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# THE VICTORIA NATURALIST



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VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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COVER PICTURE: ALLOTROPA VIRGATA

by Jessie Woollett

COVER STORY

ALLOTROPA VIRGATA (CANDYSTICK)

by Jessie Woollett

A saprophytic herb - stem has longitudinal stripes of red and white and sometimes grows to a height of 18 inches at maturity. The leaves are elongated scales on a single spike-like stem, and the flowers appear at the base of the scales on the upper half of the spike.

The flowers are close to the main stem and look like a brownish-red raisin with ten stamens rising from it; no petals. The ovary is just the "raisin" swollen up, and in late summer contains many minute seeds. The plant grows in dry humus in open coniferous forests, and may be found in May and June.

Allotropa belongs to the heather family and is mentioned on page 18 of the British Columbia Provincial Museum's Handbook No. 19, The Heather Family (Ericaceae) of British Columbia by Dr. Adam Szczawinski. Although it is now out of print, many of our members have a copy of it.

The specimens of Allotropa on our cover picture were found in Goldstream Campsite. Allotropa is also to be found in Little Qualicum and Englishman River Parks, but is never plentiful. It is a fascinating plant, and I am always amused to see people brush against them on the side of the path and never notice them. When one's eye is tuned to the plant it seems forever bright and showy.



SPRING OBSERVATIONS, MARCH 1969

How impatient I have been to see the first growth of spring after five weeks of snow. Morning frosts curtailed February growth and grass had not coloured much by mid-March. But on March 11 I heard the first early morning warble of the robin. To me it is a symbolic song of spring.

Many so-called hardy bulbs reach a stage in their spring growth when they are very vulnerable to frost. I snatched the Chinese sacred lilies (narcissi) from under the snow where they were potted prior to forcing and flowered them indoors; but the potted hyacinths, longer exposed to frost, were reduced to a pulpy mass though the shoots looked all right. This reminded me of a situation when the contents of several hundred flower baskets in the Parks Department were similarly killed by late frost several years ago.

On December 29, the temperature in Victoria officially dropped to an all time low of 3.8 degrees Fahrenheit. A month later, on January 27 a north-easterly gale blew at an average of 26.2 miles per hour for a 24 hour period at temperatures of 13 to 23 degrees Fahrenheit. The combination of frost and desiccation from wind and sun caused considerable damage. Freezing and thawing caused sun scald on tender evergreen foliage and created longitudinal cracks in many trees. The desiccating winds were fatal to many tender plants. Others were severely injured. Such weather took a heavy toll of fall-planted evergreens and conifers, because, being frozen, they could not replace the lost moisture.

Unsuspected damage was caused by salt spray. This burn to the foliage is evident on the south-east side of trees and shrubs. A large Sequoia gigantea tree in Royal Athletic Park, two miles from the sea, was severely burned; I expect the damage could be traced for many more miles inland. Try a taste test for salt on an uncleaned window facing east. You may be surprised.

I remember many years ago going to East Sooke with Bill Newcombe of the Museum staff to study growth of native trees under wind-swept conditions in order to find suitable material to withstand salt spray at Ross Bay Cemetery.

Near Douglas Street on Dallas Road there are a number of pine trees growing south of the Douglas Street football fields in Beacon Hill Park. Salt spray has left the Austrian pines unharmed, but Pinus ponderosa were very badly injured as evidence by the dead, reddish-brown foliage.

The late spring has given one bonus. The varied thrush are in no hurry to head for the upland hills and mountains, and their lonely song is ever thrilling.

As I gazed early one morning from my window in the first week of March, I was entranced by the activity of a couple of bush tits darting up into a bare-branched hawthorn and then to the ground. Suddenly I realized the tiny mass of moss and lichen in the bare twiggy branches was taking form. A nest was under way.

W.H. Warren

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On March 8, Miss Melburn reported that 12 wild plants were in bloom. On April 8, Miss Melburn told the magazine that the list had increased to 72. In spite of this increase, the average flowering speed was still behind the normal.

