

April, 1972
Vol. 28, No. 8

THE VICTORIA NATURALIST



published by the
VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Victoria B.C

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Most readers will have recognized our cover photograph for what it is, a picture of a squirrel. Some may have gone so far as to pin it down to a picture of a Red Squirrel. A few will have gone a step farther and penetrated my little secret by discovering that this is no typical Vancouver Island Red Squirrel.

I admit to the subterfuge! What you see on our cover is a typical prairie province's Red Squirrel, one which more observant mammalogists will have recognized by its generally paler pelage.

And therein lies the object of this little exercise, for while scientists have neatly divided the Red Squirrels of this continent into several subspecies, using morphological and anatomical criteria, they seem to have completely overlooked an equally important yardstick, namely psychological. Maybe it's because psychological measurements adapt themselves more to the living mammal than to the musty tables of the dissecting room.

Whatever the reason, little or no scientific acumen is required for the more observant among us to know that the Red Squirrels of Vancouver Island and say, those of Manitoba, are different; not because of any obscure anatomical measurements, but because they act different. Each has a completely different mental outlook.

On the one hand we have a Manitoba representative of the clan who believes that every waking moment must be spent policing the territory; announcing, with strident calls, the arrival of strangers, and ushering them through his wooded kingdom to the accompaniment of wild vituperation.

Beside him stands his sedate Vancouver Island cousin who minds his own business, seldom raises his voice, is proper and polite at all times and is the epitome of mammalian propriety.

I'm open to criticism of my interpretation of these differences but the fact remains, they exist. And since nothing exists without purpose, there must be selective survival value in the actions of both squirrels.

It makes one wonder.

*Cover photo and story
by Harold Hosford*

ECOLOGY

The word "ecology" is before us in the press, radio, and T.V. It seems to be a new toy to play around with, yet how many people really understand what it means?

The way in which it is put before us it seems to be so complicated that most people shy away from it and say that it is something for the experts.

Yet it is really so simple that it should be introduced in to our school systems at the grade 1 level, for that is where the greatest impact in a person's life is made.

Ecology tells us that all life is interwoven from the microscopic to that animal called man.

Sometimes I wonder just how the ecosystem got along before man came upon the earth; there is no doubt that the whole system sorted and adapted itself to climate and other conditions.

I think that one of the greatest problems we have today is to get man to understand and realize what he is doing with the so called "Wild Life".

We must realize what will happen if we keep on the same path of destruction of this living world in the many ways in which we are doing with pollution in its many forms.

Perhaps the best method of getting this across to people is by interpretation. "Interpretation" is a problem in itself, for often it causes confusion so the average person shies away from it.

It is not like interpretation of a language, but ecology is to tell people about something that is before their eyes.

In this method of understanding it is making people realize that all life is a product of rock, and soil, water and air, weather, sunshine, plants and other

animals; this of course includes mankind which can be amongst the most important of all.

To understand wild life one must understand the total landscape from the meadows, forest, marsh, desert, lakes and streams, yes even to the high mountains which have such a large bearing upon the land in the valleys and plains.

To understand ecology means good interpretation and that must come through experience.

It must be simple to get the general public to understand and grasp this thing we call "life", and to realize that the world and all its inhabitants are ever changing. There are no two days alike, there never has been and there never can be--it is ever new and ever old.

Freeman King

REPORT OF THE MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE FEBRUARY 4, 1972

After some preliminary discussions of the problem of increasing the membership of the Victoria Natural History Society, it was your committee's opinion that our organization suffered more from a lack of membership participation than from an actual shortage of members. The present roll of something over 400 members may represent a respectable percentage of the population we have to draw from but when one counts heads at meetings or field trips, we do not fare so well. While 100% membership participation is often little more than an unreachable ideal, the low turnout at our meetings and outings demands some examination. It is our opinion that the answer lies, in part, in a more diversified program of activities, as well as a more intensive publicity campaign. This, we think, will not only help to increase present membership participation, but hopefully, attract new members as well.

