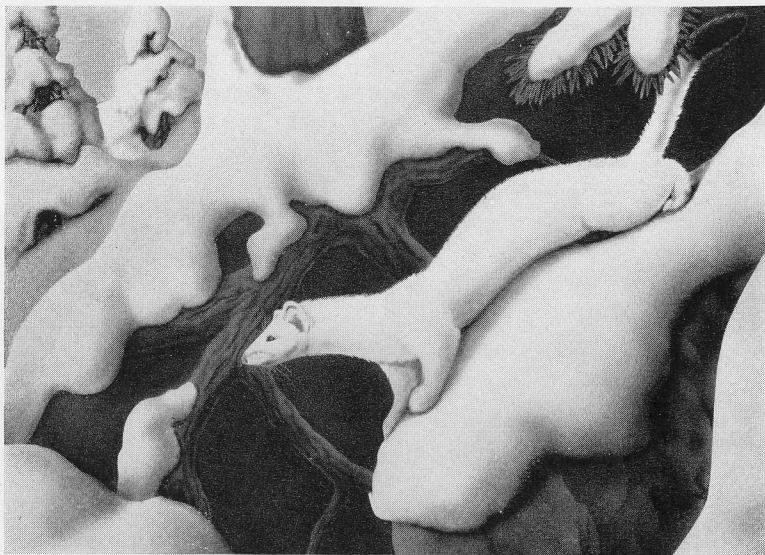


The
**VICTORIA
NATURALIST**

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(F. L. Beebe.)

Short-tailed Weasel

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OUR COVER

The species of weasels are sidespread throughout the northern part of the northern hemisphere and all fairly closely related. British Columbia alone has three species, the short-tailed, the long-tailed and the least, which are divided again into sub-species, five of the short-tailed and three of the long-tailed, the least weasel being a rare species in B. C., where it has been found occasionally in the northern and central parkland regions.

A short-tailed weasel common to Vancouver Island is given the imposing name of Mustela erminea anquinae, and can be found in a great variety of habitats, usually at lower elevations. Rock-slides, coniferous forest edge, deciduous forest, grasslands, sea-beach debris, banks of streams and lakes, cultivated fields, and wherever small mammals and birds occur. Males measure about 12 inches long, and in summer the fur is brown above and white underneath, turning white in winter where low temperatures prevail.

An excellent account of the weasel is given in the November-December issue of the Canadian Audubon.

Those interested in the mammals of British Columbia should obtain the handbook on this subject issued by the Provincial Museum, written by Ian McTaggart Cowan and Charles J. Guiguet, from which the above information was obtained.

A.R.D.

GREETINGS

May we wish all our friends a Happy Christmas, and many good meetings in the coming year. In addition, we have just received a letter from our good friends and members Cmdr and Mrs. Soulsby, in which they advise the book on European birds given them on their departure last August is being found very useful, and that they had the joy of finding a dipper on the River Ammer, near their residence at Oberammergau. They wish all their many friends in the Society a Happy Christmas.

The editors.

THE NOVEMBER GENERAL MEETING

This meeting was held in the Cafeteria on November 10, and it was well this place had been selected, as 120 persons attended, which is more than the Provincial Museum could have accommodated.

Dr. Victor B Scheffer, biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of Seattle, was the speaker. His talk, however, had nothing to do with his occupation, but was entitled "Art Sources in Nature", and was illustrated by color slides, many of which he had taken with the aid of a microscope. They depicted the curious patterns which nature has designed in different forms of life. His slides ranged from broad landscapes to enlargements of the most minute of living things. Some were so strange as to be almost abstract in character, others were baffling, but most of them showed what beauty of design there was in nature.

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The Victoria Natural History Society, which was established in its present form in 1944, has never been registered under the Societies' Act, and at this meeting, the members confirmed the wish of the executive that this be done. The cost is only \$18.00, and will necessitate that the books be audited by a chartered accountant, and Mr. Stan Wakeford kindly agreed to act in this capacity.

The purchase of an amplifier (used at this meeting) was also passed. This will cost about \$90.00, and will be owned jointly by the Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary Association and our Society, each providing half the cost.

