# The VICTORIA NATURALIST

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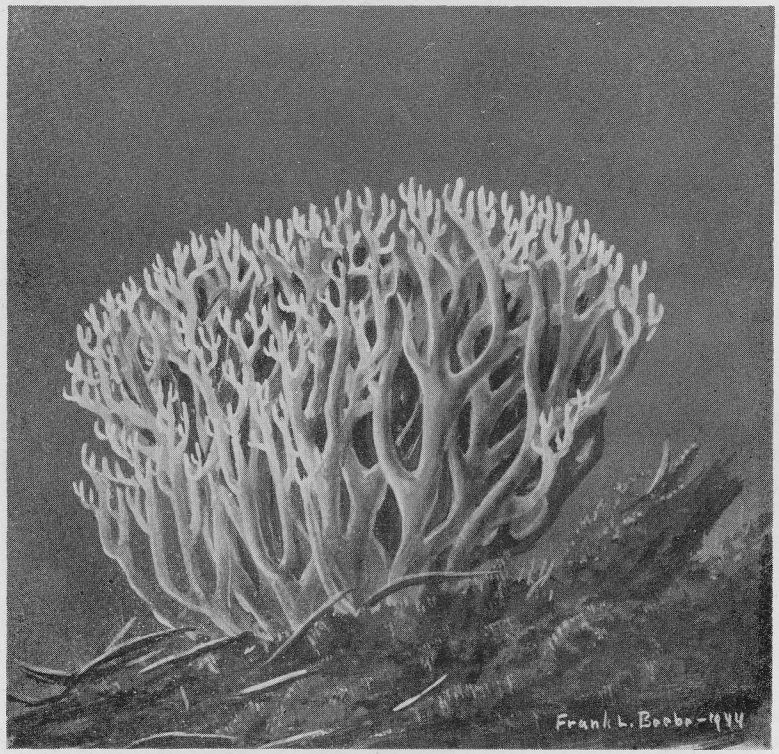


Dryad's broom (*Clavaria abietina* Pers.).

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## THE DRYAD'S BROOM

Among the wealth of fungal growth that luxuriates in our autumnal woodland, there is sure to be some representative of the Club Fungi of which the Dryad's broom, Clavaria abietina Pers.is a typical example. (See cover of this issue). The characteristically branched nature of the Club Fungi is well demonstrated. The spores are produced from a specialized covering on the tips of the branches. The colour of this species is dark ochre which turns to greenish when damaged. It is generally to be found in coniferous woods and may grow either on the ground or on old stumps.

None of the Clavarias is known to be poisonous. Individual taste is probably the best guide as to edibility.

G.A.H.

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## THE HARD-SKINNED EARTH STAR. Scleroderma Geaster Fr.

by George A. Hardy, Provincial Museum

Mr. T. Taylor recently brought into the Museum a most interesting species of fungus from the Colwood district belonging to the family Sclerodermataceae or Hard-skinned puffballs.

While rather far advanced in decay it still retained sufficient clues as to identity, among which the nature of the spores was most helpful, for the globular spores (4) distinguishes members of this family from the cup fungi in which the spores are smooth and elliptical.

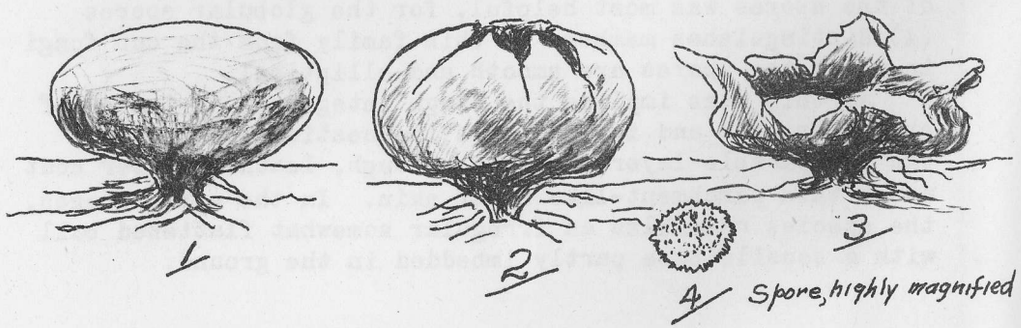
As this name implies the tough integument is the chief characteristic and in the genus in question consists of two inseparable layers, a thick, tough, leathery outer coat and a thin parchment-like inner skin. In the early stages, the species resembles an irregular somewhat flattened ball with a sessile base partly imbedded in the ground.

