

Toronto Field Naturalists' Club

OCTOBER MEETINGS

Monday, October 6th, 1952, at 8.15 p.m.

at the

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Speakers: Mr. James L. Baillie, of the Royal Ontario Museum, and President of the T.F.N.C. will speak on "Florida Birds". The talk will be illustrated.

Dr. W. W. H. Gunn, Executive Director of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, will speak about the Summer Nature School, with special reference to the bird-banding and song recording carried on there. This talk will also be illustrated.

It has been suggested that transparencies of various natural history subjects which might be of interest to the Club should be shown through a viewing box in the rotunda at the meetings. Would anyone who has slides of this nature which they would be willing to lend to us kindly contact the secretary, Mrs. J.B. Stewart, 21 Millwood Road, or Mr. James Simon, 17 Robert Street, Mimico, giving the size of the mount and the title of the pictures, so that arrangement may be made for displaying them.

OCTOBER OUTING

A shrub and tree walk in Cedarvale Ravine

On Saturday, October 4th, at 2.00 p.m.

Meet at the corner of Boulton Drive and Cottingham St.

Leader - Mr. L. T. Owens.

It would be very much appreciated if all those who can conveniently do so would mail their yearly fee of \$2.00 to the secretary rather than paying it at the desk at the meeting. This will help to eliminate the crowding and delay which usually occurs.

Secretary: - Mrs. J.B. Stewart, 21 Millwood Road, Toronto,

Toronto Field Naturalists' Club.



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Moonlight does strange things to all kinds of creatures, both human and otherwise. This we all know unless we are too old to remember, which I suppose no naturalists are. Yet how many of us seek Nature in her mysterious phase, by the light of the silvery moon? What does happen when moonlight bathes the forest and the glen? For a long time Greer Roberts and I have had a plan to discover some of the answers to that question. This summer we were able to carry out our plan. Our findings were all we hoped for and more too.

The project began on the first Saturday afternoon in July when Greer and I went over to Point Ideal and brought back a light canoe which we then paddled to the mouth of the Beaver Pond Brook. There we drew it out onto the beach and prepared it for portaging to the pond, or Little Lake, as it is locally known. It is "little", I assume, in comparison to the large Lake of Bays, its near neighbour.

The art of portaging like all arts is doubtless to its devotees a simple and graceful procedure. To Greer and me, however, this was an initial venture. Our only guides were hearsay and theory. Having lashed the paddles, well-padded with towels, to the thwarts, everything seemed ready. I volunteered to take the first stretch. Getting that canoe onto my shoulders is an acrobatic feat better imagined than described. At last after several vain efforts with a mighty heave it was there, my head having suffered several thumping whacks in the manoeuver. Only when the canoe was up did I discover that our estimates of balance had been somewhat erroneous. Instead of the towel-padded parts of the paddles resting upon my shoulders I had bare wood, while the hard thwart behind the one I was grasping cut across my back. Thus we started. By the top of the first rise I was puffing like a grampus. At this point the path forked. I swung to the right, pushed through some bushes that overhung the trail. Then came the

crash. The front of the canoe banged smack into a building, and I neatly fell over. What was it? An outhouse! We had guided ourselves straight into an outhouse! !

That ended our "orthodox" portaging. We decided that age and inexperience were against us. Henceforth we proceeded each one carrying one end of the canoe. Penny, Greer's eight-year old daughter, was given the paddles. She led the way though she didn't care much for the places where the bracken towered over her head. In this manner, after several halts, did we eventually arrive at Little Lake. We left the canoe on the bank, the solution of the transportation problem being enough for one afternoon.

Sunday evening Greer and I set forth upon our venture, to see what the world of wild creatures was like around Little Lake in the full of the moon.

Our trip began auspiciously. Behind one of the cottages along the Bona Vista shore we heard no less than three whippoorwills calling. As the trees grow thick and tall here the lane was mightily black beneath the leafy branches, even with the full moon already rising. When we were close enough to the nearest "whipper" I started whipping poor will myself. The response was instantaneous. My neighbour immediately intensified his singing, and, as I continued, added a series of annoyed "whups" to it. Though we could not see him we could hear him come nearer and nearer until he was so close all the angry innuendos that commenced each of his outbursts could be detected. When we moved slowly along the lane he followed. Then the real fun began for we obviously enticed him onto his rival's territory. Now the second bird became very excited, and we had them both singing and "whupping" above our heads. A few yards more and the third bird joined in. By now it was clear that not only were they annoyed at me but also at each other for we could hear explosions of throaty "whups", growing and lessening in volume and intensity, as no doubt one bird chased another through the trees. Each such outburst would be followed by strenuous singing. The contest between the four of us was so vigorous and noisy that we could hear cottage doors opening and people coming out to listen. Finally we decided that we had disturbed these birds enough for one evening. When we moved away, and I stopped my imitations, we could tell that the whippoorwills each returned to its own territory since their singing now came from well separated points. It is curious to have three whippoorwill territories so close together. For some reason a junction seems to occur along the lane. However this sort of meeting of territories does happen with other birds, so perhaps it is not so strange after all. The little drama wherein we had played our part put us in good fettle, and was, we hoped, a happy augury for our moonlight adventure on Little Lake.

