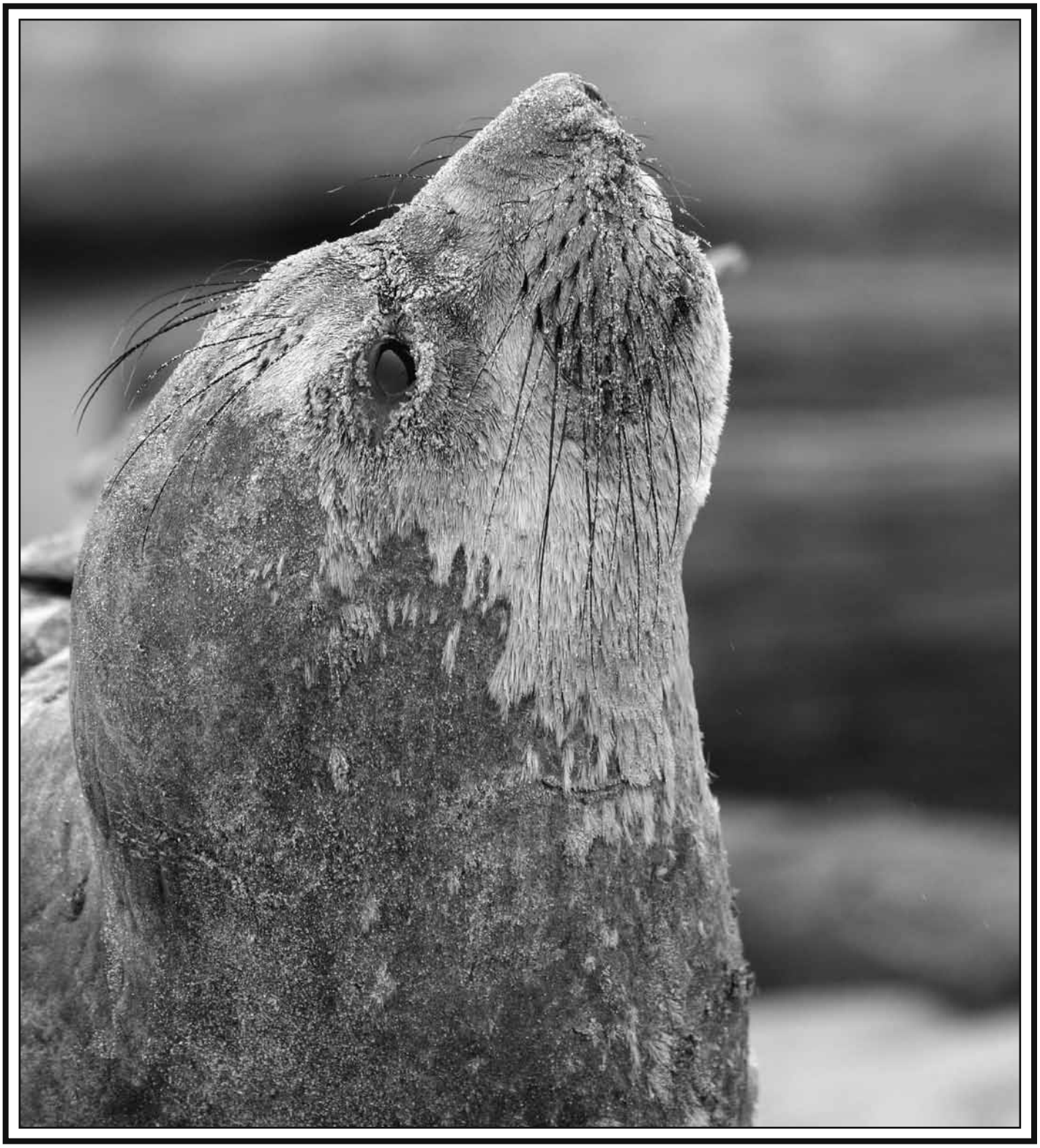
The Victoria NATURALIST

SEPTEMBER
OCTOBER
2009
VOL 66.2

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY



The Victoria NATURALIST

Published six times a year by the
VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY,
P.O. Box 5220, Station B, Victoria, BC V8R 6N4

ISSN 0049—612X Printed in Canada

Editors: Claudia Copley, 250-479-6622, Penelope Edwards
Desktop Publishing: Frances Hunter, 250-479-1956
Distribution: Tom Gillespie, Phyllis Henderson, Morwyn Marshall
Printing: Fotoprint, 250-382-8218

Opinions expressed by contributors to *The Victoria Naturalist* are not necessarily those of the Society.

Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper.

SUBMISSIONS

Deadline for next issue: **October 1, 2009**
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Members are encouraged to submit articles, field trip reports, natural history notes, and book reviews with photographs or illustrations if possible. Photographs of natural history are appreciated along with documentation of location, species names and a date. Please label your submission with your name, address, and phone number and provide a title. We request submission of typed, double-spaced copy in an IBM compatible word processing file on diskette, or by e-mail. Photos and slides, and diskettes submitted will be returned if a stamped, self-addressed envelope is included with the material. Digital images are welcome, but they need to be high resolution: a minimum of 1200 x 1550 pixels, or 300 dpi at the size of photos in the magazine.

VNHS MEMBERSHIP

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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We acknowledge the financial support of the government of Canada through the Publications Assistance Program. PAP Registration No. 9841

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Contents

COVER PHOTO: This month's cover girl is the northern elephant seal (*Mirounga angustirostris*) hauled out at Willows Beach. Read more about this special visitor (p.12). *Photo*: Marie O'Shaughnessy

Pulling together the September/October calendar for this issue was quite a challenge, for a number of reasons. I'll start with room bookings for our evening lectures. Normally this is a simple matter – we've used the same room at UVic for several years now and so it goes. Not this year. We are in different rooms and a different building for the first half of the fall. The September Marine Night is even in a different town (but worth the drive!). So pay close attention to each calendar entry. The new rooms are easily accessed and the new building is very close to the Fraser Building, so please do still come out to enjoy our evening get-togethers.

I was also responsible for booking the Natural History Night and Birders' Night speakers in addition to the rooms, as well as getting their information into the magazine. But I'm putting my foot down when it comes to hosting the evenings! We are a relatively large society (approximately 750 members) – aren't there some among you that are interested in being more involved in the processes that keep us functioning in a reasonably coordinated fashion? These aren't necessarily roles that board members have to take on, and each task, in isolation, isn't a burden. I would welcome some help with programs: finding speakers, booking speakers, booking the UVic rooms, introducing speakers, handling the audio-visual needs of the speakers, etc.

We also need more field trip leaders – you do not have to be a world expert to go on a nature walk in a familiar haunt with a group of like-minded individuals. They'll appreciate your familiarity with the area and enjoy whatever turns up. And the theme can be something other than birds: check out the focus of the October 4th field trip – I'm looking forward to it!

Claudia

President's Message

By Darren Copley

I'm always a little sad when summer comes to an end as it seems to be the time of year that I most enjoy. The reason for this might not be what you are thinking. I really do miss the swallows when they migrate south, but the hottest months of the year are also when the majority of insects are active. For several years now I've been fortunate to be able to volunteer for the Royal British Columbia Museum on some amazing invertebrate inventories, and this year we surveyed on Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlottes) and in the Flathead Valley region of BC. What incredible locations to spend time in. We are privileged to live in such a biologically-rich province.

Some early progress was made this summer on the Vancouver Island ringlet project – egg-laying by ringlets at Rithet's Bog was observed for the first time ever in this provincially red-listed sub species. Jeremy Tatum took responsibility for this precious find, and successfully reared and photographed each stage – another first. Basic natural history is fundamental to species protection, despite the sneers of some ivory-tower academics.

It wasn't all about insects this summer, but our society events certainly do slow down as many of you, like me, were off to places further afield. Hopefully some of you were at the grand opening of the Witty's Lagoon Teaching Shelter, with Ann Nightingale and the Leadership Victoria Team. This structure will be a lasting legacy, and used by many school children and other area residents. Your board would like to extend a large thank-you to all of the volunteers and funders that made this project a success.

As usual there are fewer field trips in the summer because of the lull in birding, but what we lack in quantity, we make up for in quality. I hope that many of you enjoyed the trips to

El Presidente setting up a Malaise trap at Rose Spit. *Photo*: Claudia Copley

Witty's Lagoon teaching shelter. *Photo*: Jaya Polden

the Olympic Peninsula this summer and I look forward to seeing some of your pictures – perhaps at the October "Farewell to Summer" Botany Night? People often join the Society to participate in these trips, so if that is you, welcome!

The other great project we were involved with is at Haliburton Community Organic Farm. Purnima Govindarajulu organized a wetland construction workshop, leaving participants inspired about the potential to rehabilitate, restore, or even create wetlands, and also leaving the farm with the first stages of a restored vernal wetland. The workshop was presented by Thomas R. Biebighauser from Tennessee, the man who literally "wrote the book" on wetland construction. What a wealth of knowledge and a warmth of personality – we had a great time.

But the fall also has plenty to look forward to. Songbird and Saw-whet Owl migration monitoring with the Rocky Point Bird Observatory, the hawkwatch, fungal explorations, owls calling again, waterfowl returning, and much more. Just seeing the mosses green up and the licorice fern unfurl is enough to get a naturalist enthused about the coming season.

