

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

Number 291

April, 1975.

APRIL MEETING

Monday, April 7, 1975, at 8:15 p.m.

at

252 Bloor Street West

Entrance on the west side of the building via covered walk from Bloor Street (midway between the two exits (St. George and Bedford, of the St. George subway station. To park, enter from Prince Arthur Avenue, under the building (parking fee 50¢).

SPEAKER: Jim Grayston, B.Sc.

SUBJECT: "The Natural Way of Learning". An illustrated talk on the flora and fauna of southern and central Ontario and how it can be utilized to benefit today's youth. The slides will cover the mammals, birds and flowers of these areas.

In the foyer a video tape presentation will be showing the Toronto Junior Field Naturalists at Duffins Creek, as filmed by the CBC for their program "A Way out".

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Monday May 5, 1975.

Junior Club NOTE CHANGE IN DATE: Meeting will be held in the Royal Ontario Museum.
Saturday The Fossil Group will be in charge, under the direction of Dr. Peter
April 12 Von-Bitter.
10:00 a.m. Director - Lyn Scanlan, 488-8321 (after 5:30 p.m.)

Environmental Meet at St. James Bond United Church on Avenue Road, north of
Committee Eglinton Avenue. **SPEAKER:** Mike Garrett of the Metropolitan and Toronto
Wednesday Region Conservation Authority. **SUBJECT:** "Plans for Toronto's Waterfront".
April 16 Club members are invited to attend this special meeting.
8:00 p.m. Chairman, Henry Fletcher, 421-1549.

Bird Group Meet at St. James Bond United Church (see above for directions).
Wednesday Lou Marsh will be our speaker. Come and see Lou's colour slides on
April 23 birds in the tropical areas.
8:00 p.m. The American Birding Association will have a special bird book display.
Bird identification books from all over the world. Doors will open at
7:00 p.m. Check with Red on getting autographed copies.
Chairman, Red Mason, 621-3905.

NOTE The next issue of the Newsletter will be the last one of the 1974-75 season. Anyone wishing to make a contribution to this issue -- and these are always welcome -- should try to get it to the Editor by Saturday, April 12th. If conditions are normal, i.e., the Post Office workers are on strike, then phone the Editor to see what arrangements can be made for picking it up.

EDITOR: Elmer Talvila, 12 Cranleigh Court, Islington, Ont. M9A 3Y3 (231-1064)
Newsletter Production and
Mailing: Hattie Beeton, 1164 Broadview Ave., Toronto, Ont. M4K 2S5 (422-4830)

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

I have little to report this month, so I will simply make a list of things to do that could help your Club, and hopefully, help further the cause of naturalists.

1. Have you written your letter to Premier Davis protesting the Government's decision to take no action on the matter of non-returnable containers? (See February Newsletter for details.)
2. Have you contacted the Honourable Judd Buchanan to protest duck hunting in Point Pelee National Park? (See March Newsletter for details.) If you have not done so, please give this matter some more thought. We must convince the Government to change its policy this spring. If not, this coming fall, naturalists who visit the area will, once again, have to tolerate the disturbing noise of shot-guns and the unpleasant sight of dead ducks being carried out of the area.
3. Be sure to give John ten Bruggenkate a call if you wish to help with tree planting at the nature reserve. (Details are elsewhere in this issue.)
4. A chairman is still needed to assume direction of the Audubon Wildlife Films Committee beginning in the fall of 1976. The person who accepts this position will understudy the present chairman during the 1975-6 season.
5. The Club has been given about \$2,000.00 for the erection of some kind of permanent building (such as a picnic shelter) on the nature reserve. If you have any ideas for the form that the structure should take, please contact John ten Bruggenkate (425-6096) or myself (425-4607). We would appreciate the submission of sketch plans or any other ideas that might assist us.
6. Last but not least, clean the dust off those binoculars and oil those hiking boots! Spring is here. Enjoy it with your fellow naturalists on our many spring outings.

..... Bill Andrews

Help wanted

May 3rd ... tree planting at the Nature Reserve

See Page 6 for details ... The Club needs YOU!

PLANTING A BIRD AT LONG POINT

by Jack Gingrich

In the fall of 1961 I happened to read a few chapters of a borrowed copy of Roger Tory Peterson's book "Birds Over America". One of the chapters was entitled "Deceiving the Experts"; in it the author describes how he was completely fooled during a Christmas census by a fake dovekie. It was actually intended for someone else, and was anchored far out in a lake where the census takers would be stopping to look for a gadwall.

This humorous incident made me think about trying a similar trick. An excellent opportunity presented itself in the spring of 1962 when April 1st fell on a Sunday. I was planning to spend the weekend at Long Point along with some friends, and I knew that there would be experts there to deceive, including the late Jim Baillie.

I started one week earlier to prepare my fake bird. I chose the ancient murrelet; I used the small illustration in Peterson's Western Field Guide to determine the shape and coloring. There is no illustration in the Eastern Field Guide. Over a framework of cardboard and strips of balsa wood I wrapped layers of cloth, in strips, impregnated with waterproof glue. This made a strong lightweight shell.

The cloth sagged somewhat between the balsa stringers, and a thin layer of plastic wood was required. Only two cans of paint were needed since the ancient murrelet is black, gray and white. I mixed black and white to get gray. When the paint was dry I tested it in a sink. Weights were added on the bottom to make it float properly. All of this was done in my apartment.

At Long Point, we stayed at a motel at the foot of the causeway. Although it normally does not open until much later in the season, we had arranged for it to be open for us that weekend. It was not adequately heated and thus on Saturday evening we gathered in the common kitchen which had a stove.

