

TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 530

March 2005



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TFN MEETINGS

Sunday, March 6, 2005 - CARDEN ALVAR

at 2:30 pm

at Emmanuel College
75 Queen's Park Cres. East

VISITORS WELCOME!

Suitable for the whole family

**SPECIAL
GENERAL
MEETING***

an illustrated talk by Jean Iron, retired teacher, tour leader, and editor of the ONTARIO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS NEWS.

- The Carden Alvar, northeast of Toronto, is a globally rare habitat with special birds and plants. An early summer tour explores scenic back roads where grassland birds, wildflowers and butterflies are abundant. This informative and entertaining presentation features excellent photos of loggerhead shrikes and grassland specialities.

+ a "social hour" with free coffee and juice beginning at 2 pm

* Members are required to vote on the issue of increased annual fees for TFN. See articles in TFN 527, pages 5 & 6, TFN 528, page 8 and TFN 529, page 6. Proposed new fees are:

- \$50 - Family (2 adults -- same address, children included)
- \$40 - Senior Family (2 adults, 65+)
 - Single
- \$30 - Senior Single
 - Student

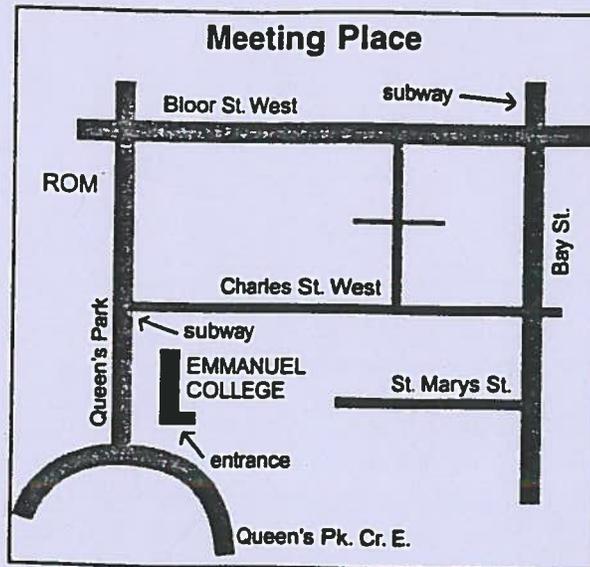
WHEELCHAIR ENTRANCE:

second door south of Charles St. on Queen's Park Crescent East.

Note: Door does not have automatic opener.

Elevator on inside to the right.

Lecture room is one floor below street level.



SOUTH ENTRANCE:

at south end of building, down a few steps of an outside stairwell to reach Electronic Classroom 001.

NEXT MEETING: Sunday, April 3, 2005

NEXT NEWSLETTER: April (to be mailed in mid-March)

TFN OUTINGS

REMEMBER: Children and visitors are welcome on all outings but please, **NO PETS!**
 To get to outings on time, check TTC routes and schedules by calling 416-393-4636.
 Check the weather by calling 416-661-0123 so you will know what to wear on outings
 which go rain or shine.

- Wednesday GLENDON HALL - nature walk
 March 2 Leader: Roger Powley
 10 am Meet at the entrance gates on the east side of Bayview Ave.
 at Lawrence Ave. East.
 Bring binoculars. Dress warmly. Morning only.
- March 6 TFN MEETING
- Monday DEERPARK LIBRARY - nature arts (members' photography)
 March 7 Leader: Robin Powell
 2 pm to Meet on the second floor of the library which is on the north
 4 pm side of St. Clair Ave. East, one block east of Yonge St.
 Any member who has slides or snap-shots to share with other members
 is encouraged to bring about 20 to this afternoon event. Others
 are urged to come and enjoy. A projector and screen will be provided.
 If you have questions, please call the TFN office (416-593-2656).
- Wednesday STAIRWAYS OF SWANSEA - urban geography
 March 9 Leader: Ron Allan
 1:30 pm Meet at the northwest corner of Jane St. and Bloor St. West.
 Walk will end near the Rummymede subway station. Lots of climbing so wear
 sturdy shoes.
- Saturday TORONTO ISLANDS - early migrants
 March 12 Leader: Doug Paton
 10:30 am Meet at the ferry docks at the foot of Bay St.
 Bring binoculars and lunch.
- Thursday BASE OF SPIT TO CHERRY BEACH - nature walk
 March 17 Leader: Boris Mather
 10:30 am Meet at the southeast corner of Queen St. East and Leslie St.
 Bring lunch and binoculars.
- Sunday LANDFILLING AND LOST RAVINES - urban ecology
 March 20 Leader: Richard Anderson
 2 pm Meet at the northwest corner of Queen St. East and Orchard
 Park Blvd.
 This is a joint outing with the North Toronto Green Community.

\$ ferry
 tickets



MARCH OUTINGS (cont'd)

- Wednesday HUMBER VALLEY - nature walk
March 23 Leader: George Bryant
10 am Meet at the Old Mill subway station. Bring lunch & binoculars.
- Saturday EARL BALES PARK - urban ecology
March 26 Leader: Paula Davies
10 am Meet at the entrance to the community centre at the north end of the park which is on the east side of Bathurst St. just south of Sheppard Ave. West. Bring lunch.
- Wednesday COLONEL DANFORTH PARK - nature walk
March 30 Leader: Karin Fawthrop
10 am Meet at the park entrance on the south side of Kingston Rd. at Col. Danforth Trail. Morning only. Bring binoculars. □

IT'S YOUR NEWSLETTER

Requested: Essays (no longer than 500 words), reviews (no longer than 300 words), poems, cartoons, sketches and newspaper clippings.

Subjects: plants, animals and natural areas in the Toronto region, especially reports of personal experiences with wildlife, including locations, dates, and any sources consulted.

Please include your name, address and telephone number so submissions can be acknowledged. With newspaper clippings, include source and date of each clipping.

Time dated material such as notices of meetings should be submitted at least six weeks before the month in which the event is to take place.

Send material to: Toronto Field Naturalists
2 Carlton St., #1519
Toronto, Ont. M5B 1J3

Editor: Helen Juhola

Poetry, Art and Nature Observations: Diana Banville

Assistants: Eva Davis, Karin Fawthrop, Nancy Fredenburg, Elizabeth Gladstone,
Toshi Oikawa, Marilyn Murphy, Robin Powell, Wendy Rothwell

Printer: DM Printing

Mailer: Perkins Mailing Services

 TFN OFFICE HOURS: Friday mornings from 9 am to 12 noon

Memberships, TFN publications, miscellaneous nature books, hasti-notes, art, pins, decals and crests are all available.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The bitter cold of early January has given way to near ideal winter conditions for enjoying Toronto's natural areas. While out photographing in the natural areas of Etobicoke and Mimico Creeks, I saw unusual numbers of people enjoying the weather in nearby parks. These last days of January have been the first decent conditions for winter photography for almost a month. I hope it lasts!

The last months of 2004 were a busy time at the Jim Baillie Nature Reserve. The last major maintenance activities were completed. Most, if not all, of the duckboard placed and trail marker replacement were the work of Jerry Spevak and Jim Allan. Having moved a few duckboards myself, I know what hard labour this must have been to place the remaining ones. Thanks to both Jerry and Jim for this work which had been long delayed for lack of volunteers. Now what remains is to get more TFN members interested in the nature reserves and come out on the outings there.

