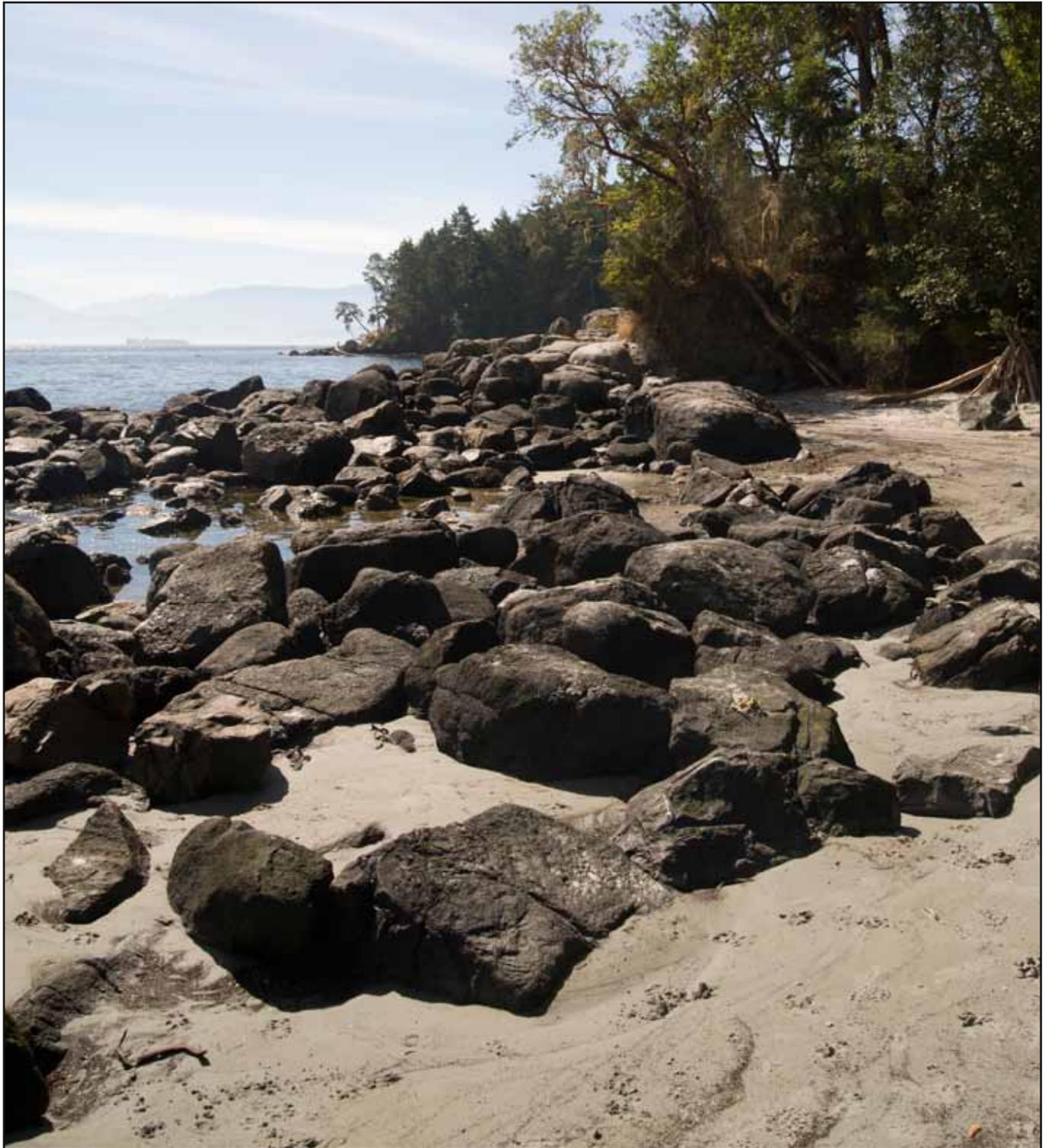




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COVER PHOTO

Does May 2 mean a rocky road ahead? Never mind! Head to the beach for some ‘intertidaling’ with the Society! Check out the field trips (p.21-23) for opportunities to learn about intertidal organisms: May 21 and June 16, 2011.
Photo: ©Mikhail Belikov/www.focusonwild.com

By the time you are reading this, my brother and his wife will be long gone after their Easter weekend visit, but as I write this it is top of mind. Andreas hasn't been for a visit since our wedding, and 16 years have had a significant impact on our landscape. What he saw in 1995 was an abandoned horse pasture – no native trees, shrubs, or wildflowers – just weeds.

The only thing my brother and I have in common are genetics, so when the visit was proposed I was pleased with the timing; plants native to our region put on their best show early in the year and I wanted them to get a full appreciation of how much more amazing a landscape can be than just the usual lawn and horticultural blob-shrubs. I'm not sure our delayed spring will cooperate with their arrival, but I'm hopeful with every opening bloom.

If you are new to the region and want to feel overwhelmed by beauty, go for a walk into any one of our natural parks in May and June. You'll wonder how anyone could have ever thought they could improve on nature.

Claudia

President's Message

By Darren Copley

At our Annual General Meeting in March I presented my President's Report. Although we had a great turnout (approximately 75 people) I thought I'd summarize it here so that everyone would get a chance to read about how active your Society has been.

The Victoria Natural History Society regularly donates to worthwhile causes, and this year was no exception. Our annual \$4000 went to support public programming at Swan Lake, as well as \$2000 towards helping Habitat Acquisition Trust manage their conservation covenants. The year an extra \$5000 was also put towards the Swan Lake *Bridges to Nature* Campaign. In partnership with The Friends of Beacon Hill Park, more interpretive signage was erected in the Park at a cost of \$1000. Other educational support went out in the form of \$750 to the local Science Fair, as well as our regular support through scholarships at the University of Victoria, Camosun College, and Royal Roads University. In consultation with BC Nature, our Society helped direct funding from a bequest from Lillian Hayden to three important local land acquisition projects: \$70,000 to The Land Conservancy (TLC) for their *Wild Hills and Beaches* Campaign, \$70,000 to the Salt Spring Island Conservancy for land acquisition, and \$4,500 to the *Save Mary Lake* Campaign.

Our school program was as active as ever, with 19 programs reaching more than 400 children, all thanks to our 12 volunteer leaders and the excellent coordination by Bill Dancer and John Henigman. For members and the public there were 30 monthly presentations, more than 100 field trips (including weekly Tuesday and Saturday birding), and our first VNHS Annual BBQ Social held in conjunction with Hawkwatch at East Sooke Park.

Your Society also made presentations to the Capital Regional District on parks management as well as the issue of off-road vehicles. We have representatives on the following committees/boards: Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative, Viaduct Flats Committee, Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, and Rocky Point Bird Observatory, and we had our display at the Swan Lake Native Plant Sales, the Westshore Town Centre's Hobby Show, the Organic Islands Festival, and Seedy Saturday. Thanks to all of you that helped with these events!

In partnership with Capital Regional District Parks and the Rocky Point Bird Observatory, we hosted our first annual *International Migratory Bird Day* at the new teaching shelter at Witty's Lagoon. This year we will again be co-sponsoring this event: the second annual *International Migratory Bird Day* will be held at Beaver Lake Regional Park on May 14:



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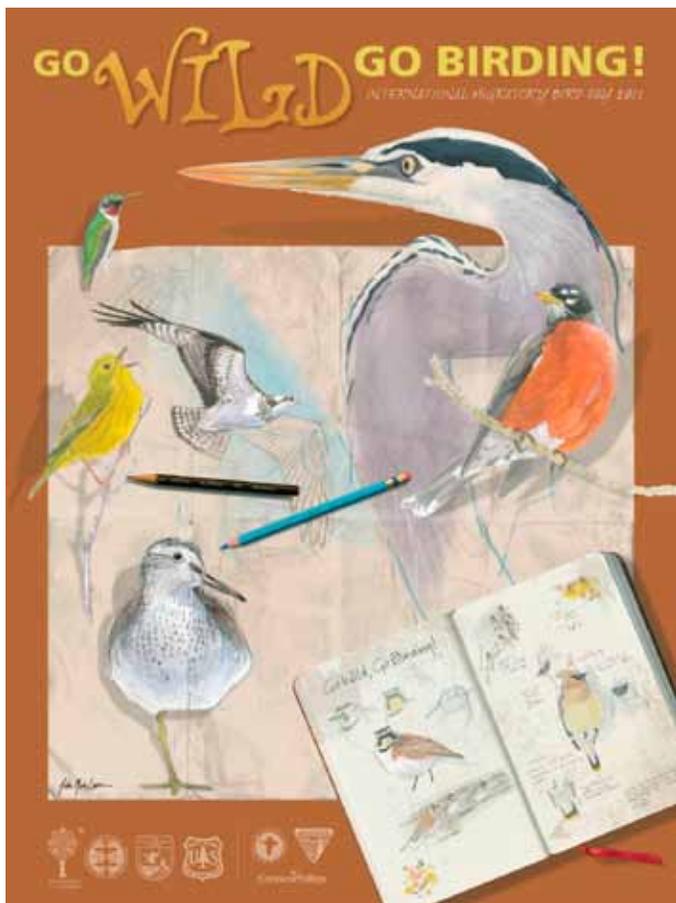
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check out the VNHS website for more details (<www.vicnhs.bc.ca>) as well as the calendar (p. 22) and the back cover. I hope many of you will come out and enjoy a day dedicated to celebrating birds.

