

The
**VICTORIA
NATURALIST**

Vol. 16, No. 9

May, 1960



Calypso

(F. L. Beebe.)

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OUR COVER

This orchid is certainly one of our most attractive wild flowers, and in its natural setting, rising as it does out of the mosses and ferns of the woods, it has a distinctive and delicate appearance unsurpassed by other native flowers.

To quote from the Museum's handbook on the orchids of British Columbia, written by Dr. Adam Szczawinski and illustrated by Frank Beebe - "This charming little orchid is very fragrant and is easily distinguished by its slipper-like flower, with an overlap forming an apron in front. Calypso is deemed by many who appreciate wild orchids as the most beautiful of them all. It is still one of the most common orchids in British Columbia, but it is being exterminated in places frequented by man. When the flowers are picked, the plant is usually destroyed, as the small corm is on the surface, held there by delicate roots that break at the slightest touch. Calypso is the lone representative of the genus in North America".

AUDUBON SCREEN TOURS

The double Audubon lectures given the previous season having proved successful, the same arrangements have been made for next winter, the dates and lecturers being as follows:-

Friday, Sept.30th, and Saturday, Oct. 1st, 1960 --
Allan Cruickshank.
Saturday, Nov.12th, and Monday, Nov.14th, 1960 --
Wm. Anderson
Friday, Jan.20th and Saturday, Jan.21st, 1961 ---
Robert Hermes
Friday, March 3rd and Saturday, March 4th, 1961 ---
Chester P. Lyons
Friday, April 7th and Saturday, April 8th, 1961 ---
Laurel Reynolds.

* * * * *

"OF CRACKPOTS AND OWL-LIGHT"

by Dorothy Palmer.

Out of the stillness a breeze stirred, whispered through the gully, softly awakened the drowsy tarn, nudged lazy ripples across the pool to spend themselves amongst the reeds, the reeds nodded in graceful greeting and farewell. And all was still again.

Mountain air elation and gloaming's changing lights and shadows charmed the scene. Fish, rising, strewed ringlets in widening circles of spendthrift gold; a ball of feathers sat on a branch overhead and kept dropping pebbles in a bottle, slowly at first, then faster and faster and faster, saying in owl-talk that the woods of night are his.

It is a small lake tucked away in the Beaufort Range, hidden in a grove of cedars and hemlocks, an olive green and brown oasis in the evening shadows, surrounded by barren forest devastation. The water reflected a pale sky above and across the farther reaches soft henna tones mirrored the inverted contours of Mount Arrowsmith. Along the trail was a better view of this Island vertebra upthrusting jagged crags to catch a wealth of rich colourings from the setting sun; now, as it towered loftily above the remaining treetops, it was washed in brilliant apricot pink, with tattered snows drifting from its crown to flow lacy streamers down amethyst rifts.

While awaiting the fisherman's return the little owl and thoughts were company, - and solitude.

- A bird-watcher had laughed, "They call us Crackpots!" -

Each day one small bird will control undesirable insect life by eating thousands of insects or their eggs or larvae. Because of their usefulness to mankind - birds surely merit our gratitude and protection.

It has been said that if there were no birds left the proliferating insect life would kill off all humans on this earth within a few hours.

Bird-watchers are recording the survival and distribution of birds, not for love of birds alone but in the interest of all humanity's survival.

An orchardist complains that the cost of insecticides leaves him little profit from his investment and labours. The poison sprays kill off a high percentage of birds and somehow he has to spend more each year on insecticides.

"Crackpots?"

Birds take fruit too. It is said that birds will satiate themselves on earlier maturing non-marketable fruits and will not require the saleable fruit. A few years ago we proved this to be correct. The orchardist would find it worth the extra trouble.

... The old farmer talked about clearing land in the early twenties; slow work, he said, but we kept our good soil organisms. Year after year, in the fall when summer's drought had dried the tree-stumps they were set a-smouldering; the autumn air was scented with the pleasant resinous smell of smoke from smouldering fires and in pasture and ploughland, where stumps upthrust their blackened snags, wisps of smoke rose autumn after autumn, and after dark, red rubies jewelled the landscape. Smoke's pungency and scattered red glows, - these were the autumn features of this Island's farmlands. He has a nostalgia for those autumn burnings.

Nowadays, he said, a bulldozer clears your acreage in next to no time; it pulls the smaller trees out by the roots and pushes blasted stumps and all debris up into vast piles for burning, leaving acres of stones and rubbish and displaced top soil.

