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VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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The financial year is May 1 to April 30. New members joining after January 1 and before March 1 - half-dues.

Rare Bird Alert
383-0211

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RARE BIRD ALERT

*The Rare Bird Alert went active
at 20:30 P.S.T. 20 April, 1977*

Information is contributed from all areas around Victoria including Sooke, Goldstream and the Highlands. In addition, reports of rarities come from Duncan, Courtenay-Comox, Qualicum Beach, Campbell River and Vancouver.

Who uses the system? Those who contribute to it, for one, "Victoria Times" newspaper columnist Harold Hosford, whose enchanting writing appears every Saturday evening under the caption "Stray Feathers". Harold helped make the "Dial-a-Bird" service known by introducing it to the public in one of his columns in April 1977.

The Tuesday Group, and various other members of the Victoria Natural History Society who see a rarity, or perhaps an early or late Spring or Fall migrant.

Birders from out of town who require information, or who have some observations to report from rambles.

A mother who is already too busy with her little family but who just happens to have a bird feeder and a copy of "Peterson". Or a Dad who golfs or fishes and sees an uncommon bird on his outing. Or perhaps while he is at work, he hears of someone who has an unidentified bird in his garden.

COVER:

SAW-WHET-OWL

By Bertha McHaffie-Gow

Budding young ornithologists who will first check with the Rare Bird Alert before going afield, and when the day is over, they will phone in their observations to the Programmer.

Parents and grandparents alike divulge the fact that we have some very young birders who lack experience and self-confidence. They are simply too shy to contribute information but who will none-the-less use the Rare Bird Alert to learn of the activities taking place.

There has been very enthusiastic response from people who think "it is wonderful" and "great for developing knowledge about birds". Retired people, in particular, show much appreciation of the Rare Bird Alert and tell of the satisfaction such a service brings them.

There is no Call Counter attached to the machine. However, there is a green light which goes on when "Dial-a-Bird" is activated. From general observation it is estimated that there are, on the average, 6 to 9 calls received per day throughout the year. Certainly, the really busy times occur during migration periods, most particularly from Friday to Sunday night, when both "Dial-a-Bird" and the Programmer are kept busy bringing the latest information to those who care to call. Sometimes the green light is going on so often that "Dial-a-Bird" must really feel it belongs in a business office! There are, of course, those inevitable periods when activity slackens.

After its first year in operation, the Rare Bird Alert shows that birding, without communication, loses some of the stimulant which makes it such an enjoyable hobby.

*" A bird list the more communicated -
the more abundant grows. "*

The above was written by Peggy Goodwill who has operated the Rare Bird Alert for the past 15 months. If you have anything unusually interesting to report, phone her at 386-2780.

SPRING TIDES

by Alex Peden

Our Marine Biology group attracted many keen naturalists to the sea-shore this spring. Thanks to Val Fletcher, we had a glimpse of marine life off the Victoria Breakwater when he and a scuba diving partner brought sea creatures to the surface while we explored the large stone blocks on the shore. A trip to Mill Bay yielded many species of fishes caught with our beach seine. In June, we will explore Botanical Beach again to see those animals that prefer living near the open ocean surf rather than in protected waters.

As you comb the beaches around Victoria's shoreline this summer, you will notice a number of differences in sea-life between the open ocean and the calm waters of Saanich Inlet. In particular, colourful anemones and sea urchins are more abundant and the large California Mussel is only found along the more wave-swept coast.

You may find me doing my own exploring on nearby beaches this summer. We need to record distributions of as many intertidal fishes and other sea-life as possible so we can more accurately predict their occurrences and note changes from year to year. The Mosshead Sculpin is most interestingly found only in the highest and seemingly barren rocky tide pools of surf areas such as at Botanical Beach. Although that species is a drab greenish-brown, the Calico Sculpin is more intricately coloured to match the pink hues of the thick growths of corraline algae in other higher tide pools. Lower down in the exposed masses of kelp and algae, some of the most brilliantly coloured fishes occur, especially the Fluffy Sculpin, Pen-point Gunnels, Rockweed Gunnel and the Tide-Pool Snailfish.

