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A transient Killer whale tail, near chain Islets, off Victoria (1986) **© Robin W. Baird**

The International Cetacean Watch Society

BY ROBIN WILLIAM BAIRD

The International Cetacean Watch Soceity is a non-profit education and research organization founded in Victoria in 1983. "Cetacean" is the scientific term for whales, dolphins, and porpoises, but the Society is interested in all marine mammals. We are fulfilling our educational and research goals with a variety of activities, many of which the general public is invited to support and participate in. For the first several years of our existence we invited many well-known researchers to Victoria to give slide and film presentations on their work, but lately our focus has shifted. Adopting a more "hands-on" approach, we are now directly supporting projects being undertaken by researchers throughout western North America, as well as undertaking several of our own. Working together with many researchers and educators, we hope to foster a network of individuals in B.C. and elsewhere who share a common interest.

Inviting the public to participate in the research is one of the most important aspects of this work. Assisting in establishing a B.C. – wide toll-free whale sighting and stranding hotline, through The Whale Museum of Friday Harbor, has allowed us and other researchers to gain valuable information on whale movements, and will speed up the response time in the case of strandings of marine mammals. Everyone can participate in this research by reporting marine mammal sightings anywhere in B.C. to

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VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

RARE BIRD ALERT: 382-5562
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the toll-free hotline at **1-800-334-8832**, and in Victoria, by phoning Cetacean Watch's 24-hour number at 383-orca (6722).

Cetacean Watch is helping to support two PhD projects being undertaken at the University of Victoria; David Nowell is studying sea lion fishery conflicts in B.C., and David Duffus is studying killer whale and gray whale management in B.C.

We are contributing to a B.C.-wide underwater acoustical monitoring system undertaken by Dr. John Ford, through our installation of a permanent hydrophone system at the Race Rocks Lightstation, and we are currently installing another hydrophone at Ten Mile Point, Victoria. These are the first two in a network that will hopefully encompass southern Vancouver Island. This project is beneficial to both Dr. Ford's acoustical work and to our tracking network for killer whales and other toothed whales, since many species can be detected and identified by their vocalizations.

We are also photo-identifying individual whales of many species that pass through local waters, including gray and minke whales and Dall's porpoises, and supplying these photgraphs to interested researchers. Supporting Dr. Mike Bigg's research on the life history of the killer whales of B.C. is one of the most exciting projects we are involved in. We obtain I.D. photos of the resident killer whales whenever they pass by the Victoria waterfront, which Dr. Bigg uses for updating the yearly status of individuals and the populations in terms of births and deaths, and also for determining sub-group associations, or who travels with whom. The differences between "transient" and "resident" killer whales are the focus of a study undertaken by Cetacean Watch on travel patterns, die times and feeding behaviour.

Looking at the educational projects being undertaken, a naturalist program undertaken at French Beach Provincial Park this summer by several of our members was an outstanding success, and will be carried on in future years. Publication of our newsletter, distribution of educational literature, and the compilation of a comprehensive marine mammal library in Victoria are ongoing projects. There are also plans for a marine mammal guide to southern British Columbia, hopefully to come out in 1987. Our program of public talks will continue.

To aid in education and research, we respond to strandings of marine mammals in local waters, working together with other interested organizations and institutions. Autopies will be performed if possible to determine the cause of death, and dissections for those wishing to learn more of anatomy and marine adaptations. These strandings also provide a source of skeletal material for educational displays and research. To date, Cetacean Watch has obtained the skeletons of two common dolphins (from Mexico), a gray whale, and two killer whale calves.

We have opened an office in downtown Victoria at #3-671 Fort St. to house our library and some of our educational displays. This is the first step in establishing our major goal, a marine mammal museum in Victoria.

For anyone interested in supporting or participating in the activities of the International Cetacean Watch Society, please visit our office at #3-671 Fort St., phone 383-6722, or write to Cetacean Watch, Box 1294, Victoria, V8W 2W5.

For membership information and renewal please contact Ed Coffin (592-0964) or write V.N.H.S., Box 5220, Station B, Victoria, B.C.

Opinions expressed by contributors to the Victoria Naturalist are not necessarily those of the Society.

From the Editor

Lodge Accommodation Contest

Now is your chance to win a night's accommodation and breakfast for two (based on double occupancy) at the beautiful Sahtlam Lodge located on the Cowichan River 10 miles from Duncan. All you have to do to win is submit an article, photograph, or both on or before Janaury 30. The best submission, chosen by a selection committee, will win the prize. All entries will be considered for publication in future magazines, with the winning entry appearing in the March/April issue.

I hope our "regulars" will submit articles but I also hope this prize will provide enough incentive for others to enter. Judges will be looking for originality, so use your imagination. Dig up your best photos or write that article you've had smoldering in the back of your mind. Some of you may even have old photos of some of the natural areas around Victoria that could make an interesting photo essay. Just about anything that may be of interest to readers is suitable.

All entries should be labelled with address and phone number. Photos will be returned if desired. So start working now and you could win a stay at a beautiful riverside lodge. The winner will be contacted by **FEB. 14**, and has one month to use the prize. GOOD LUCK!

Send entries to: Mark Nyhof, The Victoria Naturalist, 220 Beechwood Avnue, Victoria, B.C. V8S 3W7

MAR.-APR. ISSUE COPY NEEDED JAN. 30

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES are invited for display space in *The Victoria Naturalist*. Here is a special opportunity to reach hundreds of active outdoors people who are particular about the quality of their equipment, clothing, accessories, and recreational experiences. Our reasonable rates enable you to inform the membership about your commitment to providing superior products and services. Contact **Margaret Mackenzie-Grieve at 477-2402** for details, rates, and upcoming deadlines.

Trevlac Trifles No. 2
Marvellous Merlins

BY GIFF CALVERT

Every year, towards the end of summer, a merlin pays us a visit; in some years for just a day or two, in others for over a month. It doesn't really stop over to see us: it comes for the dragon flies. Over twenty species live in, over and around the pond, the largest being the striking pale-blue, black and yellow *Aeshna palmata* (thank you, Rob Cannings). On a sunny windless day the air is filled with hundreds of them – just the ticket for a hungry migrating merlin.

When we built the dam and back-flooded the five-acre rather dull swampy meadow to create Trevlac Pond, we also drowned the roots of a two-acre stand of large red cedars. As they would have died anyway, all were removed except two, which were left standing (and did die) as predator trees. These are the merlin's lookout.

