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# THE VICTORIA NATURALIST



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COVER PICTURE

Asclepias speciosa Torr. Milkweed, Silkweed

by A.F. Szczawinski

Nearly every person is familiar with the common milkweed, a native perennial found in old fields, orchards, along roadsides and in waste places in our dry interior. Visitors to the Okanagan often are specially attracted to it in early autumn when the seed pods burst and the seeds, with their parachute arrangement, go sailing in the wind.

The milkweed can be used as a superior green vegetable. When properly prepared, it is quite wholesome and almost as palatable as any other well known vegetable.

The young shoots, make a very passable dish to serve like asparagus; the young, newly opened leaves can be served like spinach; the unopened flower buds are eaten like broccoli and the young seed pods can be served like okra.

The milkweed has an extremely bitter taste. Fortunately, this bitterness is easily removed by a simple treatment with boiling water. Here is how this can be done: Cover the prepared parts of the plant with boiling water and place over a high heat. Boil one minute, drain and cover with fresh boiling water and return to the heat. Repeat this process at least three times, then boil the vegetable about ten minutes. Season and serve. You will find the milkweed to be fascinating and tasty, it can be served plain, with butter and breadcrumbs and with a cream sauce on toast.

The sticky juice of Asclepias was used by some of the Indians as a cleansing and healing agent for sores and cuts, also as a cure for warts and ringworm. A hot tea made from the roots was given to bring out the rash in measles or as a cure for coughs. Photo by Bill Reith.

## AQUATIC INSECT ODDITIES

by M.D. Atkins,  
Canada Forestry

Before proceeding with a consideration of some of the larger insect orders containing numerous aquatic species, it might be of interest to discuss some of the less common aquatic groups and oddities.

Most of us are familiar with the habits of grasshoppers and crickets in fields and pastures, so do not think of them as aquatic insects. However, the pigmy molecrickets (*Tridactylidae*) are closely associated with the water. They live along the water's edge where they burrow in the wet sand. In addition, they are able to swim with the aid of specially modified plates called 'calcaria' borne at the ends of their hind tibiae. Most saltatorial (jumping) Orthoptera are good swimmers, using their strong hind legs much like a frog. The pigmy locusts are exceptionally good swimmers, and even dive below the surface when disturbed.

Among the Neuroptera, the family Sisyridae is strictly aquatic and the larvae are parasitic on fresh water sponges. When mature, the larva crawls out of the water and builds a dome-shaped silk net by swinging its flexible abdomen with terminal spinnerets back and forth. When the net is complete, the larva spins a smaller cocoon inside and pupates.

The Lepidoptera are among the best known insects because of their beauty, abundance, and desirability in collections. However, most entomologists and naturalists are only familiar with the moths and butterflies that frequent our forests, meadows and gardens. Nevertheless, there are ten or more families of Lepidoptera that contain aquatic species. The best known species are members of the family Pyralidae. In general, their eggs are laid on the underside of the leaves of floating water plants on which the larvae feed. Pupation occurs below the water in silken cocoons from which the adults emerge into the water. Another group belonging to the genus Parargyractis are rock-dwelling forms. The larvae build a silken net over a depression in a rock. They live beneath their tent, that becomes camouflaged with debris, feeding on algae and diatoms. Pupation takes place in submerged silken cocoons. The adults emerge, then using

their hind legs as oars, enter the water again to deposit their eggs on rocks several feet beneath the surface of swift streams.

The Hymenoptera is another group of insects that we consider to be terrestrial. Most of them are, but several families of parasites have successfully entered the water. This is not as surprising as it first seems, because the larvae of parasites develop surrounded by the body fluids of their hosts. Consequently, they have not had to adapt greatly to develop within a host that lives beneath the water. The main adaptations have occurred in the adults which must penetrate the surface film to deposit their eggs in aquatic hosts. One pompilid enters the water to catch its prey which it then carries to its terrestrial nest as food for its larvae.

Unfortunately, most of these oddities are not found around Victoria, but they have been mentioned here as an illustration of the amazing adaptations that occur among insects in their struggle to occupy diverse habitats and survive.

\* \* \* \*

## NEW ZEALAND

### Starlings More Effective Than Chemicals

The claim that starlings are more effective than chemicals for the control of pasture parasites is made by Mr. Otto Bjeering, who farms 624 acres between Waihi and Whangamata, New Zealand.

Mr. Bjeering finds that the starlings have enabled him to avoid the use of insecticides over many years.

Youthful memories of the encouragement of bird life on farms in his native Denmark led him to erect bird boxes in strategic positions on the farm, and even to develop moulds to produce concrete nesting "castles".

His comment: "The birds live and the birds work".  
(New Zealand Journal of Agriculture, Jan. 1965).

