

OF THE
**THUNDER BAY
FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB**

PORT ARTHUR - FORT WILLIAM



30th April, 1952
Vol. VI, No. 3.

250 N. Algoma St.,
Port Arthur, Ont.

Fellow Field-Naturalists:

Our Regional Gathering will be held at Stanley on May 24th, 1952. Members will meet at Central School in Port Arthur and Fort William at 1 P.M. and drive out to Stanley where group leaders will take their parties on hikes through this interesting area. Wear sturdy clothes and shoes, bring your field glasses, bird and flower guides, and your note book. Bring your own lunch. When the field trips are over we will meet at the Anglican Parish Hall at Kakabeka where coffee will be provided by the women of the church.

Dr. W. W. H. Gunn, Executive Secretary of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, will be the speaker at the evening meeting at the Anglican Parish Hall at Kakabeka. This will be an eventful day for club members and a good time to bring along any friends interested in natural history.

Please phone the secretary (4-1336) regarding transportation. If you will have room in your car for other members of the club please advise him. Hoping to see everyone at Stanley on May 24th

Yours sincerely,
A. D. Allin, President
Keith Denis, Editor.

FIELD NOTES

- Apr. 9 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, P.A., Bill Cockell (Also pages 18 & 20)
17 White-throated Sparrow, Mr. & Mrs. D. Beckett
Pintail, P. A., A.E.A.
Tree Swallow, P.A., Mrs. O. Addison.
18 Rusty Blackbird, C. E. Garton
Hooded Merganser
Brown Creeper
Pistillate flowers of Beaked Hazelnut, staminate (male) flowers
of Trembling Aspen and Speckled Alder in bloom.
19 Mallard, C.E.G.
American Bittern
Northern Wood Frog
Winter Wren, McTavish Twp., Allins, C.E.G., L.S.D.
20 Bloodroot in flower, Riverdale, Mrs. C. Rydholm
Myrtle Warbler, Vickers Heights
Vesper Sparrow, P.A., Mrs. Addison & Miss R. Penwarden
Eastern Chipmunk
Eastern Bluebird, McTavish Twp., Dr. W. P. Hogarth
Fox Sparrow, P.A., Norman Denis
Garter Snakes
Green-winged Teal, O'Connor Twp. The Allins & K.D.

NATURE NOTES FROM THE HEAD OF THE LAKES

by

A. E. ALLIN

This paper was written for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, Toronto, April 5, 1952.

Since my listeners are from Southern Ontario, I should define the area with which our talk is concerned. By the "Head of the Lakes", I refer to the territory surrounding the cities of Fort Arthur and Fort William, but for discussion purposes we shall include the region stretching forty to fifty miles south, and west to the Minnesota boundary at Pigeon River, to Whitefish Lake, and to Shebandowan, as well as a long narrow strip northeast along the rugged shore of Lake Superior, past the mighty Nipigon River, to the picturesque fishing village of Rossport. Superimposed on a map of Southern Ontario with Hamilton as a centre, it would include the southwestern peninsula to Guelph, Paris, and Simcoe and extend in a narrow strip along the north shore of Lake Ontario to Port Hope.

The area lies in the Canadian Zone of the Boreal Region at the boundary between the Canadian and Hudsonian Arctic Provinces. Only a casual convergance shows the appropriateness of Halliday placing most of it in the Superior Section of the Boreal Region characterized by its black spruce, balsam-fir, poplar, white birch and jack-pine. The lower stretches of the Pigeon, Pige and Kam-in-ist-iquia Rivers lie in the Lake Superior West section of the GreatLakes-St. Lawrence Forest Region with its white pine, sugar maple, white spruce, balsam-fir and, in the lowlands, red maple and white cedar. Although we belong to Ontario politically, our biological interests are in common with those of northeastern Minnesota. Fortunately we can refer to the publications of the University of Minnesota by Macy & Shepherd, Breckenridge, Eddy and Surber, and Roberts and Swanson, until Canadian publications along the same line are available.

