

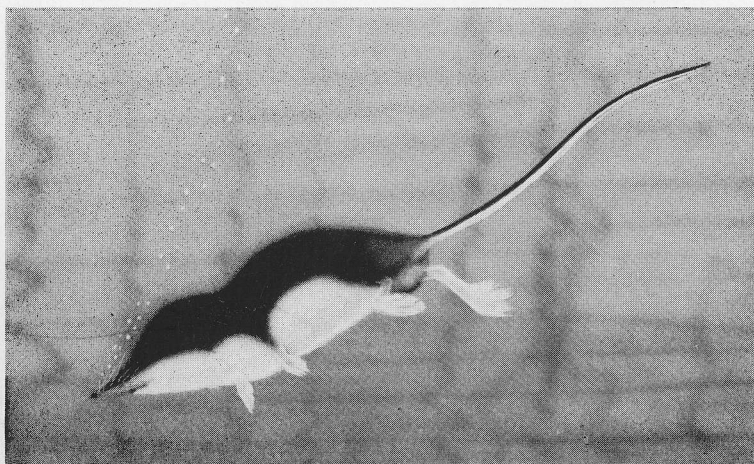
*The*  
**VICTORIA**  
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(F. L. Beebe.)

Navigator shrew.

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THE NAVIGATOR SHREW

Our cover picture shows a species of shrew which occurs only on Vancouver Island. Only three specimens are known to science. They were taken on the Millstream, near Victoria, at Comox and at Quatsino. It is one of the largest of its kind, and frequents small streams and lake margins, particularly where streams leave or enter. It feeds very actively under water upon insects, invertebrates and small fish. Nothing is known of its reproductive biology or life history.

(Taken from "The Mammals of B. C.", by I. McTaggart Cowan and Charles J. Guignet).

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AN UNUSUAL FUNGI

One day last April three ladies; Miss M. C. Melburn, Miss Leila Roberts and Miss J. Brenton, members of the Society, were walking through the woods at Ten Mile Point, Victoria, keeping a lookout for unusual fungi, plants and birds.

They had the good fortune to find a rare species of fungi resembling the 'Crown Fungus' *Sacrospheera Coronaria* (Jacq. Serrot) but without the stem. This particular fungi is purple in colour, is shaped like a many pointed star and is about three inches across.

Miss Roberts, who found it, recognized it was something she had never seen before, and called Miss Melburn, who is a trained botanist, to the scene, but it was a species unknown to her also.

It was therefore taken to the Museum, where Dr. Adam Szczawinski, the Provincial Botanist, realized at once that it was a rare and interesting fungus, and had samples taken to the University of B. C. for study and identification.

A.R.D.

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### A MASSIVE DANDELION

Forty-six years ago the writer requested permission to enter a paddock to pick dandelion heads for wine-making. It was the only patch of land where dandelions grew? Today this ubiquitous plant with its golden blooms has become a pest. The invader had its commencement from the seeds contained in bales of hay shipped from abroad and unloaded on the shores of Burrard Inlet. After the trees were felled and stumps removed the arable patches of pioneer settlers became nurseries for the growth of the dandelion. Its multifarious seeds vied with the well-known fireweed as they cavorted, air-borne, on the varying winds to seek new territory. The fireweed, once exceedingly prolific, favouring burned-off lands, has been greatly reduced in numbers. Gone are the days when we experienced its snowfall of flying seeds; its place is now taken by the dandelion which, in its millions, is now a permanent resident on the Coast, defying man's strenuous attempts to extirpate it.

