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Goose barnacle (*Mitella polymerus*).

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A WOODLAND POND

George A. Hardy, Provincial Museum

In these days of hustle-bustle it is quite a treat to sit quietly by the margin of a certain woodland pond far from the sound and noise of civilization; where the silence is only broken by the distant cooing of the Band-tail pigeon, or the faint screams of the Red-tailed hawk as it soars high above in effortless circles. Nearer at hand the hum and buzz of wasps, bees and other insects enliven the water's edge.

This pond was originally a slight hollow which accumulated the spring flood waters, some years since deepened and dammed to form a cattle-watering pool; an old tree has fallen into the water, forming a convenient approach for the various forms of wild life that dwell in the vicinity, and is a source of shade and cover for the water inhabitants. While occasionally stirred up by cattle in search of a drink, this has not prevented a strong growth of pondweed, algae and a few sedges to complete ideal conditions for part of the moisture-loving fauna of the district both aquatic and terrestrial. The pond is completely surrounded by a mixture of conifer and deciduous trees, but with a fairly wide grassy margin, for easy access.

The most noticeable feature of the insect fauna on hot summer days is the abundance of dragonflies - not so much as to kinds, as to individuals of 3 or 4 species, and of these the most evident at certain seasons is the large *Libellula*-lydia. Its stout blunt body is propelled by broad black-barred gauzy wings. In company with others of its kind it swings back and forth and round and round in tireless games of tag, occasionally alighting on the old tree or on the ground. Now and then one may be seen ovipositing, as it swings pendulum-like over the water, - up to 90 backward and forward swings at one count, - the distance of each swing being only about eight inches each way.

At other times, or coinciding with the *Libellula* is a bright red species of more delicate build, its mate is much duller in colour. This species is not so active on the wing and likes to spend much of its time on the ground or nearby bushes.

The smallest of the dragonflies is also to be seen flitting daintily over the water. It is one of the Damsel flies, and belongs to a section of the group in which the wings are folded along the body, and not straight out like aeroplane wings, as in the other assemblage.

As we watch a damsel-fly it is seen to crawl downward on the stem of the rush but does not stop at the surface of the water, but continues on down. Presently it will lay an egg in a notch in the stem, under water, after which it comes to the surface and flies away.

If the water weeds are close to the surface the damsel fly, has no need to submerge completely as was seen repeatedly; all that is necessary is accomplished by curving the tip of the body down and under the water, where the egg is affixed to the nearest weed stem.

Occasionally a giant of the dragonfly tribe glides swiftly by, or alights on the old tree-trunk; soon to dash forth again to capture a fly and return to the original perch to enjoy a snack. This is a large bright blue and black species, belonging to the genus *Eschna*. It may be seen ovipositing as it flies over the water, dipping the tip of the body just under the surface as it passes.

All the larvae or nymphs of the dragonflies spend their time in the water, preying on various aquatic insects and their larvae.

As we gaze into the quiet depth of the pond numbers of underwater boats seem to be sculling about, these are the water boatmen (*Corixa*) and may be distinguished from the larger Back-swimmer, (*Notonecta*) which swims upside down. The water boatmen breathe by means of a layer of air covering the whole body - while the back-swimmer takes in air between the wing cases and the upper part of the body, periodically coming to the surface for this purpose. Both have an efficient dagger concealed in a case which is folded under the chin when not in action, but which can be erected and plunged into some unfortunate insect selected for its meal.

Now and then a water-skater darts into view, searching for some edible fly or hapless grub that may have fallen on the surface of the water. Should a bait be dropped on the water, it is surprising how quickly the skaters appear from seemingly nowhere. The skater is able to run over the surface so easily by virtue of little brush-pads on the feet, which act as air cushions to keep it afloat. Like the boatmen the water-skater has a set of sheathed daggers, for the purpose of killing and sucking the juices of its prey.

Tiny green tree-toads were in evidence, mostly resting either on the bank at the edge of the water or on the weed masses, with the head poked inquiringly out of the water. One was seen swimming leisurely in the open water propelling itself by the hind legs only. A passing back-swimmer, - that tiger of the ponds - observing it gave it a tentative poke, whereupon the toadlet scrambled hastily for the shore, using all four legs this time.

