



COMING EVENTS

Evening Outings: Call Alison Elliott (905)797-1123 for information and directions.

•**Thursday, May 24, Northumberland Forest, 7-8:30 p.m.** Meet at 6:45 p.m. at the Hwy 45 commuter parking just north of 401 at Cobourg. This is the last of four evening outings held in May.

•**Friday, May 25, 6:30 p.m.** - Annual walk at Willow Beach Marsh. Directions: From Port Hope, travel west on Lakeshore Rd., through Port Britain to Willow Beach Rd. Turn south (toward the lake) on Willow Beach Rd. and meet near the barn. Bring binoculars and dress appropriately for the weather. Be aware that there is poison ivy along the path, so long pants and shoes with socks are recommended. Phone Alison Elliott (905) 797-1123 for more information or to arrange car pooling.

•**Monday, June 11, 6:30 p.m.** - Annual Bluebird and Whip-poor-will Walk with Hazel Bird. Meet at at Hwy 45/401 commuter parking lot at 6:15 p.m. to car pool or at Harwood Rd. and Beaver Meadow Rd. at 6:30 p.m.

•**June 9 & 10** - Northumberland Summer Bird Count. Come out to find what birds are in our area. In 2000, 123 species of birds were found in the count circle. New participants are welcome. Less experienced birders will be teamed up with experienced birders. Be aware that these are strenuous days of birding, beginning at dawn or before. Contact Roger Frost (905) 885-9615 or e-mail: ekrf@eagle.ca.

•**Friday, September 28, 2001, 7:30 p.m.** - Reserve the date for the next General Meeting. Details will be in the September *Curlew*.

THE OBSERVER

by Ian Tate

Ten years ago, we planted about 35 trees, mainly conifers, at the back of our ordinary-sized lot. It is now a miniature ecosystem with its own flora and fauna. Among this winter's denizens are seven squirrels (four gray, three black), nine Mourning Doves, four chickadees, a scatter of juncos and many visitors: White-breasted Nuthatches, cardinals, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Blue Jays, and so on. They are attracted by seeds and peanuts in a feeder and also on the ground - that, to attract ground-feeding birds and to keep the very entertaining squirrels happily at a good, safe distance from the house. (The Blue Jays clean up on the peanuts in the feeder!)

The other (March) day, I happened to be

watching a beautiful, gray squirrel gathering peanuts for a later day. It would take a peanut just a few leaps away and bury it in the snow. Back for another, and off again a little distance to bury it. Never the same place twice. After about the fourth or fifth time, a large, black crow glided in to sit on the bough of a nearby tree. As soon as the squirrel spotted the oncoming shadow, it dashed into the cover of a cedar. Moments later, having determined that the invader was not a hawk, out he came and continued to get and bury peanuts. The crow just sat there, watching. Just silently and unmovingly watching. Eventually, the squirrel had enough, and loped off. The crow immediately flew down to the ground, walked over to where the squirrel had buried one of the peanuts, poked into the snow with its beak, came up with a peanut and flew away. Back it came for another, then another and another, usually getting a peanut on the first poke!

EDITOR'S NOTE

This is the last issue of the *Curlew* until September. Please continue to make note of your interesting sightings and relay them to Ted McDonald at 905-885-4764 or Norma Wallace at 905-885-5552.

We are always interested in stories of your experiences in the field, either locally or abroad, for future issues of the *Curlew*. Articles can be mailed to the WBFN, P.O. Box 421, Port Hope, ON L1A 3W4 or e-mailed to ekrf@eagle.ca, preferably in Microsoft Word format, or as a .txt file.

WBFN still needs a 2nd Vice President. If there is a member interested in taking on this job, please contact Bob Short at 905-885-1420.

THE WILLOW BEACH FIELD NATURALISTS

Past Pres.	Terry Stopps.....	372-1028	stopps@eagle.ca
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The editor is most grateful to those who have contributed to this issue of the Curlew. Copy for the September 2001 issue should be received by August 31, 2001. Rare or interesting sightings should be reported to Ted McDonald (885-4764) or Norma Wallace (885-5552) for the September Curlew. Correspondence for WBFN should be addressed to: "The Willow Beach Field Naturalists, P.O. Box 421, Port Hope, ON L1A 3W4."

OUT OF INDIA

by Audrey E. Wilson

On October 26, 2000, fifteen women left Vancouver for India via Singapore on "Women's Tour 2000" organized by Operation Eyesight Universal (O.E.U.), a Canadian charitable group focussed on preventing blindness around the world.

Never in memory had I gone on a trip that was not directly involved with nature interpretation, so initially I was a tad apprehensive! Taking both binoculars and camera, I was thrilled at how many things along this line we did experience.

In our quest to see O.E.U. programs with women in leadership roles, we covered a lot of ground from Delhi in the north, to Chennai (Madras) on the southeast coast and north to Sompeta along the Bay of Bengal.

