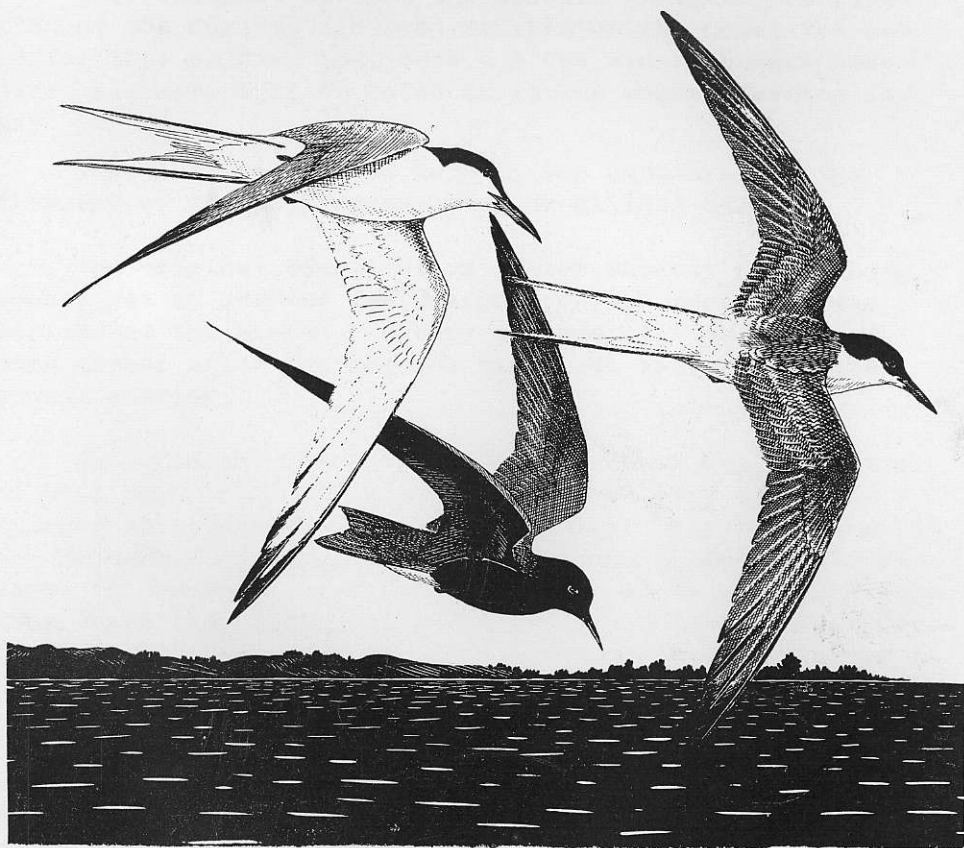


The
**VICTORIA
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Terns

(F. L. Beebe)

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VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
Victoria, B.C.

APRIL MONTHLY MEETING

Our regular monthly meeting was held at the Museum on Tuesday the 8th, with the President in the chair, after a four months' absence touring the States.

The President advised the members that the constitution of the Society had been revised by the Committee set up for this purpose last year. A few minor changes were made, and same will be voted on at the annual meeting in May.

This meeting will be held in the Cafeteria in the basement of the Douglas Building on Elliott Street.

The original constitution of the Society cannot be found, but an undated and unsigned carbon duplicate was located at the Museum. A copy of same will be mailed to each member after the changes have been approved at the annual meeting.

The speakers for the evening were Mr. & Mrs. H.A. Dreany of Mill Bay. They showed a series of colored slides of a journey they took last September. Their trip took them via the Hope-Princeton Highway to the Okanagan, through Revelstoke to Arrowhead, and down the Upper Arrow Lake to Nakusp. From there they travelled to Nelson and Creston. From Creston they motored south into the United States to Glacier National Park, then north again to the Waterton Lakes in Alberta. They then took the Kannanaskis Highway to Banff, thence to Yoho Park, from where they hiked into Lake O'Hara and to the 'Hoodoos' (capped pinnacles) at Leonchael, returning home via the Big Bend and Cariboo Highway back to Mount Baker and the coast.

Their pictures of some of these "hard-to-get-at" places were magnificent, and Mrs. Dreany's narration of their trip was a pleasure to listen to. This is the second time we have had the pleasure of having Mr. & Mrs. Dreany with us, and we hope to have them again.

BIRDS OF MITTLNACH ISLAND

by Theed Pearse, Comox, B.C.
(continued from last issue.)

