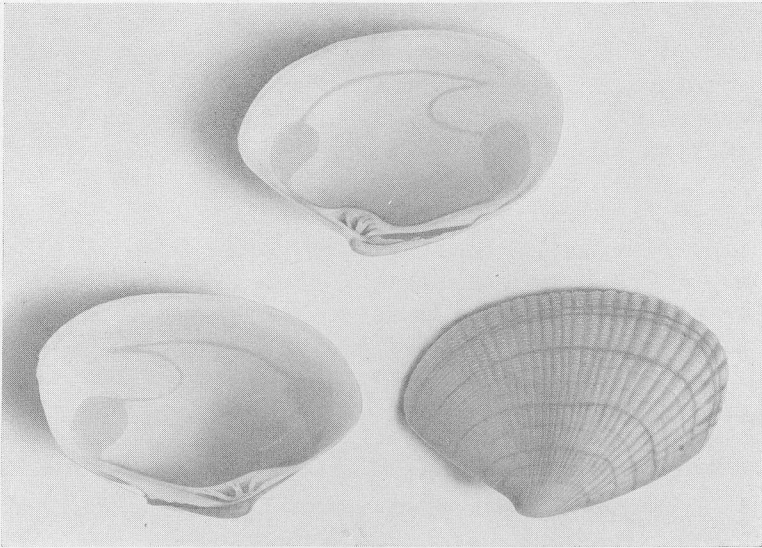


The
VICTORIA
NATURALIST

Vol. 15, No. 7

March, 1959



(F. L. Beebe)

Japanese Little-neck Clam

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

THE FEBRUARY MEETING

The regular monthly meeting of the Society was held at the Museum on Tuesday, February 10th, about eighty members and friends being present.

Mrs. Soulsby, our President, mentioned that at the last meeting of the executive, Mr. Freeman King had come forward with the idea of having leaflets distributed to the school children on our wild flowers, in an effort to stop the wholesale picking of diminishing species, especially during the Easter vacation.

The President also asked the members if they would approve an essay contest being held for children between the ages of eleven and thirteen on any natural history subject, same to be advertised in the local papers, and prizes to be given for the best written essay. Both these measures were passed.

Our speakers for the evening were Dr. and Mrs. Carl. Dr. Carl's subject was evolution, which, as he stated, was a continuous process, mostly progressive. He also mentioned certain species which had never changed, according to the fossil record, but had, so to speak, come to a dead end. There were also some which he termed retrogressive; one, specifically being the Indian pipe, which at one time was a normal plant with green leaves and coloured flowers, but which had reverted to a type which derives its nourishment by growing on decaying matter from other plants.

Mrs. Carl spoke on the life history of shrimps and crabs, illustrating her talk with deftly drawn diagrams of these species in their different stages of growth. She gave some remarkable figures of the number of varieties of these particular crustacea, stating that there were about 2000 different kinds of shrimps known, of which British Columbia had 70, and of a total of 1500 kinds of hermit crabs, 40 were to be found in this Province, also that there were 4500 varieties of crabs, of which only 30 were to be found in our waters.

The evening was much enjoyed, it being a unique occasion to have both Dr. Carl and Mrs. Carl give the Society an address on two different aspects of evolution.

A WELCOME GUEST

by Dorothy Palmer

Would you be thrilled if you looked out of a window and saw a brilliant jewelled coronet appear in a flash? Brighter ablaze than cut rubies, breath-catching, apparently lit up from within in colours of vermilion, lemon, scarlet, crimson, blazing incredibly, and gone. Would you be thrilled? We were!

On a light wire close by a window there sat a neat little glossy green body with head tucked snugly back, fine tapering beak uptilted, bright eyes scanning sky-wards. With imperceptible speed it swivelled on the wire, swinging the head in a rapid sweep which flared an irridescent cerise crown into flaming brilliancy. And we knew a rare visitor was with us.

This was late in August. It was a hummingbird, larger than our rufous hummingbird, gentler in its ways, red at throat, with peacock green back and, when he exposed his jewelled crown, a bright red head.

