



The Victoria **NATURALIST**

NOVEMBER
DECEMBER
2010
VOL 67.3

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
Contents © 2010 as credited.
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.

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Honorary Life Members Dr. Bill Austin, Mrs. Lyndis Davis,
Mr. Tony Embleton, Mr. Tom Gillespie, Mrs. Peggy Goodwill,
Mr. David Stirling, Mr. Bruce Whittington

Officers: 2009-2010

PRESIDENT: Darren Copley, 250-479-6622, dccopley@telus.net
VICE-PRESIDENT: James Miskelly, 250-477-0490, jmiskelly@gmail.com
TREASURER: Gordon Hart, 250-721-1264, gordh19@shaw.ca
SECRETARY: Jennifer Ellenton, 250-388-7158, jellenton@shaw.ca

Directors and Committees

Darren Copley, 250-479-6622, dccopley@telus.net (*Membership*)
Claudia Copley, 250-479-6622, dccopley@telus.net (*Publications*)
William Dancer, 250-721-5273, w.dancer@telus.net (*Schools Project*)
James Miskelly, 250-477-0490, james.miskelly@gmail.com
(*Swan Lake representative, FBCN representative.*)

Directors at Large:

Phil Lambert, 250-477-5922, plambert@pacificcoast.net
Shona Lawson: 250-508-4021, lawson.shona@gmail.com
Nancie Dohan: 250-592-1956, nancied@shaw.ca
Wendy Tyrrell, 250-598-7276, wendyct@shaw.ca

Presentation Coordinators

Marine Night: Phil Lambert, 250-477-5922,
marinenight@pacificcoast.net
Botany Night: Adolf Ceska, 250-477-1211, aceska@telus.net
Natural History Night and Birders' Night: Christina Ball,
250-383-3188, ball_ch@telus.net

Membership

Payable online – see website <www.vicnhs.bc.ca> for details
Individual subscribing \$30*
Family subscribing \$35*
Subscription only: \$20
Membership without subscription: \$15
*less discount: Senior \$5 or Student \$10
Any donation in excess of the above fees is income tax deductible

RARE BIRD ALERT: 250-704-2555

VNHS Website: www.vicnhs.bc.ca

Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper.

SUBMISSIONS

Deadline for next issue: December 1, 2010

Send to: Claudia Copley

657 Beaver Lake Road, Victoria BC V8Z 5N9

Phone: 250-479-6622

e-mail: dccopley@telus.net

Guidelines for Submissions

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>.

ADVERTISING GUIDELINES

We do our best to ensure your ad is produced accurately. Should we make an error, please contact us and a correction can be printed in the next issue. A charge is levied for typesetting. Minor alterations to existing ads cost \$10.00. Add \$15 per photo. Advertising fees are due and payable when copy is submitted. Please submit a cheque payable to The Victoria Natural History Society.

Ad Size	Price	Dimensions (in inches)
Back page	\$120	7.5" width x 8" height
Full page, inside	\$100	7.5 width x 9.5" height
1/2 page, horizontal	\$80	7.5" width x 4.75" height
1/2 page, vertical	\$80	3.5" width x 9.5" height
1/3 page horizontal	\$50	7.5" width x 3.25" height
1/3 page, vertical	\$50	3.5" width x 6.5" height
1/4 page, horizontal	\$40	7.5" width x 2.25" height
1/4 page, vertical	\$40	3.5" width x 4.75" height
1/8 page, horizontal	\$25	3.5" width x 2.25" height

Rates as of February, 1994. May be subject to change.

Submit advertising to:

email dccopley@telus.net

or phone Claudia Copley at 250-479-6622

Thank you for your patronage.

VNHS Website: www.vicnhs.bc.ca

Contents

President's Message

By Darren Copley 4

Black Wolf Sighting at Rocky Point Bird Observatory

By Ann Nightingale 6

Mortuaries

By Bill Merilees..... 7

Salish Seascape: Explore This Newly Named Sea Without Getting Your Feet Wet

By Tina Kelly 8

The Price of Convenience

By Birgitte Dreger-Smylie 9

Phantom Orchid Zoo

By Kristen Harrison..... 10

Welcome to New VNHS Members 11

Endangered Avatar Grove

By David Riedel 12

The Encyclopedia of Life: One Species at a Time

By Melissa Frey..... 15

Snowflakes in the Jaded Spring

By Annie Pang 16

Book Review: *What's That Island?*

By Lori Waters..... 16

New Species Predicted for 2010 Christmas Bird Counts

By Ann Nightingale 18

Hat Tricks

By Adam Taylor, Habitat Acquisition Trust ... 20

Letters 20

Bulletin Board.....16

Calendar of Events 17

COVER PHOTO

One of several endemic mammals on the Olympic Peninsula, an Olympic Chipmunk (*Tamias amoenus caurinus*), seen on a VNHS hiking trip in Olympic National Park. Photo: Val George

I recently spent an evening telling the truth about daddy-long-legs (Order Opiliones) at an annual fund-raising event for the Royal BC Museum called *Artifact/Artifiction*.

This is an entertaining evening where curatorial staff are either stringing you a line or stating a fact, and the guests need to decide which. In the process, we learn a lot about our guests. I learned that most people believe that eight legs = spider, spiders are dangerous, and that these misconceptions are difficult to overcome. But the scariest thing that I learned was that many people had never even seen a daddy-long-legs! What kind of nature-less circumstances could lead to that? I actually said to some of them that they need to get out more, and I meant outside!

Our Society is the opposite. We spend as much time as possible outside, and there are probably few among us that haven't seen a daddy-long-legs. For you, I'm recommending a rare inside activity. There is an exhibit on at the museum right now that is focused on natural history, and the rains of winter are the perfect time to be indoors for a few hours. And in this issue's calendar there is even a field trip that combines a gallery visit with a tour of the fossil collection (p.22) – perfect!

Claudia

President's Message

By Darren Copley

Normally I'm not a big fan of P3's (Public Private Partnerships), but recently the VNHS was involved in a very successful one with CRD Parks at the annual Hawkwatch event in East Sooke Park. Obviously this wasn't a real P3, but as you can see it did involve partnerships with local government and the private sector, along with us, the non-profit. The big difference here being that the project had a net benefit to the environment, and the public sector (Red Barn Market, Planet Organic, and Tiffin Treats) was kind enough to donate food for our après-Hawkwatch BBQ Social. This event was put together by your board and I'd like to give special thanks to Wendy Tyrrell for soliciting donations for the food, James Miskelly for cooking the dogs, and Nancy Dohan for the important connection with CRD Parks, including tables and a tent, which we needed for shade! If you missed it this year, be sure to put it on your calendar for next. It is a great way for us to connect with the general public.

I'm embarrassed to say but in the 20+ years that I've been a VNHS member, I'd never gone to the Hawkwatch. I was really inspired by the number of raptors that we could see, but it wasn't just the number of different species that made it special. What is even more amazing is the fact that this is an annual migration and many of these birds travel hundreds or even thousands of kilometers twice a year, despite the obstacles we put in their way.

While socializing at the BBQ, I was happy to learn that the Young Naturalists Club of Victoria has been rejuvenated with new leaders. The CRD Parks Naturalists, led by Heather Chatwyn, will get the program back on its feet after a recent hiatus. This program provides an opportunity for children to participate in naturalist-led activities, and to learn to appreciate the environment. If you have kids yourself, or grand-kids, or nieces and nephews, think of giving a membership as a gift. You can also volunteer to lead trips by contacting Nancy Dohan (see



inside cover). Hopefully we can help this program get back on its feet and keep it connected with our club, so that as these kids grow up they will remain active with the VNHS.

In other news, I recently attended the Federation of BC Naturalists (BC Nature) Fall General Meeting in Langley. Important activities like bird atlassing are happening at the provincial level, and it is a chance to meet with other club directors to hear about some of their great local projects. It was also decided at this meeting that BC Nature will be sending out an E-Newsletter to all of the affiliate members to keep you up to date on important projects and initiatives. This will also allow us to inform all other clubs of any important announcements we have. If you would like to hear more about BC Nature activities, contact James Miskelly, the BC Nature representative on our Board (see inside cover).

Finally I'm very happy to announce that your Board directed \$5000 towards the new Swan Lake boardwalk. I'd like to thank long-time member Barbara Hanwell for presenting our cheque in the absence of any Board members. It is hard to imagine going to Swan Lake and *not* using the boardwalk, so I'm encouraging everyone to donate to this worthy project. The life-time materials being used make it a long-term investment, and our Society plans to provide interpretive signage for the new boardwalk. If you are able to donate to the *Bridges to Nature* Campaign (www.swanlake.bc.ca/capital-project.php) please remember to mention that you are a VNHS member.



Ann Nightingale receiving her BC Nature Regional Award from your Society's president. Congratulations Ann!