Fort William began as an Ojibway encampment on the Kaministiquia River and was first visited by Europeans in 1655 when Groseilliers and Radisson made it their headquarters. In 1678 Sieur De Dulhut erected a trading post on the present site of this modern city and during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was recognized as the centre of the Fur Empire of America with a population of fur traders, trappers and Indians. Although the existence of these men depended upon the wild life of the territory we have no record of the birds and animals of the period. The first such list was not to be made until Duncan Cameron visited the area in 1804 and recorded his observations in "Voyage au Nord-Ouest." "Pigeons", he said, "are very fat and palatable". Before the century ended the district had been visited by Agassiz, Fountain, John Macoun, Atkinson and Gerritt Miller. Subsequently Wilson, W. E. Saunders, Koelz and Kendeigh have carried out studies and published their findings. Shirley Brooks, the Winnipeg entomologist, collected at the Lakehead on more than one occasion. In recent years it has been visited by many contemporary Ontario naturalists.

Port Arthur-Fort William are the twin homes of the Thunder Bay Field Naturalists Club, the activities of which include monthly meetings throughout the winter, a Christmas Bird Census, spring and fall field days, and a mid-winter meeting with clubs belonging to the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union. Newsletters are issued bi-monthly and the Club sponsors Audubon - Screen Tours. Its members publish their share of scientific papers. Whereas twenty years ago L. S. Dear was probably the only naturalist in Northwestern Ontario, the membership of the club today approaches the 100 mark. The future is bright. One Lakehead boy, before reaching his 'teens, had added a new species of mammal to our local list as well as a fish which proved to be a new subspecies for the Province.

The birds of the Lakehead have received more study than the other groups. 235 species have been reported recently and we have accepted Cameron's record of the passenger pigeon and Atkinson's for Audubon's caracara. There is a Smith's longspur taken by Atkinson in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology. Four new species were added in 1950, viz. the European widgeon, Florida gallinule, Oregon junco and yellow rail. Four more species were added during 1951. On May 20, Mrs. W. P. Hogarth saw a western tanager and Mr. Garton observed a yellow-throated vireo. The first local report of a western grebe was made on October 19 at Whitefish Lake by Col. Dear. Our first cardinal was seen by members of the club while taking the Christmas census on December 26.

As the taxonomists well know, there is a mingling at the Head of the Lakes of northern, southern and western forms. There are nesting records of the catbird, woodcock, upland plover and indigo bunting. An addled egg of the barred owl collected on May 3, 1940 was the first for Ontario. On May 1, 1949, I flushed a woodcock 90 miles northeast of Port Arthur. There are records of the Baltimore oriole, brown thrasher, mourning dove, turkey vulture and cardinal. Thirty years ago the latter was but a recent arrival at Minneapolis, 400 miles south. The western meadow lark, clay-colored sparrow, Holboell's grebe, pintail and Brewer's blackbird have entered from the west. We discovered a colony of the latter in 1943 and Dear found the first Ontario nest in 1945. They continue to return to this nesting area despite the fact it has become industrialized. By 1950 there were 10 pairs but in 1951 the colony was reduced to one male and two females. Two nests were found on June 13, one hundred feet apart, with 4 and 5 young respectively. Northern forms which have bred here include the red-throated loon, palm and black-capped warblers and the raven. An increase in ravens coincides with the decline in the use of poisons for so-called predators. The Connecticut warbler is an uncommon summer resident of the black spruce bogs but its nest has not yet been located. Dear and I found the species in two swamps northeast of Nipigon in June 1951 in an area where Dr. Axtel of Buffalo had found it not uncommon in 1950. We agree with Axtel that the song of this species, locally is "chirpity, chirpity, chirpity, chirp."

The advent of civilization has been accompanied by many changes in mammal life at the Head of the Lakes. The woodland caribou now exists in but small numbers. The lynx has withdrawn until it can no longer be expected but the bobcat is becoming common. Occasionally a black squirrel is seen. On June 20, 1947, my fishing companion, Dr. Ed. Hall, saw a raccoon cross the Cypress River, 100 miles northeast of the Lakehead.