Jim Baillie joined us that evening along with some of his friends. He was noted for a vast repertoire of jokes and anecdotes. He recited one story that evening which I found particularly amusing. It involved an amateur ornithologist who had somehow managed to obtain a license to collect birds. He was a particularly obnoxious character, and was intensely disliked by the professionals.

At an ornithological gathering, they decided to get even with him. They obtained an old moth-eaten museum specimen of some extremely unlikely bird (I think it might have been a kookaburra from Australia) and tied its feet securely to a low branch where he would be sure to see it on his morning walk.

He became quite excited when he saw it, and said "We've got to collect this!" He returned with his gun and, from a few feet away, shot the bird. The force of the blast made the bird swing several times around the branch before coming to rest upside down, still hanging from the loosened strings attaching its feet to the branch. This story was doubly funny because of what I was planning to do the following morning.

I excused myself early from the party and retired to my room; I wanted to get to sleep early so that I could wake up before dawn. There was no heat in the room and the temperature went down below freezing during the night. In spite of being in a sleeping bag with blankets on top, and wearing all the clothing I had with me, I shivered all night and got very little sleep. I had no difficulty awakening before dawn!

I walked up the causeway and planted the ancient murrelet far enough out from the causeway, in the marsh, so that a telescope was needed to see it well. The water was quite shallow, and the marsh vegetation kept it from floating away. I then returned to the motel and prepared a breakfast for myself. None of the others were up yet.

After breakfast I took my telescope, set it up on the causeway, and waited for victim number one. The first victim was not very experienced, and of course could not identify it. The second victim was much more experienced, and not easily fooled; after looking at it for some time, she said "It couldn't be a decoy, could it?"

The three of us waited for victim number three to arrive. He could not identify it, and was extremely amused when he found out that it was a trick. He exclaimed "We've got to get Jim up here!" He jumped into his Volkswagen and raced down the causeway and around the corner to the restaurant where he knew Jim Baillie and his friends were having breakfast.

He was able to impress them sufficiently with the urgency of the situation that they left their coffee half consumed, paid their bill, and followed him up the causeway to where we were waiting at the telescope. Jim Baillie looked through my telescope for a short time, but my tripod was very light, and it was quite windy that day. With the vibration of the 'scope and unfamiliarity with my unusual focussing arrangement, Jim had difficulty. He called for another telescope.

Another 'scope was produced and quickly set up. After what seemed like a long wait, Jim finally gave his opinion that it could only be an ancient murrelet. Immediately, one of his friends said "But Jim, that's impossible!"

At this point Jim Baillie displayed his legendary memory for ornithological information by reciting three occurrences of the ancient murrelet on the Great Lakes, giving the day, month, year and location. One of these locations was Lake Erie, but the latest of the three dates was many years ago. Obviously I had chosen an excellent bird for my trick, not completely impossible, but extremely unlikely.

Jim Baillie then made an unusual statement; he said "We've got to collect this!" And, with no weapon whatsoever, he started to walk out into the marsh. I was prepared to let the joke go on longer, but victim number three spoiled it by asking "Jim, do you know that day this is?" Realizing that the joke was finished, I asked Jim if he had seen it move. Then we shouted April Fool!

I waded out again to retrieve the decoy. This time the water went over my boots, and I got both feet wet. When Jim Baillie saw the fake Murrelet, he said that it was well proportioned and correctly coloured, but that it was almost twice actual size. The reason is now apparent; I made its length the same as the length given in the field guide without realizing that this is the length from tip of bill to end of tail with the bird stretched out straight. Also, the added plastic wood made it come out somewhat fatter than I had originally intended.

I really did not know Jim Baillie very well at that time. My friends, who knew him better, reported that he had two comments to make about this incident. First, he was relieved to have identified it correctly; although he had never seen one alive, he would still have been embarrassed if he had made a wrong identification. His second comment was "That character Gingrich has a droll sense of humour!"

It was never my intention to embarrass anyone, and I had the impression at the time that both victims and perpetrator were equally amused by the incident. I sincerely hope so.

It was not until recently that I suddenly realized the significance of Jim's words when he had finally identified the ancient murrelet. They were precisely those used by the character in his story the night before. Is it possible that he was already aware that a trick was being played on him, and that he deliberately went along with it? It is very likely, for that is just the kind of person he was.

CHASING BIRDS IN WINTER (continued)

by Gerry Bennett

Continuing my quest for winter birds, I spent January 25th, a rainy, miserable day, tracking down possible additions at feeders and ravines in the Niagara peninsula but added nothing. The next day, Arn Dawe and I carried out our bi-weekly winter census of Vaughan, and again I was blanked. So, from a list-hound standpoint, it was a lost week-end indeed.

On February 1st, I accompanied Dave Fidler and Grace Harding to Algonquin Park. Gray jay, common raven, pine grosbeak and white-winged crossbill were quickly added. With a little extra looking we also found common redpoll, red crossbill and boreal chickadee. Coming home the next day, we found ruffed grouse and, near Barrie, quite unexpected, a sharp-shinned hawk.

I now had 123 species with three week-ends left.

On the 8th of February, Dave Fidler and I spent a full day afield on the trail of birds I needed but, due to both bad luck and stormy weather, found none of them. The next day I again failed to find anything I needed, my second "zero" week-end of the winter. Such week-ends kill the "big-lister."

Seven A.M. on February 15th found me at the door of Helen and Spencer Inch in London where we had lined up a full slate of birds I wanted. The ones we most expected didn't show up. However, Cahills' feeder has had a chipping sparrow and it was right there when we arrived. In a snowstorm, in the afternoon, we examined Bradley's Marsh, northwest of Chatham and found 2 Virginia rails and 10 whistling swans.

