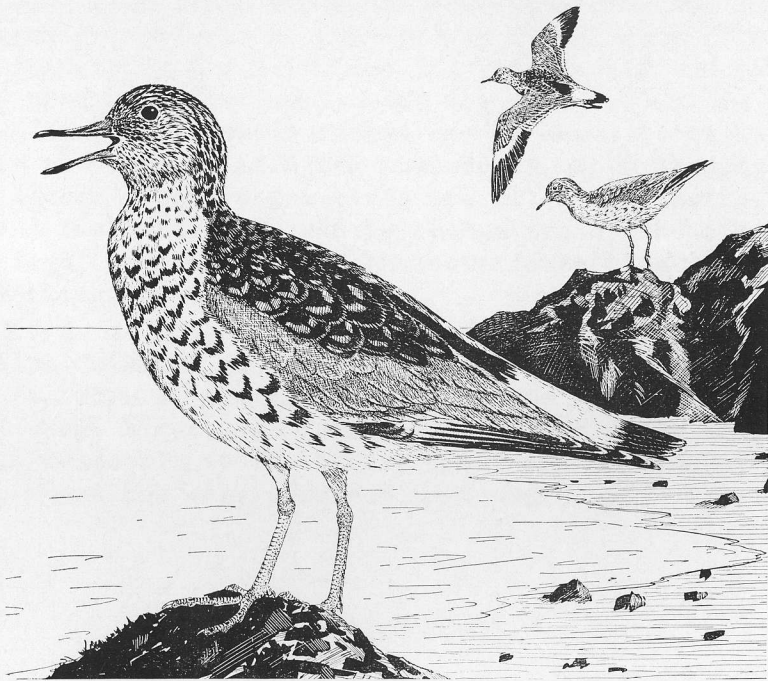


The
**VICTORIA
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(F. L. Beebe.)

Surf Bird

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OUR COVER

The surf bird is a species peculiar to the Pacific coast of America, and is one of the birds which visiting ornithologists always look for. In Victoria particularly, it can be seen to advantage, generally arriving in numbers about the middle of July and remaining until the following April. The height of migration occurs during August when good-sized flocks of sometimes over one hundred birds are present at many places on our rocky sea front, notably Clover Point and the islands off Oak Bay. Most of them continue south, some migrating as far as the coast of Chile, but small flocks can be seen all the winter here, in the company of black turnstones, rock sandpipers and killdeer. These three birds are all about the same size, but the surf birds can be recognized by their strong yellow legs, grey colour and characteristic black and white markings on the tail.

Mr. C. J. Guiguet, in his handbook of the shore birds of British Columbia (obtainable at the Museum) reports that little is known of the nesting habits and migratory behaviour of these birds, and that the centre of their breeding range is evidently in the higher mountains of central Alaska, where the only recorded nest was found.

THE GOLDEN EAGLE

On October 10th, in a small pasture close to the old lime kiln just across Parsons Bridge, an immature golden eagle was found in a starving condition. This was reported to Frank Beebe, who picked it up, fed it, and turned it over to Dave Hancock, a friend of his, who also understands how to handle these birds, it is now doing well.

There is a probability that a pair nested on the island, as a week after this bird was found an adult golden eagle, accompanied by an immature, was seen flying in the vicinity of Esquimalt Lagoon by Mr. & Mrs. Barry Morgan. A.R.D.

THE MONTHLY MEETING

The General Meeting for October was held in the Museum on the 13th.

A couple of items of business were brought to the attention of the members. First, that the signing of the contract for next season's Audubon Lectures was due. Up to the present time we have paid the Audubon Society \$100.00 for each lecture, and also turned over to them half of the net profit. The new contract calls for \$130.00 for each lecture, and no division of profits. It is proposed that we again have the lecturer on two successive days, which will mean a total payment of \$1,300.00. A show of hands indicated that the signing of this new contract was approved.

The other item was the advisability of the purchase of an amplifier at a cost of approximately \$90.00. This machine is to be owned jointly by this Society and the Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary Association. The amplifier was used at this meeting, but as the experiment was not altogether satisfactory, the matter was postponed until the next meeting.

This meeting was attended by eighty-five members and friends, and the slides of David Sterling and Barry Morgan were much enjoyed. These included some shots taken at Miracle Beach where Mr. Sterling was acting as nature interpreter this summer, and slides of the birds and wildlife of the Okanagan, also some most interesting ones of some of our bird group meetings this summer, taken by Barry Morgan.

