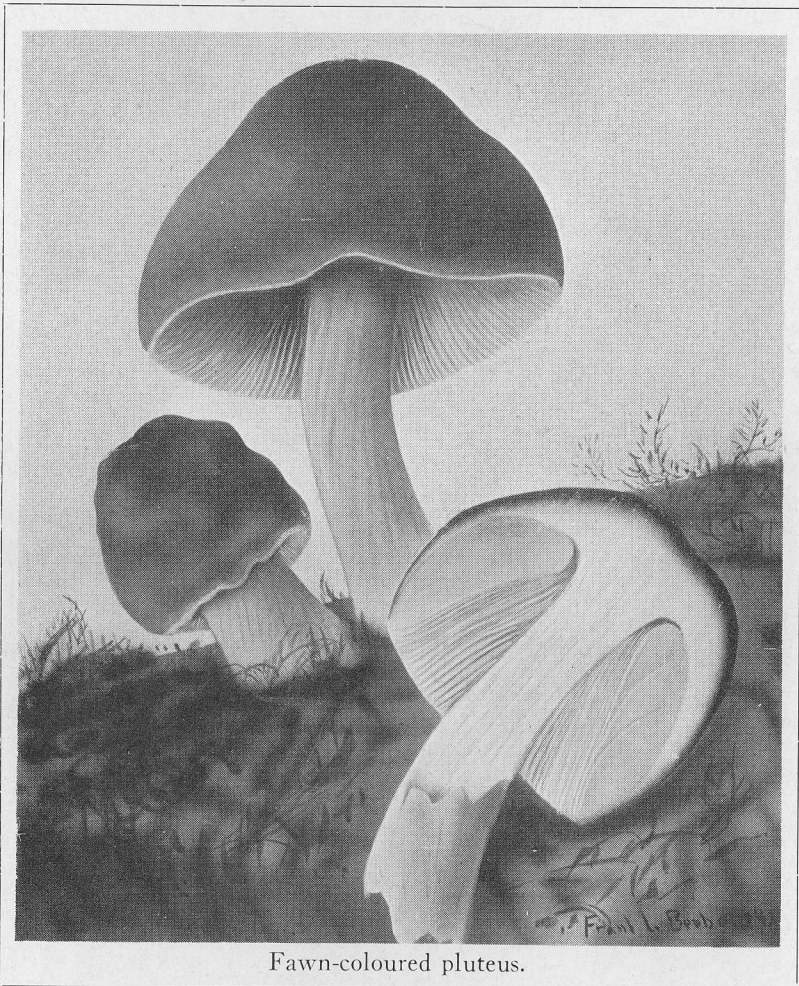


The
**VICTORIA
NATURALIST**

Vol. 7, No. 4

October, 1950



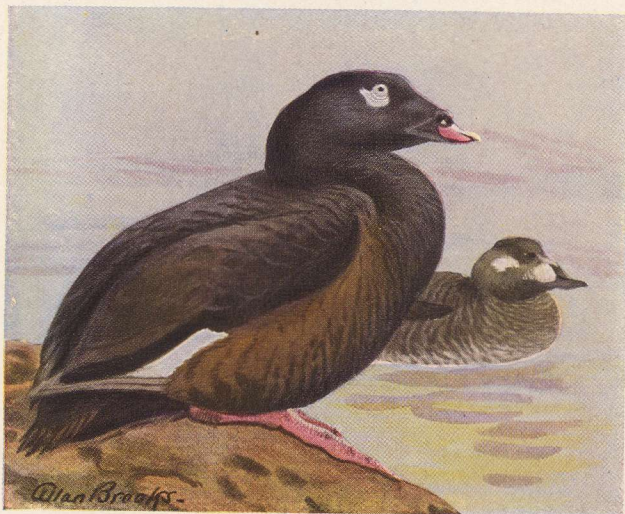
Fawn-coloured pluteus.

Published by the
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VICTORIA, B.C.