Its hunting technique, considering the unpredictable and erratic flight of the dragonflies, is a marvel of coordination and precision. Not that it is successful every time, but its kill ratio is well over fifty percent. It glides down off its perch, at varying angles, without a wingbeat, suddenly turns upside down, extends its talons upwards for the snatch and flies back to the tree with its prey. (Does the dragonfly have a blind spot underneath?) The head and wings are torn off and the body swallowed. Eight to ten mouthfuls seems to make a fair snack – for 15 to 20 minutes. If it misses, it does not chase another insect, but starts afresh. We consider this whole routine to be rather clever, since the birds have so far always been young ones.

Some years the bird must take hundreds of dragonflies, but there seem to be just as many the following years. If there were fewer and fewer, our beautifully marvellous miniature peregrines wouldn't come back, would they? And that would be a pity.

Some Notes From "Davey"
Golden-crowned Sparrow

BY A.R. DAVIDSON

On a day in September of 1948 I was cycling down Blenkinsop Road when I ran into an immense flock of birds, all very excitedly dashing here and there, their calls so piercing I had to close my ears. They were all Golden-crowned Sparrows, which generally are quite unobstrusive, with their gentle call of three descending notes, but not this time. They were everywhere. I stood amongst them for a long time trying to find out how many were in the flock. The was very difficult, and finally I figured there was a minimum of 300 birds. At that time Blenkinsop was a pleasant country road, with the valley on

one side, with Lost Lake in the centre, and Mount Douglas on the other side.
The only other large flock of these sparrows in my records was on May 7, 1955, when there were 175 of them round my cottage which was next to the glen.

Mergansers

Over the years I have compiled a chart of our Christmas Counts since 1958, and going over it the other day I found many interesting figures. One in particular maybe worth recounting. In the winter months of 1963 and 1964 there were immense flocks of Common Mergansers in Elk Lake. It was quite a sight to see the flotillas slowly patrolling the lake all massed together, most in full plumage. There were maybe a total of fifteen hundred in two or three groups. The Christmas Count in 1964 listed 1602, mostly all from Elk and Beaver Lake. They are present on the lake every winter, sometimes in good numbers, as are the Hooded Mergansers.

Skylarks

The rise and fall of skylarks as indicated on the Christmas Counts is remarkable. As an example, in 1960 the Count gave 35, the next year 90, then 126, and in 1963, 243, but in 1964 there was a jump to 812 and in 1965 the almost incredible number of 969. But this, alas, is almost the end. That winter was one of deep snow, and the skylarks being exclusively ground-feeding birds fared badly. Several parties went out with feed, mostly to the Martindale and Island View Road areas, but the snow continued and, while the feed given them helped somewhat, the next year's count was down to 91.

In the spring of this year Alan McLeod and Bruce Whittington visited 22 known sites; only on 10 of them could skylarks be found, and their total was 31 singing males.

There is still hope. In the late Sixties a small flock from Saanich flew to San Juan Island and located themselves on the American Camp (a National Park). This is a large rough field of possibly over 500 acres sloping down to the sea; with binoculars this area can be seen from Cattle Point. On May 17, 1970, a party from Seattle Audubon Society visited this American Camp and estimated 12 pairs. We visited the site in 1972 and again in 1975 and found the numbers hadn't changed. A count made last May also reported at least 12 pairs, without covering the whole area.

Birds of the Sooke Estuary and adjacent waters

BY ROBERT HAY

The first study of water birds in the Sooke region of B.C. has been assembled from one year of continuous weekly counts (15 May 1985 to 15 May 1986). Additional sightings were made in May – Aug. 1986 and BCPM sight record cards were used for rarities. Surveys were conducted at the estuary, with occasional trips made to Sooke Basin, the outer portion of Sooke Harbour, and Whiffin Spit (see map). Marine mammals and unusual weather or environmental events were also recorded.

My home overlooks the estuary, allowing an unobstructed view from my second-story apartment balcony westward up Sooke Harbour. Birds were counted using either a 60 power Bushnell spotting of the count period (no holidays were taken), birds were observed several times each week, allowing a minimum/maximum range to be established for the common species per week (see table). Forays were made frequently onto the tidal flats of the estuary. Together with additional outings around Sooke, a good picture emerged of the bird life in the region.

Accounts of the more interesting findings are presented following the table.The information in this report should help to increase the knowledge on birds in the Greater Victoria Region. More sightings, though, would help. If Victoria birders made more outings to Sooke, a better picture of its bird life would be formed. Knowing when to visit, the places to stop, and the typical species to see will make such outings more enjoyable and successful. Please keep this issue of the Victoria Naturalist handy to consult for the birds of Sooke. Who knows, perhaps you will find a Brambling or a Rustic Bunting in your journeys... or another Siberian vagrant. Happy birding in Sooke.

Weather and Environmental Events

The 1985-86 survey period was unique in many respects. A list of notable events is presented to enable easier interpretation of my bird observations by future researchers.

Mid-May to mid-Sept. 85: record-setting for sunshine and heat; a long, hot summer.

Mid-Oct. to mid-Nov. 85: large run of salmon up the Sooke River (dead ones there until Feb. 1986).

Mid-Nov. to early Dec. 85: up to .5 meters of snow in Sooke and very cold.

First week of Jan. 86: gale force winds on New Year's day blow oil onto the beach at Sooke bluffs: up to 400 water birds oiled in region (40 birds rescued by volunteers, but noen survive).

17-19 Jan. 86: heavy flooding of Sooke River due to torrential rains (10 cm).

Mid-Feb. 86: snow hits Sooke again: less than 10 cm, but still cold.

24-25 Feb. 86: heavy flooding again of Sooke River due to 12 cm of rain.

This record-setting year in Sooke of heat, snow, heavy rain, and an oil spill ended with a seismic sea wave warning on the night of 7 May 86 which, thankfully, turned out to be false alarm.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Unless stated other wise, all records are of marine associated species from the Sooke River estuary in the period 15 May 85 to 15 May 86. Most records only show the week (no date); these sightings are written as: Aug. (3)-1, for August (third week)-one bird. Refer to the table for numbers and seasons of regularly-occurring birds. Sightings of uncommon birds are included in the text below. The number of species per group are shown in brackets after each group name. Additional rarities which were recorded by other observers in the Sooke region are listed following these accounts.

