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NESTING OF DOUBLE CRESTED CORMORANTS

· BALLINGALL ISLAND, B. C.

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The monthly meeting for December was held on 10th in the Provincial Library. Mrs. K. Drury took the chair as Dr. Carl was the speaker for the evening.

Dr. Carl spoke on the Seals of the Pribiloff Islands and his most interesting talk was illustrated by a silent film. To compensate for the silence of the film Dr. Carl mimicked the various noises made by the seals and so gave the audience a very complete picture of seal life on the islands.

The Pribiloff Islands, of which there are two, lie south-west of Alaska and nearly due north of Dutch Harbour in the Aleutians. The natives of the islands are Aleuts who have prospered greatly under the organized seal industry on the islands. The climate on the islands is foggy and overcast with very little sunshine. Grasses and flowers and birds are, however, abundant.

The fur-bearing seals use the islands as breeding grounds. The present management of the islands is under the U.S.A., in accordance with an International arrangement arrived at in 1911 between the following five powers; Canada, U.S.A., Great Britain, Japan and Russia. Under this agreement sealing at sea was discontinued and sealing on the islands done in moderation and under strict supervision.

At the time the agreement was made the number of seals visiting the islands annually was as low as a few thousand. It is estimated that about three million visited the islands this year. The value of this year's catch is about \$5,000,000.

The breeding males are the first to arrive on the islands. These weigh from 5 to 700 pounds and are not mature until they are seven years old. The females mature at two years and weigh from 80 - 100 pounds only. The young weigh 8-10 pounds at birth. The

mortality of the young is 50% in the first year and 12% in the second.

As soon as the females arrive their young are born. They mate again within a week or two. While the period of gestation would thus appear to be 12 months there is in fact about three months of delayed development.

The breeding males acquire as many females as they are able and so form what is called a harem. Groups of harems are called rookeries and are dotted all over the islands. While the breeding male mounts guard over his harem the females go to sea for food, leaving their young to look after themselves.

The immature or surplus males, called bachelors, take up residence further from the shore. It is these that are killed. About 65000 were slaughtered this year. They are herded into groups and killed by a blow on the head. The skins are partly processed on the islands and are then packed into barrels. Of the total catch Canada obtains one fifth. An ingenious method has been evolved to ensure that Canada receives skins that are average for the whole catch.

The Fouke Fur Company at present receives all the skins. It has a secret processing method. Guard hairs are removed and the skins are dyed several shades. The firm is in St. Louis.

The carcasses are processed into fertilizer etc., so nothing is wasted.

The seals get about on land quite adequately on their flippers.

Sea lions also visit the islands to breed. Their skins have no market value.

There are no harbours on the islands so landing is a somewhat hazardous adventure, with heavy seas most of the time. The islands show signs of Russian occupation, especially in the

form of religion which is that of the orthodox Russian church. The priests are also Russian. At one time the islands were dominated by Russia. Under the present arrangement Russia does not receive any skins.

BIRD NOTES FROM THE MUSEUM:

California Gull -

On October 9th Mr. I. Finlay of the Legislative Buildings ground staff discovered a dead gull in the ornamental fountain in front of the Buildings. The bird carried a red and yellow celluloid band on the right leg as well as a numbered metal band. According to information received from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife service, Washington, D. C. the bird was banded at Great Salt Lake, Utah, on June 14, 1941, by Dr. A. M. Woodbury of Salt Lake City.

Canada Geese -

A band of about 100 birds passed southward over the city of Victoria about 10:30 a.m. October 29th; others were reported at an even later date.

Snowy Owl -

A Snowy Owl was reported to be present in the Chinese Cemetery on October 27th and on St. Andrews Presbyterian Church on 29th. One was sighted at the Royal Jubilee Hospital about the same time and a specimen was shot at the Legislative Buildings on October 30th.

White Pelican -

Mr. Lacon reports that on Sept. 8th and on one other occasion these pelicans were seen flying south over Denman Island. The following day, in each case, pelicans were observed in Quamichan Lake near Duncan.

