The VICTORIA NATURALIST

Vol. 20 No. 4 December, 1963

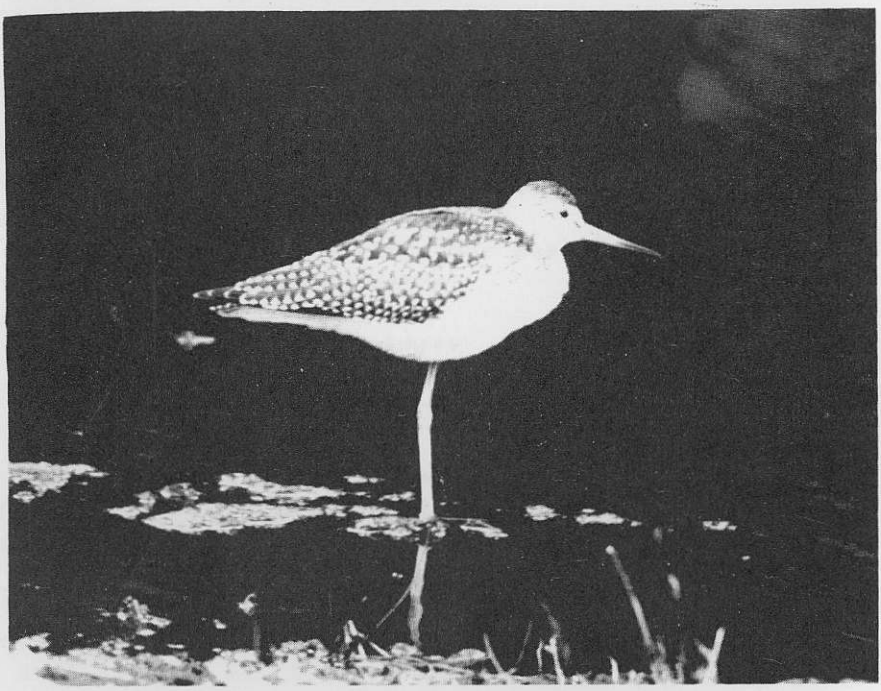

Photo by A. Poynter

Published by the
VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
Victoria, B.C.

THE VICTORIA NATURALIST

Published by
THE VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Vol.20, No.4 December 1963

COVER PICTURE

by Alan Poynter

Greater yellowlegs (Totanus melanoleucus), one of the larger sandpipers that migrate through or winter in this area, can be confused only with lesser yellowlegs; even then, the difference is obvious if the two are seen together --- size alone is indicative.

About 12 to 15 inches long, this bird has long yellow legs and a long, slender bill, slightly upturned. Winter plumage, the phase we usually see it in, is grey and black. In flight, no wing-pattern is seen, but the completely white tail and rump are very obvious. These features, and its very sharp three-noted whistle, make identification almost simple.

Watch for yellowlegs along our seafront or in freshwater sloughs and flooded fields.

****

1962 BIRD COUNT

Complete details of last year's bird count in U.S.A. and Canada have just been received, revealing some interesting figures.

Nine thousand, nine hundred eighty-one observers counted 672 species, totalling 44,548,277 birds. Starlings topped the list with 10,456,414. Red-winged blackbirds came next with 10,211,579. Other large numbers were, grackles 8,439,034; cowbirds 2,762,063; robins 1,373,609; and mallards 1,262,797.

The foregoing figures should not be construed as a total of these species in North America; large areas were not examined.

****

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The annual Christmas Count will be held on Saturday, December 21. The count must follow rules laid down by the Audubon Society. To summarize, these rules are: (1) Forms supplied by Audubon Society must be used for compiling the count. (2) Count must fit within, and preferably fill, a 15 mile diameter circle. (3) Counts must be held within dates specified by Audubon Society and must be during a dawn to dusk or longer period. (4) All unusual bird records must be accompanied by a separate sheet giving details of such observations. (5) A fee of fifty cents will be charged for each participant.

