

THE
BRODIE
CLUB



ROYAL ONTARIO
MUSEUM OF ZOOLOGY

THE 1,022 MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB

The 1,022nd Meeting of the Brodie Club was held at 7:30 pm on Sept. 16, 2008 in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Laboratories of the University of Toronto.

Chair: Jean Iron
Secretary: Ann Falls

The meeting was attended by 26 members and 2 guests:

Alison Tasker, guest of Ron Tasker

Brenda Gibson, guest of John Sparling

Regrets: William Rapley, who was attending the annual AZA meeting in Milwaukee and the two Addisons who were touring Australia.

Announcements:

Elections will be held at the next meeting. Volunteers are always welcome for all positions, especially that of secretary (sic!).

The incumbents are:

- Secretary: Oliver Bertin, with help from many other members (thank you)
- Treasurer: Aarne Juhola
- Membership Committee: George Bryant, Ann Falls, Kevin Seymour, Jennifer Young
- Program Committee: Ed Addison, Hugh Currie, Bruce Falls, Jock McAndrews, Jim Rising
- FON (Ontario Nature) Representative: Trudy Rising
- Archives: Alexandra Eadie, Kevin Seymour

Aarne Juhola is collecting this year's dues – \$10 for individuals and \$15 for couples. The club's finances are in good shape with more than \$1,000 in the bank.

The American Fisheries Society presented John Casselman with its highest honour recently in Ottawa. The Award of Excellence recognizes outstanding contributions to fishery science and aquatic biology.

Jean Iron will speak at the next meeting about Akimiski Island where she spent part of the past summer.

Program:

Six members gave presentations.

Bob Curry provided the following notes. He illustrated his talk with excellent photographs taken by two fellow passengers in his pelagic trip.

Brodie Club members Bob Curry and Glenda Slessor accompanied by three friends took a five-day trip to North Carolina from 27 – 31 May 2008. Raison d’etre and highlight of the trip were the two “pelagics” with Brian Pattison. These are birdwatching trips out into the Gulf Stream, which passes relatively close to shore off Cape Hatteras.

These trips last close to 12 hours and are not for the faint of heart. Brian’s boat, the Stormy Petrel plies rather quickly out to about 30 miles offshore and then follows the edge of the warm Gulf Stream waters – as do the birds – as it meanders northeast.

We picked the end of May to maximize opportunities for seeing the greatest variety of seabirds. On May 28, there was a strong north wind, driving rain and very rough seas. Nevertheless, despite very difficult conditions and mal de mer suffered by many, some marvelous seabirds were encountered. On May 30, it was sunny warm and calm. The pleasant conditions did not diminish the birds.

Seabirds from several families and sub-families were observed, including three species of storm-petrels (Hydrobatidae); five species of shearwaters, four species of petrels (Procellariidae) and five other ocean-going species.

Specific highlights were a Bermuda Petrel (*Pterodroma cahow*), a species thought to be extinct but rediscovered in 1951, Fea’s Petrel (*P. feae*), which breeds in the Cape Verde and Madeira Islands, and Trindade Petrel (*P. arminjoniana*), which breeds in the South Atlantic Ocean on the Trindade Islands well off the coast of Brazil.



Bermuda Petrel

George Bryant recounted natural history observations of the past summer that were new to various lists that he keeps, and showed a reference book for each. He provided these notes.

Summer Highlights / New species or observations

May 8—Bruce Trail near Owen Sound—Wild Turkey nest with 16 eggs—
ref. Harrison Bird Nests, Eggs and Nestlings
May 15—Point Pelee—Kirtland's Warbler—ref. new Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas
June 4—Ouimet Canyon—Red-backed Vole—ref. new Peterson Mammal Guide
June 5—Rainy River sewage lagoon—38 Wilson's phalarope—personal high count
June 7—Lyleton, Manitoba—Western Grebe Penguin Dance—ref. Sibley: Guide to Bird Behaviour
June 14—Penticton, B.C.—Flammulated Scops-Owl—ref. Dick Cannings: Enchantment of Birds
June 22—Hwy. 17 @ Kenora—Sedum aizoon—ref. Fitter: Wildflowers
June 24—Pukaskwa N.P.—Sparrow's Egg/Franklin's Ladies'-slipper—ref. Whiting and Catling: Orchids of Ontario
June 24—Pukaskwa N.P.—Black Crowberry—ref. Soper and Heiburger: Shrubs of Ontario
June 25—Marathon—Dead Moose—Life dor (=dead on road)
June 30—Gravenhurst—Locust Underwing—ref: Quebec Moth Guide
July 6—Bala Butterfly count—Indian Skipper—ref. Kaufmann: Butterfly Guide
July 14—Parry Sound—Cyrano Darner—ref. Colin Jones Dragonflies of Algonquin Park
July 21—Cottage—Pickerelweed—Elegant Spreadwing—Ed Lam: Damselflies
July 31—Torrance Barrens—Coral-winged Grasshopper—ref. Capinera et al: Orthoptera of the United States
August 9—Glenora Ferry Landing—Round Goby—ref. Erling Holm: ROM Guide to Freshwater Fishes of Ontario
August 10—Prince Edward County—Tiger Mosquito— ref. S. Marshall: Insects of North America
August 15—Deschenes Rapids, Ottawa— Horn-leaf Riverweed (*Podostemum ceratophyllum*)—
ref. Ontario Plant List
August 16—Voyageur Park—Water Chestnut (*Trapa napeolans*)—ref. Firefly Plant Families of the World

