

A photograph of Robert Bateman, an older man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue jacket over a red shirt and a blue button-down shirt. He is sitting in a black office chair at a wooden table, focused on signing a large print of his artwork. The print depicts a tiger in a snowy, wooded landscape with bare trees. He is holding a yellow pencil in his right hand and has his left hand on the print. The background shows a cluttered workshop or studio with various items on shelves and tables.

Robert Bateman: Spokesperson for Nature

By Mike Davis

Robert Bateman signing prints
of his art. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

The first time I met Robert Bateman, the famous artist, was about 25 years ago at a conference I was attending. He gave a dinner speech and passed around his sketch books for the audience to look at. They had one of his own sketches on the front cover, with a price tag on them. I thought it interesting that he paid for books with his own art on them, when I would have thought he could get them for free. Yet I was amazed that he trusted us with his own personal sketch books. What an incredible

A birder since age 12, Robert Bateman sketched these Canada geese over the Niagara Escarpment. ►
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privilege it was to examine them. His drawings included sketches of wildlife and portraits of political leaders like Colin Powell. His command of his pencil and his ability to capture his subject with a few strokes really impressed me. So last November, when I had the opportunity to interview him for *Escarpment Views*, I jumped at the chance.

Early Trail Workers, 1962, from left: Charles Harris, Robert Bateman, Ray Lowes and Aubrie Diem. ►
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BRUCE TRAIL CONSERVANCY ARCHIVES.



Bateman was in Ontario on a promotional tour for his art and he was willing to be interviewed while he signed prints of his painting of a tiger at a waterfall. He had already been asked every question possible, he said. Yet my first question, "When did you first become aware of the Niagara Escarpment?" brought the response "No one has asked me that question before!"

Although Bateman could not pin down when he first became aware of the Escarpment, he said

Robert Bateman built a dream house with a view of Rattlesnake Point in Halton's part of the Niagara Escarpment. ►
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MAR 3



Old Buffalo
at Ngorongoro
attacked by 11 lions
took refuge in lake
near hippos
which lions were afraid of.

MAR 4. Same buffalo
the next morning.



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SimbaKopje MAR 7

"We can afford the luxury of w



COUCH GRASS
Sporobolus sp.



Just two pages from Bateman's sketchbook while on a trip to Africa. COPYRIGHT ROBERT BATEMAN.

Robert Bateman: Spokesperson for Nature

that he was "conscious of the Niagara Escarpment being a natural area" when he first took up birding around the age of 12 in the ravines of Toronto. While it was "not an outstanding birding area, it was a lovely natural area."

The Best Place

After finishing university, briefly teaching high school in Thornhill and taking a year to travel around

the world, in 1958 he decided to teach at Nelson High School in Burlington.

"I wanted to live near enough to Toronto for the museum or theatre," he explained, "but also to live near rough country and nature. The Escarpment was perfect."

He wanted to build his dream house on land that had a woods, a stream and a view. Being me-

thodical with a geography background, he got a topographical map, drew a 12-mile arc out from the school on it, and visited every spot suitable. He found the perfect place with a north-facing view, which he says is great for artists, and a beautiful view of Rattlesnake Point. He bought the 10 acres near Lowville in Burlington for \$4,500.

He drew blueprints for his house and then had it built with beams that still have adze marks

on them. He also used barnboards to complete the house, adding an upstairs level later. I was fortunate enough to photograph this house and meet the current owners, Klaus and Brigitte Schreyer, for a feature article in the premier issue of this magazine [Winter 2008].

When asked where was the best place along the Escarpment, Bateman had a sharp reply. "That is a hopeless question. It's like asking who is your favourite kid or what is your favourite painting?"



The Niagara Escarpment is so full of beauty spots and wonderful places, except for the quarries and a little bit of development here and there. The entire Niagara Escarpment is the best place.”

Then he described the landscape near his house in Lowville. “I’d walk through our woods and over to the end of the Blind Line at Britannia Road. This was a good aerobic hike. I’d go down to Cedar Springs Creek and come to the lovely swing-

ing bridge that the Bruce Trail Association built down there, but I would not usually cross the bridge. I would turn right and walk along the river. There is a beautiful old abandoned stone house that is in ruins down there. We called it the Macbeth House and often if we had company and we had time, we’d go for that hike. It’s a beautiful hike back up the hill.”

Niagara Escarpment Commissioner

In 1973 Bateman was appointed by then-Premier of Ontario William Davis, to sit on the newly founded Niagara Escarpment Commission. Ray Lowes, a founder of the Bruce Trail, was on the commission at the same time.

“Ray was a legendary figure,” says Bateman. “I think that Ray, working at Stelco in Hamilton and living in suburbia, saw his mandate as protecting the Escarpment for the great masses of urban dwellers and people who needed a lovely amenity for family hikes and weekends. He was against all kinds of housing and privatization. I evolved my philosophy as a spokesperson for nature. I wanted to speak for the Great Horned Owls and the Pileated Woodpeckers and the beavers.” Bateman agrees with Lowes who said of the Niagara Escarpment, “Use it or lose it.”

“We need people to have experiential learning which goes deep into their souls by experiencing the Niagara Escarpment,” he said. “Then they are voters and writers of letters to the editor and the political-pressure people to help with the preserve and protect.”

Bateman remained on the Commission until he moved to British Columbia in 1985. Through his life and famously through his art, he has shared his passion for nature, in the form of paintings, prints and even rough sketches handed out to audience members. **EV**