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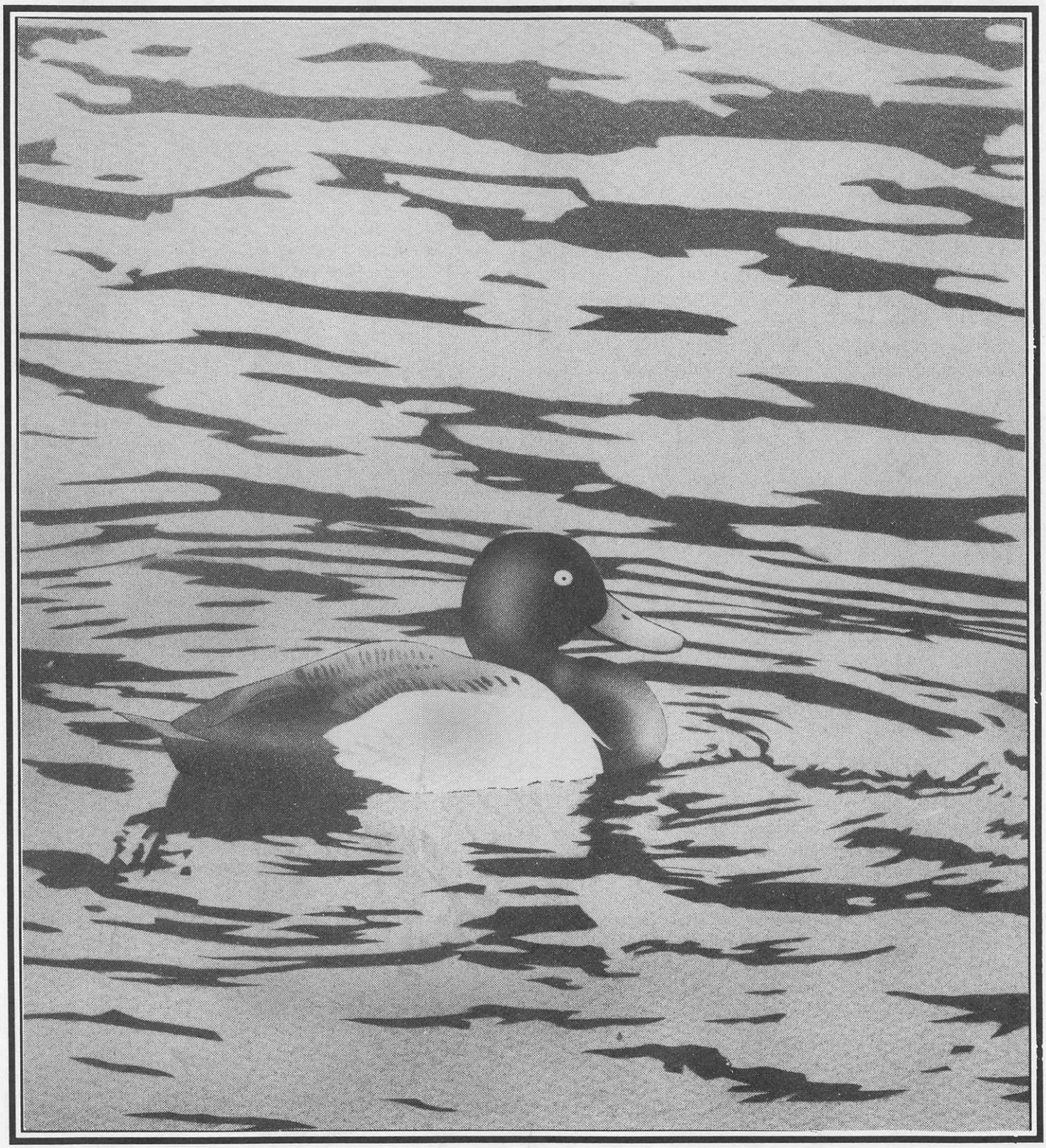

The Victoria NATURALIST

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GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION

Members are encouraged to submit articles, field trip reports, birding and botany notes, and book reviews with photographs or illustrations if possible. Photographs of natural history are appreciated along with documentation of location, species names and a date. Please label your submission with your name, address, and phone number and provide a title. We will accept and use copy in almost any **legible** form but we encourage submission of typed, double-spaced copy **or** an IBM compatible word processing file on a 360K 5.25" diskette plus printed output. Having copy submitted on diskette saves a lot of time and work for the publications group and we really appreciate the help. If you have an obscure or very old word processing program, call the editor, **Warren Drinnan**, at 598-0471 or 652-9618, or save the text in ASCII format. Blank diskettes may be obtained from the editor and we will return any of your own diskettes submitted. Photos and slides submitted may be picked up at the Field-Naturalist, 1241 Broad Street, or will be returned if a stamped, self-addressed envelope is included with the material.

VNHS MEMBERSHIP

For membership information and renewal, please contact Tom Gillespie at 361-1694, or write to Membership Committee c/o The Victoria Natural History Society, Box 5220, Victoria, B.C., V8R 6N4.

ADVERTISING GUIDELINES

The deadline for advertising submissions is the first of the month preceding publication. Please contact Jennifer Emms at 479–6323 regarding advertising which requires typesetting.

Ad Size	Price	Dimensions
Back Page	$120	7.25 x 8 in.
1/2 Page	$80	7.25 x 5 in.
1/3 Page	$50	7.25 x 3.25 in.
1/4 Page	$40	3.25 x 4.675 in.
1/8 Page	$25	3.25 x 2.25 in.

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1. Ad copy should be typeset and camera ready, not just sketched or typed on a typewriter.
2. Minor alterations to existing advertisements will cost $10. Typesetting of ads is charged at $20 per hour.
3. Add $9 per photo for PMT (at Island Blueprint).
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Contents

Our Cover

By Bruce Rowles

This month's cover art of a greater scaup is by Bruce Rowles, a local artist who presently lives in Whistler, B.C. After completing a two year art course at Capilano College, he began to specialize in airbrush art and produces a variety of nature and ski-related paintings.

Rowles is also an avid photographer which he uses as a basis for some of his work. His line drawings and airbrushed cards have been carried by the Royal British Columbia Museum and the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Air brush art involves the use of a high-pressure compressor to deliver paint through very fine tips (analogous to spray painting). Different colours (including background colours) are applied by cutting out those components for painting then reinserting them into the picture. Air brushing is then used to blend the sections into a complete painting.

In addition to the cover, Bruce's work is shown on the back cover. Two pen and ink drawings, on pages 9 and 15, were also done by the artist.

A Sperm Whale Stranding on Nootka Island

Pam J. Stacey

May 28th, 1991 dawned cold and wet, and the clouds hung low over Tahsis Inlet. The prospects at that point didn't seem favourable for making a helicopter run to Nootka Island where, according to reports from fishermen, a whale carcass lay rotting on a beach. The Stranded Whale and Dolphin Program had received a call a few days previous, and from the description it sounded like the small sperm whale that had possibly been seen in the area in the previous weeks, swimming in the company of a larger animal. The whale had apparently been on the beach for several days, and even if not fresh, there was valuable biological information to be gathered from it.

