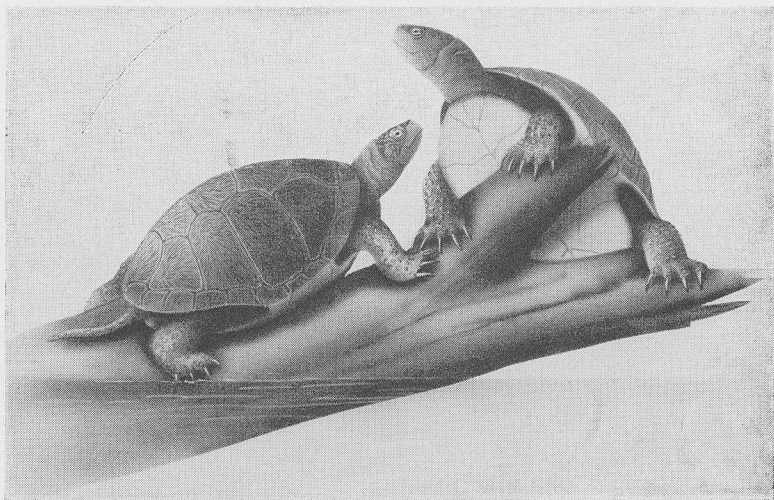


The  
**VICTORIA  
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Pacific terrapin.

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**VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY**  
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THE VICTORIA NATURALIST

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THE VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETYVol.7, No.9.March, 1951GET-TOGETHER FOR MEMBERS

Old and new members will have an opportunity to meet one another and to meet the old and new executive at a tea to be held at the Victoria Art Centre, Broughton St., at 8 p.m. March 27. There will be a charge of twenty-five cents to cover the cost of rental and tea.

This is a new departure for The Victoria Natural History Society but one which should give the members a chance to get to know one another which is not possible at our general meetings or other activities; Mrs. Hobson is to be congratulated on her effort to make this Society an even more friendly group than it already is. Let us all turn out for this, our first social event.

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FEBRUARY GENERAL MEETING

This meeting was held on Tuesday 13th at 8 p.m. in the Provincial Museum, the seventy members and guests being too large a number to find accommodation in the Library.

Mrs. Hobson, our President, reminded the members that the contract with the Audubon Society had to be renewed right away if we wished to continue to sponsor the Audubon Screen Tours. The meeting was overwhelmingly in favour of continuing our sponsorship but left the matter of the Audubon suggestion of a fifty dollar extra gift payment to be dealt with by the Executive. This would be considered when our financial position in this enterprise was known at the end of another season. The President also mentioned the "get-together" at the Victoria Art Centre on March 27. Mr. Tildesley reminded those who wished to procure Audubon Centennial Stamps that the order would be going in within a few days (since then some sample illustrations have come in so we have held the order up for a while). Mr. Taylor announced that the subject of Prof. Lowe's lecture to the botany section would be "The Life Cycle of Ferns". Mr. Grant brought in a box of geological specimens among which was a most unusual exhibit, the teeth of the prehistoric ancestor of the horse found

in a Saskatchewan fossil bed.

In introducing the speaker for the evening Mrs. Hobson remarked that this was the first time a general meeting had been entertained by a speaker from across the line. She assured Dr. and Mrs. Congdon that the members all appreciated their great kindness in making the journey from Seattle to share with us some of the interest and beauty they had found in making this film "Birds: North and South".

By way of introduction Dr. Congdon explained that he was still a practising physician in Wenatchee, but was lucky enough to have sons who had followed in his footsteps so that he could indulge his enthusiasm for nature and photography without disrupting his practice. He also had the support and possible abetting of a wife who was equally as enthusiastic in her love of nature. This was evident as he described the taking of these three reels of films which ranged from the semi-tropics of the Gulf of Mexico to the frozen tundra of Hudson Bay.

