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The Victoria NATURALIST

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[Subject: VNHS newsletter submission]

Guidelines for Submissions

Members are encouraged to submit articles, field trip reports, natural history notes, book reviews, etc., up to 2000 words. Please note: If you are concerned about protecting your privacy when submitting an item, please notify the editors at the time of your submission and indicate whether or not you wish to use a pseudonym or have your name withheld.

We prefer electronic submissions—these can be submitted in either PC or Mac compatible word processing format—but hardcopies are also accepted. Please include photographs or illustrations if possible, along with a suggested caption and photo credit. If digital, images need to be high resolution—a minimum of 300 dpi for all sizes is requested.

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Front cover photo:
Great Gray Owl (*Strix nebulosa*)
Photo: Mark Yunker

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Spring is well underway in our region, and the many events and field trips scheduled over the next couple of months give us all an opportunity to get out and enjoy it! From Camas Day, International Migratory Bird Day, and World Oceans Day to the Metchosin BioBlitz and various guided walks, there is something for everyone. Lots of “B’s”: beach seining and walks, birding, butterflies, botany (wildflowers and dune ecology), even a boat trip and a bicycling tour for those more adventurous.

In the last issue, I talked about my “discovery” of some amazing photographers we have in VNHS, and how, if I could, I would publish a 30-page newsletter! Again, in compiling this issue, there are some super photos and I’d like to thank the photographers and remind all of you about submitting photos (and stories) for publication in our newsletter. Although I cannot promise to print everything I receive, I will give it a good try. Actually—I would love to produce a “photo issue”, with as many and as varied photos as we can fit, so keep that in mind and check the deadline for submission of your high resolution image files (see page 2).

Recently, I read a fascinating article about changes in our environment and the species we may see in future. Plenty of species we DON’T want, unfortunately, like mountain pine beetle, and trouble for species like salmon and caribou, but for some species, changes in temperature and moisture and the resulting changes in habitat could mean increases in numbers. Anna’s Hummingbirds love our warming climate (check out the article on page 12), and Bighorn Sheep and Fox Sparrows are both benefiting. Hard to imagine seeing Great White Sharks or the giant Humboldt Squid in our waters, but they could already be here. All the more reasons to be aware of the natural world around us (get out and have a look for changes) and how we are caring for the environment.

Enjoy the sunshine!

Gail Harcombe

Errata: The names of the flowers in the images with the Camas Day article on page 17 of the March/April issue should have been: Camas (*Camassia leichtlinii*) and Fawn Lily (*Erythronium oregonum*). Photos by Agnes Lynn.

Message from the Board

At our March Annual General Meeting, minor changes to our bylaws were passed unanimously, so the usual “year in review” is presented here as a summary of your Society’s activities in 2014. A copy of the financial report as presented is available upon request.

Donations

Each year since the establishment of Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary 40 years ago, the Victoria Natural History Society has given them \$4000, and last year was no exception. This year, we are supporting the effort to replace the deteriorating boardwalk through a much more substantial contribution: \$75,000. It is estimated that it will take \$600,000 to complete the span across the lake with the lifetime material. The area leading from the nature house to the edge of the open water is definitely the part that has suffered the most from the ravages of time, and it is scheduled to be replaced with the money raised to date. Any additional funds raised will help complete this important project.

Donations for scholarships, bursaries and the regional Science Fair competition are given annually by the VNHS to the University of Victoria, Royal Roads and Camosun College for undergraduate, graduate students, and high school students. This can be as much as \$7000.

In May 2014, the Society co-hosted the BC Nature Annual General Meeting. Half the proceeds of the event went to BC Nature and instead of splitting the other half; VNHS gave their entire share (\$4000) to Rocky Point Bird Observatory for their important projects. In the fall, we sold used books at the Society meetings, and the few hundred dollars raised from that were also given to Rocky Point.

Our members have gone on field trips to Avatar Grove, so we knew the value of helping the Ancient Forest Alliance fundraise for the construction of a boardwalk at this slippery and, in places, steep site. So in January, we contributed another \$1000 towards its completion.

Another event popular with many of our members is the Metchosin BioBlitz. Just as we did last year, this year we will contribute \$200 to help cover the minimal costs of putting on this awareness-raising event.

Fundraising

Sales of the Nature Guide to the Victoria Region and the revised Birds of Victoria Checklist continue to be steady. We sell them at our evening presentations and at outreach events, and they are also sold through local bookstores and nature centers. In 2014, approximately 100 were sold.

Fundraising events include the Annual Valentine’s Day Couples’ Birdathon, capably coordinated by Alan McLeod and Jan Brown (see article page 7), and our collaboration

with ticket sales for the Island Chef Challenge at Madrona Farm. Together these events raise another few hundred dollars.

Contributions from members in the form of donations, bequests and even the switch from print copies to digital versions of the magazine make up the bulk of monies raised for conservation initiatives. Thank you to you, our members! Your generosity allows us to continue actively facilitating education, outreach, and stewardship in the region.

