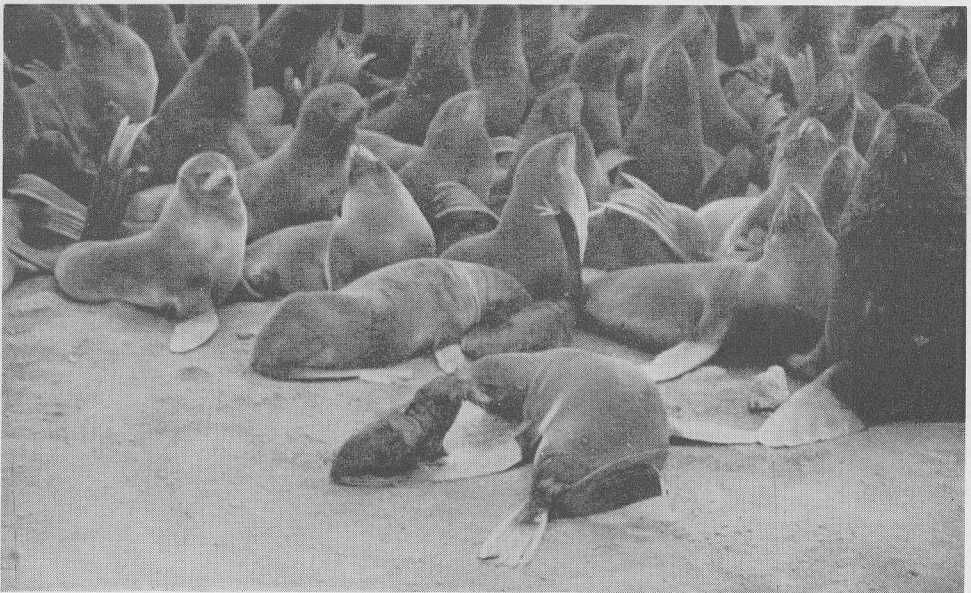


The
VICTORIA
NATURALIST

Vol. 7, No. 8

February, 1951



Fur-seals on St. Paul Island, Alaska.

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

THE VICTORIA NATURALISTPublished by
THE VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETYVol.7, No.8February 1951FRONTISPIECE

The Spotted Towhee is a resident on the West Coast but a migrant in the other areas from here to Manitoba. In size it is larger than the house-sparrow and smaller than the robin. The head and neck of the male is jet black and this carries down the back and tail. There is some white barring on the wings and shoulders and white shows on the end of the outer tail feathers. The flanks are rufous red and the under-parts white. In the female the black parts have a greyish colour. The contrasting black, red, and white make identification simple. It likes the underbrush along paths, roads and the edges of woods. Its bill shows it to be a seed eater but it takes much insect food in the nesting season. The names Towhee and Chewink arise from the sound of its call, this accounts for the name "cat-bird" which is used locally just south of us. It is not related to the true cat-bird (Dumetella carolinensis). A Towhee's nest with four eggs was found on the Mt. Douglas field trip of the botany group May 13, 1950, just a foot or so from the trail.

The Song Sparrow does not need much introduction as it is a year long resident and very common. The most striking thing about this bird is the manner in which its color varies according to its locality. While the eastern form is fairly uniform there are no less than six sub-species between here and Alaska, getting progressively darker and larger as we go north. During the winter a number of these northern types may be seen around Victoria but our common resident is the rusty song-sparrow, a brown and white streaked sparrow with the streaks of brown more sharply defined than in most others. The under parts are whitish and darken to a rusty brown over the back and the dark streaks aggregate into a dark spot on the breast.

H. D. R. Stewart.

EXECUTIVE NOTES

Dear Members:

Another March will soon be here, which, to our Society means another Annual Meeting and the election of a new executive. Some of your executive have served you, in one office or another, since the Society was formed and I know you join me in hoping that they will continue so to do for we cannot spare them. Dr. Carl, Mr. Clay, and Mr. Hardy, how could the V.N.H.S. have thrived as it has without these stalwarts? Mrs. Bland has been a most efficient and willing secretary for three years and before that was very popular with the Junior group to which she devoted many Saturday mornings.

We have a very happy little Society, organized for the benefit of all its members. None of the executive posts is heavy and all of them are rewarding.

