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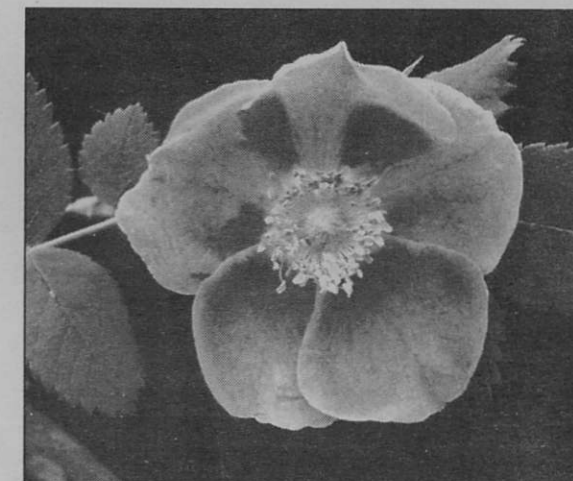
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OUR COVER

The Victoria Naturalist travels all over the world including the far North. Philip Critchlow has provided some great pictures and an article from his trip to the North West Territories. The picture of a musk ox so represents our far North that it had to adorn our front cover.

We wish you all a great New Year.



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The Burnside River

By Philip Critchlow

It was mid-morning, June 24th, as the Twin Otter descended through the cloud layer and we got our first view of the tundra, seven musk-oxen and hundreds of barren land caribou. We had just flown from Yellowknife in preparation for a raft trip down the Burnside River. The group consisted of two guides and four tourists. We had all congregated the previous evening to discuss the trip and express our objectives; already, two had been partially met, views of musk-oxen and caribou, but we obviously wanted much closer sightings. We were not to be disappointed! And there were other animals to be seen.

Soon we landed on Kathawachaga Lake, NWT, at a latitude close to 65°N. The Burnside River actually begins in Contwoyto Lake some distance upstream but since it was still ice covered we began our journey here. After unloading all the gear, the Twin Otter taxied across the lake, accelerated to take-off, turned, flew back towards us as a farewell gesture and then disappeared on its two hour flight back to

Yellowknife. Now, at last, the sense of isolation, the feeling of excitement, and, perhaps a little trepidation (had we enough warm clothes? Would the mosquitoes be bad? etc.) hit home. But there was work to do.

The pile of equipment looked daunting. Deflated rafts and accessories, tents, canisters of food, Coleman stoves, bags of charcoal, cooking equipment, buckets (we carried out all solid waste) and personal packs lay scattered in the short shrubs. After helping the guides to inflate the rafts and while they completed the organization, I went fishing, where a creek entered the lake. I quickly caught five lake trout, all released, ranging in size from 1-3 kg. We camped nearby and observed our surroundings more closely. The caribou still roamed the tundra but the musk-oxen had wandered away down river. Small ice floes on which many scaup were perched crowded along the lake edge. Canada and white-fronted geese, herring gulls and arctic tern passed overhead. In the distance tundra swans and an unidentified hawk flew



Campsite at the Mara River. Photo: Mey Critchlow

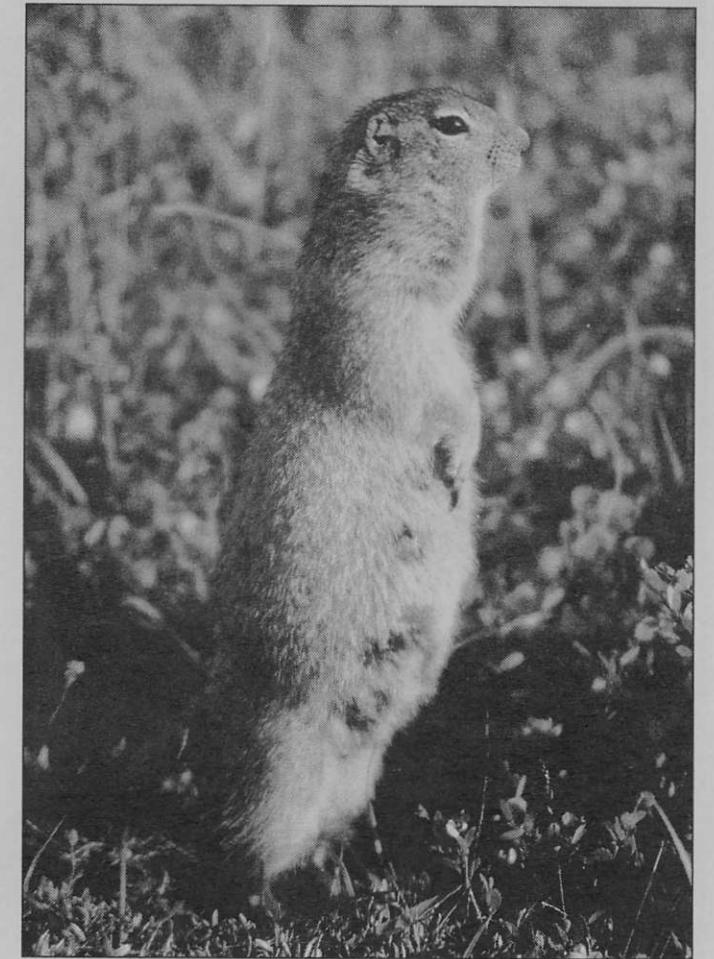
by. A common loon fished in the middle of the lake. Tree sparrows and an American golden plover searched for insects in the shrubs – willow, alder and birch. As we were eating dinner, three white wolves came to investigate the strange creatures who had dropped in.

From its source, the Burnside River flows 200 km to Bathurst Inlet, Nunavut, dropping almost 400 m in elevation. In its upper reaches it is a placid river as it crosses the Contwoyto plateau, a flat treeless region with a few gently rolling hills. It zigzags its way in a roughly north-easterly direction, widening into little more than a lake in several sections with no visible current. The land appears to consist predominantly of glacial remains; sand, gravel and rounded boulders of diverse sizes. Initially, the banks are low, often sandy with shrubs extending to the water's edge. Small islets and gravel bars are common. Downstream the river passes through a short stretch of rapids, slows, then steadily picks up speed (although only rarely were the waves sufficient to splash into the raft). The increased speed produces dramatic changes in the river bank – the sand and gravel have been washed away and stony beaches and banks of stacked boulders appear. The hills become slightly higher, up to a few hundred meters. Beginning several kilometers upstream of its confluence with the Mara River on the Arctic Circle, the banks of the Burnside were piled high with massive ice blocks, remnants of a huge ice-jam. Many of these blocks were crystalline and shattered under the slightest blow. As Bathurst Inlet is approached, solid rock becomes more evident and the river becomes unnavigable, plunging over a series of falls and rapids between steep rocky walls. The remains of snowdrifts in creeks and sunken areas dotted the landscape. On one patch musk-oxen enjoyed a cooling siesta. The width of the river varied widely, 50 m and more; its water crystal clear, not deep so that you could see the river bed glide by under the raft.

Inuit have long used the Burnside River valley. Reminders of their passage can still be seen today. Stone rings, believed to be tent foundations, are present along the river and Inlet. On one island enormous numbers of weather-beaten caribou antlers lay in a mound. One theory suggests that the Inuit constructed a barricade around the island as a defensive wall against attacks by Indians. This theory is supported by the fact that the island can be seen, on close examination, to be ringed with the embedded remains of more antlers. Alternatively, it has been proposed that the antlers served as tent supports, although it is difficult to see why so many would have been required. Several Canada geese and a herring gull had nests with eggs on the island. A brown lemming scurried in and out of its burrow.

The few vertical walls along the upper reaches of the river provide ideal nesting sites for a variety of birds. As we approached one cliff, a white shape sitting on a high promontory became evident. Could it be a gull? No! It was soon identified as a gyrfalcon. The river was fairly rapid at this point and we only caught a glimpse of several litter strewn ledges, possibly active nests. Fortunately, we camped just down river on the opposite side and could walk back to a high bank with excellent views of the cliff face well lit by

the evening sun. Four species were nesting, some in harmony, others not so. The gyrfalcon had an untidy nest of small sticks, roots and grasses containing two young hatchlings which moved about restlessly. A neat pile of sticks housed a family of young ravens their mouths gaping wide, revealing bright red throats, in the expectancy of being fed. A peregrine falcon, which we had heard during dinner, constantly harassed the adult ravens, vocally and with airborne assaults when they attempted to feed the young. Frequently, the ravens were forced to the ground to protect themselves. We didn't locate the nest of the peregrine – it is a relatively late breeder on the tundra so that feeding its young coincides with a plentiful supply of newly fledged sparrows, longspurs and redpolls. About a dozen pairs of cliff swallows also had nests, some in apartment style structures stacked together under rock overhangs. The swallows, unconcerned with the other residents, foraged for insects. The following morning I returned to the overlook opposite the cliff. Walking further along, I discovered the feathers of seven or more ptarmigan – five distinct groupings and several areas with more scattered plumage – and the carcass of an arctic ground squirrel (the Inuit call them sik-siks). There was also a dead gyrfalcon hatchling, little bigger than a newly hatched hen chick. Apparently the plucking ground served as a makeshift cemetery!