The other things that have been keeping Society volunteers busy this past year are all of our other regular activities: correspondence, BC Nature representation, our financial health, advertising, producing *The Victoria Naturalist*, membership, and the many ways we try to promote our Society and natural history to others. A big thank-you goes out to all of the our Board Members who have agreed to continue on in their capacity as directors and I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome our newest board member, Nathalie Chambers. Hopefully this name sounds familiar: her grandmother-in-law was Ruth

Chambers, the original owner of Madrona Farm and an Honorary Life Member of our Society. We look forward to Nathalie's positive outlook at our board meetings, and her connections with TLC.

A significant honour was earned by one of our Society's best-known members: a BC Nature Regional Award that was presented in 2010 to Ann Nightingale for the myriad ways she is involved with nature-related activities. Way to go Ann! And finally, I'd like to thank the Society for awarding Claudia and I the Distinguished Service Award. Typically I don't like to be caught off-guard at our Annual General Meeting as I'm always a little stressed about making it fast and effective, but this was certainly a very nice surprise. Thanks everyone!



International Migratory Bird Day, May 14, 2011



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2010 VNHS Award Recipients

(Presented at the VNHS AGM)

Distinguished Service Award: Darren and Claudia Copley

There is a good reason that they have not been nominated sooner. Everyone assumed that they had already been so recognized a long time ago. “Shock” would be a good word to describe people’s reaction to learning that the Copleys have never been “officially” thanked for their service to our organization.

Darren and Claudia have been active VNHS members for more than 20 years and on the VNHS Board for well over a decade. Never ones to take a back seat, they have led by



Photo: Birgit Chow

example to all of us over the years. While they have many strengths, their greatest contribution may be that they have been tireless in spreading the word of the importance of nature appreciation, education, and conservation to the masses. Both have led innumerable field trips, classes, presentations, and public events. They are known to the community at large, not just to VNHS members. In fact, members of the public have contacted us and asked that we ensure they receive formal recognition for their work.

Their contributions could take up a whole issue of *The Victoria Naturalist*, which Claudia has edited so well over the years that it is considered one of the best in the naturalist community. Following are just a few examples of their work.

Darren is probably best known by many for the years that he worked at Goldstream Park, teaching children, their parents, and their teachers about nature so close to home. His easy-going style and love of short pants have made him a favourite of many. Now working for Saanich, he takes his naturalist and biologist values there to help keep that focus alive within the municipality. Among other accomplishments, Darren was instrumental in developing the design currently used for Purple Martin colonies in British Columbia. This specie’s survival and growth is largely due to his efforts.

Claudia is less likely to be found in front of a camera than Darren, but she has risen to the rank of senior collections manager of entomology at the Royal BC Museum. Her dedication to and enthusiasm for all living things, from plants, insects and other invertebrates, to fish, birds, and other vertebrates is inspiring. Most people probably have no idea of the amount of time she spends behind the scenes making things happen for VNHS and the naturalist community at large.

Organic farming, invasive species removal, school and family programs (and they don’t even have kids!), native plantings, dragonflies, nest-box programs, naturesscaping, field camps, community outreach, course development, mentoring, event organization, cat indoors advocacy, and general nature ambassador duties are all on the daily “to do” list for Darren and Claudia.

They have done more for nature in their lives to date than most will do in 50 years!

And still, they also find time to do the mundane, administrative tasks required to keep VNHS the great organization that it is. It is time to thank the Copleys for everything they have done... and are still doing!

Small is Big in 2011 Valentine Birdathon

By Alan MacLeod

Let us praise serendipity: sometime small is big. The fourteenth annual running of the VNHS Valentine Couples Birdathon attracted a smallish turnout – five couples – but it was clear from the lively, merry post-count gathering at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Centre that this year’s participants reaped at least as much fun as in previous Valentine counts. Maybe more. The jubilant winners of this year’s birdathon are Agnes and David Lynn. Agnes and David listed Rock Sandpipers at Cattle Point and a Northern Saw-whet Owl at Blenkinsop Lake among their highlights. With 67 species tallied in the 6 a.m. to 12 noon count period the Lynns reached the winners’ circle in their third try and thus get to add their names to those previously inscribed on the Anderson Trophy.

Ordinarily Jan Brown and I would have done the birdathon by bicycle. But at the last minute Jan thought it might be novel to simply walk out the door of our James Bay townhouse and see how many species we could find in our own urban neighbourhood. Our 11 km walkabout took us through Beacon Hill Park, Ross Bay Cemetery, the Dallas Road waterfront from Clover Point to Ogden Point, as far west as Fishermen’s Wharf. The favourites among our haul were a Western Grebe at Clover Point, Merlin on May Street in Fairfield and American Goldfinch at Finlayson Point. We

were pleased and slightly amazed to score 64 species for our troubles, just three in arrears of the Lynns.

The rest of the field was tightly bunched in the high 50s. Mike and Barb McGrenere also opted for a walkabout; they found 59 species along their Saanich route, including Hairy Woodpecker and Red-breasted Sapsucker on ‘White Bridge Hill’ and Wood Duck at Lohbrunner Park. Jenny Feick and Ian Hatter crossed the finish line with 58 species, pleased with the Snow Geese they’d seen at Island View Road and an early Yellow-rumped Warbler at Swan Lake. Jerry and Gladys Anderson are the “old hands” of this event. They were in on the ground floor and are the only couple who can boast about never having missed a Valentine count. Jerry and Gladys finished the half-day with 57 species, including Barrow’s Goldeneye at Pat Bay, Gadwall at Farmington Road ponds, and a nice gang of Canvasback on Elk Lake.

Fourteen years is perhaps a long enough time to consider historical perspective. This year’s winning total, 67, is by a small margin the lowest on record. The highest winning count was an astonishing 99, in 2008, better by nine than the second-best 90 recorded in 2002. The 14-year median winning count is 78. Altogether the 2011 Valentine couples listed an even hundred species, well behind the 119 record set in 2007 but ahead of the 2005 low of 96. It’s strictly subjective but I have been at this game for a good number of years now and would argue based on our own outing and the post-count gathering that the 2011 birdathon was the best yet. As always, the whole proceeds from participants’ entry fees will go to VNHS conservation efforts.

Jan and I salute all those who participated in this year’s Valentine birdathon and we extend particular thanks to Don Wuest of **Wild Birds Unlimited**, 3631 Shelburne Street, our principal sponsor.



(Left) Front row: Ian Hatter & Jenny Feick, Agnes Lynn, Jan Brown. Back row: Mike & Barb McGrenere, Alan MacLeod, Gladys and Jerry Anderson. *Photo:* Provided by author. (Right) Agnes and Dave Lynn, winners of the 2011 Valentine Birdathon. *Photo:* Alan MacLeod

Species at Risk and You

By Shona L. Lawson

The environment is still very much a top concern for Canadians, especially for those of us interested in natural history. Today there are more environmental groups than ever before working to protect species and their habitats through stewardship, public awareness, and pressuring governments to change and enforce regulations and policies. Yet the numbers of species at risk keep going up every year. British Columbia is Canada's most biologically diverse province, meaning we also have a high number of species at risk; yet there is no legal provincial protection for these species and only a fraction of these species are protected by federal legislation. Manitoba, Ontario, Québec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Northwest Territories, and Newfoundland-Labrador all have provincial legislation in place to protect endangered and threatened (provincially red and blue-listed) species. B.C. is one of the very few provinces/territories without any form of protection. Both Nunavut and Yukon Territories have revised their Wildlife Act legislation to incorporate policies and regulations for species

at risk under their jurisdictions. According to the document *Species At Risk and Local Government: A Primer for British Columbia* (<www.speciesatrisk.bc.ca>), only four of the 1598 provincially-listed endangered and threatened species are protected by the *B.C. Wildlife Act* (<www.BClaws.ca>) (0.25%!) and only 14% (223¹ species) are legally protected by the federal *Species At Risk Act* (SARA).

What does this mean to you? It means that the public has to fight and campaign for legal provincial protection for these species by encouraging our legislative representatives to put forth and **pass** an *Endangered Species Act* in B.C. and to hold municipal, provincial, and federal governments accountable for enforcing policies and regulations that protect and conserve species and ecosystems at risk. You play an important role in protecting and conserving species at risk, and one of the best ways is to be informed. Know the purpose of SARA and how it pertains to management and protection of species and landscapes. SARA has many purposes, including: 1) providing legal protection of



California Buttercup (*Ranunculus californicus*) is considered by COSEWIC to be a wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction. The only records of this species in Canada are from a few extreme south-eastern Vancouver Island and adjacent island populations. *Photo:* Claudia Copley

wildlife (plants, vertebrates, and invertebrate) species, 2) conservation of species' biological diversity, 3) securing the necessary actions for listed species' recovery, 4) preventing indigenous species and subspecies in Canada from becoming extinct or extirpated, 5) encouraging management of listed species, to prevent them from becoming at risk and 6) to provide for the recovery of endangered or threatened species. SARA also helps to conserve and manage habitats and ecosystems, as well as individual species.

