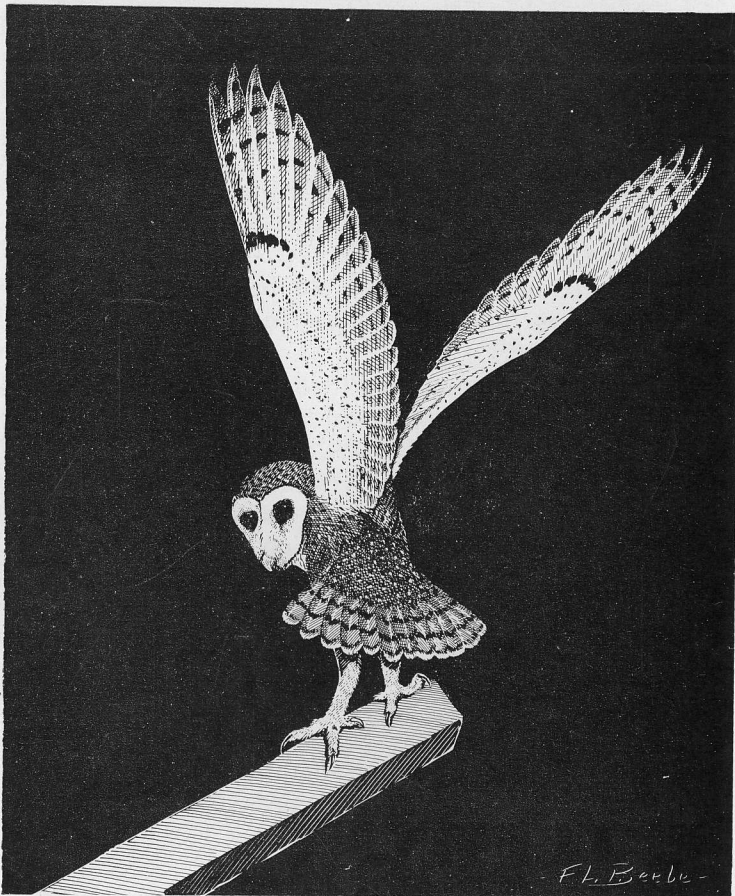


The
**VICTORIA
NATURALIST**

Vol. 15, No. 6

February, 1959



Barn Owl

Published by the
VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
Victoria, B.C.

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Vol.15, No.6

FEBRUARY, 1959

THE MONTHLY MEETING:

The General Meeting took place in the Museum on Tuesday, January 13th, with a capacity attendance, to see and hear our own members show their slides. On this occasion Mrs. Lucy Parris, Miss Muriel Aylard and Mr. Philip Monckton gave their audience a most interesting time with their diversified and beautiful slides. Miss Enid Lemon operated the projector and also showed a few slides of her own of a hummingbird and nest taken on River Bottom Road, in the Cowichan Valley, which quite probably was the nest and young of the Anna's hummingbird.

This could be the beginning of a popular series of lectures, as many of our members are enthusiastic photographers of birds, flowers and points of interest seen in their travels, and I am sure would be pleased to show their slides, obtained at the expense of much time and energy, to the other members of our Society.

Mrs. Gladys Soulsby, our President, brought up the question as to whether it would be feasible to have the Audubon Screen Tours given twice in Victoria to properly accommodate the large number of people who wish to attend. The suggestion was agreed upon by the members present, so the plan will be put into operation this fall.

A letter was read from Ellen Hart re the bronze plaque in Beacon Hill Park dedicated to the late Mrs. Hugh Mackenzie for the work she accomplished in the preservation of our wild flowers.

A letter was also read from Mr. David Turner re the proposed poisoning and re-stocking of Prospect Lake.

Miss Edith Valens is kindly acting as our secretary in the absence of Miss Latimer, who will be away for a few months.

OUR COVER

The barn owl, although it is resident in many parts of the northern hemisphere in suitable habitat, is by no means a common bird on Vancouver Island. The fact that it is a strictly nocturnal species makes it difficult to state what distribution it has in this district, but our records over the last twelve years include only one barn owl. It was seen by a group of members some years ago in the glen at Cadboro Bay.

THE VANCOUVER ISLAND WATER SHREW
by C. J. Guiguet, Provincial Museum

The water shrew, Sorex palustris, is an engaging little mammal which frequents streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, swamps and other marshy places. Although widespread on the adjacent mainland it was not included on the list of mammals for Vancouver Island until May, 1897. On that date a specimen was taken by Mr. D. Stevens at Millstream in Victoria's Highland District. This specimen, an adult male, was catalogued no. 985 and filed at the Provincial Museum but this fact was never publicized. Thirty-seven years rolled by before another specimen was taken.

