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COVER PICTURE

Botanically known as Osmaronia cerasiformis, Indian plum is easy to find near Victoria. It is also an early flowering shrub, usually blossoming early in March -- its leaf buds are opening now. Other names for this shrub are osoberry, bird cherry and skunk bush.

Many housewives, after gracing their living rooms with blossoms of this native, will confirm the justice of the last listed name. Indian plum flowers, when brought indoors, will fill a room with an unpleasant odor. Outdoors, on the bush, they are graceful and beautiful, a refreshing sight after the drabness of winter.

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BLACKTHORN OR SLOE

by J.E.UNDERHILL

Blackthorn, or Sloe, is a kind of plum that has become naturalized in a few localities in this area. It is quite striking in flower and in fruit, and often arouses some curiosity in those who find it.

Botanically known as Prunus spinosa (L.), perhaps more or less modified by interhybridization, and occurring here in what appear to be several slightly differing forms. As a plum, it is, of course, related to cherries, apricots, peaches, greengages, etc., of our gardens.

It is a native of Europe and Western Asia, and has long been cultivated as an ornamental. It was quite surely introduced to Victoria gardens by early settlers. We know it was grown under cultivation at Pullman, Washington, as early as 1892. There too, it has escaped and is found occasionally in southeast Washington and adjacent Idaho.

Locally, we may look for blackthorn along Wallace

Drive, just past Heal's Range. There, it forms dense thickets on moist ground by the roadside. Another location is Raymond Rd., Royal Oak, and there are likely other sites unknown to the writer.

The plants are shrubby, erect, and up to about twelve feet tall. Under cultivation, they may be made to form a small tree. They are notable for long, stiff thorns which make fruit-picking most unpleasant. In spring, they generally cover themselves with masses of white blossoms which have made them of garden usefulness. In autumn, these are succeeded by small, plum-like fruit. Each fruit is globular, about the size of a small cherry, bluish-purple in colour with a "bloom" (glaucous).

The fruit is very dry and acrid to taste, and, though wholesome, is not at all inviting. It does,however, have its value. At the risk of leading local naturalists astray, it must be pointed out that this is the fruit from which "sloe gin" is made, and that in England it is used to make a pleasant country wine. Quite probably it would also make a good jelly of the tart sort, for use with meats.

Editor's note: Blackthorn is also good walkingstick material. The editor also knows from experience that it is very easy to make fine sloe gin! The editor's wife did make an excellent jelly from blackthorn berries last fall.

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THE TUESDAY GROUP

by A.R.Davidson

For some years now, a group of people have met at about nine o'clock on Tuesday mornings, at the corner of Central and St. Patrick Streets, for an outing in the nearby countryside. Nature lovers all, they are interested in everything they see, whether it be fungi, flowers, trees, shrubs, seaweeds or birds. All who are interested are welcome. Most of us are Natural History Society members, but this qualification is not essential.

Here is a brief record of our February 11th meeting. It was a fine day, sunny, cold and calm. Our first stop was at the foot of Bowker Avenue, where we saw about thirty black-bellied plover, a few dunlins and turnstones, and, on the sea, many species of ducks, grebes, mergansers, etc.

At the university campus, we met two ladies from Port Angeles, who wanted to see skylarks. Nothing could have been easier to show, there were dozens of them, some already singing. On the football fields of the campus, there were about fifty black-bellied plover, thirty dunlin, a few killdeer and a variety of gulls.

Our next stop was at Mount Douglas Park, where evening grosbeaks had been reported. Walking down the park paths by the creek, we found Indian plum in full bloom and sword ferns of magnificient stature. We also found four evening grosbeaks and heard an early song of a winter wren. Then we climbed to the lookout to view Georgia Straits before descending into the forest on the seaward side of the park.

After lunch, we went by car to the junction of Lochside Drive and Royal Oak Avenue and the nearby old Canadian National right-of-way -- always a good place for birds. There, we had a real bit of luck -- to our astonishment and delight, we found a flock of eleven pine grosbeaks, very busy eating pussywillows. These birds are most unusual here. This is the first winter we have seen them. In company with them was a lone and beautiful male evening grosbeak, eating dried-up wild cherries. He paid no attention to us and allowed us to approach as closely as we wished. In the same locality, was a large flock of bushtits, many chickadees, a few ruby crowned kinglets and purple finches.

