



# The VICTORIA NATURALIST

PUBLISHED BY THE  
VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY  
VICTORIA, B.C.  
ISSN 0049-612X

FEBRUARY 1977  
VOL. 33, NO. 6

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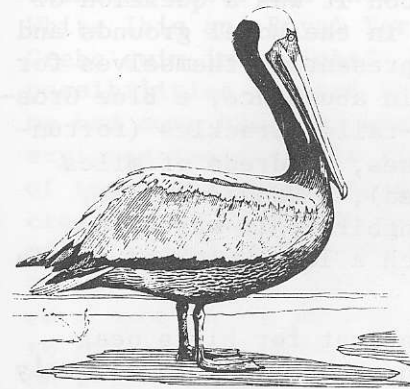
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FEBRUARY, 1977

THE BIRDS OF MAZATLAN:
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

by John & Linda Fitch

(This article was originally written for last winter but due to your editor's infallible filing system, it went astray. But the Fitch's had a copy so here it is - late; but better late than never. Ed.)



It's a stirring sight to see 20 or so Brown Pelicans overhead, alternately flapping and gliding in unison, as if by some secret accord, particularly when you know that there are literally hundreds of other pelicans in the area. For once, concerns about ecological damage, breeding failure and endangered species seem remote.

We enjoyed this experience several times during a week in Mazatlan in December of 1975. Mazatlan, which has become a popular holiday resort in recent years, is a port on the Pacific coast of Mexico, roughly opposite the southern tip of Baja California. We were there primarily to enjoy some sunshine after that long rainy fall. But of course our binoculars had accompanied us. So had two first-rate birding guides: Peterson and Chalif's new Field Guide to Mexican Birds and Peter Alden's Finding the Birds in Western Mexico. The latter contains maps of frequented birding areas (including Mazatlan itself), and checklists of birds to be seen in each area.

COVER:

Satin Flower (Sisyrinchium grandiflorum)

On our first morning, after the long flight down, we wanted to do nothing but relax on the beach. But it was impossible to ignore the huge, slender-winged, swallow-tailed birds that circled high overhead. We needed no binoculars to identify Magnificent Frigatebirds. Back in Victoria we had wondered how difficult it would be to add this bird to our lifelist. In fact it proved difficult not to find them, except early in the morning. Again that afternoon it was a question of the birds coming to us. We sat in the hotel grounds and watched long-dreamt-of species presenting themselves for inspection: Groove-billed Anis in abundance, a Blue Grosbeak, Lesser Goldfinches, Great-tailed Grackles (fortunately, for identification purposes, hundreds of miles from the range of the Boat-tailed), a Hooded Oriole, Gila Woodpecker and Tropical Kingbird. It was a long time since our list had made such a leap, with so little effort on our part!

Much the most productive habitat for birds near Mazatlan is the series of lagoons which runs immediately behind the coastal road to the north of town. Here we could enjoy all manner of exotic delights including Snowy Egrets, Jacanas, Mangrove Swallows and flocks of Black-necked Stilts which flashed in a brilliant black-and-white pattern as they flew in the sun. Sadly most of these lagoons are destined to be filled-in within the next few years; but there is one larger lake, about seven miles north of town, which seems likely to be protected by its size for a little longer. Here our daughter Alison (then aged 13 months) pointed in amazement to a Pelican as it flapped across the road just a few yards above our heads. "A wonderful bird is the Pelican ...". Around the lagoons there is much scrubby, weedy habitat, of the sort that makes birder's hearts beat a little faster. Here the eye was frequently drawn to Vermilion Flycatchers, dazzling in their flight from one perch to another. They seemed quite untroubled by the American Kestrels which we occasionally saw perched on the wires overhead.

One of the highlights for birders in Mazatlan is the boat-trip to the Booby Rocks about a mile offshore. These precipitous rocks are a dramatic sight, stained white by generations of Booby families. Both the Brown and Blue-footed species nest on the ledges of these crags.

Standing four-square on their huge flat feet, they give no more than a dismissive glance to the boat passing 30 feet below them, no doubt applying their own uncomplimentary name to these intrusive, staring humans.

Soon our week was over. We were delighted to have got to know many new species, and to have renewed acquaintance with old friends such as the Mockingbird and Ruddy Duck. On the other hand, we couldn't help thinking about the ones that got away. Where were you, White Ibis and Royal Tern? And couldn't even one Least Grebe swim into sight? We were also conscious of the possibilities offered by Mazatlan as a centre, if only we had more time and energy. The Jungle Cruise which explores inaccessible rivers and lagoons to the south of town; the chance to see pelagic species on the ferry crossing to La Paz on Baja; the trip to San Blas, 180 miles south, where over 200 species are regularly found on the Christmas count; and the three-hour drive inland to a spot in the mountains where the Tufted Jay is said to be common and the Golden-browed Warbler abundant. Oh well - it's not nearly such fun if you've seen everything ...

### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - 1976 STYLE

*by Tim Murphey*

If for no other reason, the Christmas Bird Count held on Saturday, December 18, will be remembered for its weather -- just about the most beautiful day ever experienced on a Victoria Count. But it will also be remembered for a Lapland Longspur, a first for Victoria on a Christmas Count, and for the Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Pintail, European Wigeon, Rock Dove, Bush Tit, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Townsend's Warbler and Lincoln's Sparrows -- all of which were recorded in higher numbers than ever before.

In all, 129 species were seen on the Count Day with another 5 species -- Wood Duck, Golden Eagle, Red Phalarope, Cowbird and White-throated Sparrow -- seen during the Count period. These were almost outnumbered by the counters themselves. A list of these -- plus the species seen, by area, follows.







AMERICAN GOLDFINCH	0	0	0	0	0
RED CROSSBILL	31	39	8	32	6
RUFIOUS-SIDED TOWHEE	6	12	3	9	7
SAVANNAH SPARROW	0	0	0	1	0
LINCOLN'S SPARROW	1	0	0	0	1
DARK-EYED JUNCO	35	87	37	151	42
WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW	3	0	0	0	0
GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW	13	33	0	0	13
FOX SPARROW	13	4	0	0	0
SONG SPARROW	17	11	14	17	1
LAPLAND LONGSPUR	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	1776	2827	6053	1192	5351
TOTAL SPECIES	55	59	65	48	79

### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - PARTICIPANTS

Elizabeth Armstrong, Anne Adamson, Michael Bently, Peter Bricknell, Jim Bryden, Mr. & Mrs. Tom Briggs, Eileen Campbell, Wayne Campbell, Mr. & Mrs. A.R. Davidson, Harry Davidson, Eileen Davidson, Lucas Dewatt, Rita Jackson, Nancy Dohan, C.E. Downy, Rob Duncan, Norman Fatt, Jennifer Fisher, Ralph Fryer, Mr. & Mrs. V. Goodwill, Bertha Gow, Janet Graham, Vera Guernsey, Lea Halsal, Merle Harvy, Mart Harkness, Gwen Hooper, Harold Hosford, G.F. Houston, Ivy Jarvie, Joyce Jensen, Anne Knowles, Enid Lemon, Ches Lyons, R. Mackenzie-Grieve, Brian McGavin, Jean McInnes, Michael McNali, Dorothy Melam, Lavender Moncton, R.C. Muirhead, M. Muirhead, Tim Murphey, Elizabeth North, Joan Crabbe, Alex Pedden, Fran Reed, Stuart Reid, Mary Richmond, Leila Roberts, Nancy Rovatt, Ron Satterfield, Jean Seaborn, Ken Seaborn, W. Sendal, L. Slocombe, Mr. & Mrs. D.B. Sparling, David Stirling, Ruth Stirling, Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Suttill, Jeremy Tatum, Keith Taylor, B. Trotter, C. Trotter, Freda Truman, Hank Van den Pol, Margret and Roy Weinwright, Mary Winston, and Rosa Wood.

0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
16	41	0	11	37	70	12	252	132
0	1	0	4	0	0	0	6	5
50	149	43	199	35	47	0	875	37
0	31	0	0	0	3	0	116	57
2	12	29	3	0	11	0	57	134
6	22	4	6	2	0	0	22	22
22	0	10	20	3	16	3	134	22
0	0	0	0	0	0	22	22	22
5629	5966	11295	4321	1608	7260	4879	58157	129
55	81	60	72	42	80	56	129	

### BEACH SEINING AT MILL BAY

by Alex Pedden

An apology is due to members of the Victoria Natural History Society for scheduling the Marine Biology field trip of December 18 on the same night as the annual Christmas Bird Count. However, we did choose the lowest tide for a Saturday night in December. A party of four including two V.N.H.S. members were rewarded with a clear warm evening and an immensely successful catch of small fishes. Three hauls of the seine yielded so many small shiner perch (*Cymatogaster aggregata*) that it was difficult to find the other fish species in the nets. We had to hurry in the examination of our large catch if we were to return the fish alive to the water. A quick estimate indicated about 900 shiner perch in each haul for a total of over 2,500. We also concluded that the number of fish inhabiting the shores of Mill Bay was almost uncountable.



Other species included several hundred tube snouts, some male pipefish with pouches to nurse their young, 5 species of sculpins including the attractively coloured silver-spot sculpin, two species of sea poachers (characterized by armor plating), two snailfish, a few sticklebacks and a spiny lumpsucker. Of the commercial species caught, there were juvenile hake, herring, and several starry flounders. Although I started the day at 7:45 a.m. with six enthusiastic birders participating in the Christmas count at Island View Beach, and then finished the long tiring day with the evening expedition to seine fish, this opportunity to study our native fauna on such a gorgeous winter day is certainly a highlight of the season.

### OUR FIRST ANNUAL DINNER

Holyrood House, 2315 Blanshard Street, is the place to be on the night of Tuesday, February 8. For there and then will be held the first of what we hope will be many annual dinners of the Victoria Natural History Society. The Society has quite a long history. In its present form it has existed without interruption for 33 years. But there was an earlier association of lovers of birds, bumble-bees, basalts, and buttercups in Victoria, which was formed as long ago as 1890. However, it faded out in the early thirties, perhaps because it was a stronghold of male chauvinism and admitted no women.

