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Gorse.

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OUR COVER

George A. Hardy

Gorse (Ulex europaeus L.)

From a distance gorse and broom look much alike; both grow on open uncultivated land, both have green foliage and bright yellow flowers; but a near approach soon shows that gorse is a mass of prickles, as compared with the smooth stem and foliage of broom. An even closer examination of the flowers will reveal that the two-lipped calyx of gorse is coloured and nearly as long as the sepals whereas in broom the calyx is very small and reaches only a short way up the tube of the corolla.

Gorse, furze or whin to give its various names, is a native of Europe as its specific name denotes, and is to be found abundantly on commons, waste and uncultivated land. Etymologically the word gorse has no definite meaning, beyond referring to the underbrush of waste land, which grows without man's attention, a meaning eminently suitable to this plant.

In some parts of Britain it is spoken of as gorse, in others it is called furze, while whin is almost as well known everywhere. The whinchat, a fine little songster that haunts the whin thickets derives its popular name from this habitat; a bird beloved of all old country naturalists.

The sharp spines with which gorse is so well provided are modified leaves and branches; in the seedling stage the leaves are soft and rounded, without any indication of the later habit.

At one time gorse was planted as a useful binder of loose sandy soils, while the young plants were used as cattle fodder, a special implement, the whin-breaker was employed to crush any hard parts.

Gorse is not as abundant in the Victoria district as broom, but where it does occur it usually occupies extensive tracts. Being a legume, gorse is a provider of nitrogen to the soil by means of the small nodules on the roots, in which the nitrogen bacteria make this valuable element available not only to the gorse itself, but to other nitrogen-loving plants that may grow after the gorse has been removed, provided the rootlets are left in the soil.

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - VICTORIA, B.C., DECEMBER 29, 1956

8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Temperature 40 degrees. Cloudy,  
mild and very little wind.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	TOTAL
LOON, Common	1	4	3	10	17	6			41
" Pacific					1				1
GREBE, Holboell		1	4		1	4			10
" Horned	25	27	12	44	27	27			162
" Eared	15	4	11	8	8	11			57
" Western	22	54	9		1	26			112
CORMORANT, Doub.Cr.	1					5			6
" Baird	29	38	36	50	43	25			221
HERON, N.W.Coast			1		1	2			4
SWAN, Mute (Int.)	3								3
GOOSE, Gr.							24		24
BRANT					4				4
MALLARD	375	26	50	10	500		390	200	1551
WIDGEON, Eur.			2						2
BALDPATE	521	303	320	25	350	32	350	795	2696
PINTAIL	1		1		67	37	100	184	390
TEAL, Green W.				45	125			53	223
SHOVELLER	1	22		10	14		30	120	197
MANDARIN (Intro)	2								2
WOOD DUCK	2								2
RING-NECKED Duck							6		6
CANVASBACK	9				10	7			26
SCAUP, Greater	285	467	47	18	103	27			947
" Lesser	6								6
GOLDENEYE, Am.	26	15	5	2	30	20	2		100
BUFFLEHEAD	69	52	28	4	65	67	31	2	318
OLD SQUAW	7	13	4	1	23	2			50
HARLEQUIN	5	14	18	19	5	2			63
SCOTER Wh.-wing	4	14	37	10	33	109			207
" Surf	66	17	11	8	30	7			139
RUDDY DUCK					77				77
MERGANSEr, hooded	15		7		10	3	1		36
" American			2				76		78
" red-br.		4	2		19	12			37
GOSHAWK, western					2		1		3
HAWK, sharp-shinned	1	1				1			3
" Cooper				2		1			3
EAGLE, bald								1	1
FALCON, Peregrine			1	1					2
HAWK, Pigeon								1	1
QUAIL, Calif.	12	1			2				15

(Cont'd page 91)

