

*The
Lady's-slipper*



November, 1987.

The Lady's-Slipper

The Lady's-Slipper is the official newsletter of the Macnamara Field Naturalists' Club, P.O. Box 94, Arnprior, Ont. K7S 3H2.

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President's Address...

by Michael Runtz.

Once again winter's blanket of white adorns our landscape. Whether or not it will remain until the genuine "dead" of winter falls upon us is anybody's guess. Regardless of whether it melts back temporarily exposing frozen soils and brittle plant remnants or whether it lingers until further deposits compress it into a crystalline matrix, its presence has triggered the disappearance of much of summer's life. Those brilliant jewels of the bird world, the wood warblers, have virtually disappeared from the Canadian scene, and are well on their way to the warmth and culinary delights of the tropics. Even some of our better known insects have chosen to flee this frozen environment- i.e. Monarch Butterflies and Green Darner (dragonflies).

However, for most of our living creatures, winter means one of three things: sleep, struggle, or sure death. Those who were at our November meeting will recall (some with delight, others with perhaps a little more reserved feeling!) the beautiful spider that Arnold Muirhead brought in. This spectacular spider had a gigantic "rear" end, not only indicating that it belonged to the group of spiders known as the orb weavers, but also that it was a female full of eggs. The strategy followed by this animal is to lay its eggs in the fall. The female dies shortly after the eggs are laid, but the eggs overwinter to hatch into hundreds of little spiders in the spring. Thus winter may signal the time of death for a part of our fauna.

Other animals may search the frigid land for life-sustaining nourishment. Many of our finches are nomadic, moving relentlessly from forest to forest in search of cones or seeds. Woodpeckers not only inspect under the bark of trees for dormant insects, but may also search inside the globular galls on goldenrods. Foxes and wolves may have to wander dozens of miles across the frozen landscape, and may have to go days before finding a meal. Life in this area above ground during the winter can be harsh, and many of the unfit perish.

But as we propel ourselves across the icy terrain on skis or snowshoes often we pass unknowingly over familiar summer friends. Under the blanket of snow in our agricultural lands, the groundhog sleeps away the cold hours, living off a stored layer of fat. Even some of our cold-blooded creatures may be directly under foot. Wood frogs hibernate just under the leafy layer beneath the snow and we often pass directly overhead without knowing it.

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A Rescue Mission...

by Marjorie Boyle.

Though this is not a recent incident, and not a local one, it is worth relating because it carries its own message.

Not too long ago our daughter, home from Europe for the summer, and my husband and I were visiting other family members in various localities across Canada. This day, as we were being shown around by one of our sons we walked along the edge of the river that skirted his prairie town.

Suddenly we came upon a woeful sight. A large shrubby willow extended its long slender branches well out over the water. Off the end of one branch, under a merciless noon-day sun, and hanging by one wing, was what appeared to be a small owl, hopelessly tangled in a mess of nylon fish-line. We wondered what we might do to render immediate help, since it would take too long to find a telephone to phone the proper rescue mission for small creatures in trouble. As we talked, there seemed to be a bit of movement from the owl.

We took stock of our surroundings, wondering if perhaps he had been hanging there too long already. The natural rubble along the river bank offered an idea as to how we might help. A long pole, (possibly once a branch of the willow) now well weathered, lay partially concealed under other decaying remnants of past seasons. We pulled it loose. A large boulder at the edge of the water also proved useful.

Our son, six foot plus, by standing on the rock and resting one hand on his father's shoulder for balance, and stretching as far as he could, was just able to reach the owl with the end of the pole. As he carefully nudged the little bird it flipped its body somehow and grabbed the pole with its talons. It would not let go. Our son was able to pull the bird closer to us. There was plenty of line in the willow to allow this manoeuvre. Now we needed to cut the owl loose from the tree. Fortunately this travelling lady had a pair of scissors in her purse, so the owl was clipped free of the tree, but still bound tightly in the line, one wing drooping uselessly at its side.

My husband held the pole while our son clipped the fish-line away from the owl's body. The owl sat perfectly motionless as this went on, occasionally opening one eye to peer at us rather balefully, then letting his eye slowly slide shut.

