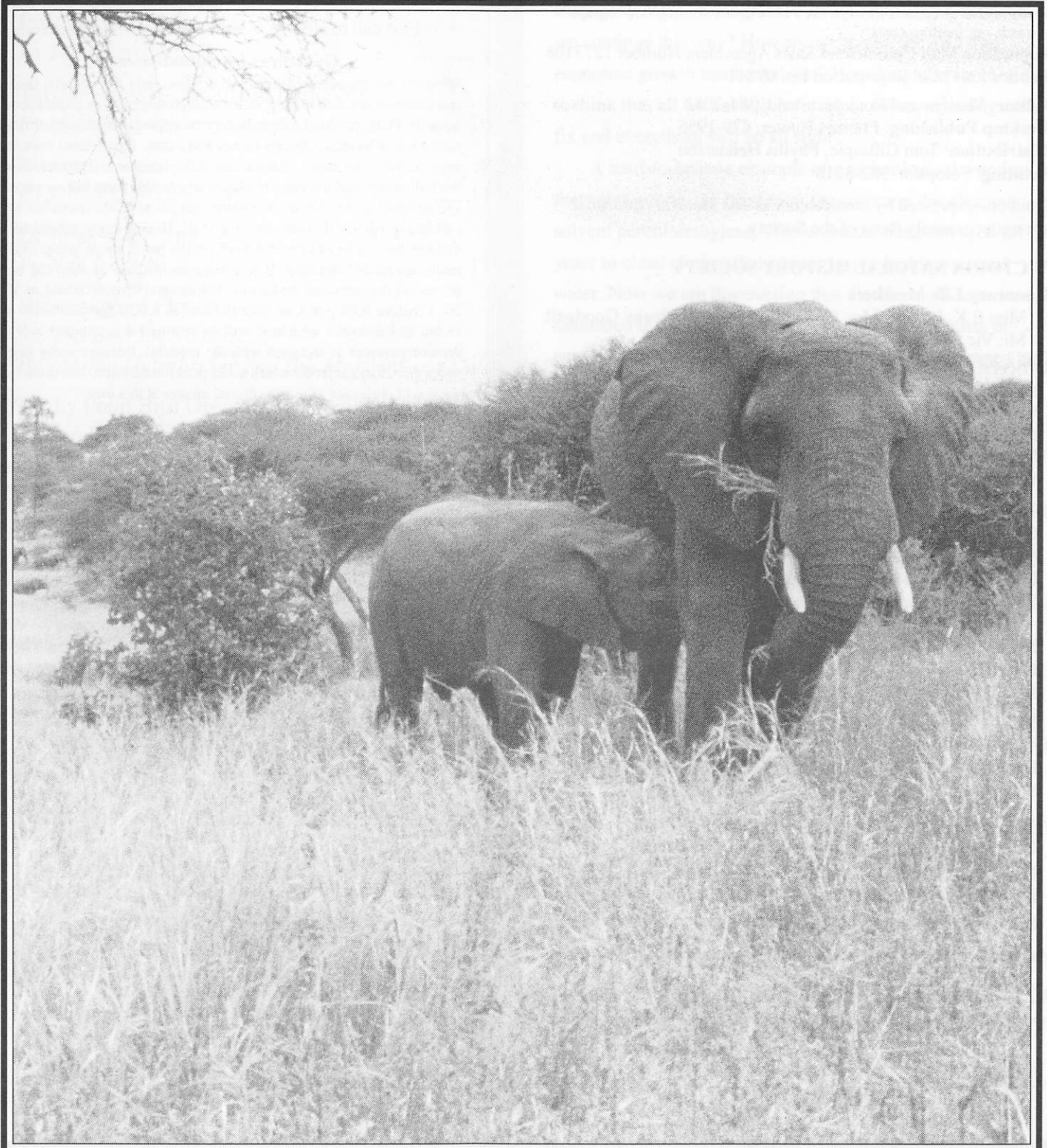




# The Victoria NATURALIST

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Cover Photo:  
Elephants at Tarangice Photo: Morwyn Marshall

## "Enough is Enough!"

We both recall our mothers using this phrase to tell us that  
there were limits to what was acceptable in our behaviour.  
But now it seems that our Western culture instead more  
frequently says: "Enough is never enough." How long can  
we continue this way? How are we to end the idea that  
economic growth can be infinite? How long can we continue  
to think that all we have to do is apply some technological  
fix and everything will be all right?

A hard-to-believe example of a technological wonder  
that went wrong can be seen in the common dry cleaning  
solvent perchlorethylene. This chemical has been used for 30  
years to clean clothes that cannot be washed in soap and  
water. Now we are discovering that the chemical has con-  
taminated drinking water and is implicated as a cause of  
cancer. Do we really need clothes that cannot be cleaned with  
soap and water? Is this really better living through chemis-  
try?

It has been 13 years since an essay in the Time magazine  
issue in which our planet Earth was named "Planet of the  
Year" instead of some human being named "Man of the  
Year," concluded with these words: "Man must abandon the  
belief that the natural order is mere stuff to be managed and  
domesticated, and accept that humans, like other creatures,  
depend on a web of life that must be disturbed as little as  
possible." Instead we have madly continued to attempt to  
prove our collective immortality by consuming more and  
more of the Earth's finite resources.

Noted environmental writer Bill McKibben recently  
argued that the time has come to accept our society as a  
maturing one if we stop our incessant cries of growth at any  
cost, rather than as a stagnating one. The argument that  
growth is inevitable is fallacious. We are human beings with  
free will. We can decide to make a difference. We can decide  
as mature individuals to take up the challenge to reverse our  
headlong race to oblivion. All we need to do is to take up the  
challenge. What are you doing to take up the challenge?

*Marilyn and Ross*



# African Adventure

By Morforwyn Marshall and Phyllis Henderson

We arrived at Nairobi airport after a long tiring journey from Victoria with little on our minds but SLEEP. Met by Mark Smith our enthusiastic leader and birder, we were soon thinking differently when offered the chance to immediately start our birding that very day. By 3:00 pm we were entering the Nairobi National Park in our safari van. With only four guests on the bird watching tour plus Mark and our driver Simon, we were a close-knit group, each of us helping to spot every new bird and animal. Some were easy to see with giraffe and rhino crossing the road directly in front of us and Grants and Thompson Gazelle amongst the acacia trees close by. We had a brief glimpse of two cheetahs before they sat down in the tall grass, leaving only an occasional sight of twitching tails.

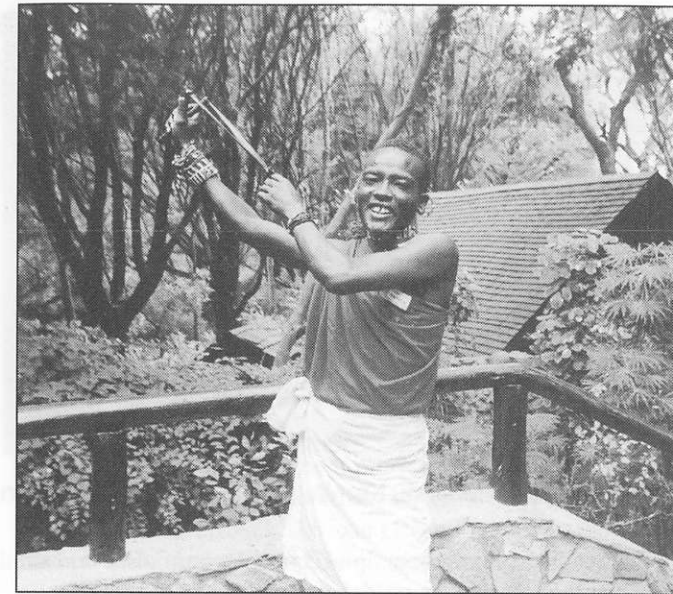
The Common Ostrich and Marabou Storks could not be missed either or the Grey Crowned Crane and White bellied bustard. There were Red Cheeked Cordon Bleu, Purple Grenadier, Red Billed Firefinch, and Bronze Manikin with colours to match their magical names. Trees hung with the nests of Weaver Birds and we saw Ruppell's Long Tailed Starlings — iridescent purple, green blue black — one of the many brilliant starlings we were to see. Fifty birds in the first few hours and we still had 18 more days to go!

The next morning we drove north to Sambura Park, the first of the pleasant comfortable lodges we were to stay at. Mark knew all the good birding spots and we saw our first Hammerkop and Superb Starling (iridescent blue-green, orange, black and white) — constants through out our trip. We also saw a stately Secretary Bird and a Long Crested Eagle with its long floppy crest hanging over its beak. Posts and wires everywhere supported Black and White Common or Long Tailed Fiscal, of the Shrike family. Long Tailed Widow Birds suddenly rose out from the long grass in a slow undulating flight displaying their white and red wing bars before disappearing into the grasses again.

Approaching the Lodge at dusk, we saw three young lionesses stalking a Cape Buffalo with a very young calf. We slowly followed as one by one they pounced on the calf only to be driven off by the mother — one so violently that she rolled over and over and lay winded for some time. We knew what the end would be as darkness fell, and were glad to leave and not be witness to the inevitable. At the lodge, we were handed cold damp towels to remove some of the dust of the day, and a cold drink — a pleasant welcome at each destination. The lodge, situated beside the river that runs through the park amidst a stand of tall trees, looks down upon the swimming



At Kenya/Tanzania border with guides Photo: Morwyn Marshall



Shooting at monkeys (Servets), Samburu Park, Kenya  
Photo: Phyllis Henderson

pool and cottages. The dining/lounge areas have open verandahs where an employee in native dress keeps monkeys at bay with a slingshot!

The next day, we explored the park seeing our first zebra, many elephant, giraffe, baboon and antelope. Phyllis spotted our first owl, Verreaux's Eagle Owl — the size of a Great Horned. We saw young Red Billed Hornbills being fed at the nest and a snake gliding from nest to nest feeding on the eggs of Weaver Birds. By the end of the day our bird count was approaching 200: eagles, swallows, vultures, sunbirds, herons, kingfishers, spurfowl, and our first Lilac Breasted Roller. Then there were the Cisticolas — the LBB's of East Africa — small flocks flitting from bush to bush but such lovely names — Siffling Cisticloa, Rattling Cisticola, Winding Cisticola, Stout Cisticola. As we drove back to the lodge at dusk, our last excitement was the company of a young leopard who walked along the track beside our van, close enough to touch.