RATS ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

The recent finding of Black rats near Duncan has renewed the interest shown in these rodents on Vancouver Island. The common Norway rat is familiar to most householders in the vicinity of Victoria but the Black rat and the Roof rat (Alexandrine rat) are not so well known. All three rats are unfortunately found on V.I. and since they are pests of considerable importance it may be of interest to note something of their peculiarities here.

The Norway rat is the largest and most common of our rodent pests. It reaches a length of 15 or 16 inches. In colour it is brown or grayish above and ashy below. The tail is thick; it is marked with rather coarse annulations and is partly covered with hair.

The Black rat is often smaller and more slender than the Norway rat. It is easily distinguished by the darker colour of the pelage. Above, the fur is slaty or black; below, the colour is bluish-black. The tail is long and slender with finer annulations and fewer hairs. The ears are more prominent than those of the Norway rat.

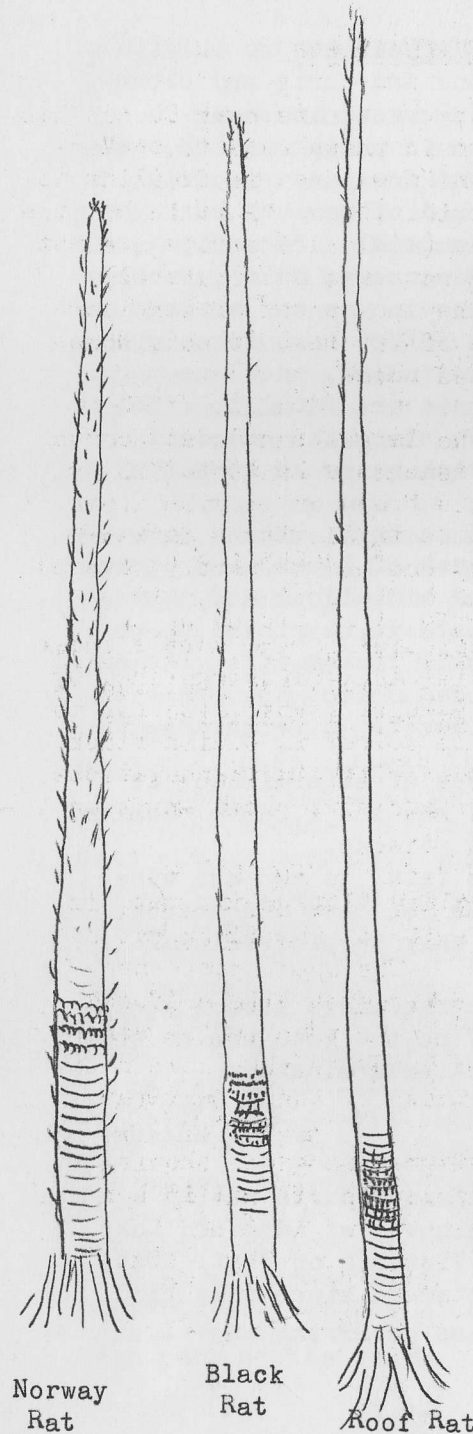
The Roof rat, also called Alexandrine rat, is about the same size and build of the Black rat but is much lighter in colour. The upper parts are reddish-brown; the under parts are white suffused with yellow. The tail is longer than in the other two rats; it is finely annulated and has some hairs. The ears are larger than those of the Norway rat.

On the next page a diagram is given showing appearance and comparative length of tail in Norway, Black and Roof rats.