The nominating committee will soon be busy again. If you are asked to help and have no real reason for refusing, DO accept. It is an honour to be asked.

R. Hobson,
President.

Dr. Margaret Newton and Mr. J.O. Clay have been asked to serve as a nominating committee.

The Executive feels that the Society is rather falling down on the job of keeping the younger generation interested. Group Chairmen are asked to give consideration to the idea of organizing junior field trips during the season. Look around for members of your group who are willing to devote one or two half days during the spring and summer to interesting the rising generation in the things you are interested in.

FUR-SEALS

While the fur-seal hauls out only in the Pribilof Islands, in Alaskan waters of the Bering Sea, it can be classed as a British Columbia animal since it spends a considerable amount of its time at sea off our own coast. At this time of the year numbers of them may be sighted a few miles off the West Coast of Vancouver Island where much of the sealing was done in the old days. Now they are afforded international protection; only Indians may take them provided they use only their primitive gear.

Many of our seals move northward each year arriving on St. Paul or St. George Island in the Pribilofs about May or June. Females haul out on the breeding grounds while the immature males join the bachelors. Certain of the latter group are selected each year and killed for their skins; Canada receives one-fifth of the number as her share in the industry.

The cover illustration shows part of a large harem on the breeding grounds. The bull is on the extreme right; some of the cows have already given birth to pups, one of which is shown in the foreground.

G.C.C.

ATTENTION -- SUMMER CAMPERS

The Vancouver Natural History Society is again planning a summer camp and we understand an invitation is to be extended to members of the Victoria Society to join them. Details are not yet available but the camping period will be about the end of July or the beginning of August and possibly in the Ashnola country south of Princeton. Until further information is at hand those Victoria members who are interested might leave their names with the secretary.

G.C.C.

BIRD GROUP

At two p.m. on Saturday, December 2nd, a small but enthusiastic group of members met at Clover Point to check upon the sea-birds around our rocky shores. Groups of birds typical of these areas were seen at Clover Point, Shoal Bay and Gonzales Point near Hood Lane.

At Clover Point were a few black turnstones beside a flock of 13 Aleutian sandpipers all busily feeding over the rocks lately uncovered by the receding tide. Nearby were a few yellow-legged surf birds. Offshore on the west side of the Point were American goldeneyes, buffleheads and cormorants. At the Point itself were short-billed and glaucous-winged gulls and surf-scoters. To the east were a great number of scaups.

Going on to Shoal Bay we saw a flock of house-sparrows feeding among the hip-laden tangle of roses on the cliff's edge. Beyond and at the east side of the Bay the usual flotilla of western grebes, 60 strong were lying at anchor, their white breasts gleaming in the afternoon light and heads resting on the middle of their backs.

At Gonzales Point there was the usual raft of several species actively feeding and dancing over the waves in bright winter colours; widgeon, shovelers, harlequins, and a few mallards. Further out were a few cormorants, old squaws and goldeneyes. As at Clover Point a number of scaups were lying off the east side of the Point.

Weather was calm and conditions good for bird watching.

J.O.C.

JANUARY MEETING

The first general meeting of 1951 was held at 8 p.m. Tuesday, January 8th, in the Reading Room of the Provincial Library. Many old members were present, after long absences, so reunions and seasons' greetings somewhat delayed the calling of the meeting to order. Once

January Meeting Cont'd

Mrs. Hobson, our president, got the attention of the members, routine business was soon disposed of. Mr. Taylor reminded those interested that Mr. John Nutt would address the next Botany Group meeting on Australian Flora, Jan. 16. Mr. Clay left the Saturday date of January 27th open for suggestions from members of the Bird Group who might know of good locations for the observation of spring arrivals and migrants. Mr. Whitehouse announced that Dr. F. W. Gray, an authority on the subject, would give the Geology Group an illustrated lecture on "The Nova Scotia Coal Fields", January 30th, in the Museum. The editor of the Naturalist made a plea for more active participation of the membership in their own publication particularly by contributing more material for inclusion in the magazine.

After Dr. Carl had mentioned a letter from the Vancouver Natural History Society regarding a possible naturalists' summer camp, Mrs. Hobson turned the meeting over to Mr. Wilson Duff, Provincial Anthropologist, the speaker for the evening.

