



THE
VICTORIA
NATURALIST

published by the
VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
Victoria B.C.

October 1972

Vol. 29 # 2

THE VICTORIA NATURALIST

Published by
THE VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Vol. 29: No. 2

October 1972

ORB WEAVER SPIDER

The spider shown on this month's cover is Araneus diadematus, a typical member of the orb-weaver family. The cinnamon-brown females up to three-quarters of an inch in body length, are common on their webs at eye-level among garden bushes around Victoria during September and October. This species is believed to be a native of Eurasia and first came to eastern Canada a century ago from Europe. On Vancouver Island it has been common at least since 1932 but may have come either from Europe or from Japan.

A new web is begun by bridging a space of several feet between branches with a few horizontal strands of silk. Between the upper and lower horizontal guy lines, 25 to 30 radiating lines are added. Finally starting in the center, the spider spirals around the web, spacing out the line with its extended hind foot. Only this spiral silk is coated by the spider's spinnerets with a liquid adhesive, and as it is joined to each ray, the spider pauses momentarily to pluck the freshly completed section so that the adhesive is vibrated into an evenly spaced row of droplets. An orb weaver can build a new web in several hours of steady work, and when an old web becomes torn or dry, the silk is eaten and a new one begun.

Although most active at night, A. diadematus can often be seen by daylight hanging head down in the center of the web waiting for prey. If

disturbed, the spider climbs quickly out of sight among foliage from where it monitors the web by feeling a taut signal line which is attached to the hub. By assessing the vibrations of a tangled insect, the spider can usually judge how to handle it. Even quite large insects are quickly wrapped in silk, and tranquilized by a bite from the jack-knifing hypodermic-like fangs. Prey is squeezed and sucked dry.

Adult males, only half the size of females, are timid but persistent lovers. They maintain a safety line of silk by which to swing free if the female moves aggressively. She is apparently quieted by special vibrations made by her mate, and at last allows him to court her. After a period of several weeks the female lays a large number of eggs in groups of a hundred or more, around which she spins protective cocoons of grey silk, often fastening them under leaves near the web. Exhausted by her work, she feeds less and less, fails to maintain the web, and usually perishes soon from exposure to autumn frosts.

Around Victoria the young hatch mostly in spring but sometimes in warm autumn. They remain quietly in the cocoon for some time, then in warm moist weather the spiderlings disperse. Each survivor builds a tiny web about an inch across, and catches what gnats it can. After each of seven or eight growth periods leading to maturity, the entire skin is moulted. Over a year the cycle repeats itself once.

This attractive species, like most of our spiders plays a mildly beneficial role in the ecological complex. As one of the more conspicuous kinds, it offers naturalists and photographers a worthwhile subject.

Story by Erik Thorn.

Cover photo by Mrs. Bertha Gow.

CANADIAN NATURE FEDERATION CONFERENCE

The second Conference of the Canadian Nature Federation was held in Edmonton from August 17 to 20. Adults and Juniors had two very full separate programs, joining together for an enjoyable barbecue at a local park. The second National Exhibition of Canadian Nature Artists was held in conjunction with the Conference and we were very pleased to see four paintings from Michael Hunter of Metchosin there.

A feature of the Conference was a series of lectures followed by discussion workshops. My impression was that much of the discussion was centred around the human environment and relatively little was concerned with natural history. However, the opening panellist, Dr. A.M. Pearson, of the Canadian Wildlife Service, told about the various programs for conserving the animals of the Arctic by fixing ear-tags and radio transmitters to them. Dr Pearson, in stressing the need for conservation of the Grizzly Bear, stated that this was important because the species could be harvested. He felt that many conservationists get a great thrill from killing a Grizzly, and they should not be denied this pleasure.

One got the impression that there is a great deal of activity in the Arctic, and it was rumoured that the Caribou are engaged in surveys to determine the total number of Biologists in the region. It seems there are probably a few hundred there, all engaged in managing our natural resources.

Dr. J.G. Nelson talked on ways to attack environmental problems. He emphasized clear identification of the problem, reliable sources of information, the need to keep the real issue in view to offset efforts by the opposition to suppress discussion and introduce personality feuds into the debate, and the need for extensive publicity.

Since even the smallest error may become a tool

of the opposition, accurate facts are essential. Even emotion has a place in a well-organized attack on an environmental problem, provided it is backed up with logic, he said.

Richard Fyfe talked about some of the steps being taken to protect Peregrine and Prairie Falcons. He gave much information about all of Canada apart from B.C., which he did not discuss. He described successful efforts to provide artificial nesting sites for Prairie Falcons by digging holes in cliff sides. He pointed out that "captive breeding programs" are useless unless more birds, having been reared in captivity, are returned to breed successfully in the wild than are initially taken from the wild.