Although the three kinds of rats are present on Vancouver Island they are not equally numerous nor found in the same area. The Norway rat is the most common and the most widespread. It tends to drive out other species with the result that Black and Roof rats are found in scattered areas and usually not in large numbers. According to Museum records and information supplied by Mr. Gordon Dowding who is in charge of a rodent survey conducted by the Department of Public Health, the three rats have been taken in the localities as shown in the table:

<u>Norway Rat</u>	<u>Black Rat</u>	<u>Roof Rat</u>
Victoria	Victoria	Victoria
Ladysmith	Duncan	Bamfield
Duncan	Nanaimo	Ucluelet
Nanaimo	Pt. Alice	Pt. Alice
Cowichan Lake		Tofino

Lately rats have been a subject of special study because of the danger of spread of diseases such as bubonic plague which is carried by the rat flea. Public health officials have been on the



Norway
Rat

Black
Rat

Roof Rat

watch to guard against the appearance of this dread disease in our various sea-ports and clean-up campaigns have been inaugurated in some.

Besides being a menace to public health, rats are extremely destructive of food and property with the result that the hand of man has been set against them from time immemorial. Recently a new chemical poison has been discovered which promises to be of great effectiveness in the war against rats. The poison, known as ANTU (short for alpha-naphthylthiourea) is a tasteless, odorless powder of which small amounts are fatal to rats. The victims literally drown since the chemical causes the lungs to fill with water as in acute pleurisy.

ANTU may be sprinkled on bait, making sure the poison is placed out of reach of humans and other animals, or it may be mixed with flour and dusted in burrows and runways, where it is picked up on fur and paws and subsequently licked off. The chief disadvantage is that rats can detect the presence of ANTU and some can even develop a resistance to it.

A more devastating type of exterminator is known as "1080" because it was the 1,080th chemical tested in the hunt for rat poisons.

Unfortunately 1080 is fatal to man and other animals and no antidote has yet been discovered; it is therefore available only to professional exterminators.

When and if these new raticides become generally available they should be put into use so that these enemies of man may be exterminated.

G.C. Carl,
Prov. Museum.

MAGPIE:

Mr. H.R. Lacon of Denman Island reports seeing a magpie flying across the highway at Langford Lake while he was driving into Victoria on Sept. 30th. This sight record is of interest since this bird has not yet been recorded as occurring on V.I.

ASPECTS OF BIRD MIGRATION ON VANCOUVER ISLAND:

This article does not pretend to deal with the basic problems of migration; to attempt to do so would only mean repeating the theories advanced in such well known works as Wetmore's "The Migration of Birds" or Thomson's "Problems of Bird Migration". All the ordinary birdman can do is to see how the recognized principles apply to his particular area. Though this article may have reference to the Island in general it deals with the Comox district in particular.

Vancouver Island is not a main highway nor in the line of any heavy migration in the ordinary way. Though we talk of the Island lying north and south, a glance at the map shows how incorrect this really is and, as birds primarily migrate north and south, the greater part of Vancouver Island has no land to the south from which migrants can be passed on. Then, it must be remembered that when migrants are returning in the fall, it is usually by the same route so that it is not likely that more will pass through then than in the spring.

Those birds that do arrive on the east coast (for convenience this lapsus linguae is continued) must either work down that side or face the crossing of the mountains and then the open sea. It is likely that the majority take the line of least resistance and follow the coast line even if it is not the most direct way. Certainly the passerine birds tend to do so though I have traced a distinct line that, at some point south of Campbell River, works due south inland. Here, at Comox, we seem to be off the coastal line; there would be no object in birds going this way lying as we do across the normal routes. Certainly there are very few migrants seen at Comox compared with Courtenay. Not that all the migration does follow the coast or keep at the lower levels as I have seen parties of migrants well up the mountains, back of Courtenay, working along a route that meant crossing quite a high part of the range.

One cannot be sure of the direction that these small birds, as they flit from bush to bush or from tree to tree, are actually taking but with large birds like geese, it is different and they fly over this part invariably headed nearer west or east than north or south.

Though it may be that the majority of migrants travel north and return south over the same route, their physical condition is different. In the spring their organs are tuned up to the breeding urge that pushes them on towards their nesting quarters; in the fall there is none of this and migration then proceeds more slowly. We see the spring rush and a species is not seen again, whereas in the fall it may consist of a trickling through over quite a long period. Take the robin and blue-bird neither of which can be called winter residents here; they are likely to pass through almost any time during the late fall and early winter; both these species regularly winter not far to the south and I think it is such species that tend to have the more protracted migration in the fall and, of course they are the earliest to appear in spring. (This may not explain hummingbirds wintering in Victoria.)