It wasn't long ago that seeing a cormorant was considered an event among birders. How times have changed! Now cormorant numbers have increased greatly in many areas of the Great Lakes. Probably one of the largest cormorant colonies is at Tommy Thompson Park. Denuded trees and odour (if downwind) are the most conspicuous aspect of the large number of cormorants in the park. Such bird concentrations have caused problems for other animals and plant life. Control measures by the Conservation Authority to reduce their numbers apparently have not been effective; for example, by oiling their eggs. The Conservation Authority, no longer willing to let the cormorant numbers go unchecked, is considering culling the cormorant numbers by means of shooting them, as was done in Presqu'ile Provincial Park. This would probably be a precedent in the Toronto areas for controlling the numbers of any animal species. This proposed drastic action has upset many naturalists. Fortunately the Conservation Authority will have to do an Environmental Assessment for this means of population control. More about this on page 8.

Robin Powell



Without a sense of community, people won't cooperate to improve their environment, whether that means carpooling, curbing their wastes, accepting zoning rules, or simply disposing of trash properly. And communities are fragile. Difficult to create, easy to destroy, they are developed when humans share a common history or a common area: time and space.

from A LAND ON FIRE: THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN BOOM
by J.D. Fahn, Westview Press, 2003

OUTING REPORT

Toronto Field Naturalists enjoy tour of ROM Herbarium

On Wednesday December 8, from 2 to 4 p.m., TFN members enjoyed an orientation to the Herbarium at the ROM, hosted by Deb Metsger, Assistant Curator, and Jenny Bull, Botany technician. This was clearly popular: more than 35 persons took part. The green plant herbarium at the ROM, formerly housed at the University of Toronto, is an extraordinary resource. Many interesting topics were covered: the standardized protocol for herbarium sheets; how collection techniques and priorities have changed over time; how well the system has stood the test of time; the varied uses to which the collection has been put, from mapping to phenology studies, and so on. Questions ranged widely, yet all were handled patiently and well. Deb and Jenny are to be commended. The time they took and the effort put into their preparations certainly paid off in a stimulating and fascinating "outing" indoors.

Katherine J. Miller

□



PROJECTS

LOOK FOR MARCH BLOOMS

The one native wildflower for which we have reports in March is the faithful skunk cabbage. There also is the native tree, silver maple.

An introduced plant which can be counted on is coltsfoot. Possibly the tree, the European black alder, can be seen in bloom at the very end of March. Another introduced plant which has been reported once in March is henbit. Otherwise we have to be satisfied with the earliest bulbs, the garden species, snowdrop and crocus.

Please report all wildflowers you see in all months of the year - "star-ring" them as usual. [Please send records to TFN office.]

Diana Banville

TFN AT CANADA BLOOMS

The TFN is going to Canada Blooms at the Metro Convention Centre. The North Toronto Green Community is sharing their booth with us. It's a great chance for us to spread the word and cultivate a new crop of naturalists. Would you like to help? If you volunteer a minimum of 2 hours, you will get FREE admission to the show which runs from March 9 - 13 from 10am - 8pm daily. NTGC is having a training session for volunteers on February 28 from 6 to 7 pm, at their office in the Northern District Library, 40 Orchard View Blvd. (Yonge and Eglinton). Call Zora at the NTGC (416)781-7663, or Pinky Franklin, a TFN director, (416)488-3226 for more information. Details can also be checked on the NTGC website: www.ntgc.ca

Pinky Franklin

A BOULDER APPROACH

Toronto is littered with rocks, many of them hundreds of millions of years old. They have travelled — most by glacial ice, but others by tidal wave, meteor impact or even truck — hundreds of miles to get there.

Their mineral composition differs from their surroundings, making them "erratic." And over the past 14,000 years, they have come to dot the city's landscape, commemorating our parks and schools, heating our saunas and marking our burial sites.

"There's A New Boulder In Town" is a sculpture exhibit that ties our current urban landscape to the glacial Northern Ontario of the last ice age. The exhibit runs until April 15, 2005 at the Toronto Sculpture Garden. Maps of Toronto's erratic boulders are available for free at La Maquette restaurant, 111 King St.E. Guidebooks to Toronto's erratic boulders cost \$5, including a copy of the map, at selected downtown bookstores.

extracted from an article by Jordan Heath-Rawlings in the Toronto Star, November 14, 2004

PROJECTS (cont'd)

CORMORANT CRISIS AT TOMMY THOMPSON PARK

Members will be distressed to learn that the Toronto Region Conservation [TRCA] Authority, encouraged by Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources, is contemplating a more aggressive cormorant management strategy at Leslie Spit, including a cull during their spring nesting season in 2005.

The rationale put forward by TRCA is stated to be the steady increase since 1990 in the numbers of nesting cormorants at the Spit, the resulting damage to trees and other vegetation, and the predicted eventual loss of habitat for both colonial nesting species and migratory birds. Opponents of the cull feel that with time, the situation at the Spit will resolve itself without human interference. Colonial birds and trees have co-existed since the last ice age. Trees eventually re-grow, and tree-nesting birds such as black-crowned night herons, if displaced, will return to nest in due course.

Last April the Toronto Ornithological Club [sent] a strongly-worded letter of opposition to Premier McGinty, the Ministry of Natural Resources and others regarding their proposed action in a similar situation at Presqu'ile Provincial Park. In spite of significant public protests, the Ministry went ahead with their plan to shoot double-crested cormorants inside this provincial park, even using lead shot to kill 600 nesting birds.

The Toronto Ornithological Club has again authorized letters of protest to be sent to the Conservation Authority and the Ministry of Natural Resources and others.

Anyone wanting to comment on this issue is encouraged to write, fax or e-mail to the following:

- ▷ Mr. Brian Denney, CAO, The Toronto Region Conservation Authority,
5 Shoreham Dr., Downsview, Ont. M3N 1S4; Fax: 416-661-6898; e-mail:
bdenney@trca.on.ca
- ▷ The Hon. David Ramsay, Ontario Minister of Natural Resources,
6630 - 99 Wellesley St. West, 6th floor, Whitney Block, Toronto, Ont.
M7A 1W3; fax: 416-314-2216; e-mail: dramsay.mpp@liberal.ola.org
- ▷ Councillor Paula Fletcher (represents Toronto's Ward 30 which includes the
Leslie Spit), City Hall, 100 Queen St. West, Suite C44, Toronto, Ont.
M5H 2N2; fax: 416-397-5200; e-mail: councillor_fletcher@toronto.ca

from an article by Marg Catto in the TORONTO ORNITHOLOGICAL NEWSLETTER, No. 150, Dec. 2004

□

One of the worst things that ever happened was that 'nimby' became a pejorative term. Look after your backyard -- that's what you're here for.

a quote of Alan Titmarsh in "Alan's new beat" by James Fair in BBC WILDLIFE,
Vol. 22, No. 10, Oct. 2004

FOR READING

ONTARIO WILDFLOWERS: 101 WAYSIDE FLOWERS by Linda Kershaw, Lone Pine Publishing, 2002, 144 pages

A photographic colour guide is an easy way to study a limited number of common plants -- with a page devoted to each in this little book. For those wishing to learn the "key" method of identification, symbols are provided through detailed drawings with a numbering system of pairs of choices rather than the multiple choices of the more elaborate keys. Suitable for beginners but also good for a review of terms for the "rusty". It has an index, illustrated glossary and "further reading" suggestions.