A. Marbled Murrelet; scale $\frac{1}{2}$
 Young in winter
 Summer adult



B. White-winged Scoter, scale, $\frac{1}{2}$
 Male Female

Oréal Bonner

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The Marbled Murrelet

by C.J. Guiguet

All bird lovers on the west coast are familiar with this mysterious little alcid. It is most abundant along the entire coast line of British Columbia where it is seen the year around.

As illustrated, the summer and winter plumage are vastly different, the summer bird appearing very dark at a distance, while the winter and juvenile plumage is predominately white.

Although several egg records exist, they, for the most part, are represented by oviduct specimens only, that is, eggs taken from shot birds. A few records, none authenticated, exist of eggs found in nest location. For large part then, practically nothing is known of the breeding behavior of this species. This is strange for a species so abundant, and which obviously nests within sight of the sea all along our coast.

Records of the young birds are interesting. Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan took a juvenile, incapable of flight, with down plumes still present at the extremities of the tail retrices - on the lawn in front of the University library in Vancouver. Jewett found young birds in the forest several miles back from the sea in Washington, Ronald Stewart picked one up wandering in the coniferous forest two miles from the sea, on the Queen Charlotte Islands - none of these birds were in a nest location as far as the investigations could ascertain. Several young have been shot when they first appeared on the water, these birds also carried natal down and the egg tooth was still present as it was in the specimen taken on land. So close and yet so far!

The circle of evidence however, is gradually tightening on the elusive nest, here are the facts known today.

The bird is strictly nocturnal in visiting the nesting area. They have often been seen at dusk, rising from the sea, and, like small accurate projectiles hurtling inland over the beaches, sometimes very low, often at great height. In season, they pass over the home of H. M. Laing at Comox, and over that of R. Stewart at Massett. These two field investigators are highly experienced experts in the art of tracking and trailing all manner of wildlife, particularly birds - they have yet to pinpoint the terminal point of these nocturnal flights. In the dusk of early morning the birds are seen returning from the land, usually extremely high, their piercing calls may be heard, while very often the birds themselves cannot be seen.

From the evidence gathered, the birds are incubating in May. Specimens taken on May 31 at Goose Island had brood patches bare. The first young were observed on the sea on June 25. These birds were capable of flight, though egg tooth and natal down were present. It is assumed they leave the nest and fly to the sea. Apparently the marbled murrelet lays only one egg, incubating males and females have a single brood patch and pairs are seen with a single young bird only.

The male and female "swing shift" during incubation, one remaining on the nest throughout the day, the other on the sea feeding. In the early evening they exchange places. When the young are hatched and are being fed both adults are on the water, at dusk they may be seen gathering sand lance or herring, which they hold in their bills while uttering their cries. As darkness increases, so does the calling, this is accompanied by short circular flights terminating at the point of take off. Eventually the birds take off in straight flight and disappear over the gloomy coniferous forest.

When the young are ready to come off the nest large concentrations of adults have been observed in certain areas along the coast. These masses of birds often numbering four to five hundred individuals which keep up a continual din throughout the day. As evening approaches the calling activities and fighting intensifies, then gradually the pairs disappear. I have observed four such concentrations, in each case, the young were on the water in numbers the following morning. At this time the possibility of locating the nesting area appears to be high. It is thought that the marbled murrelet is a colonial nester only in certain areas, normally breeding as individual pairs here and there. If these concentrations appeared annually the matter of location would be simplified, however, upon return to two of these concentration areas on the same dates a year after discovery I found no concentrations there, though a fresh concentration was found some fifty miles distant.

Other commitments have prevented the Provincial Museum from continuing the murrelet research this spring, but plans are afoot to continue the work annually until the life history of this secretive bird is made known.

The White Winged-Scoter

This large scoter is another of our most common birds. It is to be seen on the coast littoral about Victoria the year around, but the greatest concentrations are seen in the winter months. Those birds observed after the month of May are for the large part non-breeding immature individuals. In May the scoters leave the sea and migrate to the interior of the continent where they breed and rear their young about the fresh water lakes.

