

Toronto Field Naturalists' Club

163

April Meeting

Monday, April 6, 1959 at 8.15 p.m.
at the
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Speaker: Mr. Robert Bateman

Subject: "Highlights from Three Continents"

Mr. Bateman, who is well known to many members of our Club, is an active member of the Toronto Field Biologists' Club, a director of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, and teaches geography and art at Nelson High School, Burlington. Last summer he returned from a 14 months' Land Rover trip around the world which was taken in company with Mr. Bristol Foster, another well-known Toronto naturalist. By means of coloured slides Mr. Bateman will take us to the heart of Africa, to northern India and to the coral reefs of Australia. In the rotunda we will see some of his clever sketches made while on this trip.

SPRING OUTINGS

For information regarding spring outings please consult the enclosed folder. The Outings Committee, under the leadership of Miss Helen Lawrence, has certainly planned a splendid programme for the fair months ahead.

Re transportation on out-of-town trips The Secretary would be pleased to hear, not later than the Thursday before each out-of-town trip, from any club members who could provide transportation for non-drivers, and from any club members who require it. In this way we hope it will be possible for many to enjoy the trips who could not otherwise do so.

BOTANY CLUB

Place - Eglinton School, Room 12 (instead of library), Mt. Pleasant Rd. & Eglinton

Date - Thursday, April 16, 8 o'clock sharp

Speaker - Prof. Coventry, an authority on Ecology and Conservation

Topic - "Ecology" - illustrated with slides

New members welcome

Acting Secretary,
Miss Llewella B. Mann
BA 1 - 3961

President - Mrs. Janet Goodwin

JUNIOR CLUB

The Junior Field Naturalists' Club will meet on Saturday, April 4, at 10 a.m., in the theatre, Royal Ontario Museum. The Botany Group will be in charge. Mr. Marshall Bartman, of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, will show slides of Spring Flowers. Mrs. Janet Goodwin, president of the Botany Club, will show slides of Mushrooms.

Five-minute talks (illustrated with slides by Mrs. Goodwin);

Joan Shields - "Some Canadian Wildflowers"

Janet Miles - "Canadian Ferns"

Ellen Salo - "The Mustard Family"

Bonnie Elliott - "Oak Leaves"

VISITORS WELCOME

President - Dr. Walter Tovell

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



Number 163

March, 1959

Hungarian or gray partridge continue to prosper and increase on Hamilton Mountain and on the Niagara Peninsula as far east as the Welland Canal. In late winter flocks are a common sight to those who drive the back roads of that area. Hamilton observers take this bird for granted but we from Toronto, who have to make a special expedition to see them, still think of them as something special.

Thus, four of us -- Gerry Bennett, Earl Stark, Doug. Scovell and I -- made such a trip on February 22nd. We had received specific instructions as to where to expect the birds, and previous experience suggested that we should have little trouble in finding them. In this instance our expectations were realized quickly and completely. Mohawk Street on the top of Hamilton Mountain runs east from No. 6 highway out through a new housing development. Where the houses began to thin and remnant fields to show through clutches of new construction we found our first flock of partridge. That is, Earl did, for it was he that spotted and called our attention to a circle of "clods" in a snowy field. The clods could be birds, yet were they? So still, so lifeless did they seem that we wondered if, after all, these might not be piles of manure. Yet birds they were for all that, and partridge too. Examined through binocular and balscope the rigidly motionless creatures appeared like ragged mounds and scarcely more lifelike, just lumps covered with feathers. The formlessness of the thirteen birds -- this was the number, clustered in a circular group -- was enhanced since all of them had their heads tucked under their wings, so presenting no creaturely mien to the world. No more than one hundred yards from the nearest house and less from the road it was amazing to us that such simple sitting targets should have escaped the small boy's air rifle or slingshot, or more adult harm. Thank heavens they have, and may they continue long to do so. Our observing disturbed them not in the least; we left them as unmoved lumps as we found them.

Our next sight of a flock was along Stone Church Road where we caught sight of eight of the fat, rounded "Huns" busily at work gathering a meal no more than fifty feet from our car. The toughness of these European immigrants, and their ability to survive under highly adverse conditions, such as have

prevailed this dreadfully "old-fashioned" winter, was being demonstrated before our eyes. With sure and vigorous strokes each bird was striking icy crust from covered weeds and grasses, sending bits of ice and snow flying as prodding and swinging bills hit the surface. Quickly they exposed edible seed, gobbling their fill. Here we were seeing how conditions that can be deadly to pheasants and to many other birds are manageable to such hardy customers as these.

