

THE 935th MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB

The 935th meeting of the Brodie Club was held on December 16, 1998, in the Ramsay Wright Building of the University of Toronto.

Chairman: Paul Aird
Recording Secretary: Jennifer Young
Attendance, 23 members and four guests
Sandra Eadie, guest of Bertin
Mary Tasker, guest of Tasker,
Linda Pim, guest of Aird
Kathryn Falls, guest of the Falls

The minutes of the 934th meeting were approved with the following corrections made: The number of wild swans was 16; the number of trumpeters 191.

Announcements:

Lumsden stated that the F.O.N. was approximately \$50,000 over budget. F.O.N. trips are now to be privatized with the business going to Quest and other licenced tour operators.

The F.O.N. website has received over 15,000 hits since 1996, making it among the top ten websites in Canada. This interest has encouraged increased membership in the organization.

David Fowle is recovering from recent surgery.

Speaker:

Aird introduced Bruce Falls, club member and professor emeritus of zoology at the University of Toronto, who presented a video on his recent trip to South Africa.

A Video Tour of South Africa:

Member Bruce Falls began his presentation by stating that in August of this year he and his wife Ann travelled to South Africa in order to attend the International Ornithological Conference in Durban. The conference was preceded and followed by birding trips throughout several parts of the country. Other Brodie members present were the Risings, the Bendells, and the Mullers.

Falls showed a video-travelogue emphasizing the local birds with mammals and wild flowers also included. Landscape and vegetation features were highlighted as well. The video was a one-hour condensation of nine and one-half hours of film taken during the trip. The camera used was a Hi-8 Sony Handycam with a 21X optical zoom lens. Falls consulted three different reference books, but all bore the same name — Birds of Southern Africa, written by Sinclair, Hockey and Taborson; Newman; and Roberts respectively.

Southern Africa comprises South Africa as well as Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Falls estimated that South Africa proper has about 700 species of birds, 500 of which are present during winter. He saw about 360 species, half of them new to him, without travelling as far north as Johannesburg or the Kruger National Park. The location of the birds depended upon such factors as the varied geography, the SE trade winds, and the amount of rainfall present. Some species were generally distributed, whereas others were limited to the dryer regions or to the Cape and coastal areas. Birds were most abundant in the north-east where the rainfall is greatest.

South Africa has many different vegetation zones, which provide a variety of species of birds and mammals. The Fynbos is a scrubby, rocky, mountainous region of the Cape Province with endemic species of plants and birds. A second area, very large in size, is the Karoo, which is characterized by dry stony plains. Namaqualand, near the west coast, is famous for its wildflowers, but the group was not fortunate to be there at the right time to see the full glory of its display. The Kalahari Desert is a dry, scrubby savannah. Au-grabies Falls N.P. is also semi-desert. The grassland area east of Kimberly is called the highveld. Drakensberg is a combination of dramatic rocky high-country with meadows of montane grassland. The group saw a little montane forest, a few patches of lowland forest and a bit of the coastal mangrove area. Agriculture and human settlement has altered the countryside, but this has sometimes provided suitable habitat for bird species.

The two-week pre-conference trip began in Capetown, travelled by bus westward up the coast, inland to Upington, then to Gemsbok-Kalahari National Park, to Au-grabies Falls N.P., across country to Giant's Castle Park in the Drakensburg Mountains and ended at Durban, the conference site. Meals along the tour were often prepared by the leader's wife in their specially outfitted bus. Since the tours were organized by the Congress most of the participants were fellow ornithologists, many of whom had particular interests in specific bird species, such as raptors, larks and also wild flowers. The total count on all the tours was 33 raptors, 9 larks, 15 sunbirds, 10 robins, 10 shrikes and 9 cisticolas.

Some of the more notable bird species seen on this first trip are as follows: Cape Francolin, orange-breasted sunbird, Cape sugarbird, both red-bellied and Cape teal, lesser flamingo, Jackass penguin, lesser ^{shrike} collared sunbird, Cape robin, Southern bou-bou shrike, helmeted Guinea fowl, Cape white-eye, fiscal shrike, ostrich, stonechat, assorted gulls, Cape cormorant, kelp gull, and Cape gannet. Birds of the Karoo ^{included} were the spotted eagle owl, black Korhaan, Kalahari robin, white-breasted ^{swallow} sparrow weaver, scaly-feathered finch, sandgrouse, Burchell's courser, lilac breasted roller, pale chanting goshawk, red-eyed bulbul, grey-headed sparrow, Cape turtledove, crowned plover, glossy starlings, yellow ^{bellied} hornbill, crimson boubou, black-headed heron. ^{Corey Kori} bustard, red-billed wood hoopoe, Marico flycatcher, familiar chat, ^{Namibian} dove, ^{Lanner} falcon, pygmy falcon, Martial eagle, fork-tailed drongo, and a passel of weaverbirds. They also saw at a man-made waterhole Burchell's sandgrouse soaking up water to take to the young in the nest. On a night trip, we saw a giant eagle owl, jackal, spring hare, and Cape fox. Other ^{amphibians} ^{mammals} spotted were angulated tortoise, Southern right whale, caracal, springbok, red hartebeest, yellow mongoose, black-backed jackal, cheetah, black-footed wild cat, gemsbok, meerkat and steenbok.

