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(F. L. Beebe)

Muskrat

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OUR COVER

The muskrat is a native of the mainland of British Columbia, but was introduced to Vancouver Island many years ago, and is now found in numbers in many of the swamps and lakes. It is extensively trapped for its fur.

The muskrat prefers the marshy borders on lakes and rivers, where it feeds upon the sedges, pond weeds and other plants growing in and near the water. Dead fish, fresh-water mussels and other animal matter are eaten when available. It sometimes lives away from the water, making burrows in fields, into hay-stacks, or in brier thickets, but these are generally displaced animals unable to find more favourable habitat. In deep water areas it lives in burrows, but in shallow sedge-meadow areas where water levels are stable it may build large mounds of vegetation with the nest in the centre. Beaver lodges are occasionally occupied, along with the beavers. It has two and sometimes three litters a year, averaging six young to a litter.

(From 'The Mammals of British Columbia' by
Ian McTaggart Cowan and Charles J. Guiguet)

BIRD FIELD MEETING

A group of eighteen members spent four hours at Island View Beach on Saturday, November 15th. It was a sunny day after frost with a chilly northeast wind and a choppy sea running. Members kept moving to keep warm in the cool breeze and were amply repaid in making a list of forty-four species there. A typical cross-section of our local winter birds were seen, including four shrikes, small flocks of pipits, many red-winged and Brewer blackbirds and too many starlings, and one short-eared owl. The party then moved on to Shoal Harbour and the sea coast above Sidney. A total of 57 species were seen in the two areas and a grand total of 85 were identified by the various members of the party on this day. A list of the 57 species of birds observed at this meeting will be found on page 48.

J.O.C.

THE NOVEMBER MEETING

The General Meeting was held in the museum on the evening of Armistice Day, and, in spite of the heavy rain there was a good turnout of members and friends, about sixty people being present.

The President had to advise of the death of two members, Col. Woodward, a member of many years standing, and J.A. Munro, one of the old-time ornithologists of the Province, and an honorary member of the Society.

The President also announced the following: first, that the nominating committee advised that Mr. A.H. Marrion had been appointed as Vice-President, subject to the approval of the members; second, that the brief for the protection of predators was now in progress, and that many prominent individuals and societies had been requested by letter to support the brief before it is presented to the legislature; third, that the Audubon Society of Canada had asked if they could have a list of the names of the members, for circularizing purposes. Put to the vote of the members present, the letter was acceded to.

Mr. Jack Todd was the speaker for the evening. He had brought with him three reels of moving pictures in colour of the local birds, taken by himself. Included were many beautiful scenes of the rufous hummingbird feeding on the fireweed and other flowers. His movies of the black oyster-catcher on the rocks at Oak Bay were quite unique, while the series of his two pet coons playing on the lawn at his home were fascinating. He had some good shots of the two Hudsonian curlew on the rocks opposite the Old Charming Inn, (they can still be seen there) the Canada geese and their young broods on Prospect Lake, and many other of our local birds. All of them were most interesting and the audience thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Mr. Ralph Fryer, in thanking Mr. Todd for his kindness in showing his films to the Society, stated that he knew from his own experience the vast amount of patience that had been necessary to obtain such a series of bird pictures.

In December the General Meeting will be held in the Cafeteria at the Douglas Building, when Mr. C.P. Lyons will give an illustrated lecture. Many of us still remember with pleasure his talk and magnificent movies shown to the Society last March.

A FIELD DAY WITH MR. JOHN LIVINGSTON

by Alan Poynter

Being an ardent bird watcher, Mr. Livingston requested a field trip while on his recent visit to Victoria, so a small group met on Sunday, 26th September, and started the day off with a bang by finding a marbled godwit at Bowker Avenue. This is the second time this bird has been seen in the Victoria vicinity this fall.

Several stops were made on the route to Sidney, one in particular was to watch a red-breasted sapsucker which Mr. Livingston spotted near Beckwith Avenue, Lake Hill. This was a 'first' for several of the group. The western blue-birds were also seen on Royal Oak Avenue.

