

THE 942nd MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB

MINUTES

The 942nd meeting of the Brodie Club was held on Oct. 19, 1999 in the Ramsay Wright Building of the University of Toronto.

Chairman: Jock McAndrews
Recording Secretary: Oliver Bertin
Attendance: 20 members and three guests
Barbara Welch, daughter of Fred Bodsworth
Joyce Peterson and Henri Sellers, guests of Claire and Bernard Muller

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved with minor amendments on a motion by Harry Lumsden.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Bill Crins has moved to Peterborough from Nova Scotia allowing him to attend his first meeting in 14 years. He hopes to attend many more.

The Membership List has been updated. Members are asked to check their telephone numbers and their postal and e-mail addresses and to telephone corrections to Bertin.

Lumsden reported that the Lake Ontario North regional meeting of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists will be held Saturday, Nov. 13 following a field trip at 8:30 a.m. near Brighton, Ont. The FON's executive director Mr. Fuller has been replaced by Ric Symmes, a former acting executive director.

McAndrews recommended a book entitled "Special Places: The changing ecosystem of the Toronto region." It was published by the Royal Canadian Institute and costs \$49.95.

DAVID FOWLE:

Long-standing member David Fowle passed away on Oct. 14 after a long illness. A memorial service was held at York University on Nov. 3. His ashes were interred in British Columbia after a family memorial service.

Jim Bendell worked his first summer job with Fowle, who was doing a PhD on Ruffed Grouse at the time. "He was a very kind and patient man who made tremendous muffins on a Coleman stove."

Michael Boyer has written an obituary which has been attached.

SPEAKER:

As a member, George Bryant needs no introduction. Now semi-retired, he leads tour groups to exotic locations around the world, looking for interesting plants and birds. His topic was:

What to pack for a four-month-long world tour:
Misadventures of a tour leader.

In a talk that was off the beaten track for a Brodie Club meeting, Bryant opened his bag of tricks and pulled out all the essentials for a four-month, around-the-world cruise.

Everything was contained in an under-the-seat airplane suitcase on wheels - "if you don't have wheels, don't travel"- that he bought in a bazaar for \$50. "Offer half what they ask," he advised.

The first surprise from the bag was a collection of three alarms and a Casio watch with altimeter and barometer. The barometer tells you that the weather will be "lousy" again tomorrow, while the altimeter is very handy for locating high-altitude birds in the tropics. In Nepal, many species are found only in a narrow band high up on a mountainside, and the altimeter has proven very handy for finding them.

"Never leave it at home," Bryant advised.

Collapsible butterfly nets will catch butterflies, moths and scorpions. A small live trap is good for catching itinerant mammals. Bryant's trap was about 4 inches square and a foot long, and caught a "lovely animal," a bank vole, in Scotland.

A fearsome, two-foot long machete is all he carries for cutting trails in the bush, while a folding ear trumpet allows him to pick up bird songs from quite a distance away. His ear trumpet is "a cheap and simple" sheet of thin plastic with a locking side-piece that twists into a cone two feet long with a 12-inch aperture. The earhole was on the side, near the small end.

Bryant picks up far-away bird songs with a pocket amplifier - a Radio Shack Stereo-amplified Listener - that he bought for \$10. A cheap tape recorder will attract birds, while a directional microphone can be used to record them. The microphones tend to take a half-an-hour or so to set up, sometimes longer than the attention span of the tour members.

A disposable poncho sheds any rain that a fold-up umbrella doesn't. He wears Tilly hats, baseball caps and toques. Leather gloves last longer than cotton ones and are more comfortable.

A flashlight with spare batteries is important for 12-hour tropical nights, especially in regions where the power tends to fail as you're heading for the loo. Bryant carries a small pocket torch with red filter taped over the end for looking at star maps in the dark. The filter allows him to retain his night vision.

Pocket immersion heaters are handy for making a cup of coffee the next morning but can cause serious burns.

Binoculars are available that will focus on a distant bird or a tiny flower, while a cheap pair of reading glasses and a small 10x magnifying glass can pick the mites off the back of a beetle. A telescope is useful but can be heavy. Insect envelopes hold the beetle for further study.

