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The Victoria NATURALIST

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SUBMISSIONS

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Send to: Gail Harcombe

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[Subject: VNHS newsletter submission]

Guidelines for Submissions

Members are encouraged to submit articles, field trip reports, natural history notes, book reviews, etc., up to 2000 words. Please note: If you are concerned about protecting your privacy when submitting an item, please notify the editors at the time of your submission and indicate whether or not you wish to use a pseudonym or have your name withheld.

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 300 dpi for all sizes is requested.

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Front cover photo: Scaly vase chanterelle (*Gomphus floccosus*). Found in an old growth forest just outside the Cowichan Lake forest research station. The species has been misidentified for a golden chanterelle, *Cantharellus formosus*. *Gomphus floccosus* will generally cause some degree of stomach upset if eaten. Photo taken October 25-26, during SVIMS's Annual Foray. Photo: James Holkko

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Happy New Year to you all! Hard to believe it is 2015...2014 was so full of great events and experiences, it flew by. Every new year brings changes, and this one is no exception.

First, a thank you to Ken Sohm, who is stepping down as co-editor of *The Naturalist*. The many hours he spent editing and proofreading drafts of our newsletter helped make it the “good read” it has been over the past years.

Second, another thank you—this one to Frances Hunter, who has been our graphic designer for close to 20 years! Over all those years, Frances has adjusted to different editors and changing technologies, always with patience and often humour, so is owed a BIG thank you (I am glad to say she is not actually retiring completely...she is simply putting her considerable talents into other projects, primarily design and layout for small book publishing).

The third change is that although we are losing Frances, we are gaining a new, very accomplished designer—welcome to Patrice Snopkowski, a talented graphic designer with many years of experience. She will be a great addition to our “publishing team”.

More firsts for the new year include my “discovery” of some more of the amazing photographers we have in VNHS...if I could, I would have published a 30 page newsletter this issue. I had so many beautiful photographs to choose from when we were putting together the articles like the Reifel Refuge/Boundary Bay and whale watching trips, not to mention the SVIM article, it was hard to limit the number. I hope you enjoy the ones in this issue...they make it almost as good as being on the trips...almost...

So “Thank you” to the photographers for this issue, and a request to all of you to think about submitting photos (and stories) for publication in our newsletter. I cannot promise to print everything, but I will give it a good try.

Wishing you all a new year filled with great experiences and adventures in natural history!

Gail Harcombe



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Message from the Board

Over the last many months, a dedicated group of people have been working on a new design and updating content for the Society's website. One area requiring attention is the *Society Constitution and Bylaws*, and the board is recommending some changes. These changes will be voted upon as a Special Resolution by the general membership at the VNHS Annual General Meeting in March 2015. The proposed changes are shown to the right on page five. Only those bylaws for which a change is proposed are included. All others remain unchanged.

We suggest that if you plan to attend the AGM and vote on these changes, please study them and keep them handy for the AGM. (The current Constitution and Bylaws are on our website at www.vicnhs.bc.ca/bylaws.html#constitution).

The words/passages in the CURRENT bylaws to be revised are in bold. Corresponding proposed changes are in bold and italic. (See page 5)

Other business: In late fall, we held a number of 'donation book sales' to reduce a large quantity of volumes that had accumulated. These were relatively successful, in that many books found their way into members' hands that are likely to appreciate the reading. The proceeds of the sales will be going to one of our sister organizations.

Fall events: Our field trip organizer, Agnes Lynn, reports that the November outings were quite varied and successful. In addition to a trip to Port Angeles, there were two mycology trips, a marine trip, and many birding outings. The two events on Nov 22 were especially noteworthy: the birding trip to Boundary Bay registered 98 species, including birds seen in Active Pass (see article on page 9); the Beach Seine yielded not only a considerable number of species, but also a remarkably large number of participants (see page 17). Thanks to all the team leaders and to our trip organizer. We have also had a great series of talks since September, and thanks to all who dedicated their time and expertise to these. The best thing is we have another series of talks to look forward to, in addition to the ongoing field trips.

Finally, please pay attention to the new Field Trip Guidelines (see page 6). One of the major changes is that all members will be asked to complete a annual Waiver; we ask everyone to do this, understanding that for those who don't plan on going on any trips it will just be a formality.

On behalf of the board of directors, we wish you all a happy and healthy New Year!

Ken Sohm

VNHS Proposed Bylaw Changes

The words/passages in the CURRENT bylaws to be revised are in **bold**. Corresponding proposed changes are in *bold and italic*.

CURRENT:

1.01 Classes of Membership

There shall be **six classes** of membership:

- (a) Individual - for any person 16 years of age or older;**
- (b) Family - for husband and wife and/or parent(s) and dependent children and each person shall be classed as an individual or junior member;**
- (c) Golden Age - For any person aged sixty-five or over;**
- (d) Junior - for any person under the age of 16 years who has paid the membership dues, and the dependent children within a family membership;**
- (e) Sustaining - for any person eligible for membership who pays a minimum of three times the annual dues based on the individual membership;**
- (f) Honorary Life - any person who has rendered outstanding service to the Society by increasing knowledge of and interest in natural history may be made an honorary life member.**

1.03 Rights and Obligations of Members

(a) A member may obtain from the Society a copy of the Constitution and Bylaws at a charge of no more than \$1.00.

...

(c) Every member 16 years of age or older shall have one vote at any regular or special meeting of the Society and shall be eligible to hold office in the Society.

...

1.04 Cessation of Membership and Expulsion

(a) Resignation: A member wishing to resign shall give notice in writing to the secretary.

3.06 Treasurer

The Treasurer shall ...

(e) submit an audited financial statement for the previous year and a proposed budget for the ensuing year at the Annual Meeting

...

5.04 Auditor

An auditor **shall** be appointed by the Society at the Annual Meeting held in each year...

PROPOSED:

1.01 Classes of Membership

There shall be *three* classes of membership:

- (a) Individual - for any person under 65 years of age;*
- (b) Family - for spouses and any dependent children under 18 years of age or related individuals living in the same household;*
- (c) Honorary Life - any person who has rendered outstanding service to the Society by increasing knowledge of and interest in natural history may be made an honorary life member.

NEW for 1.01

NOTE: Discounts to membership classes (a) and (b) will apply for students (any person under 18 years of age or enrolled as a student in a post-secondary institution) and seniors (any person aged sixty-five or over).

1.03 Rights and Obligations of Members

(a) A member may obtain from the Society a copy of the Constitution and Bylaws.

...

(c) Every member shall have one vote at any regular or special meeting of the Society and shall be eligible to hold office in the Society.

...

1.04 Cessation of Membership and Expulsion

(a) Resignation: A member wishing to resign shall give notice to the secretary, or cease payment of annual dues.

3.06 Treasurer

The Treasurer shall ...

(e) submit a board-approved financial statement for the previous year and a proposed budget for the ensuing year at the Annual Meeting

...

5.04 Auditor

An auditor *may* be appointed by the Society at the Annual Meeting held in each year...

NEW!



Victoria Natural History Society

FIELD TRIP GUIDELINES

November 2014

VNHS provides its members with a variety of field trips* covering a broad range of nature and natural history-related subjects. These trips are intended to be informative, practical, and enjoyable for participants, and are conducted with due regard to age and safety. Field trips are scheduled for most weekends throughout the year and occasionally on weekdays. Scheduling of more than one trip on any given date will be possible if the opportunity arises (ideally trips on the same day will be for different topic areas). A field trip may be suggested by members, program organizers (evening presentations), trip organizers, or trip leaders themselves.

**Field Trip is defined as every kind of outdoor activity arranged by the VNHS.*

Who Can Participate in Field Trips

Members - Field trips are available to all members on a first come, first served basis (no restriction on the number of trips per person). NOTE: For trips where advance registration is required, the “early bird gets the worm”.

