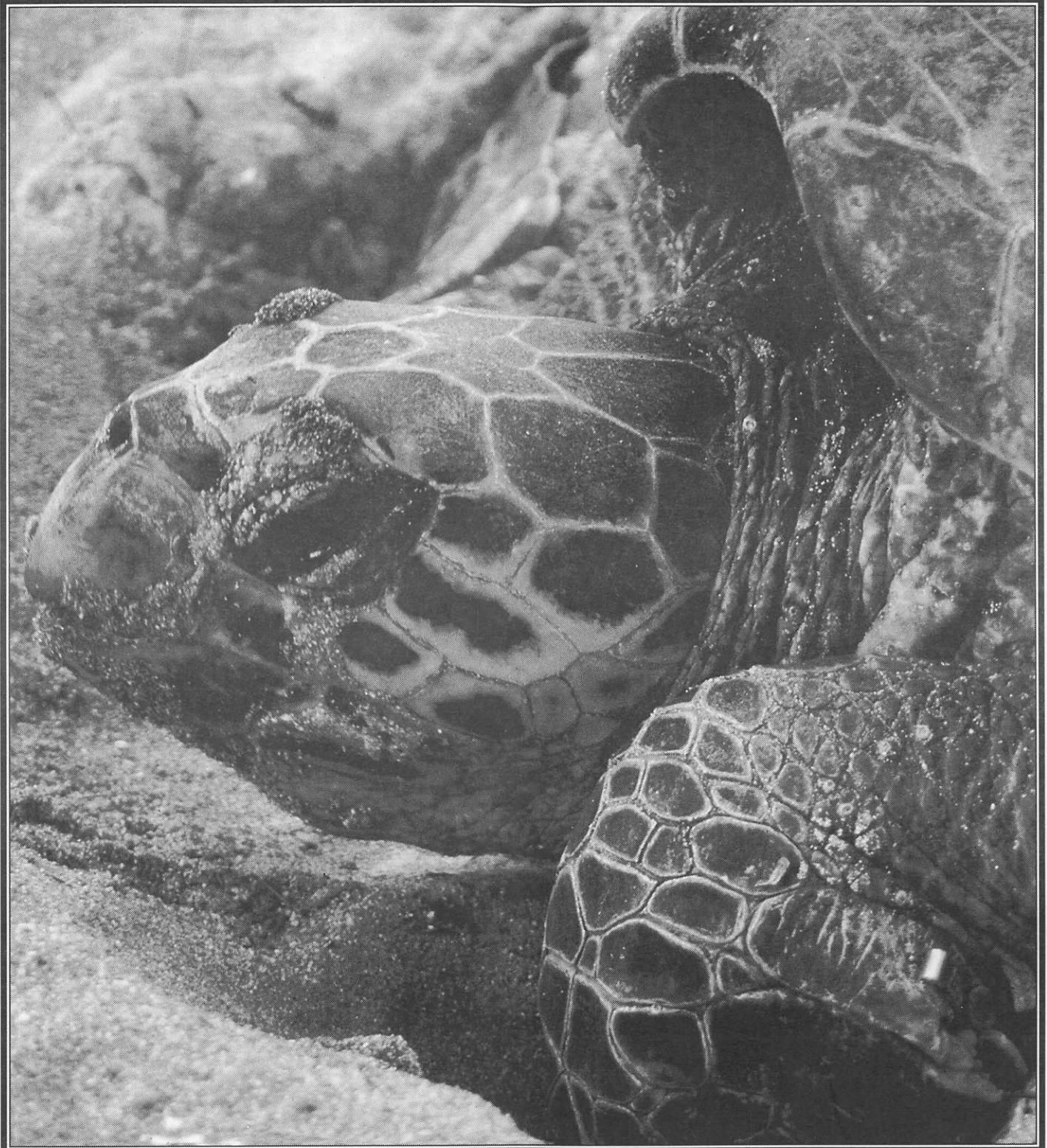




# The Victoria NATURALIST

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Hawksbill Turtle, Cousin Island, Seychelles by Alan E. Burger	

## EDITORS' NOTE

For a significant part of our lives, autumn means change and a return to learning. With this autumn issue we think of the change from having a direct connection with the sources of our nourishment and the cyclical nature of our lives to present day trends of convenience food available "24 and 7" for 365 days of the year. It is our disconnection from our natural, biological roots that seems to have fooled us into thinking that we can "improve on Mother Nature" as was heard at a "public hearing" regarding the fate of the wetland at Hull's Field featured in an article this month.

Learning for our entire lives is something we all must do, creating change in the way we look at the natural world. Change does not necessarily mean physical growth. It can mean growth in our understanding of the interconnectedness of all biological creatures. It can also mean helping others to grow in their understanding.

Resistance to change is everywhere around us, but nowhere more noticeable than in the approaches taken by our political bodies to the natural world. We still see political "leaders" fostering the myth of infinite growth of the human economy at the expense of the natural world. Those of us who have a greater understanding of our natural roots must now step up to lead our communities forward toward living compatibly with the other members of the biosphere, before we have no reason for the existence of our naturalists' society.

In the upcoming months we hope to make our own small changes, not to the format or content of the *Naturalist* but to the methods of distributing information. We hope to be including parts of the *Naturalist* on a revitalized VNHS web presence, as well as instituting an electronic naturalist community via e-mail.

Everyone has stories to tell. One thing you can do to help lead change is to share your natural history stories with others. Why not share them through the *Naturalist*? We look forward to hearing from you.

*Marilyn and Ross*

# Seabirds, Skinks and Sea Shells in the Seychelles

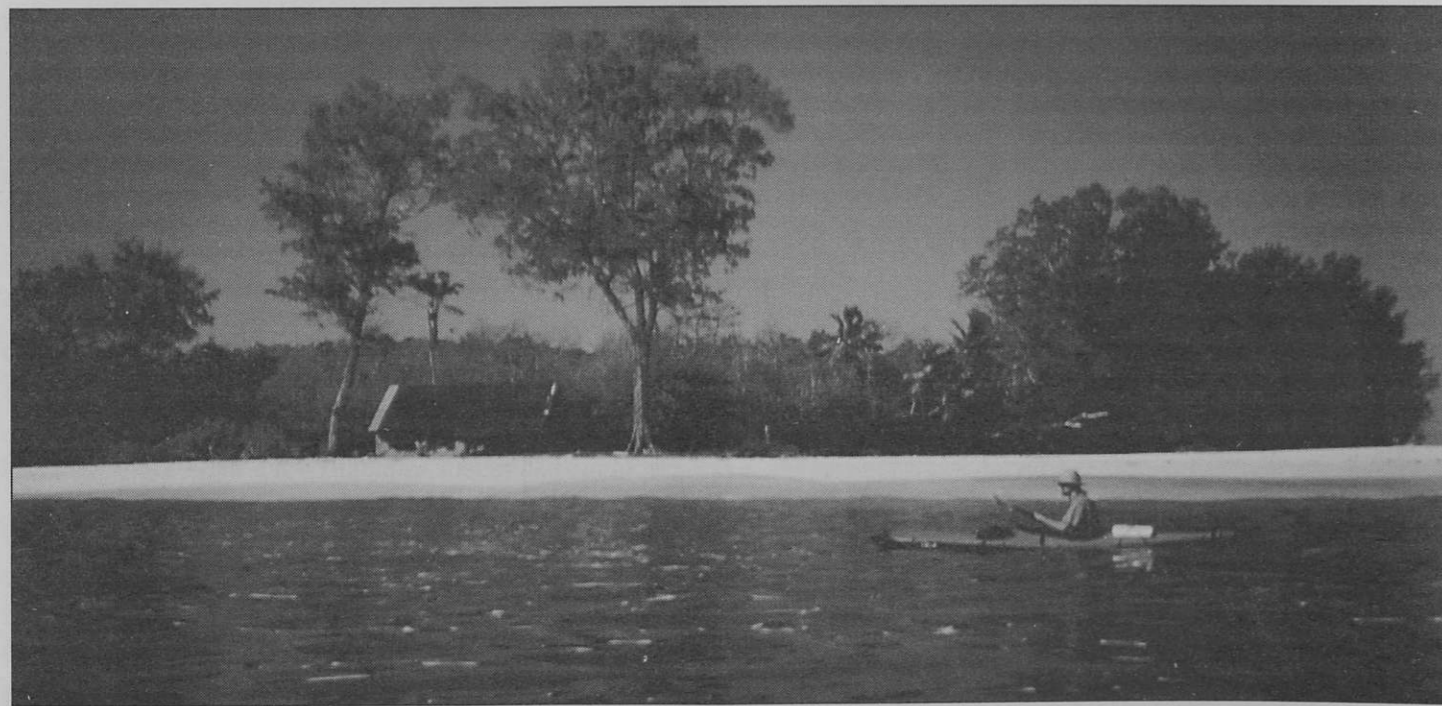
By Alan E. Burger

Tourist propaganda promotes the Seychelles islands as "Paradise". Situated four degrees south of the equator in the western Indian Ocean, and blessed with stunning beaches, golden granite outcrops, and marvelous coral reefs, much of the Seychelles is, indeed, a tropical paradise. My wife Andrea and I were fortunate to live on one of the most exquisite of all the Seychelles islands: Cousin Island (pronounced the French way: Koosan). Andrea was there for eight months and I for a year. Our son Corey was also there for 6 months, boarding with a Seychellois family on nearby Praslin Island. We had a one-year contract with BirdLife Seychelles, the local branch of the conservation group BirdLife International, to develop methods and a handbook for censusing and monitoring seabirds. Large populations of 15 species of seabirds, including terns, noddies, tropicbirds, shearwaters, boobies and frigatebirds, breed on many of the 115 islands which make up the far-flung Republic of Seychelles.

On arrival on Cousin in April 1999 we quickly realized that we didn't have to go far to find the seabirds we were to study. The leafy trees surrounding the research house were dripping with Lesser Noddies, building their fragile nests of leaves held together with droppings and blind faith. Brown

Noddies were clamorously setting up house in the crowns of coconut trees shading our house. White-tailed Tropicbirds nested at the base of the trees and under logs. One pair even raised a chick under our bedroom. White (Fairy) Terns were incubating or raising their single chicks on precarious nests — usually just a notch on a branch. One pair was nesting on the eaves of our porch. At nightfall we were treated to a chorus of Audubon's Shearwaters coming in to their nest burrows in the forest behind the house, while the eerie calls of thousands of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters echoed from the granite hillside.