BBQ Social helpers (right to left): Wendy Tyrell, James Miskelly, and Kristen Harrison. Photo: Nancie Dohan


GOES WITH ANYWHERE

A symbol of Canadian quality, Tilley hats are now available at Wildbirds Unlimited. Great for any of your outdoor adventures, from a day birding to 2 months in Africa these hats won't let you down.




Bird Feeders - Custom Seed Blends - Optics - Gifts


Wild Birds Unlimited®
 Nature Shop

3631 Shelbourne St., Victoria - 250-595-3595

*Quality is remembered long after price is forgotten...
Visit our store for your
very best value!*

Black Wolf Sighting at Rocky Point Bird Observatory

By Ann Nightingale

In the early morning hours between mid-July and mid-October, Rocky Point Bird Observatory volunteers head to the migration monitoring site in Metchosin hoping to see a good variety of birds making their way south to their wintering grounds. The site is on restricted Department of National Defence land, and it is a privilege to be permitted access to the site. In addition to birds, native and introduced mammals – river otters, harbour seals, sea lions, raccoons, mink, squirrels, voles, shrews and many others – are regularly seen in the area. Occasionally the sighting of a pod of orca, sometimes very close to shore, will bring the birdbanding crew running down to the water's edge for a look. Once or twice a year, someone sees a black bear in the vicinity, reminding everyone that despite being close to the city, Metchosin still has its wild side.

Even more rarely, wolves have been found at Rocky Point. In 2000, two wolves – one with the typical grey colouration and one with a reddish cast – were observed for several weeks. Occasionally on the shoreline or swimming across Eemdyk Passage to Bentinck Island, the grey wolf was also seen hunting voles in the open meadows near the banding area. Since 2000, although scat had been found that suggested there might still be wolves around, the banding team had not reported any further sightings. Until this year, that is.

Rocky Point Bird Observatory conducts MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) banding on seven days between late May and mid-August. This year, the banding team had noticed considerably more suspected wolf scat along the roadways and trails at Rocky Point. While none of the team claim to be expert “scatologists”, the suspect feces were quite large and had a lot of hair and bone fragments in them. Even after much of the content has been washed away, the long cylindrical “hairballs” can remain visible for several weeks.

On July 26, less than a week after the start of migration monitoring, a large canine was seen on the shoreline at Rocky Point. Long-legged, straight-tailed, and larger than a German Shepherd, the obvious question was whether it was a wolf, a feral dog, or something in-between. Black overall, except for a white patch on the chest, this was clearly a different individual than had been observed before. Over the next couple of weeks, the animal was seen and heard several times, frequently making a noise falling somewhere between a bark and a howl. The vocalizations consisted of continuous short bursts stretching out for several minutes at a time. They weren't the distinct barks of a domestic dog, but neither were they the typical howl associated with wolves. Pictures and



Photo: Ann Nightingale

video were shown to several biologists and the consensus was that the Rocky Point animal was indeed a wolf.

The Wikipedia entry on black wolves contains the following information:

“In his 1791 book *Travels*, William Bartram mentioned seeing black wolves among the few red wolf populations he saw in Florida. He stated that they were “perfectly black”, except the females which were described as having a white spot on the breast.” Based on this description, the Rocky Point wolf is believed to be a female. On one occasion, she was observed (and photographed by Ian Cruickshank) carrying a Canada Goose from the shore into the woods.

Canis lupus crassodon was a subspecies of wolf unique to Vancouver Island. Present over the entire island in the early 1900s, wolves were eradicated by hunting, trapping, and poisoning, beginning in the 1920s. They were considered extirpated between the 1950s and 1970s. The removal of the wolves was considered advantageous to hunters because it allowed the deer population to increase.

Since the 1970s, however, wolf numbers have been increasing on the island. According to Muñoz-Fuentes *et al.* (2010), wolves are believed to have returned naturally to Vancouver Island by swimming the channels at the northern end of the island. These are likely the coastal subspecies, *Canis lupus fuscus*. Although there is some evidence that early arrivals may have mated with domestic dogs due to lack of suitable wolf mates, hybridization is considered a rare event in the natural environment.

Wolves rarely confront humans, but there have been attacks. The most notable near Vancouver Island was a non-fatal incident on Vargas Island in 2000. That wolf, and its presumed sibling, were shot and killed. There is still considerable pressure from hunters, ranchers, and others to control the wolf populations throughout the province. As such it is truly a rare privilege to get to see one so close to Victoria.

A video on the coastal wolf population, *Last Wild Wolves*,

by Twyla Roscovich, can be seen at <<http://vimeo.com/groups/vancouverisland/videos/4420635>>.

References

- McTaggart Cowan, I. and C.J. Guiguet. 1973. *The Mammals of British Columbia*. British Columbia Provincial Museum Handbook No. 11: 280-285.
- Muñoz-Fuentes, V., C.T. Darimont, P.C. Paquet, and J.A. Leonard. 2010. The genetic legacy of extirpation and re-colonization in Vancouver Island wolves. *Conserv. Genet.* 11: 547–556.
- Read, N. 2009. Cross-bred animals found on Vancouver Island aren't fit as pets or wild creatures. *Vancouver Sun*. September 29, 2009. Accessed online at <<http://www2.canada.com/vancouvernews/story.html?id=4a0e27ec-9f00-402c-8255-231408b1da99>> August 12, 2010
- Wikipedia contributors. 2010. Black Wolf (Animal). Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_wolf_\(animal\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_wolf_(animal))>. Accessed August 12, 2010

Mortuariums

By Bill Merilees

Roadside verges become the repositories for all manner of discarded materials, among which, drink containers are a considerable component. When not totally drained of their contents the variety of perfumes they emit is considerable. Fermented or not, acting as pheromones, these olfactory stimuli attract an impressive variety of creatures. Once through the narrow neck or opening of the container, the smooth surfaces are as adept as pitcher plants in trapping their curious visitors. In essence, when augmented by rainwater, many of these containers become mortuariums!

Over many years, examples of such circumstances are recorded in the author's field notebooks. Long cylindrical millipedes, colourful beetles, wasps, and flies have been the most usual prey. The most interesting contents of one such mortuarium were two, neatly cleaned, vagrant shrew skulls (*Sorex vagrans*) plus a number of large orange and black carrion beetles, two of which were still alive.

Pheromone technology is well known and utilized in many commercial applications, from wasp traps to perfumes, but for the curious naturalist, the careful inspection of old discarded drink containers offers another avenue of investigation to learn about a host of seldom seen organisms. With all the different drinks and brands of beverages available there is an unlimited array of scents to attract a diverse range of four, six, eight, and multi-legged critters.

In addition to becoming mortuariums, many of these discarded containers also provide refuge or shelter for a similar assemblage of animal species.



Vagrant shrew skulls (*Sorex vagrans*) (top) and Northern alligator lizard (*Elgaria coerulea*) (bottom). Photos: Bill Merilees

Salish Seascape: Explore This Newly Named Sea Without Getting Your Feet Wet

By Tina Kelly

“He looks like Uncle Jim.” “That thing resembles Grandpa Joe.” “He reminds me of the old guys in the balcony on the Muppet Show.” “It has a face only a mother could love.” These are only a smattering of things overheard while standing in front of the male wolf eel swimming around his habitat at the Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre.

There have been more than 170,000 visitors to the not-for-profit Centre since it opened in Sidney in June 2009. The award-winning marine education centre is funded through admission fees, grants, and donations, and much of the public education is conducted by hardworking volunteers.

Not all visitors have witnessed the distinctive look of the wolf eel – he prefers the comfort of his den. Yet there are scores of other species to be seen in the other 27 habitats. Have you heard of a spaghetti worm, Vancouver feather duster, light bulb tunicate, or orange peel nudibranch? Time spent exploring the details of each habitat unveils these creatures, along with more well-known species such as Chinook salmon, ochre stars, rockfish, urchins, and anemones.

Many creatures previously only accessible to local divers are on display – here to educate the public about the diversity of the Salish Sea. In fact, every species in the Centre represent the life found in this newly-named sea. In 1988, a biologist first proposed the idea that the watershed surrounding the Strait of Georgia, Juan de Fuca Strait, and Puget Sound be named the Salish Sea, paying tribute to the local First Nations people. The United States officially recognized the term in 2009, and Canada followed, accepting the name in 2010.