A.R.D.

WILD PLANTS AND THEIR USES

On September 2nd the Botany Group of the Natural History Society heard the third in Mr. Freeman King's series of talks on wild plants and their uses. As usual, Mr. King had brought along specimens to fully illustrate his subject.

Mr. King reminded the members that an excellent jelly, rich in vitamin C, can be made from rose-hips; these fruits also can be made into a very pleasing drink. Our native crab-apples also make up into a very good jelly, especially pleasing when served with meat. Mr. King had made and brought along some of this jelly for the members to sample. From the leaves of labrador tea a fairly good tea substitute can be made; this also was tried out by interested

members. An algal colony (Genus Nostoc) found on gravel in the Todd Inlet area was on display but Mr. King seemed to be the only one inclined to sample this "food". At this point we were reminded that any unpleasant results from eating wild plant parts can be dissipated by chewing a bit of bark from the cascara tree.

Mr. King demonstrated how smoked-up cooking utensils can be cleaned with scouring-rush (horsetail) and he also showed us how to clean soiled hands by rubbing between them a handful of snowberries.

Many wild plants have medicinal properties and sphagnum moss, on account of its unique absorptive quality, has long been used in dressings for wounds; tons of it were used in war-time.

Mr. King emphasized that whereas the natives and early settlers of this country made use of these plants and many others, we do not, but they are still here for our use in an emergency. And even though we do not actually use them, knowledge of these uses makes the study of our flora much more interesting.

Many of our wild plants have been taken to other countries where they are now grown as prized garden plants. So, too, many plants of other lands have been introduced into our country, many of them very useful species indeed; one of these is the comfrey which is now being used locally as cattle fodder as well as for human consumption. The leaves of this plant are very large and of coarse texture, but they cook up very well.

In the concluding part of his talk Mr. King reviewed some of his work with "the juniors", making special reference to the programme of activities carried out at the July 6-12 summer camp held at Little Qualicum, where instruction was given in making and breaking camp, swimming, collecting, skinning specimens, rope-work and rock-climbing, with emphasis always on SAFETY FIRST.

Mr. King was introduced by the chairman, Miss E. Sartain, and thanked by the President, Mr. R. Fryer.

M.C.M.

H A W K S

by Freeman King.

Do birds teach their young to do things, perhaps not quite in the same way as we do, but by letting the young birds observe?

During the summer a pair of sharp-shinned hawks were observed flying over a meadow with a young one between them. They were at a height of about two hundred feet when one of the parent birds dropped a small mouse or bird and then swooped down and caught it. This was repeated several times; then winging upwards to perhaps another one hundred feet, with the young bird still between them, they dropped their object again. This time, the young one made the swoop, and after two attempts caught it. Then the three of them flew away into the tall trees, apparently to let the young bird enjoy his meal.

Could it be they were teaching their offspring to take something that could be stolen from another bird that had the meal in its talons, or to be able to take a small bird on the wing? One thing appears certain, and that is that some birds do teach their young, and they are not left entirely on their own.

ALBINO BIRDS

Several times this year white robins have been reported in Victoria, and once, at Deep Cove, a white crow (see the September "Naturalist"). Now we have a letter from Jack Field, a member of the Society living at Osoyoos, who writes as follows:

"One day in August, while sitting out on the lawn, we saw a white hummingbird. It was about 4:30 p.m., and the bird remained in the garden for approximately half an hour. The belly, breast, head and back were quite white, while the rump and tail were an off shade of white - perhaps a little pinkish".

It would be interesting to know if any other member has ever seen an albino hummingbird; also if albinism can occur in all species of birds. During the last twelve years the writer can remember seeing only two examples of albinism, one a brewer blackbird and the other a barn swallow; partial albinos are, of course, more common.

A.R.D.

FLOATING GOLD

by Dorothy Palmer -

Autumn's mists come to us in many colours, each shade a delight in varying ways; silver across the valleys, apricot in the sunset, amethyst draping the foothills, ice-blue in the gullies; - and gold, vivid yellow gold.

Through the autumn mists of a silvery day we set out to walk through some maple woods. Maple and alders and dogwood trees, with dense patches of salmonberry canes, for the woods soak up a heavy water run-off throughout the winters. The occasional giant Douglas fir yet stands amongst the deciduous trees, and large stumps, which the tree-fallers left, provide artistic rootage for a wealth of treen moss, lichens, ferns and sproutings of baby firs and cedars. The earth beneath the trees is covered high with a criss cross of storm thrown branches half concealed by lady ferns, sword ferns and bracken fronds.

