

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB NEWSLETTER

Visitors welcome!

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NOVEMBER MEETING

Monday, November 6, 1967, at 8.15 p.m.
at the
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Speaker: MR. GERALD McKEATING

Subject: OUR URBAN ENVIRONMENT (illustrated with colour slides)

Mr. McKeating will examine some problems of conservation in an urban area, particularly in the 'Golden Horseshoe' section of southern Ontario. In addition, he will review briefly the current activities of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists and will touch on its aims and immediate objectives.

In the rotunda: FON Christmas cards: \$1.50 doz; Toronto Bird Finding Guide, \$1.25.

AUDUBON FILMS Tues., Nov. 21, D. J. Nelson, 'Three Seasons North'. Tell your friends!

FEES FOR 1967 ARE DUE! Pay at the meeting or send cheque or money order to the Secretary.
Single: \$4. Family: \$6. Corr: \$2. Full-time student: \$1.50.

NOVEMBER OUTINGS

Sunday TORONTO WATERFRONT - Birds
Nov. 12 Meet at the parking lot on the south side of Lake Shore Blvd. just east
9.30 a.m. of Parkside Dr. This is near the footbridge which crosses Lake Shore
Blvd. from the intersection of Roncesvalles & Queen. Morning only.

Saturday HIGH PARK - Birds
Nov. 25 Meet at the north entrance to the park, on the south side of Bloor St. W.
9.30 a.m. at High Park Ave. Morning only.

Chm: Jack Gingrich, 489-9953

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JUNIOR CLUB A few openings are left (8-16 years). Adults welcome to attend. The
Saturday Museum Theatre meeting is in charge of the Bird group. Leaders needed
Nov. 4 for the Explorer group (8-10 years)

10 a.m. Director - Mr. Robt. MacLellan, 488-9346

BIRD GROUP Meet at St. James Bond United Church, west side of Avenue Rd., 2 blocks
Thursday north of Eglinton. Speaker: Mr. J. L. Baillie, 'Attracting Birds'.

Nov. 9 Chm: Mr. Clive Goodwin, 241-1572
8 p.m.

BOTANY GROUP Meet in Hodgson School, Davisville Ave., just east of Mt. Pleasant.
Thursday Speaker: Mr. Marshall Bartman, 'A look at orchids'. An expert has agreed
Nov. 16 to share his knowledge & colour slides with us. Miss Emily Hamilton will
8 p.m. show her centennial collection of plants.

Chm: Miss Edith Cosens, 481-5013

President - Dr. Peter A. Peach

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



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NEWS AND VIEWS

.....Congratulations to Dr. Helen Hogg, a former long-time member of the Club. Dr. Hogg has received the Radcliffe Graduate Achievement Award for 1967 in recognition of her astronomical research and for work with various scientific societies.

.....There's some great news from the New York Cultural Festival - modern art is going invisible. Now all we have to do is imagine a piece of art and the thing's done. 'Just because you can't see a statue doesn't mean that it isn't there', one official stated. (He's still at large!) This sort of thing could have great benefits if it spreads to rock and roll music and political speeches. Unfortunately, though, it seems to have affected my correspondence instead. This month I got a large number of invisible letters from the Club members in response to my appeal for experiences and stories. I guess the only proper thing to do is publish an invisible newsletter next month; or send you 11 blank pages so you can imagine the whole thing yourself.

Write - to tell me how indignant you are!

.....I spend a lot of time in New York City and consequently often find myself walking through Central Park and blessing the far-sighted city officials that have managed to preserve the park nearly intact. Don't think it's been easy! If all the proposals for Central Park had been accepted, the 'park' would now be crammed full with a school, opera house, airplane landing field, racetrack, churches for all sects, circus, recreation centre, amusement park, sports stadium, housing project, radio station, a steamboat, a graveyard and a statue of Buddha, to name just a few.

Why am I talking about this now?

Because Toronto's High Park is being threatened by the same kind of 'improvements' starting with an athletic field proposed by the Toronto Board of Education. Although opposition from the city parks committee has been vigorous, the threat is still very real. Trustee Alan Archer has been quoted as saying that 'if High Park or any other damn park helps education then it should be used.' We hope all of our members become familiar with the issues involved and vigorously protest this further encroachment on park property. We think it high time for politicians to realize that the usefulness of parks can be measured in other ways than dollars per square foot and that green is the colour of grass as well as dollar bills.

.....In happy contrast to the above it is pleasant to report that Ontario's Department of Lands and Forests is purchasing 11 new land properties and expanding 19 others as part of the Government's 200-million dollar land acquisition programme. This is the first year since the programme started in 1962 that the government has spent its full 5-million dollar annual appropriation. Only 195 million and 3 million acres to go!

