

The
**VICTORIA
NATURALIST**

Vol. 2, No. 1

April, 1945



TRILLIUM or WAKE-ROBIN
Trillium ovatum

—Photo by V. E. L. Goddard.



THE VICTORIA NATURALIST

Published by

_____ The Victoria Natural History Society _____

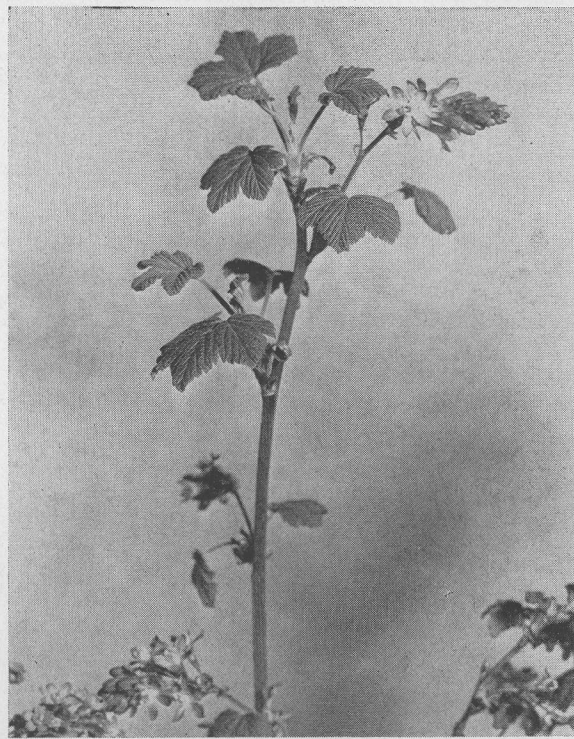
The second annual meeting of the Society was held on the 13th of March, 1945 in the Provincial Museum. Mr. William Mathews acted as Chairman of the meeting and duly appointed the officers who had been nominated at the previous meeting. The annual report was read by the Secretary, Mrs. M.R. Watson, also the statement of Receipts and Disbursements for the year and a list of the various meetings held during the year was also given.

On the recommendation of the Executive, a Program Committee was elected with Mr. Winkler, Chairman, and Mr. Colin Curtis. The function of this Committee is to arrange the programs for each General Meeting, to co-ordinate the meetings and field trips of the various Groups and to provide the Editor with a schedule of activities for publication each month.

Votes of thanks were awarded to the Honorary Presidents, The Honourable H.G.T. Perry and Major Allan Brooks, to the members of the Executive and to Mr. Morrison of the Provincial Library and Mr. Cunningham for their assistance in obtaining accommodation for the various meetings.

A beautiful specimen of amethyst crystals from Eastern Canada was shown by Miss Cox. The meeting concluded with the showing of two very interesting movies, "Birds of Canada" and "Sea-Lions".

Subscriptions are now due and should be paid to Mrs. K. Watson, 42 Linden Avenue.



RED FLOWERING CURRANT
Ribes sanguineum

—Photo by Knight's Studio.

STATEMENT of Receipts & Disbursements for the year ending 1st March 1945

Receipts

93 Single Memberships @ 2.00	186.00
20 Family " @ 3.00	<u>60.00</u>
Making a total of 133 members	246.00
Sale of Magazines	<u>11.35</u>
Receipts from all sources	<u>\$ 257.35</u>

Expenditures

Secretaries Expenses	
Postage	10.88
Printing	7.50
Stationery	<u>21.09</u>
	39.47
Magazine Costs	
Postage	12.75
Printing	156.00
Cuts	<u>14.50</u>
	183.25
	222.72
Leaving a credit balance for year	<u>34.63</u>
	<u>\$ 257.35</u>

Signed, M. R. Watson, Secretary.
A. L. Meugens, Auditor.