As we neared the woods the mist around us became softly golden, maple gold drifting through the mist. The day had been almost drearily grey; the mist met the maples and the maples painted it a golden yellow. Our spirits soared! A yellow effulgence glowed out of the vapour, floating all around and overhead. An unforgettable delight of a sunless day.

Beyond the golden curtain we walked along the woodland trackways. We found ourselves in a world a-bustle with preparations for the coming winter and a-bustle with birds feasting on the autumn harvest. The wild creatures were urgently occupied as is mankind at this season; (the hearty sound of buzz-saws has been reminding us that our neighbours are garnering logs for their winter hearths).

Squirrels chattered, scampering through the trees, flirting their tails as they sprang away up trunks to their secret hoards of winter stores. Time is getting short; and Steller jays watch and raid their larders.

Flocks of wild pigeons were rustling in the dogwood trees, tearing off seed-clusters, sending down showers of tawny hulls; all the woods were bustling with grey shapes, fluttering, hanging precariously to tenuous branchlets as they snatched the elusive food. Some of them swooped away to alight high up in alder trees and perched even-spaced on horizontal branches; they sat quite still, looking like solemn grey nuns in devout contemplation. But soon they fluttered back to the dogwood trees, to snatch and tear,

setting the trees in rustling commotion again.

Around us the woods glowed with the maples' golden panoply and warmed to the cerise of drifting dogwood leaves, with pale biscuit bracken fronds below and the dainty creamy-yellow leaves of dying thimbleberry and salmonberry canes. And moss crept greener up silvery tree trunks.

Bird travellers were visiting in the woods; unseen birds rested awhile in tree tops, sang a few rich notes and were gone. Flashes of tawny red and yellow-breasted varied thrushes appeared, wearing their feathered chains-of-office markedly looped across their chests, paying the maple woods a courtesy call as they passed on their southward journey. Many of them will stay to brighten our winter.

A cock-of-the-woods flew by overhead, his red head flashing as he passed, and he gave his happy ringing call as he flew away through the tree tops.

Under untidy knotted roots of trees blown down long ago the sober coloured wood wrens were busy scratching for their dinners. From an alder thicket we disturbed a flock of siskins, which arose with a swish and whirled away around the tree tops in compact formation, chattering indignantly, and swooped around and back, returning to those alder catkins when we had passed. A number of kinglets were feeding amongst the cones of a fir which leaned across the trail; they crooned "tse-tse-tse" all the time, flitting unafraid about their affairs. We found fish remains at the foot of a tall Douglas fir and waited to see a bald eagle fly in from the nearby sea and alight atop his dining tree.

As we were leaving the woods a Steller jay see-sawed in a dogwood tree beside the path, shook his top-knot at us, screamed a final impertinence and departed in a brilliant flash of iridescent blue.

The golden-yellow haze stayed beside the maples as we walked homewards through silver mistiness.

The Society is interested in the conservation of Rithet's Swamp. It is possible this matter will come up for discussion at the November meeting.

JUNIOR ESSAYS

The following, written by Peter Gibson, of Kyuquot, age 12 years, was given the first prize for boys in the essay contest for juniors conducted by the Society this spring.

THE GREAT BLUE HERON

The great blue heron, commonly but incorrectly called the blue crane, is a fascinating bird to watch. He will sit for hours on a stone at the water's edge, patiently waiting for some careless fish to swim past him. If he thinks he sees one his body will become rigid, and his neck dart out. Then, when he has decided it was only a false alarm, he will slowly retract himself into his former slouch. At last he will decide to try fishing elsewhere, so with long slow and steady strokes of his wings, he will glide majestically away.

This heron is from three to four feet in height, and is the second tallest wading bird in western Canada. He is blue-grey, with a lighter head and neck. When in flight he keeps his neck curled back, as do other herons.

A heron will eat any small creature which comes his way. From fish to snake if the heron can stab it, any small creature is as good as dead. One sees his neck dart out, make a slight splash, and then a triumphant bird with a fish in his beak. If the fish is small he will eat it alive. It is funny to watch the bulge going down his neck as the heron tries desperately to make it go down. If the fish is larger he will kill it on the rocks before eating it.

Hérons are social birds, and usually a whole colony will build nests in a large tree. The nests are slightly dipped platforms of sticks, which will be used for many years. This arrangement is not completely fool-proof though, as with the accumulated filth of years the nests may become too heavy for their branch supports and will come crashing down.

