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# THE VICTORIA NATURALIST



published by the  
VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Victoria B.C

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## DRIFTWOOD

No other shores in the world are so littered with driftwood as are those of northwestern North America. Although some of this wood comes to the beach by natural means from the heavily forested land, much of it is brought here by the logging activities of man. Most driftwood, then, can be called a form of pollution but for wildlife it is "good pollution" for the log strewn upper beach is home to many living things.

The driftwood zone varies in width from only a few feet on steep shores to many hundreds of feet where wood, sand and vegetation have completely filled in shallow bays. You need only to glance at a map of British Columbia to help you to visualize the enormous extent of this kind of wildlife habitat along our coasts.

Many pioneer plants grow among the logs. There is the tall, graceful wild rye grass, beach pea, wild vetch, showy gunweed and many others of several families.

Insects and other invertebrates are here in variety and abundance. Spiders, beetles and carpenter ants are always noticeable. In early autumn a million termites take wing from the rotten wood and rise almost vertically in laboured flight on the still, warm air.

A termite flight attracts a host of birds. Bonaparte's gulls come in hundreds. Late-lingering nighthawks, black swifts and swallows arrive to participate in the feast, and even robins, Audubon warblers and screech owl are on hand.

Small mammals such as shrews, deer mice and voles find shelter and food among the driftwood. Predator mustelids - weasels, mink and martens prey on these "mice" and find shelter here when not seeking shellfish at low tide.

The huge Douglas-fir root shown on the front cover was stranded on the shore of Miracle Beach Provincial Park about twenty-five years ago and it has remained as a landmark ever since. Now, fungi, termites and other forces are taking their toll, and this particular piece of driftwood will soon return to the soil and the air.

*David Stirling*

## RESPECT OF PRIVACY

The Society, and in particular the Bird group, has been sharply reminded recently that the rights of Property and Privacy must be carefully observed.

On two separate occasions a report of a rare bird has attracted many observers to private houses. Both owners voiced ready willingness to show hospitality to Birdwatchers.

The two owners were very much distressed to find that their houses were being stared at through binoculars by unannounced trespassers.

In each case this was mentioned very courteously but quite firmly, to an Officer of the Society.

Apologies have been written on your behalf.

Remember 1) You too are a citizen and should respect another's property and privacy as you demand respect for your own.

2) Binoculars are an extension of your eyes. Anyone aware of their use feels that you are as close as he appears to you. It's embarrassing.

3) It is a simple matter to make a telephone call or to knock at the door, exchange the usual courtesies and request permission.

4) Failure in such simple courtesy will give the Society a very bad name, deservedly so, and will dry up valuable sources of information.

Rod Muirhead

## ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS

The list of new members is printed each month in the hope that you will see the name of a neighbour or friend whom you then would like to introduce to one of the many activities of the Society.

Mr. Brian R. Perretts	2625 Avebury Avenue
Mr. and Mrs. J.N. Doughty-Davis	2654 MacDonald Drive
Mr. T.D. Hodgkins	415 Michigan Street
Mr. G.I. Green	#208-1025 Linden Avenue
Mrs. P. Palmer	1517 Coldharbour Road
Mrs. Nora Southwell	#5-900 Park Boulevard

## DO BATS EAT CATS?

The answer to Alice's question, of course, is that they do not. It may come as a surprise to some readers, however, to know that there are bats in the world that eat fruit, suck nectar and even catch fish. The bats that we have here on Vancouver Island are much more orthodox in their habits, though even an orthodox bat is a marvel of the first order. I was prompted to start thinking about these wonderful creatures when I was watching a bat flitting around Sayward Beach as late as October 11, and I realized how very little we know about our local bats. At least eight species have been recorded on Vancouver Island, but can any of us identify them in the field? Surely here is a challenge for our birdwatchers.

One of the most wonderful things about bats is their well-known method of echolocation. We must pass rapidly over the horrible experiments of the Abbé Spallanzani in the eighteenth century who blinded bats and showed that they could still avoid hitting objects in flight. Such experiments would be regarded as unconscionable today. It is only since the Second World War that it has been conclusively shown in great detail that bats detect objects by emitting very high-pitched squeaks and bouncing them off objects. These squeaks are emitted all the time and are far too high for any human ear to hear. They are not to be confused with the intermittent squeaks the bat uses for communication; these squeaks can be heard at least by young people. When a bat approaches an object, it must speed up its squeaks in order to maintain the correct "Squeak-Echo-Squeak-Echo" sequence.