The European Hare does not appear to have survived following its introduction in 1942, 1943, and 1945. Hundreds of bats hibernate in a large cave near Cavern Lake. The little brown is most abundant but the long-eared little brown and the big brown also occur. During the present winter, star-nosed moles have been particularly abundant as have red squirrels.

It is regrettable that no Lakehead naturalist is particularly interested in entomology for probably there are more discoveries to be made in this field than in any other. Hymers, a hamlet 25 miles southwest of Fort William, is the type locality for three subspecies of butterflies, the pearly eye (Lethe portlandia borealis A.H. Clark), Bog Fritillary (Boloria eunomia dawsoni B. & McD) and the Purple Lesser Fritillary (Boloria titania grandis B. & McD.) John Macoun first took Macoun's Arctic (Oeneis macounii Edwards) at Lake Nipigon in 1884. This is a rare species which I have seen on only two occasions. Ralph Macy visited the type locality in July 1940 but failed to find this butterfly. I believe the species requires further study as the two specimens I have collected differ considerably from the illustrations in the literature.

Botanizing has been carried on since John Macoun visited the area in 1884. Among the species he listed was the Small Purple Fringed Orchid (Habenaria psycodes (L) SW) and I was delighted to rediscover this beautiful little flower several years ago near the Minnesota border. It is reaching its western limits in Northwestern Ontario. On July 8, 1939, with Dr. E.M. Walker we rediscovered the Auricled Twayblade (Listera auriculata Wiegand), at Morris' original Ontario Station. On July 29th, 1939, a specimen of Malaxis paludosa (L) SW, the rare Bog Adders' Mouth, was found at Pass Lake in the Sibley Peninsula. Previously it had been discovered only twice in Ontario, both times on the same Peninsula. During 1950, C. E. Garton, collecting for the Botany Division of the Dominion Department of Agriculture, added 4 new species to the Provincial list, viz. Festuca Scabrella Torr. Carex loliaceae L. Potentilla Hippiana Lehm and Potentilla multifida L. The last named species is also new to the range covered by Gray's Manual.

The fishes, reptiles and amphibians of the region have not been neglected. Last summer, snapping turtles were reported at Arrow Lake and at Owakonzie immediately west of the area we are discussing. Mud puppies are locally common but the two albinos we received in 1950 were unexpected as were two more in 1951. The Northern Creek Chub (Semotilus atromaculatus (Mitchill)) and the Brassy Minnow (Hybognathus hankinsoni Hubbs) were anticipated as they occur in Northern Minnesota. Nash (1908) postulated the Creek Northern Chub (Couesius plumbeus dissimilis Girard) would occupy the niche north of Lake Superior but it was not until August 31, 1946, that my son David, aged seven, added this subspecies to the fish fauna of Ontario when he took numerous specimens from Beartrap Lake near Rossport. A silver lamprey (Ichthyomyzon unicuspis Hubbs and Trautman) was taken by Rossport fishermen in 1945 and David found one dead at the Lakehead on September 17, 1946. Subsequently, we have found this native species relatively common in local waters. Six fishes are of recent advent. The king salmon, rainbow trout and brown trout were all introduced many years ago into the American waters of Lake Superior. To-day the rainbow is widely distributed throughout our area. A brown trout was taken in the waters of Thunder Bay on October 20, 1951. Reports of "Pacific salmon" being taken locally are unconfirmed but we saw one recently which was taken several years ago off the north shore of Minnesota only a few

miles below our southern boundary. The smelt and the sea lamprey have recently entered Lake Superior from the Lower Lakes. The former reached the Lakehead about 1940 and the latter a decade later. On August 22, 1943, I took a fallfish (Semotilus corporalis (Mitchill)) in a tributary of the Kaministiquia River. This species normally inhabits the James Bay drainage. In 1938, the waters of the Kenogami River, a branch of the Albany, were diverted into the Aguasabon River which enters Lake Superior at Terrace Bay. It is postulated that this was the channel by which the fallfish gained entrance to the Lake Superior drainage.

