Toronto Field Naturalists' Club

DECEMBER MEETING

Monday, December 6th, 1954, at 8.15 p.m.

at the

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Speaker: Mr. Frank H. Kortright
President - Toronto Anglers' & Hunters' Association
Canadian National Sportsmen's Show
Conservation Council of Ontario.
Author of "Ducks, Geese and Swans of North America".

Subject: "Conservation or Else" illustrated with synchronized kodacrome slides.

A thirty minute colour and sound movie entitled "Rendezvous in the Reef" will also be shown. This picture was filmed on the reefs around Bermuda. It is a fascinating story of fish and marine life taken under water.

DECEMBER OUTING

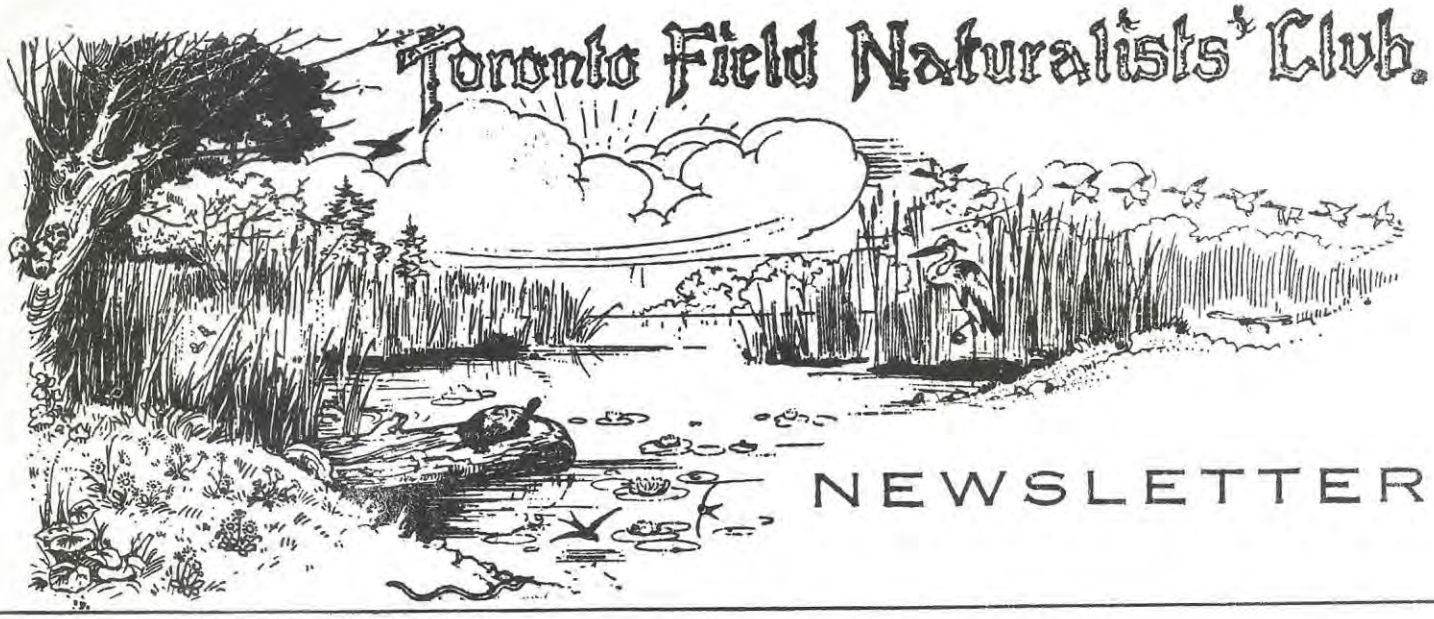
Birds: Saturday, December 18th - 9.00 a.m.
Glendon Hall, 1275 Bayview Avenue. A pre-census work-out. Leaders Mr. J.R.Mackintosh and Mr.Jim Baillie. Glendon Hall may be reached either by the Davisville bus from the Yonge and Davisville subway station and walking north from the stop at the Red Cross Lodge of Sunnybrook Hospital, or by the Lawrence East bus which crosses Yonge Street at Lawrence Avenue, and stops directly opposite the Glendon Hall gates. Allow about half an hour on either bus. Meet at the entrance to the grounds.