The first reel which was taken in the coastal area of Southern Texas also ranged inland to give us some pictures of animals much more unusual to our eyes than the birds. There were shots of armadillos taken from all directions and a chance shot of a group of peccaries scampering through the woods. Wild turkeys seem to be increasing quite rapidly in this refuge but the pair of whooping cranes that made newspaper headlines last summer by hatching a lone egg, lost their chick to predators a few days after hatching. The film contains numerous studies of that jewel of the southern woods, the cardinal which were a treat to our western eyes but the mocking bird which is such a favourite where he can be heard is a very uninteresting subject for photography looking as he does like a rather dull cat-bird. While prairie chicken might more often be seen in our own prairie regions, Dr. Congdon must have felt amply repayed for his long early morning vigils when he received his pictures on the mating ritual of this bird. The enormous size to which strutting males blew up the orange-coloured sacs on either side of their necks has to be seen to be believed and once seen the stories of their booming being heard for miles do not seem at all fantastic. There are

a great variety of shore and wading birds in the Gulf area, a good number of which are familiar around Victoria at different times of the year.

To solve their transportation problems when they got there the Congdons loaded their station wagon onto the train which took them from the Pas to Churchill. By the look of the terrain at that sub-arctic port it was a good job they did. One look at that picture of a late June blizzard and one can understand the feelings of the soldier up there who wondered why, with all the rest of a nice warm continent to choose from the birds had to come and nest in that frigid desolation. Evidently the weather did not bother the bird enthusiasts for they stayed twice as long as they first intended and then hated to leave.

The variety of nesting birds in the area is truly wonderful and after looking at the film it seemed that from the confines of town to the open tundra and scrubby trees beside the river one was always stumbling upon nests of one sort or another. Longspurs, horned larks, yellow warblers, redstarts seemed all mixed up with all the varieties of plovers, sandpipers, turnstones and arctic tern. Predators seemed scarce except the arctic fox which cleaned out a few nests that Dr. Congdon was watching and one whole nesting area of tern. This species, the arctic tern, the speaker said was the most graceful in flight that he had ever seen; this is understandable when one considers that it makes an 8,000 mile migration from arctic to antarctic every year.

Dr. Congdon's particular pride and joy was his third reel on which he had captured the private lives of a group of arctic loons. After polling a raft back and forth from an island twice a day and spending hours in a rough and very damp blind he managed to get a series of pictures of this very elusive bird that were really worth the effort and discomfort. This loon differs from the common loon by being smaller in size with a shorter neck and a distinct streak of white from the head down the back of the neck, shading to gray at the base.

This film and narrative again brought to my attention what seems to be a paradox in human observation. Time after time one is entertained by naturalists who can spot the most perfectly camouflaged birds hidden in a background

of lovely flowers and trees. Usually they can tell you exactly what variety of a particular species it belongs to by the short glimpse they get of it as it leaves the nest but if you ask them what flowers made up the bold and obvious background they either admit that they did not notice any flowers or give a vague "Oh! some Compositae and Legumes, I really did not look at them very closely." Dr. Congdon did better than the average as he did point out the wonderful display of northern Rhododendron and paint brush but there were dozens of other plants that I would have loved to have had a better view of. Maybe someday a botanist will accompany a bird photographer and we will get to know not only what the birds are but what they are hiding in. As this was definitely a bird film we can have no complaints whatever. The picture was of exceptional high quality and every foot of it was enhanced by the obvious enthusiasm of the speaker.

In thanking Dr. and Mrs. Congdon, Dr. Clifford Carl expressed the wishes of us all in hoping that we would see them again soon.

W.T.

#### GROUP MEETINGS

**GEOLOGY:** On Jan. 30, in the reading room of the Provincial Library the Geology Group was entertained by a most interesting talk on the Natural History of Coal by Dr. R. W. Gray.

In his address Dr. Gray described the various forces which had been acting for hundreds of millions of years to turn the residue of plants into the coal measures we are using today. He explained that all the coal fields of Eastern Canada, Europe, Greenland and most of the Asiatic coal fields were laid down in the Carboniferous era, about 250,000,000 years ago. This was the age of the giant horsetails, clubmosses, tree ferns and of plants that have long since disappeared from the surface of the earth. Spores of these plants make up entire layers of coal in some of these mines.

The Western Canadian coals, including those of Vancouver Island, are of a much later date, having been laid down during the Cretaceous era, about 110,000,000

years ago. This was the time of the last great spread of shallow seas across the continents. The land was predominantly low with great swamps. Dinosaurs evolved and the moderate climate produced flowering plants, some of which appear to be directly related to our oak. Some well preserved leaf impressions are almost identical with those of the Ginke or maidenhair tree.