We were a bit apprehensive as to how he would react to us. but he was intent upon keeping upright on his perch. When the bird was free of the line our son examined him carefully, quite confident that no bones were broken and that the wing wasn't out of its socket. He carefully folded the wing back into position. After he repeated this a few times , holding the wing in place for a few minutes each time, the owl was able to keep the wing more or less in place.

Now what to do? A little injured screech owl, clinging tightly to the end of a ten foot pole, with literally no energy, and with a partly disabled wing, was still very vulnerable. We selected a fair-sized bushy shrub, parted the leaves and made a cavity right in the centre. There we placed the owl, still on its perch, and closed the leaves around him. We propped the pole so that it was stable, and moved a rock or two in place as further protection, and left. It was our hope that he would gain energy and be able to move to a safer area.

Later that day my husband and son returned to the river's edge to see if the owl might still be there. He wasn't. There were no signs of anything or anyone having visited that spot. No feathers. It seemed reasonable that he had indeed been able to move to a safer location among the higher branches of the nearby trees.

Contributed by **Helga Jacobs**

Dandelion coffee.

If you want to try something different, why not dandelion coffee? The National Wildlife Federation gives the following recipe:

1. Wash several dozen roots in warm water.
2. Dry at 300 degrees in oven for 2 hours, until roots are brittle and brown.
3. Cool, then crush into a powder.
4. Use one teaspoon of powdered root per cup of boiling water.
5. Steep for 15 minutes.

University of Vermont Extension Service.

A Cure for Snake Phobia...

By Mimi Edmondson.

So long as I can remember, I have had a dislike (fear?) of snakes. I had always lived in the city, so occasional exposures were all the more dramatic.

Without due consideration, eleven years ago we moved to Pakenham Township which, in the spring, is garter snake paradise... harmless, my husband assured me. Psychologically, I mastered the situation while walking outside by wearing boots, walking more slowly than I usually did, and stamping my feet down. So, we had coexistence, uneasy but achieved.

Adolf Vogg approached us last winter with great enthusiasm about a survey called the Ontario Herptofaunal Summary. Since we are interested in the comings and goings of the other inhabitants of our property, we said we would give it a try. Friends, curiosity is stronger than phobia! In particular, snakes are now something I want to identify and to check for vital statistics- not avoid. It's wonderful.

One of my friends has been a red-bellied snake who I could regularly find under the mulch (munching on slugs, the books say) at one corner of our house. Garter snakes turned our pile of hay bales (destined for mulch) into a maternity ward. The offspring were uncountable.

Our garden was inundated with meadow voles. They gnawed on everything above the ground. We welcomed the reptile predators which included the elegant Eastern milk snake and (we think) a metre-long black rat snake.

Since we live beside Indian Creek we often see Northern water snakes undulating through the water. At the end of August, Lorne found a 44 and 1/2 inch Northern water snake skin on the rocks next to the creek. Some of you may have seen it at the September meeting.

Of interest to the survey are the frogs, turtles and salamanders that we have seen. As you can tell, it has been a busy summer identifying all these creatures, but oh, so rewarding.

I do not think that I will ever pick up any snake but I do thank Adolf Vogg and the Survey for helping me overcome my "snake phobia."

FON Insurance.

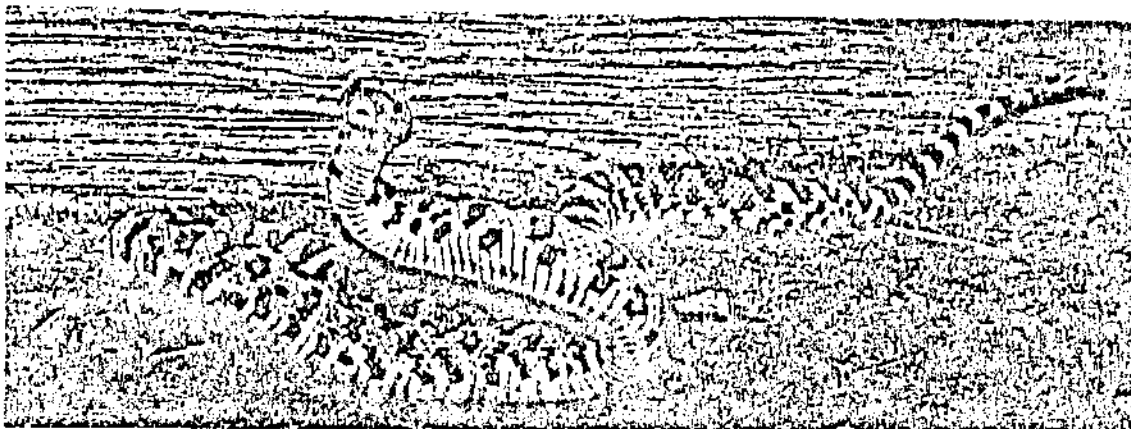
One of the benefits of being an affiliated club of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists is that we are eligible to receive coverage under their liability insurance policy.