Next day it was on to Mountain Lodge on the slopes of Mount Kenya, four stories high and built in a curve around a salt lick. After finding our room, we rushed to the open verandahs on the fourth floor to look down on the elephant, buffalo, bush buck and water buck gathered at the lick. There were monkeys climbing all over the building and we watched as one pushed open a window, disappeared inside and climbed back out with an orange. It seemed funny until we realized that it was our room and then it was a mad rush back down to chase two monkeys who had been busily feeding on the remains of our packed lunch!

That night during dinner, there was an announcement that a rhino was at the lick and there was an exodus as everyone left for the viewing verandahs. Each room had a bell and you could leave a request to be called if and when the animal of your choice showed up at the lick during the night. As we had already seen so many animals, we left no request, heard no bells and slept well with welcome hot water bottles in our

beds to keep off the chill of the mountain air. In the morning 2 Marabou Storks were busily feeding on the chicken carcasses that had been put out.

After first birding around the lodge, we set off up north up the Rift Valley to Lake Baringo — another lodge set amidst gardens and trees fronting the lake. Here we saw the African Pygmy Kingfisher and the Goliath Heron standing 60" tall, Little Bittern and Diederik Cuckoo. The following day, we drove to a nearby escarpment to look for localized birds and were lucky to find Jackson's and Hemprich's Hornbills, Bristle Crowned Starling and Cliff Chat. The rain had turned the soil under the cliff into prairie gumbo and we wished we were barefoot like the two young Kenyan boys guiding us.

Next we were off to Tanzania to meet our new guide Urio. Crossing the border was chaos. As soon as we stepped out of our vehicle we were surrounded by hawkers selling their jewelry and wooden carvings. The easiest escape was to hand over some money and take a trinket. We had soon paid over our \$50 US visa fee and had our passports stamped and were on our way again. We were now in Masai country and as we drove through a seemingly empty landscape, each half mile or so we would pass a tall Masai man striding long carrying his spear and stick. A Masai saying was translated to us 'A Masai man without his spear is like a woman'!!

We arrived at Tarangire National Park in late afternoon and drove slowly towards our lodge. By this time we had seen so many birds that finding new ones was becoming more difficult but we were beginning to recognize some of the more common ones. For the first time we saw Baobabs — the upside down tree. Fibrous not woody, they are hollow inside and serve as reservoirs for water and can live to 1000 years. Baobabs provide shelter and food for so many animals and birds and they are also said to provide sanctuary for ghosts and spirits. Many had fresh strips torn away by elephant for food. One tree dwarfed our tent/cabin high on a ridge from where we could watch elephants and giraffe feeding in the park below.

This was elephant country — we must have seen 100 - some so close we sat frozen in our van as they looked us over. Others were having a dust bath on the road and then decided that the road was the route they were taking. After following them for 5 minutes Urio decided another route would be quicker for us! During the night, one left large droppings not many yards from our tent.

There were also many lions, giraffe, zebra, wildebeest, gazelle, wart hog, mongoose, baboons and our first sighting of jackel. Amongst the birds were more hawks and eagles — the Pale Chanting Goshawk, Steppe Eagle and Bateleur. Bateleur means 'tumbler' in French and we were lucky enough to see a pair performing their acrobatic tumbling act during one of our drives. We also saw Amethyst Sunbird, Barefaced Goaway Birds, African Palm Swift, Mosque Swallow (we were to see 13 different martins swifts and swallows), more Somali Ostrich with their blue/grey necks instead of the pink necks of the Common Ostrich and the Kori Bustard standing up to 50", the heaviest bird still able to fly.

After a long drive over roads varying from very good to



horrendous, (typical wherever we went), our next stop was a lodge at 8000 ft on the rim of the Ngorongoro Crater. The landscape was first dry and poor but as we reached the rift wall and large Nanyara Lake where irrigation was possible, vegetation became more lush and corn, wheat, banana, pigeon peas, many vegetables and sisal were growing.

We made one stop before we started climbing, which gave us a view of nesting Yellow Billed Storks and Pink Backed Pelicans. Finally we arrived at the gates to Ngorongoro Nature Reserve — closed at 6 pm so that the animals are not disturbed. The road through is long and winds through rich thick vegetation with occasional signs of where elephants have broken through to cross the road. The lodge is perched on the rim of the crater at 8000 ft with huge windows so that the view of the crater is always with you. Electric light and hot water are turned on at 5:00 pm and off again at 11:00 pm. By 7:00 pm, it was nearly dark and the view was hidden by mist. No hot water bottle to warm us on another chilly night!

The mist was even thicker in the morning so shorts and shirts were replaced with long trousers and sweaters for an early start as we drove down the one-way road into the crater 2000 feet below us and 102 square miles in size. Here we saw our first Flamingo — Greater and Lesser — hundreds of them at the edge of the lake as well as many new ducks and shorebirds — Cape and Hottentot Teal and the Spurwing Goose (largest of the African waterfowl and almost as big as our Canada Goose). The Spurwing is glossy black with green/bronze reflections and white belly and wing patches. We also saw Black Winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Long Toed, Ringed and Kittlitz's Plovers, Ruff, White Winged and Whiskered Terns and finally everyone's favourite, the Saddle Billed Stork standing 57 inches tall, black and white with an enormous red and black striped bill with a bright yellow saddle shaped frontal shield. We ate inside our vehicle at our lunch stop, as numerous Black Kites around had, like our Grey Jays, learned how to snatch a quick meal from unsuspecting hands.

By mid-afternoon we were back at the lodge watching a group of Maribou Storks in the trees. Then it was a long hard drive west to the Serengeti Plain — 14,000 sq km of seemingly



Janet and sister, Malindi, Kenya Photo: Phyllis Henderson

endless rolling plain where up to 3 million animals live. I think we saw all of them! The wildebeest and zebra were in the midst of their migration from the calving grounds in search of food and water and were on the move wherever we went. As we drove along and looked across the miles of flat grasslands, the vast horizon was one long line of animals moving from east to west. We were told there were 1\_ million Wildebeest and \_ million zebra in the area. We stopped beside a male lion resting in the shade of a tree. His stomach was so distended with food that he could only lie on his back with his legs in the air! Across the path under another tree was the carcass of a zebra with about 20 White Headed and Griffon Vultures waiting in the surrounding trees. Urrio told us the lioness that had made the kill was probably hidden in the tall grass, which was why the vultures were still waiting their turn to feed.

One evening, we drove to a pool where a group of about 30 hippos were splashing and blowing while a few crocodiles lay almost invisible on the surrounding rocks. Close by, we had another good look at the Goliath Heron as it walked majestically by the edge of the water while a Woodland Kingfisher and Pygmy Kingfisher challenged each other nearby. Everywhere trees were festooned with the nests of weaver birds — Baglafaecht Weaver, White Headed Buffalo Weaver, Grey Capped Social Weaver and so many more. We also saw Yellow Throated Longclaws, a grassland bird very like our meadowlark, complete with black chest band; Bearded Woodpecker, Rufous Naped Lark and many flocks of Helmeted Guineafowl with their bare blue skin on head and neck, red wattles topped by a bony casque on the crown.

Our lodge was built around a Kopje, one of the ancient granite outcrops that appear on the plain. No monkeys invaded here, instead rock hyrax sat immobile as we walked by. Outside our windows gazelles grazed in the tall grass and bands of mongoose hurried by. We were sorry to leave this area with its abundance of animals and birds.

The next day brought two stops of contrasting interest. First the Olduvai Gorge where we 'went back' 3 million years to gaze at the footprints of three people like creatures or 'homonids' discovered by Mary Leakey in 1976. These prints were actually copies, as the original footprints are deemed too rare to remain uncovered and have been carefully reburied and



Masai people, Tanzania Photo: Phyllis Henderson

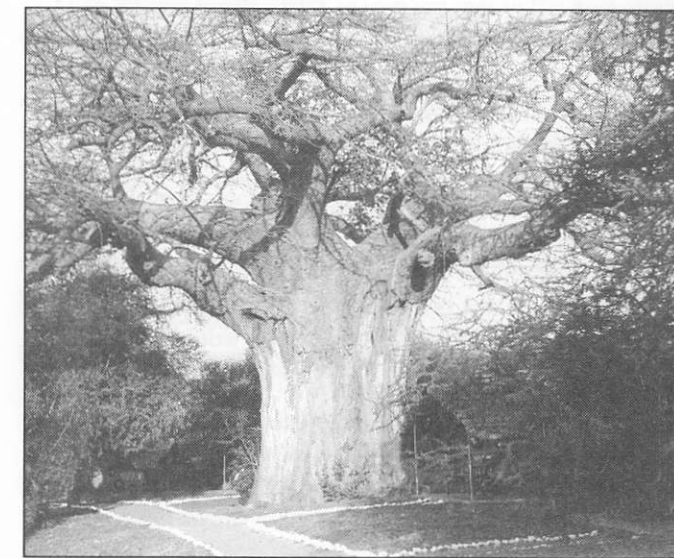
protected. The history of all the discoveries in the Gorge is well presented in the museum. Olduvai is named for Oldugai, the Masai word for the wild sisal that grows throughout the Gorge.

From the past to the present — even possibly the descendants of those homonids — we stopped at a Masai village for a photograph opportunity. The villagers had very pragmatically decided to make use of all those tourists to supplement their income. The chief introduced us to his three wives and then in their tribal dress, they performed a dance and the visitors took pictures.

Our last stop in Tanzania was at the Lake Manyara Hotel perched on the hillside looking down over the lake. Here we were warned to keep the windows closed because of baboons — but we saw none. The next morning we birded in the park below us finding some more new birds — Grey Hornbill, Black Backed Puffback, African Green Pigeon, Eastern Nicatur and Black Headed Oriole among others. Then it was on to Nairobi spotting a wonderful sign along a particularly dusty stretch of road: 'Beware of Invisibility'.

Before crossing back into Kenya, we had to stop at the border town of Namanga. Any tourist van stopping here is besieged with villagers selling their wares — it was most unnerving but one had to run the gauntlet to get to the passport office and regain entry to Kenya. We just gave them a few dollars and accepted a necklace or bracelet so that we could get on our way. The following morning we were driven to the airport for our flight to Malindi, a small coastal city on the Indian Ocean just a few miles north of Mombassa. The flight only took an hour and on the way we had a glimpse of 19,000 foot high Mt Kilimanjaro poking thru the clouds, all snow capped and pink in the morning sunlight.