The old farmer settled here while the Island was in its hey-day; he has seen the death of that hey-day. Latterly the growing pains began to take hold as they plundered the Island's resources with magnificently accelerated speed. The big trees, the hundreds of years old primeval giants, - you have to go a long way to see them now. Oh! there are a few scattered here and there, preserved by those who value princely gifts, - a few still standing to tell of past glories when this Island had so many the end of them could not be foreseen. The caterpillar bulldozers came and the high-lead which drags trunks to the spar tree for loading, trunks drawn forcefully across the ground, destroying all life to leave only a mess of boulders and stones and dust. In a few weeks vast acres of magnificence are reduced to complete devastation. Next comes reforestation and forest-planning, - slow and often disappointing methods towards the return of trees. But the days of colossal forest grandeur, - these are gone for the time while our type of civilization shall last.

Naturalists believe that a more intelligent treatment of our forest resources would have preserved the continuity of our great trees. Ancient races were wiser in their times.

The old farmer is a lover of the soil. He says we should go along with nature, fostering our better understanding of Nature's essential laws of making returns to the earth to maintain fertile soil. If we were to study Life's cycle as a whole we would stop ruining our soils with artificial chemical fertilizers and poisonous sprays. We blame deforestation for the falling water levels and that is true in part, but our destructive agricultural methods also contribute. He explains that plant refuse collects water, acting as a sponge, and then too as it disintegrates it produces chemical action on minerals and rocks in the ground which releases more plant food and it increases the biologic content of the soil and these creatures digesting the minerals further build up the soils.

He is not dogmatic; there is a time and place for most of man's inventions, he says, but he believes all extremes are wrong. We have mechanized and chemicalized to extremes; with our scientific formulas we appear to believe we are wiser than Old Mother Nature, - or than Divine purpose if you see it that way. He says we MUST return to living in harmony with Nature or the suicide of humanity is inevitable. He is thought to be a "Crackpot", he twinkles.

The birds which deserted our feeding trays last winter were probably active in his fields and woodlands. Those same birds, with returned migrants, are singing paeons from every tree and shrub in our gardens today. Life without bird-song would be drab, for everybody.

... A twig crackled as footsteps heralded the fisherman's return. The owl dropped pebbles faster and faster, fading as we left there.

We came to the last straight run down towards the twinkling lights of Old Alberni; the high sheltering hills beyond the town were a vast shadowland, intriguing imagination. On either side of us dimly perceived mountains faded into the oncoming night; the rich trappings were now withdrawn from Mount Arrowsmith, which held its head austere high in icy pride, its flanks and shoulders a cold grey. But far away to our right the plateau snowfields spread out to distances incredibly remote and from these heights mountains peeped over the horizon's rim to drape themselves briefly in a baby-pink iridescence, blushing a' Dieux to a departed day.

What a Treasure Island this is! Those jewels of her crown, - today's avaricious materialism has not the power to destroy them. That much of comfort we have.

When we escape from the cities' narrow orbit Nature never fails us.

THE SOCIETY'S MONTHLY MEETING

The April General Meeting was held a week earlier than usual, to allow a combined gathering of the Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary Association and the Victoria Natural History Society to be held the following Tuesday, our regular meeting date.

The meeting was very well attended however, about one hundred members and friends being present to see Mr. W. H. Gold's film of Vancouver Island, which was very much enjoyed.

Mr. Gold showed Strathcona Park as it looked from the air, a sockeye salmon run, the nesting of the loon, and many beautiful shots of flowers, scenery and birds, all in colour.

We certainly appreciate Mr. Gold's kindness in coming down from Youbou to show us his magnificent film.

Mr. Freeman King reported that the house for Mr. Francis, on which many of our members had so generously donated their time and money, was now completed, and that Mr. Francis had recovered his health and would be in his new home the following Sunday. It should be mentioned that this Society donated one hundred dollars toward the cost of this house for Mr. Francis.

THE MARCH BIRD GROUP MEETING

The Bird Group Field Day of March 26th didn't start out too well. Alan Poynter had been laid up for a week or so. It didn't promise to be our usual good bird do without him. The Stirlings and the Morgans were at the Francis property doing much more valuable work than bird watching. It looked as though we had had it. But the weather cleared nicely and a good sized group of enthusiasts turned out to do Wittys and Royal Roads.

