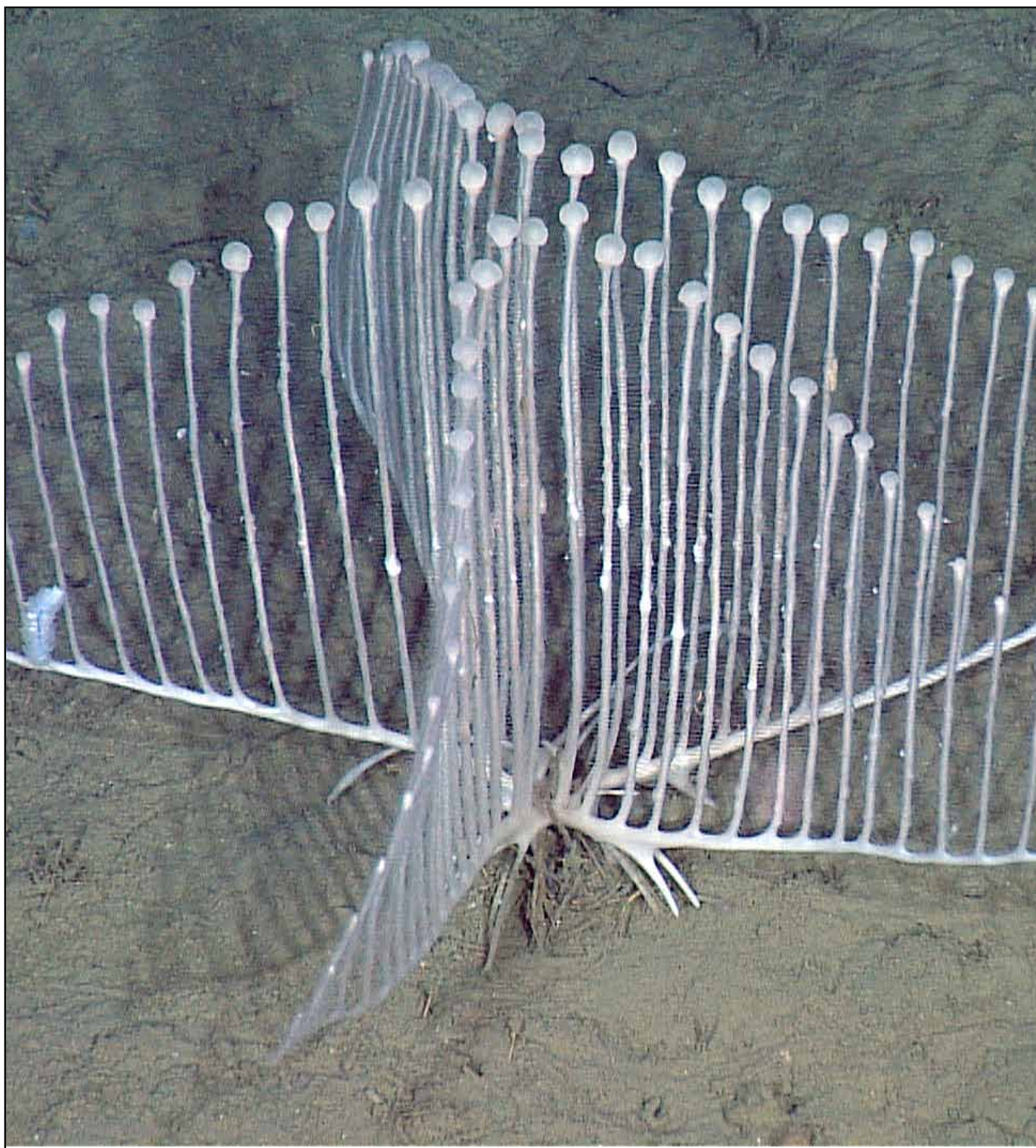




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The Victoria NATURALIST

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We prefer electronic submissions – these can be submitted in either PC or Mac compatible word processing format – but hardcopies are also accepted. Please include photographs or illustrations if possible, along with a suggested caption and photo credit. If digital, images need to be high resolution: a minimum of 1200 x 1550 pixels, or 300 dpi at the size of photos in the magazine. Once scanned/input, hardcopy materials will be returned to the sender if a stamped, self-addressed envelope is included with the material.

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Contents

President's Message	
<i>By Darren Copley</i>	4
VNHS Awards: Call for Nominations.....	5
Scientists Discover Extraordinary New Carnivorous Sponge	
<i>By Dana Lacono</i>	6
The Young Naturalists' Club	
<i>By Kristine Webber</i>	7
Connecting Children With Nature – VNHS Schools Program	
<i>By Bill Dancer</i>	8
Liron's Story	
<i>By Pete McMartin</i>	10
All Buffleheads Day – A Phenological Phenomenon	
<i>By Kerry Finley</i>	11
HAT Tricks	
<i>By Adam Taylor</i>	13
Fall Migration Summary from Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO)	
<i>By Emily Barnewall and Ann Nightingale</i>	14
1200 Acres of Endangered South Okanagan Grassland Protected by the Nature Conservancy of Canada	
<i>By Leslie Neilson</i>	16
Good News! Walbran Valley's "Castle Grove" Gets Reprieve and Big Trees "Legal Tool" Underway	18
Letters	20
Welcome to New VNHS Members	20
Bulletin Board/Classifieds	20
Calendar of Events.....	21

COVER PHOTO

The recently described carnivorous sponge, *Chondrocladia lyra*. The "harp sponge" is found off the coast of California at depths between 3,300 and 3,500 meters (10,800–11,500 feet). Photo: © MBARI 2012

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Happy New Year! Looking back over articles and news from the past year, I am struck by the knowledge and passion people have for this amazing world in which we live, and by the tireless efforts of so many that go into conservation, education (connecting children with nature), advocacy and increasing awareness of environmental issues.

Readers have been entertained and informed by articles of local interest and by travelogues about exciting places elsewhere in the world. We've learned about dragonflies, crayfish, lichen, and new species like the carnivorous sponge (this issue) (who knows what may be living in the relatively unexplored reaches of this earth?). And for those of us who enjoy books and field guides, new ones this year include great ones such as the *Nature Guide to the Victoria Region*, *Art for an Oil-Free Coast*, and *The Outer Spores: Mushrooms of Haida Gwaii*.

2012 has had some odd things, e.g., recently the Citrine Wagtail and Brown Pelicans ending up "out of their way", and more than the usual number of Snowy Owls making a rest stop on the island and lower mainland. Global warming?

But 2012 has also been full of positives. Conservation of ecosystems and habitats has been achieved (and is ongoing) – witness the efforts of HAT and NCC – and good news items include designation of the National Marine Conservation Area in the Strait of Georgia, halting logging in old-growth forests (Walbran), restoration of Garry oak meadow at Fort Rodd Hill, creation of Brooks Point Regional Park, and the reintroduction of western bluebirds to the Island, to mention but a few.

Data gathered through bird counts and at bird banding stations like Rocky Point, Vaseux and Tatlayoko, together with advances in science (e.g., backpack-toting birds), increase our knowledge regarding migration patterns and the attendant need to maintain corridors of suitable habitat.

These days, the risks to our environment are many, and whatever we can do, individually and collectively, to aid conservation efforts and increase awareness and knowledge of the relative fragility of our earth can only be beneficial. In the words of Bob McDonald, CBC Quirks and Quarks: "It's all we've got. There isn't another planet like this one in the universe". Let's take good care of it.

Gail Harcombe

Ken Sohm will be managing production of the March/April issue, as I will be away. Please send all submissions to him (contact info p.2).

President's Message

By Darren Copley

As I write this I am thinking about trying to get things ready for our upcoming holiday. Despite the effort it takes beforehand to prepare, it is always worth it in the end. This year we're off to Guyana and Trinidad with friends and fellow VNHS members. When your magazine gets to you in the New Year I will still be in Guyana and will not yet have been to the world famous nature preserve in Trinidad: Asa Wright. I don't mean to rub it in, but I'm getting very excited...

When I look back at the year that has just passed I feel very happy to have completed our *Nature Guide to the Victoria Region*, and appreciate all the effort our Board puts into keeping the Society running smoothly. This includes the magazine, field trips, accounting, presentations, publicity, and so much more. In 2012 Bill Dancer and his tireless group of volunteers provided free nature programs to more than 800 students – a new record!

