



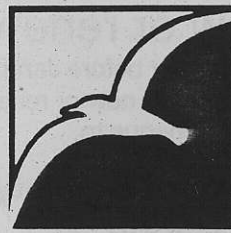
The Victoria NATURALIST

JANUARY
FEBRUARY
1991
VOL 47.4

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY



HAPPY



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The Membership Committee cordially invites everyone who enjoyed the *Naturalist* during 1990 to make the best decision for the New Year...

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GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION

Members are encouraged to submit articles, field trip reports, birding and botany notes, and book reviews with photographs or illustrations if possible. Photographs of natural history are appreciated along with documentation of location, species names and a date. Please label your submission with your name, address, and phone number and provide a title. We will accept and use copy in almost any legible form but we encourage submission of typed, double-spaced copy or an IBM compatible word processing file on a 360K 5.25" diskette plus printed output. Having copy submitted on diskette saves a lot of time and work for the publications group and we really appreciate the help. If you have an obscure or very old word processing program, call the editor, **Warren Drinnan** at 598-0471 or 652-9618, or **Diana Jolly** at 388-4259 or 479-8134, or save the text in ASCII format. Blank diskettes may be obtained from the editor and we will return any of your own diskettes submitted. Photos and slides submitted may be picked up at the Field Naturalist, 1241 Broad Street, or will be returned if a stamped, self-addressed envelope is included with the material.

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Back Page	\$120	7.25 x 8 in.
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1/3 Page	\$50	7.25 x 3.25 in.
1/4 Page	\$40	3.25 x 4.675 in.
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Our Cover Photograph

By Enid K. Lemon

This issue of *The Victoria Naturalist* features the prize-winning pictures from The Victoria Naturalist Photo Contest. Our cover photograph of the Yellow-headed Blackbird by Enid K. Lemon won first prize. Enid used Ektachrome 200 film and 400 mm. lens to get the picture. Other pictures by this photographer also appear on Pages 11 and 13. Second prize winner was Beth McLean for her tranquil image of two Trumpeter Swans at Martindale Flats reproduced on Page 5. Third prize went to A. Nugent for her photo of a butterfly on Page 12.

Story Writing Contest

Winning stories from the Victoria Naturalist Story Writing Contest appear throughout this issue. Friends of Beacon Hill Park, Helen Oldershaw and Joel Ussery, took first prize for their story "A Revegetation Project in the Southeast Woods of Beacon Hill Park" on Page 4. Second Prize was awarded for Andrea Lawrence's "Ancient Murrelets" on Page 16, and Darren R. Copley and Eric L. Walters piece "Rewards of Being a Volunteer" on Page 8 was the third prize winner.

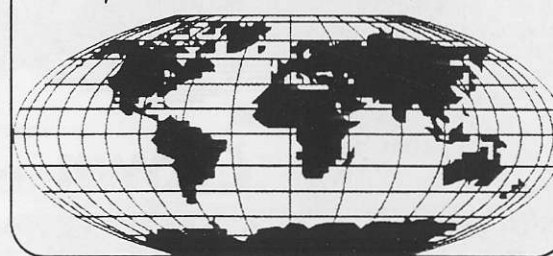


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A Revegetation Project in the Southeast Woods of Beacon Hill Park

By Helen Oldershaw and Joel Ussery
— Friends of Beacon Hill Park

“Even I can remember when the park was full of woods and wild flowers, and owls hooted and there were ladyslippers and wild lilies and the lakes were swampy pools...”

Emily Carr, 1935.

Civilization has wrought many changes at Beacon Hill Park. From its designation as a park (by Sir James Douglas in 1858), it has been constantly under pressure from various, often conflicting, interests. The pools have been dredged to create lakes. Sports fields, playgrounds, club houses, a children's zoo and the many formal gardens have replaced most of the woods and meadows. Park maintenance staff work hard to maintain a neat and orderly appearance, even where native species remain. All to recreate our image of a gentele oasis of “Victorian” England in the urban new world.

Yet the southeast woods, the groves of Garry oaks, and Camas meadows of Beacon Hill are another type of oasis. They are among the last downtown remnants of the unique natural landscape which gives Victoria its special character. Human activity and introduced species have irreparably altered these natural areas, but they have not destroyed them. Dr. Christopher Brayshaw, assisted by Dr. Adolf Ceska and Dr. Robert

Ogilvie (all botanists at the Royal B.C. Museum), have documented 60 surviving native plant species in the meadows and oak parkland, and 53 native species in the southeast wood.

The Friends of Beacon Hill Park are vitally interested in the maintenance of these remnant native plant communities. We are working to ensure that park management practices help, rather than hinder, this goal. We have also chosen to experiment with regenerating areas of native vegetation which have been substantially altered by human activity. With the aid of a grant from the Victoria Natural History Society, and donations from interested individuals, we are working to assist the recovery of native vegetation in a portion of the southeast woods.

The revegetation project seeks to repair the damage caused by the clearing, in 1986, of a large swath of the understorey vegetation during the construction of the Sri Chimnoy jogging trail. The cleared vegetation, along with the duff of needles and decaying organic matter on the forest floor, was raked into a pile and burnt. Non-native grass seed was scattered on the site and the area was mowed and raked each year, disrupting the successional processes which would have naturally regenerated the area. The Friends are particularly concerned about the absence of tree seedlings which are essential to the long-term maintenance of tree cover on the site, and the rapid spread of introduced “weed” species at the expense of the remaining native ground cover.

In consultation with the botanists from the Royal B.C. Museum, we have designed a trial project in a plot of approximately 800 square metres where native tree seedlings, herbs, ferns and mosses are being reintroduced. This area is being planted and maintained, at no cost to the City of Victoria, as a community service and nature education project. It is hoped that the project will inspire interest in native plant gardening, local ecology, and similar revegetation projects in other disturbed areas of the Capital Regional District. The Friends have been awarded a federal grant which will further these goals. Three people will be hired in the spring to plan summer nature study programs for children in the park.

Obtaining approval and preparing for the project was a lengthy process. A proposal went to the Victoria Advisory Parks and Recreation Commission, a detailed planting and maintenance plan was required by the Director of Parks and Recreation, union consent had to be obtained, and the project had to pass Victoria Council. The C.U.P.E. Local 50 members had asked to be involved to learn more about local ecology and plantings of native species, so we had several meetings to discuss the project and plan the planting procedure.

Species for the revegetation project have been chosen for their suitability to the local area and site conditions. The friends also intend to introduce mosses and some downed wood from a similar forested area. The trial project will take two years. Plantings will occur each spring and fall, with periodic weeding of exotic species and constant monitoring of the site.

The first planting took place on November 14. The authors, along with Agnes Lynn and a group of her girl guides and their parents, first selectively “weeded” the area to remove noxious and invasive introduced species. Care was taken not to disturb the site to avoid the introduction of new weedy species.

The native species for the planting came from a variety of sources. Most of the herbs were purchased from Thimble

Farms on Salt Spring Island, although Agnes Lynn supplied additional species. Will Smith of the Heritage Tree Project supplied 11 tree seedlings. All species were carefully planted in areas chosen for their ecological compatibility (for example the ferns were planted in shaded hollows where moisture collects). The number, species, and location of plantings were carefully recorded, and the planted area was marked off to discourage park visitors from walking over the area.

