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The Victoria NATURALIST

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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, 250-479-6622, or write to Membership Committee c/o The Victoria Natural History Society, Box 5220, Victoria, BC, V8R 6N4. A copy of our membership form is available on our website <www.vicnhs.bc.ca>.

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COVER PHOTO: *Sebastolobus alascanus,* the Shortspine Thornyhead, is in the same family as rockfish. Found in water 17–1524 m deep (usually between 100–800 m), this one was collected in Queen Charlotte Sound, October, 2006. *Photo*:Gavin Hanke

Cover photos this time of year typically come from "*The Fifth Kingdom*" (with a nod to the famous author on our Board), and there is a fungus featured in this issue (p. 20). But the election was underway while I was pulling this issue together and the worried look on the cover-girl(?)'s face mirrored how I felt inside, so it seemed like a good choice. I was also torn between writing my rant (as I affectionately think of it) before or after I knew the results of our "democratic" process. Would the googly-eyed fish have to stay? Or could I switch the cover to a serene scene of winter wonderlandedness?

Besides being terrified of the election results, I'm profoundly disappointed and frustrated at our collective inability to think long term and seeming to care only about money. How could **anything** take precedence over the only issue that matters to **everything**?"

And since we are a non-political organization, I'm not allowed to say any more on that topic.

Claudia

Erratum:
One of the pictures in Gavin Hanke's article on dockside fishes (Volume 65 Issue 2) was taken from the internet with permission: *Cymatogaster aggregatum* is a photo from the Manzanita Project http://research.calacademy.org/research/library/manzanita/html/

President's Message

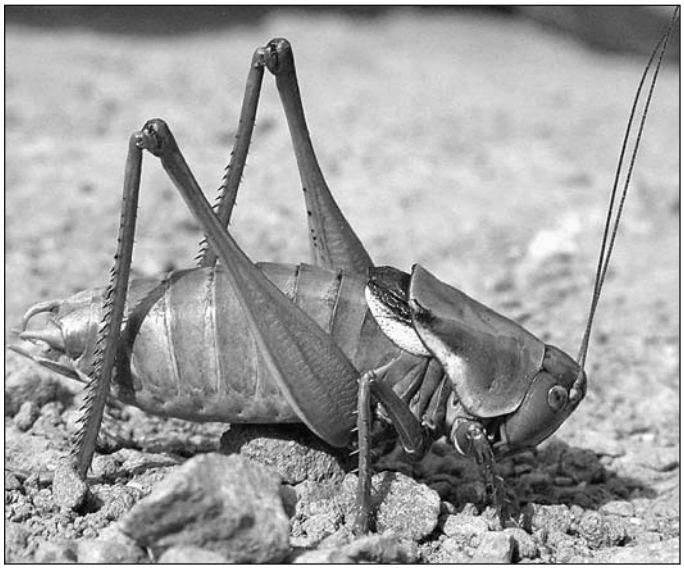
By Darren Copley

As the days get shorter (and colder), what I guess I miss most is the diversity of insects. We are just now seeing the last of the dragonflies, and shortly even the cold-tolerant fall field crickets will stop calling. With the seasonal decline in insects, so goes the diversity of insectivorous birds that use Canada as their feeding station for raising their families. Today I saw what will probably be the last of this year's warblers on their way south, and Steller's Jays and Varied Thrush have moved in for the winter.

This was another great natural history year for Claudia and I. With the help of James Miskelly, I learned more about the fascinating world of Orthoptera. I saw wingless grasshoppers, slantfaces, great grigs, and my personal favourite: *Neduba steindachneri* (very fun to say) – a shield-backed katydid that lives on Vancouver Island. Claudia, James and I also climbed Mount Cheam (near Chilliwack) where I finally saw White-tailed Ptarmigan. It was as I expected too, where they just seemed to appear out of the rocks, like a Bev Doolittle painting. The other thrill I had was to get back involved with the Rocky Point Bird Observatory. As with many of you, it was birds that started me off on this path of natural history, so having the opportunity to band again at Rocky Point has to be my highlight. This dedicated group has put together a top-notch banding station, which always puts the health of the bird first. This year I made it out to band Northern Saw-whet Owls, and I still find myself daydreaming of those cute little guys.

Reconnecting with Rocky Point meant reconnecting with Gabriel David, the bander in charge. Gabe began birding with the Society at a very young age. I remember other members picking him up, and making sure he got to as many birding trips as possible. I'm not sure what gave Gabe his start, but I do know that being young helped. What I admire most about Gabe, in addition to his incredible knowledge of birds, is his interest in all aspects of natural history. This year we collected parasitic Louse Flies from the birds, and have started an insect checklist for Rocky Point. I think starting out as a naturalist when you are young is a way to ensure a life-long interest, but that's not the only way.

This year I also got to work with our Society's *Connecting Children and Nature* team. John Henigman is responsible for organizing the requests for naturalists that we get from teachers, and then our teams of volunteer naturalists, led by Bill Dancer, take classes on field trips to nearby greenspaces (preferably by bus or walking). I went on a field trip with Glenlyon-Norfolk which was hosting a Round Square School Conference on "Creating Sustainable Communities – Local to Global". The conference brought delegates together from more than 65 Round Square schools from around the world. I was pleased to see one of the Victoria Natural History Society leaders was Donna Murray, who is now very active in the Society, participating in, and leading field trips. Donna won't mind me saying that she got a late start in natural history. Shortly after retiring early she took our Beginning Birding Course, and hasn't looked back since.



Anabrus longipes (the long-legged mormon cricket). Photo: Darren Copley

So the long and short of it is that it's not important when you start your journey of natural history, but just that you do start it. Claudia and I took our niece out on her first birding trip to Clover Point. She's now old enough to use binoculars and spotting scopes. These experiences are always full of surprises, as Malia's favourite bird turned out to be Marbled Murrelet, even though we saw others, like Black Oystercatcher and Harlequin Duck, which were much fancier. She is still talking about the birding trip, and even remembers the names of some of the birds. Of course her uncle regularly tests her!

This November we will have our first brainstorming session that will begin our new membership drive, so that we ensure that there are naturalists in future generations. I invite all interested members who would like to help out to e-mail me, and we'll get you involved. Your board has been in contact with members that have left the Society to see why, and for the most part people didn't leave unhappy, they were either having difficulty attending events due to age, or had moved away. Consider giving a membership as a Christmas gift this year. Instead of chocolates (which for me only last a day or so!), you can open someone's eyes to the wonder of nature, a gift that lasts a lifetime.

P.S. Thanks to our webmaster, Ann Nightingale, people can now "subscribe" so that their memberships are automatically renewed each year (at least until your credit card expires!): http://vicnhs.bc.ca/membershippaypal.html.

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 over a long period, in a variety of ways for the Society. Any member 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, 2009.**

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
2006 Phil Lambert, Tom Burgess
2007 no recipients
2008 Ann Nightingale

VNHS Honorary Life Members

Dr. Bill Austin, Mrs. Lyndis Davis, Mr. Tony Embleton, Mr. Tom Gillespie, Mrs. Peggy Goodwill, Mr. David Stirling, Mr. Bruce Whittington

50 Years and Counting! The Victoria Christmas Bird Count

Victoria – Saturday, December 20, 2008
Saltspring Island/Sidney – Saturday, December 27, 2008
Duncan – Saturday, January 3, 2009
Sooke – TBA

By Ann Nightingale

Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the then budding Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition – a "Christmas Bird Census" – that would count birds in the holidays rather than hunt them. So began the Christmas Bird Count.

Members of the Victoria Natural History Society joined the fun right from the early days of the Society. It was somewhat more casual than our current event, with small parties, (often just one or two birders each) checking out their favourite birding spots in the Greater Victoria area. In 1958, however, a decision was made by some of the more serious birders, our own David Stirling among them, to comply with the protocol of the Audubon Society and to establish a 15-mile diameter circle. Great care was taken on choosing the centre of the count circle, to attempt to include as many of the traditionally covered areas as possible. Unfortunately, there was no way to capture all of them, and as of 1958, the northern part of the Saanich Peninsula was no longer part of the VNHS count. Thankfully now we have the Salt Spring Island/Sidney count which once again brings the birds of the peninsula back into play.

