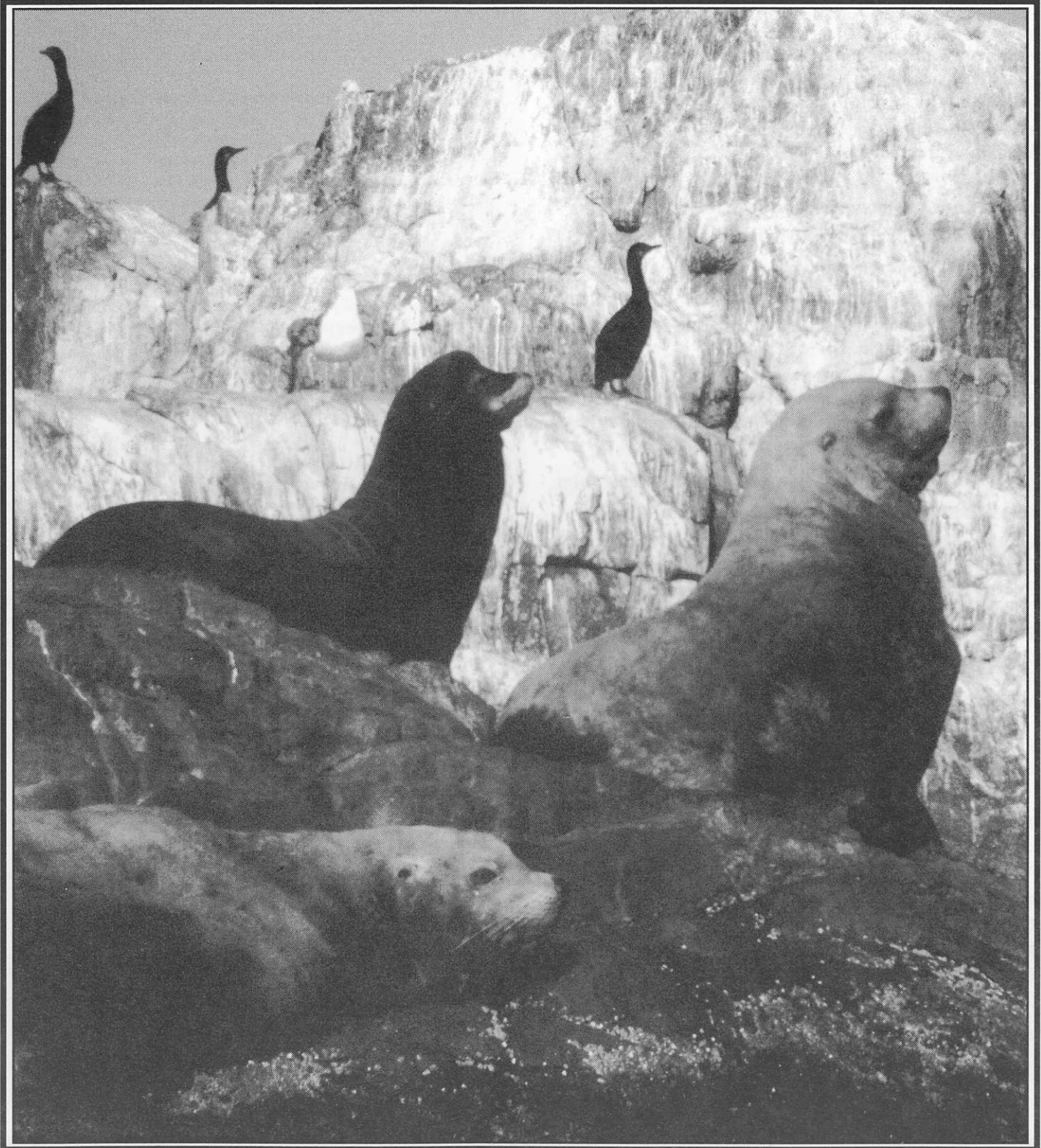




# The Victoria NATURALIST

JANUARY  
FEBRUARY  
2002  
VOL 58.4

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Published six times a year by the  
VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY,  
P.O. Box 5220, Station B, Victoria, B.C. V8R 6N4  
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ISSN 0049-612X Printed in Canada

*The Victoria Naturalist* acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Publications Assistance Program towards our mailing costs.

Publication Mail Commercial Sales Agreement Number 1273108

Publications Mail Registration No. 09841

**Editor:** Marilyn and Ross Archibald, 384-3063

**Desktop Publishing:** Frances Hunter, 479-1956

**Distribution:** Tom Gillespie, Phyllis Henderson

**Printing:** Fotoprint, 382-8218

Opinions expressed by contributors to *The Victoria Naturalist* are not necessarily those of the Society.

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**Annual Subscription Rate, Victoria Naturalist** \$20.00

**RARE BIRD ALERT:** 592-3381 **VNHS EVENTS TAPE:** 479-2054

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**Deadline for next issue: February 1, 2001**

Send to: Marilyn and Ross Archibald, Editors

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## COVER PHOTO

Sea lions at Race Rocks by Ross Archibald

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

As we end one calendar year and begin another, we would like to thank all of the people who have shared in this adventure with us; the people who: wrote articles, submitted photographs, make sure the magazine is well printed, make sure that you get our collective attempts to keep you informed, Frances who continues to make everyone's work look good, and you, the readers.

Putting together a magazine like *The Victoria Naturalist* takes a lot of effort on the part of many people, but it is one way we all can participate in spreading the word about our natural world even if we are not experts in some field.

In this "age of experts", we non-experts can soon become overwhelmed with the amount of information presented by one group or another in trying to get our support for their view of how things should be done. But, it is not expert knowledge that can solve our dilemma. We cannot, as Albert Einstein once said, solve our present problems using the same way of thinking that has created the problems.

"Real" knowledge is not the same as expert information. Experts by the very nature of their education focus on narrow bands of study. Events in the real world can easily overlap the boundaries of expert fields of knowledge.

In the case of the process for locating a new small craft harbour for Sandspit, in the Queen Charlotte Islands, expert knowledge about the ecology of Brant geese in the area was found insufficient. In order to deal with the situation, it was found necessary to combine expert knowledge with the experiential knowledge of local residents.

This all is a roundabout way of saying that your knowledge about the natural world is important. We would like to read your stories in your magazine. Make a point in the coming year of writing short notes of your observations of the many sides of nature — and share them with the rest of us through your Society's magazine.

May the coming year find you in harmony with the natural world around you.

*Marilyn and Ross*

# Miss Them Now or Miss Them Forever

By Tina Kelly

The coast of Florida is home to the endangered Florida manatee (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*), a distinct subspecies of the West Indian Manatee (*Trichechus manatus*). The manatees are found in almost any fresh or salt water area deeper than one metre, including rivers, bays, estuaries and other coastal areas abundant with seagrasses and other vegetation. Over 60 species of plants comprise their herbivorous diet, including turtle grass (*Thalassia testudinum*), shoal grass (*Halodule wrightii*) and water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*).

Although protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act of 1978, hundreds of manatees continue to die or be killed each year.

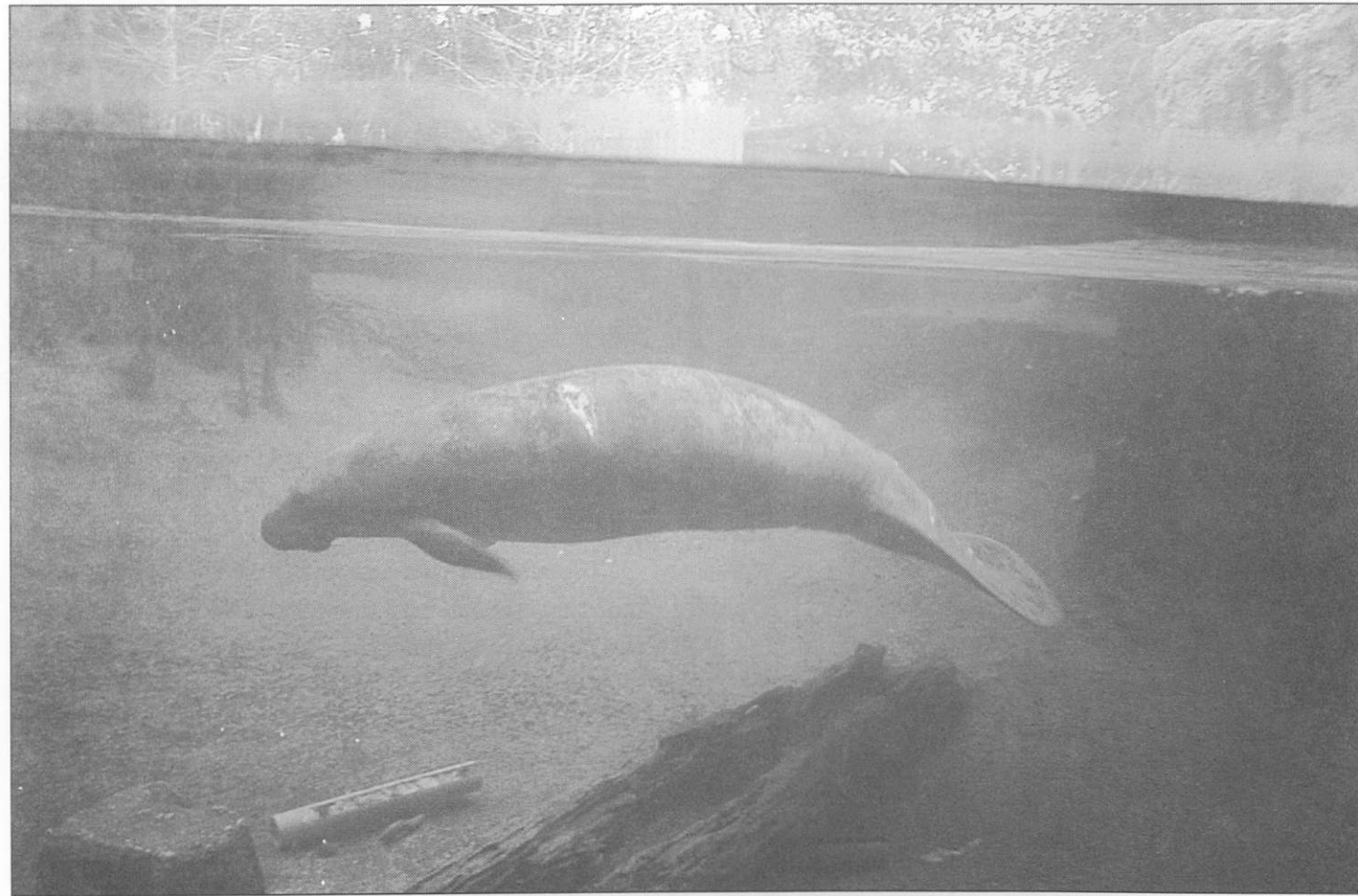
Last winter, I had the opportunity to work for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissions (FWC), Florida Marine Research Institute (FMRI) on projects aimed at decreasing those mortality rates. The two main projects

were a manatee-boater interaction and monitoring program, and a photo-identification study of the manatees.

