

Toronto Field Naturalists' Club 115

APRIL MEETINGS

Monday, April 6, 1953, at 8.15 p.m. . . .

at the

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Members' Night

- Speakers: Sylvia Hahn - "Nature on My Doorstep"  
Illustrated with slides of drawings from life.
- Joseph W. Barfoot - "What the Toronto Field  
Naturalists' Club means to me" - Illustrated
- Marion and Oliver Smith - "Coloured Slides of  
Fundy National Park, N.B."
- Alfred Bunker - "Long Point and the Swans". Movies.

ROTUNDA DISPLAY

A display by the Ontario Educational Association .

APRIL OUTING

Saturday, April 11, - 2.00 p.m. Hogg's Hollow - West side.  
Meet at the end of the Yonge Street car line.  
Leader - Marshall Bartman.

FEDERATION OF ONTARIO NATURALISTS

SPRING MEETINGS

- Saturday, April 11 - Annual Meeting F.O.N. Mills Memorial  
Library, McMaster University, Hamilton.  
Annual meeting of members 11.00 a.m.  
Naturalists' Convention 2.00 p.m.
- Sunday, April 12 - Outing to Dundas Marsh 9.00 a.m.  
Motor trip to Oak Orchard Swamp,  
New York State - 7.00 a.m.
- Saturday May 9 & Sunday May 10 - Point Pelee. Go down the night before.  
Accommodation at Aviation Inn or  
Pelee Lodge. Rendezvous at Boat  
House at the end of the Point, Saturday,  
8 a.m.

For further information on any of these F.O.N. outings,  
call the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, 85 King  
Street East, Toronto, EM 3-2583.

# Toronto Field Naturalists' Club.



## NEWSLETTER

Number 115

March 1953

For birdwatchers in this region spring begins on the first day of March. It makes no difference whether on that prophetic day the month comes in like a lamb or like a lion. No bird seen after midnight on the last day of February can be counted on the winter list.

March's entry into the calendar this year led to some puzzlement in the matter of lambs and lions. It was bright and clear, but very cold. One lady was heard to remark that March came in like cold lamb. This assertion, however, I regard as being tinged with a certain culinary irreverence for serious matters. For my own part when the temperature plunged close to zero and the sun rose triumphant over a crisp and tingling March dawn, I felt that there was something of the aloofness of a beautiful cat in the atmosphere. And is not the lion the greatest of cats? I vote that March came in like a lion.

When my wife and our little Irish terrier, Judy, went out to our Bunkie at Terra Cotta to spend that last night of February they had no idea that they would have to cope with the visit of a lion. Had they known that, Judy at least would have been nervous. As it was Sally and I, driving out the next morning with the Marshall Bartmans, were the ones who were nervous. We debated all the way from Toronto as to just what we would find. Our fearful fancies were quickly dispelled when we did arrive, for there was Ann, well bundled up to be sure, but very much in evidence. So too was Judy, though her importunate efforts to get into the car suggested that she preferred to meet the March lion at home rather than in a shack in the country. Our Irish terrier, however, is a very urbanized dog, and her judgment on such matters is a little suspect. Possibly on this occasion she may be said to have had some reason for her views, since Ann told us it had been 5° or lower during the night. Ann had arisen two or three times during the night to keep the fire alight, had slept in a sleeping bag with comforter and blankets, and had been amply warm. Judy in her basket on the floor was restive. She seemed to have worries. I wonder if the clue to these

troubles could be found in the water pail? The water, you see, was frozen in the pail when morning came.

By the time of our arrival the glass had climbed to a pleasant 15°, and the Bunkie was warm: Leaving the ladies, who preferred to remain in or near the Bunkie, Marshall and I drove back to the Credit river a mile away. While he took a picture from the bridge, I walked along the road looking for birds. A crow cawing nearby announcing his recent arrival, blue jays screaming, a white-breasted nuthatch yanking, and redpolls chattering kept me busy until he drove along and picked me up. We went along to the fourth line (Chingacousy) or Brickworks Road, and up this road to the Credit again, for along this stretch of the river is one of the most productive birding areas around Terra Cotta.