Unfortunately bats are subject to the same pressures that so many other wild creatures are, and R. Barbour and W. Davis write in their book *Bats of America* that "the collection of bats by irresponsible people for various scientific research projects has decimated several bat colonies during recent years." The same authors, in an article published in the 1970 Feb. number of the *Journal of Mammalogy*, describe how they took 270 bats from a cave and subjected half of them to deprivation of vision by cauterization (a technical term meaning they blinded the bats by sticking needles in their eyes). They released the blinded and the seeing bats some miles from their caves and recaptured them as they arrived. They found that the return performance of the blinded bats was not as good as that of

the unblinded bats. The authors put forward two theories to account for this extraordinary phenomenon. One is that vision might be of some significance in bat navigation and that therefore with loss of sight navigational ability would be somewhat impaired. A second possibility is that, without sight, the bats might not be able to distinguish between night and day and therefore might succumb more easily to predators. It will evidently need continued intensive study by scientists to determine if either of these theories is tenable.

J.B. Tatum

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#### DECEMBER MEETING

Those members who attended the meeting on December 8 were privileged to hear Mr. Tom Stirling, the Victoria representative for "Ducks Unlimited" describe the work done by his organization in the field of Waterfowl Management since the 1930's. While most of the achievements have been in the Prairie provinces, British Columbia is now feeling some of the benefits of the improvements to waterfowl habitat. And while most of us think only of the main object of the organization which is to increase the number of birds available to hunters, the slides showed many of the side effects, such as improved farm yields and preservation of many species which might otherwise have suffered extinction.

A good part of the time of the meeting was given to a preliminary presentation by Jeremy Tatum, of the matter of the collecting of rare birds for museum specimens. It was decided by the meeting that the executive should be free to consider the whole question before a firm policy is made public. However, in view of the publicity given in the *Colonist* of Thursday December 10 (p.17), and the controversial nature of the whole topic, it has since been decided that the January General Meeting will devote the time after the guest speaker's address to a free discussion of both sides. It is hoped that members will do some thinking beforehand, and come prepared either to express an opinion or at least be knowledgeable on the subject. This should prove to be an interesting meeting.

#### 1970 - A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW

The year has given us reason to be optimistic; it has also given us reason to be pessimistic. In our opinion the balance is weighted toward the second view.

Naturalists are eternal optimists, and there are those who will point to the signs of progress made in the correction of the mistakes of the last hundred years. At least, they say, we are now aware of the damage done during the frothy fifties and the senseless sixties and we can now take steps in the right direction. In Canada, a new department of Resources and the Environment has been established, control is being exercised over the use of insecticides, and even the Chemical Producers are concerned with pollution. Here in British Columbia a new Regional Park has been established, and there is talk of making the Straits of Georgia into a Marine Park. Even the United Nations is getting into the act, and declarations have been made that the seabeds belong to all mankind.

All of this sounds great - on paper. How does it all work out in practice? What happens is that if it suits us as individuals to pollute and we can get away with it, we continue to pollute. Examples of this are seen everywhere. If it is expedient to the manufacturers, and they get away with it by power and wealth, they dump effluent or cause irreversible damage to the environment in spite of arguments presented against the practices. Governments make policies, then reverse them if expediency dictates otherwise, and the politicians responsible seem to be able to salve their consciences. It seems to us that under our present system where profit and growth are the dominant motives, one is only doing a lot of wishful thinking to assume that things are not going to get worse.

Two bright trends have shown themselves. The first is that many of our young people seem genuinely concerned and are beginning to show up the falseness of some of our established practices. The second is that the past year has shown that democracy can be made to work if enough people get steamed up about it.

To us the Skagit Valley is going to be a test case for optimism vs. pessimism. If the valley is saved, our optimism may be nurtured enough to survive.