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AQUATIC ENTOMOLOGY

by M.D.Atkins,
Canada Forestry

Many naturalists are aware of the abundance and diversity of aquatic insects; and they are not surprised at their abundance when they consider the tremendous success of insects as a group.

However, before these primarily terrestrial organisms could become aquatic, they had to overcome substantial barriers. One was a modification of their shape. Their locomotion and respiration methods also had to change. Once the amazing adaptations were accomplished, insects found themselves protected from many parasites, and desiccation never a problem. Daily and seasonal fluctu-

ations of temperature were also reduced to a minimum. This last point is of utmost interest to naturalists, because it means that aquatic insects can be observed throughout the year in the temperate climate of southern Vancouver Island.

The relative absence of insects in the ocean is not due to the saltiness, as one might expect, but rather to efficient competition created by primarily aquatic arthropods belonging to the crustacea. In addition, constant turbulence in the sublittoral zone, caused by tides and surf, makes it difficult for air breathing organisms to live.

Aquatic insects are widely dispersed throughout the more common orders and present naturalists with a fascinating study in convergent evolution. Among the orders which are almost exclusively aquatic are Ephemeroptera (mayflies), Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies), Plecoptera (stoneflies), Megaloptera (dobsonflies and alderflies) and Trichoptera (caddisflies). Other orders containing aquatic forms are Collembola, Orthoptera, Hemiptera (true bugs) Neuroptera (lacewings), Coleoptera (beetles), Diptera (flies), Hymenoptera (wasps) and even Lepidoptera (butterflies).

Apart from being of general interest, there is a growing importance attached to aquatic entomology, and a great need for specialists in this field. Aquatic entomologists are now involved in public health, recreation, fish culture and water pollution studies.

In the next note, I will discuss in more detail some of the aquatic habitats in the Victoria area, and later we will have a closer look at some of the groups of aquatic insects and their interesting adaptations.

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CEDRUS, TRUE CEDARS

by David Stirling

Three related species, Cedar of Lebanon, Cedrus libani; Atlas cedar, C. atlantica and Deodar cedar, C. deodara, constitute the genus Cedrus. There is some disagreement among botanists regarding the validity of these species. Some authorities consider all three to be races of one species, while it has been suggested by

others that a fourth species, Cyprian cedar, C. brevifolia confined to a five-hundred-acre forest on the island of Cyprus, is a species, not a variety of Cedar of Lebanon.

The home of Atlas cedar is the mountains of Algeria and the Atlas Mountains of Morocco, where it occurs in pure groves and extensive forests, mixed with other conifers. In winter, much of these forests is blanketed in deep snow and there is little life except for bands of Barbary Wild Sheep and an occasional Lammergeyer or Bearded vulture. In summer, wandering Berbers move up from the parched foothills to graze their herds in the open forests.

Cedar of Lebanon is the famed tree of the Bible. Its native range are the Mountains of Lebanon, the island of Cyprus and the mountains of Turkey. Timber for man's early civilization, and recurring wars, and an overabundance of goats, have reduced the once great forest of Lebanon to a mere five small groves. These groves are under the protection of the Maronites, a Christian sect. The largest tree is said to be forty-eight feet in girth and eighty feet tall.

The Deodar cedar is a vigorous and numerous tree, growing with other conifers along the fifteen-hundred-mile length of the southern slopes of the Himalayas. It provides shelter in the winter and shade in the heat of summer for langur monkeys, snow leopards and Indian ascetics.

In their home range, cedars grow at elevations of from four thousand feet to ten thousand feet, but they succeed surprisingly well in temperate coastal lands around the world. Their symetry, spreading horizontal branches, close, dense foliage and rugged beauty make an aesthetically pleasing tree. In Victoria area, the deodar is a common tree. Examples can be seen in Beacon Hill Park around Good Acre Lake, at Hatley Park (two trees in front of the new buildings), and Ross Bay Cemetery, near May Street end. Atlas cedar, especially the blue variety, is fairly common. Fine trees can be seen in Beacon Hill Park near Robert Burns monument, and in Hatley Park beside the road to the castle. Cedar of Lebanon appears to be the rarest of the genus, but labeled trees can be seen near the tennis court at the Experimental Farm, Saanich.

