colour slide presentation--complete with sound track and script--of the canoe routes traversed by the early voyageurs during their travels through what is now Ontario. Imagine the sights and sounds in the 1600's, 1700's, and 1800's ... along the Ottawa River, the French, the Gatineau ... Think of the history connected with our Ontario waterways (which we perhaps now take for granted) ... and of how important and necessary they still are to us.

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DRIVING INSTRUCTIONS See Spring Outings booklet, June 18. Go north on Hwy. 10 to Flesherton, turn right and go about 2 miles to the second road on the left. Go north on this road through Eugenia, on to Kimberley. Meet at the main intersection at 10.30, and wait for the bus.

TIME OF OUTING See Spring Outings booklet, May 7 - 9.30 a.m. (Printer's apologies!)

Miss Florence Preston has volunteered to act as car pool organizer for TFN members planning to attend the FON Botany Weekend at Red Bay, June 9-11. Telephone Miss Preston, 483-9530. Reservations must be made with the FON.

TORONTO ISLAND The area north of the Filtration Plant is closed to the general public May 1 - July 1 each year to protect nesting and migrant birds from disturbance. However, TFNC members are authorized to enter this area at any time provided they can produce proof of membership. Carry your membership card--and wear a Club badge!

Learn more about natural history at FON CAMP, July 1-15, at Red Bay, on the Bruce Peninsula, under expert leadership. Full information, FON, 444-8419.

JUNIOR CLUB Meet on Saturday, May 6, 10.00 a.m. in the Museum theatre. Elections, distribution of prizes and "Flight" magazine.

Attractive Club badge to wear on your hiking jacket, may be obtained at the May meeting, by mail from the Secretary, or on outings from Mrs. Eva Parsons, Mr. Jack Gingrich, Mr. Eric Lewis. \$1.00. Boost your Club--wear a badge!

Important Announcement! It was decided at an executive meeting held Apr. 10 that a fund be set up to acquire eventually a sanctuary, to be called the Centennial Sanctuary Fund, and that \$1,500 be transferred from the profitable operations of the Club to start this fund. Watch your September Newsletter for further information and your opportunity to support the fund.

President - Dr. Peter A. Peach

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



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April, 1967

On the Trail

The other day between knuckle-cracking and belly laughing I managed to get through a most amusing and informative book on etiquette. Here I read about the awkward teabag; the woman who spit out the rotten egg and didn't know where to hide it; and the man who drank from a bottle.

These are serious problems.

Then the thought struck me--what if our members have equally serious problems of etiquette particularly when they join, for the first time, one of our Club's many excellent spring outings.

Somebody should tell them about etiquette on the bird-watching trail. The following little essay is the outcome of my thoughts. It is offered in the humble hope that it will make nature hikes more enjoyable for the beginner by removing some of those embarrassing moments which come--alas! so often--to the novice. Even the expert, wise in wilderness ways, may find here some food for thought or perhaps an answer to that question posed by our president: "Naturalist or Nut?"

The Beginning

It is wise to be at least three hours early for the hike since all hikes are now known to obey La Vital's First Law: The best bird on a hike is always seen before the formal beginning of the hike.

Dress

Dress on the trail is fairly standardized. Men usually wear baggy trousers of an

indeterminate colour, a baggy jacket, a baggy acclimatized hat and waterproof boots. Women wear tight trousers of a bright colour, a tight jacket, a baggy acclimatized hat and waterproof boots. In place of boots some members more avant-garde, or a la mode as they say, have taken to wearing canvas sneakers which allow water to escape as rapidly as it enters. A friend of mine, who is dressed by Bond St., tells me that spats are no longer worn on formal hikes. It seems to be a dying custom. The old order changes and all that, you know.

A necktie is optional but does come in useful for garrotting.

In the fall wear bright clothes so that the hunters will have a better chance.

Announcements

Announcing a new bird to the group can be a traumatic experience for the beginner. The method is not fixed and can be as individual as the individual. For example, any of the following ways may be used:

Quietly: (sotto voce) "Hmmm."

Exuberantly: "Yeeow!! Yippee!! A ruddy paint start!! YAHOOO!! YIPPEEE!! YA-AWK!"
(The rest has been garrotted.)

Sensibly: "I have just observed a lapwing in that pine tree--a habitat it does not usually inhabit."

Scientifically: "The superciliary line starting 3 millimetres from the upper mandible makes Zonotrichia leucophrys Gambellii a distinct possibility."

Flippantly: "It's a hoary all right. Get a load of the white rump."

Dubiously: "No!! It couldn't be! One thousand miles out of its range! and in the middle of May! No! It can't be!" (It isn't.)