We made our way to the restaurant where the Coast Guard helicopter pilot Bob McIntyre and engineer Alex Kokanovic were having an early breakfast. In spite of the gloomy weather, the prognosis was good for heading out. Soon we were assembled at the helicopter, and after safety instructions had been dealt with, we were lifting off the ground and out over the water. We followed Tahsis Inlet down to Nootka Island and then travelled inland to a mountain-top site where we dropped off several Coast Guard employees who were installing marine communication equipment. In the intervening hours before they needed to be picked up again, the pilot had agreed to fly us out to the whale. First, however, we flew to the Nootka Island Lightstation to pick up some eager assistants; on the way there spotting a lone gray whale below, making its way south near the mouth of Tahsis Inlet. Lise Saurette and her son Noah had been flown in from their home at Estevan Point Lightstation the previous day, and along with Nootka Island Lightkeeper Ed Kidder, were joining us on our expedition. All three had helped out with this sort of thing before, dealing with other carcasses on the isolated beaches of the west coast or assisting us with a porpoise post-mortem when visiting Victoria.

After leaving the lightstation we flew west, low over the rugged coast of Nootka Island, passing close by the sea otter colony at Bajo Reef. Upon reaching Nuchatlitz Inlet we followed the waterway as it cut inland and as we passed Benson Point, we sighted the whale on the beach beyond. From the square shape of the head we knew immediately that it was indeed a sperm whale. After dropping us off, the pilot flew back to check on the work crew, assuring us that he would come back to get us. The tide was low, and we'd have a few hours to work before the whale would be immersed in water.

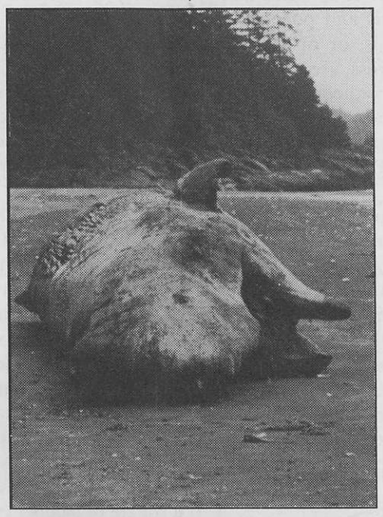
The whale had obviously been dead for some time. It was still intact, although it wasn't surprising that there had been no scavengers as yet; the hide of a sperm whale is supposedly the toughest of any cetacean and in adults can reportedly only be cut with a chainsaw. As the heavy oil had seeped out of the blubber and dripped on the ground, it had formed stalactite-like structures on the whale and corresponding stalagmite-like formations on the beach below.

We wondered what circumstances had brought the whale to the area, especially this close to shore. Sperm whales are found throughout the world's oceans. In the eastern North Pacific they are generally found south of Oregon in the winter. In summer, males will venture north as far as the Bering Sea to feed, while females and young usually stay south of about 50°N (Leatherwood *et al.*, 1988). Interestingly, our location was about 49°47'N. Although sperm whales are thought to be common off the British Columbia coast, they are rarely represented in strandings, possibly because of their deep water habits; they generally frequent waters greater than 200 metres.

We took photographs to document the stranding event and assigned the animal a number, 91-18, the 18th known stranding in British Columbia for 1991. A series of 37 measurements were then taken. When there is similar information collected over a large geographic area, these morphometric data can be used to look at size variations in different regions to possibly help delineate stocks of animals that may be reproductively isolated. The whale, at 5.5 metres, was not much longer than the reported neonatal length of sperm whales (3.5-5.0 m). Birth usually occurs in summer or fall and calves are weaned when about seven metres long, at one to two years of age (Leatherwood *et al.*, 1988).

Dead sperm whale on Nootka Island. Photo: ©Robin W. Baird

Blubber thickness measurements were taken at several locations on the body. These data, when compared to other animals of a similar size, can reveal some information about health of the individual. The next step was to do a tooth count, but the teeth had not yet erupted above the gumline in this young animal. In fact, this whales's teeth probably would not have erupted until several years after she had been weaned. There have been accounts of adult sperm whales whose small lower jaw had been badly damaged or even missing, who have been found with a full stomach of squid or fish. Obviously teeth are not essential for feeding in this species. Sperm whales have visible teeth only in the lower jaw (18-25 on each side), and these fit into sockets in the upper jaw, which usually contain vestigial teeth that never erupt.



Dead sperm whale on Nootka Island. Photo: ©Robin W. Baird

After a check of the external surfaces of the whale looking for, but not finding in this case, items such as parasites, marks from possible net entanglement, or wounds and injuries, it was time to get out the flensing knives. Donated by the Institute of Cetacean Research in Japan, the knives cut fairly easily through the skin and blubber... at first. We quickly went through our entire complement of sharp knives as we slowly cut through the blubber. We began to wonder if the ever-closer waterline was going to put an end to our activities before we made much progress. But once the blubber was peeled back it was relatively easy to make our way into the abdominal cavity.

In most cases when dealing with strandings, it's difficult to piece together the story of what may have caused the animal's death. Often we don't hear about, and subsequently reach, an animal for several days after it has died. By then the organs have generally decomposed to the point where histopathology examination is not extremely revealing. Only in a few cases is there an obvious infection, abnormal growth, or other condition to point to the cause of death. In this case, all the organs had deteriorated almost beyond the point of recognition, leading us to believe that the whale had been dead for two weeks or more. Much of the intestine remained, however, and one portion in particular, distended far beyond its normal state with solid material, suggested the distinct possibility that this whale had died from complications arising from an obstructed lower intestine.

If the organs had been in better shape, samples would have been taken of liver and kidney for analysis of heavy metal content. However, blubber samples were obtained for organochlorine analysis. As the animal was much too large to collect in its entirety, we took away only the lower jaw, the earbones, the hyoid apparatus, and one pectoral fin and scapula. The bones, with the whale being so young, were extremely soft and it was difficult not to damage them in the collecting process.

Lise had just finished collecting a jar of oil from the whale's huge melon when the tide finally put an end to further exploring. We could hear the sound of the helicopter approaching over the hill as we began to pack up. Our big question now was whether there would be room for the pectoral fin, mandibles and other collectibles on the helicopter. And would they allow us back on board smelling strongly of dead whale? There was room, and they did allow us on board, but not without the expected good-natured scepticism.

On the return trip the pilot spotted a black bear on the beach and circled around to give us a good look. After dropping Ed off at Nootka Island, we carried on to Estevan Point to drop off Lise and Noah, and were able to stay long enough for tea and to be shown around the isolated lightstation. Upon arriving back in Tahsis we had to decide whether or not to proceed to Port Hardy, where a dead minke whale had been reported the day before. We were tempted to head that direction but with a kit full of dull knives, leaking, odorous packages of flesh-covered whale bones, and blood-soaked clothes to contend with, we decided that a other volunteers could tackle that one.

References:

Leatherwood, S., R.R. Reeves, W.F. Perrin, and W.E. Evans. 1988. *Whales, dolphins, and porpoises of the eastern North Pacific and adjacent Arctic waters - a guide to their identification.* Dover Publications, Inc., New York. 245 pp.

