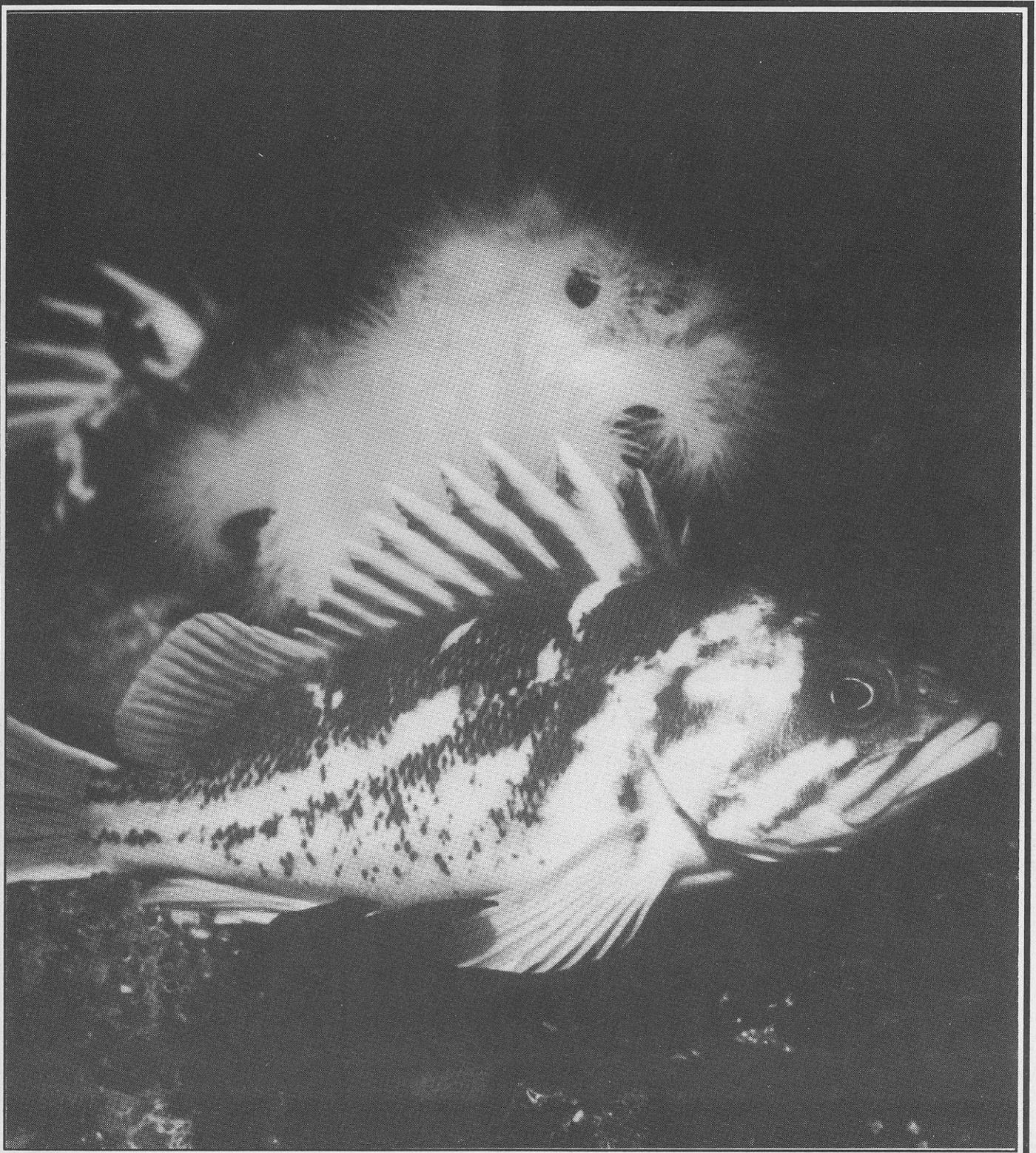


# The Victoria NATURALIST

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# The Victoria NATURALIST

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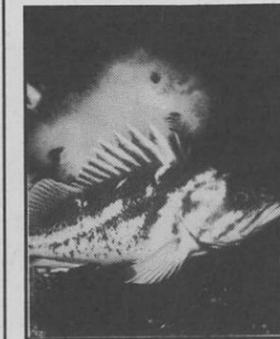
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## COVER



The cover photo featured in this issue is an excellent underwater shot of a copper rockfish (*Sebastes caurinus*) taken by Andrew M. Fedoruk. Behind the rockfish is a plumose anemone (*Metridium senile*).

The photograph is appropriate because there is a growing interest in marine natural history within the society. A VNHS subgroup has been formed and held their first get-together on the 24th April. This group plans to hold regular "marine nights" on the same lines as our popular "birder's nights." All marine enthusiasts are welcome—Phil Lambert's article has further details. Also take note of marine events coming up in this issue's Bulletin Board.



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# Ritual Sunrise

by Dannie Carsen

Taiwan was the first country I visited in my year of travelling. When I stepped off the plane, I was hit by the heat and humidity. Culture shock emanated from Chinese signs. I slept until 11 p.m. and staggered out of bed to get some food at the market below the hotel.



The next day, I met up with Yen, the nephew of a friend in Vancouver. He introduced me to his University friends. The group decided to include me on a trip to the hills.

Alishan – the name rolled mistily off the lips . . . I looked forward to travelling with friends, finding some cool air, and seeing the sunrise over the Jade Mountains. We got the morning train to Chiayi from Kaohsiung, a port city on the west coast. The next day, we took the steam train on narrow gauge tracks to Alishan. What a ride! More people were packed into a small car than you could imagine. The view from the swaying door-

Alishan – the name rolled mistily off the lips . . .

way entertained me. Lush green vegetation opened occasionally to show a group of houses. Water buffalo stood in the field and red flowers crimsoned the trackside.

Up and up and up, I held the railing firmly in the doorway. I watched the vegetation change to the pines of the temperate forest. It took seven hours for the train to reach Alishan. Despite our weariness, we posed for a photograph in front of our little excursion hotel to record our arrival in the mountains.

After a supper of noodle soup, rice, vegetables, and a chicken stir-fry, we retired to the rooms. Boys were in one room, girls in another. We met in the girls' room for a game of Mah Jong and I won 20NT dollars! They probably let me win so we could go to sleep. Boys were supposed to get tatami mats, girls the beds. After negotiation, couples paired up on tatami and amid much giggling from the other room, we slept.

We were awakened by the hotel at 4 a.m. to view the sunrise. In Taiwan, it was a serious ritual. There was a quiet, slow walk in the grey dawn to the lookout. We all stood around amid the clicking of shutters and admired first light. It was compelling to watch the greyness change to greener hues as the light warmed the hills.

It's funny, isn't it, how I needed to travel halfway around the world to put an exotic cast on that sunrise. The strong need to travel, experience, see the other part of the world was in me. Adventure, new ideas, different cultures, and changing landscape were the goals of my twenties. I fulfilled them in my

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trip, but a nagging doubt about my ability to enjoy that sunrise haunted me home to Canada.