The Junior Field Naturalists will hold their December meeting on Saturday, December 4th at 10.00 a.m. in the Royal Ontario Museum Theatre. The Rocks and Mineralogy Group will be in charge. The film "Rendezvous in the Reef" which is being shown to the Senior Club, will be introduced by Mr. Walter Tovell. Children 8 to 14 years are welcome. Membership $1.00 per year. Special family membership $1.00 for the first member of the family and 50¢ for each additional member.

This is the last copy of the Newsletter which will be sent to members whose current fees are still unpaid. The fee is $2.00 per year and may be sent by mail to the Secretary.

President
Mr. F. W. Darroch

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



Number 127 November, 1954.

Northwest of Grand Valley a few miles lies one of the finest wildfowl areas in Ontario, the Luther Swamp, a region known to hunters far and wide, though for our naturalists it seems scarcely to exist. A two hours drive or less from Toronto, is it not a bit strange that ardent naturalists who go as far and farther in other directions regularly should have overlooked this likely spot? Being myself one of the neglectful naturalists I decided this summer to put an end to such a state of affairs, and so in the first part of August made three trips to Luther Swamp.

The larger part of this area was cleared and developed as farmland during the middle and latter part of the last century. As in the case of so many other similar areas it was not then realized that the draining and clearing of a natural reservoir such as the Luther Swamp could have serious repercussions upon the surrounding countryside. As a consequence, another chapter in an oft repeated story was written here. Waterlevel in the adjacent region dropped so that onetime streams ceased to flow, wells went dry, and, worst of all, the great swamp ceased to perform its chief service, that of being a storage basin for rain and snow water which now ran off too rapidly into the Grand River, causing frequent disastrous floods. Alternatively, in years of severe drought, the Grand River went almost dry as far down as Fergus, thus creating unanticipated problems of health and water supply. Finally, after a century conditions became so critical that it became necessary to restore the "reservoirs" on the Grand River, and the Grand River Conservation Commission was created for this purpose. Under its auspices the Shand Dam was built near Fergus, forming a lake in the main valley of the Grand that reaches upstream as far as Belwood. Then another but smaller dam was made near Monticello on a tributary, a small stream, no more than a good-sized brook, but this was enough to

recreate the Luther Swamp, an area of several square miles of watery woods, marshlands, open slough and lake. These dams have been so successful in helping to control the flow of water in the Grand, both in reducing the occurrence and extent of floods - (it is estimated, for instance, that hundreds of thousands of dollars of possible property damage was prevented during the recent flooding caused by the hurricane Hazel) - and in keeping an adequate flow in the Grand River during extreme drought periods, such as we had in July this year, that additional dams are now being seriously considered in order to make the control of the Grand River system complete. In addition to the Grand River Conservation Commission, there is also a Grand Valley Conservation Authority, which undertakes general conservation promotion, such as the development of farm ponds, reforestation and such projects. So, once again, it has been found that exploitation of the land can go too far, that it is better to cooperate with nature rather than to try to make her yield up the last dollar of profit. Indeed, in the long run it is more profitable to play the game nature's way.

The restoration of this huge swamp has not only served the purpose for which it was done, that of controlling the water flow in the Grand River, it has also brought back a remarkably fine breeding place and haven for all sorts of waterfowl. As you approach the flooded area along the road from Tarbert you are faced with a wide expanse of gaunt, grey trees, skeletons of drowned woods. Water gleams amidst the ghostly trunks, whilst soon the road plunges beneath the surface and is lost. If you raise your binoculars to the hill on the far side of the swamp, you will see the road emerging there, a thin white tape, unwinding up the slope, but do not try to follow the trail through the water, for only fishes and ducks may do so now. It is, of course, with these creatures of the wild, whose ancient home has been given back, that we are concerned.

