

The
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Canvas-back.

(F. L. Beebe.)

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OUR COVER

The canvas-back duck (*Aythya valisineria*), is one of the many species of ducks to be seen around Victoria. Its numbers are few, however, in comparison to the wintering aggregations of scaup, widgeon, mallard, bufflehead, mergansers and scoters. A truly American species, it is much prized by prairie hunters who admire its alertness, its energetic grebe-like diving habit, its speed in flight, and (not the least, of course) its culinary qualities. Kortright, in his 'Ducks, Geese and Swans of North America' calls it "the lordly canvas-back" "this super-duck", "this choice of the epicure". Alexander Wilson, the naturalist, even wrote a poem about this duck.

To the bird lover the canvas-back is handsome both in form and color. Its reddish chestnut head and neck, its dark breast and hind parts, its whitish or greyish body finely vermiculated, are distinctive features. In form, the head and bill are low and long, differing from the redhead duck in these particulars. The nests are cleverly concealed along the edges of sloughs. They are constructed above the high water level, among the sedges, reeds and flags, and are well lined with down. Seven to nine eggs are laid.

The birds breed in the Cariboo park lands of British Columbia, in central Alberta and from Great Slave Lake southward into the mid-western States. They winter south from here along the Pacific slope to southern Mexico.

The canvas-back is conceded to be the fastest flyer of the duck family. Paced by aeroplanes they have been found to travel at 72 miles per hour.

To the epicure this duck has no rival, not even excepting the prairie mallard fattened on grain. Normally its food is four-fifths vegetable matter. Where the bird feeds on wild celery (*Valisineria*) in central or southern lakes the flesh is unexcelled. On the Pacific Coast the wapato weed (*Sagittaria variabilis*) is said to rival the wild celery for producing an excellent flavour. In coast waters, however, the flesh may be rendered unpalatable when this voracious bird feeds on rotting salmon.

J. O. Clay.

THE ANNUAL FUNGUS FORAY

A group of 19 members of the Victoria Natural History Society went on a foray to Thetis Lake on October 19th. Up to that date there had been very little rain to bring fungus plants into fruiting stage and so a rather meagre harvest was expected. However, diligent searching brought to light more than 40 species representing all five of the spore-colour groups, i.e. white, black, rusty, purple-brown and pink.

Two enthusiastic members had brought along specimens found earlier 'on their own' and our leader, Mr. Hardy, identified one of these as the brown chanterelle (*Paxillus involutus*) and the other as the gray parasol (*Lepiota rachodes*), both very handsome plants.

By Mr. Hardy's advice we kept to the low-lying moister areas where we succeeded in finding specimens in all the usual habitats, such as on the ground, on stumps and fallen logs and on both living and dead trees. Less usual locations were represented by *Marasmius epiphyllus* springing from the midrib of a dead salal leaf and *Collybia albipilata* always growing out of partially buried Douglas fir cones; this is one of our most abundant species at this time of the year. Two other very small species were the little wheel (*Marasmius rotula*) and *Crepidotus herbarum* which grows on dead stalks of grass.

Three species of *mycena* were found, shiny-stem *mycena* (*Mycena galericulata*), bleeding *mycena* (*Mycena haematopa*) whose broken stem drips red juice, and a pale lilac-to-purple species called *Mycena pura*.

Although the majority of the findings were gill fungi there were many other genera represented:- *Poria*, *Daedalea*, *Polyporus*, *Merulius*, candle-snuff fungus (*Xylaria hypoxylon*) and bird's nest fungus (*Crucibulum vulgare*).

The most unusual find was "green-stain fungus" (*Chlorosplenium aeruginascens*) whose mycelium had thoroughly permeated fallen branches of alder and produced on their surface a fine showing of fruiting bodies, peacock green in colour. According to Dr. W.G. Ziller, of the Federal Forest Biology Laboratory here, fruiting by this species is decidedly uncommon.

In John Ramsbottom's "Mushrooms and Toadstools" on page 103 there is a very interesting account of this organism, including a footnote describing how thin slices of "green-stain oak" are used in preparing veneer for Tunbridge Ware.