The Vice-President also brought to the attention of the members the proposal of the Oak Bay Municipal Council to 'improve' Uplands Park by cutting down the scrub oaks, filling in the bogs, creating playing fields, making a series of lakes and planting trees. The members agreed that a letter should be written the Council urging them to leave this beautiful piece of woodland exactly as it is, as it is the only piece of natural parkland left in the Victoria area.

The matter of the conservation of, and possible purchase of the wooded bog area known as Rithet's Swamp, mentioned in the October Naturalist, is still definitely under consideration, and it is hoped to have something of a positive nature brought forward at the December meeting.

MEMBERSHIP

The following is a list of our members at this time (November 20). A membership list has not been published for some years, and it was thought it might be interesting.

In addition to the above there are now forty-one paid-up members of the Junior Group.

Mr W. Adams - Winnipeg	Mr A. R. Davidson
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Miss E. Collen	Mr E. O. Humphries
Mr W. Mackay Draycot, N.Vanc'r	

Miss Mary Hamilton
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JUNIOR ESSAYS

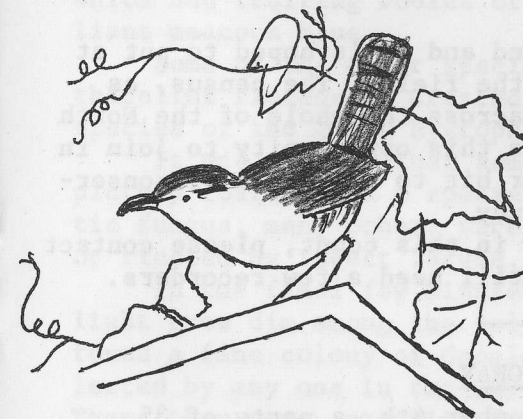
The following is one of the prize winning essays submitted in the Competition sponsored by the Society this spring. It was written and illustrated by Nancy Chapman, 580 Ardersier Road, Victoria. We think you will like it.

OUR WRENS

They really weren't ours, but we liked to call them ours. It was fun to see them and to see the babies grow up.

It all happened one sunny afternoon in the late Spring, when I was playing out in the backyard. I saw a small, brown wren (although I didn't know it was a wren then) perched on a tree limb. She had something in her mouth and I knew she must be taking it to feed her babies, so I decided to watch her and see where she was going. I followed her around the yard and back again. Finally, after looking this way and that, she hopped up the rose trellis and up onto the roof of the back porch. I ran quickly to tell my mother, who came out just in time to see the wren flying away for another tidbit. We looked all over the porch (which was

closed up like a small room) and finally we spied a well-hidden nest on top of a cupboard between two tin cans. We got a step-ladder while the mother was away, and looked into the nest; all I saw was one orange beak. We wondered whether it was the mother or father we had been watching, until one time one bird came in the door while the other was still on the nest. Then we knew both parents were helping to fill the mouths. Later that night we looked in two of the birdbooks and found it was a wren.



Once while we were out there we heard a cheep. We looked all over and finally found a tiny baby wren tangled up in the gardening tools. We put it back in the nest and while we were up on the ladder, we saw four beaks, which made five altogether.

Once or twice again one fluttered out of the nest and we put it back. Then one day we saw something that made us

blink. We saw seven wrens, two big ones and five little ones, all lined up on the wood pile. We knew they were growing up and ready to fly away. We saw them many times after that, sometimes one, sometimes seven. This year, when I was playing I saw about three wrens flying around the yard. Now I am hoping that maybe our nest will be occupied again this year.

A CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS REMINDER

by Alan Poynter

Once again Christmas is almost upon us, and with it comes the bird count. Why couldn't they hold this thing in the summer instead of dragging us all out in the cold wet dawn of a winter's day, to stand out in heaven knows what sort of weather trying to identify and count birds and write them down on a soggy old paper when we should be at home in front of a nice big fire reminiscing over Christmasses gone by, but there it is.

However, maybe the sun will shine for us. A few changes have been made this year and we are attempting to cover a few more good bird spots. The younger members will bear the brunt of this, although we do have a few new members who will help out.

