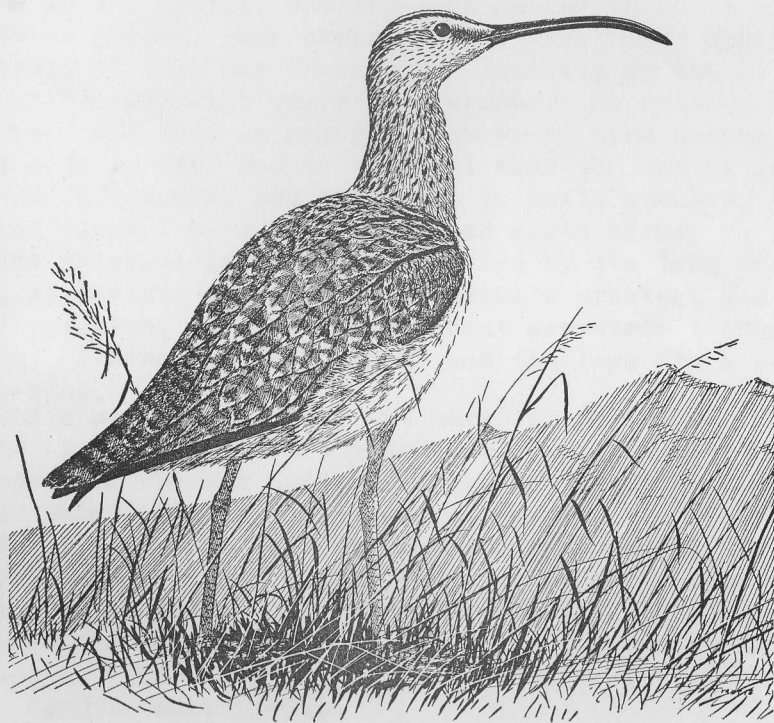


The
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(F. L. Beebe)

Hudsonian Curlew

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OUR COVER

The Hudsonian Curlew, or, as it is now named, the Whimbrel, is a bird known in all the northern part of the world, in Europe and Asia as well as in North America. It breeds in the Arctic, and migrates as far as South America and South Africa. Our members Mr. & Mrs. Barry Morgan also report it from New Zealand but normally we see it around Victoria only during migratory seasons. My records of this bird indicate that it generally shows up here during the first week in May, and in the fall from the end of July to the end of October, and then only in small numbers. The largest flock I have seen contained eight birds.

The whimbrel is easily identified by its long decurved bill, as vividly shown in Frank Beebe's drawing, and by its large size, as it averages about seventeen inches in length. Its colour is brownish and the legs are a dark slate-blue.

While not a common migrant here, it is fairly regular in its appearance. Every year we see some of them on the beaches from Whiffin Spit to Metchosin, Esquimalt Lagoon, Clover Point, the Victoria Golf course and at Cadboro Bay.

To those people however, who frequent Marine Drive from Oak Bay Boat House to Bowker Ave., it is a familiar bird, as each fall, as far back as my records go (1955) two have appeared and occasionally stayed there throughout the winter months, their favourite place being on the rocks opposite the Old Charming Inn.

Last fall they appeared right on schedule on October 8 and stayed there until about the middle of November. Whether the same two birds appear each year we do not know, as they have never been banded, but their regular appearance at Oak Bay for the last seven years at least, is most interesting.

This part of the Oak Bay coast not only provides close-ups of these rather unusual birds, but it's a favourite haunt of the black turnstone, dunlin (red-backed sandpiper), surf bird, black oyster-catcher, and, at the foot of Bowker Ave., a regular wintering flock of black-bellied plover, which this winter totalled about fifty birds.

BIRDING IN THE SNOW

The wintery weather of early March was a time of scarcity for ground-feeding birds, but for the energetic bird watcher it presented a rare opportunity for observation. Birds were forced to concentrate in small areas where food could still be found, and the predominantly dark plumaged species were clearly defined against the snow covered landscape. Flocks of starlings, meadowlarks and blackbirds fed in farmyards where cattle fodder had been scattered. Hundreds of robins could be found wherever berries still remained on hawthorn and holly trees. Killdeers favoured the bare verges of snow plowed roads. Many common snipe found food and cover in the little marsh at the corner of Pat Bay Highway and Telegraph Road. Hawks, too, were easier to spot. A dark gyrfalcon perched on a rock in the snowy plain of the airport was the most exciting bird of the day - "a life-lister".