Each plant is described and considerable lore is included. There are chapters on "when to pick or not" and on using plants as décor. Less attention to these aspects would be better in general. However, after reading the disclaimer on the back of the title page and the many warnings throughout the book, any one, I feel, would be best to stick to the basic TFN code "do not pick" (especially as it's against regulations in all parks).

Speaking of Toronto, nearly all the species in the book are native or naturalized here. In the few cases where examples are species more likely to be encountered elsewhere in Ontario, some are recognizable as similar to plants found here. One would recognize the plant as a "wild lily" or as an "aster".

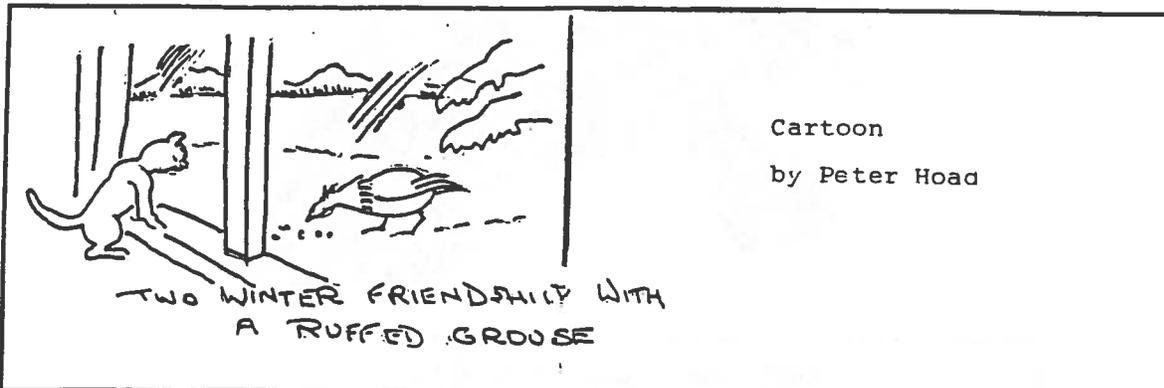
Diana Banville

RECENTLY PUBLISHED:

FLOWER GUIDE FOR HOLIDAY WEEKENDS IN EASTERN CANADA AND NORTHEASTERN U.S.A.
by Ellen W. Larsen & Betty I. Roots, published by National Research Council Press, Ottawa, 2004; \$14.95.

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' NEWSLETTER INDEXES; 2002 & 2003
available at TFN office for \$2.00 each.

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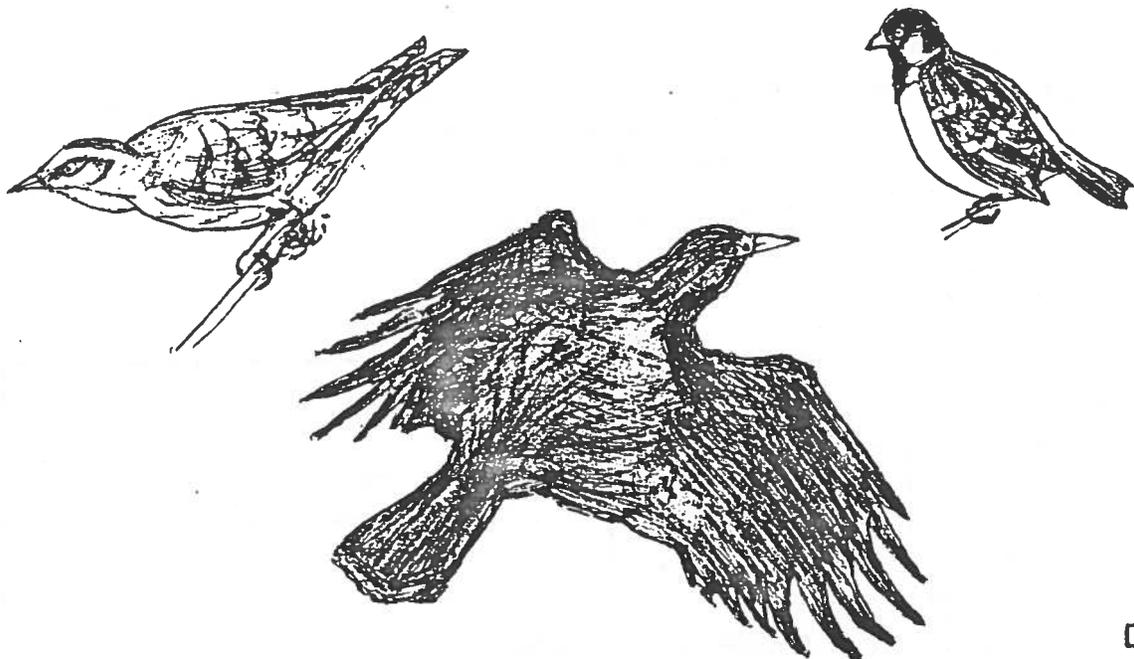
IN PRAISE OF THE "COMMON" BIRDS

I am a bird ignoramus. I know the obvious ones and that's it. Like everyone else, I delight in sightings of our majestic great blue heron and in the waltzes of swallows, the intricate games of goldfinch, and the breathtaking flashes of cardinal and oriole and tanager.

However, I have a really sneaking affinity for those recipients of a bad press: the hoi polloi of birdland. The bird in the street, as it were. I have an admiration and fellow feeling for the vociferous crows with their raucous gossiping and Neighbourhood Watch. I warm to the detested starlings with their brazen chutzpah, their "You stick to your patch, and I'll stick to mine" approach to the human animal. And I positively delight in the cheery, cheeky, chirpy, communal flittings of house sparrows, without whom I cannot imagine city streets. I am unable to picture a Britain where – as I have read – house sparrows have become rare. They were always "there", at least when Britain was home to me. I sincerely hope this scenario will not be repeated here.

The knowledgeable will know the downside of my enthusiasms, but since everything has a downside, I will continue to delight in these "common" members of the avian world.

Eva Davis



Caw! Caw! Caw! Five A.M.
Caw! Caw! Caw! Caw! Six A.M.
Shooing the crow! CAAAW!

Haiku by Therese Paradis

SOUTH-EAST WINDOW

Last fall we moved into the bedroom in the southeast corner of our house so that we could take advantage of the morning view over Sherwood Park. This would allow us to start the day facing the sunrise and provide a tree top view of the changes in foliage as the season progressed.

The room has the advantage of a large south-east facing window, one of those old-fashioned windows made up of many small panes, some sixteen panes in this case.

On the first morning we found ourselves closed in by the dense canopy of the linden tree on the lawn next door. However the leaves had changed to a bright yellow and as the sun rose we were enclosed in a canopy of gold.

Over the next few days the linden leaves fell and we were presented with a view of the fall colours across the oak-beech-maple forest of Sherwood Park. The urban forest beyond stretched out to the horizon broken only by a pair of distant office towers, the only indication that we were living in a big city.

After the leaf fall we were treated to several spectacular sun-rises. There was a dark cloud bank on the south-eastern horizon, no doubt caused by the cold waters of Lake Ontario, but the clouds that radiated out from the cloud bank were quickly changed from purple to red. In a few minutes they returned to purple and then paled and were transformed to fleecy daytime clouds.

We knew that would be a hard act to follow, and indeed we had several dull cloudy mornings in early December. However it was still a fine view considering that we were living in a big city.

