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(F. L. Beebe.)

Band-tailed Pigeon

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OUR COVER

The band-tailed pigeon is a bird peculiar to the west coast of North America. In British Columbia it has been recorded as far east as Spuzzum on the Vancouver-Cariboo Highway, and as far north as Terrace on the Skeena River. Here it is primarily a summer resident, which winters chiefly from northern California, Arizona, New Mexico and as far south as Nicaragua. Small flocks can generally be found in this vicinity in the winter, but the band-tail is definitely a migrant and should be looked for during the first week in April.

This is one of the many birds which have been over-hunted in the States, and while it now receives more protection, it arrives here in much smaller numbers than in former years.

In shape it is similar to the domestic pigeon, but it is slightly larger and can be distinguished by the dark blue-grey upper parts. Also, as shown in Frank Beebe's drawing, the adults have a white crescent on the nape.

One of its habitual local nesting places is in the tops of the tall alders and firs at the foot of Killarney Road at Cadboro Bay. This may possibly be due to the fact that the beach between Killarney and the Yacht Club is lined with some of the largest elderberry bushes in this district, and the band-tailed pigeon favours this plant.

A.R.D.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Will members kindly take note that this month the General Meeting will take place on the first Tuesday, April 5th. This has been changed from our regular date to allow members to attend the combined meeting of the Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary Association and this Society on the following Tuesday, April 12th, when the Minister of Conservation and Recreation, the Honourable Earle C. Westwood, will address the combined meeting.

Last spring a young man named Tim Dixon visited Victoria on his travels around the world in search of birds. He contacted members of our bird group, who took him out to favoured spots where he could possibly see some species new to him.

He has kept in touch with some of the members by correspondence, and we give below a few excerpts from a letter received from him last month, which shows how widespread some of our local species are.

Mr. Dixon lives in Somerset, England and one day in February he and some friends visited an area called Muchelney, a freshwater district in the western part of the county. There they saw large numbers of ducks including 2100 widgeon 350 pintails, 50 teal, 5 goldeneye and 5 mallard. Here they counted 58 Bewick swans, which are a sub-species of our Whistling swan, and 14 herons. There were also thousands of starlings, a bird becoming too common here.

Quoting now from his letter:

" We did well with predators, seeing a kestrel, a barn owl hunting in broad daylight, 3 sparrowhawks and 3 buzzards. Sparrowhawks are like your sharpshins, and are often mobbed by small birds. One we saw was being chased by pied wagtails and meadow pipits; another was driven off by a carrion crow. Another crow involved itself in a tussle with one of the buzzards, which was much too clumsy to be able to avoid it. Coots were fairly numerous - about 250 - and scavenging gulls were loitering about. During the cold weather, the smaller birds pass westwards towards warmer areas, and in the sheltered low-lying fields we found flocks of skylarks, meadow pipits, fieldfares and various finches feeding. Around Wells Moat can be found kingfishers, little grebes and grey wagtail. The woods round here are quite good for birds - buzzards, sparrowhawks, green and greater-spotted woodpeckers, nuthatches, tree creepers, goldcrests, bullfinches, little owls and long tailed tits are all fairly common."

A.R.D.

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The 'pilot' project of the Arboretum Society, an 8½ acre area set aside by the Municipality of Saanich, has now completed the first year of a five-year plan. One thousand dollar's worth of rhododendrons, azaleas, and several hundred other plants and shrubs have been planted for landscaping. This arboretum is situated in Playfair Park at the corner of North Quadra and Glenora Streets.

The development of a major arboretum started on February 1st, with a brief presented to the Parks Commission of the Council of the City of Victoria, asking that a two hundred acre plot be set aside for this purpose in the Elk-Beaver Lakes area.

The brief requests that:-

1. The Elk-Beaver Lakes Park be reserved in perpetuity.
2. The City give assurance that it will take no steps during the next ten years that would preclude the development of an arboretum at Elk-Beaver Lakes Park.

The Society then propose the gradual development of this land over a period of at least fifty years, broken into ten year stages.

The brief also goes on to say - "That the most beneficial type of urban parkland is the green belt, and Victoria is fortunate indeed to have such a belt in the four large rural parks of Mount Douglas, Thetis Lake, Goldstream and Elk-Beaver Lakes."

"The utilization of a green belt for public recreation can and should, take many forms, existing together and complementing one another. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that scientific and cultural facilities, such as an arboretum, will go hand in hand with swimming, boating, picnicing, and playgrounds for children."

