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## VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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

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Rare Bird Alert  
383-0211

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### WITTY'S LAGOON BIRDS

By Rod Muirhead

Sunday, 27 August - we got that right and in general the right place. The phone number given was the Royal Trust Real Estate Office on Douglas Street. We must thank them for the courtesy extended in redirecting calls. As for the place, which Parking Lot? now that there is a choice of four places. Those who phoned the Bird Line or myself were directed to Metchosin Parking Lot, and Sydney Stevenson from Sooke kindly called at the Witty's Lagoon Road Lot to redirect any who went there.

Anyway, some 30 assembled including new members Elaine and Bill Halliday and Harice Parkington who were introduced by Jean McInnis. We went off around the North Side Trail. It was a day of comparisons - Killdeer, Semi-palmated Plover, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Black-bellied Plover in various stages of plumage, and many ducks in Eclipse Plumage. Important specials were Semi-palmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper - yes, the tide was out.

We went back to the cars to pick up lunch and took the old farm road to the beach; it is very much overgrown with blackberries, but is not often dry enough to walk. Lunch was eaten on the beach, supervised by the Harbor Seals. In the distance, we found a Murre standing on a floating log away out by Haystack Island.

Really birds were rather scarce, 35 species, but it was a fine day and we all enjoyed the walk in parts of Witty's which were new to many.

COVER

Can you identify this bird?

Answer in Next Issue.

COURTESY: Ralph Fryer

## A HIKE IN VICTORIA'S RAIN FOREST

*By Elsie G. Turnbull*

Led by Helen Lloyd of UVic Botany Department, a dozen members of the V.N.H.S. hiked around Durrance Lake on Saturday, September 9. A T-shaped slab of territory lying between McKenzie Bight and Tod Inlet, Durrance Lake Park straddles the Highlands, a region of rocky ridges and valleys cradling fresh water lakes and streams. Shielded by the Partridge Hills and the spreading flanks of Mt. Work, Durrance Lake has the shape of a crook-necked squash and lies in timber-covered hills. Algae and yellow waterlilies thrive along its muddy edges at the narrow end while the trail around the southern shoreline twists over tangled roots of cedar, hemlock, Douglas fir and arbutus. Dripping branches and lowhung clouds marked vegetation typical of a rain forest. Mosses and liverwort swathed logs and fallen trees. Leafy pale green lichen encircled branches while from above hung strands of Old Man's Beard. Fungi poked up out of the leaf mould -- slim fingers, tiny parasol forms and a fragile lacey umbrella, smooth above with ribs below. At the edge of a black pool formed by tree roots damming a creek grew a small maidenhair fern. Where more light broke through the trees the bracken fern, licorice and sword fern clumps appeared. Salal bushes, a few huckleberries and Oregon grape grew from a nurse log above the moss-covered layer and vanilla leaf spread over open spaces. Half-hidden beneath a log we found a brown wood frog, a miniature salamander darted out of the fallen leaves while from a distance came the hoarse croak of a raven.

Durrance Road, Lake and Creek were probably called after a pioneer Saanich family. In 1885, twenty-seven year-old John Durrance left his native Leicestershire for America, finally coming to Victoria in 1860 where he settled on Spring Valley Farm. Ten years later he married Mrs. Jane Bailey, a widow who had first come to Victoria on the third voyage of the "Norman Morrison" in the year 1853. At that time she was married to Richard Cheeseman and during the voyage gave birth to a daughter. Later she married a man named Bailey. The Durrances had a son John who was born in 1872 and died in 1928 and descendants still live in the Saanich area.

P.S.

As Mrs. Turnbull did not stay for the whole day, she asked me to add to her report:

The two salamanders that we saw were, as far as I can make out, the Western Red-backed (*Plethodon vihiculum*) and the Brown Northwestern (*Ambystoma gracile gracile*). If I am wrong, would be glad to be corrected.

We had intended to climb in the afternoon, but Helen Lloyd took us to her home and provided the group with such a marvelous lunch that we were glad just to laze and talk afterwards. Ms. Lloyd certainly gave us a day out of the ordinary which we thoroughly enjoyed.

## BIRD FIELD TRIP

*By Vera Guernsey*

On Sunday, September 10, Alf Porcher kindly led the group since Bill Savale was unable to be there. The day was ideal, warm, and the sky especially beautiful with white fluffy clouds against the blue.