When I arrived back in Vancouver in August, I was exultant. Victoria International Airport almost inspired me to kiss the ground. Yet, it was a good few years before I managed to capture some of the magic of travel where I lived.

Now, I think it's important to try and experience the dawn every day in some small way. I feel the first bits of light strike my face as I walk the oceanfront path in Beacon Hill Park. Sometimes I take coffee and go down to Clover Point for a wide

angled view of first light.

I like to get up very early in the spring. Birdwatching on Mount Tolmie beckons me before sunrise. Bewick's wrens, orange-crowned warblers and rufous-sided towhees sing. The carpet of fresh morning air about my face lures me. Walk down the trail among Garry oaks and listen for wandering songbirds. The glowing light illuminates the particles of air dancing above my head. It renews as if I travelled, escaping for a few moments from the day-to-day grind. It feels as if I chopped off a piece of root, grabbed a bit of the day I wasn't expecting. It is powerful.



Now, I think it's important to try and experience the dawn every day in some small way.

# Ritual Sunrise

cinders in my hair on the narrow-gauge tracks  
 climbing Formosa's spine  
 apple-pear sleep in excursion hotels in the pines  
 awakening to see the dawn  
 corralling hills in grey-black shadows  
 trees emerge green  
 slivers of light spray pink striated sky  
 light banishes emptiness warms colours  
 half  
 three-quarters  
 full flaming orb over hills too bright now, we shade  
 eyes and watch faces  
 trying to disguise regret

cool air brushes my face with Mount Tolmie morning  
 hillside oak grey shapes frame cityviews  
 air glows with early light  
 path runs down the rocky edge  
 caught by hummingbird whispering love songs  
 warblers and wrens enraptured  
 voices claiming ownership  
 go past houses silent with morning  
 listen. fluted voices, audible only to bird women  
 waiting for arias  
 moments stolen from timekeeper  
 before light transforms me

Dannie Carsen

## Further Bird Notes from Southern Vancouver Is.

By J.A. Munro

This article is reprinted with permission from *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, October, 1925 Vol. XXXIX, No 7. Published by Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club.

### Glauco-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*)

On July 23rd, 1924, through the courtesy of Dr. Chester Brown, of the William Head Quarantine Station, I was taken on the launch *Evelyn* to the Race Rocks, some two miles off Rocky Point. The launch stopped fifty yards off shore and we rowed to the largest of the rocks north of the light station. There was a decided swell on the dead calm sea, but a better day could not have been chosen, clear and hot and still—with a wind it would have been impossible to land.

The island on which we landed is roughly an acre in extent, there is no soil or vegetation and the jumbled rocks are worn smooth by the surf that, during winter gales, probably sweeps clear over the summit. This is the highest of the Race Rocks, excepting the one on which the light station is built, all the others are submerged during high tides. It was found to be occupied by a colony of Glauco-winged Gulls estimated at seventy-five pairs, and a few Pigeon Guillemots. As we approached in the dinghy, the former rose and circled the island, rising higher after we landed. Elsewhere, nesting gulls of the same species were observed to show much more solicitude for their eggs than did these birds for their young.

Young birds were found in various stages of development from downys only a few days old to half-feathered fledglings, the majority being about four weeks old. Only the youngest downys were in nests; older birds crouched motionless in the numerous rock crevices usually with head lowered as far as possible or else thrust into a cranny too small to admit the body. After being banded they would run over the rocks to again crouch next to the first obstacle encountered. When handled, these youngsters cried and bit and invariably regurgitated the contents of their gullets, which consisted of young herring.

To band young gulls with speed and comfort, two operators are required, one to hold the bird while the other adjust the band. Thirty-six birds were banded, probably a third of the juvenile population.

Some nests were fairly substantial and all were composed of fine twigs, grass and moss; this material having probably been carried from the mainland, two miles distant, for there is no vegetation on the rock. Three nests containing eggs were noted 1/1, 1/2, 1/3.

Two Pigeon Guillemots flew on to the rock several times and several others swam amongst the kelp off shore. We were unable to find either eggs or downy young.

### Whistling Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*) (now Tundra Swan.)

A considerable migration of whistling swans took place during the latter part of October, 1924, reports of their occur-

rence in numbers being received from districts where swans had not been observed for many years. A still larger migration was reported from points on the mainland coast, notably at Sea and Lulu Islands, where the total was variously estimated at from two hundred and fifty to eight hundred individuals.

### Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*)

It has been known for some years that a band of Trumpeter Swans winter regularly on a group of lakes on Vancouver Island, and in recent years a Migratory Bird warden has been detailed to guard these birds. No casualties have been reported since this special protection was instituted. During the past five years the number of birds in the flock has varied from six to eighteen, but last winter (1924-1925) the band numbered twenty-eight—fourteen adults and fourteen cygnets. The lake most favoured by the swans is at an altitude of eight hundred feet above sea level from which it is distant about thirty miles. Of the type characteristic of Vancouver Island, with cold, deep, clear water, it is hemmed in by steep mountains covered with dense coniferous forest. Red cedar predominated along the lower levels and meets willow thickets and alder at the water's edge. The chief feeding ground is a shallow lagoon lying in a wide, marshy flat upon which is an almost impenetrable growth of willow and alder. This lagoon is fed by a small creek with sufficient current to ensure open water over the feeding ground even during cold winter where the lake itself freezes. Splatter-dock, *Nymphaea*, grows luxuriantly and in the summer the broad, fleshy leaves cover much of the surface with an over-lapping pattern. No doubt the large seeds of this plant are an important item in the winter diet of the swans. Other water plants such as milfoil and various potamogetons do not make vigorous growth, possibly because of the low summer temperature of the water.

In the summer of 1919 a pair of Trumpeter Swans nested on the shore of this lagoon and raised two young. It has been reported that one of the pair was crippled and, being unable to leave its wintering ground, induced a mate to remain behind and breed—a story denied by the lucky discoverer of the nest who stated that the crippled bird had been shot the previous year. This man accompanied me on a trip to the lake several years ago and pointed out the spot where the nest had been situated, on a sandy point, surrounded by willow, at the junction of two arms of the lagoon. He told of paddling his canoe past the sitting bird within a few yards on numerous occasions and at the same time noting the mate on the water a short distance away. Later in the summer, he several times saw two downy young accompanied by one or both parents.

Early in November, 1924, two adult Trumpeter Swans alighted on Beaver lake, part of Elk Lake Game Reserve, near Victoria. On this secluded lake, screened from observation by thick forest growth, these birds tarried until a severe cold spell (December 15th to 26th) covered the lake with ice and forced them to visit the larger, adjacent, Elk lake, where they remained until February 27th, usually frequenting the marshy south shore, in plain view from the West Saanich Road. Sometimes they could be seen feeding—with long necks submerged the entire length, perhaps dredging for the fallen seeds of the abundant yellow pond lily—but more often standing motionless in the shallows or asleep on the water at a safe distance from shore, with head and neck folded neatly over the back. Frequently I stalked them, screened

for a greater part of the distance by thick brush, but could not get closer than one-hundred-and-twenty-five yards. Once I had left the cover they sighted me at once and paddled out two hundred yards or so, there to turn and swim slowly back and forth parallel with the shore. On one occasion, after I had made a long stalk, and taken a number of pictures, both birds rose slowly, with much splashing, and flapped low over the water to the opposite shore, but generally they showed no particular alarm on being approached.

