

THE BRODIE CLUB
Minutes of the 855th Meeting

Date: January 16, 1990

Place: Faunal Laboratory, University of Toronto

Speaker: Bill Carrick

Subject: Practical Uses for Imprinting Birds

Chairman: Boissoneau

Recording Secretary: Bruce Falls

The meeting was called to order at 8.00 p.m. Eleven members were present. Regrets were received from Aird and Norm Martin. There were 10 guests: Jennifer Young, guest of Young; Yvonne Bendell, guest of Bendell; Margaret Bodsworth, Barbara and Ed Welch, Pat and Russell Rickwood, guests of Bodsworth; Lin Fox and Mandy Martin, guests of Norma Martin; Kevin Scanlon, guest of Carrick.

The minutes were read by Savage (in the absence of Aird) and accepted on a motion by Young seconded by Bodsworth.

Bodsworth reported that Leonard Bertin was ill. Savage agreed to inquire on behalf of the club.

Members Notes and Observations: Following an objection in principle by Carrick, who as a member declined to speak first, members reported their observations.

Speakman and Boissoneau had seen many Bohemian Waxwings near Cannington. Some were feeding on deadly nightshade and discussion followed on how they could get away with this. Bendell mentioned that Sage Grouse sort tissues eaten in the crop. Speakman also reported Cardinals singing in December and January. House finches had reappeared after a break (also noted by Young and Bodsworth).

Young reported that a Red-breasted Nuthatch had eaten beef fat at his feeder in preference to sunflower seeds but had taken the seeds later.

Ann Falls mentioned the unusually large number of Robins seen on the Christmas census (near Glendon College) and later in a variety of locations. Many were eating buckthorn berries.

Bendell had seen a Coopers Hawk in his garden.

Bodsworth commented on the results of the Christmas census and the duck census. He too had seen Robins in the Don valley. On the duck census five Bald Eagles had been seen. His party had seen one eagle, a Ruddy Duck, a Hooded Merganser and several Green-winged Teal.

Bruce Falls reported that he and Tasker had visited Long Point last weekend and seen lots of overwintering blackbirds and sparrows and a Varied Thrush. A Peregrine has been perching on the zoology building (U of T) and was carrying a small bell indicating that it was an escape.

Carrick mentioned that Harold Hansen had described two species and 125 (!) races of Canada Geese and produced a map of their breeding ranges. Canadas do not winter as far south as formerly, because they stop at corn fields and refuges. Populations have increased greatly.

Savage said that Rosie the hippopotamus had died at the zoo, aged 47 years. With 6 students he had collected and frozen the remains.

Speaker of the evening: Carrick said that he had been birding for 60 years and photographing birds for 35. He proposed to show parts of old films which illustrated the behaviour of wild and captive Canada Geese. He showed several film sequences (mainly from Alberta and Manitoba) which illustrated that wild birds flew from the nest readily when disturbed leaving their eggs exposed. This behaviour increased predation and contributed to the demise of the wild nesting population on the prairie. By contrast, released birds which were tame were less afraid of humans and tended to remain and defend their nests. The sequence of events involving taking eggs from wild nests, hatching them in cages and raising the young was shown. Newly hatched birds tended to follow the first large moving object they saw. There were films of goslings following children; they kept an angle of about 45 degrees with the person being followed. Thus, if the person stood upright they followed at a distance but if the person swam in the water they would move closer and climb on their back. A banding drive of flightless birds was shown. The young were released in new marshes and such birds tended to migrate with adjacent flocks. However, those raised in captivity at Guelph and released seldom migrated. Several different nest platforms were shown for use in marshes where birds were released. As mentioned earlier, these birds defended their nests and young; several sequences showed them giving threat displays to the children. These included head-bobbing with bill open and ruffled feathers. As a defensive measure, the family swam in a line with an adult at either end.

Some of the most interesting sequences involved the following response to moving objects. They would follow the children riding bikes but the geese tended to get ahead. There were remarkable sequences of a sandhill crane that followed a motorcycle and a trumpeter swan that followed a boat, taken at 200 frames per second.

Recently the speaker has been involved in preliminary trials leading up to efforts to induce geese and swans to migrate. He argued that birds need to migrate in their first year if they are to acquire the habit. He showed films of Canada Geese following a motorboat and an ultralight aircraft. These latter trials were done with Bill Lishman, an ultralight enthusiast. The geese tended to treat the aircraft as part of the V formation. They followed the aircraft away from home but tended to lead on the return journey. There were some remarkable shots of birds sideslipping and even flying upside down when slowing to land. The plan is to lead birds south at migration time, leave them there and see if they return. The final pictures showed Canadas and Barnacle Geese flying in a wind tunnel.

Questions: These interesting film sequences stimulated the audience to ask a number of questions to which Bill Carrick responded. He explained that to get birds to follow, the aircraft was first pushed along the ground. In a wind tunnel, geese stand on their toes and take off as the windspeed is increased.

Carrick did not see much evidence of organization in a flock. While birds ride the airstream from a boat or plane he doubted if this was true of a natural wedge because the birds are all at the same level. "They avoid poop in the eye."

Birds that were following an aircraft would eventually tire and drop off. They improved with training. While there was probably an optimum speed for steady flight, it was hard to determine this because he had

only crude measures of windspeed.

The speaker and Bill Lishman plan to lead flocks of geese or swans to Virginia in about six days. They will fly under 1000 feet. Geese should be ready in August or September and swans in November. It would probably be necessary to raise 200 Trumpeter Swans to end up with a reasonable flock. This would cost a lot as would support services (e.g. vans carrying gasoline and for overnight stops). Sponsorships were being sought. Bill Lishman had made a video.

Asked about criticism for changing the behaviour of birds, the speaker said that if they were raised in groups, they would readily revert to wild behaviour including mating with their own species. In raising birds he had encountered problems with predators, parasites and disease.

Both the films and the talk were very interesting and the speaker was given a hearty round of applause.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m.