Sik-sik. Photo: Philip Critchlow



Barren land caribou. Photo: Philip Critchlow

Musk-oxen turned out to be quite common. We saw them every day while on the river, about 70 in all – occasionally herds of 7-20 animals but more usually two or three together. The larger herds often contained youngsters. By the middle of June, the adults are shedding their winter coats and look very ragged with large clumps of hair, called qiviut, hanging precariously from their backs. The qiviut becomes detached as they canter or feed in the higher shrubbery. We managed to collect a substantial amount of this valuable wool. Approaching the musk-oxen proved fairly difficult. On several occasions we tried walking stealthily towards them, but they invariably spotted us early and didn't permit us closer than about 150 m. They simply moved away or formed a loose line facing us in a defensive position. The dominant male sometimes showed his apprehension by rubbing his head against his forelegs. Then, if we moved closer, they would turn and trot away. Only once were we allowed close. This occurred when we were on a plateau overlooking a stream with a group of musk-oxen grazing on the shrubs below. A steep, intervening boulder covered slope seemed to assure them that we could not offer a surprise attack and they continued to graze although we were less than 50 m away.

The Bathurst caribou herd, numbering about 2-4 hundred thousand animals, frequents the upper reaches of the Burnside River. For the first few days of our trip, caribou were everywhere, predominantly females with young. Their paths criss-crossed the tundra. They often approached our campgrounds but were easily spooked and took off at speed after detecting our presence. They swam confidently back and forth across the river, apparently not yet in migration. The most memorable encounter occurred when we saw several hundred crossing the river about 200 m downstream. Stopping, we watched the spectacle. A mother would step into the water and begin swimming with her tail

erect, grunting encouragement to her calf who swam close behind, its body scarcely out of the water. On some hillsides the damage caused by thousands of hooves was apparent – broken shrubs, trampled flowers and mini-slides of unstable sand and gravel. During our hikes over the tundra, we came across several fresh, half-eaten caribou corpses, probably killed by wolves which habitually follow the herds. Wolf tracks were common in the sandy areas, especially along the river banks.

There were other signs of predators, grizzly bear in particular – scats or diggings where they had been trying to unearth sik-siks. Although some of these excavations were obviously recent, we never caught sight of a grizzly. Once we found the two hind legs of an arctic hare, also fresh, lying on top of low shrubs with no signs that a struggle had taken place in the area – had they been dropped by a bird of prey? In addition to a number of peregrine falcons and gyrfalcons, we saw four golden eagles (three immature which suggest that breeding has been successful in recent years) and a rough-legged hawk. Sik-siks were also common, visible on the sandy banks as we drifted by or scolding us as we walked into their territory. Surprisingly, they were not afraid to approach the camp kitchen. Although they had probably never encountered humans before, they showed little fear in these circumstances as they explored for the origin of the intriguing odours.

Spring had just reached the tundra and the flowers, though only a few centimeters high, provided a colourful addition to the landscape. Several are similar to those growing in the Canadian Rockies. Mountain aven, white with yellow centers, were the most abundant and widespread – it seemed a pity to have to pitch our tents in places covered with them. Small clumps of moss campion (pink) and arctic lupines (blue) dotted the dryer, flat areas. Solitary yellow arnica swayed in the breeze. Fragrant shield fern nestled in

rock crevices. Labrador tea, bearberry, blueberry, alpine azalea, heather and many more all added to the colour, and some would provide berries later. Perhaps the most spectacular flower was the woolly lousewort, standing erect like a miniature pink sentinel. A variety of reeds and grasses added to the ground cover. Many of the rocks were covered with lichens; orange, white, greenish yellow and black. The last, black rock tripe, was scraped from icy, snow-covered boulders and eaten by the Franklin expedition in the fall of 1821 in a desperate attempt to survive while returning from an exploratory quest for the Northwest Passage.

Along the upper reaches of the river, scaup (species?) and harlequin were the common ducks. Lower down the river oldsquaw, constantly squabbling when in groups of three or more, replaced them. They also occupied the many small lakes, a male visible with perhaps the female sitting on a hidden nest. Still further downstream, red-breasted mergansers became the most numerous ducks. Along the sections of sandy shore, semipalmated plovers were the dominant shore bird. Away from the river, common redpolls, Lapland longspurs and white-crowned sparrows abounded, nesting in the shrubbery – we stumbled on a nest with five speckled blue eggs. Other species identified included American robin (one north of the Arctic Circle), horned lark, sandhill crane, yellow-billed loon, rock ptarmigan, northern pintail, least sandpiper and American pipit.

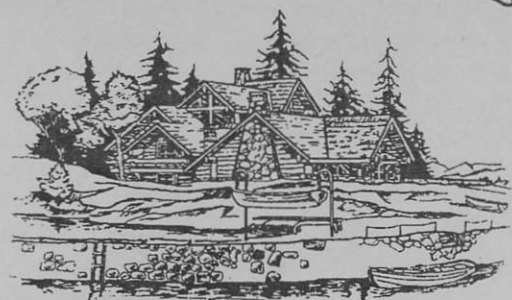
For the first four days the sun shone warmly. The following days were less friendly as gray clouds and rain showers persisted, with the occasional heavy downpour and brisk winds. It is, of course, the land of the midnight sun, and we were never pressured to arrive at the campsite before dark, greatly adding to the sense of relaxation. Mosquitoes were only bothersome the last two days and then only mildly so – repellent or bug-jackets providing ample protection. We didn't get wet or too cold, although I frequently wore all my available clothing, especially while sitting idly in the raft.

After seven days on the river, we arrived at our final campsite about 4 km from Bathurst Inlet. We walked the last stretch to view the rapids and to try to catch an arctic char but the water was too rapid and turbulent. It was with mixed feelings that we went to bed the last evening – sorrow to be leaving this beautiful river but with anticipation of a hot shower. The guides dismantled the rafts and hauled the equipment to a small knoll. In the morning two Inuit arrived from Bathurst Inlet Lodge, with an ATV and sledge, to transport it all to an esker where a Twin Otter would pick us up. As we were about to leave camp, a wolverine strolled by, disappearing as quickly as it had appeared. On the flight back to Yellowknife, we were treated to the spectacle of tens of thousands of caribou, seemingly in full migration – some hardly distinguishable from large stones, others clearly identifiable as they swam across a lake. We had enjoyed a spectacular trip with superbly competent, amicable and cheerful guides, excellent food, and a host of memories – the animals and the serenity in particular. Hopefully we will return someday!



Woolly Lousewort. Photo: Philip Critchlow

Yellow Point Lodge



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Message from the President

By Bruce Whittington

We have rounded the last turn in the race to the end of the century (I think I'll stay away from the End-of-the-Millennium debate). It's a time to be thinking of the future, and there are two issues I'd like to raise, with that future in mind.

The first is the membership survey which is enclosed with this issue. The Board has, in its regular meetings, and in planning retreats, given a lot of thought to the Society's current makeup, and to directions we might take in the future. We quickly realized that it would be irresponsible to make major planning decisions without input from the members, and so the idea of a survey was born. Most of the work of developing the survey has been done by Anna Young, and she deserves hearty thanks for an excellent job on a major undertaking.

Please take the time to complete the survey. Answer only the questions you are comfortable with, and don't hesitate to give us more information than we've asked for! With your input, we can prepare to take the Society into the year 2000.

CRD Parks land acquisition

The second issue which relates to the future is the upcoming CRD Parks land acquisition question. VNHS has participated in a planning process to bring this initiative to a successful conclusion. The process has generated considerable confusion, however.

The volunteer CRD Public Advisory Group recommended that the CRD seek additional parks acquisition funding which would amount to about \$6.00 per household per year, for ten years. This would generate about a million dollars per year, to be used for outright parkland acquisition, without costly interest charges. The CRD was reluctant to pass this without some indication of support from the public, particularly since municipalities have recently had to take on additional expenses formerly covered by the province. Surveys had already indicated overwhelming public support for increased parkland acquisition, and response to this proposed levy has been extremely positive. Many residents and groups are frustrated that the decision was not made outright, and many have urged the CRD to ask for \$10.00.

The question will be put to the public on the municipal ballot. It will be referred to as a "non-binding question"

rather than a referendum, simply because there is a question about the legality of individual municipalities seeking funding authorization for another jurisdiction (i.e. the CRD).

Some municipalities (View Royal is one) have already indicated that they will instruct their CRD representative to vote for a \$10.00 levy, so there will be no question in that municipality. Saanich's question will ask for \$10.00 instead of \$6.00. Esquimalt will not put the question on its ballot, not because it will not support such a levy, but because the municipality feels there are other equally valid funding needs which are being ignored.

What should we as naturalists do? The Board is recommending that members vote in support of the increased levy, whether \$6.00 or \$10.00. In addition, members can ensure that all candidates are asked whether they, if elected, would pass the parkland acquisition question. You may need to talk to municipal staff, to determine how the question will be asked in your area. After the election, letters to your new council, and to the CRD, in support of the parkland acquisition levy will help ensure its success.