The next day I was at the Claremont Conservation Area in the early morning to look for a Bohemian waxwing and a Cooper's Hawk. When I arrived, Don Perks already had his 'scope on the hawk. Harry and Eileen Kerr arrived and, a few minutes later, so did the waxwings -- a big flock of cedars with the two Bohemians with them.

I now had 128 with one week-end left.

WANTED

TREE PLANTERS FOR THE NATURE RESERVE

On Saturday, May 3rd, the Land Management Committee for the Jim Baillie Nature Reserve expects to plant close to 4,000 tree seedlings on the new section of the reserve. We need people with shovels to make the soil cuts and others to insert the trees into the cuts.

Call John ten Bruggenkate (425-6096) for further details and to volunteer your services for this important and interesting activity. No previous experience is required.

THE TORONTO RAVINE SURVEY : AN INTRODUCTION

Urban biology is, unfortunately, a neglected study in our time. Only rarely do professional botanists, ornithologists, or ecologists treat the city as anything other than lost, and yet the urban environment desperately needs the preservation, and often the restoration, of any natural areas that remain within its boundaries. This is a task in which the informed amateur field naturalist can play an important part.

To a considerable degree natural areas still survive within Metro Toronto because of a fortunate natural legacy -- a series of steep-sided, deep ravines running from north to south across the city into Lake Ontario. To understand this legacy of ravines, it is necessary to go back a long way in time, to the last glacial period in Eastern Canada, about 10,000 years ago. All of Southern Ontario was then covered by ice. Later, as the ice retreated northward, the basic structure of the present surface landscape was left behind, including the numerous ravines which are a unique feature of Metro Toronto.

The Toronto Ravine Survey began in a small way in 1972 when Jack Cranmer-Byng brought to the attention of the Environmental Committee of the Toronto Field Naturalists' Club the ecological deterioration taking place in Chatsworth Park Ravine. As a result our first ravine survey focussed on the problems of this very small area. It was well received by the local residents' association and by the City of Toronto Parks Department, which undertook certain remedial work in the ravine, including the planting of more trees.

Thus encouraged we have moved on to survey other areas. We believe that basic biological and ecological information on ravines is needed if the case for their preservation in a sound natural state is to be made clear to the public and to political bodies. The survey which follows is another in what we hope will be a continuing series of reports on Metropolitan Toronto's ravines.

Stewart Hilts,
Department of Geography,
University of Toronto.

January, 1975.

BROOKBANKS RAVINE STUDY

Prepared by Bruce Cruickshank and Bruce Parker

LOCATION:

The area under survey is outlined in green in the map in Appendix #1. The section east of the Don Valley Parkway is part of what is designated by the North York Parks Department as "Brookbanks Greenbelt": it is roughly 40-50 acres in extent. The section west of the Parkway has no official name: It borders on the Donalda Golf Course and is approximately 6 acres. The whole area is approximately 1¼ miles long.

This composite area was chosen for study because it follows the entire length of a single branch of the East Don River. It also offers a wide variety of habitats. The name "Brookbanks Ravine" has been chosen for it links the whole area with an identifiable public park. The study was conducted from October 1973 through October 1974.

STATUS:

Brookbanks Greenbelt is public property and is maintained by North York Parks Department. The northern and western boundary of this section abuts on streets

(York Mills Road, Fenside Drive, Valley Woods Road, Brookbanks Drive), on town houses (Valley Woods, Citadel Village) and on high-rise apartments (Top of the Valley). The southern and eastern boundary abuts on private houses.

The western section belongs to the Donalds Club. The western boundary abuts on private houses: the eastern side runs alongside the 11th and 12th holes of the golf course.

ACCESS:

Public access to the Greenbelt area is from the roads on the northern and western boundary and by two narrow lanes from Brookbanks Drive and Cassandra Boulevard. Parking at weekends is available at Brookbanks Public School and Three Valleys Public School.

Access to the western area is shown on Parks Departments maps by two narrow gaps between houses in Groveland and Lacewood crescents. Entry is also possible from the short dead end opening near the south end of Three Valleys Drive.

TOPOGRAPHY:

Four distinct sections are easily recognized (see map):

A. From the northeastern corner at York Mills Road and Fenside Drive to the 90° turn at Valley Woods Road. This is an open, grassed region, 100-200 feet wide, with relatively gentle slopes on both sides. Much of the floor of the ravine here has been filled with poor quality soil. There is no formal pathway along the area but a gravel path crosses it from the lane off Brookbanks Drive to the Valley Woods Townhouses. Trees are sparse except on the southern side.

An area of erosion on the south side opposite the townhouses is leading to a steady loss of trees. A second area of erosion is on the south side just before the bend in the river. The side of the ravine just above this is badly worn with many exposed tree roots: there is quite heavy foot traffic in this area.

B. From Valley Woods Road to Brookbanks Drive. Here the floor of the valley is not more than 50 feet wide, the sides are steeper and both sides are thickly covered with trees. A gravel path traverses the length of this section. The floor of the ravine is grassy with small marshy patches.

A large area of erosion is present on the west side behind the townhouses of Citadel Village: this is a favourite spot for Tarzan rope activity.

C. From Brookbanks Drive, behind the Top of the Valley apartments to the Don Valley Parkway. Most of this section is less than 100 feet wide and is on top of a steep bank between the river and the gardens on its south side. It is well covered with trees.

This is a problem area for preservation of the river bank and the steeply sloping side against the river. There are several major washaways.

D. West of the Parkway. This is a wild section, little affected by the human activities in the vicinity or in the floor of the valley. The sides are steep. Both sides and the floor have a dense vegetation.

