

# THE BLUE BILL

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THE BLUE BILL  
QUARTERLY BULLETIN  
OF THE KINGSTON FIELD NATURALISTS

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FROM THE EDITOR

In taking over the editorial responsibility for the Blue Bill, I hope to maintain the excellent traditions of my predecessors who have provided a forum for the Kingston Field Naturalists and brought together information on the natural history of the Kingston region. Please continue to contribute to Blue Bill with articles, letters or ideas for articles.

In place of formal editorials, for the next few issues I am going to write about local plant populations showing rapid changes. The first will be Purple Loosestrife, which rivals zebra mussels in its press coverage. About 1300 plant taxa are found locally, and roughly 450 of these are known to have been introduced.

Adele Crowder

PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

Purple Loosestrife (Lythrum salicaria L.) has become abundant in the Kingston region in the last few years. Its northward spread has been noticeable along the Rideau system and Highway 15, and it has formed large populations in marshes and swamps, like that at Westbrook, during the last five summers. This spread is part of a continental invasion, as the plant reached North America about 1810, and at first spread slowly through the northeast of the United States and Canada. Its recent rapid spread has carried it to the prairies, where it is now common.

The cause of its sudden increase is not known and there are several possible mechanisms:

- (1) The plant is sold as a garden flower, either as seed or young plants; it is a perennial. In recent years the quality of the flowers has been improved in Britain, and new "Morden" varieties have been imported into North America. The new genotypes may be more vigorous than the older types, perhaps setting more seeds or becoming established more readily as seedlings.

- (2) The plant has a complex pollination mechanism, with three forms or morphs of flowers. Stigmas can be short, mid-length or long, and the stamens fill the two positions complementary to the stigma. Bees collect pollen from short, mid-length or long stamens and deliver it to a stigma of the same length on a different plant. This pollen transfer ensures cross-pollination. Possibly the early colonizing plants did not include all the morphs, and full potential seed production has only been possible since all three arrived? Dr. L. Lovett Doust, working at Windsor, is investigating this idea. Our local herbarium specimens do not include long morphs, but our non-local Ontario plants included all three as early as 1940.

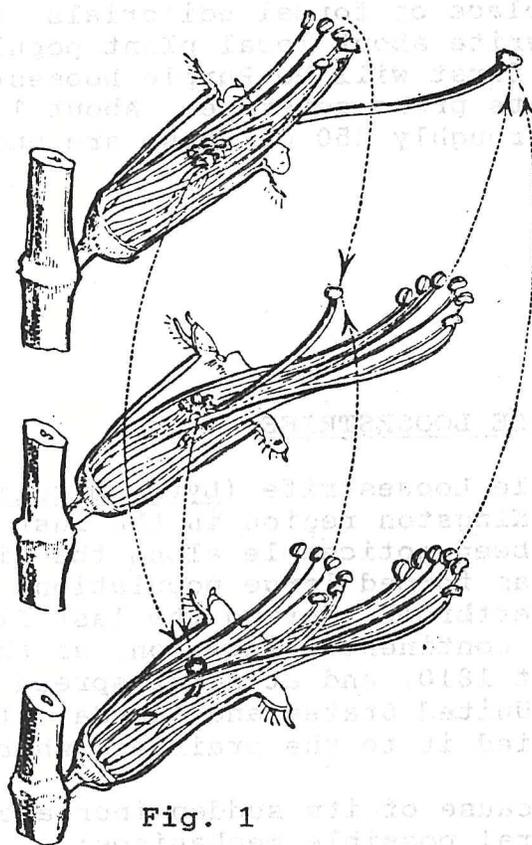


Fig. 1

Flowers with the near side of the petals and calyx removed, to show the three lengths of stigma. The dotted lines show how pollinators must travel to carry pollen, ensuring full fertility.

Fig. 1

- (3) Purple Loosestrife is an excellent competitor in disturbed sites, being able to spread both by seeds and vegetatively. In recent years summer droughts have dried the upper part of cattail marshes and this seems to be the main local type of habitat. Another habitat which is increasingly colonized is disturbed dry sites such as road verges and railway embankments. Abandoned wet meadows form a third habitat, which is increasing in area as farming becomes less profitable. In Renfrew County, for example, abandoned fields are now filled by loosestrife, which is as colourful as a heather moor in the late summer.

**PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE**



Fig. 2

Disturbance in wetlands can be any interference with the natural water regime. In many lakes and rivers, the natural regime includes large changes of water level, within and between years. Lake Ontario marshes, for example, have experienced differences of up to 2 m between extreme high and low water levels since 1915. Disturbance in some areas has therefore been the maintenance of a steady water level, for example by dyking.

The dates of collection of specimens in the Fowler Herbarium at Queen's University begin in 1888 with a plant from Middlesex County. The earliest long-stigma morph came from Russell County, collected in 1922. Local collection sites include shores, marshes and wet fields. Seven local specimens have the following provenance:

- 1960 - Leeds Co., Opinicon. Lakeshore. Short stigma.
- 1965 - Leeds Co., Gananoque. River Bank. Short stigma.
- 1965 - Leeds Co., Jasper. Riverbank and Marsh. Short stigma.
- 1966 - Leeds Co., Gananoque. Riverbank. Short stigma.
- 1971 - Hastings Co., Marmora. Roadside Swamp. Mid-length stigma
- 1982 - Northumberland Co., Presqu'ile. Meadow. Short stigma.
- 1988 - Pr. Edward Co., Rosmore. Marsh. Mid-length stigma.

Controversy has recently occurred because some wetland managers consider Purple Loosestrife is damaging wildlife habitats. Ms. C. Keddy, who has worked at Presqu'ile and many other sites where loosestrife is spreading, has concluded that it can displace rare sedges at the upper part of marshes. In much of the Kingston region, however, cattails and grasses which are not rare are the main species displaced. Ducks Unlimited considers that displacement of the food plants for ducks reduces use of marshes by the birds. This is most likely to happen in the constant shallow conditions created in dyked marshes maintained for ducks. I have not seen any evidence on whether the use of marshes by other birds, such as rails or bitterns, is affected by the proportion of loosestrife in a marsh.

Should action be taken against Purple Loosestrife, on the grounds that it decreases the diversity of vegetation? Hunters generally think that it should be eradicated. It can be killed by digging it up, by putting herbicide on it, by burning, or by flooding. Mowing has been found ineffective against it in tests done in our region by Ducks Unlimited. The problem with digging up plants or individually painting them with herbicide is that the actions create bare patches which can be recolonized. Fire is only practical in some areas, as is flooding; keeping 25 cm of water above seedlings kills them. Spraying herbicides would kill non-target plants and add herbicide to the water.

The remaining way of controlling the plant is to have it eaten. In Europe, where the plant is a regular but not an aggressive member of shore communities, over one hundred insects are known to eat it. Fourteen species are thought to eat it exclusively. In the United States several possible herbivores which could be introduced to eat it are being tested. They include three species of weevil, two leaf-eating beetles and a gall former. The gall midge can eat up to 75% of the foliage, and two of the weevils live on the seeds and ovaries. The process of testing biological control agents is necessarily slow, to try to ensure that the herbivore will not switch to another and native plant. Once such insects are released, they will of course spread from the northern States into Canada. In Illinois, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and USDA Beneficial Insects Laboratory were reported to be seeking permission to release a weevil species and two beetle species this summer.

A final option is to do nothing. This would be favoured by beekeepers, because loosestrife is a useful bee food during the late summer. When a plant invades, its population may rapidly expand, dominating the local community, and then later it begins to decline, until it is no longer dominant. Generally this is because herbivores have caught up with the plant, or some local herbivores have switched to eating it. An example of this process is seen in eurasian milfoil, which arrived in the Great Lakes region in the 1950's, spread very rapidly, and is now no longer the dominant plant in areas such as the Bay of Quinte and the Rideau system.

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SUMMER SEASON 1991 JUN 1 - AUG 31

Ron D. Weir

The warm, dry weather of the Spring Season continued into summer to become hot and ever drier. Most species of birds enjoyed a high rate of nesting success and the season was advanced by about two weeks. Several species raised 2 or 3 broods with time to spare. Observer activity was typically low once the various Breeding Bird Surveys ended by about the 3rd week of June.

Shorebird movement continued to early June, which is normal, and the first southbound waders reappeared by mid-July. The Breeding Bird Surveys and Forest Monitoring studies showed high numbers of Black-billed Cuckoos, flycatchers, swallows, Wood Thrushes and Ovenbirds, among some other insect eaters.