The Habitat Acquisition Trust has pointed out in the *Times-Colonist* that these are value-added parks acquisition dollars, when combined with the fundraising efforts of HAT and other land trusts; each CRD dollar may be matched by one to three dollars raised by conservation groups.

This is an opportunity for us to help in establishing a fund which will, with the help of HAT and other conservation organizations, ensure a rich natural legacy on southern Vancouver Island, as we enter the next century. Please indicate your support for this initiative, either on your municipal ballot, or directly to your municipal politicians.

Thanks, Glen!

Last, I would like to thank our outgoing editor, Glen Moores, for his fine work in producing *The Naturalist* over the last two years. Glen has succeeded in bringing many new authors and photographers to the pages of our magazine, while maintaining the friendly approach established by his predecessors. I hope you have enjoyed the experience as much as we have!

Mount Tolmie

By David Stirling

After two cool wet days the robust Buddleia bush was twinkling in the morning sunshine. The twinkling was a host of colorful butterflies, energized by the warm sun, jousting for position among the blossom heads. I looked down on the scene from the top of the reservoir that occupies the summit of Mount Tolmie. After a few minutes of pure enjoyment I lapsed into my identifying and counting mode. All this chasing and fluttering made counting difficult but I finally tallied a total of thirty two colorful insects broken down into: Painted Ladies-5, Tiger Swallowtails-3, Anise Swallowtails-2, Skippers-4, Lorquin's Admirals-18. Anise Swallowtails usually the commonest species on the hill top, spend their time aggressively chasing their own kind and every other butterfly species in the vicinity. This activity possibly accounts for the many tattered individuals still around in mid-summer. Butterflies are attracted to the exotic trees and shrubs planted against the sides of the reservoir contrasting with the surrounding dry, open Garry Oak woodlands of summer.

Under the oaks there are thickets of Snowberry and

wild roses. Some of the least desirable exotics such as blackberry are scarce, ivy has only a tenuous foot hold near private property and the much maligned broom appears to have been well "bashed." Trails, both authorized and unofficial, provide access to every corner of the hill. There is much polished rock, evidence of bygone glaciers and in recent times, years of trampling by short-distance hikers, stern joggers, possessive dog-walkers, sneaky moss poachers (*Saanich News*, January 13, 1999) and roving naturalists.

In early spring, even the smallest patch of earth erupts in colour. Tiny carpets of Blue-eyed Mary cling to sixty degree slopes. Rosettes of Spring Gold, nodding Easter Lilies and Shooting Stars and my favorite harbinger of spring, the incomparable Satin Flower compete for space with stiff mats of the invasive Red Hedge Nettle. By the first of May the flats are blankets of Early Camas. Tall Great Camas frames the rocks. In late June, sweet scented Mock Orange draws the nose. Billows and curls of Ocean Spray grace the slopes for Canada Day. Summer's drought leaves



Approaching storm. Photos: David Stirling.



Cumulus cauliflower.

only such hardy exotics as Queen Ann's Lace, Fall Dandelion and Blue Sailors in bloom.

Migration time on Tolmie can be exciting for birders. Over the years several rare visitors have been found here. In fall, you might be lucky enough to share the hill top with a flock of circling Turkey Vultures, scouting for a rising air bubble to help hasten their journey across the water. In winter watch for gatherings of Northwestern Crows enjoying a noisy party before going to roost.

Tolmie is on Victoria's tour bus route. Visitors from the world's four corners, chatting in unknown languages, admire the superb view while comparing shopping bargains and gossiping with their fellow travelers. A few are listening to the tour guides.

Mt. Tolmie, a 18.45 hectare Saanich park, not far from the University of Victoria and within walking distance of where I live (I usually drive), is my favorite look-out for cloud watching. (I didn't start birdwatching until the mature age of twelve but I think I was a cloudwatcher when I was eight.) The mountain gives me a panoramic view of the sky – from Mt. Finlayson to Mt. Baker and Juan de Fuca Strait to Vancouver's north shore mountains – made exciting by lenticular clouds stacked like hot cakes, cumulus castles over distant ranges and lowering frontal wall clouds trailing curtains of rain accompanied by rainbows and sunsets.

The summit is a magnet for storm chasers, especially when one of Victoria's rare electrical storms brews up. Nothing like those scary, high voltage ones that you can experience in Alberta's hail alley or Ontario's garden tip. Most of Victoria's thunder storms are fairly gentle, none of those crushing down-burst winds laced with chunks of ice. A few years ago there was a spectator storm of note. For more than two hours rivers of lightning streaked down across the entire eastern sky that was smooth black from top to



Well worn Anise Swallowtail.

bottom. Within twenty minutes the hill top was a parking lot for the duration. People crowded the highest rocks, cheering whenever there was a spectacular burst of bolts. One fellow set up his camera on a massive tripod then unfurled a large umbrella with a tall metal spike!

Mount Tolmie, in the centre of Greater Victoria, is a park for all people in all seasons. It is a place to enjoy the grand panorama, the ever changing sky and a little bit of wild nature.

Late news: The butterfly bush, mentioned in the beginning, has been axed, a victim of a recent reinforcing for the "big one."

Nesting Re-commencement of a Barn Swallow Pair at Mitlenatch Island

By Bill Merilees and Guy Monty

The summer of 1999 has not been noted as being a particular sunny or warm one. According to the meteorological records, June was one of the coolest and wettest on record, July was perhaps slightly better. Many naturalists and gardeners observed 1999 to be a 'very slow' growing season. At Nanaimo for example, the Ocean Spray, was exactly two weeks behind 1998 in its flowering.

One June 28th we took up our volunteer residency as the 'wardens' on Mitlenatch Island. The 'normal' Barn Swallow pair, nesting under the cabin's front eave, greeted us with their usual rasping chatter. Their nest held four young and one egg. The weather on our arrival was blustery and got worse as the day progressed. The 29th was cool and windy, with showers of driving rain. The Barn Swallows were quiet and relatively inactive. After supper a check of nest, by Guy, revealed that the now five young had all perished.

Early on the morning of July 1st, Bill observed two objects drop past the window under the nest. Further investigation revealed the corpses of all five young on the ground below. The adults had apparently dislodged their dead offspring, cleaning out their nest. Thought was given to the possibility that perhaps a predator had been involved. This was dismissed, as any predator would have been expected to have eaten or mutilated these relatively fresh carcasses. Also during the three days previous, no other species, bird, snake or mammal had been observed anywhere near this nesting location. No close examination was made of the young to

determine if they had been parasitised.

Not to be deterred by this setback, the adults almost immediately started carrying small amounts of nesting material to a second site above the front door, on the opposite side of the cabin. This activity was short lived. On July 3rd the adults were observed copulating. On the 4th white feathers were being added to the old nest. A new clutch of 5 eggs was initiated on July 8th and completed on the 12th. These later observations were completed by Marleen Datema who succeeded us as volunteer 'warden'. Thanks to yet another volunteer, this clutch was reported to have hatched on July 31st, an incubation period of 19 days.

It is not very often that the opportunity affords to witness and record observations of this nature. *Birds of British Columbia* (Volume III) mentions weather as one of a number of causes for nest failure by Barn Swallows (page 186). An incubation period of 16 to 19 days is also given. This note perhaps adds to our understanding of the natural history for this species by recording that adults may dislodge their dead young from a failed nesting attempt and are then able to recommence a new clutch within nine days – quite a turn around.

References:

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



Barn Swallows in nest. Photo: Bill Merilees

Living with the Devil

By C.W. "CY" Morehen

I live in the midst of flora and ponds, arranged and designed with nature in mind – not mankind. As birds are common to most gardens I will tell you about some of the mammals found in my extended garden. Dogs, cats and raccoons are escorted to the SPCA in St. Johns, Newfoundland. Owners are notified within a month or so. Deer are best observed at a distance in early morning on the sandbar a hundred yards from shore but not in my garden. Otters raise their families under my lower deck. An ocean side pond is reserved for them with a wooden slide and all. This pond is protected by a wide Alberta spruce hedge, cover for the otters from bed to bath. Each evening the otters appear from the salt chuck holding a 12 inch diameter flounder by its tail. This is their evening meal. The remains, after a washing in the pond, is their breakfast. They occasionally sun bathe on the deck allowing only me to share the space as long as I sit quietly in a deck chair.

In the Spring of 1999, I was fattening up migrating sparrows. Every sparrow species found on the coast was present. As expected, a rat appeared, then another and more, enjoying the seeds on the ground – in broad daylight. One morning, while sitting quietly and enjoying a cup of Java at my observation window overlooking the scene, the Devil himself appeared, crossed my deck, dropped down to pool level and trot-jogged in an unearthly fashion within four feet of my shocked gaze, finally disappearing around the corner of the house. A hyena would look like a cute puppy by comparison. As it slipped out of my vision an icy chill ran down and then up my spinal nerves. I actually felt terror. My visitor was a Vancouver Island Wolverine, *Gulo luscus vancouverensis**

I have been threatened by a bull elephant in Africa, charged by a cougar in the Okanagan, photographed among forty three black bears at the Western Mines dump site in Strathcona Park, watched a lone Killer Whale kill and eat a migrating sea-lion in front of my house, fed a tiger cat in Queensland while eating my lunch alone in the bush, swam for three days in shark infested waters off a beach in

Australia not knowing that this was an old whaling station site, but none of these prepared me for this close encounter with the Devil.