The Editor

## HUNTING IN SAANICH

On October 18, an article appeared in the *Colonist* describing a proposal by the Fish and Wildlife Branch that would introduce hunting in the Saanich Peninsula. A Brief was prepared by the Society and submitted to the Minister of Recreation and Conservation. It is hoped that a meeting can take place between representatives of the Branch and the Society to discuss these proposals. A short summary of the Brief follows:

The V.N.H.S. welcomes the concern felt by the Branch for preservation of wetland areas. While not condoning hunting, the V.N.H.S. recognizes that strictly controlled hunting of abundant species of food value might help to preserve habitat, but less abundant species should be protected.

The V.N.H.S. and the N.A.S. have conducted extensive surveys of the bird population of the area for twelve years, and full details are available for study.

Some points in the reported proposals of the Branch require comment.

- (1) Common Teal and European Widgeon are rare and should not be shot.
- (2) Other species, notably sea ducks, are inedible.
- (3) The numbers of birds mentioned in the newspaper report are incorrect and very much exaggerated.
- (4) It is illegal to shoot shorebirds.

In a densely-populated area it would be preferable to set aside breeding and feeding areas rather than to introduce hunting, but if hunting is introduced, it should be restricted to certain areas, and the V.N.H.S. would be pleased to advise.

The V.N.H.S. ask that the Christmas Count area be kept free of hunting.

Hunters should be competent in identification, and the V.N.H.S. is prepared to give courses.

While welcoming again the concern felt by the Branch for habitat preservation, it should be remembered that wildlife is to be enjoyed by all residents of Saanich, not

just those who wish to shoot birds.

## Appendices

- A. Census figures for all waterfowl and game species for the last twelve years.
- B. Map of Census area.
- C. Seven categories of birds as follows:
  - (A) Nine extremely rare species needing protection.
  - (B) Ten rare species needing protection.
  - (C) Ten inedible species that should not be hunted.
  - (D) Four species needing protection for special reasons.
  - (E) Four species that could be controlled if they were shown to cause damage, but which should not normally be the target of hunters.
  - (F) Fifteen abundant species of food value that could be hunted, namely:

Black Brant	Canvasback
Mallard	Common Goldeneye
Pintail	Bufflehead
Green-winged Teal	Ruddy Duck
American Widgeon	Ruffed Grouse
Shoveller	Pheasant
Ring-necked Duck	Snipe
	Band-tailed Pigeon

- (G) All other species. These should not be hunted.

(End of Brief)

A small committee has been set up to study this problem and to negotiate with the Branch, and the undersigned would welcome comment.

J.B. Tatum

## AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILM

We have come to expect a high level of excellence both in camera techniques and in speaking ability from our Audubon lecturers. Maybe we have come to expect too much. The December film was presented by a very able Park Naturalist with experience in several of the United States National Parks, but one was not left with the impression that he was a first-rate photographer. His opening remarks about the parks in which he served were interesting, but it is difficult to recall much of the rest of his hour-long lecture.

It was not the fault of the speaker that he faced competition from two similar attractions in town, and the weather had something to do with the poor attendance on the Friday evening. But if the lecture series is to continue as one of the main attractions of the winter season, and a main source of income to the Society, we hope that the contract for the 1971-72 series which was approved by the December meeting will assure our audiences of full value for the admission fee.

Having said our piece, we still think that "Scandinavian Saga", which is the Audubon film for January, sounds like a good bet. We wouldn't miss it for anything.

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## WHICH WEIGHS MORE, A TON OF FEATHERS OR .... ?

An old joke concerns a truck driver who stopped his panel truck just short of a small shaky-looking bridge, got out and began beating his palms against the sides of the large compartment that formed the back of the truck. A farmer standing at the side of the road asked him why he was doing this.

"I'm carrying 200 pigeons in this truck", explained the driver. "That's quite a lot of weight. My pounding will frighten the birds and they'll start flying around inside. That will lighten the load considerably. I don't like the looks of this bridge. I want to keep those pigeons in the air until I get across".

Assuming that the truck's compartment is airtight, can anything be said for the driver's line of reasoning?

All solutions submitted will get honourable mention in the Editor's Mailbox next month.