The Friends will continue the planting in the spring and monitor the site during the summer “drought”. Additional weeding will probably be necessary. At the end of the summer, 1991, the project will be evaluated and the type and timing of additional plantings will be planned. We will also experiment with scattering seeds of desirable native plants on site. Along with the recovery process, the Friends will work to ensure the survival of native communities in the park through continuous political lobbying for more effective protection.

The project has been, and will continue to be, a rewarding learning experience. We hope it will contribute to raising awareness of Victoria's threatened natural heritage. Beacon Hill Park is a green oasis amidst the concrete and asphalt of the city. In it are remnants of the ecologically diverse natural landscape that greeted the first Europeans and evidence of the rich native culture which flourished here. We need to recognize that there is much this area can teach us about Victoria's natural and cultural heritage. We thank the Victoria Natural History Society for its support and hope its members will continue to appreciate the “wild side” of Beacon Hill Park.

Species composition and numbers of the first planting in the Southeast Wood for November 14, 1990 were as follows:

Tree Seedlings: 2 Douglas Fir, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*,
9 Grand Fir, *Abies grandis*
Shrubs: 20 Salal, *Gaultheria shallon* (planted in old

stumps on site),

6 Oregon Grape, *Mahonia aquifolium* and three *M. nervosa*

Ferns: 8 Sword Fern, *Polystichum munitum*,

6 Lady Fern, *Athyrium filix-femina*

Herbs: 20 Starflower, *Trientalis latifolia*

6 Trillium, *Trillium ovatum*

3 Twinflower, *Linnaea borealis*

(Two dozen blackberry, *Rubus ursinus*, will probably be planted around Christmas.)

Tribute to Ed Coffin

By Dannie Carsen

There once was a man who did his job so quietly and well for so many years that no one was able to describe exactly how he did it. After many years of faithful, exemplary service, we say “thanks Ed” but not goodbye to our membership director. Ed accomplished a job *by hand* that could be considered to be the best example of the task most usefully computerized. As Betty Kennedy has often said “every society needs someone like Ed” who is willing to spend the time to ensure membership is correctly and efficiently maintained. Whenever I can't remember how to spell a member's name, Ed's list was and is the best source. Ed found satisfaction in doing this job on the typewriter, over several hours a week I'm sure, and we commend him for a job well done. With the membership list safely handed over to Tom Gillespie, Ed is able to take up the job of pursuing recreational pleasures more seriously. We'll miss you Ed, so make sure you check up on us now and then.

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Trumpeter Swans. (Photo: Beth McLean, 2nd prize winner in the Victoria Naturalist Photo Contest.)

The Risso's Dolphin in British Columbia

by Robin W. Baird

Only 17 records of the Risso's Dolphin (*Grampus griseus*) have been noted from British Columbia waters. Although there are records in offshore waters off southeast Alaska (Braham 1983), the northernmost record from the eastern North Pacific is actually from British Columbia; a single animal live stranded in November 1977 at the head of the Portland Canal, further north than the southern part of southeast Alaska. Two of the 17 records are of two groups seen close to each other in offshore waters in 1976, considered here as one occurrence in British Columbia waters. Another five sightings were over a three week period in Georgia Strait in 1978, probably repeated sightings of the same individuals. Thus the 17 records likely represent only 12 occurrences of the Risso's Dolphin on the British Columbia coast. Of these 12 occurrences, six were of singly stranded individuals, two which live-stranded and died, while the other four were found dead. Skeletal materials were collected from five of the stranded individuals, for the collections of the Royal British Columbia Museum, the Cowan Vertebrate Museum (UBC), the Queen Charlotte Islands Museum, and the Vancouver Public Aquarium. The first record of this species in British Columbia was actually an individual which for no particular reason was shot and killed off Stuart Island in May 1964 (Guiguet and Pike 1965).

Records from British Columbia are from nine months of the year, with no real seasonal trends in their presence. There are more records from summer months, but this probably represents increased observer effort, rather than an increase in their presence. Leatherwood *et al.* (1980) note that records of Risso's Dolphins in the North Pacific north of 45° N are most abundant during summer, and appear to relate to the warming of surface waters, but records from British Columbia do not really seem to support this trend.

Risso's Dolphins are found worldwide in tropical and warm temperate areas, and are not uncommon. However, no estimates of population size are available. They are typically an offshore species. However, in British Columbia waters, of the six sighting occurrences (including the one that was shot), four were in relatively shallow water, while the other two were outside the 1000 fathom contour. However, this may be due to the fact that sighting effort in inshore waters is much higher than offshore. The water temperature for one of the British Columbia records is the coldest recorded for this species in the eastern North Pacific; from mid-January, with a temperature of 8.2°C.

The Risso's Dolphin is a large dolphin with a stocky body, reaching a maximum length of four metres and a weight of 500 kilograms. The sexes appear to be similar in size and external shape. The bulbous head has a melon much larger than that of most other Delphinids and there is no beak. Found only in this species, a shallow, V-shaped crease extends from the blowhole to the tip of the rostrum. The dentition of this species is unusual as well, two to seven pairs of teeth are present in the lower jaw, and rarely one or two pairs of teeth may be found in the upper

jaw. The dorsal fin is high, erect and falcate, set at the mid-point of the body, and is among the tallest, relative to body size, of all the cetaceans.

Risso's Dolphins are a uniform light grey at birth, darken to a chocolate brown or black, and then appear to lighten again as they age. Large animals are typically cream-white or silver-grey, although the dorsal fin, flukes, and trailing half of the flippers remain dark. The body is usually covered with scratch marks, either from fighting or from squid bites. Their diet consists mainly of cephalopods and occasionally small fish. The length at birth ranges from 110 to 166 centimetres, and they become sexually mature at about three metres in length. The age of the dolphin's first reproduction and calving interval is not known.

In both the wild and in captivity, Risso's and Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) hybrids have been reported. In the wild they frequently associate with other small cetaceans, such as Northern Right-whale Dolphins (*Lissodelphis borealis*), Short-finned Pilot Whales (*Globicephala macro-rhynchus*), Pacific White-sided Dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus obliquidens*), and Dall's Porpoise (*Phocoenoides dalli*). Risso's Dolphins occasionally follow moving vessels, and may be quite acrobatic. One wild individual, named "Pelorus Jack", may be one of the most well-known individual wild cetaceans. It escorted ships into Admiralty Bay in New Zealand over a period of up to 17 years.

Risso's Dolphins have been kept in a variety of aquariums and oceanariums both in Japan and the United States. For such an uncommon species a surprising number of the records from B.C. waters have been published (Guiguet and Pike 1965; Hatler 1971; Reimchen 1980; Baird *et al.*, 1988; Stacey *et al.*, 1989; Langelier *et al.*, 1990). Other records exist offshore of British Columbia, outside the 320 km (200 mile) Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ), and have been reported by Pike and MacAskie (1969). The status of Risso's dolphins in Canadian waters, and their general biology, have been recently summarized in a report by Baird and Stacey (1990); from which the above information has been extracted.