In Malindi, Mark had rented a lovely cottage right on the beach for last few days. The owners rented it out whenever they were absent which was most of the year. A cook, housekeeper and houseboy were supplied with the house, so we were well taken care of. Each day fishermen would appear at



Baobab tree, Tanzania Photo: Morwyn Marshall

the door with their catch of the day, lovely and fresh, and very reasonable at \$4 for 4 fish. We took turns buying them. Our excellent cook fed us wonderful meals of mostly seafood so we had a break from the food supplied at the Park lodges. The cottage had a lovely open veranda facing the ocean and here we ate our meals, rested and watched the activity taking place in front of us; fishermen casting their nets in the lagoon or repairing their boats on the beach, a variety of boats going out to the reef and of course lovely birds flitting through the trees such as Amani Sunbird, Chestnut Manikin, Black and White Manikin and Olive Sunbird.

Our first morning began with an early wake-up and a drive to a Forest Management area. We were soon driving down some very narrow tracks through the forest listening out our open window and stopping whenever someone heard bird songs or saw birds fly through in front of us. This area was not very productive as the birds were hard to see as well. We visited an old 14/15th century abandoned settlement called Gede. These ruins were a protected site and a museum built of local stone and coral housed the artifacts. A lot of coral was used locally for fencing and walls and there seemed to be a huge supply of it. It made one wonder at the state of the coral reef just offshore. We had a wonderful display of different butterflies flitting through the ruins.

The next day we visited the Sabaki River, which is very tidal, drawing back for miles of exposed sand banks and a great view of shorebirds. Some seen were Madagascar Pratincole, Mongolian, Crab and White Fronted Plover, Terek Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Eurasian Curlew and Bartailed Godwit to name a few. Later in the day we returned when the tide was full and we saw Roseate Terns, Saunders Terns, Lesser Crested Terns, Hugelens Gulls, Sooty Gull and African Skimmer. This was not the best season to view shorebirds; in winter it must be an awesome sight. The Sabaki River is very important for providing a living for the local fishermen.

Our last day, we visited a large pond that was covered with lily pads and the most beautiful light blue lilies. This was an especially lovely sight, glistening in the morning sun and also provided us with some excellent new birds; namely Colm Duck, Open Billed Stork, Black Winged Bishop and Madagascar Egret. Mark spotted a Black Heron through his scope performing the canopy routine. The wings are spread up and forward down to the water, while the mud is stirred with the feet to flush prey. This was a treat to watch.

As our trip was coming to an end we had to return to our cottage and begin the job of packing and sorting. Our cook prepared an African meal and we dressed up for the occasion in our new sarongs and necklaces with sweet smelling frangipani in our hair. We ate while watching the sun set on the Indian Ocean. What a marvelous end to our African Adventure.

The next morning was rather leisurely, so we walked the beach, searched aimlessly for birds and soaked up the sun, all too aware of the long flight from Malindi, Nairobi, London to Vancouver and Victoria. It all went fairly smoothly. An awesome trip!



# Birdwatching in the Gambia

By John & Linda Fitch

The Gambia, at the western end of the West African coast, has been described as the gateway to African birding. Only six hours by plane from the U.K., the country's accessibility, political stability and use of English as its lingua franca make it easy for the traveling naturalist to visit. Though a small country, its bird list totals c.550 species, including c.150 species that breed in Europe, and other species that migrate within Africa. The mix of habitats — Atlantic coast, Gambia River, mangrove wetlands, coastal forest and dry savannah — helps to explain the extraordinary abundance of birds.

Most of the tourist hotels have gardens whose diverse bird life will keep the visitor busy for the first day or two. Sunbirds, babblers, weavers, glossy starlings, barbets, bulbuls are new species for the migrant naturalist to start with. Then forays further afield will produce rich results. Bund Road, just outside the capital Banjul, offers a vista of the Gambia River estuary, and regularly provides views of 60+ species including terns, waders, herons, egrets, pelicans, ibis, and gulls at the optimum visiting time of low tide. Nearby bush and farmland holds the spectacularly beautiful Abyssinian and Blue-bellied Roller. A trip in a pirogue along mangrove-lined creeks allows birding at leisure: we were lucky enough to see six species of kingfisher without really trying. Abuko Nature Reserve, some 20 km from Banjul, is a reliable place to find Hamerkop and African Jacana, but also regularly turns up much more rare specialties. Adventurous birders will also want to arrange visits to the interior of the country in search of impressive raptors such as Bataleur and Martial Eagle.

The optimum season for visiting birdwatchers is from November to February: at that period the rainy season is over, the heat is manageable and migrant species have arrived from Europe. We opted for a two-week stay at a coastal resort hotel, with plenty of time for swimming, reading and relaxing, interspersed with several day-trips. Our package, with flights to and from the U.K., accommodation and breakfast, cost \$1250 per person, not including day-trips. If you want to bird more intensively and adventurously, it would be worthwhile to travel with a specialist group such as Ornitholidays (<http://www.ornitholidays.co.uk>). They offer all-inclusive trips from the U.K. led by professional ornithologists at around \$3000 for one week and \$4200 for two weeks.

First-time visitors will certainly want the help of local guides in coping with practical arrangements and with the abundance of unfamiliar birds. We were fortunate to meet Lamin Jobarteh, who has more than ten years' experience as a guide. An engaging person, Lamin is founder and Executive Director of The West African Bird Study Association, an NGO concerned with creating awareness about bird life, and

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**The optimum season for visiting birdwatchers is from November to February: at that period the rainy season is over, the heat is manageable and migrant species have arrived from Europe.**

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with establishing school and community bird sanctuaries. WABSA also trains and coordinates local bird guides, and can provide a list of their contact numbers, services and fees. On one of our trips with Lamin, as we crossed the Gambia River on a ferry, we noticed him studying a gull-like bird intently. After describing it to us in minute detail, and checking his reference books, he identified it as an immature Black-legged Kittiwake, only the second sighting of the species for The Gambia (the first was in 1975). Lamin can be reached by mail c/o WABSA, P.M.B 676 Serekunda, Banjul, The Gambia, West Africa, or by email at [laminjobarteh2002@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:laminjobarteh2002@yahoo.co.uk).

The indispensable bible for any serious birder is *A Field Guide to the Birds of The Gambia & Senegal*. The senior author is Clive Barlow, an English ornithologist resident in The Gambia, and based at the Atlantic Hotel in Banjul. This book definitely outdates W. Serle et al, *A Field Guide to the Birds of West Africa*, though the latter is still useful for its broader geographical coverage. An excellent guide to birdwatching locales is Rod Ward's *A Birdwatchers' Guide to The Gambia* — not easily found, but we would be happy to lend our copy, or to provide further information, to anyone interested (652-2815).

# Prelude to Spring

By John Neville

Victoria is situated at the southeast corner of Vancouver Island in a region that enjoys a particularly mild late winter. This has become known as "pre-Spring." By late January or early February you hear comments like: "Spring is in the air!" or "Is it still really winter?" James Douglas surveyed the site of his new Hudson's Bay headquarters in 1842. "The place itself appears to be a perfect Eden in the midst of the dreary wilderness of the north west coast." The First Nations had known about these mild conditions for centuries, but it was a pleasant surprise for the Hudson's Bay Company and later settlers from Britain. Situated in the rain shadow of Vancouver Island and the Olympic Peninsula the area from Campbell River south to Portland Oregon enjoys two months of mild winter or pre-spring.

This two-month period meets the meteorological definition of a season. On the east coast a similar phenomenon occurs in Virginia, but for a much shorter period in late February. Winter remains longer on the east coast with a much quicker transition to spring. Once the 2-3 week pre-spring "phase" is finished in Virginia, it migrates north arriving at Washington D.C. about late February, New York around early March, Boston, mid March, and Halifax mid to late April. The brief eastern pre-spring doesn't reach St. John's Newfoundland until late April or early May. Nowhere on the east coast does pre-spring last long enough to qualify as a season. On similar latitude to Victoria, southwestern Ireland and extreme southwestern England are bathed by the Gulf Stream and enjoy pre-spring conditions. Interestingly, on the other side of the world, Melbourne, Australia has six clear seasons including pre-spring.

Conditions for this fifth season are met in the area around Georgia Strait and Puget Sound — encompassing the Gulf and San Juan Islands. The whole area is sometimes referred to as the Salish Sea, named after the First Peoples who inhabited the area. Because there is a drop in precipitation in late January, and a doubling of the hours of sunshine, many aspects of spring occur. The statistics for our fifth season look like this: a mean daily maximum temperature of 9-10° C, a mean monthly precipitation of 61 mm (2.4 in), and a mean monthly sunshine rating of 120 hours.

In February 1998, all of British Columbia had enjoyed a mild winter. Crocuses were up about 5 cm in Nelson. Snow ploughs were at work in the mountain passes of the Cascades, but in the coastal flats, daffodils were in bloom; pink and white blossoms of cherries and plums. In contrast, the blossoms would not be out in Nelson until the middle of May.

The norm seems to be mild conditions in late January.

Tree frogs start calling in earnest; Bald Eagles begin the courtship ritual and the plumage of wintering birds starts to change. The calls of Barred, Western Screech and Saw-whet owls can be heard as they establish nesting territories. With the help of feeders, Anna's hummingbird has become a year round resident in the Victoria area. Hutton's vireo, California quail and Bewick's wren all winter around the Georgia Strait, whereas their main population is in California. Hundreds of thousand waterfowl winter in the Fraser Delta and along the protected shore of Vancouver and the Gulf Islands. Most of them wear winter plumage; black above and white below for camouflage. By the middle of February, the spring colours appear and the pre-nuptial courtship rituals of waterfowl reach fever pitch. For example, the male goldeneye, throw their heads right back over their tails showing their white throats to the females and call persistently.

In the greater Victoria area, the annual Flower Count takes place between February 25 and March 2nd. While the rest of Canada, and much of the United States are still frozen in winter, this tongue in cheek event is used to promote a shoulder season for local tourism. The municipalities comprising greater Victoria have a Banana Belt Challenge to see who can count the most blooms. In the 26 years of this event, 2002 holds the record. With more and more enthusiastic gardeners taking part a whopping 4 billion 220 million blooms were counted! On a more serious note the Flower Count is used to fund raise for the Elder Care Foundation.

Pre-spring has an obvious influence on the flowers and the human population. On Salt Spring Island in February and March many new romances are rumoured to begin. There is one particular parking spot, on Mount Maxwell, near three large rocks that many couples know well. It may be entirely due to our fifth season, pre-spring, that romance goes hand in hand with the rest of the natural world!

