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VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1747, Victoria, B.C. V8W 2Y1

All correspondence, including membership applications and renewals,
should be sent to this address.

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Junior Membership is restricted to those not under 8 years and not over 18 years.

The financial year is May 1 to April 30. New members joining after Jan. 1 — half-dues.

Rare Bird Alert 383-0211

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BLUE GROUSE ON LITTLE SAANICH

by A.R. Davidson

On the last day of May, the Tuesday Group elected to look for birds on Little Saanich, so we drove to the top and parked the cars around the building which houses the big telescope, and up there found we were enclosed by mist, only the nearest trees plainly visible, so we walked through the wet underbrush to see what birds could be found.

While we knew there were blue grouse on this Observatory Hill, previous visits had not produced any. This time we were lucky. Right in front of us was a male bird strutting like a turkey-cock, his black tail spread out fan-wise, his wings lowered until they scraped the ground and his throat inflated showing the bare orange-coloured skin on both sides of his neck. Then one of the party spotted the hen about fifteen feet away sitting on the grass, a large dark brown bird, completely motionless. During the twenty minutes or so we stood watching these birds, the hen bird never blinked an eye, never moved and was there when we left. It appeared to be even larger than the male bird, the wings were held slightly away from the body so we figured it was sheltering some newly hatched chicks, which was likely.

COVER

BLUE GROUSE WITH SAC INFLATED

by Bertha McHaffie-Gow

All this time her mate was strutting to and fro looking very dignified and solemn, and giving our photographer an excellent opportunity of taking close-ups of both birds. Finally the male flew up into a nearby fir, walking up and down the horizontal branch obviously resenting our presence, so we all moved quietly away, leaving them in peace.

Other birds were there. We all had an excellent view of a beautiful male western tanager, and in the vicinity also were crossbills, siskins, black swift, Audubon and orange-crowned warblers, towhees, juncos with their young, band-tailed pigeons and many goldfinch.

BOTANY TOUR OF SAANICH PENINSULA

By Dr. R.C. McMinn

The field trip on Saturday, April 23 was led by Dr. Bob McMinn, who took us to various examples of native plant communities near Victoria. He explained how generally dry summers, but with a marked increase in rainfall from southeast to west, had a great influence on the type of plants that could thrive in different locations. We started with a swordfern community in Mount Douglas Park. Here sufficient moisture seeps down the slopes of Mount Douglas for moisture-demanding plants to thrive and trees to grow large. The next stop at Royal Oak was in oak parkland, one of the driest community types in the Regional District. We then progressed through moister communities as we went westward and climbed in elevation above sea level. Most of the party took the hike up the trail in Mount Work Regional Park. A fine viewpoint gave us a view of the relatively moist and thickly forested Highlands. Hybrids between kinnikinnick and manzanita were present. The distribution of communities is mapped and explained in a booklet available from the Pacific Forest Research Centre, 506 West Burnside Road, Victoria, B.C.

A FINE WEEKEND IN MAY

by Harold Hosford

According to plan, the activities for the Victoria Natural History Society outing to Miracle Beach in May were supposed to start Saturday morning; Friday night was to be reserved for briefing and planning. But when did anything ever go according to plan?

What did happen was that after about 30 of us had our briefing, we decided to have a go at owl-calling. After all, it was evening -- the sun had just gone down, there was no wind, and hadn't owl-calling been a highlight of last year's outing?

No sooner said than done. Within half-an-hour, we had made contact with one owl and were enjoying its monotonous cadences. We later identified the bird as a Saw-whet Owl.

The weekend went on from there.

Saturday morning was devoted to a ramble through the woods of the Park, along Black Creek, and the beaches. In the woods, of course, our ears came into prominent use for finding birds. Among the warblers heard were MacGillivray's and Orange-crowned. Both kinglets were also heard as were Brown Creepers, Winter Wrens, Robins, Varied Thrushes and Chestnut-backed Chickadees. These last were busily carrying food to a family hidden in a tiny cavity near the top of a tall rampike.

Along Black Creek, Red-breasted Mergansers, Mallards, Spotted Sandpipers and Bonaparte's Gulls drew our attention, while out on the beach several Bald Eagles, Brant, Black Scoters and Common Goldeneyes were featured.

Saturday evening was again devoted to owl-calling and again a Saw-whet Owl cooperated by replying to our efforts. Identification was confirmed when we managed to call the owl right overhead and got a dim flashlight beam onto it. But before the owl took over, we enjoyed the drumming of a Ruffed Grouse, the discovery of a red-faced phase of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and several rather amiable Black-tailed Deer.

