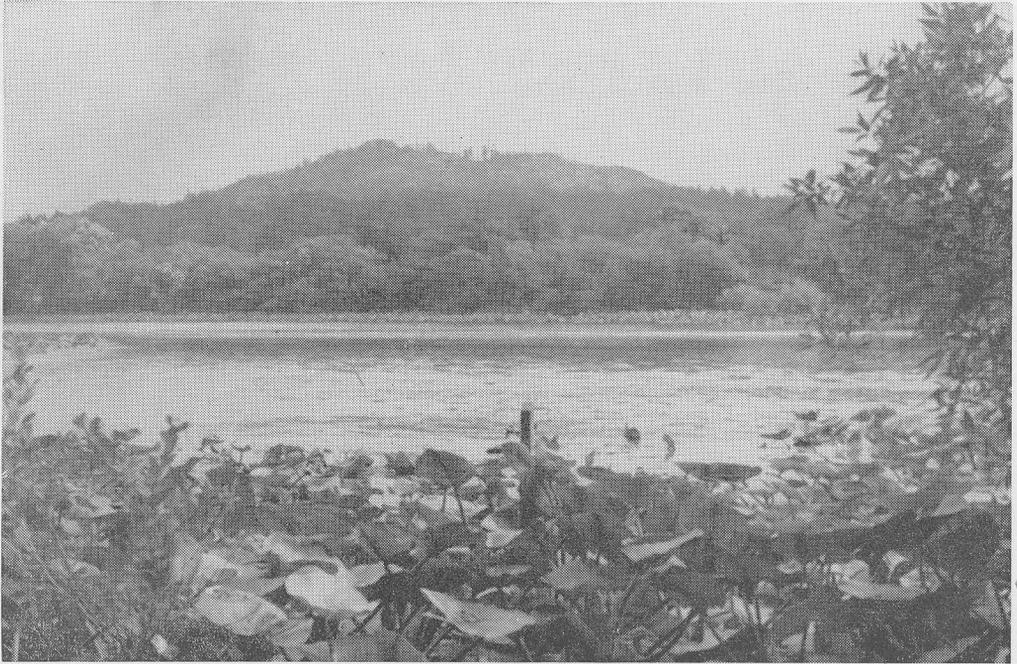


The
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(Photo by G. A. Hardy.)

Blenkinsop Lake looking north-east toward Mount Douglas

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OUR COVER

Blenkinsop, or Lost Lake, as it is best known to old timers, has a pleasant setting among green fields near the foot of Mount Douglas to the north of Victoria. It is fed by springs whose flowing waters have been confined to the south by a rim-rock, thus creating a flat and poorly drained area, nearly all of which was part of the lake, now shrunk to but a tithe of its former extent. The presence of a considerable tract of peat is a reminder of a once colder climate, making such a formation possible, resulting in an acid soil favorable to bog plants.

A characteristic of this area is the evidence of a past submergence under salt water, as indicated by beds of marine shells, later covered by a layer of fresh-water molluscan remains, as uplift and drainage continued to the near dry-land condition of the present day.

To the naturalist this lake is a source of perennial enjoyment. In an article printed in the Museum Report for the year 1956, one hundred and ten birds are recorded, including several interesting species such as the red-head duck, the wood duck, ring-necked duck and ruddy duck, while the hooded, red-breasted and American mergansers each in turn enliven the scene; to these may be added the double-crested cormorant, pied-billed grebe and the sora rail, just to mention a few of the water birds; to say nothing of the land birds of the surrounding area.

In the world of plants, two hundred and thirty-eight species are mentioned, including Sitka spruce, hemlock and birch among the trees, and such bog plants as swamp laurel, labrador tea, arctic star-flower, bog bilberry and sundew, most of which have probably been exterminated at this date. The most abundant aquatic plants include the yellow water-lily, which forms an almost continuous band round the shallow margin, and the hornwort. In late summer, when the water level is greatly lowered by irrigation, the surface is covered by a sheet of green algae of many species.