In February I hope to see some of you at Seedy Saturday (February 16) – the Society will once again have

a complimentary booth set up to spread the 'nature-loving gospel'. This year we will be selling our new book as well. Stop by the display and ask me about the wildlife I saw on our trip...

In March we'll be having our Annual General Meeting and already there are two new people who have agreed to join the board. If you are interested in helping the Society out in this way, please talk to me. I hope that someone among you and/or the current board is keen to take on the mantle of President. It is not an onerous task, and it is time for a fresh outlook.

Other upcoming projects include getting the Bird Checklist updated, as well as a new butterfly identification guide that will include caterpillars and host plants, as well as adults. Consider offering yourself as a mentor for the Young Naturalists Club of BC – experts on any topic can self-register in their new online database (<http://www.ync.ca/2000/01/volunteer-opportunities.html>) (see article p.7). At the BC Nature meeting in Parkville we learned about a trial that the Vancouver Young Naturalists and Nature Vancouver are trying out where there is a membership discount to encourage families to join both clubs. After they work out the bugs we hope to implement something similar here.

Thank you to everyone for your continued support through membership and generous donations. 2013: here we come!

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VNHS Awards:

Call for Nominations

VNHS members contribute to the Society in many ways. Some write articles for the Naturalist, some lead field trips, others serve on the board or on other committees. There are some who go out of their way just to make sure other members can continue to be a part of Society activities, by visiting shut-ins, or driving others to Society functions. The Victoria Natural History Society Board of Directors established the Distinguished Service Award in 1988. This prestigious award is meant to honour those members who have given freely of their time over a long period, in a variety of ways, for the Society. Any member of the Society can nominate any other member who in their opinion merits this honour. The VNHS Distinguished Service Award is given annually to members who have shown such dedication. The Society may also bestow Honourary Life Membership on a member whose involvement with VNHS has been exceptionally long and dedicated. Please consider nominating a member, and send your nomination to the Society's address, or give it to one of the directors. Nominations should be forwarded by February 28, 2013.

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

VNHS Distinguished Service Award Recipients

1989 Lyndis Davis, David Stirling, Katherine Sherman
1990 Anne Adamson, Charles Trotter, Robb Mackenzie-Grieve
1991 Ed Coffin, Mark Nyhof
1992 David Fraser, Margaret Mackenzie-Grieve
1993 Giff Calvert, Harold Pollock
1994 Kaye Suttill
1995 Bryan Gates, Bruce Whittington
1996 Gordon Devey
1997 Michael Carson
1998 No recipients
1999 Tony Embleton, Dorothy Henderson
2000 Tom Gillespie, Marilyn Lambert, David Pearce
2001 David Allinson, Beverly Glover, Hank Vander Pol
2002 Norm Mogensen
2003 Bob Chappell
2004 Oluna and Adolf Ceska
2005 Rick Schortinghuis
2006 Phil Lambert, Tom Burgess
2007 No recipients
2008 Ann Nightingale
2009 No recipients
2010 Gordon Hart, Agnes Lynn
2011 Claudia and Darren Copley
2012 Bill Dancer

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Scientists Discover Extraordinary New Carnivorous Sponge

By Dana Lacono

Ten thousand feet below the ocean's surface, the seafloor is a dark, desolate, and dangerous place where even the most benign-looking creatures can be deadly predators. Recently, a team of scientists discovered an unlikely new carnivorous species – the harp sponge (*Chondrocladia lyra*).

C. lyra is called the harp sponge because its basic structure, called a vane, is shaped like a harp or lyre. Each vane consists of a horizontal branch supporting several parallel, vertical branches. But don't let the harp sponge's whimsical appearance and innocent sounding name fool you, it's actually a deep-sea predator.

Clinging with root-like "rhizoids" to the soft, muddy sediment, the harp sponge captures tiny animals that are swept into its branches by deep-sea currents. Typically, sponges feed by straining bacteria and bits of organic material from the seawater they filter through their bodies. However, carnivorous harp sponges snare their prey – tiny crustaceans – with barbed hooks that cover the sponge's branching limbs. Once the harp sponge has its prey in its clutches, it envelops the animal in a thin membrane, and then slowly begins to digest it.

Using MBARI's remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) *Tiburon* and *Doc Ricketts*, researchers collected two sponges and made video observations of ten more. The first harp sponges that the scientists found had only two vanes. However, additional ROV dives revealed sponges with up to six vanes radiating out from the organism's center. Scientists believe the harp sponge has evolved this elaborate candelabra-like structure in order to increase the surface area it exposes to currents, much like sea fan corals.

The harp sponge's unusual shape and exposure to currents

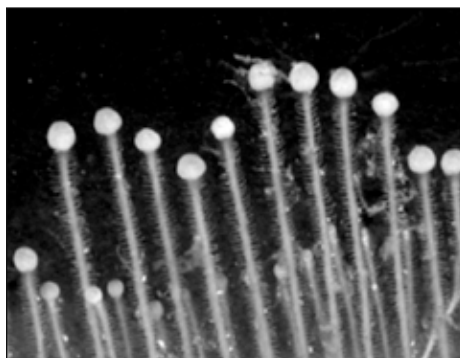
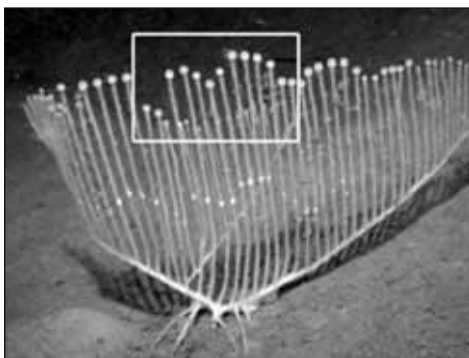
may also help it to reproduce more effectively. The swollen balls at the tip of the sponge's upright branches produce packets of sperm. These sperm packets are released into passing currents and are captured on the branches of other nearby sponges. The sperm then works its way from the packets into the host sponge to fertilize its eggs. As the fertilized eggs mature, these contact sites swell up, forming bulges part way up the host sponge's branches (see photo).

It has been less than twenty years since scientists first discovered that sponges could be carnivores. Since then, marine biologists have discovered dozens of new carnivorous species. In fact, all the members of the harp sponge's family Cladorhizidae – including the ping pong tree sponge (shown below) – are carnivores.

The deep seafloor can be a very inhospitable place. It is cold, dark, and resources are often scarce. The harp sponge is an extraordinary example of the kind of adaptations that animals must make in order to survive in such a hostile environment.

[Editor's Note: a subsequent article in the Times Colonist revealed more interesting tidbits: the harp sponge can regenerate body parts when a piece gets bitten off! <http://www.timescolonist.com/technology/Rare+killer+sponge+snare+attention+Island+researchers/7566360/story.html>

Look for more on this fascinating creature in the next issue of The Victoria Naturalist from the perspective of two Greater Victoria sponge experts involved in studying this animal, Henry Reiswig, adjunct professor at UVic and research associate at the RBCM, and Bill Austin, Khoy-atan Marine Laboratory in North Saanich]



Chondrocladia lampadiglobus, the ping pong tree sponge. Another of the carnivorous sponges in the family Cladorhizidae. Photo: © MBARI 2002

The upright branches of harp sponges are covered with Velcro-like hooks for ensnaring their prey. These extremities also typically end in a swollen ball, where packets of sperm are produced and released. Photo: © MBARI 2005



Laurence Brown shows youth sundews in Stanley Park's Secret Bog. *Photo* K. Webber

The Young Naturalists' Club (YNC)

By Kristine Webber, Executive Director,
Young Naturalists' Club of BC

The YNC is looking for people interested in sharing their nature expertise and knowledge with young people on outdoor Explorer Day field trips

The Young Naturalists' Club of BC is an exciting nature discovery and environmental action program that invites young people ages 5-12 years to discover nearby nature on Explorer Day field trips with local experts, learn about native wildlife and plants in NatureWILD Magazine and take part in environmental actions to protect their habitat with the Action Awards program.

The YNC has two active clubs in the Greater Victoria area serving 98 young naturalists. Thank you to VNHS members who have helped introduce these young folks to nearby nature by leading Explorer Day Field Trips over the years. YNC wants to make it easier for more local experts like you to get involved.

