

# *The* **VICTORIA NATURALIST**

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CINNAMON TEAL ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

By Alan Poynter

On the evening of May 11th, 1959, I was driving past the marsh, which has since been filled in the name of progress to form the Saanich Municipal Yard, when I observed a pair of ducks performing a courtship ritual. Stopping to appreciate this, I discovered that they were cinnamon teal, a "lifer" for me and a first for other members of the Victoria Natural History Society.

During the nesting season, I found nests of three blue-wing teal, two virginia rail and one sora, in this prize little marsh which covered only 2 or 3 acres. I am not aware of any blue-wing teal having nested on Vancouver Island before this date. Because of reported observations of courtship, and regular appearances of male and female cinnamon teal, I do believe they nested on the Island prior to my observation.

On April 19th, 1960, I found a pair of cinnamon teal on the marsh north of Douglas Street (being filled in at date of writing), subsequently discovered a nest, and on three occasions observed a female leave the nest to join a male on the water. While this cannot be accepted as an official record, I believe it is the first observation of the species nesting on Vancouver Island.

The nest was located at the base of a fence post, in tall grass, between a roadside ditch and the marsh, and was very solidly constructed, being deep with a thick lining of down feathers. It was 18 inches above water level. This nest of 10 eggs was destroyed three days after its discovery, when someone walked along the fence line, overturning the nest, and breaking several eggs.

During 1960 season, another pair of cinnamon teal were observed along Martindale Road, the only remaining area of suitable habitat on Saanich Peninsula.

Each year since 1960, individuals and pairs of cinnamon teal have been seen during May and June. 1962 was the best year on the Island for teal during the summer

months, when seven individuals were reported near Victoria, and reports came from Duncan and Comox (Radford's Swamp).

It was in 1962 that a pair of "cinnamons" took up residence on the marsh on Patricia Bay Highway, at Telegraph Bay Road, and the adults were seen during the third week of June with ducklings approximately one week old.

As a conclusion, I believe this influx is a temporary movement which could form the nucleus of a small nesting population. However, because our marsh areas are dwindling, and our geographical location is on the extreme fringe of the summer range of this species, this magnificent duck will probably disappear from our Island once again.

### M U S K R A T S

By G. W. Lake

About forty years ago, during an autumn when winter freezing conditions descended overnight, and remained severe for several days, leaving several inches of ice on lakes and sloughs, I skated on a small lake with ice so smooth and clear that vegetation six feet below showed clearly.

On high ground on one side of the lake, muskrats had made their winter quarters and dived beneath the ice to feed on the growth I could see so clearly. Their movements beneath the ice were as clearly discernable as in an aquarium. About twenty feet from shore, I noticed one rat lying quite still, with his back against the underside of the ice. I stooped to see if the animal was alive or had been frozen in by the sudden freeze-up, but as soon as it saw my shadow, it came to life and swam to the bank. I distinctly heard a gurgle as it entered a nest-hole.

I was about to move on, when the rat returned to the same spot under the ice and stayed quite still for several minutes before returning to shore again. This process was repeated several times, and by observing closely, I became aware that more than one muskrat was involved. Unfortunately, it was too cold and too late for me to prolong my observations, so I left.

I returned the following day, and was as astonished

to find a breathing hole established where I had seen the under-ice activity the day before. Apparently, the muskrats had thawed a hole with their body heat by floating up under the ice. To keep the hole from re-freezing, and being blocked by snow, they had built over the hole a mound of bottom debris.

The weather remained cold and clear until winter freeze-up, so during the following two weeks I spent a lot of time at the lake and observed the hole-thawing process repeated until there were many breathing holes, spaced about fifteen or twenty feet apart. I had been aware of this method of making breathing holes, but normally winter comes more gently, and the holes are made as the ice forms.

I observed yet another remarkable muskrat tactic during the same period; as long as the rats could find food within fifteen feet of the bank or a breathing hole, they were quite happy, but if the distance was greater, they resorted to an emergency plan -- each time rats dived from a breathing hole, they would exhale at the same spot, about seven feet from the breathing hole. From their exhalations, a bubble formed below the ice and during subsequent foragings beyond the bubble, the animals sufficiently replenished their air supply from an air bubble to be able to reach a breathing hole and repeat the tactic. I am quite sure the animals inhaled from these bubbles, because the bubble shrank in size as the rat applied his nose to it.

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OUR TREASURER GENTLY REMINDS MEMBERS, WHO HAVE NOT PAID THEIR DUES, THAT OUR FINANCIAL YEAR ENDED MAY 31, 1964. PLEASE PAY UP BEFORE HIS PATIENCE RUNS OUT.

### FOREST RESEARCH STATION, COWICHAN LAKE, B.C.

By Gail Moyer

(continued from September issue.)