An Update on Rithet's Bog

By Sharon Hartwell

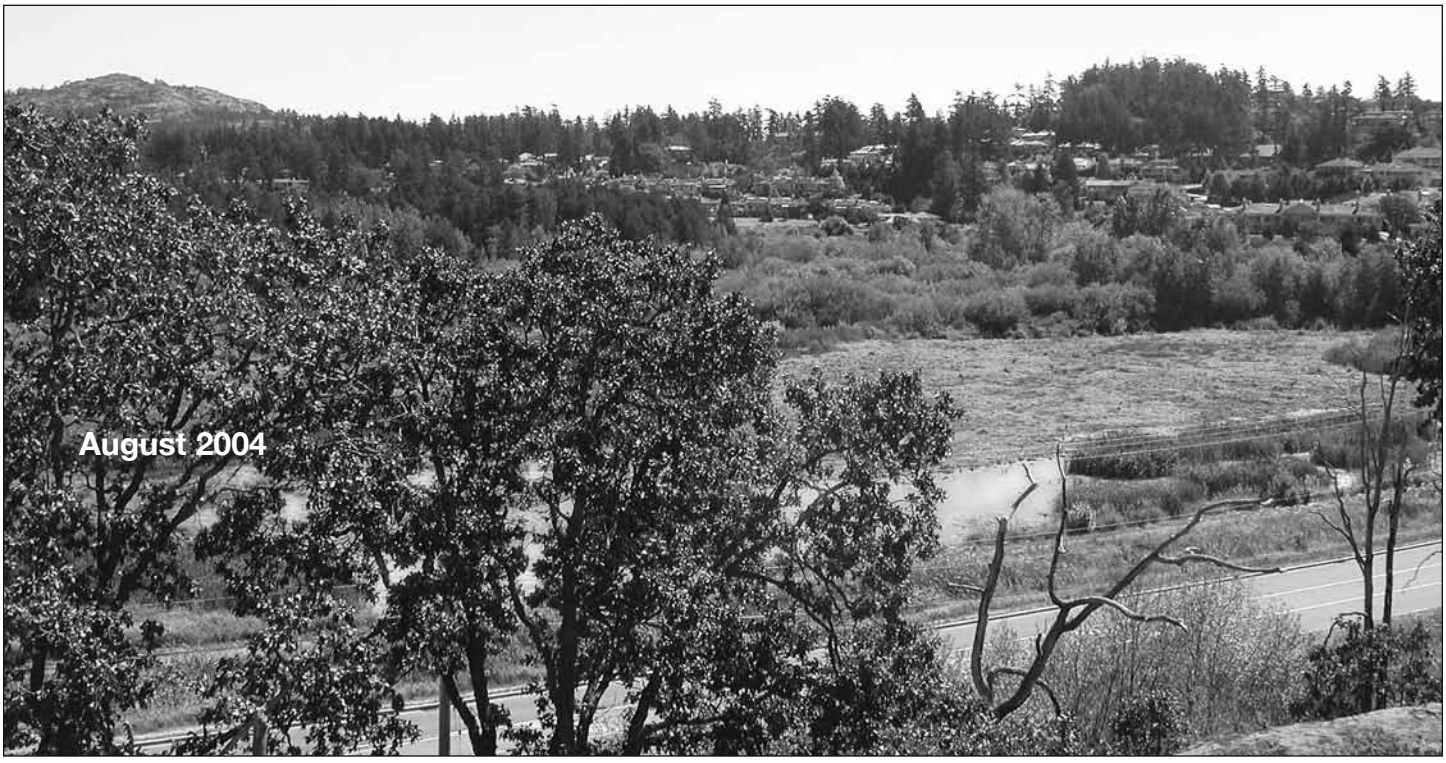
The 2002 restoration project at Rithet's Bog Conservation Area was only the first step in the ongoing management that will be necessary to maintain this island of natural habitat in a sea of urban development. This article describes some of the current management issues at the bog, a few of the surveys and studies underway, and restoration activities taking place on the upland areas.

Cutbacks at Ducks Unlimited mean no cutbacks to the cattails

The rehabilitation of the Chatterton wetlands was the most visible result of the 2002 restoration project; it created extensive open-water habitat for waterfowl, and provided great opportunities for wildlife viewing. But the new marsh was also perfect habitat for cattails, which have expanded dramatically in area over the past 5 years, decreasing the area of open water and limiting sightlines for bird-watching. There are several reasons for this increase in cattails, one of the most important being the appearance of lesser cattail (*Typha angustifolia*). This eastern species has spread to western Canada, most likely via waterfowl. It has narrower leaves and cattail spikes than the native common cattail (*Typha latifolia*), but it is a more aggressive and taller plant. It also hybridizes with common cattail to produce *Typha x glauca*, which is even more robust and invasive. Huge islands of lesser and hybrid cattails up to 4 metres tall have grown on the edge of the wetland.

Maintaining open water and wildlife viewing opportunities were major goals of the restoration project. Ducks Unlimited was scheduled to begin a mechanical cattail-clearing project this summer: unfortunately the project has been cancelled due to lack of funds. Furthermore, Ducks Unlimited's summer crew, normally four students, was reduced to a single person this year. The crew spends a half-day each summer clearing willow re-growth from the Chatterton wetland, so less willow was removed than usual, further contributing to the encroachment on the marsh.

Why the cutbacks? Ducks Unlimited, like other donor-funded conservation organizations, has experienced a significant drop in donations due to the economic recession, and their conservation efforts are suffering as a result.



Expansion of cattail islands is decreasing open water habitat on the Chatterton wetlands. Above: August 2004. Opposite: August 2008. *Photos*: Russ Cozens

Their situation is not unique – this problem is being experienced by most non-profits. It is crucial that those of us who can afford it continue to support conservation organizations. They are responsible for a tremendous amount of work, which is unlikely to be picked up by any level of government in the face of ongoing government cutbacks.

Rithet's Bog Conservation Society is hopeful that the cattail-clearing project will be possible next year, perhaps with funding or a partnership from an outside source. In the meantime volunteers are attempting to take up the slack by clearing willows next to the perimeter trail with hand tools. Our numbers are low and it is a slow process. If you are interested in assisting, your help would be much appreciated. Please visit our website for details (<www.rithetsbog.org>) or call Sharon Hartwell 250-479-0491.

Cats are a serious problem

Cat predation on wildlife is a major problem in all urban areas, but it is especially noticeable in isolated "islands" of natural habitat. Colonies of feral (wild) cats and free-roaming domestic cats create a level of predation that can seriously deplete wildlife, songbirds in particular. Well-meaning people who feed feral cats in an effort to prevent them from catching birds exacerbate the problem – the cats increase in numbers and are not deterred from killing wildlife. We have such a situation at Rithet's Bog, where a colony of feral cats is prospering to the point that their trails to and from feeding stations are clearly visible in several places.

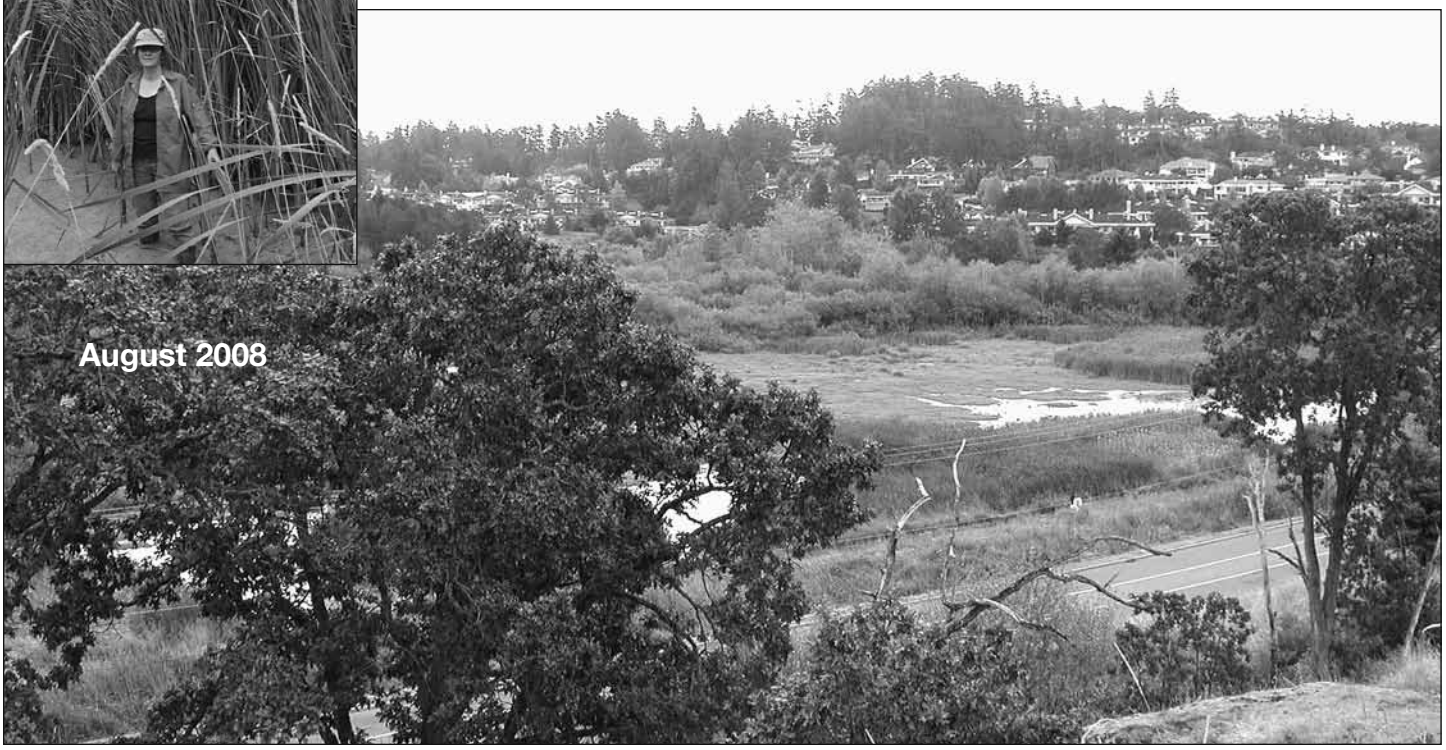
These cats are seriously depleting the Song Sparrow population. Dr. Liana Zanette, who has been conducting Song Sparrow studies at Rithet's Bog for eight years, has documented an alarming decrease in fledgling survival due to predation by feral and domestic cats: they have been responsible for 22% of the nest predation events recorded to date. Dr. Zanette and partner Dr. Michael Clichy have captured videotape of cats feeding on Song Sparrow nests, two of which can be viewed on the Rithet's Bog Conservation Society website at <www.rithetsbog.org/catvideos/cat.htm>.

