



The VICTORIA NATURALIST

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

APRIL 1977
VOL. 33, NO. 8

It would therefore seem that marmot colonies on Vancouver Island are sparse, and widely separated, perhaps justifying a more intensive search possibly with the use of helicopters. It is important that those engaged in such search be knowledgeable people sensitive to creating minimal disturbance.

The Haley Lake area on Green Mountain appears to have the most vigorous colony. Apparently, although MacMillan Bloedel Ltd. and Crown Zellerbach Ltd. logging companies have left some of the timbered slope out of their cutting plan, they are unwilling at this time to donate or sell the land encompassed in the proposed ecological reserve. Crown Zellerbach has already agreed that the ridge be a company reserve. The future of the lake, over which MacMillan Bloedel have jurisdiction, is not at all assured.

Butler Peak is included in the proposed ecological reserve. Would the logging companies consider a smaller ecological reserve, excluding Butler Peak? Would such a reduced area encompass the whole colony's habitat?

Mr. Douglas Herde, a student of Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan's, spent the summers of 1973 and 1974 studying the Haley Lake colony. Mr. Herde's thesis is not yet available, but it will perhaps answer some of these questions. I understand Mr. Herde saw two marmots on Butler Peak. Is there migration between the Butler Peak and Haley Lake colony? If so, a reduced reserve would perhaps be of little value.

Since 1974, naturalists from Vancouver Island have visited the area several times. On July 19, 1975, they found 13 marmots, eight young and five adults, near Haley Lake. The young, about the size of guinea pigs, were dark chocolate brown with white noses. The animals were frequently heard whistling, particularly when Ravens passed over, but a Red-tailed Hawk elicited the most urgent sounding whistles.

The marmots could be approached to within about 20 feet before diving into their burrows. Only those who were closely approached hid; the more distant ones remained in the open.

On September 19, 1976 the Haley Lake colony was reached via Vaughn Road. A pick-up truck was seen parked near the top of the road and shots were heard coming from the direction of the marmot colony. After a confrontation with the shooters, no evidence was found of marmots actually being shot, but the shooters were obviously eyeing them through the telescopes of their rifles. The marmots themselves did not seem concerned by the nearby gunfire.

Nine marmots were counted on this visit, all in a chocolate brown pelage with their white noses showing conspicuously. Ptarmigan flew over twice and both times drew a whistled response from the marmots. During a break for lunch, three shots were heard from the timber on the west side of the ridge, but no one was seen.

After September 19, the weather continued fine for three weeks, raising fears that if the marmots had not already gone into hibernation, they would be active during the hunting season and therefore subject to illegal shooting from unscrupulous target shooters, or by people ignorant of the marmot's plight, or by people who might consider them varmints and therefore "fair game".

It is imperative, regardless of what kind of protection ultimately afforded the marmots, that the Haley Lake basin, and adjoining ridge, be declared closed to shooting of all kinds. As an alternative, a gate could be placed across Vaughn Road; or volunteers from local game and fish clubs and naturalist societies could patrol the area on weekends when hunters have access to the area and when the most damage to the animals is likely to take place. This should be done at least until the marmots go into hibernation. Such measures are urgent because, according to Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan, there may be as few as two breeding females in the Haley Lake Colony.

Also worthy of consideration are:

- (a) the production of a leaflet with an illustration of a marmot, and a text written by Dr. McTaggart Cowan describing their plight. As photos are expensive to duplicate, perhaps the illustration could be done by Pat Wright or Sharkey Thomas. Such pamphlets to be distributed to the Fish and Game clubs and at logging company gates leading to alpine areas.
- (b) Eliciting the help of outdoor clubs in reporting any signs of marmots they may find when hiking in the mountains.
- (c) Recruiting public support by means of articles in the press and perhaps a television interview with Dr. McTaggart Cowan.
- (d) A summit conference of scientists and government officials to decide on courses of action.
- (e) The consideration of repopulating former marmot habitats if a strong population can be fostered in a particular area from which to take breeding stock.

If we are aware of the plight of the whooping crane and other exotic endangered species, surely our own unique marmot should merit our utmost concern.

OPPORTUNISTIC FEEDING BY A RED-TAILED HAWK

by R. Wayne Campbell

On May 12, 1976, while travelling by car to Vancouver on Highway 17, I observed a territorial clash between two male Robins (*Turdus migratorius*), about 50 meters in front of my vehicle. The birds flew from the edge of a shrub-bordered field into the oncoming traffic. One Robin escaped the fast-moving traffic while the other was hit and fell at the side of the highway. As the traffic line slowed for a

signal light, I noticed an adult Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) flying toward me along the border of a short grass field. The hawk noticed the lifeless Robin, swooped down and snatched the carcass from the pavement, and flew off.

