

THE CRAFTY COYOTES

1990 was an unusual year, in the sense we saw a lot of Coyotes on the way to work, and one here on the lee side of the Point, in our front yard.

As soon as I rise and come downstairs in the winter, I turn the outside light on the big tree to see if its snowing, windy, or whatever. One morning there was a Coyote standing there between the light and the tree, so I was able to get a good look at it.

That winter and spring, Tim and I saw Coyotes every week with the heaviest concentration around Beaverton and farther south around Uxbridge, where there are a lot of Sheep raised.

Closer to home, just across the lake and down the Monck Road, in the Rathburn area, where Tim lives, local hunters shoot an average of twenty Coyotes a year. The same goes for the Collingwood area -- a group of hunters there shot over twenty Coyotes last year. The Stayner group, I believe, have so far this year shot nineteen, and I have been told a hunting party out of Elmvale have taken forty this winter. I had a large Coyote cross the road in front of me one morning and clear a fence in one easy jump, this was just below the hill in Anton Mills. Farther up County Road 22 at Highway 26, a dairy farmer there a few years back saw fourteen in a pack out in the back forty. Paul,

a fifteen year plus Coyote hunter, told me his son once saw seven together, and his father, this winter hunting with Dogs near New Lowell, put eight Coyotes out of a fifty acre bush and they shot four of them. But, things seem to be changing he says. The average pack for the last few years has been three.

Cliff and Cathy saw a Coyote on the far shore and watched it trot up the lake toward Fern and out of sight; this was in 1992. Ellen and Frank saw a Coyote on the lake this past Christmas.

There could be many more about. They are very wary. This smaller cousin of the Wolf, sometimes referred to as a Brushwolf, has been around for a long time, yet one hardly -- if ever -- sees them. Just as well -- look at the anxiety they caused the "THREE LITTLE PIGS."



HOLY HOOVES OF INVERMARA

Of the many native, wild animals that have, at one time or another, found their way to the Point, the Deer I speak of were not on the Point as such, but they were as close as you could get.

This was the spring of 1990 and I was up and on the road before 5:30 a.m. on my way to work. When stopping at Highway 12, I saw the reflection of three pairs of eyes in the beam of the car's headlights. They were in Invermara, the Catholic Church's summer retreat on Smiths Bay. Three Deer were feeding on the tender young grasses that were just beginning to peep through the blanket of dead brown vegetation that covered the landscape. A light fog danced at their feet. Distracted, they had raised their heads to look in my direction.

The next morning after my co-worker, Tim, picked me up we stopped and watched them for a few minutes before we journeyed on. The gas jockey at the service station told me they had been there for nearly a week. I am -- **behooved** -- to know how the Deer came to be there, or where they came from -- *divine intervention* perhaps?



THE ROBIN GOD

You would have never known she was there, tucked away under the leaves, quiet as a church Mouse, motionless. Her only give-away was her tail, which protruded from the nest at a 30° angle (I measured it). A pair of Robins had built a nest to raise a family in our hanging basket on the front porch, an exercise repeated, I'm sure, on many porches this spring.

We watched the future family progress, one egg, two eggs, three eggs, four. Carole watered the plant every day, she would talk to the Robin first, careful not to wet the nest. This didn't bother her that much, usually staying put, but occasionally flew off to the nearby fence.

One Saturday evening, we had Bob and Judy over for dinner. A lovely evening shared with friends. Time came for their departure, it was around 11 o'clock and as we chatted at the front door, then walking them out onto the porch, I said, "Did you know we have Robins nesting in the flowers?" "No" was the reply. "Really, oh wow." "Yes," I said, "four babies, they hatched a couple of weeks ago and are covered in feathers, but they aren't ready to leave the nest yet. Want to see them? I'll get the small step ladder." "You sure its O.K.?" they asked rather hesitantly. "No problem." Out comes the step ladder. "Step right up folks, this way, no charge, come see them."

The male, who was standing vigil from the trees, sounded the alarm. The mother didn't like this one bit, she flew off into the Beech trees in Frank & Ellen's front yard and cried out sharply. "Just a peek Mom, not to worry, see there, there they are Judy." "Oh, no, they're bailing out." Thump, thump, thump, thump. All four left the nest in a hurry, one on the walk, one in the Burning Bush, one on the lawn, another amongst the flowers. "Hokey cow, quick, everyone, catch them." Carole, Judy, Bob and I all going in different directions trying to capture these little fluff balls. What a time. Bob is over the other side of Franks, Judy up on the lawn, Carole, I don't know where, I'm in the bushes, the mother is going nuts -- what a fiasco.

Everybody comes up with a Bird and I proceed to put them back in the nest, put one in, two in, three in, one out, "quick, get him," another in, two out, "there get them ." The Mom and Dad are now ballistic, "give him to me, stuff him in, got him, one more. That's the last." I have my hands over them trying to simulate their mother's body warmth, it would have worked except for this one, it kept poking its head out.

Bob and Judy graciously said their adieus. ("What was that?") I'm up the ladder, my arms and hands outstretched trying to calm four terrified baby Robins, and the parents have not shut up.

I suggested Carole go in and turn all the lights out and maybe things would calm down, if I

remained motionless. It was now 12:00 o'clock, my arms were getting tired and this one little monster was still trying to escape. (I silently prayed to the "Robin God" and swore a solemn oath never to do such an utterly foolish, unthinking moronic stunt again.) By 1:00 a.m. my arms were done, numb, and lifeless. Three babies were quiet and one was still trying to escape. Removing my hands, I think the one made its departure right there and then. I never looked back. I didn't want to know. The guilt was crushing me.

In the morning around 8 a.m. I looked about and they were all gone. This year the flowers are occupied by Finches and, if anybody asks, I'll deny it.



"FATS," THE SILVER STREAK

Sometimes you have to laugh at the goings on between man and nature. It is marvelous to have the opportunity to observe wildlife and how clever it can be. Over by the hedge on the lot between Dale & Diane's and Walter and Sue's, (Monica's parents), just where I'm not sure, lives a Groundhog. You would wonder what a Groundhog is doing out here on the Point. It is quite old, at least four or five years and has a beautiful coat, its hair has turned grey at the ends and its muzzle is now white. It appears to have an old scar on its right shoulder, a past encounter with a Dog perhaps.

Cliff grows a garden every year (second to none by the looks of it), everything straight you know, all the good stuff. While talking to Cliff one day he remarked that something was eating his vegetables at night and it was probably a Rabbit. I never let on, it looked like he had a fair amount left there yet, and knew if I told him that I had seen a Groundhog make a trip or two up to see him he would be watching for it -- so I kept quiet. Sorry, Cliff, but you can't buy Groundhogs at the supermarket. This is an account of what I saw happen on one occasion.

Late one summer afternoon, I was sitting on the porch watching anything and everything. Fats (as I will call the Groundhog) appeared out

from under the corner of the boat slip where Cooney once lived. He made a dash around the slip to the three willows that grow by the waters edge, and waited. Every once in a while he would pop up, check things out, and go back down. Slowly Fats made his way around to our dock, darting from hiding place to hiding place, rolls of fat jiggling as he ran. Once on our dock Fats flattened out and sneaked along and down into the boat slip. Here he waited and again surveyed the scene. The coast was clear, Fats made a mad dash for Frank and Ellen's dock and then went down under the end near Ralph and Doll's and waited -- a long time. Finally, out Fats comes and makes a run for it -- across Ralph and Doll's and under Neil and Margaret's boat. It was there Fats holed up.

I thought I had lost contact, he was there so long, but finally there was a *Silver Streak* as Fats beat it to Cliff's garden and disappeared in the lush veggies. All right Fats, way to go. But wait till you hear this, you wouldn't believe it.

Cliff is sitting on his porch while all this was going on. Fats made a clean hit right under his nose. Of course, Cliff may have been distracted by his company, or the foam up his schnozzle from a cold one -- who knows -- but Fats did it in broad daylight. From where Fats started he could see Cliff perfectly all the way and made his move as Cliff bent his elbow.

Two years have passed and Fats is still living over there, having seen the *Silver Streak* in action just the other day returning from a raid up

the way. Jean caught Fats sampling our snow peas and scared him off a week ago and something made a hit on our brussel sprouts. Margaret, apparently upset, appears to have lost her broccoli somehow. *Now, I wonder.....*



MAYFLY PIE

Not everyone likes the Mayfly, but the Gulls, Grackles and Redwing Blackbirds certainly do. They and probably many other Birds. The Turtles, Toads, Frogs and small animals and, of course, the Fish, all feed on them.

When Monica from up the street was about six years old and would come by to see the Dogs, I would tease her about the Mayflies. Monica would sit on the porch beside me and pet Champagne, who enjoyed that as Monica was gentle with her.

"Would you like to stay for lunch?" -- I would ask her. "We are having home made soup." "What kind" she would reply. "Mayfly soup," I said. "Ohooo -- no thank you -- are you really?" "Yes, we are -- then we will have a salad with Mayflies mixed in -- for extra flavour." "You are just kidding me, aren't you?" "Nope -- we eat them all the time" I told her. "But, best of all, Carole baked a fresh Mayfly pie -- you will love it." Monica would break out in a giggle, then a hearty laugh and have a perplexed look on her face.

