

The
VICTORIA
NATURALIST

Vol. 6, No. 5

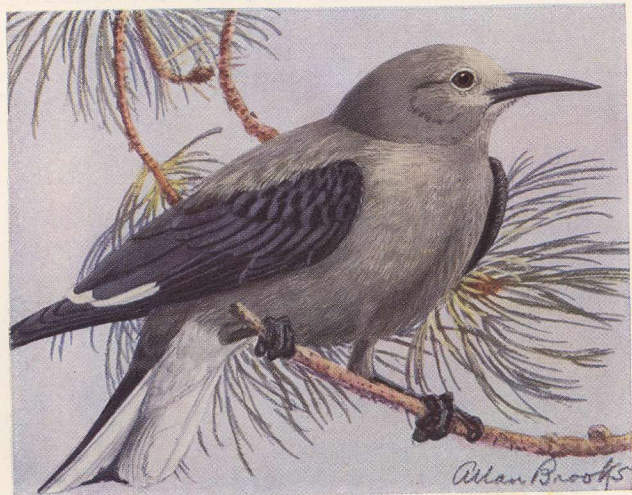
November, 1949



(Photo by J. A. Munro.)

Trumpeter swans and Canada geese, Vaseaux Lake
Bird-sanctuary, B.C.

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

A. Clarke's Nutcracker; scale, $\frac{1}{3}$ 

Mountain Chickadee; scale, $\frac{1}{3}$
 B. Black-capped Chickadee; scale, $\frac{1}{3}$

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Clarke's Nutcracker

Those in this Western country who know the benchlands and mountains lying east of the Cascades have had good chances of knowing the Clarke's Crow, that noisy member of the family Corvidae. This energetic bird of white, black, and grey plumage makes himself known by his high, sharp musical though nasal cries and by his guttural jaylike noises. In autumn he leaves the higher mountains, becoming common where bull-pines predominate in the lowlands. This bird is a master of the air, an acrobat of the woods, tumbling and twisting around the trees or hurtling down the mountain side. His diet at this time is largely pine-seeds, as he moves actively among the long needles.

He is found over a wide territory from Alaska to Lower California. Nests early in the year in conifers, laying 2 or 3 eggs chiefly in evergreens.

J.O.C.

The Black-capped Chickadee

Though so diminutive in size, there is perhaps no species of bird more welcome to a traveller in the quiet eastern woods of the Province, during the time of dull cold weather and darkened winter skies. The Black-capped Chickadee, is always busy and always cheerful. His sharp 'Chick-a-dee' note is a familiar sound, his clear song 'spring-time' is musical; the cadence 'spring time here' still more musical and sweet. This song is comparable to the better known portion of our Golden-crowned-sparrow's pensive song whistled in a variety of keys and which we hear only in spring-time as he feeds in our gardens enroute for the North.

The Mountain Chickadee is not nearly as common as

the Black-capped variety. He differs in plumage from the Black-capped Chickadee chiefly by the long white line over the eye, in sharp contrast to the black head.

J. O. C.

The Sharp-tailed Snake in British Columbia

Last July Mrs. Beatrice J. McGusty of Pender Island picked up a small snake which appeared to differ from the local garter snakes in a few details. Fortunately she decided it was worth closer study for she sent it to the Provincial Museum for identification. It proved to be the sharp-tailed snake (Contia tenuis), a reptile not known to occur in British Columbia except for an early record by Boulenger of the British Museum based on a single specimen said to be from Vancouver Island. A short time later a second individual was captured near the same spot this time by Mrs. Allan Brooks who also lives on Pender Island. The finding of two specimens within a few days of each other suggests that this snake is reasonably common in this area.

Both specimens are small, about nine inches in length. The general colour is a chestnut brown with a faint orange stripe on each side. The ventral surface is light grey with a dark cross-bar on each scale, a colour pattern which marks this species at once from all other snakes likely to be found in this Province. The most unusual feature however, is the tail which ends abruptly in a sharp spur which apparently has some use in anchoring the body when climbing.

Nothing appears to be known about the habits of this inoffensive reptile except that it is apparently mainly nocturnal, spending most daylight hours under cover. Its range is California north to the Puget Sound area in Washington. The capturing of the present specimens now extends the known range into British Columbia. Since in all likelihood this snake is also present on Vancouver Island it will repay those interested to examine more

closely than usual all small snakes seen in future and to capture any which appear to differ from garter snakes.

G. Clifford Carl,
Provincial Museum.

Bird-group at Whitty's Lagoon, September 24, 1949

Dowitchers

Swift little water birds with long needle bills,
Autumn-faded plumage with sparrow-striped quills,
Dig along the mud-shores fringing the lagoon
A termite a tidbit, a lightning bug a boon.

