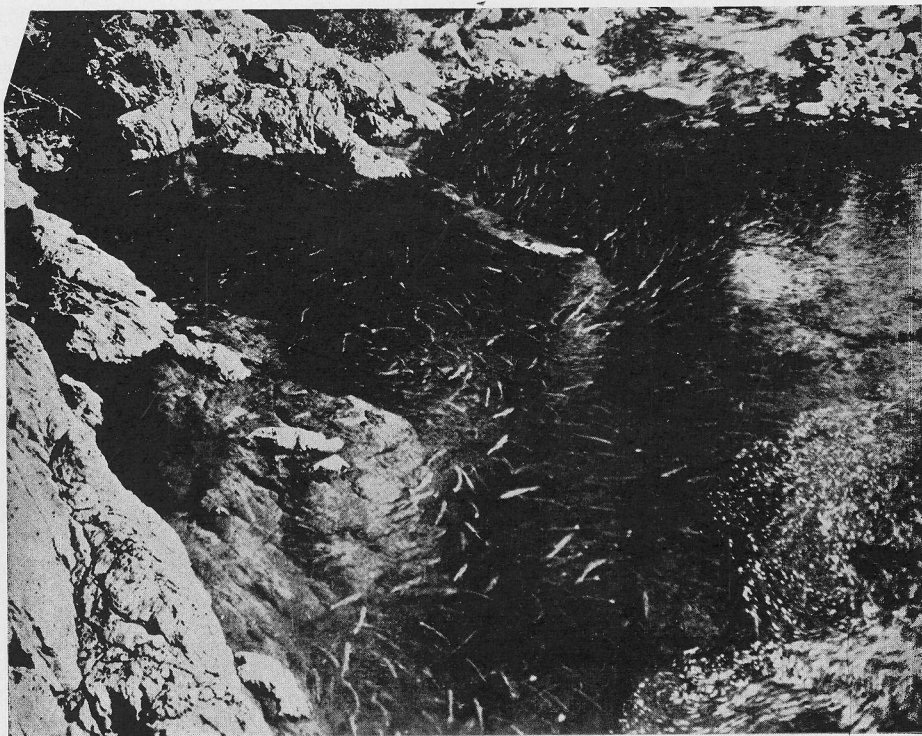


The
**VICTORIA
NATURALIST**

Vol. 12, No. 4

October, 1955



Salmon in Fraser Canyon pool.

(B.C. Dept. of Fisheries.)

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THE VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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OCTOBER 1955

BUTTLE LAKE

In view of the widespread attention given of late to Buttle Lake in an attempt to preserve it as the centre of attraction in Strathcona Park, three of us recently visited the lake. We were unanimous in the conclusion that Buttle Lake should be left at its present height and size, and the trees saved from the faller's saw. It is regrettable that only a few have had the chance of visiting this lake. Some, from the heights of Mount Albert Edward, have seen a portion of the lake as a deep pool below. The public, in consequence, have shown apathy until this autumn following upon newspaper articles by Roderick Haig-Brown.

Buttle Lake is a possible 30 miles by road, lying southwest of the town of Campbell River. It lies 6 miles south of Upper Campbell Lake, its altitude 707 feet. The northern $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles is situated outside the park, the boundary-line cutting obliquely across the lake. Strathcona Park lies on the southwest of this line. The abovementioned $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles of lake belongs to the E. & N. Railway area; part of the northern end was logged in recent years. The Government bought the remainder for park purposes at considerable cost. High mountains surround the lake: Adrain, Alexandra, Albert Edward, George V., Phillips, Myra, Marble, McBride, Cobb, Filberg, Laing. Some of these lie in the area known as 'Forbidden Plateau'.

Great bluffs and buttresses flank these mountains. The water is clear; reflections remarkable. The value of the park lies largely in its lake, $18\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, 1 mile at its widest, and most of all the wide deltas at the creek mouths covered in magnificent standing timber unspoiled by man or forest fire. These deltas are potential camping sites for a park. Names of the larger creek-mouths, clockwise from the northeast side are:- Shepherds, Henshaw, Price, Myra, Phillips, Marble Rock, Wolf. They contain each perhaps from 100 to 500 acres, all deep in great trees. Price Creek (Thetwood) is one of the winter feeding grounds of some 20 elk.

