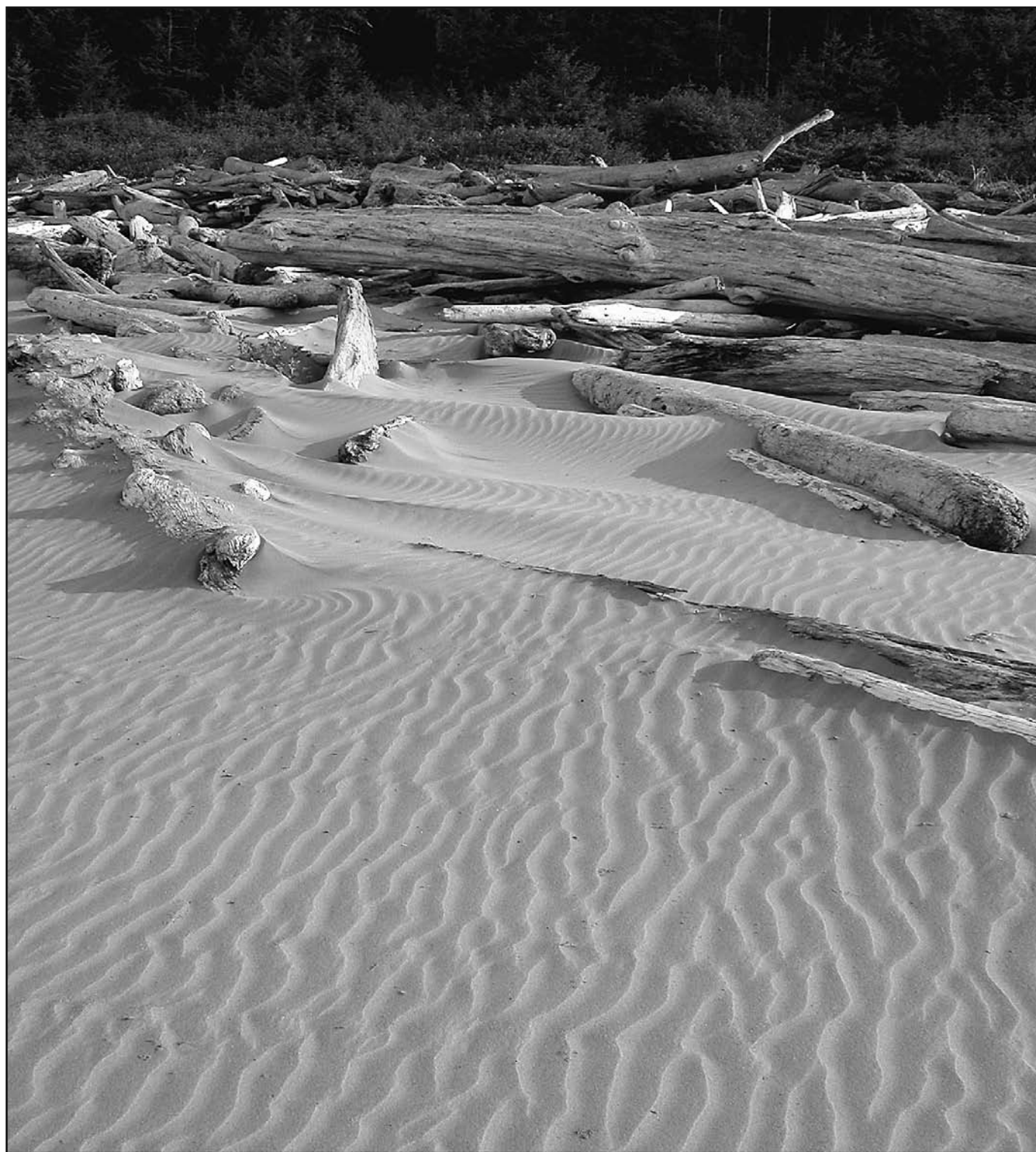




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The Victoria NATURALIST

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COVER PHOTO: Long Beach, Pacific Rim National Park.
Read Moralea's article (p.6) to learn about sandy beaches as
habitat. *Photo: Claudia Copley*

There are a variety of clues that let me know when spring has sprung, but at the time of this writing it wasn't a chorus of frogs, satin flowers blooming, or Bewick's Wren belting out whatever combination they can come up with – it was bees.

While staffing the Society display set up at a hobby show in a local mall, the item that generated the most interest was a quickly-pulled together box of bees – the non-native honeybee, a variety-pack of bumblebees, an array of native solitary bees, and even some bee-mimicking flies. The taxidermied whole mounts of Merlin, Long-eared Owl, and Pileated Woodpecker did not generate as much interest as the “bees”!

To me this interest was positive – wanting to know more about pollinators means people are thinking about environmental health, food production, ecological processes – hopefully all of the above! But even any one of these issues in isolation is a step in the right direction. The surprise people exhibit when they learn about the incredible variety of pollinators makes the telling worthwhile: ~Thirty different types of bumblebee in BC?! Solitary bees that live in the ground?! Flies that look like bees?! Flies that pollinate?!

Crazy-talk!

It also made me realize that spring was imminent and it would not be long before I saw my first bumblebee queen of the year emerging from her winter “slumber”. Two of our three honeybee hives survived their first year in our care despite our ineptitude and the sub-zero temperatures – zooming off expectantly whenever the sun shone on their doorstep. They appear to completely lack any sense of timing to match our seasons – no surprise there, considering their heritage. Those species that do belong here may be well underway by the time you read this. Step aside as they buzz by – they are busy AND vital.

Claudia

President's Message

By Darren Copley

A couple of things have come together since the last issue of the naturalist that I'm happy to tell you about. The VNHS has partnered with the University of Victoria's Natural History Club to offer field trips for university students. There are very few whole animal/field-related courses available at UVic, so this is an opportunity to introduce the students to an area of biology that is all too often neglected. We recently went on a night-time beach seine with a team from the Royal BC Museum, and caught a great selection of our incredible shallow-water fishes, including two of my favourites: Pacific spiny lumpsucker, and sailfin sculpin.

The other happy event is that our publicity team is also back in business, with our display at Westshore Mall during their annual Hobby Show, at the University of Victoria, and at the James Bay Market's Seedy Saturday. The display features insect specimens from the museum, plus literature on how to attract wildlife, but most importantly it includes Society members that are happy to share their experiences with others. Events like these are great opportunities to

spread the word about our organization, and to help people appreciate nature. If you would like to help our team at any of these events, or have other ideas, please contact me. Let's make the Victoria Natural History Society the club that people think of whenever nature is mentioned.

Hopefully by the time you read this the icing will be put on the cake at Viaduct Flats. The viewing platform interpretive panels are completed and installed, showcasing some of the more commonly viewed species of the wetland. We are also ready to mount a spotting scope for all to use. This project has been ongoing for many years now, since Anne Adamson so generously donated funds to the Society through her estate. Make sure you go see this completed project on a regular bird outing, or use it as an excuse to go to the annual Organic Islands Fair at Glendale Gardens this summer. Other major partners include the Construction Association of Victoria, the Municipality of Saanich, and Glendale Gardens.

I've recently joined the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team Vertebrate Recovery Implementation Group as a VNHS representative to help with their newest project. You may have heard about the successful reintroduction of Western Bluebird on the San Juan Islands. Gary Slater, who spoke at Birders' Night about this bluebird project in Washington, has been hired to come up with a reintroduction plan for Vancouver Island. For me this has brought back memories of the Purple Martin project I was involved in right after I finished my biology degree. At the time, numbers of martins had dropped dramatically: they were only nesting at Cowichan Bay and Esquimalt Harbour. Thanks to early nestbox program efforts of Society members including Calvor Palmateer and Bryan Gates, these populations were maintained. My best friend Eric Walters and I got involved through writing the status report for martins, and we found information on work done in Washington on nestboxes, and even the talk of reintroductions. Inspired, we implemented an intensive effort on southern Vancouver Island. When constructing nestboxes, we made sure that they looked like the ones that were working in Washington so that any birds from there would immediately recognize them as potential nesting sites. I feel certain that our martins rebounded because of the simultaneous recovery efforts in Washington.

One of the people that helped us out early on with the Purple Martin project was Harold Pollock, who was also very involved with attempts to maintain our declining bluebirds. I remember just getting my start with birds when the last of our breeding bluebirds were nesting on Mount Tuam. Like



Pacific spiny lumpsucker. *Photo:* Gavin Hanke

the Purple Martin recovery program, the original bluebird project involved many dedicated members of our Society and they should be remembered for their hard work. It is not known exactly why our bluebirds disappeared, but we are sure that competition from House Sparrows and European Starlings didn't help and habitat alteration certainly was a factor. It could also have been due to some stochastic event that resulted in declines here, as well as throughout Washington. The good news is that, as the Washington (including San Juan Islands) population is on the increase, we have an opportunity to get these birds back nesting on southern Vancouver Island. As long as there is a good chance of recruitment, I think we can expect to see Western Bluebird here again.

It isn't easy to keep track of all the work done by various individuals over the years when it comes to helping out with any wildlife recovery effort, and rarely can any one person take full credit if a reintroduction works. For this reason I hope that everyone who gets involved derives satisfaction in knowing the significance of the endeavour and can feel good about the part they played in its success. If you have any information or ideas about this upcoming attempt to help Western Bluebirds, please get in touch with me and I can pass them on to the committee. We are always interested in hearing about potential reintroduction sites, fundraising ideas, and sightings.

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Flox

By Brian Mason

crows flakker to a leaf-bare branch,
this annoyance on the wing;
silhouettes for a setting sky,
a darkening of the day.
Cull the crows!
the cry goes up,
this many, so many
s'no good for us.

subfusc serenade, their cast a pall,
a throaty cackling to us they call.
for us they come, a snuffy crowd,
their serried feathering we will prune down.

with sedulous hatching they garner domain
those febrile flocks we scorn with disdain;
but our nostrum of purity will cleanse the realm:
we'll lighten the skies ...
to increase our size.