While in the act of reducing their number in my garden recently the hoe cut through a magnificent specimen. At first sight it resembled a cluster of plants; not so, for the root crown had a diameter of three inches. A special feature of this monster was a very unusual single stalk bearing 17 heads. This stalk, ten inches tall, flat shaped, lightly ribbed without slits, hollow after the type of single-headed ones, measured two and a half inches in width by half an inch thick. All the heads were bursting into bloom and arranged mostly in pairs to simulate the shape of a cockscomb. The other buds and blooms on the plant were then counted and resulted in the surprising figure of 66. By adding the number on the freak stalk the total of buds and blooms borne by this monstrous plant was 83. The longest leaf measured 21 inches. Grown in sandy-loam soil the thick tap root extended to eighteen inches, having several rootlets. Abnormal growth was not due to any special fertilizer but it is recalled that a heap of uprooted dandelions and grass sods were buried the previous year at the spot where this giant grew. The freak stalk has been photographed for purpose of record.

W. Mackay Draycot.

### SPRING BIRDING IN THE INTERIOR

by Gladys Soulsby

On May 16th four members of the Victoria Natural History Society left by car for a birding expedition into the interior of B. C.

From Vancouver to Hope we found the same species which we have locally, but as we got further on the Hope-Princeton Highway, changes became apparent. The white-crowned sparrow's song left us at Hope. At Princeton, Lewis woodpeckers were first to be seen - it was a first for me. A mountain bluebird was seen sitting on a house top there too, just like we see a house sparrow. (But no, not so many as that!).

Between Princeton and Okanagan Falls we saw our first western kingbird, and there were always chipping sparrows wherever we went; height of mountain pass, deserted range land, slough or cultivated field. Black-capped chickadees and magpies we saw first around Vaseaux Lake, which is a sanctuary for birds and game. We had the book 'A Nature-lover in B.C.' by Parham, so were interested to follow where the author had lived near Vaseaux Lake and see the places he had mentioned. The scenery is very beautiful and a different kind of country around Penticton and down the Okanagan valley. McIntyre's Bluff at the southern end of Vaseaux Lake must be a very much painted bit of scenery with its sheer drop from a height of at least 800 feet to the lake.

The rolling open range land with its magnificent ponderosa pines and benches covered with sage and antelope brush are lovely to see and give themselves much more easily to walking than trying to get through our dense coast forests.

We had some rain, but most of it at night. We felt it kept down the heat, so were glad of it. We were disappointed that not one yellow-headed blackbird was seen, but on the low lands there were always red-winged and Brewer's blackbirds. Western kingbirds and meadowlarks were seen in abundance, even at considerable elevation, while mourning doves were along the road sides and among the orchards from Oliver to Osoyoos. There were all our native swallows, tree, cliff, violet-green, barn and roughwing. We saw spotted sandpipers on the Okanagan river where it leaves Vaseaux Lake and, of course, Canada geese. Of these we saw two families comprising four adults and twenty-five goslings. We found one Eastern kingbird there too, and our first lazuli bunting. What a thrill!

We stayed four days at Inkaneep Lodge on the shore of



Osoyoos Lake; such a nice place, and on the evening we arrived we saw western tanager, Bullock's oriole, western grebe and one Hoelbell's grebe, also one only canvasback duck and a coot. We found out here that the Audubon warbler sings a somewhat different song to the one he sings here.

One day we made a trip five miles up the Richter Pass road. It was very steep and rough, so we stopped and walked through the sage brush to Spotted Lake. There we saw a couple of mallards, some scaup, Barrow's goldeneye and two widgeon, but did not come across any nesting waterfowl save a pair of Barrow's goldeneye and a pair of Blue-winged teal in sloughs alongside the road. Here too we saw a pair of red-naped sapsuckers and our only pair of towhees. Among the sage brush we found a little non-descript sparrow with a beautiful song which has not been positively identified yet, but hold the opinion that these were Brewer's sparrow.

Another day's trip to Anarchist Mountain netted some Firsts: Pygmy and white-throated nuthatches, calliope and black-chinned hummingbirds, catbirds, Say's phoebe and white-throated swifts. The last mentioned we consider ourselves lucky to have seen. We happened to get out of the car at just the right, maybe the only, place at which we could have seen them.

