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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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Rare Bird Alert  
383-0211

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### UNUSUAL SIGHTING IN THE COMOX VALLEY

by A. R. Davidson

There are two species of birds which pass over Victoria regularly, but are not always seen. Even serious bird watchers who try and keep track of the birds, both resident and migrant, often fail to sight them.

The two are the Vaux Swift and the Black Swift. According to my records, larger Black Swifts are generally noticed in June and again in August and September, while the Vaux go through in May and return in September. Their numbers can vary from single birds to a few hundred.

The above is a preface to an account given in the March issue of the Comox-Strathcona Natural History Society Newsletter, written by Doug Newson.

"On Sunday afternoon August 28, 1977, a bright sunny day with a brisk westerly wind, about 4:00 p.m. a few Vaux Swift appeared, which later developed into a large migration. By 4:30, many thousands were in clear sight. I phoned Phil Capes (Courtenay) and Walter Fitzpatrick (Denman Island) to try and determine the approximate area covered in the flight, which appeared to be about 2 miles wide. They were simply and literally everywhere. There was no air space without swifts between tree-top height along the beach and high in the sky. Their aerial acrobatics were sheer delight as they gradually worked their way straight into the west wind. By 5:30 p.m., they were out of sight. In our view only a few, perhaps one in thousands, were the much larger Black Swift.

Whence came they, and whither?"

COVER

MARbled GODWITS

By Bertha McHaffie-Gow

## HERITAGE TREE FIELD TRIP

By Katherine Sherman

Except for the uncomfortably chilly weather, this was a most rewarding outing for the 20 or so members who turned up on Sunday, 11 March. Our leader, Virginia Bartkow, a hard-working member of the Heritage Tree Group, had certainly done her homework. We were each given mimeographed copies of the items of interest in our itinerary, along with maps marking the location of each heritage tree.

Our first tree, the well-known landmark, the Sequoiadendron giganteum, perched high up on the corner of Burnside and Finlayson, once graced the field where the Tally Ho horses were put to graze. As urbanization with its black-topped streets closed in on it, the tree began to die. The Heritage Tree Group pointed this out to the City Hall, who co-operated by removing some of the blacktop. The tree now appears to be thriving.

Our itinerary now took us downtown. Thank Goodness it was a Sunday morning, no traffic and no parking problems. The first stop was Centennial Square, where we viewed the Ginkgo biloba. The Ginkgo goes back 200 million years, and might have become extinct had it not been preserved in Temple gardens in China.

The Camperdown Elm, a grafted variety of Wych Elm, in Bastion Square was next on our list. The tree, about 80 years old, was moved in 1965. This was an operation taking skill and time. First, all the spreading roots had to be cut and the tree left in place for one year so that it might grow short new roots. In its leafless state, we were able to appreciate to the full the tortured formation of its branches.

There was not time to stop for the trees of interest around Parliament Buildings, but we made note of the 2 enormous Lombardy Poplars on Simcoe Street, before coming to a halt in McDonald Park, where a row of Cedar of Lebanon had been planted. We noted the characteristics of this species - the more or less horizontal branches and the cones which disintegrate on the tree, leaving upright "spindles".



A pleasant stop was made at the old Newcombe home on Dallas Road, to see a many-trunked Holly Oak and a magnificent Arbutus. Then we continued along Dallas past the well-known windswept Horse Chestnut, and a splendid clump of elms, to Beacon Hill Park.

There is so much of interest in the Park that we could have enjoyed another hour there had the day been less chilling. Most of the large (non-native) trees had been planted in 1889, and are ones we have so often passed by without giving them much thought. However, we hope we can now distinguish an Austrian Pine from a Scots Pine; a Sequoiadendron from a Sequoia sempervirens (California Redwood); a Nutmeg Yew from an English Yew. We also hope that in future we shall recognise a Cryptomeria japonica; a Larch, and a Swamp Cypress - at least by the "knees" if by nothing else.