Towards maturity the interior of the ball is filled with a mass of short hyphae or threads which bear the spore-producing cells. When ripe the spore mass becomes powdery and of a dark purplish-tinged brown colour. The spores are globular, covered with minute wart-like projections and are in prodigious numbers. Individually they are invisible to the unaided eye, but when suddenly ejected into the air in a mass they assume a smoky appearance.

In the common species, Scleroderma vulgaris, which abounds in our gardens and is occasionally confused with the truffle, the outer coat ruptures irregularly at maturity. It is also of a light brown colour.

Mr. Taylor's specimens are much larger than the above, and are of a dark brown or blackish colour, while the integument splits into several irregularly stellate or star-like rays. The outer surface is roughly granular in texture, brownish black externally, paler in cross-section. The inner layer is thin, tough and smooth and also dark blackish-brown. They were in sandy soil beneath coniferous trees. They grow close to the ground and in sequence of development something like the accompanying figures 1 - 3. In size they are approximately 3 - 4 inches in diameter and about 3 inches in height. Flattened out with rays fully extended, one specimen measured 6 inches from tip to tip.

As far as I know this is the first record for Vancouver Island of Scleroderma Geaster. The species is not to be confused with the commoner Earth Stars, Geaster hygrometricus, G. triplex, and others where, in addition to the stellate rays, the spores are contained within an inner sac which erupts only through a small hole in the upper surface. Other information regarding this species would be welcome.






## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON BIRDS AND BIRD-WATCHING

by A. R. Davidson.

### THE BIRD WATCHER'S LAMENT

My head is like a cullender,
It does not hold a thing,
I sometimes even wonder
If birds do ever sing!

They twit, hiss and chortle,
And sometimes give a grunt,
But I am only mortal,
They elude me though I hunt.

The swallows and the crane,
The grebe and the peewee,
Their notes are all the same,
And they look alike to me.

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The dean of American ornithology, Mr. Ludlow Griscom, in his book on bird-watching, makes the following statement:- "Never take a bird for granted." This is most excellent advice. When watching a flock of birds, one should try to get a glimpse of each one. Birds love company, and very often, especially during the migration period, a small flock may contain several varieties. Recently I have had a few experiences of this. The other day (this is written in September), while on Cadboro Beach and endeavouring to ascertain how many varieties of gulls there were in a flock resting on the sand, I noticed four Common Terns. I had never seen terns before at Victoria. During the same week at Cattle Point in the Uplands, trying to count a small flock of Meadow Larks, I noticed some small birds land on the rocks. They looked like American Pipits, and as these are migrating along our coast in fair numbers at this time, thought I would not investigate further, but Mr. Ludlow's remark came to my mind, so I walked slowly over to where these birds had landed, and found them to be the Streaked Horned Lark, another new bird to add to my list. Recently too, while at Ten Mile Point with two keen bird students, we were trying to count a flock of Barn Swallows. Few

birds escaped the watchful eyes of these young men, and before we had finished with this flock, we had seen Barn Swallows, Violet-Green Swallows, Goldfinch, Audubon Warblers, Golden-crowned Sparrows and Western Flycatchers. Admittedly there is a lot of luck in bird-watching, but obviously one must be prepared to take advantage of this luck by a reasonable amount of bird study and by knowing just what to look for in the momentary glimpse one gets of a bird, such as size, shape, colour, actions, and the knowledge in what environment one may expect certain birds.

### Raven Behaviour

Of all the birds I have observed, the raven appears to be the only one which can inject a certain sense of humour into its doings, though crows occasionally come a good second.

At Courtenay I lived about two miles from the coast, with the mountains a further eight miles away, and most mornings the ravens would come over my place on their way to their feeding grounds. They were never in a hurry, flying along in a desultory fashion, making a wide assortment of noises as they went. They have a considerable vocabulary. Occasionally they would suddenly fold up in mid-air and tumble earthwards, then flatten out and resume their normal flying. They could also turn over sideways, fly upside down for a moment, and then right themselves - all, it seemed, just for fun.