The ponderous flight of this large bodied duck is familiar to all, and the bird is readily identified in the distance by the white on the wing, no other scoter occurring in North America has this characteristic.

On the Pacific coast the scoters are not classed as a game bird, but on the Atlantic seaboard they furnish sport for many wild fowlers who refer to them as "coot". The flesh is said to be palatable, but apparently does not compare favourably with that of the pond ducks.

BIRD GROUP NOTES:

On Aug. 19th, 19 members of the bird group drove to Mount Newton Cross-roads and on to East Saanich Indian Reserve. Several hours were spent around the mud-flats, sandspit and along the open beach. The weather was clear and calm and the following classes of birds were seen: 1 diver, 2 alcides, 2 sandpipers, 2 waders, 2 ducks, 3 gulls, 1 cormorant, 1 waxwing, 3 finches, 17 varieties in all. Three newcomers were guests of members.

Mr. Stewart displayed a specimen of Traill's fly-catcher, this was one of two that had crashed into the window of Mr. W. H. Colley's house in the Observatory area. This occurred on the 13th and 14th and two days later, flights of 500 or more flycatchers of similar type were observed for two days. Probably on migration.

J.O.C.

Northern Phalarope (*Lobipes lobatus* L.)

Two small birds were observed on Aug. 29th in the garden of Mrs. Fraser Shepherd, Byng St., one with an apparently injured wing. A third bird was picked up dead, on the roadway. Mr. and Mrs. Hibberson and the writer identified them as Northern Phalaropes and took the dead bird to the Museum for confirmation.

The two survivors were taken by Mrs. Shepherd to Deep Cove and released where they at once began to swim around and feed, using their wings with no apparent difficulty.

Anna Ewart.

Beacon Hill Park, Aug. 20, 1950 by a visitor from Manhattan, now a member of the Victoria Natural History Society. J.O.C.

TURN OF THE TIDE

Marie L. Weldon

Along the beach the long-billed willets feed
Probing the plunder of the heedless tide;
Pied turnstones seek among the rocks, nor heed
Two tattlers sleeping one-legged side by side.

Intent, a busy sanderling pecks and trots
Along the pebbles on erratic feet
While slow-winged herons stand in shallow spots
And patiently await some finny treat.

Like tiny anchored ships the gulls sit white
Against the limpid blue that fills the bay,
Or cry from driftwood floats their hungry plight
With upstretched pulsing necks the sea's delay.

How old the pattern of the changing sea
That brings the world of Western birds to me.

THE FAWN-COLOURED PLUTEUS

Pluteus cervinus

G. A. Hardy

The subject of our cover page is a fairly common species in the Victoria district and is sure to reward the searcher during his or her springtime rambles along woodland trails. It has a partiality for well rotted fallen tree-trunks. Within this log the mycelium wanders and feeds until the urge of maturity causes it to "gather up the threads" to seek the daylight and open air in the form of the mushroom as depicted.

The name "Pluteus" means a shed or cover in reference to the cap, while "cervinus" means a deer, in this

particular instance referring to the colour.

At first thick and fleshy and of a rich chocolate brown colour, the cap gradually expands into a shape somewhat resembling an inverted saucer up to four or more inches across and of a light brown or fawn colour. On the underside are the many radiating vertical plates or gills, on both sides of which the salmon-coloured spores are developed, soon to be ejected into the air whence they float away to pastures new. Of the many thousands of spores thus liberated, each capable of developing into a new mycellium, only one or two may alight on a substratum suitable for germination.

Although somewhat robust in appearance it is actually very fragile, readily breaking to pieces if roughly handled; the gills, especially, are soft and easily damaged.

The Fawn-coloured *Pluteus* is of a rather solitary habit; for this reason it is not as readily noticed as some of the smaller species of mushrooms which make up in numbers what they lack in size. As an article of diet this mushroom makes a possible if somewhat tasteless addition to the menu, - the fragility of its substance is an indication of its tenderness when properly prepared for the table. Only fresh young specimens should be eaten.

