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The Victoria NATURALIST

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COVER PHOTO by Mikhail Belikov

Seaweed "frosted" with herring roe on the beach
(March 6, 2013 VNHS field trip to Nanoose,
Parksville, Qualicum area). See trip report page 12.

The other day, I looked out at the alternating drizzle
and sunshine, and was reminded of a song from my
childhood:

*"Though April showers may come your way,
they bring the flowers that bloom in May.
So if it's raining, have no regrets.
It isn't raining rain you know, it's raining violets."**



Trillium and Wood Violets in my garden. *Photos: Gail Harcombe*

Take some time this spring to enjoy these wonders
(the field trips offered are amazing) and reflect on
ways we can help protect what we have and, with a
bit of luck (and work), increase/restore the natural
areas close to home. VNHS, RPBO, HAT, and
other conservation organizations such as Nature
Conservancy of Canada (NCC), offer opportunities
to get involved in events that can make a difference
– from increasing knowledge (and debunking myths)
from kids to adults – to active restoration –
building birdhouses or planting native plants, even
pulling the dreaded Scottish Broom or Gorse. If you
want to guide yourself, the recently published *Nature
Guide to the Victoria Region* (see ad p.17) is a great
resource for learning more about your home region.

This place in which we live has many natural areas
to visit, from marine to mountain, including small
pockets where native plants and wildlife thrive –
birds, flowers, butterflies, sea life and more. Nature
in all its beauty also offers us moments of whimsy
(see the "Odd Couple" this issue).

Happy Spring!
Gail Harcombe

*From Broadway musical "Bombo" 1921.

President's Message

By Darren Copley

In case you missed the Annual General Meeting in April, here is a summary of the Society's accomplishments in 2012.

The Victoria Natural History Society regularly donates to worthwhile causes, and this year we continued the tradition. Annually we contribute \$4000 to support public programming at the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary. \$10,000 was put towards the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team's *Bringing Back the Bluebirds* project. As well, \$3000 was put towards the activities of Rocky Point Bird Observatory, and \$200 to support the Metchosin Bioblitz. Other educational support went out in the form of \$750 to the local Science Fair, as well as our regular \$7000 support through scholarships at the University of Victoria, Camosun College, and Royal Roads University.

To be able to continue funding great projects like this, we have many to thank. The interest from the legacy fund of Janet Arnold as well as regular donations from our members, totaling close to \$7000 – thank you! This year we were fortunate to again collaborate with Madrona Farm and the *Island Chef Challenge* event, where our ticket sales raised almost \$650 for each group. Thanks also to Alan and Jan who coordinate the Annual Valentine's Day Couples' Birdathon. We look forward to being able to fund even more great projects in 2013.

Our *Connecting Children with Nature* program was more active than ever, reaching almost 900 children, close to



Bill Dancer staffing the VNHS display at Seedy Saturday.
Photo: Claudia Copley.

twice as many as last year. This is all thanks to our volunteer leaders and the excellent coordination by Bill Dancer and John Henigman. For members and the public there were 30 monthly presentations, more than 100 field trips (including weekly Tuesday and Saturday birding), and our third Annual BBQ Social held in conjunction with Hawkwatch at East Sooke Park. The Hawkwatch/BBQ Social 2013 will be the 28th of September. Come out for this member appreciation event. Speaking of events, I must not forget our largest: the Christmas Bird Count. This annual bird count is a tremendous amount of work and is run by Ann Nightingale. She makes it look easy, but don't be fooled. Especially when you consider all the volunteer time Ann puts into so many organizations.

Your Society has representatives on the following committees/boards: Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative, Viaduct Flats Committee, BC Nature, and Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, and we had our display at the Ocean's Day at Gorge Park, Wild ARC's Open House, and Seedy Saturday. Thanks to all of you that helped with these events! We continue to have a presence on Twitter, with over 500 followers, thanks to Leah Ramsay.

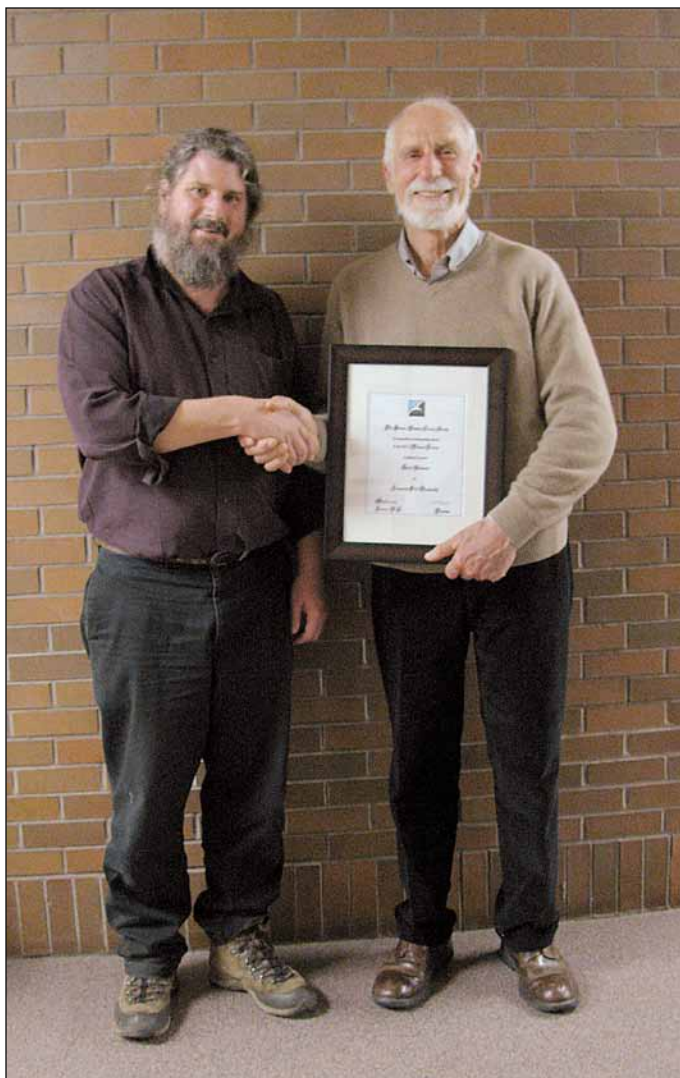
In partnership with Capital Regional District Parks and the Rocky Point Bird Observatory, we again hosted the now annual *International Migratory Bird Day* at Beaver Lake Park. This year we will again be co-sponsoring this event: the fourth annual *International Migratory Bird Day* will be held at Beaver Lake Regional Park on May 11, 2013. I hope many of you will come out and enjoy a day dedicated to celebrating birds.

The other activities keeping Society volunteers busy this past year are our other regular activities: correspondence, BC Nature representation, our financial health, advertising, producing *The Naturalist*, membership, and the many ways we try to promote our Society and natural history to others. A big thank-you goes out to all our Board Members who are continuing in their capacity as directors: James Clowater, Claudia Copley, Bill Dancer, Nancie Dohan, Gail Harcombe, Gordon Hart, James Miskelly, Phil Lambert, and Ken Sohm, and I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome two new board members Melissa Frey and Steven Roias. We look forward to the contributions Melissa and Steven will provide.

A rarely given award was presented at this year's AGM – we presented an Honorary Life Membership to former federal Environment Minister David Anderson. Read all the reasons for this award on page 5. Congratulations Mr. Anderson, and thank-you for all your work on the political front for the natural world for so many years!

That's enough about last year though. I hope to continue to try and increase our membership in the new year, as well as try to get more members involved as volunteers. These two go hand-in-hand as the more help we get, the more promotion and education we can do. I expect to have a new volunteer coordination position filled soon, which is good, since the Board just voted to partner with RPBO in hosting the 2014 BC Nature AGM next spring. No kidding!

Here's to another great year, and thanks to everyone for your continued support of the Society!



VNHS Awards Honourary Life Membership to David Anderson

By Ann Nightingale and Joyce Clearihue

It's often been said that it's difficult to get recognition in your own hometown. David Anderson has won many awards and honours from groups like the Sierra Club of Canada, the Atlantic Salmon Federation, West Coast Environmental Law, and Wildlife Habitat Canada. He's received the Order of Canada and two honorary doctorate degrees.

David has spent much of his life in politics, at both the provincial and federal levels. During these years, he raised awareness of a wide range of environmental issues, ultimately becoming Canada's Minister of the Environment in 1999. While in this position, his priorities were improving air and water quality, protecting biodiversity including enacting Canada's Species at Risk Act and securing our ratification of the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. He established Canada's first Marine Protected Areas and lobbied long and hard against offshore drilling and tanker traffic on the west coast of Canada. We don't often get political leaders that tackle these kinds of issues on behalf of wildlife and the environment!

David has received widespread national and international recognition for his work. He is considered by many to be at the pinnacle of Canada's environmental movement. But he's never forgotten his roots. During his public speaking engagements, he often tells people how he got started with the Victoria Natural History Society and what an influence it was on him. We think it's appropriate that the Victoria Natural History Society reciprocate by bestowing on David Anderson an Honourary Life Membership.

Top: Darren Copley, VNHS President, presents Honourary Life Membership Award to David Anderson at the AGM March 12, 2013.

Below: Anne Nightingale (L) and Joyce Clearihue with David Anderson at presentation of Honourary Life Membership Award.

