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The Victoria NATURALIST

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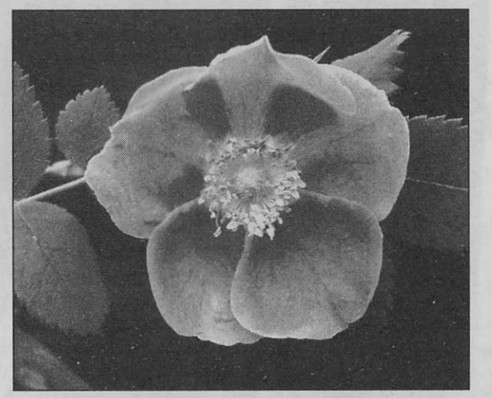
OUR COVER

Brown Creepers do nest in Southern Vancouver Island as shown by the excellent photographs by Bill Merilees in this issue. The front cover picture is a juvenile Brown Creeper just out of the nest.



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Brown Creeper

1998 Early Nesting, Longish Incubation

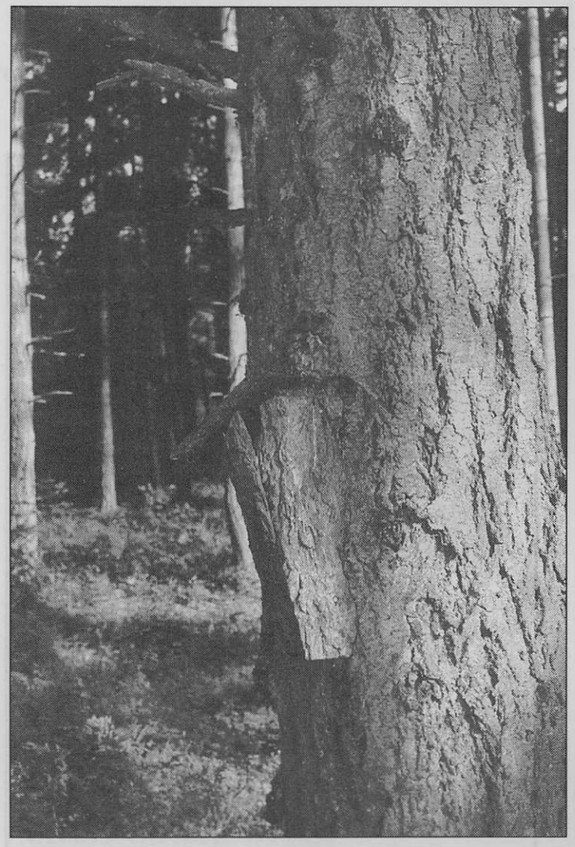
By Bill Merilees

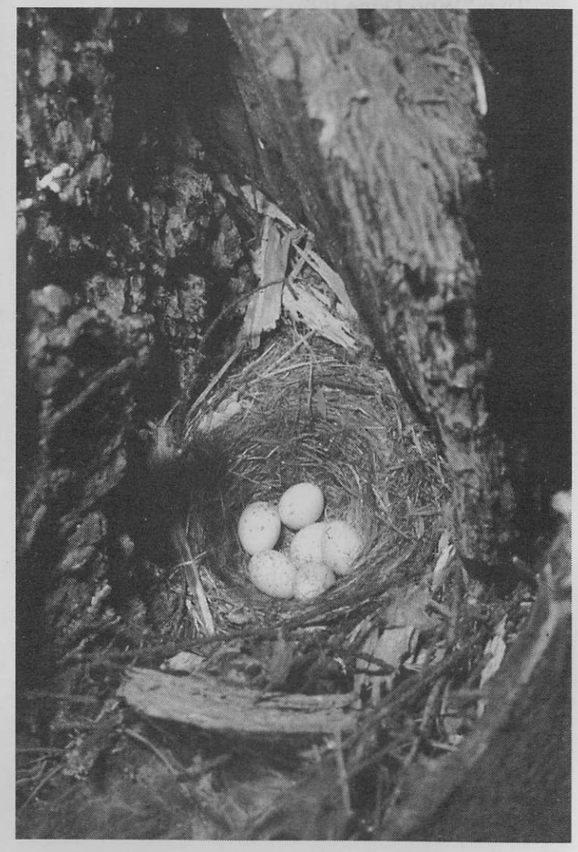
In seven of the past twelve years Brown Creepers have used a nest box provided on the neighbouring property. Plans for this box can be found in *Discovery* 1987 (Vol. 16 No.1) and a photo is in *The Birds of British Columbia* (Vol. 3, page 296).

This nest box has brought the author considerable enjoyment though he has not been as rigorous in following its use as he might have been. At the end of each summer the box is cleaned out and made ready for the next season.

