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# The Victoria NATURALIST

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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.

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COVER PHOTO:

Gilded Stranger by Judy Burgess, an entry in the VNHS 60th Anniversary Photo Contest.

I recently read an article that hit home for me. It was published in the newsletter of the Native Plant Society of BC, *Menziesia* (Vol.11(1)), and is available online at [www.npsbc.org](http://www.npsbc.org). Called “Establishing A Landscape Connection” and written by Don Gayton, an ecologist living in Summerland; it was all about how we have lost our sense of place, our bond with our landscape. In part, I attribute this loss to our transient nature. We’ll move for a job, for school (I did!), for children/grandchildren, to retire, etc. We may never spend long enough in one spot to really come to appreciate all of its nuances.

How can newcomers to Victoria know that they have just moved into one of the top five most endangered ecosystems in Canada? Where will new residents learn about the more than one hundred rare and endangered species that call this ecosystem home – just as they now do?!

From us.

And organizations like ours.

So spend time learning more about the region, and, if you already know a lot about it, teach others.

*Claudia*

# VNHS Award Recipients

## TONY EMBLETON for Honourary Life Membership in the Victoria Natural History Society

Following his retirement in the late 1980s from a career as school teacher and principal in Kamloops, where he was an active member of the Kamloops Naturalist Club, Tony joined us here in Victoria. He very quickly involved himself as a member of the Parks and Recreation Committee, taking on the Chairmanship for much of the 1990s. In the course of this effort, he and his committee members identified numerous conservation issues, and sought means to address them. One of the major efforts involved the identification and documentation of sites around Greater Victoria where significant plant and wildlife values were to be found.

Concurrent with his Parks and Conservation Committee work, Tony served for several years on the VNHS Board of Directors. One of his added functions during that time was to act as a liaison officer with the Federation of BC Naturalists, representing the Society at Regional and

Provincial FBCN functions and carrying information back to VNHS Directors and members. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Tony took on the job of representing the FBCN on the provincial government's Public Conservation Assistance Fund Advisory Committee. This committee had responsibility for reviewing and recommending for approval dozens of applications for funding of grass-roots conservation projects throughout the Province.

When the Capital Regional District released its Blue/Green Spaces Strategy in 1997, Tony's various services and experiences had put him in an excellent position to embark on an ambitious effort to conserve valued green spaces. The CRD report had invited environmentally-minded non-government organizations to assist in the identification of significant properties, in hopes of finding ways to preserve them. Tony pulled together a small but vibrant committee of like-minded individuals who designated themselves the Green Spaces Project, (GSP). This committee, meeting eight times per year over the ensuing nine years has accomplished wonders. Their initial effort involved attracting several hundred volunteers. These were provided with training in Orientation,

wildlife, plant and ecosystem identification, and completion of necessary forms. They were subsequently sent forth to gather meaningful information about their assigned sites.

During the last nine years, over 600 sites have been surveyed in five municipalities, including some very large holdings in Highlands and View Royal, and most of the federal lands in the Western Communities. Reports were compiled on the resource values identified on each site along with management recommendations for each. These reports were provided to landowners, government agencies, non-government organizations and citizen groups. This whole effort has resulted in a heightened level of awareness by local citizens, a critical requirement for securing ecologically valuable lands. Follow-up action to date by local governments and NGOs has resulted in the designation of a new 40-acre Municipal Park in Colwood, an expanded CRD Park in Highlands, and designation of 30 Conservation Covenants on private lands. In addition, the GSP Committee has been able to make significant positive contributions to



Ann Nightingale presents awards to Tom Gillespie (left) and Tony Embleton (right).  
*Photo: Maureen Funk*

Municipal Official Community Plans (MOCPs) and Greenways Plans.

The GSP is now focused on efforts to preserve a large portion of the very valuable federal lands in Colwood and Metchosin. By working with seven local area citizen groups it should be possible to engender more rapid response by the various levels of government concerned. Tony hopes a successful example in Colwood/Metchosin will encourage citizens in other municipalities to pursue security for their identified natural areas. Tony has been involved with the committee members and volunteers in the many hundreds of hours worked by them, and continues in his leadership role to this day. While much remains to be done, what has been accomplished is significant. It is very much to Tony's credit that so much has been accomplished. His efforts reflect well upon himself and the VNHS; he is hardworking, loyal and supportive.

## **TOM GILLESPIE for Honourary Life Membership in the Victoria Natural History Society**

Tom joined the Victoria Natural History Society in 1989 and from the beginning became an active member, with his first involvement being the Director of Membership in 1990 and continuing until 2002. The same year, 1990, he became responsible for the distribution of *The Victoria Naturalist*, which he continues to do today. In 2000, Tom was elected President of the Society and he currently represents us to the Federation of B.C. Naturalists and for the Beacon Hill Round Table. Tom is particularly interested in Beacon Hill Park, where he is leader of the annual Christmas Bird Count.

Tom is also involved in a number of other societies and activities:

- Perpetual Leader of Camas Day – Beacon Hill Park
- Treasurer of Rocky Point Bird Observatory/Banding programme
- Treasurer of Garry Oak Preservation Society.
- Secretary of the Friends of Ecological Reserves.
- Purple Martin Observations and Banding. There are 40 Purple Martin colonies from Victoria to Campbell River as well as Powell River, and the work involves climbing ladders to inspect bird boxes and band and count the birds.
- Vesper Sparrow Study. Observation and banding at Cassiday Airport.
- Tom has also led many field trips and, in his SPARE time picks up Victoria Natural History Society mail!!

Tom carries on all this work in his own quiet way and we all feel a great deal of admiration and respect for him. He is a real tribute to the Victoria Natural History Society.

## **THOMAS EDWARD BURGESS for a Distinguished Service Award**

Thomas Edward Burgess was born in Victoria, B.C. and attended schools here, graduating from Victoria High School in 1960. He then went on to the University of Victoria, graduating in the first class, in 1964, with his Bachelor of Science degree. In 1974 he attended the University of British Columbia, graduating with his Master of Science degree. His thesis subject was waterfowl of the Fraser River estuary.

In 1964 he married Judy Smirl. They have three children, and five grandchildren.

Tom worked as a biologist for the government of Alberta from 1968 to 1973 in the Peace River district, and also in Red Deer. In 1973 to 1997 he worked for the government of B.C. as the Regional Wildlife Biologist stationed in Surrey.

In 1997 Tom retired and moved to Sooke, BC.

Over the years, Tom has been an active member in a number of different organizations:

- Association of Professional Biologists
- Member of Federation of BC Naturalists and was Vice President for a few years.
- Victoria Natural History Society
- VNHS Green Spaces Project
- Colwood Association for Smart Growth
- Official Community Plan committee for Sooke

Tom took the lead in the HELP MELP Campaign and worked hard to limit the cutbacks that threatened the mandate of the Wildlife Branch of the B.C. Government

Tom's other interests:

Tom is very involved in community activities. If something needs to be done, he's right there to help with such things as the Sooke Fine Arts group & the Sooke Challenge, running with the Sooke Trail and Road Runners (STARR). He participates in (VIRA) Vancouver Island Running Association race series, plus other runs. He is an avid gardener, swimmer, kayaker, biker, hiker (often with Norm Mogensen's group, and dog walker with Alex, his Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever.

Tom joined the VNHS Green Spaces Project in 1998 and has been active until his recent illness restricted his energy. It was Dr. Bert Brink that recommended Tom to the Green Spaces Project at a meeting of the FBCN Directors in Vancouver; he was phoned immediately to ask if he would like to help. Tom agreed, and has been an active and knowledgeable contributor to this project. His talents were greatly appreciated during policy formation and the setting of goals and he always gives excellent advice and leadership, as well as helping maintain focus.

He also completed the ecological inventories of four sites in Colwood:

- 7.7 ha on Sunheights at Fulton,
- 18.6 ha down the Millstream Connector, east of the south end of Fulton,

- 3.84 ha of the Colwood Park.
- 1 ha surrounded by Demel, Krager Terrace and Fulton.

It was Tom's detailed reports that led Colwood Council to declare a 46 acre site at Triangle/Fulton into a park. This included some Crown land east of the south end of Fulton.

Tom also contributed his wisdom and knowledge to the VNHS Parks & Conservation Committee

Tom's dedicated his time and energy for almost for seven years. His commitment has made a major contribution to the Victoria Natural History Society in terms of its reputation as an organization that cares about the conservation of Victoria's green spaces.