.....The youths of Iowa are an enterprising lot. It seems they have produced and circulated maps showing where patches of marijuana grow wild in Iowa. Sounds like just the group to do that orchid survey for the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club.

.....Two recent developments promise some hope in the losing battle against Dutch elm disease. A wasp is being bred as an effective predator on the elm bark beetle which carries the disease. Also the plant geneticists are busy mixing chromosomes to develop a more beautiful hybrid form of the Siberian elm, a species which is highly resistant to the disease. Meanwhile Metro faces a 1.6-million dollar bill for dead tree removal and 10% of Metro's 80,000 elms are already dead. This year 4,000 elms have died - twice as many as last year. But there is still hope and time.

.....On a recent visit to the Niagara Peninsula we studied a fine specimen of pokeweed (Phytolacca americana) growing in the weed garden of the School of Horticulture. Poke-week is a vigorous plant about 6 feet high having handsome blackish-red berries and a dangerously poisonous root. Now it appears that the root isn't so bad after all. Poke-week root extracts have been found to yield a glyco-protein which has the property of stimulating cell transformations. They turn lymphocytes (white blood cells) into cells indistinguishable from those that produce antibodies. Perhaps in the future a spoonful a day will keep measles, mumps and chicken pox away.

Still, I wonder what Dr. Jekyll used?

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COMING EVENTS

CBC-RADIO: The Arts and Sciences Journal. Sundays at 10.30 a.m. E.D.T. A new series which will deal with such general topics as medicine, astronomy, computers, nutrition, oceanography, weather control, all areas of biology (especially genetics) and any other areas where important break-throughs are expected to occur.

ROYAL CANADIAN INSTITUTE: Convocation Hall, Univ. of Toronto, 8.15 p.m. Nov. 18 - Canada's Athabasca Tar Sands; Nov. 25 - The Vegetative Resources of British Columbia; Dec. 2 - The Lobster and Lobster Research. For more information phone 922-2804 or the Editor, 231-1064.

CBC-TV: Darwin and the Galapagos - beginning Nov. 14. A specially compressed edition for schools.

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM: Free Sunday film showings at 2.00 p.m. Nov. 26: 'The Mystery of Stonehenge'.

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AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILMS

The D. J. Nelsons are returning to Toronto on Nov. 21 to present their new film, 'Three Seasons North'. This sounds like a 'fun' film as any film is that features those northwood clowns, the otters. Most of the action takes place in the remotest parts of British Columbia. Other key roles are played by a mountain lion and a golden eagle with bit parts by mountain sheep, woodpeckers, moose, bear, caribou and many other wild creatures.

Mr. Nelson is among the most experienced wildlife photographers presently on the lecture circuit. He has traveled in 72 countries and 5 continents. 39 of his films have been shown on television, on such shows as 'Seven League Boots,' 'Wild Kingdom,' 'Bold Journey', and 'I Search for Adventure'. He has given more than 4,200 lecture appearances in 45 states and 4 countries.

All this promises a highly successful and enjoyable evening. Come on out and help make it a success!

P.S. To those of you that had to buy new bifocals or earplugs as a result of the last showing, the 'technical difficulties' have been resolved and should not recur at future showings.

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PRESQU'ILE PARK WEEKEND, 20-22nd MAY

by Mr. Jack Cranmer-Byng

The long week-end visit to Presqu'ile Provincial Park was a success in spite of poor weather. Sixteen members stayed in accommodation in the Park while about another ten joined the walks. After lunch at Woodmere Lodge on the Saturday the group followed the Indian Point Trail in sunlight tempered by a cold wind. At first birds were scarce but later in a small copse near the end of the trail we ran into a wave of warblers including several Myrtle and Chestnut-sided, a Canada, a Palm, and best of all, a male Parula. While looking over the marshes from the sides of the trail an American Bittern, a Caspian Tern, and a pair of Pintail Duck were seen. Later in the evening some members returned to the Indian Point Trail to listen for Woodcock performing their nuptial flight. In this they were disappointed but by way of compensation they saw Black-crowned Night Herons and a Least Bittern.

Sunday was a full day of sunlight though it was still cool with a strong breeze by the lakeshore. Jack Gingrich was shaved and away by 6.45 a.m. and saw over 50 different species before breakfast, while sluggards who lay in until 7.30 still managed to see a number of birds before eating. The morning was taken up by a botany walk under the expert guidance of Jim Simon. The flowers of various trees were studied, as well as smaller plants. Of particular interest was the Striped Maple, a tree which normally grows in the vicinity of the Laurentian Shield. While **botanizing** several members kept their binoculars at the ready and managed to see more than one Redheaded Woodpecker and also a Hummingbird. While walking to the rendezvous in the woods Jim Simon and a friend reported flushing four Woodcock.