Over the ensuing months we got to know these, and the other inhabitants of our tiny 27-hectare island, very well. Most of our work involved developing and testing methods for censusing these seabirds and monitoring their breeding success. Tropical seabirds have not received the same attention as temperate or polar seabirds and so there were few established methods. Tropical seabirds are also often difficult to count and study. Several species nest in large trees, making it hard to see and count them, let alone determine nest success. Many species have no seasons, but nest year-round in variable numbers. Even the seasonal species tend to be rather unsynchronized in their breeding. The



Alan Burger kayaking off Cousin Island, Seychelles. Research house in background. *Photo: Andrea Lawrence*

Bridled Tern has a unique cycle where they all breed synchronously every nine months.

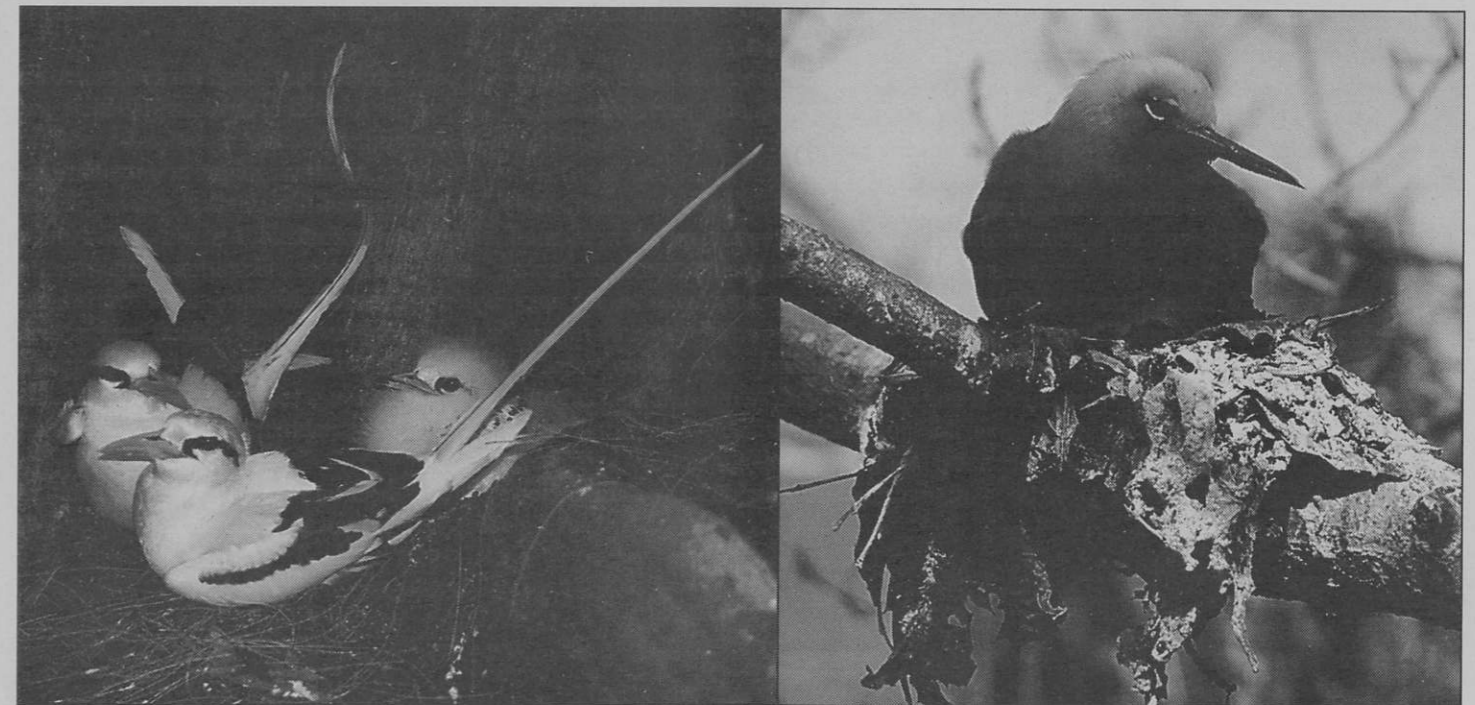
We spent many hot and sweaty days bashing through the lush forest while testing for the optimal size and number of census plots, comparing random and systematic sampling, measuring chick growth, recording breeding success, and many other variations in monitoring methodology. Eventually we worked out efficient methods which could be applied throughout the Seychelles Islands, and at the same time censused our local species: 600 pairs of Bridled Terns, 3,500 White-tailed Tropicbirds, 5,000 Audubon's Shearwaters, 13,000 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, and more than 82,000 pairs of Lesser Noddies.

Working with the shearwaters was an interesting challenge. Both species remain at sea during the day and come in to their nests at night. At dusk thousands of shearwaters gather around the island, swirling gracefully above the wave tops in the golden glow of sunset. Both species nest in deep twisting cavities and the only reliable way to determine how many cavities and burrows were occupied was to use the call-playback method. We played tapes of their calls from a ghetto-blaster near the mouth of each cavity in our census plots. If a bird were present it would call back or poke its head out to see who was intruding. So we spent many nights clambering about on the granite hillside or in the deep forest playing shearwater tapes. We also attached simple gauges to measure the depths to which these shearwaters dived when foraging at sea. We discovered that they are amazingly skilled divers: both species regularly dive deeper than 15 metres, and Audubon's are capable of reaching 35 metres and Wedge-tailed 66 metres deep. Like the penguins and auks, these shearwaters use their wings to "fly" underwater.

As on many oceanic islands, the fauna and flora of

Seychelles have been hard hit by the arrival of people. The islands were uninhabited until the 18th Century, but since then people, cats, dogs, pigs and rats have devastated and extirpated many populations of birds. Relatively few species have gone extinct, but some are holding on by their toenails. There are fewer than 80 Seychelles Magpie Robins alive today (25 on Cousin). The magnificent Seychelles Black Paradise Flycatcher is restricted to one island where there are about 80 pairs. The Seychelles Scops Owl is found only on one island and no one really knows how many there are. A BirdLife team discovered the first nest of this rare owl during our stay. Katy Holm, a volunteer from Victoria, was part of the team that later found the first owl chick. There are some encouraging success stories though. Cousin Island was first bought in 1967 and set-aside as a nature reserve to save the Seychelles Warbler. At that time there were only 25 birds, restricted to a tiny patch of mangroves, because their forest habitat had been cleared for a coconut plantation. As the indigenous forest recovered, so did the warbler populations. Today there are over 300 on Cousin and another 2,000 on two nearby islands where they were translocated.

The birds are not the only wildlife stars on Cousin. The coral reefs around the Island are a marine protected area and support huge and diverse populations of colourful reef fish. Cowries and other wonderful shells litter the beaches. Dozens of huge fruit bats flap over every night from their day roosts on Praslin Island. Ghost crabs and huge hermit crabs crawl about on the beaches and the damp forest floor. The island reputedly supports the highest density of reptiles in the world. Most of these are skinks; two species living mostly on the forest floor which benefit from a rich rain of eggs, chicks and feces falling from the thousands of noddy nests in the trees above. Each tree also supports a healthy population of



White-tailed Tropicbirds with chick. *Photo: Alan Burger*

Lesser Noddy on Cousin Island. *Photo: Alan Burger*

geckos: little emerald-green ones and large bronze ones. Several hundred Hawksbill Turtles use Cousin for nesting and we encountered laying females on many occasions. Giant land tortoises have also been re-introduced to Cousin Island and spend their days lumbering about the forest, or wallowing in the marsh during the rainy season. The grass around our house was kept neatly mowed by these slow, friendly giants, and if our doorways had been any wider they would no doubt have come right in.

Most of the other creatures did not have the same restrictions or inhibitions about entering the house. The doors and windows were always open and there was a regular flyway through the rooms. Seychelles Turtle-doves would regularly wander through the living room looking for crumbs. Swarms of skinks lived in the kitchen waiting for scraps or an unguarded plate of food. Geckos studded the upper walls. A family of Common Moorhens constantly lurked outside the kitchen door and snuck in when no one was around. The worst offenders were the Seychelles Fodies — drab sparrow-like birds that are also rather rare and restricted to only three small islands. They are supreme opportunists and in the forest make a living stealing eggs from terns and noddies, in addition to their normal fare of insects and fruit. In the house any unguarded food was fair game — or rather “fare” game. We ate most of our meals on the porch, just metres from the white sandy beach and with a stunning view of the ocean and other islands. But if we left our food for even a few seconds to get something in the kitchen we would return to find the plate buried under a

flock of fodies, backed up by skinks and sometimes even one of the rare Magpie-robins. The novelty of this wore thin after a week or two.

Despite the exotic nature surrounding us, there were some familiar faces. Small but reliable numbers of shorebirds over-winter in Seychelles, including the enigmatic Crab Plover from Arabia and the Horn of Africa. Some of these shorebirds are the same species commonly seen around Victoria: Sanderlings, Whimbrel, and Black-bellied Plover, for example. Ruddy Turnstones are the most common shorebird, but like most things in Seychelles their lifestyle has some unexpected quirks. In addition to their normal rocky habitat, they often forage deep in the gloom of the tropical forest, turning over leaves and sticks to catch the small native cockroaches and numerous spiders. Cattle Egrets nest and roost at night on Cousin but spend the day foraging on the large island of Praslin 2 km away. The sight of small flocks of roost-bound Cattle Egrets, dodging shearwaters and being mobbed by White Terns, as they flew over the water at sunset epitomised much of our Seychelles experience: even a familiar species finds itself in exotic circumstances. We felt the same way ourselves.

*Join Dr. Burger for an illustrated talk about his recent research trip to the Seychelles Islands, Tuesday, September 12 at 7:30 p.m., Room 159 Begbie Building, University of Victoria.*



### RPBO Welcomes Members and Volunteers

Rocky Point Bird Observatory memberships (\$25 per year) are available by contacting **Tom Gillespie**, Treasurer, 361-1694 (thomasw.gillespie@telus.net). RPBO could not run without volunteer field assistants. If you are interested in volunteering some time during the upcoming field season (mid-July to midthish-Oct.), or if you wish to attend one of the upcoming evening information sessions, please contact **Bev Glover**, Site Manager at 721-1476 (glov203@uvvm.uvic.ca).

## Some Call It Indian Summer

By Brenda Beckwith and Cheryl Bryce

*For thousands of years, the Lekwungen family groups occupied lands from Albert Head to Cordova Bay. Their territory also includes the smaller off-shore islands (e.g. Discovery and Chatham islands) as well as the San Juan Islands. In 1844, most of these family groups came together to live on the western shore of the modern-day Inner Harbour of Victoria and became known as the Songhees Nation. In 1911, the Songhees were relocated to the northeast side of Esquimalt Harbour and presently reside there.*

### Lekwungen Summer

In waves of purple along the green shore  
I see you standing there proud and beautiful  
tempting the yellow backs with your nesting nectar.

