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COVER PICTURE

SEA OTTER RELEASE

British Columbia Government Photograph

COVER STORY

SEA OTTERS RETURN

By Bill Ward, Editor, Wildlife Review

A warm bit of history was made in a remote section of the west coast of Vancouver Island on July 31, 1969, when 29 sea otters waddled from their cages, and dived into the light surf. The release site was Bunsby Island, some 220 miles northwest of Victoria, and it was more than sixty years since sea otters had inhabited these wild waters.

They were donated by the government of Alaska from colonies near the nuclear testing site at Amchitka in the Aleutians. It is hoped that a permanent population will develop from these 29 pioneers. Chinese mandarins and other connoisseurs of fine furs prized the pelt of the sea otter above all others 200 years ago, and because of this the animal was almost exterminated in the early days of the fur trade. It was not uncommon for a thousand natives at a time to hunt sea otters for the Russians in early times. From 1867 to 1910, over 107,000 pelts went on the market. The international protection treaty of 1911 was signed too late to preserve sea otters in British Columbia waters. A population of some 500 has persisted off the coast of California, while the otter population of Alaska has soared to some 50,000 under rigid protection.

A totem pole, still standing in front of a deserted Indian village near the release site was sad testimony to the fabulous furbearer which once inhabited these waters.

The pole was crowned with a fine carving of a sea otter which gazed out to sea as if watching as the new band of sea otters explored the off-shore kelp beds.

Sea otter pups weigh between three and five pounds at birth, and adults range in size to sixty pounds. Their graceful bodies are some five feet in length, the foot-long slightly flattened tail acting as a rudder. They have round heads, tiny ears and black, beady eyes. They sport white catlike whiskers, and make catlike mewling calls when signalling to each other.

The formation of their legs suggests some transition from land to sea. The front legs are strong, with toes prehensile enough to grasp, pull and carry. The back legs resemble flippers, and have toes without muscular construction. The animal has a habit of folding these up under the feet.

Ungainly on land, they are superb performers in water. When danger threatens, they head for the safety of the sea in a series of jumps. They favour kelp beds and shallow water near headlands. They can dive as deeply as 120 feet to obtain clams, mussels, small crabs and a variety of other foods. They bring these to the surface with one paw and a rock in the other. Lying on their backs, they use the rock as a sort of anvil while breaking open the shells.

Their inability to feed in really deep water is why, some experts believe, no to and fro migrations between Alaska and southern coasts would be feasible.

After many trapping techniques were tried - and found wanting - Alaskan wildlife workers caught sea otters in ordinary nylon fishing nets. Even netting these fine animals was a slow job.

Our 29 sea otters seem to have established themselves well so far, but it will be some years before it is known whether the transplanting has been truly a success.

Until then, sea otters are rigidly protected here, but the region of the release is so remote that even fishermen rarely operate there.

The whole project was most praiseworthy, and all members of natural history societies should thank the people who had the vision and drive to arrange this conservation program.

INTERNATIONAL VILLAGE

Among the many summer visitors to Francis Park, we had a group of about seventy children from the International Village that was held in Victoria this year.

These children came from some thirty countries. Very few could speak English, but in each group there was someone who could communicate with them.

When they came to the Park they were divided into groups, and some of our Juniors acted as conductors for a Nature Walk.

This was a new experience for our juniors and for their visitors.

In my group, I had a Japanese medical doctor, and a consultant engineer from Holland. Both these gentlemen were marvellous in the way they passed information on to the children.

We used different trails so that at the end each group could tell what it had seen and understood.

To me it was a pleasure and delight to converse in sign language and explain things so that they would be understood.

Like our children, these youngsters from abroad were anxious to learn and understand. Happy, laughing, wide-eyed, they were eager to see all they could. The very old, large Douglas firs made a big impression... Many questions were asked through their leaders and by sign.

This kind of nature interpretation was a real experience to me and to our young naturalists who did a wonderful job and learned as they taught.