I trust I have been able to bring to you some idea of the wild life at the Head of the Lakes. Possibly some of you may wish to visit us and study the fauna and flora at first hand. If so, I can assure you a most hearty welcome.

OBSERVATIONS ON FEEDING HABITS OF OWLS IN THE THUNDER BAY DISTRICT

The past winter we have examined animal remains and pellets collected in previous years beneath the nests of owls, as well as pellets obtained from owls kept for a brief period in captivity.

HORNED OWL: June 2, 1950 at the Cypress river; beneath the nest a Little Brown Bat.

May 25, 1951 at Amethyst Beach; beneath the nest we found remains of a Varying Vireo, the head of a Muskrat, and the head of a Herring Gull. The pellets contained the remains of 6 young Varying Vireo, a House Bat and the left foot of a Long-eared Owl.

GREAT GRAY OWL: Dec. 8, 1950; an injured bird brought to the laboratory disgorged a pellet which contained the remains of 3 Meadow Lice.

BARRED OWL: May 12, 1943, Oliver Township; a Red-backed Mouse was found beneath the nesting cavity of a pair of these rare owls.

RICHARDSON'S OWL: March 7, 1940; one of these little owls, taken alive at Amethyst Harbour, disgorged a pellet containing the remains of a Red-backed Mouse.

A. E. Allin

NOTE BOOK

Finches have been uncommon this winter. No siskin or cross-bills were reported and only a few small flocks of red-polls have been seen. Pine Grosbeaks were present until the end of March in small numbers. Evening Grosbeaks, however, have been observed all winter and their numbers increased during March.

American Golden-eyes have been wintering in the open water below the Wakabeka Falls power plant according to Mr. Grayson who works at the plant. Both birds, seen during March by the Allins, were females.

Sharp-tailed Grouse were seen by Ken Eoll on April 5th at Longlac, Ontario.

ADDITIONAL FIELD NOTES(continued)

Fr. 27 Broad-winged Hawk, Allins & L.S. Dear (Phoebes common)

Red Maples in flower

Cowbird, C.E.G.; The Denis'

Veery, P.A., The Denis'

Wild Ginger in bloom, Vickers Heights, Mrs. H. Rydholm

Spring Beauty in bloom

28 Savannah Sparrow, Ken Eoll

FIELD NOTES.