When we reached the shore of the lake we looked out upon a scene of entrancing mystery. The great orb of the moon had just risen over the ridge to the south so that the whole vista was bathed in silvery luminescence. A pale, ghostly mist, twisting and curling at shoulder

height over the water and the deer meadow, gave one a startling sense of witnessing a lively conclave of returning spirits, perhaps the mid-summer meeting of all those animals and wild creatures that once had graced this hidden mere. A frolicsome breeze played games with the misty aggregation, sweeping the white figures hither and yon, and giving us glimpses of dark water gleaming in the moonlight like an old, weathered mirror. Momentary peeps these at a hidden stage; what plays, what secrets were being enacted upon that black, polished surface? At the edge of the lake great masses of tall evergreens reared up, sombre and forbidding, their solid wall shutting us in as formidably as any fortress bastion. Behind the wall what stirred?

We launched the canoe as softly and silently as if we too were members of the ghostly company, slipping it in amongst the white pond lilies, firmed against the night. Paddling silently Greer eased our craft through a narrow channel edged by bulrushes and sweet gale. Smiling water glistened in our wake whilst around and over head the white shades danced.

No silent course this save for ourselves. We uttered not a word. But our neighbours the frogs and toads raised a mighty chorus, a paean of praise to Luna, now riding her chariot high in the sky, each one vying to outdo the other. Shrill whistles, ticking clocks, or was it bombs ready to explode at the least brush of our canoe, snorts, barks and grunts filled our ears from every side. Cutting through, rolling in sonorous thunder across the water, were the masculine blasts of the bull frogs. Who could fail to be astonished, crouching in a canoe, peering through moonlit mist at a forest-circled lake, suddenly to hear with bass tuba insistence within arm's reach an unsuspected creature pronounce solemnly, "How do, canoe!" And then to have his brethren for yards around take up the shout, "Canoe, Canoe!", each in turn, the cry travelling around the rushes as if an amphibious Paul Revere was giving the alarm. It was not enough for our side of the lake to make the announcement either. No sooner had all our neighbours in bullfrogdom begun to take notice of us than all their cousins and aunts and uncles across the water took up the theme so that we had a veritable Gregorian chant telling of our every move: "Canoe, Canoe!; canoe, canoe; Canoe, Canoe!; canoe, canoe."

As we listened, however, we became aware that alarm was not really the gist of the message. The choristers were not labelling us as dangerous. Again and again we came so near to a powerful virtuoso we could watch his golden singing sac swelling in the moonlight. From my position in the bow I could have snatched up such a one were it not for upsetting the canoe. He merely kept repeating in deepest politesse, "How do, canoe." You just couldn't grab at so gracious a bullfrog, canoe or no canoe. Far from calling us a danger it was as if these courteous singers were telling everyone that tonight there was a visitor on the lake, a canoe, and this canoe must be accepted, welcomed as a guest, given all rights and privileges in the moonlight fraternity.

So it must have been for how otherwise could we have entered into this mysterious, glistening realm without sending all dwellers therein

into fearful silence. We were greeted as associates and friends. As long as we obeyed the rules, behaved as welcome guests, we could live in this world of the wild almost as one born to it. As if to emphasize our entrance past the bullfrog guards the playful breeze cleared the centre of the little lake of white mist, piling it up in luminous masses around the shore. Silently we drifted across the mirroring pool, bathed in silver light, cut off from other worlds by the frowning forest and the gleaming mist. We had penetrated into a secret domain. Who could tell what might happen here?

Soft splashes all around told of frogs diving into cool water from lily pads. Rustlings amongst the reeds, sudden resounding noises from the woods, these sounds were harder to define. Were deer coming out to feed? Or were the beavers hard at work? This is their lake. They made it, and their dams maintain it. One or two of the crashes we heard could well be trembling aspens felled to earth by the diligent rodents, just as the rustlings in the reeds could be beaver navigating their private channels. Yet if so no telltale whack on the water let us know for sure that they were present. If they were we had not frightened them. We had been accepted by the beavers as we had by the bullfrogs.