These experiments of mixing children from different countries may result, we hope, in better understanding and eventually peace in this world.

I feel that more encouragement should be given to organizations which undertake such wonderful projects.

Many thanks to our young people for doing a fine job.

We all enjoyed our young visitors from "far-off-places".

Freeman King

It would be pleasant, indeed, if some of the juniors who enjoyed their visitors from the International Village could learn a little about the great Swiss educator, John Henry Pestalozzi who would undoubtedly have supported the aims of such a village.

Editor

A HUMMINGBIRD'S NEST

On the May 17 bird trip, Rob MacKenzie-Grieve showed us a hummingbird's nest. Had it not been for this we'd never have found the nest in our own cedar tree overlooking Active Pass. We are accustomed to hummingbirds crossing our "edge" as we are a short flight between two attractive flower gardens.

This hummingbird could not have selected a better site from the point of view - about six feet above ground, on a slender cedar bough, half-covered with foliage right in the middle of our usual sitting place and over a small bench from which the vantage point was perfect.

At the end of the first weekend there were two eggs in the nest. During the next weekend we watched the female sitting motionless for hours, head and tail at 45° angle. She seldom left for food and we thought about putting sugar and honey feeders out but did not want her to become dependent on these as we'd not be there and able to fill them during the week. On the third weekend two chicks hatched, one on Saturday and one on Sunday. Chicks may be a misnomer for, at that stage, each was a bit of protoplasm with a black spike.

On the fourth weekend there was no sign of either mother or life in the nest. Two little things lay there - chicks, perhaps, with beaks pointing upwards, but obviously dead. We wept with anger and frustration - the mother must have been killed by a crow or a cat, and the little birds had starved to death. Or so we reasoned. About noon on Saturday, a second look into the nest showed the corpses had moved. But how were they living? There was no sign of the mother. We watched carefully and the mother was finally seen coming in by a very circuitous route. She perched on the edge of the nest, touched the upraised beaks and left by another route. No sound was made by the mother or by the young.

On the fifth weekend, two little soldiers sat upright in the nest, the pin stripes on their throats matching the nest material in perfect camouflage. We never saw them move, but each time we visited the nest they were facing a different way.

In fading light on the Friday evening, June 20 two birds of uneven size sat bolt upright in the nest. By mid-morning on the Saturday, the larger one had gone unseen.

But later in the morning and during the rest of the day it was seen off and on in an adjacent willow from which the mother accompanied it on short flights around the garden and perhaps as far as half a mile away where there were particularly delectable red flowers.

With the flight of the one bird we stationed ourselves ten feet away from the nest. Left alone, the smaller bird shifted around and seemed to expand. The mother came very irregularly and only once did we see her feed it - the mother's bill right down the chick's throat with thrusting, choking movements. More and more often the chick rose in the nest to the extent of sitting on the edge and fluttering its wings, hummingbird fashion. The movements were so rapid it seemed flight must follow, but just before the final step, courage or strength failed and he sank back into the fluff-lined nest. In mid-afternoon I passed by and the nest was empty. The little bird sat beside it on a frail cedar branch. Its mother was calling from nearby. For about half-an-hour it flew small distances between branches in the same group of cedars. Then it left and was enveloped in the willow tree from which its sibling had been launched into the world the day before.

On June 28, several hummingbirds visited the valerian. We liked to think they included ours. At that date, courting was going on. So we hoped for a second brood and that the nest would be refurbished and used again. To our disappointment, the nest remained empty.

Frances Druce

EAGLES WIN OVER SKI LIFT: Although a 30-foot swath had been cleared to make way for a ski facility in Pere Marquette State Park, Illinois, conservationists and nearby college biologists won the day for the bald eagle. The proposed facility will not be built there, reports the Audubon Leader's Conservation Guide. The cleared area will be restored and seeded. The development would have wiped out trees in which perhaps fifty bald eagles have nested for years. It would also have destroyed a rare tract of native hill prairie of considerable interest to archeologists as an Indian burial ground.