An extra pair of glasses can prevent disaster if the regular pair break. A tiny screwdriver and Loctite will hold the earpieces on for a little longer.

The odds-and-sods include innumerable pens, a whistle for calling the group together, scissors, a short tape measure for measuring trees and an Audubon bird caller that doesn't. An electric plug is useful to run a cooler off the car's cigarette lighter socket, while a Swiss Army knife must have a screwdriver for eye glasses. You can't travel without a notebook or wrapping paper because somebody inevitably has a birthday. Bryant uses a small pocket mirror to show birds to his tour group, reflecting the sun to a point just below the bird. He has tried a laser pointer but they are not bright enough in daylight.

One of the few expensive gadgets in the bag - and one of the least useful - is a GPS navigational instrument that came with an impenetrable instruction manual. Bryant is searching for a cheaper, simpler version. A \$20 Radio Shack transistor radio will bring in the weather channel across North America, while a short-wave radio will pull CBC in from anywhere in the world. A telephone calling card is often more useful - and cheaper - than a pocket full of coins in a payphone.

Bryant has just bought a photographic camera for his around the world cruise. He has not bothered with them in the past.

The most important item in the first aid kit is Polysporin. The drops are handy for pink eye, and the cream for minor infections. A thermometer and bandages are basic tools. He has never used his small elastic tensor bandage, but carries it just in case. A leaflet on CPR-in-two-easy-lessons will hopefully not be needed.

A compartmentalized plastic box is used for a variety of pills that include basic pain killers, cold remedies and Gravol. Sleeping pills are essential, along with Alka Seltzer, stomach remedies and Kaopectate. "You can't have enough of it." Peptobismal wards off Montezuma's Revenge in Mexico, while ASA is good for back-pains. Malaria pills are expensive, taste awful and are often unnecessary. Earplugs are good when sharing a room with a noisy room-mate.

Ammonia works for insect and chigger bites. Small asthma inhalators can be bought over-the-counter in the United States for about \$10. Sunscreen is essential nowadays, while one-step hand sanitizers allow you to disinfect your hands in the field without soap and water.

One of the most useful tools that he carries is a sock filled with garden sulphur. He bangs the sock against his ankles, repelling any chiggers that happen by. He also swears by Permethrin, an insecticide that is sold under the brand-name of Duranon Tick Repellent. This product can be bought in the United States in pump containers for spraying onto trouser legs before venturing into the bush. The insecticide fends off mosquitoes, chiggers and ticks until the clothes are washed. Pepper spray can ward off dogs, but has sometimes proved more effective on tour members who stand downwind.

The members recommend a variety of ways to purify water. A couple of drops of iodine or chlorine bleach will disinfect a bottle of water. Claire Muller carries a bottle of iodine crystals, stored in a glass bottle of water. She uses one capful of saturated iodine solution to disinfect a glassful of water. (On his father's suggestion, Bertin soaked those same crystals in ammonia to brew a potent explosive that came in handy for high-school pranks!) Bryant noted that pure bottled water is now available virtually everywhere in the world.

Plastic bags are very handy so shampoo and duty-free liqueurs don't leak all over the inside of the suitcase. Needless to say, you can't travel without Ziplock bags and duct tape.

Bryant uses a roll-up toiletry bag to carry all his bits and pieces, which Norma Martin hangs in hotel rooms using a small s-shaped hook. A small shoulder bag is handy for holding field guides. A variety of money belts keeps money and passports under control, while a belt bag holds the less valuable tools of his trade.

Bryant swears by identification guides, and lugs around a heavy briefcase to prove it. He carries guides on every conceivable variety of fauna and flora, including butterflies, trees, shrubs, birds and mammals. He has checklists to tick off his finds, and draws up his own list when others aren't available. The Ontario government's Travel Info Centre on Hwy 400 in Barrie has the best maps and washrooms around. "Better than McDonald's," he says.