WATERCOURSE:

The stream which traverses the whole area was called the "Deerlick" by the Maginn family who farmed (1841) the lot immediately north of Lawrence Avenue between Woodbine and Victoria Park Avenues, just to the east of where the stream joins the East Don River. Deer were frequently seen in this area up to the end of last century. Salmon were known in the stream at one time.

For the most part the stream has a shallow bed of rather sandy soil and loose stones, but, in the last few hundred yards the soil is clay and the river has gouged out a bed 6-8 feet deep in a series of hairpin bends. The portion of the stream in the most northerly section was filled in during the winter 1971-1972, the water being carried in an underground storm drain. Since that time the ground in this region has taken much longer to dry out after the spring thaw and tends to remain wet and marshy until mid-June. The rest of the stream flows above ground except for culverts under Brookbanks Drive and the Parkway.

There is a fairly steady flow of water during the year, with a spring peak. After storms there is a very heavy flow in Sections C and D.

Considerable maintenance has been carried out by the Parks Department at three points where the banks are liable to erosion. This erosion has been successfully controlled by gabion walls at the 90° bend below Valley Woods Road and along the stretch immediately north of Brookbanks Drive. Similar work just south of Brookbanks Drive has been much less successful: the gabion walls have been undermined and are falling into the river bed and erosion of the bank continues at a disturbing rate. Some portions of the path here are dangerous, even when dry.

An attempt to halt erosion of the golf course with a gabion wall near the lower end has failed. Heavy storm water has undermined the wall and the erosion increases with each run-off.

There are three collections of stagnant water in Section D, one of which dries up in a long dry spell, the other two remain wet all year long. Flooding occurs in the flatter part of this section after a storm.

Water pollution. Chemical samples taken in November, 1974, indicated that the stream contained high nutrient and mineral concentrations although this is not unusual for streams draining urban areas. The mineral content, however, was particularly high.

Items of garbage, e.g., motor tires, plastic or metal objects, are occasionally seen in the Greenbelt sections. From time to time beer bottles are thrown into the water in these sections, either intact or with intent to break them.

TREES AND UNDERGROWTH:

The slopes of the ravine are well-wooded with Sugar Maple - Beech woods and a few stands of Hemlock. Some of the more numerous of the remaining 29 species of trees which are found are Poplars, Blue Beech, Yellow Birch, Basswood and White Ash. White Pines appear to be disappearing because the seedlings are unable to grow in the shade of the deciduous trees. Smaller trees, such as Manitoba Maple, Hawthorns and Apple cover much of the valley floor in Section D. The natural variety throughout the ravine increases the scenic attractiveness of the area as well as providing a more diversified habitat for wildlife.

The understorey consists mainly of young trees (mostly Sugar Maple) showing that the wood is reproducing itself and that the area is in a state of natural succession. The value of a dense undergrowth of small shrubs, such as Raspberry, Red-berried Elder and Buckthorn, is apparent in Section D where the ravine is least disturbed. This undergrowth provides a good habitat for wildlife, particularly birds, by offering shelter and food (berries and insects).

The most interesting group of herbaceous plants is the spring wildflowers. Patches of Trillium, Dog-tooth Violets and Marsh Marigolds, with other flowers mixed in, make attractive displays during May when public interest in the natural conditions of the area is at a peak. A few plants flower during the summer and the early fall display of asters and other flowers rivals that of the spring time. The brilliance of the autumn tree colour in the ravine must be seen to be appreciated.

For a list of the 117 species of plants which have been identified during 1974 see Appendix 2.

BIRDS:

The most numerous and conspicuous animals in the ravine are the birds. Most of the 105 species (see Appendix 3) which have been identified are migrants. There is not enough information available to determine accurately how many species and individuals spend either the winter or summer in the area, but the winter and summer populations are much smaller than the migrating population. Censuses of bird numbers over a period of years would show changes in these resident populations and could serve as an indication of the overall health of the ravine. Detailed information is also required about the species which nest in the area.

During migration, particularly May and September, hundreds of birds of as many as 55 to 60 species a day may be found. Some birds pass through rapidly whereas others may linger for as long as two to three weeks.

MAMMALS:

At present the most conspicuous mammal is the Gray (or Black) Squirrel, of which 10 to 15 may be seen in one day. The smaller Red Squirrel has not been recorded for 2 to 3 years. Other mammals which were identified during 1974 were Groundhog, Raccoon, Striped Skunk, Muskrat and Little Brown Bat: no Chipmunks or Mice were identified during 1974. Smaller mammals, such as Jumping Mice, White-footed Mice and Short-tailed Shrew were found in the area during the late 1940's. The absence of these small mammals gives an indication of how the habitat, particularly the filled-in parts of the valley floor in Section A, has changed since the surrounding area became urbanized.

During heavy movements of migrating birds domestic cats frequently become numerous. At least 15 to 20 cats have been seen in one hour in Section A. The effect of these animals on the local population of birds and small mammals is not known.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS:

No frogs were found during 1974 and American Toads were only occasionally seen. Likewise snakes are scarce -- a few DeHay's and Garter Snakes were seen. The Red-backed Salamander has been reported from Section A, but the presence has not been confirmed by the writers.

Frogs, snakes and salamanders are under heavy pressure from children -- and some adults -- who treat them as animals which must be destroyed, or as animals which are so interesting that they are taken home as pets, usually unsuccessfully.

FISH: No fish were seen in the watercourse.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Not all dead trees should be removed as they form part of the natural community. Dead trees provide nesting sites for some birds, such as Woodpeckers,

American Kestrel, Screech Owl, Chickadees, House Wren, as well as housing insects which are an important part of the food web of the ravine. Dead trees which are not dangerous should be left alone.

