

# Toronto Field Naturalists' Club

# 160

## January Meeting

Monday, January 5, 1959, at 8.15 p.m.

at the  
Royal Ontario Museum

Speaker: Dr. Walter Tovell  
Subject: BENEATH THE LANDSCAPES

What better start for the New Year than an address by our President, Dr. Walter Tovell, director of the Royal Ontario Museum of Mineralogy and Paleontology? Dr. Tovell is also preparing a rotunda display which will be full of interest for all.

OUTINGS: There will be two outings in January, as follows --

Saturday, January 10, 1.30 p.m. A winter ramble at Glendon Hall.

Leaders: Mr. John Dex, birds  
Dr. Margaret Heimbürger, botany  
Glendon Hall is on the east side of Bayview Ave. just north of Sunnybrook Hospital, and opposite the eastern terminal of the Lawrence Ave. bus.

Saturday, January 24, 1.30 p.m. Geology study at Scarboro Bluffs.

Leaders: Dr. Walter Tovell  
Dr. Peter Peach  
Everyone meet at Stop 14, Kingston Rd. Those who come by bus will receive transportation by car from Stop 14 to the Bluffs, but be on time!

BOTANY GROUP: Meet in the library of Eglinton Public School, Eglinton Ave. and Mt. Pleasant Rd., on Thursday, January 15, at 8 p.m. sharp. Dr. John Soper will speak on Arctic-Alpine vegetation in Northern Ellesmere. New members welcome.  
Secretary - Mrs. May Persson, LE 6 - 0975

JUNIOR CLUB: The Junior Field Naturalists' Club will meet at 10 a.m. on Saturday, January 3rd, in the Museum Theatre. The Insect Group will be in charge, and two films will be shown -- "The Bumblebee" and "The Ladybird". Enrollment has reached its limit, and we are sorry that no more new members will be accepted this season.  
Director - Don Burton, RU 2 - 2155

PLEASE NOTE: If you did not receive a Newsletter with this announcement you will know that according to our records your membership fee for this season has not been paid. This is the last reminder you will receive. Upon receipt of your fee we shall be glad to send you the missing Newsletter! If you think there has been an error, kindly get in touch with the Secretary.

Secretary - Mrs. H. Robson,  
49 Craighurst Ave.  
HU 1 - 0260

President - Dr. Walter Tovell



Number 160

December 1958

As today we gaze upon falling flakes of snow and give welcome to the advance scouts of Old Man Winter's army, the old, old query will be in many a person's mind: If winter comes, can spring be far behind? Moved by the feelings that stir behind that perennial cry, I would like to take you in this issue back into last spring, in order that you may look forward into the spring to come.

On the morning of May 9th, then, four eager Ontario birdwatchers -- Greer Roberts, John Nettleton, Tom Murray and myself -- awoke in a roadside motel at Fieldsboro in Delaware. Spring had been creeping in on us in Ontario, welcome, stirring, exciting, until we had been incited to rush south and ride the vernal tide in full flood. When we awoke on this soft May morning there could be no doubt that we had put the tardy north far behind; we were in the south, and in the midst of spring.

For were we not wakened by the robust whistles of a lusty bob-white, calling to the dawn right outside the motel window? Then, from a distance, since the sun had not yet swept the dusk away, a voice of the night replied -- Bubo, the horned owl, hooting from a woodlot across the fields. Another southern voice joined with bob-white as bup-bup-bup filtered through the bedroom screen, bringing us smartly alert, wondering how it could be. Yet, when we went to peer out the explanation was clear -- our motel backed onto a marsh, hence could a king rail as readily sound in the ears of awakening sleepers as a bob-white. Meadowlarks and song sparrows, swallows and martins, a field sparrow and a mockingbird came on the air -- the dawn chorus was in full swing. We simply had to get up, and approval for this decision was given by a resplendent indigo bunting, glinting blue in the sun and singing gloriously a dozen feet from our window as we performed our morning ablutions. Such an avian welcome promised well for our trip; at least, it seemed so to us, and, as the days rolled by, we were more than ever convinced that this was so.