Latest Ever Departure

Horned Grebe Jun 9 (1) Adolphustown KH 84 May 29

Earliest Ever Arrival

Lesser Yellowlegs Jun 22 (1) Cressy Marsh KH 79 Jun 24

Species Account:

Horned Grebe - Jun 9 (1 ad), Adolphustown, KH (late)

Double-crested Cormorant - early June (129 nests), False Ducks I.  
(off P.E.Pt.), DVW

Gadwall - Jul 10 (1 female + 5y), Wolfe I., NLB

Bufflehead - Jun 7-18 (1 male), Amherstview Sewage Lagoon, KH

Hooded Merganser - Jun 5 (1 female + 8y), Lennox Hydro Marsh, KH

Ruddy Duck - Jun 7-23 (1 male), Amherstview S.L., PG, MB

Bald Eagle - Jun 9 (1 im), Moscow, AEB et al.

Gray Partridge - Jun 17 (2), Sandhurst, KH

Virginia Rail - Jun 12 (1 ad + 3y), Lyndhurst;  
Jun 12 (2 ad + 2y), Seeley's Bay, NLB

Com. Moorhen - Jun 29 (3 families with 8y, 6y, 4y), Little Cat,  
Princess St., RDW

Lesser Yellowlegs - Jun 22 (1), Cressy Marsh, KH (1st of autumn);  
Jul 31 (2), Amherst I., S&AT

Whimbrel - Jun 1 (1), Amherst I., PG (last)

Ruddy Turnstone - Jun 1 (5), Amherst I., PG (last)

Red Knot - Jun 1 (2), Amherst I., PG (last)

Stilt Sandpiper - Jul 31 (1), Amherst I., S&AT

Black Tern - Jun 29 (15 nests), Little Cat at Princess St., RDW

Black-billed Cuckoo - large numbers present, peaks Jun 2 (16)  
Roblin, 8 (10) Perth Rd., 9 (10) KFN Sanctuary, JHE, RDW

Yellow-billed Cuckoo - Jun 1-9 (4), n. of Kingston; Jul 10 (1),  
Newburgh, KFN

- Red-bellied Woodpecker - Jun 9 (1), Perth Rd., JHE, RDW
- Carolina Wren - Jun 16 (1), Jul 1 (1), Sydenham St., RDW, BAW;  
nest with young during June, Cartwrights's Pt., J. Knox et al.
- Wood Thrush - numbers remaining high Jun 1 (19) Abbey Dawn to Gananoque; 2 (17) Roblin; 8 (20) Perth Rd; 9 (24) Otter L., JHE, RDW
- Blue-winged Warbler - Jun 8 (1) Opinicon, 9 (1) Snug Harbour, JHE, RDW
- Kentucky Warbler - Jun 1-2 (1 male) P.E.Pt., RTS et al., 2nd there this spring
- Clay-colored Sparrow - Jun 30 (1 male), Lake-on-the-Mountain, KH
- Grasshopper Sparrow - Jun '23 (4), Wolfe I., CB, largest number noted.
- Evening Grosbeak - Jun 8 (1) Perth Rd., JHE, RDW

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K. Hennige D.V. Weseloh

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### RED-SHOULDERED HAWKS

Anne Robertson

We first noticed a red-shouldered hawk on 13 April. Red-shouldered hawks have their highest density in Ontario in the Shield areas north and northwest of Kingston. Provincially this species is listed as rare, due mostly to loss of habitat, particularly in southwestern Ontario. On 28 April an adult was seen two days running near the same spot, both times a view of a wonderfully speckled back disappearing amongst the trees. This alerted us to the possibility that a nest might be around and we indeed found one, in a dead birch tree about 12 metres above the ground. May was very quiet as incubation progressed (average laying date 25 April, Weir, Birds of the Kingston Region).

Sometime between June 2 and 14 hatching probably occurred - we first noticed droppings all around the tree on 15 June. On 23 June we actually saw two chicks in the nest. We set up a telescope, partially concealed but with a clear view, about 15 metres away from the nest tree. An adult spent much of that day on a branch near the nest. The two chicks had fluffy white heads, a prominent yellow cere and developing flight feathers. One chick seemed a little more developed than the other. The lack of leaves on the dead birch meant little shade on the nest and we could see the chicks panting in the mid-day heat. The next day they seemed noticeably further developed and stronger, climbing around on the nest, stretching their wings and feeding. One pulled a tasty morsel about 10 cm long from something a parent delivered. A parent visited briefly several times, presumably delivering food.

