

*The*  
**VICTORIA  
NATURALIST**

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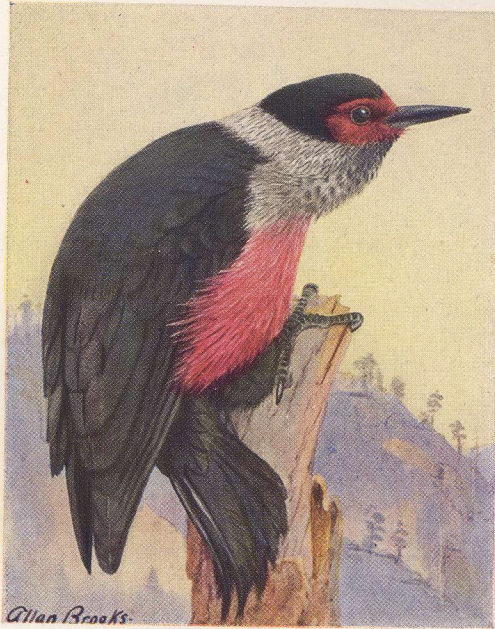
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Killer whales stranded at Estevan Point.

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*Published by the*  
**VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY**  
VICTORIA, B.C.

A. Lewis's Woodpecker; scale,  $\frac{1}{3}$ B. Western Kingbird; scale,  $\frac{1}{3}$ 

THE VICTORIA NATURALIST

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The Victoria Natural History Society

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Report of the December Meeting

New members introduced to the meeting were Mr. H. B. Binny and Dr. K. O. Wright. Specimens exhibited included leaves and seedpod of the Jimson weed (Thornapple) by Mr. Tildesley, fossil fish-scales and dinosaur teeth from southern Alberta by Mr. Taylor, a Cooper's hawk from Beacon Hill Park and an albinistic muskrat by Dr. Carl. The muskrat was taken by C. A. Neaves at Keatings in Saanich.

In the absence of both Mr. Hardy and Mr. Smith, Dr. Carl acted as chairman and introduced Mr. Albert A. de Mezey. A brief outline of Mr. de Mezey's talk follows.

"A Natural History Excursion into the  
Trans-sylvanian Alps"

The area studied is situated in south-eastern Hungary near the Rumanian border. This section of the Alps is rich in life because it is an area of transition from granitic to calcareous rock formation. It contains the largest number of species of plants and insects which are found no where else. General elevations are not as high as the Canadian Rockies although some peaks attain an altitude of 2500 metres (over 7500 feet).

Common trees include beech (used as fire wood and for beams), spruce, mountain cherry, and mountain maple (used in violin making). At higher elevation Swiss stone pine and mugho pine (*P. montana mughus*) are found. Creeping juniper, firmly anchored in rock crevices, forms a useful support when climbing. Wild flowers are represented by Campanula, Draba, Saxifraga, Dianthus, Crocus and Aconitum; varieties of the latter are found no where else.

A species of Spanish moss kills certain evergreens producing large barren areas.

The larger mammals of the area include Lynx, brown or Siberian bear, European stag and wolf. The chamois has been successfully introduced. Snakes are plentiful; of these the poisonous viper is most abundant necessitating the wearing of high boots. The bite is 40 per cent fatal. Fish are common in the streams; a local method of catching them is by poisoning. Red capsules of a certain weed when crushed and added to the water causes the fish to rise helplessly to the surface for a short time.

Above timber-line the rare "Bird of Sunrise" (*Tichodroma muraria* L.) is found. It is an insect-eating member of the woodpecker family, black with round spots on top of the wings and cardinal red on underparts of wings and body.

In Lake Zenoga at a high elevation are to be found speckled trout of a kind known only from three other lakes. They apparently feed only at dawn on a small species of moth.

Limestone caves occur in certain areas. In some of these are to be found numerous bats, blind salamanders and blind ground beetles which lack both eyes and optic nerves. The latter were collected by using small boxes baited with liver.

The talk was illustrated with photographs of typical areas.

A vote of thanks was extended to the speaker by Dr. William Mathews.

Personal: A welcome is extended to Dr. and Mrs. Wm. Mathews. Dr. Mathews has recently returned from two years' post graduate work in geology at the University of California and his bride is a graduate in palaeontology.