A third small flock of five partridge was gleaning with less difficulty underneath the vines in a grapeyard. All three flocks were close to roads, to people and habitations. Their survival in such quarters is pleasing to see if somewhat of a mystery. Had we devoted the day to seeking for more flocks we could doubtless have built up a long list as they are known to be plentiful all through this region. A pity they have never made their way around Hamilton into the area north of the lake. It is difficult to see what the conditions are that let them thrive on the Niagara Peninsula and which seem to be lacking north of the lake. Certainly they have not expanded naturally into our area, and the plantings of stock near Toronto have so far all failed.

The desire to introduce this excellent game bird into North America goes as far back as the eighteenth century. In the latter years of that century Benjamin Franklin's son-in-law, Richard Bache, stocked his plantation on the Delaware River with these partridge. Sporadic attempts were made in Virginia and New Jersey in the early nineteenth century, then came large-scale efforts just before the First World War all along the Atlantic coast from Maine to Florida, thence westward to the Mississippi. However, nowhere in this area has real success been achieved though efforts still continue.

In the far Western States and in the Prairie provinces of Canada the story is quite different. The first introductions in Alberta, near Calgary, in 1908-09 were followed by extraordinary success. Apparently 207 pairs were liberated south and west of Calgary, from stock that was imported from Hungary. Sometime later 230 partridge were placed out near Edmonton but in the meantime the Calgary birds had succeeded so well that they had spread north of that city, an incredible gain. There has been an open season on them in Alberta for years, and they are now the commonest of imported game birds in Western Canada. Within five years they had expanded their range into Saskatchewan. More recent liberations in Manitoba have proven very successful too. In other words the Hungarian partridge is extremely well-adapted to prairie country, and can live through the trying winter conditions with no difficulty. From the eastern plains of Europe to the western plains of North America has been a highly successful transfer. In Ontario the transplantation has been only spottily achieved, most satisfactorily in the Niagara Peninsula, and to a lesser degree in the eastern counties, elsewhere with only fair or poor success.

The dangers inherent in the introduction of foreign species of animals is only too evident to those who are acquainted with the stories of the house sparrow and the European starling. And few naturalists would care to see native species injured or ousted by introduced birds and animals. In this case such injury does not seem to have occurred though the effect of this introduction upon such birds as the sharp-tailed grouse and the prairie chicken is still a matter of debate. Being a field bird, the gray partridge does not compete with our ruffed grouse, and since it does not flourish in the south it does not conflict seriously

with the bob-white. If it tends to oust the ring-necked pheasant -- and this is not proven -- it would be one introduced species against another, a matter about which naturalists might well shrug their shoulders. In general in northern regions this partridge would seem to be a complementary rather than a conflicting species; and from that point of view a satisfactory introduction. To the local birdwatcher it is an attractive, good-looking and interesting bird, filling a gap in the countryside and providing additional colour and life to our surroundings.

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To the several readers of the Newsletter who called up to tell the editor where he might find those elusive Bohemian waxwings he would like to say, Thank you. And to add that he did finally, on another trip to Barrie on February 15th, catch up with a little group of those hard-to-find birds. That was on that very icy Sunday when the whole countryside was flashing crystal and sure footing was next to impossible. The waxwings, eight in number, were sitting on a little evergreen on the hill near the jail in Barrie. We saw them as we were coming down the hill, and we could not stop the car on that steep, iced slope -- so we rolled down, down, down -- until we came so close to the little evergreen the waxwings couldn't stand it. Up and away they went, not to be seen again, however hard we searched; seen enough to be told, but an annoyingly incomplete sight just the same. So, I am still open to an invitation for a good look at Bohemian waxwings.

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We welcome to the field of naturalist publications in Ontario

The Young Naturalist of the F.O.N. Designed for children, members of the Young Naturalists Club, this little paper has come out in a four-page format of a highly attractive character. Its articles are lively, informative and accompanied by interest-rousing photographs. If it maintains its initial standard it will certainly achieve the great success we wish for it.

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From the thoughtful and sensitive pen of Mr. W. Ward Simpson of Brantford we have had words of beauty and wisdom before. We have them again, this time in the form of an article which appeared in the most recent issue of The Cardinal (December, 1953), the newsletter of the McIlwraith Ornithological Club of London.

