

THE CARDINAL

No. 237

November 2014

Nature London

The McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London Inc.

"To Preserve and Enjoy Nature"

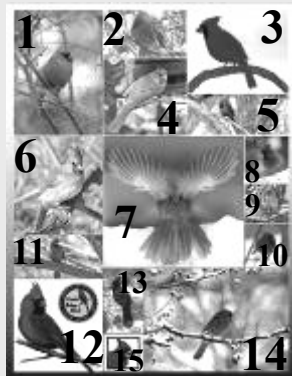


THE LEGEND OF THE LAST NATURE LONDON 150TH ANNIVERSARY COVER

Long, long ago, or so it must seem to the tireless 150th Anniversary Committee, the Chair, Sue Read, made a suggestion that it might be fun to invite you, our members, to submit photos or art of Northern Cardinals to grace the cover of the last flight of *The Cardinal* during the 150th anniversary year. The committee successfully petitioned the Board to have this cover be printed in colour. You hold the result in your hands. Many people submitted their work for the cover and we have supplemented with a few items that were just waiting for the opportunity to be printed in colour or added an historical ambience. Thanks to everyone who helped to make this cover one that we are certain our readers will enjoy.



Front Cover: 1 shows a female cardinal, probably a young adult given the poorly developed mask, photographed by Gene Lobb. 2 shows a male cardinal painted by Anita Caveney. 3 was taken by Jim Tuckerman. 4 was drawn by Beth Stewart for the cover of *The Cardinal's* 200th flight; finally we can to show it to you in full colour. 5 by John Russell shows blue sky, in contrast to most of the photos, which demonstrate how cardinals do brighten a dreary day. 6 was taken by Dick Day. 7, taken by Ray Robertson, caught a snowy setting. 8 proves that cardinals are here in the summer too and was taken by Jim Tuckerman. 9, an adult female with a full black mask, was taken by Mike Boucher. 10 is a photo of a pair of cardinals carved by Denzil D'Mello. You can admit that you were fooled by this, if only for a moment.



Back Cover: 1 is by Rob Rodger; we wonder how he got the cardinal sharply focused while the foreground and background are fuzzy and possibly in motion. 2 shows a male cardinal taken by Jim Bristow. 3 is by one of Nature London's youngest birders, Hayden Bildy, who clearly also has artistic talent. 4, taken by Carol Agocs, captures a view that many of us enjoy daily. 5 shows one of Gail McNeil's cardinals waiting for his turn at Gail's feeders. 6 is another shot of a female by Gene Lobb. 7 has languished in our image database waiting for this back-cover opportunity; Gerard Pas took this photo of a cardinal's back. 8 was taken by Mike Boucher. 9 is a female photographed by Gail McNeil. 10 was taken by Dick Day. 11 was taken by Jim Tuckerman, also in winter. 12 is a card drawn and painted by the late Gladys Carey, while the crest is a link to our club history: the 1957 McIlwraith Ornithological Club (a.k.a. London Nature Club) crest. 13 is a photo by Leslie Rockwell of her Suncatcher Award. Many club volunteers have received Suncatchers in recognition of their service. 14 is another nod to our history, courtesy of Barbara Bain. The photo was taken by the late Mary Abbott and published in *The Art of Canadian Nature Photography* edited by J.A. Kraulis. Last and most unusual, 15 is a cross-stitch created by Catherine Burr.



A YEAR TO REMEMBER: OUR 150TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Here is a list of the various activities that have taken place in 2014 to commemorate Nature London's 150th anniversary. Thanks to the Anniversary Committee and others who have played such an important role in organizing so many fabulous ways to celebrate!

ANNIVERSARY EVENTS AND FIELD TRIPS

Winter 2013/2014: A plethora of Snowy Owls come south to help celebrate the club's 150th anniversary.

2013/2014: 150th anniversary totes available

January 1: New Year's Day bird walk at Springbank Park

January 17: 150th Anniversary Kickoff Celebration

February 8: Winnett's Swamp walk

March 1 to 31: Invitation to Columbia Sportswear Employees' Store

March 4: Illustrated talk on Our Native Land and Modern Footprint: Ecological Change Through Time by John Riley at the central London Public Library. A Welcome Ceremony was conducted by Dan and Mary Lou Smoke.

April 29: Tree planting, 150th anniversary plaque unveil-

ing, and guided walk of tombstones of individuals with a historical connection to Nature London. The event was co-sponsored by Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

April 22 and May 6: Spring birding walks at Westminster Ponds

May: Tree-planting at Cedarcroft made possible by a TD Friends of the Environment grant

May 3: Higgins Farm walk

May 21: Warbler Woods ESA walk

June 1 to mid-July: Display depicting Nature London history featured in the London Room, London Public Library

June 4: Trees of Mount Pleasant Cemetery walk

June 8: Birding along the Thames walk at Dougald Murray's farm

June 14: Hike at the Wonnacotts' farm

September 6: Cedarcroft picnic to recreate corn roasts held on the property in the 1980s

September 13: Oil history at Oil Springs, a field trip destination of the Geological Section of the Entomological Society (Nature London's root organization) in the 1890s

- September 20:** Pollinators at Westminster Ponds walk – insects were the club's initial interest and field trips have occurred here since the 1860s
- October 1 to 31:** Display on William Saunders in the London Room, London Public Library
- October 1 to 31:** Invitation to Columbia Sportswear Employees' Store
- October 5:** Walk at Kains Woods, a club destination since the 1930s
- October 28:** Illustrated talk on the life of William Saunders, co-sponsored by Nature London and the London Public Library
- November 16:** Walk at Fanshawe Conservation Area, a club field trip destination since the 1950s
- November 21:** Nature London's Annual Awards Banquet, 150th Anniversary Edition
- December 6:** "CBC4kids" (Christmas Bird Count) – an anniversary initiative
- December 20:** London Christmas Bird Count – held annually since 1909

NATURE LONDON WEBSITE

Special section created to promote anniversary events throughout the year

BIRD CHECKLIST

Birds of Middlesex County Checklist updated by Pete Read, available for download on Nature London's website

NATURAL AREAS GUIDE

Guide to the Natural Areas of London and Vicinity revised – edited by Jim and Roslyn Moorhead, 2014/2015

THE CARDINAL

Special anniversary logo, designed by Hugh Casbourn, is used to designate heritage field trips and other features

The Cardinal 150th Anniversary Year Covers:

- February:** Colour photos of flora and fauna, club history, and the January kickoff party
- April:** Historical photos of early club members and microscope slides
- August:** Photo of a Common Green Darner to honour the club's origins as the London Branch of the Entomological Society
- November:** Montage of colour photos and pictures of Nature London's mascot, the Northern Cardinal

The Cardinal Feature Articles:

