

*The*  
**VICTORIA**  
**NATURALIST**

Vol. 10, No. 5

November, 1953



Antelope-bush, sage-brush, and rabbit-brush association, Osoyoos Lake, B.C.

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

THE VICTORIA NATURALIST

Published by  
The VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

---

Vol.10, No.5.

November 1953

---

SUBMARINE

by G. Clifford Carl, Provincial Museum

As the cold water presses the thin rubber of the "frogman's suit" against the diver's legs and body he enters a new and strange world -- a world so different from the one we normally live in that a new set of viewpoints must be adopted. The cumbersome bottles of compressed air strapped to the back lose their weight. The mask squeezing the face and restricting the vision is forgotten as new vistas open before the eyes. The awkward flippers compressing the toes and generally getting in each other's way take on their job of thrusting the body through the new medium. After the first few gulps of air are drawn in and expelled convulsively through the flexible tube connecting mouthpiece and air supply, breathing becomes more deliberate and requires less concentration.

All sound is blocked out. Except for an intermittent rumble from the exhaust air bubble the submarine world is silent, at least to human ears. The rock wall studded with barnacles and small anenomes glides noiselessly by; dim shapes in the distance move through the murky green of the water without a sound.

Light no longer appears to come only from overhead; it is all around. One seems to be floating in the centre of a glow which emanates from all sides. Above, a silvery ceiling shimmers in many constantly changing patterns. Where it meets the rock it dips and rises rhythmically; the wavelets seem to wash down, not up; dozens of silver bubbles dance momentarily then dissolve in a lacy fringe clinging to the rock for a split second. Directly overhead the shimmering surface merges with an indefinite circle of blue which must be sky. Outside the circle and hanging from the silver ceiling is a strange shape which must be the bottom of the small boat containing your companions who are probably wondering how you are faring.

As concern over the functioning of the suit lessens and confidence begins to return, more attention can be paid

to the rightful inhabitants of this strange world. The barnacles protruding from the almost vertical rock-face unconcernedly extend their "sweeps" in rhythmic motion. A rock crab, climbing a slight overhang, falls kicking its legs violently in an effort to right itself as it sinks to the bottom. Fronds of bladder-wrack and other sea-weeds hang gracefully from the rock-face; those nearer the surface sway in unison with the overhead wave-action. A jellyfish drifts slowly by as if suspended in space; the eight tentacles hang downward in graceful curves from the resting umbrella; the egg-sacs within show clearly through the translucent material of the body.

In the distance a series of vertical shapes resolve themselves into stems of the giant kelp. Instead of being in relaxed curves as they are when drifting loosely in shallow water or tossed on shore they are straight and taut as if held upright by invisible wires. The illusion of support is strengthened by the fact that the stems are thinnest at the lower end and broadest at the top where each widens into a bulb capped with leaf-like fronds. While they present no serious barrier to the underwater swimmer their slippery flexibility offers no useful foot or handhold; consequently they are to be avoided if possible.

Near the outer edge of the field of vision where it merges with the dark green of distant depths rockfish glide into invisibility like shadows melting into nothingness. Nearer, the mottled form of a lingcod can be distinguished among the plant growth on the rock bottom; the fish remains apparently unalarmed at the approach of a monster which gives off bursts of bubbles, but as the outstretched hand touches its tail it suddenly dashes off and is lost to sight in the marine jungle.

Though the diver begins to feel he is part of this new world yet he is still wedded to the outside. Limb and chest muscles begin to complain at the unusual task; ears object to the increased pressure; the body becomes chilled. Before the tanks of "top-side" air are depleted he is forced to return to a terrestrial habitat where sensations are once again "normal".

## A TRIBUTE TO THE WESTERN GREBE

By J. A. Munro, Okanagan Landing, B.C.

A bird watcher from the eastern seaboard on a visit to the Delta Waterfowl Experimental Station in Manitoba was excitedly interested in seeing western grebe, so much so that each morning he eagerly enquired of the staff if the grebes had arrived. When the momentous day finally dawned our bird watcher with his guide hastened to the water's edge and, after a brief survey of the grebe, duly entered the name in his notebook - a new species for his "life list". The following morning the official guide hailed him enthusiastically with the words "Lots of western grebe, come along and see them". "No, thanks" said our bird watcher "I got them yesterday".

