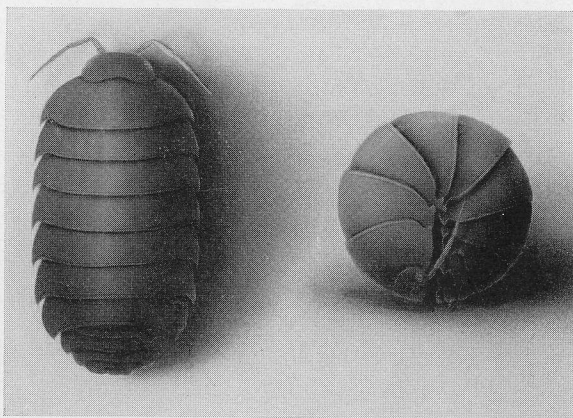


The
**VICTORIA
NATURALIST**

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Pillbug

(F. L. Beebe)

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JANUARY, 1959

The following tribute to Miss Perry, who died in the Royal Jubilee Hospital on December 7th, was written by her friend Mrs. E.M. Rive, Secretary of the Victoria and Island Branch of the Canadian Authors' Association.

The late Miss M. Eugenie Perry, a third generation Canadian, was born in Kirkfield, Ont., but lived for a time in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Later she moved to Victoria where she was a resident for 42 years.

Miss Perry's work appeared in scores of magazines, and newspapers in Canada, the British Isles and the United States and consisted of poetry, short stories, children's features and plays. One of her poems is included in the British Columbia: A Centennial Anthology.

Among her published books were: "The Hundred and Fifty Thousand Strong", a history of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clubs in Canada, and four books of verse: "Hero in Ermine" and other poems, (1939); "Hearing a Far Call", (1942); "Canteen", War Verse, (1944), and "Song in the Silence" and other poems, (1947).

In 1955 Ryerson Press of Toronto brought out her book "Green Timbers", which was dedicated to "my many friends of the Victoria Natural History Society, for without their friendship and inspiration many of these poems would never have been written." Included in this volume were poems which had appeared in Canadian Poetry Magazine, Contemporary Verse, New York Herald-Tribune, Chatelaine, The Hearing Eye, Washington Post, Ottawa Journal, Winnipeg Free Press, Regina Leader-Post, Victoria Colonist, Victoria Times and Victoria Naturalist.

Miss Perry was a member of the Editorial Board of the B. C.: A Centennial Anthology and a charter member of the Victoria Natural History Society. She was also a charter member of the Victoria & Islands Branch of the Canadian Authors' Association, had been President for several years and held numerous other executive offices. At the time of her death Miss Perry was Honorary President.

THE GENERAL MEETING

The December meeting of the Society was held in the Douglas Building Cafeteria on Tuesday the 9th.

The President, Mrs. Gladys Soulsby, was in the chair, and her first duty was to announce the death of one of our senior members, Miss Eugenie Perry, who had been a valued member of the executive for many years.

Mrs. Soulsby also announced that the Society's brief for the protection of birds of prey (printed in full in this issue) is well under way. Prominent citizens, societies, and various organizations have been written, and most of them have unhesitatingly endorsed the petition.

The Society now plans to initiate the formation of a small library for the benefit of the members. Books and magazines on all departments of natural history will be purchased. For the time being, this library will be housed at the home of Mrs. Eleanore McGavin, our Treasurer. Suggestions of what to purchase will be welcomed, as also will donations of useful books and natural history magazines.

The speaker for the evening was Mr. C. P. Lyons, a member of the Parks Division of the Provincial Government. As a writer he is well known to the public, and as a lecturer he always has a warm welcome from the members of the Society.

Mr. Lyons has the facility of talking interestingly and humourously on all phases of natural history. Never does he get pedantic or dull, and his beautiful slides included flowers, animal life, insects, birds, and some magnificent photographs of British Columbia scenery. He received a hearty vote of thanks from Mr. A. H. Marrion, and an enthusiastic accord from the audience, which was so large that it was well this meeting was held where it was as the Museum would not have accommodated it.

Mr. Lyons finished his talk with a quotation taken from a plaque over the fireplace in the home of Olaus J. Murie, Moose, Wyoming, who, when he was asked who had written it, stated that its origin is lost in antiquity.