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**Situated in the rain shadow of Vancouver Island and the Olympic Peninsula, the area from Campbell River south to Portland, Oregon enjoys two months of mild winter or pre-spring.**

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# Turkey Vultures Nesting in East Sooke

By Michael J. Porter

Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) are a common sight in the Victoria area from spring to fall, as they glide and wheel around searching for carrion. Fall marks the time when they are most noticeable as they congregate in large kettles along the shoreline, positioning themselves to cross the Straits of Juan de Fuca as they head towards their wintering ground.

The southern tip of Vancouver Island marks the northern limit of their breeding ground. While finding a nesting site of a Turkey Vulture may be expected in this area, they are remarkably elusive to find and often only discovered by accident. Stumbling along an east facing rocky scarp about 100 meters above sea level in East Sooke on August 5, 2000, I was caught by surprise by a fully fledged young Turkey Vulture as it leapt up on to a rock in front of me from a cleft below. Immediately the vulture started to regurgitate a torrent of foul smelling semi-digested carrion. Needless to say, I backed away and not wishing to cause further disturbance, left the site. I returned a week, later but by then the young bird had presumably flown.

The nesting site was at the top of a rather steep scarp although there were Broad-leaved Maples and Douglas Fir growing somewhat sparingly along the slope allowing a good drop off for an aerial launch from the nesting site. The general area was heavily forested. The nesting site was the earthen floor in a cleft of overhanging rock, which kept the site dry. The nesting area was quite narrow and the outward leaning rock offered a wonderful perch to arrive above the nest and then drop down to it and also as a launch pad to take off between the trees without much need to flap wings.

Thinking that the site may be reoccupied the following year, I revisited it on May 21, 2001. There were two eggs and a week later one egg had hatched and one was still intact. The photograph taken on May 28, 2001 shows a less than one-week old chick and the other egg. One week later, the site was empty with no evidence of anything being there a week earlier. The nest had been predated possibly by Raccoons, but this is simply a guess. I revisited the site later that summer but it was empty. In 2002 I visited the site twice. On the first occasion it appeared that the site might have been visited since there were some droppings that were most likely from a Turkey Vulture given their form.

So, over a three year period, this site yielded one addition to the population of Turkey Vultures, not a particularly productive outcome but Turkey Vultures do live a number of years, the longevity record of a banded bird being 17 years. The age when they start to breed is not known. From North



Turkey vulture chick Photo: Michael Porter

American nest records it has been estimated that nesting success is about 53% but once hatched 83% of nests do not lose downy chicks, so 2001 was an unlucky year for this nest site. Most nests (87%) west of 100W are found in rocky outcrops so this site is consistent with that finding. The most important requirement of a nesting site is being isolated from human disturbance, which this site was. This was also the reason why the site was visited infrequently. While nesting sites may be occupied over a number of consecutive years they may also be used irregularly so there is a possibility that Turkey Vultures may yet again breed at this location, hopefully more successfully. The site will be checked again in 2003.

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Kirk David K., Mossman Michael J. *Turkey Vulture* The Birds of North America, No. 339 1998. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and The Academy of Natural Sciences.

Palmer R.S. 1988: *Handbook of North American Birds*, Vol. 4 Diurnal Raptors (Part 1). Yale University Press.

# Mirrored Eagles

By Marie O'Shaugnessy

According to Stokes' Bird Behaviour Book, volume III, Bald Eagles perform sky dancing between bonded and potential pairs during late winter and early spring. On any bright sunny day as the air warms and thermals develop it is possible to see eagles soaring and swooping overhead together. Other sky bound behaviours may include diving and chasing.

Occasionally an attacked eagle turns over at the last minute and presents its talons to the eagle above. Generally their talons barely touch; however, occasionally they lock together and the two will whirl like a falling leaf to the ground below. Pulling out safely and away from this courtship display usually ensures the life of the performing eagles. Sadly, however it has been noted that some eagles meet their demise when talons do not unlock. Similar behaviours can be seen between rival adults that encroach upon another pair's territory.

On March 18th, 2003, a noteworthy event occurred at the Monterey nest site. The site is monitored by the Oak Bay Eagle cam. At approximately 10:50 a.m. the camera showed two adult eagles trapped within the branches of the nest tree with one adult hanging upside down. The upper eagle's talons held its thigh tightly. For almost an hour these two (possible rivals) hung in this position.

I left work to witness the activity in person and arrived to see one eagle in the nest, presumably on eggs, and the other two hanging as described. I had been monitoring this nest site via the nest cam and had observed an eagle in the nest since March 10th. All three were screaming intermittently.

I noted two other adult eagles and a juvenile gliding above, no doubt wondering what all the commotion was down below. The fire-truck with the extended ladder was out and the SPCA had been called to intervene. However, at the last moment the eagles freed themselves and both birds flew off without so much as a broken wing; surprising, given the predicament and positioning of the wings of the upper bird.

The female of the nesting pair does not appear to have been perturbed by the whole affair for she still remains sharing her incubating duties with her mate at the nest site.

## DELIGHTS OF BIRDING

For Gwen Taylor

I gasp in wonder as its beauty  
comes sharply into focus.  
Surprised to see a vertical line of white  
down the side of its glossy brown head.

Its white breast gleams in the sun  
contrasting with its greyish body,  
and there's a distinctive needle-pointed tail.  
I lower the binoculars and search in the book.

A Northern Pintail duck, a dabbler, male,  
and looking up, I spot its mate,  
a modest mottled brown with jaunty tail,  
a slim-necked graceful pair.

The sun shines brightly on the lagoon  
as I scan the scene, hoping for more.  
There's the ever-present horde of gulls,  
raucous in their rush for the bread  
being scattered on the shore.  
Pigeons and Northwestern crows  
step in to take their share.

I stop to appreciate the familiar mallards,  
a pair of swans, some Canada Geese,  
but then I see a flotilla of little ducks.  
The binoculars reveal the large white patches  
on the sides of their heads,  
making them easy to identify,  
Buffleheads — cute little butterballs.  
Oops, down they go in search of food,  
divers, not dabblers are they.

And so along the shore I go and wonder  
what new beauties are in store.

Nan Phillips



# Hummingbird Flowers — the Ten Best for Victoria

By JoAnna Outerbridge and Bill Merilees

For many years the bird and butterfly garden on Royal Oak Drive, known as “Shangri-La”, has been a Mecca and haven for wildlife. Its gardener and curator, JoAnna Outerbridge, has a strong and long interest in hummingbirds and her garden is a reflection of this adoration. As she notes in a recent letter, “I seem to plant for hummers”.

Greatly impressed by her creation, after an all too short visit, I was prompted to write, asking her the following question, “What did she consider her ten best hummingbird flowers?” Her very careful and reasoned response was full of detailed information well worth sharing. It is her letters that are the basis for this article.

The names given are those listed in the “Sunset New Western Garden Book” (2001 edition). As some ‘common’ names used by gardeners and horticulturists are often different from those used by ‘field’ botanists, this reference is mentioned for the readers’ convenience, should they wish to locate the species listed at their local nursery.

## JOANNA’S LIST

### 1. Bethlehem Sage (*Pulmonaria saccharata*)

This small evergreen perennial is one of the first nectar producing plants to bloom at Shangri-La. It produces sweet nectar even before Red-flowering Currant appears. It has attractive foliage with reddish violet or white flowers.

### 2. Red-flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)

Well known to gardeners and well frequented by hummingbirds, this colorful shrub is a common native. Red, pink and white flowered forms are available but it is the red-flowered one that is favoured by our hummingbirds.

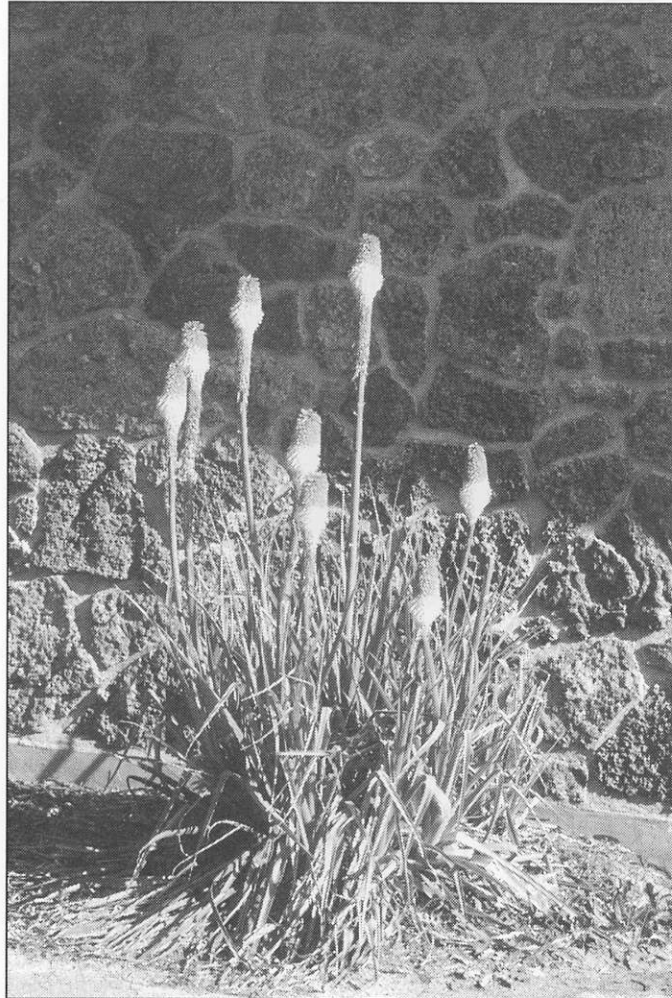
### 3. Fuchsias (Fuchsia species and varieties)

*Fuchsia magellanica* with large single red flowers is one of the hardiest species that does well in our area. It comes into bloom about mid to late May. Many other varieties and hybrids flower earlier. Often these are available in hanging baskets.

Hummingbirds also like the nectar of the Cape Fuchsia (not really a ‘fuchsia’) *Phygellus capensis* which blooms earlier.

### 4. Red-hot Poker (*Kniphofia uvaria*)

There are many varieties and colour forms of this robust plant. The more common form, is the two toned scarlet with yellow throat that starts blooming about mid to late May. This



Red-hot Poker (*Kniphofia uvaria*) Photo: Bill Merilees

form is not as eagerly sought after by hummers as the later blooming, solid orange-red variety. Perhaps the earlier bloomer does not produce much nectar. Some red-hot pokers are totally yellow and other varieties bloom well into October, a treat for resident Anna’s Hummingbirds.