Mr. Guiguet came and saw and identified the little bird; an Anna's hummingbird, male, some seven or eight hundred miles from his home in the Sacramento valley.

This hummingbird spent his summer holidays in our garden from August to October in 1957 and again in 1958. He came each year during the fourth week in August and he left each year during the third week in October. A care-free happy little bit of independence. All day he sits on a high Arbutus branch. All day he sings - at least he croons to himself; he amuses himself doing acrobatics, tumbling off the branch and back on, this way and that. Frequent pangs of hunger tumble him off his perch for a darting flight across the garden to sip, hovering, from countless fuchsia blossoms.

A day of summer rain is bath day. His enjoyment of the refreshing rain was fun to watch. He bathed frequently throughout a rainy day; shower baths, that is. Perched on the wire he lifted one wing at a time, letting the rain drip against his little body, first one side, then the other, flittered the length of his feathers deliciously, shook himself, repeated the routine a few times, - then flew up to a nearby cedar tree. But the overhanging branches keep the rain off, so he returned to the wire for another shower bath, all the while turning his head about, apparently enjoying all he saw rather than being on the alert.

At this time of the year our days are mostly dry and sunny, and for periods each day our guest rests on the wire outside a window, apparently happily contemplating the joys of the open skies - so time-wasting for humans who wait to see the flaming glory of his head-turns, or to see his backward tumbling take-off to nectar refreshment. He does not leave his perch in direct darting flight as one would expect. Always he will apparently fall off the wire and almost immediately be hovering with honeyed purpose before the nearest cluster of flowers. The window is high, we never saw the fall merge into flight, so that the first fall seen was quite a shock for us.

He has been a joyous guest. No mortal saw him go, yet we were happy when he left after the autumnal equinox. We hope for his safe return next August. Will he come?

THE NEW CANADIAN AUDUBON MAGAZINE

In 1949 the newly formed Canadian Audubon Society took over the publishing of a small periodical known as 'Canadian Nature', which first appeared twenty years ago, and was mainly devoted to the task of interesting children in the natural beauties of our country and to give them some knowledge of its plant and wildlife in general.

Last year this magazine was re-named 'Canadian Audubon', and the new issue for January-February 1959, with its larger size and many more illustrations, can be placed in the top rank of Canadian magazines. The cover of this issue is taken from one of Fenwick Lansdowne's beautiful studies of bird life.

The Canadian Audubon Society is dedicated to the conservation of wildlife, plants, soil and water in relation to human progress, and we feel that all those who are interested in this increasing important subject are helping the cause by joining this Society, the membership fee of which is five dollars per annum, which includes the magazine.

A GIANT BRITISH COLUMBIA SPONGE

by Walter MacKay Draycot

To fishermen who dredge the depths of our local marine floors the sponges are not unusual, though most are on the small size. There are many species both in Alaska and British Columbia seas and they differ greatly in colour and in form. The tall branching, tubular types are extremely fragile while in the saturated growing state.

Three weeks ago an irregularly massive specimen was presented to me by Mr. P. MacKenzie, Draycot Road, North Vancouver. An aqua-lung diver, he obtained it at a depth of 100 feet at the north end of Bowen Island in Howe Sound. When wresting it from a rock to which it was affixed the commotion of the water, occasioned by his activity, removed some of the tips of the sponge which is delicate when wet. Despite this loss the large specimen was brought safely to the surface.

Many sponges have a disagreeable odour and this one was no exception until sprayed with a disinfectant. In size it measured 27 inches long and 18 inches wide and, though the main tip fell off, the height was 18 inches. Diameter of tubes, two to four inches. Colour, yellow to light red. Being neither calcareous nor of the glass-sponge type it is placed in Class III, Demospongiae, of the Phylum Porifera.

Under the microscope the skeleton has the appearance of a disorganized meshwork of fibres and needlelike spicules intermingling among a mass of spongin. When dry it is brittle. A small piece rubbed between finger and thumb and then examined simulates bread crumbs, like several other Pacific Coast species.

