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The Victoria NATURALIST

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[Subject: VNHS newsletter submission]

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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 300 dpi for all sizes is requested.

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Front cover photo:
Trumpeter Swans (*Cyanus buccinator*)
at Maber Flats. Photo: Ann Nightingale

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Apropos of nothing whatever...I wanted to mention a couple of interesting tidbits I read in recent weeks.

First, an introduced species that didn't quite make it in BC...Camels! Recently, camel bones were found in the B.C. Interior, and the story came to light about how, in 1862, 23 pack camels arrived in Victoria from San Francisco—it was believed that they would make excellent pack animals in the Cariboo gold rush. But the endeavor was plagued with problems and after a relatively short time, the “camel train” was retired for good. The camels either died or escaped, or were taken in at ranches, either as exotic pets or as working stock. The last known surviving camel died sometime between 1896 and 1905. So unlike species like European Starling or Scotch Broom (see story page 10), we haven't needed to devise ways to combat the spread of the species (although the number of Sasquatch sightings did increase after the camels escaped...).

Next, some potentially good news about White-Nose Syndrome. Many of you will have heard of the syndrome. It has only been in Canada for about five years, but has decimated bat populations (estimated more than 5 million bats in Canada and the U.S.). Back East, rapid population declines have resulted in several species of bats being added to lists of protected species, e.g., Nova Scotia's Little Brown Bat, Northern Long-eared Bat, and the Tri-coloured Bat. The fungus affects bats when they're hibernating, depleting the reserves they need to survive the winter. The good news? Scientists are hopeful that a common North American bacterium may inhibit the growth of the fungus that causes White-Nose Syndrome in bats. Results of field trials conducted in caves in Kentucky and Missouri showed that with the help of the bacterium, bats were able to survive. Much more research is needed to assess the efficacy of the bacterium and the effects on other cave-dwelling species, but it does seem to offer a ray of hope for at least slowing the spread of the fungus.

When you receive this newsletter, the “lazy, hazy days of summer” will have officially begun. Of course, the warm dry days in May and June have had many of us thinking summer began weeks ago! The start of summer brings a variety of opportunities for getting out and enjoying nature (check the calendar and bulletin board), and many of them could be an opportunity for learning more about some aspect of nature, but perhaps a bit of history? I hope you take the time to relax and enjoy the summer, but perhaps also to explore somewhere and some things that are new.

Gail Harcombe

Message from the Board

Why are you reading this?!!! Shouldn't you be outside? On a field trip? Watching the birds at your feeder? Harvesting zucchini? Just kidding, of course. But this time of year really is for outside, and the same is true of your board members—we are scattered all over the place and not having meetings. We often have an annual retreat, but this year we even took a break from that.

In case you missed it, Purnima Govindarajulu joined the board at our annual general meeting, and we have now also added Paige Erickson-McGee to the mix. Paige is a staffer at Habitat Acquisition Trust, so that will help our two organizations stay connected. She is also a member of a demographic seriously underrepresented in naturalists clubs: youth! We are looking forward to having both Purnima and Paige on the board and will remind you all yet again that we still have room for a couple more.

We have recently lost some members of the Society too. Donations have been coming in in memory of Morwyn Marshall, who had been a member of the VNHS since 1978. Morwyn volunteered with the mail-out of the newsletter for more than a decade. She and Tom Gillespie and Phyllis Henderson formed a formidable team. A long time

participant of the Tuesday birding group, she will be missed by many. Her book club even donated to us in her memory because she spoke to them of birds and birding so fondly.

We have also been receiving donations in memory of another member: Chris Broadbent. Chris was also an artist whose work will be remembered by Society members visiting the Goldstream art show: The Nature of Island Artists, among other exhibitions. Maybe Chris' exceptional landscapes even grace some of your homes.

Not everyone will have had the opportunity to meet Barry Gatten, but if you have met or heard of his son Jeremy, then you can be sure that Barry was an excellent mentor and created yet another curious naturalist through fatherhood. His good nature and kindness will be missed.

Although none of us can know everyone in a club as large as ours, what we all do know is that all these members also love being outside and in nature. So this message will end as it began: with instructions to get outside and appreciate nature. And if you would like to get to know one another better, then please attend the BBQ Social we host each year in conjunction with Hawkwatch, and introduce yourself – September 26th—RSVP by Sept 16 to Gail Harcombe (see ad below for details).



VNHS September Social Saturday, September 26, 3:00 p.m. following Hawk Watch You are invited!

Join CRD Parks and the Victoria Natural History Society for Hawk Watch and then join your fellow VNHS members for a BBQ get-together at Aylard Farm in East Sooke Park. Members are welcome to a free smokie (veggie option available), beverage, cake, and camaraderie! Bring a lawn chair.

To RSVP, email or phone Gail: 250-652-3508, g.harcombe@shaw.ca
before September 16, 2015

**A reply is only necessary if you plan to come.
Please specify number of smokies and whether regular or veggie.**

Maber Flats—Wetland on the Edge

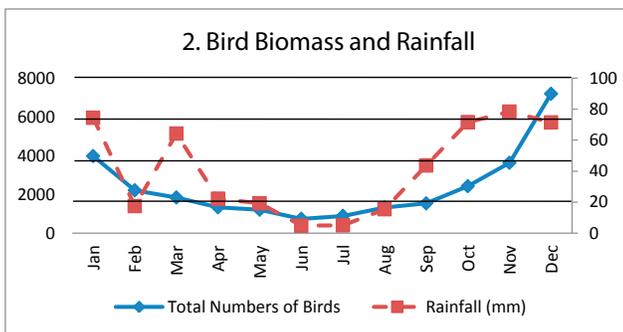
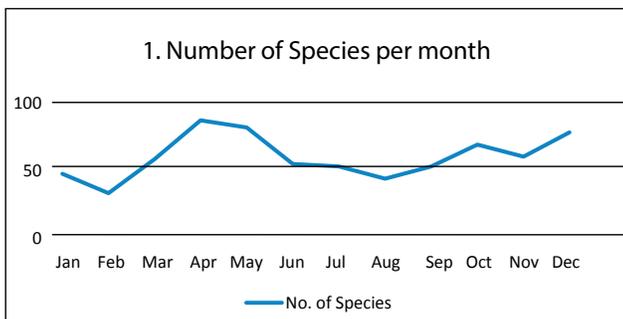
By Michael Simmons

Most Victoria area birders know Maber as a place with abundant waterfowl in winter and migrating shorebirds in spring and fall, e.g., the Long-billed Dowitchers (photo right). Water is the key. Whenever there is standing water on the flats, at any season, there are more birds and more species present.

In January 2014, a small group of us started a weekly census that still continues. Last year we found 115 species throughout the year¹, with peak numbers of species in spring and again in December (graph 1). Total numbers of birds sometimes exceed 7000 at any one time in winter (graph 2). Such a dramatic spectacle inspires us to continue our efforts to conserve the flats. Most of these winter birds are waterfowl, including American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Mallard, Green-winged Teal, and of course resident Canada



Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*).
Photo: Stuart Clarke



Goose and the magnificent Trumpeter Swans (photo by Ann Nightingale). Many birds of prey are attracted by these waterfowl, e.g., Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, and Red-tailed Hawks. Northern Harrier, American Kestrel and occasional rarities such as Rough-legged Hawk are attracted by the voles that concentrate on slightly higher ground to escape rising flood water. In the summer of 2012, it was the breeding Black-necked Stilts that caused the most excitement

amongst birders (see photo page 6). For a photo gallery of these and other birds see Stuart Clarke's photo gallery².

But the flats are changing and changing rapidly. The stilts nested in ideal habitat in 2012, when there was standing water until late in July. This year (2015), the flats are dry before the end of May. These changes in hydrology are the result of land use changes that dramatically affect the ecology of the flats.