### 5. Buddleia (*Buddleia davidii*)

Better known as ‘butterfly bush’ this is a largish, often vigorous growing shrub. Many flower colours are available from white to deep purple. A hybrid known as ‘Lochinch’ appears to have a preferred sweeter nectar. A vigorous pruning about early March will ensure a controlled form.

### 6. Penstemons (*Penstemon* species and varieties)

All species appear to be coveted by hummingbirds, but the taller rose-red flowered species, (possibly try *P. barbatus* or *P. eatonii* if they are available?) appear to be preferred.

### 7. Monarda (*Monarda didyma*)

Also known as Bee Balm, the scarlet flowers of the variety “Cambridge Scarlet” offer an excellent nectar source. If push comes to shove “Croftway Pink” will do!

### 8. Honeysuckles (*Lonicera* species and varieties)

There are many colourful varieties to choose from in this group of shrubs that are well known ‘vines’. Hall’s Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica halliana*) could almost be considered invasive due to its vigorous growth. Often it blooms into October — a joy to Anna’s Hummingbirds. The native Orange Honeysuckle (*Lonicera cilliosa*) has a late spring early summer blooming period but is not a prolific flowerer.

### 9. Crocosmia (*Crocosmia crocosmiiflora*) AKA Montbretia.

This is one of the last ‘notable’ hummingbird flowers to come into bloom. This species is drought tolerant making it an ideal ground cover for our dry summers. Hummingbirds literally fight one another over good patches of the orange-red Lucifer variety.

### 10. Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*)

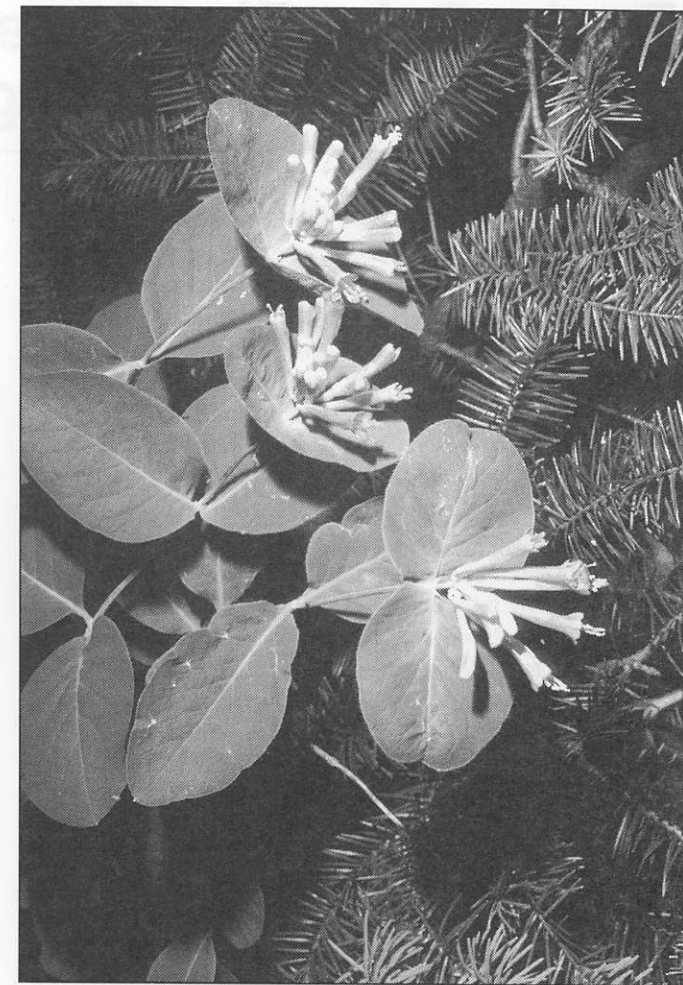
Occasionally called ‘Witches Thimbles’ due to the size and shape of the flowers, the foxglove is a biennial blooming in its second year of growth. The deep pink to purple flowered ones are hummingbird preferred. Seeds scattered on moist banks can provide impressive displays of colour.

### 11. ‘Canon Went’

A pink form of the normally purple flowered Toadflax (*Linaria pulpurea*) is one additional ‘last choice’. Though it has tiny flowers, the needle like bills of hummingbirds can extract their nectar.

As the environment created at “Shangri-La” attests, gardens can easily become hummingbird meccas. With careful attention to flower selection and species that ensure a broad overlap in blooming periods, just about any garden can become a hummingbird garden. We trust you can put this information to wise use.

For additional information, many good references specific to this subject are available. “Gardening for Wild-



Honeysuckle Photo: Bill Merilees

life” by myself has a chapter, as does the “Sunset Western Garden Book”. Knowledgeable staff at your local nursery can also be immensely helpful.

Good luck and have fun!

## References

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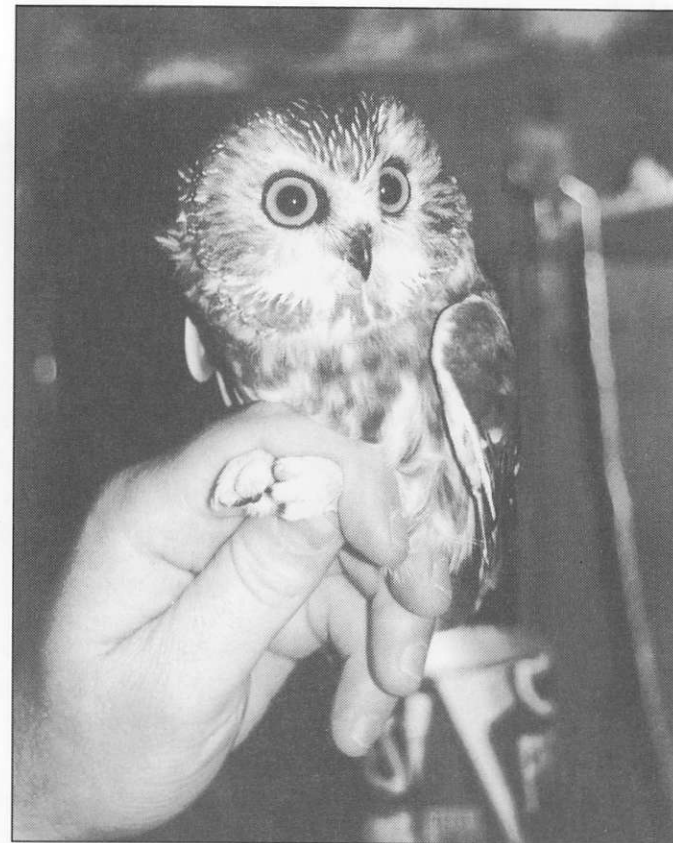
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# Rocky Point Bird Observatory — 2002 Season Highlights

Open between July 20th and October 21st, the 2002 season was an eventful one at the Rocky Point Bird Observatory. Weather played a role in keeping migrant songbird numbers down during July and August. Clear skies and successive high-pressure systems allowed nocturnal migrants to continue south without need for stopover or refuelling. For example, in spite of all thirteen nets running daily this year, our capture rate was down to only 0.48 birds/net-hour, compared to 0.60 or 0.53 as in previous years (see Table 2 below). Nevertheless, a combination of thirteen nets, excellent coverage, and busy days from mid-September until the end of season added up to our highest banding tally ever — 3153 individual birds of 56 species with an average of about 36/day. An additional 212 owls were banded during a pilot project (see below). Some 19,242 birds have now been banded since operations began in August 1994 (see Table 1 below). Only three full days were lost to rain this year, for a total of 87 days of coverage by over forty volunteers. Fourteen species recorded new season highs, with Ruby-crowned Kinglet (a phenomenal 466), Pacific-slope Flycatcher (271), and Wilson's Warbler (231) coming out as the top three species banded (these three species alone represented ~30% of captures).

Some remarkable regional rarities were also recorded in our nets. British Columbia's sixth record of Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was captured on August 6th (second record for Victoria). A Northern Parula was banded on August 23rd, representing only the third record of this species for the province (first record for Victoria). A total of ninety species have now been netted at RPBO. Four additional new birds for the site checklist were also recorded — Marbled Godwit, Cattle Egret, Rusty Blackbird, and Common Redpoll. The new Rocky Point checklist total stands at 281 species (for comparison, this represents more than 75% of the entire Victoria and southern Vancouver Island checklist). Of interest, a total of 194 species were recorded over the course of the year (eclipsing previous high of 192).



Northern Saw-whet Owl Photo: Stephanie Blouin

Led by Paul Levesque, this year also marked the start of a new pilot project to capture migrant Northern Saw-whet Owls. The project's objective was to band owls on the weekends from mid-September through early November. The project would not only determine the feasibility of owl banding at RPBO, but also give us direction as to when monitoring should start and end. The plan was to band from dusk to an hour before dawn, and we managed to do this on 12 nights, with some hours of banding on a further 7 nights altogether. In the end, we banded a remarkable 210 Northern Saw-whet Owls, as well as 2 Barred Owls, with the peak of migration occurring on October 11th and 12th. The banding was done at our banding lab, and the nets and audio lure were ~70m from the banding lab. The audio lure was a car CD player with a car speaker playing a 'tooting' saw-whet call that could be heard for 400m. Re-charged by solar panels during the day, a deep cycle 12-volt battery powered the CD player as well as a 30-watt fluorescent light in the banding lab.