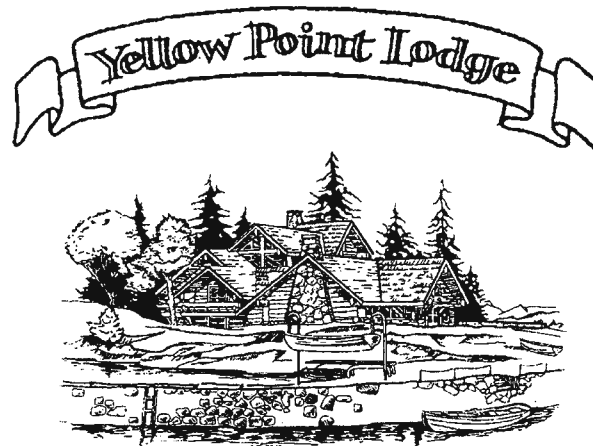


Northern Abalone (*Haliotis kamtschatkana*). Photos provided by author.

The diverse species inhabiting the Centre live in varied habitats – from rocky substrates to sandy bottoms, and deep water to beneath docks and along pilings. Most of the habitats can be found within the main galleries. Other exhibits, however, allow for a more interactive experience. In the Ocean’s Heartbeat, the classroom, microscopes bring the minute details into view. At the touchpool, there is a chance to feel the textures of seastars, cucumbers, anemones, and more.

Teachable moments abound. From kelp greenlings displaying their courtship behaviour, predator-prey interactions, or seeing how the female octopus tends her thousands of eggs. The latter is a special sight rarely witnessed in aquariums.

The ultimate teachable moment is showcasing an endangered or threatened species. Such is the case in the

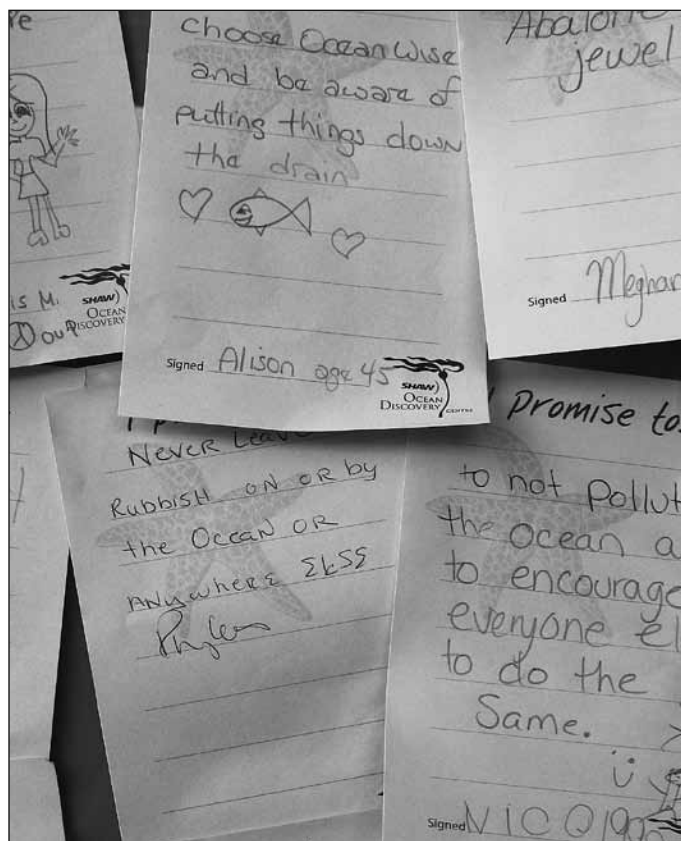


R.R. 3, Ladysmith, B.C. V0R 2E0
(250) 245-7422

3700 Yellow Point Road,
Ladysmith, B.C. V9G 1E8
(250) 245-7422

Centre's procurement of 10 northern abalone from the Bamfield Huu-ay-aht *Community Abalone Project*. A Species-at-Risk since 2003, getting a permit to display abalone was a difficult process and a truly unique opportunity to teach the general public about the plight of this threatened mollusc. Poaching of abalone for their meat and shell continues to occur, despite its endangered status. "We wanted to put this species on display to help our visitors identify abalone, especially if they see it being taken from our shoreline", says Mike Anderson, Head Aquarist. "If people can recognize it, then we have a much better chance of being able to replenish it and help remove abalone from the list of threatened species."

Before you leave the Centre, visit the Take Action Station, where you will find information on local organizations, tips on helping the environment, and space to make a promise. A promise to protect all that you have seen – the local Salish Sea and the Global Ocean needs all of our help.



The Price of Convenience

By Brigitte Dreger-Smylie

Last year, a dead Laysan Albatross chick from Kure Atoll was found with more than 300 pieces of plastic wedged inside its tiny body. Having consumed a deadly amount of synthetic material, the death of this chick was clearly the direct result of human activity. This disturbing scenario is becoming all too common, leaving us all wondering: what is the cost of a seemingly innocent synthetic product?

Plastic is a form of petroleum and its breakdown in the presence of sunlight causes the formation of carbon dioxide and water. This is a process that can take tens or even hundreds of years, and even longer at sea due to a cooler environment and partial blocking of the sun's rays. Some studies over the last few decades had shown that the level of plastic being found in the ocean has been relatively stable, despite its ever-increasing use in everyday life. But recent observations have found that this lack of correlation between plastic consumption and accumulation in our environment is not only misleading, but totally untrue.

Where the seas connect with land, we see plastic in the forms that are familiar to us: bottles, toys, and packaging. In a region where few travel and where winds and ocean currents converge, the plastic we discard on a daily basis amasses. Here the plastic is broken into continually smaller pieces as it is ravaged by wind and waves. Its disintegration into "bite-sized" pieces allows it to make its way into the food web, harming and even killing wildlife.

Whole items made of plastic that have been dated back several decades are still present in some of these infamous patches, casting the future of their biodegradation in a discouraging light. It is clear that our failure to actively combat this problem will cause humans, as much so as our wild counterparts, to suffer, and this problem will shadow our existence until we find a plastic alternative. Household items once prized for their convenience, durability, and practicality are now devastating our seas.

References

- Greenemeir, L. 2010. Ocean Garbage Patches Are Not Growing, So Where Is All That Plastic Going? *Scientific American* Blog. Retrieved from <<http://www.scientificamerican.com/blog/post.cfm?id=ocean-garbage-patches-not-growing-s-2010-08-20>>.
- Burrows, M. 2008. Pacific Ocean Filling Up With Plastic, Experts Say. *Georgia Straight*. Retrieved from: <<http://www.straight.com/article-135556/>>.
- Mcfarling, U.L. 2010. Plague of Plastic Chokes the Seas. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/la-me-ocean2aug02,0,5594900.story?page=4>>

Phantom Orchid Zoo

By Kristen Harrison

After leading a VNHS hike this past summer to discover the phantom orchid (*Cephalanthera austiniiae*) in Gowlland Tod Provincial Park, I gave some thought to the value of both common and rare species. The phantom orchid, as its name denotes, is a rare and highly sought after species. As a lover of nature it is difficult to say which plant species I value the most, but I do know that rarity is not my prime criterion. In a world where our most common and ubiquitous species are too often taken for granted, I want to say something on their behalf. All species contribute to the ecosystem they inhabit and their preservation is vital to the conservation of biological diversity in British Columbia. The whole ecosystem is more important than rare exotic individuals alone because that is the habitat on which they depend. It's impossible to deny the special character that phantom orchids possess, but many more lessons can be learned from these orchids besides beauty and rarity alone.

Finding the elusive orchids in Gowlland Tod was somewhat of a challenge despite the conspicuous fences which have been erected to protect them from trampling. We found them growing in two locations amidst a complex assemblage of common native herbs, shrubs, and trees along Tod Creek and in a higher riparian zone. We feasted our eyes on the **ghostly** white flowers that are accented with a yellow spot on the reflexed lip, and inhaled its vanilla scent. Preferring rich soils in mature and old growth coniferous forests, these perennial orchids grow to a height of 65 cm and are completely leafless. We found them flowering in mid-June, and they have been reported flowering from early May to mid-July.

The phantom orchid is white because it does not need chlorophyll to live, instead is a mycoheterotroph which means that it is an achlorophyllous, non-photosynthetic plant that obtains fixed carbon from photosynthetic plants via mycorrhizal fungi. The fungal species on which the orchid depends are limited to mature forests, hence one of the restrictions on phantom orchid distribution and abundance (Taylor and Bruns 1997). The group of fungi themselves form associations with specific species of trees and shrubs.

The phantom orchid, described and named almost a century ago, is a threatened species in Canada and is protected under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). It is the only representative of genus *Cephalanthera* found outside of Europe and Asia. As with many plant species which extend along the Pacific coast down to California, the phantom orchid is at the northern limit of its range in southwestern British Columbia. It is found in the lowland zone in the Chilliwack area, around Victoria and the Saanich Peninsula,



Phantom Orchid (*Cephalanthera austiniiae*) at Gowlland Tod Provincial Park. Photo: Harry McLeod

and in the Gulf Islands (Douglas *et al.* 2001). A total of eight extant and four extirpated populations are known. There are only a few individuals at each site, for a total of approximately 100 individuals across all sites (Species at Risk Public Registry 2010). Of the eight extant populations, only three produce flowering stems regularly and seed set may be a rare occurrence in those that are flowering (Klinkenberg 2009). At present, the phantom orchid receives some protection at two sites where it occurs in provincial parks, a third is partly protected in an ecological reserve, and a fourth site has received protection on crown land set aside specifically for it (Species at Risk Public Registry 2010). As a red-listed species in British Columbia it is imperative that we protect the habitats where phantom orchids are known.