To some of us this so graceful, mellow-voiced, black and white "swan" grebe of mysterious ways means more than a name on a "life list". Here, on Okanagan Lake each year we look forward with pleasant anticipation to the late April day when the first few of the migrating thousands may be expected. A day arrives, seemingly like any other day, when from far off across the water comes the muted, but never-to-be-forgotten voice we have awaited. We feel another summer is just ahead and a holiday feeling fills our hearts.

Later, in a few days perhaps, acres of the spring-calm waters will be fretted with innumerable flashing points of light at the centre of concentric circles which binoculars identify as western grebe diving and emerging. The binoculars reveal further the elegance of posture, the harmony of movement, the grace and beauty of this delightful visitor.

Their arrival was not seen, their departure unobserved, for these flights are night-flights.

Why, we wonder, do these thousands fly across British Columbia from the sea to nest in far-off Alberta and Saskatchewan?

We assume a fixity of habit and behaviour in bird species. We are accustomed to the idea that a bird population is static, an idea that bird species in much the same numbers forever occupy much the same position in time and space. And this is true, but only partly true. Over and above the known factors that modify the numbers and movements of birds is an ebb and flow, an expansion and contraction, and of this deep pulse we know little. There is

also a propensity to change - to change of migration routes, to change in the distribution of nesting populations, and to change in food preferences irrespective of habitat-modifications. And concerning these, also, little can be said.

Not all the western grebe pass over British Columbia in migration. A nesting colony at Williams Lake has been recorded elsewhere. More recently another colony was established. There is a lake with marshy shores near Vernon, eminently suited to the nesting of western grebe in the requirements of food, nesting-cover and relative immunity from human molestation. The ecology of the lake prior to 1915 is unknown but it is known that in the ensuing years no colonies of western grebe nested there until 1949 when at least 15 pairs did so. In 1950 there were two colonies on opposite sides of the lake, one of 18 pairs, the other of 25 pairs. Of these we examined 17 nests containing eggs. The grebe nested again in 1951 and 1952 but the colonies were not visited.

We can speculate regarding this departure from the normal in a species usually so conservative in behaviour, but speculation brings no satisfactory answer.

And conservative in behaviour it surely is. At Morro Bay, California, twenty or so western grebe frequented a sheltered place near a group of pilings, inshore from the channel through which the tide rushes past Morro Rock. Day after day during December and January of 1951-1952 this group occupied the same place during the same daylight hours. Usually they slept, motionless on the quiet water, necks folded back and bills hidden under the scapulars. At times we stood close enough to them so that when occasionally one suddenly assumed an erect position we could see the brilliant red iris. The following winter the same group, or perhaps more likely another of similar size, occupied the same stretch of water and acted in an identical manner.

Yes, undoubtedly, the western grebe means more than a name on a "life list".

---

### THE BATTLE OF LIFE

Observed and written in California  
by E.D.T. Woodward.

In the midst of a patch of golden sunlight, surrounded by wild lilac, chaparral, and manzanita bushes, partly hidden by a fallen leaf and twig or two from a nearby scrub oak, crouched an old tarantula - the giant spider of the South West.

The air, heavy with the scent of sage and lilac, shimmered in the semi-tropical heat. Everything was still - not a leaf moved.

From under the surrounding brush appeared the head of a mother quail, carefully looking round. Seeing no danger in sight, she strutted out, followed by her newly hatched brood, active youngsters who, a few moments after emerging from their broken, beautifully marked shells, can run like a streak, and in an hour or two make quite long trips after their mother, bustling about, picking up seeds and generally starting to enjoy life. Proudly, across the patch of open sunlight the mother led her family of fifteen. On one side of the opening was a big granite rock and as his family came out into the open, the cock quail ran up to the top of the rock, standing proudly there with his soft, blue-grey body shining in the sunlight, his neck stretched up, his smooth round head with his bright eyes, surmounted by a black crest. The quail looked this way and that, even scanning the sky to see that no danger lurked for his proud young wife and her new babies.

The little family scattered out, picking up a seed here, chasing an insect there, with no thought of danger, their father on guard and their mother with them.

One of the babies chasing and jumping into the air after a tempting insect landed almost on top of the fallen leaf. In a second, eight long, black hairy legs were round it. There was only time for one little "peep" and all was over - the giant spider's cruel jaws were already deep in the little throat, sucking out the warm blood. So quickly and silently was this carried out that no notice was taken of it by other members of the family, which went on their way, jumping and running till they disappeared into the shadows on the far side of the opening. But only fourteen.

