

The
**VICTORIA
NATURALIST**

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Mountain quail.

((F. L. Beebe.))

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OUR COVER

The mountain quail is slightly larger than the California quail; its chief distinguishing feature is a long plume which lies back from the top of the head. The back of the head and breast are soft grey in colour, blending to olive-grey on the back and tail. The throat is a rich chestnut bordered in white, and the flanks are of the same rich chestnut colour conspicuously marked with broad vertical white bars.

Unlike the California quail, this species is shy and retiring. The birds live on the higher slopes during the spring and summer, where they nest. It is during the spring that these birds are most often seen, for the crowing cock is a noisy individual, calling lustily in the early mornings. A careful observer may stalk and view the male as he calls from some rocky prominence or stump.

The species was introduced to the lower mainland and on southern Vancouver Island in 1860, and later in the 1870's and 1880's, but on the whole the history is obscure and some ornithologists believe they may have been indigenous to Vancouver Island (Munro and Cowan 1947).

Occasionally small flocks, pairs and individuals are seen in the Highland District (Durrance Lake), along the Malahat (Spectacle Lake) and on the Victoria Watersheds (Cabin Pond).

C.J.G.

PEANUT PIONEER

One of the half-dozen varied thrushes that have been visiting us since late in November has learned to eat peanuts. What is more, he has learned to stand fast as the peanut is pitched to him; which is essential to his getting any peanut at all, since numbers of small birds watch each peanut we throw and vie with one another for it. I do not know how he is able to crack the larger peanuts with his thrush's bill, but I have seen him on several occasions break them into several fragments. Beyond doubt a lot of skill must be employed, since his beak is much too feeble to crush the nut--such skill as was employed by "Susie", Dr. Fluck's pet bluejay, that bored large holes in the woodwork and doors of the doctor's home.

So we have another pioneer, perhaps; a bird that has found something new and from whom his companions may learn. It is often rash to generalize about birds (one is always so uncomfortably aware of many exceptions) but it has been our experience that peanuts have not been recognized as food by towhees, juncoes, finches, or song-sparrows until an individual of their species had commenced to compete with the towhees for whom the peanuts were first intended.

Our first peanut eater was a towhee we raised. We continued to feed him peanuts after his liberation, though his fellow towhees flew away at our approach. In winter, he was joined by a young female and, from then on, we were in the peanut business. Since we made it our habit to throw a peanut-half to every towhee within thirty feet, we soon had lots of friends.

It took the juncoes two years to "muscle in." Then one day a fast-flying snowbird snatched a peanut from the ground before an overcautious towhee had decided to take it. Inside of a week every junco knew that they, too, could have peanuts if they were quick. This, of course, greatly added to our feed bill. We consoled ourselves somewhat by saying the house finches did not bother with peanuts but stayed with the oats. It must have been at least three years before a cock finch decided that he, too, could have peanuts. From then on, feeding peanuts has been pretty much of a free for all. Hand-feeding is the only method within our financial means; simply to pile them on a plate would mean an endless refilling of the vessel.

But we shall not mind if by some chance all the varied

thrushes learn to eat peanuts. After all, there are not many of them, and they are very beautiful!

Morris Jackson
Fanny Bay, B.C.

SIGHT RECORD OF THE LARK SPARROW

On Easter Monday, April 2nd, Mrs. H. M. Russell-Pavier and I went to Island View Beach. After lunch we went along to the Indian Reservation where we saw a small bird which we did not recognize. It was obviously of the sparrow family. We were both able to get a very good look at it as it perched on the top of a fence post, singing the while. When it had flown off, my friend and I each looked in Petersen's "Field Guide" and Hoffman's "Birds of the Pacific States". Independently we both decided that the bird we had seen was a lark sparrow. Its flight, song and markings were most distinctive and could not be mistaken for any other bird.

That night I looked up in Cowan and Munro's book and found no record for the lark sparrow on the Island.

On Tuesday we both went to the Museum to see the specimens and again independently decided that we were correct in our conclusion.

As you will observe we went very thoroughly into the matter and we both feel that without a doubt our find was a lark sparrow.

E. K. Lemon.

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COPY OF BRIEF SENT TO ROYAL COMMISSION

The Honorable Chief Justice, Gordon Sloan
Commissioner
Royal Commission on the B.C. Forest Act
Victoria, B.C.

Sir:

On behalf of the Victoria Natural History Society, we respectfully submit this statement.