The manatee-boater interaction project is a three-year study in two areas. One area is slated for regulation and one for voluntary speed zones. The project will compare boater responses to education with responses to regulation. The study is being carried out in three phases. Phase One consists of collecting the baseline data, when no regulations or education are in effect. Phase Two will be when the regulations and education are in place. The third phase of the study will occur when boaters have had a year to be exposed to the changes.

The education program will encourage boaters to:

- Wear polarized sunglasses while operating a boat as polarized lenses make it easier to see things under the surface;
- Stay in marked channels;



Scarred manatee in the rehabilitation center at the Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa. Photos: Tina Kelly

*In many ways man continues to be not only wild but more dangerous than any of the so-called wild animals.* JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

- Pole, paddle or use a trolling motor when over shallow seagrass beds;
- Slow down; and
- Observe all manatee speed zones and caution areas.

The importance of this project stems from the increasing number of manatees killed by watercraft. Impact by boat hulls and propellers is the leading cause of death in manatees. Entrapment in floodgates and navigation locks is the second largest human-related cause, whereas the principal cause of natural mortality is cold stress, followed by red tide poisoning (an outbreak in 1996 killed 150 manatees), disease and parasitism.

Manatees are extremely sensitive to changes in water temperature. When the water temperature drops below 20°C (68°F), manatees seek refuge in known warm-water sites such as power plant discharges and natural springs. Although all of these contribute to manatee mortality, much of the increase in deaths over the last fifteen years can be attributed to watercraft-related deaths.

The State of Florida currently has over 800,000 registered boats. Total yearly manatee deaths have increased from 174 in 1991 to 268 in 1999. These are significant numbers when the most recent population estimate was 3,276 individuals.



One of many signs notifying boaters of manatee habitat

Many if not most, living manatees bear permanent scars and markings from collisions with watercraft, entanglement in fishing gear and fungal infections. These scars act as "natural tags", allowing researchers to identify individuals and collect data on their complex seasonal movements, determine their history of reproduction and estimate adult survival. These parameters are important when making decisions on the conservation of an endangered species. Scars vary in size, shape and location on the body. They may be small lines or gashes along the body or notches or chunks missing from the tail. Tail scars may indicate an attempt to dive away from the watercraft.

Photographs of scarred manatees are taken during the winter months, at power plants and natural springs, and added to a large database of over 1,500 manatees. My primary location for photographing manatees was Tampa Electric Company Power Plant (TECO). One day last winter, an aerial survey recorded 216 animals at this plant in one day. Retired employees of TECO maintain a manatee viewing platform and education center. For anyone wanting to see wild manatees I highly recommend a visit to TECO during the winter.

The goal of the FWC, along with many other organizations, is to reduce the manatee mortality caused by humans, whether it be through regulation or education.



Top: Normal rib. Bottom: Encounters with boats may fracture bones but do not kill the animal. This rib had healed from a previous fracture. Bones are collected from carcasses for educational purposes.

# Winter Marine Visitors

By Ross Archibald

Before the snow melted and the sound of cars, trucks, and motorcycles once again filled the air, following the snowstorm of 1996, I recall thinking that coming up the snow covered street must be a large number of California sea lions (*Zalophus californianus*). Their barking, two blocks away along the Dallas Road waterfront, was so loud that it sounded like they were just outside our house.

It is an all winter, male bonding, bachelor party as adult and sub-adult male California sea lions come to British Columbia coastal areas, leaving the females and pups in the warmer climes of California and Mexico. As Canadians start heading south for winter vacations, the sea lions travel north. They arrive in September or October and leave some time in April or May.

It was in May one year that I watched from a deck at the Bamfield Marine Station as a group of the very social California sea lions circled around a school of what was probably herring, taking turns diving into the middle of the circle to grab a tasty mouthful. Study results provided in one Fisheries and Oceans Canada publication indicate that close to 35% of the diet of these large creatures consists of herring. The 10% of their diet that consists of salmon only represented about 1% of the commercial salmon catch when the study was conducted. Hake and Pollock make up about

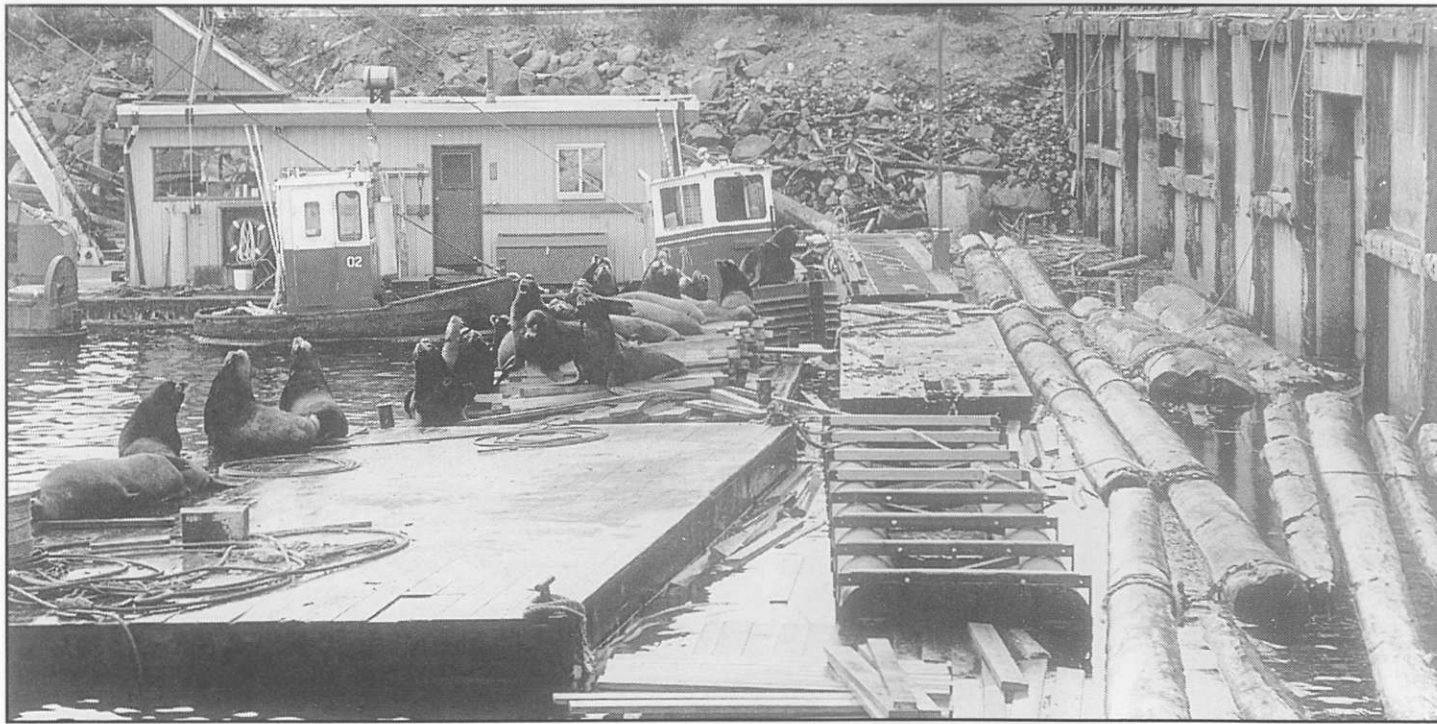
25% of their diet, with the remaining 30% consisting of dogfish, squid and octopus, eulachon, sand lance, skate, lingcod and other fish.

Another interesting sea lion behaviour is their resting offshore in "rafts", much like yachts people do, where no suitable haulout site is available. They are often seen with flippers held out of the water. This behaviour is thought possibly to minimize heat loss, although on a cold wintry day, that is sometimes hard to believe.

One favourite haulout site in Coastal British Columbia has been the log booming ground at the Harmac Pulp Mill near Nanaimo. Lying on logs, barrel buoys, docks, and even boom boats, the sea lions there are tolerant of people in slow moving boats, but immediately, and noisily, hit the water should any humans walk down the wharf.

Four hundred kilogram creatures, not particularly suited to land travel, can severely injure themselves scrambling to return to the water when humans approach too closely. The National Marine Fisheries Service, Northwestern Region of the U. S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recommends that humans should not approach seals or sea lions at haulouts closer than 90 metres (100 yds). Get out those spotting scopes and binoculars.

According to NOAA, the following behaviours may



California sea lions at Harmac mill site near Nanaimo. Photos: Ross Archibald



indicate disturbance and causing them should be avoided:

- a number of animals raise their heads;
- a few animals hurriedly enter the water;
- a number of animals move closer to the water; or
- increased vocalization by sea lions.

Another favourite haulout site in the Victoria area is Race Rocks. On one visit there with a Royal British Columbia Museum press trip, we saw the result of an overcrowded situation when a large portion of the approximately 1000 of these behemoths present had taken up residence on the lighthouse lawn and garden. The area looked like a steamroller had driven over every soil-covered inch of the island. Can you imagine being surrounded by hundreds if not thousands of 400 kg creatures?

Much less pleasant scenes have happened at Race Rocks as well. When we were there several years ago, Bruce McNall, Ornithology Collections Manager at the Royal British Columbia Museum, had brought along a spotting scope in hopes of seeing a reported Brown pelican. Instead we saw the gory sight of a sea lion lying nearly motionless on the rocks with three deep gashes on its back, appearing as if a boat propeller had struck it. A recent photograph by a Lester B. Pearson College student, posted on the college website shows a sea lion at Race Rocks with some sort of plastic ring around its neck.