Bold little dowitchers, even when they see
The curious students of orni-thol-ogy
Craning and staring like tourists at the zoo
Go right on doing what Dowitchers do.

M. Eugenie Perry.

Three hours of interest and enjoyment were spent by thirty-three members of the group in this delightfully scenic spot. Fine, still sunny weather, moderate visibility, high tide. A circuit was made of the west side of the lagoon. Birds seen and watched inside the Spit were:- Fox sparrows, Golden-crowned sparrows, Savanna sparrows, Pintail ducks, Red-breasted Mergansers, green-winged teal, herons, a Kingfisher, Killdeer plovers, a Golden Plover, Long-billed dowitchers, Pectoral Sandpipers, Glaucous-winged gulls. Looking outward from the spit

were seen Band-tailed pigeons, Surf-scooters, Coast-herons, Violet-green Cormorants, Least and Baird Sandpipers. Overhead were Bonaparte gulls hawking for high-flying termites. Off-shore there were several hair-seals. (With considerable interest they watched the party consuming cookies on the Spit.) The most interesting feature of the afternoon was the party of 3 Long-billed dowichers together with 3 Pectoral Sandpipers. These half-dozen birds probed busily and deeply in the soft ooze taking little notice of many human onlookers some of whom stood within 15 feet. One onlooker approached within one pace of them. The Pectoral Sandpipers were of special interest, being rare or only casual visitors on their Pacific route to S. America. Cars were provided by E. W. Adshead, Mrs. Bland, Mrs. Blackton, J. O. Clay, A. R. Davidson, V. G. Odling, Messrs. Stansfield, W. Stevens, Stewart.

Migrants.

Mr. A. L. Meugens reports that on October 5th a flight of large birds passed over the city at a height of less than 200 feet. They were probably Turkey-vultures on migration.

They Follow the Tourists to Victoria --

The Heermann's Gull has been noted by several of our members this summer. It is one of the smaller gulls, graceful and active, following the kelp-beds and rocky shores. Adult birds have whitish head and neck, dark grey body, tail black tipped with white. Immature birds are very dark. The red bill is distinctive.

A peculiarity of these birds is that they breed along the Californian coast, afterwards coming north to visit our shores.

J. O. C.

Botany Meeting

The first meeting of the Botany group held in Dr. Carl's office on September 20th was well attended and a programme for the coming winter was outlined. It is hoped to continue the study of taxonomy, taking up a number of families in detail. It is also planned to have several speakers, specialists in their own line, to address the group.

Geology Group

As Mrs. William Mathews has moved from Victoria and therefore found it necessary to resign as chairman of the Geology Group, Mr. John H. Whitehouse has consented to act for the remainder of the year. He is a keen amateur palaeontologist and has dug up some interesting fossils both in Alberta and B.C.

The first meeting under Mr. Whitehouse's chairmanship will be held in the Provincial Museum at 8 p.m. November 1st. The subject will be "Hunting Fossils" and the future programme for the group will be discussed both for this winter and possible field trips next summer. Members interested in this subject should get in touch with the chairman at 1627 Hollywood Crescent, B-1684.

Blossom-picking by California Purple-finches --

respecting a contribution to the Victoria Naturalist by Morris Jackson, Fanny Bay, B.C.

The California Purple-finch is one of our commoner birds on Vancouver Island, staying here for the spring, summer and autumn months. These birds, together with a very few housefinches feed largely on weeds and fruit-buds at blossoming-time, moving through an orchard and nipping blossoms as they proceed. Sometimes a small group of these birds will gather in a fruit-tree, and these may give the observer the impression of a miniature snowstorm. Mr. Jackson observes, "All the attacks that I have witnessed were of brief duration, but were they to last several hours or to be made by many birds the effect on the fruit-output could be severe".

The amount of surplus flowers produced by a healthy fruit tree should be considered, for only thus can the finch be fairly judged.

In the case of cherries, horticultural authorities believe that 20 to 30 per cent of the flowers should set for a full commercial crop. In the plum it would be somewhat less. #

Since "a full commercial crop" means the maximum quantity of fruit that can be produced without impairment of quality and without reducing the tree's vigour, it follows that any quantity of fruit additional to what is requisite to a commercial crop is undesirable. Furthermore, not only is blossom-thinned fruit superior to fruit that has been thinned after several weeks' growth, but tree growth also benefits from blossom-thinning.

Therefore, since 70 to 80 per cent of the flowers can be considered to be surplus, it would seem that a high percentage may be removed by finches; not only without danger to the crop but actually with benefit to it.