"Because of the fact that no other area in Canada can offer such ideal growing conditions, we expect a project of this scope to interest industry in the whole of Western Canada, and will be in a position to apply for grants from all or any of the large cultural foundations on this continent. We will seek grants and bequests from private individuals and contributions through membership on a wide scale throughout Western Canada."

This Society is now waiting for a favourable response from the City. It will then make the necessary surveys on the actual ground and will formulate definite plans and designs for presentation to the public.

A.R.D.

THE STRANGENESS OF SUCCULENTS

A Botany Group Meeting on February 23rd

by Emily Sartain

A most interesting evening was spent by this group at the Museum, when Professor Lowe transported us to another world in his talk on 'succulent plants'.

This term covers a wide range of species, running into thousands. Even our common groundsel is related to a South African succulent plant. Seldom do these plants have common names, but what fascinating 'proper' names they have:—opuntias, epyphyllums, bryophyllums, mesembryanthemms, tradescantias, etc. (What a test for a spelling bee).

Mr. Lowe had numerous live specimens with which to interest us, including the familiar Christmas cactus, sedums, various curious but interesting little cacti plants, and a native opintia that can be found near Gordon Head and at Ten-mile-Point. (If anyone finds this little cactus in bloom this summer, please telephone me. I want its portrait.)

These succulents need to reserve their water supply, as for the most part they live in hot, dry areas, though some exist on the branches of tropical trees, where they must grow aerial roots in order to absorb whatever moisture is in the atmosphere. For this reason many of them like the Christmas cactus, the epyphyllums and the hoyia or wax plants, have thick waxy leaves which help to retain the moisture. Others have an outer protection of thick stiff hairs, which protect their breathing cells. Some plants die at the base when the water supply is cut off, and yet continue to grow at the tips of the leaves where the water is stored. Also, some air plants grow baby plants along the edges of the leaves which drop off and root in the soil. One can even cut up a leaf of a succulent into several pieces, put each piece in the right kind of soil, and a new plant will grow.

Most of us think of green leaves as being cool on a hot summer's day, when we wander into the cool shady woods out of the hot sunshine, but this is not so with the leaves of the succulents. They stay warm and do not evaporate their moisture, but store it up for their future sustenance.

I have just touched on a few of the delights revealed to us in Mr. Lowe's talk, and the coloured slides added greatly to the interest. We are indeed grateful for such an interesting evening.

GEMS OF SPRING

by J. W. Winson

The jewels of spring are all her own, for winter took back with him his sapphires of cold and his diamonds of ice. He may turn again breathing gems of rime on nights that are cold, but spring will not open her eye to them.

When she steps out on the tears of night they are dew-drops, with rainbow facets, having sparks of brilliant bronze not seen in the bow.

Dew is an early denison of spring, appearing only when the sun has warmed the evening air.

Emerald jewels stud the bushes and thrust their narrow bars through the sod, to open into leaf. Of all her jewels, these are the most numerous, making miles of vernal carpetry through meadow and valley to hill-top.

Rare as yet, more thrilling in their loveliness, are the petal jewels of white trillium and ruby currant. These petals will soon crowd to commonness, but the first are always precious; strange and astonishing in their beauty, as they rise from the deadened earth.

Then suddenly, while the grass stubble still scintillates with its bright pendants, a bare maple is hung with feather jewels of emerald and topaz; three dozen evening grosbeaks are perched in the path of morning.

They came, no doubt, to pick up the swollen keys, the nutlets of autumn's maple seed, but before foraging they pause as if to greet the light, and sprinkle jewels of tinkling castanets on glad and hungry ears.

On a tree to the left alight almost as many robins, reflecting the rosy dawn on their breasts; not yet in the fullness of their song, but dropping gem notes casually without thought, as if choosing and dropping their sparkles of sound before threading the string that will be April's melody.

But jewel notes come from the lowlier bushes, where juncoes trill in broken bars, and song sparrows twitter in that sweetness intended for themselves alone, before they take to the bush tops for their characteristic callings.

Jewel of sight and jewel of sound meet at the top of a third maple where a purple finch is warbling alone. The 'warbler' family have not arrived yet, but this larger bird is a much truer warbler, having a lower pitched, more rippling and fluting trill, than the yellow and green warblers of later arrivals.

Purple is a poor guess at his coloring. He looks as if

he had been dripped in crimson wine, head first, and most of it stayed in his head feathers.