On March 30, 1934, Major Allan Brooks sent a specimen, an adult female, to Dr. R.M. Anderson at the National Museum of Canada. This specimen was taken on the east side of Vancouver Island at Black Creek (north of Courtenay). Dr. Anderson, unaware of the Millstream record, promptly described a new subspecies after comparing this lone specimen with 70 specimens from the mainland. He named it Sorex palustris brooksi, the Vancouver Island water shrew, in honour of the man who collected it. Four years later (1938) Mr. Arthur Peake collected another, this one from Quatsino on the west coast of the island and twenty more years elapsed before another was taken. This one, an adult female, I took on August 22, 1958, at Miracle Beach, where Black Creek meets the sea.

The four specimens known to science are characterized chiefly by dark underparts (silvery white in other forms) and by minor skull differences, so that Dr. Anderson's descriptive gamble on the one specimen that he had seems justified.

There is little doubt that Sorex palustris brooksi is a valid subspecies. However, the series is far from adequate and many more specimens are required to round out the description, variations and habitat of this mammal. The lack of specimens is due simply to the fact that very little trapping has been done specifically for this mammal and general trap lines, which take terrestrial shrews, microtines, white-footed mice and other rodents, very seldom capture water shrews. If lines of traps were maintained on Millstream, Goldstream and others, and around the small lakes and marshes in the highland district, it is almost certain that additional specimens would be taken. Perhaps some member or members of the Natural History Society would find a great deal of excitement in seeking out this elusive and little known mammal which probably exists so close to home. The Prov. Museum will be happy to supply traps and advice upon request and to make up, acknowledge and file any specimens so taken.

FALL NOTES ON THE BIRDS
by Alan Poynter

Browsing through my notes recently, I realized there were several species of birds on migration that I had not noticed over the last two fall seasons, the first and foremost being the golden plover. Single birds were seen at various points along the waterfront, and three of them spent almost a month at Clover Point, from the 22nd of September to the 20th of October.

Several short-eared owls were recorded by our group, ranging from Island View Beach to Esquimalt Lagoon; all of these owls were close to the shore. After surprising a mature bird at Esquimalt Lagoon, I watched it climb almost out of sight, with three glaucous-winged gulls in close pursuit.

Flickers with yellow-shafted feathers were seen several times throughout November, mingling with flickers showing the more usual red-shafted feathers. I think a close watch of the flickers in any year will show these beautiful birds.

Red-breasted sapsuckers can once again be seen in city limits. I would recommend Beacon Hill Park for this bird, having seen two there myself. It is the first time in many years that this sapsucker has been reported wintering in Victoria.

For the second year in succession the Alaska longspurs have stopped off in the Victoria area on their fall migration. Last year this bird was seen for the first time for several years, and it appeared in small groups with pipits and horned larks. Not very many were seen this year, but it is good to know they were in our vicinity.

The ancient murrelet is a pelagic bird, little known to most of our group because of its scarcity, small size and preference for open water. However, after spending a number of hours on most of our rocky points during the last two weeks of November and into December and aided by the accurate observations of Dave Stirling, I formed the opinion that this small illusive bird was wintering here. Once again Clover Point proved to be an excellent observation area, bringing the murrelets to within fifty feet of the rocks.

During this same period large flocks of California murrelets, totalling into many hundreds, were seen, always well out in the straits, and flying in a very determined manner.

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THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The count this season was carried out by the following members:

- A. Dallas Road at Ogden Point to Clover Point: Mrs. H.M.S. Bell, Mrs. A.G. Gosling, and Mr. K.R. Beckett.
 B. Ross Bay to Humber Road: Mrs.M.Slocombe, Mr.Phylip Symons and Mr. J. O. Clay.
 C. Cadboro Bay and Ten Mile Point: Miss E.K. Lemon, Mrs.G.J. Jackson and Mr. J.H.C. Palmer.
 D. Queenswood and Finnerty Roads: Mrs. E.McGavin and Mr. A.R. Davidson.
 E. East Saanich to Mills Road: Miss M.C.Melburn and Miss L. Roberts.
 F. Saanich north of Mills Road: Mrs.J.A.Sherman, Mrs.E. McGavin and Mr. A.R. Davidson.
 G. Elk Lake and vicinity: Mrs. M.Slocombe, Mr.Phylip Symons and Mr. J. O. Clay.
 H. Swan Lake and Panama Flats: Mr.Alan Poynter, Mr.T.Briggs and Mr. K. Christiansen.
 I. Gorge Waters and Burnside district: Mr.and Mrs.D.Stirling, Mr.and Mrs. Barry Morgan and Mr. Ralph Fryer.

