

Outlook on Lifestyle

Reflections on a 'breeding ground for mosquitoes'

I think back at times on how my interest in nature arose and developed. There was definitely some parental influence. When I was young, my father brought home pets. Lizards, tortoises and horned lizards took up residence in downstairs terrariums and those exotic creatures spurred my interest. I can recall proudly escorting my grade two class to my home to view our 4 ft iguanas.

I remember also, a pond that formerly existed in a field behind my house. It was here that I made my first enthusiastic inquiries into

the natural environment around me. I caught frogs and tadpoles and to my mother's chagrin, garter snakes.

In the manner of children past present and future, these creatures would be carried triumphantly back to the household and, despite my mother's earnest protests, many would become temporary boarders. I became amazed, my mother horrified, at the ability of garter snakes to squeeze through tiny holes in their enclosures. Once a quartet of the striped reptiles decided to take leave of their living quarters and establish dominion over the rest of the basement. Our clothes didn't get washed for a fortnight.

When I was a little older, my friends and I began to make forays further afield in search of animals and adventure. Most frequently we would explore Silver Creek in the Cedarvale area. That area became our "turf" - we knew it, and the creatures it sheltered, intimately. We christened a sandbar in the stream "Reptile Island" because of the numbers of snakes and turtles we'd find there.

My favourite destination though,

Backyard Naturalist

By DON SCALLEN
Herald Special



was the old mill pond on River Road. To me, this stagnant duckweed covered pond was a veritable Garden of Eden. Swallows played over the surface of the water and huge bullfrogs sat like monoliths at the water's edge, occasionally signalling their vitality by snapping up a dragonfly.

The creatures that held the most fascination for me were the turtles and the mill pond was chalk full of those armoured reptiles. There were painted - they would haul themselves out on logs by the dozen.

There also lurked in the pond a turtle with a malevolent reputation - the snapper. The mill pond was home to numerous snappers. Some of the older specimens were usually clearly visible, their impressive bulks cutting swaths through the duckweed.

To me, the snapping turtle was one of the most exciting, impressive animals that could be found. The ridged back, the long jagged tail, the sharp beak and its aggressive nature impressed me greatly. Snapping turtles were like mini-dinosaurs. They seemed too outlandish, too exotic to be found in the rather civilized environs of Southern Ontario.

I remember capturing one of the largest snappers in the pond and finding several fat, juicy leeches lodged in the pits of its back legs. With my friends we formulated a plan of action and decided to return another day to remove the leeches. Though as harebrained and misguided as a scheme of Tom Sawyer, we returned to the pond to recapture the giant.

After perhaps two hours of sloshing through the black malodorous ooze of the pond bottom we again captured the beast. I grabbed its long bony tail and held the snapper at arm's length. As I did, my buddies maneuvered as close as they could to the flailing snapper without coming within range of its gaping jaws and poured salt on the leeches.

We'll never know if we were successful in removing them. The snapper was by now, very upset. I placed it back in the pond where it made a speedy retreat from its would be helpers.

Some kids didn't share our affection and concern for snapping turtles and the other creatures in the pond. They came with BB guns, intent on using the harmless and beautiful occupants of the pond for target practice.

The pond remained as a magnet to neighbourhood children until a fateful day when the Credit River was dredged upstream from the old Barber dam. Most of the pond was filled in and undoubtedly, countless numbers of creatures were smothered. I was returning home from work that day and stopped to view the extent of the damage. I talked for a while to the dredging operator who informed me that "The pond wasn't of any use to anyone - just a breeding ground for mosquitoes" if he only knew.

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Take a cruise this summer

The summer is only beginning so you have from now until October to investigate your options. To take a free trip in a cruise/fishing boat designed especially for wheelchairs.

The owner of this specially equipped 30-ft. wooden hulled, sea skiff is Mr. Jim Catalano. A few years ago he gave up his job to devote time to the information of a non-profit organization, Excaliber Leisure Skills Centre Inc (ESLC) which offers free tours for American and Canadians, operating out of Buffalo NY. In 1986, in its first year, 1,100 Americans saw Niagara River, Lake Erie, and the Black Rock Canal.

As the dock has been designed to permit wheelchair access and a hydraulic lift lowers one on to the deck. Once on deck there are handrails, iron rings to secure the chair and another lift to take one below deck where two accessible washrooms are provided, as well as, two cots. Besides this, a diagram of the boat and instructions for VHF radio operations are written in braille. The harbor is also wheelchair accessible with a restaurant, washroom, and picnic tables.

Volunteers are relied on to operate the boat and donations keep the expenses paid. Mr. Catalano is anxious that all citizens experience the joys of the water and would welcome visitors and volunteers from Canada.

If you would like more information, call Mr. Catalano at 716-876-5297 or write to Excaliber Leisure Skills Centre c/o James Catalano, 465 Colvin Avenue, Buffalo NY 14216.

