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VICTORIA NATURAL
HISTORY SOCIETY

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
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Phone bird sightings to 382-9652

COVER: *Virginia Rail*

King's Pond, April 1984

Photo by Tim Zurowski

VICTORIA "BIG DAY" RECORD REACHES 135 --

CAN 140 BE FAR BEHIND?

by Alan MacLeod

One of man's best inventions for having some fun, seeing a lot of birds, enjoying some healthy competition, getting some exercise, and covering a lot of pleasing territory in a short time is to join the growing ranks of Victoria's Big Day aficionados -- birders who get less of a kick from champagne than they do from listing as many bird species in a day as they can find.

The Victoria-area record for a Big Day count now stands at 135, following three May, 1984 assaults on the former record of 121. On May 5, Harold Hosford, Alan MacLeod, and David Stirling scored 127 birds, only to have Roy Prior and Keith Taylor eclipse them the same day, with 134. A week later, Alan MacLeod, Ron Satterfield, and Bruce Whittington eked out 135 species in a 20-hour marathon.

Not so long ago -- with counts of just over 100 considered respectable -- 135 species would have seemed a very impressive total for any Big Day effort. Not any more. The better part of 150 species could possibly be seen or heard in the Victoria checklist area in the fullness of spring migration, and with a modicum of planning and effort no Big Day enthusiasts should be daunted by the challenge of 140 species. The 140 mark can be achieved in a future Big Day by building at least eight objectives into a Big Day assault.

1. Planning. All three of the May, 1984 Big Day teams prepared a "Should-Get" list of the birds they expected to count, as well as itinerary of the stops they planned to make during the day. Each item is important. The "Should-Get" list facilitates the tracking of "missing" species as the day wears on, and an itinerary reduces the possibility that an important stop will be missed. The "Should-Get" list used on two of the May Big Days includes some 146 species and the itinerary of stops included 30 locations or more.

2. Composition of the Team. No attempt at 140 species will succeed without a capability for identifying birds by ear. Experience in the Victoria area in May indicates that 10 percent or more of any Big Day count consists of birds identified by ear alone. A Big Day team should therefore include one or more individuals who are as familiar with what they hear as what they see. On the other hand, we all know individuals who seem to be better at spotting birds than the rest of us are, and it is just as important to have such an individual on your Big Day team. A team is also benefitted by the presence of an organizer who can get away with keeping the whole expedition on track and on schedule throughout the day. If all of these skills can be found in three individuals, that number is an ideal size for a Big Day team.
3. Commitment. No Victoria Big Day team will count 140 species without a wholehearted investment of time, travel, and effort. The team which scored 135 species, May 12, was on the road shortly after 3:00 a.m., chasing owls in highlands above Munns Road. Close to 11:00 p.m. the same day, they were still chasing owls, attempting to list Barn Owl at Holland Avenue, near Burnside. Between 3:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. the team birded non-stop, taking meals "on the fly". In addition to several kilometres on foot, that team also travelled 360 km. by car, all of them inside the Victoria Checklist area.
4. Timing. The timing of a spring Big Day is critical. A date must be selected with a view to picking up as many migrants and returning summer residents as possible, without sacrificing late-lingering winter residents. As events transpired between May 5 and May 12, there was a roughly equal trade-off between these two categories. The Hosford/MacLeod/Stirling team listed six winter residents that were missed by MacLeod/Satterfield/Whittington. These were Red-throated Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Northern Pintail, Northern Harrier, and Black Turnstone. On the other hand, the earlier effort missed these migrants and summer residents: Semi-palmated Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Long-billed Dowitcher, Spotted Sandpiper, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Hammond's Flycatcher, and Lincoln's Sparrow. Still, on May 12, MacLeod/Satterfield/Whittington found a large drop in the number of winter water birds, and they felt that the peak day for a spring day had likely passed. In 1984, the best possibility for the highest yield was probably about midway between the two Big Day dates, or some time between May 7 and 10.
5. Local Birds. A critical element in building a successful Big Day campaign is to ensure that your team gets that handful of "nemeses" birds that habitually plague spring Big Days in Victoria. These are chiefly winter residents which remain in our area in small numbers during breeding season, if at all, such as the smaller grebes, Gadwall, American Coot, and Black Turnstone, or early migrants such as Brant,