- "The Nature London Story": A history series by Winifred and Dave Wake
- February 2014:** Part I (1864 to 1889)
- April 2014:** Part II (1890 to 1913)
- August 2014:** Part III (1914 to 1939)
- November 2014:** Part IV (1940 to 1964)
- November 2013:** "A History of the Well-Dressed London Naturalist" by Roslyn Moorhead and Dave and Winifred Wake
- February 2014:** "William Saunders: Founding Father of Nature London" by Roslyn Moorhead
- April 2014:** "Memories of Dougald Murray" by Bill Mad-

deford; "Sunday Morning at Wonnacotts' Farm" by Bill Maddeford; "William Saunders, Native Trees, and Mount Pleasant Cemetery" by Roslyn Moorhead

- August 2014:** "Cucumber Magnolia Planting and Plaque Unveiling at Mount Pleasant Cemetery" – a photo montage; "Charles Watson, Ornithologist" by Charles and Bill Maddeford; "Reminiscences of Traction Creek" by Bill Maddeford; "Tree Planting at Cedarcroft" by Herb Bax; "Congratulations on This Your 150th Anniversary" – a letter from Mary Lund, a former club member

MORE ANNIVERSARY FEATURE ARTICLES

- ON Nature** – Spring 2014: "Nature London is 150 Years Old" by Lisa Richardson
- Ontario Nature Website** – Posted April 1, 2014: "Nature London: 150 Years Old and Counting" by Anita Caveney
- Londoner** – February 20, 2014: "Nature London Celebrates 150th Anniversary"
- Londoner** – February 27, 2014: "Nature London: Our Changing Landscape" by Winifred Wake to promote the anniversary lecture
- The World Outdoors** (*The London Free Press*) – March 1, 2014: "Nature London Looks to Future" by Paul Nicholson
- Londoner** – Late October: "William Saunders and the Forest City" by Roslyn Moorhead

IN THE WORKS

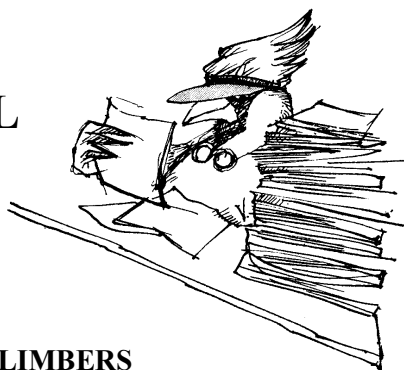
- December 20:** "Nature London at 150", Exhibit on Nature London's history at Museum London
- The Cardinal:** February and April 2015, Nature London history series – Parts V and VI (1965 to 2014)
- Field Trip** to UWO Collections: February 2015

Sue Read
Chair, 150th Anniversary Committee



This drawing of a bridge at Cedarcroft appeared on the cover of a special Cedarcroft Supplement, *Cardinal* no. 129b, November 1987. (Drawing by Michael Rouse.)

ASK THE CARDINAL



GROUNDHOG CLIMBERS

Dear Cardinal,

Groundhogs are a well-known garden pest within cities and farm fields. Besides the damage they do to young plants, they are ubiquitous; we even had one raise a family underneath our solarium! One day, on opening the garage, I surprised what was recognized as a groundhog climbing up a joist to the rafters, which led me to ask several friends if they thought a groundhog could climb. The answer was a unanimous "No – groundhogs are burrowing creatures which rarely come up from their burrows." Can groundhogs climb, or do they restrict themselves to being very efficient diggers?

On the fence about garden Groundhogs

Dear On the Fence,

I appreciate your lack of enthusiasm about another garden pest, but it is remarkable how certain mammals can learn to exist in new environments, availability of food probably being the main driving force. As for climbing, my human friend tells me that guidebooks on mammals state that the Groundhog (*Marmota monax*) definitely can climb trees, usually to escape predators or simply to survey its surroundings. Groundhogs do, by the way, regularly leave their burrows to feed.

Although it's somewhat off the topic, another name for the Groundhog is Woodchuck. Most readers will recall the childhood rhyme:

How much wood could a woodchuck chuck
If a woodchuck could chuck wood?

The name does not seem to derive from wood, however, but from the Algonkian word *wuchuk*, possibly imitating one of the animal's several calls or vocalizations. My human contact recalls that, as a youngster, his father showed him how to attract a Groundhog by continuously



A Groundhog on the fence. (Drawing by Robert Stinson.)

tapping two small stones together near the entrance of its burrow. Often the Groundhog would stick its head out, probably in readiness to repel an invader or in response to one of its similar calls – or maybe just out of curiosity?

The Cardinal

LEAF WEATHER FORECASTING

Dear Cardinal,

I have heard that trees can forecast rainy weather, by turning their leaves so the underside is upwards. Is this a fact or a myth?

An amateur meteorologist

Dear Met person,

Yes, I have seen this. The cause is beyond my simple thoughts about Nature, so as usual I turned to my helpful human. Before a storm, there is a sudden increase in humidity and a decrease in temperature, causing an up-draft from the warmer ground and eventually the buildup of a breeze. Moisture deposits onto the leaves, and for trees with broad and simple leaves, such as maples (*Acer* species) and poplars (*Populus* species), the leaf-stems become soft and pliable, making them easier to bend. The wind lifts the leaves in all directions, leaving some with exposed undersides. The contrast between the lighter-coloured undersides and the darkening sky makes them more visible.

From this explanation, it is clear that leaves are short-term predictors of rain, usually within hours of the first visible approach of a storm. That's at least enough time to get under cover! For me, thick cedar hedges are good shelters.



Silver Maple leaves. (Drawing by Kate Collins-Thompson.)

As we seem often to drift off our main topics, I want to describe a minor change in this column. My human advisor has moved into an apartment, which fortunately has a view of a thickly wooded roadside. Also fortunately, one of my sons-in-law has taken up residence in this wooded area, which is not far from his native woodlot. This son-in-law has a strong interest in his surroundings, and will be a great choice to work with my advisor, to whom I have introduced him. My mate and I will continue on in our own woodlot, but of course I shall miss being the lead author of this interesting and sometimes challenging column. Readers, don't be concerned: the column will remain much the same. Your questions and interest will always be welcome.

The Cardinal

MEMORIES OF SAUNDERS' POND

Kathleen E. Ball

Editors' Note: This article consists of excerpts of a longer article published in the April 1990 Cardinal, No. 140. We are sorry to report that Kathleen Ball, granddaughter of W.E. Saunders and sister of the girls shown below, died recently (see page 7).

When my grandfather, W.E. Saunders, purchased the land around what is now known as Saunders' Pond and came home to tell my grandmother, she was surprised . . . and not too pleased. But we all grew to love "the farm" as we called it, though it was never a farm in the strict sense with crops or domesticated animals – it was more of a recreational and horticultural area. My grandmother had a flower and vegetable garden (I particularly remember her wonderful star dahlias) north of the cottage and an asparagus bed to the east, while my grandfather planted lilacs and honeysuckles around the cottage and a variety of fruit trees behind it.