This insurance is effective through the Royal Insurance of Canada policy # 60077802 under the management of Moore-McLean Corporate Insurance Limited in Toronto. Phone 1-416-364-4000.

Such insurance is required when, as a result of club activities, damage is caused to persons or property. The policy protects the club and its members from liability suits filed by others. Examples of how such a claim might arise is if a campfire burned down a woodlot, or a member is charged for wrongful entry to a property. The policy provides for defense costs even if the resulting action is not successful.

Although non-visible to most members, this insurance ensures that we, as a club, continue to meet and participate in field trips.

Kevin MacDonald, Treasurer/Membership.



Bread Hops, by Sloan Watters

My grandfather came from Scotland on a sailing vessel in the 1800s to work for the Hudson's Bay Company, under contract as a clerk. He went to old Fort Temiskaming on the Upper Ottawa River and then was sent to an outpost called Hunter's Post on Lake Kippewa. Later he became a fur trader, moving farther inland to Wolf Lake. There was a band of Indians living on the east shore of the lake. He built a large, two-storey log home on the southwest shore of the lake, and raised a family of ten.

I have several pictures of the log house, which had a two-storey verandah built across the front. There were many tall vines growing up the front of the verandah. In a conversation with my mother, I asked what kind of vines they were. She said they were important vines, not flowers, because they were necessary to make bread.

In late summer the cylindrical seed pods were carefully gathered when mature, and stored in the house in a dry place. Each day some of the potato water was poured into a pail that was kept warm behind the kitchen stove. A hop cone was added periodically to the solution.

When bread was baked, every other day, my grandmother would take a cup and dip out the solution from behind the stove. She poured it into her flour mixture. The hop solution helped the dough to rise, making lighter bread.

Whenever I go rambling on field trips in late summer I watch for any hop vines, which indicate an early settler's home. They are very scarce, but when I find one my memory goes back to the stories about earlier times, which I loved to hear.

Drumnadrochit, Scotland.

A scaled-down effort to find the Loch Ness monster with sonar received a signal Monday indicating a large fish-like form at a depth of 137 metres, searchers say. A clear, arched blip was registered near the southern end of the lake on the sonar aboard one of five vessels still searching for signs of Nessie after a three-day sweep of the lake by a score of motorboats. "The contact shows a fish-like arch" said a spokesman. "The sonar boom would indicate it is something very large indeed." *Ottawa Citizen, fall 1987.*

Another Look at Poison Ivy Acres...

By Marjorie Boyle.

Poison Ivy Acres was introduced to Lady's-Slipper readers by its owners in an earlier issue. "P.I.A", as it is affectionately referred to at times, could well stand for "Peace in Admaston." (Township.)