"You are kidding me, aren't you?" "Listen, I eat them all the time," I said, and picked one off the porch where we sat and popped the wiggling Mayfly in my mouth. Then I moved my jaw up and down in pretence of chewing it.

Meanwhile, the Mayfly was squirming around on my tongue and I thought I might gag. Monica was having a fit, but she suspected I was not really eating it. I faked a swallow, turned my head, removed the Mayfly and told Monica it was delicious.



This brought another round of laughter from both of us and Monica settled for a cookie and a glass of milk.

SCARY TAILS

On a warm, dry, early summer day, I decided to paint the side entry door inside and out, as well as the jam and trim. By leaving the door ajar, it would not take long to dry and there were no bugs about to spoil the paint job. Continuing on with the painting, I moved to the other side of the house and was called to lunch at Noon.

Carole went downstairs to the basement to our own mini Miracle Mart to get a bottle of soda and on the way up spied some creatures in the dog room near Tessie's food bowl. Carole proceeded to scream and rescued Tessie from her bed two feet away, as she was taking a puppy nap. Meanwhile, I am three feet in the air.



After I got her calmed down and found out what was wrong, I went looking for something furry. There on the top step leading down the stairs, huddled in the corner, were *The Three Mouseketeers* (three baby field Mice) -- scared to death. I picked them up by their tails, after a chase up and down the stairs, and put them out on the walk where they soon disappeared.

Carole, Tessie and I, having regained our composure, proceeded to nibble on our lunch of cheese and crackers.

BOWFIN, CARP, AND CATFISH

KATE

There is a species of Fish here in the bay that the majority of folks have never seen before. It is the Bowfin -- or Dogfish. This is not to be confused with the Burbot (or Ling) which also inhabits Lake Couchiching by the thousands, though seldom seen.

Three years ago two fisherman working the weeds out in front of Cliff and Cathy's dock caught one and brought it over to me to see if I knew what it was. Being familiar with this species, I explained to them that the Bowfin was a cinch to identify by the large spot on the base of its tail, a very long dorsal fin, a flat head, and an ugly mouth full of teeth.

This Fish has a unique air breathing-bladder-system. It can be kept alive out of water providing it's cool enough for up to 16 hours.

I have netted Bowfin on two separate occasions in the boat slip. This was just to examine them and show Carole what they looked like up close.

They are what is known as a coarse Fish -- the opposite of a game Fish. A full grown adult would weight around six pounds and reach a length of two to three feet.

These Fish are not as well known as the Carp that enter the bay here and spawn in the

shallows and boat slips next to shore.

In late May and early June, the Carp will be splashing around under Frank and Ellen's dock, right up to Cliff and Cathy's and over to Dale and Diane's boat slip, which they really like. You will usually see a large female with two or three smaller males. Their spawning usually lasts around a week -- two at the most -- it seems -- depends on the water temperature.

The Catfish, or rather the Brown Bullhead, also inhabits the bay and is a favourite of the Great Blue Heron and the Osprey.

Worms and Minnows seem to be the bait of choice when fishing for them. The Catfish do not spawn here in the bay that I know of.

One of their favourite spots leading into Lake Simcoe is in the creek crossing the road before you get to McPhee Bay. On a warm spring night they will gather in the pools along the creek in great numbers. When concentrated like this, they come up to the top of the water and make gasping sounds.

The flesh of Catfish makes for a fine meal, getting the skin off is the only trick, a pair of pliers, cuts in the skin in the right place, along with a nail through their heads into a block of wood -- does the job. You have to watch you don't get jabbed by their spikes, that's all.

My brother and I were out fishing one evening and we caught fifty-four Catfish between the two of us. This made for a rather sumptuous feast.



Every time Carole and I and Kate and Terry went fishing in the Perch derby -- you could bet on it -- Kate was going to catch a Catfish. She did it every time -- a couple of years in a row -- so we gave her the nickname -- Catfish Kate -- and she doesn't even have whiskers.

THE WATCHER

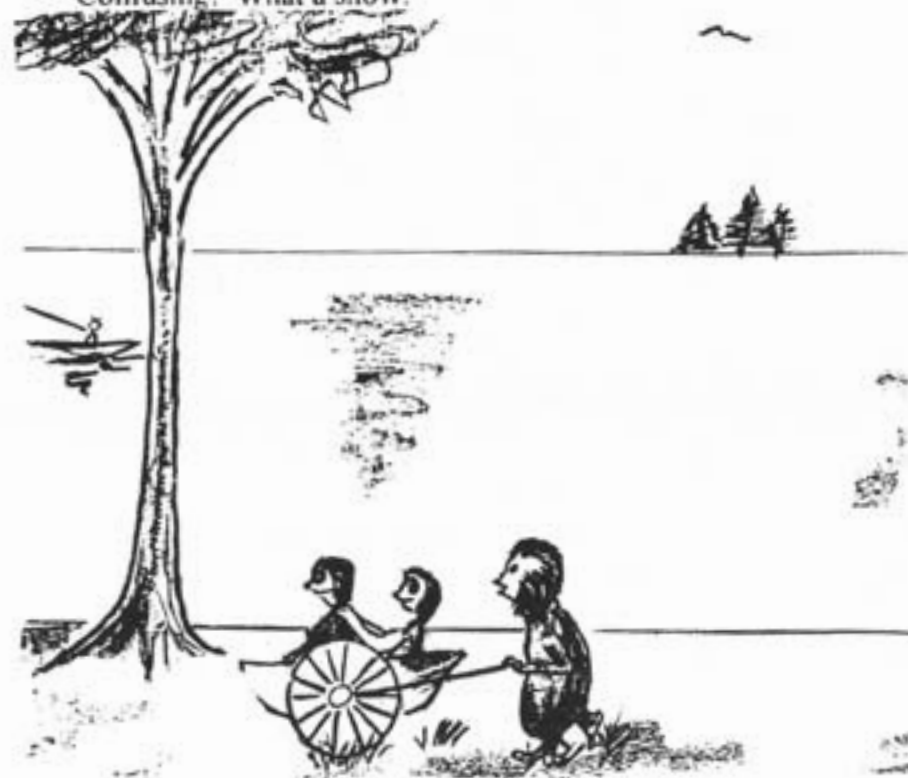
Spring brings many wonderful and beautiful creations to life, and this is one such occurrence. Sitting on our porch one Sunday afternoon, enjoying the warm weather, just looking out on our great expanse of 50 feet on the lee side, a movement up the way caught our attention.

Neil and a friend were standing in front of his boat which was still covered by the winter tarp. I think he was in the process of removing it, the object escapes me due to what was about to happen. Across his property from Cliff and Cathy's direction came a mother Mink with a baby in her jaws. The Mink never hesitated on her way past Neil and across Ralph and Doll's lawn to Frank and Ellen's, where she stopped and dropped the baby in the grass by the dock. Then, she headed back in the direction she came from, back across Neil and Margaret's and Cliff and Cathy's, to disappear out of view.

She wasn't long and here she comes again, another baby in her jaws and she brought it right along to where the first one was lying. Mom was moving them, I suppose, to a safer location. Something must have disturbed her. Mother now drops this second one and picks up the first and proceeds across our lawn with the second one crawling after her, she was getting anxious it seemed. Our boat slip, at the top end, had a drop

of about eighteen inches, she never went around -- went right over the edge down the drop, baby in her jaws, the second falling just behind her, they went under the boat and carriage and she up and over the far side with the first one, drops it, retrieves the other from the slip and carries it around Dale and Diane's dock to the edge of the mound of earth and limestone that was piled up on the vacant lot next door to them. She left the baby in the long grass. She then went back, picked up the first, retraced her steps, only stopping for a moment and disappeared with it in her mouth and the other crawling after her into the taller grass.

Confusing? What a show!



It was a quiet day, not many people out – the conditions must have been ideal. In all, she moved them in our line of sight about four hundred and fifty feet. It took about 10 minutes, but we will remember it for many years to come.

Three weeks later, from our vantage point on the porch, where we see all kinds of wildlife activity, we were witness to nature's survival of the fittest. A mother Mallard with a brood of Ducklings was entering the boat slip to feed on the cracked corn we put out for them every day. They had to waddle up the dry ramp around twelve feet. All this hadn't gone unnoticed. Another pair of eyes were watching. Something was waiting.

They had just started to feed when there was a terrible commotion with the mother Mallard underneath the boat. She quacked and squawked and you could see and hear her wings beating, but death had struck one of her babies swiftly and surely. The mother Mink emerged with a baby Duckling -- its neck in her jaws and the limp body dangling between her legs. She bounded up out of the slip and headed towards her den over in the limestones, a fresh meal for her young family. The mother Mallard obviously distressed and in great torment, left with her frightened brood, now swimming furiously ahead of her to the safety of the open water, and behind her the curtain closed on one of Mother Nature's most natural, though violent, acts.