Fred Bodsworth talked about and showed photographs of a visit to southern Saskatchewan in late June. He visited the Chaplin Nature Centre at Chaplin Lake on the Trans-Canada Highway between Swift Current and Moosejaw. It is a Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve, one of only two in Canada. There are lakes, marshes and salt flats. Large numbers of brine shrimp provide food for shorebirds. In the spring and fall, there are large numbers of migrants, which are monitored by CWS. It is a major nesting area for Piping Plover. There is also commercial salt production. A shuttle bus takes visitors around the dykes.

He found Avocets, Marbled Godwits and Wilson's Phalaropes were abundant breeders, including one flock of 100 phalaropes, but most of the Piping Plovers didn't remain this spring because of extremely low water in May. Also seen were Yellow-headed Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Brewer's Blackbird, Swainson's Hawk and Ferruginous Hawk.

He also visited Grasslands National Park on the U.S. border. There he saw a Bison rubbing stone – an erratic boulder worn smooth by bison over the centuries. Nearby he saw tent rings. He also saw Prairie Dogs and cacti, but missed the hoped-for Long-billed Curlew.

Visiting Sioux Lookout on his way home, Fred saw a colony of Red-necked Grebes right in the town. Water was very high this year. He also saw three Bald Eagles' nests. Large Silk Moths were abundant. In this area, Moose with young are a serious hazard on the highway.



Red-necked Grebe

Q: Why are there so few silk moths in southern Ontario?

A: Bob Curry suggested light pollution was a problem. Bryant suggested looking in June.

Ken Abraham (from his notes)

Ken Abraham spoke about caribou along the Ontario coasts of Hudson Bay and James Bay. The Pen Island herd contained at least 12,000 animals in mid-summer 1997. Evidence of a decline or re-distribution of the Pen Island has been accumulating for a few years, but comprehensive surveys have not been undertaken. This year, as part of a broader inventory of caribou in Ontario, the MNR conducted surveys to determine the current distribution of caribou during the calving period and to get a count of the animals in the post-calving aggregations. Ken described the preliminary results of those surveys.

In late May (24-27), a survey by Twin Otter tallied approximately 400 animals, most of which were found on tundra ridges south of Cape Henrietta Maria. Calving had only just begun by the third day of the survey. In early July (11-15), a survey by helicopter undertook to cover the whole coast and photograph all the herds that were located. Although the photographs haven't all been analysed, a preliminary count indicates between 3,000 and 4,000 animals (all ages and sexes combined). About 20% of the total were calves born this spring. More than 90% of the animals were in Polar Bear Provincial Park, again near Cape Henrietta Maria. Fewer than 200 animals were seen in the former calving and post-calving range of the Pen Islands herd on both surveys. It seems clear that a major re-distribution of caribou along the Hudson Bay coast has occurred over the past 10 years, although the processes involved and the causes are not yet clear.

Ken also spoke about a trip he took to Southampton Island with the Canadian Wildlife Service as a volunteer to band geese. He went with Jim Leafloor, formerly the Moosonee Waterfowl Biologist with MNR, to band four species of geese. That part of the trip was very successful, as they banded 950 Cackling Geese, 3,500 Snow Geese, 650 Ross's Geese and 900 Atlantic Brant.

Ken worked on Southampton Island in 1979 and 1980, and 1994. The lowlands were a major Atlantic Brant nesting area at that time. Ken has maintained his interest in Brant ecology and part of his reason for going to Southampton Island was to assess their status first hand. Unlike larger-bodied species of geese that incubate using stored nutrient reserves, Brant have only enough reserves to lay clutches of eggs and incubate for about a week to 10 days. Brant nest in the coastal turf zone because the females need to feed of these grasses and sedges during incubation. Information from some recent CWS work on the island indicated that Brant were no longer nesting in significant numbers.

The banding crew found a significant number of yearlings among the adults they caught at Native Point and East Bay. They also found that nearly all of the females had brood patches, indicative of nesting attempts. Ken hypothesizes that the Brant may indeed, still be nesting in good numbers, but that they are unsuccessful either because they run out of energy before completing incubation, or because the goslings do not thrive. Ken found that the lowland sedge habitats of the southern part of the island have deteriorated significantly over the period during which both snow geese and caribou have increased exponentially. Currently, it is estimated that there are more than 700,000 snow geese (compared to 200,000 in 1979) and 18,000 caribou compared to about 5,000 in 1979 are on the island. Some areas were vast expanses of dry and dying moss, others were extremely close-cropped but sparse sedges, and of note was the absence of lichens over vast areas of upland ridges. Ken and his colleagues visited his former study areas and found them to be almost completely de-vegetated and hyper-saline. He hopes to return there in 2009 and 2010 to undertake quantified surveys of both nesting Brant and their habitats.

