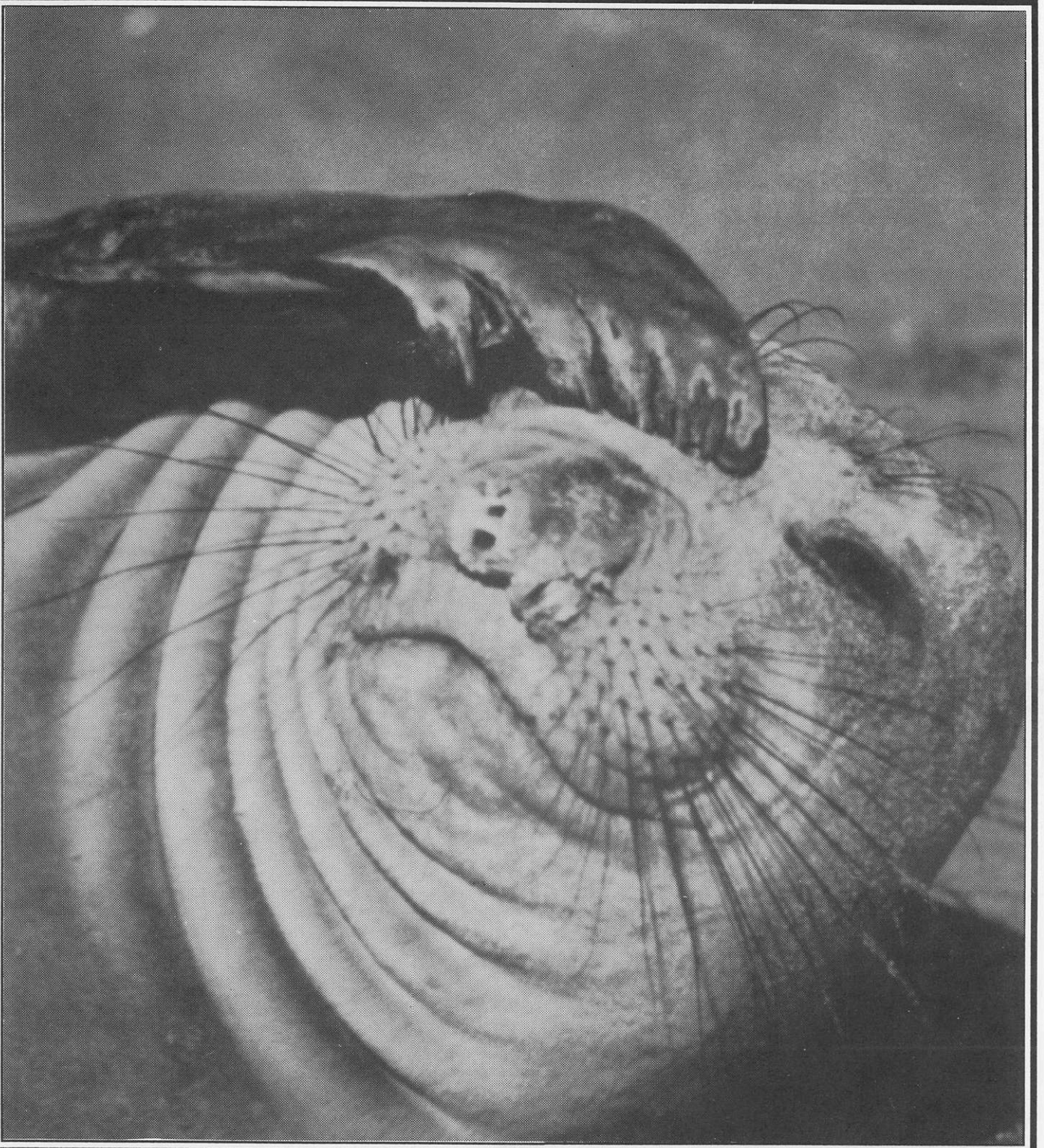




The Victoria NATURALIST

JANUARY
FEBRUARY
1993
VOL 49.4

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY



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The Victoria NATURALIST

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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 361-3543 or 652-9618, 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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Ad Size	Price	Dimensions
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OUR COVER

Our cover photo this month features a juvenile elephant seal taken by Robin W. Baird. Baird and co-author Tamara J. Guenther prepared the feature on the identification and distribution of pinnipeds in British Columbia with appears on page 8 of this issue of the *Victoria Naturalist*.

In B.C. five species of pinniped have been recorded: Harbour Seals (*Phoca vitulina*), California Sea Lions (*Zalophus californianus*), Northern or Stellar Sea Lions (*Eumetpias jubatus*) and Northern Fur Seals (*Callorhinus ursinus*). Baird and Guenther describe the physical and behavioral characteristics by which these species may be identified and the areas in the province where they may be found.

The horizontal nose crease, just below the nostrils, which is visible in the cover photo, is one of the identifying characteristics of the Elephant Seal.



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Alpine Watch in the Western Selkirks

By Kaye Suttill

Turning up Carnes Creek, past an active goldmine operation (this area has been spotted with claims ever since 1845), the helicopter pilot exclaims "There it is — catching the sun on its red roof," a small chalet perched on a knoll at the valley head, some 6350 feet above sea level, below the great expanse of Durrand Glacier. This is the heart of these Western Selkirk Mountains north of Mount Revelstoke National Park.

Everywhere here speaks silently of the ravaging force of ice: hanging valleys where glaciers paused a while earthtime before retreating higher upstairs, steep headwalled cirques scooped out by ice that has left high basins often with snowmelt ponds, some so long ago that they are now in the upper subalpine zone, others in still raw rock. Great moraine deposits are everywhere. The active glaciation seems to have gone on over a very long period of time here and today the ice has retreated close to the mountain tops, usually on the north faces, while the steep-sided bare slopes of the opposite sides suggest extensive earlier glacial carving. Not only is the main Carnes Creek a typical U-shaped glacier valley but the hanging side valleys reach back in U-shape too.

To interpret the present ecosystem here we need to go back in time to the earth sequence which has cumulatively

produced our flora and fauna today. Hundreds of millions of years ago, in the Cambrian and pre-Cambrian eras, these ice-sculptured Selkirks were sedimentary rock created from mud, sand, silt and gravel transported by ancient rivers into the vast inland sea which then covered this part of our continent. Tens of millions of years later these sedimentaries were subject to the cataclysmic forces of mountain making, during which and more recently masses of molten rock invaded faults and weakened zones, still further changing the original strata. So the Earth drama here continued from fire and titanic internal pressure to erosion by running water and years of the scouring, scouring action of ice. All are summated in the conditioning of Life here today, additionally factored by very heavy snowfall, up to 19 feet at the Chalet in mid-April.

Because of the deep snow persisting into late June and the densely forested lower slopes, there are few large mammals up here. Although we did see Grizzly footprints on Tumbledown Mountain and some Caribou tracks near Marmot Lake, the only mammals we actually saw in mid-August were Mountain Goats roaming the slopes and one resting with kid, and whistling Marmots darting about the rocks as did an occasional Pika and ground squirrel.

The only bird life we noted at the Chalet were ubiquitous juncos and a nuthatch twanging away below in the heavily wooded lower slopes. White-tailed Ptarmigan munched their way through the alpine meadows, more camouflaged than I have ever watched them, and once two hawks settled briefly on a snag, identified as a Sharp-shinned by fellow birders with a field guide. Occasionally, too, Water Pipits called out as they darted around this water everywhere glacial world.



Durrand Glacier, Western Selkirks, mid-August. (Photo: Kaye Suttill)

The flora seems mainly usual montane species favouring wettish sites besides streams or in seepage areas. But in over 20 years of Alpine watching I've never joyed to such spires of Alpine Fir growing as if in purposely placed "cultivated" landscapes, thanks to the deep lingering snow up here.

Your memory is held streamside by the masses of pink *Mimulus lewisii* and our "Victoria" *M. guttatus*, the big monkey flower. While these yellow ones do range from Alaska to Arizona where they amazed me blooming in Madera Canyon, to see them in these Selkirks bordering nearly every stream or waterfall, or tucked between old wet moraine rocks or most incredible of all way up high in the alpine mud verge of a glacial meltwater pond, here to me they are THE special ones.

Little ferns, identified by Museum staff as *Polystichum lonchitis*, the rosette one, and *Cystopteris fragilis*, the small

sword one, niched in old moraine rock surprise you, and so, too, the highest species count I've ever noted of Coltsfoot and *Senecio triangularis* and *S. mimulus*, and while little white fingers of Partridgefoot were everywhere. Just about any alpine flower species of wettish meadows you can think of lives multiplied here in these wild watered rock gardens, with cushions of fragile Moss Champion specializing the alpine and towheaded babies, those seedheads of Western Anemones rising up, as always, where snow has recently lain. Of course, palettes of paintbrush repeat and repeat in the meadows, too.

So after all the millions of years, our Earth comes alive here now in magical gardens, jewelizing the alpine pond verges with brilliant light green moss mosaics.

This Western Selkirk glacier country is truly an alpine paradise.

Collared Dusky Canada Geese

By Wallace Macgregor

For the past four seasons I have been keeping track of a flock of Dusky Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis occidentalis*) which have been wintering primarily in the Blenkeinsop Valley. My attention was first attracted to these birds by the fact that several individuals were marked with coloured neck collars. These neck collars are red plastic with white characters or numbers which allow the identification of individual birds. The numbers of geese have ranged from 32 to 558 with an average of 155 birds.

I have been submitting my observations on these collared geese to the Canadian Wildlife Service in Delta, B.C. and they inform me (Smith, pers. comm., 1992) that these birds were all banded in the Copper River delta in Alaska.

Kortright (1943) describes this subspecies as a "large, dark-coloured variety of the Canada Goose group". The birds are markedly darker than the other races of Canada Geese. Campbell *et al.* (1990) states: "The dusky geese migrate from the area of Cordove, Alaska—some stop at the Queen Charlotte Islands and at Vancouver Island." He gives their main winter areas as Benton, Lane and Polk counties in Oregon.

While most of my observations are from Blenkeinsop Valley of Saanich some were made near Chatterton Way (near Royal Oak). Occasionally, there are other races of Canada Geese with the Dusky race, along with Greater White-fronted geese (*Anser albifrons*), Snow geese (*Chen hyperborea*) and one Emperor Goose (*Chen canagica*). They are usually feeding on waste carrots or grazing in the fields.

The birds usually arrive in the Victoria area around the middle to later part of October and remain here until mid-March. During the 1989-90 season I kept track of five colour-marked birds. In the 1990-91 season there were six colour-marked birds including one (R VY) from the 1989-90 season. During the 1991-92 season there were again six collared geese, including "P 46" which was observed in 1989-90 but not in 1990-91.

To date in the 1992 I have observed four collared geese. Three of these were also seen during the 1991-92 season and

the fourth bird (R VY) had been observed during both the 1989-90 and 1990-91 seasons.

I have not seen any adverse reaction to the collars and marking a few birds in this manner certainly can provide valuable information on migration, distribution and survival. It is possible to get repeat information on individual birds which would not be possible if they were not collared.

Literature cited:

Campbell, R. W., N.K. Dawe, I. McTaggart-Cowan, J.M. Cooper, G.W. Kaiser, and M.C.E. McNall. 1990. *The birds of British Columbia. Volume I. Non-Passerines - loons through waterfowl.* Royal British Columbia Museum.

