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# THE VICTORIA NATURALIST



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COVER PHOTO

By Bill Reith

A little over a year ago, Mrs. Reith was busy with a Girl Guide function, leaving the children, Rowallan and Joanne, and me with little more to do than tootle around admiring the countryside. As we passed the boat launching area at Elk Lake, the children spotted the swans and wanted to see them close at hand. However, the birds were not too keen on being "talked" in close to shore. The disappointment of the children was a bit much for me to bear, so we made a quick trip to a nearby store for a loaf of bread. When we returned a few scraps of bread on the water soon brought the swans inshore. A moment after this photo was snapped, the nearest swan deftly nipped the piece of bread from between my son's fingers. So, for a few cents worth of bread, we all had a pleasant half-hour -- even the birds seemed grateful.

A ROADSIDE RAPTORE COUNT

By David Stirling

Raptors are a fascinating but much persecuted group of birds. Indiscriminate shooting, pesticides and other interference by man have contributed to their world-wide decline.

Last September I had the opportunity to do a roadside raptor count while visiting a number of British Columbia's parks. On my journey from the coast to the Okanagan, through the Arrow Lakes country to Nelson, up the east Kootenay highway to Golden, to Shuswap Lake, north through the Cariboo to Barkerville and back to Victoria via the Fraser Canyon I covered 2,600 miles.

Here is what I saw: Red-tailed Hawk, 5; Unidentified Buteo, 1; Golden Eagle, 1; Marsh Hawk, 4; Osprey, 2; Sparrow Hawk, 61. Total - 74.

The low count of Red-tails was a surprise. The unidentified Buteo was an all black red-tail size hawk seen in East

Kootenay. It was probably a Harlan's Hawk migrating down the Rocky Mountain Trench. One Osprey was seen at the Arrow Lakes, the other over the "Valley of the Swans" - Creston's Duck Lake. Sparrow hawks were particularly numerous in East Kootenay - thirty-three were counted along the highway from Radium to Golden. The Golden Eagle was seen over Stagleap Park on the Salmo-Creston "skyway". I was admiring that curious plant, Beargrass, Xerophyllum tenax and watching Bohemian Waxwings hawking for insects when I noticed one bird cock his head to one side (the way birds look up). I looked too and saw a fine adult Golden Eagle directly overhead, the autumn sun shining on his golden hind neck and shoulders. A magnificent bird in magnificent surroundings, and the highlight of my raptore count.

#### WORLD-WIDE CONCERN FOR WHALES

Mr. E. E. Bridgen handed the editor some copy from "The Polar Times" published in New York by the American Polar Bear Society, in which references are made to the acute situation that is rising from the wanton slaughter of whales.

"The Food and Agriculture Organization" meeting in Rome "Calls for Global Rules to Protect the Whale Industry".

From London, Eng. a report "14 Nations Agree on Whaling Curbs" and again from England "Wildlife Group Seeking Protection of Whales."

And the Victoria Natural History Society was asked to support these efforts to establish planned conservation of whales among the nations. As a result this society sent the following letter, addressed to -

His Majesty,

Olaf V, King of Norway,  
Oslo.

His Majesty, Hirohito,  
Emperor of Japan

and Premier Alexei Kosygin,

Chairman, Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R.

"February 4, 1966

His Majesty, Olaf V, King of Norway,  
Oslo, Norway.

May it Please Your Majesty,

The Victoria Natural History Society wishes to draw your attention to the possibility that certain species of whale may become extinct as a result of man's increasingly effec-

tive methods of hunting and using these animals. The background information for the conclusion that populations of certain whales are already dangerously low is set forth by Mr. Noel Simon in "Science" (American Association for the Advancement of Science) Vol. 149: 943-946, 1965. In an article, "Of Whales and Whaling", Mr. Simon, who is on the staff of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Morges, Switzerland, documents the history of man's utilization of whales and the serious decline in numbers of certain species that has resulted from failure of all whaling interests to practice conservation of these animals.

At a time when the human population is growing rapidly and there is need for more effective utilization of the world's food and other resources, it seems tragic that over-utilization of certain whales appears to be endangering their survival as species. Whales are among the most effective ways by which man can utilize the great biological productivity of the Arctic and Antarctic oceans. Extinction of any species of these animals would represent an irreplaceable loss to mankind. On the other hand, cooperation of all nations and all whaling interests in practicing conservation could lead to a great future increase in the value of this resource from the sea.

