

# TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

Number 312

January 1978

Visitors welcome!

## JANUARY MEETING

Monday, January 2, 1978, at 8:15 p.m.

at 252 Bloor Street West

(between Bedford Rd. and St. George St.)

Topic: NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY AS A HOBBY

Speakers: Mr. Dave Taylor and Mr. Don McClement

Last year these two talented young men gave an excellent presentation to the Bird Group. This year they have agreed to return to introduce all of us to the joys of nature photography. They will also show us how to create and present a nature address. They will show us a series of small presentations, the first of which will be a multi-image presentation using seven projectors to illustrate the subject "Canada Sea to Sea".

FEBRUARY MEETING - Monday, February 6, 1978 at 8:15 p.m.

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## AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILM SERIES

Tuesday "Okavango" and "Arribaba", two movies by Bernard Nathanson  
Jan. 24 OISE Auditorium, 252 Bloor Street West  
8:15 p.m. Single Admission: \$2.75

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JUNIOR CLUB This meeting will be presented by the Mammal Group. Meet in  
Saturday the Theatre of the Royal Ontario Museum. Membership open to  
Jan. 7 boys and girls from 8 to 16 years of age.  
10:00 a.m. Chairmen: John Martin (265-2818), Mary Nickle (221-7124)

BOTANY GROUP Poisonous Plants, wild and cultivated presented by Mrs. Dale Hoy  
Thursday Meet in the cafeteria in the basement of Hodgson Public School  
Jan. 18 on Davisville Ave. just east of Mount Pleasant Rd. Parking  
8:00 p.m. available in the schoolyard, off Millwood Rd. one block north  
of Davisville. Chairman: Wes Hancock (757-5518)

BIRD GROUP Kirtland's Warbler: photographs and recordings of songs of this  
Wednesday rare bird were taken in Ontario during the summer of 1977 by  
Jan. 25 Professor Paul Aird, University of Toronto. Come and see them  
8:00 p.m. at St. James Bond United Church on Avenue Rd. just north of  
Eglinton Ave. Chairman: Red Mason (621-3905)

OUTINGS

Everyone welcome!

Held rain or shine!

- Sunday  
Jan. 8            WINTER WATERFOWL COUNT  
For further information, contact Clive Goodwin (249-9503).
- Sunday  
Jan. 15            KEW BEACH PARK (Eastern Beaches Board Walk)  
Leader: Bill Dibble  
10:00 a.m.        Meet in the parking lot of the Balmy Beach Cance Club at the foot  
of Beech Ave. ( $\frac{1}{2}$  km south of Queen Street East). Queen Streetcar  
east of Woodbine Ave. Morning only.
- Saturday  
Jan. 28            EDWARDS GARDENS, WILKET CREEK PARK  
Leader: Clive Goodwin  
10:00 a.m.        Meet outside the Civic Garden Centre at Lawrence Ave. and Leslie St.  
Leslie #51 or Lawrence East #54 buses from Yonge and Eglinton.  
Morning only.  
Note: This is a joint outing with the members of the Civic Garden  
Centre.

ROYAL CANADIAN INSTITUTE - Saturday Evening Lectures

- Jan. 14            Permafrost with Dr. R.J.E. Brown of the Nashville Research Council
- Jan. 21            State of the World's Whales with Dr. Edward Mitchell from the Arctic  
Lab. of McDonald College, St. Anne-de-Bellevue
- Jan. 28            Hibernating Animals with Dr. E.T. Pengelley from the University of  
California

Lectures are held at 8:15 p.m. in Convocation Hall, University of Toronto, and are free to the public. Parking on the campus. College Streetcar to King's College Road (just east of St. George St.) and walk one block north.

For further information apply to the Secretary, 191 College St., Toronto, Ont. M5T 1P9, or telephone 979-2004.

TORONTO TREES - an inventory taken during the summer of 1977

The results of this interesting research project will be on display for one month starting January 11 at the Civic Garden Centre, 777 Lawrence Ave. East. The Centre is open Monday to Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Sundays from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

"Birds around the city", "The Bryological and Lichen flora of Ontario", "The marsh in winter", "The trees and shrubs of Ontario" are four of the fourteen courses concerning Nature and the Environment being given by the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies, 158 St. George St., Toronto (978-2400) this spring.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Although winter's blast is still upon us, do not mourn the absence of warm spring breezes. Now is the time to take refreshment from the silvery sheen of sunlight reflected through pine needles encrusted with snow. Revel in the rustle of persistent beech leaves as they dance before winter's wafting breath. Peer carefully for the relentless cruising and circling of a hawk as it patiently searches for sustenance.

