

# THE CARDINAL

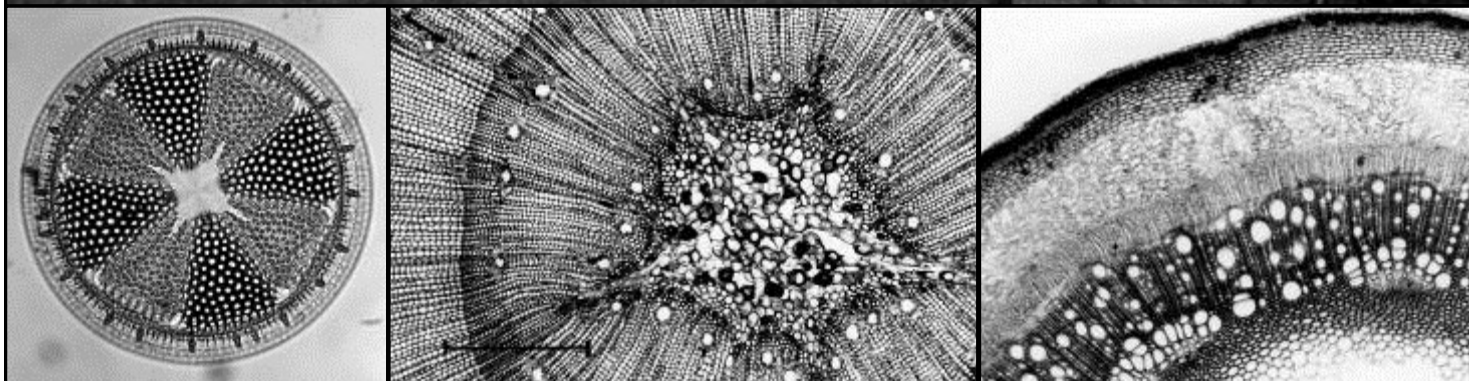
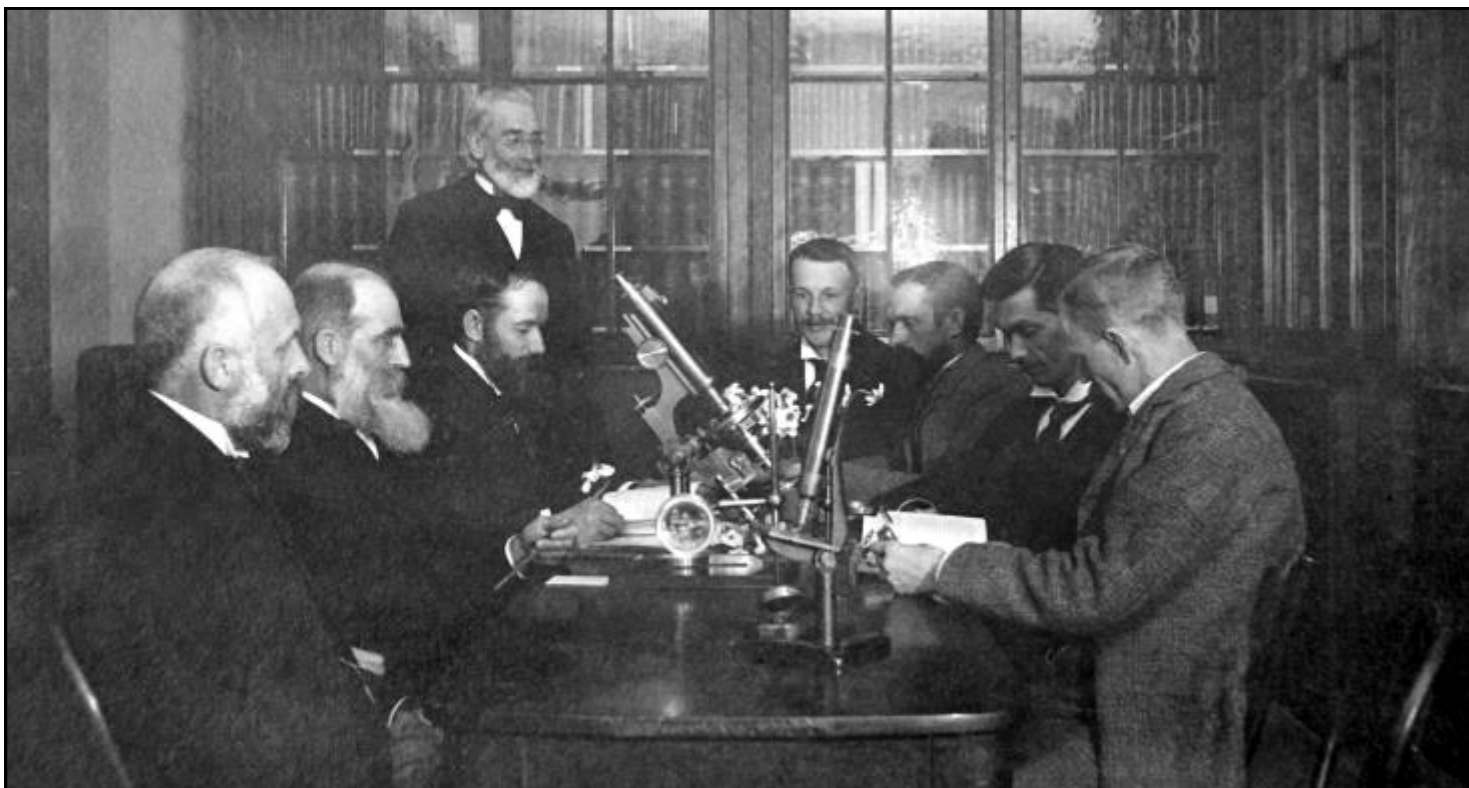
No. 235

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**Nature London**

The McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London Inc.

"To Preserve and Enjoy Nature"



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## THE NATURE LONDON STORY

### PART II: 1890 TO 1913

David Wake and Winifred Wake

**Authors' Note:** In Part I of this series, we discussed the first 25 years of Nature London's precursor organizations, including the founding of the Entomological Society of Canada in 1863 and the London Branch of the Society in 1864, the renaming of the Society as the Entomological Society of Ontario in 1871 and its move to London in 1872, and the closing of the London Branch in 1881. In Part II, we consider activities of London naturalists from 1890 to 1913.

The year 1890 brought significant changes for the Entomological Society of Ontario (ESO), and especially for its operations in London. Edmund Baynes Reed, a founding member, left London for British Columbia. Reed was described as "active and zealous", having served at various times as Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer, Auditor, Librarian and Curator. He contributed many articles to ESO Annual Reports and was instrumental in the acquisition of important scientific books for the Society's library. London entomologists keenly regretted the loss of this valued member.

In April 1890, local members met to explore the possibility of establishing sections that would "... extend the operations of the society beyond the strict limits of entomology". Special interest groups were already active in other learned societies of the day, including the Canadian Institute, the Hamilton Scientific Association, the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

ESO members in London set about establishing four sections, dedicated to the study of Botany, Geology, Microscopy, and Ornithology. An organizational meeting took place on May 3, 1890 in the ESO rooms, then located in Victoria Hall, 394 Clarence Street.

Sections functioned independently, electing officers, setting membership fees and arranging regular meetings. Some individuals were active in more than one section. As they had done for the previous 25 years, London members continued to play an active role in the activities of the parent Society. In the Annual Report for 1891, we read that "the formation of these sections has proved so successful and that it has led to an increase of our numbers and the performance of much valuable work".

In 1892, the Society's President, the Rev. Dr. C.J.S. Bethune reported: "The results have been most satisfactory, and the cheerful assistance given by the members of one section to those of another has been most useful ... The result is to make London, the headquarters of the Society, a

centre of scientific work for the peninsula of Ontario, and to attract its residents, especially the young, into the delight-giving paths of Natural Science." In 1894 another President, W.H. Harrington of Ottawa, referred to London as "the Entomological Mecca to which we annually resort to renew our strength and zeal ... and to arrange our plan of campaign for the coming year."

