

## GLEANINGS FROM THE NATURAL HISTORY OF HURON COUNTY, ONTARIO\*

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IT WAS my privilege to live in Huron County, Ontario, from early July, 1921, to early September, 1927, at first in the village of Brussels and later, after July 1925, in the county town of Goderich. Since my residence terminated I have been back frequently and regularly. During both residence and subsequent visits a comparatively large amount of time has been devoted to natural history, and gleanings from the notes accumulated are not without interest. Bird notes were made available to J. L. Baillie Jr. and Paul Harrington for the compilation of records later summarized by them in "The Distribution of Breeding Birds in Ontario"<sup>1</sup>. I am repeating two published notes in order to add to them. Special attention is given to changes that have occurred from 1921 to the present.

Huron County is intensively farmed but has nevertheless many woodlots and several good bush areas. The western fringe is a plain, the bed of post-glacial lake Algonquin. East of that is a wide hilly zone which is part of the "Horseshoe Moraine" system of southern Ontario. The eastern fringe of the county, farthest inland from Lake Huron, is part of a flat plain, formerly a cedar swamp known as the "Queen's Bush", the source of the Maitland and Bayfield Rivers. Now it is perhaps the least wooded portion of the county and with its clearing three generations ago the river beds became mere conduits for the spring run-off, except where damned at grist mills. The tulip tree, flowering dogwood and sassafras reach their northern limit at Bayfield<sup>2</sup>, and the sycamore stops at Goderich. On the other hand the balsam fir just enters the county along the Bruce boundary. I know of no clumps of native spruces, but larch is not uncommon in swamps. In general, white cedar covers the swamps and river banks and

sugar maple and beech crown the morainic hills.

Notes selected refer to the following species:

**Coyote**, *Canis latrans*. - This species must now be considered a resident, still not common. So far as I know, the first one taken was killed in 1936, and one or two have been reported killed every year since. I have not yet seen one.

**Porcupine**, *Erethizon dorsatum*. - During my residence at Brussels porcupines, though seldom seen, were frequently reported, chiefly on the evidence of quills in the mouths and noses of dogs. The species may justly be described as occurring rather uncommonly in cedar swamps in north Huron. One once wandered into the town of Goderich but I have not heard of any farther south.

**Varying Hare**, *Lepus americanus*. - Varying hares are abundant in cedar swamps in north Huron. I know of no occurrences at Goderich and they are probably scarce or absent in south Huron. On or about September 1, 1923, I saw a black individual at Brussels.

**European Hare**, *Lepus europaeus*. - I first saw this species at Brussels on December 19, 1924. It was already established at Goderich when I went there in 1925. Since 1926 it has been abundant and large numbers are taken in organized cross-country sweeps.

**Elk**, *Cervus canadensis*. - The Goderich "Signal-Star" of December 21, 1939, recorded an elk seen with some deer, in the Saratoga swamp near Dungannon, on December 14, 1939. It had evidently strayed from the Bruce peninsula, where elk were released by the provincial authorities. No subsequent observations have been reported.

**White-tailed Deer**, *Odocoileus virginianus*. - In 1921 deer were to be found near Brussels in both Morris and Grey townships. I was given to understand that they were rare and had

\*. —Received for publication January 18, 1944.

1. —Trans. Royal Can. Inst., vol. 21, pt. 1, 1936, pp. 1-59 and vol. 21, pt. 2, 1937, pp. 199-283.

2. —cf. John Gibson and John Macoun, "The Botany of the Eastern Coast of Lake Huron", Can. Journ. reprint, 1874-5, pp. 1-14.

been so for years, but that they had never been extinct. I had seen no sign of a deer when I left Brussels in 1925. However, reports of deer were becoming more and more frequent. In June, 1931, I was astonished to find unmistakable deer crotels in a small and isolated woodlot near Goderich. Since that time deer have increased rapidly and the Goderich "Signal-Star" was able to report the observation, on March 24, 1939, of 72 individuals at one time in the Saratoga swamp. The numerous cedar swamps of the county furnish abundant winter range, and I have so far seen no sign of over-grazing. This will come in due course if the deer increase continues unchecked. A short open season in 1942 aroused a storm of protest. I have noticed that a cedar swamp too small to hold varying hares will winter three or four deer over a period of years without over-grazing.

**Black-crowned Night Heron.** *Nycticorax nycticorax*. - On October 18, 1924, early in the evening, a flock of about 30 night herons flew over Brussels, headed southward.

**Blue Goose.** *Chen caerulescens*. - On November 15, 1925, I shot a blue goose at Goderich. On October 26, 1935, and (from reports) early in the same month of 1936, enormous numbers of geese, undoubtedly blue and snow geese, flew over Goderich at night in migrations that took most of the night to pass<sup>3</sup>.

**Buffle-head.** *Charittonetta albeola*. - Flocks of buffle-heads were seen regularly at Brussels in both spring and fall migrations. While the numbers were not large, this species was the commonest migrant duck, a rather unusual condition.

**Turkey Vulture.** *Cathartes aura*. - The turkey vulture is said to nest in Huron County<sup>4</sup>. I saw four at once at Bayfield on May 23, 1939, and learned of one shot at Brussels prior to 1921.

**Sharp-tailed Grouse.** *Pedioecetes phasianellus*. - On April 5, 1926, I saw at Goderich what I was certain was a sharp-tailed grouse. This record is one that I was tempted to suppress until, years later, I learned that fifty live sharp-tails had been shipped from Wainwright, Alberta, to Eugenia Crown Game Preserve in Grey County, on March 30, 1923. Obviously the introduction was a failure, for passing

years have brought no evidence of the establishment of sharp-tailed grouse in this region. However, it makes my record look more reasonable, even if at the same time it deprives it of any great significance.

