

**Minutes of the 926th meeting of the Brodie Club at the University of Toronto
Dec. 16, 1997**

Chaired by John Riley, Minutes taken by Don Huff

Minutes of the 925th meeting were approved.

Attendance: 22 members and 8 guests.

Chris Winter, guest of Huff

Trudy Rising, Dan Koslovic guests of Jim Rising

Mary Boswell, guest of Falls

Vicky Draper, guest of David Fowle

Claire and Bernard Mueller guests of Carrick

Eleanor B----- guest of Oliver Bertin

Club Business

A card for Keith and Maudie Reynolds was circulated by Fowle.

Jock McAndrews referred to previous meeting - talked to Dr. Sadler, clarification that the manuscript was not turned down by the ROM Editorial Board. Suggested there could be some financial assistance from the Howard Savage fund.

John Riley introduced Partners for Public Lands, and the Boreal East maps. Talked about the cooperative efforts to deal with protected lands.

Speaker

Bruce Falls introduced **Dan Koslovic** a recent Ph.D. candidate at UofT. Koslovic spoke on the Biology of House Finches.

His interest in the topic began in 1983 at St. Catherine's. He noted Cowbird parasitism at the time. He started field work on the topic in 1990.

He discussed the availability of hosts and host quality. Do Cowbirds choose host species? If done prudently reproductive success could be increased. It is difficult to assess host/Cowbird associations.

Some of the areas dealt with were:

- Assessment of House Finch/Cowbird interactions in eastern NA.
- Consequences of brood parasitism by Cowbirds on House Finches in new areas of sympatry.
- Colonization history.
- Relationship between the rate of parasitism and Cowbird reproductive success.
- Cowbirds are known to parasitize the nests of 217 host species in NA.
- Although House Finches are common in the west they are rarely subjected to Cowbird parasitism.
- House Finches are poor hosts. Young Cowbirds last only 3.5 days on average in a House Finch nest, only one of the sample lived to 14 days.
- House Finches have a long breeding season which makes them appealing for Cowbirds. Being semi-colonial it makes it easy for Cowbirds to find the nests. They are conspicuous nesters and are acceptable of Cowbird eggs.
- Factors affecting parasitism.
- Population trends, adaptive techniques to counter parasitism, differential reproductive success, learning by Cowbirds.
- Rate of parasitism of House Finches by Cowbirds in Ontario has decreased over time.

Dan concluded that: Cowbirds are opportunistic parasites, House Finches are unsuitable hosts, host discrimination can occur rapidly.

Questions:

How is the learned knowledge passed down? Many theories, jury still out.

Do Cowbirds color their eggs to match the host nest eggs like the cuckoo? No.

When examining the chart of western House Finch populations, why did it not move further east?

No idea of whether the western House Finches would have reached here.

There was discussion of phenology shift. It was thought that birds will breed as early as possible, as early as March 13, unsure of how much is adaptation and how much is variance.

How common for birds to feed their young with grains (dandelion seeds)? Unsure

House Finch populations are being controlled by *Gavia septica* (eye infection)

What species are good hosts in Ontario? Yellow Warbler, Chipping and Song Sparrows are most frequently parasitized.

The eastern population shows a migration tendency but the western population doesn't.

In the instance of the Great Spotted Cuckoo, it destroys the nest of the Magpie forcing the Magpie to re-nest and then making it available for parasitism.

Cowbirds have the ability not to deposit eggs until the host is nesting. They can produce 40 eggs in one year, up to 80 eggs in their life.

Hussell: Thanked the speaker, made us more aware of the mechanics of parasitism, learned more about House Finches and Cowbirds, several new areas of study were made obvious.

Notes and Observations:

Dave Fowle - Mentioned that distribution of wildlife had changed in Indonesia as a consequence of the large fires. Read the report in the NY Times that in particular Orangutans had been forced out of their habitat. The paper estimated there were 20-30K Orangs left in Borneo and Sumatra.

Hugh Curry - Described recent observations in Niagara Falls area, following up on a report of a Slaty-backed Gull (Willy Dana of Buffalo), also a dark Herring-Gull-like bird similar to a California Gull. Some thought that it might be the *vegae* race of the Herring Gull.

John Speakman - Noticed flocks Snow Buntings, Redpolls have disappeared over the past months.

Janet Cooper - The Chilean Flamingo that had been in the Ottawa area was sent back to Conn.

Norma Martin - Noted the subsidence of the breakwater in Belleville harbour. The breakwater is constructed of tires and is thought to being dragged down by the weight of zebra mussels.

John Riley - Noted that at Point Abino the mussel shells are forming a new beach substrate.

David Hussell - While trapping Snow Buntings has been capturing only males, speculated that males winter further north.