A Day With a Field Collector  
by Charles J. Guiguet

The average individual apparently has a few misconceptions regarding the nature of field collecting so a brief account of this type of activity may not be amiss here.

Local people in the up country usually drop into one's camp, are interested, "Oh" and "Ah" over the specimens lined up so neatly on the drying racks and leave saying that they envy me my soft occupation.

Field collecting is not a soft occupation, but it is a fascinating and an interesting game. There is no such thing, however, as the eight-hour shift and the five-day week in the field. Usually it's the "clock around" and the "week around" for four arduous months; unless one is keenly interested in the work it is apt to become more tedious than other occupations due to long hours and fatigue.

I believe the best way to exemplify is to outline the average day in the field with the collector. Assuming that we have arrived, having undergone the packing, laying in of supplies and equipment and so on, we've established a camp and have a large supply of wood in for our Teslin stove (in order to dry specimens); we have our traps in the woods, usually 100 mouse traps and 24 steel traps. These have been baited the previous evening and laid out with meticulous care, which involved a lot of crawling around through the grass and bush upon hands and knees, searching for mouse signs, cuttings of grass, droppings, runways, and so on. This has taken us hours, of course. The steel traps have been laid out with like precision, set in a "line" based upon the cruising radius of the various species we hope to obtain. Each trap is placed, where through long and bitter experience, we have learned that animals frequent habitually. In short, all trap sets, have been based on years of previous experience; there is nothing haphazard in the planning and setting out of trap lines. The usual dual sets, mouse and steel, very often overlap so that

the line does not extend more than three miles from camp. Usually the camp is chosen as the hub of activities to minimize the travelling time, morning and evening, in lifting specimens and baiting up. Often the line is over rough terrain and through thick bush.

Before sunrise the collector arises and sets out along the line in order to beat the slugs, snails, ants, etc. to the "take". On an average night the "make up" take is about seven specimens in small mammals. About one a week is the average catch in the steel traps, a flying squirrel, mink or a marten perhaps. We are running the line at daybreak, our gun is with us and usually active. The average take in birds runs at four specimens. Some birds are very elusive of course, and consequently their collection takes time. At any rate we come back to camp having covered perhaps five or six miles. We have in our pack seven small mammals, each one in a confectionery paper bag to prevent the mixing of exo-parasites, fleas, lice and ticks. We have four birds treated likewise. We shall assume that the steel traps were empty. We now have a quick breakfast prepared on the primus and we sail into the preparation.

First we do the small mammals as they usually decompose very quickly. The first step is to remove, label, preserve, and catalogue the exo-parasites. This is done by "knocking out" the fleas with small wads of cotton soaked in chloroform which are popped into the bags in which each specimen reposes. Having completed this, each specimen is weighed. Measurements of total length, tail and hind foot are taken, and along with the place, date and sex, recorded in a field catalogue. Each animal is then skinned and stuffed and set out to dry upon the drying racks over the stove. Having removed the pelt the carcasses are then examined for internal parasites, worms usually. These are treated as the exo-parasites were. Apart from the measurements the same procedure applies to the birds.

By this time it is well on into late afternoon and we are hungry again; another quick meal prepared on the primus and away along the trap line again, baiting up, removing the diurnal take, collecting the birds and mammals appearing in the late afternoon and evening. The average take at this time is another four or five specimens.

Having reached the end of the line by dusk it is now time to collect bats. This goes on until too dark to shoot and we return to camp and write up all we've done and seen during the day. This chore averages two hours. Each species observed, besides being written up in a journal must be entered under a species index in order to facilitate the analysis of the work in the laboratory during the winter months.

Our day is now officially ended, usually about 11 p.m. We cast a side glance at the bats lying on the table; the night is warm, perhaps we will lose them. So - by 1 a.m. we are in bed. We still have the four bird specimens taken on the evening run to make up - but tomorrow is another day and maybe the mice won't be running. After about seven days of this, one just lies down and sleeps a day out, arising fresh for another go.