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The marginal growth surrounding the lake is much of it cedar, fir and some deciduous trees, deep-rooted to form the needed protection from wind for inner stands of timber. Consequently there are now few windfalls or unsightly snags in the lake. At the present time the Power Commission is planning to take away all timber to an altitude of 730 feet; also to raise the water by damming to 725 feet. The present normal high is 707 feet, and the present low 700 feet; there is also an excavated 'draw-down' at 690 feet. On the above figures a fluctuation of 35 feet of muddy banks, vertical, is indicated.

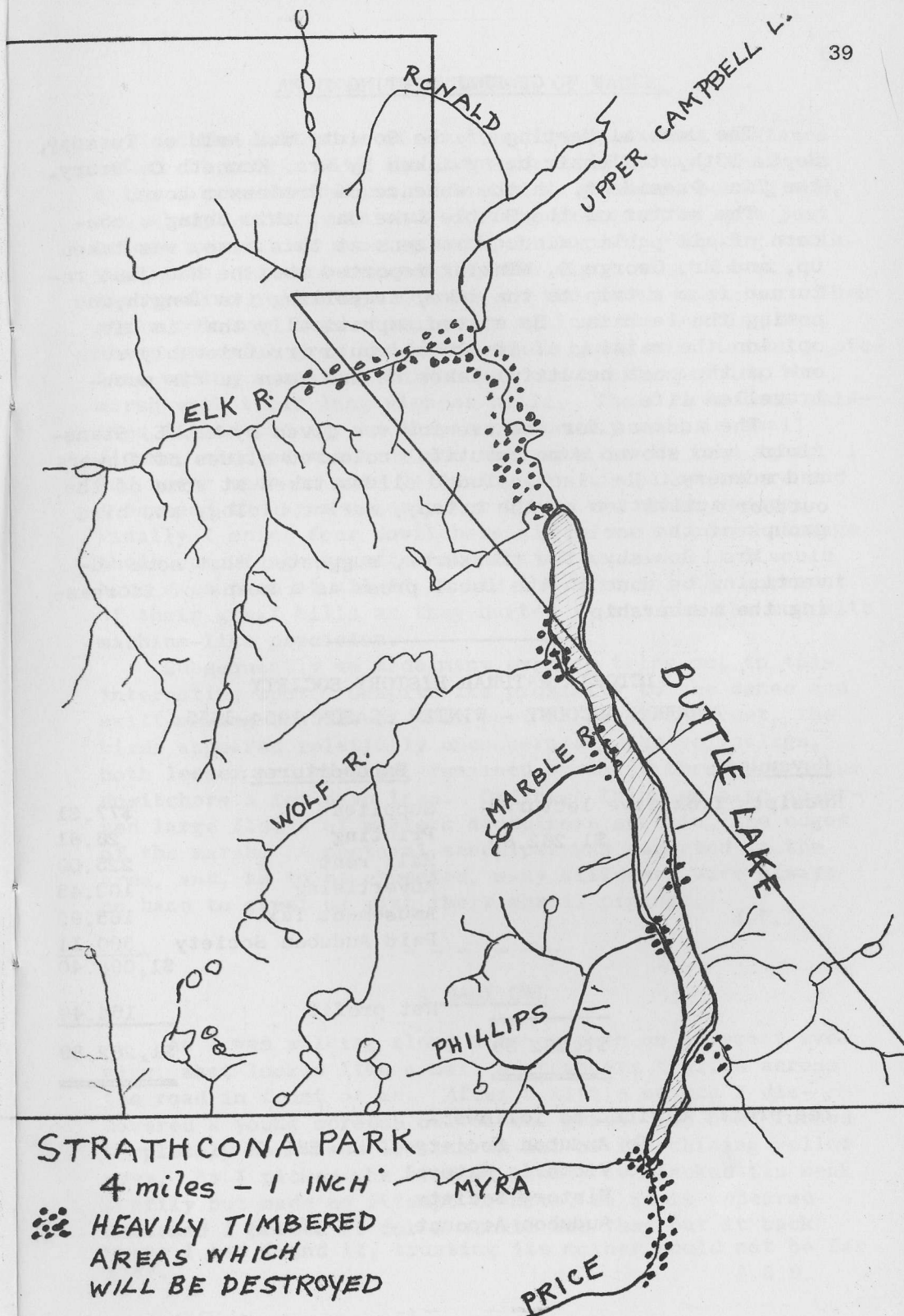
The three visitors, members of the Society, were the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Reid, whose summer home is here. They are deeply interested in the preservation of the lake as it is. Their daughter has made jams and jellies of 17 varieties of local fruits from around the lake. I spent 27 hours there, a time of rainstorms. The birds that attracted my attention during a few hours were: 40 short-billed gulls, 1 glaucous-winged, 2 dippers, 1 spotted sandpiper, 1 osprey, 1 eagle, 1 solitary vireo and 1 heron. Fish were cut-throat and rainbow. An unusual sight was the top of a rainbow seen from above where we stood looking down upon the lake, together with a reflection above the bow in the rainstorm.