On the Sunday afternoon one of the Park wardens gave a brief talk on the history of Presqu'ile including its geological formation, and then we drove to the main sandy beach of the Park to look for shorebirds. It was pretty cold on the shore in spite of the sunlight and members were wearing almost winter rig with gloves and hats or caps of various design. The most numerous of the shorebirds were Dunlin (50+) interspersed with a few Semipalmated Plover and Semipalmated Sandpiper, a few Least Sandpiper, and Sanderlings. There were also present five Ruddy Turnstone in breeding plumage, one Black-bellied Plover, and two Knot also in breeding plumage. No Whimbrel, Yellowlegs, or Dowitcher were seen, nor were the Egrets in evidence anywhere. The high level of water in the lake had covered the beach which juts out from the Point in the direction of Gull Island, and thus a favourite resting-place of the larger shorebirds was denied them. There were quite a number of Common Tern and a few Black Tern flying about. Having endured the cold breeze long enough we made for the woods in the centre of the Park and followed another nature trail which proved to be quite rewarding for birds. Among others the following were seen: a Pileated Woodpecker, Rosebreasted Grosbeaks, a Wood Thrush, Veery, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Redheaded Woodpecker, a male Indigo Bunting, two male Scarlet Tanagers, several Orioles, and a fair sample of Warblers including a Black-throated Blue, a Black-throated Green, a Blackburnian, and several Canada Warblers and Redstarts. A fully adult male Marsh Hawk was also seen.

At dusk on the Sunday a number of us walked to a spot near Woodmere Lodge where Jim Simon had put up the Woodcock earlier. After a short wait the first 'beep' was heard, and suddenly a Woodcock flew silently down to rest at the foot of a bush only a dozen yards from the road where we were standing, and members could observe it through their binoculars. This bird must have been a female moving nearer to be able to hear better the serenading of the male which was 'beeping' a short distance away on the further side of the road. In spite of fireworks exploding very near by, he began to work up a fever pitch of 'beeps' and then suddenly exploded into the air near us in a perfect take-off. As it was still not quite dark we were able to follow him with our binoculars as he circled above us with very rapid wingbeats, gaining altitude as he flew. Then suddenly the sound of his fluttering wings changed and he began to descend with that liquid musical sound which is impossible to describe in words. It grew louder and louder and suddenly, when it seemed just above our heads, the sound stopped and the bird landed at almost the exact spot from which it had taken off, and at once started to 'beep' loudly again. After it had repeated this performance a few times we all moved forward off the road and stood just a few yards from where the bird had taken off, the spot luckily being marked by a branch of silver birch lying white on the ground. Although it was now dark we were near enough to the bird to see it each time it returned to the ground again aided by the white branch. We must have listened to its non-stop performance for over half an hour, and when we walked back to the Lodge there were other birds 'beeping' or drumming as they descended in their musical flight. It was a memorable evening. None of us had witnessed the Woodcock's nuptial flight so closely before, nor had we seen both the male and the female, for whom he was presumably performing, at one and the same time.

We had hoped to enjoy a good morning's birding on the Monday, but when we collected at 7.00 a.m. for an early walk it was raining quite heavily. This was especially disappointing since Jack Gingrich had observed a flight of Whimbrel out over the lake the previous evening and we wanted to look for them on their usual beach near the Point. Nevertheless we drove to the Point and searched carefully in the rain, but without results. On the way back we saw a Redhead Duck and an American Bittern. However, there was a minor compensation in store for us. As we sat having breakfast at the Lodge, with our binoculars at the ready, someone called out, 'What's that bird on the hedge behind the cars?' After a moment's pause Jack Gingrich proclaimed, 'Mockingbird.' At once everyone threw down their knives and forks and asked for directions. Jack began to say, 'Do you see that Volkswagen? Well, it's just to the right of it, behind that Cortina.'

But in the excitement most members couldn't identify a Ford Cortina, so Jack boldly shouted the car's registration number as though the bird itself had an Ontario licence plate. Just as everyone was focussed on it, the bird flew away, showing its unmistakable white wing-patches. We had had a Mockingbird for breakfast!

The final count of birds seen was 106 different species in one and a half days. All those who took part in the Presqu'ile weekend returned to Toronto invigorated by the fresh air and exercise, not to mention the good companionship and the change of scenery.