Kortright, F.H. 1943. *The ducks, geese and swans of North America.* The American Wildlife Management Institute.

Wally Macgregor is an active member and current president of the Victoria Natural History Society.

Expense-shared Tour

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DATES: from Vancouver; May 29-June 12

Expected species include: Arctic Loon, eiders, Common Ringed Plover, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Rufous-necked Stint, Ivory Gull, Aleutian Tern, many alcids, Bluethroat, Northern Wheatear, White Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail, Red-throated Pipit and many, many more.

COST: \$2600. CDN.
(subject to change; nine participants needed; reservations as soon as possible).

CONTACT: Keith Taylor,
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V8R 2B5

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Welcome To New Members

- Oct. 1 Andy and Mairi MacKinnon, of Witty Beach Road: are interested in botany, mycology and family events.
- Oct. 5 Fred and Mary Peirce, of Clarence Street: are birders.
- Oct. 8 Grahame Ruxton, of Tovey Crescent: is a birdwatcher.
- Oct. 8 F.H. Wooding, of Lancelot Place: writes nature books.
- Oct. 13 Fred and Flo Lavalley, from Victoria: are birdwatchers and enjoy all natural history.
- Oct. 16 Larissa Shumuk, of Viaduct Avenue: studies insects, birds, native plants and marine life.

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- Oct. 20 Melanie Fiander, of Ravenhill Road: is a birdwatcher.
- Oct. 20 N. Ringuette, of Dallas Road: has eclectic naturalistic interests at a non-expert level.
- Oct. 20 Louise Blair, of Elm Street.
- Oct. 20 Gail Mireau, of Rutland Road: is a birder.
- Oct. 21 Susan McKay, of Island Highway: enjoys hiking and field trips.
- Oct. 27 Karen Reid, of St. Andrews Street.
- Oct. 28 Eric and June Domke, of Dallas Road.
- Nov. 3 Benny McLean, of Lower Saltspring Way: studies geology, maps, marine biology, historical archaeology and is a birdwatcher.
- Nov. 6 Dorothy Armstrong, of Dallas Road: likes wildflowers, trees and birds.
- Nov. 6 Joan Randall, of Bushby Street.
- Nov. 10 Jennifer Barlow, of Wordsworth Street.
- Nov. 16 Jeff and Mari Stone, of Chestnut Street: interested in birds, conservation & wildlife management.
- Nov. 20 Dr. L. van den Berg, of Woodhaven Terrace: enjoys nature and ecology.
- Nov. 20 Gordon Jones, of Pipeline Road: is interested in ornithology, archaeology, forestry, environmental conservation and wildlife.
- Nov. 23 Joan and Edward Riecken, Cambridge Street.
- Nov. 23 Ron Bates, of Niagara Street: enjoys whales, birds and flowers.

The Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society

By Joyce Lee

The Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society is not yet a year old. But very busy! Naturalists Briony Penn, Joyce Lee and Lynn Husted met with Willie MacGillvary of Swan Lake in March. From that initial meeting, the group has mushroomed with a growing membership and public support.

The Society is dedicated to the preservation, protection and restoration of Garry Oak stands and their natural habitats. The purposes of the Society are:

- Preserving to the greatest extent possible the remaining Garry Oak stands and ecosystems
- Protecting and maintaining these stands and ecosystems
- Restoring damaged representative stands
- Promoting the aesthetic and natural values of these landscapes, their species and elements
- Fostering a sense of "oneness" with nature through these endeavours.

We work with a great sense of urgency as our special tree is threatened daily by the chain saw; its natural habitat eroded in the path of ever relentless development.

The Mackenzie Interchange shook many out of their complacency; others worried that their neighbour might cut

down the lovely Garry Oak. Most members of the Society are not naturalists but they are lovers of the *Quercus garryana*, the wildflowers, and the special sense of place that Victoria represents. The Garry Oak meadow forms an increasingly rare habitat. Of the 150 plants associated with this habitat, 40 species are listed as rare and are found nowhere else in Canada.

This past summer Carmen Cadrin of the Conservation Data Centre of the Ministry of Environment looked for *Quercus garryana* ecosystems that were not yet disturbed or had been invaded by non-native plants. One such stand, covering about five hectares on Hornby Island, was found, on private property, fresh with flagging tape.

Victoria naturalists live in the midst of the Garry Oak's home. Each one of us has a responsibility to save the remnant meadows for our future and the future of every plant and animal associated with this tree. Carmin Cadrin explains, "If the Garry Oak meadows are not to go the way of the Great Auk and the Passenger Pigeon, any protected areas strategy must highlight this unique and endangered plant community".

For further information on the Garry Oak Meadows Preservation Society or donations to this non-profit organization, please contact Joyce Lee at 386-3785 or Tom Gillispie at 361-1694.

[Editors Note: The Garry Oak Meadows Preservation Society has received radio station CJVI (AM 900) Environment Watch Award for 1992. We would like to add our own congratulations to the Society.]

Joyce Lee is a founding member of the Garry Oak Meadow Society and actively involved in many natural history events in the area, especially related to Garry Oaks. Check the Calendar and Bulletin for upcoming activities.



Garry Oak meadow in springtime, at Mt. Tzouhalem Ecological Reserve, near Duncan. (Photo: Adolf Ceska)

Pinnipeds in British Columbia Part I: Identification and Distribution

By Tamara J. Guenther and Robin W. Baird

Seals, sea lions and walrus can all be referred to as pinnipeds. The term pinniped is derived from the latin words *pinna* meaning feather or wing and *pedis* meaning foot. A literal translation of pinniped is then feather or wing-footed. All pinnipeds are carnivores with special adaptations for living a mostly marine existence. These adaptations include streamlining, flippers and blubber. Even though the basic body characteristics are the same, there are some very noticeable differences between seals, sea lions and walrus.

Seals do not have external ear flaps and have short flippers that are covered in fur on both sides. When out of the water they are not very mobile and tend to inch along the ground in much the same manner as a caterpillar. When in the water they swim using alternating strokes of their hind flippers and the foreflippers are used for changing direction (King, 1983).

Sea lions have small external ear flaps and large flippers that are covered in short hair on the dorsal surface but are hairless on the ventral surface. While on land these large flippers are used to raise the head and shoulders of the animal off of the ground. In addition, the rear flippers can be rotated underneath so that the animal can "walk" over land. In sea lions it is the foreflippers which are used both for propulsion and to change direction (King, 1983).

Walrus have characteristics of both seals and sea lions. They do not have external ear flaps and have relatively short and often hairless flippers. On land they are able to rotate their rear flippers forward for walking (Kenyon, 1986) and in the water most of the propulsion comes from alternating strokes of the hindflippers (King, 1983).

In B.C. five species of pinnipeds have been recorded, including the Harbour Seal (*Phoca vitulina*), Northern Elephant Seal (*Mirounga angustirostris*), California Sea Lion (*Zalophus californianus*), Northern or Steller Sea Lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*), and Northern Fur Seal (*Callorhinus ursinus*). It is possible to distinguish these species from one another based on various physical and behavioural characteristics.

Harbour Seal

Harbour seals are the smallest pinnipeds commonly seen in B.C. Adults are generally 1.2 to 1.6 m (4-5 ft) in length and weigh 60-80 kg (130-180 lbs) (Olesiuk and Bigg, 1988). The spotted pelage of Harbour seals makes them readily distinguishable from the other species recorded here. The colour of the pelage, however, varies from dark with light spots to light with dark spots. Harbour seals are often seen resting on rocks in the intertidal zones and will frequently congregate in large numbers in areas such as Race Rocks and the Chain Islets around southern Vancouver Island, due to the large number of suitable haulout sites in these locations. Breeding occurs throughout their range and pups are generally born between July



Harbour seals hauled out on a sandy beach in eastern Juan de Fuca Strait. (Photo: ©Robin Baird)

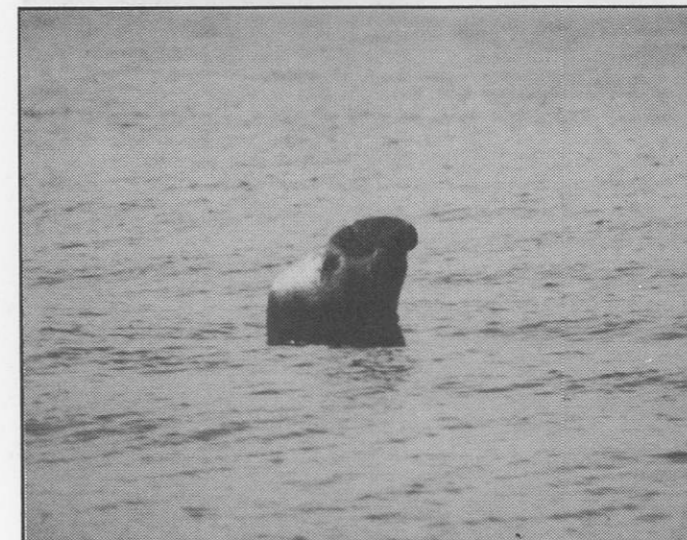
and August in southern B.C. and between May and June in northern B.C. (Olesiuk and Bigg, 1988).

Harbour seals can be found throughout the northern hemisphere in temperate coastal areas. The B.C. Department of Fisheries and Oceans offered a bounty for each seal killed between 1913 and 1964, and combined with intensive hunting for their pelts between 1962 and 1969 there was a rapid decline in the population (Olesiuk and Bigg, 1988). In 1970 the Harbour Seal population was protected with an estimated number of 9,000-10,500 individuals (Olesiuk *et al.*, 1990). The B.C. Harbour Seal population has been increasing at 12% per year since 1973 and the most recent population estimates indicate that there are between 75,000 and 88,000 individuals, likely reflecting historic levels (Olesiuk *et al.*, 1990).

Northern Elephant Seal

Northern Elephant seals are the largest species of pinniped in the northern hemisphere. The males can be up to 4.5 m (15 ft) in length and weigh 2,000 kg (4,400 lbs) while females are much smaller, reaching lengths of 2-3 m (6.6 - 9.9 ft) and weights of about 900 kg (2,000 lbs) (King, 1983). The pelage of adult Elephant seals is a greyish brown, however, it often has a mottled appearance. In addition to their greater size, adult male Elephant seals can be distinguished from females by their large inflatable proboscis. Adult Northern Elephant seals are rarely seen on land in B.C., however, they are often seen resting with their head held out of the water in a manner that resembles a large deadhead.

Young females and males are often mistaken for Harbour seals in B.C., particularly while they are moulting. Unlike other seals which moult their fur once a year, Elephant seals moult their fur and the upper layer of their skin. In B.C. the younger animals tend to do this on land, often in populated areas. Because they are losing large patches of skin, have large watery eyes and are easy to approach quite closely, they are often mistaken for a sick Harbour Seal. The easiest way to distinguish between a sick Harbour Seal and a moulting Elephant Seal is to look at a few easily identifiable characteristics. Elephant seals do not have any spots on their fur, they have a horizontal crease just below their nostrils, and their hind flippers have an inverted U-shape to their trailing edge, being longer on either side and shorter in the middle. Harbour seals on the other



Adult male elephant seal in open water, as typically seen in B.C. (Photo: R.W. Baird)

hand do have spots, do not have a crease, and the trailing edge of the hindflippers are relatively straight.