The muddy margins of the pond have a constant stream of visitors, noticeably so are the thread-waisted wasps in search of building material, for they make mud cells under loose bark or in our outhouses and woodsheds, or behind the shutters of the house. They have two distinct tones; first, a louder buzz of wings when seeking a suitable place followed by a highly pitched tone as she collects her cement. In doing so the body is held vertically with the head down, against the mud which is gathered into a ball and carried away under its "chin". Sometimes a dozen or more of these wasps are busy in one small area.

At one time an angry buzz announced the near presence of a black-hornet which was seen rolling and struggling in the grass. On close examination it was found to have attacked a yellow-jacket wasp, their combined angry buzzing as they wrestled back and forth and over and over being rather alarming to a sting allergic person.

Each was trying to sting the other, without much apparent success, finally the larger black hornet caught the back of the neck of its opponent in its jaws and with a distinct "crunch" all was over; after a little kneading and rolling up of its prey the hornet finally flew heavily away; but what the delicate grubs would do with such a tough morsel is not recorded.

Once in a while a white admiral butterfly alighted daintily on the wet mud and unrolling its slender sucking tube sipped the welcome moisture. Sometimes it is joined by the silver-spotted fritillary a magnificent brown and black butterfly, with bright silver spots on the underside of the hind wing.

Numbers of bright metallic beetles of the genus Bembidium run over the mud in search of insect food; at the slightest alarm they dive into the cracks of the dried mud.

Small spiders of the wolf-tribe are constantly scouting around for a possible meal and an ant may be seen busily dragging a beetle or small grub that unwittingly got in the way.

Signs of the raccoon are often seen, the small bear-like imprints of its feet being very evident in the soft mud; by the difference in size it is obvious that mother was accompanied by her family.

And so the time passes quickly away, as the pageant of pond-life unrolls before our eyes. We go away refreshed for the little insight into the ways of the tiny things of life and an avowed intention to renew their acquaintance at the earliest opportunity.

CHICKADEES AND CHIPMUNKS

The following is an extract from a letter received by a friend of mine on the mainland last week which I thought would be of interest to our readers:-

"Had a grandstand seat at a good fight the other day. You may remember you advised me how to persuade a chickadee to nest. I followed your instructions and a pair took over in sight of our dining-room window. They made an interesting study 'sneaking in' when they thought they were not observed. They came back to the same place this year, and a pair of chipmunks took a lease on a hole up the fence. One day we noted a chipmunk working his way along the fence toward the chickadee's nest and in a minute there was a war on. Both birds sailed in and the last we saw of the chipmunk was him hightailing it along the top of the fence for home with two balls of feathers pounding his tail.

That was not the last of the chickadees however. In due course they used to visit the bird bath every day at noon (one at a time), but one day five of them were sitting on the edge of the bath. The old ones had a real bath, and the three young ones sat and looked on. All at once they waded in and as the water was too deep they floated across and then tried to dry themselves. It sure was a show. That was the last we saw of them, so we are hoping they will return next year to stage a bit more entertainment. It was well worth while."

A.R.D.

CALIFORNIA QUAIL

According to the Dictionary, "fact" and "actuality" are synonymous but I do not entirely agree with this dictum.

For example, consider that fascinating little ball of personality - the Quail. Any book of bird study will tell you of the size, colouring, headcrest, habitat and distinctive call of the Quail - these are "facts", but what a masterpiece of understatement! The "actuality" is an absorbing study of unending interest.

A quail 'community' is an admirable organization - always one, or more, on guard to give warning of the approach of any of their many enemies - cats, rats, hawks, humans, etc. and their different calls distinct and intriguing - "come and get it" "where are you" "here I am" "alert" "take cover" "panic stations". In February or March the Quail "pair off" and from then on show a connubial fidelity rarely equalled in nature or humanity. What a contrast between the love-making of the pheasant and the quail! Mr. pheasant, with his exotic plumage, and his flamboyant posturing, and dancing around his coyly skipping little hen, is a sight to behold - and apparently just as seductive to several coy little hens. But when the eggs are hatched, Mr. pheasant goes about his lordly business, leaving the entire burden of protecting and rearing the brood to the Mrs. pheasants.

Mr. Quail's courtship is prosaic in the extreme - he dispenses with all preliminaries, just a quick matter of fast mating - but his faithfulness to, and his care of his one little mate continue throughout the hatching period and until the chicks are fully grown. All day long he keeps guard near the nest, leaving only to escort Mrs. Quail to feed, then hurrying her back to duty on the nest.