P.S. I forgot to mention that on the Saturday evening we had a quiz on bird songs and calls. The proprietor of Woodmere Lodge, Mr. Alan Vanderwater, played about 70 different songs to us on his tape recorder. The quality of the recordings was excellent, and we had fun trying to distinguish them all.

P.P.S. A Chipping Sparrow had built its nest in a bush just outside the door of Jack Gingrich's cabin, and managed to lay two eggs in his honour during our stay.

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THE HEAVENS ABOVE - NOVEMBER

- Nov. 1 - Sunrise at 7.54 D.S.T.; sunset at 6.09 D.S.T.
- Nov. 2 - A total eclipse of the sun visible to our corresponding members in Antarctica.
- Nov. 5 - Taurid meteor shower. Not a very strong shower - about 15 meteors per hour extending over a period of a month. Associated with Encke's comet which has been observed on 48 appearances and which has the shortest period (3.3 years) of any known comet.
- Nov. 9 - Venus at greatest elongation west of the sun when it rises as a morning star over 3 hours before the sun.
- Nov.17 - Leonid meteor shower. Should be a fairly strong shower (25 meteors per hour) although handicapped by a full moon. Leonid shower peaks occur every 33 years; the last peak was in 1966. Associated with the comet Tempel-Tuttle (1966) which has a period of 33.2 years. Leonids have been recorded since 902 A.D.
- Nov.17 - Mercury at greatest elongation west of the sun and may be seen easily in the southeast just before sunrise.

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PLANT FAMILIES

The Pea Family - Leguminosae

This important family of plants offers us food, beauty, and soil enrichment. After the compositae it is the largest family of plants in the world containing about 600 genera and 14,000 species. It is cosmopolitan in distribution and includes herbs, vines, shrubs and trees.

Three subfamilies are usually recognized:

Papilionoideae: sweet pea family (papilio means butterfly from the form of the corolla).

Mimosoideae: mimosa as acacia family.

Caesalpinioideae: senna or redbud family.

About 35 species of the family grow wild in the Metro Toronto region.

To identify this family look for the following characteristics:

1. The flower is usually very showy, with the corolla divided into 5 petals: the upper one (or standard), two side ones (or wings) and two lower ones more or less united and enclosing the stamens (the keel).
2. There are 10 stamens: one free (usually) and 9 united into a tube around the single pistil. Sometimes all the stamens are free.
3. The fruit is a pod called a legume (peas) or lomentum (beggar-ticks) which is just a jointed legume.
4. The leaves are usually compound and alternate and have stipules (small leaf-like structures at the base of a leaf stalk).
5. The roots contain nodules caused by a nitrogen fixing bacteria called rhizobium. This is a good example of symbiosis or beneficial association: the bacteria gains protection and moisture while the plants obtain a constant supply of nitrates for growth.

Here are the names of some distinguished members of this family:

The eaten ones: peanuts (Arachis hypogaea); chick-pea (Cicer arietinum); lentil (Lens); bean (Phaseolus); peas (Pisum); tamarind (Tamarindus); soybean (Glycine).

The underground or soil-enrichers: alfalfa (Medicago sativa); soybean (Glycine); clover (Trifolium); vetch (Vicia).

The beautiful ones: goat's-rue (Galega officinalis); French honeysuckle (Hedysarum coronarium); perennial pea (Lathyrus latifolius); sweet pea (Lathyrus odoratus); lupine (Lupinus); wistaria, broom (Cytisus); laburnum or golden chain tree; rose acacia (Robinia hispida).

Some tropical trees: pudding-pipe tree (Cassia fistula) - pods 2 feet long, from India; royal poinciana or flamboyant (Delonix regia); orchid tree (Bauhinia variegata).

Some native (N.A.) trees: yellow-wood (Cladrastis); black locust (Robinia pseudo-acacia); redbud (Cercis); honey locust (Gleditsia).

Our wild ones: wild lupine (Lupinus perennis); hop clover (Trifolium agrarium); white sweet clover (Melilotus alba); black medick (Medicago lupulina); milk vetch (Astragalus canadensis); common vetch (Vicia augustifolia); tick-trefoil (Desmodium canadense); marsh pea (Lathyrus palustris); ground nut (Apios tuberosa).

The colourful ones: logwood tree yields a purple dye used in staining wool and silk; indigo plant (blue); gorse (yellow).

The drugs and medicines: liquorice root; balsam of tolu; gum of tragacanth; fenugreek (makes a terrible tea which of course is good for you).

