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(F. L. Beebe)

Rattlesnake Plantain

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RATTLESNAKE PLANTAIN
(*Goodyera oblongifolia*)
Family - Orchidaceae

Here is a case where one may well ask "what's in a name? Why should an 'orchid' be called a plantain - and rattlesnake plantain, at that? The reason may be, in part, because the plantains, which have long been favourites of the herbalists for use in making poultices to treat wounds, bruises and insect bites, have basal leaves in rosettes and very prominent leaf veins. Now this little orchid of ours, also, has basal leaves in rosettes and the veins of its evergreen leaves are strikingly decorated with white lines and white blotches suggestive of the rattlesnake pattern. Again, it is not unusual to find animal names being used as descriptive terms in the common names of many of our well-known plants, for example, sow thistle, horse chestnut, deer fern, sheep sorrel, monkey flower, cow parsnip and tiger lily, to name but a few. Moreover, the rattlesnake part of the name is a reminder that Indians used to think this plant, if properly applied, would cure rattlesnake bite. Who knows? Perhaps it did. This member of the orchid family is not so handsome as some of its relatives (calypso, the coral-roots and the moccasin flower) so perhaps we should not deny it the right to be considered useful for something.

The greenish-white flowers of rattlesnake plantain are small, and one must look closely to note their orchid-like shape -- fifteen to twenty of them rather closely arranged on a stiff hairy stem rising high above the foliage. The leaves are much more noticeable and attractive than are the flowers. And this is fortunate, because any one individual plant may fail to produce flowers for two years or more, but, its uniquely marked evergreen leaves continue to brighten the forest floor throughout the seasons and year after year.

Rattlesnake plantain favours coniferous woods and

likes well-drained humus soil. In damper locations one often finds it growing among deep mosses rather high above the ground on fallen tree trunks. Look for it in Thetis and Francis Parks and in Beaver Lake Park. Further afield, it occurs from Alaska through British Columbia on eastward right down to Nova Scotia.

The orchid family is represented in our province by at least thirty species (all perennials), and about half this number can be found in Thetis Park.

Provincial Museum Handbook #16 "The Orchids of British Columbia", by Dr. Adam F. Szczawinski, gives a description and an illustration of each B. C. species together with a map for each to indicate its distribution.

Let's get better acquainted with our native orchids.

M. C. Melburn.

THE HEATHER FAMILY

Latest in the series of handbooks published by the British Columbia Provincial Museum is one on the heather family. Written by Adam F. Szczawinski and illustrated by Betty Newton and Ann Hassen, it contains two hundred pages and has a distribution map for each species. The price is fifty cents.

About sixty members of the family ERICACEAE occur in British Columbia, and includes arbutus, azalea, blueberry, cranberry, heaths and heathers, huckleberry, Labrador tea, laurel, manzanita, pyrola, pipsissewa, salal and rhododendron.

This Handbook, No. 19, can now be obtained from the museum, and to all those who are interested in the flora of British Columbia, this is a most essential book.

To quote from the introduction: "The wild heathers of British Columbia include many delightful and interesting plants, which are well worth knowing and searching for, and worth the effort of self-control involved in refusing to pick them. Many of our native heathers are not only important elements of beauty which form the spectacular mosaics that carpet the slopes, ridges and alpine plateaux, but are also members of the natural biotic communities which continuously are exposed to destruction by mankind."

A. R. D.

ARCHDEACON ROBERT CONNELL

Mr. A. H. Marrion has turned over to the Society a seventy page volume of newspaper cuttings containing articles written by Rob't Connell, dating from 1921 to 1943.

The Rev. Rob't Connell was one of the small group of men who initiated the Society, and was its first president, from 1944 to 1948.

He was a man of wide and varied interests, which included the whole field of natural history - geology, archeology, botany, ornithology and marine biology. Although scientifically accurate, he wrote in a manner which could be enjoyed by all lovers of natural history.

All his articles are of local subjects, as is evidenced by the titles - "Nature's Gardens within the six mile radius of Victoria", "Birds of the Seashore", "November in the Highland Hills", "A wanderer in Happy Valley", etc.