Northern Elephant seals can be found in the northeast Pacific from Mexico to southern Alaska. Breeding only occurs at rookeries off of California and Mexico and most pups are born at the end of January (King, 1983). During the 19th Century, Northern Elephant seals were hunted almost to extinction. By 1890 there was only one herd left and it was composed of less than 100 animals (King, 1983). The Elephant seals that are around today are all descended from that one herd and now there are as many as 100,000 individuals (De-Long, 1986).

California Sea Lion

California Sea lions are likely to be recognized best as those animals seen in zoos and circuses with a ball balancing on their nose. Adult males are 2-2.5 m (6.5-8 ft) long and weigh 200-400 kg (450-900 lbs) and females are 1.4-1.7 m (4.5-5.5 ft) long and weigh 70-110 kg (150-250 lbs) (Olesiuk and Bigg, 1988). Their pelage is usually a dark chocolate brown and may appear almost black when it is wet. However, some animals become bleached by the sun and have a lighter brown appearance. The best ways to discriminate California Sea lions from the other pinnipeds in B.C. is by the sound they make. When vocalizing they make a noise that sounds very much like a barking dog.

—continued following page

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If the animal is not vocalizing, the size and colour are good indications. As well, the adult males develop a crest on the top of their skull that can be up to 4 cm (1.5 in) high, resulting in a very noticeably high forehead (King, 1983).

California Sea lions are generally not found in B.C. between May and August. During the summer they congregate at rookeries off of California and Mexico where they give birth and mate. During the winter, females and juvenile males remain in California and Mexico while subadult and adult males head as far north as the central B.C. coast. They can be found on and around rocky haulout sites and logbooms. The entire population numbers between 120,000 and 140,000 individuals (Mate and DeMaster, 1986), however only about 3,000 of these visit B.C. each winter (Olesiuk and Bigg, 1988).

Steller Sea Lion

The Steller Sea Lion is the largest of the sea lions. Adult males are about 3 m (10 ft) long and weigh up to 1,000 kg (2,200 lbs). The females are smaller, up to 2.4 m (8 ft) long and 180-230 kg (400-500 lbs) (Olesiuk and Bigg, 1988). They are tan or buff in colour and adult males develop a heavy muscular neck and have a "mane" of longer, coarser hair (King, 1983). Besides the greater size, lighter colour and lack of a high forehead, Steller Sea lions can be distinguished from California Sea lions by the very deep rumbling/growling sound that they make.

Steller Sea lions inhabit the cooler coastal regions of the North Pacific and can be found as far south as southern California in the eastern North Pacific (King, 1983). They are usually found on rocky islets or on the open coast and numerous rookeries and year-round haulouts exist in B.C. Animals tend to return to the rookery where they were born in June and July

to breed and then disperse along the coast to wintering sites in late summer and fall. There are currently about 116,000 animals in the entire population, which is less than half of what it was estimated at 30 years ago (Loughlin *et al.*, 1992). This decline has resulted in the listing of the Steller Sea Lion under the U.S. Endangered Species Act in 1990. There are about 7,000 animals in B.C. and the population appears to have been stable since the 1960s (Olesiuk and Bigg, 1988).

Northern Fur Seal

While the name "Northern Fur Seal" implies the animals are true seals, fur seals actually fall into the category of sea lions since they have external ear flaps, large foreflippers and the ability to turn their hindflippers beneath them for "walking". Adult males are about 2 m (6.5 ft) and weigh up to 270 kg (600 lbs) and females are about 1.5 m (4.5 ft) and up to 50 kg (110 lbs) (King, 1983). The adult pelage is a greyish brown that appears black when wet. The shape of the head is quite unique with a short, pointed nose and a very rounded profile from the nose around to the back of the head.

The Northern Fur Seal is the most oceanic, generally being found on shore only during the breeding season (Fiscus, 1986). The breeding season occurs between June and October in the eastern North Pacific and the animals congregate on the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea during this time (Olesiuk and Bigg, 1988). In early winter most of the adult females migrate as far south as southern California and then back north again in late spring, passing through B.C. waters along the way. Adult males winter offshore in Alaska (Bigg, 1990). Some individuals can be found off the B.C. coast during the winter and spring, generally at least 10 miles offshore, however they are occasionally sighted in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The entire Northern Fur Seal population



Sea lions on the logbooms at Harmac, B.C. A California sea lion can be seen on the left (note the high forehead and smaller size) and a Steller sea lion can be seen on the right. (Photo: ©Pam J. Stacey)

numbers about 1.2 million individuals, about 871,000 of which inhabit the Pribilof Islands (Fiscus, 1986).

Other Species

There are several other species of pinnipeds which may possibly be seen in the waters off B.C. The following list is of some arctic species that have not yet been recorded in B.C. but have been recorded in California. These animals would have likely arrived in California after passing through B.C. waters, and should be considered as hypothetical or accidental species for B.C. We are listing them to raise awareness about the potential for these species to occur accidentally and to encourage naturalists to make detailed observations when seals are seen.

Hooded Seal (*Cystophora cristata*)— This species inhabits the North Atlantic and Arctic seas, but a few animals have been recorded from the western Beaufort Sea and one has been documented in southern California (Dudley, 1992). The pelage of this species is grey with black patches of irregular size and shape (King, 1983). Many Harbour seals are similarly coloured except that Harbour seals spots are generally small and circular. In addition, adult male Hooded seals have a "hood" on top of their head that can be inflated to twice the size of a football (King, 1983).

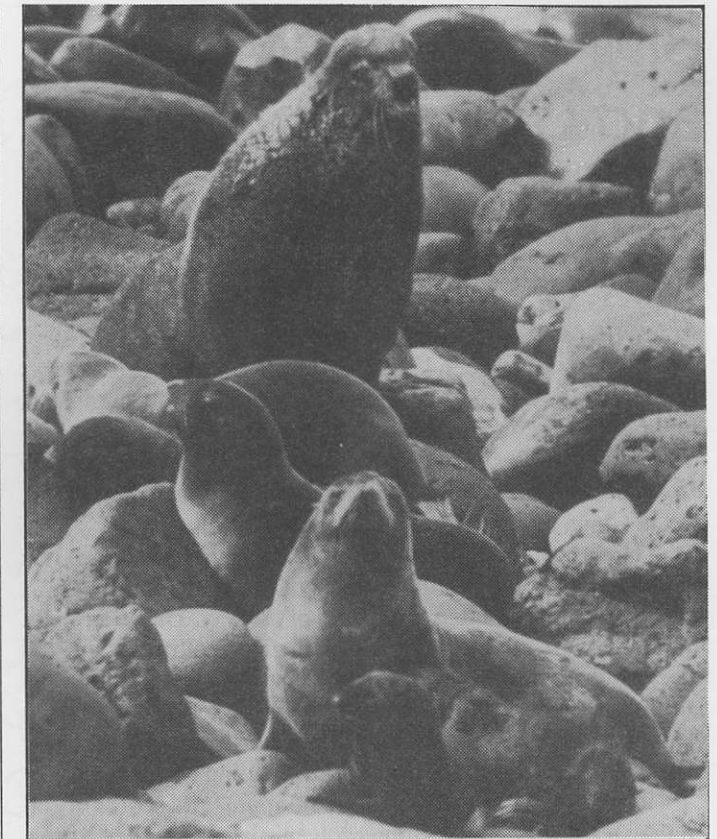
Ribbon Seal (*Phoca fasciata*)— This species is generally only found in the Bering and Okhotsk Seas but two animals have been recorded as far south as California (Roest, 1964; Dudley, 1992). These animals are very distinctively coloured. They are dark brown and have wide, white bands around their neck, the hind end of their body, and around each foreflipper (King, 1983).

Ringed Seal (*Phoca hispida*)— This species is found in circum-polar arctic waters and has occasionally been recorded in the Pribilof Islands as well as in various areas in the Atlantic (King, 1983). In addition, one animal has been recorded in California (Dudley, 1992). The pelage of this animal is usually light grey with black spots, particularly on the back. However, many of the spots are surrounded by light coloured rings and the black spots along the centre of the back may be so close together that they are continuous (King, 1983).

A toll-free number exists in B.C. for reporting sightings of rare pinnipeds, elephant seals and fur seals. Reports of whales, dolphins, porpoises, and sea otters (both alive and dead) are also valuable. To report such sightings, regardless of how old they are, call 1-800-665-5939 (24 hrs) or 380-1925 in the Victoria area. For more information, contact the Marine Mammal Research Group, Box 6244, Victoria B.C. V8P 5L5.

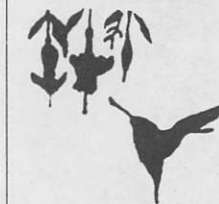
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Northern fur seals in the Pribilof Islands. (Photo: Courtesy of the Pacific Biological Station.)

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Birding in Hong Kong and China

By Barbara Begg

A birding trip to Hong Kong's New Territories and in Sichuan Province, west China, during May, 1992, proved to me that, contrary to some popular notions, not all of China's birds have been shot, poisoned, caged or eaten. I was able to tally 113 species in Hong Kong and 245 in China, for a total of 358 species, of which 254 were "life birds".

In Hong Kong, our small group of birders was led by Richard Lewthwaite and Wendy Young of Kingfisher Tours, and in China by Ben King of Kingbird Tours.

However, the flight to Hong Kong from Vancouver was one of the most interesting aspects of the tour. The view was unobstructed by clouds a good deal of the way. The addition of monitors with an on-going display giving altitude, ground speed, outside temperature, time to arrival and, most importantly, our exact position shown on a map. Clearly visible were Cape Scott and the Scott Islands off the north end of Vancouver Island, Kodiak Island, the base of the Aleutian Chain, complete with ice pans in the water, Mt. Fuji in Japan, (and scores of golf courses), a smoking or steaming volcanic island south of Korea, and lastly, crossing Taiwan, before shoe-horning our way down onto Kai Tak, (Hong Kong International Airport).

In warm and humid Hong Kong we birded fresh and salt-water marshes, wooded and grassy hillsides and farms. Not surprisingly, the first bird I saw in Hong Kong was the Eurasian Tree Sparrow, counterpart to our introduced city bird, the House Sparrow. Near Shuen Wan, on our first organized birding day, we had excellent views of a pair of very striking Black Bazas, a small crested hawk with distinctive black and white

barring on the breast. They were calling and performing their acrobatic flight display—very exciting. Later the same day, while waiting for Savannah Nightjars to appear at dusk, we were again entertained with a display flight, this time by a pair of Bonelli's Eagles, another flamboyantly marked raptor with a reputation for outstanding aerobatics. A short time after the courtship/territorial flight, we saw one of the pair plunge to the ground and a moment later fly over us carrying a rat in its talons.