Photos: Nancie Dohan





Sandcut Creek falls showing Metchosin volcanic outcrop in the distance. *Photo: Dave Lynn*

Sandcut Creek – A Walk In Time

By Tom Cockburn

As a member of the Victoria Palaeontology Society, I sometimes get requests from other organizations to give talks about fossils or lead field trips to fossil sites. Such was the case on September 9, 2012, when I joined an enthusiastic group of VNHS members for a fossil walk to Sandcut Creek.

Sandcut Creek cuts through the 23-25 million years old, Late Oligocene Sooke Formation and enters the ocean about 4 km east of Jordan River on the West Coast Road, Highway 14. During the spring freshet, there is an impressive 4-5 metre waterfall at the mouth of the creek, but in the late summer when the water is low, the creek and falls are dry.

Sandcut Creek is just east of the boundary of the Jordan River Regional Park Reserve lands (www.crd.bc.ca/parks/reserves/sandcut-jordanriver.htm) which were purchased by Capital Region Parks from Western Forest Products. A photograph of Sandcut Creek Falls is showcased on the CRD Reserve webpage even though Sandcut Creek itself is not part of the reserve lands.

After crossing the bridge over Sandcut Creek, there is a parking area a few hundred metres further along on the left side of the road. A forested trail from the parking area leads

to the beach. A mid-level tide of about 2 metres provided ample upper beach for walking. We walked a short distance east along the beach to the falls at the mouth of Sandcut Creek.

A few hundred metres east of the falls are massive outcrops of Metchosin volcanics that are a component of the Metchosin Igneous Complex of rocks composing the Crescent Terrane. This offshore, volcanic mass formed about 50-55 million years ago. Tectonic movements of the volcanic mass resulted in part of it going south to form the Olympic Mountains in Washington State and the remainder was the last piece of real estate to collide with Vancouver Island about 42 million years ago. The Leech River Fault near Loss Creek and Sombrio Point defines where the Crescent Terrane was shoved under the earlier Pacific Rim Terrane. The southern boundary of the Crescent Terrane is what we now call Metchosin and East Sooke. Subsequent erosion and sedimentation of the Crescent Terrane rocks led to the deposition of the Sooke Formation.

The marine fossils representing an extinct, diverse fauna of snails, bivalves, barnacles, tubeworms, sand dollars, brachiopods, a coral, and the bones and teeth of marine



Top: Fossil whelk *Bruclarkia acuminata*. Photo: Pauline Davis

Below: Fossil barnacles *Solidobalanus sookensis*. Photo: Pauline Davis

mammals are found in the Sooke Formation sandstone. The whelk *Bruclarkia acuminata* and clusters of the barnacle *Solidobalanus sookensis* are common in the sandstones. Fossils were “collected” by camera, rather than by physical means on the field trip.

We returned by walking up Sandcut Creek and observing fossils in the creek bed and the terraced effect of the creek eroding the sandstone creating some mini-falls. We walked up the creek to the highway bridge, scrambled up the bank, with even those using two walking canes declaring no problem, and returned to the parking area via the highway.

Further Reading

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Sandcut Creek bed and terrace. Photo: Kem Luther



Metchosin volcanics outcrop. Photo: Carolyn Haywood

Different Strategies Gratify Valentine Birders

By Alan MacLeod

An early augury foretold an excellent day for the sixteenth annual Valentine Couples Birdathon. Whilst sitting on a park bench in the pre-dawn gloom of Beacon Hill Park, a Barred Owl flew just past our noses and landed on the ground not ten feet away. Tick one species for the day's checklist. The morning proceeded in similarly happy fashion: an Orange-crowned Warbler here, three American Goldfinches there, a Peregrine Falcon bulleting past Clover Point.

Jan Brown and I – old hands at the Valentine tally – used to do it by car, then for a few years by bicycle. Now that at least one of us is officially aged according to the good folks who run Canada's Old Age Pension, we've simplified the process even more: shortly after 6 a.m. we roll out our door and seek to find as many bird species as we can by walking our own James Bay neighbourhood.

Other Valentine couples prefer a different sort of start. David Fraser and Leah Ramsay thought a nice pre-dawn soak in their outdoor hot-tub a sublime and strategic way to get going. Indeed it was: while they soothed weary bones a Great Horned Owl offered a gratifying serenade. Other, very sensible, Valentine couples feel no imperative to get going before the sun comes up and certainly not before enjoying a hearty Sunday breakfast.

Six couples joined in the fun for the 2013 Birdathon. The aggregate count in this year's event was 104 species. Apart from the entertainment provided for those participating, the count has the socially redeeming value of supporting VNHS conservation efforts: entry fees go entirely to that purpose.

Though we are always happy to see familiar, friendly faces, Jan and I are particularly pleased to welcome newcomers to the event. This year – eureka! – one-third of the field were first-timers. Jenny Clark and Ken Walker



were particularly pleased that Long-tailed Ducks, Cedar Waxwings and a Yellow-rumped Warbler availed themselves for their binoculars.

Jim and Jeannie Cosgrove are normally far away in sunnier, warmer climes on Valentine's Day. A year ago they were well situated to see Rifleman, Tomtit or fantail on Valentine's Day but this year New Zealand's loss was south Vancouver Island's gain: the Cosgroves were happy to make do with the likes of Trumpeter Swan, Green-winged Teal and Marsh Wren.

Jerry Anderson carved the splendid pair of mourning doves that adorn the ultimate prize of the birdathon, the Anderson Trophy. What's more, Jerry and Gladys are true blue: they have never missed a Valentine Birdathon. No one else can make that claim. Jerry and Gladys counted Eurasian Collared-Dove and Northern Shrike as the bird notables of their day.

And whose names will be carved on the Anderson Trophy for 2013? Well, for the second time in the last three runnings, top-dog honours go to Agnes and Dave Lynn. Their strategy honed to a fine edge, the Lynns found 75 species during the 6 a.m. to 12 noon count period, including Band-tailed Pigeon, Virginia Rail, Northern Shrike and White-throated Sparrow. Apart from the glory of seeing their names again on the event trophy, Agnes and Dave collected a \$75 gift certificate from **Don Wuest of Wild Birds Unlimited**, 3631 Shelbourne Street. Thank you, Don, for your continuing loyalty to this VNHS event.



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Ocean Myths Dispelled

By Tina Kelly

More than 335,000 people have visited the Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre since opening in June 2009. Staff and volunteers – called Oceaneers – have observed and overheard many misconceptions about sea life. I'd like to set the record straight on four of the most common fallacies.

All fish lay eggs. Blame this on Goldstream Provincial Park. I'm surely kidding but this myth is no doubt perpetuated by locals – myself included – who grew up with annual trips to the river to watch the iconic west coast salmon partake in an epic journey to reproduce. Others maybe think of the roe on their sushi. But a surprise for many is that some fish species give birth to live young. (It is however less common than external development of fertilized eggs.) These fish are referred to as “ovoviviparous”; the eggs develop inside the mother's body and the fish are born live. Perch are a notable local example of ovoviviparous fish. Every August since opening, three perch species – Shiner, Striped, and Kelp – have delivered their young in habitats at the Centre.

All sea stars have five arms. The five-point star is a basic shape we all learn as kids. But in the world of sea stars, five is not the only number of points, or arms one can have. It is certainly the most common arm count, but local species include 6-rayed stars and the Sunstar and Sunflower Stars that can have up to 14 and 24 arms respectively. The Centre displays 6-rayed, Sun and Sunflower Stars but some anomalies exist as well. A few individuals – of Vermilion and Bat Stars – that 'should' have five arms are living in the Centre with one extra arm.

All otters in the sea are Sea Otters. An argument can certainly be made for the use of scientific names when it comes to otters; the terms River Otter and Sea Otter were destined to be confusing. River Otters live in other areas of North America and do spend time in rivers, but coastal River Otters spend the majority of their time in the sea. They are agile on land and water, much different from Sea Otters who are great at floating on their backs but awkward – and therefore rarely seen – on land. Sea Otters are found along Vancouver Island's exposed coast and only recently have been seen as far south as Race Rocks near Sooke. River Otters however are common in the Greater Victoria area.

All long snakelike fish are eels. Eels have a distinctive body shape we also learned to identify as youngsters. Many fish species on display at the SODC are often called eels by visitors. But look closely, does that fish have fins? If your answer is yes, it's not an eel. True eels have no fins. Gunnels – Saddleback or Penpoint – and pricklebacks are species often mistaken for eels. These fish are sometimes seen in the intertidal zone and are often also inaccurately referred to as blennies. Just to confuse matters, the Wolf-eel has fins, and thus is not an eel at all. Yet another example why common names can be confusing.



From top: River Otter, Sunflower Star, Prickleback.
Photos by author



Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca unalaschcensis*) in the garden in Cordova Bay. Photo: Chantal Jacques

RPBO Project: Tracking Fox Sparrows to their Breeding Territories

By Michael Simmons and Ann Nightingale

Southwestern B.C. is the only place in Canada where there are more birds in winter than in summer. In general these over-wintering birds migrate north and east to breed, but very little is known of migration routes and actual breeding areas. Tracking technologies and miniaturization are making it possible for the first time to discover the full life cycle of these birds. When the Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO) was offered 32 geolocators for use in tracking a temperate passerine migrant, we chose the Fox Sparrow as a suitable, interesting, and challenging species.