Marine Mammals (6)

Harbour Seals were common in Sooke Harbour from Sept.-Apr., with up to 100 present at the estuary during the fall salmon run. A family of River Otters is resident along the lower Sooke River. Single Sea Lions sometimes visited the estuary in mid-winter. One small pod of Killer Whales ventured into Sooke Basin in Dec. (4). Tracks of Raccoon and Mink were found occasionally along the banks of the Sooke River.

Birds (106)

Loons (4)

A few Common Loons were affected by the oil spill, as was one Yellow-billed Loon seen first off Whiffin Spit on 4 Jan. 86 (now in BCPM collection). Another Yellow-billed was off Gordon Beach, 9 km west of Sooke, on 11 Jan. 86. Red-throated Loons were occasionally seen in Sooke Harbour: Nov. (3)-1, Dec. (4)-1, and Jan. (2)

Grebes (5)

Horned and Eared Grebes were heavily affected by the oil spill (loss of 30 – 40 of the former, representing 80% of the local population). Eared Grebes were found in Dec. (2)-3, Jan (3)-2, Feb (1)-1 to 5, and Feb. (2)-4. Pied-billed Grebes were present in Oct. (1)-1, Oct. (2)-1, Oct. (3)-1, and Jan. (1)-1 (also in small numbers on Sooke Basin).

Cormorants (3)

Double-crested Cormorants had a peak of 110 in Oct. (1) in Sooke Harbour; up to 25 were feeding in the estuary in Nov. (1) during the salmon run. Brandt's Cormorant was at Whiffin Spit in Dec. (4)-6, Jan (1)-3, and Jan (2)-1.

Herons (1)

Only Great Blue Heron was sighted, with a peak of 50 in July (1). There is likely a small heronry up the Sooke River. Herons preferred the tidal flats of the estuary, especially during the low tides of summer.

Swans (3)

The Mute Swan is resident, with one pair using the estuary and another at the west end of Sooke Harbour. Each pair is very territorial during nesting season, driving away other swans and geese. The pair at the estuary has unsuccessfull attempted nesting in 1985 and 86. Tundra Swans were seen once on 12 Nov. 85-2.

Geese (4)

The Canada Goose is resident in small numbers; one flock of 9 to 10 birds travels between Whiffin Spit and Sooke Basin. At least 2 pairs nest at the estuary regularly. A white-fronted Goose wintered with barnyard geese west of Sooke beside Highway 14 (near Grant Road); a flock was also seen on 13 May 86-7. Despite the presence of extensive eelgrass beds in Sooke Harbour, Brant was only

Aerial view of Sooke Estuary. © Adele Lewis

seen at the estuary on 3 May 86-1. A (possible) immature Snow Goose was there in May (4) of 1985.

Dabblers/Coot (10)

The only resident species of this group is the Mallard, with 1 or 2 pairs nesting near the estuary; a peak number of 350 was there in Jan (3) during migration. American Wigeon were the most numerous dabbler, with up to 1200 in Oct. (3). Gadwall were present from Oct. (4) to Feb. (3) and from Mar. (4) to Apr. (4); several counts of 25 - 30 were reached when freezing temperatures forced dabblers out from lakes. Blue-winged Teal were seen in 1985: May (1&2)-3 to 4, and in 1986: May (3)-2 to 3 and May (4)-1. Cinnamon Teal were present in 1985: May (1)-3 and May (3)-1, and in 1986: Apr. (1)-1, Apr. (3)-1, Apr. (4)-5, and May (1)-1. Dabblers were most common in the region at the estuary.

Diving Ducks (8)

The most prevalent diving duck was the Bufflehead, with a high count of 750 in Dec. (4). These and other diving ducks were present from late Oct. to late Apr., with some stragglers in May. They fed around the estuary at high tide. Common Goldeneye numbers peaked at 350 in Jan. (3), attracted to the flooding Sooke River. Barrow's Goldeneye, regularly found at the estuary, were also seen often on Sooke Basin (along the northwest shore) and at Whiffin Spit. All three of these species were affected by the oil spill (up to 25 birds lost). Ring-necked Duck was found only in Jan (3)-1, Feb (2)-3, and Apr. (4)-2. Ruddy Ducks were observed at Whiffin Spit in Dec. (4)-1 to 2.

Sea Ducks (5)

White-winged and Surf Scoters were most common around Whiffin Spit and on Sooke Basin. These two species were impacted by the oil spill, with at least 50 birds affected. Harlequin Duck was sighted once in 1986: May (2)-2; it was also seen occasionally at Whiffin Spit in winter. Black Scoter was found once at the Spit in Jan (1)-1 (it is a regular winter visitor there).

Mergansers (3)

Common Merganser is resident, with numbers reaching 70 in mid-Sept. due to an influx of grown young (8 broods were found along the lower Sooke River). Numbers were also high in mid-Oct. due to the salmon run. This species is largely replaced in winter by the Red-breasted Merganser. However, a peak count of 390 Red-breasted in