The broods average 10 to 20 chicks although I have seen one brood of 26 - and when the chicks are first hatched they look very like striped bumble bees - and are almost invisible in the grass until they move. Mother cautiously leads the way followed by the brood with Father the personification of importance and alertness bringing up the rear - and the chicks' training starts immediately - Father and Mother flit about rounding up stragglers - and pecking them on their way - any slowness in answering signals is sternly attended to - alarming to watch until one realizes that implicit obedience is their chief hope of survival. What an object lesson to modern parents addicted to "self expressionist" school of thought.

At three days old the chicks start trying their wings. Hurrying after Mother they will "take off" for 18 to 24 inches - each day increasing their flights. If Mother fluffs her feathers or stretches a wing - the chicks do likewise - at 3 or 4 weeks old, Mother will fly about 20 feet away and coax the chicks to fly to her.

In every way Father takes his full share of rearing and training his family. In wet or chilly weather when Mother covers the chicks with her warm body and wings, Father does the same with half the brood - and if a bird loses its mate to one of the many predators the remaining bird will carry on alone, as guard, tutor and guide - quite a pathetic sight to watch the widow, or widower, getting more harassed and thinner each day until the chicks are independent.

When the chicks are tiny, the different broods do not mix together - but sometimes in the long grass they inadvertently run into each other - then there is trouble - of a minor kind - the adults putting up a show of rivalry. It is amazing how quickly a parent will spot a 'stranger in camp' - a chick from another family will join a group of chicks cuddled into a tight bunch for warmth, and immediately Father or Mother will spot it and chase it and peck the "interloper" severely back to its own family.

By the time the chicks are grown to be self-reliant - the family unit still remains, but the inter-family rivalry completely disappears - and the fine community spirit mentioned at the beginning exists.

No family will take unto itself a stray chick from another brood - I wonder if I have proved my contention that there is a difference between "fact" and "actuality".

G. Stevenson.

COW BIRDS ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

On May 17th, while taking in the bird life at the Cadboro Bay beach, a party of us saw a species which was new to us here, being brown and grey in solid colors, no streaks, and about the size of a fox sparrow. We agreed that it might have been a cowbird, but as they are very rarely seen here, we were rather dubious.

However, a few weeks later, a report came in from a gentleman who lives close by, and who has a good knowledge of birds, that he had seen a cowbird in his garden, and gave us an accurate description.

We were still somewhat doubtful, until he advised us on

July 6th that he had seen a yellow warbler feeding a dark colored bird much larger than itself. This episode, both he and his neighbours, saw several times.

It is quite certain therefore, that a pair of cowbirds were in the vicinity of Cadboro this spring, and that an egg had been laid in the warbler's nest.

A few days later I saw this now full grown young cowbird for myself, quite contentedly eating bread from a food tray, its foster mother apparently having had quite enough of it.

A.R.D.

TOWHEES AT PLAY

by Morris Jackson, Fanny Bay, B.C.

Writing in "Nature Magazine," W. L. McAtee points out that play in animals is usually defined as activity that is not directly useful. However, play can be and perhaps usually is indirectly useful; and this seems to be borne out by the aphorism about no play making Jack a dull boy. Although, as Mr. McAtee says, it is true that in birds play-activity is seen mostly among adults, yet the play impulse is manifest in young captive towhees. Young and free birds do not get much chance to play --the struggle for survival and the need to gain experience giving them little opportunity. Yet they do find time for chasing one another. But young captive towhees will play freely by themselves or with a human foster-parent. (They keep still and quiet unless the "parent" is with them.) A month-old bird we had would play a form of tag: he liked to be chivied around by my finger, when I found it very difficult to touch him as he squirmed and twisted around an old mattress which was his playground. After dodging thus for a few moments, he would "attack" with open beak. He also played a form of hide-and-seek, hiding behind some object and calling the chick note, "tsip-tsip." Then he would show his head, only to duck hastily when he felt sure he had been seen. He had little toys: a small tin-capped cork, a small red packet that had contained five razor blades, a marble. He would pursue a string as eagerly and persistently as would a kitten. He would take the cork in his bill and throw it to the floor, pursuing at such speed that he would alight on the cork as it reached the floor, when he would scratch it around for a while. The red packet came in for a deal of