A member of the Duncan National History Society tells us that he tried unsuccessfully for years to establish a lawn; lawn-moths were abundant and their grubs caused brown patches, for which he did not discover a cure. A flock of starlings arrived in his garden, -- unwelcome visitors. But when he saw what they were up to he welcomed them. They marched en masse across his lawn

cleaning up the lawn-moth grubs, and having finished the job moved elsewhere. He now has an excellent lawn.

D.P.

#### BANDED GULLS AND DUCKS

by J.B. Tatum

A note recently circulated to Members appealed to people who had seen colour-banded gulls to report their observations to The Canadian Wildlife Service, 6660 N.W. Marine Drive, Vancouver 8. Most of these colour-banded gulls carry also an aluminum band which bears an 8-digit number. It is the purpose of this note to point out to telescope-owners that it is not at all difficult to read these numbers, and that nine such numbers have been read by the author this year. Details will probably be published later in the Naturalist or the Bird Report; suffice it to say here that the gulls were found to have been banded on Mitlenatch and Mandarte Islands.

Reading the bands is easiest at Clover Point and Beacon Hill Park where the gulls are fairly tame. The numbers are easily big enough to read (I succeeded once with 10 x binoculars); the main difficulty is to keep the bird still and to get it to "show a leg". It takes about 45 minutes to read, for of course great care must be taken to be absolutely certain of each digit. The writer carries a loaf of bread in his car to attract the gulls, and often a band costs a complete loaf, but it is all in the cause of science.

Bands on ducks are sometimes seen in Beacon Hill Park. Band numbers on these can be reported to U.S. Dept. of Interior, Migratory Bird Populations Station, Laurel, Maryland.

\* \* \* \*

#### BIRDWATCHERS TAKE NOTICE

Mark Monday, December 27, THE DAY (Christmas Bird Count) on your calendar. Time: Daylight to dark. Weather: Regardless. Details from David Stirling, 385-4223 and Murray Matheson 383-7381.

\* \* \* \*

#### COMOX BIRD COUNT

Experienced birdwatchers who wish to take part in the Comox Bird Count should get in touch with Betty Westerborg, 385-4223. Billets can be arranged.

\* \* \* \*

#### COMOX BIRD NOTES

12 snow geese; Comox Airport; Nov. 8; Sid Belsom.  
32 whistling swans seen on the dyke near Courtenay,  
Nov. 9; Norma Haas.

\* \* \* \*

#### EDITOR CHANGE

Your executive received with regret the resignation of W. D. "Bill" Reith, editor of our magazine, and voiced their appreciation of the good work he has done for the past two and one half years.

The executive are also pleased to say that Dr. D. B. Sparling, #11,- 1354 Beach Drive, is the new editor. Please keep him supplied with material so that the high standard of the magazine can be maintained.

\* \* \* \*

#### LAST WORD

It is with regret that I relinquish the task of editing your magazine. I have enjoyed the job, and I hope Dr. Sparling will find it a pleasant task. Thank you all for your co-operation -- please continue to give it to Dr. Sparling.

W.D.R.

\* \* \* \*

## FUNGUS FORAY

by M. C. Melburn

Rain was predicted for this first Saturday in November, but none came and the party of more than 40 men, women and children that gathered at Francis Park for the annual mushroom hunt found more than 70 species.

Ten paces in on the first trail off Munn Road the questions began: "Is this a good one? Can we eat this kind? Here is a fine white one, is it safe to eat?". But the fine white one was a suspected *Clitocybe*, while the big firm olive-brown bolete with its red-stained stem was Zeller's *Boletus* and a good edible mushroom in spite of its yellowish-green pore-surface and rather dirty yellow flesh.

There are no "rules" by which mushroom edibility can be determined; people who want to eat mushrooms must know with certainty the kinds which are safe. Become thoroughly acquainted with a few reliable species and then cautiously add to that number. Never cook a dish of two kinds at once; if sickness should result from a mixture of species there would be no way of knowing which kind caused the trouble.

However, on Saturday most members of the group were more interested in the great variety of shape, size, colour and texture displayed by these interesting "fruits" and certainly there was a good show to examine. The dainty pink and white *Mycena adonis* was one of the smallest and most admired. Its quarter-inch cap was quite a contrast to the eight to ten inch *Agaricus* and Giant *Clitocybe*. There were numerous white or cream specimens of various species and almost every colour of the rainbow, except green, was represented. At the end of the colour line came the black *Xylaria hypoxylon*, its horn-like branches tipped with white spores.

The younger fry liked best the quivering jelly fungi, *Protohydnum gelatinosum* and *Phlogiotis helvelloides*, the former equipped with "teeth" to increase the spore-producing surface of its translucent white cap and the latter with its apricot-coloured fruiting surface completely smooth.