Because conservation of natural resources is one of the objectives of the Victoria Natural History Society, we are expressing our concern about the threat of extinction of certain whale species to you, as your country is one of those that maintains a whaling industry. We respectfully request that you consider this matter and we hope that as a result you will exert your influence to support the conservation measures needed to prevent extinction of whale species and to permit better use of this resource for mankind in the future.

We are sending similar letters to the Emperor of Japan, and Premier Alexei Kosygin of the U.S.S.R.

I have the honour to remain,

Your most obedient servant,

President."

### OUR WINTER RUDDY DUCKS

By G. Allen Poynter

During the winter of 1958-59 a solitary Ruddy Duck could be seen in Oak Bay. The following winter three birds stayed over and each winter season this small flock has increased in numbers; their maximum numbers are approximately 18 this year.

While the forming of a wintering flock is of interest, it is not unusual to find "Ruddy's" in this area. Esquimalt Lagoon and Canoe Cove can boast flocks of 200 or more, while Elk and Beaver Lake, as well as many of our other small lakes, are suitable habitat where from the first week of October this fascinating duck can be seen until the last Spring migrants leave for the nesting grounds during the latter part of May.

The Ruddy Duck needs no description. Although its winter plumage is quite drab many of its characteristics are obvious; diminutive size, tail cocked vertically, oversized mandible and very aggressive attitude. It is worth a day's birding in spring to find a male "Ruddy" in breeding plumage immediately prior to spring migration.

Southern British Columbia is the most northern limits of the Ruddy Duck's wintering range which extends down the West Coast on North America across the entire Southern States and northern South America and north again to the State of New York on the East Coast.

The spring migration of this species is slightly later than most of our ducks but the little "Ruddy" makes up for this with the vigour and splendour of its courtship ritual. This is performed in the nesting area throughout the Central and Northern States and into the Prairie areas of Canada to Northern Saskatchewan, Alberta and Central British Columbia. A few birds are reported on migration annually in the Eastern Canadian Provinces.

Unable to walk on land the Ruddy Duck seeks out the sloughs with tall bulrush and cattails. Here the female often lays as many as 16 to 18 oversized eggs which must be stacked in layers to enable her to incubate. Unlike many other ducks, the male Ruddy does not desert the family scene but stays close by to assist in the rearing of the young.

Although it is a small duck it is considered a good table bird by the hunting element if it can be collected before feeding on the vegetable matter in the shallow salt water bays. It is these hunters who have dubbed the

species with more than ninety colloquial names from "Spoon-Billed Butterball" to "Bumblebee Buzzer".

During a very fast-moving birding trip through the interior of British Columbia with Jeremy Tatum last spring, one of our most gratifying moments was spent observing a lone male Ruddy Duck feeding in a small slough. The contrast between the red body and the bright blue bill was magnificent, making it hard to believe that it is the same bird we have wintering with us in Victoria at present.

### GARRY OAKS

By Freeman King

The Garry Oak is British Columbia's only native oak. It grows mainly on the east coast of Vancouver Island, but it is most abundant in the Victoria area. It does not grow north of Comox, but there are small groves at Sumas and at Yale on the mainland. It also grows in Washington and Oregon where it is called the Pacific Post Oak because it is extensively used as fence posts. The heart of the wood will last almost indefinitely but the soft sap wood rots when in contact with moisture. It is a very slow growing tree and very few of the acorns germinate.

It is slowly disappearing from the landscape through indiscriminate cutting where buildings are being erected. This surely is a crime when with some thought and planning of an area this beautiful native oak can be saved. No matter where you see it it is rugged, strong and fascinating. Perhaps some enterprising nurseryman would do well to grow it as an ornamental tree and so save it from becoming a museum piece. Nature lovers should advocate its preservation and protection. Surely this means all members of the Victoria Natural History Society.

### NATURE CAMPS 1966

Date: July 9 to 16 SENIORS. July 16 to 24 JUNIORS.

Place: Peachland, B.C.

Chief Instructor: Dr. R. Stace-Smith, Federal Dept. of Agriculture, Research Station, Vancouver 8.

Camp Manager: Mr. B.M. Thornton, Box 370, Courtenay, B.C.

