

# Toronto Field Naturalists' Club

165

## October Meeting

Monday, October 5, 1959, at 8.15 p.m.  
at the  
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Speaker: Prof. A. F. Coventry  
Subject: "The Naturalist in Modern Society"

As naturalists, what is our philosophy and what is our place in this age of materialism and rapid change? How can we contribute to the present and to the future?

Professor Coventry, from his rich store of wisdom and from his collection of fine colour slides, will present us with a lucid and stimulating discussion of a topic which will appeal to all thoughtful people.

## Outings

For information regarding fall outings please see the following page.

## Botany Group

The Botany Group will meet on Thursday, October 15th, at 8.00 p.m. sharp, in the library of Eglinton Public School, Eglinton Ave. and Mt. Pleasant Rd. This will be Members' Night, and slides taken during the past spring and summer will be shown. New members welcome.

President - Mr. Sherbourne Drake

Secretary - Miss Florence Preston,  
HU 3-9530.

## Fees now due

Now is the time to pay your fees of \$2.00 for the 1959-60 season. We urge that you mail these to the Secretary (see bottom of next page) and save lining up at the meeting. If you have changed your address, please let us know.

## Audubon Screen Tours

As you will see from the announcement which has already been mailed to you, we have a very fine series of Audubon Screen Tours in store for this season. Encouraged by the complete sell-out of last year's tickets, we have undertaken to sponsor the lectures for two-night stands this year. This means twice as many tickets to sell. As we have a considerable financial stake in this undertaking it is most important that we have a good attendance for both nights of each lecture. You can help a great deal by (a) buying tickets for yourself and your family, and (b) giving these lectures all the publicity you can -- talk about them, show the folder to friends, etc. This is entertainment with a wide appeal.

## Christmas Cards

The Federation of Ontario Naturalists have produced a beautiful nature greeting card, using the prize-winning design submitted by Mr. Robert M. Bateman. Samples will be on display and orders will be taken at the October meeting. By ordering then you will benefit your club as well as the F.O.N. Price - \$1.50 per doz.

(More announcements on the next page!)

Junior Field Naturalists' Club

The Junior Club is open to children from 8 to 16. If you know of any children who would be interested, bring or send them to the Museum Theatre on Saturday, October 3rd, at 10.00 a.m. A nature movie will be shown and there will be registration and organization of study groups. The fee is only \$1.00 for the season. Director, Mr. Don Burton - RU. 2-2155. u

A Bird's-eye View of the Fall Migration

Through the courtesy of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists and the Imperial Oil Co. Ltd., members of the Toronto Field Naturalists' Club are again invited to view the autumnal bird migration from the observation tower of the Imperial Oil Building, Avenue Rd. and St. Clair Ave. The gallery will be open until October 16th, from 10 A.M. to 4.00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and on Saturdays from 2.00 to 4.00 p.m. T.F.N. members should show their 1959 membership cards to the lobbyman on duty.

AUTUMN OUTINGS

Saturday  
September 26  
10.00 a.m.

Happy Nook, R.R. No. 2, Pickering  
This is the home of Mr. Alf. Bunker. Follow Highway No. 2 east from Highland Creek to Fairport Beach Road. Turn north to the next east-west road, then turn west. Mr. Bunker's house is the third on the north side. If going by bus, take the Oshawa bus to Fairport Beach Road, and continue as above. Bring lunch.  
Leaders - Birds - Mr. Alf. Bunker  
                                Dr. David Hoeniger  
                                Botany - Mr. Jim Simon

Saturday  
October 3  
2.00 p.m.

Autumn Trees in Mt. Pleasant Cemetery  
Meet at the Yonge St. gate, 1-1/2 blocks north of St. Clair Ave.  
Leader - Mr. L.T. Owens.

Saturday  
October 17  
9.30 a.m.