This spring (1998) following the rather mild "el Niño" winter the start of Brown Creeper nesting was almost missed due to their early start. On April 8th, 4 eggs were already in place with the 5th and 6th arriving on the following two days. The commencement of this clutch would be April 5th. *The Birds of British Columbia* gives April 10th as the earliest known commencement date, making this observation probably the earliest for B.C.

This observation also provided an opportunity to 'measure' this pair's incubation period. It was not until May 27th that the first hatching was observed. At 1330 hours 2+ young (along with 2 eggs) were first observed. From completion of clutch to first hatching, this incubation period would be seventeen days. *Birds of B.C.* gives four of five clutches hatching on the 15th day and one on the 17th. Figure 1 gives the estimated or actual commencement dates for six of the previous seven at this site.





Brown Creeper nest box and nest. *Photos: Bill Merilees*

Figure 1
Brown Creeper egg laying commencement dates
Nanaimo nest box

1986	April 26th*	1993	May 4th~
1987	April 14th*	1996	May 4th*
1992	April 27th~	1998	April 5th*

* = Actual date ~ = Estimated dates

Brown Creepers show a preference for old growth forests where deeply creviced bark and natural cavities, particularly those of Douglas-fir snags provide prime nesting locations. Clear cutting practices that provide manicured young growth (manicured to remove or knock down dead growth) plantation forests seldom are able to provide these sites in 'good' numbers. Here Brown Creepers possibly have difficulty finding suitable nesting cavities, though more than adequate foraging habitat exists. In these locations a nest box program might be one way of increasing and enhancing (restoring?) Brown Creeper populations.

The nest box mentioned in this article is not 'perfect'. Bound by a traditional 'mind set', a hole was provided in the front centre of the box. Repeated observation clearly shows that Brown Creepers, never use this entrance preferring to slip in through a 2.5 cm gap or crack on either side, at the top. Here the box material (three slabs of Douglas-fir bark) pull away from the tree trunk. In an urban setting, where suitable habitat exists but the forest does not appear to offer suitable Brown Creeper nesting sites, this type of nest box has proven to be reasonably effective. Give it a try! Perhaps a trial is also required in our managed forest tenure lands?

References:

Campbell. R.W. et al 1997: *The Birds of British Columbia* Vol. 3. Passerines Flycatchers through Vireos. UBC Press Vancouver.

Merilees, Bill, 1987. A Nest Box for Brown Creepers. *Discovery* (Vancouver Natural History Society) Vol. 16 No. 1, pages 16-17.

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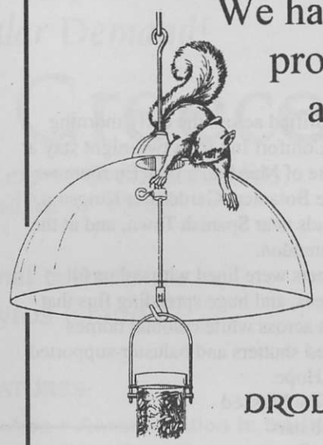

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Jamaica — Part 2

By K. Taylor

Cauliflower-clouds drifted across the early morning sky as we left the Comfort Inn for a two-night stay at the wonderful estate of Marshall's Pen. En route we stopped briefly at the Hope Botanical Gardens in Kingston, at the Caymanas Dyke Ponds near Spanish Town, and at the Portland Ridge area of Clarendon.

Kingston's narrow streets were lined with colourful tropical flowers, banana trees, and huge spreading figs that sired sun-dappled shadows across white colonial homes adorned with vivid-coloured shutters and baluster-supported porticos. The ponds at the Hope Botanical Gardens held a few Masked Ducks and the nearby scrub harboured a few introduced Saffron Finches. The Ferry River has been dammed east of Spanish Town which has created the large Caymanas Dyke Ponds. Among the reedy edges and rushes of these wetlands we observed Glossy Ibis, Common Moorhen, Purple Gallinule, Yellow-crowned and Black-crowned Night-Herons, Least Bittern, Northern Jacana, and the introduced Yellow-crowned Bishop perched upon drowned trees. "Caribbean" Coots have been downgraded from having full-species status to being merely a localized varient of the American Coot; both are resident at Caymanas where they interbreed. Our next stop was the hot, very arid limestone forest of the Portland Ridge. Patches of tall cactus, thorn scrub, and thatch palms are typical of this habitat. Stolid Flycatchers and Bahama Mockingbirds were common and we were fortunate to find the rare Plain Pigeon in the dry palm scrub.

