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(F. L. Beebe)

River Otter

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RIVER OTTER

The river otter (Lutra canadensis) occurs throughout the province wherever there is suitable habitat. It appears to be more abundant along the coast and coastal islands than in interior riparian and lacustrine environments. This is due almost certainly to the abundance of food available the year round along Pacific shores. Such items as rock-fishes, blennies, flatfishes, shellfish and crabs are found in profusion all along British Columbia coastlines.

In some areas, such as in the Queen Charlotte Islands, this beautiful mammal is commonplace, and most stretches of beach, bay or headland harbor a pair. As they forage for the most part in the sea in such places, these sea-going otters are often reported as sea otters by many observers. The sea otter, however, is quite different in appearance and habit, and furthermore it is extremely rare in British Columbia waters.

The river otter is a playful, friendly, easily tamed mammal. Max Lohbrunner has had semi-domesticated otters on and around his float in the Inner Harbour for years. On one occasion two of these were sent to the Stanley Park Zoo from whence they eventually escaped. In an amazingly short time they were back in Victoria on Max's float, indicating remarkable powers of navigation.

The fur of the river otter is dense and beautiful and was once eagerly sought by trappers. In recent years the fur market has become depressed and most wild fur bearers, including the otter, are enjoying a respite.

Otters are reported regularly from Sooke Basin, the Gorge, Portage Inlet and other areas near Victoria.

THE FLIGHT OF INSECTS

by J. A. Chapman

Have you ever noticed that insects fly in different ways? I am sure you have, just as you must have noticed many different kinds of flight in birds. Insect flight has long been studied with fascination by biologists. Much attention has been given to the mechanisms by which insects wings are moved, or to the problem of how muscle systems can produce wing beats ranging up to several hundred cycles a second. Let us only consider here, however, some of the different types of insect flight.

First, here are some examples: the busy "beeline" flight of bees; the strong, expert flight of dragonflies; the lazy, almost aimless flight of some butterflies (which quickly changes character if one takes after them with a net!); the quick darting movements, alternated with precise hovering, of the hawk or hummingbird moths; the weak, labored, fluttering of winged termites, which barely seem able to keep air-borne; the slow, drifting progress of many small insects, such as aphids; and the restless up-and-down dancing of May flies or of many midges.

One typical feature of living organisms is that they seem to be fitted or adapted for the life they lead. Adaptations involve not only structures, but body functions and features of the life cycle. Biologists view them as the end result of a long period of evolution, during which those individuals of any generation most capable of surviving under the conditions of their life, have passed on their characteristics. What can we conclude about manner of insect flight by considering it as an aspect of adaptation - as a feature of activity which helps an insect to live more efficiently in its natural environment?

Bees most find and carry nectar and pollen intensively during flight weather. The more direct the route between nest and flowers the better - no time for erratic or wandering flight or stopping to sun on rocks. The term "beeline" is indeed related to the saying "busy as a bee".

Dragonflies are predators. Having weak legs, poorly suited for walking or running, they must catch their prey while in flight, and must of necessity be strong, fast fliers, capable of expert maneuvers. One summer at Lake

Cowichan I watched a dragonfly preying on winged termites, which were fluttering through the air here and there. It would dart in and intercept a termite; an instant later, head, thorax and wings of the latter would flutter to the ground. Only the soft fat abdomens were eaten (pretty good selection for a form of life that isn't supposed to be able to think!).

In regard to butterflies, I cannot offer a suggestion as to why some have intervals of gliding in their flight and others do not. However, a butterfly which flies in an irregular, erratic manner, especially when disturbed, would be more difficult for a bird to catch than one flying a steady course. This assumption can be applied to moths, which may be preyed upon by those expert night-fliers, the bats. It has recently been demonstrated that some moths can hear the supersonic "echo-location" calls of bats, and will take evasive action on the wing when a bat approaches (or when an electronic substitute for a bat begins to operate).

