

The
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(Courtesy of Provincial Department of Mines.)

Glacial erratic of granite rock, Blanchard Lake.

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Victoria, B.C.

A. Wilson's Snipe; scale, $\frac{1}{4}$ B. Spotted Sandpiper; scale, $\frac{1}{4}$
Adult JuvenileTHE VICTORIA NATURALIST

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THE VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Vol. 9, No. 8February, 1953TWO COMMON SHORE BIRDS

by

F.N. Beebe, -
Provincial Museum,
Victoria, B.C.WILSON'S SNIPE

When the long evenings of late spring come to the northern swamps and muskegs the silent loneliness comes to life with a number of most characteristic sounds. The hermit thrushes will sing from sunset until darkness and the plaintive melancholy whistle of the white-throated sparrow will come clear and lonely at intervals for even longer --- sometimes all night. Mingled with these there is a third song, one that seems to come from somewhere aloft, a winnowing tremolo whistle now near, now far that quite defies definite location.

This sound is very much a part of the chill late evenings and early mornings of the muskegs, as much so as the hum of the hordes of mosquitoes, but as long as the weather is clear you will look in vain in the darkening skies for the singer. It is when a cold rain sweeps down from the north and the skies get heavy with clouds down close to the ground, that the mystery singer comes lower down. At such times he may sing throughout the day and you can then sometimes see him. A long-winged long-beaked short-tailed bird flying on rapidly fanning wings in large circles. Watch and you will see him tilt down and his speed increase, the wing-beats almost cease until at the bottom of a long shallow dive the wing-beats resume again and he climbs rapidly and at the moment of the turn upwards the winnowing sound comes down to the listener. If you can stand the mosquitoes and watch a while longer you may see him come to earth though he just as often stays aloft for a half hour or more. When he does come down however, it is with a rush in steep dives and erratic turns and just before he lands he cries aloud his name, a harsh "scaap, scaap". If you know birds

at all you know then at once that he is Wilson's Snipe.

The sound is said to be produced by the two very narrow outer tail feathers and it may well be so, certainly at the moment of the upward turn the tail is widely spread. It is of course a part of the courting display and so is generally heard only on the breeding grounds which means that we have a poor chance of hearing it this far south. On one occasion, however, I did hear the sound, in June over a marsh well up in the mountains east of Greenwood and in broad daylight; had I not had previous experience with the bird I should certainly never have guessed what it was.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER

Of all the shorebirds none is more easily known than the Spotted Sandpiper, particularly if seen during the summer. Breeding birds frequent the open gravel reaches along streams and rivers and in addition to being one of the few sandpipers seen regularly in such situations they have several other characters that are even more strongly marked. They are the only sandpiper with the breast dotted with round black spots and when they fly they utter a sharp "peet; peet-weet", and go off on stiffly arched wings flying so close to the water that the wing tips almost touch the surface. The nest is scarce a nest at all, the eggs being laid in the gravel rubble of the stream edge and they are of course exceedingly difficult to locate.

Young birds lack the breast spotting of the adults but show all the other characters. It is during the fall migrations that the spotted sandpiper loses its identity, for then it mingles at times with other waders along sea beaches and mudflats. Here it even abandons its peculiar flight and flies with, and like the rest. At such times only the spotted breast of the adults remains unmistakable.

An unusual flowering time for the yarrow (Achillea millefolium) was noted recently, A well developed flower head was observed growing from a clump of leaves that otherwise only bore the withered remnants of last season's flower stalk.

G.A.H.

SOME EARLY SPRING FLOWERS IN THE VICINITY OF VICTORIA

George A. Hardy

Provincial Museum, Victoria, B. C.

In this part of the world with its mild Mediterranean climate, wild flowers of some sort may be found in bloom at all seasons of the year, growing if not openly, in sheltered nooks and crannies or on warm sunny banks.

Some of these, and most obvious, are of course the weedy species that thrive everywhere on roadsides, pastures and waste places, particularly in and around Victoria. With these we are not at present concerned, but will first confine our remarks to the native species.

Early in January, and for a month or two later depending on the season, one of the most pleasing features of the countryside is provided by the stems and twigs of the different kinds of shrubs; these are soft in colour and almost wraith-like or mist-like in outline, so that at a distance the subtle pastel shades blend imperceptibly into one harmonious pattern, often in strong contrast to the dark green of coniferous trees massed in the background.

The general tone of light or dark greys and browns is relieved by the rich carmine of the western dog-wood (Cornus occidentalis), the sienna of the hardhack (Spirea douglasii), the pale whitish-brown colour of the twin flower honeysuckle (Lonicera involucrata), the greenish-yellow of the black willow (Salix lasiandra), or the dull red of the wild roses (Rosa nutkana and R. spiscarpa); these and other subtle shades of colour unite to form a picture of inexpressable beauty.