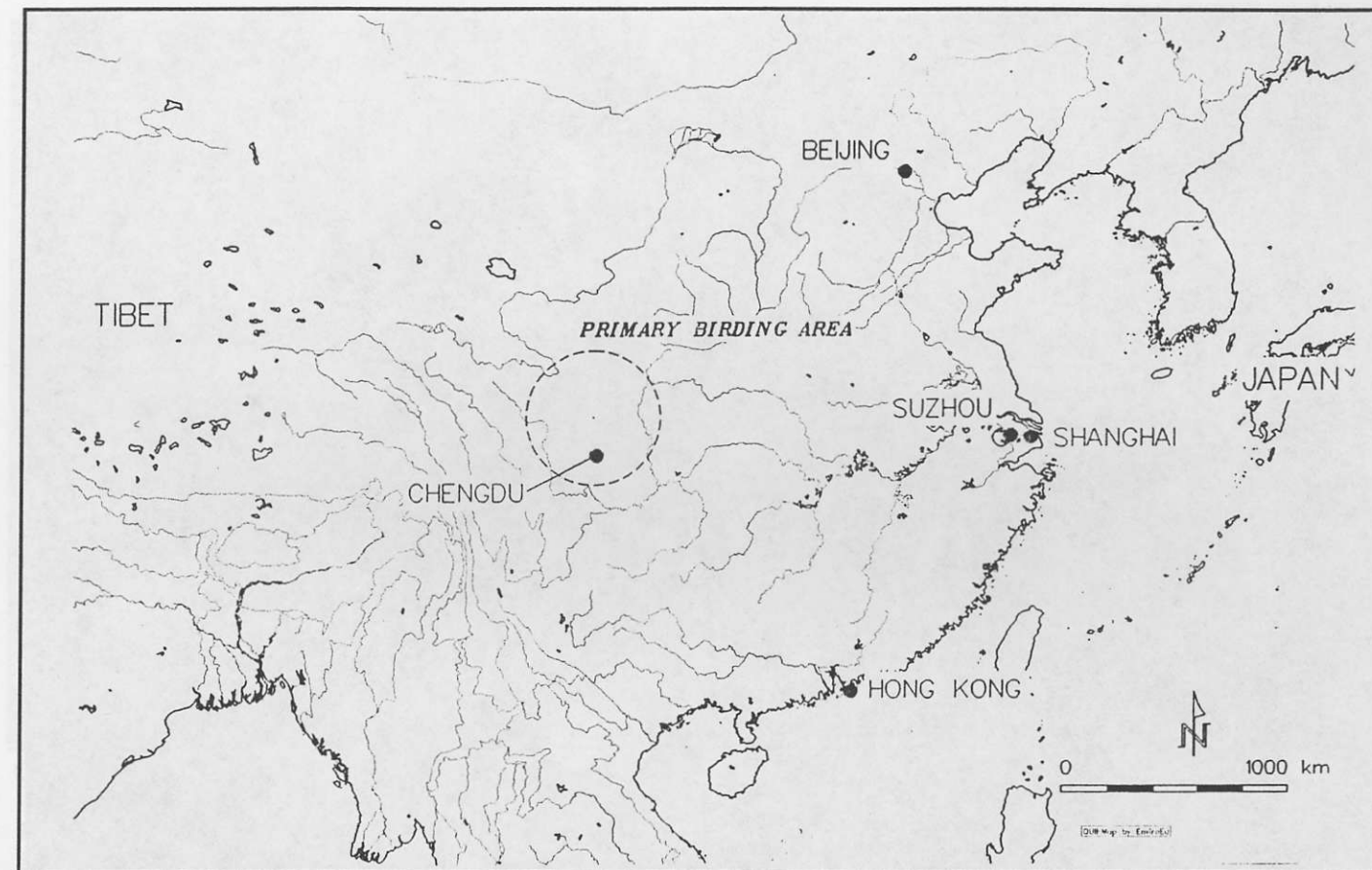
Our second day in Hong Kong's New Territories was spent at Mai Po Marsh, a shorebird and waterfowl viewing area administered by the World Wildlife Fund. With permission, we entered the fenced no-man's land area between Hong Kong and China and used the long boardwalk through the Mangroves to reach a blind overlooking mud flats bordering Deep Bay. Visible was the smoggy industrial city of Shenzhen in the special economic zone of Guangdong province, mainland China. Immediately in front of the blind were numerous Mud Skippers which emerged from the mud as the tide receded. They were fascinating to watch as they flopped around and erected their dorsal fins. We were told that the Chinese make Mud Skipper soup!

Record breaking rain, accompanied by thunder and lightning, prevented us from reaching Hong Kong Island itself for our third day's birding, which would have included Victoria Peak, Aberdeen Harbour, and a zoo. Our revised itinerary took us back to the bird blinds of Mai Po Marsh where we could take shelter from the storm and still enjoy a full day's birding. Even though the spring shorebird migration was past its peak, there were still good numbers and a variety of species. Highlights at the marsh were Nordmann's Green-shank, Asian Dowitcher, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Yellow Bittern, White Spoonbill, Black-faced Spoonbill, a Far-eastern Curlew with Eurasian Curlews, and Mandarin Ducks, unopinioned and wild.

On our first day at Mai Po Marsh, we had watched a small flock of Eurasian Curlews which included a bird identified, after much discussion, as a Far-eastern, (Australian), Curlew. It was a poorly marked bird and we didn't see its buffy back and rump area, which is diagnostic. It looked like it would be one of those life sightings for me that would need "cleaning up" at a later date.

Due to the next day's violent weather and our unexpected return to Mai Po, I got that opportunity for a second look. We dashed out of the rain and into a blind, opened the viewing windows, and there, right in front of us, was the same group of Curlews. I found the slightly darker bird that was the alleged Far-eastern Curlew. The storm raged on and I kept by binocular on the Curlew for over an hour, hoping to see its back properly. It was a very lethargic bird compared to the others, which were occasionally walking about and raising their wings, enabling me to see their white backs. Suddenly a particularly close lightning bolt put all the birds up and we were able to see six white backs and one buff one, confirming the Far-eastern. All the birds were gone and we were left with the smell of sulphur in the air for the next ten minutes.

After our three days of birding in the Hong Kong area, we flew to Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province in southwest China. The first bird species sighted in China was our familiar Barn Swallow, a very cosmopolitan bird. The drive from the airport to the city took us through a small segment of the farmlands of the vast Sichuan, or Red, Basin. Winter wheat and rapeseed, (Canola), were growing in most fields and there were rice seedlings in small paddies. Three weeks later, when we passed through this area again, the wheat was harvested and the grain was drying on straw mats on the sides of the



road. The former wheat fields were flooded and the rice seedlings were being transplanted. Before cars, trucks and buses are allowed to enter Chengdu, they must pass through an automated car wash, after which workers check the vehicles. If the job doesn't pass inspection, the driver must get out and finish the cleaning manually, using long-handled brushes. The car wash we passed through had about ten stalls, which would seem inadequate for a city of three to four million population, but there are very few passenger cars—mostly bicycles, trucks, and buses.

After a night in Chengdu, we headed northwest to the Wolong Panda Reserve, with a brief stop at the Panda breeding station. There are nineteen Giant Pandas here and they are the only ones we will see. In the wild, there are about one thousand Giant Pandas, found in seventeen scattered areas, and sixty in captivity in China. Approximately 60% of the Pandas are found in the eleven reserves, but too often numbering fewer than one hundred individuals, which is not considered a viable population. There is an ambitious ten-year plan to increase the number of Panda reserves and also to create corridors connecting different Panda populations. This would allow for genetic mixing and movement to new areas when the bamboo, in its normal cycle, dies out. Ninety to ninety-five percent of a Panda's diet consists of some forty species of bamboo, and as they are a low energy animal, ease of movement to new feeding areas is imperative. Intermingling of different groups would also improve the gene pool, resulting in healthier populations. It is planned to remove some of the farmers and lift logging licences from existing reserves, as these disturbed areas form effective barriers that the Pandas can't or won't cross, thus restricting their access to new sources of food and leading to inbreeding.

We stayed at the Wolong Panda Reserve headquarters in new and reasonably comfortable accommodations and after

much hiking and patient searching on the nearby hillsides, we had good views of the lovely Golden Pheasant. In this area we saw the newly discovered Chinese Leaf-warbler, yet to be officially described or named. According to Ben King, its scientific name will likely be *Phylloscopus sichuanensis*. We were to see this tentative species again later in the trip, at Jiuzhaigou Reserve. At Wolong we spotted our first Long-tailed Minivets, the male bright red and blue/black, and the female yellow and olive. We found this bird in many different areas, usually in pairs, as this was the breeding season.

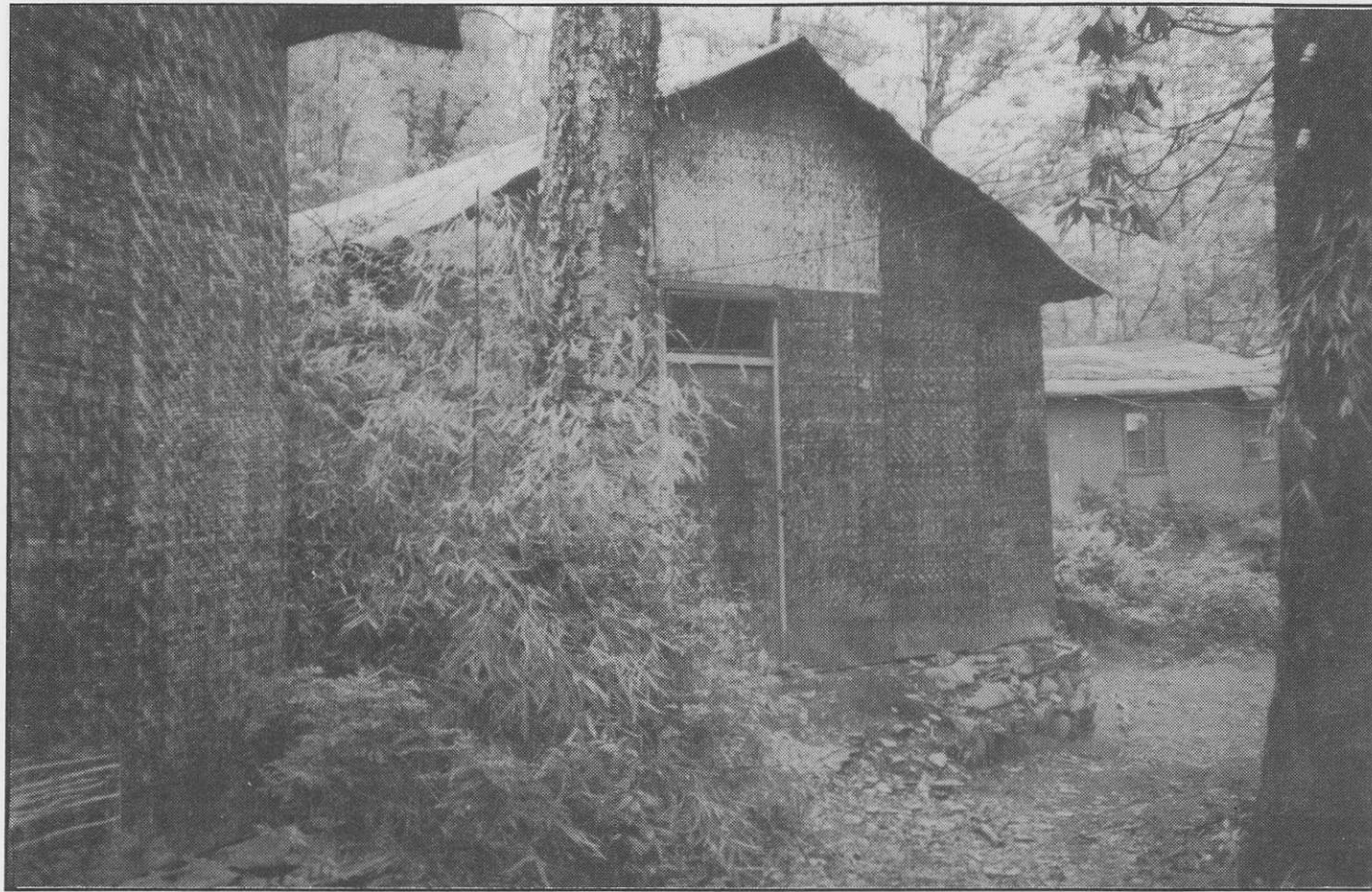
After staying in the valley at the headquarters, we hiked up to the Wolong Panda Research Station where George Schaller did much of his research. We had a three-night stay here under rather spartan conditions but the birding was excellent and the Rhododendron-covered hillsides lovely. Some of the highlights here were (Mrs.) Gould's Sunbird, Temminck's Tragopan (an outlandishly colourful pheasant), Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler (not much to look at, but with a unique, long, insect-like song) and the beautiful, blue Verditer Flycatcher.