The research is a collaboration between RPBO, Dr. Kevin Fraser of the Stutchbury Lab at York University, and Bruce Cousens of the Georgia Basin Ecological Assessment and Restoration Society.

A geocator is a miniature light sensor with a clock, battery, and chip (to record data). It is very sensitive to low light levels around sunrise and sunset. By recording the light level every 10 minutes it is possible to calculate the times of sunrise, sunset, and midday for up to two years. Knowing the day length and the time of the overhead sun, both latitude and longitude can be calculated. To calculate

and plot the daily latitude and longitude of the bird, the chip must be recovered. This means that the place where the geocator is first installed must be a location to which the bird is expected to return.

Nesting site fidelity is well known and relatively easy to document. While fidelity to wintering sites has been suspected for many years, it was only confirmed 10 years ago by a long-term study of several closely related species of sparrow in northern California. The study used data from 13 consecutive years of monitoring of five species of sparrow: Song, White-crowned, Lincoln's, Fox, and Golden-crowned. One conclusion was that winter site fidelity of migratory sparrows appears to be flexible among immature birds but becomes fixed with increasing age.

Fall migration monitoring at Rocky Point has shown that the ratio of young Fox Sparrows to older birds is about 4:1. However aging Fox Sparrows is not easy even when the bird is in the hand. During the fall migration of 2012, we asked the banders to pay special attention to Fox Sparrows, taking additional measurements in an attempt to identify sub-species, and to pay special attention when aging them. As it happened more Fox Sparrows were banded at our new Pedder Bay site in 2012 than any other species. The ratio of 4:1 young to old birds was confirmed.

The Fox Sparrow is both a lumpers' and a splitter's delight (or nightmare) [Editor's note: lumpers – refers to taxonomists who group together subspecies such as the various juncos included in the Dark-eyed Junco; the reverse for splitter's] Four major groups of Fox Sparrow can be recognized in the field and DNA analysis supports the idea that these groups are four separate species. Most of Victoria's winter Fox Sparrows are of the Coastal Northwest Sooty group, a west coast group (species) that is found from California to Alaska. On its breeding grounds the Coastal Sooty group can be further separated into up to seven sub-species, one of which mainly occurs on Vancouver Island. While on their breeding grounds the sub-species may be identifiable but sometimes only by taking measurements of birds in the hand. In winter, the most northern occurrence of Coastal Sooty Fox Sparrows is Vancouver Island, where densities can be extremely high. It is thought that four of the subspecies spend the winter here.

So this familiar and welcome winter visitor is a complex bird of which we know little in detail but much in general. The nearest nesting sites to Victoria are west of Sooke where its song may be heard from April on. Some nesting also takes place on the Olympic Peninsula. This is the southern extremity of the breeding range, which extends north throughout coastal B.C. and Alaska to the Aleutian Islands. In some places on the Pacific coast, the Fox Sparrow is the most abundant breeder of all the passerines.

- We set out to try to answer four questions about southeastern Vancouver Island Fox Sparrows:
- Where do the winter visitors to Victoria and Nanaimo breed?
- Do we have more than one sub-species over-wintering in Victoria?



Applying the geolocator to a Fox Sparrow. The loonie shows relative size and how small the geolocators are! Photos: Ann Nightingale



- Are there separate nesting and moulting areas?
- If they are a long distance migrant do they migrate over water or follow the coast?

Field work for the Fox Sparrow migration tracking project started in early December and was intense in January. Planning for the project was based on analysis of 15 years of data from Rocky Point and data as of 2012 at Pedder Bay. Fall migration monitoring has shown increasing numbers of Fox Sparrow migrants over the last 15 years and a more or less constant 4:1 ratio of young birds to older birds. The birds begin to arrive in numbers during September with the older birds generally arriving first. The older birds are also a little heavier with a median weight of about 33 gm. We expected that Fox Sparrows trapped during the winter would have an age distribution still heavily skewed towards younger birds. We also expected they would weigh about the same as at fall migration. In fact, so far this winter, the age ratio has been close to 1:1 (leading us to wonder where all the young birds have gone) and the birds have been much heavier, averaging over 40 gm, about 25% heavier than the birds we captured just two months earlier. It seems as if the stress of migration may account for the weight loss, or that preferential trapping near feeders shows the benefit of easy living.

The beauty of geolocators is that they are lightweight, allowing them to be used for an entire migration cycle on small birds. The disadvantage is that the geolocator must be recovered to download the data from the onboard chip. Winter site fidelity is therefore an absolute condition. As older birds are more likely than young birds to return to the same site, and have a higher survival rate, it is greatly preferred to attach geolocators to older birds. Interpreting the light data is complex and we are fortunate to have

the resources of the Stutchbury Lab and Bruce Cousens to undertake the analysis. Bruce has worked on Purple Martins, in collaboration with the Stutchbury Lab, using geolocators to show their migration route from Vancouver Island to Brazil and back. As far as we are aware this is the only previous study using geolocators on Vancouver Island and one of only two such studies in B.C.

We have learned, with Bruce's tuition, how to place geolocators on the birds to ensure continuation of normal behaviour and minimize risk to the birds. With the cooperation of a large number of interested and helpful homeowners we have been able to work in about 20 gardens to trap and monitor Fox Sparrows in and around Victoria and a few more in Nanaimo. For winter outdoor work there are advantages to working near a warm house able to supply hot beverages (and sometimes other good things). But the biggest advantage is the ability to have a number of knowledgeable observers monitoring behaviour from those same warm houses.

The moment of truth will be next fall when some of the birds should return to Victoria and when (if) we recapture them, and if the geolocators have worked perfectly, we may have some data to analyse.

*The full research proposal is available at www.rpbo.org Determining Breeding Areas and Migration Routes of Coastal Northwest Sooty Fox Sparrows (*Passerella iliaca unalaschcensis*) Over-Wintering on Vancouver Island using Geolocators.*



Photo: Mikhail Belikov

Birding in Parksville – a Trip Report

By Agnes Lynn

A group of VNHS members had an excellent non-rainy day on Sunday, March 10, chasing the birds that the herring run brought to the Nanoose Bay/Parksville/Qualicum area. Despite the spawn and the fishing being over, the birds hang around afterwards. Same birds as in Victoria but we make this trip to savour the huge volumes and we were not disappointed.

We started from Wall Beach where we got variety but not volume. Nice to get Eurasian Wigeon there and the start of the loons and grebes. Then on to Rath Trevor Beach. We had our first fill of Brant moving about on the beach and in the air. Dunlin, plovers and turnstones were enjoying the water's edge. We saw Common and Pacific Loon here, several getting towards breeding plumage. No Red-throated Loon as they are not common in the area. Daniel did point out the California Gull amongst the Mew and Glaucous-winged gulls but we are not much of a gull crowd so there could have been more species.

Englishman River Plumper Rd side was good. The estuary

had a few ducks including Green-winged Teal and Gadwall. On the sea side, we got our first big fill of gulls and ducks with many Brant on the move. Some ducks like the Harlequins in close. Surf Scoters in great abundance, also Common Goldeneye and Horned Grebes along with loons. This was the only place we found Common Mergansers, although Red-breasted were seen in several spots. A pair of Eagles perched up close.

A prime spot is the Parksville Community Park (Corfield Rd), but it was cold. A good volume of ducks. Scaup in close and a big raft of Surf Scoters farther out. Interspersed were Long-tailed Ducks and a few Pintail. More Brant, Common and a few Barrow's Goldeneye. A good number of seals and sea lions were enjoying the feast of herring. Some California Sea Lions were leaping clear of the water over and over again at the stern of a boat. Must have been something especially tasty right there. Rick talked us into Timmy's after this stop to get warm.

After that, we stopped at the foot of Doehle Rd (turn off



Herring roe on seaweed. *Photo: Jeannie Cosgrove*

highway at Pym). We were fondly remembering a past year when Sandra Gray told us about this spot and the whole bay was filled with ducks. Only distant ducks but lots of close-up gulls this time. We did pick up Thayer's Gulls amongst the very numerous Glaucous-winged, Mew and mutts. All the gulls took off a couple of times with an impressive whoosh sound. Then you could see how many birds there were. Also good looks at Pigeon Guillemots already in breeding plumage.

French Beach Marina always adds flavour to the trip. It's a bustling marina full of fish boats and lots of equipment. As the fishery was in the clean-up phase, we didn't actually see any fishing this year. Gulls in abundance in the bay and the estuary, also hanging around the unloading area but not many ducks. Stopped long enough to pick out a Ring-billed and a Western Gull. Missing were the usual Bonapartes. No time to walk out the breakwater but scoped for alcids with little luck except for Pigeon Guillemot. Actually alcids are not that common here at this time of year.

We always stop at Admiral Tryon Lagoon/Pool (Columbia Beach area). Busy shorebirds included Dunlin, plovers and turnstones. Nice to watch them flying in formation flashing their wings for us. I always forget to mention Black Oystercatchers. We are so lucky to have this world-wide rare bird so common on Vancouver Island that we hardly mention this fascinating carrot-beak. Brant moving about here. They love to play in the surf. Not too much else in close enough. We were happy to have lots of scopes or the day would not have been nearly as enjoyable.

I suggested we stop at the base of Memorial at the edge of Qualicum as sometimes we have seen different birds than at the Qualicum Viewing Stand which is not that much farther along. Indeed it paid off because we spotted a Western Grebe amongst the loons and Horned Grebes. No Red-necked Grebe here. Never did find one on this trip. Another good look at Gulls.