After satisfying his appetite and apparently finding the sun getting too hot, the tarantula, covering the remains

of his victim, slowly brought his body up on the top of his long black legs, and started across the hot sandy soil to his comfortable home under the granite rock.

The tarantula walked in a stilted, dancing fashion, his round body high off the ground, moving very slowly, being well fed and heavy with sleep.

A faint drone sounded in the still air, like a miniature aeroplane. Instantly, the spider's whole manner changed, terror seized him and, dropping his fancy gait, he started at his best speed to cover the few yards to his home, gazing up as he went, searching the point whence came the sound, now getting clearer and louder. Then, he saw his worst enemy, the tarantula-hawk, an insect of the wasp family about as large as a hornet, but with longer and thinner body and a bigger head, yellowish brown with reddish stripes and long, thin, red wings, darting through the air straight for him and, only just in time, the tarantula threw himself on his back, waving his legs in the air. In this position he knew he was safe. The hawk swept past and up, swinging in a circle, getting higher and higher till the hum of her wings died away. In a moment, the old spider was on his feet but, as quickly, the yellow red flash of speed was after him again and once more he turned over just in time, but having gained nothing in his dash for home and safety. Over and over, the same thing occurred till, getting weary, the spider made a desperate effort to advance a few feet. He was too slow. With a lightning dive the hawk struck the tarantula full on the back, crushing him to the ground, driving a dagger-like sting deep into the soft black body. Once more, in a moment it was all over, the giant body inert upon the ground, the long legs sprawling out - dead.

Now the hawk's work began. Her home was in the ground many yards away, and the food supply had to be transported, a big task as the spider weighed eight, or ten times as much as she. The long legs of the spider were sticking out in every direction, making the body hard to move. The hawk, with her sharp, thin jaws, first disjointed the legs, so that they dragged behind without catching in anything, then, seizing the tarantula by his head, walking backwards, the hawk started slowly to tow the body of her kill home, going in a straight line, climbing and hauling her load over fallen leaves, bits of brush and stones, never letting go, though sometimes working for many minutes to pull the big

body over a stone or drag it under a twig. After an hour's hard work, she reached the entrance of her silk-lined home. There, leaving the body of the slain spider, she soared up into the clear blue air, circling round apparently to call or find her mate who usually hunted with her. As she rose over the top of the brush a butcher-bird, or shrike - a flash of grey and white - with a fierce scream, swept out of the scrub-oak, snapping at the hawk and catching it fairly within his sharp curved bill. The bird sailed off to a nearby mesquite tree, where, on one of the long, black thorns it impaled the hawk's body. There, on another thorn, was already drying in the sun the body of the hawk's mate. So goes on the battle of life and death.

#### THE BIRDS OF VICTORIA

Every outing is rewarding to the enthusiastic bird observer. The difficulty at times in identifying even the commoner species keeps us on the alert, but occasionally luck comes our way and some of the rarer varieties are seen. This is a brief record, taken more or less in chronological order from my diary of some of the more uncommon birds seen in the Victoria area this summer.

On May 4th, four members of the Society were on Arbutus Road at Cadboro, watching for migrating waders, when one of the party spotted three yellow-headed blackbirds. As far as the writer knows, these birds, whose regular territory is in the Osoyoos and Cariboo area, have only been seen here twice previously.

On May 23rd, five cliff swallows were seen on Musgrave Street in Oak Bay. At that time two of their mud nests had already been built on the stucco wall of a house on this street. This is unusual.

On June 15th, three members of the Society visited Swan Lake, where one of the party had previously noticed the black-headed grosbeak, and there we saw five of these birds and heard their beautiful song. Evidently this is one of their regular nesting areas. Personally, I saw no

others this summer. This is an excellent district for the observation of birds. We even saw an Osprey over the lake. Not often now is the Osprey seen in Victoria.

The south end of Cadboro Beach is visited throughout the year by many shore birds. This summer, there were western, least, semi-palmated, spotted and pectoral sandpipers, and one baird, as well as semi-palmated plover, killdeer, greater yellowlegs and dowitchers. Of the latter 82 were seen on July 28th.