Pam Stacey has her Bachelor's degree in biology. She is presently a student with a research group at the University of Victoria Department of Geography, looking at the interactions between killer whales and boats.

Stranded Whale and Dolphin Program of British Columbia

By Robin Baird

The Stranded Whale and Dolphin Program of British Columbia was established in 1987 to monitor and respond to strandings of whales, dolphins and porpoises. Records of dead or live-stranded animals, or of animals caught in fishing gear or otherwise in distress, are recorded through the Program. The majority of strandings in British Columbia are single animals that are stranded because they are too sick to swim; die at sea and are washed ashore; or, become entangled in fishing gear, die and are subsequently washed ashore.

There is a wealth of information that can be obtained from a dead whale or dolphin. Information from strandings is used for both educational and scientific purposes: records of the locations of animals are used to help determine range and relative abundance of rare or unusual species; tissue samples are tested for toxins such as organochlorines and heavy metals, and are also used in genetic studies; an autopsy provides valuable information on possible cause of death and baseline information about cetacean biology; and, skeletons can be donated to museums, parks or schools. This research is being undertaken through Simon Fraser University, the Island Veterinary Hospital, the Marine Mammal Research Group, and the University of Victoria. Records from the Program are also shared with researchers at the Vancouver Aquarium and other institutions.

As noted, single live stranded individuals are usually animals in distress due to long-term illness. Their prospects if returned to the water are usually poor and the most appropriate action is to have the animal taken to a holding facility where it can be examined and treated by a veterinarian. In the event of a live stranding the animal should be kept wet, cool and shaded from the sun. The closest aquarium, as well as the toll-free reporting line, should be called as soon as possible.

The most important thing to do if you come across a dead stranded whale on a beach is to secure it so it cannot wash away, either by carrying it above the high tide mark (if it is a small animal) or by tying a larger animal to a tree or other object. Notes should then be made on the description (size, coloration, dorsal fin absence or size, shape and position, whether or not teeth or baleen are present, relative number of grooves, if any, on throat, any unusual scars or markings, sex [presence of mammary grooves, relative positioning of genital and anal slits] and state of decomposition); exact location and date of stranding; and, who reported it. If a camera is available photographs are extremely valuable for identification of species, as well as to help in avoiding duplicate records.

If return access to the site is extremely difficult, or if the animal is in danger of washing away, it would be worthwhile taking a square of blubber (with skin attached) approximately 3" wide, cut down to the connective tissue between the muscle and blubber. This sample should be taken from the back or side of the animal, to avoid penetrating the body cavity and, if possible, it should be wrapped in foil and frozen in a well-labelled plastic bag. Please then phone, as soon as possible, the toll-free 24-hour reporting line at 1-800-665-5939; in the Victoria area call 380-1925. Please leave a message with the details collected above, your name, and a number where you can be reached.

Members of the stranding team try to attend as many strandings as possible in order to conduct an autopsy and collect detailed measurements and samples. However, as a volunteer group with limited funding, this is not always possible for isolated strandings. In such cases interested individuals closer to the site may be able to collect information. If the animal is small, the best situation is to have it frozen whole and sent to Nanaimo or Victoria. Otherwise, a data sheet is available to record length measurements, tooth counts, and blubber thicknesses, along with the details of when and where the animal stranded and who reported it.

Photographs should be taken at this point, with a ruler in the picture, if possible, for scale. Besides overall views, close-ups of the dorsal fin (if present), head, genital slit, and any wounds or unusual marks are valuable. Blubber samples are not hard to collect; 4 squares about 2" across, taken from the back of the animal to avoid penetrating the abdominal cavity, should be wrapped in aluminum foil and frozen as soon as possible, and labelled as to content, species of whale, date, and location. If possible, liver and kidney samples should also be collected and preserved, in the same format as with blubber. Stomach contents should be collected and frozen. These samples should only be collected after a detailed autopsy has been conducted by a qualified individual, if such is possible considering the accessibility of the carcass. For rare or unusual species the stranding team will attempt to have the entire animal collected, in which case the specimen should be guarded against damage. Even if detailed information cannot be collected, please report all strandings. Anyone having information regarding strandings from previous years is also encouraged to contact the program, as strandings may not have been reported at the time, or only scanty details may be available. We are also interested in sightings of any whales, dolphins, porpoises, fur seals, or elephant seals.

For more information write to: Marine Mammal Research Group, Box 6244, Victoria, B.C. V8P 5L5, or phone (604) 380-1925 (fax 380-1206). All contributions to the Stranded Whale and Dolphin Program will be acknowledged in any resulting publications, and contributors will receive copies of these reports. A yearly report of the program is produced and will be sent to all those involved in strandings from that year.

Robin Baird is working on his graduate degree at Simon Fraser University. He is a member of the Marine Mammal Research Group, a group of professionals working on marine mammals in British Columbia.

BOOK REVIEW—

By Warren Drinnan

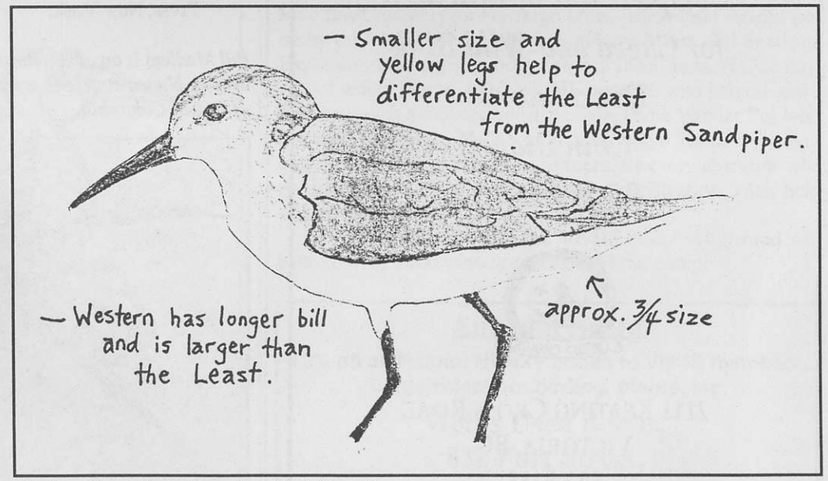
Waterbirds of the Strait of Georgia
By Eileen Campbell, Wayne Campbell, and Ron McLaughlin
Published by McMillan Bloedel & The B.C. Waterfowl Society

An interesting and useful new book entitled *Waterbirds of the Strait of Georgia* has recently been published. The authors, Eileen Campbell, Wayne Campbell, and Ron McLaughlin, have endeavoured to provide a pocket-sized reference guide to 48 of the more common seabirds and shorebirds (including some birds of prey) that are present throughout the year in the Strait. The project was jointly sponsored by MacMillan Bloedel Limited and the British Columbia Waterfowl Society.

The booklet features key identification guides for each species, including colour photographs of adult or breeding males, plus a description of either the female, winter or juvenile plumage, whichever is the most appropriate for the species. The booklet also includes a calender of occurrence for each month. A particularly useful feature is the section on sites throughout the Strait of Georgia where large numbers of birds can be seen at various times of the year. Twelve sites are described, including three in the Victoria area - Oak Bay, Mandarte Island which is east of Sidney Island, and Active Pass. A brief description of the habitat, and species likely to be observed during the various seasons, is presented.