On the way back we went ten miles on the road to Merritt out of Princeton and saw our first and only long-tailed chat, and more lazuli bunting. Of course, we saw and heard a great many of the ones we have here on the Island, altogether, in fact, 115 species, of which 87 were seen beyond Hope. So, we all voted it a very, very memorable and happy trip, and one which we agree we will want to do again next year.

But I must not forget the flowers. Much of the rolling, rounded hills are covered with gorgeous yellow sunflowers (balsamroot) in spring. Toward the end of May, when we were there, their glory was diminishing, but the pink and white phlox was at its height, and the lilac coloured penstemon was in full bloom. One patch we noticed on the Merritt Road at the edge of a slough was a mass of flowers, covering thirty square feet. The brilliant scarlet gilia too was a flower we had never seen before, while the sweet bloom of the bitter-root (what a name!) so close to the ground would enhance any rock garden, if it could be transplanted. We were delighted too with the native gaillardia, which bloomed freely among the cactus

and sage brush at the roadsides. The Antelope Bush (Greasewood) was a surprise to us. We had not expected to find it so far north. The masses of Sumac growing over the hills must make Osoyoos and district a riot of colour in the fall months.

#### VANCOUVER SOCIETY VISITS SAANICH

The Vancouver Natural History Society were represented by twenty-three members visiting Sidney on the warmest and most brilliant 28th of April since 1931. Eighteen arrived by plane in the early morning and were met by fifteen members of our society. A visit was first made to the little park at the Dominion Experimental Station at Saanichton. The balance of the morning was spent in making a circuit by car of Mount Newton and by the Patricia Bay waterfront and Mills Road to the residence of Mr. & Mrs. Clark and family at Shoal Harbour. Lunch was enjoyed sitting around the south-west promontory of that lovely estate. After this an interesting time was spent in watching a pair of osprey which had recently arrived from the south. Already they were adding to the mass of sticks accumulated over several years atop a giant fir snag. Resplendent in their black and white plumage, they arrived from a distant tree and wheeled around their nest intent upon watching our party. Among the birds this was perhaps the highlight of the sunny day.

One of the Vancouver party, a lady from California, had wished to see the chestnut-backed chickadee. Before we left this want was supplied by one of the children of the house bringing a specimen just then caught. After visiting the waterfront west and south of Sidney, the party circled the airport by car, getting good views of singing skylarks. During the day forty-six varieties of birds were seen.

In the evening several Victoria members joined the Vancouver visitors at supper, bringing the day to a successful conclusion.

J. O. Clay.

#### WILD LIFE COUNT - DECEMBER 1956

Some of our members participated in the Canadian Waterfowl Inventory last Christmas.

The completed returns for Canada (excluding the prairie provinces) show a total of 192,212 birds seen on the

survey, British Columbia contributing 49,748 to this figure. The most numerous were baldpate 5814, mallard 5732, and coot 4324. The least being woodduck of which species only two were seen. These figures are a little higher than those of the preceding year.

#### COMEDY AND TRAGEDY IN THE BIRD WORLD

by M.C.M. and J.B.

The Motor Princess was just pulling away from Fulford Harbour dock at 3 p.m. on July 15th when we saw a barn swallow fly up to a nest, built on a broad water-pipe over the car-deck, and skilfully deliver a feeding. Within five minutes she had brought four more feedings to the eager nestlings; the sixth meal was delivered at the ten minute mark and the seventh after three more minutes. By this time the Ferry was almost half way over to Swartz Bay and the busy mother made no more trips.

Since then I have heard from Mr. and Mrs. Mollet (the Purser and his wife) that the young birds were safely reared and that they left the nest July 24th. However, the entire family meets the Motor Princess each evening after the last trip and they all roost together beside the old nest.

Mrs. Mollet relates, also, that some years ago a family of birds was so reared on the Cy. Peck which at that time made a regular Wednesday excursion trip around the Gulf Islands. In this instance the parent birds took in the entire excursion, too, industriously feeding the young at each stop-over.