Pandas were probably in the vicinity as we saw fairly fresh droppings. We were asked by the researchers not to disturb any of these scats as they are one of the best means of studying the Pandas. The Giant Panda has the canines and short gut of a carnivorous animal yet they eat mostly bamboo. The bamboo is poorly digested, so much of it is excreted with little alteration, so is very noticeable in the unbroken scats. When eating bamboo, Pandas insert the stalks crosswise in their jaws. By measuring the length of the undigested stems the age of the animal can be determined using base information on the distance between the molars on both sides of the jaw.

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Joanna Gockfeld and Wendy Young at "The Fence," Thai Po Marsh, Hong Kong, N.T. (Photo: Barbara Begg)



Sleeping accommodations at Wolong Panda Research Station. Vegetation included bamboo, rhododendrum, and red birch. (Photo: Barbara Begg)

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Beside trails on the mountain, we saw Panda traps, no longer used, that were the means of capturing Pandas to collar or tag them, or for procuring them to take down to the captive breeding station. These traps are made of logs and were baited with a goat's head. Apparently this was quite effective, demonstrating the Panda's fondness for meat, but because of their lassitude there was difficulty in capturing live prey.

An interesting sidelight in the research station section of the Wolong Panda Reserve were leeches. They lie in wait along the narrow paths and sometimes latch onto passersby and simply fall off when they have had their fill. One usually is not aware that they have a passenger until later, upon noticing blood on their ankles. Only three people in our group were hosts to leeches and as I had expressed some disappointment at not seeing any, our two members from New Zealand rounded up a leech and brought it to me, calling my bluff to enjoy the total experience. I quickly decided that just having one reach for me was close enough.

The next three days were spent in another area of the Wolong Panda Reserve, Bie Mu Ping, in grasslands over 12,000 feet elevation and with the high peaks of the Himalayas in sight. At this height the air is a little thin and care must be taken to not exert oneself too much. It is difficult to hike and talk at the same time, which makes for better birding in any case! Yellow Chinese Poppies were dotted throughout the grass - and dusted with snow on one day. We now saw our first of many thousands of Yaks. They are roaming free but are domesticated and not

pure stock. Truly wild Yaks are to be found much farther east and at an even higher elevation on the Tibetan Plateau.

Butterfly Bush, showing only last year's dead blooms, was growing on the hillsides. The cultivar seen in gardens and along roadsides here in the Victoria area was introduced from China via England. Our bushes are larger and more lush but they are not struggling for survival at such a high altitude.

We stayed in a road maintenance crew's lodgings in this section of the reserve and according to Ben's very generous rating it was "basic". Often there is no means of heating the rooms, even at high altitudes, but the Chinese have wonderful, thick quilts which keep one passably warm during the night. The first morning we were up and away well before light in order to drive farther up into the grasslands to look and listen for Wood Snipes winnowing - they call it roding in China. After getting fleeting glimpses of them near the road through the fog, we trudged up the steep hillsides and finally had excellent scope views of one on the ground.

Later in the morning, when the fog had cleared, we spotted two White Eared Pheasants across a draw and they co-operated by staying in sight for several minutes at a time as they moved about feeding. This species is larger than the Common Pheasant and has a donkey-like call. We also saw Common Pheasants in many areas but they lacked the ring around the neck of our introduced sub-species. We heard a Winter Wren singing from a small patch of woods and to my ear it was indistinguishable from our North American bird, which in fact is the same species. In this area we had our first sighting of the Lammergier Vulture, otherwise known as the



Cook at the road maintenance quarters Wolong Panda Reserve. (Photo: Barbara Begg)

Bearded Vulture, or Bonebreaker, and one of my target birds. Later, on the Tibetan Plateau, we were treated to spectacular views of other individuals, for a total of seven Lammergiers.

On our ninth day in China, we had a long drive over many narrow, dirt roads but through interesting and varied terrain. When we crossed a pass at 14,500 feet, we were into ethnic, but not officially political, Tibet. Many prayer flags flapped in a frigid wind. Throughout this Tibetan area were prayer flags on bamboo poles crowning the tops of hills or houses and prayer flags strung across rivers, or draped around sacred monuments. This is an indication of the softening of the Chinese government's attitude toward the Tibetans' Buddhist beliefs.

At one point in our long drive we saw our first flock of the lovely purple/blue and cobalt blue Grandala, with the grayish brown females, an Oriole-sized bird of high elevations. When the sun catches them, they look like flying, flashing jewels. Also on this day, we saw two Wallcreepers, a much sought after species and my other target bird. It is a beautiful gray and black bird with large rose/pink wing patches. It spends most of its time creeping on rock faces, but later in the trip, at Jiuzhaigou Reserve, we saw one on the paved road before it flew down to fossick among the rocks bordering a small lake.

Today, May 19th, we drive up onto the Tibetan Plateau. As far as the eye can see, there are grasslands bordered by mountain peaks. Dotting the landscape are the Tibetan nomads' tents, yaks, horses, goats, and sheep. The Tibetans are colourful in dress as well as actions, and some of the herdsmen seemed to enjoy having their pictures taken. Sometimes they do their herding from the backs of Yaks instead of horses. It was fun to watch a Tibetan riding a Yak to herd a group of horses! (We were served Yak meat several times and we found it darker and stringier than beef, but much the same flavour.)

On the plateau we saw two flocks of Black-necked Cranes, totaling about sixty-three individuals. They nest here, but the ones

we saw were still on the move, as they were in flocks. We were told that there are about nine hundred of these cranes left in the wild. A familiar bird, the Common Tern, was breeding around marshy areas on the plateau and we saw several pairs. We were treated to the flight songs of Oriental Skylarks. Although the song was very similar to the Eurasian Skylark, it seemed to me to be a little thinner, more buzzy and less varied. We also saw many Horned Larks and Tibetan Larks, (Long-billed Calandra Lark), the largest lark in the world at eight and a half inches. Also, we saw several lovely Ruddy Shelducks. After seeing the probable escapee at Martindale Flats in the Victoria area for two winters in a row, it was exciting to see truly wild birds.

One of the spectacles of the tour was a gathering of forty-four Himalayan Griffons and two Cinereous Vultures, (the Black Vulture of the eastern hemisphere), feeding at a Yak carcass. It looked like most of them had eaten their fill by the time we arrived on the scene, as there was a procession of vultures walking up a nearby hill - they probably were too satiated to take flight easily from the flat ground. Farther down the road we found a dead Cinereous Vulture and a Common Raven. Both of them had their feet cut off, but seemed to be intact otherwise. Our Chinese interpreter told us they had likely been killed to obtain their feet, subsequently to be passed off as Eagle feet, which have some spiritual significance to the Tibetans.

After an arduous drive on nearly impassable roads, (eight hours to travel just one short section of fifty miles), we came down off the Tibetan Plateau, but it was by no means the end of the high altitude birding. Working our way southward again, with a one-night stay at mountainous Huang Lung Si, our next stop was Jiuzhaigou Reserve for a five-night stay. This is the Panda reserve where the bamboo died off a few years ago and all the Pandas moved on to other areas.

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Two females, N.W. corner of Sichuan Province. It is unusual for women here to allow their pictures to be taken. (Photo: Barbara Begg)

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We saw much dead bamboo, standing and fallen, and small amounts of new growth up to twenty inches tall. In the stream just below the lake where we saw the aforementioned Wallcreeper, we found a pair of White-throated Dippers feeding a juvenile. During our stay at this reserve, we added three new pheasant species to our list: Blood, Blue Eared, and Koklas Pheasants.

Jiuzhaigou Reserve is being developed for general tourist use and has many accommodations, large dining halls, some paved roads, trails, and limited shopping facilities. Some of the lakes and streams appear turquoise and cobalt blue due to dissolved copper sulphates. This certainly reduces wildlife in the waters but they are very appealing to the eye and present great photographic opportunities, if one can find an opening between the numerous camera toting Chinese and Taiwanese tourists. The only birds we saw on the water were two Mallards. A Chinese Pong Heron, a very striking bird, flew over the river. Two local Chinese with fishing rods were trying their luck at one section of the river, so possibly there were some fish.

Near the end of the trip we had another long drive, following the Min River south. Most of our birding on this day was done from the windows of our moving bus and we saw the ubiquitous River Chat stationed at many points along the river. By the roadside we saw our first Russet Sparrows and our second Daurian Jackdaws of the trip. We passed many honey bee yards which were squeezed in between the road and the high, steep bank of the river. Immediately beside the hives there is always a small, crude hut in which the beekeeper lives. When the bees have finished the trees or bushes in the area, the hives are moved on to another location. Some road construction crews appear to set up temporary living quarters right beside

the roads also. In the mornings they can be seen cooking their breakfasts just outside of the shack doors.

On our last birding morning in China we stopped at Qing Cheng Shan National Park, a religious shrine. We are back down close to 1,500 feet elevation now and the vegetation is more dense. This was the first time Ben King had been in this park and we were all impressed by the variety of bird life and the fact that in many places we were able to look almost directly into the tree canopy from paths and stairs on the steep hillsides. Many lovely butterflies were present here, along with some interesting beetles and reptiles. We had good views of a number of bird species that we hadn't seen anywhere else in China, such as Gray-capped Woodpecker, Black Bulbul, Vinous-throated Parrotbill and Sulphur-breasted Warbler. Even though there were throngs of people by mid-morning, they were quiet and unobtrusive. This new stop on our itinerary was necessitated by a large detour we had to make due to road construction made impassable by the more-than-usual amount of rain and snow.

Finally we reached the outskirts of Chengdu and of course our bus had to go through the vehicle washing station again. This time we didn't pass inspection after our initial wash, so our driver had to get out and spend about another ten minutes scrubbing before we were allowed to continue.

