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The Victoria NATURALIST

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For membership information and renewal, please contact Darren Copley, 250-479-6622, or write to Membership Committee c/o The Victoria Natural History Society, Box 5220, Victoria, BC, V8R 6N4. A copy of our membership form is available on our website <www.vicnhs.bc.ca>.

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COVER PHOTO: A predatory whelk (*Bruclarkia acuminata*) embedded in the fossil beds at Muir Creek (p.6). Find out more about the effort to protect Muir Creek at <www.muircreek.org>. Photo: Darren Copley

Once in a while something happens that provides a window into how things used to be. For me, most recently, it was the hauled-out mass of an elephant seal at Willows Beach. Here's a beast that has no choice but to head to shore in order to undergo its "catastrophic moult" – a period where it sheds not only hair but its outer layer of skin. If you've experienced salt in a wound (literally, in this case) then you know why they leave the ocean!

Looking at its log-like bulk lying on one of the most popular beaches in our region I wondered: why? Why had it chosen such a busy spot? Dogs outnumber people, people almost outnumber logs...But of course it came ashore at night, probably a rainy one when not even a gaggle of teens was around. And it did what elephants seals would have done for time immemorial – found a beach, humped its way to a spot among what would have been a much smaller amount of logs (thanks to no logging activity), and waited until it had finished healing. Maybe a beach like Willows would have been littered with them, because prior to our impacts their populations were healthy. Maybe *they* would have been the driftwood, so the beach may have, in effect, not appeared that differently from today.

I found myself uncomfortably among the gawkers on a rainy yet busy beach day; asking people to call back their unleashed dogs, listening to onlookers muse without even bothering to read the information posted, and saddened for the seal's unwitting choice of location to experience a "catastrophe". By the end of the weekend it had slipped back into the salt to find a more secluded spot, choosing pain over fame.

Claudia

President's Message

By Darren Copley

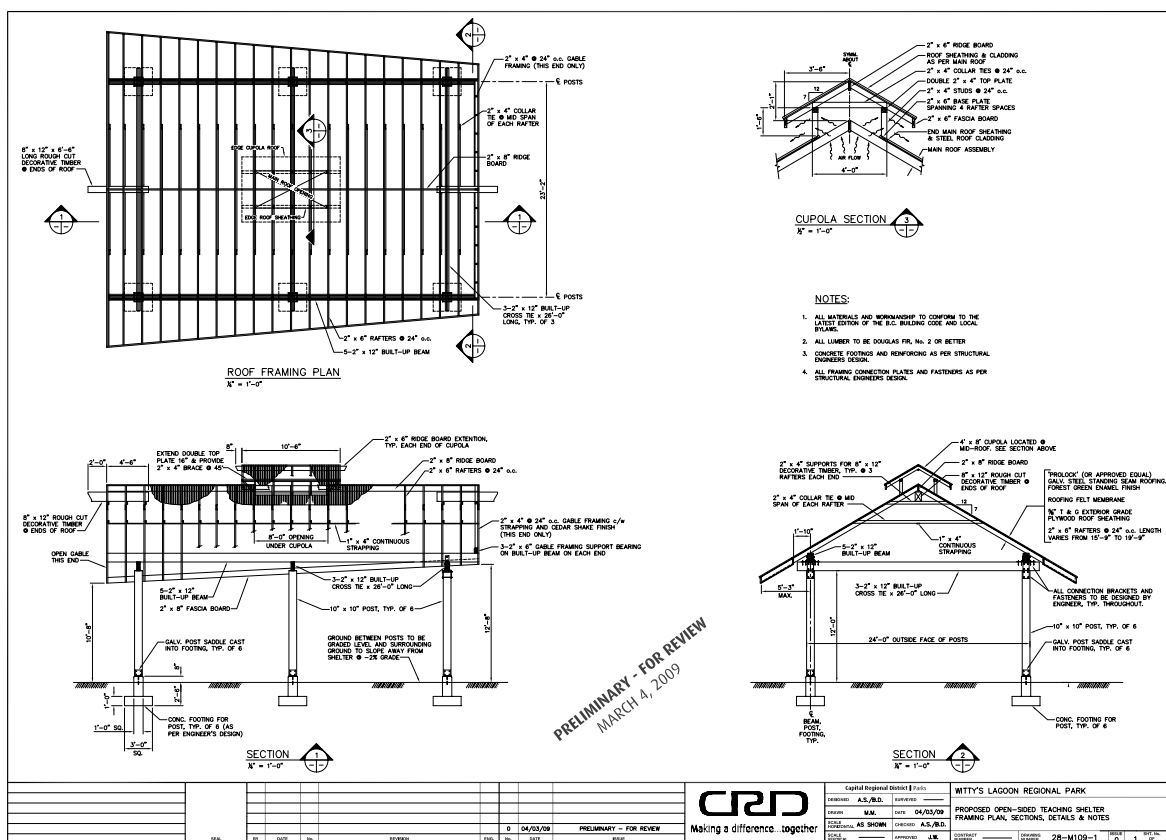
Well if you happened to miss our annual general meeting in March, I thought I'd fill you in on what was discussed. Not only did you miss our annual review of what your society has been up to, but you also missed a fantastic natural history show about places afar. Unfortunately we also saw the terms of a few of our board members come to an end, and we'd like to extend our thanks to all of the hard work that was done by your past-president Ed Pellizzon, as well as Clare Aries and Wendy Tyrell. As is typical of our Society, three members were happy to step in and fill the vacancies. New this year to the board are Phil Lambert (who presently organizes marine night), Bill Dancer (one of the leaders of our Schools Project and the Tuesday Birding Group), and Jennifer Ellenton, a relatively new member to the Society. I am really looking forward to working with all of them.

It's been another very active year – hopefully you had a chance to go on one of our many and varied field trips or enjoyed one of our four different monthly presentations. We've had a great team organizing these, so be sure to thank

them. We also continued with our Schools Project, reaching more than 450 students from 11 different schools in the Victoria area, and hope to see this number continue to increase annually. As well, the first year of our efforts designed to get university biology students hooked on natural history through field trips ended recently. If you would like to help out with any one of these activities, be sure to connect with one of your board members.

Some more permanent projects include the final stages of our Viaduct Flats viewing area and the installation of the interpretive signage to help people identify wildlife through our VNHS telescope. We are also in the editing stages for a reprint of the *Naturalists' Guide to the Victoria Region*, with several new chapters (marine mammals, dragonflies, and fungi), and a funding proposal has gone out for some new promotional brochures that talk about our society, while helping people to identify different groups of organisms (butterflies, birds, spiders, marine life, etc.).

One of this year's major projects is just beginning. We've partnered with a team from Leadership Victoria and CRD Parks to raise money for an outdoor teaching shelter at Witty's Lagoon Regional Park. The Leadership Victoria group is a small team of emerging community leaders that take on a project like this while enrolled in a nine-month course. Check out our website for more details, and how you can help. At the time of this writing, this project has \$33,000 of the \$50,000 it needs. The Society contributed \$3,000, and other funding partners to date include the



Preliminary drawing for an outdoor teaching shelter at Witty's Lagoon Regional Park

Victoria Foundation, Lions Club, Kiwanis, Kinsmen, and TELUS. Members can rest assured that the location chosen for the structure is an area of the park that had been damaged from previous activities and the access road for equipment was already in place.

To remind members of another project that is starting this year, I first need to wish long-time VNHS member Harold Pollock a happy 100th birthday. Many of you will know that Harold was one of the mainstays of the VNHS Western Bluebird project in the mid-1990s; trying valiantly to prevent the loss of nesting bluebirds in our area. Despite everything these dedicated Bluebirders did, there was something else amiss, and bluebirds were last seen breeding here in 1994. In partnership with the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team, and many others, we hope to start a fundraising drive to kick off a reintroduction program for Western Bluebirds in 2010. We already have a donation from Harold's family honouring his incredible milestone, and a volunteer to start building the nestboxes.