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The *Allotropa virgata* pictured on our cover has many descriptive common names such as Candystick, Sugarstick, barber's pole and devil's wand. "One of the most showy saprophytes to be found in our Province", says the out of print handbook No.19 and adds, "When the scaly leaves are removed, it resembles nothing so much as a brightly striped stick of candy".

It would be interesting, indeed, if candystick could be established in another of our dedicated local parks. It would be pleasant, too, if it could be contrasted with that other better-known saprophyte, Indian pipe, sometimes called ghost flower, corpse plant, ice plant. Curiously, Indian pipe also belongs to Ericaceae.

Miss Terese Todd reports that candystick grows upon her property, but in a place where it is difficult to photograph. Miss Edith Valens and Mrs. J.M. Woollett have fine colour slides of *Allotropa*. Does any other member of our Society possess a colour slide of this saprophyte?

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### HUMMINGBIRDS AND THEIR FLOWERS

A handsome book has come to the Victoria Natural History Society Library. It is Hummingbirds and their Flowers by Karen A. Grant and Verne Grant (1968). Price \$17.50. A reviewer should not summarize a book, but aim to generate interest in it. There is much of interest in this book.

Taken chapter by chapter, the first asks three questions. How does the mutual relationship between the birds and the flowers function? How have the specialized floral mechanisms developed? How have the plants responded to the birds' needs? The remaining nine chapters present the answers.

Chapter 2 deals with the distribution of hummingbirds - 319 species all in the New World. This includes British Columbia and Alaska as the northern limits. Chapter 3 does the same for all the flowers suitable for hummingbirds. Maps and lists are given. It has 48 varieties of Indian Paintbrush! This is a very knowledgeable section. It mentions that some of the plants have sclerenchymatous tissues! (My dictionary states that sclerenchyma is a protective or supporting tissue in higher plants composed of cells with walls thickened and lignified and often mineralised. Editor)

For chapter 6 concerning the geographic distribution of hummingbird flowers many floras were consulted. That for British Columbia was Henry, 1915. (Are there none more recent than that?) Geographic locations are not more important than ecological distribution from desert to high mountains. Chapters 6 and 9 would be helpful guides to birding in California.

Chapter 10 deals with Common Red Colouring in Hummingbird Flowers. Observations date back to 1870, (Muller) and up to 1966 by the authors of this book. The observations produce a number of theories. It is noted that bird-pollinated flowers are not limited to hummingbird lands but are in Australia, Hawaii and other areas. Bat-pollinated flowers were also found.

There are 97 pages of text, 4½ of bibliography and a section with 120 coloured pictures. The pictures are prepared for botanists and serious ornithologists rather than for cheerfully ignorant birdwatchers. None of the familiar names of the flowers is given, and one has to refer to a separate list to be sure.

This book is recommended to birders for its information about hummingbirds and as a guide to birding; to gardeners seeking hummingbird flowers, and to students of botany.

Ruth B. Sparling

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### BOOK NEWS FOR NATURALISTS

In March, the Greater Victoria Public Library added the following titles to its stock:

De Camp, L.S.	Day of the dinosaur.
Adams, A.B.	Eternal quest: the great naturalists.
Maxwell, Gavin	Raven seek thy brother.
Pearse, Theed	Birds of the early explorers in the Northern Pacific.
Green, J.W.	On the track of the Sasquatch.
Cherrington, E.H.	Exploring the moon through binoculars.
Bager, Bertel	Nature as designer.
Foerster, R.E.	The sockeye salmon.
Edey, Maitland	The cats of Africa.
Aiken, G.D.	Pioneering with wildflowers.
Dines, A.M.	Honeybees from close up.

List supplied by Mr. George McBride  
Circulation Department, G.C.P.L.