To protect your precious fruit I weave on through.  
Praying for your strength and nurturing power  
I watch you grow and wait to savor your essence.

Your sacrifice is not forgotten. I come with gifts of respect.  
My feet drum with the heartbeat of the earth.  
As my hands shake to the rattling repetition of the gestating seeds.  
I watch the future fall before me.

With the flame of fertility  
I brush your sacred seeds with my ancestors' song.  
In the stamina of my families' dance  
I give you protection through winter's rest.

It is a blessing to witness your gifts and share your offerings.  
In your honor I have brought the power of the sun and return your sacredness.

— Cheryl Bryce

This is the Lekwungen summer of many years ago. This is a time when the bountiful crops of the year, including the sweet camas bulbs<sup>1</sup> and clams have been gathered from choice, often family owned, sites and are waiting to be properly prepared for winter. The fall harvests for shellfish and chum salmon have already begun. Though before turning attention wholly to this work, the land will be fired to cleanse and clear it for winter's sleep.

The broad scale fires are purposely lit near the water and allowed to burn toward the hills. The flames move rapidly consuming only the driest and finest of fuels, dancing in eddies behind oaks and crackling through the open, wind-swept prairies. The blackened earth captures the sun's rays during the day and keeps the soil warm. Together with the fall rains, the

<sup>1</sup> Bulbs from the camas lily (*Camassia quamash*, *C. leichtlinii*) were a primary source of carbohydrate for the Lekwungen family groups. Cooked camas bulbs were eaten fresh, dried and stored, and widely traded.

underground world of roots, bulbs, and seeds begin to reallocate their reserves and renew their structures. The earth is reclaiming the impacts of intensive human efforts.

The burning of the landscape is not simply a chore, but a learned and shared responsibility. Burning represents an integral relationship of trust between people and their environment. The fires are an annual rite of passage between a summer of abundant gathering and a winter of gracious consumption.

This is also a time for specialized summer groups to reconvene in the villages to begin the important tasks of drying, preserving, and storing all the resources that were acquired over the summer. Everything that was not eaten or otherwise used immediately will be procured and processed. This is a concentrated and coordinated effort, by elders and youth alike, in preparation for a season of ceremonies and feasts.

This is the Songhees summer of today. An intimate sense of place remains strong though many of the special sites of gathering and fishing have disappeared or are no longer available. Many of the traditional foods that are necessary to maintain a healthy diet are either inaccessible or are no longer safe to gather.

The burning of the land has not occurred for over one hundred years though many feel this is a responsibility that should be preserved. Modern-day issues, such as unemployment, diabetes, and school dropout rates, now consume a significant amount of attention and time.

Some important cultural resources, such as salmon and berries, are still annually procured by family groups. The songs and ceremonies associated with the harvests and land management of prehistory are remembered. Harvesters today, especially those who have never gathered from the land before, come away with epiphanies of connectedness and openness. This bond is not only a spatial one, but temporal as well. The eternal link remains intact because those who tended the land over many centuries before did so responsibly and with integrity.

There was one small camas harvest and pit cook earlier this summer. There may be one small prescribed fire to cleanse the site this fall. Slowly, the link grows stronger.

As Lekwungen summer draws to a close, the shorter days and cooler nights will blanket the earth as she rests through winter's ceremonies.

BRENDA BECKWITH is a Ph.D. Candidate, Biology Department and School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria; 472-4694.

CHERYL BRYCE is a member and employee of the Songhees Nation, and descendent of Cheetlum, a Douglas Treaty signatory; 386-1043.

# Hull's Wetland

By Ray Williams and Eric Rome

**H**ull's Field is a seasonal wetland adjacent to Langford Lake. It is typically flooded for about six months during the fall, winter and spring, then relatively dry for several months in summer. The land is in the Agricultural Land Reserve but there is no agricultural activity. For thirty-five years the wetland has been recovering from its use as a potato farm and is slowly returning to a more natural state.

Historically, the water level in Langford Lake was higher than at present. As the lake level rose each winter, water flowed from Langford Lake into the wetland and then south, toward Esquimalt Lagoon. Fish and other aquatic life in Langford Lake probably invaded the wetland in the winter to find shelter and food when it was inundated with water. The hydrology of the area was disrupted in the first half of the century by the construction of the E & N Railway, road building, farming and the dredging of Langford Creek at the north end of the lake. The combined effect of all this engineering caused the flow from Hull's Field and Langford Lake to reverse. Water that gathers in the wetland now flows to the north, into Langford Lake and on into the Goldstream River.

In late October the rains begin in earnest and the wetland once again begins to take on its watery face. It's also the time of year when the Northern Saw Whet Owls migrate through our area. The trees around the wetland are regular roosting spots for these tiny owls. A little luck and a careful search of the trees at about eye level, with particular attention to the area where the branches join the trunks, may reveal one of these eight inch predators. Red-breasted Sapsuckers also pick this time of year to return to our area, but these "quiet" members of the woodpecker family often go about unnoticed.

At the west end of the wetland, the distance between Langford and Glen Lakes is at its narrowest. The rains of October and November raise the water table and flood the wetland, making a good water route for River Otters to travel between the two lakes. This route has been used by the otters for many years but as they travel at night, the otters are seldom seen.

The number of waterfowl utilizing the wetland increases as the winter rains continue to fall through December. Many ducks and geese are here for the winter. The sparrows that shelter in the surrounding bushes may be year round residents or winter visitors. The tree frogs buried deep in the mud of the field and salamanders curled up among the roots of the Douglas Fir trees are here for life.

Entering the new year, the vegetation in and around the wetland is at its bleakest. Last year's blooms have been returned to the earth to form nourishment for the coming year's flowery display. The bare bushes and barren plants are not without life, however. Song, White-crowned, Golden-



crowned and Fox Sparrows rest and forage among the plants and bushes. The Song Sparrow is a year round resident of the wetland while other sparrows arrive in the fall and stay until the breeding urge comes upon them in the spring. Besides these four common sparrows, three other much rarer sparrows have been observed at the in the winter — White-throated Sparrow, Harris' Sparrow, and the rarest of all, the Swamp Sparrow. Normally, the Swamp Sparrow spends its winters along the Gulf of Mexico, so it was quite a find when a Swamp Sparrow was spotted in the blackberry bushes of Hull's Field during a Christmas Bird Count.

California Quail, Spotted Towhee, Northern Flicker, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, American Robin, and Red-tailed Hawk are just a few of the year round residents of the wetland.

Early in the year, the wetland is still flooded to its maximum as winter rains continue to fall. This is waterfowl season and hundreds of ducks and geese use the flooded fields to rest, feed and to find a mate. A survey of this wetland would find Northern Shovelers, Green-winged Teals, Mallards, American Widgeons, American Coots, Ring-necked Ducks, Northern Pintails, Common Goldeneyes and Buffleheads. On a good day, a lucky observer can find Wood Ducks and Eurasian Widgeons as well.

For a week or so in our coldest winters, the shallow waters of the wetland freeze and the waterfowl leave for the



open waters of Langford and Glen Lakes or the sheltered waters of Esquimalt Lagoon. Then the wildest creatures invade the wetland at Hull's Field. Skates, sticks and pucks are in and birds are out. It's a short and furious time because warmer weather is always just around the corner and the fields once again belong to the wildlife.

In late January flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds return to roam Hull's Wetland in noisy bands. Then within a two-week period in late February or early March, male Pacific Treefrogs begin their spring chorus in hopes of attracting a mate. This chorus often begins in earnest on Valentine's Day! The treefrogs are the harbinger of spring and for the next two months their singing will be heard until one night all that is heard is silence, the chorus finished for another year.

Early March brings the first Rufous Hummingbirds, Tree Swallows and Violet-green Swallows. The hummingbirds search for the early blooming Red currant and Devil's club and the swallows take advantage of insect hatches brought on by the warming weather.

April and May are a time of growth in Hull's Wetland. Taking advantage of the growth are the northbound migratory birds that stop to feed and rest in the field and its environs. Western Wood Peewees, Yellow-rumped Warblers and Western Tanagers are just some of the migratory birds that use the trees around the wetland during migration. Many shorebirds, including Common Snipe, Short-billed

Dowitchers, Lesser Yellowlegs, Dunlin, Semipalmated Plovers and, on occasion, Solitary Sandpipers stop to feed in and around the wetland.

The bulk of the summer resident birds return at this time and nest building begins in earnest. Joining Marsh Wrens, Common Yellowthroats and Red-winged Blackbirds nesting in the Bulrushes, are Virginia Rails and Soras. Killdeer nest in the wetland also, but prefer the drier, rocky area near the railway tracks or the short open grasses near the water's edge.

In late May, Mallards and Canada Geese parade their

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Then the wildest creatures invade the wetland at Hull's Field. Skates, sticks and pucks are in and birds are out. It's a short and furious time because warmer weather is always just around the corner and the fields once again belong to the wildlife.

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families out of their well hidden nest sites to feed on the rich vegetation and insect life in the murky pools. Swainson's Thrushes sing their whistled song from thickets and Northern Flickers spend a larger portion of their day on the ground in pursuit of ants and grubs.

The Common (Ring-necked) Pheasant population on Vancouver Island has plummeted in recent decades as more and more fields are turned into housing developments. Fortunately, this pheasant has been able to survive in Hull's Field but because it spends

most of its time among the tall grasses, it is seldom seen. It is not until late May or early June that we realize the pheasant has survived another winter, for in breeding season it is impossible for a sunrise to sneak by a male Common Pheasant. Its "kok-cack" call can be heard with the rising sun as it advertises for a mate. Its cousin, the California Quail, can be heard all year long but is more vocal during the summer months. Its "chicago-chicago" call can be heard throughout the day as the covey travels in search of food.

June and July are months of rebirth as young birds begin to leave the nest and young mammals begin to make their first excursions in Hull's Field. A walk in the field in early morning, or just before sunset, may reward the careful observer with a view of a Black-tailed Doe and her new born fawn, or a bouncing brown bundle of fur, which bursts from under foot and materializes into a young Cotton-tail Rabbit.

This is the time of year that butterflies are numerous, as they feed on the nectar amid pollen of the flowering plants. Anise, Western Tiger, Pale Swallowtail, Lorquin, Admiral, Pacific Orange Tip, Mourning Cloak and Western White butterflies are just some of the many species that are found around the wetland.

Not all the small creatures that inhabit the wetland are as easy to see or as appealing to the eye. Both Clouded and Western Red-backed Salamanders can be found in Hull's Wetland; not easily, but they can be found. They hide among the rubble under the Douglas fir trees and can be found there only with much luck. The Clouded Salamander is much rarer in British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest than the Western Red-backed Salamander. It is generally only found on Vancouver Island, with a few records from the Fraser Valley, completely absent from Washington State and once again found in Oregon State. The reason for this strange distribution pattern is anyone's guess.