By 29 June there was a marked development in the chicks and on 2 July we heard our big nestlings calling - "kee-yeer" (feed-meee?). An adult flew in several times. Once we saw a large frog being consumed - long legs dangling from a beak; another time 20 cm of snake disappeared after several gulps. Meadow mice are the primary food and second choice is snakes in a widely varied diet, according to a Michigan study (Craighead and Craighead, Hawks, Owl & Wildlife).

Both chicks were still in the nest when we arrived on the evening of 5 July. By the next day one chick had left; the other one did a lot of calling that day and eventually walked out along a branch at 7:00 p.m., apparently staying there all night. Next morning there was great excitement as the remaining fledgling jumped and flapped in the nest and out onto the branch, clearly wanting to leave. About 9:45 a.m. it took off and flew to a nearby branch, failing to negotiate the landing and ending up hanging from a tiny twig by its talons, upside down, with wings outspread. It hung there for a full two minutes and then it let go and flapped back towards the nest, stopping "spread-eagled" in a tree that was in the way. After a short rest it took off again and flew the remaining distance to the nest. A strong gust of wind made it jump up and down several times with wings spread and then it sank down for a long rest, hidden from view, in the nest. During the afternoon it again ventured out onto the branch and stood for a long time. It was last seen around 3:00 p.m.

We still saw and often heard 'our' birds in mid-September and hope they will return to us next year to nest.

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FIELD TRIPPRESQU'ILE PROVINCIAL PARK - SEPTEMBER 15, 1991

Tony Empey

Presqu'ile is one of the prime birding spots in Ontario. A Fall field trip can often produce spectacular results in terms of species and individual birds. Unfortunately we had not yet experienced an extended cold period, so the migration had not hit its full cycle.

About 15 members braved the heavy rain and wind en route to the Park. There was a blend of familiar and new members. We were all pleased that Helen Quilliam was able to join us.

The main areas visited in the Park were Beach 4, Calf Pasture, Lighthouse, Western Campground and, of course, the bird listing board.

In total we identified 56 species. Notable were Baird's Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper and Northern Parula.

While not a great birding day by Presqu'ile standards, the camaraderie and physical beauty of the Park made it a great day.

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NORTH AMERICAN LOON FUND GRANTS

The North American Loon Fund (NALF) announces availability of 1992 grants in support of management, research, and educational projects directly related to the conservation of the family Gaviidae. In research, special consideration will be given to NALF priorities, including studies concerning capture techniques, winter ecology, migration and subadults.

Proposals in the range of \$500 to \$3000 are most likely to be considered for funding. Further guidelines for prospective applicants are available upon request from the NALF Grants Committee. Deadline for submission of proposal is December 15, 1991. Funding awards will be announced by March 15, 1992.

Please submit guideline request to:

North American Loon Fund  
6 Lily Pond R.  
Gilford, NH 03246

SIGURD T. OLSON COMMON LOON RESEARCH AWARD

ANNOUNCEMENT

LoonWatch is accepting applications for its seventh annual award for research on Common Loons in the Western Upper Great Lakes region of the United States and Canada. To apply for cash awards up to \$1000.00, a brief description (maximum 10 pp.) of the proposed research program and curriculum vitae should be submitted by the principal investigator to Terry Daulton Dunn, Coordinator, LoonWatch, Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute, Northland College, Ashland, Wisconsin 54806. Proposals must be received by January 10, 1992. Proposals by students should be accompanied by 2 letters of recommendation. The award will be granted on the basis of the project's potential to better understand and manage Upper Great Lakes populations of Common Loons. Guidelines for applicants are available from LoonWatch.

Deadline for Submission: January 10, 1992, unless otherwise noted.

Submit proposal to: LoonWatch  
Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute  
Northland College  
Ashland, Wisconsin 54806  
(715) 682-1220

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ZEBRA MUSSELS

Zebra Mussels have been reported at the Water Treatment Plant in Kingston. In September a student survey from Queen's also found a single individual near West Street.

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BOOK REVIEWS

E.G. Skelton and E.W. Skelton. 1991. Haliburton Flora, Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2C6. 142 pp. QK203.05S571990 and ISBN 0-88854-353-0.

If you go to the Haliburton region you may want to buy a copy of the Haliburton Flora, which has an attractive cover showing a yellow water lily in a pond surrounded by black spruce trees. It was published this year by the Royal Ontario Museum but, sadly, one of the authors died before publication. Mr. and Mrs. Skelton have shown what an excellent job amateur botanists can do, basing the book on their own collections and on records in herbaria.