"ILL FARES THE LAND -----"

Californians, who so recently reported with pride that their state had become the most populous in the nation, are measuring the effects of this growth. One of the costs is the loss of 375 acres of farmland a day to haphazard building programs. Another is the prospect of ceasing to be a food-exporting state in the next half century as people occupy the land where crops are now grown. Foreseen, also is the extension of cities from the ocean inland into the desert, depending for water on the Pacific Northwest and with no apparent indication of how the pollution problem of such a population will be solved.

The situation is not critical at this point. The pace of growth, however, has led Purdue University's pollution expert, James Etzel, to suggest that regions figure out their carrying capacity, fixing a balance between population and quality of environment, and setting limits to the influx of population.

This, if a workable plan could be devised, might eventually lead to regulations which permitted a new settler in only when one left - a form of control which seems totally unrealistic in this day of free domestic movement.

The prospect is unsettling. It could, nevertheless, become a pattern as, in the more attractive areas of this continent, the number of people swamp the productive capacity of the land.

Editorial in the "Victoria Daily Times", 23.12.68

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Last summer a part of the back field grew up to hay that wasn't cut. This year when the snow finally went, the pattern of tunnels and runways made by the field voles was clearly visible. Soon new grass was obscuring the paths, and the voles were no longer safe beneath the snow from hunting cats or passing hawks.

L.E.C.

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A VALLEY OF PROMISE AND PROBLEMS

We who live in the Blenkinsop Valley and know it well in all weathers have a particular interest in planning proposals that may influence the future of this valley lying within the six-mile circle centred on Victoria's City Hall.

On March 24, a Blenkinsop Valley Study - in draft form only - was presented to the Chairman and Members of the Lands and Planning Committee of the Corporation of the District of Saanich.

On March 25, the Victoria Daily Times ran a photograph of the Blenkinsop Valley on the front page of the paper's second section, and summarised the Study's recommendations.

The Study very properly took into account the valley's physical features which were here long before we, the present landowners, were born and will likely be here long after we are dead.

Briefly, and in part, the physical features are rocky ridges to the east and west of the valley, a central 164-acre "floodplain" including the lake and all the low land (below the 184 foot contour) which is subject to periodic flooding.

Now what is a wise plan for this, as yet, unsewered valley?

The magazine is not the place to discuss in detail the recommendations or appendices of the Blenkinsop Valley Study.

But Society members who are interested in land use and in planning proposals which may affect the habitat of that natural species, Homo sapiens, might well look at the Blenkinsop Valley closely and critically. Then they may understand to some extent why this valley, which is a part of Saanich Municipality and a part of the Capital Region, has been called an area of promise and problems.

Ruth Chambers

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A CHANGING ATTITUDE TO BIRDS

A past president of our Society, Professor C.W. Lowe, recently lent us a book he had received as a school prize many years ago. Written by George Bompas, it is a biography of the English naturalist Frank Buckland who lived from 1826 to 1880.

Some of Buckland's references to bird life may be of interest to Society members.

In 1877, he had been observing the migration of the wheatear and wrote, "The London bird-catchers take the wheatear by a meal-worm or maggot in a robin trap, which is placed on a small hillock. It is splendid eating and before the new Act was caught about Eastbourne by snares made of horse hair. Before the days of railroads they were sent pickled to London".

In 1878 he wrote, "Two fine nightingales were taken April 7, rather early. About April 15 the nightingale's song will be heard in any year in a suitable place let the weather be what it will - The male settles down immediately and commences a song. This is called by the catchers being 'laired' and the birds are to be caught in the immediate locality of the lair any day after". An October, 1878, note reads, "The London bird-catchers have lately had great takes of the brown linnet, common redpoll, green finches, yellowhammers, goldfinches and tree sparrows".

In December 1878 he wrote of linnets, "The great flight began this year about November 15. On the 24th and 25th very large takes were made by London and suburban catchers. The men lay their nets before dawn. As soon as it is light the birds appear; They come in flocks of two to three hundred; the call birds charge and give the catchers notice that the birds are coming before they can be seen by the men. As many as five dozen have been taken at one pull of the clap-net this year. Although so many linnets are captured annually there has been no general diminution. The large takes have glutted the bird market".