Tickseed (*Coreopsis Atkinsonia* T&G.) Mr. J. O. Clay has established a planting of this very attractive biennial from the interior. It makes a very nice garden item with its numerous bright yellow ray-flowers and brown disk-flowers.

Geology Group Visit Mineralogical Museum

Through the kindness of Dr. Hartley Sargent, Chief Mining Engineer, British Columbia Department of Mines, arrangements were made for the Geology group to be personally conducted through the mineralogical museum. Some ten members availed themselves of this splendid opportunity. Mr. Winkler introduced them to Dr. John Stevenson who then took charge. He proved to be a most patient and efficient guide, explaining things so that even the beginner could understand. The wall charts made by Dr. Stevenson were most illuminating, showing the outlines of geological history and the creation of veins, dikes, etc. He then showed us the geological map of Canada, with emphasis on British Columbia. Next we were shown crystals of various ores, quartz, amethyst, silicate, etc. Here a short study of crystallization would have been an advantage but time was too short. We then passed on to the polished specimens ranging from pseudo-jade to opal and from galena to gold-bearing quartz with jasper and marble on the side.

At this point we were introduced to Mr. Shepherd who showed us samples of various rocks under the so-called black light (argon) bringing out fluorescent lights of various colors in what appeared to be ordinary pieces of rock in the daylight; some even retained the power to transmit light for some time after the lamp was shut off. Some of us would gladly have stayed longer at this and learned more but Dr. Stevenson would have none of it and introduced Mr. Williams who showed us the marvellous machine called a "Spectroscope". It is hard for a layman to even describe such an intricate mechanism. Roughly it looks like a baby grand piano, has a vast number of gadgets and lights on it with a long black box arrangement where photographs or rather composite films are made of the ore samples. Roughly, very roughly, the idea is this: when metals are burned, each one absorbs light of a different wave

length. Therefore, when a piece of ore, even of the minutest size, is burned in a carbon arc and the light passed through a prism, the resulting spectrum shows characteristic dark bands where the light has been absorbed. By comparing the lines on the film with the lines on the chart, the content of the sample is known as each metal, gold, silver, lead etc., produces a different set or quantity of lines on the film. It is interesting to note that by this method tungsten was found during the war and also that all samples sent in for analysis are now examined by the spectroscope.

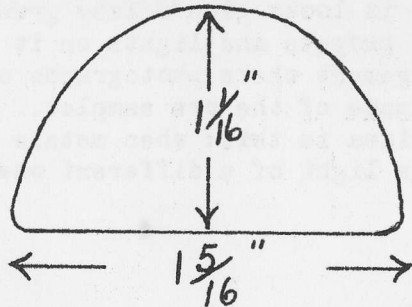
Mr. Winkler had one more surprise for us; he asked Mr. Shepherd to show us a "Geiger Counter". This was exposed at varying distances from the radium bearing ores in the showcases and we were all able to hear the "ticking" or "counting" of the machine. Time was up, so all we could do was to thank Dr. Stevenson and Mr. Shepherd for their very great courtesy. We left feeling we had had a very enjoyable as well as a very instructive afternoon.

J. H. W.

Violet-green Swallow Nesting-box

Mr. E. E. Bossence of 3230 Quadra Street writes that this season, swallows successfully occupied a nesting box measuring 6 x 6 x 5 inches made of half-inch material having an opening of the shape and size as shown in the accompanying sketch. The parent birds

had to "squeeze" to get through; presumably house sparrows could not enter.



General Field Trip

The annual picnic was held July 5th. Various incidents prevented us going to Jordan River as originally intended but 21 members turned out for what proved to be a very enjoyable outing to Muir Creek.

After lunch one group made its way along the beach to the fossil beds and managed to find some fairly good specimens of marine shells under the big bluff.

Some little study was made of the geologic fault at this point but as no one present could remember exactly how the fault looked before the last earthquake it was not possible to tell if it had been moved.