NECTAR NOSHING

One would think the Hummingbird would drink readily from the red Hummingbird feeder and likewise the Oriole from the orange Oriole Feeder. Not so. The Ruby-throated Hummingbird seems to be more interested in the Oriole feeder and the Oriole more interested in the red Hummingbird feeder.

The Oriole will hang upside down to drink or attempt to drink from the smaller red feeder. It will do all sorts of acrobatics to get what it wants. Not only does the Hummingbird like the orange Oriole feeder, it also loves the fuchsia plants that hang from the porch. It's feeder companions, both male and female Oriole, will sit in the fuchsia plants and feed on the nectar from its blooms.

When it comes to the Scarlet Runner beans, the Hummingbird has the small blooms all to itself. It will flit about, up and down the vines -- then, quick as a wink, it is gone.



BIRDBATH ABLUTIONS

The birdbath is somewhat similar to your local pub, everyone likes to drop in and have a drink, shoot the breeze for a while, only in this case, besides having a drink, everybody has a bath and gets cooled off. We bought the birdbath in Fesserton and brought it home and put it down on the lower level of the lawn, planted flowers around it, quite nice, but also difficult to really enjoy being so far away. However, there was one thing, you got species of Birds that you would not normally get if it was closer to the house.

Now, anybody who has ever observed Crows knows that they are very wary of your actions, you make the wrong move, anything, and those devils are going to take off -- except when you are in a car or in the house or something like, that, they seem to sense when you can't get at them, or to them. What I am getting at is I tried for weeks to get a picture of these Crows that kept landing in the birdbath; exasperating, but I did. I finally got a picture of three Crows sitting in the birdbath. This was a real test of my patience.

One of the really nice things about a birdbath is it doesn't cost anything to maintain the show, just a fresh supply of water and to clean and disinfect it regularly. It's not only yourself who can enjoy watching their daily ablutions, but your neighbours can, as well. Now a Bird having a

bath, well, there is something about that, people will stop and say, "Look, look at the Bird having a bath." You know somehow it's different. I guess it's because they really get into it, they're thrashing their wings, the water is flying everywhere, it looks like they are downright enjoying themselves.

Some of the Birds, certain species, get along with others better than others. I suppose this is the same as people, but there are not too many people that I personally would care to have a shower or a bath with -- certainly not somebody who just arrived from who knows where. But, Birds, they are different.

You will see a Starling in the bath and along comes another one, another one, another one, it doesn't seem to matter, all that matters to them is can they get in there, is there enough room for them to have their bath. They are the biggest community bathers, the Starlings. The most Birds we have had at one time is eight. Now, that's quite a few Birds, you really couldn't get any more in there.

The Baltimore Orioles are normally lone bathers, though a male and a female will bathe together occasionally. This summer we observed two Orioles protecting their territory. Two males would land down there at the same time, one would be on the bath rim looking down at the other one on the ground and he would be so worried that the other Bird was going to get in the bath (I suppose before him) that he would swoop down in an aggressive manner and chase him

away. As soon as he did that there would be three or four Birds -- Starlings, Grackles, a Robin -- fly in and take over the bath. The Oriole would come back and have to sit on the side lines. Eventually those other Birds would leave. The boss Oriole would get back up on the bath, the other Oriole would return and land on the opposite side of the rim -- same thing -- boss Oriole would chase him off all the way out into the trees, another group of Birds would come down and take over the bath -- and this would go on. You would think after a few times this Baltimore Oriole would figure things out.

Now, the Grackles they are the tough guys, they want to chase everybody else away. They try to bully everybody including their own species, though this usually doesn't work, but they will land there on the rim and, suppose a Robin landed opposite, the Grackle will stick its head up in the air, extend its neck into its tough guy mode and kind of fluff up and ruffle its feathers and start to strut. I guess in bird language this is a threatening gesture or something of that nature because the other Bird usually flies away.

Robins -- they will share the bath with just about anybody, they don't mind at all, they don't have a mean feather on their bodies. They will get in there with other Robins, the Starlings, even a Grackle, if it will let them, an Oriole, with anybody, it doesn't seem to matter, as long as the other Bird isn't aggressive. They don't mind sharing the bath, real easy going. Observation tells

me it has to do with size to some extent, the Grackle, in general, being the biggest uses that, but on the other hand the Robin, it's a fair size -- it doesn't. The male Red-wing Blackbirds get along. They will get in there five, six at a time and that's a pleasant sight, all thrashing their wings together, their red patches flashing -- beautiful.

Of course, the small Birds don't mind sharing at all. The House Finches, American Gold Finches, Sparrows, will all get down in there together and have a heck of a good time. Gold Finches, we have had five and six in the bath at one time. The Hummingbird also likes to visit the birdbath. Cowbirds just get in and have their bath, get out and they are gone. There's nothing too exciting about a Cowbird.

One day I'd like to see the Great Blue Heron land in the birdbath. I'm not necessarily saying I want him to come down and have a bath, that would be pretty hard. He'd have to kind of sit in there with his legs hanging over the sides. I'd just like to get a picture of it.

Some Birds, when it's really hot, they wade into the water, settle down, and spread their wings and just lay there in the water. They don't even splash. Just like a person, they ease themselves into the bath. They don't even want to move, they just want to lay there. I've never seen a Swallow or a Martin at the birdbath and it's pretty strange, isn't it? The house right there full of Martins, two houses actually, and the Swallows over at Ralph's and yet they don't go near the birdbath.

Doves visit the birdbath occasionally to drink. The same goes for the Rock Doves. Now a Robin, it likes to get in there and kind of soak, and then fly up into the trees, preen itself and come back again. Actually, the Oriole does the same thing. It will have a bath, fly up into the tree, come back again and have another go at it.



It is an endless source of enjoyment -- watching the Birds as they refresh themselves in the bath -- watching the interaction of the different species. It's surprising how cold the water can be and the Birds are still eager to have a bath in the

late fall.

Hearing a strange noise one morning, I looked out over fresh fallen snow and a frozen birdbath. There was a large gathering of birds -- a Robin, a Starling, a Grackle, a Bluejay, a couple of Finches, a Sparrow, three Gold Finches, there was even a Cardinal. The noise wasn't coming from them. No! They had hired a Woodpecker to break the ice and that's what it was doing. The Chick (adee) and the Nut (hatch) with her were causing quite a ruckus, they were planning on skating and the Pileated Woodpecker was ruining the ice surface. Was I dreaming?

I read this article about Birds and birdbaths. It said what attracts them is the sound of running water, more so than the actual birdbath itself. Plus, the author claims you should have more than one, some that are deep, some that are shallow. In any case, having spent some time building the elevator for the Dog, and the last couple of years working on the motorized boat lift, I have an idea of building a waterfall and all these birdbaths, pipes, pumps, all around the yard. *I can't wait.*

THE MANHATTAN HEN HOUSE REVELATION -- BLOOMIES STRIKES BACK

One sunny autumn day while out for a leisurely afternoon drive, and having passed through RAMA, Longford Mills and Lake Saint John, we came upon a sign -- **Eggs for Sale**. This was just past the Portage at Floral Park.

We pulled into the driveway next to the old brick farmhouse and expressed our desire to purchase 2 dozen eggs from the lady of the house who answered our knock on the door. After confirming the price of the eggs and also the price of fresh Chickens that were almost ready to market, (should we wish to place an order) she called out to her son to fetch fresh eggs from the hen house.

Then leaving to make change, the lady's son, this young PIP, came running, he was about 8 years old. I asked Carole, "Have you ever been in a hen house?" Suspecting that she had not, (there's not too many hen houses in Manhattan), Carole replied, "No I haven't." PIP interrupted with, "You've never been in a hen house? Why haven't you ever been in a hen house? You mean you have never been in a hen house, how come? Why haven't you ever been in a hen house," and on and on.



Quietly I said to Carole, "Why don't you have a look and help gather the eggs." "Okay," she said, readily agreeing. "You will take her with you?" I asked. PIP nodded his head and started off towards the hen house with Carole beside him, all the while repeating, "you mean you have never been in a hen house?," etc., etc. PIP was starting to annoy her.

While they were in the hen house, I discussed the meat Birds and ordered a half dozen to be purchased later on from the Mrs. In short order, Carole and PIP were back with the eggs and he was still going on. Upon approaching his mother and me, he blurted out in a loud voice, "Mom, guess what, she has never even been in a hen house before." Carole tensed at PIP's broadcasting of the fact yet again. This revelation by PIP rather piqued her, he was poking fun at a New York City girl. All eyes were on her. Enough already. Carole directed a glare at PIP and retorted, "Well, have *yoooouuuu* ever been in Bloomingdales?" Touche!!

VAROOM -- THE BARON KNOCKAPIGEONOFF

Pigeons or Rock Doves (their real name) have a great variety of colours and beautiful patterns and are, in general, peaceful Birds. There were times, unfortunately, that they found it necessary to hog the bird feeder. After landing on the dressing room window sill, they would fuss about preening themselves and make those soft cooing sounds and often leave a dropping or two. This eventually became a nuisance.

