

THE BRODIE CLUB



ROYAL ONTARIO
MUSEUM OF ZOOLOGY

THE 957th MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB MINUTES

The 957th meeting of the Brodie Club was held on April 17, 2001 in the Ramsay Wright Zoological Laboratories of the University of Toronto.

Chairman: Ken Abraham
Recording Secretary: Oliver Bertin
Attendance: 21 members and three guests

GUESTS:

Isabel Boardman, guest of Claire Muller
Andrew Jane, guest of Ken Abraham
Vicky Draper, guest of Mike Boyer

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Charles Lennox, a corresponding member from Englishtown, Nova Scotia, attended the meeting;
- The next meeting will be held on May 15 in a different room, Room 107 of the Ramsay Wright Zoological Laboratories. Harry Lumsden will speak on his recent trip to Kamchatka and the Sakhalin Peninsula;
- Members discussed several possible venues for the June field day. Member William Rapley has invited the members to visit the Toronto Zoo, while Jock McAndrews suggested Joker's Hill near Aurora, Ont., part of the Koffler Estate and a prominent equestrian training centre. The estate was donated to the University of Toronto and is currently being used for research by the Department of Botany. McAndrews said it is a natural area, suitable for walking, with forests and old fields and 45-foot tall white ash trees. The venue will be decided at the May meeting;
- Marc Johnson left in April to travel around the world for eight months. The primary purpose of the trip is to study natural history in England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, U.A.E., India, Thailand, New Zealand, Australia, Easter Island and Chile. Marc has asked for members to contact him by e-mail atjohnson@botany.utoronto.ca if they have any suggestions or possible contacts in the places he will be visiting.);
- Muller offered for sale several bird models made 20 years ago by the late Bill Eakin;

- Bill Carrick suggested the formation of a constitutional committee to take a new look at club practices, including the taking of attendance and minutes. He would consider volunteers for the position of treasurer, which he has filled for many years, but there were no immediate expressions of interest;

- Paul Aird said he found many of the Brodie Club traditions valuable. He was able to trace a speaker back for more than 50 years;

- Bertin has edited or written the minutes for three years, and wonders whether it is time for a fresh look. Volunteer secretaries are more than welcome, for one meeting or on a regular basis;

- A list of members and their addresses has been included in the current minutes. Please telephone or e-mail Bertin with any corrections or amendments;

- Minutes of the previous meeting were approved without comment.

SPEAKER:

The speaker was longstanding member John Speakman, a naturalist and ophthalmologist who has visited the Arctic three times a year for 40 years.

"AN ARCTIC RETROSPECTIVE"

This was the third time that Speakman has spoken to the Brodie Club on the Arctic and his medical experiences there. He has had an interest in the north and its people since childhood days reading the Hudson's Bay Co. publication, the Beaver. After finishing his training as an ophthalmologist in 1961, he had an opportunity to travel north on the Canadian Coast Guard ship, the C.D. Howe. This ship supplied oil and other necessities to the Arctic communities, provided limited medical services and helped establish Canadian sovereignty over the region.

The ship loaded in Montreal then headed north into Hudson Strait, to Frobisher Bay, Cape Dorset, Sugluk, then north again via Davis Strait to Lancaster Sound, Pond Inlet, Arctic Bay and Repulse Bay.

The annual visit by the C.D. Howe was always an exciting time for the local people because they had so little contact with the outside world. The ship would bring in drums of oil and essential supplies. Local people would come on board for a medical check, a chest X-ray and an eye examination. A helicopter was used to bring patients from remote locations.

Tuberculosis was relatively common among the Inuit in the early days. The affected people had to be shipped south for treatment, a heart-rending affair for the families involved. At that time, many of the Inuit lived in very poor housing, shacks often composed of cardboard, plywood and canvas. There had been starvation earlier on in the central Arctic, an event that horrified many people. To minimize the chance of it happening again, the government relocated the Inuit to coastal communities where it was easier to provide medical care, food and education.

Speakman showed slides of the old two-story frame houses used by the R.C.M.P. and Hudson Bay factors, and contrasted them with the modern buildings in use to-day. He also showed examples of early tent rings made of circles of large rocks, and sod huts dug into the gravel and covered with sod and skins.

Following the C.D. Howe trip, Speakman acted as consultant to the Northern Medical Unit of the University of Manitoba. This has involved two or three trips a year to nursing stations in the Keewatin District, in the northwest corner of Hudson's Bay. In addition, he has made rafting and canoeing trips down the Coppermine, Horton and Burnside rivers.

Communities like Rankin Inlet, Baker Lake and Coral Harbour now have large schools, nursing stations, oil-storage tanks, shopping malls and better housing. In Frobisher Bay, the high school is known locally as "the big bladder" because of its balloon-like architecture;

Speakman has seen a kayak only once. They were replaced by Peterborough canoes and more recently by large aluminum boats powered by one or more 40-horsepower motors. Many communities still have one or two Peterhead boats with a mast and cabin and these are used to travel long distances to collect stone for carving or to hunt walrus.

Even though there are still plenty of dogs around, they have been displaced by the snowmobiles which are used almost exclusively to travel in winter and pull the heavy komatiks. The snowmobile is a mixed blessing. It enables hunters to visit their trap lines and return in one day, minimizing the need to overnight in a snow-house. However many people have died or suffered frost-bite when their machine has broken down miles from home.