Yes, these are familiar sights and sounds which we all enjoy at this time of year. And before too long we will be treated to the first signs of spring. With the advancing new year there is much to be done. Preparations for our spring programs are well under way. Many of us will be relinquishing our current posts to take up new challenges. To the credit of this organization and its dedicated membership, vacancies are filled and tasks embraced with fervour. You can make a valuable contribution to your club by volunteering for any of the following activities:

**Program Committee:** Are you interested in helping decide about the program for our monthly meetings at OISE? We are looking for someone who could help with contacting speakers and finalizing next year's program.

**Auditor:** The Club needs a Chartered Accountant to volunteer his services to audit the club's annual financial statements.

**Botany Group:** Wes Hancock, presently Vice-president of the TFNC and Chairman of the Botany Group, will be President of the TFNC next year. He is looking for someone who would take over as Chairman of the Botany Group. This involves arranging the program for next year and acting as Chairman at the monthly meetings of the group.

**Outings Committee:** Suggestions for outings and ways to improve them, new leaders, and people to help with the telephoning and paperwork involved are always needed.

Volunteers are needed for all kinds of positions. If you have ideas and think you could help the club in some way, do not hesitate to call our Volunteer Coordinator or the appropriate Chairman.

Ron Thorpe, President (484-1807)

Volunteer Coordinator: Muriel Miville (463-8066), Laura Greer (691-4888)  
 Bird Group Chairman: Red Mason (621-3905)  
 Botany Group Chairman: Wes Hancock (757-5518)  
 Ravine Group: Jack Cranmer-Byng (488-3262), Ruby Rogers (789-9612)  
 Outings Chairman: Herb Elliott (763-4869), Mary Smith (231-5302)  
 Junior Club: John Martin (265-2818), Mary Nickle (221-7124)  
 Program Committee: Norah Stuart (485-5824)  
 Newsletter Mailing: Lorelei Owen (225-2205)  
 Newsletter Preparation: Helen Juhola (924-5806)  
 Board Secretary: Carole Parsons (494-8487)  
 Club Treasurer: Helen Yemen (783-2155)  
 Jim Baillie Nature Reserve: John Lowe-Wylde (284-5628)  
 Public Relations: Harold Taylor (225-2649)  
 Photo Librarian: Mark Sawyer (782-3116)  
 Audubon Films: David Langford (683-7654), Phyllis Thomas (459-4646)  
 Waterfront Secretary: Melanie Milanich (924-0338)

OUTINGS REPORT

Toronto Island (Oct. 8, 1977). Ten people attended this outing in wet weather to see 26 species of birds.

High Park (Oct. 9, 1977). Thirty people attended this outing. For details, see page 5.

Newtonbrook Ravine (Oct. 15, 1977). Ten people led by John Riley of the Botany Dept., University of Toronto, collected seeds of wildflowers for planting in Cedarvale Ravine next year. Participants also enjoyed identifying many species of birds which were migrating through the ravine that day.

Humber River (Oct. 16, 1977). In spite of cool, cloudy weather, 14 people attended this outing and saw about 28 species of birds, the most interesting of which was a Black-crowned Night Heron.

Toronto Lakeshore (Oct. 22, 1977). A Short-eared Owl, Surf Scoter, and Sharp-shinned Hawk were the highlights of this trip attended by 15 people.

Mount Pleasant Cemetery (Oct. 23, 1977). Sixty people turned out for this outing. Many trees still had their leaves which made identification easier. Special attention was given to Canadian and Southern species.

East Don Ravine (Oct. 29, 1977). A sunny, warm day brought 25 people out for this outing. A pleasant walk through a little-known part of the Don Valley.

Warden Woods (Nov. 5, 1977). Twenty participants identified 7 species of birds and saw 20 species of flowers still blooming while exploring this easily accessible and very beautiful part of Taylor Creek Valley.

Leslie Street Spit (Nov. 13, 1977). Sixty people (about half non-members who read about our outing in Hugh Halliday's column in the Toronto Star) were shown 45 species of birds including a Long-eared Owl, a Short-eared Owl, Golden Plovers, and Double-crested Cormorants.

Neabitt Drive Ravine (Nov. 20, 1977). Strong winds and threatening rain did not stop the 25 enthusiastic naturalists who attended this outing. Although almost no birds were seen, participants were shown witch hazel blooming and several species of still-green plants which could be identified by their odours (wild carrot, tansy, catnip, and yarrow). Several large maples growing on the west side of the Don Valley were measured and were determined to be well over 100 years old.

