

# THE BRODIE CLUB



*Established 1921*

Website: <http://thebrodieclub.eeb.utoronto.ca>

## **THE 1,125th MEETING OF THE BRODIE CLUB**

The 1,125th meeting of the Brodie Club was held on Tuesday, 21 January 2020 in Room 432 of the Ramsay Wright Laboratories of the University of Toronto.

Chair: Dominic Stones

Secretary: George Bryant

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 pm and was attended by 34; 29 members and 5 guests.

### **Roll Call:**

Present: Bacher, Beadle, Bell, Bryant, Coady, Curry, Daniels, DeMarco, N. Dengler, R. Dengler, Dunn, Eadie, Eckenwalder, Harris, Hussell, Hutchinson, Iron, Juhola, Kortright, Machin, Miller, Obbard, Peter, Pittaway, Seymour, Slessor, Stones, Thomas, Tomlinson.

Guests: Greg Stuart (guest of Seymour), Willa Wong (Thomas), Rachel Gottesman (Kortright), Mary-Lou Bacher (Bacher) and Ron Jenkins (Thomas).

Regrets: Abraham, E. Addison, R. Addison, Bertin, Currie, Dunlop, Martyn, McAndrews, Moldowan, Rapley, Riley, Lumsden.

**Minutes:** Minutes of the December 2019 meeting were approved.

### **Committee Reports:**

The next meeting, on 18 February, will be Josh Feltham speaking on “Five-lined Skinks: Life at the Edge.”

### **SPEAKER:**

Bob Curry introduced our speaker, David Agro of Toronto. David grew up in Hamilton, started bird-watching at an early age and within short order was collections manager at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. This allowed him to join a collecting trip to Ecuador and the resultant discovery of the incredible Jocotoco Antpitta. Along the line he obtained a degree in architecture and is responsible for the design of, amongst others, the Birds Canada head office, Ashbridge's Bay sewage treatment plant and a visitor centre in Panama. He heads the Board of Directors for the Jocotoco Conservation Foundation and is President of Jocotoco Tours.



## **“Conserving some of the world’s rarest birds: the work of the Jocotoco Foundation in Ecuador”**

David Agro had the good luck to be associated at an early age with the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences and ornithologist Robert Ridgely. The academy is the oldest natural history museum in the world. Lewis and Clarke set off from there; Audubon and Alexander Wilson were associated with it. It was the first museum to develop dioramas. It has tried to mesh pure science with popular science. Robert Ridgely was bird curator, has led many field trips to Ecuador and authored two books on its birds.



South America has 4000 bird species. Ecuador alone has over 1600 in an area  $\frac{1}{3}$  the size of Ontario. It is important to Canada, as 65 of our bird species winter there. In 1998, Nigel Simpson, a British birder, offered to sponsor an expedition to the Quebrado Hondo Trail in southern Ecuador with Ridgely and David Agro. Here they discovered the Jocotoco Antpitta (pictured at left). But they also observed that the whole area was experiencing severe deforestation. With donkeys dragging out all the *Podocarpus* trees, it was clear that if nothing was done, the Jocotoco Antpitta would go extinct. In 1998 Simpson donated \$100,000 to buy land, and others contributed too, leading to formation of the Jocotoco Conservation Foundation. It continued to buy up bits of land such that original Tapichalaca Reserve is now one of the top ecological preserves in the world.

The first goal was to increase the connectivity of existing protected areas, and the reserve now protects water sources for local communities. This set a trend for other land protection agencies such that 27% of Ecuador land is now protected. Despite some horror stories there is an awful lot of hope for natural areas in Ecuador.

The Foundation now has 12 reserves, mainly in western Ecuador and especially in the southwest. It employs 7 core staff and employs 30 people to operate nine eco-lodges. Instead of relying on grants and donations alone, various independent income streams have been developed: scientific research, tourism, sustainable forestry, and water management. Park guards are hired--often the former landowners--who interact with and involve local communities. Tourism covers 20% of the reserve costs and Ecuadorians constitute 60% of the visitors. The Foundation advises mining companies on minimizing environmental impacts. Reforestation is targeted, focusing on tree species that have been high-graded out. They have planted over 1,500,000 trees of over 130 species.