Picked up the first reported lutescent warbler of the spring before we could get down the Wittys' steps. The bank was alive with birds, all hustle and bustle. The Audubon warblers put on a good show. The highlight of the day was the discovery of marsh wrens on the Spit. Their song is most distinctive. They held us there for the longest while but would not co-operate enough to let us have a good look at them. They were seen flicking through the broom occasionally. But the presence of these birds was most interesting.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the outing. About 70 species were seen.

Tom Briggs

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

FINANCIAL STATEMENT JUNE 1st 1959 to MAY 31st 1960

INCOME:

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Bank balance from previous year - - - - - | \$1,893.37 |
| Membership dues - - - - - | 403.17 |
| Membership dues, junior - - - - - | 44.00 |
| Bank interest - - - - - | 8.93 |
| Rev. Dr. Sparling, purchase of books - - - - - | 9.72 |
| Tax remission - - - - - | 78.09 |
| Discount on payments to National Audubon Society - | 64.84 |
| Bird check lists sold - - - - - | 5.00 |
| Transferred from Audubon account - - - - - | 463.79 |
| Outstanding cheques - - - - - | 205.88 |
| | <hr/> |
| | \$3,176.79 |
| | <hr/> <hr/> |

EXPENDITURES:

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Monks' Multigraph Letter Service, printing and mailing "Naturalist" \$ | 407.49 |
| Junior Branch expenses - - - - - | 37.94 |
| Stationery and postages - - - - - | 79.64 |
| Cost of meetings - - - - - | 76.95 |
| Books for library - - - - - | 41.49 |
| Plaque in memory of Mr. J. Owen Clay - - - - - | 20.00 |
| Registration fee - - - - - | 18.00 |
| Amplifier (50% of cost) - - - - - | 46.21 |
| Mailing costs on tape recorder - - - - - | 14.13 |
| Donation: Thomas Francis - - - - - | 100.00 |
| Bank Balance April 19th - - - - - | 2,334.94 |
| | <hr/> |
| | \$3,176.79 |
| | <hr/> <hr/> |

Audited 20th April 1960:

"S. Wakeford"

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

AUDUBON ACCOUNT

FINANCIAL STATEMENT: JUNE 1st 1959 to MAY 31st 1960

INCOME:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Receipts from ten lectures - - - - - | \$2,971.03 |
|--------------------------------------|------------|

EXPENDITURES:

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Amusement Tax - - - - - | \$ 263.35 |
| Advertising - - - - - | 200.09 |
| Rent of School Auditorium - - - - - | 580.00 |
| Contract payment to National Audubon Society - - | 1,000.00 |
| 50% of net profit to National Audubon Society - - | 463.80 |
| Transferred to Victoria Natural History account - | 463.79 |
| | <hr/> |
| | \$2,971.03 |
| | <hr/> <hr/> |

TREASURER'S REPORT

The net profit of the ten lectures, after deducting the \$1,000.00 payment to the Audubon Society, as per our contract, was \$927.59. Half of this amount has been turned over to the Audubon Society, which was also part of our contract with them. The net profit for the previous season was \$765.21.

The net balance at the bank is now \$2,129.06, as against \$1,893.37 on our last balance sheet, an increase of \$235.69.

Our membership now stands at 128 single, 44 family and 43 juniors.

Respectfully submitted,

"Eleanore Davidson"

Treasurer.

SOME EFFECTS OF INSECTICIDES ON BIRDS

by Deirdre Webb

An editorial in a recent issue of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists' "Bulletin" gives a graphic account of exactly how insecticides affect bird life.

Since 1955, Dr. George Wallace of the University of Michigan has headed an investigation to study the change in the bird population in a part of the campus where trees have been sprayed with DDT for Dutch Elm disease. Over the four year period (1955-59), tree-top feeders-- orioles, yellow warblers, and vireos - have disappeared entirely, while chickadees and nuthatches have become very scarce. Also, numerous birds have been picked up either dead or in a dying condition including: robins, blue jays, flickers, grackles, and cowbirds.

Dr. Wallace was particularly interested in the "robin-earthworm" story; although, the poisoning process is similar in other species' food cycles. Briefly, what happens is this: in autumn earthworms eat sprayed leaves which have fallen to the ground; during digestion and assimilation DDT is deposited in the worm's body tissues; robins eat infected worms the following spring, and the DDT is transferred to the bird's tissues where it gradually accumulates, eventually reaching the brain; then convulsions and death invariably follow in a short time. It has been stated that a minimum of eleven worms can kill a healthy robin. But even if they do not absorb a lethal dose, birds usually get enough DDT to render them sterile, for the poison tends to concentrate in the reproductive organs. Of six nests under observation on the sprayed campus, five produced no young at all. Similar reports come from other sprayed areas. With the very great yearly "turnover" of the small passerines, it requires little imagination to visualize what devastation could be wrought, in a very few years, by nesting failure due to this sterility.