Two of the above rules have been enlarged as follows:

(4) Unusual birds: It must be emphasized that the count is not a search for rarities, nor a competition. Reasonably accurate counts of juncos, kinglets and robins are as important as finding a snowy owl. Contrary to some recent reports on Christmas counts, most birds (except starlings) are not increasing. Christmas counts have documented the decline of the eastern bluebird in the U. S., and the disappearance of Lewis woodpecker in Victoria. Rarities must be carefully identified, and in this connection, groups are advised to stay together. An unusual bird, glimpsed by one observer, is not good enough for the record. A committee of three birders has been set up to deal with controversial sightings.

(5) Fees: In the past, Victoria Natural History Society has paid the $.50 fee, but this season all participants will be required to pay. Area leaders will collect fees from their groups and submit the monies to the compiler on the count evening.

Mr. and Mrs. G. A. Poynter again extend an invitation to all participants to meet at 1555 Monterey Avenue, after 7:30 P.M., December 21. Dress -- casual clothes.

If you want to count birds, or if you need more information, please get in touch with G.A.Poynter, 384-8330; T.R. Briggs, GR.8-4145; or David Stirling, 384-4223.

David Stirling,

Compiler.

ANNUAL FUNGUS FORAY

by M.C. Melburn

Vancouver Island is noted for its fruit-growing, but would you think that in November more than 75 different species of "fruit" could be observed in approximately two hours, and in an area of less than ten acres? The Botany Group of Victoria Natural History Society had that pleasant experience in Francis Park, Saturday afternoon, November 2nd.

Mushroom fruits collected by the party of 28 showed a wide range of colours -- white, pink, red, purple, blue, yellow, brown, grey and black. Sizes were just as varied, from dainty half-inch mycenas to eight-inch velvet-tops.

Actual fugus plants, of course, were not seen; they were out of sight, growing in wood (dead or alive), soil and forest debris, or living on another fungus. Two examples of the latter were a brilliant orange organism, Hypomyces lactifluorum, feeding on a Lactarius species and a white mould-like fungus, Mycogone roseola, growing on the surface of elf's-saddle.

The toothed group were represented by two handsome brown hydnums, golden Hydnum repandum, and a little brown cousin, Auriscalpium vulgare, wearing its cap on one side. The latter, by-the-way, grows only on Douglas fir cones.

Fir cones were found providing homes for several other species -- creamy-white Collibia albipilata, three species of jelly-like fungi, two yellow and one white, and that small relative of common bird's-nest fungus called Sphaerobolus stellatus, whose ability to "shoot" its spores as far as 14 feet, was the delight of the late Dr.A.H.R. Buller, one of Canada's most eminent mycologists. Dr. Buller called it "the largest, most powerful and loudest of all fungus guns". In spite of this formidable ability, their small size permits a cluster of four or five of these fruits to sit comfortably between two scales of a cone.

Its larger relatives, the puff-balls (Lycoperdon perlatum), were quite numerous on the forest floor, and there were also a few earth-stars (Geastrum triplex), very neat and well-groomed in their buff coats.

Eight members of the polypore group were identified -- varnished bracket (Ganoderma oregonensis), velvet-top(Polyporus schweinitzii), the pine destroyer (Fomes pinicola),

hoof fungus (Fomes fomentarius), and four smaller species.

Perhaps the most admired species were scotch bonnets (Marasmius bellipes), their maroon caps lines with broad white gills; tiny red and white mycena (Mycena flavoalba); crested lepiota and three species of cystoderma, all wearing crisp "collars" and gay hats; stout, red russulas, so much appreciated by slugs; waxy laccarias and handsome big blue-bonnets(Tricholma personatum) with pale-lilac caps and violet gills.

Blue-bonnets are sonsy big specimens and some of the men in the party were especially pleased to know these are edible. As a matter of fact, at least 90% of our wild mushrooms are edible, and very few are known to be unsafe or actually poisonous. But do take care to get "well-acquainted"! Don't trust to luck.

****

THE HAPPY FROG

by J.W. Winson

One little creature, ill clad for winter, has defied the North King almost openly. The tree frog (to the scientific, Pacific tree toad Hyla regilla) is the frailest of his fellows, so soft that a frost can snap him, so delectable that a score of bird and animal foragers would make him a mouthful. Yet, in any of our woods, when the hoarfrost is off the dead leaves, his voice can be heard.