Hummingbird or hawk moths are heavy-bodied nectar feeders. They would strongly bend or break many flowers by alighting on them. The ability to hover permits such a moth to pause in front of a fragile flower, uncoil its hair-spring-like proboscis and take nectar (the original re-fueling in flight!). But flowers are scattered, and these moths must be able to move about quickly when they want to. Actually they can fly so quickly that they are seldom clearly seen while moving and are often mistaken for hummingbirds. In short, their size and way of life require a certain flight ability, and this same flight ability is to be found in that very different form of life which has essentially the same food problems, the hummingbirds.

Flying termites are kings and queens out to find new nesting sites. As nature is lavish with pollen and seeds, so she is with those stages of insect life which function to spread and continue the species. What matter if birds or insect predators take a fearful toll, as long as a few pairs find the relatively few new sites which become available each year. Why have a strong flight mechanism (which needs more energy to operate) when a weaker one is simpler and will do the job?

Apparently, the function of the flight of aphids and

many other small insects is, likewise, the distribution of their species. They use their wings not so much to fly as to remain bouyant and drift with the air currents. Indeed, some biologists refer to such insects (and small spiders drifting on silk threads) as "aerial plankton". An indication of the dispersal function of such flight is the fact that aphids known to be moving to certain plant species may pay little attention to them until they have flown for a certain time. They may alight, but often fly again, giving up a home that is certain for the often slim chance of finding another, apparently because their "wanderlust" isn't satisfied yet.

Finally, with respect to May flies and midges (and some winged ants) and their up-and-down dancing flight. The individuals usually fly together at the same time of day or under special weather conditions, often gathering over certain prominent objects on the ground and frequently forming conspicuous groups. Mating activity occurs in these insects at the time of such flights. The function of this sort of behaviour, then, seems to be to increase the chances of finding mates. After all, the world must be pretty big to a small insect and the problem of finding a mate must be great. Many insects use special odour attraction to solve this problem, but others, including our dancing fliers, apparently depend upon visual stimuli.

In conclusion, it seems that if we look carefully, we can see that the way an insect flies is usually related to its way of living, or to the problems it encounters in its environment.

REPRIEVED

by Dorothy Palmer

Dark firs rise in a semi-circle around a damp grassy dell where a tall balsam poplar stands at the road's edge. It rises vigorously to meet the sun's rays; an ecstasy of golden hues in all our Octobers and Novembers, brilliant in sunlight, spreading a glowing effulgence of a misty day and even throughout the nights. Coming round a bend in the road and down the hill - there is the tree, breath-takingly lovely. In spring the sweet perfume of its sticky buds drifts pervasively across the countryside.

A tree reprieved. In a dramatic moment, when men with

saw and axes set about felling the tree one lover of nature's beauties rushed out in the chilly dawn to plead eloquently for its life. "If it means so much to you" the owner responded, but thought it daft.

As the story was being told to us, unseen birds sang softly amongst the branches; golden-crowned kinglets flitted about, chickadees and juncoes, a Savannah sparrow, while below a warm brown fox sparrow fed shyly.

In all our springs birds will perch on the tree's bare branches to fill the air with melody, - robins and vireos, fly-catchers and finches, giving us glory-in-sound.

To the owner, a weed tree, of no commercial value, its beauty invisible to him, its service to life not understood.

We might have a respectful bearing towards trees and a grateful one: man, the newcomer of a million years of earthly ancestry, - and the trees of Cretaceous Period ancestry, contributing to life on earth through many million years.

Esthetic pleasure, shade, shelter, water and soil conservancy and soil replenishment, and heat, - all gifts of trees, gifts to life. For instance, in a summer's day one large willow tree will transpire many gallons of moisture into the atmosphere, - vapour vital in nature's cycle. "Oceans of the Continent" our forests have been named.