Although habitat alteration and lack of formal protection are often the culprits to species decline, sometimes biological limitations may put certain species at risk. The historical increase or decline of phantom orchid populations is unknown, and all that can be currently assessed is their critically sparse distribution and vulnerability to habitat change. To date, no consistent long-term monitoring has been initiated, so it is not known if the low number of flowering records represents declining or dormant populations (Klinkenberg 2009). No one knows why so few seeds are produced either. Like many terrestrial orchids, when conditions above ground are not suitable, the phantom orchid lies dormant. They have been reported as lying dormant for up to 17 years (Species at Risk Public Registry 2010). It is important not to trample the area around these extremely

Like many terrestrial orchids, when conditions above ground are not suitable, the phantom orchid lays dormant. They have been reported as lying dormant for up to 17 years,

rare orchids whether or not their flowers are visible because their flowering is unpredictable.

It's striking what we do not know about these orchids, making protection of them very difficult. The conditions that trigger flowering are unknown and specific habitat preferences are largely unexplained. Like pandas in a zoo, the phantom orchid populations in Gowlland Tod are encircled by fences to protect them. How can small enclosures protect habitat for a species we may not see for 17 years? How large do enclosures need to be to protect the orchids and the communities on which they rely? Perhaps the only solution to keeping rare species alive is to cage them off from us, but that still leaves the remaining ecosystem, filled with the supposedly common species, vulnerable to human activities. Even the most common plants don't grow in isolation and our knowledge of them is elementary. We have to show humility and err on the side of protection for common and rare species alike.

Literature Cited

Douglas, G.W., D.V. Meidinger, and J. Pojar (editors). 2001. *Illustrated Flora of British Columbia. Volume 7: Monocotyledons (Orchidaceae Through Zosteraceae)*. B.C. Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management and B.C. Ministry of Forests. Victoria.

Klinkenberg, B. 2009. Rare saprophyte maintains only a toe-hold in Canada. Niagara Region Orchid Society Newsletter. Accessed October 10 2010 from <<http://www.niagaraorchid-society.org/2009novembernewsletter.pdf>>

Species at Risk Public Registry. 2010. Accessed October 10 2010 from <http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/species/speciesDetails_e.cfm?sid=261>

Taylor, D.L. and Bruns, T.D. 1997. Independent, specialized invasions of ectomycorrhizal mutualism by two nonphotosynthetic orchids. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 94:4510-4515.

Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 14 new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our "welcome" column:

Hugh Campbell
Tillicum Road
birds

Denise Gaudreault
Winslow Drive
wildlife photography, art

Evan R. Jones
Browning Street
birds, botany

Heather Bunner
Portsmouth Drive
birds

Joanna Preston
Starling Place
*all animals and plants
and their ecology and
habitats*

Meaghan MacDonald
Wark Street
*education, knitting,
screen printing*

Tracy White
Camli Place
birds, gardening



Where is the Colour? It's Out There!

Visit it in nature and bring it home in Patrice's art

For original art; museum quality limited edition reproductions,
notecards and commissioned art, please contact:

PATRICE PLANK FINE ART

250-474-3907 or sons60rg@earthlink.net
www.patriceplankfineart.com

Endangered Avatar Grove

By David Riedel

Between Port Renfrew and Cowichan Lake, above the banks of Gordon River, a small pocket of old-growth western redcedars (*Thuja plicata*) and Douglas-firs (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) was discovered earlier this year. It represents a rare remnant of valley-bottom primary forest on southern Vancouver Island, where 96% of the original forest has been logged. This place was dubbed Avatar Grove, after this year's box office blockbuster *Avatar*, the story line of which is a cautionary tale warning against the unsustainable use of our planet's resources.

On September 19, 12 people participated in a VNHS day trip to visit the trees of Avatar Grove, which is slated for destruction despite its rarity and potential to become a major tourist attraction as "the Cathedral Grove of southern Vancouver Island." Our trip itinerary, via the Pacific Marine

Circle Route, included several other ancient trees in the area, but the focus was unprotected Avatar Grove.

Unlike the movie, no 3-D glasses were required at the Grove, but the special effects were impressive. Grey skies and intermittent rain enhanced the various rich hues of green in the forest. Except for the occasional soft, high-pitched call of Brown Creepers and Golden-crowned Kinglets, this "green, dark forest was too silent to be real," to borrow a lyric from Gordon Lightfoot.

We were led by TJ Watt, who co-discovered the Grove earlier this year. TJ is a campaigner for the Ancient Forest Alliance, which was founded by former activists with the Western Canada Wilderness Committee. To maintain its status as a charitable organization, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee is prohibited from partisan political



TJ Watt, a campaigner for the Ancient Forest Alliance, talks to us about the need for protection of Avatar Grove.
Photos: copyright Mikhail Belikov/<www.focusonwild.com>

activity, whereas the Ancient Forest Alliance has no charitable status, and can therefore play a direct role in the political realm, including the electoral process.

The Ancient Forest Alliance supports sustainable second-growth forestry. British Columbia's forestry sector has always been, and continues to be, an important component of the economy, providing well-paying employment for legions of British Columbians and a crucial stream of revenues to support a wide array of public services. However, liquidation of the last remaining stands of unprotected old-growth, and an over-reliance on the export of raw logs to foreign mills, does not constitute sustainable forestry. The Ancient Forest Alliance recognizes that the conservation of primary forest also has significant value, and provides benefits for the ecosystems from which our species is inseparable. Beyond our region, we increasingly understand the importance of temperate rainforest ecosystems to the larger biosphere.

Over the course of this year, as the existence of Avatar Grove became known, a footpath has appeared to the largest trees. A short walk into the lower Avatar Grove reveals several massive Douglas-firs and some gnarly, burl-adorned western redcedars; in fact, the Grove is thought to contain



sign up for
FREE newsletter



saving the world, one investment at a time

At the Pinch Group, we combine a passion for social and environmental issues with the best practices of sensible investing. And we've been doing it successfully for more than 20 years. Learn more at: www.pinchgroup.ca

The Pinch Group
BC's leaders in socially responsible investing

Toll free: 1-866-515-2420
Email us: pinchgroup@raymondjames.ca

RAYMOND JAMES Member CIPF

the “gnarliest” cedars in Canada, with some of the largest ones likely being more than 500 years old. (A burl indicates some form of distress to a tree, possibly caused by a fungus.) The upper Avatar Grove features many towering redcedars along its path and eventually leads to the “gnarliest” tree of all: a giant old-growth cedar with a contorted burl measuring 12 feet in diameter.

Throughout Avatar Grove, the top soil is derived mostly from decay of trees that have fallen over the years. Much of the soil clearly consists of disintegrating cedars, and retains

the deep rufous that is recognizable as the colour of western redcedars. A hike in this forest is an unforgettable experience of walking across a sponge-like surface. With each step, a hiker’s boot sinks slightly into the soil, which quickly springs up again as the boot lifts for the next step.

The biodiversity and complexity of an old-growth ecosystem is far greater than that of second-growth forests. Biodiversity is especially rich in valley-bottom old-growth forests such as this one. Old cedars frequently become hollowed out at the base of their trunks while remaining viable; the resulting cavities provide dens for bears, cougars, wolves and other animals.

On September 17, members of the South Vancouver Island Mycological Society conducted a mycological survey of the area. As reported by Adolf and Oluna Ceska, the group was “surprised by the richness of the mycoflora there.” SVIMS has documented at least 50 species of fungus. The most significant find was *Leptonia approximata*, which was not previously known in BC; its distribution is northern California. Additionally, three species of the genus *Phaeocollybia* were found, along with two species of *Ramaria* that are considered rare, and the distribution of which are tracked in the United States by the Bureau of Land Management. At publication time, SVIMS intended to return to the area in October to record later-fruiting species. For more information on SVIMS, see the Society’s website at <http://www.svims.ca/>.

From an economic perspective, the Ancient Forest Alliance suggests that the potential ongoing value of Avatar Grove as a tourist destination is superior to the one-time financial hit of turning the biggest trees into a few logs and losing the most accessible stand of monumental old-growth on Vancouver Island. Port Renfrew and the communities of Cowichan Lake would benefit as gateways to the protected Grove.