QUESTIONS:

- Bryant said his luggage can be very heavy, especially when he carries a telescope and a briefcase full of field guides;

- he has not had much luck attracting birds with an Audubon squeaker. Claire Muller recommends rubbing a mirror with a piece of styrofoam;

- Alexandra Eadie asked whether he carries a camera. Bryant tends not to because he falls asleep during other peoples' slide shows, and he finds he cannot take pictures and lead a bird group at the same time. He has just bought a camera with a 300 mm. zoom lens and doubler for his next trip;

- Jim Bendell asked Bryant whether he carries a clothesline for drying his laundry. Bryant can usually find a laundromat wherever he goes. He rarely has time to wash his clothes, and instead carries a pillowcase full of dirty clothes;

- Trudy Rising asked about his tour members. They tend to be retired women who are interested in botany and birds. He takes them where he wants to go, usually to study botany and birds;

- Bryant became involved with tours in the 1960s, with a friend who was a tour leader. He joined some tours, picked up some ideas and soon started leading his own.

The speaker was thanked by John Speakman.

NOTES & OBSERVATIONS:

- Bendell has noticed Snow Buntings along Hwy 560 and Tree Sparrows along Hwy 144 near Gogama;

- Crins saw a variety of Sparrows: White-crowned, White-throated, Tree and Lincoln Sparrows passing by his new home in Peterborough;

- Bryant has seen Fox Sparrows in Toronto's High Park;

- Lumsden told of the first confirmed evidence in many decades of a cougar in Ontario, a scat near Kenora. There have been many reports of cougars since the 1970s, usually of spoor or visual sightings through the trees, but there has never been a positive photograph, hair or scat that could confirm the sighting. Given the lack of hard evidence, cougar watchers have developed a reputation akin to UFO and sasquatch finders.

In March, 1998, a logger named Ralph Anderson found footprints north-east of Silver Lake, in the bush about one hour from Kenora, and risked his reputation by reporting them to the local MNR naturalist. The logger was sure he was on the track of a cougar because the paws were 3.5 to 4 inches across with a stride of 28 to 32 inches. More important, he saw evidence of a tail marks in the snow, distinguishing this animal from a lynx. Another characteristic of lynx is the halo of hair around the foot and between the toes, which cougars do not have.

The naturalists decided to follow up the sightings and followed the footprints in the snow until they found a scat. They performed thin-layer chromatography, giving absolute confirmation eight months later that the animal truly was a cougar. Cougar footprints have also been confirmed in Manitoba's Whiteshell Park, near the Ontario border, and in New Brunswick;

- Eadie has been tracking four migrating Peregrine Falcons using satellite tracking and the Canadian Peregrine Foundation website, www.peregrine-foundation.ca. The foundation placed satellite monitors on the falcons and released them in Richmond Hill, north of Toronto. One migrated straight down the centre of the Appalachians, across the Gulf of Mexico to Belize, Costa

Rica and Panama. Another flew 900 km. out into the Atlantic before returning to north-east Florida for an eight-day rest. The falcon then flew over Cuba and the Cayman Islands, heading for Panama. One falcon was injured and has remained near its release site in Richmond Hill, Ont. The speed the birds travel is truly amazing. One travelled 1,500 km. in four days;

- Lumsden reported that Trumpeter Swans are close to being a self-sustaining population in Ontario, but are not quite there yet. There are 252 wild swans in the province. Many pairs disappear in the spring and turn up in the fall with cygnets in tow;