Bald eagles are also suffering from the effects of spraying, as revealed by an account in an Ontario newspaper from the town of Brockville on the St. Lawrence River in the region of the Thousand Islands this year: "There is strong evidence to indicate that indiscriminate spraying of insecticides is causing sterility and death in eagles. The late C.L. Broley, known as "the Eagle Man", noted this condition particularly in Florida. The eagles there live almost entirely on fish-- and the fish eat insects which have fallen into the water from the insecticide spraying.

"Mr. Broley discovered that, in the past 20 years the fertility of eagles has dropped to 20% from 75%."

But this is not the whole story. What of the many beneficial insects that are destroyed along with the injurious? And what of the insectivorous amphibians, reptiles, and mammals that may be living in a sprayed area? Insecticides are becoming more potent and more widespread in application every year. Indiscriminately used they will defeat their very purpose; they will reap only a harvest of desolation.

THE ROOSEVELT ELKby C.J. Guiguet
Provincial Museum, Victoria, B. C.

In recent years the Roosevelt elk, otherwise known as wapiti, has come to more public notice than formerly, due largely to the opening of a short season in which bulls can be legally harvested. Public reaction in such matters is usually felt first at the office of the Provincial Museum. The letters, phone calls and queries received often point up how little the "average" individual (if there is such a person) knows of the province in which he lives, or for that matter, of the island where he makes his home.

Roosevelt elk are native to Vancouver Island, but in our experience here, practically every person not active in some aspect of natural history assumes that the species was introduced to the island. Yet, elk were in fact, more often seen by early explorers and residents than were the black-tailed deer which are so plentiful today. In the late 1800's elk roamed the Saanich Peninsula, as present-day relic skeletal remains and old land survey records show. They occurred on the lower mainland as well; in the Fraser Valley, and very likely where the city of Vancouver now stands.

Today they are gone from the Saanich Peninsula and from the lower mainland but herds occur elsewhere. There are populations on the Olympic Peninsula and on Vancouver Island; successful introductions have been made to the Kodiak Islands and the Kluane Reserve in the Yukon. On Vancouver Island the largest population seems to be centred in the Nanaimo Lakes - Cowichan Lake area, but herds of unknown size occur at the head of practically every inlet on the west coast. They are said to be plentiful at Cape Scott, and on the Nimpkish watershed and there is a nice herd in

the Courtenay area.

In the past few years the Roosevelt elk on Vancouver Island seems to have increased in numbers and in range. This somewhat parallels population increases apparent in big game over many parts of the province and an optimistic outlook seems warranted in regard to the Roosevelt elk on Vancouver Island.

ZONOTRICHIA ALBICOLLIS

On March first we found a sparrow that seemed to be a wee bit different from our usual boarders, the golden-crowned sparrows. Light wasn't too good for the first few times we had a chance to gaze at it and its marks weren't too definite. However, one bright day it came in to stay awhile. We were able to positively identify it as an immature white-throated sparrow. It is small compared to the Richmond Road specimen, which is a beauty. From this we figured it could be an immature female.

As the weeks went by its plumage and marks improved vastly. Stripes on head seemed whiter and patch on throat seemed somewhat larger. When it first came in the golden-crowned sparrows went for it after the manner of birds hogging all the pickings. Good crushed oats and wheat seem to have done something to it. Now it moves the golden-crowned sparrows around.

But this bird is most interesting. Now for the question. Is it a bird of barge at large? (Victoria Naturalist Feb. 1960) Or is it a stray that has lost its way? We'll never know, but it does tend to lend a feeling of frustration.

Last year when the Harris' sparrow was here visiting we had the unusual good luck to see three of the Zonotrichias together. At that time I considered the possibility of ever seeing the four Zonotrichias en masse. At 7 A.M., on Mar. 22 Albicollis came in with the golden-crowned sparrows for a long breakfast. In came our first white-crowned immigrant of the year. So once more we have seen three out of four.

Tom Briggs.

THE SUMMER FIELD TRIPS

On the programme page of this issue will be found all the field trips to be held this summer. Please keep this copy handy as a reminder. In connection with the boat trips on July 2nd and August 6th, remember that Mr. Poynter has to charter a boat and make other arrangements, so please notify him in good time if you wish to participate in these very interesting excursions. There will also be a boat trip on Saturday, Sept. 3, details of which will be given in the Sept. issue of the Naturalist.