A couple of sparrows crossing the road stopped us on the bank above the river. A moment's listening and watching revealed them as tree sparrows. They had taken refuge in some cattails below the road. As we were trying to ferret them out loud cries from above turned our eyes upward, there to see three magnificent red-tailed hawks circling. All three were beautiful adult birds, their coppery red tails fanned out to the full, gleaming against a cloudless blue sky. Two at least of the trio were shouting the husky Kree-arr screams that are the most characteristic utterance of the redtail. Whether they were protesting our scrutiny, or were hurling defiance at each other was not at first clear: Later we decided that the latter was the case for two of the hawks, keeping always close together, drifted away down the valley, whilst the third, still screaming lustily, remained. This division suggested that the trouble could be referred to that ancient problem, the eternal triangle, a serious matter with birds now that spring is in the air. The encounter today was presumably between two males and a female. Why the apparently mated pair allowed themselves to be ousted by the single opponent is a mystery. But even as a small dog is a formidable creature on his own doorstep, so a bird that has chosen its breeding territory will defend it fiercely. Possibly the redtail pair had crossed the bounds already chosen by their opponent.

We parked the car by the bridge and started along the bank on the south side walking up stream. This seemed to alarm the remaining hawk for he now withdrew, still screaming, in the direction of Cheltenham, the opposite direction from the others. As soon as the redtail left we heard horned larks sounding their flight calls. Looking up we saw half a dozen larks fly across the river and land in the field on the top of the southern bank. In a moment they were followed by a single snow bunting, very white in the bright sky. It too was calling, the rippling trill of its kind. A close look at the field on the opposite shore showed us a crowd of birds flying up and settling down. Changing our plans we turned back to the bridge, crossed over and got into this field. There we discovered that manure had been recently spread over a large area. Freshly manured fields are a great attraction to many birds in the early spring. The odour was very strong but that is no deterrent to birds whose sense of smell is very feeble or non-existent. On the manured area was a large flock of pigeons, 60 or more, and with them

were some two dozen horned larks, and two more snow buntings. As we stood watching several redpolls flew in, coming down to join the others enjoying the rich fare. We stalked the larks carefully trying to make out a northern, but though several had strongly yellow throats, none had yellow stripes over the eyes. Here in this considerable flock was another reason for the presence of the three redtails, and for their conflict with each other. The successful contender may have been protecting rich feeding rights rather than nesting territory. That the birds on the ground were conscious of the hawks seems clear from their nervousness, especially the pigeons. Even with the hawks gone, the pigeons were constantly rising into the air, flying around, settling again only to shoot up almost immediately. I have never seen a pigeon flock so restless, and there was now no reason visible. They must have received a severe fright.

On the way back to the Bunkie we had just crossed the railroad on the 5th line when I saw what seemed to be a black and white pigeon drop from the side of a large tree into a pasture field. In a flash I realized it could not be a pigeon, that it must be a pileated woodpecker. I shouted, Marshall stopped. A pileated it was alright, and not one but two. Both were back on the trunk of the large tree, a huge elm, and nodding at each other the way flickers do in springtime displays. Suddenly one flew out from the trunk, then began a few feet distant, fluttering around the other in the manner of a butterfly or a short-eared owl. This is the flight that I first saw last fall when a pileated used it to get away silently after I startled it. Our stopping unfortunately put an end to this performance. One bird, the female, set off along the row of elm trees, really a fence line leading to a wood in the west, while the other, the male, headed in the opposite direction towards the river woods. This bird crossed the road a few yards below us, turned along the railroad, and in a moment alighted upon a telephone pole where it proceeded to bellow - cuk, cuk, cuk, cuk, cuk - to the sky. Was it denunciation of us, an outburst of exasperation, or letting his companion know that all was well, that he'd be back again at a more auspicious moment? Having made his pronouncement he departed over Pultava Camp to the woods by the river. What we had chanced upon was undoubtedly a courtship display. Spring is in the air, no matter what the thermometer may say!