Whether it is a croaking desire for warmer weather, or cheerful, if husky, appreciation of present clemency, the hearer may guess. When the leaves are disturbed, causing him to move, his eye is seen to be brightly happy, burnished with brilliance of spring exuberance already.

Soon he will leave the woods and bushes for the ponds, having escaped the sleep that colder weather would have laid on him. He has lengthened his living by the many rainy days that kept him active, and if life is a boon, his winter croaking must have been the gurgling of thankfulness.

Food may be scanty, but the beams that bring him comfort also lure the fly into the open and quicken the spider, and both are welcome to the little frog of the trees. His colour may change from green to brown, so that it conforms to his perch. His tiny toes have suction pads that cling automatically.

He can make more noise than any other creature his size. When he gets to the spring mud, and the water warms to his chest, his throat will balloon out as big as his head, and a mighty trumpeting will ensue. A dozen of him will waken the marshy meadows, a chorus will shake the night shadows of the woods until the trees quiver into leaf with the melodious burbling.

****

GINKGO, THE LIVING FOSSIL

by David Stirling

The Ginkgo, Ginkgo biloba, or maidenhair tree, has the distinction of being a species, genus, family and class encompassed in one living thing. It is the sole survivor of many species which occurred over most of the earth in the carboniferous age. Whole logs of Ginkgo, four to five feet in diameter, can be seen in the petrified forests of Washington and Oregon.

Ginkgo probably owes its survival to early tree worship in ancient China. Europeans found Ginkgos growing around Buddist temples and tombs in China and Japan. Some of these trees are over one thousand years old, one hundred feet tall and up to thirty feet in girth. Wild Ginkgos have never been found.

The Ginkgo belongs to the Gymnosperms, but it is more closely related to the Cyads than to the Conifers. Identification is easy as there are no similar species. The sparsely branched trees have decidous leaves, alternate or in clusters of three to five, slender stalked, fan shaped and parallel veined. Leaves turn a golden yellow in autumn.

In Victoria, small Ginkgos, ten to fifteen feet tall, can be seen on Quebec, Camosun and other streets. It is also commonly planted in many gardens in this city.

****

The contemplation of the works of the Creator is the highest delight of the rational mind. In them we read, as in a volume fraught with endless wonders, the unlimited power and goodness of that Being who, in the formation of Atoms, and of Worlds, has alike displayed unfathomable Wisdom. (Abel Ingpen, 1827)

INSECTS AND GARRY OAK

by David Evans
Canada Forestry

Nearly 500 species of insects have been found in association with Garry oak, Quercus garryana Dougl., on southern Vancouver Island. This figure has been established by a study of oak insects in the Victoria area during 1957-1961. Beetles, moths and wasps each comprise about one-quarter of the total, and many of the other insect groups are represented to a lesser degree in the remaining 25 per cent. Approximately 100 of the species have yet to be identified, and it is anticipated that others will be found when the results of 1962-1963 investigations are incorporated. Garry oak is particularly attractive to insects because of its abundant succulent foliage, which offers shelter and protection as well as food. The oak is the principal tree in the sunny, open, well-drained areas it prefers, and this narrow ecological zone is one that hosts many insects which would have difficulty living elsewhere. A few of them are completely dependant on Garry oak.

The insects vary from Prionus californicus Mots., a 2½ inch brown wood-boring beetle, whose white grub-like larvae tunnel in old oak roots for at least two years before reaching maturity, to fragile, bright-eyed lacewings, and minute gall wasps of the genus Callirhytis, which spend nearly their entire existence inside the pollen anthers of the male flowers of the oak. Small as these wasps are, they are parasitized by other wasps that are even smaller, which are able to locate Callirhytis larvae within their usual home, and insert eggs into the chamber -- brilliant emerald and golden adults that emerge are about one twenty-fifth of an inch long. Most oak insects cause little or no injury to the trees, many are beneficial: eliminating weak and injured tree sections, assisting in pollination and controlling harmful insects by predation and parasitism. The insect population on oaks is a year-round food supply that attracts many birds and keeps them in provisions when other sources are not available.