We make the following recommendations:

Publicity

1. Continue the present releases to news, radio and T.V.
2. Have a simple but effective 8½" x 11" poster designed on which each meeting or outing can be publicized and which could be posted on certain specific notice boards in the city, i.e. Libraries, Museums, Universities, Tourist Bureaus.
3. Take advantage of the potential of Channel 10 T.V.

by having a regular presentation by a member or members of the Society

4. Examine the possibility of setting up periodic displays at local hobby shows, shopping centres, etc.
5. Consider a telephone listing where interested people could get information about the Society and its activities.

Comment

Inexpensive but attractive posters could be printed at a cost of approximately \$8.00 per hundred and with a distribution of less than 20 per meeting or outing the total cost would not amount to more than \$20. to \$30. per year. The distribution could probably be carried out under the present publicity set-up with no additional help needed. By judicious selection of the places these posters are displayed we would aim our program at that segment of the public most likely to take advantage of what we offer.

It is the opinion of the chairman, based on previous experience in this field, that any attempt to exploit the potential of a periodic television presentation depends for its success on two essential points: 1. That it appear regularly - i.e. weekly or monthly - and always at the same time. 2. That it be hosted or chaired by one member, thus providing identification and a sense of continuity. We understand that free time is available. If a decision is made to experiment with T.V. a separate committee might be set up which would work out the details of programming.

As for hobby shows and presentations at shopping centres, the photographic resources of the members of the Society would ensure success for ventures of this type and stimulate great interest in what we are doing.

Programming

1. The present program of lectures and field trips be expanded to include
 - (a) day trips farther afield,
 - (b) joint outings with other societies;
 - the possibility of weekend outings to remote areas.
2. That outings be organized on a natural history survey basis and not on an individual discipline basis.
3. That reports of each outing be recorded and filed and possibly published in the Naturalist.

4. That public transportation be used where feasible.

Discussion

As far as it goes, the present program serves a useful and essential service but apparently does not encourage very extensive member participation. It is our belief that by extending the field trips to more remote areas, by pooling the resources of all disciplines, by having an objective for each outing, and where possible, travelling as a group, we could increase the turn-out.

It is apparent that trips to some areas may exclude participation by some members - particularly those unable to "rough-it" - but this is where the importance of diversity becomes apparent. Various types of activities will attract different elements of the Society.

The Natural History Survey concept is important because by making complete records of all observations and findings on a trip we not only contribute to the overall knowledge of natural history but, hopefully again, increase the participation of some of the less popular disciplines such as entomology and geology. Repeat trips to specific areas at different seasons would stimulate interest as well as help to provide a more valuable survey of the natural history of the area on a seasonal basis.

The use of public transportation, where feasible, keeps the group together, offers opportunities for discussion in transit and reduces the already formidable drain on the environment made by automobiles.

Youth

Since this is a special area of concern it has been treated separately.

With the kind of enthusiasm we find among Freeman King's juniors we wonder why more of these youngsters do not make the jump to the senior group. Certainly there are heavy demands on a youngster's time during the late teens and early 20's but this should not discourage us from trying to get more of these young people to become involved with the senior society. None of the members of your committee could make specific recommendations towards solving this problem except to suggest that a young member be placed on the executive of the society to act as a representative of youth and to provide a liaison with young people. Out of this may come proposals for activities which attract more young people.

We should not overlook the fact that a more diversified program, such as previously outlined, may also help.

Conclusion

Success in any kind of a program expansion such as that suggested will depend to a large extent on the people running it. There will obviously be more work than can be handled by one program chairman. Therefore, we think it advisable that a standing programme committee be established to coordinate the many organizational problems involved in such an expansion.

Respectfully submitted.

*Harold Hosford,
Chairman.*

FEBRUARY BIRD FIELD TRIP - ELK AND BEAVER LAKES

This outing was attended by 48 keen birders including a group from the University of Victoria under Allan Brooks. The weatherman smiled sunnily most of the time. Bird life was mixed and varied from the tiny Winter Wren at Beaver Lake to the mighty pair of Bald Eagles perched at the top of a spar on the west side of the lakes. The abandoned eagles nest at Eagle Park was observed. Could they still be nesting somewhere in the area?

It must have been merganser week as the American and Hooded Mergansers put on a real show in black and white against the dark water. Extensive workings of the Pileated Woodpecker were observed. Also represented were Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers. Most small winter birds were seen.