Against the odds

PAT WOODE

Two to three trips daily are made by the admiral P.R. Lucci out of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority Small Boat Harbor (Buffalo) for two to four hour sport fishing or boating/sightseeing trips. Twelve people can be accommodated, four in wheelchairs. Boarding the vessel is no problem.

Last week, we discussed the Human Ecology Foundation of Canada, a support group which is attempting to address the problems facing those with extreme environmental hypersensitivity.

The quarterly newspaper, published by the Ecology Foundation, is recommended reading for anyone who may be experiencing problems or those who want to learn more about good food, vitamins and minerals, housing requirements, and environmental hazards. Membership is \$20 per year. Two local residents, Marg Lamothe and Wendy Medland discuss the "20th Century disease" in more depth on Halton Cable 4, "Against the Odds". The show was aired Wednesday, and will be rebroadcast Thursday, July 23 at 7 p.m.

Here's some good news for Milton residents. A special door-to-door van service will be introduced in Milton on Aug. 5, between the hours of 9:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., every Wednesday for a three month trial period.

If you cannot board regular buses, you may apply for this parallel service by obtaining an application form from the town office after July 15.

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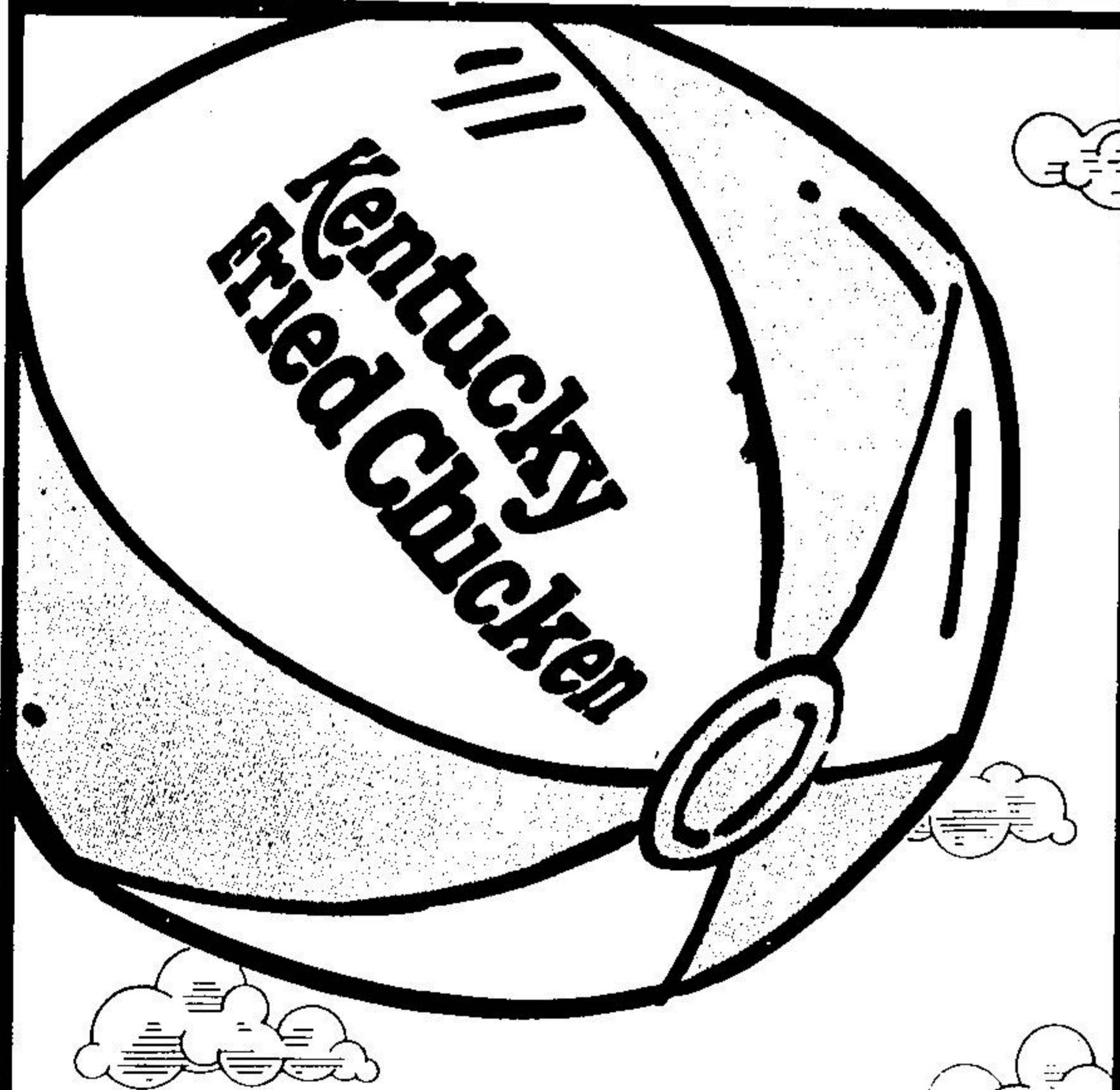
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