Hanlan's Point  
Meet at the city ferry dock for the 9.30 boat. Be sure to check the boat schedule with the T.T.C., UN. 1-4545.  
Lunch optional.  
Leaders - Birds - Prof. T. F. McIlwraith  
                                Geology - Dr. Walter Tovall

Saturday  
October 24  
2.00 p.m.

Trees, Shrubs and Flowering Plants at Glendon Hall  
Meet at the entrance gates, 1275 Bayview Ave. Take the Davisville bus to Sunnybrook Hospital, then walk north on Bayview. Or take Lawrence East bus to the corner of Bayview and St. Leonard's Ave., right at the Glendon Hall gates.  
Leader - Mr. Kenneth Armson

President -

Mr. A. A. Outram

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

FEES PLEASE!

# Toronto Field Naturalists' Club.



## NEWSLETTER

Number 165

September, 1959

Rain was pitting the coffee-brown surface of the river this late July day as we rolled across the bridge whilst thunder growled in the distance. We were following a forest-darkened road along the contour of a high sandy ridge. Ages past this sinuous serpentine was a huge sand dune marking the bound of an ancient lake. Now, with lake in long retreat the wood has flung its cloak of green above the naked sand. Beneath that cover exists a new world, a fruitful world of flower and beast and man.

At last the road took a bend away from the ridge and on to the succeeding flat where the scraggy brush of a one-time pasture field, advance guard of the returning wood, met our eyes. Our guide called a halt. This was the remembered landmark. We had arrived.

In the parking of the car it was necessary to be careful for, though the main ridge of the ancient dune was well away from us, we soon found that this flat was as pure sand as the ridge. Little pockets where some inquisitive skunk or fox had been digging laid bare the fine yellow grains, so that when we got out we realized that where we were standing was really an outswEEP of the dune. We have all seen large sand dunes which, on the side away from the prevailing wind, have long gradual slopes or plateaus that fall away again in a final dip to lower land. This was one of these, for here we were parked on the edge of that final dip which at this point led down to a long, winding bog. Indeed, the road, as we now could see, had been built along the convenient outswEEP plain, finding room between the high ridge and the last plunge to the bog.

This bog it was that we had come to explore. Looking at the conformation of the countryside we could understand how it had come into existence, and how it was now maintained. Clearly the long high sand dunes had ages ago dammed up the river we had crossed, causing it to make a huge meander at this point in order to find a way out to the lake. This natural dam is still intact, and has been for untold centuries. As a result the

floodplain of the river, so little above lake level here, has been kept in a perpetually water-soaked condition. As the river is comparatively broad and sluggish, given to forming ponds in its meandering, there must have been hitherto much more open water than now exists. Gradually this has been filled in by silting and plant growth, and the bog formed. It continues to exist because of the continually water-soaked condition which means that the water-table is at or only just below the surface of the land.

That this was the case we quickly ascertained when we began to tramp about in the sphagnum. Any unwary step could result in a sudden squish and a plunge into an unsuspected watery hole. After one of us had suffered one such mishap we all took our steps with the greatest of care for, on a dripping, rainy day, a rubber boot full of water somehow has a cold, clammy wetness unknown at other times. And on this dark day rain fell steadily; water ran off the leaves, sometimes coldly down our necks; sodden bushes slithered along our gleaming coats. Cameras, binoculars, all instruments were ruled out. What a day to be in a bog!

That's what our Irish terrier thought, for sure. She soon looked like a half-drowned rat, and acted the part so convincingly that we were moved to take her back to the car and shelter. Being human, however, and not canine, we others continued our explorations.