Members please note that the Audubon Lectures this month take place on Thursday, November 5th and Friday the 6th.

Notice to Members: The General Meeting this month is being held in the Cafeteria in the basement of the Douglas Building.

BIRD NOTES

By Alan Poynter

The month of October brought in more unusual and interesting birds to the Victoria area.

A skua, a bird of the arctic, was seen in the vicinity of the Chinese cemetery on three occasions, being identified by several of the bird group members.

The sharp-tailed sandpiper, reported last month, is in all probability the same bird that spent at least two weeks at Esquimalt Lagoon; the bird, both times, being accompanied by a golden plover, which is not too common a bird here. In the same field were five white-fronted geese.

Maybe the most interesting report this month was of a rock wren, which stayed in the writer's garden for two days. Admittedly, I was not quite sure of my identification, as this bird belongs to the southern dry belt of British Columbia, and migrates south from there in the winter, but apparently that is what it was, as sixteen other members saw this wren and confirmed the identification.

We do not have a spectacular hawk migration on Vancouver Island, but some movement was noticeable last month among our western hawks, reports being brought in of peregrine falcons, pigeon hawks, rough-legged hawks and five marsh hawks.

The next week or two should bring in the yellow-shafted flicker, and possibly hybrids between it and the red-shafted flicker; also the yellow-bellied sapsucker, and, with the elements on our side, the return of the snow bunting to Esquimalt Lagoon.

Watch carefully the flocks of juncos, as every year we do get reports of the slate-colored, and some of our members believe the pink-sided junco also passes through.

(Since the above was written, a snow bunting was seen on the lagoon (October 17th) by Mr. & Mrs. Barry Morgan)

Ed.

DISCOVERY ISLAND BIRDS

by Alan Poynter

The field trip to Discovery Island on September 26th was made possible by the courtesy of Capt. E. G. Beaumont who owns the southernmost section of the island, and has made his home there for many years. Capt. Beaumont put his large launch at the disposal of the Society, and piloted the boat himself for the five trips necessary to convey the twenty-three members to and from the island. Going over in the morning the weather was calm and mild, but during the afternoon a violent hail and rain storm arose, which made it essential to make two trips for the return of the passengers. We are all very grateful to Capt. Beaumont for his kindness and we have a real appreciation of his skill in piloting the boat through the tortuous passages studded with rocks and beds of kelp, and also very turbulent with the strong tides.

Sailing from the yacht club in the 'Discovery II, we had birds on the water all the way to the island, counting literally hundreds of the very beautiful harlequin ducks, together with mergansers, cormorants (all three species), marbled murrelets and many others.

Landing on the island we were literally up to our ears in birds, in only minutes, finding flocks of shore birds made up of black turnstones, surf birds, black-bellied and semi-palmated plovers, dowitchers, and even twelve of the rare knots.

In the woods the ruby-crowned and golden-crowned kinglets and chickadees were only surpassed by the red crossbills or the occasional flock of warblers (mostly Audubon) that flew by.

The wind was blowing at 20 m.p.h. when a flock of 53 turkey vultures flew over. Flew is hardly the word to use, they drifted, glided, side-slipped or hung suspended in space, giving a tremendous display of aeronautics, while occasional hawks flew in and around the flock.

Even on the trip back in the torrential rain a new bird was seen, when a pair of the greater scaup came in sight, banking to show us the white wing marking extending right out to the primary feathers. This bird brought the day's count to seventy-three species, which I consider good for any time of year.

BIRD FIELD TRIP

by Eleanore McGavin

The October bird group meeting was held on the 17th at Island View Beach. The day was fine and warm, and the thirty-two members and friends enjoyed the outing, and between them identified sixty-four species of birds.

We have all heard so much about falconry, but this day we had the opportunity of a lifetime. We saw the falcons in action. We saw how a falconer can control a free flying bird. It is marvellous to think that a wild bird can, with infinite patience, be trained to come down at a whistle or a shout, or to a lure thrown by the falconer.

Mr. Frank Beebe, whose hobby it is to train falcons, first of all explained to the group that a falcon hunting game, which is instinctive, is much more sporting than so-called hunters who shoot and often leave maimed birds to die from wounds or starvation. He told us how difficult it is for a falcon to make a hit, and how wary game birds are in out-maneuvering their predator.