REPORT by J.O.CLAY

The Christmas Count was made on the 27th December, 22 members taking part. In addition to our previous annual counts, an extra area was included - The Gorge, Selkirk, Portage Inlet waters and Burnside.

Our total for this season was 37,974 birds. The enlarged area, together with unusually clear and still weather, gave the field groups an opportunity of recording ten species above last year's list. Total species observed were an even hundred, a record in this Centennial year. Another record was in the number of individual birds estimated and counted, one third more than last year's listing. This increase again is attributed to the count and estimate of the size of the roost of robins and starlings in Beacon Hill Park the night of the 27th, and at sunrise the next day.

This influx of robins and starlings is described elsewhere in this issue.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - VICTORIA, B.C., DECEMBER 27, 1958

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	TOTAL
LOON, Common Pacific	1	2	6	3		22			2	36
Red-throated				1	2	30			1	33
GREBE, Holboell		2	2	2	1	7			18	41
Horned	94	100	16	58	10	7			15	613
Eared		15	18		34	296				34
Pied-bill		1				1			11	15
Western	4	100	25			410		3		554
CORMORANT, Doub.Cr.	15	10				2			16	43
Baird	8	55	23	48	8	136			10	288
HERON	1	1	1			4			3	12
GOOSE, Gr.Canada									1	7
Lesser "									7	14
MALLARD	452	37	325	113	122	1		296	105	1608
GADWELL	1									1
WIDGEON, European									1	1
BALDPATE	924	444	197	5	815	285	72	1024	295	4061
PINTAIL	3				10	33	17	121	34	218
TEAL, Green-Wgd				18	110	95	6	226	7	462
SHOVELLER	6	90	1		16		20	64	51	248
WOOD-DUCK	3							11		14
Ring-necked duck							1			1
Canvasback	31					35			21	87
Scaup, Greater	675	560	61	3	78	710	2		74	2163
Lesser	2									2
Goldeneye, American	24	18	62	13	24	57			30	228
Bufflehead	97	105	47	2	46	164	15	7	66	549

THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - VICTORIA, B.C., DECEMBER 27, 1958, cont'd:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	TOTAL
OLD SQUAW	2	8		6	1	31				48
HARLEQUIN	24	29	34	15		5				107
SCOTER, white-wing	5	12	30	22	17	160			12	258
Surf	34	28	10	5	28	13				118
American			2			4				6
RUDDY DUCK						231			13	244
MERGANSER, Hooded	2	3	2		5	21	10		13	56
American	1		4			3	150	3	21	182
Red-breasted	8	21		20	22	83			9	163
HAWK, Sharp-shin	1			1		1			1	4
Cooper		1		2						3
Red-tail				1	2		1			4
EAGLE, Bald						1			1	2
HAWK, Peregrine						1				1
Pigeon	1								1	2
Sparrow					3	1				4
QUAIL, California	12		65	16	10	30		30	64	227
PHEASANT, ring-neck	5		8	9	10	5	2	33	5	77
COOT	3	5	105		32	64	326	190	306	1031
OYSTER CATCHER, B.		2				15				17
PLOVER, Killdeer	22					7		35	16	80
SANDPIPER, dunlin				40						40
TURNSTONE, Black	40	44				2				86
SNIPE				4					3	7
SANDPIPER, Aleutian		35								35
GULL, Gl.-wing	725	81	100	130	426	475	51	488	165	2641
Herring	3			2		1			2	8
California	2						1	2		5