It is indeed much to be hoped that the wide interest in saving the lake will have brought about a decision not to alter the natural high level of the lake, and that the trees may be preserved for the future generations of our people to enjoy.

J.O. Clay.

On Sunday morning, Sept. 25th, Mr. Clay and myself saw a flock of thirty-seven Turkey Vultures soaring and wheeling in the sky over our heads. After a few minutes they all flew in a southerly direction for maybe 300 yards then again formed another spiral. This alternate flying toward the south and then circling continued until they were out of sight.

A.R.D.



GENERAL MEETING

The General Meeting of the Society was held on Tuesday, Sept. 13th, the chair being taken by Mrs. Kenneth C. Drury, the Vice-President, in the absence of Professor Lowe.

The matter of the Buttle Lake dam, this being a concern of all public minded citizens at this time, was taken up, and Mr. George E. Winkler reported that he had just returned from a trip to the lake, travelling its length, and noting the terrain. He stated emphatically that in his opinion the raising of its level would irretrievably ruin one of the most beautiful lakes he has seen in his much-travelled life.

The address for the evening was given by Mr. E. Stansfield, who showed some beautiful coloured slides of flowers and scenery. He also included slides taken at some of the outdoor activities of the botany, marine biology and bird groups of the society.

Mrs. Soulsby, the treasurer, suggested that some advertising be done in the local press as a means of increasing the membership.

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
AUDUBON ACCOUNT - WINTER SEASON 1954-1955

| <u>Revenue:</u> | <u>Expenditures:</u> | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Receipts from five lectures | Supplies | \$77.31 |
| \$1,262.89 | Printing | 26.61 |
| | Hall rent | 225.00 |
| | Advertising | 103.45 |
| | Amusement Tax | 165.92 |
| | Paid Audubon Society | 500.11 |
| | | <u>\$1,098.40</u> |
| | Net profit | 164.49 |
| <u>\$1,262.89</u> | | <u>\$1,262.89</u> |

The profit divided as follows:-

| | |
|--|---------|
| To Audubon Society - - - | \$82.25 |
| To Victoria Natural History Society | |
| Audubon Account - - - | \$82.24 |

AN UNUSUAL GATHERING OF WADERS

On the left side of Douglas Street a short distance before it merges with the Patricia Bay Highway, there is a low marshy meadowland dominated by grasses, oozing mud, and slough water. We were driving passed this spot just before sunset one evening early in August; stopping to investigate, we were rewarded by the sight of at least twenty-five yellowlegs feeding in the marsh below us. Their straw-coloured legs conspicuous against the setting sun, these graceful grey and white toned birds were indeed a picture wading sometimes thigh deep and busily probing the marsh with their long slender bills. Their tremulous whistles filled the air as they continuously rose in small flocks, circled the area and then settled to feed again. I had never seen so many yellowlegs in one place before and I scanned the area eagerly for these and other waders. Finally I spied four dowitchers all in rusty brown plumage, their camouflage so effective that I wondered if I would have seen them at all if it had not been for the movement of their great bills as they darted in and out the mud with machine-like precision.