Mr. Duff spoke about the beliefs the Indians had about animals and the effect of these beliefs on their behaviour. As this material is interesting and out of the run of material usually presented to our Society we have decided to publish the complete text in this and the March issue under its title "Indian Natural History". To illustrate his talk Mr. Duff had a number of dance-masks from the Provincial Museum collection. These illustrate the animals' combination of human and animal nature as described by the speaker, and included a perfect specimen of an Eagle mask that could be opened by the dancer to show the human mask underneath.

After Mr. Duff's lecture we were treated to a showing of the award winning Canadian film, "The Loon's Necklace". Nothing could have illustrated the theme of the lecture better than this fascinating depiction of a traditional story from the folk lore of our interior Indians. The story is carried through entirely by the use of authentic masks from the collection at the National Museum, Ottawa; even the colours are the original Indian dyes. No human faces appear on the screen; the only departure from authenticity is that the masks are those of our coast Indians

while the tale is from the folk lore of the interior.

The story is of the old blind medicine man, Kelora's attachment to his guardian spirit, the loon. As a token of gratitude for the spirit's aid in driving the wolves away from the starving tribe and for restoring his sight, Kelora takes his magic necklace and throws it over the head of the loon. The necklace falls around the loon's neck and a few white beads break away and scatter over the loon's back where they can be seen to this day.

There is a delightful absence of archness or the coy "Uncle Remus" sort of Hollywood treatment. It is a mature treatment of an authentic piece of Canadian folk lore with good recitation of the story, an excellent music score, unobtrusive sound effects and no distracting frills.

W.T.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN FEBRUARY

Amphibians

The tree-frog chorus should be heard for the first time during this month unless cold weather persists. Normally, these amphibians can be heard croaking about the first week of February but a freezing spell may delay their singing by some weeks. By the end of the month egg-masses of these frogs will be present in most temporary ponds. Salamander eggs may also be found at this season; the most common are those of the Northwestern Salamander, (Ambystoma gracile), which are in masses of thick jelly about as large as an orange. Look for these attached to twigs or other supports in woodland pools or along edges of lakes. The eggs of the Long-toed Salamander, (Ambystoma macrodactylum), are similar to those of the tree-frog except that the individual eggs are larger in size and the jelly-like envelopes are more distinct.

Another conspicuous inhabitant of the early spring ponds is the fairy shrimp, (Eubranchipus oregonus). Actually these creatures may be present all winter long, having hatched in the fall, but they become more conspicuous at this time because they are full size and often

abundant. The females are readily distinguished by the presence of an elongated tube filled with eggs. The males are identified by the greatly developed clasping organs around the head region. With the advent of warm weather they die; the eggs which are released float to the edge of water, dry out and hatch with the first fall rains.

G.C.C.

Birds: Watch for water-fowl beginning to move northward, particularly black brant and pintail duck. The smaller inland birds are also beginning to arrive.
C.G.

Wild Flowers:

A walk through the more natural areas of Beacon Hill Park and similar places in the vicinity of Victoria will reveal an abundance of awakening plant energy on every hand. Seedlings by the thousands are choking the ground with their tiny first leaves; little rosettes of miner's lettuce, buttercup and sanicle abound among the debris of last seasons once glorious display, a glory which as these seedlings foretell, will be repeated in due course. In the swamps the first spathes of the Skunk Cabbage, or Yellow Arum (Lysichiton americanum) are thrusting their golden spears through the rich black mud, a welcome ray of hope for things to come. By ditchside and swamp borders the buds of the Bird Cherry (Nuttallia cerasiformis) have already burst their bonds, soon to dangle their dainty candelabras of pedant white flowers from every twig, presenting one of the prettiest floral sights of the countryside. The pussy paws or "Palm", of the Scouler's Willow (Salix Scouleri) have now been a feature of the thickets for some time; soon, yellow masses of pollen will gladden the eye and entice the first adventurous bee or moth to partake of the proffered feast, though this willow depends chiefly on the agency of the wind to convey to the pistils, on a separate bush, the vital stimulus of regeneration.

On the southern slopes of gravelly soils the earliest of the mustards, Whitlow grass (Draba verna) will soon be speckling the ground with its tiny inch-high

inflouences of minute white flowers, a reminder to the herbalist that the balm for a sore, or "whitlow", will soon be available in the form of juicy leaves.