As a contrast, in the 1960's, we read that the British Trust for Ornithology strongly protested alleged brutality to birds in Cyprus.

Ruth B. Sparling

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JUNIOR JOTTINGS

Although attendance has been small of late, some interesting hikes have been taken.

Both groups have been to Taylor Beach. The younger group explored the sea-shore and hunted for crabs and other sea life. The next week the older section enjoyed scrambling after lichens on the rocks. Some unusual types were found. As the tide was not fully in, some limpets were exposed for viewing.

The following week, the younger group visited Freeman King Park where they found many spring flowers and trees beginning to show leaves. If you open the bud of a maple tree you will find not a leaf but a flower for this is one of the few trees that flowers before it comes into leaf.

Some of the older members have been coming out during the Easter holidays to help Skip with tours and explanations. They also write and print signs and place them along the trails. The Park is very beautiful with many Easter lilies and peacocks blooming, so please come out and enjoy this haven of Natural History.

Vicki Osselton, junior

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"It would be disastrous in the long term to destroy agricultural potential adjacent to our cities. It is too easy to assume that we can get our food from elsewhere. In times of universally expanding populations, our existing alternative food sources are just as threatened by urban development as are our own. It must be recommended that Saanich provides every opportunity for the continuance of agriculture within the Municipality. However, it would appear that the most effective action in this respect can come from vigorous policies and programs of the Federal and Provincial Governments". From Blenkinsop Valley Study (First and Second Draft Proposals).

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"The Valley as it exists at the moment is a scenic asset that the community should consider preserving, at least partially, for the benefit of all".

Ibidem.



ON THE EDITOR'S DESK

NATIVE PLANT ENTHUSIASTS: Please contact Mrs. F.A. Sherman about a possible project to conserve such plants. Mrs. Sherman's address is 2168 Guernsey, Victoria, and she will be at the May 13 Annual Meeting. Thank you.

NOMINATIONS: Allen Poynter - 3935 Emerald Place, phone 477-3230 - is in charge of nominations. (Remember to get the consent of the nominee before submitting a name).

A NEW EDITOR?: I have agreed to edit the magazine for one more year unless another member wants this amusing, fascinating task. As I firmly believe that a magazine such as ours benefits from a change of editors every two years, and as I've done 21 numbers (2 1/3 volumes), I'll yield gracefully to any eager competent volunteer.

FROM COLOUR TO BLACK AND WHITE: During the past year Mr. T. Sowerby has greatly helped our Society by making many conversions from 35 mm colour slides. Several of Volume 25's cover pictures were converted by him. He also did pictures for A Net of Naturalists. Thank you, Tom.

BUTTERFLIES AT THETIS PARK: Since, regrettably, Volume 25 has had no material on butterflies, we suggest that, at this season, members might be interested in the Thetis Park Pamphlet's section on butterflies, their food plants and caterpillars. This section was contributed by the late George A. Hardy.

BLINKINSOP LAKE: As this lake figures largely in the Blenkinsop Valley Study (see page 119) members might like to know that the 1956 Report of the Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology contains a 40-page section on the flora and fauna of Blenkinsop Lake. Written by George A. Hardy, it is based on observations chiefly made between 1945 and 1950. Recommended reading.

EXECUTIVE MEMBERS: Please note the address for the May Executive Meeting.

PAINTINGS BY ALLAN BROOKS: In August, at a still unknown date, an exhibition of original paintings by Allan Brooks will be held at the Museum. (See our March Cover Story).

FISCAL YEAR: Our fiscal year ends on April 30.

