

## Mr. MacDonald and Brewery Creek

Some years ago the late Rt. Hon. Malcolm MacDonald, who was then the British High Commissioner to Canada, spent an instructive year at Brewery Creek, a stream that flows into the Ottawa River across from Ottawa on the outskirts of Hull, Quebec. He noted the weather, tested the ice and watched the arrival of birds in the spring and their departure in the fall.

Spring begins officially in Ottawa, as elsewhere, on March 21, and by that date in that particular year it was bursting out at Brewery Creek. This was unusual.

"The snow gradually melted. It remained longest in the woods or beneath groups of trees where it was partially protected from the sun, a glistening carpet of sugary spring snow. Before it wholly disappeared the next phase in the cycle of bird life had commenced. In the spring birds lose no time in progressing towards the achievement of the supreme aim which governs all their activities — procreation, the renewal and preservation of their various species. No sooner have they completed migration (which might be supposed to exhaust them) than they take the next step, the securing of 'territory' on their breeding grounds . . ."

The male birds sang their mating songs, and the most conspicuous were the brown, striped and streaked song sparrows.

"They perched near the tops of shrubs or small trees, faced the sun, tilted their heads, opened wide their beaks and poured forth songs so vehemently that their throats swelled almost to the bursting point."

By the 24th of March the first snows were gone and Mr. MacDonald actually sunbathed on two successive afternoons. Then, alas, the sun withdrew and the temperature dropped. April came in with a gale and ice formed on the edge of the river, but then things warmed up. By the sixth day of the month the buds on the trees had, in Mr. MacDonald's exultant words, "turned into infant leaves and a few small dandelions and a patch of strawberries appeared on the banks."

The warmth was followed, inevitably, by a cold spell which was followed in turn by warm rain. The dandelions lost their flowers and grew fuzzy grey heads, and the richer yellow of buttercups arrived. And then, in rapid succession, came anemones, white dogwood, lavender, speedwell and pink spring beauty. By the middle of May the trees were covered with leaves and the birds sang hidden among them. Spring had definitely arrived.

### Mr MacDonald's Bird Count

The birds that came to Brewery Creek were pretty much the ones that came, sooner or later, to all of southern Canada. Sixteen species arrived in March, eighteen in April and fifty-three in May.



All were migrants, though some individuals among the hardier species had probably hung around Ottawa all winter. On March 5th he saw a few starlings and on March 7th a crow. On the 8th pine siskins, on the 9th, a horned lark and on the 10th, an English skylark. These were followed by a herring gull, American goldfinches, song sparrows, bronzed grackles, American robins, a couple of ducks (merganser and golden-eye), a cowbird, a red-winged blackbird, a northern flicker, a meadowlark and a belted kingfisher.

In April Mr. MacDonald counted, among others, various duck species, slate coloured juncos, lesser scaups, savannah sparrows, downy woodpeckers, purple finches, barn swallows, spotted sandpipers and killdeer.