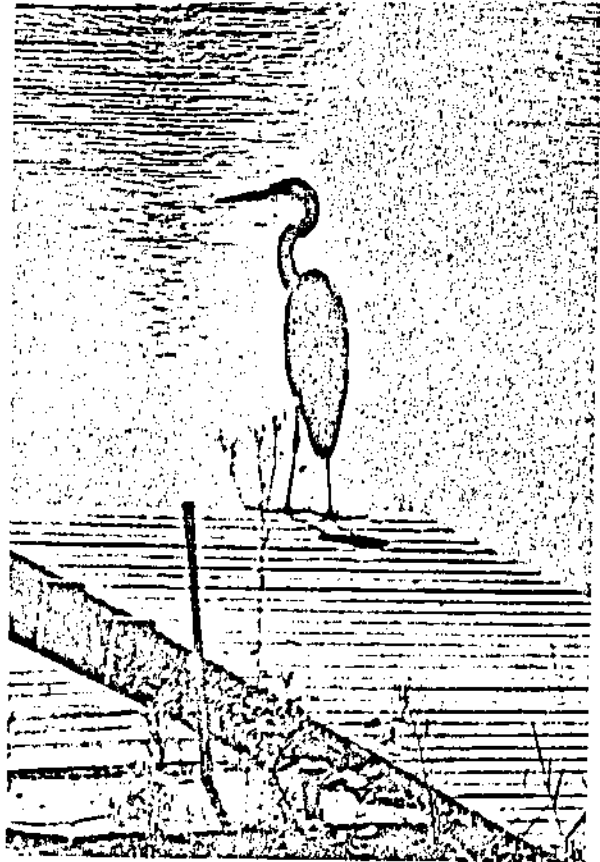
Tranquility is often the result of diligence and co-operation between man and nature. Nature provides a varied world of plants and trees on this planet. Man makes his home among them by clearing a space for himself and making it suit his tastes. P.I.A certainly reflects the varied tastes of its owners, Don McCuaig and his wife, Carol Bennett.

Macnamara Club members were invited to take a tree and shrub hike at The Acres in September, and started off from our local mall full of anticipation, despite a glowering sky and threatened rain squalls.

Arriving at the acreage one is impressed with the natural unspoiled look of the woods as you pass through the gate and follow the winding lane to the cluster of log buildings set on the edge of a hill, as neat and picturesque as a Currier and Ives print. As we left our cars, parked in front of the guest house, we noted grain scattered on the driveway, for the mourning doves to feed in the early hours of the day.

We were invited inside the McCuaig's home for coffee and maple syrup squares. Introductions were made all round, and then we were off on our hike, under the friendly leadership of club member Arnold Muirhead.

Our walk took about 2- 2 1/2 hours to complete three loops, each loop bringing you back near the house. One could either follow along the next loop or decide to relax at the house and wait for the others to return. We were 15 people in all, plus three ambitious dogs who obviously revelled in so much company to enjoy, and one venerable old dog who rested often along the way.



Each loop trail displayed its own distinctive character, the first one taking us through a lovely sugar maple grove. As is usual in such an environment, the underbrush seems almost non-existent and so you have a beautiful view through the tree trunks, that stirs your imagination. This year, perhaps because of the dry season this area had experienced, the forest floor was carpeted in sombre greys and beige rather than the more brilliant colours usually seen. Through the maples, and along the trail, we passed several oaks. Burr oaks, of the white oak family, had their branch tips nibbled off by porcupines.

There were also red oaks, with seven points to each leaf as an identifying characteristic. Large trembling aspen, with each leaf attached by such a long stem that any current of air causes the leaf to tremble. White ash, white spruce, staghorn sumac, prickly ash, juniper. Balm of Gilead (which started a discussion on its medicinal qualities,) ironwood, balsam fir, pin cherries (often mistaken for white birch in their early growth stage.) There was the occasional bird to be heard, and glimpsed among the trees.

In the more open area of loop two, splashes of colour dotted the foreground. The brilliant red of virginia creeper among the junipers. A tiny cap of white fungi, sucking life from a larger scarlet mushroom growing on the trail. Joe pye weed and purple asters, yellow butter and eggs. White birch, arctic willow, white elm, forming a backdrop, and, glimpsed among the trees, bittersweet twining its vines around the remnants of an old rail fence, a memorial to those whose labour helped settle this land.

We came upon some low growing plants in an open area that we identified as ground cherry or husk tomato, of the solanaceae (nightshade) family, and another plant, identified as Indian tobacco, a lobelia.