Late in the day we drove through the stone-pillar gates of Marshall's Pen, a working cattle ranch and nature reserve owned by Robert Sutton, author of *Birds of Jamaica: A Photographic Field Guide.* Soon after our arrival, Robert pointed out the reliable roosting site of a Northern Potoo, a species that has recently been split from Common Potoo and distinguished from that species *via* its habit of holding the beak horizontally instead of vertically. Later that evening we searched the surrounding paddocks looking for a resident pair of Jamaican Owls with the use of Robert's recording on *Voices of the New World Owls.* Warned previously about the nasty, tiny ticks which inhabit the grassy pastures, I tucked my trousers into my socks and sprayed the area liberally with insect repellent before entering. The tape was answered by a rather hoarse, throaty un-owl-like *whow* from high in an isolated Red Birch, a massive tree that seemed to support the sky like an ornamental pillar. The beam of our flashlights searched amongst the thick bromeliads on the huge limbs and eventually fell upon the shine of two large hazel orbs. Gratified with the sighting of these small tawny owls, I picked up the tape recorder that I had placed on the ground not knowing it was now crawling with ticks!

The Sutton estate is a delightful old Jamaican country home complete with elaborate trim and aesthetic plank floors. From our rooms, filled with quaint antiques, we gazed out across the flowered landscape to the distant hills, or sat comfortably on the balcony looking down into the surrounding tree tops where native and migrant birds were easily observed. As we sipped cool drinks, a Jamaican Vireo sat motionless on its perch, occasionally exploding into action to pick insects off leaves. Nearby, a Sad Flycatcher acrobatically fly-catched from an exposed perch, periodically darting out after its prey.

As we sipped cool drinks, a Jamaican Vireo sat motionless on its perch, occasionally exploding into action to pick insects off leaves.

While at Marshall's Pen we concentrated our birding efforts along one dirt road that has been cleared of tick-infested grasses. This was not a difficult task as twenty-four endemics are possible along this lengthy road. Characteristic of the mid-level limestone forests at Marshall's Pen are spindly, low canopy trees, thick growths of vines and straggler figs, and other dense foliage that obscures bright sunlight. A profusion of orchids and bromeliads cling to these trees in an endless struggle for nutrients. There were butterflies painted with every hue of the rainbow, some with wings ablaze with an intense iridescence. In the extensive tracts of forest and in the gardens filled with flowering shrubs we observed White-winged and Caribbean Doves, Common Ground-Doves, Jamaican Parakeets (split from Olive-throated), Cave Swallows, Jamaican Todies, Jamaican Elaenias, Jamaican Pewee (recently split from Greater Antillean Pewee), Jamaican Becards, White-eyed and White-chinned Thrushes, Arrow-headed, Black-throated Blue and Black-and-white Warblers, Ovenbirds, Northern Parula, Yellow-shouldered and Yellow-faced Grassquits, Greater Antillean Bullfinch, and Orangequits. Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo and Jamaican Lizard-Cuckoo were also common. These huge endemic cuckoos were truly impressive as they hopped slowly through the trees.

It was late in the day when I become aware of several

Continued on page 8

Back by Popular Demand!

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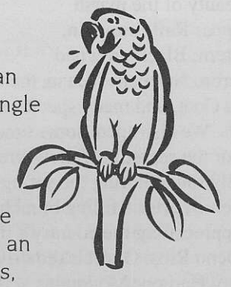

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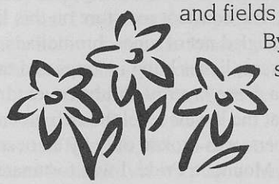

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OMEGA TRAVEL

itchy welts with miniscule black centres covering my body. Ticks! My wife spent the next hour gouging the non-infectious pests out with her thumb nail and applying anti-itch ointment.

During our stay at Marshall's Pen, we took short drives into Mandeville for midday and evening meals. We were particularly fond of an excellent Chinese restaurant and a fabulous local cafe serving jerk dishes. As the best birding was early in the mornings, we purchased a few groceries for snacks and to prepare breakfasts in our kitchenette.

After saying our goodbyes to the Suttons we drove off to the Upper Black River Morass, the largest, most interesting and varied of Jamaica's wetlands. In particular we had come to search for the very local West Indian Whistling-Duck. Although most active at dusk we found two of these rather inconspicuous "tree-ducks" hidden amongst the reeds at the end of a dike road that follows the Black River. Others enhancing the beauty of the marsh were Clapper Rail, Limpkin, Least Bittern, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Northern Jacana, the Caribbean race of American Coot, and many species of migratory ducks and shorebirds. We also spent some time at Great Pedro Pond looking for the secretive Yellow-breasted Crake which is more easily found during the spring nesting season.

Contented after a filling brunch in Mandeville we spent the day appreciating the country's many charms on our way back to Ocho Rios. Our relaxed drive took us high over the rugged Dry Harbour Mountains at the edge of Cockpit Country. The route was very scenic with rugged bluffs, beautiful forests, and quaint villages.