The Rithet's Bog Conservation Society will likely be approaching the VNHS board for a letter in support of "trap and remove" cat control measures at the bog. This is sure to be a contentious issue, but it is imperative that some sort of control measures be taken. If you are concerned about the general problem of feral cat predation, please consider writing letters to your local municipal council and Parks program, expressing your concern and urging that action be taken.

Eastern and hybrid cattails grow up to 4 metres in height, obscuring vews of waterfowl and shorebirds. *Photo*: Diane Mothersill

Death of shore pine in the central bog forest: are beetles the cause?

The shore pines that dominate the central bog forest have been dying at an accelerated pace in recent years. This is not surprising in a 120-year-old forest that emerged after ditches were dug to drain the bog for farming purposes in the 1880s. The slightly higher water table, resulting from the restoration project and recent heavy winter storms, has been a further stressor for the aging trees. But scientists from the Pacific Forestry Centre were curious whether bark beetles



were responsible for the red-needled trees visible on the edge of the forest.

On June 5, Ph.D. student Greg Smith, insect ecologist Dr. Allan Carroll, and community ecologist Dr. Kathy Bleiker conducted a survey of fallen and standing dead pines to assess cause of death. *Pseudips mexicanus*, a bark beetle feeding on lodgepole and shore pine trees in British Columbia, was found in abundance. This was a surprise, since the closest known site for the beetle was the Shirley area. Greg will be returning to set pheromone traps for both *Pseudips mexicanus* and the western pine beetle, which is already known from the Victoria area.

In spite of the abundance of the beetles, they were not felt to be responsible for killing the pines; the beetles are instead secondary agents feeding on dying pines. The primary cause of death seems to be pine blister rust. Galls produced by this fungus were visible throughout the forest, ranging from small knobs resulting from recent infection, to large welts from years if not decades ago that encircled the main tree trunk. These older infections can girdle the tree, creating a weak spot where trees break during winter storms or heavy snow/sleet loads, effectively topping the trees. They also stress the standing trees, setting the stage for opportunistic invasion by bark beetles. Final verdict: the beetles may be producing the red needles, but rust infection, age and the higher water table are the precipitating stressors.

Swallow nest box project

Since 2007, members of the Rithet's Bog Conservation Society has been mounting swallow nest boxes at the bog and providing free boxes to nearby residents as part of an "enhanced biological mosquito control" program and public outreach project. This spring, four new swallow boxes were erected, one on the Garry Oak restoration site at Chatterton Hill, and three on Foxborough townhouses south of the bog, bringing the total number of boxes to fourteen.

It was a successful year, with all boxes occupied by native species. The cool spring and late arrival of swallows allowed Chestnut-backed Chickadees to occupy four nest boxes and successfully rear young. The other boxes were claimed by eight pairs of Violet-green Swallows and a pair of Tree Swallows. A final box apparently remained unoccupied – Violet-green Swallows approached it on several occasions, but were repelled by "dog in a manger" House Sparrows, that were not able to gain entry to the nest box due to the entry hole customized for use by swallows. All the occupying birds appear to have been successful in rearing young, and juvenile swallows are a common sight over the wetlands. Barn Swallows from nests on buildings in the Chatterton business complex are also common.

The presence of the Chestnut-backed Chickadees in the nest boxes is not in itself undesirable – they are a welcome native species. But because the swallow boxes are part of a "natural mosquito control" program, the public expects them to be occupied entirely by swallows. We are considering placing rubber bungs in the openings of the boxes this winter, and not removing them until the swallows arrive next spring. We would welcome comments on this plan, if anyone sees any problem or has any objections. We will be offering free nest boxes to residents adjacent to the bog again next spring; many thanks to volunteer woodworker Garry Potter for building these boxes.

Butterfly surveys

Rithet's Bog is surveyed every month from April to September as part of the VNHS Butterfly Survey. Surveys have been undertaken since 1992, and so far we have 24 species on our checklist, which can be viewed on our website (<http://www.rithetsbog.org/naturalhistory/butterflies.htm>).

Of particular interest is the provincially red-listed Vancouver Island ringlet (*Coenonympha tullia insulana*); Rithet's Bog has one of the highest populations of ringlets in

James Miskelly is producing a restoration plan for purple sanicle, thanks to funding from the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team (left). Milbert's tortoiseshell (*Nymphalis milberti*) is one of 24 species of butterfly recorded at Rithet's bog (right). *Photos*: Sharon Hartwell

Greater Victoria. The best time to view them is during one of their two peak flight seasons, which vary with the weather but are usually mid to late May and August. Preferred habitats are the grassy knolls on the outer side of the perimeter trail in remnant Garry Oak woodland on the south side of the park, and a moist meadow on the inner side of the trail on the south side of the park. An exciting discovery was made this spring when Darren Copley and James Miskelly staked out a spot on the meadow and were able to see female ringlets laying eggs on dead grass stalks. The eggs and larva of this species had been unknown up until now. Two of the eggs were collected with their grass stalks, and Jeremy Tatum was able to rear one, photographing the various development stages.

Another mystery was solved in July when Darren captured what I thought was a colourful orange and brown "butterfly" flying very quickly at height and rarely settling, so that I had been unable to identify it. Just as Claudia predicted, it was a sheep moth (*Hemileuca eglanterina*). This gorgeous moth is apparently often mistaken for an orange and brown butterfly such as a satyr comma or California tortoiseshell.

Dragonfly survey

We are also attempting to document other agents of natural mosquito control: thanks to Darren and Claudia Copley, a monthly dragonfly survey is now underway at the bog. The first two sessions, in June and July, documented nine species of dragonflies and damselflies. Here they are, in the order they appear on the *Checklist to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of the Victoria Region*:

California Darner (*Rhionaeschna californica*)
Blue-eyed Darner (*Rhionaeschna multicolor*)
Eight-spotted Skimmer (*Libellula forensis*)
Four-spotted Skimmer (*Libellula quadrimaculata*)
Cardinal Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum illotum*)
Striped Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum pallipes*)
Western Red Damsel (*Amphiagrion abbreviatum*)
Pacific Forktail (*Ischnura cervula*)
Western Forktail (*Ischnura perparva*)

Blue-eyed Darner (*Rhionaeshna multicolor*), one of the many dragonfly species that use Rithet's Bog. *Photo*: Darren Copley

We hope to add more species in the months to come, and continue the survey next year. Many thanks to Claudia and Darren for training volunteers in the art of dragonfly capture, handling, and identification. It has been fascinating to learn about the dramatic variation in colour that sexual dimorphism can produce in a species, and the further variation that can be observed in newly emerged adults (tenerals). We will soon be adding a dragonfly checklist to the Rithet's Bog website (<www.rithetsbog.org>), with links to the excellent photos on the University of Puget Sound website (<www.pugetsound.edu/dragonflies.xml>).

Species at risk restoration project

Rithet's Bog supports a population of purple sanicle (*Sanicula bipinnatafida*), a provincially red-listed plant designated as Threatened by COSEWIC and listed under SARA, the federal *Species At Risk Act.* The sanicle is growing in a remnant Garry oak woodland area below the Foxborough Townhouse complex, where it is threatened by the growth of broom, blackberry, and invasive grasses. The Rithet's Bog Conservation Society has been monitoring the population and removing as much broom and blackberry as our small group can manage, but our efforts were not quite enough.

Last winter the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team obtained funds for James Miskelly to undertake more directed invasive species control and produce a restoration plan for the purple sanicle population. James has been working with Rithet's Bog Conservation Society volunteers and Saanich Park staff to remove invasive shrubs and also clear non-native grass thatch. The results have been impressive to date – there was a 50% increase in the number of purple sanicle seedlings this spring. Future plans include removing non-native bunch grasses and replacing them with native grass plugs grown from seed collected at the site this summer. Volunteers will be needed for the seed growing a well as the ongoing physical work of clearing invasives. If you are interested in helping to protect this rare plant population, please contact Sharon Hartwell at 250-479-0491

Ongoing volunteer work: invasive plant removal

The list of invasive plants at Rithet's Bog is a long one. While willows, cattails, reed canary grass, and hairy willowherb are a problem in the wetlands, the major culprits in the upland areas are Scotch broom, blackberry, English hawthorn, poison hemlock, and oyster plant. Rithet's Bog Conservation Society holds work parties throughout the year to remove these plants. We can always use more volunteers – muscular ones to dig and chop and pull broom out by the roots, and equally valuable people who may wish to collect the resultant debris and place it in bags or stretchers to be carried out to a collection point. Everyone is welcome. Once again, please check our website (<www.rithetbog.org)> for details, or phone Sharon Hartwell at 250-479-0491.