## PHIL LAMBERT for a Distinguished Service Award

Phil Lambert has been a dedicated member of the Victoria Natural History Society for many years and he deserves this award. He is a founding member of the Victoria Natural History Society's marine group and he has been a driving force of the Society's Marine Night for many years. He has arranged speakers on a monthly basis, and organized countless marine field trips, including unforgettable night

outings! Phil is very knowledgeable as a marine scientist and has always been more than willing to share this great knowledge and passion he has for marine creatures. Marine nights were first held at the Swan Lake Nature House, but have since moved to a larger space at the University of Victoria, demonstrating how popular these evenings have become. It is a tribute to Phil, who has a real knack for finding interesting speakers and also for explaining in plain language to neophytes about marine invertebrates. He does it with humility and humour.

Phil has a B.Sc. From the University of Victoria (1967) and M.Sc. from the University of British Columbia (1970). He has been the curator of marine invertebrates at the Royal British Columbia Museum since 1973 and has made many important contributions to marine science. He has, for instance, identified six new species of sea cucumbers from BC's coast. He is also the author of two handbooks, one on sea cucumbers and the other on sea stars, first published in 1981 and revised in 2000. A handbook on the brittle stars will be out any day.

When Phil is not busy discovering new marine species or planning the next Marine Night, you might find him SCUBA diving, drawing, playing ice hockey, kayaking, cycling or boating.

He well deserves the VNHS Distinguished Service Award.



Ann Nightingale presents awards to Tom Burgess (left) and Phil Lambert (right). *Photo: Maureen Funk*



# Two Funerals and a Wedding?

## The Ethics of Behaviour in Public Places

Michael Fox

I recently enjoyed a hike on Mount Tzouhalem, near Duncan, with a small group of friends who hike together on a weekly basis. The hike was what we expected in most ways, with steep, wooded trails and spectacular viewpoints overlooking the Cowichan estuary. The unexpected came early at the first viewpoint in the form of a makeshift memorial of the kind often seen at the site of fatal road accidents. A printed tribute, lightly protected from the elements, revealed Derek's age of 22 years. The small, flimsy cross and sad items of remembrance had a look of extreme impermanence, leaving me with the hope that Derek's friends would eventually remove the memorial from what was presumably a favourite place.

We continued our hike and shortly reached the second viewpoint, where we were quite surprised to see what appeared to be a second memorial. This was more substantial, consisting of a sturdy and very healthy variegated holly tree interlaced with long stemmed red roses. The holly was about 60 cm tall, container grown and planted in a hole dug in the ground. The only identifying information was a plastic wrapped photograph of the bridal party at a wedding. Maybe this was not a memorial after all. A closer look around the area revealed yet a third memorial nearby. This clearly was a memorial, with a rather sturdy wooden cross and the remains of a floral arrangement. No name or photograph was in evidence and the memorial appeared older than the other two.

The conflicting emotions in the minds of the hikers were interesting. All of these artefacts were moving in a very fundamental way and yet our social and environmental ethics told us they should not be there. It was a mental struggle not to remove the holly tree and yet we felt it would be disrespectful to do so and so we left it. From a legal perspective, these artefacts should not be placed in the Ecological Reserve. Our observations and common sense shows that one memorial leads to many memorials. It is interesting to speculate on the role of the original, very prominent cross on Mount Tzouhalem.

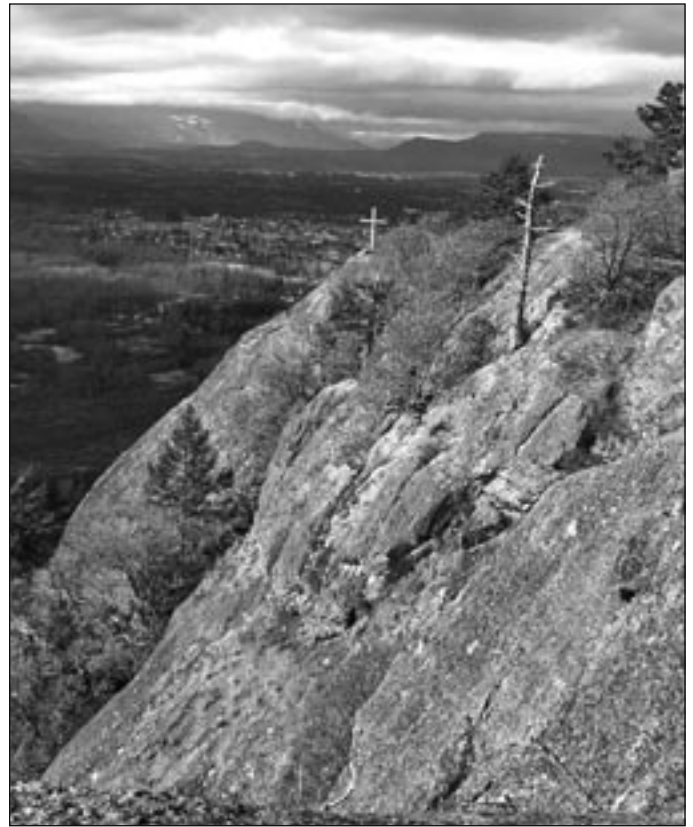


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# A New Alien Among Us

By Chris Borkent

An alien invasion has reached the shores of Vancouver Island and is spreading around us! Luckily this is no extraterrestrial invasion from Mars by creatures resembling sentient slime molds or hydrocephalic, green skinned anthropoids. Our new visitors are able to probe us though, and are socially organized. This new invader on Vancouver Island is *Polistes dominulus*, the European paper wasp.

The genus *Polistes*, commonly known as paper wasps, is a cosmopolitan group that frequently nests on artificial structures. In British Columbia there are two native species, *P. fuscatus* (Fabricius), and *P. aurifer* Saussure, though there is some uncertainty whether these are separate species or subspecies of *P. fuscatus* (Kenner 2002). These wasps are frequently confused with various yellow-jacket species (Vespininae), but are easily distinguished by their thread-

waist, their habit of trailing their legs in flight, and their nests of exposed cells, resembling an upside down umbrella.

The European paper wasp, *P. dominulus* (Christ), is native to Europe, Asia and North Africa, and has been introduced into the USA, Australia, and Chile. This wasp was first recorded in the USA from Massachusetts in the late 1970's (Eickwort 1978), and has since expanded its range south and west, covering most of the northeastern USA (Judd and Carpenter 1996, Pickett and Wenzel 2000, Gamboa *et al.* 2004, Johnson and Starks 2004). This species has also traveled north, and has been sighted recently near Kingston (in 2002) and Sandfield (in 2004), Ontario (H. Goulet, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, pers. comm.), but apparently no specimens have been collected in eastern Canada. *Polistes dominulus* has also been found recently on the west coast of the USA, from Washington to California, and east to Colorado (Landolt and Antonelli 1999, Cervo *et al.* 2000, Pickett 2003). It is not known whether populations in the western USA are the result of new introductions, possibly from Asia, or of western expansion of the eastern introductions (Johnson and Starks 2004).

*Polistes dominulus* is easily distinguished from the native *P. aurifer* and *P. fuscatus* by the yellow patterns on the thorax. Our native species also tend to be larger than *P. dominulus*, specimens of which are usually the size of yellowjacket wasps.

*Polistes dominulus* was first recorded in Saanich, BC in late August 2003, when D. Manastyrski (Victoria, BC) took a photo of a nest, which was published on the back cover of the Entomological Society of Canada 2003 meeting program. No specimens were collected from this nest. On 30 September 2004, a nest, built around a nail, was taken from the eaves of a house in Saanich, BC. Initially the nest appeared to have only three female wasps still attending it. However, when the nest was collected, 17 more females were found between the eaves and the back of the nest. The wasps may have congregated for warmth, as the temperature was 7°C. The nest was composed of 206 cells, six of which contained larvae at various stages of development. There were also a few cells that were less than a third filled with nectar. Since this nest was found, there have been reports of *P. dominulus* from a number of Lower Mainland sites as well as elsewhere in the Capital Regional District.



Top: Our native paper wasp. Photo: Darren Copley. Bottom: Females of *Polistes dominulus* at a nest in Saanich, BC, 30 September 2004. Photo: Chris Borkent





Diagrammatic representation of the thorax of *Polistes aurifer* or *P. fuscatus* (left) and *P. dominulus* (right), showing differences in size and markings (white areas = yellow). Gray areas represent wings. Scale line = 1 mm.