California sea lion males may reach 2 to 2.5 metres (6.5 to 8 ft) in length and weigh between 200 and 400 kg (450 to 900 lbs). The females are about one-quarter to one-third the size of the males and give birth to 8 kg (18 lbs) pups. The California seal lion is smaller and darker than the Steller sea lion, which also visits British Columbia in the winter.

Steller sea lions are generally less noted in this area, in part because the number that come to the area are fewer, but also because they make a deep growl which is less noticeable than the honking bark of the California sea lion that has had some waterfront residents complaining in recent years.

Two families of pinnipeds, as seals and sea lions are known, frequent British Columbia coastal waters. The *Phocidae*, or true seals, includes the northern elephant seal and the harbour seal. California sea lions are in the *Otariidae* family along with the northern fur seal and the Steller sea lion.

The true seals lack external ear flaps and short, fur-covered flippers. On land they tend to remain prostrate, not being able to easily raise their heads. True seals cannot rotate their rear flippers forward, so they move in a caterpillar like fashion. They swim by alternating side-to-side strokes of their rear flippers, while the front flippers are used to aid in steering. It is difficult to observe adult seals swimming but observant, slow-moving boaters may sometimes experience the joy, as I have, of watching baby Harbour seals chasing smaller fish near the surface of the water. Unfortunately, at least some these small seals seem to have been unable to avoid fast moving boats and seaplanes near the mouth of Victoria Harbour.

Our winter visitors in the *Otariidae* family have small external ear flaps and large hairless flippers that can be used on land for body support and to raise the head and shoulders. They can amble over land using both front and rear flippers by rotating the rear flippers forward. Sea lions swim by using their front flippers like wings to propel and steer themselves.

At the present time, populations of California sea lions appear healthy with estimated numbers of near 150,000 in California and Mexico, with another smaller population breeding on the Galapagos Islands. A third population that used to breed off Japan disappeared around the time of the Second World War. Steller sea lion populations are in decline and much of the present day sea lion research is being conducted on this species.

We can only hope that the increased use of the oceans by humans for food and recreation will not have the same impact on our winter marine visitors from California.

Information in this article, other than personal observations, was gleaned from: Olesiuk, Peter F. and Michael A. Bigg. Undated. *Seals and Sea Lions on the British Columbia Coast*. Pacific Biological Station, Nanaimo, B.C. Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

National Marine Fisheries Service, Northwest Region. Undated. *Marine Mammal Watching Guidelines*. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The photo of the sea lion on the Pearson College website is at: <http://www.pearson-college.uwc.ca/pearson/racerock/marmam/sealion/neckring/sealionring.htm>

# Arbutus Trees

By Yorke Edwards

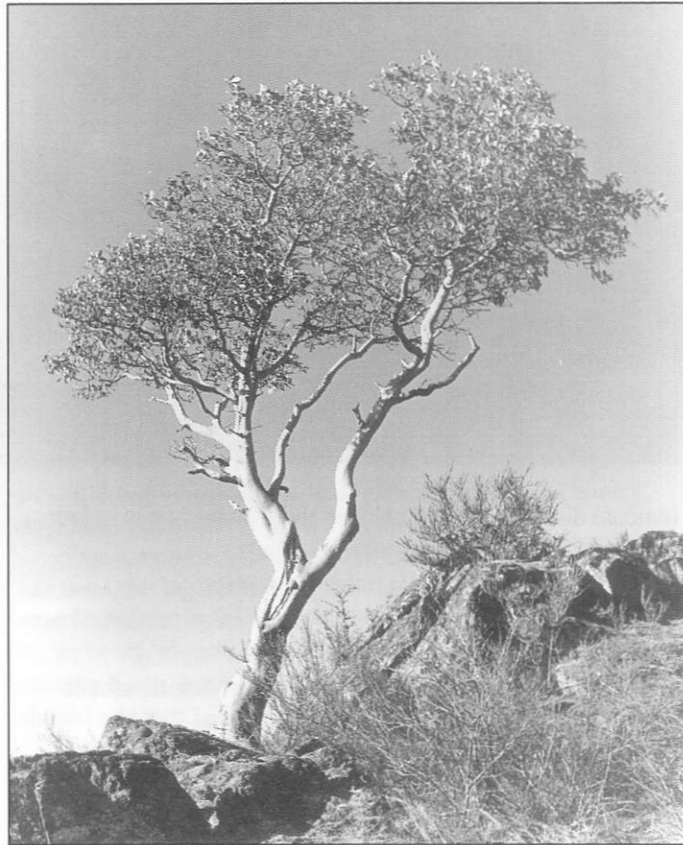
I grew up knowing only small bits of eastern hardwood forest growing in small patches. The first time I walked into one of British Columbia's old forests, the giant Douglas Firs, towering into the sky, became my choice of the "best" trees; but those "sky scrapers" had only one wonder which was their size. Impressive as those huge trees were, another species soon came to the top of my list. The first Arbutus tree I saw had not just one wonder, it had a host of them. At once it became the tree I consider most interesting and colourful.

Arbutus trees are startling in many ways. They like thin soils and rocky shores, where they grow to lean with the winds or sometimes to the sea, their trunks often dividing into two trunks before disappearing upward into their foliage covered branches. Both the trunk and branches are coloured quite unlike any other Canadian tree. The smooth bark is paper thin and reddish brown. It often peels off to reveal smooth new green bark. The twigs zigzag up into the glossy dark green, leathery leaves which are large and oval shaped.

Their small, white flowers grow in clusters that give off a strong and pleasant odour that attracts bees. The flowers become red berries that are not much eaten by birds except for a few robins, varied thrushes and band-tailed pigeons. Those red berries are the reason for the name "arbutus" which, in Latin, means "Strawberry Tree." Europe has its own kind of Arbutus tree.

The biggest wonder of this good looking and unusual tree is that their oval leaves remain on the tree through winter, and during the summer dry period turn brown and drop away.

Almost everything about Arbutus trees is unusual because of their colours, their shapes, their leaves and their often thriving in poor soils on rocky places. For some reason many live near the sea.



In Canada, the tree is called Arbutus, taken from its scientific name *Arbutus menziesii*. A Scottish botanist, Archibald Menzies, was the first to collect seeds of this tree and send them to England in 1792. In the United States its common name is Madrone, named by a Spanish priest in California in 1769. In southern Europe, near to the Mediterranean, is a similar tree called the Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*). The two *Arbutus* trees are similar but half a world apart.

I have often wondered how related plants have come to be oceans apart, even before humans began spreading them about. A good example is the two Arbutuses, one in western North America, the other in southern Europe. Maybe some day I will tell you that other story.

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# The Planner's Dilemma

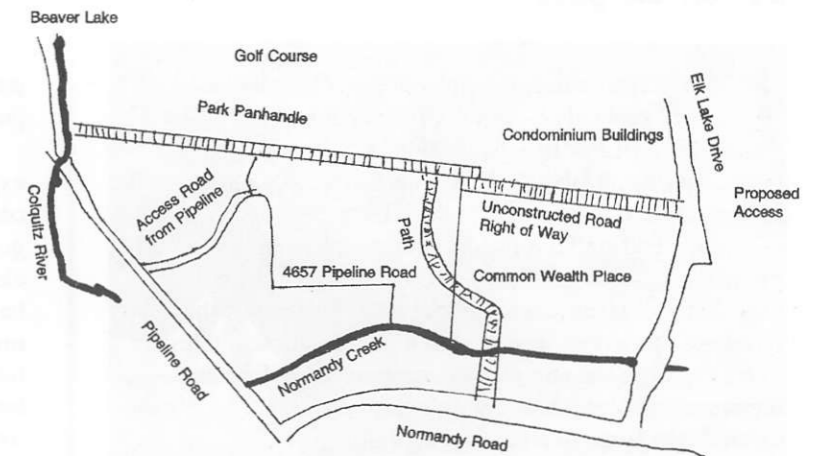
By Harvey Williams, Green Spaces Project

It has been said that nothing focuses the mind like the prospect of being hanged. Now with the abandonment of hanging, it can truthfully be said that nothing focuses the mind like survey stakes on the undeveloped property next door. In the neighbourhood around Saanich Commonwealth Place in Royal Oak, the minds of the people next door are focusing on newly driven DayGlo red survey stakes. The survey stakes mark a proposed access road on an approximately 12 metre wide unconstructed road right of way connecting Elk Lake Drive with a parcel of undeveloped land immediately to the west of the Commonwealth Place parking lot.

The address of the undeveloped land parcel is 4657 Pipeline Road which is accessed by a private driveway. For simplicity, we'll refer to it as 4657. The irregularly shaped parcel of land lies just inside Saanich's urban containment boundary and encompasses 4.02 hectares of pasture and woodland and includes one home. On the west, 4657 is bounded by the Commonwealth Place parking lot and on the north by a 12 metre wide panhandle of park land. The pan to which the handle is attached is Colquitz River municipal park to the west. The panhandle acts as a spacer between 4657 and a golf course which has encroached on and nearly absorbed it. The easternmost 100 metres of the southern boundary of 4657 is Normandy Creek.

The owner has submitted a plan to the Municipality of Saanich to subdivide 4675 into 29 oddly shaped lots, several 15.3 metres wide by 75 metres deep and some pie-shaped with only 12 metres of street frontage. One large lot is apparently destined for a multiple family dwelling. Since the property lies within the urban containment boundary, if the subdivision plan complies with Municipal bylaws a development permit should be forthcoming. The plan is supported by the Saanich's Royal Oak Local Area Plan which designates 4657 for small single family lots and/or attached housing. The Local Area Plan would expand Commonwealth Place to the west by incorporating land from 4657. The subdivision proposal would add 1.5 hectares to Commonwealth Place as called for in that Plan. The lower or southern half of this parcel is a pasture while the upper, northern half is dominated by Garry oak woodland.

The Royal Oak Plan also calls for the construction of a trail from Normandy Road across the stone bridge over Normandy Creek on to Commonwealth Place property. The trail would pass through the development, eventually connecting with the Colquitz River trail in Elk-Beaver Lake Regional Park. The strip of municipal park between the golf course and 4657 could not be used because flying golf balls would endanger hikers.