Usually while swimming the neck is held rigidly at right angles to the body, but at times there is a swaying movement forward and back in unison with the paddle stroke; the latter made visible by the regular appearance and submersion of the knobby heel-joint, so conspicuous against the white flanks. This neck swaying was performed first by one bird then the other.

During two months acquaintance with these birds, not once was heard the famous "brassy" trumpet call so often referred to in literature, nor have I heard it elsewhere—in my experience the Trumpeter Swan has been a relatively silent bird. Occasionally a three note call was given, the first two, slightly guttural, being introductory to the third, which is a sustained composite note, first deep and mellow, then rising crescendo—this with great carrying power but seemingly no louder at two hundred yards than at half a mile. Syllabifying bird voices is most unsatisfactory and the results usually intelligible only to their author so the following is submitted with apologies: *ugh-ugh-aw-r-r-r-r-h*. Sometimes the last composite note is given without introduction, at other times the introductory *ugh* is uttered four to five times in succession without the culmination sustained note. To me, the performance resembles Canada Goose talk on a magnified scale.

### Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) (now Common Snipe - *G. gallinago*.)

Wilson's Snipe were fairly abundant during the past winter (1924-1925) and in the cold weather of late December a number congregated about a ditch containing a little open water supplied from the Colquitz Pheasant Farm. Through the interest of Game Warden Cummins, in charge of the Farm, it was possible to band nine of these birds. Mr. Cummins captured them without difficulty by simply placing, over a portion of the ditch, a partridge net into which the birds walked at dusk.

### Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*)

Abundant during migration, much less common in winter and a scarce breeder. Two immature males were taken in quail

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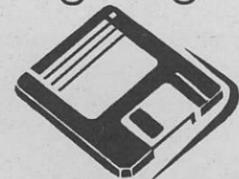
traps on January 28th, 1925. One had torn to pieces six captured quail but no part of the birds had been eaten; the other had been attracted by an Oregon Towhee, the only bird in this particular trap. This had been killed and eaten.

## Colonial Waterbird Society and Pacific Seabird Group

A joint meeting between the Colonial Waterbird Society and Pacific Seabird Group will be held at the Victoria Conference Centre, in Victoria, BC, 8-12 November, 1995. The theme of the meeting is "Behavioural Mechanisms of Population Regulation". Three days of scientific paper and poster sessions are planned. Plenary addresses by world renowned scientists will kick off each day. A special meeting on Marbled Murrelets will be held during the conference and several symposia are planned. Outstanding speakers, breathtaking scenery, great birding opportunities and terrific field trips will make this a memorable conference. If I have not convinced you yet, then give me a call at 604-946-8546 or e-mail at [butlerr@cwsvan.dots.doe.ca](mailto:butlerr@cwsvan.dots.doe.ca).

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# Book Review

by **Connie Hawley**

*A Birder's Guide to Churchill*

by **Bonnie Chartier**

American Birding Association, 1994, 3rd edition, wire-O binding with wrap-around cover. \$14.95

Churchill Manitoba, our most accessible sub-arctic community, has been a mecca for naturalists for many years. Coniferous forests, tundra and marine ecosystems all converge here, providing perfect breeding conditions during the short summer season. At the peak of the spring migration, in late May and early June, birds from the Atlantic and Pacific flyways can be seen here as well as those moving up the Central flyway. The concentrations of birds are spectacular; their colourful spring plumage a delight. Birding in the Churchill area is a thrilling experience.

Bonnie Chartier, the author and Churchill's very knowledgeable and well respected naturalist, is owner-operator of a nature tour company *Churchill Wilderness Encounters*. Her love for the area and concern for the fragile land and its inhabitants is evident throughout the book. She warns readers not to walk across the Tundra on cold days as the bird's eggs can chill in a few minutes if a bird is flushed from its nest; and to take special care while stepping on the higher spots in the marshes, as most nests are placed in the little mounds of vegetation. She co-authored the first edition of the Guide in 1983 with the late Jim Lane.

Since the first edition, five more birds have been added to the bar-graph list of regulars, now at 172; and fifty more to the "possible" list, now at 109. Two more birding areas are covered in detail and lists of amphibians, mammals, butterflies and moths have been added along with the plants of Churchill.

The book is beautifully and carefully written. Bar-graphs show the seasonal occurrence and abundance of all regularly

## Welcome New Members

**February 10, 1995**

**Jonathan Grant**, of Salt Spring Island: enjoys wildlife photography, birds and mammals.

**Cathy Reader**, of Shelbourne Street: interested in birds, reptiles and amphibians and photography.

**February 27, 1995**

**Benjamin McLean**, of Salt Spring Island: enjoys bird watching and ocean studies.

**Correction**

In the March/April *Victoria Naturalist*. The first name under Welcome New Members should read M. Joan Falkner not John Falkner.

occurring bird species and whether they nest in the area. There is also information about the history and geography of Churchill, how to get there, where to stay, where to eat, what to see, what to wear, weather conditions and insect pests. There is detailed information about each of the best birding areas with good maps and directions about what to look for each step of the way. The book is well illustrated with photographs of Churchill, excellent coloured photographs and beautiful pen and ink drawings, some by Keith Taylor, of the birds which are commonly seen there.

When you go to Churchill, be sure to put this neat little Field Guide in your pack. It will make a rewarding experience even more enjoyable.

## An Embryonic Marine Night

by **Phil Lambert**

On Monday March 20th a group of people met to discuss the formation of a Natural History Society subgroup, interested in fostering an appreciation of all aspects of our marine environment. We tentatively decided to hold a "Marine Night" on the fourth Monday of the month beginning on the 24th April. Each meeting will feature a speaker, discussion or workshop about some marine topic.

We discussed the possibility of organizing baseline studies at a series of locations in the lower Vancouver Island region, both intertidal and subtidal. These would be permanent transects which would supply long term data for measuring changes in flora and fauna. People with marine biology and SCUBA experience are encouraged to join the group to share their experiences and knowledge. We may also start a "Junior Marine Biologist" chapter aimed at getting young people interested and involved, through field trips and workshops. Dr. Bill Austin of the Cowichan Valley Naturalist's Society has suggested that we form a link with that organization.

If you feel that a group like this is long overdue and you would like to take part, to either share your knowledge or to gain some, give Yves Parizeau a call at 592-7441 and express your interest.

We will try to hold a Marine Night at 7:30 pm on the 4th Monday of each month (unless it falls on a holiday) from September to May. Initially, the meetings will be held at the Swan Lake Nature Centre. Archipelago Marine Research has also kindly offered to let us use their boardroom if we need it. When this report was written in early April our plan was to have Dr. Bill Austin, Cowichan Bay Maritime Centre speak to our group on April 24 about his experience in organizing a group of volunteers to do intertidal surveys.

In May we will meet on Monday the 29th. Phil Lambert of the Royal BC Museum will speak on marine biological diversity.