The Receiving Line

The member spotting the new bird is usually congratulated by the group. Remember however that female observers must never be congratulated--they must always be felicitated. This can be done by a few choice phrases such as, "You lucky dog, you!", or more formally, "Talk about blind chance!" Male observers must always be congratulated with a hearty smack on the back and if a real big occasion by the popping of thermos bottle corks.

Meals

The eating place is usually selected by the hungriest member of the group who collapses on the greensward and swallows the nearest mushroom. An unnatural look at a shelf fungus often warns the vigilant leader that lunch time is near. If possible he should then try to select a spot abounding in birds so that La Vital's Second Law will not be broken; i.e., The second best bird on a hike is always seen during lunch time by someone who has his mouth full of food.

If you are eating a violent meal--such as limburger and Kobassa sausage and garlic (I always do)--then sit to leeward of the others--or is it windward? I can never get these crafty words straight.

Order

The order of march on the trail is very important. Under normal circumstances the largest birdwatchers should go first so that they may serve such useful functions as trailbreakers, windbreakers, icebreakers, and so on. All others follow with their hands up--so as to avoid getting their heads bashed in by swinging branches.

There is one important exception to the above rule and that is when the party is close to a Lifer. This is so important that it deserves another paragraph.

Lifers

A member of the party who is in the near presence of a Lifer--a bird he has never seen before in his life--must always be allowed to lead the group. This is called the Law of the Jungle. It is an extension of the basic rule of trail etiquette--self preservation. Even the staidest birdwatchers have been known to run amok when suddenly confronted by a Lifer; there is nothing more perilous than standing between a Lifer and an amok birdwatcher--even a small one.

Closing

At the end of the hike thank the leader for the lovely time you had and tell him you saw far more birds on the previous hike. This will make him very happy and also makes for a healthy turnover of leaders.

This is also the time for post mortems, often--as in chess--more important than the game itself. You may hear such remarks as,

--"Just two wing-bars away from a Bell's!"

--"A bit more red in the sun and we would have had a summer tanager."

--"I thought you were watching the birdie and I was looking out for the pot holes!"

Well! See you at the next hike! Bring along your Newsletter if you want to be safe--but no neckties please!

References

W. Lawson: Lifers--Cause and Cure.

Peter A. Peach: Nut or Naturalist.

Amy Vanderbilt: Everyday Etiquette.

E. J. La Vital: Birdwatchers: Study of a Primitive Society.

A Happy Summer to all of you! And bring back lots of ideas and stories for the Newsletter next Fall.

Elmer Talvila

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The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice

by A. A. Outram

Reference to animals, or stories about them abound in the literature of all peoples. Fables, propaganda, medicine, religion, entertainment, travel, and other forms of writing have made much use of all classes of animal life. Further to our editor's appeal for nature in the classics, a story called "Batrachomyomachia" comes to mind. The formidable title translates to simply "The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice". This was long thought to be an Homeric Fable but most scholars now attribute it to some later writer. At any rate, it was written many centuries B.C.

In the story, Crumb-snatcher, a mouse, trying to escape from a weasel, is offered a ride on the back of Puff-jaw, the Frog King. In spite of his fear of the deep pond it seems to be the lesser hazard and he accepts. When a water snake raises its head above the surface, the frog instinctively dives and the mouse is drowned. The mice blame the frogs and eventually a war ensues between them.

This story is a very clever travesty, not of Homer, but of the Homeric epic style and of the ten years of fighting on the gusty plains of Troy. We can imagine we are reading the Iliad. There are prayers to the gods for assistance, mighty preparations, fierce mass fighting and a combat between champions in the presence of their respective armies. Noble compound names are used, such as Pond-larker, Loud-croaker and Cheese-scooper, son of Pot-searcher. When Ham-gnawer carries away the corpse of his son we can see in our minds, King Priam doing the same thing at Troy.

"The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice" has been referred to and quoted from ever since it was written. Many satires and parodies have arisen from it, such as, "Battle of Flies" by Folengo, "Battle of Cats" by Lope de Vegas, "Battle of Donkeys" by Alvarez de Toledo y Pellier and "Battle of Cranes and Pygmies" by Addison. The great Dutch scholar and writer, Erasmus, said that his "Praise of Folly" was justified by it.

"The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice" may be read by all ages. Children may find it a thrilling adventure story. Later, as students and adults they will become familiar with its place in Literature. There were other ancient Greek stories that probably were similar, such "Battle of the Cranes", "Battle of the Spiders" and "Battle of the Starlings", but they have been lost and we know little of them except their titles. The oldest existing piece of satiric literature is "The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice".