Luncheon over, Marshall and I undertook the serious business of putting up a nail keg he had prepared as a potential screech owl residence. The prospective site was soon chosen in the upper part of an old apple tree near a corner of the marsh. Sheltered from the west by a group of cedars the keg could be placed so as to face a glade to the east, but with the cedars close by to the south. Outlooks, privacy, shelter from wind and rain, all seemed combined. Erecting this keg in the top of the tree was quite another matter from selecting the site. I volunteered to climb the tree. Divesting myself of leather wind-breaker and binoculars I proceeded, after several false starts, to the ascent. Every other branch was dead, so caution was necessary. Once up, I drew up the barrel, some boards and nails and a hammer.

First I tried to place the barrel in the chosen crotch. Thinking

I had it settled I turned to see to the boards. But the barrel had other ideas. Queer how lively and recalcitrant these inanimate things can become. In a second it nosed over, tumbling earthward with a crash. Marshall retrieved it. I had to climb down to the lower branch while he reached it up again. Once more up. This time I hammered a board into the crotch to make a base. Then the barrel was placed on it. Fine. Just at that moment Ann appeared to ask how we were doing: We weren't doing so well but that barrel was having a wonderful time, for as I turned to greet Ann I merely touched the barrel. No slight hint was ever more quickly acted upon for over it went, plunging to earth as before. Down the tree again to get the wretched thing. Then up, I swear I heard it chuckle as I lugged it up for the third time. At least I knew all the safe limbs by now. I tried nailing a supporting board from a branch to the keg. Have you ever tried driving a nail through a barrel stave while perched in the top of an apple tree? Don't do it, it won't work. Marshall suggested that the nail could be driven through the stave much easier if the keg were on the ground. There was nothing to do but agree: He drives the nail while I wait on the first limb. Then up again, board attached. I nail it onto the desired branch only to find the barrel wriggling like an Egyptian dancer in a Cairo night club. Despair reigned. Finally Marshall said he could nail an extra board across the bottom of the keg which could then be nailed to the board already in place. Alright! The keg was detached. Down the tree to the first limb again. Marshall went off to the Bunkie while I stayed in the tree. 'Twas a beautiful day, yes, oh yes! Especially so without a leather jacket, for a smart breeze from the north was sending the temperature down towards zero again. Would Marshall never come back? I could feel myself crystallizing. When I felt about ready to join Lot's wife he reappeared keg in hand, bottom board attached. Up the tree again. Eureka! This board fits the one in place. I begin to hammer, the first nail goes part way, then bends. The second nail leaping from the barrel, jumps into the air and disappears below. Blast! My hands are so numb I can hardly strike a straight blow. At last after much twisting, turning and other acrobatic contortions the keg is securely fixed to base and supporting wing. Down the tree for the cover. Up for the last time to jam it onto the keg. Then down for good. The owl box is up! Do the owls know it? We shall see. I'm betting on red squirrels myself!

To celebrate the owl box raising we walked to the Porcupine cliff to see if the porkies were at home. While waiting for some of the others I saw a mourning dove shoot over my head, bound from Norry's Hill toward the Brickworks. A real surprise this on March 1st. I suppose it was a wintering bird; one of the many summer lingerers this season. A hound, baying loudly, made its way along the Barfoot ridge down across Reid's pasture, into our cedars and onto the Jaquiths' path. Marshall and I hurried to where we could look down into the Jaquith wood, thinking that the noisy hound might start some creature, and it did. I was a little ahead, so was just in time to see my third pileated woodpecker of the day, frightened by the hound and winging away. When the rest joined us we went on to Porcupine cliff.