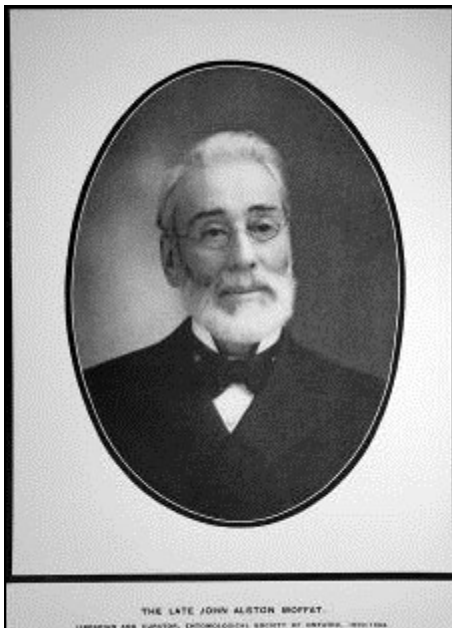
In 1890 John Alston Moffat, supported by a modest honorarium, moved from Hamilton to become the Society's Librarian and Curator. In his new position, Moffat, a long-time insect collector and contributor to *The Canadian Entomologist*, made arrangements for the rooms to be open on a regular basis for visitors. He soon established himself as the Society's welcoming face. In 1891, he reported 1168 volumes in the library.

Each year, in the Society's Annual Report, there are words of commendation regarding Moffat. In 1896, for example, John Dearness of London, President at the time, expressed "satisfaction with the careful manner in which the Curator, Mr J. Alston Moffat, continues to look after the collection of specimens, scientific instruments and library of the Society. Visitors have found him in constant attendance even outside of the hours at which he is expected to be present. Any one, whether allied with the Society or not, seriously studying any phase of insect life, has been cheerfully assisted by him."

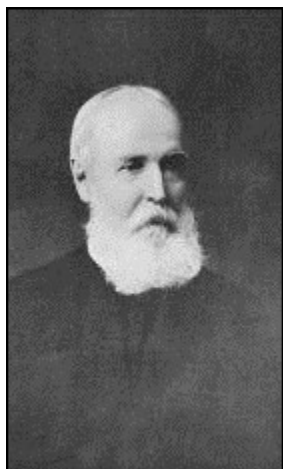
John Denton, an original member of the London Branch in 1864, died in 1896 at age 66. In three decades of devoted service, Denton served on the

Executive of the London Branch, on the Council and Executive (including as Treasurer and Vice-President) of the parent Society, and Vice-Chairman of the Microscopical Section. Although a tailor by trade, Denton held natural history as his passion. Bethune, in praising Denton, referred to him as an authority on economic entomology who "was frequently called upon to address meetings of farmers and fruit growers and give them the benefit of his knowledge and experience".

In November 1896, after 16 years in Victoria Hall, the Society moved its headquarters to the "fine new building" of the YMCA, on the west side of Wellington Street, south of Queens Avenue. The new rooms were "more accessible, commodious and better lighted". Members were pleased to "escape from the beating of drums and other noises from the Salvation Army", which had occupied the lower level of Victoria Hall. Unfortunately, heating in the new space was inadequate.



John Alston Moffat was appointed ESO Librarian and Curator in 1890. (Photo from the Archival and Special Collections of the University of Guelph Library.)



C.J.S. Bethune was a founding member of the Society, active for many years, and a resident of London for a few years. (Photo from the Archival and Special Collections of the University of Guelph Library.)

John Dearness, in his presidential address for 1896, encouraged members to promote nature study for children. In his professional life, Dearness was an educator, and would later publish a book entitled *The Nature Study Course*.

In 1899, the Society's activities in London were strengthened by the arrival of the Rev. C.J.S. Bethune from Port Hope. Since the ESO's founding in 1863, he had worked tirelessly for the Society in many capacities, including many years as editor of *The Canadian Entomologist*. In London, Bethune became active in the Botanical and Microscopical sections and continued his editorial duties.

While Bethune brought new energy to the local group, the expansion of the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) in Guelph had a negative influence on the Society's London operations. Over a period of years, key members moved from London to

Guelph. William Lochhead, active in the Botanical and Microscopical sections, left London in 1898 to become Professor of Biology at OAC. S.B. McCready, a year after being elected Chairman of the Botanical Section, relocated to Guelph in 1905 to assume duties at OAC.

The Society suffered a significant loss in February 1904 when the esteemed and much-loved John Alston Moffat died at the age of 80. In tribute, Bethune remarked that Moffat "endeared himself to all with whom he came in contact by his kindness and courtesy. It was always a pleasure to him to identify specimens, and to exhibit the beautiful objects in the Society's cabinets to anyone interested in natural history."

After Moffat's death, Bethune assumed the responsibilities of Librarian and Curator. By 1904, the room at the YMCA was considered to be "... too small for the steadily increasing library and collections", the tally of books by then numbering 1832. That fall, after eight years at the YMCA, the Society moved next door to the Public Library, at the corner of Wellington Street and Queens Avenue.

By 1903, the Geological Section had suspended opera-

tions, although the other three sections remained active, and study of entomology continued. In 1903/1904 entomology meetings took place on Saturday evenings, alternating with those of the Botanical and Microscopical sections. In the following season, however, there were no formal meetings of the sections, but "classes" were held twice a month for "practical instruction in the elements of entomology..." In the spring of 1905, botanical outings were held. Efforts at public outreach continued, with lectures in London and area by Bethune (insects) and Saunders (birds).

Now we will take a look at each of the four sections.

### Botanical Section

The Botanical Section first met on May 3, 1890, "immediately following the adjournment of the general meeting" at which the creation of sections had been approved. The group decided to meet on Saturday evenings, and arranged to purchase copies of H.B. Spotton's *Flora*. At meetings, knowledgeable members used pressed specimens to teach others how to identify plants. The first field trip took place at Springbank on June 14. In July, six members travelled to Komoka by train for a field day. Disembarking "one mile west of the station", they walked through the swamp, returning along the tracks to the station. Meetings continued until September and resumed the following February. At the end of the 1891 field season, the Section's herbarium held 300 specimens.

John Dearness, the first Chairman of the Botanical Section, was a long-time member of the Entomological Society. He was also a key figure in the Microscopical Section and served the parent Society as Vice-President from 1893 to 1895 and President from 1895 to 1897.

Through the 1890s, field trips were organized to places such as Pond Mills, Delaware, Dorchester, and Woodstock. Some trips were shared with other sections. For example, the microscopists invited the botanists along on an outing on May 7, 1892. Individual members also travelled widely, with John Dearness visiting the Niagara peninsula, and Dearness and others collecting plants in the Port Franks area.

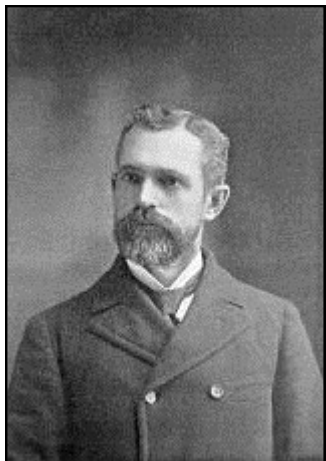
At the May meeting in 1893, W.E. Saunders presented a paper on the "Plants of May in the London District". Many of the wildflowers discussed can still be seen today. Exceptions include Yellow Ladyslipper (*Cypripedium pubescens*) at "Griffith's Pond" (Saunders Pond). Alas, this species is now unknown at Westminster Ponds. The Pink



The ESO moved to the YMCA on Wellington Street in 1896 (left) and then to the London Public Library on Queens Avenue at Wellington Street in 1904.

(Photos from the Nature London archives.)





John Dearness about 1900.  
(Photo from the Archival and  
Special Collections of the  
University of Guelph  
Library.)

Ladyslipper (*C. acaule*), also found at the ponds, has fared better, and a few specimens can still be seen in the 21st century.

To aid in recruitment of new members, in 1892 the Botanical Section developed a circular “setting forth the benefits to be derived from membership . . .” The minute book unfortunately is silent on the success of this circular. Over time, a pattern developed, by which the Botanical Section met during spring and summer, and the Microscopical Section met during fall and winter, with many members in common.

As the 1890s drew to a close, interest in the Botanical Section declined and attendance

dropped. No minutes were recorded between July 1898 and May 4, 1901. Some botanical work was being carried out, however, as the parent Society’s Annual Report for 1899 cites three new plant species found.

In 1900, W.E. Saunders (son of William, see page 47) presented a paper entitled the “Planting, Care and Pruning of the Trees in the Parks and Streets of the City” at a joint session of the parent Society and the London Horticultural Society. Saunders was highly critical of current planting and tree-care practices. He advocated the planting of a greater diversity of species, including nut trees, “which render the parks attractive to the squirrels and the birds and the children . . .” The ESO subsequently passed a resolution calling on City Council to have its shade tree program handled by a “small committee of citizens”. Clearly, the Society’s interests were broader than insects only.

