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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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Annual dues, including subscription to "The Victoria Naturalist":

Juniors - \$2.50 Golden Age Single - \$4.00 Regular Single - \$5.00

Family (Golden Age or Regular) - \$7.50 Sustaining - \$25.00

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

## THE VICTORIA NATURALIST

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### RACCOONS (Procyon Lotor)

By Katherine Sherman

Raccoons, commonly known as coons, must be familiar to everyone living in and around Victoria. Native wild animals that they are, it seems the tables have now turned, and THEY are invading US!

Here in South Oak Bay we have our full share. At night I can often hear them rummaging in the compost box. Now and again one will go "r.r.r.r."; and they also have a repertoire of less polite noises! A friend living in the next street has raccoons living under her house, which sits low on the ground, and the coons have made entrances back and front. Here they live quietly, tolerating the occupant on the main floor.

An abandoned crow's nest in an old pine is a favourite resting place by day. One day last Spring there was a drama in the huge oak in the next garden. The crows had a nest up there, and a coon was halfway up the tree. A whole army of crows joined in the attack, making such a racket that the whole neighbourhood turned out to see what it was all about. On that occasion, the coon went without its hoped-for meal.

In recent years, we have been bothered by leaf-cutter bees, but now a coon has obliged by digging up the nest.

### COVER

*THE SLEEPY RACCOON*

By Doreen Richards

The raccoon is a carnivore, and in B.C. the mammal most closely related is the bear, another carnivore, and both leave unmistakable imprints in wet sand or mud.

Raccoons have made themselves very unpopular with many by invading fishponds, aviaries and chicken roosts. They will attack and even kill a cat. They are also partial to ripe fruit and corn. On the other hand, they are one of the most attractive of animals, intelligent and very easily tamed.

A friend who used to live on a small island had a bench placed conveniently beneath her sitting room window. Every evening at dark half-a-dozen little faces would appear at the window. A slice of bread, thickly spread with jam, would be handed to each. We would watch, fascinated, as each carried off his treat a few yards, and then, sitting up with the bread in his hands, would daintily lick off the jam before eating the rest.

There is an old belief that the coon washes his food before eating it; in fact, the Latin name "lotor" means "washer". R.D. Lawrence in his "Wildlife of North America" made a special study of the raccoon. In the wild they feed mainly along shores and stream-beds, and would often appear to be washing food, whereas in reality they were merely freeing it from debris. On occasions when he put out food to them along with a bowl of water, he found that the water was used for drinking only. However, tame or semi-tame, coons often wash their food before eating it, possibly in an attempt to remove the smell of man - or perhaps to make it seem more like something freshly caught in the stream?

The raccoon has starred in wildlife movies; been the subject of numerous stories and even a best seller.

RUNNING



WALKING



LEFT FRONT

LEFT HIND



DRAWINGS FROM ARTICLE BY  
JOSEPH J. SHOMAN, WILDLIFE  
REVIEW, DECEMBER 1969

Scale approx 1cm = 1inch

#### NOTES BY THE PRESIDENT

##### ANNUAL DINNER

The Society's Second Annual Dinner will be on Tuesday, February 14th at the same place as last year, Holyrood House. But, alas, it is no longer possible to offer the members such a good bargain as a year ago. Inflation has inflated the prices offered us, and the menu of last year would cost \$7.50 per person this year. Moreover, as a few complaints reached the ears of the Directors about last year's chicken dinner, the Directors have decided to try a slightly more expensive menu, a "hot and cold buffet", which will give the diners a choice of fare. The price will be \$7.50 per person, and there will be a no-host bar.

Vera Guernsey (929 Byng Street, phone 598-4968), and Dorothy McCann (Apt. 303 - 2180 Haultain Street, phone 592-1992) have again kindly undertaken to handle ticket sales. They will be in the lobby of the Newcombe Auditorium to sell them before the General Meeting on 10th January, or you may write to them giving your name and address and enclosing your cheque, made out to the Victoria Natural History Society. Both, by the way, are mississes.