This is the owner's second attempt to develop his land. A previous plan which would have accessed 4657 via Pipeline Road was dropped when local residents objected on the grounds that Pipeline Road is too narrow to accommodate the increased traffic. This plan would access the proposed subdivision from Elk Lake Drive, hence the DayGlo red survey stakes that are focusing neighborhood minds.

But the new access route is densely wooded, hosting a variety of birds, and sheltering small mammals and even deer. Condominium residents have landscaped their property up to the edge of the right-of-way and perhaps beyond. And bird feeders abound. Much of this woodland might have to go if this access is approved. In addition there will be traffic noises and exhaust fumes from the roadway below their windows. A whispered chorus of "over my dead body" is becoming audible and soon may rise to a crescendo of sound and fury if this access is granted.

If the development is approved, no question, there will be benefits to the local community. Another patch of Garry Oak woodland will be protected and the network of hiking trails extended to include access from a built up-area into a major regional park. And local businesses will thrive from the increase in population.

But the adjacent condominium residents will lose. The noise and fumes of automobile traffic will replace the sights and sounds of nature close up. And, the biosphere will lose unless measures are taken to manage water runoff from the additional houses, driveways, and streets. Runoff from streets and driveways carries with it a load of contaminants such as oil and radiator coolant from automobiles, which reduces the water quality in streams that receive the runoff. Rapid runoff from impervious surfaces increases fluctuations in stream-flow, adversely affecting aquatic ecosystems.

So this is the planner's dilemma. There are winners, but like the biblical poor, the losers will always be with us.

# Wildlife and Parks Risked by Government Cutbacks

By Tom Burgess

Concerned citizens reading this environmental alert will probably be aware of the actions being taken by the HELP MELP Campaign. A collective of conservation and labour interests initiated this Campaign three years ago in response to the NDP government's cutting of funding and staff assigned to the management and protection of wildlife, fish, habitat protection and parks. Over the past seven years, budget cuts of up to 50% have devastated programs designed to look after these interests. The Campaign has attracted the support of 86 different organizations representing hundreds of thousands of British Columbians from all areas of the province.

The cutbacks of the past seven years have been extensive and damaging, indeed, the worst blow to our environment in decades. Nearly half of the staff upon whom we relied to conduct the inventories, studies, research, inspection, monitoring, liaison, planning and management, are gone. The effects of these losses are numerous, wide ranging and devastating for both the environment and for the public who depends on government to provide recreational and economic opportunities associated with our fish, wildlife and special outdoors places. We have lost ground, literally, all across the province, at an alarming rate. Populations, habitats, genetic diversity and even species are at increased risk, right now! But, it's going to get worse!

Late in September, we learned from the Premier of his Government's intentions to reduce over-all spending by 10% over the next three years. While freezing Health and Education budgets, he intends to balance the provincial budget by cutting 20% to 50% of the remaining Ministry and Agency budgets. The Ministries of Water, Land and Air Protection (WLAP), and of Sustainable Resource Management (SRM), which share responsibilities for managing wildlife, fisheries, habitat protection and parks, will certainly be included in these cuts. Indeed, we have been reliably informed that the cuts to parks will be 35% and to wildlife, fisheries and habitat protection, as much as 50%! Try to imagine what effect these additional cuts will have on the four programs that have already been reduced to 50%. The new cuts will take them to as low as one quarter to one third of their former functional capabilities. Government blandishments notwithstanding, it is just impossible for the remaining staff to deliver anything remotely like the services they were before. If these cuts proceed, we must expect substantial and long-lasting damage to our environmental resources and the recreational and economic benefits associated with them. Our future generations will be the

poorer for these shortsighted decisions being made by a government headed in the wrong direction.

The question is, can we turn them around? Recent experience suggests we can, if we work together and adopt a consistent and reasonable approach. Work with the NDP government had produced good results, up until the recent election. The continuous budget and staff cutting had been halted, modest one-time additions of \$5 million and \$4.9 million had been made, and last March a \$14 million addition to the MELP budget had been produced. Sadly, the election brought a splitting of the Ministry, with virtually all gains transferred to programs other than wildlife, fisheries, habitat protection and parks. Still, these temporary gains are evidence that united public pressure can influence government leaders.

## How should we respond?

The HELP MELP Campaign's organizers will be sending letters to the Premier and Ministers, reiterating our concerns. A number of our signatory 86 groups made presentations to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, in Victoria. We are requesting opportunities to meet with staff and Ministers of both SRM and WLAP to discuss Core Services Review documents.

## What should you do?

Even if you've never communicated any concerns to government before, do it now! If we lose this environmental battle, we will be decades recovering from the losses, if that's even possible. Write to, or email your MLA, the two Ministers, and the Premier. Government's insistence on tax cuts, balanced budgets within three years, and freezing of the Education and Health budgets (66% of the Provincial budget!), is putting too much pressure on other elements of government on which we all depend. Tell them they have to take a second look, that the interests of all citizens have already been badly hit by cuts to the SRM and WLAP programs, and that we need gradual program recovery, not more hits.

And spread the word, to your friends, neighbours, colleagues and local media. The environment we depend upon, depends on you!

TOM BURGESS spent 25 years of his working life as a wildlife biologist.

# Sterling Changed My Life

By Linda Timbs

On June 5, 2001 three or four ounces of grey and white fluff scampered into my yard, and settled into my heart in what can only be described as fate. The event has changed me as a person.

What was this strange creature? Exactly the point! I have never seen anything like it in all of my years of animal and bird watching. Describing him in words could not do him justice, but I will give it my best shot.

First, he looked exactly like a young Douglas squirrel. He was about the same size (a six inch body and five and a half inch tail). He moved in the same manner, had the same call, body characteristics, and overall squirrel behaviours. I cannot say if "he" was male or female, as my expert contact person felt it was probably a "mule". I did witness "it" engaging in what I thought was a sexual act with another Douglas squirrel, but apparently, young "Dougs" frequently engage in this type of play, preparing for the real thing when able. I still refer to "it" as "him" for convenience sake.

The oddity, was in his colouring — off-white, ivory coloured throat, chest, and tummy. His tail had long grey guard hairs on the topside, and whitish shorter hairs on the underside. It was because of these colour characteristics, that I named him "Sterling."

Initially, he was a loner — showing up every couple of days, eating alone, and going on his way. However, before long, he was mixing with the typically coloured Douglas squirrels; both playing and fighting with them.

He was a bit strange too, in that right from the start, he showed no fear of humans, allowing me to get within two or three feet of him to snap some photos. Often, he would follow me about the yard like a puppy, and watched intently, as I tended to gardening chores.

It was very difficult to remain objective with Sterling. If he did not show up for a couple of days, I'd call his name over the ravine. The little imp would come dashing along the tops of the neighbours' fences until he reached our yard. He'd sit atop the fence, and stare at me, while I, like an overly protective Mother, would ask, "Where have you been? I have been concerned about you!" (I think the neighbours were all starting to get concerned regarding my behaviour about that time!)

I was unable to find any useful information pertaining to this squirrel in my own research, so I contacted my resource person, Emily Gonzales. Ms. Gonzales recently successfully defended her Master's Thesis at the University of Guelph, in Ontario. We became acquainted via e-mail, when, about two years ago, she had posted an add in the V.N.H.S. paper asking readers for input regarding Eastern squirrels in B.C. Emily now resides in the Lower Mainland, and is furthering her education at U.B.C.



Photo: Linda Timbs

I sent Emily pictures, we e-mailed information back and forth, all in an attempt to better understand what Sterling was all about. Ms. Gonzales contacted other highly qualified persons, but no-one had seen anything quite like Sterling; either in their studies or research.

Ms. Gonzales, with some input from myself, wrote an article about Sterling, from a scientific view point for "Discovery", a magazine published by the Vancouver Natural History Society. We are hoping that the article will be published in the Fall issue.

Sterling was with us for about three months. Then, one day, he showed up with a horrific eye infection, which rapidly became systemic — and within a week, I found him dead behind the fountain he loved to play in. I was overwhelmed with grief, and buried him, in a secured container, exactly where I had found him. It was difficult advising Ms. Gonzales, and she was upset too on learning of his demise.

Reflecting back over the entire episode now, I feel that Sterling's short life span was in some fashion due to his genetic make-up. Perhaps, he didn't have the proper immune system that a typical Douglas squirrel possesses to fight off invasive germs.

Sterling changed my life. He gave me gifts of a deeper understanding of, respect, and appreciation for Nature, and its beauty. He taught me too, to let go of situations beyond my control, and to accept that Nature has reasons for acting in ways that we as humans have difficulty understanding, in our need to rush in and "fix things" that were probably never broken. I cherish the memories of the little grey squirrel, and think of him whenever I see all of our visiting squirrels in our yard.

I will never forget Sterling, the squirrel that wasn't meant to be.

# Advantages of Joining the BCFO

By Marie O'Shaughnessy.

Membership Director: Russ Tkachuk 604-885-8867  
President: Bryan Gates 598-7789

Five years ago I became a member of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists (BCFO). I had three main reasons that inspired me to do so. Initially, I wanted to find a way of travelling this beautiful province without using my own car. It had become more apparent with each passing year, that I was not a highway driver. I will travel anywhere as long as I am not behind the wheel.

The adventure of seeing new places and chasing after different and exciting birds was a lure that I couldn't resist. I have also taken to listing birds that I see, and the annual extension trip of three to four days following the BCFO Annual General Meeting (AGM) each year, allowed for this indulgence. My bird list keeps growing.

Lastly, I wanted to hear of the great research that dedicated Naturalists and Ornithologists were conducting in and around our diverse and picturesque province. Research papers are presented at each AGM, which I have found to be most stimulating and informative. Combined with morning field trips and a Saturday night banquet where members recount exciting encounters, I can only applaud the organizers of each and every AGM. A great deal of time and hard work goes into the preparation.

During the past five years, as a member of the BCFO, I have had the opportunity to attend four AGMs. We have travelled to Prince George, Creston, Vancouver, and in 2001 we headed north to Dawson Creek. Next year our travels will take us to Williams Lake. I look forward to seeing yet another part of our lovely province, and some new birds.

Since June, I have reflected frequently of our adventure with the BCFO this year in and around Fort Nelson and Dawson Creek. Not only were some of the birds different, my encounters with the wildlife were thrilling. I was never

too willing to encounter a grizzly or a wolf, which were possibly the only two of the large mammals we didn't see on this trip. Close encounters we had with black bear and moose with their calves were a major thrill.