Etobicoke Creek (Nov. 26, 1977). In spite of howling winds and temperatures at  $-7^{\circ}\text{C}$ , the TFNC had some unexpected guests on this outing. The combined police forces of Peel Region, Metro, and the RCMP took over our site with drawn guns, four-wheel drive vehicles, pursuing cruisers, and much shivering and confusion. Club members, needless to say, beat a hasty retreat to Lambton Woods which we had to ourselves.

Outings Chairman: Herb Elliott

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#### Scarborough Nature Walks

After a chat with the TFNC Outings Committee during the summer, Scarborough members thought it would be worth organizing walks in our local ravines this fall. It must have been a success as an average of 38 people attended each of the six Sunday afternoon walks. My thanks to John and Lise Lowe-Wylde, Brian Greggains, and all the club members.

Bill Dibble (261-7955)

MEMBERS' OUTINGS REPORTS

## The Fall Picnic - Jim Baillie Nature Reserve

No doubt the grey skies and the weatherman's promise of rain were to blame for the small turnout for our picnic — some 12 by bus and 15 by car — but I can't help feeling sorry for those members who missed this outing. Fall is so short and the beauty of it quickly passes. Just driving up the road to the reserve was an experience, with the trees lining the highway turned to bright red, orange, and yellow. As pretty as it is now, a few weeks will see the end of it.

As we moved down the trail to the shelter a light rain began falling which, inside the shelter, sounded like a real downpour — not one of the advantages to a metal roof. Time out from a friendly lunch to watch a flight of Canada Geese pass over, headed south. If the fall colour in the trees hadn't told us winter was just around the corner, the geese did. We were to see more of them a bit later, but for now the rain had stopped and we divided into four groups for the trail. John Lowe-Wylde, John's wife; Liese, Ian Wilson, and myself would make up the leaders. With my own group in tow, we left the shelter and moved down the open hillside past the scattered young pines (planted in the past two years) to the White Trapezoid Trail. Patches of aster, goldenrod, and everlasting painted the hillside in pastel shades of blue, gold, and white and an occasional blue jay screamed in the trees or flew over.

We found the trails wet but not impossible in spite of all the recent rain, and it was nice not being bothered by mosquitoes in the woods. Some leaves were down and others soared through the air, caught up by the light breeze. Temperatures were moderate and many of the group shared my own thoughts that it was an ideal day for a walk — particularly when the sun came out in mid afternoon to heighten the colour. I found my own group interested in everything from a tiny clump of reindeer moss (a bit rare in the reserve) and British Grenadiers to a showy Orchid that grew on the trail and challenged our right to pass. Throughout the afternoon, we admired the large amount of Fringed Geranium, in startling blue flower, growing near our outhouse and a single orchid of the Ladies Tresses variety along the trail. Bird sightings were not exceptional but the usual grouse were seen along with jays, chickadees, nuthatches, crows, sparrows and a turkey vulture, soaring over the nearby hills. We wandered from trail to trail, enjoying the beauty of the day, the scenery, the abundant growth and the pleasant company. Truly, it was a day well spent.

Ed O'Connor

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High Park Mushroom Hunt - Oct. 9, 1977

Professor John Morgan Jones was as surprised as the rest of us when the clouds gave us a break on Sunday just in time for the mushroom hunt in High Park. With the first frost forecast for the following week, Prof. Jones obviously had picked a good time for the club to ransack the park for specimens to be identified. Frost usually finishes off the mushroom season, and by this time the students have had a fair chance to see them all.

The first mushrooms we saw were several kinds in a shopping bag carried off by an early-bird hunter on his way home to eat them. He was pleased to hear that he had got the right ones.

Our party found about thirty kinds, ranging in size from  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to 5" in size.

They were mostly growing on the ground, but some on branches on the ground and some on dead tree trunks. For the pessimists who stayed home thinking the rain would never give up, here is a partial listing (with phonetic spelling). Among about thirty species of mushrooms, we found nine edible ones:

Clavaria, the hen's comb; Armellaria mellea, the honey mushroom, near cottonwoods and oaks; purple Tricholoma, under oak trees; Shaggy mane, Coprinus commetus; puffballs, Lycoperdum; Garlic mushroom, Mirasmaeus Scordonius, a miniature mushroom; Fairy ring mushroom, Mirasmus aureades, which rejuvenates after drying, and is not to be confused with another look-alike which intergrows with it; Agaricus sylvatica, the field mushroom; Polyferous sulphureum, the chicken of the woods, growing on the dead trunk of an oak tree.

Two very poisonous ones:

Clitosobec dealbita; Amanita muscaris, the fly agaric, so-called because mixed with milk it was used to kill flies. It is bright orange flecked with white, and is hallucinogenic.

