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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 requested. E.g.,

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Cover Image: Black-legged Kittiwakes colony.
Photo: Rob Gowan.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

While cleaning out some shelves and cupboards—a task LONG overdue, I came across an old April issue of Gardens West magazine ... it had an interesting article by Randy Thauberger titled “No CDs—No Burgers.” “What on earth?” you say? “What does that have to do with gardens?” Well...perhaps not a lot, but it was fascinating reading...the article was, in fact, about birds “winging their way” to breeding grounds for the summer and in fall migration, and it described some of the journeys birds took and the hardships they endured on those trips.

For example, did you know that the Arctic Tern breeds in the high Arctic, and then spends the winter in Antarctic? That in itself is amazing, but what makes it even more so is that they follow the west coast of North and South America, then many of them fly east and follow the coast of western Europe and Africa to finally arrive in the Antarctic—total distance (round trip in one year) 25,000-30,000 miles! We are talking about birds that weigh about 4 oz. (not much over 100g)!

Warblers are another group that fly impressive distances, and the Blackpoll Warbler is one of the most impressive. A bird of the boreal forest, these birds breed throughout the Yukon, NWT, and northern parts of much of the rest of Canada. In the autumn, they set off on their fall migration - traveling to northeastern USA where they “fatten up” then head out over the ocean in a southeasterly direction. If they kept straight, they would end up in Africa, but (luckily) they hit the prevailing winds, which force them southwest, and they end up in South America. Nonstop flying time over the ocean? 80-90 hours! And these birds weigh about 14g (1/2 oz.). By the time they hit South America, they have lost a lot of weight and are “a wee bit peckish”.

The connection to CDs and Burgers? The author says... ”Think about that [the flight of Blackpoll Warblers] the next time you drive a few hundred [kilometers] to visit relatives, listening to your CDs and stopping now and then for another burger and fries.”

On that note, have a great summer! Looking forward to the fall when evening presentations start again and field trips abound!

Happy Summer!
Gail Harcombe

A Message from Your Board

Board meetings are always put on hold during the summer, so there is less to report about specific decisions being made and funding allocated. This doesn't mean that nothing is happening though! Included here are some updates on ongoing activities.

Liz Turner has very capably taken over the coordination of Connecting Children With Nature program requests and has reported that, not surprisingly, it has been busy this year. So far they have had 632 children from 4 to 14 participate in various nature activities. Amazing VNHS volunteers have led a variety of activities including taking school groups on field trips, helping with the Robert Bateman Centre's children's nature sketch program, setting up and staffing booths at Rogers Elementary Eco Days, the Wild Arc open house and Esquimalt Earth Days. One volunteer even explained to children from South Park Elementary school the relationship between the wild flower paintings on display at the UVic Legacy Gallery and indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge.

Connecting children, teachers and parents with the natural world is a fun and rewarding experience and the program is always looking for new volunteers. Please email Liz if you are interested in volunteering or would like more information about the program at schoolprograms@vnhs.bc.ca.

For the past five months, CRD Parks staff have been documenting feedback provided through stakeholder workshops, engaging with First Nations, and a public survey. They are now wrapping up the consultation stage of the project and are preparing a 2-year land acquisition strategy (2020-2021) to be presented to the CRD Parks and Environmental Committee in the fall. They are incorporating local knowledge, recreation values, and public interests data collected through this project into a longer-term land acquisition framework (2022-2032). The results of this process will form the foundation of a future parkland acquisition strategy, should the Regional Parks Land Acquisition Fund be extended past 2019.

VNHS members participated in at least two of these workshops, with the more recent one held in March and attended by Saul Arbess on our behalf. Saul submitted his report on this meeting and the following is an excerpt of his experience:

We were asked to look at two large maps presented to fill in our activities in the park reserve presently, so trails were written on the maps by hikers, cyclists, and equestrians, fairly peppering the map with many routes. Despite a priority for the park being to protect wildlife and ecological integrity by low-impact, restricted access, this was done in the spirit that everyone wanted to continue with their preferred activities, without necessarily due regard for these priority values. That does not mean people were not concerned with protection but, given the nature of the exercise, this is what transpired. It could well be that CRD Parks may close most of these trails, now knowing their approximate locations. One of the attendees at

our table did speak about necessary exclusion zones for wildlife priorities. It will take much work for CRD Parks to stay on course to implement the plan as laid out, against all of these recreational interests wanting access.

On another important conservation matter: in May, the VNHS received an e-mail from the Minister of Transportation in reply to a letter the society sent in opposition to a proposal to build a road through the Sooke Hills Wilderness Park. The Minister gave assurances that "any highway infrastructure that might result within CRD lands or parks would be used only as a temporary, closely supervised and controlled detour route, and would not be a permanent road that is open to the public." How the ministry differentiates a temporary road from a permanent one is not made clear, nor is it clear how they intend to enforce the closures. The Minister goes on to say that she is "optimistic that we can find a balance between environmental concerns and the need to help people get home or wherever their destination may be." Balance is a euphemism that hides the truth. No matter what assurances are given, the proposed road would significantly compromise the ecological integrity of the park. The Minister noted that a consultant will soon be working "with local stakeholders and Indigenous communities to identify improvement options for the region, going as far north as Duncan and west to Sooke." An up-to-date assessment of the full E&N corridor is starting soon; however, the Minister didn't reveal what the vision is for the corridor. VNHS directors will continue to monitor the issue and intervene when called for on behalf of the membership and in support of the Society's mandate.

