

OUTINGS REPORTS

Mount Pleasant Cemetery—December 4, 2007

Despite blustery winter weather and icy walking conditions, seven hardy TFN'ers joined me to tour one of the most densely populated yet quietest places in the city—Mount Pleasant Cemetery. I grew up near the cemetery and spent many hours playing and bird-watching among the tombstones. I like returning—remarkably little has changed in the past fifty years—I can still get lost amongst the winding roads.

Because the cemetery is a manicured landscape with little undergrowth or natural vegetation, it does not have a lot to offer winter birds. A serious birder may find the pickings slim but the cemetery does offer many diversions to a more general naturalist.

The leaves had only recently fallen so we could spot artifacts hidden during leafier times. These included a robin's nest (with diagnostic mud-lining), two paper wasp nests and several globular leaf nests—summer squirrel residences. In the fresh snow, squirrel tracks were much in evidence but something different had passed behind the Eaton monument. The large round imprints were only a few inches apart. What mammal has short legs and a deliberate walk? Perhaps one that doesn't have to worry about predators—a skunk!



Cedar Waxwing photographed by Norah Jancik

We observed several obese squirrels, some in the act of begging for food. A plump squirrel makes an easy target and filling meal for any passing Red-tailed Hawk—we observed two soaring overhead. Red-tailed Hawks have nested successfully in the cemetery for several years. We found a nest in a tall white pine—the adults should return by the end of February. There was

another Red-tail nest in a nearby pine—possibly an alternate nest built by the same pair.

Near the mausoleum we enjoyed close studies of a small flock of Cedar Waxwings gleaning berries from a juniper tree. Norah Jancik obtained some superb pictures of these handsome creatures.

Mount Pleasant Cemetery has some of the oldest and most magnificent white and red oaks in Toronto, many pre-dating the establishment of the cemetery in 1876.

Although most had lost their leaves, one upright tree glowed a resplendent crimson against the snowy backdrop. It bore a label—pin oak. But labels can be incorrect; I think that is the case here. The lack of side branches and the brilliant leaves lead me to believe this is a scarlet oak. And we saw it at its best!

George Bryant