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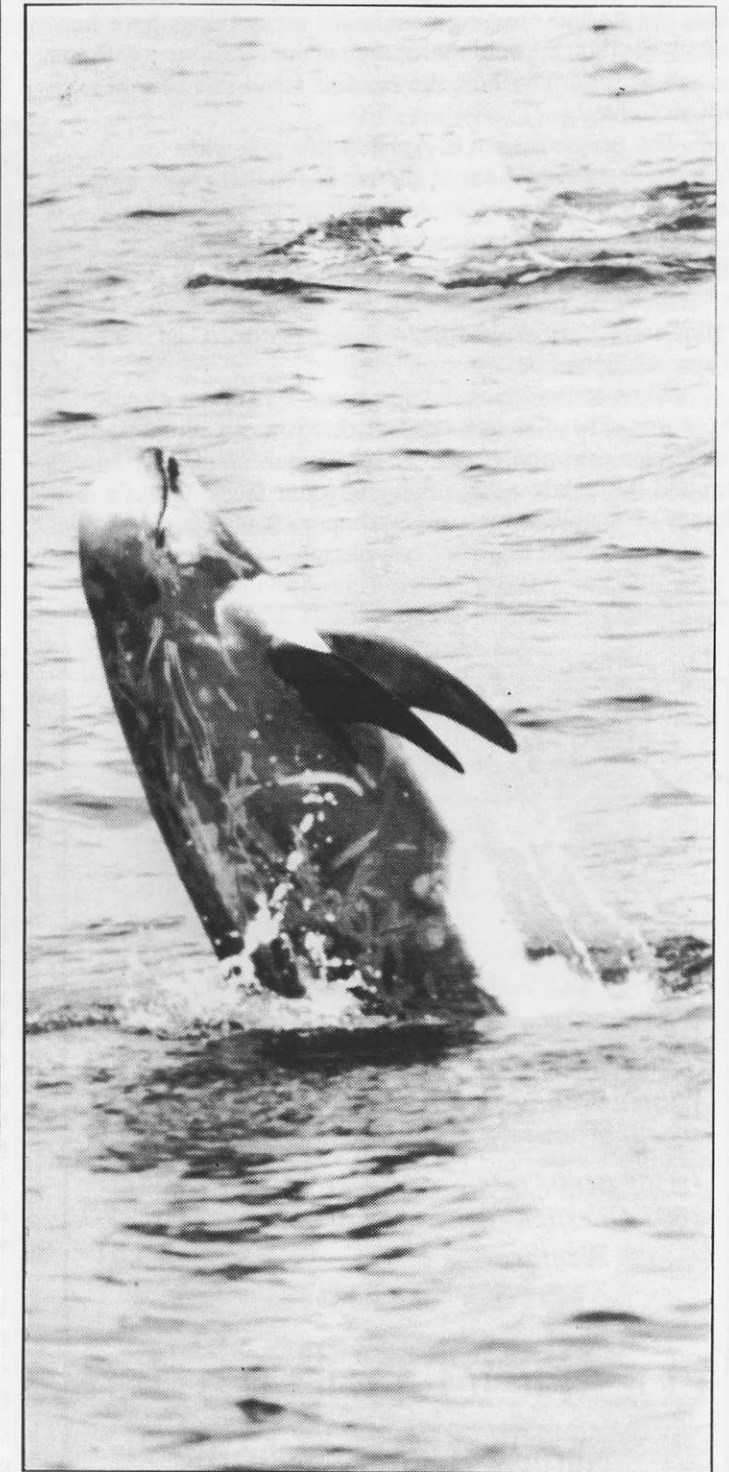
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Risso's dolphin in Monterey Bay, CA., showing tall dorsal fin and scarred back. (Photo: D. Costa, supplied courtesy S. Kruse.)



Risso's dolphin breaching in Monterey Bay, California. (Photo: S. Kruse)

Rewards of Being a Volunteer!

By Darren R. Copley and Eric L. Walters

What does a boot, a hammer, a boat and your sanity have in common? They're all things you can lose when you volunteer to help out Purple Martins. In the July/August, 1990 issue of the *Victoria Naturalist* (47.1:4) we wrote an article on the Purple Martin Nest Box Programme. Since we started erecting nest boxes many things have happened. We thought we'd share some of our adventures with you as well as report on how the martins fared this year here in British Columbia.

The project began in April of this year when we started building nest boxes. First of all, one has to determine what the nest boxes should look like. After talking to several people and reading various references on the subject, we had as many different nest box designs as there are "know-it-all" politicians in Victoria. We ended up with a hybrid form called the Harold Pollock - Calvor Palmateer - Bryan Gates - Cam Finlay - Wayne Campbell design.

When constructing the nest boxes, one of our discoveries about our old radial arm saw was that you can actually adjust the fender over the blade. To our amazement, this fender stopped the sawdust from flying into our faces. It was a nice change to be able to work in the shop without a gas mask. We, of course, realized this after completing over 150 nest boxes.

After contending with the construction phase of the project, we incorrectly assumed that putting up the boxes had to be easier! In first deciding where to place them, the obvious choices were Cowichan Bay and Esquimalt Harbour. From there we had suggestions anywhere from Sooke to Fort St. John. Everyone always had "just the perfect spot" where the boxes should go. We narrowed it down to four other locations, in the time frame we had, based on past breeding records.

Our first location was Whiffen Spit in Sooke Basin. We were painting identification numbers on the boxes when onlookers made comments such as: "Boy, what a great job you have, it must be nice to get paid for this," and, "Aren't martins' those animals they make fur coats out of?". After we explained to people what Purple Martins are, they would then tell us about how they have them in their yards all the time. One person told us that while she was growing up in Prince George she used to see hundreds. We had to assure her that we know of no records from Prince George and that Purple Martin's are very rare in British Columbia with only about 30 birds left.

In putting the 12-foot aluminum boat into the water we learned that parts of a beach that appear muddy make great disguises for quicksand. We ended up leaving our boots behind as a crowd of onlookers curiously watched as we pulled and pushed the boat to the ocean. We soon realized there was little space for us to sit, especially with a 30-foot ladder and 20 nest boxes in the boat. After managing to get into the boat, it became apparent that Darren had forgot to bring the plug. At least now we know that our nest boxes float (and aluminum ladders don't).

Once out in the middle of the basin (after fixing the plug) we spotted a good set of pilings to attach the first three boxes. With the boat tied, Darren then proceeded to climb 30 feet up the ladder. This was fine until curious boaters investigated what we were doing. It was especially "interesting" with the bigger boats because at that point Darren vertically travelled a good six feet up and then down as the wake hit our boat.

By late afternoon we had made our way to the end of the basin and found a nice shallow muddy bay with lots of pilings (ideal habitat for martins). We pulled the boat on shore and then started walking towards the pilings. We found that there are more than two spots in Sooke where one can find quicksand. Darren sank so deep in the mud that it appeared that Eric would lose both Darren and the ladder he was carrying. At about the same time we had a lesson in tidal flow when Eric noticed our boat floating away with the tide. Eric was now faced with the dilemma, save Darren and the ladder or save the boat. Realizing this was his only way home (and he could always buy another ladder), Eric pursued the boat. However, Darren felt much better after seeing Eric catch up to the boat in chest-deep water, knowing Eric was wearing only knee-deep boots.

After finishing up in Sooke, our next location was the infamous Purple Martin Pond. In speaking to the owner of the property, who had no idea the pond was so-named, we received permission to take in the boat and erect some boxes. Since everyone knew where this pond was, we assumed it would be a simple job that would only take a couple of hours. We spent an entire afternoon trying to find this pond, enduring such inconveniences as being chased by bulls and hiking a quarter mile over rocks and through dense underbrush to find that we couldn't even get the boat into

the pond. When leaving for the evening, the owner kindly pointed out the road that we were supposed to have taken, which leads right to the pond.