YOU CAN HELP, IF YOU WILL

No Society is in a healthy state when too much is left to the Executive assisted by a few volunteers who tend to be the same people year after year. In the V.N.H.S. we badly need more membership participation. Of our 430 members, about 350 live in the Greater Victoria area and unfortunately many of these are simply names on a mailing list. This situation becomes acute when the Nominations Committee starts to look around for new people to fill the various positions. We are sure that among the unknown members there must be all kinds of natural resources just waiting to be tapped! We'd be so pleased if some of our younger members would come forward. But we need those older members, too. We could not function without them.

At our September General Meeting, we arranged to inaugurate a Reception Committee to welcome new members and visitors to our meetings, and to introduce them to other members.

We'd like "understudies" to each of the Executive positions, people who can thank and introduce a speaker, or type, or audit accounts, or help in the Oak Bay Native Plant Park, or show visitors to Victoria our local birds and plants, or usher at Audubon meetings, or provide transportation to General Meetings.

We'd greatly appreciate volunteers or suggestions as to who might be interested in actively helping in the tasks outlined above.

Katherine Sherman

SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS INTRODUCED

At the September General Meeting, Miss Lemon introduced Miss Barbara Brayshaw, winner of the Victoria Natural History Society Scholarship.

Freeman King introduced Miss Sylvia Drought, winner of the Freeman King Scholarship.

Later, our speaker Dr. John E. McInerny said that the University was grateful for these scholarships, and commented on the calibre and performance of former scholarship winners.

GARDENS OF THE SKY

Every year many thousands of visitors come to Manning Park to see the dazzling display of colour in the alpine meadows. Reds, yellows, and blues splash themselves about with gay abandon, to form one of Nature's grand spectacles. Both scientist and poet alike can find inspiration in the rocky peaks and rolling meadows where millions of wildflowers make their homes.

Dynamic, that's the high country, for every living creature is in a race for time. Snow stays until late June at these heights of 6,000 feet and over. It returns again in September. Even before the snows have melted and the melt water rills rush to the valley below, some flowers such as the Snow Lily and the Western Anemone are poking their heads above the icy carpet to bask in the life-giving sun.

The flowering of these meadows occurs in two stages called "bloom waves". The first bloom wave consists of flowers predominately yellow (Snow Lily) and white (the Western Anemone). The second wave incorporates blue (Lupine) red (Paintbrush), and deeper yellows (Ragworts and Fleabane).

To the alpine adventurer, each turn in the trail, each new rocky ledge, each new spongy bog, brings the thrill of discovering new truths in the never-ending drama of Nature. Who would not marvel at the delicate pink cups of Alpine Bog Laurel, cradled in a cushion of dew-laden moss, or the tiny yellow bells of Mountain Heath? What dull soul could fail to be thrilled at the discovery of a sparkling crystal clear mountain brook whose banks were carpeted with the glorious crimson of Lewis' Monkey Flower?

Yes, the alpine meadows are for poet and scientist alike, but how much better a poet with Grass of Par-nassus, Sulphur Erigeron and Mountain Meadow Cinquefoil for inspiration.

Al Grass

A FALL DAY

In most of Canada, fall is a time of warm hazy days with a smell of smoke in the air, cool crisp nights with a touch of frost and the brilliant oranges, reds and yellows of the hardwood forests. Along the exposed outer coast of Vancouver Island, fall is a barely recognized season. If it weren't for the flocks of migrating birds there would be no real marker on the graduation from summer to winter. In the more protected areas the maple and alder turn brown and lose their leaves but those trees which have managed to survive in exposed locations can be turned brown from salt burn after any gale. Fall on the coast is not measured by the landsman's scale. It is the time of fogs and low-lying cloud. It is heaping piles of seaweed at the high tide line, heavy dews that drip from roof or tent like a soft but steady rain and a salt tang to the air that bites the nostrils and gives fair warning of the gales to come.