Between 7:00 and 8:00 p.m. on June 18th we stood on the shore at Bowser and watched a bald eagle soar over the water above two gulls peacefully riding the tide. Suddenly the eagle swooped, missed, and then swooped twice more. One gull escaped but the other was caught and dragged along in the water for some eight or ten feet. Apparently the gull's wide-spread wings acted as a brake and the eagle, failing to lift his prey clear, let go and flew off to a distant perch.

The gull's wings remained outspread but he was powerless to use them. Wind and wave finally brought the crippled victim to shore where, after many pathetic attempts, he managed to crawl up on a stone. There he stood, his head drooping and his wings hanging useless. Examination revealed fatally deep back wounds and other serious in-

juries, so he was mercifully put to sleep and buried in the sand.

#### MEMORANDUM FOR MEMBERS

Will any members who have collected anything of interest during the summer months, please bring same to the General Meeting on September 5th.

Also, it would be appreciated by the editors if members sent in articles for the magazine on something they had seen in the natural history world, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank those members whose notes appear in this issue.

#### THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN JUNIPER (*Juniperus Sceptulorum*)

by Freeman King

At Towner Bay, Deep Cove, near Sidney, on the edge of the sea where the roots are washed by the salt water, grows a Rocky Mountain Juniper which is unique as it has grown to a height of 78 feet and is three feet six inches through at a height of six feet from the ground. It has been badly burned at the base, and is partly hollow through the ravages of the fire and erosion by the sea washing against it at high tides.

At one time there were three of these trees growing there, but two of them have fallen down. Normally this tree grows to a height of about fifteen feet. The species is sparsely scattered in the Gulf Island area, and is abundant in the dry interior of the province.

It is estimated that this particular tree is over 150 years old. The wood is almost a bright red in color and the wide ring of white sap wood makes it much sought after by collectors for carving fancy wooden articles. The limbs and roots are of a twisted nature and are looked for by those who make unique and fancy table pieces and lamp stands.

It is rather strange that this tree is growing at such a low altitude, as the species like a well drained soil. Perhaps it is because this particular tree is growing out of an ancient Indian kitchen midden, and the large amount of clam shells give it the drainage and soil that has caused the tree to flourish and reach such an old age.

#### A VISIT TO HAWAII

On Tuesday, April 30, Dr. T.M.C. Taylor, head of the Department of Botany and Biology at the University of B. C.,



gave an account of his recent tour of the Pacific entitled 'A Botanist looks at the Hawaiian Islands'.

His trip covered all the larger islands of the group, Hawaii, Mani, Molokai, Oahu and Kauai. He stated that the temperature of the islands at or near sea level ranges from a low of 60 to a high of 90 degrees. The prevailing winds are from east to west, which makes the rainfall vary from five inches a year at one very dry area to a maximum of around six hundred inches a year on the island Kauai. In general the climate is favorable to the growth of most tropical and semi-tropical plants, including pineapples, sugar cane, orchids, bananas, coconuts and coffee. Many of the plants and flowers seen on the islands have been introduced, and, as the last Audubon lecturer advised us, so have the birds.

The color slides used by Dr. Taylor to illustrate his talk, mostly taken by himself, supplemented his most interesting address, and gave the audience a vivid picture of the islands, its flora and scenery.

A.R.D.

#### UNUSUAL VISITORS

An albatross was picked up injured in Surrey, near Vancouver, on February 25th. Rarely indeed are these birds seen so close to the mainland.

One of these birds was also seen last month near Mill Bay on Saanich Inlet. We went out to see Harry Gilbert who runs a boat and marine service at Brentwood to find out if it was still in the area, as he and his son act as fishing guides, but were advised that it had not been seen again. These men, who spend much of their time on these waters, are quite knowledgeable on the natural history of the district, and we can accept their identification of this bird as correct.

Out of curiosity, we asked Mr. Gilbert if he had ever seen our local sea-serpent 'Cadborosaurus'. He told us that one day, from his boat-house he had seen a strange sea animal which answered the description generally given. It had a long neck and large head and the coils of a large body. He sketched what he had seen and rushed across to a neighbouring boatman whose wharf was nearer the animal and who had also seen it. This man also made a sketch, and the pictures were identical. He squashed our excitement however by stating that occasionally a school of sea lions will go through the water with only the foremost showing its head and neck and the following ones showing their bodies only, and that undoubtedly this was what they had seen.

A.R.D.

#### BIRDS OF THE CHAIN ISLANDS

At the conclusion of a long executive meeting of the Society on July 31st at the home of Mr. Clay, Dr. Carl asked the members if they would like a trip on his houseboat to the Chain Islands, off Oak Bay. Naturally they would, and did, as at nine o'clock the following morning they boarded this well designed, commodious and powerfully engined craft. It was one of those brilliant and calm mornings which have been very unusual this year. Very soon they were among the flocks of northern phalarope which are on migration at this time of year, and as the boat wound its way among the many islands, rocks and kelp beds, they were afforded many opportunities watching these tiny ocean going birds at close range.

"Phalaropes weigh less than two ounces, and, although they are shore birds on their breeding grounds in the north, they are believed to pass the rest of the year at sea, and it seems remarkable that these gentle creatures should be able to withstand the storms of wide oceans, but after they pass our shores on their southward journey they disappear into the ocean wastes and are rarely seen again by human eyes until they return in spring over the same seas." (Quoted from the Birds of Massachusetts by E.H. Forbush).

The rocks and islets were literally covered with cormorants, old and young. There must have been over a thousand congregated here. Also there were many glaucous winged gulls with their young at various stages, together with pigeon guillemots, oyster catchers and black turnstones. A few marbled murrelets were seen and one tufted puffin.

While Mrs. Carl navigated the boat, Dr. Carl took some close-ups of the phalaropes in motion picture. Their kindness in giving us this opportunity of seeing this wonderful off-shore bird life was much appreciated.

A.R.D.

#### BIRD TRAPS

It came to my notice recently that the Dominion Experimental Farm at Saanichton had erected double wires charged with fairly high voltage over certain areas on their grounds to kill birds and so protect the plants being grown underneath for seed purposes. It has always been our belief that insect eating birds are more useful alive than dead; also that all our small birds were protected by law.

A.R.D.

REPORT ON FIELD TRIPS OF THE JUNIOR BRANCH

by Freeman King

During the summer the Junior Branch made five trips to different parts of the lower Island. The first expedition was to John Dean Park at Mount Newton, where an exploration of the Thunderbird Caves was made. This is a large rock that has been partly built up by the Indians of a by-gone age and partly by natural formation. This rock is formed in the shape of a whale and the cave underneath has at one time or another been the refuge of Indian tribes from their enemies or from the weather. It was noted with regret that the log cabins built by John Dean in the early 1900's have been destroyed.

The second trip was to Barrow Point, Sidney, to see the original building that was used as the first post office in North Saanich; also the place where the first flour mill stood. This was built in the early 1800's, and parts of the original machinery are still to be seen, as well as the revetting and bulwarks against the sea that were made by the original settlers, the McDonalds. A trip to Clovelly Point to explore the old shaft of a coal mine was on this agenda, the children finding pieces of coal and some of the old mine timbers. From there we went to see an old Indian stone well that was still in a fair state of preservation. The day ended with a picnic at McDonald Park.

The third trip was to Island View Beach and the sand dunes at Saanichton Spit. There the nest of a killdeer and some of the baby birds were seen. Sea plants and shells were also collected. A side trip to see the Indian long houses was made, through the courtesy of the Chief. These old houses are now used mainly for storage, and in one of them their racing canoes were seen. A weiner roast on the beach completed the day.