As soon as we began to walk along the muddy shore of the swamp northward from this road, we became aware of how fully the birds appreciated the change. Bordering the drowned woodland here is a broad channel of open water that becomes after some two hundred yards or so a large slough-like arm reaching into farm fields for nearly a mile. It reminded me strongly of western prairie sloughs, and like them it was, even in early August, crowded with ducks and other water birds. Hundreds of ducks, mostly blacks and millards, rose before us as we advanced, sweeping across the sky in noisy flocks to other parts of the swamp. Blue and green-winged teal, pintails, wood ducks gadwall (2) and lesser scaup (1) were all represented in these flocks. More surprising than the ducks to our eyes was the enormous number of pied-billed grebes. At least 200 were massed in small groups along this arm. Of these many were young birds, startlingly striped on head and neck. Presumably all were birds raised in or near the swamp. What a boon the restoration has been to this species alone! Probably as numerous, though on the first trip we did not see nearly as many, were the coots,

whose mad chatter and wild antics could be heard everywhere among the flooded trees. When surprised in open water the coots always made for this covert in frantic haste, acting and sounding like a pack of avian monkeys. The grebes also took to the same cover when frightened, but more surreptitiously, slipping away silently, melting into the water, vanishing in truly grebian fashion. Then if you scanned the open parts among the trees and shrubs you could make out the vanished ones, hiding there till danger be past.

Over marsh and swamp wheeled scores of black terns. Several of these birds held little silvery fish in their beaks for they were still feeding young. The pied coloured youngsters were lined up on floating logs, submerged fence posts, and mud islets, waiting for their parents to swoop down with tasty morsels. Nesting would seem to be later for this species here than in the Toronto area, from which the black terns had already disappeared, they being one of the first of our summer residents to leave. Clearly there had been a considerable colony this summer at Luther Swamp.

Along the edge of the marsh stretched a broad bank of enticing mud, reaching as far as we could see. The letting out of water from the swamp in order to keep up the flow in the Grand River no doubt made this muddy verge. What a wonderful feeding place for shorebirds we thought, and thinking, looked ahead to see the mud dotted with the very birds of which we thought. Though we discovered no extraordinary rarety in the ranks of yellowlegs, greater and lesser, of peeps, pectorals and plovers, yet we felt that at any moment, around the next bend, in another pool, we might find almost any rare shorebird we could imagine. And that is the sort of place that Luther Swamp is. It makes the observer hope endlessly. Rightly so, for almost any of our water birds could occur there.

On the three visits which we made to the Luther Swamp (August 7th with Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Bartman, August 9th with Rev. and Mrs. Henry Marsh, August 14th with Dr. and Mrs. L.E. Jaquith) this summer, the birding picture altered little. Always there were quantities of birds. Most of the black terns disappeared as was to be expected. The surprising thing was to find 52 of the terns still present on August 14th, a late date for them. On that day they were all circling high over the marsh together, as if trying to make up their minds to start off south after their relatives who had already gone. But they could not seem to decide, for they were still circling when we left. Pectoral and semi-palmated sandpipers increased in number; greater yellowlegs declined sharply, but the total of shorebirds seen stayed about the same. There were fewer ducks by the 14th though they may have been in parts we did not or could not visit. At any rate all the ducks were noticeably warier and more nervous. We saw few redwings on the first two trips, but on the 14th we came upon a tremendous flock of 10,000 or more. We detected this crowd in a curious way while driving along a dirt road near the Swamp. Ahead of us the road appeared all black. As

