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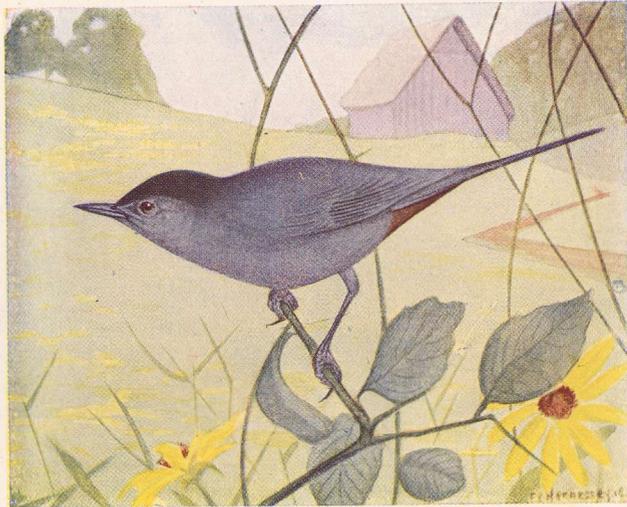
December, 1952



Cowichan Lake from the air.

(Courtesy B.C. Forest Service.)

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A. Catbird; scale, $\frac{1}{3}$ B. Varied Thrush; scale, $\frac{1}{3}$ THE CATBIRD

This beautiful songster is an uncommon bird in coastal British Columbia; so far we have no records for Vancouver Island. It summers in the bottom lands of the dry interior, and casually in the Caribou parklands north to Hazelton. There is little doubt that it will eventually be taken on the island, and bird watchers here should keep an ear open for that peculiar "meow" after which the bird is named. Actually the appellation "catbird" is a misnomer, for the cat-like note is the poorest in this bird's repertoire. Like other members of the family Mimidae it is a great mimic but in its own right one of our most accomplished songsters. The "series of quick, bright, widely varying phrases" will remind those who have heard it of the mocking bird, and the long, lasting song (five minutes or more) is truly a delight to the ear of the birdman.

The male is very conspicuous when singing on territory, especially in the early morning and in the evening. As a rule, however, the catbird frequents thick shrubbery or hedgerows, skulking in that cover when disturbed so that it is often difficult to observe.

In their centres of abundance to the south catbirds do much damage to berry crops, and their depredations make them unpopular with fruit growers. At the northern limits of their winter range they eat the berries of the honeysuckle and mountain ash and have been known to subsist on a completely vegetable diet for long periods of time. In the summer months, however, they are largely insectivorous.

The slate-colored body with reddish under tail coverts serve in distinguishing the catbird from all other species; members of the bird group should have little difficulty in identifying the species when and if they see one.

THE VARIED THRUSH

This secretive thrush is one of our common birds and its well-known whistle is a part of our coniferous forests. Despite its abundance here, many people are confused when

they get a really good look at this bird. When a "tough" winter drives the varied thrush to the open gardens and feeding trays, the museum phone jangles continuously with enquiries as to the identification of a "strange bird". The descriptions forwarded are usually very accurate - the gun-metal blue of the back, the banded breast, about the size of a robin, and so on. This I believe, we can attribute to the skulking nature of these large thrushes. They live largely upon the ground, and flitting through the low boughs, they show themselves momentarily to disappear before a good diagnostic look can be had. Once the observer has had a good look, however, he can mistake the varied thrush for nothing else except possibly the American robin, which is of a similar size.

The species nests throughout Vancouver Island and the nests are usually easily spotted, situated as they are on top of branches about eye-level from the ground. The nests are large and bulky resembling those of the robin, and very often they are built in sparse cover where it is easy to locate them.

Two races of varied thrush occur in British Columbia: Ixoreus naevius naevius (Gmelin) west of the Cascade range and Ixoreus naevius meruloides (Swainson) east of the mountains. These birds are almost identical in appearance; observers familiar with the coastal race will have no difficulty in recognizing the bird of the interior as a varied thrush.

C.J.G.

One day recently on the Cadboro Bay beach at low tide I was trying to count the Bonaparte gulls to find out what the proportion of young birds was in the flock, when I noticed a lot of them were rapidly shuffling both feet in the small pools left by the receding tide. In the process they disturbed numerous sand fleas or some similar crustacean which they were picking out of the water as they shuffled. I have never seen any other species of gulls adopt this unusual method of finding food. Although there must have been about a hundred Western and Least sandpipers among the gulls, none of them attempted this trick.

A.R.D.

OUR BRITISH COLUMBIA PARKS

by R. Y. Edwards

Parks and Recreation Division, B. C. Forest Service

Someone has said that there are people who can live without wildlife, and people who cannot. If you are one of the latter you should know more about your park system, the parks of British Columbia.