In 1902, the Botanical Section held only one field excursion, “to Komoka, favourite collecting ground near London; it was thoroughly enjoyed by the few botanists and entomologists who attended.” Indoor meetings during the early 1900s involved review and identification of specimens that had been collected by members.

The Botanical Section operated until 1904. In the final season, nine indoor meetings were held, between May and October. The average attendance was nine with a high of 17. Only two “field-days” took place, one in Dorchester, and one in Komoka. Part of each indoor meeting was devoted to the study of plant life, with the remaining time devoted to the classification and history of collected specimens. Although the section held no formal meetings in 1905, classes in botany were offered during the spring. Plants collected during field excursions were identified in subsequent indoor sessions.

### Microscopical Section

In Victorian times, there was great interest in all things scientific, including the natural world. This passion for knowledge of nature led to the founding of the Entomological Society in the first place. Microscopes were one of the tools used by the Society in its study of insects. It is natural, then, that members wanted to improve their skills in microscopy. Organizations devoted to microscopy existed

throughout North America – in 1893, an American publication, *The Microscope*, published a list of 50 such organizations, three of which were in Canada. At that time, the London group owned two microscopes – a Carpenter and Westley monocular, and a Zentmayer binocular.

At the first meeting of the Microscopical Section on November 15, 1890, James H. Bowman was elected Chairman, soon to be replaced by John Denton. At this meeting and the next, Bowman, a professor at the Medical School, gave instructions on how to use the microscope. Members who owned microscopes brought their instruments in to share with others. Meetings of the Microscopical Section mostly took place during fall and winter. Some members of the section, including Professor Bowman, were active in the Botanical Section during the summer.

At indoor meetings, members took turns providing instruction on topics such as preparation of slides; treatment of samples to be placed on slides; and examination of algae, green plants, fungi, bacteria and insects. In October 1891, a field trip to Pond Mills yielded specimens that were examined at an indoor meeting the next day.

During the 1891/1892 season, the Microscopical Section met 13 times. The total membership was 12, with an average attendance of nine. That season, the section gave demonstrations at the Teachers Association and at Hellmuth Ladies College. John Dearness, prominent in both Botanical and Microscopical section meetings, provided instruction on various aspects of microscopy and biology. A number of microscope slides prepared by John Dearness (see front cover) are still extant at Western University.

Discussions at the Microscopical Section sometimes ventured into other topics. On October 22, 1898, there is mention of recent bird sightings and a story about a mink. At the same meeting, W.E. Saunders discussed the new Bausch & Lomb – Zeiss field glasses, “which contains 3 sets of prisms and for which many advantages are claimed”.

The Microscopical Section organized special events for external groups, including the 1903 exhibition for the “Daughters of the Empire”. In the final season, 1903/1904, there were 13 meetings with an average attendance of nine. The last minutes of the section record the meeting of April 23, 1904, when 12 people were present. The topic was Practical Microscopy, presented by John Dearness.

The Microscopical Section was the most successful of the four sections formed in 1890 – it met each winter from 1890 to 1904, without the “gaps” experienced by other sections.

### Geological Section

The first meeting of the Geological Section took place in the Society’s rooms on Friday, May 14, 1890. Dr Solon Woolverton was elected Chairman, a position he held for most of the next 13 years. Woolverton, a dentist, had a great interest in Geology, and lectured on the subject at Western University from 1895 to 1920.

The section met weekly on Wednesday, from May through November of 1890. The first outing was a field trip to St Marys on July 1, and, in mid-July, the geologists joined the Botanical Section in a field trip to Komoka. Lectures at weekly meetings were organized like a course in Geology, following the textbook by the British geologist Geike.



Members of the Geological Section of the Entomological Society of Ontario in the "rooms" at the YMCA on Wellington Street. Around the table, **from left:** (Unidentified), George Kirk, William Percival, Solon Woolverton (Chairman), Josiah Wilson, Mr Spettigue, James F. Sangster. John Alston Moffat is partially obscured in the right background. (Photo from the Archival and Special Collections of the University of Guelph Library.)

During 1893/1894, the Rev. C.H. Andras became Chairman of the Geological Section. Often accompanied by Woolverton, he travelled around the region energetically searching for minerals and fossils, which he exhibited at meetings. In November 1893, he reported on his geological trip up the Medway. Alas, Andras did not stay long in London, and the section lost an important member when he moved to Alberta.

In 1894/1895, the number of members increased, with attendance at meetings reaching as high as 15. A highlight of the year was an October visit to the Mammoth Caves in Kentucky, undertaken by Dr Woolverton and Mr William Percival. Upon their return to London, Woolverton and Percival provided detailed reports about this trip at several meetings.

Members travelled farther afield in search of geological features in 1896. George Kirk visited mineral deposits in BC; Mr Brown was prospecting along the north shore of Lake Superior; Mr A. Blackburn was "opening mines" in the Lake of the Woods district; and Dr Woolverton collected samples from the gold fields of Hastings County. During summer excursions in later years, Woolverton visited the Parry Sound area and Manitoulin Island. Other members visited the "oil districts" near Dutton and Sarnia.

Locally, there are occasional references to the place we know today as the Sifton Bog Environmentally Significant Area. Each of the sections reports visits to the "Spruce Bog" or "Redmond's farm." In 1899, the Geological Section undertook investigations at the "peat bed" on Redmond's farm, to examine the feasibility of mining peat for fuel. Exploitation of science for economic benefit was a recurring theme in Victorian times.

A highlight in 1900 was the discovery of bones, thought to be from a mastodon or mammoth, in West Nisour Township. Woolverton visited the site, and the bones were displayed at the Western Fair. There was talk of establishing a local museum for items such as these, but nothing happened.

Presentations at indoor meetings sometimes strayed

from geology to topics that included astronomy, production of heat by the human body, and the mystery of circulation. Little wonder then that the minutes of September 24, 1901 record a motion directing future meeting topics to be limited to paleontology, mineralogy and geology.

There are no entries in the minute book after this meeting, but other sources report continuing activity during 1901 and 1902, with weekly meetings and a number of field expeditions. In 1903, the Report of the ESO Council mentions that the Geological Section had suspended its operations. It is not clear what factors led to the demise of the Geological Section. Eight members were present at the meeting in September 1901, and the newly elected Chairman, George Kirk, was described as a capable and energetic member.

### Ornithological Section

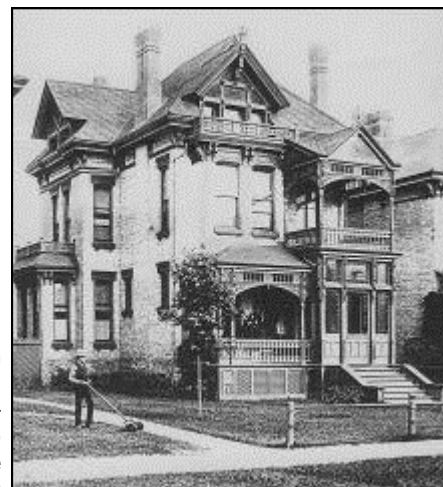
The first meeting of the Ornithological Section took place on May 5, 1890. W.E. Saunders was elected Chairman. The group settled into a schedule of meeting once every two weeks during May and June. When the Section reconvened in September, it met once a month. Most meetings were held in the ESO's rooms, but two took place at the home of W.E. Saunders, 240 Central Avenue.

In 1891, the group held monthly indoor meetings from January to June. In March, there was a comment about the abundance of Snowy Owls during the winter, with members having heard of eight or ten. At the same meeting, there was mention of the first Carolina Wren for Canada, which had been shot near Forest.

On the first known outing (January 10, 1891), three members visited Peters Swamp (south of Oxford Street, west of present-day Proudfoot Lane). The only bird recorded was a chickadee, although the party observed tracks of several mammals. A second trip was scheduled for February 25 to the "Spruce Swamp", and a third to Komoka on May 16.

In 1891, the ornithologists published a "List of Birds Known to Breed in Middlesex County Ontario". Birds were placed in three categories, based on their feeding habits: (a) decidedly beneficial, (b) neutral or nearly so, (c) possibly injurious. Crow, Blue Jay and Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks were all identified as possibly injurious. Classifications were likely related to perceived impact on agriculture.