The President, Dr Douglas Pimlott, spoke of his efforts to prevent the local council from widening the road in front of his house. Though it was hard to see what this had to do with natural history, it did show how, by an immense amount of prolonged and highly-organized hard work, it was possible to win against City Hall.

At the business session it was announced that Mr Allen Poynter, a former president of our Society, and Dr Bristol Foster were among the 12 National Directors elected.

After much vigorous debate, seven Resolutions were passed. They were: to thank the organizers of the Conference; to ask for a change in the boundaries of Kluane National Park; to ask for protection of the Cougar; to indicate the Federation's concern for protection of raptorial birds; to indicate concern for the position of the Peregrine in B.C.; to congratulate the Canadian government on its National Park system; and to deprecate most strongly the killing of birds to establish ornithological records.

The Conference was very ably summed up at the banquet by Yorke Edwards, who returned to Victoria last month to take up his duties as Assistant Director of the Provincial Museum.

Those who have not yet joined the Canadian Nature Federation are reminded that it is the foremost national organization for naturalists in Canada and are urged to join by sending their \$6.00 subscription each to Dave Stirling as soon as possible. The Federation needs and deserves your support.

-- Jeremy Tatum

THE BULLOCK'S ORIOLE

When a bird, whose nearest normal nesting area is the sunny Okanagan valley, manages to find its way across the Coast range and over the water to Vancouver Island, and proceeds to build a nest and raise young there, that's news.

On June 1 this year, six of these orioles landed in the garden of a friend of mine two miles north of Courtenay, and one pair, and possibly two pair, nested successfully, as the young were seen. They left on August 15.

This garden extends to several acres, and the birds chose a site where a Lombardy poplar was growing close to a creek.

I did not learn of this interesting, and possibly unique, incident until late in August, so told my friend the only proof acceptable was the nest, so he went back to Courtenay, climbed 30 feet up the tree, cut off the top containing the nest and brought it here.

Oriole's nests are remarkable creations. This one is composed of horsehair, string and fibre, and lined with cotton-wool, and anchored firmly to the upright small branches.

Single birds of this species were sighted around Victoria in 1968, 1969, and 1970, and what appears to be an old nest was found in Beacon Hill Park this spring, so there is some possibility this beautiful bird may become a new species for us -- providing, of course, it escapes the attention of the bird-collecting museums.

-- A.R. Davidson

SUBALPINE JUNKET

The botany group indulged in a frightfully new event -- an overnight trip to Green Mountain, August 19-20. We were fortunate to have bright weather, good lodging, and the company of many mosquitoes. The leader made an embarrassing start by running out of gas at home and as a result, found the group touring the upper reaches of Nanaimo River valley, wondering which logging branch led to Green Mountain. Eventually, 15 people disembarked at the parking lot and hoisted on packs for the walk to Sno-Bird Lodge.

Subalpine plants were quite abundant in spite of the long spell of hot weather, with valerians, lupines, false hellebore, and fleabanes splashed in great carpets. A complete species list is too extensive for inclusion here. However, we found such attractive plants as Saxifraga bronchialis (spotted saxifrage), Phlox diffusa (spreading phlox), Pedicularis racemosa (lousewort), and Rubus pedatus (trailing raspberry). One person found a marmot hole the hard way!

Four members returned to Victoria the first day and missed the raucous company of some young skiers who were up to ready the lodge for the coming season. After a somewhat disturbed night, the naturalists spent Sunday morning clambering over rocks and snow patches, photographing plants, and wondering how leg muscles would react to all this activity. In the heat of mid-afternoon we dissolved for the return trip, and four of us lingered to pick huckleberries and blueberries before taking a tingly swim in Nanaimo River.

--Stephen Mitchell

Don't forget that October 8 to 14 is Environment Week!

EXPEDITION TO MOUNT FINLAYSON

To show what tough material we naturalists are made of, the Ornithology Group organized a massive assault on the ramparts of Mount Finlayson (1,300 feet) on August 27.

Shortly after the team assembled, its leader, Jeremy Tatum, vanished, apparently on the trail of some rare birds that had been reported from Cook Street. These turned out to be a couple of Red-cheeked Waxbills escaped from someone's aviary. Meanwhile, while the party was patiently awaiting the return of its leader, Rod Muirhead took the group along to the Goldstream River to watch the Dippers.

Eventually the leader deigned to return and proceeded to deliver a learned lecture on the different Altitudinal Life Zones, and on how the average temperature dropped as one ascended the mountain. He listed, too, the different birds we could expect to see in successive Zones.

And so the expedition set out, with Barbara McLintock in the lead and Stuart Johnston chasing the dawdlers in the rear. An hour and three-quarters later, we (or some of us) had reached the summit, where it must have been at least 20 degrees hotter than at the bottom. We had seen almost no birds whatever, and certainly none that we had been promised.