At Mill Bay, brightly coloured fishes are less common, however, our beach seine caught some colourful fishes which normally live in eel grass beds that remain submerged at low tide. I think the most spectacular fish was the Silver-spot Sculpin which is brownish but has bright silver spots on the undersurfaces. The whiskers round its head and its enlarged fins resemble the algae in which it hides.

I hope some of you will either take photographs or make notes on the things that you see around our beaches. Hopefully we can discuss your observations this winter.

IN SEARCH OF PINK LILIES*By Charles A. Trotter*

Timing is an essential ingredient of the perfect golf swing and of many other things. One of these is to catch the right moment when the Pink Lilies of Sutton Creek, Cowichan Lake, are at their finest. Because last year's date of May 8 was definitely too late, it was hoped that this year, by moving it two weeks ahead to April 22, all would turn out well. How were we to know that this season was to be exceptionally early? Our spies in the locality reported that the lilies would be at their height of display during the week of April 9-15. On the Monday of that week, a party of 10 people (including Mr. Leon Pavlic, botanist from the Museum) went to spy out the land-masses of lilies were in full bloom.

The result was that an announcement was made at the General Meeting, held the next evening, to the effect that the date would be moved ahead to Sunday 16th. The fifteen people who attended on that date were delighted to find a good display of *Erythronium revolutus*. Mr. Pavlic conducted a very interesting tour. For those who had not heard of the advancement of the timing, the expedition went through as originally arranged on 22nd, when nineteen people attended. On that date the lilies were well past their peak and showing the effects of having been badly treated by the heavy rains of the previous days.

Besides the usual evergreens, Douglas fir, hemlock, and Grand fir, and deciduous maple and alder, quite a number of other plants and shrubs were observed in the Wildflower Reserve.

Bird lovers were able to spot a few; a pair of Water Ouzels diving and bobbing in the Creek; Varied Thrushes whistling in the tree tops; Audubon's warblers and others active among the maple tassles; winter wrens seen and heard; and a pair of brown creepers building a nest under a piece of loose bark on a dead snag. Some argument arose as to whether a duck seen in the Creek was a wood duck or a harlequin.

The final list totalled 32 wildflowers in bloom: which can be obtained from the editor on request.

A NATURE CENTRE COME TO LIFE*By Ruth Lash*

On April 29th, a group of VNHS members enjoyed an unusually varied afternoon at Swan Lake. Our charming and well-informed guides were Grace Barclay and Heather Crampton.

To explore the geology of the site, Grace used a soil auger in the flood meadow. The soil samples in some areas clearly showed small marine snail-shells - so the sea had once flowed over the area. This surprising event came with the retreat of the last Ice Age, possibly 15,000 years ago. A plug of ice 3/4 of a mile deep had covered and depressed one area. As the ice melted the sea rose and covered the land. Then the land rose gradually, and the shallow depression gouged out by the glacier became a lake. This formation is known as a "kettle" lake.

We hiked around the property in the glorious sunshine, watching for birds and plants. A California Quail, perched on a low bush, scolded long and loud - there must have been a nest close by. A woodpecker drummed near the bird blind and the killdeer were crying and wheeling around the still moist floodland. On the higher ground there was Peppergrass, the leaves of which when well chewed have a distinct "bite". There was a magnificent stand of Poison Hemlock with its blotchy red stems and another weed with luxuriant leaf growth and an insignificant yellow flower on top, which was later identified as *AMSINCKIA INTERMEDIA* or "Fiddleneck" from its curiously twisted flower stalk. The Blenkinsop Creek, which feeds Swan Lake, is very small now; no doubt the farmers need the water in the Blenkinsop Lake - another "kettle" lake.

The highlight was fishing with little nets from the wooden dock and examining the wiggling creatures under the microscope, helped by Heather. Grace had assembled 3 microscopes on a card table near the dock. We looked at the nymphs of dragonflies and damselflies; a water-boatman with his trapped air bubble; transparent water fleas who were apt to jerk themselves out of our vision; the larva of mosquitoes, midges and other fascinating creatures.

Finally we returned to the Nature House, an attractive former residence. Here we talked over future plans; Grace was happy to be able to hire 4 summer students (for constructive work) and a biologist. The immediate project is to construct a path from Saanich Municipal Hall Parking Area around the Lake to the Nature House.