Species	May-3	May-4	Jun-1	Jun-2	Jun-3	Jun-4	Jul-1	Jul-2	Jul-3	Jul-4	Aug-1	Aug-2	Aug-3	Aug-4	Sep-1	Sep-2	Sep-3	Sep-4	Oct-1	Oct-2	Oct-3	Oct-4	Nov-1	Nov-2	Nov-3	Nov-4	Dec-1	Dec-2	Dec-3	Dec-4	Jan-1	Jan-2	Jan-3	Jan-4	Feb-1	Feb-2	Feb-3	Feb-4	Mar-1	Mar-2	Mar-3	Mar-4	Apr-1	Apr-2	Apr-3	Apr-4	May-1	May-2
Pacific Loon																													4	4	1	3	2	1-2									1					
Common Loon																			1	1		1	2	1	1			2	2		3	3	2	2	2				1	1-2						1	1	
Horned Grebe																			2	1		2	1		1			6		12-18	5	4	2	1				1-2	1	1				11			
Red-necked Grebe																													2	5	3	3	2		1				1	2	1		2	1		3	
D-cr. Cormorant			10		1								8	3	8-30	7-30	15-60	25-30	20-110	30-40	40-70	40-70	30-60	30-60	30-60	25-50	50-75	55-85	15-25	30-70	15-20	5-10	5-18	3-19	5-15	5-15	10-14	10-15	10-15	10-15	8-10	8-10	5-10	15-20	2-5	2-3	3-4	1-2
Pelagic Cormorant			1		1	1							3		2-3	1	2-5		2	1	1		2-3		2-3	2-3	15-20	13-20	5-10	10-30	4-6		6	8-10	3-4	2-3	2	2	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-4	2-3	2-40	3-4	3-4	2	
Great Blue Heron	25-30	30-40	15-30	20-35	20-40	20-40	40-50	25-30	20-35	35-45	15-20	15-25	15-25	15-25	10-15	10-15	10-15	10-15	5-10	5-10	5-10	4-5	2-3	2-3	2-3	2-3	2	1-3	1-2	2-3	2	1	2	1	1-5	1-5	11	4-5	4-6	3-4	4-6	10-12	8-12	4-5	8-10	12-28	10-15	5-15
Trumpeter Swan																										1-2	1		1	4	4																	
Mute Swan	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2-3	2	2	2	2		2-4	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	
Canada Goose	4	2-13	4	4-6						10		2		9				9										10	9	9	9	9	9	9	9-10	9-10	2-4	5-6	4-14	9-10	4-5	2-4	2-4	4	4	4	8	2-
Green-winged Teal												2-12	4-12	12-18	2-22	4-20	15-30	20-25	15-25	30-75	30-75	30-50	10-20	10-20	10-20	10-15	30-45	25-30	15-25	25-40	20-30	20-30	5-10	2-3	3		7					4-7	2-4	2-4	4	15-25	10-15	9-2
Mallard	4	4	2	2-7	2	7			2	2-7	2-7	7-34	10-25	10-25	15-30	15-25	15-25	10-15	10-30	40-130	100-200	100-150	75	75-100	75-100	100-125	75-100	60-75	75-100	100-150	75-100	75-100	200-350	150-250	200	100-150	100-150	75-125	75-100	60-75	60-75	60-75	30-40	30-40	30-40	10-15	8-10	2-
Northern Pintail													5	10-18	10-30	10-15	15-20	10-15	15-30	30-60	30-60	50-75	10-30	20-30	20-30	15-25	20-25	20-25	25-50	50-100	40-60	40-60	10-15	5-10	1		3										
Northern Shoveler	2											2	2	2								1	1		1					1																	1-14
Gadwall																						5	4-14	4-5	4-12	2-4	5-9	5-28	4-6	4-26	4-8	5-10	4-5	1-2	2	6	6-30					8-13	5-8	4-5	4-6	4-6			
Eurasian Wigeon																			3	3	2		1	1	2	2	2	3			2	2			1	1	2					5	2		1	1-2			
American Wigeon	2-5	2-5	1											6	7	6	10	15-65	60-240	200-350	1000-1200	600-1000	700	700	400-500	200-300	200-300	150-200	150-300	250-475	250-400	200-300	150-200	75-125	70	125-200	100-150	75-125	60-80	80-100	80-100	80-100	25-40	30-50	50-75	75-100	100-125	20-2
Canvasback																									2-4	4-6	6-9	3-9	4-6	2-6	4	2								1								
Greater Scaup																			3-4	5-6	10-12	10-20	10-12	15-25	40-75	40-75	40-50	40-50	40-50	20-25	15-30	20-30	15-20	15-20	10-15	10-15	10-15	5-10	5-15	10-15	10-15	5-10						
Lesser Scaup																					2	1	2-3	3-5	15-25	15-25	10-20	10-20	10-20	20-25	4-15	8-10	5-10	10-15	5-10													
Oldsquaw																														1	8	2	3	14	1				1-2				10				
Surf Scoter																					2-3	4			3			15		5-15	8	2	6	2	7	3		6	20-30	15-20	15-20	10-12		8				
White-wing. Scoter																						1	1		3					24	23	8			8			5	35-40	25-30	10-15	4-6		3	3	1	3	
Common Goldeneye																						3	10	15-25	25-50	40-50	35-40	35-40	40-60	60-90	60-75	40-50	250-350	150-200	100-150	75-125	75-125	150-200	100-125	60-80	100-125	60-80	25-30	20-25	3-8	2-10	1	1
Barrow's Goldeneye																						5		1-2	2-5	2-4	2-4		1	4	4	3		3	6						2							1
Bufflehead	2	1																			1	175	430	300-400	200-300	150-250	150-250	150-200	200-225	250-750	250-300	100-150	500-650	400-500	300-400	250-300	250-300	250-350	200-250	150-200	200-250	150-200	75-100	75-100	125-175	125-175	150-175	75-150
Hooded Merganser																					2	3	2-3	2-3	4-5	4-5	5-10	8-12	6-8	8-13	4-8	3-4	3-4		2		1		1		2				3	7	2		
Common Merganser	25-30	10-15	6-10	6-10	5	4	6	1	2	2	2-3	2-4	2-4	15-30	15-65	40-70	30-45	15-30	40-55	50-60	15-30	30-60	50-60	25-40	5-10	5-10	5-10	5-10	5-10	5-10	1-8	2	5-6	2-3	2	1	1-3	9	4	1	8-12	8-12	5-10	5-10	4-6	10-25	10-15	14-26
Red-br. Merganser																							25-50	25-50	75-125	150-275	150-200	150-200	150-250	250-390	200-300	50-75	40-60	50-75	70-90	50-60	60-75	40-60	40-50	80-100	75-90	50-60	15-20	10-15	6-8	1	8-33	4-33