Punctuated by poetry, and often illustrated by his own sketches, his writings represent a wealth of local nature lore, and we are indeed grateful to Mr. Marrion, who, by the way, accompanied Mr. Connell on many of his trips, for having preserved these articles and put them together in one volume for the benefit of the members of our Society.

This volume, which is titled "The Ramblings on Southern Vancouver Island of Robert Connell", is now part of the Society's library, which is presently housed at the home of Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Davidson, and can be borrowed by any of our members.

A.R.D.

THOSE PECULIAR WINTER WRENS

Recently there was an item in the Naturalist from the pen of Mrs. Madeline Till, of Sidney, with reference to the behaviour of these birds during a cold spell.

Mrs. Till also had an account of this episode, from a different point of view, published in the Sidney Peninsula & Gulf Island Review. This is such an interesting and amusing article that we thought our readers would also enjoy it. The birdwatchers in question were Mrs. Walker L. Taylor, my wife and self.

"Not long ago, I sent in an account of the activities of winter wrens which aroused the interest of real bird watchers. Three of them came out to see me. I know they

were real bird watchers because they bore the unmistakable insignia; a pair of binoculars slung from the neck.

Very gently, but very thoroughly, they proceeded to cross-examine me about the wren episode.

Said one: "Are you sure that the birds you saw were winter wrens?"

"Well yes, they were small, very dark brown, with perky tails."

"Now then, winter wrens are usually seen in twos and threes, but you say the garage roof was covered with them, and that at least a dozen went into the nesting box to sleep. Did you count them?"

"No. But I would say there were about two dozen or more on the roof all lining up for the box, some were pushed out while others went in"

"So you can't really be sure?"

"Well, no (I almost said 'your honour') there was so much coming and going and it was getting dark. I would hazard a guess of twelve as a conservative estimate of the numbers that got in."

"Ah, you would hazard a guess (pause). Now tell me, did you observe this occurrence on more than one occasion?"

"No. You see, I was just standing by the kitchen window one evening, and happened to see them."

"Can you remember what the weather was like?"

"Yes, it was very cold. I watched for them about a week later when it was mild, and no birds came."

The man excused himself, went out to the car and came back with a book.

"We are always glad to be able to confirm these things," he said, opening the book to show me an account by an authority who counted 31 wrens crowding into a box, a practice they sometimes have in severe weather.

I relaxed, and breathed more easily after that, and went on to tell them of an unusual visitor to my garden. According to Peterson's Field Guide it was a white-throated sparrow.

"A white-throated sparrow!" they exclaimed in surprise. "That is a very rare migrant indeed."

I went into the kitchen and looked out of the window. Not a sign of him. Then I wished and I wished. And he came!

I went back and said nonchalantly; "He is there now feeding with the others."

With one accord they rushed to the window, three pair

of binoculars clicked into position. For a few seconds there was a pregnant silence.

"Yes, it's a white-throated sparrow all right" they agreed with happy smiles and watched this eastern visitor for about five minutes, looking as pleased as if they had found a crock of gold.

Once again I breathed more easily.

Now I shall really get down to business and out-bird-watch the bird watchers. To ensure accuracy I'll always have the binoculars and Field Guide with me, in the country and in town. Yes, even in bed to spy on the birds while drinking my morning tea.

A.R.D.

LICHENS

by J. W. Winson

Old Man's Beard is a lichen that always looks its age. Its straggling filaments are wisps from the locks of Time himself, as he threads his way through the forest. The grey green festoons are the garland of maturity on the bark of the forest trees, and they share with the moister mosses the solemn rites of shrouding the dead.

The Bearded Lichen is the common fringe of the conifers of the Coast. It does little service and little harm, in the eyes of those who look for these attributes in all things; an absorbant in emergencies, a cushion for a sleeping man or nesting bird, and for the rest, an untidy decoration.

As the dry belt is approached, however, its place is taken by the Hairy Lichen, a lichen of youthful hair, not hoary, but black or dark brown, fine-spun as ladies' tresses. This is eaten by the Indians after long and elaborate cooking.

There is food-virtue in most lichens, though it is only called on when famine threatens. Arctic travellers have been thankful for the "reindeer-moss", which is but a lichen under another name, and the fact that animals thrive on it is evidence of its goodness, but there are better foods for the growing.

With this dusky lichen grows one of yellowy green, bunched like fine coral growth, on rare occasions showing the brown discs of its "seeding". Known to them as wolf moss, this lichen gave the natives a fine yellow dye, which afterwards faded to a fine toned brown; a feature of

homespun garniture difficult to imitate.

The first use man had for lichens was to color his robes or his body. Then their supposed resemblance to parts of himself led him to use them internally as medicines. The virtues still linger in the names of lungwort and liverwort; this lichen whose fruit sacs curl up like dog's teeth, was a sure cure for hydrophobia, and who could doubt that Old Man's Beard and the Hairy Lichens would induce hair to grow where it was lacking? The Manna lichen of the steppes and deserts is eaten today by Tartar and Bedouin as it was by the Wilderness Wanderers.

If these ancient uses and virtues are passing from the lichens, science can point to a newer discovery which gives them greater interest. It is now known that a lichen is made up of a partnership between a green plant and a grey fungus. It is a union of perfect services and mutual benefit. Spore cells of each float separately in the air and when meeting on a suitable spot agree to work with each other, or sometimes the dual cells may start out together rather than risk separation when travelling.

The fungus plant is unable to extract food from the sunbeams, as does the green alga. Its mission is to attack the rock for the mineral salts, and to absorb and keep the moisture required.

In return for this moisture and mineral, the green plant gives the starch it has made in the sunshine, and so both prosper; generally fungus and alga "agreeing to anything so long as we are happy."

This is the oldest co-operative association in the world, the most universal example of mutual services extant. For lichens grow everywhere, as they have grown through all time since plants began. Mosses left them by "leafy" stems and soft rich mats, plants grew away and above them in stalks and flowers, but the lichens obligingly moved aside, taking any vacant spot until a better plant needed it, painting every bare trunk and crag with their message of service and sociability, preaching through groping epochs the message man is just beginning to understand, that by the bestowal of benefits self-interest is served.

OIL POLLUTION

This matter was brought to the attention of the society by one of our members, there having been two serious cases recently in local waters.

An Act covering oil pollution was passed by the

Canadian Government on March 21st, 1957, and amended on February 24th, 1960, making discharges of oil from the bilges of ships illegal within fifty miles of land in the Canadian Zone.

However, there are no facilities at Victoria for the discharge of oil into shore receptacles, and I can find no evidence that there are any at Vancouver. All masters of ships are made aware on this convention, and the pilots also warn them, but, as the steamship inspector pointed out, evidence is difficult to obtain.

In connection with this matter I quote below some comments taken from an editorial in the English magazine "Country Life" of January 4th last:

"The evil wrought by the practice is not confined to the massacre of wild birds: the ruin of beaches for bathing and other recreation come from this source. These consequences are serious enough, but the slaughter of birds ranks as an atrocity, both by the magnitude of the loss and the cruelty involved. The birds do not die in masses or instantaneously, the oil glues the feathers of a bird in such a way as to destroy insulation. The creature cannot dive or feed. It may drift helplessly shoreward, dying from exposure en route or from slow starvation if it reaches land.

The British Co-ordinating Committee on Oil Pollution, after long study of the problem, are convinced that the only effective remedy is total prohibition of the discharge of oil into the sea, anywhere, at any time. All waste should be dumped ashore and facilities for disposal be provided by the port authorities.

At an international conference in London recently oil pollution was banned in the Baltic and North seas. A prohibited zone will also include the North Atlantic within 1600 miles of the British Isles, the Mediterranean and other coastal waters. At this conference delegates were present from 54 countries, including Canada.

So there the matter stands. Much has been accomplished but there is a long way to go yet.

A. R. D.

THE GREY JAY

by Adrian Paul, Kleena Kleene, B.C.