The members of our Society are deeply interested in many matters to be considered by the Royal Commission on Forestry and are especially interested in the lands administered by the Parks and Recreational Division of the B.C. Forest Service and the use and conservation of such lands in British Columbia.

The Society wishes to go on record as fully endorsing every statement made in the brief submitted to you by the Vancouver Natural History Society.

Our Society particularly would draw your attention to Section IV on Page 3 of the brief mentioned above regarding Special Habitat Reserves which should be used for biological studies and the preservation of rare species.

We further recommend that if the Department of Indian Affairs at Ottawa ever relinquish any lands now used as Indian Reserves - such as the Chatham Islands - that the Government of British Columbia be urged to take over the said lands for areas of study and recreational parks.

Also that if the Federal Government ever relinquishes its use of Rocky Point the Provincial Government should immediately take it over for ecological studies and the preservation of many species which may become extinct upon Vancouver Island in the not too distant future.

The Society also suggests that a Committee representing the Natural History Societies of British Columbia, the Alpine Society of Canada, the Indian Arts and Welfare Society, the B.C. Historical Society and the local legislature be formed to make recommendations to the Provincial Government regarding the preservation of sites of Historical or Biological interest.

"Chas. W. Lowe"

Signed by.

On behalf of the
Victoria Natural History Society. February 1956

"Jeffree A. Cunningham"

Signed by.

DISTRIBUTION OF MOLLUSCS
Introduced into British Columbia

On March 6th Dr. D. B. Quayle, of the Provincial Shellfish Laboratory, Ladysmith, addressed the Natural History Society on this very interesting subject, and showed an excellent set of slides at the conclusion of his lecture.

Some of these exotic species were introduced accidentally, while in the other cases the transplanting was intentional. Introduced species tend to become highly successful; if they survive the shift, they usually thrive apace, since they have escaped the restraining influence of their natural enemies. But in general, "introductions" are frowned upon by the authorities.

Since 1947 American biologists have been stationed in Japan to check for pests when seed-oysters are being packed for shipment to the U.S.A., and Canadian authorities check closely for such pests at all ports of entry of seed-oysters.

Species that have been introduced here are chiefly of two groups:- (1) bivalves (2) gastropods, the former being useful and the latter mostly harmful.

Mya arenaria, the mud clam, likes the muddy bottom found at the mouths of creeks and rivers. It is found around Victoria and vicinity but is most abundant in Graham Island's Masset Sound (Q.C.I.). Although an excellent food-clam, it is not yet of commercial importance in British Columbia. On both Atlantic Coasts it is known as the soft-shelled clam. Exactly how it arrived here is not fully determined but it is known that it reached the waters of Washington State in 1880, and it is believed that it got to the West Coast with spat of the Eastern oyster some years earlier.

Crassostrea gigas, the Japanese oyster, was introduced here over 40 years ago. Plantations were made in suitable areas along Vancouver Island and now these oysters have spread into other favourable locations in some of which they have multiplied tremendously. Dr. Quayle told of collecting half a ton in half an hour at the north end of Cortes Island, where bands 3' - 10' high occur attached to the rocky shores.

Venerupis semidecussata, the Japanese "littleneck" clam, was an accidental transplant arriving as $\frac{1}{4}$ " creatures attached to Pacific seed-oysters. It first appeared in Vancouver Island waters in 1936, but has now become the dominant "littleneck" in Georgia Strait. It is more elongate than

our native "littleneck" (Protothaca staminea) which, by-the-way, does not seem at all bothered by the competition it meets from its foreign cousin.

On the other side of the picture we have certain introduced enemies of the bivalves. The Japanese oyster-drill (Ocenebra japonica) has now become a serious pest in Puget Sound. It occurs in Vancouver Island waters, too, but as far as have been studied its distribution appears static. One of these "drills" eats approximately three one-inch oysters per month.

Urosalpinx cinereus is a "drill" accidentally introduced with Eastern oysters. It resembles a small dingy-grey Thais or the "dire whelk" (Searlesia dira).

Ilyanassa obsoleta is a small dog-whelk thought to have been introduced in the same way and at the same time as U. cinereus. It lives in slimy mud and is a good scavenger, being especially useful in disposing of dead fish.

"Drills" come rightly by their nickname for they actually do drill holes in the shells of bivalves. Their proboscis is supplied with a groove in which runs a ribbon-like structure bearing chitinous teeth. As the ribbon slides back and forth in its groove it mechanically cuts through the shell. These teeth are in transverse rows, and they are replaced as fast as they wear out.