Turkey Vulture	2	2-14	1-4	2-10	2-4	4-9			4-11	2		1			1-3		2-7		1-45																													
Osprey		1	1	1	2-3	2	1-2		1	1				1	1																											7	1	4				1
Bald Eagle	1-2	1-3	2	2-3	1	2	1	1	1-2	1	1								1		2	1		2	1	2	2	1	1	2	7	3	5	3		1	2	1	1		1	1	1			1		
Red-tailed Hawk		2	2		2	2															1	1		1		1				1																	
Merlin															1	1	1					1						1																				
American Coot																						1	2-3	2-3	2-5	2-6	5-8	5-8	5-8	5-8	5	3-4	3-4																
Semipal. Plover									1		1	1-25	3-4	1																															5-26	10-18
Killdeer	2-6	2-4	2	2	4	2	2-4	2-4	2-4	2-4	2-5	2-5	2-5	2-5	2	2-5	2-3	2-3	2-3	3-6	3-4	6			1-3	1-3	2-3	2-3	4	4	2		1	1	2-7		1		1-2		1-2	1-2	2-3	2-3	2-3	2-3	2-3	1-2
Greater Yellowlegs									1-2	1-2	2	2-10	1	1	1		1																												1	1-2	1
Lesser Yellowlegs												2-20	2-3	3		1-2																												1-2		
Black Turnstone																14-17	24	10-25	10-35	25-45		6-15				4-15	15		2	18	8	3-4		15		1		5-10							30-90	90-125	
Western Sandpiper	5-10							5-10	10-25	10-25	10-15	15-50	15-25	15-25	10-15	2		5-10																												10-60	50-350	300-400
Least Sandpiper	2-5							5-10	10-20	10-20	10-15	15-150	25-40	25-40	10-15	10-15	5-15	5-10																													50-100	50-100
Dunlin																				3	8	2				1-75	60	1-2		25				15		3								30	20-25	4
Long-b. Dowitcher									4	5	5	1	1	2	2	1	6	2	1-2	2	4	1-3																									
Bonaparte's Gull										2	2-10	2-10				3	3	6-1000	10	5-10	500-1000	10	10-20	3-5	3-5				1		12													30	20-25	4
Mew Gull	5-10	5-15	2	2-10	6-10	10-20	5-10	5-10	2-8	5-10	2-10	5-15	15-20	20-30		40-50	40-50	25-30	20-30	25-50	50-75	75-100	40-75	20-50	30-60	40-50	50-60	40-50	50 75	40-60	75-150	25-40	50-75	50-75	80-100	80-100	80-11	50-75	50-75	50-75	100-125	80-100	50-60	15-30	8-15	3-4	2-6	1-2
Ring-billed Gull									3	3	1-2	1		2		1-2	1	2																													
California Gull				6-8	4-5	5-6	4-6	4-6	10-75	75-150	50-75	40-60	25-50	50-200	5-30	50-75	50-75	50-75	20-30	20-30	30-50	40-60	25-50	15-30	5-10	2-3	1				1					1			15	4-9	15-35	2-5	10-18	4-7	3-7	4-12
Herring Gull																1	1		1	.1	1	1				1	2-3	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1		1		2	1		1
Thayer's Gull																									1	2	15-20	2-3	4-5	2	30-40	2	2	2-6	3		1	1	2-6		3			1				
Western Gull			1						1	1					1	1	2-6	2-3	2	3-4	1-2		1	1	1	1-2	1	1	2-4	1-4	2-3	3-5	3-5	2	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2	2-3	4-5	1-2	1		1	1	1	1
Glaucous-w. Gull	25-50	25-50	50-75	50-75	50-75	50-75	50-75	50-75	50-75	50-75	25-50	25-50	25-50	25-50	25-50	25-50	50-100	50-100	50-75	50-150	50-150	150-200	150-250	200-250	200-250	150-200	150-200	100-150	150-250	150-250	300-400	200-250	300-400	150-250	200-300	200-300	200-300	150-200	150-200	150-200	200-250	150-200	125-150	100-125	40-75	50-90	75-100	75-100
Caspian Tern		2-14	2-14	2-10	10-50	10-15		5	2	2	2																																		1		
Pigeon Guillemot	1-2																													2	2	3									3		1			
Belted Kingfisher			1	1-2	6	2	1	1	1	1	1-2	2-4	2-4	2	1	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2										1	2	1	1	1	1	1			1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Violet-gr. Swallow	15-25	15-25	10-20	5-15	5-15	5-15	5-10	5-10	5-10	5-10	5-10																														2-5					5-10	10-15
N. Rough-w. Swallow	2-4	2	2	2																																										2
Barn Swallow	25-75	25-75	25-75	25-60	25-50	25-40	15-30	15-30	15-30	15-30	15-20	20-35	20-35	10-15																															5-20	15-30
Northwestern Crow	25-50	25-50	15-35	15-40	15-40	15-40	25-40	25-40	25-40	25-40	25-50	25-50	25-50	25-50	20-40	20-40	20-40	20-40	20-40	25-60	25-60	25-40	40-75	40-75	40-75	25-50	40-50	40-50	40-50	50-70	75-150	50-75	50-75	40-50	40-50	60-75	75-175	125-200	150-225	100-150	100-125	75-100	25-40	25-40	20-25	40-120	50-75	50-75
Common Raven									1								1	1	1	1	1	1	1			1	1				1	1-2	1	1	1-2	1				1	1	1	1-2	1	1-2		
European Starling	25-10	25-100	25-75	10-50	10-50	10-50	15-50	15-50	15-50	15-50	15-30	15-30	15-30	15-30			5-15	10-15	40-75	40-75	25-40	20-30	10-20	10-20	10-20	20-30	30-40	25-30	25-30	30-40	25-50	20-30	15-20	40-60	25-30	25-30	25-30	40-50	25-30	25-30	25-30	25-30	20-30	20-30	20-30	20-30	20-25	20-25
Savannah Sparrow																1-10	2-5	2-5	2-5																												5-10

