

150

# Toronto Field Naturalists' Club

## November Meeting

Monday, November 4, 1957 at 8.15 p.m.  
at the  
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Speaker: Dr. P.A. Peach

Subject: "WILD FLOWERS ACROSS CANADA" - illustrated with colour slides

For the past ten summers Dr. Peach has been doing geological work in various parts of Canada, including the Yukon, Northern Ontario and Quebec, Labrador and Southern New Brunswick. Being keenly interested in botany, his talk and colour slides will cover some of the wild flowers he has encountered in the localities already named.

## NOVEMBER OUTING

Saturday, November 2 Saw-whet Owls at the Island. Meet at the Island ferry dock in time for the 9.30 a.m. boat  
Leader - Mr. Robert Taylor

## CHRISTMAS CARDS

May we again remind you that we are selling the F.O.N. Christmas cards. These cards are proving very popular, and the supply is limited. They will be on sale in the rotunda at the November meeting, or orders may be sent to the Secretary. The price is \$1.50 per dozen.

The Audubon Society of Canada has also produced a very attractive Christmas card for this year. It is a reproduction of J. Fenwick Lansdowne's picture of the mourning dove, in colour. These cards may be obtained direct from the Audubon Society of Canada, 181 Jarvis Street, Toronto 2. The prices are - Single cards 25¢, 12 cards \$2.50, 25 cards \$5.00. Proceeds from the sale of these cards are devoted to furthering Audubon conservation programs.

## BOTANY GROUP

The November meeting of the Botany Group will be held in Eglinton Public School, corner of Mt. Pleasant Road and Eglinton Avenue, on Thursday evening, November 21st, at 8 p.m. sharp.

Chairman - Mr. James McIntosh

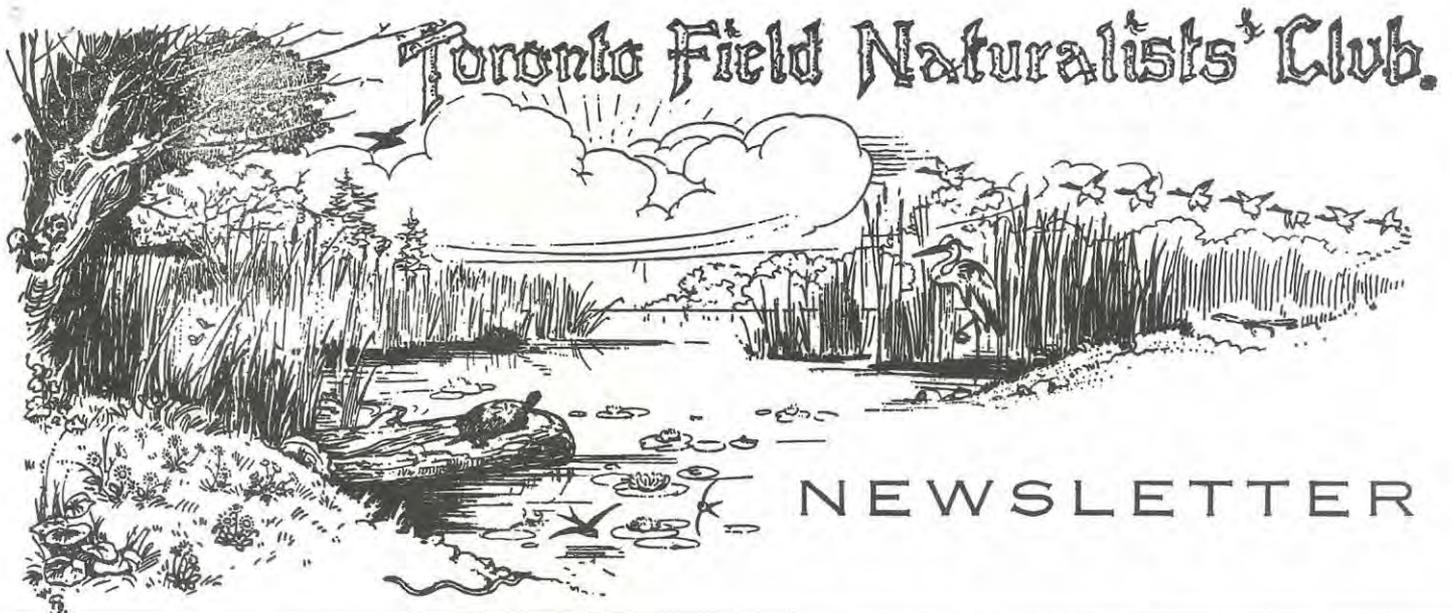
Subject - Grasses

## FEEES

For the benefit of our newer members, may we explain that the Club's fiscal year begins in September, and runs through to June. Fees are now due. Please try to send them by mail to the Secretary, rather than attempting to pay them at meetings. They are still \$2.00 per year.