It was fascinating to see one of these birds climb high in the sky circling the field, and then, as Mr. Beebe swung his lure, making a sudden stoop. Each time the falcon came headlong down with folded wings to a sudden strike, and then rose again to come to rest on the ground a few yards away with the "prey" clasped in its talons, waiting for the falconer to take it.

MOTHER KNOWS BEST

This little story, told by Mrs. R.C. Mackenzie-Grieve, is really too good to pass up. It appears that this summer a pair of house sparrows were building a nest in her garden on Penrhyn Street at Cadboro Bay. The male, however, was just too energetic for words. He kept on bringing more and more material for the nest, far more than was necessary. This evidently exasperated the female sparrow, for finally, when he appeared with a long piece of string, she stopped working on the nest, caught the male by the scruff of the neck and gave him a thorough shaking. He flew off to the top of a nearby shed, looking, as Mrs. Mackenzie-Grieve said, very disconsolate, but apparently he had learned his lesson, for he stopped worrying his partner, and allowed her to complete the job.

A.R.D.

THE JUNIOR PAGE

by Freeman King

During the past month the junior branch have had some very interesting experiences.

A trip to the rock cliffs west of Otter Point, hunting for sea shore creatures proved disappointing, as the tide was high, though Indian carvings on the face of a rock outcrop were examined, and the caverns were explored.

The trip to Beaver Lake was really exciting, when some of the group found the skeleton of a man. The police were notified, and it was found that the man had been missing since last March. During that trip we experienced a thunder storm which brought in its wake a violent hail and rain storm. Every one of the party got thoroughly soaked, but there were no complaints and all took the rough spot with a smile.

A trip was made to Prior Hill in Thetis Lake Park, where we found the fireplace which had been built there. Here some excellent specimens of fungi were collected.

A trip to the panhandle off Munn Road where it had been logged off was made. Some rock climbing was demonstrated to the group.

The excursion to Wells Mountain proved to be another wet trip, and still no complaints, but a happy bunch. Some very interesting country was explored in this area, as the mountain is in terraces. Also some very good specimens of fungi were found and collected.

We have approximately thirty-five children going on these trips, and more are joining every week.

The junior leaders have held an executive meeting, and re-organized the members in each group. We now have six groups operating.

We would like more parents to give us a helping hand with transportation on Saturdays. If any can, will they contact Mr. Gordon Clendenning, 2489 Epworth Street, telephone EV.3-8998.

The Juniors will meet each Saturday at the Monterey Cafe at the corner of Hillside and Douglas Streets at 1:30 p.m. for field trips. Leader: Mr. Freeman King.

Anyone who would like to join these trips is very welcome. Mr. King can be contacted at GR.9-2966.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

Thursday &

Friday:

Nov. 5th & 6th:

AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR: At the Oak Bay Junior High School at 8 p.m., both nights.

Speaker: Mr. Emerson Scott.

Subject: "Rocky Mountain Rambles".

Saturday:

Nov. 7th:

FUNGUS FORAY: Meet at the Monterey Cafe at 1:30 p.m. for a trip to John Dean Park.

Leader: Miss M. C. Melburn.

Tuesday:

Nov. 10th:

GENERAL MEETING: At Cafeteria, Douglas Bldg. at 8 p.m. Guest speaker will be Dr. Victor B. Scheffer, biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wild Life Service. His topic is "Design in Nature" and is illustrated by a set of most unusual and interesting colour slides.

Saturday:

Nov. 14th:

BIRD FIELD TRIP: Meet at Clover Point at 9:30 a.m. for a tour of our waterfront.

Lunch break at the home of Mrs. Parris, 592 Island Road. Bring lunch.

Leader Alan Poynter, phone EV.4-8330.

Tuesday:

Nov. 17th.

BOTANY GROUP: At the Provincial Museum at 8 p.m. Subject 'Facts about Fungi'.

Questions will be answered by Miss M. C. Melburn.

Also 'Lets Look at Lichens', Display of sketches by Miss Emily Sartain.

Members are requested to bring note-books, pencils and one or two specimens at least, of any fungi or lichens, and to bring two questions.

Tuesday:

Nov. 24th:

GEOLOGY GROUP: At the Provincial Museum at 8 p.m.

Speaker: Dr. A. O. Hayes

Subject: 'The Vancouver Group'.

Saturday:

Nov. 28th.

GEOLOGY FIELD TRIP: Meet at 2 p.m. at the end of Foul Bay Road, overlooking Gonzales Bay.

Leader: Mr. A. H. Marrion.

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