

MINUTES OF THE 882nd MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB

JANUARY 19, 1993

Chairman: D. Fowle

Secretary: Ann Falls

The meeting was held at the Faunal Osteology Lab, South Borden building, University of Toronto. It was attended by 16 members and 8 guests.

Guests: Fowle - Vicky Draper

Tasker - Mary Tasker, Jim Murray, Nancy Archibald, Kate Graham, Verna Higgins, Marilyn MacKellar

Speakman - Betty Speakman

The minutes were passed with one minor amendment.

Announcements:

Carrick brought two dead Trumpeter Swans, which he was giving to the ROM, and demonstrated the plumage difference between young and old birds. Both the young of the year and the adult weigh over 30 lbs, swans being the heaviest flying birds. They died from getting caught in the netting of their cage which was under water as a result of collapse in the severe snow storm in mid-December.

Norm Martin brought a new FON publication, "Around Ontario" which contains news of affiliated clubs.

Hussell reported that he is moving to Ottawa soon, as his wife Erica Dunn has a new job with the CWS.

Fowle announced that the February meeting will be addressed by Dr Charles McInnis, an excellent speaker, on the MNR rabies program. Recently there has been an increase in the incidence of rabies in raccoons just south of the Great Lakes, and the problem may be moving to Ontario.

Tasker noted the article in the latest issue of the Canadian Field-Naturalist (Jan-Mar 1992) on the botany of the Rice Lake Plains by Catling, Catling and McKay-Kuja.

Speaker: Dr Ron Tasker

Subject: Birding in Irian Jaya, New Guinea

In the summer of 1992 Ron and his son James went on a Bird Quest expedition to Irian Jaya. It was a 'pioneer' trip, i.e. the first this organization had made to this area. It turned out to be very strenuous with much hiking on steep slippery slopes, and with arrangements that left a lot to be desired.

Irian Jaya which lies north of Australia was formerly Dutch New Guinea. After independence it became part of Indonesia. Dutch foreign aid has been cut off because of Indonesian civil rights abuses. Much of Indonesia is very overpopulated and largely

deforested. Their policy of transmigration -i.e. sending large numbers of immigrants to less populated areas such as Irian Jaya has put a great strain on the environment and caused many problems for the native Papuan population. All the land in Irian Jaya is owned by Papuans, but Indonesia wants them out of the way so mining and logging can proceed. On the positive side, alcohol has been prohibited in the Highlands and law and order is well maintained, which is not the case in Papua-New Guinea in the eastern half of the island.

Their first stop on the main island was at Sentani airport near the capital Jayapura, on the north coast. Sentani was the main allied base in the Pacific during WW2, HQ for Gen. MacArthur. From there they flew over a mountain range to Wamena on the interior plateau inhabited by the Dani. These stone age people have no wheeled vehicles or beasts of burden. They hunt with bows and arrows, and have no guns, but are starting to use steel arrowheads and axes. Dani villages are surrounded by sharp stakes topped with thatch. Inside the enclosure are vegetable gardens and thatched huts. Huts have a central fire and raised sleeping platforms where the people, who generally wear no clothes, huddle for warmth at night. Dani make use of irrigation in their agriculture. Yams are a staple crop. The tour group spent the first night of the trek in a Dani village.

The strenuous 7 day trek from 5,000 feet to a height of 10,000 feet was aided by a crew of Dani porters who carried the food, baggage and equipment. Deforestation is extending ever farther up the steep mountain slopes but after crossing a river on a bridge made by the Dani from vines they entered pristine forest. Camping was primitive. At times they slept on the ground under a plastic tarp suspended on stakes. Food prepared by the porters and their wives consisted of rice, noodles, sardines/bully beef, lots of vegetables, always yams and lots of tea. There was little drinking water and seldom water for washing, although it rained often. At higher altitudes the forest looked more northern. Familiar looking plants such as Pinguicula and Lycopodium, and some heath like flowers were photographed. At nearly 10,000 feet there were alpine meadows and a few tree ferns along the water courses. At Lake Habema they saw coots, Salvatori's teal and a spotless crane. Many birds were seen on the trek but few could be photographed because the forests were so dark. Orchids and butterflies, scenery and the native people were subjects of many excellent slides.