From this area we crossed a little stream on loop three. We climbed a ridge through woods and open areas. The trees were mainly red and white pine, tamarack, aspen and alder. Bottle gentian was plentiful along the trail, which wound up hill and down dale, giving a variety to our walk, past a large beaver pond with its myriad interests. We saw evidence of an industrious beaver attempting to fell a couple of large burr oaks.

We rested at the edge of a pond, sitting on a mossy bank under a shady tree, as the gentle rain plunked rhythmically off our heads. To be seen on the opposite shore was a muskrat den entrance, just above water level.

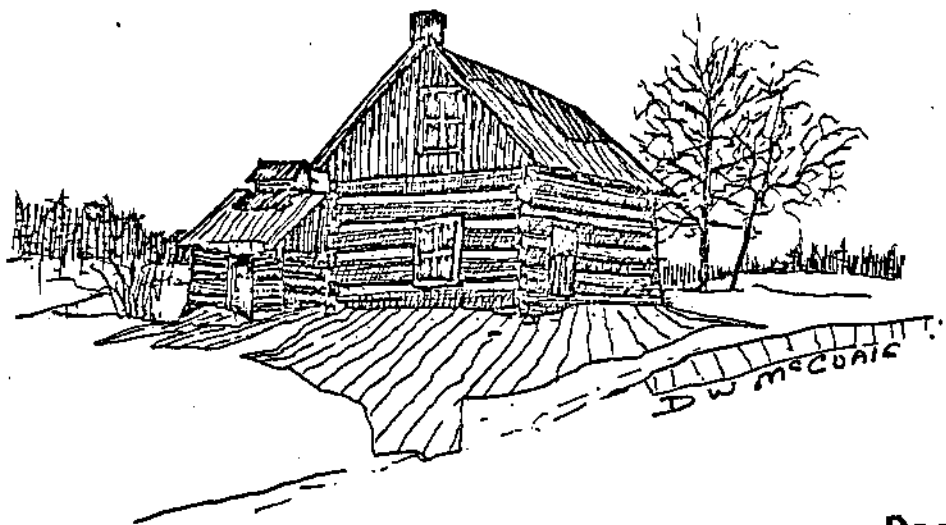
Refreshed by a few minutes' rest and conversation, we moved on to the conclusion of our tour, to the fish pond near the house, where the trout were waiting to accept their favourite pellet food. The dogs were happy to flop on the grass and pant their appreciation of a good time.

Wherever woodland beauty is, a beastly is not far away- wanted or unwanted. The unwanted, as we viewed the trees, were leaf miners, a bit pesty this year, chewing holes in, or sucking the juices from, the leaves of some trees. The enjoyables were merganser ducks on the pond, skunk dens to be seen along the trail, bluebird nesting boxes, an 18 inch garter snake in the woods, grouse among the trees, a rabbit scuttling for cover. Signs of life everywhere, animal and vegetable.

Our walk finished, we were once again invited by our hosts to partake of our lunch inside, since it was rather damp outside. We accepted, and enjoyed an hour or more of congenial conversation before expressing our appreciation and heading for home.

A little reminder of a pleasant morning is a recorded by Mrs A. Muirhead in the water colour picture she did of the buildings at P.I.a as she waited for us to conclude our tree and shrub hike. Very nice.

Thank you, Arnold Muirhead. Thank you, Carol and Don. " Thank You, Lord," as Christopher Robin would say.



A Back-yard Nature Story for your tiny ones.

By Marjorie Boyle.

Do you have a garden in your back yard? Alice and Taylor do. They work hard. They dig the ground and plant the seeds and fertilize the new little plants that grow. Alice is always so happy when a pretty flower appears. She must water her garden often to keep the flowers clean and healthy. They like a shower to wash the dust off their petals. They often hang on to the little droplets of water and wear them on their leaves like jewels sparkling in the sun.

One morning Alice was home alone while Taylor, her best friend and helper, was away on a trip to look at beautiful little flowers that are found in the woods. Alice took a rest from making cookies to go to her garden and water her flowers. They were called "hens and chickens"! As she watered them a surprising thing happened.

