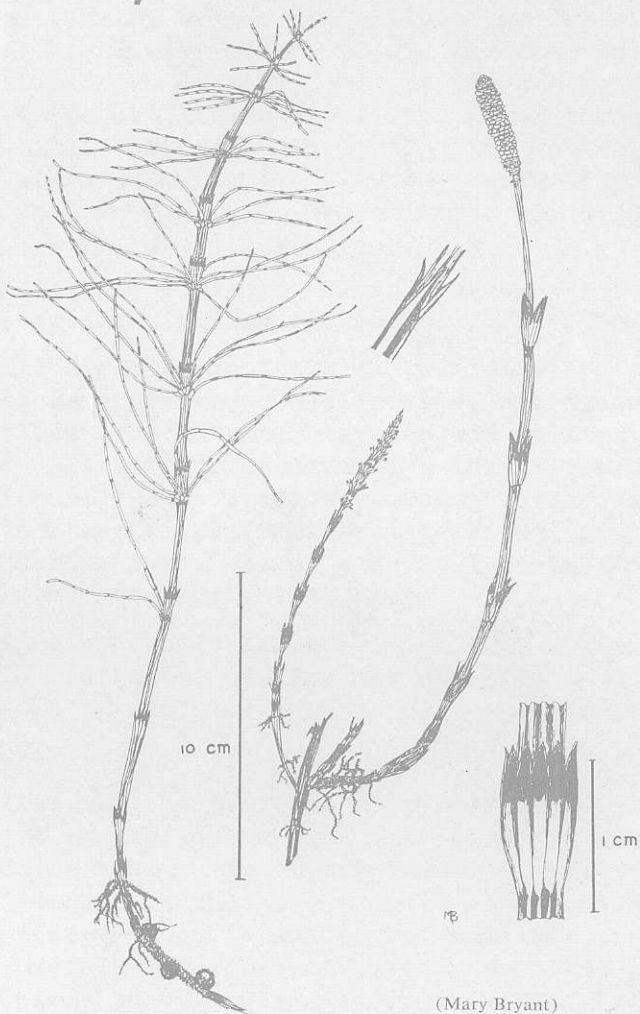


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(Mary Bryant)

Common Horsetail

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THE PROTECTION OF PREDATORS

The committee of the society which was assigned the job of preparing a brief to the legislature for the protection of birds met Mr. David Turner, Deputy Minister for Conservation & Recreation in January. He advised the committee he was fully behind their endeavours, and would assist them in any way possible, and asked that they find out what protection is afforded birds in the districts adjoining British Columbia. This we did; the results being as follows:

MONTANA: None protected but Bald Eagles.

ALBERTA: All birds protected except House sparrows, crows, starlings, golden eagles and magpies.

IDAHO: All birds protected with the following exemptions: House sparrows, crows, ravens, starlings, kingfisher, cormorants, magpies and pelicans.

WASHINGTON: All birds protected with the following exemptions: House sparrows, crows, ravens, starlings, duck hawks, pigeon hawks, goshawks, cooper hawks, sharp-shinned hawks, prairie falcons, magpies, cormorants and horned owls.

The following, which is an excerpt from a leaflet issued by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, is very interesting, and could be usefully adopted by our own Department of Education:-

"It shall be the duty of the state superintendent of public instruction, the county superintendent of schools, the superintendents, principals and teachers in all the schools of the state to give instructions to school children concerning the usefulness of insectivorous, song and innocent birds in the destruction of insects and pests that destroy plant life, and in the values of hawks and owls that destroy rodent pests."

THE PROBLEM OF INDIAN TOBACCO IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

-- by J. E. Michael Kew

Tobacco is a native American plant which was domesticated by North American Indians in pre-white times. The first European visitors took to the weed with alacrity, adopted the Indian inventions of pipes, cigarettes and cigars, and spread the cultivation and use of tobacco throughout the whole world in a very short time. The use of tobacco among the Indians themselves spread from the southeastern part of the United States over a wide area of the continent. British Columbia seems to have been the North Western extremity of this distribution. In the interior of our province we know that the Kootenay Indians and the Okanagan, Thompson and Shuswap divisions of the Interior Salish people smoked a variety of tobacco mixed with kinnikinnick when the first fur traders entered upon the scene. These people used stone pipes of two kinds: one was the "elbow" pipe similar in shape to pipes we see used to-day; the other, was the tubular type, simply a stone tube expanding at one end to contain the tobacco. In the northern part of the province and throughout the coastal area none of the Indians smoked tobacco. However, the early fur traders who visited the territory of the Tsimshians on the northern coast and that of the Haidas on the Queen Charlotte Islands found these people using a plant which seemed to be like tobacco. These Indians ground the plant in stone mortars, added charred shell or ash, then chewed the mixture.