The first year of the Victoria count circle, which is centred on Marigold Ave between Interurban and Burnside Roads, saw 22 participants tally 37974 birds of 100 species. The top five species were European Starling (7747), American Robin (7375), American Wigeon (4062), Glaucous-winged Gull (2641) and Mallard (1608). Only single individuals were seen of Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Peregrine Hawk (sic), Ring-billed Gull, Short-eared Owl (the only owl counted that year), and Red-breasted Sapsucker. Two Lewis's Woodpeckers were seen on the 1958/59 count. There were no Anna's Hummingbirds, although the first Canadian sighting was recorded in Victoria three months before the count.

The big story for our first count circle year was a mixed flock of Starlings and Robins on the slope at Beacon Hill Park (proving that there are lots of birds even beginners can identify). 7000 Robins and 7500 Starlings were observed mustering for departure right around dawn. The counters had their work cut out for them counting as group after group left the cover of the shrubs for a day around the city.

This 50th anniversary of our Christmas Bird Count circle is a great reason to celebrate. David Stirling is still counting with us fifty years later! And although we generally do better than 100 species on our current count, the biggest improvement has been the participation rate. Last year, we had 196 counters in the field. To commemorate our 50th anniversary, we're going to make a serious run at breaking the 200 participant level. Bring a friend! Novices are welcome! Counters under 18 years of age and Bird Studies Canada members are invited to participate at no charge. Other counters are asked for a $5 tax-deductible contribution to offset the costs of the count and follow-up publications.

You don't have to be an expert birder to participate. Novices will be teamed up with more experienced counters. Anyone can help out by acting as a tally person or as a spotter. There are a few "keeners" who go out looking and listening for owls in the pre-dawn hours, and a few teams of boating birders who check out the offshore waters, weather permitting and suitable boats available. Feeder counts can be reported via the VNHS website.

If you are curious, interested, would like to see lists and pictures of the region's winter birds, or just need more information, please check out the VNHS website (www.vicnhs.bc.ca/cbc/) and the Christmas Bird Count site (www.birdsource.org) or contact **Ann Nightingale at 250-652-6450 or by email at motmot@shaw.ca for the Victoria count; Jean Brouard at 250 653-2335 or by email at johnbro@saltpring.com Salt Spring/Sidney counts; Derrick Marven (marven@shaw.ca; 250-748-8504) for the Duncan count; Denise Gubersky (dgubersky@telus.net; 250-642-3996) for the Sooke count.** If you have a preference to count in a specific area, you may contact the team leader for the area directly. There will also be a presentation on Victoria's Winter Birds on Tuesday, December 9 (see calendar page 22 for details), and several field trips that can be used as training or tuning up for the count.

Post Count Gathering and 50th Anniversary Celebration!

After the day of counting is over, we'll have a post-count gathering to share stories and find out how we have done as a group. Last year's Crock-Pot Luck was very successful, and we'll be doing it again this year. The gathering will start at 5 p.m. We're asking all who would like to attend to bring a salad, a dessert, a Crock-Pot entrée (soup or stew) or contribute $7 towards other items (such as beverages and buns) that we will purchase. If there is something that you'd really like to bring that isn't on this list, give me a call. Everyone who plans to attend will need to register their item on the VNHS website or by phoning or emailing me (**Ann Nightingale**, 652-6450, motmot@shaw.ca). The post-count gathering will be at the Gordon Head United Church Hall, 4201 Tyndall Avenue. I am always looking for a helper or two to handle the post-count gathering, so if you can help out, please let me know. You don't even have to be a birder!

Here is this year's list of leaders. If you'd like to be a bird counter this year, please contact the leader for the zone you'd like or register on the VNHS website. And don't forget to invite a friend!

2008 Bird Count Areas

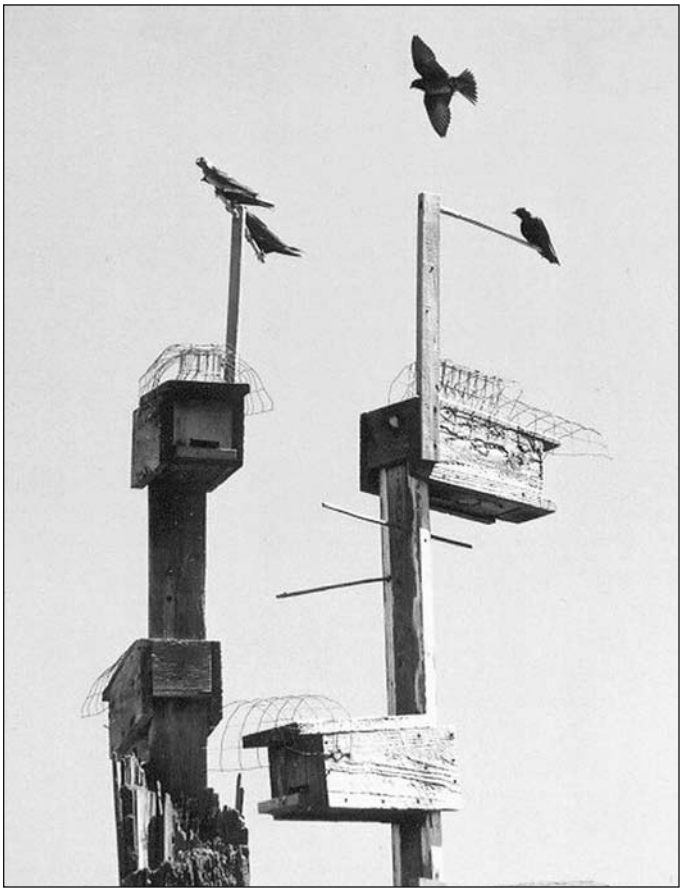
	Area Name	Leader	Phone	Email
1	Butchart Gardens – N. Highlands	Warren Drinnan	250-652-9618	drinnan99@telus.net
2	Central Highlands	Rick Schortinghuis	250-652-3326	shylo@islandnet.com
3	Goldstream – Finlayson Arm	Adam Taylor	250-743-4273	a.s.taylor@telus.net
4	Thetis Lake – Hastings Flat	TBA	250-652-6450	Motmot@shaw.ca
5	Langford Lake	Glen Moores	250-655-3772	gmoores@islandnet.com
6	Albert Head – Triangle Mountain	David Allinson	250-391-1786	passerine@shaw.ca
7	Esquimalt Lagoon – Mill Hill	TBA	250-652-6450	motmot@shaw.ca
8	Esquimalt Harbour	Camilla Smith	250-479-4950	camillas_@hotmail.com
9	Portage Inlet – The Gorge	TBA	250-652-6450	motmot@shaw.ca
10	Victoria Harbour	Ed Pellizzon	250-881-1476	edlps@telus.net
11	Beacon Hill Park	Tom Gillespie	250-361-1694	twgille@telus.net
12	Oak Bay	Mike Edgell	250-656-5998	dadv@uvic.ca
13	University – Cadboro Bay	Marie O'Shaughnessy	250-598-9680	isis_mosh@shaw.ca
14	Ten Mile Point – Arbutus Rd	Andy Stewart	250-477-1328	andy.stewart@shaw.ca
15	Gordon Head – Mt. Douglas	Margie Shepherd		motmot@shaw.ca
16	Swan Lake – Cedar Hill	Bill Dancer	250-721-5273	dcdancer@shaw.ca
17	Blenkinsop Lake – Panama Flats	Cheryl Mackie	250-479-4083	bcmackie@pacificcoast.net
18	Elk Lake – Cordova Bay	Mike McGrenere	250-658-8624	mmcgrenere@shaw.ca
19	Prospect Lake – Quick's Bottom	Dave Fraser	250-479-0016	
20	Martindale – Bear Hill	Mike Bentley	250-479-7024	mbentley@lgl.com
21	Zero Rock (ocean)	TBA	250-652-6450	motmot@shaw.ca
22	Chain Islets (ocean)	Marilyn Lambert	250-477-5922	lambert@pacificcoast.net.
23	Juan de Fuca (ocean)	Ron Bates	250-386-1264	rbates@bc1.com

Purple Martins Still Need Your Help

By Bruce Cousens and Charlene Lee

The BC Purple Martin population has increased from a low of five known breeding pairs in 1985 to about 635 nesting pairs in 2007 primarily as a result of nest boxes built, installed and maintained by volunteers. They are also appearing in more birder sighting reports which was unheard of a decade ago. This is a phenomenal success story for a 20+ year recovery program that was started by members of the Victoria Natural History Society back in 1985. Purple Martins in BC are still entirely dependent on human-supplied housing and still need our help to persist.