Bill Crins spoke about an 11-day trip to Guatemala (24 Mar-4 Apr 2008), led by Peter Burke and Colin Jones. He visited Tikal first (on the Caribbean side of the country) and then several other sites on the Pacific slope. He showed views of the impressive Mayan ruins – some 40 are excavated but there are hundreds more unexcavated. He also showed pictures of a Tarantula, Bare-throated Tiger Heron, and Ocellated Turkey. He saw the rare Orange-breasted Falcon on one of the ruins and in adjacent trees. After Tikal the group headed toward Monterrico on the Pacific coast, which is in a hot, dry forest. On the way, they visited Cerro de Alux, an oak-cypress forest, and then La Antigua, an old colonial city that was formerly the capital of Guatemala. It is surrounded by three very large volcanoes. Severe damage from earthquakes prompted the move to the present capital – Guatemala City.

Following the visit to La Antigua, the group visited Finca El Pilar, where Mountain Pygmy Owl was observed and photographed. In the Monterrico area, among many interesting birds, several reptiles were observed, and photographs were shown of a Basilisk lizard and a skink. The group then moved north along the Pacific slope of Volcan Atitlan and stayed at two different farms (Finca Los Andes and Finca Los Tarrales) where highlights were Resplendant Quetzal and the southern Mexican – northern Guatemalan endemic Horned Guan (the guan required a great deal of effort, including a long climb up the mountain, and searching in several of the usual roosting locations before it was found). The habitat of the Horned Guan had been decimated by a hurricane a couple of years previous to this trip, and none had been seen for about three months prior to this trip, but the group was lucky to see one bird at ca. 2100 m asl, lower than the usual 2500 m or so.

On the return leg toward Guatemala City, the group visited the town of Panajachel, and then stopped at a pine-oak forest at Corazon del Bosque where they saw one of the other southern Mexican – northern Guatemalan endemics, the Pink-headed Warbler. In total, the group bird list was more than 400 while Bill's was 350+.

John Sparling

In his garden, Sparling observed a leaf-cutting bee (*Megachile* sp.) removing circular pieces of Hibiscus leaf and storing them in a hole in his garage. He took a remarkable series of excellent digital photos seconds apart that revealed the whole process – the bee rapidly cutting the circle and folding it against the abdomen so that it could be transported held firmly by its legs. The bees store the leaf pieces with pollen and nectar to provide food for their young.

The meeting adjourned at 9.50 pm.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be held at 7:30 pm on Oct. 21, 2008 in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Zoological Laboratories. The speaker will be Jean Iron, assisted by Ken Abraham, who will talk on Akimiski Island.

European Starlings

By Yorke Edwards

Our Western Correspondent

The first starlings in North America were sent from Japan to someone living in New York City. There, the starlings were set free and they slowly spread into many regions. They were soon living in areas south, north and west as far as the sea.

They first crossed western Canada about 1945, living on many southern farms and in villages and cities as they moved slowly across. They spread westward, many staying on farms and towns, while others

continued across the flatlands and through the Rocky Mountains. Many spread onward through forests and grasslands and then around mountains, and sometimes along rivers. When they reached the sea, some went to western islands and some went north into Alaska.

I saw my first starling in central British Columbia in about 1947 at the edge of a long and

narrow lake. It was flying west. Some years later, I saw some going west across the tiny, treeless bit of desert in the Okanagan Valley. There they were, half way across British Columbia. The same thing was probably happening in the United States to the south.

A few years later, starlings arrived by the sea, in the city of Vancouver. The first one

reported in Victoria was in about 1956, seen by a natural history teacher downtown. In a few years, they were scattered across Victoria city, and soon over the rest of Vancouver Island. They became the most numerous birds about our homes.



Starlings have sharp bills, good for catching insects on the leaves of trees, or picking them up in the grass. In many cities, they soon had nests scattered in trees, on houses, even going into holes in downtown buildings. In summer, their family groups can be seen hunting on our lawns through July and August. Through our winters, they fly about in groups, sometimes

in large flocks just wandering about. Often they feed on the grass beside houses. There they get good food in many places, eating worms and insects from our lawns.

There are many kinds of “starlings” in Europe, Asia and Africa, some living in large cities. Some species have yellow, orange or white markings on generally dark plumage. Last August, I saw about forty together. Most were coloured black with spots of white, but with

them were young ones, dark brown with a few spots of white. When I see them, I often remember that they are probably the most numerous birds in all our cities.

Note: Yorke’s account reminded me that in 1945, when I was in the RCAF in Penhold, Alta., I saw what local naturalists said was the first starling observed in the province. It was on a grain elevator. A couple of years later, Yorke was seeing them in British Columbia: Bruce Falls.

And, last but by no means least,
Happy Birthday, Fred!



Ron Tasker, (left to right), Erica Dunn, Fred Bodsworth, Gerald McKeating, Bruce Falls and Roger Tory Peterson in 1982.