The plants are listed in taxonomic order, and for each species the Latin and English names are given. English names are indexed alphabetically. The nomenclature follows Morton and Venn's list, which is reviewed here. Occurrence is summarized by townships, and the introduction has a map which shows them. Habitats and an estimate of frequency are given for each species; the introduction briefly describes the habitats and discusses the geology and climate of the region.

Bill Crins, who works in Algonquin Park and knows the flora of the area well, strongly praised the book in a recent review (CSEB Ontario Chapter Newsletter 3:1, 1991). He did suggest that some weedy species may have been omitted, and also named Campanula rotundifolia and Crataegus chrysocarpa as possible omissions.

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J.K. Morton and J.M. Venn. 1990. A Checklist of the Flora of Ontario - Vascular Plants. Published by and obtainable from The Department of Biology, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G1. 218 pp. QK 203 06MG and ISSN 0317-3348.

Birders may complain about Baltimore orioles losing their identity, but they have little to change in comparison with botanists. The flora of Ontario has at last been given a single authoritative list, incorporating correct and up-to-date nomenclature. The effect of seeing all the recent changes in one list, however, is enough to make the field botanist feel amnesiac. Old friends like Satureja become Clinopodium, Aster ptarmicoides becomes Solidago ptarmicoides, and the little Isanthus on alvars becomes Trichostema. It is, however, a great pleasure to see all of the changes put together, so that one does not have to consult several books for different groups of plants when making a check-list. The list is organized in taxonomic

order, listing all synonyms in a different type face from the accepted name. Genera and families are also listed in an index, so the book is easy to use, and there is an excellent list of references.

The authors are to be congratulated on completing an enormous project which has taken years of work. They have made changes to their computerized listing over more than a decade, checking records of occurrences and consulting their colleagues, as well as reading the taxonomic literature for every group. They have steered a nice course between splitters and lumpers, the taxonomists' equivalent of Scylla and Charybdis. The next great landmark to hope for is a fully illustrated flora of Ontario, complete with workable keys to all groups!

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#### TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: TANAGERS AND BATS

Jessie Deslauriers

It's not always just the birds on a birding trip that are fascinating. Keep your eyes open to the other life that's around you.

From February 15 to 25, 1990, I was part of Gus Yaki's tour to Trinidad and Tobago. And what a trip! Ten days - 207 bird species of which 147 were "life" birds; and butterflies, termites, leafcutter ants, wild guppies, four-eyed fish, dayflying and cave-roosting bats, caimans, and a very young and innocent gecko in a battle with a katydid twice its size. And our group had a horrible tendency to break out into doggerel verse for every event. (I plead guilty to the ones quoted herein.)

From February 15 to 17, we travelled from one end of Tobago to the other, visiting swamps, mountains, beaches, abandoned estates, country roads, and Marigot Bay, one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Our guide was a charming gentleman, Adolphus James, an extraordinary birder who found us almost every endemic species on Tobago, plus a mass of other birds.

Grafton Estates produced that delightful bird, the Blue-crowned Motmot. Bigger than a jay, chestnut front, turquoise eyebrow above a black mask, olive-green back and dark blue tailfeathers ending in a "bobble". They lie in wait for visiting tourists to bring handfuls of food, and sit soberly on low branches

commenting on the world situation with a deep "Whooop", followed by a lengthy pause for deliberations, and then a final commentary, "Whooop". They also pose very nicely for their portraits.

We later saw Motmots at the north end of the island, all lined up on a clothesline as if hanging their tails up to dry.

At one point during the trip, we ventured into very wet rain forest, down a path known as the "Gilpin Trace" - to find a White Sabrewing hummingbird, two species of thrushes, jacamars and flycatchers. I will NEVER again go down anything called the Gilpin Trace!

Mud, mud, Tobago mud,  
Yellow and slippery, a glutinous flood.  
You slip and you slide and you land with a thud  
In that oozy thick ochre Tobago mud!

My running shoes were worn and too smooth, and at one point the group threatened to have me run behind the bus all the way back to our resort!

One of our group, Barbara, was particularly entranced by the delightful donkeys seen on occasion on Tobago roads.

#### Barbara's Heart's Desire

Barbara wants a donkey in the very worst way  
To take her out a-birding all through the livelong day.  
Her wishes won't be answered; her desires can't be met,  
Or there'd be a sign on Adolphus' bus -  
"A birding van - to let".