The following morning after an early breakfast at our hotel we headed west along the coastal highway towards Falmouth. Here we stood on a limestone bridge in the humid morning air awaiting a response to the playback of our tape recorder. Surrounding us were clumps of mature Red and Black Mangroves that impersonated solid islands; as sunlight penetrated their canopy it illuminated the splendid plumage of several White-crowned Pigeons. Soon, the slow, gutteral *gaw gaw gaw* call of the Mangrove Cuckoo was followed by the sight of a cinnamon-buff breast glowing from among the dense stands. Twisting its head to grotesque angles while holding its body immobile, it then dropped abruptly to pursue some unseen prey in hops through the stilt-like aerial roots. Early morning was most productive in luring this secretive bird from cover and to experience the bites of the miniscule *no-see-ems*. Nearby, Prairie Warblers flit amongst the hammocks of Jamaica Dogwood, Loblolly, Feathery Lysiloma and Mahogany. The Falmouth mangroves and pungent salt ponds also produced Great, Reddish and Snowy Egrets, Great Blue, Tricolored and Little Blue Herons, many migrant shorebirds, Black-necked Stilt, and the "Golden race" of Yellow Warbler. Rare, two gorgeous Greater Flamingos stood in dazzling sunlight along the edge of one pan. It is difficult to imagine the evolutionary process that led to such an exquisite creation!

Later that morning we boarded a raft for a peaceful two-hour trip down the Martha Brae River. Lazily, the poleman and crew drifted under cerulean skies, pulled by the torpid flow of the river. A bewildering variety of flora and fauna appeared at every twist and turn. Exploring each bend, we stopped to admire flocks of resplendent egrets drifting from the heavens like gossamer snowflakes and chattering groups of Smooth-billed Anis. The modest bamboo vessel certainly offered a compelling experience.

I was fortunate to notice the movement of a pair of Crested Quail-Doves as they crept in the shade of the forest understory and had an eye-to-eye encounter with several stunning Stripe-headed Tanagers.

At noon the temperature had become oppressive so we took time off to swim in the cool waters of our pool. After a light lunch we relaxed in the shade surrounding our rooms. Sipping cold lemonades we absorbed the awe-inspiring views.

It was pre-dawn when I kissed my wife goodbye. I was off to visit the wet limestone forests of the Cockpit Country where three endemics, Black-billed and Yellow-billed Parrots and Jamaican Crow are found exclusively. The car's radio was tuned to Bob Marley as I negotiated the narrow paved road that leads to Windsor Cave. I parked the rental beside a small shop where it would be safe, watched by Mr. Taylor the rastafarian owner. We made jokes about being related before I started out on the series of tracks and trails that gives easy access to search for the Cockpit endemics. Entering the humid tropical forest, I gazed up into the crowns of huge trees reaching 80-115 feet in height. The constant moisture on this limestone plateau creates a tangled net of vines, bromeliads, and orchids upon the trees; lianas hung in loops and tangles from the canopy while a dense layer of shrubs covered the dark forest floor. Here at the lowest level the rich green tapestry, choked with creepers, was broken only by an occasional patch of gorgeous Mountain Pride. I was fortunate to notice the movement of a pair of Crested Quail-Doves as they crept in the shade of the forest understory and had an eye-to-eye encounter with several stunning Stripe-headed Tanagers. An antithesis of the dark interior, this fiery *Spindalis* eclipsed even the brightest of its Neotropical cousins. Three short hours later I returned to the hotel after having seen the endemics and the introduced Green-rumped Parrotlet, Ring-tailed and White-crowned Pigeons, Rufous-tailed Flycatcher, and Jamaican and Blue Mountain Vireos. The Jamaican Crow, although a typical crow in appearance, made up for it's plain plumage by performing a hilarious collection of jabbering and gobbling vocalizations.

After a delicious breakfast we drove back through Montego Bay to visit Rockland's Feeding Station where Vervain Hummingbird, Jamaican Mango, Orangequit, Black-faced Grassquit, and the introduced Saffron Finch come to be nourished at the seed and hummingbird feeders. Here, the Red-billed Streamertail, a hummer with a ten-inch tail, actually perched on our fingers as it fed from a small glass bottle! In the ruinate woodland around Rockland's we observed Caribbean Dove, Ruddy Quail-Dove, and Stolid Flycatchers. The quail-doves were devilishly difficult to see, only the rustling of leave litter giving their positions away.

As shadows lengthened late in the evening we drove into the neighbouring hills to listen for Chuck-will's-widow. Scanning the multi-hued skies we saw the nightjars silhouetted against the darkening skies. The aerialist-feeders skimmed the forest canopy hawking for the insect banquet.

The air was calm as we celebrated our vacation that evening at Montego Bay's best restaurant, an elegant heritage house of white clapboard construction. Surrounded with splendour, we dined contented on a *bon viveur* menu of succulent roast pheasant and baby sweet potatoes and finished with a fabulous slice of homemade mango pie. During the serene sunset hour we toasted our live's with glasses of blackberry wine. Tomorrow would be our last day in paradise.