At one point a large mass of fossilized shells in sandstone, fully two feet square and four inches thick was split off with geologists hammers. It was suggested that this mass of shells would make a good museum specimen but no one had any suggestions as to how this 100 lb. mass was to be transported to the cars, so we had to be satisfied with breaking off a few samples for later examination. A few other specimens were picked up along the shore on the way back to the meeting point.

Some members of the party collected botanical specimens to bring home for identification but the ornithologists were rather disappointed as only the common shore birds were in evidence.

While we failed to find the particular specimen asked for by the President, we did have a lovely drive and a very pleasant afternoon. We felt that Muir Creek had given up its best and we must now look for new worlds to conquer.

J.H.W.

HOUSE FINCH OR "LINNET"

J. O. Clay

It is nineteen years since the first specimens of the House finch (Carpodacus mexicanus) were taken in the Southern Okanagan and thirteen since they were first noted on Vancouver Island.

The first birds were seen in Victoria, near the Legislative Buildings and now their high-pitched, staccato song can be heard any spring around Thunderbird Park or the large creeper covered buildings in that vicinity.

Outside the city they have been seen at Hatley Park near Royal Roads and Mrs. James Hobson made the first report for Oak Bay nesting of this species, near Fairfield and Beach Drive. J. O. Clay reports a nest near Sunset Avenue. A pair have also been seen near the waterfront home of Mrs. Hepburn near Oak Bay Golfhouse.

The species have migrated northward and westward from eastern Oregon in recent years following the clearing and settlement of the Pacific Northwest. Dawson and Bowles, in their volumes entitled "Birds of Washington" dated 1909 do not even mention the House-finch. Hoffman, in his "Birds of the Pacific States" dated 1927, speaks of the species as 'fairly common in Washington lowlands east of the mountains'.

The nest, deep and cup-shaped is built in wall creepers or low shrubs. It is closely and cleverly constructed of plant fibers, rootlets and is lined with hair. Eggs are pale bluish-green, sparingly spotted at the larger end, usually four or five in number.

Junior Page

The first meeting of the Junior Natural History Society for this season took place at ten o'clock on Saturday, September 23rd, at the Provincial Museum. Dr. G. C. Carl gave a talk on "crickets" and one hundred of these insects were on view to be studied. After the talk the Juniors sketched them and at 11:30 the meeting closed.

At the meeting on September 30th the following people were elected:-

Chairman:	Brenda Sigrist
Vice-Chairman:	Patricia Petrie
Secretary:	Marie Mitcham
Editor:	Doreen Wilby
Ass't Editor:	Peggy Carl

The Juniors will continue to meet in the Museum on Saturdays at 10 a.m.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

Saturday BIRD GROUP, Whitty's Lagoon.

Sept.30th:

Mr. Clay.

WEDNESDAY AUDOBON SCREEN TOUR LECTURE, Crystal Garden.

Oct.11th:

TUESDAY GENERAL MEETING - Provincial Library.

Oct.17th: "Natures' Marine Creatures", Dr. G. Clifford Carl.

TUESDAY

Oct.24th: BIRD GROUP, Mr. Chas. Guiget,

"Taxonomy of Birds".

Home of Mr. and Mrs. Tildesley, 118 Wildwood Ave.

8 p.m. (Take Gonzales Bus No.2, Crescent Rd.)

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Regarding the next monthly meeting, it will be held on the third Tuesday in October instead of the second, so as not to conflict with the first of the Audobon lectures. We would also like to remind members to dig around for interesting specimens to bring to this meeting. Anyway bring specimens even if you don't think them interesting, someone else may.

Did you see anything of interest this summer? Don't keep it to yourself, put it down on paper and send it to the Editor, Victoria Naturalist, 118 Wildwood Ave., or Dr. G.C. Carl, Director, Provincial Museum.

If any of our readers have favourite places where they find nature study particularly satisfying, the executive would be pleased to hear of it because they have an idea percolating in their collective heads that would make information of this type available to the various groups so that small parties that wish to go on field trips on their own will have some idea where to go to find the things they are interested in.

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