One which combines with alcohol, even a week later!, to produce a red face and a fast heartbeat: This one is OK for teatotallers;

Coprinus sp.

One with pink, angled spores (most spores are round), which causes vomiting:

Entoloma sp.

Two that looked nothing like mushrooms at all:

Earthstars, Geastrum sp.; the edible hen's comb (above)

One with yellow sap and a hollow stem:

Lactarius torminosus

One bolete (with round pores), Suillus, and some polypores, and several other species:

Melanoleuca brevipes; Hebelonia sp.; Hydrophorus sp. (tiny); Cortinarium; Leucoagaricus; Russula; Coreolus versicolor (on wood); Laccaria locata

Fresh specimens can be identified at the Botany Department, University of Toronto. Telephone extension 3543.

And remember, with mushrooms, one man's meat is another man's poison.

Mary Smith

### Saw-whet Owl Banding on Mugg's Island

With a grant from the Ontario Bird Banding Association and the cheerful dispositions of those who didn't know what they were getting into, a small but enthusiastic group of bird banders organized Toronto's first all-night banding program for Saw-whet Owls on Mugg's Island.

We chose Mugg's Island for several reasons:

- 1) Toronto Islands are a known congregating spot for Saw-whet Owls
- 2) Peter Fetterolf volunteered his two huts (normally used for his gull behaviour research) for use as shelters
- 3) the 20-foot deep channel around the island would help to keep the general public away

A few telephone calls were all that was necessary to complete the roster of banders. Zoology students from the University of Toronto were used as assistants. A total of 42 participants spent 98 person-nights on this project.

What about owls?

Briefly, we banded 87 Saw-whet Owls and one Long-eared Owl. This was about

the number I originally estimated. During the 35 evenings we were in operation from 1 to 4 owls were caught. Our two "big" evenings were October 19 when we caught 14 Saw-whet Owls and our only Long-eared Owl, and October 28 when we caught 10 Saw-whet Owls. On 14 evenings we were "skunked". (These were around the start and end of the program.) Warren Russell almost caught a cottontail in one of the mist-nets, but it got away, and isn't counted in the totals!

We set up an average of 15 mist-nets each evening to capture the owls. These are fine black nets, 6 feet high and 30 feet long, which are strung between poles. They are very difficult to see when in front of shrubby vegetation.

Besides banding each owl caught, we noted its age, sex, weight, time of capture, net, side of net, and height above the ground. This produced some interesting results. Most owls were flying north when captured. This is what you would expect if the birds are following the shoreline from east to west and swinging north as the shoreline turns northward. They were captured at a uniform rate over the evenings with no discernible peak times. In contrast to the mouse-catching owls captured at Prince Edward Point, our owls were never netted with a mouse in their talons; however, they did catch birds up to the size of thrushes.

All in all, it was a very interesting project. We had some worthwhile results and got to handle some of the lowliest of all birds. While Prince Edward Point banded more owls (549 Saw-whets) they have been at it for three years and have about 2½ times as many nets. Wait until next year!

David Broughton

#### Warning: PARSNIP TOPS MAY CAUSE SKIN RASH

Several of our younger club members participating in a clean-up of Black Creek during the summer of 1977 became painfully aware that poison ivy isn't the only plant that can cause a skin rash. A plant identified as Heracleum mentagazzianum, or Cow Parsnip, described as common to the valley of Black Creek south of Shoreham Drive, was identified as the source of a severe sunburn-like rash suffered by the students.

According to an article entitled "The Giant Cow Parsnip, Heracleum mentagazzianum, Umbelliferae, in Canada" (Can. Field-Naturalist, Vol. 89, pp. 183-185, Apr./June 1975) by J.K. Morton, Heracleum mentagazzianum is a native of Europe and was brought to this country as a garden curiosity because of its remarkable size. The species appears to "be naturalized, firmly established, and very much at home on the banks of the Saugeen River...In the summer of 1972 the plant gained some notoriety in Tara, Ont. because several children developed serious and extensive weeping blisters over various parts of their body after playing with the thick bamboo-like stems".

In Ontario Weeds (1976), J.F. Alex and G.M. Switzer say that the two native species of cow parsnip, H. lanatum and H. maximum, "are not considered poisonous"; however, some people develop a severe skin irritation from contact with the leaves of wild parsnip, Pastinaca sativa.

John J. Craighead et al, in A Field Guide to Rocky Mountain Wildflowers (1963), state that cow-parsnip, Heracleum lanatum, "was used as a food by Indians and Eskimos and formerly had wide use in medicine. The sweet, succulent young stems can be peeled and eaten raw or cooked. The juice and hairs of the outer 'skin', if left on the face and mouth, may cause blisters".