Other areas we visited included the Inner Harbour, where we dodged float planes that were landing, the Gorge, where the engine overheated from all the weeds, and Esquimalt Harbour, where we had to balance on log booms.

Once all the nest boxes were put up we knew it had to get easier, or so we thought. We found that examining nests when birds are nesting can be quite frightening. Darren learned that martins have a tendency to dive down and strike one's body when one is in the vicinity of the nest box.

We ended up finding martins nesting in all sorts of locations. Most were in nest boxes but some pairs nested in a length of PVC pipe, in pilings over the water, and even on the side of a navy ship, in a porthole.

The finale to our season of martin study came after the breeding season when it was time to collect nests for study. All the nests were full of parasites and we were fortunate enough to discover what it feels like when mites and fleas crawl down your back. You get the most pleasant itchy feeling which only lasts for a week.

Some of the bad news that we discovered was that a Great Blue Heron may have had "rare" martin hors d'oeuvres one afternoon. It apparently perched on top of a piling, reached its head down and was eyeing up what was inside. Be on the lookout for a heron with braces since these nestlings were banded.

More bad news comes from Ladysmith where the town has decided to develop the area where martins are nesting. It is unfortunate but it seems that all the pilings where the martins nest will be removed. These are probably one of the few remaining martin colonies in all of North America where they do not rely on nest boxes for their survival. A similar process of removal was done in Campbell River which resulted in the abandonment of the area by martins.

Another area of concern is Esquimalt Harbour where two pairs of martins may also lose their homes. These houses are a little more elaborate than usual since they are located in portholes on an old decommissioned navy ship. Since this ship is being sold for approximately one million dollars, these birds currently hold the record for the most expensive "birdhouse".

All in all we had a great time and can't wait until the spring when we get to try it all over again while preparing the houses for next year's martins. All in a day's work for two crazy biologists who enjoy helping out when they can.

NOTE: Portions of this project were undertaken for a Purple Martin status report being prepared by Chris Siddle for the Wildlife Branch.

Purple Martin Nest Box Programme Summary - 1990

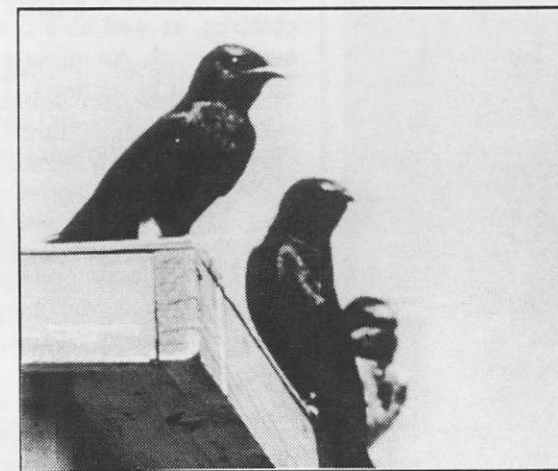
Only thirty confirmed nesting birds were observed in British Columbia this year, as follows (ASY = after second year, SY = second year):

a) Esquimalt Harbour: Four ASY males (one of these males was only seen once and there is a chance this bird travelled to Cowichan Bay or elsewhere); three ASY females; one SY** male; and, one SY female were reported. One of the ASY pairs was observed with 3+ young in a PVC pipe and another ASY pair with 2+ young in a nest box. The two other pairs were nesting in portholes on the side of a decommissioned navy vessel.

b) Cowichan Bay: Four ASY males, three ASY females, three SY males, and three SY females were observed, all nesting in nest boxes. Of the ASY pairs, we banded four young from each of the three nests.

Of the SY pairs, one was observed with 2+ young and the other with only two young.

c) Ladysmith Harbour: Four ASY males and four ASY females were observed. These pairs were nesting in pilings over the water. Five young were found in one nest.



Purple Martins. (Photo: D.F. Fraser)



Photo credit: Alexandra Morton, Raincoast Research

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Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary It's Not Just for the Birds

by Joan Cowley

What does a 13-year-old boy who loves turtles have in common with a retired nurse who enjoys gardening?.....They are both interested in nature and they both are volunteers at the Swan Lake-Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary.

Those who choose to volunteer at the Nature Sanctuary do so for a variety of reasons. For some, volunteering provides an opportunity to interact with nature and meet people with similar interests. Others enjoy sharing their knowledge with school children or the general public who visit the sanctuary. Some are seeking to learn more about career options in nature interpretation and environmental studies. Still others simply enjoy outdoor work and physical activity.

The programs and activities volunteers who are involved in at the Nature Sanctuary vary considerably. They teach school children, weed the native plant garden, tend the live animal displays, and catalogue the library books. They conduct bird walks around the lake, tend the honeybee display, maintain the trails, and work in the native plant nursery. Some spend up to

four hours a week at the sanctuary, others are available to assist as the need arises. During the Christmas season, members of the Victoria Natural History Society contribute their time and knowledge in helping visitors identify our visiting waterfowl and the birds frequenting the feeders.

The spring school activities begin in February. We are now recruiting volunteer naturalists for these programs. All that is required is an interest in nature and an enjoyment of children, as well as a commitment of approximately three hours a week. An understanding of the birds of the Victoria area would be an asset. Training to give volunteers a background in the flora and fauna of Swan Lake, and information on teaching techniques and nature interpretation skills, is provided.

Volunteers are also needed now to assist with a junior naturalist group. This is a nature science club for children, ages 8 to 12, which focuses on teaching environmental responsibility. The group meets twice a month for two hours on the weekends. Activities include field trips, group project work and discussions.

If you are interested in contributing to the environmental education of children, either through the school programs or the junior naturalist group, consider joining our volunteer team.

Phone us at 479-0211 for more details.



Mute Swan and family. (Photo: Beth McLean)

The Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary Library

By Ann Scarfe,
Program Naturalist,
Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary

The Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary Society is a non-profit, charitable organization responsible for the maintenance and operation of the Nature House and property at Swan Lake. The Society has had a small resource/reference library since the Nature House was established in 1977. Since that time donations and a modest budget have allowed the library to increase to about 700 volumes. One of the mandates of the society is the advancement of natural history education so the library focuses on popular works on the flora and fauna of Canada, with special reference to British Columbia and Vancouver Island. Books form the bulk of the collection but there are several periodicals, such as *Owl* and *Nature Canada*. The material ranges in age level from pre-school to adult.

In addition to this collection, the Victoria Natural History Society (VNHS) moved their collection of 550 volumes to the Nature House in 1989. While the two collections are similar and there is much overlap, the VNHS collection also has books pertinent to the flora and fauna (especially birds) of other locations and countries. Periodicals in this collection include current newsletters from a dozen British Columbian, Canadian, and American naturalist clubs and *The American Birder*.

With the help of dedicated volunteers and the support and advice of University of Victoria and Pacific Forestry Centre librarians, the material has been classified according to the LC System and is listed on a computer inventory. The cataloguing system is used to provide a consistent shelf arrangement for the material but there is no access to the collection via a card catalogue.