Meetings held during the year ending 13th March 1945

General Meetings indoor	10
Special with Pac. B & M Club	1
Outdoor General at Mr. Taylor's	<u>1</u> 12

Group Meetings	Indoor	Outdoor	
Botany	5	8	13
Marine Biology	2	4	6
Zoology	4	2	6
Ornithology	4	4	8
Entomology	1	2	3
Geology	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>7</u> 43
	19	24	
Total Meetings for year			55

VANCOUVER ISLAND SNAKES

By G. Clifford Carl

Sometime after the first warm days of spring begin to waken the creatures that are inactive during the winter months the snakes begin to appear, crawling sluggishly to sunny spots where they doze soaking up the warmth of the sun's rays. Having spent the winter coiled up in some place of refuge such as may be found under logs and roots of old stumps they creep forth, slowly throw off the sluggishness of hibernation and make ready for a meal after their long fast.

Garter snakes only, are found on Vancouver Island, other mainland species such as the rubber snake, blue racer, bull snake or rattlesnake, found chiefly in the interior of the Province, apparently are not present on the Island, either because conditions are unsuited for them or because means of reaching the Island were not available when dispersal took place.

At least three kinds of Vancouver Island garter snakes may be distinguished: the Northwestern or Striped garter snake (Thamnophis sirtalis), the Puget garter snake (T. ordinoides ordinoides), and the Wandering garter snake (T. o. vagrans). All are rather slender snakes with long, tapering tails, and usually with three longitudinal stripes running from head to tail tip. The three kinds may be identified by means of the following "key":

General colour black, with or without red blotches on sides - - - - - Striped garter snake.

General colour not black.

Head small, very little wider than neck; plates of upper jaw usually seven and plates of lower jaw usually nine (on each side from jaw tip to angle of mouth) - - - - - Puget garter snake.

Head large, definitely wider than neck; plates of upper jaw usually eight and plates of lower jaw usually ten, - - - - - Wandering garter snake.

Garter snakes vary greatly in colour and pattern so that it is unwise to depend entirely on these features when attempting to identify a specimen. However, colours may occasionally be of assistance. For example, a snake having red in the dorsal stripe or on the belly is likely to be a Puget garter snake; one with a black ground colour and red blotches on the sides is almost certain to be a Striped garter snake while one having a brilliant yellow dorsal stripe bordered by dark spots is, in all likelihood, a Wandering garter snake. Specimens of Puget garter snake all black in colour have been taken on Vancouver Island and a white one (albinistic) has been taken at North Vancouver on the mainland.

Young garter snakes are born alive about midsummer; twenty or more offspring may be produced in one brood. Food consists largely of insects, earthworms, slugs, salamanders, frogs, tadpoles and occasionally small birds. In the case of the Striped garter snake and the Wandering garter snake, both of which often are found near water, small fish and fish eggs may also be taken.

Garter snakes are commonly found in gardens where they may take up a more or less permanent residence. Their presence here should be considered beneficial since they prey upon many common garden pests. Nevertheless they are occasionally looked upon as unwelcome visitors particularly by persons who have a strong dislike for reptiles and the problem of ridding the garden of these creatures arises. Several methods may be employed, the most direct one being killing of the trespassers. This method, however, does not prevent other snakes from moving in from the surrounding areas. Another, and perhaps more effective way, is to clear the garden of all rubbish, piles of rock or other materials which may provide shelter. Snakes will not remain where there is no cover to give them refuge. Despite the fear which many persons have for snakes, the Vancouver Island members of this group are harmless to man. Occasionally one will bite, particularly in the case of the Wandering garter snake and then only when cornered or molested, but of course the bite is not poisonous and under normal conditions the wound will heal quickly.

APRIL FLOWERS ON AND ABOUT MOUNT DOUGLAS

by Robert Connell

Our climate makes the spring season correspond to that of the British Isles, February, March and April rather than to that of the greater part of continental North America where March, April and May are the usually accepted spring months. Some of our spring flowers at this end of Vancouver Island even appear in unusually favourable seasons as early as January. But the month that normally brings our spring blossoming to its full richness is of course April. I propose we take a country ramble about and up Mount Douglas that we may observe some of the herbaceous plants that are to be found in bloom there in the April of the average spring.