Really, though, it was most exciting. So much so that you scarcely had a thought for the rain. How could you when almost every step you made some new discovery dawned. Orchid plants that had bloomed were dotted everywhere: the majestic Queen lady slippers, the yellows and the still-helmeted stemless. With their flowers gone they seemed only parts of the endless, dripping green of the bog. Yet, to the knowing eye they were memories of beauty gone, and warranty of beauty yet to come another year. Now a white bloom gleamed forth amongst the dark, dank cedar trees; only a simple little flower but quick to catch the eye in the surrounding gloom. When approached 'twas a gem: five pointed white petals with a suspicion of mauve at their bases surrounding a little white tube that rose from a tiny green pin-cushion to end in a receptacle decorated by five white prongs. Yet, what could be held in that elfin holder? The whole flower was nodding as if looking down to admire the trio of roundish green leaves that decorated the stem a bit above the -- I almost said ground, but that would not do for this jewel-like flower was growing out of the side of a mossy old cedar tree, a foot above the ground! What could it be in such a place? The flower was familiar-looking; so were the leaves. The name that came to me first was "pipsissewa" since the blossom reminded me of that flower though the leaves weren't right. My companion, regarding the leaves, said, "Pyrola," and certainly that is what they suggested. As it turned out, when we had checked the characteristics in the book, neither of us was so far wrong, especially as we were both seeing a new flower for the first time. Neither pipsissewa nor pyrola to be sure, but the closest relative of each was before us -- one-flowered wintergreen (Moneses uniflora), which in the botanical hierarchy comes exactly between these two. No wonder the observer thought of one relative and the second of the other. As so often occurs, now that we had found one such flower we saw others shining up at us all around the green sphagnum, atop old logs, and in all sorts of situations except that original, fantastic tree-perch.

Remains of coral root, shrivelled and blackened, bent toward the soil from which they had risen, returning to earth its gift of loveliness, borne so few days before. Little green orchids that could delight only a botanist's eye sent us into eager exclamation amidst the trickling trees: Habenaria obtusata and Habenaria hyperborea, whose green blooms ascend green stems like verdant steps; Malaxis unifolia and Malaxis monophyllos, so hard to pick out that you have nearly to get on your hands and knees to tell them apart from a myriad of other greens, yet as satisfying to a flower-seeker as a rare and drab, brownish sparrow to the ornithologically-minded. Suddenly, as I parted streaming bushes and started to high-step over an old log, rich red-brown in decay and velvety-green with moss, I spied a spear of delicate white blooms beneath my arching leg. Quickly withdrawing and stooping down I gazed in appreciation at this new find. Riding gracefully on slender, twisting grass-like stem, the spiral of dainty white flowers seemed like a flock of minute birds at rest, yet poised, ready to take off at the least alarm. Ladies' tresses, this charming orchid is commonly called, but to me its proper name is far more expressive, more fitting -- Spiranthes gracilis -- the winding grace.

With this our discoveries had attained a count of eleven orchids, in bloom or in plant. And we had covered but a fraction of the far-reaching habitat. What with all these and the many other plants and flowers the serpentine bog had lived up to and surpassed its repute. A visit to a bog is at any time a real event to the naturalist; this bog, we agreed, would stand in the first rank.

Enquiring chickadees accompanied our exit through breast-high bracken up the first rise of the ancient dune and so back to the road. There, as the rain was hesitating between showers, we spread a rug on the ground and sat for lunch to the amazement of two passing carloads of local residents. Naturalists at feed on the sodden green were for them an irresistible subject for fun. What if they had seen the naturalists on the hunt in the bog, rain-splashed, water streaming from clothes, exclaiming at the finding of little green flowers? But what do the naturalists care when beneath the dripping trees there is revealed to those who go and seek a world of infinite grace and beauty. Let the uninitiated have their laugh. Let those who know revere and wonder.

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It is a byword with the experienced birdwatcher that common, ordinary birds can spring sudden surprises on anyone. A similar possibility is equally true of old, familiar places, as was demonstrated to my wife and me on the evening of July 25th last.