One day in late spring I went out on the balcony off the bedroom to look around. There were the usual Pigeons on the feeder who flew up onto the roof when they saw me, since I had been harassing them for over a week.

It was the noise, I think, that caught my attention, I'm not sure, perhaps the movement, but I looked up and coming straight at me in a power dive was a Peregrine Falcon. The sound it made was like a mini jet plane as it rocketed over the roof, *VAROOM*. I could see the Peregrine's face, its eyes, its beak, its body -- smooth and sleek -- wings tucked in tight, approximately twenty feet overhead, a once in a lifetime circumstance, absolutely fantastic. I immediately realized what it was after. The outcome remains a mystery, but the Pigeons soon disappeared.



Two weeks passed and then one day, just as we were sitting down to relax on the porch late in the afternoon I heard a familiar sound and looked towards the lake. The Peregrine was just coming out of a power dive close to the water and was on its way back up. A pair of Mallards were flying flat out over the waves. I figured that's what the Falcon went for, but after gaining altitude it

dove again and hit a Grackle in front of Cliff & Cathy's. The Bird dropped into the trough between the waves. The Grackle was still alive though stunned, floated in the water. Once again the Peregrine dove and tried to grasp the Grackle with its talons, but missed. We watched with binoculars as the waves carried the Grackle to relative safety on shore. That was the last time I saw the Peregrine Falcon.

Upon Carole's suggestion, I phoned the Golden Creek Bird Sanctuary and described to them what I had witnessed with the Pigeons, the Grackle and the Peregrine Falcon. The owner told me he lost a Russian Peregrine about one month before and it was last seen in Brechin terrorizing the Pigeons that hung around the feed mill. He said it had been gone too long and figured he would never be able to retrieve it, and that the **Baron Knockapigeonoff** would revert to the wild and go south with others in the fall migration. *VAROOM.*

FELIZ CUMPLEANOS NUMERO NUEVE

Hip deep in the water, while working on the new boat lift in the slip, I was somewhat surprised to see a Turtle appear at my side. It must have been down there on the bottom and my movements disturbed it. This was a common Painted Turtle, as I think most, if not all of the ones here in the bay are, with the exception of the Snapping Turtle. You can pick them up without fear of being bitten, as they are timid and mild mannered.

Ralph's grandchildren have discovered a Turtle or two while fishing off the dock there at the waterfront. Over at Marg and Neil's, I've seen Jeremy and Jason with a couple of large ones a number of years ago that they had scooped out of the lake in front of their house. I've never seen a Snapper on this shore yet, but I'm sure they're about.

Ellen and Frank saw a huge Snapping Turtle on the east side of the lake last year while out fishing. Last spring I watched two Snappers laying their eggs on the shoulder of the road, right by the North River, as it flows out of Bass Lake. The next day there were more female Snapping Turtles digging holes in the gravel -- it must be an ideal location for them. A week later the County was out grading the shoulders of the road.

Whether this disrupted them or not depends on how deep the eggs were buried, I suppose.

Although everything in Nature is all part of the master plan, the bottom line is Painted Turtles and the like are reasonably harmless, but Snapping Turtles are considered dangerous if handled without extreme caution -- so they are best left alone.



There is one thing a lot of people don't know -- Turtles can sing. Yes -- two years ago Carole and I were having a surprise birthday cake presentation for #9 (the other half of the Catfish

Kate combo). No, he is not a hockey player, baseball player, basketball or football player. Terry is #9 on our telephone memory directory. As I carried the flickering cake out the door and onto the patio, Carole and Frank (of the Franklin Egg fame) led Kate, Avril, Jean, myself and Ines in a lively rendition of Happy Birthday.

I pointed to a small raft in front of Dale and Diane's when the singing was over. "Listen," I said, "What's that sound?" A very unusual melody drifted up from the water's edge, gently caressing our ears. Avril, Ines (a Spanish exchange student living with Terry and Kate for the summer) and me, with cameras in hand, went over to investigate. There were three Turtles on the raft, standing upright, their heads were back, singing their hearts out --

FELIZ CUMPLEANOS NUMERO NUEVE" (Happy Birthday Number Nine) — at least that's what I think Ines said.

HOME BODIES

The House Finches started to build a nest up in the corner of the lakeside porch, so I put up a small square piece of plywood with a rail around on two sides, to give them a secure site. It didn't take them long to build their nest -- just four days.

With their nest up out of sight from outside the porch, it wasn't long -- two days -- and she had laid an egg, five more days -- five more eggs, though I was surprised when one turned out to be a Cowbird egg. They are bigger than the House Finches, though not by much. It was consequently destroyed.

The male played the role of defender, chasing away other Finches that ventured too close. It was easy to see into the nest as I held up a mirror when counting eggs or babies that had hatched. From the first egg sighted until they were all fledged -- it took 18 - 20 days.

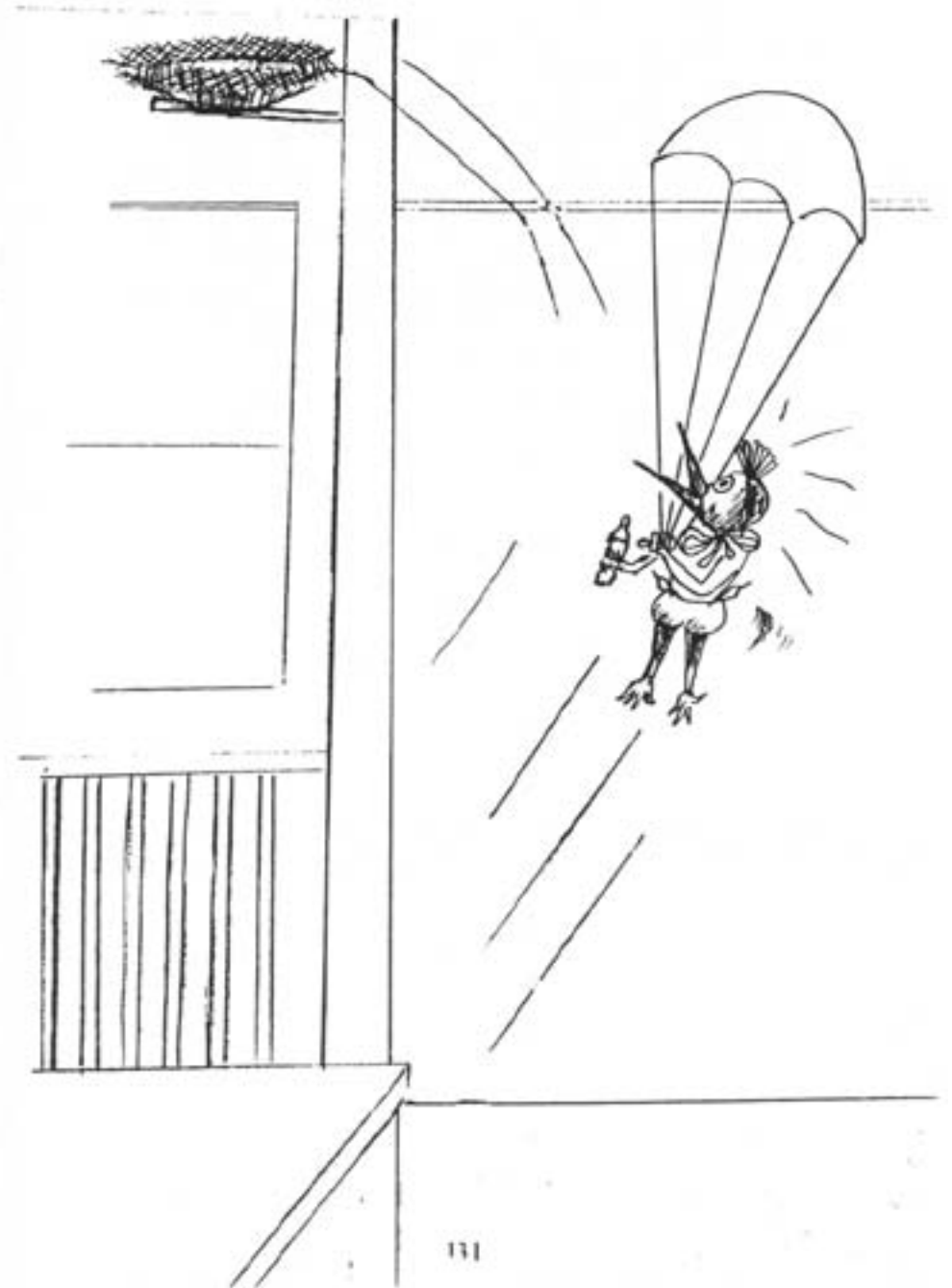
Simultaneously, we had another family of House Finches warming eggs in the hanging basket on the front porch. And, likewise, this nest had a Cowbird egg. It was removed, shown to Andrea and Amanda, Paul and Carolyn's two little girls from across the street, then discreetly destroyed.

The third nest started by House Finches in the hanging flower bag on the garage wall never survived. They had two eggs -- then it was plundered -- by what I don't know -- the evidence

lay on the walkway -- broken eggshells.