We think that a quite unnecessary toll is taken each season by gun-men. Pine grosbeaks, purple-finches, house-finches and even crossbills may be the victims. These birds are of value in thinning potential excess fruit or in clearing foliage of plant-lice. In addition to their usefulness they have varied and attractive plumage. Their call-notes and songs add very much to the attractiveness of the countryside.

J. O. C.

Those wishing specific information on the number of flowers required for a full commercial crop of various fruits are advised to write to: "Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A."

A Short Note on *Isia Isabella* A. & S.
The Isabella Tiger Moth

In the fall of the year the larva of this somewhat common moth may be seen crawling, at times in large numbers, across roads and paths with hurried gait, as if anxious to reach some far off goal before it is too late. This is actually what is happening, as the larvae are seeking quarters in which to hibernate before being overtaken by the rigours of winter. They will reappear in spring, sometimes quite early, should the weather be mild, as they are fond of a sun bath when opportunity affords, and in May or June they pupate.

In appearance the larva is one of the so-called woolly bears, being covered all over with a coat of longish black hair, with a central zone of red brown. This band varies in width in different specimens, and is sometimes entirely absent.

It must not be confused with the larva of *Halisidota maculata angulifera* Wlk. which it resembles at first sight.

This latter larva always has some white hairs intermingled with the black ones at either end of the body. The central zone is of a yellowish brown and has a number of black spots down its centre, more or less distinct, in all specimens. This species pupates in the autumn and feeds chiefly on alder.

The spring pupating *Isia isabella* A. & S. feeds on *Spirea discolor* Pursh and *S. douglasii* Hook., also on *Bracken* (*Pteris aquilina* L.) According to Holland, in his *Moth Book I.* *isabella* is partial to grasses and plantains, (*Plantago* spp.) but the writer has not found this to be the case. It is possible however that the larvae may, in the spring occasionally nibble at tufts of grass and also moss. It is probable that in British Columbia at any rate, the larvae are fully fed in the fall and do not partake of food to any great extent after reappearance in the spring. Tufts of grass and moss however should be placed in the container with any larvae which it is desired to keep over winter.

They are easily kept alive during the winter months by placing them in a ten inch flower pot. This should be prepared as follows: Place a little earth over the hole at the bottom of the pot to help to prevent the larvae escaping. Over this place a deep layer of moss, filling the pot to about three quarters full. Fasten a cheese cloth cover over the top of the pot. In the spring, when the larvae are again showing signs of activity, introduce a few tufts of fine grass in which the larvae may cocoon in due course. Pupation usually takes place in April or May.

The flower pot should be placed out of doors, as moisture is necessary to prevent the larvae from drying out. A reasonable amount of frost does no harm, but excess of moisture is to be avoided. The pots therefore should be placed in a situation where excess moisture may drain away readily.

The moth is on the wing during June and July, and is straw coloured in general with some dusky dots on both upper and lower wings and a row of black spots on each segment of the abdomen. Sometimes the underwings are more or less suffused with salmon which also spreads to the abdomen. It may be taken occasionally at night, but is not seen as commonly as is the larva. It oviposits freely in almost any sort of box. The eggs hatch in about ten days. If it is desired to rear a series, the newly hatched larvae may be placed in a suitable container and supplied with leaves of the food plant. It is a good plan, when the larvae are large enough, to place them in a sleeve of cheese cloth and tie this securely to the growing food plant. They must be examined from time to time to see that no intruders have got in which might injure or kill the larvae, and also to release any pellets deposited by the larvae, which if left too long might prove a source of infection.

It is essential to supply larvae with an unlimited supply of the food plant.

The larvae may be kept in the sleeves till they are full grown in the fall, when they should be supplied with winter quarters as described above.

J. R. J. Llewellyn Jones,

Cobble Hill, B.C.

Report of October Meeting

The October general meeting was held on Tuesday, October 11th, in the Provincial Library. As Mr. Hardy was confined to the house with a cold, our new Vice-President, Mr. J. O. Clay, was called on to take the chair.

After the reading and adoption of the minutes of the September meeting two new members, Dr. and Mrs. Terry, were cordially welcomed.

Mr. Tildesley then took the occasion to introduce the new chairman of the Geology Group, Mr. John H. Whitehouse. Mr. Whitehouse disclaimed any authority as an expert and assured the group he had joined the Society to learn things and not to teach, but as he was very interested in fossil collecting and has had some practise he hoped the geology group would get together at various times and exchange ideas and try to further their knowledge of the subject. The first meeting is called for November 1st, when Mr. Whitehouse will show some of the material he has collected and discuss some of the do's and don'ts of fossil collecting.

Following the business session Mr. George J. Alexander, Deputy Minister of Fisheries, was called upon to speak and show the Provincial Fisheries Department film, "Let's Go Fishing".