From our viewpoint, it is caterpillars of local moths that are responsible for the greatest damage to oaks, although it appears only for a brief part of the year when the leaves are past their best. Foremost among these is the oak looper, Lambdina somniaria (Hulst), a geometrid

that periodically creates severe defoliation in localized areas. The caterpillars are grey-green, dotted with darker marks, and the August-flying moths are bright buff in colour. The numbers of leaf webbing larvae are considerable; most of them overwinter as eggs or small larvae, and many of them commence feeding on buds before they are fully open, so that by the time the leaves are mature, so many different insects have been at work on them that they appear worn out before their time. Every part of the tree supports its own type of insect: tiny grey springtails and bark lice live on the bark, round-headed beetles bore beneath the bark, and there are small ambrosia beetles that bore into the wood of the trunk; scales and flat-bugs suck sap from the twigs, and aphids take juices from the more tender shoots and leaves. Acorns are infested with snout beetles, and lepidopterous larvae and gall wasps may be found on nearly any section of a tree, including the roots.

One of the more curious dwellers among oak foliage is the neuropteran snakefly, Agulla. This black, mantis-like creature is about an inch long -- females have a slender ovipositor that might be mistaken for a stinger. They have two pairs of clear, gauzy wings, but their outstanding feature is their long upright "neck" that facilitates locating and capturing prey, which consists of aphids, small caterpillars and other soft bodied insects. Despite its size, the snakefly, with its intelligent expression and quick aggressive movements, can create an impression of deadly belligerence. Young snakeflies are fast-moving, flat-bodied, brown and white larvae with three pairs of legs, less intimidating in appearance than their parents, but more voracious in appetite. Lacewings, ladybird beetles (both adults and larvae), snakeflies, stinkbugs, and countless spiders of many species are the principal agents of natural control in oak insect population.

Environmental conditions have many complex variables that have yet to be fully understood. However, causes of mortality among oak insects might be listed as follows, in order of importance: insect and spider predation; weather hazard; predation by larger animals, birds, rodents, reptiles, etc.; parasitism; miscellaneous causes; and disease. The price of survival is extremely high in the insect world. Just as Garry oak is unique among our native trees, so is the insect community it supports.

****

BIRDS FOR THE RECORD

Short-eared owls were seen on October 10th and 11th within the city limits. These birds have not been seen too often for three winters.

On October 20,an immature snow goose and three cackling geese were feeding on Oak Bay Golf Course. By November 3, this small flock had increased to six snow's and 15 Canada's, some of which were lesser's. Snow geese were reported from two other locations.

Between October 20 and November 1, at least five golden plover were seen locally, the best record for this species for several years.

Saw-whet owls were reported from several points,most of them dead or dying by the roadside. This is normal for late October when the fall migration reaches lower Vancouver Island.

October 24.

Weather: Overcast, strong winds from Race Rocks.
Location: Clover point.

12:30 P.M. -- Two fork-tailed petrels! Plus-minus 50 red phalarope, one ancient murrelet.

5:00 P.M. -- Five Sabine gulls, one western gull.

The week following was one of the most spectacular ever recorded by the Bird Group. Everyone who took time off to go to Clover Point saw at least one "lifer". Fifty-six species were listed for the week with Sabine gulls becoming almost commonplace.

Fork-tailed petrels covered the water by the hundred. Leach petrels were seen quite often. Dark phase fulmars posed for photographs off the rocks. Even light phase fulmars were seen several times.

Sooty shearwaters and slender-billed shearwaters were both seen. Parasitic jaegers were seen twice (a late record). Rhinocerous auklets came within a stone's throw. A fantastic display of oceanic species -- even an albatross got into the act, but didn't quite make it to Clover Point -- it was seen by two fishermen, off Becher Bay.

It is worth noting that while all species mentioned are unusual to most of us, their flyway is off the west coast of Vancouver Island, and these birds are within 50 miles every fall. The recent display can be attributed to adverse weather in the north Pacific.

Tom Briggs and Dr. J. Tatum found a marbled godwit at Esquimalt Lagoon on October 28, the third local report in eight years.

An influx of great horned owls had birders dashing all over town. With six reports to date, it is obvious that this is out of the ordinary.

R. Fryer saw the first European widgeon on November 8, in Oak Bay, just to let us know he is back from vacation.

The last barn swallow was seen on October 23, by Mr. and Mrs. Davies.

