

## THE BRODIE CLUB

### Minutes of the 871st Meeting

The 871st meeting was held on 19 November 1991, in the Faunal Lab of the Borden Building of the University of Toronto at 8 p.m. Boissoneau was Chairman; Riley was Secretary. 16 members were present; 1 sent regrets. Kathryn Falls and Roy Colobillo were guests of the Falls; Kirstin Burling and Ron Schovill were guests of Bendell; Margaret Bodsworth was guest of Bodsworth; Margery Ritchie was guest of Ritchie; Maudie Reynolds was guest of Keith Reynolds; and Frank DeMatties and Clair and Bernard Muller were guests of Carrick.

The minutes of the 870th meeting were approved, with minor corrections noted by Bodsworth.

Bodsworth reported that Cornell University was preparing lists of naturalist and birding clubs as part of an information (and marketing) network, and recommended that the Brodie Club not be part of it.

The evening's talk was entitled, "Brodie Club Members at the Antipodes", presented by Bruce Falls, outlining the trip, and Jim Bendell, discussing the original peoples of the region.

The Bendells and Falls toured much of Australia from late December to late March 1991, searching out the natural features and birds in some of the outstanding natural areas and parks, guided in large part by John Bransbury's 1987 "Where to Find Birds in Australia". The birds were not numerous, but were strikingly different from North America. Their excellent slides took us to each of Australia's six states, to the north, east, southwest and southeast of the continent, and to its interior outback.

Near Cairns, on the Coral Sea in the northwest of Queensland, were seen the Australian Pelican, Royal Spoonbill, Pacific Black Duck and Willie Wagtail. In the interior to the southwest, sugar cane dominates with lowlands, but the Atherton area is ringed with rainforest mountains where Platypus occur, full of ferns and interesting plants like the Curtain Fig, a strangling tree fig, and Schefflera. Over the divide in the arid interior, sclerophyllous scrub dominates, dotted by tall termite mounds. Here, the speakers saw Laughing Kookaburra, Australian Raven, Grey Butcherbird and Southern Cassowary.

Darwin is on the northwest coast of Arnhem Land, the northernmost part of the Northern Territory. East along the coast is the Kakadu National Park, extending from the flat coastal wetlands along the Van Diemen Gulf up the Arnhem escarpment to the high plateaus. Slides of Brolga, Black-necked Stork, red fruit bats, and Little Corella were shown from the East Alligator River and Obiri Rock. From the South Alligator River, slides were shown of crocodiles (no alligators occur in Australia), Lotusbird (Comb-crested Jacana), Magpie Goose, Darter and White-bellied Sea-Eagle. Australian Pelican and Agile Wallabies were shown from the Northern Territory Wildlife Park near Darwin.

Far south of Darwin in the outback of the Northern Territory, Alice Springs occurs southeast of the MacDonnell Ranges. This is a region of extremely dry microphyllous woodland and semi-desert scrub, dominated by 'armed' species like the Mulga, an acacia, and Spinifex Grass (*Triodia* spp.) Yellow-throated Miner, Spinifex Pigeon, Pied Butcherbird, Cycads, and Rock Wallabies were shown from the Ormiston Gorge and Pound National Park and the Standley Chasm, both in the MacDonnell Ranges. At the sewage lagoon in Alice Springs itself, White-faced Heron and Eurasian Coot were seen.

Southwest of Alice Springs is Uluru National Park, containing both Ayers Rock and the Olgas. At the Olgas, Dingo and Parenti were seen, the latter a 5 ft long minotaur lizard.

From Uluru, the speakers travelled south to Adelaide and Kangaroo Island (Flinders Chase National Park) on the coast of South Australia. This is a region of mallee (*Eucalyptus* spp.) scrub, dramatically shaped by the winds on the coastal rock barrens. Grey Kangaroo, sea lion, iguana, Koala and Emu were illustrated.

The Falls headed west from Adelaide to Perth and Albany, on the southwest coast of Western Australia. This is an area of broad-leaved evergreen Karri forests (*Eucalyptus diversicolor*), with open canopies 200 to 250 ft high, savanna-like understoreys, and dense grass cover. Slides were shown of kangaroo-paw flowers (*Anigozanthos* spp.), the state flower, and the fire resistant savanna Grass Tree (*Xanthorrhoea* spp.) In the Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve east of Albany, the Falls saw the Noisy Scrub-bird at its only known Australian location, where it was rediscovered after 60 years. Its breeding habitats, in the deeper gulleys through the coastal heath, are protected.

To the east, the Fitzgerald River National Park is renowned for its outstanding diversity of *Banksia* spp. Much of the area had burned, triggering the release of banksia seed. Brown Falcon, the commonest of Australian raptors, was photographed here. North of Albany, mallee eucalypts, Western Grey Kangaroo and Grey Currawong were seen at the Stirling Range National Park.