Regular meetings continued through 1892 and 1893 but, by 1894, the Ornithological Section stopped meeting. In addition to being Chairman of the Ornithological Section, W.E. Saunders was



The home of W.E. Saunders as it was in the early 1900s, when the Ornithological Section met there. (Photo from the Nature London archives.)



J.E. Keays was elected Chairman of the Ornithological Section in 1900. (Photo from the Nature London archives.)

the Secretary of the ESO and participated in some activities of the Botanical and Microscopical sections.

The Ornithological Section was revived in January 1900 when J.E. Keays was elected Chairman and W.E. Saunders Secretary. At the first meeting, Saunders reported on his experiences at the November 1899 meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union in Philadelphia. Meetings during 1900 took place at the homes of members, with most at the residence of W.E. Saunders where he kept study skins of many species of birds in a "bird room" on the third floor.

In 1901, the Ornithological Section discussed reports of opossum, a species that had not been recently recorded in Southern Ontario. One specimen was taken at Port Colborne and two at Rondeau. It is interesting that the "bird" group was taking note of mammals! During that year, membership stagnated, with an average attendance of three or four at the nine meetings held. During 1902, the section gathered one Friday a month at Saunders' home, where papers were presented by members. These were later published in the *Ottawa Naturalist*.

At a February 1902 meeting members discussed a new book by C.W. Nash, *Birds in Relation to Agriculture*, which advocated the shooting of hawks and owls. Saunders criticized this position, telling of a Great Horned Owl whose stomach contained 13 mice. He argued that "on the basis of 5 mice per night, these owls would consume in the neighbourhood of 2000 per year. It was considered that a valuation of 1 ct each for the damage a mouse might do in its lifetime was very moderate and at this rate, each [owl] is worth \$20.00 a year to the farmer . . ."

Following a request by the section to the ESO, the new name McIlwraith Ornithological Club came into effect in February 1903. The year-end report of August 31, 1903 noted the loss of two important members. Mr Harry Gould, described as "one of our most active workers", moved to Alberta. Robert Elliott of Plovers Mills died at the age of 44. Held in high regard by the members of the ESO, Elliott was considered as "probably the best all-round Naturalist in this neighbourhood, being well versed in Ornithology, Botany, Geology and Entomology, and . . . also without a peer among the local students of Mammalia."

The September 1903 meeting took place in the bird room of the Saunders home, with ten members present. Discussion centred around a collection of birds, eggs and mammal skins, some of which had been collected by Saunders on a recent trip to Alberta. There was also talk of preparing a long-delayed update of the list of Middlesex birds (an earlier version had been published in 1891). There is no record of further meetings in 1903, and no formal list of the birds of Middlesex County was published until 1933.

### The ESO Moves to Guelph

In 1906, the Rev. C.J.S. Bethune, a founding member of the Society and London resident since 1899, was appointed Professor of Entomology at OAC, with an effective date of June 1.

In May, the ESO's President, Mr. J.D. Evans of Trenton, had sent a letter to members of the ESO's Council, which included officers and directors representing identified regions, proposing that the Society should also leave London and outlining his reasons. Council voted 11 to 4 in favour of the move, with one abstention. By August, the headquarters of the ESO, together with the library and collections, had been transferred to Guelph. Through special arrangements with OAC, Bethune continued to look after the Society's library and collections in their new home at the college.

The headquarters of the Society had been in London since 1872. For more than 30 years, London members had been the backbone of the organization, conducting research on insects, carrying the bulk of the administrative load, overseeing the day-to-day operations of entomological activity in the Society's rooms, and ensuring that monthly issues of *The Canadian Entomologist* were published and Annual Reports compiled in a timely manner. The Annual Reports were submitted to the government of Ontario. Each one documented the operation of the Society; provided detailed information, largely based on investigations by members, regarding insects injurious to agricultural crops; and offered practical advice on methods of suppressing pests of current concern.

No doubt the move of operations to Guelph was a severe blow to the remaining members in London. At the Annual Meeting in Guelph in 1906, a new Secretary was elected, ending the tenure of London's W.E. Saunders, who had held the position since 1887. Not only had the physical possessions of the Society departed but so too had the key administrative roles traditionally held by Londoners.

We have found no official list of the reasons for the Society's move to Guelph, but it was likely a combination of factors. The report of Council for 1906 states "interest in entomology has almost entirely died out in London, and there seemed to be no one there available for the supervision and care of the library and collections. The sections also of Botany, Ornithology, Geology and Microscopy had, one after the other, ceased their active operations, and no meetings of any of them have been held during the last two years." Perhaps an even more important factor is found in another line of the same report: "removal to Guelph would be in the best interests of the Society as well as in accordance with the wishes of the Ontario Department of Agriculture." The government wanted the Society to relocate to Guelph to help consolidate entomological work there and so that OAC would have the benefit of direct access to the Society's library and collections. In considering the concern over waning interest in London, it is pertinent to note that, over a period of several years, London ESO members who had been most prominent in carrying out entomological research had been drawn to Guelph to assume paid academic positions. At a time when entomology as a practical science was shifting from the hands of competent amateurs to formally educated professionals, London did not have an academic institution that specialized in agriculture or entomology. The handwriting was on the wall for the ESO in

London and, as the Ontario government provided an annual grant that funded the ESO's two flagship endeavours – publication of *The Canadian Entomologist* and the Annual Report – the government's wishes prevailed.

The death of John Alston Moffat in 1904 was likely another contributing factor in the decline in activity in London and the timing of the removal to Guelph. Moffat had been a welcoming presence in the Society's rooms, and made extraordinary efforts to keep the library and collections open and available for members and the public. When Bethune took on the role of Librarian and Curator in 1904, he was already busy as Editor of *The Canadian Entomologist*. In 1905, the rooms were open only three afternoons a week.

### Natural History in London after the Departure of ESO

For the period from 1906 to 1915, there is no written record of any formal nature study group in London. W.E. Saunders remained very active in the study of natural history, especially birds. He was also busy travelling, and continued to collect birds and write about his experiences. From 1906 to 1914, he published at least 57 articles (mostly about birds, but some about mammals and plants) in a half-dozen different journals.

Other Londoners also maintained an interest in birds. The first London Christmas Bird Census took place in December 1909, conducted by two teenagers, Floyd Jones and Alex Eastwood. Beginning in 1910, E.M.S. Dale, J.F. Calvert, and C.G. Watson carried out the annual count, adding J.A. Cameron to the crew in 1913. These four men were poised to become significant players in the events that were about to unfold.

Meanwhile, Solon S. Woolverton, long-time Chairman of the Geological Section, continued to lecture in Geology

at Western University, and established his own natural history museum on the third floor of his home. John Dearness, a key figure in the Botanical and Microscopical sections, maintained his interests in botany, mycology and the teaching of nature study.

The groundwork had been laid, and men having a strong interest in nature, as well as a high degree of competence, were still present in London. For much of the decade after the 1906 departure of the ESO to Guelph, London naturalists pursued their interests alone or as part of small, informal networks. That was about to change, however – the years 1914 and 1915 were marked by a resurgence of interest and two new rejuvenation initiatives. Watch for Part III of the Nature London story in the next issue of *The Cardinal*.

(Dave and Winifred Wake are Nature London's Archivists and are members of the club's 150th anniversary committee.)

### SOURCES

The major sources for Part II included branch reports, council reports, financial statements, librarian's reports, president's addresses, and other accounts published in various numbers of the *Annual Report of the Entomological Society of Ontario* and *The Canadian Entomologist*. Publications prepared by W.W. Judd were helpful, including the annotated minutes of the four sections, and his books on early naturalists and natural history societies. Newspapers of the day provided additional information. The above material has been variously accessed in the Nature London archives, the London Room of the London Public Library, the Taylor Library at Western University, the Archival and Special Collections of the University of Guelph Library, and on-line.