- March 15 - Arctic Three-toed Woodpeckers (pair), Kam Power Plant, Mrs. Beckett.
- March 18 - Crows reported more common in farming areas near Canadian Lakehead. Cawing crow reported in Fort William March 25th. Very common over week-end of March 29-30, many flying in pairs. Mrs. Knowles noted crows carrying sticks on April 6th.
- March 18 - Herring Gull, Fort William; Mrs. Beckett. Herring gulls become more numerous daily after this date. Like the crows some were seen during the winter, Mrs. Koll reporting a gull and a crow present at McIntyre #2 School in February.
- March 22 - Skunk seen at Rosalyn Nursery by Harry and Anita Hakomaki.
- March 27 - Snowy Owl, Fort William; Miss Mynah Smith.
- 30 - Mustard plant 3" high in full bloom, Vickers Heights, Mrs. Rydholm.
- 30 - Pine Grosbeaks, C. E. Garton.
- Common Redpolls (30), Fort Arthur, Norman Denis.
- Stoneflies, Boulevard Lake, K. Denis.
31. - Snow Bunting, Scott Highway, Mrs. Beckett. Flock of 25 seen at Kamistiquia by News-Chronicle correspondent on April 1st.
- April 3 - Pied-billed Grebe, F. W. J. Thompson.
- Marsh Hawk, Jumbo Gardens, Ken Koll.
- Snowy Owl, Fort William, Mrs. A. E. Allin (9th seen this winter)
- Robin - Vickers Heights; Mrs. H. Rydholm. During the winter robins were reported a few times. One at least was seen in the vicinity of McVicar's Creek: Feb. 14, March 11, 24, 27, and in Fort William Mrs. Beckett reported one on March 27. They were numerous in Fort William on April 8th and David Denis saw 2 in Port Arthur that day. However, no noticeable numbers were observed in Fort Arthur until April 10th when F. W. Kridler and F. J. Wright reported them. At 5:30 p.m. on the 10th, 8 robins were seen along Lover's Lane, P. A. (K.D.). Robins were singular at Vickers Heights on April 8th (H. Rydholm).
- April 5 - Common Tortoise Butterfly
Fort Arthur; Bill Addison.
- 24 Evening Grosbeaks, Vickers Heights, Mrs. H. Rydholm.
- 6 - Cooper's Hawk, Mrs. F. Hogarth, near Stanley.
- Slate-coloured Junco, Vickers Heights, C. E. Garton.
- 8 - Western Meadowlark, Mosby Twp., The Allins.
- Killdeer (2), Jumbo Gardens, Mrs. K. Koll.
- 10 - Black Duck, Paipoonge Twp, the Allins.
- Red-winged Blackbirds, Carle's Twp.
- Red-tailed Hawks (3), near Stanley (one probably a Kridler's if they can be identified in the field.
- Sharp-tailed Grouse, near Stanley.
- 6 Marsh Hawks.
- 11 - American Sparrow Hawk, Rosalyn, Mrs. Knowles & the Addisons.
- Wilbert's Tortoise-shell Butterfly - Peter Addison, Jr.
- 12 - Canada Goose, Fort William, F. W. J. Thompson.
- 12 - Golden-crowned Kinglet, Fort William, Allins & L. S. Dear.
- Song Sparrow, Jumbo Gardens, Ken Koll.
- 13 - White-winged Crossbills, Fort Arthur, K. Denis
- Purple Finch
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- Yellow-shafted Flicker, G. Whitefield
- 14 - First smelt running
- 15 - Great Blue Heron, C. E. Garton
- 16 - Blue Goose, Stanley, Mrs. Hogarth
- Canada Goose
- American Golden-eyes
- Swamp Tree Frog, singing, F. W. J., A.E. Allin
- American Rough-legged Hawk, P. A. Mrs. Eva Beckett

CO-OPERATIVE BIRD MIGRATION PROJECT

James H. Zimmerman to the Kumlien Club, University of Wisconsin, Madison, has written our club regarding the above project and members of the Thunder Bay Field Naturalists' Club can be of real assistance by participating in this project. The species often observed locally being studied this year are - White-throated Sparrows and Geese. The report forms at the end of this article state the few, simple notes required. The club secretary, Keith Denis, will be glad to record your observations if you phone 4-1336 or mail them to 250 N. Algoma St., Port Arthur. The co-operation of every member is needed and will be appreciated. The following quotations from the letter received tell about the project.

"Contributions to our knowledge of migration have been made by comparisons of average yearly first-arrival dates at various stations, banding studies, behaviour recorded during unusual storms or unusual waves of migrants, and telescopic observations of nocturnal movement. To supplement these efforts, yet another approach is proposed here: To follow a given species intensively throughout the Mississippi flyway area during its migration season, utilizing the field notes of as large a number of observers as possible, scattered over the whole route.

This idea grew out of a survey last spring when some of the field-notes contributors of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology were asked to record the date of the first white-throated sparrows. The reports, received from about half the counties of the state, gave a good picture of the progress of the species northward. It was concluded from the arrival dates and some volunteered notes on subsequent changes in abundance that the white-throats moved only at certain times in April and May, and that whenever the birds found themselves in strong south winds, they were scattered northward for several hundred miles. The coincidence of each period of movement with the arrival of the warm front on the eastern edge of a cyclonic low-pressure area is in accord with the recent findings elsewhere which show that the quantity of migration in general is greatly increased when these particular pressure patterns prevail, and that the direction of flight coincides with the wind direction around these lows. But those studies were not accompanied by attempts to determine where these flights began and where they ended. How far south of the path of a cyclonic disturbance do the birds leave the ground; and do they hit the ground again mostly at the center of the low or mostly on its northeast edge, or do they merely fly during certain hours of the night or day and then alight wherever they may be? Are the birds actually stimulated to start flying by these weather conditions or are these merely the only conditions which permit movement in a roughly northward direction? Do all species respond alike to the weather?