Quite frequently, when staying at Terra Cotta, we make an evening round of the wet spots, hoping to find something of interest to see. By mid-summer the number of places still showing water is greatly reduced, this season being no exception. Perhaps that is why the remaining water holes are so favored. On this evening we had covered two farm ponds and found little. Dusk was coming on as we came to our third spot, a favorite place, on the Ferndale Road

(No. 2 Concession West, Chinguacousy, north of No. 27 side road). Ann had let me off and was going to park the car when I, strolling casually along the road and glancing into the watery verge of the cow pasture to the west, was brought to a startled halt. A pullet-sized rail in full view was staring fixedly at me. You may be sure I returned the compliment, for the last time I had seen a rail as large as this was on the salt marshes in New Jersey in May, and then it was a clapper rail. But this was no clapper, which only dwells in salt meadows; this was its fresh-water cousin, a king rail. The large size, huge bill, long legs and general coloration all told me that I was looking at a king rail. Yet rails of this ilk are so rare in the Toronto region that it hadn't entered my head to be looking for one. When I realized what it was I was galvanized into action and ran down the road to get Ann there in time to see it. Little fear, when it saw we meant no harm it began placidly to feed, making no effort at concealment except when a passing car made a sudden noise. Then it would glide behind a grass tuft or bush, remain rigid, watching, only to walk out again as soon as it deemed the danger past.

I left Ann standing on the road, climbed into the pasture at the lower end and walked up towards the wet part. As I neared this a second and notably smaller, though very similar-appearing rail, could be seen feeding. It was a Virginia. A second of this species came into view before I reached a point where I could see the large king rail. This bird now paraded openly across the mud, picking up a few morsels on the way until it reached a part where grassy clods rose in the water, when it was able to slip amongst them and, presumably, to feel more hidden, though, in fact, it was still visible from both road and field. Neither Ann nor I was more than 20-25 feet distant from the bird. The two Virginias had long since scuttled to cover, exhibiting a far greater nervousness than their larger relative. A third Virginia, which I put up unexpectedly when I got close to the upper end of the wetness, was so upset that it shrieked loud keek-keeks at me as it ran madly for a hidey-hole. This clamor alarmed the big fellow more than any movement of ours or any passing car so that it too vanished into the nearer scrub and was not seen again.

When I got back to the road I found that Ann had spotted no less than three sora rails around the edge of the pond on the east side of the road. Two of these chunky little fellows were feeding whilst the third was standing quietly at the edge of a willow thicket, surveying the open as if calculating the advisability of coming out. Apparently its decision was against such bold action as it was still in the safety of seclusion when we left.

Seven rails we had seen in our evening visit to the roadside pool, seven when the sight of one of these secretive marsh birds is counted a real birding sight. And one of them was a king rail.

As soon as I got back to Toronto I put the news of this find on the grapevine. Immediately the parade of observers began. How the word got around! A good sample of the working of the grapevine telegraph came to light on Tuesday evening (July 28th) when Ann and I were making a quick run out to Whitby Harbour for shorebirds. We stopped in at Eastbourne to speak to the LeVays and to see if there were any interesting birds in their marsh. They were not at home, but hanging on the door-catch was a yellow card with a note written on it to the effect that there had been an eared grebe on the lake that afternoon

(we promptly rushed to the beach and saw this, Thanks), and that there was a king rail at Terra Cotta (for which see R.M.S. or Jim Baillie). Now the yellow card that had been chosen as writing material was that observer's current union membership card! I am still wondering how he is getting along without it. Leaving the note was an excellent idea, however, so I added my bit. My choice was a dentist's appointment card on which I gave detailed directions to the rail pond. The LeVays had quite a literature on the door when they came home. The grapevine was in full swing.

That it was having an effect was manifest on the Civic Holiday weekend when, on three visits to the pool, we never failed to find other observers in attendance. With all this watching we came to know that not one king rail but a family of probably seven was in residence, doubtless raised in this same spot. The heavy cattail growth north of the railway tracks, where in previous years I have found other rails breeding, would be well suited to be the home of king rails. On this Saturday evening I saw three of the king rails. Other observers had counted up to five in view at one time. As there seem to be five in the dark juvenile plumage we must assume that the family numbered seven at least. The adult birds were to be seen off and on but were not as constantly in view as the young. These were so regular that the photographers were having a field day, or should I say a series of them, for this was no one-day stand.