It’s time to say “enough is enough,” and take a stand. Time is slipping away. Visit the Ancient Forest Alliance website at <http://www.ancientforestalliance.org/> to see what you can do to help.

As with so many VNHS day trips, many thanks are due to Agnes Lynn for organizing the day trip, and Dave Lynn for his safe driving skills behind the wheel of the van. Thanks also to TJ for sharing his enthusiasm for Avatar Grove, and for his efforts to save it.



The Encyclopedia of Life: One Species at a Time

By Melissa Frey, Invertebrate Curator
at the Royal BC Museum

Imagine an electronic page for each species of organism on Earth, available everywhere by single access on command.” – this was the vision outlined by world-renowned biologist E.O. Wilson in a seminal 2003 paper¹. Wilson, an expert in the taxonomy of ants and an advocate for the protection of global biodiversity, proposed that such an elaborate project *could* be accomplished through the collective contributions of researchers, educators, and citizen scientists. In 2008, the concept of an online initiative finally came to life as the first Encyclopedia of Life (EOL) portal was launched. The objective of the project was ambitious, yet simple: to develop a comprehensive page for each of the formally described 1.9 million species on the planet!

Inclusive in taxonomic scope, EOL aims to compile key information and data for all living species, from the most minuscule bacteria to the charismatic megafauna. Ultimately, each “species page” will be composed of a scientific and

Already, individuals in more than 230 countries have accessed more than 8 million taxonomic pages. The result is a comprehensive, dynamic, peer-reviewed, and freely accessible encyclopedia of the world’s biodiversity.

common name, images illustrating diagnostic traits, detailed descriptions, geographic and habitat distributions, general ecology and evolutionary history, genomic data, conservation risks, importance to humans, and relevant literature. A portion of this information flows directly from other online providers, as more than a hundred content partners, such as the Tree of Life, AntWeb, FishBase, and GenBank, link their data directly with EOL. However, EOL also draws heavily upon the contributions of individual researchers, educators, students, and citizen scientists willing to share their expert knowledge. Together, such content partners and individual contributors help build the core of EOL.

With new technologies, EOL is developing dynamic species pages, and distributing the information throughout the world with a few clicks of a button. In order to generate up-



to-date, comprehensive pages, content is revised continuously with the discovery of additional facts and data. Contributors, editors, and online curators work together to yield accurate information that can be expanded and improved upon indefinitely. All content is free to the public and accessible anywhere in the world with an internet connection. Already, individuals in more than 230 countries have accessed more than eight million taxonomic pages. The result is a comprehensive, dynamic, peer-reviewed, and freely accessible encyclopedia of the world’s biodiversity.

The Encyclopedia of Life project is led by a network of prominent natural history institutions, including the Smithsonian Institution, the Field Museum, the Missouri Botanical Garden, and the Biodiversity Heritage Library. Further financial support for EOL comes from the generous contributions of private donors, foundations, and corporations. However, it is the dedication of thousands of individuals, including nature enthusiasts like you and me, which form the core purpose of EOL. Indeed, our collective contributions to and continued use of EOL will determine the future of the project.

To date, contributors have authenticated more than 160,000 species pages; and another 1.4 million base pages are waiting to be populated with information and data. The goal is to reach one million authenticated species pages within the next five years. In addition to the main website, EOL hosts several other online and audio resources that highlight the planet’s biodiversity. If you are a natural history enthusiast, EOL invites you to explore the following:

Encyclopedia of Life – <http://www.eol.org/>

EOL Learning + Education – <http://education.eol.org/>

EOL LifeDesks – <http://www.lifedesks.org/>

EOL Podcast: One Species at a Time – <http://education.eol.org/podcast>

¹Wilson, E.O. 2003. The encyclopedia of life. *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, 18: 77-80.

DR. MELISSA FREY is the new Curator of Invertebrates at the Royal BC Museum, and presently holds an EOL Rubenstein Fellowship. If you are interested in contributing to the EOL initiative and would like additional information, she can be contacted at: mefrey@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca

Snowflakes in the Jaded Spring

By Annie Pang

*White snowflakes flitter in the jaded Spring
and Aspen leaves are stripped down to the bones.
There is no wind to drive each frenzied wing –
the call to procreate sings stronger tones.
They blur the airless sky as time stands still;
a spectacle like this I've never seen.
This dance to Instinct being the only will
that drives them to their death where Life has been.*

*What caused this Summer Solstice Winter storm
of Satin Moths all flying to the Light.
So many cloud the Aspens in a swarm –
more time to mate than on the Shortest Night?*

*White Satin Moths now flood up to the Sun
in ecstasy of Life, 'til Life is done..." A.P.*

No photographs could possibly do justice to what we witnessed on 19 June 2010 at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, in the aspen grove near the Nature House, just a few days prior to the summer solstice. After virtually next to no significant butterflies sightings for a few months, we happened to be walking down the trail in search of hummingbirds when we noticed an enormous number of what we initially mistook for cabbage white butterflies. Hundreds of them were swarming the aspens, and that is when we noticed many of the tops of the trees were looking rather badly off, nearly stripped of their leaves. These creatures did not fly like any butterflies we'd ever seen and it wasn't until I saw one resting on a snowberry leaf, as well as a pair on the ground in a mating frenzy, that I realized we were dealing with a moth emergence swarm. I took a few photographs but could not possibly capture the activity that was occurring with the camera I use.

Earlier, I had taken a photograph of the same species of moth resting in the shade on the entrance side of the Nature House, and I thought I recognized the species. We called Jeremy Tatum to confirm what we had seen, and I went home to look up my records from last year. I was correct in my identification of this swarm of White Satin Moths.

Jeremy later wrote me in an email "Thank you very much for telephoning me about the White Satin Moths. I was down there in a trice, if you know what a trice is. The White Satin Moth (sometimes just called the Satin



Moth)... is a common enough moth here, but I have never, never seen anything remotely like what was down at the Swan Lake aspens. There were hundreds upon hundreds of them, flying in full daylight. It looked like a Montreal snowstorm. It was one of the most exciting things I have seen for a long time. The White Satin Moth is a native of Europe. Whether it is also a native of North America or is another dastardly European invader depends on whom you ask. I shan't venture an opinion myself." Coming from Ontario as I do, I am very familiar with the eastern snowstorms and I thought this a very apt description indeed!

When he urged me to write something about it, I could only come up with this sonnet and brief commentary. We returned a few days later and most of the moths were gone, in tatters, or dead, but a few were still flying and I got some pictures of a pair mating on an aspen sapling leaf that was rolled up in a cocoon housing yet another White Satin Moth that had not yet emerged.

The White Satin Moth is so-called because its wings are very much like white satin. This is the common name for this species, its scientific name being *Leucoma salicis* (Family Lymantriidae). Trembling aspens (*Populus tremuloides*), are in the family Salicaceae, which includes poplars, cottonwoods, and willows – the food source for the caterpillars. Although a common moth, it would appear that seeing "hundreds upon hundreds" of them like this is quite unusual.

I hope this sonnet helped to paint a picture in some way of the wonder I felt while witnessing this phenomenon.

What brought this population explosion on is anyone's guess, but for us it was an exhilarating experience to see these normally nocturnal creatures flying in such numbers in broad daylight, with a very good dose of sunshine to boot!

Special thanks to Jeremy Tatum for some of the latin terms, background information and his permission to quote him in this article.

Book Review

By Lori Waters

***What's That Island?* by Bruce Whittington**

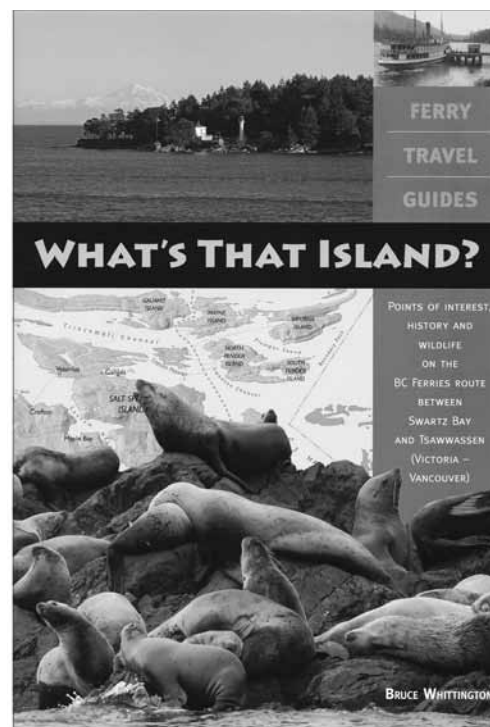
Stray Feathers Press. ISBN: 978-0-9782913-1-0. \$14.95 in Canada

I have spent a large portion of this year under water, zooming through Active Pass many times a day, looking at all the nooks and crannies of this unique area, albeit virtually, as part of a bathymetry animation project I completed for Parks Canada's upcoming "Emerald Sea" documentary. Soon to be shown on major BC Ferries routes, this project aims to focus the attention of ferry passengers towards the unique ecosystems within the Gulf Islands Marine Protected Area. I'm therefore delighted to have the opportunity to "surface" from my virtual underwater world, and spend some time in a similar geographical mind-space, jaunting about in the fresh air of Bruce Whittington's timely "*What's that Island?*" – a delightful guided jaunt along the Tsawassen-Swartz Bay ferry route, and beyond.