Another effort getting underway this year is the Vancouver Island Ringlet Project, outlined in more detail on page 8, and new this year are marine field trips in the calendar (p.22). We are looking for a new coordinator for Birders' Night and Natural History Night, so please get in touch with me if you can help with either of these. It is the activities and projects of our members that make our society what it is. With your help, and direction, we can continue to be a force in the world of natural history. Always remember the mandate of our Society is:

- To stimulate active interest in natural history
- To study and protect flora and fauna and their habitats
- To work with other societies and like bodies having interests in common with this Society.

Let's continue to get our important message out there, and I look forward to seeing you at an upcoming event!

Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 22 new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our "welcome" column:

Elaine Hicks
Lochside Drive
birds, botany

Gordon McKerrell
Shelbourne Street

Annie and John Pang
Obed Avenue
birds, butterflies, poetry

Norm and Gerri Lavigne
Hockering Road
birds, botany

Kathy and Gary Wolfson
Welch Road



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Beach-combing the Past

By Tom Cockburn, Victoria Palaeontology Society

James Richardson of the Geological Survey of Canada first reported the rocks and fossils of the Sooke Formation in an 1876/77 report on surveys of the coalfields along the southwest coast of the Vancouver Island. Richardson noted that between Otter Point and Sherrington Point, in the sandstone beds at John River (Muir Creek?), there were fossils referable to *Ostera*, *Pecten* and *Saxidomus*.

On March 15, 2009, twenty-one members of the Victoria Natural History Society joined me for a field trip to the Sooke Formation sandstone cliffs, which are approximately 400 meters northwest of the mouth of Muir Creek. The rocks and fossils are of the late Oligocene Epoch (25 million years ago) and in 2007 palaeomagnetic techniques were used to date the material to between 24.1 and 24.8 million years old.

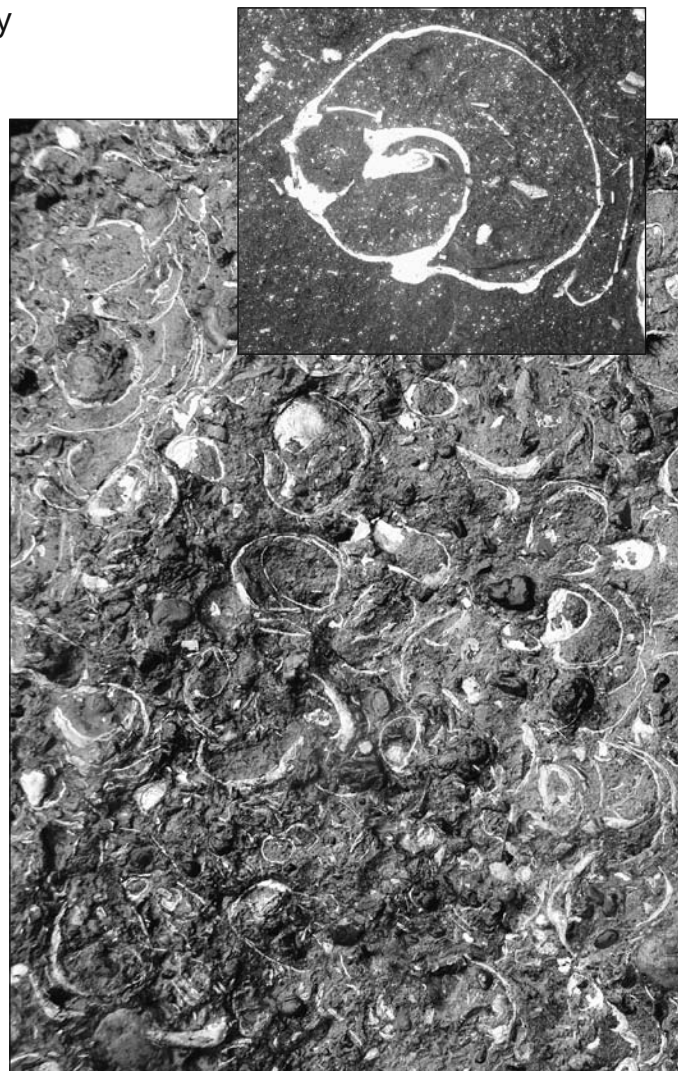
The fossils of the Sooke Formation represent a diverse near-shore and intertidal fauna consisting of gastropods, bivalves, barnacles, sand dollars, calcareous tubeworms, brachiopods, a limpet, and a coral. The bones and teeth of extinct sea mammals have also been found, including cetacean rib fragments and vertebrae, the teeth of the desmostylian (distantly related to manatees) *Cornwallis sookensis*, and a partial lower jaw and tooth of an odd carnivore, *Kolponomos*, sometimes called a “beach bear”.

Upon arriving at the fossil site, you notice that large sandstone blocks of the cliff have broken away and are resting on the upper beach. These blocks are loaded with the clam *Saxidomus newcombei* and other fossils. Examination of the cliff wall shows the cross-stratified deposition indicating wave action and a number of faults indicating that the area was tectonically active 25 million years ago, as it is today. Layers of broken and intact shells are seen in the cliff wall and in the intertidal sandstone bench that extends seaward. No fossils were collected with rock hammers and chisels on the field trip, although some nice examples of the gastropod, *Bruclarkia acuminata*, found loose on the beach were given to members.

Fossil Collecting

Victoria Palaeontology Society (www.vicpalaeo.org):

The VicPS formed in 1994 for the purpose of promoting the science of palaeontology and related earth sciences. The Society is composed of amateur and professional palaeontologists who are strongly focused on scientific research and education. The Society loans fossils to qualified researchers, donates scientifically important specimens to the Royal British Columbia Museum, and hosts an annual Fossil Fair. For information on meetings, speakers, field trips, and joining the Society, please go to our website.



Moon snails, *Polinices victoriana*, are a common predator found in these fossil beds. Photo: Mikhail Belikov. Inset photo: Darren Copley

The VicPS is also a member of the British Columbia Paleontological Alliance (BCPA) (www.bcfossils.ca), which coordinates and represents the interests of BC palaeontologists and the palaeontological societies on a provincial level. The BCPA has encouraged and worked with the province to develop a program for fossil management.

What Are Fossils and Why Are They Important: Fossils are the preserved remains, traces, tracks or impressions of animals, plants or other organisms that lived in the past. There is no minimum age a specimen has to be to be a fossil. While fossils are commonly found in rock, they do not have to be “turned into stone” to be a fossil. The importance of fossils is in their scientific and educational value, and they are part of our natural heritage.



Sandstone shoreline showing layers of well-defined marine fossils in a variety of strata. *Photo: Mikhail Belikov*

Where to Find Fossils: Fossils may be found in sedimentary rock (sandstone, shale, conglomerate) or in unconsolidated sediments such as glacial deposits on Vancouver Island and throughout the province. Likely areas are along shorelines and beaches, road cuts and road construction sites. There are many fossil sites in the Nanaimo Group of sedimentary rocks along southeast Vancouver Island between the Victoria area and Campbell River. *West Coast Fossils* by Rolf Ludvigsen and Graham Beard is an excellent guidebook and is available in most bookstores.

What Kind of Fossils Can Be Found: The most commonly found fossils on Vancouver Island are Nanaimo Group marine animals from the Cretaceous Era, such as cephalopod ammonites and nautiloids, gastropods, bivalves, scaphopods, and sea urchins. Sometimes the skeletal remains of marine reptiles, turtles, or birds are found. A single dinosaur caudal vertebra has been found from an up-island site. All vertebrate remains are very important and should be reported. Cretaceous plants such as giant palm leaves and dicots are also found in the Nanaimo Group rocks.

Pleistocene fossils are sometimes found in sand or silt sediments following glaciations. Fossils may be marine shells or the bones of Ice Age mammals such as mammoths or bison. The fossil shells are mostly the same species as those living today, but when found removed from the present living environment (i.e. inland), they truly represent “past life” and are fossils. The VicPS has had shells from two Pleistocene sites Carbon 14-dated to about 12,500 years old.

What to Do When You Find Fossils: Fossils may be surface collected with hand tools such as rock hammers and cold chisels. Always wear eye protection. Collecting should be done conservatively with as little disturbance to the site as possible. Collecting with cameras is a recommended option. It is important to document fossil sites by GPS, map notations, or field notes. The most important piece of information about fossils is the locality where they were found. Other important information is the date and the name of the collector or discoverer. The name of the fossil can be determined later. Labels with the locality information and a number assigned to the fossil should be kept with the specimens.