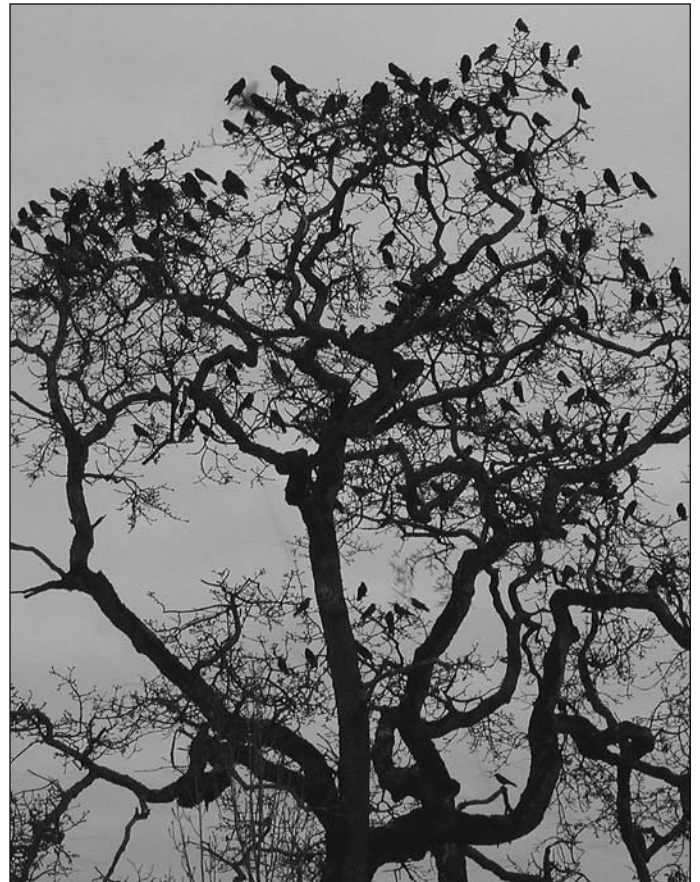


Photo: Ann Nightingale

Shoreline Savvy

By Moralea Milne

If you take a walk along Taylor Beach in Metchosin, you will often see river otters chasing each other through the waves and curious seals stare at you with their velvet painting eyes. Birds whirl and alight in the choppy grey sea. These animals provide some visual reference to the surrounding waters but the marine world is not one that is easily accessible to terrestrial creatures such as us.

Just off the beach are large eelgrass beds and seaweed communities that provide crucial nursery habitat for juvenile fish, crabs, and octopus. Under our feet as we walk on the beach, Pacific sand lance and (possibly) surf smelts lay their eggs in the high intertidal zone, forgoing their usual aquatic environment during their incubation.

They are known as forage fish, the cornerstone of the nearshore food web that supplies a critical food resource to commercial species such as salmon and cutthroat trout. Seals, sea lions, whales, and seabirds, comprise part of the 100 species that are dependant on forage fish for their survival. A 2007 report states that “35% of the diet of juvenile salmon and 60% of the diet of Chinook salmon are comprised of Pacific sand lance”. Because they forage close to the shoreline, coastal cutthroat trout are heavily dependant on sand lance and surf smelts; 50% of our endangered humpback whales’ diet is sand lance. Marine birds are also

dependant on these fish; there are estimates that 75% of Rhinoceros Auklet’s food intake and 50% of the endangered Marbled Murrelet’s diet are comprised of forage fish. Forage fish include Pacific herring, sardines, capelin, eulachon, and northern anchovy, as well as Pacific sand lance (a.k.a. needlefish) and surf smelts.

At night, Pacific sand lance (*Ammodytes hexapterus*) burrow in the sand as a means of escaping predators, sometimes surprising people walking at low tide along a beach, as they wriggle up from their nighttime “safe houses”. Some people will recognize them from the large, dense schools they form near the surface that are called “bait balls”. They spawn between November and February, more frequently in the late fall. Sand lance use their bodies to form small, shallow pits in sandy beaches, much like salmon redds, in which to deposit their spawn, which will hatch in four to five weeks. Both sand lance and surf smelts spawn during high tide – the upper beach must be covered in shallow water to facilitate egg deposition.



Sand lance and surf smelt spawning occurs at high tide in shallow water on sand-gravel beaches such as this one. Photo: Claudia Copley. Inset: Pigeon Guillemot with a blennie. Photo: Bruce Whittington

A consequence of hardening shorelines, by building seawalls and other fortifications, is that the waves will now pound the adjacent shorelines with more force...and cause the loss of soft sand and gravel.

Surf smelt (*Hypomesus pretiosus*) can spawn at any time of the year, depending on weather, vegetation and probably many factors of which we are not aware. Surf smelt lay their sticky eggs in the high intertidal zone of a sand and gravel beach, just below the log line, usually between the two lines of deposited seaweed that are readily visible. Pea gravel sized stones, intermixed with coarse sand are preferred spawning material. Surf smelts that spawn in the summer make use of beaches with overhanging vegetation or areas with a continual underground movement of water (such as from a blocked stream slowly seeping through sand and gravel beds). These components ensure the smelt eggs will remain moist and viable under the hot summer conditions. Summer incubation and hatching happen within two weeks, while cold winter conditions will increase the incubation time to one to two months. Surf smelt eggs can be found in small patches or they might cover miles of beach, depending on beach conditions and surf smelt abundance.

In order to ensure continued habitat for these important fish, it is important to understand how beaches are formed and maintained. Bluffs and beaches form a type of unwitting partnership. The bluffs are subject to erosion because of their steepness, the type of material from which they are formed (clay, sand, gravel), and the force of wave action and storm events. Waves are powerful forces that continually act on shoreline materials; they pound against a bluff until it is undercut, when it will fall onto the shore, giving short term protection to the bluff. Slowly, wave action will redistribute the fallen material, according to tides, currents, and topography. The accumulation of these sediments on beaches and in shallow tidal ecosystems provides habitat for many different species. Storm-water runoff and removal of bluff vegetation (especially to accommodate the desire for views) can dramatically increase the rate of erosion along bluffs.

Other creatures benefit from this eternal process. Under the cobbles of the low intertidal zone, in the area that is exposed only at low tides (visit the western end of Taylor Beach), you will find small squirming black eel-like fish known as blennies. There are many species of blennies, some of which will lay their eggs under these cobbles. One or both of the parents will often remain to guard their developing young. At low tides, garter snakes and raccoons will descend from their land-based territories and forage for blennies and other marine organisms. If you go searching for blennies, please respect their needs; lift the cobbles carefully and return them to their same positions.

It is not only the changes to rivers through logging activities, over-harvesting and pollution from industrial and sewage contamination that has affected our declining marine stocks. Developments along shorelines, where we have not realized the cumulative effects of shoreline changes, have impacted heavily on the ability of marine species to survive.

The bluffs to the west of Witty's Lagoon are continually eroding and supplying sand to Witty's beach. If you were to "harden" this area by erecting a wall to try to protect those slopes, you would eventually lose the beach. A consequence of hardening shorelines, by building seawalls and other fortifications, is that the waves will now pound the adjacent shorelines with more force, causing a chain reaction of property owners hardening shorelines; the beaches that remain are scoured by the extra forces working on them and lose the soft sand and gravel that provide surf smelt and sand lance spawning habitat. Less spawning habitat = less forage fish = less food for the 100 species that feed on them.

If you have ever strolled the seawall around Stanley Park, or taken a boat cruise around Victoria's shoreline, you will soon see that the beaches have been heavily impacted. Many of them have disappeared entirely, or the high intertidal zones have been so heavily scoured that no spawning habitat remains.

There are new "soft" techniques that have been developed to protect shoreline properties. Building natural formations such as sand and gravel berms, planting them with native shoreline grasses and trees, the placement of drift logs, all these mimic the natural barriers to erosion and contribute to maintaining our fish, marine bird, and mammal populations.

Most of us might never see a forage fish nor would we recognize one if we did, but they are vitally important to maintaining the food web which feeds the more recognizable inhabitants of our marine waters. If you enjoy a meal of wild caught salmon or the sight of basking seals; consider using "soft" armouring techniques to reduce shoreline erosion and bear in mind, on your next walk along a beach, that under your feet could be the developing embryos of these valuable residents of our marine waters.

A group of Metchosin residents, under the guidance of Ramona de Graaf, biologist and a passionate advocate for forage fish, has recently begun sampling along Taylor Beach, to search for evidence of Pacific sand lance eggs (sand lance are known to occur there) and surf smelt spawning. Eventually Ramona hopes to expand this initiative along other Metchosin beaches and throughout Vancouver Island. If you would like to become involved in this project, you may contact Ramona at: rdegraaf@bms.bc.ca

References and Resources:

- <http://racerocks.ca/metchosinmarine/foragefish/foragefish.htm>
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- Lamb, A. and P. Edgell 1986. *Coastal Fishes of the Pacific Northwest*. Harbour Publishing. 224 pp.
- www.coastalgeo.com
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VNHS Trip to the Lower Mainland

24 January, 2009

By Kevin Meldrum

We met just outside the entrance to Beaver Lake Park on a dark, crisp morning. The group made new acquaintances and renewed old ones. It was revealed that our leader and guide, Rick Schortinghuis, was celebrating his birthday that very day. He would not answer the questions concerning his age but he did ask, "Where's the cake?"