Boundary Bay and the Fraser River Estuary – A Global Birding Hotspot

By Anne Murray

Dense flocks of Western Sandpipers, flights of High Arctic Brant, a Northern Harrier pouncing on a vole, Bald Eagles setting up clouds of waterfowl: these are all regular sights in season around Boundary Bay, a global birding hot spot within easy reach of Victoria. The bay is well known to BC birders as a great location for shorebirds and raptors, with a high chance of rarities. The first Far Eastern Curlew in Canada was recorded from the eastern end of the bay in September 1984, and a White-rumped Sandpiper in 2006. Gyrfalcon, Golden Eagle, and Prairie Falcon have all wintered in surrounding farm fields in recent years, providing excitement to birders and photographers. Reifel Bird Sanctuary, on the active front of the Fraser River delta, is renowned for bird diversity, including owls, migrant shorebirds, and songbirds, and the large flocks of Lesser Snow Goose that arrive from Russia each fall. The Boundary Bay – Fraser River Estuary Important Bird Area (IBA)[1] is the top site out of 597 IBAs in Canada, based on population numbers. The Ladner Christmas Bird Count, covering the western Boundary Bay delta region, vies with Victoria for top count every winter. Given the right location for the season and the right tidal conditions, good birding is pretty much assured.

Despite the area's prominence for local birders, Boundary Bay is not well known outside of British Columbia. Unlike Texas, Florida, or Washington, this is not an area with Great Birding Trail maps or Birders' Breakfasts in local diners. Neither provincial nor municipal governments have capitalised on the bay's ecotourism potential, which includes marine mammal viewing as well as birds. Local

chambers of commerce have so far shown little interest in the possibilities of enhancing birding opportunities for residents and visitors alike, or the recreational and health advantages of maintaining quality habitats. Spreading the word about the bay's wildlife attributes has fallen almost entirely to environmental/nature groups and to individuals, who are deeply conscious of the rapid rate of habitat loss in this increasingly urban area.

Boundary Bay's importance for birds has hardly been recognized in provincial or federal protection either. Only the federally-owned land of the Alaksen National Wildlife Area has been named a Ramsar Site[2]. Despite Canada's obligations to list and designate all "Wetlands of International Importance, especially for waterfowl" the provincial government has been reluctant to recognize Boundary Bay as a Ramsar site, even though the bay and other wetlands of the Fraser River estuary were described in a 1987 Environment Canada document[3] as exceeding the designation criteria by 60-fold for shorebirds and 30-fold for waterfowl. The area is also a scientifically-recognized hemispheric site under the Western Hemispheric Reserve Shorebird Network program, yet shorebird habitat protection is scant. Boundary Bay, Sturgeon Banks, and the South Arm Marshes are recognized as Wildlife Management Areas, but this designation has neither long term security nor the backing of management plans. Another key shorebird habitat, Roberts Bank, has yet to be designated as a Wildlife Management Area, despite nomination by the Provincial Ministry of Environment in 1996. Instead, the green light has been given to substantial expansion of port facilities in this critical ecological area, with more developments planned in the coming years.

The last two decades has seen a steady erosion of upland habitat around Boundary Bay. Farm fields are extremely important for wintering waterfowl, raptors, and migrant shorebirds, particularly during high tides and stormy weather. Hedgerows provide shelter for songbirds at all seasons of the year. Remnant forest patches around the bay are the last holdouts for such birds as woodpeckers, owls, nuthatches, creepers, kinglets, and vireos. Any habitat not secured in parks is at extreme risk, since land costs are prohibitive for anything but urban development

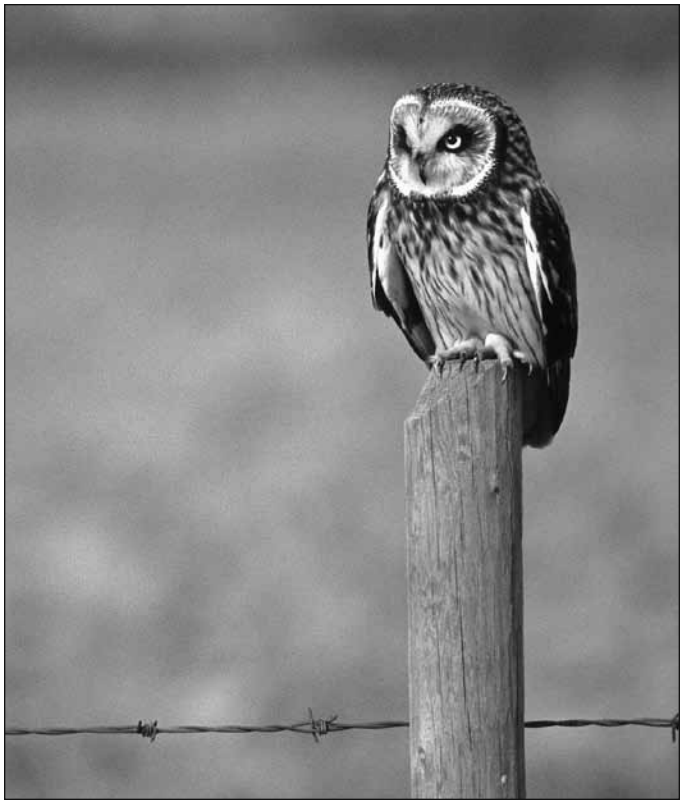
Despite the significant threats to the region's habitats, Boundary Bay is still one of the best locations in Canada to go birding. Snow Geese populations have increased in recent years (although last year was a disaster for juveniles) and Bald Eagles are thriving. Visit in late summer to see some of the 50 species of shorebird that have been recorded, or in winter to find rare gulls. BC Nature members at the Boundary Bay birding camp last November enjoyed Harris' Sparrow at Reifel, Grey-crowned Rosy Finch at Point Roberts, and Western Gull at White Rock, among 110 other species. While you are here, stop at the local shops and mention why you came: it helps people know the value of all those birds.

Endnotes

[1] The IBA Program is a world-wide bird conservation initiative coordinated by BirdLife International, a partnership of non-profit organizations in more than 100 countries <www.birdlife.org>. The program is managed by Nature Canada and Bird Studies Canada in Canada, and by BC Nature in British Columbia; see www.ibacanada.ca and www.bcnature.ca stewardship programs.

[2] Ramsar Site: under the 1971 Ramsar Convention www.ramsar.org

[3] Butler, R.W. and R. W. Campbell. 1987. The Birds of the Fraser River delta: populations, ecology and international significance. Occasional paper No. 65 CWS.



Short-eared Owls prefer the old-growth grass areas of Boundary Bay, a habitat eroded by turf farms, golf courses, and other development. *Photos*: David Blevins

ANNE MURRAY *will be the speaker for October's Birders' Night. She has had a life-long interest in nature, particularly birds, and enjoys sharing her passion with other people. Originally a school science teacher, she has also been an adult educator and mathematics tutor, and was a president of BC Nature for four years. She is currently co-chair of BC Nature's Conservation Committee and volunteer coordinator of the BC Important Bird Area Program, as well as being on the steering committee of the BC Breeding Bird Atlas and a board member of the Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust and the Delta Museum and Archives. Anne has received several recognitions of her conservation work, including the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal and the Elton Anderson Award. When she is not writing or working on nature conservation issues, Anne likes to travel with her family in search of birds and other wildlife. Anne lives in Tsawwassen, Delta, and is the author of* A Nature Guide to Boundary Bay *and the ecological history,* Tracing Our Past – A Heritage Guide to Boundary Bay. *Both books have photographs by David Blevins, and are available at booksellers or online at <www.natureguidesbc.com>.*

A Visit from a Northern Elephant Seal (*Mirounga angustirostris*)

By Marie O'Shaughnessy

Resembling a piece of bleached-grey driftwood, this strange looking creature lay inert on the damp sand as though dead. Its rotund 2-metre body length indicated that it might be a young animal, despite the fact it is a member of the largest species of seal in the northern hemisphere, the northern elephant seal (*Mirounga angustirostris*). The large size of these animals and inflatable nose, or 'proboscis', of a mature male gives this seal its name.

Although two bright green identity tags could be seen on its hind flippers, it still blended well with the weathered logs that lay scattered along the upper reaches of the beach. Some of the regular beach walkers and their frisky dogs made their way along the shore, giving no indication that something had changed that day. No apparent odour came from this animal or section of the beach. Its concealment left it undisturbed for the most part, but, true to form, when an area of beach is suddenly corralled by yellow tape and information signs are posted, curious folk are likely to investigate. My need to see, overcame my need to stay away. My presence added to those spectators already on the beach that morning. I watched with fascination the sleeping creature with the long facial whiskers. Even the light rain that fell that March morning didn't deter those of us that stood at the almost invisible fence. There, beyond the yellow tape, lay a large sleeping, sausage-shaped log. So well camouflaged, it took some bystanders a while to recognize the oddity in the sand. Looking very much like any other piece of driftwood, it remained motionless. It wasn't until we heard a snort and noticed a small shower of sand rise like a fountain in the air, did our eyes focus on which log was showing signs of life. Its sporadic and noisy breathing made its ample-sized abdomen convulse. The delicate movements of those dexterous, fore-flippers were seen scratching flaking skin, in contrast to the almost imperceptible motion of its hind flippers. These were the indicators that demonstrated that this 'thing' in the sand was truly alive. Occasionally it would lift its heavy head and look around, peering between half closed, sand-coated lids. Reassured the human element on the far side of the pen would do it no harm, it would return to its previous state of repose, blow more sand in the air, and resume fitful sleep. It remained in this spot for hours, while its body underwent a silent, traumatic event. One could see the ribbons of skin and silver-grey fur, peeling away slowly. With the added abrasive action of loose sand, its present condition resembled, for the most part, mange, a skin disease of mammals. This creature looked pathetically sick and had been reported to the wildlife authorities a day or two earlier. The animal parked on the beach, however, was not in need of medical attention. It was simply engaged in a natural cycle of molt.