High in the Alpine meadows dwarfed botanical plants and flowers gave colour to the wind swept terrain. The scenery was often spectacular as we traversed the mountain slopes looking for Ptarmigan. We were rewarded for our efforts. We saw Rock and Willow Ptarmigan. These are two species I had never seen before. Their cryptic feathering allowed for full camouflage within their surroundings making it impossible to see them until the last moment. We saw a total of 5 Ptarmigan at the two locations we visited.

I added 12 new bird species to my list including: Leconte's and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows; Black-throated Green, Bay-breasted, Blackpoll, Cape May, and Connecticut Warblers; Sabine's Gull; Great Gray Owl; Gray-cheeked Thrush; and Willow and Rock Ptarmigan.

We had wonderful looks at many other birds. A few die-hard birders found a Yellow Rail in the Dawson Creek vicinity on the last evening. I had by this time ran out of all birding steam and so opted for an early night.

I look forward to another opportunity in the future to chase after birds and perhaps to find a Yellow Rail. One doesn't have to be a scientist or professional Naturalist or even an Ornithologist to enjoy the activities of the BCFO. Consider the love of birds and nature your key for membership. Participation in The Victoria Natural History Society fosters that curiosity of bigger and better things, so ruffle your feathers and learn to fly for there is a world of discovery out there just waiting for you.



Birders on the BCFO extension trip to Fort Nelson. Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy

# Summary of the Bald Eagle Nest Tree Project for the 2001 Breeding Season

By Gwen Greenwood

Our area for the Bald Eagle Nest Tree Project covered the corridor of seashore and communities from Sooke to Sidney. We also monitored a few small islands off Sidney and a couple of nests in the Gulf Islands out of our own interest.

In the CRD area (excluding the smaller islands) there were:

- 21 monitors;
- 36 nests documented;
- 16 active nests; and
- 12 young fledged.

It was unclear for a couple of nests whether any young were actually produced or not. Several pairs appeared to start nesting and then abandoned the process at various stages. We only counted the definite nests.

Our information indicates that only 10% of the young reached maturity. This raises the question whether productivity is lower than usual this year.

The area reports on the East side of Vancouver Island from Duncan to Campbell River appeared to show that productivity there was considerably higher.

One of the many interesting stories that came out of the past season involved a nest near Pat Bay. Two "branchers" — approximately 7 weeks old — were at the nest. The larger of the two ended up on the ground, apparently after a branch broke. Over the next 3 days it was able to hop up onto branches high enough to reach safety. The parents did not appear to feed it.

At the end of the fifth day the bird had made it all the way to the top of the tree *next* to the nest — only to fall all the way to the ground again!

At this point, Ruth and Dick Keogh, who were monitoring this episode had to leave on holiday — much to their chagrin. The only consolation was that the young bird seemed to be unhurt and was proceeding to hop up to safety again!

Upon checking the situation the following afternoon, to my delight, there were two eaglets in the nest tree. Our hero was out on a branch flapping like mad, while the smaller eaglet was watching from the edge of the nest — sitting very still! Both eaglets began flying shortly after.

As part of this program BC Hydro facilitated and supervised the modification of a Douglas Fir tree in the McNeill Bay area (Transit Road) in order to attract the local pair of eagles. The existing nest was in a rather precarious

Cottonwood tree. As it happened, the nest fell out of the cottonwood in mid-November. We will be watching that area with great interest. If anyone sees any nest-building activity please let me know (Gwen 652-2876).

Many thanks go to BC Hydro, Ministry of Environment (former title) and to FBCN for sponsoring this project.

Monitoring in the CRD will continue next year under the auspices of WiTS — The Wildlife Tree Stewardship Initiative — about which we will be hearing more at Birder's Night in January.

Gwen may be contacted at: 8590 Alec Rd, Saanichton, BC V8M 1S4. Phone: 250 652-2876.

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

# 2001 Scholarship Recipients

By Tom Gillespie

The thank-you cards and letters have been arriving over the past couple of months from the grateful students whose hard work has resulted in them receiving one of the several VNHS-funded scholarships. I have the enviable "chore" of opening them but, as society members, we can all feel good about helping others further their education and contributing to our collective knowledge of the world we're

Dear Mr. Gillespie,

I write to express my thanks to you and the VNHS for supporting university students in their pursuit of education and their intended contribution to the preservation of biological diversity. I am very grateful to have received the Alice M. Hay Scholarship. The award will greatly offset my fall tuition, allowing me to focus on research and education without the worries imposed by finances. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Chris Darimont

Dear Donor,

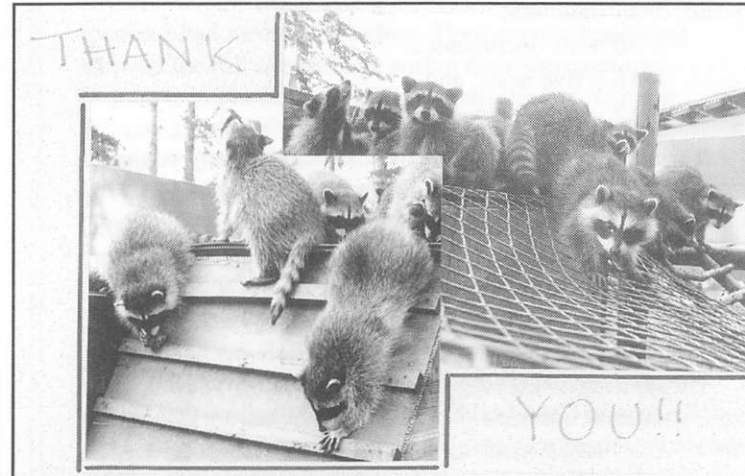
I would like to thank you for honouring me with the Freeman F. King Scholarship. It will be a most appreciated assistance in funding expenses for my university education. It has come at a time that, due to increased enthusiasm and interest in natural history, I have begun applying more of my potential to learning. Furthermore, receiving this award reveals to me that the more I put into something, the more I will benefit in the end.

Sincerely yours,

Doron Lis

living in. Included below are their expressions of gratitude, in their own words.

Your board continues to work on establishing a scholarship for graduate students at Royal Roads. For more information about contributing to our Royal Roads scholarship, or any other related questions, please contact me at 361-1694.



Raccoons at Wild Arc. Photo: Wild Arc volunteer Robert Campbell

Dear Victoria Natural History Society,

This note is to thank you for the generous Samuel Simco Bursary I received towards my studies at the University of Victoria. I am currently enrolled in my fourth year of studies in the Biology Department. My career aspiration at this point is in the field of Conservation. Following completion of my degree, I plan to attend the Conservation Officer program at Malaspina College.

The Bursary will help ease the financial burden of studying and being a new father. I think it is really wonderful that the Victoria Natural History Society takes an interest in the pursuits of students and is willing to support them in their worthy endeavours. Following in the footsteps of the VNHS, I hope to work in a capacity that enhances our beautiful natural environment and the creatures that depend on it.

Sincerely,

Robert Campbell

## Book Review

### It Gives Me That Warm And Fuzzy Feeling

*Mammals of British Columbia*

T. Eder and D. Pattie

Lone Pine Publishing, Vancouver. 2001

By Claudia Copley

I am pleased to let the naturalist community know that there is a new tool available for their "toolkit" of field guides: *Mammals of British Columbia* by Tamara Eder and Don Pattie, published by Lone Pine.

Let me first say that owning a book devoted to such a well-known group of organisms, not exceptionally well represented on this continent, and some of which you will never encounter, may seem a bit excessive. On the other hand, the reality is that humans have a soft spot for mammals, probably because they epitomize "warm and fuzzy". And there are groups of mammals that are extremely difficult to differentiate e.g. shrews, so you can rationalize this purchase! For Darren and I, it really is purely an addiction to field guides. One day we may need to identify the poop of a Bittern or the tracks of a Sasquatch, and we'll be ready!

Apart from this addiction, I have, for years, taught a lab at the University of Victoria that is an overview/identification course to the (non-fish) vertebrates of British Columbia. Because the province's bird fauna is so diverse and the herptiles and mammals are relatively under-represented, students have only been encouraged to purchase a field guide to the birds. All that has now changed with the publication of this book. Until now the options when dealing with the mammalian identifications included searching for a long out-of-print museum publication or purchasing the revised museum handbooks that focus in on specific groups such as the *Bats of British Columbia*. These revised handbooks are incredibly informative and worth the price, but they are not intended as field guides. This new mammal guide is designed intentionally with the great outdoors in mind and, at a reasonably priced \$26.95, is affordable even on a student budget!

The book is divided using colour coded pages into broad categories such as "hoofed mammals", and it has a key to this code on the back and in the table of contents. A quick reference guide, which includes all the illustrations, helps direct you to the exact page of the specific animal you'd like to know more about, and there is information about the

different regions of the province as well as specific locations for "mammal viewing". It is the individual species accounts where this book shines the brightest. Each account is accompanied by an exceptional illustration of the animal as well as a range map, and there are often additional illustrations such as tracks, shape of blows (for whales) and fascinating tidbits in a "Did You Know" section. The accounts themselves are thorough and entertaining. For instance, how many people know that Merriam's Shrew (*Sorex merriami*) remains have been found by archaeologists in stored foods of indigenous people, and the suggested reason is because its bad smell may keep out pests!

I only have a few suggestions for the next edition; most are minor and some are biased. The range maps are an essential component and, for the most, part accurate and well done. Besides a couple of small errors, I found the marine mammal range maps a little misleading because the terrestrial regions were coloured as they are for terrestrial species. Although the marine mammals in the book are those most commonly seen, readers should be aware that there are many other possibilities in our provincial waters. Skulls and scat are my two big requests for future editions. As naturalists, we are far more likely to encounter what a fisher ate than the fisher itself, and, as a lab instructor for a course that concentrates on using skulls for identification, I feel they would be an invaluable addition. The few misspelled Latin names and bits of "crazy talk" like: red foxes preying on Vancouver Island marmots, can be easily corrected at the same time!

What makes me smile about this new book is the equal time given to the small and elusive mammals of the province. This rarely happens in typical publications and, as a result, few people realize just how diverse our small mammal fauna is. This indicates to me a dedication to accuracy and a determination to produce a comprehensive guide. I definitely recommend this book as a travelling companion on your journeys around our province. Keep an eye out for a Pygmy Shrew (*Sorex hoyi*); they're about the size of an eraser, including the tail!