Various methods have been used to free oyster-beds of "drills", e.g. electrical equipment and also chemicals of various kinds. None of these have proved successful. It now appears that "hand-picking" is the only effective method, success being proportionate to the persistence of the operators.

American authorities have very strict regulations against moving oysters from one locality to another for breeding purposes and it would seem as though similar "drill" laws must soon be adopted in Canada.

M.C.M.

The following letter was sent to the Canadian Wildlife Service at Ottawa in April:-

"The Victoria Natural History Society wish to send the following brief regarding the extension of the open season this year on Brant:

"Whereas Brant are said to pair for life and are already paired when they reach our shores in Spring.

"And Whereas Brant are too confiding and easy a target for sportsmen at that season, especially when decoys are used.

"Therefore the Victoria Natural History Society protest against the extension of the open season on Brant as allowed this season; also against the use of decoys during the spring migration."

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

AUDUBON ACCOUNT - Winter Season 1955 - 1956

REVENUE:

Receipts from
five lectures \$1,254.60

EXPENDITURES:

Hall Rent - - -\$ 250.00
Printing - - -- 42.65
Advertising - - - 76.98
Amusement Tax - - 152.34
Audubon Society - 500.00

1,021.97

Net Profit 232.63

\$1,254.60

\$1,254.60

Net Profit divided as follows:

To Audubon Society - - - - - \$116.31
To Victoria Natural History Society 116.32
\$232.63

Audited and found correct: (signed) Edwin W. Adshead
" J. H. Whitehouse.

"Gladys E. Soulsby" - Treasurer.

MEETING OF NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETIES

On Saturday April 14th several members of the Vancouver Natural History Society arrived at Victoria and were taken for a tour of our countryside, afterwards meeting at the Provincial Museum. The next day more of the Vancouver members came in by plane at 8:15 a.m. where they were met by our members. They then held a field day together, covering the Sidney district, Shoal Harbour, the Airport and Patricia Bay. Fifty-three people were present at this joint meeting, and, during the day, 67 species of birds were noted in the area, including the European skylark and a pair of horned larks. Heading the Vancouver Society were Mr. Allen R. Wootton, President, Mrs. Stewart Bradley, Secretary, and Mr. William Hughes, who directs many of their field meetings. A most successful and pleasant day was spent, many thanks being due to Miss Enid Lemon, Mrs. H.W.S. Soulsby, Mr. J.O. Clay, and other members of our Society, who provided refreshments and transportation.

Initial steps were taken at this meeting for the formation of a B. C. Federation of Naturalists to fight for the conservation of natural resources, as naturalists and all public minded citizens feel there is a definite need for such a federation to protect wildlife and the alienation of park areas by provincial and civic governments.

The Vancouver Natural History Society are holding their Annual Camp - July the 7th to the 14th - on the southern end of Vancouver Island, the site of which has yet to be determined.

The above Society would welcome any members of our Society who would like to join them.

Phone Miss E. K. Lemon at 3.2496 (evenings) for particulars.

THE FOLLOWING LETTER WAS SENT TO THE —
HON. ROBERT BONNER, ATTORNEY-GENERAL
 by the Society in April: -

The Victoria Natural History Society wish to bring to the notice of your department that a great deal of ignorant and shortsighted killing of birds of prey has become a very widespread custom.

Ecologists across the continent are becoming increasingly aware of the upsetting of nature's balance when eagles, hawks, owls and vultures are wantonly destroyed. The feathered predator is one of the vital cogs in the complicated mechanism of nature.

In Canada, the Provinces of Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Alberta - especially our neighbouring Province of Alberta - are leading in the protection of these predators. In Alberta the two major farm organizations, the Federation of Agriculture, and the Farmers' Union, are two of the most emphatic defenders of the birds of prey.

The Victoria Natural History Society would urge that your department have the eagles, hawks, owls and vultures protected by law at all seasons; that legislation be passed such as can give farmers and breeders of livestock exemption where damage is being done to their livestock.

THE USES OF BOTANY

There should be no monotony
 In studying your botany;
 It helps to train and spur the brain-
 Unless you haven't got any.

It teaches you - does botany -
 To know the plants and spotany,
 And learn just why they live and die,
 In case you plant, or potany.

You learn from reading botany
 Of woolly plants and cottony
 That grow on earth, and what they're worth,
 And why some spots have notany.

Your time, if you'll allotany,
 Will teach you how and whatany
 Old plant or tree can do or be,
 And that's the use of botany.