Excellent coverage and additional nets helped make this our most productive banding season yet. This would not have been achieved without the close co-operation of the Depart-

**Table 1. Total birds banded and species totals from 1994-2002**

	2002*	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994
<b>Total banded</b>	<b>3365</b>	<b>2576</b>	<b>2723</b>	<b>2255</b>	<b>2127</b>	<b>1818</b>	<b>1571</b>	<b>1260</b>	<b>1547</b>
<b>Total species</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>60</b>

\*2002 — total of 13 nets  
2000-2001 — nets 11-13 used only on odd days  
1994-1999 — total of 10 nets

## Appendix 1. Total birds banded in 2002

Species	Numbers banded	Species	Numbers banded
<b>Sharp-shinned Hawk</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Cedar Waxwing</b>	<b>7</b>
Northern Pygmy Owl	1	Orange-crowned Warbler	150
<b>Barred Owl</b>	<b>2</b>	Northern Parula	1
<b>Northern Saw-whet Owl</b>	<b>211</b>	Yellow Warbler	114
Downy Woodpecker	1	Yellow-rumped Warbler	31
Northern Flicker	2	Black-throated Gray Warbler	4
<b>Traill's (Willow) Flycatcher</b>	<b>47</b>	Townsend's Warbler	2
Hammond's Flycatcher	23	<b>MacGillivray's Warbler</b>	<b>48</b>
Dusky Flycatcher	1	Common Yellowthroat	74
<b>Pacific-slope Flycatcher</b>	<b>271</b>	Wilson's Warbler	231
Hutton's Vireo	4	Black-headed Grosbeak	1
Warbling Vireo	11	Spotted Towhee	88
Steller's Jay	8	Chipping Sparrow	14
Violet-green Swallow	4	Savannah Sparrow	74
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	2	<b>Fox Sparrow</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Chestnut-backed Chickadee</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>Song Sparrow</b>	<b>168</b>
Bushtit	45	Lincoln's Sparrow	148
Red-breasted Nuthatch	4	Swamp Sparrow	1
Brown Creeper	9	White-throated Sparrow	1
Bewick's Wren	34	<b>White-crowned Sparrow</b>	<b>96</b>
House Wren	11	Golden-crowned Sparrow	66
Winter Wren	177	Dark-eyed Junco	63
Marsh Wren	8	Red-winged Blackbird	8
<b>Golden-crowned Kinglet</b>	<b>117</b>	Brown-headed Cowbird	7
<b>Ruby-crowned Kinglet</b>	<b>466</b>	Purple Finch	6
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	1	House Finch	6
Swainson's Thrush	62	Pine Siskin	9
Hermit Thrush	53	American Goldfinch	159
American Robin	15		

<b>Total individuals</b>	<b>3365</b>
<b>Total Species</b>	<b>57</b>

(Species in **Bold** indicates new single season high captures).



ment of National Defence and Forestry Canada. We would like to acknowledge the financial support from a number of sources, including the Victoria Foundation, BC Gaming Commission, Public Conservation Assistance Fund, Canadian Wildlife Service, and Bird Studies Canada. In 2003, we are looking forward to marking the TENTH season of migration monitoring at the Rocky Point Bird Observatory.

Please visit our website for more information and photo highlights at [www.islandnet.com/~rpbo](http://www.islandnet.com/~rpbo).

David Allinson  
President, Rocky Point Bird Observatory Society  
[www.islandnet.com/~rpbo](http://www.islandnet.com/~rpbo)  
[goshawk@telus.net](mailto:goshawk@telus.net)



Adult male Blue-gray Gnatcatcher Photo: Laurie Savard

**Table 2. Coverage effort from 1999-2002**

Coverage period	Days	Banded	Net hours	Birds/net hour
20/07-21/10	87	3153	6509.5	0.48
23/07-7/10	75	2576	4296	0.6
21/07-21/10	90	2724	5113	0.53
23/07-23/10	87	2255	4493	0.48

1999 – ten mist nets used  
2000-2001 – ten mist nets and three additional mist nets used on odd days  
2002 – thirteen mist nets used

## The Baillie Birdathon 2003 — One Day in May for the Birds

By David Allinson

The Baillie Birdathon has a simple formula for success – birding for bird conservation. Birdathon allows birders, from beginners to pros, to raise money for bird conservation organizations, while enjoying a day of bird watching.

Thanks to 451 participants and 6400 sponsors, the 2002 Baillie Birdathon was a resounding success, raising a new high of over \$181,600!

In 2002, money was allocated to 108 conservation clubs across Canada for a wide array of purposes such as food, housing, and medical care for injured birds, junior naturalist programs, youth outdoor education, nesting boxes, conservation land purchases, bird surveys, and banding support – to name just a few projects.

Birdathon is simple, fun and functional – Bird Studies Canada covers all the administrative costs, participants have the fun, and the proceeds are shared between Bird Studies

Canada and locally for the Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO) and its on-going migration monitoring work.

RPBO President David Allinson will be conducting a Birdathon locally on Saturday, May 24th to raise money for the 2003 Baillie Birdathon. On that day, David will be birding Victoria-wide, from Sidney to East Sooke and estimates being able to tally between 85 and 115 species. To make your sponsoring pledge, contact David with either a “flat” amount or a “per species” amount ([goshawk@telus.net](mailto:goshawk@telus.net) or (250) 391-1786). Note sponsors donating more than \$10 will receive an income tax receipt from Bird Studies Canada.

For more information, visit Bird Studies Canada’s website: [www.bsc-eoc.org](http://www.bsc-eoc.org) (click on ‘Birdathon’ button). For more information about the Rocky Point Bird Observatory, please visit: [www.islandnet.com/~rpbo](http://www.islandnet.com/~rpbo).

## Thank You’s

Dear Members of the Victoria Natural History Society:

I am very pleased to accept the Samuel Simco Bursary. As a first year graduate student at the University of Victoria, I am conducting my Master’s thesis research on ringtailed lemurs (*Lemur catta*) at the Beza Mahafaly Wildlife Reserve in southwestern Madagascar. Wild ringtailed lemurs depend on xerophytic and riverine forest habitats that are rapidly disappearing. In fact, the dry forests of southwestern Madagascar are being destroyed at an alarming rate, with fewer than 4,500 hectares of gallery forest remaining in this region.

I believe that successful conservation initiatives are derived from a comprehensive understanding of the physiological, social, and environmental challenges affecting survivorship of individuals of a particular species. Through my Master’s research, I aim to elucidate how hormones (specifically testosterone) affect the social status of adult female ringtailed lemurs, which in turn has the potential to impact upon infant survivorship in this species. Moreover, by conducting multiple censuses on this population, I aim to monitor the survivorship, troop composition, and life history patterns of ringtailed lemur residing both within and outside the park boundaries at Beza Mahafaly. This information will provide a baseline for survivorship of individuals in fragmented communities outside the reserve, in addition to providing key information for the implementation of future conservation initiatives.

I sincerely thank you for supporting my research project. I aim to continue my conservation efforts through the dissemination of my results to colleagues and community members upon my return to Canada, and by furthering public education concerning the survival of wild ringtailed lemurs in Madagascar. Thank you for continuing to support ambitious biology students in the field of habitat protection and species conserva-

tion. Their initiatives will certainly help to preserve our treasured wildlife and wild spaces for future generations

Sincerely,

Renee Bauer

Dear Members of the Victoria Natural History Society:

I would like to express my gratitude at being chosen as the recipient of the Victoria Natural History Society Bursary. This bursary will contribute significantly to the payment of my tuition fees at Royal Roads University during my second quarter.

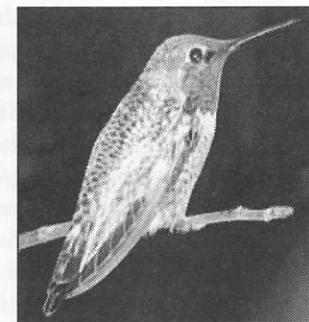
I have been a student at Royal Roads University for four months now as an Environmental Science undergraduate. I am enjoying the program immensely and, after a hectic and exciting end of term, am looking forward to starting up again in the New Year.

Over the holidays I plan to spend time with family and friends of Galiano Island and Vancouver. I am also looking forward to doing some more volunteer work with some of the charitable organizations that I have been associated with on Galiano Island.

I wish all of you at the Victoria Natural History Society a happy holiday season and I hope the New Year brings you success in your endeavours.

Sincerely,

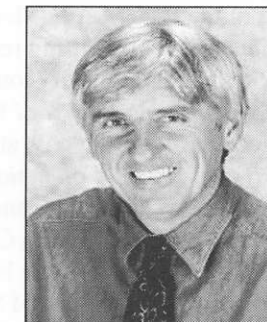
Katherine (Kate) Emmings



### COMPANIONS

Anna’s hummingbirds frequent my feeders year round. I have one located just outside my home office window. The ‘action’ starts at daybreak and continues non-stop throughout the day.

Jim Farrell  
DFH Real Estate Ltd.  
477-7291





# VNHS Life Member Honoured with Jubilee Medal

By Bruce Whittington

In the early 1930's, in the Athabasca region of northern Alberta, a young boy often left his family's farmhouse, and went out in search of birds. As was the custom in those times, and in that part of Canada, he shouldered a rifle. But unlike most boys his age, this boy had no intention of using the rifle; he was out to watch birds.

David Stirling did not often have company on his early birdwatching outings; it was not a popular pursuit in those days. Neither was there much available to foster a boy's interest in birds. Binoculars were hard to get, and not affordable by most farm families. Books about birds were scarce, even in populated areas. Stirling identified birds using post-cards of Allan Brooks' bird paintings. At the age of twelve, he began to keep a field notebook, and he maintains it to this day.

With the onset of the Second World War, Stirling enrolled in Sandhurst Military College, graduating as a Second Lieutenant. He then manoeuvred his way into reconnaissance work. It was not so much that this was what he wanted to do — he heard that they were issuing binoculars. And so began his list of European birds.

After the war, Stirling came to British Columbia, where in 1959 he began a career with the provincial Parks Department. Here, he was instrumental in establishing the department's Park Naturalist program, and for many years recruited, trained, supervised, and mentored hundreds of naturalists. The list is a Who's Who of British Columbia natural history.

All three of the Cannings brothers — Dick, Syd, and Rob — worked under Stirling. All continue to make important contributions in their careers in biology, and are well known for *The Birds of the Okanagan Valley*, published in 1987. Stirling worked with Yorke Edwards, now Director Emeritus of the Royal British Columbia Museum, and trained Bill Barkley as a naturalist, who retired recently, also as the director of the RBCM. Bill Merilees began working for BC Parks under Stirling, retiring recently. He continues to lead international natural history tours with Stirling, and is the author of *Attracting Backyard Wildlife*. Wayne Campbell went on to a career in ornithology, and collaborated on the landmark *Birds of British Columbia*. Andrew Harcombe began his career under David Stirling, and is now director of the British Columbia Conservation Data Centre. Alison Watt has recently published a book on Triangle Island, and Nancy Baron is an award-winning author. One of Stirling's greatest contributions in his field was his insistence that his naturalists keep detailed field notes. These notes, and the continued commitment of their authors, have contributed enormously to the natural history literature in British Columbia.

Stirling himself has published dozens of popular and

scientific articles. He produced *Birds of Vancouver Island* for Birdwatchers in 1972, and co-edited the VNHS publication, *The Naturalist's Guide to the Victoria Region* in 1986.