In a row of Scots Pines by the cricket field there was one specimen so poorly shaped that one wondered why it had been allowed to remain. On closer inspection, it appeared as though another species had been grafted on to the original tree. Apparently, a rust fungus was responsible for the peculiar growth, known as Witches Broom. In this instance, the new growth was healthy and attractive, and bore cones much smaller than on the main tree. Scions of the growth can be taken and grafted on to Scots Pine; it is in fact known in Horticultural circles as "Pinus sylvestris c.v. Beacon Hill".

Ordinarily, on our Botany trips we confine ourselves to our native plants and those accidentally introduced as weeds. Sunday's tour might be described as a "Round-the-world" nature tour. We are all indebted to Virginia Bartkow for her excellent leadership, and the added interest she has given us in our City.

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Vancouver N.H.S. member Robin Weber set a new record in 1978 with a total of 303 species of birds seen within the boundaries of B.C. in one calendar year. Previous record (several years ago) was 301, by Mike Shepard.

Vancouver Bird Alert  
Seattle Hot Line

266-2413  
(206)455-9722



## FEDERATION OF B.C. NATURALISTS

Our co-representative, David Orton, has been elected Regional Vice-President of the Vancouver Island Region. At the March General Meeting he gave a resume of the business at Nanaimo on 3 March, at which several resolutions were put forward and passed.

One item was that the Federation is holding a sum of money representing donations for the acquisition of Sidney Island, although it was considered that the price asked, for just over 2,000 acres, was excessive.

However, a letter from the Minister of Lands, Parks and Housing, James R. Chabot, contains the following: - "In view of public expression of interest, I am prepared to review this decision" (that is, that the Province could not act on the offer,) "and explore, in some part at least, if the property for sale might be obtainable for Park purposes."

### BARBARA CHAPMAN MEMORIAL FUND

At the General Meeting on 13 March, a resolution recommended by the Board of Directors was passed, to increase the amount of money collected by Barbara's friends and colleagues following her tragic death. That amount was just over \$300.00. This sum will be made up to \$1,100 from the Nehring Fund. A committee of 3 trustees (Gwennie Hooper, Bill Barkley, and Gail Mitchell) will use the interest for a prize to be given each April to a naturalist under 18 years judged by the FBCN and VNHS to be the most promising young B.C. naturalist of the year.

### FREEMAN KING-THOMAS FRANCIS PARK

Also passed at the Meeting was a recommendation by the Board of Directors that this Park should become the responsibility of the Capital Regional District who will provide certain operating and maintenance services. A naturalist service will continue to be provided under the Parks Board to be financed by the VNHS up to approximately \$2,000 per year following the tradition established by Freeman King.

## EDITORIAL

The past year has been a very busy and varied one for Society members, both Junior and Senior. We have had Field Trips on Botany, Ornithology, Entomology, Marine Biology, Beach Seining, Geology, Archaeology, Heritage Trees, Plants in Fruit, Fungus Foray, a Boat Trip to Mandarte Island, the Environmental Bus Tour in September, and the Christmas Bird Count. Add to these, many evening lectures in the Provincial Museum.

Longer Trips included Miracle Beach, Hurricane Ridge, Botanical Beach at Port Renfrew, the overnight trip to Big Qualicum River, and the trips to see salmon spawning and herring spawning.

The Juniors had a Camp-out on Saturna Island, while many members went to Summer Camp at Waterton Lakes, organised by the FBCN. This proved so popular that it is being repeated this year, plus a Camp at Nanoose on Vancouver Island. A trip to Point Pelee has also been arranged.

Much business was debated and decisions made by the Board of Directors, with the results put to the members at the General Meetings for their approval, and passed. All in all, a busy time too, for Organisers, Leaders and Lecturers when you add the organising of the Audubon Films as well.

Vic Goodwill has finished compiling the Winter Season Records of birds seen in Southern Vancouver Island. This may be seen by phoning our Librarian.