Bonaparte's Gull and California Gull. Several of these birds are "common residents" if we are to believe the Victoria checklist, but each of them has proved difficult to score on May bird counts in Victoria. Another nemesis category is the group of permanent residents which are found only in a limited area. Wood Duck, Skylark, Dipper, Hairy Woodpecker are examples. Then there are the seasonally local species, such as Vesper Sparrow. A third category to look for are the returning summer residents -- primarily passerines such as the flycatchers, Western Tanager and Black-headed Grosbeak.

In the week before a Big Day it pays to listen to the Rare Bird Alert and research the whereabouts of the available birds in each of these categories -- not to mention such rarities as the Harris' Sparrow and White-throated Sparrow at a Colwood feeder -- and plan to stop for them.

6. Area Coverage. In addition to stops required for local species, a Big Day itinerary should cover the full range of habitats in our area so that regularly-occurring species indigenous to those habitats are not missed.

As self-evident as it may appear, it is always surprising how much a Big Day count seems to vary in direct proportion to the number and variety of stops the Big Day team makes, rather than to the average time spent at each stop. The rule seems to be the more stops, the higher the count. Two reasons come to mind in accounting for this. The first is that, as in most of life, Big Days never run exactly as planned. Species that are anticipated for a given spot sometimes do not show up there, and it is therefore important for your itinerary to include contingent stops for the species that "got away". But a second factor is that notwithstanding all the planning, luck is still an important factor in a successful Big Day, and the more stops you make, the greater the likelihood will be of turning up "lucky" birds. An average stay of 60 minutes at 15 stops will seldom be as fruitful as 30 minutes at 30 stops.

The Prior/Taylor team were lucky to find Trumpeter Swan at Somenos Lake, Ruffed Grouse in the highlands on Munns Road, Spotted Sandpiper at Goldstream, and Northern Harriers at Somenos and Cobble Meadow. Hosford/MacLeod/Stirling were fortunate to get Whimbrel at Cowichan Bay, Gadwall at a pond in the 4000-block, Interurban Road, and a Blue Grouse at Cobble Hill. MacLeod/Satterfield/Whittington had Golden Eagles over Mount Finlayson, winnowing Common Snipe at Bolton Farm, Munns Road, Ruddy Ducks at Somenos and Swan Lakes, and a Solitary Sandpiper at Blenkinsop Lake. Some of these were contingent stops and the birds would have been missed had a high number of stops not been planned.

In addition to these locations, other favoured stops in all these Big Days included Spectacle Lake and the Malahat rest areas for highland land birds, Duncan sewage ponds for ducks, Cowichan Bay for ducks, Quick's Bottom for rails, Cordova Spit for loons and grebes, Martindale Road for Skylarks, University of Victoria campus for Anna's Hummingbird, Esquimalt and Witty's Lagoons for shorebirds, and Pears Road for blue-birds.

7. Sound Equipment. The May 12 Big Day owed at least four of its 135 species to taped recordings and to the fact that Virginia Rail, Sora, both at Quick's, Western Screech-Owl in the Munns Road highlands, and Barred Owl at East Sooke chose to reply to the taped songs that were played for them. None of these birds would have been listed without tapes. A note of caution, though. Tapes should be used sparingly, especially in a known nest area, as some species can be disturbed, or even frightened away, by the intrusion of a vocalizing "rival" hidden in a tape recorder. Tapes are useful well before sunrise in a highlands area for attracting owls and possibly grouse.
8. Land Birds. One final word to the wise is to plan one's itinerary so as to be in prime land bird habitat, such as the Munns Road area, at sunrise when the passerines are most active and vocal. All three Big Day teams were at Munns Road early and had good counts there to start their days.

By following these points in May of next year, you may not be guaranteed 140 species. Even the best-laid plans can be put awry, by the weather, for example. But you should be pleasantly surprised at the number of birds the Victoria area can produce on a single day in May. And you should have a good deal of fun in the process.

