

THE 941st MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB  
MINUTES

The 941st meeting of the Brodie Club was held on Sept. 21, 1999 in the Ramsay Wright Building of the University of Toronto.

Chairman: Jim Rising  
Recording Secretary: Oliver Bertin  
Attendance: 17 members and four guests

GUESTS:

Pat and Roger Pocklington of Bermuda, guests of Bertin;  
Jennifer Lea, guest of Jock McAndrews;  
Joyce Peterson, guest of the Mullers.

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Rising, seconded by Jennifer Young.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Alexandra Eadie was welcomed as a new member. She is a financial analyst with The Globe & Mail, an avid birdwatcher and traveller, and a member of several other naturalist clubs.

Long-absent member Bill Crins has moved to Peterborough and hopes to attend Brodie Club meetings again.

Bruce Falls reported that David Fowle is very ill. A get-well card was signed by the members, which Fowle appreciated very much.

Jennifer Young regretted the passing of Peter Whelan last summer. He was a keen ornithologist and bird-columnist for The Globe & Mail.

Bruce Falls has invited five speakers for the coming season. They include:

Oct. 19: George Bryant, a club member who leads nature tours around the world;

Nov. 16: Prof. Glenn Morris of UofT's Erindale Campus, who will talk on katydid conversations;

Jan. 18: Member Ken Abraham, who visited the great plains of southwest Baffin Island last summer;

April 18: UofT Professor Nicholas Mrosovsky on sea turtles.

Falls would welcome suggestions for the December, February, March and May meetings.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Bill Carrick reported that the Brodie Club started the year with \$133 and raised \$280 to give \$413. A total of \$395 was spent, leaving \$17 and 100 postage stamps. That is enough to last into the next Millennium.

The single biggest expense is postage at about \$17 a mailing. Other items in the past year included: flowers \$40; Savage book subscription \$100, and Federation of Ontario Naturalists \$75.

The dues for the 1999-2000 year were set at \$10 for regular members; \$15 for couples and \$5 for corresponding members. The dues are welcome any time.

NOMINATIONS:

The following members were nominated and acclaimed to their positions.

TREASURER: William Carrick

SECRETARY: Oliver Bertin

FON REPRESENTATIVE: Harry Lumsden

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE: Ann Falls, George Bryant, Jennifer Young

PROGRAM COMMITTEE: Paul Aird, Jock McAndrews, Bruce Falls, Hugh Currie, Fred Bodsworth, John Riley, Jim Rising

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE: David Fowle, Keith Reynolds, Don Huff.

Carrick suggested that a club archivist be appointed but there was a shortage of volunteers. The position remains open.

MEMBERS' NIGHT:

The members were invited to report on their activities over the summer.

Ron Tasker said it was a good year for Carolinian butterflies, including some very rare species that are "popping up all over Ontario."

Mary Tasker observed a mother raccoon in her garden in the Rosedale area of Toronto that appeared to adopt three babies after her own litter left. The adoptees were of different ages and sizes. Rising noted that this behaviour is well known among raccoon experts.

Bertin watched a mother raccoon teach her two very young babies to walk along a telephone cable and then climb down the pole. The very nervous babies were encouraged to walk along the cable with persistent nudges on their rumps.

Ken Abraham noticed that White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows appear to be moving in large numbers, while adult Common Grackles are migrating even though they are still in moult.

Rising said it has been a good year for Red-breasted Nuthatches.

An increasing number of Kirkland Warblers have been seen in a Jack Pine forest in Michigan, in Pinery Provincial Park and in Wisconsin.

Aird said the Federation of Ontario Naturalists has purchased a region of alvars on Manitoulin Island. The FON is selling one-acre plots for \$300 to raise the \$700,000 it still owes on the deal.

He erected "an extraordinary scarecrow" near Hwy 400 in Bondhead, which attracted a television crew and thousands of children.

Aird visited Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland this past summer. It was a beautiful place, but stocks of cod, lobster and salmon are in difficulty, the result of gross mismanagement of the fishery.

Bernard Muller, a meteorologist, was intrigued by the relative frequency of microbursts - as opposed to the more-common tornadoes - in Ontario last summer. He witnessed one apparent microburst near Temagami in northwestern Ontario. Very destructive winds tore a path 30 meters wide through an old-growth forest, uprooting huge trees. At first, he thought this was a tornado but the trees were all uprooted away from a centrepont, indicating this could have been a microburst.

Tasker saw a microburst near Lake Huron. It was very windy and very noisy.

Bertin learned later that microbursts have sparked a lot of attention in recent years even though they have been around for a very long time. They are a sudden and vertical down blast of air, often from a cloud, caused by heat effects. Microbursts are just one form of downdraft. The others include vertical winds from a thunderstorm and precipitation effects. Typically, the air shoots down, hits the earth and spreads out sideways leaving a circle of damage several hundred meters across.

Tornadoes are vortices, like water swirling down a bathtub drain, caused by the interaction of warm and cold air. Tornadoes are stronger and they swirl horizontally; microbursts are vertical and do not swirl. One characteristic of thunderstorms and tornadoes is the greenish luminescence of the sky, probably caused by electric charges. Electrical effects are not common with microbursts.