Mount Douglas forty years ago was known only as Cedar Hill, and I cannot but think it a pity the old name has been discarded, for it recalled the ancient cedar forest that in the early days of settlement marked the vicinity. However, leaving the Old Cedar Hill Road we turn down Mt. Douglas cross-road and then sharply to the right proceed to the confines of the Park and the base of the great hill. Here before we enter the woods we may hope to see in the grassy border *Dentaria tenella*, the toothwort or milkmaids as the school children called it in the days when I first became acquainted with it. I suppose this name was first given because the rich shining green leaf and stem and the faintly scented pale purplish flowers suggested bright faces and print dresses. It is a member of the Cruciferous or Mustard family. The flowering stems spring from an irregular branching root-stock with tuberous swellings. Like other members of the Mustard family its juice is hot and pungent and hence its name toothwort, because used to relieve aching teeth.

A little way on as we approach the boundary stone of the Park we see how the old oak forest has been successfully invaded by the Douglas Fir. Dead Oaks are to be seen in all directions standing just where they grew, killed by the cutting off of their necessary

share of sunlight. Much of this invasion, in fact almost all of it, has taken place within the past forty or fifty years and it still goes on. This means a definite change in the ground flora. Under the dark coniferous branches we come on the sweet cicely, the popular name of an umbelliferous plant known botanically as *Osmorrhiza divaricata*. It is one of the commonest plants in this type of rather young and open forest, but there is no striking beauty about its umbels with their minute flowers, and when in fruit the burs have a marked tendency to adhere to the clothing of the passer-by. But if the flowers are insignificant to the eye the root has the attraction of a pleasant smell, and it is from this property the plant gets both its botanical and popular names, *Osmorrhiza* meaning scented root, and sweet cicely being transferred to our local plant from the European *Myrrhis odorata*, a plant sweet smelling in every part.

HILLSIDE AND SUMMIT PLANTS

Forbearing expeditions into the woods on each side, inviting as they are, let us go on to the great maples that mark the end of the road and the beginning of the path to the summit. From the craggy north peak of the hill a long steeply sloping scree of broken rock dribbles down to the head of a long ridge of interglacial sand along the more level and extended portion of which we have been walking since we left the Mount Douglas cross-road. It is on both sides of the upper part of this ridge that one of the most delightful exhibitions of wild flowers is to be seen in April and even earlier.

Of this rich and abundant flora the most conspicuous is the little *Collinsia grandiflora*, popularly known as blue-eyed-Mary. An annual in habit it forms carpets of exquisite blue in a shade I think possessed by no other plant and resulting from the combination of two quite different blues in the same flower. The upper lip is a pale but bright blue, the lower is a purplish blue something like cobalt. At this season the plants are still low and their massed effect is at its best. Later they become taller and the flowers

seem to lose their brilliancy. Higher up where the *collinsia* grows in moist rock-crevices as it often does it is very usually accompanied by the dwarf mimulus, *Mimulus alsinoides*, the specific name of which means that the plant has the resemblance to the alsine or vernal sandwort, but in what the resemblance consists I cannot say. The small yellow flowers are very like those of the common mimulus or monkey-flower of wet places but are marked by large deep crimson brown spots on the lower lip.

To return to the slopes, the common broad-leaved shooting-star or peacock, *Dodecatheon latifolium*, grows here in abundance, and so does the purple satin-flower, *Sisyrinchium grandiflorum*; the first belongs to the Primrose family, the second to the Iris. Then we find the earliest of our lilies to bloom, *Erythronium oregonum*, the white fawn-lily, its flowers and leaves alike objects of beauty. They are particularly fine in the grassy hollows. It is very interesting to note the side range of variation in this Fawn-lily, a variation extending to both flower-colouration and leaf-pattern and colouration. A little attention to it will give you an idea of the difficulty the compiler of a Flora has in making out species and varieties.