Purple Martins remain a "Species At Risk" in BC and are currently Blue-listed (Vulnerable); downlisted from Red-listed (Threatened/Endangered) in 2006. Martins remain "At Risk" because of low population numbers and dependence on human-provided nest sites after extensive nesting habitat loss and intense competition for nest cavities from introduced House Sparrows and European Starlings. They once nested in small colonies in natural cavities and abandoned woodpecker holes in old trees and snags in open woodland areas, forest clearings and fire-killed stands, often near bodies of water.



Purple Martin on perches. *Photo*: Bruce Cousens

The number of breeding pairs continued to increase slowly but steadily. By 1995 more than 50 pairs were nesting at seven colony locations in southwest BC.

In 1985 VNHS was instrumental in starting the Purple Martin nest box program in BC, when Bryan Gates and a group of VNHS members built and installed several single nest boxes on pilings at Cowichan Bay, where martins were observed nesting in piling cavities in 1984. Purple Martins used the nest boxes that first year and more boxes were installed at this site. During the mid to late 1980's, Purple Martins were also observed nesting in pilings at Ladysmith and Sooke Harbour and in port holes in decommissioned ships in Esquimalt Harbour. A similar nest box program had been initiated in Puget Sound a decade earlier, likely contributing to the recovery in BC.

Purple Martins, 2005. *Photo*: Ralph Hocken

Purple Martin, 2004. *Photo*: Ralph Hocken

In 1990, a major effort to re-establish Purple Martins in BC was undertaken by members of VNHS including Eric Walters, Darren Copley, Calvor Palmateer, Tom Gillespie, and many others. More than 160 nest boxes were built and installed at locations around southern Vancouver Island where Purple Martins were reported to have nested previously, including Sooke Basin, Esquimalt Harbour, Victoria Inner Harbour, the Gorge, Purple Martin Pond and Cowichan Bay.

When Purple Martins readily took to nesting in boxes at some of these sites, more nest boxes were installed at other marine piling sites on east Vancouver Island as far north as Campbell River and on the BC Lower Mainland. These nest boxes were again built, mounted and monitored by volunteers and naturalist groups, including VNHS, Nanaimo Field Naturalists and Burke Mountain Naturalists. Use of predator-resistant nest boxes with entrances sized to admit martins but exclude most starlings helped the martins to compete more successfully.

The number of breeding pairs continued to increase slowly but steadily. By 1995 more than 50 pairs were nesting at seven colony locations in southwest BC. Martins returned to nest in the Vancouver area (Burrard Inlet) in 1994 after being absent for more than two decades. In 1997 the first breeding pair returned to Campbell River, the historic northern breeding range limit, again after an absence of over two decades. By 2000 the martin population had increased to 175 pairs nesting at 12 of the available 19 nest box sites.

During this same period banding studies conducted by Cam Finlay and Tom Gillespie showed that the BC Purple Martin population was well mixed throughout the Strait of Georgia area and additional nest boxes and colony sites could prove beneficial to this recovering population. The BC Ministry of Environment, through Laura Darling,

Begging nestlings. *Photo*: Ralph Hocken

contracted Kevin Storey to build and install 400 additional boxes. With the help of naturalist groups like VNHS and many individuals these boxes were installed at new and existing colony sites, thereby doubling the number of boxes and nesting sites available for Purple Martins. However, population growth stalled for several years, apparently due to a series of cool wet summers with low flying insect food availability, causing reduced survival and nesting success and population numbers remained below 190 nesting pairs.

In 2002, changes in the BC Provincial Government saw the loss of provincial funding and management for the coordination of the recovery effort. The Nanaimo-based non-profit organization, Georgia Basin Ecological Assessment and Restoration Society (GBEARS), undertook to provide ongoing overall project coordination and management for the continuation of what became the BC Purple Martin Stewardship and Recovery Program and to attempt to secure funding necessary to sustain the program in the future.

GBEARS staff and volunteers, individuals and naturalist groups continued to monitor and maintain the existing nest box inventory and additional sites were started. In 2003, five nest box sites were started between Nanaimo and Courtenay to further facilitate recolonization of the northern portion of the Georgia Basin. In 2005 and 2006 nest boxes were also installed at about 20 suitable freshwater locations on the east coast of Vancouver Island, Lower Mainland and Lower Fraser Valley in the hopes of encouraging martins to once again nest in natural cavities and woodpecker holes in adjacent snags. New nest box sites were also started on Mayne and Pender Islands. By 2007 there were about 1400 nest boxes distributed among 70 marine and 20 freshwater nest box locations (see map of current colony distribution at www.georgiabasin.ca/puma.htm).

With the large number of available nest boxes and sites and warm dry summers with greater nesting success, the martin population started to grow again. Between 2003 and 2006 the population tripled to 620 known nesting pairs at 45 locations. With this dramatic increase and colonization of more nest box sites, there were also two observations of martins nesting at freshwater sites. In 2005, the first nesting attempt in nest boxes at a freshwater site was observed near Dewdney, about 70 km from coastal colonies. In 2006, the first successful nesting of martins east of Vancouver and over freshwater in 35+ years was recorded at Stave River near Mission. Since then population growth has once again stalled with only a small increase in 2007 to 635 pairs, due to recent cool wet summer weather adversely affecting the food supply during the nesting season.

However, 2008 saw quite a different picture. The long cold spring and an untimely week of wet weather at the end of July saw the most significant decrease in the numbers of breeding pairs and young fledged since the start of the nest box program. There was a loss of more than 100 adult pairs and a 40% loss in young produced. Only ~550 pairs nested successfully at 44 sites and only 1200 young of an expected 2000 fledged.

With the loss of adult birds and low production this year we can expect a further population decline in 2009. This decline will be compounded by the 3 large year classes from the highly successful 2003-2005 nesting seasons that are now rapidly aging out of the population, leaving the much smaller year classes from 2006-2007 nesting seasons.

At the same time some of our dedicated long-time colony stewards are "aging out" of our volunteer work force and have left or will soon leave the program, and many of the nest boxes are a decade or more old and due for repair or replacement as they begin to fall apart. So more than ever now we need to find new stewards to monitor nest box sites to document how the martin population responds to this significant decline as well as maintain and upgrade the nest box inventory of 1400+ boxes.

As the Purple Martin recovery has grown over the years, so have the costs of running the program. A part-time paid Project Manager/Biologist now co-ordinates two paid summer students and 130+ volunteers. The costs for travel and vehicle gas as well as materials and supplies continue to increase. We need your help to keep the recovery program going. Please make a cash donation and/or volunteer some of your time as a colony steward to help us continue this successful BC Purple Martin Stewardship and Recovery Program. Tax receipts will be issued for donations of $25 or more. Please send donations payable to:

Georgia Basin Ecological Assessment and Restoration Society, 4-1150 N. Terminal Ave., Unit 117,
Nanaimo, BC V9S 5L6
Contact us at (250) 758-2922
or by email at pmartins@island.net

Editor's Note: The Board of the VNHS has allocated $500 towards the purchase of nest-box construction material for improvements to Purple Martin colonies in the Victoria region. Providing nesting habitat has a proven record of success with this species.

Records of the Red Abalone in British Columbia

By Bill Merilees

The finding of a "fresh," clean, beach-washed red abalone shell (*Haliotis rufescens*) (see photo) near the mouth of the Oeanda River (about 19 km south of Rose Spit in the Queen Charlotte Islands, (53˚ 57' N, 131˚ 44' W) is a potentially incredible northward range extension for this species. Attached to a kelp holdfast, this 20 cm long specimen was found by local resident James Schatz, circa 1995. This specimen is now in possession of the author.

The red abalone's normal range is from Oregon south (Harbo 1997), where this species supports a recreational and small commercial fishery. It is much larger and heavier than our local Northern or Kamtchatka abalone (*Haliotis kamtschatkana*). The presence of a central muscle scar on the shell of the Red Abalone further separates these species.

This is not the only record of a red abalone on the British Columbia coast. A second specimen, in the possession of Steve Dennis, a sea urchin fisherman living in Tofino has also been seen and photographed by the author. This living specimen was collected alive at Wilf Rock, (49˚ 08' N, 125˚ 29' W) near Tofino circa 1985. According to Steve "it was delicious."

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans in Nanaimo has a tissue sample taken from a commercially harvested abalone which, through DNA testing, has been confirmed as this species (Dr. Alan Campbell and Ruth Withler, pers. comm.). This sample was taken on the Central British Columbia coast in 1998 or 1999.