Events/Outreach

We co-hosted four events in 2014:

- The BC Nature AGM—with Rocky Point Bird Observatory, this event was a major and very successful undertaking of the Society—244 naturalists from all over the province took part. We are off the hook for a decade now (at least!).
- The 23rd Annual Camas Day event was co-hosted with the Friends of Beacon Hill Park and will be held again this year on Saturday, May 2, 2015—come see the purple haze! (See page 20 for information.)
- International Migratory Bird Day was co-sponsored by Rocky Point, Capital Regional District Parks, and your Society. Join us again this year on May 9, 2015, at Elk/Beaver Lake (see ad page 20).
- Capital Regional District Parks and VNHS also co-sponsored the annual Hawk Watch at East Sooke Park, followed by the Society’s member appreciation BBQ social. Join us again this year (September 26) as the Turkey Vultures and an assortment of raptors take advantage of thermals and soar across the Strait. Watch for details in coming issues and on our website.

In addition to the co-sponsored events, the VNHS display table was set up at Seedy Saturday, World Ocean’s Day in Sidney, the Swan Lake Native Plant Sale, and the Creatively United for the Planet event.

The number of Christmas Bird Count participants (222) demonstrates the scale and popularity of this annual event adeptly coordinated by Ann Nightingale, and the monthly Butterfly Counts are now being coordinated by Aziza Cooper. Last year, 3219 individuals were spotted during the count periods, with some species more numerous than they had been for many years.

Through the free Connecting Children With Nature programs offered by the VNHS (co-coordinated by Bill Dancer and John Henigman), almost 800 children of all ages got out into a greenspace near their school to learn more about natural history and a variety of subjects.

Each month, from September to April, the Society has four themed evening presentations (Birds, Botany, Marine,



Bill Dancer at the VNHS booth on Seedy Saturday.
Photo: Claudia Copley

and General Natural History); these were well attended by both members and the general public and are a great way to learn about current research.

More than 100 field trips were offered to our members over the course of the year, including weekly Saturday and Tuesday birding trips. At the start of the calendar year we implemented a waiver, and members have been submitting them with their renewals or when attending field trips. A big thank you to Gail Harcombe for the forms, Darren for making them online-friendly, and Adam Taylor for getting them onto the new website (not to mention Agnes Lynn, for making sure field trip participants sign the forms)!

Six issues of the Victoria Naturalist Magazine are published each year, and we hope that copies will be shared with friends or left in doctors' offices. For those who prefer it in colour, a PDF version is available. (Currently 182 members receive the magazine digitally.)

Our website is new! Please visit! And please delete the old one from your computer's memory so you can access the current calendar of events and other good things! A huge thanks to Adam Taylor for the technical know-how, and to Claudia Copley for the content.

Committees

Your Society has representation on or connections with a number of committees and collaborations: the Viaduct Flats Committee, the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary Board, Rocky Point Bird Observatory, Habitat Acquisition Trust, BC Nature, and the Young Naturalists Club.

Awards

This year a Distinguished Service Award was presented to Hans Roemer, botanist extraordinaire and long-time member (see page 6).

Membership

VNHS Memberships are up from last year: 523 households (up from 470) and 730 adults (up from 651).

Upcoming

At the VNHS AGM, both James Miskelly and Gary Kaiser stepped down from the board. James has been a board member for many years and served as both our Swan Lake representative and a BC Nature Director. He also coordinated the butterfly counts for many years. We are appreciative of the time James gave to the Society, and we are grateful that he intends to continue in his role as Botany Night co-host. We are looking forward to welcoming Purnima Govindarajulu to the board and would like to remind members that there is still room if they are interested in helping guide the Society.

Your Society is working with Ocean Networks Canada and the Friends of Uplands Park to have interpretive signage about the offshore environment installed at Uplands Park, so stay tuned for more news on that front.

Another interpretive sign project involves the Friends of Beacon Hill Park and the City of Victoria. This will be part of an ongoing effort to provide information about the area's critical natural features to the masses of visitors.

Our biggest commitment to date is, of course, the \$75,000 towards replacement of the Swan Lake Sanctuary boardwalk, and we look forward to seeing the improvements this year. Your Society has also pledged an additional \$5000 to the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team for the Bringing Back the Bluebirds project for 2015. We hope the membership sees the value of both these projects, and also contributes to see them through to completion. It has been so heartening to hear of all the bluebird sightings, and everyone wants to feel safer on the floating boardwalk!

VNHS Distinguished Service Award 2015



Hans Roemer with James Miskelly. Photo: Dave Robichaud.

At the Annual General Meeting held on March 10, 2015, the Victoria Natural History Society was pleased to present Dr. Hans Roemer with the VNHS Distinguished Service Award. Hans has been an important part of VNHS for many years and is deserving of this award.

Shortly after coming from Germany, Hans started work on his PhD at UVic on the forest ecosystems of the Saanich Peninsula. He was one of the first to emphasize the importance of the unique environment of our Garry oak ecosystem. He worked for the Provincial Government, helping to develop their Ecological Reserves throughout B.C., and was also involved with the B.C. Conservation Data Centre. After retiring from the government, he is busier than ever with his ecological consulting company, but still takes the time to give talks and lead field trips for VNHS. No one is sure when he first became involved with the Society but it may have been through his close friendship with Adolf and Oluna Ceska. He was always there supporting them as they organized Botany Night for many years.

