



SIGNALS FROM T•A•R•S•U•S

February 2004

This is the Winter 2004 issue of *Signals from TARSUS*. Due to delays in receiving U.K. publications, this newsletter accompanies *Mixed Moss*, *Outlaw*, and *Signals*. I am informed that the U.K. has changed mailing houses which we hope will alleviate some of the distribution problems we and other overseas groups have had over the last several months. Please note that this *Signals* contains the advance information about the Annual General Meeting May 28-30 in Edinburgh, Scotland, including booking forms. If you plan to attend I encourage you to get your booking information in as soon as possible as space will be limited.

In this issue we have the second “namesake animals” article from Molly McGinnis, and the first of what is intended to be a series from Des Kelsall, in addition to our regular column from Mary Wessel Walker. Also please note the [change of contact information](#) for the TARS U.S. Coordinator!

Welcome

A warm welcome to Steve and Mary Crouch (KS); Moss Hardman (OR); Cascade Kirst (CA); Alan, Ian, Madeleine & Rauri MacMillan and Jeanne Ouellette (RI); Nick, Gittan and Adam Mockridge (CA); and Kristin White (MD).

As a reminder, the new membership rates are:

Junior:	\$8.50	Adult:	\$34.00
Student:	\$17.00	Family:	\$42.50
Pensioner:	\$25.50	Corporation:	\$68.00

Change of Contact Info for U.S. Coordinator

Effective immediately, my new address and telephone number are:

Dave Thewlis
TARS U.S. Coordinator
1550 Dena Drive
McKinleyville, CA 95519-4146
707-840-0472

Mail sent to the P.O. Box in Trinidad will continue to be forwarded for a few months, but please note the new address and use it in the future.

My e-mail address remains unchanged:
dthewlis@arthur-ransome.org

Exchange Rate

Remember that our new (as of 1 October 2003) exchange rate for transactions handled by the U.S. Coordinator with the U.K. is **\$1.70 = £1.00**. This applies for everything TARSUS members pay for through the Coordinator, including membership application and renewal, TARS Stall items, etc.

Membership Renewals

Renewals were due on 1 January 2004. ***If you have not yet renewed, please do so before April!*** The membership list will be purged of non-renewals prior to mailing the April publications.

Reminder: 2004 Amazon Publication

The 2004 Amazon Publication does not yet have a title, but the advance information says “we hope to bring together all the available correspondence concerning the Swallows and Amazons series” (including correspondence between Ransome and the Altounyans, Ransome and his publisher, Ransome and advisors, some fan letters from children and Ransome’s responses), illustrated by contemporary photographs, sketches and facsimiles.”

If you wish to subscribe prior to publication, please send \$30 to cover the book plus air post to the United States to the Coordinator (information at the end of this newsletter) and indicate on your check that it is for the 2004 Amazon Publication. I’ve already received several subscriptions; I anticipate you will be able to subscribe until late spring or early summer of 2004.

Feature Column: Ransome Readers Recommend

Here is a place where you can really contribute to your fellow members, especially Juniors, by writing a brief (2-3 paragraph) review of a book that you really liked and which you think other TARS members will enjoy.

I’m not going to keep running a “blank” column forever though – so if nobody sends me a review soon I will assume there’s not enough interest in them to keep this column going.

Résumés

If you haven’t sent one please do so; it is always fascinating to learn about fellow Ransome enthusiasts, and we haven’t gotten any new ones for some time.



Namesake Animals from the Swallows & Amazons Books

Molly McGinnis

Great Northern?

Gavia immer Great Northern Diver (Britain); Common Loon (North America) (*Colymbus Immer* in Dick’s bird book -which must have been a very old-fashioned one as the name *Colymbus* was replaced by *Urinator* in the 1800’s (we can forgive Ransome for skipping this one), then in 1931 by *Gavia*!

Could there be a Great Northern nesting in the British Isles? *Could* there have been one where Dick found it? Yes! Great Northern Divers have nested in Scotland in recent years -one pair was confirmed in 1970 and another in 1996. There are no “confirmed sightings” listed before that. Dick’s birds, with its identity confirmed by his photos, would indeed have made ornithological history! (There had undoubtedly been an occasional GN nesting unnoticed in Scotland before such records became of interest.)