Other ears than ours were on the alert for suddenly out of the impenetrable caverns among the trees on the south bank came a premp-tory demand in a drill sergeant's stentorian tones, "Who cooks, who cooks, who cooks for you all?" Immediately the question was hurled back, by friend or foe I do not know, but in the very same terms, "Who cooks, who cooks, who cooks for you all?". Again the demand was made, cutting through the frog chorus with the incisiveness of one who knows how to command, who fears not. Then the query came no more. Did Strix really expect an answer to his age old question from us? Or was he and his brother telling all those that rustled and crept and dove, "We are watching, we are watching, beware!" Perhaps the owls were only talking to the moon for if warning there was therein no one seemed to take the least heed. The frog chorus rose to a new crescendo whilst off on the opposite bank a whippoorwill commenced his flagella-tions.

We were moving again. Soon we glided up to the sphagnum islands that front the bog at the far end of the lake. With binoculars trained on the bog meadow we tried to see through the dancing mist. Greer was soon successful. His whispered directions brought my glasses around half a crescent until I found myself looking straight into the face of a large doe on the nearer edge of the meadow. Alerted, either by our whispers or by some sound undetected by us, the deer gazed intently in our direction. Swathed half in lacy white that swirled and eddied about it the doe was just the sort of being we could expect to encounter in this fanciful, moonlit world. Nor had we frightened her for having looked curiously in our direction the gentle animal bent again to its meal. No fear of us.

Then abruptly in one startling sortie fear entered the scene. The deer stiffened. We froze to our seats. Out from the sombre, sec-retive spruces that march down to the deer meadow wild wailing howls

stabbed through the moonlight and the mist. Quavering and writhing the eerie sounds rose to the sky like the offerings of some mad trumpeteer. They stopped, and were succeeded by a medley of savage barks and yaps. Then again the howls spiralled heavenward, a wolf pack baying to the moon. For a quarter of an hour we heard them no more. When with unannounced fury they once more rent the night air with their fierce melodies it was with such intensity and so near at hand, scarcely more than a hundred yards for sure, that we nearly fell out of the canoe. Yet it was the deer that must fear these wailing marauders not us. A quick glance showed that our doe had discreetly disappeared. Another interval ensued. When next the lupine music fell upon our ears the pack had travelled from the meadow's verge to a shimmering pasture on the old abandoned farm some distance up the slope from the lake. Twice more the howls came as the wolves made their way from opening to opening. At last their cries were no more than the wails of departing spirits among the bellowing outbursts of the bull frogs. The bandits had gone but behind them they left a shiver of fear that nothing could dispel.

When Greer had brought the canoe back to shore, and we were carefully threading our way along the path where the bracken reaches so high and the pine trees arch overhead, we expected at any moment to hear the rush of padded feet, the snap of whitened fangs. Reason told us that this would not be, for our ears had reported the wolves going away in another direction. Moreover, when, if ever, have wolves really attacked humans in full possession of their powers? Still, with the memory of those wild howls ringing in our ears, it was impossible not to feel a quiver of trepidation until we saw the welcome light of the cottages along the shore of Lake of Bays.

During our two hours in the moonlight on Little Lake we had been received into another world, a strange and beautiful world. Now we had returned safely home, but with a warning, I think, that humans who venture into other realms than their own do so at their own risk.

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SUMMER NATURE SCHOOL

Some folk like to spend their vacation relaxing in a lawn chair with a good book. Others like to visit expensive resorts where they dance, play bridge and dress for dinner. There are nearly fifty people however, whose holidays this year were spent hiking along winding Muskoka roads and woodland trails with binoculars slung around their necks or with hand lens in their pockets, ready to identify a new bird or to examine one of the many interesting plants of the region. These are the people who attended the fourteenth annual Nature Camp of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, held this year at Camp Billie Bear.

Billie Bear is ideally situated for a camp of this type, as it offers a good variety of habitat. One need not wander too far from camp to find dry woods, boggy woods, open bog and marshy lake. There

are also partially cleared areas such as exist in the vicinity of the camp, lovely Bella Lake on which the camp is situated, and a few miles away the East River.

On the first day the campers were divided into three groups. Those taking the general course were under the leadership of Professor A. F. Coventry, director of the school, Mrs. Carl Heimburger and Mr. Don Sutton. For those who wished to specialize in one branch of Natural History there were the bird and botany groups under Mr. James L. Baillie and Dr. James Soper. These divisions were not too sharp however, for "Baillie's dozen" as the twelve members of the bird group became known, could often be seen studying the flora along the roadside when the birds were unco-operative, and their leader could always spur them on to greater efforts by the promise of "a patch of wild strawberries as big as thimbles, just around the next bend". Likewise the botanists, when they chose to vary their studies, were known to return to camp with reports which eclipsed those of the birders in ornithological import.