Title: "Out of sight, out of mind - life beneath the sea."  
Date: Monday 29 May 1995. Time: 7:30 p.m. Place: Swan Lake Nature Centre

*Philip Lambert is Head of Invertebrate Unit at the Royal B.C. Museum. If you have any questions on marine invertebrates you can telephone him at the museum at 387-6513 or fax him at 387-5360.*

## Black-headed Grosbeak Survey, Greater Victoria – June 1-8, 1994

by **Michael Carson**

### Background

Black-headed Grosbeak (BHGR) is indicated as an uncommon summer breeding species in the Southeastern Vancouver Island checklist (Gates and Taylor, 1989). It overwinters in Mexico. The species breeds in open deciduous vegetation, near surface water, and, as such, is found in the checklist area primarily in the more extensive lowland parts around Cowichan Bay and Duncan rather than in the Victoria area.

Within Greater Victoria, regular reports of BHGR exist for the Blenkinsop Lake area, especially on Lochside Trail to the north of the lake, but elsewhere observations have been spotty. Up to six singing male BHGR were frequently observed on (or from) this part of Lochside Trail in the summer of 1993, and over the years the Blenkinsop Lake area has provided an easily accessible venue for birders wishing to enjoy the colour-

## Urban Wildlands Conference

The Sea-to-Sea Greenbelt Society is hosting a one-day conference on Urban Wildlands on Saturday May 27, 1995 at 9.00 a.m. in the Begbie Building (Room 159) at the University of Victoria.

The conference, co-sponsored by the Sierra Club (Victoria Group) and the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, will explore the merits of different forms of protection of urban wildlands, with specific reference to the Sooke Hills and the Greater Victoria Water District surplus lands.

The conference will feature case studies of success and failure in other areas of the Pacific Northwest presented by various speakers, including ecologist Chris Pielow and water conservation expert Larry Farwell. The opening address will be given by Robert Bateman.

To assist in assessing numbers those planning to attend are asked to preregister by phoning the Sea-to-Sea Greenbelt Society (380-3098). Admission is by donation.

There is also an art show and auction, and a reception, on Friday 26th May, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the Fourth Floor Galleries of the Eaton Centre. Contact Dr Saul Arbess (work phone 370-3384; work fax 370-3660) for further details.

All members of the Society are encouraged to attend what promises to be a timely and informative exchange of ideas on this important issue.

Please see the January/ February issue of the *Victoria Naturalist* for background material on the Sea-to-Sea Greenbelt Proposal.

ful plumage and even more colourful song of this species.

The mixed hedgerow-tree habitat presently enjoyed by the grosbeaks and other species along this part of Lochside Trail is threatened, however, by plans for a combined equestrian, pedestrian and cycle artery for through traffic along the trail using a proposed bridge over Blenkinsop Lake. Ultimately, as this artery grows in popularity, widening of the trail will become essential in order to allow safe coexistence of all the different types of through traffic. Such widening will thin the hedgerow vegetation to a point where it may no longer provide sufficient cover for nesting species such as the grosbeaks.

With this perspective, it seemed appropriate to the Parks and Conservation Committee of the Society to undertake a survey of BHGR during the breeding season throughout all likely habitats in the Greater Victoria area. The purpose of the survey was to determine the number of BHGR present during the breeding period and their distribution. This would permit more accurate assessment of the importance of the Blenkinsop-Lochside Trail population.

### The Survey

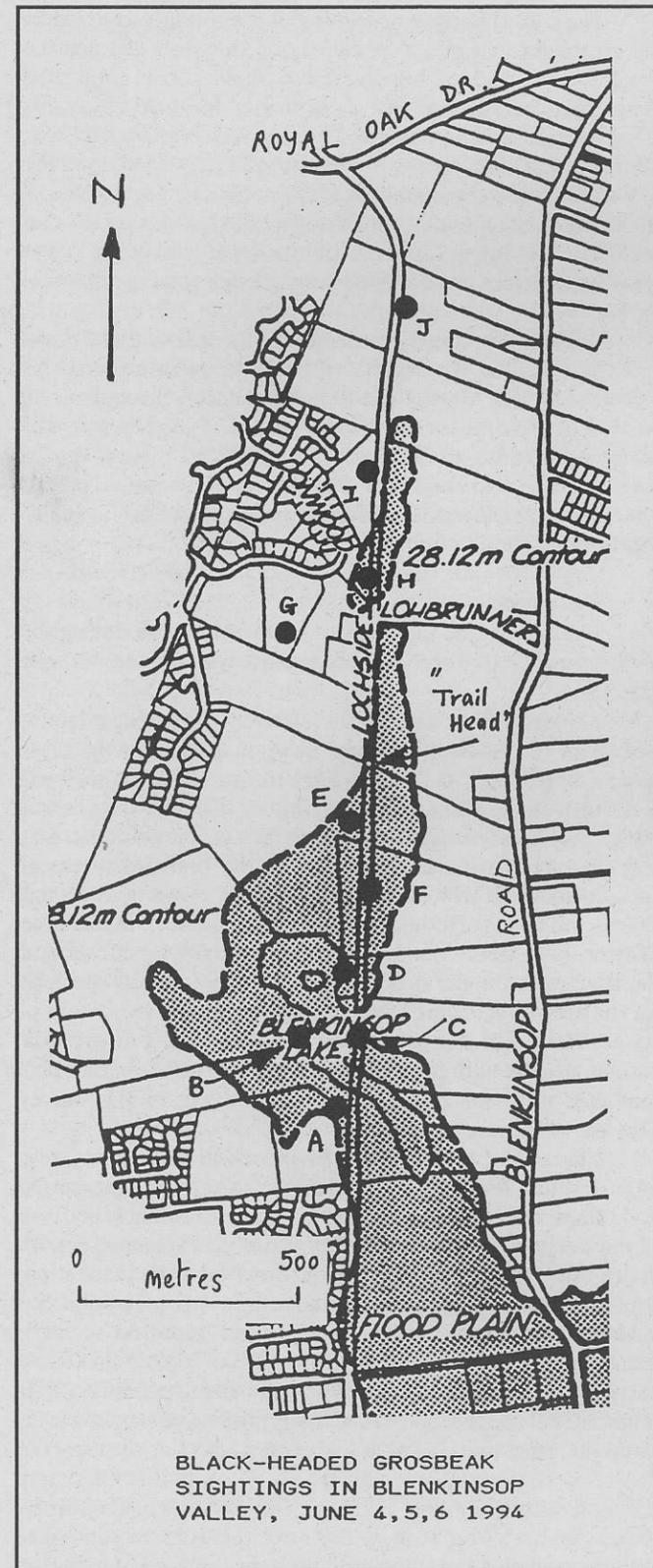
The survey was undertaken by 18 volunteers during the period June 1 to June 8. This period was chosen for two reasons.