Dr. Gray also pointed out that not only were the East and West coal fields of different ages and made up of different types of plants, but the manner in which they were formed was different. While the coals of the East were laid down by being covered by tremendous layers of soil and rock, the deepest coal usually being the hardest, the coals of the West seem to have been acted upon by heat and movement, such as the major upheavals which pushed tidal swamps up thousands of feet into the air. Petrified stumps of swamp-loving trees which have become agatized often interfere with mining operations far up in the Rocky Mountains.

After explaining how the coal came to be where it is and of what it consisted, Dr. Gray showed illustrations of remains of the actual plants found in the mines and of the giant insects of that era which had been trapped in the debris. One interesting example was of a Dragonfly (Meganeura) which had a wing spread of two feet, the largest insect known.

Mrs. Hobson, our president, in a few gracious words, thanked Dr. Gray for his very interesting and instructive lecture, and also Dr. Sargent and Mr. Stansfield for their kindly assistance.

J.H.W.

**BOTANY:** Tuesday evening, January 16, was the occasion of a most interesting talk by Mr. John Nutt on the flora of Australia. In spite of the inclemency of the weather a large group of the botany section gathered in Dr. Carl's office and were amply repayed by a most vivid and informative discussion, not only of Australian plants but of the peculiar geography of this continent. Basically, a narrow belt of green around a vast expanse of desert, this narrow belt has been further depleted by the arrival of civilized man with his bent for

destroying that which he should most conserve.

Due to its isolation the endemic flora and fauna is unlike that of any other continent. The mammalian fauna is almost exclusively marsupial and of a mild and peaceful nature but some of the plants exhibited developed the most vicious traits. For instance Mr. Nutt described an occasion when he touched the hairy surface of a plant with one finger and was in an agony of fiery irritation for several days. Some of the flowering plants are unbelievably beautiful particularly along the east coast from about Sydney to up past Brisbane.

The Great Barrier Reef with its coral floor teeming with weird and wonderful forms of marine life is evidently something that has to be seen to be believed.

This talk, given by a person of Mr. Nutt's wide experience gave us all a much greater appreciation of the physical aspects of Australia most of which seem to be little understood on this side of the Pacific. We hope the speaker will be persuaded to address the whole Society at some future date.

In the absence of Mr. Taylor, Mr. Tildesley thanked the speaker and as a final happy gesture Mr. Nutt distributed sprays of the Yellow Wattle (Australian flowering Acacia) to the ladies.

W. T.

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN MARCH

Here on the Pacific Coast this is the month of revival and return. Already the bird-cherry and the early willows are in bloom and occasional patches of gorse are brightening the hillsides with splashes of gold. Before the month is out our dry and rocky hills will be starting upon their brief blaze of floral glory. Satin flower (Sisyrinchium Douglasii A. Dieter.) Easter lily (Erythronium grandiflorum Pursh) peacock (Dodecatheon spp.) and numerous species of Saxifragaceae will be carpeting the hills and even now the lowlands are aglow with yellow masses of skunk cabbage.

Though not as obvious as our spring flowers, the smaller members of our bird population will be nesting or rearing young. To those who know them the songs of these

spring arrivals will be just as distinctive as the bright colouring of the flowers. Numbers of the winter residents that have brightened our shores for the last few months have left for their northern breeding grounds but the lagoons and tidal flats are alive with new arrivals.

Every fresh-water pool is teeming with enough life to keep an interested watcher busy for days. Weather is the only thing that can detract from the interest in the tidal pools at any time of the year but even those are probably livelier than ever as the days get longer and the sun climbs to higher and warmer altitudes.

Truly, this is the month of regeneration.

W. T.

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#### INDIAN NATURAL HISTORY (Cont'd)

By Wilson Duff, Provincial Museum

During the mythological era, men and animals all possessed supernatural powers. Animals lived just like men, often in the same villages, and could change into human form at will. Men could see and converse with these animal-people, and lived in harmony with them. The animal-people were responsible for many features of the world as it is today. One of them, Raven, who was the great culture-hero of the northern coast, stole daylight and fire from selfish supernatural beings who owned them, and made them available to men. He was also responsible for the origin of many forms of animal life; for example, he liberated the colachens from a box in which they were kept, and told them to go to the mouth of the Nass river every spring.