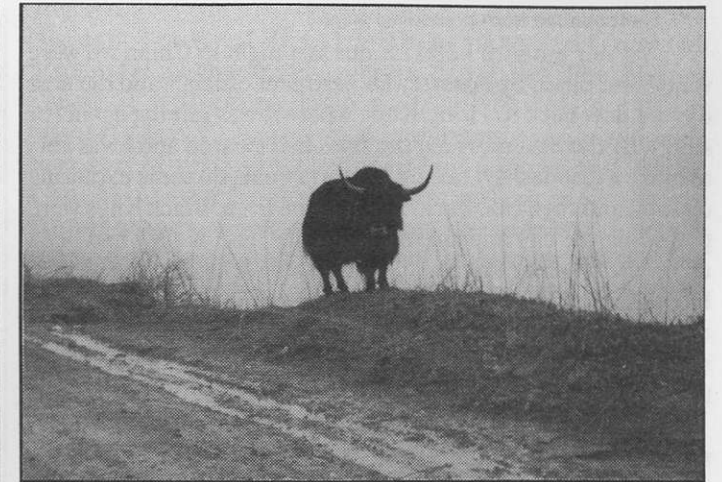
We saw few wild mammals in China, so creatures such as pikas, squirrels, Woolly Himalayan Hares and Himalayan Marmots caused quite a stir. In alpine scrub we watched a lovely reddish orange weasel carrying a small rodent to its den. The weasel stayed in sight for several minutes, allowing good views for everyone. The only large mammals we saw were Blue Sheep, (Bharal), Pseudois nayaur, a herd of fifteen high on the side of a distant slope in Jiuzhaigou Reserve.

We didn't do any active owling, but did hear an owl at Bei Mu Ping, as well as Collared Owlets and Tawny Owls at Jiuzhaigou. On our long day's drive descending from the Tibetan Plateau we spotted two Little Owls perched quietly a short distance away from the road.

We saw several bird species in Hong Kong and China that call North America home as well. Some of these old friends that we have all seen here in British Columbia and we were able to enjoy on our trip were Cattle Egret, Eurasian Wigeon, Gadwall, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Common Merganser, Golden Eagle, Gray, (Black-bellied), Plover, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Snipe, Red Knot, Red-necked Phalarope, Caspian and Common Tern, Rock Dove, Horned Lark, Barn Swallow, Common Raven, Northern, (Winter), Wren, and Red Crossbill. Seeing Crested Mynahs in Hong Kong, as indigenous species there, as opposed to an introduced species in Vancouver, is a step towards sanitizing one's "life list".

In spite of experiencing wetter and snowier weather than usual on this Tibet/West China tour, we saw a record number of bird species. Helping to boost the numbers were several species not recorded before on this trip, such as White-cheeked Starling, Rock Sparrow, Lesser Kestrel, Short-toed Eagle, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Amur Falcon, and Moustached Laughing Thrush.

One of the bonuses of going to a different country is the opportunity to experience new foods. Some of the unusual foods we had were bamboo shoots, which we had no trouble digesting as they were cooked, and 1,000 year old eggs, and even though they aren't really 1,000 years old, the texture felt like they were and they were not a big hit with anyone. It must have been the first time any of us, other than



Yak at 11,000 feet. (Photo: Barbara Begg)

our leader, had tried Yak meat, yogurt, and milk, or lotus blossoms. Sichuan meals do not normally include deserts, but our support staff were able to round up some for us and they were usually a part of boxed breakfasts and lunches. Bottled Wolfberry jelly was a treat, but I wasn't able to learn what Wolfberries are. Glass noodles were tasty but difficult to handle with chopsticks. Chicken dishes demonstrated how very little food is wasted, although we had trouble finding any chicken amongst the bones, feet and bills. Several times we had rose hip juice in drinking boxes! Sichuan food is spicy and we usually had very spicy, cold appetizer dishes. Otherwise, due to popular demand, most of our food was milder than is the norm.

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Covered Bridge, Jinzhaigou. (Photo: Barbara Begg)

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At our modern hotel on our last night in China we were wined and dined by Forestry Department officials and the next day we flew back to Hong Kong where it was raining again (or still?). By the next morning the skies had cleared and I was able to make a fast dash by taxi up Victoria Peak, do some exploring on foot, and then ride back down on the tram. Black Kites were patrolling the city and surrounding hills, just as they had been up on the Tibetan Plateau. Given a smog-free day, the view of Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories from The Peak must be outstanding. Another inexpensive taxi ride returned me to my hotel in time to catch the limousine to the airport for the flight home, ending a most interesting trip.

Anyone who is in reasonable health and who believes that rough conditions add to the experience, should enjoy this unique tour.

Common and scientific names of bird species mentioned in the text in order of appearance:

- Eurasian Tree Sparrow—*Passer montanus*
- House Sparrow—*Passer domesticus*
- Black Baza—*Aviceda leuphotes*
- Savannah Nightjar—*Caprimulgus affinis*
- Bonelli's Eagle—*Hieraetus fasciatus*
- Nordmann's Greenshank—*Tringa guttifer*
- Asian Dowitcher—*Limnodromus semipalmatus*
- Broad-billed Sandpiper—*Limicola falcinellus*
- Yellow Bittern—*Ixobrychus sinensis*
- White Spoonbill—*Platalea leucorodia*
- Black-faced Spoonbill—*Platalea minor*
- Far-eastern Curlew—*Numenius madagascariensis*
- Eurasian Curlew—*Numenius arquata*
- Mandarin Duck—*Aix galericulata*
- Barn Swallow—*Hirundo rustica*
- Golden Pheasant—*Chrysolophus pictus*
- (Chinese Leaf-warbler—*Phylloscopus sichuanensis*)
- Long-tailed Minivet—*Pericrocotus ethologus*
- (Mrs.) Gould's Sunbird—*Aethopyga gouldiae*
- Temminck's Tragopan—*Tragopan temminckii*
- Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler—*Cettia acanthizoides*
- Verditer Flycatcher—*Muscicapa thalassina*
- Wood Snipe—*Gallinago nemoricola*
- White Eared Pheasant—*Crossoptilon crossoptilon*
- Common Pheasant—*Phasianus colchicus*
- Winter Wren—*Troglodytes troglodytes*
- Lammergier Vulture—*Gypaetus barbatus*
- Grandala—*Grandala coelicolor*
- Wallcreeper—*Tichodroma muraria*
- Black-necked Crane—*Grus nigricollis*
- Common Tern—*Sterna hirundo*
- Oriental Skylark—*Alauda gulgula*
- Eurasian Skylark—*Alauda arvensis*
- Horned Lark—*Eremophila alpestris*
- Tibetan (Long-billed Calandra) Lark—*Melanocorypha maxima*
- Ruddy Shelduck—*Tadorna ferruginea*
- Himalayan Griffon—*Gyps himalayensis*
- Cinereous Vulture—*Aegypius monachus*
- Black Vulture—*Aegypius monachus*
- Common Raven—*Corvus corax*
- White-throated Dipper—*Cinclus cinclus*

- Blood Pheasant—*Ithaginis cruentus*
- Blue Eared Pheasant—*Crossoptilon auritum*
- Koklas Pheasant—*Pucrasia macrolopha*
- Mallard—*Anas platyrhynchos*
- Chinese Pond Heron—*Ardeola bacchus*
- River Chat—*Chaimarornis leucocephala*
- Russet Sparrow—*Passer rutilans*
- Daurian Jackdaw—*Corvus dauuricus*
- Gray-capped Woodpecker—*Picoides canicapillus*
- Black Bulbul—*Hypsipetes madagascariensis*
- Vinous-throated Parrotbill—*Paradoxornis webbianus*
- Sulphur-breasted Warbler—*Phylloscopus ricketti*
- Black Kite—*Milvus migrans*
- Collared Owlet—*Glaucidium brodiei*
- Tawny Owl—*Strix aluco*
- Little Owl—*Athene noctua*
- Cattle Egret—*Bubulcus ibis*
- Eurasian Wigeon—*Anas penelope*
- Gadwall—*Anas strepera*
- Northern Pintail—*Anas acuta*
- Northern Shoveler—*Anas clypeata*
- Common Merganser—*Mergus merganser*
- Golden Eagle—*Aquila chrysaetos*
- Gray (Black-bellied) Plover—*Pluvialis squatarola*
- Whimbrel—*Numenius phaeopus*
- Rudy Turnstone—*Arenaria interpres*
- Common Snipe—*Gallinago gallinago*
- Red Knot—*Calidris canutus*
- Red-necked Phalarope—*Phalaropus lobatus*
- Caspian Tern—*Sterna caspia*
- Rock Dove—*Columba livia*
- Red Crossbill—*Loxia curvirostra*
- Crested Mynah—*Acridotheres cristatellus*
- White-cheeked Starling—*Sturnus cineraceus*
- Rock Sparrow—*Petronia petronia*
- Lesser Kestrel—*Falco naumanni*
- Short-toed Eagle—*Circaetus gallicus*
- Rufous-bellied Woodpecker—*Picoides hyperythrus*
- Amur Falcon—*Falco amurensis*
- Moustached Laughing Thrush—*Garrulax cineraceus*

Primary reference books:

- Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee. 1984. *The Birds of China*.
- Clive Viney, Karen Phillipps. 1989. *Birds of Hong Kong*.
- Ben King, Martin Woodcock, E. C. Dickinson. 1975. *Birds of South-East Asia*. (Might come in handy)

Contacts:

- Ben King, Kingbird Tours, Inc.
P.O. Box 196
Planetarium Station
New York, N.Y., 10024
- Richard Lewthwaite, Kingfisher Tours
2 Ville Paloma, Shuen Wan
Ting Kok Road
Tai Po, N.T., Hong Kong
- Barbara Begg is an avid birder and an active member of the Victoria Natural History Society. She would be happy to talk to anyone wishing more information on birding in China.