Minors - A parent or official guardian of participants under 19 years of age must sign the ***Informed Consent/Assumption of Risk*** form on their behalf. Children under 15 must be accompanied by an adult.

Non-members - Non-members are welcome to join in these trips but are asked to limit their participation to three events, after which they will be requested to join the Society (**Honour system**).

Informed Consent/Assumption of Risk and Release of Liability/Waiver of Claims

*VNHS has liability insurance through BC Nature with SBC Insurance Agencies Ltd. (underwritten by Lloyds) to protect members, trip leaders, organizers and volunteers against lawsuits from third parties. This liability policy covers legal liability for bodily injury to or damage to property of others, including participants in club activities. **All participants must sign the Informed Consent/Assumption of Risk and Release of Liability/Waiver of Claims form in order to be covered by the Society insurance.***

Current Members – sign the Consent/Release of Liability form when they renew their annual membership (forms are valid for one year from date of signing).

New Members – sign the Consent/Release of Liability form when they join the society.

Non-Members – sign the Consent/Release of Liability form at the start of each trip (**non-members self-identify** – leaders are not responsible for enforcing this).

Carpooling

- Participants are responsible for arranging their own transport.
- It is suggested that passengers offer the driver reimbursement for gas, particularly on trips outside the CRD area involving car-pooling. **The amount of reimbursement to be at the driver’s discretion.**

Notification for Field Trips

Notice is given by:

- the printed/PDF newsletter (members only)
- the calendar on the VNHS website www.vicnhs.bc.ca
- Twitter and other media

NEW!

Field Trip Coordinator

- **is the link between the Board and the Society's members, Leader Liaison, and Leaders**
- accepts submissions for field trips/events and checks to ensure no conflicts (while ensuring maximum choice is available). More than one trip per date is possible.
- works with members and Leader Liaison in soliciting new leaders/trips
- provides newsletter editor with the list of **confirmed** trips for inclusion in the newsletter calendar, the VNHS website, and other media.

Leader Liaison

- can be the trip leader or person who contacts potential leaders
- submits topic, description, date, time and leader for field trip to Field Trip Coordinator for approval as long as possible before the intended trip, ideally 2-3 months. Once approved, Leader Liaison confirms with leader.
- notifies members through various media, augmenting information in the VNHS newsletter and website.

Field Trip Leader

On the day of the field trip, the safety of participants will be handled by the field trip leader.

The Field Trip Leader

- can change or cancel a field trip based on judgment of the weather or any other relevant factors.
- can limit the number of participants if doing so enhances the enjoyment of those who attend.
- meets at the designated time/location prepared to answer questions. Provides any "props" appropriate to the topic if desired.
- requests that all participants sign the "**Participant**" list (based on honour system – **leader is not responsible for enforcing this**). Field Trip Leader may designate someone to do this on his/her behalf.
- explains about liability waivers at the beginning of each trip (Field Trip Leader may designate someone to do this on his/her behalf):
 - describes the importance of the Informed Consent/Assumption of Risks and Release of Liability and asks that **non-members** sign the Consent/Release of Liability form (based on honour system – **leader is not responsible for enforcing this**). Leader should have a supply of blank forms and pens/pencils. Forms collected to be submitted to the VNHS Secretary at a mutually agreed upon time and place (not necessary to submit after every trip).
- is prepared with a plan of action to be taken in the event of an injury to a participant. Most trips are uneventful, but it is best to be prepared.
- ensures a basic First Aid kit is available (this does NOT imply that the leader has medical/1st Aid training).
- as much as possible, makes sure that in large groups, all participants are present before starting talk.
- encourages everyone to provide feedback on the trips to Field Trip Coordinator.
- NOTE: Trip leaders are not to solicit or accept remuneration. If there are donations, they are considered as donations to the Society.

Tips for Participants

- **No Pets Please!** Due to allergy concerns and potential for damage to participants and the environment.
- Choose clothing that is sufficient for the weather expected - consider the weather in the trip area – and wear footwear suitable to the terrain/level of difficulty.
- Bring a snack or light lunch and plenty to drink (bring more food and water than you think you'll need).
- Remember to "leave nothing but footprints".
- **On trips to the United States**, a valid passport or an enhanced driver's licence is now required. It is advisable to have extended medical insurance as the BC Medical plan covers only a small portion of most medical costs in the US. For information on travel to the United States, see <http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel>

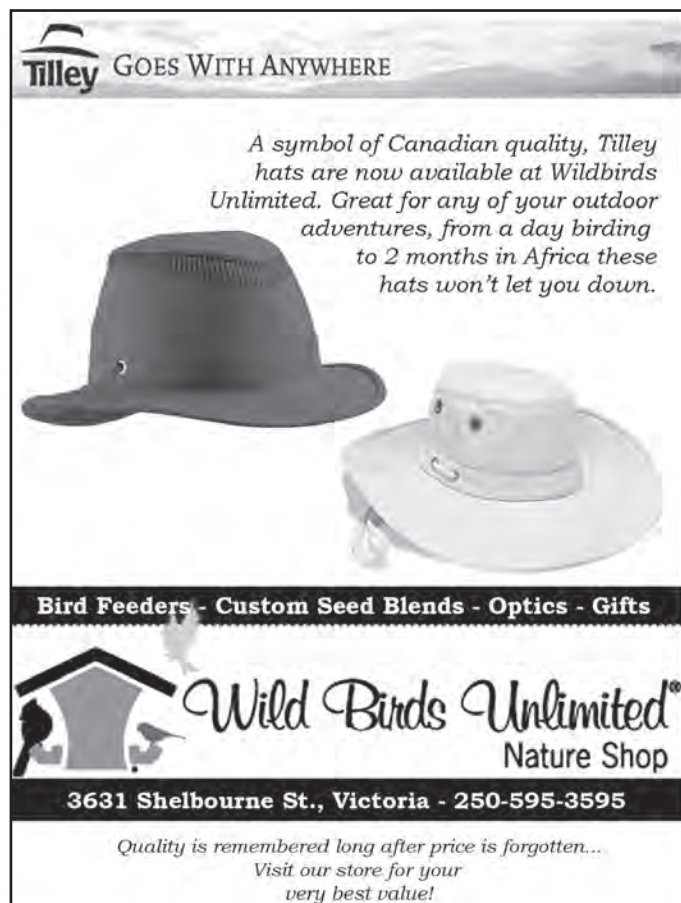
VNHS Awards: Call for Nominations

VNHS members contribute to the Society in many ways: writing articles for the Naturalist; leading field trips; or serving on the board or committees. Some go out of their way to ensure 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 Honorary 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, 2015.

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
 2013 John Henigman, Jeremy Tatum



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VNHS Honorary Life Members

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



Dunlin flock seen from Boundary Bay dike.

VNHS Trip to Reifel Refuge and Boundary Bay

By Andrew Harcombe

The annual fall VNHS trip to the Lower Mainland on November 22 was described by some as “the best one yet”. Sixteen members embarked on B.C. Ferries on what was predicted to be a wet and cold outing. Instead, to the delight of the birders, we were greeted by blue sky and sunshine. As soon as we left the main highway and meandered our way over agricultural fields towards Westham Island, raptors (hawks, falcons and eagles) started appearing. An early highlight was terrific views of a Rough-legged Hawk, both in flight and perched. Bald Eagles seemed to be everywhere. After viewing a number of Ring-necked Pheasants brilliantly glowing in a field, the group arrived at Reifel Refuge. Reports of a Harris’s Sparrow proved to be correct; we were able to see him posing on both the ground and in a tree. That was followed by a roosting Northern Saw-whet Owl and a shy Great-horned Owl. A diversity of waterfowl included displaying Hooded Mergansers, Wood Ducks that competed with the pheasants for brightest colour, and thousands of Snow Geese along the estuarine shore. We examined all Cedar Waxwings looking for the reported Bohemian Waxwing, without luck. Overhead, we saw Sandhill Cranes, Trumpeter Swans and a Peregrine Falcon. After leaving the Refuge, we headed towards Surrey in search of a reported Gyrfalcon. Although a distant bird could not be confirmed as our target, we did find three Tundra Swans in a larger flock of Trumpeters. We ended the outing at Boundary Bay, where we were delighted to see lots of Northern Harriers, a Short-eared Owl, and several Western Meadowlarks. Enormous flocks of shorebirds over the bay were identified as Dunlin and Black-bellied Plovers. A total of 98 species were recorded for the trip list; the weather combined with great birding created a very success field trip.