The factors that have most bearing on migration, apart from the urge itself, are food and weather. That food plays an important part, in more ways than one, is demonstrated by the ducks on the Prairie which, with a plentiful food supply on the stubble, remain so long in the fall that they lose the migratory urge and perish. This may be an extreme instance but robins will stay as long as rowan berries are available and then leave. A small bird must feed at frequent intervals to keep alive; an insectivorous bird starves to death in an unseasonable cold spell in the spring. A few years ago bluebirds were almost wiped out in the Eastern States and probably other species suffered as

badly but, not being so spectacular as the bluebird, were not noticed. I have seen violet-green swallows heading south in the early spring when the weather has been cold. Year after year the Seasonal Reports in the Audubon Magazine will state such and such birds appear scarce, probably because they have hit one of those cold spells. Again, cold weather will halt migration and on its breaking up, there will be a rush through and little may be seen of the birds.

Migration must not be considered only in terms of the spectacular flights beloved of the daily papers, such as that of the Arctic tern which is said to nest in the Arctic and winter in the Antarctic. (It has yet to be shown that the same individual has been seen at both places and there are many intervening places where it either winters or nests.) The migration of many species may be only a few miles or altitudinally a few hundred feet, but it is just as much a movement from winter to summer home and vice versa. Here varied thrushes, winter wrens and Oregon juncos provide instances of altitudinal movement; all are scarce at sea-level as breeding birds but are quite numerous in winter. It might be contended that food conditions force these birds to a lower level and no doubt they do, but why should they leave the better food supply in the spring unless as a result of some urge?

Note: This is the first part of an article by Theed Pearse of Comox. The second and final part will appear in our next issue.

Sunstar.



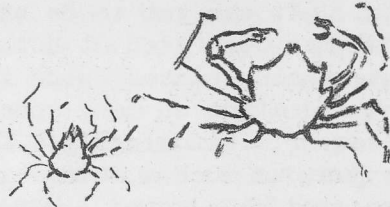
Tube worms



Key-hole Limpet



Kelp crab



Spider crab

Octopus



Sea-mats.



Sea-squirts.



Happy New Year, Juniors.

Dec. 7th:

This week we took "Frogs" with Dr. Carl. He told us brown frogs can only turn to light browns and the black to gray, but the green frog can turn almost any colour.

Dec. 14th:

This week we learned about "Mushrooms" and "Toadstools" with Mr. Hardy. Those toadstools that have a cup at their base are poisonous; it is called the "death cup".

I expect you are already feeding the birds, but if the ground gets frozen hard do not forget grit to help them digest their food.

A piece of fat will attract chickadees, wrens and downy woodpeckers.

The song sparrow, towhee and even the varied thrush like rolled oats and many of the smaller birds will come for cracked wheat and "wild bird seed".

Steller's Jay:

Jays are again noted within the city of Victoria after an absence of four years. In 1941 these birds were present in some numbers during the winter months; this year they have appeared again.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

1947

MONTHLY MEETING

Tuesday

Jan.14: The monthly meeting will be held in the Provincial Library at 8 p.m.
Dr. Don Buckland of the Dominion Gov't Forest Pathology Laboratory will be the speaker.

Tuesday

Jan.21: Bird Group Meeting at the home of Mr. A.L. Meugens, 179 Olive Street, who will show his collection of birds' eggs.

Tuesday

Jan.28: Zoology Group Meeting at the home of Mrs. K. Drury, 524 Island Rd. Mrs. Drury's house is at the Newport Ave. end of Island Rd. Dr. Carl will speak on the "Biology of reptiles".

Tuesday

Feb. 4: Entomology Group will meet at the entomological office on Superior St. Mr. Harry Andison will take this group.

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To