Other animal-people played important roles in forming the present state of things, as another example for Tsimshian mythology will show. Before the Flood (and all Indians have a legend of the Flood) all the Tsimshians and all the animals lived at Prairie Town, up the Skeena River near Hazelton. One day the animals had a council to decide on the days and seasons. They decided that the Sun, who had just been formed, should walk about every day giving light so that everything could grow, and that the Moon should walk about at night. When it came to deciding the length of

the months, however, they had some disagreement. The Dog chief spoke first, because dogs were considered the wisest animals, and suggested a month of forty days. Porcupine pointed out that thirty days would be much more convenient, and finally the other animals agreed. The dogs were sent away, and that explains why, ever since, dogs have been enemies of the animals of the forest, and bears special hatred for the porcupine. At one point in the proceedings, Porcupine became so angry at the stupidity of some of the larger animals that he bit off his thumbs, and that is why the porcupine has only four fingers.

One day in this time long ago a Tsimshian Indian outwitted and killed the chief of the Mosquito village, an individual with a proboscis of pure crystal. He burned the body, but much to his dismay the ashes, as they blew away, turned into clouds of mosquitoes. That is why mosquitoes are so numerous.

These myths of course varied greatly from tribe to tribe. The Songhees believed that all animals were formerly people, who were changed into their present forms by Haylse, the Great Transformer. The Indians who were changed into whales were from Neah Bay, and so, they say, whales speak the Makah language. That's why the Neah Bay Indians were such successful whale hunters.

Tales are different from myths, in that they deal with traditions of the historic past during which time conditions were much like those of the present. Men had lost the supernatural ability to see and converse with animals in their human forms, except on rare occasions. Shamans could still sometimes see the animal-people, and from them, the people learned about the invisible life of animals. The few occasions on which ordinary men visited the animal-people were powerful supernatural experiences, and the animal visited usually bestowed a dance, song, or some supernatural power on the visitor. The tale which told about this experience was itself a valuable family possession, and often a crest commemorating the event was carved on the family's totem poles for generations.

Not all tales were of this type. Some, for example, were just stories explaining the origin of some animal or some natural phenomenon or of some observance or custom. One Tsimshian tale tells of the origin of the

beaver. A hunter and his wife were out hunting raccoons, and the wife got angry because her husband was too busy to pay much attention to her. She went away alone to sulk. Her husband found her swimming in a lake, but she refused to come out, and slowly turned into a beaver. Her apron turned into the beaver's flat tail, and her brown hair turned into the beaver's fur.

Another Tsimshian tale, about a young prince who visited the village of the Spring Salmon people, explains the origin of the first salmon ceremony and the time and sequence of the various salmon runs. The young prince, scolded by his mother, ran away from home, and was taken by four men in a canoe to the village of the Spring Salmon people far out in the ocean. He was taken into the large house of the chief, who promised to take him home the next spring when the salmon people would again visit the Skeena river. In the spring, the chief set out scouts to see if it was time to go up the river. The scouts came back with good tidings, the ice had broken and there were many cottonwood leaves floating on the river, it was time to go. The chief gathered all his people, and taking the prince in his canoe, set out for the Skeena River. On the way they stopped at the village of the Sockeye Salmon to tell them the good news. "Go on," said the Sockeye Chief, "and as has been our custom, we'll follow you soon." A little later, they met the canoes of the Steelheads, who were returning home from the rivers, and they exchanged news. Then they visited the Humpback village, and the Humpbacks said that they would follow along after the Sockeyes; and the village of the Dog Salmon people, who agreed to follow the Humpbacks. The next village was that of the Cohoes, who decided that they would wait until late fall, as was their custom. Finally, they came to the village of the Trout. "Wait a couple of days," said the Trout chief, "and we'll be ready to go with you". The Spring Salmon Chief agreed, and they rested a couple of days, and then let the Trout precede them to the river. When the Spring Salmon finally reached the mouth of the river, they stopped for a rest. Some of them stood up in their canoes to stretch, and the Indians on shore saw them (to them the stretching salmon people were seen as fish jumping) and knew they were coming. An old shaman in the prince's village caught the Spring Salmon chief, and inside its stomach found the young

prince, who rapidly grew to his former size. The old shaman and the prince now knew how the salmon-people liked to be treated, and they taught the Tsimshian Indians how to welcome the first salmon every year.