Of the nine mammals, the otter occasionally turns up, and the muskrat and raccoon maintain a precarious existence.

Fish have not been fully investigated, but trout were taken here when the water was deeper and cooler. Young catfish have been reported as clogging up irrigation pipes, while sunfish have been seen to dangle from the line of some youthful disciple of Izaak Walton.

Thus Blenkinsop Lake may still be considered to be a refuge to at least a portion of the hosts of wildlife that once found sanctuary here.

George A. Hardy.

OBSERVATIONS OF A PROSPECTOR

by A.H.Marrion

One of our members, George E. Winkler, has spent a lifetime as a prospector, travelling the length and breadth of British Columbia in his search for minerals since the beginning of the century.

Earlier this year he gave a lecture to the Society on the birds, animals and flowers he had seen on his travels, and it was obvious from his talk that his interests were by no means confined to rocks, while his knowledge of the history of mining and mining personalities was profound.

Among the birds he had identified at various places were the solitaire, hermit thrush, flycatchers, juncos, yellow bellied sapsucker, Canada and Steller jay, horned owl, pigeon hawk, warblers, tanager, mountain bluebird, kingbirds, waxwing, catbird, dipper, blue and willow grouse. Once at 5500 feet at Lost Horse Creek he saw a large flock of mountain bluebirds, about a hundred Clark's nutcrackers feeding on grasshoppers, Franklin grouse and one lone prairie chicken.

North on the Portland Canal he recorded ptarmigan, blue grouse, pipits, sparrow hawks and goshawk. Also at an elevation of between three and four thousand feet in this area were bluebells, fireweed, purple and red paintbrush, mountain hemlock, alpine fir, mountain ash, bunchberry and willows.

Among the animals he mentioned were mountain goat, bighorn sheep, grizzly and black bear, mountain and American beaver, coyotes, badger, porcupine, moose, mule deer, otter, martin, snowshoe rabbit, pica, gopher, marmots, rattlesnakes, blue racer and rubber boa.

Life in all its forms, he told his audience, was the most interesting thing in the universe.

BLOOD ON THE SNOW

by Frank L. Beebe

The line between fact and fancy is not always an easy one to draw and what is fact to one generation may be mere fancy to the next. This is as true in the study of wildlife as anywhere else. To state as fact some aspect of animal behaviour that runs counter to popular fancy is never easy, to restate as fact something that has come to be regarded as the fancy of a generation past is even more difficult. Nevertheless this is what I intend to do.

Probably the least understood of all forms of wildlife are the raptorial birds. The amount of "good" or "harm" done by certain of these has been a bone of contention between sportsman and conservationist for not less than three generations in North America, and a good deal longer than that in Britain and Europe. The sportsmen have long insisted that some species of raptors are, in their viewpoint, extremely destructive birds. Back about twenty years or so they made some very broad generalizations, and regarded all hawks as destructive. In more recent years their most serious accusations have been narrowed down to the two main groups of primarily bird-killing raptors - the hawks and falcons. The sportsmen's criterion of destructiveness is, of course, based on selfish motives, and when examined turns out to be but ill-concealed jealousy. They covet the game species for their own recreation and for their own tables and resent any competition from the natural hunters, especially when these are not controllable to what they consider the proper hunting season.

The modern conservation movement, which seeks to preserve all wildlife equally without giving any particular value to any group or species over, or at the expense of another, does not agree with the sportsmen's attitude. Conservationists have had no trouble at all in proving most conclusively that the great majority of North American raptorial birds do not normally hunt those species generally classified as game. At the same time they obviously could not claim that this was true of the accipiters and falcons, as these groups just as clearly do regularly seek game birds.

There still remains one point of contention in relation to these most controversial of raptors, and that extends to some degree to all predators. There is a small but observant group of sportsmen-naturalists who still

insist that these birds are extremely destructive, and regularly kill in excess of what they eat. The modern conservationist is very inclined to dismiss this claim as mere prejudice and maintain instead that they kill only to satisfy their hunger, and that they do not normally hunt unless they are hungry.