"The Wonder of the World,
The Beauty and the Power,
The Shape of Things,
Their Colours, Lights and Shades.
These I saw, Look ye also, while life lasts"

OUR COVER

Pillbugs, sowbugs, woodlice or slaters, call them what you will, they are one of the most successful groups of invertebrates judging by their ability to populate the earth. Members of this group, properly called isopods, are found in every part of the world and terrestrial forms have accompanied man wherever he has penetrated except the arctic and antarctic regions.

The isopods are crustaceans in which the body is flattened dorso-ventrally and the legs are more or less all alike. (Hence the name isopod which means "equal legs".) The hindmost appendages are modified into gills for respiration and are carried in a special chamber beneath the "tail". Most members of the group live in the sea and a few in fresh water. Some of them are parasitic. Only a small number have managed to "make the break" from the ancestral aquatic environment and adapt themselves to life on land. These are the so-called woodlice and their relatives commonly found in the garden and in other damp situations.

On land these creatures have become associated with man particularly in the farm yard. The name sowbug for our most common species reflects the farm background and its Latin name Porcellio (meaning little pig) does the same. The less common pillbug gets its name from its ability to roll into a pill-sized ball for protection when disturbed. Its scientific name Armadillidium also stems from this behavior which reminds one of the armadillo.

The pillbug is a relatively recent arrival in British Columbia. It may be found in gardens particularly in greenhouses where it is capable of doing some damage.

A NEW MAMMAL BOOKLET

Congratulations to the Saskatchewan Natural History Society on the appearance of their first Special Publication "A Guide to Saskatchewan Mammals" by Harvey Beck. The booklet contains keys, descriptions and distribution maps for all species known to occur in the Province and a few are illustrated by photographs. Write Mr. E. L. Fox, 1053 Gladmer Park, Regina, for a copy, price 50 cents.

BUSH-TITS - NOW YOU SEE THEM, NOW YOU DON'T

by G. M. Bell

Twenty, thirty, forty - uncountable - bush-tits have swarmed in a lilac bush where the Steller jays have eaten all the suet. Now they are away to the other side of the house, a mass of them on a hunk of fat hanging in a place inaccessible to the jays. Some of them find other spots where suet has been, a little remaining on twigs. A dozen perch on the wires from shed to garage and watch, then dart in their bee-like flight into trees and bushes. Suddenly there is again swarming, this time on a spiraea. Suet is fastened here beneath chicken wire, for protection from larger birds. House sparrows drive the littler birds away. Two bush-tits try to find means of reaching suet in the six by six foot wire bird house. They succeed in entering; but the rest of the flock departs, leaving these two unable to find the way out of the house. There are three openings, but the frantic flying onto the wire in one place and another - all the while rapidly tinkling their note groupings -- gives them no time to figure out where they came in. The suet is untouched, a greater urge propels the gregarious mites of birds. Follow the flock, follow the flock, follow the flock. Is there a special leader? Humans watch and wonder, study and deduce.

The six foot door is opened wide for them. They are instantly away, tinkling round about the garden before departing from sound and from sight.

Each day they come from a southerly direction working northward. Perhaps they begin at one end of the street and go along it to the other. One thing we know - they will not stay, these tiny, grey birds with tinge of brown, wee heads and long tails; and the clusters of tinkling, fine notes like miniature bells.

UNUSUAL BIRDS OF THE MONTH: A cackling goose and a white fronted goose have joined company and can be seen at any time at the Esquimalt Lagoon.

Some whistling swans were seen at Swan Lake and Esquimalt Harbour. A mourning dove was seen on Island View Beach Road on December 6th. A Lewis woodpecker is wintering in a group of oak trees on Oliver Street.

The following is a copy of the brief delivered to Dr. David Turner, Deputy Minister of the Department of Conservation and Recreation in November, to be included in the bills presented to the Legislature in January:

'Victoria Natural History Society --
c/o Provincial Museum, Victoria, B. C.
November 28, 1958

'To The Honourable Earle C. Westwood,
Minister of Recreation and Conservation,
Victoria, B. C.

Sir:

As the matter of bird protection has concerned the members of the Victoria Natural History Society for many years we were pleased indeed to learn of the recent Amendment to the Provincial Game Act extending protection to eagles and certain hawks. We feel that it is certainly a step in the right direction.

However, as you know, the Amendment as it now stands is not satisfactory from the point of view of coverage and enforcement. Among the predator species three hawks and two owls are without protection.