Along the highway this morning, as again we headed south, we rode through a landscape of fresh and delicate greens, spring-new and well-washed,

glistening under the sun, made dramatic by gardens ablaze with flaming azaleas. In places the azaleas in their many hues were so massed as to rival the tulip beds of Holland for dazzling colour. To us for whom this shrub is a rare exotic the rich display was a revelation.

Somewhere near Milford a flooded field, dotted with laughing gulls and shorebirds, reminded us that birds were our main objective. Gulls in the field indicated that we were approaching the sea; indeed, we had already crossed marshes obviously tidal in character, and thus in another few miles we reached the ocean at Rehoboth Beach, turning south there along the shore road to Ocean City, Maryland. We did not actually see the water on the ocean side, though the bay was visible, until we had stopped some miles down the road and climbed the tall dunes that shut off the view from the road. Then, with Atlantic waves crashing on the beach, an endless stretch of fine white sand, we were face to face with the ocean for the first time in two years. As ever, the exhilaration of the sight struck us all and set us dreaming all manner of thoughts and ventures.

A fitting place this beach to bring out the new balscope and set it up. True, we had peered at shorebirds through the car window near Milford, but this was the first real test. With least terns squeaking excitedly over our heads, chasing each other in courtship display, an egret beating along the bay, cormorants pushing northward over the waves, we had ample opportunity to try out the new instrument at all angles and distances. But you can't have one balscope on every bird at the same time, so we missed the identification of a long line of scoters far out at sea because at that moment the focus was fixed on another line of birds, likewise northward bound above the waves -- five blue geese! Scoters immediately forgotten, everyone saw the geese, and knew them. Without the balscope this would have been impossible.

If the balscope may, therefore, be said to have proven itself on this beach, this fact was quickly and emphatically underlined a few miles to the south at Indian River Inlet. Here rock jetties reach out into the ocean, and, reminded by Pettingill's Guide and by our own previous experience at Cape May, we determined to give the rocks a very careful examination. A smart breeze had sprung up so that keeping the balscope steady on its tripod was a bit tricky, and a constant procession of least, royal and common terns over our heads, of other birds over the sea, kept diverting our attention. Nonetheless we centred our looking on the rocks. At first the crashing of breakers across the jetties appeared to make bird occupation of them out of bounds. But it is well never to underestimate the resourcefulness of creatures that dwell in such spots. All at once a spurt of spume was dotted by beating wings as hitherto unnoted birds fluttered out of danger. Surf and wave gone, the birds vanished too; it was as if they had been thrown up out of the wave and had dropped back into the ebbing wash. Then we saw bits of "rock" detach themselves, and run. We had been deceived. The birds were still there. Quickly the balscope was brought into play; the 20x lens confirmed the identification -- these were purple sandpipers, the remainder of the winter flocks. Sure of their identity, we tried to get a better look. How hard it was to keep them in view, for not only every wave set them in motion, they were really feeding most of the time, and so kept on the move, disappearing over the sides of rocks and into cracks and crevices. When they did stop to rest or preen they vanished at once, so completely did they merge with the colors of their favorite rocks. Finding two or three at rest we put in the 30x lens, and now had the satis-

faction of seeing the bird's "bib" and the dull grey-purple coloring clearly. Finally, we tried the 60x lens. This gave us the orange on the legs and every detail, but with this lens it was extremely difficult to keep the birds in view, since the slightest movement took a bird out of the field of vision. Also, the unsteadiness caused by the wind, and the haziness arising from heat waves, were both magnified. The 20x lens had confirmed our finding; the 30x had made it possible to see new detail; and the 60x had added to that, but there was no doubt that the highest power was ineffective except under very quiet and clear conditions, and when the birds would stay still for long periods. Without the balscope we would not have had any sort of a satisfactory look. Without our previous experience we would scarcely have given the rocks so thorough a search. The balscope was now a proven part of our observing equipment; the underline had been drawn.