More spectacular scenes were to follow. December 23 brought the first snowfall of the season and we awoke to find ourselves in the traditional winter wonderland. The snow clung to the tree branches and two Austrian pines in the near foreground had become huge Christmas trees. We looked out on an old fashioned Christmas card. Surely this was the ultimate view that our southeast-facing window could provide.

Not so. This morning, December 24, we awoke to a scene that was even more spectacular. There had been a sleet storm during the night and every tree branch was coated with ice. As the rising sun hit the branches the linden tree seemed to have enclosed us in a bowl of diamonds. Beyond the linden the urban forest sparkled all the way to the horizon.

We can't expect nature to continue to surprise us with such wonderful new scenes. However I cannot help anticipating next May's morning view of the linden tree as it blossoms and breaks out in fresh young leaflets. There is always something to look forward to when you have a morning view from a southeast facing window.

George Fairfield

□

MY FAVOURITE MARSH

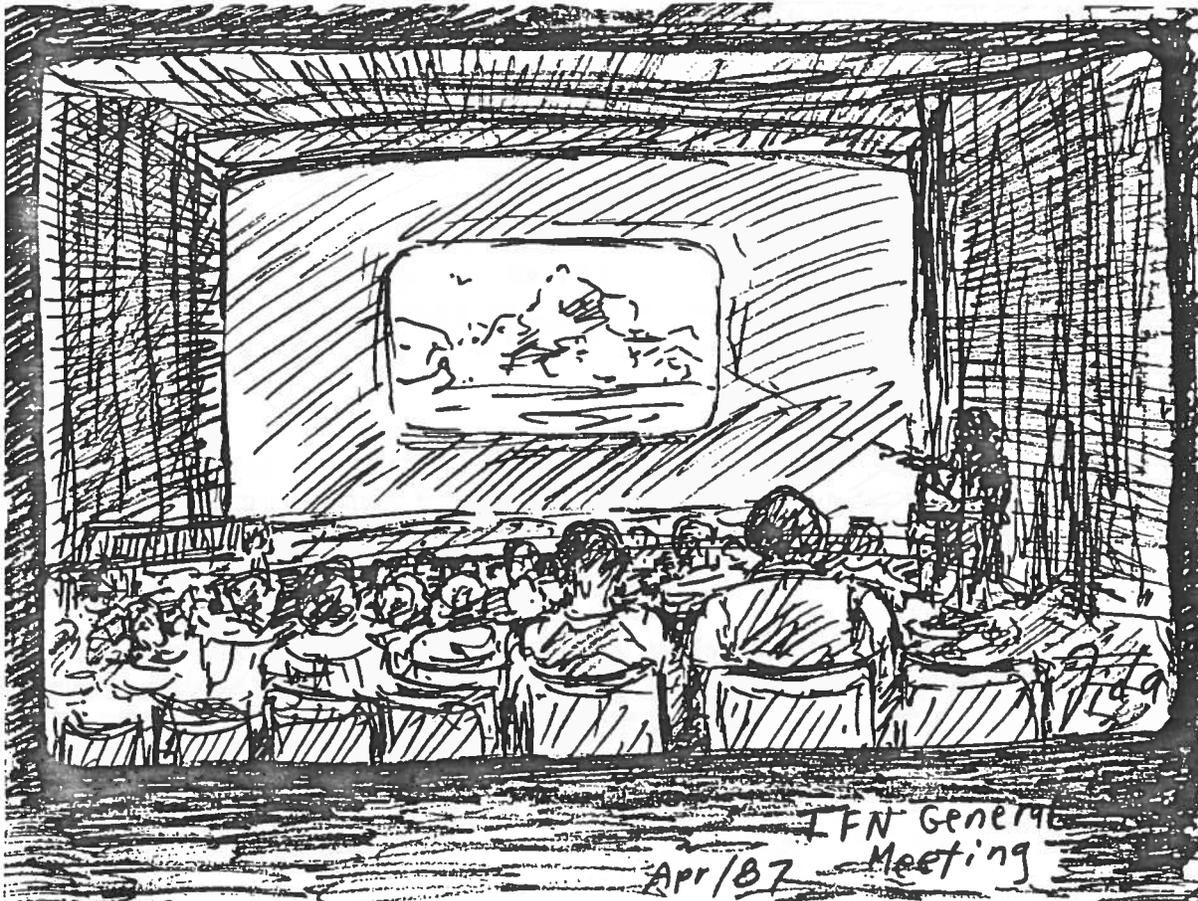
The Humber marsh just south of Bloor Street West is a fabulous area for naturalists. Years ago I saw my first house-finch there. I was also fortunate enough to see a black-crowned night heron there. It was the place I first encountered the great horned owl. Recently a beautiful doe has been living in the marsh, and a couple of times I have been within 20 feet of her.

The area is extremely wild and overgrown. There is no real path. It is best to wear rubber boots and carry a stick in front of you to clear away the many spider webs you will encounter. You will have to climb under and over fallen logs. There is also lots of wood nettle, so make sure you know what plants not to touch.

I have seen coyotes, groundhogs, beavers and all the common mammals in this area. Every time I visit the marsh I see something interesting. What a treasure, and only a few minutes' walk from the Old Mill subway station!

Roger Powley

□



TWELVE HERP SPECIES ON A MARCH DAY

It had started like many March birding trips with Bob Curry over the past forty years: a 6 a.m. sunrise rendezvous at Woodland Cemetery for flyby [Hamilton] passerines, a quick inspection of waterfowl at LaSalle Park and then a dash to the Long Point area to spend the day in search of early migrants. Our choice of date, Monday March 29, 2004, proved fortuitous. The weather over the weekend had been sunny and warm, encouraging many birds to venture north. By day's end, we had tallied about 85 species including chipping sparrow at St. Williams, hermit thrush at Old Cut and red-throated loon at LaSalle Park, all record early dates for me.

Although the day was cool (the temperature never exceeding 12°C), the bright sun at midday had warmed the ground and water. We speculated that perhaps some turtles might be enticed to emerge from hibernation. Near the end of the Long Point causeway, the sight of 15 eastern painted turtles basking amongst the reeds rewarded us. We then ventured onto the berm of Big Creek marsh at the Long Point causeway. In previous years spotted turtles had been observed here. We were greeted by the usual cacophony of Canada geese and red-winged blackbirds while overhead swirls of arriving tree swallows clamoured in territorial disputes. Muskrat houses covered in warm black mud were magnets to 10 large Blanding's turtles. Much bolder than other species, these turtles, generally in pairs, had clambered up the lodges well above the water line. As we studied them, we were excited to note three spotted turtles emerging from the water at the base of the lodges. Unlike snapping turtles that ascend from the bottom covered in a blanket of muck, the shells of these pond turtles were immaculate without a trace of bottom residue. Through Bob's zoom telescope, the contrasting black and yellow neck of the Blanding's was outstanding. With yellow spots on the carapace, orange spots on the neck, the little spotted turtle became a jewel-encrusted medallion. We felt fortunate to be able to study these two endangered species. As we left the marsh, over the din of the birds, we detected the subtle snores of three leopard frogs.

Four herp species in one March morning was quite an accomplishment. We wondered if there were other possibilities. Perhaps an eastern garter snake might be on the sand dunes at the provincial park, our next stop? Amongst the hundreds of song sparrows and dark-eyed juncos in the grassy openings of a conifer plantation, we studied a bright orange eastern comma, freshly emerged and our first butterfly of the year. Right on cue, a medium-sized garter snake crossed the path in front of us.