References

- Highet, Gilbert. The Anatomy of Satire.
Highet, Gilbert. The Classical Tradition.
Lesky, Albin. A History of Greek Literature.
Martin, George. The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice.

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Letters to the Editor

Mrs. J. G. Coburn relates:

"Our holiday last summer--one of the best we have ever had--had its beginning in the TFN Newsletter so it seems only proper to say, 'Thank you.' Some years ago, a former editor of the Newsletter (Dr. R. M. Saunders) wrote of an interesting adventure

he had had into the Swiss National Park to watch the wild animals at dawn. This article, combined with an appetite we had already developed for walking in the Swiss mountains, took us to the Park for a walking holiday.

"The Park is not large, only 50,000 acres, but its mountainous nature gives a visitor plenty of opportunity to stretch his legs and test his wind. Since 1914 it has been a sanctuary set apart for plant and animal life to carry on without any interference from man. Man is now welcome only if he stays on clearly marked paths or, in the look-out areas, within the space marked by stakes. Three and sometimes four languages on conspicuous signs warn him of this. He must not shout, clap his hands, throw sticks, or in any other way seek to disturb birds or animals. Nor may he pick even one blossom.

"Now a good highway follows the river valley through the Park and the Swiss government operates one small hotel about midway through the Park at an altitude of nearly 6,000 feet. We made this our headquarters. Since this is below the tree line the walks that we were able to take began through thick evergreen woods, often with the paths thickly bordered by what we took to be wild azaleas. Swiss friends, looking at our pictures, tell us that they are Alpenroses. Above the tree line the walking becomes more strenuous. My husband found it difficult to keep his pipe alight and used this as an excuse for frequent stops. I just frankly gasped for breath and then continued to gasp at the grandeur of the scenery.

"When our eyes dropped from the distant mountains there were the flowers at our feet. At a wild look-out spot at about 7,000 feet we saw large, exquisitely-coloured violets on long stems above ground-hugging Lilliputian leaves, satin-letalled anemones, and other flowers so small they seemed like spreads of moss.

"The mountains in the Park do not rival the internationally-known giants in size. There are several that can be circled in a day, giving changing views of peaks and valleys and that strange satisfaction that comes from looking at a mountain and saying, 'I've walked around you.'

"On the paths we were greeted in French, Italian and German, never in English. Many people carried powerful glasses as animal-watching seems to be the great attraction of the park. To us it seemed like a botanist's paradise. We saw very few birds, and not even in the woods were we bothered by insects as we would have been in July at home. Once, while drinking like one of Gideon's rejects from a snow-cold stream, I had just reassured myself that nothing could live in such water when I spotted what I took to be a caddis-fly larva. Maybe we only had eyes for the flowers and the mountains. These we certainly saw, and our thanks to the Newsletter for a valuable lead.

Gratefully yours,

Mary E. Coburn"

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Miss Rosemary Gaymer writes (in part):

"As every birder knows, all vacations are apt to become excuses for birdwatching. Last year I had an invitation to visit friends in Kansas, so of course I delved into Pettingill's Guide to Bird Finding in order to work out the best birding routes there and back. But the planning got completely out of hand, "there and back" became a large rectangular route of approximately 6,000 miles, and I eventually left Toronto on May 20th headed east.

"It started in a riot of wild cherry blossom in leafless woods through Eastern Ontario, the Adirondacks in New York, and down along the Appalachians--and ended almost a month later with a re-entry into spring through northern Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, and more cherry blossoms. In between, my route took me through the Virginias, Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, South and North Dakota. A total of 5,902 miles, off the beaten track as much as possible, bypassing major cities, browsing through as many National and State Parks and Forests as time allowed. Travelling solo was entirely delightful. The only concession that I made was to write in advance to every National Park, Wildlife Refuge or whatever that I intended, or hoped, to visit during the trip, asking for detailed maps and birding information, since I would be alone and felt I should know before arriving roughly where to go and what to expect. The response was a deluge of information and kindness--pages of letters, trails marked in red specially for me on Park maps, notes as to which birds might be nesting, and so on. Many of the informants remained anonymous, so I couldn't thank them; but others gave me strict orders to present myself to headquarters when I arrived, for up-to-date information and at least a get-acquainted cup of coffee if not an escorted trip through the area. Actually, I don't think I was being particularly spoiled--it may have had something to do with the fact that 1966 was the Golden Anniversary of the National Parks system in the U.S. and everyone was putting his best foot forward!