The date will be January 2nd and it is hoped to put at least twelve teams of two into the field. The census, as most of us are aware, is taken across the whole of the North American continent, and gives us this opportunity to join in a co-operative effort to add our bit to the cause of conservation and of bird migration study.

Anyone who can participate in this count, please contact me as soon as possible, as we still need a few recorders.

FUNGUS FORAY

On Saturday afternoon, November 4th, a party of 35 assembled at John Dean Park for the annual Fungus Foray. More than 60 species were found, ranging in size from the tiny Mycenas to the big red Russulas and giant Clitocybe. There were jet-black ones and shining white ones, as well as some of almost every other colour except blues and greens which are decidedly uncommon among members of this group of plants.

Of course, the majority of the specimens were gilled mushrooms, but all the other types of fruiting bodies were represented too, i.e. those with spores produced on a

smooth surface or on surfaces with pits, pores or teeth. The toothed group included *Hydnum repandum*, a gay little golden 'blonde', and *Tremellodon gelatinosum*, a jelly fungus having the appearance of wet snow. Elf-saddles, witch's butter, rabbit-ears and coral fungi (*Clavaria*) bear their spores on a smooth surface; *Boleti* have rather deep pores as do all the various *Polypores*. Some fungi produce their spores on "hidden surfaces", for example, bird's-nest fungus and all of the puff-ball group.

Several *Lactarius* species, known by their milky juice, were found and compared with the waxy *Laccaria* whose gills are flesh-coloured, except in the variety *amethystina* which has purple gills. Only two pink-spored species were found, these were fawn-coloured *Pluteus* and one of the *Entolomas*; and the sticky peg-top mushroom (*Gonphidius glutinosus*) was the only black-spored species found in the Park -- shaggy-manes do not grow in the woods but they were noticed along the roadside; shaggy-manes and inky-caps are black-spored.

Helotium citrinum, with its bright yellow almost sessile fruiting bodies growing out of dead wood, is a "first cousin" to the green-stain fungus (*Chlorosplenium aeruginascens*) found on our foray in Thetis Park two years ago and which had fruiting bodies of a similar shape but of a brilliant peacock blue.

Some of the other species found were the scaly *Cantharellus floccosus*, Crested *Lepiota* and three handsome species of the genus *Hygrophorus*.

It was noticed that some mushrooms were almost completely coated with a species of *Hypomyces*, a white parasitic fungus; many others were found partially eaten by slugs or riddled by insect larvae. Everything has its enemies.

In the final few minutes of the afternoon, as the light grew dim among the tall timbers, one of the observers found a fine colony of *Geoglossum glabrum* never before collected by any one in the party. This was a real "find". There they were, standing like a troupe of black exclamation marks, indicating the end of the "hunt" and the end of the day's sunlight.

M.C.M.

A MUSHROOM EPISODE

by W. MacKay Draycot

The prevailing mushroom season brings to mind a most pleasant experience; the opposite sensation to those who have taken and eaten poisonous specimens. We had grown turnips in a soil mixed with fresh horse manure and the

growth was excellent. Under the large leaves a good crop of mushrooms was thriving. We quizzed each other about secretly sown spawn; neither was guilty of the act. After consulting that reliable book *One Thousand American Fungi*, by McIlvaine & Macadam, we were satisfied the specimens were Agaricus campestris Linne, or one of its kin.

After they were washed and cooked my dubious friend preferred to try half a plateful while my share was a full plate. They were really delicious. Twenty minutes went by and no complaints. The room atmosphere was warm. "Say! Do you feel all right? My head and eyes are not normal!" said Charles. "Well, perhaps mine are not either for the lines on this letter I am writing seem to run into one another," was my reply. "We're poisoned. Salt and water, quick!" he yelled. "No, Charles, the sensation is extremely delightful." He swallowed the salt and water and went outside to vomit. Returning, he helped me to stagger outside to breathe cold fresh air. In ten minutes the delightful sensation had ceased, which was certainly a disappointment! We decided to retire and, being in separate beds, arranged to call "All right", periodically. Half an hour or so passed. Charles was in the arms of Morpheus, snoring. Not me, the former sensation had returned. All nerves in my body were glowing warmly in an ecstasy of delight. This condition lasted continuously for about an hour before I lapsed into a semiconscious state, in which dreaming ensued. No T.V. script writer could invent the scenes nor magnate rich enough to produce them--a bridge across the Atlantic, billions of richly coloured butterflies, aeroplanes thick as flies, millions of hideous beetles, and so on, it continued until the "screen" went black. In my drugged fantastic brain that was the end! No. Next morning we were both back to normal with no after-effect feeling. Only mushrooms, bread and butter had been eaten, with tea as a beverage. Therefore the peculiar sensation can not be attributed to anything else but the mushrooms. Not deterred by the above experience the writer has eaten, raw and cooked, several species of fungi without any recurrence of the drugged episode, or ill effects. After enjoying a feed of *Langue de boef* and *St. George toadstools* in France, with a Frenchman, both of us were taken to hospital for treatment! Nothing happened, except that we lost the meal we had so enjoyed. Just the same it is advisable to learn to know fungi.