Dr. and Mrs. Clifford Carl very obligingly took us around the inner islands on their houseboat, the "Carlsark", playing the perfect hosts, while we revelled in the water birds that were to be seen in every bay, and were present in vast flocks on the open water. Most of the birds seen were our normal winter residents, but we did see several Pacific loon, and Heerman gulls, and got a few good close looks at the very beautiful old squaw ducks.

Mr. Livingstone was very pleased to see one rhinoceros auklet, which was a 'first' on his list.

The "Carlsark", which was designed and built by Dr. Carl with the assistance of his boys, was able to land the party on the beach of Pym Island, where we spent a pleasant lunch hour before crossing over to Sidney Island spit. A small rocky island (Reay Island) off the north end of Forrest Island was covered with cormorants of all three species, several species of gulls and a flock of approximately 85 sand-lings together with several red-backed and Aleutian sandpipers. In future I would recommend approaching this rock from the windward side.

Sidney Island spit is always interesting with the hundreds of ducks off its shores. One black brant was seen in the midst of several hundred ducks, and on the return trip approximately 400 red-backed sandpipers were moving down the spit, showing their light and dark colours as they wheeled and turned with their split-second timing.

Fifteen persons took part in this trip, and a total of 69 species were seen, which is a good count for a single day.

The weather was perfect; there were plenty of birds, and this was voted the most enjoyable trip of the year.

THE LITTLE QUALICUM RIVER

Before the ice spread over northern lands
And long before man came upon the scene
The rivers ran from mountains to the sea.
Antarctica and Greenland are still capped
The last of the great ice sheets of the earth.

The Pleistocene endured a million years
And four world ice caps formed successively.
The snow stretched southward over Canada
And over other continents afar
Until a third of all the land on earth
Was weighted with a load that made it sink.
The mountains of the west were fields of white
Except for topmost peaks, the nunataks.

The ocean furnished all this snow and ice
And so was lowered several hundred feet.
The earth's depression took a longer time.

When warming climate caused the cap to melt
The streams were forced to overflow and flood
Depositing their loads of sand and mud.
Returning water made the ocean rise
To drown the coast before the land came up.
The fossil shells that mark this littoral
Are found high up above the present tide.

When thick enough the ice moved down the slope
And rocks that fell in cracks to reach the sole
Were frozen fast to form a hardened rasp
Uprooting forests and removing soil.

Below Mount Arrowsmith east of the pass
The ice scoured deep and dug the site to be
The lovely curving lake named Cameron.
The Little Qualicum now drains this tarn,
And with a gentle current purls along
Meandering to where the falls begin.

Steep cliffs of rock appear and rapids foam.
The water races swiftly towards the brink
And pours a constant stream that formed a hole
Ground round by pebbles whirled in glacial floods.

Beyond the falls a gorge is dimly seen
A steep walled canyon cut in solid rock.
It seems impossible that present flow
Could sink this narrow trench, but long ago
The volume of melt water that ran down
Could drag coarse gravel ceaselessly along
And this is likely how the bed was worn.

In gentler clime to-day the winter snow
When melted by the early summer sun
Refills the lake and floods the Qualicum
A token only of its former run.
The charm is kept without the violence.

The Little Qualicum from source to sea
Has carved a record of its history.

A.O.Hayes

EARLY HISTORY OF THE EARTH

by A. O. Hayes

Speculation regarding the earth's origin continues.
The nebular hypothesis of Laplace that satisfied most astronomers and geologists for a century has been modified.
Chamberlain's planetesimal hypothesis is also criticized severely, and while both these ideas have added much to knowledge, they are superceded by suggestions more in keeping with the progress of astro-physics.

In a personal communication from Dr. Wright following his lecture on "Earth in relation to the Universe" in September 1958, I learned that instead of the concept of "passing suns", the explosion of a super nova of high density gas is being considered for the origin of our sun and the solar system.

Analysis of radioactive minerals have established the ages of the eras approximately as follows:-

Era		Time in million years, from beginning to the present	
Cenozoic	began	60	more or less
Mesozoic	"	180	"
Paleozoic	"	500	"
Proterozoic	"	1000	"
Archeozoic, Unknown, but includes the oldest rocks such as those at the Yellowknife gold mine 2130 to 2500 million years, and from Northern Minnesota 2400 to 2500 million years.			

