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THE VICTORIA NATURALIST



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VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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MIRACLE BEACH PROVINCIAL PARK

How many of you have taken the time to visit Miracle Beach Provincial Park? This park is located on Vancouver Island, halfway between Courtenay and Campbell River, and just three and a half hours from Victoria on the scenic island highway.

The road leading into this picturesque park is lined with mature forest trees. The more predominant species are large-leaved maple, red alder, Douglas-fir, grand fir, western hemlock and a sprinkling of dogwood. Their natural beauty is further enhanced by the absence of overhead wiring and associated unsightly poles.

This park consists of 326 acres containing approximately 182 campsites in the forested areas. The forest extends to the sea and at low tide the shallow waters recede to expose a remarkably large beach area free from pollution-producing cars and human habitations.

Eight miles off shore one can see a barren-looking, rocky island of 88 acres. This is Mitlenach Nature Park, home of countless sea birds. Barren as it looks because of its rain shadow position, and rocky composition, it does contain a pleasant meadow with a few lodgepole pine which give a scenic effect against the setting sun.

The island is also the summer home of two park naturalists who are there to make your visit a pleasant one.

The focal point of Miracle Beach Park is the Nature House shown on the front cover. This well designed building grew out of the original tent structure which was in use over a decade ago. The nature house is open during the afternoons from mid-June to the end of June and from 10 a.m. until 9 p.m. July 1 to Labour Day.

Once inside the nature house you will find yourself surrounded by displays depicting all aspects of the animals and plants to be found within the boundaries of the park. The displays were originated by park naturalists and added to or changed as time and money permitted.

The most popular display is one showing life in the sea with live specimens maintained in nearly natural conditions in salt water tanks. It is a challenging job for the naturalists to keep these tanks and their inhabitants clean and healthy. Sea water pumped directly from the ocean is a constant requirement.

Terrariums containing reptiles and amphibians are popular with young people. You are introduced to bird songs of the park by simply lifting a telephone receiver. Other displays show the advancement of plant growth, characteristics of birds, and the food chain of the sea. Most forms of plant life are on display in a living state. The displays are not dead museum exhibits, but living examples of life around us.

Naturalists are on hand to answer your questions and acquaint you with life in the wild state by taking you on daily nature walks, and evening nature talks, including slide shows. A handy booklet to acquaint you with the shore life of Miracle Beach is "Shore Things" by David Stirling. If you read this informative booklet, your stay at Miracle Beach will be that much more interesting.

This coming summer do make a trip to Miracle Beach Provincial Park. You deserve it, and the naturalists deserve your company.

Cy Morehen

Photo by David Stirling

BIRD FIELD TRIP - MARTINDALE RD

The 18th of March was very unusual, it was wet. Nothing unusual about that you say, for this winter. Well it was only the second Bird Trip in two years on which we got wet. How's that for unusual! Anyway both the 'Birders' and the Birds knew it and stayed home. Only 26 people and 27 species turned out, and I don't blame them.

In spite of the day we saw Violet-green and Tree swallows, Skylarks, and a very controversial Gull which just might have been a Glaucous Gull but was not. Many of the regulars of the area and season were seen except there was NO Meadowlark.

We lunched at Island View Beach and enjoyed a walk along the beach in the afternoon. Some interesting surveying was noted in the Regional Park area.

Rod Muirhead

THE PIGEONS OF CENTENNIAL SQUARE

Follow the birds to Victoria! When you arrive you will find a particular sort of bird - the pigeon abundantly represented in Centennial Square. This is much to the delight of the citizens who like to feed the birds and watch their busy self-important progress across the paving stones of the square in search of crumbs. Too, there is the customary billing and cooing as aggressive male courts pseudo-reluctant female, the wheeling descending flocks as some titbits are scattered by a pigeon fancier, and the scurry of wings as birds depart before the onset of dog or stranger.

