



The Victoria NATURALIST

JANUARY
FEBRUARY
2006
VOL 62.4

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY





The Victoria NATURALIST

Published six times a year by the
VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY,
P.O. Box 5220, Station B, Victoria, B.C. V8R 6N4
Contents © 2006 as credited.

ISSN 0049—612X Printed in Canada
The Victoria Naturalist acknowledges the financial support of the
Government of Canada through the Publications Assistance Program
towards our mailing costs.

Publication Mail Commercial Sales Agreement Number 40045722
Publications Mail Registration No. 09841

Editor: Claudia Copley, 479-6622
Desktop Publishing: Frances Hunter, 479-1956
Distribution: Tom Gillespie, Phyllis Henderson
Printing: Fotoprint, 382-8218

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

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Honorary Life Members Mrs. Ruth Chambers, Mrs. Lyndis Davis,
Mrs. Peggy Goodwill, Mr. David Stirling, Mr. Bruce Whittington

Officers: 2004-2005

PRESIDENT: Ann Nightingale, 652-6450, motmot@shaw.ca
VICE-PRESIDENT: Claudia Copley, 479-6622, dccopley@island.net
PAST-PRESIDENT: Bruce Whittington, 250-245-1484,
fieldnat@pacificcoast.net
TREASURER: Gordon Hart, 721-1264, gordh19@shaw.ca
SECRETARY: Isobel Dawson, 721-0232, idawson@uvic.ca

Directors and Committees

Darren Copley, 479-6622, dccopley@island.net (*Membership*)
Rick Schortinghuis, 652-3326, shylo@islandnet.com (*Field Trips*)
Marie O'Shaughnessy, 598-9680, isis_mosh@shaw.ca (*Publicity*)
John Defayette, 598-3442, ul345@victoria.tc.ca (*Publicity*)
John Henigman, 598-6326, henigman@pacificcoast.net
(*Parks and Conservation, FBCN representative*)
Ed Pellizzon, 881-1476, edlps@telus.net (*Programs*)
Donna M. Ross, 384-5327, hoshihana@shaw.ca (*Social & Publicity*)
James Miskelly, 477-0490, jmiskelly@telus.net (*Butterfly Surveys,*
Swan Lake Representative)

Presentation Coordinators

Marine Night: Phil Lambert, 477-5922
Botany Night: Adolf Ceska, 477-1211
Natural History Night and Birders' Night: Ed Pellizzon, 881-1476

Annual Dues, Victoria Natural History Society

Includes *The Victoria Naturalist* and *B.C. Naturalist*
Regular \$30.00 Golden Age \$25.00
Family \$35.00 Student \$20.00
(Any donation in excess of the above fees is income tax deductible)

Annual Subscription Rate, Victoria Naturalist, or membership
without subscription \$20.00

RARE BIRD ALERT: 592-3381 **VNHS EVENTS TAPE:** 479-2054

VNHS Website: www.vicnhs.bc.ca

SUBMISSIONS

Deadline for next issue: February 1, 2006

Send to: Claudia Copley, Editor

657 Beaver Lake Road, Victoria BC V8Z 5N9

Phone: 250-479-6622

Fax: 479-6622 e-mail: dccopley@island.net

Guidelines for Submissions

Members are encouraged to submit articles, field trip reports, natural history 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 request submission of typed, double-spaced copy in an IBM compatible word processing file on diskette, or by e-mail. Photos and slides, and diskettes submitted will be returned if a stamped, self-addressed envelope is included with the material. Digital images are welcome, but they need to be high resolution: a minimum of 1200 x 1550 pixels, or 300 dpi at the size of photos in the magazine.

VNHS MEMBERSHIP

For membership information and renewal, please contact Darren Copley, 479-6622, or write to Membership Committee c/o The Victoria Natural History Society, Box 5220, Victoria, B.C., V8R 6N4. A copy of our membership form is available on our website www.vicnhs.bc.ca.

ADVERTISING GUIDELINES

We do our best to ensure your ad is produced accurately. Should we make an error, please contact us and a correction can be printed in the next issue. A charge is levied for typesetting. Minor alterations to existing ads cost \$10.00. Add \$15 per photo. Advertising fees are due and payable when copy is submitted. Please submit a cheque payable to The Victoria Natural History Society.

Ad Size	Price	Dimensions (in inches)
Back page	\$120	7.5" width x 8" height
Full page, inside	\$100	7.5 width x 9.5" height
1/2 page, horizontal	\$80	7.5" width x 4.75" height
1/2 page, vertical	\$80	3.5" width x 9.5" height
1/3 page horizontal	\$50	7.5" width x 3.25" height
1/3 page, vertical	\$50	3.5" width x 6.5" height
1/4 page, horizontal	\$40	7.5" width x 2.25" height
1/4 page, vertical	\$40	3.5" width x 4.75" height
1/8 page, horizontal	\$25	3.5" width x 2.25" height

Rates as of February, 1994. May be subject to change.

Submit advertising to:

email dccopley@island.net

or phone Claudia Copley at 250-479-6622

Thank you for your patronage.

Contents

President's Message	4
Holland Point Beach Study <i>By June Pretzer</i>	4
VNHS Awards	5
Swan Song <i>By Gwennie Hooper</i>	6
Yellow Bullhead (<i>Ameiurus natalis</i>) <i>By Gavin Hanke</i>	8
2006 Valentine Couples Count Looks to be Best Ever <i>By Jan Brown and Alan MacLeod</i>	10
Partnership Protects Mount Erskine on Salt Spring Island <i>By Janet Hughes</i>	11
Do Native Plants Bloom Earlier in Victoria or Nanaimo? Results of a Five Year Phenology Study <i>By Bill Merilees</i>	12
2005: An Irruptive Year for Owls? <i>By Marie O'Shaughnessy</i>	16
Welcome to New Members	17
Completing a Squirrel's Repast <i>By Bill Merilees</i>	18
Letters	19
Book Review <i>By John Defayette</i>	20
Thank You VNHS Volunteers! <i>By Darren Copley</i>	20
HAT Tricks <i>By Kathryn Martell</i>	21
Calendar of Events	22
Bulletin Board	23

COVER PHOTO:

This photo by Claudia Copley was taken while flying from Vancouver to Terrace this past summer. The view includes some of the Coast Mountain range (Good Hope Mountain) and the south end of Chilko Lake, part of T'sylos Provincial Park in the Chilcotin.

I felt it was time, via the cover photo, to step back and consider the big picture after a year of close-ups, where the minutiae are appreciated but the whole is missing. We need to consider how each piece fits: although these connections are too complicated to fully understand, we should at least be considering the ones we do know...

Some days I wonder when exactly the moment was when we as humans considered ourselves somehow removed from nature and the environment. I eat, I breathe, and I drink the water: how is it we can add toxins to these essential components and not expect it to affect us?

I listened to a news report where Killer Whales were added to the U.S. Endangered Species list and the same news had a story about secondary sewage treatment in Victoria – some saying it was an unnecessary expense – and the connection was never made. Our local population of Killer Whales is considered among the most toxin-laden of all marine mammals due to bioaccumulation. If they're affected by our actions, how can we consider ourselves immune? How high on the food web are we eating?

We have an obligation to implement recovery strategies for endangered wildlife that will, hopefully, see them removed from these lists because their populations are healthy again. Will any species, once "listed", be recovered, if we can't even be thoughtful enough to save ourselves?

That sacred cow, our medical system, is out of step with reality. The big-picture question should not be: "Why can't I get well?" but rather "What is making us sick?" Why, if health care is the number one issue of importance to Canadians in this upcoming election, isn't everyone out there championing a healthy environment?

And how can creating an unlivable environment not be considered when the issue of "standard of living" is raised – "developing" countries all want the same standard we've come to expect, and this will come at a cost of breathable air, drinkable water. How can we think that what is happening "over there" isn't affecting us when we can so readily accept a "global" economy? Every dollar I save on the purchase of yet another widget has a far greater cost.

Claudia

President's Message

I attended the fall meeting of the Vancouver Island region of the Federation of British Columbia Naturalists in Nanaimo in late November. It was a great opportunity to get to meet the “movers and shakers” from the island clubs, and to share some of our common concerns. One of the agenda items was on how groups recruit new board members. It seems that many naturalist organizations have considerable difficulty finding willing members to fill their boards. VNHS enjoys the position of having one of the most diverse boards in terms of both interests and ages of its members.