Shrimps, copepods and other small animals occupy the caverns of this immense sponge. It is difficult to ascertain what part of the structure possesses the original rootstock for so many are intertwined as they adhere to the rock face. The answer seems to be in some of the knobby branches that have taken a downward trend for their terminals can be likened to the vine maple (Acer circinatum) whose branches take root when contacting the soil. For its size and bulk this massive specimen is deceptive regarding weight. Like all dry sponges it is remarkably light.

COOPER HAWKS AT MOUNT FINLAYSON

by Alan Poynter

It was my good fortune, while accompanied by Leslie Moore, to observe a spectacular sight on the mist-shrouded summit of Mount Finlayson last November.

While resting after the short but very steep climb, we saw a bird rocketing over our heads, giving an alarm call that was unknown to me. While lying flat on the top of a large rock slab we noted two Cooper hawks in the small jack pines below us. One, an immature bird which proved later to be crippled, was moving on foot through the underbrush, while an adult sat above on a bared branch.

Within seconds of us taking our perch, the young hawk made a lunge into the brush, setting to wing a single mountain quail. Before the quail could clear the pines it was bowled out of the air by the powerful talons of the adult hawk, leaving behind large portions of its plumage. The quail hit the rocks unhurt, however, but had to race for its life as the immature hawk swooped over it, losing its quarry in the underbrush.

This manoeuver was carried out three times by the hawks, with identical results. On the fourth attempt two quail left the brush and both escaped unhurt by inches when the young hawk also took to the air.

The hawks then left the scene after flying only feet away from our lookout, but left us with lots of unanswered questions. We were thrilled at seeing our first mountain quail in such remarkable circumstances, but I could not help but ponder on the hawk's behaviour. Was it usual for hawks to hunt as a team? Was this the paternal instinct of the hawk family being carried on into the adult life of a crippled immature bird? What happened to the 'survival of the fittest' theory? I would have thought the crippled immature hawk should have starved to death.

A RARE BOOK

Mr. J.W. Winson of Huntingdon, B.C., has presented to our new library a book entitled 'A First Book upon the Birds of Oregon and Washington', by William Rogers Lord, and published in the year 1901 by himself. This book is dedicated by the author to the "Knights and Ladies of the Birds", and all those who shall come to find in the birds ministers of beauty and joy'. We are grateful to Mr. Winson for this delightful gift.

GEOLOGY MEETING

by A. H. Marrison

The meeting on geology for January was held on Tuesday the 20th, the subject being "The work of glaciers in and around Victoria", an illustrated lecture by the writer. Briefly outlined were the glacial and interglacial periods of the Upper Mississippi Valley; the centres of ice accumulation in Central British Columbia during the Admiralty-Vashon glacial periods; and its outflow via the various valleys to sea level in the Gulf of Georgia, passing over and around southern Vancouver Island, then through the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

The following details were illustrated:-

1. Remnant glaciers on the mountains.
2. Cirques, cirque lakes, cirque-produced saw-tooth mountains.
3. Rounded hill-tops.
4. Smoothed and quarried rocks.
5. 'U' shaped valleys. Drowned valleys. Fiords.
6. The older Admiralty till.
7. Interglacial blue marine shells (shell specimens)
8. Uplifted blue clays. Peat beds with wood. Bog matter. Beetle wing cases.
9. Brown clay deposits.
10. Outwash sands, then gravels. (ice approach)
11. Erosion of outwash during ice advance.
12. Pot holes drilled in solid stone.
13. Till. Erratic boulders of various kinds. Glacial clay deposits.
14. Grooves and striations (scratches).
15. Glacial Colwood River route. (air photo) with ox bows and terraces, fore-set and top-set deposits.
16. Kettle holes left in the old delta and on outwash plains.
17. Fossil shells and boulders found in clays of ice retreat period.
18. Land uplift, with most recent shell deposits. Lake and bog accumulations with immense number of fresh-water shells.
19. Present erosion effects as seen in stream valleys, cliffs, lagoons, sand spits and rock erosion.
20. Depth of ice indicated by mountain grooves (Prevost 2000' Granite on Olympics 3000', etc.