Violet-green, Tree and Barn Swallows swoop over the wetland capturing thousands of airborne insects. Sleek crested Cedar Waxwings, one of our latest summer breeders, picks this time of year to raise its young due to the ample food supply of insects and berries. From perches in adjacent

trees, Pacific-slope, Olive-sided and Willow Flycatchers dart out to catch their share of winged insects, and as dusk approaches, Common Nighthawks and several species of bats join in the feast.

August is a period of transition as the young birds and mammals of the wetland struggle to survive. They are joined by large numbers of southbound migratory birds. Arbutus and Cascara berries begin to ripen and become nutritious food for Band-tail Pigeons, American Robins and newly arrived

Varied Thrushes. Brightly coloured American Goldfinches and House Finches are attracted to seed heads of the Canada Thistle and spend much of their time feeding on the seeds.

Overcast days in August and early September are good times to watch for high soaring Vaux's and Black Swifts as they wheel and circle over the field. Savannah Sparrows arrive in large numbers in September and feed on seeds and tiny insects.

Warblers stop to glean insects from leaves and branches. Steller's Jays and Varied Thrushes begin to arrive and take up residence for the winter.

The hummingbirds and swallows disappear in late August and by the end of September, most of the flycatchers have departed. Sparrows arrive in numbers and while some tarry just long enough to feed before continuing their southbound flight, many stop and stay the winter in the wetland at Hull's Field.

A natural, wetland ecosystem now exists that benefits Langford Lake and the surrounding area. The wetland was designated an "Environmentally Sensitive Area" in Langford's Official Community Plan (adopted March 1996). Other communities in North America, where wetlands have been destroyed by development, now understand, often too late, that wetlands serve an important purpose. In some areas millions of dollars are being spent trying to recreate wetlands and fish habitat that have been ruined simply by neglect of natural processes.

The "wildest creatures" threaten soon to return to Hull's Wetland, this time not with instruments of play, but with dinosaur-like machines, in order to improve on nature. A proposal has been put forward to create a commercial-residential development on a significant portion of the wetland. The "Coalition of Langford Residents" has been working for months to preserve this valuable wetland. For more information and to volunteer your assistance contact the Coalition at: [clrmessage@home.com](mailto:clrmessage@home.com).

RAY WILLIAMS *has lived near the wetland for 20 years. He was previously a Director of VNHS.*

ERIC ROME *lives near the wetland and has explored it in all seasons.*

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The "wildest creatures" threaten soon to return to Hull's Wetland, this time not with instruments of play, but with dinosaur-like machines, in order to improve on nature.

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# Victoria Natural History Society

## Member Survey Results Summary

By Ann Nightingale

During the fall and winter of 1999/2000, VNHS members were asked to complete a membership survey to be used to guide the direction of the Society. Special thanks go to Marie O'Shaughnessy and her publicity team for co-ordinating the survey distribution and collection.

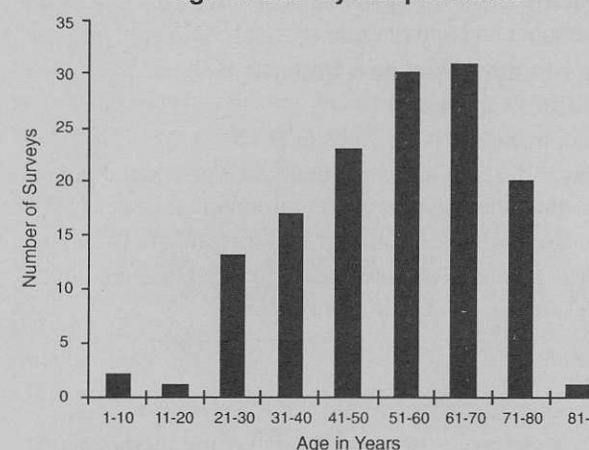
This spring, the results were tabulated, thanks to the efforts of Denise Gubersky, and have been shared with the VNHS Board. The following summary has been prepared to provide the members with an overview of the results. Full results will be available at VNHS meetings and on our website.

### Who are we?

Of a membership of 750, approximately 20% of us are the kinds of people who will fill out surveys. This is considered a good return on a mail out survey, but the results must be viewed with the recognition that there was no input from the majority of the members. This may be due in part to a number of members joining to support the efforts of VNHS, but who are unable to fully participate in the regular activities of the Society.

The respondents are mature (with only three members under 20 included in the survey) and the majority live in Saanich, Victoria, or Oak Bay. The following chart shows the age distribution of the respondents.

Age of Survey Respondents



We enjoy a wide-range of mostly-outdoor activities, and are members of many other organizations. The most frequently mentioned "non-naturalist" activities were gardening (66), hiking (65), and photography (32). Most of us have one day a week or less for our leisure activities.

### Role of VNHS

The respondents listed education, promotion of natural history awareness, providing an information exchange, and serving as an advocate for conservation efforts as the primary functions of the VNHS. There was a very strong interest in the local context. Many of the members also belonged to regional, national and international environmental organizations and may have felt their support for these groups complemented the local focus of the VNHS.

While there was strong support for VNHS attempting to influence governments, there was a divided response as to whether VNHS should take positions on issues or simply provide information and encourage members to take individual stands. Some members spoke of VNHS as an umbrella organization, providing links to other groups for those members who wished to become active for certain causes, but providing a comfortable place for novice naturalists to exchange information and discover their areas of interest.

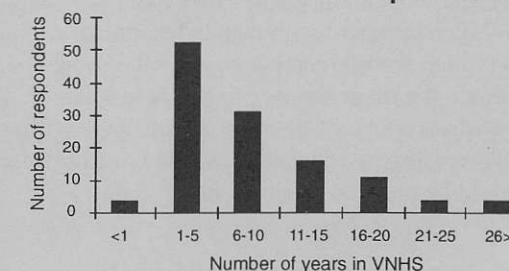
### Membership

The survey responses generally supported activities to increase membership, especially for younger members. However, several respondents suggested we be cautious in duplicating efforts of other groups such as Swan Lake/Christmas Hill, CRD Parks and Goldstream Nature House.

Welcoming the public to events was seen by many respondents as a way of attracting new members. Several members commented that free attendance for non-members should be limited — either by restricting participation to certain events, providing event "coupons" or limiting the number of free events anyone can attend before becoming a member.

Improvement of services for and better integration of new members was seen by many as a way of increasing the number of our members who actively participate in the activities of the Society. The following chart shows the length of membership of survey respondents:

Years of membership in VNHS



## Current Activities

The level of activity in the VNHS by the vast majority of members is minimal. All of the current activities were supported by the respondents, with the favorite being events for members and the least favourite being the VNHS Events Tape. Several respondents indicated they were hesitant to comment as they did not actually participate in most activities.

### Rankings of current activities (continue/stop)

1. Events for members (81/0)
2. Publication of the *Victoria Naturalist* and membership brochures (73/0)
3. Rare Bird Alert Hotline (73/0)
4. Christmas Bird Count (70/0)
5. Distribution and maintenance of nesting boxes (69/0)
6. Liaison with other environmental organizations in the region (68/0)
7. Support of VNHS Habitat Acquisition Trust (69/1)
8. Construction of bird blinds at local areas of conservation interest (67/0)
9. Campaigns to save threatened local wildlife, plants and habitat (66/0)
10. Fund-raising such as raffles, book sales, etc. (60/0)
11. Goldstream Art Show (59/2)
12. Greenways Inventory Project (55/0)
13. Representation at shows (such as peninsula Country Market, Native Vegetation Symposium) (54/0)
14. Events for non-members (51/1)
15. Financial Support for local environmental organizations (50/5)
16. VNHS Events Tape (49/7)

Several respondents expressed apprehension about increasing activities, concerned that it might spread the active membership too thinly. Many members participate in other groups and activities, and as a result, have limited time to offer to the VNHS.

## The Naturalist

*The Naturalist* received overwhelming support from most survey respondents. Several indicated it was the main reason they joined the VNHS. Many recommended that no changes be made, although others proposed injecting some controversy into this forum. Several respondents suggested reprinting articles from past issues to add to the content.

The cost of the publication was mentioned by several respondents. While a number recommended technical improvements (which would increase costs), others suggested paring down the magazine or printing it less frequently to cut costs. About half the respondents were willing to have more advertising to offset costs, while none indicated advertising should be reduced or eliminated.

## Events

For the most part, existing events were supported, with Natural History Night and Birders' Night leading the group. Several members suggested that field trips on days other than Saturday or Sunday would interest them. There were also suggestions that a wider variety of field trips should be offered and recognition that this could only happen if volunteer leaders could be found.

The idea of paying for local field trips was not supported, although some respondents thought that non-members should pay a nominal fee. There was support for a greater number of out-of-town trips, provided the fees weren't too high.

While a few members (8) indicated that they would attend more events if the meeting nights were changed, the majority (67) would not.

### Rankings of current events (favourites/least favourites)

1. Natural History Night (53/2)
2. Birders' Night (50/0)
3. Birding Field Trips (42/0)
4. Christmas Bird Count (41/0)
5. Intertidal Field Trips (27/1)
6. Spring Bird Count (28/8)
7. Annual Banquet (28/9)
8. Botany Night (18/3)
9. Butterfly Counts (17/3)
10. Botany Field Trip (15/2)
11. Marine Night (13/4)
12. Valentine's Day Bird Count (5/6)

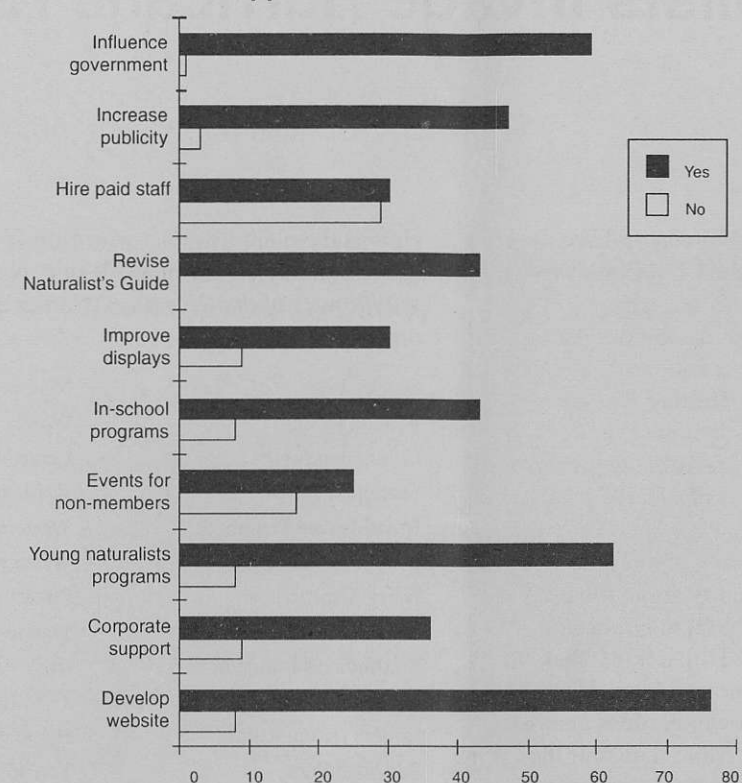
## New Activities

Most of the suggested events were quite strongly supported, with the exceptions of paid staff and more events for non-members. Concerns were expressed by some members that member resources may not be sufficient to accomplish all the listed desirable goals. Some members expressed a need for a more prominent and activist role for the VNHS.