In early afternoon the skies became overcast and showers appeared imminent. Sun-loving reptiles would now seek cover but the moist conditions might appeal to amphibians. Leaving Long Point, we drove north past Walsingham. Here the flooded fields and swamps lining Big Creek often attract shorebirds and ducks. As we set the telescope up for closer studies of a flock of rusty blackbirds, a spear fisherman emerged from the swamp, three-pound northern pike still wriggling on his trident. Engaged in conversation with him, we almost overlooked the background music of western chorus

TWELVE HERPS (cont'd)

frogs, surely one of the most beautiful of the sounds of spring. We were to hear several more congresses of this tiny anuran later that day.

At the next river crossing Bob walked a few hundred metres uphill where a north-facing hemlock slope descended to an ice-covered oxbow. As I retrieved the vehicle and drove up to Bob, I wondered why he would waste time bird watching at such an unpropitious location. The answer was clear when I turned off the ignition and Bob announced, "wood frog". From a buttonwood swale below us we could hear the muttering conversation of about three individuals. The spring call of the wood frog has often been likened to the quack of a duck; to my mind it sounds more like gossiping characters out of a Thornton Burgess story. I do not hear wood frogs very often but when I do, their voices invariably make me chuckle. While we were savouring this experience a spring peeper began calling at the edge of the oxbow where a moat of water surrounded the ice. This was not the typical one-note peep but a short trill, an alternate call often used when spring peepers are just tuning up.

Eight herp species by late afternoon in one March day was an impressive accomplishment. At this point Bob mentioned that a friend had recently told him of an ephemeral (vernal) pond in Dundas Valley where breeding spotted salamanders had been observed. Bob had been to the site before and felt we could readily relocate it. Arming ourselves with flashlights, we arrived at the site about 7:30 p.m. and found the trail into the forest.

Dundas Valley is a very hilly area with mature forest bisected by deep ravines. A person could spend days exploring the complex on the lattice-work of footpaths. After we had spent some time negotiating the trails, guided only by the bright sky over Hamilton, Bob conceded that it had been twenty years since he was last here. The topography now seemed different; the pond could not be found. As we retraced our steps to the parking lot, Bob tried several times to reach his friend by cell phone. This was not a simple task. It involved squatting on the ground, using a flashlight to read the telephone notebook and dialing without stepping on his eyeglasses.

Back at the vehicle but still in the dark forest, we attempted the cell phone one last time. As we hunkered over the phone we heard a pack of panting hounds charging toward us. In fact, they were two yellow Labradors leashed to two very obliging gentlemen. After some cross-examination in which the dog-walkers suggested several potential sites, they recalled a small dugout still completely ice covered. For at least one person, their insistence on taking us to the site was blissful. Within ten minutes they had led us through the maze of intersecting trails to the site. It appeared to be an old borrow pit surrounded by forest. Much of the pond was still frozen with a narrow ribbon of open water about the edge. By walking around the perimeter and peering into the clear water we eventually found a spotted salamander that immediately took refuge under the leaf litter. We walked further around the edge to a larger area of open water. Here we discovered the mother lode of salamanders. Spotted salamanders in mating pursuits slithered into our view. At one time with my face a foot above the water I looked down on five big chubby spotted salamanders in courtship

TWELVE HERPS (cont'd)

dances only one inch below the surface. Camouflaged by the algae and waterweeds, they were readily distinguished by the regular chains of parallel yellow spots along the back and tail. Spotted salamanders return to their breeding ponds on rainy nights in early spring with males preceding the females by several days. These salamanders had been present for several days -- some females were in the process of laying eggs.

In the same patch of open water we noted Jefferson salamanders, a smaller species with an unmarked mud grey skin. On two occasions we observed "mating balls" of this species -- about eight individuals wrapped about each other, writhing and twisting as rival males competed to mate with a female.

In total we observed about 30 spotted salamanders and 25 Jefferson salamanders, probably a small fraction of the individuals present in the pond. Amongst them we also noted three eastern newts. As befits their more aquatic lifestyle, this species was streamlined and swam quickly through our field of view. Illuminated by our flashlights the orange spots could be seen against the green background in our close-focusing binoculars.

By this time it was 10 p.m. As we drove home I observed that eleven herp species in one March day was outstanding. Not so, Bob pointed out. Excited by the views of the hordes of mating salamanders, we had almost ignored the three frog tadpoles that wriggled through our view. The only frog species that over-winters as a tadpole in the Dundas Valley is the green frog.

For a March birding day in Ontario that had started out like so many others, observing twelve species of reptiles and amphibians was a personal feat and a day long to be cherished.

George Bryant

□

A naturalist is lucky in two respects. First, he enjoys every bit of the world about him and has a much more enriched life than someone who is not interested in nature.

Second, he can indulge his hobby in any place, at any time, for a naturalist will be fascinated to watch nature struggling to exist in the midst of a great city as well as observe its riotous splendour in a tropical forest. He can be equally interested and moved by the great herds on the African plains or by the earwigs in his back garden.

from THE BEST OF GERALD DURELL by Lee Durrell, Harper Collins Publishers, 1998



Discovery Walk in Glen Stewart Ravine

Beach-found china shard,
pattern worn by wave and sand,
blue-white mystery.

Haiku by Arthur Wade
Hanlan's, Summer, 1999

IN THE NEWS

GREEN GONE

In Pelham Bay Park in the Bronx -- at more than 2,700 acres, the second largest park in New York City -- there's a lot less nature than half a century ago.

In 1946-47 the park's plants were surveyed; from 1994 until 1998 the survey was repeated. In the intervening years, about a quarter of the native species disappeared, and the number of non-native rose by 40 percent. Nearly all of the 140 vanished native species were herbaceous (rather than woody); most used to grow in Pelham's meadows and wetlands.

Why did so many plants disappear? Expanded sports facilities, creation of a landfill, road construction, the natural shift from meadows to shrubland and forest, increasing soil acidity, non-native earthworms, summer droughts, pollution, herbicides, mowing, off-trail biking, arson -- and that's just the short list.

from "Samplings" in NATURAL HISTORY, Vol. 113, No. 10, Dec. 2004/Jan. 2005

BLACKOUT IS BEAUTIFUL

Remember the blackout of August 2003, which shut down power plants across much of the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada? For one group of chemists and meteorologists, that was a matchless opportunity to directly measure, not merely estimate, the air pollution caused by the plants' burning of fossil fuels.