The first is that BHGR is a relatively late spring migrant, and, prior to this time, it seems likely that some of the birds observed are simply passing through the area. This suspicion is confirmed by the absence of observations in early June in areas where BHGR were seen during May. In fact, it is now clear that migrants are moving through even in the first two weeks of June, as up to 50 BHGR have been observed on both Mount Tolme and Mount Douglas on days after "fallouts" at this time (Taylor, 1995, pers. comm.). This has led to reclassification of the species as "moderately common" on the revised checklist for the area (Gates and Taylor, 1994) in the first two weeks of June. These fallouts are almost always in open Garry Oak habitat, usually hilltop locations, rather than the riparian bottomlands used for breeding and the object of this survey (Taylor, 1995, pers. comm.).

The second point is that experience with previous surveys indicated that the number of BHGR heard during the spring and summer decreased steadily over time, presumably because of the decline in courtship songs during the summer as both males and females become more involved with incubation, brooding and feeding of young. Indeed, breeding among some birds may start quite early: David Fraser reported seeing a female grosbeak on Lochside Trail south of Martindale Road carrying a caterpillar in her bill as early as May 13 in 1994! It is hard to believe that she was actually feeding young, however, given the usual time lag of at least two weeks between start of nest construction and hatching of eggs. Perhaps this was simply part of courtship feeding. A female carrying flies in her bill was seen at Rithet's Bog on June 26, 1993; this is more consistent with the view that breeding took place in early-mid June.

The various observations above indicate that it is possible that both breeding birds and migrants are present during the first week of June but probably only breeding birds in the lower riparian habitats.

The survey was not restricted to a specific day. Observers were free to choose whichever day was convenient. The only



disadvantage of this multi-day approach is if there is inter-area movement of grosbeaks during the week allowing the same bird to be counted more than once. It was assumed that the risk of this was minimal, given that the birds should be establishing and using territories by this time.

In addition to this survey of specific areas, notice of the survey was given on the Rare Bird Alert so that any person observing BHGR during that week, in areas not being covered by the survey, could phone in their observations.

Observations were split by sex. This is easy when the bird is seen but the chances of a bird being detected by sight in the thick deciduous vegetation of June are low. Most birds are heard first and seen later, if at all. It is potentially more difficult to distinguish sex when the bird is simply heard because both sexes sing. However, the normal songs of the two sexes are quite different, though the song of the male is quite variable and it does sing while incubating eggs on the nest. According to Weston (1947) males alternate the incubation with females, sitting for about 20 minutes in an average incubation period, so that without such vocalization it would be possible to miss a male BHGR at such times.

#### The Results: Inventory Accuracy Sampled areas

In areas where only one or no grosbeaks were observed, there is clearly some chance that birds were simply missed. This could arise for several reasons. One is that birds may have been temporarily in other parts of their territories away from the route being taken by the observer. A second is that the bird may not have been singing at the time of the survey.

As an example, Barbara Begg could find no BHGR along Creswell Road during the first week of June but did observe one in the cottonwoods there between June 17 and 23, and heard one on July 4. Whether the bird was actually there during the survey or simply wandered in later is not known. As a second example, repeated surveys along the full length of Lochside Trail in the Blenkinsop Valley north of the lake in the first two weeks of June indicated numbers of males to range from as high as 5 to as low as two. These two extremes were recorded under virtually identical survey conditions: between 9.00 and 10.30 on overcast, windless mornings.

It is difficult to see how this statistical uncertainty could be removed from any survey without repeated coverage through each area. This is beyond the resources of any amateur naturalist group. However, almost all areas surveyed were in the early-mid morning and some areas were, in fact, repeated once or twice.

In cases where more than one male was recorded, there is the same possibility of underestimation. However, in this case, there is the danger of overestimation because of the same bird being counted twice. This arises because of the large territory that the birds apparently use.

In the Blenkinsop Valley, for example, one male was seen to fly right across the valley for a distance of about 500 metres. Thus, when two birds are observed at a spacing along the trail of only 150-200 m, the question arises as to whether the second observation is simply the result of movement of the first bird. Weston (1947) reports BHGR nests in California being spaced as close as 100 m, so such close spacing of two males is certainly possible.

The problem of double-counting is to some extent minimized by the powerful song of the male BHGR enabling it to

be heard up to 150 metres away in many cases: thus a second bird that is 300 m away from the first bird can frequently be heard singing at the same time as the first bird. At spacings of more than 300 metres, however, this assurance no longer exists: in this case verification of two birds requires back-tracking to ensure that the first bird is still there. Though back-tracking along a trail is a simple enough precaution to take, back-tracking through head-high swampy grasses is less attractive. Moreover, the problem is complicated by the fact that the volume of a male BHGR song is quite variable: in some cases it may not be heard until less than 50 m away.

The distribution of male BHGR observations in the Blenkinsop Valley is shown in the attached map. Some of the ten sightings were thought to be duplicates but the estimate of 7 males that was adopted for this area is believed to be a conservative one. A separate estimate for just that part of Lochside Trail between the Lake and the Trail Head made by Ron Satterfield during the early part of June put the figure at 5 males: this is one more than the highest figure found in the survey and two more than the figure actually adopted here.

In the Newton Heights area (on the southeast lower slopes of Mt Newton) it is also possible that the total of 3 males recorded for that area is too low. Three were noted by Sheila Mosher on a single walk and a fourth in a different location on another day. A fifth was heard from Haldon Road by a separate observer but probably corresponds to one already recorded. Three of the birds seen (two males and one female) were found on a 10-acre property north of Haldon Road, the two males apparently feeding in the trees together. Three birds (two males and a female) were similarly reported from a sunflower seed feeder in Dean Park Estates on the Miyasaki residence, about 1000 metres north of the Haldon Road property, the two males again feeding together. It has been assumed here that these two groups of birds are actually the same. The Dean Park birds were seen fairly regularly from May 12 on, but were not seen after June 2, perhaps because nesting had already begun in the lower area.

The problem of counting is thus complicated considerably by the apparently variable (and large) territories established by the birds. Reference to Weston (1947) and Bent (1968) provided no information on the extent of BHGR territories. The problem is compounded by the fact that not all males appear to have distinct territories. This is indicated by the pair of males at Newton Heights and at Dean Park Estates. Similarly two males and one female were seen by Colleen O'Brien, moving around together on the woodland edge of Beaver Lake near Jennings Lane. The sociological significance of these male pairs is unclear. From an inventory standpoint, it casts doubt on the assumption that one song means one territory and only one male.

#### Unsampled areas

The present survey clearly did not cover all likely areas of BHGR breeding occurrence in Greater Victoria. Many small pockets of open deciduous woodland in moist low-lying areas could not be sampled because of insufficient observers. Among these might be noted the shores of Tod Inlet, stands of alder and cottonwood on the east side of Martindale Valley (where one male BHGR was singing in May), low areas around Prospect Lake and Trevlac Pond and the margins of Florence

Lake and Langford Lake.

Suitable habitat in most of these areas is, however, generally quite small in extent. The survey did include many such small habitats and in general most of these small pockets of deciduous woodland did not reveal grosbeaks. As indicated in the next section, most of the BHGR observations were clustered in a few large areas of suitable habitat. Thus, though the total number of male BHGR obtained for the Greater Victoria area is obviously a minimum value, the true number may not be significantly greater than this.