Go out and walk the sands of Wickaninnish on a misty fall morning and watch the wisps of fog float up from the sand before being snatched up and borne inland by the rising southeast wind. Start from Green point and climb the rocks to the lookout. As you poke your head up over the top of the rocks the sting of salt spray and the roar of the surf is staggering. When a big wave breaks you breathe a frothy combination of air and salt water that has been torn off the top of the wave and thrown in your face by the wind. With luck and perhaps a little imagination you may hear a faint but melodious barking from the sea lion rocks looming out of the mist to the south. Put the wind to your back and walk north along the beach past the deserted parking lots and the other all but obliterated scars of summer visitors. Walk slowly and search each pile of drift for shells. Top shells, olives, tritons, turbans and dozens of others wash up in the drift piles. Look closely at the flocks of gulls as you herd them up the beach. At this time of year such a flock can be an exasperating mixture of glaucous wings, dark phase herrings and light phase westerns.

As you round the point into Schooner Cove a break in the clouds spreads sunlight over the bay and a glistening arc of sand leads you on past the bay to the rocks of Portland point. From here, a glimpse of radar beach is

the only break in the jagged rockbound coast leading up to Cox point. A rocky crevice gives shelter from the wind and a priceless view of surf pounded rocks entwined in skeins of foam.

The return trip against the wind gives some indication of how exposed the coast is. The mist of the morning has gradually changed to a fine saturating rain which soon soaks through the most watertight clothing and forms cold rivulets down the spine. The surf that earlier beat against the hard sand with a rhythmic quality has become a wild and dangerous thing which leaps at the beach with a demoniacal roar. With rising excitement the gulls wheel and cry in the air turbulence above the cliffs. The marine weather office describes it as a small but active disturbance approaching the coast but you know it is another step in the progression from summer to winter at what may in time be one of Canada's most interesting National Parks.

This province has more than 1,000 miles of exposed coast. Let us hope that the setting aside of a relatively few miles of it will not be such a strong salve to our conscience that we will allow the pollution and destruction of our remaining coastline. We are lucky and may be able to rehabilitate the sea otters: let's not take any more chances like that.

Murray Matheson

ITEM OF AUDUBON INTEREST: California, reports the August issue of Audubon Leader's Conservation Guide, has added a new category to areas that may be set aside as parks - underwater marine parks. Conservationists there see it as an important tool in helping to preserve marine environments. Three areas are being considered for the new designation, one at San Diego, another off the Monterey Coast, and the third at Salt Park north of San Francisco. The parks may be preserved as unique scenic and natural areas or developed for appropriate recreational uses.

BIRDS FOR THE RECORD

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

Green heron (1) - Beaver Lake -	Aug. 25 -
Great horned owl (1) - Munn Road -	Aug. 7 -
	Cy Morehen
Great horned owl (1) - Martindale -	Aug. 27 -
Barn owl (1) -	Aug. 20 -
	Cy and Lois Morehen
Black-throated gray warbler (2) - Ten Mile Pt. -	Aug. 31 -
	R. Mackenzie-Grieve
Marbled godwit (1) - Cadboro Bay -	Sep. 1 -
	R. Mackenzie-Grieve and Allen Poynter
Whimbrel (3) - Witty's Lagoon -	Sep. 1 -
Water pipit (20) -	
	Allen Poynter
Snow ^{Blue} goose (Blue phase) (1) - Martindale -	Sep. 1 -
Pectoral sandpiper (2) -	
American golden plover (1) - UVic -	
	A.R. and Eleanore Davidson
Swainson's hawk (dark phase) (1) - Ten Mile Pt. -	Sep. 6 -
Lincoln's sparrow (14) - Uplands Park -	
	Allen Poynter and Jeremy Tatum
Wood duck (26) - Beaver and Elk Lakes -	Sep. 6 -
	Allen and Helen Poynter
(14) - Thetis Lake -	Sep. 7 -
	Ralph Fryer and Betty Parlow

A nestling band-tailed pigeon found by Bruce Blannin on September 14 in the front yard of his family's home, 2093 Windsor, provides an interesting record. Not only does it confirm the suspected nesting of this species within the residential area of Victoria but it also provides an unusually late date for the breeding season.