President - Dr. Walter Tovell

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



Number 150

October 1957

On the evening of September 23rd, between ten and eleven, I had the pleasure of spending an hour on top of the new Imperial Oil Building with Dr. W.W.H. Gunn. This is the highest lookout in Toronto, and it commands an unbroken view in all directions. As has been previously reported, members of the T.F.N.C., the F.O.N. and the Audubon Society were graciously granted permission, until mid-October during The Migration Season on showing their membership cards, to go to the observation platform for the purpose of observing migrating birds. Many took advantage of this privilege, particularly for seeing hawks on favourable days. The observation room is on the twentieth storey, and is glassed in. The view is towards the east, with some prospect to the north and south.

A special permission was also given to Dr. Gunn to take observers - not more than five at a time - to the roof, which is five storeys above the observation platform. It was as Bill's companion, therefore, that I had the chance to go up to the top. Bill has been making a careful study of hawk movements, and small bird nocturnal migration from this point this fall. He has had some very interesting observations, and has even managed to make recordings of the night calls of migrants which I hope some of you will hear someday. On this evening he was going up to make his regular evening check on what was happening.

On the roof I found that my sensations were much like those when standing on the bridge of a liner at sea. The wind swirling by, the distant vista, the smoke from the incinerator funnels and the vibration of the ventilator all reminded me of the ocean liner. All that was needed to complete the illusion was some swaying and plunging. But perhaps that after all was better not included.

Below us lay spread out all Toronto, a world of lights, arranged in fascinating geometric patterns and full of colorful surprises. Instead of the monochrome of white light that might have been expected we could see clusters of reds, yellows and greens, spots of bright blue, and in the distance pastel blends of all of these. Only once before, when I flew over New York City, have I looked upon a night scene so entrancing. From such a perspective all the drab ugliness of a modern city is gone, and a vibrant beauty shimmers in the night.

Since this building is floodlit, and the lights point upwards from several storeys below the top, there is, as one stands on the roof, a field of visibility extending for 30-50 feet all around. Into this field of vision small birds were continuously appearing, crossing and vanishing into the dark beyond. Whenever one came into view it took on a greenish-yellow look because the floodlighting is green. All the birds consequently looked like yellow warblers or winter tanagers. Telling what they really were was, of course, quite impossible except in a very general way. We could see that a bird was probably a warbler, a sparrow, a thrush or something else. To be more specific than that, unless the bird uttered a diagnostic call note, was out of the question. This evening two or three thrushes, all olivebacks, called and were identified; and they were the only ones we could name exactly.

Yet we had no need to identify the particular birds in order to find their steady movement, sometimes several birds a minute, tremendously exciting in itself. Here was the proof that over the city, unbeknownst to almost everyone, a great nocturnal migration was taking place. Here were the travellers we knew of in theory, or perhaps by some scarcely heard note as hitherto we stood in some garden or field, here they were right before our eyes. These were our summer birds going south, hidden in the night from human and from other more dangerous eyes, performing their annual long trek to their winter homes. To see them like this, and to realize that what we were seeing here could be, and most likely was going on along a front possibly hundreds of miles in length, made us understand as nothing else could that the night sky was alive with a passing multitude. What a startling revelation! And what a sobering one, to think that so much creaturely activity could be occurring all unknown to humans down below. If movement was as steady as here over the whole long front a fantastic number of birds must be involved. And when we consider that this sort of movement has been happening since early August, and will continue until early November, we can see that nearly astronomical numbers of birds are concerned. Here, indeed, is one of Nature's wonders that has to be seen to be comprehended. The miracle of migration loses nothing of the miraculous when encountered so.

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Mr. and Mrs. Ray Pannell had recently (September 16th) a most unusual experience with a hummingbird, of which they have written the following report.