The V.N.H.S.— Nature Trust Fund

By Colleen O'Brien

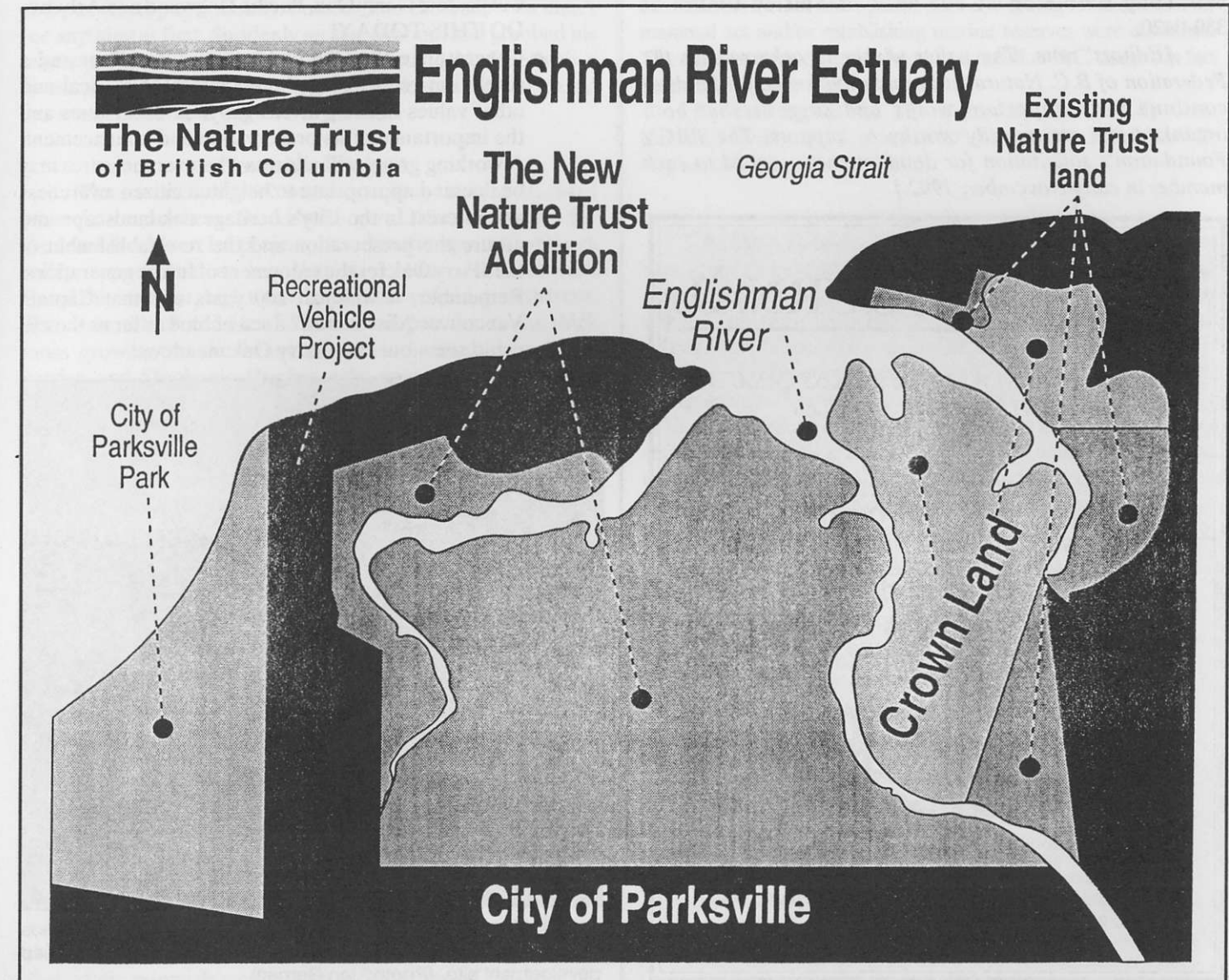
Last spring, when the provincial government refused to help save the Englishman River Flats in Parksville, many local naturalists were bitterly disappointed. A proposed RV park would result in the loss of critical habitat for migratory and over-wintering birds as well as for steelhead trout and salmon smolts. With the issue of conservation coming to the forefront just as the new provincial budget was brought in, many perceived the Flats as being a victim of exceptionally bad timing. Meanwhile, negotiations between the property owner and the agencies of the Pacific Estuary Conservation Program quietly continued with The Nature Trust of B.C. playing a lead role.

On October 22, 1992, we learned that a significant portion of the Parksville Flats had been secured by the

Nature Trust of B.C., with assistance from the provincial government. As is usual for The Nature Trust, it will retain title and will lease its estuary property for 99 years to a managing agency—in this case the Ministry of Environment, Lands, and Parks. The Ministry intends to establish a Wildlife Management Area to include the new 64-hectare acquisition, a 30-hectare parcel of Crown land in the middle of the Englishman River Estuary, and 11.75 hectares of land at the east side of the wetlands, previously secured by The Nature Trust (see map).

The key portion of the property was purchased for \$2.7 million. At a ceremony in Parksville on November 17th, John Cashore gave The Trust a cheque for \$1.6 million on behalf of the Province. To contribute the balance, The Trust had to pool all of its existing resources, pulling money away from numerous important conservation projects under consideration throughout B.C. The 21-year-old Trust has now begun its first major public fundraising campaign in an attempt to recover \$1.1 million by the end of April 1993.

—continued following page



In support of The Nature Trust's endeavours, most naturalist clubs from Vancouver Island have recently sent donations and are planning further fundraising activities. Two mid-Vancouver Island organizations, Our Future Foundation and SPHERE (the Society for the Preservation of the Englishman River Estuary) are fundraising door-to-door in the Parksville area. At the December Board of Directors' Meeting a motion was passed to donate \$ 1,000 of our society's funds on behalf of all Victoria Natural History Society members.

In addition, as the result of discussions initiated at the Parks and Conservation Committee meeting in November, 1992, VNHS Treasurer Gordon Devey has established a special fund to receive donations for The Nature Trust. If you would like to contribute to this fund please send a cheque to The Victoria Natural History Society, P.O. Box 5220, Station B, Victoria, B.C. V8R 6N4 or drop by the Field-Naturalist, 1241 Broad Street.

Cheques should be made payable to V.N.H.S.—The Nature Trust Fund. You will receive an official receipt for income tax purposes. If you wish further information, please call Tony Embleton at 595-6812 or Shirley Embra at 380-0420.

[Editors' note. The writer wishes to acknowledge the Federation of B.C. Naturalist Foundation's need for funds to continue their important works and suggests that both organizations are equally worthy of support. The FBCN Foundation's solicitation for donations was mailed to each member in early November, 1992.]

BIRDERS JOURNAL

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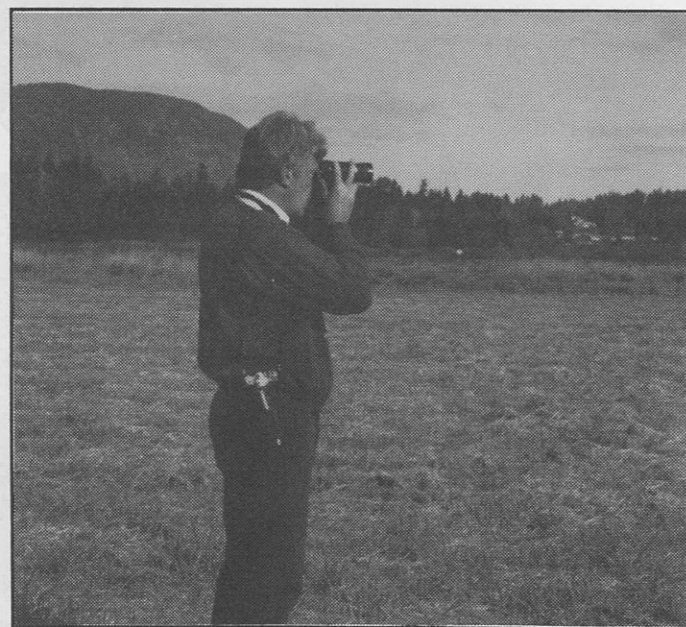
Subscription rate per annum: \$34 (in Canada),
\$38US (in the USA).

Write: Birders Journal, Circulation Department,
8 Midtown Circle, Suite 289, Oshawa,
Ontario, L1J 8L2.

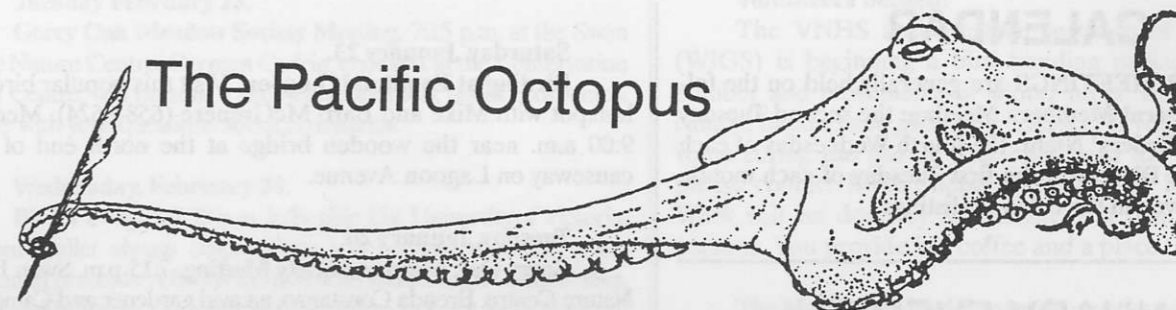
New Year Resolutions— Actions to Make a Difference

The Garry Oak Preservation Society suggests a number of ways in which individuals can make a difference towards the goal of preserving the Garry Oak meadows habitat. They include:

- Ask the Victoria Natural History Society to petition the provincial and federal governments to develop inventories on the Garry Oak ecosystem and its biodiversity.
- Learn all you can about the Garry Oak (*Quercus garryana*) and the plants and animals associated with this habitat.
- Talk about the importance of preserving our remnant Garry Oak meadows.
- Write Saanich Council to congratulate them on the draft "Tree Bylaw" and ask for their support. The bylaw will protect Garry Oak, Pacific Dogwood and Arbutus. DO THIS TODAY!
- Congratulate the City of Victoria. Council passed a resolution recognizing the ecological, historical and other values of the *Quercus garryana* ecosystems and the importance of its preservation and enhancement. A working group will address whatever measures may be deemed appropriate to heighten citizen awareness and interest in the City's heritage oak landscape and ensure the preservation and the re-establishment of the Garry Oak for the enjoyment of future generations. Remember, it was just 200 years ago that Captain Vancouver "discovered" a sea of blue as far as the eye could see—our lost Garry Oak meadows!



Derrick Marven looks across a protected part of the Somenos Marsh (north of Duncan) towards an adjacent proposed development site. (Photo: Jan Garnett)



The Pacific Octopus

Introducing the Pacific Octopus... inquisitive ecologist and writer. The octopus has agreed to fill a page of the Victoria Naturalist with news, views and interviews—flotsam and jetsam from the naturalists' world. The octopus will probe the crevasses, poke its nose into naturalists' business and provide deep, inky insights into ecological matters.

Be careful when you poke your nose into an octopus' crevasse though! Octopus researcher Jim Cosgrove, Chief of Biological Collections at the Royal British Columbia Museum, learned the hard way. He tells the story of how, whilst out scuba diving off the B.C. coast, he chanced upon the den of a giant octopus (*Octopus dofleini*). Peering into the hollow he didn't see anything at first. Suddenly an arm shot out and grabbed his mask, pulling it off his face. After flooding his face with a measure of cold Pacific water, the mischievous beast released the mask to rebound back on to his face!

Carmanah Climbers

The summer of 1992 was an exciting one for Marbled Murrelet researchers. Dr Alan Burger, UVic coordinator for the Marbled Murrelet project, based in the upper Carmanah valley, reports that no less than three Murrelet nests were found this summer, high up in the branches of old-growth trees. The nests, which consist of a shallow depression in the thick moss growing on the branches, were discovered by Kevin Jordan and Stephanie Hughes, who spent this last summer living in the Western Canada Wilderness Committee Research Camp, situated in the upper Carmanah valley.

Two of the nests were found in the Walbran valley and the third in Carmanah itself. The Walbran nests were located in Sitka Spruce trees whilst the Carmanah find was 40m up a 70m-high Western Hemlock. Kevin and Stephanie use rock-climbing techniques and gear to scale these magnificent trees. They don't, however, use pegs of any sort and the observation platform they constructed didn't involve driving any nails or spikes into the tree. What makes these recent finds so remarkable is that before them only two nests had been found in the whole of Canada. They are the only alcid seabirds that nest in trees (and specifically old-growth trees) and these finds support the growing need to preserve old-growth forests in their pristine state.

Vancouver Declaration

The Canadian Marine Life conference was held from October 29 - 31 at the Pan Pacific Hotel, Vancouver. The conference, attended by almost 100 people, had as its theme "Wildlife Protection—Blueprint For Change." Rearing its head at the conference, to the point of excluding all other issues, was the "cetaceans in captivity" debate. The octopus was tickled pink when it heard at the conference that marine mammals are regarded as fish by law in Canada!