One of the objectives in creating these parks is to preserve for now and for the future some of the fauna and flora of this province. These areas ensure that British Columbians who are really getting to know their province through nature study, will always be able to find areas that are natural.

In the few words I must use, it is impossible to describe fully what your 64 parks of various sizes have to offer the naturalist. But every park has its attractions which you should see. There are beaver at Miracle Beach, and raccoon tracks by its stream in the early morning. Ungainly herons nest in Ivy Green, and dippers feed, court and nest in the spray of water falls at Elk Falls, Stamp Falls, and Little Qualicum Falls. Pileated woodpeckers inhabit the gloom beneath forest giants in Macmillan, and loons send wild echoes across Cameron Lake. These parks are all on Vancouver Island.

On the mainland, you may see a black bear by the road as you drive to timberline in Mount Seymour, or watch goats walking calmly along sheer cliffs in Manning. If you spend more time in Manning, you may see the mountain beaver (which isn't a beaver) scurrying through dark forests to its burrow, watch fat bucks lounging in the riotously flowered alpine meadows, or have Clarke's crow scold from the white-barked pines at timberline.

Stopping at well arranged public campsites along the way, which are little parks, you should go to Wells Gray Park to see wilderness wildlife. Here a guide is often necessary, but rewards justify the trouble. Moose are abundant here, and deer abound along the high canyons. Caribou graze in high, beautiful meadows not a day's climb from the road, and long deep milky green lakes lead into silent places under towering mountains where grizzly bears dig roots from steep slopes, where goats live in the clouds, and where there is a good chance of seeing a wolverine if you will spend a few days above the trees. These meadows are green, dotted with flowers, and ringed by rugged peaks that are white with

snow and glaciers.

Your parks offer you a variety in nature study, from observing pileated woodpeckers in John Dean, almost at your door-step, to watching rosy finches, almost above the last vegetation, on high wilderness peaks.

Why not begin to know your parks by going to John Dean near Sidney? We feel that naturalists are among those who enjoy the parks most. We wish you luck, and would like you to tell us what you find.

FALL BIRD NOTES

by
J. O. Clay

This year the annual fall migration of Turkey vultures over the city and district has involved birds above the usual number. As many as 50 have been seen in one flock. Their easy gyrations are indeed spectacular. One hopes that not too many of these birds, so graceful in the air and so useful as scavengers, will fall prey to would-be sportsmen. This applies particularly to our own breeding birds which may nest within the 20-mile circle as they did formerly.

Another marvel of flight but a vastly different bird, is the Rufous hummer. I write on the 8th of November, having watched today a large bright green female flit from delphinium to delphinium. Our garden has been visited at least six times since the 15th of October, itself a late date. Perhaps this individual is trying to emulate the hummer that apparently spent three successive winters here around Gonzales Hill and east to Uplands. The bird was seen by nine different people between the autumn of 1944 and January 1947. The last appearance was in a snow storm flying strongly in a westerly gale past our window on Beach Drive. A note of this was included in the February issue, 1947.

During September many people visited the field near the Oak Bay Firehall to watch up to a dozen Hudsonian curlew and a few American pipits. The birds were easy to approach. The diet of the curlews was mainly grasshoppers.

Another feature of this fall has been the presence of a flock of terns over kelp beds on the outer rocks, with a few attendant parasitic jaegers to filch their prey.

A NEW MAMMAL BOOK

Naturalists will enthusiastically greet the appearance of an up-to-date pocket-sized booklet, "Field Guide to the Mammals" by W. H. Burt and R.P. Grossenheider published by the Houghton Mifflin Company in the Peterson Field Guide Series. The treatment throughout is simple so that the most inexperienced person should be able to identify an unknown mammal with little difficulty. More than 180 species are illustrated in colour; others are represented by line drawings or photographs of skulls; in addition track patterns of most are given.

Wisely the authors have avoided treatment of subspecies, feeling that the ordinary person will be satisfied to know which species he is seeing. In each case the short description calls attention to outstanding field marks when present and the text indicates the habitat in which each species might be found. As a further aid a list of similar species and their characters is added so that comparisons can be readily made. Except in the case of marine forms a map gives the distribution of each species at a glance.

It is pleasing to note that the authors have not altogether overlooked the literature pertaining to mammals of this Province but it is regrettable that their information is incomplete. Thus we find that the following species are not indicated as being present on Vancouver Island: Keen bat, hoary bat, silver-haired bat, marten, short-tail weasel, mink, wolf, mountain lion, deer mouse, beaver, muskrat, black rat, norway rat, and house mouse. Some of these are also present on the Queen Charlotte Islands, but are indicated on the distribution maps as being absent. It is to be hoped that these omissions will be corrected before the second edition.

Notwithstanding these minor faults this beautifully planned and executed booklet is recommended to all interested in the outdoors. Copies may be obtained from Thomas Allen Limited, 266 King Street West, Toronto, at \$4.25 or through local book shops.