45 SINGING SKYLARKS COUNTED IN SAANICH PENINSULA SURVEY

by Alan MacLeod

Forty-five (45) singing Eurasian Skylarks were counted at 18 sites in the Saanich Peninsula during a survey conducted over the 1984 spring migration period, March 1 through May 31. The total of all birds -- singing and not singing -- was 63.

Forty-two (42) singing birds were counted during a 1983 survey covering the same period. However, sites 9, 10, 11 and 15 were not canvassed in 1983. If the five singers counted at these locations are subtracted from the total count, the comparable 1984 figure for the same sites is 40. The reduction of two may be partly explained in the fact that no birds were heard or seen at

three sites containing skylarks in 1983: 1. University of Victoria campus; 2. Central Saanich Road at White Road allowance; 3. Hovey Road. Four singing skylarks were counted at these three sites in the 1983 survey.

If each singing individual is once again assumed to be the male partner of a mated pair, a minimum of 90 birds may have been present in the peninsula during the survey. One nest was discovered during this count, at site five. It contained four eggs on April 15 and four nestlings on April 20.

The 1984 survey suggests no observable change in preferred habitat. All birds were seen or heard in a similar range of open grassy or weedy fields as was described in the 1983 survey. (See The Victoria Naturalist, Vol. 40, No. 1, or Southern Vancouver Island Spring Migration Records, 1 March - 31 May, 1983, J.E.V. Goodwill.)

A majority of the sites listed in the following table were visited between two and eight times. For each site the table indicates the high count of singing birds ("S"), with date, as well as the high count of all individuals -- singing and not singing -- ("T") noted during the period.

These sites, except site 11, were all visited by Alan MacLeod during this survey. Bruce Whittington visited site 11 and a majority of the others during the period.

SITE	1984	HIGH COUNTS			
		S	T	1983	S T
1. Hunt Road: west of Hambleside Farm	6 May	1	1	0	0
2. Welch Road: east of road and opposite end of Dooley Road	11 March	1	1	0	0
3. Dooley Road: south of road and west of Welch Road	11 March and 15 April	1	1	0	0
4. Welch Road: west of road and north of Raper's Farm	6 May	1	1	0	0
5. Martindale Road: west of drainage ditch running north-south across road	28 April	8	15	6	6
6. Lochside Road Allowance: south of Island View Road, east of road allowance	31 March	1	1	2	2
7. Puckle Road: west and southwest of Lamont Road	31 March	2	2	3	3
8. McHugh Road: west of road	11 March	3	8	3	3

SITE	1984	HIGH COUNTS		1983	S	T
		S	T			
9. Veyaness Road: west of road and north of Cunnaes Lane	24 March	2	2			Not Surveyed
10. Bryn Road: west of road and north of Verling Avenue	21 April	1	1			Not Surveyed
11. West Saanich Road: opposite Kersey Road	14 April	1	1			Not Surveyed
12. Stelly's Cross Road: at Cumberland Farm	24 March	2	2	3	4	
13. Mount Newton Cross Road: at Saanichton Farm	24 March	1	1	2	2	
14. Mount Newton Cross Road: between Saanich Peninsula Hospital and Pacific Forest Products Experimental Farm	18 March	1	1	0	0	
15. Mount Newton Cross Road: at B.C. Forest Service Experimental Farm	8 April	1	1			Not Surveyed
16. Central Saanich Road: south of Fentress Road allowance	27 May	1	1	2	2	
17. East Saanich Road: Agriculture Canada Research Station	8 April	1	3	1	3	
18. Victoria International Airport: perimeter of airport grounds	24 March	16	20	16	16	
TOTAL AT SITES SURVEYED IN 1983		40	58	(42)	(45)	
TOTAL AT ALL SITES		45	63			

Note: Sites 1, 2 and 3 are located in Saanich, Sites 4 through 16 in Central Saanich, and Sites 17 and 18 in North Saanich municipalities, respectively.