Designed to answer questions for travelers along the ferry routes, this well-researched and comprehensive guide is ambitious in its scope, and does excellent job of contextualizing the area for the reader. Written in friendly informal language, the guide has the feel of a personal guided tour through the islands, delivered by a gifted and exceedingly knowledgeable tour guide who is at once naturalist, geographer, geologist, and historian.

The slim format of this guide is deceptive, hiding its astonishing depth of research across a wide variety of subject areas, all neatly packaged. A holistic view of these special places is sketched out, providing fundamental information on key biota of the area – from identifying characteristics and behaviours, to migratory ranges and species interrelationships. The time scale covered is geological and includes explanations of the formation of the islands, including volcanic activity (which one may tend to forget in the absence of current volcanic events), and provides descriptions to help the reader to imagine the continuation of the island landscapes into the underwater environment, helping facilitate imaginings of this wonderful environment which so few are able to see first-hand.

In addition to providing commentary and education regarding the natural aspects of these islands, human influences are described, both from the First Nations and colonial perspective, noting key historical events and their locations, as well as more recent events and their impacts. The human timeline is illustrated through interesting archival photographs, which help to bring an appreciation of the historical context in relation to what we see today on the islands. This plethora of photographs combines well into an overall engaging layout, helping to place the reader in the environment on these islands, as well as providing opportunities



for the reader to recognize their surroundings and look for special features in the landscape before them. Images are taken both from the point of view of the ferry rider as well as from island vantage points, and these are interspersed with colourful maps noting the overall context along the route, and the points of interest discussed.

In addition to the fascinating facts and photos, there's a nice mix of interesting and odd anecdotes – from Sasquatch sightings to tidbits of island trivia. The guide also speaks to somewhat less positive impacts of human activities in this and the broader ecosystem, touching on climate change, resource mismanagement, resource extraction industries, and other environmental impacts. This factual information is presented in an objective fashion which may help foster awareness of the impacts of our actions, and the guide ends on a note of hope for the future.

I highly recommend this engaging, entertaining, and informative read. Its offering of clear, well organized information and colourful format, will likely be useful for a variety of audiences – from school groups, to naturalists, to visitors eager to learn more about the Gulf Islands environment. The thorough overview of the islands it provides can serve to build or enhance the sense of this place, and encourage further exploration, providing an opportunity for increased appreciation of the natural environment, and the beauty, biodiversity, and history of the area, which may in turn help foster the environmental stewardship necessary to protect these unique places.

LORI WATERS (MFA, MScBMC) is a medical and scientific illustrator and animator from Victoria who creates educational materials for a variety of scientific audiences during her working hours, and spends the rest of her time drawing and enjoying nature.

New Species Predicted for 2010 Christmas Bird Counts!

By Ann Nightingale

Thanks to the American Ornithological Union, we are pretty much guaranteed a new species on all of the local Christmas Bird Counts this year. Our first Pacific Wrens are expected throughout the region. Unfortunately, this won't increase our count numbers, as we lost the Winter Wren to eastern North America in the name change process. And although it won't be a first record for us, we're also expecting to hear of Eurasian Collared Doves throughout the area as this species spreads throughout the region.

Keeping track of name and population changes is only part of the fun of the Christmas Bird Counts. The long history has competition in its roots, and whether we're trying to beat our perennial rival, Ladner, or just do better than previous years, it's always exciting to see our tally come together at the post-count gathering.

One record we still haven't managed to beat, despite years of trying, is to get more than 200 counters out into the field on count day. Last year was close – 193, but just shy of the goal. I'm still delighted that we have more birders than species – a real challenge given the number of species that winter in Victoria. Think about bringing a friend or a child along with you in 2010.

Birds of note in 2009, among the 143 species reported were a flock of 14 Greater Yellowlegs on the Oak Bay waterfront, and record numbers of: Northern Pintails Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Anna's Hummingbird (breaking 500 individuals for the first time), Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Spotted Towhee.

You don't have to be an expert birder to participate. Counters under 18 years of age and Bird Studies Canada members are invited to participate at no charge. Other counters are asked for a \$5 tax-deductible contribution to offset the costs of the count and follow-up publications. Novices will be teamed up with more experienced counters. Anyone can help out by acting as a tally person or as a spotter. There are a few "keeners" who go out looking and listening for owls in the pre-dawn hours, and a few teams of boating birders who check out the offshore waters, weather permitting and suitable boats available. Feeder counts can be reported via the VNHS website.

If you are curious, interested, would like to see lists and pictures of the region's winter birds, or just need more information, please check out the VNHS website (www.vicnhs.bc.ca/cbc/) and the Christmas Bird Count site (www.birdsource.org). Contact Ann Nightingale at 250-652-6450 or by email at motmot@shaw.ca for the Victoria count; Daniel Bryant (jingming@uvic.ca, 250-361-

The Christmas Bird Counts

Victoria

Saturday, December 18, 2010

Sooke

Sunday, December 26, 2010

Saltspring Island/Sidney

Monday, December 27, 2010

Duncan

Saturday, January 1, 2011

9049), Karen Ferguson at siskin59@shaw.ca for the South Salt Spring/Sidney counts (Tim Marchant at tim@village-cobbler.ca if you are on North Salt Spring—also on December 27); and Derrick Marven (marven@shaw.ca; 250-748-8504) for the Duncan count. If you have a preference to count in a specific area, you may contact the team leader for the area directly.

Post-Count Gathering

After the day of counting is over, we'll have a post-count gathering to share stories and find out how we have done as a group. The idea of a potluck definitely seemed to have more people interested in eating rather than actually bringing food, so this we're going to do the pizza/pot luck combo again like last year, but hopefully a little more organized. In order to figure out how much we need to buy, and to make sure we've got enough funds to cover it, everyone who plans to attend will need to register their item on the VNHS website or by phoning or emailing me (Ann Nightingale, 652-6450, motmot@shaw.ca). You can bring an entrée, salad or dessert, or pay \$8.

The post-count gathering will begin at **5:30 pm at Gordon Head United Church, 4201 Tyndall**. I am always looking for a helper or two to handle the post-count gathering, so if you can help out, please let me know. You don't even have to be a birder—anyone can help.

Here is this year's list of leaders. You may notice one significant change for Zone 11. Tom Gillespie has stepped down from leading the Beacon Hill area after many years of heading that zone. Thank you, Tom, for your years of dedication to the CBC!

If you'd like to be a bird counter this year, please contact the leader for the zone you'd like or register on the VNHS website. And don't forget to invite a friend!

2010 Bird Count Areas

	Area Name	Leader	Phone	Email
1	Butchart Gardens - N. Highlands	Warren Drinnan	250-652-9618	drinnan99@telus.net
2	Central Highlands	Rick Schortinghuis	250-652-3326	shylo@islandnet.com
3	Goldstream - Finlayson Arm	Robin Robinson	250-391-5995	robinsnestridge@msn.com
4	Thetis Lake - Hastings Flat	TBA	250-652-6450	motmot@shaw.ca
5	Langford Lake	Glen Moores	250-652-7072	gmoores@islandnet.com
6	Albert Head - Triangle Mountain	David Allinson	250-391-1786	passerine@shaw.ca
7	Esquimalt Lagoon - Mill Hill	Val George	250-748-6120	valgeorge2005@hotmail.com
8	Esquimalt Harbour	Ian Cruickshank	250-382-1652	ian.cruickshank@telus.net
9	Portage Inlet - The Gorge	Daniel Bryant	250-361-9049	jingming@uvic.ca
10	Victoria Harbour	Mitchell Grant	250-384-4949	mdgrant@telus.net
11	Beacon Hill Park	Mary Robichaud	250-360-1998	maryrobichaud@shaw.ca
12	Oak Bay	Mike Edgell	250-656-5998	medgell@uvic.ca
13	University - Cadboro Bay	Ann Nightingale	250-652-6450	motmot@shaw.ca
14	Ten Mile Point - Arbutus Rd	Andy Stewart	250-477-1328	andy.stewart@shaw.ca
15	Gordon Head - Mt. Douglas	Margie Shepherd	250-477-5280	mshepherd@cw.bc.ca
16	Swan Lake - Cedar Hill	Bill Dancer	250-721-5273	w.dancer@telus.net
17	Blenkinsop Lake - Panama Flats	Cheryl Mackie	250-479-4083	bcmackie@pacificcoast.net
18	Elk Lake - Cordova Bay	Mike McGrenere	250-658-8624	mmcgrenere@shaw.ca
19	Prospect Lake - Quick's Bottom	Dave Fraser	250-479-0016	Dave.Fraser@gov.bc.ca
20	Martindale - Bear Hill	Mike Bentley	250-479-7024	mbentley@lgl.com
21	Zero Rock (ocean)	TBA	250-652-6450	motmot@shaw.ca
22	Chain Islets (ocean)	Marilyn Lambert	250-477-5922	lambert@pacificcoast.net
23	Juan de Fuca (ocean)	Ron Bates	250-386-1264	rbates@bc1.com