The cottage itself was rather dark inside and we didn't use it very much, except to escape sudden rain showers during picnics. There were two small bedrooms, a living room (where we once found a drawer full of baby mice), a back kitchen and a good-sized front porch. Near Wellington Road was another cottage where the caretakers lived – John Morden first, then Mr Paul and Mrs Beck; they kept the trail from Wellington Road to our cottage open, dug the garden and mowed the lawn that went from the front of our cottage to down near the pond where there was a dilapidated canoe house containing a leaky canoe. My oldest sister had had canoeing lessons at a girls' summer camp so she was allowed to take the canoe out. One day she and Hilaire (Cowie) Little, in a brand new white bathing suit, took a short paddle when the canoe sank; by the time they pulled the canoe into shore Hilaire had on a grey bathing suit and there was a large catfish swimming in the canoe! Unfortunately the canoe sank for good before I was considered old enough to use it.

Next to the canoe house was a large Shagbark Hickory with a swing, and to the east an enormous elm tree shading part of the lawn. We used to have 24th of May picnics there with several London families (Harveys, Pattersons, Tenants) . . . the men would light the rockets so they scattered their stars over the pond – an impressive sight. We children were only allowed to handle the sparklers.

W.E. Saunders Ltd company held several annual picnics on this lawn. There were fierce games of croquet and

various kinds of races – three-legged, feet in a sack, and a timing race where you had to reach the finish line after exactly one minute. My grandfather would count one thousand and one, one thousand and two, etc. figuring he would touch the line at one thousand and sixty and be the prize winner . . . however, one of the staff had an excellent timing sense and somehow always seemed to win.

Close to the lawn was a fine wild strawberry patch where we spent many happy hours picking and eating – the strawberries were very small but very delicious. In the middle of the patch was a large boulder, handy to sit on for the eating and home base for tag or run-sheep-run.

Do you know the expression "it's not over til the fat lady sings"? We had an example of that one hot August day when a group of people thought they'd sneak through the bushes and take a swim to cool off. A very large lady among them waded out in the mucky bottom too far and got thoroughly stuck . . . so they finally had to call for John Morden, our caretaker at the time, to help. John brought down

one of the neighbours and they managed to pull the lady out with – you guessed it – the neighbour's tractor!

In early May my grandfather would wake me and we'd meet at the farm with other McIlwraith members, Mel Dale, the Girlings, Charlie Watson, Keith Reynolds, Pete Patterson, etc., at 5 or 6 am and walk the three ponds, Saunders', Spettigue's and the Fish and Game before breakfast; this gave our bird lists a real boost with the spring warblers and other spring migrants. There used to be a marshy area where the Dearness Home now stands that had nesting Wood Ducks and Green Herons . . . and of course there were always happy surprises such as curlew flying over or a Hooded Merganser on the pond. Lots of happy memories. W.E. had a phrase "never let the weather bluff you" so we came rain or shine, in a great downpour or in a blizzard, and sometimes we would see a rare bird blown into the area and prove his point.

W.E. grew old gracefully, always young at heart and full of enthusiasm . . . as he said, he was born at a good time – when he was young he had a bicycle and when he was old he had an automobile. One of his pleasures was to bring groups . . . friends, teachers, school children, scouts, it didn't matter . . . and to share his love of nature with them at the farm.



Mrs F.H. (Muriel) Fetherston (left) with her parents, W.E. and Mrs Saunders, and daughters Marjorie and Norah in front of the cabin at Saunders' Pond, 1921. (Photo from Nature London Archives.)



THE NATURE LONDON STORY

PART IV: 1940 TO 1964

Winifred Wake and David Wake

Authors' Note: In Parts I, II and III of this series, we described activities of the Entomological Society of Canada (Ontario), including the founding of its London Branch in 1864, the rise and decline of the four Sections established in 1890, and the transfer of the Society's headquarters from London to Guelph in 1906. Also covered were the period from 1907 to 1913 during which London naturalists met informally, the short-lived London Biological Club of 1914, and the 1915 reincarnation of the McIlwraith Ornithological Club, whose affairs were chronicled through a time of gradual growth and consolidation.

OVERVIEW: 1940 TO 1964

The first portion of this article provides an overview of McIlwraith Ornithological Club (MOC) activities from the early days of World War II through to 1964. A later section explores themes and highlights in more detail.

1940 to 1945: The War Years

In late 1939, the McIlwraith Ornithological Club, otherwise known as the Bird Club, was focussed on moving forward, even in the shadow of war. In October it began publishing a two-page monthly bulletin, with an introductory blessing from W.E. Saunders, the group's beloved patriarch. Several talented young naturalists were taking on leadership roles, and the future of the group looked rosy. Ahead, unfortunately, loomed a period of loss and retrenchment.

Club activities went on much as usual during the first part of 1940. It was perhaps a sign of a growing preoccupation with the war that a public lecture by Stuart Thompson, the well-known Toronto nature writer, attracted only 100 people, far fewer than during his previous London visits. By year's end, the bulletin had disappeared and plans for a December banquet were quietly shelved.

Gradually, MOC members slipped away to join the war, making it difficult to find speakers for meetings, or people to organize club activities. Field trips decreased owing to gas rationing, and attendance at meetings dropped. Suspending rural picnics and traditional field trips, the club kept its outings close to the city. The leadership gap was bridged in several ways. W.E. Saunders often chaired a meeting, provided the program, updated the bird list, or reported on the Christmas census. Administrative duties were covered, in part, by combining positions, re-



W.E. Saunders in the field, March 1942.



Picnic at the Higgins' farm, fall 1941. From left: Pete Patterson (foreground), RAF airman (behind Patterson), John Higgins Jr, W.E. Saunders (seated), Don Higgins (standing), Mrs Dale (seated), two RAF airmen, Mel Dale.

cruiting students, and recycling former executive members. Women played a larger role, and older club members, including John Dearness, sometimes filled in as speakers. A new face, Hal Hitchcock, served a term as president. Thus, MOC's core operations continued — monthly notices mailed, meetings scheduled, the bird list maintained.

War was not the only agent of unwelcome change. November 1940 brought the death of Mrs E.H. McKone, one of the club's most active members. W.E. Saunders fell ill in the winter of 1943 and passed away in June in his 83rd year. In August, his cousin and frequent field companion, Mel Dale, died. These men had been key members of the club since 1915 (and, in Saunders' case, since the 1870s).

The war years were not entirely an inactive period for the MOC. Several conservation issues were addressed: illegal shooting, protection of birds of prey, and the possibility of designating Saunders Pond as a sanctuary. Individual members were involved in bird banding. The club began meeting in the new public library on Queens Avenue.