FUNGUS FORAY

Twenty-four members turned out for the Annual Fungus Foray held November 8th at Thetis Park. The weather was not ideal but the only sprinkles of rain lasted just five minutes. There was still much beauty in the foliage of trees and shrubs and in some areas the ground was completely covered with a golden carpet of maple leaves.

A survey of the area had been made the previous Tuesday to spy out the best locations for the Saturday walk, and the combined listing numbered more than 60 species.

A few of these are as follows:- A dainty coral fungus (*Clavaria cinerea*); a great favorite with the slugs, giant clitocybe (*Clitocybe gigantea*); bird's nest fungus (*Crucibulum vulgare*) and its cousin *Nidularia*, both growing on dead wood; elf's saddle (*Helvella lacunosa*) its ashy-black cap mounted on its deeply-carved pure-white stem; two species of inky caps (*Coprinus micaceus* and *C. atramentarius*); *Xylaria hypoxylon* growing on half-buried decayed wood, its long black "fingers" white-tipped with abundant spores. Near the children's beach there was a good patch of the gregarious sweet lactarius (*Lactarius subdulcis*) their shining red-brown caps conspicuous in their dull surroundings.

The largest specimen of the day was found growing on the trunk of a willow tree, a golden-brown *Pholiota* fully 9 inches in cap diameter; the smallest specimen was a pure-white *Marasmius* species whose cap diameter was less than a quarter of an inch; these little mushrooms were clustered like pins in a pincushion all over the surface of a decaying log.

Cameras and lunch kits added to the pleasure of the outing. Why not have another "foray" some fine day?

M.C.Melburn.

ALASKA LONGSPUR

It is rather remarkable that this bird was seen here on two successive years on the same day and at the same place. One bird in each case. Was it the same bird? We will never know. Cattle Point was the place and October 5th the date.

These birds nest further north than the most northerly point in British Columbia, and are by no means regular visitors to this area.

A.R.D.

THE CANADIAN AUDUBON SOCIETY

Mr. John A. Livingston, executive director of the above Society, paid his annual visit to Victoria late in October, and addressed a well attended meeting on Monday, October 27.

His talk was concerned with the protection of wild life, and he strongly urged the Victoria Natural History Society to prepare a brief for presentation to our Legislative Assembly asking that blanket protection be given to all predators, stating that the recent Amendment to the Provincial Game Act extending protection to eagles and certain hawks is not satisfactory from the point of view of coverage and enforcement.

At the present time, the goshawk, Cooper's hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, the horned and snowy owls can be legally killed, and, as he rightly stated, few people can identify these species in the air, which means that complete protection for all the birds of prey is the only effective legislation. Control, when necessary, is already provided for under the present Act.

Mr. Livingston illustrated his talk with some beautiful slides of the roseate spoonbill, a bird which had been practically exterminated in North America before the Audubon Society took the matter up, and eventually had protection afforded it in the United States. From then on these birds gradually increased in numbers, and have now established themselves in various localities in the southern States.

We were very pleased to have Mr. Livingston with us on this occasion, and the best wishes of the Society go to him in his efforts to have protection given our Canadian wildlife, and in his strong protests against the increasing use of insecticides, which are having so deadly an effect on our beneficial insects, the birds and wildlife in general.

SNOW BUNTING

As circumstanced on the previous page, birds are very regular in their migration. Another example is the above bird, which has been seen so seldom on Vancouver Island that it is virtually unknown here, but on October 26th, 1956 two were seen on Esquimalt Lagoon. On the 31st of October last year we saw one at Cattle Point and this year two were seen by Messrs. Sterling and Morgan at the Esquimalt Lagoon. We have some good observers in the field now and more unusual birds are being reported.

A.R.D.