Ring-billed									1	1
Short-billed	150	50		3	97	250	35	247	97	929
GUILLEMOT, pigeon		2		1	3	10				16
MURRE, California	1					2				3
MURRELET, marbled				1		21			1	23
PIGEON, band-tail					2					2
ROCK DOVE	73				54			4		131
OWL, short-eared					1					1
KINGFISHER			2	1	2	10		1	4	20
FLICKER, North W.	1	8	9	32	18	17	3	27	10	125
WOODPECKER, Pileated				1	1					2
Hairy						2				2
Downy	2		3	9		1		4	1	20
Lewis				1	1					2
SAPSUCKER, Red-breasted									1	1
SKYLARK		4		52		16			13	85
JAY, Steller	1	6	37	29	12	13		21	20	139
RAVEN					2	5	2	1	11	21
CROW, North W.	12	8		60	443	240	33	32	331	1159
CHICKADEE, chestnut-B.	13		30	82	25	63		26	16	255
BUSHTIT	8			20					1	29
NUTHATCH, Red-breasted					1	2			4	7
CREEPER	4		2	2	1	2			6	17
WREN, winter	2		11	8		5			3	29
Bewick	3		13	3	6	3	1	3	5	37
ROBIN	7000	10		164	68	4	7	5	117	7375
THRUSH, Varied	10		3	10	1	4		4	11	43
KINGLET, Golden Cr.	20	12	24	81	12	61	3	25	44	282
Ruby Cr.	5		1	10					2	18
SHRIKE, North W.		1	1	2		1				5
STARLING	7000			19	415	100	10	9	194	7747

THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, VICTORIA, B.C., DECEMBER 27, 1958,
Continued

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	TOTAL
SPARROW, House	49	75	2	40	3	15		398	38	620
MEADOWLARK	7			61	10	34		4	10	126
BLACKBIRD, Red-W. Brewer	10			7	245	50	55	4		371
GROBEAK, evening			10	2	280	56	55	11	5	409
FINCH, Calif. purple House	2		2	3	2				3	10
SISKIN		66		10				7	1	84
TOWHEE, Oregon	24	5	15	85	75	25			11	196
JUNCO, Oregon	62		30	20	16	7		13	4	104
SPARROW, white cr. Golden cr. Fox Song	3 14 33	4 2 8	3 1 9	112 7 23	53 15 8	94 6 19	12	60 1 12 10 32	41 20 3 11	464 10 60 38 144
	17740	2070	1352	1502	3704	4539	1071	3495	2447	37974

Individual species
100 species.

Seen within 24 hours:

7 red crossbills
24 black bellied plover
1 European widigeon
2 Surf birds.

22 persons in 9 parties. 92 car miles, 28 foot miles, Total hours 57 3/4
Temperature 45 degrees, light wind, fair.

AN UNPRECEDENTED IRRUPTION

by: Alan Poynter

The large flocks of robins and starlings roosting on the waterfront at the foot of Douglas Street offer a wonderful opportunity to bird observers to gain experience in counting large flocks of birds.

Late November saw the robins roosting in the brush by the hundreds, but our interest was really aroused when the birds were counted by the thousands on the Christmas Count.

Over the following week there was at least one bird watcher out almost every morning and afternoon to observe the departure or arrival of the birds. An average taken of the various counts made is a grand total of 7000 robins and 7500 starlings using the roost during this period.

The slope of Beacon Hill is an ideal location to see all the birds leaving the brush. In the darkness before dawn the silence was broken only by the occasional note of a robin but at the first sign of light the robins came to life with the morning song of several birds being almost lost in the increasing volume of the chattering of the whole flock.

As the light increased the robins began to leave the roost in small loose flocks, flying only a few feet from the ground. At this period the peculiar whistling and chattering of the starlings could be heard, but while the robins could be seen moving in the branches, the starlings were invisible in the blackness of the low shrubbery.

Suddenly a hush fell over the birds; not a sound could be heard for at least ten seconds; then the first large flock of robins left. Once again the noisy chorus began, lasting for two or three minutes until the same hush fell over the birds once again, then a flock of robins left, all flying low toward the park and my observation point. I instinctively lowered myself to the ground as dozens of robins flew past within inches in the early light. These flocks were approximately 300 strong and left the roost every two minutes with stragglers leaving continually.

When almost all of the robins had left, it was light enough to see the movement of the starlings sitting very low in the roost. All that could be heard was the whistling notes which increased to a tremendous pitch as over 7000 starlings moved out all together to the top of the brush, then with a tight flock leading, this multitude of birds flew off like a column of black smoke, the leaders

being out of sight before the last birds left the roost. The noise of the flight of such a flock just cannot be put into words.

Once again the silence prevailed, except for a peculiar clipping noise from the grass playing field behind. There was no sign of bird life, but a check on the field revealed approximately 400 robins, all moving through the grass, snapping at the drops of dew, hence the odd noise.

This was a dawn departure. The arrival at dusk equals this in interest, with starlings descending from a great height to drop vertically into the tree tops; The Cooper hawk, which meets the robins regularly, never leaving without a bird.

Bird roosts of this magnitude in city limits are not always appreciated by the residents in the immediate vicinity, but the opportunity to observe one should never be passed by.