That is a tale, and by the study of tales and myths we can get an understanding of the basic beliefs about animals that underlie Indian taboos and rituals.

One of these basic beliefs is that animals are immortal. Their bodies are merely shells or "blankets of flesh". When the body is completely destroyed, the animal returns to life in another body. When the young prince in the story above was living in the salmon village, he was told that whenever he was hungry all he had to do was go outside and club one of the children playing there. He did this, and the child turned into a nice little spring salmon, which he cooked and ate. He was told to be very careful to gather up all the bones and burn them, and when he did this, the child was restored to life. The first time this happened however, the child complained of a sore eye. The prince found the missing eye and burned it, and the child was well again. This belief explains why the Tsimshian always burned the bones of any animal killed, and carefully burned the bones of the first salmon. In so doing they were simply practicing game conservation.

The most important and deep-seated belief, which permeated the Indians' whole way of thinking about animals, was the belief that animals were semi-supernatural beings who could change into human form at will. In fact, they thought, animals are in human form all the time except when they are in contact with men. In former times, men could see the animals in their human form, but now few ever have that experience. Animals can remain in their invisible human form or put on their visible animal bodies at will. The animal body is merely a canoe in which the animal rides, or a cloak or blanket of flesh, which the animal removes and hangs up when it goes home and reverts to its human form.

The Haidas and Tsimshians thought that each species of animal had its own clans and villages, which were just like human villages. Killer whales, the greatest of animals, had their villages under the sea, near points of land. Mountain goats lived underground in solid rock.

(To be continued)

JUNIOR NATURAL HISTORY PAGE




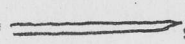
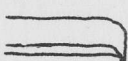
Editor:  
Doreen Wilby

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E.2357



Peggy Carl.

Mr. C. Guiguet spoke about bird bills on Saturday, Feb. 23rd. The Junior Naturalists were set by him to copy types of birds' bills in each case. After half an hour Mr. Guiguet told what each bird lived on and how they got their food with their

sharp , spatulate ,  
curved , terete , raptorial 

and other shaped bills.

The mute swans in Beacon Hill Park have a visitor with them; a wild whistling swan. Can you tell the difference between them?

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

Tuesday, ANNUAL MEETING and Election of Officers,  
Mar.13: Provincial Museum, 8 p.m. Also a showing  
of the Dep't of Visual Education sound film  
"No Man is an Island".

Tuesday, BOTANY GROUP - Provincial Museum, 8 p.m.  
Mar.20:

Tuesday, MEMBERSHIP TEA, Victoria Art Centre,  
Mar.27: 823 Broughton Street, 8 p.m. Entrance fee 25¢

JUNIORS can attend moving pictures on Saturday mornings  
March 3, 10, 17: Saturday, March 31st, meeting  
in the Museum, at 10 a.m.

Mr. Tildesley wants more contributions from the Juniors for  
their page. If you see something interesting, write about  
it to the editor, Doreen Wilby at 1276 Walnut St., or bring  
it to the Museum before the 15th of the month. Thank you,  
Peggy Carl, for your cartoon.

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EDITOR'S NOTES:

The editor is interested in obtaining the names and addresses of persons in towns or cities other than Victoria or Vancouver who are interested enough in the study of natural history and the conservation of our natural resources to organize local societies or clubs devoted to the study of these subjects. It is only through united effort that the people of British Columbia can put a stop to the wastage of her natural resources and the spoilation of her beauty.

This issue marks the end of Volume No.7 of The Victoria Naturalist. It is only by active participation and criticism by the general membership of an organization that such a publication as this can provide the service it should. Whether this service has been provided we are not competent to say but we have been fortunate in the number and quality of contributions and the helpful suggestions we have received.

W. T.



# Victoria Natural History Society

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To