YN has just launched the **Nature Mentors' Circle**, a program that matches local experts, educators, and scientists interested in leading Explorer Day field trips with YN Clubs around the province of BC.

Whether you are new to the Young Naturalist' Club or an experienced YN volunteer, if you are interested in leading future Explorer Days for young naturalists, please join the **Nature Mentors' Circle**.

By registering in the **Nature Mentors' Circle** you will be tapping into opportunities to share your expertise, enthusiasm, and passion for nature with a new generation of young naturalists in your community. You will be able to identify your preference of topics and your availability when you register so our Club Leaders can provide well-matched opportunities. The information you provide will be used for the purpose of matching nature mentors with local Explorer Day opportunities.

To join the **Nature Mentors' Circle** go to www.ync.ca. If you have questions please email naturementors@ync.ca



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Sharing the art and science of bird watching during the Christmas Bird Count 4 Kids. *Photo: C. Jardine*

Connecting Children With Nature – VNHS Schools Program

By Bill Dancer

It will come as a surprise to some members that this program has been running since 2007 and was the brainchild of Ann Nightingale (no surprise there!!). Over the five intervening years the program has, in ever increasing numbers, provided presentations and outings and has involved, to date, close to 3000 children. As of December 4th, the number of children that have participated in the 2012 VNHS Schools Program is 878, far greater than any previous year (which is surprising as for the first time we had no requests from summer holiday day cares or camps).

The program coordinators, in consultation with teachers and leaders of other groups, tailor presentations or arrange trips to support the requirements of the ongoing school curriculum for the grade levels involved, or as in the case of the scouting movement, to help obtain a badge. While the main demand remains from local schools, other sources of demand include day cares, the various groups within the scouting movement and nature clubs, to name a few. By far the largest percentage of participants in the program is

children in the primary (K-4). The program has a number of “props” including binoculars, bird guides and various items such as skulls, owl pellets, shells and bird wings and tails which are invaluable for piquing the interest of our participants.

The program is a *team* effort that involves the VNHS President, a great group of volunteers, the Society itself, and the teachers and group leaders. It takes many hours of work by all to make the program successful (as the many thank you cards and increasing numbers indicate). The program is promoted primarily by word of mouth at venues where the VNHS has a booth or display. We also encourage teachers to spread the word within the school system. Given the increasing number of users, this appears to work well – of course, being a FREE program also helps! Most often potential users contact VNHS through the website and then the two coordinators, John Henigman and myself, are contacted. We in turn contact the teachers or leaders and determine requirements and dates then recruit volunteers.

Comments from the coordinators

Bill Dancer

In 2012, together with other volunteers, I was involved with seven Elementary Schools, two Middle schools, two High Schools, a Pre-School, a Brownie and Cub Pack and a group of 1st Year University students. In some cases more than one visit was involved and in many cases there will be return visits in 2013.

Given the normal short time we are involved with the children (typically 90 minutes), I like the challenge of designing a program that will engage the children and

address the teachers' requirements. The overall message I try to get across is that we have to be aware of all elements of the natural world, as each one depends on other elements. The trick is to get the children engaged from the start – this may be as simple as exercising of their senses. Surprising how many younger children do not realize that dry grass (hay) smells completely different than new mown grass or that birds do not come in black, white and brown only. I, and I think most of the volunteers, are rewarded by 20 children being enthralled with a colony of ants excavating their winter quarters in a rotting tree trunk speck by minute speck at a time and with a well-argued debate on carbon emissions with a grade 10 student. However, most of all, for me, it keeps my brain engaged and takes years off my calendar age.

Future plans? I hope we can provide service in more than English and French. There is a large community of English as a second language that we would like to assist. There is also a movement to coordinate all the groups that offer free nature talks and walks and it would be a great advantage to have this come about. It would be super to break the 1,000 children mark, which would put the program in a very elite group.

John Henigman

(Some notes on a few of the field trips)

April 5, 2012, Royal Oak Middle School, Grade 7, 25 students.

I conducted a show and tell classroom presentation of the local geology of Victoria. I brought various samples of local rock and cleaned clay (the substrate of the School), and we discussed what clay is and how you know it's clay; how does it behave; why is it the primary substrate around the School; challenges of constructing buildings or roads on clay; and uses of clay such as making pots. Many of the students thought that clay was icky and many others got into discussing clay, especially building on it.

April 24, 2012, South Park Elementary School, Grades K to 6, about 150 students.

All classes at the School visited Ogden Point beach during the day to see and discuss local Victoria geology and intertidal and benthic marine creatures. I showed my sample rocks and discussed how they came to be here in geological terms and also how the glaciers had eroded the rocks.

May 29, 2012, Keating Elementary School, Grade 4/5, 27 students.

We walked adjacent to the school along a portion of Sandhill Creek in Central Saanich and discussed riparian vegetation and how it is different from drier upland vegetation, and we discussed the occurrence of many invasive plants seen there.

October 10 and 11, 2012, Mt. Douglas High School, two Grade 10 classes, approx. 25 students each day.

Bill Dancer and I did these classes at the same time in subgroups. We walked up Mt. Tolmie and discussed landscape and precipitation, geology and glacial effects, native and invasive plants, animals common to the Mt., and the labour (both of Saanich employees and volunteers who work

to maintain the appearance and ecological balance of the Park).

November 8, 2012, Young Naturalist Club, age 5–12, about 25 kids and with lots of home schooling parents.

We met at Finlayson Point in Beacon Hill Park and walked down the stairs to the cobble beach and out to the point on the glaciated bedrock. We discussed the geology of Victoria, especially the gneiss rock, the glaciations and its impact on the rock and the glacial till left behind as the cliffs along Dallas Rd. We also discussed the fortified Salish village site on the Point.

The Victoria Natural History Society works with several groups to provide educational opportunities and field trips for young naturalists and their parents. Check the websites for more information:

Connecting Children with Nature (VNHS School Project), Young Naturalists' Club of British Columbia, Swan Lake/Christmas Hill, Goldstream Nature House, Capital Regional District Parks, Vancouver Island Regional Science Fair

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Liron's Story

Liron Gertsman is 12, and looks uncannily like that boy in *The Sixth Sense*, with the same dark eyes and same acute sensitivity. He's bright – a straight-A student – and is by all appearances a sweet, well-mannered kid with none of the simmering resentment of an adolescent. His name, from the Hebrew, means “my song” – a lyricism, his parents would find, that would turn out to be prophetic. Liron does not sing, but his passion does. Liron loves birds.

He has been a birder since the age of five. He has notebooks from that time filled with his own drawings and observations of them. His room is filled with big colour photos of birds and a collection of bird feathers. He maintains a blog on birding that he fills with photos from his outings – you can visit it at lironsnaturephotography.yolasite.com. His camera and lenses, which he saved up three years to buy, are state-of-the art. He has a life list of just over 180 different bird species.

When he was 10, he started volunteering with the Stanley Park Ecology Society so he could take part in its bird surveys. He's done 60 of them so far. Since the society has a minimum age requirement of 14 for volunteers, his parents have had to accompany him. His parents have no idea where his love for birds came from – his mother, Keren just held up her hands and shrugged at the question. Even Liron isn't quite sure. “Well, basically, since I was born, I've always been interested in nature and wildlife. And I'm not really sure how I got down to birds, but soon it narrowed down and birds just interested me. Why? They can fly, and I wish I could fly. And how they can travel across a continent in just under a week – that's really amazing. The variety of them is really amazing, too – there's like giant vultures and tiny little humming-birds and stuff. And some can catch big animals and some will survive on just bugs and seeds.”

The family would go on vacation, and to his parents' exasperation, Liron would insist they take him birding. Hawaii, Mexico, Palm Springs, Israel – there was less beach time than birdwatching. “We just got back from a vacation in New York,” Keren said, “and this time we told him, ‘No birding this time! This vacation, we're going to look at buildings and go shopping and do all the touristy things!’” As it turned out, they spent much of their time birding in Central Park, where, at one point, Liron watched American Redstarts eat bugs – for 45 minutes. His parents deserve medals.