BIRD GROUP MEETING, SATURDAY, JAN. 10th

by J. O. Clay

Eleven people met near the yacht club, Beach Drive and spent the best part of a sunny day in the Cadboro Bay and Ten Mile Point area, including Smugglers Cove.

At Killarney Road we saw a few ring-necked ducks, ruddy ducks and canvasbacks, among others. These birds are tame, being fed by the local people. On the floats close by were seen yellow-shafted flickers, blackbirds and starlings.

Going by way of Smugglers Cove we spent the lunch hour at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Howell, Baynes Rd. From our vantage point there we saw a rhinoceros auklet and several Aleutian sandpipers and driving up Prevost Hill we saw a red-breasted sapsucker. On Queenswood Drive we paused to watch sea fowl and hair seals sunning on the rocks.

In six hours 52 species were seen.

THE JUNIOR PAGE

by Freeman King

During the past month we have had lots of action and interesting trips, in spite of the two Saturdays which were so wet we held our meetings in the Museum, where we showed forest movies and nature slides.

The second trip to Triangle Mountain was a real adventure. Taking the trail leading to the south-east, we came across the old abandoned building which was used as a radio station by the R.C.A.F. during the war. An excellent spring was located. The pussy-willow was in full bud, daisies in bloom and many different species of fungi were evident. Some time in the past there must have been an attempt in one place to establish an orchard, for amongst the native trees we spotted pear, apple and walnut trees growing.

On Saturday, December 27th, seven of us went out with Mr. and Mrs. Al. Flett, who were taking movies of the bird count held that day. Shots were taken of the boys and girls getting out from the car and then going into the fields, climbing rocks and watching the swans and Canada geese on Prospect Lake, finishing up with some shots on the beach at Cordova Bay. An interesting and useful expedition.

On Sunday the 28th the senior members of the junior branch went to the Prospect Lake road area for a cook-out and compass survey work-out. Working in three groups they were successful in making their compass project come out as planned. We cooked our lunches and made and cooked a birthday-cake, as it was one of the member's birthday. The cake was iced and had candles. Yes, it was edible except for a little on the bottom which got scorched.

On our cross country expedition we saw rabbits that had gone wild. They were running from one scrub grove to another. Ravens and Steller jays seemed to abound in this area. We finished our day's outing by going to the north portion of Maltby Lake, where we saw grebes diving in the still water.

It is interesting to note that the group leaders have improved in their out-door cooking and their ability to move over and through rough country, with a knowledge of knowing just where they are heading for; also in their ability to observe and take note of things around them. Sometimes I am astonished at the number of things they have learned and acquired.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS1959

TUESDAY
FEB.10th: GENERAL MEETING of the Month for all members and prospective members with interested visitors.
 Guest programme by Dr. and Mrs. G. Clifford Carl, "Shrimps, Crabs and Evolution".
 The Museum at 8 p.m.

SATURDAY
FEB.14th: BIRD GROUP FIELD DAY. Meet at Monterey Cafe at 9:15 a.m. or Esquimalt Lagoon at 9:45 a.m. Bring lunch. Leader: Mr. J.O. Clay.

TUESDAY
FEB.17th: GEOLOGY EVENING: "Rehabilitation of Life on the Coast after the latest Glacial Period."
 Dr. G.C. Carl.
 The Museum at 8 p.m.

SATURDAY
FEB.21st: GEOLOGY FIELD TRIP. Meet at the end of Douglas Street where it joins Dallas Road, at 2 p.m.
 Leader: Mr. A. H. Marrion.

TUESDAY
FEB.24th: BOTANY EVENING with Mr. J.E. Underhill.
 Title of address, "Adaptation of our Native Plants."

The Museum at 8 p.m.

Mr. Underhill is in the Parks Branch of Provincial Government. This past summer he was in charge of the Nature House in Manning Park. He will show some outstanding "shots" photographed in the wild.

SATURDAY,
FEB.28th: AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR: "Waterway Wildlife".
 Mr. Leonard Hall, conservationist, with wildlife pictures accompanied by sound recordings.
 At Oak Bay Junior High School.

JUNIOR BRANCH OF V.N.H.S.: Every Saturday out-of-doors. Trips planned consist of outings to: Thetis Lake area; Tree Farm, Beaver-Elk Lake area; Seashore for winter sea creatures; Special time with the older juniors towards end of month; and always the possibility of an impromptu arrangement according to time available and weather conditions. All expeditions and activities under leadership of "Skipper" Mr. Freeman King.

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