Birders enjoying Hawkwatch (25 September 2010). *Photo: Claudia Copley*

Hat Tricks

The Blue-Grey Tailedropper: Stewardship for an Endangered Slug



By Adam Taylor

It is small, slimy, blue, and can autotomize its tail when threatened. Yes, it's a slug. And it is endangered. The Blue-grey Tailedropper (*Prophysaon coeruleum*) may not be the best known endangered species in the Capital Region, but a few lucky naturalists may find one these small slugs in the fall leaf litter on southern Vancouver Island.

Identifying the Blue-grey Tailedropper can be a challenge if you are not used to looking at slugs. Usually 2 to 3 cm long when fully extended, the Blue-grey ranges in color (as its name implies), from grey to a surprisingly vivid blue,

often with very fine speckling. As its name also implies, this slug can autotomize (drop) its tail when threatened, and if you look very, very closely, you may be able to see a thin line where the tail would detach.

In Canada, the Blue-grey Tailedropper is known from only a few sites – all on southern Vancouver Island. The slug may be associated Garry oak meadows and Douglas-fir

forests, especially in small openings with dense shrubs such as ocean spray. The role of Blue-grey Tailedroppers in these ecosystems is not well understood, but they may play a part in spreading the spores of mycorrhizal fungi. Mycorrhizal fungi grow on the roots of plants and trees and help them capture nutrients from the soil. This relationship between beneficial fungi and trees is essential for healthy forest and in Oregon, biologists found mycorrhizal fungal spores in 90% of the droppings they examined.

Stewarding these small slugs is a challenge. Their distribution and habitats are not well understood, and they are usually hidden in leaf litter or under logs. Habitat Acquisition Trust is interested in working with people near known Blue-grey Tailedropper locations or with good potential habitat to monitor for the slugs. If you see a small, blue slug, please send a photo of it (preferably both from above and from the right side of the slug to show the position of the breathing hole (pneumostome) to hatmail@hat.bc.ca.

For more information on any of HAT's projects please contact HAT at 250-995-2428 or visit our website at www.hat.bc.ca, where you can also see this endangered slug in full colour.

Photo: Kristiina Ovaska



Letters

A heartwarming experience:

I went to Gordon Head Recreation Centre the other day and just inside the door I saw a spider on the mat. It was about 1 cm in length and chunky. I said "Oh there is a spider here." An Asian child of 8-9 years got off the chair she was sitting on and came over to have a look. She immediately returned to the chair where she had a pack, opened a pocket and produced a piece of paper. She returned to the spider, bent down and put it on the paper. She then took it to the door, walked over to a patch of grass and put the spider there. I was surprised she did not just toss it away when she got to the door. I congratulated her when she came inside again.

Lyndis Davis

I am writing to express my gratitude for selecting me for the Bev Glover Memorial Scholarship. This award was a pleasant surprise and is much appreciated!

I am entering the final semester of my undergraduate degree at the University of Victoria and will be studying at the Marine Sciences Centre in Bamfield, which I am very excited about. This semester will be intense but very rewarding at the same time.

After December I'm hoping to start working toward obtaining my Registered Professional Biologist status and work in my area of academic interest, which has been ecology, ichthyology, and conservation. I will either stay on the Island or move back to the East Kootenays.

Thanks again and warmest regards,
Stephanie Knightley

BULLETIN BOARD

Raptor Identification Workshop with Bill Clark, International Raptor Expert.

Saturday, January 15 and Sunday, January 16. This two day workshop is being hosted by Rocky Point Bird Observatory. Saturday will be a full day in the lab learning how to identify and age raptors. Sunday will be a field trip to Delta/Boundary Bay to put your newly acquired skills to the test. Details are available on the Rocky Point website at <<http://rpbo.org>> or by contacting Ann Nightingale at <motmot@shaw.ca> or 250-514-6450.

Bird Non-Counter Social Convener(s) wanted!

The Christmas Bird Count has a long history of gathering all the counters together for fun and tale-telling at the end of the event. If a botanist, entomologist or even a semi-retired birder is out there and interested in being part of the camaraderie, we could use one or two people to organize our Post-Count Gathering. This involves figuring out who's bringing what to the party, collecting money from those who'd rather pay than cook, and helping with the setup and cleanup. The event will be on Saturday, December 18. Please contact Ann Nightingale: 250-652-6450 or <motmot@shaw.ca> for more info.

Provincial Employee Community Services Fund

Please donate to RPBO. If you are a provincial government employee, you can now designate Rocky Point Bird Observatory as a recipient for your donations. All support, large or small, is

much appreciated. Thank you for helping bird conservation on Vancouver Island!

Wanted: Information about travelling in Australia.

I am going to Australia in February - landing in Perth. I will probably spend six months there. I have a fancy to go to some of the northern islands e.g. New Caladonia, Solomon, Borneo. I would appreciate any information about good birding and interesting spots. Please email me at <kcalvert13ca@yahoo.ca> or phone 250-656-1693. Thanks!

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.

Every Wednesday and Sunday Bird Walk

Meet at the Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary parking lot: 9 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. For everyone!

Capital Regional District Parks

CRD Parks offers programs for nature lovers of all ages. See <www.crd.bc.ca/parks> for more information. Programs are 1 to 1½ hours long and free unless otherwise noted. Pre-registration is not required for free programs unless otherwise noted.

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., University of Victoria; **Botany Night:** the third Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House; **Birders' Night:** the fourth Wednesday, 7:30 p.m., University of Victoria. **Marine Night:** the last Monday, 7:30 p.m., University of Victoria. Locations are given in the calendar listings. The VNHS Calendar also appears on the Internet at: <<http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca>>, 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.

NOVEMBER

Saturday, November 6

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL TBA)

Saturday Morning Birding

Call the Rare Bird Alert 250-704-2555) or click 'Rare Bird Alert' on the VNHS website (<www.vicnhs.bc.ca>) on the Thursday or Friday before to find out this week's location. Usually start at 8:00 a.m., rain or shine. For more details, call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns@shaw.ca. Novice and experienced birders all welcome.

Sunday, November 7

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Mushrooms at Royal Roads

This area has a diverse selection of mushrooms so it is always a great place to wander at this time of year. **Kem Luther** and others will gently lead us around but this outing is intended for us to discover our own specimens to try to identify. Bring your favourite field guide and we will have some other material also to assist you. This is an observation trip, not intended for collecting, but a few specimens will be chosen by the leaders for closer examination. Dress for the weather and bring a snack and

a drink. Meet at Royal Roads University by the tennis courts near the university entrance at 10:00 a.m. Parking fees in effect. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 if you need more information.

Sunday, November 7

EVENT

Backyard Winter Birds

Have you ever noticed that the birds around your yard in the winter aren't all the same as were there in the summer? **Ann Nightingale** will get you acquainted with the backyard winter birds of Victoria through a slide-illustrated talk and rain-or-shine walk at Glendale Gardens. You'll also learn what to feed your wintertime guests and put together a suet feeder to take home with you. See <<http://www.glendalegardens.ca/>> for more information or contact Glendale Gardens at 250-479-6162.

Tuesday, November 9

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION

Motherstone: British Columbia's Volcanic Plateau

In the high country of British Columbia's Central Plateau lies the Motherstone. It is a land that few people have walked over or seen before. It includes a chain of shield volcanoes formed over a mantle hot spot rising from a depth of 2,900 kilometers, a sea of crystallized basalts stretching 300 kilometers from Anahim Peak to the Painted Chasm, a river of obsidian, underwater volcanoes sitting high up above the world's only inland temperate rainforest, and a field of cinder cones still rising from among the trees they burned through when they were formed. Written by Harold Rhenisch and photographed by Chris Harris, *Motherstone: British Columbia's Volcanic Plateau* presents a stunning volcanic topography unknown and unseen by many British Columbians. Join **Chris Harris** as he shares his visual journey of discovery and stories of adventure. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room 159 of the Fraser Building. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee mug.