Often at the Viewing Stand, the rafts of scoters are up close and we get our year's supply of looks at the Black Scoters but they were quite distant so it was scouring the crowds of birds through the scopes to pick up a few White-winged and Black Scoters. More scaup and Harlequin Ducks. We picked up Pintail and other ducks working the various sandbars. Also plovers, turnstones and Black Oystercatchers along the edges. More gulls to examine and a Kingfisher watching from a big rock.

The day was running out on us but we decided to stop at Surfside (off Kincaid) because we could see big rafts off that way. At the very end near the estuary, we enjoyed lots through the scopes but the birds were still a ways off. Brant, scaup, scoters, goldeneye and Long-tailed Ducks. So we switched to the other end of Surfside and the views were the best of the day. Ducks were in quite a bit closer, easy to pick out White-winged and Black Scoters. Concentrations of several Long-tailed Ducks were a treat. The sun was warming our backs. Great way to finish off the day. We all got settled in for a very quiet ride home with our trusty driver Dave Lynn being the only one staying awake in the van.

No one bird stood out as the special bird-of-the-day. What we came for was the masses of ducks and gulls and we got exactly that. We always come at the same time of year but the seasons are different. Occasionally we have been too early and we see the birds but not in volume. Some years we are lucky enough to see the colourful spawn in the water that only lasts a few hours. Sometimes the boats are busy fishing. Again, this only lasts for a few hours. But it's best to come a little bit late to guarantee the biggest volume of birds. Rick says that this year we saw the biggest volume of birds of all our trips and the selection was excellent as well. He reminded everyone that the birds hang around for a few weeks so that you can check out the Brant Festival events, choose something to attend and combine it with looking at the birds. Special thanks to Rick Schortinghuis for leading this trip for so many years.



Stellar Sea Lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*) seen offshore. *Photo: Mikhail Belikov*

Harris's Sparrow

By Marie O'Shaughnessy

This Harris's Sparrow was photographed at Hyacinth Park, Saanich, January 2, 2013. It had been first seen at this location sometime in December 2012. Curiously, a leucistic Fox Sparrow and two or three White-throated Sparrows were seen in the same vicinity. This winter season there have been a number of reports of White-throated Sparrows from several locations in Victoria, making it a more common winter migrant for our area each year.

Interestingly however, the Harris's Sparrow is a much rarer visitor to our area. It is the largest of all North American sparrows, and is the only endemic sparrow to nest in northern Canada and no other place in the world. Generally this sparrow breeds in the northern part of central Canada, where the boreal forest meets the tundra. Its winter migration takes it to the central great plains of the U.S.

The bird's preference for remote breeding habitat at the edge of the tree-line makes identification of their nests most difficult. They seek out and build a nest in a depression below the overhanging foliage of stunted trees and bushes. This



Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*) in a Victoria garden. Photo by author

pink-billed sparrow with a black crown, face, and throat usually forages on the ground for seeds, insects and berries. One of the interesting facts reported in the literature about the Harris's Sparrow, is that the very first nest to be found, long after this species was identified, was in Churchill, Manitoba, in 1931.

Large migrating winter flocks, heading south for the winter, are of mixed ages. The older adult males with the larger, black areas of the face, throat, and breast-bib markings, command the dominant positions in the flock when foraging. The literature calls this 'Dominance Hierarchies.' Luckily for many, a few juvenile birds go astray and bring delight to birders that just happen to notice an interesting bird at the base of a thicket; one whose size and colour markings make it unusual and whose behaviour, while scratching in the leaf litter for a juicy bug, announces, *I am different!*

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Hat Tricks

Spring Gardening



By Adam Taylor, Executive Director, Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT)

In the last issue of the *Naturalist*, Todd Carnahan wrote about HAT's upcoming Mt. Newton Valley Good Neighbours Program. There, Todd discussed the important role private landowners play in helping ecosystems stay healthy – if you live in the Mt. Newton Valley, call us to arrange for a free, confidential visit with HAT Staff to help you find ways to care for nature on your land.

If you are looking for more immediate ideas or help, then you need look no further than your computer, tablet, or cell phone. The number of online resources available to help inspire and guide your efforts is amazing, and every time I look online I find more.

For beginners (like myself) I would be remiss if I didn't plug HAT's own website – www.hat.bc.ca. Check under the "Care for Nature at Home" for quick tips, plant lists, and garden ideas that will be attractive to the human and wildlife neighbours alike. The Islands Trust Fund has also recently updated their website (www.islandstrustfund.bc.ca) – look under "Protecting Private Land" for their links and guides. I particularly like their guide to rainwater harvesting.

More advanced gardeners probably already know about the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team Society (GOERT) website (www.goert.ca). But in case you haven't visited, they have an amazing collection of articles on propagating native plants, plant flowering times, best seed collections times and more. What I like about GOERT's, HAT's and ITF's websites is that the advice they offer is specific to southern Vancouver Island, and the unique Garry Oak and Douglas-fir ecosystems we live in.

I do know that many people prefer real paper to glowing screens, and all three organizations have information available in print form too. Contact the HAT office, and we'd be happy to provide you with a copy of our just reprinted "Gardening with Native Plants". GOERT has their award winning "Garry Oak Gardener's Handbook", and ITF has a Rainwater Harvesting brochure available. Still, for lovers of the printed word, the unfortunate truth is that more information is available online now than in print.

Finally, I have a request that I hope the members of the VNHS can help me with.

First, we'd like to know your favorite native plants to use in your garden. If you can send us a brief description of the plant, why you like it in your garden, and where it grows best (and ideally a photo), then we will use this information during the Good Neighbours program to inspire others to try using native plants.

Second, HAT would like to create a smartphone app to



Oregon Grape, Nodding Onion, fescue. *Photo: Todd Carnahan*

support beginning Native Plant Gardeners in the region. We realize that young gardeners are relying more and more on their phones and tablets to access information, and little exists in that particular digital space to support their efforts to use native plants. While HAT has all the articles, charts, and photos for an app, we don't have the computer skills needed to create it. If you, or someone you know, has the talent to produce an app and would be interested in helping us, please get them to contact us.

Thank you!

Habitat Acquisition Trust, 250-995-2428
hatmail@hat.bc.ca, www.hat.bc.ca



Odd Couple at King's Pond

By Marie O'Shaughnessy

There's an interesting couple that I have noticed hanging out at King's Pond. For several months they have been inseparable. One sees them parading together for the most part with many of the other "quackers" that gather there over the winter months. It's a great place to be. Breakfast, lunch, and supper are always on the menu. Those humans keep coming with their plastic bags full of grain, bird seed, and duck feed, undoubtedly food for all discerning tastes. This is one of the best places in Victoria to find hand-outs and why so many duck species can be seen on and near the pond. If the couple isn't readily seen, it is because he and she are apart for a moment. While she is dabbling on the pond, as ducks will do, he is keeping a close eye on things from his perch in the overhanging branches of a tree.

So who and what is this Odd Couple?

Would you believe a male California Quail and a female Mallard. From my observations, the female Mallard appears to be the Quail's surrogate mother. This is called "imprinting", where for whatever circumstances, the baby Quail came in contact with a family of hatched ducklings, and stayed, thus creating an unusual bond.

"Imprinting" is a phenomenon whereby one species, at a very early stage of life, begins to respond to and adopt the behaviours of another moving influence (usually the female of the same species). This principle was identified in the 19th century by Douglas Spalding, and later rediscovered by Konrad Lorenz, whose work on Greylag Geese received much acclaim. Further studies revealed that during the course of Captive Breeding Programs, birds were prone to imprinting. It was within these programs that handlers found they needed to dress and behave much like parent birds, while rearing the young. The changes that were required were then established for breeding programs, thus ensuring greater success initially for California Condors and Whooping Cranes. This adaptation by human handlers allowed for reared birds to return to the wild and behave appropriately.

Meanwhile back at Kings Pond, the "odd couple" continues to arouse curiosity. There are accounts of unusual bonding between species in Nature, but a Mallard and Quail combination is one I haven't observed before. The size difference between them and the aggressive intimidating behaviour of the Quail towards other female and male Mallards is quite

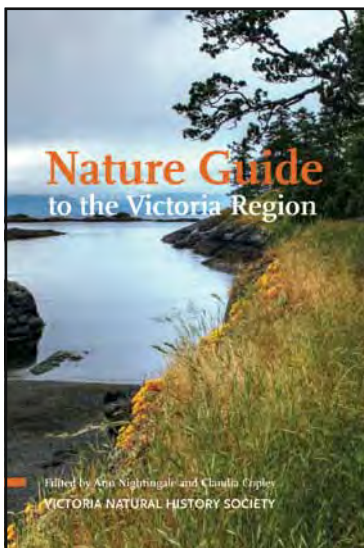
hilarious. At other times, his searching for mom appears somewhat frantic. How he finds her is a mystery since the many patterned, feathered-flanked bodies that present at his diminutive height must be confusing. I believe he finds her from the very soft cluckings from one individual. There is nothing amiss with his flying capabilities or his physical presence. Obviously he has survived the crush and rush of the hordes of larger ducks that congregate at this spot. I have seen him take flight from the thickets to descend to where the action is, albeit initially around the periphery. When the ranks thin, he is right there, alongside his surrogate mom, bills down pecking at the leftovers. My observations have allowed me to see her 'sidekick' gently beaking her tail feathers when he wants her attention which causes her to shudder. This odd couple is a delight to watch from a bench in the late afternoon sun. While relaxing here, I have pondered several scenarios as to how and why this anomaly could have occurred. Not fully understanding, I thought I would pose the question to a retired biologist, Bryan Gates, who suggested the following (and I quote):

"The most likely reason for this is that somehow a very young Quail chick (the now pictured male, and probably at an age of less than a day or two) got separated from its family in the King's Pond area. A dog, cat, person, raccoon, hawk or owl may have caused the Quail family to break for cover. This was not necessarily very close to the pond, as Mallards will nest quite far from water. Instinctively and accidentally, the chick then joined a family of very young Mallards that were nearby, became imprinted on the mother Mallard, and has stayed with her ever since. Like ducks, young Quail are "precocial", i.e., well-feathered, very mobile and able to find and eat food on their own immediately after hatching. The parent(s), however, stay with them and guide them to appropriate feeding areas. The young Quail would have to be content to stay ashore while the adoptive family is in the water, but should be able to find some food until the family returns to wander and feed on land."