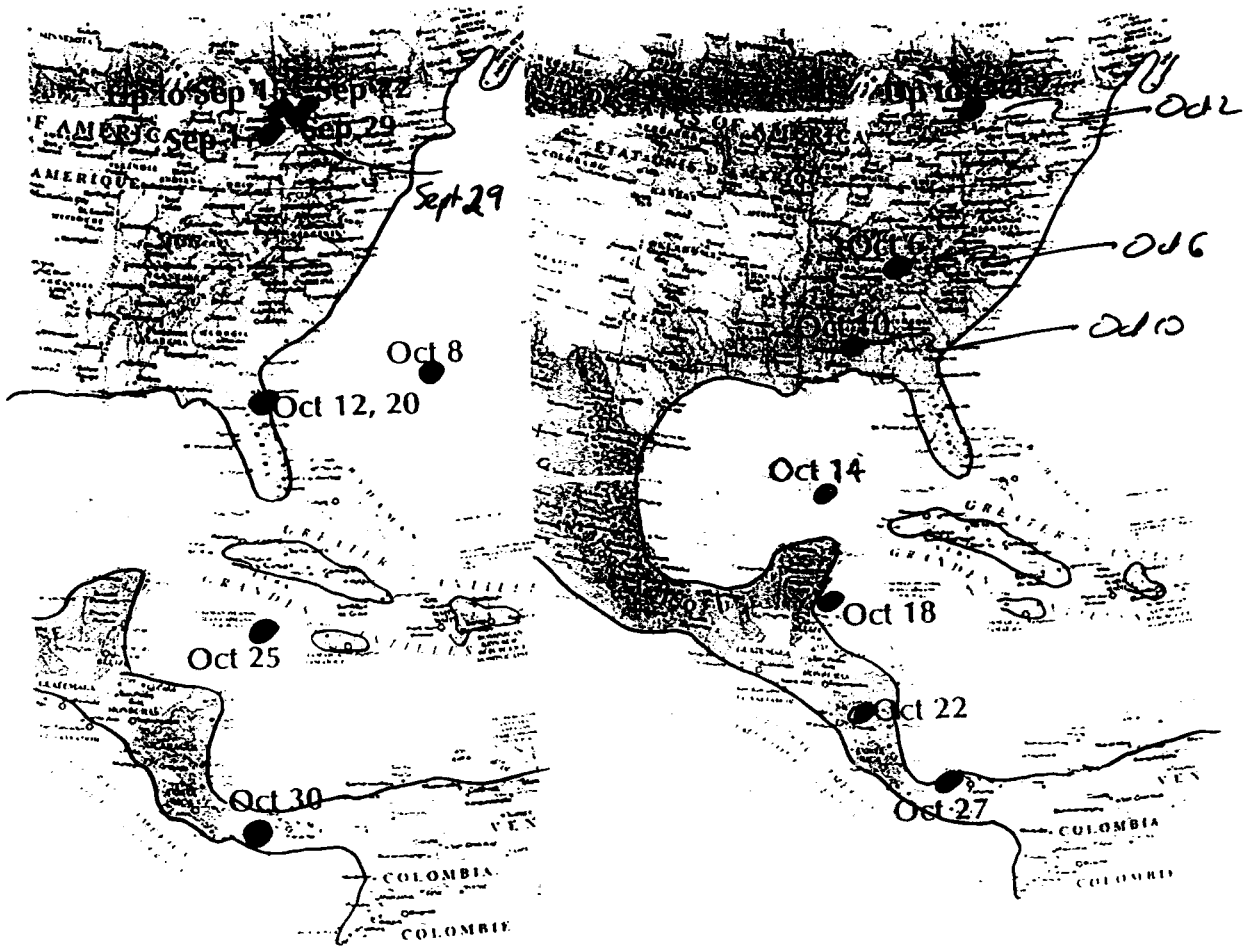
- Bryant turned up a group of Eastern Hellbenders while turning over limestone rocks in the Frenchman River, near Erie, Penna., in the Mississippi River drainage. The beasts were up to 29 inches long, "huge, grotesque, slimy salamanders," Bryant said.

- Bill Carrick nominated Pierce Brosnan for best supporting actor in the recent Grey Owl movie. The beavers were a shoo-in for the top award even though their role was cut to a mere three minutes. He received \$100,000 for his role in the three beaver shots that survived the cutting-room, and spent \$104,000. The cost was high because the directors wanted beavers of every age from birth to six months and that necessitated flying some of them from Argentina in the Southern Hemisphere. Carrick noted that beavers from Saskatchewan were introduced to Tierra del Fuego in the 1940s and have prospered ever since, sometimes to the consternation of the locals.

The meeting adjourned at 9:58 pm.

THE NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be held on Nov. 16th at 8:00 pm in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Zoological Laboratories at the University of Toronto when Prof. Glenn Morris of UofT's Erindale campus will talk on Katydid Conversations.



Travels of two Peregrine Falcons from Richmond Hill to Costa Rica, courtesy of the Canadian Peregrine Foundation , www.peregrine-foundation.ca