#### The Results: Distribution Pattern

The main survey produced observations of 19 (or perhaps 20) males and 3 females, recognizing that this may be a slight underestimate for reasons given in the previous section. Females are, of course, much more difficult to observe because of their weaker, shorter and more infrequent song, so that no special significance should be attached to the female count. The only BHGR observations reported to the Rare Bird Alert during this week were all in areas covered by the main survey.

The survey data show three distinct clusters of BHGR: the Newton Heights area of Central Saanich, the woodland edges of Beaver-Elk lakes and the Blenkinsop Lake area. These three areas provided 80% of the male BHGR heard or seen in the regular survey. It is probably not coincidence that the appearance of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak (the eastern equivalent of the Black-headed) during the week of the survey (and only the fourth record for Vancouver Island) coincided with one of these three clusters, on the east side of Beaver-Elk Lake park.

All three areas correspond to classic BHGR habitat as described by Bent (1968) and others: low-lying terrain, near surface water, covered with open woodland (or woodland edge) of mostly deciduous trees. Willows, alder and maples were the source of most bird observations.

The reason for the preference for this habitat does not appear to have been established. Bent (1968) notes that, despite the thick bill, seeds account for less than 15% of food intake. Almost 60% of food intake is animal matter (53% being insects, especially beetles), while vegetable matter is dominated by elderberry and orchard fruit where available.

Whatever the underlying reason for this habitat preference, such habitat is increasingly scarce on the Saanich Peninsula and this must be regarded as a major constraint on BHGR numbers here. Yet from the findings of this survey, habitat does not appear to be the major constraint because several large areas of suitable habitat showed no grosbeaks. According to Jeff Gaskin, the grounds of the University of Victoria and Queen Alexandra Hospital, as well as Swan Lake, all provided one or two observations last summer during the same period, but none was found there in this survey. Other sightings in previous years from late June on may have simply been post-breeding dispersal. Bent (1968) indicates that incubation lasts only 12 days and the nestling period a similar time, so that by late June breeding may be essentially over, at least for some birds.

The distinct clustering of BHGR observations is also presumably related to bird biology. According to Bent (1968), BHGR seem to repeat their nesting at the same sites each year. In addition, there is a tendency, in some species, for offspring

to return to the general area of their birth the following year. This has certainly been documented for Northern Orioles (Sealy, 1980) and may well apply to grosbeaks too. Such behaviour would seem to offer many advantages. In particular, assuming that the driving force in the breeding period is the urge to find a mate, the best chances of success are likely to be in areas where breeding has occurred in past years. For this and other reasons, new breeding adults would be expected to return to the place of their own birth to breed. In this way, once a cluster becomes established it would tend to perpetuate itself. With this kind of argument it is difficult, in fact, to understand why birds would try to disperse far away from their own general breeding area until such time as numbers become too large to accommodate adequately-sized territories.

Isolated observations at places such as Albert Head Lagoon may be the result of accidental wandering. In other cases, such as Rithet's Bog, this year's sighting in June (1 male), repeats sightings in the previous year (about 6 males throughout

June in 1993). The much smaller number this year may be related to over-wintering mortality or to lack of breeding success last year. The large number of BHGR present at Rithet's Bog in June 1993 was somewhat surprising in view of the relatively small amount of deciduous tree growth there.

#### Conclusions

The 1994 June 1-8 survey produced about 20 male Black-headed Grosbeak observations in the Greater Victoria area. Not all of these were necessarily breeding birds. Additional males may have been missed because of the limited amount of observer time possible, but judging by the large number of negative observations in likely habitats, it is thought that undetected birds were relatively few.

Most of the birds were concentrated in three distinct clusters: one on the south-east lower slopes of Mount Newton; another in the woodland edges around Beaver and Elk Lakes; and the last around Blenkinsop Lake and Lochside Trail immediately north of the lake.

It is difficult to overemphasize the significance of the Blenkinsop-Lochside population. The area accounted for seven males (more than a third of all male BHGR observations in the survey), five of the seven males occupying sites along Lochside Trail itself.

It can only be hoped that the trail-side vegetation in the Blenkinsop area is left intact in the future. Present plans to widen the trail to make it a multipurpose recreational corridor can certainly be expected to jeopardize the Black-headed Grosbeak population. Indeed, rather than hedgerow thinning, it would be advantageous to have additional tree plantings along parts of the trail, especially where gaps have already appeared.

#### Acknowledgements

This survey was made possible through the participation of the following volunteer observers: David Allinson, Jerry and Gladys Anderson, Gerry Ansell, Barbara Begg, Darren Copley, Aziza Cooper, David Fraser, Jeff Gaskin, Tom Gillespie, Gordon Hart, Anne Knowles, Ev Miyasaki, Sheila Mosher, Colleen O'Brien, Jim Phillips and Ron Youngash. Thanks are also due to Bryan Gates for providing coverage on the Rare Bird Alert.

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Michael Carson is a member of the Parks and Conservation Committee and a frequent contributor to the *Victoria Naturalist*.

## Pacific Octopus



by Lynton Burger

You may have read about, or have watched the documentary on CBC, concerning the controversy surrounding the harvesting of sea cucumbers in the Galpagos Islands. The Galpagos, an archipelago of volcanic islands that lies some 960 kilometres off the coast of Ecuador, are best known as the place where Darwin's first revolutionary ideas evolved. This is where temperate species such as sea lions and penguins share the same water with marine iguanas and tropical fish. This is where you can walk right up to Blue-footed Boobies, Frigate Birds and giant tortoises because of the lack of large predators. This peaceful, fascinating group of islands is a naturalists dream destination and it is not surprising that tens-of-thousands of eco-tourists, including many thousands of Canadians, visit the islands annually. As a result, eco-tourism is what drives the local economy of the islands.

While we are always urged to think globally and act locally, there has arisen a situation in the Galpagos that calls for global action by individuals such as you.

I would like to use this opportunity to reprint excerpts from a faxed letter that was sent by Macarena Green, a naturalist living on Santa Cruz Island in the Galpagos, to Dr. Matt James (an Associate Professor of Geology at Sonoma State University, California) and reprinted in *BioNews* here in British Columbia by Bryan Gates.

Quito,  
January 23, 1995

Dear Dr. James

"I received your fax in regards to the sea cucumber exploitation in the Galpagos. Following you will find some general information as to how things have developed.

As you must know, since the 15th October 1994, the sea cucumber fishery was legally opened in the islands. Most of the activities took place in Bolivar Channel (western side of the Archipelago) and principally the west coast of Isabela and all around Fernandina Islands. Until the 15th December there were more than 800 fishermen working on the exploitation of the sea cucumber, *Isostichopus fuscus*, in that area. It was calculated that each of them was collecting more than 1500 sea cucumbers daily. Besides that, these people lived in small boats on which they carried live chickens as a source of food, unwashed vegetables and other introduced organisms that if they landed by chance on one of the islands, could germinate. It is known that on board the boats were rats, mice and introduced insects. They were cleaning their bilges and throwing all their garbage overboard. Most of them were anchored only 20 feet from the shoreline of Fernandina Island.