You are encouraged to report fossil discoveries to the Royal BC Museum and to donate them if they are determined to be rare or considered of scientific importance. You can also contact the VicPS (250-652-4267) or through the website, but please do not ask us what your fossil is worth because we do not support the selling of fossils. You can also contact other palaeontological societies through the BCPA website.

Collecting Rules and Conduct: The BCPA has Standards and Ethics for Scientific Collecting on its website, and these are followed by its member societies. The provincial government, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, has recently announced a fossil management policy. Visit the website (<www.al.gov.bc.ca/clad/strategic_land/fossil.html>) for information on the jurisdiction, principles, and priorities for fossil management, reporting fossil discoveries, and fossil ownership, collection, use, and protection.

2008 Butterfly Count Report and Appeal: Count Your Ringlets!

By James Miskelly

Butterfly watchers may remember the glorious spring of 2005. There were a number of record high temperatures, and 11 butterfly species were recorded on Vancouver Island in March. In the three following years, each spring was progressively cooler and wetter, and butterfly populations declined proportionately. Of the 24 species recorded in 2008, 17 were less than half as abundant as they were in 2005. An additional seven species that were recorded in 2005 were not seen during our 2008 counts at all. I had several reporters call me up to ask me what was happening to the butterflies. The truth is, fluctuations due to



Common ringlet (*Coenonympha tullia insulana*).
Photo: James Miskelly

spring weather and other factors have always been part of butterfly population dynamics. The real concern should be that our butterfly populations have the strength and resilience to quickly rebound from these perturbations. “What can I do?” is a question I hear a lot. The short answer, always, is habitat; support the protection of natural areas in your neighbourhood and grow native plants to model natural areas in your yard, on your boulevard, or on your patio. This year, however, I have a more specific request: Count your ringlets!

The Victoria Natural History Society has a great tradition of conservation projects aimed at rare species and rare habitats. This year, I would like to start a project on behalf of our most unspectacular butterfly-at-risk: the common ringlet.

Most experts consider the common ringlet to be a single species (*Coenonympha tullia*) that can be found through much of Europe, temperate Asia, and North America. Its North American range stretches from Alaska to the northern border of Mexico and across Canada and the northern US to Newfoundland and New England. Our local ringlets belong to subspecies *insulana*, which is found from Vancouver Island to the northwest corner of Oregon. In Canada, the common ringlet, subspecies *insulana*, is found south of Chemainus and east of Langford. It was described as the most common butterfly in Victoria in the 1950's, but today is found at only a handful of locations. It has been placed on the provincial red list for its rarity.

The larvae of the common ringlet are known to feed on grasses, though it is unknown which species are preferred or required. Ringlets are most commonly seen around low-growing, soft-leaved grasses, including California oatgrass, red fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, and bentgrasses. They are not commonly seen in areas where tall, broad-leaved grasses, such as reed canarygrass, quack grass, and orchard grass, dominate. They have an unusual life cycle that includes overlapping generations that develop throughout the spring and summer. Because there are larvae feeding all summer, ringlets are restricted to relatively moist meadows, where the grass does not completely die back during the dry season. Many sites are vernal moist Garry oak ecosystems, or places where Garry oak ecosystems grade rapidly into wetlands.

The ringlet project will begin by surveying all possible potential habitat to determine exactly where in the CRD ringlets actually occur, and how abundant they are. In the future, we will attempt to work with sympathetic land managers on occupied sites and nearby unoccupied sites to

initiate restoration, management, and enhancement activities that may encourage the butterflies to expand and colonize new sites.

I am in need of butterfly seekers who can help with the ringlet treasure hunt. I have a list of locations that will need to be surveyed, and I know many experienced butterfly

watchers will know a few places that I haven't thought of. If you would be willing to help with even a few targeted surveys, especially in May, please write to james.miskelly@gmail.com or call 250-477-0490. After all, what will it say about us as stewards of the natural world if we are unable to look after an insect that eats grass?!

2008 Butterfly Count Results

| Species | April | May | June | July | August | September | Total |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Proterptus Duskywing | 0 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Two-banded Checkered Skipper | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| European Skipper (introduced) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 22 | 3 | 0 | 25 |
| Woodland Skipper | 0 | 0 | 0 | 48 | 417 | 4 | 469 |
| Clodius Apollo | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Anise Swallowtail | 0 | 9 | 25 | 17 | 3 | 0 | 54 |
| Western Tiger Swallowtail | 0 | 11 | 117 | 77 | 4 | 0 | 209 |
| Pale Swallowtail | 0 | 4 | 18 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 33 |
| Pine White | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 16 | 0 | 17 |
| Cabbage White (introduced) | 32 | 238 | 249 | 691 | 225 | 16 | 1451 |
| Sara's Orangetip | 5 | 77 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 82 |
| Purplish Copper | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Cedar Hairstreak | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Brown Elfin | 2 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Moss' Elfin | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Grey Hairstreak | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Western Spring Azure | 23 | 397 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 432 |
| Silvery Blue | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Satyr Anglewing | 5 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| Green Comma | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mourning Cloak | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| California Tortoiseshell | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Milbert's Tortoiseshell | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Painted Lady | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Westcoast Lady | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Red Admiral | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mylitta Crescent | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 20 | 0 | 22 |
| Lorquin's Admiral | 0 | 5 | 25 | 141 | 21 | 0 | 192 |
| Common Ringlet | 0 | 4 | 81 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 87 |
| Common Woodnymph | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Great Arctic | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Total | 71 | 766 | 540 | 1017 | 710 | 20 | 3124 |



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The Biodiversity of a Suburban Farm

By Sarah Pugh, Volunteer for The Land Conservancy

Many of us have walked the trails of Mount Douglas Park, enjoying the rapid change from the cool and shady mixed forest to the sunny, open Garry oak meadows on the south face. We notice the different insects and birds as the terrain changes and marvel at the diversity in such a small place (and yes, lament the encroaching ivy and holly). If you slide down the south slope of Mt. Doug further, you will find another marvel of nature reclaiming and renewing land, but here it is a give-and-take, symbiotic relationship with the prototypical human development: the farm.

Madrona Farm occupies a sunny 27 acres adjacent to Mount Douglas Park. Prior to its life as a farm, most of the property was a wooded wetland with three natural springs that fluctuated seasonally. Bears, deer and other animals

frequented the area, although at the time the farm was cleared, hunting in the area was rampant and the original farmers made a habit of wearing the brightest orange clothing they could find when working outdoors.

The farm was a classic small family farm from the 1950s to the 1980s, with vegetable crops and beef cattle. The original farmers, Ruth and Lawrence Chambers, were not insensitive to the beauty and natural wealth of the land they'd acquired – in fact, Ruth was a founding member of the Victoria Natural History Society. Unavoidably though, the land was altered from its natural state as their mandate was to produce food. The springs were dug out and converted to ponds, and over the years most of the trees on the farm were removed. Although data isn't available, from



Close-up of a male indian plum flowers (*Oemleria cerasiformis*). Photo: Darren Copley

photographic evidence it seems the angle of the slope has increased. This was probably due to erosion – the farm lay fallow or in hay production through the 1980s and 1990s, with the ponds being used for irrigation.

The soil remained relatively rich, though, and at the end of the 1990s the grandson of the original farmers, David Chambers, arrived to take care of his ailing grandmother. He started cultivating the land again as a hobby, but over the next ten years he became more serious and now the farm is a fully productive vegetable-growing operation once more.

David has been committed from the start to working with the land, not against it. He uses organic growing methods, and has a very relaxed attitude towards the other creatures with whom he shares the land. He wages no epic battles against the slugs, and his only rodent control is his dog, Shadow. In 2004 David married Nathalie McBain, who brought with her a passion for ecological restoration and preservation – and the know-how to accomplish it, thanks to a diploma in Ecological Restoration from the University of Victoria.

Today Nathalie and David work together to enhance the farm's biodiversity and sustainability. It's not a park, and it never will be – the land is a vital part of Victoria's food

security, producing vegetables for 3000 families. But even a working farm can be home to more than just vegetables, as a "biodiversity tour" of Madrona shows.