The elephant seal's chosen haul-out, Willows Beach, was typical of the kind of sandy location these animals generally choose for their 'catastrophic molt.' Having presumably come ashore at night when all was quiet, it would have no idea how popular a place this beach could be in daylight hours. The term 'catastrophic molt' describes the annual process by which elephant seals exchange their old coat for new. This physical exchange is known to exhaust the individual and render it to a state of vulnerability. Mindful of the need to not interfere, some of the beach audience would stand for several moments, entranced. Others would glance quickly and move on. Children, accompanied by parents, made their visits from all over Victoria to see this it.

Clicking cameras and bright flashes, barking dogs, and children's chatter didn't appear to disturb the seal. I spent several hours over several days watching closely how humans behaved around this animal and I noticed that a respectful distance was maintained. I saw nothing that would indicate any major harassment. Dogs appeared to be leashed for the most part and those off leash were too busy playing with sticks or balls to even notice the gathering crowds. It was obvious that the yellow tape provided enough of a caution, afforded some protection for the animal, and reminded the spectators, NOT to disturb.

At different times of the day I would head to the beach. It was on one of these occasions that I witnessed a human interaction with the young elephant seal that raised questions in my mind as to whether animals do share feelings as those experienced by us. I know this term as anthropomorphism. Scientists suggest one should not apply human emotions to animal behaviour, but there is a growing body of evidence to suggest more research is needed in this area. Observing the interactions between these two entities, human and animal, suggested to me that both parties were engaged in a unique experience and mutually benefiting. Sometime during the day, the elephant seal had hauled itself farther up the beach and closer to the wall. It had found more driftwood to prop its bulky frame against. At 8:30 p.m. that Saturday evening, teenagers were sitting on the retaining wall with feet dangling. The elephant seal was fully awake and focused on them. As the daylight faded and the human chatter and song filled the evening air, the creature became part of the group. With large dark eyes fully opened, and head held high, it concentrated on the activity around it, while maintaining a distance of 3 metres. I watched for a while, fascinated by the events unfolding. The elephant seal showed no sign of fear or aggression toward the young people gathered on the wall. I watched for a while and then left, convinced that no harm would come to the creature. I felt sure that the commune between both parties would leave a lasting impression, especially on the human psyche.

In the early morning hours of the following day, I found the seal had retreated from the wall and had moved closer to the high tide line. It lay asleep at the end of a trail that it had carved out. While the sun glared down and warmed the beach the creature slept on. It had been a busy night! By Monday morning the youngster had disappeared, reclaimed I hoped, by its natural element, the sea, where it would spend much of its young life foraging. It may well have sought a quieter and more private venue to complete its molt, which can continue up to a month.

I knew little of this species, but I had seen programs on TV and had visited the IMAX theatre for their thrilling documentary on elephant seals. Having now been introduced to the one at Willows Beach, I wondered why they were showing up here in Victoria, and where they were coming from. During my search, there seemed to be two reasons for their visits: A major increase in population growth of elephant seals now that they were protected, and changes in climate, possibly affecting food resources and foraging behaviours.

During the 1880s the elephant seal was hunted for its oil, almost to extinction. At that time, only 50-100 individuals survived on Guadelupe Island, off the coast of Baja. It has since made a remarkable recovery. Approximately 160,000-200,000 elephant seals now occur between Baja, Mexico, and California, to the North Pacific and Gulf of Alaska. Based on the ongoing research by private and government agencies, traditional elephant seal breeding colonies are overcrowded. New haul-out rookeries are needed to accommodate increasing numbers, so younger animals are moving north. Warmer waters are traditionally where elephant seals come ashore to molt, breed and give birth. These sites are found along the California coast, the Channel Islands of California, and beaches in Baja California in Mexico. Ano Nuevo State Reserve, California, boasts of the biggest mainland colony of elephant seals assembled during the winter months. The young animal at Willows Beach in March may well have been born and tagged at one of these California rookeries. A number of pups are routinely tagged so that they can be monitored during their extensive foraging trips that take an elephant seal thousands of miles into the North Pacific Ocean. A round trip of 24,000 kilometres is not unusual for these animals.

We are now seeing a small population of these animals frequenting Race Rocks Ecological Reserve. As many as eight can be seen on any given day in the early months of the year, but sightings of one or two individuals, sometimes more, continue this month, July. Since the molt process affects males and females at different months of the year, there are sightings there at any time. We also had two reports of young molting elephant seals beaching themselves at Smugglers Cove and Cadboro Bay Beach. Their choice of location became a situation of curiosity once again, and after a few days these animals disappeared.

This year, two elephant seal pups were born at Race Rocks, apparently a unique occurrence for this marine protected reserve, and possibly for all of the west coast of Canada. Unfortunately only one pup, named Ninene, survived. It would appear by the frequent sightings throughout the year of a pair of distinctive-looking adult male elephant seals, Misery and Slash, that Race Rocks has its own small community. Information of the two elephant seal births and of the two adult males is available on the Race Rocks website.

Elephant seals forage at great depths and great distances. Spending 8-10 months of the year at sea and 90% of their lives below the surface during foraging trips, these mammals are among the greatest divers. Their dives can take them to depths of 1,500 metres, and are 30-120 minutes in duration. They have the ability to store large amounts of oxygen in their blood and muscles while collapsing their lungs entirely during a dive. They forage for bottom-feeding fish, squid, rays, octopus, small sharks, and crabs. Males appear to forage at greater depths and in different regions of the Pacific Ocean than females. Their range can cover an area as far north as Alaska and as far south as Mexico.

Mature bulls reach lengths of 5 metres and can weigh in at 2,700 kg (6,000 lbs). These alpha males, with the huge proboscis nose and muscular necks, are given the title

Transient Killer Whales and great White Sharks are predators of elephant seals, but humans are the greatest threat of all.

'beach masters'. They patrol breeding territories and secure harems, living 13-14 years of age. Their life span is shortened by the aggressive territorial battles that are played out on the breeding rookeries and by the long periods of fasting they endure. Once hauled-out on a sandy beach in December, the males are too occupied to return to the sea to forage. Only after the breeding season ends, one hundred days later, do they leave, having lost 30% of their body weight.

Females can be 3 metres in length and weigh 900 kg (2,000 lbs) and can reach ages of 19 years or more. They nurse pups with extremely high-fat milk for 28 days, and then abandon them to go back to sea for another two months. These shore-based elephant seal pups, called 'weaners' will undergo a molt, progressing through stages where their natal black fur will be exchanged for a silver coat. This coat will darken to grey or colours of brown with age. The abandoned pup now has to fast and sustain itself by metabolizing it own fat found in the blubber. This it does for another month while is gains confidence and learns to swim by itself. The shallow waters of the breeding beaches are full of weaner pups learning to swim. The beach masters mate with the departing females before they slip away to sea, but due to the stress of fasting, birthing, and nursing, the fertilized egg doesn't implant itself for three to four months, making the gestation time a full 11 months. The next visit ashore for the females is to molt, after which she returns to the sea and remains there for eight more months.

Transient Killer Whales and great White Sharks are predators of elephant seals, but humans are the greatest threat of all. Freighters, tankers, and cruise ships all move through the North Pacific, and along the west coast of British Columbia. Commercial fishing practices and the threat of entanglement pose significant problems for all marine mammals that inhabit these waters. The continued threats of oil and gas exploration along the west coast shows little regard or respect for the health of the oceans or of its wildlife for the long term. The world's population is increasing exponentially. The demands for food will escalate. Will we be able to sustain the health of our oceans? The notion that we can continually rape the land and pollute the oceans without consequence is a foolish ideology. We must learn to appreciate and respect all living creatures and embrace the incredible biodiversity that this world has to offer.

I hope to see more of these fascinating elephant seals along our west coast in the coming years. Their resemblance to weathered logs and smooth rocks is what keeps them camouflaged much of the time. If you come across any, observe at a safe distance, and marvel at these incredible marine mammals. These are, after all, wild creatures that deserve our protection and their freedom.

References

Friends of the Elephant Seal: <http://www.elephantseal.org/index.htm>

NOAA- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/>

POST-Pacific Ocean Shelf Tracking Project: <http://www.postcoml.org/>

Race Rocks Marine Ecological Reserve: <http://www.racerocks.com/>

TOPP-Tagging of Pacific Predators: <http://www.topp.org/>

Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elephant_seal>

Photos: Marie O'Shaughnessy

From Abalone to Whales: Aquatic Species in Canada Face Risk of Extinction

May 2009 press release from COSEWIC – the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada < www.cosewic.gc.ca>

Bowhead whale recovering in Canada's Arctic

So says COSEWIC (the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada), which met in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, from April 25 through May 1, 2009 to assess the risk of extinction for 27 Canadian wildlife species. The bowhead whale is rooted deeply within Inuit culture and is the only baleen whale to reside year round in the Canadian waters of the High Arctic. Commercial whaling, beginning in the 1500s, severely depleted bowhead populations long before the species was given protection in the 1930s. Both Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge and scientific research provide evidence that bowhead population sizes have been steadily increasing in recent decades. As a consequence, bowhead in the eastern Arctic were downlisted from Threatened to Special Concern, which is also the status assigned to the species in the western Arctic. Although the increased abundance is encouraging, the species faces an uncertain future in a rapidly changing Arctic climate.