TO PEOPLE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN SWAPPING EUROPEAN BIRD SLIDES FOR NORTH AMERICAN ONES

Mr. Johannes Meyer-Deepen, who is the author of several German nature books, has been spending part of the past four years at his Canadian residence up on Triangle Mountain in Colwood. During the past 20 years, he travelled through all of the northern European countries and the north polar regions, where he took thousands of wildlife, scenery and bird slides.

This year he brought with him a series of lovely bird slides from the East Friesian Islands, his home territory. He will show those slides on a birders' night at Cedar Hill School in September. Mr. Meyer-Deepen has a request: he would like to take home with him as many wildlife and bird slides as possible. Currently he is visiting Alaska. He will return to Victoria on July 10, where he can be reached until October. Unfortunately, he has no telephone. During the winter he travels around Germany showing his slides on Canadian wildlife and birdlife at various universities, schools, and bird clubs. During his stays here in Canada he has made a great number of bird slides; however, he could make good use of many more.

He is therefore offering to trade his excellent slides of European birds for slides with Canadian birds. Is there anybody who is interested or who could help? If someone wishes to visit with him, please just drive to his house at 3425 Karger Terrace, Triangle Mountain (off Fulton Road). If you wish to phone first, contact Fritz Karger, 478-5443, who will pass any message on to him.



FIELD TRIP MUNN'S ROAD

On the morning of June 2nd, over twenty birders met at 8:00 a.m. at Francis Park, and led by Ron Satterfield, spent the entire morning along the Munn's Road power line trail. A total of 52 species were seen, including Chipping Sparrow and numerous warblers. The most intriguing bird of the day was a most intriguingly marked immature Golden Eagle.

NOTICES

National Geographic Bird Field Guide

A certain number of copies of this guide are again available through the Society, price \$16 (Canadian). Phone Roy Prior, 383-2347.

Botany Night

We are hoping to re-institute a monthly meeting for all members interested in botany, starting in the autumn. However, in order to do this we need volunteers who will help in the organising of these events. Anyone willing to help should contact any member of the board of directors.

Bird Checklists for the Victoria Region

The checklist for the area is now being revised and updated. We expect copies of the new version to be available early in July from the B.C. Provincial Museum, or from the directors of the V.N.H.S. Cost 25¢ per copy.

F.B.C.N. Club Service Award

We learn, just before going to press, that this award has been won by Peggy and Vic Goodwill. We do not yet have full details on this, so we will give more information in our next issue. Congratulations, Peggy and Vic!

Regional Parks Programmes

For the Regional Parks programmes at Witty's Lagoon Park and at Francis/King Parks offered this summer, there will be a total of six naturalists on duty.

The Francis Park nature house will be open Tuesday through Sunday (10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.) beginning on June 5th. There will be special programmes for disabled people using the Elsie King broadwalk trail and a variety of other programmes for community groups and casual visitors commencing in June. Two 2-week long children's nature programmes will run during July and August. For more information on these summer programmes at Francis, please call the Nature House at 727-2544, or the CRD Parks office at 478-3551.

The Witty's Lagoon nature house will be open Tuesday through Sunday afternoons (noon to 5:00 p.m.) beginning on June 5. There will be an open house on June 9th and all are invited to investigate the displays in the nature house or talk with the naturalists.

Beginning in June, special nature events including guest speakers, slide shows and guided walks (for example, rocky shore life, lagoon bird watching) will be scheduled and announced at a later date. Three 2-week long children's programmes will run on Wednesdays and Fridays from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and will be directed at increasing awareness of natural and cultural history.

The first programme will run on July 4, 6, 11, and 13th; the second programme will run on July 25, 27, August 1, and August 3; and the third programme will run on August 8, 10, 15 and 17th. Transportation to and from the park, "bush clothes" and snack should be supplied by parents. Ten dollar donations to cover material costs would be appreciated. Age groups will range from 5 to 11 years and enrolment is limited. To register or for more information, call the nature house at 474-2454, or leave a message with the C.R.D. Parks office at 478-3551.

Barbara Chapman Award

This has been won by Janice Tomlinson, and will be presented at a general meeting this autumn.