And finally, to end on a positive note, please join us in congratulating two VNHS members for awards they received from BC Nature at the BC Nature Annual General Meeting held in Duncan this past May: Genevieve Singleton for her recognition as a Naturalist Mentor, and Alison Moran for a Club Service Award. Alison is a member of our club and has also been a director of the Rocky Point Bird Observatory since 2009. She was nominated for her dedication to the Hummingbird Project—she has been integral to the success of this effort and it was a fitting tribute for her to receive the award.

Genevieve lives in Duncan and is a key member of the Cowichan Naturalists, but is also a member of VNHS, leading field trips for us into the Ecological Reserves in the Cowichan area for which she is the volunteer warden. Genevieve grew up in Victoria under the mentorship of Freeman (Skipper) King - she was a young naturalist long before there was a province-wide organization dedicated to educating children about nature, and she attributes her enthusiasm for nature to these childhood experiences. It is wonderful to see the long term impact of these experiences and see things come full circle: now "Jenny" is the mentor!

Congratulations to both for working so tirelessly for nature!

Bird Families of the Victoria Area: Owls

By Val George

Photos by author



Barred Owl (*Strix varia*).

Birders and non-birders alike are fascinated by owls. Everyone remembers the wise old owl of childhood nursery rhymes and stories, and the nocturnal habits of most of them add an air of mystery to this family (actually two families) of birds; the mystery can sometimes have a sinister aspect as exemplified by Macbeth's witches tossing an owl wing into their blood-curdling brew.

There are about 220 species of owls in the world. They're distributed worldwide, occupying all habitats except the polar ice-caps. Taxonomists split them into two distinct families: Typical Owls (*Strigidae*) number just over 200 species; Barn Owls and their allies (*Tytonidae*) comprise about 20 species.

Owls vary greatly in size: the smallest is the sparrow-sized Elf Owl of the southern States and Central America; the largest is the eagle-sized Blackiston's Fish Owl of north east Asia.

Owls perch upright allowing them to survey all the habitat around them, which they do with their very sensitive vision and acute hearing. An owl's eyes are forward-looking and fixed in the sockets obliging the bird to swivel its head to scan the habitat; some owls can turn their heads by as much as 270 degrees.

As well as having superior vision, owls have excellent hearing. Their facial discs help to focus sounds to their ears, which are offset allowing the bird to pinpoint the direction of any sound a prey species might make.

Regarding prey, owls are carnivorous. They mostly feed on small mammals and other birds, though the smaller owls will take insects. A few species hunt fish. Food is usually swallowed without separating the indigestible parts, such as bones and fur, which are regurgitated as what are known as owl pellets.

Of the 13 species of owls on the Victoria checklist, two are seen and heard regularly: the Barred Owl (*Strix varia*) and the Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*). Both are widely distributed across our region in suitable habitat. Both are generally nocturnal—though they may hunt before dark when feeding young—but due to their large size can often be detected when roosting in the day.

Fifty years ago, the Barred Owl was listed as rare in B.C. Since then it has expanded its range from the eastern areas of the North American continent so that now it can be regarded as fairly common in the Victoria area. Barred Owls feed mainly on small mammals, though they'll take birds, reptiles and amphibians when the opportunity arises.

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Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*).

The Great Horned Owl is a very large owl; in fact, it's one of the largest owls in the world and one of the most common North American owls. Though generally nocturnal, it can often be seen roosting in the day both because of its large size and because its location can sometimes be revealed by small birds harassing it. As might be expected from its size, its food can include the larger small mammals, such as rabbits, and large birds including other owls; smaller animals and birds are also taken.

The other owls on the Victoria checklist are much less common so are rarely seen or heard unless they're sought out by birders who know exactly where an individual might be found.

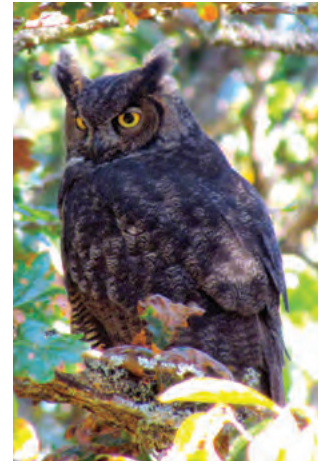
A species that attracts considerable attention when one appears in our area is the Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*). This spectacular species has a circumpolar distribution, breeding in the arctic regions of North America and Eurasia. Some winters Snowy Owls irrupt southward in search of food. One or two might then make it into our area when a

bird will quickly be found by someone due to its large size and conspicuous, mostly white plumage. It hunts in the day as well as the night, so this also brings it to the attention of birders and non-birders.

The other Typical Owls on our checklist are: Western Screech Owl (*Megascops kennicottii*), Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*), Northern Pygmy Owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*), Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*), Great Grey Owl (*Strix nebulosa*), Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*), Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*), Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*), and Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*).

These are not often seen because their status in our area varies from very uncommon to very rare, and the small size of many of them makes them difficult to detect when roosting in the day. An exception to the general statement regarding rarity is the Northern Saw-whet Owl; these small owls pass through our area in considerable numbers during migration, as evidenced by the several hundred banded each fall by the Rocky Point Bird Observatory.

The Tytonidae family has only one representative in the Victoria area, the Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*). Despite being the most widely distributed owl in the world—and in fact one of the most widespread of all birds—you're not likely to see one in our area unless you can discover exactly where there is a pair. Then a visit at dusk or at nighttime to an open area where they hunt might be rewarded by the sight of a bird's ghostly form as it flies low and silently listening for the small mammals that constitute most of its diet.



Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*).



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Encounter with a Leaf-cutting Bee

By Bill Merilees

Photos by author



This observation took place over two days, July 3rd and 4th, 2018. On July 3rd, the second half of a leaf-cutting bee's nest building sequence was recorded and by lucky happenstance, the first half was witnessed on July 4th. Both days were sunny, dry and warm.