India is truly a magnificent country with endless contrasts. Riding through the countryside, one continually sees scenes seemingly straight out of biblical times or from the pages of National Geographic.

Since it is illegal to shoot birds except in Kashmir, we found birds to be surprisingly abundant. Even in the very populous city areas, for example, Agra, where we made a sunrise visit to the Taj Mahal, one was always aware of dozens of vultures, Brahminy and Pariah kites soaring overhead.

Local guides had a fair knowledge of animals, birds and plants. They frequently shared interesting anecdotes. We learned many homes in the countryside have a parakeet or myna bird to ward off thieves.

Amid the masses of humanity, especially in city areas, environmental rules exist. In Delhi, if a tree is cut down, one can go to jail for six months. Concern over acid rain effects on the Taj Mahal has curtailed all industry in the area. Electric coaches deliver tourists to the site as a direct result.

Agra is noted for its precious stones. Tiny slivers of polished precious stones are inlaid in

the walls of archways and entrances of the Taj.

Farther out in the countryside, we were introduced to two types of eucalyptus. Red gum is used for firewood while blue gum is used as aromatic oil.

In Mumbai (Bombay) we visited Dr. Gopa's notable slum project. Her philosophy is to make the .6 million people who inhabit one square kilometre of space self sustaining. Small steps toward this objective surrounded us. Garbage is sorted into recyclables and compostables. Compost was then used to grow radish pots which in turn provided Vitamin A to prevent blindness. This was just one of many ongoing projects underway in this upbeat community.

As we approached Coimbatore: coconut palms, banana trees with monkeys and rice paddies, with the ever present paddybirds, gave way to tea plantations covering the steep slopes of the Nilgri Hills. Tea pickers receive all of two rupees daily, the equivalent of eight cents! Turning from one switchback to the next, we were astounded to see the brilliant reds of the Flame of the Forest. Did you know black pepper grows as a vine deliberately planted at the base of conifers? Huge Jack fruit, the largest fruit in the world, hung from nearby trees. A single fruit can weigh 20 kilograms. Ditches were filled with crown of thorns, huge milkweed and lanta, a bush with multi-coloured flowers.

At one point, we were surprised to share the road with dancing bears travelling with a group of gypsies. Moving through a huge forest reserve near Mysore, we saw herds of spotted deer, monkeys, bushy squirrels, tethered work elephants and camels as well as peacocks, India's national bird.

The countryside near Bangalore was devoted to agriculture; chiefly rice, sugarcane and millet. Numerous farms had mulberry orchards and sandalwood trees.

An optional trip one night was to a bird

reserve near Mysore. The warden took us out in rowboats just at sunset when egrets, ibis, storks, terns, darters and fruit bats were coming in to roost. Below, crocodiles were present. The guide explained there were many snakes but only the cobra is killed as all others are considered the farmer's friends.

Geographically, there was much of interest too. Caves where the "Out of India" film was shot were natural formations in pure white granite. Mysore was home to a huge elephant, Nandi, carved from one piece of black granite.

We visited three environmental type industries. Being an amateur entomologist, the first of these particularly interested me. A small family unit was busily sorting silkworm larvae onto large wooden wheels. The eggs had been laid on paper. As the larvae pupated in silken cocoons, 80% were kept for the silkworm business, while 20% would be released to perpetuate the species. Dipped into boiling water, some one and a half kilometres of silk would be taken from any one cocoon!

The second stop was at a cashew factory near Sompeta. Cashew nuts were placed in a large blast open-faced furnace. After heating, the nuts were raked out and women with small machetes cracked the nuts open. Other workers then sorted them into whole nuts or cracked pieces. Most of these women sat in a squat

position frequently with small toddlers present. Their pay for a long day's work was the equivalent of 25 cents. However, one would be hard pressed to find a happier group of employees anywhere!

The final stop was at a coconut plantation. Young lads from 12 years to college students were busily harvesting coconuts. Nothing was wasted; the rough outer shells were piled high for future use as fill. Coconut milk is very sterile and at one point was used directly in I.V. lines. A machete handle was positioned on the ground with the blade edge pointing upwards. Coconuts were held in two palms and split open on this sharp edge – a risky business!

Leaving the hospital compound and surgeries behind at Sompeta, we slipped away to a nearby beach on the Bay of Bengal one evening for sunset. The sand dunes with fabulous sand patterns, fishermen with their long nets working the incoming tides and silhouettes of beached craft against the setting sun are scenes hard to erase. It seems fitting that O.E.U. restores sight to thousands. The poorest of the poor are the most grateful. Is it any wonder when one considers all of the things in nature I've related here plus much more are free to everyone's enjoyment – if only we have the sight by which to see!