On the dry rocky slopes in some favoured nook, sheltered from the inclement weather, the Spring Gold (Lomatium utriculatum) may dab the greening sward like pats of butter set amid dark green feathery leaves.

Down by the sea the rugged Gum Weed (Grindelia stricta) still challenges the elements with its showy blooms.

As to the ubiquitous aliens, or "weeds" as we impolitely term them, they have long proved their ability to thrive in our climate; many flowering in every month of the year. The "wee crimson-tippet" flowers (Bellis perennis) of Burns is only temporarily suppressed by a blanket of snow, otherwise its cheerful flowers are always present, and possibly gave rise to the expression "fresh as a daisy" a tribute to its power to convey a feeling of optimism to its beholders.

On the border of fields and in our gardens the Chamomile (Anthemis arvensis) will not be downed by adverse circumstances, while the Chickweed (Stellaria media) and the Groundsel (Senecio vulgaris) are in their glory this month, for as winter annuals they are in the hey-day of their existence.

Thus the month of February has much to offer to those with an observant eye and an interest in the minutiae of Flora's domain, with an especial promise of delights to come.

George A. Hardy.

INDIAN NATURAL HISTORY (part 1)

By Wilson Duff, Provincial Museum

If Natural History can be defined as the study of animals and plants, then the old-time Indians of the British Columbia Coast were all first-rate naturalists. This is not surprising, of course, considering the immense importance of these other forms of life in the

native economy. The growing Indian child learned rapidly from a great fund of traditional information on animals and plants, which was, in effect, a whole system of Natural History, very different from our own. He accepted all this information as truth, fact, knowledge, and it all profoundly influenced his attitudes and behavior toward other living things. What he accepted as pure knowledge, however, seems to us to have been a fascinating mixture of knowledge and beliefs, of verifiable scientific facts based on his acute powers of observation on the one hand, and his traditional explanations of those facts on the other.

Nobody who has gained an appreciation of the complex ways in which the Indians made use of animal and plant materials of their environment will deny that they excelled in the field of practical knowledge and its application. They observed when and where runs of salmon would occur, then developed an efficient means of catching them. They studied the peculiar shape and habits of the halibut, then designed a hook to catch it. They observed the habits of deer, then developed a pitfall and placed it where the deer was certain to fall in; and so on. This kind of practical knowledge of animals and plants is well known and always credited to the Indians.

We will concern ourselves, however, with what we have called beliefs, and deal only with beliefs regarding animals. These beliefs deal with what the Indian thought about the origin and nature of animals, and how he accounted for the peculiarities of the different species. These beliefs were just as important to the Indian as his practical knowledge - indeed, he wouldn't and couldn't separate the two - and they were equal in influencing his behavior toward animals. Without an understanding of these beliefs we cannot understand many of his acts towards animals, and are tempted to label them as senseless or inexplicable "queer customs".

Of these queer customs, some are rituals or observances such as the First Salmon Ceremony, which was practiced in some form by every tribe of the Coast. Among the Tsimshian of the Skeena River, for example, the first spring salmon caught each year was treated as an honoured guest. It was caught by the oldest and wisest shaman (medicine man) in the village, who had dressed up in his

full regalia. Then four other shamans in full costume carried it on a new mat into the chief's house, where all the old and ceremonially pure people gathered for the ceremony. It was placed on a new cedar board, and as all the shamans sang, two old women carefully cut it open and cleaned it, calling it honorable names the whole time. After it had been roasted and eaten, all the bones were carefully gathered up and burned.

Another observance of the same sort was performed by all Coast hunters whenever they killed a bear. Among the Nootka of the west coast of Vancouver Island, for example, the body was brought into the house and placed in a sitting position. Then a hat was placed on its head and it was sprinkled with eagle down. It was offered food and invited to eat.

Besides these observances (and many others), there were numberless taboos. The Tsimshian would not let young women work on the salmon nets, and would not allow any woman to eat of the first salmon. The Tsimshian hunter would never leave a kill without carefully burning all the animal's bones. No Coast Indian would ever go on a hunting or fishing trip without first purifying himself by fasting, bathing, and scrubbing his body with boughs. Even today some of the older fishermen up the coast still bathe before going out fishing. To the Indians, a knowledge of these taboos and rituals was felt to be just as necessary for success as the more practical knowledge of animals and how to catch them. To them, these weren't queer customs, but logical acts based on their most fundamental beliefs concerning animals.

