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COVER PICTURE

Satin flower seems such an appropriate name for the blossom of Sisyrinchium grandiflorum, very often first to relieve the relative monotony of grey, green and brown of winter on mossy rock bluffs on southern Vancouver Island. A black-and-white photograph can never do justice to the glowing, bluish-purple, satiny petals, contrasting vividly with bright yellow, pollen-laden anthers and pure white, forked stigma, but even in monochrome, the open-faced symmetry of this flower stands out.

By design or accident, the embryo flowers seem better than usually protected from chance cold winds and late frosts. First sign of this plant is what appears to be an exceptionally robust tuft of grass. A few blades in each clump soon develop an elongated bulge about a third down from the blade tip, and as blooming time approaches, the bulge splits to eject a short stem and pendant bud. A few hours later, the flower is fully open. A day or two passes, then the petals shrivel and fall, leaving a shiny green ovary nodding on the stalk. Within a few weeks, the whole plant dies back to ground-level, invisible until the following spring.

Pure sentiment perhaps, but for the writer, the blooming of this plant marks the beginning of spring and the end of winter. Probably this is because a few years ago, it also marked the end of a period of severe illness. On that occasion, the writer's wife carefully dug up a whole plant, complete with its mossy surrounds, potted it and brought it into the sick-room. Later, the little tuft of greenery was transplanted to the garden, without any real hope for its acceptance of a new habitat. Right now, it is blooming cheerfully by the garden steps. Since that spring, satin flower has been regarded with particular reverence and its re-appearance is eagerly awaited each year.

AQUATIC ENTOMOLOGY

by M.D. Atkins
Canada Forestry

Aquatic habitat in its broadest sense includes both the shore area, frequently called the littoral zone, and the water itself. The air-water interface creates a surface film known as the neuston, upon which (supra neuston) the surface forms of aquatic insects such as water striders and whirligig beetles are supported. Beneath the film, (infra neuston) small insects such as dryopid beetles crawl about like flies on a ceiling. Insects swimming freely within a body of water are referred to as being nektonic, while those living on or in the bottom are called benthic. The shallow area, to a depth which limits photosynthesis, is often named the sublittoral or autotrophic zone, and deeper water is called the profundal zone.

The southern part of Vancouver Island, with its sea-shore, lakes and rivers is an ideal locality for a naturalist with an interest in aquatic life. One need not venture far from Victoria to enjoy many hours observing and collecting aquatic insects.

By turning a few stones along the shore of almost any pond or stream, one can find interesting insects such as carabids, a unique orthopteran of the family Tettrigidae, and many true bugs such as the fast-moving shore bugs (Saldidae) or bizarre toad bugs (Gelastocoridae). The latter make good collection material because their colour varies according to that of their habitat, making it possible to accumulate a long series of different patterns. Many different colour patterns can also be found among sand-dune inhabiting tiger beetles.

One of the most productive areas in the aquatic ecosystem is the dense mat of vegetation along the shallow edge of ponds and lakes. By sweeping in this area with a strong net, one can capture water beetles (Dytiscidae, Hydrophilidae and Haliplidae), water scorpions (Nepidae), back swimmers (Notonectidae), water boatmen (Corixidae) and sometimes the giant water bugs (Belastomidae). In this same zone, one will frequently find the nymphs of dragonflies, mayflies and stoneflies.

Many other interesting aquatic insects can be found by examining rocks from a stream bed or lake bottom, or by digging in sand or mud. On rocks, there may be water

pennies (Psephenidae), caddis fly larvae, blackfly larvae or the elusive larvae of aquatic Lepidoptera hidden under a mat of algae. In sand or mud live the larvae of many species of aquatic insects, but most common will be immatures of various Diptera.

If you want a truly rewarding experience, take along a quart sealer so you can return home from your trip with live specimens. Place them in a fresh water aquarium with a few water plants and enjoy some close-range observing. Ideal for this purpose are water beetles, back swimmers, water boatmen and larvae of dragonflies and caddis flies.