Sixteen of us gathered at Thetis Lake and we started off with the motto "See birds better with mouth closed!" and it proved successful. In the stillness of the morning it seemed there wasn't a bird in the Park; however, it was the large birds that were of interest - 3 Turkey Vultures at close range and a noisy display of a Raven chasing three very excited Ospreys. It was difficult to understand why - maybe one had a fish. A River Otter, Red Crossbills and many Nuthatches were noteworthy.

After lunch, a stop at Esquimalt Lagoon was productive. Our count of 49 birds for the day included Heermann's gulls and Northern Phalarope.

A very good day, thank you Alf. You made a good substitute. We will look forward to an outing with Bill another time.

ADDITION TO LIBRARY: "A Guide to North American Bird Clubs" by Jon E. Rickert.

## BIRDING IN SCOTLAND

*By Margaret Wainwright*

We were in Scotland in July this year and thanks to Merle Harvey, got in touch with her friend, Mrs. Jean Grant, and arranged a day of birding. Jean Grant lives in Crail, a most attractive fishing village on the east coast of Fife. She is an enthusiastic and expert birder, a member of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Scottish Ornithological Club and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Presently, she is involved in a bird-watching programme for children. We felt very fortunate to be able to go out with her, because it makes such a tremendous difference when one is on "foreign" territory to have an experienced leader, who knows where to go and what to look for.

We arranged to meet her at a village called Crawton, on the east coast, south of Aberdeen, between Montrose and Stonehaven. So good were her directions that we found the place without difficulty, although the final road was no more than a lane and Crawton itself an almost deserted fishing village of one or two cottages.

The sea cliffs which we had come to see are a bird sanctuary. They are very high and sheer and are the nesting site of thousands of sea birds. We walked along the path above and as it was sometimes very close to the edge and the cliff overhung the 150 foot drop, I sometimes felt an increased heartbeat, especially after looking through the binoculars for a long time and losing my sense of depth and balance.

It was a very noisy, crowded place with birds flying into and out of the ledges, jostling and screaming while they fed their young or guarded their particular territory. It was distinctly smelly too.

The birds were stacked on the cliffs according to species, with the herring gulls and puffins at or near the top, the puffins beside their burrows. Then the fulmars, kittiwakes, razor bills and guillemots in descending layers. The guillemots were the southern type, Uria aalge albionis, a dark chocolate brown and like our common murre.

By mid-July, the eggs had hatched and we could see fluffy offspring on some of the ledges, and in the case of one or two of the herring gulls, the fledglings were beside us on the cliff top. Preying on the young were Greater Black-back Gulls, very large and fiercely aggressive. They are a constant predator in the breeding season and we saw several with hatchlings dangling from their beaks.

The sea below the cliffs was massed with more of the same birds and small flocks flew by in both directions or came back to the cliffs with food from the sea. We had hoped to see gannets but looked in vain for them. There were two eider with young, however, and four shags.

All around us in the fields above the cliffs were meadow pipits as well as the usual rooks and jackdaws. And of course there were oystercatchers on the beach near the road, but then in Scotland there seemed to be oystercatchers everywhere; in fields, tidal flats, sea-shores, streams and lakes. They are similar to those here but have pure white underparts and are very handsome.

We spent a very pleasant day and wished Jean Grant had been along on other occasions to help us identify some of the difficult small, glen and hedgerow birds and the shorebirds on the tidal flats, always just too far away to see without a scope. We did manage to see lapwings, curlew, redshank and shelduck at Dornoch but no doubt missed many others. Next time we go to Scotland we will try to be there during migration rather than in the summer months or else plan to visit some of the sea-bird islands such as St. Kilda or the Orkneys.

\* \* \* \* \*

If your "Birds of North America" is falling apart, it can be rebound in plastic rings with a plastic cover for \$1.80 plus postage. Send to: Book Rebinding Dept., OSU Book Store, P.O. Box 489, Corvallis, Oregon, 97330.

\* \* \* \* \*

The National Audubon Society increased some of its membership dues on September 1. Student and Senior Citizens \$13.50; Independent \$18.00; Family \$21.00.

SUMMER BIRDING*By Anne Knowles*

August is supposed to be the worst month of the year for birdwatching. Every year I expect to see the usual birds and no more, but this past summer I was extremely lucky and added several new birds to my list.

Travelling in the Shuswap area, I went up onto the Fly Hills, a mountain range west of Salmon Arm. There I saw 3 Hawk-owls - presumably a family. They called to each other with wheezy whistles. They were very tame, perching on low snags and dead trees. (The area had been burnt over about 5 years previously), and I was able to photograph them. One cried its rapid "ki, ki, ki, ki" call and I located it sitting on a stump, having caught a chipmunk. They were all dark brown, with beautiful paler horizontal barring on their underparts, and fierce yellow eyes.