Helen Juhola



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Please send additions, corrections, and suggestions to  
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James L. Hodgins (466-5683)

## THE TORONTO BIRD OBSERVATORY — A BEGINNING

The idea of a bird observatory in Toronto arose several years ago in response to the feeling that the city's birds are perhaps the most over-watched but under-studied birds in the world. The potential benefits were demonstrated by the successful operation of the observatories at Long Point on Lake Erie and Prince Edward Point near Kingston. With these thoughts in mind, a small (but enthusiastic) group decided to organize a pilot-project — Toronto's first all-night Saw-whet Owl banding program on Mugg's Island. This was a great success.

The next step was to approach the Ontario Bird Banding Association and the Toronto Field Naturalists' Club. Both groups agreed to support the ideas of a Toronto Bird Observatory. Applications for funding have been made to various organizations. Metro Parks Dept. has been approached about allowing us to operate in the Toronto Island Nature Sanctuary. The next few months promise to be hectic as we set up our operation.

The proposed program is both exciting and far-ranging. It will centre around a banding and migration monitoring program. This involves making estimates of the total numbers of each species present in our study areas as well as catching and banding birds. We hope to begin a systematic ravine breeding-bird census program and an annual census of colonial-nesting birds (such as gulls, terns, and herons) in the Toronto area. Other special studies such as on shorebirds, owls, and bird mortality at man-made structures will be carried out if there are enough volunteers.

We hope to have an active educational program. This will include workshops for naturalists and the general public, and for both the young and old. One of the main priorities will be to build a core of trained bird-banders and observers. The process of becoming a bander is demanding for the fate of many birds rest in the banders' hands. During our first year we may have to concentrate on training those who are familiar with birds and who have had some exposure to birding. However, our other programs and the construction of a cabin for a headquarters will require all the help we can get.

If you think a bird observatory is a good idea and would like to help, write me about it. More information will be forthcoming in future issues of this newsletter.

David Broughton  
4 Heddington Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario M5N 2K5

### IDENTIFICATION OF PLANTS DRAWN BY MARY CUMMING (drawings on page 8)

1. Wild Carrot (Daucus carota), a member of the Carrot Family (Umbelliferae)
2. Lamb's Quarters (Chenopodium album), a member of the Goosefoot Family (Chenopodiaceae)
3. Common Dandelion (Taraxacum officinale), a member of the Daisy Family (Compositae)
4. Canada Goldenrod (Solidago canadensis), a member of the Daisy Family
5. English Plantain (Plantago lanceolata), a member of the Plantain Family (Plantaginaceae)

PLASTIC RUNOFF

When the spring runoff has finished in Burke ravine, the summer "plastic runoff" begins. Burke Brook descends rapidly between Bayview Avenue and its junction with the West Don River at the north end of Sunnybrook Park, and normally can cope with some debris and bits of garbage as it is a fast running stream. However, in recent summers the ravine near Bayview Avenue has been littered with a large number of plastic bags and pieces of plastic. Some are partly embedded in the mud of the stream, others are lodged in the branches of shrubs along the bank where the flood waters of the spring runoff or summer storms leave them stranded.

During July 1977 I spent three Sunday mornings removing some hundred or so pieces of plastic from the stream. I threw these on the high ground of the bank; however, they were promptly washed back into the stream by a very heavy storm and the subsequent flood water. The second time I collected them into small dumps of plastic at intervals and farther back from the banks of the stream, where I judged them to be safe. However, again severe storms caused several of the dumps to be washed back into the stream. At the third attempt I managed to collect all the pieces of plastic into six green garbage bags, and then placed these near the small footpath in the ravine. This was at the end of July, and I thought that the stream would now be clear of plastic for a long while. Walking in the ravine with a companion, Marc Lichtenberg, at the end of August, I was dismayed to find just as many bits of plastic in the upper part of the stream as there had been at the end of June before I began to remove them. We inspected the stream bed right up to the culvert where the stream flows under Bayview Avenue. Here we found the source of the endless supply of plastic. The fallen gabion baskets which partly obstruct the flow of water at the mouth of the culvert were festooned with an assortment of plastic bags and wrappers, supermarket bags, Mac's milk, Beckers candy bars, cookie and cake wrappers, even empty bags of lawn fertilizer and herbicide. All had been swept downstream from the direction of Sherwood Park through which Burke Brook flows. We fished out enough plastic fill four more garbage bags that morning.