Alas, the city grows upwards and each new tall building provides an additional quota of nesting sites for the city's pigeons. The pigeon population explosion though welcome to many who love birds, is aided by the growth of the modern city and regretted by the human owners of the numerous ledges upon which the pigeons roost.

The inevitable complaint reaches City Hall and to some in a modern expanding city the wild, free beating of wings seems anachronistic: there is too great a contrast with the imprisoned souls contained and fettered inside the concrete canyon walls of the human rabbit warren. The pigeons must go. The method - stealthy and deadly as the way in which the concrete replaced the green sward and the asphalt replaced the trees. A chemical that sterilizes - that kills love and the birth of little birds. A filthy industrial product - the evil fruit of modern technological society. It will not hurt, no pain, just oblivion. How humane - and how quiet the square will be, and dead, without the pigeons.

For an epitaph - the following lines written by W.A. (Judge) McKay, Fur Biologist and author, as he comments on the use of synthetic oestrogens to "solve" the pigeon "problem".

WARNING!

Centennial pigeons! Beware!!

Of the corn that is fed in the Square-

Don't fly in to get it,

It's oestrogenetic.

And soon there'll be none of you there.....

R.P. Finegan

THE APRIL BIRD FIELD TRIP

Thirty-three Bird Watchers met at Thomas Francis Park for the April 15th Bird Field Trip and to enjoy a sunny spring day as well as the birds which were scarce but 37 species were listed.

No effort was made to enter the heavy woods. The swamp below the Nature House was explored and then along Munn Road and to the Power Line. Lunch was eaten at the Park Parking Lot after which the party moved by car along Munn Road as far as Goodland Farm.

Special mention should be made of a pair of Western Bluebirds, a Hutton's Vireo, a Solitary Vireo, two Audubon Warblers and a number of Orange-Crowned Warblers. A Red Tail Hawk was observed on a nest close by in good view a little below eye level. The Hawk took alarm as the observers gathered and joined the mate in flight above. A Turkey Vulture and the Hawks began to dispute the airspace in plain view.

Doug Sparling

NEW FEE STRUCTURE

As approved by the General Meeting of April 11, the Society dues for the coming year starting May 1, 1972 will be as follows:

Regular single membership \$3.00 (no change);
Family \$6 (up from \$5); Junior \$2 (no change)
Sustaining \$25; Life \$200.

AN INVITATION

From the Arrowsmith Natural History Society, Parksville, comes an invitation to join them and members from other Natural History Clubs on the island at an outing at Englishman River Falls Park. This is a great opportunity to meet other club members and to enjoy a Nature walk in the park.

Date: Sunday, May 7, 12.30 P.M. (bring lunch)

Place: Englishman River Falls Park (near Parksville)

The President of the A.N.H.S. is Mr. George Tranfield.
Sec.-Treasurer is Mrs. Thelma Farrell.

HOCA THE ORIOLE

On December 12, 1971, an oriole appeared at the suet feeders in our garden on St. Patrick St. The startling orange-yellow breast and extensive show of yellow when it flew sent me into an ecstasy of excitement. The caged bird association knew nothing about it, disclaiming ever having had an oriole.

The specific identification was at first tricky. Was it autumn plumage? female? Bullock's? first year bird? etc. Many books and writings were consulted, and visits from the most qualified birders in Victoria ended in the consensus that the bird was the Baltimore oriole, *ICTURUS GALBULA*. By the time it departed March 28, 1972 there was ample proof of the bird's sex and species for the black feathering appearing on the frontal area and neck identified it as a male Baltimore.

Having such a bird in the garden through one of the worst of our winters - a bird which should have been wintering in Central America - was a rare occurrence. Every day was a challenge to our inexperience, an anxiety in our thoughts, a thrill to our being and a time full of unanswered questions.

When the house finches began their early courting, the purple finches their singing, and all the usual garden birds showed the approaching signs of the developing spring within them, the oriole was alone. A house sparrow once sensed, perhaps, the oriole's need for fun and frolic, for it allowed itself to be chased. The next round the sparrow did the chasing, and when both birds tired they alighted near one another to rest and preen. What a contrast! Another time a song sparrow noticed the oriole long enough to peck aggressively in its direction. But usually the oriole was a total outsider ignored by all. Perhaps the code between them was "Don't bother me and I'll not bother you." The starlings were in such numbers at times that the oriole stayed away.