The active parts of all these plants are the masses of mycelium down in the soil, in rotting wood, or in a living plant according to whether they are saprophytes or parasites. The mycelium is therefore the 'real

plant' and our collections were fruits only. The wonder is that the fruits can be so diverse. Three kinds of elf-saddles were found; four kinds of coral fungi; three cup fungi (rabbit-ears, *Patella* and *Peziza*) and three kinds of *Hydnums*. There were also at least three species of parasitic fungi living on the fruits of other fungi -- orange-coloured *Hypomyces lactifluorum* on *Lactarius* and two white mould-like parasites on elf-saddles and *Russulas*.

And, of course, in addition to the 70 odd kinds which attracted our attention there must have been a great many more that we missed and of course numerous other microscopic types impossible to see with the naked eye. It has been estimated that between one-quarter and one-third of known plant species the world over belong in the fungus groups; and these are sometimes roughly classified as beneficial, harmful or neutral. However, the so-called neutral fungus plants help carry on the important work of breaking down organic debris and rendering its content available to feed other plant life. It's like the old song which says "The music goes round and round -- it goes in here and comes out there." And so plants live and die and no part thereof can ever be said to be wasted.

Within the last four years two species of fungi found in Francis Park have proved to be first records for Canada. No doubt other rare and even new species live here on Vancouver Island. Let's keep looking!

\*\* \* \*\*

### FREEMAN F. KING SCHOLARSHIP

The idea of this scholarship was conceived after the last general meeting in May, 1965. There was one executive meeting thereafter at which the plan was put forward and agreed upon by those attending. A committee of three was formed after this consisting of Dr. John Chapman, chairman, Miss Enid Lemon and Mrs. H.M.S. Bell, members.

Letters went out and money came in, with remarks commending the move to do something now to honour "Skipper" King by establishing a natural sciences scholarship in his name.

Donors wrote glowing letters of what he had meant to them or their children, or they wanted simply "to do something" constructive to register their appreciation for all time.

There has been turned over to the University of Victoria Foundation for investment \$4,000. The goal is \$5,000. We have \$200.00 which leaves us in need of \$800.00.

At an entertainment last spring the public gave generously, resulting in the first \$250 Freeman F. King Scholarship award. The recipient, Gail Moyer Mitchell, a top Botany student entering her fourth year at the University of Victoria, was one of Skipper King's first junior naturalists.

It may not be generally realized, but the Society has not been asked to contribute to this project. It has so far been supported only by the individual members and by others outside the membership who recognize the lasting value of the work Freeman King has done and is doing with the young people, not only for their benefit but for us all.

It is believed you would like to know the suggested wording of the Statement for the Freeman F. King Scholarship. Unfortunately the University of Victoria Calendar for 1965-66 was printed too early for this submitted wording to get in. There will be a change in the 1966-67 University of Victoria Calendar.

"Freeman F. King Scholarship. Two hundred and fifty dollars (\$250) awarded to a student entering 3rd or 4th year, preferably the latter, and preparing for a career in Natural History, considered in a broad sense. Award is to be based on high academic standing and demonstrated interest in field studies, especially in terrestrial biology. Recipient to be selected by the Committee on Prizes and Scholarships from candidates recommended by Biology Department staff members."

G.M.B.

#### BIRD NOTES - AUTUMN

Autumn migrants are passing through -- a particularly big migration of Audubon warblers was noted from August through October.

Many wintering birds have arrived, with the waterfront of Oak Bay seemingly displaying an ever increasing number of baldpate (American widgeon). Near the Marina on Beach Drive is a handy place to view these pretty ducks and at Bowker where it meets the beach.

(This also is the 9:15 a.m. assembling point of the Tuesday Group). Hundreds of American widgeon will be feeding over the lawns in Beacon Hill Park; and if you can find a European widgeon amongst them; spread the news. The coot shows up with the widgeon; also at this time, the shoveler, which returns in splendid plumage.

Listed here are some of the birds to see now, which are not all year residents:

Bufflehead	Harlequin
Scaup	Canvasback
Scoter, white-winged and surf	Oldsquaw
Loon, redthroated and Arctic	Merganser, redbreasted
Grebe, horned, rednecked & western	Ruddy duck
Cormorant, Brandt's	Snipe
Goldeneye, American (watch for a Barrow's)	

Though certain hawks are with us the year round the peregrine falcon, the pigeon hawk and the marsh hawk are not. All three have been noted in the field this autumn.

Coming to stay or rest before moving on are the surfbirds and black-bellied plovers. The few ruddy turnstones which came have long since departed, so also have any semi-palmated plover which were often reported.

The Aleutian sandpiper, the dunlin, dowitcher and whimbrel all can and do appear in these months, before or after this date. The western and least sandpipers have visited us and gone south, though the odd straggler is still seen.