While several writers, including Fitch *et al.* (1946, Condor 48:205-237), Craighead (1956, Hawks, Owls and Wildlife, Stackpole Co., Harrisburg, Pa.), Austin (1964, The World of the Red-tailed Hawk, J.B. Lippincott Co., New York) and Beebe (1974, B.C. Prov. Mus. Occ. Paper Series No. 17) discuss opportunism in the hunting methods employed by Red-tailed Hawks, I cannot find any reference to this species utilizing road-killed animals as food.

BIRD REPORTS

by Michael G. Shepard

April is here and soon the main spring migration will be underway. Swallows, hummingbirds and a few warblers arrived before mid-March, and we can expect the first Solitary Vireos by the time you read this. Good birding spots in April will be Elk-Beaver Lakes for song birds and Esquimalt and Witty's Lagoons for shorebirds.

As usual, February was a dull month, the main excitement being the occurrence of a wind-blown Leach's Storm-Petrel on the Colwood Golf Course. During the last two weeks of February, John Royle estimated 100 Western Bluebirds to be present, in the Metchosin area, certainly an incredible number of birds!

Please send any interesting March bird sightings to me at the Birds and Mammals Division, B.C. Prov. Museum, Victoria, B.C., V8V 1X4, by April 8th.

BIRDING IN THE RAIN*by All Wet*

Into each life a little rain must fall- but so much?

That refrain must have been on the lips of a baker's dozen birders who, despite pleas from their something-less-than-intrepid leader to call the whole thing off, braved the elements - a veritable deluge - to score 31 on the birding scale. Not bad for an hour - in the rain - on Cobourge Spit - on Sunday, March 6.

It was an hour highlighted with animated nuptial performances from a group of Common Goldeneyes, dozens of Buffleheads, and one drake Red-breasted Merganser who, with no potential mates in sight and obviously caught up in the enthusiasm of his goldeneye brethren, gave forth with a brief display - to nobody in particular.

At the other end of the emotion scale was a Common Murre brought to us by a concerned youngster. The bird was in obvious distress and when last seen was headed for the local S.P.C.A. in the gentle care of Therese Todd.

Later, under the indifferent gaze of seven Great Blue Herons draped soggily over the boughs of some Douglas firs on the grounds of Royal Roads, we tried - without success - to sort out the various scaups to be found on the Lagoon. While two species of scaup have been officially recognized, the gathered birders that day were prepared to argue for at least a couple more.

It would be difficult to talk about that morning and not mention the Mute Swans, nine of them, that greeted us enthusiastically on our arrival, but who swam off in a huff when no food was immediately forthcoming.

The Lagoon produced its usual complement of wintering ducks with Canvasbacks, Wigeons (American), White-winged Scoters prominent as well as the aforementioned courtiers. On the seaward side, about 200 Western Grebes lay at anchor, while Common Loons, Red-necked Grebes, Harlequins and Oldsquaws were scattered over the rain-spattered water. And of course, there were gulls - mostly Mews and Glaucous-winged but one or two slightly smaller than the Glaucous-wings and with darker wing tips might have been Herring Gulls.

Another highlight had to be the two Northern Sealions, swimming about 200 yards offshore and raising their heads every now and then to give a water-smudged look at their triangular profiles.

To those with a systematic bent, a list of the species identified follows:

Red-throated Loon, Common Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Horned Grebe, Western Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Pelagic Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Mute Swan, American Wigeon, Mallard, Canvasback, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Harlequin, Oldsquaw, White-winged Scoter, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Red-tailed Hawk, American Coot, Black Oystercatcher, Black-bellied Plover, Greater Yellow-legs, Black Turnstone, Mew Gull, Glaucous-winged Gull, Common Murre, Belted Kingfisher and Northwestern Crow; 31 species.

DON'T GET STUCK!

Once upon a time, there was a member of the Victoria Natural History Society who was out hiking when a sudden severe storm overtook him (her). Crawling into a hollow log for protection from the elements, she (he) waited until the storm abated. When it was over he (she) tried to move and found she (he) was stuck solidly and could not move either way out of the log.