From here, we went into the plantations. Several different species of Pseudotsuga were seen, and the possibility of crossing different species was suggested by our guide. The two species of Pseudotsuga indigenous to North America are: Pseudotsuga menziesii and Pseudotsuga macrocarpa. As well as these, three species of Asiatic



Pseudotsuga are grown on the plantation, from such places as Formosa, mainland China, and south-eastern Japan. It was very interesting to compare the different environmental conditions.

Next, we went on to see the oldest stock of controlled pollinations. These progeny have developed from such crosses as:

2xW -- open, or wind-pollinated, that is, the father is unknown.

2x2 -- both parents are from the same tree; in-breeding. (Trees vary greatly in their ability to "self").

2x3 -- cross-pollinated; the parents are from distinct trees; cross-breeding.

2x0 -- Agamospermy; these trees are fatherless.

The general observation seen here is that progeny from controlled pollinations are more uniform than progeny from open pollinations.

An individual graft about three weeks old was shown to us. Polythene bags act as greenhouses in holding moisture, but as these bags heat up very quickly in direct sunlight, the scions must also be shaded with fibre glass mesh bags.

Progeny and grafts from the research trees in Robertson Valley were seen, and it was interesting to note that those from #13 were nice looking trees, but those from #19 were very crooked, as was the parent.

Being sure to shut the gates, to protect the seedlings from deer, we left the plantation for a tour of the new laboratory. Here, Mr. Heaman showed us such equipment as the windowed terylene pollination bags and the hypodermic syringes.

It is very evident that many years of hard work are both behind and ahead of Dr. Orr-Ewing, Mr. Heaman and their associates. Their objective is to improve the

growing stock of Douglas fir on the coast, and the importance of their work to the future economy of our province is, indeed, very clear. This field trip, along with Dr. Orr-Ewing's lecture, served well in providing us with a view of some of the work done in forest research in British Columbia, and, as stated by Miss Lemon, on behalf of the thirty-three seniors and fifteen juniors, we are highly indebted to Mr. Chris Heaman for a very enjoyable and informative expedition.

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#### BAIRD'S SANDPIPER

By G. M. Bell

On Saturday, May 16th, 1964, a Baird's sandpiper, Erolia bairdii, rested at the small swampy pond by Burnside Road below Prospect Lake Road. The sky was heavy with clouds; temperature on the cool side, with a minimum of wind in this valley between low hills.

Derek Lundell, Sean Newton and I were homeward bound from an outing with friends. Earlier, at this pool, all of us had watched a pair of cinnamon teal, vigorously feeding as they moved forward, heads down to the horizontal, with bills submerged. A dark plumaged dowitcher stood alone, and two Canada geese were on the further side of the water, up on the soggy grassland. Also, a few mallard, male and female, milled about, sometimes up-tilting to feed in deeper parts of the slough. (Incidentally, three days later, ducklings were seen beside this pond with their mother).

We did not see the dowitcher when we stopped on the return trip, but we did have a stimulating time with a 'new' sandpiper.

It was not feeding and appeared rather unsettled, moving slowly along the edge of the muddy pond, sometimes a slight way into the water, then slowly out; not racing here and there picking up small feed. It made no sound.

Its legs were dark like a western sandpiper; it

was larger than a least; when it flew a short distance it showed no white on wings or rump; its breast was buffy, chin white; its bill quite straight and dark; and it had a slight effect of striping over its head, more noticeable just above the eye. Its back was somewhat "scaly" (Peterson) in appearance; a clear white on the belly, white as a sanderling ... dunlin? Remember, this bird had a straight bill.

In determining its species, we worked through the key-system elimination method while watching the bird at the swamp. At home we continued the search through more bird books. Records of Baird's Sandpiper do exist in spring and autumn migration notes of this area, but they are scarce; therefore, the bird is all the more interesting to those who see one.

Thus we have it - one of the favourite groups, the sandpipers - to argue about and question. We are open to discussion - Sean, Derek and I; though the suggested identification by these two sharp-eyed, keen birders, aged nearly thirteen is not easily dismissed, as anyone knows who fields with them.

ROYAL CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC ELUMNI  
VICTORIA CHAPTER

presents

B O R I S   R O U B A K I N E

"The Interplay of Peaks and Clouds"

A colour slide programme photographed in Switzerland and vividly narrated.

Oak Bay Junior High School Auditorium  
Friday, October 9th, at 8 p. m.

Admission \$1.25

Students 75¢

Tickets at Eaton's and Woodward's Camera Departments and Victoria Photo Supply.  
(or phone EV 5-2684)

ALL PROCEEDS FOR THE SCHOLARSHIP FUND

B. C. NATURE COUNCIL MEETING

The British Columbia Nature Council will meet in Victoria on Saturday, October 10th, in St. John Ambulance Building, 941 Pandora Street. Co-operating in arranging for this meeting is Thetis Lake Nature Sanctuary Association. Representatives from Vernon, Kelowna, Penticton, Nelson, Vancouver, Victoria and Duncan, make up the body of the Council.