We had an enjoyable picnic at the waters edge on the north end of Elk Lake where we were observed at close quarters by a juvenal Bald Eagle.

After lunch the waterbird population of Martindale was enjoyed, topped with a flight display by a pigeon hawk.

We started for home when rain began to fall.

Cy Morehen

MARCH GENERAL MEETING

The major portion of the March 14th meeting involved the business of the proposed by-law changes and the proposed increase in dues.

To begin with, however, there was a brief session dealing mostly with last month's business and this was followed by a short presentation of slides. The pictures were taken at the social evening which was held at the

home of Gladys and Bill Abbott after the annual bird census. The slides had been taken by Mr. Abbott's sister Mary and Mrs. Abbott narrated.

Then began the serious part of the meeting. The by-law changes were hardly more than a formality even though several amendments were introduced. The session on the proposed changes in the fee structure was quite a different matter and time only allowed consideration of the regular dues. The proposed change from \$3 to \$5 was debated with energy for over half an hour and the motion for an increase failed to carry by the necessary majority of two-thirds of those present. At that time there were sixty members present, although it is interesting to note that there were eighty-nine people present at the beginning of the meeting. Incidentally I should add here that at the February meeting there were 120 members present; I regret the error in reporting just over 80 present.

During the course of the evening Mr. Bridgen announced his desire to resign from the position of treasurer. He was soon given a vote of confidence in the hope that he would reconsider. Mr. Bridgen has been a valued member of our executive.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.10 p.m. after which time refreshments were served in the staff coffee room.

R. Beckett

THE VARIED THRUSH

Victoria people should be proud to show visiting birders or others our Varied Thrushes - not that they are always very plentiful. Nor are they plentiful anywhere, for their range is limited both in Canada and in the United States. The map in Robbins and Zim's book shows them extending south from all of Alaska to the Mexican border, east from the coast to the Rockies and into half of southern Alberta. Other provinces have occasional records - Regina 1958, only one for Quebec, 1890, but a wintering record in New Brunswick in 1960. These dates are from "Birds of Canada". In the U.S.A. not much east of the California border.

Even so, it is not the rarest Canadian thrush as some Easterners might be pleased to point out. The Wood Thrush has a very limited range in southern

Ontario and Quebec, although it has a wide range in eastern U.S.A., from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico and from the Mississippi to the Atlantic. Nor does the Grey-cheeked Thrush come into British Columbia except in the extreme northwest near Alaska. During its migration to such places as the West Indies, Peru and Brazil it is frequently seen in central Canada. Our first sighting was in Manitoba in 1956. Another we saw had been killed by flying into a large window.

But to return to the Varied Thrush. I think French Canada has a name for it more descriptive and, therefore, more useful, for they call it the Collared Merle.

"Merle" being their general name for thrushes. A name also used in Scotland for their blackbird which is also a thrush. That explained a lot when I heard a blackbird singing so sweetly. Local names for birds do not seem to be used much anymore but Taverner in his "Birds of Canada" gives some apt ones for the Varied Thrush - "Oregon Robin, Wood Robin and Painted Robin."

As prairie birders we were glad to see our first Varied Thrush in 1960 and we have continued to see them around Victoria each year ever since. In 1966 we visited the Malheur Sanctuary in Oregon. Following our usual methods we went first to the headquarters building to enquire about what birds were around - in this case we wanted to know about Trumpeter Swans. Brushing aside such ordinary birds as Trumpeters the woman at the office said, with real excitement in her voice, "But did you see the Varied Thrush as you came through the trees? It is a first record for Malheur."

I quote from Earl Godfrey's "Birds of Canada"

"The thrushes are a very large family widely distributed in most parts of the world.

There is a good deal of variation in the appearance of many species but the young in their juvenile plumage (and the adults of many species as well) have spotted breasts....The family contains some of the worlds finest singers including the Nightingale of Europe and the Hermit Thrush of North America."

There are eighteen species of thrushes in North America, thirteen in Canada including the Robin, the bluebirds and Townsend's Solitaire, but none are so

truly British Columbian as the Varied Thrush. Many would agree that this bird would make a fitting candidate for Provincial Bird of this Province.