At the end of the conference the steering committee pledged to:

1. Work to attain more effective protection for all forms of marine life, marine ecosystems and their natural habitats.
2. Accept the attainment of this protection as our ultimate responsibility to all life forms.
3. Endeavour to eliminate all unnecessary destruction, abuse and exploitation of marine life.
4. Strive to reduce all willful cruelty and unnecessary suffering inflicted upon sentient wildlife. If these sound like ideals you stand for, why don't you get involved? The steering committee plans to take matters further and options such as working towards a marine mammal act and/or establishing marine reserves were discussed. The octopus turned black when it learned that B.C. doesn't in fact have any bona fide marine reserves.

Put feelers out to: The Canadian Marine Life Conference, P.O.Box 34129, Station "D", Vancouver, B.C. V6J 4N3; or phone/fax them at 736-9615.

Seen Any Stellers Seacows Lately

Not likely. Fossil remains of this extinct marine mammal have been found as far south as California but the last credible sighting of this docile algae-grazer was in 1768 from the Bering sea. Discovered only thirty years before this, its docile nature, good flesh and its limited distribution caused its demise. Alleged sightings of this dugong-relative were reported in Russian newspapers in 1962 and again in 1977, both from the vicinity of Cape Navarin, northeast of the Kamchatka Peninsula. These reports have not been taken seriously by scientists and it seems highly unlikely that a slow-moving, 20-foot, air-breathing animal would escape attention for so long. Or has it? Only the octopuses know.

WHALE HOTLINE

Report marine mammal sightings
and strandings to:

380-1925 in the Victoria area
On the water: VHF channel 68 to the vessel *Sundiver*

1-800-665-5939 toll-free anywhere in B.C.

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

CALENDAR



REGULAR MEETINGS are generally held on the following days. **General Members Meeting:** the second Tuesday of each month. **Birders' Night:** the fourth Wednesday of each month. **Board of Directors:** the first Tuesday of each month. Locations are given in the calendar listings.

JANUARY EVENTS



Saturday, January 2.
Duncan Christmas Bird Count. The Duncan naturalists would appreciate the help of Victoria birders in covering their area. If you wish to participate contact Derrick Marven (748-8504).

Friday to Sunday, January 1-3.

Bamfield Christmas Bird Count. The count takes place January 2. Participants will cover the area by ground and water. Accommodation at Bamfield Marine Station will be arranged for approx. \$10 a night. Contact Alan Burger (479-9833) to register.

Sunday, January 3.

Seawatch at Clover Point. This joint VNHS and Western Institute of Global Studies (WIGS) project continues to survey seabird movement at Clover Point. Volunteers are needed to work one hour shifts for the dawn to dusk monitoring. Please Contact Mary-Anne Montgomery (380-7152) if you would like to participate.

Tuesday, January 5.

Board of Directors' Meeting. 7:30 p.m. in the Clifford Carl Reading Room, Cunningham Building, UVIC.

Saturday, January 9.

Christmas Hill Work Party. The Gary Oak Meadow Preservation Society is having a Broom pulling work party on Christmas Hill. Meet at 10:00 a.m. in the Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary parking lot - rain or shine. Bring work gloves and a lunch. For further information call Jean Anne Wightman at 380-2286.

Tuesday, January 12.

VNHS General Meeting. The meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. in Begbie 159, University of Victoria. Syd Cannings will give a visual presentation titled **River Rafting on the Tatssheniini.** Syd is Program Zoologist with the Ministry of the Environment's Conservation Data Centre. Bring a friend and your coffee mug along for an armchair journey to this amazing wilderness river.

Sunday, January 17.

Victoria Waterfront Bird Tour. Come work your way along the Dallas Road seawall, visiting viewpoints from Ogden Point east to Clover Point in search of waterfowl and seabirds. Meet leader Lyndis Davis (477-9952) at Ogden Point breakwater at 9:30 a.m.

Tuesday, January 19.

Botany Night. 7:30 p.m. at the Swan Lake Nature Centre. The evening will consist of two twenty minute presentations. Adolf Ceska will discuss an excursion to the Okanagan and Bev Glover will look at the region around Dease Lake, B.C.

Saturday, January 23.

Birding at Esquimalt Lagoon. Visit this popular birding hotspot with Mike and Barb McGrenere (658-8624). Meet at 9:00 a.m. near the wooden bridge at the north end of the causeway on Lagoon Avenue.

Tuesday, January 26.

Garry Oak Meadow Society Meeting. 7:15 p.m. Swan Lake Nature Centre. Brenda Constanzo, an avid gardener and Camosun College lecturer on native plant gardening, will speak on gardening with plants associated with the Garry oak. Join us to find out how you can turn a corner of your home garden into a Garry oak meadow.

Wednesday, January 27.

Birder's Night. 7:30 p.m. Begbie 159, University of Victoria. Bruce Bennett presents **Talking Owl.** Bruce is a VNHS member and worked for a number of years as a Park Naturalist at Manning Park before joining Royal British Columbia Museum staff. Learn about the ecology, folklore and calls of British Columbia owls. Everyone welcome. Bring a friend, coffee mug and your binoculars for a close up look at the screen. Loosen those vocal cords, learn to hoot.

FEBRUARY EVENTS



Tuesday, February 2.
Board of Directors' Meeting. 7:30 p.m. in the Clifford Carl Reading Room, Cunningham Building, University of Victoria.

Sunday, February 7.

Birding at Island View Beach & Martindale Flats. Meet at Farmer's Market barn near corner of Island View Road and Highway 17 at 9:30 a.m. Explore one of B.C.'s premier birdwatching areas. Leader TBA. Contact David Allinson at 478-0457.

Sunday, February 7.

Seawatch at Clover Point. See January 3 for details.

Tuesday, February 9.

Annual Banquet. This year it will be held at the Ballroom of the Princess Mary Restaurant. Happy Hour begins at 6:00 p.m. with a buffet dinner served at 6:30 p.m. There will be ample choice for vegetarian and non-vegetarian alike. Get your tickets early. Cost is \$20 per person (GST included). Tickets are available from Freda Woodworth (382-6693) or Beth Chatwin (592-5346) We are pleased to have Robert J. Ballantyne, Vice-President of the Canadian Nature Federation (CNF) and former board member of the Manitoba Naturalists, as our banquet speaker. Robert will present **Naturalists: Our Contribution to the World.** Robert feels that naturalists have a vision that is often valuable and balanced. Also, naturalists tend to be very knowledgeable people. Robert will discuss how naturalists currently contribute to society and how we can further work toward achieving a balance between nature and development.

Tuesday, February 16.

Botany Night. 7:30 p.m. at the Swan Lake Nature Centre. Botany group members are encouraged to bring 5 to 10 slides (maximum) of a favourite plant group or habitat to share with others.

Tuesday February 23.

Garry Oak Meadow Society Meeting. 7:15 p.m. at the Swan Lake Nature Centre. Carmen Cadrin, ecologist at the Conservation Data Centre, will present a slide-illustrated talk about ecosystems. Come with your questions about ecosystems.

Wednesday, February 24.

Birder's Night. 7:30 p.m. in Begbie 159, University of Victoria. Is your wallet always empty since you became a birder? Glen Vinegaart presents: **A Birder's expose: a behind the scene look at birders, listers and twitchers.** Glen studied the birders in Point Pelee National Park as part of a Master's Degree and is currently working on a PhD in Geography at the University of Victoria on the topic of eco-tourism and its importance to conservation. He will take a light-hearted look at birders, the pastime of birding and the economics of bird watching.

EARLY MARCH EVENTS



Sunday, March 3.
Seawatch at Clover Point. See January 3 for details.

Wednesday, March 24.

Birders Night. Stamatis Zogaris of Vancouver will present a slide-illustrated talk on *Important Natural Areas in Greece.* Stamatis is an active member of the Hellenic Ornithological Society and has over a decade's experience in research and nature conservation in Greece.

ADVANCE NOTICE



The 22nd Canadian Nature Federation's Annual Conference. On July 22 to 25, 1993 the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club is hosting **From Desert Sands to Alpine Slopes** at the Silver Star Mountain Resort as part of celebrating their 42nd anniversary. Explore the famous Okanagan Valley, from the desert in the south to the alpine slopes in the north. Registration kits will be available January 15, 1993. For more information, write to the Secretary, North Okanagan Naturalists Club, P.O. Box 473, Vernon, B.C., V1T 6M4.

BULLETIN BOARD



For Sale
Ocean to Alpine - A British Columbia Nature Guide. This new book by Joy and Cam Finley is available from Lyndis Davis (477-9952). Also for sale: National Geographic's *Field Guide to Birds*, the *Naturalist Guide to the Victoria Region*, the Victoria Area Bird Checklist and the new Victoria Natural History Society's Window Decals.

Back Issues of the Victoria Naturalist

Copies of back issues and indices of the Victoria Naturalist are available from Tom Gillespie (361-1694).

Volunteers needed!

The VNHS and Western Institute of Global Studies (WIGS) is beginning a bird banding project to survey the number and movements of winter birds. Birds will be safely caught, banded and promptly released. If you are interested in volunteering the use of your back yard for a banding crew, please contact Mike Shepard at 388-4227 for more details. Work will be done by a licensed bird bander and support persons. You provide hot coffee and a place to warm up.

The Martindale Bird Survey also continues. Please volunteer for Saturday Mornings 8:00 to 11:00 a.m. Contact Eric Walters or Darren Copley. For information, see past Bulletin Boards.

Slide Photographers.

The 1993 program of the Greater Victoria Colour Film Study Group begin again on January 12. Meetings incorporate slide viewing, speakers, educational programs, field trips and member participation. Club meetings are held on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m., Room 105, at the Central Junior Secondary School, 1280 Fort Street. For further information please contact Wayne Maloff at 385-1640.

Garry Oak Meadow Society Membership

The Garry Oak Meadow Society aims to promote, conserve and restore our native oak meadow lands. You can help us to preserve our rarest Canadian habitat by joining the Society or through donations to any branch of Pacific Coast Savings Credit Union. For further information contact Joyce Lee at 386-3785.

Natural Treasures of Greece.

Greece is a very diverse mediterranean country, located at a biological crossroads between Europe, Asia and Africa. Despite its renowned cultural history, little is ever heard of the natural history of this country. Yet Greece sustains some of Europe's most significant natural treasures including Mount Olympus, the Hills of Evros, the Lakes of Thrace and the Northern Sporades Islands.

Stamatis Zogaris and his wife will guide a 17-day tour (May 3-19, 1993) to the above-mentioned treasures and other important habitats in Northern Greece. For further information on this exciting trip write Stamatis at 2732 Wall Street, Vancouver, B.C., V5K 1A8 or call 255-4121. Also watch Stamatis' presentation on natural areas in Greece on Birder's Night in March.

Lost

A copy of the Audubon Field Guide, Western Region (the one with the red cover) was lost on Martindale Road the last week of December. Anyone finding this book can return it to its anxious owner by phoning new VNHS member Jane Defaye at 598-5663.

Garry Oak Meadow Search

Our white lilies and other spring windflowers of Garry oak meadows will be showing by late February and in early March. Do you have a special spot to enjoy, photograph or sketch? The Garry Oak Meadow Society has begun an inventory of special flowering locations. Let us know your favourite — it doesn't need to be publicly owned. Contact Joyce Lee at 386-3785.

 **The Victoria
NATURALIST**

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Looking at Jansu Province, China, from Sichuan Province.
The road in the foreground is in Sichuan; the hills in the background are in Jansu.
(Photo: Barbara Begg – See Begg's article on birding in China on Page 12 of this issue.)