Dr. Fairfield Osborn tells us it may take a thousand years to build ONE INCH of living soil, - the life span of many of our big trees. Our trees contributed their share and, after serving our island so richly, they would seem to have lived their long lives to serve this century's needs, - finally. All those decades when ravens circled above them, eagles made regal landings on their branches, squirrels chatteringly harvested their seeds and countless other creatures lived in our forests, and our big trees lifted proud heads to look out across phalanx after phalanx of trees till the ocean limited the horizons, - all those decades they appear to have lived to serve our present times.

The colossal cedars of the Westholme valley are gone, their vast fluted stumps have gradually disintegrated; they did their share towards providing this century with the

rich soils of their valley.

Even the travesty of silvered driftwood piled high where tides turn back along our shores, for these some service still remains. In winter chain saws buzz amongst the logs; fence posts and firewood become, euphemistically - "something for nothing".

Each one of us is a trustee for a plundered inheritance; we regret prodigal wastage and our regrets could have a guilty flavour. The soils our trees contributed to may yet be salvaged; living soil that Fairfield Osborn calls "the precious sensitive earth cover through which life flows".

But we (and our successors) will always have trees of individual artistry to enjoy, through the vigilance of those who step in to save them; a happy thought. Joyce Kilmer expressed their sentiments, - "I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree".

We remember our Garry oaks that have been preserved in their delightful symmetry by those who care. The "Sloan Oak" is one such. This tree's colossal trunk bends with courtly grace, bracing itself to meet the southwesters, - a gallant old "Heart of Oak". You may lean against the trunk and watch the western hills darken under flaming sunsets, while seas ripple in golden musical-chairs around rocks and in and out of tidal pools; and see the moon climb to drop a silver lariat across the Straits, as lighthouses swing blinkers over their eyes; seabirds will call in wistful cadences amongst the islets and eerie night winds rustle leaves overhead. Or wait until the night is at its darkest before dawn breaks and thrill to warnings of storms at sea, when fretful gusts shiver the branches and whistle softly all about you.

Our lesser oaks along our shores curve inland, their backs to the sea, their lichens blowing ahead of them, in appearance barely hanging on to their hats and beards. But our sturdy old-timer faces the panorama and the sun; - like Joyce Kilmer's "Tree that looks at God all day".

A BOOK TO BE READ

One of the books recently purchased for the society's library is 'The Living Land' by Roderick Haig-Brown.

Mr. Haig-Brown is a writer, a novelist, a conservationist, a magistrate at Campbell River, and an authority on the salmon of British Columbia.

This book of his, commissioned by the B. C. Natural Resources Conference and published last year, covers British Columbia from every angle, including the present and future resources of the Province, education, a brief history of the original inhabitants, pollution, recreation, etc.; the theme of conservation and the proper use of natural resources runs throughout the pages.

Although Mr. Haig-Brown is a sound conservationist, and could have written bitter truths about many things, he has presented both sides of the picture; has pulled his punches, so to speak, which has made the book more valuable, as it is written with full knowledge, but without bias.

The B. C. Natural Resources Conference, now completing its fourteenth year, is an independent, non-profit organization, devoted to objective study of the natural resources of British Columbia. The membership and the executive council are drawn from industry, labour, government at all levels, and university. Dr. David B. Turner, Deputy Minister of the Provincial Department of Recreation and Conservation, is the secretary and founder of the Conference.

A. R. D.

PICTURES FROM THE PAGES OF OUR NOTEBOOK

by J. M. Barnett

As we thumbed through the jottings of the past year, we were surprised at the many beautiful living pictures we saw during our rambles around Victoria.

At the beginning of this year we were at Mrs. Bell's when a dickcissel flew up from the feeding station under a bush and sat on the topmost twig. The stranger from the plains had made history by being the first of her kind to be seen in Victoria, and on her arrival last autumn had been an exciting puzzle to many who first saw her before she was definitely identified by the experts. But we didn't think of that while we stood and admired her delicate markings and the yellow on the head and breast.

