

THE 950th MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB  
MINUTES

The 950th meeting of the Brodie Club was held on Sept. 19, 2000 in the Ramsay Wright Zoological Laboratories of the University of Toronto.

Chairman: Norm Martin  
Recording Secretary: Oliver Bertin  
Attendance: 20 members and two guest

GUESTS:

Elizabeth Redrupp, guest of Hugh Currie  
Brenda Hatcher of London, England, guest of Jennifer Young

Minutes of the annual field day were approved. They are attached.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Bill Carrick reported that the Brodie Club started the 1999-2000 year with \$68.40 and ended with \$59.13 and 15 stamps. The main income came from memberships at \$340, but the Brodie Club also received \$200 in donations and \$100 in refunds from the Savage book. Expenses included \$172.27 in stamps, \$75 to the FON, \$62 for speakers and \$300 in donations to the Toronto Zoo. The dues for the 2000-2001 year were left at \$10 for regular members, \$15 for families 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: Keith Reynolds, Don Huff  
ARCHIVES: Sandra Eadie volunteered to help Carrick with the club archives.

## MEMBERS' NIGHT:

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

Aird has renewed his passion for scarecrows, erecting one on the east side of Hwy. 400 near the Beeton exit. The scarecrow has attracted considerable attention if only because they are so rarely seen nowadays. He has also kept tabs on a crow near his home in Inglewood which has the habit of emitting a double caw instead of the single note that is characteristic of the breed.

He reported the second-highest number of sighting for the Kirtland's Warbler, a total of 889 this year, just short of last year's record. The species almost disappeared for a period, partly because the armed forces cleared their jackpine habitat in Petawawa to limit injuries to paratroopers. They have recovered in Michigan but have not yet started to breed in Ontario.

Bertin reported a simple intelligence test he performed on a group of birds while sitting eating his lunch in a park in Washington, DC.

A flock of birds decided to join him for lunch, and they showed varying abilities in their ability to scoff the food. Bertin experimented with a female Mallard duck. He threw a piece of sandwich, which bounced off the duck's chest and laid on the ground while the duck wondered what to do next. The bird eventually stumbled onto the food and gobbled it up. A pigeon spied a piece of sandwich and waddled over to take a peek before sampling the wares. It was far less adept than the starlings who spied the food and immediately flocked around, grabbing the food far faster than the pigeon or duck could manage. Soon, the starlings were catching bits of food in mid-air, with a style that no baseball player could match.

The brightest of the bunch, however, appeared to be a crow which appeared with all the majesty that such a bird can muster. It drove out the lesser birds and dominated the proceedings. Bertin tried an experiment. He threw one grape to the crow, which pecked away at it. He then threw another grape a few feet away, causing considerable confusion in the crow's mind given the flock of eager starlings hovering just out of pecking range. The crow eventually left the first grape half-eaten, strode to the second grape and ate it, and then returned to the first grape to finish it off.

It was a winning strategy. The crow managed to eat two grapes, an unlikely occurrence if it had waited to finish the first grape before heading for the second.

Bodsworth kept on eye on gulls at his place in Port Burwell, Lake Erie. He would spy 4,000 gulls in large flocks on the beach, with perhaps 1,000 gulls in the area. There was an even number of Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls, with a smattering of Great Black-backed and Herring Gulls. The number of gulls doubled in the evening, with the count reaching as many as 10,000 of the same mix as during the day. A handful of young gulls turned up by the end of July, but no more than that.

Bryant recommended a number of field books.

- 'Seabirds' by Peter Harrison is a most enjoyable bird-watching book, "the best";
- 'Butterflies Through Binoculars' and the accompanying 'Dragonflies Through Binoculars' by Sidney Dunkle are "excellent books. There is nothing like them";
- 'Mushrooms of Ontario' is a help, but the fungi are still a challenge to identify. The accompanying 'Goldenrods of Ontario' is a good spiral-bound book that hangs together well. Both are published by the biology department of the University of Waterloo:

- the Owen Sound Naturalists has published a handy series of guides on the identification of ferns, asters, orchids and fleabanes. This is the first fleabane guide that Bryant has come across.
- Peterson's 'Field Guide to the Mammals' is useful but is outdated. Published in 1964, it does not have the latest taxonomy on bears, ground squirrels and other species;
- The 'Canadian Field Naturalist' magazine has excellent articles;
- 'Field Guide to the Birds of Australia' by Pizzey and Knight has excellent descriptions of birds and their habitats.
- The Australian Road Atlas' is handy for travellers in that country.