VNHS has managed to fill the roster each year with a corps of dedicated people, thanks in part to the willingness of several long-time board members to stay on. But this year, some of the current members will be stepping down, and others would like to try their hand at new activities, opening up some critical positions on the board.

As some of you know, I will be stepping down as President. By design, I will remain on the board as Past-President to help ease a new President into the position. I also intend to remain very active on many VNHS projects, so you haven't seen the last of me, by any means!

This is the time for people who have ideas for the future of VNHS to consider joining the Board. There will likely be at least one vacant position, and an opportunity for someone to actually take over the role of President, if he or she is interested.

We are also looking for people who may be willing to assist our current directors, perhaps with an eye to taking over some responsibilities down the road. Gordon Hart, who has kept our records straight as VNHS Treasurer for many years, would love to hear from someone with an accounting background who may be interested in this position.

I am encouraging you to consider taking a leadership role with VNHS. It doesn't require a large time commitment. Representation of a variety of interests around the board table helps keep our Society fresh and active. We could especially benefit from another botanist and a marine enthusiast to balance our current birder bias. If you have questions, or just might be willing to give it a chance, please contact me or any of the other board members. Our information is on the inside front cover of this magazine.

Ann Nightingale

Holland Point Beach Study

By June Pretzer

I am conducting a shoreline study that includes Fonyo Beach to Holland Point for a project for the Restoration of Natural Systems Program at UVIC. In restoration projects it is very important to gather history of the site prior to disturbance. Prior to 1959 this stretch of beach was quite different, sections were sandy and the shoreline was more gradual. In 1959 the city put in the seawall at the base of the cliffs to prevent erosion and since then the shoreline has changed significantly.

I would like to invite the members to share any recollections they may have of this site with me to create a vivid picture of the site prior to 1959. Especially important are photographs, natural history surveys, bird checklists and your memories.

I can be reached at junepretzer@yahoo.com or you can call me at 382-9253. Thank you in advance for your assistance!



Jim Farrell 477-7291 jamesbfarrell@shaw.ca

VNHS Awards

Call for Nominations

VNHS members contribute to the Society in many ways. Some write articles for the *Naturalist*, some lead field trips, others serve on the board or on other committees. There are some who go out of their way just to make sure other members can continue to be a part of Society activities, by visiting shut-ins, or driving others to Society functions.

The Victoria Natural History Society Board of Directors established the Distinguished Service Award in 1988. This prestigious award is meant to honour those members who have given freely of their time in a variety of ways for the Society, over a long period. All members of the Society can nominate any other member who in their opinion merits this honour.

The VNHS Distinguished Service Award is given annually to members who have shown such dedication. The Society may also bestow Honourary Life Membership on a member whose involvement with VNHS has been exceptionally long and dedicated. Please consider nominating a member, and send your nomination to the Society's address, or give it to one of the directors. **Nominations should be forwarded by February 28, 2006.**

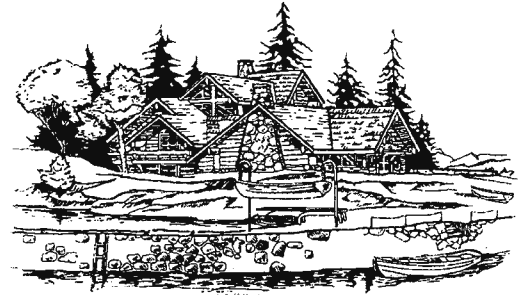
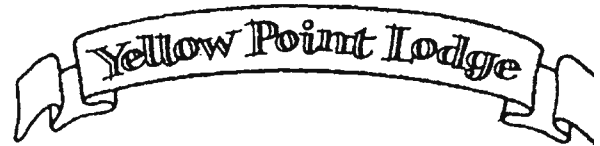
All nominations must be in writing and should be signed by at least two members of the Society. A brief biographical sketch and a description of the contributions and achievements of the nominee, along with his or her address and telephone number, should be included. The Awards Committee reviews the nominations and makes recommendations to the Board of Directors, which grants the awards.

VNHS Distinguished Service Award Recipients

1989 Lyndis Davis, David Stirling Katherine Sherman
1990 Anne Adamson, Charles Trotter,
Robb Mackenzie-Grieve
1991 Ed Coffin, Mark Nyhof
1992 David Fraser, Margaret Mackenzie-Grieve
1993 Giff Calvert, Harold Pollock
1994 Kaye Suttill
1995 Bryan Gates, Bruce Whittington
1996 Gordon Devey
1997 Michael Carson
1998 No recipients
1999 Tony Embleton, Dorothy Henderson
2000 Tom Gillespie, Marilyn Lambert, David Pearce
2001 David Allinson, Beverly Glover, Hank Vander Pol
2002 Norm Mogensen
2003 Bob Chappell
2004 Oluna and Adolf Ceska
2005 Rick Schortinghuis

VNHS Honorary Life Members

Mrs. L.E. Chambers, Mrs. Lyndis Davis, Mrs. Peggy Goodwill, Mr. David Stirling, Mr. Bruce Whittington



3700 Yellow Point Road,
Ladysmith, B.C. V9G 1E8
(250) 245-7422

Nature Trips 2006

led by Canadian Professionals

Bathhurst Inlet, Nunavut
Brazil
Franz Josef Land
Galapagos & Ecuador
Iceland
KHAM Inner Circle, China
New Zealand
Panama
Spitzbergen
St. Paul's Island, Pribilof
South West England
Tuscany & Florence



Tel. 604-461-4289 or josephine@bestway.com
www.skiesunlimited.com



8678 Greenhall Avenue, Ste #206 Burnaby, BC V5J 3M6

Swan Song

By Gwennie Hooper

On 27 December 1965 we woke to snow. The roads were not ploughed but my husband Gordon and I managed to drive from our home on Dallas Road to the junction of Cook and Quadra and we could go no further. We parked the car and started walking up Quadra and Tattersall to Blenkinsop, where Murray Matheson found us and said the Bird Count was postponed until January 2. That day wasn't much better either. It started with hail that turned to snow and my diary says "The snow stopped seven hours later, making roads slippery and difficult and the paths hard going or impassable". Our first Christmas Bird Count!

We tramped to the south end of Lost (Blenkinsop) Lake, did Elk Lake in a snowstorm, Brookleigh, Linnet Lane, over to Cordova Bay, and back to the north end of Lost Lake: Four of us to cover Area I, later to be slightly reduced in size and renamed Area 18. In that first year, 54 people took part in the Count and saw 124 species and 54,345 birds. Among those species were three Yellow-shafted and 191 Red-shafted Flickers, now lumped together, as have also the two Slate-coloured and 1,233 Oregon Juncos.

The evening reception was held at Murray and Peggy Matheson's and there we met the "greats" of the VNHS: Rob Mackenzie-Grieve, Freeman King, David Stirling (compiler), Ralph Fryer, Gladys Soulsby, Allen Poynter, Miss Melburn (I could never use the Christian name of such

an august person), Davie Davidson, Grace Bell, Clifford Carl, Enid Lemon, Cy Morehen, Frank Beebe and Charlie Guiget. Many of them are dead now and only David Stirling is still active in the Victoria-area count. The following year Nancy Chapman, Chess Lyons and Yorke Edwards took part.

In 1968 the Count was again postponed because of bad weather and even on the alternative date we couldn't get the car out so we walked from home (now near Finnerty Cove) to Telegraph Bay and back along the coast to Hollydene. Out 8 hours for 49 species.



Trumpeter Swans.
Photos: Marie
O'Shaughnessy

It became only the second Barred Owl seen on the Count...The following year new houses were creeping up the hill to the reservoir and the wood where we saw the Barred Owl was gone, replaced by houses.

Just once more there was a postponement, this time in 1971, but from 1974 the Count has been held before Christmas and the weather has been much better. That year of 1971, we took over Area I and were joined by our daughter Wendy, Barbara McLintock and her mother, and Kaye and Dennis Suttill, and together we saw an amazing 5,065 Northwestern Crows, most of them in the afternoon on their way out to the islands. We played a tape of Virginia Rails at Rithets Bog with our daughter's new tape recorder and, to our delight, got four separate answers. We've done that ever since and had responses most years. Ours was the only area with Virginia Rails for some years until, by 1983, they had spread out and become relatively common. Even so, you can imagine our feelings when in 1987 there was a road within two yards of the little knoll where we played the tape, and five townhouses across the way. Rithets Bog was changing



Northwestern Crow. Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy

rapidly. When we first knew it, access was from Royal Oak Drive on a gravel road down to the old tennis courts, into the woods, climb a barbed wire fence and walk up the ridge as far as possible towards Quadra Street. By 1976 a new road was going in from Quadra and every year after that there were more roads, more houses, but eventually good came of it all when Rithets Bog was made into a park.