Not all of us made it to the top, and those who gave up short of the summit found themselves being eyed by a couple of hungry Ravens and a Turkey Vulture circling overhead.

Lunch, which included at least one illicit bottle of beer, was taken in the shade of some pine trees a little below the summit, where we were joined by a Something Flycatcher. Rob and I wandered off on our own, and, knowing that everyone would be too exhausted to question us, we declared that we had seen a Western Tanager and heard a Purple Martin.

Then began the descent. We had not gone far when someone spied four young grouse in plain view

almost within touching distance straight in front of us. "Arent' they tame?" someone exclaimed. "Actually they're scared stiff," remarked Rod.

The embarrassed leader of the expedition, who didn't have the slightest idea what they were, stood silently, hoping that no one would ask what they were. "What are they?" piped up a voice. Two confident voices spoke simultaneously. "They're obviously not Ruffed Grouse," said one. "They're obviously not Blue Grouse," said the other. Finally it was agreed that, when the birds grew up and decided what they were going to be, they would eventually turn into Blue Grouse.

Back to Goldstream and the Dippers, and so ended a hot, tiring, rather birdless, but very enjoyable trip.

-- Jeremy Tatum

WINNERS

The Victoria Natural History Society at its September meeting bestowed on one of its members its highest honor when it made him an honorary life member of the Society.

Recipient of the honor was E.E. Bridgen who served the Society faithfully for six years as Treasurer before retiring from the post last spring. An honorary life membership can be given only by a unanimous vote of members at a general meeting. The members' support of the honor for Mr. Bridgen show they have appreciated his hard work at the often thankless task of keeping the Society's books in order. The Editors join with all VNHS members in offering him our congratulations.

Also at the September meeting, the scholarship winners were introduced. Willa Noble is this year's winner of the Freeman King Scholarship, while Wayne Limbert won the VNHS Scholarship. It is of interest to note that Miss Noble was last year's winner of the VNHS Scholarship. To these young people also, we offer our congratulations

The program at the meeting was an illustrated talk by Mr. A. Ceska on Flora of the Pacific Northwest. Mr. Ceska showed us many lovely slides of flowers and gave us a most interesting and informative talk spiced with much good humor.

-- Barbara McLintock

YOUR LUCKY STAR

By Al Grass

Legend tells us that each one of us has a lucky star. This could be brushed off as mere superstition -- but it's true! The fact is that each one of us does have a lucky star. What is even more amazing is that we all share the same star -- the sun.

The sun is, of course, the primary body in our solar system about which all the planets revolve. It is said that light takes some eight minutes to make the 93 million mile journey to Earth.

Why is the sun so important to us? All of Earth's energy comes from the sun. The 'green stuff' in plants called chlorophyll captures this energy and uses it to convert carbon dioxide and water into food and oxygen. One way or another we need these green plants. Either we eat the plants directly or we eat the animals that eat the plants. The waste product of green plants in sunlight is oxygen which is what you are breathing right now! At night green plants reverse this process using oxygen and producing carbon dioxide the same as we do. We are so tied to green plants that without them we would cease to exist. You can even thank green plants for the shoes on your feet (leather comes from cows or pigs, and these animals eat grass). Try to name three foods that you eat that somehow haven't been made from green plants either directly or indirectly.

Even plants which are not green such as the fungi and other saprophytes need the decaying materials of green plants (or those which have

passed through the body of an animal) to survive. Next time you see fallen leaves or rotting logs, try to think of them as accumulated minerals and stored solar energy. The decay process is no more than a recycling of stored goods or rather making them available so that new things can grow from the old.

Some people are starting to worry about sunlight. How much is air pollution affecting the amount of sunlight reaching the earth? Will air pollution have a cooling effect on the earth, leading us into another ice age? Are we using up more oxygen than the green plants of the world are producing? We know for certain that paved parking lots of super deluxe shopping centres produce no food or oxygen. No magic wand (i.e. chemist's stir rod) or political rhetoric can change the fundamental law of man's absolute dependence on green plants which are in turn dependent on solar energy. Actually, all living creatures are dependent on one another -- none can stand alone.

Perhaps you'll agree by now that 'Old Sol' is your lucky star. With summer gone maybe it's a good time to seriously consider your personal relationship to the sun and its energy.

FROM THE EDITORS' CORNER

The Editors have been thrilled this month by your response to our plea for material which we wrote in the September issue. For the last few days we've been getting two or three articles a day in the mail, which is just the way we like it. We've been delighted of course to receive many stories from veteran contributors to the Naturalist, but what has pleased us even more is the number of new contributors that have come forward. We hope everyone will keep it up all winter.