The northwest corner of the farm is an undeveloped Garry Oak meadow. While the usual invaders are present (Scotch broom and introduced grasses), the oaks are flourishing alongside the oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*) and indian plum (*Oemleria cerasiformis*). Songbirds abound here, along with the native flowers and insects.

Below the oak meadow, David and Nathalie have constructed a "tree house" made from reclaimed wood next to the first of the three ponds on the property. Two similar but larger ponds are found toward the base of the slope. The pond is in a small depression, ringed with non-native blackberries, with a tall stand of black cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera* ssp. *trichocarpa*) beside it. These wetland trees persist around the ponds, and since the ponds are no longer used for irrigation, the trees have access to all the moisture they need year-round. Nathalie and David have done considerable work to evict the non-native American bullfrogs (*Rana catesbeiana*) from the ponds, leaving them free for the original inhabitants, pacific chorus frogs (*Pseudacris regilla*) and red-legged frogs (*Rana aurora*).



A leaf beetle (family Chrysomelidae, *Galerucella* sp.). Photo: Darren Copley

Scattered stands of tall conifers throughout the property provide ample perches for the herons that find prey in the ponds. These conifers also provide perches for the Red-Tailed Hawks, Common Ravens, Turkey Vultures and Cooper's Hawks, most of whom assist David with rodent control. They also ensure that David's chickens are smart and predator-wary, and they make his roosters earn their keep.

Smaller birds abound throughout the property, too. Nathalie lists an impressive array of birds she's sighted: Bewick's Wrens, Red-winged Blackbirds, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, House Finches, Northern flickers, Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Anna's Hummingbirds, Steller's Jays, Dark-eyed Juncos, Killdeer, California Quail, Yellow Warblers, and Pileated and Downy Woodpeckers. Nathalie has also seen (and heard) three different species of owl: Barred Owl, Barn Owl, and Great Horned Owls.

Without a doubt, the farm is a birder's dream. Part of that stems from the fact that it *is* a farm. Crops attract insects, and insects attract birds. Crops also attract birds who find them just as tasty as the humans do. The key to keeping this relationship sustainable and manageable is a diversified crop system (David rarely has more than three or four rows of any given vegetable). Since most types of insects usually prefer a single type of vegetable, reducing the amount of that type in an area prevents the kind of exponential insect growth that requires the use of pesticides. Green manure (cover crops that are tilled in), chickens rotated around the farm and mulch also provide a haven for beneficial insects and worms, which both help the crops and feed the birds.

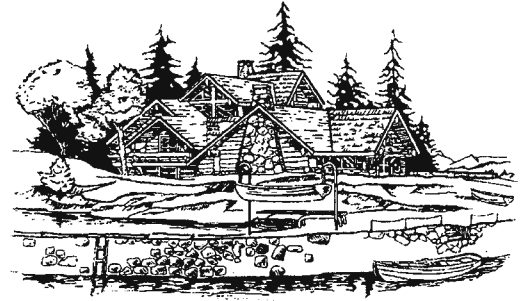
Madrona Farm draws on the best of the past and the present, in its small family-farm structure and its commitment to existing in harmony with, and in support of the surrounding ecosystems. Its success points the way for future restoration of fallow or unproductive farmland that can enhance the biodiversity of our area instead of limiting it.

Unfortunately, Madrona Farm is at risk – the owners of the land (the sons of the original farmers) wish to sell. The Land Conservancy of BC is trying to raise the money needed to buy it. TLC will lease the land to the current farmers (retaining the valuable knowledge about how the land works), and will place covenants on the land to ensure that it remains in ecologically sustainable food production forever. If you would like to donate, please go to <http://www.conservancy.bc.ca> and follow the "Save Madrona Farm" links. The total amount required is \$1.7 million, and to meet the next funding deadline TLC needs another \$400,000 in the next four months.

For more information about the farm and its crops, go to <http://www.madronafarm.com>. Tours of the farm are available at 9:30 am every second Saturday, starting May 2, 4317 Blenkinsop Road.

The VNHS will be visiting the farm May 24 – see calendar p.23 for details.

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Modiolus rectus: The Mussel with a Mighty Byssus

By Bill Merilees

Shore-prowling naturalists are familiar with mussels and their use of strong threads to attach themselves to rocks, piling, and virtually any solid object. These threads are collectively known as a byssus, defined as a “bundle of fibers secreted by glands in the foot and used to anchor bivalves to the substratum, or to construct nests or brood pouches” (Coan *et al.* 2000).

Not all mussels have byssus, partly because the term “mussel” is used to refer to a wide range of bivalves that are not necessarily closely related. For example, we have fresh water clams that are also known as mussels. For our marine species, the term is generally applied to a specific family, the Mytilidae, but even then not all members are given the common name of mussel.

The very largest of our 16 mussel species is the giant California mussel, which grows to be more than 25 cm long and frequents our outer coast. Here, in the face of the most violent storms and pounding seas, they manage to anchor themselves to the substrate and each other by means of many incredibly strong byssal threads. The tiniest of our mussels is in deep water: the Arctic glassy mussel barely reaches 6 mm. The ubiquitous mussels of our local beaches, rocks, wharves and pilings were thought for many years to be the blue mussel, *Mytilus edulis*, but instead they have been found to be foolish mussels, *M. trossulus*, and Mediterranean mussels, *M. galloprovincialis*, distinguished from one another only through molecular markers (Coan *et al.* 2000).

The straight horsemussel, *Modiolus rectus*, has a mighty byssus. Second in size to the California mussel at 22 cm, this gorgeous species is found sub-tidally, almost completely buried vertically in sandy sediments (Harbo 1997). Without a firm substrate to attach to, it has developed a different strategy; its byssus has become an anchor. Instead of a number of sturdy tough threads, the horsemussel’s byssus is composed of many thousands of long fine filaments, estimated to number in excess of 25,000 and possible more than 50,000! For a small portion of one byssus I quit counting at 1,700 threads! These threads bifurcate into two groups, as they exit the shell, one roughly horizontal and one near vertical, both penetrating the local substrate. At their extremity they attach to the largest grains of sand available, thereby forming a large bulbous mass, not unlike a ship’s anchor. These threads, the longest measuring just over 8 cm, varied from about 1/10th to 1/5th the diameter of a human hair. They appeared to get wider and flatter as they got longer. The anatomy of this byssus apparently is not well known (Coan, *pers. comm.*) so further, more detailed, study is required.



Straight Horsemussel (*Modiolus rectus*). Actual size: 14.6 cm

I would like to thank Bruce Clapp, geoduck biologist, for procuring the specimen from which these preliminary observations were made.

Literature Cited

- Coan, E.V., P.V. Scott, and F.R. Bernard. 2000. *Bivalve Seashells of Western North America*. Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Monographs, Santa Barbara, 764 p.
- Harbo, R.M. 1997. *Shells and Shellfish of the Pacific Northwest, A Field Guide*. Harbour Publishing, Madeira Park, B.C.

Pacific Herring Spawn!

By David Riedel

The 2009 VNHS field trip to witness the annual Pacific herring spawn occurred on March 8. Seventeen intrepid naturalists braved a late blast of wintery conditions to experience the spectacle in the Parksville-Qualicum Beach Wildlife Management Area and vicinity. The spawn provides a banquet for seafood-loving fauna, from the Northern Sea Lion, which can weigh more than a metric tonne, to the diminutive Mew Gull.

Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are designated under Section 4 of the provincial *Wildlife Act*. In the case of the Parksville-Qualicum Beach WMA, the reasons for the designation include:

- The area's wildlife/habitat values are of regional, provincial, or national significance.
- There is a need to conserve or manage important species and habitats while still allowing certain types of activities or developments to continue.
- And a standard "protected area" designation is not an available option or is considered too restrictive.

The Parksville-Qualicum Beach WMA was established on March 31, 1993 to conserve estuarine and foreshore habitat used by waterfowl and fish, in the context of development in the City of Parksville and the Town of Qualicum Beach. Vast beds of eel grass in the shallow waters provide habitat or food for a variety of species, including Brant geese. The northbound migration of this species is the focus of the annual Brant Wildlife Festival.

