

MINUTES OF THE 847TH MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB

21 February 1989

Ann Falls chaired the meeting which was attended by 14 members and 7 guests. John Reynolds acted as Recording Secretary.

Members Present P. Aird, J. Bendell, F. Bodsworth, A. Boissoneau, W. Carrick, A. Falls, B. Falls, R. James, K. Reading, J. Reynolds, J. Riley, H. Savage, J. Speakman, R. Tasker

Guests Yvonne Bendell (guest of Bendell), Margaret Bodsworth (Bodsworth), Isabelle Côté (Reynolds), Bronwyn Morund (Carrick), Steve Price (Riley), Betty Speakman (Speakman), Mary Tasker (Tasker)

Regrets S. McKay-Kuja, Norm Martin, Norma Martin, D. Sherry, S. Varga, D. Young

Minutes of Previous Meeting The minutes were adopted on a motion by Tasker, following one amendment by Carrick (Least Weasel changed to Ermine).

Announcements

Riley mentioned a profile of C.H.D. Clarke from a recent issue of the journal "Arctic".

Carrick mentioned that the Trumpeter Swan Society is requesting funds to support a population of swans facing a tough winter at Jackson Hole. He added that eastern populations are being reintroduced in five states plus Ontario.

Treasurer Speakman noted that our funds are nearly exhausted, due largely to expenses incurred with our monthly mailings, which cost \$8.00 per member annually. We agreed upon a motion by Bruce Falls to request \$10.00 from each member, in order to cover this expense as well as our F.O.N membership fee.

Savage presented his latest compilation of Brodie Club speakers and topics, covering September 1948 to May 1958. Copies are enclosed with this mailing.

Notes and Observations

Savage has a catalogue of rare books entitled Milestones of Science, from the Buffalo Science Museum.

Speakman heard a robin singing at Cedarvale on 30 January and has heard Song Sparrows singing for the past few weeks, perhaps due to the mild winter. Anne Falls added that she saw an eastern chipmunk in February, and Tasker recorded an Eastern Phoebe on 11 February. Tasker also noted the presence of Ontario's third Rock Wren, at the foot of Kipling Ave. since 13 February.

Boissoneau saw an introduced Trumpeter Swan with three Mute Swans on the lakefront at the Humber River, and Bruce Falls saw two more (#'s 24 and 25) at Whitby Harbour.

Aird mentioned a Northern Flicker wintering in Hudson, Quebec, 30 miles west of Montreal. He also noted the U.S. Forestry Service's recent report on Kirtland's Warblers. There are 207 known birds in Michigan, up from 167 the year before. A preliminary search in Wisconsin last summer turned up 8 more, all singing males, 4 in each of 2 locations.

Carrick mentioned a Peregrine Falcon that has been seen on the waterfront. The bird was a refugee from a release program in Detroit.

Speaker

Ron Tasker gave a presentation on a natural history trip that he and Mary took in the U.S.S.R. from May 28th to June 22nd, 1988. The trip, organized by Birdquest Ltd. of England, covered an assortment of natural regions in a country that few naturalists have discovered. Ron and Mary overcame numerous minor irritations including ticks, sheep, and Ronald Reagan (who was visiting Moscow at the time) to rack up 300 of the 850 species of birds that occur in the U.S.S.R.

The first major stop was Tbilisi in the state of Georgia. A park there called St. David's Hill offered a spectacular view of the Mediterranean, as well as numerous Egyptian Vultures. Minerali Vodhi was then reached by plane rather than by bus to avoid mudslides on the highways. There, Ron and Mary discovered that massive sheep migrations can be nearly as effective at impeding earnest naturalists as mudslides. Areas visited included the Terek River, where the first Terek's Sandpipers had been collected (in migration). The fabled 120-year-old people of the Soviet Union also live in this area.

This route led to the the town of Kazbegi, under the peak of Mt. Kazbegi, the highest mountain in the Caucasus. The area yielded Mountain Chiffchaffs, Caucasian Snowcocks, Scarlet Rosefinches and numerous Lammergeiers. Next came a flight to Tashkent in the south. This is a desert city, irrigated with water from the Himalayas. Birds seen in this vicinity included Turkestan Tits, Paradise Flycatchers, Rollers, Hoopoes, and nesting Penduline Tits. At the snowline in the Timshan Mountains Ron and Mary encountered a stunning array of butterflies and wildflowers, and were undaunted by numerous memorials commemorating hikers who had died there.

From Tashkent the destination was Frunze, which served as a base for explorations of the Alma Archa Gorge. This offered a Tengmalm's Owl in a nest box, and Himalayan Rubythroats. On a subsequent bus trip to Alma Ata, Ron and Mary passed through a short-grass prairie habitat that bore a striking resemblance to the foothills of Alberta, except for the Calandra Larks and Isabellian Wheatears. From Alma Ata, Ron and Mary visited Medeo to see a pair of nesting Ibisbill. At prairie sloughs in Tselinograd, the skies were filled with planeloads of practicing paratroopers plummeting to the ground. This didn't preclude observations of European Stilts, European Avocets, Citrilline Wagtails, Mute Swans (real ones), or the noble Red-necked Phalarope. In Tselinograd our speaker braved fermented mare's milk

(a local favourite). Then during the return trip to Alma Ata he and Mary endured a delay caused by a rocket launching. One evidently learns to take such things in stride in the Soviet Union.

Ron and Mary next flew to Bratsk to explore taiga habitat. There they were met by Three-toed Woodpeckers, Crested Honeybuzzards, Eurasian Nightjars, Black Grouse, and numerous flowering plants including species of Mertensia, Phlox, Pasqueflower, and Eurasian Columbine. After a pause in Irkutsk for birds such as Siberian Rubythroats and Siberian Accentors, Ron and Mary took a bus trip to Lake Baikal. This lake, which is 700 km long and 1.5 or more km deep, was formerly part of the ocean before being pinched off by continental drift. Fully 85% of the life there is endemic, including a species of landlocked seal. Unfortunately, populations of local Baikal Teal are crashing for some reason.

Back in Irkutsk, Ron and Mary saw rare Asiatic Dowitchers in a marsh that is facing increasing encroachment by the city. There is local concern about the loss of this significant marsh, and the members of the tour accepted a request to appear on television to explain why such places were worth conserving. From Irkutsk they flew back to Moscow, and then home.

During the ensuing discussion Ron recommended Flint's Birds of the U.S.S.R. as the best field guide available. Specific permission was necessary for all of the places Ron and Mary visited; this had been arranged by the Birdquest organizers in conjunction with the Soviet tourist bureau, which had representatives on all parts of the tour. Birdquest specializes in tours to offbeat locations; their address is Birdquest Ltd., 2 Jays Kempel End, Birdy Brow, Stoneyhurst, Lancashire, BB6 9QY.

Fred Bodsworth thanked the speaker, noting that things have clearly improved since his first birding trip to the Soviet Union, when he found himself booked into a three-day poultry convention in Kiev! We all joined Fred in thanking Mary and Ron for a rare glimpse into the natural history of the U.S.S.R.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 p.m.