It is recognized by most wildlife authorities that these birds are beneficial, or at worst are only occasionally harmful. Moreover, since few people can distinguish between the various species of hawks and owls, from the point of view of the enforcement it would be much more satisfactory to provide for no exceptions in this group. In other words we wish to see all birds of prey on the protected list. Control, when necessary, is already provided for under Section 4 of the present Act.

Further, to render the Act consistent we suggest that the wording of Section 14 be amended to extend protection to the eggs and nests of all eagles, hawks and owls. As it stands now certain birds are protected but their nests and eggs are not.

Respectfully yours,

Victoria Natural History Society."

EARTHQUAKES

Mr. W. G. Milne, Seismologist of the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory, gave an excellent talk on Tuesday, November 18th, on the subject of Earthquakes. He mentioned some of the large earthquakes of the past - Lisbon in 1755, where 30 to 60 thousand perished, due mostly to a tidal wave; India in 1898 and a repeat there in 1950; San Francisco in 1906; Los Angeles in 1857. The Seismograph was first used here in 1897 although Berkeley had used one in 1880. Around 1909 new discoveries were made by people in Central Europe concerning the earth's crust and core. He told of the fault of San Andreas in California where the road had been displaced 21 feet. Some slides of damaged buildings at Santa Barbara and vicinity showed the necessity of building in future to conform to earthquake risk. Honolulu has suffered at times from tidal waves and elaborate warnings have now been worked out. The speaker also stated that faults existed in the vicinity of Victoria, Leach River and Bare River and he mentioned the earthquakes that have occurred recently in our own vicinity.

During a question period at the end, Mr. Milne said that the test run during the ripple rock explosion at Campbell River showed at the observation station in Banff in less than 2 seconds. There are tests being made at Bamber-ton during their blasting operations to determine the rebound of the earth's crust.

G.E.S.

PANTING BIRDS

by Philip Symons

Everyone will remember how hot it was last summer. Many birds seemed to suffer from the heat as much as people. On May 24, 1958 at Port Alberni, I found two pairs of spotted sandpipers, each pair with a nest and four eggs. The nests were not particularly well sheltered from the sun, and incubating must have been a hot job. The sandpipers were often seen running about on the rocks in shallow water with their bills held open, panting like dogs. Birds have no sweat glands and must lose heat through the moist surfaces of the mouth if the normal method of cooling through the body's skin is not fast enough. About thirty feet away from the sandpiper's nests was a rose thicket. On the outskirts of this thicket a song sparrow would often sit with its wings

held out from his body and its mouth open too.

On June 18th at Sproat Lake, which is close to Alberni, there were three or four cedar waxwings which appeared to be finding it very hot work catching their food. They would sit puffing on a twig until they saw an insect nearby when they would fly off and snatch it out of the air, perhaps make a circle or two and then return once more to a branch.

Except for a panting crow which I once saw several years ago flapping its way wearily along a beach shore, these are the only species of birds which I have seen cooling down this way. It is likely, however, that most birds can cool down by panting if they become too hot. It would be interesting to know of other cases that anyone has seen.

THE EUROPEAN STARLING

Although starlings have been present in Victoria and vicinity for at least ten years, they were mostly seen in very small numbers. While taking the 1954 Christmas Count, we were astonished to find a flock of 142, and it seemed to us then as if the invasion had commenced. However, they did not stay, and for the next three years very few were reported, the largest flock on my list being twelve.

This summer many more were around, flocks of fifty being seen in various localities. As fall approached more and more arrived (presumably from the Vancouver area) and on the field trip of Nov. 15th, it was estimated the party saw at least five hundred. The previous week one experienced observer estimated he saw at least one thousand in one flock.

On December 6th, however, in the area bounded by Island View Beach Road, Martindale Road, and the Patricia Bay highway, we saw about two thousand. One flock alone was composed of not under fifteen hundred birds, all starlings. Some of the smaller flocks were mixed starlings, Brewer blackbirds, meadowlarks, pipits, skylarks and killdeer.

Up to the present time Vancouver Island has not been much troubled with foreign birds. House sparrows, it is true, are rather a nuisance, but they are confined mostly to the towns. The skylarks are a blessing, and displace no native birds. The Japanese starlings are confined to a few birds in the centre of Nanaimo. Two other species of N. American birds which have recently extended their territory to include V.I. - the house finches, and the bush-tits - are a welcome addition to our bird life. These European starlings, however, are a different matter, but there is nothing we can do about them. We will have to wait and see.

A.R.D.