G.C.C.

A FRIENDLY BIRD

by

Captain W. Redford, "F.P.C.Laurier"

When at sea, shore birds come on board not infrequently, usually to rest, and remain for long periods perched in the rigging or other convenient places. These visitors come also in foggy weather when they seem to have lost their direction of flight. It is seldom that such birds will take food but we had a visitor in this patrol vessel which was an exception.

We were in Bell Passage off Prince Rupert on August 25 entering Hecate Strait for the fifty-mile run across to Masset in the Queen Charlotte Islands, when a bird appeared on board which I took to be a Sooty song sparrow. It was soon following any of the crew around, taking bread and drinking water from a cup held in the hand. It liked company, so perched or fluttered around anyone on deck. A favourite perching place was on the combing of the galley door where it could watch the cook at work. Flights were taken around the galley, in the Officers' mess room, wheelhouse, and even down in the engine room. In the latter place, fearing the bird would be injured, we tried every means of getting it out, but this problem was only solved when all the men left the engine room for the passage leading up to the deck, and the bird followed.

By this time we realized the bird was used to ships. On entering the long narrow passage leading up to Masset Inlet our pet took off for shore, but returned on board again. Off New Masset dock we passed two fish packers bound in, and it was about this time the bird disappeared--so we thought he had flown to the bush and so away.

That afternoon we anchored among the fishing fleet in Ferguson Bay in Masset Inlet, leaving next morning for Naden Harbour about forty-five miles away. After getting under way our friend was back again, acting as before.

That evening in Naden two seiners came alongside and after these had left our bird was gone, no doubt with them. We remained in the vicinity of Naden for the next three days and during this time I learned the bird had been on board several seiners and packers. The last boat it had joined was the "Sea Biscuit", a seiner which had left for the south on the 29th.

It would seem that this bird had found an easy way to procure a food supply and so had attached itself to the fishing fleet and had become quite tame and friendly. If it gets to town with some boat it may easily become the victim of a cat or lose its freedom by being caged.

One morning, early in the year, I was strolling through Queenswood to see what birds had arrived, when I heard the call of a raven. The trees were thick and visibility was limited, but looking up I saw an immature Bald eagle which was closely followed by the raven. I followed these birds as well as I could with my glasses, and found they were constantly changing their order of flight, the raven chasing the eagle and then vice versa. The raven was calling all the time, and their flight was leisurely, so I imagine they were just enjoying themselves.

A. R. D.

Walking by the Jubilee Hospital grounds one showery day in August, I noticed a small group of crows having some fun under one of the large lawn sprinklers which was operating at the time. They would lie on the ground and push themselves along with their feet, with their heads almost buried in the grass. It was a cool day, so the heat wasn't bothering them. Maybe they had just discovered a new sensation.

A. R. D.

BIRDING IN THE SOUTHERN OKANAGAN

by J.O.C.

Miss Anna Ewart, that keen bird-watcher has sent in from time to time several good field-lists dating from 1947. Fifty has been the average number of species seen, but Miss Ewart's lists make variable reading. The following is one of them. The Okanagan Valley these days is not too far distant from Victoria. To become acquainted with, and better to study the birds and learn new call-notes and songs is an excellent way of spending a holiday.

It is unfortunate that the new sprays are now making havoc of the smaller birds that frequent the orchards. A bird enthusiast does well to keep close to the deciduous growth of the valley floor or to follow the water courses.

The species marked with an asterisk are those characteristic of the area East of the Cascade Range.

Loon;		Steller jay
Holboell's grebe;	*	magpie
bittern;	*	western crow
mallard;	*	mountain chickadee
widgeon	*	pygmy nuthatch
* redhead;	*	rock-wren
ruddy duck;	*	catbird
red-tail hawk	*	willow thrush
marsh hawk		robin
osprey		western bluebird
sparrow hawk	*	mountain bluebird
quail		ruby-crowned kinglet
pheasant		meadow pipit
coot	*	red-eyed vireo
killdeer		warbling vireo
spotted sandpiper		yellow warbler
mourning dove		Audubon warbler
* calliope hummer		yellow-throat
Lewis woodpecker	*	long-tailed chat
red-shafted flicker		house sparrow
* eastern kingbird	*	yellow-headed blackbird
* western kingbird	*	red-winged blackbird
western flycatcher	*	Bullock's oriole
violet-green swallow		Brewer's blackbird
tree-swallow		western tanager
bank-swallow		goldfinch
rough-winged swallow	*	Cassin's purple finch
barn-swallow; * Lark sparrow		house finch
cliff-swallow; song sparrow; *	*	savannah sparrow
chipping sparrow; * Brewer's sparrow; golden-crowned sparrow.		grasshopper sparrow

WHERE GOLD OCCURS

(The poet listens to a lecture on geology)

The geologist is a diffident man.
"Greenstone volcanics", he points to the map
Of Atlin, "where gold is found";
So making poetry of words science devised.
The slides shiver and straighten in the projector,
The monitors force twin rainbows of water
Against the placer bed, into the yawning sluice;
Where the gravel hurdles the riffles,
The tailings vanish in spray,
And the residue is gold.