# Thank You Art Show Volunteers!

To all the volunteers from the Victoria Natural History Society: thank you very much for participating in "The Nature of Island Artists" art show. We received many compliments on the quality of the show. At the end of the three weeks more than 10,000 people went through the doors; thanks for being a huge part of this success.

Extra thanks are in order for people who went above and beyond the "call": Carolyn MacDonald for soliciting donations for, and organizing the entire wine and cheese; Johanna van Barneveld for tirelessly phoning and scheduling

The following is the list of people from the society who helped staff the show, protect the artwork, and sell raffle tickets. **We could not have done it without your participation and we really appreciate your support!** Our apologies to anyone whose name we missed or misspelled!

David Allinson	Anne Gibson	Susan Jennings	David Stirling
Barbro Baker	Keith Gibson	Don Johnson	Denise Storey
Stephen Baker	Tom Gillespie	Maryann Johnson	Germaine Taylor
Barbara Beggs	Margaret Gray	Kerry Joy	Shirley Terry
Judy Beinder	Alan Greatbatch	Lynn Joy	Margaret Turner
Maxine Bradley	Joan Greatbatch	Anne Knowles	Jim van Barneveld
Bob Chappell	Gwen Greenwood	Barbara Lake	Jean Weye
Isabel Clemson	Robert Hadley	Bob Lake	Bruce Whittington
Lyndis Davis	Mike Hammersley	Marilyn Lambert	Mary Winstone
Isabel Dawson	Andrew Harcombe	Enid Lemon	Bert Youell
Katie Dawson	Gail Harcombe	Bob Loosmore	Sharon Youell
Elaine Eastman	Gordon Hart	Doreen Loosmore	
Val Edwards	Valerie Hawkins	Jean MacDonald	
Marion Edworthy	Connie Hawley	Cheryl Mackie	
Barb Elton	Dorothy Henderson	Morwyn Marshall	
Tony Embelton	Phyllis Henderson	Jill McLean	
Sue Ennis	Barbara Henwell	Wynne Miles	
Cam Finlay	Bruce Henwell	Marilyn Miller	
Marilyn Fuchs	Iris Heron	Cathie Neighbour	
Louise Gates	Peter Heron	Marie O Shaughnessy	
Barry Gatten	Elena Hind	Pat Robertson	
Jeremy Gatten	Bob Hooper	Wayne Robertson	
Ann Gibbard	Mary Hooper	Rick Schortinghuis	
Hal Gibbard	Edith Husnberger	Camilla Smith	

in all of the volunteers; and finally the "hang gang": Carol Berryman, Bruce Whittington, Leah Ramsay, Kari Nelson, and David Fraser. Rick and Ingrid Carswell provided all the wine for the opening night. Food donations came from Thrifty Foods, Lifestyles Market and Save-On Foods, and flowers came from the gardens of Robert and Jean Copley as well as Sherri Granger.

Yours sincerely,  
Darren and Claudia Copley



## HAT Tricks

By Bruce Whittington

It's been a very rewarding time for us at Habitat Acquisition Trust, as we have begun to see the fruits of our efforts of the last several years.

We have had successes with acquisitions like Ayum Creek and Brooks Point, yes, but as a regional land trust we have also recognized the need to lay a broader foundation for long-term conservation work in the region. This foundation, in large part, is based on partnerships.

With some 130 organizations active in conservation work in the region, there was often a duplication of projects being undertaken, and a lot of experience, which was not being shared. HAT has long recognized a need for a regional network of conservation groups, and in 2001 we were successful in developing a web-based resource: [www.conservationconnection.bc.ca](http://www.conservationconnection.bc.ca). Here, over 90 organizations are listed, and we are now expanding the site to include a calendar of events. HAT is working with other non-profit sectors, and with provincial and federal on-line stewardship websites to share this tool.

There have been encouraging discussions about the development of a regional environmental education centre, and HAT is also cooperating with the community mapping initiatives of Groundworks.

HAT is also near completion of a stewardship resource kit for decision-makers which will be presented to municipal councils. In this, we are pleased that the federal — provincial Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team is cooperating with us in sharing this resource beyond HAT's mandate area (the CRD).

We have had wonderful cooperation from many agencies and grassroots organizations that provided input to our Good

Neighbours project, which encourages good environmental stewardship of private lands adjacent to protected areas. The first phase of this project is now complete, and, funding permitting, we will begin working directly with landowners this spring. Here, too, HAT will rely on partnerships with the community groups that have the local knowledge to enhance the effectiveness of our work.

We continue to work with other land trusts, too. The campaign to purchase Laughlin Lake on Galiano Island, with the Galiano Conservancy Association and Islands Trust Fund, is on the home stretch. HAT is protecting more habitat on private land, too, using conservation covenants. These are normally co-held with Nature Conservancy of Canada, The Land Conservancy of BC, Islands Trust Fund, the Capital Regional District, and others.

Habitat stewardship also depends on people. HAT has learned a great deal from the community in the Tod Creek Watershed Project. There is now a very active and committed Friends of Tod Creek, and HAT is preparing to reduce its involvement, but to continue to provide assistance where it can, as a community partner.

We are encouraged to see what can be accomplished when we work together. Many of our partners have a slightly different focus, but that just serves to give the conservation movement greater strength in its diversity.

And, once again, we simply could not do the work we are doing without the support of our members and donors. We thank all of you who have helped us in so many ways in the past year. Of all the partnerships we value, yours is the most important of all.



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# Birding Victoria's Waterfront by Scope and Binocular — Field Trip Report, September 8, 2001

By Marie O'Shaughnessy

It never ceases to amaze me how many avid birders haul themselves out of the comfort of their warm beds to don all-weather-gear and head out to some designated meeting place. There, at all hours of the morning these curious people seek to join fellow enthusiasts, while observing their favourite subject, birds. Some mornings are less than hospitable and yet they still come. We, the Leaders, are always pleased to see new and familiar faces, as we stage like birds gathering.

This years "Birding by the Waterfront" was one of those wonderful bright mornings full of golden promise as the sun came up over the horizon. I was out scouting the waterfront before the first early participants, seventeen in all, joined me at Clover Point. Eight o'clock was not an unreasonable a time to gather, as the warmth of the day created ideal conditions for the foraging for birds beneath the bluff. It was even pleasant for us as we un-zipped our jackets.

Upon watching the waves lap over the edges of the rocks below, my disappointment mounted; the tide appeared to be flooding instead of heading out. I had failed to look at the tide tables before agreeing to lead this trip. Rule No. 1: Get the best conditions for your trip. Shorebirds are better seen on a low tide especially around Victoria, however, three Western Sandpipers, and one Least Sandpiper flew just as the first "scoper's" parked their cars and joined me.

One small flock of Dunlin didn't pass unseen by the group, so the credibility of my having seen other shorebirds earlier was boosted.

A large group of Black Oystercatchers, 8 in total were present, as were Harlequin and Mallard ducks. The gull population included: Heermann's, Mew, California and Glaucous-winged Gulls.

The new juveniles of our local resident species of Gull — the Glaucous-winged - were screeching at the top of their lungs "feed me, feed me" albeit in a submissive pose. The rocks beneath us were alive with sound. No wonder the adults fly off at this stage.

Out beyond the kelp beds, Pigeon Guillemots, Marbled Murrelets, Common Murres and Rhinoceros Auklets dove just as we settled our binoculars upon their forms. Such are the joys of birding. Patience is definitely a prerequisite for the pastime of BIRDING, for much time is passed while birding!

We were rewarded too, at this location, by sightings of Common Loons. The Rockdoves were milling around as usual but this wasn't the day to witness the killing stoop of the local Peregrine Falcon that usually takes breakfast at this location.

The familiar shape of a resting Great Blue Heron graced



Black turnstone. Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy

the lumpy "entrails" of the Bull-whip kelp, and Pelagic and Double-crested Cormorants beat their morning flight across our gaze. A buzzy seep from several Savannah Sparrows afforded some relief from the noisy calls of our other feathered friends.

Within forty-five minutes, we had exhausted all possibility of seeing Surfbirds and Black Turnstones at Clover Point, so off we headed to Ogden Point Breakwater. The Rare Bird Alert Line had received report of a Wandering Tattler in this area during the previous few days. I needed this sighting for my year list so although the Breakwater wasn't one of our designated spots to visit for this trip, it did fulfill our quest for two or three shorebird species.

All eyes scanning the nooks and crannies along the breakwater for possible Tattler, came instead, across four to six Black Turnstones. Alas no Tattler. It wasn't until we had reached the beacon on the end of the breakwater that we saw many more Turnstones across the soft inlet that separated us from the far jetty. Here, sequestered within a shelf on the opposite jetty where as many as 40+ Turnstones basking in the sun.

Jeff Gaskin proved invaluable on this trip for his keen Birding eyes alerted us to one lone Surfbird amongst the hordes of Black Turnstones huddled together. This was indeed a find, but that wasn't the end for Jeff. He then called out, "Over there, over there." We swung our binocular toward the open water past the beacon, and there, swimming in typical circular movement among the kelp, were five or six Red-necked Phalaropes.

Surf Scoters in small numbers in the distance were evident as was the one Belted Kingfisher that frequents the breakwater. Our meander out on this concrete barrier was fruitful to say the least.

The next port of call was Bowker Avenue where the rocks, at low tide, can prove to be a bonanza. Black-bellied Plover and Yellowlegs are plentiful at certain times of the year, but not this day. Even a Ruff, or Red Knot have been sighted here in past years, but we were to only add Hooded Merganser to our list after our brief stop.

A Barn Swallow flew over head at some point which added another bird for the morning. Northwestern Crows, House Sparrows, Starlings and Robins were the common Birds that are always observed on these outings.

Our last two stops at Cattle Point and Loon Bay hardly swelled our total. There were none of the Terns that are usually seen most years in September. Even a reported Horned Lark at Cattle Point avoided us. The Auks were in evidence off the point but we had seen them earlier in the

day. Bonaparte's Gulls and one lone Greater Yellowlegs at Spoon Bay made this unscheduled stop worthwhile, for neither of these two species had been sighted previously.

Our total bird observation along the waterfront was the grand total of 32 species. We weren't disappointed. This September we had experienced a beautifully warm, late summer sunlit morn to indulge our sights and senses. What more could one ask for when one is out chasing the birds!