Jessie Woollett, whose skill as a nature-photographer is famous in Victoria, will be our guest-speaker, and she is going to give us a slide-show, entitled "Low Tide", about the creatures that live in the inter-tidal zone of our shores.

## THE TREASURY CHANGES HANDS

Greta and Jack Hutchings left towards the end of last month on a six-month visit to their native land, "where Africa's sunny fountains roll down their golden sand". There's not much golden sand in the Society's kitty, but what there is has to have a new watch-dog, and Jim Black has kindly agreed to take over the role. So the Directors have appointed him our Treasurer for the remainder of Jack's term of office, which ends on April 30th. Jack has done a tremendous job minding our shekels and keeping our very complicated accounts straight, and the Society is deeply indebted to him. We shall miss him and Greta sorely, and, as we are too late to wish them bon voyage, we pray that their stay on the other side of the world is a happy one and that the birds of Africa turn out to give them a warm welcome.

## PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE DUES

In an article entitled "Society Finances: An Executive Statement of Policy", which was published in the Victoria Naturalist of April-May 1973, the principle was laid down that "the General Account of the Society, from which the main income is from dues, is to be responsible for the day-to-day running expenses of the Society, including the Victoria Naturalist, and income into this account should be sufficient wholly to cover these expenses". As the General Account has not been sufficient to do this for the last few years, and has been incurring an ever-increasing deficit, the Directors have decided, after long and careful consideration, to recommend to the membership that membership dues be increased. Accordingly, at the General Meeting on 10th January, 1978 the following Extraordinary Resolution will be presented to the members in accordance with Sections 1.05 (a) and 507 of the Bylaws:

"That, starting in the fiscal year 1978-79, membership dues shall be as follows: Regular Single, \$7.00; Golden Age Regular Single, \$6.00; Family, \$9.00; with no change for Juniors and Sustaining membership."

## EDITORIAL

Thanks to all those who have submitted articles, drawings and photographs to help make up an interesting magazine. It is abundantly clear that members of the Victoria N.H.S. are not mere "Listeners" but also "watchers" and "listeners". (As a previous editor has pointed out, many observations such as these have been used by researchers in more extensive biological works).

But we also need "doers" who will fight to save the habitats of the wildlife which we like to see and hear. The Christmas Count, when analysed, should give us a better idea of whether or not the bird-life is dwindling as rapidly as it appears to be.

The GENERAL MEETING on 10th January will have a film on the Whooping Cranes, the National Film Board's "Great White Bird", which will take the place of Ralph Fryer's talk "About Birds".

There will be an outing in February to look at common Mosses and Liverworts, led by David Jamison, and Alex Peden will lead a Field Trip on the first warm evening in March, to look for Frogs and Salamanders. Phone him at 652-3596 and leave your name if interested, so that he can contact you when the time comes.

"Kangaroos Can't Be Cornered" is the title of the February Audubon film, presented by Lionel Hudson who, with a team of scientists, filmed these giant marsupials when they were stranded by floods in eastern central Australia. A superlative film not to be missed.

## INTERESTING FIND IN RHODESIA

In the Victoria Times of November 19th, 1977, there is an article from Salisbury, Rhodesia, (Reuter) which tells of a chance find by a group of schoolboys that sparked off a chain of research and discovery that suggests that some dinosaurs of 200 million years ago had feathers, and may be the ancestors of today's birds.

Mike Raath, Executive Director of Museums and Monuments, who teaches biology at the school, excavated the fossil that the boys found. It was immaculately preserved, apart from head and neck, in soft sandstone and was in the position in which it died 200 million years ago. It even retained in its stomach the remains of its last meal, a small vertebrate of lizard size, showing it to have been a flesh eater.

By reconstructing the skeleton, it was found to be well-built for speed, and had grasping hands with sharp claws. Studies led to the conclusion it was feathered; was very close to the line of ancestry of the birds; and that the birds therefore are direct descendants of one particular group of dinosaurs. In fact, Mr. Raath said it was not a bird but a dinosaur with feathers. He concluded that feathers evolved long before the ability to fly and the principal role of feathers was not to allow a bird to fly but to give it warmth.