In November 1944, Stuart Thompson returned to London, this time attracting an audience of 250, a harbinger of better times to come. Attendance at meetings began to creep upward. The year 1945 got off to a fine start when 100 people attended a colour film on Ontario birds. As the months passed, it was evident the war was drawing to a close, and spirits lifted accordingly. The Komoka woodcock outing and spring and fall picnics resumed. The boys in service began to trickle home. Gord Cummings, Lee Marsh, Keith Reynolds, Bill and Harry Girling, Bill Jarman, and others reappeared at the Bird Club. Bill Lott was not so lucky. Before enlisting in the Royal Canadian Air Force, he had been MOC's secretary, bulletin editor and a dedicated bird bander. He was listed as missing in action on October 13, 1942, aged 25.

The newly returned men soon became active in the club. At the annual meeting in December 1945, their names occupied key positions on the MOC's slate of officers. The bulletin was reactivated. A new surge of energy was poised to carry the club into an exciting post-war era.

1946 to 1949: The Early Post-War Period

Gordon Cummings served as president of the Bird Club in 1946 and 1947. Keith Reynolds occupied the chair next and was succeeded by Bill Girling. These three ex-servicemen would make significant long-term contributions to the knowledge, appreciation and conservation of nature. It was Gord Cummings who brought the Audubon Screen Tours (AST) to London in 1946. The series, organized by the New York-based National Audubon Society, consisted of five speakers who crisscrossed the continent each fall and winter, lecturing and showing movies on wildlife. This nature education initiative was aimed at the general public, who responded enthusiastically in London. For the next 25 years, the Audubon film series was MOC's signature undertaking, adding thousands of dollars for many new projects, including the W.E. Saunders Memorial Library and a scholarship fund to send London students to the Federation of Ontario Naturalists' nature camp.

During the late 1940s, attendance at Bird Club meetings averaged more than 60. Programs often featured wildlife films, with colour and sound. Presentations usually related to birds, but there were also evenings devoted to topics such as reptiles, mammals, insects and holiday trips to enjoy nature. Increasingly, the club spoke and thought of itself as a nature club, not just a bird club. The field trip program, severely curtailed from 1942 to 1945, was expanded. Traditional outings were reinstated and new destinations added. As always, the club maintained its annual bird list and records of first-arrival dates, and conducted the Christmas bird census. A significant achievement for the MOC in 1949 was hosting the annual meeting and conference of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON), the first ever outside Toronto. During the meeting, the FON released a memorial volume on W.E. Saunders.

1950 to 1955: Ongoing Initiatives and Many Firsts for the MOC

During the early 1950s, the McIlwraith Ornithological Club reached a pinnacle of energy, ideas and achievements. Under the leadership of three dynamic presidents – Bill Girling, Don Sutton and Florence Cummings – the Bird Club not only maintained established programs but achieved many firsts. Its flagship initiative, sponsorship of the Audubon films, was ongoing. FON camp scholarships were awarded; books and films were purchased for the Saunders Library. As will be seen, much more was also accomplished, including very significant contributions to FON's operating funds. Club membership gradually increased – from 70 in 1950 to 130 in 1955. In keeping with interests of the day, meeting programs began to include topics such as reforestation and soil conservation. When Eli Davis spoke on mammals in 1952, his presentation included both study skins and Kodachrome slides, signalling the final transition from the old way of illustrating talks to the new. As cameras improved and people had more money for travel, many meetings featured slide shows of visits



The first annual banquet in 1951. Standing, from left: W.D. Sutton (president) and Richard Saunders (guest speaker); seated: Mrs. J.W. (Edith) Leach (secretary-treasurer), Dr W. Sherwood Fox, and Mrs. G. (Florence) Cummings (vice-president).

to natural destinations.

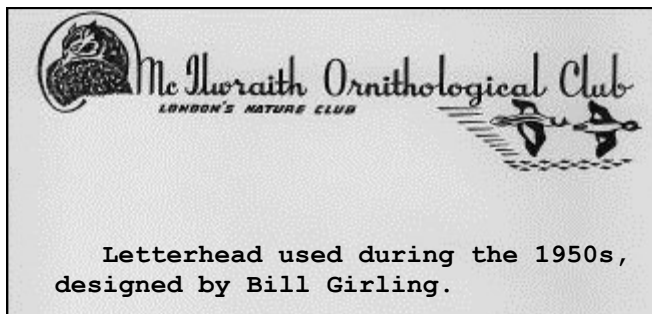
The first half of the 1950s was not a particularly active time for field trips. There were outings to Wonnacott's (Komoka) and Higgins' (Lobo) farms, plus occasional trips elsewhere. In 1954 the club arranged its first waterfowl expedition to the newly created Fanshawe Lake. A possible reason for the reduced number of local MOC trips is that many of its best field people were heavily involved in running out-of-town regional gatherings for FON, at places such as Point Pelee, Rondeau, Springwater, and Hawk Cliff. In January 1955, a duck count was organized. Beginning that year, participants in the annual Christmas bird census gathered at J.K. Elliott's cabin in Byron for lunch. Some efforts were made on the conservation front. During 1953 and 1954, the club president made repeated attempts, with little success, to interest the Town Planning Board in the concept of preserving open spaces around London.

Several new undertakings were commenced in the early '50s. MOC first participated in the London Hobby Fair, held at the YMCA. It established the club magazine, *The Cardinal*, and inaugurated an annual club banquet. Florence Cummings became the MOC's first woman president; it would be almost two decades before there was another. Retired UWO president Sherwood Fox was named the first honorary member. Dr Fox had previously been active in FON and conservation circles and now became more involved in the MOC. Another innovation was the formation of the Fanshawe Wildlife Sanctuary Committee. The Bird

Mr and Mrs John Elliott's cabin on the Thames River west of Byron, in the area we know today as RiverBend and Kains Woods.



Club set up a booth at the Home and Garden show at the Western Fair Grounds. Many of these activities were financially supported by profits from the Audubon Screen Tours. The early 1950s was a golden period for the MOC, but an ominous sign emerged in 1954/1955, when the Audubon series failed to attract a full house and revenues began to drop.



1956 to 1959: Marking Time

The latter half of the 1950s was a time of belt tightening and few new initiatives. Despite insistent pleas from FON, the Bird Club's substantial financial support of the federation gradually diminished. The club began soliciting new members at the Audubon films. It is difficult to understand why this was not done sooner. A possible explanation is that the MOC held a somewhat elitist view of itself as an organization of serious birders and committed naturalists. While there was a great willingness to educate and entertain (and make money from) the general public, the club was reluctant to open membership to the masses. In 1956, there were 101 paid-up members; in 1958, the number stood at 150.

Jim Leach served as the Bird Club's migration secretary throughout the 1950s. When reliability of bird sightings became a concern, it was decided that records of rare species would be accepted only if verified by two qualified observers. In 1957 a telephone chain was established for alerting people to sightings of unusual birds. Doug Dow prepared the first Checklist of the Birds of Middlesex County in 1958.