The robin is the charmed chorister of sunset, but the finch is the fitting herald of morning. His song is a vigorous roll with no sweet tenderness, but a quality of ready gladness for the new day. The dawn was given to him, he has the energy to greet it, the courage to welcome it and the confidence to enjoy such a jewel of a morning.

#### MEMBERSHIP

In the December issue a list of our members was given. To bring this list up to date, the following are the names of members who have joined the Society since then:-

Mr. R. B. Rushworth	Mr. & Mrs. E.W. Adshead
Miss Rachael Bogart	Mr. J. C. Ellens
Mrs. Lilian Rutherford	Mr. & Mrs. J.A. Flett
Mr. & Mrs. C. Patey	Mr. Frank Buffam
Mr. Raymond Barnes	Mr. A. Gray
Mr. J. M. Barnett	Rev. J.G.G. Bompas
Mr. G. Goodlake	Midwest Inter-Library Corporation

The total membership now stands at 126 single members, 43 family, and 43 juniors, 255 in all.

#### A LOCAL MOCKING BIRD

Our bird leader, Mr. Alan Poynter, works in an office on the Dallas Road at the corner of Ontario Street. Opposite stands the deserted immigration building, a fine old brick structure standing in its own grounds, in which are growing some large holly trees. One day in February, Alan noticed a bird here which was about the colour and size of a shrike, a fairly common wintering bird. However, he thought it worth investigating, and, on doing so, discovered it to be a mocking bird.

One of these birds was identified last summer at Miracle Beach, and some years ago one was collected at Duncan. Apparently the mocking bird is somewhat of a wanderer. This particular bird may be an aviary escapee, or a migrant; we do not know.

A.R.D.

#### A TRIP TO THE NANAIMO LAKES

Deirdre Webb

Dave and Ruth Stirling and myself planned a trip to look for elk at the Nanaimo Lakes for February 20th, and left shortly after 8:00 a.m. on that date. Overcast skies and a steady drizzle at Victoria filled us with foreboding, but, once we were over the Malahat the rain stopped, and the sun shone, though somewhat feebly, for a short time at the Lakes. That, combined with only a light north-westerly breeze, made for quite pleasant weather.

Our first stop was made at some flooded fields beside the main highway just north of Duncan, and our close scrutiny of the birds attracted to this place of abundant food and cover was well rewarded. Coots (about 80 in one flock), baldpate (totaling about 30), and common mergansers (also numbering approximately 30) formed the bulk of the water birds; but we also indentified: pintails (6 pairs), shovelers (1 pair), bufflehead (3), american goldeneye (2), ring-necked duck (7), scaup (several pairs), mallard (several pairs), canvasback (2), green-winged teal (5 pairs), one western grebe, and a few gulls (both glaucous-winged and mew). Furthermore, two surprises were in store for us: in the midst of the flock of coot, a male redhead duck--his rounded head and pale bluish bill unmistakable-- fed and swam quietly: while we easily picked out a male European widgeon, in full breeding plumage, from the baldpate flock with which it was feeding. These two species are uncommon in this area, so it was quite thrilling to be able to observe them at such a close distance that field marks were clearly seen with only low power binoculars. A few song sparrows and red-winged blackbirds sang from the bushes and young trees along the fence lines. We counted six hen pheasants picking up grubs and other food items from an exposed ridge of mud in a ploughed field; and, just before we drove on, three crows flew into some nearby trees.

Our attention was next attracted by a flock of birds congregated near the top of a bare tree in an open field. The tree was some distance from the highway, but by their silhouettes and actions, we identified the birds as: robins (approximately 24), pine siskins (3), a flicker, and a western meadow-lark.

We then paid a brief visit to Ivy Green Park which lies on the coastal side of the Island Highway a few miles north of Ladysmith. We saw nothing of the heronry for which the

park is noted, but golden-crowned kinglets lisped in the dense growth of Douglas fir; while cheery, active groups of oregon juncoes, pine siskins, red crossbills, and purple finches kept to the more open parts where the conifers gave way, quite abruptly, to a low-lying, salt-grass meadow. In the quiet water beyond this lay a straggling raft of bufflehead, scaup, and white-winged scoters. However, of most interest here was an unusually co-operative sharp-shinned hawk which we flushed from an inconspicuous perch in a willow. It was probably a female, as its large size bespoke Cooper's hawk until we saw its square-tipped tail when it flew low over the grass to alight on a hugh tree root which had been washed ashore. Here it remained until we approached to within twenty or thirty yards; whereupon it took wing, circling around and landing at the top of a nearby Douglas fir. The small finches must have been aware that the hawk(whose diet consists mainly of small perching birds) was not in a hunting mood, for they continued with their lively chattering seemingly oblivious to the close promimity of a predator. And, for its part, the hawk paid no heed to its potential prey-- wild predators do not kill wastefully; only to satisfy their hunger.