**Upland Plover.** *Bartramia longicauda*. - This species has always been more or less in evidence. On June 3, 1936, and since, I have examined many miles of the flat fields of the old Lake Algonquin bed north of Goderich and found this bird well distributed, though hardly to be called abundant.

**Iceland Gull.** *Larus leucopterus*. - On December 21-23, 1935, an Iceland gull was seen at Goderich harbour. There was ample opportunity to compare it with both herring and ring-billed gulls.

**Bonaparte's Gull.** *Larus philadelphia*. - This species is extraordinarily abundant in both spring and fall migration at Goderich, and stays late in fall, e.g. December 23, 1935, December 24, 1939 and December 26, 1941.

**Snowy Owl.** *Nyctea nyctea*. - In 1927, after the ice disappeared, carcasses of snowy owls washed up along the shore of Lake Huron. I saw some at Goderich in spring and in Bruce County in summer. A single living straggler was seen at Goderich on May 27, 1927, headed north.

**Belted Kingfisher.** *Megaceryle alcyon*. - This species wintered at Brussels in the very open winter of 1922-3.

**Red-headed Woodpecker.** *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*. - When I first knew Huron County red-headed woodpeckers were common. There may still be a few, but I have seen none since 1929. The arrival and spread of the starling may or may not have had something to do with the disappearance of the red-headed woodpecker. One individual, perhaps more, wintered at Brussels in the winter of 1922-3.

**Short-billed Marsh Wren.** *Cistothorus stellaris*. - I observed this erratic species only in 1931, when there were two separate colonies at Goderich during the nesting season.

**Starling.** *Sturnus vulgaris*. - The first starling that I recorded was seen at Goderich on November 29, 1925<sup>5</sup>. Its increase was rapid and now it nests all over the countryside. The wintering population has not grown since the early years of its occurrence, hence most of the nesting birds must be migrants.

3. —cf. L. L. Snyder and T. M. Shortt, *Auk* 53 173-177, 1936.

4. —cf. Baillie and Harrington, *op. cit.*

5. —cf. H. F. Lewis, *Univ. of Toronto Studies, Biol. Series No. 30* 1927.

**Cardinal.** *Richmondia cardinalis*. - I saw individual males at Goderich on November 9, 1925, and December 27, 1928. In 1937 the cardinals arrived to stay. I saw them on April 3 of that year and have seen them on every subsequent visit. Small flocks have been reported in winter and there are reports of nests, undoubtedly true though unverified.

**Grasshopper Sparrow.** *Ammodramus saviarum*. - My first observation of this species was in June, 1931, (first seen June 9), when there were two thriving colonies at Goderich. It was not seen again until May 27, 1939, when a site near one of its former stands was occupied. On June 4, 1943, it was back again in the same general area.

**Henslow's Sparrow.** *Passerherbulus henslowi*. - On June 4, 1943, this species was observed in the same meadow as the grasshopper sparrow, at Goderich. There were at least two singing males.

**Clay-coloured Sparrow.** *Spizella pallida*. - On June 4, 1931, I found a male clay-coloured sparrow at Goderich in the restricted locality already mentioned as frequented by grasshopper and Henslow's sparrows. It was observed until June 8 and then collected<sup>6</sup>. On

6. —cf. Baillie and Harrington, *op. cit.*

May 26, 1939, another singing male was discovered in the same vicinity.

**Song Sparrow.** *Melospiza melodia*. - At Brussels first nestings of song sparrows seen by me all had clutches of six eggs; at Goderich all had four eggs. At this date I am unable even to guess the number of nests observed, but the information may have some interest.

**Smelt.** *Osmerus mordax*. - In 1906 and 1909 the smelt was introduced into the upper Great Lakes at Sault Ste Marie, Michigan<sup>7</sup>. Since that time it has been spreading around Lake Huron and the Goderich area seems to have been one of the last places reached. In 1939 a run started at Port Albert, but the Bayfield River seems to have had no smelt in 1940 and possibly none until 1942. In 1943 the Port Albert run is reported to have been very poor.

The Goderich "Signal-Star" of April 25, 1940 contains an account of the "second annual smelt harvest" in the Nine Mile River at Port Albert, and estimated that "last night" 150 persons had taken two and one half tons of smelts, using a variety of methods including scooping them out with bare hands. Smaller catches were said to have been made in the Maitland River at Goderich.

7. —cf. North Bay "Nugget" June 19, 1936.

## CURRENT LITERATURE

MELLON CARNEGIE MUSEUM EXPEDITION TO THE MACKENZIE DELTA, by Arthur C. Twomey. *The Carnegie Magazine*, Vol. XVII, Nos. 4 & 6, pp. 99-110 and 179-187 (1943).

Dr. Twomey who is Assistant Curator of Ornithology of the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, is well-known to Canadian ornithologists for his work in Hudson Bay and Ungava and for his book "Needle to the North" (in collaboration with Nigel Herrick).

In the Carnegie Magazine Dr. Twomey gives an interesting preliminary account of the Mackenzie Delta, N.W.T., its people and its

wild life. He travelled to the Delta by air, in March 1942, accompanied by Mr. Bert Wilk, a student at the University of Alberta. Headquarters were established at Aklavik where he spent ten months making numerous trips by canoe or by dog team. Of particular interest is his account of a trip to the breeding grounds, of the snow geese, on islands of the Delta, and of a white whale hunt. In July Mrs. Twomey joined the expedition.

The article is profusely illustrated by excellent photographs by the author. A sketch map of Canada shows the route of travel. — A. E. PORSILD.



Clarke, C. H. D. 1944. "Gleanings from the Natural History of Huron County, Ontario." *The Canadian field-naturalist* 58(3), 82–84.

<https://doi.org/10.5962/p.340716>.

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