## Federation of BC Naturalists Annual General Meeting

Discover Island Biogeography May 9-12, 2002 in Victoria

The Victoria Natural History Society will be hosting the 2002 FBCN Annual General Meeting at the University of Victoria this spring. It has been eight years since we were the hosts, and we are looking forward to making this an exceptional gathering of BC naturalists.

Officially, the meetings take place on the Friday and Saturday, but we are offering additional events on Thursday and Sunday.

A full-day field trip planned for **Thursday, May 9**, will be to the **Carmanah Walbran Provincial Park**. The park offers protection to diverse forest ecosystems, including a large Sitka spruce ecosystem that represents two per cent of BC's remaining old-growth forest. Carmanah Walbran is home to some of the world's largest spruce trees which may tower over 95 metres and live for more than 800 years. This event will be followed by a casual social evening with an opportunity for AGM participants to share some of their own adventures through slides and stories.

On **Friday, May 10**, we will be offering early morning birding, a variety of field trips, and guest speakers addressing "island" issues: from plants and animals that inhabit our islands and the surrounding waters, to the effects of creating islands of habitat in our forests. Friday evening will be another casual social event, followed by a presentation on local owls, and weather permitting, an owl walk on the wooded University of Victoria campus.

**Saturday, May 11** will have early morning birding, the FBCN Directors' meeting, the Annual General Meeting, field trips and speakers for those not attending the meetings, and the banquet.

Our banquet speaker will be **Dr. Neville Winchester** of the University of Victoria, whose research involves the study and conservation of elevated "islands". His doctoral work in the Carmanah canopy was instrumental in its eventual protection in a provincial park, and he continues to demonstrate the uniqueness of these areas with emphasis on the organisms that live in the canopies of British Columbia's ancient forests.

We will be offering a number of half-day field trips on

**Sunday, May 12**, which will allow participants to enjoy one more location before heading home.

Full registration information will be available in the Spring 2002 edition of the BC Naturalist and on the FBCN website. We are hoping that a good number of VNHS members will attend the AGM and associated events.

To make this an outstanding conference, we are looking for people who would like to help with the planning and organization before, or who are willing to assist during the events. We have already had several people offer to help, but we still need more. The more people involved, the less each will be asked to do! If you are interested in assisting in any of the following areas, or have some other ideas about how you could help out, please contact **Ann Nightingale** at 652-6450 or by email at [motmot@shaw.ca](mailto:motmot@shaw.ca).

- Registration coordinator (for the AGM and field trips)
- Registration desk assistants (probably 2-4 hour shifts)
- Collating registration packages
- Gathering information/brochures for registration packages
- Field trip leaders
- Presenters for sessions on Friday and Saturday
- Door prize and sponsorship coordinator
- Accommodation coordinator (identify a range of accommodation, negotiate special rates if possible)
- Web page maintainer (post new information to the FBCN website as it is available)
- Transportation coordinator (determine best options for field trip transportation: carpooling, rentals, etc.)
- Social event hosts (Arrangements will be made in advance. The host will be available to ensure that the events run smoothly. This may include picking up supplies and confirming food orders.)
- Ticket takers for the Saturday evening banquet.
- Publicity (write press release and notices for newspapers, radio stations, etc.; set up information display)

# President's Report

By Bruce Whittington

It's a tradition at the beginning of a year to comment on how special it will certainly be, and, looking forward, the year does hold much promise for the Victoria Natural History Society.

There may be some auspice of this in the fact that 2002 is a numerical palindrome — it reads the same in either direction. The last time this happened was only eleven years ago, but the next occurrence will not come for 110 years. So what's in store this year?

VNHS will take a more prominent place in the provincial community of naturalists, when it hosts the Federation of BC Naturalists Annual General Meeting in May. Ann Nightingale has been very busy organizing this event, and we are now developing a program of speakers and field trips which will share Victoria's natural wonders with the rest of the province. Watch for ways in which you can help.

Our Young Naturalists Club continues to grow, under the leadership of Sheila Mosher and her volunteers. The Society's excellent program of field trips and presentations has been augmented with an expanding selection of courses in birding and other natural history subjects. These activities are all important components in our mandate to educate our own members, and also the public at large.

The efforts of our members in collecting data on the natural history of this region are expanding as well. The Green Spaces Inventory Project continues to survey sensitive habitats, and their efforts are included in the new web-based CRD Natural Areas Atlas. Christmas Bird Count

data are added to the literature every single year.

VNHS also continues to support many conservation initiatives in the region, with volunteer committee members, and in some cases financial contributions.

Towards the end of 2001, the Year of the Volunteer, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien signed a landmark accord called the Voluntary Sector Initiative, in recognition of the important contributions that organizations like ours will continue to make.

Here in British Columbia, however, this year the province is poised to eliminate entirely the government branch that deals with volunteer organizations.

Will it slow us down? No, it won't! Our society is funded almost entirely by memberships and revenue from investments. So can we afford to be complacent? On the contrary.

2002 will be a year in which we might be seduced into coasting on the Society's momentum, but this is a time for us to continue to build. VNHS has the human resources to improve the work it does, and to expand its efforts as well.

Perhaps you have had ideas about ways in which VNHS can be a better organization — some of you have come forward already. Perhaps you wondered about becoming more involved yourself, but you thought everything seemed to be under control. Well, there is nothing like new ideas, someone else to share a task, or even just someone in the wings to take over when a volunteer needs a break.

VNHS is a strong organization, with a long history in this community. We're glad you've chosen to be a part of that, and we hope you'll help us to make 2002 a great year.

# 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 at 7:30 p.m., in Begbie 159, University of Victoria; **Botany Night:** the third Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., Swan Lake Nature Centre; **Parks and Conservation Committee Meeting:** the third Wednesday, 7:00 p.m., Swan Lake Nature Centre; **Birders' Night:** the fourth Wednesday, 7:30 p.m., Murray and Anne Fraser 159, University of Victoria. **Marine Night:** the last Monday, 7:30 p.m., Swan Lake Nature Centre. Locations are given in the calendar listings. Telephone the VNHS Events Tape at 479-2054 for further information and updates.

## JANUARY THROUGH FEBRUARY

### *The Eagles Have Landed (over 200!)*

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 estuary is also a great viewing area for the occasional Golden Eagle. The Nature House is open daily all winter from 9:00am to 4:30 pm (except Christmas day). On exhibit is the **Royal B.C. Museum's Birds of Prey exhibit** and great eagle viewing through spotting scopes and video cameras. Call 478-9414 for information on programs happening most weekends!

## JANUARY

### Tuesday, January 1

#### *First Birding Trip of the New Year*

Get the New Year off to a good start! A great excuse to start a new bird list. Join **Kevin Slagboom** for a birding walk in the Layritz, Broadcast Hill, Viaduct Flats area. Wear good hiking boots and bring a lunch. Meet at 10:00 am at Layritz Park. Call Kevin at 658-0940 for more information.

### Tuesday, January 8

#### *VNHS Natural History Presentation Spineless and Other Tropical Wonders*

This slide presentation will cover tarantulas and other fabulous tropical scenery and the creatures that call these regions home. **Rick West** (*spiderman... spiderman...*) is currently involved with two tarantula conservation projects: one in India/Sri Lanka and the other in French Guiana and he will be telling us all about these endeavours. In addition to being considered one of the world's leading tarantula experts, Rick spends time with indigenous cultures and learns about their uses for his favourite organisms. Although his true love is tarantulas, he can answer your questions about local spiders as well. To find out more, we'll see you at 7:30 p.m., Room 159, Murray and Anne Fraser Building (formerly Begbie), UVic. Bring a coffee mug and a friend; non-members are welcome.

### Sunday, January 20

#### *Birding the Victoria Waterfront*

Join **Ron Bates** in search of waterfowl and shorebirds. Meet at the Ogden Point Breakwater on Dallas Rd. at 9:00 am. The walk will continue from there on to Cattle Point with several stops along the way. Call Ron at 386-1264 for more information.

### Wednesday, January 23

#### *Birders Night*

Murray and Anne Fraser Building (ex Begbie) Room 159, UVic,

7:30 p.m. **John Maher** of BC Hydro and **Ron Speller** of FBCN will present a slide-illustrated talk on the Bald Eagle Nest Tree Project to which many of our members have contributed, and on a new program, The Strait of Georgia Coastal Wildlife Tree Conservation Project. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend, novice birder and your binocular.

### Monday, January 28

#### *A View From Behind the Camera: Science Education Featuring BC Marine Invertebrates.*

**David Denning** is a Biologist and Filmmaker with BioMedia Associates. He will present excerpts from some of his nature films used for educating students about natural history. Caution (nudge nudge!) may include Gnathostomulids and hermaphroditic matings of barnacles or nudibranchs. 7:30 p.m. at Swan Lake Nature Centre

## FEBRUARY

### Sunday, February 10

#### *Fourth Annual Valentine's Day Couples Count*

Join **Dannie and Susan Carsen** for another couples bird romp around Victoria. In the checklist area, both partners need to see or hear all the birds to add to a total species count collected between 6:00 a.m. and 12 noon. No mechanical devices may be used to call birds. You may only use the romantic duet of the human voice and romantic pishing! The entry fee for this fantastic Valentine's Day event is only \$10 per couple. Funds raised will be contributed to the Parks and Conservation Committee to be used for the Greenspaces Project. We will meet at Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary at 12:30 p.m. to tally the results and determine the winner! The grand prize for the highest count will be a romantic dinner for two. The second prize is usually a basket of food and wine and other prizes have included a romantic brunch and a bird book. Please register at January Birder's Night to get your official contest list or drop by the Swan Lake Nature House in the New Year. For further information, contact Dannie Carsen at 595-2773 (or dcarsen@shaw.ca).