## A PHOTODUPLICATE FILE OF B.C. VERTEBRATES

With photography as popular as it is today, naturalists throughout British Columbia have a new "tool" they can use to substantiate rare sightings, unusual nestings, etc. of Amphibians, Reptiles, Birds and Mammals in the Province. We are now organizing a method of handling the center of deposition for photographic records in British Columbia. WHAT IS IT?: The PHOTODUPLICATE FILE will consist of duplicate or original 35 mm slides (black and white or color) or prints (black and white or color), not exceeding 4 x 6 inches, of rare mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians occurring in the Province. For example, photographs of birds listed as accidental or casual on local checklists could be included in the PHOTODUPLICATE FILE as well as new birds, mammals, etc. for local areas. Unusual plumages, pelage, nesting, etc. could also add greatly to the file's importance. Marine mammal strandings documented by photograph would also be acceptable.

WHERE WILL IT BE KEPT?: The PHOTODUPLICATE FILE will be housed in the Vertebrate Museum at the University of B.C. along with the Pacific Nest Records Scheme. Photographs should be sent to either:

David Stirling, 3500 Salsbury Way, Victoria, B.C.

or

Wayne Campbell, Vertebrate Museum  
Department of Zoology, University of B.C.  
Vancouver 8, B.C.

We will accept the responsibility of maintaining the PHOTODUPLICATE FILE and deal with accessions and correspondence. The file records will be available to anyone wishing to use them, either by visiting the museum at UBC or by correspondence. EACH CONTRIBUTOR WILL RECEIVE AN ANNUAL REPORT OF PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORDS OBTAINED. WHEN TO SEND IN PHOTOS?: Photographs can be sent in at any time. Closing date for inclusion of records for the current year will be DECEMBER 31. Each photographic record should contain the following information:

PHOTOGRAPHER:

ADDRESS:

SPECIES: (English and Latin names if possible)

DATE:

EXACT LOCALITY:

REMARKS: (anything pertinent to further the record, such as witnesses, duration of stay, etc.)

WHY A PHOTODUPLICATE FILE:

BRING THEM BACK ALIVE!!!

Need we say more?!?

## CALENDAR OF BIRD FIELD TRIPS FOR 1971

Month	Day	Location	Bird of the Month
January	16	Bazan Bay	Loons
February	20	Elk Lake	Ruddy Duck
March	20	Martindale Road	Rock Sandpiper
April	24	Francis Park	Violet-Green Swallow
May	15	Sooke River Road	Orange-Crown Warbler
June	19	Goldstream Park	Band-Tailed Pigeon
July	17	Clover Point	Evening Grosbeak
August	21	Cowichan Bay	Heermans Gull
September	18	Island View Beach	Savannah Sparrow
October	16	Witty's Lagoon	Red-Breasted Merganser
November	20	Esquimalt Lagoon	Golden-Crown Sparrow
December	TBA	Christmas Count	Skylark

## Notes:

The Location given is the 'field' meeting place. The Leader of the day will continue from there.

The 'Bird of the Month' is a selection of interest for the month not necessarily a difficult bird.

It may be possible to arrange other special trips during the year but it is expected that they would be on other dates, special announcements would be necessary.