Once VNHS members realized what Hans knew about Garry oak ecosystems and forest ecology in general, he was a popular speaker and field trip leader. It got to the stage that we were hesitant to mention that Hans was leading a trip as we would get so many people out on a field trip that they would trample the environment they wanted to protect. Favourite field trips included those to the Ecological Reserve at Mount Tzouhalem and also to local parks such as Mill Hill and Thetis Lake Park. Hans had worked documenting a

number of rare plants on Mill Hill, but on field trips he was careful so that people would not end up loving them to death. Just this past year, he shared this area with the participants of the BC Nature Conference. A favourite field trip that we still convince him to do is to visit the Big Trees in the forest at Royal Roads. He has the background to teach us so much about forest ecology in that setting so close to home. He has also taken us to Eagle Heights, an area above Shawnigan Lake, to show us the native grasses that struggle to survive. He says this is the best example of our native grasses and warns us that we must work harder to get protection for this area. He has done an entire weekend's workshop on native grasses, in cooperation with the Native Plant Society of BC. Several VNHS members attended.

Hans has been honoured to have one of our native grasses named after him, *Festuca roemerii*. Just recently at Botany Night, he showed us another of his passions—the alpine plants that we rarely see. He has produced a pamphlet and co-authored a book on alpine plants for us to enjoy. He is a strong hiker who captures images from those high places that many of us cannot reach.

Hans is very modest and manages to get along with everyone, despite treading on controversial issues related to protecting plants and their habitat. He is a true mentor to many plant enthusiasts in the Society. Whether he is speaking to a casual observer or a professional botanist, he is always generous with his time. His gentle humour, patience and vast knowledge make him a highly effective teacher and a real treasure in the botanical community. We also benefit from the excellent plant lists he has provided for areas where he has taken us. They include the Olympics, Mount Washington and San Juan Ridge.

He stretches himself to give talks and do field trips for other like-minded organizations, such as the Native Plant Groups, the Botany BC annual gatherings and the yearly Metchosin BioBlitz. We are lucky to have such an eminent botanist who gives so freely of his time.

With his wife Heidi, he works at preserving the beautiful Garry oak habitat on his five-acre property, but he also grows vegetables and exquisite rock and alpine plants, including many bulbs from seed. He also opens his garden for us to enjoy on occasion.

As a true naturalist, he is still interested in learning more about this natural world. He enjoyed studying sphagnum mosses this year when we had an expert visiting. He is also learning more about fungi from Adolf and Oluna. And occasionally, he even checks out a few birds as he has been interested in them since his youth. VNHS is fortunate to have him as a member. Congratulations, Hans!

How to Make the Most of Valentine's Day

By Alan MacLeod

Photos by author

Both the weatherman and the birds cooperated in the 18th annual VNHS Valentine Couples Birdathon, February 14. Ten birder couples decided that getting out in the pre-dawn hours of a winter day was a better bet than lolling abed with one's valentine.

The Valentine Birdathon is a competition, albeit a very amiable one. The principal point of the exercise is to get outdoors with one's partner and try to find a greater number of bird species than any other couple. That's the main objective but it needn't be the only one. Some couples seek simply to build their birding skills or set a personal best. Other folks like the idea of leaving the family car parked in the driveway while they walk or bike their way to glory. They know they aren't going to win—they can't win against competition that is both talented and motorized—but there is gratification to be had finding every bird in their neighbourhood or in covering every nook of a limited patch of ground.

Participants gather afterwards at Swan Lake Nature Centre to swap war stories, reveling in their best finds, lamenting the 'easy' birds that somehow escaped their notice. The event organizers have experienced a good many of these birdathons but their verdict is that none of the preceding counts rank ahead of this one for the fun and good-natured competition it generated.

The winners—for the second time—were **Mike and Joanna Preston**. They tallied 88 species for their morning effort, the third-highest winning total ever. Mike and Joanna had a long list of highlights—Gadwall at Charlton Pond, Mourning Dove on Burnside Road, two Northern Harriers at Martindale Flats, et al.—but the star attraction

was likely the Swamp Sparrow they found at Roy Road in the margins of Interurban Flats. So, for a second time, the Prestons will see their names engraved on the Anderson Trophy (which features Jerry Anderson's fine carving of a pair of snuggling Mourning Doves).

Four couples listed at least 75 species in their effort. The second-place finishers were first-time participants, **Brian Starzomski and Aimee Pelletier**, with 82 species. Aimee and Brian highlighted their Western Grebe at Ross Bay, Ancient Murrelet at Clover Point and a gang of Western Meadowlarks at Puckle Road as some of their best birds.

Daniel and Susan Donnecke finished third with 79 species. Here is a measure of the birding talent on display in this edition of the valentine event: 79 would have been good enough for first place in nine of the previous 17 counts.

continued on page 8



(left)
Anderson
Trophy
winners
Mike and
Joanna
Preston;
(below)
2015 VNHS
Valentine
Couples
Birdathon
participants.



As for highlights, the Donneckes celebrated the four Snow Geese and eight White-fronts they found on the Victoria Golf Course, and the Merlin they spotted while 'on the road', but their truly remarkable sighting was of 25 Red-throated Loons in a group at Esquimalt Lagoon.