Photos by author

I returned to King's Pond a week ago and found the two celebrities together once again. Both appeared in good health. The question is will this female be pestered by several male Mallards in April, and go off to lay eggs somewhere close and bring forth a new brood of ducklings with the help of the Quail? Or will the springtime hormones of the male California Quail determine the outcome of this couple, when and if he flies off to new and better pastures, to ensure his species continues. One wonders how persuasive and permanent this example of imprinting on this odd couple is. Undoubtedly, it is a question for "Nature" to decide.



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The Straight Hermit Crab

By Bill Merilees

Who hasn't taken a small amount of time to be entertained by the antics of hermit crabs? These energetic, quarrelsome, tidepool crustaceans, that live and depend on another animal's shell for their safety, fascinate beach goers of all ages. There is a special term for this relationship; it is metabiosis – a mode of living in which one organism is dependent on another for providing an environment in which it can survive. In the case of hermit crabs, the great majority of species utilize an empty snail shell for this purpose. Tucked snugly into this 'home', the hermit crab's tender abdomen is safe from would be meal seekers.

Of British Columbia's ninety-five crab species (Hart 1982), twenty-eight are hermit crabs. Of these, all but two rely on snail shells for their 'home', which, in accordance with the snail's coiled shell the bodies of these hermit crabs are likewise spirally twisted. Of the two that remain, one utilizes the parchment-like casings of tubeworms. The other, the subject of this article, *Orthopagurus minimus*, the Straight Hermit Crab, relies on the shells of the scaphropod, *Dentalium pretiosum*. Dentaliums, aka Tusk Shells, Indian Tooth Shell, and Money Shell, were better known during British Columbia's Fur Trade era (circa 1750–1850) as



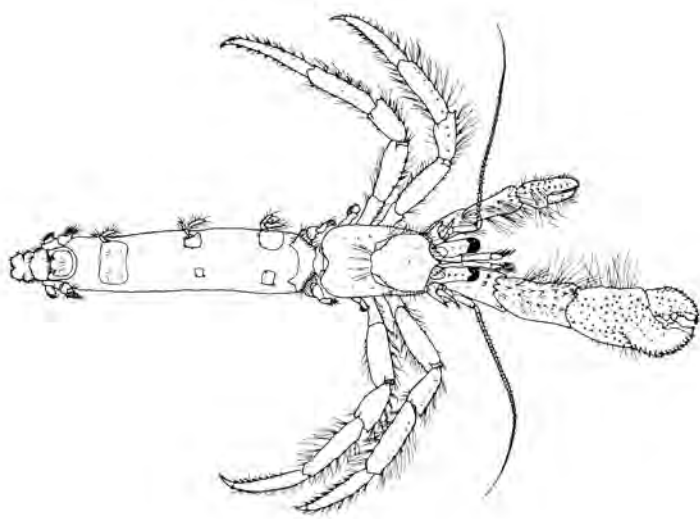
Straight Hermit Crabs residing in the Tusk Shells of *Dentalium pretiosum* from 18 metres, off the Bunsby Islands, near Kyuquot, B.C. Photos by author



Haiqua. These shells strongly resemble an Elephant's tusk (see photo). For trade purposes they were strung end to end and measured by the Hudson Bay Company in fathoms (six



Living *Dentalium pretiosum* from 15 metres, off the Gordon Islands, Haida Gwaii



Watercolour (p.18) and line art illustrations of Straight Hermit Crab (*Orthopagurus minimus*) by Josephine F. L. Hart. Reproduced with permission.

feet). Forty shells equalled one fathom. (Mackie and Galois 1990). The *Haiqua*, for a period between the 1820s and 1850s became the standard unit of barter or currency along our coast. To First Nations people, the dentalium was coveted as a prestigious ornament of considerable ceremonial importance.

Along our coast, dentaliums burrow into the sand and are entirely sub-tidal. It would be very lucky for a beach walker to ever find one. Scuba divers, or those using a small dredge on the right substrates at special locations, can find them quite readily at water depths of 5 to 30 metres. Such was the case, June 6th, 2012, near Kyuquot on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Divers at 18 m brought up quite a number. Most were dead shells occupied by the Straight Hermit Crab. These were easily seen and gathered as the crabs dragged

their homes along the surface. The living dentaliums would be buried in the sand with only their narrow tip projecting above the surface.

The Straight Hermit Crab is an interesting beast. This species is confined to our open west coast. Unlike traditional crabs that have five pairs of walking legs (hence their name decapods), hermit crabs have only three pairs, one pair of which are pinchers. The remaining two pairs are vestigial. This is an adaptation to living in another animal's shell. The bright maroon red right pincher is considerably larger than the left (see photo, p.18). When withdrawn into its shell, the right pincher acts in a similar manner to a snail's operculum or 'trap door', sealing off the aperture.

From the specimens collected, about half were carrying eggs. These ranged in colour from light yellow through orange to dark brown to near black. This range of colours is indicative of their age, the darker the colour the closer they are to hatching into larvae (Graham Gillespie, pers. com.) These larvae will then drift on the ocean currents.

Like their tidepool relatives, Straight Hermit Crabs are active and quarrelsome creatures. In order for a marine biologist or a seashore naturalist to appreciate this species, SCUBA or a small dredge are required to bring them into view. In a shallow bowl of sea water they will put on a 'good show'.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Rick Harbo, Graham Gillespie, Mike Kattilakoski, Brian Rusch, Pauline Riding of the Pacific Biological Station in Nanaimo, and Richard Mackie for their interest and assistance during the field work and preparation of this article.

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Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 7 new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our *Welcome* column:

Lise Gagnon

Vista Heights

Field trips and learning more about local flora & fauna.

Micah Aalders

Prospect Avenue
*birds, trees, mushrooms,
edible plants*

Galen Kennel

Selkirk Avenue
Bird watching

Devin Roberts

Sea View Road
Behavioural Ecology

ANNE HANSEN



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Garry Oak Tree Nursery to be Started by Local Preservation Society

Press release March 14, 2013

By Michael Croteau



After more than 5 years of planning, the Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society (GOMPS) is pleased to announce the start-up of a nursery dedicated to producing Garry oaks of local genetic origin. This nursery addresses the rapid loss of Greater Victoria's native flagship tree, the Garry oak.

Large mature Garry oaks are falling faster than they are being replaced, producing a dramatic age gap between large established trees and the few recently planted young ones. Most seedlings do not survive the hardships in our urban forest due to their required care and protection from humans and animals. Our Garry Oak Growers Group (GOGG), a task force drawn from members of GOMPS, is meeting the challenge of producing local Garry oaks. The general public, municipal governments and restoration projects need young trees now but few of those available are of local origin.

While collaborating with the City of Victoria to establish the nursery, GOMPS will use funding from two generous legacies of local estates to operate. The City of Victoria has agreed to sub-license a former nursery site to GOMPS and in return we will provide a percentage of trees to the City of Victoria free of charge.

Drawing on the support of volunteers and local expertise, our goal is to produce approximately 1000 young trees per year over the lifetime of the nursery project. The majority of the nursery's inventory will be for sale to other municipalities, major landowners and the general public. Our aim is to have the trees planted out after they are 6 years old and of sufficient size to withstand hardships found in the urban forest. In addition, we will develop educational materials to help landowners care for the trees and ensure their survival.

For more information on the Garry Oak Nursery Project, GOMPS and GOGG, please contact: **Michael Croteau**
Phone: 250-744-2257 Email: grow.oaks@gmail.com

GOMPS was founded in 1992 to preserve and restore the Garry oak ecosystem that is characteristic of Greater Victoria, and also includes parts of Central and Southern Vancouver Island, with only a couple of small outliers on the mainland. This ecosystem is unique in all of Canada and contains over 100 species that are officially at risk.

Seen by Chance

By Ali Muller

The Cedar Waxwing was actually one of a group doing their usual 'dine and dash' routine in the neighbours' shrub. I got a few shots of them as they stripped the entire shrub of its berries. When I showed the photos later to my neighbours, they were elated as they've only seen a mere three waxwings in their 26 years of living in their home. However, they know the birds have passed on through the yard every year because of the shrub's evidence: from berry-laden to bare.