Sunday morning was devoted to a visit to Salmon Point, two or three miles north of Miracle Beach, where on a small fresh-water lake near the sea -- a lake that reminded me of a prairie horseshoe lake -- we got the highlights of the weekend -- Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal. In the tidal pools nearby Semi-palmated Plovers were found, as well as Dowitchers, Dunlin and Western and Least Sandpipers. The debate that raged over the colour of the legs of these last, points out the danger of using this clue as a means of identifying this difficult little "peep".

In all, something close to 70 species were recorded. Our only disappointment was that somewhat threatening weather in Victoria may have made some people decide to stay home, making for a small turn-out for what was otherwise a fine weekend.

ENTOMOLOGY

by Luke de Wit

About 15 members of the VNHS participated in a May insect study session under the guidance of Dr. Ring of the University of Victoria. The group was fortunate in having a warm morning, perfectly suited for looking under leaves and stones, parting blades of grass, and shaking the branches of trees in search of six-legged specimens. To a considerable proportion of the group, a sunny Saturday outdoors means having the binoculars ready at hand, but Dr. Ring exhorted the bird-lovers for this one day to "forget about birds and think insect!"

The session began with a look at the University entomological collection which represents most of the common insects of the Victoria area. Dr. Ring stressed the fact that much enjoyment can be got either by observing insects as they go about their daily business, or by "kidnapping" them for a few minutes of close inspection in a pill bottle. Especially in the case of colourful butterflies, naturalists who observe but don't harm endear themselves both to entomologists and to the insects. Before going outside, a number of currently topical insects were discussed, including the Bruce Span Worm (or Green Looper), Spruce Bud Worm, and African "Killer Bee".

Outside, the members found insects in such variety and number that by noon the group still had not gone farther than the little pool adjacent to the Biology Building, where a large carp and a female mallard attracted attention by swimming lazily about, oblivious to us. Dr. Ring was quick to identify each insect brought to his attention, and usually added some intriguing highlights peculiar to its lifestyle as well. The common Tent Caterpillars are uncamouflaged and highly visible during daytime, because few birds can palate the hairy larvae. The Backswimmer is an energetic predator and can be so bold as to give a fierce bite should you crowd his corner of the pond by putting your hand in the water. Leafhoppers sometimes transmit plant viruses as they move from plant to plant sucking the juices. Spittlebugs dessicate very rapidly and are unable to survive without their frothy mantle of "spit". Soldier beetles wear bright military colors and produce an irritant substance (Spanish fly is one of these) as a defense. Many Aphids are parthenogenic, which means that the female produces young without the presence of a male; their great success in temperate climates raises a number of interesting questions in the field of genetics. There are quite a variety of gulls to be found at this time of year; most are produced by two major species -- one a wasp, and the other a small fly. When Bees sting, they also leave behind a pheromone substance, which attracts other bees and increases the likelihood of being bitten again soon afterwards. Honey Bees have a separate honey stomach, with a sphincter muscle that causes the nectar to bypass the regular digestive system.

A most enjoyable morning. Perhaps by the date of the next entomological field trip, wheels will have been set in motion to create a "butterfly garden". This, a project dear to Dr. Ring's heart, consists of a garden whose plants & flowers have been chosen to appeal to the prettiest and most colorful butterflies. Such a garden might even attract a variety of birds -- or is this defeating the purpose of a butterfly garden?

EDITORIAL COMMENT*By Merle Harvey*

As you will see from the inside cover, Harold Hosford has given up the editorship of the magazine, and I have taken over from him. I hope to keep the fine quality of the Naturalist, and look to members to keep it supplied with interesting articles.

We welcome Eric Counsel as our new President, and Roy Wainwright as the new Vice-President. May they enjoy their term of office. Ex-President Doug Turnbull remains on the Board of Directors, and James Black and Ben Reece are two new Directors.

This summer has given us a number of extra outings, so only brief summaries have been possible about each. This does not mean that they have been any less enjoyable, and indeed, we have had some very interesting days, enhanced by the beautiful weather.

The highlight was surely our day at Hurricane Ridge, when 91 members and friends found, as Dorothy puts it, that it was very well worth the effort to rise at 4:00 a.m.!

PLEASE NOTE that the Rare Bird Alert phone number has been changed to 383-0211, so Peggy Goodwill won't have to answer her phone so often.

And PLEASE pay your subscription dues if you have not already done so, and not miss the following issues.

TRIP TO BOTANICAL BEACH*by Alex Peden*

Being enticed by the season of lowest tides and warm weather, about a dozen members of the Victoria Natural History Society made their way to Port Renfrew on the weekend of June 4th and 5th.

A miserable soaking rain characterized the first day. However, two of us persevered and surveyed nearby Botanical Beach, thus preparing ourselves for a detailed study on the following day. About 12 members gathered together on Sunday and were rewarded with brilliant sunshine.