A stop at Augabies Falls produced the following additions to the list: Laughing dove, palewinged starling, African hoopoe, scimitar billed wood hoopoe, white-backed mousebird, rock martin, and ^{these mammals} ^{other animals} skink, rock hyrax, and klipspringer.

Further along en route the group saw Bradfield's swifts, bald ibis, Hadedda ibis, red-winged starling, black crow, white-naped raven, lammergeier, rock kestrel, jackal buzzard, Cape vulture, forest canary, greater double collared sunbird, black-eyed bulbul, malachite sunbird, Capeweaver, Gurney's sugarbird, ^{around Durban area} striped mousebird, thick-billed weaver, spotted-backed weaver, black-necked stilt, African jacana, Egyptian goose, reed cormorant, white-eared barbet and gymnogone.

In Durban, the early morning walks produced other fresh bird species as well. The Botanic Gardens had a good variety of easily photographable birds. Conference participants visited the sewage lagoons and reserves near the city to hunt for other species.

Following the conference, the second tour, whose participants were mainly ^{ornithologists} ~~non-ornithologist~~ Europeans, travelled north from Durban to Bonamanzi Primate Game Park and the ^{Wakkerathoom} ~~Mkuzi~~ N.P. before climbing to the high grassland area around ^{Wakkerathoom} ~~Wakkerathoom~~. The group spent a day in the mountain kingdom of Lesotho and returned via the Golden Gate N.P. to Durban.

billed
Kalahari birds included
Corey Kori
Lanner
amphibians
mammals
around Durban area
Wakkerathoom
Mkuzi
Wakkerathoom

This trip produced an assortment of bird species, some of which are pied crow, long crested eagle, wood sandpiper, knobilled duck, white-striped robin, hammerkopf, brown-headed kingfisher, purple-crested lourie, spotted dove, white-faced duck, three banded plover, red-billed oxpecker, blue crane, black-shouldered kite, secretary bird, African spoonbill, sacred ibis, ~~pied kingfisher~~. There was a greater variety of large mammals seen on this tour, such as hippo, Nyala antelope, impala, giraffe, baboon, and warthog. On the high grassland were seen black-shouldered kite, secretary bird, vultures eating at a vulture restaurant, Indian mynah, African spoonbill, cattle egret, sacred ibis, moorhen, pied kingfisher, spur-winged goose, red-eyed dove, black-headed heron, grey heron, spectacled weaver, speckled mousebird, Kurrichane thrush, yellow-billed kite and tawny-flanked prinea.

Questions:

Questions regarding photographing the birds and rhino were posed. Why is there such a diversity of species? Species had a long time in which to evolve, remembering that there was no glaciation to hamper the evolution. Also, the variety of habitat and presence of all-season food sources help foster the variation in species.

Falls was thanked by Aird. Members responded to the very informative presentation with hearty applause.

Members' observations:

Bertin exhibited a least bittern which he had bought in a local antique shop.

Jim Bendell read a copy of a hilarious letter from the Smithsonian Institute, written in response to a submission of an extremely questionable identification of an artefact to that institute.

Abraham said there now existed the first solid evidence of cougar in the Kenora area.

Carrick stated that the Trumpeter swan migration from Sudbury to SW Indiana was almost complete. The birds average about 210 km. per day.

Ann Falls said that the level of chipmunk activity was less than usual in the ^{Montreal} McGill area. It is speculated that squirrels cleaned up on fallen keys of maple branches, leaving little for chipmunks.

Scovell noted a second provincial sighting of the Cave Swallow was made at Point Pelee by Alan Worthington. He further reported that he had taken a photo of two avocets and some Northern gannets in Hamilton. A red-eyed vireo was seen today in High Park.

Rising saw a turkey vulture east of Kingston.

Aird reported a trillium opening and apple buds swelling due to the unseasonably warm autumn weather.

Scovell noted that he had seen a flowering primula in November on Manitoulin Island.

Carrick reported pussy willows blossoming recently.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15. Members enjoyed a social time together celebrating the Christmas season with traditional food and drink.

The next meeting of the Brodie Club will be held on Tuesday, January 19, at 8:00 in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Zoological Laboratories at the University of Toronto. The speaker will be David Pendergast of the Royal Ontario Museum, speaking on "Mayan archaeology."

Upcoming meetings include:

Feb. 16: Harry Lumsden: Travels in Siberia

Mar. 16: Harold Harvey: Climate change ~~fish~~