The Ministry of Environment describes this WMA's wildlife values as follows:

"The abundance and diversity of natural resources found in this WMA are outstanding on a global scale. The many estuaries, beaches, and foreshore gravel bars provide critical staging grounds for the internationally important Pacific Brant Sea Goose. These habitats are equally significant to over sixty other waterbird species; over 100,000 waterbirds come to feed in the productive foreshore waters. The estuaries and foreshore zones provide vital rearing habitat to all Pacific salmon species and Steelhead and coastal Cutthroat Trout. Millions of Herring



Northern sea lions. Photo: Bruce Whittington

spawn each spring on the abundant Eel Grass and algal beds found within the WMA foreshore. This in turn attracts several marine mammals such as the California Sea Lion, Harbour Seal, Northern Sea Lion, and Harbour Porpoise.”

Our meeting time (7:00 a.m.) arrived earlier than usual, due to the overnight transition to Pacific Daylight Time. As we drove through Nanaimo, we encountered a cell of snow and heavy fog. We thought the day might be a wash-out (or white-out). Debate commenced on the assignment of blame for the selection of this particular day. Recrimination met counter-recrimination, as no one willingly accepted responsibility.

However, we live in a region of microclimates, where the dispersal of weather systems is dictated largely by topography. On this day, Vancouver Island’s mountain ranges determined that Nanaimo alone would feel the brunt of this weather system. We were past the snow by Nanoose Bay, back into conditions that were sunny, though cold.

Our first stop was Rathtrevor Provincial Park. The snow cell had brushed the east end of Parksville, so Rathtrevor was dusted by a centimetre of the white stuff. At this location, we found Brants, Dunlins, Black-bellied Plovers, and several species of gulls and diving ducks.

Next was the Englishman River estuary, which protrudes slightly into Georgia Strait. It was therefore exposed to the icy wind, and unusually quiet and relatively devoid of fauna. We then went to Parksville Community Beach, which was more productive (more Brants, gulls and diving ducks, many at very close range), but still in the path of the bitterly cold wind. A highlight was a large number of Greater Scaups.

We found shelter on the opposite side of Parksville Bay, accessed from Doehle Road. A substantial quantity of herring milt was seen here, indicated by the whitish-green hue of the water. Thousands of ducks and gulls congregated here, including hundreds of Long-tailed Ducks, still in their stunning winter plumage, and great rafts of Surf Scoters and Greater Scaups. Northern Sea Lions were laying idly in the water and Harbour Seals’ heads bobbed at the surface. At first glance, I mistook a raised sea lion flipper for the dorsal fin of an Orca. Unfortunately, we did not see this most famous of our whales; I expect that the sea lions and seals did not share my disappointment.

French Creek Marina, Columbia Beach, two stops along Qualicum Beach, and the Little Qualicum River estuary rounded out our tour of the WMA. At French Creek, some observers were intrigued by gillnet skiffs pulling in their catch. Bald Eagles were seen snatching herring from the nets, while sea lions, seals and gulls also tried to get in on the action. In trees along the shoreline, 15 or more Bald Eagles watched patiently over the scene. We speculated that they were waiting for gulls to gorge on herring, before the unluckiest gulls would become nutritionally diverse meals for the eagles.

In the waters surrounding the Little Qualicum River outlet, we found a raft of perhaps 15 or more Black Scoters, the least common of our three scoter species.



Brant geese. Photo: Tim Zurowski, <http://www.timzphotography.com/>

Last November 29, I saw a raft of more than 60 Black Scoters at nearby Qualicum Beach; the ones located on March 8 may have been from that group.

We made two more stops beyond the WMA boundary, at Big Qualicum River and Nile Creek. The latter proved to be a highlight of the day. A vast stretch of water, from Denman Island to Qualicum Bay, contained an immense quantity of herring milt. Here too, sea lions, seals, and thousands of gulls and ducks were in attendance to partipate in the banquet. Another seafood-eating organism of the region, *Homo sapiens*, was also present; dozens of commercial fishing vessels were seen here. The most recent high tide line was marked by a line of dead herring at the mouth of Nile Creek. Most had been sampled by gulls; roe was exposed in some females.

The dramatic scenery along this section of the Georgia Strait shoreline supplemented our enjoyment of the day. The views across the Strait are dominated by the mainland Coast Mountains, Texada and Lasqueti Islands, and further along, Hornby and Denman Islands.

We identified 53 bird species, including drive-by Trumpeter Swans and Ring-necked Ducks in the Cowichan Valley on the drive home. Thanks to Rick Schortinghuis for leading the trip, Dave Lynn for driving the van and sharing his knowledge of the herring fishery, and Agnes Lynn for distributing email reminders.

The work and dedication of management partners for the Parksville-Qualicum Beach WMA must be acknowledged, including the work of volunteers who patrol the shoreline to ensure that the prohibition against dogs is obeyed. See http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/wma/parksville_qualicum/index.html for a list of management partners and more information about the WMA, and <http://www.brantfestival.bc.ca/> for information about the Brant Wildlife Festival.

Hummingbird Feeder Know How

By Alison Moran

In Victoria, we see Rufous (*Selasphorus rufus*) and Anna's (*Calypte anna*) Hummingbirds at our feeders. Rufous Hummingbirds are only here during the spring and summer, spending their winters on the Gulf Coast and Mexico. Although an unusual sight fifteen years ago, Anna's are now winter regulars at many Victoria feeders. Do not worry- feeders will not stop a bird migrating, a process that is triggered by the bird's internal clock and levels of sunshine. Anna's are with us year round and their presence at feeders has become more obvious because their numbers are increasing locally.

So how can you attract hummingbirds to your garden? Hummingbirds need nectar for energy and invertebrates, such as insects and spiders, for protein. On average they visit between 1,000 and 2,000 flowers every day. To meet the same demands, an average human would have to eat about 130 kg of hamburgers daily! Although nectar was the drink of the gods in ancient Greece, flowers only provide a simple fluid containing mainly water and sugars, primarily sucrose. Most ornithologists agree that the nectar in your feeders should be as close as possible to that provided by nature. The best sugar solution can be made easily: just boil 1 cup of table sugar (sucrose) with 4 cups water for 2 min, and then fill your feeder when it has cooled. Higher sugar concentrations, although enticing to the bird (think ice cream sundaes at

Like many birds, hummingbirds can't smell and have only limited taste. Their main food cue is the presence of a bright colour. Many hummingbird flowers are red, which explains why feeders that mimic this natural advertisement are so successful.

every meal), may cause kidney damage. **Never** use honey, juice, or artificial sweetener! Honey ferments rapidly when diluted in water and can kill the birds!

Like many birds, hummingbirds can't smell and have only limited taste. Their main food cue is the presence of a bright colour. Many hummingbird flowers are red, which explains why feeders that mimic this natural advertisement are so successful. However, plants do not colour their nectar and it is best that we do not either. It is also possible that artificial colouring may harm the birds, especially in the amounts consumed from feeders. The red plastic on the feeder is a sufficient indicator that food is available. Some commercial products add a scent, which is also not necessary.

These birds need protein in their diet and some artificial hummingbird foods include such supplements but they are prone to spoiling, and the birds are already catching all the insects and spiders that they need. If you do want to provide protein, don't use pesticides in your garden. You can even set out some over ripe banana peels to attract flies. Hummingbirds will appreciate this proximity of resources.

Although it is unlikely that a bird will feed from a dirty food supply, it is possible that dirt or fungal contamination could end up causing a blockage in the tongue. The hummingbird laps nectar using a long tongue with a brushy tip. Nectar flows along two troughs in the tongue by a process called capillary action rather than by sucking. So, it is important to choose a feeder that you can keep clean. Wash your feeder regularly (at least once a week) using normal dish soap and a brush if necessary. Strong disinfectants such as bleach should be avoided.

The final step is to set your feeder up in a place where you can watch the birds. In order to reduce freezing during winter, it is often best to place the feeder under an overhang. You will see the greatest activity first thing in the morning and at dusk. Happy hummingbird watching!



Male Anna's Hummingbird. Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy

Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America

Book Review by Jack Sutherland

Those birders who cut their teeth on one or more of earlier versions of Roger Tory Peterson's field guides will be pleased to know that, after a lapse of several years, a new edition of these famous guides is now available. The *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America*, which recently made its way into my collection, combines and updates the information in the earlier *Peterson Field Guide to Eastern Birds* and the *Peterson Field Guide to Western Birds*, so users of these earlier guides will feel right at home.