The temporary appearance of southern marine species in British Columbia, such as the Pacific mole crab (*Emerita analoga*), is documented (Hart 1982). The presence of other species such as the California datemussel (*Adula californiensis*), well north of their "normal" distribution, though considered "unusual", is not uncommon. The arrival in British Columbia of these and other species is attributed to a variety of causes. These include the transport of larvae via northward ocean currents during periods of warm sea water (El Niño) events, ballast water discharge, transportation by attachment to natural drifting materials such as logs and kelp rafts, and attachment to ships or abandoned fishing gear.

Rick Thomson, Senior Research Scientist at the Institute of Ocean Sciences, (pers. com.) indicated that the strong North East Pacific Coastal Current (a.k.a. the Davidson Current), can generate speeds of 0.5 knots per hour during the winter months. This current would have the capability to move floating debris from southern Oregon to the southern British Columbia coast in a matter of three to four weeks and to the Queen Chartlotte Islands in about six to eight weeks. The presence of drifting kelp "islands" is a well-known phenomenon to mariners who frequent our offshore waters. Some of these are of considerable size – large enough to be considered navigational hazards. On a recent trip from Prince Rupert to Skidegate, many such floating "islands" were observed.

Haliotis rufescens (Red abalone). *Photo*: Bill Merilees

Due to the red abalone's very brief larval period before settlement and this species habitat preference for kelp beds, transport via attachment to dislodged kelp and drifting north would appear the most probable method for this species to naturally reach British Columbia. The drifting distance from central Oregon to B.C. is considerable, approximately 560 km to Tofino, and twice this distance to the northern tip of the Queen Charlotte Islands.

It cannot be absolutely ruled out that these red abalones were not accidentally or deliberately released by persons unknown. However, three specimens, from separate, relatively remote locations, two living and one with algae still attached, would seem to strongly favour their arrival by natural causes. If red abalones can reach the British Columbia coast on occasion, one must therefore wonder what other southern, sedentary marine species might also arrive here on an infrequent basis? Any process that would increase provincial sea water temperatures by only a few degrees, such as El Niño events or global warming, might well assist or increase the temporary or permanent immigration of southern species to our province. As a result, vigilance by shore-prowling naturalists, fishermen and researchers, may well discover "new arrivals" to our coastal flora and fauna.

References

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The Asiatic Clam (*Corbicula fluminea*) "Rediscovered" on Vancouver Island

By Lisa Kirkendale, Invertebrate Curator at the Royal BC Museum and
Jeremy Clare, Student at WestShore Centre for Learning and Training

Earlier this year, two specimens of freshwater bivalve were brought in for identification from the Sooke watershed. One was quickly identified as a native freshwater mussel, *Anodonta kennerlyi* (Fig. 1A) relatively common in many lakes and streams in the area. The other was tougher to identify; something didn't look quite right and it certainly wasn't a mussel! A closer look through the literature yielded a startling discovery – this animal was the notorious bivalve invader *Corbicula fluminea*, commonly known as the Asiatic Clam, and about as fun to have in your watersheds as the zebra mussel (Fig. 1B). A quick flurry of activity followed – who was this invader, how did it get here and where else was it?

Background

Native to China, Korea, southeastern Russia and the Ussuri Basin (Aguirre and Poss 1999), *Corbicula fluminea,* or the Asiatic clam, is a widespread freshwater bivalve pest throughout its introduced range that includes Japan, much of Europe and the Americas. *Corbicula fluminea* is restricted to freshwater, unlike many other members of the family Corbiculidae and is of moderate size with pronounced concentrically-ribbed shells ('corbus' = basket) (Fig. 1B). Their ability to establish viable populations from very few individuals is probably due in large to their remarkable reproductive plasticity. *Corbicula fluminea* is a known protandric or sequential (male first, female second) hermaphrodite (Morton 1977) that exhibits ovoviparity and can self-fertilize. Water temperatures above 16˚C are required for larval release (Global Invasive Species Database). Under favorable conditions, larvae spawned in late spring or early summer are capable of reaching sexual maturity by the following fall, just over one year (Aguirre and Poss 1999).

Individuals are not only restricted to sexual modes of reproduction, clonality (genetically identical individuals) (Lee *et al*. 2005), as well as androgenesis (all-male lineages) (Hedtke *et al*. 2008) reproductive strategies have been documented in some populations.

Distribution

The oldest documented record of this species in North America, and the first record of occurrence in Canada, was based on dead shells collected from Nanaimo, BC in 1924 (Counts 1981). Deposited in the National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian), this record was sent with a label that stated "Dead on beach. Probably a Japanese import". Burch (1944) discovered the first population of live Asiatic clams in 1938 in the sand and gravel banks of the Columbia River, Washington. Later surveys in Nanaimo by the Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago) did not uncover *Corbicula fluminea* (Haas 1954) and no further records of this species in Canada were ever reported until now – 84 years later!

Fig. 1A. *Anodonta kennerlyi*, the Western floater.
Photo: J. Clare

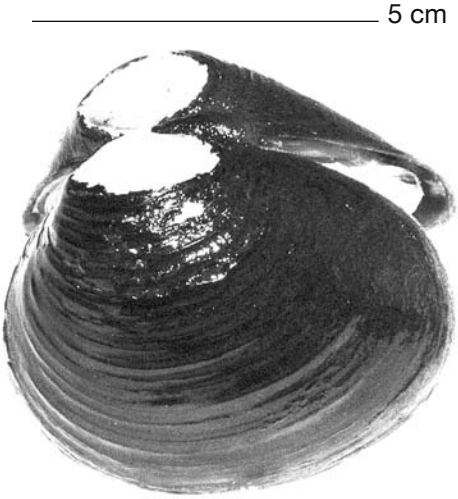

Fig. 1B. *Corbicula fluminea,* the Asiatic clam.
Photo: Mike McNall, Royal British Columbia Museum

In the US, the most likely vector is widely thought to be immigrant Chinese laborers in the US (Hanna 1966; Fox 1971a,b; Morton 1973). In Asia, *Corbicula fluminea* is widely available and consumed as a favored food source, where it is known (in some regions) as the "prosperity, pygmy or golden clam" (Miller and McClure 1931).

It is thought that the Asiatic clam might have been originally introduced as bait in North America. A local bait shop was contacted, to follow-up on this as a possible explanation for the live population of *Corbicula* recently discovered in Sooke, however the representative said that live clams (of any sort) are currently unavailable and not commonly used as bait in and around Victoria. An online aquarium trade search yielded a much different response. In both Canada and the US, the Asiatic clam is available, where it is marketed as the "golden" clam and featured as a great way to keep algal populations in check.

The Vancouver Island specimens were collected this past year at a site in the Sooke Watershed now known as Irwin Park (previously Humpback Valley Campgrounds) and

Fig. 2. Top, right: Site of Humpback main lake in 1971. *Photo courtesy of Dorothy Pekter*. Below: Similar view of Humpback main lake today. *Photo:* J. Clare