Unfortunately, competent botanists and even collectors of floral specimens were few and far between in the early days of exploration and fur-trading, with the result that the botanical evidence regarding the identification of the "tobacco" plants is very fragmentary. To complicate the matter further, the Indians readily adopted the use of tobacco imported by traders and gave up the use of their own products, with the result that all the native botanical knowledge of these plants was lost. Today, even Indians well informed in the old way of life cannot identify those plants their forefathers used as tobacco.

The only known British Columbia specimen confirmed as a species of tobacco is one specimen of Nicotiana attenuata collected by James A. Teit, in 1912, at Spences Bridge and now in the University of British Columbia Herbarium. Recent botanizing expeditions in the Interior regions have failed to turn up any other specimens of Nicotiana. Mr. J.W. Eastham

of the U.B.C. Herbarium after special search in 1947 and 1948 in the Kootenay area, failed to find any Nicotiana (personal communication). Apparently, any stocks of this plant which existed in the past have now disappeared. However, the existence of the single specimen from Spences Bridge combined with the fact that we know N. attenuata was used by Indians to the south and east of British Columbia, present sufficient evidence to assume the use of this species of tobacco by the interior groups of Indians.

For the coastal area where a "tobacco" was chewed, there are two specimens in existence. Both were collected before 1800. One, collected by Capt. Dixon on the Queen Charlotte islands is in the herbarium of the British Museum. The other, collected by Menzies from an unidentified place, but probably from the Queen Charlotte islands, is in the Royal Herbarium at Kew. Both specimens are in poor condition and their true identity has never been satisfactorily established. Some botanists feel they are a species of Nicotiana, possibly related to N. multivalvis. Others feel that further examination is necessary before a conclusion can be made. A botanical expedition to the Queen Charlotte Islands in the summer of 1957 did not encounter any Nicotiana, so it seems that if the Indians there did really chew a tobacco and not some other plant, that tobacco has disappeared too.

Further examination of the whole problem seems justifiable both from the botanical and anthropological viewpoint. If it does turn out that the north coastal groups did use a species of Nicotiana this would extend the known distribution of the genus and perhaps make it eligible for the dubious distinction of being the first intentionally introduced plant in British Columbia. If it turns out that the Indians did have their own tobaccos, but that these have not survived in the wild; then obviously the Indians must have given some attention to the cultivation of the plant. Anthropologists may have to revise the previous conclusion that British Columbia Indians at the time of contact, were completely non-agricultural.

MR. WASHINGTON'S DUCK

(Editor's Note: On a recent visit to the Provincial Museum, the Rev. Dr. Frank Hoffman of Victoria, B. C. brought in a dried duck's leg with an aluminum band. We thought the story of its origin so appealing we asked Dr. Hoffman to write it out. The following is his account.)

On a September day in the year 1934 around 10 a.m., visiting my parishioners of the United Church of Canada, I reached the homestead of Gabor Zatopek north of the Canadian National railway tracks crossing the Indian Reserve, Mistatim, west of Hudson Bay Junction, Saskatchewan.

I found the old-timers in great distress. Asking the reason, Gabor Zatopek told me this story:

"Yesterday I went to shoot a hawk which had depleted my chicken flock. Surveying the northern sky, I saw several flocks of wild ducks heading for the south. They flew very low, and before I realized it my single barreled shotgun rose under my arm. With my left hand I propped it up and looked along the barrel and as the flock glided along in the air, my gun went off and a duck fell close to me. I picked it up and hurried into the kitchen where my wife Lydia was preparing lunch. Although the bird seemed to us to be very lean, she decided to boil it into soup. She started to pluck the down for storing it for pillows. While doing so she said to me: "Gabor, this bird has a wedding ring on the leg, and if you shot only this one bird then you made a widow. Furthermore, you shot other people's duck. Look, there is the name of the owner with the series number of the bird on this ring. He must be a very rich man having so many birds. I am afraid there will be a court case and we will be punished."

Meanwhile we entered the kitchen and brave Mrs. Zatopek produced the duck leg with the ring. I read: "Biological Survey, Washington, D.C., No.633464". I promised the Zatopeks that I would write a letter to Mr. Washington and I hope he would not prosecute them.

So I wrote a report to Washington, D.C. that the duck which was on the way to winter quarters in the south met its fate in Mrs. Zatopek's soup pot on the above mentioned Canadian homestead. The letter was acknowledged, and the Zatopeks felt very relieved when I read the letter to them.