Apart from all the glory arising from their success, the top couples collect worthy prizes too. Don Wuest of Wild Birds Unlimited, 3631 Shelbourne Street, continues to be the Birdathon's enthusiastic and generous sponsor. Don donated nine specialty mugs, all bearing the handiwork of bird photographer Stuart Clark of Shawnigan Lake: the winners get four mugs, with three and two going to the second and third-place finishers respectively.

Liam Merrick and Kara Delbrouck listed 75 species in their second valentine effort, including Great-horned Owl, Snow Goose, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Northern Shrike. Agnes and David Lynn, winners in 2011 and 2013, had another good outing with 70 species, including two Virginia Rails, at Hector Road and Panama Flats.

Andrew and Gail Harcombe reported 68 species, a commendable total given that most of their effort was on foot. The Harcombes listed three falcon species as a highlight, including Peregrine from their Central Saanich front yard. Two couples tied at 61: **Jenny Clark and Ken Walker** and **Jeannie and Jim Cosgrove**. Focused on perfecting their birdathon tactics, both couples were happy with substantially improved results.

Due to their transportation choices, the final two couples were no threat to claim the Anderson Trophy, but both were pleased with what they managed without burning fossil fuel. **Mike and Barb McGrenere** walked from their Cadboro Bay neighbourhood to the nature centre and listed 60 species for their effort. The Birdathon organizers, **Alan MacLeod and Jan Brown** rode their bicycles around their James Bay/Fairfield neighbourhood, their day list falling one short of the McGreneres, at 59 species.

The 2015 valentine birders listed 114 species in all. Contemplating the 'good' birds seen on a Valentine count is entertaining but the same applies to examining the birds that were missed. Ring-necked Pheasant is probably extirpated from our checklist area, and perhaps it is not all that remarkable that Canvasback, Turkey Vulture, and Northern Pygmy-owl were all missed in the February 14 count, but who would have imagined ahead of time that ten pairs of skilled birders could spend a half-day in the field in mid-February and not see a single Sharp-shinned Hawk, Surfbird, Sanderling, or Thayer's Gull?

Despite the misses, the 2015 Couples Birdathon delivered a generous portion of the fun veteran participants expect of this event, but it produces more than mere fun. Couples pay ten bucks for the privilege of sharing in the revelry and they are happy to pay: Birdathon proceeds go entirely toward supporting VNHS conservation efforts. Yes, the 2015 Valentine Couples Birdathon has come and gone, but if you want a piece of the action, there's always next year.

Neonicotinoids and Birds

By Jannaca Chick



Photo: Chantal Jacques

This past year there has been a lot in the news about the effects of neonicotinoids, particularly in relation to bees, but also to birds, as well as the environment. As I am interested in how these insecticides could affect birds, I contacted Alison Moran, who coordinates the Hummingbird Project at RPBO. She said that she often gets asked this question and directed me to a number of online resources. I thought it might be useful to outline how these pesticides work, why they are used, the effects on birds, and the basis of the current controversy.

What are Neonicotinoids?

Neonicotinoids, commonly called "neonics," are broad-spectrum systemic insecticides. They were first introduced in the 1990s in response to the widespread resistance of pests to older products, as well as associated health concerns. Neonicotinoids are now the most widely-used insecticides in the world, registered for use on hundreds of field crops in over 120 countries. They are coated on seeds, sprayed on plants and injected into trees. You may also use them regularly, since some, such as imadocloprid (Advantage®), are commonly used in treatments for pets to prevent fleas and lice.

How Neonics work

Neonicotinoids are neurotoxic for many invertebrates, meaning that they disrupt information flow down nerves and thus, have an impact on muscle coordination and spatial perception, such as the location of a food resource. As such, neonics can act directly and indirectly. They can act directly as toxins, affecting invertebrates such as plant predators, which eat coated seeds or plant tissues containing the insecticide. They can also affect organisms indirectly by altering prey availability.

Neonics are water-soluble, which causes them to break down more quickly than the older class of more recalcitrant

insecticides. It was expected that they would break down quickly; however, some environmentalists and scientists are concerned that studies show this class of pesticides is lasting longer than expected in the environment. They are worried about leaching and runoff potential, groundwater infiltration, and the possibility of longer-term direct and indirect effects on target and non-target species.

Neonicotinoids' toxicity to bees and other insects, as well as their effects on birds and the environment at large, has been much in the news this past year. Information from scientific studies and statistics on honey industry bee losses have led to a better understanding of observed, and potential, environmental effects. While these effects are being addressed generally by regulatory agencies and industry, responses by different countries (and even provinces of Canada) differ. For example, Ontario has decided to adopt a precautionary principle with respect to pollinator protection and is just bringing in new regulations that will dramatically reduce neonicotinoid use in that province.

Neonics and birds

Scientific literature identifies a number of environmental concerns for avian species. Although supposedly not an intended target of the insecticide, birds can be directly and indirectly affected by neonics (direct: toxicity from ingestion of coated seeds; indirect: reduced food availability for insectivores). Direct toxicity concerns differ depending on the sensitivity of a species and route of exposure. Concerns are highest for birds that are pollinators, seed eaters, insectivores, nectarivores, and those dependent on invertebrate prey.