When the cucumber fishery was opened, a limit of 550,000 sea cucumbers, in a three-month season, was established. However, in two months, it had exceeded more than 7-million. By

the beginning of December reports on the abuse of the resource went to the different officials involved, and to the press. On the 15th December the sea cucumber fishery was closed until scientific could be done to assess the damage that had occurred in the first two months.

The people involved in such a lucrative, yet devastating, enterprise were not about to accept the new disposition. During the first days of January 1995, they took over the installations of the Parks Service and the Charles Darwin Research Station. They kept all the people inside as hostages, including the wives of many of the workers and children. They threatened to kill all the tortoises in the captive breeding programme at the Station and they threatened to start fires on little islands like South Plaza and Santa Fe. They also demanded that Chantal Blanton (Director of the Station) and Arturo Izurieta (Director of the Parks Service) resign their respective positions.

In Quito (the capital of Ecuador), some government officials said that this time they (the government) would not let them (the fishermen) get their way, and that the fishermen would have to change their attitude. But on Friday, January 6, the director of the National Institute of Fisheries went to Puerta Ayora and offered the fishermen that by the 13th January they could start catching sea cucumbers again. All the people involved in tourism and science in Puerta Ayora got together and decided to take actions in case this type of activity started again. So in Quito and Guayaquil, the minister of Fisheries met with fishermen and the people involved and after getting pressure from many environmental groups, the association of eco-tourism, the association of tour operators in Galpagos, and the government of Spain. He felt in the position to close the Pepino (Cucumber) fishery until October 1995.

All the groups named above have got together to fight for the same cause. Our aim is to persuade the government to close all types of industrial fisheries in the Galpagos, to stop all type of exportation of any resource that comes from the Galpagos and to enforce the National Park regulations.

We have strong reason to believe there is someone very powerful involved in the exploitation of sea cucumbers in the Galpagos. It seems the Ecuadorian government is doing very little to fight this type of exploitation. However, we have noticed that when there is international pressure, their attitude changes. If you could get together and write a demanding letter to the President of Ecuador, I think that they might think twice about opening the Pepino or any other type of fishery in the Galpagos."

The address of the President of Ecuador is:

Arq. Sixto Duran Ballen  
Presidente Constitucional de la Republica de Ecuador  
Palacia de Gobierno, Quito, Ecuador

NOTE: Since this letter was sent in January, reports of illegal harvesting still come out of Puerta Ayora. It is essential that the government of Ecuador gets a clear and loud response from people around the world before October this year. I urge you to join me in writing to the above address. We should, in my opinion, urge the Ecuadorian government to consider ecologically and economically (for the government and for local residents) sound alternatives to the destructive and uncontrolled harvesting of living resources within a national park and a world heritage site.

| AREA                             | MALES   | FEMALES |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|
| <b>NORTH SAANICH</b>             |         |         |
| McDonald Park                    |         |         |
| Coles Bay                        | 1       |         |
| Aylards Reservoir, John Rd.      |         |         |
| Airport stream and pond          |         |         |
| Cresswell Rd.                    |         |         |
| <b>CENTRAL SAANICH</b>           |         |         |
| Newton Heights                   | 3(+1?)  | 1       |
| Lochside Trail                   |         |         |
| <b>SAANICH</b>                   |         |         |
| Beaver-Elk west shore            | 2       |         |
| Beaver Lake east side            | 3       | 1       |
| Observatory Hill                 |         |         |
| Viaduct Flats                    |         |         |
| Rithet's Bog                     | 1       |         |
| Blenkinsop/Lochside Trail        | 7       | 1       |
| Northwest Broadmead              |         |         |
| Mount Douglas                    |         |         |
| Swan Lake and Swan Creek         |         |         |
| Cuthbert Holmes - Colquitz Creek |         |         |
| Queen Alexandra Hospital         |         |         |
| University of Victoria           |         |         |
| <b>VICTORIA AND OAK BAY</b>      |         |         |
| Uplands Park                     |         |         |
| Beacon Hill Park                 |         |         |
| <b>WESTERN COMMUNITIES</b>       |         |         |
| Goldstream Park                  | 1       |         |
| Royal Roads College              |         |         |
| Colwood Golf Course              |         |         |
| Albert Head Lagoon               | 1       |         |
| Triangle Mountain                |         |         |
| Witty's Lagoon                   |         |         |
| Galloping Goose Trail            |         |         |
| Devonian Park                    |         |         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                     | 19(+1?) | 3       |

## CALENDAR

**REGULAR MEETINGS** are generally held on the following days. **Board of Directors:** the first Tuesday of each month. **Natural History Presentations** (Formally known as the General Members Meeting): the second Tuesday of each month. **Botany Night:** the third Tuesday of each month. **Birders' Night:** the fourth Wednesday of each month. Locations are given in the calendar listings. Telephone the VNHS Events Tape at 479-2054 for further information and updates. **NOTE:** The next Natural History Presentation will be in September. May will be the last Botany Night and Birders Night presentation before the summer break. They will start again in September.

## MAY EVENTS

### Tuesday, May 2.

**Board of Directors' Meeting.** Clifford Carl Reading Room, Cunningham Building, University of Victoria at 7:30 p.m. Note that Parking Lot "A" by the Cunningham Building no longer exists.

### Saturday, May 6

**Spring Bird Count.** If you are interested in participating in this annual event contact **David Pearce** at 658-0295. There will be a post-event gathering at 12:30 pm at the Swan lake Nature Centre.

### Sunday, May 7

**Steam pit cooking at East Sooke,** 10:00 am to 1:30 pm. Join CRD Parks for food cooked the aboriginal way and a walk and talk about native uses of plants. Preregistration and fee required (\$8/person; \$6/person for families of 3 or more). Please call CRD Parks at 478-3344.

### Saturday, May 13.

**Spring flowers.** Join **Chris Brayshaw** to catch the bloom of spring wildflowers in Uplands Park. Meet at the Cattle Point Parking Lot at 9:00 a.m.

### Sunday, May 14

Hilltop highlights, Lone Tree Hill. Join a CRD naturalist for this informative walk. Meet in the parking lot on Millstream Road in the Highlands at 1:30 pm.

### Tuesday, May 16.

**Botany Night.** Swan Lake Nature House, 7:30 p.m. This is the last meeting until September. Join **Dianne Lockyer** for a slide presentation on Uplands Park.

### Saturday, May 20.

**Marine biology trip to Botanical Beach.** Explore the tidepools at Botanical Beach with **Phil Lambert** (477-5922). Meet at Helmcken Park and Ride at 8:30 a.m. or at the Botanical Beach Parking Lot at 10:30 a.m. Pack a lunch, water and bring your rubber boots.

### Saturday, May 20

**CRD Parks 50+ Trip 3, The natural world,** East Sooke, 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. Hike the loop from Aylard Farm to

Beechey Head. Learn the origins of local plant names and the language of flowers (the coastal portion of the trail is strenuous in parts). Meet at Aylard Farm.

### Sunday, May 21

**Compass Capers at Elk/Beaver lake.** Can you find your way in the woods? Test your skills in this introduction to map and compass. Adults and children 8 years and older, \$5/person. Limited enrolment, please call CRD Parks at 478-3344 to register. Starts at 1:30 pm.