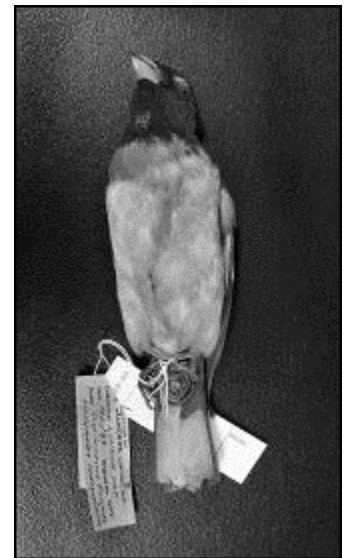
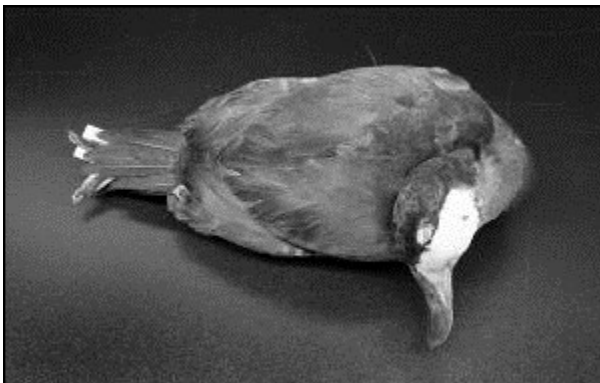


Study skins originally from the collection of W.E. Saunders.  
**Top left:** Southern Bog Lemming, *Synaptomys fatuus* (now *S. cooperi*), "Spruce Swamp" (now Sifton Bog), 1902. This specimen seems to appear in the November 14, 1902 minutes for the Ornithological Section: "... Mr. Elliott's Pine mice and lemmings were again discussed and examined, along with one lemming taken by the Secy [W.E. Saunders] at the Spruce Swamp."

**Lower left:** Ruddy Duck, London, 1881.

**Right:** Rose-breasted Grosbeak, London, 1883.

(Photos by Dave Wake.)



### CORRECTION: SAUNDERS FAMILY PHOTO

On the cover and on page 38 of the February 2014 *Cardinal*, No. 234, is a photo of William Saunders and his family at their home in Ottawa. Pictured are William, his wife Sarah, and a son and daughter. The son was incorrectly identified as Will (W.E.); he is Fred Saunders, a brother of W.E.

## FAVOURITE LOCATIONS FOR BUTTERFLIES

Ann White

I was asked one day where my favourite spots were for looking for butterflies. That would seem a straightforward question with a simple answer, but alas, no. I have found many good spots in different years that have gradually disappeared. Many within the City of London have been turned into housing estates. Those spots were probably good previously because the land had been let lie as the owners knew it was to be built upon, or had put it up for sale and no longer looked on it as their responsibility. Wildflowers, and maybe shrubs, had taken over and butterflies had been enjoying them. Some other spots that were good previously, such as two on Killaly Road, now sport “No trespassing” signs, so I stay away from them. The trail and adjoining land along the north bank of the Thames River from Clarke Road to Fanshawe dam is good. I found my first Common Buckeye there, and Gavin Platt found some of the first skippers for our Middlesex butterfly list. But when we first discovered that area, we could park near the bridge and walk up. Now it is fenced, the parking is gone and it is necessary to enter via the pay gate of Fanshawe Conservation Area to get there. A spot on Commissioner’s Road which was good up to last year for several species, including American Lady and Buckeye, has been ploughed and levelled and now hosts nothing.

However spots within nature reserves are still good and should remain so. One of these is in the Meadowlily Woods Environmentally Significant Area. In the first field after you enter at the farm gates on the east side of Meadowlily Road there is a large boggy area. This is good for several species of skippers, and also other species of butterflies as flowers grow around it. I have seen Giant Swallowtails along the edge of the wood; crescents, blues and sulphurs flitting among the flowers; and Red Admirals, Great Spangled Fritillaries and browns flying in the shrubby area between the bog and the wood, though not all at once!

One other spot near this is the City Wide Sports Field off Commissioner’s Road East. When it first opened, some prairie flowers were planted at the back of this area, and also there is some water present in the low part: two fea-

tures butterflies like. I have seen a good variety here including swallowtails, and have never been there without seeing something in butterfly season. Meadowlily Woods is beyond the back fence and accessible from there. A few miles east, on Elgin Road just south of Highway 401, there is a good spot for American Coppers and other species, including many Wild Indigo Skippers at the right time. Look for a sign “Banks Forest” and draw into the parking area. This area used to be known as the Dorchester hydro cut, but some trails were made there a few years ago which are now falling into disrepair, and it got a new name. If you get that far it is not too much farther to Lake Whittaker Conservation Area, where many butterflies show up, particularly, I have found, on the west side of Lake Whittaker. Nature London members can get a permit to enter free by applying to the Kettle Creek Conservation Authority (see page 7).

West of London, Komoka Provincial Park is very good, and a reliable spot for the rather scarce Baltimore Emperor. Strathroy Sewage Lagoons are a favourite spot of mine, and here one can do some good birding at the same time! Lots of flowers grow around the lagoons, particularly at the back. Dainty Sulphur and Checkered Skipper both recently made their first appearances in Middlesex County here, and many brushfoots show up including Milbert’s Tortoiseshell, American and Painted ladies, and Great Spangled Fritillary. Also in Strathroy, the Clark Wright Conservation Area is very good and has pleasant trails. It is on the edge of town and is not to be confused with the conservation area in the centre of Strathroy.

Even farther away, Skunk’s Misery is a prime spot, which is why our Butterfly Count focuses on it and the two Thames Talbot Land Trust Properties in that area – Wardsville Woods within Middlesex and Newport Memorial Forest across the river in Elgin County (see pages 12 and 49). Another TTLT property, near Arkona but also in Middlesex County, is Joany’s Woods. This rather distant area is great for butterflies and also for birds.

The park in Mount Brydges is another spot that comes to mind, as is the area on both sides of the river bridge be-

Middlesex County butterflies. **From left:** Bog Copper (photo by Dave Wake), American Lady (photo by Sue Thauer)



tween Komoka and Delaware, and Sharon Creek Conservation Area just south of Delaware village. Besides butterflies there are nesting bluebirds here, a nice bonus! Sifton Bog is a special spot as two scarce butterflies can be found here and nowhere else in our part of Ontario – the early Brown Elfin and the Bog Copper, which flies about the time the Butterfly Count takes place.

Sometimes butterflies appear in strange places, maybe on horse poop in the middle of a road or around a puddle,

so you always have to be on the lookout. But of course those sightings are by serendipity and can't be planned. Maybe our readers know of good spots that they could share?

(Ann White has been Nature London's Skunk's Misery Butterfly Count Co-ordinator for 14 years. She was instrumental in developing the Middlesex butterfly checklist, and also writes about Red Trilliums on page 44.)

## STATUS OF THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY

J. Bruce Parker

It certainly isn't news that the decline of the Monarch butterfly population may lead to the loss of the annual migration that occurs each autumn. Within the last year, most major newspapers on this continent carried articles describing the potentially dire outlook of this well-known migrating species. In 1996, Monarch butterflies covered 20.97 hectares of land in Mexico after completing their migration in the autumn. The overwintering population in Mexico during the winter of 2012/2013 was at an all-time low, covering a meagre region of only 1.19 hectares.

Monarch Watch director Orley Taylor stated in his pre-migration newsletter of 2013, "The distribution of Monarch production appears to be changing due to the loss of milkweeds following the adoption of herbicide tolerant corn and soybeans in the Midwest."

The migration during the autumn of 2013 carried the smallest population of the Eastern Monarch butterfly ever recorded. The colony count in Mexico during February 2014 revealed that only 0.67 hectare of forest was covered in Monarchs. Ninety percent of the population occupied only two of the 12 overwintering sites. The population was estimated to be 33 million. Compare that to one billion Monarchs in 1996.

The continual loss of habitat through illegal clear-cutting in the overwintering colonies in Central Mexico, the great decline of milkweed in the American Midwest due to cultivation of herbicide-resistant crops, and conversion of rangeland and grassland for biofuels are the significant factors that have caused the population to reach this critical state.

The dismal situation was very much understood during last fall's migration through Southwestern Ontario. I monitor a roadside area in Elgin County which contains approximately 400 milkweed plants. Each summer I inspect the plants weekly for evidence of larvae. None were found during the summer. I am also licensed by the Ministry of Natural Resources to tag migrating Monarchs at Hawk Cliff during the month of September. Movement through this region was both delayed and minimal. My records indicate that the annual peak migration through this region occurs between September 11 and 14. In 2013 the migration peaked between September 17 and 19. I was also tagging late into the month with 44 specimens tagged on September 24. I have developed a term, "visible" migration, in reference to times when dozens or hundreds of Monarchs

move by a fixed point over a certain period of time. As an example, on one occasion during the migration of 2011 approximately 300 Monarchs per hour moved by a fixed point for several hours. There was no evidence of any "visible" migration this last autumn.