Bertin visited the famous Barrie tornado site shortly after it struck in the mid-1980s. The damage was mind-boggling. A two-storey brick house was lifted off its foundations and turned by about a foot; the front wheel of a tractor was hurled 300 feet into a field and a telephone with an Orangeville telephone number was found near Barrie!

The path of the tornado could be seen across Holland Marsh. A trail perhaps six feet wide twisted and turned across the fields, uprooting vegetables, hurling heavy objects and ripping out greenhouse windows. But a foot to the side of the tornadoes path, there was no damage at all.

Norma Martin saw thousands of Double-crested Cormorants near her home in Belleville.

Falls heard a Pine Warbler and Myrtle Warbler at his cottage

on Go Home Lake, south of Parry Sound. He did not see the usual warbler species. Broadwing Hawks seem to have changed their migration route this year. They were uncommon at the usual hawk observation posts in southern Ontario, but 475,000 were reported in Michigan.

In past years, Claire Muller has observed lots of Hermit Thrushes, White-throated Sparrows and warblers in Temagami. This year, however, there were very, very few in the area. Mice were frequent. She set five mousetraps and caught 66 mice in 14 nights. She saw the same Golden Eagle pass by three times.

Guest Jennifer Lea has seen a Merlin on an island in Algonquin Park for the past two years. The Merlin was a welcome guest, even though it decimated the population of White-throated Sparrows and other songbirds.

McAndrews distributed two papers which illustrated his talk on the formation of the Oak Ridges Moraine last spring. They were:

"On the origin of the Oak Ridges Moraine" by Barnett et al, Can. J. Earth Sci. 1998; and

"Evidence for catastrophic subglacial meltwater sheetflood events on the Bruce Peninsula" by Kor et al, Can. J. Earth Sci. 1998.

Another paper, "Cliffs as Natural Refuges" by Larson et al, Amer. Scientist, 1999, talks about the Niagara Escarpment as a sheltered environment for plants and animals, including 1,000-year-old white cedars.

Carrick attended a symposium on urban geese, where speakers discussed ways and means of cutting the over-population of geese. Plaster eggs reduce the laying of eggs and oiling the eggs kills the foetus. Harvesting geese for the soup pot has also proved effective.

Carrick has discovered that imprinting on humans to precede following vehicles is quite unnecessary. Trumpeter Swans raised in isolation were more alert in one experiment, and those imprinted on their parents followed vehicles more effectively than birds imprinted by humans.

Tasker moved in 1967 to a ravine lot near downtown Toronto and looked for evidence of breeding birds. He found 48 species, of which 16 were confirmed breeders, 27 probable and five possible. He repeated that survey this summer. He upgraded five species and downgraded 11. There were two new species, but 18 had disappeared. Killdeer are now common, but House Wrens have gone. Carolina Wrens were seen for the first time this year. Common Nighthawks, Red-eye Vireos and Baltimore Orioles were common, but are now so rare that only one of each species was seen this year.

Norman and Norma Martin are compiling a "Handbook of Biotic Forest Communities of Ontario," an ambitious project that should be ready for publication early next year. They conducted transects in Opasquia Provincial Park, an area the size of Algonquin Provincial Park, 180 miles north of Red Lake on the

Manitoba border. The park is very far north biologically, near the border of the tundra where black spruce is the dominant tree. He found 140-year-old Black Spruce, 100 feet tall and spindly. There was lots of feather moss everywhere and the odd bit of sphagnum moss. Wildlife included fishers, wolverines and black bears.

Abraham saw "many" Bald Eagles hanging around fishermen on James Bay. One eagle was found to have a high concentration of DDT.

Abraham witnessed the ice melting on Aug. 2 on the southwest plains of Baffin Island. He did a habitat evaluation to determine how many geese the area can support. He studied Canada, Brant, Ross and Snow Geese, noting that permafrost lakes are very good for grazing. There was lots of flora in the limestone niches, hundreds of caribou and lots of fossils, but no bears.

Mary Boswell spent five weeks at the bird-banding station on Long Point, an "incredible, enchanting" location that is inaccessible to the general public. A group of interesting people from Europe joined her there, to experience a Canada that is far removed from tourist sites. She saw lots of Mourning Doves and Barn Swallows, hundreds of Purple Martins, as well as terns, gulls, Spiny Soft-shell Turtles and lots of flowers. The bird species included: Great-crested Flycatcher, Northern Flicker, American Woodcock, American Goldfinch, Canada Warbler, Eastern Kingbird, cuckoos, Yellow-breasted Chat, Black and White Warblers, Red-eyed Vireos and Brown Thrashers.

The meeting concluded with a video on the recent - and not so recent - Brodie Club Field Days, presented by Falls.

The meeting adjourned at 10 pm.

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be held on Oct. 19 in Rm. 432 of the Ramsay Wright Zoology Labs at UofT. The speaker will be club member George Bryant, who leads nature tours all over the world. The talk will be titled "What to pack for a five-months' tour: Misadventures of a nature tour leader."