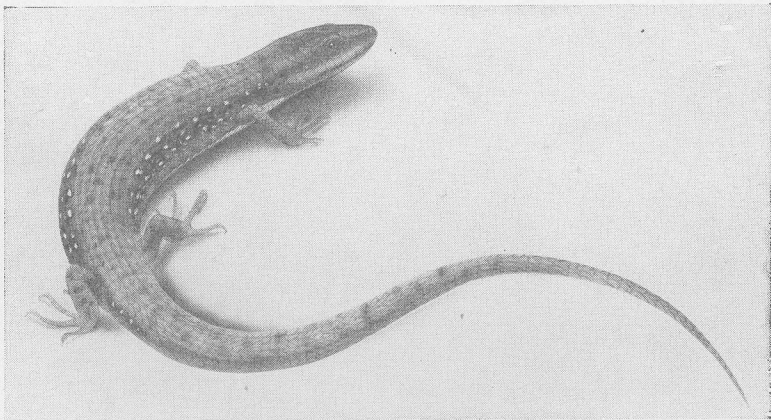


The
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Northern alligator lizard.

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Report of the May Meeting

During the preliminary business session Mr. A. L. Meugens, treasurer of Audubon Screen Tour funds, reported that a balance of \$106.30 remained after all bills for the 1947-48 season had been paid. By agreement half of this sum goes to the National Audubon Society; it was proposed to apply the remainder to a fund for the 1948-49 season.

As specimens for examination Mr. W. T. Tildesley produced examples of low clover (Trifolium depauperatum) and purple sanicle (Sanicula sp.) while Mr. Hardy exhibited specimens of garlic-mustard (Alliaria officinale), hitherto unrecorded in western Canada, and purple dead nettle (Lamium amplexicaule) unrecorded for Vancouver Island.

The Chairman then introduced Mr. W. H. A. Preece, President of the Victoria Rock and Alpine Garden Society, who spoke on "The Use of Native Plants as Garden Subjects" summarized as follows:

Each plant requires a certain balance of conditions. Those normally growing in shaded woods may thrive in the open, if sufficient moisture is available. Plants from dry habitats (e.g. blue-eyed grass) thrive in a well drained location which dries out in summer. The sand rose which is found in arid regions will survive if planted at the base of a thirsty subject such as Gary oak.

Plants which occupy a wide variety of habitats take well to garden conditions. An example is Pentstemon menziesii which is found from sea-level

to snow-line and which thrives well under cultivation. Plants with restricted ranges, and rare species, should be avoided.

The following materials are needed for collecting -- damp sphagnum moss, grease-proof paper, rubber bands, tags, and box-opener or trowel. Dig carefully and soak in water to remove all soil away from the roots. Wrap the roots in moist sphagnum, cover with paper and label. Reduce top to cut down water loss by transpiration. Pot up individually in pure, sharp sand and place in shaded tray. Give air and light gradually. Move later to sand and soil or to the garden.

The following natives were mentioned as being useful:

- Hemlock and Douglas fir -- as hedges.
- Juniper -- low growing.
- Arbutus -- not good for small garden; messy.
- Cascara -- good; not too large.
- Dogwood -- finest flowering tree.
- Rhododendron -- flower colour varies from blush-white to purple-red.
- Azalea -- not native to B.C. but good.
- Vaccinium ovatum -- a good evergreen shrub.
- Red currant -- varies from pure white to deep pink.

Many of our herbaceous, bulbous, alpine and woodland plants can also be successfully used in the garden.

The lecture was well illustrated by a fine series of kodachrome slides presented by Mr.W.P.D. Pemberton.

Mr. Colin Curtis, who has left the city to join the staff of the Dominion Entomological Laboratory at Kamloops, was given an expression of appreciation for services rendered and best wishes were extended to him.

G.C.C.