Point Pelee National Park, which has made daily counts of migrating Monarchs for many years, actually decided to cancel the count in 2013 due to a lack of butterflies. Each year as I tag Monarchs at Hawk Cliff, I generally see thousands of Monarchs moving along the fields and cliff face. This year I sighted a total of 830 for the season.

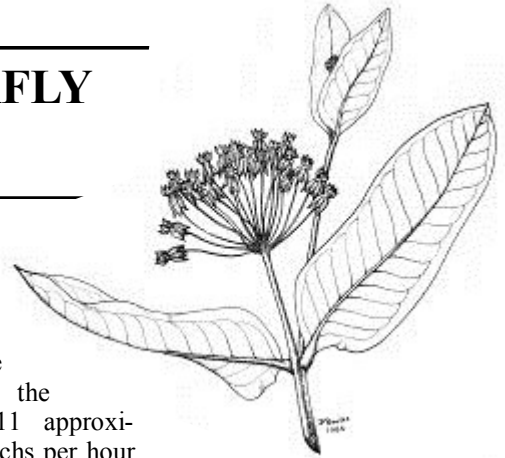
Milkweed (*Asclepias*) is the only plant on which the female Monarch will lay eggs, and the plant material is the only source of food for the larva. Monarch Watch is encouraging the planting of milkweed to help restore the Monarch population. There are 73 species of this plant in North America, 30 of which are used by Monarchs. In Southwestern Ontario, Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), and Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) are the more common species. Plants can be grown from seed or seedlings purchased from local nurseries.

In Ontario, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food is now considering amendments to the Noxious Weed list which would remove milkweed from the list. This is a small but positive step.

(As well as doing his work with Monarchs, Bruce Parker is a steward at Newport Forest (see page 42).)

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Common Milkweed  
(*Asclepias syriaca*)  
in flower. (Drawing by  
Jane Bowles.)

## RESEARCH AT WESTERN

### MIGRATING *NOCTIVAGANS*: THE NIGHT WANDERERS

Leslie Kostal

Some 24 years ago, during David Attenborough's nature documentary, *The Trials of Life*, the seeds of scholarship were sowed. Kristin Jonassan, a PhD candidate in Biology at Western University, is passionate about helping nature persist and working to make positive changes. Currently in her third year, Jonassan's research looks at migration energetics and movement ecology of bats in Ontario.

Bats, she noted, are one of the most diverse group of mammals, representing a quarter of all mammalian species. Along with feasting on mosquitoes and so cutting down on West Nile Virus, bats are an important predator of other nocturnal insects detrimental to agriculture or forests. "We know very little about bats compared to what we know about birds and bird migration," she said. When studying the conservation of a species and trying to understand how an animal is reacting to landscape development, researchers need to comprehend a bit about its basic biology to ask the appropriate questions. How are bats managing their time and energy while they're migrating? How fast can one get somewhere and how much does it cost?

During fall migration, both sexes are migrating south and mating. Female Little Brown Bats (the kind most often found in cottages, attics and caves), differ from males during spring migration. They store sperm over the winter and ovulate in the spring when emerging from hibernation. Once having arrived at their summering grounds, the demands of pregnancy should affect how much they feed and how much they're able to preserve energy.

A major bat-related conflict is wind energy development. For that reason, studying migration routes, or any other development on the landscape and how it might affect them, is important. Most research on Canada's migratory tree bats – the Silver-haired Bat, the Red Bat and the Hoary Bat – is on fall migration. Jonassan is interested in looking at bat routes, what direction bats are travelling and where they're going. Many migratory animals may follow a leading linear landscape feature like a shoreline, a mountain line or a river valley. It's very possible that they may be following or avoiding human-made features, such as hydro lines. That information just isn't known.

Under the supervision and support of biologist Professor Christopher Guglielmo and his CFI (Canada Foundation for Innovation) and NSERC (Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada) grants, along with her own NSERC scholarship and help from Bat Conservation International, Jonassan is grateful to have found her spot at the Long Point Bird Observatory in Old Cut right on Lake Erie. Bird Studies Canada staff and other scholars have collaborated in setting up telemetry towers at Long Point, which has recently been discovered as an important stopping habitat for fall-migrating bats.

Jonassan's first field season at Long Point looked at spring migration, which has allowed a comparison of the migration times between sexes. Spring migrating animals



Silver-haired Bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*) outfitted with a radio-transmitter (the antenna extends left of the bat).  
(Photo by Kristin Jonassan.)

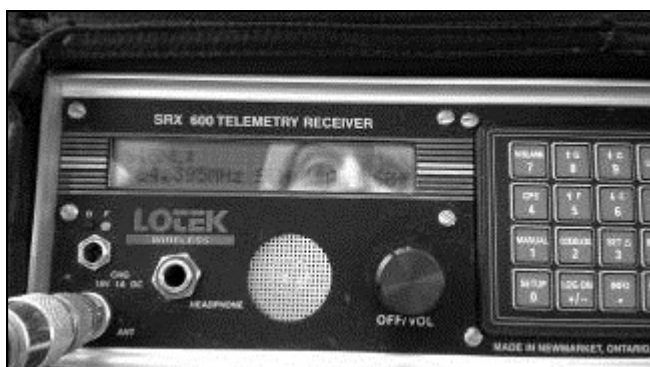
are important for next year's population. "If they're adversely affected they might not have pups," she added. She has found a migration timeframe through Long Point which, in turn, allows her the opportunity to look at the bats' stopover. Previous research has found that migrating bats stay for only one day during the fall. It's a little pit stop spent getting ready for the next leg of the journey. She has found that during spring, males are on the same track. They're in, they're out. But females are having extended stopovers of multiple days. Her research suggests they need more time to refuel during spring migration than during the fall, possibly due to pregnancy.

To track her subjects, bats are caught using mist nets. "Basically they look like large volleyball nets but with a finer mesh. The bat will fly into this mesh and fall into a pocket." Throughout April and May Jonassan works all night, every night, from sunset to sunrise, checking her nets every 15 minutes and catching, on average, one bat a night. On a few occasions, her nets have caught other unsuspecting nocturnal animals such as a Saw-whet Owl, Whip-poor-will and American Woodcocks. The bats are weighed, sexed and aged. "If you hold them up against a light you can see if the bones are finished ossifying." Juveniles starting their first migration may take longer to fly off if they need to build up more fuel reserves.

To determine the amount of water, lean tissue and fat in the animal, a bat is placed in a small Plexiglass tube and placed in a QMR (Quantum Magnetic Resonance) machine which quickly provides a reading. By trimming the fur on the bat's back and attaching a transmitter the size of a small pinky nail (weighing 0.3 grams – less than five percent of the animal's body mass) with non-toxic Ostomy glue, dissolving after a few weeks, Jonassan either tracks their movements or monitors their body temperature.

Once the bats have been fitted and freed, Jonassan and her assistants use Yagi antennas resembling TV aerials, then drive around looking for signals in a game of hot and cold. Each transmitter gives a rhythm beat. "They're called coded tags," she explained. "I have to have 30 different radio stations, all in different frequencies and each with a different speed."

In addition to their hand-held antennas, five towers pointed in cardinal directions around Long Point always



Reflection of Kristin Jonassan in the telemetry receiver.  
(Photo by Kristin Jonassan.)

listen for radio signals that have a range of close to 10 kilometres. Data from the towers indicate the length of the bat's stay and when it left the perimeter. "Our first spring we also set up a tower at MacGregor Point. Two of my 30 bats flew by there. When you think how big Southwestern Ontario is, I thought two out of 30 was *fantastic*," Jonassan claimed excitedly. It took two nights to fly between Long Point and MacGregor Point – well over 200 kilometres.

Telemetry towers are also set up at Pinery Provincial Park and on the Bruce Peninsula. The network is expanding and there's hope for a grid across Southwestern Ontario into Québec. More northern towers are difficult to place due to a lack of services. An international collaborative (the Icarus Project), however, is looking into the creation of a low-flying satellite which will allow for GPS tags small enough to fit birds and bats. Jonassan believes that technology will be made available in the next couple of years.

It's still unclear where the southern and northern tips of migration are located. There's a broad spectrum of possibilities of where the bats might be coming from. Other problems arise in counting. "People can record their echolocation [calls] and they'll give you a measure of activity, but you won't know if 50 bats passed through and you hear them all calling or if you had one very persistent bat that flew around your microphone and called the entire night."