### Ranking of suggested new activities (support/don't support)

1. Development of VNHS website (76/8)
2. Increase efforts to influence municipal/provincial governments and other agencies on environmental issues (59/1)
3. Young Naturalist Program for junior members (62/8)
4. Increase publicity and promotion for VNHS, including articles, radio, TV, group talks (47/3)
5. Revision of the *Naturalist's Guide to Greater Victoria* (43/0)
6. In-school nature education for children (43/8)
7. Corporation connections, sponsorship and memberships (36/9)
8. Quality displays for attendance at shows (30/9)
9. More events for non-members, especially children (25/17)
10. Appoint paid staff to assist with increased activity and workload (30/29)

## Support for Possible VNHS Activities



## Fundraising

Generally, respondents were comfortable in increasing VNHS membership numbers and having campaigns for specific purposes as fundraising strategies. All other suggestions were received less favorably, particularly those that would increase fees to existing members or introduce commercial aspects to the meetings. Several comments suggested looking for external funding sources or volunteer "experts", such as university students, for public relations functions. A few members expressed concerns that emphasis on fund-raising could detract from the primary goals of the VNHS and become self-perpetuating — i.e. we need more money to advertise to get more money. The concept of sponsorship and grant funding received mixed reviews, but seemed more acceptable for specific projects than general operations.

## Paid staff

The survey results did not support the suggestion of paid staff, with the membership almost evenly divided. Most comments raised concerns about the costs of staff, but several also felt having paid staff would undermine the volunteer spirit of the VNHS. Respondents recognized that achievement of some of the suggested activities and goals would be unlikely without sufficient person-hours — which would be difficult to get from volunteers. Comments suggest that paid staff and corporate sponsorship may be acceptable for specific projects, but in general, VNHS members would like the Society to remain a volunteer and non-commercial organization.

## Where do we go from here?

The VNHS is made up of a diverse group of people, some of

whom wish to participate as recipients of information (through monthly meetings, the *Naturalist*, and member events), and others who wish to assume a more active, and perhaps, more activist role. The Board needs to encourage participation in a wide variety of events and activities without overburdening members' schedules or finances.

The VNHS Board faces the challenge of matching members with their interests and providing a sufficient number of high quality activities to maintain interest.

Based on the survey results and other input, the Board will have to identify its priorities for the upcoming year and attempt to identify champions or leaders for activities or projects. It is possible that lower priority goals may be met before higher priority projects simply because there is a member willing to take the lead.

The Board will have to be creative in developing strategies to achieve the more ambitious goals. Seeking grant funding for specific projects, partnering with other environmental or natural history groups, identifying individual or corporate sponsors for certain kinds of events are all ways to accomplish projects that would otherwise be out of VNHS's reach.

Because we are more comfortable with an all-volunteer organization, what gets done, and what doesn't, will depend entirely on membership involvement. If you feel that you could contribute to any of the activities, goals, or events listed, or have a project that you would like to lead or share responsibility for, please let a member of the Board know. The names and phone numbers are on the inside front cover.

The VNHS Board of Directors wishes to thank all members who participated in the survey.

# Victoria Naturalists Invade Hurricane Ridge

By David Stirling

On Sunday, July 23, twenty-three keen naturalists boarded the 6:15 AM sailing of the M.V. Coho for the VNHS's field trip to Hurricane Ridge. For birders, a report of a Manx Shearwater the day before added extra excitement to the crossing. Luck was not ours that day for no shearwater of any stripe was seen. Birding was not exciting. We saw only the usual gulls [including several immaculate adult Heermann's], Rhinoceros Auklets, Pigeon Guillemots, Common Murres and in Victoria's Harbour, Purple Martins.

En route to the alpine on the Olympic Van Tours' bus, our driver provided an excellent commentary about the early geology and the later vegetation of the Olympic Peninsula.

Our walking route was up Hurricane Hill, a hogs-back ridge that climbs through the finest flower meadows. Here, we had spectacular views of bountiful flower gardens against a background of stern snowy mountains. More than half the time curtains of low cloud shut off the mountains but this only added a mood of anticipation when the cloud drapes parted revealing jagged ridges and snowy peaks. Some participants moved on to the top enjoying the whole scene, others paused to photograph while some lagged behind to identify each and every flower. Early bloomers such as Phlox and Glacier Lily were past their prime but fields of lupine and bistort were unforgettable. Olympic endemics such as Magenta Paintbrush and Scalloped Onion were of particular interest.

We saw a few mammals; the coast black-tail variety of the Mule Deer, Olympic Chipmunk, the huge, endemic Olympic Marmot and young and from the bus, a melancholy coyote by the roadside. New dirt at burrows of the Mountain Beaver confirmed that this crepuscular and mostly fossorial unique rodent [the only species in its family] was alive and well. In the strait we saw Dall's Porpoise and Harbour Seals,

Birds in the mountains: The ubiquitous American Raven and American Robin, a female Northern Harrier, American Pipit, Oregon Junco, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Gray Jay [Whisky Jack] and Varied Thrush [heard]. Possibly the "best bird" was the Blue Grouse — a large male, like a short-necked turkey with its legs sawn off at the knees, and later, a mother and chicks.

The cool cloudy day was very comfortable for hiking but disappointing for butterfly enthusiasts. I saw only one — an Anise Swallowtail.

Here is the plant list. Get your flower picture books and relive that day on Hurricane Ridge. Names are mostly from *Wildflowers of the Olympics*. [Names are not in botanical order.]

Glacier Lily	Nodding Arnica
Avalanche Lily	Woolly Sunflower
Columbian Lily	Large Yellow Monkeyflower
Scalloped Onion	Fan-leaf Cinquefoil
Broad-leaved Sedum	Western Buttercup
Orange Agoseris	Western Wallflower
Hairy Arnica	Sitka Valerian
Slender Hawkweed	Wandering Fleabane
Martindale's Lomatium	Rosy Pussytoes
Mountain Oxytropis [Loco Weed]	Twinflower
Elmera [Alum Root]	Huckleberry sp? [Vaccinium]
Partridge Foot	Spreading Phlox
Woolly Pussytoes	Baldhip Rose [Dwarf Rose]
Pearly Everlasting	Heather sp?
Field Chickweed	Alpine Willow-Herb
Cow parsnip	Smooth willow-Herb
Common Yarrow	Fireweed [Great Willow-Herb]
Dwarf Bramble	American Vetch
Woods Strawberry	Indian Thistle
White Rhododendron	Magenta Paintbrush
Hooker's Fairy-bell	Harsh Paintbrush
Starry False Solomon's Seal	Scarlet Paintbrush
Narrow-sepaled Phacelia	Sitka Columbine
Silky Phacelia	Small-flowered Penstemon
American Bistort	Creeping Penstemon
Ox-eye Daisy	Rockslide Larkspur
White Bog Orchid	Lyall's Lupine
Green Bog Orchid	Broad-leaved Lupine
Tufted saxifrage	Hare Bell [Bluebells of Scotland]
Spotted Saxifrage	Jacob's Ladder [Polemonium]
Salal	Naked Broomrape
Sickle-top Lousewort	Mountain Bog Gentian
Elephant's Head	Western Meadowrue
Catchfly	Field Chickweed
Bladder Champion	Mountain Ash
Douglas-fir	Sub-alpine Fir
Mountain Hemlock	White-bark Pine

# Hat Tricks

By Bruce Whittington, Executive Director

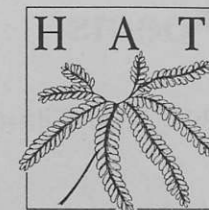
As HAT's new Executive Director, I have had a busy summer. It began, hours into the new job, with rush plans to attend the National Stewardship Conference in early June, at the University of Guelph. With over 500 participants from across the country, there was no doubt that the land stewardship movement in Canada is active, and growing. Those of us from the left coast can be proud of the fact that no fewer than five land trusts operating in our region were represented. It is remarkable that across those thousands of kilometers, land trusts face similar problems everywhere. What is encouraging is that we are also able to share solutions to those problems.

The new HAT office is open and functioning well. Thanks to the efforts of John Cleveland and Staples, we now have a second computer, purchased at a very reasonable price. Angie West (who is now Angie Cleveland) has put our computers through their paces as she finishes her work with HAT on a Baseline Inventory protocol. It is a system that is critical to the long-term effectiveness of conservation covenants. It will serve HAT's needs extremely well, and will also be shared through HAT's affiliation with the Land Trust Alliance of BC.

Karen Hurley has brought the Tod Creek Watershed Project along well this year. Several information events have brought community members out to learn more about land and water stewardship. Many have signed on as Environmental Stewards, and HAT is negotiating several conservation covenants in the watershed. A committee of residents has been formed to continue to spread the conservation message to residents and newcomers. A proposal has been submitted to continue the project for another year, which will see an active collaboration with stream stewardship groups, and the Restoration of Natural Systems Program at UVic.

HAT will be highlighting the watershed project at "From Headwaters to Deepwaters: A Saanich Inlet Celebration" to be held at the Institute of Ocean Sciences at Patricia Bay on September 16th. For more information, you can contact 652-9578 or 363-6837.

HAT also has special events planned in the watershed itself on that day. The Prospect Lake Community Hall, 5358 Sparton Road, will be the focus of daytime events, which will include displays and speakers. VNHS member Loucas Raptis will be artist-in-residence. His series of prints on the Freshwater Fishes of Vancouver Island will be exhibited. Every sale of these remarkable works benefits HAT directly. In the evening, a special family event features local singer Holly Arntzen and others, at 7:30. For reserved seating, or more information about the events at Prospect Lake, you can



HAT's new office, at 517-520 View Street, was jammed with supporters at its official opening on June 22nd. Photo: Bruce Whittington.

call Karen Hurley at 477-9601, or the HAT office at 995-2428.