Finally, late in September, Metro Parks Department promised to send some men into the ravine to carry out this grotesque plastic harvest. On the Sunday before they were due to arrive, Robin Cunningham and I were walking the ravine and discovered that most of the original garbage bags had been broken open, presumably either by inquisitive raccoons or as a result of the weight of the mass of sodden and dirty plastic inside them. We rebagged them — a smelly and dirty job — and left ten neat, but heavy, green garbage bags beside the path. I hope the Metro Parks employees got them out safely.

What, then, is the moral of this tale, if any? Don't try to clean up the plastic from a stream bed — it's a losing battle? Don't walk in ravines that lie in or near public parks? Adopt a stream, or section of one, and clear out the accumulation of plastic at the end of each fall as a routine operation? What would you do?

Any suggestions before the annual "plastic runoff" is in full spate in Burke Ravine in 1978 would be appreciated.

Jack Cramner-Byng (488-3262)

RESTRICTED MULTIPLE USE

On May 21, the day following the peak of the spring bird migration in Toronto, my objective should still have been warblers, vireos and other soft bills. But for some unfathomable reason, I elected to visit the exceedingly rough area west of the southern half of Clairville Conservation Area.

The west boundary of that part of the area is unopened concession line, and there, in the shrubbery lining the road serving only pedestrians and aggravating trail bikes, I have, in certain seasons, found a few birds of interest. Owls sometimes gather there in numbers and sparrows can almost always be found in variety and abundance. But I considered it the last place to find warblers.

West of this line are a number of sloughs heavily grown with willows, difficult to penetrate and, for the most part, thanks to fallen trees, impossible to traverse. But since the shrubbery of the first slough contained a couple of Magnolia Warblers and since its edge boasted a Swainson's Thrush, which I still think of as an Olive-back, so old am I, there was the suggestion that the scattered patches of greenery held promise.

So I carried on and soon entered a small tract combining light woods, a row of planted white pine, and a small slough. And had a ball!

Obviously, the sensible thing to do was to sit, the better to observe the dozens of warblers about me. And, as I sat, revelling in the constantly changing cast of performers, I was transported back to when the gullies west of Catfish Pond in High Park were the spring haven of just about every kind of warbler I have ever seen. There too I would sit to watch the unceasing play of small-bird movement in the shrubbery nurtured by the moist soil of the hollows.

What was gained when that growth was removed? No extra playground was added to the park. No additional picnic sites were created. There was added only additional grass and the chore of keeping it cut. The parks department merely satisfied its ego by tidying up and flaunting their opinion that they know what is best for parks.

Why do we allow such authorities to reduce all parks and so-called conservation areas to an expansive stretch of turf? How can we convince them that the reduction of a tangle of shrubbery, and the elimination of all dead trees is not conservation in its fullest sense? What must we do to demonstrate that the term "multiple use", used so widely these days, includes setting aside habitats for birds and other animals as well as picnic grounds, formal gardens, ball diamonds and other playing fields for humans?

Toronto's High Park and the many conservation areas in Ontario fall far short of the example set by Stanley Park in Vancouver and even by the Royal Botanical Gardens in Hamilton.

Offhand, it would seem that the management, or at least the planning, of such areas should be by organizations such as the TFNC, FON, and CNF, and not by those who cannot see beyond the nearest picnic table.

William C. Mansell

REPORT ON BLUEBIRD NESTING BOXES

My trail consists of 500 boxes stretching across 11 townships: Caledon, Albion, Mono, Mulmur, Osprey, Tosorontio, King, Uxbridge, Reach, Cartwright, and Darlington.

In 1976 140 nests were good, and I expected about 170 to be good in 1977. As it happened, there were only 100 good broods. The blame can be placed on the deep snow that plagued the eastern United States last winter. It was definitely a set-back year, but the first such year since bluebirds began to nest in my houses in 1970.

I wish I could say I had found ways to counteract vandalism, but this is not so. This was the worst year for shooting and destruction since the project began. A singing male was shot dead while sitting on top of box 10 in the Drumlin-Esker Park in the Hockley Valley. A family of tree swallows was killed by rifle fire in box 268 in Mulmur Township in June. Trail bikes are entering many fields and cruising around at high speeds and with a terrific amount of noise. Some boxes are broken off and left lying on the ground. Other units are broken off and stolen. Some houses get the door pulled off and some have their roofs prised open. In spite of this, five successful broods were raised in six boxes with no interference during the nesting season in one new area in Mono Township.

My entire trail is being reorganized. More boxes are going into the good areas, while the poorer regions are being abandoned. Bluebirds like dry, sandy soil, sparse vegetation, old orchards, worn-out farms, forest glades, and Christmas tree plantations.