If you are making a collection, be sure to equip yourself with a few vials of seventy percent alcohol for preserving the soft-bodied forms.

Good hunting!

BIRD-WATCHING

By Eleanor Davidson

Bird-watching is a wonderful hobby; it's exciting, challenging and time-consuming. Once fired with enthusiasm for bird-watching, you will never have a full moment. It's more than just ticking off a number of species seen in a day or a year; it's a gradual awareness of birdlife around you. It is learning to see, to focus on what to many people is just a blur. A bird-watcher, seen merely standing, looking and listening, is not necessarily doing nothing. He is intently watching something that has attracted his attention and knows if he is quiet, he may have the pleasure of seeing a new bird and hearing it sing.

By constant observation, and frequent reference to a good bird book, a newcomer to bird-watching quickly learns the many distinguishing features of each bird. For example, the black head and white outer tail feathers of a male junco. After a while, a tyro begins to recognize flight characteristics, wing position and wing-beat -- compare the lazy flapping of the wings of a heron with the quick wing-beat of ducks. When describing a bird, the most outstanding colour should be noted, so should other characteristics such as wing bars, beak length and shape and leg colour. A bird's activities can also be a

clue to its identity -- whether it is scratching in underbrush, darting from branch to branch, sitting atop a tall tree, flying in and out of a tree, probing in mud, digging among barnacles, flying in a flock or alone or sitting on a fence post.

One soon realizes that birds cannot always be readily identified from book illustrations. They are seldom seen exactly as pictured, therefore, an observer must develop an ability to recognize a bird from below, above, or if only a portion of it is visible. A robin sitting upright in a distant tall tree can be mistaken for several birds -- it can look like a flicker, a solitaire, a shrike, a waxwing, a sparrow hawk or a purple finch -- it pays to check. Memorizing characteristics of various birds is a help. For instance; a robin flicks its tail when it alights, a flicker bobs its head, bushtits travel in flocks (in winter), a brown creeper climbs the trunk of a tree, then flies to the foot of another. But there is no cut and dried formula for bird identification. Bird-watchers are always learning something new, which keeps them, or should, from becoming dogmatic.

An interesting part of bird-watching is becoming familiar with bird songs and calls. After learning a few, a birder can confidently say, "That's a nuthatch", or whatever it may be. Many birds have similar call notes, some have gently lisping notes, others make ticking sounds, some buzz, a few have a different song for winter and summer, but most confusing are birds such as Bewick wrens, catbirds, etc. that mimic others.

Bird-watching means different things to different people. Some people cannot go beyond the confines of their gardens and have placed bird baths and feeders at strategic points to facilitate their observation of the birds. They faithfully keep the feeders full and love to watch the coming and going of the birds. More active people are willing to tramp over fields, climb fences, wade pools and go out regardless of weather conditions.

Beginners may wonder where to find birds -- experienced birders know they move about searching for food and cover and keep track of them. By careful observation, it is fairly easy to find out where various species are usually found. Some areas appeal to birds more than others, Beacon Hill Park is an excellent place to find a great variety of bird life -- 129 species have been found in and

around the park. Clover Point is one of the best places in Victoria to observe shore and sea birds. Uplands Park also supports many varieties of land birds. Fields near CJVI radio masts, and Victoria University Campus, are favourite places. Woods, bordered by Finnerty and Cedar Hill Cross Roads, are a wonderful bird habitat and there are many other fine birding sites near Victoria -- no one need travel far.

It is an interesting fact that most birds return regularly, year after year, to their favourite nesting sites. Years of record keeping also show the time of arrival of birds that nest or winter in Victoria area varies little from year to year.

Yes, bird-watching is a wonderful hobby which promotes good health and new interests. It takes its enthusiasts off the beaten track and they soon realize the beauty of the country around Victoria. In addition to observing birds, they also enjoy the magnificent variety of trees, shrubs and flowers that Vancouver Island is blessed with.