The best way to get an understanding of Indian beliefs regarding animals is to study their mythology.

All the Indians' traditional knowledge of the world and its creatures was remembered and passed on in the form of myths and tales, and as a result, if you ask an old Indian why the loon has spots, or why the runs of salmon occur in the same order every year, he will answer you by telling a story. Stories in Indian mythologies are of two types, myths and tales. The myths are stories of a mythological era long ago before the world and its creatures existed in their present forms, and usually explain how things came to be as they are. Needless to say, they were not 'myths' to the Indians. Tales are stories of the past since that time, when conditions were more like those of the present. (To be continued)

JUNIOR NATURAL HISTORY PAGE

Editor:

Doreen Wilby.

Phone:

E.2357.

Answers to the Christmas tree X-word puzzle:

ACROSS:

7. Trio
12. Bells
25. Roy
31. Tinsel

39. Eve
42. Gem

DOWN:

1. White Christmas
3. Frosty
6. Lightning
9. Ill
27. Yule

On Saturday, Jan. 13, Dr. Carl took us on a trip to the Fisherman's Co-op to see how the fish are stored and frozen. Mr. Gow, a worker at the plant, showed where the fish are brought in and cut open ready for the quick freeze. Flounders, lemon sole, rock sole, rock cod and grey cod were shown to us. We then moved into the cold storage rooms. We were taken into the quick freeze which contains fish that are stacked to be frozen on shelves. When the freezing unit is turned on a fan blows the temperature down to forty below zero.

From the quick freeze we were taken into the ice room which was ten above zero. Here the huge blocks of ice for the fish boats were kept. Next there was the cold storage room where it was four below zero. Here the fish were stacked on shelves almost to the roof. The fish were as hard as bricks and were very cold.

When at last we came outside the air felt warm as summer.

Marie Mitcham, Secretary,
J.N.H.

Announcement: The members of the J.N.H. may attend the Museum Movies at the 9:30 or 11 o'clock shows starting February 3. Our regular meetings will probably continue for the month of April. Read your magazine for announcements.

On the 2nd of December, 1950, the Provincial Museum was sixty-four years old.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

Tuesday: ZOOLOGY SECTION, 8 p.m. at the home of Dr. and
Feb. 6: Mrs. Carl, 410 Queen Anne Heights, Dr. Carl
will speak on "Mountain Mammals".

Tuesday: GENERAL MEETING AND GUEST EVENING, 8 p.m. at
Feb. 13: Provincial Museum, Dr. R. T. Congdon, noted
nature photographer of Wenatchee, will show
his film of bird life entitled "Wings North
and South".

Monday: AUDUBON SCREEN TOURS fourth lecture, "Below
Feb. 19: the Big Bend" by Allan Cruickshank. Crystal
Garden Auditorium, 8 p.m.

Tuesday: BOTANY GROUP - Provincial Museum at 8 p.m.
Feb. 27: Prof. Lowe

Saturday: JUNIORS will attend either the 9:30 or the
Feb. 3: 11 a.m. showing of movies commencing on this
Saturday and continuing each Saturday until
March 17th.

SUNDAY MUSEUM MOVIES:

Senior members are invited to attend a series
of natural history and other films to be shown on Sunday
afternoon at 2:30 p.m., in the Museum commencing on Sunday
Feb. 4th.

EDITOR'S NOTES: Last month in the heading of the article
on the "Vapourer Moth", the author's name, George A. Hardy,
was inadvertently left out. Now if readers have further
information on this insect or have any questions they would
like to ask, they can address them to the author at the
Provincial Museum.

Audubon Centennial Celebration. For this occasion the
National Audubon Society in New York are issuing stamps
which are reproductions in colour of 24 Audubon illus-
trations of birds. The stamps are 2-3/16 by 3-1/8 inches
and sell for \$1.00 for two sets of twelve stamps. Whether
this will have to be in U.S. funds is not yet known; any-
way the editor will collect orders and cash. In the mean-
time information has been sought regarding payment and
possibly some sample material.

W.T.

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To