SOME DIMINUTIVE PLANTS

Among small plants in flower to be looked for up here in April are three members of the Cruciferae or mustard family. They are not only small in size as plants but inconspicuous in flower. *Athyas pusillus* has no popular name and is chiefly remarkable for its round flat pod often with hooked bristles, having a plain margin without wing or fringe, hence the generic name *Athyas*, meaning without a fringe. Evidently it was named with reference to our next plant, popularly known as lace-pod but botanically as *Thysanocarpus curvipes*, the generic name meaning lace-pod or fringe-pod, and the specific curved-pedicelled. It is in the flat pod its attraction consists or rather in the winged edge of it with its round-toothed margin and finely radiating veins giving a lacy effect. The third is *Playosperum scapigerum*, the scape- or stem-bearing

flatseed: it has no popular name. The specific name refers to the leafless stems that bear the solitary yellow flowers; the generic to the flat broadly winged pods. The last of the three is distinctly a plant of the Dry Interior and is one of several species that are found on the bare lofty hills of Vancouver Island as well as some of the Gulf Islands.

There is also to be found up here a rare little plant, the only member of the poppy family we have wild. In California it is represented by one or two pretty and conspicuous species, but ours is a tiny little plant, at most a couple of inches high and with white flowers proportionately small. It favors places where the water lies in the winter, and at considerable elevations. It is found up here on Mount Douglas and on Pemberton Heights above Cadboro Bay. Its name is *Platystigma* (*Platystemon*) *oreganum*, the Oregon cream-cup, to give it the popular name of one of its Southern cousins of larger size and showier appearance.

LARKSPUR AND CAMASS

Up near the top we may come on the purple larkspur in bloom or at least in leaf or bud; it will be found on the sunny south side. Our species is *Delphinium menziesii*, named after that pioneer botanist, Archibald Menzies who collected plants on this coast in the last decade of the eighteenth century. It is one of the aristocrats of the buttercup family that have made remarkable variations from the simple flower-plan of the true buttercups. We shall be sure to come on the commonest of our saxifrages, the hairy-stemmed with its thick stem and flowers with contrasting white petals and red anthers. *Saxifraga integrifolia*, the unbroken-leaved saxifrage, is marked by untoothed leaves and in this and other respects differs very much from the ruddy saxifrage, *Saxifraga rufidula*, of Mount Finlayson and other high rocky hills of Sooke and Goldstream districts.

We ought to see the early camass, *Camassia quamash*, in full bloom also; there are two species, - *C. quamash* and *C. leichtlinii*, the second coming in flower just when the other is beginning to wane, so that both are seen blooming together for a brief period. *C. quamash* has one of the petals or flower-segments distinctly isolated from the other five, whereas in *C. leichtlinii* the symmetry is unbroken. Then in *C. quamash* the petals wither separately whereas in the other they all twist themselves round the seed-vessel. The camass is one of the great Indian foods of the past about which much has been written. By the way, the white camass sometimes come across is a variety of *C. leichtlinii*. Although I have had a specimen growing in the garden for years it has never multiplied, but I believe nurserymen supply bulbs of this variation.