One day, I was watching a pair of eagles soaring, when along came a small flock of ravens, one of which immediately climbed up between the eagles and joined them in their spiralling flight. It was apparently beneath the dignity of the eagles to notice such an intrusion, but the raven kept up with them, making a pretty good job of soaring, and then, with a derisive squawk, it tumbled out of the sky to treetop level and flew on to catch up with the other ravens.

### CROSSBILLS

Walking down Tudor Avenue at Ten Mile Point on a warm sunny morning last February, I was surprised to see a flock of about 25 Red Crossbills come down the Douglas Firs on which they were feeding and alight on the ground. The unusually warm day must have made them thirsty, as they drank from a pool of water under the trees. Now as a



rule we see Crossbills only as they fly over the treetops, and this is the first time I have had the pleasure of observing them at such close quarters and their colouring was wonderful and most diversified. Some of them were a rich deep red, others brown-red, or brown-yellow, while a few of them were a dark olive-brown. They all appeared to have different colour and yet they were all the same species. They are a small bird, hardly any bigger than Pine Siskins.

(A similar flock was observed on March 26th feeding on the cones of the small fir trees which border the east side of Ross Bay Cemetery. I came upon them most unexpectedly, but although I was only three or four feet away they were not in the least disturbed and continued to extract the seeds from the fir cones in an expert manner. These birds work on the cones from any direction and climb around the trees like a lot of small parrots. While Crossbills seem to feed mainly on coniferous seeds a very large flock of them worked through the elm trees on Wildwood Avenue one summer's day in 1949 when there was a heavy infestation of aphis. They seemed to be feeding on these and passed on as soon as they had worked over the leaves.

To Mr. Davidson's list of colours I would add an olive-green shading to yellow. W.T.)

The Cormorants of Gordon Head: On the precipitous, and indeed overhanging, cliffs at Gordon Head is established a colony of Baird's Cormorants. This year (1951) there were about 40 nests. This nesting site is inaccessible, but part of it is well placed for observation. The Cormorants have it all to themselves, no gulls nesting within a mile. The birds were busy at this site from the beginning of June, the first eggs being laid about the middle of the month. The following are the dates and observations of our visits:- June 25: Nests all occupied.

June 29: On this day several photographs were taken, which showed several of the nests with their full complement of 5 eggs.

July 22: As far as could be seen, all the young were hatched. This summer, the weather was unusually warm, and the cliffs faced south. On this day, the adult birds were all standing in front of the nests facing the cliff with their wings outstretched, protecting the young

from the blistering rays of the sun. Their beaks were wide open and their necks visibly throbbing with the heat.

Aug.9: Several of the young were full grown. The count on this day was 70 young and 20 adults.

Aug.17: Some of the young birds had flown, as the count this day was 60 young, most of them full sized, while a few were only half grown, so this site will be partially occupied for a week or two yet.

(This data was written on August 19.)

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## SEPTEMBER GENERAL MEETING

The first General Meeting after the summer interval is usually the occasion of a pleasant reunion for most of us and this year was no exception. We were also pleased to welcome five new members and a number of visitors who, the President hoped, would soon be members.

With Mrs. Hobson in the chair the meeting got under way on time and the routine business was disposed of in short order.

Mrs. Stevens suggested that a scrapbook for cuttings and one for snapshots would add to the interest of the meetings and the meeting gratefully accepted her offer to take charge of this effort. It is now up to all of us to keep her well supplied with material for inclusion in these books.

A large collection of specimens was on view including a large sea-urchin - spines and all; some cat's ear with stems distorted by the intrusion of insect grubs. Mrs. Hobson observed that almost all of this common weed is affected around her home. Mr. Whitehouse exhibited the toe bone of a dinosaur which he had picked up in the Alberta bad lands, and a representative collection of rocks from the Mount Sicker area together with maps and photographs.

The group reports were led off by Professor Cunningham who gave a most entertaining account of five Marine Biology field trips. He suggested that the rather random type of study and collecting indulged in this summer should be supplemented by a study of more systematic methods during the winter. There is no doubt that a wider knowledge of the structure and other details would add greatly to the



enjoyment of those taking part in all phases of nature study.

Mr. Clay gave a graphic account of the activities of the Bird Group which held three well-attended field trips and has another scheduled for Witty's Lagoon on Saturday, September 22.