I visited Durrance Lake in early February and it was quite quiet: one lone female Bufflehead at one end of the lake and one female Hooded Merganser at the other. She looked very lovely standing out on the log. As it was only a couple days before Valentines' Day, the only appropriate thing I could think to say was, "I guess I'm not the only single woman around here."



Photos by author



The Big Trees of Royal Roads, March 3, 2013

By Lise Gagnon

Thanks to Hans Roemer for leading us on a delightful walk through the woods at Royal Roads, in search of majestic Douglas fir, grand fir, hemlock, and western red cedar. Hans showed us how to identify these big trees by their pine cones, the shape of their needles, and the texture of the bark. We also learned about the geological history of the area, going as far back as the last ice age, some twenty thousand years ago. Here are two of my favourite pictures of the giants.



*Photos
by author*

Rocky Point Bird Observatory Chatter

By Jessie Fanucchi



Spring has definitely sprung at RPBO! On March 29–31, we held a sold-out bird monitoring and banding workshop at Royal Roads University. Instructor Ron Melcer and many RPBO volunteers spent three days with 18 participants, teaching them banding techniques, learning about moult, ageing, and sexing strategies, and working with our extensive specimen collection. Thanks to everyone who came out.

Spring also means hummingbirds and the return of hummingbird banding. Rufous Hummingbirds are breeding, which means Alison Moran and her teams of hummingbird banders began the 2013 season across the province in April. As we approach summer, RPBO will also be starting the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program at Witty's Lagoon and Madrona Farm. If you are interested in volunteering with RPBO, please visit http://rpbo.org/vol_appl_form.php to fill out an application form. We will be having a volunteer information session before the field season begins this year so be sure to check our website frequently for more information (www.rpbo.org).

Finally, RPBO and VNHS will once again be hosting International Migratory Bird Day at Beaver Lake Park on Saturday, May 11. This free drop-in event offers engaging activities for birders of all ages, expertise and abilities. Participate in guided walks, mist-netting demonstrations, hummingbird and passerine banding demonstrations,



Instructor Ron Melcer (at left) (RPBO Bander In Charge 2009), who came from Sacramento, CA, to teach this workshop. He is demonstrating banding protocols with a Dark-eyed Junco to four of our workshop participants. Photo: Stacey Hrushowy

children's activities, and a visit from The Raptor Centre folk in Duncan who will be showing some of their birds. This event takes place at the filter beds parking lot off Beaver Lake Road from 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

*"Psssst! Do you need Aleutian Tern for your list?"
Check out this amazing fund-raising trip for Rocky
Point Bird Observatory*

Birding the Tatshenshini-Alsek River by Raft June 21-July 4, 2013

Ptarmigan, Aleutian Terns, icebergs, glaciers and more. Rocky Point Bird Observatory and Canadian River Expeditions have teamed up to develop this exciting birding and rafting trip. We will travel through some of the most spectacular and rugged scenery in North America and will have a chance to find some of the iconic birds of the St. Elias Mountains.

The naturalist/birder on the trip is biologist Dave Fraser who has birded the Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers for the past 18 years. Dave's bird list and more information are available here: http://www.rpbo.org/cre_tatenshini_trip_2013.php or contact Marilyn Lambert at 250-477-5922.

ALEUTIAN TERN PHOTO: NICK HAJDUKOVICH/USFWS



Letters

Thank you John for teaching us ducks and showing us around King's Pond! We learned a lot and had a lot of fun with you

From the campers at Hands On Spring Break Camp

Eva Tiline
Klara

Gina!

Tomas

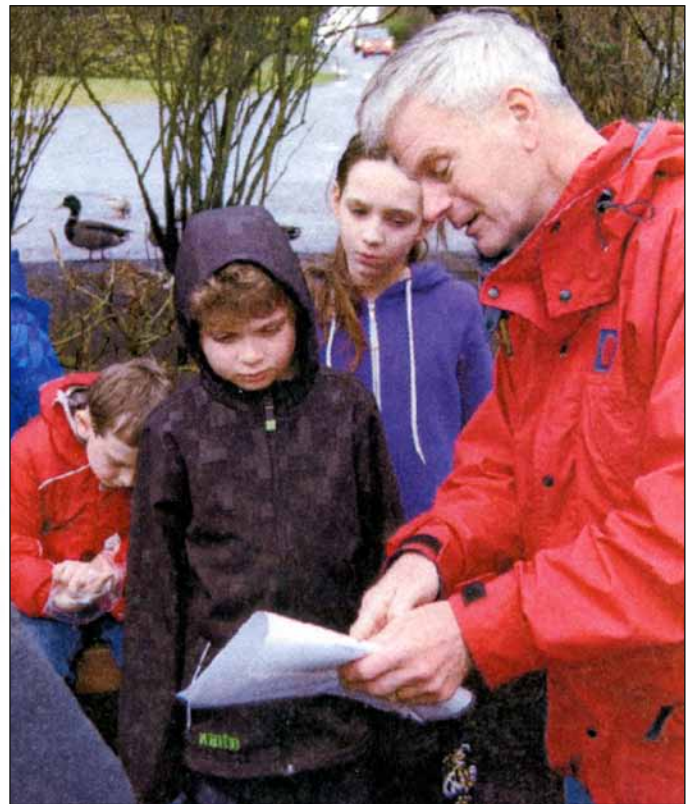
Ellis

Luke

Kate

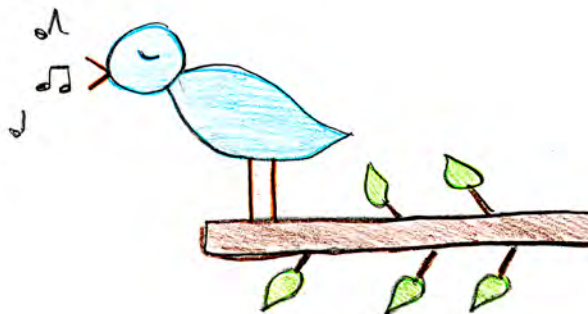
Laura

Oden



A letter from Helena Radisavljevic:

John Henigman at King's Pond



Dear Victoria Natural History Society,

I would like to thank you for donating money to the Victoria Natural History Society Award for the Vancouver Island Regional Science Fair.

From: Helena R.



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We have recently signed a conservation covenant on nearly 70 acres of our property.

www.yellowpointlodge.com
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BULLETIN BOARD/CLASSIFIEDS

VNHS is looking for a Volunteer Coordinator

Our organization has many volunteer opportunities, from leading field trips to staffing booths at events such as Seedy Saturday to helping with the administrative work of the Society. We are looking for a person to match people and jobs –to recruit individuals for a variety of volunteer roles (providing them with opportunities to strengthen knowledge, skills, and association with the organization), coordinate recognition of volunteer commitment, and maintain a database tracking information, hours, roles and event participation. Our database has information on members' areas of interest in volunteering, so it will simply be a matter of asking those in the correct category. Our committees could tell the coordinator what help is needed and then members interested in the activity can be contacted. We need someone with good administrative skills who can work well with volunteers with a diversity of experiences and backgrounds. Ideally, the Volunteer Coordinator will have some experience working with volunteers in a non-profit organization. If you are interested in this volunteer position, please contact Darren Copley dcopley@telus.net

SFU Western Sandpiper Study – May 2013

Are you a birder with good shorebird identification skills who is able to accurately estimate flock sizes (or willing to learn estimation skills)? If so, please consider volunteering your time and expertise to this project. Bird Studies Canada and Simon Fraser University are studying the migration of the Western Sandpiper as part of the research on causes of shorebird population decline. Participants will simultaneously census sites in the Salish Sea and Vancouver Island region on a weekend in May during the peak of northward migration, and in July and August, during adult and juvenile southward migration. If you are interested in participating or learning more, email David Hope dhope@sfu.ca [subject line "WESA Survey"] and state which area you would be willing to survey.

Creston Valley Bird Fest – May 10 & 11, 2013

For information see <http://www.crestonvalleybirds.ca/>

Skagit Valley Bird Blitz - May 10-12, 2013

For information E-mail: info@hopemountain.org
Web: www.hopemountain.org

Meadowlark Nature Festival - May 16-20, 2013

Experience the unique natural diversity of the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys ... for more information see <http://www.meadowlarkfestival.bc.ca/>

Oceans Day – June 8, 2013

Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre hosts an Oceans Day celebration – a family-friendly event hosted outside in Beacon Park on the Sidney waterfront with live music. A variety of organizations, e.g., Parks Canada, Cetus Research and Conservation, CRD, BC Hydro Powersmart team, and Seachange, take part each year. Contact Tina Kelly, oceaner1@oceandiscovery.ca for more information.