In North America the Great Northern Diver is the “Common” Loon and has cult status. It’s the state bird of Minnesota (where 12,000 pairs nest) and there are state and national loon societies (try a Google search on “NALF”). You’ll hear the eerie laughing or yodeling territorial warning call any time “nature sounds” are played, whether as music or TV backgrounds. *Gavia immer* nests on freshwater lakes across the northern United states and Canada and must have expanded east little by little, establishing nesting through Iceland (500 miles from Scotland), to the Faeroes, (200 miles) and finally perhaps to Scotland. This probably happened in recent geological times, because *Gavia immer* looks the same on both sides of the Atlantic, suggesting that the European birds haven’t had time to evolve away from the North American group. It could have been a few million years ago (Loons are one of the most ancient birds -there were loonlike birds 8 million years ago) when the Atlantic land masses hadn’t drifted apart so much.

A few thousand Divers, three species (GN, Red-throated and Black-throated -- *G. immer*, *stellata* and *arctica* respectively) winter on the seas around the British Isles (and as far south as Spain) and Dick and Ransome would have seen them, but all species look alike in dull winter plumage (*immer* means burnt ashes). As spring approaches, Divers molt to handsome breeding plumage and head north. Almost all of these Great Northern -about 600 pairs-- nest in Iceland. A few pairs nest regularly in the Faeroes, between Iceland and Scotland. The other two species often nest in Northern Scotland and the Laird was quite right to suspect that Dick's enthusiasm had run away with him when Dick said he'd seen nesting Great Northern. There are not very many GNs even in winter in Europe -probably under two thousand.

East or west, waters like Dick's loch have everything loons need to nest and raise young -a safe island with a good haul-out and quiet water with lots of small fish and invertebrates, where the parents can fish for the chicks and teach them to catch their own fish. But populations are declining everywhere and one frightening reason is that acid rain is sterilizing these "nursery ponds" and they are very slow to recover even where acid rain is coming under control. Loons are slow breeders and raise, on average, only one chick every other year even when conditions are good. While loons may return to lakes where they've failed to raise chicks because of people and boat disturbance, or egg predation by raccoons and gulls attracted by summer communities' garbage dumps, the fishless ponds are slow to recover and loons may leave them permanently. Sadly, the worst hit areas include Scotland and Northeastern North America. The few loons that think of nesting in Scotland may never return not because of egg collectors but because dirty power plants have ruined their lochs.

Great Northern is an exciting book to a biologist. It shows the beginnings of a biology we now take for granted, a public rather than a private biology whose concern is for conservation, preservation, and observation of species. There are three important biological threads, expertly interwoven. We're shown the damage the old style shoot-em-first museum collectors and "vanity biologists" and especially egg collectors can do (for a blood-curdling read go to http://www.audubon.org/bird/BoA/F45_G1a.html). But the rising New Biology gives us the new order: Dick, focusing on intelligent observation and concerned for conservation and preservation, is victor and hero. The more academic biology is set against a background of economic biology: a major cash crop of the islanders, driving the unique way of life to a large extent, is renting the hunting of "their" highly managed herds of Red Deer (Americans would call them Elk).

Especially for Californians

The California coast has some of the best loon watching anywhere. Though Common Loons quit nesting in California about 1900, they winter along our coast and into Baja and sometimes change into breeding plumage before they leave. Monterey Bay is famous for loon-watching and we've seen *Gavia immer* and other species in Humboldt Bay, Mendocino, Tomales Bay, Berkeley Marina, Elkhorn Slough Reserve (Moss Landing) and down the coast in San Pedro and San Diego Bays. <http://www.montereybay.com/creagrus/loons.html> has a nice writeup and pictures.

Was Ransome's Diver Real? - S & M McGinnis

Ransome hints that there is a secret location where there really was a diver nesting. Was there? We think yes, given that we haven't found a record of any trips to Iceland or the Faeroes. As biologists we look at http://www.audubon.org/bird/BoA/F45_G1a.html.

1. He drew and described neck markings that would only be seen in the breeding and nesting season.
2. The call "like wild laughter, as if the two great birds were sharing some fantastic joke" is a territorial warning, only heard in breeding season.
3. "...moving in an odd way, as if it could not get properly up on its legs." GNs only go onto land in breeding season! The intimate descriptions of land behaviour are very convincing.

Yes, it all could have been from books and native tales but these two biologists are convinced that he's reporting, not transcribing! Ransome certainly must have observed Divers on a breeding pond -the behaviour is just too closely described. Some of the other observations would be applicable to other species but 1, 2, 3 only apply to Great Northern.