LIST OF BIRDS SEEN ON THE FIELD TRIP
ON THE SAANICH PENINSULA ON NOV.18th

Common loon	- - -	Old squaw
Holboell grebe	- - -	Harlequin
Pied-billed grebe	- - -	White-winged scoter
Horned grebe	- - -	Surf scoter
Western grebe	- - -	American scoter
Double-crested cormorant	- - -	Ruddy duck
Pelagic cormorant	- - -	Red-breasted merganser
Heron	- - -	Greater yellowlegs
Mallard	- - -	Red-backed sandpiper
Baldpate	- - -	Black turnstone
Pintail	- - -	Killdeer plover
Green-winged teal	- - -	Glaucous-winged gull
American goldeneye	- - -	Short-billed gull
Greater scaup	- - -	California gull
Bufflehead	- - -	North-west crow
Sharp-shinned hawk	- - -	North-west shrike
Red-tailed hawk	- - -	Starling
Ruffed grouse	- - -	Red-winged blackbird
Pheasant	- - -	Brewer blackbird
Short-eared owl	- - -	Robin
Kingfisher	- - -	House finch
Marbled murrelet	- - -	Sitka crossbill
Red-shafted flicker	- - -	Oregon towhee
Yellow-shafted flicker	- - -	Oregon junco
Pipit	- - -	White-crowned sparrow
Raven	- - -	Golden-crowned sparrow
Chickadee	- - -	Fox sparrow
Creeper	- - -	Winter wren
		Bewick wren

A Lewis woodpecker has taken up its residence on a large oak tree across the school grounds from where I live on Monterey Avenue. It seems to live mostly on acorns, which are placed in a crevice on the tree and pounded to pieces. It has trouble though; the crows love to pester it, but so far they have been unable to dislodge it. The other day I noticed five crows trying to get the Lewis out of the tree, but although the Lewis is a much smaller bird, it finally chased them all away. Immediately afterwards a Steller jay appeared in the tree, but after putting five crows to flight, the Lewis was not going to take anything from a jay, which disappeared from the vicinity in high gear.

A.R.D.

COWBIRDS ON SOUTHERN VANCOUVER ISLAND

by A.R.D.

Up to ten years ago there was no official record of this bird having been seen on the island, but in July of 1955 we found a young cowbird being fed by a yellow warbler at Cadboro Bay.

Since then many reports of their presence have been received. There seems no doubt that these rather unwelcome visitors are here to stay, as this year we have had reports of young cowbirds being fed by different species of our native birds, who so easily fall a victim to this parasitical member of the bird family.

One day in July a group of members visiting Saanichton Spit saw a chipping sparrow being pestered for food by a relatively enormous immature cowbird. Other reports from our members include cowbirds being fed by juncos, song sparrows, McGillivray warbler and lutescent warbler.

THE NUTHATCH

I see you there, your head to earth,
Race down that limb. There is no dearth
Of bugs! Then stop and rest a bit.
Come, chat awhile with me. Don't flit,
But just explain this cunning wile
Of running upside-down. I smile
To see you there, your tail to sky,
Your eye so bright; do you decry
My right-side-up? Or is it true
That thus you have a clearer view
Of this, a topsy-turvy age?
If such be so then you presage
A clever race of men who know
(When giddy storms around them blow
And nothing seems to come out right
As Reason shows a dimmer light)
A sane solution will be found
By meditating upside-down!

Ellise Collier

(From the "Atlantic Advocate"
published in Fredericton N.B.)

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A FEDERATION OF NATURALISTS

by Gladys E. Soulsby

On July 14th last at the home of Mr. Frank J. Sanford in Vancouver, a meeting was held to discuss the formation of a B.C. Naturalists' Federation. Those present from the Vancouver Natural History Society were Mr. Sanford (President), Dr. M. Y. Williams, Dr. V. C. Brink and Mr. A. R. Wootton. Mrs. Gladys E. Soulsby represented the Victoria Natural History Society and the Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary Ass'n.

Mr. Wootton was elected Chairman. The aims, objects, membership, funds, publications, meetings, etc. were discussed, and all agreed on the necessity of forming such a society in our province. It was also agreed that this society would in no way interfere with the autonomy of the local groups. Plans for a further meeting were made, and copies of the minutes of this meeting were to be sent to the North Okanagan Naturalists Club in Vernon, and the Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary Association in Victoria, for their discussion and comment.

On October 25th another meeting was held in the Provincial Museum at Victoria. Mr. Frank J. Sanford and Dr. V.C. Brink came from Vancouver, Miss Anne Gorham and Mr. Ed. Lohbrunner (President) came from the Thetis Park Ass'n; the Victoria Natural History Society being represented by Dr. Clifford Carl and Mrs. Soulsby. Unfortunately the North Okanagan Club were unable to send a representative. Mrs. Soulsby was elected chairman and Dr. Carl the secretary of this group.