JUNIOR JOTTINGS

by Freeman King

Activities by the junior branch have been many and varied during the month. A trip into the panhandle off Thetis Lake Park was very interesting. Many spring flowers were noted as well as birds, reptiles and the working of the bark beetle in the logs left after the logging operations. There was one particular spot noted that would be interesting for the geologists. When the road was pushed through the bush, rock was exposed, and the outcrop showed almost perfectly clear-cut glacier scores. The rock was clean and smooth, as apparently it had been under the forest floor for countless ages. Now it will be interesting to see how long it takes before the lichens take a hold.

The junior leaders have made some exploratory trips with their groups in the Francis Park area. A number went out and made a survey over a part of section 78, and listed 35 flowering plants, 9 trees, 15 shrubs, 17 species of birds and several reptiles. There is a lot more to see on the property.

A trip to Terrace Mountain, Luxton, was more than interesting, as the plant life there is somewhat later than nearer the City. A junco's nest with three eggs in it was found. Hummingbirds abounded in this area, perhaps owing to the large number of red flowering currant shrubs there. It was interesting to note how the fire, which occurred last summer, had affected a number of plants. They had apparently been forced, possibly owing to too much potash being present for the plants to absorb naturally. This would make a first class study for the botanists.

The leaders went to Skutz Falls on the Cowichan River for their monthly outing. It was a really wonderful trip, even if the boys did NOT catch any fish. This country has been extensively logged and it was interesting to note the different flora taking hold in the area. Devil's club abounds on the banks of the river.

An interesting session on trees and their association was held in the Provincial Museum on the very wet Saturday. This has given the members a better understanding of the growth of our native trees.

Janice Cudmore and Gerry Rushton went to the McTavish Cross Road school with me on one of our speaking tours. They demonstrated and spoke on sea shore animals, and the different kinds of rocks which occur in the local areas.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

1960

Tuesday,
May 10:

ANNUAL MEETING: This Annual Meeting of the Society will be held in the Douglas Bldg. Cafeteria at 8 p.m. and will be devoted to the election of officers and other business, with an interlude of slides by Mrs. Slocombe and Mr. P. Croft.

Saturday, COMBINED FIELD TRIP: A meeting of all the groups, May 14: bird, botany and geology, will be held in the Girl Guide Camp grounds, seven miles beyond Sooke. Meet either at Monterey Cafe at 9 a.m. or at picnic site at 9:45 a.m. All members welcome. Bring lunch. If you can supply some transportation, or need transportation, phone Miss Joan Hannay at EV.5-1748 after 6 p.m. Further details will be given at the May Annual Meeting.

Saturday, BIRD FIELD TRIP: Shawnigan Lake. Meet at the June 11: Monterey Cafe at 9 a.m. or Shawnigan Lake cut-off on the Malahat at 10 a.m. Bring lunch. Leader: Alan Poynter.

Saturday, BOTANY FIELD TRIP: Meet at 1:30 p.m. at the June 18: Monterey Cafe for John Dean Park. Bring tea. Leader: Miss M. C. Melburn.

Saturday, BIRD FIELD TRIP: Around Bare Island and ashore July 2: on Sidney Island. Meet at Monterey Cafe at 9 a.m., or at Deep Cove wharf at 10 a.m. For reservation phone Alan Poynter at EV.4-8330. All day trip. Bring lunch.

Saturday, BOTANY FIELD TRIP: Meet at Monterey Cafe at July 16: 1:30 p.m. for Goldstream Park. Bring tea. Leader: Miss M. C. Melburn.

Saturday, BIRD FIELD TRIP: Portland Island: Meet at Aug. 6: Monterey Cafe at 9 a.m., or at Deep Cove Wharf at 10 a.m. Bring lunch. For reservation, phone Alan Poynter.

Saturday, BOTANY FIELD TRIP: Meet at Monterey Cafe at Aug.13: 1:30 p.m. for Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary; Sections 2 and 4. Bring tea. Leader: Miss M. C. Melburn.

Saturday, BIRD FIELD TRIP: Probably a boat trip. See Sept.3: September magazine for details.

JUNIORS meet on Saturdays at Monterey Cafe for Field Trips. Anyone interested - please phone Leader: Mr. Freeman King at GR.9-2966.

Victoria Natural History Society

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Former Provincial Plant Pathologist

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Annual dues, including subscription:
Single, \$2; Family, \$3; Junior, \$1; Life Membership, \$20.