Bryant recommended 2.75x reading glasses, but other members said 4x glasses are also available. They are sometimes needed for reading the small print.

Bill Crins travelled with Ken Abraham to the Hudson Bay Lowlands in mid-July to band Snow Geese. They used Winisk as their base, flying out every day looking for flocks to tag. Judging by earlier records, this was not a very successful breeding season. Nevertheless, they banded 2,000 Snow Geese with neck or leg bands, along with some young birds.

They also came across two pure Ross' Goose, one probable hybrid and two Brant Geese, which are very rare on the coast in the summer. Other birds included three species of loon, Common, Pacific and Red-throated, as well as Tundra Swans and Sandhill Cranes. Smaller birds included sandpipers, Dowitchers, Sanderlings, five Common Eiders, some Parasitic Jaegers and Willow Ptarmigan. Mammals included one polar bear, an early arrival on the coast and a small pod of belugas, but no walruses.

The Snow Goose project is continuing. There does not appear to be a drop in the population of geese even though the bag limit has been raised.

In answer to a question from Bryant, Crins said there was widespread evidence of environmental degradation even from the air. There was substantial physical damage to the vegetation and sometimes desertification that was severe enough to affect stands of willow. The environmental damage was worse near Cape Henrietta Maria on Hudson's Bay but not as serious near the Sutton River.

Falls and Jim Bendell and their wives took the opportunity of a conference in August to spend three weeks in Newfoundland. Falls was intrigued by the Serpentine Barrens and other geology so he went looking for it in Gros Morne National Park using the 'Traveller's Guide to the Geology of Newfoundland.'

The current theory is that the barrens were formed about 450 million years ago, during the Ordovician era. At that time, much of the area was still covered by the Lapetus Ocean, the predecessor to the Atlantic Ocean. Tectonic plates apparently moved together, pushing up the ocean floor. This floor contained a rock named Peridotite, which becomes Serpentine under pressure. Serpentine is a curious rock. It is green in colour and is highly toxic to many plants. Only a few species can survive, among them insectivorous plants which rely on other sources of nutrition

Falls showed a four-minute video of the serpentine barrens which included shots of a those plants which seem to co-exist with Serpentine rocks. They include juniper, larch, dwarf birch, saxifrage, grey moss and harebells, but he warned that some of these plants may have been introduced later, when a gravel road was laid.

BRODIECLUB  
ANNUAL FIELD DAY

The annual field day was held June 11, 2000 at the Toronto Zoo at the invitation of member Bill Rapley, executive director of biology and conservation.

GUESTS:

14 members and 18 guests

Ed and Barbara Welch, guests of Fred Bodsworth;

Jill Cameron-Huff, Addy, Carter and Sally, guests of Don Huff;

Isabel Boardman and Jeff and Yolanda Stewart, guests of Claire Muller;

Julia Riley, guests of John Riley;

Eleonora Bertin, Heather Anne Campbell, Peter Auckenthaler, Alice, Janet and Barry Blackwell,  
guests of Oliver Bertin;

Jeff Stewart and Yolanda Van Grootel

Rapley and his staff offered a fascinating, 6.5-hour tour of the behind-the-scenes workings of the zoo. Members were escorted through the workshops, graphics and machine shops, the nutrition and horticultural centres and the animal hospital.

The members were offered a tour of the zoo on a zoomobile, and a chilly picnic lunch in the Simba Safari Lodge overlooking the rhinoceros habitat. That was followed by a walk in the pouring rain through the Africa, Indo-Malaya and Malayan Woods Pavilions, and the Conservation Connection Centre. The highlights of the afternoon included a peek inside the elephant house, the staff preparation areas underneath the Africa Pavilion, the construction project that will soon become the Gorilla Rainforest Exhibit and a behind-the-scenes look at the tropical fish exhibit before returning to the administration building for a warming coffee.

Following the tour, Bill Carrick offered Rapley \$300 to help with the zoo's work. The funds included \$200 in member donations collected that day and \$100 from club funds.

NEXT MEETING:

The 950th meeting of the Brodie Club will be held on Sept. 19, 2000 in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Zoological Laboratories of the University of Toronto. This will be a members' night. Members are invited to offer their notes and observations from the summer in the field or at home.