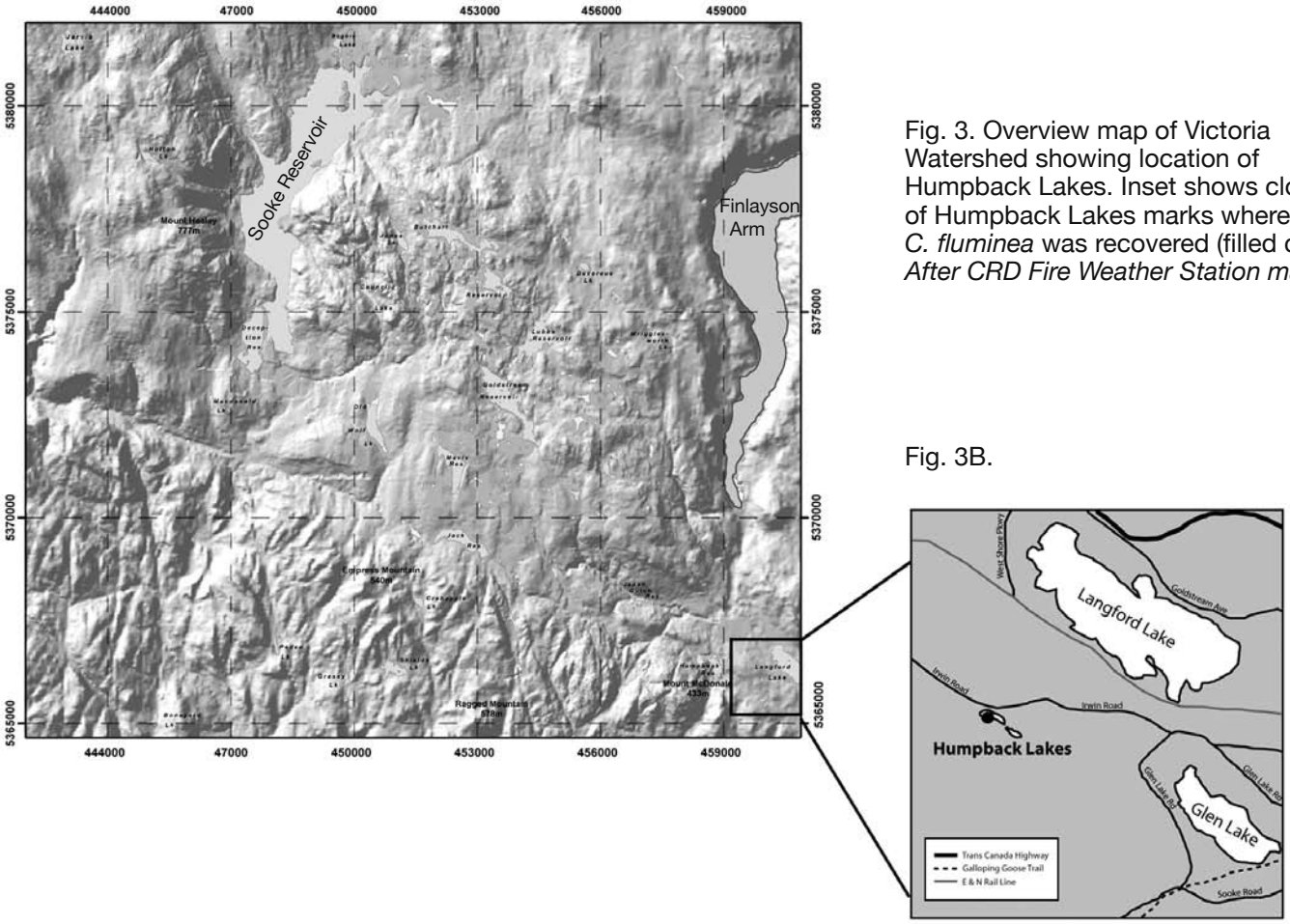

Fig. 3. Overview map of Victoria Watershed showing location of Humpback Lakes. Inset shows close-up of Humpback Lakes marks where *C. fluminea* was recovered (filled circle). *After CRD Fire Weather Station map.*

comprised of two man-made lakes, Humpback Lakes, built by Joe Pekter beginning in 1971 (Fig. 2). Humpback Lakes are part of a system of interconnected waterways that fall just outside the present boundaries of the Greater Victoria Water Supply System (Fig. 3). Since 2005, Irwin Park has been environmentally rehabilitated by students from West Shore Center for Learning and Training that have taken great pride in cleaning up the park, documenting the local wildlife in the area (that includes mallards, river otters, freshwater sponges, cnidarias, molluscs) and working on a hut intended to house an interpretative center (Fig. 4). Future plans have Irwin Park slated for a LEED development known as Westhills that has garnered mixed reviews from some local residents concerned that no concrete environmental targets have yet been set (Goldstream News Gazette, May 2008).

Although the Western floater, *Anodonta kennerlyi* was found living in both "lakes", *C. fluminea* was only recorded from one (Fig. 3-inset). The water levels in the lake where *C. fluminea* was recovered had dropped about 2 metres over the past year, exposing shells that lined the bank adjacent to where live populations were found (Fig. 5). *C. fluminea* was hand-collected in <0.5 m of water, from a muddy, gravelly bottom. Individuals ranging from 1-5 cm were found, indicating that juveniles are present and that reproduction is likely occurring. Levels in the second of the two Humpback lakes have not dropped so drastically and no indication that *C. fluminea* inhabits this other Humpback lake (e.g. dead shells on banks) were found, suggesting that *C. fluminea* may reside at slightly deeper depths than is generally frequented by summer snorkellers or aquatic naturalists/biologists conducting littoral survey work.

Following the discovery of the Vancouver Island population of *C. fluminea*, Department of Fisheries and Oceans was contacted. This led to the discovery that a second population had been found, on the mainland and prior to when the Humpback Lake population was first reported (February 2008). A confirmed observation of the Asiatic clam at the confluence of Scott Creek and the Coquitlam River in the Lower Fraser Area (Maurice Coulter-Boisvert, pers. comm.) suggests that the Asiatic clam may be more widespread than is presently appreciated (it is uncertain whether the recently discovered mainland siting is based on live specimens or not). For example, if widely known records of the Asiatic clam existed, it is likely that the species would have been included in a 2000 pamphlet entitled *Freshwater Molluscs* by the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks. Given how long it has taken to rediscover the Asiatic clam in the province, the first record may represent an isolated incidence of a handful of discarded clams that never formed an established population in BC. Similarly, the larger of the two Humpback Lakes was previously stocked with trout and the

Fig. 4. Hut at Irwin Park rebuilt by students from the Westshore Center. *Photo*: J. Clare

C. fluminea population recently discovered there could have been established from discarded clams used as bait (but not from recently, or even locally purchased bait, see above). It is unlikely that the two records of *C. fluminea* on Vancouver Island are related, especially given that the Humpback Lakes were not in existence prior to 1972.

Impact

When conditions are favorable, huge populations can occur (5000 clams/m^2 in California, 12,000/m^2 Texas), likely stressing native and often endangered (e.g. freshwater mussels) benthic communities. Like the highly invasive zebra mussel, *Dreissena polymorpha*, the Asiatic clam can clog intake pipes, necessitating considerable and costly maintenance procedures to clear. An estimated 1 billion dollars was spent in the USA in 1986 mitigating damage caused specifically by *C. fluminea* (Isom 1986). The Asiatic clam has likely been spread not by waterfowl, as studies indicate it cannot survive passage through the gut, but by inherent aspects of its reproductive biology that permits establishment from a small number of initial settlers. Humans have probably helped increase its introduced range (e.g. in the USA), perhaps collecting it as an aquarium curiosity and later releasing it in the wild, thereby assisting with long distance transport.

The Asiatic clam can tolerate a wide range of water temperatures, but it is restricted from sexually reproducing unless water temperatures are at or above 16°C (although *C. fluminea* has been reported from cold countries such as Hungary and Poland, these records are from isolated instances of populations that may be living in artificially heated water,

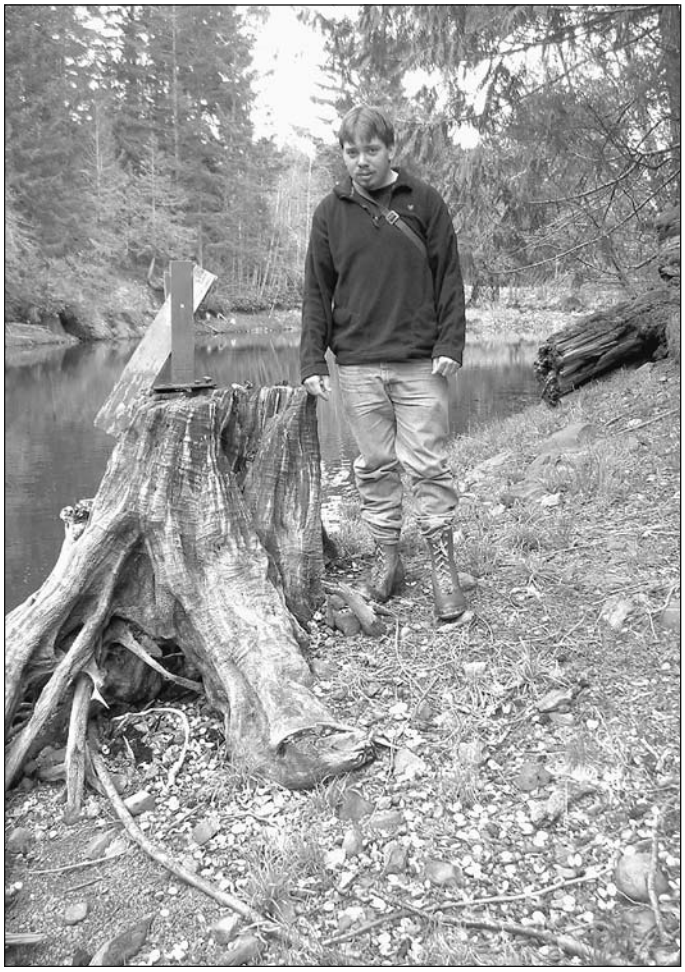

Fig. 5. Jeremy Clare by a previously submerged stump. Dead shells of *C. fluminea* are present in the foreground. *Photo*: L. Kirkendale

such as found in cooling ponds associated with power plants, Domagala *et al*. 2004). Because of this, although the Asiatic clam can survive here, it is likely restricted to summer reproductive bouts, which may limit its spread in our region. That said, we can look to our southern neighbors as a portent of things to come, given predictions of temperature increase as a result of global warming. This could mean more *Corbicula* in the near future. The discovery of the Humpback Lake population is a reminder to be careful of what you toss into rivers, lakes and streams. Remember that what is bought in the pet trade (for aquaria), should stay indoors in carefully monitored tanks or terraria and not later dumped into wild areas. Purchasing dead bait or locally-collected live bait is also a good practise.