During the two weeks at camp approximately eighty-five species of birds were identified. Of course no one camper could claim to have seen them all. Brief glimpses of a Pileated Woodpecker were accorded to only three members of the group. The Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker was equally shy and a Barred Owl whose hooting was heard every night was not seen at all until the last night when Mr. Sutton spotted it as the campers sat around their farewell bonfire.

The most common birds at camp were Evening Grosbeaks, Purple Finchs and Barn Swallows. These could all be seen in good numbers just around the lodge itself. Indeed, the Barn Swallows nest under the eaves and verandah roof in such profusion that the owners regard them almost as pests. There were no English Sparrows or Starlings in the neighbourhood.

Dr. William Gunn, executive director of the Federation, was successful in banding many of the Grosbeaks, Finchs and Swallows. In this endeavour he had the enthusiastic assistance of many of the group. Several of the Evening Grosbeaks which Dr. Gunn caught had been banded previously and it will of course be possible to learn from the numbers on these bands just where this was done.

The banding operations almost led to tragedy one morning when a skunk became entangled in the nets used to catch the birds. It was thought at first that the frightened animal would have to be shot but an employee of the camp bravely released the prisoner who had apparently used up all of her supply of perfume during her frantic efforts to escape.

A trip to Algonquin Park proved very successful. It was hoped that Ravens, Canada Jays, Spruce Grouse and Hudsonian Chickadees might be found. The Ravens were seen even before the party had reached the Park, and the Spruce Grouse and Canada Jays were seen in the Wilderness Area near Bat Lake. Everyone was very pleased and satisfied in spite

of the absence of the Hudsonian Chickadee.

Since it was Dr. Soper who found the Spruce Grouse on the Algonquin trip, the birders vowed that they would find the *Ophioglossum vulgatum* or Adder's Tongue Fern for which a huge reward of five chocolate bars had been offered. Jim Baillie was even heard to declare that he knew exactly where it grew, not far from Billie Bear, having seen it there several years ago. Perhaps on hearing that a reward was posted for its capture, it had taken to its heels. At any rate no trace of the *Ophioglossum* was found.

Another interesting trip taken by the bird group was to Limberlost Lodge on Lake Solitaire. Just across the bay from Limberlost, on a shelf of a high rock cliff, a family of Duck Hawks have nested for a number of years. Only one of the adult birds was seen but the heads and wings of two young were visible. The adult bird was very annoyed by the two boatloads of naturalists and put on quite a performance, shrieking, soaring and diving overhead. Mrs. Hill, the owner of Limberlost and a naturalist herself, provided a delicious supper for the Nature Camp group and afterwards conducted them on a tour of her own nature trails.

On several occasions, when it was too wet for hiking, or in the evenings there were interesting lectures by members of the staff. Professor Coventry gave two very informative talks, on Ecology and on Conservation. Mrs. Heimburger spoke on plant identification and Mr. Sutton gave a helpful talk on how to identify birds. Two very pleasant evenings were spent looking at Dr. Soper's plant slides and Mr. Baillie's bird slides. Dr. Gunn enthralled everyone with his recordings of the songs of the wrens and thrushes of Ontario.

There was plenty of time for relaxation and fun at Nature Camp too. Swimming and canoeing found many enthusiasts. One evening there was dancing, both round and square, to an orchestra provided by the lodge and on the last night a fire, with entertainment in the form of skits and charades, followed by a sing-song, hot dogs and coffee.

It was a wonderful two weeks and the last morning came all too soon. Now we can only look forward to next year's Nature Camp and wonder, when it comes will we still be able to tell the song of a Magnolia Warbler from the song of a Redstart?

Nancy Rogers

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Stuart Thompson has kindly sent in the following account of how he helped a robin this spring. He writes: "There is a robin building on the bracket under the porch roof. The work has been quite a struggle. The bird either through inexperience or lack of judgment insists on bringing very large long strands of garden trash, paper and other materials which are easily blown away as quickly as

she puts them in place if there is much wind. The bracket is small but in former years robins' nests have been built thereon. After each day's work there is a pile of stuff below to be gathered up and almost none on the bracket.