Porcupines ate a lot of the plywood out of which my boxes are made, so for 1978 we are trying to put metal around all the posts. A big job but progressing satisfactorily.

Leo Smith (654-2856)

URBAN WILDLIFE HABITAT COMMITTEE?

I have recently erected a bird feeding station in my back garden, and I have been delighted with the increasing variety of birds and animals (squirrels) it has attracted. My experiment has made me realize that more people could enjoy this same experience if the necessary facilities for wildlife habitat were to be provided for them. I am thinking of elderly citizens who may not be able to erect and provide wildlife accomodation on their own. I, therefore, propose that a committee be formed which could provide information to people seeking advice in attracting wildlife to their gardens. Committee members would be experienced in actually erecting nesting and feeding facilities, and planting trees and shrubs which would attract and sustain wildlife in the gardens of Toronto. There would be no charge for such a service other than the cost of trees and other articles. Voluntary donations by householders would be forwarded to the TFNC and could be used for other environmental work.

As a concerned naturalist I believe we should not only be contented with studying wildlife, but also be prepared to assist and encourage it. Anyone interested in becoming involved in such a worthwhile venture should be prepared to give of their time and knowledge.

Ian Wilson (759-1069)

## HERITAGE TREES

A tree may qualify as a heritage tree for many different reasons. People value trees for many reasons, each one a valid expression of interest. My particular concern is that the best trees be retained while we are improving our surroundings or making unavoidable alterations. Trees have a difficult time adjusting — especially big, old, valuable trees.

One tree which merits a visit from all of us is the red maple (*Acer rubrum*) which stands on Laing Street. If any tree qualifies as a historic heritage tree, this red maple does. It is the tree which inspired the writer of the song "The Maple Leaf Forever", and the species whose leaves adorn our currency and our flag.

Laing Street is a one-way street going north from Eastern Avenue to Queen Street East (between Pape and Greenwood). This old part of town tends to look dilapidated, especially in contrast to our posh new developments where there's no room for a plant out of place, and never a dog kennel.

Although several years ago the Canadian Orange Headquarters put up a bronze plaque in honour of this tree and enclosed the grounds around it, what assurance do we have that even this tree, well marked as it is, and healthy, will not be destroyed as the city grows and changes? None! A concerted scream might work when the emergency arises, but a sensible tree bylaw would be a more dignified approach.

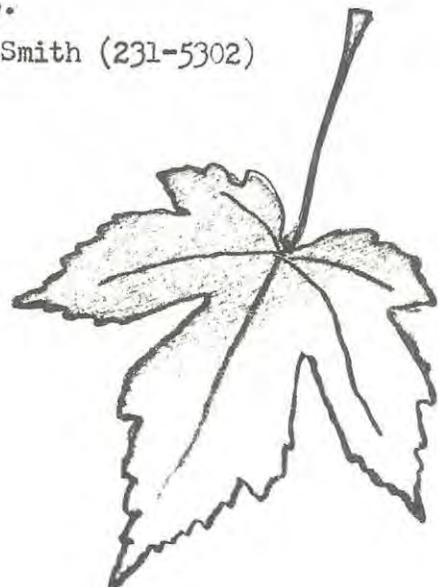
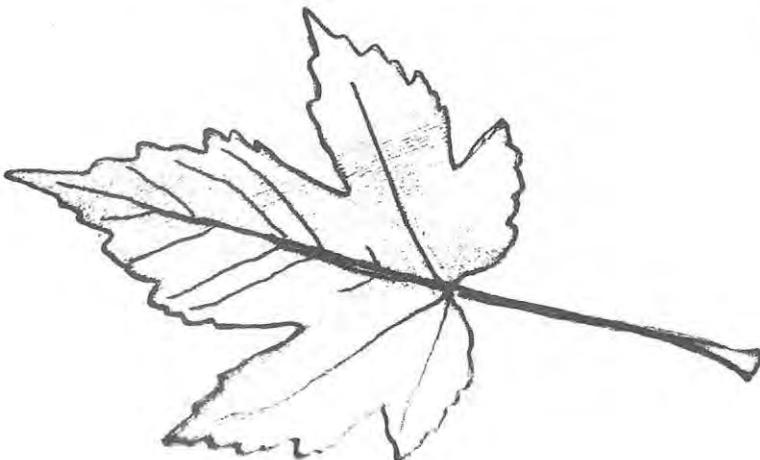
I believe the City of Toronto still uses OUR (public) money to cut down trees for the benefit of landowners who have neglected to nurture them, and still advises people who are concerned about tree care that it will cost them nothing to let a tree die as the city will cut it down "for nothing" when it is dead. Because tree care usually costs less than tree removal, this policy is not even sound economics, much less sound of mind.