At Ocean City, a huge beach resort just opening for the season, we had our lunch, then took a look at the jetties there. Again, after a careful scanning of the farther jetty, we eventually spotted two more purple sandpipers indulging in their characteristic cranny crawl after marine tidbits. Here, however, it was a lone duck swimming seaward along the far side of this same jetty, that held our attention. We watched it pass the end of the jetty, head across the mouth of the inlet, pass the channel buoy and go on out. A scoter we knew it to be from the start, but not until it had got to the inlet opening were we able to get a good focus; then, whenever the bouncing waves would permit, we could see the flashes of white from the head that told us we were watching a skunkhead, or surf sooter. Once more it was the balscope that had made really satisfactory observation possible.

Our concentration on the scoter made us do no more than record the passage of two willets, crying wee-willy-willy into the sea air as they swept out the inlet and over the open sea. Then, as we were heading back over the bridge for the mainland, cries of wee-willy-willy began anew to ring in our ears, coming now from the salt marshes ahead. The two travellers before had been heralds from the world behind the dunes. Before we could begin to seek out the dwellers of this world for ourselves we were suddenly presented by them with a mass greeting. As we reached the middle of the bridge we could see a small sandy islet just below, and there on the sand was a resting company of least terns and black skimmers. All in a rush, even as they came into view, up rose the whole group until the air below us was filled with wings, a core of fifty-five skimmers, black and white and red, being flanked by the lacy white least terns, two hundred strong. Like a perfect aerial display, greeting the arrival of royalty, this brilliant manoeuver was perfectly carried out, accompanied by a wild swirl of cries from the terns. Could ever a more magnificent welcome into the realm of the salt marshes be dreamed of than this! By the time we had gained the marshes the display was over, but we were inside the realm. Skimmers and terns were again resting upon the sand.

For the next two hours we were busy making the best of our welcome. Everywhere we looked we could see shorebirds in the salt grass, alongside tidal pools, on gleaming mud. Willets we had at fifty feet in the balscope -- good heavens, you could almost count the barbicules on the feathers -- or so close you needed neither telescope nor binoculars. These big, blue-legged shorebirds are so unassuming as they stand, wings closed, unmoving, so brilliantly dramatic as they take flight, uncovering their startlingly patterned

wings and making the air vibrate with their thrilling cries. Here on this breeding ground they were fully at home, chasing each other, fighting, standing with high-raised wings, running and racing, living the spring of life at its most exciting. And we could watch it all, be in on every act of this tremendous drama.

Along with the willets were dozens and scores of shorebird relatives, not so excited and active since this for them was only a place of passage, a stop-over on the way to the Arctic tundra. But like the least terns and the skimmers, these lively relatives -- the dowitchers with their long bills, the robin-breasted knots, the crowding peeps -- provided an ever-changing, ever-fascinating framework and border to the dramatic vitality of the willets. Each moment we stayed brought its new sight and sound -- a clapper rail jabbering for attention, seeming to tell us he was in the salt grasses as much as the willet; a skimmer, great red mouth agape, passing from a little inside pond over a road, across a lawn, above our heads only an arm's reach away; a tufted titmouse calling from shrubbery beside a cottage, just to let us know, it appeared, that landbirds existed too. Little wonder it took us a good while to get beyond this delightful spot.

Still, we had to be in Chincoteague, Virginia, by suppertime, and, finally we dragged ourselves away. We did get stopped en route by a turkey vulture eating a black snake on the road near Snow Hill, and we really couldn't go past all the snowy egrets in little marshes without a pause. But we did reach Chincoteague at last, there to find larger marshes than any we'd seen so far, marshes that were simply exploding with willets, clapper rails, shorebirds and terns.