On July 3rd, as June and I were winding up afternoon tea on our patio, the hum of a large bee attracted my attention. It circled and then landed in the garden nearby and quickly disappeared into a tunnel. A few minutes later it emerged, flew off and returned a short while later, carrying something green. It again disappeared into its tunnel. At this point I realized I was watching a leaf-cutting bee (Borror and White 1970) (photo 1) in the act of constructing one of its nesting chambers. The species observed is believed to be *Megachila perihirta* (Cory Sheffield, pers. com.)

Around my garden I had, on a number of occasions, seen the handy-work of this megachilid bee (megachilid means large lips!) carved into the leaves of Vine Maple, Saskatoon and possibly other species. The large (1 +/- cm) tell-tale incisions made by this bee are quite distinctive (photos 2 and 3), making me aware leaf-cutting bees were present in our garden.

On July 3rd, fascinated by this chance observation, I was determined to follow this bee's activity through to its conclusion. Over the next 47 minutes, I recorded 12 visits by the female bee, each time carrying a visible leaf cutting. This bee's nest, completely underground, was now apparently complete and its maker was not seen thereafter. As 24 leaf pieces were later found forming the nest chamber, I had apparently only witnessed the last half of its construction.

The following day, close to 1:00 p.m., possibly the same bee arrived on site, circled, landed and then began searching on the ground. After visiting 3-4 locations the bee focused on one, did a little digging then moved to another site 45 cm

distant. Here excavating began in earnest. After loose surface litter was pushed aside it began scratching with its legs. Then, using its large lips like a backhoe's blade, it began scraping loosened earth backwards out of the tunnel. This created a kind of apron in front. The nesting tunnel was considered complete when the bee was observed carrying in the first leaf cutting. Tunnel digging had taken this individual just under one hour, 58 minutes and 30 seconds to be precise!

Combining the partial observations of July 3rd (and extrapolating for the unobserved construction time) with those of July 4th provides an approximate building time for a single nest. From start to finish, it took this female leaf-cutting bee just over 2½ hours, before laying its single egg!

After this series of observations was completed, I endeavoured to uncover the nest observed on July 3rd. It was not easy to find. Eventually, about 3-4 cm below the surface, the nest chamber was located. Inside the tunnel was a 2 cm +/- long cylinder of elongate leaf shards neatly cemented together, surrounded by a number of similar sized loose cuttings. This

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sheath was capped at each end, by circular ones (photos 4 and 5). Inside the cylinder was a wad of ‘sticky yellow pollen’ on which the egg is laid. The egg was not located. The leaf shards used in this nest’s construction all came from nearby Saskatoon shrubs (*Amelanchier alnifolia*).

The Megachilidae is a family of largish, robust, solitary bees. These bees do not gather pollen on their legs like honey bees, but rather on a cluster of hairs, on their abdomens. The well-known mason bees, which many people attract to their gardens with nesting tubes, are also members of this family.

For readers interested in insect biology, the author highly recommends the writings of J.H. Fabre, in particular “The Wonders of Instinct”. Though over a century old, Fabre’s observations provide fascinating insights into the natural history of six legged creatures.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Dr. Rob Cannings, Curator Emeritus of Entomology, Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, and Dr. Cory Sheffield, a megachilid expert at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, Regina, for their assistance in the preparation of this note.

References:

- Borror, D.J. and R.E. White, 1970: A Field Guide to the Insects of America North of Mexico. Peterson Field Guide Series. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA.
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Photo 2.



Photo 3.



Photo 4.



Photo 5. Scale in photo is 1 cm.

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Open Ocean Birding in the Bering Sea and North Pacific Ocean

By Jim Cosgrove, Ann Nightingale, and Robert Gowan



Laysan Albatross.
Photo: Jim Cosgrove.

In October 2018, some members of the VNHS read a posting from Ann Nightingale that a Norwegian Cruise Line ship would be making a repositioning trip from Yokohama, Japan to Vancouver, Canada during the month of May 2019. The cruise was being offered at a very reasonable price, with on-board perks for those that registered early.

The path of the cruise was from Yokohama north to the Japanese island of Hokkaido (an eight-hour stop), north (one day at sea) to the Russian town of Petropavlovsk (an eight-hour stop) and the east across the north Pacific and Bering Sea (four days at sea) to Seward, Alaska (an eight-hour stop). There would be three other stops in Alaska (Juneau, Icy Point Strait and Ketchikan) and a visit to the Hubbard Glacier before heading down the Inside Passage to Vancouver. The whole trip would be 15 days.

Ann established an email address for those interested, and over time, there were 16 adventurers signed up. Some were very skilled birders who were looking for the opportunity to add some pelagic birds to their life lists, some were avid birders, some were avid photographers and some were fairly novice birders who were looking forward to learning about the pelagic birds as well as improving their birding skills.

Over the winter, the participants organized into several groups. Some would be going to Japan early to do some birding prior to boarding the cruise ship and those groups were visiting a number of different sites in Japan. Some remarkable birds were seen and photographed and some life lists improved significantly.

May 5, 2019, saw us all aboard the Norwegian Jewel, and most were on deck as we left Yokohama to the beat of some Taiko drums on the dock and a very pale Mount Fuji in the distance. We birded until dark as we travelled up the east coast of Japan's main island but we did not see many birds. We did document Laysan Albatross, Black-footed Albatross, Short-tailed Albatross as well as Short-tailed, Sooty and



Black-tailed Gull.
Photo: Jim Cosgrove.



Black-footed Albatross.
Photo: Jim Cosgrove.