So much for the gulls. Now for the rather few other species met with in the different years. There have generally been some crows, once quite a flock, 200 or more, but few, if any, nest there. They may take gull eggs or even small young, but I have seen practically no signs of predation. They come over from other islands, the attraction possibly being berries or grasshoppers. Of course, occasionally one comes across the remains of adult gulls, but never in numbers to suggest that the gull population is seriously affected. On one occasion the late Major Brooks shot a horned owl, and there may have been another on the island, but there was no sign that gulls had been taken.

Though the gulls are the predominate feature, the pigeon guillemots were quite numerous in the early years. They nest under the logs washed on shore and are usually inaccessible, though the presence of the nest is often very evident from the fishy smell. For some reason in the late forties they almost disappeared, but were in good number again in 1957.

Once a peregrine made a short stay, making a beautiful picture perched on a boulder, and there has often been a sparrowhawk enjoying the crop of grasshoppers. A bird that we always look for and usually see is the wandering tattler. I remember the gratification of Taverner in getting a specimen for the National Museum. The black turnstone is usually found when the wader migration is on. There are also generally some peeps to be seen as well as passage warblers and other passerines. The only residents are song sparrows and towhees.

A bird that has recently recognized the advantages of the island is the Baird cormorant. Last year I estimated there were 100 nests of this species. Though there are some excellent nesting sites, much used for perches, they did not nest in the early years, in fact, not until 1949. (Why could they not have been so obliging 20 to 30 years ago?)

From the foregoing a comparison can be made over a period of 35 years. As regards the gulls there may have been some increase in the breeding population. It is very difficult to even estimate the number of birds in the air, and there is always the likelihood that some are counted more than once. As one moves around there is always a

protesting overhanging flock, which attracts birds not locally interested. I did think there were more in 1957 in those parts of the island I was able to get to. At over 80 these are limited, as most of it entails much clambering over the rocks.

Mittlenach has never produced the number of youngsters one would expect from the number of breeding birds present, in spite of the fact that in recent years I do not think there has been excessive human predation. In some of the years I had the assistance of two or more boys, and the island was pretty well combed, but the best result was only 400 from an estimated population of 1500 adults. Much of the island does not provide attractive nesting sites, which are the more exposed ledges with easy access to the sea. (I found one nest among bracken).

In 1956 the island suffered badly from a fire. In fact, I gave up a visit owing to a report that the whole place had been burned over, but this could not have been the case, judging from its condition last summer.

Possibly a botanist would find plenty of interesting plant specimens on Mittlenach Island, but they are not noticeable to the layman except the cactus, which is sometimes unnecessarily in evidence.

Mittlenach nearly succumbed to the exigencies of present-day warfare, to be used as a bombing site, but fortunately it and the gulls were saved. Now there are rumours that the government might turn it into a sanctuary.

EDITOR'S NOTES:

Members will please note that their subscriptions for the coming year are now due. The treasurer will be on hand at the Annual Meeting on May 13th.

It is a pleasure to announce that the membership has increased during the last year, and the attendance at the various meetings and lectures has been excellent.

The Audubon Screen Tours also were given to capacity audiences. In fact, the Oak Bay Junior High School Auditorium, which seats up to 650 people, has been found to be too small, and there is a possibility that these lectures this winter may be held at the Victoria High School, which seats about 1000, but this will not be known definitely until later in the year.

* * * * *

BIRD GROUP MEETING

Thirty members met at Clover Point on Saturday the 29th of March. An hour was spent in the lee of the headland, both watchers and sea birds enjoying shelter from a crisp north-east wind, the birds being close to the shore. Here, as elsewhere, numbers of wintering birds were already diminished by migration.

Several eared grebes were here, some of them in spring plumage and display. We watched them with interest. Greater scaup were sheltering both south of Clover Point and south of Gonzales Point (Shoal Bay). Short billed gulls in various attractive plumages were seen off the point at both places. At Shoal Bay the scaups took the place where western grebes are wont to congregate throughout every winter, but now only four of the latter remained. Harlequins were sparsely grouped in their usual numbers. Baldpates were few, their place being taken by the brant. Offshore small flights of white-winged scoters and eared grebes were showing their eagerness to depart for their far flung inland lakes.

At Shoal Bay violet-green swallows flitted around a house, being attracted by a nest box under the eaves. At Cattle Point one oyster catcher was seen and one black turnstone. One killdeer plover fluttered uneasily on a rock doing the "broken wing act", but no eggs were found following this display.

A welcome break during this day's birding was made at Mrs. Parris' home on Island Road, where the party stayed during the lunch hour.

Thirty varieties of birds were seen on this trip.