One state is too small for studying migration. But if a county-by-county network of observers could be established, such as is now being built in Wisconsin, in the larger area bounded by east Texas, north to Ontario and Manitoba, we could try to answer the questions noted above and many others, by carrying out long-term studies, following a given species for several years, in fall and spring, and without much effort by any one observer.

With interest shown by the research committees of the American Ornithologists' Union and the Wilson Club, a start is being made to see what can be accomplished this spring."

Report forms will be sent to anyone requesting them. The main points to note are given below;

GESE: Summarize the number of flying flocks noted on each date as in the following example:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Canada</u>	<u>Blue</u>	<u>Snow</u>	<u>Blue & Snow</u>	<u>Unidentified</u>
April 12	1 flock				

Notes on the occurrence of feeding or resting flocks will also be of value. Size of flocks and direction of flight are optional

(2. co-operative bird migration project)

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW: Arrival date of first migrants.....
Number of birds observed on that date.....
Dates when increases in numbers or waves were noted:

Date(s) of peak numbers _____ Estimated number observed then _____

Where observed _____

BOOK REVIEWS

THE STARS by H. A. Rey: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1952, 144 pp., maps and illustrations, \$5.00. An excellent book for those who want to recognize the constellations. The groups of stars are shown in shapes suggested by the names used. Graphic star maps are used instead of allegorical or geometrical patterns. Where and when to look for the constellations is shown in twelve calendar charts. The wobble of the earth's axis, latitude, the changing pole stars and other interesting facts are explained in the last quarter of the book. Well indexed.

THE BIRDS ARE YOURS by Robert S. Lemmon with illustrations by Don Eckelberry; Macmillan Co. 1951; 121 pp. \$2.50. The 44 short articles, each with a full page sketch, are enjoyable reading. Some chapter titles: "New Times, New Customs", "Queer Ways to Sing" and "Time to Change Clothes".

PEOPLE OF THE DEER by Farley Mowat: Little, Brown and Co. 1952, 344 pp. \$6.75. The tragic story of the Ihalmiut, Eskimos living 300 miles NW of Churchill. Largely dependent upon the caribou that range between winter grounds near Reindeer Lake (on the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border) and fawning areas north of Dubawnt and Hicouliuak lakes, these people abandoned bows and spears for rifles supplied by traders. When fur prices fell, the traders left the country and the Eskimos were without cartridges for their weapons. Starvation and disease decimated this tribe. The worst blow was during the winter of 1949-50, perhaps 30 persons remain. The indifference of the government is compared with the administration of Greenland. Protection is advocated for walrus, white whales, narwhals, musk ox and right whales. Introduction of reindeer would be very beneficial. Regulations to protect the hunting and fishing rights of the Eskimos from traders, missionaries, and others who deprive the natives of customary sources of food are essential.

WILD WINGS by Frank S. Stuart: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1952. 222 pp. \$4.50. The delightful story of a pintail drake - from the day he was banded in the south until he returned once again to the banding station. Each incident is built upon actual observation by the writer or his naturalist friends.

ADDITIONAL FIELD NOTES

- Apr. 20 American Merganser, Allins & K.D.
Tree Sparrow
- 21 Fox Sparrow, F. W., David Allin
- 22 Kingfisher, P.A., Bill Addison
- 23 House Wren, P.A., Harry Scott
- 24 Big smelt run at McKenzie River and Current River
Loon, The Addison's
- 25 Olive-backed Thrush, Addisons
Swamp Sparrow
Chipping Sparrow, A.E.A.; K.D.
Buffleheads(7) C.E.G.; A.E.A.
White-breasted Nuthatch, P.A., C.E.G.
Hermit Thrush - C.E.G.; A.E.A.
Tacamahac in flower
- 26 Lesser Yellowlegs, Paipoonge Twp., A. E. A.
Wilson's Snipe, P. A., C.E.G.
Phoebe

(continued on page 17)