At Hardware Gap, high in the Blue Mountains above Kingston, the noise of traffic had vanished, replaced by the exotic sounds of tropical birds and insects. The dawn chorus was unbelievable! My plans to spend the whole day on this range had deteriorated. My wife was feeling ill and only part of the day was mine to spend alone in search of my last Jamaican endemic — the endangered Jamaican Blackbird. Although rare and found almost exclusively at this location, I had a good chance of locating this most difficult of Jamaica's endemics foraging silently for insects high among the lush growth of bromeliads. The rain of debris falling from above would attract my attention to its whereabouts.

The virgin montane forest was lush, dark, dense and cool with many large trees heavily overgrown with orchids, creepers and fungi. Long strands of grey lichen trailed from huge branches. Sitting under the foliage with its head inclined upwards searching the underside of leaves for insects, the tiny, comical Jamaican Tody added wonderful splashes of colour. The songs and calls of Ring-tailed Pigeons, Jamaican Becards, White-chinned and White-eyed Thrushes, Blue Mountain Vireos, Arrow-headed Warblers, and Orangequits filled the old-growth forest.

Above 5,000 feet, the stunted, gnarled and twisted elfin forest remained shrouded in mist throughout the day. This mist created a profusion of moss-clad and exquisite epiphyte-encrusted trees. Shy quail-doves crept on the cloud forest floor amongst the dense shrub layer and elegant tree ferns, whilst White-collared Swifts flew at tremendous speeds high above the forest canopy. Here, the nature trails at Holywell Forest Reserve gave access to many of Jamaica's endemics, and the haunting flute-like song of the local Rufous-throated Solitaire was heard echoing across the valley. The trail has a rather eerie atmosphere and you could be forgiven for believing that you had entered some enchanted forest of folklore.

At noon I left the Blue Mountain's dense forest with its cool inviting pools and waterfalls contented in having ticked all but one of Jamaica's endemics. Impeded with the limited time and very disappointed, the oriole-like Jamaican Blackbird was not found. The next day we expressed our sad goodbyes to the hotel staff before reluctantly leaving one of the most beautiful islands that eyes have ever seen!

Faced with the excessive task of observing several hundred species, one never feels relaxed, eager to achieve the longest possible list. This fretfulness however is mixed with highly-charged emotional gratification and certainly produces more "bang for the buck" (I have ticked as many as 600 species in a three-week trip which was certainly fun-filled as well as hard work). Although vowing never to visit a country that would produce so few species, the relaxed pace in Jamaica shaped the vacation into one of the most enjoyable that we have experienced. Here the anxieties so often felt with the need to succeed in observing as many species as possible were quelled. Easily located during a one-week stay, two weeks allowed plenty of time to assault all of our Jamaican lifers and left occasions to pursue other interests. We came home with a commendable list of 42 life birds.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

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References:

Jamaica: Jewel of the Caribbean; Winging It. Volume 4, Number 9, September, 1992

Lonely Planet's Jamaica

Ghosts of Christmas [Bird Counts] Past

By David Stirling

Before 1959, Victoria's Christmas Bird Counts were rather casual affairs. All that changed when three young guys, Alan Poynter, Barry Morgan and David Stirling decided to up-scale the Victoria count to full National Aububon coverage. Alan Poynter got caught up in his work and shortly moved to Vancouver, Barry Morgan disappeared permanently to Australia leaving me with most of the task of getting the count on the road. As I was working for British Columbia Parks at that time I had the assistance of a good draftsman, Ray Huckin, to help get the maps and charts done. The expanded Bird Count generated much local interest and once the CBC came over from Vancouver with their multi-dollar equipment to do a feature TV story.

Contrary to popular wisdom we had plenty of "unusual" weather before El Niño became a household word. Sometimes we stretched out in the sun while having lunch at Esquimalt Lagoon; once the Count had to be postponed when daybreak showed two feet of snow in the driveway and a blizzard raging. I scrambled to get the word out to all party leaders but somehow someone was missed. At five p.m. the phone rang. It was Cy Morehen. He had chained up his Chrysler, loaded wife with snow shovel and struck out to battle the elements and count birds. After describing his considerable adventures in drifts and ditches he proceeded to sound-off his list.

"Cy...err I — harumph — we didn't go today."

He was not amused.