Does your alderman know you are interested in your trees? Does the TFNC inform councils of their public obligation to trees in general, and specific trees in particular? Do we ask Councils to let us know which areas are intended for changes which could (and no doubt will) affect trees of interest to the club? Do we do it? No, we don't! Will we do it? The first such request is in process (Echo Valley, Etobicoke), and we will be interested to see the results, if any.

In the meantime, see you at the red maple on Laing Street. You can't miss it!

Do you have a pet tree in your neighbourhood? Tell us about it. We are marking the locations of special trees on a map.

Mary Smith (231-5302)



BIRD LISTS — AND LISTS — AND ...

The list of bird name changes in the TFNC December newsletter resulted in a number of queries as to what this nomenclature business is all about. My difficulty is that I cannot explain it without revealing that I have strong views on the subject, and so I am going to state them at the outset.

I don't think that the American Birding Association (ABA) — and I'm a member myself — has any business tinkering around with nomenclature. This is not to suggest that some names could not stand revision (the ABA alternatives to Long-billed Marsh Wren and Short-billed Marsh Wren are simple and descriptive) but the name business is complicated enough without a quasi-official body offering another set of "official" names!

All plants and animals have scientific names, one for each species. Duplication of these is avoided and uniformity assured by international scientific committees on nomenclature. The whole business is much more complex than it might appear at first glance.

Let me explain how we come by the English bird names we use at present. In North America there has been some standardization of English bird names because the same group that looks after the scientific nomenclature also issues a list of standard English names. This group is the Committee on Nomenclature of the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) which is the senior scientific body for ornithology in North America. The AOU issues a check-list (really a thick volume) listing North American birds, their names, distribution, and geographic races. The most recent edition was published in 1957; however, the committee is at work continuously, and periodically publishes "supplements" to the check-list in the AOU journal, The Auk. Its most recent name revisions were made about three years ago; for example, it is the AOU that is to blame for changing Myrtle Warblers into Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Having a standard English name is very useful; for example, in botany if someone talks about Bittersweet you cannot be really sure if the plant he has in mind is the same species you call by that name. But in ornithology, a Black Duck means only the bird with the scientific name Anas rubripes. The other side of the coin, however, is that if the scientific nomenclature changes, sometimes the English name has to change too. Ornithologists have now decided that it is more accurate to regard the eastern Myrtle Warbler and the western Audubon's Warbler simply as geographic races of one species — which receives the new name of Yellow-rumped Warbler. The reason that nomenclature constantly changes is because, in many cases, the interrelationships between different birds is by no means clear-cut, and what constitutes a species is often a matter of opinion. Research is constantly shedding new light on these problems, and so changes must be made.

Having said all that, not all name changes are of this character: some are just because the committee feels the existing names are not very good. Our Kestrel used to be called a Sparrow Hawk, which is the official name given to an accipiter in Britain. Our bird is a falcon (and the British also have a Kestrel) so American Kestrel is a much less confusing name. Three-toed Woodpeckers have had four name changes during this century, and the present names are far from satisfactory.

Why, then, is the ABA getting into the act? The ABA is concerned with the "sport" of birding. It is a very competitive sport among its participants, even though there is no way of assuring the competence (or even honesty!) of

the competitors. Your "friend's" list may be longer than yours simply because he counted some lumps of earth as Upland Sandpipers, but it's still good fun if you do not take it all too seriously.

"Birders" tend to travel (to get longer lists) and once you leave North America you find that other countries do not have standard English names or that the standard names do not refer to the same species; for example, our Marsh Hawk is England's Hen Harrier, and their Marsh Harrier is a different species again. So now you have two official names for the same bird. At least there were two names until the ABA got into the act. They have given this species the name of Northern Harrier, so now we have three!

There is really nothing to stop anyone putting out their own list of names for birds. The ABA needs a list because its members must know what they are allowed to count (the game may not have referees, but it does have rules), and I suppose they thought they might as well tidy up a few names at the same time. Unless you plan to start playing the ABA's listing games, I would suggest you forget about its new names.

Clive Goodwin

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#### FRIENDS OF THE SPIT

A new conservation group called "Friends of the Spit" has been formed to preserve the Leslie Street Spit as a wilderness park and fight plans to convert the area into a 20-million dollar recreation area. The group has plans to publish a booklet or leaflet on the spit's natural assets and to submit briefs to the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the Toronto Harbour Commission outlining the group's concern. Further information about this new group may be obtained by writing to Friends of the Spit, 174 Balsam Ave., Toronto, Ont. M4E 3C1.

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