Largest Plants and Animals Found in Ocean's Depths

Commenting on the film "Let's Go Fishing", which he edited, Mr. Alexander told the meeting that although the largest plants and animals in the world are to be found in the ocean they are rarely seen by man.

The film he showed depicted the salmon industry in British Columbia, and the life of the fish from spawning ground to can. The first canneries in the province were crude affairs run almost entirely by hand, and a far cry from the factories of today with their incredibly efficient mechanical equipment.

The speaker said fisheries were directly responsible through the centuries for the development of maritime nations, that the oldtime fishermen ranged far and wide, some having appeared on the Atlantic coast far in advance

of Christopher Columbus.

Although there are 245 species of fish obtainable in the province only thirty-two species are canned commercially. Mr. Alexander, in describing the origins of commercial canning as we now know it stated that the first fish to be canned on this continent was the Atlantic lobster.

After the lecture Mr. Alexander answered a number of questions in the interesting and informative manner that only an expert in his field can achieve.

Mr. J. H. Whitehouse moved a vote of thanks to the speaker which the meeting most heartily endorsed.

JUNIOR PAGE

SOLUTION TO LAST MONTH'S PUZZLE:

¹ D	U	² C	³ K	█	⁴ C	⁵ H	A	⁶ R
E	█	⁷ O	I	L	█	O	█	O
⁸ N	⁹ E	W	T	█	¹⁰ C	R	A	B
█	M	█	¹¹ E	Y	A	S	█	I
¹² C	U	¹³ B	█	█	¹⁴ T	E	R	¹⁵ N
O	█	E	█	█	█	█	O	█
¹⁶ B	O	A	R	¹⁷ S	█	¹⁸ B	E	¹⁹ E
R	█	R	█	²⁰ K	E	A	█	L
²¹ A	S	S	█	Y	█	Y	A	K

JUNIOR PAGE

The Hallowe'en Spider (Aranea trifolium)

One of our most common and beautiful spiders is the Hallowe'en Spider, so named on account of its appearing around that time of year. It may easily be recognized by the extremely large abdomen, with two pairs of eye-spots upon it. Its legs are banded black and white. About this time of the year, the large females are frequently seen with their abdomens distended with eggs.

Before winter, these eggs have been laid in a silken pouch where they will remain until spring, at which time the young emerge. On hatching, these tiny spiders climb as high as possible and release a thread, which acts as a parachute on which it may glide afar. When the spider wishes to alight, it merely reels in some of its parachute and glides down to a safe landing. It then spins a web and commences all the normal duties of a spider. The Hallowe'en Spider is one of the Orb Weaver family, spinning a beautifully symmetrical web. The spider does not sit on the web itself, but under a nearby leaf, to which is attached a "telegraph wire", by means of which it knows when food has landed in its trap. As is common among spiders, the female is larger than the male. The young spider continues to feed and grow, until autumn, when the large female lays her eggs and dies soon afterward. This spider lives only one year, yet in that short space of time it does a lot of good -- so in future when you see one, or for that matter, any spider, let it live on for the rest of its intended life.

Brian Ainscough.

NOTICES OF MEETINGS

- 1949
 Tuesday
 Nov.1st GEOLOGY GROUP MEETING in Dr. Carl's Office,
 Provincial Museum, at 8 p.m.
 Speaker: Mr. J.H. Whitehouse, on
 "Collecting Fossils".
- Tuesday
 Nov.8th General Meeting in the Reading Room of the
 Provincial Library, at 8 p.m.
 Speaker: Dr. Kenneth King, Dominion-Provin-
 cial Entomologist, with a film on Vegetable
 Insects".
- Tuesday
 Nov.15: BOTANY GROUP MEETING: An illustrated lecture
 will be given by Mr. Roy Foster, Dominion
 Plant Pathologist, in the office of the
 Plant Pathologist, Superior Street, at 8 p.m.
- Thursday
 Nov.24th Ornithology Group Meeting at the home of
 Miss Sara Spencer, 1040 Moss St., at 8 p.m.
 Speaker: Mr. David A. Munro, Dominion
 Wildlife Officer.
- Wednesday
 Nov.30th: AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR at Prince Robert House
 Auditorium at 8 p.m. The first tour of the
 season with Bert Harwell and his film
 "Canada West". Season tickets are now
 available at Prince Robert House or the
 Provincial Museum for \$2.00.

Muskrat Feeding

A muskrat was observed feeding on the surface of the water some yards out from the shore and clear of supporting herbage. It was lying horizontally on the surface with its tail held stiffly straight at an angle of about 45 degrees. This position was evidently just sufficient to counterbalance its head while it munched some choice morsel of food on the surface. When ready to dive, the animal lowered its tail under the water and then disappeared gracefully beneath the surface, soon to reappear and re-enact the action.

G.A.H.

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