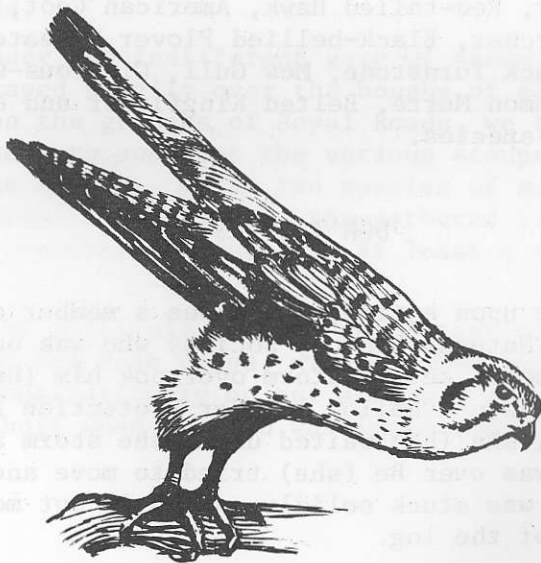
Believing he (she) was doomed, she (he) began to think about all the things he (she) had overlooked in her (his) life. It was then he (she) remembered that her (his) Natural History Society dues had not been paid. This thought made him (her) feel so small that she (he) was able to crawl out of the log with ease.

The moral of this story seems to be that if you keep your Society dues up to date, you won't get stuck. And IT'S DUES TIME AGAIN so DON'T GET STUCK!

(Thanks are due to Ralph and Jean Breckenridge for this little twist to our annual dues reminders.)

Editor's Note:

This story originally appeared in a paper of a chapter of the Masonic Order. In its original form emphasis, as it should have been, was placed on the male of the species. Our version - to avoid any repercussions from the distaff side of the Society - gives equal billing to the ladies.



K I D S C O U N T R Y

THE WEST COAST TRAIL

by Brenda Curran

(Your editor's calculations went a little awry last month with the announcement that the first of two parts of Brenda's story would appear then. Parts being what they are, last month's first of two now becomes this month's first of three. Any any rate, Brenda's story continues this month and will be concluded next month.)

Early Sunday morning, we met at the school and loaded the rented vans each with 14 packs and 14 very squished people. It was a long drive to the Nitinat River where we paddled to Knobb Point on the Nitinat Lake. There we split into our groups and the back-packers prepared for another hour's drive.

This was it. We were now at the beginning of the West Coast Trail which runs along the "graveyard of the Pacific" for 50 challenging miles through Pacific Rim National Park on Vancouver Island. One of our two supervisors registered us at the Park registration board.

The first half-mile we trekked along the sandy beach, taking advantage of the warm day and beautiful scenery. At this point, we continued along the path. This first day we hiked only four miles until we came upon a beach-access route leading half a mile to a perfect, sandy camping area. After setting up camp, we spent our time playing frisbee with someone's plastic plate and baseball with a piece of driftwood as a bat and a piece of kelp as the ball.

By the campfire that night, we learned a lot about the Trail and its history which would make our next days of hiking more interesting.

Monday morning, we got up at seven but didn't break camp until 9:30. From our camp, we hiked the access route we had taken the day before and rejoined with the Trail. Three miles of hills later, we reached the Pachina Point lighthouse where we took a rest. After this point, there were more hills with lots of unwelcomed mud mixed in. By the time we arrived at the Michigan River, we decided on walking the beach. Although the beach was more level than the actual Trail, it was hard finding rocks to walk on rather than the thick sand. The Darling River was unanimously a lunch break.

The rest of the day was long and exhausting. Up and down hills, through the thick mud, and climbing ladders to bridges over crevices or, down on the beach, sliding on the wet kelp and seaweed. Yet now as I think about it, even that was more exciting and fun than a day in the city where there is the continuous roar of cars and the polluted air everywhere.

When we finally reached our day's destination, we were beat, but the scenery was worth the effort.

We took our time the next morning before we pulled our packs across the river on the pulley car. It took us forty minutes to get all the packs and people to the other side. This gave us time to explore the lineman's cabin on the Trail. This and other such shacks were erected along this life-saving trail for sailors who survived shipwrecks. In these cabins, when first built, were telegraph wires and instructions for use in several different languages.

Leisurely, we hiked to where a bridge crosses the Tsusiat River. Shortly after this, we came upon a set of ladders going from the trail down to the beach. They went down at a 90 degree angle, 100 feet to the sea shore. It took us a few minutes, but we made it down packs and all. It was not yet noon but we had our lunch.

The sky was cloudy but it was warm enough to wear shorts and to go swimming and wash our hair under part of the falls. Later in the afternoon, some of us walked along the shore to the "hole in the rock". It was an interesting rock eroded by the waves.

When we returned, the other group had not as yet come. At 6:30, a few of us climbed to the bridge along the trail hoping to meet the other group which was carrying supper.