After an excellent supper at the Channel Bass Hotel where we were staying, we recrossed these great marshes to seek for chuck-will's widows in the woods we had too hastily passed on the way down. In this hunt we were highly successful, having the pleasure of hearing this typical night voice of the South rising in full richness above a chorus of common and Fowler's toads, a fitting accompaniment for the resonant aria sung by this southern relative of our own whip-poor-will. Chuck-will's-widow, chuck-will's-widow, we were advised again and again and again from out the dark pines. A mysterious voice in the night it was; its author we never found any more than the elusive "will's widow" whom we were being told so repeatedly to "chuck"; but such a mysterious invitation, so much a part of southern hospitality, was proof that we had arrived. Satisfied with this, we drove back to Chincoteague, and to bed, full of anticipation about the morrow.

On May 10th we had the very great privilege, thanks to the kindness of Mr. Jacob Valentine, warden of the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, of taking part in the annual May count on the refuge, along with the President and Secretary of the Virginia Ornithological Society, and distinguished guests from Rochester and Washington. The refuge, situated on Assateague Island, one of the many off-shore barrier islands along the Atlantic coast, is one of the largest and most interesting of the growing chain of natural refuges maintained by the Federal government of the United States. To make its acquaintance is a rare privilege indeed; to do so on the perfect day that dawned this morning, and in the company we had, was an enhancement of that privilege which we could have in no way anticipated.

After an early breakfast, and a quick run back and forth on the causeway across the nearer marshes as a sort of starter for the day, we all assembled at the Refuge Headquarters on Piney Island, which can be reached by car. There we boarded the refuge launch and were soon chugging down a tidal channel towards Assateague. This route took us through a network of such channels in the marshes, and in several places we noticed white piles of bleaching oyster shells that reminded us that here we were seeing evidence of one of the chief means of making a living locally. Later we saw many of the oyster beds, among the finest in existence, and marvelled at their extent.

Another, and very special feature of local life, was revealed to us as we neared Assateague. This island has been noted since colonial days for its population of wild ponies. Now, as we approached the shore, we were excited to see several of these ponies grazing in a salt marsh cove. We deemed this a really fortunate sight, and congratulated ourselves upon it, but we were soon to find out that everywhere on the refuge, at least around the marshy fringes, you are likely to see groups of ponies. The animals are quite accustomed to humans. Indeed, there is a round-up once a year -- a local holiday, incidentally -- conducted, of all things, by the Fire Department in Chincoteague. At that time a percentage of the yearlings is culled out and sold, the proceeds going to maintain the Fire Department! The profits from the sale are such as to enable this institution to operate without resort to taxes, and to do so with the most up-to-date equipment and buildings. I can easily imagine that many a town may be envious of this unique way of assuring fire protection. And here surely is a human association with wild life not to be found in any other place.

Jake Valentine met us at the dock. Then the fun began. We had had no indication of how the count would be conducted, nor had we any real idea of how large the refuge would be. Personally I had been somewhat apprehensive of being called upon to hike for miles across marsh and dune, and I was not sure my uncertain right knee would stand up to it. I needn't have worried. We did very little walking all day; and it wasn't my knee but another part of my anatomy that needed special consideration. What we got in for was a fifty-mile jeep ride, the whole of which was done on a wooden box for a seat.

Two jeeps were brought out as soon as we disembarked. Valentine drove one, and his assistant, named McCoy, the other. The Toronto four were with McCoy, the others with Valentine, except for the Virginia ornithologists who had a third jeep on their own. So far as we four were concerned this was the first time any of us had had any real experience with a vehicle of this type. In consequence we had not the slightest idea of the power a jeep can muster, nor of the nearly unbelievable feats it can be made to perform. After this day's run we came back convinced that a jeep can go almost anywhere regardless of terrain, mud, sand, water or anything else.