SKYWARD

Above me in the cobalt sky
On wings outstretched each gull drifts by
Like a tiny silver plane.

The wind swept heaven is their abode
Its trackless paths, their jeweled road
In sunshine and in rain.

They fly in lines of perfect grace
They break formation, dip, and race
Then wheel and form again.

And as the day draws to its close
With snowy breasts, all tinged with rose
They fly into the night.

I like to think that some day I
Shall like a silver aircraft fly
To some celestial height.

Like gulls and planes I'll soar on wings
Of freedom far from mundane things
And into realms of light.

Emilie Craig McTavish

THE WILLET

Early in the morning of October 31st we were sitting in the car on Beach Drive at the corner of Newport Avenue, looking over the golf course for birds on the distant rocks. The atmosphere was hazy and identification of birds difficult. We were just about to move on when a bird flew from one distant rock to another. It appeared to have some white on its wings, and it had a vague appearance of a large shore bird, but apparently at the time it didn't register in my mind as anything unusual; we moved on to Bowker Avenue, where we are sure to see shore birds. There we met Alan Poynter. Just as we were leaving, I asked him if he would like to see a willet. He looked at me with astonishment and disbelief, which was quite excuseable, as I didn't believe it myself. On the off chance however, he immediately went back to the spot, and climbed over the rocks to the spot, and there was a willet! Maybe not quite believing his own eyes, he got on the phone and called up the Sterlings, the Morgans and Tommy Briggs, and in a very short while they all appeared on the scene, Tommy with a small boat in his car. Well, they all saw it, photographed it, and established a positive record of this bird being here.

This is an unusual bird to be seen on the Pacific Coast. In Munro & Cowan's book, 'The Bird Fauna of B.C.' it is included in the hypothetical list on the basis of one bird reported to have been shot here on August 18, 1898. The only other records include one made by Mr. Owen Clay about fifteen years ago, when he sighted a small flock of willets at about the same place as this one bird was seen last month, one taken more recently by Mr. H.M. Laing of Comox, and three birds observed off Discovery Island in 1956. A.R.D.

THE BOTANY GROUP MEETING

by L. M. Parris

Those of us who braved the elements to attend the botany meeting on Tuesday, November 17th, had a most rewarding evening.

It was planned to be a follow-up to the Fungus Foray, which took place earlier in the month.

The first part of the evening was spent viewing Miss Sartain's beautiful paintings of fungi and lichens. She had some fifty or more on view. These were much admired.

The sixty odd species of lichen and fungi brought in by various members were also of great interest and help in identifying the various species. Of special interest was the rather rare *Hericium erinaceum*, a fungus, of which the common name "Satyr's Beard" is rather astonishing. This was found by Mrs. L. Wilkins on the under side of a rotted maple log in the grounds of St. Margaret's School between the old house and Fort Street. Another interesting specimen was a lichen named *Letharia vulpina*, which was found this summer by Russel Porter at Merritt, and which is rarely found this side of the Coast Mountains.

Miss Melburn handled the questions of the members in her usual efficient manner, to the satisfaction of all those present.

Professor C.W. Lowe had two microscopes with him and showed slides of the internal structure of some fungi and lichens.

The latter part of the evening was devoted to the showing of slides brought in by Mr. Osborne, Mr. Burroughs, Miss Lemon, Mr. Stansfield and Mrs. Parris.