Friday, November 12

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Royal British Columbia Museum Paleontology Collections Tour

Join us for a Special Curatorial Tour of the Fossil Collection in the Fannin Building by paleontologist, Marji Johns, followed by a tour of the *Behind the Scenes* exhibit and the rest of the galleries. The Fossil Collection area is very small, limiting the tour to 10 people. Cost for the group rate is adult \$24.25; senior \$18.40, taxes included. Cost includes Private Tour and General Admission. The tour will start at 10:00 a.m. sharp so please leave enough time to find parking. We will meet at the 3-dimensional BC Map in the museum lobby. No backpacks, large bags, food, or drinks are allowed, and coats can be left in the Cloak Room (by donation). The Fannin Building is not wheelchair accessible. You must pre-register by phoning Gwen Walter before November 9 at 250-727-7376 or 250-744-3313.

Saturday, November 13

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL TBA)

Saturday Morning Birding

Call the Rare Bird Alert (250-704-2555) or click 'Rare Bird Alert' on the VNHS website (<www.vicnhs.bc.ca>) on the Thursday or Friday before to find out this week's location. Usually start at 8:00 a.m., rain or shine. For more details, call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca. Novice and experienced birders all welcome.

Sunday, November 14

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Pelagic Birding on the M.V. Coho

Mike McGrenere will lead this trip on the *M.V. Coho* on its usual sailing across the Strait of Juan de Fuca and back. The crossing takes 1½ hours and this is the best opportunity to see bird species that are usually found further out to sea, including shearwaters, fulmars, and phalaropes. We will be birding from the bow of the boat, so dress warmly. Bring a lunch and meet at the Black Ball Ferry terminal in the Inner Harbour at 10:00 a.m. for the 10:30 a.m. sailing. We will return on the 2:00 p.m. sailing. Allow plenty of time for parking; street parking is free on Sundays. Ferry cost is \$31.00 Cdn. return. **Important!! You will require a Passport or enhanced driver's licence to go through Customs.**

Sunday, November 14

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Common Mosses of the Victoria Area

Our trip leader Kem Luther has stated that if we learn just 20 of the common mosses in the area that we will have covered about 95% of the number of mosses in the Victoria area. Kem will show us most of those 20 at Thetis Lake Park to get us started. Meet at the main parking lot at 10:00 a.m. To reach the park, take the Colwood exit off the Trans-Canada Highway and follow the Old Island Highway for a short distance. Turn right at the traffic light at Six Mile Road 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. Parking is free in November. Dress for the weather and bring a snack and a drink. No pets please. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Tuesday, November 16

BOTANY NIGHT **** NOTE THE LOCATION CHANGE****

Pink Mountain Revisited – The Conservation Crises that No One is Aware of

Pink Mountain stands apart from its surroundings in the far North of BC. The summit supports an assemblage of arctic/alpine plants that simply does not occur anywhere else. Many of these plants are rare or at least are rarely seen and are never seen in the combination and numbers that are found on Pink Mountain. But now extensive industrial development (more than 40 wind mill towers) threatens this unique habitat and it could all be lost within a year. **Ron Long** was a photographer at Simon Fraser University for thirty-six years and his interest in British Columbia wildflowers goes back forty years. He is also Vice-President of the Native Plant Society of British Columbia. **Please note the location change:** University of Victoria, Elliott Room 167, 7:30 p.m. Admission is free. Bring a friend.

Saturday, November 20

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Snow Geese at Reifel Bird Sanctuary

Come and see the annual Snow Goose spectacle at the Reifel Bird Sanctuary. Every November thousands of Snow Geese stop over in this part of the Fraser River delta. Past trips have produced more than 100 species of birds for the day. Participants will carpool from in front of the Elk-Beaver Lake Regional Park Sign on Elk Lake Drive at 5:45 a.m. for the 7:00 a.m. ferry sailing. We will return on the 5:00 p.m. sailing. Cost should be about \$50.00 per person with car-pooling. Bring a lunch and a drink. Call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 to confirm.

Wednesday, November 24

BIRDERS' NIGHT

Pacific Great Blue Heron: Seashore Sentinel of Vancouver Island

Great Blue Herons are familiar sentinels across Vancouver Island. Join **Trudy Chatwin** as she talks about the life history, population status, and threats to the Great Blue Heron. Learn about the ways that we can assist Great Blue Herons on Vancouver Island. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room 159 of the Fraser building. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee mug.

Saturday, November 27

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL TBA)

Saturday Morning Birding

Call the Rare Bird Alert (250-704-2555) or click 'Rare Bird Alert' on the VNHS website (<www.vicnhs.bc.ca>) on the Thursday or Friday before to find out this week's location. Usually start at 8:00 a.m., rain or shine. For more details, call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns@shaw.ca. Novice and experienced birders all welcome.

Monday, November 29

MARINE NIGHT

How Climate May Be Affecting Habitat In The North Pacific

Frank Whitney, Emeritus with Fisheries and Oceans Canada will describe changes in oxygen and nutrients in the North Pacific, as surface waters become warmer and less saline. As this occurs, nutrients accumulate in the subsurface layers of the ocean. This results in a slow decline of productivity at the surface in the North Pacific as well as more severe impacts of upwelling along the Oregon coast. Since 2002, fish and crab kills due to low oxygen have been more serious than any observed in past decades, and low oxygen is reducing favourable habitat for groundfish along the margins of North America and Asia. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Bring a friend. Everyone is welcome.

DECEMBER

Saturday, December 4

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Christmas Bird Count Tune-up

Meet at Helmcken Road Park and Ride at 8:30 a.m. for a chance to tune up your winter bird-spotting identification skills. This trip will cover Knockan Hill Park, Hastings Flats and the roadsides in between, so bring your walking shoes, field guide and note-pad. Special interest for novice or near-novice Christmas Bird Counters. For more info, call **Ann Nightingale** at 250-652-6450.

Saturday, December 11

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Christmas Bird Count Tune-up

Meet at the viewing tower at the foot of Viaduct Avenue and Interurban Road at 8:30 a.m. We will cover Viaduct Flats and Quick's Bottom and areas in between. Call **Rick Schortinghuis** at 250-885-2454 if you need more information.

Sunday, December 12

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Gull Identification Workshop at Goldstream

Learn more than you ever thought possible about the gulls that winter on Vancouver Island. Some come from as far away as the prairies to take advantage of the winter abundance of salmon. Don't be afraid of gulls. Use this as an opportunity to practice for the Christmas Bird Count. Meet at the Goldstream Picnic Area parking lot by the Finlayson Road bridge at 9:00 a.m. Wear adequate winter clothing and boots. Leader: **Rick Schortinghuis**

Tuesday, December 14

NATURAL HISTORY PRESENTATION

The Influence of Wildfire and Mountain Pine Beetles on Stand Dynamics in Southern Kootenay National Park, British Columbia

The forested ecosystems of the southern portion of Kootenay National Park have been shaped by a fire regime for the last several thousand years. Historically, the combination of fairly frequent fire with climatic and environmental conditions that attenuated fire severity, resulted in a mosaic of fire effects and patch dynamics on the landscape. An important environmental variable that affected fire severity, and ultimately stand dynamics, was endemic infestations of mountain pine beetle in lodgepole pine. An unintended consequence of the fire exclusion policies of the mid-20th century was the cascading effect of reduced fire activity in these ecosystems. Mountain pine beetle epidemics have become more likely as larger, and more contiguous proportions of the landscape have become susceptible. Subsequently, wildfires, fueled by dead lodgepole pine, tend to burn larger areas with more uniform, and higher, severity. To disrupt this cycle, Parks Canada staff at Kootenay National Park began a program of landscape-level prescribed fire to break up the contiguous nature of fuels and introduce a mosaic of stand structures intended to mimic the potential range of conditions that prevailed prior to organized fire exclusion. Join **Robert W. Gray** and **Rick Kubian** as they discuss this program. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room 159 of the Fraser building. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee mug.

Saturday, December 18

EVENT

Victoria Christmas Bird Count

See the article in this issue (p.18) or visit our website <www.vicnhs.bc.ca/cbc/>

Sunday, December 26

EVENT

Sooke Christmas Bird Count

See the article in this issue (p.18) or visit our website <www.vicnhs.bc.ca/cbc/>

Monday, December 27

EVENT

Saltspring Island/Sidney Christmas Bird Count

See the article in this issue (p.18) or contact or visit our website <www.vicnhs.bc.ca/cbc/>

JANUARY

Saturday, January 1

EVENT

Duncan Christmas Bird Count

See the article in this issue (p.18) or contact **Derrick Marven** (marven@shaw.ca; 250-748-8504).



Time is running out for Avatar Grove. See page 12 for more information on how to help. *Photo: copyright Mikhail Belikov/*
<www.focusonwild.com>