From the late 1950's through the late 1970's, Stirling was a subregional coordinator for long periods, for *American Birds* and its predecessor, *Audubon Field Notes*. He also coordinated the annual Victoria Christmas Bird Count from 1960 to 1969, and has acted as the provincial coordinator of the Breeding Bird Survey program.

Stirling has always been a strong supporter of organizations which support the study of natural history, and birds in particular. He has served on the executive of the Victoria Natural History Society, and continues to actively support the Society, and contribute articles to *The Victoria Naturalist*. He was given the Society's first Distinguished Service Award, and in 1995 was made an Honorary Life Member.

In the 1960's, David Stirling and Elton Anderson recognized the need for a provincial organization to bring together the many regional naturalist clubs in British Columbia. They founded the British Columbia Nature Council, the forerunner of the Federation of British Columbia Naturalists, an organization which now has over 7000 members, and over 75 affiliated clubs. Stirling has been a member of the American Birding Association since 1969, and served as a Director from June of 1984 to December of 1987. He has also served on the boards of the Canadian Nature Federation, and the Pacific Northwest Bird and Mammal Society.

But it is in the field where David Stirling's impact on the naturalist community becomes so compellingly evident. He is as excited to share a new birder's first look at an Evening Grosbeak as he is to "tick" a new bird on his own world list. In addition to his professional work as a park naturalist, he has led countless field trips, and has instructed many courses. In later years Stirling has become a sought-after international tour leader.

The majority of Stirling's tour leading is done in support of educational institutions and conservation organizations. Here in Victoria, he has led many birding tours in recent years to support the work of Habitat Acquisition Trust, with his efforts helping to raise over \$25,000 for conservation work. He has a gift for bringing birders to the birds; but they always leave with a better understanding of the crucial role of conservation.

David Stirling was recently awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal, in recognition of his contributions as a naturalist in British Columbia. His medal was presented by Joyce Murray, Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection, in a ceremony held at Van Dusen Garden in Vancouver.

Stirling was one of eleven British Columbia naturalists to receive the medals.

# President's Message

By Ann Nightingale

It seems fitting somehow that a new VNHS executive begins its term at the end of the programming "season". This gives us an opportunity to reflect on the accomplishments of the previous board and to look forward to new projects to undertake.

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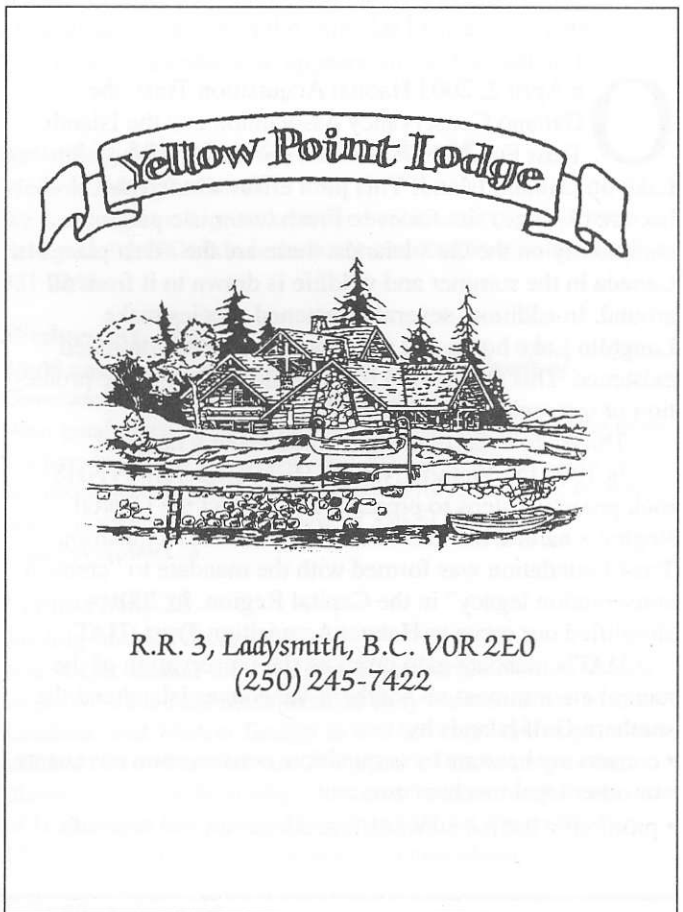
...the successes of VNHS are often due to the work of a lot of other volunteers — people who help out at meetings, displays, serve on committees and contribute in other "behind the scenes" roles.

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As the new VNHS president, I have some pretty big shoes to try to fill. Bruce Whittington has done an exemplary job leading this organization for several years. I am pleased and grateful that he will continue on the board as Past-President. Many of the other directors, Rick Schortinghuis, Marie O'Shaughnessy, Darren Copley, Claudia Copley, Gordon Hart, Isobel Dawson, John Defayette, and Ross Archibald are keeping their positions, giving us much-needed continuity. Two new directors, Ed Pelizzon and John Henigman, join us and we say thank you and good-bye (for now) to two incredibly hard-working and long-serving directors, Bob Chappell and Tom Gillespie.

While the directors' names are often seen in *The Naturalist*, the successes of VNHS are often due to the work of a lot of other volunteers — people who help out at meetings, displays, serve on committees and contribute in other "behind the scenes" roles. Many of the VNHS accomplishments are the direct results of ideas brought forward by members as proposals, or sometimes just as interesting thoughts. It's through your ideas and involvement that the society will become better and better.

Over the next few months, I encourage you to consider activities you think VNHS should pursue. Contact any of the directors (their names and contact information is on the inside of the front cover) or reach us through the VNHS website ([www.vicnhs.bc.ca](http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca)) with your ideas. Thanks to all of you for ongoing support for VNHS.







## HAT Tricks: Creating a Conservation Legacy

By Boyd Pyper, HAT Executive Director

On April 2, 2003 Habitat Acquisition Trust, the Galiano Conservancy Association and the Islands Trust Fund announced the purchase of Laughlin Lake on Galiano Island! This joint effort secured the 11 hectare (27 acre) site for ever. Fresh water is a precious commodity on the Gulf Islands: these are the driest places in Canada in the summer and wildlife is drawn to it from all around. In addition, several threatened species make Laughlin Lake home and are dependent on its continued existence. This acquisition is a significant step in the protection of our region's natural habitat.

Thanks to everyone who helped make it happen!

In 1996 the Victoria Natural History Society (VNHS) took proactive steps to preserve and protect the Capital Region's natural habitat. The VNHS Habitat Acquisition Trust Foundation was formed with the mandate to "create a conservation legacy" in the Capital Region. In 2001 we simplified our name to Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT).

HAT's mandate is to promote the preservation of the natural environment on southern Vancouver Island and the southern Gulf Islands by:

- conserving habitats by acquisition, conservation covenants, or other legal mechanisms; and
- promoting habitat stewardship, education and research.

HAT's projects have spanned the Capital Region from Sooke to Galiano Island, with well over 700 hectares protected through direct acquisition or conservation covenants. This amount does not include HAT's involvement in "indirect partnerships" projects like the Sooke Hills.

There are still many connections between the VNHS and Habitat Acquisition Trust. Two important examples are HAT's commitment to the goal of creating a conservation legacy in the Capital Region and the fact that all VNHS members receive a discount on HAT membership (only \$10!). As well, all HAT members get a 10% discount at the Goldstream

"Creating a conservation legacy" requires more than just a commitment in principle. To achieve our mutual goals, funding is crucial and you can help directly through your charitable contributions. All donations over and above the cost of membership are tax deductible. By becoming a member and donating to HAT you are helping to protect our region's rare and beautiful ecosystems.

Thank you for your continued support of Habitat Acquisition Trust. Please feel free to drop by our office (316 - 620 View Street, Victoria, BC V8W 1J6), call us at (250) 995-2428, e-mail us at [hatmail@hat.bc.ca](mailto:hatmail@hat.bc.ca) or check out our website: [www.hat.bc.ca](http://www.hat.bc.ca).

## 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 Murray and Anne Fraser 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. The VNHS Calendar also appears on the Internet at: <http://www.vicNHS.bc.ca>.

### MAY

#### Saturday, May 3

##### *Birding at Witty's Lagoon*

Join **Bruce Whittington** at one of Victoria's birding hotspots! It is a peak weekend for migrant songbirds and the lagoon may produce a nice mix of waterfowl and shorebirds. Meet at the main parking lot on Metchosin Road at 7:00 am. **No pets please.**

#### Friday, May 9

##### *Birding Swan Lake*

Join **Chris Saunders** for a birding walk at Swan Lake. Meet at the main parking lot at 7:30 a.m. Call Chris at 391-1159 if you need more information.

#### Saturday, May 10

##### *Birding Royal Roads and Esquimalt Lagoon*

Join **Ann Nightingale** for a birding walk around Esquimalt Lagoon. Possibilities include Caspian Tern, and Ruddy Turnstones. You should see a good variety of spring migrants. Meet at the south end of Esquimalt Lagoon at 7:30 a.m. Call Ann at 652-6450 for more information. **No pets please.**

#### Sunday, May 11

##### *2:00 pm - a tour of the Garry Oak woodlands behind Government House.*

This is an area not normally open to the public. A number of native spring flowers should still be in bloom. Wear good walking shoes. Tours will meet at the Porte Cochere in front of the House, 1401 Rockland Avenue. They will last about one and a half hours and cost \$10.00 each. For information or questions, leave a message at 356-5139 or [gvanslyk@direct.ca](mailto:gvanslyk@direct.ca).

#### Saturday, May 17

##### *Birding Elk Lake*

Come for a wonderful stroll with **Tom Gillespie** (361-1694) through exceptional nesting habitat on the shore of a favourite recreational lake. Watch for breeding warblers, vireos, and waterfowl. Meet at 7:00 am at the parking lot on Jennings Lane on the west side of the Pat Bay Highway (just south of the rowing boathouse). **No pets please.**

#### Sunday, May 18

##### *A Nature Walk on Mount Douglas*

Join **Claudia Copley** in searching for interesting plants, butterflies, birds and bugs on Mount Douglas. Meet at the trail entrance on Cedarhill Rd. just west of Shelbourne St. at 9:00a.m. Call Claudia at 479-6622 if you need more information.

#### Saturday, May 17 and Sunday, May 18

##### *Victoria Butterfly Count*

We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers so get out your field guide! **Jeff Gaskin** is the count coordinator; give him a call at 381-7248.