### Tuesday, February 12

#### *VNHS Natural History Presentation*

#### *The Gray Wolves of British Columbia's Coastal Rainforests.*

**Chris Darimont**, a recent recipient of a VNHS scholarship, will share natural history information about these unique wolves and their beautiful and increasingly rare ancient forest habitat. Do wolves actually fish for salmon? Do they swim among islands? Why are they important animals to consider in land-use plans? Come find out! Chris has spent much of the last two years on the Central and North Coasts of BC working on wolves and he promises lots of slides and video footage. If you are interested,

## Welcome to New Members

**Patricia Gauthier**  
Linden Avenue  
(birds, botany, marine)

**Doreen Johnson**  
South Bank Dr.  
Saltspring Island  
(birds, photography)

**Mady Niel**  
Glasgow Avenue  
(birds, field trips)

**Elizabeth Silvester**  
St. Louis Street  
(all nature)

**Chris Slade**  
King George Terrace

**Noreen Greig**  
Hollyridge Place (birds)

**Elizabeth Parnis**  
Valewood Trail  
(botany, geology)

**Vicky Scott**  
Jean Heights  
(birds, walking)

**Beth Mitchell**  
Aloha Drive

**Graham Knox and  
Brenda Spencer**  
Roy Road

**Debra Drury**  
Coal Point Lane, Sidney

**Jill Thompson**  
Johnson Street

**Jeff Hunter-Smith**  
Oliphant Street

**Barry and Valerie  
Arnsdorf**  
Roslyn Road

**Gerald Graham**  
Gibson Court

**Valerie Macdonald**  
Old West Saanich Road  
(invertebrates)

**Jessica and Lee Murray**  
Orchard Avenue, Sidney  
(birds)

**Crystal Ross**  
Foul Bay Road

**Patricia Ruth**  
Esquimalt Road (birding)

please see the website of his funders at [www.raincoast.org](http://www.raincoast.org). On the wolf project page, there is a downloadable file that summarizes results of the 2000 field season. We will see you at 7:30 pm, Room 159, Murray and Anne Fraser Building (formerly Begbie), UVic. Bring a coffee mug and a friend; non-members are welcome.

#### **Saturday, February 16**

##### ***Birding Island View Beach***

Join **David Stirling** (477-0625) to check out the bird life at Island View Beach. There will be a variety of seabirds and passerines, depending on which direction you face! Wear your woollies 'cause the breeze can be brisk! Drive all the way in to the end parking lot for a 9:00 am start.

#### **Friday, February 22**

##### ***Birding Macaulay Point and Saxe Point***

Join **Bob Chappell** in birding the Esquimalt waterfront. There should be a variety of seabirds and passerines. Meet at the boat ramp at Macaulay Point at 8:00 am. Call Bob at 388-4696 for more information.

#### **Saturday, February 23**

##### ***Boundary Bay and Raptors***

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** and **Murray MacDonald** for a trip to Boundary Bay and the Tsawassen Jetty. If time and weather permit, we may also visit the Reifel Bird Sanctuary. We can expect to see

large flocks of waterfowl and shorebirds, as well as visit some of the best wintering habitat for raptors in western Canada. Car-pooling will reduce costs to approximately \$35 per person. Meet at Elk Lake Drive at the entrance to Beaver Lake Park at 6:00 am. To register call Rick at 642-3596.

#### **Monday, February 25**

##### ***Underwater British Columbia***

Underwater photographer **Carole Valkenier-Pope** will present some spectacular views of BC's underwater world. Photos of a variety of animal groups were taken near Sidney, Victoria, Strait of Juan de Fuca, Campbell River/Quadra Island, Barkley Sounds, Port Hardy and Seymour Inlet. 7:30 pm Swan Lake Nature Centre.

#### **Wednesday, February 27**

##### ***Birders Night***

Murray and Anne Fraser Building (ex Begbie) Room 159, UVIC, 7:30 p.m.. Our understanding of southern Vancouver Island as a key to coastal bird migration has increased greatly as a result of banding activities at the Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO). **David Allinson** will bring us up to date with facts, findings and photographs from Rocky Point. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend, novice birder and your binocular.

## **BULLETIN BOARD**

#### **Wondering about the VNHS Banquet?**

VNHS will be hosting a banquet on May 11 as part of the Federation of BC Naturalists' Annual General Meeting. Banquet tickets will be available for VNHS members who do not register for the AGM.

#### **Show What You Know**

The word is getting out — there are natural history experts in the Victoria Natural History Society. We now have several new ways for members to share their knowledge with the community. We are compiling a list of media contacts — people who are willing to respond to questions (like, what is that big white owl?) from the newspapers, radio and TV stations. For those who want to share even more, we are developing a speakers' list. Occasionally, we are asked if we have someone who could speak to a community group. **Bruce Whittington, Marie O'Shaughnessey** and **Bob Chappell** are putting together a tray of slides which could be used in a presentation with a standard, or your very own, script.

#### **The Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative**

is sponsoring a project with Royal Roads University Environmental Studies students to develop an environmentally sensitive recreational plan for the Coburg Peninsula. They are looking for a

few contact people from VNHS who have knowledge or experience of recreational effects on the types of habitat and organisms found in and around the lagoon. If you are able to help with any of these projects, please contact **Ann Nightingale** at 652-6450 or by email at [motmot@shaw.ca](mailto:motmot@shaw.ca).

#### **Intrigued by the "Exciting" World of Publications?**

The "Naturalist" is looking for a person, or persons to help to reduce the cost to the Society of producing the newsletter. This is a great opportunity for someone who likes to talk with people to help your Society, without feeling that you need to be an expert in some area of natural history. We will provide you with sample copies of past issues, and sometimes may even be able to suggest potential advertisers to contact. Call Ross or Marilyn at 384-3063.

#### **Volunteer For Nature**

There are a number of volunteer positions available at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, including nature interpretation with school children, trail building, and nature house receptionist. Most positions require a commitment of 2 to 3 hours once a week. For further details call Joan at 479-0211 or email [jcowley@swanlake.bc.ca](mailto:jcowley@swanlake.bc.ca)

#### **RIDES WANTED/OFFERED**

Member living on View Street, between Blanshard and Quadra, would like rides to Society events at UVic. Dorothy, 480-0225.

### YOUNG NATURALISTS EVENTS

#### **Winter 2002 Field Trips**

#### **Sunday, January 6 Esquimalt Lagoon, 10:00 a.m.**

##### ***Birding at Esquimalt Lagoon***

Join us for a look at wintering ducks, herons, gulls, blackbirds, sparrows and other small birds. We may see loons and grebes and hopefully some shorebirds. There will be a spotting scope available for close looks. Bring binoculars if you have them and your bird checklist. Meet by the bridge. Call **Sheila Mosher** (652-3502) or **Carolyn MacDonald** (544-2246) to register.

#### **Saturday, January 19 Centre of the Universe, 2:00 p.m.**

##### ***Explorations at the Centre of the Universe***

Join us at the Centre of the Universe for a virtual tour of the solar system, a multimedia misadventure to the farthest reaches of the solar system, featuring incredible images of the planets. Take part in an exploration of telescopes large and small, including Canada's largest, with emphasis on how a reflecting telescope works. This program is limited to 30 participants. Cost is \$5 per family and is best suited for children 9 years and older. Contact **Sheila Mosher** or **Carolyn MacDonald** to register by December 30, 2001. (If there is insufficient registration, the program will be canceled.)

#### **Sunday, February 3 Swan Lake, 10:00 a.m.**

##### ***Birding at Swan Lake***

We should see a variety of wintering waterbirds and small song birds, especially sparrows. There is always the chance of a raptor or two as well. Meet in the parking lot. To register, phone **Sheila Mosher** (652-3502) or **Carolyn MacDonald** (544-2246).

#### **Sunday, February 24 Port of Sidney, 10 – 11:30 a.m.**

##### ***The Marine Ecology Station***

Join marine ecologist Bill Austin for a guided tour of the floating Marine Ecology station in Sydney BC. Explore the wet lab, look at marine creatures through the microscopes and take part in a marine scavenger hunt. Meet at the Marine Ecology Station, Port of Sidney Marina. This program is limited to 30 participants. The cost is \$4.50/participant. To register, phone **Sheila Mosher** (652-3502) or **Carolyn MacDonald** (544-2246).

#### **Sunday, March 20 Viaduct Flats, 10:00 a.m.**

##### ***Birding at Viaduct Flats***

This is a great place for wintering waterbirds as well as birds of forests and fields. There should be some early returning migrants here also, such as swallows. Meet at Viaduct on Interurban Road. Wear boots. To register, phone **Sheila Mosher** (652-3502) or **Carolyn MacDonald** (544-2246).

#### **Monday, March 18 RBCM, 1 – 2:00 p.m.**

##### ***Royal BC Museum***

Join Mike McNall, ornithology collections manager, for a behind the scenes tour of the bird collections at the RBCM. This program is for young Naturalists age 9-12 years old. Bring one adult only please to enable maximum attendance for young Naturalists. This program is limited to 15 participants — so register ASAP. To register, phone **Sheila Mosher** (652-3502) or **Carolyn MacDonald** (544-2246).

#### Victoria Young Naturalist Club

Coordinator: Sheila Mosher, phone: 652-3502

Program Coordinator: Carolyn MacDonald, phone: 544-2246

Organizing Committee: Susanna Solecki, Laurie VanInisberg, Maureen Funk.



# The Victoria NATURALIST

P.O. Box 5220, Stn. B.,  
Victoria, B.C., V8R 6N4

Expires: Aug--02

Barrie Bird  
3820 Epsom Drive  
VICTORIA BC V8P 3S7



## Natural History Courses



Here's a chance to support the society while learning a bit more about natural history. These programs will be taught by experienced VNHS trip leaders who have volunteered their time. The proceeds will support VNHS conservation and education activities. Please note the lower prices for members (yet another reason to join!). We are interested in offering other courses but require more leaders to come forward. Please call Darren Copley at 479-6622 if you have any suggestions.

### Beginning Birding



An easy introduction to the pursuit of birding for those with little or no previous experience. The emphasis will be on bird identification in the field. We'll start with an illustrated lecture on February 7, 2002 and 6 Saturday morning field trips from February 9th to Mar. 16th. The cost will be \$65 for non-members and \$45 for members.

Take the next step beyond the basics of identification. Our group of local VNHS experts places an emphasis on birding by ear and the identifying field marks of those difficult groups and species. This course includes 8 very diverse field sessions around Victoria led by 8 different leaders. Sessions run on Thursday or Sunday mornings beginning on April 4th. The cost is \$95.00 for non-members and \$65.00 for members. Each session is limited to fifteen.

### Beyond Beginning Birding



If you have any questions, or would like to register, call Darren Copley at 479-6622. More detailed brochures will be available in the new year.



Victoria Natural  
History Society