“Liron,” Keren said, “says to me many times, ‘You know, you'd be waking up at 5 am to take me to hockey. And because I don't want to do that, because I don't want to play hockey, it doesn't mean you're off the hook.’ He's very convincing. And I mean, who wouldn't be happy their child is out looking at nature? So, we don't understand all of it, and we're not passionate about (birding), but we support it as

“Hope is the thing with feathers.” – Emily Dickinson

much as we can.” “They're very good about it,” Liron said.

Recently, on August 8, Liron's grandparents took him birding in North Vancouver's Maple-wood Flats. Later that night, as he usually does, he logged on to eBird, a global birding site. Launched in 2002 by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca, N.Y., eBird collects data and sightings from birders around the world. Liron reported the 24 bird species he had sighted that day. One of them was an American Robin. Soon after, Liron received an email from eBird explaining that, to celebrate the popularity the site was enjoying, and to mark a milestone in the vast amount of birding data that was coming in from birders all around the world, eBird had been holding a contest that would reward the person who submitted the 100-millionth birding observation.

Liron's American Robin, the email informed him, was Number 100,000,000.

“I won some bird books, which haven't arrived yet,” Liron said, “and some chocolates. And I got to go birding with one of the ornithologists from Cornell, which was really great.” (Andrew Farnsworth, with the Cornell lab, took Liron on an outing while attending the North American Ornithological Conference held here this August.)

The odds of Liron winning were improbable; it was also fitting. The eBird site was started in part to respond to the dire condition of many bird populations around the world. Bird numbers among species like swallows and songbirds have crashed alarmingly. Data was needed about the state of their numbers. What better way to collect that data than from millions of birders, those people who love birds most? But eBird was also about ensuring the future of bird populations. And who could better personify the future than some-one who would have to live it, a 12-year-old whose future was still ahead of him?

Asked about that future, and about the future of birds, Liron's answer was a surprise. He said: “I feel things are getting better. And there are organizations out there like SPES and eBird that are teaching people there can be a better future. I'm hopeful, because I think we're doing things better for birds and nature than we were.” You do not hear optimism like that much these days, but it was a tonic. It was reassuring just to be reminded that some could still think there was a future, and that we could do something about it. And I couldn't help but think that, sitting beside me, embodying it, was that thing with feathers – hope.

pmmcartin@vancouver.sun.com

All Buffleheads Day – A Phenological Phenomenon [Can we predict the weather by the activity of Buffleheads?]

By Kerry Finley [Includes excerpts from Kerry's "blog"]

In August, I submitted a manuscript to the Canadian Field Naturalist entitled: "All Buffleheads Day: a phenological constant and reliable prognostic of weather during freeze-up in the northern hemisphere."

Although I appreciated that the claim sounded preposterous, to claim anything less would have been falsely modest. At any rate, I anticipated that the opening phrase alone would invite skepticism and incredulity. It did. So I'll define it right off. All Buffleheads Day (ABD) is the 298th day of the earth's cycle, falling on October 15 except in non-Leap Years. It marks the nominal first appearance of Buffleheads in Shoal Harbour Sanctuary in Sidney and North Saanich on the Salish Sea. It's a statistical fact based on sixteen years of close observations from my front-room window overlooking Roberts Bay, prime Bufflehead habitat. [It's also an Act (Bill C-454), presently before Canadian parliament.]

Also, right off, I'll define phenology. It's not recognized by spell-check. One of the oldest branches of natural history,

phenology is the systematic study of the timing of natural phenomena in relation to environmental factors such as day length, temperature, chemistry and weather. Long dismissed as amateur science, there has been a resurgence of interest in keeping 'nature notes' and phenology has become popular with the rise of citizen participation in environmental and ecological monitoring programs, the ease of entering data on computer spreadsheets, and the ability to network. In fact the U.S. government recently recognized its enormous potential and established the U.S. National Phenology Network.

All Buffleheads Day marks the first appearance of the Bufflehead on its wintering grounds and the approach of freeze-up across the northern plains. Since 1995, ABD has remained constant over fifteen seasons in Shoal Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Remarkably, they have arrived on target or within two days of ABD 67% of the time, but never on the intervening day, an unprecedented case of non-random variation in field studies. ABD preceded two influxes, the first corresponding to freeze-up on the prairies, the second to freeze-up in interior BC. I conclude that ABD is a photoperiodic-based constant, and a reliable prognostic of large-scale, atmospheric conditions representing an important seasonal transition in weather patterns and climate in the northern hemisphere. "Prove it", a friend said, "give an accurate forecast". So in September I set out to test the predictive ability and accuracy of my phenological model...

Excerpts from the "blog"

Earth Cycle – Day 286 – October 1

As the northern hemisphere slants away, eleven days after equinox, the migratory urge is building amongst the waterfowl. As night length rapidly increases at 60° latitude (six minutes per day), the avian pituitary releases melatonin, inducing nocturnal restlessness and bringing on the urge to feed intensively – to bulk up on fat for the long journey to winter quarters. The Bufflehead becomes the real Butterball.

All Buffleheads Day – Lillian Hoffer Park, October 14

Here's a prediction: There's a 67% chance that Buffleheads will arrive today by noon. Failing that, they have no chance of arriving tomorrow, and an 80% chance they'll arrive the next day! Another: There will be two subsequent influxes of migrants – one around the 312th day of the earth's cycle



Bufflehead drake. Photo Suzanne Huot.

(around October 28th), the last around the 322nd day (November 7th).

She's Back – October 16, 7:33 am

As predicted, the first Bufflehead, a single female, appeared in the wake of last night's storm.

Prognostication – October 19

My prediction is that we will have a large first influx on Monday October 22nd, and that airport radars on the prairies and eastern Canada will detect mass movements of migrating waterfowl on Sunday evening.

Where's the Buffleheads? October 22, Day 306

At first glance this morning, I felt egg on my face, as there wasn't a Bufflehead in sight. But with binoculars I soon found a nervous flock of 16 in the far northwest corner.

This is the moment that radar ornithologists wait for, and you can find several sites on the internet where enthusiasts monitor airport radars and wind charts for evidence of mass movements of birds. It's a marvelous spectacle to watch the massive blooms of echoes moments after Civil Twilight. At dusk, I picked up the radar site at Cold Lake Alberta, but could detect nothing in moving echoes. The radar site on the North Saskatchewan River showed a pattern of signals on the Yellowhead route that indicated a good migration of birds headed southeast, and in southern Manitoba, the mass of signals became intense. Undoubtedly Buffleheads were responsible for some of this "biological noise".

Eggs n Bacon – October 23

At 3:30 am, I woke to the sound of rain, and looking out over the bay, I decided to revoke my forecast that today was the big day. I re-forecast for Thursday, then slept in, took my leisurely time with a coffee, before noticing a long, thin line of small ducks on the far side. A first scan indicated that there were about twice as many as yesterday. My forecast was bang on, even though I chickened out at the last moment. This is the earliest influx since monitoring began, beating 2004 and 2010 by a day. So it's eggs with bacon today.

Re-forecast – November 2

The second and last influx did not occur on Thursday as I forecast, despite the forecast indicating the Cariboo region of central BC was in for a freeze (freeze-up in the Cariboo district is the final moment when winter really takes hold of Canada.)

Now that we're nearly past this first level of probability, the chances that they will arrive within a narrow window of time jump dramatically, such that I can forecast with 75% confidence that they will arrive on Thursday or Friday, or as high as 90% within a day either side.

Last Influx – November 8

At first glance this morning, I resigned myself to crow for breakfast, as there appeared to be fewer Buffleheads than

yesterday. But the wind switched to the north and picked up speed, and surprisingly, my tally was 356. I'm pleased to say that my forecast was correct to the day.

This predictive ability – first arrival, first and last influxes – is proof in the pudding, supporting my hypotheses that ABD represents a photo-periodic response whereas the subsequent influxes are a function of certain weather patterns representing two climatic domains (northern great plains/boreal forest and interior BC grasslands).

The phenological constant of ABD and its efficacy in predicting weather patterns and climatological events in the northern hemisphere is like having a biological DEW line station monitoring Rossby waves over the North Pacific.