When the day came for the fledglings on the lakeside porch to take their maiden flights, we were on hand to observe the activity. One by one they left the nest. The last one perched on the edge of the small platform railing that surrounded its home and looked about -- flexing its wings -- wondering, I suppose, what to do next. It must be scary -- the first time. The baby let go and away it went -- about four feet to the hanging fuchsia plant, then again after a few minutes to the lattice work on the veranda next door where it rested. The proud parents were nearby voicing their encouragement.

Our residents on the front porch produced four new Finches, and they were gone after 19 days. We enjoy the House Finches. They have a clear, cheerful song and are pleasing to the eye. They are always welcome here -- on the lee side.

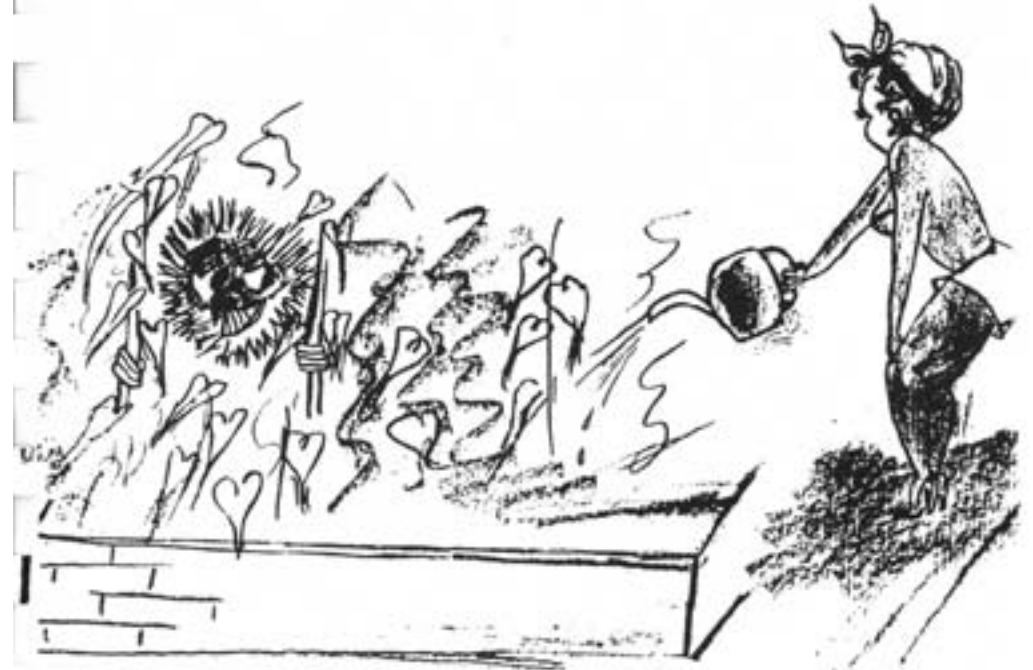


VINNEY

Carole kept telling me about this creepy creature she sees when out watering the flowers. She tried to describe it but only came up with black and slimy. Carole could only get a fleeting glimpse of the thing, it was always just out of the corner of her eye when she saw it. That didn't fit anything that readily came to mind -- especially the slimy part, but, considering the fact she was using the hose, there were several possibilities.

The creature usually showed up in the flower bed beside the house and in the planter that contains the large sedum plants. Oddly enough, it never made an appearance while I was there.

Ellen, our neighbour, was visiting with Carole one day and as they sat at the table on the deck over looking the lake, Carole spied the creature under the Shibano Spirea bushes. She screamed, pulled her legs up onto the chair and pointed in its direction. Ellen startled, jumped at Carole's response and the creature disappeared. Meanwhile, I was discovering more and more holes in and around the flower beds. This I contributed to Chippy and a growing family perhaps, as I would often see the Chipmunks in the same areas. The thought of a Mole crossed my mind, but the colour and slimy description just didn't fit. Summer was passing and one thing was certain -- a black, creepy critter was lurking in the flower bed, behind the vines -- waiting for Carole.



Then one autumn day, while out in front of the house, we came face to face with the creature. I had just finished cutting the grass and we were cleaning up next to the walkway when suddenly, out of the long flower bed it bolted, down the blacktop it went -- lickety-split -- to disappear between the bags of grass clippings by the roadside -- that black creepy critter, Vinney, the Short-Tailed Vole.

THE FRANKLIN EGG -- OR, IS IT A BIOSPORE?

The sometimes green, sometimes blue water of Lake Couchiching, on a calm sunny Sunday morning, is oh, so inviting. Carole and I, Jean (her mom) and friend, Frank Pugliese from Manhattan, set out in our boat for a few hours on the water.

Our favourite mooring was at Big Chiefs Island. Everyone has a particular spot they favour, we being no exception. There is a small bay on the west side of the island just big enough for two boats, that was our destination.

We were in luck, when we arrived the bay was empty, we had it all to ourselves. Anchors were dropped and the boat secured, sun lotion and newspapers appeared, everyone relaxing in the serenity of the calm and the quiet -- the sight and sounds of passing boats in the channel the only distraction. While Carole soaked up the sun and Jean retreated to the shade, Frank and I decided to enjoy the water.

After a brief dunking, we waded around the sandy bottom then headed towards the windblown willows overhanging the water to explore the shoreline. There was all sorts of debris imbedded underfoot, driftwood, clams, and patches of smooth worn rocks. Small Fish scattered ahead of us as we approached. Occasionally, we stepped on broken clam shells and stopped to check our feet for cuts.

Frank nonchalantly reached down and retrieved something from the bottom, then called out,

"Larry, what is this?" Frank cradled a strange looking dark brown object in both hands. My excitement grew as I reached over and touched it and felt the unusual texture. This was something I had never seen before. It consisted of thousands of woven quill-like slivers, and appeared to be very dense -- porous -- yet firm, with some give when squeezed. The thing was egg-shaped, only flattened more on the bottom side, where there was a faint white ring of slime. I was quite fascinated with it, not knowing exactly what it was.



The desire to discover something unusual has always been there in the back of my mind, especially when walking the sea shore, and now Frank had discovered something quite unusual right here in Lake Couchiching.

The cooler was later emptied and filled with water to transport "Sandy, The Franklin Egg" (so named in honour of Frank for discovering it on the sandy bottom). Back home on Couchiching Point, it was thoroughly examined, photographed, weighed and measured, which was as follows: Length: 5 inches; Width: 3½ inches; Depth: 2¾ inches; Weight: 225 grams.

Sandy was kept in a pail of cool water which was changed daily. While doing so a half dozen small leeches were flushed out. I decided to let it stand for a day or two. Over the course of a 24 hour period the water would give off a rather strong smell, yet the Egg itself was odour free. It was shown to the neighbours, they all reached the same conclusion -- they didn't know what it was -- never having seen the likes of it before.

The Franklin Egg took up permanent residence in our garage, being rather quiet and reserved, there were no wild parties and howling at the moon. A welcome guest, and I never once had to feed it. Reading every book I had in an attempt to identify it, I came up empty handed.

Finally, desperation led me to the Orillia Public Library. I proceeded to scour the shelves in search of answers. Finally, I thought I had found it, a Fresh Water Sponge and, through a most kind and helpful librarian, I was referred to Bob, a local expert and F.O.N. executive. The story now takes on a new **squeeze** so to speak.

I called Bob and left a message on his answering machine and two weeks later, after

returning from a birding trip, he returned my call. I explained to him what I had and where it came from and that it might be a freshwater sponge by a description given in Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia, Volume I, Lower Animals. Bob suggested I bring it around so he could have a look. Saturday morning found Bob rather involved when I arrived and only took a cursory glance at the object I was holding -- he didn't put it under a scope, but agreed it was a freshwater sponge. *Oh, the power of suggestion.*

Friday afternoon found me at the doctor's office and I had taken along the Franklin Egg to show Si. I thought he might be interested. When the business in hand was over, I opened the small cooler and presented it to him. "What is it?" "Freshwater sponge," I replied. "Bob, you may know him, thinks it is." "Well, if Bob thinks it's a sponge, then that's what it is." Si then proceeded to examine the Egg and suggested that perhaps I could bring it to the local F.O.N. meeting the next week.

Come the night of the meeting, feeling under the weather, I called Si and explained to him I wouldn't be attending, but that he was welcome to pick it up and take it along himself, which he did. Through Terry and Kate we learned of what took place that night. Apparently (if I got this right) there was a suggestion to have it x-rayed and another to have it undergo ultrasound. There was also a suggestion by Nancy, I believe, whether or not it could be something called a Biospore, but Si

insisted the Egg be returned to me immediately.

Armed with this information, I proceeded to show other people. Most who saw it were skeptical to say the least. I took it along to show Holly at the physiotherapy clinic. "What is it?" she asked. "A freshwater sponge" I replied. "Looks like a bunch of old twigs" offered David. "Sure does," agreed Brian. "Go ahead Holly, pick it up" I said. "It won't bite." So she did, very gingerly. "Look out," I cried, "it's going berserk." Holly dropped it like a hot potato into the container.