I never saw a rat again. My 250 gold fish, in the pond never visited by the otter and in water too deep for a raccoon, were gone. I was relieved the Devil had taken all and I hoped, moved on although at night I could hear loud thumps on my deck.

On June 10, my home-care person, Tammy, was helping me prepare for two weeks visiting old friends and birding in Ontario. Shortly after arriving in Ottawa, I received a phone call from Tammy. It seems that after I drove off to the Comox airport, while she was hanging up my scattered clothes, she was startled by a terrifying hiss so loud that it sent her racing for the farthest room in the house. The Devil had struck again! It was either in the clothes closet or in the lumber shed attached to the other side of the unfinished wall. Apparently the wolverine had accepted my activities but not those of a comparative stranger.

In 1997 the otters raised four young, in 1998 they raised three. Just before the wolverine arrived the otters were having a tubing together in their pool. I have not seen them since. Their nesting area is dug out like never before. I think the wolverine was here for two months. At present, July 10, all seems quiet. Where is everybody?

*The wolverine is a very rare animal on Vancouver Island. Because it is so powerful and cunning it has been called "Indian Devil" or just plain "Devil" by trappers and other woodsmen. Not to be confused with the Tasmanian Devil from the bottom of the world.

CY MOREHEN, in years gone by, VNHS vice president and treasurer, park naturalist at Miracle Beach and various Okanagan provincial parks, lives among flora, ponds, wildlife and recently with the Devil at Black Creek near Miracle Beach, Oyster Bay, BC.



VNHS Natural History Presentation

Tuesday, November 9

The Gypsy Moth: An Unwanted Visitor to British Columbia

Join Vince Nealis from the Pacific Forestry Centre for a presentation on the Gypsy Moth situation in British Columbia. This program will discuss the life history of this most famous of moths, as well as the ins and outs of the control program. Arm yourselves with questions and we'll see you at 7:30 p.m., Room 159, Begbie Building, UVic. Bring a coffee mug and a friend; non-members are welcome.

Victoria Natural History Society Members Survey

Introduction

With a new President and a change in Board members this summer, the VNHS is taking a close look at its current activities, direction, and future development. To do this we need your help and input to ensure that the Society continues to grow and develop supported by its membership. Please take a few minutes to complete and return this membership survey. **Any question may be left blank if you do not wish to answer it.** To complete the survey, just remove from the centrefold of the magazine or photocopy. You can return it by delivery at one of November's event nights, or by mailing to: VNHS Survey, PO Box 5220, Station B, Victoria, B. C. V8R 6N4 (with thanks for the donation of the postage).

We thank you for your help and assistance. We look forward to receiving your survey and will be publishing the results in a later issue of *The Naturalist*. Keep a copy of your survey if you would like to see how your responses fit with the overall results.

Information about yourself

- How many people are included on this membership? (more than one survey form may be completed if desired)
- How many are male? female?
- Your age. (please check one box for each person covered by the membership)
 0-10 years 11-20 years 21-30 years 31-40 years 41-50 years 51-60 years 61-70 years 71-80 years 81+ years
- How long have you been a member of VNHS?
 Less than one year 1-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 21-25 years 26+ years
- What municipality do you live in? _____
- What is your occupation at present?
 Government Manufacturing Student Education Self-employed Retired Tourism/service industry Military Professional Other _____
- What leisure activities do you enjoy in your spare time?
 Birdwatching Gardening Hiking Golfing Kayaking/canoeing Fishing Photography Hunting Other _____ Cycling General nature appreciation
- Please check the box which best estimates the time you spend on leisure activities.
 One hour per day One hour per week One day per week One day per month Other _____
- Why did you first join VNHS? (check more than one box if suitable)
 To receive *The Victoria Naturalist* To attend VNHS events To support local environmental / conservation organisation Introduced by a friend Concern for the environment To meet other like-minded people Other _____
- Please list other nature/environment/conservation groups you belong to.

General information

11. What do you feel the role of the VNHS is?

12. The Society plans to develop a mission statement to focus and enhance its current objectives. Please comment on what elements you would like to see in a mission statement. (The Society's objectives, as stated in the Constitution, are: to stimulate active interest in natural history, to study and protect flora and fauna and their habitats, and to work with other societies with like interests, locally, in BC and in Canada.)

13. VNHS at present is involved in the following activities. Please put a check by those you would like to see continue and an X by those you feel VNHS should stop (*more than one "check" or "X" is fine*).

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Events for members | <input type="checkbox"/> Events for non-members (and publicity) | <input type="checkbox"/> VNHS events tape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Christmas Bird Count | <input type="checkbox"/> Fund-raising such as raffles, book sales etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> Greenways Inventory project |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rare Bird Alert Hotline | <input type="checkbox"/> Distribution and maintenance of nesting boxes | <input type="checkbox"/> Goldstream Art Show |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial support for local environmental organisations | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support of the VNHS Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT) | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Liaison with other environmental organisations in the region | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Publication of <i>The Victoria Naturalist</i> and membership brochures | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction of bird blinds at local areas of conservation interest | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Campaigns to save threatened local wildlife, plants and habitat | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Representation at shows (such as Peninsula Country Market, Native Vegetation Symposium) | | |

Comments on present activities _____

14. The VNHS Board is considering involvement in the following activities. Please put a "check" by those activities you would support, and an "X" by those you feel the Society should not do. Your comments on these and any other potential activities VNHS could become involved with are particularly welcome.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Development of VNHS website | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate connections, sponsorship and memberships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Young Naturalist program (for junior members) | <input type="checkbox"/> More events for non-members, particularly children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In-school nature education for children | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality displays for attendance at shows |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Revision of <i>Naturalist's Guide to the Victoria Region</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Appoint paid staff to assist with increased activity and workload |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increase publicity and promotion for VNHS, including articles, radio, TV, group talks | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased effort to influence municipal/provincial governments and other agencies on environmental issues. | |

Comments _____

15. As part of an increase in fund-raising, VNHS is considering the following methods. Please check those you would support, and comment on any other fund-raising methods you may have experience with.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drive to increase membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing such items as lapel pins, t-shirts, gifts, books |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeals and campaigns for specific projects | <input type="checkbox"/> Planned giving (e.g. bequests) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Event charges (for members/non-members) | <input type="checkbox"/> Annual increase in subscription fees as partial funding for increased activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Donation drives | <input type="checkbox"/> Funding from this increase dedicated to different activity each year |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seek grant funding to pay for increased activity and workload | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paid commercial elements to indoor meetings (e.g. a talk on birding abroad by someone running a foreign bird tour company) | |

Comments _____

About *The Victoria Naturalist*

16. *The Naturalist* comes bimonthly at present. Would you prefer to receive it:

- Monthly Quarterly Three times a year Twice a year No change

17. Do you read each issue:

- Always Sometimes Rarely Never

18. How many in the household read *The Naturalist*? _____

19. Please place a "check" by the features you read, and "X" by those you do not read.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feature articles | <input type="checkbox"/> VNHS mailbox | <input type="checkbox"/> Events calendar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Field trip reports | <input type="checkbox"/> Christmas Bird Count reports | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial and AGM reports |
| <input type="checkbox"/> HAT reports | <input type="checkbox"/> Bulletin board | <input type="checkbox"/> Photos of local wildlife and plants |

20. What changes would you like to see in *The Naturalist*?

21. The sale of advertising space in *The Naturalist* helps pay for the cost of production. Would you like to see advertising:

- Continue at the same level Decrease to a lower level Increase to a higher level Stop altogether

22. How often do you use the advertisers in *The Naturalist*?

- Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

VNHS events

23. Which VNHS events have you attended in the past two years? Please put a "check" by favourite events and "X" by least favourite events.

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Natural History Night | <input type="checkbox"/> Christmas Bird Count | <input type="checkbox"/> Birding field trips | <input type="checkbox"/> Botany Night |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spring Bird Count | <input type="checkbox"/> Botany field trips | <input type="checkbox"/> Birder's Night | <input type="checkbox"/> Valentine's Day Count |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intertidal field trips | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Night | <input type="checkbox"/> Butterfly Counts | <input type="checkbox"/> Annual Banquet |

24. Would you attend more events if the meeting nights were different? Yes No

If yes, which nights are inconvenient for you? (e.g. first Thursday of the month) _____

25. What changes would you like to see in VNHS events? (e.g. mid-week field trips, more or fewer trips on weekend days, change of indoor meeting dates/venues)

26. It has been suggested that Society field trips could be opened to non-members, to encourage attendance and educate more people about the wildlife and plants of the Victoria region. Would you like to see the general public admitted to Society field trips?