Bill C-454, An Act respecting an All Buffleheads Day – October 17th, 2012 / 3:40 pm – House of Commons, Ottawa

Elizabeth May, Saanich – Gulf Islands, BC, moved for leave to introduce Bill C-454, An Act respecting an All Buffleheads Day

She said: Mr. Speaker, it appears I am lightening the mood in this corner already with the news that I am presenting a private member's bill for October 15 to be declared a national All Buffleheads Day. I bring the good news that the most punctual duck in Canada is now back. The Buffleheads travel to far-flung places, but on the 298th day of the solar cycle, like clockwork, our smallest diving duck returns. This duck puts the swallows of Capistrano to shame and is a better weather predictor than the groundhog. This is a wonderful duck to celebrate. All Buffleheads Day will be put forward to all members to decide whether we should mark it every year on October 15. We can come together for many things. The little Bufflehead duck is found across Canada and it is worth celebrating. (Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

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Hat Tricks

Why Small Land Trusts Play a Large Role



Creating Conservation Legacies

By Adam Taylor, Executive Director, Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT)

Land trusts have been in the news a lot recently. The Nature Conservancy of Canada is celebrating its 50th birthday, and TLC (The Land Conservancy) has been in the headlines as well. Both organizations have accomplished great things, as have the Nature Trust of BC, and Ducks Unlimited Canada. These large, influential organizations have saved wetlands, Garry Oak ecosystems, forests, rivers, estuaries, and helped raise awareness of the need to protect natural landscapes.

But if these large organizations with provincial or national mandates are doing great work, then what is the role of smaller land trusts? In B.C., there are 32 land trusts. Most of them are small organizations that serve a specific geographic region. In the southern Vancouver Island area, there is the Cowichan Land Trust, the Galiano, Salt Spring, Mayne Island, and Pender Island Conservancies, and of course Habitat Acquisition Trust. Why are there all these local trusts?

At this point, I do have to declare my bias – I am employed by HAT, and I believe strongly in the importance of what we and other small land trusts do. I also believe that local land trusts are an important complement to the larger provincial, national, or international trusts.

What HAT, and other small land trusts, does well is respond to the unique challenges and opportunities of their community. In the Capital Region District, our challenges loom large. We are losing important and rare ecosystems at

an astonishing rate, land prices are astronomical, and there is little to no publicly-owned land to work with. This is why HAT has engaged in community outreach programs to encourage good stewardship by private land owners in addition to legally protecting land. When government stopped funding salmon run school programs at Goldstream, a local tradition dating back decades, HAT was able to help the community keep these incredible school programs going. These are local solutions to problems in our community.

Even large land protection projects often involve both large and small land trusts. HAT, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and the Friends of Matson Lands worked together to save Victoria Harbour's last Garry Oak meadow, the Matson Lands, and we continue to partner on other protection and restoration projects. Similarly, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Cowichan Land Trust worked together to save the Cowichan Garry Oak Preserve and Chase Woods.

In the end, it's not really a question of large or small. We need land trusts working at all scales to protect natural areas and identify new and innovative ways to meet the unique challenges every community has.

P.S. We hope you can join us at Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary on the evening of January 24 for a look at the past year for HAT and our Annual General Meeting. We'll make it fun, I promise.



Somenos Marsh – Not a HAT project, but a partnership with DUC, The Nature Trust of BC, and local group the Somenos Marsh Society. Kids attend a Salmon program at Goldstream. *Photos: Adam Taylor*

Fall Migration Summary from Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO)



By Emily Barnewall and Ann Nightingale

The 2012 banding season at Rocky Point Bird Observatory has come to a close. We had a really busy and exciting year running up to three banding stations simultaneously! We could not have done this without the excellent work and dedication of our volunteers! A big thanks goes out to our banders-in-charge (BiC) - Brian Pomfret came back to Rocky Point for his 3rd season with us! He must really like us or it could be the delicious baking from our volunteers. Rick Schortinghuis started off the RPBO banding season as our BiC of MAPS and we are glad he stayed on at Pedder Bay. Jessie Fanucchi was the BiC with the Northern Saw-whet Owl banding program run at Rocky Point. This year we had two fabulous interns: Andrea Follett at Pedder Bay and Christina Lam at Rocky Point (they made a great presentation for the wrap-up party [https://www.dropbox.com/s/fyo5dpgztj3nzar/RPBO 20Final 20Draft 28hopefully! 292.pptx](https://www.dropbox.com/s/fyo5dpgztj3nzar/RPBO%20Final%20Draft%20Hopefully!%20292.pptx)).

But before I delve into the oh so exciting banding totals, I want to share with you some great news. We were awarded grant money from the Victoria Natural History Society, the Public Conservation Assistance Fund, and the Victoria Foundation, and the Willard and Elva Dawson Fund (Victoria Foundation). We are also thankful for donations from private supporters, either directly to RPBO or through workplace programs like the Provincial Employees Community Services Fund. If you are considering a donation, you can

direct it to a specific project or to where it is needed most.

With this support we can continue to run an excellent banding program and expand our educational activities in 2013.

Now back to the numbers - Rocky Point vs. Pedder Bay. Rocky Point banded more and had a greater diversity of birds at 3191 banded birds (up from 2734 in 2011) from 63 species and forms (up from 59 in 2011). Pedder Bay had a respectable first year with 2702 birds from 59 species. This was the first full season of banding at Pedder Bay and it looks as if it is going to be a really nice site.

This year was a record-breaking year for three species. Three Western Tanagers were banded this year (the previous record was two) and Red-breasted Nuthatches were more common this year with 42 banded (previous record of 19). We had the highest number of Puget Sound White-crowned Sparrows with 153 banded (previous record of 132). Red-tailed Hawk, Anna's Hummingbird, and Northern Shrike were tied with the previous record of one of each species banded. No new species were banded this year at Rocky Point, but every species from Pedder Bay was a record since this was the first official season!

Even though Pedder Bay and Rocky Point are only 4 km apart, they have a few attributes that attract different species. Species banded only at Pedder Bay included Belted Kingfisher, Northern Pygmy Owl, Red-breasted Sapsucker,



Rufous Hummingbird on nest. Photo: Bill Pennell

Cooper's Hawk, and House Finch. Birds banded only at Rocky Point were Barred Owl, Barn Swallow, Marsh Wren, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-winged Blackbird, and Swamp Sparrow. Overall, sparrows, thrushes, and hummingbirds were banded more frequently at Pedder Bay while finches, warblers, kinglets, and wrens were more common at Rocky Point.

Our Northern Saw-whet Owl banding program also had a great year. A total of 814 Northern Saw-whet Owls were banded. We had an amazing five foreign recaps. Our friends Chris Chutter and Andrew Harcombe from Tatlayoko Lake Bird Observatory were the source of two of our foreign recaptured owls. Andy Stewart in Cobble Hill banded two others and our last bird was a rehabilitated bird from Delta O.W.L.

Thanks again everyone for a great season!

Next year will see more changes for RPBO. We are offering an amazing adventure with Canadian River Expeditions (CRE) on the Tatshenshini River and Haines Triangle. In addition to passing through some of the most spectacular scenery in North America this trip is a chance to look for an interesting mix of boreal and arctic bird species. We will be

searching for Aleutian Terns, Kittlitz's and Marbled Murrelets, Parasitic Jaegers, Trumpeter Swans, Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, Harlan's Hawks, "Timberline" Sparrows and all 3 species of Ptarmigan. Birder biologist and RPBO board member David Fraser will be a leader on this trip that has extra time birding at hotspots along the road in the Haines Pass, and a side trip to the Pacific Ocean to make this a "birders special" version of CRE's world class trip, June 21–July 4, 2013.

We are also undertaking our first winter, and first geolocator project. In early 2013, 30 Fox Sparrows will be equipped with a small sensor which, if and when recovered (keep your fingers crossed and eyes peeled for colour-banded Fox Sparrows) will give us valuable information on where "our" winter Fox Sparrows go in the summer.

With all of these new projects, we are looking for more volunteers. We have "at home" jobs like making and maintaining bird bags, to more "exotic" field work and interpretive positions. Something for everyone! For more information on Rocky Point Bird Observatory, please visit us at rpbo.org.