On the Sunday afternoon the king rails brought us a pleasant visit and a new bird for this year's Toronto list when the Bruce Matsons, who had been looking at the rails, came to the cabin and told us about an egret on the Credit where the 5th Concession crosses the river below No. 7 highway. True, we didn't find it that day, but did the next. The egret, along with a dozen or so great blues, fished that section of the river for two weeks or more. The grapevine was at work again.

Next visit to the rail pool was on Saturday evening, August 8th. When we arrived we found a family viewing the scene, a man, his wife and two small children. They were from Oakville, and recognized my name when I told them, saying that they had seen "my article" in the paper that evening. A little questioning elicited the fact that it was Jim Baillie's Wildlife article in the Telegram that they had read. Jim had seemingly given specific directions so they had swallowed their dinner and driven straight up. They had not been disappointed for as we talked one king rail was feeding in the open near the road and another arrived to join it. We left to walk along the railway tracks on the north side of the pool. Our progress here was halted for some minutes since the northbound train was being held up by a cow on the track near the head of the pool. When all the tooting and whistling was over, the cow down the bank, and the train, the engineer shaking his head, gone clanking on, we walked along. There, at the water's edge just down this embankment, was an adult king rail, feeding as mildly as if no commotion had occurred, quite undeterred by the train's noisy encounter with the cow. Probably this unruffled conduct says as much as anything about the fact that this family was raised here, alongside the road and the tracks, coming thereby to disregard trains and traffic. But humans on view are another matter. Probably it was us that set this rail to uttering a series of low bup-bup-bups, traditional call of the king rail. Whatever it was we were delighted to hear them, for this was the first and only time that one of the big rails was vocal when we were around. When we got back to the road the Oakville family was still present,

and as we walked toward them we could see one of the young king rails race across the road almost over the boot-tops of the two children. These rails certainly were at home.

The mention of Jim Baillie's article sent us on a search for a copy of the Telegram which we could not find in Cheltenham, Terra Cotta, or Georgetown. In the last town we were told rather curtly that there were too many Tories around and the Tely was all sold out.

The next day we drove once more to the pool, this time in the pouring rain. Now we found that "publicity", not merely the grapevine, was at work. In spite of the downpour seven cars were lined up beside the pond! One contained a well-known observer from Collingwood who had driven down to see the rails and to get pictures. Oshawa and Hamilton were represented as well as Toronto. Later I was told that earlier in the day when the sun was out there were ten cars, a different lot, in line. Two days afterwards the local farmer became so anxious about all this coming and going that he showed up with another man, produced a badge and said, "I'm the deputy game warden. What's going on here?" He had reason to be on the alert for, when assured that the people were only watching birds, he reached into his pocket and brought out a freshly-killed young wood duck that some irresponsible fellow had shot in a pond just the other side of his house.

When I did see Jim's article finally I understood why so many were rushing up to Chinguacousy to see the rails. The headline was, "12 King Rails in 150 Years," and Jim pointed out that this was only the second breeding record in the Toronto region, the other having been in Marsh No. 8 on the Humber in 1938. A fine photograph, taken by Ott Devitt when the king rails nested at the Burlington Golf Course (outside the Toronto region) in 1939, adorned the article. The emphasis on the ease with which the rails could be seen and the fact that other species were on view too, fully explained the rush of people to see birds that are ordinarily so hard to find. Many observers were seeing the king rail for the first time, and many others, less experienced, seeing their first rail of any kind. The turnout after the publication of this article shows above all the large number of people in the area who are interested in birds, a large part of whom are still unknown even to the naturalists.