Skylarks were our main concern during our intensive birding. The location and numbers of the larger flocks, and the kind of food available might be of interest.

Airport - 129. Weeds and grasses.

Experimental Farm - 40. Weeds and tall grass.

Keating Cross Rd. - 38. Small patch of broccoli.

Martindale Rd. - 213. Cabbage patch, small weed patch and bare earth on south side of daffodil rows.

Gordon Head - 138. Cabbage fields and weed patch.

Cedar Hill Cross Rd. - 19. Weeds and grasses.

A total of 694 skylarks was counted. The only birds seen outside a known breeding area were 3 reported by the Davidsons at Coburg Spit (Esquimalt Lagoon). Green food in the form of frozen cabbages and their allies seemed to be preferred during this time of scarcity. Weed seeds were obtained by jumping up, securing the head, and bending the plant over. On Martindale Rd. where we watched both skylarks and horned larks feeding in this manner, the skylarks appeared awkward in comparison to the horned larks. Alan Poynter reported that the small flock on Cedar Hill Cross Rd. were having difficulty in finding food. One skylark apparently nearly dead was picked up. After forced feeding and a night indoors it recovered and was set free.

Probably a long period of snow covered ground would have a serious effect on the skylark population. An item in the Victoria Naturalist, March, 1950, states that three Victoria birders in a survey of the fields north of the

city found only 12 skylarks after the severe winter of 1949-50. The species survived but the population was considerably reduced.

David Stirling.

A TALE OF A COCONUT

by Katherine Sherman

Two years ago a friend visiting the Hawaiian Islands sent us a coconut in the hope that we might enjoy really fresh coconut milk. As luck would have it however, it got sent to Sydney, Australia, and by the time it had reached Sidney, B.C. it was completely dried up. We thought it beautiful though with its thick outer husk and decided to make the best of a bad job by converting it into a bird house. We sawed off one end, scraped out what was left of the inside and hung it up under the eaves of the house. Although it looked inviting, we hardly expected it to be occupied, and sure enough spring and summer came and went without any tenants.

One day this winter I noticed droppings on the railing below the coconut, and still more at the entrance of it. Evidently someone was occupying our coconut. One evening after dark I climbed up with a flash-light and peeped in and there, at the bottom, was a little huddled body. About a week later I looked again and it was vacant.

On Saturday, March 3rd, the "Victoria Naturalist" arrived, and was devoured with the usual interest, especially the article by Madeline Till about the winter wrens. Just for fun, I decided to examine our coconut once again. It was a cold and snowy night and there, huddled right up to the top of the coconut, were little brown bodies! I only gave the briefest glance for fear of disturbing them, but like the couple at Cordova Bay, I decided to rise at dawn and watch.

6:30 a.m. Sunday morning a regular blizzard was blowing and the coconut was on the most exposed corner of the house, and where it couldn't be seen from any window. Nothing but the interests of natural history roused me from my bed. It wasn't quite light, but our robin was already waiting for his hand-out. All was quiet in the coconut and I hoped I wasn't too late. It was hardly the morning to hang around, so I climbed up, and as I did so out flew a winter wren, quickly followed by another. A moment

later two wrens flew out simultaneously, and then a fifth. Then there was a pause, and I thought perhaps they had all gone, but up came another little head, only this one obviously didn't want to fly away. Being at the bottom of the pile, he could not have known it was morning, and what a morning! He didn't appear to be at all perturbed at the sight of a large head scarcely two feet from his own, but eventually he too decided to join the others. Although he hadn't seen the others go, he knew exactly where they were over the steep bank by the sea.

As a finale, for the benefit of those who, like myself, might be worrying whether our over-night guests would be forever scared of returning to the coconut, that night I carefully cleaned off the railing below, and to my great delight next morning, there were obvious signs that they had stayed there for at least another night.

NESTING NOTES

by J.M. Barnett

We are rapidly approaching the nesting season, and no doubt many of us will have the happy experience of watching some part of the home life of the birds.

The early nesters have already started, and therefore a word of advice to the neophyte is timely.

Last December Mr. York Edwards gave us a very interesting talk on the natural history of Mittlenatch Island which can be seen from Miracle Beach, and we were pleased to have his advice on how to act around a nesting colony of gulls and cormorants.