Yes No Sometimes

Comments _____

27. If you would like to make any other comments about this survey or about VNHS in general, please use this section. Longer comments on a separate sheet are welcome.

28. VNHS could not survive without the volunteers who do the many different jobs which keep the Society running. The increased activity which the Society plans to undertake will need more volunteer help to be successful. If you are able to contribute to any of the following, please check and complete this section.

If you would like your survey to remain anonymous, photocopy this section and deliver separately, or talk to Kevin Slagboom (Volunteer Co-ordinator) at one of the indoor meetings.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poster and leaflet delivery (2 hours per month) | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing grant proposals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assistance with manning stalls at shows | <input type="checkbox"/> Plant and animal inventories |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Form part of team working with some Directors | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership/assistance with field trips |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provision of coffee and refreshments at indoor meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> Clerical/data entry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Magazine administration, particularly help with advertising | |

Any other skills/experience _____

29. What amount of time would you be able to spend as a volunteer? (e.g. two hours per week, one day per month)

Name and address

Thank you very much for completing this survey. Your input will be of great help in determining future directions and activities for VNHS. **Please return your survey by the end of November** (to VNHS Survey, PO Box 5220, Station B, Victoria, B. C. V8R 6N4), or drop off at one of the November indoor meetings.

Squawk, and You're Dead!

By Bill Merilees

Anyone who has visited a seabird colony will have had at least three of their senses amply stimulated. The first, is the sight of hundreds, if not thousands of birds, wheeling about. The second is the cacophony that continues uninterrupted. The third is the smell of guano that white washes everything and makes the spring plants grow to gigantic proportions. Together, these three stimuli are the essence of a thriving seabird rookery and a first class naturalist experience.

Any one of a number of British Columbia's small coastal islands will suffice in providing this environment, but Mitlenatch is my favourite. From my first visit in 1960 to the present, my year is never complete without one or more visits to this provincial nature park. On every visit, there is always something new or different, to be experienced.

When it comes to a chorus of sounds, Mitlenatch offers a raucous symphony. With an estimated 3,000 pairs of Glaucous-winged Gulls (1991 estimate) there is never quiet. When a Bald Eagle passes overhead, a crescendo of alarm ripples over the rock. A salute of oystercatchers, in tight formation, explodes in shrieks as they pass over Camp Bay. The guttural "yaak, yaak" of a Caspian Tern, the shrill squeal of the pigeon guillemots, the whirr of their wings or the sweet territorial melody of a Song Sparrow, are just a few of the more prominent symphonic elements.

Come late June and early July it is the young crows, fresh off their nests and begging persistently from their parents, that can almost drive a visitor to distraction; even when the crafty parents are not trying to steal your lunch! 1999 was different - there were no squawking young crows! An appropriate number of adults was present but their efforts, to bring forth their kind, had apparently failed.

In 1998, I noted a pair of ravens in residence during my one week volunteer 'warden' stint. In 1999, this (?) pair had returned, built a nest in one of the large pine trees and had two fully fledged young on our arrival, June 28th. This family added a different sound element to the symphony. Had they replaced the crows in more ways than one? One young raven was observed picking at a pin feathered crow carcass and I suspect that this year's cohort of crows has suffered a similar fate. After all, it is said there is no honour among thieves. When it comes to thievery, ravens and crows are among the best, not to mention, being arch villains.

Knowing that food hungry crow nestlings are very vociferous when begging, what better clue would a foraging raven need? My suspicion is that they squawked once or twice too often!

Come late June and early July it is the young crows, fresh off their nests and begging persistently from their parents, that can almost drive a visitor to distraction.

According to the information available, 1999 is perhaps the first year that ravens have nested on Mitlenatch. The impact of their presence certainly could be 'heard' during our visit. It will be interesting to follow this event forward into the year 2000 and beyond. It is hard to believe, but at Mitlenatch, if the ravens persist, could crows become an endangered species?

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Goldstream Art Show Draws Record Numbers

By Bruce Whittington

More than 16,000 visitors enjoyed The Nature of Island Artists at the Goldstream Provincial Park Nature House this fall. The show, which is held every two years, is supported by the efforts of about 150 VNHS volunteers, who staff the show during its run.

More than 100 works of art were exhibited, with most being for sale; about a quarter of these were donated outright. For the first time this year, the show was moved to Duncan for an additional run there, in the Freshwater Ecocentre, where members of the Cowichan Valley Naturalists assisted.

The profit from the art show is split two ways. Half is directed to the Eagle Extravaganza program at Goldstream Park, to extend opening hours and provide more school programming. The other half will be donated to HAT, the land trust founded by VNHS. Those monies will be put toward the campaign to purchase Brooks Point on South Pender Island. The final bookkeeping was not complete at press time, but indications were that profit this year would be higher than in previous shows.

Much of the work in organizing the art show is done by the Staff of Arenaria Research and Interpretation, which provides interpretive services for many Vancouver Island provincial parks. VNHS director Darren Copley and his brighter half, Claudia, deserve special thanks for long hours



The distinguished Victoria bird artist Fenwick Lansdowne, as Honorary Patron, opened the Goldstream Art Show.

and strong support for VNHS and HAT. Thanks also to BC Parks for cohosting the event, at the warm and friendly Nature House. Finally, all those VNHS members, organized by Marilyn Lambert, who showed up to staff the show, can be proud of a job well done.



Dave Fraser (right) with Brenda Costanzo and Ross King on opening night. Photos: Bruce Whittington

Christmas Bird Count – December 18, 1999

By David Pearce

The Victoria Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 18, 1999. 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 18 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 21 in order to be included in the count records.

If you see a rare bird at your feeder on December 18 (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 200 people taking part. So please mark December 18 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 will meet 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, savouries or a dessert to share if you wish.



HAT'S OFF AGAIN

WESTERN MEXICO

February 25 – March 10, 2000

Join David Stirling on this tour to explore Mazatlan, the Sierra Madre Occidental and the coastal fishing village of San Blas.

Travelling from sea shore to nearly 8000' above sea level we will pass through a wide variety of habitats including coastal wetlands, tropical forests and mountain forests. These habitats host their own specialties and we can expect well over two hundred species of birds. We'll travel by boat to an offshore seabird island and enroute we may see Humpback Whales and, if we are really lucky, perhaps a Whale Shark!

Colourful birds, tropical weather, exceptional scenery and a relaxed atmosphere combine to make this tour Mexican birding at its finest.

For more information, please call Marilyn at 477-5922

All proceeds from this tour will be donated to the Victoria Natural History Society's Habitat Acquisition Trust.

Watch for Colour-banded Cooper's Hawks

A study on the ecology of Cooper's Hawks breeding in the urban environment of Greater Victoria has been underway since 1995. To date nearly 500 of these hawks have been colour-banded at about 40 nest sites. You can greatly assist this research project by watching for and reporting observations of these banded hawks.

Colour-bands are uniquely coded with 2 vertical alphanumeric characters (i.e. number over number or letter over number) and are placed on the left leg (see illustration). To provide ease of visibility, these codes are repeated 3 times around the circumference of the band. Bands can be read at a distance of about 20 m with binoculars or up to 75 m using a spotting scope. Red bands were placed on females and black bands were put on males. If you observe one of these marked hawks, please record the band colour and code, date and time, whether it was in adult or juvenile plumage, as well as the location. **Please report all sightings, even if you were unable to determine the band code.** Band colour in itself provides very useful data.

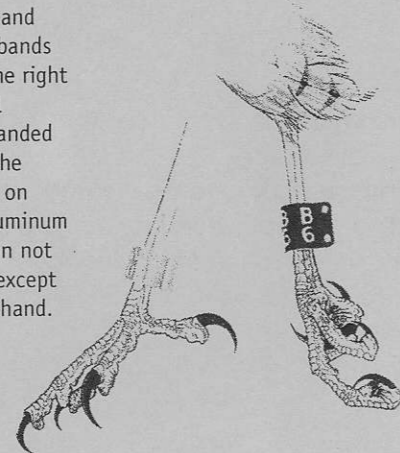
To date we have received over 250 observations of these marked birds, from as far away as Nanaimo on Vancouver Island, and at Delta and Boundary Bay on the mainland coast. We have also received band recoveries from central Washington and western Nevada. However, over 90% of year-round sightings come from the Greater Victoria and Saanich Peninsula areas. A great many were observed in the vicinity of backyard bird feeders.

Please report banded Cooper's Hawks to:

Andy Stewart
Ministry of Environment, Lands & Parks
PO Box 9344, Stn. Prov. Govt.
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9M1

Phone: (250) 387-9780 or
Fax: (250) 387-2733
E-mail: andy.stewart@gems6.gov.bc.ca

U.S Fish and Wildlife bands are on the right leg of all colour-banded hawks. The numbers on these aluminum bands can not be read except when in hand.