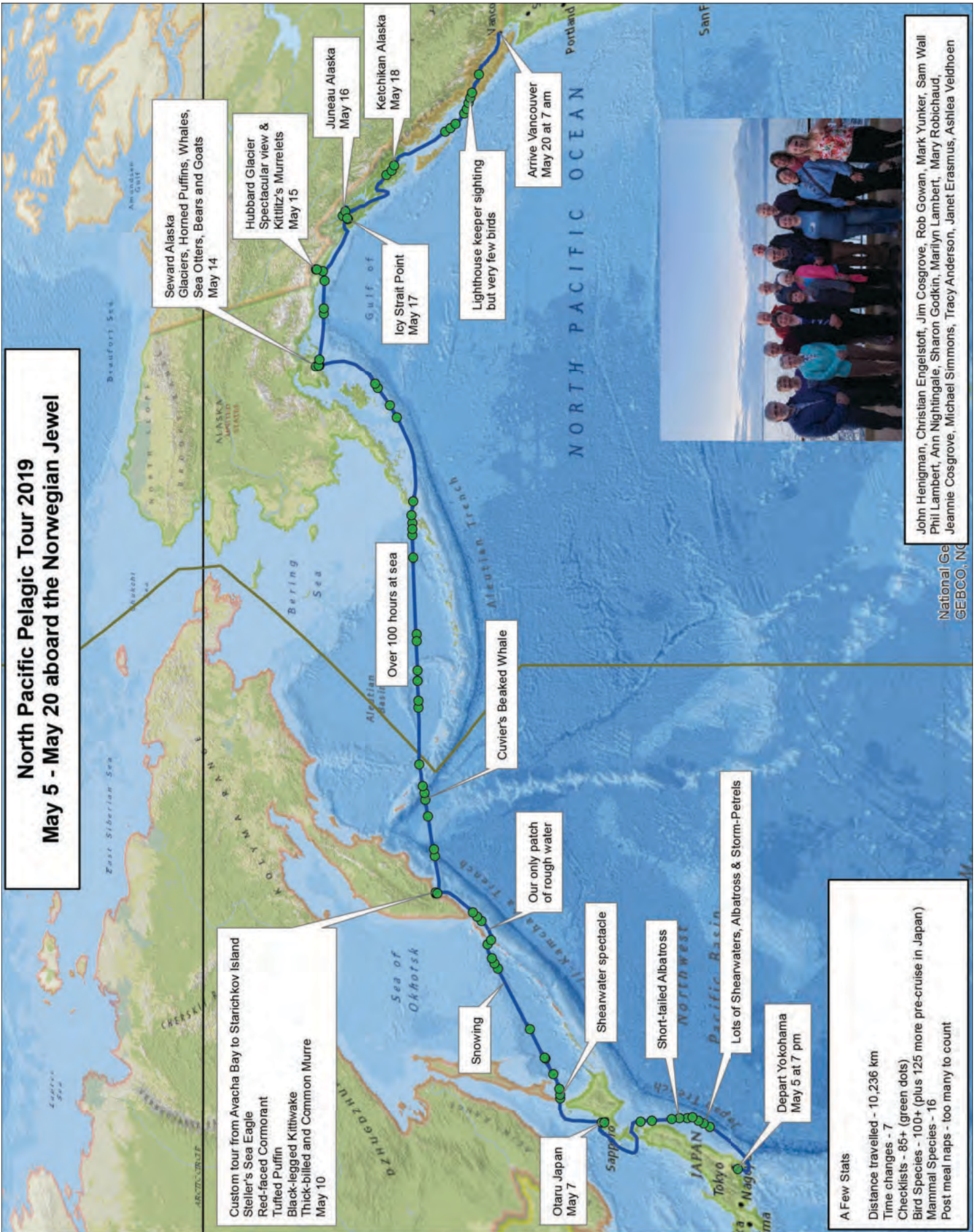
Streaked Shearwaters on our first full day at sea. We also had our first WOW moment of the trip with an estimated 90,000 birds in one group. Many of us thought this was the best day of the trip; we were fine with that.

The next morning had some birders on deck at dawn as we approached the island of Hokkaido and our first port of call, Otaru. Many of us had signed up for a shore excursion and did pick up some new land birds such as the Chestnut-cheeked Starling, Oriental Green Finch and White Wagtail.

Leaving Japan, we spent a full day at sea as we moved to the port town of Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia. Dawn found us in the midst of the largest flock of shearwaters you could imagine. A one-minute count through a scope yielded 2000 birds. Over the course of the next 80 minutes, travelling at about 20 knots, we estimated 420,000 shearwaters. Many of the same pelagic birds as we had seen before but we added Northern Fulmar, Vega Gull and both Leach's and Fork-tailed Storm Petrels to the list. One particular bird of interest was a Barn Swallow that crash-landed on the deck at the feet of some of our birders. The bird was exhausted and obviously lost. It spent several minutes on the deck, too tired to move, before it flew a short distance to some of the ship's superstructure. Eventually, it moved out of sight and we did not see it again.

In Russia, customs presented a bit of a hassle to get us off the ship in time to meet a personal tour that Ann had been

North Pacific Pelagic Tour 2019 May 5 - May 20 aboard the Norwegian Jewel



able to arrange. A van took us to a boat that then took us off on a five-hour trip through Avacha Bay, where we visited several very rich bird sites. Highlights included four Steller's Sea Eagles, Tufted Puffins by the hundreds, Thick-billed Murre, Red-faced Cormorant and tens of thousands of Black-legged Kittiwake. While drifting quietly near the nesting pinnacles of the kittiwakes and murre, the boat crew fed us a very nice lunch followed by a feast of freshly caught and cooked crab. What a fantastic afternoon! Although the seas were rough in places (3–4 meters), only our tour guide was afflicted by mal de mer. He was an interesting shade of green before he disappeared below decks and was not seen again until we were back in harbor.