Our last sight of a king rail at this pool was on August 19th when one, an adult, was feeding in the open in the middle of the afternoon. On the last weekend in August not a rail of any sort was to be found even in the evening, which is the best time to look for rails. Since other observers had a similar experience at this date we suppose that the rails have gone. May they prosper and return another year to this, the northernmost breeding spot known for the king rail.

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ANNUAL HAWK MIGRATION

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Imperial Oil Limited has again extended its generous invitation to interested persons to observe the fall migration of hawks from its building at 111 St. Clair Avenue West, Toronto. Excellently situated for this purpose, the observation gallery of the building will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Friday; and from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays, from Monday, September 7 until Friday, October 16. The gallery is not open on Sundays.

Admission is open to members of the Toronto Field Naturalists' Club, the Audubon Society of Canada and the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, on presentation of membership card.

List of Officers  
1959-60

President - Mr. A.A. Outram  
Vice-President - Mr. Fred Bodsworth  
Secretary-Treasurer - Mrs. H. Robson  
Assistant Secretary - Mrs. J.B. Stewart  
Director, Junior Field Naturalists' Club - Mr. Don Burton

Executive Council

Mr. John Barnett	Mr. G.C. Mark
Mgr. Lucius Barnett	Prof. T. F. McIlwraith
Mr. Alf. Bunker	Mr. George Myland
Miss Winifred Chute	Miss Elizabeth Price
Mr. Sherbourne Drake	Dr. R.M. Saunders
Dr. Bruce Falls	Dr. Walter Tovell
Dr. Margaret Heimburger	Mr. John Mitchele
Miss Helen Lawrence	Mr. Frank Darroch

List of Committees  
1959-60

Programme & Rotunda Displays

Mr. Fred Bodsworth, chairman  
Mr. Don Burton  
Miss Margaret Cumming  
Dr. Margaret Heimburger  
Prof. T.F. McIlwraith  
Mr. John Mitchele  
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Audubon Screen Tours

Mr. Frank Darroch, chairman  
Mrs. J.B. Stewart, secretary  
Mgr. L. Barnett  
Mr. Fred Bodsworth  
Dr. L. E. Jaquith  
Mr. John Livingston  
Prof. T. F. McIlwraith  
Mr. John Mitchele  
Dr. Walter Tovell

List of Committees  
1959-60 - (continued)

Outings

Miss Helen Lawrence, chairman  
Miss Rosemary Gaymer  
Miss Elizabeth Price  
Miss Helen Smith  
Mrs. J.B. Stewart

F.O.N. Camp Scholarships

Prof. T.F. McIlwraith, chairman  
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Mrs. J.B. Stewart

Botany Club

President - Mr. Sherbourne Drake  
Vice-president - Mrs. Sherbourne Drake  
Secretary-treasurer - Miss Florence Preston

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STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS

For the year ending April 1959

Receipts

Membership fees	\$1,606.75	
Sale of Christmas Cards	375.30	
Sale of Bell Telephone rights	13.02	
Donations	3.25	
Interest on stocks and bonds	107.50	
Total receipts for year	<u>\$2,105.82</u>	
Add cash in bank Apr. 30/58	1,326.05	\$3,431.87

Disbursements

Printing	\$ 789.52	
Office Supplies	143.07	
Postage	185.00	
Salaries, Honoraria, etc.	500.00	
Scholarships (F.O.N. Camp)	200.00	
Audubon Screen Tours	400.52	
Christmas Cards	300.00	
Affiliation fees	83.70	
Auditorium Expenses	350.00	
Bell Telephone stock	99.00	
Junior Field Naturalists (donation)	50.00	
Bank Charges	6.54	
Sundries	11.00	<u>\$3,118.35</u>
Cash in bank May 1, 1959		\$ 313.52

NOTE: This does not include receipts from Audubon Screen Tours, which were kept in a separate account, \$1197.00 was transferred to our account on May 20, 1959.