Although there is no question that *P. dominulus* is expanding its range, the effect of this invasion on native species is not as easily determined (Pickett and Wenzel 2000, Johnson and Starks 2004). The recent appearance of *P. dominulus* in BC provides the possibility of measuring its effects on native *Polistes* populations before and after the invasion. *Polistes dominulus* will probably become more abundant within its new BC range, resulting in many more observations of this wasp in and around human dwellings, its preferred nesting sites. It is also possible that this new arrival may act effectively as a bio-control agent for alien defoliating insects (mostly caterpillars, one of their favorite foods) that attack our gardens. Their docile nature (I have approached a nest to within 30 cm without producing any response from the wasps on the nest surface) may make them particularly useful as pest control agents in an urban setting. Therefore, we should welcome these alien invaders until they have been proved a threat, and enjoy the chance to observe some interesting social behaviour and reduced herbivory on our gardens in the interim.

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# Macadamized

By David Stirling

If you are going to burn up the highways this summer to commune with nature in the great outdoors, remember you will be sharing the motorways and byways with a host of other creatures. I have seen a messy sampling of skunks, porcupines, and other creatures dead on the road in my many years of travel, but the magnitude of this slaughter was brought to my attention by a Christmas gift a few of years ago. The gift was a slim book called *Flattened Fauna* by Roger Knutson, a field guide to help the motorist identify the smelly remains of small animals and to separate furred and feathered pancakes from shredded big rig tires and pock-marked Volkswagen mufflers.

The gruesome statistics seemed to indicate that the enroadment of some species might exceed the toll from all other causes such as hunting, trapping and natural losses to predators and disease. In Nebraska, a road counter found nine reptiles, 58 birds and 161 mammals on a 480 mile trip. Another, way back in 1932 when Bonny and Clyde were at large, found 39 Red-headed Woodpeckers flat as Frisbees on a 211 mile stretch. That possibly helps to account for the paucity of living examples of this species today. Woodpeckers, it seems, view the world through a knot hole.

The natural order of the universe is that most creatures devour others. Unfortunately, for wildlife, humankind

devours everything in many and diverse ways. Since one of these ways is highway overkill, I decided to do my own field studies. My first route was Ontario's Highway 401. Big rigs were verge to verge. Nothing without wheels could survive for long on this motorized madhouse. I saw many carcasses of iron, rubber and plastic but no identifiable meat. I couldn't slow down or take my eyes off the road. Perhaps every living thing not encased in metal was long dead. On the other hand, my peripheral vision picked up several live groundhogs [woodchucks], fat and sassy, on the grass beyond the tarmac. The short-sighted groundhog, in spite of its propensity for highway edge living, was apparently doing well. It must be among the top street-wise animals, venturing onto the hard surface only to get a clear shadow on the second of February, its special day.

My next attempt to count the dead was on the Trans-Canada between Moose Jaw and Piapot under the big sky of Saskatchewan. The traffic was considerably below that of Highway 401, but still wild enough to cause numerous deaths in the ranks of that ground-hugging rodent, the prairie gopher [Richardson's ground squirrel]. It was late June when teen-age gophers were getting kicked out to fend for themselves. These youngsters, with no road sense, were rapidly becoming smears.



A roadrunner. *Photo:* Darren Copley

Through the mountains there were larger creatures. Animals ranging in size from hares to moose were feeding on the roadside greenery when spring had barely touched the interminable coniferous forests on the higher slopes. A galloping *Mustang* had made contact with a shambling black bear. Both were casualties. Finches, attracted to salt and gravel on mountain roads, were frequent losers. A speeding *Cougar* massacred a whole flock of Evening Grosbeaks. The driver reported that the birds appeared to be drunk.

Reptiles and amphibians fare badly on the roads. Snakes seeking the tarmac's warmth on cool evenings are frequent victims. Unfortunately, few people are concerned whether a snake is living or dead. Bungling toads are confident that on their trek to the ancestral mating puddle across the tracks they will be left in peace. For the horny toad it is often "rest in peace." In England, at a notorious toad crossing, a culvert underpass has been installed to save the naughty natterjack (a British amphibian).

Of all the victims of road and radiator, none are as numerous as insects. Billions end their brief lives plastered to paint, chrome, and glass. Perhaps nobody cares. We are, after all, waging a war on these critters that compete with us for food and make us itch. The most noticeable flattened insects on roads and cars are butterflies, grasshoppers and dragonflies, the big game of the bug world. I know of no studies regarding dead insect tonnage on the trails but there might be some, another good area for research.

The "ill-wind principle" applies on the road too. Scavengers regard the highways as elongated fast food chains. Red-tailed Hawks and others of their kin, ever watchful for the next victim, perch on the poles lining the motorways. Hungry coyotes and foxes, highlighted in your sealed beams in the crepuscular hours, are sniffing the verge for a snack. Clean-up gangs of sparrows, blackbirds and starlings, lurking in the relative safety of shopping mall parking lots, eagerly await the next radiator stuffed with hot crispies. Perhaps ravens have the most road savvy. For them the, highway means fresh meat, especially in summer when streams of young, inexperienced animals are on the move. Ravens, patrolling in the early morning hours when most *Pintos* and *Ponies* are resting, seldom make the DOR list.

Animals become macadamized for a variety of reasons. Some species awaken to find that their home turf is now a parking lot leaving them no choice but to move elsewhere. Others find their traditional migration routes suddenly blocked by a super highway. Some are young animals seeking new homes. Others are looking for mates. A few attempt a crossing just for the hell of it. Whatever the reason, for many, their story ends here. *Cougars* and *Mustangs* have voracious appetites.

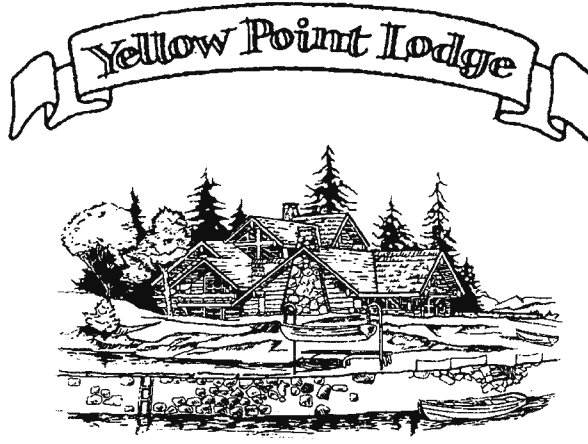
So, on your next road trip be alert for other beasts that might decide to contest your right of way. You might save a varmint and from a selfish point of view the varmint could be you. Several kilograms of fresh animal propelled through your windshield at 100 km/hr can be calamitous. And that is the last word.



Snakes regularly fall victim to vehicles because they are drawn to the warmth of the road. *Photo: Darren Copley*

### Further reading

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- Roger Knutson, 1991. *Flattened Fauna: A Field Guide to Common Animals of Roads, Streets, and Highways*. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, California.
- Slanina, Carrie. 2005. Roads to Ruin. *Canadian Parks and Wilderness Quarterly*, BC Chapter, Vol.16 No.4.



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# The 2006 Valentine Bird Count: and the Winner is...

By Alan McLeod and Jan Brown

The 2006 running of the Valentine Couples Bird Count is in the books, and we're happy to have judged it a winner. Participants found 110 species on this year's count, an increase of 14 over the 2005 result, though not quite good enough to match the all-time high of 118. We were also pleased to have nine couples participate this year, just one short of the 2001 high. Several participants were new to the event and we're banking on them having enjoyed themselves well enough that we'll see them again in 2007.

The point of the Valentine count is to give birder couples a mid-February excuse to share their passion for birds and enjoy some healthy outdoor fun by running up a big count of birds between six in the morning and noon.

Bruce Whittington and Wanda Dombrowski were one of the first-time couples. They started their day in Ladysmith, worked their way south and finished their inaugural run with 69 species, tied with Dave Fraser and Leah Ramsay. Their efforts landed Bruce and Wanda a copy of Graeme Gibson's acclaimed *Bedside Book of Birds*, compliments of Munro's Books of downtown Victoria, while Dave and Leah will enjoy breakfast for two provided by Canoe Cove Coffee Shop, North Saanich.

Andrew and Gail Harcombe, another first-time couple, finished the day with 71 species, earning themselves a breakfast or lunch for two at Floyd's Diner, at the corner of Quadra and Yates in Victoria.

The prize-winning didn't stop there. Barb and Mike McGrenere won a gift certificate for a box of the finest hand-made chocolates to be found anywhere in Victoria, compliments of Chocolat, Fort Street near Douglas, Victoria. Allison and Mike Lafortune won a lunch for two at Swan's Brew Pub, at Pandora and Wharf in Victoria.

A new honour this year was for "Bird of the Day", as determined by a consensus of participants. Good candidates included a Red-breasted Sapsucker in south Oak Bay, Spotted Sandpiper in North Saanich, and a gang of singing Western Meadowlarks in Central Saanich, but in the end the best bird distinction went to the Ring-billed Gull that Bruce and Wanda spotted at Cherry Point.