On July 19th, the northern phalarope appeared at Cattle Point, Uplands, and could be seen there from then on to the end of August. Several times I estimated their number at about 500 birds. One day (August 28th) these birds were present, close to the shore, from Clover Point to the Oak Bay Golf Links.

In August an eastern Kingbird was observed at Ten Mile Point, at which time it was vigorously chasing a crow.

On August 4th, at Clover Point, were seen four wandering tattlers, two ruddy turnstones, together with a flock of surf birds and the more common black turnstone. Two of the tattlers were seen by members of the bird group at a field meeting on August 15th.

On August 30th, at Ten Mile Point, I saw a family of Lewis woodpeckers, seven in all, as they were flying from the top of one Douglas fir to another on their way south.

During September on three or four occasions small groups of Vaux swift were seen, and on the 29th, ten of the larger black swift flew over Cadboro Bay.

On Sept. 23rd approximately fifty black vultures circled their way over Victoria. We saw them flying low at Ten Mile Point.

On October 5th, while trying to identify flying gulls from the rocks at the tip of Ten Mile Point, two long-tailed jaegers came into the field of my glasses. Previously this summer I had seen two parasitic jaegers from this spot, but this is the first time I have seen the rarer long-tailed.

On October 7th, in the late afternoon a large course of small migrants appeared on Cedar Hill Cross Road near the Uplands Golf Links. Most of them I could not identify, as they were very excited and it was difficult to get the glasses on them, but among them were not less than thirty-five western bluebirds.

A. R. D.

---

LEAF INTAGLIOS

Here in your garden pink magnolias grow;  
An artist pictures their fragility -  
Rare as a Babylon intaglio -  
Nor dreams magnolia once an Island tree.

Etched in the ebon of Nanaimo coal,  
Perfect in form, their fossiled leaves reveal  
To those who learn from plant or petal scroll,  
The secrets nature's strata may conceal.

The fabulous Eastern Ginkgo lived its hour,  
And other giant ferns engraved their signs  
When earth, upheaved or set by molten power,  
Indented these intaglios of the mines.

And curious man in centuries beyond  
Will map our flora from a leaf or frond.

M. Eugenie Perry

---

EDITORIAL

This little bulletin of local natural history events is produced by and for the members of the Society for their mutual interest. The Editors therefore would appreciate the contribution of articles on any natural history subject or episode in which they are interested.

Among our members are amateur and professional botanists, geologists, entomologists and ornithologists, who could make the magazine a pleasure and an education to read.

We feel sure that many local episodes of natural history life observed by our members are never recorded. For instance, there has been no articles on insect life in the magazine for some considerable time. Did no one hear of the plague of flies in the Crofton area last month? I was informed by a man who was fishing there in September that these insects covered the sea, making it black as far as the eye could reach, and were washed up on the beach by the million. What were they? Then on September 28th an ex-prairie farmer living on Shakespeare Street reported to the Colonist a flight of twenty sandhill cranes. Can any member confirm this report? These birds used to be regular spring and fall migrants to the Cadboro Bay swamp. At a motor cycle race meet at Abbotsford a couple of weeks ago, while the races were in full progress, a large white bird with black edges to its wings sailed placidly overhead, undisturbed by the terrific noises below. The races were forgotten for an instant as the spectators caught sight of the unusual bird. What was it, a white pelican?

The co-operation of our members in sending short articles will be much appreciated.

We are not professional writers, and do not require scientific treatises, but merely factual observations of some interesting phase of life.

Chairman: Bruce Colvin

Editor: Roger Porter

(about two type-errors last month) We are awfully sorry about the 87 inches of rainfall in Victoria, but the 27 inches it should have been is still too much for us. And the space between the stories was not there so it looked like one story.  
The Editor and helpers

---

Monterey Junior Natural History Society: Some of the pupils of Monterey School, Oak Bay, formed a club and called it this. The members are: Barry Summerfield, Raymond Barnes, Don Thorsen, Michael Watson, Walter Grant, Barry Morrison, Denis Bates, Ronald Briton, and Bobby Argall.

We made a collection of minerals, bones, fungi, insects and other things including stuffed birds. We have had two Nature Outings: One to Smuggler's Cove and the other to Mount Douglas Park. We had a try at stuffing birds a few days ago and found we could do it quite easily. The birds we stuffed were a robin and a fox sparrow.