In the fall, there will be a major exhibition of Loucas Raptis' work at the Freshwater Ecocentre in Duncan. There will be a raffle of a complete subscription to the Freshwater Fishes of Vancouver Island, all proceeds of which will be donated to HAT by the artist. Many thanks go to Loucas for his generosity, and commitment to conservation. The art show is tentatively scheduled for late October. Watch for further updates.

Mark your calendar also for the next Musical HATs evening, at the Prospect Lake Community Hall on October 14th. There was never more Fun in Fundraising than when these environmentalists take to the stage with their instruments and voices. There are raffle prizes and door prizes, and excellent food available. If you have a Designated Driver, you can order a beer, too. The funds raised at this event will be used for HAT's work, which may include an acquisition project that the Board is currently considering.

As always, HAT welcomes VNHS members to join HAT at a reduced rate of \$10.00. Please consider HAT, too, when you are thinking of charitable donations. We are now set up to accept credit card donations, and you are welcome to specify what your donation might be used for. We can currently use funds for operations and office equipment as well as for directed conservation work, and our endowment fund with the Victoria Foundation. If you have any questions about HAT, call me, or drop in to the office, at 517-620 View Street.



## Poems

By Sister Eileen Curteis

### Spring

I cannot run fast enough to find her.  
I cannot run fast enough!  
When I hold her  
she's intangible as the wind  
and delicate as the rain.  
She comes softly  
like a whisper in the trees  
softly, softly, softly.  
She has no hair, no hands, no feet.  
Her house is in the air  
and nothing is as fragrant

### Springtime Happenings Birthing Joy into Us

Each has her time for the smothered air  
when the light goes out  
when the glimmer is gone  
when the only thing left  
is to hope there might be a hope.

Surprisingly enough  
that's the way  
the barren tree does it too,  
uncomely for awhile  
like the first burst of life anywhere.

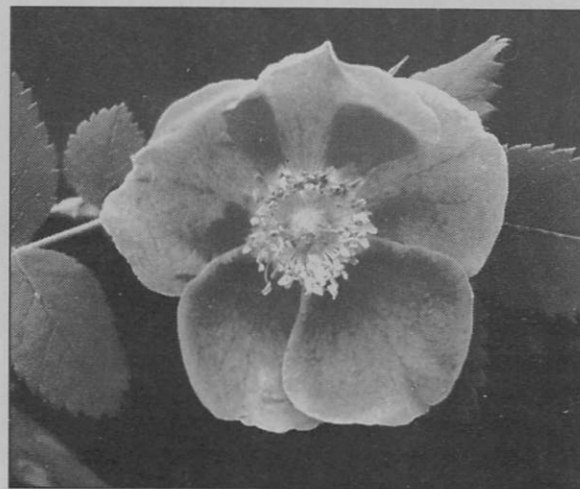
The child coming into our world  
the parent leaving us  
it comes slowly this rejoicing  
the day after the nothing of nothing before.

[Autobiographical note: Sister Eileen is an artist, poet, and writer. For the last seven years she has been involved in a healing ministry at Queenswood in Victoria, a retreat, growth and renewal centre administered by the Sisters of St. Ann.]

## Birding the World Wide Web

By David Stirling

Rainy days of fall give us the opportunity [and the excuse, if needed] for Internet surfbirding. Perhaps you are ahead of me but I would like to inform others like me who are still an eagle's wingspread behind the sharp edge, that the *Internet Guide to Birds and Birding* compiled by Jack Sanders is here. The one thousand "quality" [their term] sites [I haven't tried them all yet] covering topics from "artful birds" to "videos" is contained in a soft cover 8"x10"x3/4" 330 page book, published this year by Ragged Mountain Press/McGraw Hill. You can pick it up at the library and check it out before coughing up \$36.95. As the back cover says, "keep this book within arm's reach of your mouse."



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## Violet-Green Swallow Nest With a "Front Door"

By Jeremy V. Kimm

Violet-Green Swallows (*Tachycineta thalassina*) are well adapted to nesting on or in a variety of manmade structures, ranging from sheds and barns to piping and walls. However, I have been unable to find any references to this species using a "door" at the entrance to a nest.

While birding in the Duncan area on July 4, 2000, my attention was drawn to a pair of swallows that were constantly flying to a covered vent approximately 6-7 m. up an outside wall of an apartment building. As I approached, three young were heard calling from inside the vent. The adults were feeding the young frequently, returning to the nest upwards of 6 times per minute.

Inspecting the vent closer, I found there to be an outward-swinging flap, presumably plastic, under the vent cover and over the opening. A small space between the flap and the wall of the apartment allowed the adults to fit their beaks through in order to feed the young. Soon, an adult was again seen landing at the nest, though it made no move to repeat the pattern of feeding the young and taking off. Instead, the adult inserted its beak into the gap and, using its forehead, lifted the flap. This created an opening of adequate size to permit entry into the nest. The same behaviour was observed on a return visit on July 7.

Whether this is an adaptation to thwart entry by House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) or simply an example of opportunistic use of an available nest site cannot be known. There are many possible benefits of selecting such a site for nesting, including predator exclusion and protection from the elements. This may also be an isolated incident and may never be repeated, but such are the surprises of birding.

## More Lodgers

*Published anonymously because the writer is "not supposed to encourage birds on the patio."*

On June 1, 2000 we had a sunrise visit to our B & B. The visitors requested a room on our patio deck. They started furnishing the room immediately with hay and feathers, and took up residence.

On July 1 we heard little squeaks from the nest. More visitors had arrived! We discovered they were Mum and Dad Violet Green Swallows and four baby swallows with white

tummies and white around their eyes. Very fast movers in and out of their home, and very attentive to their family members, the swallows were beautiful looking birds.

On July 17, the first baby left the nest, and appeared back to help feed the other three — a well-trained family. The parents kept the nest and deck floor very clean, with only one small accident. They carried the droppings away in their beaks.

July 20 at noon the second baby left the nest, took some trial flights and returned with a shaky landing on the deck. Then suddenly left again with Mum. The same baby came back again and spent a few minutes encouraging Baby No. 3 with the message that all was good outside the nest. The first and second babies then flew away.

At 2:00 p.m. Baby No. 4 appeared, but was not very interested in taking flight. A half an hour later Mum and a baby were again at the nest and at 4:00 P.m. the nest was empty. Two of the babies returned briefly to the nest at 5:45 p.m.

On July 22 we saw one baby appearing out of the nest. At 1:30 p.m. two babies were back at the nest, being fed by Mum. At 7:00 p.m. all four babies were trying to sleep, three on top of the nesting box and one inside, all sheltering from a stormy evening.

At 8:00 a.m. on July 23 no lodgers were present. We took the nest down on July 24 and cleaned it out, only to have two of the babies return, demanding that we put the nest back for the night! The next morning they left for good.

R.R. 3, Ladysmith, B.C. V0R 2E0  
(250) 245-7422

# Rocky Point Bird Observatory

## Spring 2000 Sightings of Interest

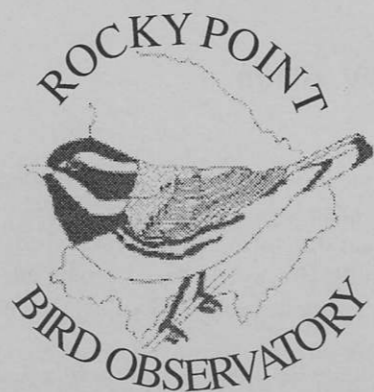
By David Allinson

Our census season began late this year due to unforeseeable delays with the Department of National Defense granting our access permit. However, our observations began with an awesome day in late April. Migrant numbers appeared steady throughout late April and into May. This spring will forever be remembered as the "season of second records"!

On April 29, David Britton, a visitor from the Innis Point Bird Observatory in Ontario, briefly joined Devon Anderson, Gabriel David, and myself. A few Pacific-slope Flycatchers and Wilson's Warblers were calling in the forest. Seven Semipalmated Plover were on the mudflats just west of Building 100. During census, I sent Devon into the woods to chase an odd-sounding Townsend's Warbler and continued on to finish the transect. Some thirty minutes later, Devon returned with news that while he had not located the Townsend's, he had observed a female Tennessee Warbler with a flock of Orange-crowned Warblers. This represents our second record for RPBO (but unfortunately, our efforts to confirm it were unsuccessful and it will remain a sight record). Later that day as we sat eating our lunch, I spotted an odd buteo flying with a pronounced dihedral at extreme distance, and pronounced that I had a probable Swainson's Hawk. We hopped in the car to chase it to the upper fields as it flew north. Eventually, the three of us were able to view an intermediate or rufous morph Swainson's Hawk. The Swainson's was only the third record for Rocky Point. A female American Kestrel briefly appeared while we were looking at the Swainson's. Just when you thought our day couldn't get any better, we took a walk to the banding hut and spied an odd, pale flycatcher. For the next twenty minutes we all got fleeting glimpses of a bird I at first thought might have been a Gray Flycatcher. Eventually we were able to identify it as a washed-out Dusky Flycatcher after hearing its soft 'wit' calls and noting a hint of yellow on the breast and belly. Amazingly, this represents our fourth record for RPBO — are they regular?!

The next day, Devon and I returned and enjoyed a fall-out of Orange-crowned, Wilson's and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Other highlights included Warbling Vireos, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Common Snipe and many Golden-crowned Sparrows. During the census, we were able to hear our first spring record of White-throated Sparrow as it sang its distinctive song. Finally, a pair of Cinnamon Teal was in the lower pond and represented only the second record for the site.

The following weekend on the day after the Victoria



Spring Bird Count, Devon and Gabriel as well as Gavin Bieber once again joined me. The extra sets of eyes and ears helped as we tallied 53 species on census. Another Dusky Flycatcher was heard with its distinctive 'wit' call and probably represents a different bird from the week before. A Dusky Flycatcher remained for a few days on Mt. Tolmie during the week and Vancouver also reported multiple observations of this migrant, which breeds in the Okanagan. A Great Horned Owl also sat roosting out in the open, much to the chagrin of breeding American Robins. Other highlights that day included a late California Gull, Hermit Thrush, Evening Grosbeak, and two Hutton's Vireo.

During the week, I endeavoured to visit the site after work in the evenings. On May 8th, I was rewarded with great looks at a Bank Swallow as it sat on hydro wires for our first spring record of this species. A Barred Owl was serenading its partner with its unique 'who cooks for you' song from deep in the woods. Finally, in the soft light of sunset, a gorgeous Tufted Puffin flew to the west towards Race Rocks. On the 11th, two late Surfbirds were on rocks just west of the Building 100 and a noisy Virginia Rail was 'ka-dick, ka-dick'ing' the night away from the lower pond.