THE SHOWY COLTS-FOOT

There are many other flowers we may come across both in the woods and out, violets, fringe-cups, *nephophila*, and last but by no means least that flower of showiest pink, the sea-blush or *Valerianella congesta*, that converts the barest ledges into waves of brilliant colour. As its name suggests it is a diminutive relation of our garden valerians and of the wild one of the mountains and cliffs. I must however pass on to a plant that we may be able to find at the foot of Mount Douglas on the North-east side. This is our native colt's-foot, *Petasites speciosa*, the beautiful hat-leaved; I suppose it may be rendered the generic name having a reference to the large and very beautifully designed leaves that suggested to the original namer of the species a broad-leaved felt hat worn by travellers, the Greek petasos, that became in due course the winged hat of Mercury or Hermes. *Speciosa* means beautiful, showy and in a good sense of the latter words the leaves are showy especially by some stream of water in a quiet reach a place they love to dwell in. Their flowers are clustered in heads, for the colt's-foot belongs to the composite or dandelion family. The colour of the heads is pale reddish

purple and white. They open their flowers before the leaves unfold and are very attractive to certain small beetles that forage among the close clusters; even if the colt's-foot has vanished from the mountain foot we shall be sure to find it by the sea at the foot of the clay-cliffs for the frequent slides of clayey mud are favorite sites.

These are a few of the spring flowers we may look for in April; it would take a volume to tell of all. Our wild flowers constitute in their simple beauty and freshness one of the purest sources of enjoyment we have for young and old. The better and the more familiarly we know them the greater is our appreciation of them. Their memory lingers with us through the winter and their coming in spring brings us cheering hope. They are diminishing in number because of the encroachment upon their grounds of our modern life and developments. All the more reason is it we should cherish and protect corners here and there where men and women and little children may enjoy the beauty of these wild things.

AMBERGRIS

A wax-like and valuable product of the digestive tract of a whale, may occasionally be washed up on our shores. Anyone finding a substance which is thought to be Ambergris may compare it with samples in the Provincial Museum Office or send it to the Pacific Fisheries Experimental Station, Vancouver, for positive identification.

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER

(*Dendroica townsendi*)

The Townsend Warbler is one of our British Columbia summer visitors and is quite common on Vancouver Island during the nesting season. It is not well known owing to its habit of keeping high in the trees. Brightly coloured in yellow, streaked with black and with white wing bars, it can be watched most easily from an eminence on a steep hillside. The song announces the presence of the bird, "So he, so he, so he, is here, so he easy." Well on into the hot summer days the song contracts into "Seer, seer, sip, soar dee."

At Beaver Lake one Sunday during the latter part of May, the writer had the opportunity of studying a pair of these birds at close range and to actually see them in the act of nest building. It was the hen that did the work of building while the male sang his song high in the trees. I first noticed the two birds playfully chasing each other down the hole of a large fir, the hen then proceeded to collect the material for the nest which consisted mostly of hair-like strings of bark from an ocean spray bush.

The nest was being built about 25 feet from the ground in a thin Douglas Fir, placed out from the bole in the second large crotch. The hen worked assiduously carrying these fibres and could be seen weaving them in to her delicate nest silhouetted against the sky, diving down again headlong for more material. It was a pretty sight, and all the while the male kept up his song "So he, so he, so he, is here, so he easy,

J. O. Clay.

NOTICE OF MEETINGSMONTHLY MEETING

Tuesday
Apr.10th Reading Room of Provincial Library.
Speaker: Mr. George J. Alexander
Assistant Commissioner of Fisheries.
"Some Freshwater Species of British Columbia
Fishes."

OUTDOOR GROUP MEETINGS

Saturday Ornithology - - - - - Convener, Mr. J.O. Clay
Apr.14th Trip to Colquitz River
Bus leaves Coach Lines Depot at 1:15 p.m.
(Burnside Bus, get off at Bridge)

Saturday Botany - - - - - Convener, Archdeacon Connell
Apr.21st Trip to Mount Douglas.
Bus leaves Coach Line Depot at 1:30 p.m.
Returning by Bus leaving Cordova Bay at 4:30.