1984 BIRD OBSERVATIONS

APRIL

No.	Species	Date	Area Seen	Observer
1	Western Kingbird	15	Lohbrunner Rd.	E. & A.R. Davidson
1	Western Tanager	15	Mystic Lane	Helen Rocchini
1	Vesper Sparrow	15	Cobble Meadow	A. L. MacLeod
2	Black-throated Gray Warbler	15	Saltspring Is.	Dave Fraser
1	Hammond's Flycatcher	15	Saltspring Is.	Dave Fraser
1	House Wren	16	2551 Florence Lake Rd.	Gwen Briggs
1	Emperor Goose	19	Race Rocks	P.E. Griffiths & A. Duffus
2	Blue-winged Teal	19	Metchosin Lagoon	Tom Briggs
1	Mountain Bluebird	22	Gyro Park	Margaret Mackenzie-Grieve
1	Solitary Sandpiper	22	Blenkinsop Lake	Tim Zurowski
1	Green-backed Heron	26	Cadboro Bay	Rob Mackenzie-Grieve
1	Baird's Sandpiper	30	Blenkinsop Lake	Ron Satterfield

MAY

1	Harris' Sparrow	4	729 Kelly Road	Ron Wilson
1	White-throated Sparrow	4	729 Kelly Road	Ron Wilson
1	American Bittern	7	Blenkinsop Lake	Ron Satterfield
1	Northern Oriole	7	Locarno Lane	Keith Taylor
1	Yellow-necked Blackbird	7	Camelot Road	Keith Taylor
1	Snow Goose	8	Gotha Point	Jim Bryden
1	Lewis' Woodpecker	14	4634 Blenkinsop	E. Schnoter

No.	Species	Date	Area Seen	Observer
1	Marbled Godwit	15	Patricia Bay	Bruce Whittington
1	Purple Martin	17	Esquimalt Hbr.	Guy Crowther
6	Whimbrel	17	Victoria Golf Course	Dr. Bob Houston
2	Tundra Swan	18	Metchosin Lagoon	Alf Porcher
1	Wilson's Phalarope	20	King's Pond	Ron Satterfield
1	Ruddy Duck	22	Swan Lake	Tuesday Group
1000	Band-tailed Pigeon	20	Martindale Flats	Bruce Whittington & Alan MacLeod
1	Mourning Dove	20	Gyro Park	Rob Mackenzie-Grieve
1	Caspian Tern	26	Esquimalt Lagoon	Ron Satterfield
1	Lesser Yellowlegs	26	Blenkinsop Lake	Keith Taylor
1	Sanderling	26	Cordova Spit	Keith Taylor
1	Red-eyed Vireo	26	Malahat Drive	Mark Nyhof

When a rare or unusual bird has, or is suspected to have been seen, speed in communication cannot be over-emphasized.

Such an observation should not be treated casually because some birds do not linger.

It is imperative that identification be confirmed by other observers. If the 'Rare Bird Alert' operators cannot be reached at 382-9652, the observer of the bird should then contact either:

RON SATTERFIELD 598-7345

or

KEITH TAYLOR 595-5561

If in the field, do not wait to go home; use the nearest pay phone. Upon receiving such an 'Alert', Ron and/or Keith will speed to the scene of the sighting. The 'Rare Bird Alert' operators will contact as many other birders as possible before 'flying' to the source of the excitement.

PROMPT ACTION is this regard could add new species to the birds of British Columbia and/or Canada as well as reduce the growing number of "hypothetical" records.

FIELD TRIPS DURING JULY

by Fritz Karger

In order to offer a greater variety of field trips, the VNHS has put on a number of trips for July which will hopefully attract a lot of participation. Places have been chosen which are particularly outstanding for their excellent birding as well as wildlife, plant life, and scenery.