The MOC was active on several conservation and outreach files. Letter-writing campaigns were periodically launched to advocate for the preservation of Springwater, and then-president W.W. Judd spearheaded a huge effort to protect Byron (Sifton) Bog. Maurice Comfort led a Save the Bluebird campaign aimed at rural school children. Gord and Florence Cummings taught conservation to Boy Scout leaders.

The number of outings increased. An excellent new field trip leader emerged in the person of Frank Cook, who, in 1958, led seven of the eight club field trips. Attendance at these ranged from 10 to 50. MOC continued to help organize and run FON gatherings at Rondeau, Point Pelee, and Springwater; participation rates, however, began to drop off.

Meeting programs in the late 1950s consisted of a mix of films and slide talks on various aspects of natural history. On one occasion members visited the Cronyn Observatory at Western for a lecture and a peek at the night sky. Many presentations showcased members' increasing photo-

graphic skills. Only rarely was the evening's topic devoted to birds, except for the occasional film. The single significant new initiative of this period was the establishment of a Junior Nature Club in 1957.

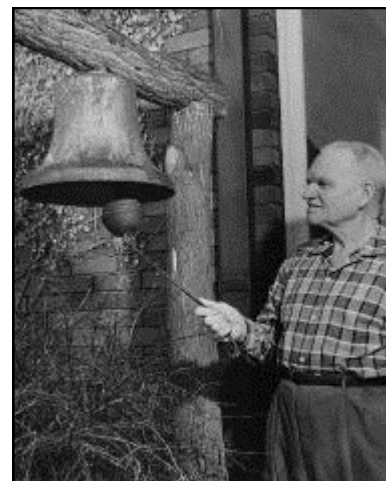
1960 to 1964: A Time of Transition

In the early 1960s, some programs wound down or were reorganized and several long-serving members passed the baton to successors. Income from the Audubon films continued its downward trajectory and, by the end of 1964, the situation was approaching a crisis. To generate revenue, in 1962, the annual MOC membership fee was doubled to \$2 per household. The number of members hovered around 100.

The majority of meeting programs consisted of pleasant nature travelogues to exotic destinations, but there were also programs of a more local and regional flavour. The meeting of November 16, 1964 was probably one of the liveliest ever experienced by the group, when a talk on the timely but touchy topic of pesticides led to a very heated discussion. Field trips most frequently went to traditional favourite locations, but there were also other destinations. Club members remained active in the FON weekends at Point Pelee and Rondeau. In a new and very successful venture in 1962, a chartered bus transported 41 members to the Royal Ontario Museum for behind-the-scenes tours with museum staff.

As the 1960s progressed, MOC members pursued a number of environmental issues. Bill Jarman kept tabs on bird mortality at the CFPL TV transmission tower during fall migration. Bill Morris championed the cause of erecting bluebird nesting boxes. The club appointed a representative to the Parks Board of the Public Utilities Commission, and the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests requested input on possible nature reserves. There was ongoing advocacy for the protection of Saunders Pond, Byron Bog and Springwater. In the spring of 1963, club members witnessed the shooting of a young Bald Eagle at Wonnacott's, and aided in the prosecution of the case. The shooter was fined \$50.

The early '60s brought other changes in long-established patterns. Jim Leach retired from the position of migration secretary in 1964, but not before the club's Christmas count area had been brought into conformity with stated rules. This was done by naming Byron Bog as the centre of the London count circle. Don Sutton retired as editor of *The Cardinal* and was replaced by F.A.E. Starr. Gord Cummings died suddenly and Bill Morris took over the running of the Audubon films. The last Home and Garden Show was held in 1964. The



John Higgins rings the bell outside his home in 1962.

Junior Nature Club faded away, and the Fanshawe Sanctuary Committee was disbanded.

Several innovations were introduced in the early '60s. A Student Naturalist Group operated briefly in 1961. Also that year, the centenary of the birth of W.E. Saunders was celebrated through displays, articles and a talk. The most ambitious undertaking of all was hosting the FON's 30th annual meeting and conference in April 1962. Under the chairmanship of Frank Cook, 40 club members orchestrated a very full weekend program for 400 delegates. Featured speakers included CBC personality Lister Sinclair, and Blair Fraser, the editor of *Maclean's* magazine.

For more than two decades, the topic of changing the McIlwraith Ornithological Club's name to something simpler had been intermittently discussed. In 1964 a decision was finally made. The new name – McIlwraith Field Naturalists – would come into effect in January 1965 and launch the club into a new era of accomplishments.



FON Conference, London, 1962. From left: Bill Girling, William W.H. Gunn, Frank Cook, David Fowle, Blanche Jarman, Fred Bodsworth. The FON logo in the background was designed by Bill Girling.

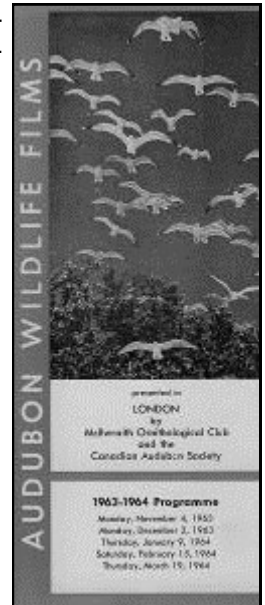
THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS

In the preceding chronology, we summarized the activities of the MOC from the wartime period to 1964. During these 25 years, several overarching themes emerged. Highlights are also evident in the evolving relationship between the McIlwraith Ornithological Club and its members, and the larger community. We shall now explore some of these themes and highlights by topic.

Audubon Screen Tours

A pervasive theme of this period in the club's history was the allocation of resources. In 1946 the MOC brought the Audubon Screen Tours (AST) to London. Under the leadership of Gord Cummings, arrangements were made with the National Audubon Society, the 1600-seat auditorium at Beal Technical School was booked, and club members peddled tickets at \$1 for the season. Eventually 1450 tickets were sold and the money poured in. The great success of the 1946/1947 series led to the AST becoming an

Programme brochure for the 1963/1964 season of Audubon Wildlife Films.



annual event. By the third season, all tickets were gone months in advance. Suddenly the club had the happy problem of deciding what to do with hundreds and even thousands of dollars in profits.

The MOC maintained its regular club finances distinct from its Audubon balance. The annual membership fee was \$1 per household and income was approximately \$100 per year. The separate account for Audubon films allowed various things to be done that could not otherwise have been contemplated. Bank debentures were purchased, and honoraria were provided to the two AST volunteers who carried the biggest workloads: Gord Cummings and J.F. Calvert. Annual scholarships sent worthy students to the Federation of Ontario Naturalists' summer nature camp. The W.E. Saunders Memorial Library was established, and an annual banquet was inaugurated. One dream that took several decades to come to fruition was the purchase of land for a sanctuary; in the meantime, funds for this purpose accumulated interest. Beginning in the early 1950s, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists was in desperate need of large annual cash infusions. The MOC, being one of FON's oldest and strongest member clubs, was called upon to render significant financial support.