Picture yourself sitting amongst the lodge-pole pines of the Chilcotin. Presently, if you are lucky, along comes a

little group of grey jays. (This is the new name for the Canada jay) If it is May or June there may be one or two that look much like the Vancouver Island subspecies, but these are the young birds, hatched in early April. The parents look as if age had turned them grey; the head, particularly, being whitish. This family group will likely stay together through the winter, though probably not all will survive that long.

Your visitors may pause to look you over, but unless food is forthcoming soon they will be on their way. They will be searching amongst the branches, working their way upward. They are deceptively light in weight, "just a ball of feathers", and when they get near the top of the tree one will spread its wings and "float" over to the next, soon followed by the others.

The family has a territory of perhaps a thousand acres which it patrols daily. If the territory happens to include a barnyard or a temporary camp, these will be watched, and if there is much food, the daily routine may be broken, in which case an adjacent group may extend its range. If it is winter there will likely be chickadees feeding there too, and perhaps Clark's nutcrackers.

At nesting time a mated pair may have a third bird, perhaps last year's hatch, staying with them. A family group may consist at times of only two or even just one bird, presumably due to predators or poor hatching conditions.

It seems that most grey jays remain in one small area all their lives.

Today we met Alan Poynter in Beacon Hill Park, and he showed us in an old and battered maple tree on the edge of the road (Lover's Lane) a tree creeper's nest under a piece of loose bark and a perfectly round hole about $1\frac{1}{2}$ " in diameter which a downy woodpecker has been working on for some weeks. Near by, close to this busy road too, is a bush-tit's nest.

ACTIVITIES OF THE BIRD GROUP

for the year 1961

Compiled by David Stirling

Bald Eagle Nesting Survey: Twenty nests were under observation during the spring and early summer. Reports on these nests were sent to the Audubon Society. A start was made on an inventory of all eagle nests on southern Vancouver Island.

Bald Eagle Winter Inventory: Counts were made of wintering eagles with special emphasis on the ratio of immatures to adults.

B. C. Nest Record Scheme: Forty-six nests were recorded and reported to compiler G. A. Poynter. The three top nest finders were Mrs. A. G. Gosling (10), Miss E. K. Lemon (9) and Mr. G. A. Poynter (9). No nests of noteworthy birds were found this year.

Special Studies: Information concerning common snipe, purple martins, and sea bird colonies was sent to the people compiling reports and life histories of these species.

Visits to and by Other Groups: Members of the Vancouver Bird Group visited Victoria in late April. Victoria and Comox members held a field trip and social evening at Comox in May. Several Victoria members participated in the Vancouver Natural History Society's summer camp in early July. Three Victoria members spent a day with Vancouver members in the Fraser marshes in early November. Highlights of the day were 3,000 snow geese and 10,000 dunlins. In December two Victoria members helped the Comox birders with their Christmas Census. A number of visiting birders were taken on bird tours.

Tuesday Field Trips: Every Tuesday Mr. A. R. Davidson led a group on a field trip. These trips were well attended.

Monthly Field Trips: Ten field trips were organized and led by Mr. T. R. Briggs. Average attendance was 25 members. Average number of birds seen was 60 species. Two of these trips were of special note. In July, 39 members participated in a trip to Mandarte Island. This island is an important breeding site for glaucous-winged gulls, cormorants and pigeon guillemots. "Glamour species" nesting on the

island are black oyster-catchers and tufted puffins. The September field trip to Discovery Island was attended by 43 people and 79 bird species were recorded.

Audubon Field Notes: Noteworthy observations were submitted to the Audubon Field Notes, the "bird news" for North America north of Mexico.

Sidney Bird Count: A census of the birds in the North Saanich area was held at New Year under the direction of Mr. G. A. Poynter. This census in conjunction with the Victoria Christmas count provides a good indication of the mid-winter bird population on the Saanich Peninsula.

Christmas Bird Count: Forty-two people including four Juniors participated in the annual bird census. Record totals of 124 species and 58,000 individuals were reported. The Christmas Count has been described as the most enthusiastic nature activity of the year. It should be emphasized, however, that this census is not just another outing, but is a serious census of the bird population in a given area. The success of the count depends on good organization, accurate field identification, and many hours of checking and compiling. Results of the census are published in the February issue of the Victoria Naturalist and the April issue of Audubon Field Notes.