we drove nearer the blackness became alive, turning into hundreds of blackbirds busily picking up gravel! Never having seen such a sight we stopped to watch, the birds paying no attention to us though we halted the car at the very edge of the flock. Suddenly we saw what at first appeared to be a large dog ambling along the road towards us, but which, as it drew nearer, turned out to be a wandering pig, a very scrawny, thin-backed pig, a real razorback. As the pig reached the blackbirds the flock raised as one mass and swirled over the adjoining field. As if by magic the tall grasses and weeds in the field exploded, spouting blackbirds into the air in all directions. Thousands of hitherto unsuspected birds joined their fleeing brethren to make a black cloud whirling and circling over the field like smoke. The pig, quite unconcerned, turned into the field too, his every step sending new birds into the air. Thanks were due for such porcine cooperation and were duly offered, though the porker seemed to take no heed. Bobolinks, swallows and sundry sparrows were also flocking in the neighbourhood, proof, if any were needed, that land birds as well as water birds find the Luther Swamp region attractive.

A small section of the flooded area has been set aside as a Crown game reserve, the part nearest the dam. One could wish that it were a very much larger section, for the Luther Marsh is one of the most heavily shot over parts of southern Ontario during the duck shooting season. It would be inadvisable for naturalists to go there during that period. At other times of the year, and especially during spring and summer it is certainly an area that should be much more thoroughly explored than it has been. Though in existence but a few years the birds have, with the quick adaptability of their kind, already found out its possibilities. The naturalists ought to do so too.*

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Our former president, A.A. Outram, has kindly sent in the following interesting observations, one concerning predatory animals, the other beaver.

Investigation before Extermination

"For nought so vile, that on the earth doth live,
But to the earth some special good doth give."
nRomeo & Juliet 11.3.

The extermination, or even depletion, of a species of plant or

*Ed. Note: Luther Swamp may be most easily approached from Toronto by way of Orangeville and Grand Valley. From the latter place go north two roads to Tarbert, then west until you run directly into the Swamp. The third road north of Grand Valley may also be used. This brings you to the flooded area very near to the dam. People who wish to explore this area should equip themselves with the appropriate one-inch maps and sketch in the flooded area on these maps. They do not include it since it is too new to have been mapped by the topographic survey.

animal may be followed by unforeseen, far-reaching and serious effects. It is hardly necessary to mention this to the readers of the Newsletter, who are conservation-minded and in most cases have a broad outlook toward nature. As I heard recently, "Why keep on with sermons? The congregation believes them, and the unbelievers are not present to hear them." However, it seems to me to be worthwhile refreshing our minds about certain beliefs so that we may be able to help correct the ideas of friends who are less informed about nature.

We must use some judgment, of course, and all of us will readily kill an attacking mosquito, or exterminate a roomful of them with the use of a spray gun. Nevertheless, when it comes to oiling or spraying a huge marsh area, we should hesitate to voice our approval until competent biologists have given their opinion.

The following story, which I heard last June at Estes Park, Colorado, at the convention of the American Society of Mammalogists, illustrates my point that investigation should precede extermination. "In many parts of the West, the wolf and coyote have been exterminated, because of their inroads on the herds of cattle. Now, a certain rancher is trying to buy live coyotes to release on his land. He has found that smaller mammals have increased to so great an extent in the absence of natural predators, and by eating huge quantities of vegetation, that they are doing more harm than ever was done by their enemies."

White Pine Taken by Beaver

The beaver is one of our most interesting mammals. Due to heavy trapping it became rare or extinct in many parts of Southern Ontario, and for many years, few of us had an opportunity of observing it, in its natural surroundings. This condition has changed of recent years and the beaver has resumed much of its old range, and in some localities has increased to such an extent that it has become a nuisance, at least from our point of view. It has flooded roads and railways with its building of dams. It has cut many trees, naturally close to water, and in many cases this has denuded the shore line in front of summer homes. Falling trees have taken down telephone lines, or blocked roads and trails.