The greatest concerns for this bird were survival against the cold and food for subsistence. We thought of capturing the oriole and bringing it into the house till the severe winter ended. We talked about having it taken to Guatemala by a friend headed that way. It would have been more comfortable to have the bird in the house, safe from the elements, cats, hawks and people. But it was a

healthy bird, so why not help it to live where it was in the out-of-doors? This was one of those questions that was hard to resolve through those violent storms and high winds. Our convictions regarding freedom and the rights of wildlife took precedence over confining this healthy wild bird - besides it is illegal to do so.

Often at dusk the bird was seen to fly for shelter into a tangle of dry clematis and green leafed laurel under the overhang of the garage roof and this seemed to afford him comfortable quarters.

As for food, writers say the oriole consumes large quantities of caterpillars, fruit and nectar. At this season, Dr. Skutch in Costa Rica had written to say his Baltimore orioles were eating bananas on the feeder tray! Our bird would not touch banana; if it were a first year bird it may never have seen such fruit. Jeremy Tatum jogged my memory on meal worms, and I remembered a container outside in a shed which fortunately contained some small ones. When my supply ran out sympathetic friends provided the twenty-five or more worms his hunger required. At the feeder there was no conflict in seed eating, for the oriole ate the rolled oats, soft crumbs, and apples when they were not frozen, or guarded by ravenous robins. Every bird wanted suet, including the oriole who unfortunately often found it too hard for his fine tender beak because of the cold weather.

In any event the oriole thrived; he was vigorous and his flight was strong. Later we thought of honey-water as an addition to his food; a tablespoon of honey to about a cup of water. It not only became a staple of his diet but also gave him his name: Hoca - Ho for honey, and Ca for nectar. Hoca really went for honey-water and for a time he seemed to be at the bowl more than he was away. He liked it to be fresh and neither too strong nor too weak.

There was a breakthrough of sun one cold day. It shone right into that dark leafed laurel, melting the snow and glistening on wet patches in the leaves. The oriole appeared, handsome, long-legged and striking against that background. He rolled in the wet leaves as though bathing, dropped out of sight into the depth of green, popped up and began bathing action again. He rubbed and spread his feathers this way and that, then shook and settled to dressing

himself. When he faced me without obstruction or shadow (which seldom happened when we had a photographer present) it was most noticeable that the yellow colour in the ventral area obtained throughout with no more than half an inch of fading of the intensity before going into the strong orange yellow undertail coverts.

As the insects of this part of the world are now awakening to spring and there are blossoms to provide nectar, it is more than likely that the beautiful oriole fares well. It would be interesting to know where he is and what has happened; not that his life would be any better for satisfying our curiosity. If he had wanted to stay he would have stayed. Let it be.

Grace Bell

YOUR DELEGATE'S REPORT

The annual meeting of the B.C. Federation of Naturalists was held on April 15th at the UBC Faculty Club. Some 32 delegates and observers participated in the day-long session.

Mr. Elton Anderson was elected President with Dr. V.C. Brink as Vice-President and Mrs. George Durand as Secretary.

Highlights of the meeting included the resolutions submitted by our Society. All these were passed unanimously.

Victoria Resolutions:

1. That the varied thrush (*ixoreus naevius*) be established as British Columbia's provincial bird.
2. That all rails, excluding coots, be removed from the list of migratory birds hunted.
3. That the mountain quail be protected.
4. That the practice of collecting extra-limital species of birds be stopped.
5. That provincial parks be established in the northern one-half of British Columbia over lands known to have unique scenic recreational and wilderness values.

Conservation Committee Resolutions:

This committee's work proved to be of great importance and interest to all.