Vivid pictures appear and disappear:
White tents, red-roofed buildings, mine workings;
First the bright twirled pans, then rockers,
Now the monitors with their riffled sluice;
And booted, arrogant miners striding across the screen.
But the geologist strode first -- past Surprise Lake,
Skirting the mountains and glaciers,
Forests of Spruce and Pine naming the turbulent creeks;
Heat and black flies' bite in the hurried summer,
Cold and snow warning of winter's approach.
Then see, here on the map's face, greenstone volcanics,
And the cry of "Gold, gold!" reanimates restless men.

The geologist returns to his quartz:

"Zircon, scheelite, iron oxide may occur with gold".

M. Eugenie Perry.

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JUNIOR PAGE

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"The Robin and I"
by
Gerry Skinner.



Feeding time.

It was in late spring when I found it. A crow was eating up all the little baby robins. There were three little robins left in the nest. Next day there was only one little robin left. So I kidnapped the little robin.

After I got the robin there was a terrible commotion. All the robin's friends and relatives came around squawking and yelling. The mother sat on a nearby bush and was squawking too. So I picked up the robin and ran for home.

Next day there were worms strewn all over the floor. Every time Mom or I walked past, it opened its mouth and yelled for more food. A little while later it was big enough to fly away from the crow so I put the robin back in the nest and mother and child flew away together.

A BINGO Party will be held on December 13th. This will be the last meeting before Christmas. We will start again January 10th.

We thank the Rev. George Kinney for giving us a very interesting talk on Geology. He brought with him some specimens of quartz crystals; brain coral; fossils; different kinds of marble and many other interesting specimens.

(cont'd on page 71)

(Cont'd from page 70) Junior Page -

Please bring in anything for the display case that is interesting and will fill up room.

BIRD NOTES - by A. R. D.

You have to have luck. The other evening I was at the Cadboro Bay pools showing a visitor from New York a good place to locate shore birds, when close to where we were standing at the edge of the large pool alighted a Lesser yellowlegs and a Sora rail. Now the Lesser yellowlegs is not included in the Victoria check list, and I have never had the pleasure of seeing a Sora rail in Victoria before, though I have visited these pools and other likely places hundreds of times.

On the 8th of April last, there was a meeting at the Museum, the main item on the agenda being the choosing of a bird as the emblem for British Columbia. On this day a Whistling swan arrived at one of the pools at Cadboro Bay, and I noticed it on my way down to the meeting. This swan stayed at the pools for three months, becoming fairly tame, and being fed by the people who live in the houses nearby. Towards the end of May it got restless making short flights over the Bay and finally on June 8th, it disappeared. It was most interesting to watch this swan on the edge of the pool, preening itself and gracefully smoothing out its snow-white plumage, surrounded as it was most of the time by an apparently admiring ring of mallards, for all the world like a group of ladies-in-waiting watching their queen. Though my choice for a British Columbia bird was the Pileated woodpecker, the swan certainly has a claim to this eminence.

A. R. D.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

1952

- Tuesday GENERAL MEETING:
 December 9: Reading Room, Provincial Library,
 at 8 p.m. Speaker: Mr. Gunner Fagerlund,
 Chief Naturalist, Olympic National Park, Wash-
 ington. Mr. Fagerlund will speak on the flora,
 fauna and geology of the Olympic National Park.
 Illustrated with Kodachrome Slides.
- Friday AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR:
 December 12: Second in series.
 Crystal Garden Auditorium,
 at 8 p.m. Robert C. Hermes, "Bonaventure Diary".
- Saturday JUNIOR NATURALISTS meet at Museum at 10 a.m.
 December 13: for Bingo Party
- Saturday JUNIOR NATURALISTS meet at Museum - 10 a.m.
 January 10th: First meeting for 1953.
-

One day in August, I was watching the skylarks on the Finnerty Road field, when I saw a white bird amongst a flock of Barn swallows which were flying over the field; I assume this albino was also a Barn swallow. I have seen albino robins and Brewers blackbirds, but never a swallow. In this case the white had a bluish tinge. This field on Finnerty Road opposite the Army Camp maintains more skylarks than any area I am familiar with, and in the winter they are generally accompanied by American pipits, which ornithologists tell us are a related group of birds. There were about a hundred pipits in this area last winter. As their habits are very similar to those of the skylark, I had some difficulty in telling them apart.

A. R. D.

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