There, close to the hens and chickens was a tall sedum plant, growing a lovely yellow umbrella shaped flower (to keep the sun off its roots.) The whole plant was about six or seven inches high. As Alice watered the yellow flower she noticed Sleeky Snakey, who lived in the garden, wiggling his pretty eight inch green and gold body toward the umbrella on the plant. "Now what do you suppose he is planning to do?" thought Alice. He started helping himself to all the little water jewels, snapping them off with his tongue and hiding them in his jowls.

Alice went into the house to get her camera. She wanted to take pictures, to show Taylor later on when he returned home.

Alice took several pictures as Sleeky travelled around the sedum plant, looking for the best treasures and popping them into his mouth. He was a wary fellow. Whenever Alice took a picture he would pull his head back and hide behind a flower stem. Then, in a minute or two, he would slide out cautiously to help himself to another lovely little crystal clear jewel.

After a while, Sleeky Snakey seemed to be ready to go to his home because he looked straight at Alice as if to say "take my picture if you like, Alice. I'm really just getting a lovely drink of clear, cool water in this shady clump of flowers on this very hot day. Thank you, Alice."

Ten Years Ago in the Life of the Club...

by D.W. McCuaig.

Some years ago, D.W. McCuaig wrote a weekly column, Outdoors, in The Renfrew Mercury. Ten years ago this month he wrote the following account of our club's Christmas bird count, and your editor thought that it might be fun to compare the 1977 event with this year's upcoming census.



It is 5.15 in the morning and it's cold. I am standing on the Bellamy road, somewhere between White Lake and Cedar Hill, with Mike Runtz and Andre Vietinghoff, listening for owls. Light from a bright, white moon falls on the ploughed icy road and snowbanks. The temperature is somewhere between minus 15 and minus 20 celsius. We are on the Audubon Christmas bird census in which wild birds are sighted and tabulated in locations all across the continent. Runtz is the co-ordinator for the Annprior-Pakenham section.

Another stop, and Runtz plays his tape of great horned owls. No answer. He tries a barred owl cry. No answer. We are in the North Lanark bush country so he cups his hands and howls a mournful wolf cry. The only sound is the sharp crack of snapping limbs. Finally he gets an answer to a barred owl call. We puzzle over the two sharp barks; it's a fox.

At daybreak we get an answer to Mike's squeaking which sounds like a rabbit in trouble. It's a great horned owl. It glides up near us and perches on the branch of a dead elm. Great delight. Our first bird, and a good one.

Half an hour later we tramp along snowmobile trails through tall pines on the Ontario game preserve near the Ottawa River. There are chickadees and the first of many pine grosbeaks seen that day. From the river we cross a marsh on snowshoes and find a northern three-toed woodpecker.

Further up the marsh we have to take to the woods; the ice on the creek is soft. Another woodpecker, this time a black-backed three-toed, another good find. On the road out there's a goshawk. Nothing in the open water at the mouth of the Mississippi but later, on the roadside, a sudden flare of birds. Nine horned larks; another good tally.

Back road follows back road, concession after concession, township after township, and the total mounts. The mid-hours of the day are warmer, and better for hawks in the fields and ravines. We get two kestrels (fairly rare because most migrate) and two goshawks. No rough legged hawks, no red tails. Some of the birds Runtz has seen a few days before the Audubon count don't show up, though we search for hours.

Andre, from Golden Lake, is a student at Laval University in Quebec. He's been on the bird counts at Carleton Place and Deep River. He has the same trouble bird watching as I do; his glasses fog in the cold air. Runtz hardly needs field glasses. Shapes and perches and flying patterns bring almost instant recognition of birds.

By 4.15 in the afternoon, and after 200 km of jeep travel as well as walking and snowshoeing, we have tabulated 30 species of birds. That's good, according to Runtz. He remembers some counts with 15. Our last two include a common loon and a ring-neck duck in the Madawaska at Arnprior. The loon probably won't live past Boxing day. The ice is starting to cover the river as we leave.

And that's a Christmas bird census. This year the pine grosbeaks were plentiful. We estimated that we saw 50. There were lots of snow buntings; we counted 110. The bluejays and chickadees are in normal supply, it seems. Home at six, I head for an easy chair. If I close my eyes I can see flocks of snow buntings dipping and wheeling in the winter sun.



From the editor's desk...