1. A brief on the National Parks' Village Lake Louise proposal was sent to Ottawa outlining the Federation's opposition to the development. The suggestion was made that

such development should be outside park boundaries. (Canadian Press reported that briefs were 3:1 against the development.)

2. That Mr. Kiernan undertake to protect the 40 mile long Brigade trail, from Hope to Tulameen, under Park classification.

3. The conservation committee has sponsored an "Opportunities for Youth" program for canoe clubs to examine and recommend various rivers to be designated as Wild Rivers having strip protection along each bank.

Forestry Practices

Present forestry practices by industry and the B.C. Forest Service were strongly criticized by various delegates. The following resolutions passed unanimously.

1. That many lakes have had their recreational potential severely damaged by logging practices. The offending companies must legally be required to clean up after their operations. Where an offending company cannot be identified the provincial government shall pay for the clean-up.

2. Green belts or shelter belts along rivers, streams and lakes are not now required in logging plans with consequent aesthetic and wildlife damage to salmon spawning streams and winter range for Roosevelt Elk. The resolution passed would make green belts mandatory in all new logging plans.

3. Block logging or clearcutting of trees in alternate blocks along a valley is a less damaging method of logging since it offers more stream protection, more shelter for game and less soil erosion. The Federation urges this method of logging be applied throughout the province.

Finances:

The Federation faces a deficit unless more funds are forthcoming from member societies. A per capita increase from the present 50¢ to \$1. was foreseen as one way. Other ideas were discussed with a decision being postponed for consideration by the new executive until the fall meeting. All delegates were asked to urge their members to take out \$4.00 individual memberships in the Federation. This would increase the Federation's operating funds and decrease the necessity for a per capita raise from member societies.

Litter Act:

A resolution by Elton Anderson that pop bottles be standardized to aid in their collection and recycling was approved by all delegates.

Plant Protection Act:

All member societies were asked to publicize the Trillium, Dogwood, and Rhododendron Act and to keep a careful watch over locally endangered species.

THE EDITOR'S MAILBOX

Box 565,
Ladysmith, B.C.
April 19, 1972

Editor

Dear Sir,

A very large gathering of birds occurred in our harbour this morning to feast on what was probably a herring run.

People claim that there are not many eagles in this area but there were twenty-seven over the bay, flopping into the water and then flying off with their meal. Eleven were adults and the rest immatures in various stages on their way to adulthood. Also in this melee were approximately 2000 pelagic cormorants, about 1,000 glaucous winged and herring gulls mixed, about four hundred horned grebes, four common loons, one red-necked grebe, and a harbour seal that kept driving off the cormorants from the large log on which he was basking.

Yours truly, *David R. Denis*

307 Strickland St.
Whitehorse, Yukon

Editor

Dear Sir,

Although only a few of us have kept records for the last seven years, we think that we have a new record with

the sighting of three mountain bluebirds at Marsh Lake about 30 miles south of Whitehorse, on March 26. The earliest previous sighting was April 7. We don't know if they will survive as there are not yet many insects about.

Kay Johannes

EXTRA BONUS ISSUE

As an experiment, your executive has approved a 10th issue of the magazine for this year, publication date to be June 1. The extra issue will include the President's Report for the year and the Treasurer's Report, the list of the new executive following the May 9 general meeting, and announcements of summer programme. There will also be room for any articles which are submitted before the deadline of May 15. With your copy you will also receive your copy of the "Newsletter" of the Federation of B.C. Naturalists.

GENERAL MEETING TUESDAY APRIL 11, 1972

Eighty-nine attended the meeting held in the Newcombe Auditorium last month. Guest speaker for the evening was Mrs. Eve Howden, who is a member of our Society but was representing the Sierra Club on this occasion. She held her audience entranced for over an hour with her slide illustrated talk on the Nitinat Triangle. After an active question period, the business part of the meeting carried out.