Swan Lake will always have some pollution from agriculture in the Blenkinsop Valley, but the closing of the St. Michelle Winery, much regretted from most points of view, has the advantage that its effluent will no longer flow into the Lake.

We thought how lucky the present Victoria school children are to come with their teachers to study the fascinating ecology of Swan Lake with Grace and Heather.

(Heather Crampton is co-ordinator for Outdoor Education for the Department of Education.)

SAANICH GREENBELT ASSOCIATION

The Saanich Greenbelt Association was recently formed as a result of the concerns of its members regarding developments which were incompatible with existing land uses.

Some of these concerns are: the preservation of the Agricultural and Floodplain Lands of Saanich; the prevention of the Blenkinsop Valley from being bisected by a possible East-West Highway; the preservation of the Mystic Vale area from development; to name a few.

It is in our interest to preserve as much "Greenbelt" as possible in order to retain the rural atmosphere of Saanich. Many members of the VNHS enjoy their outings in Saanich. How many of them realize that they are doing so for what might be a limited time?

VNHS members who are interested in the aims of Saanich Greenbelt Association (President: Mrs. Irene Block) should contact the Treasurer: Joan E. (Mrs. G.L.) Alston-Stewart, 4386 Lochside Dr., Victoria, V8X 2C9.

THANK YOU, WHITE ROCK BIRDERS

From Kaye Suttill

On Saturday, April 15, 21 VNHS members braved early morning rain to board the 7:00 A.M. "Queen of Esquimalt" ferry for a day of mainland birding hosted by the White Rock Group led by Jack Williams.

In Active Pass, some of us kept the deck watch to count eagles - 7 on Galiano side, 6 on Mayne - and assorted Arctic loons, murrets, Pigeon guillemots et al. Sliding into Tsawwassen Dock we added an Eared Grebe in breeding plumage; Surf scoters and others.

Brant and herons collected off the causeway as we headed for Iona Island via Sea Island, and driving along near the airport we saw 6 pheasants in one field, and usually a heron in sight.

On Iona we parked beside the Vancouver Sewage Treatment Farm, where bushtits, and House finches were nesting, and walked around the sewage ponds noting Water pipits, Savannah sparrows, Barn and Tree swallows, shovelers, coots, scaup, canvasbacks and Ruddy ducks. Snipe arced over and went into hiding in the Marsh wrens' reeds; gulls did an eagle chase as the count started to climb. Donald Carruthers called our attention to 2 Crested mynahs. At another pond Green-winged teal flew in, whilst dunlin made pennant streamer clouds towards the airport horizon.

The highlight for many was walking out alongside a slough whose grass-reed shores were home to Long-billed Marsh wrens clicking their talk. Five Yellow-headed blackbirds "people-watched" from the cattails. The music of a Western meadowlark showed its singer atop a big tree. Here also we saw 2 Short-eared owls. Rough-legged hawks hovered and Marsh hawks combed the fields near the sea.

At lunch, beside the future runway to the airport, merlins dominated, their smaller "weight-watched" bodies equally perfecting the hover tactic of the Rough-legged hawks, and matching the Northern shrike (today seen on a log) for balancing on telephone lines. After lunch we wandered in former gardens, still alive in flowering Japonica, Dogwood, and fruit blossoms. The mixed conifer-

deciduous habitat homed kinglets, finches, juncos, and the Black-capped chickadees of the mainland; whilst one Audubon's warbler played "seeme - can you?" music on a flowering appletree. A Black-bellied plover later brought our total to 69 species.

Doug Turnbull gave our group's thanks to our hosts for this day of joyful birding. We look forward to the White Rock birders coming over to Victoria in the Fall.

Like a Symphony of Birdness, the finale crescendoed into a Spectacle of Seeing at Active Pass as hundreds of Brandt's cormorants kept reforming kaleidoscopically just above the water as the "Queen of Burnaby" broke through their ranks. A fitting end to a day of good comradeship and birding.