Among the first plants to bloom, are the Scouler and the Sitka willows (Salix scouleri and S. sitchensis). The fat catkin buds begin to burst early in January, showing the silky pads that have suggested the common name of pussy-willow. Later on many bright yellow stamens will protrude from among the silky hairs should it be the pollen-bearing bush, or the less conspicuous greenish styles of the pistillate one will appear, for the two kinds are not carried on the same shrub.

A close second in time of flowering is the bird-cherry or osco berry (Nuttallia cerasiformis), whose pendant candelabras of greeny-white flowers almost cover the bush being well developed before the upward growing leaves are fully

grown. Some of the flowers are incomplete, bearing stamens only, which will explain why at a later date some of the bushes are crowded with the peach-coloured to dark purple fruit while others have none. This fruit while not poisonous is very disagreeable in taste to most of us, and besides, has the disadvantage of containing a large stone or pip. Birds however are very partial to the fruit, robins especially. Those of us who attract birds to our gardens by providing a pool of water, will find young bird-cherry bushes sprouting all around it in course of time, the seeds having been "planted" there by the robins.

On the rocky hillsides facing south, one of the earliest blooms to be found is spring gold (Lomatium utriculatum) dotting the steep slopes or green sward of the terraces with cheerful looking patches of yellow set among ferny leaves of dark green. I have found this plant in bloom as early as January 14 in some years.

Here also may be found the rare poppy, Platystigma oreganum, a tiny chickweed-like plant about three inches high, and with small spoon-shaped basal leaves. The three sepals fall soon after opening, while the six petals, also drop off soon after seed formation, leaving a long pod that later splits open to shed many small seeds.

Along with the above may be found another interesting plant about two inches or so high, Platysperma scapigera, the "flat-podded seed-container", belonging to the Cruciferae family. The basal leaves are coarsely lobed and whorled, the flower is a typical crucifer, but the pod is most characteristic, being flat and round like a tiny green coin with brown marblings and carried on a long stalk.

Both of these plants flower early in March or April. They are rare in British Columbia, southern Vancouver Island being the only locality known to me where they may be found.

Still another little crucifer should be looked for at this time on well drained gravelly slopes; this is the early whitlow grass (Draba verna). Despite its common name it is not a grass at all but was so named possibly because it grows in association with grasses, and might just as well be one for all the originator of the name knew. If botanical niceties were overlooked, the practical side of the question was not, for country folk recognized the curative or antiseptic properties of a related species the juice of which was often applied to a sore or "whitlow".

The early whitlow grass possesses a basal rosette of tiny lobed leaves from which one or more short, slender stems arise bearing a few minute white flowers at the top. This plant usually grows in beds or colonies often of some considerable extent forming a misty carpet of white on green.

In the shelter of the woods a few flowers of the miner's lettuce (Montia siberica) may nearly always be found in January and indeed every month of the year.

Most of the terrain in the vicinity of Victoria has been badly scarred by the advancement of civilization, with the result that "weeds" have taken possession, and will continue to do so. It is necessary therefore for the up-to-date botanist to take notice of them as they are very definitely a part of our permanent flora.

One of the most common of these is the filaree or storks-bill (Erodium cicutarium) which comes up abundantly where the ground has been cleared by fire or by other means. It seems to be increasing by "leaps and bounds", particularly on the southern slopes of Mount Douglas where it is fast superseding the native plants. Similarly the hawksbeard (Hypochaeris radicata) is becoming conspicuous in our lawns and gardens along with the dandelion, wall lettuce, chickweed, shepherd's purse and others; in cultivated areas these will soon be the only wild flowers known to city dwellers.

Only strong and prompt measures by an interested public can prevent the few remaining natural areas near Victoria from going the same way. The exclusion of native species from southern Vancouver Island would be particularly regrettable as the flora of this area is unique as far as British Columbia is concerned and the area is of such small extent that the native flora may be completely obliterated if present trends continue.

Fortunately we have in Mount Douglas Park a sanctuary that harbours part of our most characteristic and unique flora. Long may it remain so.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, December 26, 1952

S City and east to Gonzales Bay, H. D. R. Stewart
 C Shoal Bay to Spoon Bay, J.O.Clay, W.Adams and B.Pattenden.
 D Cadboro Bay and District, A. R. Davidson.
 Sd Sidney Harbour and District, Mrs.J.Hobson, Mrs. Blackden.
 EB Elk and Beaver Lakes, J.O.Clay, W. Adams, B. Pattenden.