Mt. Robson Provincial Park Bird Blitz – June 7-9, 2013

A long tradition in Mount Robson Park (every June since 1982), this popular event draws bird enthusiasts from far and wide and provides long-term trend data on bird diversity in the park. For information contact Gail Ross gailross1@telus.net

Manning Park Bird Blitz – June 14-16, 2013

Manning Park's annual June event, the BIRD BLITZ is a fun event for expert and novice birders alike. Registration Friday, a full day birding on Saturday followed by a barbecue and guest speaker, and Sunday morning is another opportunity to cover areas missed on Saturday. For more information E-mail: info@hopemountain.org

2nd Annual Flathead BioBlitz Expedition – June 21-28, 2013

Last year, in the first-ever Flathead BioBlitz in the magnificent Flathead River Valley, southeast of Fernie, BC, the Flathead Wild team of biologists, photographers, a videographer, and nearly a dozen visual artists spent a week in August exploring the river and streams, floodplain, surrounding forest and mountains, collecting, documenting and cataloguing species in an effort to understand the area's rich biodiversity. We are currently searching for our next team and are particularly interested in finding top ornithologists. If you are a biologist/ornithologist or know one who would like to be involved in protecting a vital link in the Yellowstone to Yukon wildlife corridor (and for more information), contact Galen Armstrong, Sierra Club BC galen@sierraclub.bc.ca 250-386-5255 ext. 243 www.flathead.ca

Humble Suite Sought for Gardener

Small humble quiet suite in RBCM/ Beacon Hill Park vicinity sought by gardener dedicated to enhancing urban bird/butterfly corridors and habitat. NS, mature, very responsible (housesitting experience) and travel by bike. Please contact Elizabeth atleijne@telus.net for further details.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

REGULAR MEETINGS are generally held September-April on the following days: **Board of Directors:** the first Tuesday of each month (directors' meetings are held at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary at 7:30 p.m.); **Natural History Night:** the second Tuesday at 7:30 p.m., University of Victoria; **Botany Night:** the third Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House; **Birders' Night:** the fourth Wednesday, 7:30 p.m., University of Victoria. **Marine Night:** the last Monday, 7:30 p.m., University of Victoria. Locations are given in the calendar listings. The VNHS Calendar also appears on the Internet at: <http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca>, 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 or steeper grades, requiring agility. LEVEL 4 – Very steep, insecure footing, or longer hikes requiring good physical condition. **Please – no pets on VNHS field trips.**

Members! Remember that if you want to do a talk or know someone who might, please contact one of the talk night coordinators. Many of you do interesting things either for fun or for work, and it would be great to share. Contacts: Birder's Night and Natural History Night – Christina Ball; Marine Night – Phil Lambert; Botany Night – Kristen and James Miskelly. Email/phone numbers on p.2 of the newsletter.

MAY

Saturday May 4

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Birding Witty's Lagoon

Join **Dannie Carsen** on this visit to an important resting and feeding area for migrating birds. The trail at Witty's Lagoon drops quickly via a scenic waterfall to the beach. Enjoy the birds such as resident Brown Creepers in the woods on the way down mixed with the migrant warblers and vireos. Watch for shorebirds such as dowitchers or yellowlegs along the estuary and in the salt marsh behind the beach. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the main parking lot on Metchosin Road (across from golf course). Contact **Rick Schortinghuis** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes Lynn** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday, May 5

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Birding Royal Roads & Esquimalt Lagoon

Join **Ann Nightingale** for a birding walk around Esquimalt Lagoon. We should see a good variety of migrating shorebirds and passerines. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the south end of the lagoon by the washrooms. This is a five-hour walk. Bring a drink and a snack. Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Tuesday, May 7

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP

Meet Tuesday at 9:00 a.m. at the foot of Bowker Avenue on the waterfront (off Beach drive) in Oak Bay. For more information call **Bill Dancer** at 250-721-5273.

Friday-Sunday, May 10-12

EVENT

British Columbia Field Ornithologists' Annual Conference
BCFO is holding its 23rd Annual General Meeting on Southern Vancouver Island. It will be in Sidney and all conference events will be held at the Mary Winspear Centre. Lots of good birding locations within easy driving distances and a full complement of great trips is being planned. For more information see <http://bcfo.ca/annual-conference/>

Saturday, May 11

EVENT

4th Annual International Migratory Bird Day!

The Victoria Natural History Society, Rocky Point Bird Observatory, and CRD Regional Parks are proud to present the 4th Annual International Migratory Bird Day from 7:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park. Help celebrate and learn more about the journey that birds take from their summer and winter homes by participating in this free all-day event that offers engaging activities for birders of all ages, expertise, and abilities. Participate in guided bird walks, mist-netting demonstrations, hummingbird and passerine banding demonstrations, live raptors, and children's activities. Be sure to check out booths representing local organizations focused on studying migratory birds, and gather information on ways to help conserve species and their habitats.

9:00 a.m.: Event opening – Picnic shelter (at the Elk/Beaver Lake filter beds). Displays, touch tables, crafts, scavenger hunts, games, fun! Follow the signs!

9:00 a.m. – 2 p.m.: Bird banding demonstrations – mist nets will be nearby and constantly checked for songbirds.

9:00 a.m. – 2 p.m.: Hummingbird banding demonstrations – hummingbird feeder traps will be monitored all day.

Birding walks: There will be a 7:00 a.m. walk with the VNHS Saturday Morning Birding Group (see below). Meet at the main parking lot at Beaver Lake. All other walks (up to 40 minutes in length) leave from the picnic shelter and run every hour, starting at 10:15 a.m.).

Live raptors: Pacific Northwest Raptors will have birds of prey at the event, with a presentation in the morning and afternoon.

Saturday, May 11

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding at Beaver Lake

This event will be part of International Migratory Bird Day. For other events planned for the day, see the IMBD info (see above) or on the VNHS web site. Join **Dannie Carsen** as he checks out the trails and the lakeshore to see what migrants have joined the resident birds in this productive area. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the main parking lot at Beaver Lake. To reach this parking lot, turn on to Beaver Lake Road off Elk Lake Drive (parallels the Pat Bay Highway). There is a large park sign at this intersection. Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday, May 12

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Enjoy the Birds at Panama Flats

Join us at Panama Flats which is former farm land now owned by Saanich. It has berms holding water that provide waterfowl and shorebird habitat. Last year it proved to be the best spot in the region for shorebirds. The area is also surrounded by shrubbery providing habitat for good woodland birds as well. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the parking lot at Hyacinth Park on Marigold Avenue. Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday, May 12

NON-VNHS FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Race Rocks with Friends of Ecological Reserves

A rare opportunity to visit Race Rocks ER. Interesting natural history. 10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Must pre-register and pay. For more information and to register, call Marilyn 250-477-5922 <http://ecoreserves.bc.ca/2013/04/01/race-rocks-field-trip/>

Tuesday, May 14

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP.

For details see May 7.

Friday, May 17

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Along Lochside Trail at Blenkinsop Lake

Join us as we walk along Lochside Trail in the Blenkinsop Lake area. Migrants such as swallows, Black-headed Grosbeaks and Yellow Warblers will have joined the residents such as Cooper's Hawks and Downy Woodpeckers. Meet at 7:00 a.m. opposite Don Mann Trucking on Lochside Drive (off Cedar Hill Cross Road). Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Saturday, May 18

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Scramble up the Back of Mount Douglas

Join Mike McGrenere in birding Mount Douglas. We should get a good number of warblers, flycatchers and vireos. Also Western Tanager, House Wren and Chipping Sparrow are likely. The late wildflowers such as Menzies' Larkspur (*Delphinium menziesii*) and Woolly Sunflower (*Eriophyllum lanatum*) should still be good as well. Please note the trail is steep but will be taken at a leisurely pace to enjoy the habitat. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the new parking lot to the right off Blenkinsop Road just north of Lohbrunner Road on the left. Wear sturdy footwear. Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Saturday/Sunday, May 18/19

VICTORIA BUTTERFLY COUNT

We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers to submit butterfly records. If you would like to participate, please contact **James Miskelly** at 250-544-0455, james.miskelly@gmail.com

Sunday, May 19

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Stewart Mountain Road

Join us in this very productive birding area. This trail, mostly under power lines, is a great place to see warblers, vireos and flycatchers. This is the most reliable spot for MacGillivray's Warbler. Take the Trans-Canada Highway to the Millstream Road exit. Follow signs to the Highlands and you will be on Millstream Road. Right at Stewart Mountain Road and meet at the mailboxes at 7:00 a.m. Wear sturdy footwear. Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Monday, May 20

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Natural History Cycling Tour of the Galloping Goose Trail from Sooke Potholes to Leechtown

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** on a cycling tour into the Sooke Hills. We will enjoy the flowers, birds, and scenery along the way. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Galloping Goose parking lot 2.3 km along Sooke River Road (off Sooke Road). Bring a cool drink and lunch. Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Tuesday, May 21

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP. For details see May 7.

Friday, May 24

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Mount Newton

Join us on this leisurely loop on the south side of Mount Newton looking for warblers, flycatchers and other spring migrants in this area of mixed forest and large rural lots. This is a great area to see Western Tanagers, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Black-throated Grey Warblers and Mourning Doves. Take East Saanich Road to Haldon Road. Meet at the corner of Haldon Road and Newton Heights at 7:00 a.m. Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Saturday, May 25

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2/3)

Zero Tide at Harling Point

Better known as a National Historic Site for its Chinese Cemetery, Harling Point also offers up a very accessible and

close to the city rocky shore to explore! With a zero tide, expect to see a variety of algae and intertidal invertebrates adapted to this habitat. Leader **Tina Kelly** will describe what makes this a challenging place for an animal to live and how the sub-zones within the intertidal zone are different. A variety of field guides will be on hand to help us identify any surprises. Please wear appropriate footwear for scaling slippery rocks and wet seaweed. Meet at the end of Crescent Road adjacent to Chinese Cemetery at 9:15 a.m. For more information, call **Tina** at 250-881-4191.