Life is not all sunshine; it was raining the day we

went to Glen Lake. The picture had a sombre background of greys and browns and deep greens, but this did not dull the spirits of a flock of ruby-crowned kinglets and Oregon juncos among the bushes in the immediate foreground, not a downy woodpecker, who beat out a rhythm on the trees above. Then to spark the whole there were a couple of flashes of yellow as two Audubon warblers flew by. We assumed they had wintered in the vicinity of this delightful spot, as it seemed too early for any migrants.

March blew in with our first snowfall of the season, and spread a blanket of white over the lawns of Beacon Hill Park. The crocus were only just able to thrust their yellow faces through, but the daffodils marched bravely uphill waist deep in the fluffy stuff, the early ones all sporting white cha-peaus rakishly perched on their heads, rivalling the best designs displayed by our local milliners. Not to be outdone, the Japanese plums along the more sheltered streets, draped their delicate mauve-pink blossoms with cloaks of white and made an unusually beautiful picture.

The snow melted and the sun shone, and on a day when we drove around Elk Lake we stopped near a swampy spot. Here, amid the lush green of new springing grass and plants the whole scene was lighted by bright yellow candles, the closely coiled spathe of skunk cabbage. A picture of spring which brought back memories of rambles in the east where the cousins of these flowers wear a purple-red dress, streaked and blotched with green, and more often than not are seen forcing their way through the ice and snow of wet spots.

Never to be forgotten was the club outing which finished up at Tom Brigg's residence on Florence Lake. Tom had thrown out some grain near a bush behind the house, and this was the setting for a delightful picture of many colours. Dark, perky Oregon juncos flashed the white of their tails as they flew, and a Steller jay seemed to shoot our blue sparks from his feathers with every little movement. Three male purple finches displayed their rich plumage from the top of a bush while they waited for a yellow and blue varied thrush to finish his meal.

At Ten Mile Point one day we found another riot of colours. A broad-leaf maple was hung with clusters of pale yellow flowers, and nearby a red-flowering currant stood out in sharp contrast. A large rock in greys and browns was richly decorated with the greens of lichens and moss. Near the top some blue-eyed Mary, shooting stars and sea blush gave a delightful variation of colours to the scene, while from the sides

polypody ferns completed the picture. This day we ate our lunch in a picturesque clearing surrounded by Easter lilies, many of which had two blooms per stalk, and among which we even saw three plants with three blooms on one stem.

We had the good fortune of being on the beautiful grounds of Royal Roads when a wave of migrants was passing through. A row of broad-leaf maples, now in full leaf, was suddenly lit up by what at first looked like fireflies. These were actually Audubon and myrtle warblers darting about everywhere and displaying their bright yellow caps and rumps.

But it was not all colour which brightened our picture. On Allison Road one day when osier dogwood, nine-bark, cascara and wild rose bushes coloured the roadside with their flowers, we were regaled by a chorus of black-headed grosbeaks. There were at least three songsters who kept up an almost continuous flow of song, but in their few brief intervals of rest which they allowed themselves we could hear the softer songs of Macgillivray, Townsend and yellow warblers and a Bewick wren. To our surprise we also heard the 'fit-beu' of an alder flycatcher, but when we located this songster he appeared to be a wood peewee. Was this another case of imitative song, or were our old eyes deceiving us again?

In summer the scene changed to a velvet green front lawn with a dark green Garry oak dominating it. As we stood on the side of the road two glossy black birds with striking pink breasts flashed about, now searching the lawns for insects, now tapping the tree trunks for grubs and even going to a cherry tree for fruit. The handsome pair of Lewis woodpeckers were very busy parents, and put on quite a varied performance while they searched for food for their hungry brood, who kept up an incessant chatter from their nest in a hole of a Garry oak.