Shortly after turning off the main highway onto the paved road leading to the Nanaimo Lakes, we noticed a significant change in the landscape which became increasingly mountainous as we approached the interior-- indeed, most of the higher peaks were topped with a frosting of new snow. The soil, such as we could see from the road, seemed to consist entirely of coarse glacial till in which second growth lodgepole pine predominated; although Douglas fir(especially in the vicinity of the Lakes) was also abundant, together with a smattering of western hemlock, western white pine, balsam, and, where drainage was poor, red cedar.

At the lower end of the Second Lake is a large lumber camp where we stopped to enquire where elk had last been seen, and also whether we could drive beyond the road barrier on the far side of the lumber camp. The night watchman informed us that elk were to be found on "the flats" at the head of the Second Lake, and that only private cars with a special permit were allowed past the road barrier, but, that he had no objection to our walking beyond that point. At the camp we added a red-tailed hawk(cruising leisurely over the First Lake), and a raven to our bird list. This latter species was indulging in

some unusual manoeuvres-- proceeding in level flight for a short distance it would suddenly set its wings and plane down at a sharp angle in a sort of "side-slip"; return to normal flight for a few seconds, then "side-slip" again. This was repeated several times, with the bird occasionally giving voice to hoarse croaks. I remembered having seen a raven do this same thing near our home a few weeks previously, but could offer no explanation for these actions unless, perhaps, the bird derived some personal pleasure from them.

By the time we reached the barrier where we had to leave the car it was almost noon, so we decided to have lunch before going further. Here we were kept company by red crossbills (a few of the males singing) juncoes, siskins, golden-crowned kinglets and chickadees; and watched an adult bald eagle soaring with majestic ease against a backdrop of forested mountain slopes. The walk to the head of the lake, though invigorating and at the same time relaxing, was uneventful, for, in addition to the ever-present "small birds", we saw only one female American merganser and one female common goldeneye (these narrow, deep, and steep-shored lakes are not attractive to most of the winter water birds).

The road lies well above "the flats" affording an excellent view of the extensive alluvial area, once logged over, but now grown with young lodgepole pine and fir, alder, broadleaf maple, red-osier dogwood, ninebark, raspberry vines, grasses, and various herbaceous plants. A close inspection of "the flats" with binoculars did not reveal any elk-- either resting or feeding-- so we tossed down a stone from the roadside in the hopes of startling some hidden animal. This produced no elk, but it did flush an adult golden eagle from one of the many stumps. As it flew off, we had a very clear view of its brownish upperparts, dark wing tips and dark tail. And, like the sharp-shinned hawk, it proved most cooperative by landing near the top of a dead maple not far away, and allowing us to walk within a hundred yards or so of it without showing any concern at our presence. Later, when the eagle took to the air again, we had an excellent opportunity to compare it with the appreciably smaller and more slightly built bald eagle; for it was joined by two adults of the latter species, and the trio wheeled almost directly overhead for some minutes before drifting off over the mountains.

An old logging track wound across "the flats", and we followed it, still hoping to catch a glimpse of elk, if nothing else. Certainly, the abundance of well used trails, droppings, and tracks (though none fresh enough to be of that day) attested to the fact that this area is much frequented by these animals. Nevertheless, our search proved fruitless, though it is quite conceivable that they may have sensed our presence and moved off quietly, or else remained hidden in some dense thickets which we could not penetrate.

However, birds proved to be much less elusive creatures as we made our way slowly back to the road by a somewhat devious route (necessitated by jumbled piles of logs and slash which had to be clambered over or some way found around). A restless winter wren scolded briefly when we passed the brush pile in which it was feeding; a pair of towhees, calling occasionally, flitted about in a dense thicket of nine-bark; the metallic notes of a hairy woodpecker carried distinctly from the dead fir in which it was working; two red-shafted flickers flew overhead to pause momentarily at a tree-top perch; uttering harsh alarm notes, a Steller's jay (and the only one we saw) flew down from the top of a fir when we disturbed it; a grouse whirred away as we entered a stand of fir near the road, where also was a small flock of chickadees, and a brown creeper which brought the day's total to 50 species.