Studies have shown that while neonicotinoids are commonly considered to be safer for mammals and birds than for insects, they can still be dangerous in high enough doses. In Canada, canola seeds, wheat, corn, soybeans, and even some fruits, vegetables and flower seeds are coated with neonics, which allows the them to be incorporated throughout the plants. These are of particular concern for seed-eating birds given the fact that only a small number of seeds need to be ingested to be harmful. According to a study published by Environment Canada researcher Pierre Mineau in 2013, "a single kernel of imidacloprid-treated corn can kill small and 'blue jay-sized birds,' and sicken larger ones".

For avian insectivores, the abundance and availability of food directly affects their habitat selection, reproductive success, and survival. Aerial insectivores as a group have been experiencing widespread population declines for the last few decades. Their dependence on emergent insects is well known. Since these pesticides persist in water and kill target and non-target species alike, there are fewer insects overall for birds to eat.

It should be noted that during breeding season even seed-eating birds become insectivores, and they feed insects to their young in nests. As planting season coincides with bird breeding season, there is an overall increased risk to birds.

Agricultural perspective

The concerns of farmers must also be recognized. They need to make a living and keep their costs down as their profit margins are small. They already deal with many factors, including variable weather patterns, complex pest management strategies, and changing prices on the open market. Farmers have turned to coated seeds because this use is targeted, and broadcast spraying of crops is not necessary, greatly reducing the amount of insecticide used. In addition, pre-treatment of seeds often does away with the need to till fields (tillage can adversely affect soil quality and structure, and can lead to increased land erosion and fertilizer use). If neonics are not used, it is possible that farmers will need to use more land for crops to get the same yield.

In addition to the environmental and economic considerations discussed above, there is also the issue of food security. Most of us are not growing food ourselves and thus, we rely on the output of farmers on a daily basis. This begs the question, "If neonicotinoids are banned, then with what will they be replaced?"

More on Neonics

Clearly, neonic use is a multi-faceted topic, with real concerns on all sides. Balancing the environmental costs and benefits of using these products with economics and food security is not a trivial task. However, it is one that regulatory agencies, science and the agriculture industry are trying to solve. There is now a quite a bit of information available on the subject of neonicotinoids. The following links should help you find out more about this topic.

The impact of neonicotinoids on birds:

http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/toxins/Neonic_FINAL.pdf

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/decline-in-birds-not-just-bees-linked-to-neonicotinoid-pesticides-1.2706542>

A CBC "Quirks and Quarks" interview with Dr. Christy Morrissey an ecotoxicologist at the University of Saskatchewan, who is currently investigating how neonics affect insects and birds in the prairies:

<http://www.cbc.ca/quirks/2014/10/04/2014-10-04-1/>

In Canada, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) is the agency that issues compliance standards and regulates the use of insecticides by farmers.

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/branch-dirgen/pmra-arla/index-eng.php>

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pest/index-eng.php>

Ontario is the first province to restrict use of neonics as of 2015.

<http://news.ontario.ca/ene/en/2015/03/reducing-neonicotinoid-pesticide-use-by-80-per-cent.html>

In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency's review of neonicotinoids is focused on the threat to insect pollinators (one third of the U.S. diet depends on insect pollinators):

http://www.epa.gov/oppfead1/cb/csb_page/updates/2015/alt-neonicotinoids.html

<http://www.epa.gov/opp00001/about/intheworks/ccd-european-ban.html>

A recent letter, January 2015, from the American Soybean Association to the EPA concerning the use of neonics in soybean agriculture:

<https://soygrowers.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/ASA-comments-neonicotinoid-seed-treatments-1-151.pdf>

Roads Kill Amphibians

By Adam Taylor, Executive Director,
Habitat Acquisition Trust, with files
from Paige Erickson-McGee



Rabbit. Squish. A couple of The Victoria Naturalist issues ago, I wrote about the problem of amphibians being squished under car tires around Greater Victoria. Since then, volunteers and biologists with HAT have surveyed a number of sites around Greater Victoria for signs of amphibian road kill—including those brought to our attention by readers of the Naturalist. Unfortunately, the results have been grim.

In March, adult amphibians, including Northern Pacific Treefrog, Roughskin Newt and salamanders, are returning to water from their forest foraging to breed. There are not as many amphibians on roads as there likely will be in late spring/early summer, but these adults are especially important, having already survived the dangers of life in the forest to adulthood. But before many of them make it to ponds to reproduce, they are encountering the unforgiving tires of passing cars.

The recipe for dead frogs, salamanders, and newts appears to be a combination of a road, a nearby wetland, and rain. When these conditions line up, it is very bad news for amphibians.

The worst site was a section of West Saanich Road by Red Barn Market. There, on a rainy night, it took six people two hours to count all the dead amphibians. The deadly total: 494 dead and another 44 intercepted when about to cross

the road. Most of them were Northern Pacific Treefrogs, but there were also Roughskin Newts and Wandering Salamanders. Other sites were not as deadly, but many hundreds of dead amphibians were recorded on other roads in Saanich and the Highlands.