Every year, many Victorians migrate here in May and June to see the spectacular marine life. These trips, undoubtedly, began as early as the turn of the century when an American university sponsored a field station nearby. Not long ago, one would have to traverse several miles of old board walk from Port Renfrew. Now the landscape is denuded by logging and bisected by a rough gravel road. The road starts near the Government wharf at Port Renfrew and just near the end, the road forks to the left. Many would-be visitors follow the wrong path to the right that leads to a less spectacular portion of the beach.

After leaving the cars, and walking along rough roadway for twenty minutes, we were greeted with blue waters and a surf that exploded on the sandstone rock. Immediately we were impressed by how the wind and sea have carved and sculptured the soft stone into symmetrically round pools and rocky configurations that were certainly designed by a superior architect. Carved out of the cliff near high tide is a soft, wide amphitheatre with a remarkably flat floor of stone. Many of the nearby pools possessed the pioneering sea-life able to withstand longer periods of drying between tides. At lower levels, the retreating tide exposed a variety of beautiful creatures with the reds of coralline algae, and rich purple of sea urchins predominating. Each sea urchin was residing in a finely etched cavity that formed a perfect fit for each urchin. We were left wondering whether each of these multitudinous cavities were specially created to house its occupant or had the urchin helped to reshape its own home. Other colorful creatures observed were the purple starfish, blood-stars, anemones, mussels, chitons, sea-squirts, and variously tinted algae.

The saddening part of our trip was to see hundreds of other intruders treading over this delicate habitat and we were left wondering how the joy of this day's experience could be preserved for future generations. With increasing numbers of tourists trampling over the animals and the beach and taking souvenirs home, the richness of Botanical Beach will surely diminish.

ISLAND VIEW BEACH

by Katherine Sherman

A clear blue sky, a gentle breeze, a skylark trilling overhead; the twenty-three members who turned up for the Botany Trip could not have asked for more on June 25th.

Terese Todd, our leader, had prepared a list of some 80 plants to be found in this area of salt marsh, sand dune and flood land. All were duly located, together with a number not listed. Three recent recruits worked hard making note of what must have been a bewildering number of new names. We old timers, who should have known them all, badly needed the refresher course!

Of special appeal were the large patches of the Yellow Sand Verbena (*Abronia latifolia*). Growing sparsely in the flat desert area, was the ground-hugging Beach Silver-top (*Glehnia littoralis*), even more attractive in fruit than in bloom; and Toadflax (*Linaria dalmatica*), as showy and vigorous as any carefully tended garden plant. Further north, on the dunes facing the ocean, conditions must have been more favourable, as there the Toadflax was blooming profusely. While on the dunes, our minds turned briefly to the animal kingdom as we found ourselves in a large "village" of mining bees, each with its own hole in the sand. Also, all those little wavy lines? Were they made by insects, or by the tails of frisking mice?

Along the inland trail were dense clusters of the Stout Cancer-root (*Orobanche grayana*), parasitic on Gumweed. Here also was a large patch of *Trifolium Wormskjoldii*, a native clover for which Szczawinski gives no common name. Fortunately Gilkey and Dennis in their HANDBOOK OF NORTHWESTERN PLANTS come to our rescue with the simple and satisfactory name of Marsh Clover. Finding Brass Buttons, less attractively known as Mud Disks, (*Cotula coronopifolia*) is always reassuring. Along the trail, it was plentiful, but the plants were stunted.

In the meadow, outside the park area, specimens at least 12" tall were found. Sad to say, this meadow, one of our happy hunting grounds, was fast being turned into hay. Half had already been mown, and there lay our treasured marsh plants, the sedges and the rushes. Surely not even the most botanically-minded cow could find that hay palatable!

For these many years we have freely enjoyed this magnificent Island View Beach area without seriously considering its status. Actually most of the area is privately owned waiting to be "developed". We can be thankful that the Capital Regional District has in recent years acquired a block of 62 acres, and this block fortunately includes the sand dunes. Perhaps if enough people show their care, more of this area will be acquired as parkland.

TRIP TO HURRICANE RIDGE

by Dorothy McCann

When the alarm went off at 4:00 a.m. on July 17, I'm sure 92 people wondered "was it worth it?" It WAS. Hurricane Ridge at this time of year is a breath-taking wonder. As soon as the snow disappears, the alpine flowers start to bloom in a medley of floral patterns. The meadows are a kaleidoscope of colour, giving us one of Nature's finest flower shows. The masses of blue lupines, cinquefoil, bistort, Avalanche lilies, red heather and phlox are a sight we will never forget. Over 80 species seen.