There are a number of resources, websites, and organizations that provide important resources on species at risk. To learn what species are listed, what their habitat requirements are, and where they occur, the federal *Species At Risk Act* registry (<www.sararegistry.gc.ca/>) is a good place to start. Here you will find very good information about SARA and summary species information. You can view and download species assessments, status, and documents such as recovery strategy plans. The B.C. Conservation Data Centre (<www.env.gov.bc.ca/cdc/>), *Species At Risk and Local Government* (<www.speciesatrisk.bc.ca>) and the B.C. Ministry of Environments Species and Ecosystems at Risk in B.C. (<www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/serisk.htm>) websites are good sources of information on British Columbia's listed species, and what role governments (local, provincial, and federal) have in protecting and conserving these species.

Another good resource is the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) (<www.cosewic.gc.ca/>). COSEWIC is an independent group of experts that assesses species status and recommends a classification for their legal protection based on the best available biological information, including scientific, community, and Aboriginal traditional knowledge. The COSEWIC status assessment is the first step for many species at risk to be protected. After receiving a recommendation for listing a species, the federal government consults with the relevant ministries, wildlife management boards, and the public to consider many factors, including possible social and economic implications of listing the species, and then decides whether to add the species to the List of Wildlife Species At Risk (Schedule 1 in the *Act*). Once a species is listed, the provisions under SARA apply to protect and recover the species. This includes forming a recovery team that prepare and implement recovery-planning activities (i.e. recovery strategy, action, and management plans). Recovery Teams are good sources of information as they have the most up-to-date knowledge of the species or landscape at risk i.e. population status, threats, and recovery activities.

So what is the most important thing you can do to help protect both these species and their habitats? The answer is get involved. I am not suggesting you march on the Legislative Buildings en masse (although that could not hurt). I am talking about realistic actions that can and do make a difference. Write to your Member of Parliament and Member of the Legislative Assembly. Many environmental organizations campaign for species and ecosystems at risk and often they have already drafted letters and emails that you can use and/or add your name to their petition(s).



Sharp-tailed Snake (*Contia tenuis*) is another local endangered species. Even when full grown they are tiny: pencil-thick and about the length of a ruler (30 cm). Photo: Darren Copley

Individuals and/or organizations can put forward candidate species that you are concerned about to COSEWIC for further investigation. Another way you can help is by providing observations of species at risk to the Recovery Team (if one is in place), the Canadian Wildlife Service, and the B.C. Conservation Data Center (CDC). The B.C. CDC has animal, plant and ecological community observation forms available for download (<www.env.gov.bc.ca/cdc/>), so that observations can be incorporated into the provincial database. Government planning, engineering and environmental departments, environmental consulting firms, researchers, organizations, and the public rely on CDC information when reviewing potential developments and permits, designing projects, and carrying out activities and studies.

There are several programs and organizations such as Environment Canada's *Habitat Stewardship Program* (<www.ec.gc.ca/nature/>), that provide funding to private landowners, non-profit, non-government (First Nations), and government (municipal) organizations to carry out stewardship projects to help manage, protect and conserve species at risk and their associated habitats. I have only mentioned a few resources for species at risk but there are many more available through the internet, libraries, organizations, and individuals. I encourage everyone to take an active part in conserving and protecting our natural environment.

1 The number of species listed under SARA grows annually and these numbers may be not be current.

Bring Back the Bluebirds: The Georgia Basin Western Bluebird Reintroduction Project

By Kathryn Martell, Conservation Specialist for the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team

The Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team (GOERT) is teaming with the Victoria Natural History Society, Salt Spring Island Conservancy, Ecostudies Institute, and the American Bird Conservancy to bring the Georgia Basin population of the Western Bluebird back to the Salish Sea. We are working hard to raise funds to support our project. In addition you may have information on a good location to mount nest-boxes and/or nest data from the 1980s to support our re-introduction plan.



Father (centre) Western Bluebird flanked by two of his juveniles at their mealworm feeding station, San Juan Island. These juveniles are among the first Western Bluebirds fledged in the San Juan Islands since 1960. Photo: Elise Portal.

Until the 1950s, the Georgia Basin population of Western Bluebirds (*Sialia mexicana*) were commonly found in open areas and in particular, in Garry Oak ecosystems, throughout the Salish Sea, including southeastern Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and the San Juan Islands. After the 1950s, Western Bluebirds suffered serious population declines in both British Columbia and western Washington and Oregon, and were considered extirpated from the San Juan Islands in the 1960s and from British Columbia's southwest mainland coast by the 1970s. However, a small population of Western Bluebirds continued to breed on southern Vancouver Island through the 1980s, supported by the VNHS nestbox program. Harold Pollock and Calvor Palmateer put up approximately 75 boxes around the Gulf Islands and at scattered locations on Vancouver Island. The last records for nesting Western Bluebirds came from Mt. Tzouhalem, near Duncan, and Mt. Tuam, on Salt Spring Island. Although there have been scattered sightings of Western Bluebirds since then, by 1995 they were no longer nesting in south-western British Columbia.

The Georgia Basin Western Bluebird population is red-listed and considered extirpated in British Columbia. The population decline is thought to have been caused by competition for nest holes with exotic bird species such as the European Starlings and House Sparrows, reduced food supply, and loss of Garry Oak meadow habitat. A series of cool wet springs could have been a factor in eliminating the last small population of birds. Pesticides such as DDT were also likely a factor through both reducing the prey base, and direct poisoning of bluebirds. As habitat loss led to smaller and more fragmented populations, and snag removal substantially degraded remaining habitats by further reducing nest holes, bluebirds were likely impacted by increasing competition for the declining availability of cavities. Concurrent declines in cavity-nesters such as Lewis's Woodpecker and White-breasted Nuthatch, combined with the population increases of Western Bluebird that have occurred in response to nest-box programs in other areas, support the idea that limited nest-cavities were a major factor in Western Bluebird declines.

Today, through a combination of nest-box programs and reintroductions, Western Bluebirds are recovering throughout Washington (Olympic Peninsula, Whidbey and San Juan Islands), and in the Willamette Valley in Oregon. An extensive nest-box program at Fort Lewis Military Reserve, Washington, where the population was down to a few pairs

in 1980, resulted in an increase to more than 200 pairs today. Beginning in 2007, the recovered Fort Lewis population has served as a source of birds for a reintroduction program in the San Juan Islands. The San Juan Island project is led by Gary Slater with Ecostudies Institute, Bob Altman with the American Bird Conservancy, and Kathleen Foley with the San Juan Preservation Trust. In 2010, the fourth year of the five-year project, San Juan Island saw 23 adults return and 84 juveniles fledge. See <www.sjpt.org> for more info.

As the umbrella organization responsible for the recovery of species at risk in Garry Oak and associated ecosystems, the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team (GOERT) recognizes the Western Bluebird as a priority for recovery. GOERT's Vertebrates at Risk Recovery Implementation Group has been working with the San Juan reintroduction partners to support population recovery on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.

The goal of this reintroduction is to establish a viable population of the Western Bluebird to former parts of its range in south-western British Columbia, as part of the greater Georgia Basin population. The successful reintroduction in the San Juan Islands provides a detailed methodology and expertise to draw upon. As the first phase of this reintroduction, since 2005 GOERT's *Bring Back the Bluebirds* project has been working with volunteers to build, mount, and monitor nest-boxes in appropriate Western Bluebird habitat throughout the region. Suitable habitat consists of open areas, such as Garry Oak meadows and grasslands, with some perches nearby to be used for hunting and fledging. Western Bluebirds also nest and use agricultural areas, where the open fields and fences mimic the Garry Oak meadows of their historic habitat range. Our great hopes were boosted when nine Western Bluebirds were seen checking out our nest-boxes at Rocky Point in February 2005! This past summer, GOERT, with the help of grants from Evergreen/Home Depot and the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund (PCAF), built nearly 100 nest-boxes with local youth groups. We are looking for suitable locations to mount these boxes throughout our region.

We are now also getting ready for the translocation phase of *Bring Back the Bluebirds*, scheduled for the spring and summer of 2012, involving translocation of Western Bluebirds from healthy populations in Washington and Oregon to a suitable site in our region. The reintroduction sites will most likely be on Salt Spring Island. The Salt Spring Island Conservancy has been a strong supporter of this initiative and has placed almost 200 hundred boxes throughout suitable areas of the island, with a dedicated volunteer coordinating their monitoring.