Future plans

Our future plans are to search for more populations of this species and continue to document its occurrence on Vancouver Island and around British Columbia. We would appreciate if interested parties would keep an eye out and inform us if they spot anything that looks like the animal featured in the photos. If found, please collect, freeze and contact Lisa Kirkendale, lkirkendale@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca.

Note: While this paper was in press, a dead specimen of *Corbicula fluminea* was discovered in a collection donated to the Royal British Columbia Museum. The specimen was collected 26 November 1989 from beach drift near the high tide line in Stanley Park.

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Join the Great Backyard Bird Count

Count for Fun, Count for the Future

February 13–16, 2009

Bird and nature fans throughout North America are invited to join tens of thousands of everyday bird watchers for the 12th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), February 13-16, 2009. A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this free event is an opportunity for families, students, and people of all ages to discover the wonders of nature in backyards, schoolyards, and local parks, and, at the same time, make an important contribution to conservation. Participants count birds and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org.

"The Great Backyard Bird Count benefits both birds and people. It's a great example of citizen science: Anyone who can identify even a few species can contribute to the body of knowledge that is used to inform conservation efforts to protect birds and biodiversity," said Audubon Education VP, Judy Braus. "Families, teachers, children and all those who take part in GBBC get a chance to improve their observation skills, enjoy nature, and have a great time counting for fun, counting for the future."

Anyone can take part, from novice bird watchers to experts, by counting birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and reporting their sightings online at www.birdcount.org. Participants can also explore what birds others are finding in their backyards, whether in their own neighborhood or thousands of miles away. Additional online resources include tips to help identify birds, a photo gallery, and special materials for educators.

The data these "citizen scientists" collect helps researchers understand bird population trends, information that is critical for effective conservation. Their efforts enable everyone to see what would otherwise be impossible: a comprehensive picture of where birds are in late winter and how their numbers and distribution compare with previous years. In 2008, participants submitted more than 85,000 checklists.

"The GBBC has become a vital link in the arsenal of continent-wide bird-monitoring projects," said Cornell Lab of Ornithology director, John Fitzpatrick. "With more than a decade of data now in hand, the GBBC has documented the fine-grained details of late-winter bird distributions better than any project in history, including some truly striking changes just over the past decade."

Each year, in addition to entering their tallies, participants submit thousands of digital images for the GBBC photo contest. Many are featured in the popular online gallery.

The GBBC has become a vital link in the arsenal of continent-wide bird-monitoring projects," said Cornell Lab of Ornithology director, John Fitzpatrick. "…GBBC has documented the fine-grained details of late-winter bird distributions better than any project in history, including some truly striking changes just over the past decade."

Participants in the 2009 count are also invited to upload their bird videos to YouTube; some will also be featured on the GBBC web site. Visit www.birdcount.org to learn more.

Businesses, schools, nature clubs, Scout and Guide troops, and other community organizations interested in the GBBC can contact:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology
(800) 843-2473 (outside the U.S., call (607) 254-2473) or

Audubon
(215) 355-9588, ext 16
citizenscience@audubon.org or.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible, in part, by support from Wild Birds Unlimited.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a nonprofit membership institution interpreting and conserving the earth's biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds.

Audubon is dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Our national network of community-based nature centers and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in conservation. www.audubon.org

Young Naturalists' Club of British Columbia

By Daphne Solecki, YNC President

As many of you know, the Young Naturalists' Club started in 2000 as a program of the Vancouver Natural History Society. As interest in the YNC program grew, local clubs sprang up in many different regions until today there are 27 clubs around BC. In 2006, recognizing that YNC had developed into a provincial organization, we became a separate society and were accepted as a registered charity. The third item in our Constitution reads: *The Young Naturalists' Club of BC Society is affiliated with the Federation of BC Naturalists* (now BC Nature*) and is committed to supporting the objectives of the Federation*.

All administrative matters including fund-raising, membership services and publication of the quarterly magazine NatureWILD, are carried out centrally in the North Shore office that we share with BC Nature. The principal commitment of local YNC leaders is to organize a monthly Explorer Day (generally a half day field trip) for their member families. For more information please check our website www.ync.ca or contact YNC Coordinator, Jennifer Swanston (coordinator@ync.ca)

YNC for Families

YNC Victoria was one of the first provincial clubs to be organized. There have been a number of leaders over the years; currently the YNC Victoria leader is **Susanna Solecki (victoriaync@hotmail.com)**. In the past year the club has enjoyed many great Explorer Days – a tour with Saanich First Nations and SeaChange Marine Conservation Society in Gowlland Tod Provincial Park; bird watching at Witty's Lagoon and Lone Hill Tree Park; hikes at Matheson Lake and Mt. Wells Regional Park; Sooke Potholes Ramble; finding dragonflies at Elk Beaver Lake; tour of Hillside Farm to see where food comes from.

Recently, a new club was started – YNC Home Learners Victoria, under the leadership of **Andrea Dam (ecowild@telus.net)** – following the success of YNC Home Learners Lower Mainland. Home learners can do their field trips midweek so having a separate club works for them.

Between them these clubs have about 50 member families, and more are added all the time. These YNC leaders do not depend upon their own knowledge to provide a learning experience on Explorer Days but invite naturalists and other experts as guides to different areas and aspects of nature. The dates are set as convenient for the resource person and the YNC leader informs the membership. Children must be accompanied by a parent, which reduces safety and discipline problems.

Both Susanna and Andrea are looking to Victoria Natural History Society members to come forward as Explorer Day guides. Please do contact them for an opportunity to share your enthusiasm and knowledge of nature with keen young naturalists and their parents.

YNC for Schools

This past year YNC has launched a new program – *Nature Clubs in Schools*, coordinator Kristine Webber Lampa (schoolclubs@ync.ca). This program is for both existing school nature/environment clubs and for schools that are thinking of starting a new club. By joining they will become part of a growing network of school-based nature clubs and can access on-going support such as e-bulletins, NatureWILD magazine, Action Award Contests and the online Virtual Clubhouse (details at www.ync.ca). In Victoria the Nature Clubs in Schools project will be working in partnership with the Victoria Natural History Society's program Connecting Children With Nature, which provides volunteer naturalists to act as free trip co-leaders and free resource people for Greater Victoria area schools (details at www.vicnhs.bc.ca).

Letters

Letters of appreciation from teachers and students for programs provided by VNHS volunteers through our *Connecting Children With Nature* project.

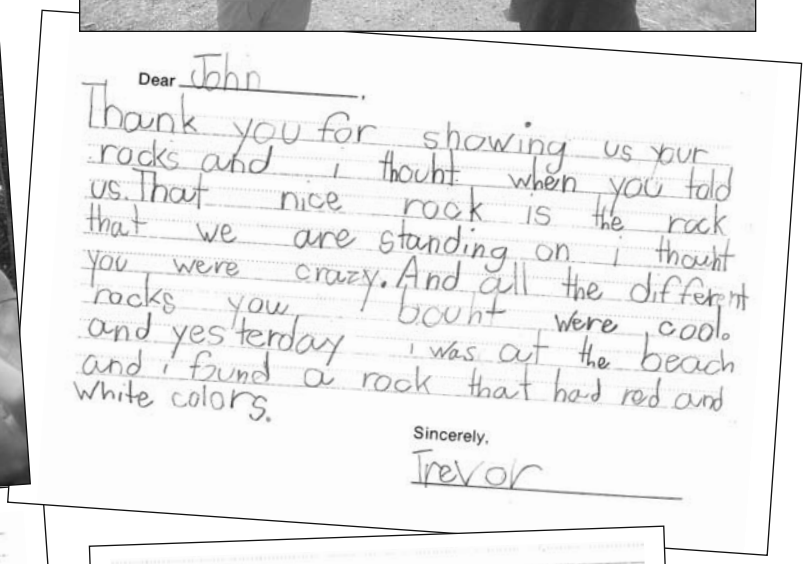
Letters from teachers

Dear Mr. Bill Dancer
Thank you for taking us birding. We may never have spotted the Bald Eagle if you hadn't been there. Wonderful information and patience.
Ms. Johnson-Dean