In 1980 it was "wet, wet, wet" according to my diary, and we did part of the newly-named Area #18 under Roy and Margaret Wainwright. The evening reception was at the Garth Homer Centre. Earlier receptions had been held at Bristol Foster's, Anne Adamson's and Alf Porcher's among others, and in later years they moved to Windsor Park Pavilion, Fernwood Community Centre, Gordon Head United Church and St. Luke's. I noted in my diary after the 1973 gathering "Chess Lyons had the bright idea that each leader get up, introduce his party, name his area, mention highlights and low points. It was very, very interesting and the best evening we've had." The beginning of a tradition.

The 1987 Count was held on a beautiful frosty day. As well as the new townhouses at Rithet's, we found the reservoir high above Broadmead decked in and Lochside north of Royal Oak built up halfway and survey posts beyond. But in the woods on the left, within sight of the barrier, an owl flew up into a tree...a Barred Owl. My diary says I was ecstatic. We watched it for several minutes and it became only the second Barred Owl seen on the Count. The overall total for that day was 143 species. The following year new houses were creeping up the hill to the reservoir and the wood where we saw the Barred Owl was gone, replaced by houses.

There is a little artificial pond on Rithetwood, sometimes productive, sometimes not. In 1990 there was a vertical stump where no stump had been the day before. It flew and perched on a tree. I spluttered "heron". We looked and looked but had never seen such a bird before and from the bird book thought it was probably a Least Bittern. I reported it at the evening gathering and others went to investigate next day and Wally McGregor even got a photograph. It was an immature Green Heron, a first for the Christmas Count.

Such highlights more than compensate for the wet, cold hours of unproductive trudging, although last year was the warmest, calmest, sunniest Count of them all and 196 counters tallied 154 species.

2005? Time to retire and leave it to the younger folk. Forty years is enough.

Yellow Bullhead (*Ameiurus natalis*)

By Gavin Hanke, Curator of Vertebrate Zoology, Royal BC Museum

Most organisms in British Columbia arrived during and after deglaciation. British Columbia's biodiversity has also been "enhanced" by waves of accidental and intentional species introductions, which now are the principle sources of new fish species in the province.

Just to the south of British Columbia, Washington waterways contain seven species of exotic catfish (Wydoski and Whiteny, 2003), but until this year, researchers thought that only the black bullhead (*Ameiurus melas*) and brown bullhead (*A. nebulosus*) existed north of the international border. On July 21, 2005, while electrofishing in Silvermere Lake; I identified a yellow bullhead (*Ameiurus natalis*) in the catch from the southeast corner of that lake. The fish emerged about 20 centimeters from shore, from its hiding place among deciduous leaf litter and an algae-covered clump of dead grass. While we only caught one, I suspect that other yellow bullheads have been caught in the past but went unrecognized. That is, assuming people fish for catfish

rather than the largemouth bass that were stocked in the lake, or perhaps the native salmonids.

Yellow bullheads superficially look like black and brown bullheads. The pink-white to cream-coloured mental (chin) barbels are the obvious feature separating yellow bullheads from the other bullhead species released here. The yellow bullhead's head is broad, with a blunt snout and terminal mouth. They have dusky to dark fins with rounded margins, a tail that is rounded or with only a slight indentation halfway down the trailing edge and dorsal and pectoral fins each with a leading edge spine. The colour on the base of the tail blends evenly to that on the tail fin, but the transition from the olive brown to yellow back, to the creamy white belly is abrupt. Yellow bullhead may reach 46 cm in total length and reasonably large individuals are excellent eating when prepared for the dinner table.

Yellow bullheads are native to Atlantic and Gulf Slope drainages from New York to Mexico, the St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi River Basin from



North Dakota to the Gulf of Mexico. They are known from the Hudson Bay drainage in Minnesota but not downstream in Manitoba to date (Stewart and Watkinson, 2004). Sadly, yellow bullheads have been introduced to at least 14 states outside of their native range both intentionally and accidentally (Fuller *et al.* 1999). Given their presence in Washington, it was only a matter of time before they appeared in British Columbia.

I assume that yellow bullheads were introduced here as a contaminant with largemouth bass released in Silvermere Lake. The fish sample collected last July, contained the single yellow bullhead, one brown bullhead, five pumpkinseeds (*Lepomis gibbosus*), 28 prickly sculpins (*Cottus asper*), 30 black crappie (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*), and 57 largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*). Note that only one species (*Cottus asper*) in the six caught, is native to the Fraser River drainage, and that single native species made up only about 23% of the catch.

Yellow bullheads eat crayfish, amphipods, cladocera, copepods, chironomids, corixids, other insect larvae, snails, oligochaetes, and algae, and occasional fishes (usually cypriids), and some are known to specialize on crayfish (Becker, 1983). Young bullheads feed on what ever is available, but mostly on zooplankton.

Spawning occurs in May to July and both male and female contribute to nest construction. The nest usually consists of a shallow depression in shallow, warm water. Females deposit few (300-700) of their 7000 or so eggs in any individual nest. Eggs hatch in 5-10 days and the parent fish guard the young until they reach 5 cm in length and disperse (Becker, 1983). Young bullheads school in a tight mass and can be seen swimming in open water in mid-summer. The attending adults swim through the writhing mass of young fish. These easily-located schools may be the

Help prevent the spread of exotic catfish by introducing them only to your dinner table.

best way for naturalists to survey the species in the Fraser River Delta (or get out your fishing rod and catch a few adult bullhead for dinner, but save the heads so we can verify the identification).

Even reasonably focused photographs of the chin of bullheads caught on hook and line can be sent to me to verify identification, but *never* ship live specimens away from their place of capture. Bullheads make lousy pets (they eventually eat or mangle everything else in the tank), and taking live individuals as pets is illegal without separate collection, transport, and captive care permits. Help prevent the spread of exotic catfish by introducing them only to your dinner table.

Literature Cited

- Becker, G.C. 1983. *Fishes of Wisconsin*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, U.S.A.
- Fuller, P.L., Nico, L.G. and Williams, J.D. 1999. *Nonindigenous Fishes Introduced Into Inland Waters of the United States*. American Fisheries Society Special Publication 27, American Fisheries Society, Bethesda, U.S.A.
- Stewart, K.W., and Watkinson, D.A. 2004. *The Freshwater Fishes of Manitoba*. University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Wydoski, R.S., and Whitney, R.R. 2003. *Inland Fishes of Washington*. University of Washington Press, Seattle, U.S.A.

10% OFF scopes & binoculars for VNHS members
(with this ad)



Market Square
#110-560 Johnson Street
Victoria
ph/fax: 250 382 6838
www.camera-traders.com



- *Field Scopes
- *Binoculars
- *Telescopes
- *Microscopes
- *Tripods
- *Accessories



MODERN - VINTAGE

WE BUY & SELL

2006 Valentine Couples Count Looks to be Best Ever

By Jan Brown and Alan MacLeod

The ninth annual VNHS Valentine Couples Bird Count, set for Sunday, February 12, is shaping up to be the most exciting ever. Dannie Carsen inaugurated this event in 1998 and was its principal organizer for the first eight years. Having done his best over that period to give birder couples some relief from the mid-February blahs, Dannie has now turned the organizing responsibilities over to us.

The object of the exercise is to give birding couples a Valentine's weekend opportunity to get outdoors together and enjoy a few hours finding as many species of birds as they can between the hours of six in the morning and 12 Noon in the VNHS bird checklist area. The event can be approached as casually or competitively as participants like. Some couples think that looking for owls in the 6 a.m. winter darkness is an excellent way to start a Valentine Sunday. Others prefer to sleep in a bit longer and have a hearty breakfast first. Some like to race around in a car to as many hot spots as they can squeeze into those six hours. Others prefer to do it at a more leisurely pace, perhaps even by bicycle.

There are rewards apart from the fun. Local restaurateurs donate fine dining opportunities; others provide different prizes. Scoring the greatest number of birds is not the only road to collecting a prize. For instance, the 2006 count will feature prizes for the couples who collect the highlight bird or tell the most entertaining tale about their day's experience – as determined by participants themselves.

Best of all, the 2006 count will for the first time afford couples the opportunity of having their names inscribed on a new prize we're very proud of and are calling the 'Anderson Trophy'. Jerry Anderson is not just a top-notch birder and – with his wife Gladys – a four-time winner of the top prize in this event. He is also a master bird carver who has generously produced a beautiful carving of cuddling mourning doves to honour the couple who record the highest bird count. The trophy will stay on permanent display at the Swan Lake Nature Centre.