On January 1st a 'stock-taking' of wild plant life within the boundaries of Greater Victoria showed the following twelve species in bloom:

gumweed; cat's ear; wild turnip; mayweed; perennial daisy; sow thistle; groundsel; dandelion; chickweed; yarrow; gorse; and shepherd's purse.

1958 CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS

by Theed Pearse, Comox, B.C.

Area: Courtenay; Wallis Park (Puntledge River), feeding stations; through Courtenay on Comox Road, along shore line at intervals and head of Comox Bay. Comox feeding station (T.P.) and Comox wharf. Much the same as previous years omitting side trips and parts of shore line.

Date: 9th January 1959; feeding stations ten to noon and one to four-thirty afternoon; at Comox feeding station and wharf, Comox Bay.

Observers: one party and one at Comox; Miles: about eight, mainly on foot.

Common Loon 11. Artic Loon 10. Red-throated Loon 2. Unidentified 2. Red-necked Grebe 4. Horned Grebe 9. Western Grebe 1. Double-crested Cormorant 3. Pelagic Cormorant 5. Unidentified 3. Great Blue Heron 4. Mallard 350. Pintail 12. Am. Widgeon 200. Bufflehead 50. Canvasback 8. Greater Scaup 200. Common Goldeneye 50. Old Squaw 3. Barrow's Goldeneye 2. White-winged Scoter 750. Surf Scoter 500. Common Scoter 15. Hooded Merganser 1. Common Merganser 5. Red-breasted Merganser 16. Unidentified duck 2500. Bald Eagle 2. California Quail 15. Ring-necked Pheasant 5. Am. Coot 75. Killdeer 15. Black Turnstone 25. Dunlin 11. Glaucous-winged Gull 100. Herring Gull (Thayer) 1. Mew Gull 28. Unidentified Gulls, probably 90% Glaucous-winged, 600. Pigeon Guillemot 1. Belted Kingfisher 3. Red-shafted Flicker 5. Downy Woodpecker 1. Steller Jay 9. Common Raven 8. Northwestern Crow 50. Chestnut-backed Chickadee 20. Am. Dipper 1. Bewick Wren 10. Am. Robin 14. Varied Thrush 3. House Sparrow 20. Brewer Blackbird 7. Pine Siskin 30. Rufous-sided Towhee 18. Fox Sparrow 3. Song Sparrow 17.

Species 52. Seen on partial count previous week, stopped by weather: Green-winged Teal; Peregrine Falcon; Ruffed Grouse; Harris Woodpecker; Brown Creeper Golden-crowned Kinglet; Western Meadow Lark and House Finch.

Observers: Harold H. Hames, J.A. Hames and Theed Pearse (part time).

Note: Mr. Theed Pearse of Comox asked if the above count could be published in the "Naturalist" as his date made it too late to be included in the Christmas count recorded in the spring number of the Canadian Field-Naturalist.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

On January 27 Mr. Freeman King gave a talk to the Botany Group of the Victoria Natural History Society on the subject "Edible Plants".

He recalled to us that there are many common edible fruits that are fairly abundant in season, such as, salmon-berry, huckleberry, strawberry, blackberry, gooseberry, rose-hips and hawthorn-haws, the latter two being rich in Vitamin C. Cascara fruit was classed as "not bad", but the waxy fruits of snowberry are unfit for food. However, they are useful as soap, and an immediate demonstration of this proved very convincing.

The edibility of dandelion leaves, young fern fronds (fiddle-heads), nettle tips and water-cress is fairly well-known, but, to many persons present it was surprising to learn that the rhizomes of most ferns, stripped of their outer bark, are quite edible when cooked. Several species of lichens, which Mr. King grouped under the general term "rock tripe", make nourishing food, as do also the basal parts of some sedges.

At times, Mr. King, noting signs of skepticism on the faces before him would pause to interject, with characteristic emphasis, "I know -- I've eaten them!", and forthwith proceed to munch some of his wares on the spot. In this activity he was seconded by the Chairman, Miss Sartain, who cheerfully sampled some leaves of miner's lettuce.