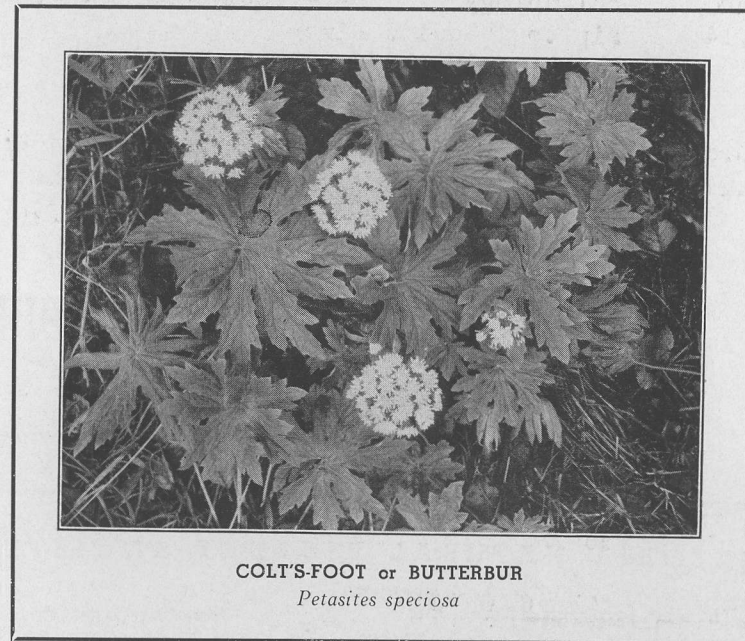
Saturday Geology - - - - - Convener, Mr. W.H. Mathews
Apr.28th Trip to Rosebank Quarry.
Bus leaves Veterans Stage Depot; 736 Yates
at 1 p.m. returning at 5 p.m.

Saturday Entomology - - - - - Convener, Mr. W. Downes
May 5th Arrangements will be announced at the
Meeting of Apr.10th.

NOTICE TO GROUP CHAIRMEN:

It is essential that all Group Chairmen notify the Program Committee (Mr. Geo. Winkler and Mr. Colin Curtis) what plans they are making for outdoor group meetings for the summer season so that the members can be notified. THIS IS IMPORTANT.

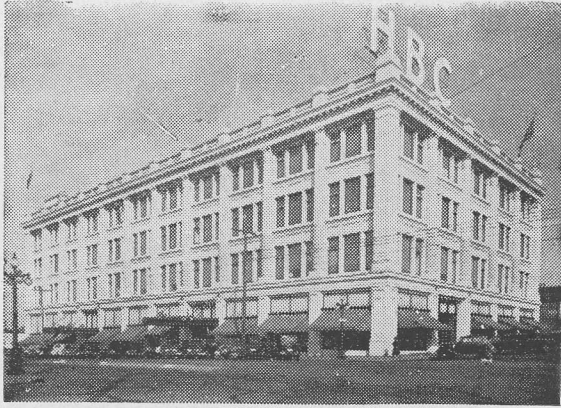
ooo-----o-----ooo



COLT'S-FOOT or BUTTERBUR
Petasites speciosa

To

Mrs J. A. Bland,
1049 Richmond Ave.,
Victoria, B. C.



Your Friendly Store

Hudson's Bay Company.

INCORPORATED 2ND MAY 1670.

VICTORIA, B. C.

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

OFFICERS

Hon. Presidents

MAJOR ALLAN BROOKS - HON. H. G. T. PERRY

President

ARCHDEACON R. CONNELL

Vice-President

DR. G. C. CARL

Secretary-Treasurer

MRS. KENNETH WATSON
42 Linden Avenue

Editor

A. L. MEUGENS
756 Yates Street

CHAIRMEN OF GROUPS

Botany: J. F. PALMER Entomology: WM. DOWNES Geology: W. H. MATHEWS
Marine Biology: J. CUNNINGHAM Ornithology: J. O. CLAY Zoology: MRS. B. WOODWARD

Annual Subscription: Single, \$2.00; Family, \$3.00; Junior, \$1.00.

NOTICE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Society will be held in
PROVINCIAL LIBRARY, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS
at 8 p.m. on Tuesday the 10th April, 1945