BIRDS FOR THE RECORD

by G.N. and G. Hooper, 2411 Alpine Crescent (477-1152)

Slate-colored junco (1) - St. Patrick Street - Mar.29 -  
Grace M. Bell  
Glaucous gull (1) - Dallas Road at Ross Bay - Apr. 1 -  
Margaret Wainwright and Eleanore Davidson  
(2) - Dallas Road at St.Charles St. - Apr. 1 -  
(Second winter, all-white, plumage) - Ralph Fryer

Migrants and summer residents:

Tree swallow (1) - Pike Lake - Mar.20 -  
Terese Todd  
Rufous hummingbird (1 male) - St.Patrick Street - Mar.29 -  
(1 female) - Apr. 3 -  
Grace M. Bell  
Audubon's warbler (1) - Qualicum - Mar.30 -  
Dave Stirling  
(2) - Prospect Lake Road - Apr. 4 -  
Orange-crowned warbler (several) - Prospect Lake Rd. -  
Bonaparte's gull (6) - Clover Point -  
(Spring plumage)  
Savannah (brooksi) (7-8) - Pat Bay Airport - Apr. 5 -  
Hutton's vireo (2) - Clayton Road - Apr. 7 -  
Solitary vireo (1) - Burnside Road -  
Horned lark (2) - Pat Bay Airport -  
California gull (3) - Esquimalt Lagoon - Apr. 8 -  
A.R. and Eleanore Davidson  
Common yellowthroat (1) - S. of Duncan - Apr. 5 -  
Pine siskin (nest with two week-old young) -  
Cy Morehen  
Common snipe (25-30) - Sayward Road - Apr. 8 -  
Tuesday Group  
Chipping sparrow (1) - Bonnie View Place - Apr. 8 -  
Lois Morehen  
Rough-winged swallow (4) - Bonnie View Place - Apr.12 -  
Cy Morehen

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SUMMER PROGRAM 1969

Executive Meeting Tuesday May 6, 8 p.m. at home of  
Dr. D.B. Sparling, No.9, 1354 Beach Drive.

Botany Field Trip Saturday May 10: Meet at Douglas and  
Hillside 10:00 a.m. for trip to Henderson Point and  
Centennial Park. Bring lunch. Leader, Miss M.C. Melburn

592-2069

General Meeting Tuesday May 13: Douglas Building Cafeteria  
8:00 p.m. After election of officers Mrs. J.M. Woollett will  
show slides of "Long Beach - Canada's Seacoast Park".

Bird Field Trip Saturday May 17: Island View Beach and  
North Saanich. Meet at Douglas and Hillside 9:30 a.m. or  
Island View Beach 10:00 a.m. Bring lunch.

Leader: Mr. R.C. Mackenzie-Grieve 477-2402

Botany Field Trip Saturday June 14: Meet at Douglas and  
Hillside 1:30 p.m. for trip to Uplands Park. Bring tea.

Leader: Miss M.C. Melburn 592-2069

Bird Field Trip Saturday July 5: Sooke Harbor. Meet at  
Douglas and Hillside 9:30 a.m. or Sooke River Road Store  
10:00 a.m. Bring lunch. Leader: Mr. A. Poynter 477-3230

Botany Field Trip Saturday July 12: Meet at Douglas and  
Hillside 10:00 a.m. for trip to Goldstream Park Campsite  
and picnic area. Bring lunch. Leader: Miss M.C. Melburn

592-2069

Botany Field Trip Saturday August 2: Meet at Douglas and  
Hillside 10:00 a.m. for trip to John Dean Park and vicinity.  
Bring lunch. Leader: Miss M.C. Melburn 592-2069

Bird Field Trip Saturday August 9: Thomas Francis Park. Meet  
at Douglas and Hillside 9:30 a.m. or Nature House 10:00 a.m.  
Bring lunch. Leader: Mr. C.W. Morehen 477-3383

Junior Group: Meet each Saturday at Douglas and Hillside  
1:30 p.m. for field trip.

Leader: Mr. Freeman King 479-2966.

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Happy vacation  
and please remember that the  
September magazine deadline is August 10

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# VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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