Your editor remains in office for another year, with the assistance of Joan Inglis. But next issue of the "Naturalist" will be brought out by Helen Rodney, with Joan's assistance. Deadline for July/August issue is 1st June - NOT LATER PLEASE. (Helen - 592-3707)

Don't forget that the May meeting is the Annual General one and will NOT be on the second Tuesday but on Tuesday, 29 May. Voting will take place to fill the gaps caused in the Board of Directors due to retirements. All members by that date should have renewed their dues!

NOT QUITE SUCH A BIG DAY!*By Roy Prior*

How many species of bird can be seen in the Victoria area in a single day towards the end of March. When the migration has scarcely begun?

This was the question that 2 birders tried to settle on 24 March. On our way long before sunrise, we registered our first robin at 5:45, and dropped in on the Marbled Godwits at Cadboro Bay, but saw no hummingbirds at Penrhyn St. Prevost Hill was splendid: a Hairy and a Downy Woodpecker on the same tree, a male Anna's Hummingbird located by its song, and a Yellow-shafted Flicker with his black mustache, red nape, and yellow wing linings. Disappointment at Haro Woods: but at Ascot Ponds we arrived so early that we took the Virginia Rail by surprise, momentarily glimpsing as well as hearing this elusive bird. On Swan Lake, 2 Ruddy Ducks; at Quick's Bottom a Cinnamon Teal but no Barn Swallow. Ring-necked Ducks at Prospect Lake and all three species of Scoter at Patricia Bay.

On to Sidney and a flock of Black Brant on the water, but no Barrow's Goldeneye. North of the airport, 2 raptors in the sky together: a Redtailed Hawk and a female Marsh Hawk: a second female Marsh Hawk was at Martindale Road.

The problem was always the same: whether to go to a given spot in the hope of seeing another bird: how long to stay in one place. At Saanichton Bay we drew a blank; at Martindale Road we saw no Skylarks. About 75 species, and it was well after 2:00 p.m. Would it be worth trying Beaver Lake Playground? On such a lovely sunny spring Sunday, the place would be crowded: and surely the White-fronted Goose would have been scared away? Well, we'll just try it anyway. And there, surrounded by people, and ignoring them, was the goose!

Back to Victoria for some shore birds, and the Brandt's Cormorants that are always at McNeill Bay. They weren't. Clover Point produced its usual little group, the 9 Sanderlings and the Rock Sandpipers, Surfbirds and Black Turnstones.

Time getting short. Red-throated and Arctic Loons at Esquimalt Lagoon, but at Pears Road neither the Western Bluebirds nor the Western Meadowlarks, a great disappointment. Suddenly we realized we had seen no Kinglets and no Kingfisher. But they would turn up for certain at Witty's Lagoon.

Lengthy and arduous searching, whistling, cooing, coaxing, and (regrettably) cursing produced 2 paltry Golden-crowned Kinglets and nothing else. But down beside the stream were unexpected Water Pipits. It was late. Where would we have the best chance of pushing our total to 100? "We'd be sure to get a Yellow-rumped Warbler at Swan Lake". "And there's ALWAYS this one Kingfisher at Oak Bay Marina! For certain."

But first, at Portage Inlet, 2 Redheads and some Common Mergansers, although the Trumpeter Swans we both saw across the water disappeared when we looked through the scope, and some Mute Swans took their place: very strange. At Swan Lake a considerable search yielded no Warblers, and the shades of night were falling fast. Right then, "let's just catch the celebrated reliable ever-present old faithful Oak Bay Marina Kingfisher and we'll call it a day". I think we examined the rigging of every boat in the Marina, but the celebrated, reliable, etc. etc. kingfisher must have been taking the evening off.

We gave up at last. Nearly 13 hours; 130 miles by car; 96 species. Well, anyway, it was NEARLY 100, we assured each other, and we'd do better next time.

