

THE
BRODIE
CLUB



ROYAL ONTARIO
MUSEUM OF ZOOLOGY

THE 968th MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB

The 968th meeting of the Brodie Club was held on Sept. 17 in Room 432 of the Dept. of Zoology of the University of Toronto.

Chairman: George Bryant

Secretary: Oliver Bertin

Attendance: 11 members and two guests

Guests: Eleonora and Adrian Bertin, wife and grandson of late member Leonard Bertin.

The minutes of the June field day were approved with no changes.

NEW BUSINESS:

Bill Carrick asked for nominations for the 2002-2003 slate of officers.

Treasurer Claire Muller has moved to Wolfe Island, near Kingston. Jennifer Young was nominated to replace her.

Oliver Bertin was nominated as secretary. He suggested that members may like to take over as secretary for meetings they are knowledgeable about or interested in.

Bruce Falls was nominated as chairman of the program committee.

George Bryant was nominated as FON representative.

All past committee members were nominated to continue in their current positions.

The election will be held at the October meeting.

Young reported that she had \$229.63 in the club bank account after paying Bertin \$95 for postage stamps. The stamps will last until year end at a cost of about \$18 a mailing. The members approved an annual fee of \$10 a year for members and \$15 for families.

Falls offered the report of the program committee. He said Marc Johnson of the UofT Botany Dept. will speak on his recent around-the-world tour at the next meeting, on Oct. 15. He asked for suggestions for speakers for the other meetings this year.

The members discussed giving speakers an honorarium in addition to dinner at the Faculty Club and occasionally travel expenses. The members turned down the proposal.

Falls noted that attendance tended to be low at members' nights and asked whether these events should be replaced by speakers. The members decided to continue with the current schedule on Carrick's recommendation.

Bryant offered the report of the FON committee. He said the FON had requested the usual annual membership fee of \$75 and the members agreed to the sum. Bryant distributed some FON literature and sample Christmas cards.

Bertin reported that he had received correspondence from Keith Reynolds, a member since 1938. "I'm alive and very well," he said. Unfortunately, Dr. Reynolds will no longer be able to attend club meetings. The members voted to make Reynolds an honorary life member, the only one currently so honoured. Keith Reynolds was a young naturalist in London, Ontario, who studied biology at the University of Western Ontario and went on to a PhD with research on European hares. He had a long career with the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests as a biologist, district forester and deputy minister. During the Robarts era he was secretary to the Ontario Cabinet - the top civil servant in Ontario - where he was instrumental in promoting conservation within the Ontario government.

Ken Reading wrote to club members from Puruni, British Guyana. His letter was included in the club archives.

Claire Muller wrote to say that she and Bernard had moved to a house on Wolfe Island, a short distance from the ferry to Kingston giving them the best of both worlds. "We can only say that this new setting is wonderful - water, farms, village, ferry, Canada's first capital at our doorstep and birds, mammals, amphibians, insects and verdure within a short bicycle ride." Their address is 1263 Main St. (Box 126), Wolfe Island, KOH-2YO, telephone 613-385-9926.

MEMBERS' NIGHT:

Ron and Mary Tasker talked about their recent visit to Spitzbergen Island to attend the third Arctic Stereotactic Conference. When asked why they chose such an unlikely spot, Ron explained that the neurosurgeons who attended were at "the cutting edge of everything. They don't want to go to the Royal York for their conference." The surgeons visited Pond Inlet-at-a past meeting.

The Taskers flew from Oslo, Norway, to Tromso and from there to Spitzbergen, a total flight time of about four hours. The island is controlled by Norway, although several other countries, including Russia and the United States, have laid claim at various times. It is approximately the same latitude as Ellesmere Island but the climate is as mild as southern Baffin Island because it is situated in the Gulf Stream.

The capital is a small town located in one or two valleys at the end of a long fjord. Taskers' slides showed numerous rough buildings, similar in many ways to Canada's Arctic towns with the usual plethora of snowmobiles and abandoned machinery. There is a very good university in the town. It is part of the University of Oslo and specializes in geology and biology.

Spitzbergen was discovered in the 1500s. Unlike Ellesmere Island which had indigenous people as far back as about 1200, there were no endemic people on Spitzbergen. The current residents are descended from miners who came to the island in search of coal. They speak English and Norwegian, and the culture is European.

There are 20 or 30 abandoned mines on the island, but only one is still working, supplying coal to the local people. None is exported. The locals estimate the coal will last for another 15 years. Mary Tasker went on a tour of a mine that travelled horizontally from a cliff face and was dug by hand. The island is littered with mining machinery and coal dust covers everything and everybody in the town. "It's a mess," Ron Tasker said. "You blow your nose and your handkerchief is black."

With the dwindling of the coal industry, many islanders have turned to tourism. There are many fine restaurants and lots of nature reserves on the island.

There was a cemetery across the fjord from the townsite which was used for victims of the 1918 influenza epidemic. Medical researchers hoped to isolate the flu virus from the remains in the cemetery but they found the DNA had deteriorated too much to be useful.

The area is characterized by low mountains and fjords similar to those in Norway, and flora and fauna that is similar in many ways to Baffin Island. Reindeer and polar bears arrived before the humans and are relatively common. The reindeer are wild. They are a separate race from the typical European animal and are the size of goats. The polar bears are considered very dangerous and residents often carry rifles when leaving the townsite. The Taskers saw one of the bears on a boat trip down the fjord, as well as Arctic foxes.

The Taskers saw a Mallard duck, ravens, Glaucous Gulls and sandpipers. Parasitic Jaegers and Arctic Terns were common. There were thousands of nesting Dovekies, high on a scree slope near the town. Kittiwakes were found nesting on the window sills of an old mine. Ron was surprised to see Puffins. The only passerine bird was a Snow Bunting.

Vegetation included campion, red saxifrage and potentilla, but very few flowers.

Bruce and Ann Falls went to Beijing for a meeting of the Ornithological Congress. Before the meeting, they went on a field trip to the mountains north of Beijing and saw a second-growth forest. It was in August and they saw only 40 species of birds, with few exotics. Most of the birds and plants were typical Eurasian species, which are common right across the continent at that latitude. The flora of eastern China is similar to that of eastern North America, with maples and other common species. The city of Beijing has many parks and trees, with lots of European Tree Sparrows, Pigeons and Azure-winged Magpies.

The Falls traveled to Yunnan province, a tropical area in the southwest that borders Burma and Laos. There were lots of forests, but many have been cleared for tea plantations. There are some ecological reserves in the area. There are 700 to 800 species of bird in the province, half of the total number of species in China. Most are similar to those found in India.

In Hong Kong, they visited a nature preserve in the New Territories that was operated by the World Wildlife Fund. It had a large marsh with shrimp and fish ponds. Birds included migrating shorebirds, herons and marsh birds. Falls also saw lots of dragonflies, butterflies and huge moths. They saw no wild ducks or gulls.

Hugh Currie along with Bob Yukich saw thousands of Hallowe'en Pennant and Great Blue Skimmer dragonflies on July 10 on Lake St. Clair marsh. This was only the second time the Skimmers have been seen in Ontario. They are a southern species that are apparently moving north.

Carrick has closed his site north of the Toronto Zoo. It was originally bought by the province for Pickering Airport, but was turned over to the local conservation authority, which will operate it in future. All the birds and animals have found homes, many in the local zoo.

Carrick had a mixed year with his Sandhill Cranes. One laid four clutches of two eggs each in captivity, at 12-day intervals. All of the eight eggs were hatched artificially, but one was eaten by a raccoon. A mink killed two fledgling cranes and one was strangled in a wild vine.

Young saw an impressive white stork in a field in Freiburg, Germany.

Sandra Eadie saw *Winged Migration*, a very good movie with lots of bird shots. It was filmed by the directors of the insect film, *Microcosmos*. Bill Lishman was credited with the filming techniques, but Carrick pointed out that he had supplied many of the birds used in the film. Eadie visited a reservoir in Colorado, which was down by about 90 per cent and she saw an American Dipper with young in the middle of Vail, Colorado.

John Speakman visited the Carden Plain and Cranberry Marsh. He saw Sandhill Cranes and a Shrike. In Sunderland, he saw lots of herons and a dozen or so Black Terns that were probably nesting.

Bryant spent three days in the wild country east of Georgian Bay on the Muskoka-Gravenhurst border, north of the Severn River. The area is rarely visited. It is isolated with few signs of people.

Ron Tasker believes the number of Whip-poor-wills is declining. There are fewer forest fires now and the habitat for this species is dwindling.

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be held at 8 pm on Oct. 15 in Rm 432 of the UofT zoology department. The speaker will be Marc Johnson who will talk about his recent voyage around the world. The title of his speech will be: *Exploring nature's wonders around the world and back again.*

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