NUMBERS GAME
by Horace Loftin

What great impulses can lead a citizen to abandon the comforts of home and office, in the face of sly smiles and broad jokes from friends and family, to spend a cold, wet day at bird watching?

These impulses are many and varied; but to many or most of the birdwatching tribe, it is the sporting instinct that gives them the biggest shove down the path of birding from which there apparently is no return.

You see, to a large extent, birding is an exciting game a type of "numbers game" as many play it.

According to the "birdwatchers' bible", the official Checklist of the American Ornithological Union, there are 1,686 species and subspecies of birds known from North America above the Mexican border. Any one area contains only a fraction of these birds, of course, but the eager birder wants his share of that fraction! Victory is sweet when he adds a new bird to his "life lists" -- those species which he has positively identified alive and in the field. It is sweeter when the new bird is one which his companions and friendly competitors have not managed to find.

Adding "life list birds" is routine at first. But after a while the easy birds will have been marked off and hunting starts in earnest.

As the bird watcher becomes more skillful through experience, however, the "tough" species will be added to his list. Thereafter, until he makes a birding trip to another section of the country, his "life listing" will just about be halted. So the numbers game takes new directions.

Initially, the bird watcher begins to play hard to see how many kinds of birds he can positively identify in a given area in a single day. This is where skill in identification and knowledge of the habits of birds begins to pay dividends. The difference between the beginner's daily list and that of the "professional" at the game of birding is a measure of how much the expert bird watcher has learned about the ways of wild creatures.

Then there come the annual list, the spring, fall and Christmas bird counts, the breeding bird censuses, the nest hunts, the life history studies, and on and on.

The birder is as much a sportsman as the hunter or fisherman. The chief difference, perhaps, is that the birder comes to know much more about his "prey". Birding is a numbers game in which the player always wins.

(from Science News Letter, November 22, 1958)

THE SHORE BIRDS OF OAK BAY

One morning in November, on one of our regular visits to the foot of Bowker Avenue, a place much favoured by shore birds, and hence by us, we saw a flock of about sixty black turnstones, very busy picking edible matter from a bank of seaweed; with them were sixty-five very lively red-backed sandpipers, scampering about on the logs and the shingle, mingling with the turnstones and feeding on what the lowering tide had left behind. Also in the group were about twenty black-bellied plover, all in their sober grey winter costume. All these birds winter here and can be seen whenever the tide is favourable.

Amongst these birds was one that stood out from the others by its very light colour. It was a knot. As Mr. Guiguet remarks in his "The Shorebirds of British Columbia" knots are uncommon here; in a four year period only having been recorded twice.

While watching all this interesting life almost at our feet, we noticed a small bird flying directly toward shore close to the water. Apparently exhausted, it slowed its wing beat and finally flopped into the sea about fifty feet from the beach. It just couldn't quite make it. We could not identify it, though it was obviously a passerine and not a shore bird. Slowly it swam closer to the shore, though still too far out for us to be of any assistance. With what seemed to be its last remaining strength, it raised its wings, beating them rapidly and managed to get just clear of the water. However, it dropped back again and seemed this time to be waterlogged, but finally another attempt enabled it to get into the air. Flying heavily it cleared the beach and landed in one of the gardens which here come right down to the shore. It was a fox sparrow. We watched, but didn't disturb it, and within a few minutes this nearly drowned bird was busily preening itself, so there was no doubt but that it would survive its ordeal.

A.R.D.

WHAT IS YOUR ANSWER?

In the December issue of the "Wood Duck", published by the Hamilton (Ontario) Naturalists' Club, there is an article written by their President, Mr. R. O. Elstone, which should be of considerable interest to our Society.

The following is condensed from this article:-

As an organization, are we interested in conserving natural areas about our City? The natural areas referred to are woodlands with trees and wildflowers, valleys with streams and waterfalls, bogs with unusual plants; stands of magnificent trees; swamps as habitats for birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals; scenic geological formations, etc. Let us think seriously of this question. We can answer that it is a waste of time and money. We can say it is a good idea but it will cost too much. We can shrug our shoulders and say it is too late, that something ought to have been done ten or fifty years ago. We can accept the idea that these remaining areas of natural beauty are doomed, and not be concerned, but enjoy them while they are here and when they are gone, suffer no ado. This is probable a realistic view point. These are attitudes we might have toward this most pressing question. I wonder, are these not the attitudes of those who are indifferent, uninterested, unimaginative, or merely people who lack faith in our Society.