Brochures: Will be available soon. Anyone wishing further information please contact B.C. Nature Council Secretary, Mrs. W.J. Smith, 1108 Hillside Rd., West Vancouver, B. C.

BIRD NOTES

February 11 to March 14, 1966

This list will name some of the birds seen between the above dates, which for one reason or another, are worth noting. Mr. M.C.M. Matheson is Bird Group leader.

February:

- 11: BARROW'S GOLDENEYE, 1M, Inner Harbour, GH  
 17: MARBLED MURRELET, 10 " " "  
 18: EVENING GROSBEAK, 2 Prospect Lake Road, GB  
 19: SPOTTED SANDPIPER, 1, Whiffin Spit, E&ARD, LM  
 20: PIPIT, 6, Chain Islands, AP  
 22: REDBREASTED SAPSUCKER, 1, Bear Hill, TG  
 26: EUROPEAN WIDGEON, 4, flooded field Pat Bay Hiway, RF  
 26: GADWALL, 1 " " " " RF  
 26: COWBIRD, 4, 2M 2F, Penryn, Cadboro Bay, MckG

March:

- 5: AUDUBON WARBLER, 1M, Esquimalt Lagoon, H&GS, GMB  
 5: " " 4, Colwood area, RF  
 6: ORANGE CROWNED WARBLER, CM.  
 10: VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW, 7, Hastings & Granville, RF  
 14: " " " 1, garden on Transit Rd., PMcA

Observers: Gordon Hooper; Gwen Briggs; Ralph Fryer; Allen Poynter; Eleanore & A.R. Davidson; Lavender Monckton; Tuesday Group - Gladys & H. Soulsby; Grace M. Bell; Pattie McAfee; R. Mackenzie-Grieve; C. Morehen.

Approximate date of arrival of April migrants:

1st, Savannah Sparrow (brooksii); 5th, Orange-crowned Warbler; 9th, Solitary Vireo; 10th, Townsend Warbler; 14th, Rough-winged Swallow; 15th, Chipping Sparrow; 15th, Western Savannah Sparrow; 18th, Cliff Swallow; 19th, Barn Swallow; 20th, Warbling Vireo; 22nd, Myrtle Warbler; 22nd, Cowbird; 24th, House Wren; 25th, Purple Martin; 25th, Pipit; 27th, Swainson's Thrush; 27th, Goldfinch; 28th, Yellow Warbler.

The above comes from the records kept for many years by Mr. A. R. Davidson.

G. M. Bell.

JUNIOR JOTTINGS

By Freeman King

Activities of the Junior Branch have been as usual with very good turn-outs. On an average there are over forty-five every week. We have been to Mt. Douglas to search for the early spring flowers and to Logan Park where a new nature trail has been laid out by the Parks department of Saanich. The second part of the Centennial Trail has been cleared and it is now usable and makes a pleasant walk. Several new features have been included such as a walk alongside the deep pools at the north end of the park.

The Intermediate Group are carrying on with the ecology survey of the park now that the weather is more favorable for bushwhacking. There have been many visitors during the past Sundays at the Nature House and the leader section have been on duty to give guided tours around the trails. They have also made up a number of "Trail Cards" which are spotted along the way.

It is possible that the Junior Branch may become "movie stars" in a film showing the activities of the children and their part in the activities of Francis Park.

THAT CUNNING CUDDLY KILLER

by C. W. Morehen

The domestic cat, someone's pet, neglected, half-starved, and finally dropped by the wayside to fend for itself.

In self survival this poor creature must kill and eat. Unfortunately its food includes our prettiest and most useful songsters. Often our bird feeder station areas offer the easiest place for obtaining a bird diet. This daily massacre occurs generally before most of us are up and around. We find only feathers as the evidence.

Birds, if frightened at a feeding station, panic into the nearest cover. Here waits the cat.

One simple method I have found effective is to drive galvanized nails through thin plywood boards and place them under the bird cover, nails up. This will discourage the cat without doing it harm. He will be forced to find an alternate area for food. Be careful, young children may crawl under such cover.

Persistent cats should be caught in a trap obtainable

from the S. P. C. A. who will then dispose of the cat, thus saving it from the cruel, neglected life of survival in an unkind environment.

You would be doing both the cat and the birds a favour!