The nest was typical, a flimsy structure of twigs in a Garry oak. Band-tails are known to have a long nesting season. Usually only one egg is laid but two or more young may be reared each year.

G.C.C.

BOOK NEWS FOR NATURALISTS

Atwater, M.M.	The avalanche hunters
Holiday, F.W.	The great Orm of Loch Ness
Budd, Mavis	A prospect of love; country life in Sussex
Schatzman, E.L.	The structure of the universe
Lockley, R.M.	The island
Van Wormer, Joe	The world of the pronghorn
Knight, D.M.	Atoms and elements
Phillips, O.M.	The heart of the earth
Hyndman, C.C.	The grasp
Lindblad, Jan	Journey to red birds (Trinidad and Tobago)
Larson, Peggy P.	Lives of social insects
Welman, John	Ducks, geese and swans
Fitter, R.S.R.	Vanishing wild animals of the world
Monkman, Noel	Escape to adventure
Aylesworth, T.G.	This vital air, this vital water
Wickler, Wolfgang	Mimicry in plants and animals
Crick, Francis	Of Molecules and men
Villee, C.A.	Biology
Asimov, Isaac	Photosynthesis
Harris, B.C.	Eat the weeds
Rowett, H.G.Q.	Guide to dissection
MacLeod, Dawn	A book of herbs

List supplied by G. McBride

Circulation Department, Greater Victoria Public Library

ITEM OF AUDUBON INTEREST: FOSSIL BEDS ARE SAVED. A BILL has been passed clearing the way for the creation of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument in Colorado, reports the Audubon Leader's Conservation Guide. This fossil bed, so long unprotected, is a world-recognized source of fossils from the Oligocene, 35 to 40 million years ago. As is too often the case, continues the Guide, legislators and conservationists only mustered the necessary support for this when the roar of the developer's bulldozer was heard.

PROGRAM for OCTOBER 1969

- Audubon Wildlife Film - J. Bristol Foster presents
"Down South up the Nile"
Thurs. Fri. Sat. Newcombe Auditorium,
Oct. 2, 3, 4 Provincial Museum
(South Entrance)
- Executive Meeting 8 p.m. at home of Mrs.S.Prior,
Tuesday October 7 1903 Shotbolt Road
- General Meeting Douglas Building Cafeteria
8:00 p.m. C.W. Morehen will
Tuesday October 14 present a program: "Twelve
Thousand Miles of Nature"
- Bird Field Trip Meet at Douglas and Hillside
Saturday 9:30 a.m. or Bazan Bay 10 a.m.
October 18 Leader: A.C. Schutz
386-0541
- Junior Group Meet every Saturday 1:30 p.m.
at Douglas and Hillside for
Field Trip.
Leader: Freeman King
479-2966

A NEW HANDBOOK: The British Columbia Provincial Museum has a new handbook, No.28, Some Common Mosses of British Columbia, by W.B. Schofield, Department of Botany, University of British Columbia. Illustrated by Patricia Drucker-Brammall, this 262-page handbook retails at \$1.00. The introduction shows clearly the structure of a moss, and contains much useful information on the Life Cycle of a Moss, How to Collect Mosses, Where to Collect Mosses, a section on the history of collectors. Many of our members are likely to get much enjoyment from this book. Many are likely to become aware of mosses as they were not before.

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Junior membership is restricted to those not under 9½ years and not over 18 years.

Dues and changes of address should be sent to the Treasurer.