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - Continued - -

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	TOTAL
PHEASANT, r.-neck	1				2		1	9	13
COOT	1	2	32		40	9	110	124	318
OYSTER CATCHER, black		4							4
PLOVER, Killdeer				20	2	1	2		25
TURNSTONE, Ruddy		1							1
" Black	26	40	20						86
SNIPE, Wilson				35					35
CURLEW, Hudsonian		2							2
YELLOWLEGS, Greater					3				3
SANDPIPER, Aleutian	9	11							20
" Red-back		2							2
GULL, Gl. W.	14	16	70	100	332	47	50	120	749
" Herring			5	1	13		4		23
" Sh.billed	205	30	30	20		1		172	458
GUILLEMOT, Pigeon	2	1	4		5				12
ROCK DOVE					6				6
KINGFISHER					3	2	1		6
FLICKER, North-W.	12	2	2	12	15	2	26	13	84
WOODPECKER, Hairy				1		1			2
" Downy	1			3	1				5
SKYLARK				30			2	6	38
LARK, horned								7	7
RAVEN					1		2		3
CROW, North-west	16	3	25	6	63	200	3	3	319
CHICKADEE, Ches.-b.	5		4	40	14	36	6	2	107
BUSHTIT				25		2		1	28
NUTHATCH, red-br.				2		5			7
CREEPER, brown	3			5	3	1			12
WREN, winter	5			4	1	2			12
" Bewick	4	1	3	5	3	1		5	22
ROBIN, North-west	46	1		3	55	51	32	8	196
THRUSH, Varied	6			15	1	1			23
" Hermit				2					2
KINGLET, Golden-Cr.	10		38	5	29	4			86
" Ruby-cr.					2	3		1	6
PIPIT, Am.				40					40
WAXWING, Cedar				24					24
SHRIKE, N.-west		1							1
STARLING, Eur.						5			5
WARBLER, Audubon			1						1
SPARROW, House	50	50	30	50			6	44	230
MEADOWLARK, West.		2		30	12				44
BLACKBIRD, Brewer					23		12	175	210
FINCH, purple			2	8	2	9		37	58
" house	8	117		1					126

(Cont'd page 92)

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - Continued - -

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	TOTAL
TOWHEE, Oregon	5		1	7	3	5	1	4	26
JUNCO, Oregon	13	7	7	2	92	56	20	18	215
SPARROW, wh.-crowned		3							3
" golden-crowned	7			20	2	3			32
" fox	6	1		5				9	21
" song	12	2	7	14	14	5		6	60
MURRELET.marbled	1								1
	<u>1971</u>	<u>1376</u>	<u>892</u>	<u>802</u>	<u>2308</u>	<u>887</u>	<u>1289</u>	<u>2120</u>	<u>11645</u>

- A. Mrs. H.W.S.Soulsby, Mrs. H.M.S.Bell, Mr. R.Beckett -  
DALLAS ROAD TO CLOVER POINT.
- B. Mr. J.O.Clay, Mr. P.Symons, - CLOVER POINT TO HUMBER ROAD.
- C. Mrs. G.J.Jackson, Miss E.K.Lemon, Mr. Alan Poynter, -  
HUMBER ROAD TO 10 MILE PT.
- D. Mr. & Mrs. P.M.Monckton, Mrs. E.McGavin, A.R.Davidson, -  
QUEENSWOOD, 10 MILE POINT,  
CEDAR HILL X RD., FINNERTY  
ROAD
- E. Miss L.Roberts, Miss M.C.Melburn, -  
EAST SAANICH.
- F. Mrs. W.L.Taylor, Mrs. Sherman, -  
WEST SAANICH.
- G. Mr. J.O.Clay, Mr. P.Symons, -  
ELK LAKE
- H. Mr. W.Adams, -  
PANAMA FLATS; SWAN LAKE.

The day selected for the annual bird census was mild, with very little wind, enabling the observers to make a good count. Missing from the list, although seen in the same week, were goldfinch, surf birds, black-bellied plover, red-winged black-birds, pied-billed grebe and Brandt's cormorant. Last year's count was 84 varieties and 11465 individuals.

J. O. Clay.

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Mr. & Mrs. J.H. Whitehouse	1627 Hollywood Crescent,	"

H. D. R. STEWART

A Tribute by J.H. Whitehouse

In the passing of this fine old gentleman the Society has lost a very faithful and valuable member. He was always willing to give of his best, especially so in the case of the Audubon Lectures. Many of us will remember his strenuous efforts at the old Prince Robert House. Some of us too, have cause to remember his keen participation in the annual 'Bird Counts'.