The Not Untravelled Watchman

by W. Ward Simpson

I have for long thought that eventually I must put on paper some ideas regarding the relative advantages of Society and Solitude -- of travelling or, in the words of a great philosopher, "staying at home with the soul."

I said to the farmer at his gate, "In what direction is Drumbo?" (the nearest village, some four miles distant). He replied, "I don't exactly know but,

[and he pointed with his thumb in a general north-westerly direction] I see them going off up that way." From his words and his manner, I decided that he might well have added, "You can all go tearing off to Drumbo if you wish. As for me I stay at home and mind my own affairs."

One morning I found in my mail a parcel containing an empty match box. On the lid of the box was the name Silver Hill, and on the inside of the paper in which it was wrapped was the written question, "Does this arouse any memories?" It did and quite vividly.

A dozen years before, in exploring the out-of-the way places in Norfolk County for trout streams, the questioner and myself had come by a winding road into a valley where, by the roadside, was a mill, not at the time being operated but containing much valuable machinery and equipment. For the protection of the property the only resident in the valley had been employed as a watchman. It seemed to concern him little that in this secluded place visitors were extremely rare.

The watchman appeared shortly after we had stopped, chiefly, to investigate a phenomenon. The water in the mill pond was transparent but of a beautiful deep blue colour. We loitered about, chatting with the watchman and casting upon the pond from which we took just one fine fish.

As the day was now far spent, while we were preparing to leave, we inquired regarding the shortest way to Simcoe, his county town. He replied, "I wouldn't know. I've never been to Simcoe." When he noted our surprise, he drew himself up quite proudly and announced, "I've been to Silver Hill." To the question, "Where is Silver Hill," he answered, "Drive right on up out of the valley and when you come to the next crossroad that is Silver Hill." Here was a man living, quite apparently, a contented life in this little valley, though the horizon of his world was a mile distant at the next crossroad.

I am sure my companion and myself told more than once the story, with some glee, of the not untravelled watchman. With a further experience of life I have decided, however, that there is much to be said in behalf of the watchman and of the man who didn't go to Drumbo. The great French naturalist, Fabre, whose works are classics in the realm of the natural history of the insect world, was no traveller. He gathered his immense fund of knowledge by using his marvellous powers of observation in the fields and gardens right round his home.

It was James Russell Lowell who wrote, "I hold that a man should have travelled thoroughly round himself and that great 'terra incognita' just outside and inside his own threshold before he undertakes voyages of discovery to other worlds."

We have in our town a gracious lady who has not been able to leave her room for half a lifetime. My professional duties have taken me to that cheerful room on several occasions. She is a bird lover. The house is on a busy street. Her window at the side of the house seems always to be open. On the sill is a feeding tray for the birds. She has many feathered visitors: Jays, Cardinals, Woodpeckers, Nuthatches, Tree Sparrows, occasionally Juncos and of course the Chickadees which entered the window and hopped about upon the counterpane.

In the neighbouring village of St. George, a man, victim of arthritis for

thirty years, sits on his verandah right beside Highway No. 5. I stop for a little chat. He says, "A pair of birds are nesting in that little maple. Find them and tell me if you ever saw birds more beautifully and tastefully dressed and tell me what they are." The Cedar Waxwings had come to bring a touch of life, beauty and joy into the life of one who could no longer travel.

Travel is excellent, it can diversify our interests and widen our horizons if we have that within which is responsive to its influence. Travelling is not vitally necessary. An important question is, What are we looking for? Something we have not found at home? Is it happiness for instance? Emerson says, "If I go to the ends of the earth in search of happiness, if I take it not with me I find it not."

Pleasures that are shared are multiplied in the sharing. We even enjoy the more fine music or a good play if we have the company of appreciative companions. On the other hand, it is fine sometimes to be alone. If, at the last moment, plans for a shared woodland walk have to be abandoned, do not hesitate to go alone. Some of the finest experiences come when you are all alone. It was under such circumstances that long ago we first heard the song of the Wood Thrush, mistaking for a time his lovely chimes for those of a golden bell. The search, the discovery and the identification were among the rare experiences that never can be forgotten.