We wish to thank Miss Lemon for so efficiently putting them through. Miss Sartain and Miss Melburn are to be congratulated for arranging such an enjoyable evening.

A vote of thanks was tendered by Mr. Barry Morgan and Mr. Stansfield to all those who took part.

Some thirty members were present.

THE JUNIOR PAGE

by Freeman King

Field trips during the past month have been very good, with an average attendance of over thirty-five.

On the expedition to Horth Hill, North Saanich, we found a large number of the red flowering currant, ranging from tiny seedlings to some over six feet in height, most of them growing in shale formation and exposed to the south. The creeping blackberry and the flowering dogwood abound in this area.

The trip to Mount Metchosin took us into a different country. There is very little undergrowth, though the arbutus grows in abundance. From the summit we did some sketching, and some very good results were shown. From here some excellent views are to be seen. It was a worthwhile trip.

We held one meeting in the Provincial Museum on a really wet Saturday. Plant identification was carried out as well as slides being shown.

On our latest trip we went out to the original Old West Road which goes through the Indian Reserve in north Saanich. This again is different country. At one point there is a large arbutus tree grove in which most of the trees are straight, and do not have the twisted formation that is usually found in their species. A lone western hemlock was noted, unusual for this area, and a freak of nature - two small cedar trees had grown side by side for several years, then they had joined together, and one could see where they had twined round each other for several years then formed one straight trunk which in no way showed the formation of the two. This tree is about twenty-five years old.

The trip to Goldstream with the twelve-year-olds to see the salmon run was more than interesting. Not only were there lots of salmon but several pairs of dippers were seen diving in the shallows for the eggs of the fish.

The leaders' expedition to Iron Mine Hill at East Sooke was one of our best trips. There you go through part of the rain forest where the moss and ferns grow to the tops of the maples and the sword fern grows five and six feet tall. We cooked our dinners at the mouth of a beautiful little stream with several small islands in the foreground.

Some of the leader group helped to run a new trail in Thetis Sanctuary Park down to the Colquitz River.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

Friday & Saturday
December 4th & 5th: AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR: At the Oak Bay Junior High School Auditorium at 8 p.m., both nights.
Speaker: Mr. Bristol Foster
Subject: "Roving Three Continents: Africa - Asia - Australia."

Tuesday:
December 8th: GENERAL MEETING: At the Cafeteria in the Douglas Building near the Museum at 8 p.m.
Guest Speaker: Mr. C. P. Lyons.
Subject: "A Year's Travel in Pictures"
Mr. Lyons is Supervisor of Provincial Parks, an Audubon Lecturer, and one of our favourite speakers.

Saturday:
December 12th: BIRD FIELD TRIP: Meet at Monterey Cafe at 9:30 a.m. or at Parking Lot at Beaver Lake Park at 10 a.m. Lunch break at the home of Mr and Mrs J. A. Berry, 4651 Pipe Line Road.

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.

NOVEMBER BIRD FIELD TRIP

Twenty-five birdwatchers braved the elements on Saturday the 14th of November to take in the waterfront from Clover Point to Humber Road at the Uplands.

It was a cold day, with the thermometer reading thirty degrees, and a fifteen mile an hour wind blowing; but no matter what the weather our waterfront in winter always has an abundance of birds, and over the day we saw fifty-six species.

Once again we have two European widgeon in Beacon Hill Park, with wood duck, the beautiful mandarin duck and not less than eight male hooded mergansers in their full resplendent fall plumage.

Mrs Parris opened her home to the very cold group for lunch, which was really appreciated. Alan Poynter.

Dr. Hayes wishes the following corrections made:

October issue: page 26, 8th line from top 'Kitwan' should be 'Kirwan'; 10th line from bottom 'Principals' should be 'Principles'.

Victoria Natural History Society

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President:

RALPH FRYER
244 Richmond Road
Telephone EV 3-8795

Vice-President:

FREEMAN KING
541 McKenzie Avenue
Telephone GR 9-2966

Editors:

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

G. CLIFFORD CARL
Telephone EV 3-8524

Secretary:

MISS IRENE T. LATIMER
2445 Hamiota Street
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