"The advantage I have is that during the day my sub-

jects aren't moving, so I can get a lot closer," Jonassan said. The strength of a signal depends on the quality of the antenna. If the antenna has more elements and it's longer, you hear more. There are all sorts of things that can complicate the strength of the signal and reception.

Jonassan claimed that most bats around our suburban neighbourhoods are Big Browns and there are some Little Brown Bats. However, it's not out of the question to have migratory species stay in the city for a time depending on the habitat. Little Browns and Big Browns historically like big dead trees. Red and Hoary bats prefer to roost in foliage or on large tree trunks to get a lot of sun. Silver-haired are more cavity roosters that seek out old woodpecker holes or roost underneath bark or wedged between things. "With the Silvers, I found most of them were roosting under a metre in height," she said.

Jonassan believes bat boxes are a great addition to one's property and the best time to put one up is during winter, before hibernation ends. "You want that to be one of the first things they're going to find," especially if you don't want them inside. "They like tight warm places that squirrels can't get into." Jonassan encourages homeowners not to remove bats from homes in spring or summer when babies are present. The vast majority of bats have only one pup once a year. Pups are born very large and can be 30 percent of the mother's body weight. "It takes a lot to raise a baby bat. Their bones need to grow to adult size before they can fly." The Silver-haired Bat may live up to 12 years, as may the Red Bat, and the Hoary Bat has a recorded lifespan of a possible 38 years.

"With the introduction of man-made impediments and White-nose Syndrome, which has killed over one million Little Brown Bats, those populations won't recover in my lifetime," she said. "Maybe we just don't always understand how important things are until they're gone."

*(Leslie Kostal has written staff feature articles occasionally for Western News and is on The Cardinal Editorial Committee)*

#### Personal Interview

Kostal, L. 2014. Interview with Kristin Jonassan, Ph.D. Candidate, Western University, City of London at Social Science Centre, London, ON, January 27.



Robert Elliott, Frank Lawson. Standing: John Alston Moffat. In Society's room at YMCA, between 1896 and 1904. (Photo from the Archival and Special Collections of the University of Guelph Library.)

**Bottom:** Photos by **Barbara Bain** of microscope slides from John Dearnness's collection. From left: Diatom (an alga) in Gum Thus (plant resin; slide dated 1894); cross-

**COVER:** Photos from Nature London's history (see page 22).

**Top:** Members of Botanical Section, Entomological Society of Ontario. Seated, from left: Alexander McQueen, J.A. Balkwill, Alexander Hotson, James H. Bowman, John Dearnness,

section of Scotch Pine twig (1901, scale bar about 500 micrometres); cross-section of Bittersweet vine (1900).

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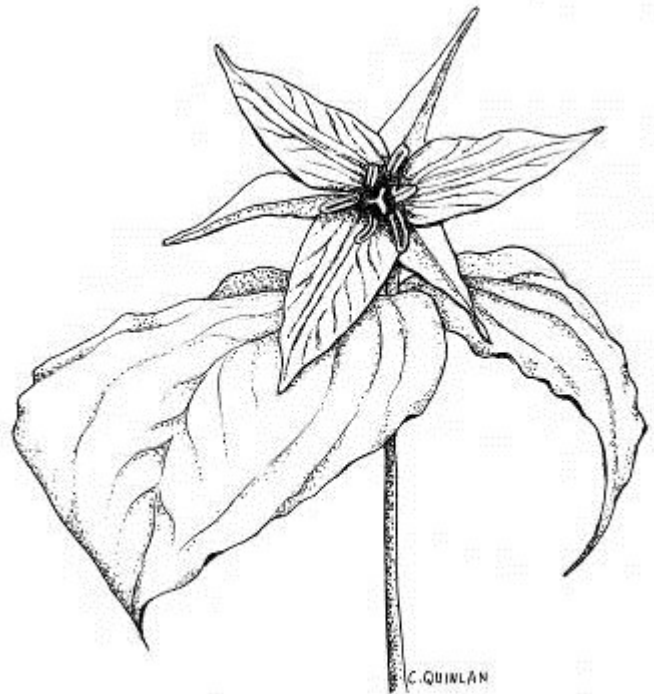
## INTRODUCING THE RED TRILLIUM

Ann White

Trilliums are found in Asia as well as North America. There are eight species listed in North American flower guides, four of which are found in Ontario. Two species grow in rich, moist woods in our area, while the other two are rarely found south of the Canadian Shield. Northern trilliums are named Painted, which I have seen near North Bay, and Nodding. They grow in acid soil in cool, moist woods. The two that grow here in Southern Ontario are the White Trillium, *Trillium grandiflorum*, and the Red, *Trillium erectum*. Everyone knows the White Trillium, which has been our official Ontario flower for nearly 80 years. In 1937, the government decreed: “the flower known botanically as *Trillium grandiflorum* and popularly known as the White Trillium is the floral emblem of the province of Ontario.” It is also the official flower of Ohio and in light of their shared connection to the flower, Major League Soccer teams in Toronto and Columbus compete for the Trillium Cup. In April or early May it is easy to find these showy flowers in wooded areas within the City of London, such as Meadowlily or Westminster Ponds. Growing alongside the White Trilliums, a careful observer will spot some Red Trilliums. They can easily be overlooked because of their splendid companions. The Red Trilliums flower a little sooner than any of the White, but both can be found in flower together.

The Red (sometimes locally known as Scarlet or Purple) Trillium has several names. “Wake robin”, because it flowers early – about the time robins return – “stinking Benjamin” and “birthroot”. Stinking refers to the unpleasant smell of this flower and Benjamin is a corruption of benzoin, itself a corruption of benjoin which is an ingredient derived from plants in manufacture of perfume. The Red Trillium smells neither sweet nor spicy, hence “stinking, (benjoin), or Benjamin”. The name “birthroot” interestingly comes from the medicinal uses of the plant in the past. Sapogenins obtained from the plant were used by Native and early colonial midwives as a uterine stimulant in birthing. An astringent tonic obtained from the root was useful in controlling bleeding and diarrhoea. It was also used in treating gangrene, tumours and heart palpitations.

The Red Trillium is a perennial herb. The plant grows from a short rhizome up to three centimetres thick. Sometime in April or early May, this sends up a scape from which grows a whorl of three sessile (stalkless) leaf bracts, often called leaves. They are photosynthetic. The single flower grows from the whorl on a short stem, which is up to ten centimetres in length. Under the three-petalled flower are three green sepals, which may be tinged with maroon. They are alternately placed under the petals. Inside the flower are six stamens and a style with six angled, ovoid, dark-red berry fruits which mature in the summer. The flower of the Red Trillium is normally maroon in colour, but creamy-white ones are sometimes seen. It is bisexual. The hanging flower is about six and a half centimetres wide, while the pointed leaves are as much as 17 centime-



tres in length. They are smooth on both sides, broadly ovate and are nearly as wide as long. Although the trilliums belong in the order Liliales (lilies), the leaves are net-veined rather than parallel-veined like lilies. The plant reaches 26 to 40 centimetres in height.

Although the unpleasant smell and dark maroon colour of the flower are a technique to attract pollinators, this plant produces no nectar and therefore bees are not attracted to feed on it, so do not provide pollination. However, green flesh flies that are looking for rotten meat on which to lay their eggs get hoodwinked and end up helping the plant in its procreative efforts, getting a meal of pollen as a reward. Ants are attracted to the oily elaiosomes (food bodies) on the seeds. They collect them and transport them away from the parent plant, thus providing seed dispersal. Sometimes beetles interfere and eat the elaiosomes, making the seeds less attractive to the ants.

Children have always been taught not to pick trilliums because it is illegal. Actually this is not true. Picking trilliums is illegal only in provincial parks and conservation areas. Fearing retribution, however, is possibly a good thing. Picking the flower alone may not significantly harm the plant, but picking it with the leaves will weaken the rhizome and likely lead to the death of that plant. It takes a very long time for a new plant to become established. In the first year, a seed will only develop the rhizome and in the second, a single seed leaf may grow. A true leaf may be seen after another year. In two or more years the three-leaf whorl appears and perhaps in the seventh year, a flower. But it may take eleven years in total. The seeds may stay viable for some years if they are always in moist soil. Trilliums are very sensitive to light. Although it is possible for trilliums to survive selective logging, clear-cutting will destroy a colony.

Get out this spring, and when you see a beautiful carpet of White Trilliums, look for their inconspicuous cousin – the Red Trillium. Don't forget to smell it!