Cedrus are separated from other conifers by the following characteristics. Their branches are large, spreading horizontally and their evergreen leaves are short and alternate, on leading shoots, otherwise grouped in close clusters of twenty to forty on short, spur-like branches. In this way, cedars resemble larches, except that larch needles are deciduous. Cedar cones are egg-shaped, from two to five inches long, grow upright on the branches and the cones ripen during the second or third season. The broad closely appressed scales of the cones fall at maturity, leaving the cone axis on the branch.

It is difficult to separate the three species unless the needles and cones are examined closely. In form, Atlas and Lebanon closely resemble each other, but Deodar is more pyramidial and larch-like. Several nursery varieties have been developed with blue or silvery-white foliage.

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BIRDS FOR THE RECORD

Pine grosbeaks -- 11 seen on Lochside Drive, by the "Tuesday" group.

Bohemian waxwing - 1 seen on Tatlow Road by the Davidsons

Black brant -- First spring migrants. A small flock seen at Witty's Lagoon, on February 6 by T.R. Briggs.

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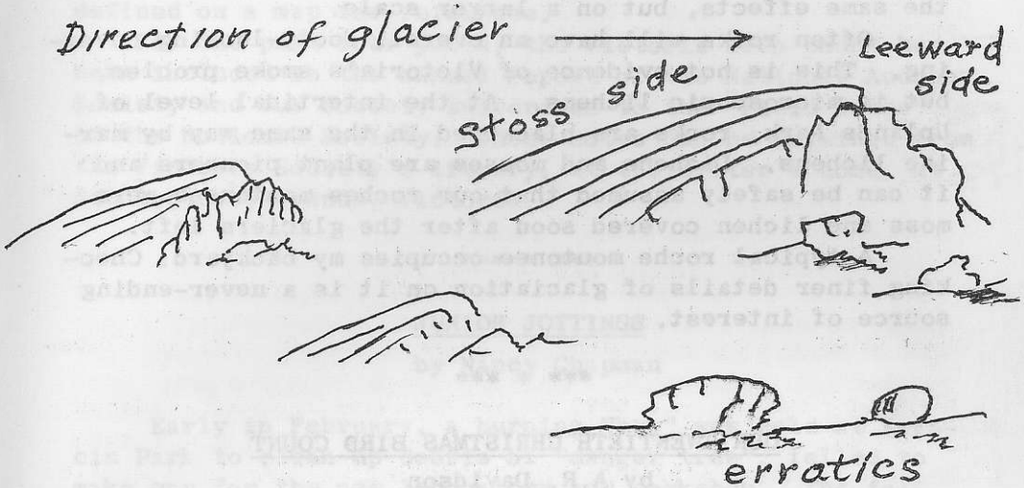
ROCHES MOUTONEES

by J.L.Rimmington

The Ice Age, which lasted thousands of years, loosened its grip on this area about 10,000 years ago. During the Ice Age, the western part of North America accumulated an excessive amount of snow on the Rocky Mountain system. This snow consolidated to ice and spread out in the form of glaciers. In Victoria area, this ice crept directly southwards. Most of the rocky hills in our district were smoothed over by this mile-thick sheet of ice. Similar smaller glaciated hillocks, when situated in heavy grass, were thought by the French to resemble resting sheep and they gave them the name of "roches moutonees".

We thank the German language for our next term, "stoss", meaning "push", referring to the slick, smooth side of glaciated rocks -- the north side in our area. The leeward side, instead of being smoothed and striated by rock fragments caught in the bed of the glacier, has pieces

plucked from it and is deeply cracked. Soil, transported by the ice, and sand washed from the glacier by streams of meltwater, collects on the ice side of glaciated hills, such as Mt. Tolmie. Erratics, stray rocks which have been carried a yard or a thousand miles by a glacier, are similarly dropped. These strays, after being bulldozed along by ice, are often rounded in shape.



Many classic styled roches moutonees can be seen in and around Victoria. For example, there is a large one on the west side of the college parking lot on Lansdowne Road, and others surrounding the college at Richmond St. and Foul Bay Road. Another good specimen is in Beacon Hill Park, at the Douglas Street entrance. Anyone standing on this rock will note that the deep, smooth grooves point northward, towards the Empress Hotel.