With much anticipation, 20 members of the VNHS boarded the three vehicles (two vans and a car) which would transport a group diverse in age and background to the mainland. The group was not so diverse in its goals, which was to view what Mother Nature had to offer us of her avian children while enjoying each other's company. We were also gratified to know that the fog, which had plagued the lower mainland for some time, would not be an issue. We were expecting clear skies and crisp clean air, and were not disappointed.

We ventured to the outer decks when the ferry entered Active Pass to call out our discoveries and to discuss the not-so-clear sightings. The wind and temperature served to remind us that it was a January day, but it was somewhat easy to persevere when focussed on an activity so enjoyable. During the ferry trip, I was personally pleased to hear that our trip would also include Reifel Bird Sanctuary. I believed that the trip was solely to Boundary Bay, which in itself offered much excitement to me, being a "new birder" and never having been to either location.



Artwork: Pat MacLeod

We did not locate the famed Willet as we drove along the causeway at the Tsawwassen Ferry Terminal, but many heads were turned to the right hoping for our first excuse to stop. We didn't need to wait long though. On our way to Reifel Bird Sanctuary we stopped numerous times to observe Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers, Rough-legged Hawks, Cooper's Hawks and Red-tailed Hawks. As we were stopped to wait for the people in the lead vehicle to confirm one of their sightings this "new birder" exclaimed, "I think that's an owl on the left peak of that barn!" Let me tell you, Agnes Lynn can move! It took Rick Schortinghuis to calm me and others down by identifying it as another Red-tailed Hawk. Rick, being a kind and gentle person, advised me never to let an experience like that discourage one from calling out a sighting. I concluded he was right, I would continue to call out sightings but leave much of the identification to others much more experienced and learn from them.

At Reifel we were called together and a cake magically appeared from under a seat, then we blessed Rick with our vocal skills. Let me tell you, Agnes Lynn can bake a cake! Rick was still being evasive concerning his age though. As we proceeded into the sanctuary, we discovered roosting Black-crowned Night-Herons, cheerful Black-capped Chickadees, and Wood Ducks. The long screech of a Red-tailed Hawk was heard and I learned that the general public is led to believe it is the call of a Bald Eagle, as you hear in commercials and movies.

Many of us ventured out to the observation tower to view many Great Blue Herons, more Northern Harriers, Red-tailed Hawks, a Cooper's Hawk, Red-winged Black-birds, distant Snow Geese, Canvasbacks, and many other species. We also enjoyed watching a male Northern Shoveler gingerly walking on the thin ice, only to fall through, spend some time swimming in small circles and then proceed to imitate an ice breaker.

We later encountered four Sandhill Cranes sharing the path with us; they did not refuse our offerings of food. We had the chance to view a pair of Gadwalls up close. Another sighting of note was a hybrid of a male Northern Pintail and male Mallard, quite striking.

After a brief lunch we headed to Boundary Bay. Of course, the short trip included many stops along the way to confirm our sightings. Bald Eagles were so numerous we would say, "Oh, just another Eagle". We did stop, though, to watch a kettle of approximately 20 Bald Eagles topped with about the same number of gulls. We arrived at Boundary

Bay at the end of 64th Street, set up scopes, put binoculars to eyes and were immediately rewarded by sightings of four Short-eared Owls. We enjoyed watching them scour the log-filled beach for prey, and even witnessed a Northern Harrier and a Short-eared Owl grapple briefly in mid flight. We were treated to a distant sighting of a Gyrfalcon at the end of 72nd Street, which took some effort to determine. There were many Bald Eagles, seabirds, and shorebirds present as well.

Rick led us to a local farmer's property and we were granted permission to enter one of his barns. We were delighted to see a sleeping Barn Owl. With all of us quietly viewing it, another Barn Owl from the other end of the barn decided to find more intimate surroundings.

On the way to the 5 p.m. ferry we stopped along the Tsawwassen causeway to share in more sightings. Seventy-five confirmed species were recorded for the day, with a possible sighting of a Northern Goshawk. Another item of note were the seven sightings of Rough-legged Hawks. The first one was on the same house as noted on the trip in November 2008.

As we were parting at Beaver Lake, it was agreed that it was a great day all around. Somehow Rick Schortinghuis was coerced into revealing his age, confirming that he was indeed eligible for discounts at one local retailer. My gratitude goes to Rick Schortinghuis (leader), Agnes and Dave Lynn (baking and driving), Andrew Harcombe (driving) and Bob Lake (driving) for a truly remarkable day!



Northern Shoveler "on thin ice". Photo: Kevin Meldrum

Meaningful Access to British Columbia's Bird Database Still a Bone of Contention

By Bill Merilees, Jeremy McCall, Andy Stewart, and Bruce Whittington

Recently the authors had the opportunity of meeting with the Honourable Barry Penner, our Provincial Minister of the Environment, to discuss the problems with public access to British Columbia's bird database. Those who have read the articles in recent issues of BC Nature will be familiar with the challenges of access to the BC Nest Record Scheme, one component of the bird database. Over the past fifty years, thousands of volunteer participants built, in partnership with government agencies, an incredible natural history database that was largely funded by public money. Without meaningful and timely access to these materials, technical reports on endangered species, environmental impact assessments, and natural history research remain incomplete.

At the meeting, Minister Penner was asked to initiate an inventory of all materials currently in government

possession pertaining to this database. The Minister was also asked that government not support organizations where outstanding issues of public access are problematic. The final request of the Minister was that the Ministry of the Environment and the Royal BC Museum, in consultation with non-governmental organizations, determine how the BC Nest Record Scheme might best be managed.

Bird Studies Canada, which has just initiated the BC Breeding Bird Atlas project, is a credible organization with broad stakeholder support that would be a suitable repository. Naturalists should consider entrusting their observations to Bird Studies Canada until data access issues elsewhere are resolved. Observers are reminded to always keep a personal copy of all their observations to prevent loss.

Rarely Seen Green: Get to Know the Mosses

By Kem Luther

A scruffy fellow on a bicycle crossed the U.S. border into Canada every Friday afternoon. He always had a large hiker's pack strapped to his back and the oversized saddlebags of his bicycle bulged. The border guards were certain that he was smuggling something into Canada. They frequently stopped him to search his pack and saddlebags. They strip-searched him several times and even brought in a mechanic to take his bicycle apart. But they never caught him with contraband. Then the man stopped crossing the border. One night, a few years later, a former border guard ran into the fellow in a pub. After a few drinks the guard said, "We were sure you were smuggling something into Canada. But we just couldn't find it. Would you tell me what it was?" "Sure," said the fellow, "bicycles."

An army of professional and amateur naturalists track all the rare birds that wander into southern Vancouver Island. They bushwhack into the wilderness to bring back evidence of undocumented wildflowers. Take them on a walk and ask them about the mosses that line our paths and drape our trees, however, and they frequently draw a blank. "It's just moss," they say. Mosses are the bicycles of our local ecosystem – they are assumptions that we stop thinking about, the obvious that we miss.

Perhaps mosses would not be so anonymous if we knew some of their names. Biologists have given Linnaean binomial names to 12,000 species of moss. More than 800 of these mosses can be found inside the borders of British Columbia. British Columbia and the nation after which it is named, Great Britain, are among the most moss-rich regions in the temperate zones. In the rainforests on the west side of Vancouver Island, mosses seem to smother the landscape. Even in the drier areas of southern Vancouver Island mosses are major contributors to the scene of green that delights our eyes through all the seasons of the year.

A trail near to where I live passes by several ancient Big-leaf Maples. Their huge trunks are carpeted with mosses. On the lower part of the trunks I see two Yellow Mosses, two Neckeras, an Antitrichia, and Cat-tail Moss. A little higher on the trunk is Plume Moss and Magnificent Moss. If someone were to rip these mosses from the trunk, they could take decades to regrow. One or two might find it impossible to return – certain mosses can only establish themselves on the bud scars of saplings. On the duff between the maples I walk through patches of Step Moss, Badge Moss, Menzies' Tree Moss, Goose-necked Moss, and



Above, top: Broom Moss, a *Dicranum*. Also called Stork's Bill Moss because of the upturned "bills" on the sporophytes. Photo: Darren Copley.

Below: One of the Haircap Mosses, a *Polytrichum*. With thick midribs and curled edges, the leaves of *Polytrichum* mosses look like small conifer needles. Photo: Darren Copley.

Wavy-leafed Cotton Moss. I step over a fallen cedar that is now home to thick layers of Coiled-leaf Moss, Fan Moss, Oregon Beaked Moss, and Rough Moss. A minute's walk up the nearby hill would take me to a rock bald where I would find Roadside Rock Moss, Broom Moss, and Juniper Haircap Moss. Just over the hill are deep carmine mats of Red Bryum nestled in the seeps between the boulders.

The mosses of our Vancouver Island forests serve many needs. Perhaps their most important contribution is the part they play in the water cycle. In this Mediterranean climate, with its wet winters and dry summers, mosses help the rest of the forest to make efficient use of the inconsistent rain. In wet times mosses soak up water and release it slowly into the surrounding soil. One study found that the mosses on just a hectare of land can absorb more than 50,000 liters of water, enough to fill a small swimming pool. The water that



Hardwoods, especially Bigleaf Maples, often sport thick mats of *Antitrichia californica*. Photo: Ann Nightingale

flows down the trunk of a moss-laden tree during a rain is filled with dirt, frass (insect excrement), and plant pieces. Moss patches on the branches and trunk interrupt the stem flow by absorbing some of the water coursing down the tree and slowly releasing it, allowing the water and its nutrients to make their way to the roots of the tree in gentle doses. The mosses in the duff around the trees protect the sensitive hyphae of the fungal partners that extend the reach of the tree roots into the surrounding soil. The ground mosses also host an expansive community of insects and spiders and give shelter to snails and slugs. A hectare of mature, mossy forest can provide a home to thousands of banana slugs. The banana slugs eat the mosses and fungi, digest them, and return the undigested remains to the land. Slug droppings can amount to 20 kilograms/hectare each year. The droppings build up the soil of the forest floor, providing more places for the trees and mosses to flourish.