We would love to hear from you if you have data on historical nesting locations, suggestions for suitable areas to mount nest-boxes, or recent observations of Western Bluebirds in our area. We are actively raising funds to support this project and we welcome your donations and fundraising suggestions! If you would like information on becoming a nest-box steward, or about other ways to be involved with *Bring Back the Bluebirds*, please contact GOERT: bluebird@goert.ca or 250-383-3427.

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An Old Story and a New Dolphin

By Jacques Sirois

First confirmed records of the Northern Right Whale Dolphin in the Salish Sea, 13 years later...

Old and long-forgotten stories and photos can be interesting when seen in a new light. In a recent conversation, Oak Bay Kayak guide Ben Garrett told me that he had seen and photographed a Northern Right Whale Dolphin in McNeill Bay, 13 years ago! Really?! He actually saw this dolphin about seven times, and photographed it while kayaking with his six-year-old daughter. He even “played” and raced with the friendly animal which dove, jumped, and swam along his kayak. The dolphin even had a good look at him. I urged Ben to find his photos, which he did several weeks later. This led me to talk to several whale watchers and biologists and look for other records of this now relatively uncommon dolphin in the Salish Sea. This species usually occurs far offshore or along the outer coast.

Several whale watchers saw this strangely named and shaped dolphin in Oak Bay during a period of approximately six weeks, mostly in August 1998. For example, Victoria whale guru Ron Bates has a confirmed sighting in McNeill Bay for August 17, 1998. Ron told me that the animal was often near shore, rather slow and appeared sick. At one point, there was a man playing a flute to it from shore, he told me. But both Ben and Ron remained unaware that their dolphin story was a little longer.

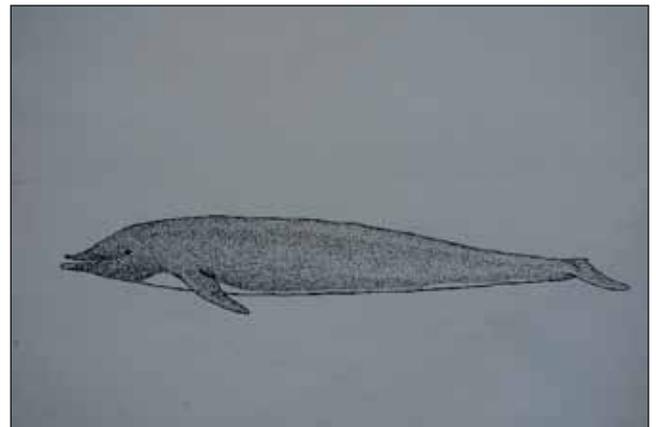
First I contacted John Ford, a well-known whale biologist in Nanaimo, who only knew of records of this

normally fast and gregarious dolphin from the northwest side of Vancouver Island. Second, I consulted the B.C. Cetacean Sightings Network (Vancouver Aquarium) who had, until now, only 17 records of this slender and poorly-known dolphin out of its 55,700 records for all species. All 17 records are from the open ocean, far to the west of us in Canadian and U.S. waters, some as many as 500 km offshore.

Finally, I reached The Whale Museum in Friday Harbour, San Juan Island. It had only three records from three U.S. locations in the Salish Sea, all from 1998. And no photo. Bingo, this had to be our dolphin, as the following suggests. It was first seen in U.S. Oak Bay, Puget Sound, near Port Townsend, on May 30, 1998; then in Canadian Oak Bay, actually in McNeill Bay, before and after August 17, 1998; then at North Beach, Orcas Island in the San Juans, on August 31, 1998; and finally in Carr Inlet, southern Puget Sound, near Tacoma, on October 10, 1998.

These are apparently the first records of this dolphin in the Salish Sea. Only 14,000 individuals are estimated to live along the west coast of North America at present. At least 75% of their original population perished as bycatch in the North Pacific squid driftnet fishery in the last decades. However, according to an American observer contacted by The Whale Museum, there are “lots of records from the outer coasts”, a matter that I may investigate later.

In the meantime, never keep cool sightings and rare photos for yourself. A story can be more interesting than expected.



Northern Right Whale Dolphin (*Lissodelphis borealis*). Photos by Ben Garrett. Sketch provided by author.

A Note on the Ignominious Demise of My* Barred Owl

By David Stirling

March 1, 2011, 2:20 p.m., clouds thick and low, strong southeast wind, visibility not so good. I am half-way up my driveway. I see a large raptor holding something, in an oak tree above my bird feeders. I stop and grab my in-car binoculars. The hawk is a big Cooper's as I suspected, but what is that in its talons? A flicker? No, its bulkier. Hawk drops its prey, dives down, retrieves it and perches on an oak tree about three feet from the ground. I can get a fine view of the raptor but prey is still partly obscured by the low bushes. The hawk shuffles around bringing the head of its catch into my line of sight. The hawk has its foot on the neck of a Barred Owl! After five minutes of peering around, the hawk begins to pluck the owl which is now belly-up on the branch. Downy feathers are carried away on the wind. An owl is mostly feathers. As the hawk is now occupied and seemingly not as alert as it was, I decide to sneak up to the house to get my camera. Unfortunately, I am noticed. Ms Hawk flies off, barely above the ground and disappears among the trees and rocks behind neighbouring houses.

It was sad to see my owl ending up as a meal for a Cooper's Hawk. I like to think it had been harvesting the rats that fatten at my bird feeders. Perhaps another owl will fill the niche.

*I say *my* because I think this individual had been hanging around in a Monterey Cypress on the edge of my place for some time. Last year it (?) made an unsuccessful attempt, in daylight, to snatch a rat from a male Cooper's hawk.



Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy

Welcome to New VNHS Members

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

Russ Pym
Scottswood Lane

Jeremy Kimm
Goldstream Avenue
Birds

Birthe Levie
Wishart Road
Birding

Margriet Marshall
Vickery Road
General natural history

Megan Watters
Malaview Avenue
Birds

Don and Vanessa Kramer
Dunsmuir Road
Anything

Ron Mathews
Victoria Avenue
Birds, photography, walking

John Sager
Henderson Road
Birds, hiking

Robert Auger and Anne Whyte
Arbutus Road
Birds, butterflies, wildflowers



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The Canada Goose on Southern Vancouver Island – Is it an Alien and Invasive Species?

By Michael Simmons and Ann Nightingale

Summary

Of the many bird species that have been introduced to Vancouver Island, the Canada Goose is one of the most visible and poorly understood. A common misconception is that there has always been a native breeding population of Canada Geese on the south Island. We think it most likely that there were no breeding Canada Geese of any subspecies here until the introduction of non-native birds in the 1950s. Another misconception is that Canada Geese were a significant target for local hunters in the early days of European settlement and this belief has been used as a rationale for the introduction of non-native birds. We conclude that significant numbers of Canada Geese have never been hunted in and around Victoria.

The Canada Goose is an extremely variable species, now divided into two species. Innumerable subspecies have been recognized since the late 19th century. As we review the historical records it becomes clear that these names and definitions have changed over time and reports of this or that subspecies having been seen are to be treated with great care. We set out to clarify these issues, as far as is possible given the evidence known to us, and to seek assistance in further understanding the origins of the current Canada Goose population of the south Island.

Early reports suggest that the only native breeding Canada Geese were in the north Island and were of the subspecies now known as Vancouver (*fulva*). The only other native breeding Canada Goose in British Columbia was found in the interior of the province, especially in the Okanagan, and is the subspecies Western (*moffitti*). It was sometimes seen wintering in the south Island. Other Canada Goose subspecies were often seen during migration on the south Island and included Cackling Geese (two subspecies), Dusky Geese (*occidentalis*) and perhaps a group of subspecies known as Lesser Canada Geese. As a result of our research, it is most probable that all of the **nesting** Canada Geese of southern Vancouver Island are descended from introduced birds, and that this population could be classified as alien and invasive.

What is a Canada Goose?

The American Ornithological Union now recognizes two species of what was originally Canada Goose: the large birds which are still called Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) and the small birds which are Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*). The larger species includes, amongst others, Western,

Vancouver, and Dusky subspecies. The AOU, which used to recognize subspecies, no longer does so. However, the great variability within these two species still requires the use of subspecies names to adequately describe these birds. What is most confusing when reviewing the historical literature is the common names used earlier are now, in some cases, used for different subspecies. As the *Birds of British Columbia* stated twenty years ago, “the present taxonomy in southern areas of British Columbia has been confused by the introduction of mixed subspecies and is likely to remain unclear for a long time”.

In their review of the bird fauna of British Columbia published in 1947, Munro and McTaggart-Cowan recorded Greater Canada Goose, Lesser Canada Goose, and Cackling Goose. Included in the Greater group were two subspecies we would now call Western and Vancouver. The Lesser was, and still is, problematic and records were only shown for spring and fall migrants.