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Following is the fifth in a series of articles describing exotic conifers in Victoria. Next month's article, written by David Stirling, will be about European larch.

SEQUOIAS THRIVE IN VICTORIA

By R.Y. Edwards

Stand in any old part of Victoria -- in James Bay if you like -- and look at the skyline about you. Usually, part of the scene will be a tree reaching above the buildings, an evergreen with the regular form of a gently pointed dome. Architecturally, I suppose, this shape is Gothic. This graceful, exotic tree is the Giant Sequoia (Sequoia gigantea) which grows well in Victoria.

In its native land, this Sequoia is a disappearing species. It lives in eastern California on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada range. There, it grows in groves of several thousand trees; and only about 65 groves have been found. Several National Parks protect part of the scattered population, notably Sequoia National Park (385,000 acres) and Kings Canyon National Park (453,700 acres).

Sequoia National Park has large trees claimed to be the largest things alive. Not long ago they were claimed to be the oldest living things, but some Bristlecone Pines of the southwestern U.S. desert now hold this honour.

The largest Giant Sequoias in California are over 270 feet high, and over 30 feet in diameter. There are taller trees in the world, but the massive diameters give them impressive size. Many of these trees when cut have been over 3,000 years old, and several living today were about 1,500 years ancient when Christ was born.

Like the Giant Sequoia, two closely related trees are now confined to small patches of suitable range. The Coast Redwood in California thrives in a narrow strip of foggy coast, and the famous Dawn Redwood of China, discovered in 1947, survives in some remote valleys. Both relatives are scarce exotics in Victoria.

The foliage of this Sequoia is a bit "cedar-like", but the scale-like leaves are more needle-like than in our cedar, and they have very sharp tips. Look closely for yourself. There are five trees in the park at Menzies and Michigan, two large ones north of the road and west of the deer pens in Beacon Hill Park, four near the bridge over Goodacre Lake, and so on. Keep your eyes open and you will see many about town.

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WHITE-HEADED JAY

A copy of a letter from George E. Winkler to Dr. G. C. Carl, and an excerpt from a letter to Mr. Winkler, written by Mrs. W. R. Tooth of Stewart, B. C.

In a letter dated January 16, 1964, Mrs. W. R. Tooth of Stewart B.C., wrote regarding a white-headed blue jay that has been wintering in that northern town.

She says, "We have been watching a blue jay that has a white head and a white feather in each wing, feed around here with the other blue jays. I talked my next-door neighbour into taking its picture. She had to take it from inside her window, and with two trees just outside, it made it rather dark, although she used a flash. Did you ever see one before?"

I thought you might like the picture. Put your

magnifying glass on it, it will help a little."

I have seen many blue jays, but this is the first one I have seen to 'show the white feather', and we are pleased that Mrs. Tooth took the trouble to get a photo of it, although, as she says, the light was unfavourable.

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SURPRISING VARIETY OF ROBIN NEST SITES

By Adrian Paul, Kleena Kleene, B.C.

Juncos always build their nests on the ground (beside a bush or in a bank); white-crowned, song and chipping sparrows build on the ground or in a bush. Swainson's thrush nests I have seen were in each case in a willow bush, three feet from the ground and close to water; Townsend's solitaire's nests are almost always in a cutbank.

Robin nests are masked from immediately overhead; hence they avoid building in May in trees which are not in full leaf until June, but other than that, they don't seem to have any rules. I have seen their nests on the ground (in a bank); in a box, nailed to the side of a house; on a fence rail; six feet from the ground in a pine tree, close beside the highway; on a broken off aspen near a river bank; about 18 feet from the ground in pine trees, both near habitation and near a highway; and lastly, forty-five feet from the ground near the top of a spindly aspen (diameter six inches near ground-level). This last mentioned tree was among a number of spindly aspens growing beside a creek, nearly half a mile from a habitation. Perhaps the position was chosen as being an easy one to defend against marauding squirrels.