A joint field trip of the Victoria Natural History Society and RPBO on May 13th introduced nine potential volunteers to the wonder of spring migration at Rocky Point. A quick flypast of two male Red-necked Phalarope off Edye Point unfortunately was only enjoyed by a few of the participants. A female Merlin buzzed the upper ponds and continued northeast over the forest. Two Virginia Rail were calling in the lower pond and gave me some hope that they may stay to breed. Two Western Tanager, four Yellow Warblers, a singing Hutton's Vireo, a Black-headed Grosbeak, seven Western Sandpipers and a single Semipalmated Plover were other highlights. On the following day, Michael Settingington and I returned to complete the census and were pleased to see a total of eight Blue-winged Teal (6 in the upper ponds and a pair in lower pond). Later I enjoyed hearing and seeing a single male White-winged Crossbill (only our fourth record). Other highlights included four Black-headed Grosbeak, 6

Cedar Waxwing, over 25 Brown-headed Cowbird and six late Common Mergansers.

Rick Schortinghuis and Ann Nightingale visited on May 18th and located a male Lazuli Bunting near the old trailer location. This is only our second record of this species having banded an immature Lazuli in August 1995. Rick and Ann also found a nesting pair of Downy Woodpecker in a willow near the trailer at Cape Calver. I visited on the Victoria Day long weekend and was rewarded with 56 species on census on the 20th with a pair of Blue-winged Teal in lower pond, a Great Horned Owl, a Varied Thrush, and a Cliff Swallow as the main highlights. On the 22nd, I managed to hear the Lazuli Bunting singing near where Rick and Ann had seen it earlier. A pair of Western Wood-Pewee were hawking for insects near the banding hut. At one point I had an Olive-sided Flycatcher, the pewee, a Pacific-slope Flycatcher, and a Hammond's Flycatcher out in the open, all within 20 yards of each other in the back net area — a flycatcher grand slam! A pair of Varied Thrush appears to be nesting in habitat atypical for this species near the upper field. On May 28th, Claudia Riveros and Mike Settingington recorded two Whimbrel on the mudflats west of Building 100.

## President's Report

By Bruce Whittington

I have always felt that New Year's Eve was somehow misplaced, and that the year really takes a new direction in September. Kids go back to school, holidays are over for most, and things just seem to get back into gear again. So it is with the VNHS, and I am looking forward to a new season of events and programs with our members.

The Society's Board of Directors held its third annual retreat in June, an event that we all enjoy, and seems destined to become a tradition. It's an opportunity for the directors to get together, and discuss the many issues which seem to get pushed out of normal meeting agendas. They are often important issues, which benefit from the kind of free and open discussion, and ample time, that is a part of our retreats.

One of the major items at this year's retreat, which was held in the wonderful wild garden of Claudia and Darren Copley, was the results of our VNHS member survey. We could not have made much sense of these, if it were not for the remarkable efforts of Denise Gubersky, who put all the results together into an easily understandable document.

Ann Nightingale has summarized these results very well elsewhere in this issue, but I would like to make a few additional comments.

We were very pleased with the response to the surveys. These things generally have a fairly poor return rate, but we feel that we have been given some of the direction that we

An outing on June 3rd began with a bang as Devon, Gabriel and I were rewarded with a breeding plumaged female Wilson's Phalarope feeding in the mudflats beside Building 100. The bird was photographed and is a long overdue record for the area and represents RPBO's 264th species. On June 10th, two downy Virginia Rail with an adult in the lower pond provided confirmation for breeding for that species. Driving in to Rocky for a work party on a wet and blustery June 11th, I was rewarded with Rocky Point's second Western Kingbird hawking for insects near the unmanned gatehouse opposite the Pedder Bay marina. Finally, on June 18th Claudia and Mike found our second summer record of an Osprey during census.

Our fall banding season began July 21st, and one can only imagine some of the interesting avian discoveries awaiting us at the Rocky Point Bird Observatory.

DAVID ALLINSON, *RPBO president*, is a past-president of the Victoria Natural History Society. His birding interests are wide and varied, and include diurnal and nocturnal raptors, pelagic species, neotropical songbirds, and bird photography.

were seeking from the members. What sort of direction is that? Well, for instance, we will likely see no major changes in *The Victoria Naturalist* — apart from some minor comments, it is very well-liked. There is strong support for VNHS to be more active in conservation and environment issues. We also felt that there was good overall support for many of the initiatives the Board is pursuing, but as Ann points out, these will have to be prioritized depending on the required time, money, and volunteers available.

The issue of volunteers comes up everywhere. Some respondents thoughtfully noted that we should not take on so many activities that we strain the present corps of volunteers. It is a valid concern. What is not clear is what level of activities an organization of 700 plus members can support, and what percentage of the membership needs to be active in order to keep the organization running. That percentage is currently very small.

I was struck by one statistic in the survey. Our Natural History presentations, which are normally attended by 30 to 50 people, ranked first in popularity of Society events. Birders' Night was a close second, an event which usually attracts 130 to 160 members. It means that the birding members of the Society would rather go to Birders' Night than fill out surveys, which is fair enough. But it also seems to suggest that there is a significant percentage of



VNHS Directors attended a retreat in June. Left to right, Bob Chappell, Rick Shortinghuis, Claudia Copley, Darren Copley, Gordon Hart, Ann Nightingale, Bruce Whittington, Ross Archibald (growing out of Marie's head), Marie O'Shaughnessy, Maureen Funk, Tom Gillespie. Sheila Mosher was unable to attend. Photo: Bruce Whittington.

the membership which is content to participate passively rather than actively, to be watchers rather than doers.

The Board now has to determine how it will accomplish the goals it is establishing. Some of these things will get done, and some won't. Certainly more of them will bear fruit if there are willing hands and minds to help them along.

Volunteering is not about facing a monstrous task alone. Its about working together with other like-minded people, a little bit at a time, to achieve shared goals, to put a little something back. A volunteer contribution is determined not by others, but by volunteers themselves. One hour a month can make a big difference, to the Society, and perhaps to another volunteer.

For those of you who did submit the volunteer portions of your surveys, we thank you. You are next on our list of

things to do! And now is an excellent time to acknowledge those volunteers who already contribute to the Society's activities.

So as we start a new season, a stage is set for us. We have ideas, we have vision, and we have direction from our members. We have resources within our membership, we have a fine magazine, and a strong program of events. In your survey responses, you have been thoughtful, critical, complimentary, even provocative. Please keep it up. If there is something on your mind, call a director; our phone numbers are in the magazine. And as you read the survey results, think about what you might contribute, to keep VNHS as good as it is, and to extend its reach in the community. You'll be in good company.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

REGULAR MEETINGS are generally held on the following days. **Board of Directors:** the first Tuesday of each month (directors' meetings are held at Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary); **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.

### SEPTEMBER

#### Saturday, September 9

##### *Birding the Victoria Shoreline for shorebirds*

Marie O'Shaughnessy (598-9680) leads this search for migrant shorebirds. Meet at Clover Point at 8:00 a.m.

#### Tuesday, September 12

##### *The Natural History of the Seychelles Archipelago*

Join Dr. Alan Burger for an illustrated talk of the highlights of his recent research trip to the Seychelles. The Seychelles Archipelago occupies 400,000 sq km (150,000 sq miles) of the Indian Ocean northeast of Madagascar and contains 115 islands and islets. This presentation will discuss Dr. Burger's research on one particular island as well as the general natural history of the area. 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.

#### Saturday, September 16

##### **NEW FIELD-TRIP!**

##### *Dungeness Spit and Elwa Estuary field-trips Plus Pelagic Birding on the M.V. Coho*

David Allinson (478-0493) will lead this trip on the M.V. Coho to two new field-trip locations on the Olympic Peninsula. The Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge covers 631 acres including the eastern edge of Dungeness spit (one of the longest natural spits in the world). The calmer waters of Dungeness Bay make this an outstanding shorebird area. The refuge is the home of, or visited by, over 250 species of bird, 41 species of land mammal, and 8 species of marine mammal. The Elwa River estuary is also a local birding hot-spot. On the sailing across the Strait of Juan de Fuca watch for bird species (Shearwaters, Fulmars, Phalaropes) usually found further out to sea. Meet at the Black Ball Ferry terminal in the Inner Harbour before 6:00 a.m. (allow time to park) for the 6:10 sailing of the M.V. Coho. Ferry cost is \$14.00 (US) return, and it is a good idea to have some ID with you for customs. Cost of the charter bus and entry to the park is about \$15.00 (US—this will vary with number of participants). We'll return on the 5:15 p.m. sailing (90 minute crossing time). There is room for 23 participants. Reserve your spot early by calling the Goldstream Nature house at 478-9414. Bring a lunch!

#### Saturday, September 16

##### *Birding at Cuthbert Holmes Park.*

Jeff Gaskin (384-1573) leads this search for migrant songbirds through a variety of habitats in this park that he birds regularly. Meet at the Pearkes Arena parking lot at 8:30 a.m.

#### Saturday, September 16

##### *"From Headwaters to Deepwaters: A Saanich Inlet Celebration"*

HAT will be highlighting this watershed project to be held at the Institute of Ocean Sciences at Patricia Bay. For more information, you can contact 652-9578 or 363-6837.

#### Sunday, September 17

##### *Hawk Watch: East Sooke Park*

Hundreds of Turkey Vultures are joined by a dozen other species of birds of prey in their annual southward migration. Meet Dannie Carsen (595-2773) at the Aylard Farm parking lot in East Sooke Regional Park, off Becher Bay Rd. at 10:00 a.m., or car pool at Helmcken Park and Ride at 9:20 a.m. Bring a lunch.

#### Tuesday, September 19

##### *Botany Night*

Botany, BC. Overview of the botanical meeting at Big Bar Ranch, July 13-15.

#### Saturday, September 23

##### **NEW FIELD-TRIP!**

##### *Sea Otters, Puffins, and First Nations Museum*

Join us for a field-trip on the Olympic Peninsula to Cape Flattery and the Makah Cultural and Research Center. Cape Flattery is the most northern point in the continental United States and is one of the closest locations where you might see puffins or sea otters. Islands off the point are also home to thousands of seabirds throughout the year. In 1970 tidal erosion uncovered an ancient whaling village at Ozette, parts of which had been covered by a mud slide hundreds of years ago. The subsequent artifacts which were found have now classified Ozette as one the most significant archaeological discoveries ever made in North America! In 1979 the Makah Cultural and Research Center opened to the public in order to share this great find. Meet at the Black Ball Ferry terminal in the Inner Harbour before 6:00 a.m. (allow time to park) for the 6:10 sailing of the M.V. Coho. Ferry cost is \$14.00 (US) return, and it is a good idea to have some ID with you for customs. Cost of the charter bus and entry to the museum is about \$18.00 (US — this will vary with number of participants). We'll return on the 5:15 p.m. sailing (90 minute crossing time). There is room for 24 participants. Reserve your spot early by calling the Goldstream Nature house at 478-9414. Bring a lunch!