#### Wednesday, May 21

##### *10:00 am - a tour of the bird life in the woodlands of Government House, given by Bill Dancer.*

Wear good shoes and bring binoculars. Tours will meet at the Porte Cochere in front of the House, 1401 Rockland Avenue. They will last about one and a half hours and cost \$10.00 each. For information or questions, leave a message at 356-5139 or [gvanslyk@direct.ca](mailto:gvanslyk@direct.ca).

#### Friday, May 23

##### *Birding Mount Newton*

Join **Sheila Mosher** for a birding walk on Mount Newton's south slope. We should see Black-throated Gray Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Western Tanager as well as many other migrant and resident birds. Mount Newton is also one of the few remaining places you can see Mourning Dove near Victoria. Meet at the corner of Haldon road and Newton Heights at 7:00 am. Phone Sheila at 652-3502 if you have any questions. **No pets please.**

#### Saturday, May 24

##### *Birding Blenkinsop Lake*

Join **Kevin Slagboom** and **Rick Schortinghuis** in birding the Blenkinsop Bridge and Lochside Trail. Meet at the south end of the bridge at the end of Lochside Drive at 7:00 am. Call Rick at 652-3326 for more information. **No pets please.**

#### Sunday, May 25

##### *Birding the Boardwalk at Langford Lake*

Meet **Gordon Hart** for a birding walk on the trail at the north end of Langford Lake. You will also be birding the power lines behind the lake. This walk will take you to Hull's Wetland. Meet at 7:30 a.m. on Goldstream Avenue and the highway across from the entrance to the boardwalk. Call Gordon at 721-1264 for more information. **No pets please.**

#### Sunday, May 25

##### *A Natural History Cycling Tour of the Galloping Goose Trail (Sooke Potholes to Leechtown)*

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** on a cycling tour into the Sooke Hills. We will enjoy the flowers, birds and scenery along the way. Meet at the Galloping Goose parking lot 2.3 km up Sooke River Road at 8:00

## Go to Goldstream Park to see the birds...

Whether you're visiting Australia, Russia, or the Antarctic the Goldstream Nature House has the field guides you need for your next trip abroad.

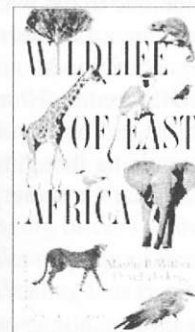
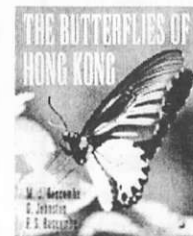
Proceeds help keep the Nature House open. Just a 5 minute walk downstream from the Picnic site.



Goldstream Provincial Park

Nature guides for every corner of the planet now in stock at the Goldstream Nature House.

### Of India?





am. Bring a cool drink and a lunch. Call Rick at 652-3326 for more information. **No pets please.**

### Friday, May 30

#### *Birding the Colquitz River Trail*

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** for a 3-4hour birding jaunt between Marigold Avenue and Wilkinson Road and on to Quick's Bottom. Snacks are a good idea. Meet at Hyacinth Park on Marigold Ave. at 7:00 am. Call Rick at 652-3326 for more information. **No pets please.**

### Saturday, May 31

#### *Spring Bird Count*

The Spring Bird Count runs midnight to noon and the post-count gathering will be at Swan Lake. Phone **Rick Schortinghuis** for more information and to get involved (652-3326).

## JUNE

### Sunday, June 1

#### *Birding in Francis King Park*

Join the **Gattens (Barry and Jeremy)** on a walk through Francis King Park and the Power Line trails. We will be stopping to look at the flowering shrubs, butterflies and birds along the way. Bring a lunch and meet at the nature house at 7:00 am. Call Barry at 652-4357 for more information. **No pets please.**

### Saturday, June 7

#### *Birding the Cowichan River*

Meet at the Helmcken Park and Ride at 7:00 and expect to be gone for most of the day. In that case you'll also need a lunch! Phone **Ann Nightingale** for more information: 652-6450.

### Saturday, June 21 and Sunday, June 22

#### *Victoria Butterfly Count*

We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers so get out your field guide! **Jeff Gaskin** is the count coordinator; give him a call at 381-7248.

## PROGRAM COMMITTEE REPORT

The Program Committee organized over 50 field trips in 2002. Some of the more popular trips were to Cape Flattery to see Tufted Puffins and to Hurricane Ridge to see the alpine flowers. With Natural History Night we covered many interesting and diverse topics: from our native bees, to the ecological effects of the introduced Bullfrog, to Gray Wolves of the coastal rainforest. We would like to thank all the leaders and guest speakers who volunteered their time for us.

The birding courses being offered through the society are going very well; last year more than \$2000 was raised for important conservation projects. Please let us know if you have suggestions for other courses the society could offer, or if you would like to become a trip leader or do a presentation.

## BULLETIN BOARD

The Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO) has a copy of Volumes I and II of "The Birds of British Columbia" for sale. Both are in mint condition and the asking price is \$70 for each copy. We will consider trading these for Volume IV to complete the set for our reference library. Please call Colleen O'Brien @ 388-4520.

RPBO is also looking for volunteers with sewing skills to help make bird bags for the upcoming fall migration-monitoring season. Volunteers will be supplied with a kit which includes instructions (they're simple), a sample bag and pre-cut fabric for 25 more bags. Each kit takes approximately 6 hours to complete. If you can help with this task, please call Colleen O'Brien at 388-4520.

### May Baillie Birdathon

VNHS birders are encouraged to support the Rocky Point Bird Observatory by participating in the 2003 Baillie Birdathon (<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/organization/brdathon.html>) in May or by sponsoring participating birders. Names and contact information of participants looking for sponsors will be posted on the VNHS website. Contact [feedback@vicnhs.bc.ca](mailto:feedback@vicnhs.bc.ca) to have your name added.

Does anyone have a small freezer they would like to donate to Rocky Point Bird Observatory. Call Rick Schortinghuis at 652-3326.

CRD Parks has a new website: [www.crd.bc.ca/parks](http://www.crd.bc.ca/parks) featuring: downloadable maps and brochures, information on 30 regional parks and trails, news, nature programs schedule, Kid's Corner, and more. Your feedback on the new website is welcome at: [>crdparks@crd.bc.ca<](mailto:>crdparks@crd.bc.ca<)

The FBCN has vacancies for several Board Positions, beginning May 2004. Members of the FBCN Executive manage the FBCN according to the policies set by Directors representing the member clubs. Executive members are expected to join in conference call executive meetings about 4 times a year, and attend if possible the Annual and Fall General Meetings. The AGM is in Kamloops in May 2003, and the FGM will be in the Kootenays. Expenses are covered as far as possible for Executive members (though I have to admit we encourage frugality!) Executive members also have a number of tasks for which they are responsible, which are outlined below. The experience of volunteering with the FBCN Board is very fulfilling. One learns a tremendous amount and meets wonderful people. For more details contact the Nomination Chair, Anne Murray 604 943 4460.

### Recording Secretary

The Recording Secretary takes minutes of Executive meetings, the Annual General meeting and the Fall General Meeting (but not Regional meetings). Executive Meetings are conducted by conference call, from the FBCN Vancouver office. This might be easier for a local person to do, so we are thinking the Secretary's job could be split between two people, one to do the Exec. Meeting minutes and one the general meetings. The Secretary gets to know everything that is going on in the FBCN and meets lots of people, plus there is the opportunity by being on the Executive to join in discussions and shape FBCN policy.

### Education Chair

The Education Chair is the coordinator of FBCN's educational programs and projects. There is a lot of scope here for someone with good organizational skills and an interest in nature education. The FBCN has several educational projects, including Wildlife Watch, our involvement with the Provincial Science Fair Program, Young Naturalists (which is currently run by the Vancouver Natural History Society but which will probably be moved to FBCN management), and the FBCN web site. The first three have liaison people from FBCN who help to manage the programs. Greg Ross, the current Education Chair, has concentrated on getting information from clubs onto the web site, a huge task that has been just about completed. We need someone with an educational vision for FBCN to pull together the various components and also to initiate

workshops of the kind FBCN used to put on in the past. It would be good if the chair could also get a little committee together to facilitate this.

### BC Naturalists Foundation: Board Members

The FBCN is looking to increase the size of the B.C. Naturalists Foundation board by about 3 members. The Foundation is the fund-raising and planned giving arm of the FBCN and has opportunities for interested members, particularly those with some experience in similar fields. Frances Vyse, the current Chair is looking to step down from this position. Anyone interested in serving on the Foundation Board should contact Frances for further information on this valuable role: [vyse@telus.net](mailto:vyse@telus.net).

## Welcome to New Members

**Carley Goodchild**  
Moss Street  
*birds, field trips*

**Robert and Jan Carroll**  
Patterson Road  
*birds, butterflies*

**Becky Shaw**  
Goward Road  
*bird behaviour*

**Ann Strother**  
Locarno Lane  
*birding trips*

**Kate Day**  
Fairfield Road  
*birds*

**Nigel Buckland and Nathalie Dechaine**  
Cherry Road  
*birds, botany, herpetology*

**Thelma Dronsfield**  
Island Highway  
*birds*

**Guy and Lynda Krocker**  
Beaton Street

**Hans and Heidi Roemer**  
Woodsend Drive  
*botany, birds*

**Emily and Bruce Talbot**  
Colville Road

**Shirley Collins**  
Sunridge Valley Drive

**Walter Gordon**  
St. Charles Street  
*birds*

**Karen Hogg**  
Lotus Street

**John Carter and Val Nevile Carter**  
Marcola Place  
*birds, botany, marine*

**David Pretty**  
MacDonald Drive  
*birds, mammals, photography*

**Barrie Szekely and Rhonda Rose**  
Cedar Hill Road  
*birds*

**Mrs. Doubravka B. Spilka**  
Lockley Road

**Gail Duguid**  
Flannagan Place

**John G. Fitch**  
Pat Bay Highway

**Peter Gage**  
Central Saanich Road

**Maureen Gordon**  
Fairfield Road

**Merton and Frances Moriarity**  
Lochside Drive

**Tim Roberts**  
Viaduct Avenue West

**Richard and Lea Simpson**  
Strom Ness Place  
*birds, botany*

**Gail Squire**  
Hunley Street

**Sara Stallard**  
Mason Street  
*stormwater management, urban stream restoration, mapping, benthic invertebrates*





**The Victoria  
NATURALIST**

Renewal Date Aug--03

Barrie Bird  
3820 Epsom Drive  
VICTORIA BC V8P 3S7

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

Welcome to New Members