2. Fallen trees should be allowed to decay and contribute to a natural formation of humus. Fallen leaves and trees provide an essential link in the natural cycle of foodstuffs.

3. Wild flowers should be "enjoyed, not destroyed". It may be possible to designate some ravines, or parts such as Section D of this ravine, as Wildflower Sanctuaries.

4. Breeding bird censuses are required.

5. A more detailed study is required of small mammals.

6. Frogs, snakes and salamanders appear to require special protection if they are to survive as part of the natural community.

7. The effects of domestic cats should be determined with a view to restricting their activity if necessary.

Editor's Note: Club members interested in obtaining the complete Brookbanks Ravine report, please phone Miss Hattie Beeton at 422-4830. We have left out: Facilities and Uses; Map; Checklist of Plants; and Checklist of Birds which are all in the complete report.

This very worthwhile project even made the Toronto newspapers. In a recent issue of The Star, I noticed the following:

METRO NATURALISTS SET PLANS TO PRESERVE AREA RAVINES

Metro's skein of ravines, gouged out by glaciers and creeks, have been a vanishing resource this century, and members of the Toronto Field Naturalists' Club are trying to halt their use as beds for yet more highways.

The club recently published its second catalogue of ravine flora and fauna -- this one concentrating on the Brookbanks Ravine in North York -- and now the city parks department is asking for more.

Professor John Cranmer-Byng of the University of Toronto history department and an environmental committee member of the club, said last night one of its next projects will be a survey of West Pond in Rennie Park, near Grenadier Pond.

Previously, the naturalists club had concentrated on the Chatsworth Park ravine, listing its wildlife populations and recommending protective measures to enhance the ravine for recreational use.

The 16-page Brookbanks survey, for example, lists 105 species of birds and 167 species of trees, shrubs and woody vines * that may be found in the 6-acre, 1/4-mile-long ravine that winds across the Don Valley Parkway south of York Mills Road.

The stream in the ravine, which bears no official name, was once called the Deerlick by a family that farmed the area more than a century ago. At that time

deer were seen frequently in the ravine. But today, the largest forms of wild-life are skunks, groundhogs, squirrels and raccoons.

The report has been given to the city parks department "and received a very good reception," Cranmer-Byng said.

At the turn of the century, there were about 1,900 acres of ravine parks in Metro. Today, estimates put ravine recreation lands at about 840 acres and the erosion of ravines to highways continues, although on a much reduced level.

* (Ed: also ferns and herbaceous plants)

BOOK AVAILABLE

"FOR A LARK - A REMEDIAL FIELDGUIDE FOR CONFUSED BIRDWATCHERS - Price \$2.00, from the author, Dr. John Huberman, 4765 W. 6, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1C4.

This is just a little fun volume with suitably irreverent illustrations by Vancouver artist Sylvia Tait. Quoting from the B.C. Natural History Society's journal DISCOVERY in a review by Charles Ney:

"Any devotee of the poetry of Ogden Nash will find an hour of amusement in this little book of pen sketches and rhymes about birds (birdereels, not to be confused with doggerels). Mostly the authors poke fun at names of birds which are admittedly a little strange; for instance:

Aged whiskey-jacks are slightly mottled
They perch in trees and don't come bottled.

At times the rhymes are slightly corny, and occasionally they are slightly ribald, as in the case of the titmouse, which your reviewer is too bashful to quote. (besides, I don't want to spoil the suspense for a prospective purchaser of the book). It is strictly a fun book whose wild irreverence will be enjoyed by serious birdwatchers willing to accept a joke or two about his craft. The anti-birdwatcher will, of course, enjoy it without developing a guilt complex and may even learn a few bird names he did not know before.

About 40 birds are pictured, including the Kittyhawk, a little known fixed-wing species discovered by the Brothers Wright

I predict the book will sell like whiskey jacks, even to birdwatchers, who will find its small size convenient for quickly stashing out of sight of fellow birdwatchers."

SPRINGTIME BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS - APRIL 12 and 13, 1975

This tour in the Toronto area will help you sort out the early migrants before the spring migration reaches its peak. By becoming familiar with the birds and their habitats, you will be able to get the most out of birding this spring.

Travel will be by minibus and participation is limited to ensure individual attention. Have an enjoyable birding weekend (with early wildflowers as a bonus) under the guidance of David Broughton.

For further information as to pick-up times, etc., phone: Hattie Beeton
422-4830.

THE SCHOMBERG SCREECHER

by Tom Letson

Three years ago this November I was busily immersed in my duties as an English teacher in Bramalea. My wife and I had just escaped from the suffocating tentacles of Toronto and we were enjoying the pastoral pleasures of country living in Schomberg. As I recall, I was probably delivering a scintillating lecture on Aristotle's theory of Catharsis in Greek tragedy, when the secretary interrupted over the intercom to inform me of an urgent phone call from my wife and would I please come to the office immediately.

Envisaging some catastrophe, I hurriedly made for the office fully expecting the worst. I was, at that particular time, unaware of the peculiar news that awaited me and to recapture the conversation or even the spirit of it is beyond my powers of recall. Suffice it to say that I rushed home after my last class to see first hand this "cute little owl" on our street in Schomberg.

Upon arriving home in a "screeching" halt, Carol and I quickly walked down the street and there, perched in the knot of a partially dying silver maple, was a red phase Screech Owl. Startled, I stopped and stared at him (her?) in disbelief until he lazily turned his head and sleepily opened his eyes ever so slightly to peruse this peculiar sight. We both stood there staring at each other for several minutes, me in utter disbelief and him probably in mild consternation for having his afternoon nap prematurely terminated.