The speaker assured us that the young flower-groups of cat-tail, when cooked, taste like sweet corn; that the new shoots of salmonberry peeled and eaten raw taste like candy; that the seeds of pond-lily and also of round-leaf mallow are tasty food; that acorns though not so pleasing, are quite edible; and that even skunk cabbage is edible but not what you would call palatable.

Other edible plants include the plantains, shepherd's purse, and the clovers. From strawberry leaves one can make "tea", and a good coffee substitute can be made from the roasted roots of chicory.

Tree bark is also a good source of food, notably maple, poplar, hemlock and all species of pine. When the outer bark is removed from branches of up to two inches in diameter, the inner bark can be scraped off and eaten either raw or cooked. The Indians used to mix hemlock scrapings with salmon oil to make flat cakes which, when properly dried, could be stored for long periods. Sir Alexander Mackenzie saw and sampled this food en route to

the Pacific in 1793.

Persons caught in the wilds without cooking utensils can survive by using the "mud-ball" method to cook fish and game as well as plants. And Mr. King's directions on how to boil food in a rock-hollow, using water transported without benefit of conventional containers, gave rise to a good deal of amusement.

The speaker stressed several other survival tips:-

1. Carry a packet of matches pre-dipped in paraffin wax.
2. In wet weather collect blobs of resin from conifers to help ignite damp fuel.
3. Always wash thoroughly all plants to be eaten either raw or cooked.
4. Eat sparingly of any unaccustomed food -- it may not "sit" well; if uneasiness or pain results from eating a strange food, a good drink of salt and water is recommended as a most effective "return ticket".

This was a lively topic dealt with in lively style and the audience showed hearty approval of the expression of appreciation spoken for all of us by Mrs. J. R. Parris.

Reported by M. C. Melburn.

BIRD GROUP MEETING, FEBRUARY 14

Twenty-two people gathered at Esquimalt Lagoon on a mild sunny day, after the gale of the day before. The usual wintering water-birds were seen in the area.

The outstanding features were three species of loon, four of grebe, ten of duck, two of gull, one individual eagle, five heron, and, on the spit, a little flock of five horned larks.

While we were on the spit, Mrs. H.M.S. Bell arrived bringing a newly banded shrike, together with its quarry - a linnet with a broken neck. The shrike was duly admired by all. As soon as released, it flew away in direct and slightly undulating flight; then rose up steeply, shrike fashion, to its newest vantage, a television aerial. Whether this bird will return to Mrs. Bell's garden is a matter for conjecture.

At noon the whole party were invited by Mr. and Mrs. Tompkins to spend the lunch hour in their home on Lagoon Rd. where an interesting interlude was spent.

Our party then drove to Florence Lake where redhead ducks had been observed. Eight ring-necked ducks were seen here and two species of mergansers. Then some time was spent on the property of Commander and Mrs. Cunningham.

During the day singularly few woodland birds were seen. The total number of species for the day was thirty-one. J.O.C.

NESTING BOXES FOR VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOWS

by Captain W. Redford

In the nesting season this swallow finds it increasingly hard to locate suitable nesting places. True, there are many nesting boxes around many of Victoria's homes and gardens, but if the hole is large enough to admit the house sparrow, then these birds will be in possession.

A box for swallows should be about six inches square, and the hole no larger than one and one-eighth inches in diameter, placed about three inches above the base.

The hole should have half rounded smooth sides, with the bottom roughened for the birds to grip when squeezing through.

To get the proper diameter I bore a one inch hole, trim it with a pocket knife, and then sandpaper it to the correct size.

Under the eaves on the south side of a house is a good place to nail the box, or fasten it on the top of a thin pole at least eight feet from the ground. Nailing to a tree is not good, as cats can climb up and disturb the birds.

A Japanese orange box taken apart, then shortened and renailed so as to be almost draught proof, makes a suitable box.

Strip of wood nailed on the inside of the hole assists the bird to get out easily.

Editors' note:

It is further recommended that no perch be fixed below the entrance to the nesting box. Lack of a perch makes it almost impossible for sparrows to enter but is no hindrance to swallows.