Meanwhile, times were changing and the public's appetite for big-name speakers and their big-screen wildlife films was beginning to wane. By the 1956 season, one-quarter of the seats in the Beal auditorium were empty. As the '50s ticked along, attendance continued to fall. With so many initiatives depending on Audubon film income, the club executive spent many hours considering options. Ticket prices were doubled to \$2, advertising was increased, bonuses were offered, and ticket-selling drives were mounted. Yet, by the start of the 1960 season, only



Members of the Bird Club, opening night of the Audubon films, 1946. From left: Mrs Woods, Dr John Dearness, Eli Davis, Dr Gordon Cummings.

877 tickets had been sold. For 1963, the price of a season's ticket was raised to \$2.50, a move necessary for the Audubon Wildlife Films (the name had been changed in 1959) to merely break even.

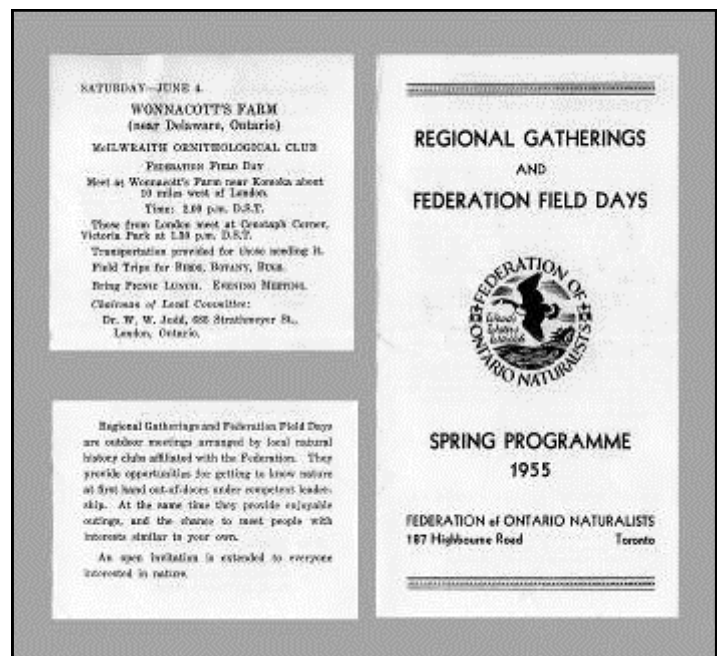
Attendance kept dropping and, by December 1964, the series was \$400 in the red. Drastic action was necessary – Beal Tech was asked to reduce rent, and a cheaper venue was sought. Despite the financial crisis, the Audubon film series in London still had a number of years of life in it. Alas, Gord Cummings died in October 1964. Since 1946, he had been the mastermind, backbone and workhorse behind the MOC's sponsorship of the Audubon films. To him goes much of the credit for generating the revenue that enabled the club to carry out so many worthwhile endeavours over many years.

Relations with the Federation of Ontario Naturalists

An ongoing theme in the history of the MOC is its relationship with the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the FON was at a crossroads. One burning issue was whether to affiliate with the US-based National Audubon Society (NAS). Affiliation with NAS would mean an influx of much-needed cash, but at a risk of losing Canadian independence. The debate was eventually resolved in 1950, under the leadership of Sherwood Fox (FON president from 1948 to 1951). The decision to eschew American money in favour of Canadian autonomy had significant financial implications for FON's member groups, including MOC.

A second urgent issue concerned FON's lack of an office and full-time staff. As the number of federated clubs and the complexity of operations grew, it became increasingly difficult to sustain the federation by volunteers alone. Thus, early in 1952, the FON made a bold move, hiring its first executive director and opening an office in Toronto. Half of the \$8000 annual cost was to be borne by members and federated clubs.

At the time, MOC's basic annual income was approximately \$100, mainly derived from membership fees, and its Audubon profits were largely committed to other projects. Yet, by the fall of 1952, the MOC had raised \$600 for the FON cause. This was achieved by pressing individual members for contributions and hosting an additional visiting lecturer showing wildlife movies. Thereafter, FON assigned MOC the responsibility of contributing \$600 annually and sometimes asked for even more. More public lectures/movies were sponsored, and members were repeatedly exhorted to make significant personal donations. Sut-



Excerpts from the 1955 FON regional gatherings brochure, including an outing to Wonnacott's farm organized by MOC.

ton and Fox, both past presidents of FON, were particularly vocal on behalf of the federation.

As income from Audubon films steadily fell through the late 1950s and early '60s, MOC's financial situation deteriorated (though it resisted dipping into reserve funds). In 1957, though hard pinched financially, MOC managed to remit \$600 to FON once again. It also remitted profits from the sale of FON Christmas cards and paid directors' expenses. Thereafter, MOC's annual payments to FON were substantially reduced, though it still forwarded funds to the extent that revenues allowed.

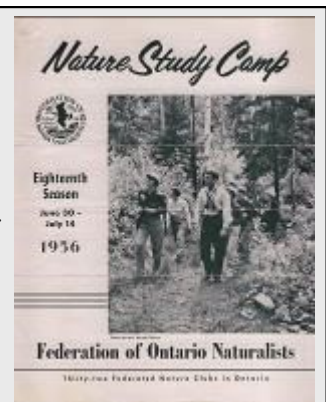
MOC members also worked very hard on the ground for FON. They helped organize and lead several FON regional gatherings a year – White's Bush (Springwater), Rondeau, Wonnacott's farm, Hawk Cliff and Point Pelee. Over time, interest in regional gatherings waned and attendance dwindled at some locations. Despite intense pressure from FON, MOC was simply unable to deliver the large crowds that FON wanted at its events.

Still, throughout the 1950s and early '60s, MOC remained unwaveringly loyal to the federation and its conservation and nature education work. For many years, MOC

Scholarships to FON's Nature Camp

The establishment of MOC scholarships arose directly from Audubon Screen Tours' profits. These enabled high school students who were club members to develop proficiency as field naturalists through attendance at the FON annual summer nature camp in Muskoka. The MOC scholarship covered fees and transportation costs for the two-week session. Beginning in 1949, up to three scholarships per year were funded, depending on the number of applicants and the club's current financial position. Beginning in 1957, students at London Teachers' College were also eligible.

MOC member, Frank Cook (with binoculars), was a regular FON nature camp leader.