Well, for the past three years, from mid-October to mid-April, like clockwork, the Schomberg Screecher and I have exchanged glances and occasional morning greetings.

That was in the autumn of 1971, and in April 1972, he quietly disappeared one day. However, during July of that year my wife and I were sitting in our backyard having supper when a sudden flurry among the black willows in a ravine immediately to our rear caught our attention. Much to our surprise a gray phase Screech Owl had flown into a cavity in a black willow which had been used by a pair of Flickers the previous summer to raise their brood. My wife and I looked at each other, and then at this pair of peering yellow eyes inside the willow. Then, before either of us could utter a word in amazement, a black squirrel scurried up the tree and rushed into the cavity as if he were protecting his squatter's rights. A few moments passed and the squirrel poked his head out. Then he disappeared. Then the owl's head emerged. Then he disappeared. I was beginning to wonder how long this game of musical perches was going to continue when the Screech Owl burst from the hole in another sudden flurry and flew off. The squirrel then emerged from the hole, presumably victorious, and went on his way. To this day, I have yet to surmise what transpired inside that tree.

The red phase Screecher could be heard calling periodically throughout that summer. In the fall of 1972, he returned to his silver maple roost and proceeded to spend many winter days sunning himself as people and cars passed by beneath his gaze. It is interesting to note at this point that in the three years he has been showing up, no one that I know of in the town has noticed him.

On March 29, 1973, he changed trees and this time showed up in another silver maple in the front yard of the house next door. Again, it was my wife who spotted him. In fact, as I write this, I can look out the window of my study and watch him snoozing.

In 1973-74 he alternated between the two maples showing up about 40% of the days. On March 21, 1974, I decided to have a closer look at his roost. My Journal records the occasion -- "He moved to the tree at the end of the street today so I decided to get a ladder and have a look at his roost. It is a very deep hollow being about 18 inches deep and tapering down. He must cling to the side when he sits. Also of interest, several pellets were lodged in a crease at the rim of the hole. They were dark gray and would appear to be mouse remains. One pellet was unusual in that it was almost totally absent of hair and made primarily of bones. It was very loose and fell apart when I touched it. Perhaps it was a bird at one time."

A pair of Great Horned Owls have nested behind my house in a small stand of hemlocks for the last two years. On April 28, 1974 I was out for a walk to check on the nest and an old but infrequent acquaintance reappeared. The gray phase Screecher came out of a hemlock and flew right by me and disappeared into the thickness of the trees.

On many hot summer nights I am awakened by the tremulous call of these beautiful birds. On occasion, they will use a sugar maple on the other side of the street directly in front of the house to call from. One night this spring my good friend Bob Watt from Ottawa was visiting and he mentioned as how he had never heard a Screech Owl call. Well, I got out my tape recorder and we played the call in front of the house several times and, sure enough, we got an obliging reply.

After several years of acquaintance I have decided that perhaps everyone is not as fortunate as I am. So, if you haven't seen a Screech Owl for some time and would like to, give me a call at (416) 939-7145 and I am sure my friend, the Schomberg Screecher, will be most co-operative.

Addendum:

I have delayed sending this article in because one of the owl's trees was cut down in November and this may have affected his behaviour. Coupled with this the unseasonably mild weather and it may account for the fact that he has made but four appearances to date. The last, one was on December 20. His pattern of behaviour in the past has been to show up in late January and appear regularly to the end of the year. Hopefully, the disappearance of one of his roosts will not deter him from visiting.

CAPE MAY - Southern New Jersey - May 16-19, 1975

An exciting long weekend trip for the keen birder. Southern New Jersey has many southern and seaside species rarely recorded in Ontario.

Visit such top birding spots as Briggantine Wildlife Refuge (for Curlew, Sandpiper, Seaside Sparrow, and Clapper Rails).

... Stone Harbour (for many herons and egrets, and Cape May itself (for Chuck-will's-Widow and Piping Plover).

The numbers and variety of shorebirds are incredible.

Travel will be by minibus with a small group under leader David Broughton.

For complete details contact: Hattie Beeton, 422-4830.

DESCRIPTION OF TRAIL MAP AND SOME COMMENTS ON THE NATURE RESERVE

SCALE: Although the original drawing for this map was at a scale of 1 inch--200 feet, it had to be reduced in size to fit the format of the Newsletter, and is here printed to a scale of 1 inch -- 310 feet (approximately).

PARKING AND ACCESS: The main entrance is located at the extreme north-west corner and leads you into the parking area. From there one can cross the field and start out either on the White Circle Trail or the Ingrid Trail.

Other entrance points along Stevenson's Sideroad are located at the starting point of the Blue Rectangle, Red Hexagon and Yellow Triangle Trails and are for pedestrians only.

TRAIL MARKING: The trails are clearly marked by plastic markers on the trees, as a rule just above the height of your head so that the next marker can be easily spotted from the location of the previous one. The trails are marked in both directions, usually on your right hand side, at very frequent intervals. At locations where another trail intersects, a marker indicating the intersecting trail has been placed below the marker of the trail you are following. The trail markers are of course of the colour and shape indicated, by the trail name, except for the Ingrid Trail.

OPEN AREAS: The Ingrid Trail is just an access trail connecting the large north-western and south-western open fields. Its marking is experimental being the metal tops of used baby food jars (a form of recycling).

There is one other sizeable clearing, located to the east of the Red Hexagon Trail, where strong secondary succession can be observed.

FENCES: As indicated there are post and wire fences along the north and west boundaries, and fences of different structure and condition along parts of the south limits of the Reserve.