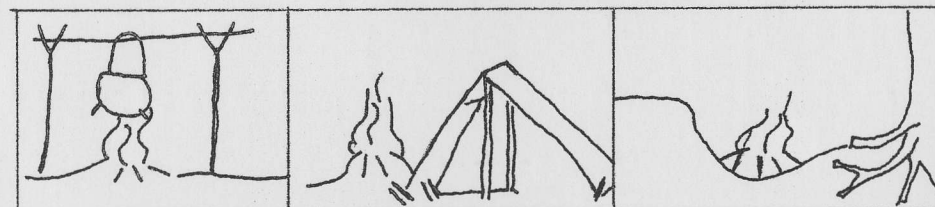
Raymond Barnes.

---

Mr. Maxwell gave the Junior Natural History Society a lecture on camping. "First," he said, "when you build a fire, build it on a flat rock or dig deep into the ground until you have reached solid earth. This will prevent the fire from catching onto any of the roots of a tree; if it does it will work its way up the tree and spread from one tree to another and cause a forest fire. So to make doubly sure that there is no chance of fire, pour a bucket of water on it."

Mr. Maxwell also said, "A fly (an open air tent) is very easy to make and it is light and comfortable if you put a fire outside of it."

Gerry Skinner.



A Potholder

A FLY TENT

FIRE

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

1953

Saturday

Nov. 7th:

FUNGUS FORAY: Meet at home of  
Mrs. James Hobson,  
1970 Argyle Street, at 2 p.m.  
Take the Mount Tolmie bus. Mrs. Hobson is  
kindly providing tea.

Tuesday

Nov. 10th:

GENERAL MEETING: at the Provincial Library  
at 8 p.m. Dr. H. T. Gussow,  
formerly Dominion Botanist at Ottawa.  
Subject: "Applied Mycology."  
Illustrated.

Tuesday

Nov. 17th:

GEOLOGY GROUP: Meet at the Museum at 8 p.m.  
Dr. W. R. Bacon, B. C. Depart-  
ment of Mines.  
Subject: "History and Composition of the  
Coast Range Batholith."  
Illustrated.

Tuesday

Nov. 24th:

MARINE BIOLOGY: Meet at the Biological  
Laboratory, Victoria College,  
at 8 p.m.  
Subject: "Sea Anemones and Corals."  
Speaker: Prof. J. A. Cunningham.



# Victoria Natural History Society

OFFICERS, 1953-54

**Honorary Presidents:**

HON. TILLY J. ROLSTON,  
*Minister of Education.*  
J. W. EASTHAM,  
*Former Provincial Plant Pathologist.*  
J. A. MUNRO,  
*Former Dominion Wildlife Officer.*

**Past Presidents:**

ARCHDEACON ROBERT CONNELL.  
G. CLIFFORD CARL.  
GEORGE A. HARDY.  
MRS. JAMES HOBSON.

**President:**

J. A. CUNNINGHAM,  
Telephone G 3897.

**Vice-President:**

C. W. LOWE,  
1826 Hollywood Crescent.

**Editors:**

A. R. DAVIDSON,  
2541 Killarney Road, Telephone E 6602.  
G. CLIFFORD CARL. J. NUTT.

**Secretary:**

MRS. W. H. STEVENS,  
1580 Kisber Avenue,  
Telephone B 2041.

**Treasurer:**

E. W. ADSHEAD,  
1973 Crescent Road,  
Telephone B 2834.

**Chairman of Groups:**

*Programme:* MRS. F. A. SHERMAN,  
662 Niagara Street, Telephone G 9482.

*Botany:* C. W. LOWE,  
1826 Hollywood Crescent.

*Ornithology:* J. O. CLAY,  
Telephone E 3101.

*Marine:* J. A. CUNNINGHAM,  
2474 Hazel Street.

*Zoology:* G. CLIFFORD CARL,  
Telephone E 8524.

*Geology:* J. H. WHITEHOUSE,  
Telephone B 1684.

*Conservation:* DAVID B. TURNER,  
Telephone B 4975.

*Audubon:* MISS LENORA PANTON,  
Telephone B 4450.

**Juniors:**

*Chairman:* BRUCE COLVIN.  
*Vice-Chairman:* PEGGY CARL.

*Secretary:* JOAN LIVESEY.  
*Editor:* ALEX PEDEN.

Annual dues, including subscription: Single, \$2; Family, \$3; Junior, \$1.

To