J. O. Clay,
Convener.

BIRD NOTES

Mrs. H. M. S. Bell reported seeing a Grinnell's water thrush at her property 'Thrushmere' at Beaver Lake on April 13th. It was observed at close range on the edge of a swamp, and its appearance and behavior agreed with its description. This bird has not previously been reported on the Island. Its normal habitat is the eastern side of the Rockies to Ontario.

A gadwell has made its appearance in one of the pools at Beacon Hill Park. Also there at the present time (Apr. 19) is a European widgeon.

A. R. D.

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETYFINANCIAL STATEMENT MARCH 1st 1957 to MAY 31st, 1958INCOME:

Bank Balance from previous year	- - - - -	\$ 173.25
Membership fees	- - - - -	301.00
Membership fees, junior	- - - - -	19.85
Bank interest	- - - - -	28.85
Transferred from Bk. of Commerce (Natural History)		108.82
" " (Audubon)	- - -	1,062.88
Tax remission	- - - - -	63.41
Discount on payment to Audubon	- - - - -	19.60
Transferred from Audubon Account	- - - - -	515.84
Outstanding cheques	- - - - -	96.70
		<u>\$2,390.20</u>

EXPENDITURES:

Monks Multigraph, Printing & mailing 'Naturalist'	\$ 364.10
Printing & stationery	39.27
Projector & Screen	144.37
Junior branch	15.00
Wreaths	10.50
Lecture expenses	12.75
Audubon Dues	10.00
Postages	8.50
Bank cheques	.60
Bank Balance May 1958	<u>1,785.11</u>
	<u>\$2,390.20</u>

Bank balance per pass book \$1,785.11

Less cheques outstanding:

Monks Multigraph	\$28.52	
School Board	50.00	
Minister of Finance	13.18	
Miss I. T. Latimer	<u>5.00</u>	-- 96.70
		<u>\$1,688.41</u>

Examined and found correct:

Signed: J. H. Whitehouse

" C. W. Lowe.

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETYAUDUBON ACCOUNT

Year March 1st 1957 to May 31 1958

INCOME:

Receipts from five lectures - - - - - \$2,022.95

EXPENDITURE

Amusement tax - - - - -	181.71
Advertising - - - - -	67.82
Rent of School Auditorium - - - - -	250.00
Contract payment to Audubon Society - - - - -	491.75
50% of net profit to Audubon Society - - - - -	515.83
Transferred to Victoria Natural History Soc'y	515.84
	<hr/>
	\$2,022.95

TREASURER'S REPORT

The net profit of the five lectures, after deducting the \$500.00 payment to the Audubon Society as per our contract, was \$1,031.67. Half of this amount is paid to the Audubon Society, which is also part of our contract with them.

The balance at the bank is now \$1,688.41, as against \$1,344.85 on our last balance sheet, an increase of \$343.56.

Our membership now stands at 136, an increase of 15 over last year.

Respectfully submitted,

Eleanore McGavin

Treasurer.

JUNIOR BRANCH NOTES

by Freeman King

The highlight of this month was the planting of 400 tree seedlings on the experimental plot at Beaver Lake.

Fifteen boys and girls worked like beavers, starting in the morning and completing the work by 3 p.m.

The trees are planted in rows eight feet apart, so that they will have lots of opportunity to expand and have sufficient ground to get the necessary plant food.

Douglas fir, balsam fir, hemlock, western red cedar, Port Orford cedar, Sitka spruce, black spruce and jack pine, as well as a few mountain ash and sycamores were planted. The plantation has been plotted as to the number of seedlings and the rows of each.

There is a portion of the plot which we hope to plant with flowering native shrubs another season.

During our trip to Goldstream Park, we found trilliums that had petals which were partly green, and one plant that was a pale yellow in color. These plants were marked and next year will be observed to see if they again show these colorings.

It was noted there is a large patch of coltsfoot growing in the flats which could, during the winter high tides, be covered with salt water.

Thanks to the trails that the Junior Rangers have built to the top of Mount Finlayson, our climb proved not too tough for the youngest of our party (but a bit heavy going for the leader - not enough wind I think). There we found the tiny Red Maid plant growing on the mossy rocks. The woolly sunflowers were also found. Amongst the manzanitas there were hundreds of wild honey bees collecting their nectar and pollen; it would be interesting to find out where their nests are hidden.

On Saturday last we went to Brentwood Bay and explored the beach for sea animal life.

Expeditions coming up are a trip to Tod Inlet to make a study of pond and stream life, and an all day trip to Sandstone Creek in the Jordan River area to look for fossils.

Many thanks to those who have so kindly supplied cars for our trips. Without them we could not have had the fun and the interesting times we have had.

Will anyone who wishes to be present at our meetings please phone me at 9-2966.