Moratorium not enough to halt declines in two other marine species

American plaice, a fish similar to sole and halibut, has suffered declines exceeding 90% in some areas along Canada's east coast. The fishery for plaice on Newfoundland's Grand Bank was once the largest fishery for flatfish in the world. Overfishing led to a moratorium on directed harvest in 1994 for the Newfoundland population, but fisheries in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and on the Scotian Shelf are still permitted. These populations were assessed as Threatened. Ongoing threats include fishing mortality caused by bycatch and under-reported catch.

The situation is even more dismal for a large marine shellfish on the Pacific Coast. Northern abalone, prized for its succulent meat, is the only species of abalone to occur in Canada. The species continues to decline despite a 20-year moratorium on all harvest. Extensive poaching is unquestionably the primary threat to abalone. The species was up-listed from Threatened to Endangered, reflecting a heightened risk of extinction since the species was last assessed in 2000.

Wetland species in trouble

Canada contains one quarter of the planet's wetlands. These extremely important ecosystems provide key habitats for a diversity of plants and animals, including migratory birds. They also act as nature's kidneys, filtering toxins and debris from water before it is returned to major waterways. Wetlands are disappearing rapidly in some areas with a greater than 60% loss in southern Ontario and Manitoba due to agriculture and development. To date, one third of all wildlife species assessed by COSEWIC to be at risk live in or near wetlands.

More than 90% of the breeding grounds for Horned Grebe in North America are located in Canadian wetlands. Declining abundance led to a status of Special Concern for this species west of Quebec. The distinct Magdalen Islands population in Quebec, having fewer than 50 breeders, faces a higher risk of extinction and was assessed a status of Endangered.

Coastal salt marshes provide unique conditions for habitat specialists like the Maritime ringlet. Globally this butterfly only occurs in Canada, inhabiting a few marshes in northern New Brunswick and the Gaspé Peninsula. Given its extremely limited distribution and vulnerability to habitat loss, this butterfly was assessed as Endangered.

Once ubiquitous and common in wetlands across most of Canada, the northern leopard frog has experienced major declines. In BC, it only persists as a single population in the Creston valley in the south of the province. This population was designated as Endangered. Prairie and northern populations were assessed as Special Concern. Ongoing threats include spread of alien diseases and habitat loss. Populations east of Manitoba appear to be holding their own and were assessed as Not At Risk.

The BC population of northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*) is endangered. *Photo*: Gavin Hanke

Next meeting

COSEWIC's next scheduled wildlife species assessment meeting will be held in Ottawa, Ontario, in November 2009.

About COSEWIC

COSEWIC assesses the status of wild species, subspecies, varieties, or other important units of biological diversity, considered to be at risk in Canada. To do so, COSEWIC uses scientific, Aboriginal traditional and community knowledge provided by experts from governments, academia and other organizations. Summaries of assessments are currently available to the public on the COSEWIC website (www.cosewic.gc.ca) and will be submitted to the Federal Minister of the Environment in late summer 2009 for listing consideration under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). At that time, the full status reports will be publicly available on the SAR Public Registry (<www.sararegistry.gc.ca>).

There are now 585 wildlife species in various COSEWIC risk categories, including 244 Endangered, 145 Threatened, 160 Special Concern, and 23 Extirpated wildlife species (i.e. no longer found in the wild in Canada). In addition, 13 are Extinct and 45 are Data Deficient.

COSEWIC comprises members from each provincial and territorial government wildlife agency, four federal entities (Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Federal Biodiversity Information Partnership, chaired by the Canadian Museum of Nature), three non-government science members, and the co-chairs of the Species Specialist and the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittees.

Definition of COSEWIC terms and risk categories:

Wildlife Species: A species, subspecies, variety, or geographically or genetically distinct population of animal, plant or other organism, other than a bacterium or virus, that is wild by nature and is either native to Canada or has extended its range into Canada without human intervention and has been present in Canada for at least 50 years.

Extinct (X): A wildlife species that no longer exists.

Extirpated (XT): A wildlife species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere.

Endangered (E): A wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction. Threatened (T): A wildlife species that is likely to become Endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction.

Special Concern (SC): A wildlife species that may become Threatened or Endangered because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

Not at Risk (NAR): A wildlife species that has been evaluated and found to be not at risk of extinction given the current circumstances.

Data Deficient (DD): A category that applies when the available information is insufficient (a) to resolve a wildlife species' eligibility for assessment or (b) to permit an assessment of the wildlife species' risk of extinction.

Marine Protected Areas – Fully Protected "No-Take" Areas are needed to Conserve Ocean Fisheries and Biodiversity

July 2009 press release from the Western Canada Wilderness Committee

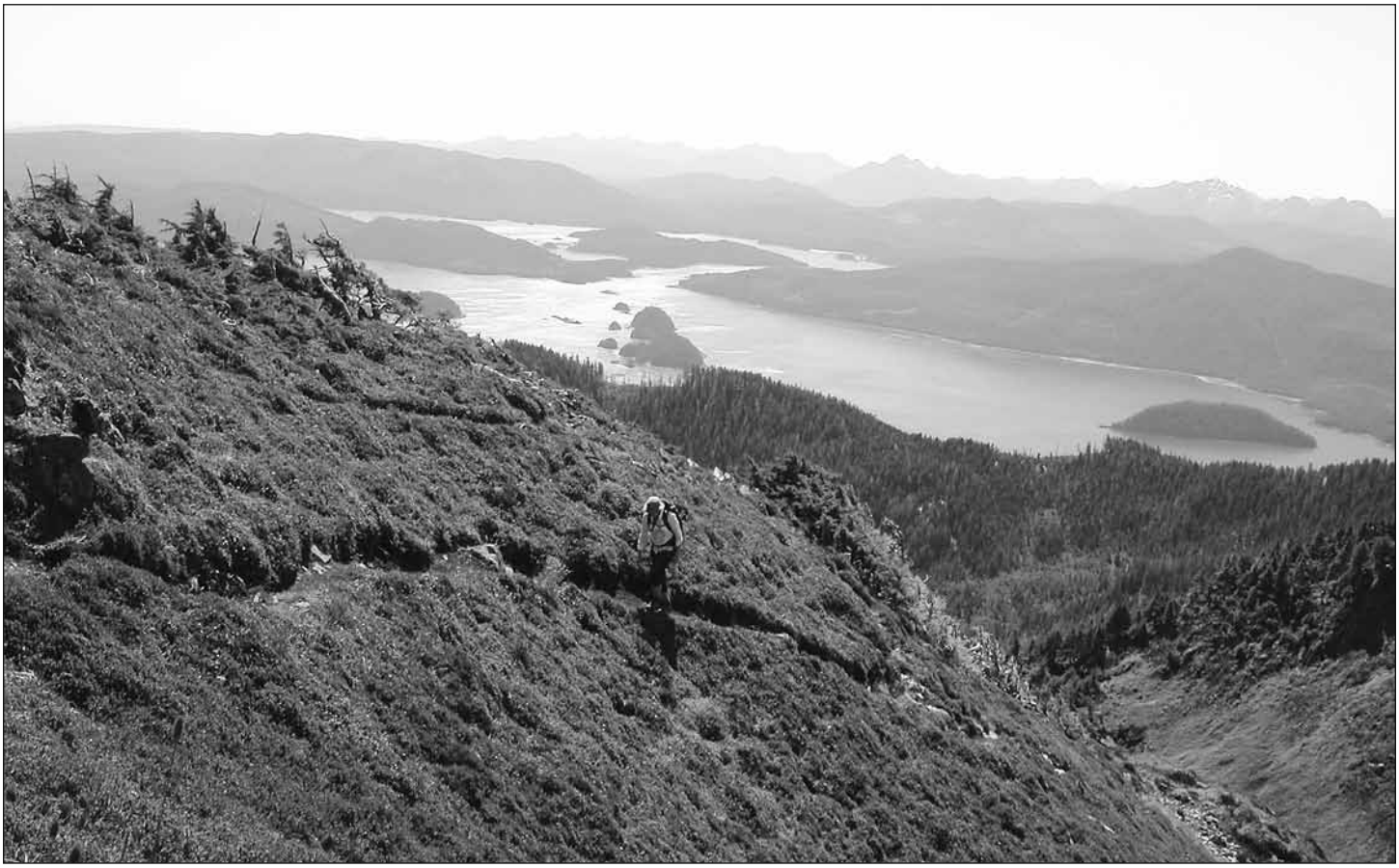
PROBLEM – Our oceans resources are being depleted

BC's marine environments are as much a part of our identity as our renowned ancient forests and majestic mountains. More than 400 fish species, 161 marine birds, and 29 marine mammals including grey, minke, blue, and humpback whales, orcas, harbour porpoises, Pacific white-sided dolphins, sea otters, harbour seals, and sea lions populate the waters and shores of BC's ocean. The diversity of marine invertebrates is the richest in Canada, with thousands of species. Rich and complex First Nations cultures flourished on these marine resources for millennia.

Unfortunately, decades of over-fishing, habitat destruction, exotic species introductions, and pollution have drastically reduced this abundance, leaving it in desperate need of protection in the form of strong and binding protected-areas legislation. The intricate seabed of corals, sponges, and invertebrate-encrusted rocks that provide habitat for a large diversity of marine species have been smashed into rubble by bottom trawlers in pursuit of bottom fish – a process likened to clear-cutting of forests. Fish farms, factory discharge, and ocean dumping increasingly contaminate our marine waters with wastes, while climate change and shifting ocean currents are wreaking havoc with the survival of numerous native fish.

STATUS – Less than 0.01% of BC's oceans are fully protected

National Marine Conservation Areas (NMCAs) – the equivalent of national parks in the ocean – and Marine



View towards Gwaii Haanas from the summit of Sleeping Beauty Trail on Graham Island, Haida Gwaii. *Photo*: Claudia Copley.