Well fed, and very happy with the many lifers documented on this trip, in magnificent scenery, we returned to the Jewel for our night departure to Seward to the east.

For the next four days (including two Mother's Days as we crossed the International Date Line and the Bering Sea), we lined the railings from dawn to dusk and documented the birds we saw. This was a special time as land was so far away and at times we were travelling along the continental shelf. Jaegers, albatross, fulmars, murre, petrels, auklets, phalaropes, puffins, and murrelets were all documented, and again some were present in very large numbers, while others such as Parakeet Auklets were only seen once or twice.

Our arrival in Seward, Alaska, brought us back to many of the birds that we know well, but there were still a few



(above) Shearwater Spectacle. Photo: Ann Nightingale.

(left) Short-tailed Shearwater. Photo: Jim Cosgrove.

(right) Barn Swallow that crash-landed on the deck. Photo: Jim Cosgrove.



(left) Thick-billed Murres. Photo: Rob Gowan.

(below) Seabird colony in Russia. Photo: Jim Cosgrove.



new ones left for our less experienced birders, including Arctic Tern and Horned Puffin. For those of you who would like to see some of the northern birds and are on an Alaska cruise, then think about taking the Major Marine Tours boat in Seward. Some great scenery along the way, and we also saw Mountain Goat, Black Bear, Dall's Porpoise, Humpback Whale, and Sea Otter.

While the focus of our trip was the pelagic birds, we did see and document some of the mammals we came across, including Sperm Whale, Common Dolphin, Cuvier's Beaked Whale, Minke Whale, Humpback Whale and Dall's Porpoise.

For those of you thinking about doing this trip in the future, then think about doing the September trip from Vancouver to Yokohama. That way dawn is an hour later on the five time changes rather than an hour earlier. Getting up at 0400 one morning and then 0300 the next morning, etc., was a challenge. Of course, going in the fall will get you a different slate of birds.

All in all, it was a great adventure and a wonderful way to go birding with friends. For more details you can check out Ann's blog of the trip at <http://nightingaleadventures.blogspot.com>, Jim and Jeannie's blog at <https://jcosgroverv5.wixsite.com/2jsadventure>

Several of our comrades have also posted their photos to Flickr, including Rob Gowan at https://www.flickr.com/photos/pampered_oaks/albums/72157708899221093/ with/48007732037/



Ancient Murrelets.
Photo: Jim Cosgrove.



Tufted Puffin. *Photo: Rob Gowan.*



Dall's Porpoise. *Photo: Ann Nightingale.*



Common Murres. *Photo: Jeannie Cosgrove.*



Steller's Sea-Eagle. *Photo: Rob Gowan.*



Shipboard viewing on the roughest day.
Photo: Ann Nightingale.



Colonies near Seward, Alaska. *Photo: Jeannie Cosgrove.*

Open Ocean Birding Species List—May 2019

Greater White-fronted Goose	Dunlin	Bonin Petrel	Long-tailed Tit
Lesser White-fronted Goose	Least Sandpiper	Providence Petrel	Eurasian Nuthatch
Brant	Pectoral Sandpiper	Streaked Shearwater	Eurasian Wren
Cackling Goose	Western Sandpiper	Pink-footed Shearwater	Pacific Wren
Canada Goose	Long-billed Dowitcher	Flesh-footed Shearwater	Brown Dipper
Mute Swan	Common Snipe	Sooty Shearwater	American Dipper
Tundra Swan	Terek Sandpiper	Short-tailed Shearwater	Brown-eared Bulbul
Whooper Swan	Red-necked Phalarope	Brandt's Cormorant	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Northern Shoveler	Red Phalarope	Red-faced Cormorant	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Falcated Duck	Common Sandpiper	Pelagic Cormorant	Asian Stubtail
Gadwall	Gray-tailed Tattler	Great Cormorant	Japanese Bush Warbler
Eurasian Wigeon	Common Greenshank	Japanese Cormorant	Eastern Crowned Warbler
American Wigeon	Greater Yellowlegs	Double-crested Cormorant	Oriental Reed Warbler
Eastern Spot-billed Duck	South Polar Skua	Great Blue Heron	Japanese White-eye
Mallard	Pomarine Jaeger	Gray Heron	Red-billed Leiothrix
Northern Pintail	Parasitic Jaeger	Great Egret	Asian Brown Flycatcher
Green-winged Teal (Eurasian)	Long-tailed Jaeger	Intermediate Egret	Blue-and-white Flycatcher
Green-winged Teal (American)	Common Murre	Little Egret	Japanese Robin
Common Pochard	Thick-billed Murre	Cattle Egret	Siberian Blue Robin
Tufted Duck	Pigeon Guillemot	Black-crowned Night-Heron	Narcissus Flycatcher
Greater Scaup	Marbled Murrelet	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Blue Rock-Thrush
Lesser Scaup	Long-billed Murrelet	Osprey	Brown-headed Thrush
Harlequin Duck	Kittlitz's Murrelet	Eastern Buzzard	Pale Thrush
Surf Scoter	Ancient Murrelet	Japanese Sparrowhawk	Varied Thrush
White-winged Scoter	Japanese Murrelet	Black Kite	Hermit Thrush
Long-tailed Duck	Parakeet Auklet	Bald Eagle	American Robin
Barrow's Goldeneye	Least Auklet	Steller's Sea-Eagle	Japanese Thrush
Common Merganser	Crested Auklet	Common Kingfisher	Dusky Thrush
Red-breasted Merganser	Rhinoceros Auklet	Belted Kingfisher	European Starling
Ring-necked Pheasant (Green)	Horned Puffin	Ural Owl	Chestnut-cheeked Starling
Little Grebe	Tufted Puffin	Pygmy Woodpecker	White-cheeked Starling
Red-necked Grebe	Black-legged Kittiwake	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Gray Wagtail
Great Crested Grebe	Sabine's Gull	Japanese Woodpecker	Japanese Wagtail
Eared Grebe	Bonaparte's Gull	Red-breasted Sapsucker	White Wagtail
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	Black-headed Gull	Northern Flicker	Brambling
Oriental Turtle-Dove	Black-tailed Gull	Peregrine Falcon	Hawfinch
White-bellied (Green) Pigeon	Mew Gull	Ashy Minivet	Japanese Grosbeak
Rufous Hummingbird	Herring Gull	Bull-headed Shrike	Oriental Greenfinch
House Swift	Herring Gull (Vega)	Eurasian Jay	Eurasian Siskin
Eurasian Moorhen	Slaty-backed Gull	Azure-winged Magpie	Lapland Longspur
Eurasian Coot	Glaucous-winged Gull	Oriental Magpie	Meadow Bunting
Ruddy-breasted Crake	Glaucous Gull	Eurasian Magpie (Kamchatkan)	Rustic Bunting
Sandhill Crane	Little Tern	Black-billed Magpie	Gray Bunting
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Common Tern	Japanese Paradise Flycatcher	Black-faced Bunting
Black Oystercatcher	Arctic Tern	Steller's Jay	Fox Sparrow
Black-bellied Plover	Arctic Loon	Northwestern Crow	Golden-crowned Sparrow
Pacific Golden-plover	Pacific Loon	Carrion Crow	Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon)
Semipalmated Plover	Common Loon	Large-billed Crow	Savannah Sparrow
Gray-headed Lapwing	Yellow-billed Loon	Common Raven	Song Sparrow
Lesser Sand-plover	Laysan Albatross	Eurasian Skylark	Lincoln's Sparrow
Greater Sand-plover	Black-footed Albatross	Tree Swallow	Pine Siskin
Kentish Plover	Short-tailed Albatross	Violet-green Swallow	Orange-crowned Warbler
Little Ringed Plover	Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel	Barn Swallow	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Bristle-thighed Curlew	Leach's Storm-Petrel	Asian House-Martin	Yellow Warbler
Eurasian Curlew	Tristram's Storm-Petrel	Coal Tit	Townsend's Warbler
Whimbrel	Least Storm-Petrel	Varied Tit	Wilson's Warbler
Ruddy Turnstone	Northern Fulmar	Willow Tit	Eurasian Tree Sparrow
Black Turnstone	Stejneger's Petrel	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	
Red-necked Stint	Mottled Petrel	Japanese Tit	