(Ann White has now written five annual articles introducing spring wildflowers to Cardinal readers. She also introduces us to some of her favourite butterfly locations in this issue; see page 29.)

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## SUNDAY MORNING AT WONNACOTTS' FARM

Bill Maddeford

The gravel crunches under our car wheels as we pass Brigham Road and continue past (now) Komoka Provincial Park and down a steep hill to the floodplain. It is 6:30 am and in the pale light of the awakening day the wondrous sight of billowing mist hangs over the Thames River, rising up 100 feet on a wave weaving across the countryside, a sight I will always remember. It is mid- to late April, 1946, and we make our first stop by a small creek that runs into the nearby Thames.

The resident phoebe that builds a nest yearly under a small bridge greets us, one of a chorus of birdsongs that fills the crisp morning air. There is no sun out yet but the eastern sky is brighter and mist glistens. I, the 11-year-old, emerge from the back seat of the Packard coupe (always impressive) as my dad Charlie and his birding buddy Charles G.D. Watson climb out of the front seat where they have been swapping poetic verse and lots of worldly talk as well as bird talk. We sneak up to the nearby river's edge (in case there are ducks). However, the billows of mist hide the water and we are to be content with the chorus of towhee, Field Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, bluebird, robin, Blue Jay and many other members of the choir.

Shortly we drive off and over the old rusted iron Komoka bridge. Here we will stop again and look and listen. I am quite sure this bridge is wide enough for two cars. The spot just to the north of the bridge always gets mention as where the Little Blue Heron was once. All we get today is a Great Blue, lumbering off up the river.

A short ride past fields and one small gravel pit at the corner and we are at Komoka. It had no Little Beaver Restaurant, but perhaps a gas station; west again past Komoka Creek and Camp Kee-Mo-Kee (no Pete and Sue Read) and soon we are turning into a long sandy lane that leads to Wonnacotts' farm, our main destination.

The Wonnacott family and our family, the Maddeford, had several connections. My father Charlie and Gord Wonnacott were both secondary school teachers in London. Our families both attended Calvary United Church on Ridout Street. Gord's son Tom and I both were in the same Cub pack at Calvary United and we both went through our five years at South Collegiate at the same time.

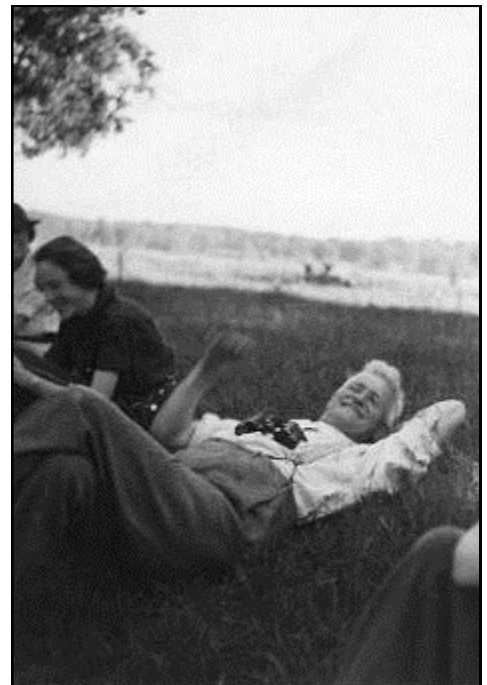
I think W.E. Saunders started the McIlwraith Club

journeys to the Wonnacott farm years before our Sunday morning in 1946, and the Wonnacott family had left a welcome sign out for all club members. The family all seemed to love their farm and did a lot of upkeep with crop and cattle care.

We always arrived by 7 am and departed by 10 because Mom at home and church at 11 am awaited us. Our course rarely varied. Walk through the field to the west of the farmhouse, old even then, and look for Vesper and Savannah sparrows. From the hill bottom and the flats would come the chorus of marsh birds and from the oak upland forest, White-throated and White-crowned sparrows, Myrtles and other early warblers – Black-throated Green, Nashville, Black-and-white. Sapsuckers and Hermit Thrushes would often be present in goodly numbers.

The air would still be crisp but now the sun was burning off the mist in the field. Man, that air was good to breathe in. Now I think I was often self-absorbed with these feelings and didn't pay attention to my mentor.

We reach the ravine that cuts deeply from the field to the north through the soft and sandy soil down to the river flats. Here is where the prize is. This oak-pine forest upland is a 15-plus-acre area on



W.E. Saunders at Wonnacotts' farm. (Photo from Nature London archives.)

the east side of the ravine. In June it becomes an area where we are allowed by the Wonnacott family to have a club picnic and where members bring their picnic baskets. As I remember, there are walks, lots of talk, a campfire for toasting wieners, blankets on the ground and friendly companionship.

The prize is there. Floating up from below comes the strong melodic chant of the Louisiana Waterthrush, at that time the only place the species was to be seen; it is now a threatened species in Ontario. This bird's song is a real experience for anyone as it rises up out of a deep ravine.

After walking a trail along the edge of the ravine we turn towards the flats and walk down the long sandy road. In April or early May the cattle were not usually down on the flats. This is a huge area that the Thames empties over in flood times. The ravine streams were very clear and cool, and bubbled on and disappeared into two to three acres of cattails. Now this area has filled in with silt from erosion of the ravine. Then it was full of marsh sounds. Often rails or bitterns made

mysterious noises and occasionally allowed you a glimpse of them peeking around a bulrush. There was a need for wearing rubber boots and trying not to overflow the boots. The whole hillside bottom here is a huge seepage area of many acres that has cedar and Tamarack and habitat for Great Horned Owls, Winter Wrens, thrushes and many migrants. Between this wooded area and the marsh is a very soggy meadow with sedges, Marsh Marigolds and other plants. Yellowthroats love it. We slog through, squishing with our rubber boots and trying to not overflow them. Here we join a farm trail where the cattle are led to the flats in the late spring. I think the marsh and the pond to the east were part of the old oxbow of the river that was here long ago. The pond is alive with swallows, Yellow Warblers and Common Yellowthroats, coots and Pied-billed Grebes. We approach a series of small ponds from the old riverbed and do the duck sneak. Often teal, Wood Ducks, Ring-necks and mergansers are here.

We continue south past a hawthorn area where often towhees and Brown Thrashers call. There we approach many large old elms and cottonwoods along the widened end of Komoka Creek where it joins the Thames. Here again we do the duck sneak and approach quietly, hoping to get a closer look at a Wood Duck, which often happens.

Across the creek there lies the "island", which really

isn't one, but is a mysterious spot covered with huge Sycamores, elms, cottonwoods and overgrown vines. There is a jungle-like appearance and the island is often difficult to walk through because of downed timber and flood debris.

In May, this area houses Cerulean Warblers and tanagers, but today, having survived crossing the creek on a fallen log without incident, we see a shadow fly past us. A harsh cackle begins that tells us the Bald Eagle has spotted

us. There are young in the nest, a huge stockpile eight to ten feet high in a large Sycamore at the end of the land. We don't approach it but are content to watch our friend sailing near us to remind us we are trespassing. Eagles have nested here for years and, fortunately, after an absence when DDT decimated their numbers, they have returned to the flats in higher numbers.

Recrossing the log (without incident) we go to the hogsback corner of the hillside by the creek and begin the long ascent. This hill is not for the weak. It has been logged here and is more open, with rotted stumps; it is good habitat for Hognose Snakes. We met one here on the path one day and it went through its bag of tricks

for us – puffing up its head like an adder and rolling over to play dead when it saw we weren't running away.

Finally at the top, depending on time, we may walk along the forested hillside above the creek for a while or may just turn west. It was then, one Sunday at 10 am, that I heard my first Blue-winged Warbler. I was excited beyond belief. But I could only raise token enthusiasm from Dad who had the pull to church at 11 am on his radar. Getting a really good view of our first Blue-wing did not overrule "Get me to the church on time"! Such was the fate sometimes of many a good bird sighting.

As we round the corner of the barn, the air is filled with the chattering of Barn Swallows. We head for home, me especially anxious to get back for another Sunday trip to this beautiful nature park. I feel grateful now in 2014 that the Wonnacott family have been very sharing of their beautiful natural farm area.



Blue-winged Warbler. (Drawing by Beth Stewart.)

*(Bill Maddeford writes that this article came from the writings of his Dad, Charlie Maddeford, and his own 11-year-old's memory. See Bill's article about Dougald Murray on page 40. There will be a field trip to the Wonnacott farm in June; see page 51).*