Of course the day's big prize was the first presentation of the new Anderson Trophy, featuring Jerry Anderson's beautiful rendering of a pair of cuddling Mourning Doves. Jerry is a master bird carver and also one half of a crack birder team, as demonstrated by the fact that he and Gladys had won this event five times in the past. Well, this year's result had a familiar look about it: Jerry and Gladys once again finished the day with the highest species count, 75. Having produced an exquisite work of art perhaps it's only fitting that Jerry should insist on seeing to it that his name would be the first inscribed on his trophy.

There's a wrinkle though. By contrast to the Andersons, we had never won this event, finishing second-best four times, often behind Jerry and Gladys. This year we finally struck gold: we too finished the day at 75 species, so we're co-winners of the first Anderson Trophy award with our Valentine count role models. Now we have another reason to visit the Swan Lake Nature House where the trophy will remain on permanent display.

If you and your spouse are enthusiastic birders but have never participated in a Valentine count, you don't know what you're missing. Apart from the joy of birding, the post-count gathering always generates entertaining accounts of the day's found, and lost, birds, the windfalls and the patfalls.

Now that we've taken our first run at organizing the Valentine count we already thinking about ways of improving it in 2007. We are grateful for the generosity of the merchants who donated prizes for the 2006 event and we encourage VNHS members to see for themselves why these were the businesses we chose to sponsor the Valentine count.



Left to right: Jerry and Gladys Anderson, Alan MacLeod and Jan Brown.

# Bike Music

Dannie Carsen

I ride down the Lochside trail up and down the Saanich Peninsula to work most every day. I love to ride. I get legs like iron, a slow resting heart rate, and a smile on my face. I see fall skies fade and darken and in spring brighten again. I see Cooper's Hawks swoop low over the path, hear Trumpeter Swans honk softly overhead, and recognize the slow hammer tones of a Pileated Woodpecker on a nearby tree.

Why are all these iPods sprouting on people? People seem to want to escape the natural landscape I revel in. They want to retreat into themselves rather than take part. There is so much to be seen and heard, even in the suburban landscape.

A daily ride has the side benefit of engaging you with the landscape. You gotta concentrate on the trail ahead and that focus allows you to see things with greater clarity. You stop being a passive observer.

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Even when fog rolls up over the Blenkinsop Valley, I can still tell where I am from the sound cues. Each location sounds different as the sounds of birds change with the landscape.

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There is a sensual pleasure feeling wind, rain or sun on your face. However, a different type of enjoyment is to listen to the sounds of my ride. Even when fog rolls up over the Blenkinsop Valley, I can still tell where I am from the sound cues. Each location sounds different as the sounds of birds change with the landscape. I love the variety of birds I hear while riding through the fields, between the trees, down along the creek, over the trestles, and near the lake. I can almost "see" the landscape through their songs. Waterfowl and sparrows in the fields, woodpeckers amongst the dense second growth, and songbirds perched on the hedgerows provide audio cues to location and season.

In the winter, I hear the bold confident cascade of Winter Wrens in the hedgerows. A Bald Eagle speaks in falsetto shrieks from the big cottonwoods along Wallace Drive as I cruise through wet fields. Crossing the highway brings me to open farmland where sweet wistful arias from Song Sparrows begin to flavour my February rides. As I approach a small woodlot I hear the quick-fire bursts of



Easter lilies along the trail. *Photo: Dannie Carsen*

Bewick's Wrens. The chip of Fox Sparrows is a counterpoint to the chitter of Dark-eyed Juncos. As I burst through the farmyard and into the long field, I leave behind the descending whinny of a Downy Woodpecker and hear the swish of feathers in Canada Goose wings overhead. They land in the fields and hold court and conversation in the cool air. Savannah Sparrows give buzzy trills from low perches in spring. Between the trees on either side of the hedgerows beyond, the morning resonates with Red-winged Blackbirds' singing "potpourri".

Splashing coots or unmelodic mallards sometimes break through the sounds of tires trundling on the wooden trestles over the lake. On the water, American Wigeon murmur and male Buffleheads rear up and charge their opponents. Bright spring sun brings out a new frenzy of the dawn chorus on my route. Just before all the trees leaf out, a rising tide of new birds sing during April migration. The first Orange-crowned Warbler song foreshadows spring. Each day in early May brings a new sound like the "witchety, witchey, witch" from a Common Yellowthroat at the pond near the schoolyard. After I pass the school, the measured whistles and shrieks of Black-headed Grosbeak catch me in contemplation of summer. I slow for glimpses of orange in the canopy. I rarely stop.

My rides wend their way through the seasons. June finds most birds nesting but many still sing from their territories as I pass. August and September are quieter, but I still listen intently for young birds singing truncated or unpractised songs. Sometimes they sound like the White-crowned Sparrows or Ruby-crowned Kinglets they are trying to be. The nickering of young Northern Flickers is one of my favourite songs of later summer. Each new sound of the season is a reminder of the advance of spring and, when their sounds diminish, that fall has arrived again. Every day I ride is another exciting possibility for the sounds of bike music.

# Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve – Ecuador

By Philip Critchlow

**B**ellavista, Ecuador, is a cloud forest reserve about 30 km as the condor flies northwest of Quito, a few kilometres south of the equator. We straddled this imaginary line on the drive from Quito, crossing from northern to southern hemisphere several times. The reserve, originally a 40 ha Finca (farm), now encompasses roughly 700 ha with an elevation range of 1600-2400 m above sea level. The main buildings are at 2250 m. Much of the land has been logged with only a small area of primary forest on the steepest slopes; secondary growth covers the remainder with patches of bamboo and a grassy field. A multitude of trails have been developed, ranging from easy and level to steep and slippery. Many of the buildings are constructed from bamboo brought in from the coast. The main building is in the form of a four story “geodesic dome” with the restaurant on ground level and different types of accommodation above. We stayed on the second floor of a separate bamboo house – lots of space, but not much headroom, including bathroom with hot water shower.

About twelve hummingbird feeders hang along the main walkway and around the dome. A constant hum arises from the numerous birds feeding there. As many as 10 different species may be seen drinking simultaneously, with three or four different species at the same feeder at any one time. The most attractive hummingbirds were the Booted Racket-tail with its elongated outer tail feathers ending in blue-black “rackets” and the Violet-tailed Sylph. As its name suggests, it has a long, 7-8 cm, violet tail. The Gorgeted Sunangel, with a white collar and large iridescent purplish throat, was the most colourful. While there was much jostling and squabbling at most of the feeders, one Buff-tailed Coronet monopolised a particular feeder, chasing away any others that tried to drink there. The predominant iridescent colours were shades of blue and green with a few pinks but interestingly, no reds. Some species lacked any bright colouration. Blue-winged Mountain Tanagers, Bananaquits, and two species of Flowerpiercers, Black and White-sided, were also



Plate-billed Mountain Toucan. *Photos: Philip Critchlow*



regular visitors to the feeders, often getting drips or overflows.

During dinner on the first night, we learned that a Common Potoo frequently comes soon after dark to sit on a tall pole in the vegetable garden. While we were there it came every night. It was not shy but turned its head when a bright light was shone on it. In the mornings at 5.30, it still sat on its perch. It was, however, much more active than in the early evening, often taking short sorties to catch moths or large insects attracted by the overnight lighting, sometimes coming as close as a few metres. It left at around 5.45 a.m. Soon after, a pair of Turquoise Jays and Masked Trogons arrived, also looking for an easy breakfast of insects. These birds were fairly tame, especially the female trogon.

Each morning, shortly after 6.00 a.m, we went bird-watching with a guide in the forest or along the old Quito-Mindo road, which is open on one side with forest on the other – almost no traffic. None of the expeditions into the forest were very rewarding; it seemed few birds were active. Once we caught good sightings of a distant Golden-headed Quetzal and once we watched, for some time, an Andean Pygmy-Owl being mobbed by Beryl-spangled and Golden Tanagers together with several hummingbirds. A third morning yielded no birds although we could hear calls from the low shrubs and undergrowth. Birding along the open road was far more interesting yielding Sickle-winged Guan, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan and a number of mixed flocks



Violet-tailed Sylph.

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## In our brief stay, in spite of poor weather and having no bird call recordings, we saw 55 species of birds.

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often comprising several species of tanagers plus others. One of my favourites was the easily identifiable Grass-green Tanager – bright green body, large rusty face patch, and red bill and legs. On one occasion, out on our own, we were thrilled to see and identify a Crimson-mantled Woodpecker and a Green-and-black Fruiteater.

