

Minutes of the 904th Brodie Club, May 16, 1995

CHAIRMAN: Paul Aird

SECRETARY: John Speakman

13 members present, guests included Jack McAndrews, Jason Broder, Yvonne Bendell.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Lumsden drew the attention of the Club to an all day meeting at the Metro Zoo on May 25th to discuss the Trumpeter Swan program and lead poisoning.

Bendell reported on a Boreal Forestry Conference to be held in late November at Toronto.

SPEAKER: John Riley

TOPIC: History of Prairie Habitat in Ontario.

Reference was made initially to the work of several club members who had an interest in this subject Lumsden, Colin Martin and Colting. Prairie grasslands represent a rare ecosystem in Ontario. A topographical map and a series of photographs were used to illustrate the possible early distribution of prairie grasslands and the current situation which is thought to represent much less than one percent of the original habitat. The speaker quoted extensively from the historical records of early travellers in southern Ontario, who described the prairie grasslands and he began with the descriptions of the habitats in the eastern part of the province, adjacent to the Detroit river and Walpole Island, where there is still a well preserved area of tall prairie grass. Reference was made to the active burning program on Walpole Island which the speaker thought was instrumental in helping to preserve the habitat from invasion by trees. Reference was made to an area around Windsor, in Pelee Island and in Kent County, near the lower part of the Thames River. In Haldimand Norfolk County in the St. Williams area the speaker referred to attempts to restore the prairie grass habitat by Gartshore. In Norfolk County, good descriptions of the sand plains were recorded in 1824 and the speaker illustrated residual habitats on the side of railway embankments. He also showed slides of potential habitats on the Brantford Golf Club. Moving further east, reference was made to areas adjacent to the Niagara Gorge and the Black Oak Savannah in High Park and the Humber plains at the mouth of the Humber River. Restoration projects are underway in High Park, which include tearing up roads and planting Black Oaks, but so far no permission has been obtained for burning activity. It is hoped that the Karner Blue Butterfly

may be re-introduced. The speaker talked about typical sites on a traditional trading route from Toronto to Georgian Bay with grassland habitat being found along the Humber at Holland Landing, at Degrassi Point, and on a portage from Barrie to Minnising Swamp. In Northumberland County, several sites were described south of Rice Lake and reference was made to Parr Trails comments in 1836. Slides of Red Cloud Cemetery illustrated the habitat in this area. In the Peterborough area, reference was made to the Scotts plains and again it mentioned that only .1% of the original habitat survives.

In the discussion which followed, comments were made regarding the pollen record which indicates major loss of Beech trees occurred around 1360 and was followed by an invasion of Oak and Pine and possibly allowed the prairie grass species to spread. There was considerable discussion about the role of burning by the Indian natives in preserving the habitat. Apparently, there is no reference to burning in any of the historical records of the Huron Indians.

FIELD TRIP - Carrick referred to the field trip being planned to view Lishman's activities in using ultralight aircraft to induce the migration of the Canada Gees.

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS - Lumsden reported two trumpeter swan pairs were nesting at Wyemmarsh and other birds had paired up in various locations, without any definite nesting recorded. He also noted the hatching of a nest of Kildeers and commented on how quickly the young bird dispersed.

Speakman reported that a new female Pileated Woodpecker had appeared two weeks after the loss of the bird on Easter Monday. The birds were seen mating ten days previously on the horizontal bough of a Maple tree. A post mortem report from the Metro Zoo failed to disclose a cause of death for the female Pileated and it was noted that the ovary was inactive, which is a little surprising as the birds seemed prepared for nesting when the female died.

Bodsworth reported many more individual warblers counted on his warbler plot and three more species were noted than last year at this time.

Bendell observed a Redbacked Vole being attacked by a Hairy Woodpecker and noted Red Squirrels chasing Chipmunks. He has found two Spruce Grouse eggs in an old nest.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15 p.m.