The library is open for reference use only during regular Nature House hours, 8:30 am to 4:00 pm, Monday to Friday, and 12 noon to 4:00 pm on Saturday and Sunday. Students and the general public are welcome to come and use the books and enjoy our reading room with its pleasant view of the lake.

Inquiries may be directed to Ann Scarfe or Margaret Lidka at the Swan Lake Nature House office, telephone 479-0211.

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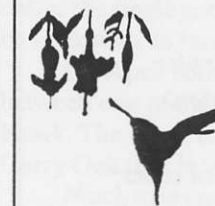
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Telephone: 477-6513



Wild Rose. (Photo: Enid K. Lemon)

Announcement: 10% off all Natural History books to VNHS members. Large selection: birding, plants, etc. Wells Used Books, 1505 Fell (off Oak Bay), 592-8376.



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Unknown Butterfly. Can any VNHS member identify the species? (Photo, A. Nugent, third prize Victoria Naturalist Photo Contest)

Parks and Conservation Committee Seeks More Volunteers as "Conservation Observers"

By Joel Ussery

The committee is still looking for records of rare plants, inventories of flora and fauna, knowledge of any special soil, drainage or geological considerations, and notice of threats to its priority areas: Martindale Flats, Esquimalt Lagoon, Quick's Bottom, Blenkinsop Valley, and Tod Creek Flats.

David Fraser has designed a study for the Parks and Conservation Committee to determine the numbers and species of birds utilizing Martindale Flats. A checklist and map has been prepared to record numbers of each species and their relative location.

VNHS members can assist the study by picking up a copy of the checklist and map before they go birding at Martindale Flats. Call Eric Walters at 385-0927 for more details.

In the last issue of *The Victoria Naturalist* the Parks and Conservation Committee announced the intention to create a network of "conservation observers" throughout the Capital Regional District. Observers would assist the committee by reporting any threat to waterways, stands of native vegetation, parks and other important habitat areas in the region.

To date, 23 VNHS members have become observers reporting to coordinator Margaret Wainwright. But there is always room for more.

Volunteers are needed to monitor the Inner Harbour, Songhees to West Bay, Brentwood Bay, Ardmore, Deep Cove, North Saanich, north of Sidney to the ferry terminal, and Sooke Harbour. If you can help please call Margaret at 592-1310.

Doris Brix, 469-7420, is now the committee member responsible for Quick's Bottom.

The committee is still working on its inventory of shoreline and adjacent wetland areas needing protection on the southern tip of Vancouver Island for the Federation of B.C. Naturalists Round Table in March. Please contact Connie Hawley at 385-2535 if you can assist us in this important initiative.

Membership Update:

Tony Embleton (Chair), Jerry Anderson (Vice Chair), Gladys Anderson, Doris Brix, Darren Copley, Wilda Cottam, Bill Dawkins, Connie Hawley, Mary Morrison, Henry Niezen, Colleen O'Brien, Chris Sandham, Joel Ussery, Eric Walters, and Bruce Whittington.

The Committee:

The Parks and Conservation Committee seeks to protect the integrity of the habitat critical to the survival of our local flora and fauna.

Welcome To New Members

September 26 Wendy Harbord, of Davie Street, and son Christopher Hecker. Interests: birds, marine life, hiking and wildlife. Wendy was member previously in the late 60's.

October 2 David Greer, of Island Road. Welcome back! (David was a member previously in 1989).

October 2 L. Cowan and Family, of Edgewood Place.

October 2 Mr. and Mrs. R.J. Loosmore, of Clarence Street. They are interested in birding and native plants.

October 5 Paul Fast, of Duncan. Welcome back! (Paul was a member previously in 1989). Interests: Birding and Sea Mammals.

October 5 Alism Candy, of Victoria.

October 19 A. L. Hall, of Munro Street. Particular Interests: birds and ducks.

October 30 Judith Neild, of Duncan and West Vancouver. Judith is interested in upcoming events.

October 30 Joachim & Catherine Carolsfeld, of Russell Street.

October 30 Etna Stackhouse, of Yates Street.

October 31 Dianne Takacsy, of Heywood Avenue.

November 8 D. Jean Mitchell, of Dunsmuir Road. Jean has been a previous member, welcome back!

November 10 M. J. Goldsworthy and Family, of Verrinder Avenue. Interests: flowers and birds.

November 10 Lynne Griswold, of Nelson Street. Particular Interests: Hawks and other birds of prey.

November 10 Mary Firman, of Hibbens Close. Particular Interest: art—flowers.

November 13 Carmen Cadrin, of Wordsley Street. Interested in the Christmas Bird Count, rare or endangered species, conservation strategies, etc.

November 15 Jane Ferris, of Ross Street. Jane is looking forward receiving *The Victoria Naturalist*.

November 21 Allan Milligan, of Canterbury Crescent, North Vancouver. Particular Interest: birding.

November 27 Joan Gowan, of Synod Road. Interested in birding and hiking.



Phantom Orchid. (Photo: Enid K. Lemon)

Unusual Behaviour In Canada Geese

By Barbara Begg

For the past two spring and summer seasons, in the Cresswell Road area of North Saanich, there have been up to four Canada Geese with rather aberrant habits. These birds are probably of the introduced resident subspecies, *Moffitti*.

Barn and house roofs seem to hold a special attraction for these individuals. They fly around the neighbourhood taking turns landing on various roofs. I have seen them on seven different roofs, all sloping and some sheeted with corrugated metal. It is quite entertaining to watch these geese with their large, spatulate feet, trying to cross a slippery metal roof and

sliding down at each step.

One of the geese spent most of each day in a paddock with a large Belgian horse, whose company it seemed to prefer, as each morning the other three geese would fly by, calling, and entice the single goose away, but within twenty minutes it would be back with its farm friends.

On April 20th, 1990, I watched a brief aerial "dog-fight" between one of these unusual geese and a resident Red-tailed Hawk. The chase took place in the air above the top of a large Garry Oak tree in which the hawk had been perched.

Much to my surprise, the hawk was not always the aggressor—they actually took turns chasing each other! At times, a goose can be quite aggressive if someone or something approaches its nest too closely, but these two combatants were fifty feet in the air and there were no nests of either species close by. I would be interested in hearing from anyone who has witnessed similar behaviour by Canada Geese. (Barbara, 656-5296).



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Underwater High

By Don Gordon

Finally! The weekend's arrived. Five more days of ringing phones, downtown traffic and office politics are behind you. Two whole days of freedom in front of you to...to...to what?

Sound familiar? A big piece of time at your disposal, and nothing to fill it with? Well then, how does this sound?

Suspended, weightless in a peaceful, slow motion world full of wonder and adventure—a world of strange, quiet inhabitants which greet your presence with lazy, harmless curiosity. A gentle kick of the feet and with little effort you are propelled gracefully towards a bright wall in the distance. As you approach the wall it gains definition and you finally realize—it is alive! As far as you can see in any direction unusual, flower-like, multi-coloured life forms cling tenaciously to the wall, creating a living kaleidoscope. You turn to your companions, wanting to share your emotions upon witnessing this incredible scene, but you realize words are unnecessary as you see in their eyes the awe inspired in you by this incredible scene.

As you further explore the secret beauty of this mysterious world and adapt to its strange properties, you begin to experience the sensation of flying. Your senses heighten. Your stresses dissolve. Your relaxation becomes total.

It must be illegal, right? Wrong! It is perfectly legal, and it is perfectly accessible, right here, in Victoria. It is an experience that awaits you on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, but it won't be necessary to call your travel agent. I'm talking

VICTORIA BIRDER ALERT

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about the other side, the underside—the experience of SCUBA diving.

Far from its beginnings as an activity reputedly for only the macho, hairy-chested risk-taker, SCUBA diving has evolved into a safe and rewarding pastime for healthy men and women of all ages. This sport has the versatility to not only accommodate, and enhance, a wide variety of conventional hobbies and interests, but also to create opportunities to develop new ones.

For the photographer and artist, the underwater world provides a challenging medium, with endless subject variety and rich tapestries of colour beyond even the wildest imaginings.

The many uncharted wrecks lying in and around Victoria's waters challenge the explorer to pit his or her wits against the vagaries of the Pacific, and to discover their final resting places.

The naturalist, or anyone moving, in harmony with the quiet rhythm of aquatic life, will marvel at the limitless, often amusing, adaptations with which the ocean's inhabitants have been endowed.

Perhaps most important is the camaraderie which naturally develops between people bonded by a common interest. Those moments of adventure and discovery below can be further embellished (often significantly) later on, around a roaring bonfire on the beach or over a steaming mug of strong coffee in the cosy galley of a charter vessel.

Many people are surprised to learn the coastal waters of British Columbia offer some of the best diving in the world. This is due to our temperate climate and tide-swept, nutrient-enriched waters which support an abundance of marine life unsurpassed anywhere else in the world. For example, the largest octopuses and wolfeels (both harmless) on this planet are found...you guessed it...right here at your doorstep.

Accessibility can be as simple as jumping into your car and driving down to Ogden Point breakwater after work. Easy access is not the only merit this site has to offer. The breakwater is a protected sanctuary for a rich variety of marine life which thrives in the various habitats created by this structure. Underwater plaques located at frequent intervals along the wall identify the creatures inhabiting the area. Billowing plumose sea anemones and spiny sea urchins form a backdrop for giant ling cod, tiger rockfish, cabezons and seaperch. Large schools of black rockfish hang suspended in dense forests of the bull kelp, *Nereocystis*. Close inspection of the kelp fronds and blades will usually reveal the presence of the kelp crab, *Pugettia producta*, a variety of grazing gastropods and, on occasion, an attached Pacific spiny lumpsucker. (They look even worse than they sound.) With the aid of an underwater flashlight, octopuses can be observed huddled deep within their lairs in the crevasses between the giant seawall blocks. It is a real bonus when a diver encounters, in midday, one of these shy, normally nocturnal animals, spread-eagled on the sandy bottom, apparently sunning itself.

In Saanich Inlet, MacKenzie Bight and Henderson Point provide popular, easy-access shore dives somewhat protected from winds and current. Here the underwater visitor will encounter ling cod, various species of rockfish, ratfish and swarming schools of herring. In the spring, the unforgettable sight of giant nudibranchs floating gracefully under a 10 meter

layer of billowing moon jellyfish is a regular occurrence. Brilliant orange sea pens project out of the sea floor surrounded by sausage-like sea cucumbers, *Stichopus californicus*, and giant sunflower starfish. The cautious diver is occasionally rewarded with glimpses of octopuses and wolf eels warily peering out from crevasses between the rocks, although sightings are becoming more rare as harvesting and spearfishing of these animals have significantly reduced their numbers.

For more experienced divers, the current-swept waters of the Gulf Islands, Ten Mile Point, and Race Rocks provide some of the most exciting diving to be found anywhere in the world.

The bright white rocks of "the Race" are clustered with abalone, large basket stars, and giant red sea urchins. Brilliantly-coloured Puget Sound king crabs adeptly make their way among black serpent stars, pink, green and lavender anemones and lush, pink hydrocoral blanketing the seafloor. Upon arrival on the bottom, divers are usually surrounded by a welcoming committee of greenlings with free handouts, and not hospitality, on their minds. In the not-to-distant past one very shrewd resident wolf eel was notorious for shadowing human intruders, administering an occasional tug on the diver's fin as

a not-so-subtle hint that a handout, preferably sea urchin, would be greatly appreciated.

Escorts by harbour seals and sea lions curious about the presence of transient, neoprene-clad terrestrial visitors are to be expected at Race Rocks. These amusing, normally playful animals will go to great lengths to impress divers with their graceful displays of underwater acrobatics. However, around mating season sea lions become aggressive towards intruders, and should be avoided.

Whatever your preference or level of expertise you will find the sport of SCUBA diving offers endless opportunities for discovery, adventure, relaxation, camaraderie and fun.

If you're still with me I would suggest, as a first step, that you pay a visit to one or more of the many fine dive shops operating in the Greater Victoria—Sidney area. Talk with the instructors at the shops and settle on one you feel comfortable with. Courses offering open water certification cost under \$250 and may be completed in as few as four days or spread over several weeks to accommodate most schedules.

The last natural frontier awaits you at your doorstep—why not explore it? Discover the therapeutic value of diving.



Diver Don Gordon exploring the local underwater environment encounters and Ling Cod swimming near Purple Sea Urchins. (Photo: Peter Dickinson)

Ancient Murrelets

By Andrea Lawrence

It has been my pleasure the past three spring seasons to have lived and worked in an Ancient Murrelet colony on Reef Island in Hecate Strait. April, May and June is a time of intense activity for these pelagic seabirds who come to land only to lay and hatch their eggs. To be a house guest to 5000 pairs of nestling seabirds on a rugged island is a unique experience, especially set in the context of the wilderness of South Moresby. From camp we can hear the sea lions barking at their haul-out to the east; through our telescope we can spot Humpback and Killer Whales and sometimes an Elephant Seal; and on days when the sea surface boils with herring, eagles number over a hundred.

By day, where our tents sit under tall Sitka Spruce, no noise or movement gives away the presence of the Ancient Murrelets, sitting on their eggs at the end of arm-length burrows. With a careful look around the mossy forest floor, one begins to notice their tunnel entrances under tree roots or rotten logs. Because these gentle-tempered birds are easily frightened off their nests, we tread carefully in the colony, with voices low, as we go about the daily chores of locating and checking nests.

At night the Ancient Murrelet colony comes to life. Our usual human schedule is turned topsy-turvy, as our work begins at nightfall when the first sound of whirring wings announces the arrival of the birds. Darkness means safety to the Ancient Murrelets who make a welcome addition to the diet of eagles, peregrines and ravens, as evidenced by carcasses and piles of feathers under mossy log "plucking posts".

On a night about mid-May, we wait by the seashore for the first sound of peeping chicks running and tumbling downslope to the sea to meet their parents. Only two days after hatching, the fluffy black and white chicks, with webbed feet almost adult-size, leave their burrow-nest forever to paddle furiously alongside their parents away from the island to more open seas and safety from predators. This is the time we can briefly interrupt their journey to catch, weigh and band the

chicks. We are bundled for warmth and working with headlamps, as we handle perhaps 1000 chicks over the coming month of nights. It is an exciting time, when the colony is at its peak of activity, with partnered mates changing incubation duties and young non-breeding adults visiting the colony for their first time, exchanging chirrups with their prospective life mates.