The morning's jaunt was simple and mild compared to what was to come later. We began by bumping along sandy trails through the woods. This island has miles of open pine woods, almost parklike in appearance. Do not be deceived, for when you try to tramp through these parklike pines you find yourself immediately involved in vast tangles of smilax that serve as incredibly effective booby traps for the unwary. Our first scheduled stop was along a dyke that reaches beyond the wooded dunes. Here, out on the marsh, we saw ponies as soon as we emerged from the woods, and with the ponies were white birds. There was little need to tell us what they were, for we had been told that they would be here. Nonetheless we had

never expected to be driven right up alongside, yet here we were, looking at cattle egrets a few yards away feeding in the midst of wild ponies! Ponies will do as well as cows, it appears, to stir up insects in the grass, and ponies, like cows, will accept such avian companionship. From Africa to Virginia, from cattle to ponies, is really a case of remarkable adaptation in the world of birds. Neither ponies nor egrets paid much heed to us. We could study them both for as long as we wished; and we did. There were five cattle egrets and a dozen or more ponies. Each stallion, we were told, has his own herd or harem, and woe betide any intruding stallion that tries to steal another bride. The fights can be fierce and deadly. The sire of this group was pointed out, standing alone, head high, shaggy mane fluffing in the breeze, watching his herd and all the surroundings. We had quite as much an eye for him as for the beautiful orange-headed cattle egrets. Proud pony and lovely egret were equally at home on these broad salt marshes in the lee of the ocean wave.

For the rest of the morning our party was off on its own, following an itinerary mapped out by the warden. We did another turn through the woods, came to a point on the marsh, and got off to look around. As we started out, boat-tailed grackles created a terrific row, flying up from the marsh where they were feeding, and plunging into the cedar groves along the edge, deafening us with their raucous, chinging trills and rough cries. Clearly we were disturbing their domestic affairs, and they had no hesitation in letting us know their opinion of this. A nuthatch yanking in the trees led John and me to the chase. We hoped to find a brown-head but what we caught up with was two red-breasted nuthatches. These we followed a good way through tangles, wet holes and brush. In the hunt we caught sight of two beautifully-coloured parula warblers, and with them a Blackburnian. The last, we later found, is a rarity here, probably the first for the annual spring count. This stop was followed by another jaunt through the woods and out along the dykes, thence across the marsh to the bay shore. Out here willets and curlew were our company, with common egrets dotted about like white beacons amidst the green salt grasses. Across the bay we could see a long stretch of white beach with a Coast Guard station on it, and were informed that this beach has been built up in the past several years by the action of the sea. Miles long, it represents the endless process of change that is common to the whole sea front. The old Coast Guard station had been in where we were, miles from the present site. From here we traversed marsh and sandy lanes to the sea proper, coming out over the last wall of dunes in a fine flourish of flying sand. Here, to our surprise, we saw men casting lines out into the rolling surf, and learned that they were fishing for sea bass. This, I gather, is a most exciting and unpredictable sport. Although no hunting is allowed in the refuge, fishing of this sort is, and people come in their own cars down the beach from the north end of the island, a drive of twenty-seven miles. We even saw two trucks making the trek. Where the sand had been packed by the waves it was hard and smooth, so that the beach was a natural raceway. Of its possibilities we soon had a demonstration, for McCoy stepped on the gas and we roared up the strand, the waves tumbling on one side and the dunes flowing past on the other. Several miles were passed like this before we cut over the dune wall into the inner lagoons and marshes. Here we made another halt, and had a chance to wade in the marsh whilst sharptailed sparrows shot up before us and gull-billed terns circled above. Every bird we raised was a possible novelty, a find, and we kept hard at the chase until required to leave in order to get to the noon-time rendezvous on time. Back through the woods it was, with time out for probing another smilax tangle from which we finally squeaked out two white-eyed vireos and a number of warblers. Reaching the rendezvous at last we found the

rest of the company all gathered around a steaming gridiron laden with roasting oysters! Lunch was on, and were we ready.