Past Valentine counts have included duets-of-convenience who understandably wanted to share in the birding fun. Ad hoc twosomes will qualify as in the past for the usual rewards, but not the trophy: Jerry's cuddling doves will bear the names of the mated pair of spouses or sweethearts who record the highest count.

What will it take to win? Most years the highest total is somewhere in the vicinity of 80 species and was once as high as 90. If you've never tried the Valentine count, you are

missing out. Spending six hours chasing birds in the great outdoors with one's spouse or partner is a terrific way to enjoy a Valentine weekend morning.

We would like to see the 2006 edition produce the greatest-ever number of couples having the most fun collecting the best rewards yet. If you're tempted and would like to have your names included on the distribution list for news of the Valentine Couples Count you can reach us at 382-3854 or by e-mail at leotaj@telus.net.



Anderson Trophy. Photo provided by author

Partnership Protects Mount Erskine on Salt Spring Island

By Janet Hughes, Development and Communications Assistant,
The Nature Conservancy Of Canada, BC Region

The summit of Mt. Erskine on Salt Spring Island will be preserved forever as a provincial park, thanks to the efforts of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Ministry of Environment.

The three partners have joined together to purchase 40 hectares of ecologically sensitive habitat on the highest point of land on northern Salt Spring Island. This is a strategically important acquisition because the property contains coastal Douglas-fir and Arbutus forest and forms the core of almost 240 hectares of protected and undeveloped lands on Mt. Erskine, including a park reserve, the Manzanita Ridge Nature Reserve (owned by the Salt Spring Island Conservancy), two Crown land parcels and adjacent lands protected by conservation covenants.

The campaign to save the top of Mt. Erskine was launched by the Salt Spring Island Conservancy in April 2005. The project was made possible by all of the Salt Spring Island residents and businesses who donated so generously to the campaign to secure this key parcel of land, as well as a major donation of \$60,000 received from Environment Canada (Georgia Basin Action Plan). Peter Lamb, president of the SSI Conservancy, acknowledges the valuable assistance and financial support received from their conservation partners at the Islands Trust Fund, Habitat Acquisition Trust and The Land Conservancy of British Columbia as well as the Salt Spring Island Foundation, the Capital Regional District, Parks and Recreation Commission and Friends of Salt Spring Parks.

The contributions to the \$625,000 purchase price were:

- Salt Spring Island Conservancy – \$375,000
- Nature Conservancy of Canada – \$125,000
- Province of British Columbia – \$125,000

The Nature Conservancy of Canada's contribution was made possible by private donors and the BC Trust for Public Lands, an \$8-million government-funded, multi-agency partnership announced in 2002. The fund, with matching contributions from the conservation sector, supports improved conservation planning, and acquisition and management of private lands that have unique ecological values.

Jan Garnett, Vice President for the BC Region of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, is proud to have been a part of this exciting conservation project because Mount Erskine

is an important piece of the Gulf Islands' natural heritage. Under the purchase agreement, BC Parks will manage the property on behalf of the partners. Mt. Erskine will be designated a Class A provincial park sometime in 2006.

For more information

The Nature Conservancy of Canada, BC Region
1205 Broad Street, Suite 300, Victoria, BC V8W 2A4
Telephone: (250) 479-3191
www.natureconservancy.ca



Mount Erskine cliff. *Photo provided by author*

Do Native Plants Bloom Earlier in Victoria or Nanaimo? Results of a Five Year Phenology Study

By Bill Merilees

In 1998 I had the audacity to question the “bragging rights” Victoria had to the earliest blooming dates for spring flowers. This question arose with the opportunity to compare data gathered in Nanaimo in 1997 and 1998 with data gathered and published by Ms. M.C. Melburn for Victoria in 1954/55 and reprinted in *The Victoria Naturalist* in 1988. When these first flowering dates of five or six common species (Table 1.) were compared, the results were very ambiguous.

These flowering dates are hardly conclusive due to a variety of factors; notable the small sample size and variable weather conditions one year to the next. As a result, to test the hypothesis that Victoria has or has not the earliest spring flowering of native plants, a co-operative survey was initiated in 2000 that continued for five seasons. A number of observers were recruited in Victoria, Nanaimo, Gabriola Island, Parksville/Qualicum and Courtenay/Comox.

Each participant was sent a recording form that listed ten species of flowering shrubs and twenty-four species of spring flowers that were common, easily identified and easy to observe. Dates of first flowering were recorded and a cumulative summation of this data for seven species (those most frequently reported) was prepared and distributed to all observers at the end of each season.

With five years of data “in hand” it was decided to look at this information to see what insights or answers these comparative observations might provide.

Method

The method used to calculate mean blooming dates was to number each day, January 1st being Day 1, and continuing this process with July 19 becoming Day 200. Years 2000 and 2004 were leap years, so day numbers after February 29th were adjusted accordingly, one day higher.

Results

Are the “dates of first flowering” earlier in Greater Victoria than “up island” communities?

Based on our sample the answer is a definite “YES”. For the six species (Ox-eye Daisy was excluded due to a very small number of observations for Victoria) Greater Victoria’s average mean first flowering time was approximately nine days earlier than Nanaimo, eight days earlier than Gabriola, nine earlier than Parksville/Qualicum and thirteen days earlier than Courtenay/Comox (Table 2.).

Continued on page 14

Table 1. First flowering dates – Victoria 1954 compared to Nanaimo 1977 and 1978

Species	Victoria	Nanaimo	Nanaimo
Spring Gold	March 14	March 31	March 22
Large-flowered Blue-eyed Mary	March 14	March 13	< March 6 *
White Fawn Lily	March 21	April 6	March 23
Chickweed Monkey-flower	March 21	March 13	< March 6 *
Dull Oregon Grape	April 7	April 6	March 16
Salmonberry	April 11	April 3	March 25

* < means first flowering before this date.



Blue-eyed Mary (*Collinsia* sp.). Photo: Darren Copley

Table 2. Average first flowering dates.

Location	Number of observations	Day	Date
Victoria	104	92.93	April 3
Nanaimo	118	102.33	April 12
Gabriola Island	71	100.73	April 11
Parksville/Qualicum	58	101.72	April 12
Courtenay/Comox	64	106.38	April 16

Was the arrival of spring early or late in any particular year?

Comparing the annual date of first flowering to the mean first flowering date for a particular species provides a measure of the earliness or lateness of the season. For the five year duration of this study, almost all species flowered earliest in 2004 and latest in 2002.

The remarkable similarity of yearly first flowering patterns for Red Flowering Currant, Salmonberry and Blue-eyed Mary (that bloom mid to late March) – and – Saskatoon, Common Camas and Thimbleberry (that bloom late April to early May) is noteworthy (Figure 1.) .

This appears to tell us that these species are responding in a similar manner each season, so that their blooming chronology or sequence can be used as an indicator of how fast or how slow spring is advancing at a particular point in a particular year.

What is the variability in the arrival of spring from one year to the next?

On the data provided during this brief five year series of observations, spring “arrived” within a twelve (12.0) day period for Blue-eyed Mary and within an eighteen (17.8) day period for Red Flowering Currant as compared to the mean flowering date for these species. For Salmonberry (13.0); Common Camas (15.2); Saskatoon (16.6); and Thimbleberry (16.8), the range in dates was intermediate.

Conclusions

The data set on which these observations are based is indeed small, therefore coming to any firm conclusions is tentative and somewhat problematic. Those better versed in statistical analysis might interpret these results differently.

Until a larger survey is completed the results of this survey simply provides some interesting observations. This survey indicates that: native plants bloom earlier in the Greater Victoria area than their up Island counterparts; that the time a species first blooms can vary widely from one year to the next; and that by comparing the “first” blooming of a large number of species to their mean blooming date through a full season, a keen observer might be able to track the ebb and flow of Spring’s progress.

To attempt this is my present challenge!

References

- Melburn, M.C. 1988. Chronological plant list (Part 1). The Victoria Naturalist Vol: 44(4): 10-11.
Melburn, M.C. 1988. Chronological plant list (Part 2). The Victoria Naturalist Vol: 44(5): 14-15.
Merilees, B. 1998. Victoria and Nanaimo – Spring has come. The Victoria Naturalist Vol. 54(6)



Camas (*Camassia* sp.). Photo: Darren Copley

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following observers for their assistance in this study. The number in () indicates the number of years each participated.

