

THE GREAT LAKES ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

BY J. H. FLEMING

ABOUT the year 1900, a small group of ornithologists living in the region of the Great Lakes, became increasingly aware of the need for closer cooperation. These men were, William E. Saunders of London, Ontario; Percy A. Taverner of Detroit, Michigan; the late Bradshaw H. Swales of Detroit and Grosse Isle, Michigan; the late A. Brooker Klugh of Guelph, Ontario and James H. Fleming of Toronto, Ontario.

The question of migration routes was uppermost in our minds and there arose some correspondence with Professor Lynds Jones of Oberlin, Ohio. About this time we were joined by the late J. S. Wallace of Toronto, Ontario. He was a business man interested in birds, whose duties necessitated frequent visits to southwestern Ontario and to Detroit where he had a wide acquaintance among Michigan naturalists, as he had in the various centres he visited in Ontario. The result was that by personal contacts, Wallace kept us informed by the movements of birds in southwestern Ontario, and we decided to form the Great Lakes Ornithological Club with a membership of six, which number was never increased.

We soon found the need of a journal of some sort in which problems of bird life could be discussed. The result was a manuscript bulletin, Saunders acting as secretary. The procedure was simple—any member with an idea relating to birds wrote it out on a sheet of eight by ten inch paper, and posted it to the secretary in an especially printed envelope marked "Printer's Mss." The secretary, if so inclined, added comments on a separate sheet of paper and forwarded the bulletin to the next member and so on in rotation, till it reached the original sender who removed his contribution and forwarded the remaining manuscript to the secretary who also removed his from the file and added any new matter that had come to hand with his comments but always on a fresh sheet of paper, thus the bulletin passed in rotation to the six members but never grew too bulky. The private character of the bulletin allowed for freedom of expression and a certain amount of sarcasm, if thought necessary. Some of the subjects dealt with were migration routes, injurious species, the mild winter of 1905-6, and even subspecies. The bulletin ran along fairly well from 1905 to 1909 with occasional revivals and proved a useful means of communication.

The Club soon felt the need of a suitable place to meet, preferably a place where migration could be studied and Saunders suggested Point Pelee, projecting some nine miles into Lake Erie at the western end, and also the most southern point of the mainland of Canada.

The first visit of the Club to Point Pelee was in September 1905, though Saunders had made several previous visits, the first dating back to 1884.

In "The Birds of Point Pelee" by Taverner and Swales, published



Great Lakes Ornithological Club at the Point Pelee Camp, October 1, 1909
Left to right: Wallace, Swales, Saunders, Taverner (lower), Fleming

in *The Wilson Bulletin*¹ there is a full account of the activities of the Club at Point Pelee, up to August 1908. This gives an annotated list of the birds observed.

A permanent camp was established in October 1908 and was occupied at intervals to the end of 1927.

From the first a journal was kept of the birds observed at Point Pelee, this journal being in two volumes beginning May 13, 1905, and ending December 22, 1927.² A printed list of Ontario birds took up the first column for every six pages, with room for additional species, followed by two blank pages for a general write-up of events. The number of birds seen each day was recorded in ruled columns of the six pages. Each evening the list of birds was read aloud by one of the members and the entries were made with the aid of all members of the Club present from their field notes.

During the period of the Club's activity several new birds were added to the Ontario list, but the chief benefit was a better understanding of the migration routes, and the periodicity of numbers and species.

¹ *Wilson Bulletin*, No. 59, June 1907, pp. 37-54; *ibid.*, No. 60, September 1907, pp. 82-99; *ibid.*, No. 61, December 1907, 133-53; *ibid.*, No. 63, June 1908, pp. 78-96; *ibid.*, No. 64, September 1908, 107-29.

² Now in the library of the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology, Toronto, Ontario.