In the October issue of the "Naturalist", written in the summer, John Rimmington had an article entitled "The Ancestors of the Birds" which came to the same conclusion. It must be very heart-warming to have your findings substantiated in almost the same words.

### "MANITOBA PHILOSOPHY"

The Manitoba Environmental Council has adopted a Philosophy which we could all take to heart. Here are some excerpts from it:

#### Statement 1 says:

"Man, as one species among many, is an integral part of Earth's biosphere and therefore is obliged to consume materials and energy in order to maintain the population structure necessary to ensure survival of his own gene pool. But he also should ensure that he diverts no more materials and energy than is necessary for his survival and comfort."

#### Statement 3 states:

"It is now possible for Man to bring about massive and rapid and irreversible changes to the environment. Such actions should not be undertaken before careful study has been made to determine their impact and possible consequences upon wildlife."

#### Part of Statement 4:

"Wildlife requires adequate living space and living conditions. Crown land is a public heritage and must be managed so that wildlife values are adequately considered in relation to other proposed uses. In addition, sufficient diversity of wildlife habitat must be preserved or created on private land."

#### Statement 5:

"An appreciation of natural history should be instilled in children. The study of ecology should be included in the teacher training program and become an integral part of the school curriculum at all levels. There is a need to keep urban people attuned to nature ... rural people should be made aware of the impact of their agricultural activities on wildlife population."

### BIRD FRIENDS

*by Merle Harvey*

British robins, alas, only live about three years, so a succession of little red fellows have become known to me. They became somewhat tame, coming when I called, but never allowing me to touch them.

Robeena was the only one I could definitely recognize as a female. A pugnacious wee thing, keeping her territory rigidly marked. For two years she never missed a day at the slate, and I could tell when she was on a nest by her thin and hungry look as she came morning and evening to be fed. I knew when her babies hatched, because then she came incessantly, and flew off with food in her beak several times before she stayed to feed herself.

After two years, she disappeared, and I mourned my wee friend's early demise. However, to my delight, she appeared after three months, greeted me with happy chirps, and stayed for another two years. I have often wondered if some other feeding station claimed her attention for a while.

It was when the snow was lying that I loved the robins best. The honeysuckle arch in front of the house became pure white, so the birds showed up like so many jewels. The scarlet of robins, (one winter there were five), the blue of bluetits, the dark blackbirds, the varied colours of chaffinches, would show up. But they were only allowed on the slate for a short time by royal prerogative of Robin or Robeena!

Occasionally, bullfinches would appear, rosy-red, black-and-white, but they never stayed long in the garden, and never came regularly, so it was always a delightful surprise to see them.

It was in winter that the tiny Coaltits came in from the woods. When I heard their tiny voices, I put out a teaspoonful of butter, and they became very excited and called their friends to come "quick, quick".

I never knew whether they or the Longtailed tits were my favourites. These lovely creatures of black-white-and-grey, with their versatile tails, came in small flocks through the garden at intervals. Never did they come to the slate, but chatted away among themselves as they went quickly from one appletree to the other, and then were gone.

In the summer it was the small Willow warbler who lived in the garden and sang all day the silvery, descending cadence of notes that so delighted my ears. Occasionally, it would come to the edge of the window and have a look at me, but never became tame enough to feed on the slate.

And then those beautiful, graceful, agile creatures the wagtails, gave me great pleasure to watch as they darted about the lawn, waving their long tails up and down. The black-and-white Pies were a common sight,

with their grey babies, but the Greys were splendid in bright yellow, with grey head, back and tail, and their silvery-grey young. They preferred the roof of the old cottage below mine, where they darted about, poking long slim bills among the old slates, or walking along the ridge, having a look at the world.

Rarely, in early spring or late autumn, I would spot a White Wagtail and often wondered where they spent the winter, and where they nested - possibly the Arctic.

The jackdaws I never liked, for they were too clever at watching where the smaller birds had nests, and then robbed the eggs or young ones. They managed to get into the chimneys to nest, and fill them with sticks, to the danger of setting the chimneys on fire if we did not clear them first. Even wire netting put over the tops, if not VERY firmly tied down, did not keep them out.