Bush-tits on Vancouver Island
by J. O. Clay

The western limit in the range of the Least bush-tit (*Psaltriparus minimus minimus*) is given by Taverner in "Birds of Canada" as being the mouth of the Fraser River. Recently, however, the species has appeared on Vancouver Island. Munro and Cowan ("Review of the Bird Fauna of British Columbia", 1948) record nests being found near Victoria in 1945 and 1946 and recent sight records of birds are provided by G.A. Hardy (Lost Lake), Mrs. R. G. Hobson, Mrs. A. Blackden (Uplands), J.O. Clay (Shoal Bay) and A.R. Davidson (Lost Lake). This season three more nests were located in the Victoria area one by A.L. Meugens in Saanich, another by A.N. Upward in Uplands and a third by E.F.G. White near Gonzales.

These diminutive birds appear to be newly migrated from brush areas farther east around Puget Sound. The nest is a wonderfully constructed pouch of moss, lichen, cob-webs, wool and feathers. The entrance hole is placed near the top of the structure.

The nest located by Mr. Meugens was situated in open bush-land close to timber in a clump of ocean spray. It yielded a healthy family of at least seven young, which flew from thorn-tree to thorn-tree and waited in sunshine for food from the two parents. Curiously, a third adult was closely in attendance throughout the feeding both in the nest and after the young had flown. This bird was probably a non-breeder from last year's hatching.

RECENT LITERATURE

"Field Guide to the Birds of King County, Washington" by Earl J. Larrison (Illustrations by Elizabeth L. Curtis) The Seattle Audubon Society (H. W. Higman, Editor, 1320 East 63rd, Seattle 5, Washington) 66 pages, 8 plates of illustrations, 1947. Price 50¢ (Copies available at the Museum.) Although intended primarily for use of persons in the Seattle area this booklet should prove of value to Victoria bird students since many species are common to both areas. The Introduction is of especial value to the beginner and the notes which follow include information on field characters, call notes or song, nesting data, and distribution.

"An Investigation on Marine Plants near Hardy Bay, B.C." by Robert F. Scagel. Bulletin No.1, Provincial Department of Fisheries, Victoria, B.C., 70 pages, 11 tables, 26 figures, 1948. (Free on request) An excellent account of certain seaweeds, their methods of growth, effect of harvesting and conservation. Life history notes, drawings or photographs and other data are given for most of our local, larger species of seaweeds.

Associate Editors of the Victoria Naturalist:

Mr. W. T. Tildesley of 118 Wildwood, Victoria, and Mr. J.R.J. Llewellyn Jones of Cobble Hill, have each consented to act as Associate Editors of the "Victoria Naturalist". The Editor and the Associates will comprise an Editorial Committee and will share the responsibility of selecting and editing material submitted for publication.

The 1948 Spring Migration at Comox, B.C.

by Theed Pearse, Comox, B.C.

In these notes I have the benefit of the recorded observations of Mr. H.M. Laing, also made at Comox.

The 1948 spring migration can only be characterized as distinctly poor. The season was very late, not only here but all down the Pacific States; it is possible, that owing to these weather conditions, many birds were delayed in starting their migration and, then, did not linger as much as usual on their northern journey and thus gave the appearance of being scarce. Even granting this as a factor, it hardly explains the extraordinary scarcity of the migrants which are usually plentiful. A possible reason for the shortage of seed-eaters was suggested to me by Dr. J. Linsdale, in charge of the Hastings Natural History Reservation, in Monterey County, California. He believes that their populations had suffered when in winter quarters, owing to the shortage of food supplies, the long dry weather having prevented the seeds from reaching maturity. In support of this he said sparrows caught in their banding traps were often thin. Birds starting out in poor condition must have little chance of reaching their destination if this be many hundreds of miles away.

The migration usually commences about the beginning of February with a rush of robins which do not stay but continue on to other points. These duly arrived and went on but the number of breeding birds that arrive two or three weeks later was reduced contrasting with an unusual abundance last year. However, judging from the complaints of damage done, somehow we made up in numbers later on.

Violet-green swallows (10th April) were two to three weeks late; all species of swallows are down in numbers except the barn swallow which was first noted on the 1st of May, a week late.