Forty years ago the popular idea was that all hawks were "destructive". Anyone who stated otherwise was dismissed with scorn. Hawks were often bountied, and they were universally placed on the vermin list of every game department right across the continent. Today, largely due to the educational efforts of the conservationists, this idea is no longer the popular one. The currently popular concept is that almost all predators kill only to eat. This, unfortunately, is not true. The idea contains within it a curious, and typically modern concept, which is that if a half-truth is repeatedly stated, and serves a worthy purpose - in this case to create a popular tolerance of the predators - it is perhaps better if people never become aware of the real truth.

Now nobody could be more concerned about the welfare of the raptors, or more convinced of their biological value than I, but at the same time every bit of the rather intimate experience I have had with these birds has convinced me that the modern viewpoint is incorrect and that the old-time sportsmen-naturalists were, and are, quite right when they insist that a good many of the raptors are, in their terms, really extremely destructive. While I re-assert the truth of their observations I do not, of course agree with their use and interpretation of the term "destructive". However, in the broad sense they were far closer to understanding the real nature of these raptors than are most modern conservationists. The fact is, popular or not, that most of the raptors, and for that matter most of the predatory animals, do kill far in excess of their own food needs, regularly and as a matter of course, just about every time the opportunity to do so presents itself. The old-timers well knew this, and, interpreting the actions they observed, by appearance and in human terms, they decided that this kind of thing must be done out of pure devilishness and lust for destruction. In this interpretation they were undoubtedly wrong, for human emotions and motivations will not fit the actions of a bird. But the observation is accurate and they are somewhat less wrong than the modern naturalist that states blandly that all "wild" animals hunt only when hungry.

(To be continued)

AN AERIAL DISPLAY

by Mary Winstanley

While walking along Belleville Street on the afternoon of December 8th, my attention was drawn to a number of crows, about thirty or forty, flying around the central dome of the Parliament Buildings.

Standing to watch their display of acrobatics, I noticed it was a game they were enjoying. Flying above the dome and diving downwards, one after another the birds alighted, one at a time, on the point of the flag held in the hand of the gold figure of Captain Vancouver, or sometimes on his head. This went on for some time, the birds cawing and screaming in great glee. Finally some seemed to be exhausted, and flew off to the bare branch of a great oak tree for a rest.

It was a most fascinating sight to watch in the bright December sunshine. I resumed my walk, wondering if anything like it had happened before, and also what it must be like to be a crow.

MIGRATING GEESE OBSERVATIONS

by Wilmer H. Gold, Youbou

Early last month I returned from a trip to the prairies. During the first week of November, accompanied by my brother, we visited the treeless, gently rolling country east of Calgary as far as McGregor Lake, a fine body of water measuring some 13 miles in length, varying up to one and half miles in width. Late on three successive afternoons it was our good fortune to witness the flight of many thousands of snow geese, and a few flocks of the larger Canada geese, streaming from the lake in a regular "V" pattern, or 'V's within 'V's, in clusters, or in wavy undulating chain-like formation.

Late each afternoon for fully forty minutes this pageant of the skies unfolded beneath the canopy of the bluest of blue skies. Four to six hundred feet overhead the flocks sailed in tight, connecting patterns, or spaced at one hundred yard intervals, the rays from the near setting sun lending a roseate hue to the birds'

undersides.

At my leisure I recorded this armada of the skies on colour movie film, using alternately both wide angle and telephoto lenses, some sequences running as long as a quarter of an hour with no break in the passing goose-parade. High overhead on several occasions I studied through binoculars migrating flocks of swans.

Then came a clear, frosty night, and next morning the placid surface of the lake was clear of snow geese except for the odd flock, and a few Canada geese, which are always more tardy in migrating. Under the light of the moon they had commenced their long flight southward to their wintering quarters in the Gulf of California.

Snow geese appear to be uncommon on Vancouver Island, but during the summer of 1958 I observed a long straggler with a flock of Canada geese nesting on Quamichan Lake, near Duncan.