Mr. Whitehouse reported on the two field trips of the Geology Group and introduced Dr. A. O. Hays, who explained the formations of the Mount Sicker area as outlined in the maps and the rock specimens obtained at the workings.

Professor Lowe was not present to report for the Botany Group but Mr. Taylor expressed the feelings of the members when he said that this summer's activities had been the most enjoyable he had yet participated in.

The slides exhibited by Mr. Edgar Stansfield were of the same high quality we have come to take for granted from this enthusiastic colour photographer. While the collection contained pictures of most of the field trips, probably the most interesting were those of the cormorants' nests on Bare Island, although for sheer beauty, the views of the scenery around Miss Haughton's "Benacres" could not be surpassed, particularly the shot of hillsides covered in a golden mantle of gorse.

After the meeting adjourned the members remained for another half-hour or so of visiting and discussion. Altogether "a good time was had by all"! W.T.

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## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN OCTOBER

During the month of October all bird students are on the alert to catch sight of some of the many migrations which occur at this time. Anyone who likes walking along the delightful waterfront at the Uplands, between the Willows Beach and the Victoria Yacht Club, is almost sure to see the Savannah Sparrows and the American Pipits, both of which have been going through this stretch of country for the last few weeks and will continue until possibly the second week in this month. Also, one is liable to run into small groups of summer birds on their southern migration, such as Bluebirds, any of the Warblers, Flycatchers, Goldfinches, Gold-crowned and White-crowned Sparrows - possibly all grouped together.

Returning to Victoria this month will be the Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Juncoes and Fox Sparrows, while the Robins are going through constantly, some, of course, staying all winter.

On the beaches and mudflats one will still be able to see the Dowitchers, Spotted, Western and Least Sandpipers, and possibly other Waders.

During the summer months the seafront is fairly empty of birds, but during October the following will return to spend the winter in these waters:- Greater Scaup, Western and Horned Grebe, Widgeon, Mallard, Shoveller, Coot and Buffleheads, also the Red-breasted Merganser, as well as a few Hooded Merganser. Many of the Scoters, American, White-winged and Surf, arrived last month, while the Harlequins, the most colourful of all our ducks, will be returning from their breeding places on the rivers of Vancouver Island and the mainland throughout the month.

A.R.D.

Charley Guiguet has just returned from a field trip and remarked on the increased number of turkey vulture families seen in various parts of the Province. He also suggests that bird watchers keep an eye open for jaegers, both the parasitic and the long-tailed species of this interesting group are now passing through.

BOTANY: The dry weather has made the floral picture very bare but there are a certain number of fall flowers still persevering and in the shaded woods some fungi are beginning to appear. W.T.

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## AUDUBON SCREEN TOURS

Considering the rather inclement weather and the competition of another lecture in town, the attendance at the first Audubon lecture was very gratifying. Some 400 people attended and heard a first class lecture together with instruction in identifying birds by the area in the C scale where their song is pitched.

With a few well chosen words the president, Mrs.James Hobson Introduced Bert Harwell who himself is no stranger to Victoria Natural History Society members.

Starting off with "Pattern in Bird Song" at the piano the speaker held the attention of his audience right from



Niagara Falls until he and his Audubon station wagon disappeared down the Cabot Trail. There is no need to detail all the points of Mr. Harwell's talk as most of the members were there. It was evident that the lecturer's main interest in "Canada East" was the extensive colonies of sea birds around Gaspe, Bird Rock and Bonaventure Island. Here he photographed arctic tern, murre, Atlantic puffin, razor-billed auks, gulls and gannets and more gannets. The piece de resistance of Bert Harwell's trip to Eastern Canada was obviously his opportunity to observe the gannet colonies on Bird Rock and Bonadventure Island. His shots of these birds covered all periods of their lives and the nesting sites but the pictures he was most proud of were those of the mass diving exercises. He was lucky enough to get what are claimed to be the best views ever taken of gannets diving from the 75ft.cliff and from the wing in such numbers. It was interesting to know that in their dives, which may take them as much as 90 feet below the surface of the sea, often yield them two large herring which must be swallowed before the bird comes to the surface.

The consensus of opinion after the lecture was that the Audubon Tours had got away to a flying start. The lecturer was interesting, the pictures first rate and the hall by far the best we have yet been able to rent. Some crowding and inconvenience might have been avoided if those who had parked their cars by the back of the hall had known that they could have got out of the side door, directly onto the parking area.

