

MINUTES OF THE 5th MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB

held in the Faunal Archaeo-Osteology Laboratory, South Borden Building, University of Toronto

May 17, 1994

Chairman: Rufus Churcher

Secretary: Norma Martin

ROLL CALL: 15 members present and 6 guests: Vicky Draper guest of Fowle, Janet Cooper and Greg Day guests of Savage, Bee Churcher guest of Churcher, Jennifer Young guest of Young and Carolyn deMatteis guest of deMatteis.

MINUTES of the previous meeting were declared adopted as circulated with the following corrections: (1) p.6 Carrick reported six trumpeter swans returned to Bronte. Leishman's geese returned to Ontario on their own; 16 started north and 12 arrived. (2) p.6 deMatteis reported a sandhill crane was observed at Kemble, Grey County.

Following a minute of silence, John Speakman read a tribute to the late Art Boissoneau.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Bill Carrick announced plans for the club's spring outing, June 5, 1994 to Caesarea, Lake Scugog.

A letter from Ken Redding of May 9, 1994, was read and tabled for further consideration.

Norm Martin made several FON announcements.

Martin offered complimentary copies of his recently published Handbook of Biotic Forest Communities of Ontario, second edition, to members.

SPEAKER, Dr. Bill Rapley was introduced by Howard Savage. Dr. Rapley is a graduate of the Ontario Veterinary College in 1971 with a subsequent degree in Environmental Toxicology from the University of Western Ontario. He has 50 scientific papers on the environment and care of animals to his credit. He is executive director of Metro Toronto Zoo (MTZ).

To-day a zoo is more than a zoo. It reaches out to communities to preserve habitat. MTZ has 22 species in a Species Survival Plan (SSP). Animals are bred in captivity and reintroduced to preserved habitats. Zoos have become leading conservation centres.

A new environment for lowland gorillas is being constructed at the MTZ. Half the African pavillion will be converted to rain forest. The design is based on the natural habitat and will reflect the bond between gorillas and their habitat. It is like a giant greenhouse with a tropical interior like the rain forest. There are 12 gorillas in the zoo breeding successfully. Their genetic content is 97% the same as humans.

Rapley showed a film, The Invisible Zoo featuring Bill Rapley, which is the first of a series to be made to reach a wide audience. Zoos all over the world are involved in the SSP to preserve animals such as the lowland gorilla, the white rhinoceros, the red panda of China and Nepal and northern India, African and Asian elephants, tree kangaroo of New Guinea, Liberian mongoose of which there is only one in captivity.

Although orangoutangs have been successfully bred in captivity and returned to the wild, there is no plan to return gorillas to the wild. Rather the aim is to protect habitat and hope the natural population of the 35,000 lowland gorillas can be maintained.

Continuing his presentation using slides, Rapley concentrated on the protection of gorillas, particularly the gorillas of Camaroun. He was a member of a team which travelled in Camaroun on a reciprocal project resulting from a visit to Quebec by a group of Camarounians. (Incidentally, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has transferred its French functions of the world to Montreal. In 1996 the IUCN meeting will be held in Montreal).

Camaroun has great biodiversity, from the coastal rain forest to Guinea savannah to dry savannah to desert. A French veterinarian has found three previously unknown surviving populations of black rhinoceros in semimountainous areas. A program has been established to protect and study them.

Camaroun has the highest rainfall record in Africa but its rain forests are disappearing rapidly, faster than those in Asia or South America. The lowland gorillas are a flag species to be protected; if they are saved a whole area of habitat is saved. Their populations, however, have been reduced because of the pressure of human population, now 12 million. Farming, by the slash and burn method, logging and acid rain are affecting the forests. Although our own forestry practices of clear cutting make us guilty of habitat destruction too, we can still help prevent further destruction of rain forests by refusing to buy products from those areas.

It is easy to be discouraged about the rain forests but we must not give up. We should protect what we have for future generations.

Burning of the forests is not entirely detrimental to the gorillas. Within 25 years after fire there can be tremendous growth including two plants favored by the chimpanzees and gorillas, wild ginger trees and umbrella trees. Controlled programs of cutting could help the primates.

Even though it is illegal to kill an animal like the chimpanzee there are still some being killed for food.

Gorillas are becoming quite rare. They are protected by law but poachers are still present. Among the tribes in Africa gorillas are considered an omen of good will. Sometimes baby gorillas are nursed by women. Gabon has a large population of gorillas and a huge tract of forest. Efforts are being made to have the area protected.

The western and eastern populations of African gorillas were joined at one time. The mountain gorillas have a small range in the Burundi mountains. These 320 individuals were made famous by Dianne Fossey and are the best known gorillas. Events in Rwanda give cause for concern about this population.

In Campo Wildlife Reserve on the west coast of Camaroun an effort is being made to implement more selective cutting. This an area of 300,000 hectares. There are 4 offices and 1 bicycle. The sincere dedicated conservators struggle to manage the reserve. The river hippopotomi have been eliminated because the river is too small. A pygmy guide, however, swears there are pygmy hippos in the park. An investigation is underway to look for them since there is no record of pygmy hippos east of Nigeria although there is a historical record of their presence.

World Wildlife Fund is active in the country organizing interesting programs in nature trails but not helping the people who live there to become involved in habitat conservation. On the other hand, IUCN which is a splinter group of the WWF, does not emphasize beaurocracy and offices but action. They set up programs to help the people take over and manage.

Korup National Park is an area of 300,000 hectares. There are 400 tree species and 300 bird species. The unique plants in the park have captured the attention of the U.S. Cancer Institute. They are funding a British botanist who has found a plant extract that is possibly effective against AIDS. The secret ingredient of Coca-Cola was obtained from coconuts from this area. There are chimpanzees but no gorillas. Here the WWF have shiny offices but the people are not friendly. The equipment is antiquated and there is insufficient funding from WWF.

The project team visited many areas in the country; an old lava flow, was so remote that they were told they were the first Europeans to visit it. Specific recommendations were made based on their conclusions. There is a basic need for funding: for equipment, education, research and planning.

Metro Toronto Zoo has a 25-year master plan. The new designs are more like a museum's approach with more meaningful habitats. Complementary educational programs are being developed.

There is also an enrichment program for its animals. The

animals' environments look natural and also contain something for them to occupy their time.

The MTZ wants to motivate people to become involved in helping animals. Some large zoos are involved in "Adopt a Park" program in which they support a wildlife park abroad.

The chairman thanked the speaker who was given an enthusiastic round of applause.

NOTES AND OBSERVATION

Savage: asked for comments on an animal skin. Rapley thought it was not a lowland gorilla but possibly a mountain gorilla. He suggested DNA testing of the hair.

Rapley: visited the International Crane Foundation in April in Wisconsin. Emphasis is on the breeding of rare cranes in captivity - Siberian cranes, red crowned cranes, whooping cranes. Up to 14 eggs are produced in a nest. Puppets are used to raise the young. A ninety-year-old Siberian crane is still producing semen.

Lumsden: reported frogs singing on 2 or 3 nights only and there is no spawn in the water. He suspects that the cold winter has killed the stock.

Fowle: there are no eggs or toads in the pond in Thornhill

Carrick: the only frogs heard were wood frogs.

Bodsworth: last year the T.O.C. warbler count was the second highest since the beginning in the '70s. Last year his count to this date was 251 individuals with 18 species. This year the count is 60 individuals with 11 species.

Bruce Falls: reported a small variety of birds at Pelee. He heard wood frogs, spring peepers and leopard frogs.

Martin: suggested having a picture taken of Brodie Club members for the record. Savage said that the 900th meeting next year could be a photo opportunity.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.30