Also on top of the mountain I saw a Spotted sandpiper - they seemed to be everywhere. Mountain bluebirds and other small birds were common, but not at the lower elevations. I saw several Turkey vultures during my two weeks in the area, and one was sitting atop a dead snag, drying its wings - a wonderful sight.

Another bird that I saw all too often was the Black swift, forerunner of storms - and storms we had! When I tell people we will have rain in a few hours, they are always skeptical, but rain always comes.

Another new bird for me which I have been wanting to see for years was the Long-billed Curlew. There were 4 of them in a meadow in company with about 24 Canada Geese, a few Ring-billed Gulls and many Killdeer. When they raised their wings the cinnamon wing-linings were seen, which is a sure identifying mark. Three of the curlews' bills were not as long as the fourth one, and at first I thought they were whimbrels. Later, I read that young curlews' bills continue to grow for some time and that, because of the bill length, can be confused with the whimbrel.

My next sighting was also on a mountain - a family of White-winged Crossbills, unusual for this area I think. The male was a beautiful bright red with prominent white wingbars.

At the Salmon Arm wharf on the mud flats, there were numerous sandpipers - Pectorals, Solitarys, Least, Western, Spotted, Lesser Yellowlegs, a Sanderling and a Sora! Overhead were clouds of young swallows - Barn, Cliff, Rough-winged, Violet-green and Bank - flocking up in readiness for going south.

In a grove of tall willow trees, under which we were camped, was a robins' roost. The trees were so thick we could not see anything, but we could hear them going to bed - then silence. Nearly every night we heard low cries of alarm, and squacks, and sometimes the sound of many wings. I can only think that it was an owl coming for his nightly snack.

All in all, August was not such a poor birding month after all.

PLANTS IN FRUIT*By Charles A. Trotter*

The Botany Outing to Island View Beach on 23rd September was led by Leon Pavlic, Assistant Curator in the Provincial Museum, now doing research on the grasses of B.C. Present were 17 people.

This is an interesting area combining seabeach, sand dune and swamp land, and this expedition was to study plants in their fruiting stage covering from sedges to trees. A surprising number were blooming after the dry summer resting period. Sticky Daisy (*Grindelia integrifolia*), Silvertop (*Potentilla tacifica*) Brass Buttons (*Cotula coronopifolia*), Beach Pea (*Lethyrus japonicus*), Douglas aster (*Asper subspicata*), and Shrubby Knotweed (*Polygonum paronychia*) were some flowers noted trying to bloom before the Fall frosts come.

Mr. Pavlic proved an excellent guide with a wide knowledge of the plants, and supplementing his explanation with interesting anecdotes.

## THE COLQUITZ WATERSHED

By Merle Harvey

The last day of September was a perfect day on which to tour Saanich by bus and observe the Fall colours. The recent rains had caused new grass to grow and the fields were an unbelievable bright green. To those of us who have no car now, it was an opportunity not to be missed.

Not only did we see the countryside but we also learned about it. Leaving the Museum carpark, the bus first took us to Swan Lake where the resident naturalist, Grace Barclay, showed us round and explained what is being done there, and we had a walk out over the water on the new Board Walk. Grace extended an invitation to attend the Nature Programs on October 10 and 24 and November 7 and 21. These are held at the Nature House, 3837 Swan Lake Road, at 7:00 P.M. (Dress warmly and take a flashlight with you.)

Following the Colquitz River, we passed Rithet's Bog and had a stop overlooking Blenkinsop Lake while Dr. Bob Langford explained about the drainage system.

Next stop Beaver Lake, where we walked over to inspect the small dam made to control the water outflow which allows the fish to come up-river. Following up, we next came to Quick's Bottom, a marsh at present lush and green, but which in winter is flooded and a good place to observe ducks then. Then on to see the spawning beds at Mann Avenue put in this summer by Saanich Council with the help of the Militia. The shingle was dry and clean in the low summer level of water, but in February the Choh can spawn in two to three feet of water.

A stop to look out over the Panama Flats, another area flooded in winter. This drying-out process keeps the marsh sweet and clean and prevents stagnation. On to Interurban Road where the Colquitz River runs into Colquitz Creek. As we passed Tillicum we were told about the hatcheries being made, and how amazingly productive is the Gorge.

It had been intended to look at the Colquitz River-mouth but our three hours were up and we had to get back to the Museum on time.