URGENT:

If anyone has a spare copy of Volume 20, No. 1, September, 1963, of The Victoria Naturalist, Miss Enid Lemon will be pleased to receive it to fill a special order from a Canadian university.

Note: The colour photo of the white-headed jay has been passed to Miss Enid Lemon who will bring it to the next regular meeting for viewing by anyone interested.

A NOTE FROM KATHERINE SHERMAN

My brother, a botanist, visited Russia last September. The following extract from a letter describing the countryside near Leningrad may be of interest to members.

"The city ends suddenly -- at the edge there is perhaps half a mile devastated by small children and then the birch woods and cranberry bogs all the way to the Arctic Sea. Most of the wild plants are much as in Scotland except that there are no toadstools, only the bases of their stalks. The Russians gather and eat the lot, including poisonous ones which they treat in one way or another first, so there is almost nothing they don't take. You see people coming home with enormous baskets containing forty species, Boletus being the most prized."

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BARRY BREAKS INTO BIG TIME

Many members will remember Barry Morgan, one of our more enthusiastic naturalist-photographers. The December 1963 issue of Wildlife in Australia features Barry's colour shot of a variegated wren (Malurus lamberti) as the 9" X 11" cover photo. Barry and his wife Joanna now live in Brisbane.

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BIRDS FOR THE RECORD

A willet, a rare straggler here, at Bowker Avenue. Seen by Jack Barnett, A.R. Davidson and others, on March 17.

Several violet-green swallows, first of the season, at Glen Lake. Seen by Gwen Briggs on March 19.

Audubon's Warbler, a singing male, at Florence Lake. Seen by Tom and Gwen Briggs on March 19.

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A RARE BIRD

By A. R. Davidson

The Tuesday Group gathered at the foot of Bowker Avenue on the morning of March 17. There weren't many birds about, so we were just talking together, when Mr. Barnett, somewhat after the manner of Richard III, yelled, "A willet, a willet!!!"

Instantly, our glasses were trained on a dull grey bird walking in the shallows about one hundred feet away. Sure enough, it was a willet. We couldn't believe our eyes. In Munro and Cowan's 'Fauna of British Columbia', it is only mentioned on the hypothetical list, and to the best of my knowledge, has only been sighted twice in British Columbia.

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EAVESDROPPING

By G.A. Hardy

With a little imagination, this word can be manipulated to express a special meaning. An eave is a projection of part of the roof of a building. To "drop in" is a friendly invitation to our acquaintances.

The acquaintance in this case is a chickadee, a well-known bird in Victoria district, and its habit of dropping in to roost under the eave of our porch, a snug retreat from the elements.

This chickadee was first observed roosting there on June 30, 1963. I was picking a leaf from a sapling maple tree when a little head peeked down at me from the ledge above. Not wishing to alarm it, I went into the house to a window that overlooks the site, and was rewarded by seeing a little ball of fluff cosily installed on the ledge and close up against the side of the porch. It remained there all night.

With the exception of two days, it continued to use this place until August 10. How long it had been going there before I noticed it, I don't know, and for what reason it ceased to return is also an enigma. A chickadee has been seen every day since, but whether or not it is the same bird, is only a guess.

A feature of its roosting habit was the precise regularity of arrival and departure, hardly varying a minute. It arrived punctually at 7:45 p.m. and left at 5:45 a.m. every day during the period I observed it, thus, out of every 24 hours, it was active for 14 hours and passive for 10 hours.