vigorous scratching also, but was kept hidden much of the time. Scratching by towhees is not always done solely to find food, and in the case of birds under two months old the impulse seems to provide exercise and probably amusement or distraction. Thus, this young bird would scratch vigorously in an old felt slipper for several minutes while gazing vacantly around. He has scratched, with much discomfort to us, our heads and, when we were lying down, our chins, mouths, and noses; getting his feet entangled in my wife's hairnet, and sliding from my bald head. Like many other birds, he enjoyed a brief slide. A breath-stopping performance was given regularly when he found he could fly. His course went in at the lower right rungs of an old wooden rocking-chair, out at the back lower rungs, then up and in through bars of the back-rest, out through and below the left arm-rest, down and in through the lower left rungs, straight through and out again at the right rungs. All this happened while you could say "whizz, whizz, whizz!" Though his long tail appears to turn him about like a weathercock so that at times he may look clumsy, never think a towhee is not able to fly well. He can fly quite well without a tail, for that matter. Like Br'er Rabbit, of whom Uncle Remus tells us, the Towhee is "born and bred in a briar bush." He must get around in thick brush very speedily, or he won't live long!

RAVENS' AERONAUTICAL PARTY

On a brilliant August afternoon, above Thetis Lake, I watched a dozen ravens making the best practical use of a steady warm westerly wind. The majority of them, by size and voice, appeared to be juveniles, but oldsters were among them. They soared into the wind over a bluff above us in parties of two, three, four or more. They banked, swerved, gyrated in wide circles. They twisted shortly, turned, curvetted, dodged, knifed, rolled to avoid or attack each other.

When I imitated a juvenile croak, they all emerged over the tree-tops to check on the new sound. A flimsy tree-top, barely strong enough to support a young raven was a base for competition: no sooner had a youngster alighted and flapped to a standstill, than some competitor would swoop to dislodge him. One bird alighted on a dead tree, wrenched a mouthful of wood away, placed it in his claw and tried to sail off with it. Finally, after at least an hour's play, the sky darkened with rainclouds and the party ended. It broke up, the groups disappearing in various directions.

J.O.C.

BIRDS IN JUNE

At the south end of Hobbs Road at Cadboro Bay there is a deep glen, the lower part of which has innumerable springs. On a bright summer day this glen, which is heavily timbered with tall trees, has a beauty all its own, with the sunshine lighting up the vivid green of the young leaves of the dogwoods and maples, which climb high among the dark firs and balsams.

On a fine day in June a small party of bird watchers went through this glen to see what birds could be found there. The winter wrens were singing everywhere on the forest floor, accompanied by the rich notes of the russet-backed thrush. Up among the tree tops could be heard the song of the Townsend's warblers, intermingled with the liquid notes of the warbling and solitary vireos. Lower down the western flycatchers and the blackcapped warblers could be seen and heard. Robins were flying through the trees or guarding their nests and now and then could be heard the calls of the nesting quail.

The find of the day, however, was a barn owl. One of our party noticed a large bird fly up to a high branch of a particularly heavy leafed fir, and then heard the loud chattering of a group of robins, which seemed to indicate either a hawk or an owl. We climbed up the sides of the ravine to the base of the fir, and there, in plain sight, was a bird that was obviously a barn owl, with its large light coloured head. The robins kept near, still calling excitedly, while a hummingbird with its characteristic fearlessness, flew at the owl repeatedly, but keeping just out of reach. The owl never moved, but closed its eyes and apparently went to sleep, occasionally turning its massive head down and eyeing us with indifference. This was the first time any of us had seen a barn owl on Vancouver Island, and, in fact, were not aware that they were to be found here, there being no official record.

On this June morning we found forty species of birds in and about these woods, the list including house wrens, pileated and Harris woodpeckers, olive-sided flycatchers, wood peewees, waxwings, black-headed grosbeaks and the first night hawk for the year.

G.E.S.

THE WRENS GO MODERN

Country homes are usually surrounded by gardens, for the charm of color, and also perhaps as an apologetic attitude towards Nature for having disturbed a piece of her better planted landscape. The plants and trees were hers, we only re-arrange them to our own peculiar taste.

Fences may keep animals out of the "lovesome spot" but birds and insects ignore them. They take the green growth and fruits for their natural food, and the shade for more secure nesting. Few insects are welcome. Birds are either tolerated or encouraged. Their singing is encouraged, if not too loud and too early. The robin at dawning, the finches and wrens through the day, the thrush in the dusk of evening seldom fail to please.