Dec. (4) was reduced to less than 100 by mid-Jan: up to 175 were directly affected by the oil spill, with many others choosing to depart the region.

Raptors (9)

A number of species use the estuary for foraging or hunting. The Turkey Vulture was most common during fall migration, with a flock of 45 seen in Oct. (1). They feed on the tidal flats (on decaying matter) in the summer, whereas Bald Eagles feed there on rotting salmon in late fall and winter. Both species likely nest near the estuary, as do Red-tailed Hawks. Osprey have nested at Sooke Basin in 1985 and 86, using the estuary for fishing. Sharp-shinned Hawk was seen in Sept (4)-1, Cooper's Hawk in Dec. (4)-1, Peregrine Falcon on 10 Dec.-1 (and at Whiffin Spit on 11 Jan-1), and Golden Eagle on 5 Sept.-1 and 10 Dec.-1. The estuary appears to be the most important feeding ground in the region for raptors.

Plovers/Whimbrel (5)

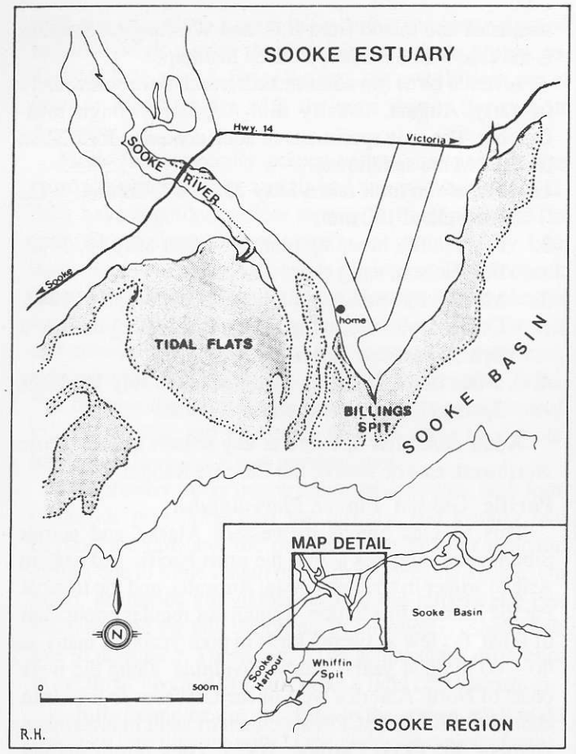
These waders prefer the higher ground of the estuary tidal flats. Only the Killdeer is resident, with 2 or 3 pairs nesting along the Sooke River and in nearby gravel pits. High counts of Semipalmated Plover were made in May (1) and Aug. (2) of 25 to 26 birds. Black-bellied Plover was seen in Oct. (1)-3 and May (1)-7, Lesser Golden Plover on 15 Aug-1, and Whimbrel in both 1985: 19 May-1 and 18 June-3, and in 1986: 12 July-1.

Rocky Coast Shorebirds (5)

The estuary provides only marginal habitat for these birds. Black Turnstone was irregular, with numbers peaking at 125 in spring migration in May (1). Surfbird was infrequently found, with sightings in 1985: Oct (1)-1, and in 1986: 29 Apr.-100 and May (1)-15 to 25. Ruddy Turnstone is a regular spring migrant, with records in 1985: May (1&2)-2 to 4, and in 1986: May (3)-33 to 36. Black Oystercatchers were found sporadically in 1985: May (1&2)-1 to 2, May (3)-1 to 2, May (4)-2 to 3, and June (3)-1, and in 1986: May (2)-2; in winter they were also seen regularly at Whiffin Spit. A pair of these birds may nest on the islets in Sooke Basin. Sanderling was seen once at Whiffin Spit in Aug. (3)-3.

Mudflat Shorebirds (11)

These species are found on the tidal flats of the estuary during both spring (late Apr. to late May) and fall (early July to end Oct.)migration. Only the Dunlin winters, with peak counts in Nov.-Dec. of 60 to 75 birds. Least and Western Sandpipers were the most numerous migrants; up to 400 Western and 100 Least were present in spring, but only 50 Western and 100 Least were found in the peak of fall migration in Aug. Dowitchers were seen occasionally, with a large flock of Long-billed seen on 26 July 86-35 and Short-billed observed in 1985: July (3)-1 and Sept.(2)-1, and in 1986: 29 Apr.-80 and 3 Aug.-6. Greater



Yellowlegs peaked at 10 in Aug. (2), whereas there were twice as many Lesser Yellowlegs seen at that time. Spotted Sandpiper was observed in 1985: Sept. (2)03, Sept. (4)-1, and Oct. (1)-1, and in 1986: May (2)-1 to 2 and 28 Jul-1. They may nest along the banks of the upper Sooke River. Pectoral Sandpiper was only sighted in fall migration; in 1985 it was seen in Sept. (1)-15 to 20, Sept. (2)-2 to 19, Sept. (3)-7, and Oct. (1)-1, and in 1986 on 26 Jul-1 and 9 Aug.-1. There was one sighting of Baird's Sandpiper on 15 Aug.-2 and one of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper on 25 Oct.-2.

Gulls (11)

The estuary is an important feeding and resting area for gulls. The Glaucous-winged Gull is the only resident species, with a few likely nesting on the islets in Sooke Basin. Gull numbers are highest in mid-winter; only a few non-breeding Mew and California Gulls are present in May-June, along with the Glaucous-winged. Peak concentrations of gulls were 400 Glaucous-winged and 150 Mew in Jan.(1) and 200 California in Aug. (4). Two large groups of 1000 Bonaparte's Gulls were observed in Sept. (4) and Oct. (3). Rarely found with Thayer's Gull flocks in mid-winter were Iceland Gulls, with sightings of first-year birds on 6 Dec.-1 and 1 Jan-1. Other infrequently seen gulls were the Glaucous (a second-year bird was present on 11 Jan., 29, and 3 Feb) and the Heerman's, which was found only on Aug. (3), although the Heerman's Gull was often seen from Whiffin Spit in late Aug. and Sept. The oil spill affected Glaucous-winged an Mew Gulls, with up to 30 lost in total.

Terns (2)

Caspian Terns were observed often in small feeding flocks around the estuary as the tide flooded in mid-summer; a large group of 50 was there in June (3). In 1986 these terns arrived about 2 weeks later and were present in smaller numbers. Common Terns frequented the outer coast; a group of 5 were seen at Whiffin Spit in Sept. (2).

Alcids (4)

Pigeon Guillemots were sighted occasionally in winter on Sooke Harbour and in Apr.-May as they flew past the estuary into Sooke Basin (where they may breed on the islets). Other alcids were seen around Whiffin Spit and the outer portion of Sooke Harbour: Common Murre in Jan. (3)-1, Rhinoceros Auklet in Apr. (2)-2, and Marbled Murrelet in Jan. (2)-2 and Apr. (2)-7. A few murres were affected by the oil spill.

Kingfisher/Swallows (5)

Belted Kingfisher is resident at the estuary and lower Sooke River, where at least 2 pairs breed. Swallows were common in May-Aug., feeding above the estuary on insects. Northern Roughwinged Swallows may breed along the Sooke River as far as the Sooke Potholes. Purple Martin was sighted once in June (1)-1.

Crow/Raven/Starling (3)

Northwestern Crow and European Starling were the most numerous passerines seen on the tidal flats, where they commonly feed. Crows also use the estuary in winter as a gathering point prior to roosting. Ravens were seen regularly feeding on dead salmon (from Nov.-Feb.)

Other Passerines (5)

These species use the weedy, grassy portions of the tidal flats above the high-tide mark. Besides small numbers of Savannah Sparrows in spring and fall migrations, American Goldfinch was found at the estuary in Aug. (4)-2 and Sept (2)-1. Snow Bunting was seen at Billings Spit in Dec. (1)-7 (it is a regular late fall migrant at Whiffin Spit).