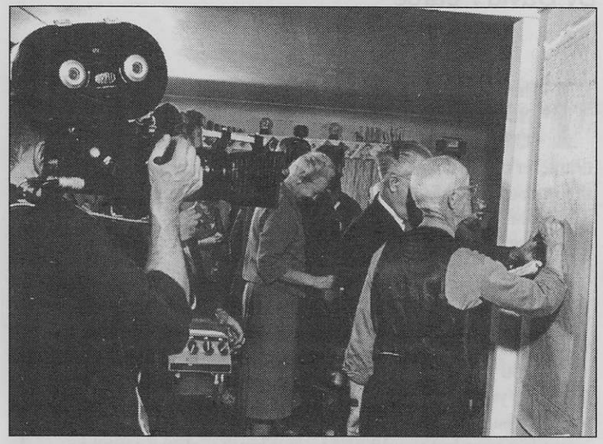
Total species seen is higher now, due to the fact that many more participants cover the same area. Some species such as the Trumpeter Swan have increased dramatically while others have declined. Here is an excerpt from a 1964 CJVI news item by old time news commentator, Dick Batey. "In contrast to Edmonton's twenty one species Victoria's count showed 125 species....two fewer than last year. Total birds...some 50,000 — about a quarter of the total were Robins and Varied Thrushes. Greater Victoria's unique Skylark residents are apparently holding their own — about 900 were counted....and fifty nine Bluebirds as well as several so-called summer species....an Orange-crowned Warbler, a few Goldfinches, Red-winged Blackbirds and a high-seas species — a Fulmar."

Count down was held at the home of one of the participant's. This was a gala occasion. Every one arrived properly dressed — ladies in evening dresses, men in jackets and ties. Contrast this with today when most of us are indistinguishable from deserters from the Cuban Army. Some vices were considered normal. There was an alcoholic punch bowl to warm us while the day's totals were marked on the large wall chart [some participants needing a stronger tonic, brought their own bottle.] Smoking was not taboo and occasionally someone was observed ruminating with a smoldering White Owl.

I organized and compiled the count for the next ten years [before computers] — until one Christmas it was time to take daughter, Patricia, to Disney Land and I wanted to see the California Condors. Both tasks successful.

Perhaps, these pictures taken by the late Bill Reith will bring a twinge of nostalgia to some of the participants of Christmas Bird Counts past.

See you at the '98 count-down.



Another record? Sightings are marked on the wall chart.

El Niño where are you? *Photos: Bill Reith*

A party atmosphere prevailed at the post count gathering.

Christmas Bird Count — December 19, 1998

By David Pearce

The Victoria Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 19, 1998. The purpose of the C.B.C. is to count birds observed within a 15-mile diameter circle covering the Greater Victoria area centred on the intersection of Grange Road and Jasmine Avenue in Marigold. The circle is divided into 22 land areas and two ocean areas, each having an area leader.

Victoria Natural History Society members are encouraged to participate in the Christmas count in one of two ways, either as an active "counter" in the field or as a feeder watcher.

If you participated as a "counter" in the Christmas count last year, you will be contacted and asked if you would like to participate this year. If you did not take part in the Victoria count last year but would like to participate, please contact **David Pearce, Count Co-ordinator, at 658-0295 by November 30, or sign up at the November Birder's Night.**

If you have a feeder in your yard and wish to participate as a feeder watcher, simply watch your feeder on December 19 and record all bird species and number of individuals of those species. **Cam Finlay (479-9833) is organising the feeder watchers so please contact him to register or if you have any questions.** After the count mail or bring your list into the Field-Naturalist, 1126 Blanshard Street, Victoria. Please put your name, address and telephone number on the list. Your report must be received by Tuesday, December 22 in order to be included in the count records.

If you see a rare bird at your feeder on December 19 (see the Victoria Area Checklist of Birds or last year's Christmas count results in the March/April issue of the *Victoria Naturalist* to find out what is rare in December), please phone your sighting immediately to the Rare Bird Alert at 592-3381 and leave a message on the tape.

Victoria currently holds the Canadian Christmas Bird Count record of 152 species set in 1991. This was achieved by getting an exceptionally good coverage with over 150 people taking part. So please mark December 19 in your calendar and join us in trying to set another record! It is a good idea to survey your area in the previous week to see what is around if you have the time.

After the count we are planning to hold a meeting at the Gordon Head United Church starting at 7:00 pm. This will be the same format as a regular Birder's Night, where coffee, tea and biscuits will be served, and we will discuss the day's count results. Please bring finger food, savories or a dessert to share if you wish.

Wings over Clover Point. Clover Point was a Mecca for birds and birders before Victoria moved its sewage farther out into the Strait. *Photo: David Stirling*

Two "Who Done It?"

By C.P. (Chess) Lyons

At an age somewhat beyond the legendary fourscore and ten, one encounters an increasing number of puzzling events. How can a pair of glasses disappear when you haven't moved 3 feet (or .9m)? Why are directions on everything printed in smaller and smaller type? And why do you miss the point in about half of the TV commercials? Do anti-senility pills really do any good?

It is a somewhat comforting thought that the technical wizards of this complex age might provide these answers if you really wanted to know. But what about events that appear to rank in a sphere of complexity beyond human understanding? Two of the latter have bugged me for months so now I put them in print in hope of enlightenment, but also realising that every reader will make a quick and unflattering assessment of my problem.