The 4 inch x 9 inch soft-cover format can be easily carried in pocket or purse and the book is printed on high quality paper that will be resistant to periodic exposures of rain. Because it includes only a portion of the over 130 species that have been sighted, there is the inevitable discussion as to why some species were included and others not. However, this will be of concern only to serious birders; the book successfully addresses its intended audience of casual birders and those with a general interest in the outdoors.

Waterbirds of the Strait of Georgia is available at the Royal British Columbia Museum, Crown Publications, and most natural history and book stores in the area.



Western Sandpiper. (Drawing: Mark Nyhof)

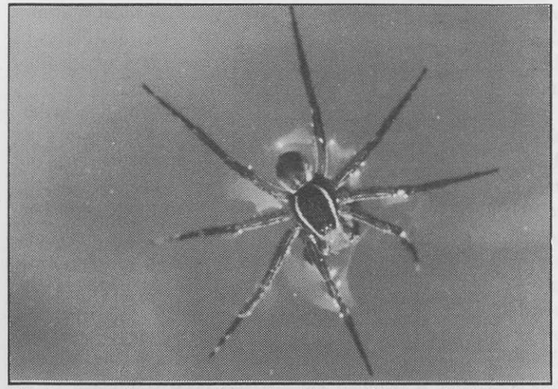
Fishing Spider Encounter

By Bill Merilees

With only a rudimentary knowledge of British Columbia arachnology, I made a very false assumption when I assumed that the only "experience" I would ever have with fishing spiders would be via television and the wonderful nature programs on the Knowledge Network or from National Geographic specials. For all I know, many of the television images we watch could be staged or as mythical as the Unicorn. However, for many naturalists television might well be our only opportunity to encounter or gain some understanding of many fascinating beasts. For me, the fishing spider was one of these, until my son, Stuart, and I made a before-breakfast tadpole hunting trip to our local frog pond, June 25, 1988.

With nary a thought of encountering the unusual, but full of hopes for a good catch, we approached the pond through dew laden grass. When we peered over the pond side rushes, there, sitting motionless on the water, was a largish heavy bodied spider (see photo).

Something "told" us this spider was different, so we captured it and took it home in a separate container. When the sun was up, the spider was placed on the surface of our garden pond where the tadpoles and salamander larvae had earlier been released. Again it sat motionless, allowing two photos to be taken, and then it was off! It dashed across the surface, "hit" a lily pad then instantly disappeared beneath the surface, not to be seen again.



Photographs (above and below) — Fishing Spiders. (Bill Merilees)

Subsequent enquiry, confirmed through our photograph, revealed that this was a "fishing spider" of the genus *Dolomedes*. Apparently they are quite common. All live near water and can run easily over the surface. Each leg that makes contact creates a small depression in the water's surface, but the leg does not become wet. Our species do not build underwater webs to which they carry air bubbles, but they can "dive", breathing air that "sticks" to the body like an envelope.

Fishing spiders do fish, occasionally capturing small fish or tadpoles. However, they are much more likely to feed on other insects found on the water surface or nearby vegetation.

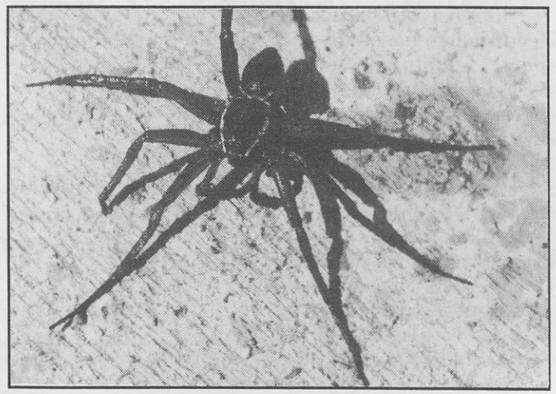
Stuart and I have visited the pond a number of times since. On our last visit (July 7, 1990), we found three *Dolomedes*, confirming that they are, indeed, reasonably common. However, it will be our first encounter that will be remembered, a cherished moment which I trust Stuart will long appreciate.

References:

Emerton, J.H. 1961. *The common spiders of the United States*. Dover Publications, New York.

Levi, H.W. and L.R. Levi. 1968. *Spiders and their kin*. Golden Press, New York.

Bill Merilees is an avid naturalist, photographer and author who lives in Nanaimo. He is presently working on a book on plants of British Columbia



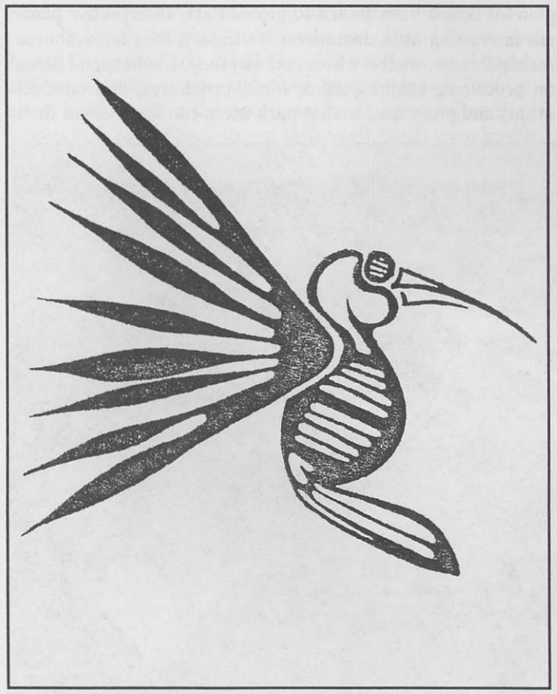
Welcome to New Members

August 2	Alan and Doreen Hodgson of Frost Avenue: interested in birds and flowers.
August 3	James, Susan and Hannah Farrell of Transit Road.
August 8	Wanda Crawford of Quadra Street: likes birds.
August 16	Lynn Kavanagh of Meridith Crescent: enjoys birding.
September 6	Nancy Dowd of Cumberland Road.
September 10	John and Eileen Husted of Montreal Street.
September 12	Fred King of Galiano Island: is interested in wildlife and all natural history.
September 13	Robert C. Austad from Shawnigan Lake: studies native B.C. flora and fauna, and wants to protect the environment for all people to see.
September 20	Klaus and Laura Kollenberg of Cedar Hill Road: have been interested in birds and herbs, but as they are new to B.C., everything is of interest.
September 23	Helen Butler of Fifth Street: is an environmental artist specializing in birds, land and seascapes.

Federation Of British Columbia Naturalists Camp

By Lyndis Davis

The FBCN Camp, held in Victoria May 12-19 at the University of Victoria, was an outstanding success thanks to the 70+ people who volunteered their time and expertise as leaders of trips, guides who took people to the place for a trip, guest speakers who gave slide shows, and people who made goodies and served juice in the evenings. There were 66 campers from around the province and they had nothing but praise for the program we provided.



Hummer. (Drawing: B. Rowles)

The programs made use of "outside" help as well as that of our members. Capital Regional District Parks put on the program at Witty's Lagoon; Thetis Lake Nature Sanctuary provided leaders at Thetis Lake; Arenia Research and Interpretation used their provincial park naturalists for programs at Goldstream and Sidney Spit; and Swan Lake naturalists gave a waterlife program. Naturalists from Duncan helped with the trip to the Ecological Reserve at Mount Tzouhalem and Cowichan Bay and the Royal British Columbia Museum provided guides for the native plant garden and the Living Land/Living Sea tour, and a leader for the trip to Botanical Beach.

Campers saw what a rich resource the area has in its parks--city, regional and provincial. About half the participants went to Fort Rodd Hill and Royal Roads, and some to the University Gardens to see the rhododendrons and to Ross Bay Cemetery for Heritage Trees--these last two trips put on by the respective societies. Swiftsure Tours and Seacoast Expeditions did trips in zodiacs to visit the islands off Oak Bay.

I would like to thank all those people who helped make the camp such a success, and especially Hank Vander Pol, who organized the trips; Wally McGregor, who organized the evening programs and saw the Campers off every morning; and Audrey Copping, who was in charge of registration. Their help was invaluable.

Both the FBCN and the VNHS Scholarship fund will benefit from the revenue generated by the camp.

Island View Beach! 800 Kilometres from Lake Louise

By Jim Mulchinock

The noisy ultra-light whines down the beach and I immediately think of toxic snapping turtles. Follow me for a bit; there *is* a connection to Island View Beach. A few years ago, I worked in a small office in Lake Louise, Alberta. Each day at coffee time (and beyond) my colleagues Ed and Liz and I would rail at rampant development in our national parks. Our favourite target was only five minutes up the road—Skiing Louise, one of the big three ski resorts entrenched in beautiful Banff.

Back then Skiing Louise had locked horns with Parks Canada (more recently, the Canadian Parks Service). Artificial snow making and a high speed quad chair lift were the issues of the day. A great idea on paper - whisk skiers up the mountain and scatter them evenly around on every slope. No lineups. No crowded slopes. Happy skiers. But a few glitches spoiled the idea: building the lifts and installing the snow making meant rearranging the fragile alpine landscape and altering the river drainage. So, over coffee, we preached to each other about the evils of greedy developers and how they threatened the 6,641 square kilometre wilderness of Banff National Park.

Then Ed transferred to Cornwall, Ontario. Weeks into his new job, we talked on the phone and he claimed that toxic waste disposal was the big issue in Cornwall. Snapping turtles were showing up dead.

"It's bad here," he lamented, "the turtle tissue is so contaminated that they can't dispose of the carcasses in a normal fashion." And then the kicker, "I just can't get excited about some ski lifts in Alberta anymore, when here they're treating wild turtle flesh as toxic waste."

Its a late Monday afternoon on the August long weekend at Island View Beach Regional Park. The air is hot and calm. The parking lots are slowly emptying. I stroll along the dyke built with clay and landfill, brush past the six foot Scotch broom, and catch my leg on some Canada thistle. Across Haro Strait, the sail boats and cabin cruisers are motoring back to port, their diesels cutting the still summer air. It sounds like Vancouver at 8:00 a.m. Monday mornings.

I climb down off the log horse jump and stroll across the Second World War berms built for target practise. From out of the north, an ultra-light motorized hang glider drones by within slingshot range, its small engine straining to keep the thing aloft. Within minutes a large twin engine seaplane roars by, barely 5 metres off the beach, and then banks eastward towards Sidney Island.

I head out onto the beach and walk back in front of the RV camp. A few owners are getting supper ready and the smell of barbecuing burgers fills the air. Some visitors have left their flotsam trail of lawn chairs, fire circle debris, cooler, beach toys, and garbage bags strewn in a rough line from grassy high ground to strand line. Dogs bark from the other side of the fence.

For a brief moment on the hot sand of Island View Beach, I share Ed's southern Ontario new-found perspective on environmental priorities in Canada. Lake Louise was never like this. The wilderness of Banff National Park is suddenly on the other side of the planet.

I have been involved with Capital Regional District (CRD) Parks for the last three months to write an interpretive plan for Island View Beach Regional Park. Interpretive plans are interesting little documents. In theory, they tell resource managers how, where, when, and why they should spend funds on producing exhibits, signs, films, brochures, and conduct events and programs, so that park users can learn about their natural heritage. CRD Parks, like most parks agencies, have noble and worthy goals, the chief one being "...to protect a system of diverse natural areas that will support appropriate recreational pursuits and which illustrate the natural characteristics of the region."

Island View Beach—new interpretive plan will tell the beach story. (Photo: Jim Mulchinock)

They are also supposed to provide means for visitors to learn about their natural environment. CRD staff are faced with the same management dilemmas encountered by park administrators from here to Banff and beyond: balancing use with preservation. But unlike the national parks, a small and overworked CRD Parks staff rides herd on 17 regional parks with a relatively small budget to do the job. Fierce pressure on the ecological integrity of each park comes from the outside, with Island View leading the way with its own complex problems.

In Banff National Park, the vast majority of visitors arriving in Lake Louise are there for one major reason: to stand at the shore of Lake Louise and marvel at the scene now famous on calendars and beer advertisements. Many stay to read the lakeshore exhibits. Most hurry on to drive up the Icefields Parkway and snap pictures of the Athabasca Glacier.

At Island View Beach Regional Park, nature appreciation isn't the only thing on the minds of park visitors. According to park surveys, visitors want to relax and sun tan first, beach comb second, sightsee third, picnic fourth, swim fifth, walk their dog sixth, and *then* study nature and bird watch. Naturalists visiting Island View Beach can find solace in knowing that the average visitor rates nature study ahead of playing games, horse riding, fishing, attending an event, rowing their boat, sailing, or sail boarding. The interpretive plan, once implemented, may move nature study up to the top of the list. Island View has never seen a regular interpretive program.

In Banff, the park's vast landscape (26,000 Island View Beach Regional Parks could fit inside Banff National Park) is still mostly wilderness. And while large mammals could use some buffer turf in the provincial lands surrounding Banff, wolves are coming back strong and the elk herds seem healthy.

At Island View, park managers face resource problems that can dwarf the problems faced by their counter parts in national parks. About 30 percent of the flora is introduced or exotic. Much of the former salt marsh is now introduced grassland. Conflicting recreational demands strain the fragile nature of the park. The saltmarsh mosquito, *Aedes dorsalis*, thrives in the drainage ditches, forcing officials to conduct an active mosquito control program. A large RV park sits between the two park parcels. A tattered land use history dating back to the turn of the century makes me wonder what portion of the parks 25.9 hectares is undisturbed and what isn't.

In 1989, faced with these obstacles, CRD Parks ventured out and asked for public input in deciding Island View Beach's future. A year later, they produced their first individual park management plan. CRD Parks management acknowledges that compromises were made by all user groups, reflecting widely divergent views. The plan addresses every issue from horse use to future land acquisition. While few CRD Parks staff claim the plan will solve every user conflict, each section identifies management intent. The highly readable document is a good model for subsequent plans.

Island View has another bright side. Late last spring, Dr. Robert Ogilvie showed me *Camissonia (Oenothera) contorta*. It took a while to find it; I almost stood on one before I spotted it. A dainty yellow flower with a thin stem, twisted pod evening-primrose is the rarest of Island View Beach's "rare 18" and the only record for Canada. As an annual, it survives by relying

Sand verbena rootstalk dwafs sand verbena, the plant. Note film canister for scale. (Photo: Jim Mulchinock)

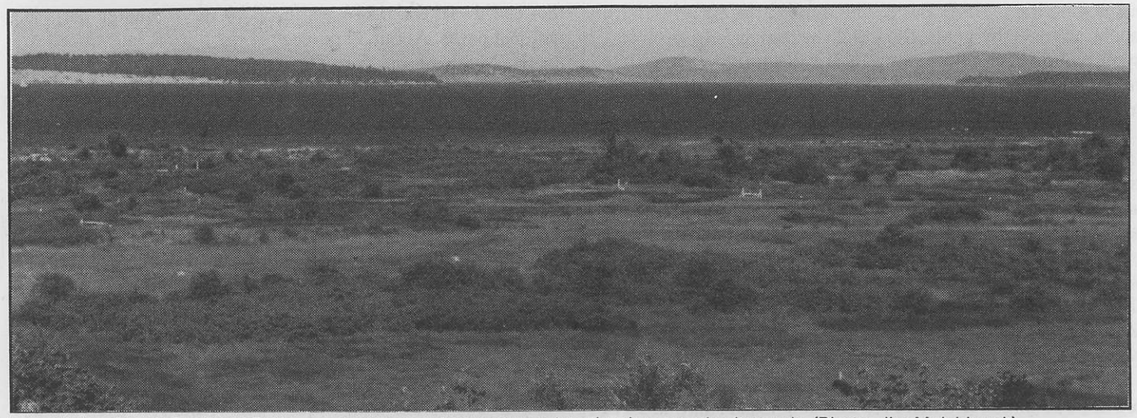
REPORT MARINE MAMMAL SIGHTINGS AND STRANDINGS TO:

380-1925 in the Victoria area

On the water: **VHF channel 68** to the vessel *Sundiver*

1-800-334-8832 toll-free anywhere in B.C.

All sightings, no matter how old, are useful for research purposes, and are put into a computer data base. Records are available to all researchers. When current local sightings of killer whales, or any unusual species, are reported promptly, researchers will try to respond to them. Please report date, time, location, a description of the animals, and number and direction of travel, as well as your name and phone number in case further information is required.



Island View Beach Regional Park—most visitors seldom venture into the dunes and salt marsh. (Photo: Jim Mulchinock)

totally on its seed bank buried in the top few inches of sandy soil. It's a year-to-year existence ! a hazardous existence. Three weeks later they finished their bloom and I couldn't find a trace of them any where. Ogilvie says "You could go several years without ever seeing it."

Near the foredune, we knelt to scrutinize a clump of sand verbena. I knew sand verbena well from my days as a park naturalist in Pacific Rim National Park. Our office was next door to the south Long Beach dunes and sand verbena was an old friend. But what Dr. Ogilvie showed me next was the botanical equivalent of Ripley's Believe It or Not. "How big do you think this root gets." he asks rhetorically.

"I have no idea," I said lamely, I'll guess about two feet long and a half inch wide?"

Wrong of course. "About the width of my forearm and about as long as your entire arm." exclaims Ogilvie.

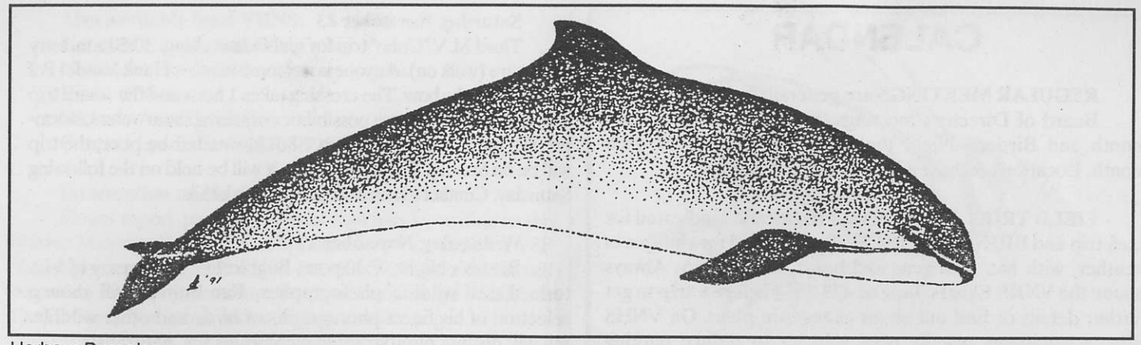
I was suspicious but he's the botanist. "We'll look at some later," he says reassuringly. I thought: Oooookay! Of course, he was right. Later, I stare dumbfounded at an old sand verbena root bigger than both our forearms. If you stumbled on this root washed up on a beach you'd swear it belonged to a thirty year old lodgepole pine, not a creeping sand plant with leaves only a couple inches across.

I write copious notes on sand verbena. It will be an easy winner when it comes time to talk plants with the park visitor. Island View Beach is shelter to one of the few accretion beaches on the peninsula. Sand erodes off Cowichan Head to the south and drifts with the long shore currents until it settles out along the coast from Island View to Cordova Spit. Sand verbena is a dune colonizer at Island View. With its elephantine root system and waxy leaves, it conserves moisture much like a camel. With its sticky hairs to trap sand grains to help anchor the plant, sand verbena is the main star in the dune succession process.

The next week, Dr. Adolf Ceska and Bruce Whittington also kindly tramp around the park with me in tow. By August I submit the first draft of my interpretive plan to CRD parks staff for preliminary approval. The plan proposes a number of options for low-cost, vandal-resistant, natural history signs, many of which will appear on a self-guiding trail. The signs will work overtime explaining the natural history to naturalists *and* sunbathers, beachcombers, picnickers, horse riders, and just about anyone else who wanders by.

I show an early draft to a colleague from Lake Louise. We walk around the park for an hour and I show him what CRD Parks management wrestles with on a daily basis. He is strangely silent about recent challenges in Banff. I drop him off at Swartz Bay for his 800 kilometre journey back to Lake Louise.

Jim Mulchinock is a Victoria-based interpretive consultant, writer, and desktop publisher. He recently returned to British Columbia looking to escape perpetual frostbite.



Harbour Porpoise.

Wanted: Information on Harbour Porpoises in British Columbia

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) recently reviewed a report on the status of the harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*). The author of the report, Dr. David Gaskin, recommended that both Pacific and Atlantic populations be listed as threatened. COSEWIC listed the Atlantic population as threatened, but was unable to list the B.C. population due to insufficient information. No directed studies on this species have ever been undertaken in British Columbia, and even basic information on distribution is largely lacking.

In order to prepare an updated report on this species in British Columbia, information on harbour porpoises is being compiled. Records of sightings, animals caught in fishing gear, and strandings, will be used to determine relative abundance, seasonal distribution, and causes of mortality. Examination of carcasses of stranded animals will provide information on age structure of the population, food habits, pollutant levels, and reproductive rates. Samples will also be collected for examination of potential genetic differentiation along the coast.