After the end of June, when the last of the chicks has hatched and gone to sea, the island is left to resume a quieter rhythm for another year. My companions and I leave for "civilized" places, not so wild, abundant or awesome, feeling fortunate to have witnessed a small slice of the life of the Ancient Murrelet.

Volunteers Needed For Martindale Flats Study

The Victoria Natural History Society (VNHS) has embarked on a wildlife survey of the Martindale Valley. The purpose of this survey is to provide the VNHS with quantitative information on the wildlife use of the area. This information will be used by the Parks and Conservation Committee of the VNHS to make informed submissions regarding land use of the valley. We will be concentrating on accurate estimates of the common birds of this area so one doesn't have to be an expert to be involved. If you can tell a Mallard from a Trumpeter Swan then you qualify for the study. This survey will be carried out for at least one year and involves volunteers contributing two hours on either a Saturday or Sunday morning. If you can only volunteer for one day for the whole year, that is fine. All surveys start at 8:00 a.m. at the Barn Market at the corner of Island View Road and the Pat Bay Highway. If you are going birding at times other than those already mentioned and would be willing to put two hours in, we could also use your help.

Volunteer observers will be given a map and checklist of birds to fill in. Please call **Eric Walters** at 385-0927 to register and he will give you further information. It is **VERY important that you register** with Eric so he can give you the map showing the area you will be responsible for as well as making sure we have enough volunteers each week to make the study worthwhile.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR — Clear Cut Logging

Editor,
Victoria Naturalist

As a member of the Victoria Natural History Society, I feel compelled to bring attention again to the awful devastation and waste of clear cut logging.

I went twice by bus to the Carmanah and Walbran areas, near Cowichan Lake, with a group of concerned people to see how bad it really is. I wasn't prepared for the terrible carnage that I saw. We were all shocked by the sight of vast areas, as far as the eye could see, of complete destruction. Not a tree standing, grey ghost-like stumps, grey logs stripped of their bark lying scattered over the mountain side, as if toppled by some atomic blast or volcanic explosion, great gullies caused by erosion with no trees left to hold the soil, and rushing water after the heavy rains. Erosion was also caused by logging roads, which crisscrossed the mountainside, and along which our bus lumbered. A terrible wasteland, with little or no life left.

There should only be selective logging, not the complete annihilation of clear cut logging. These old forests, with their habitat and soil, take centuries to evolve. No quick planting of thousands of trees of the same type is the answer — the frail soil has gone and pests could wipe the new trees out. As Naturalists, it is our responsibility to save our forests, our birds, and our animals from the greed and waste of companies who want to take it all now and then move on.

Selective logging and proper forestry management is the only answer. It will assure us forests for the future and jobs for our loggers. It will, of course, save our environment and our planet.

Penelope Stockley, Victoria

P.S. The very few magnificent trees that had been spared did not lift my spirits when I looked at the vast areas of desolation around them.

REPORT MARINE MAMMAL SIGHTINGS AND STRANDINGS TO:

380-1925 in the Victoria area

On the water: VHF channel 68 to the vessel *Sundiver*

1-800-334-8832 toll-free anywhere in B.C.

All sightings, no matter how old, are useful for research purposes, and are put into a computer data base. Records are available to all researchers. When current local sightings of killer whales, or any unusual species, are reported promptly, researchers will try to respond to them. Please report date, time, location, a description of the animals, and number and direction of travel, as well as your name and phone number in case further information is required.

Rufous Hummingbirds

Editor,
Victoria Naturalist

I receive *The Victoria Naturalist* regularly and read with interest Deborah Humphrey's article on the nesting Rufous Hummingbirds: "We Will Always Remember Our Rufous Visitors" (Vol. 47.2). Not only was the story interesting because of an early nesting of Rufous Hummingbirds and the nesting in a hanging Fuchsia plant, but it also told us something important about the bird's incubation period.

I have been studying avian breeding biology for some time now, and I knew that the length of Rufous Hummingbird incubation was not very well known. Going through the literature on the incubation period of the species, I found the following statements:

"[Incubation] period not known." — Colin Harrison. *A Field Guide to the Nest, Eggs and Nestlings of North American Birds*, 1978.

"Probably about 14 days." — Hal H. Harrison. *A Field Guide to Western Birds' Nests*, 1979.

"13 to 14 days reported is erroneous." — Paul A. Johnsgard. *Hummingbirds of North America*, 1983.

"12–14? days" — Erlich, Dobson and Whye. *The Birder's Handbook*, 1988.

Clearly, there is something unknown here.

When Deborah Humphrey stated that she found the nest and eggs on March 31 (where it had not been "a few days before") and that the young hatched April 17th, we get a better idea of the incubation period of the species. Here is a good record of an incubation period of 17 days for Rufous Hummingbird. More importantly, perhaps, we have further evidence of how dedicated amateurs can actually contribute to the body of biological knowledge through consistent observation and careful record-taking. All that the non-professionals need to know is what it is that remains unknown. Then there can be an attempt to contribute to the accumulation of information.

Paul J. Baicich
Fort Washington, Maryland

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Oregon Junco, a common sight at bird feeding stations in Victoria. (Photo: Robert Allington)

CALENDAR

 **REGULAR MEETINGS** are generally held as follows: Board of Directors meetings the first Tuesday of each Month; Botany Night the third Tuesday and Birder's Night the fourth Wednesday of each month. Locations are given in the calendar listings.

FIELD TRIPS. Please meet at the location indicated for each trip and BRING A LUNCH. Be equipped for changes in weather, with hat, rain gear and boots, if necessary. **Always phone the VNHS Events Tape at 479-2054 before a trip** to get further details or find out about changes in plans. On VNHS trips, participants usually pool vehicles to reduce parking problems and costs. The Board suggests that fuel costs be shared with the driver.

JANUARY EVENTS

 **Tuesday, Jan. 8.**
Board of Directors' Meeting at 7:30 p.m. in Clifford Carl Reading Room, Cunningham Building, UVIC.

Tuesday, Jan. 15.
VNHS General Meeting at 8:00 p.m., Room 159, Begbie Building, UVIC. Steve Pridgeon shows us "Hidden Nature - a Photographer's View of the Unusual". Steve is a biologist and an excellent nature photographer. He seeks out topics which are slightly different or looks for a somewhat different perspective on a familiar world. Spiders, bats, close-ups and night scenes are some the subjects of Steve's slide presentation.


Thursday, Jan. 17.
General Meeting, Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary Association at 8 p.m., Christ Church Cathedral Auditorium.

Saturday, Jan. 26.
Birding at Witty's Lagoon with Harry Davidson (479-1286). Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Helmcken Park & Ride or at 9:30 a.m. in Witty's Lagoon parking lot.

Saturday & Sunday, Jan. 26-27.
Squamish River Trip. Meet at the Big Scoop Restaurant near the terminal at 8:40 a.m. Phone Henry Bauld at 721-5962 for more details. The trip is with the Friends of Ecological Reserves to the Squamish River to see the large congregation of bald eagles feeding on the late spawn of Chum Salmon. Professional naturalist and ecological reserve warden, Al Grass, will lead the trip. If there is enough interest we can spend the Sunday cross-country skiing in the Diamond Head or Whistler area. Take the 7:00 a.m. Nanaimo ferry to Horseshoe Bay.