As Bert Harwell starts on his long drive to Fort William and points east we all join with Dr. Carl in wishing him bon voyage. W.T.

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## GROUP REPORTS

Geology Notes: A visit to the Sunloch and Gabbro Claims on Jordan River.

This much anticipated trip was made on June 30th, some 20 members making up the party. There was a bit of a squeeze at the rendezvous, one or two members being a trifle late, but under Mrs. Hobson's tactful arrangement all four cars got away on time. Everybody enjoyed the lovely drive except perhaps the last few miles, where

the road has not been paved.

After lunch those of us who were going all the way followed Mr. Winkler single file up hill and down dale and up and around and up again, stopping to examine an old outcrop on the way and also to sample some very fine salmonberries! The trail led up to the shed where the cores from the diamond drilling were all kept, sorted and labelled, and it was interesting to note that the deepest were not always the best, although in some places the deeper hole showed the higher grade. The trail was well marked and easy travelling except for a few trestles, one of which even the dog did not like, but then he had no way of hanging on to the rope handrail! However, nearly everybody made it and reached the first dump, and it came as rather a shock to some of us to see all the old steel pneumatic drills and railway lines all thrown up in a heap like so much junk, with tons of what appeared to be good ore lying in the dump. One lady wanted to know why, if metal was so badly needed, this had to be left like this. In any case, one couldn't help thinking of all the back-breaking and heart-aching toil that had been spent to get even so far in the discovery of a mine, or perhaps I should say, in the prospect of a mine? Mr. Winkler, who incidentally was the original discoverer of the Sunloch Claim, told us that nearly all the tools and supplies had been packed in on men's backs - some men, you will agree, I think! He also told us some other tales, one how he had spent his first winter on his claim in a board shack in spite of the fact that 16 feet of snow fell that winter. Mr. Winkler also explained the diamond drilling and how they had located the different ore bodies, showing the abrupt change from the basaltic to the Gabbro, etc. Lastly we climbed to the upper working (which is really lower than the other, but higher up the river) where he showed us the different kinds of ore, good - I beg pardon - high-grade and low grade with its various other mineral contents.

To stand on those cliffs and look down into the water below where we could even see some small fish in the pools was a memorable experience, not soon to be forgotten. A few pictures were taken on the return journey, some of which we hope may be worth seeing later on. We joined the ladies at the bottom of the hill, who in the meantime had been suffering from those annoying "no see'ums". However, we all

(cont'd on page 48)



## JUNIOR PAGE

Editor: Doreen Wilby

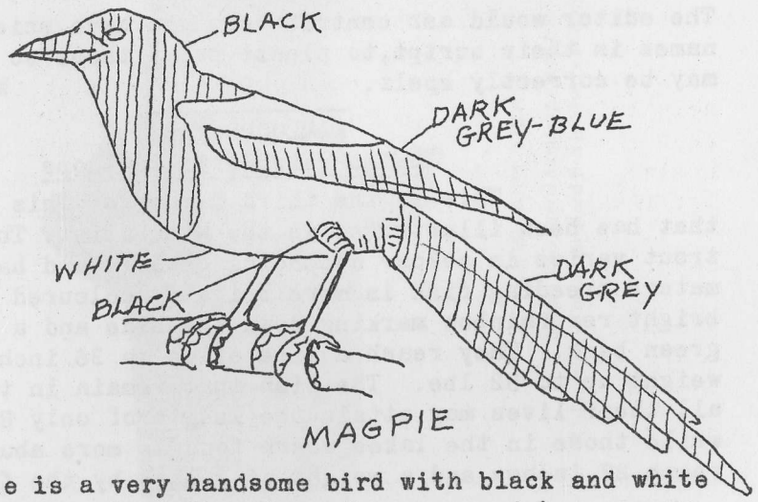
Ass't Editor: Peggy Carl.

### Our Pet Magpies

by Peggy Carl.

This Spring my father brought two young magpies from the Okanagan. My brother and I each got one. We named them Kim and Jim. We had to feed them every couple of hours. When they started to fly, we gave them to a boy Daddy knew. As they grew up they got very tame and went visiting the neighbours.