Back in southeastern Australia, the Falls visited a number of interesting areas. South of Adelaide, on the Coorong sand spit, they saw Little Blue Penguins and Malleefowl. The latter is the most famous of the compost assemblers, that incubate eggs in warm mounds. The mallee scrublands supported Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Australian Magpie, and Little Eagle. From southeastern Australia, the Falls also showed us Gang-gang Cockatoo, New Holland Honeyeater, and Superb Blue Wren.

Off the southeast coast, Tasmania has remote central highlands such as at Cradle Mountain and Mount Field National Parks. Many endemic plants and trees of great ages occur here, such as the palm-like heath *Pandani*, and the Cradle Mountain is recognized as a World Heritage Site. Because of fewer mammalian predators, Bennett's Wallaby, Wombat and other marsupials are in greater numbers.

At Gordon River, rainforest occurs at sea level. Slides of very ancient Huon Pine (*Dacrydium franklinii*) were shown, and of Tasmanian Devil and Echidna. On the east coast, at Wineglass Bay in Freycinet National Park, the poisonous Tiger Snake and Bandicoot were seen. In eastern Tasmania occur the tallest broadleaf trees in the world, the Mountain Ash or Swamp Gum (*Eucalyptus regnans*), individuals of which rise to 95m.

At the Melbourne sewage lagoon, the Falls photographed the Freckled Duck and, at the Sherbrooke Forest Park east of Melbourne, saw a superb Swamp Gum forest, where Superb Lyrebird and the Bell Miner occurs.

In the Snowy Mountains of southernmost New South Wales, Mount Kosciusko (7316 ft ASL) supports a diverse alpine flora. In Canberra, the Falls photographed the Musk Duck and Pied Currawong. South of Sydney, they encountered feeding Kookaburra. On their way to southern Queensland, they crossed the Dingo fence, a 6000 mile fence to exclude Dingoes from the pastured areas of Australia.

In southern Queensland, they visited O'Reilly's, in Lamington National Park, where they saw Antarctic Beech cloudforest (*Nothofagus moorei*), full of strangler figs, and interesting birds such as the Satin Bowerbird, Green Catbird, Lewin's Honeyeater, and Eastern Whipbird.

Falls played tapes of numerous bird species to accompany the bird slides.

Bendell spoke about the aboriginals and myths of Australia, contrasting his in Arnhem Land, Ayers Rock and the Olgas, New Zealand, and Rarotonga. Many Australian aboriginals remained unknown to Europeans until as recently as the 1930s, making the present era a critical one of contact between successful stone age and post-industrial societies. The native peoples were traditionally extremely mobile and peaceful, with almost no possessions other than their complex oral and drawn mythology of creation events and creation locations, and their advanced knowledge of the ecology of the land. They are a totemic, artistic and musical culture.

In Arnhem Land, rock paintings were created in red and yellow ochre (iron oxides), white clay and black manganese, with water, plant sap or turtle eggs as media of choice. Many of the themes were sacred, focused on "dream time" creation myths, whereby the shape and players and processes of the real landscape were known. Others themes were more secular myths, dealing with narratives of daily life. The rock paintings date from before 6000 yBP, and a chronology from animal art, to human art (stick art and narrative themes), to more recent xray-like depictions of natural phenomena.

Sacred landscapes were central to the creation myths, providing geographic and psychic meaning for aboriginals. For example, the Ayers Rock is a sentinel monolith of exfoliating sedimentary rock sitting on the older Olga formation of more fragmented sedimentary conglomerates. All of the features of Ayers Rock have mythic, explanatory links to the real world and its workings.

In contrast to the ancient culture of Australian aboriginals, Bendell cited the examples of New Zealand's Maori and the Maori-like people of Rarotonga. These people inhabited their lands only very recently, and appear to have cultures which are much more possession-oriented and warlike, reflecting their recent ascendancy over their environment.

The slides taken by the Falls and Bendells were excellent, and the speakers were warmly thanked by the audience.

Bendell observed how low Lake Ontario water levels of Lake Ontario are at the present time. Riley noted that the recent breaching of the baymouth bars of Oshawa Second Marsh and Levays marsh were linked to this increased gradient between water levels in the marshes and the lakes, and that higher levels and storms will restore them.

Savage noted that human fingerprints from an ancient clay hearth in New Mexico have been identified on the basis of primate sweat pores. Wood carbon found in the hearth in the Pendejo Cave was dated at 35000, 28900 and 27800 yBP, dates which significantly predate the accepted beginnings of human activity in the Americas.

Lumsden reported a Peregrine Falcon in Aurora in the first week of November.

Speakman recently observed some very active and vocal Great Horned Owls at dusk and sunrise. While hooting, the male would lean over and raise its tail as part of its serenade to a nearby female.

Bertin noted thousands of gulls flying for an hour over the Ontario Science Centre.

The meeting adjourned at close to 11 p.m.