Before his retirement, Mr. Stewart or 'Herb' as he was affectionately known, had had a long and interesting career with the Post Office Department. He was one of the very early mail clerks on the E. and N. Railway; transferred later to the mainland, he spent a long time on the Big Crow run, between Medicine Hat and Kootenay Landing. It was while on this run he had the unique experience of being on the first train to make connections after the disastrous Frank Slide in Alberta. Subsequently, he was promoted to Post Office Inspector covering all southern Alberta and part of British Columbia with headquarters in Calgary. Mrs. Stewart sometimes accompanied him on his tours of inspection and it would be hard to find even a small village in southern Alberta where they were not known and respected.

He was very interested in the American Civil War and quite prepared to argue on either side of the question with anybody. I think one of the highlights of his life was when he visited his son in Washington, D.C. a year or so ago. On this trip he was able to see some of the actual battlefields of which he had read so much. He told the writer how he had been to Harpers Ferry and Antietam and had worked out Jackson's campaign among other things.

Mr. Stewart was a prominent member of the Masonic Order and also held high office in the Native Sons. When in Calgary he attended St. Stephens Church from whence the last rites were held. The President, in sending a wreath and a special message of sympathy to the family conveyed the feeling of all the members of the Society at the passing of one more of Western Canada's pioneers.

PERSISTENT DETERMINATION

by - W. Mackay Draycot

He was a longhorn beetle. In the course of his wanderings along the base of a steep-angled embankment, six feet high, he paused, then began an ascent. The embankment was composed of hard glacial silt, sand and clay. Some gravel and nodules of loose hard clay protruded from the face of

the matrix. In his first attempt he scaled up to two feet but insecure footing on loose clay pellets caused him to roll down with the avalanche. Quickly he regained composure and resumed the climb.

These attempts he repeated seven times, having attained an elevation of four feet and each time tumbling over and over in the avalanche of gravel, sand and clay nodules. On his eighth attempt I thought he would succeed in gaining the summit but at the five feet contour line he dislodged a "boulder" of hard clay and another tumble resulted which was the weightiest of preceding avalanches under which he became buried. One would have thought that, by now, he had learned his lesson. No. He quickly emerged from the pile of scree to begin his ninth, and final attempt. The same route was taken and despite minor slipping he gained the grassy summit.

Throughout his eight failures he appeared not to display any evidence of injury, retaining the same vitality as on his first attempt. But why was he so persistent? Furthermore he did not stop to take a "second breath!" as we humans would have to. Stranger still, he had passed by an easier slope only three feet away! Apparently their vision is extremely short, but their vitality, astonishing.

A HOMING SHRIKE

This is the sequel to the episode of the shrike, related by Mrs. Grace Bell in last month's 'Naturalist', wherein she told of its having been banded and released.

This shrike stayed around Oak Bay, mainly near Mrs. Bell's garden, for about three weeks, when it again went into the trap and was caught. This time the bird was put in Mrs. Bell's car, still in the trap, which was completely covered, and taken to Brookleigh Road, which borders the north side of Elk Lake, and is approximately nine miles in a straight line from Oak Bay, and released there.

By next morning however it was back at its old haunt, still very much interested in all the bird life which is constant in this garden, and is there at this writing - (January 19th), quite undaunted by its experiences.

A. R. D.

THE NORTH AMERICAN BIRD CENSUS

1955-1956

From December 24th to January 2nd well over 6500 bird watchers combed woods and plains, marshes and mountains, beaches and oceans to list birds for the 56th Christmas Bird Count. Their determination is exemplified by the fact that they travelled by foot, snowshoe, ski, sleigh, car, jeep, horse, bicycle, canoe, buggy, airplane, helicopter, commercial fishing boat, motor boat, air boat, and even an electric car designed to carry golfers around the course.