The oysters were an added special, pièce de la refuge, for we all had lunches that had been prepared before. But the oysters had been gathered by Valentine, and cooked by a method we had never seen. A rectangular hollow, eight to twelve inches deep and three to four feet long, had been dug. A fire had been made and reduced to a bed of red hot coals in the hollow. Then an open mesh wire screen on legs (five to six inches high) had been put over the coals. On top of the screen the oysters, unopened in their shells, were placed. When we arrived they were hot and ready, and all were invited to partake. This we did with avidity, save for one of our group who is rather chary of such novelties. The shells were really hot so that it was necessary to hold the oyster in a padded glove while opening it with a sharp knife. The Virginia fellows showed us how to manage. When opened there was the oyster, tender, fresh, tasty, ready to be picked out and savoured. And were they good! The only painful part was to see some of them go uneaten. We just couldn't do justice to all we had.

Lunch over, we were off again. This time the three jeeps all travelled together so that we made an appearance like an African safari, a likeness that became the more apt as throughout the afternoon we rolled over broad stretches of sand, across bird-dotted swales, and in amongst tangled thickets where no semblance of a trail existed. A friendly rivalry developed between the drivers, especially between ours and the Virginians', and it became a matter of pride not to let one outdistance the other. As a result we would suddenly find ourselves hurtling over banks of mud, spraying water far and wide, or roaring up long reaches of wet sand trying to forestall our rivals from passing, or endeavoring to catch up when they had contrived to get around and past.

Once we splashed over several lanes of water heading in amongst clumps of bushes on a low dune. Hardly had we descended when a flicker or movement at our feet caused us to look down, to find that we were standing inches from two brightly gleaming black snakes, a pair of black racers, each about five feet long. As soon as we moved they became alarmed and began slithering about to the accompaniment of much side-stepping on our part. These are harmless snakes. We all knew that. But few people are easily persuaded to let snakes of any size, let alone five-foot black snakes, course over them with abandon. To our amazement one of the Virginians circled the bush where the snakes had taken refuge, forcing them into the higher branches, then reaching in and picking one up. I must say he handled it with utmost care, for though a black racer may be innocuous so far as poison goes it can give one a real nip. Little by little the captor worked one hand up the snake's body whilst holding the tail with the other, until finally he was able to bring the squirming reptile over to the group. It was an astonishing demonstration, and one which enabled us to see a truly beautiful creature at close quarters. For this we were pleased and appreciative but no one else showed the slightest inclination to share in the experience of holding the big black twister. Dropped after a good look, it immediately made for the bushy retreat where its mate had disappeared.

After surveying the landscape from the top of the nearest sanddune, while six gull-billed terns grunted and chattered about our heads, we moved on. This time our driver, who was responsible for the mechanical operation of all the jeeps, waited for the others to go first. They were heading out over a long plain of wet, soft sand, only recently covered by water, and if they got

into trouble someone would have to go for help. Truly, in spite of huge tires and four-wheel drives the two jeeps did sink in quite noticeably, though not, it appeared, alarmingly. This was McCoy's judgment, too, for as soon as they had gone a half-mile or more over the flat he started up and, pressing the gas pedal to the floor, sent us screaming after the others. When we caught up we were doing nearly fifty miles an hour and sending sand and water up like a smoke-screen. Behind us reached two long ruts in the tidal flat, a remarkable demonstration of power and skill.

At this point all three jeeps came to a stop, for off across the sand could be seen a large company of birds, made larger and vaguer by the heat waves that danced above the flat. It could have been the desert, this scene, not a tidal strand with ocean water lapping not far away. We were brought back to our real situation when the snake-holder shouted, "There's an oyster-catcher." On this note balscopes were quickly set up, all eyes were focussed in the direction named. First we picked up a pair of piping plovers in the scope; then, all alone, in solitary dignity, the great-billed, goggle-eyed oyster-catcher. The bird is striking anywhere, one of our most spectacular species. Seen now through shimmering heat waves across seemingly limitless sand it took on a mien almost fantastic, as if we had somehow unearthed a living specimen of some bygone geologic age, a relative of Archaeopteryx. It was hard to tear ourselves away from so fascinating a sight, one of the rarest among the many on this rare day.