There last night's light snow was a perfect map of animal activities. Both tracks and odour brought us to a skunk den. Recently barked trees showed that the porcupines had been busy but we did not find them. More tracks led us to a fox's lair, situated like the skunk den in the crevices of the cliff. Presumably these crevices lead to caverns. Not more than 75 feet from the fox's home Marshall discovered a "frame" in the snow where a ruffed grouse had spent the night, as a mass of green-hued droppings testified. In the lee of the cliff it was a well sheltered spot, but a singularly dangerous one so near the fox. Indeed a fox trail passed within 20 feet but with no evidence that Renard had detected his delectable company. The cliff would appear to be a well populated area, its cracks, crannies, and crevices playing host to a whole company of wild creatures.

On the way back to the Bunkie we separated somewhat so that I crossed the brook in the midst of our cedars alone. There I found a track going down the middle of the stream. Where the ice was solid and powdered with snow it showed; where water intervened it went directly in, to re-emerge onto the next patch of snowy ice. The course of the track indicated an animal used to water, preferring to keep to the brook rather than to the woods. This clue with the 2 by 2 placement of the prints, rounded with toe or claw marks inside the rounded impressions, told me a mink had travelled that way. When I told Ann she said she had seen a similar track in the stream out in Reid's pasture. Apparently the mink had come downstream for some distance. We must keep an eye out for this fellow. He's a new member of our known group of animal neighbors at the Bunkie. So came the first day of spring to an end in Terra Cotta.

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In the following Dr. Fletcher Sharp tells about the flowering of those trees that in Toronto are so controversial, the maples.

"Toronto is very conscious of her maples at the present time so it may be of interest to our members to know something about when they are supposed to bloom.

Often before April first, the Silver Maple may be seen leading the parade by sending forth its male flowers, which are much more conspicuous and earlier by two weeks than its female flowers. These flowers are unprotected and undecorated by any petals. About the middle of April comes the beautiful Red Maple, with the most attractive flowers of the whole Maple family. These flowers are reddish with yellow anthers on long stamens, and reddish petals. This is the best Maple for forcing. Put a small branch in water in a warm room and try it. You will be delighted by its beauty and form. Later still in April the green pendulous male flowers of the Manitoba Maple may be seen. They are not very interesting.

Around May first comes the Norway Maple with its cluster of yellowish green flowers. As the spring advances, and the sap stops running, and the leaves come out, you may see hanging from the twigs

of the Sugar Maple a greenish bell-shaped flower on a slender pedicel. The sugar maples seem to fruit when they feel like it, and may go several years without putting forth any flowers.

Finally, and after all other maples, in early June, comes the Sycamore Maple with its yellow green clusters of male and female flowers on a single long pendulous panicle. They are really most attractive. On aging many of them develop a pinkish hue.

If you are interested in the rarer specimens of maples pay a visit to Mount Pleasant Cemetery, and there you will find many of them labelled by Lou Owens, who tells us he has identified over forty species of maple in this Toronto region.

Worthy of special notice is the Schweidler Maple, which belongs to the Norway group. About the middle of May you will notice whole rows of these trees coming out in leaf, and looking much redder than any other trees along the street. Their leaves hold this reddish color for five or six weeks, and then turn a dark green. The mid-veins of the leaves however retain a reddish tinge for a much longer time.

Collecting the flowers of maple trees is an interesting experience."

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Mr. Ralph Knights writes in to discuss the question "Do birds have reasoning powers, or show any signs of intelligence?" He says "I think they do", and offers the following items to uphold his view. He writes, "While resting in a friend's garden at Orangeville last summer I noticed a song sparrow nearby. It was trying its best to peck off top seeds from a frail-stemmed plant about two feet high.. After several unsuccessful flights to reach the seeds, undaunted it paused awhile. Then it put one foot on the base of the stem and by working the other foot along the stem soon had the plant lying flat on the ground.