After the long trek they flew back to Sentani where they spent a few days in the lowland forests, which are rich in birds. In all during the trip they saw 21 species of birds of paradise, many parrots, and many other species. At Lake Sentani natives live in houses built on stilts, and fish from dugout canoes. Many endemic species of fish have been extirpated. Tasker photographed an impressive looking Victoria Imperial Pigeon which is native to the area but was only seen in captivity. Trade in wild birds is legal

within Indonesia, and there is probably much illicit international trade.

From Sentani they flew to Biak and on to Sarong in the Vogelkop peninsula in the far west of the country. From there, with the purpose of visiting islands rich in endemics, they went by boat to Salawati and on to Batanta. This was something of a tropical paradise. They stayed in a fine shelter built for them by the local people who all came out to welcome them. They stayed for a couple of days enjoying the birds, butterflies, and trails in the forest before going back to Salawati. There they walked in the forest and saw several large reptiles including a rock python and a poisonous viper. Villagers entertained them with music at night.

The next major event in the trip was another one week trek in the Arfak Mountains in the Vogelkop peninsula, starting and ending at Manokwari. Camping was again very rough, but the forest was great. Their main destination was Bili Bay where they camped on a very steep slope, and had a spectacular view of sea and islands when not fogged in. Some points of interest were the tropical pitcher plant *Nepenthes*, the missionary airfield at Mokra where the World Wildlife Fund has a program to breed butterflies, the bower of the Arfak bower bird, the moss forest at high altitude, and the king bird of paradise. Back at Biak there were several more excursions by boat and car to see endemic birds, including beach kingfishers. The last boat trip ended in near disaster when the boat overturned at sea after dark, and the passengers had to wait 4 hours on the capsized boat for rescue. Much gear was lost. After the rescue they had to go directly to the airport, still wet and in some cases barefoot.

Questions:

Mosquitoes? Not bothersome but at least two people including James Tasker got malaria.

Land leeches? Only saw one or two.

Ticks? A few got bites.

Mammals? No placental mammals except bats. Saw a glider.

Cassowaries? Heard once but not seen. Two or three species of brush turkeys.

Raptors? Lots.

Kites? Brahminy kites.

Dysentery? No problem.

People? Very likeable. Cannibalism still occurs in the lowlands of the south coast.

Carrick thanked the speaker for his excellent talk, but admitted he will put Irian Jaya on the bottom of his list of places to go.

Notes, Observations and Comments:

Huff: Noted in the Globe and Mail a proposal to dredge for aggregates in Lake Ontario east of Ashbridges Bay.

Carrick: One of the Trumpeter Swans raised from eggs which Lumsden put in Mute Swans nests at Frenchmans Bay 3 years ago has been taken back into captivity because of injuries.

Bendell: Had a Brown Thrasher at his feeder.

Speakman: House Finches have started to sing in the last couple of days.

Tasker: Setting a mouse trap on the wire from which his bird feeder was hanging scared off the squirrel which was raiding the bird food.

Savage commented that the proposed change of the taxonomic term Aves to Dinosauria was likely to cause considerable confusion.

Lumsden: A Trumpeter Swan from Wye Marsh seems to have formed a pair bond with one from the Liverpool Road area, and there is another mature pair at Wye Marsh, so there may be one or more Trumpeter nests in the wild next breeding season.

Bruce Falls read from a clipping about the decline of song birds in the UK. It recommended helping out the birds by sprinkling chopped cheese on the grass!

Reading: During the past summer just north of the tree line in south central Keewatin he found the nest of a small curlew which was not much bigger than a robin, and wonders whether this could be an Eskimo curlew. He showed a photo of the nest containing four eggs, one of which was just hatching.

Whimbrel eggs are larger and darker. It is far from the recorded nesting ground (Anderson River in the Bathurst peninsula) but an Eskimo Curlew has been seen at Churchill in June. Perhaps they are nesting in the treeline area rather than in their former known nesting area. The bird did not call and left the nest as he approached. There were isolated islands of 10-15 ft spruce trees in the surrounding area. It had been a very cool summer and flowering dates were up to one month later than usual.

Bodsworth suggested Reading contact the two people in Saskatchewan who are searching for Eskimo curlews.

The meeting adjourned at 10.05 pm. During the refreshment time Tasker played tapes of music and bird song which he had recorded in Irian Jaya.