OUR MEMBERSHIP

In this issue is given the present membership of the Society.

This month's mailing list of the 'Naturalist' comprises 254 copies. This includes free copies to museums in Victoria, Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Lajolla, (California) London (England) and Washington, D.C. Reciprocal copies are sent to natural history societies in Regina, Hamilton, Surrey (England) and Cairns (Australia). The magazine is also mailed to the public libraries at Victoria and Vancouver, the Provincial Library and the Library of the University of British Columbia.

In addition to the above, fifty copies are mailed to juniors direct, and there are twenty-three family memberships which includes forty-three children, all of whom are members of the Junior group.

* * * * *

OUT OF THE PAST

by Freeman King

Leading out of Portage Inlet along the reaches of Craighflower Creek, or Deadman Creek, as it was known years ago, there is an old Indian trail that has almost disappeared, except in places where kitchen middens can be found. Apparently these spots were used as stopping off places, used by the Indians as they migrated from the coast regions to the hill area behind what we now term Big Saanich Mountain, called by the Indians Green Mountain.

These middens are found by the clam shells which are showing up through the overburden. It is apparent that these shell beds are several hundreds of years old, as is evidenced by the growth of the firs coming through the middens. The large majority of the shells are small, like those of the butter clam, many being found in an excellent state of preservation.

What did these migrations mean? Why did the people move inland? Perhaps it was on their annual hunt for elk which were in abundance in this area at one time. For there are still places to be found where there are the remains of elk pits, places where the natives made holes in the ground, lined them with stones, then built a fire. When the stones and the ground was hot enough, the elk were skinned, the hides put over them, then a plentiful covering of skunk cabbage leaves placed on top, then covered with earth and left to cook.

All of these stopping or camping places were by a stream or some small body of water. Also all those I have found are protected by sheltering rock. These shelters could have served in several ways against the weather and prowling wolves, for less than a hundred years ago, wolves were shot here in the Highlands area.

Perhaps some of the old fire scars on the large firs and cedars were made by these wandering bands of people. In those far off times they must have moved over terrain where it was possible for them to be able to find food, both flesh and vegetable.

We wonder what other species of animals have vanished from this area since that time besides the elk and the wolf. How has the forest changed? Has the underbrush increased through the clearing of the big trees? It makes an interesting study, and perhaps would show us how we have changed the balance of nature in some ways. Do we take notice and be guided by our findings?

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NOTICE OF MEETINGS

- 1961
Saturday: Exhibition of Collections at 1:45 p.m. in the
 Jan.7th & Museum. Those on the 7th will be by the
 Jan.14th intermediate group of the Juniors, and on
 the 14th, at the same time, the items on
 display will be those of the younger group.
- Tuesday: GENERAL MEETING:
 Jan.10th: at the Douglas Building Cafeteria on
 Elliott Street, next to the Museum, at
 8 p.m. The guest speaker will be
 Mr. T. J. Bandy, Regional Game Biologist,
 who will speak on conservation and will
 have a film to illustrate his subject.
- Tuesday: BOTANY MEETING:
 Jan.17th: In the Museum at 8 p.m.
 Speaker: Mr. Ted Underhill.
 Subject: Alpine Flora, illustrated
 with coloured slides.
- Friday AUDUBON SCREEN TOUR
 Jan.20th At the Oak Bay Junior High School Auditorium
 and at 8 p.m. on both nights.
Saturday: Speaker: Robert Hermes.
 Jan.21st: Subject: Animals at Home and Afield.

-- JUNIORS --

The Juniors will meet each Saturday at the Monterey Cafe at Hillside and Douglas Streets at 1:30 p.m. for field trips.

Leader: Mr. Freeman King. Anyone who would like to join these trips is very welcome. Mr. King can be contacted at GR 9-2966.

Anyone who would like to be guided through the Thomas Francis Park should get in touch with Mr. King, who will be very pleased to arrange an outing on Sundays.

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