But they were favourite pets, as they could learn to talk. One was injured as a youngster, and brought up by the boy next door. "Jackie" learned to like sandwiches, and had to be sent away to another area when he frightened the small school children in the local school, by swooping down for a bite at lunchtime. He used to sit on the roof ridge till he heard the bell, then off he would go like a bullet, straight for the school, half a mile away.

One blackbird born in 1967 in my garden, was named "Sooty" as his plumage was a matt browny-black instead of shiny jet black. He picked up a phrase from Mozart's 27th concerto (heard from my radio?) and incorporated it into his song, so we knew when he was around. He only disappeared the winter of 1976/77. His father was "Spot", (white spot on his head), and his grandfather was "Jet", (a very handsome bird).

Birds are delightful creatures, with personalities of their own, and when they have been around one for a while, are missed with an ache at the heart.

Will the next generation ever have a chance to make friends with their birds in the garden, I wonder?

THE FLEDGLING*By Anne Knowles*

One cold evening in late June, after a day of strong wind, my son brought home, in the palm of his hand, two minute birds. One died en route and the other looked as though he should - neck stretched out, gasping breath, eyes closed. However, he was put in a box with soft material under and over him. Using an eye-dropper, we fed him a mixture of bantam egg beaten with a little milk. This continued every twenty minutes for two hours, then we all went to bed.

I fully expected this baby bird to be dead the next morning, as all our other attempts at bird care had failed. But no, when we lifted his cover off, there was his head bobbing about. When the dropper was touched to his beak, a large, bright, hot pink interior, surrounded by bright yellow, gaped at us.

Next day his eyes were open, and his diet was changed from runny egg to hard-boiled egg slightly softened with milk.

As the days went by, he grew steadily stronger standing up on his makeshift nest, although we noticed that one foot was deformed, probably from the fall, when he was blown, nest and all, out of the tree.

As the weeks went by, our little bird flourished. He grew from two-and-a-half inches when first brought home, to four inches when fully grown. He had a short thin beak, very pale yellow breast with light brown stripes, and a suggestion of wingbars. He graduated from the box to a small cage with a perch, that was suspended in the kitchen window (to be safe from cats). We thought he was of the warbler family, so in lieu of hairless green caterpillars, which were very hard to find (although I did find a lovely one on a prize cabbage at the Victoria Horticultural Show and took it carefully home to him!) we fed him tinned cat food.

As he grew and lost his baby fluff, and grew proper feathers, I felt he should learn to fly, and little by little he did, first jumping up from arm to arm, then taking short flights of a foot or so, until he was flying about the house in great style.

He loved being let out, and swooped around the kitchen; usually landing on the highest perch available. His colouring had changed now, being very heavily streaked on his breast, with a brown back, a touch of yellow in wings and at the base of the tail, which was heavily notched.

He had graduated from egg-mix to cat food, and eventually learned to eat this by himself. He also had a dish of finch seed which he enjoyed, and showered the surrounding area with seed husks. I thought he should be introduced to fruits, and offered him a ripe raspberry, but he said he did not like this, and swayed from side to side on his perch, like a small child shaking his head, determined not to have that nasty stuff.

He liked to land on peoples' heads, and there he would start fluttering his wings as though dusting, so a box of dry sandy soil was obtained for him to have a dust bath. He enjoyed picking through the earth but did not dust. Next, a saucer of water was put down for him and he was placed on it. It did not take long for him to get the right idea, and the water showered around him.

By this time, his injured foot had healed completely. The last stage in his development was singing! It was a very quiet, subdued little chirrupy twitter, but it was definitely a song. I tried to tape it, but, like a shy child, he would stop as soon as the mike appeared.

By now we knew that he was a Pine Siskin. Next problem - where and when to release him. Before we could carry out our plan, he accidentally flew out of a small open window and we never saw him again.

After six weeks of daily and intimate contact with this tiny bird, we missed him greatly. We could only hope that he survived.