Photos from Reifel Refuge. Top Left: Black-crowned Night Heron. Top Right: Harris’s Sparrow. Middle: Hooded Merganser males displaying. Lower: Sandhill Crane group.
All Photos: Aziza Cooper

Birding Stress Without Distress

How to search for rarities without driving yourself crazy

By Aziza Cooper

Photos by author

To the hard-core birders who are keen for more ticks on their lists and the beginners who don't know yet what they're getting into.

First, there's no way to avoid disappointment if you're looking for rare birds. Rare birds are rare. They are rarely seen, and they are rarely cooperative enough to wait for you to see them. For every rarity that obligingly poses in the open, a hundred will offer a brief look, then hide deep in the woods or fly away to parts unknown. And a wonderful bird that some local hotspot reports may be seen by dozens or it may vanish instantly. Wild birds are not under human control, and when your happiness depends on the uncontrollable, it's a set-up for great disappointment. So the aim is not to get birds to cooperate—it's to change attitudes and expectations to prevent the major stress when you miss a sighting.

Your local bird checklist offers an enticing list of birds, and a beginner eagerly treats it as a promise of great birds to be seen. But read the fine print: in your area, Rare means seen most years, but not every year, and not by every person; Vagrant means seen more than five times in the last hundred years; and Accidental means seen less than five times, period. Rare birds may take years to appear in your area, and there's no guarantee you will be out in the field and looking in their direction when they show up.



Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*).

Birding is a sport of diminishing returns. You start by observing all the common, fairly common and most of the uncommon birds in your area. This can take a couple of months or a couple of years, and you get used to the thrill of seeing a new species quite regularly. But after the easy

species are ticked off, to keep adding to your list you need to see the rare, vagrant and accidentals. List-driven birding is setting yourself up for disappointment.

Sense of humour? What's that when the lust for list totals has you in its grip? When you've waited years, missed a bird multiple times in the past, and then hear, "It was here five minutes ago", can you smile and even fake amused tolerance of yet another disappointment? Birding is character-building, or character-destroying.

Can you balance the ecstasy of being the first finder of some fabulous rarity with the misery of all the misses you undoubtedly will have to endure? If not, either give up birding for rarities, or make the major effort to focus your expectations differently.

Take it easy! Enjoy the birds, not your lists of them. Make it your daily goal to notice behaviour you never noticed before; to see features of colour and feather new every day; to delight in bird interactions; to admire swallows, hawks or gulls in graceful flight; to see the humour in crows' and ravens' cheekiness. Bird study is just as rewarding as bird listing, and far more controllable. The returns in pleasure and satisfaction are steady, and the disappointments minimal. Get the most out of every day you're outside, looking at and listening to the daily miracles abounding around you.

Treat rarities as a special bonus, something not expected, and enjoyed all the more when you do see one. A miss is to be expected; a rarity sighting is the exception.

So, with that in mind, here are a few tips to help you look for rarities.

Know your birds!

From the checklist, go to the field guides. Look carefully at shape, colour, size and any behaviour notes. Look at the bird shown in flight, and especially check the "Similar Species" entry. Roger Tory Peterson's books have a pointer system to show at a glance what to look for to identify a bird quickly. Otherwise, read the description, matching it with the pictures. Use several different guides—it's interesting how they can differ! David Sibley's books are very detailed, but overwhelming at first. Learning the birds is a long process, and a great challenge to memory skills. The National Geographic field guides are aimed at listers, with pictures of rarities not shown by Sibley or Peterson.



Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*).

- What does the bird sound like? Use Xeno-Canto website, or recordings of birds to become familiar with their calls and songs. A sound can be the first sign of a rarity
- What habitat does the rarity like? Forest, grassland, shore, mountain? In each habitat, know which rarities might occur.
- Where has it been seen before? Waterfowl rarities sometimes take the same wrong turn for several years in a row. The Emperor Goose of the early '90's returned three years in a row, and an American Black Duck has wintered in Beacon Hill Park for the last two years.
- Timing is critical. Southern strays might come north in spring; Asian migrants might get off-course and show up here in late summer or fall. The southward hawk and passerine migration could bring unexpected strays. Look at the checklist to see what month the dots are in.
- Bad weather could bring good birds. Check beaches after (or during) storms for shorebirds, and look offshore for storm-driven pelagic species. The morning after a spring storm, look on hilltops for tired passerines resting after a hard night fighting a headwind.

Bird often!

The more you are out in the field, the greater are your chances of seeing the unusual. And the more practice you get, the better your skills are and the greater your familiarity with I.D.

Try patch birding: find a convenient place with good habitat, and visit it often. Get to know the local resident birds. Make them your friends and family, and observe everything

you can about them. If a new bird shows up, you'll know right away by its unfamiliar call, behaviour or appearance.

Get connected with birders!

We have a very active local community of bird-seekers, and many are equipped with cell phones, and willing to share their sightings. Find a rare bird, tell everyone via phone and internet, and they may do the same for you. The more eyes are out there, the more likely someone will find the mega-tick you want, and that you'll be able to see it. Let other birders know your cell phone number, and take theirs.

Four other suggestions

One: Broaden your nature observations to include more than birds. Butterflies can be a rewarding study, and botany is a vast field. Flowers are colourful and graceful, and plants don't fly away before you can get a good look at them. Geology and marine biology are both fascinating, and so is every other aspect of nature. College extension courses in these fields could lead you to a world of wonders.

Two: Travel! A new location will put you in a position to see local, common birds which you've never seen before. The listing thrill will receive a wonderful boost. But be aware that once you've seen the new locals, you're back in the same place of seeking rarities.

Phoebe Snetzinger (see her book "Birding on Borrowed Time") inherited a fortune and became the top world lister for a while, but most people don't have the money to bird the world. And world birding burns jet fuel. Give the environment a break—bird local!

Three: Photography for I.D. Take pictures, no matter what quality, to confirm a sighting, or to ask for help and confirmation of identification. A recognizable image of a rarity enables others to see what you saw. Some organizations, such as the American Birding Association, refuse to accept a sighting without a photo or video, no matter how many observers agree on the i.d.

Bird photography for enjoyment or for a photo list can be wonderful or difficult. The joy of getting a good picture of a bird is great, but the disappointment can be just as much as missing a sighting.

Four: Volunteer! If you like to work outside and want the satisfaction of helping the environment, get in touch with eco-restoration groups such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT), and the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team (GOERT). These groups have many projects, have wonderful people to work with and would be glad of your help. This is also great physical exercise. I've had a great time out there!

To repeat the core message: Lighten up! Don't let your happiness depend on seeing a particular bird. Enjoy birds, birding and nature. There is bountiful joy in nature to be found any day, every day.

Comments? Observations? Suggestions? Email Aziza at skylarkbc123 AT gmail.com

SVIMS 20th Anniversary

by Agnes Lynn



Swan Lake Mushroom Show. Photo: Agnes Lynn

Some of you may not know that SVIMS stands for South Vancouver Island Mycological Society. Basically they are a bunch of “fun guys” that have hung out together for 20 years to learn about mushrooms. I knew very little about mushrooms until recently but constantly get asked about them while doing botany and even birding trips, so I decided to join this fascinating bunch of people. It is true that a number of the members are only interested in learning about edible mushrooms, but there is also a very knowledgeable group who want to study all mushrooms. Members are a mix of professional mycologists and hobbyists. They have regular evening presentations throughout the year as well as forays into the woods in the fall during our “second spring” when the mushrooms are plentiful. They also go out at other times of year to see what’s out there—at snow melt time in the upper elevations or in the spring to chase morels.