A few weeks after, some boys caught Jim and strangled him for stealing fruit. By then Kim was very popular with the neighbours. One day the boy found him strangled. He had got his head in a hole in the wire of his cage and got stuck.




The magpie is a very handsome bird with black and white plumage. It is about the size of a crow and has a very long tail. It does not live on this coast; but in the southern prairies and adjacent districts. The magpie on this continent has almost the same plumage as the European magpie but the voice is very different.

This bird is very mischievous. It robs the nests of other birds and eats their eggs and the young birds. In "Birds of Canada", by P.A. Taverner, which you can get from the library, there is a picture of the magpie; also there is a stuffed one in the bird cases in the Provincial Museum.

## NOTICE OF MEETINGS

The Junior Naturalists meet at 10 a.m. Provincial Museum every Saturday.

1951

Tuesday Oct. 9: GENERAL MEETING: Reading Room of the Provincial Library, 8 p.m.
Speaker: Mr. Geo. A. Hardy -
Illustrated Lecture - "Floral Gems".

Saturday Oct.27: FUNGUS FORAY: Meet at Mrs. Hobson's residence, 1970 Argyle, at 2 p.m. (Mount Tolmie bus)
Tea will be provided for members who bring their own lunches.

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The editor would ask contributors who have scientific names in their script,to please print these so that they may be correctly spelt. W.T.

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## KAMLOOPS TROUT

### Salmo gairdnerii kamloops

This is the third member of this species that has been illustrated in the Naturalist. The Kamloops trout varies in colour depending on size and habitat, the mature breeding fish is more brightly coloured with the bright red rainbow marking down the side and a lighter green back. They reach a size of up to 36 inches and a weight up to 52 lbs. The fish that remain in the streams all their lives may attain the length of only 8 inches while those in the lakes where food is more abundant will reach 27 inches and a weight of 8 lbs. by the fifth year.

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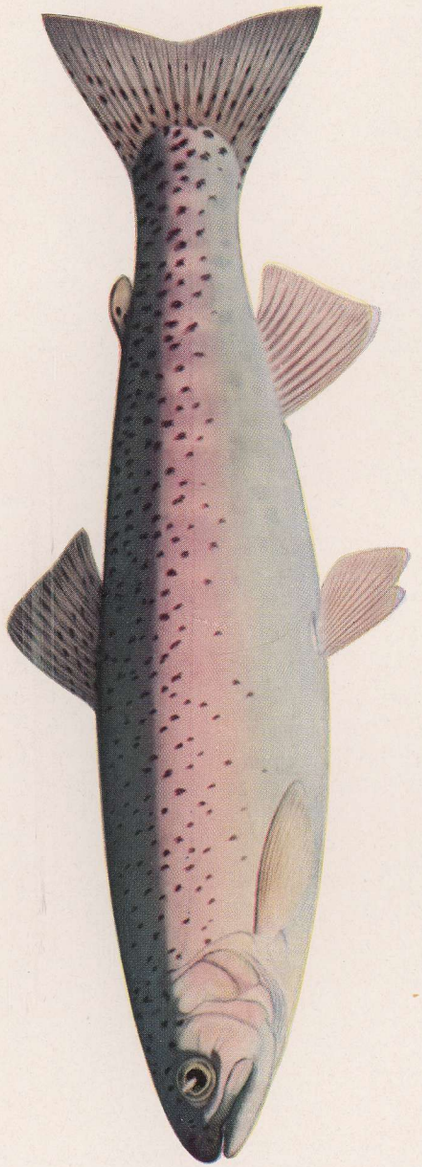
Cont'd from page 46: had lunch together,everybody agreeing that it had been a most interesting and instructive trip, and a hearty vote of thanks was tendered to Mr. Winkler.

P.S. To some of us it was a demonstration of the why and wherefore it takes so much money to develop a mine.Before any real mining can be done, the ore bodies must be proved by diamond drilling, which may run into very heavy expense, and only then can the real work of developing the mine begin, and that immediately involves transportation of machinery, etc.,which may mean having to build roads into a wild country; and then, having got the mine, the ore or concentrates must be transported to the smelter,all at high cost.Perhaps this answers the question asked by the lady!

J.H.W.



KAMLOOPS TROUT.
*Salmo gairdnerii kamloops* Jordan.
Coloration of medium-sized fish in rivers and small lakes.

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