Bring Back the Bluebirds Project 2019 (Year Eight) Update

Cowichan Valley Naturalists' Society



Western Bluebird
(female).



Western
Bluebirds "at
home" (male
and female).



(left) Western
Bluebirds (female
and male).

(below) Western
Bluebird (male).
Photo: Mark Yunker.



At the end of March, the Cowichan Valley Naturalists' Society (CVNS) hosted a bluebird trail monitoring workshop that taught volunteers about nestbox and trail monitoring strategies. Following the workshop, CVNS volunteers have been working studiously to monitor and maintain nearly 250 nestboxes (dispersed among 70 different properties).

The CVNS currently has a single bluebird monitoring trail in the Victoria area and hopes to expand on this at some point in the future to build connectivity between bluebirds in the Cowichan Valley and southern populations.

On April 7th, the CVNS hosted a Beer and Burger fundraiser at the Cowichan Bay Pub. This event was a tremendous success with nearly 140 attendees and raised \$4000 for the Bring Back the Bluebirds project. A huge thank-you to all of our supporters and volunteers who coordinated music, raffles and the silent auction.

On April 10th and 30th, the CVNS hosted "bluebird blitzes" in which volunteers from the community simultaneously survey many areas within the Cowichan Valley in search of bluebirds. On the first blitz, volunteers sighted the third nesting pair of the season, and the second blitz yielded several sightings

of bluebirds at previously known locations. In addition to our three breeding pairs, we also have a few solo male bluebirds that are hanging out in the valley without a mate.

At the end of April, the CVNS were a part of the annual In Bloom Festival, the one day of the year where the Cowichan Garry Oak Preserve is open to the public! Despite being a super windy day, we had a great turnout (over 100 visitors at our table) and even had a male and female bluebird cooperate for many to see. We are always thrilled at finding ways to encourage Garry oak ecosystem stewardship with events like this!

On the April 29th we attended the GOERT Conference in Victoria. Genevieve presented her work on the Bluebird Project and the Eagle Heights protection plan on behalf of the CVNS. This was a fantastic symposium focussed on the conservation of Garry-oak ecosystems and their unique inhabitants. For her tremendous volunteer contributions Genevieve was awarded the Golden Acorn Award (congratulations!).

In the first weekend of May, the CVNS hosted BC Nature's annual general meeting in Duncan. We are extremely thankful for the support of our volunteers who were instrumental in organizing such a large and significant event. The AGM

involved several field trips to important ecological areas and we were again able to show off our beautiful Western bluebirds to naturalists from all across BC. Thanks again to everybody who was involved in such a fantastic event.

At the time of writing, we have three nesting pairs of bluebirds in the Cowichan Valley, two of which are incubating eggs (12 eggs in incubation, 4 hatchlings and 2 unhatched eggs as of May 22nd!). The females among these pairs are incubating their first clutch of the year and hopefully we will have more nestlings soon. The CVNS are also busy growing mealworms (right in the Cowichan Valley!). The bluebird families are supplemented with mealworms to ensure both the young and their parents are nourished. We also supplement with mealworms to encourage the bluebirds to have a second clutch of eggs later in the summer.