In summary, the native population of Canada Geese of British Columbia was most probably limited to:

- Vancouver (*fulva*) which does not occur in Vancouver, but nests on Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlotte Islands), in coastal Alaska and has been recorded nesting on the north Island. Migration is very limited.
- Western (*moffitti*) is a native breeder from the interior, which wintered on the coast. This was likely the most common winter goose around Victoria until about 1970. It is now probably so mixed with imported birds as to be indistinguishable.
- Dusky (*occidentalis*) breeds only in the Copper River delta of Alaska, has always been a migrant through the south Island, and winters in the US Pacific Northwest. These birds are frequently seen during migration and occasionally seen during the winter on southern Vancouver Island. Dusky are easily distinguished from the resident birds by their dark breasts. They are also frequently seen sporting numbered collars.
- Cackling Geese (*minima* and *leucopareia*) sometimes wintered here but always have nested in Alaska and winter far south of Canada.

For an understandable discussion of all the subspecies see: <<http://www.oceanwanderers.com/CAGO.Subspecies.html>>

The reader may now be wondering what subspecies are the introduced, resident Canada Geese. Difficult to say. The source of the original goslings was southern Ontario, and

we have heard that some of these birds came originally from Michigan. They may have been Atlantic or Giant or Interior subspecies. They may have interbred with the Western subspecies in the interior of British Columbia. They may have caused migrating Canada Geese to start spending winters here and may have interbred with them. Sibley simply calls them “Common”.

Canada Goose population growth

The earliest reports listing birds throughout British Columbia were produced by the Provincial Museum towards the end of the 19th century. These were followed by a list compiled by the University of California at Berkeley, in 1925, and a comprehensive review in 1947 by Munro and McTaggart-Cowan. All these reports show that Canada Geese nested in the Okanagan and other parts of the interior and were most probably (using today’s terminology) the Western subspecies, found west of the Rocky Mountains. The Vancouver subspecies nested on the north coast of

British Columbia and on Haida Gwaii. Its range extended to the north Island and this was most likely the subspecies nesting at Campbell Lakes in the 1925 report. Small numbers of both these subspecies migrated to the south coast and were sometimes seen in and around Victoria in winter.

Further evidence to support these ornithological observations comes from accounts of hunting. The numbers of Canada Geese occurring as winter visitors and during migration around Victoria were not sufficiently reliable for hunting. From the early days of settlement in southern Vancouver Island, it was usually necessary for hunters to travel to find geese. For example, in 1893, the *British Colonist* newspaper (yes that is what it was called!) reported that a shooting expedition to Comox returned with 15 Canada Geese. Similarly Jim Hatter, former director of the British Columbia Fish and Wildlife Branch, wrote that in the 1960s there were very few geese on the Saanich Peninsula and hunters, including himself, made trips to Tofino to hunt migrating Canada Geese in the fall.

It may come as a surprise that a century ago there was



The Canada Geese breeding in the Victoria area are from introduced populations. *Photo: Marie O’Shaughnessy*

deep concern over the future of Canada Geese. The giant Canada Goose was thought to have been exterminated and many other subspecies were in decline throughout their range across North America. For example the *Victoria Colonist* newspaper, in a 1910 article about geese in the eastern USA, reported that “few geese are brought to bag today, but they are steadily decreasing in number, although they are a long-lived bird and can live more than 50 years.”

During the mid-20th century, Canada Goose recovery programs were started all across North America. It was discovered that rearing young from wild birds was remarkably easy. Released birds had a high survival rate. These recovery programs eventually came to coastal British Columbia, even though there had never been a native breeding population of Canada Geese on the south coast. Dr. Hatter provided us a letter from Bob Forbes (Canadian Wildlife Service) describing the 1974 agreement between the Canadian Wildlife Service, the Province, and Ducks Unlimited to create a Canada Goose recovery program in the Lower Mainland. It was extremely successful in producing viable goslings and introducing them to the wild. The Lower Mainland program had so many birds it was able to provide them to participants on Vancouver Island. Initially the birds were taken to Sidney Island, but before long they were distributed to whoever wanted them. The term “recovery” as applied to coastal British Columbia was a misnomer, as there had been no breeding Canada Geese on the south Island.

One hundred years ago, moving wildlife around the world was common and considered desirable. Even the VNHS was involved in importing birds. In 1913 the Society imported songbirds from the United Kingdom but, as far as we know, the Society was never involved with the importation of Canada Geese. With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to criticize those who imported geese and other birds, but we need to keep a clear historical perspective. The Canada Goose “recovery” program in coastal British Columbia promised game birds where there were none, was already successful throughout much of North America, and would add a spectacular, iconic, bird to the British Columbian coast.

Today we may have as many as 7,000 Canada Geese resident and breeding on the south-Island, and more than 46,000 resident throughout British Columbia. How did the situation change so dramatically? One source of statistical data is the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC), conducted in Victoria by the VNHS and carried out using similar methods in many count circles throughout British Columbia. For the south Island, we have relied on data from the three counts in Victoria, Sidney/South Salt Spring, and Duncan. For the Lower Mainland, we have used data from the three counts in Vancouver, Ladner, and Chilliwack.

The first Victoria Christmas Birds Counts to report Canada Geese were in the early 1950s and they were almost always featured in subsequent counts. Remember that the formal agreement between governments to begin a “recovery” program was in the mid 1970s. So what was the

origin of the earlier birds? Were they native? While some migrating birds may have overwintered here on rare occasions, there is evidence of an earlier introduction in the Royal British Columbia Museum 1967 series, *Birds of British Columbia* by C.J. Guiguet, “About a dozen birds were placed there (Elk Lake) some years ago by Game Warden Jones and J.A. Munro (Dominion Wildlife Officer). The birds have increased in numbers, and we have recorded as many as 200. They trade back and forth to Quamichan Lake and feed in fields on the Saanich Peninsula.”

It seems highly probable that these birds were the source of the sightings reported in the 1950s CBCs. We cannot be sure as there is no definition of “some years ago”. It also seems possible that there may well have been other private introductions of Canada Geese from the eastern parts of North America where raising goslings was well established. Figure 1 shows the numbers of Canada Geese reported by the Victoria CBC from the early 1950s until the formal introduction of Canada Geese in the south Island began in the early 1970s. We now assume that most, if not all, of these geese were from introduced birds that had begun to breed around Elk and Beaver Lakes, Thetis Lake, and in Duncan, at Quamichan and other lakes.

The numbers at Elk Lake never exceeded 120 between 1952 and 1978. The annual variations and gradual increase are typical of a newly-introduced species becoming established. After 1978, results from the government “recovery” program dramatically accelerated the increase in Canada Goose numbers.

Before 1951, only an occasional Canada Goose was reported from the Victoria Christmas Bird Count. At that time the count area was very small and there were only a limited number of participants. When the count area was expanded to include Elk Lake in 1952 the introduced, resident, Canada Geese we mentioned earlier were included for the first time, as we show in Figure 1. In 1958, only 31 birds were reported by the Vancouver count and 21 birds by the Victoria count. By 1970 the total for all British Columbia was still only 273. Until 1978 the numbers in Victoria were quite small, and the numbers fluctuated within a narrow range. The success of the government sponsored introduction program then became very evident as the population increased exponentially through the 1980s and 1990s (Figure 2.).

Victoria now has the highest population of Canada Geese reported by any CBC count circle in the province. The Victoria count circle only extends part way up the Saanich Peninsula. If the numbers of Canada Geese from the Sidney/South Salt Spring count are included, the number of geese in Greater Victoria may exceed 7,000. If we also include Duncan, the south Island count is approximately 10,000 birds. By comparison, the three highest Canada Goose counts in the Lower Mainland (Vancouver, Ladner, and Chilliwack) all report fewer resident geese, and the total is less than 6,000 birds. The counts for all six of these circles are shown in Figure 3 for 1970, 1980, and last

Figure 1. Canada Geese in Victoria 1952 - 1978
(Christmas Bird Count data)

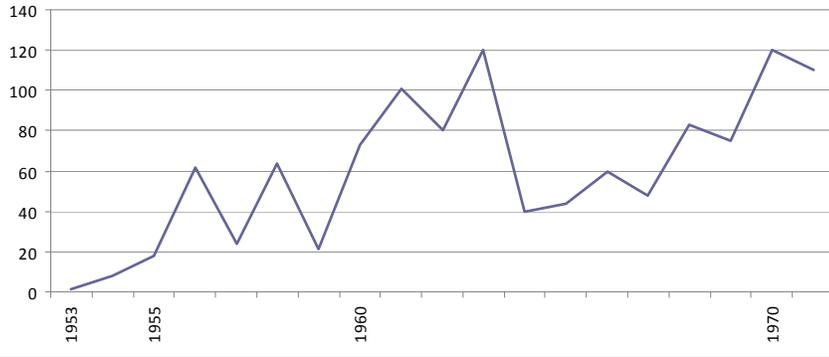


Figure 2. Canada Geese in Victoria 1959 - 2010
(Christmas Bird Count data)