OUR COVER

The Japanese little-neck or Manila clam was first discovered in 1936 in Ladysmith Harbour, where it had presumably been introduced by accident along with seed oysters from Japan. In a few years it became more abundant in this area than the native little-neck, and soon entered into the commercial catch. It now occurs throughout Georgia Strait and Barkley Sound.

by Freeman King.

The highlight of the past month was our second Annual Party which was held on January 17 in the Scout Hall on Kings Road.

Including both the members of the senior and junior groups and their parents, there were over 125 present.

The stunts and competitions were run off by the group leaders, the parents taking part. The evening finished up with a sing-song and refreshments served by the committee under the convenership of Mrs. Marion Rushton.

The hall was decorated with trees, shrubs, etc., to make it look as much like the out-of-doors as possible.

Displays brought in by the junior members were excellent and showed that they have made observations and also gained a lot of knowledge during the past year.

We have held two meetings in the Museum owing to wet weather, at which movies and instruction on compass work were held.

A work bee at the tree plot was held during which a great deal of rubbish was burned and some clearing done to make a picnic ground.

A cross-country trip by compass was made on the 30th January, in which the group leaders took their own party over hills and across swamps and through the deep bush at Thetis Lake. Each group made their objective, and there is no fear that they will become confused in the woods.

On Sunday, February 1st, the group leaders made a trip to Tugwell Creek. Leaving the car on the highway, we explored up the creek for a mile or two. During the hike we had to cross the creek which was running heavy, so we made a temporary bridge.

Cooking our lunch on a gravel bar proved interesting, as there was no good fir for fires and we had to chop into an old cedar log to get sufficient fuel for kindling. Bear and coon tracks were found. Sword ferns five feet long were noticed and one old maple tree over a hundred feet tall had ferns growing in the moss clear to the top. Being in this type of terrain was like being in the rain forest; a rugged and interesting country.

EARLY FLOWERING NATIVE PLANTS

January 26, bird cherry; February 1, spring gold; February 4, red alder; February 6, Satin flower (see also page 82). These are the earliest dates I have recorded (back to 1952)

M.C.M.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS - MARCH, 1959

- Tuesday
10th, 8 p.m. GENERAL MEETING of the month for members and prospective members.
Guest Speaker: Dr. John E. Armstrong, geologist in charge of B.C. office of the Dominion Mines and Technical Surveys, Vancouver. Prominent in his line and exceptionally qualified for addressing the public, Dr. Armstrong will speak on - "Geology of The Fraser Delta." This illustrated lecture will be held in the Cafeteria of the Douglas Building, Elliot St.
- Tuesday
17th, 8 p.m. FLOWERS OF HAWAII: Presenting a change of scene for Victorians Miss Enid Lemon will show her fine coloured slides taken in Honolulu. The showing will be in The Museum.
- Tuesday
24th, 8 p.m. "TREES AND BARK" - Explanations and illustrations by Mr. Freeman King, continuing his previous lecture. The Museum.
- Saturday
28th, 9:15 a.m. BIRD GROUP FIELD TRIP: Meet at the Monterey Cafe at 9:15 a.m. or at "The Black Swan", south end of Elk Lake, at 9:45 a.m.
Leader: Mr. J.O. Clay. Bring lunch.
- Monday
30th, 8 p.m. AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR at Oak Bay Junior High School, Cadboro Bay Rd. Title of address and film - "Great Smoky Skyland", with Mr. G. Harrison Oriens, showing sequences taken in the wilderness depicting wildflowers, birds and other wildlife, with trees and glories of sky-high mountains.
- JUNIOR BRANCH,
Saturdays
1:30 p.m. "OUTING WITH SKIPPER"- Available to any and all of the Junior members of the Natural History Society every Saturday, meeting at the Monterey Cafe at 1:30 p.m. Mr. Freeman King (Skipper), is pleased whenever the group is joined by one or more members from the senior branch of the Society. For any further details telephone him at GR.9-2966.

Victoria Natural History Society

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