There were 498 counts reported to the National Audubon Society with a score of 485 species. The total number of birds is not given in the Audubon Field Notes for April 1956, from which this account is taken, but one group in Tennessee reported 4,530,426 individuals, which included 4,000,000 red-winged blackbirds, 400,000 purple grackles, 20,000 starlings and 5,000 cowbirds. Another, also in Tennessee, had 200,000 starlings, 100,000 red-winged blackbirds, 800,000 purple grackles and 100,000 cowbirds. While one party from Norfolk Country, Virginia, saw 4,000,000 red-winged blackbirds, 4,000,000 purple grackles, and 100,000 cowbirds, and turned in a total of 8,115,766 birds. (It is understood, of course, that these large figures are estimates made by experienced people). As a contrast to this, in Grand Forks, South Dakota, two observers, working energetically all day, located seven species.

In addition to the above, there are many counts taken in Canada which are not reported to the Audubon Society.

Birds are important to people, and all this information on bird populations, gathered by these enthusiastic amateur bird students, is valuable now, and will be increasingly so in the years to come.

A.R.D.

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The following radio programmes should be of interest to many of our members:-

"Out-doors with the Experts":-

Dr. Clifford Carl and Inspector George Stevenson with Red McMillan - CJVI each Thursday at 6:15 p.m.

"Sport Outdoors":-

Charles J. Guiguet - CKDA Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 8:10 p.m.

JUNIOR NATURAL HISTORY PAGE

Bruce Crawford - - - Editor

SNAKES AS PETS by Waldon Davis -(Cont'd from last month)

I will describe one of the King Snakes,- the Scarlet King Snake: These snakes have a striking resemblance to the coral snake and are often mistaken as such. The most reliable and easy way to tell them apart is that the coral snake's nose is always black whereas the Scarlet King Snake's nose is red. The coloring of these snakes from the head back is a thin yellow band followed by a wider black band, and again followed by a red band again followed by a yellow band, etc. Indigos, on the other hand, are midnight blue shiny-scaled constrictors with a reddish throat. These snakes have almost attained a length of eight feet. It is a harmless snake and tames easily in captivity. It makes an excellent pet if it can be made to eat, and eats the same as the King Snake.

GARTER SNAKES:

Garter Snakes, which are found almost everywhere on Vancouver Island, will, as you know, emit a foul odor from glands at the base of the tail. This is done so that an enemy, about to eat them or to handle them will think them too offensive to bother them. When a garter snake is caught he will perform this act but once you have tamed him he will cast aside this habit. These snakes will eat worms and frogs, and some species, which live near water and are often incorrectly called Water Snakes, will take tadpoles.

If you are worried about how big your cage should be, a simple rule to follow for all snakes is: For every foot of snake give 1½ or 2 square feet of cage floor space.

---

Someone cast some bread upon the waters yesterday in the Museum. They put a loaf of bread down one of the toilets. (News item by Mr. Maxwell)

P.S. "If I catch the person it will be just too bad" ! ! ! !

NOTICES OF MEETINGS

1957

Saturday  
Feb. 9th: BIRD GROUP: Meet at Clover Point at 10 a.m.,  
bring sandwiches. Leader: Mr. J. O. Clay.

Tuesday  
Feb. 12th: GENERAL MEETING:  
Provincial Museum at 8 p.m.,  
Film - "Arctic Wildlife"  
Speaker: Mr. R. H. Mackay,  
Dominion Wildlife Biologist,  
Vancouver.

Saturday  
Feb. 16th: AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR:  
"Animals at Night in Colour"  
Speaker: Mr. Howard Cleaves.  
Oak Bay Junior High School at 8 p.m.

Tuesday  
Feb. 26th: GEOLOGY GROUP:  
Provincial Museum at 8 p.m.  
Speaker: Mr. H. W. Naysmith of the  
Department of Mines.  
The subject to be announced.

-----  
H. D. R. Stewart  
(An appreciation)

Goodbye old timer! We have seen  
The last smile on your friendly face  
In this - or any earthly place -  
Since Death contrived to intervene.

Your intimates will not forget  
Your quiet, unassuming zeal  
To find what Nature might reveal  
To keep us deeply in her debt.

Goodbye old timer! We will trust  
To meet and greet you once again  
In some beloved Elysian glen  
Long favored by the kind and just.

Pisces.



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