These birds nest in rather compact colonies and their eggs and young are so well camouflaged that if you do not watch where you are walking you could easily step on some of them without knowing it. Your presence when too close also frightens the young which then scamper off seeking whatever shelter they can find. Sometimes they go quite a distance from their nests if you follow after them, and mingle with other young ones.

They do not seem to have the instinct to return to their nest when you move away, and in the crowd of lost ones it is difficult for the parents to find their own young.

I know of one colony of gulls nesting on a small island not far from a public park which was visited by a party of men. A few days later over two hundred young were picked

up dead on the beaches of the park. The men got the blame for this, but whether the tragedy was due to carelessness on their part or the visit of some other holiday makers who had gone there later and frightened the birds, could not be determined.

Seabirds however generally nest on small rocky islands where the danger of animal predators is not a big factor. Their foes are usually birds of prey, ready to snatch eggs or young if the nest is left unguarded. We have seen this ourselves when visiting Bare Island, where the close approach of the boat to the nesting area drives off the parent birds, and crows immediately swooped down to carry off some eggs.

Birds which nest on the mainland have many more enemies not the least of which are humans. We have a distinctive smell which lingers around wherever we walk and whatever we touch, and animals are very susceptible to our scent. For this reason if you touch the young of a wild creature the first thing that the mother will do will be to lick the smell off.

We should remember this when we see a nest, especially if it is on or near the ground. If at all possible do not go near the nest or touch anything in its immediate surroundings. Animals are quick to pick up your scent and will soon find the nest if you have been looking at it closely.

One day while out some youngsters seeing us with binoculars proudly told us they had found a bird's nest. They took us to it, and as we approached a spotted sandpiper flew up. The nest was in the grass on a small rise in the ground and contained four eggs.

The next day we were in the same vicinity and found the nest empty. During the night some predator had picked up the scent of the boys around the nest and had carried off the eggs.

There is nothing so interesting to a naturalist as a bird's nest with young or eggs in it, for it is fascinating to watch the behaviour of the occupants. If it is the nesting colony of some gregarious species the best plan is to walk around the edge as far away as good observation will permit. If it is a single nest on the ground, in a bush or tree, get a vantage point a little distance away from where you can see it clearly. Let us use our glasses more in observing nests, for with them we can get an enlarged view which will give us as much detail

as if we had it in our hand.

So let us be cautious the next time we see a nest and use our binoculars, so that the story will have a happy ending.

JUNIOR JOTTINGS

by Freeman King

The unusual winter spell of snow did not stop the Junior Branch from carrying out their weekly hikes and outings.

We made a trip in to Terrace Hill at Luxton, and the climb was well worth while. The view from the summit showed us the country below us on all sides. Plant life seemed to be sleeping and waiting for the warm sunshine.

The trip around Thetis Lake in the deep snow was real fun. A red-flowering currant was in full bloom, and the red against the white of the snow made an interesting contrast. On the west side of the lake where the snow was about eighteen inches deep we noted what appeared to be a greenish dust on the surface. Could this perhaps have been one of the fungi that grow in snow? At the end of the hike a real snowball fight was held by the boys and girls.

"B" group put in a real good afternoon's work clearing the number one trail at the Francis Park, as well as clearing up old bricks, etc. around the nature house. This makes a delightful walk now, and it is not too long, about 600 yards.

A meeting of the group leaders was held, at which plans were made for securing material and taking care of the displays in the nature house, when it is completed.

They also agreed to help conduct parties around the trails during the summer months, if it is so desired.

It was agreed that the leader group would help collect, mount and classify material for permanent record, that would be kept in the nature house.

PERPETUAL LIVING

An Easter message by J. W. Winson

The giant fir in a little wilderness may be celebrating its tercentenary, if it had known how to count its years and to celebrate. By the stumps of some of its fellows its

age is gauged.

Rising dog's tooth violets, those lilies resembling hovering angels, seem to be making the celebration. If they felt the honourableness that gathers with great age, they and the trilliums would thus swing and sway in adoration. They know something of perpetuity in perennial root and annual seed. There are cells in them that were alive three centuries away, when deer and red men dug or bit them. Each spring saw their resurrection, the same hovering of the lily petals, the same trinity of graces. But did they know anything of years or age?

The fir grew a foot or more each year, widening its branches as it raised its head. Its ideal shape was a rounded pyramid, the lower limbs spreading for light as higher ones shaded them. Expansion, however, was limited by its fellows; all must drop their elder branches in the shadows as they all rose higher. Like dead hopes they fell about them, healing bark covered annual wounds of broken stubs.