Meanwhile, I had called the R.O.M. and spoke with Sheila Byers from the Zoology Department and she willingly agreed to examine the Franklin Egg. Carole was going to Toronto the next week and she would deliver it. When Carole entered the R.O.M. and asked security for Sheila Byers, the guard asked, "What is in that," referring to a small compact cooler. "A freshwater sponge," Carole whispered. "Ooh, really" security replied.

Two weeks passed and one evening around 6 p.m. Sheila Byers called to say they had examined the Egg and confirmed that it wasn't a freshwater sponge. We discussed the Egg and I gave her my theory as to how it may have attained its shape -- possibly by rolling in the waves on a sandy bottom.

Sheila asked permission to cut into the Egg -- I hesitated, but that was the only way to find out for sure if it was a living organism. "O.K., go ahead, take a slice off." She called back two hours later and asked for permission to dissect it further -- "okay, go ahead" -- they were to quarter it -- by cutting, I presumed. She

called back at nine to give me the bad news. It was pulled apart in quarters and revealed no living creature. A full report was on its way that ironically was based on my theory as to how it attained its shape. The sliver-like material that the Egg was comprised of was not studied in itself -- I was told a true limnologist should have examined it.

A follow up visit with Si was in order and as we chatted The Franklin Egg was mentioned. I told him it was at the R.O.M. "What did they have to say about Sandy?" Si asked. "Well, it's not a freshwater sponge," I replied. "Oh no," Si said as he put his elbows on the desk and his head in his hands. "Nancy was right -- it's a Biospore."

Later that week the dissected egg was returned and sat in the garage in pieces until I decided to dispose of it, where it made its final trip to the landfill site.

The next week Bob called to inquire about the Egg. I told him I no longer had Sandy and explained its demise. Also, that I had sent it off to Toronto to be examined by the R.O.M. "Oh -- how did this come about?" I told him about the F.O.N. meeting and, subsequently, my decision to send it to the R.O.M. Bob had been thinking about the Egg and perhaps was having second thoughts and wanted to have another look at it. He was headed to a provincial F.O.N. meeting and wanted to take it with him. A Ministry associate also wished to examine this curiosity. The mail arrived with a package from the R.O.M. Sheila Byers had put together the information at hand on freshwater

sponges. Included was her summation and official analysis of what the egg consisted of, along with her theory as to how it was shaped. This closed the final chapter on the mystery of The Franklin Egg, except for one thing -- **WHAT WAS IT?**

We have looked for two years for another one, without success, **but** -- in the foggy, early wee hours of the blackest night, if you should ever hear a primeval scream echo across the water from the direction of the landfill site -- keep your homes locked and Dogs, Cats and children indoors. Lock Ness has its Nessie and Okanagan Lake has its Ogo Pogo, and now Lake Couchiching has The Franklin Egg -- or is it a Biospore?

Postscript

Bob did an extensive follow-up and wrote an article on The Franklin Egg (The Thing in Lake Couchiching). Bob recently informed me that two pine balls were found at Camp Arrowhead in the Old Man River in the Huntsville district.

Also in April, 1995, I received additional information from the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa on The Franklin Egg Mystery. In 1975 two were found in the Rideau Lakes district. The article explains exactly what they are -- Pine Balls -- but not how they are formed. That part of the mystery still exists.

This is a typed copy of the handwritten note from Sheila Byers)

Royal Ontario
Museum Memorandum ROM
100 Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3C61

TO: Larry & Carole Watson

FROM: Sheila Byers, Invertebrate Zoology

Date: 22 Nov., 1993

Please find enclosed the information on sponges that I promised to send. One is a general overview on sponges (marine & freshwater) and the other 2 are more specific but will give you a good idea of freshwater sponges in Ontario.

It is unfortunate that "Sandy" turned out to not be a sponge but it certainly had me fooled, at first; although, I must admit to never having seen a FW sponge of such a dark colour! I wouldn't be surprised if you have seen FW sponges in Lake Couchiching, but just didn't recognize them. They are often a light beige colour and like to grow on waterlogged logs of branches. Certainly I have seen them in water less than 3 ft deep. If you touch them they will feel spongy (as in a bathtub sponge) but have the recognizable "holes" or osculum over the surface as shown in Barnes' Figures 4-1,2. Once you learn to recognize them you'll be surprised at how common & abundant they are! Then, who knows, you might even fall upon some FW mussels or snails while you're looking for sponges...

Sorry! I can't help but promote invertebrates a little bit!! They are fascinating animals, very diverse, very important and found in almost any type of habitat you can think of, on land or in freshwater systems or in the ocean. Did you know that of all the identified species of animals in the world (including birds & dogs, & elephants & human beings) over 95% of

these are invertebrates? So they may be inconspicuous, but they are a very important component of food webs and our environment, in general. So, don't be discouraged -- keep walking in the lakes and rivers and keep your eyes open for unusual shapes and forms. I hope these reprints are of interest to you. Please call if you discover another interesting creature. We're always interested!!!

P.S. To more specifically answer your questions of "what the hell is it?" I would suggest the following: a conglomerate of plant roots & stems probably from freshwater weeds that somehow have been compacted into a very symmetrical form. I can think only that wave action from a constant and unidirectional wind, particularly if the near shore area of the lake is shallow enough for the wave action to reach the sandy bottom, has tossed & rolled the roots along the hard sand forming it into an egg shape. A process, I assume, not unlike the shaping & formation of tumbleweed. What makes me think this, is the surprising similarity in shape & size of the egg to that of smooth, worn rocks on an exposed ocean coast or shore of a lake where indeed the wave action has picked up and moved the rocks around, year after year, slowly transforming them into similar-sized, smooth & egg-shaped rocks. Anyway, that's my theory. Perhaps a true limnologist could offer a better suggestion. Or maybe your fellow Naturalists have some ideas on how it could have attained its shape. Regardless, I find it interesting in that it provided a very safe and ideal habitat for leeches! I hope this provides further food for thought at your Club meetings!

Sheila Byers

UNIDENTIFIED FLOATING OBJECTS

On October 20, 1975, Murray Outhet, Bill McLean and Neil MacLaren, all of the National Capital Commission, were engaged in dry docking a boat at an island in Newbury Lake in the Rideau Lakes district of Ontario. While working in the water they picked up two balls drifting along the gravelly bottom.

The cove was subject to frequent wave action and was skirted by a stand of white pine. The lake was relatively shallow, with numerous weed patches and was well stocked with smallmouth bass.

The balls, four to six inches in diameter, were carefully wrapped up and brought to the Canadian Aquatic Identification Centre for examination. They were composed of white pine needles, and a few grasses, seeds, algae and fish bones, all of which were tightly intermeshed as if woven. No glue-like substance was present. A variety of animals had decided that these balls made the ideal home: aquatic worms (Oligochaeta), flatworms (Turbellaria), and crustaceans (Amphipoda, Ostracoda, and Isopoda). The animals inhabiting the balls were very abundant.

What exactly are these objects? How are they formed? Repetition of certain unknown phenomena which created the balls seems possible. The right combination of storms, currents and winds may break off a mass of needles from the edge of the forest litter. By rolling along the bottom the needles may pack into a ball. Or perhaps we may speculate that it might be the deft paws of a beaver or muskrat which pat a 'pineburger' into shape.

With summer on the way, more of these unidentified floating objects may be spotted, which will give us a further clue as to how they were formed. We received a rumour of the existence of similar objects in a shallow lake in British Columbia. If there are any sightings, please contact the CAIC to let us know.

J. Madill
Freshwater Unit
Canadian Aquatic Identification Centre
Museum of Natural Sciences
Ottawa (613) 996-1690



1

Exterior of a ball. Diameter 4"



2

Interior of a ball after being cut open. Width 4½", height 3".



3

Close up of Fig. 2 showing inner packing of the pine needles.

Larry Watson
723 Broadview Avenue
Orillia, Ontario
L3V 6P1

April 20, 1995

Dear Larry Watson:

I was a pleasure receiving your letter about "Sandy" found in Lake Couchiching. It sounds very much like the balls discovered in Newbury Lake. Your response is the first documented sighting since 1975.

At the moment you probably know as much about these objects as I do since they uncommon. We can only hypothesize how they are created. Sheila's response (from the Royal Ontario Museum) was very good. It is impossible to decide which came first: a decomposable object which became embedded with needles and provided a good habitat for small animals, or whether the currents and substrate provided the right environment to form a ball.

It is common for a scum to form on a container containing living material. Microscopic algae, sponges, rotifers and other invertebrates which will use any opportunity to grow quickly.