Population Summary

9 Adults
3 Nesting Pairs
14 Eggs
2-3 Single Males

We will continue surveying the Cowichan Valley in hopes of finding more bluebirds.

Please check www.facebook.com/CowValleyNaturalists and www.cowichanbluebird.ca for more frequent updates, info and photos. Send an email to cowichanbluebird@gmail.com if you would like to receive weekly email updates about the project, and as always, remember to let us know if you see a Western Bluebird on Vancouver Island!

Salish Sea Creatures

By Tina Kelly

Photo by author



Sand Lance at Witty's Lagoon Regional Park, summer 2018.

Pacific Sand Lance

Where are the fish? Fish have been notably absent from this column so let me introduce the Pacific Sand Lance, *Ammodytes hexapterus*.

Pacific Sand Lance is one of many forage fish species in the region. Forage fish, as the name implies, are fish species critically important to the coastal food web; these are fish eaten by a wide diversity of birds, marine mammals, and larger fish species including Chinook Salmon. Other local forage fish species are Pacific Herring, Surf Smelt, and Northern Anchovy.

Sand Lance are schooling fish found in both nearshore and offshore habitats; when not feeding in the water column they bury in sandy substrates anywhere from the intertidal zone to deep water. It is in the high tide zone of sandy gravel beaches where Sand Lance spawn; spawning in this region however makes them highly susceptible to human disturbance.

What does this fish look like? Sand Lance are silver fish with flashes of blue, grey and green colouration. The slender body can reach 28 cm in length. They have a pointed snout, a forked tail and a dorsal fin that runs the length of the body; the pointed snout protrudes out of the sand when buried.

Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 10 new members since the last issue. The following have agreed to have their name published in this Welcome section.

Karen Lochhead

Victoria
*Geography, geology,
geoheritage*

Alan Fleming

Edinburgh

Patricia Fisher

Victoria

Sherman Waddell

Victoria
*Nature art, Photography,
Learning more*

Cassandra Rosa

Sidney
*Marine invertebrates, birds,
and ecological restoration*

BULLETIN BOARD

Outerbridge Park Sunday Bird Walks

Sundays July 14 and August 11 at 9:00 a.m. Rocky Point Bird Observatory hosts guided bird walks at Outerbridge Park in Saanich on the 2nd Sunday of each month. The easy walks, suitable for people with mobility concerns, begin at the parking area off Royal Oak Drive. For dates and details, see <http://rpbo.org> Download the bird list http://www.rpbo.org/outerbridge_park.pdf

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary Guided Bird Walks

Every Wednesday and Sunday 9:00 a.m.
Bring binoculars and walking shoes and meet in the parking lot for this informal and informative walk around the lake area (usually led by VNHS members). Donations are appreciated. For information, see <http://www.swanlake.bc.ca/adult-programs.php> Download the sanctuary bird checklist: <http://tinyurl.com/birdchecklist>

Enhance your knowledge...

Consider buying yourself or a birder friend A Guide to Bird Calls of Southern Vancouver Island (CD/booklet set) by Rocky Point Bird Observatory. This guide provides an introduction to call notes of common birds found on southern Vancouver Island. When learning to bird by ear, many people concentrate on learning the songs because songs tend to be complex and often beautiful. However, songs are generally only by breeding males in the spring and summer, and there is a whole world of simpler sounds given year-round by songbirds of all ages and sexes. For information or purchase (discount for RPBO members), contact rpbo@rpbo.org

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or extinct.*



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and
RETIREMENT
PLAN
DESIGNATIONS**

To discuss the possibility of leaving a planned gift to Swan Lake, please contact kburton@swanlake.bc.ca or phone: 250.479.0211 today.

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/?page_id=1518 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 the Field Trip Coordinator Claudia Copley. Many of you do interesting things either for fun or for work, and it would be great to share! See page two for email addresses and phone numbers.

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. If space allows, guests may participate for up to three trips, after which they are expected to join the Society.

Despite our best efforts to schedule events in advance, changes are inevitable. Please check the website close to the date for any changes. We sometimes also schedule additional events due to unexpected opportunities. Please be sure that VNHS has your up-to-date email address to receive these changes or notice of additional events. If you do not use the internet, team up with someone who does to keep up with changes.

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 the Calendar page of the VNHS website (http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1518) 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.

JULY

.....

Sunday July 7

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Monthly Butterfly Outing

Join **Gordon Hart** on our monthly Butterfly outing. Each outing is intended to help us learn more about our local butterflies. This outing is weather dependent. It needs to be warm and sunny to make it worthwhile. We will start at the top of Mount Tolmie (off Cedar Hill Cross Rd). Meet at 1:00 p.m. in the lot by the reservoir where we will have an initial look for butterflies and then decide where to go from there. Contact Gordon at (250) 721-1264 or butterflies@vicnhs.bc.ca for more information.

Sunday, July 14

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Olympic Park Hurricane Ridge High Elevation Wild Flowers—Switchback Option

To enjoy the amazing wildflowers and the spectacular mountain scenery in Washington's Olympic National Park, we get picked up by a small bus/van after getting off the Coho ferry. From near the Visitor Centre at the top of Hurricane Ridge, we will start along a high ridge trail towards Mount Angeles on the Klahhane Ridge trail. The route drops away quickly on both sides to give fabulous views as well as close-ups of many fascinating subalpine plants. Then we'll start downhill from there on the adjoining Switchback Trail. This goes down quickly through a sometimes more moist area with quite a different variety of plants. The trail eventually meets

up with the main road in a very lush area and we arrange for the bus driver to meet us there to take us back to the ferry. The route may vary if conditions dictate. Although the weather is generally sunny and clear, due to the high elevation, it could be quite cool or rainy so dress appropriately. Also have sturdy foot wear and hiking poles might be handy but the trail is mostly reasonably surfaced. Bring a lunch and lots to drink as we will not be near any facilities. 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 (now must find a pay parking lot) and purchase your ferry ticket that costs about \$50 CDN return. The parking and ferry costs are 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 \$80.00 CDN. Limited number of participants, so reserve your spot early. VNHS members get priority. Please do not book after July 7. First contact Agnes to reserve your spot. Then pay the cost of the tour online (get the link when you reserve) or you can pay by cheque (address when you reserve). Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 to reserve or if you need more information.