Bill Dancer came to speak (on very short notice – thanks again Bill!) to eight classes about bird identification. His presentation was excellent and helped us launch a very successful weekend "Bird Count" for all our kids.
Vivian Plint, École Marigold School

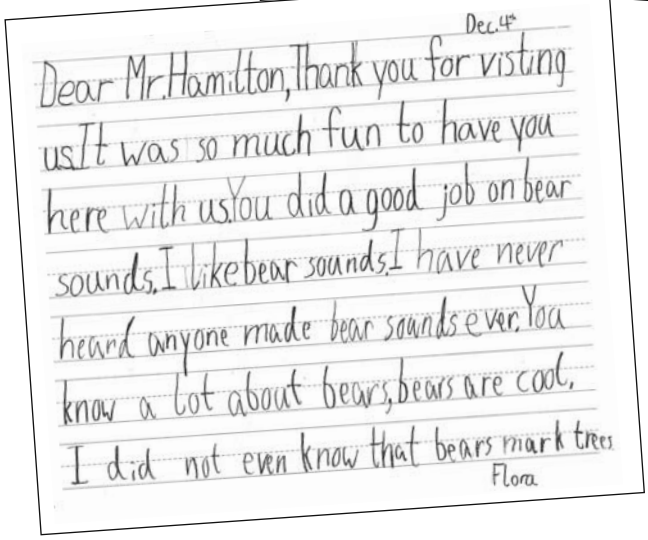
What a wonderful program! Thank you so much for sharing all of your knowledge. The students (and adults) loved it!
Terry Pickwick, Lake Hill Elementary

These photos are from this summer's Robert Bateman *Get-to-Know* program, which VNHS volunteers helped out with. *Photos*:JoyAnne Krupa

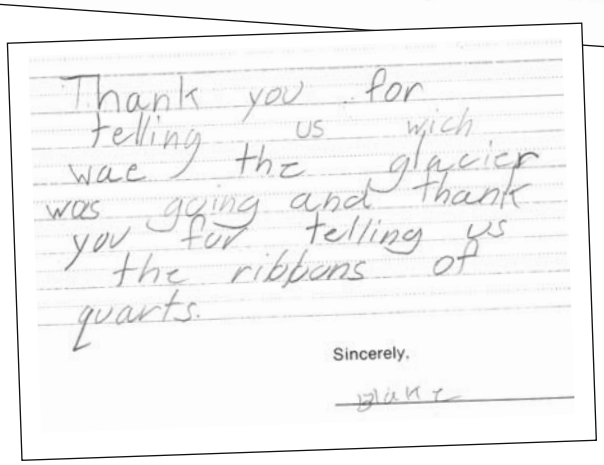


Dear John,
Thank you for showing us your rocks and i thoght when you told us. That nice rock is the rock that we are standing on i thoght you were crazy. And all the different rocks you bought were cool. and yesterday i was at the beach and i fund a rock that had red and white colors.

Sincerely,
Trevor



Dec. 4th
Dear Mr. Hamilton, Thank you for visting us. It was so much fun to have you here with us. You did a good job on bear sounds. I like bear sounds. I have never heard anyone made bear sounds ever. You know a lot about bears, bears are cool. I did not even know that bears mark trees.
Flora



Thank you for telling us wich wae the glacier was going and thank you for telling us the ribbons of quarts.

Sincerely,

Chanterelles Trumpet the Arrival of Victoria's Second Spring

By Todd Carnahan, Land Care and Stewardship Coordinator, Habitat Acquisition Trust

HAT
Creating Conservation Legacies

Not everyone welcomes the fall rains in Victoria, but mycologists and fungal foragers love Victoria's "second spring". This is the season when plants and fungi wake up after the long summer drought and begin growing again. Licorice ferns unfurl, Oregon Grape turns out a new leaf, and the enchanting chanterelle pops yellow trumpet-shaped mushrooms skyward. Gourmands will pay top dollar for a basket of fresh apricot scented chanterelles, but how many people realize that these mushrooms grow in Victoria?

Chanterelles respond to the cooler, wetter climate by sending up a fruiting body (mushroom) that will release spores. The winds and rain help to transport and germinate the spores in new locations. Suitable locations may include Arbutus woodlands or hemlock forests with healthy humus and duff layers. Fungus occupies the upper levels of the forest floor, turning leaves and wood into humus and then soil. The many species of fungi also help trees to collect water through an incredible network of mycelium. The cottony network comprises more than 99 percent of the organism, so mushrooms collected without disturbing the mycelial mat are considered a sustainable "non-timber forest product".

If you want to support a crop of coveted chanterelles, lobster mushrooms, or morels on your natural lands, consider trying the following techniques. Allow twigs, needles, and leaves to compost in place. Raking up this material disrupts the soil building process and dries out the underlying fungus. Keep your low ground covers intact (e.g. salal, sword ferns) for the same reasons. This protective layer of plants and forest litter keeps soils intact and moderates temperature extremes. It will also help your trees to survive drought and grow faster. If you go on a fungal foray, fling the less desirable trimmings from your harvest into suitable habitats to seed them just like a sloppy squirrel.

Seasonal changes are a significant part of the natural beauty of southern Vancouver Island; associating mushroom feasts with the stormy weather is a great way to relish our second spring.

Please don't hesitate to contact HAT with questions, (or donations or membership requests!) at 995-2428, or email hatmail@hat.bc.ca.

Chanterelles. *Photo*: Todd Carnahan

Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 16 new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our "welcome" column:

Diane E.Taylor
San Juan Avenue
birdwatching, walking

Jennie Holden and Lyn Merryfeather
Jasmine Avenue
birds and all aspects of natural history

Deborah McColl
Malahat
learning more!!

Sylvia and Jim Maguire
Fairfield Road
birding and botany outings

Gary Bartlett and Elaine Preston
Shorncliffe Heights
birds

Joy Newham
Quadra Street
marine, birding, botany, natural history

Giselle Wikelund and Jim Turner
Admirals Road

Darrell and Sheila Norton
Kipling Street
hiking, birds, flowers

BULLETIN BOARD

Saturday Birding Group

We send out the time and location on the RBA (Rare Bird Alert) (250-592-3381) on the Thursday and Friday before that week's walk. For more information, call Rick Schortinghuis at 250-652-3326.

Year-round Tuesday Morning Birding Group

The Tuesday Birding Group meets every Tuesday at 9:00 a.m. at the foot of Bowker Avenue on the waterfront in Oak Bay, they then decide where they will go birding that morning. The Tuesday Birding group has been around for more than 50 years. Call Bill Dancer at 250-721-5273 for more information.

Birding in Trinidad and Tobago, June 2009

I will be offering a 10 day birding tour to Trinidad and Tobago, Caribbean islands derived from the South American land mass. Due to their proximity to the most biodiverse continent on the planet, one can receive an excellent introduction to neotropical avifauna without being overwhelmed. Birding on these two small islands can be done at a leisurely pace, while soaking up each bird for as long as you like. We will stay on both islands, and see many South American species from the comfort and proximity of the nature lodges, as both islands are small enough that all of the birding spots are usually a maximum of 1.5 to 3 hours away (this latter spot is to see Leatherback Turtles and the endemic Trinidad Piping-Guan). We will stay at the world famous Asa Wright Nature Center, where one can observe beautiful forest species (including Tufted Coquette) frequenting the flowers and feeders right in front of the veranda, allowing for some amazing photographic opportunities. Also on the property is Dunston Cave, where one can see the Oilbird, a strange nocturnal frugivore that moves through the forest using a form of echo-location. We would also visit the famed Caroni Swamp, home of the roosting Scarlet Ibises, and Nariva Swamp, where Red-bellied and Blue-and-Gold Macaws can be seen, and many moriche palm-swamp specialties. On Tobago we would visit Little Tobago off of Speyside, where there are nesting colonies of tropical seabirds, such as Red-billed Tropicbird, Brown and Red-footed Booby, Brown Noddy, and Laughing Gull. We would also have a chance to see the threatened White-tailed Sabrewing at higher elevations on Tobago.