Wednesday, Jan. 30.
Birders' Night at 7:30 p.m., Begbie 159, UVIC. The topic will be "Picture Perfect Birds" with host Tim Zurowski presenting a show featuring some of his best slides plus talk about some techniques of bird photography. Come and enjoy and learn how to improve your own shots.

FEBRUARY EVENTS

 **Tuesday, Feb. 5.**
Board of Directors' Meeting at 7:30 p.m. in Clifford Carl Reading Room, Cunningham Building, UVIC.

Tuesday, Feb. 12.
Annual Banquet at the Ballroom of Princess Mary Restaurant. Happy Hour begins at 6:00 p.m., with buffet dinner served at 6:30 p.m. There will be ample choice for vegetarian and non-vegetarian alike. Get your tickets early! The cost will be \$17 per person (GST included). Tickets are available from Freda Woodworth, 382-6693, or Margaret MacKenzie-Grieve, 477-2402.


Banquet Speaker. We are pleased to have **Rob Butler**, from the Canadian Wildlife Service. Rob is a keen naturalist and an enthusiastic speaker. The topic will be: "The Life and Times of the Great Blue Heron". For several years, Rob has led a study of the breeding patterns, dispersal and conservation of herons in the Strait of Georgia. Herons are an integral part of the shoreline scene, but also are harbingers of possible problems in our environment. Rob will share some of the joys and frustrations of working with these interesting birds.

Saturday, Feb. 15.
Birding around Blenkinsop with Art Durkee, 388-6077. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Lochside trailhead, south of Lohbrunner Drive.

Thursday, Feb. 21.
General Meeting, Thetis Lake Park Nature Sanctuary Association at 8 p.m., Christ Church Cathedral Auditorium. **John Parminter** will talk on fire ecology on the west coast.


Wednesday, Feb. 27.
Birders' Night at 7:30 p.m., Begbie 159, UVIC. This meeting we will be having a "Members' Night Special". Birders are invited to bring up to 10 slides of birds or trips of interest. Included in the evening are a few zodiac zingers from the impromptu pelagic trip in October.

COMING UP THIS SPRING

 **Tuesday, March 12.**
VNHS Annual General Meeting at 8:00 p.m. in Begbie 159, UVIC. A Presentation by Bill Merrilees, noted naturalist and author. Watch for details in the next newsletter.

May 12-19.
FBCN Camp events open to VNHS Members. Three events during the week will be open to our members: two lectures and the logging show and salmon BBQ dinner at Sooke on the last evening. Save those loonies and plan to attend! It should be a great evening. Details to come in the next newsletter. Tickets will go on sale in March.

BULLETIN BOARD

 **FBCN Camp Bulletin**
Wanted: Volunteers to help with the FBCN camp. The registration form for the camp, on May 12-19, 1991, will be in the B.C. Naturalist in January. The FBCN committee's work will accelerate as registrations come in. Volunteers are needed to help with field trips. Phone Hank Vander Pol at 658-1924 to sign up. We also require daily hosts/hostesses at UVIC and 'goodie makers' for the evening coffee breaks. Phone Lyndis Davis at 477-9952. We also need help before camp to do the packaging for mail-outs and making up the registration kits. Please volunteer, you'll lighten the FBCN Committee's heavy load and have the pleasure of participating.

Course on Natural History of Local Marine Mammals
Beginning January 21, 1991, Camosun College Community Education Services will sponsor a course on the "Natural History of Local Marine Mammals". Taught by Pam Stacey, the course will include eight 2.5-hour sessions on Monday evenings, ending on March 11. You will learn what species of marine mammals are found in our local

waters, how to identify them, when and where they can best be seen, and why they use local waters. Their biology, behaviour and conservation issues will also be addressed. There will be an optional field trip to view local marine mammals.

Comox/Courtney Bird Sightings
Any unusual bird sightings in the Comox/Courtney area should be reported to the Comox-Strathcona Natural History numbers, 388-0206 or 355-0064.

Program Committee
The program committee is still looking for volunteers. The work will involve meeting twice a year to brainstorm ideas and making a few phone calls. Contact Bev Glover, Coordinator for Programs and Publicity, at 721-1476.

Membership Committee
Tom Gillespie is now the new chair for the Membership Committee, replacing Ed Coffin [see article Page 5]. Members are reminded that this is the time to renew their membership with the Victoria Natural History Society. A renewal form has been inserted in this issue of the *Victoria Naturalist*.

Book Review

Birding By Ear—A Guide to Bird Song Identification
By Richard K. Walton and Robert W. Lawson,
Peterson Field Guide Series, Houghton Mifflin, 1990

Review by Pat Freeman

At last, here is a guide that even the most visually-dependent birder will find a valuable aid in identification. *Birding By Ear* is a wonderful shortcut to becoming at least partway competent at identifying species by their calls and songs. It provides the birder with the means to separate and classify the myriad sounds birds can make, without spending hours in the field trying to link a particular song with a visual identification.

This new member of the Peterson Field Guide genus is actually a collection of three tapes, each of them an hour long, along with a small soft-cover handbook. The first twenty minutes of the first side is Walton's spoken introduction. Author Walton presents a brief explanation of the different types of vocalizations birds make. He also provides a very good reason for becoming proficient at recognizing birdsongs—our eyes can only focus in one direction, while our ears are constantly attune to 360 degrees.

The best justification I know for learning to recognize birds by their song is the flycatchers. A gag in a birder's humour book once displayed a number of flycatchers in the best of fieldbook artwork. The joke was that all the birds looked exactly the same. Like most good jokes it had an element of truth in it. I defy even the best birders I know to pluck out a positive identification between Hammond's and the Willow Flycatcher, even with a good look at the so-called "conspicuous

eye ring" on the one. *Birding By Ear* lists the songs of seven different flycatchers, all of which are mercifully distinct.

Walton also provides an introduction on how to make sense of all the auditory clues the birder in the field picks up. So Chickadees identify themselves by calling "Chickadee-dee", or the Olive-sided Flycatcher calls "Quick—Three Bears". Comparisons between sound are also listed; so the Red-breasted Nuthatch is likened to a miniature tin trumpet. An example of a descending call is provided—the Canyon Wren. Clark's Nutcracker is held out as an example of a harsh call.

The 91 different birds (only 11 of which are not found on the VNHS checklist) are placed in 19 classification corresponding to the similarity of their song rather than their family. So the Mountain Chickadee appears in the same group as the Common Poorwill. None of the groups contain more than eight birds and the song groupings are presented back to back to avoid confusion. Unlike other tapes, where a narrator just names the species to introduce the call, Walton always gives a little introduction and explanation of what to listen for. The quality of the recordings is outstanding. Very few contain any outside noises at all. When calls are similar, repeats are given. Walton offers first one song, then another, with a brief explanation of what to listen for and what to compare.

If there is anything to criticize about *Birding By Ear* it is the handbook rather than the recordings. It is not enough to hear the different songs and recognize them. The circumstances in which a bird gives a particular call should be listed. For example, it would be nice to read that the Read-winged Blackbird gives its "Tse-er" call when predators are in the area, without delving into other books.

Birding By Ear isn't cheap either. It retails for just under \$50. Still, when compared with the cost of popular recorded music, that isn't outrageous.

 **The Victoria
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Transient Killer Whale,
observed near
Otter Point, Sooke.

Photo: © Robin Baird