Our annual boat trip to Bare Island always produces some most interesting pictures. This year we landed on the island for lunch after circling it and looking at the numerous nests of the gulls and cormorants clinging to the steep rock face on the southern side. We had no sooner disembarked than the experts in our crowd discovered the nest of a black oystercatcher. We use the word 'nest' advisedly because as we looked at the mass of grey and brown rock all that could be seen was a slight depression in which a single egg rested. The beautifully mottled shell of the egg so well matched the

surrounding rock in colour and design that it is doubtful if it would have been found but for the presence of the mother bird who stayed close to watch us.

On our very next boat trip, which was to Sidney Island, we saw a picture composed of various shades of grey. The setting was a sandy depression covered with rotting logs. Bob Mackenzie-Grieve, while walking around had disturbed a nighthawk, and on looking to see from where it had flown he saw an egg. There was no nest, the egg being simply laid on the top of a log. The shell was so beautifully mottled and coloured to match the surroundings that it was difficult to find it again if you turned your head away. Fortunately the mother bird flew around long enough to permit us all to see her.

This year summer extended into September - the month of clouds - "beautiful billowy streamers of white soft rounded mountains of cumulus, golden tipped at dawn, silvery white during the day, and magenta pink at sundown". But the smell of damp grass and leaves proclaimed the approach of autumn. We were in Uplands park where the picture was one of yellows, browns and dull greens. The trees had started the change into their fall fashions, the bushes were loaded with berries, and the weeds were browning and starting to shed their seeds. This is the time when the Douglas asters are conspicuous in the fields and roadsides, their pale mauve flowers giving an additional touch to the ever changing scene.

There was one memorable day when a number of club members were sitting on the shore at Oyster-catcher Beach near Sidney, looking over a large and varied assortment of birds swimming, flying around, or just sitting on the off-shore rocks. The number of different species observed here made quite an impressive list, but for us one bird stole the show. He was a belted kingfisher which put on a special display of diving for our benefit. He would come flying by, hover in front of us for a moment and then dive straight down. The performance was repeated half a dozen times and on most occasions he disappeared completely under water for a few seconds. There must have been some fish there, but we never saw him come up with one. His performance and the general scene was so interesting that it was with the greatest reluctance the crowd were persuaded to move on.

The visit to Goldstream Park has a special niche in our picture gallery of memories. Here, walking along the stream with mountains and tall trees on either side, clothed in brilliant autumn colours, evoked a feeling of reverence such

as we have when walking down the aisle of a beautiful cathedral. In this setting of grandeur we stood and watched three blue-grey dippers diving and swimming around, and then watched a pileated woodpecker - the Cock-of-the-Woods with his brilliant scarlet crest, fly from stump to tree and make the echoes ring with his hammering.

Swans always make a picture. One fine morning we stood on the railway embankment looking down on Swan Lake and saw seven huge whistling swans swimming placidly along. On the bank below us two snow geese were feeding on the grass, but as we moved around they flew up and circled around, their flashing white wings with black tips giving life to a charming picture. They finally settled on the water near the whistling swans, which gave us a good opportunity to study the difference in size and shape between these two white species.

A week later when we visited Prospect Lake and stood admiring the autumnal scene, we noticed a pair of immature whistling swans flying around. Finally their long outstretched necks pointed our way and held course until they alighted on the mirror-like surface. We were admiring their sleek streamlined bodies when we noticed a mute swan also coming our way like a ship in full sail. As he came near the whistlers, his neck curved forward and wings arched well above his body, he looked a picture of outraged dignity. This was his domain and he was not going to let strangers intrude. It did not take long for the young whistlers to realise they were poaching, and with big wings flapping and black feet digging into the surface of the water, they took off for the far end of the lake.

There are many more 'living' pictures in our memories of 1961, but it is time to close the book. A new year is born and what it will bring none can foretell, but to those who wander along the seashore and the lanes around Victoria there will again be many pictures to make us aware of the bountiful goodness of the Great Architect of the Universe.