EDITORIAL

As of May 30th, 1978, the VNHS has several changes in its Board of Directors, as you will see from the inside front cover. We welcome back Doug Turnbull as President; and Tim Murphy as our new Vice-President. Jack Hutchings, back from Africa, returns as Treasurer (which office Jim Black filled temporarily). Jean Rimmington remains as our invaluable Secretary.

Jean McInnis has taken over from the Suttills as Membership Chairman; Grace Barclay now has charge of the Juniors' program instead of Gail Mitchell; W. A. Williamson and his sister Phoebe are now distributing the "Naturalist" in place of the Seabornes.

Retired from the Board are Kaye Suttill, Gail Mitchell and Roy Wainwright, and in their places are Kerry Joy, Kevin Brehart and Bill Barclay.

Thinking that this issue would be the last in Vol. 34 (instead of No. 1 in Vol. 35) I did not indicate in the May issue my grateful thanks to all those who sent in reports, articles, poems and photographs. Special thanks to Bertha Gow for so generously letting me have so many of her excellent pictures to grace our front cover.

This is your THIRD reminder to send in your dues for 1978/79 if you mean to remain a member, and get your "Naturalist". See inside front cover for current costs. Cheques payable to "The Victoria Natural History Society" P.O. Box 1747, Victoria, B.C., V8W 2Y1.

MIRACLE: IN THE RAIN

By Harold Hosforth

The weekend started, on Friday night, with the usual owl walk. No owls were seen and for that I think we could thank the weather which eventually forced us to cover.

Saturday morning followed with a bird walk during which songs emanating from the lush, damp, greenery around us were identified as Orange-crowned warblers, Winter wrens, Pine siskins and, of course, Robins. One fuzzy little, unfamiliar song was eventually tracked, by Eleanor Davidson, to the rare Black-throated Grey warbler.

Out on the Strait of Georgia, a few late Brandt were present, as were Harlequin ducks, Surf and White-winged scoters, Arctic, Red-throated and Common loons and several pairs of little dark alcids skittering low over the water, that might have been Marbled murrelets.

The rains held off after lunch - for awhile - to let Charlie Trotter and Jean McInnis point out Fairy Bells, Bleeding Heart, Twinflower, Twinberry, Rice Root and Stinking Currant among the hundreds of kinds of plants encountered.

Then the rains interfered and there was a general rush for cover. Some of the more fortunate found said cover in Alf Porcher's camper where, primed with some of Charlie Trotter's vintage vinegar, we philosophized for some time on the state of world affairs, the weather and what Charlie could do to improve his product.

Evening once again found us on the trail of the owls. But once again we came up empty - and once again the weather was blamed.

Sunday morning dawned almost as damp as Saturday but there was a hint of improvement in the air and by the time we gathered at Salmon Point, just north of Miracle Beach, the day was sparkling in lovely sunlight. Here, Bald eagles were putting on their usual show, draped over nearby snags or soaring back and forth along the beach. The lagoons held several Black-bellied plover and Common mergansers plus a party of buffleheads, a shoveler, a yellowlegs - probably a Greater - and what was taken at first to be an otter, then an "awfully big muskrat" and finally a beaver - which it probably was.

In a nearby fresh-water slough that in the past had produced dowitchers and Blue-winged teal, only the teal were present this year.

By noon, most of the 40 people who had enjoyed the weekend were preparing for home, the poor weather of the previous day forgotten and visions of another trip next year strong in their minds. Don't let me mislead you; the weather was not its best - but few of us noticed it. That's what's good about being at Miracle Beach.

BIRDING AT ITS BEST

By Rita Dickson

Sunday, May 28, turned out to be a lovely day for the 14 members who met in Francis Park under Doug Turnbull's guidance. The Centennial Trail was followed, where a Brown creeper and a Western flycatcher were seen, and near Munn Road were chickadees and juncos. Cedar waxwings showed themselves several times and a Brown-headed cowbird was seen flying - up to mischief, no doubt.

Half-a-mile (birdwatchers haven't gone metric yet) along the road is the power line between Francis Park and Freeman King Park. Here were wildflowers everywhere to delight us as well as good birding to follow. Among the warblers seen were Wilson's, Townsend's, McGillivray's and a Yellowthroat. Traill's, Western and an Olive-sided were the flycatchers on our list.