Owing to the difficulty of electing officers for a federation at this time, it was agreed that those present would constitute themselves as an Interim Committee for nomination officers, and that the Vancouver representatives follow up enquiries from Chilliwack for a Natural History Society there. Victoria representatives are to establish contacts with Nanaimo with a view to a meeting there.

It was agreed that by early spring we plan for a small general meeting and a slate of officers be presented.

POISONING OF FISH

In a recent issue of the Colonist it was reported that rotenone will be used in two years' time to poison all the fish in Prospect Lake and then have the lake re-stocked with trout. This is very nice for the few fly fishermen but a disaster for the many children who spend their summers at this lake. Possibly the Society can interest itself in this matter.

A.R.D.

THE JUNIOR PAGE

by Freeman King

On Sunday, November 1st, the senior members of the junior branch made an exploring expedition to the other side of Jordan River. After travelling about seven miles beyond the settlement we attempted to make a cross country trip from the road to the sea. After travelling along an old logging road for about a mile we headed into the scrub. Bracken, salal and salmon berry all over our heads. That, and the slash that had been left made it really tough going. When we finally reached the edge of the cliffs we found it almost impossible to get down to the beach. By this time we were not on the ground but walking on the salal, and even then it was over our heads. We finally made it and stopped on an old log to eat our lunch, then back through the brush to the road.

After reaching the car we went back to Jordan River and saw the Pacific breakers roll in. They were quite large, apparently from the storm that had raged the day before. We then moved back to Muir Creek where more explorations were made, and landed back home at 5 p.m., having had a wonderful day, all of us tired and scratched, but having had a lot of fun, even if it was a bit crowded with seven of us in an old Austin.

The trip to Shawnigan Lake during the summer proved a huge success. We met at the E. & N. depot at 8:30 a.m. and filed into the coach. There were fifty of us, including the adults! The girls and boys got quite a thrill going over the trestles at the Malahat, many of them never having been on a train before.

On reaching the lake we went up to the village and parked some of our equipment, then hiked to the picnic grounds on the east side of the lake. There we put our lunches on the tables alongside the beach and explored the waterfront for plants, fungi and water creatures, including some large crayfish. After lunch we hiked back to the village; there we gave the children a chance to purchase a bottle of pop, etc., at the store. They went in by groups and were more than good in their behaviour.

Then an exploratory trip to the top end of the lake, where we found some late specimens of flowering plants, more crayfish and various kinds of rocks. Then back to the village where we had secured the Community Hall for about half an hour's show of coloured slides of the Provincial Parks of B. C. We landed back at 7 p.m. after an enjoyable outing without a kick or a complaint. Many thanks to the parents who went along.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS1958DECEMBER

9th:

GENERAL MEETING OF THE MONTH for all members and prospective members. At this meeting Mr. C. P. ("Ches") Lyons, ardent photographer of wildlife and nature subjects, graduate in Forest Engineering and now an official of the Parks Branch of the B. C. Forest Service, will show films and address the Society at 8 p.m. in the Cafeteria of the Douglas Building. This is across the street from the Museum, on Elliott Street, down stairs.

Mr. Lyons, a resident of Victoria, is author of TREES, SHRUBS and FLOWERS to know in BRITISH COLUMBIA and other books on the history and traditions of B. C. His latest bears the title, MILESTONES ON VANCOUVER ISLAND.

There are no official group meetings for December, nor does an Audubon Screen Tour visit Victoria this month.

JUNIORS:

Indefatigable Mr. Freeman King is still commanding the admiration and respect of everyone who is aware of his work with "the Juniors". He needs help. The numbers attending his field trips are growing larger and larger. It is an indication not only of his capacity to lead and interest young people, but of their natural bent toward the outdoors and in wholesome activity. Is this not what we look for - to assist these young people to establish tastes and inclinations which will in years to come help them toward good citizenship?

For this month "Skipper" plans the following:

Transplanting trees and shrubs.

Winter bud expedition.

Seashore expedition.

The older members of the Society are invited to join in at any time on these outings. His telephone number is GR.9-2966

NOTE: The second annual Party for Juniors is planned for January, 1959.

Victoria Natural History Society

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