Protected Areas (MPAs) – generally smaller, more numerous protected areas legislated by the province or the federal government – offer beacons of hope for our threatened oceans. They create areas for sustainable use where certain types of resource extraction are prohibited.

The legislation of these designations needs to be strengthened to ensure that fully protected "no-take" zones – areas off-limits to all types of fishing and resource extraction – are mandatory and not merely optional components of these marine sanctuaries. Worldwide, "no-take" MPAs have dramatically increased the populations and size of commercial and non-commercial species. This includes increasing the net amount of commercially available fisheries as protected populations inside MPAs grow and expand into adjacent areas where they can be harvested.

The Canadian government has committed to developing networks of marine protected areas by 2012 under the International Convention on Biological Diversity, but lags in its responsibility and still has a long way to go! Approximately 176 areas have been designated for marine protection by the BC government – however, the majority of them are small, isolated areas, often not larger than a few square kilometres, and virtually all of them allow continued harvesting of marine life.

Only two Marine Protected Areas have been designated by the federal government under the Oceans Act on the Pacific Coast – the Endeavour Hydrothermal Vents (2003) and Bowie Seamount (2008) MPAs. Although they are currently protected from ocean dumping, undersea mining and oil and gas exploration and development, they have no mandatory provisions to ensure "no-take" zones within them.

So far, virtually all marine protected areas allow for commercial and recreational fishing, with the exception of Whytecliff Marine Park, Porteau Cove Marine Protected Area, Race Rocks Ecological Reserve, and the parts of Checleset Bay Ecological Reserve. When considered with respect to our terrestrial conservation efforts, the BC government is proud to boast that 14% of BC's lands are protected from commercial resource extraction; however less than 0.01% of our coastal marine environment is afforded the same level of protection.

Nationally, federal marine protected areas protect less than 0.5% of Canadian waters, with even less in "no-take" areas. In contrast, the World Parks Congress recommends that 20-30% of every ocean habitat be protected from all resource uses.

So far, no National Marine Conservation Areas (NMCAs) have been designated in BC. Gwaii Haanas (South Moresby) NMCA was proposed in 1988, while work to develop a Southern Straight of Georgia NMCA has been underway since 1995. The Gwaii Haanas NMCA proposal is now being looked at within the Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area planning process – a large scale integrated management planning process stretching from northern Vancouver Island to the Alaskan border. If it's effective, an outcome of the process could include a large network of "no-take" marine protected areas designed with values of connectivity and resiliency.

ACTION – Demand an effective network of marine protected areas with core "no-take" zones!

It is up to the citizens of Canada to demand from our governments a planned network of fully protected marine protected areas. Write to the Canadian and BC government letting them know if you want them to:

- Legislate connected and planned networks of large Marine Protected Areas and National Marine Conservation Areas with core "no-take" zones by 2012
- Protect at least 30% of BC's marine waters as "no-take" zones in marine protected areas
- Ensure that within each National Marine Conservation Area, at least 50% of the area is a "no-take" zone

An extensive network of real marine protection can help our oceans approach their former biological magnificence, brimming with sea life to sustain all the citizens of this province!

Express your opinions to:

Gail Shea
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
Parliament Buildings, Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6
Min@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Jim Prentice
Minister of the Environment and Minister responsible for Parks Canada
Parliament Buildings, Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6
Minister@ec.gc.ca

Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Parliament Buildings, Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6

Barry Penner
BC Minister of the Environment
PO Box 9047, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC, V8W 9E2
env.minister@gov.bc.ca

Copy your letter/email to the Auditor General's Office:

Office of the Auditor General of Canada
240 Sparks Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0G6
communications@oag-bvg.gc.capm@pm.gc.ca

The Western Canada Wilderness Committee is Canada's largest grassroots, membership-based wilderness protection organization.
Website: <www.wcwcvictoria.org>
Phone: 250-388-9292, email: wc2vic@island.net.
The September Birders' Night presentation is about a proposed Marine Protected Area around the Scott Islands to preserve seabird foraging areas. Come out and show your support.

Conservation Covenants with Habitat Acquisition Trust

HAT
Creating Conservation Legacies

Protecting natural landscapes is the day-to-day business of a land trust, but the toolbox available to us to carry out this work is small. Aside from directly acquiring land through purchase or donation, one of the best tools available to us is the conservation covenant. Habitat Acquisition Trust has emphasized the use of covenants as a way to protect habitat in a region where land prices are prohibitively high.

Covenants are voluntary, and are not possible without conservation-minded landowners willing to make a significant commitment to protect their land in perpetuity. In a recent edition of *HATChat,* we highlighted Ric and Frances Hunter and the covenant they placed on their Prospect Lake property.

If you are interested in learning more conservation covenants, contact us at the HAT office (250 995-2428) or visit our website, www.hat.bc.ca.

—Adam Taylor, Executive Director

If you venture past all the coffee shops and restaurants on Quadra Street, through Royal Oak, down the hill and into West Saanich, it is possible to feel completely apart from the city. You'll find yourself on thin, twisting roads lined with Douglas-fir, Garry oak, arbutus and a sense of ecological history. It is a familiar story, sadly, that this history is coming under increasing pressure from development. I am out near Prospect Lake to meet Ric and Frances Hunter, and talk to them about the conservation covenant HAT helped them place on their land in 2005.

A conservation covenant is a promise. Usually, they restrict land use and development to prevent damage to natural areas. For example, a covenant can be used to limit logging to ecologically sustainable forestry, to protect a wetland from being drained for development, or to prevent a large property from sub-division and development. Every covenant is tailored to the unique character of the land and the conservation goals of its owners.

The Hunter's property is unique in that five different ecosystem types exist there. The Conservation Data Centre classifies all of them as "sensitive". These ecosystems are:

- Riparian - mature forest stream;
- 100+ year old Douglas-fir forest;
- Mixed dry woodland (Garry oak/Douglas-fir/ arbutus);
- Mossy bald;
- An undeveloped lake margin.

In addition to the maturing forest and Garry oak woodland, there are a number of veteran Douglas-firs that are 400 years and older, well-utilized wild-life trees, and an ancient nurse log with three mature trees growing out of it. Blue-listed seaside bittercress (*Cardamine angulata*), red-listed phantom orchid (*Cephalanthera austiniae*) also grow there.

Neighbours have asked Ric and Frances why they don't cut down the trees that lead to Prospect Lake. It would add to the property value and give them a prettier view for their morning coffee. For Ric, there is no debate. "We have to get over this arrogance of thinking that because we are property owners we think it means we can destroy the property by destroying the trees or blasting the hell out of it," he says as we look out onto Prospect Lake through a tangle of forest. "I don't think that property ownership in any day and age – but particularly our time – should mean we have the right to destroy it because we 'own' it. That's something that simply has to change and somebody's got to take responsibility for that."

The greatest ecological virtue of the Hunter's property is that it is a significantly large, fairly pristine piece of protected land that provides habitat and forage for native flora and fauna in a region that is under intense stress due to loss of habitat. The land is part of a larger local network of green spaces in the area such as Mount Work to the west and Elk/ Beaver Lake Regional Park to the east.

The Hunters have spent the better part of the last three and a half decades protecting their piece of land on Prospect Lake. They felt the covenant was the next logical step to make their hard work permanent. Ric views it as more of a responsibility than a legacy, "Those of us who care about the environment simply have to stick our necks out and do it," he says. "It's the same thing we do when we're recycling or we try not to use so many plastic bags; it's just another thing we can do to help save the planet, and people just have to take that responsibility when it's before them to take."

—Darin Steinkey, HAT Volunteer

BULLETIN BOARD

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 and 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.

SEPTEMBER

Thursday, September 3

SOUTH VANCOUVER ISLAND MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY MONTHLY MEETING

Introduction to the Top 20 Edible Mushrooms

Pacific Forestry Centre, 507 West Burnside Road, Victoria, B.C., at 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, September 5

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Shorebirding from Victoria to Sooke

We will be starting at Esquimalt Lagoon and ending at Whiffin Spit, with several other stops along the way. Meet at Helmcken Park and Ride at 7:30 a.m. to car pool. Call Rick at 250-885-2454 if you need more information.

Sunday September 6

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Dragonflies for Beginners

As Dennis Paulson says in his book, *Dragonflies of Washington*, "Perhaps even more than butterflies, dragonflies are bird-watchers' insects." Meet **Darren** and **Claudia Copley** at the Beaver Lake Retriever Ponds at 11:00 a.m. (a distinct advantage over birding) and we'll see what we can find. We'll look at what field guides are available, some tricks to catching dragonflies, and even how to key out the difficult ones. Bring binoculars, an insect net (if you have one – or we can provide), and hope for sunny weather.

Tuesday September 8

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION

The Wild Side of Madrona

Madrona Farm has a long history, much of which is entwined with the Victoria Natural History Society. The original owners were active members of the Society and left large areas of their farm natural, which acts as an extension of the wildlife habitats found in Mount Douglas Park. Join **Nathalie and Dave Chambers** to learn more about the wildlife of Madrona Farm and the importance of biodiversity in agriculture and as a biological legacy for future generations. 7:30 p.m. in the new UVic Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A120 **(**NOTE ROOM CHANGE!).** Admission is free and everyone is welcome. Bring a coffee cup! If you can't make it out to the presentation, then remember that the *Chef Survival* event is scheduled for October 4, when 10 of the finest chefs do an obstacle course, race, and cooking demonstration using Madrona Farm veggies. With a musical accompaniment!