Well, it's happened again! In the previous newsletter I told how, a couple of years ago, a bluebird family came arrived on October 15 to check out the box where they had nested in the spring. I felt that this sighting was possibly a once-in- a-lifetime experience for me, but, lo and behold, it was repeated this year. Although bluebirds were sighted on our property this past spring and summer, they did not choose to nest in any of the boxes provided for them. Then, on October 13 I saw a family of five examining a box which had been unoccupied in 1987. Each bluebird entered the box in turn, spent a few seconds inside, and then emerged, to yield its place to the next bird. Does this mean that some of this family will return to this very spot in the spring, having pre-selected their 1988 home? It seems to me that, despite all our scientific discoveries, there is still much that we don't know about the habits of birds. Consequently it is all the more exciting when one is privileged to see something such as this bluebird episode.

Is it my imagination, or are waxwings becoming more common in Renfrew County? In the last couple of years we seem have had more at Poison Ivy Acres than ever before. This year a pair of cedar waxwings nested in a spruce tree right outside my office window, so I was able to follow their progress from the time when the parent birds began to carry nesting materials into the tree, to the day when the young birds flew shakily out of the nest and landed, trembling, on the rail fence beside it. Until that moment I hadn't realised just how colourful the juvenile birds are, with their yellow tail bands proclaiming their identity to the world.

Now, in November, the Bohemian waxwings have arrived. We have unfortunate proof of this; one of their number is now in the freezer, having crashed into the kitchen window. This gave us the opportunity to study the bird at close quarters, including the very red coloration under the tail.

In the spring of 1986, just at maple syrup time, I had a most interesting experience with bohemian waxwings. Those club members who came to Poison Ivy Acres for the field trip on shrubs and trees will remember the little beaver meadow down by the creek, where the beaked hazels grow. One afternoon I took the dogs for a walk there and was surprised to find hundreds and hundreds of bohemian waxwings, all talking to each other, and moving lazily from tree to tree. A great number of them were working the juniper bushes, eating the berries. This was another surprise, because in the past I've only seen them eating red fruits. I suppose that at the end of winter they take what they can get.

Christmas is coming. What do you associate most with Christmas, as far as the world of nature is concerned? When I was young, in Wales, the big event was going out into the woods to search for holly and mistletoe. Holly was easily found, and we were encouraged to "leave some for the birds" who do not eat these berries until late in the winter, when all the hips and haws have disappeared, and the frost has got into the holly. In turn, the birds encourage the growth of holly trees by dropping the seeds in new places.

We used holly to decorate the house, the church, and the Christmas pudding. At Christmas dinner, the holly on the pudding was doused with brandy and set alight. No doubt this practice had its origin in some pagan custom! Many of our old Welsh carols mention holly, such as the well known "deck the hall with boughs of holly" which was brought to North America by the early Welsh settlers.

I don't need to tell you what mistletoe was used for! This is a parasitic plant which grows on several species of deciduous tree. The ancient Druids of Wales believed that it had magical properties when it was found growing on an oak tree; however, it seems to me that we usually found it on a poplar or apple tree. Mistletoe berries are quite sticky, a feature which helps the plant to get established on the host tree.

We can't go out to gather holly and mistletoe at Poison Ivy Acres, and somehow the plastic varieties are no great substitute. However, as I write this on November 27, the spruce tree outside my office window is covered with small icicles which the sun has coloured in sparkling reds, greens and gold, for all the world like the tinsels and glass baubles we use to decorate a Christmas tree. Nature thought of it first!



President's Address, continued...

Under our woodland trails one animal half-sleeps through the winter months. The chipmunk may sleep for several days in a row in its underground burrow, but it constantly awakens to get rid of its body wastes, and to feed on the stash of goodies in part of the tunnel system. A variety of small rodents, as well as insects and other invertebrates are active in the subnivean space at ground level. Thus not all is lifeless beneath the blanket of white.