We have quite a long list of equally gratifying memories. Four of our list of twenty-eight species of orchids found come immediately to mind in this connection; also that rare and interesting plant, the Lizard's Tail; and a find of a lifetime, a pair of Kentucky Warblers nesting in Brant County.

Have you ever stood alone and gazed upon the beauty of a wooded hillside clothed in its glorious autumn colouring? The silence, the autumn haze, the spirit of it all roused in you an almost pagan love of Nature.

There are things you cannot completely share. They are for yourself alone. On the other hand, had there not been a number involved on one occasion, most of us would certainly have missed seeing, hearing and finding a nest of a pair of Yellow-throated Vireos just above a woodland trail.

No matter how fond we may be of good company, how blest with worthy friends, each of us lives in a little world of his own. We cannot escape, neither can anyone climb over the walls. So this question of Society and Solitude has, like a coin, two faces. Each face is an essential part. There is an old Latin adage, "A great city is a great solitude." Bacon said, "A crowd is not company." On the other hand, elsewhere we find the same writer saying, "It is a mere solitude to want true friends, without which the world is but a wilderness." His mind dwelt much upon the subject. Again we quote him: "It had been hard for Aristotle to have put more truth and untruth together in a few words than in that speech, 'Whoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god.'" Hyperbole here for emphasis. The complete recluse is very rare indeed. There are those, however, who, in the main, are sociable but who like to withdraw from the world from time to time for close association and communion with nature while the majority have never known the virtues of that valuable habit. Lord Byron said, "There is society where none intrudes."

Two remarkable men were friends, Thoreau and Emerson. For some years they lived in the same house, always good companions. Each admired the high qualities of the other. Thoreau, a distinguished naturalist; Emerson, one of the world's great philosophers. They often walked together in the woodlands and the wilds. One of Emerson's finest essays is entitled "Henry David Thoreau." Thoreau's high privilege of companionship with one of the world's great men did not prevent him writing in his essay on Solitude; "I love to be alone. I find it wholesome a great deal of the time. I never found a companion that was as companionable as solitude."

Perhaps if the not untravelled watchman of the mill had not been one of us mute, inglorious Miltons, he might have given expression to similar sentiments.

Not many months ago the able editor of the Federation's Bulletin quoted some words spoken twenty-five centuries ago by one of the great nature lovers of all time, the prophet Isaiah. How much more applicable they seem now than in those ancient days. "Woe unto them that join house to house that lay field to field, till there be no place that one may be placed alone in the midst of the earth."

Surely William Cullen Bryant was alone when he became aware of a Presence. "Thou art in the soft winds that run along the summits of the trees in music and Thou art in the cooler breath that from the inmost silence of this place comes, scarcely felt."

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Many people always miss the values so admirably set forth by Mr. Simpson in his article. Some few are fortunate to enter upon this highway of happiness early. Such a one is the fifteen-year-old New Brunswick boy whose article, "The Plentiful Pleasures," appeared in The Curlew, October 1958, the Willow Beach Field Naturalists' publication, and which we reprint here.

"When a person is alone in the out-of-doors he feels within him a sensation which makes him want to wander for hours admiring the beauties of nature. This feeling causes him to reap all the pleasures from the surrounding countryside that he can. The pleasures that are gathered in this way will be remembered long after the turkey dinner and the roast beef are forgotten. These are pleasures of the mind, not of the body, and are absorbed in one's memory, to be referred to in dreams and idle moments. This communication with nature is experienced in all seasons and in almost all the moments of solitude a person has in the great out-of-doors.

"I have experienced this feeling on days in late winter, when the sun has broken through the cold, warmed the trees and begun its task of shrinking the icy drifts away to nothing. The birds busy themselves flitting amongst the trees in search of food, all the while soaking up as much of the wonderful warmth as they can. Some of them perch in the tree-tops and burst forth in song, reminding one of spring which is not far away. Below these cheerful carollers little trickles of water spread in all directions from the fringes of the great drifts and join to form roaring torrents of water which congregate as pools in the hollows. High up in the conifers squirrels lazily sun themselves as they dissect the cones and eat the seeds.

"Once on just such a day I came upon a flock of Redpolls feeding on Speckled Alder seeds. I lay down in the snow amongst the alders and the flock

drifted over the place where I lay and began to eat the seeds. As I lay there two of them came within a yard of me, where I could have reached out and touched them. The sun was just at the right angle best to display their crimson forehead and breast patches, which were being ruffled by a gentle breeze that had sprung up. I watched them for about ten minutes, until they drifted farther on through the alders. On many other winter days I have enjoyed pleasures, such as the fiery dress of the male Pine Grosbeaks and the stalwart loneliness of the wintering Robin.