"Aside from predators, winds and storms are obvious hazards in the life of a bird. There are other perils, not so evident, but just as deadly. This fact was brought to our attention one Saturday afternoon during a recent trip through Cedarvale. Nicolaas Verbeek, my wife and I were approaching the St. Clair bridge when a fluttering object on a burdock took our attention. It turned out to be a hummingbird entangled in a cluster of burrs, hanging upside down, exhausted and bleeding from its struggles to escape. Great care was taken to extricate the tiny mite, which was accomplished at the expense of two claws and a number of feathers. It lay in my hand inert and panting. Fearing for its life we decided that to assure survival it must be taken home. Shopping had to be done, so we came up the street eventually, my wife carrying the parcels and I holding my hands together like a prima donna about to sing an aria.

The hummer was released on a plant in our kitchen. Some sugar and water were mixed and attempts began to get it to take the syrup from the ends of my fingers. After some coaxing the threadlike tongue slipped out as it took its first nourishment. We thrilled to watch the tiny throat quiver in swallowing. After several feedings it showed definite signs of recovery and was never fearful of our proximity. Suddenly the little bird took to its wings, flying up to the ceiling and around the room, coming no closer than six inches to the window panes, appearing to sense that it could not go through the windows. In all subsequent flights it never struck either glass or screens. Feeding from my finger became routine now, and it knew that it was going to be fed the moment I reached for the egg-cup that contained the syrup. After feeding it would fly up to a perch and attempt to preen its wings, but always gave up quickly, no doubt because of aching muscles. As soon as the light was put out it flew to a perch for the night.

Sunday morning found our little friend up and ready for breakfast. It was amazing how quickly it learned that the source of food came from my fingers. After breakfast we left for the Island to do a bit of - you guessed it - birdwatching. On our return we headed for the kitchen to see how our bird was making out. Then the blitz began. He dive-bombed me, flew round my head, sat on my shoulder, then, on whirring wings, touched my lips and ears with his bill. He could not have made it clearer if he had shouted. He was hungry and I was responsible. I reached for the egg-cup and soon thrust out a gooey finger. By careful manipulation I was able to draw him to the edge of the egg-cup so that he could feed perching instead of on the wing. After he was satisfied he flew to a plant and attempted to remove the sugary incrustations by scraping his long bill on the edge of the flower pot. Later my

wife was subjected to the same violent demand for food as she came into the kitchen to put the roast in the oven. She gave up finally and for the first time fed the bird herself.

Thinking that Dr. Saunders might like to see this little fellow in action, he was called. He and Mrs. Saunders came up Monday morning and had a little visit with our guest. He accepted syrup from Mrs. Saunders' finger immediately, in spite of four people gathered around him, being totally unafraid. Then, for the first time, he sat on the edge of the egg-cup, dipped his head and fed himself.

Our young male hummingbird was fully recovered now, less than forty-eight hours after we found him. We now were faced with a decision to make. It resolved itself into the question of his freedom and ours. A little sorrowfully he was released at high noon.

It had all been a pleasant experience, one that we shall never forget; but better still was the satisfaction of having saved the bird from coming to an untimely end."\*

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Four members of the T.F.N.C. meeting in Yukon and Alaska, and what they saw, is the theme of Barbara Jaquith's contribution to the Newsletter. Mrs. Jaquith writes:

"On July 17th, four members of the Toronto Field Naturalists Club met by chance in the Yukon Territory on the way to Alaska! It was at the luncheon stop on the bus trip up the Alaska highway from Whitehorse Y.T. to Fairbanks, Alaska that Emily Knowles, Sadie Cation, Barbara and Everett Jaquith discovered that they would be travelling together for several days. They were all experiencing the exasperation of fleeting glimpses of birds turned the wrong way to show their identification marks, the confusion of blurred images of unfamiliar plants and trees and the

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\*Ed. note: The "tameness", or rather ready adaptability, of this bird to human surroundings was most impressive, and an example of how the urge to survive can alter the normal habits of even the wildest of creatures. There are quite a few reports in the literature of small birds being caught by burdock burrs, and of their dying as a result. Some years ago I had the pleasure myself of being able to free a golden-crowned kinglet from such a fate. There can be no doubt that Mr. and Mrs. Pannell rescued this hummingbird from certain death. If it comes back from the long and dangerous journey to South America to breed in Canada next summer, it will be because they gave it a chance to do so.

exhilaration of superb and ever changing scenery.