In 2006 and 2007, I led three successful birding/natural history tours to Costa Rica for VNHS members at basic costs. My experience as a field ornithologist working in 12 Latin American countries has allowed me to become familiar with the majority of the resident avifauna by sight and sound. The trip is already half-full (best group size is a maximum of 10 people), so should there be more interest I can organize a second trip to the same destination, or, should birders wish, to an alternate one of the following three: Cuba, Panama, or Vietnam. If you are interested, please contact Gabriel David at: (250) 721-5476 or gbldavid@gmail.com

Red-billed Tropicbird. *Photo*: Gabriel David

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 Christmas Hill 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 250-479-2054 for further information and updates. The VNHS Calendar also appears on the Internet at: <http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca>, and is updated regularly.

Codes for Field Trip Difficulty Levels: LEVEL 1 — Easy walking, mostly level paths. LEVEL 2 — Paths can be narrow with uneven terrain. LEVEL 3 — Obstacles in paths requiring agility or steeper grades. LEVEL 4 — Very steep, insecure footing or longer hikes requiring good physical condition.

NOVEMBER

Tuesday, November 11

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION
Cambodia and Nepal
Trudy Chatwin will share with you her slides and stories about her travels to this region of the world, including her studies of endangered turtles along the Mekong River. We meet in Room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria at 7:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee cup.

Sunday, November 16

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)
Birding Martindale Flats
Late migrants, winter arrivals, and raptors should make for some great birding with **Warren Drinnan**. Meet at the farm market at the corner of the Pat Bay Highway and Island View Road at 8:30 a.m. Park along Lochside Drive north of Island View Road. Gum boots are mandatory!!!!! Call Warren at 250-652-9618 if you need more information.

Tuesday, November 18

BOTANY NIGHT
Botanical Wanderings on Vancouver Island Peaks
Hans Roemer will talk about the botany and habitats of four Vancouver Island mountains he and his friends visited this past summer. Our knowledge of the mountain flora on Vancouver Island is incomplete and trips to these mountains always have the potential for botanical surprises, particularly if chosen with a geobotanical or geological bias. Swan Lake Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Admission free, everyone welcome. Bring your friends.

Saturday, November 22

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)
Snow Geese at Reifel Bird Sanctuary
Come and see the annual Snow Goose spectacle at the Reifel Bird Sanctuary. Every November thousands of Snow Geese stop over in this part of the Fraser River delta. Past trips have produced more than 100 species of birds for the day. Participants will carpool from in front of the Elk-Beaver Lake Regional Park Sign on Elk Lake Drive at 5:45 a.m. for the 7:00 a.m. ferry sailing. We will return on the 5:00 p.m. sailing. Cost should be about $40.00 per person with car-pooling. Bring a lunch and a drink. Call **Rick** at 250-652-3326 to confirm.

Sunday, November 23

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)
***Pelagic Birding on the* M.V. Coho**
Mike McGrenere will lead this trip on the *M.V. Coho* on its usual sailing across the Strait of Juan de Fuca and back. The crossing takes 1½ hours and this is the best opportunity to see bird species that are usually found further out to sea, including shearwaters, fulmars, and phalaropes. We will be birding from the bow of the boat so **dress warmly**. Bring a lunch and meet at the Black Ball Ferry terminal in the Inner Harbour at 10:00 a.m. for the 10:30 a.m. sailing (allow plenty of time for parking). Ferry cost is $25.00 (US$) return (~$28.00 Can), and it is essential to have **2 pieces of ID** with you for Customs, one with a photograph. We'll return on the 2:00 p.m. sailing.

Monday, November 24

MARINE NIGHT
The Evolution, Natural History, and Diversity of King Crabs
King crabs (family Lithodidae) likely evolved from a hermit crab ancestor in the Northeast Pacific within the last 20 million years. We are fortunate in the Pacific Northwest to be at the epicenter of lithodid diversity. Beach naturalists and divers may encounter at least 10 species from eight genera in local waters. Some of these are the most bizarre and fascinating animals on our coast. **Will Duguid**, a graduate student at the University of Victoria, will introduce these characters to us and provide a primer on the evolution and biology of this charismatic group.7:30 p.m. Room 159, Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Everyone welcome.

Wednesday, November 26

BIRDERS' NIGHT
Members' Night
Have you been taking lots of pictures or maybe video of birds during the past year? We would love to see them and members' night is the best place to show us your stuff! We can accommodate digital pictures, video on CD, DVD, VHS tapes, and 35 mm slides. Call **Ed Pellizzon** for more information at 250-881-1476. We meet in Room 159 of the Fraser Building at the University of Victoria, 7:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee cup.

Sunday, November 30

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)
Mushroom Study Session

Rather than a designated leader, your participation is what will make this event a success. Each person will come ready to share knowledge with others. Interested beginners welcome also. Bring your favourite field guide. Please note this is an observation trip, not intended for collecting. However a few selected specimens will be chosen for closer examination. Bring lunch, snacks and drinks for potentially an all-day outing. Meet at UVic Parking Lot 6 near the Chapel at 10:00 a.m. (free parking on Sunday). No pets please. Call **Agnes** at 250-721-0634 or email her (thelynns at shaw.ca) if you need more information.

DECEMBER

Saturday, December 6

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)
Christmas Bird Count Tune-up
Meet at the intersection of Viaduct Avenue and Interurban Road at 8:30 a.m. We will cover Viaduct Flats and Quick's Bottom and areas in between. Call **Rick Schortinghuis** at 250-652-3326 if you need more information.

Tuesday, December 9

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION
Winter Birds of Victoria* ***PLEASE NOTE ROOM CHANGE FOR THIS EVENING**
Are you participating in the Christmas Bird Count this year? Feeder watch? Or maybe you would like to learn which species of birds call Victoria their home during the winter? Then join **Ann Nightingale** for slides and stories of what we can expect around town and at our feeders in the winter, all in preparation for the 50th anniversary of the Victoria Christmas Bird Count. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room C103 (Mathews/McQueen Theater) in the David Strong Building at University of Victoria. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee cup.

Saturday, December 13

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)
Christmas Bird Count Tune-up
Meet at Helmcken Road Park and Ride at 8:30 a.m. for a chance to tune up your winter bird-spotting identification skills. This trip will cover Knockan Hill Park, Hastings Flats and the roadsides in between, so bring your walking shoes, field guide and note-pad. Special interest for novice or near-novice Christmas Bird Counters. For more info, call **Ann Nightingale**: 250-652-6450.

Sunday, December 14

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)
Gull Identification Workshop at Goldstream
Learn more than you ever thought possible about the gulls that winter on Vancouver Island. Some come from as far away as the prairies to take advantage of the winter abundance of salmon. Don't be afraid of gulls. Use this as an opportunity to practice for the Christmas Bird Count. Meet at the Goldstream Picnic Area parking lot by the Finlayson Road bridge at 9:00 a.m. Wear adequate winter clothing and boots. Leader TBA.

Saturday, December 20

EVENT
Victoria Christmas Bird Count
See the article in this issue (p.18) or contact **Ann Nightingale** at 250-652-6450 (motmot@shaw.ca) or visit our website www.vicnhs.bc.ca/cbc/

Saturday, December 27

EVENT
Saltspring Island/Sidney Christmas Bird Count
See the article in this issue (p.18) or contact **Jean Brouard** at 250-653-2335 (johnbro@saltspring.com) or visit our website www.vicnhs.bc.ca/cbc/

JANUARY

Saturday, January 3

EVENT
Duncan Christmas Bird Count
See the article in this issue (p.18) or contact **Derrick Marven** (marven@shaw.ca; 250-748-8504).

Tuesday, January 20

BOTANY NIGHT
Rare Plants of Salt Spring Island: Research and New Discoveries
Robin Annschild, Staff Biologist, Salt Spring Island Conservancy, is conducting a research project on the impact of grazing by sheep on the Endangered Yellow Montane Violet and recently discovered a new population of Scouler's catchfly. Swan Lake Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Admission free, everyone welcome. Bring your friends.

The Victoria NATURALIST

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2009 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 contact 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 5, 2009 and follow with six Saturday morning field trips from March 7 to April 18. The cost will be $75 for non-members and $45 for members.

Beyond Beginning Birding

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 eight very diverse field sessions around Victoria led by eight different leaders. Sessions run on Sunday mornings, beginning on April 5, 2009, with the two long weekends skipped. The cost is $95.00 for non-members and $65.00 for members. The course is limited to 15 participants.

If you have any questions, or would like to register, please contact Darren Copley at 479-6622 or dccopley@telus.net. More detailed brochures will be available in the new year.

Victoria Natural History Society