	<u>S</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>Sd</u>	<u>EB</u>
Loon, C.		1	6		
Grebe, Hol.			3	2	
" H'd	1	16	186	75	1
" E'd		5	55	1	
" W		72	83	93	
Cormorant		18	101		
Heron N. W.			1		
Swan, Mute (Int.)					3
Goose, Lesser C.					1
Mallard	465	1	140	74	8
Baldpate	395	521	425		510
Pintail			4	100	
Teal, G. W.			2		
Shoveller	2	85	130		2
Canvas-back	15			22	80
Scaup, G.	460	278	115	60	
Goldeneye, A.		12	12	20	6
Bufflehead	11	19	125		
Old Squaw			7		
Harlequin	11	16	38		
Scoter, W-W.		7	48	22	
Scoter, Surf	2	9	41	20	
Scoter, Am.	3				
Ruddy duck			2	25	
Merganser H.			1	1	6
" Am.				7	3
" R-B.		4	15	9	3
Quail, Cal.			27		
Pheasant, N-N.			5		2
Coot			50		510
Oyster-catcher			6		
Killdeer Pl.			17		
Turnstone R	1				
" B	17	11			
Gull, G.W.	380	65	350	50	30
" S.B.		167	50	50	
Guillemot, P.					

	<u>S</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>Sd</u>	<u>EB</u>
Murrelet, A.				8	
Hummer, R. o-o.		1			
Kingfisher			2	1	
Flicker, N.W			15		1
Woodpecker, Ptd.			3		
" H'y.			1		
" D'y.			1		
Skylark (Int.)			10		
Jay, S.			1		
Crow, N.W.		2	50	100	10
Chickadee C-B.			120		5
Creeper			1		
Wren, W.	1		9		
" S.			13		
Robin		6	320		5
Thrush, V.			18		
" H.			3		
Bluebird, W.			30		
Kinglet, G-C.			57		
" R-C.			2		
Pipit, Am.			47		
Sparrow, House			50		
Meadowlark, W.					1
Blackbird, R-W.				2	
" Brs.				300	
Finch, Cal. P.			9		
Siskin			318		
Towhee, S.	2	1	16		2
Junco, O.		20	112		1
Sparrow, Fox			10	1	
" Song		2	28		1
Species	15	24	55	23	22

Footnote: o-o Hummingbird (Rufous) seen by Capt.W.Redford among yellow jasmine December 24.

Weather part cloudy. West of City and Blenkinsop area not covered.
 Temperature 45 Wind 24.
 Tide estimated 9 feet.

J.O.C.

CANADIAN DINOSAURS

On December 16, the members of the Geological Group of the Victoria Natural History Society were privileged to attend an illustrated lecture on "Canadian Dinosaurs" by Mr. Charles Sternberg of the National Museum, Ottawa. Giving a short resume of the history of evolution to the time of "The Age of Reptiles" (Mesozoic), Mr. Sternberg pointed out that the Cretaceous Period alone lasted some 60,000,000 years and it is only by first thinking in terms of millions of years that we can begin to realize the gradual development of the earth.

A map of the Cretaceous Sea showed that it too was a great shallow sea covering the interior of the American continent from the Arctic to the Gulf of Mexico. Gradually as the land was uplifted, vast tracts of land appeared as swamps and the seas became more brackish and from these emerged the herbivorous dinosaurs feeding on the dense aquatic vegetation. There were also the carnivores with huge jaws and serrated teeth for grinding flesh and bone. Peculiarities of bony structure were common, each having some particular reason for its existence, hence the armoured and horned Triceratops for defence and the strange helmet-shaped head of Corythosaurus, with long air passages inside the skull to enable the animal to breathe while seeking food beneath the water. Mr. Sternberg showed pictures of both kinds, reconstructed from the fossils that he and his brothers had excavated from the Red Deer Valley in Alberta.

It is interesting to note that dinosaurs were not all of the great unwieldy type we associate with Tyrannosaurus and Brontosaurus. There are known to be some 5,000 different kinds ranging from tiny ones, the size of a rabbit, to the immense Brachiosaurus, which attained a length of 80 feet. Photographs were shown of the actual work of excavating and transporting the fossils to the Museum, showing the immense amount of time and labor involved in getting even one perfect specimen.

Mr. Sternberg introduced Mr. Pinchbeck who showed some very interesting coloured photographs of the "Bad Lands" taken by him on a recent trip to Alberta.

The feeling of the whole gathering was voiced by

Mr. Winkler when he thanked Mr. Sternberg for a very instructive and illuminating address, coupled with the hope that he would visit us again at a not too distant date.

J.H.W.

A NEW BOOK OF INTEREST TO NATURALISTS

"Trees, Shrubs and Flowers to know in British Columbia,"
by C. P. Lyons.