The sixty-six mile trip into Mt. McKinley National Park proved to be a memorable one. We were called at 3 a.m. -- breakfast at 3.30 a.m., and the bus left the Mt. McKinley Park Hotel promptly at 4 a.m! By luck and good management the four T.F.N.C. members had the four front seats of the bus. Our driver, Jack Fagen, (from Berea College, Kentucky) asked the assistance of the forty people in the bus in spotting wild life -- "Pull the stop cord if you see an animal!", he said. It was a foggy, misty morning and our spirits were rather low; there would be little chance of seeing Mt. McKinley, the highest mountain in North America (20,269 feet above sea-level).

The first signal to stop disclosed, not a caribou, but the roots of an old upturned stump showing above the buckbrush (dwarf birch). 8000 caribou had passed through that part of the park headed westward just two weeks before. We could see their deep-worn trails. A few stragglers were still around.

A form materialized out of the mist on the nearby mountain-side. "There's an animal," said Barbara Jaquith cautiously.

"It's a female caribou," said our driver, "Females have smaller antlers than the males." After a good look at our bus, the caribou zig-zagged up the mountain, but not too fast. The whole busload of people was alert now. Two more young caribou and three more higher up the mountain were seen before they disappeared into the mist or behind the great rocks. If these stragglers are not able to regain the herd when it comes back in the fall they have little chance of surviving the winter. They will become bear or wolf meat.

The fog was lifting but the clouds still hung about the mountain tops. Great excitement ensued at Sable Pass when white dots on a green Alpine meadow proved to be Dall Sheep. There were seven in one group and five in another. Everyone had a good view of them through binoculars since the sheep were not far above us on the mountainside across a rather narrow valley. Some were grazing, three lambs were playing about and other sheep were lying down.

At Look-Out Point we were supposed to have a view of Mt. McKinley but the clouds were still heavy. These stops were the naturalists' opportunity to range as far as possible looking at tundra plants and hoping for the sight of a bird. Sadie Cation saw a chunky, very scaly-looking bird huddled in the gravel near some dwarf willows. She called for consultation. The bird sat quietly while we decided that it was the one bird that we hadn't even hoped to see --- the elusive Surfbird! It breeds in central Alaska in the high mountains and winters on the Pacific Coast of South America as far south as the Straits of Magellan.

Several of the people on the tour came to see why we were so excited and were convinced that it was a Surfbird when we showed them the picture in the Mt. McKinley Park Guidebook. After being so obliging the Surfbird flew down into the tundra a short distance.

As our bus travelled along, numerous small birds flew from the road to the about two inches high tundra growth of willow enchanting little saxifrages and other alpine plants. The birds were all hurrying away from us showing many tail patterns of brown and white. Besides the familiar Slate-Colored Junco, I'm quite sure that we saw Smith's Longspur, Lapland Longspur, and at least one Wheatear.

Our bus had to stop for a family of Willow Ptarmigans crossing the road. Say's Phoebe was busy catching insects near by. Three Golden Eagles were seen during the trip and doubtless there were more, for they could vanish from view rapidly as they dropped down against the brown, rocky mountside.

Parka Ground Squirrels captivated everyone with their expectant confidence that they would be fed from our ample lunches. Everett Jaquith joined the other photographers in taking movies of the tame little creatures. Also waiting for leftovers, but not so tame, were the lovely Shortbilled Gulls or Mews.

No account of a trip in Alaska is complete without mention of the spectacular growth of fireweed, both Epilobium angustifolium and E. latifolium. It grows in hedges along the roadsides and in masses in the open places. The rosy purple color is most effective in an open grove of white birch trees as we saw it in southern Alaska.

Emily Knowles discovered a mottled blue and white flower resembling a bottled gentian. Here's hoping that she was able to secure a good photograph of it in spite of poor light conditions. Picking wild flowers is forbidden in the National Parks.