THE STORY OF A PET SCREECH OWL

by K. Osborne.

Little did we realize, when Bobby brought us a funny looking little bundle of grey down with huge eyes, that we were being launched on the most delightful and interesting of all our experiences with pets ranging in size from white mice to goats. It was a helpless baby owl not nearly ready to leave its nest, but how it came to be on the ground, with no parent birds or nest to be found, has remained a mystery.

The immediate problem, of course, was food. Flies, spiders, grasshoppers, worms, etc., were plentiful and acceptable, but even baby screech owls need meat. At that time we had a cat, Honey by name, who was a great hunter and mouser. Whenever he made a kill he brought it home to be admired, himself to be praised, and his efforts rewarded with a saucer of milk. While we were pondering the meat situation for the new addition to the family - along came Honey with a fat field mouse. Here, we thought, was the answer to our problem. We gave Honey an extra big drink of milk, and while he was not looking, filched his mouse. That was the one and only time. It was over a month before Honey brought in another kill, and from then on he kept a wary eye on us. Meanwhile, Owly's insect diet was supplemented with beef kidney.

When Owly grew big enough to move around easily, he roved throughout the house with the curiosity of the proverbial cat, investigating everything within his range. From the beginning he preferred to be right with us which called for constant care on our part lest we accidentally stepped on him. In the evenings as I sat reading, when he grew tired of prying into things, he came to me to be picked up so he could nestle in the crook of my arm and go to sleep. As he became better able to navigate he learned to climb the front of the chesterfield by pulling himself up with his strong hooked beak.

As a rule a wild pet is ever on the alert for a chance to escape to its natural environment, but this has never been the case with Owly. An outside door left open had no attraction for him, but tended rather to make him nervous and upset.

Our home had an unfinished porch off the kitchen. It was our intention to supply Owly with a deep box and let him live there during the winter months - screech owls being acclimatized to prairie winters. Though the porch was his favorite hangout, once the weather made it neces-

sary to close the inside door, he would have none of it, and was in danger of breaking his neck with banging against the door trying to get into the house with us. We let him in to see what he would do. As though he really understood that we wanted to see if it would be possible to have him inside all the time, he flew directly to Bobby's room and began looking things over. The first place he laid claim to was the top shelf in an open corner cupboard. We cleared it, covered it with newspapers, and gave him a deer antler for a roost. His second choice was the ledge of the window in the same room overlooking a grove of poplars, some of which overhung the house, and from where he could watch events in the bird world outside. We put a bar across the doorway with a dropping board under it. Anyone over five feet tall had to duck or get bumped, which was something of a nuisance, but anyone scatty enough to adopt an owl is not easily fazed. From this doorway perch Owly could keep an eye on all that went on in the house. A cage to shut him in at night or when everyone was going out, completed the necessary arrangements. Living in a heated house did, however, produce an unexpected development. At the end of a few weeks Owly moulted all his tail feathers and most of his wing pinions which he did not replace until late spring. This hampered his flight, and though it was probably very frustrating for him, it was easier for us to keep track of him.

The most amazing feature of this funny little character is his capacity for loving. We expected that, being a bird of prey - a killer - he would have a nasty disposition at times. Instead, he is as loving as he is lovable.

When Owly was about a year old, Bobby went to camp for nine days. Owly was desolate! He moped and went on a hunger strike. At the end of the second day Ernie returned from a trip, and he managed, after a long siege of coaxing, to get him to eat. But for the whole time that Bobby was away, Owly sat on the window ledge watching up the path for his return. Such devotion in a little wild bird is not only amazing - it is pathetic.

There are many who think that owls cannot see in the daylight. Such is not the case. Owly can sight a mosquito across the length of a room just as quickly and easily in the daylight as he can at night. However, it is at night that he is most alert and active. Many times after Bobby was in bed and asleep, Owly would want him to wake up and play with him. He would nibble Bobby's face and kiss with

his tongue as a budgie bird does, and try to get him to open his eyes, making little chuckling coaxing sounds all the while. We have seen Bobby, many times, pull the sheet up over his head and Owly work for an hour if need be to get him uncovered again. The outcome was always the same - Owly eventually gave up, and snuggling against Bobby's cheek, went to sleep too.

Owly could always hold his own with the house cat, Tiny Mite. As a rule they ignore each other, but on occasion will share a window ledge or other lookout vantage point. The canary is, of course, a delicious looking dinner, so we must be careful that Mr. Pip does not become just that. Owly and the dog are not a combination to turn our backs on either. When we brought home a fat little four-weeks old puppy, Owly was terrified of her and retreated to his top shelf hideaway for a couple of weeks. Now that Smokey is a full-grown German Shepherd, Owly never passes up a chance to try to beat up on her.