A very pleasant outing as well as an interesting and instructive one, and we are all grateful to our president, Doug Turnbull who shared the commentary with Dr. Langford, President of the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Society, and Consultant Biologist, and who has been largely responsible for the Colquitz River scheme. Also to our driver, Rod Garroway, for his skillful driving on some very tricky roads.

Our thanks also go to David Jackman and the Energy Conservation Centre and to the Environmental Centre, for arranging this bus tour (among others) during Environmental Weekend. It was regretted that the E.C. Centre had to be closed down owing to lack of funds, causing the telephone to become "Out of Service".

## BIRD OBSERVATIONS

By Peggy Goodwill

NO.	SPECIES	DATE	AREA SEEN	OBSERVER
1	Red Knot	Aug. 15	Esq. Lagoon	B.&M. Meiklejohn
1	Marbled Godwit	18	Cadboro Bay	M.&V. Goodwill
1	Say's Phoebe	19	Vic. Golf	" "
1	Nashville Warbler	20	Lovers Lane	R. Satterfield
1	Stilt Sandpiper	22	Martindale Res.	M.&V. Goodwill
1	Buff-br. "	22	Vic. Golf	M. Goodwill
1	Bank Swallow	25	Quamichan L.	V. Goodwill
1	Am. Golden Plover	26	Esq. Lagoon	L.G. Roberts
1	Screech Owl	29	Lochside Tr.	Tuesday Group
1	Caspian Tern	Sept. 3	Vic. Golf	R. Satterfield
1	Mockingbird	3	1217 Fairfld.	Wayne Campbell
1	Pomerine Jaeger	7	Cattle Point	Alf Porcher
1	Short-eared Owl	14	Vic. Golf	E.&A.R. Davidson
1	E. Kingbird	14	5133 Wm.Hd.Rd.	Beryl Holt
1	Skua	16	Vic. Golf	Bill Savale
1	Tufted Puffin	17	Vic. Golf	R. Satterfield
7	W. Bluebirds	17	5447 Rocky Pt. Rd.	Mary Winstone
2	Scoty Shearwaters	20	Clover Point	M. Goodwill
1	Am. Bittern	30	Quick's Bottom	R. Satterfield

We have been informed that the VNHS Scholarship of \$300.00 has been awarded to Linda M. Reid, 2031 Kendal Avenue, and the two Samuel Simcoe Bursaries of \$400 each have been awarded to Patrick James McAllister 5251 Pat Bay, and to Marilyn Jean Ratcliffe, 3401 - 235 Michigan Street, all of Victoria. Our secretary, Jean Rimmington, has written on our behalf to congratulate these young people, sending them a membership for one year and an invitation to join us at our Annual Dinner on February 13.

Ben Reece has unfortunately had to resign from the Board of Directors and his place has been taken by W. Winston Mair, who will complete the term of office.

A Conservation Committee is being set up to advise the Society on conservation and environmental matters. This will consist of David Orton, Rick Coole, and Bob Ogilvie, with Winston Mair as Chairman. David Orton has also been asked to serve as our second member on the Regional Board of the Federation of B.C. Naturalists.

The ANNUAL DINNER will be held in Holyrood House on Tuesday, 13 February. Cost about \$7.50 per person. Tickets on sale sometime after the New Year.

Our president and some members attended a Protest Rally in front of the Empress Hotel to show our disapproval of the decision to go ahead with the Cowichan Estuary development.

VOLUNTEERS required to help at Swan Lake Nature House. Clerical, telephone, receptions, etc., phone Grace Barclay (479-0211).

Can you identify the bird on the front cover? Write down distinguishing marks and see the answer in January. Tim Murphy will have a Quiz each issue.

Don't forget that VOLUNTEERS are required for the Christmas Count on December 16. Offers to Harry Davidson (479-1286).

Over 60 new members have joined the VNHS and we welcome them warmly and hope they will join in our activities.

The Southern Vancouver Island Committee of the Outdoor Recreation Council has launched a public campaign to have Sidney Island, which is now up for sale, acquired by the Provincial or Federal governments for use as a park.

The following resolution was unanimously adopted by the Outdoor Recreation Council at a meeting held in Vancouver on Sunday October 1, 1978:

"Whereas, the Gulf Islands represent a priceless scenic and recreational asset to the B.C. people, and Whereas, Sidney Island represents one of the few remaining islands in the Strait of Georgia, and Whereas, significant recreational demands remain unsatisfied through the existing provincial/federal parks system in B.C.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT

The Outdoor Recreation Council recommends to the federal/provincial governments that Sidney Island be established as a park."