Greater Victoria Area

Linda Beare (3)
Tracy Fleming (2)
Catherine Fryer (4)
Teny Morrison (5)
Ruth Cleary-Dohan (3)
Mikkel & Ann Schau (5)
Pat Johnston (5)
John Arnold (1)
Susan Bastin (1)

Greater Nanaimo Area

Mollie Byrne (5)
Kathy Jackson (5)
Ray & Sue Gullison (1)
Gwen Johnston (1)
Tom Hutton (1)
Guy & Donna Monty (1)
Irene Malthouse (5)
Jay Rostagi (2)
A. & L. Gast (1)
Peter & Anneke vankerkoerle (4)

Parksville – Oualicum Area

Will Lemmon (5)
Pamela Helem (5)
Margaret Kent (1)
Gillian Spencer-Sinclair (1)

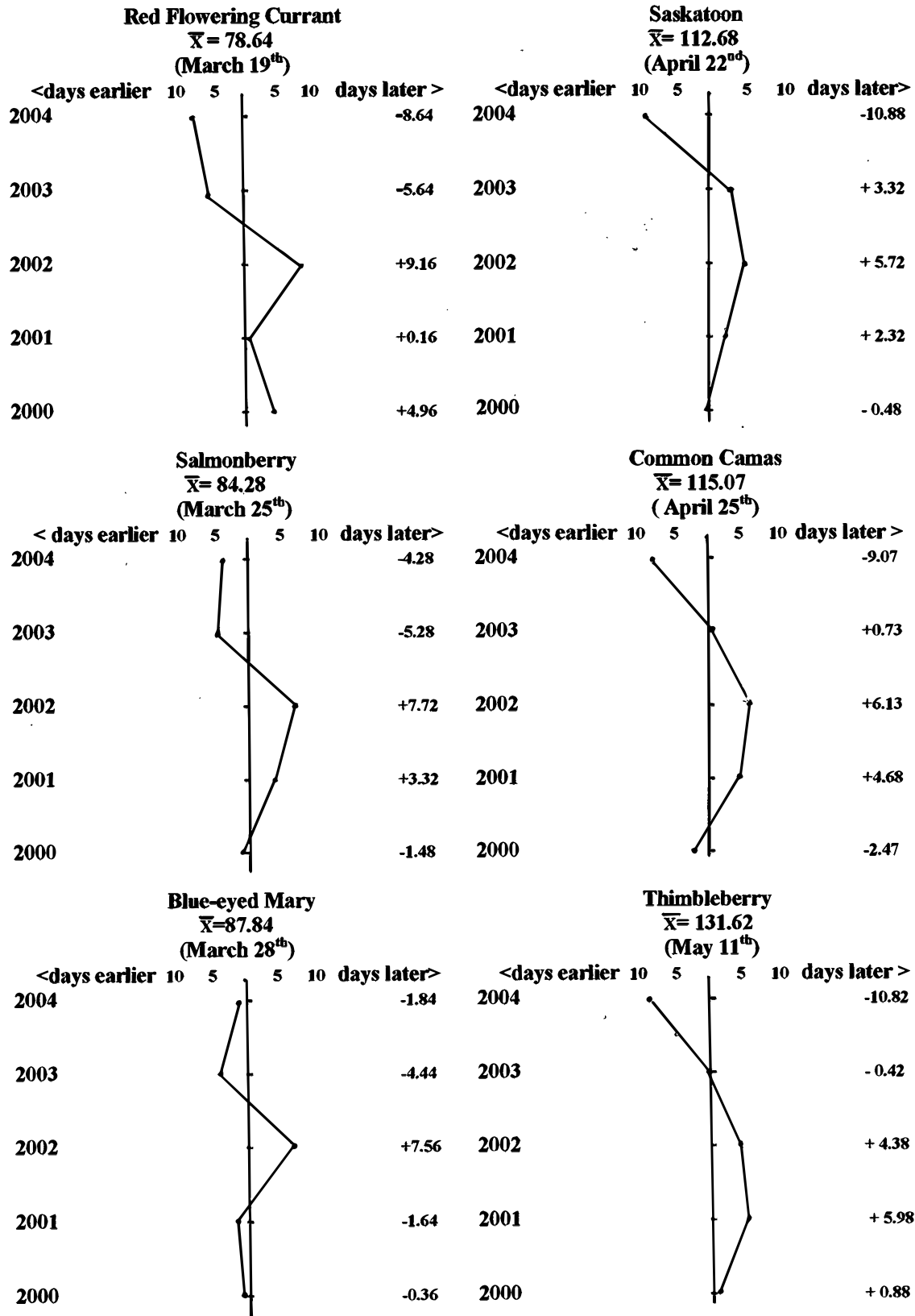
Gabriola Island

Jean Rhodes (3)
Mary Butt (5)
Jane James (1)
Phyllis Fafard (5)
Edna Sikavish (1)

Courtenay – Comox

Fred Constable (5)
Helen Robinson (5)
Fran Johnson (2)

Figure. 1. Yearly first flowering dates compared to the average first flowering date.



2005: An Irruptive Year for Owls?

By Marie O'Shaughnessy

An “irruptive year”, in terms of birds, is defined by a southward movement of northern seed-eating birds or rodent-eating raptors. These somewhat predictable or sporadic occurrences are directly related to a disruption in food supply. A failure of seed crops in the coniferous forests or a rodent crash in the boreal forests and Arctic tundra provide the necessary circumstances for certain species of birds to move southward, or sometimes laterally. Usually the birds that move are primarily adults. It has also been suggested that in years of plenty, bird populations grow rapidly, perhaps creating the very circumstances that induce movement: there simply isn't enough food left for the numbers of birds in a given region or in a particular year.



Great Gray Owl. Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy

An “irruptive year”, in terms of birds, is defined by a southward movement of northern seed-eating birds or rodent-eating raptors.

We may see irruptive years in seed-eating species such as Red and White-winged Crossbills, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings, and Common and Hoary Redpolls. Other species involved may include chickadees, nuthatches, siskins and finches.

The northern raptors that typically eat rodents and other small mammals are Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Goshawks, Snowy, Great Gray, Great-horned, Northern Hawk-Owl and Short-eared Owls. Within these species we may see irruptive years. Typically for Snowy Owls, which may eat four to five lemmings a day, a dramatic reduction in their main prey item would cause them to invade southern areas. This species has been seen as far south as Washington, Oregon and even California. The four year cycle of explosion and crash of grassland rodents of the north is a predictable occurrence. Thus, raptors that depend on these rodents will ultimately move south in search of food. Hare and rabbit populations upon which Northern Goshawks prey, tend to “peak and valley”, often over a roughly ten-year cycle. Consequently, Goshawk irruptions do not occur as frequently as with other raptors.

Could 2005 be an irruptive year? Here in Victoria, we have had one report of a Snowy Owl already and others have been seen further up Vancouver Island. The Victoria bird was at the water's edge below Dallas Road on November 23 – a delightful occurrence for Victoria. On the mainland in Vancouver, there have been at least six Snowy Owls reported to date. The first occurred November 16 at the Iona south jetty in Richmond with other reports from Boundary Bay, Brunswick Point and Sea Island. If winter snowfalls are heavier than usual, and temperatures colder, we may see more of these impressive Arctic residents here on the south coast.

While visiting Edmonton in February 2005, I was able to experience first hand how wintering raptors can concentrate. During the course of six hours of birding in the Opal area of Alberta, my friends and I encountered a very fluffed-up and cold looking Northern Rough-legged Hawk, five

Great Gray Owls, six Northern Hawk Owls, and one Snowy Owl. The temperature for that morning of birding remained at a chilly minus 12 degrees Celsius. The local newspapers had featured articles on the apparent influx of owls during the month of January, so we were well prepared to find good numbers of owls in just the right locations. We were not disappointed.

Meanwhile, the scientific community has confirmed that it has been an unusual year for owls. Bird Studies Canada has recently published their findings based on all the information collected from the 105th Christmas Bird Count. The bird counts across Canada for 2004 gave credence to the phenomena of southward movements of owls. Dick Cannings, in his Cross-Canada Report for Bird Studies Canada, indicates that this was indeed the "Year of the Owl." I quote, "Great Gray and Northern Hawk Owls moved out of their northern forests, likely driven by a crash in the vole population."