RED CLOUD BURN

by William Crowley

On Wednesday evening, April 25th, a group of volunteers from WBFN joined the Cramah Fire Department to assist Ed Heuvel in a burn at Red Cloud Pioneer Cemetery.

The Red Cloud Cemetery is a remnant prairie and contains a number of prairie plants, some relatively rare.

Fire is a normal and natural part of the prairie ecosystem. This is the reason for the controlled burn of half of Red Cloud. Within two to four weeks, the scorched earth will be replaced by healthy, lush growth.

IN MEMORIAM

Helen (Lawrence) Inch – Dec. 9, 1918-Dec. 28, 2000

Fran Westman – Aug. 7, 1911-Feb. 14, 2001

Within a seven week span, Canada has lost two prominent naturalists. Helen Inch died Dec. 28, 2000 and Fran Westman on Feb. 14, 2001. Many present WBFN members may not know that each of these naturalists had ties with WBFN.

I was privileged to become acquainted with each of them in 1954. Helen was a very popular and respected leader at the FON's annual Billie Bear Camp. Each fall the camp reunion was held at Florence and Kip Reeve's hospitable summer place at Willow Beach. In May, the camp staff returned for the Curlew migration. Earlier the same year, Fran took me under her wing on my first Point Pelee experience. Over the early years, both women assisted on the WBFN annual Christmas bird census as well as sharing trips to nearby Presqu'ile and later to Peter's Woods.

Both ladies had tremendous vitality and excelled as birders with a special flair for accurate I.D. of bird song. Their enthusiasm was contagious and both were always so willing to encourage and share with others. Their contributions included many aspects of nature: birding, botanizing, committee members, photography and environmental advocates.

As late as June 2000, Fran was recognized at the FON annual meeting in Midland as "The Mother of The Marsh" for her involvement with the Wye Marsh. She had been on their staff from 1968 to 1976. Indeed WBFN made special field trips to the Wye Centre under Fran's capable leadership during this time. She also documented the migratory bird kills at the CKVR TV tower in Barrie 1960-66. Helen and her husband, Spencer, visited and financially supported the WBFN Bluebird Project. On her last visit to our area December 24, 1998, she was thrilled to see the Red-bellied Woodpecker at A.K.'s feeders as well as the Virginia Rail south of Port Hope.

Over the years so many nature adventures were shared with these devoted naturalists. My mind wanders back over camping and canoe trips, annual trips to Point Pelee, waterfowl visits at Presqu'ile as well as journeys to Cape May, Newfoundland, Delta Marshes on the way west, Cariboo country and even farther afield to Patagonia. My life as well as countless others has been enriched by knowing these ardent naturalists. May the birds be singing and the orchids blooming for Helen and Fran now!

The following note was received on April 25 from Louise Schmidt along with her sightings. Louise is reporting in from Jamieson Rd. near 7th Line, Hope Twp.

It's a wonderful time of year, the wildflower Bloodroot is popping up all over the roadsides and the birds are frisky. Spotted a "woolly bear" caterpillar and the Spring Peeper Chorus was deafening on April 23.

April 17: Chipping Sparrows back at the feeder

April 20: Watched an American Kestrel male catch a snake (could not identify snake but had no markings on belly which looked a greenish yellow) which appeared to be at least 24 inches long. It held the snake under its claws on a fence post but eventually let the snake go as it was too large. Spotted the female kestrel later that day. Watched a pair of Northern Harriers hunting the nearby fields - male and female are staying in the area.

RECENT SIGHTINGS

compiled by Ted McDonald

Red-throated Loon	Apr. 26	1	Cobourg Harbour	CEG
Common Loon	Apr. 10-15	89	off Lakeshore Rd., Cob.	LW
	Apr. 29	370	off Cobourg Harbour	CEG
Pied-billed Grebe	Mar. 29	1	Cobourg Harbour	CEG
Horned Grebe	Apr. 1-15	192	off Lakeshore Rd., Cob.	LW
	Apr. 26	30	Chubb Point	MB
Red-necked Grebe	Apr. 1-10	36	off Lakeshore Rd., Cob.	LW

Sightings - cont'd.

Virginia Rail	Apr. 28	1	Willow Beach marsh	MB, RF
Sora	Apr. 26	1	Lake St. marsh	RF
Common Moorhen	May 5	2	Lake St. marsh	EB
Wilson's Phalarope	May 15	1	Lake St. marsh, PH	MC, RL
Greater Yellowlegs	Apr. 25	1	Cobourg Harbour	MB

Sightings - cont'd.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE	May 5	1	Ganaraska Forest Centre	EK, AE
Hermit Thrush	Apr. 8	1	Albert St., Cob.	MB
Gray Catbird	May 7	1	Larchmere Golf Course	ERM
Brown Thrasher	Apr. 17	1	s. of Harwood	AEW
American Pipit	Apr. 26	1	Chubb Point	MB

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Erich
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