On the way back to Mt. McKinley Park Hotel we looked long and carefully for a Toklut Bear. They are medium-sized grizzly bears of a light golden brown color -- blonde bears with black paws and black noses. They were first discovered in the Toklut River Valley, hence the name Toklut Grizzly Bear. No bears anywhere. Then we met Joe Hankins walking along the road. Our driver said, "We are in luck! If there are any bears anywhere around, Joe will know it."

Joe Hankins has spent five summers living in the wilds of Mt. McKinley Park photographing grizzlies and moose particularly.

He has a remarkable series of pictures of the charge of a grizzly that didn't want its picture taken. The last picture is just a blurr. Joe said, "Oh yes, I got my camera back from him after a while." But he didn't tell us how!

It was welcome news that there was a Toklut Grizzly on the mountain side just a short distance back; Joe was proud to show him to us. The bear was a comfortable distance up the mountain hunting and digging for ground squirrels. We had time to watch him five or ten minutes before he ambled off behind the rocks, out of our view. How many animals there could be among those rocks just out of sight!

Now a moose -- we must see a moose -- one of those huge Alaska Moose that weight as much as 1700 lbs. with antlers having a spread of 63 inches or more. And there --- close by the road in a willow thicket was a beautiful bull moose with a tremendous set of antlers in the velvet! His hind quarters were almost black and very glossy. Photographers quickly and as quietly as possible climbed onto the fenders and hood of the bus, others took pictures through the windows. The moose moved off slowly, crossed the road a short distance ahead of us and disappeared in the willows.

For birdwatchers there was another thrill, - the sight of several Long-tailed jaegers. Their very white bodies could be seen for a long distance as they sat on a low ridge of sand and rock. When they rose and flew like very large swallows their black caps and dark gray wings and the long central tail feathers showed to advantage.

To complete our observations for that memorable day was the sight of a male caribou standing on a ridge, with antlers raised, silhouetted against the sky.

Even if clouds prevented us from seeing Mt. McKinley, it had been a wonderful day. There would still be a chance to see Mt. McKinley from the train en route to Anchorage."

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If you should see a pink goose this fall - you probably won't - but if you should, take a second breath, and don't be too sure that you'll have to change your drinking habits. The fact is that for some years past the California Department of Fish and Game, in an effort to trace the migration routes of the snow goose, has been using a remarkable method of identifying the birds.

After being none too successful in persuading hunters

to remember to turn in bands from the legs of geese they shot, the Department hit upon the scheme of dyeing the birds with colour that would be visible in flight, and so could be reported by bird-watchers or others without its being necessary to kill the geese. Captured birds were merely dyed in harmless green, pink, yellow and purple dyes, then released. As the brightly-hued geese migrated in flocks with their unmarked white brethren, they were easily sighted in the air, and their routes recorded. Reports such as, "Holy mackerel, I saw a pink goose" poured in.

The puzzle as to their route of travel was thus finally solved. It was found that snow geese started north from their California wintering grounds in spring, west to about Tule Lake in northern California, then split into two groups, one flying northwestward to Alaska, even in some cases on to Siberia, the other going northeasterly over Alberta to the Arctic. In fall the geese returned, the coloured birds having moulted nearly all their dyed feathers.

The California Department has now found out what it wanted to know, and so has stopped dyeing geese, though it recommends the method to others as being easy, harmless to the birds, and effective. It may do some colouring of other species for purposes of research. It promises, however, that there'll be no pink elephants! So, should you see a pink or purple something flying over, hold onto your binoculars, and turn in an intelligible report.

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BOOK REVIEW:

Louisiana Birds

By George M. Lowery, Jr. Illustrated by Robert E. Tucker. Published for the La. Wildlife and Fisheries Commission, La. State Univ. Press, Baton Rouge, La. 1955. Pp. xxix, 556, Price \$5.50.

Louisiana, the state at the mouth of the Mississippi River, is one of the best birding regions in North America. The impressive Christmas bird counts made here, the famous nature refuges such as Avery Island, and the long-continued interest of ornithologists in that area from the days of Audubon to the present, testify emphatically to this fact. It is, therefore, with very great interest that we welcome the appearance of Professor Lowery's work, Louisiana Birds.