One cold November day there was the amazing sight of what was convincingly believed to be five solitary sandpipers in the mud flats off Martindale.

At this writing some sanderling in whitest of white plumage run over the rocks at Clover Point with the black turnstones, numbering from a few to dozens.

On the sea and its land fringes, are large gatherings of mew gulls and Bonaparte gulls - mixed with the resident glaucous-winged. A few Heerman's rested here when passing through and quite often other gull species show up to keep the books and binoculars busy identifying them. - (The experts know them easily, but we, the others - ?)

We have watched the parasitic jaegers pursuing

the terns and are sorry to have them depart; but a storm or rough sea (last week) will often bring nearer in interesting birds - thirteen ancient murrelets at Clover Point.

A report less thrilling is that of 2,000 starlings roosting in trees near Beacon Hill Park. Mr. Alan Hockly has watched them around 5 p.m. regularly.

Below are some of the 'specials' seen this autumn:

Clark's nutcracker - 2, Taylor Road, Metchosin, Sept. 23,  
sandhill crane - 3, Metchosin, Sept. 23 and after,  
snow goose - 1, by Jimmy Morehen, October 11, afterwards  
by the Tuesday Group and others, 4 birds on  
Lansdowne School field; also at Oak Bay beach by  
others living near, Oct. 26,  
swan - 5, Martindale; 1, Esplanade and Willows; lastly  
(at this writing) 11 in the Lagoon at Weir's Beach  
Metchosin,  
whistlers, all, immatures and adults. Nov. 15 and 16,  
turkey vulture, 50 over Beacon Hill Park; 100 over Oak  
Bay, Sept. 25,  
Say's phoebe - 1, Oak Bay behind The Talbot apartment  
block on Nov. 6; sighted by Dr. & Mrs. Sparling and  
three other members they called in. This is a rare  
find for us. In Munro and Cowan's book, The Bird  
Fauna of British Columbia it is recorded as last  
seen in Victoria July, 1890.  
marsh wren - 1,  
longspur - 10, Cattle Point, Sept. 17,  
horned lark - 55, with the longspurs,  
European widgeon,  
snow bunting at Clover Point - 2 of them last week,  
Nov. 11.

This is only a sketchy introduction to the birds being noted this fall. The dates and observers are on record for verification; but as the preparation of this report was begun late there are names, places, dates and probably some sightings which are not in -- and should be. With Mr. Davidson's help I may be able to do better next time.

If you are interested in birds we hope you will join us. Call Mr. Murray Matheson, leader of the Victoria Natural History Society bird section in the early evening at 383-7381 or Mr. A.R. Davidson, leader of the Tuesday Group, in the early evening at EV4-9595 for further information.

### YOUR CO-OPERATION PLEASE

Since 1963 hundreds of young sea-gulls have been color banded by members of the Pacific International Chapter of the Western Bird Banding Association. Members of this group are presently trying to terminate their studies on SEA-GULL DISPERSAL. To do this many more sight records are needed from various locations along the Pacific Coast. This is where we need your help.

If you happen to notice any sea-gulls wearing plastic color bandettes, usually on the left leg, would you kindly send your sighting to:

CANADIAN WILDLIFE SERVICE  
6660 S.W. Marine Drive,  
VANCOUVER, B. C.

Please include the following information in your report:

COLOR OF BANDETTE  
DATE SEEN  
PLACE SEEN  
NO. OF BIRDS SEEN  
REPORTED BY:  
NAME  
ADDRESS

Every sighting helps. The success of our project depends upon your co-operation.

THANK YOU,

R.W. CAMPBELL,  
PRESIDENT  
P.I.C. - W.B.B.A.

MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPSEXECUTIVE MEETING

December 7

In Dr. Carl's office,  
Provincial Museum, at 8 p.m.GENERAL MEETING

December 14

Douglas Building Cafeteria,  
Elliot Street 8:00 p.m.  
Speaker: Rev. Dr. D.B. Sparling  
Subject: Birds & Scenes of Florida.BIRD COUNT

December 27

Our participation in the Audubon  
Christmas Bird Census requires  
all our top birders and lots of  
recording help to keep us in the  
top spot for Canadian counts.

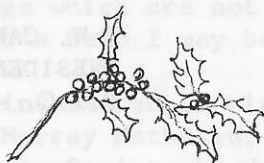
For information phone:

D. Stirling,  
385-4223JUNIOR GROUPMeet every Saturday, except  
Christmas Day, at Monterey parking  
lot at 1:30 p.m. for field trips.  
Leader: Freeman King.SEASON'S GREETINGS !

In this issue before Christmas and  
New Year, it is a pleasure, on behalf of the editors and  
executive committee, to wish you a Christmas Season of  
comradship and goodwill towards all men, and a Happy  
New Year that will bring you new or continuing prosperity.

W.D.R.

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