Table 1. Top 10 birds banded at Rocky Point and Pedder Bay during the 2012 fall migration season

Rank	Rocky Point		Pedder Bay	
	Species	Count	Species	Count
1	Pacific-slope Flycatcher	345	Fox Sparrow	312
2	Wilson's Warbler	280	Song Sparrow	219
3	Ruby-Crowned Kinglet	269	Hermit Thrush	196
4	Orange-Crowned Warbler	164	Oregon Junco	162
5	Song Sparrow	164	Ruby-Crowned Kinglet	160
6	White-crowned Sparrow	153	Wilson's Warbler	160
7	Pacific Wren	151	Spotted Towhee	143
8	Fox Sparrow	136	Swainson's Thrush	130
9	Golden-Crowned Kinglet	126	Golden-Crowned Sparrow	126
10	Lincoln's Sparrow	124	White-Crowned Sparrow	117



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Sagebrush slopes. *Photo: Nature Conservancy of Canada*

1200 Acres of Endangered South Okanagan Grassland Protected by the Nature Conservancy of Canada

By Leslie Neilson

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is the nation's leading land conservation organization, working to protect our most important natural areas and the species they sustain. Since 1962, NCC and its partners have helped to protect more than 2.6 million acres (over 1 million hectares), coast to coast. More than one quarter of these acres are in British Columbia.

In November, NCC and its partners secured two sprawling grassland properties near Osoyoos in BC's South Okanagan Valley.

The Sage and Sparrow Conservation Project features two distinct properties: Sagebrush Slopes and Sparrow Grasslands. Located on the Canada-U.S. border, these properties are part of an international swath of rare grassland habitat. Both are crucial components of a migratory corridor for species moving between the desert areas of the western United States and the dry grasslands of interior BC.

"These conservation lands show off South Okanagan grasslands at their best," said Barb Pryce, Nature Conservancy of Canada's Southern Interior program manager. "This project will benefit not only the many rare species that rely on this habitat, but also the people who live in and visit this beautiful valley and want to see it remain ecologically vibrant."

Sagebrush Slopes is named for the fragrant bush that dominates the property and is one of the most extensive sagebrush landscapes in BC. Pockets of trembling aspen woodlands provide habitat for mule deer, ruffed grouse, magpies, and a variety of cavity-nesting creatures. Two mouse species of conservation concern – the Western Harvest Mouse (*Reithrodontomys megalotes*) and Great Basin Pocket Mouse (*Perognathus parvus*) – thrive here.

Sparrow Grasslands is notable for the abundance of bird species – including at least seven species of sparrow – that

frequent the area. The rolling hills of the property are covered in grasses and wildflowers, offering a significant contrast to Sagebrush Slopes. A canyon cuts through the southern portion of the property and features a natural spring that runs year-round.

Both properties share a significant portion of their borders with the South Okanagan Grasslands Protected Area, forming an integral habitat link between protected areas that allow for the movement of species between the Similkameen and Okanagan Valleys.

Support for the Sage and Sparrow Conservation Project has come from the Government of Canada through the Natural Areas Conservation Program, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, Sitka Foundation, Dr. Sally Otto, Jean and Ken Finch, Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society, South Okanagan Naturalist Club, Oliver Osoyoos Naturalist Club and other individuals.

Facts This grassland ecosystem is one of the four most endangered ecosystems in Canada.

The area is home to a diverse range of amphibian, reptile, bird, and mammal species, some of which occur nowhere else in Canada or in the world.

The project area forms part of the Kilpoola Lake Important Bird Area as designated by IBA Canada.

Learn more about the Nature Conservancy of Canada at www.natureconservancy.ca.



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The Lower Castle Grove includes the “Castle Giant”, an enormous, 5 metre (16 foot) diameter western redcedar that is one of the largest trees in Canada. Flagging tape marked “Falling Boundary” was found less than 50 metres from the tree. Photo: TJ Watt

Good News! Walbran Valley’s “Castle Grove” Gets Reprieve and Big Trees “Legal Tool” Underway

Summary of Ancient Forest Alliance Media Release, November 30, 2012. To read the complete article or for more information, including links to maps and photos, see <http://www.ancientforestalliance.org/news-item.php?ID=515>

Conservationists Relieved as Forest Company Backs Away from Logging Canada’s Finest Old-Growth Cedar Grove, Vancouver Island’s “Castle Grove” in the Upper Walbran Valley

Conservationists are breathing a sigh of relief as Canada’s finest stand of old-growth redcedar trees appears to have been spared the axe – for now. The Castle Grove in the Upper Walbran Valley on southern Vancouver Island (west of Lake Cowichan) had been flagged for logging in August by the Teal-Jones Group and subsequently was the focus of an intense environmental campaign by the Ancient Forest Alliance (www.AncientForestAlliance.org). However, the Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations has recently indicated that they intend to follow through on a 2011 promise to create a “legal tool” to potentially protect the province’s largest trees and monumental groves, which the AFA would like to see used to protect the Castle Grove.

The Castle Grove is an extensive stand of densely-packed enormous redcedars, including the “Castle Giant”, a 16 foot (5 metre) diameter redcedar that is one of the largest trees in Canada. It sits on unprotected Crown (public) lands within Tree Farm License 46 in the Upper Walbran Valley. Unfortunately much of the grove is not protected by any forest reserve designations such as Old-Growth Management Areas, Ungulate Winter Ranges or Wildlife Habitat Areas. The Walbran Valley has been the focus of protests against old-growth logging for years, and early protests in 1991 there played an important role in the build-up towards the massive Clayoquot Sound protests near Tofino on Vancouver Island in 1993. Most of western Vancouver Island, including the Walbran Valley, is in unceded Nuu-cha-nulth First Nations territory.

For the past several months the Ancient Forest Alliance had been bracing for a major escalation in BC’s “War in the Woods” as survey tape marking the “falling boundary” for logging had been discovered in August in Upper Castle Grove. Subsequently, the organization began a public awareness campaign that included media coverage (see the *Vancouver Sun* and *Times Colonist* article), photography and video expeditions, slideshow tours, and a major letter-

writing campaign among thousands of environmental supporters.

In several recent emails to the Ancient Forest Alliance, the Ministry of Forests stated that while the forest company, the Teal-Jones Group, is still actively pursuing old-growth logging in other areas in the region, the company has backed down from their logging plans in the Castle Grove. The email stated: "There is no cutting permit application for the Upper Castle Grove area. Apparently the company did some preliminary work, hence the tape, but has decided not to pursue any harvesting in that area."

In February, 2011, former Minister of Forests Pat Bell promised that the BC Liberal government would implement a new legal tool to protect the largest trees and associated groves after a Forest Practices Board report that investigated the logging of an exceptionally grand stand of ancient redcedars near Port Renfrew showed a deficiency in protection levels for productive stands over 400 years in age. The BC government has indicated that they may be looking at using existing legal tools, namely provincial Recreation Sites and Old-Growth Management Areas, to fulfill this function.

See the BC government's announcement in February, 2011, about creating a new legal tool to protect BC's largest trees and groves: *Vancouver Sun* and *Times Colonist*: "B.C. looking for new ways to protect ancient trees." (Feb.16, 2011)

"Not all old-growth forests are created equal – the Castle Grove tops all remaining ancient cedar forests that we know for its combined qualities of grandeur, geographic size, and intactness. It's a real life Jurassic Park-type landscape, a global treasure that must absolutely be protected," stated TJ Watt, campaigner and photographer with the Ancient Forest Alliance. "Of all places, the Castle Grove is *the* place where a legal designation to protect our monumental ancient groves would make the most sense. The existing so-called 'Special Management Zone' in the Upper Walbran Valley has resulted in the area's old-growth forests being turned into Swiss cheese, punctured with major clearcuts throughout."

On Vancouver Island, satellite photos show that about 75% of the original, productive old-growth forests have already been logged, including 90% of the valley-bottom ancient forests where the largest trees grow and most biodiversity resides. Only about 10% of Vancouver Island's original, productive old-growth forests are protected in parks and Old-Growth Management Areas (OGMAs). Of 2.3 million hectares of original, productive old-growth forests on Vancouver Island, about 1.7 million hectares have now been logged. Of the remaining 600,000 hectares, just over 200,000 hectares are protected in parks and regulatory protections like OGMAs.

The Ancient Forest Alliance is calling on the BC Liberal government and the NDP Opposition to commit to implementing a BC Old-Growth Strategy that will protect old-growth forests wherever they are scarce (such as on Vancouver Island, in the Lower Mainland, in the BC Interior, etc.). The AFA is also calling for the sustainable logging of second-growth forests, which constitute most of the forests in southern BC, and to ensure a guaranteed log supply for BC mills and value-added wood manufacturers by ending the export of raw logs to foreign mills.