Two nervous members: 1. Sensitive plant (Mimosa pudica). If the leaf is touched or irritated all the leaflets immediately fold up face to face and the whole leaf collapses. If the shock is sufficient all the leaves on the plant do likewise. Grow one in your living room and have fun giving it nervous breakdowns.

2. The telegraph plant (Desmodium motorium) This plant was studied by Darwin for the telegraph-like regularity of the movement of its leaflets.

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Owl Finding, with Reference to the Toronto Region (Part I)

by John Woods

Owls have long been objects of wonderment and mystery to mankind. Their carnivorous nature and seclusive nocturnal habits make them one of the most unusual orders of the bird world and intriguing subjects for observation and research. Many species are retiring during the daylight hours and therefore offer a special challenge to the ornithologist wishing to study them in their natural surroundings. Observing owls as such is one of the most rewarding types of bird study requiring only common sense, good eye-sight and determination.

A. Location and Observation

Owl finding takes a very special type of bird watching technique. The following are a number of ideas which may increase one's success in this venture.

a. Habitat: The basic principle involved in locating any type of bird is to look for it in suitable habitat. This is of prime importance to the owl enthusiast. Owls as a group are found in many diverse situations and it is thus necessary to become familiar with the habitat preferred by each type. It is only by looking specifically for owls in specific areas that one will see appreciable numbers of owls.

b. Time: It is of course very important to know when it is best to look for owls. Generally, in this area most owls are observed in the winter months. During the late fall, winter and early spring certain species congregate in favourable areas and it is well to take advantage of this fact. Others, notably boreal species, move south in the winter and are only found in the Toronto region at that time. In the spring the northern species filter away and residents commence resting at which time they are often difficult to locate. During the summer dense vegetation impedes observation.

c. Observation technique: Many owls are very seclusive and easily frightened and therefore require a very exacting observational technique. Woodland species are often difficult to see because of their cryptic colouration and quiet nature. To pick them out in dense foliage one must go very slowly and carefully examine every part of a suitable tree from various angles. It is best to look with the unaided eyes into the maze of branches and then with binoculars at anything which does not look like part of the tree. Of course you will end up looking at 'X' number of last year's squirrel nests and uncountable paper wasp hives, but persist and you will see more owls. A surprising number of carelessly identified 'nothings' fly away!

The observant person will find many clues to help him locate owls. For instance, chickadees, jays and crows frequently harass sitting birds. By watching and listening for noisy flocks of these species you can often locate a hectored owl. Masses of owl

pellets on the forest floor usually mark roost sites as do splashes of white excreta on low branches of roost trees. If there has been a snowfall you can often determine the age of such markers by relating their position to the snow and thus know how recently the roost was active. Generally, one must keep his eyes open for everything around him and then try to relate what he sees with what he wants to see.

d. Department in roosts: Some species of owls are very susceptible to disturbance and therefore must be approached with care. One should wear drab clothing, walk slowly taking care not to make excessive noise and talk quietly only when necessary. Often owls will vacate an area if annoyed continually by over-zealous ornithologists. It is therefore best to visit roosts only occasionally and if it is possible, to avoid making the birds fly.

B. Identification

Sitting owls in good view are very easy to identify if one has a guide book such as Roger Tory Peterson's A Field Guide to the Birds. It is always important to note if the owl has ear tufts, its colour and size. By studying the habitats of various species one will find that he may eliminate many kinds as possibilities by noting habitat. For instance, you would not expect a Snowy Owl to sit in a thick cedar row nor a Saw-whet Owl to perch on a lighthouse. Flying birds are much more difficult to name but not impossible once one is thoroughly familiar with the species.

A Guide to Identification based on Habitat and Size

I. Owls of open areas: beaches, airport runways, roadsides, fields

A. No conspicuous ear tufts

1. Usually perched on or near the ground
 - a. Snowy Owl (length 25 inches)
 - b. Short-eared Owl (length 15 inches)
2. Not usually perched on or near the ground
 - a. Hawk Owl (length 15 inches)

II. Woodland Owls

A. No conspicuous ear tufts

1. Small owls (length less than 11 inches)
 - a. Boreal Owl (length 10 inches, spotted forehead)
 - b. Saw-whet Owl (length 8 inches, streaked forehead)
2. Large owls (length 20 inches)
 - a. Barred Owl

B. Conspicuous ear tufts

1. Small owls (length 10 inches)
 - a. Screech Owl
2. Medium sized owls (length 15 inches)
 - a. Long-eared Owl
3. Large owls (length 22 inches)
 - a. Great Horned Owl

(to be continued)

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Elmer Talvila,

Editor