BEACH SEINING with the JUNIORS

On Saturday, January 27, a party of 13 under the supervision of Dr. Alex Peden journeyed out to Willow's Beach to go Beach Seining. Because of the need of Low Tide conditions, the group met at 9:00 p.m. We caught several Sticklebacks, Pricklebacks, Flounders, Suckerfishes, Shrimps, many varieties of Sculpin, and a Pipefish. After we collected the specimens, Dr. Peden identified them for the group. A few fish were donated to Belmont's Biology Lab, the rest were let go.

- *By Donna-Rae and Kerry Williams and Jim Peters*



## THE MARSHALL STEVENSON WILDLIFE REFUGE

*By David Orton*

About 25 members of the VNHS journeyed up-Island on Saturday, 17 March, to visit the Marshall Stevenson Wildlife Refuge. This field trip was a sequel to a well-attended slide presentation on the natural history of the Refuge, given at the General Meeting on the previous Tuesday evening.

This particular Refuge, along with 2 other small areas (Nanoose and Rosewell Creek) together make up what is known as the Qualicum National Wildlife Area. Neil Dawe, who gave the slide presentation, and who acted as guide on the field trip, is Habitat Manager on Vancouver Island for the Canadian Wildlife Service, and responsible for the Qualicum National Wildlife Area.

The MSWR is located on the estuary of the Little Qualicum River. This is an important salmon river on Vancouver Island, containing all 5 species of salmon, as well as steelhead. The Refuge incorporates a former farm (fields and some second growth forest), in addition to a very productive migratory waterfowl area of intertidal flats at the river mouth. It totals about 115 acres. The government obtained this property around 1972, but unfortunately it has not yet been opened to the public. As some of the members found out, the entrance to the Refuge is not very "public" and was therefore hard to find.

Surprisingly, the Refuge is hemmed-in to some extent by houses. So it is not as "wild" as one might naively expect a wildlife refuge area to be. But it is a good example of how wildlife and people can live together - if a sanctuary atmosphere can be provided.

### Highlights

We saw 8-10 Bald Eagles. These eagles are basically fish eaters, although they eat carrion and catch crippled waterfowl. For some of us, it was the first time that we saw an eagle working a sea duck, dive-bombing the duck in order to force it to dive repeatedly and so exhaust itself.

Once this is accomplished, dinner commences. But for some reason the eagle gave up. However, we did see Bald Eagles consuming a duck identified as a Barrow's Goldeneye.

Hundreds of Brant - the sea-goose at the Pacific Coast - were a thrilling sight, stooping over at the mouth of the Little Qualicum and flying along the edge of the beach. Looking at these geese made one appreciate the value of undisturbed habitat which is not shot over. A large concentration of gulls had assembled to clean up the remnants of the herring spawn. Also, in one of the estuary channels, we saw a sizable group of Common Mergansers, most of which were females. Otter scat was pointed out on the river bank, close to where the mergansers were seen.

Some herring spawn was found attached to sea-weed on the beach. It looks like a mass of small semi-transparent pearls. Visually, it is very different in appearance from the roe of a freshly jigged Gorge herring. Neil said that in the Little Qualicum area, spawn is deposited regularly in the inter-tidal zone and takes 10 to 14 days to hatch.

In a fresh water pond on the old farm, grapesize clusters of salamander eggs were seen. Close by the pond was an old log house, home of the first white settler in the area, a Mr. Kincade. The house has been added to over the years, but the original section dated back to 1884.

And according to a local legend, the many wild rose bushes on the farm marked the site of a fierce battle long ago between different factions of the original inhabitants of B.C. The defeated forces in this particular battle, so the story goes, planted a rose bush wherever a slain warrior fell. Rather a nice memorial.

A toolshed on the farm turned out to be the home of a Bewick's Wren which was using a paper bag within the shed to nest. There were two eggs in the nest when we looked. A successful brood of chicks had been raised last year.

A walk was taken through some second growth forest, the trees being under 100 years old. We saw fir saplings which had been used by deer for rubbing their antlers. Following a trail, we noticed the stumps of previous forest giants with notches cut into them for the loggers to place their foot boards to stand upon. We were also shown a hummingbird nest in regular yearly use. All too soon the short visit to the Refuge was over. Many of us felt there was more to see and would like to return again.