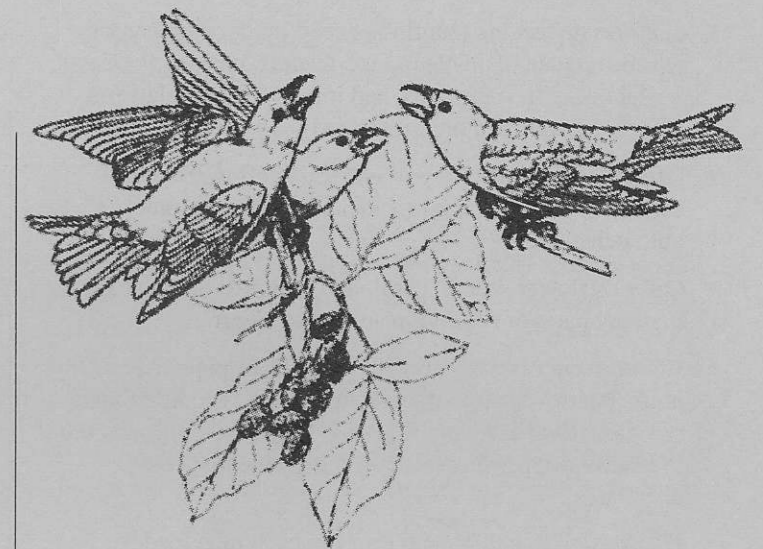
This example colour-band would be recorded as "B over 6". Red bands signify it is a female and black bands indicate it is male. These bands are always on the left leg.

Bird Feeding Do's and Dont's

reprinted from www.birdwatchersdigest.com

Tips for a Healthy Feeding Station

- Give your seed feeders (especially thistle and tube feeders) a shake before you refill them, to dislodge any compacted seed. Dump out any wet clumps of old seed.
- Clean all hulls off platform feeders and out of seed trays daily.
- Keep some old spatulas and brushes handy by the feeding station for cleaning purposes.
- Disinfect feeders by scrubbing with a weak bleach solution (1/4 cup of bleach to 2 gallons of warm water) every few weeks, oftener in summer or rainy periods. Rinse and allow feeders to dry before refilling.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after filling or cleaning your feeders.
- Move your feeding station when the ground beneath it becomes covered with seed hulls and droppings. Rake the old site to remove hulls and to give the grass a chance to recover.
- Store your seed in a clean, dry, air-tight container, such as a metal or plastic garbage can.
- Don't allow large amounts of seed to become wet, as on platform feeders. Instead, when it's wet outside, feed primarily from covered feeders that will keep seed dry, or put out only a handful of seed at a time on platforms.
- Don't put hulled sunflower hearts (or bits) out where wet weather can cause them to spoil. Offer them in a tube or hopper feeder.
- Don't put out any more seed than can be eaten by the birds by nightfall, especially where raccoons, opossums, bears, deer, or rodents are a problem.
- If you see a sick or dead bird at your feeders, halt your feeding for a few weeks to allow the healthy birds to disperse. This lessens the possibility of disease transmission. Remove and discard in the trash any dead birds. Report the sick birds to your local wildlife officials, many of whom monitor wildlife health.
- If you provide suet, reduce the amount you offer in hot weather. Heat can make suet rancid and unhealthy for birds. Runny suet can also stick to birds' feathers, making them hard to keep clean and useful. Use rendered suet or heat-resilient suet blocks that are available commercially.
- Reduce window-kills of birds by placing feeders a safe distance away. If birds regularly strike a particular



window place a screen, crop netting, or a series of branches over or in front of the outside glass panel to break up the reflection.

- Though birds may not be entirely dependent on your feeder, it's best not to leave them totally without food if you plan to be away from home in mid-winter. Purchase an oversized feeder with a large seed capacity, or ask a willing neighbor to continue feeding your birds.
- Don't discontinue feeding as soon as the grass greens and the weather warms in spring. Many birds will continue coming to your feeders all summer long.
- Don't use grease, oil, petroleum jelly, or similar substances on your feeder poles or wires to thwart squirrels, ants, or other feeder-raiding creatures. If these substances come into contact with bird feathers they are impossible for the bird to preen or wash out. Goosy feathers can become useless for flight or insulation, thus putting the birds at risk to predators, extreme weather, and disease. For squirrels and other mammals, use a pole-mounted baffle (many are sold commercially). For ants, use an ant guard that prevents ants from reaching the feeder. Both baffles and ant guards are available on the Internet, by mail-order, or in retail stores that sell an extensive array of backyard products.

Tips for Better Feeding

- Black-oil sunflower seed is the most widely used bird seed, popular with the greatest number of bird species. Its thin shell and large nutmeat are ideal for most feeder species.
- Offer a variety of seeds and food in a variety of

appropriate feeders (sunflower seed in tube, hopper, or platform feeders, thistle in tube feeders, peanuts in peanut feeders, suet in suet cages, and mixed seed on platform feeders or scattered on dry ground).

- Offer the thick-shelled gray-striped sunflower seed to cardinals, grosbeaks, jays, chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches.
- Offer safflower seed to cardinals. Squirrels and blackbirds in many parts of the continent do not like it.
- If your feeder is overrun with blackbirds, pigeons, or house sparrows, stop offering mixed seed on the ground or on platform feeders. Feed only black-oil sunflower seed in tube or hopper feeders until the problem species disperse.
- Don't offer so-called wild bird mixes in tube feeders. These are better fed on platforms or out of hopper feeders. Birds which prefer sunflower seed will just empty the feeder to get at the sunflower seeds.
- Make a brushpile near your feeder to make sparrows, towhees, and other shy birds feel more at home, but be sure it won't harbor roaming cats.
- Add natural features to your feeding station, such as branches to perch on, to make birds feel more at ease.

Hummingbird Feeding Tips

- Don't use hummingbird feeders that are difficult to clean, have many small parts.
- Do wash your hummingbird feeders thoroughly with hot, soapy water, and rinse completely, every time you refill them.
- Don't allow molds or yeasts to grow in your hummingbird feeders. When these appear, empty and scrub feeders immediately.
- When making hummingbird nectar, blend water and white table sugar in a 4 to 1 ratio (4 parts water to 1 part sugar). Add the sugar to boiling water. Bring the mixture to a boil again while stirring to dissolve the sugar, then let cool.
- Don't use insecticides, such as wasp killers, anywhere near bird feeders, especially hummingbird feeders.
- Don't use anything but white, granulated table sugar. No powdered or brown sugar, honey, molasses, red-food coloring, artificial sweeteners or nutrients should be used.

Tips for a Healthy Bird Bath

- Don't situate bird baths under feeders or perches, where droppings can fall into them.
- Rinse and scrub birdbaths daily in summer, or whenever they become fouled with bird droppings. Once a month, scrub out with a light bleach solution (1/4 cup of bleach in 2 gallons of water), rinse thoroughly and refill.

Further Reading:

- "The Problem with Bird Feeding," Eirik A. T. Blom, September/October 1999 *Bird Watcher's Digest*, pp. 88-95.
- *Enjoying Bird Feeding More* by Julie Zickefoose. Paperback, 32 pages, full color. (©1995 BWD Press, P.O. Box 110, Marietta, OH 45750. 800-879-2473. www.birdwatchersdigest.com)
- *An Identification Guide to Common Backyard Birds* by Bill Thompson, III and Eirik A.T. Blom. Paperback, 32 pages, full color. (©1995 BWD Press, P.O. Box 110, Marietta, OH 45750. 800-879-2473. www.birdwatchersdigest.com)
- *Bird Watching For Dummies* by Bill Thompson, III. Paperback, 384 pages, full color. (© 1997 IDG Books Worldwide, 919 E. Hillsdale Blvd., Suite 400, Foster City, CA 94404. www.dummies.com)
- *Backyard Bird News*, P.O. Box 110, Marietta, OH 45750. 800-879-2473. www.birdwatchersdigest.com
- For answers to frequently asked questions and links to informative feeding-related websites, visit www.birdwatchersdigest.com
- For information on participating in surveys on bird feeding and other bird-related topics, visit the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology at: www.birds.cornell.edu

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From the VNHS Mailbox

Letters to Editor

Two summers ago, violet green swallows nested in my parents' range top exhaust pipe and had found their way into the vent above the stove. It was with regret that the four chicks were evicted from the kitchen. Since then I have thought that I would like to put up a proper nest box for the swallows. I read of an interesting design at Marigold Nurseries. Instead of having the entrance hole in the front, it is in the bottom of the box which eliminates invading sparrows. Suggested dimensions for the swallow house were: back 7" across; side 10" hole 5" from back and 2.5" in diameter. To prevent eggs from rolling out the hole, an edging of garden hose can be put around the inside of the entrance. Reading the photocopy posted, I think the reference for the birdhouse is: *Peninsula News Review*, February 22, 1996, pg 32. Do any swallow observers care to comment?

Camilla Smith
View Royal

The Nasty Side of B.C. Parks policy

In recent years, the Friends of John Dean Park Society, which has been working extremely hard to protect and improve the Park since 1984, has been having problems with BC Parks. Not only have the Park authorities refused to collaborate with us on a new Covenant to cover our hands-on operations, but mainly because of our refusal to sign their bureaucratic "Stewardship Agreement" and take on significant paper-pushing administrative functions. As of June 9 '99 they have ordered us to cease all volunteer work in the Park.