GRID SYSTEM: A few years ago, a grid system to assist people in orientating themselves was laid out in the original 60 acre portion of our Reserve. It consists of imaginary lines at 200 foot intervals, in a rectangular pattern (north to south and west to east), that were determined on the site by actual survey procedures. Wherever a line intersects another, there is a 2-inch by 2-inch, four foot long, cedar post standing in the ground. On it is a metal marker indicating the distance in feet south and east from the north-west corner of the original property. This is all indicated on the map. Please do not disturb these survey stakes. The 000' south line is located in the ditch on the south side of the road, but north of the fence. Neither this line nor the fence indicate the true lot line, which is just south of the existing old fence. The 000' east line indicates the boundary between the old property and the new 30 acre part. The 1363' south line represents the south boundary of the "old" portion (no fence over here). The Uxbridge Brook forms the easterly limits of our Nature Reserve.

FIELD TOILET: Just to the east of the parking area there is a single toilet facility standing in the field. This is a temporary thing, but perfectly fit to be used. There is no building around it; however its location is somewhat protected by cedars and shrubs.

HELPFUL HINTS: As we now have our own place to park, the arrangement for parking north of the road just east of the bridge in the pasture land is no longer in force. May we ask your full co-operation in ensuring that all gates (to the parking area as well as the smaller ones along Stevenson's Sideroad) are closed when the last person leaves.

In view of the spong-like, damp and delicate soil conditions throughout our Nature Reserve, we ask you to stay on the trails as much as possible. The reason is that habitat and vegetation under the prevailing circumstances are extremely vulnerable to damage. Improvements at the worst wet locations on the trails have been made and more are planned. Remember however that waterproof footwear will always be required while exploring the Jim Baillie Reserve. Also, don't forget the mosquito season! Protect yourself by wearing clothing that covers as much exposed skin as possible while visiting the Reserve and bring insect repellent.

TRAIL LENGTHS: The total trail system is well over 2 miles long. For your convenience here are the approximate lengths of the various trails:

Blue Rectangle	2,700 feet
Red Arrow	600 "
Red Diamond	900 "
Red Hexagon	600 "
White Circle	800 "
White Square	1,000 "
White Trapezoid	1,600 "
Yellow Triangle	2,400 "
Ingrid	400 "

FURTHER INFORMATION: In conclusion we would like to remind you that further information on the natural history of the Jim Baillie Nature Reserve can be found in the following back issues of the Club's Newsletter:

Number 253 - October, 1970 - Initial reactions and observations

Number 259 - April, 1971 - Reasons, functions, values

Number 284 - May, 1974 - Plant and Bird lists

Welcome to the Jim Baillie Nature Reserve -- enjoy yourself -- and ...

COME BACK AGAIN!

John ten Bruggenkate,
Chairman
Land Management Committee.

The Toronto Junior Field Naturalists are planning a bus trip to the Nature Reserve on (4 buses)