Saturday, May 25

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Birding Little Saanich Mountain (The Observatory)

Join **Ed Pellizzon** on a birding walk up and around Little Saanich Mountain. This is an excellent place to see lots of migrant species of birds. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the bottom of the road leading up the mountain at the big sign for Centre of the Universe at 5071 West Saanich Road. Wear sturdy footwear. Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday, May 26

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Butterflies, Birds and Blooms on Mount Tolmie

Join us for a natural history walk on Mount Tolmie (off Cedar Hill Cross Road). Meet at 9:00 a.m. at the main parking lot just north of the summit. Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Tuesday, May 28

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP. For details see May 7.

JUNE

Saturday, June 1

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Jordan River Area

Join us for a trip to Jordan River. In the past it has been a hot spot for rarities in the spring and fall and it is a great place to hear Fox Sparrows singing in the spring. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Helmcken Park & Ride to car-pool. Bring a lunch and drinks. Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday, June 2

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Duncan Butterflies

Join us on our search for the amazing array of butterflies in this area. This trip is weather dependent – it needs to be sunny to make it worthwhile. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Helmcken Park and Ride to car-pool or at 10:00 a.m. at the entrance to the boardwalk at Somenos Marsh in Duncan (off the highway north of Beverly). Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca if the weather is doubtful or for more information.

Tuesday, June 4

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP.
For details see May 7.

Saturday, June 8

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

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

Join us for a walk along the power lines that border Francis King Park and the area around the Hydro substation. This is a great

area to hear or see most of the warblers, vireos, and flycatchers that we have in our area. This is the most reliable spot for Black-throated Grey Warbler. This is a four-to-five hour walk. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Francis King Park Nature House on Munns Road. Wear sturdy footwear. Bring a drink and a snack. Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday, June 9

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Enjoying the Last of the Wildflower Season at Eagle Heights

Join **James Miskelly** on our visit to an area northwest of Shawnigan Lake that is in need of protection for its unique habitat. It has interesting native grasses and other late wildflowers such as Clarkia. We might have time to look for some of the things that Pojar & MacKinnon refer to as “oddballs” if the weather is good. Meet 9:00 a.m. at Helmcken Park and Ride to car-pool. Wear sturdy footwear and bring a walking stick if you wish. Dress for the weather. Bring a lunch and drinks for the all day outing. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Tuesday, June 11

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP. For details see May 7.

June 15/16

VICTORIA BUTTERFLY COUNT

We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers to submit butterfly records. If you would like to participate, please contact **James Miskelly** at 250-544-0455, james.miskelly@gmail.com

Saturday, June 15

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding the Duncan Area

We will try to find a Red-eyed Vireo and other warblers, vireos and flycatchers. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Helmcken Park & Ride to car-pool or at 8:00 a.m. at Cowichan Bay Dock Road (north of the intersection of Cowichan Bay Road and Tzouhalem Road). Contact **Rick** at 250-885-2454 or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday, June 16

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2/3)

Rhododendron Lake

There are few native rhododendrons growing on Vancouver Island. This area near Nanoose Bay is one of only two known sites on Vancouver Island where the pink Pacific Rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*) grows, even though it is quite common in Washington State. The area surrounding the lake where these plants grow is quite boggy and, surprisingly, the plants growing with them are more like one would find in a high elevation bog. We usually think of rhododendrons requiring well-drained soil but these plants look very healthy despite their soggy surroundings. The timing of the trip should find them in bloom in a very scenic location. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Helmcken Park and Ride to car-pool. Note that the road into the area is a logging road so cars with good clearance are necessary. Bring a lunch and drinks for the all day outing. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Tuesday, June 18

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP.
For details see May 7.

Saturday, June 22

SATURDAY MORNING BIRDING

Meets every Saturday morning, usually at 7:00 a.m. Call the Rare Bird Alert (250-704-2555) or check the Rare Bird Alert <http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/rarebird.html> on Thursday/Friday before for this week's location. For details, call **Rick** at 250-885-2454 (evenings) or email **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca. Novice and experienced birders welcome.

Sunday, June 23

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Cowichan River Footpath

This is an area well known to hikers and fisherman. **Jack Sutherland** has enjoyed hiking this area but this time he will slow down to enjoy the birds and flowers along this scenic waterway. We will be investigating the area between Skutz Falls and Marie Canyon. **Joy Finlay** will be along to help look for the wildflowers such as the rare California Tea Plant (*Rupertia physodes*). There is also a small segment of Garry Oak meadow where we will see some of the late spring wildflowers but another highlight of this section of trail is the abundance of plants found in the “Oddballs” section of the field guide by Pojar & MacKinnon. This includes Ground Cones (*Boschniakia hookeri*) and Candy Sticks (*Allotropa virgata*). Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Helmcken Park & Ride to car-pool. Although the terrain is not terribly rugged, wear sturdy footwear and you might wish to bring a walking stick. Bring a lunch and drinks for the all day outing. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Tuesday, June 25

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING GROUP. For details see May 7.

Saturday, June 29

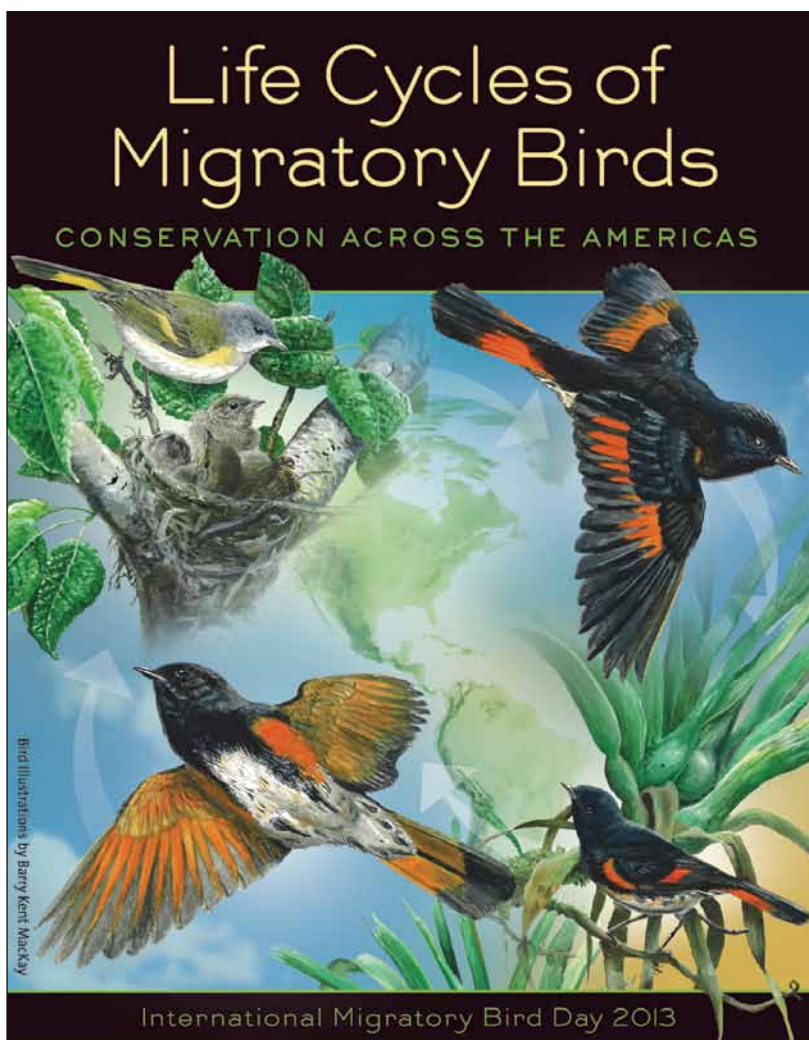
SATURDAY MORNING BIRDING. For details see June 22.

Sunday, June 30

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Jordan Ridge and San Juan Ridge

Due to uncertainty with access availability to the areas high above Jordan River, we are asking you to contact **Agnes Lynn** to get on an email list which will have more details on field trips in this area closer to the dates, probably starting on June 30. Trips in this area may include visits to see some high elevation early wildflowers such as Smith's Fairy Bells (*Prosartes smithii*), high elevation bogs containing plants such as Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*), areas with fields of White Avalanche Lilies (*Erythronium montanum*) and other meadows rich in plants that you would expect at much higher elevations such as White Rhododendron (*Rhododendron albiflorum*). We will also be checking out the birds on these trips although there is not a great diversity at these elevations. Trips may include hiking on the Kludahk Trail which goes along the San Juan Ridge. You must pre-register for these trips due to transportation limitations and potential change of plans due to snow cover and/or road conditions and changeable access limitations. Number of participants will be dependent on availability of high-clearance or 4-wheel-drive vehicles for carpooling. We generally start from Victoria around 8:00 a.m. Be prepared in case of cold and/or wet weather due to the elevation. Also wear sturdy footwear and a hiking stick is a good idea due to the uneven ground. Bring a lunch and drinks for the all day outing. Contact **Agnes** at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 to be put on the email list for further information on field trips in this area.



**Life Cycles of
Migratory Birds**
CONSERVATION ACROSS THE AMERICAS

Bird Illustrations by Barry Kent Mackay

International Migratory Bird Day 2013

Winged Migration Drop-in Event
Saturday, May 11, 2013 | 9am-2pm
Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Filter Beds)
www.crd.bc.ca/parks/events