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Letters

VNHS offers free nature walks to local schools through the Connecting Children With Nature program <http://vicnhs.bc.ca/schools/>. Below are thank you letters from participating teachers.

Re: Oct. 10 trip, 27 Grade 10 students
Thank you very much. It was exactly what I hoped!
David Newell, Mount Douglas Secondary

Re: Bamfield trip, 21 Grade 2 students
My class really enjoyed being out for a nature walk with John Henigman. He was very inspiring and engaging with my very busy grade 2's! I learned a lot about the local park also and will definitely take my class there again to find more things to talk about and revisit the places John took us so we can remember. The students are now able to take their families for a walk in the local park, Banfield Park, and show them what they now know. Thank you!!!
Terrie Anderson, Victoria West Elementary

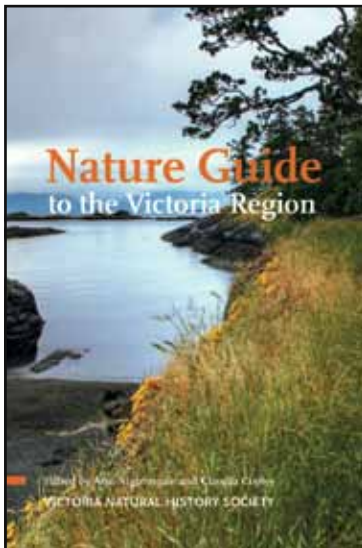
Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 17 new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our *Welcome* column:

Klaus Emmaneel
Darwin Avenue
birding/photography/wildlife sculptor

Lorne Daniel
Fairfield Road
nature walks

Murrough O'Brien
Hector Road
natural history, history, photography, hiking, kayaking



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Nature Guide to the Victoria Region

Edited by Ann Nightingale and Claudia Copley

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BULLETIN BOARD/CLASSIFIEDS

Year-round Tuesday Morning Birding Group

Meets Tuesday at 9:00 am at the foot of Bowker Avenue on the waterfront (off Beach Drive) in Oak Bay. Birding activities take place at various locations around Greater Victoria. For more information call Bill Dancer at 250-721-5273.

Year-round Saturday Morning Birding Group

Meets every Saturday morning - Call the Rare Bird Alert (250-704-2555) or check 'Rare Bird Alert' on the Thursday or Friday before to find out this week's location. Usually starting at 8:00 am. Goes rain or shine. For more details, call Rick at 250-885-2454 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca. Novice and experienced birders all welcome.

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

Most of you will be aware of the return of this show to the RBCM. Organized by the British Natural History Museum and the BBC Wildlife Magazine the show recently opened. What increases the enjoyment of the photos are the captions which give background: the person who took the picture, how he or she took it, a little about the subject and finally some technical info – type of camera, lens aperture etc. The show is arranged in different categories including age – young people 10 and under, 11-14, etc. In addition there are many subject categories, from birds, amphibians, underwater animals, etc to landscapes, plus a section of black and white images, and an experimental section. For example, in the age group 10 and under there is a picture taken by a youngster who sat 5 days with his Dad in a

hide shooting the cranes. To be admired are both the youngster and his dedicated Dad. Another striking image comes from our Great Bear Rainforest showing a Kermode bear. It was shot from one metre away. This genre of photography is not for the faint of heart! The show will run until April 2013.

Rocky Point Bird Observatory

Beginning Birding: This classroom and field based course is a great introduction to birding for people new to the area or people interested in learning more about birds. We have one evening class and 6 Saturday morning field trips, each at a different location. Tentative Dates: Spring 2013. Visit <http://rpbo.org/> for more information.

Beyond Beginning Birding: Wondering which one of those darn warblers is singing? Beyond Beginning Birding is a great field-based course to help you develop your birding ear and identify those tricky species. This course is offered during 8 Sunday morning classes and led by a new leader(s) at different birding hotspots throughout Victoria. Tentative Dates: Spring 2013. Visit <http://rpbo.org/> for more information.

Introductory Bird Banding and Monitoring: An intensive weekend where you learn how to extract and band birds safely. Other aspects of running a banding station are taught as well. Dates TBA (mid-March). Visit <http://rpbo.org/> for more information.

BCNature – Backyard Birdwatchers Wanted!

If you feed birds in your yard each winter, why not turn your hobby into research that supports bird conservation? By joining Project FeederWatch and sharing information about which birds visit your feeders between November and April, you can help scientists at Bird Studies Canada and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology track changes in bird numbers and movements. Project FeederWatch begins on November 10 and runs until early April. Taking part is easy! Just count the numbers and kinds of birds at your feeders, and enter the information on the FeederWatch website (or on printed forms). Last season, 2,565 Canadians participated, and another 13,000 people in the US. For only \$35.00, your participation would be gratefully accepted! For more information – Visit the “Explore Data” section of the FeederWatch website <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>

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 Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary at 7:30 pm); **Natural History Night:** the second Tuesday at 7:30 pm, University of Victoria; **Botany Night:** the third Tuesday, 7:30 pm, Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House; **Birders’ Night:** the fourth Wednesday, 7:30 pm, University of Victoria. **Marine Night:** the last Monday, 7:30 pm, 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.

Members! Remember that if you want to do a talk or know someone who might, please contact one of the talk night coordinators. Many of you do interesting things either for fun or for work, and it would be great to share. Contacts: Birder’s Night and Natural History Night – Christina Ball; Marine Night – Phil Lambert; Botany Night – NOTE CHANGE: contacts for Botany Night are now Kristen and James Miskelly. Email /phone numbers on p.2 of the newsletter.

JANUARY

Saturday, January 5

SATURDAY MORNING BIRDING

Meets every Saturday morning at 8 am. Call the Rare Bird Alert (250-704-2555) or check the Rare Bird Alert <http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/rarebird.html> on the Thursday/Friday before for this week’s location. For details, call **Rick** at 250-885-2452 or email **Agnes** at thelynns@shaw.ca. Novice & experienced birders welcome.

Tuesday, January 8

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP

Meet Tuesday at 9:00 am at the foot of Bowker Avenue on the waterfront (off Beach drive) in Oak Bay. For more information call **Bill Dancer** at 250-721-5273.

Tuesday, January 8

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION

Spain: Rocks, Romans and Rioja in the Geological Heart of the Pangea Supercontinent

Between 300 and 400 million years ago, Earth’s continents coalesced into one supercontinent, Pangea. What is now Spain lay at the heart of that supercontinent, and the geology of Spain provides us with a record of the monumental continental collisions that give birth to Pangea and the faulting and oceanic inundation that attended its subsequent demise. This geological heritage shaped the history of Spain. Rome colonized Spain in order to gain access to the rich gold deposits formed during the continental collisions that formed Pangea. The Romans brought with them their wine culture that survives to this day, most notably in the highlands of Rioja. Mercury mined from deposits that characterized Pangea was carried to the New World to aid Spanish gold mining in the Americas. Join **Dr. Stephen Johnston** for this talk on how Spain is at the geological heart of Pangea and is an ongoing testament to the significance of the geological history of the crust beneath us. Meet at 7:30 pm Room 159 Fraser building, UVic. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee mug.

Saturday, January 12

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Saanichton Bay Park

The VNHS Saturday Birding Group goes to Saanichton Bay Park. This is a birding hot-spot for wintering waterfowl so we should see loons, grebes, diving ducks and dabbling ducks. It is also good for passerines. Meet 8:00 am at the parking lot off Mount Newton Cross Rd just past the four way stop with Lochside Drive. Watch for the small sign. No pets please. Call **Rick** at (250) 885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information. Everyone welcome!

Sunday, January 13

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Common Mosses of the Victoria Area

Our trip leader **Kem Luther** has stated that if we learn just 20 of the common mosses in the area, we will have covered about 95% of the total number of mosses in the Victoria area. Kem will show us most of the 20 at Thetis Lake Park to get us started. Meet at the main parking lot at 1:00 pm. Take the Colwood exit off the Trans-Canada Highway and follow the Old Island Highway for a short distance. Turn right at traffic light at Six Mile Road just before the bridge. Continue on this road when it goes under the highway to the Thetis Lake Park parking lot. Parking is free in January. Dress for the weather. Bring a snack and a drink. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca or 721-0634 for more information.