On the other hand we might say, yes, we wish to preserve the few remaining natural beauty spots about this centre; that we do not wish to stand in the way of progress; that we only desire to have areas set aside as a reminder of what this vicinity was two hundred years ago, that we need a few areas as God created them, where a person may walk and not be molested by traffic, noise, fumes; a place of rest and meditation; a place where people can go and not feel they are trespassing.

Remember, the original question is ARE WE INTERESTED? If the answer is "YES", then we have a job to do.

Is it not up to us who enjoy nature to take on some of the responsibility. Some people believe the government should operate or administer more and more of our commerce, industries, culture and recreation. I have found in most cases, these advocates contribute little to the community and complain most vigorously about their taxes.

Will you think about this? Express your views at the meetings. Contribute an article to the magazine.

We would like to know your feelings.

THE JUNIOR PAGE

by Freeman King

As the schools were closed for the British Columbia Centennial holiday on November 19th, members of the seniors went on a tree seedling hunt to replace those that were lost owing to the dry summer.

We went to the gravel pit area on the Metchosin Road, where Douglas fir and balsam fir two year old plants were collected; then to Luxton for some hazel slips and on to Glen Lake for jack pine.

We then moved on to the Munn Road and hiked into the bush north east of the Thetis Lake area, where we made a fire on an old logging road and ate our lunches. We also explored a creek bottom and climbed some rocks where we found some overhanging cliffs that would make shelter in a storm, where we collected a number of red cedar seedlings.

On Saturday about twenty-five of our group turned out in spite of the rain to plant the seedlings at the tree plot at Beaver Lake. It was ideal planting, the ground being wet and soft. All the vacant spots were filled and an extra row planted.

Some of the group cleaned up and burnt an old rubbish pile that was an eyesore to the place. We then took an exploring trip to the little lake and to see the bee hives, then proceeded home, wet, but happy that a mission had been accomplished.

On Saturday, Nov. 27th, we had one of our rare indoor meetings, when movies of forestry and animal life were shown to a good turn-out, including some of the parents.

The seniors made their monthly exploration trip to McKenzie Lake in the Sooke area on Sunday the 30th. When we left town about 10:30 a.m. the weather was overcast but fair, but when we arrived at Young Lake, our jumping off place, it was raining. The hike into McKenzie was worth while, since the trail passed through a virgin grove of cedars and hemlock with several giant firs at least 400 years old. We also managed to set a number of white pine seedlings from a long parent tree that is still growing there.

The caretaker at the camp at Camp Barnard has a pet coon about eight months old. He was a real friendly little chap and soon got acquainted with the group. He stuck his nose into everything and found an egg on Joyce's pack, which he promptly snatched. By this time most of us were damp so we packed up and arrived home about 4:30 p.m.

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NOTICE OF MEETINGS1959

- SATURDAY
JAN.10th BIRD GROUP FIELD TRIP: Leader, Mr. J.O. Clay.
Meet below bus terminus, Uplands, (#3 bus),
at Midland Road, east, and Beach Drive, at
9:15 a.m. Bring lunch.
- TUESDAY
JAN.13th GENERAL MEETING: Coloured slides taken and
shown by members of the Victoria Natural
History Society, Mrs. Lucy Parris, Miss Muriel
Aylard, Miss Enid Lemon and Mr. P. M. Monckton.
Flowers and other plant life and some HIGH-
LIGHTS OF 1958. The Museum at 8 p.m.
- SATURDAY
JAN.17th
7 p.m. THE SECOND BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR JUNIORS:
King's Road Scout Hall at 7 p.m. A cor-
dial invitation is extended to all members.
The presence of members of the Senior Group
on this occasion will help to indicate appre-
ciation for the work being done with the
Junior Branch of the Society.
- TUESDAY
JAN.20th GEOLOGY: "The work of Glaciers as seen in
and around Victoria." Illustrated by
Mr. A. H. Marrion.
The Museum, 8 p.m.
(Note: This will be followed in February by
"Rehabilitation of life after the Glaciers."
The speaker, Dr. G. Clifford Carl.)
- TUESDAY
JAN.27th BOTANY evening: "Edible Plants."
Talk and demonstration.
Mr. Freeman King.
The Museum, 8 p.m.

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Victoria Natural History Society

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Telephone EV 4-8837

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A. R. DAVIDSON
825 Monterey Avenue, Telephone EV 4-9595

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