The flats have always functioned to retain storm water. When originally surveyed in 1858³, the organic deposits in what is now known as Maber Flats extended over 120 ha (300 acres) (see map page 6). The surveyor's notes record, "an open cranberry marsh...with ground too wet and swampy to build a rock mound to mark a corner...[and]...transitions to cedar and brush swamp [on all sides]". When BC Hydro built the high voltage line on the south side of Maber, bore holes revealed peat more than 60 feet (18.3 m) deep. The peat can be seen where Stinky Ditch has been excavated on the south side of the flats (see map). It gleams with water even in the driest times of year. The Municipality of Central Saanich Resource Atlas⁴, created in 2000, includes a surficial geology map showing about 120 ha (300 acres) of organic deposits, defining the winter time flood area. The area of organic deposits very closely approximates the swampy areas shown on the 1858 survey. Also, the 100-year flood level, as calculated by the engineering consultants⁵, is very similar to the original boundary of the swamp.

At the time of European settlement, Maber was the only

2 <http://www.raincoastphoto.com/Other/Maber-Flats/>

3 South Saanich OM 1859. Digital copy obtained from Denis Coupland and Robert Thompson, BC Archives CM/B645

4 <http://www.centralesaanich.ca/Assets/Central+Saanich/Publications/CS+Resource+Atlas/Cover.pdf?method=1>

5 Worley Parsons, Integrated Stormwater Management Plan, District of Central Saanich, 2008. Accessed <http://www.centralesaanich.ca/Assets/Central+Saanich/District+Projects/ISMP+Revised+Draft+Report.pdf?method=1>

1 Data is stored in eBird, an online database of bird distribution and abundance. Ithaca, New York. <http://www.ebird.org>. Use Saanich-Maber Flats, or BC-Capital County.

raised peat bog in southern Vancouver Island. The raised peat was created by the restricted outflow of water from the lowland which is now the flats. The outflow of Graham Creek was at a much higher level than it is today. Water was almost certainly present year-round, and even after drainage and establishment of European-style agriculture, it was sometimes referred to as Maber's Lake or Maber's Swamp.

The draining of the swamp for farming is recorded in Saanich Ethnobotany. Nancy Turner and Richard Hebda⁶ report the reaction of Saanich people to the draining of Maber's Swamp—".. a huge, deep ditch was dug ... five little streams on the west side which brought life to the bay had gone dry ... this was the end of the place where the Saanich people gathered willow bark ... and cedar bark ... and medicines, herbs, berries and ducks .. and swamp reeds". They conclude that the swamp had supported, "a large lodgepole pine bog forest surrounded by swamp or sedge marsh with occurrences of hardhack, willow, Labrador-tea, bog cranberry and other species".

We know that peat of various depths, some of it very deep, exists under much of the flats. What is not obvious to many visitors to Maber is that the surface of the peat was probably about ten feet (3 m) above the present level of Willow Way⁷. Draining of the swamp by deepening the channel to Graham Creek in what is now Centennial Park immediately caused the drying peat to shrink in volume and be blown away.

After the initial drainage, the next large-scale change occurred in 1913, when the Interurban railroad—now Wallace Drive—was built on the north side of the flats. A spur line went south from Wallace to the gravel pit through the centre of the flats, and is now known as Willow Way. The northern parts of the swamp that were sliced off by the railroad later became the site for Stelly's School, part of which (3.5 ha) was eventually filled to create Stelly's School playing fields (see map). Lands to the east of the school are cultivated (6 ha) and to the west of the school are used for hay (13 ha).

The newly drained flats were easily worked farmland. The best known and most profitable crop was potatoes but this all came to a sudden stop in 1965 when the golden nematode was found in potato fields on the flats. The nematode probably had been responsible for failing potato crops during the previous few years. A quarantine was placed on the area prohibiting all potato growing except for personal use. In 1982 new regulations enforced the quarantine and still exist today. The name of the flats commemorates the farmer whose life was most impacted.

Farming the flats has never recovered from this disaster. Although other crops were grown the drainage infrastructure required was gradually lost on the lowest parts of the flats—east of Willow Way. Combined with increased run-off from upstream building, this portion of the flats has become water-logged for longer periods each year until it has become impossible to work the soil in time for spring planting. As the flats have become wetter for longer, the birdlife has become more and more interesting.



Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*).
Photo: Chantal Jacques

Land west of Willow Way is used for farming of various sorts; some is tile-drained and corn is grown, part has been excavated for a large pond and the excavated soil used to raise the land level nearby, and a section is now the polo field partially protected from flood water by berms to the east and north (see map).

Filling of the original swamp for farming purposes is currently underway on the east side of the flats, (see map for locations). A new house was recently built on the northeast side and a lot on the southeast side of the flats, on which a house may be built, was recently sold.

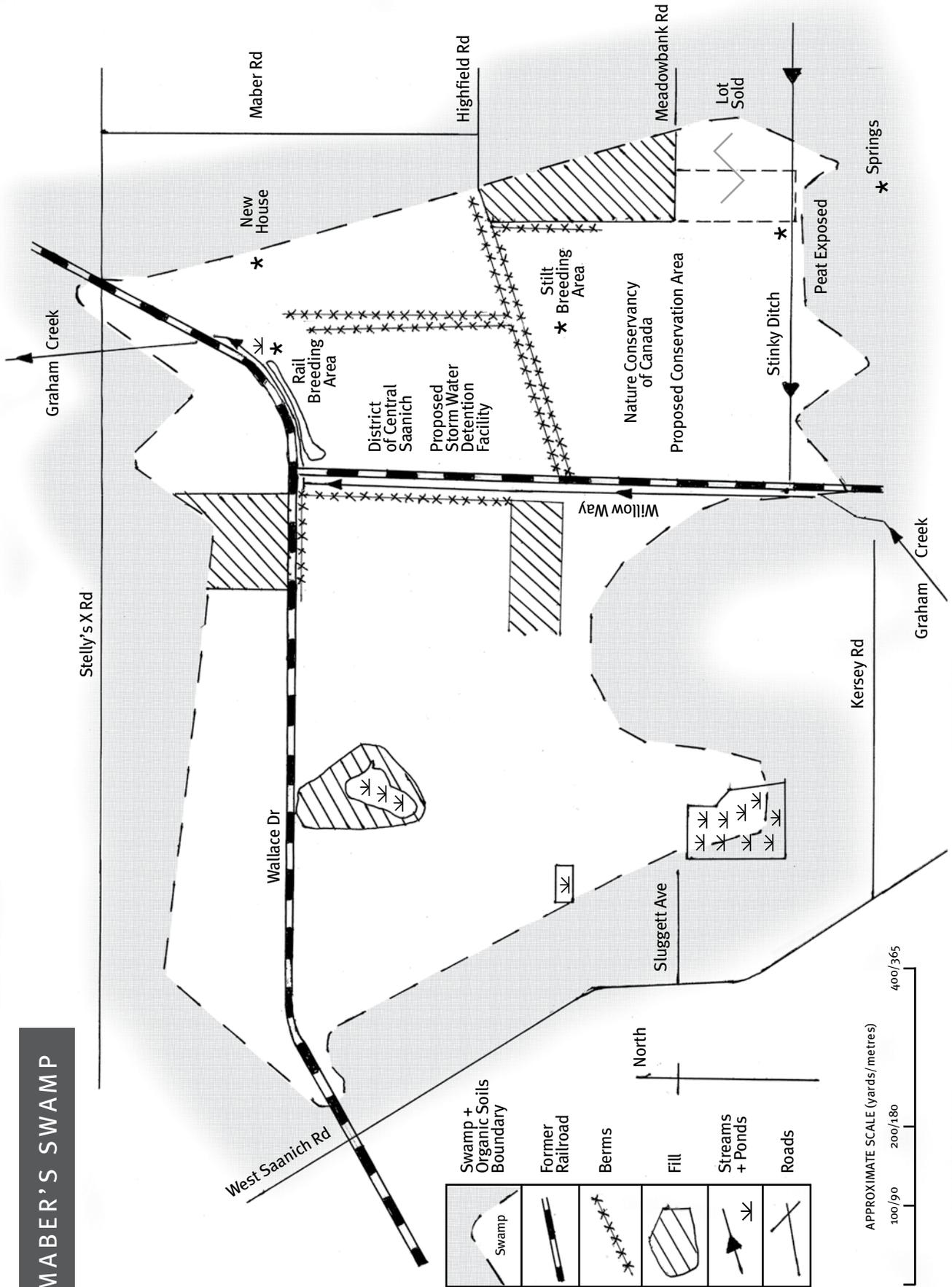
The only part of the original swamp that floods for long periods during most winters lies to the east of Willow Way. This is where most birds congregate and standing water persists the longest. What is now known as the flats receives flood water from Graham Creek every winter. It is about 25% of the original swamp area. This area of about 30-32 ha (75 – 80 acres) should be the focus of conservation attention if any useful habitat is to be retained.

Even in this area, there have been very significant changes recently, for both good and bad. In 2011, large berms were built across the flats (see map page 7). These berms impounded so much water that it remained until early August 2012, creating ideal stilt breeding habitat. This same breeding habitat was also successfully used by Sora (see photo page 7), Virginia Rail, Cinnamon Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Wood Duck, Spotted Sandpiper and Marsh Wren. But the next year, a large drain was constructed that prevented accumulation of this water.

6 Saanich Ethnobotany, Culturally Important Plants of the Saanich People, Royal BC Museum 2012

7 Robert Maxwell, Agrologist, Province of BC, pers. comm.

MABER'S SWAMP



As a result, this habitat no longer exists, but could easily be re-created by closing the drain.

Two proposals currently under discussion could significantly affect this core conservation area. The District of Central Saanich is proposing purchase of the northern section for an engineered storm water retention facility (to help alleviate seasonal flooding issues on the flats and downstream). For the southern section, in 2013, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) proposed a “Wetlands Restoration Initiative” to “... create a fully-functioning wetland and nature reserve...” (see map page 7).

The NCC initiative has stalled due to difficulties in acquiring funding. Many years ago the flats were subdivided into 2 ha (5 acre) lots, on each of which a house could theoretically be built. One lot has recently been sold, with the result that land values now reflect this potential use. In other words, this swamp land is now very expensive. The District has agreed to purchase 10 ha (25 acres) for a little more than \$1 million. If the other 22+ ha (55 acres) of the remaining useful habitat were included in a nature reserve, the purchase price of this remaining portion could be in excess of \$2 million.

The idea of “restoration” of the wetland needs some explanation. Restoration of hydrological conditions somewhat similar to those functioning at the time of European contact, and as mapped in 1859, would require peat to a depth of 3 m (10 feet) or so above the present land levels. Clearly this is an impossible ambition. But an ecologically-based engineering approach that would spread flood waters over much of the remaining flats [up to 32 ha (80 acres)] and retain the water for a significant period of time before drying the flats in late summer is feasible, and would require minimal operational management. The entire area could be managed as a Nature Park.



Sora (*Porzana carolina*). Photo: Cathy O'Connor



Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) flies above Maber Flats. Photo: Ann Nightingale

Flood water from the Graham Creek and Stinky Ditch watersheds can easily be redirected onto the flats (where most flood water has been directed in recent years). The moment flood waters extend onto the flats, large numbers of birds appear. Only during freezing do the birds leave, only to reappear as soon as a thaw occurs. These conditions are reflected in the huge numbers of birds shown in graph 2 in December and January. Retention of this flood water on the flats could be easily achieved with a simple adjustable weir. The area proposed would include the 10 ha (25 acres) being acquired by the District of Central Saanich, the 17+ ha (43 acres) originally proposed for purchase by the NCC, and perhaps include an additional +/- 4 ha (10 acres) in the adjacent northeast corner of the flats, totaling 30-32 ha (75 -80 acres). Shallow water spread over a large area of the flats would achieve the twin objectives of providing excellent habitat suitable for many species of birds and reducing flood damage downstream.

Why this article now? If the Maber wetland is to continue to provide habitat for large numbers of birds, the attention of our naturalist community is needed now. Decisions to be made soon by the District of Central Saanich and the NCC will determine irrevocably the future of this unique place. Naturalists need to be involved and engaged in these discussions before irrevocable decisions are made about this last remaining small section of the original Maber Swamp.

Great-horned Owls in a Unique Nest

By Agnes Lynn

Photos: Anon



(above) Mom on nest at end of March.

(below) Note nest construction and fat rat in nest in mid-April.



Watching the photographer at beginning of May.

About four years ago, Cam Finlay told us about a Great-horned Owl's nest near his house. We were lucky enough to watch those babes develop from little whitish-gray blobs to downy grey-brown owlets with black around their eyes. Their nest was probably a Red-tailed Hawk's abandoned nest or something similar. Great-horns don't usually build their own nest but find something like this rickety one or a hollow in a tree to use. Before the owlets fledged, they could be seen flapping their wings madly. Most birds need to do this to build up the muscles they will need when they finally take flight. Fortunately when their scraggly nest eventually fell down from all this action, they were old enough to sit on the branches nearby and be fed, even though they still could not fly. After this brood had successfully fledged, Cam and the owner of the property thought that they would try to build a substitute nest to encourage them to return the next year. Cam contacted a friend in Edmonton who had built substitute owl nests and Cam gave his plans to the owner. The nest basically looks like a crab trap—open on top and secured with 2 x 4's and wire mesh on the bottom. Joy and Cam finished it off by weaving twigs into the wire mesh. Then it was put up in the tree near where the first nest was originally. The owls showed little interest until this year when we got the word in late March that there was a Great-horned Owl sitting on the nest. She could be seen sitting there pretty well constantly, ignoring people coming and going right beneath the nest. When they figured there should be babies about mid-April, an arborist neighbour climbed a nearby tree and took photos of the three little ones in the nest when mom was away for a bit. We noted a fat rat in one of the pictures, so they were well fed. By the beginning of May, they were a good size and jumping about on nearby branches. It was great to see that all three made it that far. As I write this at the end of May, they have happily fledged and are hanging out somewhere in the neighbourhood. What will happen next year?!?



Starting to fledge at beginning of May.

Brr-oo-mm—boom, bust and echo

By Bryce Kendrick
Photos by author

Broom—Scotch Broom, *Cytisus scoparius*, to be exact—is one of the most invasive alien plants along the west coast of North America. If you doubt me, just try driving up-island or flying to or from San Francisco in April and May, when it is in full flower (there is no doubt it is beautiful—a golden shower on each bush). This “gift” from a Scottish sea captain near Sooke in the 19th century has done much more than take root here. It has basically taken over millions of acres of poor, open land, aided by the nitrogen-fixing bacterial nodules on its roots. Upon retiring from the University of Waterloo, I came to the Saanich Peninsula in 1994. I soon discovered the wonders of John Dean Provincial Park, but it was obvious that broom had completely taken over all the ‘grass balds’ or open meadows in the Park. The local cognoscenti told me that those meadows had originally been showcases of spring wild flowers such as spring gold, shooting star, satin flower, native buttercup, camas, sea blush and others.

With other members of the recently founded Friends of John Dean Park Society, I spent hundreds of hours over a period of almost 20 years clearing those meadows, and we now have the contamination down to a dull roar, as seeds from the seed bank



Old-growth broom cut at ground level.



Bryce with medium-sized plant.

germinate to produce small plants, which we can easily remove by hand.

With the sting taken out of the broom in Dean Park, I looked for other fields into which I might direct my energies. Not far from my home on Bazan Bay lies Island View Beach Park, and the neighbouring Tixen (pronounced ti-huan) nature reserve on the territory of the Tsawout First Nation at Cordova Spit. The CRD Park was heavily infested with broom of all ages up to what I began to call “Old growth”, and I set about cutting it down to as close to ground level as I could with my ratcheting loppers. Some of the plants were up to 4-5 metres tall, and had ‘trunks’ up to 5 cm thick. Over the following year, I managed to cut down most of the big plants, and to break two pairs of loppers. Fortunately, after the plants had been cut near ground level, most of them did not regenerate. I was worried that the protruding stumps might be a hazard, but I have found that after a year or so, they rot below ground level, and can easily be trodden down or broken off.

It’s very difficult and not terribly rewarding to spend one’s time searching for the baby plants, so I decided to shift my efforts to the adjoining Tixen reserve, where it was a major problem. A few broom bash days were organized by the Tsawout, and progress was made. But many hectares of broom-infested land remained. These I took on as a personal crusade. Throughout 2014, I spent a number of hours each week cutting the ‘old-growth’. Eventually, I managed to clear-cut a number of medium to large copses of 4-metre broom plants, and not long ago, I whacked the last area of flowering broom on the reserve.

Why does this matter? The Tixen Reserve is a rather complex and very unusual ecosystem, comprising areas of fairly mobile sand dunes sculpted by wind and tide, plus salt marsh and lagoon. A number of rare plants thrive there. It is a true delight to explore the reserve in May and June, and see these rarities in flower—the beach morning glory (*Calystegia soldanella*) with its delicate pink-and-white-striped trumpets and its spade-shaped, fleshy leaves; yellow sand verbena (*Abronia latifolia*) with its hemispherical heads of brilliant yellow blossoms, beach carrot (*Glehnia littoralis*), twisted-pod evening primrose (*Camissonia contorta*), grey beach peavine (*Lathyrus littoralis*), black knotweed (*Polygonum paronychia*), and fleshy Jaumea (*Jaumea carnosa*), plus millions of Hooker's onion (*Allium acuminatum*) and many others.

Last summer, while exploring for plants, we also found two nests of Common Nighthawks—mere scrapes in the sand—one with two eggs, and the other with two chicks. In both cases, the mother birds flew up as we approached, but settled only a few metres away and froze into what they hoped was invisibility. After photographing them from afar, we crept away. We had found another good reason to respect this unusual ecosystem.

With the broom beaten back, at least temporarily, I wondered how I could get a record of this event. I drove down to Michell's Airfield, where miniature planes are flown regularly. I was looking for someone with a quadcopter who could photograph the scene from above. Fortunately, the first person I spoke to did indeed have such a device and was willing to undertake the project. A day or so later he and I drove to the reserve and walked in to the scene of destruction. The 'copter was soon in the air and taking the necessary pictures. A movie is now on

Quadcopter shot of old-growth broom clearcut from air. Bryce is a small white dot.

YouTube at BryceKendrick1, and a still is reproduced below. My grateful thanks to Bob Jestico of IslandPhotoDrone.

Downwind from the main copse, there were numerous younger plants sitting like green cushions on the sand. The lopper was of no help in removing these because they arose from a thick, deep, central tap-root that was not accessible to the lopper blades. I looked for a suitable tool and eventually found the perfect solution—an antique grub hoe—on Used Victoria. \$12 and I was in business. One or a few energetic swings with the grub hoe dislodged or severed the root and the plant was history.

I recently saw on local TV that about 600 people are involved in Island-wide broom-busting. Too bad I didn't encounter any of them during my year-long odyssey. But then, perhaps it was more fun to do most of it myself.



Broom cut by grub hoe.



Misty Mossy Maples

By Don Kramer



(above)
Photo: TJ
Watts
(right)
Blue-listed
Pacific
sideband
snail
(*Monadenia
fidelus*).
Photo:
Pauline Davis

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On Sunday March 29, 33 members of the Society had a chance to visit a very special place with TJ Watt, one of the founders of the Ancient Forest Alliance (AFA). Dubbed the Mossy Maple Grove and the Mossy Maple Gallery, these adjacent sites, dominated by bigleaf maple, *Acer macrophyllum*, are the only deciduous old-growth forests to be highlighted by the AFA. Driving up-Island through heavy, intermittent showers to the rendezvous point in Lake Cowichan, we wondered how much of the forest we would be able to see. But, by the time we had eaten our lunch and traveled west over a series of logging roads, the rain had stopped, and we had a splendid time exploring the massive trees and understory vegetation, at the intersection of two roaring, bankfull streams. The maples were just starting to flower, in contrast to full bloom around Victoria. The open canopy let us appreciate the huge burdens of moss



(above) Photo: Mikhail Belikov
(left) *Marasmius* sp. Photo: Pauline Davis
(lower) Juvenile banana slug (*Ariolimax columbianus*).
Photo: Pauline Davis



and ferns covering the branches, especially of the largest and oldest trees. The forest floor, criss-crossed by the paths of Roosevelt elk and festooned with their droppings, was just starting to show flowers with a few white trillium and the leaves of pink fawn lilies. As we arrived, TJ asked us if we could document all of the species that we could see, so we quickly started scribbling notes and taking photos of leaves for later identification. Although it was really too early in the season to do a proper job, participants made a good start. One interesting discovery was a blue-listed Pacific sideband snail. VNHS members greatly appreciated their introduction to this place and the efforts of AFA to protect such vulnerable old-growth forests. TJ, in turn, expressed his appreciation to VNHS for its financial support of AFA and its contribution to documenting the biodiversity of the Mossy Maples.



*Mossy Maple Grove and the Mossy Maple Gallery dominated by bigleaf maple, *Acer macrophyllum*, are the only deciduous old-growth forests to be highlighted by the AFA.*



*(above) Photo: TJ Watts
(left) Lanky moss (*Rhytidiadelphus loreus*).
Photo: Pauline Davis*

Welcome to New VNHS Members

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

Pat Atkinson

Victoria
Birding and wildflowers

Karen Lisa Cairns

Victoria
Outdoors activities, music

Nathan Fisk

Victoria
Birds, bees, butterflies, plants...

Kanya Dayananth

Pittsburgh, PA
Nature Conservancy, love for all critters great and small (arachnophobia but will help conserve them as well)

Kavya Dayananth

Summit, NJ
Gardening, Nature Conservancy, sustainable ecosystem conservation design, love for all critters great and small

Neil MacDonald

Victoria
Nature/Hikes/Birds

Kathleen and Wayne Matthews

Victoria
*Kathleen: Garry Oak Ecosystems (Friends of Uplands Park Co-Chair);
Wayne: Birding*

Margaret Lidkea

Victoria
Friends of Uplands Park founder & Co-chair; getting kids outside

Teron Gerald

Victoria
Nature

Caitlyn Jimmo

Victoria
Nature

Black-capped Chickadees on Vancouver Island?

By Sharon Godkin

Photos by author



View of the '9-km Bog' pond, showing the south end where the Chickadees crossed from the right (west) to the left side (east) of the narrow meadow south of the water.

History

Black-capped Chickadees are generalists that range widely across North America: from the Lower Mainland and interior BC to Newfoundland; from New Mexico to the Northwest Territories and Yukon; and into western Alaska. This huge range encompasses a large number of races or subspecies. However, Black-capped Chickadees (BCCHs) have never been officially recorded on Vancouver Island (VI). The recent B.C. Breeding Bird Atlas regional checklists and bird maps for Vancouver Island document only Chestnut-backed Chickadees (CBCBs). The reasons suggested for BCCH absence from VI are strong reluctance to fly over water, the lack of any BCCH populations close to VI to serve as irruption/emigration reservoirs, and relative lack of their preferred habitats (open deciduous, mixed deciduous/coniferous forests) on VI. The closest BCCHs to VI were recorded in an isolated Atlas 'Square' containing North Thormanby Island off the Sunshine Coast. An earlier record from farther north on the mainland coast at Port Neville Inlet was not replicated by the recent Atlas. These isolated occurrences were separated from VI by wide expanses of water, and from established populations by considerable land distances. Though regarded as non-migratory, BCCHs

do make irregular irruptive movements of up to 1000 km or more.

If BCCHs will not fly across water, they must have found some other way to colonize the water-isolated islands of eastern Canada (Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton Island, Anticosti Island, Magdalen Islands, etc. Perhaps the answer to this puzzle is dependent on when they colonized these areas. As the continental and regional ice sheets advanced and retreated, various types of tundra, herbaceous, shrub and forest habitats margined the ice. Lower sea levels and isostatic effects resulted in many coastal areas now isolated as islands being connected to each other and the continent by dry land. There is also considerable evidence for the existence of multiple North American refugia during ice advances. Organisms that may have immigrated to VI and other current islands prior to the last ice advance could have survived in refugia and recolonized from them. Genetic analyses have shown that the subspecies of BCCH inhabiting Newfoundland has been isolated for ca. 75,000 years, and survived glacial advances in putative refugia on the current Grand Banks. Ongoing research indicates connectivity of herbaceous habitat between VI and the continent, both before and after the last ice advance. Limb bone physiology of Mountain Goat skeletons discovered on

northern VI indicates that their immigration likely occurred during the recent post-glacial period before rising sea levels severed the postulated connection(s). At that time, the land likely supported habitats amenable to BCCHs. Thus ability to challenge water barriers could have been unnecessary for avian immigration to VI. Any present populations of BCCHs would be successors of those established via peri- and/or post-glacial land connections. CBCHs could have also used these connections, but since they inhabit isolated outlying islands (Haida Gwaii, Goose Island, Aristazabel Island, the Scott Islands, and innumerable smaller islands), they are perhaps undaunted by expanses of water.

Historically, there have been scattered reports of BCCHs being seen and/or heard on VI, even on Christmas Bird Counts. None of these reports have been officially accepted due to their lack of documentation. Such 'first record' claims rightfully require detailed documentation such as written field notes, preferably with sketches, made at the time. Photographs showing identifying field marks may not be essential in all cases, but are highly desirable. The evidence has to be of sufficient quality to convince the necessarily sceptical members of a 'bird records committee' that the observer did actually see, however unlikely, the species he/she has reported, and has made the identification competently.

The past observations of BCCHs of which I have personal knowledge occurred on the northern portion of VI. They were made by an Ontario birder participating in the Atlas, and by a friend in Port Hardy. The Ontario birder reported hearing and seeing parents feeding fledglings, but as they were common birds to her, she failed to document the sighting. She also accepted a local report of a small group of BCCHs repeatedly visiting a feeder in Port Alice the preceding winter. My friend also did not consider BCCHs to be extraordinary, merely uncommon: they appear at her feeders sporadically, briefly, and are too 'busy' to be photographed.

Her last brief sighting was of a lone "large grey Chickadee" feeding a fledgling near her feeder. CBCHs were present for comparison. Other birders have reported hearing the distinctive two- or three-phrased song of the BCCH on VI. I also, while Atlassing, heard whistled "Fee-bee", "Fee-Bee-ee", and "Fee-ee Bee-ee" songs closely matching my own experience of, and the recordings of, BCCH songs. I heard these particularly around dawn and dusk in some North Island areas. I was sceptical as (in my Ontario experience) BCCHs start singing early (February), and are quiet and secretive once nesting begins. I heard these perplexing songs even in early summer when the local CBCHs were (and any BCCHs should have been) cryptically nesting. I eventually identified the songsters—well hidden Hermit Thrushes! I never found BCCHs associated with these songs. Golden-crowned Sparrows also whistle a credible "Fee-bee", and do so at the correct time of year. They often fill my yard with this pseudo-BCCH song during sunny days in early spring.

My Sightings

On the clear sunny afternoon of July 18, 2014, I was photographing flowers and dragonflies around '9-km Bog' on the flanks of Mt. Washington. This boggy meadow and pond is in the lowest margin of the subalpine zone, at around 780 m elevation, near the Strathcona Parkway/Mt. Washington Road. It is surrounded by low deciduous shrubs, mixed conifer forest, and regenerating clear cuts. I kept hearing high-pitched calls which sounded like CBCH or Golden-crowned Kinglet chatter. I managed only brief unedifying glimpses of two small birds busily foraging through the conifers at mid-level. I finally assumed they must be CBCHs, and ignored them as they moved away westward. Later, I was departing when I noticed the chips rapidly moving closer, and turned back. Suddenly two small birds flew in close tandem from a tree on the west, directly across the narrow meadow about eye height, and vanished into a bushy 'Christmas tree' near

me on the east. They were fully illuminated by the late afternoon sun, and were close enough for me to note their markings without binoculars. They flew like Chickadees, dippy-dippy-dippy, calling as they flew. But I was totally baffled—they just didn't fit any species that I might encounter there. I mentally reviewed all the details I had noticed:

- Overall size: too big to be Kinglets or CBCHs, but in that general size range.
- Shape and flight: like Chickadees.
- Markings: Head: black cap, large shining white cheek, black throat. Back: light grey. Wings and tail: blackish or charcoal grey, seem to have longitudinal whitish highlights; no wing bars. Ventral: breast mostly dingy white; flanks glinting lemony-yellow.
- Not: Warbler (head and throat wrong for Yellow-rumped); Vireo; Flycatcher; Kinglet; Nuthatch;

Bushtit; CBCH (no trace of chestnut colour anywhere); Mountain Chickadee or Bridled Titmouse (no white eyebrow; neither occur here). What small grey bird has a



Satellite view of the bog area, which is in B.C. Breeding Bird Atlas Square 10CA31. The birds moved off in the direction of the installation at the end of the gravel access road above the pond.



Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Victoria B.C. Note the brownish cap, chestnut flanks and chestnut on the shoulders which extends across the back.

striking black-and-white head pattern, dark wings and tail, and yellow flanks (probably accentuated by the sun angle)?

I made notes in my photo record book and left, as they had quickly tree-hopped away eastward, and the brush and trees were impenetrable. Suddenly I realized—they could be the mythical Black-capped Chickadees!! Rushing back, I started pishing desperately, hoping they were still within hearing range. Unlike CBCHs, which rarely show any interest in my pishing, BCCHs should respond. They did react immediately with increased and louder calling, and quickly tree-hopped back to the ‘Christmas tree’ I was now standing against, into the branches just a metre or less above my head. They scolded me with very distinct “Chickadee-dee-dee-dees”, but offered no photographable views as they bounced about amongst the bobbing branchlets, chipping and “dee-dee”-ing. They quickly determined that I was nothing of interest, and resumed their eastward trek with a loud farewell “Chicka-dee-dee-dee.” How frustrating—no photos! But they had clearly told me that they were indeed Chickadees! I checked references and my photo library once home to confirm my tentative field identification of Black-capped Chickadees.

Perhaps these BCCHs belong to a small, scattered, very mobile relict population, as encountering them seems to be purely by chance. I and the Ontario birder expended much effort and time unsuccessfully trying to confirm her sighting. The exasperating Port Hardy birds seem to only appear a few days after I have left there; or leave a day or two before I arrive! They often stay only a few hours, and visits can be years apart.

Moral: When out in nature, keep your eyes and ears and mind open, and camera ready! You just might be surprised by what you encounter!

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Black-capped Chickadee, George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Delta, B.C. Both Black-capped and Chestnut-backed Chickadee species coexist in this locality. Note the black cap, large white cheek patch, black throat and yellowish flanks. The flank colour and its intensity and extent varies considerably.

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Birds, Bees, Flowers and Trees: a recipe for a healthy urban landscape

By Jill Robinson, HAT Stewardship Coordinator



Since moving to Victoria less than a year ago, I have been increasingly impressed by the natural beauty of this area. This city is so closely tied to the ocean, forests, meadows, mountains, lakes and streams, it's hard to imagine a better place to live. It's also hard to imagine that in spite of how truly beautiful it is today, not so long ago this city looked distinctly different.

Imagine a place with rolling camas meadows under a canopy of trees scattered across rocky outcrops, a place where light dances between blades of native grasses and lilies, and brilliant sun penetrating through the outstretched arms of old Garry Oaks. While pockets of this historic landscape do persist, they are few and far between. Take a walk through our local community parks—Beacon Hill Park, Uplands Park, or Fort Rod Hill—you'll be taking steps back to a time when trees and meadows dominated the landscape, rather than houses and paved streets.

As the newest staff member of Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT), I am thrilled to be part a movement that acknowledges the natural and cultural history of this incredible city

Oak Haven overlooking Saanich Peninsula agriculture and forest.
Photo: Adam Taylor.

and encourages efforts to retain values of our landscape that over time has been heavily degraded. This year HAT is launching a Good Neighbours Urban Forest Project that will focus on helping people care for and restore the natural, native features of our local Garry oak and coastal Douglas-fir ecosystems, with an emphasis on urban forests.

An urban forest is an interconnected network of green space that conserves natural ecosystem values and functions and provides associated benefits to human populations. Here in Greater Victoria, we have lost more than 2500 acres of tree cover in the past six years alone. This year, our hope is to bring awareness, understanding and enthusiasm for being Good Neighbours to not only to the Smiths next door, but also the birds, bees, flowers and trees that have such a critical role in our ecological and cultural history.

An urban forest not only provides a refuge for local wildlife, but it also creates aesthetic, economic and environmental value.

- reduced energy bills from tree canopy shading
- reduced air pollution
- storm water management
- wind protection
- soil stabilization
- noise reduction
- enhanced property value
- enriched quality of life (aesthetic value)

As Stewardship Coordinator, I will be working within our urban neighbourhoods to help bring the wild back into our backyards, by helping create solutions for tree issues (healthy trees/ tree disease, fungus); encouraging value of wildlife trees (life after death), e.g., home for birds (sapsuckers, nuthatches, woodpeckers, flicker, owls); finding the right tree for the right spot (planting trees to fill important gaps in the canopy).

***Tree Care and Management:
Pest Reduction and Tree Waste (fruits and leaves)***

Trees have a natural cycle of mortality and regeneration, and it is important to recognize the difference between these natural events and when your tree is distressed. Taking photographs can be a useful way of tracking development of your tree if you are concerned about its health. Trees are slow growing and it can take up to 24 months to truly assess the health status and hazard risk. Your safety should always

be the priority, so request a Tree Assessment by an ISA Certified Arborist if you are concerned.

Pruning can be used to remove unhealthy parts of the tree and provide shape. Poor pruning can be extremely detrimental to the tree and can lead to malformed, unattractive and unstable trees. Many ISA Certified Arborists have free online guidelines for pruning and HAT strongly recommends that you seek professional advice as techniques vary depending on the age, type and size of tree. Pruning should be conducted in fall and winter to avoid affecting the tree during its growing season. Never remove more than 25% of the tree canopy in one year. Topping is damaging, causing trees to be stunted and malformed, and is not a HAT-recommended practice.

As a part of this year's Urban Forest Good Neighbours project, we will be conducting a number of confidential personalized property land care visits. These visits will be catered to each homeowner, with the goal of meeting the needs of the landowner and working together to improve and enhance habitat and tree cover. One neighbor at a time, we can work to create larger green spaces to improve the beauty of our city and create a greener and cleaner home for all of its inhabitants! Keep your eyes peeled for upcoming community tree planting events, walks and talks. Please contact us regarding any tree care questions or to book your own personalized land care visit. Together we will all become stewards of our land, and good neighbours to all.

BULLETIN BOARD

**Outerbridge Park Bird Walk
Sundays, May 10 and June 14, 2015**

Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO) hosts bird walks at Outerbridge Park in Saanich on the 2nd Sunday of each month. The walks begin at 9 am at the parking area off Royal Oak Drive. This is an easy walk and suitable for people with mobility concerns.

Swan Lake Guided Bird Walks

Every Wednesday and Sunday at 9:00 a.m., bring your binoculars and walking shoes for this informal and informative walk around the lake area. Walks are generally led by Victoria Natural History Society members. Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary is at 3873 Swan Lake Rd, off Ralph St.

Nature Canada's NatureHood, Shoal Harbour (Sidney/ North Saanich)—Volunteers Wanted

The goal of Nature Canada's NatureHood program is to inspire urban residents to connect with nature through innovative programming, celebratory events and stewardship activities set in urban green spaces and Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas." The Shoal Harbour NatureHood (Friends of Shoal Harbour) is looking for volunteers for a

variety of roles including birding trip leaders, kids activity assistants, citizen science facilitators, special event help (including All Buffleheads Day in October) and more. To express interest, or for more information, contact Tina at naturehoodfosh@gmail.com or call 250-881-4191.

**Call for Submissions:
Ecology of Vancouver Island's Lakes**

Information on the ecology of local lakes is needed for an upcoming edition of the Secret Lakes of Southern Vancouver Island Guidebook. The new edition will cover the recreation, nature and local history of 100 lakes from Victoria to Port Renfrew and the Cowichan Valley. Help us make a better book for naturalists by contributing your observations, experiences and photographs. Contact Adam Ungstad at info@secretlakes.ca or visit www.secretlakes.ca.

Advance Notice for Hawk Watch, September 26, 2015

Join us for Hawk Watch and our annual member appreciation BBQ social at Aylard Farm in East Sooke Park. Members are welcome to a free smokie (veggie option available), beverage, cake, and camaraderie! To RSVP, email or phone Gail: 250-652-3508, g.harcombe@shaw.ca before September 18. Please specify number of smokies and whether regular or veggie. Don't forget your lawn chair!

RBCM Native Plant Garden

By Ken Sohm



(above) Royal BC Museum Native Plant Garden. (below) Giant Chain Fern (*Woodwardia fimbriata*). Photos: Ken Sohm

These gardens constitute an excellent primer on some of our Province's plants. The walk was a VNHS event ably led by RBCM volunteer Michael Fox. While Victoria has many lovely public gardens, the Museum's focus on native plants is unique. We hope that its integrity and unique quality will be maintained. The appreciation of these plants is greatly enhanced if one refers to *Plants of Coastal British Columbia* by Jim Pojar, Andy MacKinnon et al., where the utility of these plants to our First Nations' people is detailed. Here a few of the many species we examined.

Western Meadowrue (*Thalictrum occidentale*) was just starting to flower, as was fringecup (*Tellima grandiflora*). Michael informed us that part of the fringecup was eaten by the Natives to improve night vision—presumably beneficial for the owls amongst us. The Saskatoon bush (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) was flowering; the berries, as many of our readers will know, make an excellent pie filling. We noted The Pacific ninebark, (*Physocarpus capitatus*) which has a very showy flower head, and goat'sbeard (*Aruncus dioicus*); this latter was an extremely widely-used plant by First Nations people—a veritable pharmacopeia and more.



At the lowest level near the pond, both hairy manzanita (*Arctostaphylos columbiana*) and its “cousin” kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) grow; there is also a hybrid of these two plants there and we spent some time comparing their leaves.

Other shrubs include highbush-cranberry (*Viburnum edule*) and black twinberry (*Lonicera involucrata*); the latter with delicate yellow tubular flowers, much loved by the hummingbirds; at the time of writing, the striking berries are on display. A blue elderberry (*Sambucus caerulea*), with flattish rather than conical flower panicles, makes a change from our locally familiar red elderberry (*S. racemosa*).

There are pine trees at the front and while the shore and ponderosa pines (*Pinus contorta* and *P. ponderosa*) are familiar, a third one was a mystery—to me at least—a five-needled pine but not western white pine (*P. monticola*). Michael grabbed a twig, bending it to demonstrate its suppleness: the limber pine (*Pinus flexilis*). According to Brayshaw¹, this species is uncommon west of the Rockies.

Several species of fern include the giant chain fern (*Woodwardia fimbriata*), which grows to a huge size in the right environment; this species is near the ramp leading down to the loading dock, N.E. corner of the gardens.

This two-hour stroll only gave us time to inspect the front gardens; perhaps next year we will see the back. Our thanks to Michael for spending time with us and for his excellent commentary.

¹ T.C. Brayshaw. 2006. Trees and Shrubs of British Columbia. RBCM.

Black twinberry (*Lonicera involucrata*). Photos: Ken Sohm



Royal BC Museum Native Plant Garden —A Brief History

By Agnes Lynn

Here's a bit of background on how the Native Plant Garden was developed on the grounds of the Royal BC Museum. The project was started in 1968 and was one of the first native plant gardens on the west coast of North America. We know that recently deceased botanist Dr T. Christopher Brayshaw had a lot to do with collecting the original plants. He travelled extensively throughout the province to collect a vast variety of species. There were many people who assisted in this process but I wasn't very successful at finding too many names. You may know one person that did some of the collecting. He is John Derrick, now the proprietor of Elk Lake Garden Centre. There were others who documented the collection as carefully as if they were specimens going into the museum itself but they were hard to track down. Around 400 different plants were included in the garden. They were laid out in vegetative zones—Coastal Forest, Dry Interior and Alpine. There were

See Artist

ANNE HANSEN

in the May 2015 Issue of
Focus Magazine



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(above) Pyramid spirea (*Spiraea pyramidata*). (inset, right) Red columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*). Photo: Ken Sohm

also beds representing specialized sand dune and wetland habitats. It is also to be noted that many of these trees, shrubs and herbaceous species were widely used by the First Nations of the region.

A collection such as this requires very specialized care. In the beginning, the Museum had staff that cared for the gardens. Then there was a period of time when the Museum contracted out their care. You may know Diane Pierce who once held that contract. Eventually as budget cuts took their toll, the garden suffered. The late Dr Robert Ogilvie, who worked for the museum as a botanist for many years, was very concerned and had been known to be out there on his lunch hours watering the plants as an irrigation system is not very successful dealing with such specialized plants. In about 1990, in an attempt to get a group of volunteers to help with the care of the garden, Dr Ogilvie gathered together a group of individuals in Victoria with a common interest in native plants. We started to meet on a monthly basis in the museum and we enjoyed talking about native plants. Dr Ogilvie's hope was that some of us would come out and volunteer to help care for the garden. It was a good news, bad news story. The good news was that this group went on to become the very successful and vibrant Native Plant Group which still exists today but the bad news is that no long-term volunteers for the Museum came out of this. We must pay homage to two very dedicated volunteers who have worked for many years on the Museum garden. The first is Charles Knighton. I believe that he started as a paid contractor but Charles spent a lot more time in the garden

than he was ever paid for and eventually ill health prevented him from continuing. He was always a great promoter of the garden, whether he was chatting with someone who stopped to look at the plants as he worked or when he would come out to groups such as the Victoria Horticultural Society to tell us about the garden. The second volunteer extraordinaire is Michael Fox who has been volunteering at the garden for around 10 years. He is still there but has little help these days. So if you could commit to a few hours a week helping with tasks such as weeding, contact the Museum Volunteer Services Manager Holli Hodgson (250-387-7902 or hhdodgson@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca) to get details on how you can become a volunteer in the garden.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the challenges this garden has faced. Sadly, pieces of it have been chopped off or changed drastically as the Museum has gone through many iterations and the future of the garden is not very promising as the Museum is continually being redeveloped. We keep hoping it will persist in some form but many of these mature plants will not survive being moved if it comes to that. So go now and enjoy it while it is still there and marvel at the diversity of our province's habitats.

PS. I hope that I have got most of the facts right for this story and if you can fill in details or make corrections, contact me directly at thelynns@shaw.ca.

International Migratory Bird Day 2015

By Penny Lancaster



(above) Acacia Spencer-Hills bands an American Robin while Rick Shortinghuis observes. (right) Acacia Spencer-Hills shows prepared wing specimens.
Photos: Cheryl Hoyle

The 6th annual International Migratory Bird Day was held on May 10 at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park in Saanich. Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO) headed the event, bringing together organizations from throughout lower Vancouver Island and the Capital Region to celebrate all things birds, with a focus on bird migration and the importance of habitat restoration. Participating organizations included The CRD, Rithet's Bog Conservation Society, Ducks Unlimited, Georgia Basin Ecological Assessment and Restoration Society (GBEARS), Friends of Ecological Reserves, and The Raptors. Geoffrey Newell returned to lead two bird walks which were very popular. Other highlights included mist netting, hummingbird banding and songbird banding demonstrations by RPBO. The CRD had a fun game to match the bird to the nest. The Raptors brought a Turkey Vulture, American Kestrel and Swainson's Hawk to show off.

The following day, on May 11, RPBO added to the fun with a bird walk and big sit led by Daniel Donnecke at Outerbridge Park in Saanich. There was a photo contest, with a winning submission by Wayne Robertson (see back cover). Both days of the event were a big success, and RPBO is looking forward to hosting the event again next May.

RPBO would like to thank all the organizations who gave their time and resources to promote knowledge and awareness about birds, to Victoria Natural History Society for their support to help the event come together, and to the CRD for facilitating the use of the park.

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Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*)

By Acacia Spencer-Hills

Is it a “Cooper’s”? Is it a “Sharpie”? Is it a bird? A plane? It’s a question often asked in these parts when an accipiter is spotted, and can stump even the most seasoned birder if they aren’t careful.

Sharp-shinned Hawks (colloquially known as “Sharpies”) are smaller than Cooper’s Hawks as a general rule but males and females differ in size so much that this cannot be used as a rule alone; instead use a few different clues to settle on species identification. You might try looking at tail shape which can be a determining factor; Cooper’s have a rounded tail end when outspread, whereas Sharpies have a squared end. As well, Cooper’s have a larger head and when in flight it projects well past the leading edge of the wings. Speaking of heads, Cooper’s have a black cap and pale nape, with the Sharpie having both black cap and nape. Finally, it should be noted that the Sharp-shinned Hawk nests mostly in conifers and heavily wooded areas, whereas Cooper’s Hawks are more commonly found nesting in suburban areas.

Sharp-shinned Hawks are common year-round residents in the Victoria area, and can often be seen around feeders preying songbirds (which make up 90% of their diet). The

smallest proper hawk in North America, Sharpies declined in numbers during the DDT pesticide era but rebounded like most birds of prey after DDT was banned.

Fun facts:

- Sharpies pluck the feathers from prey before eating, and when delivering prey to mates or young the males usually remove and eat the head. Yum!
- In 2014, Rocky Point Bird Observatory banded four Sharp-shinned Hawks at its Rocky Point site (with 291 observed), and one at its Pedder Bay site (with 50 observed).



Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*). Photo: Mike Yip

BIRDING IN BELIZE

November 14–24, 2015
with David Bird and
Rodger Titman



See toucans, trogons, Jabirus, neat herons and wetland birds, raptors, hummingbirds, flycatchers and upland and forest passerines. Migrants will be arriving at that time of the year. Sites include Crooked Tree wetlands, Rio Bravo tropical forest, TREES Research Station (<http://www.treesociety.org/>), Cockscomb, Redbank and Southwater Caye. We will also visit Mayan ruins and do some snorkeling.

US \$2550 plus airfare—limit 16 people
The fare includes lodging, meals, water and drinks (non-alcoholic), guide services, and park and special entrance fees.

**If interested contact us for more details at
rodger.titman@mcgill.ca**



References

- Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Nd. All About Birds: Sharp-shinned Hawk. Available: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Sharp-shinned_Hawk/id Accessed: May 29th, 2015.
- Pomfret, B. 2014. Migration Monitoring at Rocky Point Bird Observatory Fall 2014. Available: http://rpbo.org/reports/migf_2014_rpad.pdf Accessed: May 29th, 2015.

Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*).
Photo: Mike Yip

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/website/index.php/calendar> 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 page 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 up to three times, after which they are expected to join the Society.

SATURDAY MORNING BIRDING

Meets every Saturday morning, usually between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m., rain or shine. Check the Calendar page of the VNHS website (<http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/website/index.php/calendar>) on the Thursday/Friday before to find out the week's location. Novice and experienced VNHS members all welcome. Non-members can participate up to three times, after which they are expected to join the Society. For more details, contact Agnes Lynn at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634.

JULY

Sunday July 5

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Monthly Butterfly Outing

Join Aziza Cooper on our monthly Butterfly outing. Each outing is intended to help us learn more about our local butterflies. The outing is weather-dependent (needs to be warm and sunny to make it worthwhile). We will meet near the top of Mount Tolmie (off Cedar Hill Xrd) and decide where to go from there. Meet at 1:00 p.m. at the main parking lot just north of the summit. Contact Aziza at 250-516-7703 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday July 5

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

4th Field Trippers Nature Walk— Fossil Field Trip to Island View Beach

“Field Trippers” is a series of six walks over six months to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the first nature walks led by Royal BC Museum staff. This walk will be guided by Dr. Richard Hebda, Curator of Botany and Earth History, and Marji Johns, Paleontology Collections Manager. Starts from Island View Beach at 1:00 p.m. To reach Island View Beach, go north on the Pat Bay highway, turn right at the lights at Island View Rd (Michell’s Market) and follow that to the parking lot. Contact Chris O’Connor at 250-883-4056 for more information or visit <http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/events/field-trippers-125-years-and-counting-4/>

Saturday July 11

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Birding at Witty’s Lagoon

The Saturday Birding Group will go to Witty’s Lagoon. Meet at the main parking lot on Metchosin Rd (across from golf course) at 7:30 a.m. We will first go down to the lagoon and end with a leisurely walk through to Tower Point. We will leave a car on Olympic View so we do not need to repeat our route. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Friday July 17 & Saturday July 18

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Gulf Islands National Parks Reserve BioBlitz on Saturna Island

For full details on this BioBlitz, see <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pnnp/bc/gulf/activ/activ14.aspx>. You can go as a participant in the drop-in events and bring your family and friends, but we’d really appreciate your help in your area of expertise as well. There is free camping plus other perks for the volunteers. VNHS will primarily be assisting with the Birding component. We will do Owlting on Friday night, starting at 9:30 p.m., and two Bird walks on Saturday morning, at 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. If you wish to assist with the Birding, contact Agnes for more details. If you are interested in assisting as an expert with other aspects of the BioBlitz, contact

Agnes and she will direct you to the appropriate person as experienced observers are needed in all aspects of the BioBlitz. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634.

Sunday, July 26

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Olympic National Park Obstruction Point Road

We have arranged for a bus in Port Angeles to take us up to travel along the scenic high elevation Obstruction Point Rd. Timing of the trip is planned for peak wildflower displays. Rather than one long hike, we will stop at a number of places and do several short excursions in search of sub-alpine flowers not too far from the road. We hope to find some species endemic to Olympic National Park. Be prepared for unpaved twisty roads. Although the weather is generally sunny and clear, due to the high elevation, it could be cool or rainy. Bring a lunch and drinks. Meet at the Black Ball Ferry terminal in the Inner Harbour at 5:45 a.m. for the 6:10 a.m. sailing of the MV Coho. Allow time to park and purchase your ferry ticket (\$36.00 CDN return). The ferry cost is not included in what you prepay. IMPORTANT!! YOU WILL REQUIRE A PASSPORT OR ENHANCED DRIVER’S LICENCE FOR GOING THROUGH US CUSTOMS. We will return on the 5:20 p.m. sailing from Port Angeles (90 minute crossing). Also there is usually good birding from the ferry. Cost of the charter bus and entry to the park is \$60.00 CDN. Limited number of participants so reserve your spot early. VNHS members get priority. Do not book before Jul 4 or after Jul 19. First contact Agnes to reserve your spot. Then pay through PayPal on the VNHS website (vicnhs.bc.ca) or you can pay by cheque. Send cheque to VNHS, Box 5220, Victoria BC, V8R 6N4. Spaces remaining on PayPal do NOT indicate spaces still remain on the bus. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 to reserve or for more information.

AUGUST

Saturday August 1

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Florence Lake & Langford Lake Birding

Join the Saturday Birding Group who will be going to Florence Lake and Langford Lake. Meet at the boardwalk at Florence Lake at 7:30 a.m. To reach our starting point, go out the Island Highway and take Exit 15 McCallum Rd. Keep right and you will be on McCallum Rd. Turn left on Springboard Pl (formerly Brock Ave). Park at end of road (not in turnaround) where we will meet. It’s about a half block to the boardwalk from there with a great view of the lake. Listen for Soras or Virginia Rails. Sometimes we’ll get Steller’s Jays and Band-tailed Pigeons and other birds not that common in town. After that, we will continue to Langford Lake. To get there, return on McCallum Rd to the corner by the Shell station. Curve around the front of the gas station on to the frontage road which leads to the Leigh Rd overpass. Left at Leigh Rd and cross the highway on the overpass. Turn right on Goldstream Ave. Park at the west end of Goldstream Ave just before it intersects the highway. Meet at the parking pullout and the group will meander down to the boardwalk from there. The marshy area often yields

interesting birds as well as the walk through the forest to the lake usually gives us woodpeckers and other good woodsy birds. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 if you need more information.

Sunday August 2

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Monthly Butterfly Outing

Join Aziza Cooper on our monthly Butterfly outing. Each outing is intended to help us learn more about our local butterflies. The outing is weather-dependent (needs to be warm and sunny to make it worthwhile). We will meet near the top of Mount Tolmie (off Cedar Hill Xrd) and decide where to go from there. Meet at 1:00 p.m. at the main parking lot just north of the summit. Contact Aziza at 250-516-7703 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Saturday August 15

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Island View Beach & Saanichton Spit Birding

Join the Saturday Birding Group who will be going to Island View Beach and Saanichton Spit. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the north end of the parking lot. It's the time of year that we might find some interesting shorebirds on their return migration and we might still see a few beach flowers in the dunes as we go along. To reach Island View Beach, go north on the Pat Bay highway, turn right at the lights at Island View Rd (Michell's Market) and follow that to a left on Homathko Rd which leads to the parking lot. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 if you need more information.

Sunday, August 16

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Washington State Birding Trail

To savour some of the spots described in the excellent brochure entitled "The Great Washington State Birding Trail – Olympic Loop", we have arranged for a bus in Port Angeles to take us to a number of interesting birding stops. We did something similar a couple of years back but this time we will check out spots to the west of Port Angeles. We will include a stop to check for Tufted Puffins at Cape Flattery. Other than that, we may not see too many different birds than at home but the varying habitats make for an enjoyable experience. Locations will be mostly near sea level. Itinerary will be firmed up closer to the date to take advantage of any last minute reports of interest. Still time to put in your request for a potential stop! Dress for potentially changeable weather. Bring a lunch and drinks. Meet at the Black Ball Ferry terminal in the Inner Harbour at 5:45 a.m. for the 6:10 a.m. sailing of the MV Coho. Allow time to park and purchase your ferry ticket (\$36 CDN return). The ferry cost is not included in what you prepay. **IMPORTANT!! YOU WILL REQUIRE A PASSPORT OR ENHANCED DRIVER'S LICENCE FOR GOING THROUGH US CUSTOMS.** We will return on the 5:20 p.m. sailing from Port Angeles (90 minute crossing). There is usually good birding from the ferry, even a slim chance to pick up a Jaeger or a Fulmar. Cost of the charter bus and entry to the park is \$60.00 CDN. Limited

number of participants so reserve your spot early. VNHS members get priority. Do not book before Jul 4 or after Aug 9. First contact Agnes to reserve your spot. Then pay through PayPal on the VNHS website (vicnhs.bc.ca) or you can pay by cheque. Send cheque to VNHS, Box 5220, Victoria BC, V8R 6N4. Spaces remaining on PayPal do NOT indicate that spaces still remain on the bus. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 to reserve or if you need more information.

Sunday August 23

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

5th Field Trippers Nature Walk—

Dragonfly Field Trip at Elk/Beaver Lake

"Field Trippers" is a series of six walks over six months to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the first nature walks led by Royal BC Museum staff. This walk will be guided by Claudia Copley, Entomology Collections Manager, Darren Copley, Bird and Mammal Preparator, and CRD Park interpreter, Katie Turner. This field trip will be limited to 25 so you must pre-register. Call CRD Parks at (250) 478-3344 by August 21 for registration and meeting location details.

Saturday, August 29

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Sidney Spit Birding

It's the time of year to make the trek over to Sidney Spit to look for interesting shorebirds on their southern migration. There have been some good ones reported from there – Baird's Sandpiper, Sanderlings, Semipalmated Sandpipers and Plovers, maybe even that illusive Buff-breasted Sandpiper! Also close-ups on Purple Martins and we'll see other passerines in the woods. Mike McGrenere will be our leader. Bring a lunch and drinks. We will go over on the ferry from Sidney that leaves at 10:00 a.m. Be there about an hour early to buy your ticket as it can sell out. Cost is \$19 for adults (\$16 seniors). Ferry leaves from the foot of Beacon Ave. Allow enough time to find a place to park. Parking rates vary on how far you are willing to walk. The return ferry leaves the island at 1:00, 3:00 and 4:30 p.m. so you can choose how long you wish to stay. Contact Mike at 250-658-8624 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Saturday, August 29

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Shoal Harbour Intertidal Exploration

Learn about intertidal invertebrates and algae in one of Nature Canada's NatureHoods—Shoal Harbour. We will survey the marine diversity in the shallow mudflats of this Important Bird Area and Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Wear boots and prepare to get mucky! Feel free to bring binoculars to look for birds too. Meet at the end of Ardwell Avenue (near Resthaven Drive), Sidney at 9:30. (BC Transit Bus #72) Contact Tina at (250) 881-4191 or naturehoodfosh@gmail.com for more information.



Winner of the RPBO IMBD photo contest at Outerbridge Park, May 10, 2015
— Northwestern Crow (*Corvus caurinus*). Photo: Wayne Robertson