We would like to explain that articles which are not published the first month after they're received have not been rejected. It's just that

Continued on Page 12

BIRDS REPORTED

Bullock's Oriole	(1)	July 17	Blenkinsop Rd. M. and L. Slocombe
Parasitic Jaeger	(1)	Aug. 13	Clover Point Mr and Mrs Vic Goodwill
Baird's Sandpiper	(2)	Aug. 19	Resthaven A.R. Davidson
Green Heron	(1)	Aug. 22	Martindale Road Dr. D. Sparling
Stilt Sandpiper	(1)	Aug. 24	Saanichton Bay Bob Hay
Whimbrel	(2)	Aug. 29	Oak Bay Mr and Mrs Vic Goodwill
Franklin's Gull	(1)	Sept. 2	Clover Point
Lincoln Sparrow	(1)	Sept. 6	Esquimalt Lagoon
Red Crossbill	(1)	Sept. 9	Otter Point A.R. Davidson
Marbled Godwit	(1)	Sept. 9	Island View Beach
Golden Plover	(4)	Sept. 9	Island View Beach Bob Hay
Lapland Longspur	(12)	Sept 11	Cattle Point Miss L. Slocombe
Golden-crowned Sparrow	(1)	Sept 14	St. Patrick St. Grace Bell

ADDENDA

From Sept. 22 through 29, Victoria had a rare visitor -- a Snowy Egret. It sheltered at Esquimalt Lagoon until disturbed by water-skiers. Pictures were obtained of the bird and it is truly one for the record.

Mr. Davidson reports a large gathering of shore birds at Sidney Spit Island in late August. He also mentions the fact that there has been a rather poor warbler migration to date. However, the crow population seems to have doubled!

--M. and L. Slocombe, 3134 Henderson Road,
592-9047.

PROGRAM FOR OCTOBER

- Executive Meeting:** 8 p.m. Board Room 104M
Tuesday, Oct. 3 Provincial Museum
- General Meeting:** 8 p.m. Newcombe Auditorium
Tuesday, Oct. 10 (south entrance). The national Film Board's production "Death of a Legend" will be shown.
- Bird Field Trip:** Meet at Mayfair Lanes at
Saturday, October 21 9:30 a.m. for trip to Esquimalt Lagoon. Leader: Ron Satterfield.
- Botany Field Trip:** Fungi Foray to John Dean
Sat., Oct. 21 Park.
- Junior Group:** Meet every Saturday at 1:30
 p.m. at Mayfair Parking Lot,
 north side.

FROM THE EDITORS' CORNER (Continued)

we don't always have room each month for everything we receive. Keep looking, and they'll probably turn up the next month -- or the month after that.

We'd also like to make it completely clear that anything that appears in this column or under the heading Editorial Comment is strictly the opinion of the writer. Such articles most definitely do not represent the official executive position on any issue. They're strictly one person's opinion.

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Honorary Life Members

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

Officers 1972 - 73

President

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

Vice-President

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

Immediate Past President

Mrs. F.A. Sherman, 2168 Guernsey St. ----- 598-3237
Recording Secretary: Miss Maureen Collins, 2719 Richmond Rd.-- 598-1875
Corresponding Secretary: Mrs. G.N. Hooper, 2411 Alpine Cres. --- 477-1152
Treasurer: Alex Matheson, 11075 Dunne Road, Sidney ----- 656-1301

Programme Chairman: Dr. Rosemary Picozzi, 11-1595 Rockland -- 384-4958
Audubon Wildlife Films: Miss Enid Lemon, 1226 Roslyn Road --- 598-3517
A.H. Couser, #403-435 Michigan St. ---- 384-0832

Group Leaders

Botany: Stephen Mitchell, 3930 Braefoot Road ----- 477-9248
Entomology: Prof. H.H. Huxley, 510-1701 Cedar Hill X Rd. ----- 477-8905
Ornithology: Ruth Stirling, 3500 Salisbury Way ----- 385-4223
Marine Biology: Freeman F. King, 541 McKenzie Ave. ----- 479-2966
David Stirling, 3500 Salisbury Way ----- 385-4223
Junior Naturalists: Freeman F. King, 541 McKenzie Ave. ----- 479-2966
Gail Mitchell, 3930 Braefoot Rd. ----- 477-9248

Ornithology Records: Dr. Jeremy Tatum, (see address above)
University Liaison: Dr. Rosemary Picozzi (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
Publicity: Harold Hosford, 450 Tipton St. ----- 478-5794

"The Victoria Naturalist"

Editor: Barbara McLintock, 3-1006 Tolmie Ave. ----- 383-3097
Assistant Editor: Harold Hosford, (see address above)

Annual Dues, including subscription: Single \$3; Family \$6; 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.