Subsequently we made many evening trips out to this interesting spot. Despite its proximity to the dense and swift-moving traffic of this part of Douglas Street, the birds appeared relatively unconcerned. The yellowlegs, both lesser and greater, remained at least three weeks, the dowitchers a few days less. On these trips we also observed large flocks of western sandpipers swarming the edges of the marsh. A pectoral sandpiper was reported in the area, and, as to be expected, many killdeers were always on hand to greet us with their shrill pipings.

J.R.I.

- - - - -
A BABY OWL

As I was walking along a beach path on a recent evening, what looked like a ball of feathers fluffed across the road in front of me. After a little search I discovered a young screech owl on the grass, its head turned completely round and looking up out of its shining yellow eyes. As I picked the bird up gently it clacked its beak angrily but made no attempt to bite; so as it appeared unharmed I petted it for a minute and then put it back where I had found it, trusting its mother would not be far away.

A.R.D.

A TRIP TO BARE ISLAND

Possibly the most interesting, and certainly the most arduous, trip of the bird group is the one taken each summer to one of the local islands where the sea birds nest. This year, on July 2nd, a party of 29 met at Deep Cove wharf, and from here they were taken by motor launch through Satellite Channel to Mandarte Island, better known to most of us as Bare Island, which is a very rocky place about three quarters of a mile long, with no beaches at all. This island belongs to the Crown and is designated as a bird sanctuary. Landing in a calm sea is difficult enough; with a stiff breeze it would be well nigh impossible. However, we had a fine and calm day, so that most of the party were able to scramble ashore.

This island is the nesting place of glaucous-winged gulls, double-crested and Baird cormorants, pigeon guillemots, two pairs of tufted puffins, and possibly a few oyster catchers, also one pair of song sparrows.

No sooner had the first passenger got ashore, in this case Bernard Pattenden, than the gulls rose in the air and shrieked nervousness and defiance to the invaders of their privacy. The din was terrible; some gulls diving at the intruders, and in some cases actually striking them with their wing tips. Eggs and downy young were everywhere. How many it would be hard to estimate, but there must have been at least 1500 pairs of gulls. The nests of the cormorants were all on the more precipitous side of the island. The double-crested cormorants build their nests of sticks, some of the nests being many years old and from three to four feet high. We counted 100 nests, most of them with eggs, and some of them embellished with greenery. The Baird cormorants were more numerous than the double-crested, there being possibly 200 pairs, but most of their nests were built in places inaccessible to most of us, and we could not make a count. These nests also contained up to five eggs. None was hatched.

Although we hunted diligently for pigeon guillemots' nests, none was found although there must have been from 50 to 75 nests on the island somewhere.

We were pleased to get a good look at the tufted puffins these being a new species to most of us. They raced in great circles to observe the intruders. There were rabbits on the island, which, it appeared to us, must have had a diffi-

cult time surviving during the gull nesting period. They were in fair numbers, but kept mostly in their burrows while we were present, though we did see a group of gulls giving one of them a "run for his money", the bunny taking a headlong leap into a hole just in time to save his life for the time being. Several young were seen lying dead near their burrows. Also, as usual, the crows were very busy taking advantage of the disturbed conditions, a new contingent of these being attracted to the island by the tumult caused by our visit. The beautiful weather added considerably to the success of the expedition; Mr. Clay generally appears to be able to pick a fine day for this trip, even if he does so about two months ahead, so everyone had a most interesting and pleasant time.

A.R.D.

UNUSUAL BIRDS

On September 18th a GOLDEN PLOVER was seen at Sayward Beach, which is just beyond Cordova Bay. The bird was there for a considerable time and was identified at close range by Mrs. Joan Inglis.

A BLACK THROATED GREY WARBLER was noticed by Mrs. Taylor on August 30th in her garden at Towner Park, which is just south of Deep Cove. Mrs. Bell of 742 St. Patrick Street, Oak Bay, also had a pair in her garden on September 14th.

MORNING DOVES were seen as follows this summer:

June 15th: 2 in the woods on the east side of Mt. Tolmie.

Aug. 7th; 12 on Arbutus Road, Gordon Head.

Aug. 18th: 12 near the junction of Douglas St. and Rogers Avenue.