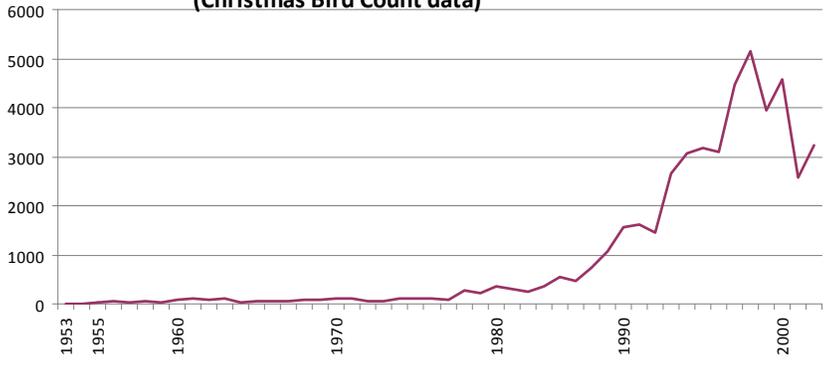


Figure 3. 1970, 1980, and 2010 Canada Geese numbers
(Christmas Bird Count data)

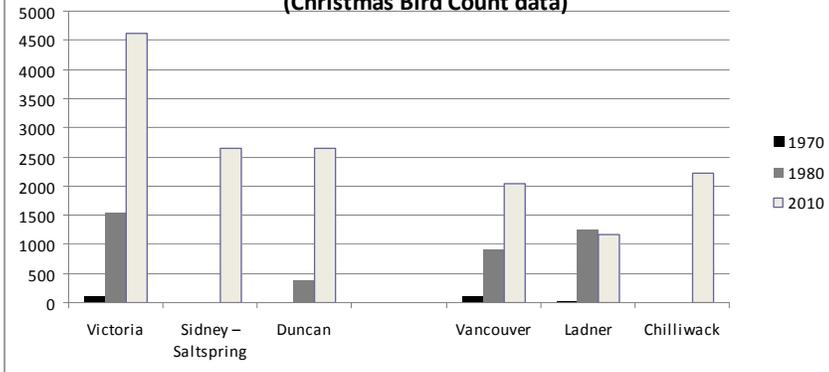
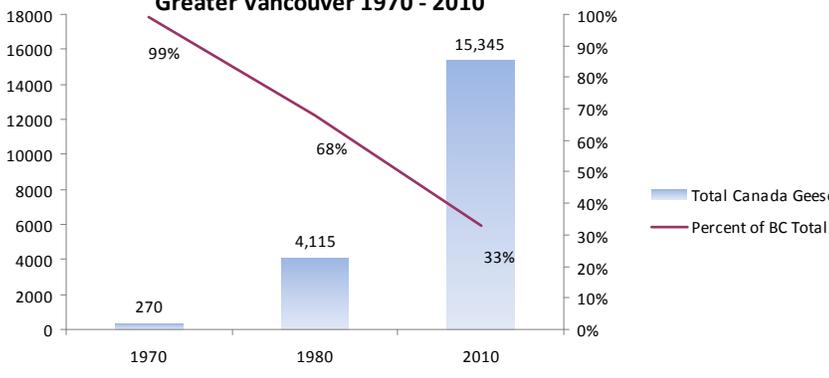


Figure 4. Canada Geese on southern Vancouver Island and in Greater Vancouver 1970 - 2010



year. The enormous increase in numbers during this period is likely due to the success of the introduction program.

As the south-Island and the Lower Mainland have the most benign winter climates in British Columbia, one might think that there is an influx of Canada Geese to these areas from other parts of British Columbia. The numbers reported from all British Columbia counts have been increasing as we show in Figure 4. This figure shows the total numbers from the three counts comprising the south-Island (Victoria, Sidney/South Salt Spring, and Duncan) and three counts from the Lower Mainland (Vancouver, Ladner, and Chilliwack). In 1970, there were only 273 Canada Geese observed in these six CBC count circles and this was 99% of the provincial total. By 1980, the six circles reported more than 4,000 birds but the proportion of the British Columbia total had dropped to 68%. Last year more than 15,000 birds were reported from the six count circles, an almost four-fold increase, but this number was only one-third of the British Columbia total.

Therefore, while local migration cannot be ruled out, it seems unlikely that many of the birds in Greater Victoria move here for the winter from other nearby areas. On the contrary, the British Columbia CBCs seem to indicate that birds have been moving out from the south Island and Lower Mainland to less hospitable parts of the province. For a very recent analysis (using unpublished sources) of the natural occurrence of Canada Geese on all Vancouver Island before the arrival of Europeans, and documentation of introductions and dispersal of the now "resident" birds on the Island, see Dawe and Stewart (2010).

The future

A working group, initiated by the Peninsula Agriculture Commission and chaired by the Capital Regional District (CRD), has received funding from the Agriculture Environment Initiatives Fund to prepare a regional goose management strategy. For the next year a fact-finding effort is being made to identify more specifically where resident Canada Geese are located throughout Greater Victoria, including the Saanich Peninsula: what habitats are used and when, how much damage is in fact being done to agricultural crops and recreational areas, and if the safety of air traffic at the airport is

threatened. Full details can be found on the CRD Parks web at: <<http://www.crd.bc.ca/parks/gooseman-strategy.htm>>

We would appreciate receiving any further historical evidence related to naturally occurring subspecies of Canada Goose and Cackling Goose and to the introduction of Canada Geese and their dispersal to new areas. If you have any records you wish to share, please contact Michael Simmons at <simmons@telus.net>.

MICHAEL SIMMONS is a volunteer on the CRD Regional Canada Goose Management Strategy Working Group, representing Peninsula Streams Society

ANN NIGHTINGALE is a past-President of the VNHS, past-President of Rocky Point Bird Observatory, and current coordinator of the Victoria Christmas Bird Count and BC Breeding Bird Atlas (Region 18).

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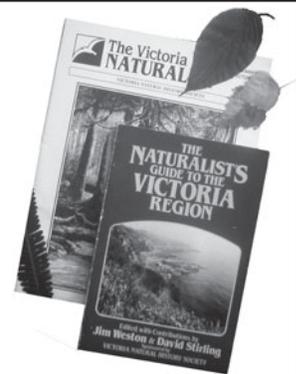


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Chatter

A Soon-to be-Regular Update on Activities of the Rocky Point Bird Observatory

By Shona L. Lawson

Spring is here and Rocky Point Bird Observatory's (RPBO) 2011 field season is just around the corner. RPBO is a non-profit registered charity whose mission is to contribute to conservation of migratory birds in western North America through monitoring, scientific research, and public education. RPBO is a member of a national network of 25 Bird Studies Canada migration monitoring stations from Vancouver Island to Newfoundland and serves as the only Pacific coastal station in Canada contributing to the *Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship* program (MAPS). Additionally, RPBO is the only coastal migration monitoring station between Alaska and Northern California.

RPBO programs include the *Hummingbird Project of BC*, *MAPS*, *Migration Monitoring*, and the *Northern Saw-whet Owl Project*. Our field season starts in May with the *Hummingbird Project of BC* and the *MAPS* program. From July through to the end of September population monitoring of southward migrating birds (primarily neotropical songbirds) is conducted, and from mid-September to October 31, southward migrating Northern Saw-whet Owls are monitored.

Most of our activities occur on Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt Department of National Defense lands at Rocky Point in Metchosin, where public access is restricted. We rely heavily on volunteers to conduct our activities, although a professional Master Bander-In-Charge (BIC) and an intern are hired through funding from Environment Canada and donations and sponsors. We always have room for new volunteers to help us with our activities, which are approved through provincial and federal scientific permits and follow scientific protocols.

RPBO data is contributed to the Canadian Bird Banding Laboratory, the Canadian Wildlife Service, and e-Bird, an online public database. Bird population monitoring by groups such as Rocky Point are important sources of information for wildlife managers and decision makers in North and South America. Funding is limited for provincial and federal agencies and biologists in Canada to conduct this work, making RPBO's long-term data collection and contributions even more important for conservation and stewardship of landbird populations in Canada and the Americas.

RPBO also conducts several public education programs throughout the year such as the *Raptor Identification* and *Bird Banding and Monitoring* workshops. This year, in collaboration with the Victoria Natural History Society, two birding courses were offered, with proceeds going to RPBO. If you wish to know more about our organization's

activities, become a member, make a donation, Sponsor-A-Net, or Adopt-A-Bird, please visit us at <www.rpbo.org>.



Feature Bird:

Black-throated Gray Warbler
(*Dendroica nigrescens*)

The Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*) was first described by John Kirk Townsend in 1837 (Guzy and Lowther. 1997). This beautiful warbler is one of the 63 species monitored in 2010 by Rocky Point Bird Observatory and is our logo bird. This species is insectivorous and a Neotropical migrant that breeds generally west of the Rocky Mountains, from British Columbia to Mexico. The Black-throated Grey Warbler is found in piñon-juniper, pine, and mixed oak-pine forests. The species winters primarily in Mexico in the Baja California Sur, on the Pacific slope and interior southern areas of Sonora, Durango, Zacatecas, and Coahuila south to central Oaxaca and along the West Coast and Gulf Coast of the U.S. (Guzy *et al.* 1997). Like many other species little is known about the Black-throated Grey Warbler, making population changes difficult to assess.

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Letters

Dear Victoria Natural History Society

I would like to thank you for awarding me the Victoria Natural History Society Bursary in 2010. As a full-time student and parent, any help with tuition can make a huge improvement to my family budget for the year.

This bursary is greatly appreciated, as it helps me attain my goal of earning my Bachelor's degree.

I wish everyone there the best in 2011.

Sincerely,

Sandy Munns

I am writing to thank all contributors to the Samuel Simco Bursary for my successful application. As a student within the Faculty of Science, I recognize the honour bestowed upon me to receive such funding.

At the University of Victoria, I am currently in progress in finishing my degree in Biological Science. Coming from a single-parent household, I was raised with no financial aid from my father and excelled in high school due to the influence of many positive instructors. Upon graduation, I was in the top five percent academically and was privileged to be valedictorian. My university career has been a learning curve, and within the last couple years I have truly surpassed what I thought I was capable of as a student. I immersed myself within the world of academia and strived to achieve top grades in all my courses. I recently started volunteering for the Biology Undergraduate Society and I also volunteer externally at Big Brothers Big Sisters. In addition, I am participating in a work-study this semester in order to gain experience and connections within the educational field of Biology. Currently, I am aiding the Senior Laboratory Instructor in the Chordate Zoology Laboratory. As I have gotten older, I began to explore other interests and courses than those within the Biology Department. I am interested in drawing, digital art, website design, game design, piano, travel, and reading. Course electives have allowed me to explore other areas of academia and develop skills that will be useful to future endeavours.

Within my Biology degree, I am focusing on aspects such as zoology, ecology, evolution, and conservation. From a young age I have always had a passion for nature and living organisms. My favourite past-time as a child was to go exploring for new insects with my older brother. As I got older, I began to explore the diversity of living things through textbooks and by natural observation. My drawing subjects are almost always an aspect from nature since it is a central dogma to my life. I was always raised with many animals and have gained empathy towards nature, since they

were a large part of my life. During high school, I performed extremely well in all courses-especially those within the field of science. Yet, I have always had the greatest passion for biology.

As mentioned previously, it is with the aid of my family and teachers that I excelled in my studies and as I take more courses within my undergraduate degree, I realise the enthusiasm that many of my professors have towards the field of biology. I always had a passion for teaching and have led an educational camp for the BCSPCA for the previous two summers. I see the greatest potential within university-aged students to actively explore the field of biology, and potentially limit the effects of humans upon natural systems. I think the conservation of living organisms is a very important field within biology and would love to study it for perhaps a thesis one day. For now, I will most likely be finishing up my courses in December 2011.

Upon graduation, I will take a few years off school to work and pay off the majority of my student loans. In addition, I would like to travel and get some field experience since I believe the best type of learning is hands-on. After that, I want to return to university and get my Masters in Science. Upon getting my Masters, I will either return back to school to get my PhD or I will look for employment within a college to teach biology. Since I am also passionate in other areas than education within biology, such as conservation and ecology, it is also possible that I will want to continue with research. I am an individual that realizes that life plans can change from what you originally expect and am open to the idea that other awesome opportunities may come up that I will embark on.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize how much external funding and bursaries enable students like me to fulfill their full potential. Without the constant stress of worrying about the state of my funds, I am able to fully concentrate on my courses and enjoy hobbies. This increases my general happiness and also allows me to appreciate living in a beautiful city like Victoria. As mentioned earlier, I received no funding from my father growing up. Since my mom had to raise my brother and I alone, it has made me really appreciate individuals that are willing to supply students such as me with funding. I only hope that eventually I will be able to make the same contributions to students when I am in a successful career. Once again, thank you very much. Please do not hesitate to contact me. I would love to thank anyone for the gratitude I feel for the funding I have received.

Thank you,

Jasmine Tamok

BULLETIN BOARD/CLASSIFIEDS

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.

Every Wednesday and Sunday Bird Walk. Meet at the Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary parking lot: 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. For everyone!

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary courses and events: For more information <www.swanlake.bc.ca> or call 250-479-0211.

Invertebrate Alert webpage: After a brief winter rest, our Invertebrate Alert page is now up and running again. The site reports on recent sightings of terrestrial invertebrates, and displays current photographs by members. Photographs are welcome, of course, but if you just want to report a recent sighting of interest, let us know. For example, as I write this in early April no one yet has reported a butterfly this year! Or you may just like to look at the site and see the many splendid photographs there, or to learn what has recently been seen in the area. Please send any photographs or observations to jtatum@uvic.ca. To view the site, go to <<http://vicnhs.bc.ca/invertalert.html>>

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 Night:** the second Tuesday at 7:30 p.m., 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., University of Victoria. **Marine Night:** the last Monday, 7:30 p.m., 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.

MAY

Saturday, May 7

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Birding Royal Roads and Esquimalt Lagoon

Join **Ann Nightingale** for a birding walk around Esquimalt Lagoon. We should see a good variety of migrating shorebirds and passerines. Meet at the south end by the washrooms at 7:30 a.m. This is a five-hour walk. Bring a snack and a drink. Call **Ann** at 250-514-6450 for more information.

Saturday, May 7

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Viaduct Flats - The Joy of Bird Song.

Come for a walk and learn about the joy of bird song with ornithologist **James Clowater** and the Sierra Club. James will present an introduction to identify birds by their songs and calls. Dress for the weather and wear shoes that can accommodate muddy trails. Meet at 9:00 a.m. in the parking lot at intersection of Viaduct Avenue West and Interurban Road. For those taking public transit, Bus #21 will drop you off at 8:48 a.m. right across the street. No pets please. Call **Gwen Walter** 250-727-7376 if you need more information.

Sunday, May 8

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

The Wild Side of Thetis Lake Park

This park is overflowing with wild flowers, common and uncommon. Pause to enjoy the ferns, lichens, mosses and other supporting cast as well. Our walk will only cover a small fraction of this fantastic park. We hope this visit encourages you to come again on your own. Please note the trail is a gentle climb, not as challenging as some of the other areas. The walk is at a leisurely pace to enjoy the habitat. Wear sturdy shoes and you might wish to bring a walking stick. To reach the park, take the Colwood exit off the Trans-Canada Highway and follow the Old Island Highway for a short distance. Turn right at the traffic light at Six Mile Road just before the bridge. Continue on this road when it goes under the highway and you will come to the Thetis Lake Park parking lot. Meet at the main parking lot at 10:00 a.m. Pay parking in effect. Bring a snack and drink if you wish. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns@shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Friday, May 13

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Mt. Newton

Meet at the corner of Haldon Road and Newton Heights at 7:30 a.m. This is a great area to see Western Tanagers, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Black-throated Grey Warblers, and Mourning Doves. Call your leader **Cheryl Mackie** at 250-479-4083 if you need more information.

Saturday, May 14

EVENT

2nd Annual International Migratory Bird Day!

The Victoria Natural History Society, Rocky Point Bird Observatory, and CRD Regional Parks are proud to present the 2nd Annual International Migratory Bird Day from 7:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park. Help celebrate and learn more about the journey that birds take from their summer and winter homes by participating in this free all-day event that offers engaging activities for birders of all ages, expertise, and abilities. Participate in guided bird walks, mist-netting demonstrations, hummingbird and passerine banding demonstrations, live raptors, children's activities and presentations. Be sure to check out booths representing local organizations focused on studying migratory birds and gather information on ways to help conserve species and their habitats.

Birding walks: There will be a 7:00 a.m. walk with the VNHS Saturday Morning Birding Group. Meet at the Nature House at Beaver Lake. All other walks (~ one hour each) will leave from the picnic shelter.

10:00 a.m.: **Event opening** - Picnic shelter 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Displays, touch tables, crafts, scavenger hunts, games, fun! At the picnic shelter - follow the signs! 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon: **Bird banding demonstrations** at the picnic shelter 10:00 a.m. to noon: **Hummingbird banding demonstration** - near the Nature House (Beaver Beach)

Sunday, May 15

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Butterflies, Birds, and Blooms on Mt. Tolmie

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** for a natural history walk on Mt. Tolmie. Meet at the main parking lot just north of the summit at 10:00 a.m. Call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 for more information.

Sunday, May 15

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Plants and Birds of Cattle Point and Uplands Park

This is an area of interest both to botanists and birders so we'll enjoy some of each. Despite the dogs and other traffic, a number of rare and endangered plants still survive in this urban setting and we'll try to find some of these as well enjoy the more common wildflowers that will still be in bloom. We will be walking on some rocky bits but this is basically a level trail so is an opportunity for those who can't handle the usual southern Vancouver Island rocky terrain where the wildflowers typically grow. Cattle Point/Uplands Park is on Beach Drive between Oak Bay and Cadboro Bay. Meet at the nature sign by the Cattle Point waterfront parking area at 10:00 a.m. Bring a snack and a drink if you wish. You might wish to bring binoculars. No pets please. Contact **Agnes Lynn** at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Thursday, May 19

EVENT

Avian Colloquium

Rocky Point Bird Observatory is holding its first Avian Colloquium, showcasing bird studies and research on Vancouver Island. Students, naturalists, and researchers will give short presentations on a wide range of bird-related topics. University of Victoria's Bob Wright Building, Room B150, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Saturday, May 21

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL TBA)

Saturday Morning Birding

Call the Rare Bird Alert, 250-704-2555, or click 'Rare Bird Alert' on the VNHS website <www.vicnhs.bc.ca> on the Thursday or Friday before to find out this week's location. Usually start at 7:00 a.m., rain or shine. For more details, call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca. Everyone welcome.

Saturday, May 21

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Low Tide Adventure/Seaweeds at Whiffen Spit

Join **Sandra Lindstrom**, adjunct professor of botany and biodiversity at UBC and curator of algae in the Beaty Museum Herbarium for a low tide adventure of one of the most diverse sites on lower Vancouver Island. Enjoy the beauty of the intertidal with the spring flush of new seaweed growth. Rubber boots recommended and other field gear and lunch to enjoy on the beach. To carpool meet at Helmcken Park & Ride at 9:30 a.m. Otherwise, meet at the Whiffen Spit parking lot at 10:30 a.m. From Sooke follow West Coast Road about 1.7 km west then turn left on Whiffen Spit Road. Call **Sandra Lindstrom** at 250-655-1534 for information.

Sunday, May 22

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Birding the Power Line off Stewart Mountain Road

Meet at the mailboxes on Stewart Mountain Road, which is off Millstream Road in the Highlands at 7:00 a.m. It is a great place to see warblers, vireos, and flycatchers. Call **Rick Schortinghuis** at 250-885-2454.

Monday, May 23

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

A Natural History Cycling Tour of the Galloping Goose Trail from Sooke Potholes to Leachtown.

Join Rick Schortinghuis on a cycling tour into the Sooke Hills. We will enjoy the flowers, birds, and scenery along the way. Meet at the Galloping Goose parking lot 2.3 km along Sooke River Road at 8:00 a.m. Bring a cool drink and lunch. Call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 if you need more information.

Saturday, May 28

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Observatory Hill (Little Saanich Mountain) Birding Walk

Join Ed Pellizzon for a walk in the park – who knows what we'll find! Flycatchers, Western Tanagers, House Wrens and a variety of woodpeckers are some of the birds we might find. Meet at the bottom of the hill at 7:30 a.m. Call **Ed** at 250-216-2789 if you need more information.

Sunday, May 29

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Newcastle Island Exploration

Newcastle Island is a small island just off Nanaimo. It has fields of wildflowers, an active Purple Martin colony, fascinating sandstone formations and a rich history. We are fortunate to have naturalist and historian **Bill Merilees** as our guide for the day. Bill has written a book called *Newcastle Island – a Place of Discovery* about the diverse history of the island, so he will have plenty of tales to tell. Although there are no big hills, we will be walking a fair distance so wear good footwear. This is an all day trip so bring lunch and snacks and drinks. We will leave Victoria at 7:30 a.m. Carpool expenses will be ~ \$18.00 per person plus \$9.00 for the ferry plus extra for pay parking. You must register for this event as the number of participants is limited. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 after May 3 to register or for more information.

JUNE

Saturday, June 4

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding the Duncan Area

We will try to find a Red-eyed Vireo and other warblers, vireos and flycatchers. Meet at Helmcken Park & Ride 7:30 a.m. or at Cowichan Bay Dock Road at 8:30 a.m. Call Rick at 250-885-2454 if you need more information.

Sunday, June 5

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Birding the Power Lines and the Ponds at the Hydro Substation along Francis King Park

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** for a walk along the power lines that border Francis King Park and the area around the Hydro substation. This is a great area to hear or see most of the warblers, vireos, and flycatchers we have in our area. This is a four-to-five-hour walk. Meet at the Nature House on Munns Road at 7:00 a.m. Call Rick 250-885 2454.

Saturday, June 11

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Jordan River Area

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** for a trip to Jordan River. In the past it has been a hot spot for rarities in the spring and fall and it is a great place to hear Fox Sparrows singing in the spring. Meet at the Helmcken Park & Ride at 7:00 a.m. Bring lunch, etc. Call **Rick** 250-885-2454.

Sunday, June 12

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Grasses of Observatory Hill

Many people think that grasses are all the same, or that the differences are highly technical. On the contrary, they are as distinctive and recognizable as many other groups of plants. Learning a handful of local grasses adds interest to every stroll. Join **James Miskelly** for an exploration of the grasses of Observatory Hill. We will meet at the bottom of the hill at 10:00 a.m. and walk up the road. On the way, we will encounter species typical of Douglas-fir forest, oak woodland, moss bald, and disturbed habitats. No pets please. Contact **James** at james.miskelly@gmail.com or 250-477-0490 for more information.

Thursday, June 16

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Intertidal Exploration-Whiffen Spit

Join **Phil Lambert** to explore the intertidal zone at Whiffen Spit in Sooke. This beach usually provides many examples of exposed west coast flora and fauna. From Sooke follow West Coast Road about 1.7 km west then turn left on Whiffen Spit Road. To carpool meet at Helmcken Park & Ride at 8:00 a.m., otherwise meet at the Whiffen Spit parking lot at 9:00 a.m. Rubber boots recommended. Bring water and a snack or lunch. For more information call **Phil** at 250-477-5922.

Saturday, June 18

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL TBA)

Saturday Morning Birding

Call the Rare Bird Alert, 250-704-2555, or click 'Rare Bird Alert' on the VNHS website <www.vicnhs.bc.ca> on the Thursday or Friday before to find out this week's location. Usually start at 7:00 a.m., rain or shine. For more details, call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca. Everyone welcome.

Sunday, June 19

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Upper Goldstream Creek Nature Walk

Join **John Henigman** at the campground entrance to Goldstream Provincial Park at 10:00 a.m. for a 3-hour nature walk on a trail paralleling upper Goldstream Creek. We will see a diversity of local native conifer and deciduous trees, shrubs, ferns, and other vegetation including some spring wild flowers as we slowly walk the approximate 1.5 km trail. This narrow creek valley is great salmon-spawning habitat, will also have some birds to see and hear, a few species of slugs and, if we are lucky, we may also see some Western Red-backed Salamanders. We will return to our cars via the Goldstream campground road. Get to the Goldstream Park Campground (near Ma Miller's Pub – Goldstream Inn) entrance off of Golden Gate Road. Langford has changed the access to the campground recently, so check your maps to take the new road to the entrance. Bring water and snacks and good walking shoes or boots. Dress warmly. Contact **John Henigman** at henigman at islandnet.com or 250-598-6326.

Sunday, June 19

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Wild Shawnigan Rhododendrons

There are only four places in B.C. where the native *Rhododendron macrophyllum* grows, one of them not far from us just west of the north end of Shawnigan Lake. We hope that the timing of the event allows us to see them in bloom. Members of the Victoria Rhododendron Society will be joining us. The plants are not that far from the road but there is no trail so be prepared for bushwhacking over logs and rough ground. Wear sturdy footwear and bring a walking stick if you wish. Dress for the weather. Meet at the Helmcken Park & Ride at 10:00 a.m. to car-pool. Bring a lunch so that we don't need to hurry on our adventure. No pets please. Contact **Agnes Lynn** at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Saturday, June 25

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL TBA)

Saturday Morning Birding

Call the Rare Bird Alert, 250-704-2555, or click 'Rare Bird Alert' on the VNHS website <www.vicnhs.bc.ca> on the Thursday or Friday before to find out this week's location. Usually start at 7:00 a.m., rain or shine. For more details, call Rick at 250-885-2454 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca. Everyone welcome.

Sunday, June 26

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

High Jordan Ridge Bogs

We plan to investigate an area above Jordan River that contains unique bogs usually only found at much higher elevations. Be prepared in case of cold and/or wet weather due to the elevation and bring high rubber boots (hiking boots not good enough). Also a hiking stick is a good idea due to the uneven ground. You must pre-register for this trip due to transportation limitations and potential change of plans due to snow cover and/or road conditions. Number of participants will be dependent on availability of high-clearance or 4-wheel-drive vehicles for carpooling and final destination choice. Starts from Victoria around 8:00 a.m. Bring a lunch, snacks and drinks for an all day outing. No pets please. Contact **Agnes Lynn** at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 after May 3 to register or for more information.

International Migratory Bird Day

May 14th, 2011



**Beaver Lake Regional Park
Picnic Shelter**

(follow the signs from the nature house or park at the filter beds)

**Live Raptors
Hummingbird Banding Demonstrations
Mist-netting Demonstrations
Bird Walks
Children's' Activities
Information Booths**

For More Information Please Visit:
www.rpbo.org or www.crd.bc.ca



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