Last August we moved from Manitoba to Victoria - pets and all. Owly in his cage in the baggage car took a lively interest in all that went on around him, and was himself the source of much interest and amusement to the train men. And now in his new home, he has better reason than ever for wanting to stay indoors with his own friendly humans. The gulls terrify him. We let him out one day in the sun and all was fine until a gull flew over. Owly scuttled for cover and refused to come out into the open again. From his cage in the window he can watch the gulls and knows that he is safe from them. No wide open spaces for him - thank you.

Right now he has no tail, but he did not lose his wing pinions during the winter so his flight is fairly good. He can fly across the room making considerable noise and breeze with his wings, or he can fly within a few inches of our heads and not make a whisper of sound. When a stranger comes within sight, he stretches up to his full height, flattens his feathers, raises those over his beak like hackles, his ear tufts or horns stand erect, and the pupils of his eyes become mere hostile slits showing yellow all around them. When only his own humans are about, his feathers are fluffed out, his horns are flat so his head looks more like that of a pygmy owl, and the pupils of his eyes are full and dark, as soft and gentle looking as a baby rabbit's. He has a number of sounds with which to indicate his moods or his wants, but he does not screech.

Are screech owls not subject to mites as are other wild birds? We do not know. I have never handled a wild bird, even a nestling, that was not as lousy as the proverbial crow. Owly has never had a mite on him. He is clean in his habits as all wild things are clean in their own way. He bathes as regularly as he is given the opportunity, and in doing so, puts on a slapstick comedy act that is priceless.

Owly has shared our home for three years. We have been told we may hope to have him for seven years more, but we hope to have our little feathered friend with us much longer than seven years.

VANCOUVER NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Eleven members of the above Society arrived at the Patricia Bay Airport on Sunday morning for their third annual trip to see the skylarks. They were met by members of our Society and taken around the north end of the Saanich peninsula. The weather was perfect, and everyone had a most enjoyable time.

Skylarks there were in abundance. Immediately on alighting from the plane, the party was greeted by many singing right overhead. At Roberts Point they found the black oyster catcher and black turnstones, birds unfamiliar to most of their members. What delighted them most was the beauty of the countryside and coast. At this time of year and on such a day it could not be surpassed.

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NOTICE OF MEETINGS1958

- Saturday: BIRD GROUP: Field trip to Tugwell Creek. Meet
 May 10:- at Monterey Cafe at 9:30 a.m., or
 at Tugwell Creek (beyond Sooke) at 10:45 a.m.
 Bring Lunch. Leader - J. O. Clay.
- Tuesday: ANNUAL MEETING: To be held this year in Cafe-
 May 13:- teria of Douglas Building on
 Elliott St. (close to Museum) at 8 p.m.
 Refreshments.
- Saturday: BOTANY GROUP: Field trip to Shawnigan Lake,
 May 17th: George Pringle Memorial Camp.
 Meet at Monterey Cafe at 9 a.m. Bring lunch.
 Leader, Miss M. C. Melburn.
- Saturday: BIRD GROUP: Boat trip to Portland Island or
 June 7th: some other small island off Sidney.
 Meet at Monterey Cafe at 9 a.m. or Deep Cove
 Wharf at 10 a.m. Bring lunch.
 Leader Mr. J. O. Clay.
- Saturday: BOTANY GROUP: Field trip to Saanichton Spit.
 June 14: Meet at Monterey Cafe 1:30 p.m.
 Leader Miss M. C. Melburn.
- Saturday: COMBINED TRIP: All groups of the Society will
 June 21: join in a field meeting at
 Muir Creek (beyond Sooke) meeting at Monterey
 Cafe at 9:30 a.m. or at Muir Creek at 10:45 a.m.
 Bring lunch. Mr. A.H. Marrion will lead the
 geology group, Miss Melburn the Botany and
 Mr. Clay the bird group.
- Saturday: BIRD GROUP: Boat trip to Ballingall Islands.
 July 5th: Meet at Monterey Cafe at 9 a.m. or at Deep
 Cove Wharf at 10 a.m. Bring lunch.
 Leader, Mr. J. O. Clay.
- Saturday: BOTANY GROUP: Field trip to John Dean Park.
 July 12: Meet at Monterey Cafe at 1:30 p.m.
 Leader, Miss M. C. Melburn.
- Saturday: BOTANY GROUP: Field trip to Goldstream Park.
 August 9: Meet at Monterey Cafe at 1:30 p.m.
 Leader Miss M. C. Melburn.

Victoria Natural History Society

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J. A. MUNRO,
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