Most roches moutonees follow the same pattern. They are often moss-covered, and if the moss is removed, it can be seen that strangely enough the stone is more weathered where it has been seemingly most protected. Similarly, the underside of erratics is often more corroded than the top. It is thought that this corrosion is caused by carbonic acid and humic acid. Darker parts of rock containing iron are attacked more easily, so weathered rock often looks lighter in colour than the original rock. Banding of gneissic rocks around Victoria has been accentuated.

Broom, waxberry, ferns, dwarfed Garry oak (as dwarfed as any bonzai), is typical of plant life found struggling for life in the rocky soil in the lee or roches moutonees.

Larger than the small hillocks, there are also hard protuberent roots of ancient mountains, long since worn down. These are called "monadnocks" and are evident here as Mt. Gonzales, Mt. Tolmie, and Mt. Douglas. They received the same treatment as the smaller outcrops and show the same effects, but on a larger scale.

Often rocks will have an overall sooty-looking covering. This is not evidence of Victoria's smoke problem, but is microscopic lichens. At the intertidal level of Uplands Park, rocks are blackened in the same way by marine lichens. Lichens and mosses are plant pioneers and it can be safely assumed that our roches moutonees were moss and lichen covered soon after the glaciers left.

A typical roche moutonee occupies my backyard. Checking finer details of glaciation on it is a never-ending source of interest.

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OUR TWENTIETH CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

by A.R. Davidson

The first Victoria area bird count was held the same year the Victoria Natural History Society was formed. Eleven members, led by Mr. J.O. Clay, went out on Boxing Day 1944 and counted birds in Beacon Hill Park, at Shoal Bay and on Braefoot estate, Blenkinsop Road. The party found 37 species and 1370 birds. Three years later, still covering the same area, they found 38 species and 2248 birds. These numbers seem small, even for that limited area, but with the exception of Owen Clay and Geo. Hardy, the others, like myself, were novices.

It was an experiment. In those days, people looked askance at bird watchers. They were considered a bit queer, peering everywhere through binoculars. But interest developed, more people joined the group and found a new and stimulating hobby, good for any and every day of the year. The Christmas Count expanded to cover south Vancouver Island from Sooke to Sidney, but for about ten years was confined to Victoria and Saanich Peninsula.

By 1954, nine parties and eighteen people were fielded to account for 90 species and 10,706 individual birds.

In the fall of 1959, the bird group met and decided that the count area should conform with rules laid down by National Audubon Society; one rule being that a count area should fill a circle fifteen miles in diameter. National Audubon Society rules now govern all Christmas Counts in North America. (Last year was a record-breaker with 672 counts) Now, for the future, the areas have been defined on a map for reference.

For the past four years, the Victoria area count has been included in the annual report of the National Audubon Society and our Society subscribes to the "Field Notes" of the National Society. These notes can be obtained from the Victoria Society's library, at the writer's home, at 825 Monterey Avenue, Victoria.

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JUNIOR JOTTINGS

by Nancy Chapman

Early in February, a burning "bee" was held at Francis Park to clean up debris of "danger tree", felled to make way for the new laboratory and workshop. The following weekend, firewood cut from the tree was carried to the woodshed. Both jobs were well and quickly done by Juniors.

To observe tree and shrub bud growth, the Juniors hiked around Thetis Lake. They were also successful in finding the old osprey nest in that area.

On another occasion, during a hike up Seymour hill in Thetis Lake Park, many spring plants were seen already breaking through the ground. On the same day, a pair of red-tailed hawks were seen soaring high above the lake. A large number of other species of birds were also observed. On the Swamp Trail in Francis Park, woodpeckers have at last felled the old rotten snag. The birds drilled right through the trunk, which was over a foot thick. Now, it is lying across the trail and will have to be cleared away.

A project for the near future will be to make a new trail, leading to the ponds at the north boundary of Francis Park.

Leaders of the Junior Group are looking forward to the completion of the laboratory and workshop to enable them to get on with extra studies and make up displays for showing in the Nature House.