This increase has been due to trapping control, to the work of the Department of Lands and Forests of Ontario in removing excess population to other areas, and to the drop in price of raw beaver pelts decreasing the amount of poaching and legal trapping.

The presence of many species of mammals is seldom known to the inexperienced person, but this is not the case with the beaver. Fallen trees, perhaps partly cut up, stumps with fresh piles of chips at their bases, peeled logs and branches floating in the water, houses, canals and dams draw attention to its presence. The mammal itself is now frequently seen swimming across a lake or

river, particularly at dusk.

While it feeds to some extent on aquatic vegetation, its principal food, and certainly the food stored beneath the ice for winter use, consists of the bark of trees. It takes mostly poplar, perhaps because it likes this best and perhaps because it is one of the easiest to cut. It has been known to cut many other kinds of tree, generally when the poplar supply has become exhausted.

I had never observed coniferous trees to be cut by the beaver and I had supposed that it disliked the taste. I had also supposed that it would not want to get "all stuck up" with the gum which exudes from such trees, although the porcupine gnaws a great quantity of spruce and other conifers, and I have never seen a porcupine with its quills and hair in a stickey mess.

I was somewhat surprised, therefore, to find a white pine taken this summer at our wilderness area on Stoney Lake in Peterboro County. It was a small tree, two inches thick at the base and about seven feet high, twenty-five feet from the water's edge. This had been cut off sixteen inches above ground, the bark eaten from one side of the stump, and the tree taken into the lake, where I found several branches with the bark neatly removed. This led me to make enquiries of several professional mammalogists and I was informed that cedar is eaten to some extent, perhaps where more palatable food is scarce, and other gummy trees are eaten very much less frequently. Why it took this particular pine, I do not know. Certainly the beaver have not yet cut down all of my poplar, although they have cut most of those close to shore.

Can it be, as one authority suggested, that it was taken as medication? In any case this is an example of the fact that in nature study, there is always something new to be noted.

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Thanks to the kindness of Greg Clark we are able to include here some colourful impressions of the Barren Lands written in a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Clark this summer from Ungava. The writer of the letter is Norman Hallendy of Toronto, an honour graduate in design of the Ontario College of Art, who is at present in Sweden on a scholarship that he won. During the past two summers he worked as a prospector in the Leaf Lake area, west of Fort Chimo, in the extreme north of Ungava.

Mr. Hallendy writes, "I have been spending the summer in the Guido Lake area, the Ungava Barren Lands, Lat. 58°, Long. 70°. This place has made such a great impression on me that I must tell you about it; it is a place that I will never forget no matter where I may travel in the future.

The first few weeks in the Barrens were mighty tough. My

heart sank and a loneliness that I have never known before rushed in its place. There were no trees, no forest sounds, just a vast, lonely, gray sea of rock and water. The land looked like some very old creature, wrinkled and shrouded in perpetual silence. The winds rushed in from the northeast in gale force, bringing freezing rain and snow in July. The winds tore across the land twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. You could hear its moan, feel its sting, and see the grasses and shrubs in constant motion. The arctic wind was the only voice in the land; and it was not content merely to whisper, it roared! Climbing along the ridges was sometimes dangerous, and after days of this, days of seeing rock, naked and barren, and hearing the damn Banshee of a wind, I was fed up with the Barrens.

In mid July the winds ceased, the sun shone. I dropped a pocket lens onto the moss and discovered a land that would startle the imagination!