Two young birders with a recorder had been listening for some time to an unfamiliar song. It turned out to be a Swainson's thrush with a double repertoire. First he sang his usual "identity" song, then went into a strange melody.

Warbling and Solitary Vireos were vocal, and Violet-green, Tree and Barn swallows were flying around. A Downy woodpecker was seen and a Pileated heard. All three wrens, Bewick's, House and Winter, appeared during our walk; also Chipping sparrows, goldfinch, siskins, towhees, and a Red-breasted Nuthatch.

The aim of the outing was to find the Western tanager, and after hearing him for a time, we finally saw him in all his glowing colours. Another gorgeous sight was a Rufous hummingbird, glinting like red metal in the sun. A bird "apartment house" was tenanted by a flicker in the lower hole, while a pair of Western bluebirds were busy above her taking food into a tiny hole.

Francis Park area did very well for us, and we thank Doug Turnbull and the other "good" birders who made it such a successful day, with 40 birds counted.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF BIRDWATCHING

In the March 1978 issue of the "Blue Jay", which is published by the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, there is an article by Richard L. Glinski of Tucson, entitled "Birdwatching Etiquette" which was first published in "American Birds" in June 1976.

Birdwatching is a relatively recent activity, but with the aid of Radio and Television has brought the interest and excitement to a wide audience and created "birders" to an extent that is now beginning to endanger the very wildlife and habitat required for the "watching".

So much so, that this is causing grave concern to thoughtful people, and this "Etiquette" is surely needed to bring the danger to the notice of all those who wish to watch or photograph wildlife - not just the birds.

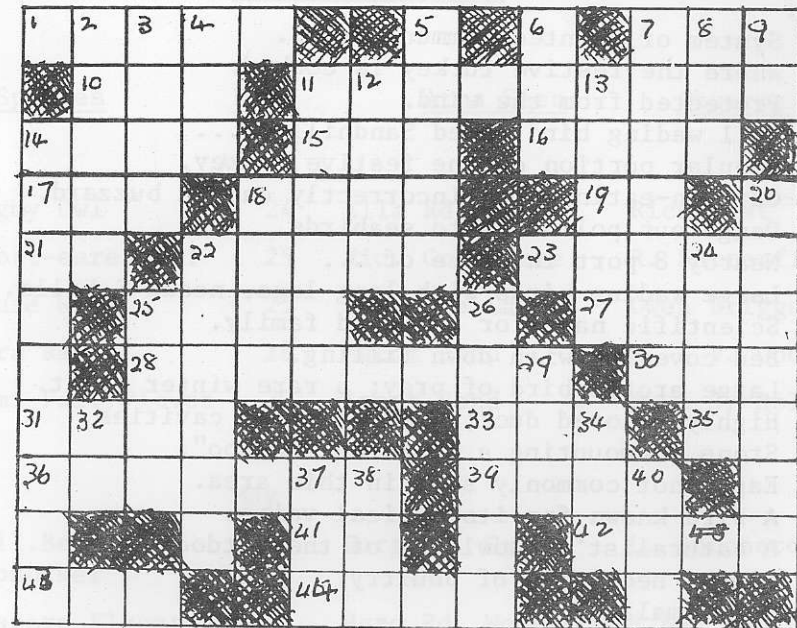
Some points from Richard Glinski's article have special appeal and are quoted below:

1. Avoid the use of tape-recorded territorial calls of rare birds that are actively breeding. Universal attractants such as "pishing" are more acceptable since they probably have fewer adverse effects than the use of specific calls.
2. Observe birds nests from a distance great enough so that parent birds and their activities are not disturbed. Nesting colonies and raptor nests should be avoided.

3. Do not relentlessly follow or harass rare birds. Photography of birds should never include the removal of nestlings from the nest or foliage close to the nest.
4. Respect the property and wishes of the private land-owner. Many of the best birding places are on deeded lands where the misbehaviour of one can result in the exclusion of all.
5. Do not associate the with large groups that are based "en masse" to critical habitats and then turned loose without responsible guides.