Business sessions begin at 10:00 a.m., close for lunch at 12:30 p.m., re-convene at 2:00 p.m. and close for dinner at 5:15 p.m.

At 6:30 p.m. there will be a "no-host" dinner at the Tally-Ho Travelodge, 3020 Douglas St. All who can come will be welcome at the dinner, and reservations can be made through Miss E. Valens. Dinner will be a la carte and will cost about \$2.50.

Commencing at 8:30 p.m., the meeting will continue through the evening.

On Sunday, October 11th, a field trip will start at Clover Point at 9:00 a.m., continue with a tour of the Undersea Gardens at 10:00 a.m. (Special reduced fee of .80 cents), move on to Thetis Park and to Thomas S. Francis Park by 12:30 p.m. for a picnic lunch.

Council members hope every one who can will attend all or any sessions of the meeting to take advantage of a good opportunity to observe the Council in action. It is also an excellent opportunity for Victorians to extend an active welcome to members of other natural history societies of British Columbia.

DAWN REDWOOD GROWS IN VICTORIA

By R. Y. Edwards

In 1944, a famous tree thought dead for forty million years was found alive and healthy in a remote and sheltered valley in China. The dawn redwood (Metasequoia) is now widely planted throughout the world, not only as a curiosity, but as an attractive tree with graceful form and unusual characteristics.

Metasequoia has flat needles and looks rather like a yew, but the tree is not evergreen. Like the larches it drops its needles in the fall.

Fossils of the dawn redwood, or at least of its



ancestors, are common in many rocks throughout the world. In British Columbia a number of fossil beds in the Interior have fine quality, and quantity, of redwood foliage. One of the best known and easiest to reach is where the Hope-Princeton Highway crosses Whipsaw Creek, east of Manning Provincial Park.

Metasequoia differs from close relatives in not having the leaves spirally arranged on the twigs, and in not having the cone scales spirally arranged, but in pairs at right angles to those above and below.

A few dawn redwoods are growing in Victoria. There are two near Goodacre Lake in Beacon Hill Park, one near the little bridge at the south-west corner of the lake, and one north of the lake, east of the automobile bridge. Ted Underhill has one in his garden, and would be pleased to introduce you to it.

### BIRD LIFE

By A. R. Davidson

Many are the books written on bird behaviour, and many are the experiments scientists have inflicted on them, in spite of which many of their actions and peculiar migrations remain a mystery.

On August 30th we were in Uplands Park. One group of bushes there is particularly favoured by the birds; why, we know not. On this occasion there was a flock of about a dozen goldfinches around, and generally half of these were resting on the topmost twigs along with two hummingbirds. Also present, but deeper in the bushes, was a western flycatcher, a McGilliveray and a lutescent warbler and a purple finch. In the midst of these was a sharp-shinned hawk, sitting on a bare branch, and looking all around in an interested kind of way. The birds did not appear to be disturbed by the presence of the hawk, but flew around and settled down in normal fashion. The hummingbirds did sit on a branch very close to the hawk and buzzed it occasionally. Flying around too were some barn swallows. They also saw the hawk and would swoop down close to where it was sitting (all swallows chase any hawk they see). We watched the scene for quite a while, and finally the hawk flew downwards out of sight, and we did not see it again.

The sharp-shinned hawk's food is mostly small birds, but we saw no signs of fear in those present.

### THE PURPLE MARTIN

By A. R. Davidson

Purple martins are not common to this district, but every year some of our bird watching friends have reported a few nests.

The following nesting records were made by Rob Mackenzie-Grieve. Near where he works, on Store Street, are old wharves; and in some of the piles flickers have bored holes for nesting sites, and in them a few purple martins raise their young.

Last year, he kept three nests under observation, each of which successfully produced five young.

This year, his records show the following:

April 17th, two birds were seen at nesting sites.

May 26th, they were observed building; and within the next week four pairs were seen, but only two pairs are believed to have been successful in raising young. The first nestlings left the nest on July 28th, and the others on August 6th.

The third pair started building again about the middle of July - probably the first nest was destroyed. This nest had earlier been occupied by flickers. On August 6, the adults were still believed to be sitting, but later it was found that the nest had been destroyed. Another pair attempted to use a box which had been put up on the site, but were also unsuccessful.

Mr. Mackenzie-Grieve adds that the eggs take twenty-one days to hatch and the young require thirty-two days to reach the flying stage.