We are lucky that long-time VNHS members Adolf and Oluna Ceska have given up studying vascular plants and now concentrate on mushrooms. Oluna is the instigator and Adolf is now her able assistant and no longer will he discuss plants! As an example of her dedication to fungi, she has done a study on Observatory Hill over the last 10 years, and has documented almost 1300 mushrooms. We are fortunate that she also comes out on forays with club members and is a great one to learn from. We also have several other specialists that take us out, including Kem Luther, Shannon Berch, Richard Winder, Andy MacKinnon, Ian Gibson, Juliet Pendray. These

experts and other members emphasize how important it is to know your mushrooms well before eating any found in the wild. There are too many look-a-likes that may fool you and make you very ill. Hints such as cooking all the mushrooms well and only eating one new one at a time are just examples of learning safe mushrooming. Usually more incidents are reported with people getting lost in the woods rather than eating unsafe mushrooms, so we get helpful tips on that, too.

Monthly meetings are extremely informative and sometimes get quite technical, which is good for us. The recent meeting had great information on how mushrooms are grown. We have a local source of kits to grow your own Shiitake or Tree Oyster mushrooms if that is something you might be interested in.

One of the crazy things about mushrooms is how many names one fungus can have. The names seem to be updated on a monthly basis! Much worse than plants ever were for changes! Best field guide is the small book “All that the Rain Promises and More” by David Aurora. One that Oluna likes is “Mushrooms of the Pacific Northwest” by Trudell & Ammirati. The big “Mushroom Demystified”, again by Aurora, is considered the best reference for this area.

A favourite weekend for me is every October when we go to Lake Cowichan. We stay at the BC Forest Research Station, complete with cabins and good camp food. We go up Friday night so we can get up early to go foraging. We spend Saturday in the woods and collect specimens to further study

and identify. No one dares to complain if it rains because we sure wouldn't have many mushrooms to look at without those heavy fall rains. We spend the evening sorting and categorizing them. The experts do their best to identify them for us, sometimes resorting to the microscope for assistance. We usually find over 100 different species. By morning, we are ready for a 'walk-through'. One of the experts will go around the table and tell us highlights of the most interesting finds. Then we pack up and head for home with some people taking diversions to areas known to have edibles. After all, it is Chanterelle season.

On the week after that, at the end of October, we have our Annual Show at Swan Lake Nature House. All the members go out to see what they can find on Saturday. Late in the day, they start bringing them in and the experts spend the evening identifying them. In a typical year, they will have over 200 mushrooms on display. Sunday is show day and hundreds of people come to the Show. They are welcome to bring any mushroom that they want identified, and several experts spend the day helping members of the public learn more about mushrooms.

It's a busy fall season with so many opportunities to learn about those amazing mushrooms. There are Myco-blitzes at Metchosin, Manning Park, Whistler and other places where collecting and identifying takes place time and again, so eventually most of the easy ones are remembered. Kem Luther keeps track of all the mycological events taking place in the area, including some up-island. He usually lists about 40 local events on the web at www.metchosinbiodiversity.com/mushrooms if you are interested.

The members do take time out to socialize as well. Their potluck that happens in January is called, in jest, the Survivors Banquet, and many mushroom dishes are sampled. They also have a special Chinese dinner at a local restaurant where almost every dish contains mushrooms. And they finish off the year with a potluck in June called the President's Picnic. Those members sure know how to cook. The food is fantastic.

If you might like to learn more about mushrooms, consider joining SVIMS. Check their web site at www.svims.ca.



Top: Fly amanita (*Amanita muscaria*).
Photo: James Holkko

Middle: Which one can I eat?
(Labels are coloured red, yellow, and green...red indicating edibility).
Photo: Agnes Lynn

Bottom: *Gymnopilus sapineus*
(sometimes called Scaly Rustgill).
Photo: James Holkko



Rocky Point Bird Observatory Field Season—Year End Recap

By Acacia Spencer-Hills



Well, that was fun! Another Migration and Nocturnal Monitoring Season has come and gone at Rocky Point Bird Observatory, and both our Rocky Point and Pedder Bay sites reported good numbers. How good you ask? Well here goes...

Rocky Point Site

2694 new birds banded in 2014, which includes 65 species and forms.

Top five species banded include Ruby-Crowned Kinglet (226), Wilson's Warbler (198), Pacific-Slope Flycatcher (172), Yellow Warbler (143), and Golden-Crowned Kinglet (130). 55 birds of 18 species were re-trapped (banded 2013 or earlier), with the oldest being a Bewick's Wren originally banded in 2008, and the most interesting being a Pacific Wren banded in Olympia, WA in the spring of this year. New species banding record at Rocky Point was a Grey-Cheeked Thrush.

Northern Saw-Whet Owl Monitoring:

681 new owls banded this year at Rocky Point.

Top Observed Species at Rocky Point:

Turkey Vulture (6052), Band-Tailed Pigeon (5993), and Rhinoceros Auklet (5930).

Cool/new species observed:

Smith's Longspur, nesting Bullock's Oriole family.

Pedder Bay Site

3074 new birds banded in 2014, which includes 64 species and forms.

Top five species banded include Fox Sparrow (267), Wilson's Warbler (211), Puget Sound White-Crowned Sparrow (209), Swainson's Thrush (176), and Song Sparrow (169). 90 birds of 20 species were re-trapped (banded 2013 or earlier). New species banding records at Pedder Bay includes a Brewer's Sparrow and a Black-Throated Blue Warbler.

Northern Saw-Whet Owl Monitoring:

482 new owls banded this year at Pedder Bay (not too shabby for our first full owl monitoring season at this site!).

Top Observed Species at Pedder Bay:

American Robin (2535), Chestnut-Backed Chickadee (2380), and California Quail (2296)

Cool/new species observed:

Lewis' Woodpecker, American Redstart

A HUGE thank you goes out to all our members (many of whom are VNHS members as well) and volunteers this year—we really could not have achieved such a great season without them!

And a reminder to keep an eye on our Facebook page (lots of nice pictures from this season), website, and blog (rpbo2014.blogspot.ca) for updates and upcoming events. Cheers!

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VNHS Whale Watching Trip

By Jim Cosgrove, with contributions from Aziza Cooper

Sunday October 19th saw fifty VNHS members, family and friends aboard Springtide Whale Watching's covered 61-foot boat, MARAUDER IV. Off the dock just after 0900, the vessel moved out of Victoria Harbour on its way to an area to the east and south of Race Rocks. The captain had already received information that the resident Orca had moved down into Puget Sound and were beyond the range of the MARAUDER IV so now the focus was on locating some humpback whales, with a secondary target being Minke whales. We lucked out with the weather, which was clear and sunny with hardly any wind, meaning calm seas, excellent viewing and no spray splashing on the foredeck even at top speed.

We left the Ogden Point Breakwater and had a fast trip out to Constance Bank, east of Race Rocks. Constance Bank is an underwater plateau providing a good foraging area for Humpbacks which prefer to feed in shallow seas. We encountered hundreds of birds—all the usual suspects although there were still a few Herrmann's Gulls amongst all the Glaucous-winged and Mew gulls. We saw many of the expected bird species, but nothing unusual. Common Murres were plentiful for the whole trip and a few Rhinoceros Auklets were near the harbour mouth.

Passing Constance Bank and heading toward the US/CANADA border, we sighted the first of the seven humpbacks that we were to observe in our 3-hour trip. With only one other whale-watching boat in the area, we were able to wait on a calm sea while the whale was underwater.