## NOVEMBER BIRD RECORDS

No.	Species	Date	Area Seen	Observer
1	Ruddy Turnstone	4	McMicking Point	Yorke Edwards Harold Hosford
1	Marsh Hawk	5	Prospect Lk. Rd.	Giff Calvert
4	Snow Geese	11	Island View Rd.	Dorothy McCann
1	Shorteared Owl	14	Swan Lake	Grace Barkley
1	Northern Phalarope	15	Agate Beach	Merle Harvey
3	Barrow's Goldeneye	16	Towner Park	Eleanor and A.R. Davidson
pair	Anna's Hummingbirds	16	William Hd. Rd.	Mrs. John Holt
2	Common Terns	17	Oak Bay	R. Satterfield
pair	Wood Ducks	18	Upper Thetis Lake	Eric Counsell
2m.	Blue-wing Teal	18	" " "	" "
1	Palm Warbler	18	Ascot Pond	R. Satterfield
1	Black Brant	19	Esq. Lagoon	Harold Hosford
1	Snowy Owl	20	Mt. Stephen St.	Jack Thornburgh
1	Parasitic Jaeger	21	Oak Bay	R. Satterfield
1	Mourning Dove	21	Marigold Ave.	Ralph Fryer
62	Ancient Murrelets	26	Bayne's Channel	Wayne Campbell
2	Short-tailed Shearwaters	26	" "	" "
1	Yellow-rumped Warbler	26	Ross Bay Cemeter.	Leila Roberts
4	Scoty Shearwaters	27	from M.V. Coho	David Mark Mike Church
5	Fulmars	27	" "	" " "
7	Trumpeter Swans	27	Tad Creek Flats	Tim Murphy
1	Roughlegged Hawk	27	Victoria Airport	R. Satterfield Vic Goodwill
1	Mountain Bluebird	27	Ascot Pond	R. Satterfield
1	Y/B Sapsucker	29	Heatherbell Rd.	Tues. Group
1	Lapland Longspur	29	Coburg Peninsula	" "
1	Wh. Thr. Sparrow	30	Ascot Pond	M. & V. Goodwill
1m.	Am. Goldfinch	30	" "	Leila Roberts

## JANUARY PROGRAMME

TUES. JAN. 10

GENERAL MEETING in Newcombe Auditorium at 8:00 P.M. National Film Board Film.

FRI. JAN. 13 &amp;

SAT. JAN. 14

AUDUBON FILM, in Newcombe Auditorium, at 8:00 P.M. SPEAKER: Jeffrey Boswell. "Wildlife Safari in Ethiopia".

SAT. JAN. 28

THETIS LAKE: BIRDS: Leader - Rod Muirhead. (384-6005). Meet Mayfair Lanes, 9:00 a.m. or Thetis Parking Lot, 9:30 a.m.

SUN. JAN. 29

Wayne Campbell is arranging to take 6 members (KEEN BIRDERS ONLY) in three rubber dinghies round Discovery Island. Phone him at Museum - 387-3649.

SAT. FEB. 4

BEACH SEINING FOR FISH. Leader: Alex Peden (652-3598). Meet Mayfair Lanes 9:00 a.m.

## JUNIOR PROGRAMME

WED. JAN. 4

Provincial Museum: 4:00 P.M. Room 112. Mammals. Charles Guiguet.

SAT. JAN. 7

A WINTER FIELD TRIP. Meet Mayfair Lanes, 1:30 P.M.

WED. JAN. 11

Provincial Museum: 4:00 p.m. Room 112. Nature Film - "The Flight of the Snowa"

WED. JAN. 18

Provincial Museum: 4:00 P.M., Room 112. All about Mosses and Lichens.

SAT. JAN. 21

Mount Douglas Hike. Mayfair Lanes, 1:30 p.m.

WED. JAN. 25

Provincial Museum: 4:00 p.m. Room 112. "Flight and Feathers".

WED. FEB. 1

Provincial Museum: 4:00 p.m., Room 112. Nature Talk: Goldstream Naturalists.

SAT. FEB. 4

FIELD TRIP with the Goldstream Naturalists. Meet Mayfair Lanes, 1:30 p.m.