THETIS PARK

On Friday evening, February 28th, a meeting was held in one of the lecture rooms at the Victoria College. This meeting was called by the Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary Association to acquaint those interested as to what had been done in connection with the creating of a Sanctuary of four hundred acres in Thetis Park, which park covers approximately 1400 acres.

It seems this piece of land was deeded by the Province to the City of Victoria at the time when the Sooke Lake watershed was established, but for a number of years now has been a park under the supervision of the Greater Victoria Water Board.

It was pointed out at this meeting that this four hundred acres has within its boundary the only untouched garry oak association left on the island, and that it contains every kind of habitat for the growing and preservation of our native trees, shrubs and flowers, ranging, as it does, from swamp land to the rocky, moss and lichen covered slopes of Seymour Hill. Here in the past, grew practically every variety of native plants known on the island, and it is the ambition of this society to re-stock it again and have it maintained in perpetuity as a sanctuary for birds, mammals and plants.

The Provincial Government has expressed its willingness to make this four hundred acres into a Class 'C' park, which means that it would be placed under the guardianship of a local board, but it will not assume control of the whole of Thetis Park. However, the society has been in touch with the Victoria City Council, and they have agreed to co-operate with the Society and set this acreage aside as a sanctuary under the supervision of the Water Board.

It must have been just such a group of wise and long-sighted people in the past who got together for the creation of Mount Douglas Park, Mount Tolmie Park, Beacon Hill Park and others for the use and pleasure of future generations. Now, with our rapidly increasing population, the efforts of this society should have the assistance and co-operation of all the citizens of Victoria and district.

A. R. D.

BIRDS OF MITTLNACH ISLAND

by Theed Pearse, Comox, B.C.

Mittlenach Island is situated at the northern end of the Gulf of Georgia, and, like most of these small islands, is just a big rock with vegetation only where there is some reservoir of moisture. At times, the plant cover was sufficient to provide pasture for a few sheep, but the owner eventually came to the conclusion that it was unprofitable to supply free mutton to fishermen and other visitors. Now, the rock is inhabited by birds.

The name is supposed to be connected with an Indian legend concerning the preservation of a group of natives from enemies or from some natural disaster. The same legend forms the basis for the inapt name of Miracle Beach Park, but the only connection seems to be that the island can be seen from there. In size Mittlenach must be close to 100 acres, and in elevation rises to a height of over 100 feet in the centre.

As with similar rocky islands in the gulf, Mittlenach is the nesting resort of the glaucous-winged gull, and to band the young has been the object of most of my visits. The first of these was July 1st, 1920, but no banding was done, as this was an exploratory visit. Banding was first carried on in 1922, when I spent two days on the island with the late P.A. Taverner and H.M. Laing, who were collecting specimens for the National Museum at Ottawa. I believe this was the first banding done in British Columbia.

In those days gulls' eggs were not protected, and it was evident that the nests had been robbed. The Indians from Cape Mudge, as well as any fisherman wanting a change of diet, regularly came for eggs. However, in 1921 a watcher was stationed on the island, and matters have gradually improved. In 1922 the three of us came to the conclusion that the adult population was some 500 pairs, but only 104 young were banded, many being too young, and probably were from second layings after the first had been taken.

My next visit in 1923 was a matter of a few hours and the results of protection were not very evident. I banded only half the number of birds available, and had time to go over only about a third of the island. This must sound very poor results for 500 pairs even allowing for predation, possibly does not give a correct picture, but, on Mittlenach, it is a case of hunting for the nests, as even in the more favoured places, they are quite scattered. Then, too, the early type of bands were difficult to fix in place - very different from

the present type that can be closed relatively easily.

Naturally returns were poor for these first years, though this may not have been entirely due to the few birds banded, but to the rings then in use. These were of a material not suitable for a strong billed bird like the glaucous-wing, nor did they resist corrosion by sea water. Nevertheless, one had persisted seven years when recovered at New Westminster.

In most of the following years some banding was done. My object was to ascertain whether the Mittlenach birds migrated south with those passing through from farther north, or whether they stayed around the Gulf of Georgia. The returns indicated that the latter was generally what happened, though there were quite a number from birds that had travelled south.

In 1938 a colour banding scheme was inaugurated for young gulls on the Pacific Slope, and I contributed birds from Mittlenach in this and the following four years. By this time Bare Island and other nesting places came into the picture, but total returns were poor. The idea of the coloured bands, different colours placed in various combinations each year, was to make sight identification possible, but I doubt whether the celluloid rings used were strong enough to resist the onslaught of those powerful beaks, which I know from experience can make quite an impression.