We hastened back along the road, stopping only to glance at seven buffle head we had missed on the way up, for the afternoon had brought with it steadily deteriorating weather conditions. Reaching the car moments before the first rain squall arrived, we looked back on the wind ruffled lake and steeply rising mountains, their tops now hidden by ragged, rain-filled clouds. We had not seen any elk, but the day had been filled with rewarding observations, and had provided a refreshing change from the "regular" birding areas close to Victoria.

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**MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE:** A combined field trip and picnic will be held for all the groups on SATURDAY, MAY 14th, in the Sooke area. Complete details will be announced at the April General Meeting, and will also be published in the May issue of the Naturalist.

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by Freeman King

The juniors have again put in a full month of activities. Trips to the Highland area by the younger section have been very interesting. During these trips they have been led by the junior leaders, as I have been working on the Francis cabin after taking them to their destination. I want to congratulate the leaders on doing such a fine job, and making notes of the interesting things that they have seen and done.

The monthly leaders' outing was spent cleaning out the creek and spring, building a dam and revetting it so that water may be obtained for Mr. Tom Francis when he returns to his new home. During that expedition we cooked out.

The junior branch also helped clean up and burn debris, and also rebuilt a portion of the snake fence that had been torn down.

The work done by these young people prove that they have the pioneer spirit in them, and if given the right lead can be a great help to others. My admiration for them gains every time I have the privilege to go out with them.

During the Sunday that we had winter, so to speak, a number of the group went for a trip around Thetis Lake, going in at the concession and along the north side and out at the swimming pool. There had not been anyone else around, so we had the clean white snow to break trail in.

On this trip tracks of mink, raccoon and other small animals were noted and studied.

A bald eagle was seen soaring above us, and the large nest at the west side was examined as well as we could, as it was high on the broken off top of a Douglas fir. We think there must be at least a ton of branches and other material on the top of this tree. A number of winter wrens and pine siskins were noted, as well as the pond ducks swimming in the lake.

One interesting feature was a muskrat that came off one of the small islands and ran along the thin shore ice, then dived into the water, then swam and dived as if searching for something. This proved to be an interesting finish to our trip.

A last year's mourning dove's nest was found at the north end of the lake, proving that they are inhabiting this area.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS1960Tuesday,  
April 5:GENERAL MEETING - in the Douglas Street  
Cafeteria at 8 p.m.Guest Speaker: Mr. Wilmer Gold of Youbou.  
His subject will be Vancouver Island, with a  
film depicting the flora and fauna of the  
Island, the Forbidden Plateau and Strathcona  
Park from a seaplane, a spawning sockeye sal-  
mon run, and native Indian totem pole carver  
at work.Tuesday,  
April 12:COMBINED MEETING of the Thetis Park Nature  
Sanctuary Association and the Victoria  
Natural History Society to hear the Minister  
of Conservation and Recreation, the Honourable  
Earle C. Westwood.Saturday,  
April 16:BIRD FIELD TRIP: Meet at the Monterey Cafe at  
9:00 a.m., or at the Sidney Wharf at 10 a.m.,  
Bring lunch. The party have been invited to  
the waterfront garden of Mr. & Mrs. Walker  
Taylor at Towner Park for the lunch break.  
Leader: Mr. Alan Poynter.Tuesday,  
April 19:GEOLOGY GROUP: At the Museum at 8 p.m.  
Speaker: Mr. George E. Winkler  
Topic: The birds and animals met while  
prospecting in British Columbia.Saturday,  
April 23:GEOLOGY FIELD TRIP: Meet at the Monterey  
Cafe at 1:30 p.m. for a trip to Island View  
Beach.  
Leader: Mr. A. H. Marrion.Saturday,  
April 30:BOTANY FIELD TRIP: Meet at the Monterey Cafe  
at 1:30 p.m. for a trip to Thetis Park Nature  
Sanctuary. Bring tea.  
Leader: Miss M. C. Melburn.

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The Juniors will meet each Saturday at the Monterey Cafe  
at 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 wel-  
come. Mr. King can be contacted at GR.9-2966.



# Victoria Natural History Society

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Single, \$2; Family, \$3; Junior, \$1; Life Membership, \$20.