Above Left/Right: Humpback Whale diving. Photos: Rick Woolley
Inset below: Common Murre.
Photo: Aziza Cooper

We knew the animal was there because we had seen the T-shaped spout from several miles away.

Humpback whales are a medium-sized whale, with females reaching a length of about 60 feet (14 metres) and males smaller, about 40 feet (12 metres). Females can reach weights of up to 40 tons and males are lighter at 25 tons.

In the Salish Sea, we commonly find three species of baleen whale: humpback (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), gray (*Eschrichtius robustus*) and Minke (*Balaenoptera acutrostrata*). Only the Minke lives here all year, while the humpback and gray are both migratory and are here in our spring, summer and fall to feed. Both the humpback and gray return to the warm waters of Mexico and Hawaii to mate and give birth to their calves. There are other baleen whales in our area, including the Sei and Fin whales, but those are rare on the east side of Vancouver Island.

Eventually our humpback surfaced and we were able to approach to the minimum 100 metres distance permitted in Canada. We watched the animal as it did shallow dives, surfacing every 30-60 seconds to breathe. After four or five shallow dives, the whale had exhaled all of the carbon dioxide that had built up on its previous dive and loaded its blood and muscles with oxygen. At that point we saw why this whale is called a humpback. As the whale started into its dive, we saw the back arch strongly and then the huge flukes (tail) came out of the water to help power the whale into the depths where it would feed.

Because the weather was amazingly mild for October, it was not a hardship for us to wait the 8-12 minutes for the whale to surface after each dive. The boat offered excellent views from all angles, so everyone was able to keep a lookout for the tell-tale spout to tell us that the whale had come to the surface again. Actually, the boat was very roomy and comfortable with lots of seating and a big cabin (which we hardly

used because the weather was so good). There were padded seats in rows on the foredeck and the afterdeck with shelter and hot drinks in the cabin. A few people watched from high up on the bridge next to the captain.

In addition to the captain at the helm, we had a naturalist on both the foredeck and the afterdeck. VNHS member Jim Cosgrove was our guide on the foredeck and was lavish with very detailed and interesting information on the whales, sea lions and seals. Jim also spent some time inside the cabin when we were running to talk more about and show photographs of the animals that we were seeing. Non-stop fascinating dialogue!

Humpbacks come to the temperate waters of B.C. and Alaska in the spring, and will stay until the fall. While they are in our waters, their only interest is in feeding. They need to put on tons of weight in the form of a thick layer of fat (blubber) underneath their skin because when they return to the warm southern waters they will have very little food available to them. Humpbacks feed on a variety of invertebrates and fish but will also take birds that are too slow in getting out of the way.

Humpbacks are found throughout the world and some populations, such as our northern humpbacks, have developed a unique way of fishing. One or sometime several animals will coordinate a dive to several hundred feet in depth. The whale(s) then travel in a circle and while they travel, they slowly exhale a steady stream of air bubbles that flows to the surface. Air bubbles underwater make noises as they ascend and this causes the prey items to crowd together in the center of the circle of bubbles. Once the circle (bubble net) is complete, the whale(s) swim vertically up the center of the net with their mouth(s) wide open and scoop up all of the organisms.

While bubble net fishing is seldom seen in the Salish Sea, we may see another method of fishing that is also unique to humpbacks. Humpbacks have huge pectoral fins that are about 1/3 the length of their bodies. If a school of fish is close to the surface of the water then the whale may pound its pectoral fin on the surface to stun the fish. The whale then swings around and scoops up the stunned fish in a movement called lunge feeding.

Each humpback can be identified by the unique pattern on the underside of its fluke. This method of identification requires that photographs taken from directly behind the whale as it dives (sounds) be collected and catalogued and then shared with other researchers so that individual animals can be tracked and documented throughout their lives. Scars are also diagnostic features and sometimes are much easier to see.

Humpbacks are, for unknown reasons, one of the most active of the baleen whales with breaching being fairly common and breathtaking to watch. Over the course of the next two hours, we were able to get photos of flukes as the whales sounded, and we could see the differences between them.

We finished our trip by visiting Race Rocks. Here we were able to see two species of sea lions (Steller's and California) and two species of true seals (elephant and harbour).

California Sea Lions are smaller and darker than the tawny-coloured Northern or Steller's sea lions. Steller's bulls are huge and could be seen towering over the smaller females. Their voices are different. Steller's roar like lions, while the California's voice is the familiar 'ark, ark' of the circus 'seal'.



Top: Whale and watchers. *Photo: James Bardy*
Middle: Race Rocks. *Photo: Gwen Greenwood*
Lower: California (small and dark) on the left, Steller's (Northern) (larger and brown) in the centre. *Photo: Aziza Cooper*

Both roars and barks carried across the water to our boat.

We also saw a pair of Bald Eagles and five Harlequin Ducks there. Black Turnstones were heard calling from the rocks. Brandt's Cormorants were roosting on the rocks and on a marker buoy. Birders searched eagerly, but with no success, for the Brown Pelicans reported recently. A later trip the same day had better luck, with two adult pelicans seen on Race Rocks at 5 pm. As we traveled back to Victoria, several Common Loons flew by past the boat. An interesting mixed flock of Surf Scoters, a murre and two cormorants passed us on the return trip, and six Bonaparte's Gulls flew off to the west. We had a total of 26 bird species for the trip.

Lots of good questions were asked and answered by the time we docked. A great day on the water!

Discovering Marine Diversity

By Melissa Frey, Royal BC Museum

The ocean is renowned for its spectacular diversity: endless shapes, brilliant colours, extraordinary species and some of the most magnificent environments on the planet—indeed, the ocean supports a great diversity of life and ecosystems¹. To date, more than 5000 species of marine invertebrates have been recorded from British Columbia alone. Many more remain undocumented or even undescribed. Fortunately our understanding and appreciation of this species richness improves significantly as we continue to explore the ocean.

From deep sea...

In 2004, a single clam specimen was collected just offshore from Quatsino Sound, Vancouver Island at approximately 1000 meters depth. The clam eventually made its way from Fisheries and Oceans Canada to the Royal BC Museum, where it awaited further discovery.

In 2011, the specimen caught my attention. The clam seemed quite unusual, with unique scalloping along the edge of its shell. Additional inquiry revealed that the shell didn't resemble any described species living on this coast or afar, suggesting this one-of-a-kind specimen represented a distinct species, new to science. However, with only one specimen in hand, we wanted to examine additional features to ensure that the shell wasn't just oddly deformed. Graham Oliver, a colleague from the National Museum of Wales, was able to confirm distinct anatomical features, including differences in gill structure.

Finally in 2014 (10 years after being brought to surface), we formally described and named the species *Ascetoaxinus quatsinoensis*, a tribute to both its shell shape and its home². The species is a member of a group called thyasirid clams. Its gills are consistent with those found in other chemosynthetic thyasirids, suggesting that this species may harbour symbiotic bacteria that convert chemicals (e.g., sulfides) into food for the clam. But other than this, we know very little about its biology or natural history. Further exploration of deep sea environments hopefully will generate new findings.

To shallow reaches...

While much of the richness lies beneath the surface of the sea, sometimes (on rare and special occasions) we get



New clam species discovered in RBCM specimens—*Ascetoaxinus quatsinoensis*. Photo: Graham Oliver

to experience these hidden treasures first-hand. This past month, the Royal BC Museum and the Victoria Natural History Society co-hosted a public beach seine. More than 100 people, including several members of the Canadian Network for Ocean Education (CaNOE)³, turned out on a dark November night to participate in the “in-seine” event.

The plan was to seine over a nearby eelgrass bed, catching as many species of squishy (invertebrates) and fishy (fishes) as possible. Unfortunately for our beach seiners, a large amount of sea lettuce was present near shore, resulting in a very large shrimp-fish salad. Not to be deterred by a bit of leafy green, we carefully sifted through the seaweed, discovering a variety of fascinating animals, from tiny amphipods and shrimps to large dungeness crabs, various sculpins, and starry flounders. We explored, we learned, we connected.

Many thanks to Chris O'Connor and Gavin Hanke for help with organizing the event, Gavin Hanke and David Robichaud for braving cold November water, Nikki Wright for highlighting the importance of eelgrass beds, Yogi Carolsfeld, Phil Lambert, and Marilyn Lambert for sharing their expertise and passion for marine critters, Aerin Jacob for giving a positive shoutout, Heather Murray for photocapturing the in-seine diversity and fun, and the avid natural historians who turned out to participate in the event.

1 Ocean Literacy – The Essential Principles and Fundamental Concepts of Ocean Sciences for Learners of All Ages. <http://www.coexploration.org/oceanliteracy/documents/OceanLitChart.pdf>

2 Oliver, PG and MA Frey (2014) *Ascetoaxinus quatsinoensis* sp. et gen. nov. (Bivalvia: Thyasiroidea) from Vancouver Island, with notes on *Conchocele* Gabb, 1866, and *Channelaxinus* Valentich-Scott & Coan, 2012. *Zootaxa*, 3869 (4): 452–468. doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.3869.4.8

3 Canadian Network for Ocean Education (CaNOE). <http://oceanliteracy.ca/>



Beach seine adventure on a cold November night. Photo: Heather Murray

2015—Time for a Vancouver Island Big Year

by Ann Nightingale
<http://vibigyear.ca>

Definition: A big year. A year in which a birder seeks to find as many species of birds as possible in a designated geographic area, typically North America.

Big years are inspirational, foolish, challenging, frustrating and sometimes, amazingly satisfying. In 2013, Neil Hayward broke Sandy Komito's longstanding record with 747 species (plus three under consideration by records committees) found on his "accidental" big year. While scouting for his planned big year in 2014, Neil was doing so well that he changed his plans on the fly in March and made 2013 "his" year. Stepping into the 2014 big year gap, Dorian Anderson took on what many consider the ultimate challenge—a bicycle big year. As of November 30, Dorian has ridden his bike more than 16,000 miles (24,000 km) and has recorded an amazing 607 species while not using any kind of motorized transportation at all. In 2015, Noah Stryker will undertake the biggest year of them all—a worldwide big year. These feats of focus and stamina are huge personal accomplishments, but also bring attention to birds and conservation to the public.

A Vancouver Island Big Year!

My aspirations for 2015 are on a much smaller scale. Instead of a whole continent, I will focus on my home "turf", Vancouver Island. Despite having been born here and having lived in Victoria my whole life, and being grateful for that every day, I have not yet discovered much of this beautiful island. In 2015, that will change. In my quest for 275 species, I plan to spend time in many of the nooks and crannies of the island and surrounding waters.

According to eBird, the number of species reported in the last five years from the six regional districts—Mount Waddington, Strathcona-Comox, Alberni Valley, Nanaimo, Cowichan Valley, and Capital—has ranged from 276 to 296. There may have been a few species seen that didn't make the eBird list, but many of those counted were individual birds, sometimes only seen by one person. A target of 275 will mean some serious chasing of rarities, and hopefully, discovery of a few.

I will start my Vancouver Island Big Year on January 1, participating in the Duncan Christmas Bird Count, on a team lead by my birding mentor, Alan McLeod. This is an essential strategic move to appease the birding maven of the Cowichan Valley, Derrick Marven. I'll need his reports throughout the year! The zone I count in is not one of the high numbers areas, so I'll expect about 40 to 50 species on my first day. The next 10 days will be spent chasing known rarities on the island and then trying to get as many of the wintering species as I can before I head south for a birding festival.

Life happens

Yes, that's right, I'll be leaving the island during my big year. If you know me, you will know that I have many things going on in my life. While my VIBY birding will be a priority, it won't keep me from doing some of the other things I have committed to do or even just want to do. In that sense, it will be more like a Brad Harris big year than a Kenny Bostick big year (inside reference for fans of the movie). I expect that I will be off-island for up to 9 weeks in 2015, thankfully in short bursts. If I was to wait for a clear year, a big year of any sort would not be in the cards, ever!

Lists, lists, lists

Well, of course there will be lists—multiple. I will have an overall list, including the offshore waters and islands that surround Vancouver Island. It is this list that has the 275 species target. There will also be a list of birds that I see while my feet are firmly planted on Vancouver Island proper, and since I'm keeping lists, I will be diligent about my Victoria checklist area list. eBird will help me keep track of my "county" lists—one for each of the regional districts on Vancouver Island, and then there will be the dreaded "ones that got away" list.

Aspirations and goals

As I've mentioned, I hope to see 275 bird species as part of my Vancouver Island big year, but it's big for me for a couple of other reasons, too. It will be a year of discovery—of the island, of the birding community, and of myself. My plan is to spend a week a month away from my usual comfort zone, and that's bound to turn up something interesting!

I also hope to use this adventure to help raise awareness and support for Rocky Point Bird Observatory. Monitoring birds and providing critical population information for the last twenty years, RPBO has relied on tens of thousands of volunteer hours and private donations. RPBO is growing up and fulfilling its mandate for monitoring, research and public education in increasing ways every year, and that takes money as well as volunteer efforts. I hope that by finding some sponsors for my quest (which will be entirely self-funded), an organization that has become a huge part of my life will also benefit. More about how you can help is posted on my blog site, <http://vibigyear.ca>.

It's all about community!

A big year is a personal thing but it's not necessarily a solo thing. In these days of social media, cell phones, and digital photography, big years are becoming more and more collaborative. And so I invite you to join me, either online or periodically in person. I'll be using eBird to keep track of birds being posted, but I welcome your sightings as well. I will post where and when I'll be birding on many occasions, and there may be more, gadget-girl that I am—but I'll save that for another post. I'm looking forward to meeting some new birders and spending time with those who have travelled the birding roads with me in the past.

In summary

A Vancouver Island Big Year! Target: 275 species. Can I do it? Stay tuned!

Ten Years of Landowner Contact

By Adam Taylor, Executive Director, Habitat Acquisition Trust



Todd Carnahan, HAT Landowner Contact Program Leader.
Photo: Adam Taylor

For the past 10 years, Todd Carnahan has led HAT's landowner contact programs, such as our Good Neighbors program and Species at Risk outreach. Soon, Todd will be departing HAT for new home in the Cowichan Valley which has given me cause to reflect on the challenges and successes of landowner contact, and why we use it as a conservation tool in the first place.

The title "Landowner contact" is fairly descriptive. Through these programs, HAT meets with landowners in our region to help find ways to conserve or restore natural values on their land. As the vast majority of our land base is privately owned, and cost of buying land here is very high, these owners play a huge role maintaining the natural environment in Victoria.

For the past 10 years, Todd has been meeting with landowners interested in learning more about how to manage their land to benefit nature. He has met with landowners in Central Saanich's Tetayut Creek Watershed (also known as Sandhill Creek), to those around Bilston Creek in Metchosin; people with Sharp-tailed Snake, Western Painted Turtle, and Blue-grey Tailedropper habitat on their property (and habitat for many, many other species as well!), and found over 500 households willing to commit to being habitat stewards.

These Habitat Stewards are important for Victoria in several ways. First, and most obviously, they commit to being stewards of the land they care for. In turn, that stewardship will improve the quality of the creeks, streams, and other habitats in their watershed. Perhaps most important, they are ambassadors for

a different model of land care; one that respects and works with the natural environment. The more people recognize that their property can be beautiful, functional, and ecologically sustainable at the same time, the more our region and the wildlife that live here will benefit.

I believe this will be the legacy that Todd leaves HAT: a network of people who are more empowered to care for wildlife and sensitive ecosystems and a growing awareness that this can be accomplished with beautiful plants in delightful yards that invite owners to spend more time outside.

HAT intends to continue build on the work of Todd, and the other land owner contact specialists who came before him. By the time you read this, HAT will likely have a new Stewardship Coordinator, and I look forward to introducing her or him to you. But before I do, I would like to thank Todd for his commitment and passion for the environment, and for expressing that passion through HAT over the past 10 years.

Thanks Todd!

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Introductory Raptor Workshop

January 30–February 1, 2015



Bill Clark with an American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*).
Inset: Close view of an American Kestrel showing breast and facial markings. Photos: Ann Nightingale

The Rocky Point Bird Observatory is offering an introductory workshop on raptor identification. This workshop will be held at the University of Victoria, from January 30–February 1, 2015. This workshop will focus on raptor identification, monitoring procedures and techniques, sexing and ageing. Bill Clark, one of the world's foremost authorities on raptor identification and taxonomy, will be the primary instructor, assisted by several other licensed banders and instructors. Enrollment is limited to 20 participants. Workshop goes ahead rain or shine. In inclement weather, more time will be spent working with specimens.



Tentative Schedule (subject to change):

- Friday 7:30 pm – Public presentation on raptor migration at UVic in room 159 of the Fraser Building. Admission is by donation with a suggested amount of \$10. For those attending the workshop, this lecture is included in the workshop fee.
- Saturday 8:30 am – Full day workshop at UVic (room details TBA). We will be working in a lab with specimens from the RPBO specimen collection.

- Sunday 7:00 am – Ferry to Tsawassen. 9:15 am – Field trip to Boundary Bay.

The cost is \$160 per participant and includes instruction, classroom materials, raptor migration lecture, field trip* and membership to RPBO. Carpooling will be arranged for the field trip. *The cost of the 7 am ferry for the Boundary Bay field trip is not included in the workshop fee. Participants should plan on \$50–\$60 additional to cover ferry and shared transportation fee.

To register, please fill out the registration form at http://rpbo.org/raptor_workshop.php

Payment can be made through PayPal once you click the “Register now” button. Please e-mail RPBO at raptorworkshop@rpbo.org if you have any trouble or have any questions.

BULLETIN BOARD

Olympic Birdfest 2015

Discover birds of the coastal Pacific Northwest—guided field trips, boat cruise in Strait of Juan de Fuca, gala banquet. The festival with the most spectacular setting! Contact www.olympicbirdfest.org (See ad page 19).

Help Wanted For Wetland Surveys

The Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society is currently looking to restore a wetland on their property in Cobble Hill. More information can be found at <http://northwestwildlife.com/bird-and-wildlife-sanctuary/>. But before that work can be done, we would like to gather some baseline data about the site through biological surveys (bird, vegetation, amphibian, water quality, etc.). If you would be interested in helping us with these surveys, especially those of you with identification skills with birds, amphibians and wetland plants, please contact Carlo Acuña at cacuna26@yahoo.ca or Connel Bradwell, the educator based in Victoria, at islandeducator@northwestwildlife.com [N.B. Join us for a presentation on this topic Feb 10th at Natural History Night—see page 23 for description of presentation].

ANSWERS to Crossword on page 18, November/December 2014 newsletter:

ACROSS: 1. Mallard 2. Hummingbird 3. Heron 4. Screech 5. Crow 6. Junco 7. Gobbler 8. Bittern

DOWN: 9. Glaucous Wing 10. Rail 11. Grebe 12. Murre 13. Tern 14. Cob 15. Robin 16. Geese

Editors' Note: Answer to #6 DOWN was missing from earlier versions...tell us what YOU think it should be!

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 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. PLEASE NOTE: EVENT DETAILS ARE ACCURATE AT TIME OF PUBLICATION BUT CHECK THE WEBSITE FOR ANY CHANGES OR ADDITIONS.

Remember that if you want to do a talk or know someone who might, please contact one of the presentation night coordinators. If you have an idea for a field trip or wish to volunteer as a leader, please contact any board member. Contact information on p.2. Many of you do interesting things either for fun or for work, and it would be great to share!

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 or steeper grades, requiring agility. LEVEL 4 – Very steep, insecure footing, or longer hikes requiring good physical condition. **Please – no pets on VNHS field trips.**

NB. While evening presentations are open to the public, field trips are designed for members. Guests may join if invited by members for up to three trips, after which they are expected to join the Society.

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING

Meets every Tuesday at the foot of Bowker Ave on the waterfront (off Beach Drive) at 9:00 a.m., rain or shine. Birding activities take place at various locations around Greater Victoria. For more information call Bill Dancer at 250-721-5273. Novice and experienced VNHS members all welcome. Non-members can participate for up to three trips, after which they are expected to join the Society.

SATURDAY MORNING BIRDING

Meets every Saturday morning, usually at 8:00 a.m., rain or shine. Check on the Calendar page of the VNHS website (<http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/calendar.html>) on the Thursday/Friday before to find out the week's location. Novice and experienced VNHS members all welcome. Non-members can participate for up to three trips, after which they are expected to join the Society. For more details, contact Rick Schortinghuis at 250-885-2454 or Agnes Lynn at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634.

NB. For most of the field trips listed in the calendar, unless another name shows as contact person, email Agnes Lynn at thelynns at shaw.ca or phone 250-721-0634 for more information.

JANUARY

Thursday, January 1

Duncan Christmas Bird Count (see details in November/December issue)

Sunday, January 4

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2/3)

Mossy Maple Grove with Ancient Forest Alliance

This outing will NOT happen on this exact date. We are still in the process of determining when we will join the busy folks at Ancient Forest Alliance on a visit to this rare grove of centuries-old native Big Leaf Maples (*Acer macrophyllum*). This is a unique stand of trees near Lake Cowichan and includes hanging gardens of mosses, ferns and lichens that thrive on the calcium-rich bark of the trees. A salmon-bearing creek meanders through the area and we must be sensitive to the Elk which are easily scared as they wander through the area. The Ancient Forest Alliance hopes to obtain some protection for this enchanting rainforest of a different kind. See <https://www.ancientforestalliance.org/news-item.php?ID=820> for more details. If you have already contacted Agnes to get on the list for this trip, there is no need to do anything else but if you wish to be informed of when this trip will take place and other details, contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634.

Saturday, January 10

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Esquimalt Lagoon

The VNHS Saturday Birding Group will be going to Esquimalt Lagoon and surrounding area. It's a great area to get a good leg-up on your new Year List if you do one or to simply enjoy the amazing diversity of water birds and passerines that this area provides this early in the year. We have got counts in the 70s of species in past years. This trip will cover the ocean birds along the lagoon and will go into the fields back behind the lagoon to provide a variety of birds. Meet at 8:00 a.m. near the bridge. Esquimalt Lagoon is on Ocean Blvd, off the Old Island Highway. Call Rick at (250) 885-2454 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Tuesday, January 13

NATURAL HISTORY NIGHT

Wildlife 911: When Our Wild Neighbours Need Help (and When They Don't)

While enjoying the beautiful natural landscape of southern Vancouver Island – at the beach, in the forest, or even in your own backyard – opportunities for observing local wildlife abound. However, these encounters aren't always problem-free. Sometimes our wild neighbours need our help, becoming sick, injured, or

even orphaned as the result of an encounter with common urban dangers like windows, cats, or cars. It's not always easy to tell when intervention is needed, or how to safely help a wild animal in distress. Join **Heather Schmitt**, Assistant Manager of BC SPCA Wild ARC (Animal Rehabilitation Centre), as she shares some tips and tricks on common wildlife situations, and what community members can do to lend a hand. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser building. Free and everyone is welcome. Bring a friend!

Sunday, January 18

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Birding via Gulf Island Ferry

We are going to do a day trip on a Gulf Island Ferry and spend about 4 hours birding by boat. There are usually a lot of birds on the water at this time of year so we should get a good look at the water birds that we generally strain to see from land. We will leave on the 9:35 a.m. ferry and return to Swartz Bay at 1:15 p.m. The ferry will stop at Pender, Galiano, Mayne and again at Pender before returning to Swartz Bay. Bring a lunch as food services are minimal on the ferry. Don't forget your binoculars and dress warmly as we will be outside as much as possible. Fare is \$12.60 for a foot passenger. Call Rick at 250-885-2454 for more information. To confirm attendance, contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634.

Tuesday, January 20

BOTANY NIGHT

Plant treasures of the Olympic Mountains

Hans Roemer introduces us to the Olympics—a botanist's paradise. They hold virtually all the plant species found on Vancouver Island, plus many others for which in B.C., we would have to travel to the mainland mountains and beyond. In addition they are home to endemic plants that occur nowhere else and to 'disjunct' occurrences of species whose main distribution is located far away. This incredible richness is connected to the geological and glacial history, as well as to a large range of climatic conditions, from the wet west to the dry east slopes of the mountains. Meet at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Everyone welcome.

Saturday, January 24

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Saanichton Bay Park

The VNHS Saturday Birding Group will be going to Saanichton Bay Park. As this is a birding hot-spot for wintering waterfowl, we should see loons, grebes, diving ducks and dabbling ducks. It is also a good area for passerines. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the parking lot off Mount Newton Cross Rd just past the four way stop with Lochside Drive. Watch for the small sign. Call Rick at (250) 885-2454 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday, January 25

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 that 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 p.m. 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. Parking is free in January. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Monday, January 26

MARINE NIGHT

Latitude 70°, entering another world...

Adventurer **Françoise Gervais** will share some of her astonishing images of her last Arctic expedition. She tells a deeply personal story that brought her to navigate, dive and kayak where ice is born. Come join us to hear the incredible stories she was honoured to see, hear and capture in the frozen world of Greenland, Baffin Island and Labrador. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Tuesday, January 27

BIRDERS NIGHT

Return of the Raptors

Populations of raptors—hawks, eagles and falcons—were decimated by massive applications of pesticides in agriculture and in forestry in the decades following WW II. But their populations recovered after DDT was banned in the early 1970s, and nowadays they are a common sight, even in cities. Top predators like raptors have powerful effects on entire ecosystems, most famously illustrated by the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park in the 1990s. Analogously, raptors have effects much further-reaching than the relatively small number of prey they kill. For example, due to their power, speed and migratory habits, the influence of peregrines extends over entire continents, shaping the migratory patterns of many millions of birds. Their prey have had to adjust as peregrines returned to the landscape. In this talk **Dr. Ron Ydenberg** (SFU) will relate what we now understand about these effects. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Friday-Sunday, January 30-February 1

NON-VNHS EVENT

Raptor Identification Workshop

See page 20 for information.

FEBRUARY

Saturday, February, 7

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Saxe Point and Macaulay Point Parks

The VNHS Saturday Birding Group will be going to Saxe Point Park and Macaulay Point Park. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot at the end of the road in Saxe Point Park. To reach the park, turn south off Esquimalt Rd onto Fraser St which ends in the park. We can enjoy the ocean birds as well as some that are 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 the thickets, and it is a known hangout for an American Kestrel but no guarantees. Call Rick at (250) 885-2454 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Tuesday February 10

NATURAL HISTORY NIGHT

Wetland restoration Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society

Wetlands are not only havens of biodiversity and productivity, but they also protect against floods, cycle nutrients and remove contaminants from the water. Despite these values, wetland areas have decreased dramatically due to urbanization and agriculture.

Carlo Acuña will help us learn how the Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society is working to restore a degraded wetland on their Manley Farm property in Cobble Hill and how you can become involved in this important ecological endeavour. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser building. Free and everyone is welcome. Bring a friend!

Saturday February 14

EVENT

18th Annual Valentine Couples Birdathon!

Whether accomplished on foot, by bicycle or by car, the Valentine Birdathon always provides a terrific pretext for birder couples to spend a half-day outdoors in friendly competition with other birders. Fun is the principal objective of the exercise: participants aim to find as many species as possible in the Victoria Checklist Area in the hours between 6 a.m. and noon then gather at the Swan Lake Nature Centre immediately afterwards to swap stories about their great finds, unbelievable misses, et al. The couple with the biggest count gets to have their names inscribed on the revered Anderson Trophy. The admission fee is just \$10 per couple, the entire proceeds of which goes to supporting VNHS conservation efforts. Please note that this event is customarily held on a Sunday but this year it is set for Valentine's Day itself, Saturday, February 14. For a copy of the birdathon rules, an event checklist or more information, contact event organizer Alan MacLeod at bigadore@gmail.com.

Tuesday, February 17

BOTANY NIGHT

Travels with a Botanist in 2014:

The Okanagan and Boundary Regions

Terry McIntosh's talk will focus on his various searches for at risk plant species in the Okanagan and Boundary Regions in 2014. Ranging from the Gilpin Grasslands in the east to the Osoyoos West Bench and north to the receding lake shorelines near Kelowna, he will show lots of images from these travels...and include, of course, lots of stories along the way! Meet at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Everyone welcome.

Saturday, February 21

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

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. Bring a lunch and drinks as we will not be stopping for refreshments. Dress warmly as it can be windy near the water. We go rain or shine. Participants will carpool from in front of the Elk-Beaver Lake Regional Park Sign on Elk Lake Drive at 5:45 a.m. for the 7:00 a.m. ferry sailing. We plan to return on the 5:00 p.m. sailing. You must pre-register by contacting Agnes. First nine people to sign up have the option of coming in her van. Others to carpool by pre-arrangement. Cost to come in the van or carpool with others will be about \$65 for

the day from Victoria. Call Rick at (250) 885-2454 for more information and contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 to confirm attendance.

Sunday, February 22

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

The Winter Hummers of Cadboro Bay

Join **Dave and Agnes Lynn** in their garden in Cadboro Bay from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. to check out the Anna's Hummingbirds that stay all winter in the area. 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. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Monday, February 23

MARINE NIGHT

Squishy and Fishy: Marine Biodiversity in BC

Curators from the Royal BC Museum, **Melissa Frey** and **Gavin Hanke**, will highlight recent discoveries of invertebrates and fishes, as they provide an overview of marine biodiversity in British Columbia. Join us as we explore remote shorelines, isolated seamounts, and deep sea environments, and learn more about the spectacular species that call our marine waters home. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Wednesday, February 25

BIRDERS NIGHT

Parasites—More than Meets the Eye

The lives of parasites are intriguing, captivating, and often perturbing. While seldom seen, the impact they can have on their hosts is often nothing short of life-altering, and their contribution to ecosystem functioning is rarely appreciated. Parasites are not only able to infiltrate the defences of their hosts, but in some instances may even take control of their minds. Among the wide range of species that have adopted the wildly successful parasitic lifestyle, the parasitic worms, or helminths, present some of the most fascinating and diverse biologies. **Elsie Hampshire** of Vancouver Island University will introduce some of the most compelling aspects of parasite-host relationships, with a particular focus on the helminths of birds. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Saturday, February 28

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Birding Elk Lake and Beaver Lake

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** in this 10 km birding walk around Beaver and Elk Lake. Elk Lake is a great place to see Canvasbacks, Redheads and Ruddy Ducks in the winter. Meet at the main parking lot at Beaver Lake at 8:00 a.m. To reach this parking lot, turn on to Beaver Lake Road off Elk Lake Drive (parallels the Pat Bay Highway). There is a large Elk-Beaver Lake Regional Park sign at this intersection. Call Rick at (250) 885-2454 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.



Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) seen standing on the West Rocks at Race Rocks. Photo: Nick Page