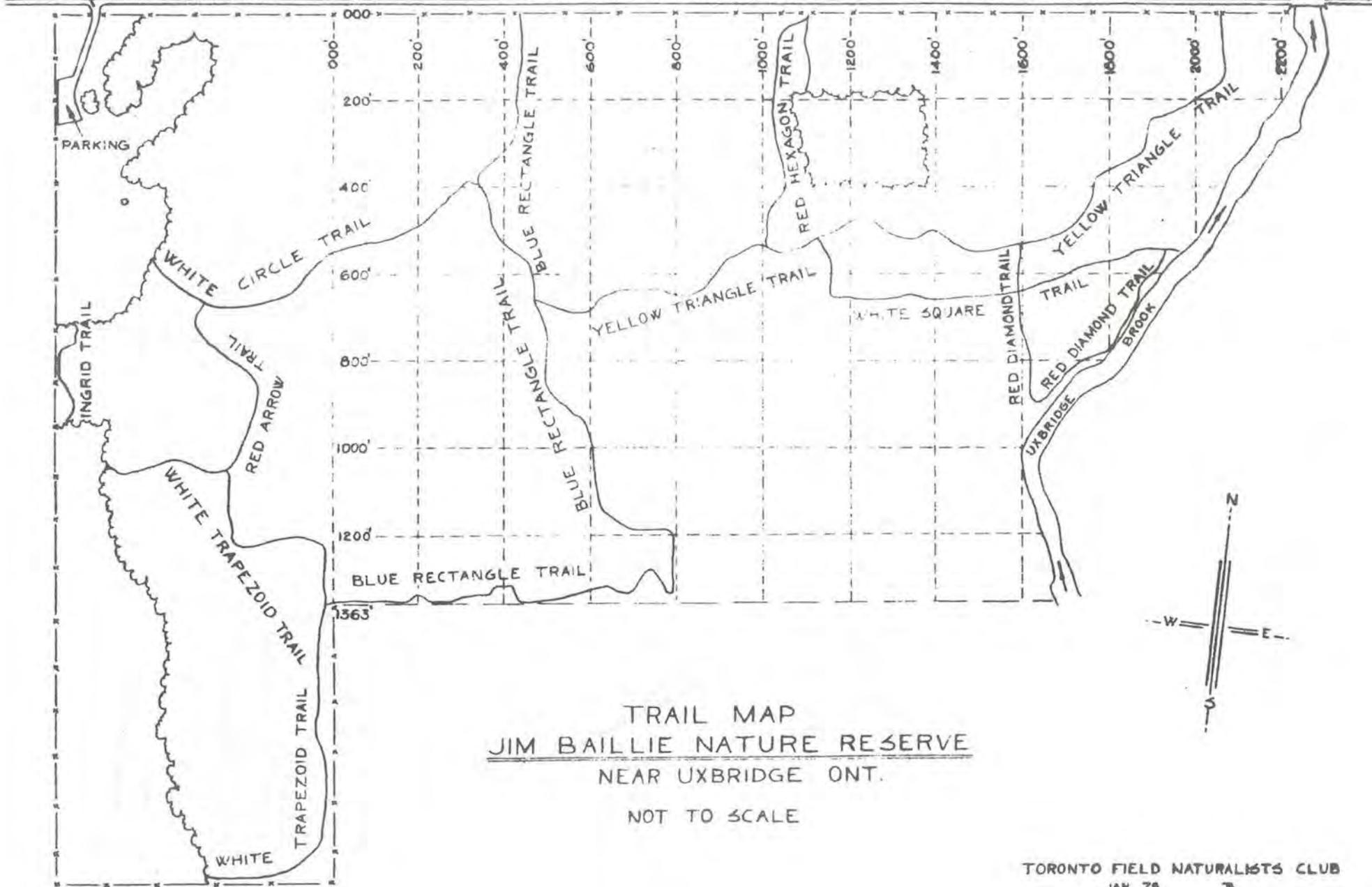
SATURDAY, MAY 31, 1975

Leaders familiar with the Reserve are urgently needed. Please contact:

.16. Lyn Scanlan at 488-8321, after 5:30 p.m.

MAIN ENTRANCE

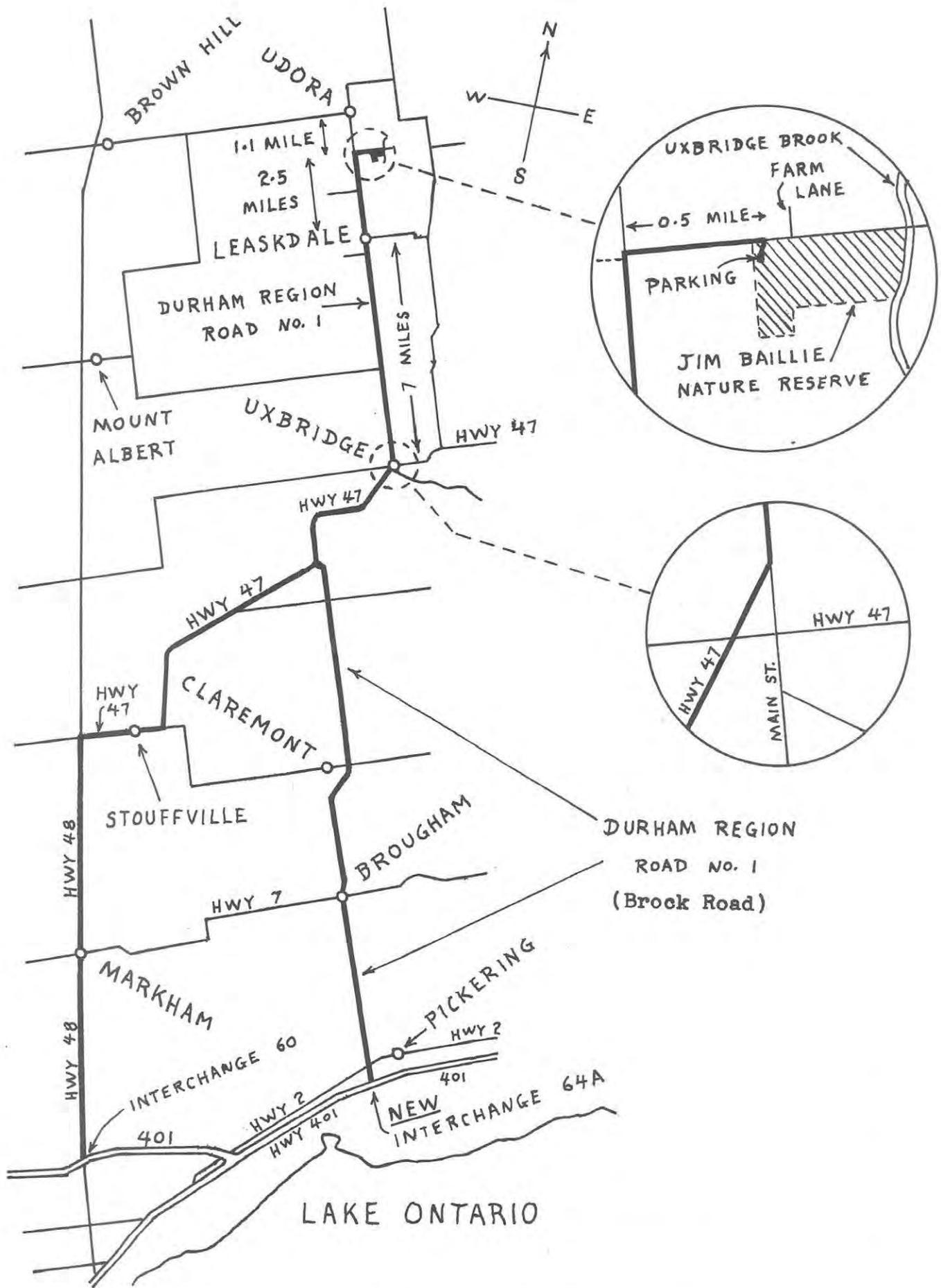
STEVENSON'S SIDEROAD



TRAIL MAP
JIM BAILLIE NATURE RESERVE
NEAR UXBRIDGE ONT.

NOT TO SCALE

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB
JAN. 79



JIM BAILLIE NATURE RESERVE: How to get there.