### C O W B I R D S

Cowbirds are a concern to birdlovers over a wide area of both North and South America for it is estimated that every one of them reaching adulthood represents the death of a whole brood of some more attractive bird. In "Birds of Canada" Taverner states rather reluctantly that being seed and insect eaters cowbirds have a certain economic value offset by the numbers of other birds displaced. It is also regrettable that they are expanding their territory.

Robert Mackenzie-Grieve has been interested in these birds since he first reported them on Penryn Street at Cadboro Bay in May 1955 and in 1965 he made some investigations into their laying habits.

On June 22nd, he found a warbling vireo nest containing two cowbird eggs. They were removed and two days later the nest contained one cowbird egg and one vireo egg. When he visited the nest three days later there were two vireo eggs and two more cowbird eggs which latter he removed. This nest was afterwards found destroyed.

Not all birds will return after even one cowbird's egg is removed. In Virden, Man. on one of the main streets a Chipping sparrow's commotion led to an investigation of her nest. A cowbird egg was found among the little sparrow eggs. It was removed but the bird never returned even to look after her own.

Adrian Paul at Kleena Klenne has also been making observations re cowbirds there. "Whereas some Redwings appear at Kleena Klenne in March, Yellow-headed Blackbirds appear in April, Cowbirds do not arrive until May. We seem to have more than our share of them. I have counted thirty-five with the live stock in one field. But they soon scatter to enable the females to look for nests.

"The egg laying is over by the end of June and early in July the breeders flock up and go elsewhere. A few days later their places with the horses will be taken by the young birds. Casual observers perhaps think there has not been any change but after mid-July a bird seen perching on a horse's back or head is little more than a month

old and does not know that its father and mother have trained the horse to accept it as a rider."

Mr. Paul sees the birds on horses. Often, of course, they are on cows and early settlers called them Buffalo birds for an obvious reason. The French call them Les Vachers (the cowers).

In "Birds of the World" by Austin, the information about cowbirds is interesting. There are but two kinds in North America -- the Bronzed, very limited in an area near the Mexican border, and the Brown-headed which is the one we know. In Central and South America the Giant, the Baywinged and the Shiny are the best known. The strange thing about them is that the Baywinged is only a parasite if it cannot find a Shiny's nest in which to lay eggs while a Shiny and its mate start nests but never finish them and leave to use the nests of many kinds of little birds. They have been known to lay as many as 37 eggs in an Oven bird's nest.

Because there are no egg laying problems in winter cowbirds get a better reception in the south. It would be thought that when in their huge concentrations they could be better destroyed. In the 1964 Christmas Bird Count at Freeport, Texas 158,600 were counted, at Sarasota, Florida 3220, at Coca, Florida 964 to pick out three locations. In Texas alone 250,543 were counted!

R.B.S.

### A NESTING RECORD OF THE GREAT HORNED OWL

near Victoria

By Keith Hodson

At least one or two great horned owls are sighted in the Victoria area each year. Although in some years there is a great influx of these birds and in other years only a few stragglers are reported, no positive evidence of breeding has been obtained. This spring I was able to locate a nest of these birds and under a permit from the Fish and Game Branch I was able to remove a nestling and rear it at home. The following is an account of my activities.

One evening in November, 1964, I was walking along the southern end of Lochside Avenue near Blenkinsop Lake (Lost Lake) when I heard what I first took to be a pair of

bandtailed pigeons but what proved to be, on investigation, a pair of great horned owls hooting from the top of a tall Douglas fir. This was my first contact with these two fine birds.

During the next few months I kept track of where they ranged and--although their nightly wanderings covered a great area -- I discovered that their nesting territory was within a quarter of a mile of the tree where I had first located them. From the nights that I spent following the owls and from all the places from which I heard them hoot I mapped the range in which they hunted as, roughly, that area encompassed by the base of Mt. Douglas southwest to the Rithet Basin and from Royal Oak Avenue southeast to Blenkinsop Lake.

On February 5, 1965, I was almost certain that I had located the nesting tree when I had the privilege of witnessing the courtship display of the owls. I had flushed the female owl from a tree and she flew towards the male who was hooting some distance away. With all the stalking skill I could muster I sneaked toward the pair. As I neared them I could hear the female (she had a very distinctive voice) talking to her mate in a series of chuckled hoots. I suddenly saw the owls go into a grand flurry of wing-beating and action too fast for my eyes to follow. The owls were on a large limb that projected outwards from below a depression at the top of a fir tree that had its top broken off. Naturally I thought that I had located the nesting tree. As I moved in closer to get a better view the male let loose with a most fearful, ear-rending screech and at the same time the female dropped from the limb and went gliding away through the trees. It would be interesting to know whether this vocal display was a part of the courtship sequence or whether the male had seen me and was cursing me for breaking into his love affair.