The report also suggests that Opal in Alberta was undoubtedly the hot-spot for these owls, with a record number of 40 Northern Hawk Owls. Across the entire Canadian count areas, 104 Northern Hawk Owls were seen, and most were in Alberta. The number of Great Gray Owls was also atypical. An impressive 197 Great Grays were counted across Canada, with more than half of them observed in Ontario. Typically, only 25 of these owls would be seen in the count areas.

I consider myself fortunate to have seen five of these imposing Great Gray Owls during my visit to Alberta. Unfortunately, we didn't see as many Snowy Owls as I would have liked and we even missed the Boreal Owl. Darn! We were totally fooled as well by the Great Northern "Leaf-owl", perched motionless in an otherwise leafless tree. "Leaf Birds" and "Rock Birds" have a way of bringing us back down to reality.

Now that the snow is falling in our garden city and winter is upon us, we need to be out there looking for the unusual. Perhaps another Snowy Owl will surprise us, or even an impressive Great Gray Owl.

References

- Ehrlich, P.R., Dobkin, D.S., and Wheye, D. 1988. *The Birder's Handbook. A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*. Simon and Schuster Inc., New York.
- Cannings, D. 2005. The 105th Christmas Bird Count: Cross-Canada Report. Bird Studies Canada National Report, Summer 2005, Number 32:13-17. (<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/download/CBCnationalsummary2005.pdf>)



Bird Watchers Digest reviewers put the Eagle Optics Ranger Platinum Class binoculars on both their "Best Buy" and "Favorites" lists.

Bird Studies Canada says "...the Eagle Optics Ranger Series of binoculars provides exceptional quality and value."

Simply,
Great binoculars
 with the **Best Warranty**
Eagle Optics Ranger Platinum Class




Your opinion is the one that counts, we invite you to come in and see for yourself

Wild Birds Unlimited

3631 Shelbourne St., Victoria • 250-595-3595

*Quality is remembered
 long after price is forgotten
 Visit our shop for your
 Best value*



*Bird Feeders
 Custom Seed Blends
 Optics
 Nature Gifts*

Welcome to New Members

Our Society grew by twenty new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our "welcome" column:

**Kathryn Harcourt, and
 Jim and Ian Cruikshank**
 all of Dunn Avenue
birds, botany, marine, geology

Brian and Gloria Plain
 Michigan Street
birds, geology

**Linda Baker and
 John Coenroads**
 Highland Road
birds

Completing a Squirrel's Repast

By Bill Merilees

A walk in the forest always has its surprises. Should you be in the company of a knowledgeable naturalist you also never quite know what might become grist for his or her spiel.

Such was the case a number of years ago, when, I believe in the company of Al Grass, our group encountered a squirrel's midden. This mound of neatly dissected cones, absent the seeds of course, was in active use.

After explaining the essentials of this sciurid's activity etc. etc., our naturalist picked up a few of the disarticulated scales, presented them to us for closer observation, and then, without batting an eye, simply asked "What did this squirrel have for breakfast?"

The obvious answer was obviously *not* the appropriate answer, so we remained mute! After an appropriate pause the answer was rendered – "Cone flakes!" This clever corny answer was greeted with a good appreciative chuckle. In fact, yours truly has borrowed this now "tried and true"



"Cone flakes". Photo supplied by Bill Merilees

witticism (with due credit of course!) on many occasions, including sharing it with members of my family.

Our Queen Charlotte son, Andrew has now added this story to his repertoire as well – and – enhanced it one step further. After the 'cone flakes' chuckle, he adds embellishment by picking up one of the de-husked cone stalks and then asks "Yes, but what did the squirrel then have for dessert?" His answer; "A nice clean cone!"

The squirrel's repast is now complete.

Letters

Victoria Natural History Society

I am writing to thank you for the Freeman F. King Scholarship that I received in August. I am honored to be selected for this award and I assure you that it will be appreciated by a student that is clothed and fed with borrowed money. I hope that, having looked at my credentials as a Biology major en route to medicine, you have found me a suitable recipient for this award. Your generosity will be enjoyed.

Yours truly,
Andrew Binding

To the Victoria Natural History Society,

My name is Mariken Van Gurp, and I have just been awarded the Bev Glover Memorial Scholarship. I wanted to express my most sincere thanks for your generous donation to the scholarship; it will be a great help in funding my last year of undergraduate study.

Since I was very young, I've always held a great appreciation for nature. Studying biology has only strengthened my desire to preserve and protect as much of nature as possible. I spent last fall in Bamfield, (by far one of the most beautiful places on the planet!) where I conducted a short study that assessed the impact of human trampling on barnacle populations. I foresee my biology career progressing towards further independent research into issues pertaining to human impact and conservation; I plan to pursue graduate studies in these areas within the next few years, after I've had a chance for more hands on experience in my field. The study and implementation of conservation strategies is crucial at this point, and I hope to contribute significantly to the effort.

Once again, I sincerely appreciate your generosity in funding this award. I would also like to wish you the best of luck in your conservation endeavors.

Sincerely,
Marikenen Van Gurp

The VNHS contributed financially to the Salmon Run school programs held at Goldstream this past fall. Below are some letters from students thanking us for the support. They have not been edited!

November 29, 2004

Dear supporters,
 Thank YOU for supporting the goldstream Nature House. I'm glad we went because I learned a lot of things about salmon that I didn't know before. they have very tiny brains. their hearts are strong because they have to fight the current.


Thank you again Yours truly
Caden



Nov. 29/04

Dear Supporters,

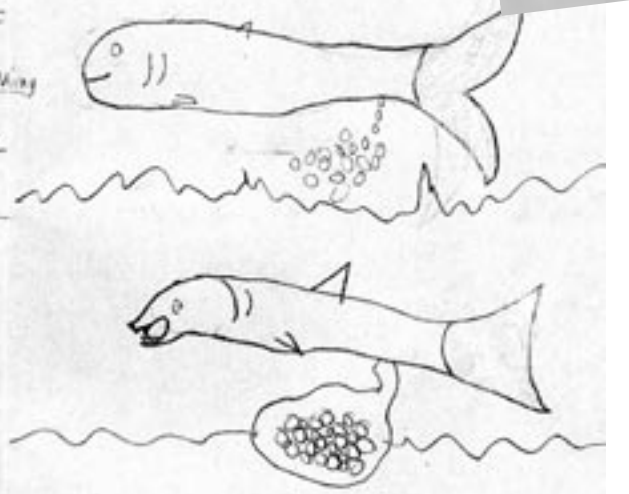
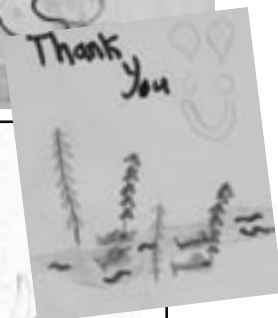
I Thank-you for supporting the Goldstream Nature House. I really enjoyed watching Allison dissect a salmon. It was kind of gross but I like it. Its heart was bigger then its brain. There were many interesting things in the Nature House. It was a gift like the first Nations. yours truly,
 Ryan




Dear supporter,

Thank you for supporting the goldstream nature house. We have fun walking on the path and watching the salmon splash. I loved looking at the toad and baby salmon in the nature house. Thank you very much.

Mingyansu

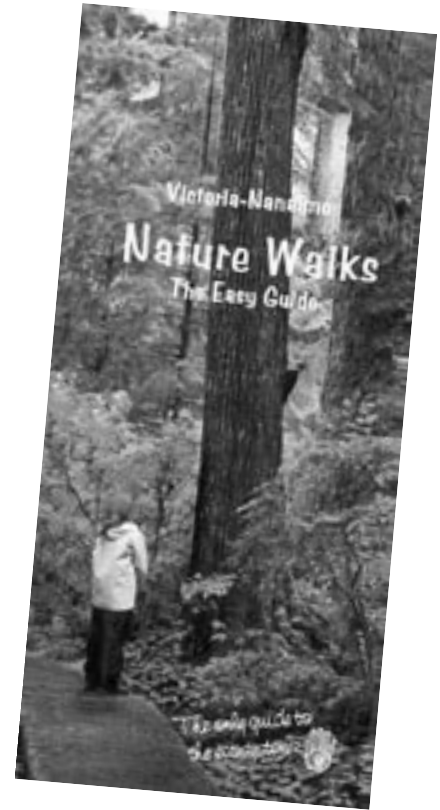



Book Review

By John Defayette

Many readers of *The Victoria Naturalist* would enjoy reading and using *Victoria-Nanaimo Nature Walks, The Easy Guide*. This pocket-sized guide includes 14 ecosystem sites from Jordan River to Strathcona Provincial Park. There are five walks around the Victoria area, including maps and directions by bus or car to the location. A brief description of the site is followed by a checklist of mammals, birds, butterflies, flowers, shrubs, and trees. Colour photographs assist in identifying the species in the forest and wetlands. The author, John Henigman, is a professional biologist and forester who sets the stage with various topics such as Biological Diversity, Landform and Climate, Geology, Aboriginal Cultures, Ecological Changes and Neighbouring Ecosystems. The bibliography lists web sites and other guidebooks available for the reader to explore. At \$13.95, this spiral bound guide is available at local book stores.