Last spring a pair of robins built a nest on a square stone slab at the top of our verandah. One morning when the three young were hatched I watched the mother perched on the edge of the nest motionless for at least 15 minutes looking down inside. It appeared that she was actually gloating over her new-born offspring. Later on during the hot spell the young would leave the nest and air themselves on another stone slab 15 feet up where the parents could feed them. They would return to the nest after dark. During their growing spell they used this convenient spot for recreation, stretching themselves but never going near the edge. I could not help thinking at the time there surely must be some mysterious means of communication here for parents to inform young of danger and for young to obey. I was fortunate to be around when they left the nest, and it seemed to me that it was not done before the parents conveyed to the young in some way that maturity had been reached, that the time had arrived to stretch their wings, to take the plunge and leave the nest."

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News of the 1953 F.O.N. Nature Study Camp

WHERE: Camp Billie Bear, Bella Lake, Muskoka District  
(17 miles northeast of Huntsville)

WHEN: June 27 - July 11, 1953

INSTRUCTORS: Professor A. F. Coventry (Chief Instructor)  
Mrs. C. C. (Margaret) Heimburger  
Professor T. F. McIlwraith  
Mr. Frank S. Cook  
Mr. W. Donald Sutton

HOSTESS: Mrs. J.B. (Ruth) Stewart.

WHO MAY ATTEND: The Camp is planned for anyone with a love of nature and a keen and growing enthusiasm for study in the field. Prior knowledge, while helpful, is by no means essential to enjoying this school of the woods. The general course is the more popular as it offers a broad introduction and a diversified programme covering many phases of natural history. Here, by observation and kindly instruction in field and lab, you come to recognize the basic principles that, once learned, make the great outdoors a more pleasant and enticing place for leisure hours.

For those who have reached the stage of wishing to specialize in the study of a particular phase of natural history in the field, advanced courses will be available on plants, birds and/or insects. This year, emphasis in advanced study will be placed on an examination of some of the ecological relationships existing in plant and animal communities.

COST: The fee remains unchanged at \$75.00 - remarkable value for two weeks of informal nature study and, for good measure, ample time for swimming, boating and relaxation in vacationland. That fee includes:

Accommodation (maid service)  
Satisfying meals  
Expert tuition  
Gratuities to hotel personnel

HOW TO APPLY:

If you are interested in attending, please telephone or write for a descriptive folder and application form to:

Mrs. J. B. Stewart, Secretary  
Toronto Field Naturalists,  
21 Millwood Road, Toronto. HU. 9-5052

Applications should be forwarded through your Club Secretary as early as possible to ensure a reservation.

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Book Review:    The Frogs, Toads and Salamanders of Eastern Canada.  
By E.B.S. Logier.    Toronto, Clarke, Irwin and  
Company Limited, 1952. Pp. XII, 127. Price \$3.75

Most field naturalists know far too little of the creatures that are classified as Amphibians. Strange, unidentified noises in the marsh, the scuttling of queer slithery creatures in the grass, unseen pipers in the trees, frogs caught for fishbait, fantastic ideas about getting warts from toads - these, I fear, still constitute the chief knowledge of most people, even many of those who call themselves naturalists, about amphibians. It is high time more people knew more about this group of fellow creatures, one of the oldest in existence. To this end Shelly Logier's new book will be an excellent help.

Mr. Logier, who is associate curator of the Division of Ichthyology and Herpetology at the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology and Palaeontology, at Toronto, is the leading authority on amphibians in Canada. In this book he devotes several chapters to general information about amphibians, their structural features and functions, their senses, instinct and intelligence, the conditions under which they live, their economic importance. He gives instructions for collecting and preserving specimens. After showing how to use keys to identification, he deals in the remainder of the book with descriptions of the species that inhabit eastern Canada, giving the range and distribution, size and structure, color, habits and habitat of each one. The book is well illustrated with five plates and 57 line drawings in black and white, all the work of Mr. Logier. There is also a glossary of technical terms and a very good bibliographical guide to literature.

This book fills a real gap in the naturalists' library, particularly for the region of eastern Canada. It is a work that everyone who goes afield will want to have. Certainly all libraries and schools should have it on their shelves. It is highly to be recommended.

R. M. Saunders

Editor.