Down the road a few miles, is an area of over 200 acres close to the mouth of Englishman River, known as Parksville Flats. This is an area where many years ago, it is said, the geese and the ducks used to blot out the sun. Today, the Arrowsmith Natural History Society, along with the Parksville Fish and Game Club and many others, would like what is happening at the mouth of the Little Qualicum to happen also on the Flats. But the Parksville Flats are slated for housing and commercial "development" by Aldergrove Enterprises. We should support the Arrowsmith naturalists. Without habitat, wildlife cannot live. For naturalists, without wildlife, would life be worth living?

#### CRUISES AND TRIPS: 1979

The FBCN have arranged day trips to Mittlenatch Island on 9 Saturdays in June, July and August. Travel to the Island will be aboard the 65' former fisheries vessel "Hostess" to and from Campbell River. Cost \$15.00 return. A few registration forms have been given to our Society and more may be obtained from MITTLENATCH TRIPS, P.O. Box 392, Campbell River, B.C., V9W 4Z9. Special trips for groups may be arranged by contacting Bill Merilees, 1655 Sherwood Drive, Nanaimo, B.C., V9T 1H2 (758-1801). A "group" trip is being considered by bus to and from Campbell River for Society members, depending on how many are interested.

A BOTANY TRIP to HURRICANE RIDGE is being planned for Sunday 8 July. Please have names in before 22 May. Check Field Trips on Bird Alert (383-0211); on T.V. Channel 10, and in Newspapers. Always take lunch unless otherwise stated.

F.B.C.N. - Meetings September 29 and December 1.

#### OUTING ON 25 MARCH

*By Merle Harvey*

This was meant to be Botanical but there were very few wildflowers out at Witty's Lagoon, only 2 Trilliums opening up, 4 Erythroniums full out, and some Salmonberry flowers. So we had an exercise on identifying trees and a variety of wildflowers in leaf. We found a Slime Mold like a small cauliflower, identified as a Fuligo. However, it was a delightful walk down to the beach and along the sand for a bit, and then some members sat down and had lunch within sight of the sea.

But 5 of us went to Pearson's College and had our lunch overlooking Pedder Bay. All around us were Filaree (*Erodium cicutum*) in bloom, and a few Blue Mary's (*Collinsia grandiflora*) and Early Saxafrage (*S. integrifolia*) and several Broom bushes bright with their yellow flowers. A walk through the wood was rewarding, as we found Wood violets (*Viola semperviren*) in several places; 1 Calypso (*C. bulbosa*) ready to open; and several groups of tiny Twayblades in bud (*Listera cordata*), their twin leaves lifting well above ground - very early indeed for these summer-flowering orchids.

Of course, the "birding" members had brought their binoculars with them but there were very few birds at Witty's. However, at Dupree Road we were lucky to see 4 Western Bluebirds, one obliging enough to sit on a post beside us and show off his beautiful blue plumage; also a Yellow-rumped Warbler. Quail called among the bushes; a Redtailed Hawk swung in curves above us; a pair of Redwinged Blackbirds preened themselves, each on a post, and a flock of Robins probed the grass.

A walk along to the pond to see 5 Ring-necked ducks, while a flock of Siskins twittered and flitted among the oaks. But our bonus for the day was the sight of a tiny Saw-whet Owl on a branch of a pine tree, right above our heads.

Our thanks to Terese Tod and all those who helped to make this Outing so enjoyable.