1. Mr. Freeman King and Mr. Harold Hosford were asked to attend a rally organized by S.P.R.I.N.T. (Save Pacific Rim Include Nitinat Triangle) on Sunday April 23, as representatives of this Society.
2. Voting was held on the fee structure for the coming year (see separate notice).
3. Mr. Harold Hosford reported that the "Evening with Bristol Foster" sponsored by the Society raised \$312.00 for the G. Clifford Carl Memorial Fund.
4. Freeman King announced that the junior group will be giving a tour of Francis Park to all those interested in their activities - Saturday May 6, 2.00 p.m.

Jennifer Brown

BIRDS REPORTED

Audubon Warbler	(1)	Mar. 11	Beaver Lake Ron Satterfield
Wood Duck (m. and f.)	(2)	Mar. 17	Duncan Mr. and Mrs. Vic Goodwill
Ring-Billed Gull (adult)	(1)	Mar. 19	Interurban Rd.
Red-Throated Loon	(5)	Mar. 25	Resthaven
Solitary Vireo	(3)	Mar. 25	Munn Rd. Ron Satterfield
Turkey Vulture	(2)	Mar. 28	Sooke Betty Gibson
California Gull	(1)	Mar. 30	Clover Point Ron Satterfield
Savannah Sparrow (Brooksi)	(1)	April 1	Pat Bay A.R. Davidson
Common Teal	(2)	Apr. 2	Panama Flats Ron Satterfield
Rough-Winged Swallow	(1)	Apr. 5	Jenkins Rd. Mr. and Mrs. Vic Goodwill
Townsend's Solitaire	(1)	Apr. 6	Francis Park Cy Morehen
Sandhill Crane	(3)	Apr. 10	Martindale Rd. Ralph Fryer
Annah's Hummingbird	(1)	Apr. 11	Cooper's Cove Betty Gibson
Western Sandpiper	(1)	Apr. 13	Clover Point A.R. Davidson
Costa's Hummingbird	(1)	Apr. 15	Cadboro Bay R. Mackenzie- Grieve

ADDENDA

At the Oak Bay Marina on April 10, I watched an adult bald eagle trying to catch an ailing duck. The eagle (followed at a safe distance by gulls) would swoop in time after time as the weary duck dived again and again. I had to leave before the kill and hoped the eagle succeeded rather than the gulls. I have seen the latter go after a sick bird and it is not a pretty sight.

(Continued on Page 112)

PROGRAM FOR MAY 1972

- Executive Meeting: 8:00 p.m. Board Room 104M
Tuesday, May 2 Provincial Museum
- TOUR WITH JUNIORS AT
FRANCIS PARK: Meet at Mayfair Lanes Parking
Saturday, May 6 Lot (north side - corner Oak
and Roderick) 1:30 p.m. or
2:00 p.m. at Francis Park
- GENERAL MEETING: 8:00 p.m. Newcombe Auditorium
Tuesday, May 9 Provincial Museum (south ent-
rance). Mr. Bruce Runyon
presents a short slide talk on
"Bowron Lake Park", followed by
the Annual Business Meeting and
election.
- BOTANY FIELD TRIP: Meet at Mayfair Lanes Parking
Saturday, May 20 Lot (north side - corner Oak
and Roderick) 9:30 a.m. for
trip to Cowichan Lake. Bring
lunch. Leader: Terese Todd,
479-2816.
- COMBINED FIELD TRIP: Meet at Mayfair Lanes Parking
Saturday, May 27 Lot 9:30 a.m. or John Dean Park
10:15 a.m. for birds, botany
and bugs. Bring lunch.
- JUNIOR GROUP: Meet every Saturday 1:30 p.m.
at Mayfair Parking Lot (north
side).

ADDENDA (Continued from Page 111)

The Wainwrights spotted a mute swan at Shoal Bay April 11th. Several reports have come in of European widgeon and orange-crowned warblers were seen as early as March 25th. The Davidsons report two western bluebirds at a nest hole near Francis Park. It looks as if spring is off to a good start.

M. and L. Slocombe, 3134 Henderson Rd., (592-9047)

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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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)
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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.