Cloud forests are found at 1000-2500 m elevation in mountainous, tropical areas, where climatic conditions produce frequent cloud and mist. Though it may not rain, humidity is so high that water is almost always present, condensing and dripping from the vegetation. The forests are characterised by a profusion of mosses, ferns, orchids, bromeliads and other epiphytes growing in every nook and cranny, tree, or rock or on the ground. The number and species of trees, shrubs and other plants is enormous. During our nature walks, the guides pointed out interesting trees and flowers. The sap of Dragon's Blood trees, obtained by making a cut through the bark with a machete, is used by the local Indians for healing cuts, burns, sore throats and for relieving insect bites. Research suggests that healing is actually improved, as the sap contains antibacterial agents. These trees grow to 30 metres with large heart shaped leaves. When you look over the forest at Bellavista, "Silver trees" visually dominate the canopy, appearing as silver islands in a green sea. The name derives from the multitude of whitish hairs that grow on the upper leaf surfaces to reflect the incoming sunlight. Bromeliads, some very bulky and heavy, thrive in the treetops, sometimes toppling trees with the extra weight. Not surprisingly, the trees have evolved countermeasures, smooth trunks and branches to reduce lodging sites or thin bark that peels away under the accumulated weight. The Melastomataceae trees even have specially designed leaves to facilitate water run-off; major veins run almost parallel to the central vein with minor ones at right angles, and with an extended pointed drip-tip.

In our brief stay (November 30–December 3, 2005) at Bellavista, in spite of poor weather and having no bird call recordings, we saw 55 species of birds, with only the Turkey Vulture and Blackburnian Warbler on our list likely to be seen in Canada. No mammals! We very much enjoyed a relaxed atmosphere and felt a little better acclimatized to the high altitude and more familiar with some of the bird species prior to our subsequent trips with Tropical Birding. The staff was extremely friendly, courteous and helpful, the food excellent, and the guides knowledgeable. Unfortunately, we never got to appreciate the view as the hills and mountains were always shrouded in mist or rain.

# 2006: Snowy Owls!

By Marie O'Shaughnessy

This past winter was a banner year for Snowy Owl sightings in our region. The birding community reported sightings of Snowy Owls in and around Victoria, up Island, between Courtenay and Campbell River and on the lower mainland at Boundary Bay and Brunswick Point. The greatest numbers of owls on the west coast were seen in the lower mainland: As many as 23 Snowy Owls were seen in a single day at the two hot-spots in Vancouver.

Two Snowy Owls were reported off Oak Bay on one of the many small islands in December 2005. I was lucky to see what appeared to be an adult male (much whiter bird) and an immature female (darker grey and white bird) at this location. Another sighting was Trial Island. Wednesday January 25, I was able to glimpse a distant white owl on Trail Island. Not an easy owl to spot among the white and grey rocks on Trial, however Snowy Owls generally seek higher perches than the flat ground, so I found it on the crest of a rise. They like to have a full 360 degree look-out perch. They also like to perch on light poles, as was the case in a news report of a 'Snowy' seen in downtown Seattle. A light pole was exactly the location where a "Snowy" was also seen at Clover Point in December 2005.

Elsewhere, south of the border, Snowy Owls were being seen in unusual numbers, delighting communities with their appearance while perched on posts or hanging out at airports. I had mentioned in the previous issue of *The Naturalist* (Volume 62, Issue 4) that if numbers of Snowy Owls increase dramatically while breeding due to an abundant food-supply, then what follows is a phenomena whereby a food scarcity occurs. Even when the lemming population is stable, there just aren't enough lemmings to meet the demand. Once this occurs, and the food source becomes less abundant, the owls have to move south in search of food. This same movement occurs in years when the lemming population crashes. Since the size of a clutch (eggs laid in a nest) is based on abundant food supply, it stands to reason that if many hatched owlets have to be fed then the lemming population will fair badly. Owl movement will naturally occur once the food source becomes scarce. Generally, the male Snowy Owls and immature birds head farther south than do females. Incursions into our region of these splendid white owls occur every three to five years.

Their southward movement can take the owls east and west. In central Canada in Oakville, Ontario, and into the USA, Snowy Owls have been seen as far south as Blackwater Maryland, Washington DC, Virginia, January 2006. As many as 70 owls were observed all across Minnesota, with ten noted in Iowa. Closer to home, owls have



Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy

been observed at Whidbey Island and Seattle, Washington, Oregon, Northern California, and Idaho.

Generally monogamous, the Snowy Owl pairs for life. It inhabits the northern tundra around the world. It is North America's heaviest owl and possibly the strongest and fiercest. It is known that geese and Eider ducks choose to nest very close to the "Snowy" due to its ability to ward off dangerous predators. They can be long-lived owls, living 10 years in the wild and 20 or more in captivity. Although lemmings on the tundra comprise a large part of the owl's diet in the north, they will eat other small rodents, small mammals, other birds including grouse, doves, sea ducks, domestic fowl, and even geese. Owls have also been seen taking fish and crustaceans.

The female Snowy Owl is larger than her mate. This is called *reversed sexual sized dimorphism*. In most bird species, the male is bigger and stronger than the female. This is not so in raptor populations. Sexual maturity is reached after one year but the Snowy Owls generally don't breed until they are in their second year. An average clutch size is seven to eight eggs, but can be as few as three or as many as 12, depending on availability of food. The male takes an active part in feeding his mate, who almost exclusively broods the eggs. Once the young hatch, he continues to participate in feeding his family. Both adults will care for their young for another ten weeks, once the young have learned to fly.

As more dramatic and devastating weather disturbances prevail in the world, the question arises, "What changes will occur in nature?" Changes possibly that further challenge animals as they are forced to leave familiar territories in search of food. What does the future hold? We can only guess. The current trends are most alarming. We can no longer ignore what is happening, nor turn the clock back. We can only become more responsible and accountable for our activity, and not continually take all the natural resources without considering the cause and effect of our actions.



## Project G.O.! Links Youth Programmers with Local Naturalists

**P**roject G.O.! *Get Outdoors with BC Parks* is an exciting new pilot project that promotes provincial parks to youth in the Victoria area and Lower Mainland. Initiated by BC Parks, Project G.O.! is one of the many new programs supported through the Ministry of Environment's B.C. Conservation Corps, which is an initiative program that employs up to 150 students and recent grads who work to benefit the environment throughout B.C.

Project G.O.! recognizes the crucial role of youth in promoting a lifelong appreciation and use of our parks. To reach youth, Project G.O.! targets youth programmers at recreation centres, cultural organizations and other agencies in the Victoria and Vancouver areas. Taking a "train the trainers" approach, the goal of the project is to promote recreation, facilitate outdoor experiences, and encourage youth to learn about the ecosystems and species that provincial parks protect.

Since September 2005, three Conservation Corps team members have been networking with youth programmers and connecting with other organizations who share our objectives (e.g., local park facility operators, AdventureSmart, Wild BC, the Federation of BC Naturalists, and the Victoria Natural History Society (VNHS)). These organizations have expressed an interest to act as resources for youth programmers looking to get outdoors with BC Parks.

The Project G.O.! website, created as the primary tool for youth programmers, will provide an ongoing planning resource. The website features Lower Mainland and Victoria area provincial parks, trip planning information and key contacts, such as the VNHS, to increase park use.

The VNHS has many highly experienced naturalists, with specialties including birds, botany, and marine life – Project G.O.! is pleased to have them on board as resources. Members may be available to lead field trips, give

presentations, or offer expertise to youth programs in provincial parks. Since the members of these organizations are volunteers, relationships with programmers will develop on a case-by-case basis, and will be dependent on the volunteer's availability to assist interested youth programmers.

In January, the team facilitated several informative and networking workshops for youth programmers to encourage outings to provincial parks. Feedback from these workshops has been extremely positive, and we anticipate that there will be many trips planned as a result.

If you would be interested in offering your naturalist abilities to youth programmers in the Project G.O.! pilot regions, please contact the Project G.O.! team at 250-387-9782 in Victoria or 604-220-0905 in Vancouver. Or email us at: [contactus@projectgo.ca](mailto:contactus@projectgo.ca).

Check out the Project G.O.! website at [www.projectgo.ca](http://www.projectgo.ca).

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The advertisement features a black and white portrait of a smiling man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a dark shirt and tie. To the right of the photo is the logo for DFH Real Estate Leaders. The logo consists of the letters 'D', 'F', and 'H' in large, bold, serif font, each inside a shield-shaped frame. Below this, the words 'THE REAL ESTATE LEADERS' are written in a smaller, sans-serif font, with 'THE' and 'LEADERS' on separate lines and 'REAL ESTATE' in the middle.