After much work on her part, and after much material was brought and lost, I lent a hand. In her absence I fastened the loose material down securely with several thumb-tacks to the wood below. She did not know of my help of course and having found sufficient stuff in place the next step was mud. But there is no mud nowadays. After weeks of dry weather there is nothing but dry earth everywhere in the garden. Again I lent a hand. I poured a bucket of water on the garden at night. Next morning she was very busy bringing the resulting mud to complete the nest, moulding it into place. But Nature was pressing. The eggs were evidently coming on apace. There was no time to finish the nest into the round well-moulded bowl so characteristic of the nest of this species. So when the structure had but a bare ridge about it; on May 5 one egg of the familiar blue appeared, on the 6th a second, on the 7th a third, and finally on the 8th a fourth egg was laid. And all this in a half-finished nest!

I have often likened the nesting activities of our birds to our own human ambitions to establish a home - similar with its joys and difficulties. The experience of my robin is quite in keeping with the times. What difficulties and discouragements this generation is having in its home building! Would that some good genius would come to the rescue with thumb tacks to make things more secure and provide even mud to see the walls rise for some folks nowadays.

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BOOK REVIEWS

My India. By Jim Corbett, Oxford University Press. Toronto, 1952. Pp. 191. Price \$2.50.

These are the reminiscences of a man, an Englishman, born and raised in India, who has devoted more than 70 years of life to that land and its people. Indeed, it is clear from this account that Col. Corbett is one of the people of India and counts himself as such.

This is in no sense a political book. As the author says, "If you are looking for a history of India, or for an account of the rise and fall of the British raj, or for the reason for the cleaving of the subcontinent into two mutually antagonistic parts and the effect this mutilation will have on the respective sections, and ultimately on Asia, you will not find it in these pages". For Col. Corbett has never been concerned with politics. His life has been lived with the people, the common people, their daily problems, their homes, their families, their work, their sufferings and enjoyments. He has concerned himself with those ". . . simple, honest, brave, loyal, hard-working souls whose daily prayer to God, and to whatever Government is in power, is to give them security of life and of property to

enable them to enjoy the fruits of their labours". His thesis throughout is that the ordinary, poor people of India are good, trustworthy, and kind.

Col. Corbett has lived close not only to the masses of India but also to the wild creatures of the Indian jungles. His knowledge of tigers and leopards, of chitals, sambhars and kakars, of birds and snakes, of the forest, the grasses and the plants may be seen in every chapter of this book. He has ere this appeared in the public eye as a famous hunter. His books, Man-Eaters of Kumaon, and The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag, tell of his adventures with some of the desperate animals of the jungle. But Col. Corbett is more than a hunter. He has the rare capacity of being able to distinguish between "killer tigers" and "just tigers", between good and bad individuals among predators. Would to God we had more hunters, more farmers, and more naturalists who could do as much for our own predatory animals. In addition he is sensitive to natural beauty. In many a beautifully written passage he depicts scenes of India nature for the reader. A facile style, strengthened by a real sense of humour and drama, and coupled with long experience, makes this book well worth attention.

If the India herein pictured be a pre-industrialized, pre-nationalistic land; one, perhaps, that is passing away, it is nonetheless, a vividly real India. Possibly it is the real India, one that will never pass away.

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A Field Guide to the Mammals. By W. H. Burt. Illustrations by R.P. Grossenheider. The Peterson Field Guide Series. Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston. 1952. Pp. xxiii, 200. Price \$3.75.

This is the book we have all been waiting for, a first-class, reliable, easy to consult, beautifully illustrated guide to the mammals. Constructed on the same pattern as the familiar Peterson's Field Guide to the Birds this book seems well known to the user as soon as he first takes it in hand. The magnificent plates, admirably drawn so that the animals have a natural, lifelike appearance, are superbly reproduced with the colouring most effectively done. The same little black lines indicating the diagnostic marks to look for that Peterson uses with the birds serve for the animals here. These greatly enhance the usefulness of the plates which are well worth the price of the book in themselves.

In addition to the coloured plates there are very interesting and valuable black and white illustrations. These portray the tracks of the animals, giving measurements for each print, and in many cases of the spread between tracks. Typical den patterns are given for some animals. Most important are the maps which show the distribution for each species as it now exists.

The text is arranged again like the Peterson Bird Guide putting the stress upon recognition marks and relations to like species. Instructions on how to use the book come at the beginning, and are followed by a check list of all the animals which may be used as a life list record. An excellent list of reading references closes the text material making it possible for anyone to know where to look for fuller reading on the animals of their particular area. The Canadian provinces are well treated in this list.

All in all both the authors, expert authorities in their field, and the publishers are to be congratulated upon this very fine example of scholarship and bookmaking. It is certainly an extremely worthwhile addition to the Field Guide Series, edited by Roger Tory Peterson, and a must for anyone who considers himself a field naturalist.

R. M. Saunders,
Editor.