In order to ascertain these facts, I established myself in a comfortable chair, well in advance of the expected time, with a pair of binoculars for closer observation. At first it was a long wait until I got onto it. Finally, at 7:20 P.M., I was ready, and precisely at 7:45 the bird suddenly appeared on its roost. Despite the fact that three hours of bright sunshine remained, the bird soon settled down, seemingly to grow larger, as its feathers rose on end. At the same time, it forcibly thrust its head under the scapulars of its left side, and fluffed out its body feathers, obliterating its head, wings, feet and most of its tail. The whole operation took no more than a minute; the chickadee was now set for its long, well-earned sleep.

At 5:40 A.M., I was on the job again. Exactly at 5:45, it woke up, first withdrawing its head from under its scapulars. Then ensued a ten minute interval of very thorough toilet, during which all available feathers received minute attention, particularly the flight feathers. Each feather seemed to receive an individual going over, with an occasional reach back to the oil glands at the base of its tail. This operation was interrupted no less than four times while the bird rose on its feet, stretched its wings horizontally and vertically and yawned widely.

When all was done to its apparent satisfaction, it settled down for a second or so; soon, it seemed to shrink in size as its feathers were appressed to its body. All at once, it was on its feet, turned about, and in a flash was gone.

Thus does a bird set us an example of punctuality without artificial aids; possibly due to a built-in system, governed by the sun's rays. Who knows?

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When someone speaks in terms of one part per million, the ratio is about the same as one inch compared with sixteen miles.

JUNIOR JOTTINGS

By Nancy Chapman

As usual, the Junior Group had a busy month. One trip took us to Goldstream Park, to go over the new trail being built along Goldstream Creek from the campsite bridge to the water tower. This new trail is a real nature trail, and many interesting things were noted as we traversed it. A few old cedar windfall logs have been cut to clear the trail and their wood was almost a bright red in colour. The wood looked as sound and clean as the day the tree fell, perhaps a century ago. Western yew is also plentiful in the area.

Our group hosted Cowichan Valley Junior Group during their visit to Francis Park. It rained quite hard during their visit, but we all hiked along the nature trails to acquaint the visitors with the park, and ended the afternoon with a talk by "Skipper" King in the nature house which was empty, in readiness for a re-paint.

On Saturday, March 7, a bus-load of us went to Vancouver to visit Vancouver Aquarium and Stanley Park Zoo. This was a real adventure and everyone enjoyed themselves.

Plans are to take the remainder of the group on the same trip early in April so that all members of the group will have had an opportunity to see some of the story of the sea.

Our annual exhibit comes up in April and it is hoped we will be able to hold it on a Sunday afternoon when more people will be able to attend to see the work of the Junior Group.

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THE OLD MAN OF THE SEA

By Jack Barnett

It was cloudy on July 6, 1963, as a number of members of the Natural History Society set out for the club's annual boat trip to Bare Island, and although it was drizzling slightly, it did not dampen our spirits or interfere with observations.

Off Coal Island, we saw three rhinoceros auklets, and soon after, in a tide rip, we observed about fifty marbled murrelets, among which were a number of young ones, identifiable by their lighter plumage.

(To be continued next month)

MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPSREGULAR MEETING:

April 14

The regular monthly meeting of The Victoria Natural History Society will be held at 8:00 P.M. in the cafeteria of the Douglas Building. Guest Speaker will be Mr. R.R. Lejune, Officer-in-charge, Field Entomology, Canada Department of Forestry, who will speak on "Pesticides in the Forest".

BOTANY GROUP:

April 11

will go on a field trip to Thetis Lake Park. Meet at Monterey Parking Lot at 1:30 P.M. Bring tea. Leader, Miss M. C. Melburn.

BIRD GROUP:

April 25

will meet at the Royal Yacht Club at 10:00 A.M. for a trip to Discovery Island. Bring lunch. Leader: Tom Briggs.

JUNIOR GROUP:

will meet every Saturday at 1:30 P.M. at Monterey Parking Lot for field trips.

NATURE HOUSE:

The Nature House at Francis Park, Munn Road, will be open every Sunday from 10:00 A.M. until 5:00 P.M. Attendants and guides will be on duty.

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