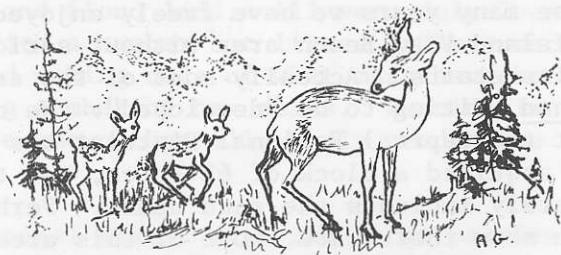
Everywhere we walked was yet another scene of beauty. All this against a backdrop of the blue snow-capped Olympic Mountains in the distance, and the densely wooded sub-alpine firs on the steep slopes close by.

The birders found 18 species, so were happy with their count. The animals were another added interest. Marmots, chipmunks, elk, Black-tailed deer, bear, and even a mountain goat, who watched close by as some of our group ate their lunches.

Later, when we were on the buses, and slowly descending the mountain road, a doe with tiny twin fawns, grazing nonchalantly at the side of the road, caused a traffic congestion, and camera bugs had a field day. Such a delightful scene to end such a memorable outing!

To Charlie Trotter for excellent arrangements, and to Bertha Gow and others for all their hard work, go our very warmest thanks.

Sketch of doe and twin fawns below, by Annette Gardiner.



JORDAN MEADOWS

*By Andrew Mitchell
(almost 9)*

One day, Saturday July 9, 1977, twenty-one children and nine adults went for a walk to Jordan Meadows. We saw flowers, places where deer laid, and one man found some Bladderwort and told how it catches insects. Bladderwort grows in water. We found it in a creek. It has a lot of little sacs called bladders and each one has a trap-door with sensitive hairs around it. When an insect touches the hairs, the trap-door opens and the insect is sucked in! When the insect is right inside the bladder, it will be digested to serve as food for the plant.

We also found some bear tracks and droppings. We found lots of orchids. We found two toads, and when you put them in your hands, they make a little noise. Another plant we found that eats insects was called Sundew.

We ended our trip by taking a swim in Shawnigan Lake.

WINTER PROGRAM

1977

Sept. 13 Dr. A. R. Fontane - "A Naturalist in Fiji"
Dr. Fontane is the new chairman in the Dept. of Biology, UVic.

Oct. 11 John Dennis - Mushrooms (illustrated with Kodachrome).

Nov. 15 Dr. John Harris - "The Spruce Budworm Controversy in B.C."

Dec. 13 Ted Underhill - Wildflowers of Western Australia.

1978

Jan. 10 Ralph Fryer - About Birds. (with movies)

Feb. 14 DINNER ... details later.

Mar. 14 To be announced.

Apr. 11 To be announced.

May 9 BUSINESS ... details later.

FIELD TRIPS

- Sat., Sept. 10 PELAGIC BIRD TRIP ... no more room.
- Sat., Sept. 10 NURSERY: PRODUCTION OF CONIFER SEEDLINGS. Leader: Mel Hughes. (Two hours). Meet Mayfair Lanes 8:30, or Pacific Forest Research Center, 9:00 a.m.
Per: D.A. Ross, 387-3649.
- Sat., Sept. 17 PELAGIC BIRD TRIP ... waiting list.
Per: Mike Shephard, 387-3544.
- Sat., Sept. 24 ORNITHOLOGY: ESQUIMALT LAGOON.
Leader: Doug Turnbull. Meet Mayfair Lanes, 9:00 a.m. or Fort Rodd Parking Lot, 9:30 a.m.
Per: Tim Murphy, 385-5357.
- Sat., Oct. 1 PELAGIC BIRD TRIP. Leave Friday night; return Sunday. Per: Mike Shephard, 387-3649.

JUNIOR INTERMEDIATE PROGRAM

- Fri. Sept. 16 -) SOOKE CAMP: Beach outings,
Sun. Sept. 18) Stream exploration, Campfire games and songs! Members: \$8.00; Non-members: \$10.50. (Are your fees due?)
Leave Mayfair, 4:30 p.m. on Friday.
Return 5:30 p.m. on Sunday.
Register immediately, as there is only accommodation for 15 children.
Phone: Gail Mitchell, 477-9248 or Nancy Turner, 384-5568.
- Sat., Oct. 1 AFTERNOON HIKE: in the Durrance Lake area. Leave Mayfair, 1:30.
Driver: HAMBLETON.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Subscriptions for the current year were due on MAY 1ST. If you have already paid your subscription, ignore this notice. If you have not yet paid, your dues may be paid at the next general meeting (Tuesday, September 13) or may be sent direct to the Treasurer, P.O. Box 1747, Victoria, B.C., V8W 2Y1. For current rates, see the Victoria Naturalist, inside cover.

Dues should be paid by the end of this month. Otherwise membership will lapse, and no further issues of the Victoria Naturalist will be sent.