So far as is known, these lovers of birds, bumble bees, never held an annual dinner -- certainly not since 1944. So this is an historic occasion and, what's more important, a grand opportunity to get to know your fellow-members. The bar will be open at 6:00 p.m. and dinner-time is 6:30. Drinks are not included in the price of the dinner, but this is only \$6.00 for a three-course meal, in which the main dish will be half a *Gallus gallus domesticus vernus*. So, all you bird-lovers, come and tuck in, and you bumble-bee-lovers, come and hear Dr. Ring tell us all about bumble-bees and the like in the Arctic. If you haven't got your ticket yet, phone Vera Guernsey (598-4968) or Dorothy McCann (592-1992). We must know if you are coming before Saturday 5th February.

And, if transportation is your problem, call Eric Counsell (386-3989). He can't assure finding some for you but he's game to try. He would also like to hear from anyone willing to provide transportation.

### KIDS COUNTRY

#### JUNIORS GO TO CAMP

by Brian Askey

The Juniors went to camp in August. We rented a mini bus and Stephen Mitchell drove us to Miracle Beach. We had a shelter to eat under and tents to sleep in. There were two ladies to cook. In the morning we walked along Black Creek to the beach. We saw Kingfishers, Herons, Arctic Tern, gulls and many smaller birds. In the afternoon we had a scavenger hunt and a treasure hunt trail to follow. We went to the nature house where Gail was working. We had campfire at night where we sang songs and had hot chocolate and cookies. The camp was 3 days, Friday to Sunday.

Thanks to Gail Mitchell, Nancy Turner, Shirley Sheldrake, Jenny Singleton, Mrs. Chapman, for making this a happy camping trip.

### THE MONARCH

by Michele Askey

A monarch is a mysterious thing;  
 Black dots, yellow dots, wing to wing.  
 Some monarchs are free,  
 Sipping apricot nectar;  
 Some poor and helpless  
 Belonging to collectors.  
 A monarch is never lonely  
 'Cause he travels with his friends.  
 Some people say  
 He's got a life that never ends.  
 Flutter, flutter, no fuss, no sputter.  
 Oh my, it's beginning to rain -  
 Good-bye, monarch, see you again.

YELLOW BIRDS*by Rita Sparling*

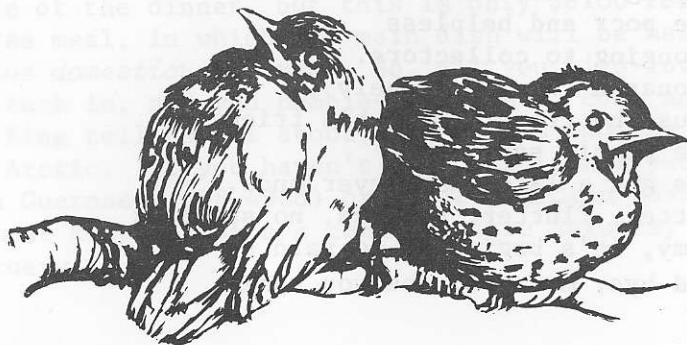
The story is told of a Glasgow teacher who set a class of nine-year-olds to write an essay on how to become a millionaire. Most were rather unimaginative but one lad with a flair for the unusual wrote: "I'd go to the park and catch a sparrow. Then I'd paint it yellow and sell it for a canary. If I went every day I'd soon be a millionaire."

QUAILS

*(from the  
Colonist,  
Feb. 12, 1860)*

H.N. Peers of Colquitz Farm has received through the kindness of E.W. Warbass of San Juan Island, a lot of California Quails which he has turned loose on his farm for the purpose of stocking the island with that excellent game. As the birds have been obtained at a considerable trouble and expense, Mr. Peers would take it as a particular favor of sportsmen and others if they will refrain from shooting them, until they have made a considerable increase -- say two years hence.

*(thanks to  
Elsie Turnbull)*

ADULT PROGRAMME

- TUES. FEB. 8 V.N.H.S. First Annual Dinner, Holyrood House, 2315 Blanshard, 6 p.m. (See page 83 for further details.)
- SAT. FEB. 12 Ornithology - Pelagic Bird Trip. Contact Mike Shepard at 387-3544. Still lots of room.
- SAT. FEB. 26 Ornithology - Island View Beach and Martindale Road. Meet Mayfair Lanes Parking Lot 9 a.m. or Island View Beach 9:30 a.m. Leader: Mike Bentley (479-7024).

JUNIORS AND INTERMEDIATES

- SAT. FEB. 5 Thetis Lake. Driver: Johnson. Meet 1:30 p.m. Mayfair Lanes.

AUDUBON FILMS

Nothing for February but keep either Friday or Saturday night, March 18 or 19, open. Eben McMillan will be taking us to Yosemite on an Ecological Visit. That's at 8 p.m. in the Newcombe Auditorium.