Researchers compared air samples taken over central Pennsylvania a mere twenty-four hours into the blackout, with samples taken earlier that day over unaffected Maryland, as well as samples collected in 2002 over the same spot in Pennsylvania under similar weather conditions. The investigators report that during the blackout, levels of airborne sulfur dioxide -- a factor in respiratory illness, acid rain, and damage to architectural materials -- dropped by more than 90 percent, and low-altitude ozone by about 50 percent. Haze and smog decreased drastically as well, extending visibility by more than twenty-five miles. Road traffic stayed about the same, as did the amounts of its typical pollutants. Apparently, fossil-fuel-burning power plants generate more pollution, relative to vehicles, than had been estimated.

from "Samplings" in NATURAL HISTORY, Vol. 113, No. 9, Nov. 2004

Like many wilderness areas on Earth, the night sky is endangered by pollution -- not from air or water but from artificial lighting. Poorly designed or badly installed lighting wastes energy and not only swamps the stars, but also threatens the habitats of nocturnal wildlife.

from "Starspot" by Ian Ridpath in BBC WILDLIFE, Vol. 21, No. 10, Oct. 2003

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

GLOBAL WARMING

Some evidence of global warming: Plants worldwide are blooming an average of 5.2 days earlier per decade, and the opossum, an animal that confined its range to the South as recently as the Civil War, can now be found as far north as Ontario.

extracted from "Social Studies" by Michael Kesterton in the Globe & Mail, December 15, 2004

NEW ARCTIC ARRIVALS

Global warming is increasingly rendering Inuit and other Arctic peoples at a loss for words. They have plenty of ways of describing their own wildlife ... but none for, say, the European robin which is only now venturing north of the treeline. The Inuit are reduced to describing it as 'the bird with the red breast' in their language. Nor are there words for salmon, hornets and barn owls, all of which are appearing in the Arctic for the first time.

extracted from "Social Studies" by Michael Kesterton in the Globe & Mail, December 2, 2004

YES, IT'S WINTER

While the calendar indicates that winter will not begin until Dec. 21, meteorologists would say the season has already begun. The event on the calendar is the start of astronomical winter, when the direct rays of the sun shine on the Tropic of Capricorn, a latitude 23.5 degrees south of the Equator. For the purposes of official climate records, winter begins Dec. 2 and will end on Feb. 28, 2005. In most of the northern United States, by another unofficial measurement, winter begins on Dec. 5, the start of the coldest 90-day period of the year.

extracted from "Social Studies" by Michael Kesterton in the Globe & Mail, December 6, 2004

THE EXPERTS SAY

One way to deal with geese and other birds who hang around an airport is to let the grass grow about 18 inches tall. They hate it because they can't walk through it and, not only that, they can't see their predators.

extracted from "Social Studies" by Michael Kesterton in the Globe & Mail, October 28, 2004

IT'S A SQUID PLANET?

Giant squid are taking over the world - well, at least the oceans - and they are getting bigger. According to scientists, squid have overtaken humans in terms of total biomass. That means they take up more space on the planet than us. The reason has been put down to over-fishing of other species and climate change.

extracted from "Social Studies" by Michael Kesterton in the Globe & Mail, November 16, 2004

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IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

THE RUSH TO FILL OUR GARDENS WITH EXOTIC PLANTS CARRIES A HIDDEN DANGER

Vast amounts of time and money are going into making sure that Mars missions do not export potentially deadly micro-organisms from Earth. Unfortunately, these wholly sensible interplanetary precautions have not been adopted closer to home. Here on Earth, many inhabitants are facing the very real prospect of annihilation by alien pathogens. The cavalier way we move millions of plants from one continent to another shows scant regard for the health of forests and other ecosystems. History has shown that importing exotic pathogens to places where plants have no resistance to them can spell disaster. Almost every serious epidemic of plant disease, from potato blight to Dutch elm disease and now the sudden oak death, was the result of moving infected plants or timber around the world. We know from bitter experience that bringing species together that would not normally meet can be disastrous -- diseases such as SARS, bird flu and HIV all emerged this way. Species that have evolved together tend to achieve a balance: left in their natural habitat, most plant pathogens cause mild diseases in their hosts. But let them loose among strange species and they can turn into serial killers.

In the world of emerging plant diseases, the main risk comes from the plant trade. Gardening itself has grown to epidemic proportions, and countries as far apart as China and South Africa, New Zealand and the Netherlands have established vast industries to feed the demand for exotic plants. Though safeguards are in place aimed at preventing pathogens arriving with the plants, it is clear that they do not work.

The simplest way to prevent new epidemics is to stop the mass transport of plants altogether. That doesn't mean forcing gardeners to shun exotics in favour of native plants -- although that might be no bad thing. But it does mean big changes in the horticulture industry. Prices would inevitably soar. But what price our native ecosystems?

extracted from "Editorial" in NEWSIDENTIST, June 5-11, 2004

HOW BIRDS THAT BANISH BUGS RAISE MORE CHICKS

Numerous species, including hummingbirds, collect specific aromatic leaves to line their nests. Often they leave their territories to locate the right greenery and replace the leaves daily. Previous research showed that leaves had a protective effect. Yarrow, for instance, is known to deter mosquitoes. But until now, no one had looked at how they might affect bacteria. Bacteria from wild birds were exposed to volatile chemicals from crushed plants including birch, oak and juniper leaves, yarrow, horsetail, lichen, dandelion and wild carrot -- all used by wild birds. Sure enough, the leaf compounds stopped the microbes from growing.

extracted from an article in NEWSIDENTIST, June 5-11, 2004

WHEN "CONSERVATION" ACTS, CONSERVATION'S AXED.

an "old saying" according to Ron Scovell

[See "cormorant issue"
on pages 5 & 8.]

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

SHARP ACOUSTIC SENSES PREVENTED CARNAGE

Many animals seem to have avoided the tsunami, thanks to acoustic senses that are far more advanced than those of humans. Experts attribute the apparent ability of animals to sense danger to an acute sense of hearing that enables them to detect extremely low frequencies, rather than some sixth sense.

In anything to do with vibrations, seismic shocks or sound waves, animals have capabilities which we do not. Elephants have infrasound communication. They can pick up these sounds at very great distances, from dozens of kilometres away. Infrasound is the term for low frequency noise, usually below 20 hertz, that is below the human threshold of hearing.

Elephants are not alone in the ability to sense a threat through vibration. Rabbits and other four-footed creatures are able to sense danger through vibrations in the ground, and bats, which use a form of sonar, bouncing a sound signal off objects to locate their position, are believed to detect danger through the slight change in the signal when an object vibrates.

Other animals that have developed highly sophisticated non-acoustic sensors include the pigeon, which is sensitive to changes in atmospheric pressure, and migrating birds and bees, which have a tiny but highly accurate internal compass that reacts to changes in Earth's magnetic field.

extracted from an article by Annick Chapoy in the National Post, January 5, 2005

CANADA IS RISING

Researchers have been using global positioning system (GPS) technology to map the way North America is slowly bringing itself back to equilibrium since the glaciers that once blanketed the area melted about 12,000 years ago. Based on 10 years of readings at 200 locations, the land in Canada and the northern parts of the Great Lakes is slowly rising - and like a see-saw, Chicago is sinking. Hudson Bay is rising about 10 millimetres a year, and Chicago is subsiding about one millimeter a year. Harbours are getting shallower on the Canadian side and deeper on the U.S. side. Canadians will have the illusion that the water table is dropping, when in reality the land is rising.

from "Social Studies" by M. Kesterton in the GLOBE & MAIL, June 1, 2004

What a pleasant shock!
The sunset a pastel one
in the falling snow.