November 9, Dr.J.Tatum identified a western kingbird on Hunt Road.

An almost unbelievable report on November 10, by the Davidson's -- one male blue-grey gnatcatcher, in Uplands Park. The bird was also seen and photographed by Alan Poynter. This is a first report for British Columbia.

November 11; 26 bluebirds flew over the Cenotaph at 11:00, during the two-minute silence.

****

INSECTS I FOUND THIS SUMMER

by Ross Storey

I found quite a few insects this year, and will tell you about some of the most interesting. While walking to Swan Lake one day, I came across a dead seagull. I turned it over and the underneath was half eaten away. Along with hundreds of maggots, there were several different kinds of beetles.

One was a sexton beetle from the family Silphidae. It lays its eggs in a tunnel leading to a small mammal which it and its mate have buried. As well as feeding on carrion themselves, they also feed it to newly hatched larvae. These insects do a very good job of cleaning up the remains of dead animals.

The third kind of beetle found there was a hairy rove beetle, from the family Staphylinidae. They are a grey and black species, found around carrion, preying on other insects which come to this type of food.

On our trip this summer, we stopped at one of the campsites. While I was there, I caught a great spangled fritillary butterfly. I put it on my pressing board and

left it on the picnic table. In a very short time, I came back to it and all that was left was four wings and a tiny piece of body with a wasp feeding on it. The wasps must have stripped the body down in a matter of minutes. I was surprised to find them eating it, and in future I will keep my specimens inside.

****

JUNIOR JOTTINGS

by Nancy Chapman

Mushroom season is on! On two consecutive trips to Francis Park, over 30 species of mushrooms were collected, but I'm afraid our attempts at naming them were, for the most part, unsuccessful. Although the weather was damp and drizzly, the little green tree frogs seemed to enjoy it, and their croaks can still be heard in the deep forest.

Maples around the park are really beautiful now, and when their golden hue is mixed with dark green of conifers, it really makes a sight worth seeing.

With coming of winter, most migrating birds have fled, but a few hardier species, such as juncos, chickadees, winter wrens and ravens can still be seen or heard.

On a trip to Thetis Lake, everyone was thrilled with the sight of a huge osprey diving for fish, right before our eyes. Several gulls also noticed him, and were soon chasing him across the lake.

For enduring a rain shower, we were rewarded by two magnificent rainbows bending right over the lake, after the storm. Suddenly, we felt as if we were hundreds of miles from civilization.

One of the most outstanding things about Thetis Lake Park is the abundance of licorice or polypody ferns; they are so thick on some rock outcrops that they obscure the stone. On the underside of the fronds, twin rows of spore cases show very clearly on each leaflet.

Several interesting algae were found in the lake or in nearby ponds, and many interesting water-weeds have been washed in to shore from deeper water.

Attendance of the Junior Groups has been excellent during the past few weeks, averaging around thirty to forty, and everyone seems to be keenly interested.

****

U.S. TO HELP SAVE CANADIAN WETLANDS?

Except for Alaska and limited opportunities to save breeding areas in the Dakotas and other Northern states, the wetlands programme in the United States is aimed at preserving migration and wintering habitat. An estimated 85 percent of all North American waterfowl nest in Canada. From half to three fourths of the total is normally produced in the vast, pothole-dotted prairies of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. But there, as in the Dakotas, farm drainage and other encroachments are chewing away the marshes.

Canada, a nation of only 19 million people, compared to 188 million in the United States, has limited resources upon which to draw for funds to buy and manage wildlife lands. Moreover, most of the hunter-harvest takes place in the United States. Canadian citizens may well ask -- and they often do, "Why should we tax ourselves and give up potential wheat land to produce ducks for the pleasure of American sportsmen?"

The organization, Ducks Unlimited, collects donations from American hunters and spends the money on marsh restoration projects in Canada. The D.U. programme is good, but it has been but a pittance set against the total problem.

A new bill in Congress may offer a way for effective across-the-border co-operation. S. 1810 by Sen. Roman L. Hruska of Nebraska and four Midwest colleagues would amend the Dingell Wetlands Act to permit the use of U. S. funds to acquire waterfowl areas in Canada. Any such acquisition in Canada would be carried out "pursuant to agreements between the Secretary of the Interior and appropriate officials ... of Canada or any Province thereof." The bill went to the Senate Commerce Committee."