Now this sounds like a very dreary and exacting business -- exacting true, but dreary no. The fascination of studying the creatures of the wild in their native haunts, the sunrise over the mountains or over the sea, the springy feel of the forest floor or the tundra under one's feet, the continual thrill of British Columbia's scenic splendour, clean fresh wind or rain upon the face, and last but not least the anticipation, upon entering and beholding a vast new country -- the anticipation of meeting wildlife friends not previously encountered -- all these add up to make field collecting one of the most satisfying of occupations.

And when the job is done and one is back in the

laboratory working it up, countless memories of the field flood back with the handling of the specimens and analysis of the notes. At the same time the mind wonders ahead to the field trips of the future. Life is never dull for the active field worker.

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Personals:

Best wishes are extended to Miss Eva Archer who returns shortly to Ireland after a year's residence in Victoria.

Mr. Ernest Smith, Vice-President, has temporarily moved to the mainland where he is in charge of a construction project.

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Two of the illustrations in Roger Tory Peterson's latest book 'Birds Over America' are from photos taken while he was in Victoria last January.

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Virginia Rail: An injured Virginia rail was picked up in Thunderbird Park on September 29th by Charlie Nairne of the Buildings Ground Staff. Examination showed that the bird had received a broken leg, bruised head and internal injuries probably as a result of collision while on migration, calling to mind similar instances recently reported concerning song birds passing over New York City.

HARDINESS OF KILDEER EGGS

by M. N. Jackson, Fanny Bay, B.C.

The eggs of birds which construct no nest but lay upon the bare ground must of necessity be more hardy than those having the protection of a grass-lined nest but the extent of that hardiness was demonstrated to me last June in such a manner that I was astonished.

A kildeer had laid four eggs on a little sandy depression on the shore. This depression becomes flooded by a tide of 14 feet (Sand Head Table). When I noticed that the kildeer had nested in this depression it occurred to me that in a few days the tide would reach and exceed 14 feet. Accordingly, I examined the spot when, one night about 15 minutes before slack-water, the tide reached the eggs and they were moving gently to and fro in about an inch and a half of water. The kildeer was not in sight and I supposed it would not return. The next morning, however, she had returned and was sitting on the eggs when I approached. I felt sorry for the little bird for she appeared to be in for a long session with the ruined eggs, unless a rougher sea than the preceding night reached the sheltered depression and carried them away. So certain was I that the eggs could not hatch, that I kept no record beyond noting when the sea first reached the eggs. I showed them to my wife and we visited the "nest" occasionally for about ten days or so.

One morning, I saw that the kildeer had wearied of her task. The eggs had disappeared and in their place were some small pieces of bark. As I was about to turn away, one of the pieces moved slightly! Looking closer I saw that they were alive. All four eggs had hatched. Two hours later the mother bird had taken the young away. Rough calculation from the Tide Table shows the longest period of wetting to have been about one and a half hours. They were immersed to my certain knowledge for five consecutive nights.

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KILLER WHALES (see front cover)

The illustration shows two individuals of a school of twenty killer whales which became stranded near Estevan Point, West Coast of Vancouver Island, on June 13th, 1945. Fortunately it was possible to make observations on these and to obtain the complete skeleton of one for the Museum.

There are several recent instances of these mammals becoming stranded. Eleven killers became grounded near Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands, about January 14th, 1941, and a number were temporarily stranded at Cherry Point, Vancouver Island, on September 28th, 1944. More recently a group of false killers went ashore at Crescent Beach, Florida.

There is no satisfactory explanation as to why these animals become stranded. In some instances it would seem that they become grounded while pursuing prey in shallow water on a falling tide. It has been noted, however, that when some stranded individuals were pulled off and headed out to sea they immediately turned round and deliberately grounded themselves again. With this in mind some investigators have advanced the theory that these marine animals are responding to an inherited urge to migrate in a straight line (as is the case in the famous lemmings) and drive themselves ahead even though dry land lies in their path.

G.C.C.

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THE LEWIS'S WOODPECKER

This handsome woodpecker (Illustration A) is still to be seen in the city of Victoria and its outskirts. It is well to write of him before he is compelled to retire to quieter and more open locations. The bird inhabits areas where poplars, alders and oaks provide ample opportunity for nesting and space for flight.