Other passerines were observed infrequently in the grassy, log-strewn area near the base of Whiffin Spit: Marsh Wren in Aug. (4)-1, Dec. (4)-1, and Jan. (1)-1, and a few Song Sparrows in Dec. -Feb.

Sightings of Other Marine-Associated Bird Species

The following species have been recorded in the Greater Sooke Region (Race Rocks to Gordon Beach on the outer coast and into Sooke Basin) by various observers prior to 1 May 85. These records are from BCPM sight record cards and Victoria area birdwatchers; a (?) beside the name indicates hypothetical status.

Sooty Shearwater	Emperor Goose
American White Pelican (?)	Redhead
Brown Pelican	King Eider
Great Egret	Norhtern Harrier
Cattle Egret	Northern Goshawk
Green-backed Heron	American Kestrel

Wandering Tattler	Sabine's Gull
Red Knot	Arctic Tern
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Ancient Murrelet
White-rumped Sandpiper	Cassin's Auklet
Rock Snadpiper	Tufted Puffin
Common Snipe	Tree Swallow
Red-necked Phalarope	Bank Swallow
Red Phalarope	Cliff Swallow
Parasitic Jaeger	Lincoln's Sparrow
Franklin's Gull	Lapland Longspur
Little Gull	Chestnut-collared Longspur (?)
Black-legged Kittiwake	Smith's Longspur

The 'Lesser' Golden Plover

BY KEITH TAYLOR

The separation of 'Lesser' Golden Plover into two species seemed inevitable, and as I had yet to see *fulva*, I asked Vic and Peggy Goodwill, the Victoria Rare Bird Alert hotline tenders, to have observers report Golden Plovers as to subspecies. I had no idea of the identification problems and controversy that would arise!

One morning soon afterward, I was surprised to hear of several *fulva* from the Martindale Road 'L' reservoir in Saanich. When I arrived there, however, I found three *dominica*. When reports of *fulva* at the same site continued (some of three *fulva*, and others of a *fulva* with two *dominica*), I ignored these sightings as erroneous. One of the observers, photographer Tim Zurowski, produced slides, nevertheless, which I found to represent two *dominica* and one *fulva* (though the images were small the identification difficult); the slides were forwarded to shorebird expert Dennis Paulson, who confirmed the identification. Therefore, it seems that four birds were involved in the Martindale sightings, three *dominica* and one *fulva*; in fact, four Golden Plovers were seen together there (B. Gates, B. Whittington). One other *fulva* was seen during the same time period below the breakwall, Dallas Road at Boyd Street, Victoria (Sepember 13).

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

American Golden Plover, *Pluvialis dominica*

This species breeds throughout the North American arctic and winters in southern South America. During fall migration it may be found from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast; the main routes followed, especially by adults, are the Central and Atlantic flyways, and many fly from James Bay to South America non-stop. In the spring, on the other hand, virtually all birds use the Central flyway.

On the Pacific coast, this species is generally uncommon. The main staging areas are Leadbetter Point and Gray's Harbor, Washington, where flocks of 50-150 birds are regular. Vancouver has average yearly counts of 25-60 individuals (with a high count of 200 on September 16, 1972); Victoria gets 6 – 20 *dominica* each fall. Numbers drop off considerably on the Oregon-California coast: this is presumably because most migrants head southeast and inland from B.C. and Washington State, as is the case with the Semipalmated Sandpiper.

Juvenile birds (no adult records)reach our shores rarely in early August, usually mid-August, through mid-October. The only specimens of adult *dominica* for B.C. in the BCPM are as follows:

1. Female in molt taken May 21, 1937, Comox, B.C., wing chord 180 mm;
2. Male in full breeding plumage taken May 19, 1982, Fort Nelson, wing chord 178 mm;
3. Male in full breeding plumage taken May 15, 1942, Courtenay, B.C., wing chord 170 mm. (possibly a hybrid *dominica* X *fulva* ?); and
4. Male in full breeding plumage taken July 15, 1959, Spatsizi Plateau, wing chord 175 mm.

Adult *dominica* are rare at any season in the Pacific Northwest, east or west of the Cascade Range!

Pacific Golden Plover, *Pluvialis fulva*

This species breeds in western Alaska and across Siberia, and migrates across the open Pacific and eastern Asia to winter in southeast Asia, Australia, and the tropical Pacific islands. In addition, a small but regular population of *fulva* (as few as twenty birds in poor years; as many as 40 – 60 in good years) follow *dominica* along the west coast of North America west of the Cascades to winter in central California (BCPM specimen of adult in molt taken October 30, 1934, Cariboo, B.C.). They return mainly along the outer coast from the last half of April through May, in breeding plumage.

The fall migration is more complex: tentatively, it seems adults arrive (mainly outer coast) regularly as early as mid-July (with non-breeders? in June) through August; juvenile *fulva* arrive later than *dominica* in mid-September through October. There is a smattering of records thereafter: some from coastal Oregon in December and January probably represent wintering birds, while the few records from Vancouver, Victoria, and the Washington – Oregan coast in March could signify early spring migration. These winter birds could be in juvenile or non-breeding adult plumages.

Vancouver usually produces five or six *fulva* each fall; Victoria only one to three. Adult *fulva* are exceedingly rare in Victoria in both spring and fall migration periods.

IDENTIFICATION

Fulva is smaller and slimmer than *dominica*, with a longer bill (generally not a field characteristic) and longer legs.

Calls

Both speices give a quick whistled 'chu-wheedle'; *fulva* at least is known to also give a single whistle.

Plumage

Juveniles: The ground colour of the sides of the head, neck, throat and breast are quite golden yellow on *fulva*. On *dominica* these areas are buff-brown through greyish buff on well-worn birds. The streaks on the nape, side of neck and upper breast are usually darker and better-defined in *fulva*; in dominica these streaks are more blurry, as likely to look barred. From the rear, the usually dark cap of *fulva* contrasts more with the nape than is the case in *dominica*.

Fulva has especially golden yellow markings on the crown, eyeline, mantle, tertials and wings. While *dominica* does have a golden yellow mantle in fresh plumage (to early September), it soon begins to wear and by late September to October has lost its brightness. The hindneck is usually quite grey even in bright plumage. The eyeline is whitish; there is also a distinct whitish area before the eye and above the bill, extending in a crescent below the eye. Wing coverts of *dominica* are always greyer than *fulva*. The fall juvenile *fulva* shows a more distinct auricular spot than *dominica*, and its mantle feathers show four spots instead of *dominica's* two terminal spots.