To minimize the danger, the Inuit often travel in pairs. In summer, three- and four-wheel ATVs are used to travel on the land. In places like Rankin Inlet, trucks and cars are everywhere and stop signs are used to direct traffic.

The C.D. Howe sea lift has been replaced by roll-on roll-off barges, and fork-lift trucks are used to carry prefabricated houses and building materials to the building sites, the structures being a far cry from the cardboard shacks used forty years ago.

Air transport, although expensive, has improved access and facilitated the evacuation of sick patients. There is jet service to the larger centres and frequent connector service to the smaller settlements.

With regard to current medical problems, tuberculosis is not nearly as serious as it was and patients are treated with antibiotics at local nursing stations instead of being shipped south. It is still hard to establish compliance in some individuals. Middle-ear infections and perforated ear drums are still serious and dental caries are a major problem related to the huge consumption of candy and pop. Meningitis is less common but extremely serious because it is so hard to get appropriate treatment when the patient is a 1,000 miles from the nearest hospital. Some children die and others suffer disabling neurological damage.

It became apparent thirty years ago that myopia or short-sightedness was increasing in frequency. The older Inuit were all long-sighted, a nice adaptation to their outdoor life, while modern Inuit have a much larger proportion of short-sighted people. A total population survey at Spence Bay and Gjoa Haven failed to determine the cause of the myopia, but they did rule out genetics, the traditional cause for myopia.

Myopia creates an important health problem because it's hard to supply glasses to the scattered Inuit people. Steel frames freeze to the face and plastic breaks very easily in the cold.

The highest incidence of angle-closure glaucoma occurs in Inuit people. It develops when the circulation of aqueous fluid is blocked and results in blindness if not treated promptly. Labrador keratitis is caused by an over-exposure to ultraviolet light. It is common along the Labrador coast because the late ice melt results in excessive ultraviolet radiation.

One of the common problems to-day is cataract formation and it is increasing in frequency as the population ages. After surgery years ago, the patients required thick heavy lenses to correct their vision, but they were uncomfortable and prone to breakage. To-day, intra-ocular lenses avoid these problems and often results in 20/20 vision without glasses.

With better diet and hygiene, many strictly medical problems are slowly dwindling. The more serious problems now are alcoholism, wife-abuse, drugs, glue-sniffing, and a high suicide rate among young people. "It's very disturbing and hard to correct," he said.

Reference was made to the development of Inuit sculpture and print-making under the initial guidance of James Huston. Slides of several well-known artists were shown. One slide illustrated an elderly blind woman who was covered with tattoo marks made by drawing a piece of caribou sinew impregnated with carbon underneath the skin. The lady was still apparently able to sew.

Improvement in communication has caused profound changes to the way people live in the north. Until the 1980's, people used short-wave radio or radio telephone to summon help in an emergency. With satellite communications, anyone can pick up the phone and get immediate contact anywhere in the world. The computer is having a similar impact. Now, Inuit children sit at their keyboards searching the Internet for school projects.

The presentation concluded with reference to features of the Arctic which remain unchanged. Pictures were shown of mountains and glaciers in Auyuituk Park; flowers; the fall colors of the tundra and rocks at Churchill; birds including two young gyrfalcons after their first flight from a nest on the Horton River; muskox; migrating caribou and a young wolf cub caught at its den on the Thelon.

The Thelon pictures also included the Hornby cabin where John Hornby, his nephew Edgar, and Abelard were buried after starving to death in the 20s.

The speaker was thanked by Ron Scovell.

NOTES & OBSERVATIONS:

- Speakman noted that high winds last week blew ice 20 feet up the banks of his place on the east shore of Lake Simcoe;
- Norm Martin has observed that a large population of crows stayed in the Belleville area through the winter. Many appear to be single, and haven't nested yet;
- Lumsden has found that Canada Geese, Mallard Ducks and swans are already starting to nest. The Mallards have laid several eggs already;
- Hugh Currie heard on the Internet about a flock of 9,000 to 12,000 Snow Geese which flew over the Ottawa area. About one-third were Greater Snow Geese, with several blue morph geese;
- George Bryant saw 15 spotted salamanders in a pond at midnight. There was a mass of eggs;
- Scovell said squirrels in his yard are learning to eat the bird feed from his feeder, despite his efforts to drive them away. They have destroyed **11** feeders so far;
- Jean Iron saw 300 Red-neck Grebes displaying and calling, off Bluffers Park on the Scarborough Bluffs;
- Lennox said a mailman/naturalist in Wolfeville, N.S. has been feeding a Barred Owl close to his house. The owl takes the food back to its nest to feed its mate;

- McAndrews has seen up to 120 wild turkeys in one flock near his place in Codrington, north of Brighton. They were genuine eastern morph wild turkeys and were very approachable;
- Claire Muller said Sandhill Cranes are now nesting in Peterborough County, and she has seen Great Grey Owls, north of Peterborough;
- Carrick has found a copy of his first bird guide, *The Bird Book* by Charles Reed, first published in 1906. He saved for five years to buy the volume on water birds;
- Bertin recommended a website called www.abebooks.com, sponsored by independent secondhand booksellers around the world, for finding obscure bird guides. He found 14 books by late member Leonard Bertin, as far afield as Peterborough, England; Perth, Australia; Tuscon, Arizona and Fredericton, N.B.

The meeting adjourned at 10: 11 pm.

NEXT MEETING:

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