Haiku by Diana Banville
January 9, 1999

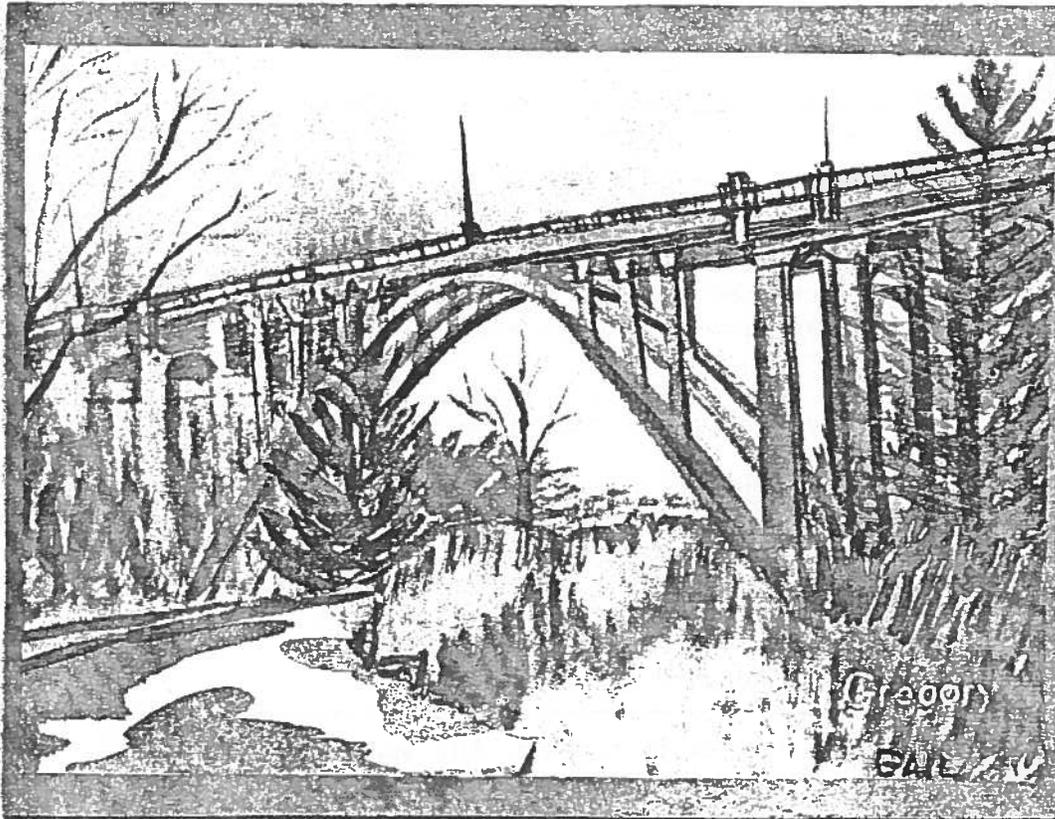
IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

A GOOD SOAKING

That vegetation slows down the rate at which water drains into rivers is commonplace. But data on how effectively different sorts of vegetation, other than mature forests, do this are surprisingly sparse. However, in sheep country, and on sloping, heavily grazed turf researchers found that the "soak in" rate was close to zero, in other words, all of the rain ran quickly off the surface into nearby streams. No surprise there. In less heavily grazed pasture, the soak-in rate averaged 10 cm (4 inches) an hour; good, but not spectacular. However, in areas planted with young, broad-leaved trees -- and with no livestock grazing -- it was up to an impressive 80 cm an hour when the trees were only seven years old. Indeed, even two-year-old trees made a perceptible difference.

This research suggests that planting trees, and even converting billiard tablelike swards of closely cropped pasture back to bushy moorland, could slow the rate of run-off into streams and rivers much more rapidly than previously suspected.

from an article in THE ECONOMIST, Oct. 23, 2004



Woodbine Bridge at O'Connor Dr., a hasti note (originally in colour)
by Gail Gregory

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

THE LEAFY STREETS OF TORONTO

The parks system in Toronto is one of the most extensive and sophisticated in North America. There are 55 kilometres of managed hiking/biking trails in the city -- if laid end to end, they would reach from the lakeshore to Newmarket. There are more than 8,000 hectares of parkland that provide essential public access to play, entertain and otherwise enjoy nature.

from an article by Mark Cullen in the NATIONAL POST, Sept. 18, 2004

THE RIGHT QUESTIONS NOT ASKED

Salamanders have special requirements. They need moist conditions, especially in leaf litter or rotting logs, because for the most part they don't drink water -- they absorb it through their skin.

They require a healthy forest canopy to keep out direct sunlight, which can dry up their habitat, and a nearby pond or wetland rich in aquatic life where eggs can be laid and larvae (the salamander version of tadpoles) can develop. Water tables have to be sufficiently high to maintain ponds and wetlands. Finally, there should be no pesticide or fertilizer runoff, which salamanders immediately absorb through their skin.

Put these requirements together and you have a vibrant forest ecosystem. Salamanders serve as nature's emissaries.

from an article by Cameron Smith in the TORONTO STAR, Oct. 30, 2004

GRAND CANYON FLOODED TO SAVE HABITAT

Scientists flooded the Grand Canyon yesterday to restore beaches and save fish and plants that have been disappearing since sediment-free water began flowing from a man-made dam 40 years ago. A torrent of water raced down the Colorado River and into the canyon, carrying badly needed natural sediment with it. An estimated 800,000 tonnes of sediment were expected to be stirred up during the 90-hour high-flow test.

Four decades ago, before the dam was built, flooding built up backwaters, eddies and sandbars with silt distributed from the Colorado's tributaries. The construction of Glen Canyon dam upstream forever altered the canyon. Twenty experiments will be conducted during the test, including archeological, biological and hydrological studies.

from an article in the TORONTO STAR, Nov. 22, 2004

The fundamental problem the planet faces is the enormous increase in the human population. You see it overrunning everywhere.

from "It's a wonderful life" [an interview with David Attenborough] by Michael Bond in NEWSIDENTIST, Dec. 14, 2002

IN THE NEWS (cont'd)

RAVENS AND RESEARCHERS BATTLE WITS IN CHILLY ALASKA

Ravens survive the brutal cold of Alaska's North Slope by caching food, scavenging scrap from oil fields, and apparently by telling time, showing up when humans are mostly likely to leave food unguarded.

The ravens' breeding cycle starts sometime in late March, long before the snow melts on the North Slope, the vast treeless plain north of the Brooks Range on the Beaufort Sea where nearly 20 per cent of the United States' domestic oil is produced. It's still 30 below and females are laying and incubating eggs. Without twigs, ravens use what's handy to build nests. They're relying on industrial materials - welding rods, plastic cable ties, copper wire, survey stakes.

Ravens have nothing natural to hunt at that time of year and probably rely on food they've cached. Structures in the oil field give them an opportunity to store food off the ground and away from the arctic fox. As the snow melts, ravens waddle along the tundra hunting lemmings. When migratory birds show up, the ravens become predators, flying off with eggs or chicks in their beaks.

At one oil production unit, ravens would meet a cargo plane. They won't be out there all day, and then five minutes before the plane is scheduled to land, the ravens come in and they're by the runway and they wait. What happens is when they unload crates of food off of the plane, the ravens immediately descend upon these crates of food and start ripping open the packaging to get at the food. Despite oil companies' best efforts to keep food from wild animals, ravens show up for crew shift changes, when many people are walking outside and there's a greater potential for food to be dropped.