The update is the work of six contributors who have revised the book's content to accurately reflect the current knowledge of birds, rewritten the text to cover both the United States and Canada, and updated the taxonomy. Among the other new features are digital updates of Peterson's original paintings and new paintings (by M. O'Brien), all new maps giving up-to-date range information, and a larger trim size to accompany range maps and to showcase Peterson's art. Some other nice features found at the beginning of the book are a large map showing the colour codes for the range maps, an index page with the common names of the birds covered (by rough estimate I came up with ~200 common names going from Albatross through Yellowthroat) and a third page showing the topography of a bird. Next follows a section on how to identify birds using features such as bird size and shape, tail shape, and how birds fly (clear, concise drawings accompany the different subjects), plus narrative sections on bird songs and calls, bird nests, a short section on conservation, the maps and ranges of birds, habitats and subspecies, and geographic variation.

Then there are 388 pages of plates and descriptions of the various birds. The first group covered are the geese, swans, and ducks (family Anatidae), and finishing off with a two-page long section on introduced old world sparrows (family Passidae). As an example, the section on cormorants (family Phalacrocoracidae) follows that for the other bird groups by starting off with a general description of cormorants, "large

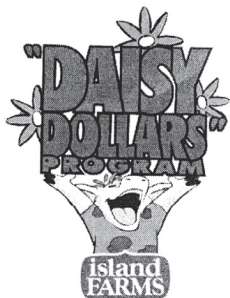
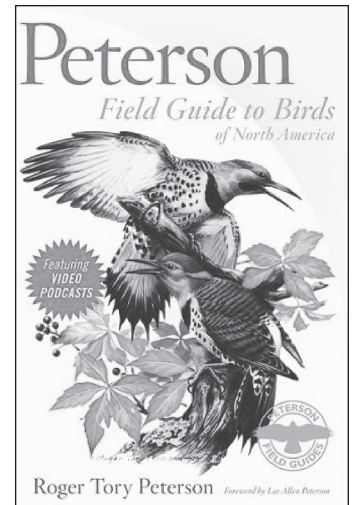
blackish water birds", then gives helpful hints on identifying cormorants such as "swim low like loons, but with bill tilted up at an angle". Then follows individual narratives and small range maps (left-hand page) and Peterson's superior paintings (right-hand page) showing the various species in breeding and non-breeding plumage for adult (and immature) birds of six species of cormorants. The small

maps serve as a quick reference while larger versions of each map are given near the rear of the book. I especially appreciate the fact that much jizz (quick impression of birds major features) is given for both groups of birds and individually. The book finishes off with a handy section where the user can keep and update their life list, an index, and finally six pages showing the silhouettes of shore birds, birds in flight, and roadside silhouettes.

An additional feature is that the reader is invited to register at www.petersonfieldguides.com to access video podcasts featuring overviews of common and popular species, helpful birding tips, and songs and calls of particular birds.

I'm certain that this book will find its way into the library or field bag of most birders!

Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America. 2008. Foreword Lee Allen Peterson. 544 pages, 195 color plates. \$26.00. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York. 24 x 15 x 2.5 cm, ~ 1150 grams, vinyl-bound.



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2009 Valentine Birdathon Fun for All

By Alan MacLeod

The Twelfth Annual VNHS Valentine Couples Birdathon is history now, but such excellent history was written February 8. This year's event attracted nine couples, matching our best previous participation high. An aggregate 116 species were recorded during the morning event, one of our highest ever. We were happy to see an infusion of new blood. Three duets were new to the event and they all did themselves proud. An all-time high four teams opted to do their birding the NMT way – by Non-Motorized Transport – and they all claim to have had nothing but fun doing it.

For the second straight year Donna and Guy Monty came all the way down the Island Highway from Nanoose Bay and showed Victoria couples how to do this right. Donna and Guy tallied 83 species for their morning's work. Their top bird – and the popular choice for Best Bird of the event – was the duo of female Western Bluebirds that have been on-again, off-again at the playing fields of Sir James Douglas School in Fairfield. Donna and Guy become the first couple to have their names inscribed twice on the Anderson Trophy. What's more, they collected a gift certificate sponsored by **Wild Birds Unlimited** of Saanich and another certificate – for *Best Bird* honours – given by **The Red Brick Cafe** of Sidney.

Mitchell Grant and Amy Medve were doing their first Valentine birdathon but they weren't one bit intimidated. Amy and Mitchell hauled in 79 species for their morning's efforts including Turkey Vultures near Albert Head. As second-place finishers they won a dinner-for-two voucher donated by **Swan's Brew Pub**, in downtown Victoria.

Rick Schortinghuis teamed up with Mary Sanseverino, a pairing of birder "old hand" and keen tyro. Rick and Mary embraced the NMT challenge, pedaling 60 km and collecting a whopping 77 species for their troubles. Their tally put them first in the "Green Division" of NMT couples and third overall. In addition to a heap of glory their rewards included a dinner-for-two voucher donated by the **James Bay Inn**, a planisphere – good for stargazing when the owling gets slow – donated by Oak Bay's **Science Works**, and not least, a pair of tote-bags designed and hand-crafted by Jan Brown, the latter their reward for finishing first in the "Green Division".

Agnes Lynn introduced her husband Dave to the joy of Valentine birding in grand style. The Lynns found 73 species in their inaugural Valentine effort. In days of yore 73 might have been plenty enough to win the top prize, but the competition seems to get keener by the year.

Next year we aim to bend over backwards in welcoming greenhorn birder couples to join in the fun.

Andrew and Gail Harcombe decided to make the challenge even tougher than the cyclists did. They chose to do it all on foot. Walking out their door in Central Saanich they scoured Maber's Flats, Centennial Park, the Vantreight bulb fields and a piece of the Saanichton shoreline. They scored a highly creditable 64 species – without having to worry about a flat tire or broken chain.

Jerry and Gladys Anderson are the *eminentes grises* of the Valentine Birdathon. Not only have they been part of all twelve events, not only have they several times been the winning couple, but Jerry is also the carver responsible for creating our terrific Anderson Trophy. The Andersons found the birding slow out in North Saanich but they spotted the Barrow's Goldeneye that eluded others and had 57 species on their list by noon. Jerry and Gladys won a prize too – a gift certificate from **The Victorian Bird House** of Sidney – for coming closest to correctly guessing the morning's aggregate species count, 116.

Mike and Barb McGrenere were another "green team" in the event. The McGreneres chose to increase the challenge by trying an entirely new route. They rode their bikes in the cold and fog from Saanich all the way to Patricia Bay, partly in the hope that Mike might add Barrow's Goldeneye to his 2009 NMT list. Alas, they were foiled in that quest but they scored some nice birds for their troubles, including American Kestrel and a big gang of Cedar Waxwings. Mike and Barb finished their day with 54 species.

Jenny Feick and Ian Hatter are also getting to be "old hands" at this event. Participating for the third straight year, Jenny and Ian rolled up a total of 51 species, including a nice Canvasback at King's Pond.

We – Jan Brown and Alan MacLeod – have been enjoying this event since the turn of the century and might be starting to get the hang of it. We added 42 km to the wear-and-tear of the bikes and managed to find 74 species on a route that took us from James Bay to Cattle Point and eventually to Swan Lake.

By all accounts the 2009 birdathon took a back seat to none of the previous ones for the amount of fun generated by the birding and in the post-event gathering at Swan Lake Nature Centre. But the organizers, always on the lookout to make the next birdathon even more attractive than the one just past, are contemplating ways of doing just that in 2010. One of the post-facto comments we heard is that some birding couples are keen to participate but shy to do so due to the 'stiff competition' they imagine is on display in the event. Hmm. Next year we aim to bend over backwards in welcoming greenhorn birder couples to join in the fun – *fun* is what it's all about after all – including the prospect of a choice prize for the neophyte couple with the highest count.