"Every day had its highlights, but some major highlights lasted all day. The first of these was the 105-mile Skyline Drive through the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. Ranging high above the intense green of the Shenandoah Valley, the hills of the Blue Ridge lived up to their name that day--haze after a night of thunderstorms, cloud shadows and bright sunlight produced ever-changing, stunning views in all directions. The trees were still leafless above the 2,000 ft. level, so that the hills behind hills that faded into the distance at every overlook point were shades of glorious purples, blues and browns, with touches of far green valley, dark green conifers, bright radiant bushes of deep pink azaleas, a lacework of cherry blossom and carpets of smaller flowers in sheltered places--with twin streams of bright yellow mustard-type flowers lining every yard of the rock-edged road.

"There were migrants everywhere--waves of warblers all through the woods. I had 17 species of warblers during the day, including several prairie warblers. Some of them were obviously already staking out their nesting territories--blackburnians, chestnut-sideds, redstarts, black-and-whites, and black-throated blues. Ravens were noisily in evidence at the higher elevations, and as the sun warmed up, squadrons of silent vultures appeared as if magically, black V's against the hazy light. I looked in vain at every one, but they were all turkey vultures. Black vultures are a rare 'specialty of the Park' but none showed up. There were compensations; not often does one have the chance to watch turkey vultures circling up a hillside towards one, until they are too close to focus through binoculars, with a view of their burnished back and flight feathers shining almost golden in the sun, their bare red heads showing every wrinkle.

"Two days later I did find the black vultures--in Kentucky, wheeling low and high over a remote ravine of the Mammoth Cave National Park by the famous greeny-brown Green River. They were again close enough to afford a wonderful view, and contrast with the other species--much stouter than the turkey vultures, shorter and broader-winged with large white patches in the primary feathers, also much shorter, wider tails, and larger, black-feathered heads.

"There were far too many people visiting the great Caves that day for my liking, so the Park Naturalists sent me off to some very lovely nature trails, miles from anywhere and equally peaceful, but not exactly leisurely--some extremely steep paths

zigzagging up and down deep ravines, which provided wonderful tree-top views of the great trees, of which there were some magnificent specimens. The tulip trees were particularly lovely: not too interesting if I stood beside one and looked up; but looking down on their crowns from above, there was a profusion of blossoms, large first-sized flowers rather like a cross between a double tulip and a magnolia, yellow-green with orange centres, and all facing the sky.

"There were birds everywhere, high and low, with a melee of song. At one point, golden-winged and blue-winged warblers, several of each species, plus parula, cerulean, hooded and Kentucky warblers were all around me in the treetops and the thick undergrowth, more curious than alarmed by my presence. Scarlet and summer tanagers added to the colour. And lizards and fascinating insects added to the constant undertone of rustling noise. One large lizard--I think it was a skink type--skittled up a tree to a point about 40 feet from the ground, circled it twice, caught sight of me, and dashed down again to safety. I suppose he could have got there faster if he'd jumped, but not much. . . .

"The plains and prairies of Kansas were next on my itinerary. Driving west from the Ozarks next morning, the trees gradually retreated into isolated woods, farming areas opened up, and the hills levelled out and valleys broadened. Almost as if Nature had taken a rolling-pin and applied a little pressure, rolling westwards, to squeeze down and spread out the landscape. Although Kansas is one great plain, it seemed more like 'plains and prairies' in the plural, for there is a fascinating diversity of prairie types. Eastern Kansas rolled in all directions and angles, and the roads followed suit. The day was very hot, and my picnic lunch was late on the Thursday before Memorial Day, 100 miles from the last town before a roadside park with some shade. But the wait was worth it, as I cooled off under a very prickly locust tree (with thorns on the trunk quite three inches long) and watched lark sparrows, a family of young loggerhead shrikes, black-headed grosbeaks, and dickcissels.

"Suddenly I became aware of a soft, rather deep-pitched whistling call, circling above me somewhere in the sun, and managed to focus on a displaying mountain plover before he landed. Following his descent, I caught sight of his mate as well when he landed beside her, and later watched both flying at quite close range. Slightly smaller than the killdeer, the mountain plover is a very plain bird. (While the pun was unintentional, it is also true! For the name is misleading: this is a plover of the short grass, semi-arid prairie.) in comparison--no black breast-bands, no rusty rump, and less distinctive face pattern, having a broad white forehead and wide white line over the eye; otherwise just brown and white. I felt very lucky to see it, since I had been warned by western birders with whom I had corresponded that the mountain plover was about the last bird that I could expect to see, since it is most elusive, although not really uncommon. Almost ashamed of myself for having really contributed no effort to the search! . . .