Tuesday, September 15

BOTANY NIGHT

Fire and Vegetation History of Garry Oak Ecosystems in Southern British Columbia

Marian McCoy studied pollen and charcoal deposits of three lakes on southern Vancouver Island and Pender Island and looked for the evidence of fires in the Garry oak and coastal Douglas-fir ecosystems. Swan Lake Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Admission is free. Bring a friend.

Saturday, September 19

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Hike Up Mount Douglas

Join **Mike McGrenere** for a hike looking for fall migrants and migrating hawks. We will do some birding in the Lohbrunner Road and Lochside Drive area, then hike up to the top of Mt. Douglas. Meet at the corner of Lohbrunner Road and Lochside Drive at 8:00 a.m. Please wear good hiking shoes since this is a fairly strenuous hike. Call Mike at 250-658-8624 if you need more information.

Saturday, September 19 and Sunday, September 20

EVENT

Victoria's Monthly Butterfly Count

We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers, so get out your field guide. Call **James Miskelly** (count coordinator) at 250-477-0490.

Wednesday, September 23

BIRDERS' NIGHT

The Marine Birds of the Scott Islands

Windy and wild, the Scott Islands are a unique place, teeming with life. Located just northwest of Vancouver Island, they support globally and nationally significant populations of seabirds, including Cassin's Auklets, Rhinoceros Auklets, and Tufted Puffins. They are also one of B.C.'s Important Bird Areas. Unfortunately, these seabirds are threatened by commercial shipping, pollution, invasive species, and fishing by-catch. Three of the Scott Islands are protected as provincial ecological reserves. But the surrounding waters, where seabirds spend 95% of their time, also need protection. Come learn about the beautiful birds of the Scott Islands, and why it is so important to B.C. and the world to safe-keep this provincial treasure. 7:30 p.m. in the new UVic Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A120 **(**NOTE ROOM CHANGE!)**. Admission is free and everyone is welcome. Bring a coffee cup!

Saturday, September 26

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Hawk Watch at East Sooke Park

Come out to East Sooke Park to see the peak of the raptor migration. Up to 14 species of raptors are possible, and the other highlight is the large numbers of Turkey Vultures- hundreds may be seen at once. Meet at the Helmcken Park and Ride at 8:30 a.m. to carpool, or at the Aylard Farm parking lot at East Sooke Park at 9:00 a.m. Leader TBA. Call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 for more information.

Monday, September 28

MARINE NIGHT

Revealing Sidney's Bottom

Dr. John Harper of Coastal and Ocean Resources will describe a recent project to map the marine subtidal habitats along the Sidney waterfront, as part of an official community plan. John and colleagues imaged approximately 1 square km of seabed by side scan sonar to determine sediment texture and morphology, and obtained 35,000 video images to quantify the biological community. This survey was an important step in developing the Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre in Sidney where this presentation will take place at 7:30 p.m. (****PLEASE NOTE DIFFERENT LOCATION FOR THIS TALK**.) A tour of the facility (9811 Seaport Place, Sidney, BC) will follow the talk. Admission is by donation and annual passes will be on sale for $22. Everyone is welcome.

OCTOBER

Thursday, October 1

SOUTH VANCOUVER ISLAND MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY MONTHLY MEETING

The Miniature Beauty of Fungal Microscopy

Presented by **Oluna Ceska**, a SVIMS and VNHS member. She will show us, through photos, the fascinating beauty of fungal samples under the microscope and explain their identification features. Two microscopes with slides will be available for use by attendees. Pacific Forestry Centre, 507 West Burnside Road, Victoria, B.C., at 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, October 3

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Birding at Whiffin Spit, Sooke

In recent years a Grasshopper Sparrow, Lapland Longspurs, a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, and a Ruff have stopped at this migrant stopover in Sooke. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Helmcken Park and Ride to carpool or meet in the parking lot at the foot of Whiffen Spit Road at 8:30 a.m. Call **Rick Schortinghuis** at 250-885-2454 for more information.

Sunday, October 4

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Looking at the Rocks South of Island View Beach

Some of you will remember the informative trip we took a while back with **Rick Hudson** to Hill 60 or will remember him from a delightful evening talk about jade at Natural History Night. Rick says he is no geologist but he sure knows his rocks and enjoys sharing his knowledge with others. He has offered to lead us on a 3 hour trip investigating the sand cliffs south of Island View Beach. Rick calls this area "recent glacial geology". Details, including date, are not firm for this trip at press time so please check the web site closer to the date or contact Agnes after September 15. We will probably meet at Island View Beach Parking Lot (south end) at 10:00 a.m. Bring water and a snack. Wear proper footwear for walking on the beach plus clothes appropriate for the weather as it is usually cool near the water. No pets please. Contact Agnes at 250-721-0634 or preferably email her (thelynns at shaw.ca) for final details.

Saturday, October 10

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Juan De Fuca Pelagic Birding

We have hired a boat (the *Fantasea II*) to go from Victoria Harbour out into the Juan De Fuca Strait and to Race Rocks to find some of the pelagic species that feed there. We will follow the tide debris line that occurs between Victoria and Race Rocks as the currents cause an upwelling of nutrients from the bottom, resulting in the best feeding spots for the birds. Possible birds include shearwaters, murrelets, auklets, jaegers, Northern Fulmar, Tufted Puffin, many species of gulls, phalaropes, and other pelagics. Sea mammals, including whales, are also possibilities. There is room for 20 people; the cost is $55.00 per person for a 5 hour trip (9:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.). You must pre-pay on the VNHS website or by cheque to VNHS and pre-register by phoning **Rick Schortinghuis** at 250-885-2454.

Tuesday, October 13

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION

Ivvavik National Park, Yukon

Artist **Joanne Thomson** was invited to participate in "Artist's in the Park" at Ivvavik National Park in early July and came home with some great photos, videos, paintings, and stories. This will be a great evening for the generalist with photos and reflections about the British Mountains, the MacKenzie Delta, the Firth River, and the beauty of the people, the rocks, daylight, bones, wildflowers, lichens and insects of the area. 7:30 p.m. in the new UVic Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A104 **(**NOTE ROOM CHANGE!)**. Admission is free and everyone is welcome. Bring a coffee cup!

Sunday, October 18

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Juan De Fuca Pelagic Birding

We have hired a boat (the *Fantasea II*) to go from Victoria Harbour out into the Juan De Fuca Strait and to Race Rocks to find some of the pelagic species that feed there. We will follow the tide debris line that occurs between Victoria and Race Rocks as the currents cause an upwelling of nutrients from the bottom, resulting in the best feeding spots for the birds. Possible birds include shearwaters, murrelets, auklets, jaegers, Northern Fulmar, Tufted Puffin, many species of gulls, phalaropes, and other pelagics. Sea mammals, including whales, are also possibilities. There is room for 20 people; the cost is $55.00 per person for a 5 hour trip (9:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.). You must pre-pay on the VNHS website or by cheque to VNHS and pre-register by phoning **Rick Schortinghuis** at 250-885-2454.

Tuesday, October 20

BOTANY NIGHT

Farewell to Summer

Bring your slides, memory sticks, or CD's with photographs that you would like to show to others. Let **Adolf** know how many photos you would bring and the medium at least a week before: aceska@telus.net or 250-477-1211. Swan Lake Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Admission is free. Bring a friend.

Sunday, October 25

EVENT

Swan Lake Mushroom Show

Held at the Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admittance by donation.

Monday, October 26

MARINE NIGHT

Code Blue: Marine Rescue and Resuscitation

Two presenters, **Dr. Colin Campbell**, and **Ana Simeon** will deliver a unique take on global warming, highlighting marine species that inhabit the Pacific Northwest. Colin's long-term perspective and dry sense of humour provide a contrasting vibe to Ana's passion for immediate action. Their slideshow includes the world's largest colony of Cassin's Auklets situated on Triangle Island, and other examples of west coast species. Colin Campbell is Marine Campaign Coordinator and Science Advisor to the Sierra Club BC. Ana Simeon is a writer and journalist in Victoria, and works with Colin on marine issues at the Sierra Club of BC. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in the new UVic Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A120 **(**NOTE ROOM CHANGE!)**. Everyone is welcome and admission is free.

Wednesday, October 28

BIRDERS' NIGHT

Eagles, Sandpipers and Salmon – The Birds and Ecology of Boundary Bay

Anne Murray, author of two books on the natural history of the Fraser River Estuary area, will be presenting a slide show on Boundary Bay, featuring the photographs of **David Blevins**. The shallow water and tidal flats of Boundary Bay attract migrating and wintering shorebirds, waterfowl and raptors in very high numbers. Find out more about birding this remarkable location, which is rated the top Important Bird Area in Canada. This slide show is suitable for all ages. There will be an opportunity for book signings and sales after the show. Cash or cheques only. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in the new UVic Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A120 **(**NOTE ROOM CHANGE!).** Admission is free and everyone is welcome. Bring a coffee cup!

NOVEMBER

Thursday, November 5

SOUTH VANCOUVER ISLAND MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY MONTHLY MEETING

Medicinal Mushrooms

Richard Winder will take us to the forefront of knowledge about medicinal mushrooms and their applications. Pacific Forestry Centre, 507 West Burnside Road, Victoria, B.C., at 7:00 p.m.

Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by nine new members since the last issue. Only Monica Pinch of Harriet Road agreed to have her name published in our "welcome" column. Her interests include birds and gardening.

The Victoria NATURALIST

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Victoria, BC, V8R 6N4

Publication Mail Commercial Sales
Agreement Number 40045722

Publications Mail Registration No. 09841

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Francis-King Park by Joanne Thomson. See more artwork by Joanne at October's Natural History Presentation about Ivvavik National Park.