**Jim Farrell 477-7291** [jamesbfarrell@shaw.ca](mailto:jamesbfarrell@shaw.ca)



Habitat Acquisition Trust  
*Creating a Conservation Legacy*

## HAT Tricks

### Metchosin Is Home to the Sharp-tailed Snake

By Christian Engelstoff

Like garter snakes, sharp-tailed snakes are non-venomous and completely harmless to humans. They may be confused with garter snakes, but can be distinguished by the sharply pointed scale at the tip of their tail, for which they are named, and the distinctive black and white banding on their belly. Unlike garter snakes, of which there are three species in British Columbia, sharp-tailed snakes have no close relative. This unique snake is the “only child” of the genus *Contia*.

The sharp-tailed snake’s range extends from southern California to southern British Columbia. The snakes are relatively common in suitable habitats in California and southern Oregon, but are found in only a few isolated locations in British Columbia and Washington State. The scarcity of sharp-tailed snakes, combined with the fact that they live in one of the most densely populated parts of British Columbia, means that the future of the sharp-tailed snake in this province is insecure. All known sharp-tailed snake sites on southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands are located on private land. This is also the case for the one site along the Galloping Goose Regional Trail in Metchosin.

Sharp-tailed snakes are chestnut brown in colour, about as thick as a pencil, and up to 30 cm long, which makes them one of the smallest snakes in British Columbia. They are rarely seen because they spend most of their time hidden underground. Hatchlings are a bright reddish brown and about the size of large earthworms. They often coil up into a ball when handled as a defensive behaviour that probably makes them more difficult for predators to swallow.

Garter snakes give birth to live young whereas sharp-tailed snakes lay eggs. Females may deposit three and five eggs in a clutch between rocks or among grass roots. The eggs are probably laid in late spring or early summer and hatch in the fall. Because hatching depends on the heat from the sun, it is expected that sharp-tailed snakes use south-facing rocky slopes or small opening in Douglas-fir/Arbutus forests for nesting.

Humans and sharp-tailed snakes often share habitat, which means that the snakes can become victims of cars, weed trimmers, outdoor cats, and indirectly, a loss of their habitat to development. Gardeners may be pleased to learn that small slugs are most likely the favourite food of the sharp-tailed snake – an added incentive to provide suitable habitat.

Unlike most other snake species in British Columbia, sharp-tailed snakes are most active on warm days in early spring and fall. They are thought to hibernate from mid-November to February. During the hot and dry periods in the summer they are inactive. The sharp-tailed snake is rarely found on the surface during the daytime but hides under rocks, rotting logs, and forest litter. Tidying a property and removing these sources of cover may make the snakes more vulnerable.

HAT is providing outreach services to landowners with potential sharp-tailed snake habitat this spring. Areas of focus include North Pender Island, the William Head area of Metchosin, and Durrance Lake in the Highlands. If you think you have seen a Sharp-tailed Snake on your property, please call me at (652 9770) or the HAT office.

Contact Habitat Acquisition Trust at 995-2428 for more information.

Office: 316-620 View St., Victoria

Mail: PO Box 8552, Victoria BC V8W 3S2

[www.hat.bc.ca](http://www.hat.bc.ca) and

[www.conservationconnection.bc.ca](http://www.conservationconnection.bc.ca)

(your database of conservation organizations and events in the CRD)

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## Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 19 new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our “welcome” column:

**Dawn and John Bradley**  
Grandview Drive  
*birds, botany, marine,*  
*geology*

**Dorothy Chuhran**  
Carrie Street  
*birds*

**Michele Hibbins**  
Linden Avenue  
*birds*

**Gerald and Liz Puttergill**  
West Saanich Road  
*birds*

**James Craig**  
Craig Court  
*birds*

# Quality of Life CHALLENGE

By Christina Peacock, Communications Manager, Community Social Planning Council

Imagine...a sustainable quality of life for everyone in British Columbia's Capital Region.

Many of us take it for granted. Some of us struggle to achieve it. Each of us has a stake in it.

Quality of life is dynamically linked with the health of the economy, the environment and the community. Together we can improve and sustain our quality of life. The Quality of Life CHALLENGE is a bold new way for all sectors of BC's Capital Region to work together to find solutions to critical concerns and to create a sustainably vibrant community.

In 1999, the Community Council produced a comprehensive report on a series of quality of life indicators including employment, health, housing affordability, community participation and safety. On September 10, 2001, 60 people from all sectors and from most of the region's 13 municipalities gathered to study the report and determine the most critical issues for the community. That day, the Quality of Life CHALLENGE was founded to engage the entire community in a common effort to address critical community concerns.

Three priority issues were identified as the focus for the next five years: housing affordability, sustainable incomes and community connections.

The CHALLENGE was built on lessons learned from initiatives undertaken in the region over a decade, which bring people together from all sectors to find constructive responses to problems in BC's Capital Region. This new approach boldly reaches further up-stream, closer to the source of the problem to work for systemic change. Long-term solutions require comprehensive shifts in our culture – in values, thinking and behaviour.

The CHALLENGE demonstrates care and respect for each person, the community and the environment through:

- Cooperation with others to build community capacity;
- Understanding the underlying problems and opportunities;
- Participation from a variety of voices;
- Inclusion of people who experience the issue first hand;
- Communication in ways that everyone can understand;
- Sharing of power, information, resources and leadership;
- Openness to innovation, various points of view and participation of all sectors;
- Acting on practical, effective solutions, and;
- Recognition for positive reinforcement and celebration.

By naming these principles and applying them in practice, the CHALLENGE seeks to deepen and expand the community's culture of engagement, inclusion and collaboration, which form the basis of a healthy community.

In the past three years, the CHALLENGE has:

- Produced and distributed the booklet "HR Options for Action", profiling innovative human resource practices employers have implemented to improve the quality of their employees' lives.
- Published thirty-eight case studies of local employers that have highlighted employment practices that improve quality of life and/or reduce poverty in the workplace. These stories have been told in the bi-monthly electronic newsletter – "*the employer CHALLENGE*", on the television and in the new publication. There is a buzz in the business community about the CHALLENGE.
- Contributed to changes in local government policies regarding housing affordability. A Regional Housing Trust Fund has been established, six new by-laws have been passed and a number of developments have been approved;
- Produced a major report on broad quality of life indicators, released in June 2005. The *Quality of Life in BC's Capital Region* is available on line;
- Completed a regional survey of self-rated quality of life and quality of employment in 2005; and,
- Been effective in breaking the myths and communicating the realities of living in poverty, particularly about the waged poor. The Poverty Experience, Fishbowls, personal stories, and application of the Inclusion Policy are some of the ways that people who are experiencing poverty are having an impact on the CHALLENGE and on the larger community.

There is growing evidence that people from all sectors are taking the initiative and the responsibility for the health of the community. The CHALLENGE is a catalyst, but the community owns the outcome. Over the past three years much has been tried, much has been learned, and much has been gained. The effectiveness of poverty reduction strategies is being documented. Leadership partners and supporters from all sectors share responsibility for the Quality of Life CHALLENGE. The Community Council is the lead partner and the secretariat for the CHALLENGE.

Leadership Partners include Vibrant Communities, Coast Capital Savings, Government of Canada, Service Canada, Shaw, *Times-Colonist*, and The Ocean/JACK FM

Supporters of the CHALLENGE include United Way of Greater Victoria, Vancouver Island Health Authority, Capital Regional District, Vancity, and Number 41 Media Corporation.

The Quality of Life CHALLENGE is a partner and leader in Vibrant Communities, a pan-Canadian approach to poverty reduction through which 15 communities from across Canada learn from each other.

For more information: [www.qolchallenge.ca](http://www.qolchallenge.ca) or telephone: 383-6166.

# Letters

## Letters of appreciation for the books donated to school libraries through the VNHS School Project.

We wish to thank the Victoria Natural History Society for their kind donation of Field Guide Books for all our school libraries. As we mentioned, we are taking the books to our next Principals' meeting.

They are a wonderful resource which we know will be put to good use.

Thank you again,  
Jordan Tinney  
Assistant Superintendent of Schools, School District  
No. 63 (Saanich)

To Whom It May Concern:

We received your gift to our school regarding the Natural Environment of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest. We wish to thank you for your thoughtfulness in providing these books to us.

These kind of resources are a great help to our students and teachers.

Sincerely,  
Jana Dick  
Librarian, Victoria West Elementary

Dear Mr. Defayette,

I'm writing to thank you and the Victoria Natural History Society for your recent donation of books for our school district's libraries. We realize that this donation was the direct result of a generous bequest from the late Ann Adamson and we wish to thank her family as well. Please extend our thanks.

The books were sent to our district mailroom today and will begin arriving at schools as early as Monday. I'm certain that school principals and teacher librarians will be very pleased with this gift and will ensure that both teachers and students in their schools are aware of these valuable resources.