Reita Sparling

BLOOM VS GLOOM

In spite of a long winter of low temperatures and an unusually wet spring with less sunshine than normal, our wild plants are flowering not far off average dates.

Gorse and broom, of course, are always early and other early shrubs, such as hazelnut, bird cherry, spurge laurel and falsebox flowered not more than a few days later than in 1971.

Spring gold, Viola adunca and perennial daisy were all in bloom February 9th and skunk cabbage, water montia and bitter-cress were out a few days later. White erythronium was only 6 days behind its 1971 date.

Trillium in my home garden on the north side of the house had good blooms March 14th, missing one day of equalling my earliest record in 21 years.

Altogether my 1972 list includes 27 species, many of them hardy perennials like cat's ear, dandelions and gumweed.

On the whole prospects seem favourable for a good year - surely we should have some benefits from all that moisture that has blessed (?) us this season.

M. C. Melburn

VICTORIA DAILY TIMES, March 13, 1972

BROWN THRASHER

WEST VANCOUVER (CP) - A brown thrasher, a species of bird not previously recorded in this area, has taken up residence at the home of a local resident.

The thrasher's identity has been confirmed by experts of the Vancouver Natural History Society, who said the bird has been recorded only once before in British Columbia - in the South Okanagan.

* * * *

THE EDITOR'S MAIL BOX ...

416-3187 Shelbourne Street
 Victoria, B.C.
 March 14, 1972

Editor

Dear Sir:

The observation by Mr. S. W. Chaffey (Naturalist, 28, 86, 1972) of an injured Rufous-sided Towhee being lifted by another is a very remarkable one indeed, but not unique. W. Weydermeyer of Montana reports (Auk, 88, 431, 1971) an identical situation involving Calliope Hummingbirds. A female collided with a window and fell, injured. Immediately a male came and lifted her away. The hummingbird lifted his companion by grasping her bill in his, unlike the towhee, which lifted his/her companion with its feet.

Miss B. S. Ormsby (Birds, p. 30, Jan-Feb, 1972) reports a situation where a European Blackbird was caught in a net, and was deliberately buffeted by several other Blackbirds until it was shaken free.

As one of our members, Derek Ellis, pointed out, before one could begin to interpret such behaviour (as, for example, gallantly rescuing a companion in distress, or any other explanation), one would need to know much more about what happened before and after, as well as the normal behaviour of the species. Not the least remarkable aspect, Dr. Ellis points out, is the physical ability of a towhee to fly with such a heavy load.

Yours sincerely, *J. B. Tatum*

NEW MEMBERS

Mr. & Mrs. J. L. Colter	#1 906 Pemberton Road
Miss M. Lowe	16 Bushby Street
Mr. Jack Ralph	1259 Roy Road
Mrs. V. Schiader	#3 1055 Pendergast Street
Mr. S. G. Mooney	3312 Gibbs Road
Mr. & Mrs. Bernard E. Walsh	1446 Wende Road
Miss M. Wydman	2938 Cedar Hill Road

BIRDS REPORTED

Townsend's Solitaire	(1)	Dec. 1	Oak Bay Golf Course Dr. G. F. Houston
Black Brant	(4)	Feb. 21	Clover Point A. R. Davidson
Rusty Blackbird (male and female)	(2)	Feb. 23	Welch Road
Glaucous Gull	(1)	Feb. 25	West Saanich Road Mr. and Mrs. V. Goodwill
Golden Eagle (eating a duck)	(1)	Feb. 26	Shoal Bay Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Davidson
Violet Green Swallow	(8)	Mar. 4	Elk Lake Mr. and Mrs. R. McKenzie-Grieve
Pied-billed Grebe	(1)	Mar. 6	Inner Harbour Alec James
Hermit Thrush	(1)	Mar. 7	Arbutus Road Mary Clark
Snowy Owl	(1)	Mar. 7	Ogden Point Ralph Fryer
Mountain Bluebird	(2)	Mar. 15	Hunt Road Vic Goodwill
Horned Lark	(1)	Mar. 11	Esquimalt Lagoon A. R. Davidson
Rhinoceros Auklet	(1)	Mar. 16	Clover Point Eleanor Davidson
Rufous Hummingbird	(1)	Mar. 17	Birch Road Madeline Till

ADDENDA

Both Betty Gibson and Jean Muir report seeing European Widgeon in February. Dr. Houston still sees "his" pigeon Hawk in the downtown area and Mrs. Eleanor Davidson, on a recent ferry trip, spied hundreds of Arctic Loons, Murres, and Brandt's Cormorants in Active Pass.

M. & L. Slocombe, 3134 Henderson Road (592-9047)

PROGRAMME FOR APRIL 1972

- Executive Meeting: 8:00 p.m. Board Room 104M
 Tuesday, April 4 Provincial Museum
- ✓ General Meeting: 8:00 p.m. Newcombe Auditorium
 Tuesday, April 11 Provincial Museum (south entrance)
 Sierra Club presents: "The Nitinat Story".
- ✓ Bird Field Trip: Meet at Mayfair Lanes Parking Lot
 Saturday, April 15 (north side - corner Oak and Roderick) 9:30 a.m. or Francis Park 10:00 a.m. Bring lunch
 Leader: Dr. Sparling 598-4262
- ✓ Botany Field Trip: Meet at Mayfair Lanes Parking Lot
 Saturday, April 22 (north side - corner Oak and Roderick) 9:30 a.m. for trip to Cowichan Lake. Bring lunch
 Leader: Terese Todd 479-2816
- ✓ Ornithology Meeting: 8:00 p.m. Board Room 104M
 Tuesday, April 25 Provincial Museum
 (subject to cancellation)
- ✓ Tide Pool Exploration: Meet Dave Stirling and Freeman
 Saturday, April 29 King at Cattle Point, 9:30 a.m. for a 2 hour visit with intertidal animals and plants. Wear rubbers, speak softly, and carry a big stick.
- Junior Group: Meet every Saturday 1:30 p.m. at
 Mayfair Lanes parking lot
 (north side)

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Honorary President

Honourable W.K. Kiernan, Minister of Recreation and Conservation

Honorary Life Members

Freeman F. King, Albert R. Davidson, George E. Winkler,
Miss M.C. Melburn, Miss E.K. Lemon, Mrs. L.E. Chambers

Officers 1971 - 72

President

Dr. Jeremy Tatum
#416-3187 Shelbourne St.
592-1332

Vice-President

K.R. Beckett
4484 Markham St., R.R. 3
479-5548

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Audubon Wildlife Films: Miss Enid Lemon, 1226 Roslyn Road - - - 598-3517

A.H. Couser, #403 - 435 Michigan St. - - - 384-0832

Group Leaders

Botany: Miss Terese Todd, Barker Road, R.R. 6 - - - - - 479-2816

Entomology: Dr. R.A. Ring, 1467 Jamaica Road - - - - - 656-2246

Ornithology: Rod Muirhead, 3431 Salsbury Way - - - - - 384-6005

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

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

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

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

Ornithology Records: Dr. Jeremy Tatum, (see address above)

University Liaison: Dr. Jeremy Tatum (see address above)

Membership: Mrs. A.R. Davidson, 2144 Brighton Ave. - - - - - 598-3088

Librarian: A.R. Davidson, 2144 Brighton Ave. - - - - - 598-3088

Federation of B.C. Naturalists: Kerry Joy, Millstream Lake Rd., R.R.6 478-5093

Friends of the Museum: Dr. D.B. Sparling, #9-1354 Beach Dr. - - - 598-4262

A.D. Turnbull, 3614 Cadboro Bay Rd. - - - 592-6025

Publicity: Harold Hosford, 450 Tipton St. - - - - - 478-5794

"The Victoria Naturalist"

Editor: Roy D. Wainwright, 3250 Exeter Road - - - - - 592-1310

Assistant Editor: Mrs. David Stirling, 3500 Salsbury Way - - - - - 385-4223

Annual Dues, including subscription: Single \$3; Family \$5; Junior \$2

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

Financial Year is May 1 to April 30.

New members joining after January 1 - half fee.

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