MEMORIUM

The Society lost its oldest member in May. George Edgar Winkler was in his 104th year and had lived in Victoria for 70 years. A past President and then an Honorary Life Member, he took a keen interest in nature, publishing several books of poems on his love of natural beauty, his interest in wild creatures, and his early life as a prospector. His "Nonsense" rhymes were published under the pseudonym of Ernest Aitrew.



ACROSS

1. South Seas coral island surrounded by a reef and lagoon.
7. Solemn promise.
10. First woman.
11. Duck appearing to wear comical mask.
14. Exultant joy of birdwatcher sighting a rare species.
15. Woman birdwatcher.
16. Herring & Glaucous-winged are common ...
17. The monetary unit of Japan.
18. Small brown bird with cocked tail.
19. Neuter pronoun of third person singular.
21. Pharmacist symbol.
22. Canada honker is local resident.
23. Zoological term for vestigial "thumb" on wing.
25. Bird symbol of Canadian wilderness.
27. Device for catching game.
28. Sea-going duck; male has needle-like tail.
30. To make a mistake.
31. Creator of nature.
33. Victoria afternoon tradition.
35. Knock-out; abbreviation.
36. Small brown bird which ascends trees spirally.
39. Whitish waterbird with black cap, forked tail.
41. To proceed.
42. ... Duck, an usual meat recipe.
43. Fruit of Garry oak eaten by Band-tail pigeons.
44. Code units of heredity.

No.	Species	Date	Area Seen	Observer
1	Solitary Sandpiper	11	Ascot Pond	R. Satterfield
2	Tufted Puffins	11	Clover Point	R. Satterfield
1	Black Swift	11	Triangle Mt.	Fritz Karger
1	Warbling Vireo	11	Oak Meadows	E.&A. Davidson
1	Fox Sparrow	12	Alpine Cres.	Anne Knowles
1	Whimbrel	13	Vic. Golf Crse.	R. Satterfield
1	Pomarine Jaeger	13	Holland Point	A. & J. Robinson
1	Green Heron	14	N. Cwchn Swg Pd.	M.K. & J. Hart
1	N. Oriole	18	Gyro Park	R. McK-Grieve
1	Vaux Swift	18	Fort/Yates St.	Grace Bell
1	Swainson's Thrush	19	Cairndale Rd.	Jeff Gaskin
1	Wilson's Phalarope	19	Ascot Pond	R. Satterfield
1	N. Phalarope	19	Clover Point	R. Satterfield
2	Pectoral Sandpipers	21	Ascot Pond	R. Satterfield
1	Stilt Sandpiper	28	Ascot Pond	J.B. Tatum



SUMMER FIELD TRIPS

SAT. JUNE 24

TIDE POOL: Botanical Beach. Leader: Alex Peden (652-3598). Meet at head of Government Wharf, Port Renfrew, 8:00 A.M. Bring lunch. See May issue for details.

SAT. JULY 1

MANDARTE ISLAND, Sidney Spit. Leader: Tim Murphy, (385-5357). Boat trip on the "Maryville". Cost: \$6.00. Leave Sidney Wharf, 9:00 A.M. Return about 4:00 P.M. Make reservations or cancellations with Tim. Bring lunch.

SUN. JULY 9

HURRICANE RIDGE: Botany. Leader: Chas. A. Trotter (477-4365). Cost - \$15.00. Meet 5:00 A.M. at Government Parking Lot (behind Executive House). Bring lunch. See May issue for details.

SAT. AUG. 5

COWICHAN MARSHES: Shorebirds. Leader: R. McKenzie-Grieve, (477-2402). Meet at Mayfair Lanes 8:30 A.M. or 9:30 A.M. Robert Service Memorial. Bring lunch.

SUN. AUG. 27

WITTY'S LAGOON: Leader: R. Muirhead, (384-8005). Meet Mayfair Lanes 9:00 A.M. or 9:30 A.M. Witty's carpark. Bring lunch.

JUNIOR PROGRAM

SAT. JUNE 24

FRANCIS PARK: Clean-up by members. Juniors meet Mayfair Lanes 1:30 P.M.

SAT. AUG. 12

EAST SOOKE PARK. Bring lunch. Meet Mayfair Lanes 9:30 A.M.

SEPT. 22-24

CAMP possible. Please phone Grace Barclay (479-0211) after June 30 if wanting to come.