A Sidney Island Committee has been formed to lead the public campaign to acquire the Island as a park. The Committee Chairman is Stan Buxcey (1819 Hartwood Place, Victoria, B.C., V8N 1H9, phone 477-8612). Individuals and organizations who support the acquisition of Sidney Island as a park or who could assist the public campaign to acquire the Island are asked to contact the Sidney Island Committee.

The Sidney Island Committee believes that this large unspoilt island of 1783 acres, which has been called the Pearl of the Gulf Islands will, if not acquired as a park, be lost to development of one kind or another. (As everyone knows, there is a tremendous urban pressure on rural lands in the Victoria-Saanich-Gulf Islands-Lower Mainland area.) One end of the Island, "Sidney Spit", some 200 acres, already exists as a heavily used Marine Park. Since 1975, the provincial governments have known that the Island was up for sale and that the present owner was anxious to have the Island preserved for the people of B.C. as a provincial park. But it appears that only a large scale public campaign can save Sidney Island from the developers.

Any members of VNHS who wish to serve on the Sidney Island Committee, please contact the President, A. Doug Turnbull (592-6025).

ATTENTION BIRDERS

The chance of a lifetime! See Point Pelee, Ontario, at the height of the Spring Migration. Victoria Natural History Society is considering sponsoring a 7-day excursion May 9 to 16, 1979. Do you want to come? Approximate cost \$500 per person for airfare, lodging and bus transport. If interested, phone Charlie Trotter (477-4365) by November 10th.

JUNIOR PROGRAM

- WED. NOV. 1 Behind the scenes Museum Tour. Meet 4:00 p.m. by Nootka Whaling Carving.
- SAT. NOV. 4 Help build Wood Duck nesting boxes. 1:30 to 4:30. Bring hammer if poss. Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Centre, 3873 Swan Lake Road.
- WED. NOV. 15 Indian Crafts, Provincial Museum. Meet 4:00 p.m. by Nootka Whaling Carving.
- SAT. NOV. 18 Goldstream Salmon Run: Mayfair Lanes, 9:30. Bring lunch and stay for afternoon hike if you wish.
- WED. NOV. 29 Museum's Plant Collection. Meet 4:00 p.m. by Nootka Whaling Carving.
- SAT. DEC. 2 Winter Waterbirds at Esquimalt Lagoon. Meet Mayfair Lanes, 9:00 a.m., returning by noon. Please dress warmly and bring binoculars if poss.
- SAT. DEC. 16 Christmas Count: Any older juniors who wish to help, please contact Grace Barclay (479-0211).

(Junior's Camp on Saturna Island was very successful with 18 children taking part. We hope to have a report from one of them in our next issue in January.)

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER PROGRAMME

- FRI. NOV. 3 BEACH SEINING: Leader, Dr. Alex Peden. Meet Mayfair Lanes, 10:30 P.M. or Bazan Bay, 11:00 P.M.
- FRI. NOV. 10  
SAT. NOV. 11 AUDUBON: Newcombe Auditorium, 8:00 p.m. Speaker: Grant Foster. "Wilderness Trek Through New Zealand."
- TUES. NOV. 14 GENERAL MEETING: Newcombe Auditorium. 8:00 P.M. Dr. Ed. Oswald will speak on the Yukon.
- WED. NOV. 15 MARINE BIOLOGY: Dr. Alex Peden (652-3598). 7:00 P.M., Room 115, Provincial Museum.
- THURS. NOV. 16 ENTOMOLOGY: Dr. Brian Ainscough. 8:00 p.m. Room 112, Provincial Museum.
- SAT. NOV. 18 FUNGUS FORAY: Dr. Al Funk. TWO hours only. Meet Mayfair Lanes, 9:00 a.m. or Goldstream Campsite 9:30. (Upper level meeting place)
- SUN. NOV. 19 ORNITHOLOGY: Leader: Tim Murphy. Meet Mayfair Lanes 9:00 a.m. or Fort Rodd Hill Carpark, 9:30.
- TUES. DEC. 12 GENERAL MEETING: Newcombe Auditorium 8:00 P.M. Kaye and Dennis Suttill on "Wild Gardens and High Trails".
- SAT. DEC. 16 BIRD COUNT: Organiser: Harry Davidson, (479-1286). Compiler: Mike Shepard (387-3544). Volunteer Counters please take \$1.50 each.
- WED. DEC. 20 MARINE BIOLOGY: CANCELLED.

Mayfair Lanes Carpark is at the corner of Cloverdale and Oak, just off Douglas. Transport for non-car owners is available by courtesy of other members. Take lunch with you and wear warm clothing and stout shoes or gumboots.