### Monday, May 22

**Ride the Goose.** Bring your bike and lunch for a naturalist-led ride on the Galloping Goose Trail from 10:30 am to 1:30 pm. Meet at the Roche Cove parking lot off Gillespie Road in East Sooke. Free but preregistration required. Participation is limited so please call CRD Parks at 478-3344 to enrol.

### Wednesday, May 24.

**Birders' Night.** Room 159, Begbie Building, University of Victoria, 7:30 p.m. Spending most of his time in the mountains and foothills of the Rockies, this is the only month that **Peter Sherrington** of Alberta is available to describe the **Migration of Golden Eagles in the Rocky Mountains.** He and his colleagues have documented numbers and movement patterns of Golden Eagles and other raptors for a number of years. His findings indicate that there is much to be learned about Golden Eagle movements in Alberta, and even more on the British Columbia side of the Rockies. Everyone Welcome. Bring a friend and your coffee cup.

### Sunday, May 28.

**Hike on the Gowlland Range.** Join **Bev Glover** (721-1476) for a leisurely hike and enjoy the flora and fauna of this wonderful area. Bring lunch, water and sturdy walking shoes. Meet Bev at Helmcken Park and Ride at 9:00 a.m.

### Sunday, May 28

**Life of the Rocks at Witty's Lagoon.** Join a CRD naturalist to explore intertidal life off Tower Point. Meet at the Tower Point parking lot on Olympic View Drive in Metchosin at 9:00 am.

### Monday, May 29.

**VNHS Marine Night.** Join the marine sub-group of the *Victoria Natural History Society* at the Swan Lake Nature Centre, 7:30 p.m. **Phil Lambert** will speak on marine biological diversity *Out of Sight, Out of Mind - Life Beneath the Sea.*

## JUNE EVENTS

### Saturday, June 3.

**Insect exploring at Island View Beach.** Join **Hannah Nadel** and **Rob Cannings** (544-1386) for an insect exploration at Island View Beach. Meet at the north parking area of the Park at 10:00 a.m.

### Sunday, June 4

**"On the boardwalk"** at Francis/King Regional Park. Join CRD Parks for a stroll along the Elsie King trail (trail is stroller

and wheelchair accessible). Meet at the Nature House on Munn Road at 1:30 pm.

### Tuesday, June 6.

**Board of Directors' Meeting.** Clifford Carl Reading Room, Cunningham Building, University of Victoria at 7:30 p.m. Note that Parking Lot "A" by the Cunningham Building no longer exists.

### Saturday, June 10

**Fifty Plus Program - "Beginner's Orienteering".** Join CRD Parks at **Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park** to learn the proper use of a map and compass and putting your new skills to the test. Please call CRD Parks at 478-3344 to register (fee is \$8/person).

### Sunday, June 11

**"The Lost Diary..."** has been found and there's a map inside. Help the CRD Parks naturalist rediscover old haunts and hideouts at **Witty's Lagoon Regional Park.** Ideal for kids and their adults. Meet at the Nature Information Centre in the main parking lot off Metchosin Rd. at 1:30 pm.

### Saturday June 17

**"Life on the Rocks" at Witty's Lagoon Regional Park.** Explore the intertidal life on the rocky shores off Tower Point with CRD Parks. Meet at the Tower Point parking lot on Olympic View Drive in Metchosin at 12:00 pm (ends at 2:00 pm).

### Sunday, June 18.

**Birding at Francis King Park.** Join **Roy Prior** for a day of birding around Francis King Park. Pack a lunch, water and meet Roy (383-5198) at the Nature House at 8:00 a.m.

### Saturday, June 24.

**Birding by ear!** Join **Hank Vander Pol** (658-1924) for a loop around Layritz Park and Quick's Bottom. Bring a snack, water and meet Hank at 6:30 a.m. at Layritz Park off Glyn Road (off Wilkinson Road).

### Sunday, June 25

**Spring into Summer at Elk/Beaver lake Regional Park.** Celebrate the warm weather and long days of summer with CRD Parks. Activities include live displays (snakes, frogs, slugs) at the travelling nature house; Red Cross 'Life Jacket Fashion Show' and learn about Bear and cougar safety at a nature theatre. All activities will be at Beaver Beach and are from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm.

## BULLETIN BOARD

### Birders Wanted.

Share your birding knowledge and enthusiasm. Be a part of a volunteer team to lead bird walks on Sunday mornings at Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary. Birders are invited to sign up for one or more days per month. These popular Sunday events are held between 9 and 11 a.m. and usually have six to twelve participants of all levels. For more details contact Joan at the Nature House (479-0211) or FAX 479-0132.

### Announcement!

BEN - Botanical Electronic News - is an electronic botanical newsletter distributed on Internet by Adolf Ceska in

about bi-weekly intervals. To subscribe to BEN send a message to: [aceska@freenet.victoria.bc.ca](mailto:aceska@freenet.victoria.bc.ca).

### Reminder!

The Swan Lake Nature Centre holds birding walks regularly on Wednesdays and Sundays at 9:00 a.m. Everyone is welcome to join in.

### For Sale

**The Garry Oak Meadows Colloquium.** A colloquium was held at the University of Victoria in 1993 to study the Garry Oak (*Quercus garryana*) and its associated meadow ecosystem. This is one of the rarest and most endangered ecosystems in British Columbia, remaining only in isolated patches on SE Vancouver Island and some Gulf islands. *The Garry Oak Meadows Colloquium* is edited by Richard Hebda and Fran Aitkens and published by the Garry Oak Meadows Protection Society. The proceedings includes papers on the Garry Oak, wildflowers, grasses, insects, and ethical, educational and development issues. To order, send \$12.00 (includes postage and handling) to **Fran Aitkens**, #4-921 Foul Bay Road, Victoria, B.C. V8S 4H9.

### For Sale

National Geographic's *Field Guide to Birds*; the *Naturalist Guide to the Victoria Region*; *Birds of Victoria*; the Victoria Area Bird Checklist; and, the Victoria Natural History Society's Window Decals.

### Back Issues of the Victoria Naturalist

Copies of back issues and indices of the *Victoria Naturalist* are available from **Tom Gillespie** (361-1694).

### Garry Oak Meadow Society Membership

The Garry Oak Meadow Society aims to promote, conserve and restore our native oak meadow lands. You can help them to preserve our rarest Canadian habitat by joining the Society or through donations to any branch of Pacific Coast Savings Credit Union. For further information contact **Tom Gillespie** at 361-1694.

## HELP WANTED

**Volunteers required for behavioral ecology research of Western Grebes off Saanich Peninsula and Gulf Islands. The work involves marine bird surveys on Sunday mornings including observations of foraging behaviour. All help would be appreciated - no experience is necessary.**

**Contact: James Clowater**  
**Telephone: 598-4570**  
**E-Mail: [clowater@sfu.ca](mailto:clowater@sfu.ca)**

Claudia  
Weiss and Darren Copley  
657 Beaver Lake Road  
VICTORIA BC V8Z 5N9



Close-up of sea anemone, *Tealia* (photo: Andrew Fedoruk).