Last April I was motoring through the desert north of Palm Springs. A particularly attractive piece of topography with a sandy wash, carpet-like stretches of green, and bold outcroppings of rock provided an invitation to explore. While I was looking at an ocotillo in bloom, a hummingbird zipped in. Before my eyes could do little more than note it was a female, it flew directly at my head. Other than possible blood-shot eyes and a sunburned dome I was wearing nothing in red.

I stood rigid for it was circling my head so closely I could feel the brush of air from its wings and periodically a so delicate touch of the bill. Around and around it went, going lower with each circle — neck, chest, waist, down one leg to the ankle — then it crossed to the other leg and came up my body in precision encirclements to the top of my head! Absolutely unbelievable, I thought, but to my amazement the complete procedure was carried out twice more. A nebulous thought arose. Had I been packaged in an invisible gossamer wrapping? Who was the sender and where was I going?

A unique minute in a lifetime of travel and experiences.

A complete change of second for another "Who done it?"

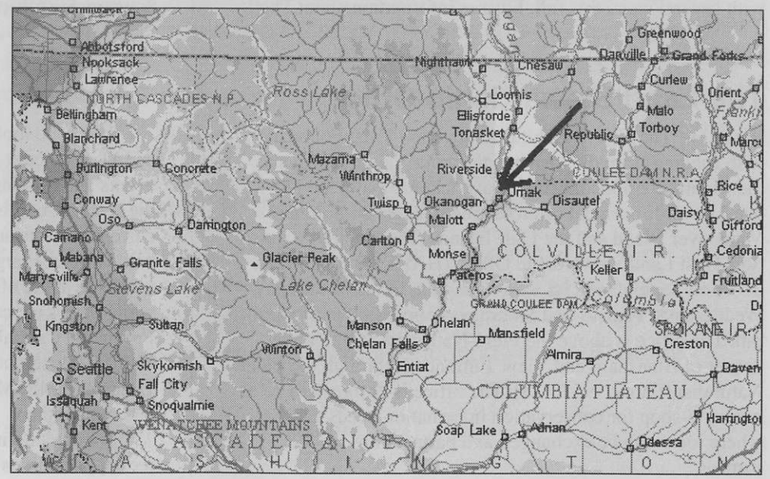
It is July in northern Washington state and about 20 miles (33 km) west of their Okanogan Valley. Along with pungent sagebrush, stately ponderosa pine and groves of aspen, there was another fatal attraction — an obscure dirt road winding back into the loose end of nowhere. But it did end high in the hills at a small, shallow lake, a refuge for some coots and moulting ducks.

I walked along the grassy lake edge with its dry land border of stunted sage bereft of any tree except for one. It was an exceptionally thick green clump of foliage about 15 feet (4.5m) across. Probably an aged, black hawthorn with a magpie nest hidden it its depths. I thought. And so it proved; in fact, two old nests hung in a derelict state of abandonment.

With some small sense of achievement, I backed off about 20 feet (6m) to admire the tranquil scene. blue skies, not the slightest breeze, the faint musical trills of red-winged blackbirds on the reedy lakeshore. Suddenly there was a great roaring sound as if some powerful machine had appeared magically to attack the hawthorn. The tree shook violently; leaves were torn from it. It looked as if it would be ripped out, roots and all! Whatever the attacker, it had come and gone in less than 10 scary seconds.

You frantically search for an answer. Was it a sudden whirlwind, a dust devil scudding across the landscape? But there was no forewarning sound nor vegetation flattening either before it arrived or after it left. So you stand there totally confused, the savagery of the noise still dominant in your mind and an overall feeling that something inexplicable had happened. A remote area, one lone tree on the landscape, and you chancing to be there for a few brief but violent seconds in its life history. The mystery hangs one. What really happened? Why?

P.S. Metric measurements added to the convenience of those under 40 years. No, I hadn't been drinking, nor suffering from heat exhaustion or rattlesnake bites, and I was alone both times.



Hat Tricks

A Report on the VNHS Habitat Acquisition Trust Foundation

By Jeff Stone

On September 21 st an official opening of the Land Stewardship Office was held. Numerous local conservation organizations as well as representatives from the Capital Regional District and the Provincial Capital Commission were present at the opening (which was actually held downstairs from the office in the Field Naturalist). It's a great feeling to have the office opened but there is a lot of work to be done before the office is functioning as a complete land stewardship resource centre. So if you can help give Andrew MacDonald our Information Coordinator a call (995-2428) *(See Andrew's comments below).*

On the Sea-to-Sea Greenbelt acquisition front, The Land Conservancy (TLC) has taken that lead in acquiring an Ayum Creek connector property. This property includes the riparian area of Ayum Creek between the estuary property purchased this past year and the Galloping Goose trail. Also located on the property is a house and associated open space. Currently, TLC should have finished raising monies for a down payment ($55,000) on a mortgage. HAT has contributed $5,000 to this cause. A likely scenario is that when this property is purchased and the riparian area will be subdivided (and covenanted) and turned over to the Capital Regional District. The down payment plus a contribution by the CRD approximates the value of the desirable riparian area. The remainder of the property (with the house) then would be rented to pay off the remainder of the mortgage. HAT welcomes the work that the TLC and its resources has been able (and continues) to do in the Capital Regional District. On the Ayum Creek front, the Society for the Protection of Ayum Creek in conjunction with government biologists and a "spider" enhanced the summer water holding capacity of the creek with several weirs this fall. Further information about The Land Conservancy, the Ayum Creek Connector, and the Society for the Protection of Ayum Creek is available through the Land Stewardship Office.