Anon.

MAY BIRDS

Most of our migrants arrive in May, and to assist those who are interested in the coming of the birds from the south, the following dates of arrivals have been taken from last year's records:

May 1st	Barn swallows
	Rough-wing swallows
3rd	Yellow warblers
8th	Myrtle warblers
	Black-capped warblers
	Western sandpipers
11th	Western tanagers
	Goldfinches
12th	Tolmie warblers
13th	Pectoral sandpipers
17th	Black-headed grosbeaks
19th	Ruddy turnstones
22nd	Olive-sided flycatchers
	Vaux swifts
	House wrens
	Russet-backed thrushes
23rd	Lincoln sparrows
24th	Purple martins
31st	Cliff swallows

A HERRING RUN IN SAANICH INLET

About the middle of March an immense school of spawning herring centered in the waters of Saanich Inlet near Towner Park. This attracted a large variety of sea birds in considerable numbers. At one time we estimated there were not less than five thousand birds, including about fifteen hundred brant, two thousand gulls and hundreds of surf and white-winged scoters, scaup, old squaw, western and red necked grebe, mergansers and cormorant. These, in turn, brought on to the scene while we were present, four immature bald eagles, one adult bald eagle and one golden eagle. Many of these birds were still there on April 15th and were seen by the members of the Vancouver Natural History Society.

A. R. D.

JUNIOR NATURAL HISTORY PAGE

Gerry Skinner --- Editor

STANLEY PARK ZOO, by Joyce Chope, Secretary J.N.H.S.

As you enter the zoo you come upon bear cages. There are grizzly and Siberian bears. The grizzly, or for that matter, any bear, will not attack you unless you disturb it. The bear is a peace-loving animal and loves honey.

Moving on, we come to the penguins. In most books they are just black and white; very uncolourful! But the King Penguin is very colourful, having golden on its neck. There is also such a bird, so I have heard, that is called Emperor Penguin. Moving on again, we come to the seals. Instead of ears, they have holes just above their eyes. It is very true about the expression, "A seal's bark", for their voice is just like a dog barking that has a cold.

I had never heard of them but I saw several white peacocks walking around. At the zoo there are geese and peacocks walking around loose and quite tame. They also had an emu. It was the height of an average man, and it certainly could kick very high.

THE VALENTINE EGG (continued)

Well, our birds have hatched and well on their way to maturity. When first hatched they were little pink blobs with string-like necks and the whole body is covered with fluff. They huddle together for warmth with the mother sitting on top. Since then they have grown up and have pale yellow feathers. The tables have turned somewhat - the small birds are now sitting on the mother while the father bird does all the feeding. When feeding time comes around a burst of pink mouths is ready to greet the food. Unfortunately one died when small. The birds now stand on the edge of the nest and flap their wings trying to fly.

Thanks to Joyce Chope for the interesting story of the Stanley Park visit and to Diane Martin whose story will be in the September number.

Gerry Skinner.
Editor.

Junior Natural History Meetings will end May 15th, starting again in the fall, September 11th.

NOTICES OF MEETINGS1956

Saturday BIRD GROUP: Field trip to Metchosin.
 May 5th: Meet at Monterey Cafe at 9:45, or
 St. Mary's Church, Metchosin at 10:30.
 Bring lunch. Leader: Mr. J.O. Clay.

Tuesday SOCIAL EVENING:
 May 8th: Provincial Museum - 8:00 p.m.
 Coffee and refreshments - 25¢

Saturday GEOLOGY TRIP: Towner Bay.
 May 12th: Meet at Monterey Cafe at 1:30 p.m. or
 meet at Towner Bay (turn left from bottom of
 Downey Road)
 Leader: Mr. A. H. Marrion.

Note: June trip to be announced at this meeting.

Saturday BOTANY GROUP: Thetis Lake.
 May 26th: Meet at Monterey Cafe at 1:30 p.m.
 Leader: Miss M. C. Melburn.

Saturday BOTANY GROUP: Saanichton Spit.
 June 23rd: Meet at Monterey Cafe at 1:30 p.m.
 Leader: Miss M. C. Melburn.

Note - Botany trip for July will be announced at
 this meeting.

Saturday BIRD GROUP: Seven-hour boat trip in the Gulf.
 July 7th: Preference to active members not included in
 1954.

Phone Mr. Clay - 3.3101 or Mrs. Parris - 3.0572

Leader: Mr. J. O. Clay.

Victoria Natural History Society

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