There were some unusual results as well. Most notably, in several spots surveyors spotted Common Ensatina (salamanders) crossing the road. Ensatinas are rarely seen in the “wild” and many biologists and naturalists have never seen one (this author included). Apparently spring roadsides are the place to find them!

There is still lots to learn. We need to do more surveys, and, at the spots where amphibians are killed frequently, need to understand why they are crossing the road where they are (which sounds like the lead in to a joke, but I don’t have a punchline). Finally, we need to develop mitigation measures that will reduce the roadkill toll, and convince road managers to implement them. Culverts or tunnels may work in some places for instance.

A dedicated crew of volunteers have been immensely helpful in getting this project started, and we owe them a huge thanks for taking on an unpleasant and sometime gruesome task. If you want to support the project, either by volunteering or donating, please let us know. Contact HAT office by phone at 250-995-2428 or email hatmail@hat.bc.ca.

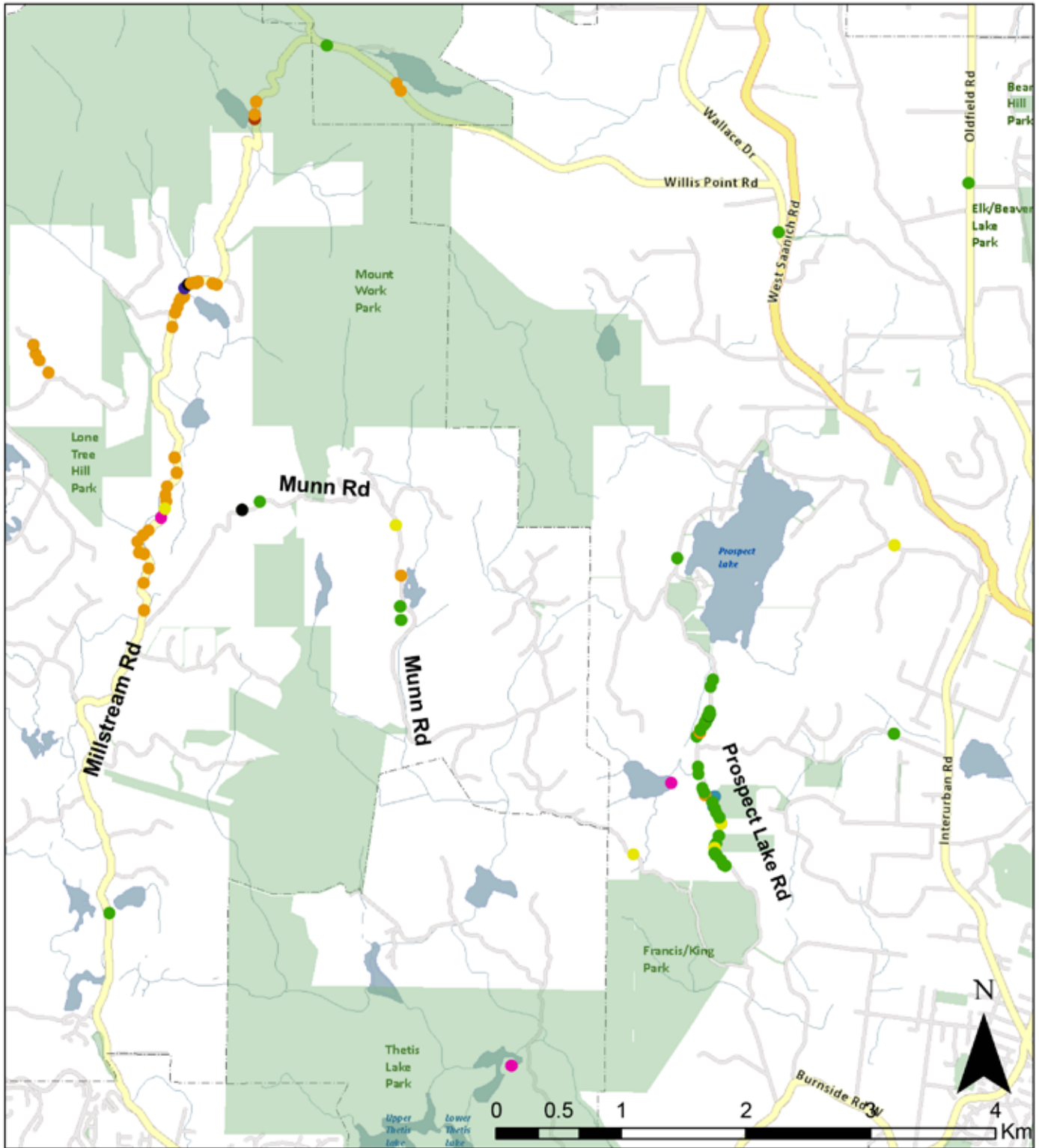
ANNE HANSEN—A Different Species of Wildlife Artist



www.oystercatchergirl.blogspot.com

anitabike@gmail.com

<https://picasaweb.google.com/anitabike>



Problem Areas on Roads of Amphibian Roadkill

Amphibians Surveys for Roadkill

Species Type

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| ● Long-toed Salamander | ● Bronze (Green) Frog |
| ● Wandering Salamander | ● Northern Pacific Treefrog (Chorus Frog) |
| ● Common Ensatina | ● Northern Red-legged Frog |
| | ● Roughskin Newt |
| | ● Species Unknown |



Largest Number of Anna's Hummingbirds in Canada?