Only the winning couple get to have their names inscribed on the Anderson Trophy but there are plenty of other rewards. Jan and I are grateful once again to the six businesses that generously sponsored worthy prizes for the birdathon. Jerry and Gladys once again have our thanks for helping to round up the prizes. Apart from the unfettered joy of a morning's birding with a friend or loved one, the followup event at Swan Lake is always a good source of merriment. Last but not least, participating couples have the satisfaction of knowing that their \$10 admission fee goes to supporting VNHS conservation efforts.

Whether you are a grizzled veteran birder or someone new to the game, still feeling all the excitement that only tyro birders really know, we hope to see you next year.



Front row: L-R, Mary Sanseverino and Rick Schortinghuis, Donna and Guy Monty. *Middle row:* Alan MacLeod and Jan Brown, Andrew and Gail Harcombe, Amy Medve and Mitchell Grant. *Back row:* Jerry and Gladys Anderson, Barb and Mike McGrenere, Agnes Lynn. Missing: Dave Lynn, Jenny Feick, and Ian Hatter. *Photo provided by author*

Taking It Outside

By Darin Steinkey (HAT Volunteer) and
Adam Taylor (HAT Executive Director)

Even though it is a chilly, slightly rainy morning on the Peninsula, excitement and expectation hang in the air like mist as Laurie and I pull up to KELSET school in North Saanich. Todd and Wendy are already unloading some of the 200+ plants purchased from Russell Nursery and the kids begin to gather and pick out their tools for the planting. After months of planning, HAT staff and volunteers, along with the teachers and students of KELSET are ready to get dirty.

HAT is providing schools, teachers and students with the resources to create an outdoor nature classroom for hands on learning opportunities through the Green Spots program. The project goal is to connect youth with nature, and to link



Photo: Adam Taylor



Creating Conservation Legacies

schools and neighbourhoods to local parks and green spaces. The project provides free, fun activities and outdoor nature classrooms for K-7 schools.

Members of the VNHS have always understood the importance of outdoor, nature-based learning and play, and several articles on the subject have appeared in the pages of *The Victoria Naturalist*. Research is also confirming that getting kids outside results in healthier, smarter, and better behaved children. Sadly, for many families it is now difficult to access a natural area close to home. Even when visiting a park there are rules designed to protect sensitive and over-used ecosystems, but that also restrict play and exploration. The goal of the Green Spots program is to begin to re-create local, accessible natural areas that children can play and learn freely in.

A partnership with HAT is tailored to meet school needs. Usually we begin with a trip to a park near the school to introduce students to natural habitats, native species, urban conservation issues, and personal actions to protect these spaces. The project's regional focus encourages children to connect with their unique local environment so they can better see the impacts of their daily choices.

The second phase of Green Spots is creating a native plant garden on the school grounds or other habitat conservation activities such as mulching or invasive species removal. Children are involved in planning, planting, and caring for the garden with hands-on activities that build an appreciation for nature and conservation. Students design and develop site plans through mapping exercises, select the right plants and set the stage for birds and butterflies. HAT assists with ordering plant material, coordinating volunteers, and liaising with administrators. As it grows, the school's naturescape can become a legacy project for graduating students.

After a morning of digging holes and arranging various native shrubs and trees, the kids and teachers alike are energized and excited about the legacy they have created at their school. For more information or to get your school involved in this project that is getting kids outside, call HAT at 250-995-2428 or email hatmail@hat.bc.ca.

Letters

Royal Roads Bursary recipient:

Dear Victoria Natural History Society

Your generosity is deeply appreciated. Thank you so very much for donating this bursary to a student in need. Your kind deed will not be forgotten.

Sincerely,
Chilla Fedoruk
(B.Sc. Environmental Science student)

Thank-you's from participants on VNHS Schools Project field trips:

—Thank you for giving your time and expertise to help us enjoy our environment. We'll be searching for all the birds we discovered!

—Thanks! I had fun.

—Thanks for an awesome time.

—We very much appreciate your warm personality and assistance in helping us find and enjoy the beauties of Nature!

—Oh my god, you're so awesome. You're the shizz.

—Thanks for the bird techniques.

—Thanks so much.

—It was a pleasure meeting you and working with you. Continue spreading your love of the environment.

—I find it interesting to learn about birds of Vancouver Island.

BULLETIN BOARD

Be a Baillie Birdathon Sponsor

The Baillie Birdathon (<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/organization/brdathon.html>) is an annual event to raise funds for Bird Studies Canada and other nature organizations across Canada. You can help by participating in a birdathon event of your own or by sponsoring someone who is. If you would like to sponsor Ann Nightingale's birdathon effort while at the American Birding Association conference in Texas, you can make your donation at <http://birdathon.annnightingale.ca> or make a pledge by calling Ann at 250-652-6450. A portion of the funds raised will go to the Rocky Point Bird Observatory.

We Need Your Binoculars!

Not the Swarovskis hanging around your neck! We need that second pair you bought a while ago, or the pair you started out with so long ago. If you haven't had the caps off them lately, maybe some young birders can put them to better use. Some of our birding friends in other countries don't make as much money as we do, and it's challenging for them to spend \$50 or \$100 for a pair of binoculars just so they can observe birds. By rounding up unused binoculars here in British Columbia and getting them to young birders in San Blas, Mexico and the Green Club Youth Environmental Group in Vietnam, youth will be encouraged to develop an interest in birding, gain an understanding of the conservation ethic, and see the importance of preserving local bird habitat. As the head of the Bach Ma National Park's Ecotourism Department in Vietnam put it: "One of the best ways to lead the love of people to nature is birding. While bird watching, people can observe nature around them and day by day, they will grow to love it. While their love of

nature is high, the protection of nature also comes high."

If you are interested in making a donation of your old optics, please be in touch with either Dannie Carsen (250-544-2117/ dcarsen@telus.net) or Gail Schacter (250-384-5905/ gailschacter@shaw.ca).

Okanagan Basin Thru-Hike

A fund-raising effort designed to showcase the pressing need to preserve Okanagan Valley migratory bird habitat and the wintering habitat in the San Blas area of Mexico. The thru-hike will traverse the entire length of the Okanagan Valley, with stops at many local communities along the way. Please check the website at <http://www.okanaganthruhike.ca> for information on the route. If you'd like to be involved you can hike a section of the valley or pledge cash donations on a "per kilometre" or "per bird" basis. Pledge forms will be available at Birders' Night, from the website, or by contacting Dannie Carsen at dcarsen@telus.net /250-544-2117.

Saturday Birding Group

We send out the time and location on the Rare Bird Alert (250-592-3381) on the Thursday and Friday before that week's walk. For more information, call Rick Schortinghuis at 250-885-2454.

Year-round Tuesday Morning Birding Group

The Tuesday Birding Group meets every Tuesday at 9:00 a.m. at the foot of Bowker Avenue on the waterfront in Oak Bay, they then decide where they will go birding that morning. The Tuesday Birding group has been around for more than 50 years. Call Bill Dancer at 250-721-5273 for more information.

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 Nature Sanctuary at 7:30 p.m.); **Natural History Presentations:** the second Tuesday at 7:30 p.m., in Murray and Anne Fraser Building, Room 159, 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., Murray and Anne Fraser Building, Room 159, University of Victoria. **Marine Night:** the last Monday, 7:30 p.m., in Murray and Anne Fraser Building, Room 159, University of Victoria. Locations are given in the calendar listings. The VNHS Calendar also appears on the Internet at: <<http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca>>, and is updated regularly.

Codes for Field Trip Difficulty Levels: LEVEL 1 — Easy walking, mostly level paths. LEVEL 2 — Paths can be narrow with uneven terrain. LEVEL 3 — Obstacles in paths requiring agility or steeper grades. LEVEL 4 — Very steep, insecure footing or longer hikes requiring good physical condition.

MAY

Saturday, May 2

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Witty's Lagoon Songsters

Join **Dannie Carsen** for a foray around Witty's Lagoon for some great ear birding and good views of warblers, vireos and shorebirds. Meet at the main parking lot off Metchosin Road at 7:00 a.m. Bring your lunch and we will stop at the picnic tables after the walk is over. For further information, contact Dannie at 250-544-2117 or dcarsen@shaw.ca.