Sunday, July 21

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Mount Washington Botanical Day Trip

This trip is planned for peak bloom time but the area is interesting over several weeks with a succession of subalpine flowers so there will be lots to see even if the season is a bit early or late. We will first do a complete tour around Paradise Meadows. We always hope to see the illusive American Three-toed Woodpecker in that area along with the amazing flowers. Your bonus for going on the trip is a list with the names of all the plants on it. Then we plan to take the chairlift to first have a look at the flowers around the chairlift area. Since it is higher, they should not be as far advanced as below. Watch for interesting Butterflies as we meander around because this entire area is known to have some very good ones. Then we plan to walk down from the top on the rough Linton's Trail. There should be flowers and hopefully some interesting Butterflies. Be warned that the beginning of the trail is very scabbly so it must be taken slowly and carefully. The trail improves after a bit but still is not great. We hope the butterflies make it worthwhile. We will leave Victoria at 7:00 a.m. and return late, stopping for a quick supper on the way home. We'll eat our bag lunch someplace out on the trail. You must register by contacting Agnes. You must preregister as the number of participants will be limited. Everyone will be asked to car-pool. Hopefully we'll take the van. We will assist in organizing this beforehand. Cost will be about \$40 for the day from Victoria. Although the weather is generally sunny and clear, due to the high elevation, it could be quite cool or rainy. Also have sturdy footwear and hiking poles might be handy. Bring a lunch and drinks. Remember to bring money for the chairlift (about \$11.00) and also to pay for a fast-food supper. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 to register or if you need more information.

Saturday July 27

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Florence Lake & Langford Lake Birding

Join the Saturday Birding Group who will be going to Florence Lake and Langford Lake. We will 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. Turn right at the stop and you will be on McCallum/Spencer 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/Spencer Rd to the corner by the Shell station. Curve around the front of the gas station on to the frontage road that 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 dead ends at 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 woody birds. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 if you need more information.

Sunday, July 28

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Olympic Peninsula Sol Duc Fall, Marymere Falls and Lake Crescent

We get picked up by a small bus/van after getting off the Coho ferry in Port Angeles and we are going to head east and a bit south from Port Angeles to enter Olympic National Park. We will start by going along the south edge of the beautiful deep Lake Crescent and then south towards Sol Duc Falls. We will travel through the Sol Duc Valley alongside the river enjoying the old growth trees amid a lush rainforest landscape. We'll make a few scenic stops before we reach the Sol Duc Falls area. There is a moderate hike to reach the falls and we will spend a while enjoying the area before turning back towards Lake Crescent. We will have our lunch at a scenic spot and then climb along the moss and fern covered area up the gentle hill to Marymere Falls. With what time we have left before returning for the ferry, we will explore some of the trails nearby that are close to the glacier-fed crystal clear Lake Crescent. Throughout the day, we will watch and listen for birds along the way. We may not see too many different ones than at home but seeing them in the varying habitats adds to our enjoyment of the day. Although the weather is usually good at this time of year, it could be cool or rainy so dress appropriately. Also have sturdy foot wear and hiking poles might be handy but the trail is mostly reasonably surfaced. 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 (now must find a pay parking lot) and purchase your ferry ticket that costs about \$50 CDN return. The parking and ferry costs are 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 going both ways. Cost of the charter bus and entry to the park is \$85.00

CDN. Limited number of participants so reserves your spot and pay early. VNHS members get priority. You may not book after Jul 21. First contact Agnes to reserve your spot. Then pay the cost of the tour online (get the link when you reserve) or you can pay by cheque (address when you reserve). Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 to reserve or if you need more information.

AUGUST

Sunday August 4

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Monthly Butterfly Outing

Join **Gordon Hart** on our monthly Butterfly outing. Each outing is intended to help us learn more about our local butterflies. This outing is weather dependent. It needs to be warm and sunny to make it worthwhile. We will start at the top of Mount Tolmie (off Cedar Hill Cross Rd). Meet at 1:00 p.m. in the lot by the reservoir where we will have an initial look for butterflies and then decide where to go from there. Contact Gordon at (250) 721-1264 or butterflies@vicnhs.bc.ca for more information.

Saturday August 17

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 will still see a few beach flowers in the dunes as we walk along. Ask

the leader to show you a Black Widow Spider if that interest you. Most people don't even know they are there. 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 that leads to the parking lot. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 if you need more information.

Monday August 26

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Sidney Spit Birding

It's the time of year to make the trek over to Sidney Spit on Sidney Island to look for interesting shorebirds on their southern migration. There are always good ones reported from there—Baird's Sandpiper, Sanderlings, Semipalmated Sandpipers and plovers, maybe even that illusive Buff-breasted Sandpiper we hope to see! Also close-ups on Purple Martins and we'll see other passerines in the woods. You will be impressed with the recent impressive removal of invasives plants from the Spit to allow more habitat for native plants and areas for nesting birds. Bring a lunch and drinks (no water available on island). Due to the over-crowding on the ferry on the weekend, we have chosen to go during the week. 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 Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

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MacGillivray's Warbler. *Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy.*