On September 9th HAT held its annual general meeting. At this meeting, HAT elected 2 "new" directors to replace directors whose term had expired. Directors on HAT's Board are elected to 3 year terms and due to the staggered nature of the initial board (1 to 3 year terms) a few positions are opened each year. Executive are determined by the board following the election of new directors. The current board is as follows (term expiration date is in parentheses): Andrew Harcombe (2001); Andy MacKinnon, Secretary (2000); Inga Nykwist, Vice-president (2001); Marilyn Lambert (2000); Colleen O'Brien, Treasurer (1999); Murray Rankin (1999); Calvin Sanborn (2000); Jeff Stone, President (2000); and Bruce Whittington (2000). At the AGM HAT's financial statement for the period between AGM's was presented (available upon request). The bottom line is that we have about $30,000 in the bank of which $ 15,000 is committed to the Land Stewardship Office, $5,000 to the Ayum Creek Connector, $5,000 to other expenses (insurance, coop student salary); leaving us with about $10,000 to start the new year. Of particular note at the AGM, is that a special resolution was passed changing HAT's bylaws that will open HAT to a wider membership (which has been currently limited to HAT's Board of Directors). Details about becoming a member of HAT will be finalized shortly.

On the fund raising note, Peter Matthiessen (author of books such as *The Tree Where Man Was Born; The Snow Leopard)* will speak in Victoria on Friday, November 13th. Look for further details in the Calendar or call the Land Stewardship Office.

The Land Stewardship Office

We did it! The VNHS Habitat Acquisition Trust Foundation, with funding from the Provincial Capital Commission and the Capital Regional District, have taken a major step forward towards our goal of protecting habitats on Southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. The Habitat Acquisition Trust Land Stewardship Office (HAT LSO) opened its doors on September 21st with its regular hours of Monday, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm. The office is above the Field-Naturalist Store on the corner of Blanshard and View. Entrance is through the Field-Naturalist (Phone 995-2428). The office is designed to be a one-stop-shop for conservation information needs and a place where ideas can be exchanged and partnerships can be formed.

Things to look forward to in the coming months will be a HAT newsletter that will include a calendar of upcoming events and training workshops. Details about membership in the Habitat Acquisition Trust and information about our current projects and initiatives will also be included. November is also our target month for having a list of publications available at the office, some of which we will have on hand while others we can order from resource partners such as the Provincial Capital Commission, Capital Regional District, Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, Ministry of Environment Lands & Parks, Ministry of Forests, Environment Canada and many others.

We can't do it all alone though. There are many volunteer opportunities available through the LSO. They include staffing the office and maintaining and organizing our resources as well as field opportunities such as site visits, land owner contact, baselines, data collection and monitoring. A short application form, available from the office and on our web page, will help us gather names and focus skills and interests on the right project. Stop by the office during our hours or call to make an appointment if you can't make it during those hours. HAT directors and volunteers will be available at most VNHS events to help answer your questions and listen to your suggestions.

See you at the office!

ANDREW MACDONALD, *HAT LSO Information Coordinator*

McFadden Creek Heronry Update

By Glen Moores

Great news! The herony is nearly purchased. As of October 15 the fund needs only $18,000 to bring complete final payment. As fund raising effort for the purchase of the land Nina Raginsky has organized tours of Salt Spring Island with stops at local artists and visits to the heronry.

For more details on the Wild Bird Trust or the tours contact Nina at 250-537-4515.

Distinguished Service Award

The Victoria Natural History Society Board of Directors established the Distinguished Service Award in 1988. This prestigious award is granted to a member who has con-tributed in some outstanding way to the aims and objectives of the Society. Awards are made at the annual banquet in February. All members of the Society can nominate any other member who in their opinion merits this honour.

Nominations should be forwarded by January 15 1999 to David Allinson, Awards Committee Chairperson at Box 5220 Station B, Victoria, BC, V8R 6N4

Ail nominations must be in writing and should be signed by at least two members of the Society. A brief biographical sketch and a description of the contributions and achievements of the nominee, along with his or her address and telephone number, should be included. The Awards Committee reviews the nominations and makes recommendations to the Board of Directors, which grants the awards.

For more information, contact David Allinson at 478-0493