The small creatures of the forest make use of our mosses for shelter and food, but large animals tend to ignore the green bounty. In the same forest where deer have stripped the bark from young saplings and nibbled the lichens to their nubs, the mosses remain pristine. We do not know why this is so—possibly the animals find the phenol compounds in moss leaves unpalatable. Humans do not eat mosses either, but they have found other reasons for harvesting them. The First Nations people used moss to layer food in their cooking pits. They knew that moss could absorb large amounts of water, so they kept some dry moss on hand for sanitary



Look for mats of Red Bryum, *Bryum miniatum*, in water seeps on rock balds. The wet leaves are wine red and the sporophytes are light green. Photo: Derrick Ditchburn.

napkins and diapers. Moss plays a smaller role, however, in the industrial society that now inhabits Vancouver Island. We have few itches that moss can scratch. Only sphagnum moss – peat – has much commercial value, and the sphagnums do not grow in the drier areas of Vancouver Island. The current neglect of our local mosses may turn out to be a hidden boon. Moss is a renewable resource, but it renews with glacial slowness. If there was quick money in them, the mosses would soon be gone.

Much of what we know about mosses we learn from bryologists, the botanists who study mosses. British Columbia does not have many bryologists. Wilf Schofield, who died last year, was our best-known bryologist, and when he retired from his academic position in the 1990s, the University of British Columbia did not replace him with another bryologist. Today no more than three or four people in the province call themselves bryologists. Alberta, a smaller province with many fewer species of moss, has more bryologists than British Columbia. The dearth of serious students of our BC mosses extends to the amateur realm. When I set out to learn something about the mosses on Southern Vancouver Island, I had trouble finding people who could help me learn what I wanted to know. I've only met a half dozen people in the Victoria area who I could trust to identify an unknown moss. British Columbia seems to be caught in a negative spiral regarding the scientific study of her mosses – we do not train and support bryologists because we do not think mosses are important, and we

Only the most common mosses have English names. I have listed below the scientific names of the mosses mentioned in this article:

Apple Moss: *Bartramia pomiformis*
 Antitrichia 1: *Antitrichia californica*
 Badge Moss: *Plagiomnium insigne*
 Bent-leaf Moss: *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*
 Broom Moss: *Dicranum scoparium*
 Cat-tail Moss: *Isoetecium stoloniferum/myosuroides*
 Coiled-Leaf Moss: *Hypnum circinale*
 Fan Moss: *Rhizomnium glabrescens*
 Goose-necked Moss: *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus*
 Juniper Haircap Moss: *Polytrichum juniperinum*
 Magnificent Moss: *Plagiomnium venustum*
 Menzies' Tree Moss: *Leucolepis acanthoneuron*
 Neckera 1: *Metaneckera menziesii*
 Neckera 2: *Neckera douglasii*
 Oregon Beaked Moss: *Eurhynchium/Kindbergia oregana*
 Plume Moss: *Dendroalsia abietina*
 Roadside Rock Moss: *Racomitrium canescens* complex
 Rough Moss: *Claopodium crispifolium*
 Red Bryum: *Bryum miniatum*
 Red Roof Moss: *Ceratodon purpureus*



Step Moss, *Hylocomium splendens*. Each year's feather-like growth emerges at an angle from the previous year's flattened growth, creating "steps."
 Photo: Derrick Ditchburn

Step Moss: *Hylocomium splendens*
 Thread Moss: *Bryum argenteum*
 Yellow Moss 1: *Homalothecium nuttallii*
 Yellow Moss 2: *Homalothecium fulgenscens*
 Wavy-leafed Cotton Moss: *Plagiothecium/Buckiella undulatum*

do know how important mosses are because we haven't studied them. Ignorance like this is a tame tiger waiting to eat us.

When I started to learn the names some of the more common Island mosses, I was surprised how easy it was to tell them apart. A full grasp of the hundreds of mosses in our forests requires a good microscope and much patience, but most of the common mosses lend themselves to quick identification, either with the naked eye or with a small hand lens. Colour is often the key to knowing which moss we are looking at. The bleached green of dry Roadside Rock Moss can be spotted from a car travelling at full speed on Highway 1 (Most of the moss you see on the rocks along Highway 1 is Roadside Rock Moss, perhaps the most abundant moss on the Island.). From 30 feet away I can spot the distinctive kelly green of Broom Moss and the lime green of Apple Moss, long before I can make out the shape of the plants' leaves. Sometimes the locations of mosses provide strong clues to their identity. If you live in Victoria, the moss in the shadier areas of your lawn is most likely Bent-leaf Moss. The little green mounds on the asphalt roof of your shed are probably Red Roof Moss. Chances are good that the tiny moss poking through the cracks in the sidewalk that leads to your front door is Thread Moss. By using color and location information and by doing a brief inspection of the stem and leaf anatomy, you can identify most of the common mosses in the field. If you learn the names and the presentations of only twenty mosses – an afternoon's work – you will

recognize 95% of the mosses you see when walking along the Galloping Goose Trail. And mosses are easy to remember once you have learned them because you are never far from them. Every outdoor walk is a chance to review.

While you are learning the names of a few mosses, watch their behavior. One of your first observations will be that mosses change dramatically with the seasons. They shrivel in the dry months, the leaves curling and twisting against the stems. They appear to be dead, but they are not – toss a glass of water on a patch and it will green up as you watch. The perennial trees and bushes respond to dry weather by tapping into the subsoil moisture with their roots. Mosses, which have no roots, take a different approach. When dry weather comes they lower their metabolisms and enter a state of dormancy. Some mosses are so adept at cutting back on their needs that they can live for years in a dormant state. Specimens in herbariums have recovered after spending decades in dry, dark envelopes. Mosses are also able to endure extremely low temperatures, particularly polar and alpine mosses. They thrive in Antarctica, where they are the highest form of plant life to take up permanent residence.

Beginners also notice at an early stage how some mosses send up small "flags" during the warmer parts of the year. These flags, called sporophytes, have at their tips tiny capsules of spores waiting to be launched into the wind. The sporophytes are the moss's mechanism for sexual reproduction. Mosses, however, don't do the deed in the way the flow-

ers and birds and bees do it. The stems and capsules of the sporophytes are not organs of the plant they are attached to. They are the offspring of the plant. For most of their lives, mosses are content to live in a haploid stage, with only half of the full complement of genes, but for a short period each year they mate and express themselves as diploid organisms, as sporophytes reaching out of the greenery to shed their haploid spores. The spores that germinate go on to produce the haploid mats that we think of as the mature moss. This pattern reverses the genetic sequence followed by animals and by vascular plants, which pass their life cycles in a diploid stage and only resort to haploid cells (sperm and egg) when they are ready to reproduce. Biologists occasionally debate whether spending one's active life in the haploid stage or in the diploid stage is the better survival strategy. We should keep in mind that mosses were on the earth 400 million years ago, long before there were vascular plants or animals, and they still thrive today. The haploid strategy used by mosses must have something going for it. *We* may be the ones with the aberrant sexual strategies.

"To everything," says the Preacher, "there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven." Those who participate in the natural cycles of Vancouver Island know that the blooms of wildflowers return in March and April. May brings nesting birds and in June the trees put on their best show. Grasses are lush in July. Butterflies, dragonflies, and other insects crescendo in August. Our shorebirds return in September. Mushrooms pop up everywhere in October and November. We count overwintering birds in December. That leaves only January and February unassigned. Could we spare a few days in these slack months, months when the moss is lush, to make friends with the overlooked mosses of our local ecosystems?

Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 18 new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our "welcome" column:

Mike Wyeth
Wellington Avenue
birds, ecosystems, forests, marine life

J. Blaney
Niagara Street
marine ecology, ecosystems

Linda Foubister
King George Terrace

Karen Chapple
Ernest Avenue

Sharon and Ewald Escher
Linwood Avenue
birds, botany, walking

Marilyn Nicolls
Blair Street
birds

Dorothy Olive
Verdier Avenue

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2008 Christmas Bird Count Results

By Ann Nightingale

Brrrrrrr!!!!

Our 50th anniversary of the Victoria Christmas Bird Count circle was more cold than gold, but the volunteers were out in droves to see and hear what they could. Braving -10°C temperatures in some parts of the circle, 164 bush beaters took their chances with icy roads and walkways and turned up an astounding 137 species for the day.

Two new species, Gray Jay and Eurasian Collared Dove, were added to the Victoria CBC list. Other rarities found on this year's count included American Tree Sparrow, Least Sandpiper, and Rough-legged Hawk. Spotted Towhees, Golden-crowned Sparrows, Fox Sparrows, Dunlin, Mourning Dove, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker and Red-breasted Sapsucker all set records for the count. While normally a record number is something to celebrate, this year alarms were sounding. In a typical year, we see one or two Red-breasted Sapsuckers. This year 79 were reported, and in several cases they were seen on Douglas-fir, which isn't a typical host tree for them. Humans, it seems, are not the only ones accustomed to Victoria's mild winters. When the cold temperatures and snow came, there simply was not enough food in the hills to sustain the birds, and many of them came down to sea level to keep from starving. Now that the weather has warmed up a little, we're not seeing as many of these birds.

We counted 68,621 individuals, down a little from last year (69,903). Keeping in mind that the counters were down about 20% and we didn't get any boats out on the water, this is a pretty impressive total. Interestingly, one of the species of note in 1958 again put on a show fifty years later: the American Robin. In much of North America, the robin is an indicator that spring is on its way. People who move to Victoria are sometimes shocked to see them, and see them in good numbers, during even the coldest winters. This year 12,851 were reported, well shy of the record of 14,327, but a good showing nonetheless.