We'd love to hear from any members who have better biographical information than we came up with. Was Ransome ever in the Faeroes or Iceland in summer? Are there descriptions of nesting Arctic (Black-throated) or Red-Throated divers in his journals or letters?

How Did the Divers Get There? - S & M McGinnis

Titty's story is as good as any (p. 183). The males get to the breeding ponds first so it could as well have been the female that got lost or hurt so that when they finally took flight again they were attracted to a loch or pond some hundreds of miles east and south of their normal breeding grounds. We think these Divers must have wintered far away -off Spain or even the Azores where they are very occasionally seen-- to be so late and tired.

Are there any sailor members who can tell us which way the winds would be blowing as the Divers make their way toward the breeding grounds in early summer? From the Atlantic coast of Spain they'd travel about 1200 miles north and 600 east, probably fishing their way up the coasts and making the last few flights in an easterly direction.



Readers may recall a letter from Des Kelsall in New Zealand which I printed in the August, 2003 *Signals from TARSUS*. I recently received another letter from Des, in which he commented "Your "cri de coeur" in the November newsletter struck a bell with me, having been in the same boat (nobody ever seems ready to provide material!) After scratching my head a bit, I thought I would write up some of my African experiences. Though these may seem, at first, to be somewhat remote from A.R. and TARS (but wait and see!)"

So here is the first of what I hope will be several articles about his African experiences, and we will indeed have to wait for the Ransome connection!

A Fisheries Officer on Lake Victoria

Des. Kelsall

In 1948 I went out to East Africa as a Fisheries Officer in the Colonial Fisheries Service to join the newly-established Lake Victoria Fisheries Service. This Service was responsible for the whole Lake, some 26,000 square miles, which was split between Tanganyika (roughly 50%),) Uganda (roughly 35%) and Kenya (roughly 15%) by area. Uganda and Kenya had catch records covering a number of years, but there were no such records in Tanganyika and our brief was to discover what fisheries existed and what they were catching. We were also responsible for suggesting and implementing any improvements in the types of net used, fishing techniques and the treatment of fish landed

I travelled to Mwanza at the south end of the Lake in Tanganyika, where the Department's H.Q. was located. The staff at the time of my arrival consisted of the Chief Fisheries Officer, Lt. Cdr. George Cole R.N.R., an African clerk/typist of dubious skills and a Head Fish Guard, Kitwara Irinje by name, a wonderful, elderly man who had served in the Police in the days when Tanganyika was a German Colony.

Some weeks after arriving in Mwanza I was provided with a 45-foot motor fishing vessel, a wooden craft built in South Africa and shipped up to Mombasa for carriage by rail to the East African Railways and Harbours dockyard at Kisumu, Kenya, in the north-eastern corner of the Lake. There, a 72 h.p. Widdop diesel engine had been installed and a wheelhouse and internal accommodation had been built. The engine was large, cumbersome and not particularly efficient but it was all that had been available at the time. Trials carried out on completion proved that the vessel was capable of about 9 knots.

My Boss told me to get out and to start discovering what was happening in the fisheries of the Tanganyika waters of the Lake. Talk about a "broad brief"! I had some 13,000 square miles of Lake and 1500 miles of shoreline to investigate!

I quickly developed a monthly working routine under which I spent two weeks on safari in the boat, now christened *Heron*, and two weeks in the office, dealing with the inevitable "bumf" and admin. The safari work was fascinating and

took me into some remote corners of the Lake, especially at the south-west end where the Africans had seldom, if ever, seen a European before. A hydrographic survey had been carried out, 50 years previously, by a Captain Whitehouse R.N. and the available Admiralty charts were based on his work. Over the years, changes had taken place on the Lake and hazards such as reefs existed where none were shown on the chart, making navigation sometimes hazardous and the Kelvin & Hughes recording echo sounder fitted to the boat often Invaluable.

There were, I soon found, three main types of fishery, gill nets of 2½ to 5” mesh which were set between moorings to fish either near the surface or on the bottom, draft (or seine) nets of small mesh hauled on long ropes usually over a sandy bottom, and “traditional” fisheries which used home made basketwork traps of several types and which operated close to the shore or in the mouth of a stream or river. Catches varied widely, according to the type of gear and the area where nets were fished. The main catch, taken principally in the larger-mesh gill nets, was Tilapia, a Cichlid fish rather like a freshwater bream. A bye-catch here was catfish (*Clarias* sp. And *Bagrus* sp.), Barbel and Lungfish, a curious creature which had to come to the surface to breathe and which drowned if kept under water – an unusual trait in a fish! The smaller mesh gill nets caught mainly a Cyprinid fish called Labeo, the heaviest catches being made at the mouth of streams when they were in flood during the rains.