This book is aimed at a general popular audience, people who are becoming interested in nature and in birds, but who have not made, or who do not intend to make such study a professional

career. In consequence, a good deal of general information about birds; how to identify them, their plumages and skeletal structure, their economic value, their migration, the purpose and need for wildlife management, means of attracting birds to gardens, is given, most of which is of value to birdwatchers in no matter what area. Particularly interesting is Professor Lowery's discussion of the connection of weather with migration, and his dramatic description of the experience of seeing a crowd of migrants heading up across the Gulf of Mexico descend into coastal ridges, as a cold front moved into that area. Most of the work (pp. 99-504) is given to a species by species consideration of the birds that occur in the state. The emphasis is upon identification, though a good deal of detail upon food and habits is also included. At the end of the book appears a summary of the occurrence of all species in the form of a graphical chart. This enables the reader to see at a glance how common a bird is, and when it is likely to appear, and is a device that could be utilized profitably for any birding region.

There are profuse illustrations. Some are photographs, and most of them are of excellent quality, well designed to reveal the character and looks of the birds, or the nature of the birding habitats. None surpasses the superb, full-pose picture of a pair of screech owls - one grey, one red-phase, at their nest, which is reproduced in colour. Of the drawings, the small black and white are on the whole the best, being decidedly helpful in the depiction of flight habits, detailed differences of patterns and indications of habit. Some of the full-page plates are very good indeed, such as those showing the heads of owls, the "three members of the blackbird family," and the rails. Other plates appear somewhat crowded. The chief weakness is that a number of the plates have been poorly reproduced, and therefore have a faded look which detracts from their usefulness as well as their appearance.

With this one reservation, we may say that this is a very good book, a valuable contribution to the steadily lengthening list of State works on birds. To the many Canadian birders who annually visit the Southern States this will be a highly useful guide. Perusing its pages will no doubt tempt even more Canadians to make a birding pilgrimage to Louisiana and the Gulf Coast.

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As has been our custom for several seasons, we include here a copy of the report blank for the cooperative bird migration study being conducted for the continent from the Patuxent Research Refuge Center at Laurel, Maryland. The cooperation from Ontario observers has been very good in the past. We hope that this will continue, and that the number participating will increase.

R.M. Saunders,  
Editor.

COOPERATIVE MIGRATION STUDY - FALL OF 1957

Thank you for your migration reports of past seasons. We expect much greater coverage in 1957 than in past falls, and we shall appreciate your assistance in helping obtain new cooperators. There can never be too many reports even from one locality, as long as they are not duplicate reports on the same individual birds.

As before, let us emphasize that a valuable report need include the arrival or departure dates of only a few of the species listed below. Counts or estimates of the number of birds noted, and the dates of peak numbers are very helpful, but not essential. We ask only that you report just the birds which are believed to have actually arrived (or departed) on the date when seen or heard; but if in doubt, report them anyway.

The present list contains both nocturnal and diurnal migrants, early and late ones, solitary and flocking species, each one included for a specific purpose. In some cases the data will be used by research workers who are studying the movements of a particular species; in other cases they will be used to correlate bird migration with weather conditions.

Please send your fall 1957 report, through your regional editor of Audubon Field Notes, or to Chandler S. Robbins, Patuxent Research Refuge, Laurel, Maryland.

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ . COUNTY: \_\_\_\_\_ . LOCALITY: \_\_\_\_\_ LAT: \_\_\_\_\_ LONG: \_\_\_\_\_

OBSERVER: \_\_\_\_\_ . ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

	Code	First Migrant		Peak		Peak		Peak		Last Noted	
	No.	Date	No.	Date	No.	Date	No.	Date	No.	Date	No.
Canada Goose	172	57									
Mallard	132	57									
Broad-winged Hawk	343	57									
Wilson's Snipe	230	57									
Mourning Dove	316	57									
Common Nighthawk	420	57									
Chimney Swift	423	57									
Crested Flycatcher	452	57									
Catbird	704	57									
Hermit Thrush	759	57									
Golden-cr. Kinglet	748	57									
Myrtle Warbler	655	57									
Red-wing	498	57									
Baltimore Oriole	507	57									
Purple Grackle	511	57									
Rose-br. Grosbeak	595	57									
Evening Grosbeak	514	57									
Slate-col. Junco	567	57									
Am. Tree Sparrow	559	57									
White-crown. Spar.	554	57									
White-thrtd. Spar.	558	57									
Fox Sparrow	585	57									

John V. Dennis, Chandler S. Robbins, James H. Zimmerman