As promised, we formally announced your donation in our Learning Initiatives newsletter in February. I will ask our secretary to ensure you receive a copy by email.

Please accept our heartfelt thanks for the generous donation of resources for our schools.

Sincerely,  
Eileen Eby, District Principal, Learning Initiatives,  
Greater Victoria School District

## The Alice M. Hay Scholarship

I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you, and to thank you for your contribution of the Alice M. Hay Scholarship to my graduate studies program in Biology at the University of Victoria.

My name is Zoë Lindo. I am currently entering my third year of a Ph.D. program in Community Ecology with the Department of Biology. I received my B.Sc. in Ecology and my M.Sc. in Soil Ecology from the University of Calgary. I am very excited to be completing my third and final degree at the University of Victoria, because Victoria is my hometown.

I study Oribatid mites, a group of mites that very few people know about, that are abundant, incredibly diverse, and species rich, particularly in forest soils. The research I perform involves much time spent in the Walbran Valley on the southwest coast of Vancouver Island collecting these mites from soils deep in the ancient temperate rainforest. These organisms are not only found on the ground, but they are also found high in the tree canopy in organic matter accumulations called suspended soils. The main focus of my research is exploring the taxonomic differences between these two communities, and how these mites may have dispersed to the canopy.

The Alice M. Hay Scholarship was awarded to me on the basis of species and habitat conservation. A major factor that drives my research is my concern with the preservation of old-growth temperate rainforest on Vancouver Island, and in describing unknown species. During my Ph.D. work, which began in January 2004, I have identified and documented 125 species of oribatid mites. Many of these species are part of a distinct canopy mite community and are undescribed. My results show the abundance and diversity of canopy oribatid mites, the prevalence of undescribed species in this system, and the need for conservation of these ancient trees. The Walbran Valley is significant due to the paucity of ancient temperate rainforest remaining regionally and globally. Additionally, environmental groups like the Western Canada Wilderness Committee are using the discovery of new and undescribed canopy-dependent species in the Walbran Valley to further the case for old-growth forest preservation.

The Alice M. Hay Scholarship is a wonderful contribution to my research. This year I am planning to present my research at an international conference in Amsterdam, and publish the results of my research in Canadian and international journals. Your contribution will help me attain these goals. Once again, thank you for this award.

Sincerely,  
Zoë Lindo



# A Duck with a Penchant for Pensioning

By Bill Merilees

It is late afternoon, October 24th, 2005 and I have just returned from a saunter around Buttertubs Marsh here in Nanaimo. Though not sunny, there was no rain, the winds were stilled and the autumn colours muted by cloud cover. The duck population, which had been growing nicely over the past weeks, was feeding actively on this year's crop of pondweeds. Wigeon were by far the most numerous, while the resident Mallard flock was hanging out in close proximity to the public feeding ramp, awaiting the next handout. Wood Ducks in goodly numbers, Ring-necked Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, Scaup, (most probably Lesser) and a very few Gadwall rounded out the ducks. Pied-billed Grebes and American Coots completed the "on water" avian contingent. All in all, a nice mix!

In typical fashion the dabblers were dabbling, the divers diving but wait; what were some of the Wigeon up to? A few were over deep water where they had no chance of reaching the food supply. Here, among the feeding Coots and Ring-necks they seemed woefully out of place.

Years ago I had the opportunity of reviewing some 1940's correspondence between J. A. (Jim) Munro, the Chief Federal Migratory Bird Officer for British Columbia, and H.H. Currie, editor of the Nelson (B.C.) *Daily News*. Mr. Currie had been writing a series of longish articles about the birds he would see during his walks along the Nelson

waterfront. A future chapter in a West Kootenay birding history will be devoted to H.H., but suffice it to say, he became a very competent field naturalist, who contributed regular counts, particularly of waterfowl, to Munro.

In a letter from Munro (January 5, 1944) to H.H., J.A. writes, referring to Wigeon wintering in the interior, "Baldpate [a former common name for this species] seem to remain [in the B.C. Interior] wherever Coots or diving ducks winter. As probably you know they are pensioners of the diving birds and obtain much of their food from them." This memory flashed into my mind as I watched these open water Wigeon. Sure enough, as soon as a Coot dove for food the Wigeon immediately paddled to the spot, waited, and when the Coot returned to the surface, latched onto the trailing ribbon of pond weed and began swallowing as much of it as possible. Without any apparent animosity, between Coot and Wigeon, this act was repeated again and again. Though I have observed this behaviour a number of times in years past, this latest observation was a most pleasant re-acquaintance. It was also a wonderful reminder that many fascinating bird behaviours are available to those who bird watch. It proves that taking the time, along with a measure of patience, can provide fascinating rewards.

In retrospect however, I wonder if rather than pensioning, this behaviour might better be described as downright theft!

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## 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 House; **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.

**\*\*\*Check the Bulletin Board for Free-Wheeling Field Trips with Your New President!\*\*\***

### MAY

**Saturday, May 6**

EVENT

#### ***Camas Day in Beacon Hill Park***

This annual event will include guided walks for Birds at 9:00 a.m. with **Tom Gillespie**, Wildflowers at 11:00 a.m. or 1:00 p.m. with **Dr. Adolf Ceska** and **Dr. Brenda Beckwith** and Archaeology at 11:00 a.m. or 1:00 p.m. with **Dr. Grant Keddie**. Walks are about one hour each. Meet at the flag pole atop Beacon Hill. Jointly

sponsored by VNHS and Friends of Beacon Hill Park Society. No pets please. Contact Agnes Lynn at 721-0634 or [thelynns@shaw.ca](mailto:thelynns@shaw.ca) for more information.

**Saturday, May 6**

FIELD TRIP

#### ***Birding Royal Roads and Esquimalt Lagoon***

Join **Ann Nightingale** for a birding walk around Esquimalt Lagoon. You should see a good variety of migrating shorebirds and passerines. Meet at the south end of Esquimalt Lagoon by the washrooms at 7:00 a.m. This is a five hour walk so bring a snack and a drink. Call Ann at 652-6450 for more information. No pets please.

## Sunday, May 7

### FIELD TRIP

#### *Witty's Lagoon Songsters*

Join **Dannie Carsen** for a foray around Witty's Lagoon for some great ear birding and good views of warblers and vireos. Meet at the parking lot off Metchosin Road at 7:00 a.m. Bring your lunch and a beverage, we will stop at the picnic tables after the walk is over. For further information, contact Dannie at 544-2117 or dcarsen@shaw.ca

## Saturday, May 13

### FIELD TRIP

#### *Nanoose Hill, North of Nanaimo*

Judith Holm has arranged for **Kent Anders** from Nanaimo to lead us around the area. This area may have the largest population of cacti on the BC Coast. Rarer plants for us to search for include *Allium amplexans*, *Allium geyeri*, *Heterocodon*, *Meconella oregona* and *Isoetes nuttallii*. Meet at the Helmcken Park and Ride at 8:30 a.m. to car-pool. Bring a lunch and drinks for the day-long outing. No pets please. Contact Agnes at 721-0634 or thelynns@shaw.ca for more information.

## Sunday, May 14

### FIELD TRIP

#### *Mount Douglas with Jules Thomson*

We travel great distances to enjoy the wildflowers but we'll see that the flowers in our backyard are exquisite as well. The delphiniums should be perfect. We will investigate little known trails as **Jules** lives on the slope of the mountain and we'll possibly visit a choice site on private property. The birds should be interesting as well. Please note the trail is steep and challenging but will be taken at a leisurely pace to enjoy the habitat. Meet in front of 1251 Pearce Crescent, off Blenkinsop at 9:00 a.m. Bring a snack and drink. No pets please. Contact Agnes at 721-0634 or thelynns@shaw.ca for more information.

## Friday, May 19

### FIELD TRIP

#### *Birding Mount Newton*

Join **Sheila Mosher** for a birding walk on Mount Newton's south slope. We should see Black-throated Gray Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Western Tanager as well as many other migrant and resident birds. Meet at the corner of Haldon Road and Newton Heights at 7:00 a.m. No pets please.

## Sunday, May 21

### FIELD TRIP

#### *Birding Blenkinsop Lake*

Join **Bill Dancer** for birding the Blenkinsop Lake and Lochside Trail area. Meet at the south end of the bridge at the end of Lochside Drive at 7:00 a.m. Call 721-5273 for more information. No pets please.