Individual members were active in photography, bird song recording, keeping detailed notes of bird movements and population trends, the friendly but keenly competitive sport of "listing" and in searching for the nest of the elusive marbled murrelet.

Except for the Victoria area and the Black Creek - Comox area, there is a lack of observations from most of Vancouver Island. The west coast and the mountainous interior of the island is almost unknown ornithologically speaking. Even lists of birds seen on visits to these areas would be of value. No breeding bird census of the coast forest has been published. The changes in the bird fauna on the huge tracts of logged-over land have had only a cursory examination. The nest and eggs of the marbled murrelet, a common bird on our coast, are still waiting to be discovered. The status of introduced species, and the spread or decrease of native species should be carefully recorded. For the serious birder, there is no lack of interesting work to do.

NOTICE

The official opening of the
THOMAS C. FRANCIS PARK NATURE HOUSE
will be held on

Tuesday, May 1st, at 7:30 p.m.,
by the Hon. Earle C. Westwood
Minister of Parks and Recreation.

The route to the park is via Burnside Road, turning right on the Prospect Lake Road for about half a mile, then left at the Munn Road sign.

Arrangements are being made for car parking.

There will be a "Coffee and Tea break" after the opening.

I would be happy to see a good turn-out of members and friends on this occasion.

Freeman King.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

1962

- Tuesday
May 8: ANNUAL MEETING: At the Douglas Building Cafeteria on Elliot Street, 8 p.m.
Election of officers and other business.
- Saturday,
May 12: COMBINED FIELD TRIP: A meeting of all the groups will be held at Evos Park Westholme. Meet at the Monterey Cafe at 9 a.m. All members welcome. Bring lunch.
- Saturday,
June 2: BIRD FIELD TRIP: Meet at the Monterey Cafe at 9:30 a.m. or Quadra and Reynolds at 10 a.m. Bring lunch.
Leader: Mr. T. R. Briggs.
- Saturday
June 23: BOTANY FIELD TRIP: Meet at 9:30 a.m. on Hillside at Monterey Restaurant. To Goldstream, have lunch, and go on to Sandy Beach Park. Leader: Miss. M. C. Melburn.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS Continued:

Saturday,
July 7:

BIRD FIELD TRIP: Bare Island. Meet at Monterey Cafe at 9 a.m. or Deep Cove wharf 10 a.m. Bring lunch. For reservation phone Mr. T.R.Briggs GR 8-4145.

Saturday,
July 21:

BOTANY FIELD TRIP: Meet at 9:30 a.m. on Hillside at Monterey Restaurant. To various points on West Saanich Road. Have lunch at Dr. Wm. Newton's at 1980 Lands End Road afterwards proceeding down East Saanich Road to John Dean Park or Island View Beach. Leader: Miss M.C.Melburn

Saturday,
August 11:

BIRD FIELD TRIP: A boat trip to one of the islands, possibly Princess Margaret Island. Confirm with Mr. T.R.Briggs

JUNIORS MEET ON SATURDAYS at Monterey Cafe for Field Trips, at 1:30 p.m.
Anyone interested, please phone Leader - Mr. Freeman King at GR 9-2966.

JUNIOR JOTTINGS
by Freeman King

We had a very busy month. The expedition to Mount Douglas Park was more than interesting in that we found numerous fossil stones in the clay cliff.

The junior group have been very active working on the Nature House project; clearing trails and setting out signs.

The leader section are looking after the displays for the Nature House.

During the summer there will be at least one member of the leader section on duty every Sunday, who will conduct walks around the trails for those who wish to go.

We are planning a camp in July. Details later.

On Sunday, April 29th the leader section are going to Snuggery Cove at Port Renfrew to investigate the wonders of the marine gardens there.

Trips are planned to beaches, lakes and other interesting places for the summer.

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OUR ANNUAL MEETING, MAY 8, will be the last meeting until Sept. and we trust members and friends will be sure to attend. Please note: book reservations for sea trips well ahead.

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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