Trinidad is a fascinating island, from trails to four-lane highways. We arrived at Carnival time, stayed at Pax Guest House at Mount St. Benedict in the hills up behind Port of Spain, and at night could hear the steel drums practising -- as well as a lovesick cat right below us!

We travelled from one end of the island to the other, visiting that haven of all birders - the best sewage lagoon in Trinidad which produced a Little Egret, a stray from Europe, for us. We visited savannah and an abandoned US WWII airbase, had lunch at a police station with a nesting colony of Yellow-rumped Caciques in its front yard, admired incredibly dramatic Red-breasted Blackbirds; and another day, in the Caroni Swamp, admired Scarlet Ibises and four-eyed fish, and watched the fire-coal eyes of Potoos glowing in the dark as we manoeuvred back along the canals that night. In the depths of Caroni, it almost looks like a far northern lake, but you can see the lights of Port of Spain in the distance.

One morning we woke up to find a special very large white feathered visitor with bright yellow legs on the edge of the road above us. It was, of course, Carnival time, and the Greatest Yellowlegs was waiting for us....

The big white bird sat perched upon its rail beneath the  
tower,  
To greet the waking birders at the early morning hour.  
She waved and posed and smiled to all beneath her feathered  
hood,  
But alas, poor Barb will be seen no more - she was finger-  
lickin' good!

We visited Point à Pierre Waterfowl Trust, and watched with great amusement as two Muscovy Ducks decided that they were the right size to join the Bananaquits and the Tanagers at a bird feeder. The Trust is incredibly located in the heart of the biggest oil refinery in Trinidad - a magnificent place to visit, with two species of Tree Ducks, Anhingas hanging their wings up to dry, and even a Red-capped Cardinal, a spectacular South American visitor. On the same trip we visited La Brea tarpits, where Sir Walter Raleigh "tarred" his ships.

Of course, we visited the Asa Wright Nature Centre, to watch incredibly-coloured tanagers squabbling for food at their feeders, and to clamber down - and up - and down - a path to visit Oilbirds on their nest, and listen to their wails, like the cries of a covey of goblins. The Centre has improved the path considerably. On the worst bits there is now a chain you can clutch as your feet start to slip!

And on the way back, an immense rainbow travelled down the road ahead of us. We kept feeling we could drive right through it.

Our guide in Trinidad was a young graduate of the University of the West Indies and an absolutely superb birder, Trevor Yip-Poy. And of course he too had to be immortalized in verse....

To Trevor - and the bird he's never seen...

With squeaks and squawks and whistles finely tuned  
He calls and tricks them out for us to see.  
But that Bright-rumped Attila just keeps singing from on  
high,  
"Trevor, Trevor, you can't see me in the trees".  
He's taken us o'er hill and dale; we've scrambled through  
the woods.  
He's found hummingbirds and parrots, egrets, terns and  
kiskadees.  
But that Bright-rumped Attila just keeps singing from on  
high,  
"Trevor, Trevor, you can't see me in the trees".

We've seen beach and swamp and sewage lagoons and  
 hummers on the nest,  
 Four-eyed fish and daylight bats and ants with little  
 leaves.  
 But that little bird keeps right on singing from on high,  
 "Trevor, Trevor, you can't see me in the trees".

Some day, when rainbows arch and bend and light the  
 mountainside,  
 Where motmots call and tanagers play in trees,  
 That Bright-rumped Attila will call at last and reward him  
 for his toil,  
 "Trevor, Trevor', you will see me in the trees".

(By the way, that's exactly what the bird sounds like.)

The trip was incredible. I'd love to go back. And, of course,  
 I've barely brushed the surface of all we saw and experienced.

And there's one more bit of verse to quote, in memory of the  
 birds that we will never see....

#### LOST, STRAYED, OR ... GONE FOREVER?

There once was a bird, whose voice could be heard  
 In a marsh by the side of the sea  
 A shy bird, at best, with a well-hidden nest  
 Was Arcturus caracticus V.

He posed in the pond, since of fish he was fond,  
 And winked at a friendly peewee.  
 The cattails would shake and the soft mud would quake  
 As past crept caracticus V.

But the water was drained, as farmers complained  
 That their land was too wet to be worked;  
 And then forests were slashed and the food chain was  
 smashed,  
 And pollution cleanup was shirked.

Now no more will be heard the song of that bird.  
 Ne'er a glimpse will we evermore see.  
 We'll search, but in vain. Only rumours remain  
 Of Arcturus caracticus V.