By Agnes Lynn



I am often asked how I get so many hummers to come my yard. Well, my numbers are nothing compared to those seen in the accompanying picture. This photo was taken in Cordova Bay in late November, when we had temperatures that dipped to a few degrees below zero. The

two feeders were side-by-side and getting so busy that the home owners added the third feeder at a table nearby. Best guess is that there were about 50 hummers present! Cam Finlay thinks this is the largest number of Anna's Hummingbirds that have ever gathered together in all of Canada. The number of birds is not that uncommon with Rufous Hummingbirds during migration, but very unusual for Anna's.

So if you think you can top this, we want to hear from you! Regrettably these feeders are on an upper-storey balcony in a town house complex so it is not possible to have visitors, but if you want to have your own crowd at your house, follow the leader and consistently keep your feeders filled and thawed, and clean and pamper them in winter with a mix of 1 cup sugar (no more) to 3 cups of boiled water. Make sure you have thawed feeders readily available from very early in the morning (bring them in at night, alternate and put a fresh feeder out in the morning or provide a heat source to keep the feeders thawed). We suspect that other people nearby had feeders out regularly but did not keep them thawed on those cold mornings. The hummers do not usually have a very large territory where they feed.

We are amazed that the usual routine of one male hummer guarding each feeder has broken down in this case and the birds feed even three or more to a port. I am going to test a possible answer to this territorial breakdown by providing a 2-cup feeder with six ports rather than the traditional 1-cup feeder with just four ports and see if we get more multiple visits at that feeder. Perhaps a lone male can only control the smaller feeder but that's just a guess at this time. These same people have two other 1-cup feeders not that far away, and a lone male seems to be able to keep the crowds away from them.

I always believed that it was also the number of winter blooming flowers that kept the hummers here in winter, but these feeders do not have many flowering plants nearby (although the neighbourhood probably has a good selection of winter bloomers). It appears that in this area, the feeders are the primary food source.

Please don't try to attract hummingbirds in areas where the temperature dips below zero by more than a few degrees and only on a few days per year. The populations of Anna's Hummingbirds, according to the Christmas Bird Count numbers and other casual surveys (Swan Lake has done some), shows these tough little jewels are gradually increasing in number each year. They are staying around farther north on the island and also fanning out from Vancouver and the Sunshine Coast.

Amazing!



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New Life for Old Boots

Don't Throw Out Those Comfortable Boots with Worn Out Treads

By Michael Fox

Photo by author

When Toronto's last cobbler (a shoemaker/repairer for those who don't remember) closed shop more than ten years ago he was asked what matters most in footwear selection. His memorable response was "there are only two kinds of shoes: comfortable shoes and uncomfortable shoes".

Those of us who love to hike and enjoy VHNS field trips know full well that the latest features of new hiking boots do not trump this fundamental truth, and we dread the day we must discard our comfortable old boots because we no longer feel safe out on the trails.

Last summer my venerable Keens began to feel unsafe on steep uneven surfaces so I replaced them with the latest, lightest and safest of boots and immediately felt secure again on the trails. Through no fault of these technological marvels, I developed a condition requiring more space for my feet and wistfully thought of my roomy old boots.

An internet search yielded a zany sounding low-cost solution involving stainless steel sheet metal screws. With nothing to lose, I decided to give it a go and purchased twenty self-drilling #8 x 1/2" stainless steel sheet metal screws for about \$3. As shown in the photo, I chose and marked ten locations around the outer part of the sole where the tread depth was greatest. I drilled pilot holes 3/8" deep with a 3/32" drill bit. This procedure does not leave a visible hole but ensures that the screw goes in straight. If your remaining tread depth is insufficient for this size of screw,



you could use 3/8" screws. The screws were then driven in by hand with a hex driver until just snugly seated.

The whole procedure is easily accomplished and takes less than an hour. You'll be keen (pun intended) to try them out ASAP. I have hiked the hills and walked the streets for two months since the installation and have never felt so secure; it's almost like wearing crampons. You can see some wear on the outer heel screw but they should last a long time and could easily be replaced.

They'd be brutal on a hardwood floor, so do have gentler footwear to change into. Your friends may comment on the clicking sound on hard surfaces, but I find it reassuring.

Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 21 new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our Welcome column.

Kathryn Cook & Ken Andrews

Victoria
marine invertebrate biology, seabirds and songbirds, ethnobotany, and local plants

Michael Collett

Victoria
Nature: observation, restoration, photography and history

Janet Zaharia

Victoria
Entomology, native plants, geology

Alison & Andrew Prentice

North Saanich
all natural history including botany, birding & marine life

Oonagh Bolton

North Saanich
Birds

Angeleen Olson

Victoria
rockfish, seagrass, kelp forests

Cathryn Corbett & Derek Gale

Victoria
All aspects of ecology and natural history, marine and terrestrial

Freya Keddie

Victoria
Birds!