****

WATCH FOR THE IMPORTANT "FLYER".

****

THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT WILL BE HELD ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21.

MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS

REGULAR MEETING: The regular monthly meeting of The Victoria Natural History Society will be held at 8:00 p.m., December 10, in the cafeteria of the Douglas Building. Mr. Louis Kirk, Naturalist, Olympic National Park, Port Angeles, Washington, will give an illustrated talk on "The Glaciers of the Olympics".

AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILM: The third Audubon Wildlife Film will be shown on January 3rd and 4th, 1964, at 8:00 p.m. in Oak Bay Junior High School. Mr. Edgar T. Jones will present "Alberta Outdoors".

BOTANY GROUP: Botany Group will not meet during December.

BIRD GROUP: Meet at Monterey parking lot, December 7, at 9:30 A.M. or Esquimalt Lagoon at 10:00 a.m. Bring lunch.
Mr. Alan Poynter will lead.

JUNIOR GROUP: Juniors will meet every Saturday at 1:30 P.M. at Monterey parking lot for field trips.

****

NOTE: All notices of meetings to be published in The Victoria Naturalist must be in the hands of the editor by or before the 10th of the month preceding the month during which the meeting will be held.

****

In this pre-Christmas issue, the editors wish to thank you all for your continuing support which makes the Society and The Naturalist possible. We wish you a sincere and hearty MERRY CHRISTMAS.

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

OFFICERS, 1963-64

Honorary Presidents

HON. EARL C. WESTWOOD
Minister of Recreation and Conservation

MR. J. W. EASTMAN
Former Provincial Plant Pathologist

Honorary Life Members

DR. G. CLIFFORD CARL
MR. GEORGE A. HARDY
MR. FREEMAN F. KING
MR. ALBERT R. DAVIDSON
MR. GEORGE E. WINKLER

Past Presidents

ROBERT CONNELL	1944-48	A. O. HAYES	1956-57
G. CLIFFORD CARL	1948-49	P. M. MONCKTON	1957-58
GEORGE A. HARDY	1949-50	MRS. G. E. SOULSBY	1958-59
MRS. R. G. HOBSON	1950-52	RALPH FRYER	1960-
J. A. CUNNINGHAM	1952-54	FREEMAN KING	1960-62
C. W. LOWE	1954-56	P. J. CROFT	1962-63

President

MISS ENID K. LEMON
1007 Government Street
Telephone GR 7-2194

Vice-President

G. A. POYNTER
Telephone EV 4-8330

Editors

W. D. REITH
6882 Wallace Drive
Brentwood Bay, B.C.
Telephone GR 4-2223

G. CLIFFORD CARL
410 Queen Anne Heights
Telephone EV 3-8524

Secretary

MISS EDITH VALENS
239 St. Andrews Street
Telephone EV 5-8855

Treasurer

J. L. RIMMINGTON
3372 Henderson Road
Telephone EV 4-9257

Librarian

A. R. DAVIDSON
Telephone EV 4-9595

Chairmen of Groups

Programme and Publicity
FREEMAN KING
Telephone GR 9-2966

Botany
MISS M. C. MELBURN
Telephone EV 4-9052

MRS. F. A. SHERMAN
R.R. 1, Sidney
Telephone GR 5-2268

Zoology
DR. G. CLIFFORD CARL
Telephone EV 3-8524

Federation
MRS. G. E. SOULSBY, EV 6-5028

Geology
A. H. MARRION
Telephone EV 4-1983

Ornithology
G. A. POYNTER.....EV 4-8330

Entomology
DR. JOHN A .CHAPMAN
Telephone EV 4-5568

Audubon Lectures
MISS ENID K. LEMON
Telephone GR 7-2194

Juniors
FREEMAN KING .....GR 9-2966
MRS. K. OSBORNE.....EV 5-8164

Annual dues, including subscription:
Single, $2.00; Family, $3.00; Junior, $1.00; Life Membership, $30.00;
Life Membership, husband and wife, $50.00.