What follows is the body of a letter sent on June 11, 1999 to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Denis O'Gorman, expressing our frustration at the negative attitude and obstructionist tactics of B.C. Parks management.

"Our park was donated in good faith to the people of B.C. by five public-spirited citizens, the first donation by John Dean in 1921 (making it the oldest donated Park in the Province). Your office solemnly promised to maintain and protect the property in perpetuity as a Provincial Park. So how did your office live up to this promise during the past 78 years?

Since 1944 no maintenance has been done to bridges, buildings, trails, drainage channels or any other facilities, except the washing of two toilets and emptying of the garbage cans.

John Dean's heritage log house, started in 1909, was ordered burned and bulldozed when all it needed was a new roof, a lock and a good cleaning. The log structure and granite stone foundation were in good shape.

The gazebo, built in 1941, was allowed to rot away without any maintenance being done at all.

A large amount of garbage, including washing machines, stoves, fridges, water softeners, car parts etc. was allowed to accumulate along the main access road and your staff drove by it for years.

Some 40 years ago Lieutenant Governor Woodward and philanthropist Barret Montfort donated 270 acres of beautiful pristine land to the park, but nothing was done to make this most scenic park addition accessible, not even a hiking trail for Dunsmuir Lodge visitors to use the park.

The main trail to the top of Mount Newton, the old Thunderbird trail, became a steep run-off ditch during rainstorms and severe erosion took place. Even though this happened in clear view from the road and parking lot, no one did anything about it. Other trails with similar erosion were likewise ignored.

Some trails existing in the days of John Dean became unusable because of fallen trees.

In 1998 the last garbage cans were ordered removed, and last month B.C. Parks staff tore out both outhouses, smashed the concrete table pads, dumped the pieces in the outhouse holes, and totally destroyed Freeman King's popular 65-year-old picnic site, ostensibly for safety reasons, but it would appear that you had already decided that the old picnic site was no longer to be maintained and was not to be replaced. The most beautiful of the nearby old-growth Douglas fir stand was closed to the public for no logical reason.

The most severe erosion damage usually happens during only about 4 or 5 hours of each year, yet not one park employee has ever been there at such a critical time, when his attention was desperately needed to take care of water flow problems e.g. free culverts, divert streams from trails, unblock streams etc. Is this called good park management?

In 1984 a group of seven private citizens decided that officially ordered decay had gone too far and started to clean up the incredible mess along the road. The park chief in Goldstream at that time was Don Carruthers, with whom I had worked for B.C. Parks as a park surveyor in the mid fifties, at the time that Cy Oldham was B.C. Parks chief. Carruthers agreed with what we were doing and, when asked, sent his 5 ton truck and a crew to help remove the largest of the dumped items. The smaller items we carried to the park garbage cans, which were filled many, many times. He personally inspected the trail locations we flagged and gave us written permission to construct 10 km of new trails through some of the most rugged parts of the area which had been added to the park since John Dean's original donation. We built and replaced bridges, stairs, dug in culverts, rebuilt the service road to the picnic site, etc. We did a great deal of erosion control and chainsaw work, stone gathering and

setting, all of which and much more I will show you if you decide to come and inspect the park. We are proud of what we have accomplished, all in line with the best of park standards, and call it the cleanest Class A park in B.C. It is probably the only park in the Victoria area without any man-made erosion, in spite of its extreme steepness. The park is now in excellent condition, the trails are as safe as we could make them with our limited means. Yet, since Carruthers retired, almost everything we did has been criticized. Why did you remove Dean Park from the parks list in the Parks Act as if this oldest of B.C.'s donated Parks no longer belongs in the system?

We will gladly sign a waiver that we will not hold B.C. Parks responsible for any mishap which may befall us while working in our park, but our park must remain provincial property, as was solemnly promised to the five donors so long ago. The people to whom it was donated should have the right to take an active hand in caring for this precious park when B.C. Parks staff is unable to do so."

Edo Nyland, President,
Friends of John Dean Provincial Park Society
Tel: 656-9276.
E-mail: edonon@islandnet.com

Birds in our Area

By Marie O'Shaughnessy

Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*) L 18" (46 cm)

These elegant shorebirds were photographed at Witty's Lagoon on September 14th, 1999. They were feeding in the shallow waters of the incoming tide. Reasonably approachable, Marbled Godwits, with their slightly upturned, salmon-pink, dark-tipped bill and slate-gray legs are the largest of the world's four godwits (genus *Limosa*). Similar in colour and patterning to the Long-billed Curlew, the Marbled Godwit is smaller by almost 5", but most of that is attributed to the curlew's very long bill. In flight, these birds are distinctive with their cinnamon wing linings and cinnamon wingbar. Breeding birds are tawny-brown over all and have heavy, blackish "marbling" above and barring below. Winter adults and juveniles show considerably less barring than breeding adults.

The females are typically larger than males. Nesting birds are very vocal and issue noisy cries of "God-wit or Ker-rek." They nest in wet, grassy meadows, near marshes and ponds in central North America. A few have been found to nest in Western Alaska and around James Bay. The nest consists of a hollow in beaten down grass, usually lined with dry grass. Four buffy-olive eggs make up the average clutch.

Females leave their nesting sites as early as July, with males following in August and juveniles in September. This species commonly winters along the Pacific coast from California to Mexico, with small numbers on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts and some as far south as Chile. Their winter diet is mostly mollusks, snails, worms, leeches and crustaceans.

Watch for more of these beautiful birds to appear here and along Vancouver Island's west coast each spring and fall.

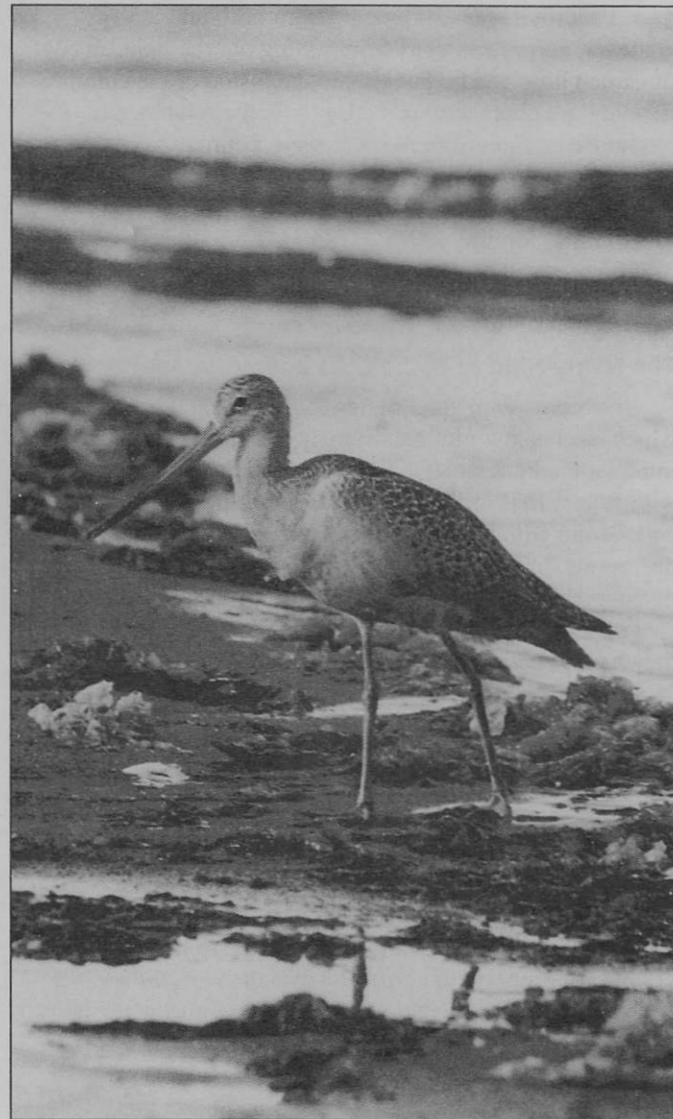


Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy

Welcome to New Members

AUGUST

Mrs. Claire Rainville
of Simcoe Street
is interested in wildlife and birding

Barrie Bird
of Epsom Drive
likes birdwatching, but is interested in all areas of natural history

Grethe Johnson
of Wallace Hall, UVic
lists wildlife rehabilitation, birds and kayaking as interests

Sally Staughton
of Linden Avenue
is interested in natural history in general and birding in particular

Jim Simmons
of Ross Street

Jill Swartz
of Queens Avenue
lists birds, botany, herbology, natural history and travel as interests

SEPTEMBER

Mike Brown
of Galliers Road

Pat MacLeod
of Seaview Road

Jenny Singleton
of Deuchars Drive
is interested in natural history interpretation. She was a member of the VNHS for many years as one of Skipper's Junior Naturalists. She is particularly interested in hearing from anyone who knew Skipper since she is collecting stories and information.