I will keep your letter and if there are any more sightings I will keep you informed.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Madill

Jacqueline Madill
Research Assistant
Research Division

HORSE FEATHERS

OLD BLUE

Looking out over the channel on Easter Sunday 1992, I observed no less than 14 Great Blue Herons on the edge of the ice, ringing the open water. The Herons arrive early, they are normally one of the first Birds to arrive, along with the Canada Goose. As spring turns into summer they can be seen here on the Point practically every day, hunting for a meal. Fortunately, there is an unrestricted open stretch of shoreline for them to walk along, from just past Dale and Diane's down past Cliff and Cathy's and beyond. When Ralph and Doll had their old dock it was nice and low, only a foot or so above the water. The Great Blue Herons just loved that dock, they could get right out there where the Fish lie under the dock in the shade, poke their long beaks down into the water and zango, come up with a Fish. Most people I believe enjoy watching the Great Blue Heron, so stately as they walk, their heads held high, very elegant.

Cliff and Cathy have a replica of a Heron down by the waterfront close to the garden. In fact, the first time I saw it I had to put the field glasses on it to make sure it wasn't the real thing. They can really fool you, they stand so still. One day I saw a particular Great Blue Heron sneaking up on it. It gave me a strange feeling.

Just after we built the house and had moved

in, our furniture was being delivered and placed throughout the house. One of the men admired the view and remarked to Carole, "I see you have one of those big lawn bird ornaments, it looks so real." Carole replied, "Yes, well thank you very much only its not an ornament, it's a real Bird." Well, they could hardly believe it, and had to wait a few minutes for the Great Blue Heron to move to convince them.

One of the Heron's favourite spots is at the end of Dale and Diane's boat slip, just where the grass rolls down into the water you see the Heron there a lot. This past spring, Frank next door purchased a Bass boat, wide and sleek, it sits low in the water. Darned if the other day a Great Blue Heron comes strutting across the lawn from over at Dale's there, here he comes, bonk, bonk, bonk, over to Frank's dock, takes a look around, then steps down into Frank's boat, down in there to get a better view. Rather nervy.

There are a number of Great Blue Heron rookeries in Simcoe County. In Minnising Swamp, there are over two hundred active nests according to a Collingwood newspaper. It would appear the Great Blue Heron has no bones about flying after dark, as I often see them just at last light flying back to their rookeries -- which can be as far away as forty miles. The down side of these long-necked, feathers on stilts is they have a penchant for young Ducklings still in the nest, as well as any species of eggs they may come across.

Song Birds nests in the reeds are particularly susceptible to this marauder; any Fish that can be swallowed is fair game. Crayfish are just snacks and Frogs are a delicacy. We counted 29 Great Blue Herons one day in a half dried up swamp area up near Victoria Bridge. Presumably, they were hunting for Frogs. Occasionally, I have watched a particular mature, well-groomed Heron over at Dale and Diane's boat slip, stand there facing the southwest with its wings open wide. I don't know if this is to dry off, cool off, sunbathe or what exactly. It could be a mating ritual not unlike a Peacock fanning its tail, but if I didn't know better, I'd say he was exposing himself -- I call him Old Blue.

Last week Neil and Ellen and I were standing by our boat slip and over at Dales was the Great Blue Heron, "Old Blue," the sunbather. Right before our eyes he plucked out a Catfish and flopped it on the bank, he stabbed it a couple of times with his long strong beak, then picked it up and turned it head first, stretched his neck out and straight up, opened his beak wide and swallowed it. The Fish was about eight inches long.

Old Blue looked our way and gave us a rather knowing smile and winked at Ellen who winked back with her right eye. Neil suppressed a smile, I never let on, but I knew right there Old Blue was no ordinary Great Blue Heron -- I had this gut feeling, so suave and debonair, every feather in place -- he had a certain air about him.

Just a week ago, I witnessed a rather unusual sight while down the way. I happened to catch a movement out of the corner of my eye. There was Old Blue creeping up on a lawn ornament, a Pink Flamingo, that was gently bobbing in the wind on a stake. The son of a gun was up on his tip toes like Sylvester the Cat, his wings out in front ready to put the grip on the Flamingo. Blue looked over and saw me, he flashed his pearly whites, gave me a knowing smile and leaped on Pinkies back. Old Blue wrapped his legs around it's body, one wing went around its neck and the other wing held high in the air as he hung on for dear life. Blue looked like a bull rider at the stampede. His eyes were bulging and his feathers were ruffled. Blue was making some very strange sounds and winked at me, and I winked back, with my left eye. He then threw his head back and started singing a rather naughty old ditty --

YOU, SEE, OOOH LA LA
BALLA BALLA WING BANG
OOOH WHEE
OH, I LOVE THESE PINK FLAMINGOS

I watched fascinated by this extraordinary behaviour and once again got that gut feeling -- something wasn't right. Blue had slipped around now losing his grip and was upside down, the stake was bent in an arc almost to the ground. He looked rather fatigued. Suddenly Blue let go and ended up on his back on the ground -- his beak pointed straight in the air, his legs wide, toes up, a stupid grin from ear to ear.

The Flamingo bobbed furiously on its stake. Then it hit me. Old Blue definitely had a case of overactive hormones.



That was the last I saw of him, but a word of caution -- Come spring, when out gardening, before you bend over, take a good look around. Old Blue doesn't appear to discriminate, you may get *goosed* by a *Great Blue Heron*.

THE PEASANT, THE PRIEST AND THE POLITICIAN

Three travellers found themselves each seeking a night's lodging at a farm deep in the rural district. The farmer willing to oblige the travellers best he could explained to them that he could definitely accommodate all three for dinner, but, unfortunately, he could only bed down two in the house and the third would have to sleep in the barn.

After all were well fed and ready to retire for the evening, the peasant feeling duty bound, in the presence of such esteemed companions, offered to sleep in the barn, as he was more accustomed to that type of accommodation. This was satisfactory to all concerned and the three proceeded to their respective beds. The peasant bedded down in the barn with all the animals.

Two hours passed and there was a knock on the door of the farm house. The farmer, the priest and the politician answered the door together. It was the peasant. "I can't sleep -- there are Cows mooing, Horses neighing, Sheep baaing, I'm terribly sorry." The priest feeling all eyes on him replied, "Not to worry, my son. I shall take your place, a prayer will calm them down and I will be quite comfortable, thank you." He proceeded to the barn for the remainder of the night. The peasant, politician and farmer went upstairs to bed.

Two hours passed and there was a knock on the door and the three trucked down the stairs to see who it could be. It was the priest. "I can't sleep, please accept my apologies for waking you, but there are Hens clucking, Pigs oinking and Goats shuffling their feet." The politician feeling the heat remarked, "Just the challenge I've been looking for, a great stimulus, you can all count on me, sleep well." A mutual sigh of relief was exhaled by the peasant, priest and the farmer, and all three retired for the night. The politician left to sleep in the barn.

Two hours passed and there was another knock on the door. The farmer, priest and peasant trudged down the stairs and opened the door. It was all the animals.



THE FICKLE FINGER OF FATE

"I would like a fresh Duck please." "Yes, Ma'am." The butcher went out back and killed a Duck and brought it in to show the woman before he dressed it out. "May I examine it please?" "Of course, Ma'am" and the butcher handed her the Duck. She took her index finger and shoved it up the Duck's ass and twisted it around, first to the left -- then the right. "This Duck is from Rama. I want a Duck from Orillia," said the woman. The butcher, taken back at this performance replied, "I'm sorry, I will get another" and immediately left to dispatch another Duck out back, then brought it in to the woman. She once again shoved her index finger up the Duck's ass, twisted it around, first to the left -- then to the right. "This Duck is from Coldwater -- I want a Duck from Orillia."

The butcher was distressed, and amazed at the woman's proclamation, but ever willing to please her left to kill yet another fresh Duck. He handed her another prime fowl and she was ready for it. Once again she thrust her index finger up this fine Duck's ass and twisted it around -- first to the left -- then to the right. Her eyes lit up and she smiled and said, "Yes, this will do just fine, this Duck is from Orillia." "Oh thank you ma'am, I will dress it out for you."

This now completed the butcher wrapped the Duck and presented it to the woman. She paid

the butcher and thanked him and on the way out the door, stopped, turned and said to him, "By the way -- you are new here, aren't you?" "Yes, Ma'am," replied the butcher. "Where are you from?" asked the woman. The butcher turned and dropped his pants, exposing his bare ass and said, "You tell me lady, you're the expert."



THE FIN AND FEATHER WAR

A crisis was at hand. The Fish were unhappy and collectively decided to let the Birds up above know just what was on their minds. While this gathering of all Fishes and Crayfish, Snails, Clams and Bloodsuckers was taking place -- up above, strangely enough, Waterfowl and Seabirds, Birds of prey and all the other species were flocking together to air their views and let them be known to the Fishes below.

The reason for this displeasure was due to a gross misunderstanding, by both parties. It seems the Waterfowl and Waterbirds were over fishing the Minnows and Salmon -- and the Fish were contemplating a ban in all but a few designated preserves. Likewise, the Fishes were consuming large numbers of Ducklings and Goslings and the Waterfowl were considering a moratorium. This would unwittingly lead to a probable overpopulation explosion and many Fishes and many Birds would suffer from starvation as the food supply could only support a delicate balance of the two.