I had looked on this period as the close of my glaucous-wing banding programme, but, having some seventy bands left, I persuaded Mr. Roderick Haig-Brown and his son to go over last year with me to use the last of the bands. After an absence of eight years it was interesting to compare conditions, and the most marked was the much more advanced age of the youngsters. Actually there were as many on the wing as on the ground, and consequently it took quite a time to use up the 70 rings we had. The date (6th August) found the birds in about the same stage they had been ten days later on the previous visit. Another difference was noted in the vegetation, especially in case of the grass in the chinks of the rock ledges where the nests were. The growth was so thick that it required real hunting to locate the young birds. Of course, the wet weather in July probably accounted for this.

(This article will be completed
in the May issue.)

GENERAL MEETING, MARCH 11th

This meeting of the Society was held in the Museum, Acting President Mrs. H.W.S. Soulsby being in the chair.

Notice was given that the Vancouver Natural History Society's annual camp will be held this year at Kalamalka Lake near Vernon. July 5th to the 12th inclusive are the dates. Arrangements for some of our members to go, especially if we can provide our own tents, can be made. Here is a good chance to begin our Federation of B. C. Naturalists. Very interesting fauna and flora, as well as geological formations for study, are easily available in this locality. There is also time for fun!

The number of people attending these general meetings has kept up well during the season. Our membership list now stands at 136, and 65 seems to be our average attendance, which is very good.

The speaker for the evening was Mr. C. P. Lyons, of the Parks Branch, Department of Conservation and Recreation. The intriguing title of his subject was "The Right to Live", being a story of the inter-relationship of animals, birds, insects and plants in four of the most interesting biotic areas of British Columbia, same being the Gulf Islands, Dry Interior, Central Forest and Alpine zones.

Mr. Lyons held the attention of a large audience as he narrated the story of these four zones, and showed the inter-dependence of all life in the environment in which it is placed, and, in fact, has created. Also how Nature has worked out a harmonious scheme for this, which can be, and has been, broken down by the interference of man.

This was a most interesting lecture, and Mr. Lyons' running commentary on his films left nothing to be desired. The subject was our own Province, which he knows thoroughly. The emphasis was on conservation, and the excellence and range of his films, particularly those of the wild flowers, were breathtaking in their beauty. These films were all in colour, and were taken by Mr. Lyons on the trips his work with the government required him to take over British Columbia.

We hope Mr. Lyons will favor us with another lecture in the near future.

BIRD GROUP OUTDOOR MEETING

The first field meeting of the bird group took them to Sidney on Saturday, February 22nd. Twenty-one people were present, and, the weather being fine and mild, a good day was had.

Meeting at the Sidney wharf, one of the first birds seen was a Cassin auklet, which, while they are present in the local waters, are rarely seen so close to the mainland. Another highlight of the day was a flock of eighty-five cedar waxwings, seen at Towner Park. The party covered the waterfront surrounding the Resthaven Hospital, and then adjourned to the home of Mr. & Mrs. Walker Taylor for lunch, where some of the party found the weather mild enough to sit out on the patio overlooking the Saanich Inlet. Here can always be found many wintering sea-birds.

In the afternoon a trip was taken to Jackson's Point, which is a promontary in Shoal Harbour, and an excellent place for observing most of the species of sea-birds which winter in this sheltered area.

Altogether the number of species of birds seen by the different members totalled seventy, which is a good count for this time of year.

A.R.D.

BIRD NOTES

On the morning of Saturday, March 8th, we got out of our car at the corner of Munn Road and Prospect Lake Road, as we thought we had heard some ravens calling. Looking upwards we saw about ten of them circling and calling. As we looked, more and more ravens joined the circle until there were fifty of these birds in the sky, soaring, somersaulting and tumbling as only the ravens can do. It was quite a sight. Standing at this corner one has a good view of the valley below, all of which had been cut out of the heavy forest by some early hardworking pioneer. As we were watching the ravens, we saw, flying below them, a group of about a dozen violet-green swallows. Then a peregrine falcon shot through the birds, paying no attention to them at all. A few minutes later a red-tailed hawk flew around the group, followed closely by an angry crow. Lowering our sights to the trees below we saw a group of about forty blackbirds on one of the oak trees. Not being sure of

their identity, we went down the valley to have a better look at them, and found they were all starlings. Here, too, were scores of robins, many flickers, song sparrows, towhees and Bewick wrens, also golden-crowned and ruby-crowned kinglets, creepers, and we even heard the hooting of a screech owl, but were unable to find it. Just as we were leaving, we heard, high in a tree, a bird singing which we could not recognize. It was a loud trill, something like a chipping sparrow, and it was some time before we found that it was just a junco singing his spring song.