The primary projection is longer in *dominica*, with four primaries projecting past the tertials, and usually two beyond the tail, and the primaries are broader near the tertials due to more length of the primary being visible. On *fulva*, primaries are visible beyond the tertials and just reach beyond the tail; the primary projection is usually half that of *dominica*. There may be an actual shape difference in the tip of juvenile primaries (not a field characteristics).

Adults (complex due to molt): In the spring, adult male *dominica* are distinct with black undertail coverts (some white barring) and sides of breast. Female *dominica*, however, have white in these areas, as do molting males; primary projection is possibly the only way of separating these, although fulva is brighter on the mantle. Beware of wear and molt of primaries!

While passing through Victoria in fall, both species would possess black blotching on the breast (*fulva* could be seen late in full non-breeding plumage); *fulva*, however, molts the breast sooner than the mantle, and any adult with little black on the breast and a bright back would be *fulva*. *Dominica* molts evenly, so the back would appear quite dark while retaining a lot of black on the breast; males could still retain black undertail coverts. Beware of wear and molt of primaries!

VISUAL REFERENCES

1. Lansdowne, Birds of the West Coast, vol. 2, p.57: pictured are two juvenile *dominica* (rear) and a juvenile *fulva* crouching in front. Lansdowne's near-perfect illustrations are only to be faulted thus: in *dominica* the eyeline and crescent are not accentuated enough and the breast is too 'brown' for the amount of wear shown on the mantle; in *fulva* the breast should be more yellow, to match the mantle colour. Notice primary projection and shape of primaries.
2. Robbins, et al, Golden Guide to Birds of N.A., p. 111: the breast colouration of the 'winter' bird is perfect for a well-worn juvenile *dominica*; the adult is a male *dominica*.
3. Hayman, etal, Shorebirds, p. 101: the juvenile *fulva* is a perfect representation, but in the juvenile *dominica* the grey of the breast and face is too cold and dark.
4. The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding, vol. 1, p. 321: the photo is of a well-worn juvenile *dominica*; p.319 pictures an adult male *dominica*.
5. National Geographic Society Field Guide to Birds of North America, p. 108: both species are poorly illustrated.

Note

I feel that all Golden Plovers should be treated as 'hot line' birds, so that all sightings in Victoria can be available to as many observers as possible, and to ensure a more accurate and complete recording of species involved, especially in the sighting of adult birds.

References

1. Hayman, P., J. Marchant and T. Prater, Shorebirds, Houghton Miffline Company, Boston, 1986.
2. American Brids, Christmas Census issues, various years.
3. Paulson, D. and J. Erckmann, Shorebirds of the Pacific Northwest, in draft, 1986. Contains references to Conners (1983), discussion of differences between *fulva* and *dominica*, and Johnson (1983), molt of Pacific *fulva*.
4. Paulson, D. and D. Kragh, personal communications.
5. B.C. Provincial Museum, ornithological skin collection.

The Victoria NATURALIST

P.O. Box 5220, Stn. B
Victoria, B.C. V8R 6N4

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We regret the delay in preparing this issue. Its volunteer staff are working to improve the process!

JANUARY / FEBRUARY PROGRAM

Please meet at the location indicated for each trip. No cars can be left at Mayfair Lanes. For field trips bring a lunch and be equipped for changes in the weather. **Always phone the Rare Bird Alert: 382-5562 the week before** a trip you plan to take, in order to obtain full particulars or details about changes (sometimes unavoidable) that have been made. On V.N.H.S. trips participants usually pool vehicles to reduce parking problems and costs. A considerable fuel bill can be run up on a trip; consuming 5 to 10¢ a kilometre. The Board suggests that these costs be shared with the driver. Contact Lyndis Davis at 477-9952 if you want to borrow the Society scope for a scheduled trip.

Tuesday, Jan. 13: "Texas Safari and Others – Bird Photography"; slide talk by Tim Zurowski. General Meeting will follow. All welcome; bring a friend.

Thursday, Jan. 15: Newcombe Auditorium, 8:00 pm. The Thetis Lake Nature Sanctuary Association . Annual General Meeting, election of officers, followed by a Ministry of Tourism film entitled: "Here to Share". Refreshments will be served in the foyer at the conclusion of the meeting, for which a donation of $2.00 minimum is requested.

Saturday, Jan. 17: Birding at Island View Beach with Mike Bentley. Meet at Mayfair Lanes 9:00 am, or Island View Beach parking area 9:30 am. Bring a lunch.

Wednesday, Jan. 28: Birders Night 7:30 pm, BCPM Classroom via main door. Bring some slides. Coffee served.

Sunday, Feb. 8: Esquimalt Lagoon Birding with leader Geoff Gaskin. Meet at Helmcken Park & Ride 9:00 am, or at the Bridge 9:30 am. Bring a lunch.

Tuesday, Feb. 10: Annual Banquet. Commons, University of Victoria. $15.50 (Buffet) No host bar 6:00 pm. Dinner 7:00 pm. Jessie Woollett presents **"Spring on Our Island".** Purchase tickets from any Board Member.

Thursday, Feb. 12: Botany Night. 7:30 pm, BCPM Classroom, with Leon Pavlick, Botany Curator, BCPM. (387-2915). Kathy Cowen, Native Plants Gardener at BCPM, will present **"Gardening with Native Plants"** including comments in ethnobotany, edibility and ornamentals.

Thursday, Feb. 19: Newcombe Auditorium, 8:00 pm. The Thetis Lake Nature Sanctuary Association. Mr. Clint Smyth, Winner of the M.C. Melburn Memorial Scholarship, will tell of his studies and show slides in connectio nwith his special interests. His talk will be about **"Using Wild Plants to Reclaim Mine-spoiled Lands in the Kootenays".**

Wednesday, Feb. 25: Birders Night 7:30 pm, BCPM Classroom via main door. Bring some slides. Coffee served.

Saturday, Feb. 28: Birding at Blenkinsop Lake with Leader Art Durkee. Meet at Mayfair Lanes 9:00 am, or at the Trail head 9:15 am. Birding until noon. Bring a lunch if you wish.

CONTRIBUTORS are encouraged to include photographs along with their articles. We can reproduce from slides but prefer 4" x 6" colour or black and white prints. The composition and contrast between elements should be strong enough to 'hold up' in black and white printing.