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The following are extracts from a report of the National Parks Management Symposium, Canadian Audubon, Vol. 26, No.3. The National Parks Symposium took place at the annual meeting of The Canadian Audubon Society, March 14, 1964. While outlining the purpose of parks, Mr. J.R.B. Coleman, Director of National Parks Branch said,

"Preservation of the Country's most superb terrain in a natural condition is now a world-wide conception with Canada as a model" .....". If Parks are to be safe, the Public must repeatedly demonstrate to the Parks Administrators that they are expected to oppose all attempts to exploit destructively, for any purpose, these public treasure houses of natural beauty, these public museums showing what our world once was like".

Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan, Head of the Department of Zoology of the University of British Columbia and Naturalist-Scientist, stated that although the primitive conditions of the parks could not be restored the natural processes of evolution should be allowed to develop with the minimum of human guidance - this means no lumbering of mature trees, since Youth, Maturity, Senility and Death are natural and necessary attributes of the forest, which contributes the vital processes of the ecosystem.

It obviates mining, as ore bodies are also essential to the integrity of the environment.

It eliminates controlled hunting, as experience has shown that public hunting does not accomplish the control of unbalanced population and leads to destruction of domestic livestock, native wildlife and the natural habitat.

Parks are for people - but the provision of campsites should not be permitted to become a "slums with a view". There must be areas remote from power machine and automobiles for quiet study of wildlife in their special habitats.

Roads, while necessary, should not be the shortest between two points, permitting people to leave the park as quickly as they entered it.

The concept of a National Park is a place where recreational opportunities are directly related to the natural environment - this precludes such recreational activities as fair grounds, football fields, golf courses and power boat marinas.

"Management" as "any activity directed towards achieving or maintaining a given condition in the plant or animal community or habitat in accordance with the

conservation plan for the area" is an essential element in the biological concept of Park policy. This implies the need for research and serious studies of the plants and animals of the area.

Dr. Cowan also urged that the Parks administrators establish a "committee" of broad competence to assist in the management of the parks which would involve others of the public in the planning program. This would promote clearer understanding of the values of preservation, and inspire greater public support to combat threats from commercial interests.

He concludes with "I can conceive of no more urgent and challenging opportunity in Canada today, nor one more deserving of our enthusiastic support and our most militant protection".

Mr. E. A. Perry, Managing Director of Hollinger Consolidated Gold Mines, spoke of the economic value of mining in Canada, with specific reference to mining in Ontario's provincial parks. The sensible thing to do, in his opinion, would be to make a geological survey of the entire province to discover areas of potential mineral-bearing rock and set these areas aside for mines. This would leave plenty of room for parks in non-mineral bearing areas.

Dr. Alan Secord, noted sportsman, stated that management of wildlife had been made necessary by Man's changing of the natural environment. He felt controlled hunting was necessary and that this could be effectively performed by hunters. He cited contributions of money by the Toronto Anglers' and Hunters' Association for Conservation projects.

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MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS

AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR: At Oak Bay Junior High School  
 October 2 & 3. at 8:00 p.m.  
 Speaker: Patricia B. Witherspoon.  
 Subject: "Stepping Stones to Australia."

EXECUTIVE MEETING: Dr. Carl's Office,  
 October 6 Provincial Museum -- 8:00 p.m.

NATURE COUNCIL MEETING: St. John's Ambulance Bldg.  
 Oct. 10 & 11 Pandora Ave.  
Registration: 9:30 Saturday morning.

NO HOST DINNER: - 6:30 Saturday Evening.  
 October 10 Those wishing to attend please let  
 Miss Valens know at EV 5-8855.

TRIP TO UNDERSEA GARDENS: Sunday, at Oak Bay; and  
 October 11 trip to Thetis Lake.  
 Lunch at Francis Park.

GENERAL MEETING: Douglas Building Cafeteria  
 October 13: on Elliot Street - 8:00 p.m.  
 Speaker: Mrs. J.M. Woollett,  
 Subject: An illustrated talk entitled  
 "A Trip to Wickaninnish".

BIRD FIELD TRIP: Leader: Mr. Murray Matheson  
 October 17: EV3-7381  
 Meet at Monterey Parking lot at 9:30 a.m.  
 or at Esquimalt Lagoon at 10:00 a.m.  
 Bring Lunch.

BOTANY MEETING: Provincial Museum 8:00 p.m.  
 October 21: Speaker: Miss Nancy Chapman  
 Subject: "Mosses, Their Collection  
 and Preparation".

JUNIORS: Meet each Saturday at the Monterey Parking  
 Lot, Hillside & Douglas, at 1:30 p.m. for Field  
 Trips. Leader: Mr. Freeman King.  
 Anyone who would like to join these trips is welcome.  
 Mr. King can be contacted at GR9-2966.



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