Reforesting degraded habitat has demonstrated that many species can recover rapidly. A case study in species management is the Pale-headed Brush Finch. At one time it was critically endangered, with 27 breeding pairs remaining. Habitat restoration combined with only a few years of removing Shiny Cowbirds is turning things around. Other endangered species are moving into the recovered patches. Spectacled Bear is an example, finding safety from hunting pressure in the protected areas.

Since Alexander Humboldt first explored the area in 1802, the altitudinal range of many species has moved 500 metres higher; climate change in action. The Buenaventura Reserve illustrates the impact of climate change. Once it was cloudy and humid almost all the time, but now there are more and more clear days. To counteract the climatic changes, the Foundation tries to buy land upslope, while also increasing habitat with reforestation. The case of the El Oro Parakeet shows the value of this strategy. The population was endangered, with fewer than 1,000 individuals, in part due to removal of the large trees required for communal nesting and by the refusal of the birds to cross open valleys to suitable forest on the other side. A nest box program was implemented in the Buenaventura Reserve which resulted in a 25% increase in bird numbers in only six years.



The jaguar also benefits from reforestation. Films from game cameras showed jaguars attracted to sites baited with an irresistible attractant: Calvin Klein “Obsession for Men” perfume!

David concluded by emphasizing the importance of land trusts to the environment, mentoring young people in conservation ecology, and engagement and support of local businesses in environmental protection.

He recognized the naturalist community of his hometown Hamilton, responsible for his developing a love for birds and nature. One book he highly recommended: “Bringing nature home: how native plants sustain wildlife in our gardens,” by Douglas Tallamy.

### **Questions following the presentation:**

Gavin Miller: What problems have there been with invasive species, and are there any successes in thwarting them. A: Invasives are mainly pioneer species from Africa or temperate zones. The tropics are a harsh environment for most of them, and they are generally out-competed by native plants. This is not true of the Galapagos, however, where invasives are definitely a problem.

Rachel Gottesman: What are the prices for staying at the lodges? A: You should budget \$100 U.S. per person, which includes full board plus transfer and guide costs.

Jim. Eckenwalder: Is there any risk of the trust properties being nationalized? A. Yes, this is always a possibility. However, we try to work cooperatively with governments at all levels. The fact that our reserves and their management benefit local communities through employment and protection of their water sources is recognized as valuable. It should be noted that the current President of Ecuador has visited Jocotoco properties and is completely supportive.

The speaker was thanked by George Bryant who had visited southern Ecuador in November using Jocotoco Tours and stayed at their lodges. The story of the discovery of the Jocotoco Antpitta is one of the most remarkable of the last century, the establishment and development of the Jocotoco Foundation is one of the great conservation success stories of this century.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

Machin has a cottage near Palmer Rapids. One day last fall she noted a large flock of bluebirds, and another day, one of meadowlarks. These were rare events, and in both cases flocks were gone the next day.

Jean Iron displayed the current Cornell Lab quarterly publication "Living Bird". There is an extensive article about Brodie member, Ron Pittaway and his winter finch forecast, and a brief note also on Brodie member Ricky Dunn and her studies on Red-breasted Nuthatch irruption. (*How Ron Pittaway Developed His Acclaimed Winter Finch Forecast. Living Bird, January 9, 2020.*

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/how-ron-pittaway-developed-his-acclaimed-winter-finch-forecast/>)

Obbard announced rumours that the current Ontario government is threatening to back the spring bear hunt. His big concern is that female bears keep their cubs for over a year. If a sow is killed in the spring, any cubs will surely die of starvation. He'll send out news about where to make comments when the time comes.

Bacher gave an update on his ongoing efforts to protect Thundering Waters.

Glenn Coady noted that Harry Kerr, well-loved and long-time Toronto birder, had passed away at age 100.

Ricky Dunn reported a loudly-calling flock of Sandhill Cranes circling low over her house in a dense fog, presumably looking for a place to land but unable to see the ground.

Dunn also recommended "The Feather Thief," by Kirk Johnson -- about the curious theft of rare bird study skins from the Rothschild Natural History Museum in England.

The meeting concluded at 8:57 p.m.