Should any of them choose nesting sites in the garden, it is taken as a compliment. The gardener may invite the nesting by putting up boxes or leaving holes and ledges in out-buildings. Some birds may become personal in their operations, as when a chickadee, short of lining material, pulled a beakful of hair from the gardener-owner's head, or a waxwing tearing away the strings used for tying up delphiniums, a wren appropriating packing material and a hummingbird weaving a hammock on the clothes line.

A farmer-friend near by reports the determined insistence of a wren to "go modern", and to use the cradle under the footplate of his tractor though it was in use for a short time every day. Though the birds were noticed to be near every day, the nest was not discovered until incubation had begun. The tractor needed service one day, and the actions of the wrens betrayed them. But they did not abandon the nest. The tractor was taken to its work for an hour or two, but the birds fed their charges when it was resting. Then one morning, as work for the day was beginning, five little wrens flew from their iron cradle and fluttered into the bush, much to the farmer's relief.

Such confidence from the small birds of the wild is complimentary to human behaviour. It is true that better foraging and shelter may be found about the homestead, but this fearlessness of strange machinery and buildings, and this trust in the harmlessness of human beings, is a sign of advancement in both towards the tolerance of dwelling together in unity.

Contributed.

JUNIOR NATURAL HISTORY PAGE

Gerry Skinner, --- Editor

Dear 'Naturalists'

This is written by the junior editor's ghost-writer. The writing for this page has to be in the Museum office by the 15th of every month so it can be typed, printed and sent during the first week of the following month to all the members. Nothing for this page has been sent in this August for the September magazine. The ghost-writer hopes that the Junior Editor gets heaps of your stories to fill this page for October. You could make the story a letter about what you did this summer, and send it in to the Editor, Junior Natural History, care of the Provincial Museum or bring it on Tuesday, September 12th at 3:30, the first day we meet for the season of 1955 to 1956. Gerry Skinner had to work hard filling up the page last year because of a shortage of your contributions.

This writer took a three day overland Port Renfrew trip in June. Purpose was to sketch Pachena Indian Village. The bus went from Shawnigan Lake through magnificent forests for a while around sides of hills looking down the occasional valley of skunk cabbage and alder spotted with patches of snow. You come out on a great high hill overlooking other hills and this time hill after hill of black stumps where the loggers have been at work. Finally you reach a valley settlement surrounded by these stump-hills and board a railway speeder for the last seventeen miles along the San Juan river valley looking into the sun and going over eight trestle bridges and on down to the ocean lumber village settlement half a mile from Port Renfrew. There is no phone service Saturday and Sunday except for emergency. There are two stores, a hotel, a pay telephone and a 'pub'. Six times as much rain as Victoria has keeps the growth luxuriant. The coast there is still tree-clad. One mile from the Port is a wonderful breaker-swept beach with ash-white huge dead trees washed up in the storms.

The river entrance beach is warmer and placid, with the eagle and osprey flying above and the peaceful old reserve of meadow, alder and salmonberry shelters many small birds.

NOTICES OF MEETINGS

1955

- Saturday
Sept.10: BIRD GROUP FIELD TRIP. Meet at Sidney Wharf at
10 a.m. Bring lunch. Phone A.R. Davidson
or H.D.R.Stewart re transportation.
- Saturday
Sept.17: GEOLOGY GROUP. Meet at Beacon Hill Park, end of
Douglas Street at 2 o'clock.
Mr. A.H. Marrion, leader.
- Saturday
Sept.24: BOTANY GROUP: Field trip at Goldstream Park.
Meet at Monterey Cafe at 1:30 p.m.
Miss M. C. Melburn, Leader.
- Tuesday
Sept.13: GENERAL MEETING:
To be held in the Provincial Library at 8 p.m.
Coloured slides will be shown by Mr.E.Stansfield.
Members are asked to participate in these
meetings by bringing some object of interest
or raising questions on matters that come
within the scope of the Society.

-- OUR COVER --

The Goose Barnacle is the only one of this type found on the B.C. Coast above the low-tide level.

Size of the head may be up to $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in length, and the stalk, or peduncle, has a maximum length of six inches. This stalk can be used as food. When steamed for twenty minutes and skinned, the flesh is red and tastes like lobster.

Its distribution is world-wide; in the littoral zone below half-tide mark, but only where there is strong wave-action.

The colour is creamy white on the plates, dark brown in the interspaces and on the peduncle. The cirri are faintly yellow. (the cirri form the sweep that captures the food.)

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