Friday, May 8

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Take the Day Off and Join Us at Thetis Lake Park

This park has a great selection of wildflowers over a long blooming period, so we're sure to find delights. Meet at the main parking lot at 10:00 a.m. To reach the park, take the Colwood exit off the Trans-Canada Hwy and follow the Old Island Hwy for a short distance. Turn right on Six Mile Rd. just before the bridge. Continue on this road when it goes under the highway and you will come to the Thetis Lake Park parking lot. Bring a snack and drink if you wish. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns@shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Saturday, May 9

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Birding Royal Roads and Esquimalt Lagoon

Join **Ann Nightingale** for a birding walk around Esquimalt Lagoon. You should see a good variety of shorebirds and passerines on their migration. Meet at the south end by the washrooms at 7:30 a.m. This is a five-hour walk. Bring a snack and a drink. Call Ann at 250-652-6450 for more information.

Sunday, May 10

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Birding the Power Line off Stewart Mountain Road

Meet at the mailboxes on Stewart Mt. Road, which is off Millstream Road in the Highlands, at 7:00 a.m. This is a great place to see warblers, vireos and flycatchers. Call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 if you need more information.

Friday, May 15

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

A Natural History Walk in East Sooke Park

Come and enjoy the spring birds and plants at East Sooke Park with **Ian Cruickshank**. There will be a good variety of

breeding songbirds and potential for interesting seabirds on the Strait. Also we will check out the plants, including Vancouver Ground Cone and Indian's Dream Fern. Meet at Aylard Farm parking lot at 8:00 a.m. Bring a lunch. Call Ian at 250-382-1652 if you need more information.

Saturday, May 16

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Birding Little Saanich Mountain (The Observatory)

Join **Ed Pellizzon** on a birding walk up and around Little Saanich Mountain. This is an excellent place to see lots of migrant species of birds, and some in the process of building nests. Meet at 7:00 a.m. by the gate. Call Ed at 250-881-1476 if you need more information.

Saturday, May 16 and Sunday, May 17

EVENT

Victoria Butterfly Count

We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers, so get out your field guides! James Miskelly is the count coordinator; give him a call at 250-477-0490.

Sunday, May 17

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Birding Swan Lake

Join **Ian Cruickshank** for an early birding walk around Swan Lake. Meet at 6:30 a.m. in the main parking lot. Call Ian at 250-382-1652 if you need more information.

Monday, May 18

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

A Natural History Cycling Tour of the Galloping Goose Trail from Sooke Potholes to Leachtown.

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** on a cycling tour into the Sooke Hills. We will enjoy the flowers, birds and scenery along the way. Meet at the Galloping Goose parking lot 2.3 km along Sooke River Road at 8:00 a.m. Bring a cool drink and lunch. Call Rick at 250-885-2454 if need more information.

Friday, May 22

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Mount Newton

Join **Cheryl Mackie** in birding Mount Newton's south slope. We should see Black-throated Gray Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak and Western Tanager, as well as many other migrant and resident birds. Meet at the corner of Haldon Road and Newton Heights at 7:00 a.m. Call Cheryl at 250-479-4083 if you need more information.

Saturday, May 23

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Birding Mount Douglas

Join **Mike McGrenere** in birding Mt. Douglas. Meet at the corner of Lochside Drive and Lohbrunner Rd. at 7:30 a.m. Please wear good hiking boots, it's a fairly strenuous hike. We should get good number of warblers, flycatchers and vireos, as well as Western Tanager, House Wren, and Chipping Sparrow. Call Mike at 250-658-8624 if you need more information.

Sunday, May 24

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Intertidal Trip to Whiffen Spit

Join marine biologist **Phil Lambert** to check out intertidal species at Whiffen Spit in Sooke. Meet at the parking lot at 9:00 a.m. Call Phil at 250-477-5922 for more information.

Sunday, May 24

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Wild Side of Madrona Farm

Most of you have heard about the campaign to help protect Madrona Farm as farmland forever (see p.10), but we'd like to go back in time a bit. Prior to her death in 2002, Ruth Chambers was a very active life member in VNHS. She invited members to come and visit in the spring to see the beautiful wildflowers and enjoy the special birds that spend time in the higher reaches of her property. Now her grandson **David Chambers** and his wife **Natalie** have invited us to re-enact this tradition. We will birding starting at 7:30 a.m. and botanize starting at 10:00 a.m. We may also spend some time in Mt. Douglas Park. During our visit, Natalie and David will be able to tell us about what they have been doing in recent years with the property and their hopes for the future of the land. Please be aware that the areas where we will be meandering are steep. Meet at 4317 Blenkinsop Road. Carpool or bike or bus to the event as parking is limited. No pets please. Contact Agnes at 721-0634 or thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday, May 24

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding the Jordon River Area

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** for a trip out to Jordan River. In the past it has been a hot spot for rarities in the spring and the fall. It's a great place to hear Fox Sparrows singing in the spring. Meet at Helmcken Park and Ride at 7:00 a.m. Bring a lunch. Call Rick at 250-885-2454 if you need more information.

Friday, May 29

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Plants and Birds of Cattle Point and Uplands Park

This is an area of interest both to botanists and birders so we'll enjoy some of each. **Dr. Chris Brayshaw** spent many years documenting the rare plants in this area so we will try to find some of these as well as enjoy the birds along the way, so bring your binoculars too. We will be on some rocky bits but this is basically a level trail so is an opportunity for those who can't handle the usual Southern Vancouver Island rocky terrain where the wildflowers typically grow. Cattle Point/Uplands Park is on Beach Drive between Oak Bay and Cadboro Bay. Meet at the nature sign at the Cattle Point waterfront parking area at 10:00 a.m. Bring a snack and a drink if you wish. No pets please. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 721-0634 for more information.

Saturday, May 30 and Sunday May 31

FIELD TRIP

BC Bird Atlas Blitz

Ann Nightingale is organizing a BC Bird Atlas Blitz, location TBA. Call Ann at 250-652-6450 for more information.

JUNE

Saturday, June 6

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding the Duncan Area

We will try to find a Red-eyed Vireo and other warblers, vireos and flycatchers. Meet at Helmcken Park and Ride 7:30 a.m. or at Cowichan Bay Dock Rd. at 8:30 a.m. Call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 if you need more information.

Sunday, June 7

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Birding the Power Lines and the Ponds at the Hydro Substation Along Francis King Park

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** and **Barry Gatten** on a walk along the power lines that border Francis-King Park and the area around the Hydro substation. This is a great area to hear or see most of the warblers, vireos and flycatchers we have in our area. Meet at the Nature House on Munns Rd. at 7:00 a.m. This will be a 4-5 hr walk. Call Rick at 250-885-2454 if you need more information.

Sunday, June 14

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Butterflies in the Duncan Area

We will be looking for butterflies in the Duncan area. Meet at Helmcken Park and Ride at 9:00 a.m. to car pool. Others can meet at Somenos Marsh at 10:00 a.m. Bring a lunch; we are going to take up most of the day. Call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 if you need more information.

Sunday, June 14

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

San Juan Ridge Adventures

We will investigate San Juan Ridge, above Jordan River, to enjoy the *Erythronium montanum* and other early sub-alpine flowers. The prime purpose of the event is to scout for the Breeding Bird Atlas but we'll enjoy flowers and birds equally. Be prepared for cold and/or wet weather due to the elevation and bring gumboots in case we have time to stop at the bog. Some rough ground and, potentially, a reasonably steep hike at a slow pace. Bring lunch, snacks and lots to drink for the day-long outing, starting in Victoria at 8:00 a.m. You must pre-register for this trip due to transportation limitations and potential change of plans due to snow cover. Guaranteed spot if you are willing to bring your 4-wheel drive for carpooling! No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at 250-721-0634 or thelynns at shaw.ca to register or for more information.

Saturday, June 20 and Sunday, June 21

EVENT

Victoria Butterfly Count

We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers, so get out your field guides. **James Miskelly** is the count coordinator; give him a call at 250-477-0490.

Sunday, June 21

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Intertidal Trip

Marine biologist **Phil Lambert** will be leading this trip. Meet at Fleming Beach Park in Esquimalt (by Macaulay Point) at 8:00 a.m. Call Phil at 250-477-5922.



Muir Creek field trip, 15 March 2009 (See p.6). *Photo: Mikhail Belikov*