Members of the public and researchers working on or around the marine environment are requested to report sightings and strandings. Please report the date, time, location, type or description of the animals, number, direction of travel, and behaviour. Records can be mailed or phoned in (toll-free in B.C. to 1-800-665-5939, or in the Victoria area, to 380-1925).

Harbour porpoises are the smallest cetacean found in B.C., reaching a maximum length of about 1.8 m, and a maximum weight of about 90 kg. These animals are typically found in groups of one or two, but occasionally groups of up to 20 animals are seen. They are a coastal species, usually staying in water less than 200 m in depth. Harbour porpoises are very shy of boats, and usually surface inconspicuously, rarely splashing at the surface like Dall's porpoise or Pacific white-sided dolphins.

The back of the harbour porpoise is a dark brown or gray colour (often appearing black). Their sides are a lighter gray, which fades gradually to white on the belly. The dorsal fin is small and generally triangular, and curves back slightly more than that of Dall's porpoise, but is not falcate [sickle-shaped] as in white-sided dolphins.

Records of other species of whales, porpoises, dolphins, elephant seals or fur seals (dead or alive) are also requested, and are entered into a computer data base available to all interested researchers. This research is being undertaken on behalf of COSEWIC by researchers working through Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria, and the Marine Mammal Research Group. For more information, phone 380-1925 (fax 380-1206), or write to the Marine Mammal Research Group, Box 6244, Victoria, B.C. V8P 5L5.

CALENDAR

REGULAR MEETINGS are generally held as follows: Board of Directors meetings the first Tuesday of each month and Birders' Night the fourth Wednesday, of each month. Locations are given in the calendar listings.

FIELD TRIPS. Please meet at the location indicated for each trip and BRING A LUNCH. Be equipped for changes in weather, with hat, rain gear and boots, if necessary. **Always phone the VNHS Events Tape at 479-2054 before a trip** to get further details or find out about changes in plans. On VNHS trips, participants usually pool vehicles to reduce parking problems and costs. The Board suggests that fuel costs be shared with the driver.

NOVEMBER EVENTS

Sunday, November 3
Field Trip to Cordova Spit. Meet at KOA campground at 9:00 a.m. Leader MikeEdgell (721-5116).

Tuesday, November 5
Board of Directors Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Clifford Carl Reading Room, Cunningham Building, University of Victoria.

Tuesday, November 12
General Meeting. NEW TIME 7:30 p.m., Begbie 159, University of Victoria. Ted Davis, a doctoral student at the University, will present "*Candominiums* in Carmanah: the natural history and conservation of salamanders". He will describe some poorly known aspects of the lifestyles of these fascinating forest creatures, and outline new ideas coming from his research in Carmanah. Salamanders are important, but often overlooked, components of old growth forests on Vancouver Island. Come and find out what its like living without lungs.

Sunday, November 17
Seabird Workshop in the Field. Meet at Clover Point at 9:00 a.m. This land-based workshop will focus on identification of marine birds, discuss seabird ecology and participate in a seawatch. It is co-sponsored by our society and the Western Institute of Global Studies (WIGS). If interested, call Mike Shepard (388-4174) or Mary-Anne Montgomery (380-7152). Cost $10 for VNHS or WIGS members.

Monday, November 18
Introduction to Neotropical Birding. This three lecture/workshop session (November18, 25 and December 2) will focus on birds of Mexico and Costa Rica with topics including identification, ecology and resources available to the travelling birder. A great course for anyone planning a trip south. For more information contact Mike Shepard (388-4174) or Mary-Anne Montgomery (380-7152). Co-sponsored by VNHS and WIGS. Cost $25 for VNHS and WIGS members.

Saturday, November 23
Third M.V."Coho" trip for seabird watching. 10:30 a.m. ferry departure (walk on). Anyone is welcome to meet Hank Vander Pol to bird from the bow. The crossing takes 1 hour and the return trip is at 2:00 p.m. There are possibilities of seeing shearwaters, storm-petrels, fulmars or phalaropes. Should weather be poor, the trip will be on Sunday. If still poor, then it will be held on the following Saturday. Contact Hank at 658-1924 for details.

Wednesday, November 27
Birder's Night. 7:30 p.m., Begbie 159, University of Victoria. Local wildlife photographer, **Ken Bowen**, will show a selection of his finest photographs of birds and other wildlife. He will discuss photographic techniques for naturalists.

Saturday, November 30
Gull Workshop. Meet at Freeman King Nature Centre, Goldstream Park, 10:00 a.m. Sharpen your skills for the Christmas Bird Count by learning to tell the confusing gulls apart. Leader Dave Fraser will do just that.

DECEMBER EVENTS

Tuesday, December 3
Board of Directors Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Clifford Carl Reading Room, Cunningham Building, University of Victoria.

Tuesday, December 10
Christmas Members' Night. 7:30 p.m., Begbie 159, University of Victoria. A repeat of the very successful members' night with six new 10-minute presentations from members on interesting destinations and interesting topics. If you have a presentation, contact Bev Glover (721-1476). See you there.

Saturday, December 14
Victoria Christmas Bird Count. Mark this date. If you have already participated, you will be contacted. If you wish to participate, contact David Pearce (477-2664) by November 30, or sign up at Birder's Night. Count Summary and Social to be held 7:30 p.m. at the Gordon Head United Church, 4201 Tyndall. See article this issue.

Saturday, December 21
Sooke Christmas Bird Count. To volunteer or get details, contact Mike Shepard (388-4174).

Sunday, December 29
Bamfield Christmas Bird Count. To volunteer or get details, contact Alan Burger (479-9833).

BULLETIN BOARD

Christmas Cards for Sale
The VNHS will have Christmas cards from CNF in November. There is a larger selection than in previous years and they are on recycled paper. Please use cards that will help your Society and the environment.

Also available from VHNS:
National Geographic Bird Guide
Naturalist Guide to the Victoria Region
Birds of Victoria
Victoria Area check lists
Contact Lyndis Davis (477-9952).

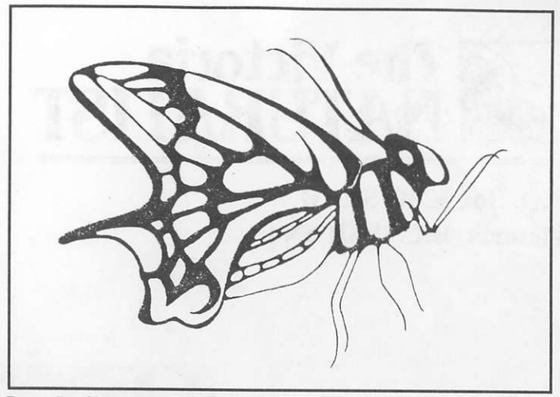
Information on Harbour Porpoises Wanted
Please report past and present sightings by writing to the Marine Mammal Research Group, Box 6244, Victoria, B.C., V8P 5L5, or phone toll-free in B.C. to 1-800-665-5939. Information will be part of a Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada study. For more information, see article page 13.

Volunteers Needed
Martindale Survey continues. Please volunteer for Saturday mornings, 8:00 to 11:00 a.m. until the end of the year. Contact Eric Walters or Darren Copley (385-0927 or 479-9879). For more information, see past Bulletin Boards.

Program Chair Needed
An opening on the Board is waiting for a member wishing to contribute. Job will involve setting the General Meeting program, contacting potential speakers, and booking rooms for the meetings. Contact Mike McGrenere (658-8624).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SLIDE PHOTOGRAPHERS -
Fall Program starts October1,1991. Meetings incorporate slide viewing, speakers, educational programs, field trips and member participation. Club meetings first and third Tuesdays of each month. 8:00 p.m. At Windsor Park Pavilion, Oak Bay. For further information please contact: W. Wayne Maloff, President, Greater Victoria Color Film Study Group, 479-6494.



Butterfly. (Drawing: B. Rowles)

HIKING TOUR -
The Outdoor Club of Victoria has arranged a three-week hiking and natural history tour to Arizona and California. The bus tour, which is planned for February 22 to March 15, includes stops at Death Valley, the Superstition Mountains, the Saguaro National Monument near Tucson, the Kitt Peak National Observatory in the Quinlan Mountains of the Sonoran Desert, and Palm Springs, California. For further information contact Stan Buxcey of the Outdoor Club at 385-7501, or Capital Tours at 384-1432.

Christmas Bird Count— December 14, 1991

By David Pearce

The Victoria Christmas Bird Count (C.B.C.) will be held on Saturday, December 14, 1991. The purpose of the C.B.C is to count birds observed in the Greater Victoria area, within a 15-mile diameter circle centred on the intersection of Grange Road and Jasmine Avenue in Marigold. The circle is divided into 22 land areas and two ocean areas, each having an area leader.

Victoria Natural History Society members are encouraged to participate in the Christmas count in one of two ways, either as an active "counter" in the field, or as a feeder watcher.

If you participated as a "counter" in the Christmas count last year, you will be contacted and asked if you would like to participate again this year. If you did not take part in the Victoria count last year but would like to participate, please contact David Pearce, Count Coordinator, at 477-2664 by November 30, or sign up at the November Birder's Night.

If you have a feeder in your yard and wish to participate as a feeder watcher, simply watch your feeder on December 14 and record all bird species and number of individuals of those species. Mail or bring your list into the Field-Naturalist/Swiftsure Tours, 1241 Broad Street, Victoria, V8W 2A4. Please put your name, address and telephone number on the list. Your report must be received by Friday, December 20 in order to be included in the count records.

If you see a rare bird at your feeder on December 14 (see the Victoria Area Checklist of Birds or last year's Christmas count results in the March/April issue of the Victoria Naturalist to find out what is rare in December), please phone your sighting immediately to the Rare Bird Alert at 592-3381 and leave a message on the tape.

After the count we are planning to hold a meeting at the Gordon Head United Church, 4201 Tyndall, starting at 7:30 p.m. This will be the same format as a regular Birder's Night, where coffee, tea and biscuits will be served, and we will discuss the day's count results. Holding a dinner after the count has been discontinued as it has proven to be too much to organize with less than satisfactory results after a long day in the field.

The Victoria NATURALIST

Second Class Mail Reg. 6428

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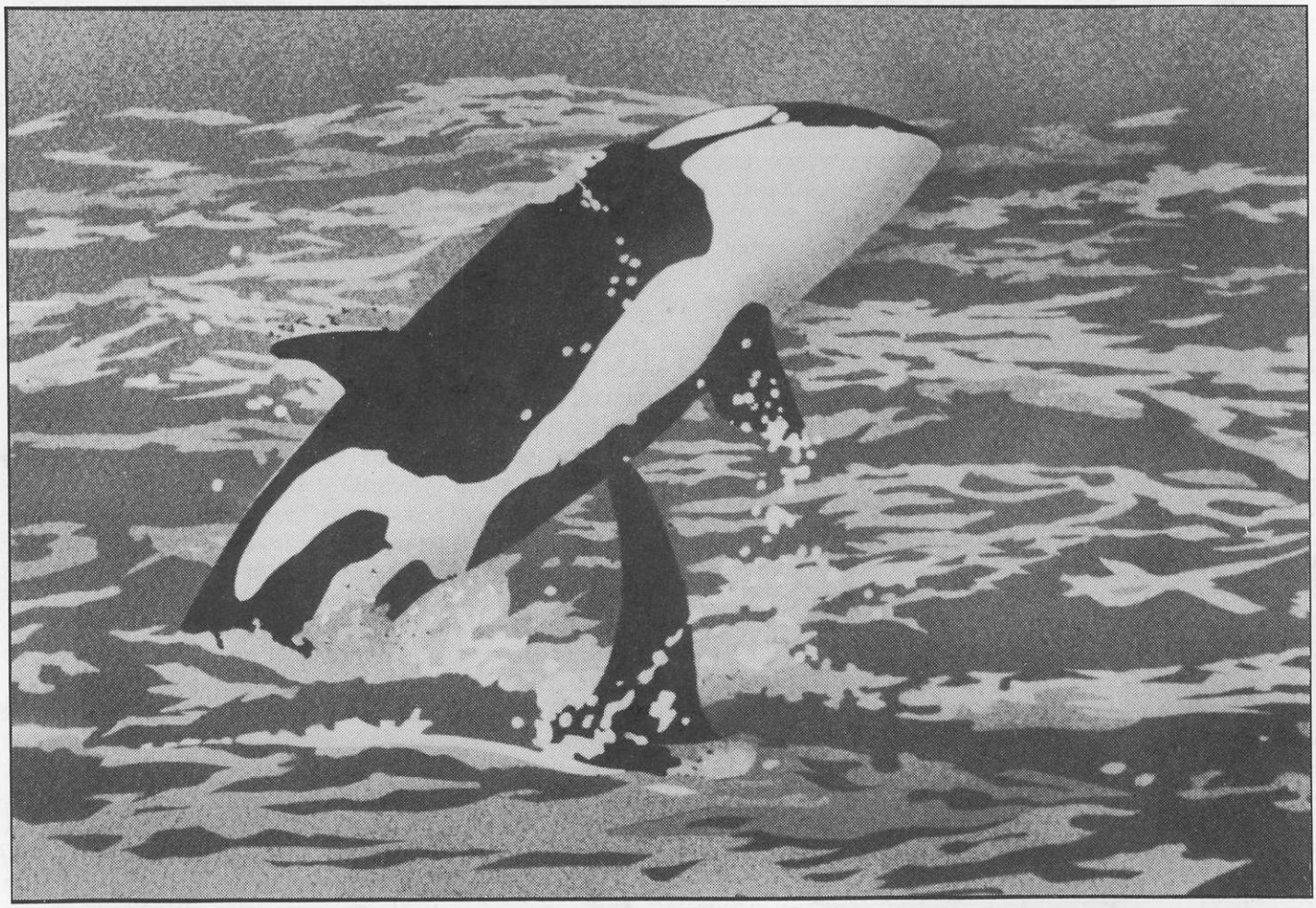
Victoria, B.C. V8R 6N4

Darren Copley,
4760 Beaverdale Road,
VICTORIA,, B.C., V8Z 6K2



Airbrushed artwork. (Bruce Rowles)