To be continued.



Missing From TARS Canada:

In the interests of space and postage (as we have a rather large set of publications to send out this time) I am carrying over the Quiz on *Pigeon Post* (and the answers to *Coot Club*) until the next *Signals from TARSUS*.



From our 10-Gong Contributing Editor Mary Wessel Walker:

In Which We are Susan (or perhaps Dorothea)

My dad is an excellent cook. He loves to cook and takes a great deal of pride in preparing tasty and diverse meals for his family. It is for this reason that I have never learned to cook, and am entering my twentieth year barely able to make anything more challenging than ramen noodles. (Actually, I can *bake*, and have won prizes at local fairs for bread and cookies, but that’s not the same thing at all in truth. I’m sure Susan would agree that cooking is less about following precise directions and more about having a feel for things.) But all this is changing! This year my friend Anna has been inspiring me to try cooking.

Under Anna’s supervision I’ve helped in preparing a few meals with only a moderate level of disaster overall. The first meal we made together was a dinner for our Campus Ministry group. We planned quite a large menu, centering around red beans and rice, but also including some winter squash and green beans bought at a farmer’s market in West Philadelphia, and some homemade bread. We used the large church kitchen and had some help from other members of the group in preparing the meal. We were almost done with cooking, and it was getting to that point where everything was coming together at once, when I took the pot of red beans and rice off the stove and set it on the edge of the counter while turning to take something else out of the oven.

Something happened, and the beans fell off the counter and spilled all over the floor! There went our main dish, irredeemable. It was an awful moment, especially since it happened right as everyone was arriving for dinner. (The dinner was still fairly successful because we had enough side dishes for everyone to get something

to eat). Some day I may manage to live down spilling the beans, and in the mean time, I tell the story often to keep myself humble.

Fortunately, I also have a cooking success story to keep me going. This January, during my vacation, I took a two-week holiday and went to England, where I spent five days visiting my TARS friend Carla at Lancaster University. Carla and I had many adventures, including a day-trip to the Lake District, and a run in with some truly horrible tea, but that’s another story. What you have to understand is that at Lancaster, as with many British universities, they don’t really have dining halls. They have kitchens in the dorms where all the students fend for themselves, which means that most of the time they eat canned beans and frozen pizza.

Occasionally, though, people will make some forays into the world of “real cooking”. On my first evening there, for example, one of Carla’s hallmates prepared himself some mashed potatoes and grilled chicken using a Foreman grill. Carla and I decided that we should try doing some real cooking at some point while I was there, though she has little more cooking experience than I do. At the time I was reading *Hope’s Edge*, by Frances Moore Lappé, author of *Diet for a Small Planet*. Like *Diet for a Small Planet*, *Hope’s Edge* has a number of recipes in the back, and Carla and I decided that it would be fun to try one of these. We looked at the different recipes and picked out one that we thought was within our (extremely limited) cooking capabilities.

I should have been worried when, as we were reading the recipes, Carla asked me, “What are cups?” When I explained that they are a unit of measure she said, “Oh, I have some cups.” I did finally get her to understand that they weren’t quite the same thing, and we decided that I would have to just estimate how much a cup was. Fortunately, all we really needed to measure in cups was rice, so it wasn’t a big deal. The dish we were making was a cooked rice and vegetable base with an uncooked (but pureed) vegetable sauce on top.

We were fairly successful in finding all the ingredients we needed at the little university grocery store. We decided to substitute sweet green peppers for green chili peppers, which actually worked out surprisingly well. The meal turned out to be delicious, though I think I slightly overestimated how much 1/8th of a cup of vinegar is. We were so proud of ourselves. I am quite encouraged by my success and plan to try cooking more in the near future. Soon I may be quite as good as Susan, but for the moment I feel like Dorothea in *Picts and Martyrs*, with some cooking triumphs and some disasters. Probably what I really need is practice.

About the author: Mary is a sophomore philosophy major and math minor at Bryn Mawr College.



New Address and Telephone Numbers!

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