## Saturday, May 20 and Sunday, May 21

#### *Victoria Butterfly Count*

We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers so get out your field guide! **James Miskelly** is the count coordinator; give him a call at 477-0490

## Sunday, May 21

### EVENT

#### *Camera and Optical Instruments Flea Market*

The second annual Camera and Optical Instruments Flea Market will be held from 10 a.m.–3 p.m. in the Market Square Courtyard

(560 Johnson Street, Victoria). This event is free for buyers; seller's tables are available for rental at \$30 each. Sellers are asked to call 382-6838 or email info@camera-traders.com to reserve a table. Last year's event was a resounding success and we expect this year will be even bigger and better. This is a great opportunity to sell your extra gear, meet fellow enthusiasts, or buy that rare item you've been looking for or didn't know you needed!

## Monday, May 22

### FIELD TRIP

#### *San Juan Ridge, Above Jordan River*

Come enjoy the *Erythronium montanum* and other early sub-alpine flowers (if we can make it to Hans Roemer Meadow in the ecological reserve). Be prepared for cold and/or wet weather due to the elevation and wear good footwear. Also throw in your gum boots in case we have time to stop at the bog. Length of hike will depend on road conditions. Some rough ground and a reasonably steep hike at a slow pace. Bring lunch, snacks and lots to drink for this day-long outing. Starts from Victoria around 9:00 a.m. You must pre-register for this trip due to transportation limitations and potential change of plans due to snow cover. Guaranteed spot if you are willing to bring your 4-wheel drive for carpooling! No pets please. Contact Agnes at 721-0634 or thelynns@shaw.ca to register or for more information.

## Monday, May 22

### FIELD TRIP

#### *A Natural History Cycling Tour of the Galloping Goose Trail (Sooke Potholes to Leechtown)*

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** on a cycling tour into the Sooke Hills. We will enjoy the flowers, birds and scenery along the way. Meet at the Galloping Goose parking lot 2.3 km up Sooke River Road at 8:00 a.m. Bring a cool drink and a lunch. Call Rick at 652-3326 for more information. No pets please.

## Saturday, May 27

### FIELD TRIP

#### *Birding the Jordan River area*

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** for a trip out to Jordan River. In the past it has been a good hot spot for rarities in the spring and fall. It's a great place to hear the Fox Sparrow's sing in the spring. Meet at the Helmcken Park and Ride at 7:00 a.m. Please call Rick at 652-3326 if you need more information.

## Sunday, May 28

### FIELD TRIP

#### *Lake Cowichan Hill 60 Rhodonite Mine*

This field trip is with **Rick Hudson**, the same fellow that gave us that great jade talk a while back. For more information about where we will be going, check out <http://www.scratchpatch.com/rhodo.htm>. We thank Rick for waiving his fees to lead this trip. This will be a joint trip with the Cowichan Naturalists. As well as the ultimate trip to the mine as described on the web site, we will enjoy the birds and plants along the way. It is rumoured that there are *Erythronium grandiflorum* that we may see. Be prepared for cold and/or wet weather due to the elevation and wear good footwear. Meet at the Helmcken Park and Ride at 7:45 a.m. to car-pool. We need 4-wheel-drive or high clearance vehicles or we will have a long walk. Bring a lunch and drinks for the day-long outing. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at 721-0634 or thelynns@shaw.ca for more information.

## Sunday, May 28

### FIELD TRIP

### ***Birding Elk and Beaver Lakes***

Join **Tom Gillespie** for a birding walk in Elk Lake Beaver Lake Regional Park. Meet at 7:00 a.m. in the parking lot on Jennings lane which is just south of the Rowing Club boathouse on Elk Lake. Bring a drink and a snack; it should be about a three hour walk. Call Tom at 361-1694 if you need more information.

## **JUNE**

### **Saturday, June 3**

#### **WORKSHOP**

#### ***Hummingbird Banding Demonstration***

Join **Cam Finlay** at the Nature House at Goldstream Provincial Park. Cam will explain the process of banding hummingbirds; he has been banding hummingbirds in our area for the past nine years. Cam has five sites on Vancouver Island that are part of the North American Hummingbird Monitoring Network and last year his teams banded over 2000 birds. It starts at 9:00 a.m. Call Cam at 479-9833 if you need more information.

### **Sunday, June 4**

#### **FIELD TRIP**

#### ***Birding The Power Lines And The Ponds At The Hydro Substation Alongside Francis King Park***

Join **Barry Gatten** and **Rick Schortinghuis** on a walk along the power lines that border Francis King Park and the area around the hydro substation. We will be stopping to look at the flowering shrubs, butterflies and birds along the way. This is a great area to hear or see most of the warblers, vireos and flycatchers we have in our area. Bring a lunch and a drink and meet at the nature house on Munns Rd. at 7:00 a.m. This will be a 3-4 hour walk. Call Rick at 652-3326 for more information. No pets please.

### **Saturday, June 10**

#### **FIELD TRIP**

#### ***Butterflies in the Duncan area***

Join **Derrick Marvin** in looking for butterflies in the Duncan area. Meet at the Helmcken Park and Ride at 8:00 a.m. to car pool. Others can meet Derrick at Somenos Marsh at 9:00 a.m. Bring a lunch and a drink, we are going to be there most of the day. Call Derrick at 250-748-8504 if you would like more information.

### **Saturday, June 17 to Monday, June 19**

#### **FIELD TRIP**

#### ***Colocum Pass in Central Washington***

This is a joint trip with **Vancouver Island Rock and Alpine Garden Society** (VIRAGS) whose members have gone many times. Why go there? Once you have been, you will never question that it is one of the most beautiful wildflower sites in the Pacific Northwest. The flora is amazing diverse from dryland to woodland to sub-alpine. The area differs from the Canadian equivalent area due to lava from the nearby volcanoes resulting in very rich soil to support this diversity. You have to be careful not to step on the *Lewisia rediviva* across the entire plateau. For the birders, bluebirds were a common site as well as many others. The plan is to travel there on the Saturday from Victoria. After settling in to a reasonably priced motel in Ellensburg, we hope to go up to an area part way up the hill where we can enjoy the long June evening. I remember *Calochortus* and *Fritillaria* and many more treasures along with amazing views of the Columbia Valley that evening. An early start on Sunday will be worthwhile as we'll botanize (and bird) until dark. Monday is again a long day as we hope to stop along the way at a high

elevation pass where there are lovely sub-alpine meadows and the exquisite *Lewisia tweedii* growing in between big rock boulders on the mountain. Hans Roemer's plant list for the area contains about 140 species. The timing of the trip is planned so it is quick to get back across the border on Monday evening and get a late ferry home. The plans for this trip are still tentative. If you are interested in joining us, contact Agnes at 721-0634 or [thelynns@shaw.ca](mailto:thelynns@shaw.ca) for more information.

### **Saturday, June 17 and Sunday, June 18**

#### ***Victoria Butterfly Count***

We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers so get out your field guide! **James Miskelly** is the count coordinator; give him a call at 477-0490.

## **JULY**

### **Thursday, July 6 to Sunday, July 9**

#### **EVENT**

#### ***Annual Nature Canada Conference in Red Deer, Alberta***

The Red Deer River Naturalists are hosting the Annual Nature Canada Conference in Red Deer, Alberta. It will be at the Black Knight Inn in Red Deer. We are extending an invitation to the members of VNHS to attend this function. We have booked many superb speakers and arranged more than twenty tours to various Central Alberta hotspots for birds and plants. Hopefully we have something for everyone. Full details are at our website [www.rdrn.fanweb.ca](http://www.rdrn.fanweb.ca). Then just follow the links to the Conference pages. There is a registration form in several formats and a conference bulletin, again in several formats. If none of those work for a given computer, there are phone numbers and addresses where a copy can be obtained by mail.

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## **BULLETIN BOARD**

### **Birding Little Saanich Mountain (The Observatory) – There could be several trips throughout May and June.**

Come and join Ed Pellizzon on birding walks up and around Little Saanich Mountain. This is an excellent place to see birds, with some in the process of building nests. The days and times will vary throughout the months of May and June. Call Ed at 881-1476 for a message on the dates, times, and where to meet.

### **Bird Walks at Swan Lake**

There are regular guided bird walks at Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary on Wednesdays and Sundays. Meet at the main parking lot at 9:00 a.m.

### **For Sale**

Spacemaster 11 scope – with zoom lens and Manfrotto tripod. Call/email Muriel: 380-3595/ [mcbirder@fastmail.ca](mailto:mcbirder@fastmail.ca).

### **Volunteer Opportunity**

“A window of opportunity!” CRD Regional Parks is now accepting applications for Volunteer Naturalists to welcome, engage and inspire visitors at our nature centres. Phone 478-3344 or visit our web site: [www.crd.bc.ca/parks](http://www.crd.bc.ca/parks).



Marsh Wren. *Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy*