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The Victoria NATURALIST

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Officers 2015-2016

PRESIDENT: Darren Copley 250-479-6622, dccopley@telus.net
VICE-PRESIDENT: Purnima Govindarajulu 250-920-7874, purnimap@uvic.ca
TREASURER: Gordon Hart 250-721-1264, gordh19@shaw.ca
SECRETARY: Ben van Drimmelen 250-598-0570, ben@barristers4bears.com

Directors and Committees

Darren Copley 250-479-6622, dccopley@telus.net
(*Membership, BC Nature representative*)
Claudia Copley 250-479-6622, dccopley@telus.net (*Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary representative, BC Nature representative*)
William Dancer 250-721-5273, w.dancer@telus.net (*Schools Program*)
Gail Harcombe 250-652-3508, g.harcombe@shaw.ca (*Publications*)
Phil Lambert 250-477-5922, plambert@pacificcoast.net (*Publicity*)
Directors at Large:
Purnima Govindarajulu 250-920-7874, purnimap@uvic.ca
Paige Erickson-McGee 250-588-1635, pericksonmcgee@gmail.com

Presentation/Field Trip Coordinators

Marine Night: Phil Lambert 250-477-5922, marinenight@pacificcoast.net
Botany Night: Kristen and James Miskelly 250-544-0455, kristen.miskelly@gmail.com, james.miskelly@gmail.com
Natural History Night: Claudia Copley 250-479-6622, dccopley@telus.net
Birder's Night: James Clowater 778-426-0166, clowater@shaw.ca
Field Trip Coordinator: TBA—contact a board member if you have ideas.

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Send to: Gail Harcombe

7368 Veyaness Road, Saanichton BC V8M 1M3

Phone: 250-652-3508 e-mail: publications@naturevictoria.ca

[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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Cover Photo: Vancouver Island Marmot (*Marmota vancouverensis*). Photo: Oli Gardner

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Happy New Year to you all! Hard to believe it is now 2016 – 2015 seemed to zip by awfully fast. For VNHS, it was a year full of interesting presentations, activities, and field trips, as well as opportunities to further efforts in conservation and education. And with the presentations, events and trips on offer for January and February (see Calendar, page 17), 2016 is getting off to a great start.

Stimulating interest in natural history and encouraging study/increasing knowledge of our natural world are important (indeed, they are objectives of the VNHS) and thinking about this the other day got me thinking about some of the new and different ways this can be done. One of those ways is the use of drones for monitoring and recording wildlife and habitats in a manner very different than was previously possible. As with many things, there is the potential for misuse, but the possibilities for positive use and improving knowledge are huge. For example, drones have been used to film Orca from above—perhaps not a new perspective, but this time without the noise and disruption a helicopter or airplane would have brought. Another example is an amazing video by Jason Ching, a research scientist with the University of Washington's Alaska Salmon Program. He recently took a drone camera out to Iliamna Lake, the largest lake in Alaska, and captured hours of footage of sockeye salmon on their spawning grounds in one of the largest runs in recent history. His absolutely gorgeous 5.5-minute video, titled "Above Iliamna"*, is well worth watching. Be prepared for spectacular views of the landscape and the salmon—truly incredible.

Lest I forget, I want to thank all who have contributed to the newsletter—the articles and photos you've shared have been interesting and informative, not to mention thought-provoking, humorous, and even inspiring. Keep up the good work! Let's make 2016 a year in which we take advantage of every opportunity to get outdoors and keep learning about our natural world, and, most important—have fun out there!

Gail Harcombe

*<http://petapixel.com/2015/12/08/gorgeous-aerial-shots-of-some-of-the-worlds-largest-salmon-runs/>

A Message from the Board

With the upcoming VNHS AGM in March (see you all there—by the way!), it is time to remind members that we welcome interest in the board. Please do consider putting your name forward as a director.

The new year is also a good time to acknowledge outgoing board members for their service to the Society. Melissa Frey left at the end of August last year to move to Seattle and take a position at the Burke Museum. Not only did she leave a void at the Royal BC Museum, she is also very much missed as an active member of our Board of Directors. From the moment she joined the board, she jumped right in to help with all aspects of the organization. As Secretary she played a critical role at each meeting, but did you know she was also responsible for all the meals, refreshments, and the wine and cheese reception at the BC Nature AGM we co-hosted way back in 2014? She also took on finding speakers for and co-hosting Marine Night, and more recently she was integral to the Friends of Uplands Park partnership with the VNHS that includes interpretive signage about the adjacent marine environment. So overall a huge thanks to Melissa for her willingness to step up—she has been missed.

It is also that time of year to think about a person or persons you would like to nominate for one of the awards of the Society. Please look over the list of past recipients (page 6 this issue), and

get your nominations in to the board by February 28, 2016.

Also in February, be sure to drop in and say hello at the Seedy Saturday event held annually at the Victoria Conference Centre (Feb 20)—we will once again have a table promoting the Society's activities. If you are interested in helping staff the table please get in touch with Darren, Claudia, or Bill.

In December, at our monthly board meeting, it was agreed that the values of the scholarships given out at the University of Victoria and Camosun needed to be increased to reflect current costs of tuition and books. In light of that, the values of each award will be increased to \$1000.

And while on the topic of scholarships and award recipients, the board would like to extend a huge thank-you to Lyndis Davis, long time supporter and Honorary Life Member of the Society, for her generous gift to the VNHS (see page 5 this issue). Thirty thousand dollars of this donation will be used to create a new \$2400 annual scholarship at the University of Victoria (thanks to a matching donation by an anonymous contributor) and the additional \$5000 will be directed to the Bring Back the Bluebird's Project to reflect Lyndis' keen interest in birds generally and bluebirds specifically. A thoughtful and lasting contribution from a member with deep roots in the organization. Thank you.



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HAT

A History of Generosity: Lyndis Davis

By Claudia Copley

Lyndis Davis was volunteering as a docent at the Royal BC Museum in the bird collection when a friend and fellow volunteer, Katherine Sherman, introduced her to the idea of joining the Victoria Natural History Society. That was in 1980.

Lyndis was soon deeply involved in the conservation and environmental education activities of the organization through her continuing interest in birds. An effort that particularly concerned Lyndis was the nest box program spearheaded by Harold Pollack for the endangered Vancouver Island population of Western Bluebirds. She remembers monitoring boxes with Margaret Jeal in the area near Witty's Lagoon Regional Park every two weeks to see if the birds had returned. At that time nesting pairs were still recorded in the area.

Lyndis was a regular at VNHS evening presentations and participated in the nature outings of the Society for years before relatively recent mobility issues affected her activities, and she has always really enjoyed and appreciated the magazine. She served four years on the board, including as Secretary, and she has the distinction of having designed our simple yet elegant logo.

Many of our members may have also gotten to know Lyndis from her time working for the local natural history store run by Bruce Whittington: The Field Naturalist. Lyndis also volunteered for many years in the Habitat Acquisition Trust office managing membership for the local land trust.

Lyndis' contributions were acknowledged with a VNHS Distinguished Service Award in 1989, and she was again honoured as an Honorary Life Member in 2004, in recognition of her ongoing dedication to the Society and its mandate. Now, as a further gift to the Society, Lyndis has given the Victoria Natural History Society \$35,000 and, through discussions with her and her son Martin, we think we have



Lyndis Davis.
Photo: Martin Davis

come up with a suitable use of these funds.

Lyndis' husband Dennis worked for 35 years at the University of Victoria as a chartered accountant. So, in light of Dennis' long association with the university, combined with Lyndis' interest in nature, it was decided to use \$30,000 to establish the VNHS Dennis and Lyndis Davis Scholarship. Thanks to a matching gift from an anonymous donor, \$2400 will be awarded annually to an undergraduate student in Biology, School of Earth and Ocean Sciences, or Environmental Studies with preference to students pursuing studies in species, habitat, or ecosystem conservation, ecology, or biodiversity. This award will be based on need as well as academic achievement.

Lyndis acknowledges that her primary motivation for joining the Society and maintaining her connection to the organization has always been her passion for birds. It is for that reason that the remaining \$5000 will be allocated to the Bring Back the Bluebirds Project- a fitting tribute to an effort Lyndis was involved in more than 30 years ago, and something near and dear to her heart.



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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 Honourary Life Membership on a member whose involvement with VNHS has been exceptionally long and dedicated. Please consider nominating a member, and send your nomination to the Society's address, or give it to one of the directors. Nominations should be forwarded by February 28, 2016. 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 Honorary Life Members

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

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 No recipients
- 2014 John Henigman, Jeremy Tatum
- 2015 Hans Roemer

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HAT Tricks—New Beginnings for the New Year at HAT

By Jill Robinson, Executive Director, Habitat Acquisition Trust



Paige (*middle*) with Saanich Native Plants owners Kristen and James Miskelly sign as HAT Habitat Stewards in the Colquitz Watershed. *Photo:* Todd Carnahan

(*inset*) Jill during Western Screech Owl surveys. *Photo:* Adam Taylor

When you reflect on the year 2015 gone past, what resonates with you most? Maybe the year crawled along like a slug, or flew past like a flurry of bats in the night. What goal or aspiration will you carry into the new year? In this time of new beginnings, HAT's New Year's resolution is to harness adaptive strategies that can better protect and support our important natural spaces in creative and, innovative ways. As we welcome new staff, we also look forward to protecting new places and forging new partnerships.

After an incredible eight years directing operations at Habitat Acquisition Trust, it is with a heavy heart that we say goodbye to Adam Taylor as Executive Director of HAT. Adam has made an incredible contribution to our organization, and we want to recognize his invaluable contribution not only to HAT but also the wider conservation community in Southern Vancouver Island. From Adam's encyclopedic knowledge of birds, bees, and bugs, to his calm and steady approach to problem-solving and dedication to the protection of natural places, Adam played a paramount role in establishing HAT as a thriving local land trust in Victoria.

Adam was absolutely dedicated to HAT's mission which shined through in everything he did. We are thrilled for him to be carrying on his love for nature with the Marmot Recovery Foundation, and wish him the very best in his new role.

A note from Adam:

"I am extremely proud of the HAT team—I know them to be capable and passionate, collaborative and practical advocates for conservation. Jill Robinson will add to the team, and bring her own strengths to the organization, making HAT stronger than ever.

On behalf of the Board of Habitat Acquisition Trust, it

is my pleasure to introduce Jill Robinson as HAT's new Executive Director. Jill will be assuming Executive Director responsibilities at this time, and I look forward to introducing her to as many of you as I can. I believe you will find her to be a strong communicator and an excellent partner. Of course some of you are already familiar with Jill, as she has been with HAT for nine months as our Stewardship Coordinator. Jill holds a Master's Degree in Wildlife biology, studying seabirds in the Aleutian Islands and a BSc in biology from Nova Scotia's St Francis Xavier. Prior to joining HAT, Jill led research projects and developed educational outreach programs across Canada. She has also worked for a number of non-profit conservation organizations in the United States, Central and South America. I look forward to seeing Jill continue to develop strong relationships with the conservation community in Victoria, and I feel positive that HAT will thrive under her guidance."

HAT is also thrilled to introduce Paige Erickson-McGee as HAT's new Stewardship Coordinator. Paige has been an integral part of HAT's operations as Community & Development Coordinator for 18 months, and previous to that she has been a fantastic intern for HAT's Good Neighbours Program in 2012 & 2013. As a student she assisted in species at risk work with James Miskelly, building a strong background in environmental outreach and stewardship. She is currently a director for the VNHS board and volunteers at the Haliburton Biodiversity Restoration Project. She will continue to develop meaningful relationships within the community and bring her passion for native plant gardening and stewardship to this new role at HAT. Please join us in welcoming Paige to her new role at HAT leading our Stewardship Programs including Good Neighbours, Species at Risk, and Green Spots.

Joining the Marmot Recovery Foundation

By Adam Taylor, Executive Director

The story of the Vancouver Island Marmot is a remarkable one, and I am very excited to start playing a part in that story, albeit a small and backstage one. You may be familiar with the Vancouver Island Marmot story, in part or whole, because like all good stories it is frightening and inspirational in turns, and best of all, the conclusion has yet to be written.

While I am new to the marmots, I do bring some experience in conservation and in protecting species at risk. For the past eight years I was the Executive Director of Habitat Acquisition Trust, a local land trust that works to conserve natural areas and species in the Greater Victoria-area. For me, the opportunity to help the marmot was too great to pass up. Vancouver Island Marmots are a special animal in ways, and their story gives me hope for the future of other endangered species struggling to hold on in a changing world.

The protagonist of our story is of course the Vancouver Island Marmot itself. As an introduction, please allow me to paraphrase JRR Tolkien. “In a hole in the ground there lived a Vancouver Island Marmot. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole, although it had nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a marmot hole, and that means comfort (for a marmot).”

Vancouver Island Marmots are a unique species that live only in the high sub-alpine of Vancouver Island. The largest member of the squirrel family of mammals, they make their homes in mountain bowls, where regular avalanches keep their homes tree-free. The avalanches don't bother the marmots, who are deep in hibernation all winter long. In the late alpine spring, the marmots awake from their burrows, and forage enthusiastically for the next five months before returning to hibernation.

By all outside appearances, Vancouver Island Marmots should have been living an isolated but relatively safe existence, free of human encroachment, unless you count the occasional mountaineer. However, sadly, that was not actually the case, and something had gone terribly wrong for the Vancouver Island Marmot.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, those few people who ventured into marmot territory reported seeing both fewer marmots and marmots in poor health. Biologist Andrew Bryant set off the first alarm bells, reporting that something drastic had happened to the marmots, and that an urgent rescue mission needed to be launched.

Indeed, something drastic had happened—predation was driving the marmot population towards extinction. Our data suggest that in the past two decades, predation was responsible for ~85% of recovered marmot mortalities.



Vancouver Island Marmot (*Marmota vancouverensis*).
Photos: Oli Gardner



However, it is still not clear why predation became such a problem, especially because marmots were never a primary prey species for any of their predators. Whatever it was occurred far outside lands regularly observed by humans, and by the time of Bryant's warning and the launch of the rescue effort, it was almost too late.

In fact, when the rescue started, fewer than 100 marmots remained. In desperation, 54 marmots were captured between 1997 and 2004 to start a captive breeding program. Many difficult decisions had to be made during that time, including how many marmots to rescue, and where to take marmots from. The goal was to ensure the continuation of the species, but in conservation is never a sure thing, and with the marmots in such dire straits, there was no room for error.

The Marmot Recovery Foundation was created in 1998 to lead on-the-ground efforts and coordinate the many partners, including zoos, timber companies, and governments,

involved in restoring marmot populations. Through 18 years of hard work by biologists and support staff, captive breeding centres at the Toronto and Calgary Zoos, and by wildlife veterinarians, the population of marmots in the wild now hovers around 300 individuals. Still a precariously low number, but worlds better than the lonely 37 individuals we started with.


This is where I join the story. The Vancouver Island Marmot is recovering. A colony of wild marmots can be observed at Mt. Washington Ski Resort in the summer, and a healthy population lives in the Nanaimo Lakes area. Smaller colonies in other parts of the Island are being established as well, which we hope will provide a safety net and opportunity for the wild population to continue to grow. The Marmot Recovery Foundation is continuing to release captive-bred marmots into wild, and is now getting help from marmots from a large and healthy colony to establish these new colonies. We believe there is reason to hope that within a few years, the Vancouver Island Marmot will longer be an endangered species. More importantly, we believe that in many years, our children and children's children will get to see marmots on the slopes of Mt. Washington, and in the mountain bowls of the far interior of Vancouver Island should they choose to adventure there.

However, conservation in these times is never without challenges. New threats are emerging to jeopardize Marmots. Golden Eagles, a mammal-eating cousin of the familiar Bald Eagle, is particularly fond of marmots for dinner, and has begun to take up residence on the Island after the introduction of Eastern Cottontails. Climate change is occurring much faster in the marmots' alpine habitats than in the low-lands, and significant changes are already being observed. Lower snowpacks and warmer winters may make it harder for marmots to hibernate. As well, a rising tree-line brings deer and elk browsing for food, and with them come other predators, for whom a marmot might be an easy snack. There are political challenges too—government funding cuts, and shifting priorities.


Despite that, I remain optimistic. Extremely so, even. The reality is that it has taken a community to launch and sustain the rescue of the Vancouver Island Marmot. While I speak of the work of biologists, zoo keepers, and veterinarians, it is the support of donors who have made their work possible. Donations have been and continue to be the largest part of the funding that enable biologists like Cheyney Jackson and Mike Lester, and wildlife vets like Malcolm McAdie to do their work.

The Vancouver Island Marmot is part of our fabric in British Columbia; in all of Canada. They are one of only 5 mammal species that occur in Canada and nowhere else in the world, and I know that we care for our wildlife and our place in nature. I am humbled and grateful to the over 5000 donors annually who have come together to save the Vancouver Island Marmot, and I look forward to working with you to ensure that the marmot has a secure future.


P.S. If you are not currently a Marmot supporter, it's not too late! Find out more on our website at www.marmots.org


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Welcoming the Buffleheads



By Tina Kelly

Photos by author

Right now, Buffleheads are hunkered down for winter in many Greater Victoria locations, but only a single female was spotted on Roberts Bay in the early morning of All Buffleheads Day, October 15. That didn't stop a keen group from heading out to look for, and celebrate, this beautiful little diving duck's return to the region. With politicians, birders, Nature Canada's Senior Conservation Manager, Alex MacDonald, and the organizers—the Friends of Shoal Harbour Sanctuary Society (FOSH)—in attendance, the day was honoured and recognized with positive words and a lot of binoculars and scopes.

FOSH had another reason to celebrate in October; they expanded All Buffleheads Day to a three day affair to include the official launch of their partnership with Nature Canada and the NatureHood program. NatureHoods across Canada, including the new NatureHood Saanich Peninsula, aim 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.”

Judith Guichon, the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia—whose property in the interior features Bufflehead nesting habitat—helped launch the peninsula's NatureHood with students enrolled in Parklands School's Marine Program. Her Honour took the opportunity to stress the importance of connecting with nature and encourage

(above) Alex MacDonald at All Buffleheads Day (ABD).

(below) ABD Nature Kids.



students to engage in environmental stewardship.

To round out the three day celebration, the Sidney Branch of the Vancouver Island Regional Library held a special Bufflehead storytime and Victoria's NatureKids had a chance to learn about the Bufflehead, and explore the Roberts Bay ecosystem, with Kerry Finley and the NatureHood Saanich Peninsula Coordinator.

Stay tuned for more events and initiatives hosted by NatureHood Saanich Peninsula.

Thank you VNHS—Land Protection in East Sooke: Louise's Story

By Paige Erickson-McGee



Great Horned Owl. *Photo: Adam Taylor*

Thanks to a generous donation of \$5000 from the Victoria Natural History Society toward the protection of land on Beecher Bay, we are hopeful to see 7.2 acres with 150 metres of shoreline and rocky bluffs registered for permanent protection with a conservation covenant in the new year.

The landowner Louise and her family have committed to protecting their property which boasts second growth forest, rocky bluffs, riparian area, shoreline and nesting habitat on Beecher Bay in East Sooke. They have a vision of connecting it to East Sooke Park, creating another connected corridor for wildlife.

Louise highlights an Elephant Seal haul-out on the shore, nesting trees for Great Horned Owl near the home where she grew up, Needle Fish spawning in the bay, and a diverse collection of amphibians including the endangered Red-legged Frog.

Louise purposefully chose HAT to help protect her land. "I believe HAT is the credible land trust in the region that I can rely on. HAT has their heart and soul in saving these

spaces, and you've got to save them whether it is a nature trail or protected area. Our animals are being stressed by development and we need to do our part."

The Land Protection Team has grown, thanks to a generous contribution from the Davis Family Fund, and we were able to create a Habitat Management Coordinator position dedicated to stewarding and maintaining the ecological integrity of our protected lands. With more land protection inquiries directed to HAT than ever before, we are working hard to preserve these regionally significant properties with passionate landowners just like Louise. You can read more about Louise's story in the latest HAT newsletter or on the HAT website. Visit www.hat.bc.ca or call 250-995-2428 for more information.



Louise admiring her property. *Photo: Wendy Tyrrell*

Field Trip Notes

By Agnes Lynn



October Mini-pelagic Trips

For several years now, VNHS has been doing five-hour mini-pelagic trips out of Victoria on the Fantasea, a safe, comfortable 41-foot boat set up for such trips. The goal is to observe a few of the pelagic species that come into Juan de Fuca Strait in the fall. We usually head out into the middle of the strait and then go out as far as Race Rocks to check out the many seals and sea lions there. This year was challenging to get out between the waves of bad weather but we made it despite the fog limiting our visibility at times. The excellent close-up views of the numerous Shearwaters made it well worthwhile. One trip was mostly Sooty Shearwaters, the next was Pink-footed Shearwaters. On a lot of the trips, we also see whales and the Humpbacks were great on one of the trips this year.



Sooty Shearwater. *Photo: Courtney Cameron*

Cassin's Auklet. *Photo: Liam Singh*



Heermann's Gull. *Photo: Courtney Cameron*



Humpback Whale. *Photo: Liam Singh*

November Fungi Forays

Mushroom season is mostly confined to October and November. The fall rains bring these fruiting bodies out of the earth. After the Swan Lake Mushroom Show and the Metchosin MycoBlitz to whet our appetite, we held two VNHS Mushroom Forays. One was to Royal Roads with Kem Luther and one to John Dean Park with Bryce Kendrick. It's a great opportunity to learn about these amazing organisms. Photographs are challenging as they like to grow in dark places. Once the fall frosts start, the main mushroom season quiets down for another year.



Amanita pantherina (amanita).



Ramaria formosa (beautiful clavaria, handsome clavaria, yellow-tipped- or pink coral fungus).



Gymnopilus spectabilis gp (group) (big laughing gym or spectacular rustgill).



Helvella vespertina (elfin saddle).



Tremella dendropsis (one of the "jelly" fungi).
Photos: Pauline Davis

LETTERS

Dear VNHS board & members,

On behalf of HAT I'd like to thank the VNHS board for your generous donation of \$5000 towards HAT's work on protecting nature within the region. Your donation will go a long way in our work towards a covenant on the Patterson property in Sooke.

We look forward to updating you once we have finalized a covenant for the Patterson property.

Sincerely,
Barb

[Barb von Sacken, Land Acquisitions Coordinator]

To the members of the VNHS,

A sincere thank you for your ongoing support to the Nature Sanctuary – You have been with us for forty years now and we could not have done all we have without the dedication and commitment exhibited by the Victoria Natural History Society.

With sincere appreciation,
Joan Cowley, Chair
Board of Directors

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary Society

Dear Victoria Natural History Society,

Thank you for donating \$4000 to Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary. Please pass along my sincere thanks to the Board and Membership. Your support of the Sanctuary is really something special.

Thank you!
Kathleen Burton
Executive Director

Scholarships

Dear Mr. Gordon Hart,

Each year another group of UVic students opens their email and finds out that they are recipients of a donor funded scholarship or bursary. For these students a remarkable thing has just happened. A total stranger, someone like you, has impacted their lives in an incredibly profound way.

Not only do scholarships and bursaries bring much needed financial support, they offer a vote of confidence, a pat on the back for the hard work and fortitude that has brought the student to this in point in time. A scholarship or bursary is so much more than a financial reward. It is a sign of faith in

the student's choices, a voice saying we believe in you and wish you well on the path of your choosing.

Your support of UVic's students changes lives. For that we can never, ever say thank you enough.

Please find enclosed the letter from this year's recipient of the Freeman F. King Scholarship.

With warm regards,
Cory Rabourn
Donor Relations Manager
University of Victoria

[excerpt from scholarship recipient's letter]

I wish to let you know how grateful I am that I was chosen to receive the Freeman F. King Scholarship. I have tried to take advantage of as many opportunities I can throughout my education, which at times has been more expensive than staying on the beaten trail. I am therefore honoured to know that my experiences have been noteworthy, as there are many students at UVic who have done amazing things with their education. It's an additional honour as growing up my family would hike at Francis/King Regional Park, which my mum worked at as a naturalist when she was growing up. My mum has told me that she even had the chance to meet him and when I was younger she told me a folklore about pinecones that Mr. King told her.

Growing up in Victoria fostered a love for the surrounding ecosystems, with a focus on the marine ecosystems. When it was my time to choose a university, I was delighted to discover that UVic had a strong biology program with numerous courses with a marine focus, which allowed me to stay at home. When UVic changed their biology program to acknowledge a marine concentration, I immediately know that I would take the courses required to graduate with that designation. UVic also gave me the opportunity to participate in the cooperative education program, which has helped guide me on my educational path. [...]

Thank you again for choosing me to receive the Freeman F. King Scholarship. Mr. King was a remarkable man and I feel that it is a great compliment to receive a scholarship in his name.

Sincerely,
Emily (Lily) Campbell
Fourth Year Undergraduate Student, Faculty of Science,
Biology with a Concentration in Marine Biology

Odds and Ends

By Gail Harcombe

Warm Water Species of Dolphin Spotted off Vancouver Island for the First Time—at least Alive

[Main excerpt from CBC News Wednesday December 2, 2015]

“Something unusual is happening off the coast of B.C. Fish species normally found in the warm waters of the tropics are finding their way north—and a blob is being blamed.” Ian Perry, a research scientist with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans based on Vancouver Island, says it’s not uncommon for some species of warm water fish to find their way northward every five to 10 years, whenever there’s an El Nino. But this year, the El Nino has yet to arrive. Instead, Perry says, a patch of warm water drifting off the coast of North America (now stretching from Mexico to Alaska and at least 2 C warmer than usual)—known more commonly as The Blob—might be to blame. Scientists say heat is being trapped within the blob, making it feel like home for fish used to warmer climes.” These fish don’t really know where they are...As long as the currents take them north, and the temperature is warm enough and there’s food to eat, they’re quite happy to live and to grow.”

The warmer water may be responsible for the sightings of the Short-beaked Common Dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*)—never before been spotted alive in B.C. waters (Fisheries and Oceans Canada). Only three of these dolphins have been sighted in B.C. waters since the 1950s, and they were all deceased. Although quite common in its usual range throughout warm-temperate and tropical oceans, this time, schools of the small, two-metre long mammals were seen swimming off the southwest coast of Vancouver Island. Federal fisheries scientist John Ford told CBC News, “It tends not to be found north of California,” he said. “But it is abundant down there.”

There are actually more short-beaked common dolphins than any other dolphin species in the warm-temperate portions of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. They tend to be in deeper waters up to 180 m, and generally do well in many areas as long as they have enough food and warm enough water. The warm water has been bringing shoals of exotic fish far north of their usual habitat and the dolphins are thought to be simply following their food supply. Apparently we should not expect the short-beaked variety to become commonplace in the province’s waters, however. “The water will cool down again in a year or two,” Ford noted. “And then we probably won’t see this species of dolphin again for a long period of time.”

References:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/ocean-blob-brings-tropical-fish-to-b-c-coast-1.3206735>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short-beaked_common_dolphin

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/ocean-blob-could-be-responsible-for-warmer-temperatures-1.3084610>

www.jamesbaymarket.com



Seedy Saturday

Victoria's Seed & Garden Show

Saturday, Feb 20 • 10-4

ADMISSION \$7, UNDER 14 FREE

Victoria Conference Centre

HOSTED BY THE JAMES BAY MARKET SOCIETY

Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 36 new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our Welcome column.

Nancy Montgomery

VICTORIA

Birding

Jillian Kittson

VICTORIA

*Hiking, Rock Climbing,
Kayaking*

Marian Porter

SALTSPRING ISLAND

Birding and marine life

Grant Single

VICTORIA

*Birds, Environmental Science,
Species Identification*

Amanda Evans

VICTORIA

*Environmental stewardship
and restoration*

Juliana Speier

SAANICHTON

Birding, nature

Devron Gaber

VICTORIA

*Bird watching, bird
photography, hiking*

Ed Wojczynski

VICTORIA

*Bird walks, kayaking, nature,
and conservation*

BULLETIN BOARD

Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT) AGM

Wednesday, January 27, 2016

Please join us for the Habitat Acquisition Trust Annual General Meeting & Social on Wednesday January 27 at the Swan Lake Nature House. Followed by a special presentation! Guest TBA (Check www.hat.bc.ca for update). NEW this year: a Social Hour for HATters before the meeting and presentation. Enjoy refreshments and light snacks, includes great conversation! There will be presentations with updates about each program by HAT staff including Wildlife Stewardship, Restoration, and Land Protection. You will have the opportunity to meet the board and your fellow members. Free. Everyone is welcome to attend, and you are encouraged to bring a friend. Only members can vote, but you can renew or become a member at this event. Doors open at 6:15 p.m., General Meeting begins 7:15 p.m., Speaker 8:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m. Contact hatmail@hat.bc.ca or call 250-995-2428 for more information.

100th Anniversary of Cougar Annie's Garden

Boat Basin Foundation, a registered charity, owns and maintains Cougar Annie's Garden, located in the northern reaches of Clayoquot Sound. Discounted visits from Tofino to Cougar Annie's Garden are again offered to organized groups. Choose between day and two night visits. Enjoy the Temperate Rainforest Field Study Centre, consisting of seven cabins and a central building, constructed on a ridge overlooking Rae Lake and Cougar Annie's Garden and out to the Pacific Ocean, and the 700-metre cedar walkway connecting the centre to Rae Lake, the garden and the beach. Please visit www.boatbasin.org for details.

How Many Birds Will You Find?

Join the 19th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count, February 12-15, 2016. Count the birds in your back yard, local park, or wherever you spot a bird, and submit your observations online. The Great Backyard Bird Count is a four-day annual event that

creates a snap shot of where birds are around the world.

We ask people to count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count and enter their sightings at www.BirdCount.org. The information gathered by tens of thousands of volunteers helps track changes in bird populations on a massive scale. The GBBC is a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society with partner Bird Studies Canada. Here is a link to the instructions and to last year's results <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/2015-gbbc-summary/>

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

A visitor favourite every year, Wildlife Photographer of the Year returned in 2015 with a brand new selection of 100 of the most stunning images from around the world. Visit the exhibit at the Royal BC Museum from now until April 4, 2016. From the adorable to the elegant, Wildlife Photographer of the Year showcases award-winning images that tell astonishing stories of our natural world while pushing the boundaries of technical skill. Showcasing the most compelling images selected from more than 42,000 entries from 96 countries, this exhibition celebrates the beauty and magnificence of our world, as well as acting as a stark reminder of the fragility of nature.

FOUND

Found at the November Natural History night, a silk scarf in purplish tones. If you are missing this scarf please call Ken Sohm at 250-658-6115.

A Little Further Afield...

Klamath Basin Winter Wings Festival, Feb. 11-14, 2016. Enjoy the 37th annual Winter Wings Festival at Oregon Institute of Technology in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Information/registration: www.WinterWingsFest.org

VNHS In Search Of Stellar Volunteer Coordinator...

Are you passionate about VNHS? Would you like to contribute one day a week to a volunteer position where you can make a difference to nature? We are looking for an individual to assist in matching our skilled and talented volunteers with projects that need to be completed in our various programs. This position is flexible, but for consistency we ask for a commitment of six months, four to five hours per week. Experience with MS Office and email required. Other valuable skills could be past work in conservation or restoration, project management, web design and webpage editing, volunteer supervision, or office coordination.

Contact Paige by email pericksonmcgee@gmail.com or call 250-588-1635.

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 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@shaw.ca or 250-721-0634.

JANUARY 2016

Friday, January 1

DUNCAN – CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Everyone is welcome! You don't have to be an expert birder to participate. Novices will be teamed up with more experienced counters. Anyone can help out by acting as a tally person or as a spotter. Most teams spend all of the daylight hours out in the field, but there is room for people who can only spend part of the day too. Come out for as long as you can! If you are curious or just need more information, please check out the VNHS website (www.vicnhs.bc.ca/website/index.php/christmas-bird-count) and the Christmas Bird Count site (<http://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>).

Sunday, January 3

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Common Lichens of the Victoria Area

This outing will NOT happen on this exact date. We are still in the process of determining when this outing will take place. Lichens are something that most of us don't know that well and here is your

opportunity to have **Hans Roemer** help us learn them better. There are many in our local area but we will start with the easy ones. Luckily most lichens look good even in the winter months. You are encouraged to bring a hand lens if you have one and dress for the weather. If you wish to be informed of when this trip will take place and more details, contact Agnes at thelynns@shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634.

Saturday, January 9

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 keep 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@shaw.ca for more information.

Tuesday, January 12

NATURAL HISTORY NIGHT

Wetlands Matter! And Not Just to Ducks!

Wetlands are one of the planet's most endangered ecosystems. Recent research establishes the loss of wetlands since the beginning of the 1900s as somewhere around 65%–70%. Of all wetland types, it is the inland ones that have suffered even greater losses. Across the Canadian prairies, sloughs, marshes, potholes, have been drained and filled to such an extent that they have been reduced by as much as 70%–90%. According to Ducks Unlimited Canada, the rate of loss is about 80 acres (32.4 hectares) every day. That's equivalent to 45 soccer fields, every day.

Why is this happening? What's the cause? Why is this a crisis? What's the solution? Come and hear the thoughts of **Rick Searle** on these questions. He has plunged into the muck and ooze of the issue to produce a video intended to motivate greater protection and restoration of wetlands among the general public, but most especially among urban dwellers. In addition to speaking to the issues raised by the questions, Rick will show the video and conclude his presentation with some commentary on the status of coastal wetlands in B.C. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser building. Free—everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Sunday, January 17

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Birding via Gulf Island Ferry

Join us for 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 \$13.15 for a foot passenger. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information and to confirm attendance.

Tuesday, January 19

BOTANY NIGHT

Climate, Landscapes, and Plant Communities 130 to 30 Thousand Years Ago in Southwest B.C.

Richard Hebda recounts the paleoenvironments of southwestern BC as seen from geological studies and pollen analysis of ancient sediments in our region. See familiar plant communities come and go as the climate varies widely during the 100,000 years before the onset of the last major glacial episode in B.C. Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Everyone welcome.

Saturday, January 23

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 all ways stop with Lochside Drive. Watch for the Central Saanich Park sign on the left. Call Rick at (250) 885-2454 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday, January 24

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 twenty at Matheson Lake Park to get us started. Meet at the main parking lot at 1:00 p.m. To reach the park, take Happy Valley Rd to Rocky Point Rd. Watch for the park sign on the right. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Monday, January 25

MARINE NIGHT

Resurrecting Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary: Pie in the Sky?

As we celebrate the centennial of the Migratory Bird Convention of 1916 with the U.S., which led to the creation of over 100 Migratory Bird Sanctuaries across Canada, we will review the past, present, potential future and relevance of this historic and forgotten Migratory Bird Sanctuary, one of three marine bird sanctuaries in Greater Victoria. This sanctuary is a core area of what is arguably the best coastal and marine environment in urban Canada. **Jacques Sirois** is a lifelong naturalist and birdwatcher who has worked for 20 years in various Migratory Bird Sanctuaries and National Wildlife Areas with the Canadian Wildlife Service from coast to coast to coast. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Free—everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Wednesday, January 27

BIRDERS' NIGHT

Bhutan Birding

Though Bhutan is a small country, its bird life is very rich and varied due to the vast range of habitats, from the lowland valleys of the Brahmaputra Valley to the alpine habitats of the southern slopes of the Himalayas. **Val George** and **Bryan Gates** will share their birding experiences from a recent trip to this fascinating country. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser building. Free—everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

FEBRUARY 2016

Saturday, February 6

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 on to 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 who hide 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 9

NATURAL HISTORY NIGHT

Urban Deer and the Urban Wildlife Stewardship Society

The Columbian Black-tailed Deer, a species native to Vancouver Island and now common within the Capital Regional District, is a delight to many residents and visitors, but a pest to many others. The community is divided, sometimes resulting in animosity between neighbours. The Urban Wildlife Stewardship Society (UWSS) was formed to present a science-based alternative to lethal culls of deer, such as the cull that Oak Bay conducted in early 2015. **Bryan Gates**, President and **Kristy Kilpatrick**, Vice President of the UWSS will explain the objectives of administering an immunocontraceptive called SpayVac to female deer, which would be trapped, treated, tagged and released in a program to reduce the number of fawns born each spring. The ultimate goal is to control and reduce deer numbers. Meet at 7:30 pm in Room 159 of the Fraser Building, UVic. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser building. Free—everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Sunday, February 14

EVENT

Valentine Couples Birdathon

What better way for bird-loving couples to mark Valentine's Day than to get outdoors for a half-day of fresh air and good birding in the annual VNHS Valentine Birdathon. This will be the eighteenth running of the event and if recent years are any indication it should deliver a bounty of good times for those participating. As usual the couple who record the highest species count in the 6 a.m. to noon count period can look forward to having their names inscribed on the highly prized Anderson Trophy. The friendly competition is open to couples of all skill levels; participants can go about their business by car, bicycle or on foot. Birder pairs get together immediately after the 12 noon finish at the Swan Lake Nature Centre to brag about their triumphs and lament their misses. Fun is a major objective of this endeavour but not the only one: the \$10-per-couple entry fee goes entirely to supporting VNHS conservation projects. To register for the event or for copies of the birdathon rules and checklist contact **Alan MacLeod** at bigadore@gmail.com.

Tuesday, February 16

BOTANY NIGHT

The Amazing Biodiversity of Pink Mountain

Pink Mountain is under threat from industrial development. Five years ago, **Ron Long** began to build a case for the creation of an ecological reserve on the mountain. With the help of the UBC Botanical garden, a research program has been implemented and results have exceeded all expectations. Pink Mountain is unique in British Columbia; everything that's been looked at—plants, birds, insects, spiders, butterflies, moths and animals has raised more questions than answers. What is clear is that the biodiversity is extreme. Pink Mountain has developed into a great story that will be of interest to any naturalist. Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Everyone welcome.

Saturday, February 20

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 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. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information and to confirm attendance.

Sunday, February 21

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

The Winter Hummers of Cadboro Bay

Join **Dave & 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.

Wednesday, February 24

BIRDERS' NIGHT

Glaucous-winged Gulls in the Salish Sea

Glaucous-winged gull numbers in the Salish Sea have decreased substantially since the 1980s. But did earlier populations 'artificially' increase because of growing access to garbage? Find out what 150 years of data on gull diet, colonies, and reproduction tell us about changes to the Georgia Basin and its waters. **Louise Blight** presents the results of her PhD research at Birders' Night. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser building. Free—everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Saturday, February 27

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Birding Elk Lake and Beaver Lake

The VNHS Saturday Birding Group will be birding on the 10 km loop around Beaver and Elk Lake. We may make arrangements for some attendees to only go part way around if they wish. 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.

Monday, February 29

MARINE NIGHT

Split Personalities: The Incredible Dual Lives of Our Local Marine Animals

David Denning, naturalist, teacher and photographer will present images and video about the mysterious life cycles of marine animals, highlighting the rich, but vulnerable biodiversity of the Salish Sea. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Free—everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.



Gymnopilus spectabilis gp (group) (laughing cap or laughing Jim). Photo: Pauline Davis