Tuesday, January 15

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP

For details, see January 8.

Tuesday, January 15

BOTANY NIGHT

Herbaria and the Role of Natural History Collections

Erica Wheeler, Botany Collections Manager at the Royal B.C. Museum, will discuss the role and importance of plant collections in conservation and basic botanical research. Meet at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House, 7:30 pm. Everyone welcome.

Saturday, January 19

SATURDAY MORNING BIRDING

For details, see January 5.

Tuesday, January 22

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP

For details, see January 8.

Wednesday, January 23

BIRDERS NIGHT

Birding Adventure in Colombia

Colombia boasts more bird species than any other country – almost 1900! Join **Andrew Harcombe** as he recounts a recent birding adventure to this biologically diverse region. The trip included six Fundacion ProAves reserves, each filled with unique flora and fauna, including more than 40 endemic bird species. Andrew will show images of a full range of what was seen (birds, insects, flowers and more). Come prepared to be inspired to go to Colombia on your next vacation. Meet at 7:30 pm Rm 159 Fraser building, UVic. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee mug.

Saturday, January 26

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Saxe Point and Macaulay Point Parks

The VNHS Saturday Birding Group goes to Saxe Point Park & Macaulay Point Park. Meet 8:00 am in parking lot at the end of the road in Saxe Point Park. To reach the park, turn south off Esquimalt Rd onto Fraser St (ends in the park). We can enjoy the ocean birds as well as some tucked away close to shore in protected water. There are also some good bush birds and often we see the resident Cooper's Hawk. Macaulay Point is more open and surprises there have included Spotted Sandpiper and a Meadowlark even at this time of year. The challenge is to find the California Quail hiding in thickets, and it is a known hangout for an American Kestrel but no guarantees. Dress for the weather (the breeze off the ocean can be chilly). No pets please. Call **Rick** at (250) 885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information. Everyone welcome!

Monday, January 28

MARINE NIGHT

More than Just a Pretty Beach: Beaches as Critical Fish Habitats

Ramona C. de Graaf is a forage fish specialist and Executive Director of the Coastal Conservation Institute of BC. Her talk highlights the spawning ecology of three critical forage fish: herring, surf smelt and Pacific sand lance. She will discuss their role in the near shore marine ecosystem and their importance to marine predators within coastal BC waters. All three of these species spawn within metres of where we live and play. Ramona will also introduce a very important marine conservation project that is taking place in your back yards! Meet at 7:30 pm Rm 159 Fraser building, UVic. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee mug.

Tuesday, January 29

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP

For details, see January 8.

FEBRUARY

Saturday, February 2

SATURDAY MORNING BIRDING

For details, see January 5.

Sunday, February 3

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Walk on the Wild Side

Beacon Hill Park is known for its cultivated gardens and exotic trees and shrubs but the best kept secret is the diverse native areas that have been preserved. We can observe Garry oaks in rare deep soils as well as sparse rocky areas, some Douglas-fir forest, a black cottonwood stand in a boggy area and other native plants that have persisted, tucked in around the edges of the cultivated areas. Of course we can identify the exotics if that interests you as we traverse the park. The emphasis will be on trees and shrubs at this time of year and, surprisingly, the list of native species is quite long. And we won't ignore the many birds in the park on our walk. Meet 10:00 am at the parking lot next to the Petting Zoo. Bring a snack and a drink. No pets please. Dress warmly. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Tuesday, February 5

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP

For details see January 8.

Saturday, February 9

SATURDAY MORNING BIRDING

For details, see January 5.

Sunday, February 10

EVENT

Valentine Couples Birdathon

The **Anderson Trophy** will be the target prize of birding couples competing in the 16th annual Valentine Couples Birdathon. The duet of spouses or sweethearts who manage to find the greatest number of bird species between 6:00 am and noon in the Victoria checklist area can look forward to having their names inscribed on the Anderson Trophy. This is a fun event open to birder couples of all skill levels. You can drive, ride or walk. 'Greenhorn' birders are particularly encouraged to join in the merriment. Couples will gather at the Swan Lake Nature Centre immediately after 12 noon to seek glory for their triumphs and/or pity for their missteps. Apart from fun, participants can take satisfaction at doing something good too - the \$10-per-couple entry fee goes to supporting VNHS conservation efforts. For more information contact

Alan MacLeod at bigadore@gmail.com.

Tuesday, February 12

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP

For details, see January 8.

Tuesday, February 12

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION

Small mouths lead to big problems? Non-native smallmouth bass in BC lakes

The impacts of introduced non-native smallmouth bass in BC lakes remains undefined, however the species' life history and ecology suggest they have the potential to cause serious disturbance. Understanding how smallmouth bass interact with native species, especially salmonids, in lakes throughout BC is a prerequisite to identifying high-risk habitats warranting active smallmouth bass control. **Martina Beck**'s project in Okanagan lakes hopes to tease out the trophic relationships between smallmouth bass and native species. Meet at 7:30 pm Rm 159 Fraser building, UVic. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee mug.

Saturday, February 16

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Boundary Bay and Raptors

Join us for a trip to Boundary Bay in Vancouver. We can expect to see large flocks of wintering waterfowl and shorebirds as well as visit some of the best wintering habitat for raptors in western Canada. There should be time for a quick trip to Reifel Bird Sanctuary as well. Participants will carpool from in front of the Elk-Beaver Lake Regional Park Sign on Elk Lake Drive at 5:45 am for the 7:00 am ferry sailing. We will return on the 5:00 pm sailing. Cost approx. \$60.00 per person with carpooling. Bring lunch and a drink. No pets please. Dress for the weather (it is windy on the dyke). Call **Rick** at (250) 885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca to register.

Tuesday, February 19

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP

For details, see January 8.

Tuesday, February 19

BOTANY NIGHT

Ancient Vegetation of southern Vancouver Island

Pollen preserved in sediments can tell us a lot about past ecosystems. **Kristen Miskelly** has been studying pollen deposited during the last ice age, a time when southern Vancouver Island was a mosaic of tundra and subalpine-like communities. Join Kristen for a description of her findings. Meet at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House, 7:30 pm. Everyone welcome.

Saturday, February 23

SATURDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP

For details, see January 5.

Sunday, February 24

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

The Winter Hummers of Cadboro Bay

Join **Dave and Agnes Lynn** in their garden in Cadboro Bay from 8:00 am to 10:00 am to check out the Anna's Hummingbirds that stay all winter. We will have special guest Cam Finlay to tell you about his banding of hummingbirds over the past few years as well. See what encourages them to hang around. You will also learn about their food plants, both native and non-native. There should be lots of hummers around. The males might still be doing their aerial shows although the females should be on their nests by then. Address is 3913 Woodhaven Terrace, off Tudor Ave in Ten Mile Point. No pets please. Dress warmly. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Monday, February 25

MARINE NIGHT

A Journey to the Remote Pacific: Diverse and Threatened Coral Reef Ecosystems

Dr. Julia Baum, assistant professor in the Department of Biology at the University of Victoria, has journeyed to the remote central Pacific, to discover the incredible beauty of the Republic of Kiribati's coral reefs and the challenges facing this island nation. Coral reefs are the ocean's most diverse ecosystems but also the most threatened. Her research focuses on understanding how anthropogenic disturbances, from exploitation to climate change, affect marine populations, and what the broader consequences of these changes are for marine community structure and function. Meet at 7:30 pm Rm 159 Fraser building, UVic. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee mug.

Tuesday, February 26

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP

For details, see January 8.

Wednesday, February 27

BIRDERS NIGHT

The Sexy Female: Is Bright Egg Colour Sexually Selected?

Much of the amazing natural variety of ornamentation in birds is shaped by sexual selection. Although most research has focused on the effect of female preference on flashy male ornamentation, male preference also has the potential to shape colorful female traits such as plumage and egg colour. The results of a field study on Mountain Bluebirds of the Caribou Plateau are the topic of this presentation by UNBC graduate student **Jeannine Randall**. Join Jeannine as she discusses her research on the influence of bright egg colour on male investment in breeding attempts. Meet at 7:30 pm Rm 159 Fraser building, UVic. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee mug.



One of the 25 plus Brown Pelicans on Pely Island in the Inner Harbour. *Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy*