

THE
BRODIE
CLUB



ROYAL ONTARIO
MUSEUM OF ZOOLOGY

THE 992nd MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB

The 992nd meeting of the Brodie Club was held on March 15, 2005 in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Building of the University of Toronto.

Chairman: Fred Bodsworth

Secretary: Oliver Bertin

Attendance: 18 members and 10 guests

Winnie Poon and Roy Smith, guests of Glenn Coady

Julie Berger and John Tyache, guests of Jean Iron

Melissa Rose and Rosemary Addison, guests of Ed Addison

Brenda and John Sparling, and Patricia Hansell-Bennett, guests of Bruce Falls

Nancy Hannah, daughter and guest of Bodsworth

Minutes of the 991st meeting were approved by Ann Falls, seconded by Glenn Coady.

NEW BUSINESS:

Sandra Eadie reminded members that she is trying to locate non-active and past members for the celebration of the 1,000th meeting in February, 2006. She invited people to send her email or postal addresses so she can track people down.

Members remain on The Brodie Club list for life. If they wish, they can be sent email minutes free of charge and hard copies for the cost of postage, \$10 a year for individuals and \$15 a year for families.

The program committee reported that Sara Shettleworth of the UofT psychology department will ask "Do animals think?" at the next meeting, on April 19.

Bertin asked members to consider a destination and date for the June field day. Last year, members visited Carden alvar. Other field days have been held at Bill Carrick's studio, behind the scenes at the Toronto Zoo, in Harry Lumsden's garden in Aurora, the Joker's Hill field station in Newmarket and Jock McAndrews' place north of Brighton.

Coady mentioned that the Kortright Conservation Area will hold an Atlas workshop on April 9 from 11 am to 4:45 pm. It will be a good way to get up to speed on results to date and Atlas needs in its final year.

Bertin recommended a world atlas that is based on satellite photographs. *The Cartographic Satellite Atlas of the World* was published by Canada's WorldSat International Inc. in 1997 and distributed by Firefly Books Ltd. of Toronto. ISBN: 1-895629-99-3. It lists for \$40 but Bertin obtained a copy at the federal government bookstore on Toronto's University Ave. for

\$32, tax incl. The 152-page large format book has wonderful and realistic topographic photographs of the world, both above and below sea level. It is far better in Bertin's opinion than old-style artists' impressions. The gazetteer and the rendition of cities and roads are poor.

Ken Abraham contacted The Brodie Club in late February with the following message. It was distributed to email members and mentioned at the March meeting.

Working Draft of the Ontario Biodiversity Strategy

A working draft of the Ontario Biodiversity Strategy (OBS) is now posted on the internet at <http://www.obs-sbo.ca> for public review and comment. Please note: If this link doesn't work, just cut and paste it into the address window of Internet Explore and hit enter.

We welcome your remarks, concerns and editorial suggestions on the draft. Simply make your comments through the website by:

- Typing your comments at the end of the draft; and/or
- Commenting at the end of each section: and/or
- Downloading the OBS, tracking your changes and uploading your copy of the OBS with the tracked changes as an attachment.

Please see the website for detailed instructions on how to provide comments. If you have any difficulties, please do not hesitate to call our WebMaster for the OBS at 1-800-731-5355 and ask for Eric Porter. Eric will be more than pleased to help.

The deadline for submitting comments on this working draft is March 28, 2005 at 5:00 pm. A revised draft of the OBS will be posted for formal comments on the Environmental Registry website in early April.

If you have questions about the Strategy, please contact us:

Jim MacLean, Project Manager
(jim.macleam@mnr.gov.on.ca)

Robb Ogilvie, OBS Facilitator (mobal@ils.net)

SPEAKER:

The speaker was Bruce Falls, a long-time member who needs no introduction. He spoke on his recent trip to India with fellow members Ann Falls and Enid Machin.

THE BRODIE CLUB GOES TO INDIA

Falls spent the month of February in India last winter and came back with 9.5 hours of video that he has condensed into a 55-minute movie. Machin took a wealth of still photographs which she brought to the meeting.

Falls visited corresponding member James Carrick, who was a senior staff member in the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi. Carrick has since moved to the Canadian Embassy in Tehran where he is a counselor. He happened to be on leave in Canada in March and came to the meeting.

The trip was led by an Indian guide, O.P. Mudgal, recommended by member Hugh Currie who had taken the same trip some time before. Falls described Mudgal as "an excellent guide, firm and friendly and a first-rate birder." He runs trips in February and November, when there are mild temperatures and little rain.

Falls saw more than birds on his trip. The guide showed them Mogul forts, the Taj Mahal, life in Indian cities and countryside and introduced the group to his family, giving them a brief but interesting view of a different culture at a moderate cost.

February is the wintering period in India for many northern and alpine species and therefore a good time to see a variety of birds. Four members saw a total of 384 species of birds, of which Falls saw 368. They added 12 species to Mudgal's list for the region. There were 162 species of birds on the video, along with a variety of mammals, reptiles (crocodiles etc.), butterflies and plants.

The four-week tour started in New Delhi. They drove south to the Agra area for a week, where they visited a National Park at Bharatpur, as well as Mogul forts and the Taj Mahal. After returning to New Delhi they drove north to the foothills of the Himalayas and to Corbett Tiger Reserve for two more weeks. The fourth and final week was spent in Rajasthan visiting Jaipur, a semi-desert area and the scenic Ranthambor National Park.

Only highlights of the impressive species list can be mentioned. Falls filmed the rare Red-naped Ibis by a roadside. In the marshes at Bharatpur there were lots of photogenic water birds including Eurasian Spoonbills, Sarus Cranes, a colony of Painted Storks, and Anhingas as well as several Eagles and a pair of Hoopoes.

At the Kosi River, Falls took pictures of Dippers and a much sought after Wallcreeper. A shot of a Spotted Forktail in a stream was noteworthy. At Corbett Reserve the group saw three species of Fish Eagles, Jungle Fowl and Black Storks. A highlight of Ranthambor was a Painted Spurfowl.

Mammals included jackals, flying foxes (fruit bats), two species of deer, Nilgai and Indian gazelle, a herd of Asian elephants, rhesus macaques and wild boars.

There were many surprises. The group saw tigers, a thrilling experience for them (too exciting to get pictures). They saw several kinds of vultures but they were few in numbers following a sharp decline in recent years attributed to a medication fed to Indian livestock. Kites may have moved into the niche previously filled by vultures and were extremely common in some areas.

The speaker was thanked by Jennifer Young.

NOTES & OBSERVATIONS:

- Guest Tyache mentioned that he visited India 38 years ago and recognized many of the same birds. Some vultures were rare even then.
- George Bryant said a Ruby-crowned Kinglet had been visiting his suet feeder all through February. He said it was probably the only one in Ontario.
- Coady visited the Leslie Street Spit and saw a Barred Owl, two Great Gray Owls and a couple of Goshawks. The Great Gray Owls were still common in southern Ontario in mid-March. About 32 have been seen in Durham County recently.
- Guest Roy Smith has seen 109 Mockingbirds in the greater Toronto area this winter, down from the peak several years ago. He said there are about 200 nests in the breeding season, but they are hard to find unless the bird-watcher knows their territories.
- Ron Pittaway saw a fisher run across the road near Kirkfield, north of Oshawa. They seem to be very common this year. Last year, he saw a fisher chasing a showshoe hare in the area.
- Jean Iron saw lots of Tundra Swans on a recent trip to Pt. Pelee, along with a Horned Grebe and a Screech Owl. She said the fishers may have been introduced by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

- Ed Addison reported a huge expansion of fishers in the southern part of their range. They have also been seen in the Ottawa and Tweed regions, where they have been killing cats. They used to be quite rare but are now common.
- Bryant saw a fisher in Prince Edward County.
- John McAndrews reported on his trip to Crawford Lake in February, looking for evidence of a 13th-century Iroquoian village in fossil goose pellets. He cut through 20 cm of ice and took many samples of the bottom sediments.
- McAndrews said Jan. 18 was the warmest of that day since 1844. There have been two floods on the Humber River this spring with a third expected when the current ice dam breaks. The floods have left considerable amounts of water-borne debris, often a fair distance from the normal water channel.
- Ron Scovell reported the lowest number of visiting birds at his feeder in history. The visitors did, include, however, a Fox Sparrow and a Carolina Wren.
- Subsequent to the meeting, Eric Grace of Victoria, B.C., a former post-doc of the late Prof. Pimlott, sent me the following note and accompanying photos. It shows a rabbit chasing a hawk in Patagonia in February. The hawk has been tentatively identified as a Chimango caracara, *Milvago chimango*, a member of the Falconidae that is closely related to the Peregrine Falcon. The rabbit would appear to be a Tapeti, *Sylvilagus brasiliensis*. “On this hike, we stopped for lunch where wild rabbits and hawks were conditioned to scavenge for food. The rabbits were not only carnivores, enjoying scraps of salami, they chased away the hawks, in a funny reversal of the usual food chain pictures I've seen in so many textbooks. Nobody told these lolloping brutes that hawks eat rabbits. But they are small hawks and large rabbits. I greatly enjoyed watching the poor raptors being bullied by the bunnies.” The photos are in attachments for ease of transmission. I was able to download in 2.5 minutes using a dial-in feed. The following website has lovely photos of Argentinian fauna: <http://www.fotosaves.com.ar/Falconiformes/FotosFalconiformes.html>. Grace added that Alec Earnshaw <aearnshaw@sinectis.com.ar> and his website are good resources for any birders wanting a contact in Argentina. He offers to guide any birders visiting the vicinity. Earnshaw writes: “Definitely an amusing photo series! The rabbit is an introduced species, so the Chimango probably doesn't know what to do with it! The Chimangos eat mostly carrion, though I have read that when breeding they take some prey too. W. H. Hudson wrote that in the Pampas the Chimangos find the nests of Hudson's Canastero (located by the noisy calls of the chicks in their nests, buried low in thistle thickets) and they dive in to take a chick. Hudson said he found many nests with Chimango chicks that had these Canasteros in their bellies! This seems weird, since this Canastero is not a common bird at all - or perhaps it used to be, 100 years ago?” (Ed note: That's enough of Argentinian rabbits, for now.)

The meeting adjourned at 9:16 pm.

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be held at 7:30 pm on April 19, 2005 in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Zoological Laboratories at the University of Toronto. Sara Shettleworth of the UofT Psychology Department will ask “Do animals think?”

The Famous Killer Whales

by Yorke Edwards
Our Western Correspondent

When I went to Victoria in 1950, I lived in the home of Charles Guiguet, an active naturalist working for the Museum of British Columbia's birds and mammals. His house was near good ocean fishing and he soon took me onto my first salt water, while going close to the south end of Vancouver Island.

Many small fishing boats were scattered near and far behind us, but suddenly all were rushing apart, some going east, others west. Charlie looking back yelled "Killer Whales coming!" The boats behind us were leaving a wide path for the killers coming toward us. As usual, there were about a dozen of them, each one rising then disappearing to rise again as they travelled while parts of their tall black dorsal fins rose and fell above the water. Danger was upon us. We rushed to shore.

Years later, people found that killers were both interesting and friendly, so why the fear? They believed what my old 1960 encyclopedia says: "The Killer Whale is probably the most savage, ferocious animal on land or sea." How was it so wrong?

The British explorer Robert Scott and his many men were the first to explore the Antarctic, in about 1910. As one was walking along the edge of ice by the sea he was attacked by a mammal soon called the "killer whale." Probably that small whale thought the man to be one of the penguins which were numerous, but for years people thought the "killers" were very dangerous. No wonder we hurried to shore. But in 1967, Vancouver's aquarium

took an injured killer into the indoor pool used for swimming with seals and other animals, and sometimes people. It was friendly with all others. Their food is mostly fish. No person has ever been attacked.

Now thousands of people pay to see our newly named orcas. From late spring to early fall, thousands of people pass our house-by-the-sea, most in red waterproof suits while sitting on large, fast, open, red "rubber" boats.

Others come by standing crowded in stubby metal boats. In summer, orcas go to special places, such as beside San Juan Island, the USA's land nearest to Vancouver Island. From our windows it is difficult to count the fast and distant people sitting on open boats a half mile away. The red boats seem to have 12 to 24 people, the metal ones about 15 within and 10 on top. They speed by from May to October, but most go by in mid-summer when we see up to 400 people go by, back and forth each day

The orcas are usually first found by planes. Boats seem to go most often to San Juan Island where orcas display their antics. On week ends, a 100 or more boats, big and small, can crowd near the orca gang. For years the boats have come from many villages, towns and Victoria. Boats must keep, or try to keep, 100 meters away from the orcas. If caught too close in either country the cost is \$100. The "dangerous killers" are now the wild beasts that people want to see. Thousands of tourists yearly see them. In our phone book, only one of the six firms shows the cost's \$65 a trip, others probably more.

The city's money intake? Millions.

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