Yet, on again it must be. And now we left the sand flat, heading into thicket-covered dunes where little ponds lay dotted in the hollows. Once more a trail was visible, and we rolled and pitched along this undulating ribbon. At one corner a faint trace curved away amongst the bushes and our driver took this whilst the others went on ahead. In a moment we were entering some of the densest thickets of poison ivy I have ever laid eyes on. All along the Atlantic coast from New England south this plant grows with extravagant luxuriance, either as shrub or vine. These thickets were a superb example of the ivy's success. We drove near to a larger pond and stopped. The track continued so we picked our way by foot along it, keeping a wary eye on the ivy that reached above our heads on both sides. Coming finally to the pond we saw a lone baldpate, the only one of the day, and this seemed to be our chief find here. That is, it did until all at once a line of large, dark birds rose over the trees to the west. We had been watching a night heron in those trees. These birds, however, uniformly dark with long, sickle-like bills, were no night herons. Indeed, they were no birds that we had ever seen before, but the great size, the glossy sheen on their backs as they veered in the sun, the huge curving bills, all told us instantly that we were looking at glossy ibis for the first time in our lives. A dozen of the large birds sailed by, dipped and disappeared, rose into sight again and circled out of reach of binoculars and straining eyes. Gone they were but we had seen them. When we reached the others we found that they too had seen the ibis, and they took the sight quite calmly for these are local birds, breeding in the area, and often seen. To us it was a very different matter since the ibis were absolutely new, and a new bird, seen for the first time, gives any real birder an unforgettable thrill. Amongst so many wonderful sights this was perforce the sight of sights.

And yet I do not know, for when we had splashed our way to the others, and all three jeeps had circumnavigated a large pond where gadwall rode the waters, we swirled out onto the ocean beach and there began a whole new series of sights and experiences, magnificent in their own right. That last high dune where, when McCoy finding an impeding mass of ancient timbers, parts of an old wreck, in

his way, simply whirled the jeep in the sand and sent us bounding across the top of the dune, sand flying in all directions as we plunged into hollows and swished down slopes in true roller-coaster style until we emerged all intact, if mightily shaken, beside the waves, that was a real introduction to the grand finale.

Beside the waves we now went. For eight miles we held our course, no driver yielding advantage to another, though two, at least, our own and the Virginians', were constantly jockeying for position. One moment we would be high up the sandy slope, the next we would be skirting the crashing breakers, feeling sure that any moment an extra swerve would send us hurtling into the surf. But no, McCoy was too expert for that; we always emerged safely, the wind in our teeth, salt in our eyes, and the jeep in the lead. All along the beach we came to flock after flock of sandpipers, all sanderlings. Feeding where the outwash of the waves brought in manna, or along the sandy edge, they would wait until we were next to on top of them before flying. Then there would be a spurt and the air would be filled with white, flashing wings. Out across the surf, white birds above white water, the flurry would whirl, coming in again to resettle behind us as we thundered on. Some flocks sped ahead, keeping in front in the mad race for a long way until they found it too much, at last choosing to follow their kin and circle behind where undisturbed feeding could be resumed. Once a large company of terns swept into the air before us; once another oyster-catcher could be seen speeding northward amidst the waves, hurrying perhaps to find a mate on the sand-flat we had left behind. Everywhere the beach was full of birds. And we raced along with wings beating a wild retreat before our mad onrush. It was one of the maddest, one of the most exciting experiences in all my birdwatching career. It ended as it had begun with a whirling dervish charge straight up the face of the ocean-looking dune and over the top, this time to drop into the mild, dyked marsh beyond.

After that ride the homeward stretch by dyke and trail, even if adorned by cattle egrets and other notable birds, was a pleasant aftermath, as was the launch trip back to Piney Island Headquarters. It had been a day unique in our experience, a remarkable and wonderful day, one that we will never forget.

(to be continued)

R. M. Saunders,  
Editor.