The colour of the plumage is unusual. Parts above are black with a greenish lustre. A narrow collar of grey surrounds the neck and extends to the breast. The face and chin are dull crimson, the abdomen a hairy mixture of rose and grey -- mostly a warm suffusion of rose. In size the bird is about as large as a robin.

The Lewis's Woodpecker is a bird of the west, first listed by Captain Lewis of the Lewis and Clark Expedition more than 100 years ago. It has beauty in colour and yet is partly crow-like black and shining. Its flight, too, is crow-like level with a full spread of wings. Flycatcher-like, the bird wings its way high among the tree-tops in pursuit of the larger insects which make up most of its diet, varied with fruit both wild and cultivated, chiefly the former.

The birds are quiet, but make a harsh churring noise in the nesting season. Nest-holes are usually placed high, generally in dead trees in which as many as nine glossy white eggs are laid.

The range is from Alberta west to southern Vancouver Island; they winter over a wide area through California, Arizona and New Mexico.

J. O. Clay.

THE WESTERN OR ARKANSAS KINGBIRD

This pretty bird (Illustration B), a true fly-catcher, of less than robin size is also a bird of the west. In coloration the head, breast and back are grey, the chin white, the tail black with white side-margins; underparts are sulphur-yellow. An orange spot upon the crown, nearly concealed, finishes the ensemble.

This migrant from the south is scattered sparsely through the prairie where there are trees for cover, and westward through British Columbia east of the Cascades. There is one record for Vancouver Island.

It is often found nesting close to the haunts of man, disregarding the bustle of busy places and rather adding to it.

The bird is an agile flier, often rising vertically from its perch on tree or wire to catch a passing insect, then usually deftly dropping to the same or a similar position.

The voice is shrill, the call-note a sharp "whit". In early June this early riser adds its "Whit-whit-feedle-di-di" to the waking chorus of bird song.

The nest, placed in trees, bushes or on posts and buildings, is composed of soft grass and twigs, string, wool, scraps of clothing and plant-down. There are three to five eggs white or creamy-white spotted with lilac or reddish-brown.

The range is from the southern Canadian prairies south to Mexico and even Guatemala.

J. O. Clay.

JUNIOR PAGE

Activities: October 23rd: Several specimens were brought along by the members, among them being a wasp's nest, guineapigs and Eastern newts. The older members went to the B.C. Police Bldg., where they saw a large relief map of Southern B.C. A smaller relief map was then seen in the Mineral Museum. These excursions were made with the idea of making a relief map of our own, of Southern Vancouver Island. After returning to the Museum, the map was begun. Meanwhile the other members modelled leaf patterns in plasticine.

October 30th: The members were shown a large Halloween Spider by Dr. Carl. The older members continued with the relief map while the rest modeled a fish in plasticine. The better plasticine models may now be seen in a display case in the Museum.

November 6th: The mapping and modeling was continued.

November 13th: Miss Newton showed the members several wax models of frogs and explained how they were made from casts of the original specimens. The younger members then modeled frogs while the older members continued their work on the map. Later, all went to the Photographic Branch Theatre, where two films, "Three Little Bruins in the Woods", and "Geological Work of Ice" were seen.

November 20th: Dr. Carl suggested that the members make some lino-block printing for Christmas cards. A start was then made on planning the designs and transferring them to the linoleum.

Brian Ainscough,

Junior Editor.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

- TUESDAY GEOLOGY GROUP MEETING, Provincial Museum at  
Jan. 4: 8 p.m. Dr. John Stevenson will contribute  
his part to the programme arranged by Mr.  
Winkler on physical geology. All interested  
are welcome.
- MONDAY AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR: Prince Robert House  
Jan.10: Auditorium at 8 p.m. Mr. Carl W. Buchheister,  
"Wildlife Down East."
- TUESDAY GENERAL MEETING, Reading Room of the Provincial  
Jan.18: Library. Speaker: Dr. G.C. Carl;  
Topic: "Some Famous Fishes". (Note change  
of date from second to third Tuesday because  
of the Audubon Tour).
- TUESDAY BOTANY GROUP MEETING, Provincial Museum  
Jan.25: at 8 p.m. Mr. W. Tildesley.

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*Jo*