The most spectacular appearance didn't occur until a few days after the Christmas Bird Count, but within the official count week: Western Bluebirds! A flock of about 12 were hanging about in Fairfield and were thankfully reported by John McDonald. These are the first Western Bluebirds recorded in Victoria during count week since 1964 according to the Audubon Christmas Bird Count website (<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>). Some of the birds were still lurking around the James Douglas School/Moss Rock into January. Perhaps this bodes well for their return to Vancouver Island!

Another pleasant surprise was the increase in Feeder-



Western Bluebirds. Photo: John McDonald

watch reports this year. We had a total of 79 Feederwatch participants, including some of our snowbound bush beaters. This is an area that could really use a champion, so if you think you could help rally Victorians to send in their feeder results, please contact Ann Nightingale at Motmot@shaw.ca or 250-652-6450.

The Duncan, Sooke, and Saltspring/Sidney counts all went ahead as scheduled as well, thanks to coordinators, Derrick Marven, Denise Gubersky, and Jean Brouard. And people think southern Islanders can't handle the snow! To review the Victoria (BCVI), Sooke, (BCSO), Duncan (BCDU) and Saltspring/Sidney (BCSS) historical results, check out the Audubon website at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>

Post-count gathering has been rescheduled – Everyone welcome!

The biggest miss this year was the post-count gathering. Due to dire weather predictions for Saturday night—which actually came true—the gathering was postponed. Several leaders dropped off their results to a reliable habitat for cold and weary birders, a local Tim Horton's, but it didn't have the same feel as a real post-count. So, the 2008 Christmas Bird Count Post-count gathering has been rescheduled. Please join us at **6 pm, Wednesday, April 22, in Room C103 of the David Strong Building at the University of Victoria**. Bring some Christmas goodies if you can. It will be a great opportunity to socialize with your fellow birders and compare notes from the coldest, snowiest Christmas Bird Count most of us can remember.

From 6 to 7:30 p.m. it will be December in April, followed immediately by Birders' Night where I will take us into the next season with an update on the British Columbia Breeding Bird Atlas.

Thanks go out again to everyone who participated. Victoria continues to have one of the highest participation rates in North America, thanks to our birding community! The next Victoria Christmas Bird Count will take place on December 19, 2009. Mark your calendars and tell your friends!

Participant List, page 18

2008 Victoria Christmas Bird Count including Feeder Watch

Count Areas	Species																								Victoria Count (Field & Feeder)	** indicates new record in 2008
	Butchart Gardens / Northern Highlands	Central Highlands	Goldstream	Thetis Lake / Hastings Flats	Langford Lake	Albert Head / Triangle Mtn	Esquimalt Lagoon / Mill Hill	Esquimalt Harbour	Portage Inlet / The Gorge	Victoria Harbour	Beacon Hill	Oak Bay	UVIC/ Cadboro Bay	10 Mile Point	Gordon Head / Mount Douglas	Swan Lake / Cedar Hill	Blenksnop / Panama Flats	Elk Lake / Cordova Bay	Prospect Lake / Quicks Bottom	Martindale / Bear Hill	Feeders					
Greater White Fr. Goose.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		Total #	Prev High			
Cackling Goose							7															7	68			
Canada Goose	88			60	168	185	159	218	81	130		187	35	87	92	8	89	233	143	972	7	7	106			
Mute Swan							25															25	77			
Trumpeter Swan	94	6		6	10		2			4			3	3			3	110	70	33		344	458			
Wood Duck											3		42				3					48	74			
Gadwall						13	23	6	6	2				1			3	20				74	170			
Eurasian Wigeon			1			2	1		1	4	3	1						2				15	28			
American Wigeon			12		3	375	332	13	27	250	313	673	13	53		35		63	5	2		2,169	14889			
Mallard	134		6	3	68	45	1028	410	48	134	522	33	250	455	98	550	213	224	44	112		4,377	10336			
Northern Shoveler						15	2				2					15		57				91	476			
Northern Pintail	15					22	207	4	1		3	11							1	4		268	1304			
Green-winged Teal	2		3			13	124	66	20	3			4			2		1		5		243	685			
Canvasback																		32				32	230			
Ring-necked Duck					22	6											4	200				232	663			
Greater Scaup									123													123	3100			
Lesser Scaup							2			4				1				2		3		12	1012			
Harlequin Duck						6				37	12	15		9						10		89	410			
Surf Scoter						36	14	2		28	14	13		3				15		37		162	1478			
White-winged Scoter						6				1		8		2						2		19	834			
Long-tailed Duck (Oldsquaw)						1				2								17		71		91	577			
Bufflehead	2	6	16		8	80	341	79	87	124	26	61	16	23	50	1		225	10	112		1,267	2863			
Common Goldeneye	1					7	95	35	19	59	12	7		1	7			46		4		293	745			
Barrow's Goldeneye			4				2			6												12	361			
Hooded Merganser			8		37	20	18	23	4	36	2	30		26	1			49				254	662			
Common Merganser			3		10	18	5	8		9		4	3			9		251				320	1600			
Red-breasted Merganser						8	23	41	41	107	5	11	1	5				59		42		343	791			
Ruddy Duck																		11				11	429			
California Quail	9	12		44		11												11		39	96	222	580			
Red-throated Loon						2		1								1		2		2		8	140			
Pacific Loon						11	1			1	2					41		1		2		59	488			
Common Loon						6	3			1	2	2						1				15	109			
Pied-billed Grebe		1			5				5	1						1		21				34	100			
Horned Grebe						5				1	6	1		2				11		20		46	1100			
Red-necked Grebe						4		1		7		6										18	671			
Eared Grebe																		4				4	123			
Western Grebe						4				1												5	3314			
Brandt's Cormorant						1120				810	6	34		72				17		2		2,061	3549			
Double-crested Cormorant				1	12	150	51	6	55	187	13	15	2	12	4	1		36	14	7		566	1004			
Pelagic Cormorant						15	16	3		10	2	15		16				11		8		96	2300			
Great Blue Heron	2	1	1		2	1	3	2	1	5	1		3	2			4	5	6	2	1	42	162			
Turkey Vulture						3																3	11			
Bald Eagle (adult)	8	2	5	4	8	11	2	4	1	2	1	4	1	11	3	4	5	12	8	6	3	105	448			
Bald Eagle (immature)	2	5	10	1	7	4	3	2	3	6		2	1	1	4	1		6	6	7		71	incl above			
Northern Harrier	1																			2		3	6			
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	2	1							1						1	1					10	30			
Cooper's Hawk	1	1							2	1	1	2	1	3	2	1	1	3	3	1	4	27	62			
Red-tailed Hawk	6	1	1	4	2	2	1		1						2	1	5	7	7	7		47	79			
Rough-legged Hawk	1																					1	1			
American Kestrel	1																			2		3	8			
Merlin	3							1	1	1										1	1	9	25			

2008 Victoria Christmas Bird Count including Feeder Watch

Count Areas	Butchart Gardens / Northern Highlands		Central Highlands	Goldstream	Thetis Lake / Hastings Flats	Langford Lake	Albert Head / Triangle Mtn	Esquimalt Lagoon / Mill Hill	Esquimalt Harbour	Portage Inlet / The Gorge	Victoria Harbour	Beacon Hill	Oak Bay	UVIC/ Cadboro Bay	10 Mile Point	Gordon Head / Mount Douglas	Swan Lake / Cedar Hill	Blenkinsop / Panama Flats	Elk Lake / Cordova Bay	Prospect Lake / Quicks Bottom	Marindale / Bear Hill	Feeders	Victoria Count (Field & Feeder)	** indicates new record in 2008
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	Total #	Prev High		
Species																								
Peregrine Falcon														1		1					1		3	15
Ring-necked Pheasant				3																			3	93
Virginia Rail																	1		2				5	14
American Coot	2				6														250	12			270	1712
Black-bellied Plover											2	18	11										31	282
Killdeer						1	12	13	6	13	9	11	5	2	7	1		1	2			3	66	370
Black Oystercatcher						1	1																33	96
Greater Yellowlegs													3										3	4
Spotted Sandpiper						2					1												3	70
Black Turnstone					3	5	15	3		47	8	19		39									139	370
Surfbird										12	10	1											23	70
Sanderling										17									35				52	67
Least Sandpiper													1										1	3
Dunlin						365	70	20		405	36	56	14	4			21			6	76		1,073	**960
Wilson's Snipe						6										1	2			1	8		18	37
Mew Gull			2		35	355	125	19	7	41	18	35	1	11					13		6		668	16375
California Gull			2																				2	130
Herring Gull			1				2					1											4	288
Thayer's Gull			2			400	7			3		8				7			1				428	3110
Western Gull						1	1			1													3	18
Glaucous-winged Gull	534	47	72	38	69	3500	165	125	123	381	178	103	40	135	79	135	24	197	211	204	32	6,392	16794	
Glaucous Gull						1																	1	6589
Common Murre						1700							1										1,701	9938
Pigeon Guillemot						8		1		6		1		11				17		3		47	260	
Marbled Murrelet						4		3		2		2										11	290	
Ancient Murrelet						420		1		62													483	6401
Rhinoceros Auklet						3				4													7	113
Eurasian Collared Dove																					2		2	**
Rock Pigeon	28	20		27		4	15	84	226	110	61	26		10	6	41				1	49	48	756	1198
Mourning Dove	25																				6		31	**23
Great Horned Owl				2			2													2	2		8	44
Barred Owl																1				1	1		3	11
Northern Saw-whet Owl																				1			1	4
Anna's Hummingbird	5	9		15	5	15	9	14	14	8		1	7	43	5	9		22	21	16	111	329	391	
Belted Kingfisher	1				2	1		3	3	1				2				4				17	71	
Red-breasted Sapsucker	2	6	1	3	1	5	6	2	6	3	3				4	2	2		4	12	2	15	79	**15
Downy Woodpecker	6	6		10	3	7	9	5	10	8	3	5	1	4	13	35	8	13	16	7	43	212	**152	
Hairy Woodpecker	3			3	2	2									1	1	2		1	10		5	30	**26
Northern Flicker	8	5	1	26	13	15	9	32	15	12	8			31	29	20	9	25	47	24	45	374	447	
Pileated Woodpecker	6	3					1	1	1			3		1	3	2	1	1	1	2	1	5	30	51
Northern Shrike										1		1			6					1	3		6	11
Hutton's Vireo															1								1	8
Gray Jay		6																					6	**
Steller's Jay	14	31		31	15	7	7	5	5						7	2	5	4	20	50	14	78	295	659
Northwestern Crow	28	11	896	12	14	7	212	49	239	105	54	46	3	118	347	100	109	116	37	227	63	2,793	10002	
Common Raven	40	54	2	32	19	4	5	2	1	2	2	15	2	9	12	2			7	39	25	16	290	420
Sky Lark																					1		1	125
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	111	85		97	37	23	62	28	48	29	14	43	12	88	82	97	38	100	358	57	203	1,612	2312	
Bushtit			5	15	22	4		49	60	17	6	14	6	18	23	26	35	89	34	68	377	868	2522	
Red-breasted Nuthatch	6	13	2	38		2	16	7	23	5	7	4	3	32	9	16	3	15	42	8	74	325	558	