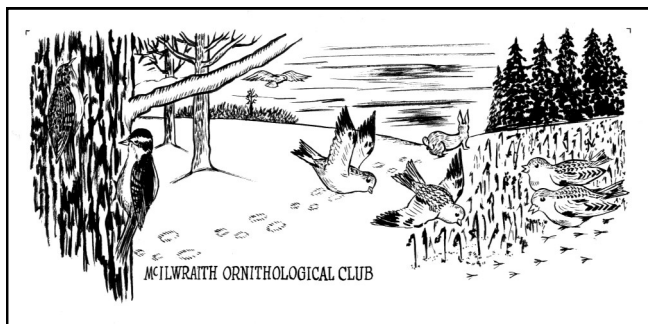
sacrificed to support FON financially and continued to organize and provide leaders for those regional gatherings (such as Pelee camping weekends) that could yet attract a crowd.

The Cardinal

In April 1951, the first issue of *The Cardinal*, MOC's magazine for members, appeared, with Bill Girling and Don Sutton as co-editors (two years later Sutton became sole editor). The cover featured a handsome four-coloured cardinal design, later rendered in a single colour, which was in use until 1964. Not surprisingly, the bulk of the content of *The Cardinal* focussed on birds: seasonal and annual lists, records of nesting birds, and results of Christmas bird censuses from Middlesex, as well as neighbouring counties. Issues were rounded out by articles of more general interest.



In 1959, Bill Girling created new headers for monthly notices, one for summer (above) and one for winter.



A supporting team handled typing, printing (via stencils), and collation. Expenses for *The Cardinal* were underwritten by profits from the Audubon films, though costs were partially recouped through sales – 10 cents a copy for members and 25 cents for non-members. In 1957 a Gestetner was purchased for \$225 and installed in the home of Gerd Muller, who faithfully ran off each issue of *The Cardinal* for the next 27 years. Beginning in 1962, the magazine was mailed to members free of charge. *The Cardinal* did not contain announcements of upcoming meetings and field trips. Such information plus other relevant news was communicated by mail through one-page, monthly flyers referred to as club notices.

By the mid-1950s, *The Cardinal* was becoming a noticeably slimmer bird. The length and frequency of reports of bird sightings diminished and fewer feature articles were submitted. At the end of 1960, Don Sutton retired as editor and was replaced by F.A.E. Starr. Starr served as editor of *The Cardinal* for three years, his tenure marked by intermittent health problems that affected the publication schedule. Under Starr, two special issues were produced. One consisted of an annotated list of the birds of Middlesex County (by Jim Leach and Bill Jarman), the first such up-

date since 1933. Starr also put out a special issue of *The Cardinal* in connection with the annual meeting of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, hosted by MOC in 1962.

In 1964, Bill Jarman became interim editor. The period of instability was resolved when Frank Cook assumed the editorial reins early in 1965.

Outreach to Youth: Junior Nature Club and Student Naturalist Group

In 1957 the MOC established a Junior Nature Club for children in grades 4 to 8. Frances Girling was the leader, assisted by Mary Green and others. Meetings were held outdoors on the first Saturday morning of the month, usually at locations within walking distance of a bus line. Participants were recruited by a flyer sent to school principals before each outing. In addition to the committee, about ten knowledgeable members of MOC assisted at each of the Junior Club's nature walks and other activities. In general, children were divided into small groups (about ten) with a leader or two for each group. During the walks, items of natural interest such as trees, plants, birds and fossils, were examined.

The Junior Club was an immediate success. The first meeting attracted 100 children, and subsequent outings were also well attended. During the next three years, about seven walks were held annually, with attendance ranging from 40 to 150. Meetings were held at Gibbons Park, Springbank Park, Thames Valley Golf Course and Fanshawe Lake. One year, the Junior Club was given 50 wren houses to put up. It is believed the Junior Nature Club ceased functioning in June 1961. The probable cause for its demise was diminishing support from MOC members, who no longer attended Junior outings in sufficient numbers to deliver a viable program.

As the Junior Nature Club was winding down, another MOC initiative aimed at young people was getting underway. The Student Naturalist Group operated briefly during the first half of 1961, under the leadership of Bill Girling. About eight or nine high school students (mostly boys) met several times at the downtown library. They held joint outings with the senior club and, on their own, visited Dead



W.E. Saunders Memorial Library

When Audubon Screen Tours profits began to flow, one of the first club expenditures was on wildlife books and films for the London Public Library. The first grant – \$200 – was made in 1948. Florence Cummings was in charge of selections. Bill Girling designed a bookplate (at

left), and the collection was designated the W.E. Saunders Memorial Library. In the 1950s, books cost a few dollars each, but films ran about \$50 apiece. Unlike films purchased directly by the library, those donated by the MOC circulated without a fee. In appreciation of the club's ongoing generosity, for many years MOC held its meetings at the library rent-free. In the past 65 years, Nature London has contributed many tens of thousands of dollars to the Saunders Memorial Library. The club currently donates \$1000 a year.



Members of the Junior Nature Club created designs for a possible crest for the group. This whimsical submission (artist unknown) is one of six that survive in the Nature London archives.

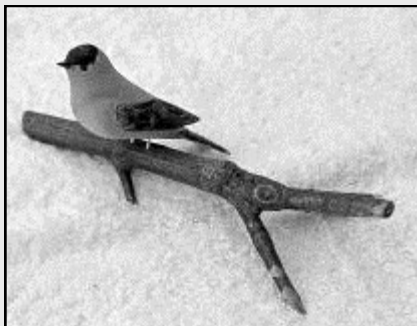
Horse Canyon, Trott's Swamp and the university to view the collection of bird study skins. That spring, student members helped with the Hobby Fair at the YMCA. Indoor meetings lasted only a few months and field trips perhaps a little longer. By this time, the student group as a separate entity from the parent club seemed to be petering out. Its members may have been happy to participate in the regular activities of the MOC and did not need an extra level of organization in their lives. A year later, in May 1962, however, boys from the student group were again active in the Hobby Fair.

Annual Banquet

One of the long-lived innovations of 1951 was the inauguration of an annual banquet. For many years, about 125 attendees gathered in St George's Parish Hall to enjoy a turkey dinner served by the ladies of the church. Generally billed as Christmas banquets, these events were classy affairs, with grace, a toast to the Queen, special table decorations, a singsong of carols, and an out-of-town speaker of note. Since the banquet replaced the December MOC meeting, which had been the traditional time for the club's annual meeting, the AGM was incorporated into the banquet agenda. Eventually most of the business of the AGM was transferred to the January club meeting, though the election of officers continued to take place at the banquet. Monies from the Audubon fund subsidized the event. Initially, tickets sold for \$1.25 but, by 1960, the price was \$2. In 1960, the banquet venue was changed to Rowntree Memorial Church.

At the 1955 MOC banquet, Thomas Hill, who had attended the first Ornithological Section meeting in 1890, presented the club with three carved birds.

A cardinal went to the club president, a Blue Jay to the secretary and a goldfinch to the treasurer. When incumbents retired from their positions, the birds were to be passed along to their successors. The goldfinch is shown here, the jay reappeared in 2008 (see the August 2008 *Cardinal*, No. 212), but the cardinal disappeared in the late 1980s. Does anyone know where the cardinal is? (Photo by Dave Wake.)