Published by J.M. Dent and Sons 1952, 168 pages, 8" x 6".
Price \$3.25.

This fascinating little book does all it claims to do in an unique and concise manner.

Its 168 pages are crammed with information as to the names, habits, range and other matters pertaining to plants commonly found in British Columbia. Each species is well illustrated by a pen and ink sketch, that brings out the salient features both in perspective and in close-up detail. A map of distribution for each of the trees is inserted, considerably narrowing the field for identification purpose. Tables of the shrubs, a calendar for time of flowering and fruit and an illustrated glossary round out a very comprehensive account of the more conspicuous flora of our province.

Mr. Lyons is to be congratulated on bringing out a book that will fill a long-felt want on the part of the public for an illustrated non-technical account of the trees and wild flowers of British Columbia.

G.A.H.

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WINTER BIRDS IN VICTORIA

by A. R. Davidson

From my observations in the Victoria area it would appear that the winter months provide as many species of birds as do the summer months while the number of individuals is comparably greater.

As an example, on January 11th all the Cadboro Bay district appeared to be alive with robins. I endeavoured to count one flock, first in twenties, then fifties, and finally by hundreds, and estimated that there were 1200 birds. Within a few minutes other flocks totalling another 1000 flew overhead; all these in one direction. But the trees nearby were still filled with them, and they were calling from all directions. It was really impossible to make an accurate count, as large flocks were flying from every quarter, but after watching them for about two hours, I concluded there must have been about 5000 in the area. With them were purple finches, cedar and bohemian waxwings. Three years ago, almost to the day, we had a similar visitation here.

On the same day I saw a flock of about 30 golden-crowned sparrows, while two days previously eight Lincoln sparrows came along. I am not familiar with this sparrow, but was fortunate enough to find them again the next day when I observed them closely with binoculars for some time.

One of the more uncommon birds seen this winter were northwestern shrikes, five in number, seen mostly on the sea front in various localities since the beginning of November. I did not locate hermit thrushes until the second week in December, these birds being shy and somewhat difficult to find. While taking the Christmas count we found a number of bluebirds near Phyllis Avenue at Ten Mile Point, 18 in one flock and 30 in another. This is the largest number of these birds I have seen at this time of year.

JUNIOR PAGE

Editor: Alex Peden. Phone G.7518.

One sunny day in July a fortunate frog was found in the old fair grounds by Dennis Gillespy. She had been fed flies through the summer months until there became a scarcity of flies. For the past few months she occupied a small jar on Doctor Carl's desk and has had a diet of worms. When I say 'was fortunate' I mean that through the winter months it has gained a whole centimeter when usually most frogs hibernate and don't grow. After all this civilized life she has become a bit greedy. We gave her this worm which was too big for this frog to eat. She was gulping down millimeter by millimeter and got it just about all eaten up when up it came alive as ever; shows what a civilized life can do. Now Dennis Gillespy has claimed it, ready to feed it himself with his own worms I suppose.

Lot more space
to fill up in
Display case,
and this page.

G	P	G	O
A	C	N	O
V	L	S	I
L	U	C	E

Please bring
in material
for Junior
Page. (Editor)

See how many words pertaining to birds you can make. Use one letter for each word once. We will see who has most at the next meeting.

Dennis Gillespy, Tommy and Bobby Glenney report that on a trip to Beacon Hill Park they saw 40 quail; two mute swans; 45 canvas-backs and 130 mallards. Do you know the names of the birds that come around your home?

(Continued on page 96)

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

1953

- Tuesday Feb.10: GENERAL MEETING: Provincial Museum, 8 p.m.
 Speaker: Mr. J.A. Cunningham;
 Subject: "Patterns in Bone" -- The development
 of the vertebrate skull.
- Saturday Feb.14: ORNITHOLOGY OUTDOOR MEETING: Sidney. Meet at
 Sidney wharf, 1:45 p.m. All those needing
 transportation kindly make arrangements for
 same at the general meeting on February 10th
 with the programme convener.
- Friday Feb.20: AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR: Third in series, Crystal
 Garden Auditorium, 8 p.m. Speaker: Howard
 Cleaves. Subject: "Animals Unaware".
- Tuesday March 3: GEOLOGY SECTION: Provincial Museum, 8 p.m.
 Speaker: Mr. G. E. Winkler;
 Subject: "The Kootenays and the Okanagan."
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Cont'd from page 95 - Junior Page:

Museum Movies will be shown from 9:30 to 10:30
 and from 11 until 12 noon, starting February 21st.

The Juniors will meet at the movies and for a few
 Saturdays until Easter. Those who have paid the
 dollar membership fee will get their card and the
 Natural History Magazine until September when the
 new season starts. The Magazine is not published
 during the summer.

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To