Sept. 18th: 4 on Finnerty Road.

A LOCAL BIRD BANDING RECORD

In February of this year a glaucous-winged gull was found dead on the beach near Humber Road at the Uplands. Noticing that it had been banded, one of the party, Mr. H.D.R. Stewart, removed the band and sent it to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at Laurel, Maryland. Some time afterwards a reply was received that this gull had been banded by Mrs. Zella McMannama at Flower Island, Washington, on July 22nd 1948.

The following rather interesting additional banding records were received by Mr. Stewart from the Bird Banding Office at Maryland:

In the past about 7 million birds have been banded, and a half a million are being added each year. More than 500 thousand recovery and return records are now available for study.

Of interest also are such extreme age records as that of the Caspian Tern recovered 26 years after banding, a ring-billed gull and an osprey after 21 years, and a mallard and a pintail with known ages of more than 20 years. Among the longest intervals between banding and recovery for the smaller land birds are 14 years for purple martin and blue jay, and 13 years for chimney swift.

Wild birds banded in North America have been recovered as far away as Siberia, Africa, France and the mid-Pacific. Following are several records which illustrate why the pintail duck is particularly famous as a traveller:-

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Banded Sept. 7, 1951 in Labrador, | recovered Sept. 25/51 in England. |
| Banded Aug. 27, 1939 in N. Dakota, | " Jan. 10, 1940 in Columbia So. America |
| Banded Aug. 16, 1949 in California | " Nov. 15, 1949 Cook Islands, New Zealand. |
| Banded July 19, 1950 in Alaska | " Nov. 24, 1951 in Delaware. |
| Banded Oct. 21, 1951 in Hawaii | " Sept. 10, 1952 in Edmonton. |

We hope to publish in an early issue of the 'Naturalist' an interesting article on local bird banding and returns, recorded by Mrs. G.M. Bell of Oak Bay.

A.R.D.

A TRIP TO TRIAL ISLAND

July 22nd dawned bright and sunny, and the sea being calm, Mr. Davidson and myself obtained a rowboat from the Oak Bay boathouse. We wished to view shore birds from the sea, and in this we proved to be fairly lucky, though it was difficult to focus our quarry with the boat's bobbing motion.

The first birds of interest were several black turnstones, which apparently had just returned from their breeding places in the north, and were the first to be seen this summer. Also off the golf links were seven black oystercatchers. Western and least sandpipers were seen feeding in some of the bays and a few of these birds were also picking amongst seaweed on rocks.

Twenty California gulls rested on some rocks and with them were twelve Heerman gulls looking very smart with their very dark mantles contrasted with red bills. Two short-billed gulls were also seen flying low over the sea. Our resident gull, the glaucous-wing, is always in evidence. The only ducks seen were a few harlequins which swam off shore or appeared to doze on various rocks. They were all females or immatures.

Having passed the golf links and the sea being calm, we rowed across the normally treacherous stretch of water to Trial Island. It proved to be easy, and there on a rock, as if to greet us, stood a dowitcher, looking quite impressive against the skyline, with its long bill and legs. The bird proved to be very tame and we rowed fairly close to it. Another dowitcher was seen on the island later in the day.

As we landed two tufted puffins flew swiftly over the sea, so fast we were fortunate in being able to identify them. This was really interesting, since we had only seen this species for the first time on the bird group meeting to Bare Island two weeks previously.

Our exploration started very well with about thirty surfbirds and several black turnstones feeding on the rocks. With them was one ruddy turnstone, again the first of the summer. This bird looked smart with its red, black and white markings and orange feet. On the other side of the island were many glaucous-wing gulls getting up their un-earthly clamour, and with them, very much alone, one black brant. We wondered why this brant was there, away from its own kind, in the company of these noisy gulls. As it

circled round with the gulls, landing again on the island we assumed it was not hurt in any way.

The gulls had a few nests here, some containing eggs, and a couple of flightless young were seen running into crannies in the rocks to hide themselves. More oyster-catchers were resting on the rocks and with them several black guillemots. We counted twenty of these birds, some resting and others flying low over the waves calling a high pitched 'whee' 'whee'. Baird cormorants rested on the higher part of the island, but we failed to discover any nests of these birds or of the guillemots.