#### Sunday, September 24

##### **NEW FIELD-TRIP!**

##### *Field trip to Carmanah Walbran Provincial Park*

This park, comprising 16,450 hectares, offers protection to a large Sitka spruce ecosystem that represents two per cent of B.C.'s

remaining old-growth forest. Carmanah Walbran is home to some of the world's largest spruce trees. These giants may reach heights in excess of 95 metres and live for 800 years or more. Join naturalist **Larry Hall** on this tour through the Carmanah Valley. We will meet at the Helmcken Park and Ride at 8:00 a.m. and won't return until 8:00 p.m. There is a fee of \$55.00 and you must call the Goldstream Nature House (478-9414) to reserve your spot (only 13 spaces available and a minimum of 10 participants for the trip to happen). Sections of the trail can be extremely muddy. Be equipped with appropriate clothing (including adequate rain gear) and good hiking boots. Bring a lunch.

### Wednesday, September 27

#### *Birders Night*

7:30 p.m., Room 159, Begbie Building, UVic. *Members Night*. Once again it is your chance to stand up and be seen. Anyone wishing to give a 5-15 minute slide or visual presentation on the identification, biology or natural history of birds, a recent birding trip, or any other light entertainment relating to birds is invited to participate. Please call **Bryan Gates** at 598-7789, email bgates@pacificcoast.net to let him know your topic and how much time you would like. Members Nights are full of surprises. Everyone is welcome. Bring your binocular, coffee mug and a friend.

### Thursday, September 28

#### *Marine Birds with James Clowater*

Discover fascinating secrets about the life and behaviour of marine birds. How some birds can dive to 180 metres, the truth about wettable cormorant feathers, how grebes find fish at night, and much more. The emphasis is on unique and interesting biological and behavioural information that will capture the imagination of both amateurs and professionals. The course is instructed by **James Clowater**, an ornithologist who specializes in the behavioural ecology of marine birds. Classes begin on September 28, 2000, meeting Thursdays 7-9 pm at Swan Lake Nature House. Cost is \$70.00 for five 2-hour sessions. An optional field trip can be included for an additional cost depending on participation and charter fees. Call Swan Lake to pre-register (250) 479-0211. For more information visit <http://webs.ii.ca/clowater>.

## OCTOBER

### Sunday, October 1

#### *Migrants on Jocelyn Hill*

**Rick Schortinghuis** (642-3596) shares his knowledge of the Gowland Range on this walk in search of migrating songbirds and raptors. Wear sturdy footwear and bring a lunch. Be prepared for a 4 to 5 hour hike. Meet at the Lone Tree Hill Parking lot on Millstream Rd. at 8:30 a.m.

### Sunday, October 8

#### *Birding at Whiffen Spit, Sooke*

In recent years Lapland Longspurs, a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and a Ruff have stopped at this migrant trap in Sooke. Meet your leader **Bob Chappell** (388-4696) at 9:00 a.m. in the parking lot at the foot of Whiffen Spit Rd. Call ahead to arrange a car pool.

### Tuesday, October 10

#### *Arizona And Hawaii: Appreciating the Ecosystems and Good Auto Air Conditioning*

Join **Bev Glover** as she compares the ecosystems of Hawaii and Arizona in an illustrated talk. Follow her travels from the hot arid lowlands of Arizona to the cooler, wetter habitats of Hawaii. Meet at 7:30 p.m., Room 159, Begbie Building, UVic. Bring a coffee mug and a friend; non-members are welcome.

### Saturday, October 14

#### *Musical HATs event (see ad on back cover)*

7:30 p.m., Prospect Lake Community Hall, tickets at the HAT office.

### Sunday, October 15

#### *Cedar Basket Workshop with Doug Andrew*

Participants will learn both twine and twill weaving techniques in the creation of a cedar bark pouch basket. This basket will be constructed entirely from indigenous materials, and finished with an ancient West Coast rim, taught to Doug by Coast Salish basket weaver Lena Dunstan. Doug is a well-known local naturalist and the operator of a Victoria business called Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). TEK focuses on all of those wonderful things in nature that provided a bountiful living for the First People. Cost: \$55.00, \$50.00 to friends of Swan Lake. The cost includes all materials.

### Tuesday, October 17

#### *Botany Night*

Recent botanical discoveries in British Columbia.

### Saturday, October 21

#### *Fin Art at the Freshwater Ecocentre: The Freshwater Fishes of Vancouver Island*

October 21 through November 4. There will be a raffle of a complete subscription to the Freshwater Fishes of Vancouver Island by Loucas Raptis with all proceeds of which will be donated to HAT by the artist. For information call 250-746-6722.

### Sunday, October 22

#### *Pelagic Birding on the M.V. Coho*

**Bryan Gates** (598-7789) will lead this trip on the M.V. Coho on a sailing across the Strait of Juan de Fuca and back. The crossing takes 1-1/2 hours and this 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 sailing of the M.V. Coho (allow plenty of time for parking). Ferry cost is \$14.00 (US) return (\$22.00 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.

### Wednesday, October 25

#### *Birders Night*

7:30 p.m., Room 159, Begbie Building, UVic. *Birding the Tropical Way*. Costa Rica supports one of the richest diversities of bird life in the world. It is also a place of varied, complex ecosystems. Join us for a slide-illustrated talk on birding, tropical ecology, and ethnobotany, presented by guide **Freddy Madrigal**. Mr. Madrigal has been a professional guide in his native Costa Rica for ten years.

His first love is birding, but he has a wealth of knowledge of tropical ecosystems as well. Bring your binocular, your coffee cup, and a friend.

### Saturday, October 28

#### *Identifying Mushrooms with Rob Countess*

Join University of Victoria mycologist **Rob Countess** for an intensive eight hour mushroom workshop. Starting with a one hour slide show at the Nature House, the group will then carpool to a nearby area for field study and collection. Upon returning to the Nature House, Rob will conduct an identification workshop.

Please pre-register at the Nature House. (Minimum of six participants required for the course to run.) Bring a mug, a bag lunch, bucket or basket for collecting, and dress for the weather. Date: October 28, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Cost: \$40.00 per person, \$36.00 to friends of Swan Lake. A second course will be offered on November 18 if registration warrants. Limited registration. You may register by calling Swan Lake at 479-0211. Payment deadline is two weeks before the event. Courses will be in the classroom at Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary, 3873 Swan Lake Rd. For more information, call Ann Scarfe at Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary, 479-0211.

## CRD PARKS PROGRAMS

### September 2

#### *Sunrise Seekers Canoeing*

This fall we're paddling through early morning mist at Beaver and Thetis lakes. This weekend search for fall birds and other lakeshore life at Thetis Lake. You must pre-register: \$12 + GST/person (15 yrs and older); \$6.50 + GST/person (14 yrs & under). Canoe equipment and instruction provided. 7-9:30 a.m. Thetis Lake Regional Park (View Royal) adults and children 5 and older. Call 478-3344.

### September 2

#### *Forest Snoop*

Nature's treasures abound in this park. We'll explore the forest in search of salamanders, slugs, and special wildlife trees. Visit the Fern Gully and meet the inhabitants who call it home. Meet at the map kiosk in the main Beaver Lake parking lot. BC Transit #70 or 75. 1 p.m. Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Saanich). Everyone welcome.

### September 3

#### *Hilltop Highlights*

Looking for a new place to hike? This park offers exercise and great views from the top. We'll be highlighting plants in the Heather family, including the Arbutus tree. Bring a lunch and wear sturdy hiking shoes. Meet at the map kiosk in the parking lot off Millstream Road. 11-1 p.m. Lone Tree Hill Regional Park (Highlands). Everyone welcome.

### September 4

#### *Sands of Time*

This park is constantly growing! Dune formation is only one of the highlights of this shoreline park. It's also home to rare plant species and a resting place for birds. Join us for a closer look. Meet at the map kiosk on Homathko Rd., at the end of Island View Beach Rd.

### Sunday, October 29

#### *Birding the Pumpkin Patch*

Late migrants, winter arrivals and raptors should make for some great birding with **Brent Diakow** (656-3190). Meet at the farm market at the corner of the Pat Bay Highway and Island View Rd at 8:30 a.m. Gumboots are highly recommended!

### Wednesday, November 22

#### *Birders Night*

7:30 p.m., Room 159 Begbie Building, UVic. *Ethiopia — A Walk on the Wild Side*. We are pleased to welcome **Mr. Mageru Demissie**, a professional naturalist and tour guide in his native Ethiopia. He will present a 45-minute slide lecture on endemic birds and wildlife of one of Africa's least-visited countries. A map will be included for audience members to "travel along" as Mageru speaks. The slides will also show some geographic highlights of this stunningly beautiful country, as well as the occasional interesting tribal photo. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend, your binocular and coffee mug.

1 p.m. Island View Beach Regional Park (Central Saanich). Everyone welcome

### September 9

#### *Sunrise Seekers (see Sept 2 for details)*

We're paddling on Thetis Lake again. There's a pre-registration and fee. 7-9:30 a.m. Thetis Lake Regional Park (View Royal), adults and children 5 and older

### September 9

#### *Beach Explorations*

Crabs, barnacles and fancy seaweeds! We'll amble down this beautiful little beach exploring as we go. Whatever the tide has brought in will be our delight. Meet in the parking lot at the end of Delgada Dr. off Park Dr. in Metchosin. 1 p.m. Albert Head Regional Park (Metchosin). Everyone welcome

### September 10

#### *Metchosin Day (special event)*

Once again, CRD Parks Naturalists will be participating in this community event. Visit our Traveling Nature House. Happy Valley Road. BC Transit #54, 11 a.m. -4 p.m. Metchosin Municipal Grounds (Metchosin). Everyone welcome

### September 16

#### *Sunrise Seekers Canoeing for Adults*

We'll paddle the still waters of Thetis Lake, search for lakeshore life, and get a fresh-air start to the weekend. This longer program includes a stop on one of the islands. You must pre-register: \$16 + GST/person. Canoe equipment and instruction provided. Call 478-3344. 7-11 a.m. Thetis Lake Regional Park (View Royal). Adults only.

**For information on more programs, or to register, phone CRD Parks at 478-3344.**

Expires: Dec-2000

Philip & Marilyn Lambert  
1868 Penshurst Road  
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## Musical HATs Is Back!

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H A T



October 14<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 p.m.

Prospect Lake Community Hall, 5358 Sparton Rd.

Tickets: \$10.00, at the HAT Office 995-2428

517-620 View Street [hatmail@home.com](mailto:hatmail@home.com)