"Wichita was specially interesting as being in the 'blend zone' where eastern and western birds of closely allied species are both present in similar habitat. There were eastern and western kingbirds, as well as scissor-tailed flycatchers, Baltimore and Bullock's orioles; and all the other eastern species had songs with very obviously strange dialects. And I never expected to glance at a female house sparrow without recognizing, as I should have, that it was actually a female dickcissel! Which does go to show that however hard one studies the books, experience is the only thing that teaches. . . .

"Imperceptibly, the long stretch of Kansas and Colorado prairies are tilted up towards the west. Wichita has an elevation of 1,300 ft., and from there to the foot of the Rockies, about 450 miles, the elevation rises by another 3,300 ft. But I didn't

realize it--there was no sense of going uphill, just of vast space ahead and all around, as the highway followed the route of the old Santa Fe Trail--until I noticed both white-throated swifts and violet-green swallows near Colorado Springs, which confirmed the elevation. The approach to the Rockies at that point in Colorado is a shock. The mountains rear up out of the plains with no intervening foothills, presenting a many-thousand-foot high wall to mark the end of the arid prairie, a wall dominated by the great Pike's Peak (14,110 ft.). Toronto, incidentally, has a link with Pike's Peak, names after its explorer, Col. Zebulon Pike, who was killed here in Toronto during the battle for Fork York in 1812.

"After a night in a chalet-type motel nestled at 6,000 ft. in the shadow of Pike's Peak, I headed for a blind date with naturalists from Denver, meeting them in a little off-the-map crossroads hamlet about 30 miles south of Denver. They had a full day planned for me and we worked through river-bottom areas and farmland (they tried hard to find a rattlesnake for me, but we weren't lucky--after two trips to the West, I have yet to see anything more interesting than a gopher snake!), then we drove more or less northward, into the true foothills, which intervene west of Denver. My life-list had added unto it band-tailed pigeons, Lewis's woodpecker (brilliant pink below and metallic green-black above, a beautiful bird), Williamson's sapsucker (the male is black above, and black-chested, with the long white sapsucker stripe on the wing, white rump, yellow belly, and white stripes on the head, with red chin; I did not catch sight of the female of the pair we visited--an altogether plain brown bird, with zebra back and sides, so different from the male that the early naturalists thought it was another species altogether). And, of course, the dippers--they are in most of the mountain streams, once one knows where to look. And nowadays the place to look is near the many mountain cottages. Many people now attach special hanging platforms to the underside of their bridge over the stream as nesting sites for the dippers, which are adapting happily and greatly increasing in numbers. They are fascinating little birds, rather like over-sized, black, tubby wrens. Never still for a moment, they constantly bob up and down even as they try to keep a balance on a small slippery rock in a raging torrent; walk into and under the water, wings aflutter furiously to achieve submergence as they feed; and are apt to reappear out of the water anywhere else than where expected. They even dive into the water from the air. We were lucky to see a fully-fledged young dipper being fed by its parents at very close quarters, all three birds completely unconcerned by our presence. . . ."

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Elmer Talvila,

Editor

Interim Statement of Receipts and Disbursements

May 1, 1966 to March 31, 1967

Receipts

Membership fees	\$ 2,307.50	
Donations	110.00	
FON Cards	370.80	
Interest on stocks & bond	127.72	
Sale of Bell Telephone rights	23.76	
Bank interest	28.08	
Literature (crest, history, checklists)	159.00	
Sale of bus tickets	198.00	
Refund on FON Camp scholarship not taken	137.50	
Sundries	52.55	
Audubon Wildlife Films	<u>3,513.00</u>	
Total receipts	7,027.91	
Add balance on hand April 30, 1966	<u>3,171.95</u>	\$10,199.86

Disbursements

Printing	\$ 1,131.11	
Postage	199.14	
Office supplies	117.06	
325 Crests - Artwork	\$97.18	
Manufacture	<u>296.89</u>	
Salaries & honoraria	885.00	
FON cards	276.35	
Theatre, film rental	388.75	
Affiliation fees	78.50	
FON Camp scholarships	275.00	
Donations	325.00	
Bus charter fees	221.00	
Sundries	106.75	
Audubon Wildlife Films	<u>1,793.10</u>	
Total disbursements	6,190.83	
BALANCE March 31, 1967	<u>4,009.03</u>	\$10,199.86

The balance as shown on this interim statement has been verified with the bank balance for March 31, 1967. An audited statement of receipts and disbursements for the fiscal year April 30, 1966 to April 30, 1967 will be on display at the May meeting and will be published in the September issue of the Newsletter.

Estimated receipts for the month of April 1967	\$725.00
Estimated disbursements " " "	\$550.00