MAY/JUNE PROGRAMS

- SUN. MAY 6 BIRDS: No Leader Trip to Beaver and Elk Lakes. Meet Mayfair Lanes 9:00 a.m. or Beaver Lake Parking Lot 9:30 a.m. Walk by Beaver Lake towards Highway and back by the meadows.
- SAT. MAY 19 BOTANY: Goldstream. Leader: Katherine Sherman. Meet Mayfair Lanes 9:00 a.m.
- SUN. MAY 27 BIRDS: Francis Park. Leader: Anne Knowles. Meet Mayfair Lanes 8:00 a.m. or Nature House 8:30 a.m.
- TUES. MAY 29 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: Newcombe Auditorium, 8:00 p.m.
- SAT. JUNE 2 BOTANY: Island View Beach. Leader: Leon Pavlick. Meet Mayfair Lanes 9:00 a.m. or Island View Beach 9:30.
- SUN. JUNE 10 BOTANY AND MARINE BIOLOGY: Leaders: Bob Ogilvy and Alex Peden. Botanical Beach, Port Renfrew. Leave Government Wharf there at 10:00 a.m. (4 hours drive from Victoria. See notes below for those who wish to go up the night before).
- SAT. JUNE 16 BIRDS: No Leader Trip to Mount Douglas. Meet Mayfair Lanes 8:00 a.m. or Mount Douglas Beach Parking Lot 8:30 a.m.

BOTANICAL BEACH (SUNDAY, JUNE 10):

Camping facilities available at Fairy Lake (B.C. Forest Products) and 2 motels listed for Port Renfrew.

RENFREW BEACH MOTEL  
Port Renfrew  
VOS 1K0 (647-5437)

ELLIOTT'S CABINS  
Port Renfrew  
VOS 1K0 (647-5405)

Queries to Dr. Alex Peden (652-3598) or  
Dr. Bob Ogilvie (658-8937).

(Always take lunch unless otherwise stated.)

JUNIORS AND INTERMEDIATESCombined Outings - Something For All

- SAT. MAY 12 BEACHCOMBING on Pender Island. Meet Mayfair Lanes 8:50 a.m. or Swartz Bay Foot Passengers Waiting Room 9:20 a.m. Bring lunch and ferry fare: 75¢ to 11 years; \$1.50 - 12 and over. Returning early afternoon.
- SAT. MAY 26 MATHIESON LAKE: Meet Mayfair Lanes, 10:00 a.m. Games. Challenges. Hike. Cook-out. Swimming if weather favourable. (Bring own lunch to cook)
- JUNE PROGRAM UNCERTAIN.

BIRD OBSERVATIONS

*From Peggy Goodwill*

NO.	SPECIES	DATE	AREA SEEN	OBSERVER
<u>FEB.</u>				
1	Townsend Solitaire	10	Dean Park Rd.	Joan Payne
1	Yel-billed Loon	11	Genoa Bay	R. Satterfield
1	Bl-legged Kittiwake	11	Ogden Point	Mike Shepard
1	Yel-hd. Blackbird	17	Lakehill Ave.	Huber Moore
<u>MAR.</u>				
5	Tree Swallow )	3	Head,	Jim Wilson
	)		Cowichan Bay	
15	Vi-gr. Swallow)			
10	W. Bluebird	4	Pears Road	Jim Wilson
1	Am. Golden Plover	6	Beach Dr./Goodwin	Wayne Campbell
3	Black Brant	11	Willow's Beach	Wayne Campbell
2	Lap. Longspur	11	Gt. Chain Island	Wayne Campbell
1	Rufous Hummingbird	11	Rithet's Bog	Harold Hosford
1	Harris' Sparrow	15	Haliburton Rd.	Barbara Hunt
1	Cinnamon Teal	17	Quick's Bottom	R. Satterfield
1	Turkey Vulture	18	Westholme	Doug Turnbull
1	Barn Swallow	18	Quick's Bottom	Alan McLeod
2	Redhead	19	Portage Inlet	M & V. Goodwill
1	W. Bluebird	20	E. Sooke Park	B&J Meiklejohn
1	Rough-w. Swallow	24	Quick's Bottom	R. Satterfield V. Goodwill
1	Saw-whet Owl	25	Dupree Drive	Merle Harvey
2	Marbled Godwits	31	Cadboro Bay	K & D Suttill