Community Outreach: Hobby Fair and Home and Garden Show

Some of the projects undertaken by the MOC in this time period were not only for members, but for the community at large. The Audubon film series was a prime example. Several other efforts at nature education for the general public were made. In addition to those previously mentioned, club participation in the Hobby Fair and the Home and Garden Show functioned as significant outreach initiatives of the MOC that also helped to raise the club's profile in the community.

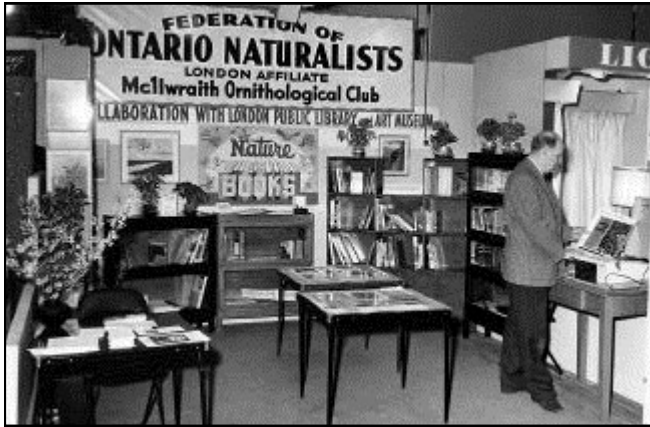
In 1950, the MOC mounted its first exhibit at the YMCA-based London Hobby Fair, an annual involvement that continued until 1966. The event was held during the first week of May and was aimed at London's youth. MOC was in charge of the Department of Nature Study, and a technical advisor from the club served on the Hobby Fair's planning committee. Many members of the club assisted with setting up exhibits, judging, and acting as attendants at the booth. In addition to regular Hobby Fair prizes, prizes donated by MOC were awarded to the winners of entries in various categories of natural history. Bird Club prizes usually consisted of nature books and magazines, plus membership in the MOC.

A first-time venture for MOC in 1954 was a presence at the newly established Home and Garden Show. This event was held annually in March at the Western Fair Grounds. Each year the Bird Club selected a different nature-related theme. A crew of club members then created an elaborate exhibit in the allotted 12-by-12-foot space. Records of nature sounds were often played and, in 1963, nature pictures were shown on an automatic projection machine. Bird Club members staffed the booth throughout the week. In addition to highlighting MOC, the work and name of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists figured prominently in this endeavour. The club participated in the Home and Garden Show each year until 1964, after which the event was discontinued (its name by then being the Modern Living Show).

Fanshawe Wildlife Sanctuary

For many years the MOC had been interested in establishing a wildlife sanctuary and had been investing some of the Audubon profits towards this end. Early in the 1950s, however, an opportunity arose to establish a sanctuary without having to purchase any land. As Fanshawe dam and lake were taking shape, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority staff invited MOC to evaluate lands adjacent to the lake for their conservation potential. In 1953 the MOC formed the Fanshawe Wildlife Sanctuary Committee, which made numerous field visits to assess vegetation and create maps. Eventually a report was produced containing recommendations as to appropriate uses of various sections.

The MOC was offered a parcel of land along the north-east shore of the lake on which to establish a sanctuary. In those days, the concept of sanctuary was somewhat different from that of today. The Authority was to fence the area, while members of the MOC were to do the work of developing the site – planting trees, wildflowers and food shrubs; erecting nest boxes and feeding stations; provisioning feeders; planting water-bird food in shallow areas; set-



MOC's display at the Home and Garden Show in 1960. The theme that year was Nature in Books. Club president, Dr H.A.U. Monro, is standing at right.

ting out corn during bird migration; and labelling various flora and other items of interest. Over several years, committee members cleared a nature trail and built and installed hundreds of signs identifying trees and shrubs growing along the way.

The Fanshawe Wildlife Sanctuary Committee was active from 1953 to 1958. A visit by club members in 1964 found the trail unused and overgrown. Since the area

was judged to be at high risk of vandalism, it was decided not to renew signs. This appears to have been the end of the Fanshawe Sanctuary.

For the McIlwraith Ornithological Club, the period 1940 to 1964 represented a transition from the difficult war years to an era of organizational growth, technological innovation, and public outreach. The MOC became more than just a "Bird Club". Stay tuned for Part V.

(Winifred and Dave Wake are Nature London's archivists, and members of the club's 150th Anniversary Committee.)

All photos are from the Nature London Archives, unless otherwise noted.

SOURCES

The primary sources consulted were the minute books of the McIlwraith Ornithological Club for the period in question. Also reviewed were numerous additional documents preserved in the MOC archives in the London Room of the London Public Library. These included *The Cardinal*, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, miscellaneous papers, and club records, bulletins, notices and correspondence. Publications by W.W. Judd and articles by Frances Girling and Florence Cummings were also helpful.

NEW FISH FOR THE THAMES: BOWFIN

Editors' Note: This article first appeared in the June/July issue of FYI, the newsletter of the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority. It is reprinted here with permission.

On June 9, a Bowfin (*Amia calva*, a.k.a. Dogfish) was captured by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) fish sampling crew in the North Thames River below Fanshawe Dam. Although there have been anecdotal reports of Bowfin being caught by anglers from the Thames, this is the first sampling record we are aware of for this species. This record brings the Thames list in the UTRCA fish database, which includes records from a number of sources, to 94 species. This total is remarkable as it represents over half of the fish species found in Ontario.

The Bowfin is considered to be a living fossil, as it is the sole surviving species of a group of fish that evolved 200 million years ago. It can be recognized by its large head and elongated body, the dorsal fin that extends all along the back to the tail and, in males and young fish, a distinct spot at the base of the tail.

The Bowfin is usually found in shallow, warm, weedy waters. The species has two adaptations that allow it to survive the low dissolved oxygen conditions often found in these habitats. The Bowfin is able to take in oxygen by gulping surface air. The fish can also go into aestivation, a state of dormancy that is the summer equivalent of hibernation and is characterized by inactivity and a lowered metabolic rate.

In the spring, the male fish are preparing nests and attempting to attract mates. Once spawning is complete the male actively and aggressively protects its nest and, following hatching, the young fish for a time.

Although unproven, Bowfins have been suggested as the likely culprits in attacks on bathers in beach areas. They will also readily attack a presented bait but are usually released as they are not particularly palatable.

The Bowfin captured in the Thames appeared to be a male in spawning colours. Measuring approximately 45 cm (18 in) in length, it was slightly smaller than the Ontario average of 54 cm (21 in). This species can grow to be quite large in Ontario, often weighing more than 4.5 kg (10 lb). The provincial record is a 6.8 kg (15 lb) fish. The Thames River fish was released back into the water after a brief photo session.

John Schwindt, Aquatic Biologist, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