As some of these destinations require a bit of travelling, the trip leader will try to coordinate the means of transportation in such a way that the cost per person is reduced to a minimum and yet a great degree of independence is maintained which would allow people to divert from the actual itinerary. Those of you who own vehicles able to carry a larger number of people are encouraged to make them available for the trips and to inform the trip leader of the availability. Also please let us know how many litres of gas your car is using for 100 km. It is recommended that the owners of the cars have \$1,000,000 third-party liability insurance. Cost per person is based on four passengers per car. So let's all pitch in and help reduce expenses by making our cars available! Any money left over will be given to the VNHS.

As usual, all trips will be announced on the Rare Bird Alert tape. However, as the announcements on the tape are usually no more than one week prior to departure, you are asked to register and pay a \$10 deposit no later than one week ahead of the departure date. That does not preclude any late-comers as long as transportation is available.

Those of you who would like to bring your own recreational vehicles are welcome to do so. As the gas consumption for such vehicles varies a great deal, the owners of such vehicles will have to carry all expenses themselves. Naturally, they may want to invite others to share.

All trips are non-profit and based on sharing expenses. For that reason, no firm cost has been quoted, as we always have to know first what kind of vehicles are available, and how many people are going to participate. A rough estimate, however, will be given on request a few days prior to each trip.

Further information regarding the trips can be obtained by phoning Fritz Karger, 478-5443.

PROGRAMME - JULY AND AUGUST, 1984

Please meet at the location specified for each trip - if no location given, field trips will meet at Mayfair Lanes, corner of Oak and Roderick at the specified time. No cars can be left at Mayfair Lanes. Always take a lunch and dress according to the weather. If you have any problems, please contact Alice Elston (592-1400) or Harry Davidson (479-1286). Always phone the Rare Bird Alert (382-5562) the week before a trip that you anticipate taking in order to obtain full particulars or details of the changes that may have been made. Changes cannot always be avoided.

On V.N.H.S. field trips, participants usually pool vehicles to cut down on parking problems and to reduce costs. A considerable fuel bill can be run up on a trip - vehicles usually consume 5-10¢ of gas/km. The board suggests that participants share the fuel costs with the driver.

SAT. JULY 7

&

SUN. JULY 8

Trip to Lillooet via Nanaimo - Horseshoe Bay, Squamish, Pemberton, Mt. Currie, Cayosh Creek. Overnight twice at Lillooet. Return via Lytton and Fraser Canyon, Pitt Meadows, Tsawwassen, Victoria. Overnight at Lillooet in Motel, tent, or your own recreational vehicle. Firm registration required by July 1st. Leader: Fritz Karger.

SAT. JULY 14

Aquatic Plants - Elk Lake. Bring your own canoe or arrange rental. Attendance limited. Phone leader, Dr. Chris Brayshaw for details - 386-6475 or 387-3215.

SAT. JULY 14

&

SUN. JULY 15

Walk along the West Coast Trail from Nitinat Narrows toward Tsusiat Falls and back. Details to be announced.

SAT. JULY 21

By rental outboards from Pedder Bay to Race Rocks and surrounding shores. Details to be announced. This trip is weather-dependent.

SUN. JULY 22

Trip to Hurricane Ridge. Meet 6:00 A.M. at ticket office, and catch M.V. Coho at 6:30 A.M. Return by 4:30 p.m. ferry. Tickets: \$23.00 per person, includes ferry and bus, and must be paid for by July 16. Contact Mary Winston, 598-1282 or Lyndis Davis, 592-1341.

SAT. JULY 28

Tidal Fish - Mill Bay. Leader: Grant Hughes. Bring lunch and boots. Meet at Mayfair Lanes 10:00 A.M. or Mill Bay at 10:45 A.M.

SAT. AUG. 4

Birding at Witty's Lagoon and Esquimalt Lagoon. Leader: Hank Van Der Pol. Meet Mayfair Lanes at 9:00 A.M. or Witty's Lagoon parking lot 9:30 A.M.

SAT. AUG. 11

or

SAT. AUG. 18

Another birding field trip may be arranged. Please consult Rare Bird Alert.

SAT. AUG. 25

Birding at Cowichan Bay. Leader: Rob Mackenzie-Grieve. Meet Mayfair Lanes at 8:30 A.M. or Robert Service Memorial, Cowichan Bay, 9:30 A.M.