The fourth trip was to First Lake in the Highland District, through the courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. A. M. Thomas, who gave us afternoon tea. On this trip the party were shown different edible berries and plants. At the lake a number of the children went for a swim, others collected frogs and newts, a number of which were taken home to observe and watch their habits.

The fifth expedition was to Ardmore, to one of the beaches there to collect and study sea shore animal life. We were very fortunate to have Professor J. Cunningham with us, and he was able to tell us some of the habits

of these interesting creatures. The weather on this trip was not too kind, as it rained, and the turn-out was not as large as usual. On these expeditions we have had an average turn-out of 18 to 20, which includes those who have so kindly supplied transportation for us.

I feel these field trips have been well worth while and that the boys and girls have learned something as well as having a lot of fun and enjoyment from them, and I would like to personally thank all those who so kindly turned out and helped with transportation and for their interest shown. It has been a pleasure for me to be allowed to go along with the boys and girls and join in their activities and fun.

THE SUMMER BIRD TRIP

The annual boat trip of the society was taken on Saturday, July 8th, its objective being Bare Island, which is a rocky islet about half a mile long and a quarter wide, and situated off the east side of Sidney Island. Fortunately the weather was mild and calm, as had there been wind, landing would have been difficult, if not impossible, as there are no beaches.

On arrival we found two student scientists, Jerry van Tets and Jozsef Takacs, had established themselves there for the summer, having leased the island from the Indians, to whom it belongs. Their primary objective is information on the habits of the cormorants.

At the time of our visit these two young men had about one thousand nests under observation of the glaucous winged gull, double-crested and Baird cormorant, also 36 of the pigeon guillemot and two each of the black oyster-catcher and tufted puffin.

We had to be very careful when exploring the island, as gull's eggs and downy young were everywhere. The thieving crows were there too, and lost no opportunities to steal any eggs that were exposed. The only small birds seen were song sparrows, one pair of which nested there, though we were told a few red-winged blackbirds had nested on the island earlier in the season.

Twenty-seven members attended this excursion, which is possibly the most interesting of all the field trips taken during the year by the bird group.

A. R. D.



NOTICES OF MEETINGS1957

Thursday

GENERAL MEETING:

Sept.5:

In the Provincial Museum at 8 p.m.

Speaker: Mr. J.A.Livingston, Executive Director of the Audubon Society of Canada.

Saturday

BIRD GROUP MEETING:

Sept.7:

Meet at Monterey Cafe at 9:15 a.m. or

Canoe Cove at 9:50 a.m.

Boat trip and to paddle ashore. Bring lunch.

Leader: J. O. Clay.

Saturday

GEOLOGY GROUP:

Sept.21:

Field Trip to Lands End Road, Saanich.

Meet at White's Garage at the corner of

Cloverdale and Quadra Sts. at 1:30 p.m.,  
or Swartz Bay at 2:15 p.m. (Take Quadra  
Street bus to Cloverdale).

Leader: Mr. A. H. Marrion.

Friday

AUDUBON LECTURE:

Sept.27:

Speaker: Cleveland P. Grant

Subject: Yukon Indian Summer.

Members please note - that the General Meeting is being held on Thursday, September 5th, instead of the usual second Tuesday, in order to have an opportunity of hearing Mr. Livingston, who will be in Victoria on that date. Come and bring a friend.

Have you paid your dues for the present year? The Treasurer will be on hand and at your service on the evening of the General Meeting on September 5th.

Leaflets giving details of the forthcoming Audubon Lectures are enclosed. Please note change in prices.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

We were pleased to note that our last Christmas Bird Count was printed in the Canadian Field Naturalist, Jan.-March 1957 issue. As far as we are aware this is the first time this has been published. It may be remembered that the participants identified 92 species on this occasion, the second largest in Canada.



# Victoria Natural History Society

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