"I have also experienced this feeling on a quiet summer afternoon beside a river. A small group of ducks peacefully paddled through the grasses that grew about eighty feet from the shore and a lone heron stalked quietly through the shallows, occasionally thrusting his spearlike bill into the water and gulping down a fish. Farther out an osprey hovered and dived into the water after a silvery fish, while nearer the shore a pair of kingfishers noisily chattered their rattling cries as they laboured in their constant quest for food. Along the shoreline a few sandpipers teetered back and forth and occasionally a fish would rise to catch an insect floating on the surface of the calm water. I have also very much enjoyed a river in the evening as the sun sets behind the hills.

"I have often, when I have been fishing and found the fish too small or the like, picked out a quiet pool below a small rip and tossed pieces of worms into the water and watched the fish consume them. It is very amusing to see a baby trout rush eagerly at a worm and discover that it is too tough or too large for him to eat. It is also amusing when two fish try to eat the same worm. They tug and pull and won't let go until one becomes tired, spies another tasty titbit which appears more toothsome, or they are frightened away by a larger fish or a strange noise. Usually I watch them battle each other until my worm supply runs out; then I leave and wonder how such tiny fish can digest worms.

"I have enjoyed myself immensely observing animals of all kinds in many other situations which are too many to write about here; such as just before a summer rain and on a spring morning when the birds are busying themselves gathering material for their nests.

"Many people before me have enjoyed these refreshing pleasures and many after me will also enjoy them. These pleasures are found in the living things which surround us; the warmth of the sun, the forces of nature, and even in a tiny trickle of water. These are the abounding satisfactions of nature that I call 'The Plentiful Pleasures'."

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As in past years we call your favorable attention to the continental migrational study program being conducted from the research center -- the Patuxent Research Refuge -- at Laurel, Maryland, and publish here the form for the Spring Records.

The following letter dated February 16, 1959, is from Mr. Chandler S. Robbins, who is in charge of this project, and to whom all letters and returns should be directed.

"Dear Cooperator:

"Thank you again for your migration reports of past years.

" . . . We should like to have spring records by June 10. Late reports, as well as records for prior years (1953-58), can still be used; but they may not be

processed as promptly as those received by this date.

"Most of the 1957 material has been put on IBM punch cards and is available for research purposes. Records for 1958, as well as those for 1956 and prior years, are currently being punched, one State or Province at a time. Some time this spring or summer you will receive a machine listing of your records. If any error or omission is noted please advise us at once so the correction can be made before the record is used.

"We wish to repeat that there can never be too many reports, even from one locality, as long as they are not duplicate observations of the same individual birds. Our ideal cooperater is not one who makes long trips to different areas; but rather one who watches and listens in his own neighborhood, for at least a short time, nearly every day. We ask that you report just those birds that are believed to have actually arrived (or departed) on the date when seen or heard. In the "Peak" columns enter any arrivals of additional individuals, any high counts obtained, or any other records of migratory movement. Records of even single birds found freshly killed at towers or ceilometers are important and should be included, together with a footnote explaining the source of the observation.

"While the processing of migration data for electrical sorting and tabulating has many advantages, it also has certain limitations. If an actual count of birds is not possible, we ask that you give a reasonable estimate of numbers rather than using terms such as "many", "common", "few", etc. We have no way to interpret these words and no provision for putting them on the punch cards. Also, we respectfully request that you use a separate sheet for each location (town or county). Requests for extra sheets will be filled promptly. Also, we shall appreciate your assistance in helping us get forms in the hands of new participants.

"We wish to emphasize once again that we do not expect any one person to report all species on the list. The average person reports on only 5 to 10 species, and many sheets contain data for but a single species. We are not so much interested in the very first bird of a species to reach a certain State, Province or locality as we are in the date on which many different people report an influx or departure of that species. So every observation counts, no matter how meagre it may seem to the reporter. Although many birds arrive at about the same time each year, the exact date is determined in part by weather conditions. Only by having a large number of observations from many localities can the full extent of the effect of meteorological conditions on bird migration be determined. Your continued cooperation is greatly appreciated."

R. M. Saunders,

Editor.