Furrows deepened in the rugged bark, impotent to cover the widening girths. Wind and ice snapped higher branches. The symmetrical pattern of its first century was lost in later scars and tortures. For the last century it has gained only in girth. To grow higher would incur greater risk of disaster. Year by year it held and holds its own, maintaining that highest achievement known to men and trees, identity.

Without memory, perhaps, that greater identity of man, the lowly lilies rise, spread their petal wings and sink again each spring, lacking both. There is no difference at all between these flowers and their ancestors centuries ago, but the tree can proudly claim to be the very same tree. On the outer ridges of its bark and in the inner rings of its heart-wood are the very cells that were formed centuries ago. Here is continuity with certainty.

Is it continuity with knowledge? This is man's great question. Science is now promising longer life, believing that soon the cause of decay will be arrested. To be any benefit, the mind must remain keen also, and how long will man wish to live on a declining plane?

The lilies apparently have happier lives, if shorter; no wood to build, no winter storms to brave. The tree, man feels, is nobler for facing these, for maintaining its being. He wishes so to do, to go on living, but more than this, to know he is living and will live. Not to carry

continuous cells, but continuous thought, even into the realms of the "All-life", whose perpetual centenaries the feast of Easter celebrates.

WHEN THE HERRING SPAWN

In March, when the Pacific herring spawn in the shallow bays along the east coast of Vancouver Island, we are treated to one of the finest wild spectacles on the West Coast for with the herring come thousands of birds - gulls, ducks, grebes, loons and cormorants - to feed on the swarming fish and their eggs.

We travelled to Miracle Beach early in March when the "rush" was at its peak. Nanoose Bay, Little Qualicum Bay and Comox Bay were covered with birds. We estimated the gull population at Comox to be about 20,000, but when birds are in such numbers that the sky and sea are nearly obscured, estimates can be off by several thousand. Scoters and western grebes were present in rafts covering many acres of water surface, while cormorants and Arctic loons in closely knit pods pursued the fish underwater. Greater scaup and common goldeneyes were present in large rafts, while old squaws were sprinkled in small groups among the other wildfowl. The clamour of many voices filled the air - the squawking of gulls, old squaw ducks repeating their names, the high pitched chirping of western grebes, and the melancholy calls of common scoters. Sometimes a bald eagle joined the multitudes and sometimes a sealion's head popped out of the water near shore.

Against a background of snow-covered mountains turning pink in the late afternoon sun these gatherings of birds presented a stirring spectacle.

David Stirling.

THE TOWNSEND SOLITAIRE

by Adrian Paul, Kleena Kleene, B.C.

Where I live you may not notice any of these birds for months at a time. In fact, some people perhaps don't see them at all, as they rarely come around habitations. But they do frequent trails and roads, and like to sit on tele-

phone wires for brief periods. Young birds might be mistaken for young robins. If you see a rather robin-like bird on a phone wire look again. If it has a somewhat different posture (see Allan Brooks painting in 'Birds of Canada') and is of a rather nondescript color, it may be a solitaire.

In spring, around the beginning of May, the solitaire has a wonderful song, usually lasting some sixteen seconds without a pause.

Since 1951, I have located an average of about five nests each season. You don't really have to look for them, as frequently the bird flies out as you walk by. The nest is usually built in a low cutbank along the side of a road or trail. At Kleena Kleene the cut banks happen to face south or south-east, and sometimes the sun shines in the nest briefly, which may be the cause of the occasional unhatched eggs.

Solitaires may be noted up to a mile from their nests searching for food among the pine trees rather after the manner of the grey jays (Canada jay).

About two out of five nests are almost invariably destroyed, sometimes by some small predator which takes the eggs without disturbing the nests. At other times by some larger animal which treads the nest down, and in some cases destroying the young birds.

Sometimes the young stay in the nest until almost full grown, at other times they are led away before they can fly. On one interesting occasion, when visiting a nest, I found it empty, but heard the warning note of a parent coming from somewhere nearby. Returning an hour later, when perhaps fifty feet from the nest, and there being a few low bushes on each side of the trail, a willow grouse put in a distraction display, crossing the trail about ten feet from the solitaire's nest. Within about five seconds all the following things happened. My dog started to follow the mother grouse, but at that moment the two solitaire parents entered the picture. They both literally hovered in front of the dog about four feet from the ground, practically blocking his path, but out of reach. Probably thinking that they were the grouse, and at the same time noticing the hot scent of the grouse, the dog turned away and dashed along the grouse's back trail and snapped up a baby grouse before I could stop him.

REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION & CONSERVATION

The above report for last year, recently issued, covers the activities of the Fish & Game Branch, Provincial Parks, the Travel Bureau, the Provincial Museum, the Photography Branch, and the Commercial Fisheries. This is an interesting and informative publication, and would be mailed to anyone who wishes a copy.

One section of this report, the Predator Control Division, we found rather disturbing, and, in fact, rather bewildering.

During the year the following animals were destroyed, either by poisoned bait or other means:

Bears - - -	196	Bobcats - -	114
Cougars - -	67	Coyotes - -	570
Dogs (wild)	218	Foxes - -	317
Raccoons - -	78	Skunks - -	315
Wolves - -	7	Cats (wild)-	788
Gophers	1106	Lynx - -	6
Opossum - -	31	Wolverine -	4

The number of birds destroyed is also detailed, as follows:

Crows - - -	2404	Eagles - -	1
Hawks - -	50	Magpies - -	622
Mergansers	19	Owls - -	17
Ravens - -	224	Starlings -	559

These figures are interesting, for two reasons: first, that eagles, hawks and owls are protected by Provincial legislation through the Fish & Game Branch; second, according to the reading of this report rodent control measures were increased, and as same progressed "more and more instances of heavy damage to crops appear". In other words, the predators which keep the rodents under control, are being killed.

This report also states "In the Fort Nelson district it was felt the wolf population had reached the level where control was necessary to prevent a large increase." Are feelings evidence?

A member of our society who lives in the Okanagan, writes as follows:

"We are just in the process of raising a big stink over Game Department's policy of scattering poison bait around the country "to curb the coyote menace." I like to think that we have a modern and progressive game department with good men at the top, but as long as this abominable practice

is continued I can only conclude that we haven't come very far in the last thirty years."

A. R. Davidson.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

by W. MacKay Draycot

The sight of birds engaging in combat is a common occurrence, to which we pay little or no attention, but seeing them wildly excited over something in the grass called for observation on my part.

Two young varied thrushes were having a wild time quickly fluttering their wings as they rose repeatedly then dived at the object. Heedless of my presence they allowed me to obtain a close view. The object of their excitement was a young garter snake with a length of about five inches. Vainly the snake tried to elude them by scurrying away. The determined birds picked him up, carried him to a height of about ten feet then dropped the wriggling snake. This went on until the snake, pecked and stunned, became listless, and was eventually carried off. The incident left me with the thought -- Did those birds mistake the snake for an oversized worm?

The Secretary Bird of South Africa is a known snake killer; takes them to a great height, drops them then makes a speedy nose-dive to see the result. Truly a sight worth witnessing. The bird is protected by the government. During my sojourn in that country the penalty for killing one was fifty dollars.

REVENGE !

A friend of mine told me the following story the other day. In their garden a pair of violet-green swallows had nested for three years. The fourth year the swallows again occupied the box, but a pair of house sparrows came along, ousted the swallows and took over the box themselves. A week or so afterwards my friend noticed a gathering of excited and chattering swallows on the wires overhead. When he returned a few hours later, the sparrows' nest and eggs were lying on the ground below. The box has not been occupied since.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

1962

Tuesday

GENERAL MEETING

April 10:

Douglas Building Cafeteria, Elliot St. at 8 pm.
 There will be two Moving Picture Films:
 "The Loons Necklace" and "Life on the
 Western Marshes."

Saturday

BIRD FIELD TRIP

April 14:

To Discovery Island, courtesy of Captain
 Beaumont. Meet at the Royal Victoria
 Yacht Club, Ripon Rd., at 9 a.m.
 Please contact Mr. T.R. Briggs,
 GR 8-4145 for reservations.
 Bring lunch.

Saturday,

BOTANY FIELD TRIP

April 21:

Meet at the Monterey Cafe Parking Lot at
 1:30 p.m. for a trip to Thetis Park Nature
 Sanctuary.
 Bring tea.
 Leader: Miss M. C. Melburn.

ENTOMOLOGY:

Watch for announcement in the daily papers
 regarding a field trip.

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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Telephone GR 9-2966

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Editors

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

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