The Barren Lands are not barren. I would venture to say that they support the most wonderful and prolific forests of moss, lichen and wild flowers in the world! When you stoop down and look at the vegetation which averages 3-1/2 inches high you become aware of the vast number of species there are in lichens alone. When you become a hand-lens explorer, watch out! You have entered into a world that makes the fantastic seem common. Let me take you into a strange Lilliputian forest of thirty square inches in these so-called Barrens! We see the caribou lichen growing like pale green trees that tower to three and four inches. We come across a fantastic lichen that grows into the shape of weird hollow tubes, whose extremities flower into a riot of deep crimson buds. We see lichens far more beautiful than Oriental fans and more delicate than the finest of laces. We see fronds of floral frost as beautiful as winter's etchings on a window-pane. There are the wild flowers too. Usually the flower itself averages the size of a snowflake. The darn little things pop out at the first hint of sunshine, like happy eager children. We see miniature Arctic orchids no larger than a match head. There are the lilies and the snowy heads of Arctic cotton. There are flowers everywhere! These wild little flowers are delicate, and of the most beautiful and unlimited hues; they mock the very word, Barren! When blossoms fade and become lost in the autumnal winds, a riot of lush berries and seed pods appear. You hear the constant Pa-pee, Pa-pee of the ptarmigan. You see hosts of little birds that have appeared from nowhere, busily chirping all around. The Canada geese, like a convoy of old Fords, come honking in.

Since that day that I stooped and looked at what grew beneath my feet I have never felt that loneliness again."

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Mr. Jim Mackintosh of Glendon Hall, well-known to other members of the Club, writes of noteworthy experiences with cardinals. He says: "Some years ago we had an opportunity of observing a pair of cardinals, and their history for the season of 1940 is as follows. The male had a white feather in his tail, which enabled us to know him. His first nest had eggs April 20th, destroyed by a red squirrel. The second nest had two young cardinals and a cowbird on June 29th but were destroyed by a cat. From the third and last brood towards the latter part of August one chick was successfully raised. The first nest was in a tall and leafless mock orange bush, easily seen by squirrel, cat, collector, or other vermin. The second nest was in the crotch of a Lombardy poplar, 25 feet from the ground, which is unusual I think. The third nest, which had two sterile eggs, and one fertile, was in a thick barberry bush, one foot from the ground. It would appear that the cardinal is not consistent in its nesting habits. This year in addition to the family which we feed at our house there are seven more in various parts of the grounds, in all 11 birds, an increase over last year of 9 birds, which is encouraging. We have four males."

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BOOK REVIEW

Protozoology by Richard R. Kudo (Toronto, The Ryerson Press 1954) pp.xi, 966. Price $11.75.

If you own a microscope and would like to explore a field of nature unknown and unknowable to the ordinary field naturalist, this new edition of a standard work is just what you want. Or again, if you have a son or daughter taking medicine or advanced zoology, this is a book they could use. It takes you right into the middle of the world of radiolaria, foraminifera, microsporidia and other creatures of the microscopic universe of which, though we live in their midst, and in many cases, they in us, we are rarely conscious. Submerged plants, decaying leaves, surface scum, ooze and similar materials are wonderful culture spots for protozooars. But before you launch into the protozoic hobby be sure you know how to use a microscope.

This is really a book for advanced experts - teachers of biology, veterinarians, physicians, laboratory technicians and the like. For them it is a standard work, well recognized in its field, and now brought up to date, including an extensive and valuable bibliography on the subject.

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The Toronto Field Naturalists' Botany Section has arranged the following lectures for this winter, for those interested in plants. They will be held in Eglinton Public School, Eglinton Avenue and Mt. Pleasant Road at 8.00 p.m.

November 18: Newer knowledge regarding fungi.
Dr. R.S. Cain - Department of Botany, University of Toronto.

January 20: The evolution of flowering plants.
Dr. Margaret Heimburger - Department of Botany, University of Toronto.

February 17: Plant ecology.
Mr. Hugh Dale - Department of Botany, University of Toronto.

March 17: Discussion on Solonaceae (Nightshade family)
Members night.

April 21: How we arrive at our present system of nomenclature and rules - presentation of specimens.
Mr. Leslie Gary - Department of Botany, University of Toronto.

May: A field trip to the Niagara Peninsula.

June: A field trip to the Bruce Peninsula.

The date of the two field trips to be announced later.

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