Henigman, John. 2004. *Victoria-Nanaimo Nature Walks, The Easy Guide*. Published by Bird in the Hand Enterprises, 85pp. \$13.95 ISBN 0-9689550-1-0



Thank You VNHS Volunteers!

By Darren Copley

Thank you to the following people for participating in “The Nature of Island Artists” art show. The success of the show is due to the people that come forward and volunteer their time and talents. My apologies if I’ve missed anyone – it is a long list!

As always, we received many compliments on the quality of the artwork in the show. At the end of the three weeks more than 10,000 people passed through the doors of the Goldstream Park Nature House. The show was also a great success in fundraising, breaking the \$10,000 mark, with more than \$20,000 in total art sales. All the proceeds of the show support the Goldstream Nature House – keeping the doors open and providing nature education for local school children. We look forward to doing it all again in the year 2007

(Sept. 15 – Oct. 8)!

Alan Greatbatch
Andrew Harcombe
Andy MacKinnon
Angela Deering
Ann Gibbard
Barbro Baker
Blake Waters
Bob Chappell
Bruce Whittington
Cheryl Mackie
Dave Duke
David Fraser
Donna Gaudard
Donna Ross
Dorothea Hoffman
Doug Thornton
Edith Hunsberger
Eloise Defayette

Eric Lofroth
Francis Defeudis
Gail Harcombe
Germaine Taylor
Gladys Craig
Hal Gibbard
Holly Cairns
Ingrid Carswell
Isobel Dawson
Jacquie Taylor
Jean MacDonald
Jill Mclean
Joan Greatbatch
John Defayette
John Henigman
Joke van Barneveld
Judith Parish
Kari Nelson
Keely Rodan

Kerry Joy
Leah Ramsay
Lynn Joy
Marie Burgess
Marilyn Domokos
Morwyn Marshall
Pat Robertson
Pat Toszczak
Peggy Price
Phyllis Henderson
Rick Carlswell
Shelia South
Shirley Terry
Stephen Baker
Tania Black
Tanya Lequesne
Wanda Nash
Wayne Robertson



Habitat Acquisition Trust
Creating a Conservation Legacy

HAT Tricks

By Kathryn Martell, Restoration and Outreach Specialist, Habitat Acquisition Trust

What better ways to engage children with nature than by getting their hands and knees dirty, their eyes right up to a creepy crawly critter, or their noses pressed against a flower bud? HAT's *Good Neighbourhoods Project* gets kids out doing exactly that!

HAT's *Good Neighbourhoods Project* is about kids in the "hood": an elementary schools version of our highly successful *Good Neighbours Program*. The *Good Neighbourhoods Project* provides fun and educational activities for elementary schools, to foster environmentally aware youth, and to link the school and the neighbourhood to local parks. In our "Think Like An Oak" classroom session, we discuss species-at-risk, ecosystem awareness, urban conservation issues, and environmental stewardship with a bio-regional theme. Then we hit the trails with an "Expedition of Discovery!" Armed with eyes, ears, noses, and fingers, we explore a park or natural area near the school.

Good Neighbourhoods' third stage brings nature a bit closer to home, as we build a Naturescape (wildlife habitat) garden right on the school grounds. This year, we've been creating native plant gardens with Sundance, Braefoot, and Strawberry Vale elementary schools. For many months the schools have been getting ready for their gardens: pulling

weeds and turf, piling leaves and mulch, and learning about soils, native plants and animals, habitat niches, food webs, and garden design.

In the past few weeks, we've put our plants in the ground! Kids, parents, and teachers have planted hundreds of Oregon grape, swordfern, red-osier dogwood, mock orange, Garry oak, Nootka rose, salmonberry, hardhack, and other hardy, native plants.

These gardens are outdoor classrooms where children can connect with and learn about local ecosystems. Teachers will use these school gardens not only to teach about nature but also as spaces to teach math, geometry, poetry, chemistry, entomology, mapping, and a myriad other subjects. School gardens provide a sense of community and connection – they bring nature back into children's daily lives and build excitement for conservation, protection, and restoration of wild places.

Good Neighbourhoods has been generously funded by the Victoria Foundation Community Fund, TD Friends of the Environment, and BC Gaming Commission. RalMax Enterprises, District of Saanich, Saanich School Board, and Victoria School Board all donated many tonnes of leaf mold, mulch, and topsoil for school gardens, and Capital Iron donated planting tools and supplies.



Students, teachers, and parents eager to get planting at Strawberry Vale school, as teacher Lenny Ross explains about the pond Naturescape. *Photo:* Kathryn Martell

**Contact HAT at 995-2428
for more information.**

**Office: 316-620 View St. Victoria
Mail: PO Box 8552 Victoria BC
V8W 3S2**

**www.hat.bc.ca and
www.conservationconnection.bc.ca:
your database of conservation
organizations and events
in the CRD.**

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

REGULAR MEETINGS are generally held September-April on the following days. **Board of Directors:** the first Tuesday of each month (directors' meetings are held at Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary at 7:30 p.m.); **Natural History Presentations:** the second Tuesday at 7:30 p.m., in Murray and Anne Fraser Building, Room 159, University of Victoria; **Botany Night:** the third Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., Swan Lake Nature Centre; **Birders' Night:** the fourth Wednesday, 7:30 p.m., Murray and Anne Fraser Building, Room 159, University of Victoria. **Marine Night:** the last Monday, 7:30 p.m., in Murray and Anne Fraser Building, Room 159, University of Victoria. Locations are given in the calendar listings. Telephone the VNHS Events Tape at 479-2054 for further information and updates. The VNHS Calendar also appears on the Internet at: <http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca>, and is updated regularly.

JANUARY

Sunday, January 1

FIELD TRIP

New Year's Day Birding

Join **Bill Dancer** for a New Year's Day birding walk around Viaduct Flats and Quicks Bottom. Meet at Layritz Park at 9:00 a.m. Layritz Park is off Glyn Road, which is off Wilkinson Road. Call Bill at 721-5273 if you need more information.

Tuesday, January 10

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION

The Baffin Islands

George Sirk will be presenting his slides of mammals, birds, and the natural history of the Baffin Islands and Hudson Strait, and also some slides of the rarely visited Ungava Bay and Akpatok Island. George has been a guide and naturalist for more than 30 years and has been to this remote area of North America many times. Everyone is welcome, and don't forget to lug-a-mug. We meet at 7:30 p.m., Room 159 in the Murray and Anne Fraser Building at the University of Victoria.

Saturday, January 14

FIELD TRIP

Sooke Potholes Meander

Join **Rosemary Jorna** in an area she has enjoyed for many years. The area we will visit includes the small Sooke Potholes Provincial Park and the brand new CRD park and the area in between. The habitat is amazingly diverse. Rather than just the alders and western red cedars you would expect out that way, there are pines and arbutus and many interesting shrubs as well. Meet at Helmcken Park and Ride at 9:00 a.m. to car-pool. No pets please. Call **Agnes** at 721-0634 or email her (thelynns at shaw.ca) for more information.

Tuesday, January 17

BOTANY NIGHT

Chasing the Seasons Through 2005

Join VNHS members **Agnes Lynn** and **Sharon Godkin** as they chased the wildflowers as they bloomed. They first scouted for early signs of spring locally, and then enjoyed the local peaks around the region before revisiting spring by increasing elevation. This will be a collection of images from members who came along on these adventures. Swan Lake Nature House, 7:30 p.m., everyone welcome.

Wednesday January 25

BIRDERS' NIGHT

Members' Night

Have you have been taking lots of pictures of birds? Or maybe videoing them? well we would love to see them! The VNHS Members Night is the place for you to show us your pictures, we can accommodate digital pictures with our lap-top computer and digital projector, and also video on CD or DVD's, and 35mm slides with our

slide projector. If you are interested in doing a presentation, call **Ed Pellizzon** at 881-1476. Everyone is welcome. We meet at 7:30 p.m., Room 159 in the Fraser building at University of Victoria. Bring a mug for tea or coffee!