Sparrows were phenomenally scarce; between us we did not see a dozen Savannahs whereas usually one might see this number in little more than as many yards in suitable localities. Chipping sparrows were average but both white-crowned and golden-crown were quite scarce, though the breeding population of the former does not appear any less. American pipit, often numerous, were represented by but a few birds.

Of the warblers I did not record an Audubon until April 4th; two to three weeks late, but Laing heard one singing March 18th. Other warblers were about on schedule but there did not appear to be the usual number of Tolmie. The Rufous hummingbird, as usual, arrived about the middle of April but has been down in numbers all the summer. Flycatchers, after some revival last year have dropped to a low again and Cassin vireos were certainly short though warbling vireos were well up to the average.

Owing to being away from home for the first half of May I have no records of the arrival of most of the later migrants. However on May 20th I recorded five tanagers, which were undoubtedly migrating, and also heard the first Russet-backed thrush. The latter were not nearly as abundant as last year. Incidentally, on the same day, there were over 100 brant to be seen.

The first nighthawk was recorded on June 6th. Again they are very scarce apparently still being on a steady downgrade which has been apparent for some years.

If the land birds were short some of the other families were even more so. Phenomenally few waders were present; I noted only three Least and one Western sandpiper while another party and Mr. Laing did not see one at all. Most springs there have been scores. The Greater yellowleg was not seen until April 8th and neither of us have any note of Dowitchers.

In the gulls, Californias were first heard by Laing on March 21st; they never were up to the numbers common in recent years. Bonapartes were almost a miss; I saw them at Deep Bay on April 16 and Laing heard the note at Comox on the previous day. Normally, this gull is to be seen in the spring migration. Some usually spend the summer but none did this year.

The Anatidae were not much better; I did not see or hear any flocks of geese going over but from what I heard, they chose a route over the city of Vancouver rather than Vancouver Island. Brant showed up very well. Except for mallard I would say that all the surface-feeding ducks were below normal. No large flocks of scaup were seen but a fair number were seen for a few days when there were some herring spawning in the Bay. On March 7th I noted that there was a decided movement of bufflehead, goldeneye and red-throated loons. We usually have some 200 to 300 surf and white-winged scoters that stay over at Point Holmes as well as at other places but there have never been as many this summer. On one occasion there was not a single duck there, a thing I have never experienced before. These scoters return quite early to their summer moulting grounds and I have often counted between 2000 and 3000 off the north end of Denman Spit; the count at the end of July this year showed only some 800. An-

other duck that frequented the same places, harlequin males in eclipse, were seldom seen this year.

On April 17th I took a census of our local brant and at that time noted the general scarcity of all sea-birds.

The foregoing justify my opening remarks that the migration this year was poor in this area. That this condition may not have been general is possible as Mr. Kenneth Racey tells me he considers that the number of migrants in the vicinity of Huntingdon, on the mainland, was normal and Mr. R. M. Stewart reports he saw no difference in numbers at Masset in the Queen Charlottes, small waders and robins being very numerous and hummingbirds and warblers well represented.

Purple Martins

Owing to human activity around the Inner Harbour this season suitable places for nesting have become scarce. This summer colony-boxes have been made by J. Galliford and J. O. Clay. Mr. Ernest Smith and Mr. John Redford helped in placing these over the Inner Harbour and farther up over Gorge waters. The sites for these boxes were kindly provided by Colonel J. R. Kingham and Mrs. Fred Border.

J.O.C.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

The male mountain bluebird is the most exquisitely coloured of our western birds. (Illustration A). Toward the end of March and early April, when days have become bright once more, the soft call of the bluebird can be expected. Male birds are first to arrive and do so in little flocks of half a dozen or more.

It is a week or more later that females and immature birds follow the old males on this migration. They, too, are readily noticed by the familiar "chup" call and energetic flight.

In many deeply wooded valleys the bluebird was little known until clearings were cut and settlement made. As soon as nesting-boxes were set up they were occupied. Often two broods are successfully reared in a season.