A Christmas bird count started in 1987 at the Prudhoe Bay landfill was the first indication that raven numbers were increasing. Raven numbers, like those of some other predators, were inflated around areas of high human activity. There are predators on the North Slope that for all purposes can be called subsidized predators. That includes grizzly bears, arctic fox and glaucous gulls - scavenging species that can benefit from human food or structures. Except for a few river bluffs, the North Slope lacks the high natural structures that ravens prefer for nesting. That may have limited their range in the far north until oil companies erected pipe and buildings.

from an article in the TORONTO STAR, January 17th, 2005

□

THESE PARKS ARE THE PROPERTY OF TORONTO
AND ARE PROTECTED BY THE PEOPLE OF TORONTO.

suggested sign for Toronto parks

THE WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

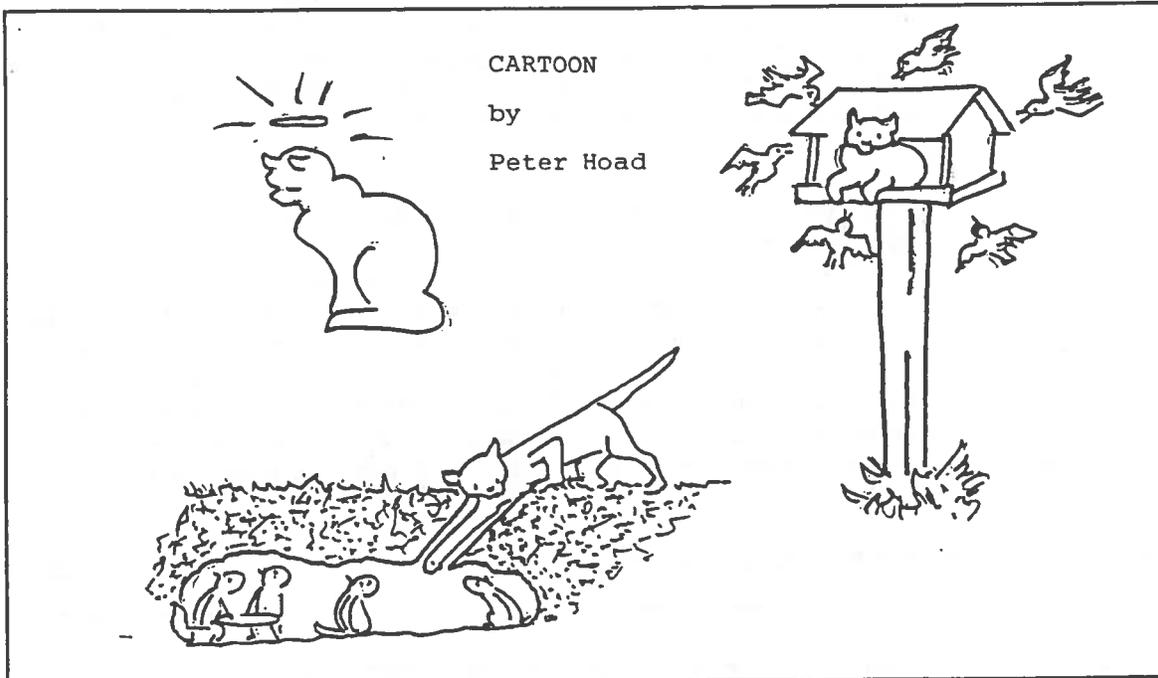
March 2004, Toronto

March was mild, cloudy and wet overall. The mean monthly temperature was 3.2°C downtown and 2.3°C at Pearson Airport, the warmest for March since 2000 and about the same average as for March 1998 (a month which had an extraordinary March heat wave). The average was about 2°C above normal. Precipitation was mostly in the form of rain, and mostly early in the month. Pearson Airport had the wettest March since 1998 with 63.4 mm total precipitation. Snowfall was uneventfully light.

Sunshine at Pearson Airport was only 93.8 hours, making this the cloudiest March since 1953 (89.3 hours).

The month began with the intense thaw continuing from February. A warm front on March 5th was preceded by heavy rain. This basically eliminated the snow pack for the season. Temperatures rose to a record-breaking 18.8°C downtown and 18.5°C at Pearson Airport, the earliest readings above 18°C ever recorded. Thereafter, it cooled down and there was fairly cold weather with frequent negative daytime readings from March 16th - 22nd. The final part of the month brought a return to mild, cloudy and moderately wet weather.

Gavin Miller



▶ Please keep your cat indoors or in a safe, enclosed OUTDOOR KENNEL.
Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Cats in Kennels, P.O. Box 436,
Minden, Ont. KOM 2K0.

COMING EVENTS

Toronto Ornithological Club - Jim Baillie Memorial bird walks - aimed at the intermediate birder, but beginners are also welcome. Free.

- Sat. March 5 from 9 am (all day) with Ron Scovell to see waterfowl from Toronto to Burlington. Meet in the parking lot at Humber Bay East to car pool. Bring a lunch and dress warmly.

Niagara Peninsula Hawkwatch - March 1 to May 15 at Beamer Memorial Conservation Authority (above Grimsby).

Citizens Concerned About the Future of the Etobicoke Waterfront

- Thurs. March 10 at 7 pm at LAMP, 185 Fifth St. - Annual General Meeting which includes a presentation by Glenn Coady about Arctic Birds. Call 416-252-7047 for more information.

High Park Sunday Afternoon Walking Tours

- March 6 - Monuments and Sculptures in the Park
 - March 20 - Looking for Signs of Spring
- Walks begin at 1:30 pm just south of the Grenadier Restaurant in the park and last for 1½ to 2 hours. Donation of \$2 expected.

Toronto Entomologists' Association

- March 19 at 1 pm - Student Symposium in Room 432, Ramsay Wright Bldg., southwest corner St. George & Harbord. For more information call 905-727-6993.

Rouge Valley Conservation Centre

- March 13 - a walk
 - March 27 - a walk in the Central Rouge Park
- All walks begin at 1:30 pm at the Pearse House and last about 2 hours. Walks go rain or shine and are free (but donations accepted); families are welcome; dogs are not. Call 416-282-8265 for more details.

Ian Wheal Heritage Walks

- Sat. March 5 at 2 pm - Lower Russell Creek. Meet at the northeast corner of Front St. West and Simcoe St.
 - Sun. March 27 at 2 pm - Toronto's Railway Frontier. Meet at the northeast corner of Eglinton Ave. West and Caledonia Rd.
- Call 416-570-6415 to confirm.

Canada Blooms (March 9-13) See page 7. □

THIS MONTH'S COVER

Anne Léon drew this scene of Highland Creek Valley from Botany Hill Park, south of Ellesmere Rd. and east of Orton Park Rd. during a TFN Nature Arts outing.

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TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB:	INDEX OF TFN NEWSLETTERS (1938 to present)..... \$10.00
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Survey #3 - Chapman Valley Ravine, 1975	butterflies, other invertebrates, mosses, other plants).....
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Survey #5 - Park Drive Ravine, 1976	HUMBER FORKS AT THISTLETOWN, 2000.....
Survey #6 - Burke Ravine, 1976	\$ 4.00
Survey #7 - Taylor Creek-Woodbine Bridge	NO G.S.T.
Ravines, 1977	All publications may be ordered from Toronto Field Naturalists,
Survey #8 - West Don Valley, 1978	2 Carlton St., #1519, Toronto, Ontario M5B 1J3. (Add \$2.00 per item
	for postage and handling).

Please note: It has always been the policy of the Toronto Field Naturalists not to give out its membership list.

MEMBERSHIP FEES (No G.S.T.)

\$30 FAMILY (2 adults - same address, children included)

\$25 SINGLE, SENIOR FAMILY

\$20 STUDENT, SENIOR SINGLE

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