We stayed on the bridge an hour before we headed back to the beach.

To pass time, we rebuilt an outhouse which had fallen from a west coast storm. It took all our strength as well as the help of a large log as a lever. Next on our list of "keep busies" was popping popcorn. While doing this, around 7:30 we heard a bellowing, "hello down there". It was a teacher from the canoeing party. They had just finished the hardest day of their trip, one which we would have to face tomorrow.

Later, the rest of the group arrived and we formed a pack relief where we climbed the ladders and took the others' packs and brought them down to the beach.

They put their tents up, ate supper, and then we all hit the sack.

Wednesday, we got up early and were at the top of the ladders at 7:00. We forced our way through the thick woods along a poor trail, helping each other over and under the large logs fallen on the path. About a mile along, a running shoe hanging on a branch directed us to the river. With packs on backs, we carefully balanced ourselves along a log and from it onto another at water level. By means of a long chain line, we waded in the icy water and threw the backpacks into the six canoes left by the other groups. With our packs tied in, we set off doing more pushing and pulling than paddling. Over and under logs we finally made it to the shore of Little Tsusiat Lake.

This lake, true to its name Little, took only a few minutes to paddle. Now we faced the log jam. This was a conglomeration of logs which were large enough to step on but the majority were not stable. Here we all helped carry the canoes one at a time to the water, with our perfected method of "log hopping".

By now, we were all wet and cold, not too anxious to get to the end of Big Tsusiat Lake where the Portage was situated. However, four miles later we were there.

By now, Nancy was very sick because she had the beginnings of a cold even before our trip began. She was too weak to carry her own pack on the first of the portage route, so it remained with the canoes. The rest of us carried our packs the 1-1/2 miles to Hobiton Lake, where we had our lunch and left Nancy to look after the fire and keep herself warm.

After returning to the canoes at Big Tsusiat, it was decided that I would go back with Nancy's backpack. The others began their return with canoes. It the time it took me to get to Hobiton Lake, I had lots of time to think of how the others behind me were doing, walking over the slippery logs, through the thick mud, in the deep swamp and up and down the hills without tripping over the many roots. It was raining harder than before, which made the portage worse than you would believe.

I reached the Hobiton Lake and Nancy and I spent the time until the others got there, collecting firewood. Doug was the first to come with the canoe, and Al and Joe arrived shortly after. It was still raining hard when the two Dougs went back to Big Tsusiat for a third time to bring back Nancy's and my canoe. I also went back to get a few lifejackets and paddles.

Now we paddled across the lake to Cedar Log campsite where our two supervisors attempted to build a fire. Everyone felt rotten and it took a while to get all the tents set up.

Talking about unpredictable weather! Thursday morning was sunny and it only rained a bit. Pancake cooking over the fire took three hours since only 2 cakes could be cooked at a time, and there were 14 hungry appetites to satisfy. Tents came down and we loaded the canoes. Today would be extremely simple. The bow paddler lay in the bottom of the canoe holding a large plastic garbage bag as a sail. The other paddler steered to keep the canoe on course.

PROGRAMME

TUES. APRIL 12

GENERAL MEETING - Newcombe Auditorium
8:00 P.M. SPEAKER: Dr. T. C. Brayshaw. TOPIC: Northern Plant Hunts (illustrated).

SAT. APRIL 16

Ornithology - Witty's Lagoon
LEADER: Mary Winstone (598-1282)
Meet 9:00 a.m. Mayfair Lanes Parking Lot (Oak and Roderick corner) or at 9:30 a.m. at the new Park parking lot on Metchosin Road, opposite the club house of the Metchosin Golf Course.
Bring lunch.

SAT. APRIL 23

BOTANY - Native plant habitats of the Saanich Peninsula.
LEADER: Dr. R. C. McMinn
Meet Mayfair Lanes - 9:00 a.m.
Tour will continue to about 1:00 p.m.

SUN. MAY 1

ORNITHOLOGY - Spectacle Lake for migrants.
LEADER: Tim Murphey (385-5357).
Bring lunch. Meet Mayfair Lanes parking lot 7:30 a.m. or at Spectacle Lake at 8:00 a.m.

JUNIORS AND INTERMEDIATES

SAT. APRIL 9

MOUNT FINLAYSON. Meet Mayfair Lanes 11:00 a.m. Bring lunch.
DRIVER: Lauzon.

SAT. APRIL 23

ISLAND VIEW BEACH. Meet Mayfair Lanes 1:30 p.m.
DRIVER: Johnson.