Three song sparrows were the only land birds to be seen, but their singing certainly could not compete with the din the gulls were creating. There are not many shrubs and no trees on the island to provide shelter for the smaller songbirds, but in a slight depression in the centre were masses of the swamp hollyhock in full bloom, their deep pink making a show of colour that was quite startling.

The trip back to the boathouse was uneventful except that the tide had changed and rowing against it took about twice as long as the outward journey.

I hope this short article will help to show any newcomer to the Society the wealth of bird life that is to be found around our coasts on a sunny day in July.

B. R. Pattenden.

THE BIRD GROUP MEETING AT SIDNEY

On Saturday, Sept. 10, members of the bird group, twenty-eight in all, met at the Sidney Wharf. From there they proceeded to Randall's Boat House on the north side of Shoal Harbour to find out what shore birds were present in the extensive mud flats in this area. Jackson's Point, also in Shoal Harbour, was the next objective. From a rocky bluff here a good view can be obtained of these inland waters, all of which, by the way, is designated as a bird sanctuary. The lunch hour was spent in the beautiful grounds of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Gile. In the afternoon the party went on to Roberts Bay and the adjacent coast. The weather was fine and calm and a fair number of birds were seen, about thirty species in all. There are three osprey nests in this area, all of which appeared to have been used this year.

H.D.R.S.

JUNIOR NATURAL HISTORY PAGE

Gerry Skinner, --- Editor

Bruce Crawford and Louis Kirby went up Mount Douglas on a hike at about two o'clock one Saturday. Bruce went especially to get material for this page but did not write it down. They took two cameras and went up the wooded north-east side.

They left their bikes beside a large stump and followed a trace of a trail. They came to a wider horse trail and followed along a branch trail from the horse trail. This led to a large field of ferns which Bruce says is a mass of Easter lilies (erythroniums) in the early spring. They were a quarter of the way up Mount Douglas.

They found a fungus on dead leaves and lots of green slugs and a dead rat. There was one thing they couldn't find - the trail leading to the stump, and you can guess why they were anxious, their bicycles were lost also. They went finally downhill which they knew must lead to the road and then they found the trail they first went in by and so found the tree stump and the bikes again. They had been on Mount Douglas for three hours.

Now what particular point in this story is interesting and why? Well first I am interested in the open field of ferns. Why is it open? Were the trees cut down and if not why don't they grow there. What kind of trees are around the field? What kind of ferns are growing there? Why is the north-east side more wooded than the other side?

We welcome back this week of September 12th not only the Juniors but two golden crowned sparrows and a fox sparrow. These birds come readily for crumbs remembering our calls from last year. The Seattle wren which had remained all summer did not like these newcomers. He gave his deep raspy call at first but now they get along alright. The wren chased a rat into the compost pile yesterday.

By the time you read this you will have seen the Vireo's nest. It is called pensile; it hangs from the branch with no support from below. The nest edge is wrapped neatly around the branch in several places.

NOTICES OF MEETINGS

1955

Tuesday

GENERAL MEETING:Oct. 11:

To be held in the Provincial Library at 8 p.m.

Speaker: Mr. R.H. MacKay, Dominion Wild
Life Officer, Vancouver.

Subject: The Trumpeter Swan. (Illustrated)

Saturday

BIRD GROUP:

Oct. 15th:

Field Trip to Island View Beach.

Meet at Monterey Cafe at 9:45 a.m. or at
Island View Beach at 10:15.

Bring lunch.

Leader: Mr. J. O. Clay.

Saturday

ANNUAL FUNGUS FORAY:

Oct. 22nd:

Meet at Monterey Cafe at 1:30 p.m. or
at Thetis Lake Tea Rooms at 1:45 p.m.

Leader: Mr. G.A. Hardy.

Saturday

GEOLOGY GROUP:

Oct. 29th:

Meet at Cadboro Bay Bus Terminus at 1:50
or corner Tudor and Seaview at 2 p.m.

To explore Ten Mile Point.

Leader: Dr. A. O. Hayes.

Bus leaves Pandora and Douglas at 1:30 p.m.

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