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PRINCESS LOUISA INLET

by John Errington (Junior Member)

One of the most beautiful spots on the British Columbia coast is Princess Louisa Inlet. This inlet lies near the end of Jervis Inlet about 100 miles north of Vancouver. It is here that the well-known Malibu camp is situated.

At the entrance to Princess Louisa Inlet lies Forbidden Island, so called because of an Indian belief forbidding any Indian to trespass on it. The entrance to the inlet is no more than 50 feet wide with a continuous tide rip boiling through it. Once you are in the inlet itself, high mountains, 8,000 feet in height, rise almost perpendicularly from the shore. To the left, Mount Hamilton, formerly called "One-Eye", thrusts its one eye into the clouds above. Straight ahead, high up towards the sky, lie the ice fields. From these ice fields continuous water rushes down the cliff in a spectacular showing of waterfalls. An enormous number may be counted at one time,

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the most beautiful being the Chatter-box Falls. At the head of the Inlet the raging river makes its final leap not more than 50 yards from the shore. Its sound may be heard even before it is sighted. Also near the end of the Inlet, rises a perpendicular cliff. The Indians used this cliff as a testing place. Here the best brave would attempt to climb to the top with a heavy rock strapped to his back. If he fell, some other brave would be given the chance at a later date. If he reached the top, he would become the Chief.

In view of all this grandeur it is easy to see why so many of the yachting public visit Princess Louisa Inlet every summer.

JUNIOR JOTTINGS

by Freeman King.

During the frosty weather the juniors made a trip into the Pike Lake area. This locality has been grazed, and it showed quite a difference in and around the low flat area.

The trip to the south summit of Mount Newton turned out to be more than interesting, not only for the wonderful view to be obtained from the summit, but for some excellent and unusual fungi we found there.

The hike into the Goldstream Provincial Camp-site gave us a complete view of the area, as we travelled from the rocky stream bed to the high land behind, where the jack pines are growing.

The soil and insect survey at the Thomas Francis Park last week showed some excellent work done by the group leaders.

Remember our Exhibition and Display, which will be held on Thursday, December 28th, in the Douglas Building Cafeteria on Elliott Street, at 7:30 p.m. Mr. George Chatterton, M.P. will open the show for us. Refreshments will be served. All parents and members of the society are invited to attend.

A course for the older children has been set for this month. This will take place every Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. Dr. Clifford Carl, Dr. John Chapman and Mr. Charles Guiguet have kindly offered to put on sessions for the boys and girls. This course is open to members over thirteen years of age.

We would like to thank all the parents who have so kindly helped with transportation during the year. Without their help we could not have achieved nearly so much.

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NOTICE OF MEETINGS1962

Tuesday

GENERAL MEETING:

January 9:

At the Douglas Building Cafeteria on Elliott Street, at 8 p.m.

Speaker: Dr. T.M.C. Taylor

Subject: "Botanical Wanderings in the Pacific".

Tuesday

BOTANY:

January 23:

At the Museum at 8 p.m.

Prof. Lowe will speak on "Ferns and Their Life Cycle".

Saturday

BIRD FIELD TRIP:

January 27:

Meet at the Monterey Cafe at 9:30 a.m.

or the Black Swan at Elk Lake at 10 a.m.

Bring lunch.

Leader: T.R. Briggs

Monday &

AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR:

Tuesday

January 29

At the Oak Bay Junior High School Auditorium at 8 p.m. Both nights.

and 30:

Speaker: Emerson Scott

Subject: "Pika Country"

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The Juniors will meet each Saturday at the Monterey Cafe at Hillside and Douglas Street, at 1:30 p.m. for Field Trips.
Leader: Mr. Freeman King.

Anyone who would like to join these trips is very welcome.

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MEMBERSHIP

In addition to the roll of members of the society given in this issue, there are at the present time seventy juniors actively participating in these field trips.

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VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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Minister of Recreation and Conservation

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