A summit meeting with the Birds was called by the Fish with all to attend. In flocks and schools they migrated to a large pool of water, with an island in the centre and when all were rested and ready to listen the discussion began --

"Cut them off" cried the Bluegull.

"No More" screeched the Gull.

"What about the Minnows?" said the Catfish.

"What about our Ducklings?" replied the Mallard.

You could feel the tension in the air as feathers flew from beating wings and the water was roily from mighty dorsal fins.

"If you want a fight, you came to the right place" said the Muskie. "Suck clam poop," replied the Eagle. "Stop bickering" boomed the wise old Owl. "Agreed" chorused the ancient Sturgeon. Feathers were smoothed and gills relaxed as they all eventually calmed down. The Owl and the Sturgeon huddled in deep discussion.

Silence hung over the assembled parties as a heavy fog descended upon them. For two years they endured, becoming disillusioned with a sense of woe and foreboding permeating all thoughts. They were numbed to the core. As days passed, they became restless and agitated. Nothing was being accomplished. The party leaders, the Owl and the Sturgeon, appeared to be brain dead. They both had one track minds. They could not comprehend the other sides situation or else they chose not to. Each wanted only what was best for themselves.

Then, in the third year, the fog lifted. The Birds flexed their wings and preened their feathers. The Fish beat their pectoral fins and fanned their tails. A Kingfisher fed up with it all suddenly speared a Minnow. This did not go unnoticed and a restless Pike inhaled a Duckling.

The sky erupted with thousands of screaming Birds who dove into the water to trap Perch and Crappies, Bass and Salmon in their beaks. The large Fish took command, Pike, Muskie, Pickeral and Trout went on a feeding frenzy -- consuming all the baby Goslings, Grebes, Ducks, Gulls, Coots, Cormorants, everything that had feathers. The wise Owl ripped an eye out of the ancient Sturgeon who in turn then sucked the Owl up its snout and dove to the bottom drowning him.

For days the battle raged and casualties grew -- the air was hazy with feathers and down, the water spoiled and murky with scales. Finally, a deadly silence hung over the island pool. Not a Fish swam, not a Bird flew, and then, after eons, from this foul smelling stagnant fish-brew, a slimy configuration oozed up out of the depths to metamorphose into the human form. A scurvy diseased spawn of lying cheats, bloodsuckers, vultures, predators and pikers.

This most despicable of thieves appeared in full disguise as an honest law abiding, unselfish, trustworthy, reliable and dependable, fair champion for the young, old, destitute, rich, poor, blind, crippled, crazy, uneducated, the down-trodden, the business machine, the banks, the persecuted, the unions, the religious, the environmentalists, the fundamentalists, for animal rights, the farmer's friend and fisherman's fancy, civil servants, the labourers and as the sheppards staff, for the underprivileged, the immigrants, refugees, aboriginals, the unemployed and for all those who despair,

one you can believe in, -- a *politician*.



BIRD SPECIES — ON THE LEE SIDE

American Coot	Hooded Merganser
American Gold Finch	House Finch
American Wildgeese	House Sparrow
Bald Eagle	Killdeer
Baltimore Oriole	Lark Sparrow
Barn Swallow	Lesser Scaup
Belted Kingfisher	Mallard
Black-Crowned Night Heron	Mellic
Black Duck	Mourning Dove
Black Tern	Night Hawk
Blue Jay	Old Squaw
Brown Creeper	Osprey
Buffhead	Pied-Billed Grebe
Canada Goose	Pileated Woodpecker
Cardinal	Pine Siskin
Caspian Tern	Purple Finch
Cedar Waxwing	Purple Martin
Chickadee	Redpoll
Common Crow	Red-Winged Blackbird
Common Goldeneye	Ring-Billed Gull
Common Grackle	Ring-Necked Duck
Common Loon	Robin
Common Merganser	Ruby-Throated Hummingbird
Common Tern	Song Sparrow
Cowbird	Snowy Owl
Dark-Eyed Junco	Starling
Double-Crested Cormorant	Traill's Flycatcher
Dusky Woodpecker	Tree Swallow
Eastern Kingbird	Trumpeter Swan
Flicker	Turkey Vulture
Great Black-Backed Gull	Whistling Swan
Great Blue Heron	White-Breasted Nuthatch
Great-Crested Flycatcher	Winter Wren
Hairy Woodpecker	Yellow-Headed Blackbird
Herring Gull	Yellow Warbler

CHANGES

There have been a number of changes take place here on the Point since the story about Woofie began. She is gone now, as you know, so is Champagne, and Ellen's dog Missy, is no longer with her. Murray and Sandy and family, including Pepper, have moved out West.

The big change on our waterfront was the removal of the sloping boat slip -- no more feeding the Ducks, Geese and Muskrats. For our feathered friends we now use a new bird feeder arrangement -- an Oriole and Hummingbird feeder and four new silos, all on the same structure. Last year I installed a steel breakwall where the Beavers and Muskrats had an entrance to an underground den, they appear determined to breach it somehow.

And, believe it or not, NYC Frank finally caught a decent Fish.

Herschel -- well, we hardly ever see him anymore. Ralph and Doll have two Dogs, Dalmatians, Woody and Sweet Pea. Over at Neil and Marg's, Zudnik (Polish, I believe), their son Jason's dog, has come and gone and Kalie, their new Lassapoo puppy, has taken over. Frank and Ellen are now sharing their home with Harleigh, a Golden Retriever.

The biggest change for us came five years ago when Jean and I presented Carole with a new addition to our family -- Lutece of Mariposa -- a Bichon Frise, otherwise known as Tessie. We are

now pet bound -- this is a condition that occurs when you come home, kiss the Dog, then pat your spouse on the head.

There have been other changes of a different nature -- of creatures coming instead of going. This was the first summer in many years that I can remember seeing Grasshoppers and even Leopard Frogs on the lawn. This spring, Peter next door, was catching Black Crappies off the dock. And this fall, his Dad, Frank, showed us our first Zebra Mussels from Lake Couchiching.

Our most exciting visitor this year appeared on August 13 as we sat on the deck. The Martins were still here when a Merlin swooped in to grasp an unsuspecting Martin sitting on the bird house railing. But, lady luck was with the Purple Martin this day as it evaded the Hawk's deadly talons. Then the Martin colony turned the attack around and harried the Merlin up into a tree in Neil and Marg's yard.

Five days passed and no sign of it, then on August the 18th at 12:30 p.m., as we sat having lunch, a female House Finch struck the glass sliding door and fell onto its back stunned. I started to rise from my chair to tend to the Bird when it righted itself and flew up onto the wrought iron railing. Within seconds the Merlin was there, wings spread, talons flexed. It was right here on the porch not five feet from us. But, once again, lady luck smiled on the intended victim as the House Finch flew towards the lake, twisting and turning, trying to escape with the Merlin in pursuit.

The House Finch turned down by the boat and flew towards Frank and Ellen's dock only to turn again and fly back towards their house. Halfway up the lawn the inevitable happened. The Merlin overpowered the Finch and grasped it in its flight. Up and over Ralph and Doll's pool it went, up into the same tree in Marg and Neil's yard to feast on its prey. I suspect the reason the Hawk was hunting here was because of the bird feeders. A large gathering of Birds, nice and convenient.

Another tragedy was to befall the Finches. The feeder located a mere 13 feet from the house (with its floor to ceiling glass windows) has proven to be a deadly unseen killer. The reflection of the lake in the glass has struck down many baby American Gold Finches. Twenty in one day hit the windows. Three never survived. Streamers and tape crisscrossing the glass didn't deter them. We put Savannah Grass and Cattails all along the railing to ward them off, but to no avail. Moving the feeder a good 50 feet away had almost rectified the problem until the Birds went after the Cattails, pecking them apart and ultimately more Birds hitting the windows. Down came the Cattails and the casualties decreased on the porch, but the upstairs bedroom sliding door is now attracting them.

There has been another visitor here this year in greater numbers than I have ever seen before -- the Pied-Billed Grebe. I have observed as many as eighteen in our small weedy bay, perhaps feeding on the abundance of Crayfish that

are present here. Also, this year, the Double Crested Cormorant and the Common Loon have been observed here between the weed bed and shore, not unusual, but noteworthy.

There are two Mallards who visit the bird feeder on and off every day feeding on the niger seed that the Finches drop. This may or may not save them from the hunters across the bay who started the season off this week with a bang.

This evening as I look over the bay, the images of trees in autumn dress are reflected onto the mirror-like surface of the water. The silence is shattered by one, two, three shots from the east side of the channel and my eyes follow the sudden flight of five Mallards as they rise above the tree line and circle only to land in the weeds -- here -- safely -- on the lee side.

BIOGRAPHY

Larry Watson lives in Orillia amid the remaining wildlife that inhabit the shores of Lake Couchiching with his wife, Carole, and faithful Dog, Tessie.

A loner by nature, Larry is most content among the furry, feathered and aquatic friends that inhabit this small bay on Couchiching Point -- here on the lee side.

May the left hand of God rest gently on all of those who are kind to his many creatures and may his other hand deliver a thundering right hook to those that are not.