2008 Victoria Christmas Bird Count including Feeder Watch

Count Areas	Victoria Count (Field & Feeder)																								** indicates new record in 2008
	Butchart Gardens / Northern Highlands	Central Highlands	Goldstream	Thetis Lake / Hastings Flats	Langford Lake	Albert Head / Triangle Mtn	Esquimalt Lagoon / Mill Hill	Esquimalt Harbour	Portage Inlet / The Gorge	Victoria Harbour	Beacon Hill	Oak Bay	UVIC/ Cadboro Bay	10 Mile Point	Gordon Head / Mount Douglas	Swan Lake / Cedar Hill	Blenkinsop / Panama Flats	Elk Lake / Cordova Bay	Prospect Lake / Quicks Bottom	Martindale / Bear Hill	Feeders	Total #	Prev High		
Species	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20					
Bewick's Wren	3	3		10	3	2	2	2	10	13	1	4		1	12	24	3	11	21	8	26	159	324		
Winter Wren	10	53	7	40	9	15	32	9	23	8	1	2		11	16	13	4	18	46	6	6	329	569		
Marsh Wren																7	2		1	3	13	52			
American Dipper			1																			1	11		
Golden-crowned Kinglet	75	61	43	124	49	69	66	35	76	5		1	2	23	35	20	6	47	406	65	2	1,210	4000		
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1	3	6	4	4	5	3		14	6		6		11	9	21	7	11	29	29	7	176	402		
Hermit Thrush	4			7		6	2	2	2	1				1		1	1	2	3	1	1	32	51		
American Robin	223	237	7	158	128	8765	102	123	69	131	44	67	2	893	340	32	6	261	1035	82	106	12,811	14,327		
Varied Thrush	6	41	33	50	29	120	18	3	1	1				2	1	2		5	306	18	5	641	1200		
European Starling	145	110		164	15	340	170	269	62	160	66	55	12	139	32	73	17	108	308	215	48	2,508	18183		
American Pipit																				34	34	272			
Cedar Waxwing			10			75								8							93	600			
Orange-crowned Warbler														1								1	6		
Yellow-rumped Warbler																1					2	3	25		
Spotted Towhee	60	31	2	62	13	42	12	41	65	11	9	34	6	40	30	64	13	64	116	106	147	968	**949		
American Tree Sparrow																				1	1	1	3		
Savannah Sparrow										2										12		14	112		
Fox Sparrow	43	22	2	76	18	34	14	15	41	15	2	1	1	40	21	64	69	60	107	105	173	923	**709		
Song Sparrow	58	21	11	21	5	22	17	16	27	17	6	17	4	30	64	39	39	62	110	146	47	779	937		
Lincoln's Sparrow	3									1							2	22	2	12		42	89		
White-throated Sparrow								1							1	1	1	1			3	7	13		
White-crowned Sparrow	7			8			8		9	10					14			6		143	10	215	376		
Golden-crowned Sparrow	89	9		69	8	90	11	70	37	34	8	17	10	134	169	76	29	75	57	217	122	1,331	**1163		
Dark-eyed Junco	440	157	5	149	134	205	52	133	167	32	21	29	6	239	109	115	52	320	436	682	684	4,167	8823		
Red-winged Blackbird	10			6				2								25	22	21	130	73		289	2160		
Western Meadowlark																				28	28	126			
Brewer's Blackbird		16					6								49	32		1	1	153	2	260	1377		
Brown-headed Cowbird																				3		3	22		
Pine Grosbeak					22														6			28	44		
Purple Finch	10	24		1		17	5	2	1					10	1		14		14	6	23	128	293		
House Finch	35	16		45	9	16	3	45	54	28		39	5	62	50	92	34	104	72	58	137	904	1973		
Red Crossbill		4		11										23								38	1830		
Pine Siskin	192	44		75	10	28	167	57	19	65	25	2	20	78	51	1	10	262	115	78	161	1,460	9386		
American Goldfinch						2	2		4			1		1		1			4		16	29	240		
Evening Grosbeak						2								4								6	187		
House Sparrow	48	48		123	31	85	12	102	323	133	9	7	13	11	74	87	35	150	91	140	308	1,830	2975		
Unidentified Gull							34			130								2				166			
Unidentified Cormorant																		22				22			
Unidentified Goose																						6			
Count Totals	2,652	1,239	1,185	1,689	1,100	19,025	3,978	2,323	2,329	4,087	1,584	1,833	548	3,133	2,004	1,958	953	4,319	4,649	4,763	3,264	68,621	125,518		
Species Totals	53	41	35	43	45	82	67	57	55	80	49	61	36	63	49	56	41	76	56	82	44	137	154		

Participant List, Victoria CBC 2008

Dave Aldcroft	Frances Gundry	Brian Nyberg
Diana Aldcroft	Robert Hadley	Mark Nyhof
David Allinson	Poul Hansen	Hennie Nyhof
Doug Bateman	Andrew Harcombe	Colleen O'Brien
Brent Beach	Bruce Hardy	Rick Page
Sylvia Beacom	Chris Harris	Dorothy Parker
Barb Begg	Gordon Hart	Ed Pellizzon
Louise Beinhauer	Ian Hatter	Tom Plath
Geoff Bennett	John Henigman	Clive Prior
Mike Bentley	Bud Henning	Leah Ramsay
Janice Brown	Jo Henning	Cathy Reader
Daniel Bryant	Edith Hunsberger	Emma Reader
Bert Buckley	Doreen Hunter	Rebecca Reader
Martha Burd	Kelly Hunter	Mary Robichaud
Cynthia Callahan-	Gaileen Irwin	Dave Robichaud
Maureen	Lynda Jamison	Robin Robinson
Carol Callahan-	Colin Jennings	Donna Ross
Maureen	Gary Kaiser	MarySanseverino
Ian Cameron	Jim Kirby	Chris Saunders
David Campbell	Barb Kirby	Ann Scarfe
Lynne Campbell	Adrian Koolman	Rick Schortinghuis
Jan Carroll	Rhonda Korol	Rob Shephard
Bob Carroll	Audrey Kyle	Michael Simmons
Dannie Carsen	Bob Lake	Rosalind Simmons
Bob Chappell	Barbara Lake	Juliet Simon
Myke Chutter	Marilyn Lambert	Camilla Smith
Aziza Cooper	Warren Lee	Marlin Smyth
Darren Copley	Margaret Lidkea	Joan Sommers
Claudia Copley	Kitty Lloyd	Finn Steiner
Elizabeth Cross	Eric Lofroth	Margaret Stevens
Ian Cruickshank	Kem Luther	Andy Stewart
Jim Currie	David Lynn	Irene Stewart
Helen Currie	Agnes Lynn	David Stirling
Bill Dancer	Alan MacLeod	Jack Sutherland
Gabriel David	Pat MacLeod	Ken Sutill
Neal Donegani	Christian McCarty	Jeremy Tatum
Warren Drinnan	Barb McClintock	Adam Taylor
Don Eastman	Mike McGrenere	Jacquie Taylor
Mike Edgell	Barb McGrenere	Mark Taylor
Ros Eldridge	Bill McMillan	Mitchell Temkin
Sue Ennis	Amy Medve	Ed Tupper
Mark Faulkner	Marilyn Miller	Gail Tupper
Jenny Feick	Kirsten Mills	Ben van
Cam Finlay	Rod Mitchell	Drimmelen
Joy Finlay	Glen Moores	Leo Vezina
Maiya Finvers	Judy Moores	Joyce Vezina
Mike Force	Ken Morgan	Ted Walker
Ron Fownes	Mary Morris	Fern Walker
Dave Fraser	Chris Motherwell	Lea Walsh
Marilyn Fuchs	Donna Murray	Carol Wardle
Jeff Gaskin	David Newell	Sarah Weber
Tracee Geernaert	Geoffrey Newell	Sharon White
Tom Gillespie	Jean Newell	Bruce Whittington
Heather Glass	Jeff Newman	Jean-Anne
Sharon Godkin	Rae Ann Newman	Wightman
Mitchell Grant	Ann Nightingale	Mark Yunker

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Millstream Watershed: 2009 Good Neighbours Project

By Todd Carnahan, HAT Land Care and
Stewardship Coordinator

HAT uses landowner contact to help community members protect the last significant ecosystems in our region. Since 2002, our land trust has contacted more than 2000 residents in and around the most important natural areas in our region. This year's ambitious project will enhance and protect one of Greater Victoria's most important watersheds, and develop better community understanding of the green infrastructure benefits provided by healthy natural ecosystems. Habitat Acquisition Trust will use our proven landowner contact methodology, public events, and focused buffer plantings to increase community stewardship of Millstream Creek.

Draining an area of 26 square kilometers, this watershed has a diversity of natural values. The Highlands, Langford, Colwood, and View Royal all share jurisdiction of the 12.5 kilometer long Millstream Creek as it passes through several lakes and wetlands to the mud flats of Esquimalt Harbour.

Millstream Creek is also a salmon-bearing creek that provides habitat and a connective corridor from Gowlland-Tod Provincial Park in the Highlands to the marine waters of Juan de Fuca Strait. As our climate changes, wildlife corridors will be critically important avenues for plants and animals to migrate to new habitats. Many species-at-risk live in the watershed, including the endangered western painted turtle. Millstream Creek also provides a host of green infrastructure benefits to our community. These free ecosystem services provided by the creek and its associated wetlands include reduced stormwater flows and improved water quality. The trees and shrubs supported by Millstream Creek trap airborne pollutants, sequester carbon, and moderate local temperature. Replacing this green infrastructure with engineered solutions (if even feasible) would cost the community far more than maintaining the natural ecosystem.

Because much of Millstream Creek is bordered by private property, the land care practices of those landowners will largely determine the health and functionality of the creek. HAT's experienced outreach staff will deliver free information packages and provide property consultations to interested landowners. Our free services include land care prescriptions, site inventory, liaison with government, and advice on many topics (invasive species control, species-at-risk, alternatives to petrochemical fertilizers, tree health, drainage, erosion, soil improvement, etc.).



Creating Conservation Legacies



Photo provided by author

HAT is currently soliciting proposals from groups and individuals interested in contributing to the care of Millstream Creek in 2009. Perhaps you live in this special place, or have a story to share with us about Millstream. Please call Todd Carnahan or Adam Taylor at 250.995.2428 or email hatmail@hat.bc.ca.

Where to go, what to see ?



**A Nature Guide to
Boundary Bay**
and
Tracing Our Past
*~ A Heritage Guide to
Boundary Bay*

by Anne Murray with photographs by David Blevins

Available in bookstores, gift shops and online.

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www.natureguidesbc.com 604 943 0273

Letters

Thank you to the VNHS Board for their generous donation to the BC Purple Martin Stewardship and Recovery Program. The Home Depot gift certificate of \$500 will go a long way towards nest box maintenance and/or additions to Purple Martin colonies in the Greater Victoria area.

This spring and summer proved to be difficult ones for swallow species, including Purple Martins. Early numbers indicated that approximately 650 pairs of martins would be nesting, but the prolonged cool and wet spring (remember snow in April and the coldest June on record?) and lack of flying insects for food resulted in only 570 pairs nesting successfully. These martins nested at 44 colonies around the Strait of Georgia as far north as Campbell River. Then a week of wet weather at the end of July resulted in lower survival of nestlings than in recent years. There were still about 1250 young that fledged and migrated as adult birds to South America for the winter. We are hoping for better weather next spring and summer and a good season for Purple Martins.

This year the two oldest banded martins were again observed at Ladysmith and Nanoose Bay – a nine year-old male and a 10 year-old female, respectively. They both successfully raised young and started on their way south in mid-

late August. We will be watching to see if they return again next spring.

Thank you again for supporting the BC Purple Martin Stewardship and Recovery Program.

Yours sincerely,

Charlene Lee, Director, Georgia Basin Ecological Assessment and Restoration Society

BULLETIN BOARD

Saturday Birding Group

We send out the time and location on the Rare Bird Alert (250-592-3381) on the Thursday and Friday before that week's walk. For more information, call Rick Schortinghuis at 250-885-2454.

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.

Check Out Swan Lake programs for Spring Break 2009

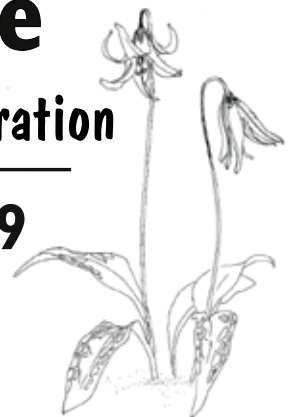
These programs are listed at www.swanlake.bc.ca



Gardening for Wildlife

A Native Plant Gardening Sale and Demonstration

Saturday and Sunday, April 18 and 19
10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.



Sale: Native Plants (over 120 species)

**Demonstrations
Presentations
Refreshments
Displays**

**Admission:
\$3/day, \$5/weekend pass
Friends Members Free**

A variety of special presentations and displays on choosing the right native plants for your yard, attracting and supporting wildlife, tips on removing lawns, Native Plant Garden toursand much more, will be held both days.



Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

3873 Swan Lake Road, Victoria, B.C.

For more information: 479-0211

**A complete plant list and description of presentations is
available on our web site - www.swanlake.bc.ca**

**Friends of the Sanctuary will
receive a 10% discount on all
native plant and merchandise
purchases.**

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. 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.

MARCH

Thursday, March 5 – Sunday, March 8

EVENT

Get Outside! It's In Our Nature Forum

It's In Our Nature forum theme directly reflects the mission of the Bateman Centre and the work of Robert Bateman to reconnect children and adults with nature through the arts and communications media. (<http://www.royalroads.ca/continuing-studies> to register).

Sunday, March 8

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Birding in Parksville

Come to see the annual congregation of Brant Geese and the massive numbers of sea ducks and gulls. Meet at the Helmcken Park & Ride at 7 a.m. This will be a day trip, so bring a lunch. Leader: **Rick Schortinghuis** (250-885-2454 for more information).

Tuesday, March 10

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION AND AGM

Exploring the World's Hidden Places

Join **Maria Coffey** and **Dag Goering**, award-winning writer/photographers as they take us on a journey to some of their favorite places around the globe. Twenty years of exploring and leading trips in such diverse locations as the Galapagos Islands, the Antarctic, India, the Solomon Islands, Vietnam and Croatia have given Dag and Maria a deep love of the natural history of those places and a treasure trove of stories and images. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a mug.

Sunday, March 15

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Palaeontology Field Trip to Muir Creek

Tom Cockburn of the Victoria Palaeontology Society will be our guide. The fauna of this Sooke Formation is about 25 million years old (Late Oligocene) and consists of intertidal and near shore fauna such as bivalves, gastropods, barnacles, sand dollars and sometimes the bones of early whales and desmostylids, a group of extinct sea mammals distantly related to manatees. Meet at the Helmcken Park & Ride at 10 a.m. to car-pool for this all day event. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns@shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information

Tuesday, March 17

BOTANY NIGHT

Carnivorous Plants

Glenn Hallworth will show the variety of carnivorous plants, illustrate their diversity, and discuss the problems of their cultivation. Swan Lake Nature House – 7:30 p.m. Admission free, everyone welcome. Bring your friends.

Sunday, March 22

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Satin Flowers and Birds at Juan de Fuca

For those of you who are not up to the strenuous walk up Mount Wells, this outing is another chance to see satin flowers as well as other early spring flowers without the effort. Plus it is an excellent place to check out birds. Bring a snack and a drink if you wish. Meet at Juan de Fuca Recreation Centre, 1767 Old Island Highway, at 10 a.m. We will start from the end of the parking lot nearest to town. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns@shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 if you need more information.

Wednesday, March 25

BIRDERS' NIGHT

The Classification of Birds

Every time we turn to a field guide we are using a classification of birds that no one really agrees on. **Gary Kaiser** will explain a possible new family tree for birds that is consistent with a common sense approach to avian biology. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser building, University of Victoria. Everyone is welcome. Bring your coffee cup!

Monday, March 30

MARINE NIGHT

Marine Invasive Species in BC

Invasive species threaten our biodiversity, and humans continue to spread them around the world. **Dr. Matthias Herborg** will present the most notorious invaders found in BC waters, their biology, impacts, and current distribution. He is particularly concerned with the European green crab and several tunicates, all with a global record of successful invasions. He will describe ongoing research to identify the potential distribution and impact of these species on the west coast. Room 159, Fraser Building, University of Victoria, 7:30 p.m. Everyone welcome.

APRIL

Friday, April 3 – Sunday, April 5

EVENT

Olympic BirdFest: Come Bird With Us.

Grab your binoculars and join the Olympic BirdFest 2009 celebration at the Dungeness River Audubon Center in Sequim, Washington. Enjoy guided birding trips, boat tours; and a traditional salmon bake at the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribal Center. Check out the offerings by going online <<http://www.olympicbirdfest.org>>, phone 360-681-4076, email: info@olympicbirdfest.org.

Saturday, April 4

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Mystic Pond, UVic, and Haro Woods

Join **Bill Dancer** in birding the University of Victoria area. Meet at Gyro Park in Cadboro Bay at 7 a.m. Call Bill Dancer at 250-721-5273 if you need more information.

Sunday, April 5

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Satin Flowers on Mount Wells

As well as an extensive display of early spring wild flowers, this location also offers a good chance to see a Golden Eagle soaring above us. Please note the trail is steep and challenging but will be taken at a leisurely pace. Wear sturdy shoes and you might wish to bring a walking stick. Take the Trans-Canada Highway towards Goldstream Park. Turn left at the new Westshore Parkway shortly before you get to Goldstream. Turn right at the roundabout and carry on left when you reach Sooke Lake Road. Turn left on to Humpback Road at Ma Miller's pub. At the intersection with Irwin Road, stay right. Follow Humpback Road to the park entrance. Meet at the parking lot on the right at 10 a.m. Bring a lunch and drinks for the all day outing. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns@shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 if you need more information.

Good Friday, April 10

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Two for One Bargain – Horth Hill and Bear Hill Wildflowers

Despite the close proximity of these two areas, the flora is quite different. Horth Hill is sunnier and drier. Please note the trail is steep -wear sturdy shoes and you might wish to bring a walking stick. Meet at the parking lot at Horth Hill at 10 a.m. To get to Horth Hill, take the Pat Bay Highway north to the Wain Road exit. Follow Wain Road west to cross the highway, then turn right on Tatlow Road to the park entrance on the right. To get to Bear Hill from Horth Hill, return to the highway and go south. Turn right at Island View Road, left on Saanich Cross Road to Central Saanich Road. Continue south on Central Saanich Road to right on Keating Cross Road, left on Oldfield Road and left on Bear Hill Road to the parking lot. Bring a lunch and drinks as the two outings will take up most of the day. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns@shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 if you need more information.

Saturday, April 11

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Birding Rithet's Bog

There should be a good number of early migrants around Meet at 7:30 a.m. along Dalewood Lane (just off Chatterton Way) in the northwest corner of the bog. Leader is **Marie O'Shaughnessy**. Call Marie at 250-598-9680 if you would like more information.

Easter Sunday, April 12

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Enjoy a Happy Easter at Oak Haven & Gore Parks

What better way to spend Easter morning than in these two delightful Saanich Peninsula parks with their exquisite spring wildflowers. Oak Haven does have a climb to the summit but Gore Park is level. Meet at 10 a.m. at the entrance to Oak Haven Park on Garden Gate Drive, off Benvenuto Ave, off West Saanich Road. To reach Gore Park from Oak Haven Park, return along Garden Gate Drive to Benvenuto Ave. When you cross Benvenuto Ave, Garden Gate Drive becomes Amwell Drive. Follow Amwell Drive to reach Greig Road. Turn right to park entrance on right. No pets please. Call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 if you need more information.

Easter Monday, April 13

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Easter Monday Leisurely Walk up Lone Tree Hill

Another treasure trove of spring wildflowers. Diversity of species on this hill is amazing but don't forget to take in the fantastic views from this high viewpoint as well as listen for birds such as the Orange-crowned Warbler singing his heart out. Please note the trail is steep but not as challenging as some of the other areas. The walks are at a leisurely pace to enjoy the habitat. Wear sturdy shoes and you might wish to bring a walking stick. Start at 10 a.m. Follow the Trans-Canada Highway to Millstream Road exit. Turn right on Millstream Road and continue to the junction of Millstream Lake Road. Keep left to continue on Millstream Road to the park entrance on the right. Bring a snack and a drink if you wish. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns@shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 if you need more information.

Tuesday, April 14

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION

How the Turtle Got Painted, and Other Tales

Todd Carnahan of Habitat Acquisition Trust will present highlights from HAT's conservation efforts in 2008 focusing on the endangered western painted turtle. We meet in the Matthews/McQueen Theatre (Room C103 in the David Strong Building) Everyone is welcome. Bring a mug! **PLEASE NOTE ROOM CHANGE FOR THIS EVENING**

Saturday, April 18

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Viaduct Flats and Quick's Bottom

Come out and check out the great trails around Viaduct Flats, Quick's Bottom and Layritz Park. A lot of the early migrants should be around. Meet at the foot of Viaduct Flats at 7 a.m. Leader TBA. Call Rick Schortinghuis at 250-885-2454 for more information.

Sunday, April 19

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Enjoy All That Jocelyn Hill Has To Offer

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** to enjoy the wildflowers and the birds as well. Our goal is to see the Gold Stars in bloom but we will not be disappointed if we miss them as there is an amazing array of other delights and great panoramic views from the ridge. Please note the trail is steep and challenging but will be taken at a leisurely pace to enjoy the habitat. Wear sturdy shoes and you might wish to bring a walking stick. Follow the Trans-Canada Highway to Millstream Road exit. Turn right on Millstream Road and continue to the junction of Millstream Lake Road.

Keep left to continue on Millstream Road. Go past Lone Tree Hill Park on your right and watch for Emma Dixon Road on the left. The trail head is on Millstream Road just past that intersection. Park on the right-hand side of the road. Meet there at 9 a.m. Bring a lunch and drinks for the all day outing. No pets please. Call Rick at 250-885-2454 for more information.

Tuesday, April 21

BOTANY NIGHT

The Story of Richard Layritz

Leslie Drew will talk about Richard Layritz, his life and his contributions to the botanical richness of the Victoria area. Swan Lake Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Admission free, everyone welcome. Bring your friends.

Wednesday, April 22

EVENT

2008 Christmas Bird Count Post Count Gathering

The snow kept us from our usual celebration of our count day in December, but it's not going to stop us from getting together to talk about the Christmas Bird Count that was. Everyone is welcome, whether or not you participated in the count. Bring some fresh "Christmas" baking (no leftovers, please!) and a holly jolly spirit to a social event with fellow birders. Room C103 of the David Strong Building at the University of Victoria 6 p.m. Everyone is welcome.

Wednesday, April 22

BIRDERS' NIGHT

BC Breeding Bird Atlas Update

Ann Nightingale, Regional Coordinator for Southern Vancouver Island/Gulf Islands, will bring us up to speed on the results of the first year of the BC Breeding Bird Atlas Project, and discuss what is needed in the second year of this five-year project. The presentation will include a slide show as well as a demonstration of how to use the online resources to enter or review your observations. Room C103 of the David Strong Building at the University of Victoria, 7:30 p.m. Everyone welcome. Bring your coffee cup! ****NOTE ROOM CHANGE**

Friday, April 24

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Saltspring Botanical Adventure

We enjoy the local wildflowers but sometimes it is nice to venture a bit farther afield to see what grows on our nearby Gulf Islands. We plan to explore a few areas that have been recommended as having a diverse selection of wildflowers. Please note some trails may be steep and challenging but will be taken at a leisurely pace to enjoy the habitat. Wear sturdy shoes and you might wish to bring a walking stick. We will carpool to catch the 9 a.m. ferry, returning around supper time. Participants will be expected to share in transportation expenses. Bring a lunch and drinks. No pets please. You must register for this event to assist in planning. Contact **Agnes** after April 1 at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 to obtain final details.

Saturday, April 25

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Birding Swan Lake

Come and check out the early migrants at Swan Lake. Meet at the main parking lot at 7:30 a.m. Leader is **Ian Cruickshank**. Call Ian at 250-382-1652 if you need more information.

Saturday, April 25

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

18th Annual Camas Day at Beacon Hill Park

This annual event will include guided walks for birds, wildflowers, and archaeology. Walks are about one hour each. Check details on the back page and the website closer to the date.

Sunday, April 26

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Wildflowers at Mill Hill

Meander to magnificent Mill Hill for a spectacular spring show of wildflowers. Join us for a guided flower walk at 10:00. **Joy Finlay** will join **Agnes Lynn** to lead the walk to the top. Please note the trail is steep and rough on the way down but will be taken at a leisurely pace to enjoy the habitat. Wear sturdy shoes and you might wish to bring a walking stick. Bring a snack and a drink if you wish. Meet at the Mill Hill Regional Park information kiosk. To get to the park, take the Colwood exit off the Trans-Canada Highway and follow the Old Island Highway for a short distance. Turn right on Six Mile Road just before the bridge, then left on Atkins Road. Turn left at the four-way intersection to continue on Atkins Avenue that leads to the park entrance on the right. No pets please. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 if you need more information.

Monday, April 27

MARINE NIGHT

How I Stopped Worrying About Global Fisheries.

Do you suffer from "doom overload"? Does science have the answers? What can one person do? Biologist and writer **Brian Harvey** will present an entertaining talk and slide show about his experiences "taking science on the road" to aquatic biodiversity hotspots from British Columbia to Brazil. Brian is author of *The End of the River*, which *The Globe and Mail* describes as "a brilliant and instructive book, alive with the author's seditious intelligence". Everyone is welcome. 7:30 p.m. Room 159, Fraser Building, University of Victoria.

Thursday, April 30 – Sunday, May 3

EVENT

BC Nature Conference and AGM

The spring conference and annual general meeting will be in Duncan this year; hosted by the Cowichan Valley Naturalists. Registration information will be posted on their website (<http://bcnature.ca/index.html>). Field trips and presentations focused on the region make these events a terrific opportunity to learn about an area. Everyone welcome.

Who doesn't love OYSTERCATCHERS?

See Anne Hansen's

OYSTERCATCHER ART

<http://www.oystercatchergirl.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/anitaoystercatcher/>
annebike@look.ca oystercatchergirl@yahoo.ca



18th Annual CAMAS DAY

WHEN: Saturday April 25, 2009, 9:00 am – 2:00 pm

WHERE: Beacon Hill Park (walks begin at flagpole on top of Beacon Hill)

Guided Walks (each 1-2 hours long)

Rick Schortinghuis, Victoria Natural History Society

7:00 am, Birding Walk

Tom Gillespie, Victoria Natural History Society

9:00 am, Birding Walk

Adolf Ceska and Brenda Beckwith, Ecosystems Scientist (Ethnobotany)

9:00 am, Wildflower Walk

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11:00 am, Wildflower Walk

Grant Keddle, Curator of Archaeology, Royal BC Museum

9:00 am, Native History of Beacon Hill Park

Grant Keddle, Curator of Archaeology, Royal BC Museum

11:00 am, Native History of Beacon Hill Park



**There may be other additions to the schedule.
Please check the website at www.friendsofbeaconhillpark.ca**

Sponsored by the Victoria Natural History Society and Friends of Beacon Hill Park
For more information, call Helen Oldershaw (592-6659) or email Agnes Lynn (thelynns at shaw.ca)