A.R.D.

THE SPRING MIGRANTS

April is the month when most species of migrating birds will appear at Victoria.

Black Brant will be seen every day throughout the month.

The Rufous Hummingbird generally puts in an appearance toward the end of March or the beginning of this month, but the early blooming of red flowering currant and the broad-leaf maple may give us an early record for this year.

This spring the violet-green swallows arrived (at Lost Lake) on March 2nd, which is the earliest date on record. The other swallows last spring were first noticed on the following dates:

Rough-wing	April 19th
Cliff	19th
Barn	20th

The Western Bluebird migration generally reaches Victoria about the last week in March. Look for them in the Albert Head and Metchosin districts during the first week in April.

Other dates of arrival last year were as follows:-

Lutescent warbler	April 1st
Savannah sparrows	1st
Townsend warbler	3rd
Solitary vireo	9th
Chipping sparrow	13th
Myrtle warbler	22nd
Goldfinch	27th
Yellow warbler	28th
Warbling vireo	30th
Black-capped warbler	30th

JUNIOR BRANCH NOTES

by Freeman King

During the past month the Juniors have had a variety of expeditions. A trip to one of the summits of Skirt Mountain where some strange rock formations were seen, as well as sign of bears. We also found the manzanita in full bloom, as well as some yellow violets.

Our next trip was to Thetis Lake Park, which turned out to be quite a route march. Going by the trail we made a complete circuit. Noted that the little bridges over the dongas and gullies are in a bad state of repair. Saw satin flower and salmonberry in bloom, and a profusion of skunk cabbage. It was noted that in one place at the north end of the lake there were a large number of holly seedlings growing in a second growth fir grove.

Our expedition to Ed Lohbrunner's nursery and the Rithet woods proved interesting. The children saw the tame Canada goose that has taken up his abode in a small lake there. We saw that he was in consort with a duck, and the poor drake seemed to be having a bad time of it. Found a number of saddle mushrooms, of which a number were taken home by one of the boys. Mr. Lohbrunner gave some of us a number of bulbs of the English ladyslipper.

On Saturday last we held a work bee out at the property loaned to the group by Capt. and Mrs. H.M.S. Bell at Beaver Lake. A plot has been plowed up and this week it will be harrowed. We burned a bunch of slash and pulled up a lot of broom.

On Saturday, March 29th, we will be holding a planting bee. Going out in the morning and taking our lunches. Arrangements are being made with the Re-forestation Division of the B. C. Forest Service for a number of seedlings for the start of our centennial arboretum, in which we hope to grow and preserve as many native trees as we can plant in the one acre plot. We hope to be able to establish some of the flowering shrubs as well. This will be a long term project, and should give some incentive to the boys and girls to protect and conserve our native flora.

Plans are under way for a beach expedition; also to the Goldstream Park, and the Jordan River area.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

1958

Tuesday

GENERAL MEETING:

April 8th:

Provincial Museum at 8 p.m.

Subject: "Autumn Tour"

Presented by Mr. & Mrs. H.A. Dreany.

Saturday

BOTANY GROUP:

April 12th:

Field Outing to Thetis Lake.

Meet at Monterey Cafe at 1:30 p.m.

Leader: Miss M. C. Melburn.

Tuesday

GEOLOGY GROUP:

April 15th:

Provincial Museum at 8 p.m.

Subject: "Volcanoes"

Speaker: Dr. A. O. Hayes.

Monday

AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR:

April 21st:

Oak Bay Junior High School Auditorium
at 8 p.m.

Speaker: William Ferguson

Subject: "High Horizons"

In connection with the illustrated talk being presented to the Society on April 8th, Mrs. Dreany writes as follows:- This 'Autumn Tour' taken in part of the Okanagan, Arrow Lakes, Glacier National Park (U.S.A.), the Kannanaskis Highway to Banff through to Yoho Park, including a hike into beautiful Lake O'Hara. As the title suggests it is all in autumn colouring. As usual we photographed not only scenery, but any flora and fauna which we were fortunate enough to encounter. We think this series should interest your members.

NOTE TO LIBRARIANS

In order to adjust the issues of the VICTORIA NATURALIST to coincide with the new fiscal year adopted by the Victoria Natural History Society, the current volume will contain 11 numbers instead of the usual 9. Number 1 of Volume 15 will appear in September 1958.

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