In March, a trip to Vancouver Public Aquarium is planned for older members of the Junior Group. Early in April, the Juniors will stage their exhibition -- an "outdoor" show in the Nature House.

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A 'COON

During a recent inspection of Francis Park trails, a movement at the foot of a cedar caught my eye. I stood still, watching, and saw a sharp nose and two bright eyes peeking around the tree. Slowly, stealthily, a 'coon (Procyon totor vancouversis) crept out, sniffed and looked around. I did not move. Gradually, about five feet away, he came into full view. Then, deciding that I was not a stump, he darted behind the tree again. First he peeked out on one side, then the other, like a game of hide and seek.

As I got my camera ready, he waved his paw at me. When I moved a little closer, he dodged behind the tree again, but soon peeked out and darted up the tree a few feet. I took one quick snapshot as he climbed, and another when he balanced on a small limb to wave his paw at me again.

When I thanked him and turned to walk away, he gave a funny little cry, stood up on his hind legs, waved both front paws at me, then scurried up out of sight among the branches.

He was a young, full-grown male; clean, slick, in the prime of life and fascinating to watch. I hope we will meet again. By the way, the snaps were very poor, d..... it!!

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IMPORTANT FLYER

FIRM ACTION IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT OUR IDEALS. WHEN YOU GET YOUR FLYER, ACT DECISIVELY.

THE TEETERER

by G.A.Hardy

That interesting little wader, the spotted sandpiper, made its presence known to me in uncertain manner during the summer of 1963, from June 13 to August 3, on the border of a small woodland pond in Saanich.

I first became aware of it by the persistent "peet-peet" it uttered as it came flying towards me as I arrived at the margin of the pond. The bird alighted on the ground within three feet of me, calling and teetering incessantly as if vainly trying to find its balance. Otherwise, it seemed quite unconcerned about my presence, feeding, calling and teetering backwards and forwards, but never very far from where I was standing and it followed me as I moved along the edge of the pond.

This procedure was repeated every time I visited the place, which was often. In a week or so, it was joined by another one, but the two were only seen together for one day. The remaining one became increasingly vociferous as time passed, though it never followed me away from the pond, but returned to the top of a large pile of dirt recently dreged from it. From this vantage point, it kept a strict watch, giving voice to anyone who approached the area. On one occasion, I sat down on a log at the edge of the pond, whereupon the teeterer came skimming over to me -- it has comparatively little up and down movement of the wings -- alighting as usual within three feet, or at times even close enough to have touched it with my hands, if I had so desired. It ran back and forth, always finding some delectable morsel to eat. At one time, a large dragonfly settled on a nearby stick; at once, the teeterer approached in a crouching position, and I believe would have caught it if discretion had not taken the place of valour, for it hesitated long enough to allow the dragonfly to move away. This happened twice as I watched. Evidently convinced that I was harmless, it flew off to its lookout. Even the presence at one time of a noisy earth-moving machine failed to drive it away, on the contrary, it was seemingly as much annoyed as I was.

Whether this sandpiper was nesting in the vicinity or not, I have no evidence. Judging from my experience with another wader, the lesser yellowlegs, a discrete silence is maintained during nesting period; it is noisiest after the brood has dispersed.

MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS

REGULAR MEETING:

March 10th. The regular monthly meeting of The Victoria Natural History Society will be held at 8 p.m. in the cafeteria of the Douglas Building. Guest Speaker will be our Past President, Mr. P. J. Croft, who will show slides of the mountains of West Vancouver.

AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILM:

March 13 - 14 The fifth Audubon Wildlife Film will be shown at 8 p.m. in Oak Bay Junior High School. Mr. Alfred G. Etter will show his film "Awake to Nature".

SPECIAL FIELD TRIP:

March 21. Will be held one week later than previously proposed. Alan Poynter is still taking names.

BOTANY GROUP:

March 24. Will meet in the Provincial Museum at 8 p.m. A special film from the B. C. Forest Service will be shown.

JUNIOR GROUP: Will meet every Saturday at 1:30 p.m. at the Monterey parking lot for field trips.

Congratulations to Mrs. Soulsby for launching the B. C. Nature Council News Letter. It will be an important link in the chain of affiliated naturalists' groups in British Columbia.

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