Our Museum's handbook #4 "Some Mushrooms and Other Fungi of British Columbia" by G.A. Hardy is a very useful little book covering 46 of our local species of fungi, for every one of which Mr. Hardy has found a common name. Each of his descriptions is accompanied by one of Frank L. Beebe's fine half-tones. In the back of this little hand-book you will find a good list of "Selected Literature" published up to the year 1946.

GOOD HUNTING!

M.C.M.

THE CANVAS-BACK DUCK

written by Alexander Wilson in 1832, published in
"American Ornithology"

Slow around an opening point we softly steal,
Where four large ducks in playful circles wheel,
The far-famed Canvas-backs at once we know,
Their broad flat bodies wrapt in pencilled snow;
The burnished chestnut o'er their necks that shone
Spread deepening round each breast a sable zone.
Wary they gaze - our boat in silence glides,
The slow-moved paddles steal along the sides;
Quick-flashing thunders roar along the flood,
And three be prostrate, vomiting their blood!
The fourth aloft on whistling pinions soared,
One fatal glance the fiery thunders poured,
Prone drops the bird amid the dashing waves,
And the clear stream its glossy plumage laves.

It was reported that at the tide flats on the Cowichan River recently five short-eared owls and two marsh hawks were found dead having been shot by hunters, who apparently just have to kill something. While eagles and certain hawks are now protected, the Society is submitting a brief to the Legislature at the next session requesting the protection of all predators. Results will be reported in a later issue.

NOVEMBER GENERAL MEETING

The November meeting was held in the museum on Tuesday the 12th, when several items of business were discussed.

The Audubon Screen Tours came first on the list. The first two lectures held this fall have been so well attended that on both occasions some people were turned away, and it was thought it might be well to accept the suggestion of the Audubon Society to have the lecture on two consecutive nights. The matter was discussed but a decision was left until the next meeting. A motion was also passed that in the future a reserved season ticket plan is to be followed.

The Society is still fighting to have the electrified wires at the Saanichton Experimental Farm removed. Letters have been written to the Minister of Agriculture, the Chief of the Wildlife Service at Ottawa and the Audubon Society and the matter will not be allowed to drop until some definite decision is made.

A slide projector and screen have been purchased for the use of our members. The projector will take 35 mm. and the larger 2½ x 2½ slides. The machine is available at the museum, and it is possible a small charge will be made for the loan of same.

One of our members (Alan Poynter) reported that he had paid a visit to Goldstream last week-end to watch the spawning salmon, and had observed that several of the younger element were maltreating the fish, throwing stones and wading into the stream after them. There did not appear to be anyone in authority to protect the salmon. It was agreed that a letter be sent to the Federal Department of Fisheries about this matter.

As this was mostly a business meeting, only twenty-four members were present, but at the close of the various discussions Miss Enid Lemon showed some of her slides taken at Vancouver Natural History Society's camp at Noaxe Lake, which is at the five thousand foot level in the mountains north of Lillooet. Her coloured slides and narrative of the arduous trip were most interesting. Some of the photographs of the scenery and the flowers were equal to anything we have seen, and it is hoped she can be induced to show us more of her work at future meetings.

SOME INTERESTING BIRDS

by J.O. Clay

Knot -- One of our more unusual birds at Victoria is the knot. This autumn a few individuals have been seen. At the time of the visit of the B. C. Bird and Mammal Society lately one bird was seen by several of us amongst a flock of surf-birds and black turnstones. This one was first identified by Mr. M.J. Wootton, who knew them well in England. Another knot a few days later was identified on Mary Tod island by Mr. A.R. Davidson, and on Oct. 9, four were found at Cattle Point.

They are found chiefly coastwise, but are much more common on the Atlantic seaboard than along our shores. In fact, in spite of Fannin's comment "abundant during migrations", we hardly count them less than rare on Puget Sound.

They move singly or in small flocks, and may be found on the mud flats as well as sandy beaches. The plain dark coloration of an adult does not attract attention at a distance, but it is often associated in feeding and in flight with more brightly coloured birds, notably the turnstone. It is, moreover, one of the least suspicious of the larger shore birds and decoys readily to any whistle of its genus, even though the gunner be standing in plain sight.

According to Dawson and Bowles the knot is named after King Canute or Knut. The synonym "gray snipe" is given to the autumn birds which are light in colour.

Willet -- It is always a thrill to the bird watcher to see something new, and especially something rare. It was such a thrill on the 29th of April, 1945 when the writer first saw a number of willets in the Victoria area. They were in three flights, each closely connected, consisting of 8, 25 and 17 individuals. They were watched through binoculars off Oak Bay golf links against an inky-blue sea; a remarkable sight with their white wing markings. Since that time the unbelievers in Vancouver have been shaken by the collecting of a specimen at Comox by Hamilton Laing, and by a further sight record of four by Charles Guiguet here.

It behooves us bird-minded people around here to substantiate these sight records by further binocular evidence, most likely in April and in October each year.

Lewis Woodpecker -- This pretty bird still manages to survive in the outlying districts of Victoria. Several nesting holes in oak trees used to be seen on the site of the two hospitals on Richmond Road.

These birds were observed this summer in a nearby area in Saanich where large cottonwoods and oaks are standing in an open area surrounding Bowker Creek.

It is a fact that the Lewis woodpecker is fond of fresh fruit, both wild and cultivated. This addiction, coupled with its superficial resemblance to the north-west crow has often, no doubt, made it a target for a gunman and proved its untoward undoing.

Two of these birds can still be seen in and near the Monterey School grounds. They appear to be living on acorns, inserting them in a crevice in a tree and then breaking them up by repeated blows of the powerful bill.

The House Finch or Linnet

It is an exaggeration now to call this species "unusual". It was over twenty years ago that Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan secured the first specimens known on Vancouver Island. In some previous years, possibly, the species had been overlooked in mistake for the purple finch. Only five years before its discovery here, however, it had been recognized as an Okanagan species by S.J. Darcus in Penticton.

For fourteen years the species was considered to be a summer migrant. Led by the example of Mrs. H.M.S. Bell of St. Patrick Street, Oak Bay, local bird lovers placed sunflower seeds and other suitable fare to keep them here all winter.

But it seems reasonable that the original surmise was correct and that the house finch is by nature a summer resident here. In this connection, Mr. John A. Livingston in company with Mr. A. R. Davidson and the writer recently saw on Cedar Hill Cross Road an estimated 200 birds sitting upon the power wires. These appeared ready to migrate.

The house finch is now well established on the island, and is seen at least as far north as Courtenay.

BIRD GROUP FIELD MEETING

The November outdoor meeting was held on Saturday, the 16th, it being one of those perfect calm sunny days which occasionally blesses us at this time of year.

Only twelve members attended this bird walk. We met at Island View Beach, and walked through the fields and woods to Saanichton Spit, returning along the beach.

We lunched on a rocky outcrop just beyond the sand dunes, and pleasant it was there in the warm sunshine. The sea was calm so we were able to locate many flocks of the old squaw

duck, and a large congregation of California murrelets, also many grebes, scoters, scaup, and common loon. On three occasions when walking down the beach we were favored with a close view of a red-throated loon, the first any of the party had seen this fall.

On returning to the cars most of the party dispersed, but as there was plenty of daylight left, a few of us decided to see if we could not add more birds to our list. Going over the hill from the beach we saw a flight of small birds in a strawberry field. We stopped to investigate, and, after some time, were able to get in amongst them, and found they were all horned larks, about fifty in number, by far the largest flock of these migrants any of us had ever seen. Altogether we listed sixty species this day, included in which were ravens, redbacked and Aleutian sandpipers, black-bellied plover, Holboell grebe, winter wrens, marbled murrelets, shrike, brewers and red-winged blackbirds.

This was the eighth field meeting of the bird group this year. The next will probably be the Christmas Bird Count. Anyone wishing to participate in this event, please contact Mr. Clay.

A.R.D.

THE HORNED LARK

We appear to have had an unusual number of these birds migrating through Victoria this summer and fall. In the Provincial Museum publication, issued in Dec. 1947, called 'A Review of the Bird Fauna of British Columbia', a valuable book for all bird students, Munro and Cowan state that the horned lark is casual on Vancouver Island but not recorded there since 1899. However, we now have them every year. They undoubtedly nest at Esquimalt Lagoon and Patricia Bay Airport.

This year we saw the first arrival on Aug. 3rd while on Sept. 22nd a flock of 24 were reported at Cattle Point, Oak Bay, and so tame were they that we were able to watch them from a few feet distant. In fact, we were afraid some of them would get run over by the cars, as they seemed reluctant to fly out of their way.

I might mention that both at Cattle Point and Clover Point, Alaska longspurs were seen on a few occasions in the company of the horned larks and pipits. These longspurs are not often reported in the Victoria area, but as they have a close superficial resemblance to the common house sparrow, it is possible our observations have been faulty, and we have passed them up as such.

A.R.D.

MIGRATION

On October 28th last year two snow buntings were seen at Esquimalt Lagoon. On October 30th this year one was seen at Cattle Point. These are most unusual birds to appear here, but the coincidence of dates made me check up on some of my records of bird arrivals in Victoria, and I found the regularity of their travels so interesting that I made a list of dates for the past three years of some of our migrants, which is found below:

	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>
Western sandpiper	no record	June 27th	June 27th
Bonaparte gull	July 17th	July 17th	July 16th
Heerman gull	July 10th	July 18th	July 1st
Tern	Sept. 11th	Sept. 18th	Sept. 11th
Swallow, violet-green	Mar. 12th	Mar. 15th	Mar. 9th
Swallow, barn	Apr. 29th	Apr. 28th	Apr. 20th
Night hawk	June 7th	June 11th	June 12th
Russet-back thrush	no record	Apr. 22nd	Apr. 27th
Solitary vireo	Apr. 14th	Apr. 14th	Apr. 9th
Warbling vireo	Apr. 16th	Apr. 18th	May 3rd
Townsend warbler	Apr. 6th	Apr. 8th	no record
Myrtle warbler	no record	Apr. 22nd	Apr. 22nd
Audubon warbler	Mar. 20th	Mar. 18th	Mar. 20th
Yellow warbler	May 3rd	Apr. 28th	Apr. 28th
Lutescent warbler	Apr. 5th	Apr. 10th	Apr. 7th
White-crowned sparrow	Apr. 2nd	Apr. 4th	Mar. 30th
Chipping sparrow	Apr. 16th	Apr. 17th	Apr. 13th
Goldfinch	no record	Apr. 28th	Apr. 27th
Rufous hummingbird	Apr. 11th	Apr. 6th	Mar. 31st

The dates of arrival may be even closer than indicated by this list, as we are not out in the field every day. The notation 'no record' simply means that I forgot to make an entry; not that the birds did not arrive on time.

A.R.D.

In October the Vancouver Natural History Society issued a list of their members, which totals 282 adults and 14 juniors. As a matter of comparison the Victoria membership is now 130 adults and 25 juniors. This appears to be a small number out of a population of about 120,000, particularly as 600 people crowd in to hear and see an Audubon lecture, but, compared with other cities, it is well up to average.

NOTES ON DISNEY MOVIES

by Frank L. Beebe.

By way of information, some of the amazing action sequences in the recently released Walt Disney true-life adventure "Perry the Pine Squirrel" deserve a note of explanation.

The predatory birds shown in this film, the goshawks, the snowy owl and the eagle were trained and flown by a falconer from Boise, Idaho. So too were the prairie falcons in the falcon-sequence in Disney's "Vanishing Prairie". Close-up action sequences of the kind shown in these films do not 'happen'. The things shown do happen of course, but not fortuitously and completely naturally in front of waiting cameramen. All such sequences must be "set up" beforehand, and the animal actors must be sufficiently conditioned, "trained" if you like, to the presence of men and camera that they go right ahead and behave as they would do naturally, in total disregard of the men that virtually surround them.

Cutting and splicing can give very different apparent results than what actually happens, too. Thus the flying squirrel, hit hard in midair by a stooping goshawk appears to escape, when in actuality it is extremely doubtful if the squirrel shown escaping is the same one as was hit by the goshawk; the film was cut at the point just after the strike and another sequence of another squirrel spliced on. This is not to detract from the excellence of the film, but merely to point out that there is much more to wildlife photography than appears in the film, or that can be taken by passively sitting in a blind waiting for something to happen.

Looking for ideas on Christmas Presents?

The Federation of Ontario Naturalists suggest copies of the following long-playing recordings:

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|--------|
| (1) 25 Common Songbirds of Ontario | - - - - - | \$4.95 |
| (2) A Day in Algonquin Park | - - - - - | 5.95 |
| (3) Birds of the Forest | - - - - - | 5.95 |

Available through the Federation at 187 Highbourne Rd.,
Toronto 7, Ont.

THE BONAPARTE GULL

These gulls, the smallest to be seen on the Pacific Coast, generally arrive here towards the end of July, and stay with us until early winter. Off Oak Bay, in late summer, can be seen large flocks, wheeling and turning in the sky, somewhat after the manner of the small sandpipers.

They have the unusual habit of shuffling their feet in wet sand which apparently brings to the surface the small crustaceans on which they sometimes feed. They can do this quite gracefully, giving the impression that they are dancing.

We found they had another habit. While we were walking on the road which borders the long arm of Pedder Bay one afternoon recently we noticed these gulls flying low over the shallow water and diving until they were completely immersed, coming up with their wings half open, generally with a small fish in their beak. There were about 25 or 30 of these small gulls, and they were all fishing in the same manner. This is the first time we have seen the Bonapartes actually diving, as they mostly skim the water for the surface fish, then hitting the sea with a tremendous splash but never going under.

In the 'Birds of Massachusetts' by E. H. Forbush, which is our standard book of reference, he remarks that "they frequently drop down to the water, but I have never seen one go under as terns so often do", so this must be a rather unusual incident.

A.R.D.

JUNIOR OUTINGS

by Freeman King

Out at Royal Oak there is an area of low lying land that is known as Rithet's Swamp. These few acres are quite different from the surrounding country and can be likened to a sub-arctic area. Growing here are many kinds of plant life that are rarely found elsewhere in the Victoria district. Here are white birch, black birch, arctic willow, rowan trees and lodge-pole pine. Labrador tea is in profusion, and the swamp is surrounded by a thick and almost impenetrable thicket of hardhack and willow scrub, as well as groves of osier dogwood. In the winter it is covered with water and not accessible. In places the bracken is eight to ten feet high. Fungi are abundant and large patches of sphagnum moss form a great carpet. Scattered among the other trees are cottonwoods, aspens and balsam fir. In early summer on the out-skirts of the thicket is a carpet of yellow violets that lasts until late fall. The land is a soft peat bog and, that which has been reclaimed and planted to crop, produces a heavy growth.

Twice lately we have had the junior members of the society here, the first time to see the sphagnum moss and arctic willows and the second time for fungi. Some of the boys made sketches of the surrounding country, and we did a certain amount of exploring around the old virgin timber east of the swamp, and saw where the pileated woodpeckers had been working, and even some signs of the red-breasted sapsucker.

Birds abound in the scrub, and the pheasants have made it a stamping ground.

For those who like to explore and find unusual plant life it is a wonderful place to go. The writer has made many trips there, and it is always new and interesting.

On Saturday, November 16th, we made a trip to the Saanich Experimental Farm, where Mr. Crossley, the assistant superintendent, escorted us over the whole farm, including the arboretum, the ponds, the greenhouses where all kinds of plants are propagated, and also showed us colored slides of many of the trees and shrubs in full bloom. We are much indebted to him for his kindness; the boys and girls were most interested.

About fifteen of the junior members attended each trip.

NOTICE OF MEETING1957

Tuesday

Dec. 10:

GENERAL MEETING

Provincial Museum at 8 p.m.

Speaker: Professor Lewis J. Clark,
Head of the Department of
Chemistry, Victoria College.

Topic: "Latitudinal and Altitudinal Variation
of Plants".

The lecture will be illustrated
by slides.

On Monday evening, November 18th, there was a botany meeting in the Biology Building of Victoria College. Miss Anne Gorham, Group Chairman for the winter, welcomed us and gave some explanatory remarks about the specimens on display.

These were set out on long tables across the room. Books of reference, magnifying glasses, and chairs were on hand.

Fungi, lichens, ferns and trees vied with each other for attention. Miss Brenton had arranged specimens in three containers as table decorations, showing how beautiful and attractive lichens can be when used for that purpose. Small seedling trees in pots came in for much attention too.

There was talk about arrangements for future botany trips through the winter, and from the interest displayed it looks as if walks for lichen collecting are being considered.

Coffee was served during the evening, and certainly an excellent start for winter study was made. Many thanks are due to Miss Gorham and all who assisted her in making this a very special occasion.

About twenty-five members were present.

Victoria Natural History Society

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