Saturday, January 28 and Sunday, January 29

EVENT

Hummingbird Weekend at Swan Lake

All Victorians know that Anna's Hummingbirds are a favourite bird in the region, so join us for programs for families and gardeners both days. From January 22 to 31st, please call Swan Lake (479-0211) with your hummingbird sightings, so we can see how the distribution of this bird continues to change throughout our area. For more information, please call **Ann Scarfe** at Swan Lake Nature House.

Monday, January 30

MARINE NIGHT

VENUS: Victoria Experimental Network Under the Sea

You have probably heard about the VENUS Project, well now you can find out what it is all about, from the project co-ordinator **Deborah Smith**. The Victoria Experimental Network Under the Sea is a network of instruments in the ocean to observe the marine waters around southern Vancouver Island in both Saanich Inlet and the Strait of Georgia. The first cable was scheduled to be laid in Saanich Inlet in mid December. When operational, scientists will be able to take ocean measurements remotely via an internet connection. We meet at 7:30 p.m.,**** **Room change to Room 159******, Fraser Building, University of Victoria. All welcome.

FEBRUARY

Sunday, February 5

FIELD TRIP

Birding Pat Bay

Join **Barbara Begg** for a birding walk around Pat Bay. This can be a great spot to see all three scoter species, both goldeneye species, plus many other seabirds, also some of the passerines near by. Meet at 9:00 a.m. in the small park on the water just north of the Coast Guard Jetty on West Saanich Road. Call Barb at 656-5296 for more information.

Sunday, February 12

EVENT

Ninth Annual Valentine Couples Bird Count

What better way for birder couples to mark the Valentine Day's weekend than to get outside and chase birds for a few hours while enjoying some friendly competition with fellow birder couples. For an entry of \$10, couples get the opportunity to win excellent prizes donated by local restaurateurs and others for highest count, best bird, best tale-of-the-day etc. This year there's a terrific new incentive: the spouses or sweethearts who record the highest species total will have the honour of being the first to see their names inscribed on the

splendid new Anderson Trophy (see separate article in this issue). The count rules permit birds to be counted from 6 a.m. to noon within the VNHS checklist area. Couples will gather afterwards at the Swan Lake Nature Centre to compare notes and collect the bounty. Everyone is encouraged to bring valentine treats to the post-count event to share with others. For more information or to register for the couples count, contact **Janice Brown** or **Alan MacLeod** at leotaj@telus.net or by phone at 382-3854.

Sunday, February 12

FIELD TRIP

Boundary Bay and Raptors plus Snowy Owls

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** and **Gabe David** for a trip to Boundary Bay. We can expect to see large flocks of wintering waterfowl and shorebirds, as well as visit some of the best wintering habitat for raptors in western Canada. This year has been an irruptive year for Snowy Owls: there have been good numbers seen on the lower mainland. Car-pooling will reduce costs to approximately \$35-\$40 per person. Meet at Elk Lake Drive at the entrance to Beaver Lake Park at 5:45 a.m., we will return on the 5:00 p.m. ferry, dress warmly and bring a lunch. To register call Rick at 652-3326.

Tuesday, February 14

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION

Botswana and Beyond

Come and take an armchair tour of the Okavango Delta and Kalahari ecosystems of Botswana. In January 2005, fourteen members of the VNHS went on a guided birding safari with **Grant Reed** of Letaka Safaris to the Okavango area of Botswana. Grant is now returning to Victoria to give us a slide tour of this same area. Everyone is welcome, We meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room 159 of the Fraser building at University of Victoria. Bring a mug for coffee.

Sunday, February 19

FIELD TRIP

How to Keep Hummingbirds Happy

Join **Agnes Lynn** at her home in Cadboro Bay to see how to make these hummers stay around all year. She will show how she encourages the annas and other birds by providing the habitat they enjoy. She will also discuss their food plants, both native and non-native. There should be lots of hummers around. The males might still be doing their aerial shows although the females may be on their nests by then. Please note this is an event for VNHS members only. Be prepared to show your membership card. Address is 3913 Woodhaven Terrace, off Tudor. Choose a tour at either 8:30, 9:00

or 9:30 a.m. No pets please. Call Agnes at 721-0634 or email her (thelynn@shaw.ca) for more information.

Tuesday, February 21

BOTANY NIGHT

From Kew Gardens, London to the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna: A Botanical Travelogue

Join **Wynne Miles** for a slide show of botanical highlights of her trip to the XVII International Botanical Congress held this summer in Vienna, Austria, including a five day field trip to see bogs and bog restoration sites in the Central Alps, and a side trip to Kew Gardens, London to see (amongst many other favourites) the giant water lilies. Swan Lake Nature House, 7:30 p.m., all welcome.

Wednesday, February 22

BIRDERS' NIGHT

A Celebration of the Birds of Vancouver Island

Come and spend an evening enjoying the birds of Vancouver Island. **Mike Yip** has spent hundreds of hours photographing birds all over the Island for the past few years and has recently self published a coffee table book entitled: *Vancouver Island Birds*. Come and see his amazing slide show. Everyone is welcome. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room 159 in the Fraser building, UVic.

Sunday, February 26

FIELD TRIP

Birding Elk Lake

Join **David Kelly** for a leisurely 10 km stroll around the loop trail at Elk Lake/Beaver Lake Regional Park. This is a good location to find wintering passerines and waterfowl. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Brookleigh Road parking lot at the north end of Elk Lake, just off Hamsterly Road. No hills, but it might be muddy in places, so choose footwear that can take the weather as well as the distance. Call David at 658-8669 if you need more information.

Monday, February 27

MARINE NIGHT

Effects of the 26 December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in the Republic of Seychelles

Dr. Vaughn Barrie of the Pacific Geoscience Centre will describe the impact of this memorable event. He will present the results of a study done by a team of experts who assessed the extent of the damage and he will then apply that knowledge to predict what is vulnerable on our coast. We meet at 7:30 p.m.,**** **Room change to Room 159******, Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Everyone welcome.

BULLETIN BOARD

Are you going to one of the VNHS meetings?

Willing to pick up a VNHS member in the **Fairfield** area? If yes, then please telephone 382-7202. Thank you for your consideration.

Are you going on one of the VNHS field trips?

Willing to pick up a VNHS member in **James Bay**? If yes, then please telephone 384-7553. Thank you for your consideration.

Make It Your New Year's Resolution!

Get involved with nature and volunteer at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary this year. Volunteer positions include nature interpretation with school children, invasive plant removal on Christmas Hill and stream restoration. For more details contact Joan at 479-0211 or email: volunteer@swanlake.bc.ca

Marine Birds: A Course For Naturalists And Enthusiasts

This series of slide and video illustrated talks is ideal for those interested in learning more about marine birds and bird behaviour. Discover fascinating secrets about how marine birds live and feed. The emphasis of this course is on unique and interesting biological and behavioural information that will capture the imagination of both amateurs and professionals. The course is instructed by **James Clowater**, an ornithologist who specializes in the behavioural ecology of marine birds. Two shoreline fieldtrips are included. Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary: Feb 23, March 2, 9, 16 and 23, 2006, 7 – 9 p.m. \$70.00 (Friends \$63.00), payable Feb. 9.



2006 Natural History Courses



Here's a chance to support the society while learning a bit more about natural history. These programs will be taught by experienced VNHS trip leaders who have volunteered their time. The proceeds will support VNHS conservation and education activities. Please note the lower prices for members (yet another reason to join!). We are interested in offering other courses but require more leaders to come forward. Please call Claudia or Darren Copley at 479-6622 if you have any suggestions.

Beginning Birding



An easy introduction to the pursuit of birding for those with little or no previous experience. The emphasis will be on bird identification in the field. We will start with an illustrated lecture on March 9, 2006 and 6 Saturday morning field trips from March 11th to April 22nd. The cost will be \$75 for non-members and \$45 for members.

Take the next step beyond the basics of identification. Our group of local VNHS experts places an emphasis on birding by ear and the identifying field marks of those difficult groups and species. This course includes 8 very diverse field sessions around Victoria led by 8 different leaders. Sessions run on Sunday mornings beginning on April 23rd, 2006. The cost is \$95.00 for non-members and \$65.00 for members. The course is limited to fifteen participants.

Beyond Beginning Birding



If you have any questions, or would like to register, please call the Goldstream Nature House: 478-9414. More detailed brochures will be available in the new year.



**Victoria Natural
History Society**