Benjamin Blackmore
of Haultain Street
is primarily interested in birdwatching, but really anything related to nature and the outdoors

Rick Searle
of Falkland Road
is interested in parks, protected areas, environmental education and stewardship

Coralee Lord
of Queenswood Drive
likes native plants

Frank Mitchell
of Witty Beach Road



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 contributed 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, 2000 to Tom Gillespie, Awards Committee Chairperson at Box 5220, Station B, Victoria, BC V8R 6N4

All 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 Tom Gillespie at 361-1694

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

REGULAR MEETINGS are generally held on the following days. **Board of Directors:** the first Tuesday of each month; **Natural History Presentations** (formally known as the General Members Meeting): the second Tuesday of each month; **Botany Night:** the third Tuesday of each month; **Parks and Conservation Committee Meeting:** the third Wednesday of each month; **Birders' Night:** the fourth Wednesday of each month; **Marine Night:** the last Monday of each month. Locations are given in the calendar listings. Telephone the VNHS Events Tape at 479-2054 for further information and updates.

OCTOBER - DECEMBER

Glorious Goldstream Offers World-class Salmon-viewing

Goldstream is a world class salmon-spawning stream with thousands of chum salmon returning between October and December. These chum salmon have traveled thousands of kilometres in their four-year lifetime and are at Goldstream to continue their life-cycle by spawning in the river. Good years have seen as many as 50,000 salmon return home to the Goldstream River. The Visitor Centre is open daily this fall/winter from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Weekend activities at the Centre include Gyotaku (Japanese fish printing), salmon slide shows, videos and interpretive programs on the hour from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. New this November is an underwater video camera, donated by Charlie White, to view salmon spawning behaviour in the Visitor Centre. Hot coffee and baked goods are available at the book/gift store and the fire is usually lit to warm you after a walk along the river to see the spawning salmon.

NOVEMBER

Sundays, November 7 to December 5

Goldstream Birds of the Salmon Run Walk

Join a naturalist for a stroll up the Goldstream River from the estuary to watch the birds enjoying this annual salmon feast. Common birds include the American Dipper, Red-breasted Sapsuckers and Golden Eagles, as well as many species of wintering gulls. Meet at the Goldstream Visitor Centre at 10:00 a.m.

Tuesday, November 9

VNHS Natural History Presentation

The Gypsy Moth: An Unwanted Visitor to British Columbia

Join **Vince Nealis** from the Pacific Forestry Centre for a presentation on the Gypsy Moth situation in British Columbia. This program will discuss the life history of this most famous of moths, as well as the ins and outs of the control program. Arm yourselves with questions and we'll see you at 7:30 p.m., Room 159, Begbie Building, UVic. Bring a coffee mug and a friend; non-members are welcome.

Sunday, November 14

Mushrooms in Thetis Lake Park

Join **Oluna and Adolf Ceska** on a mushroom walk in Thetis Lake Park, which they bird regularly. Meet at the Helmcken Park and Ride at 10:00 a.m. Call 477-1211 for more information.

Monday (not Tuesday!) November 15

Botany Night

Dr. Geraldine Allen: Plants I saw on my sabbatical.

Again, this time, and only this time, it is on MONDAY. Swan Lake Nature House, 7:30 p.m. **Adolf Ceska**, phone 250-356-7855 (work), 250-477-1211 (home).

Saturday, November 20

The Owls of Goldstream

This owl program will begin at the Goldstream Nature House with an introduction to the owls of Vancouver Island. We will then begin an evening excursion in the campground searching for these elusive birds. You must pre-register for this program as there is room for only 20 participants. Please call Goldstream at 478-9414 to reserve your space.

Sunday, November 21

Day Trip to Reifel Bird Sanctuary, Delta

David Allinson has arranged a group rate at Reifel for VNHS members for this annual outing. Participants will carpool in front of the Elk-Beaver Regional Park sign on Elk Lake Drive at 6:00 a.m. for the 7:00 a.m. sailing. With carpooling, costs will be about \$40.00 per person for this all-day birding bonanza. Pack your lunch and a thermos. Call David (478-0493 evenings) to confirm as the trip will be limited to 20 participants.

Wednesday, November 24

Birders Night

Dick Cannings of the Okanagan will present a slide-illustrated talk on "Bird Studies Canada", a look at on-going data collection programs that are underway in British Columbia and across the nation. Dick will explain how your involvement can help maintain and even re-establish healthy populations of birds. Dick is an accomplished natural history author, consultant, speaker and tour leader, and is BC's coordinator for Bird Studies Canada and western Canada's editor for Christmas Bird Counts. Everyone is welcome, bring a friend, your binocular and a coffee cup. 7:30 p.m., Room 159 Begbie Building, UVic.

Note that there will be no December Birders Night.

Saturday, November 27

Gull Identification Workshop with Dave Fraser

Learn more than you ever thought possible about the gulls that winter on Vancouver Island. Some come from as far away as the prairies to take advantage of the winter abundance of salmon. Don't be afraid of gulls! Use this as an opportunity to practice for the Christmas bird count. Meet at the Goldstream Picnic Area parking lot by the Finlayson Road bridge at 9:00 a.m. and bring adequate winter clothing and boots.

Sunday, November 28

Pelagic Birding on the M.V. Coho

The crossing takes 1-1/2 hours and is the best opportunity to see bird species (Shearwaters, Fulmars, Phalaropes) usually found further out to sea. We will be birding from the bow of the boat so dress warmly. Bring a lunch and meet at the Black Ball Ferry terminal in the Inner Harbour at 10:00 a.m. for the 10:30 a.m. sailing of the M.V. Coho (allow plenty of time for parking). Ferry cost is \$13.50 (US) return (\$20.00 Can), and it is a good idea to have some ID with you for customs. We'll return on the 2:00 p.m. sailing. Leader TBA.

Monday, November 29

Marine Night

Hot Vents: Oases of the Deep

Jean Marcus of the University of Victoria will present an overview of life on deep ocean hot vents and will also report on her own research about the recolonizing of a vent on Axial Seamount off the coast of Washington, after a recent eruption. **Phil Lambert** is Marine Night Co-ordinator. 7:30 p.m., Swan Lake Nature Centre. Everyone welcome.

DECEMBER

December 6 through February 29

The Eagles Have Landed!

Visit the Nature House on the estuary at Goldstream Provincial Park during this year's Eagle Extravaganza. There are excellent viewing opportunities as hundreds of Bald Eagles feed on spawned-out salmon carcasses. The Nature House is open daily all winter from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. There will be birds of prey exhibits and great eagle viewing through spotting scopes and video cameras. Call 478-9414 for information on special programs and guest speakers happening every weekend!

Tuesday, December 14

VNHS Natural History Presentation

Members Night

December is Members' Night. Sip hot apple cider and meet with friends for an evening of Christmas cheer and slide presentations on

interesting topics and destinations by our many talented members. If you wish to make a presentation, please contact **Bruce Whittington** at the Field Naturalist (388-4174). 7:30 p.m., Room 159, Begbie Building, UVic. Bring a coffee mug and a friend; non-members are welcome.

JANUARY

Saturday, January 1, 2000

First Birding Trip of the New Millennium

Get the century off to a good start! Great excuse to start a new bird list. Join **Kevin Slagboom** for a birding walk in the Layritz, Glendale, Quicks Bottom, Viaduct Flats area. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at Layritz Park.

Wednesday, January 26, 2000

Birders Night

"Members' Night", inviting anyone with a few slides and a brief talk to participate. If by chance you can't get in touch with me, go with that, with a note that those wanting to participate should leave their name and phone number on the Rare Bird Alert. 7:30 p.m., Room 159 Begbie Building, UVic.

FEBRUARY

Wednesday, February 23, 2000

Birders' Night

Join **Barbara Murphy** of Australia, Travel Specialist in Natural Holidays, for a slide illustrated talk entitled *Australia - Travel to Natural Places*. Enjoy her selection of birds and other wildlife in out-of-the-way places in this unique look at 'down underland'. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend, your binocular and a coffee cup. 7:30 p.m., Room 159 Begbie Building, UVic.

BULLETIN BOARD

VNHS Help Wanted

Building a strong public presence as well as attracting new members are the main goals of the VNHS publicity committee. And with the continued support of our society members, these goals can be easily reached.

VNHS Presentations tables volunteers

Over the last year, the VNHS publicity committee has successfully represented our society at over 16 shows, venues and events. This could not have been done without the continued support of our

members who have helped staff our VNHS display presentation tables. This year, we hope to continue this important publicity activity however, we need more members to help staff our tables. Ideally, we would like a large group of volunteers to draw from so that no one person is asked to help us more than once.

New Editor

Your *Naturalist* needs a new editor as Glen Moores is looking forward to retiring. Please call **Kevin Slagboom** at 658-0940.



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Draw at the V.N.H.S. Annual Banquet Feb. 8, 2000
Winner will be contacted by V.N.H.S.



Tickets from V.N.H.S. Directors, Regular Meetings and the Field Naturalist