*Rod Muirhead*

## BIRDS FOR THE RECORD

- by G.N. and G. Hooper, 2411 Alpine Crescent (477-1152)
- Western meadowlark (8) - Cattle Point - Oct.30-31 -  
(1) - Esquimalt Lagoon Oct.31 -  
Peggy Pickford and Leila Roberts  
(This species appears to be rather less scarce than last year).
- White-throated sparrow (1) - Florence Lake - Nov.20 -  
Tom and Gwen Briggs  
(In addition to the one at Alpine Crescent)
- Water pipit (2) - Oak Bay Golf Course - Nov.21 -  
(A late date) Ron Satterfield
- Blue jay (1) - Prospect Lake Road - Nov.25 -  
Mrs. E.D. Ward-Harris
- Cattle egret (1) - Sooke - Nov.26 -  
(Not seen by other observers but a good S. Rothgordt  
description given. Could be a first  
record for British Columbia)
- Snowy owl (1) - Pat Bay Airport - Nov.28 -  
Jeremy B. Tatum
- Ross's goose (1) - Martindale - Nov.28 -  
Enid K. Lemon
- Bohemian waxwing (2) - Downey Rd/Wayne X Rd. - Nov.28 -  
(With 6 Cedar waxwings) Ralph Fryer
- European Widgeon (4) - Glen Lake - Nov.28 -
- Lesser yellowlegs (1) - Glen Lake - Nov.28 -  
(With 2 Greater - a late date) Ralph Fryer
- Trumpeter swan (1) - Prospect Lake - Dec. 3 -  
Gordon Meyer
- Glaucous gull (1) - Clover Point - Dec. 5 -  
Ron Satterfield
- Gadwall (4) - Beaver Lake - Dec.10 -  
Keith Taylor and Ron Satterfield  
(In addition to 2 on Elk Lake, first seen Nov.15)
- Migrants and winter residents
- Snow goose (1) - Blenkinsop (JBT) - Nov.21  
(1 imm.) - Gibraltar Pt. (RS) - Nov.7-21
- Barrow's goldeneye (1) - Finlayson Pt. (PP) - Dec. 2
- Black-bellied plover (120) - UVic (ARD) - Dec. 5
- Ruddy turnstone (1) - Clover Pt. (RS) - Dec.5, 12
- Short-eared owl (1) - Beacon Hill Pk./Dallas(EKL) - Nov.22  
(1) - Sidney (ARD) - Nov.28
- Long-billed marsh wren (1) - Martindale (KT,RS) - Dec.10  
(Seen also Oct.25. Reported as Munn Rd. in error)

## PROGRAM FOR JANUARY 1971

- Executive Meeting: 8:00 p.m. at home of Mrs. S. Prior  
 Tuesday January 5 1903 Shotbolt Road
- General Meeting: 8:00 p.m. Newcombe Auditorium  
 Tuesday January 12 (Provincial Museum, south entrance)  
 Dr. Jack Littlepage will speak on  
 "An Oceanographer looks at the  
 Phosphate Problem"
- Bird Field Trip: Meet at Mayfair Lanes Parking lot  
 Saturday January 16 (north side) 9:30 a.m. or Bazan  
 Bay 10:00 a.m. Bring lunch.  
 Leader: Rod Muirhead 384-6005
- Ornithology Meeting: 8:00 p.m. Room 216 Oak Bay Junior  
 Tuesday January 26 Secondary School
- Audubon Wildlife Film: John Douglas Bulger presents  
 Fri., Sat., January "Scandinavian Saga"  
 29 and 30 at 8:00 p.m. Newcombe Auditorium (Provincial  
 Saturday January 30 Museum, south entrance)  
 at 2:30 p.m.

## ANNUAL BIRD REPORT 1970

Observers are asked to send their records for 1970 to J.B. Tatum before February 14. Please prepare them species-by-species in A.O.U. order, supplying field notes for unusual species, on the standard Bird Record sheets. Orders for the 1970 A.B.R. would be welcome now, although it is unlikely to be published before July and the price is not known at present. It will cost more than the 1969 Report.

## MUSEUM EVENTS

Each Sunday from January 31 to March 28, the Provincial Museum will show "The Best of National Film Board" films in the Newcombe Auditorium. Films shown will include the special series on Eskimos. Watch the newspapers for times and titles.

"WINGS OF SUMMER" George Cotter

Watch for this wildlife film in Victoria 31st January



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Botany (Winter) Mrs. J. M. Woollett, 624 Harbinger Avenue - - - - 384-4836

Entomology: Dr. R. A. Ring, 1467 Jamaica Road - - - - - 477-4883

Ornithology: A. C. Schutz, 2060 McNeill Avenue - - - - - 386-0541

Marine Biology: Freeman F. King, 541 McKenzie Avenue - - - - - 479-2966

David Stirling, 3500 Salsbury Way - - - - - 385-4223

Junior Naturalists: Freeman F. King, 541 McKenzie Avenue - - - - 479-2966

Mrs. E. C. Osborne, 1536 Vining Street - - - - - 385-8164

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Ornithology Records: Dr. Jeremy Tatum, #416, 3187 Shelbourne Street 592-1332

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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.