In plumage the male bird is azure-blue above paler below. The female and young are brownish tinged with blue, the young being streaked with whitish on the breast.

In nature the bluebird chooses woodpecker holes and other cavities in trees as nesting places. Outbuildings are also often used, nesting-boxes are a great attraction. These should be large enough to approximate to the size of a flicker-hole, being six inches by six inches inside, eight to ten inches deep, with a round $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch entrance near the top. A warm aspect is preferred. The box should be cleaned out each season of use. Eggs are five in number and of a pale greenish blue.

The mountain bluebird covers a wide territory, breeding from Manitoba, the Mackenzie Valley and the Yukon southward, keeping east of the Coast Mountains. It winters south to New Mexico.

On Vancouver Island spring migrants have been reported from Nanaimo and Comox.

J.O. C.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE

The solitaire (Illustration B) is one of our more inconspicuous birds, brown in colour, retiring in habit, sought after by those who know of its singing and surroundings. He is a lover of mountain-sides, steep and rocky places, waste areas in the forest and open places near streams.

In feeding the solitaire is both a fly-catcher and ground-feeder like the blue-bird. Sitting on a post, snag, rock or some such position of vantage, it dives abruptly and quickly aside or downward to secure its prey.

In plumage male and female have a light eye-ring and white outer tail-feathers. A buff coloured patch is conspicuous in the wing, particularly in flight.

No description of the solitaire is complete without mention of the song. From an outstanding branch of a tall tree it is poured forth, a loud and mellow cadence, clear as that of the black-headed grosbeak, better sustained than that of the warbling vireo or purple finch. The singer, too is sometimes almost ventriloquial, producing the song from nearby and softly, thus baffling the hearer, who expects to locate the singer at a longer distance.

The nest is of twigs and moss, built into a sloping rock crevice or root near the ground. Eggs are whitish, spotted with reddish brown.

The solitaire leaves mountain and hillside for the south and for lower levels in fall or winter, where it can feed on juniper and other berries, sometimes entering city gardens to supplement the meagre diet of insects.

The range is western America from Alaska south to California.

J.O.C.

JUNIOR PAGE

September 18th has been set as the date for the first meeting of the Junior members of the Natural History Society for the 1948-49 season. As in the past, the meetings will be held in the Museum every Saturday morning at 10 o'clock.

In former years the group has had many interesting activities and outings arranged for them. They have had a sketching competition; they have been given talks by various people; and have visited many places of special interest including the Plant Pathology Laboratory, the Forest Pathology Laboratory, the Entomological Laboratory, the Blue-printing Department, the Air-surveys Division, the Forestry Department, the Mineral Museum, and the Archives. However, it is hoped that this year the members will be able to give us some suggestions as to what they would like to do. So give it some thought and bring any suggestions you may have along to the first meeting. The second meeting (on the 25th of Sept.) will probably be used for the annual election of officers.

Members are invited to bring any of their friends who are interested.

R.F.

ALLIGATOR LIZARD

The alligator lizard (front cover) is commonly seen on Vancouver Island as well as throughout the southern portion of the mainland. It prefers rather dry, rocky slopes where it can bask in the sun and seek shelter under rocks. Its food consists chiefly of insect and spiders. The young, three to seven in number, are born alive.

Our lizard has the unusual ability of parting with its tail voluntarily which no doubt may save its life on occasion, for while the pursuer stops to examine the writhing tail the owner makes good his escape. A new tail grows from the old stump in due course.

G.C.C.

NOTICE

Monday

Sept. 27: Audubon Screen Tour:
Prince Robert House,
8 p.m.
Karl H. Maslovski,
"Saguaroland".

Is your membership paid up? If not, Mr. Taylor would be pleased to receive your dues along with names of prospective members.

Have you seen anything of special interest lately? Why not write it up and send it in to the Editors? They wish to receive more contributions from members.

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Annual dues, including subscription: Single, \$2; Family, \$3; Junior, \$1.

Jo