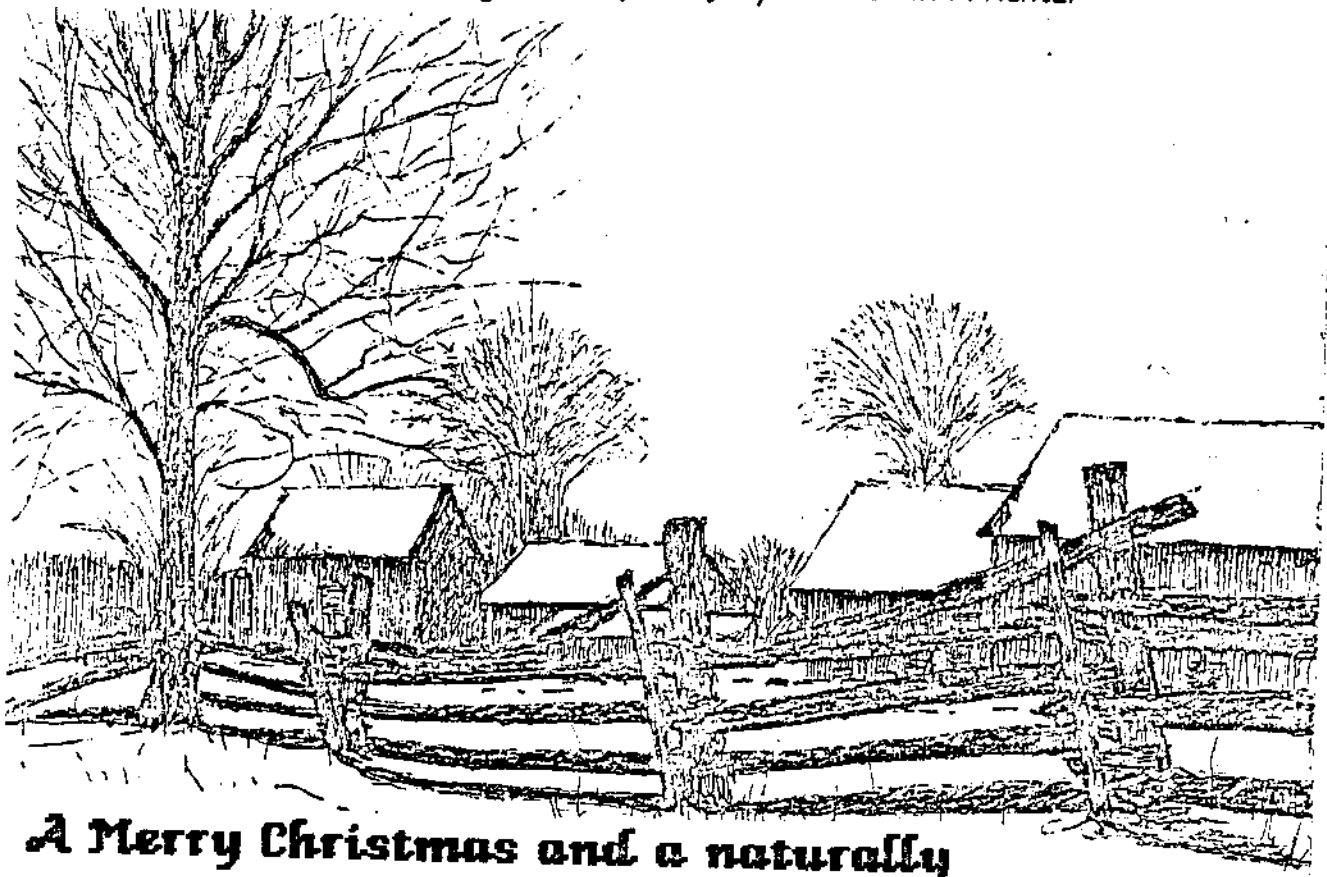
When you are out exploring the often silent vistas of this winter, be sure to pause for a moment or two and marvel at the many different ways our summer life has adapted to survive this beautiful but often brutal season.

To all, a very Merry Christmas and a bountiful New Year, and, as always, GOOD NATURALIZING!

Michael W.P. Runtz.

COMING IN OUR NEXT ISSUE:

Short-eared Owls Nesting at Arnprior, by Michael W. P. Runtz.



A Merry Christmas and a naturally wonderful 1988 to all our members.