About a month later I discovered an old red-tailed hawk's nest about a hundred yards from where I had observed the mating display, and I realized that this was a much more likely place for the owls to be nesting. This proved to be correct.

On March 18, after almost a week of futile attempts, I finally managed to shoot an arrow carrying a line over a limb near the nest and to haul a rope ladder up. The owls did a lot of hooting and buzzing past me as I climbed

the 75 feet up the swaying and twisting ladder to the nest. It contained two pure white, almost round, unhatched eggs. When I reached the nest one of the owls made a very strange squealing sound -- almost as if it were in pain.

On April 3, I ascended to the nest to photograph the young ones as I felt the eggs would have hatched by this time. When the female left the nest she was immediately beset by a red-tailed hawk which made a number of terrific stoops at her, connecting once with a dull thud that sent her reeling for safety into the nearest tree. The two eggs had hatched (I would guess that the owlets were about a week old -- give or take a few days), and there was another egg in the nest as well. In addition there were three robins, a crow, a teal, and a red squirrel in the nest.

(to be continued)

### T H E E A G L E

By Sally Morehen

The eagle flies o'er his domain;  
There forever he will remain.

No other bird up in the sky  
Would ever dare to fly so high.

His wings are great, his beak is strong,  
No other bird could do him wrong.

Then came man with his great gun  
Who chose to kill him to make fun.

But still the eagle spreads his wings,  
And of his glory birdland sings.

This mighty bird of beast and man  
Will forever be king of his land.

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### NATURE COUNCIL MEETING:

Everyone is welcome to the biannual meeting of the Nature Council in Duncan, May 7 and 8. Meet lots of naturalists. Go on a field trip. Details from R.Y. Edwards.

MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPSFREEMAN KING SCHOLARSHIP FUND DRIVE (Nature Film)

FRIDAY APRIL 1 ) Oak Bay Junior High School Auditorium  
 SATURDAY " 2 ) Subject: Australian Natural History.  
 8 p.m. To be introduced by Dr. G. C. Carl.  
 Admission FREE. (All donations gratefully accepted.)

BOTANY FIELD TRIP: Meet 1:30 p.m. at Monterey parking  
Sat. Apr. 2 lot or Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary Parking  
 lot. Bring tea.  
 Leader: Miss M. C. Melburn.

THOMAS FRANCIS PARK (WORK BEE)

Sunday The Juniors will give us adults an oppor-  
April 3rd tunity to apply our artistic talents in  
 the form of a new coat of paint on the  
 nature house. Any time after 8:30 a.m.  
 with or without your own paint brush.  
 Bring lunch.

EXECUTIVE MEETING in Dr. Carl's office 8 p.m.  
Tues. Apr. 5 Provincial Museum.

GENERAL MEETING Douglas Bldg. Cafeteria, Elliot St., 8 p.m.  
 Tuesday Speaker: Mr. Howard Paish (B.C. Wildlife  
April 12 Federation) Subject: The relationship  
 between natural resource development and  
 outdoor recreational values.  
 Illustrated with slides.

BIRD FIELD TRIP Meet at Monterey parking lot 9:30 a.m.  
Sat. Apr. 16. or Thomas Francis Park at 10 a.m.  
 Leader: Mr. M. Matheson

BIRD FIELD TRIP 7 a.m. (1 hour) early morning field trip.  
Wed., Apr. 27 Meet at corner Cook St. & Dallas Road.  
 Leader: Mr. Yorke Edwards.

BIRD FIELD TRIP meet at Monterey parking lot 9:30 a.m.  
Sun., Apr. 30 or Goldstream picnic area at 10 a.m.  
 Leader to be announced at next meeting.

JUNIOR GROUP meet every Sat. at Monterey parking lot,  
 Douglas & Hillside, 1:30 p.m. for field  
 trips. Leader: Freeman F. King. - 479-2966

NOTE TO ALL GROUP CHAIRMEN:

All summer field trips will be published in the next  
 magazine. Please have all pertinent information available  
 for April 12.



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