Charlene Wood

Victoria
Entomology, ecosystems, biodiversity conservation, rare species

Alison & Lonnie Paton

North Saanich
bird watching, plants

Victoria Natural History Society Tweets

@VictoriaNHS

By Leah Ramsay

We (VNHS) have had a Twitter account for just over three years, and I was asked to write a piece about this account and the medium of Twitter for those that haven't yet dived in.

What is Twitter?

It is a social media platform and news source. People write missives of 140 characters, post them and then these show up on their home page as well as the timelines of anyone following. Thanks to Adam Taylor and the beautiful new web page, you can also see @VictoriaNHS tweets scrolling there.

Why do we have a Twitter account?

It is another way to get the message out to everyone that we exist, but particularly to the younger demographic. It is a way to disseminate rare bird information and remind people about trips and meetings. Through tweets, I can pass on any local event information or items that may be of interest. When other members or members of the public feed me choice nuggets to pass on, I am very pleased! As one face of the society to the public, I do attempt to remain apolitical and non-confrontational. At the time of writing, there were 1489 people following @VictoriaNHS. This blows me away! About half are from the Victoria and island area, but there are others around the globe.

There are multitudinous resources to read on the internet or watch on YouTube about what Twitter is and how to get involved. Below is an overview and some tips to getting started. Remember that you can be as passive or as involved as you like with Twitter. The best way to figure it out is to just get on there and look and play around.

Here are three scenarios on twitterdom should you decide to explore.

1. You can view what is happening on the VNHS account at the webpage <https://twitter.com/VictoriaNHS>. Here you see the complete VNHS profile and can scroll through the tweets made on behalf of the society, plus ones that I have "retweeted". That means that there was something that another individual or group posted that I thought people would be interested in and I re-posted it to our followers. If someone is "following" us, it is this stream that they will see on their timeline.

2. Sign up and follow. This is easy and means that you can add other accounts that may interest you. It also means that

you can have a quick peak at a Twitter app on your smart phone without having to go to the web page. Follow the instructions at <https://about.twitter.com/what-is-twitter/story-of-a-tweet> and you will have an account. Search for Victoria NHS or @VictoriaNHS and click on the button that says "follow". Now every time that you sign in or look, you will see these wee missives on your timeline. You don't need to tweet anything yourself if you don't want to, or fill in any profile or put up a picture. You can just be. There are a number of members that fall into this category. And if you are going to do that—there are some other groups that you may as well follow at the same time.

A few other local natural history-type accounts are:

@HabitatAcqTrust (Habitat Acquisition Trust)
@SwanLakeNature (Swan Lake Nature House)
@GSNaturehouse (Goldstream Nature House)
@garryoakeco (Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team)
@crd_rare_bird (the automatic account that tweets oddities from the CRD reported to eBird)
@RoyalBCMuseum (you can figure that one out, right?)
@RockyPointBird (Rocky Point Bird Observatory)

There are local individuals such as Ann Nightingale, who is chronicling her Vancouver Island Big Year on Twitter: @lfanightingale, and Dave Ingram (@IslandNature) from the Comox Valley, who keeps us informed from that piece of the island. This list is too long for here!

There are many more – Bird Studies Canada, (@BirdStudiesCan), the Canadian Field Naturalist, (@CanFieldNat) or the Ecological Society of America natural history account, (@esanathist). There are dozens of accounts for entomologists, birders, geologists, astrophysicists, you name it! If there is someone that you are enjoying, look and see who they are following and you may discover other kindred spirits. Most conservation organizations have an account (e.g., Rainforest Alliance, WWF, Davis Suzuki Foundation), as do every newspaper, radio channel, most politicians, CBC shows and their hosts, e.g., our morning guy, Gregor Craigie, is quite active on Twitter... it goes on and on.

Look at the home page of what they tweet, decide if it is of interest and click the "follow" button. If after a while you find that you are not that interested in what they are posting, "unfollow"...easy.

3. You can tweet! Maybe you see something that moves you and you want to retweet it. Perhaps you want to respond to something that I or someone else has tweeted. Do it. Think of it as a conversation.

To directly respond, click on the left swooshing arrow below the tweet. You will have 140 characters to say what you want to say! If you want to re-tweet something, push on the circle of arrows. When you are writing a post, there is a little number on the lower right that tells you how many characters you have left and when it is red and a negative, start deleting characters. You can add photographs or links – both of which use up characters, but can make the post more interesting.

If you decide to be more active, it is a good idea to put up a profile, however brief so that others know the source, and a photo in the little box that starts out as an egg. It doesn't have to be of you, it can be anything!

There were a few things that it took me a while to figure out. If you start a tweet with the @ symbol, for example @LRRamsay, all of your followers will not see that tweet on their timeline, only if they also happen to be following @LRRamsay. RT = retweet; MT=modified tweet; HT = heard through. I will often RT something, but add a comment in front of it. You may also see things in a timeline from someone that you don't follow, because someone that you do follow has retweeted it.

Hashtags—the # is used to gather tweets of a similar vein or topic. Many natural history tweets have #NatHist. If you

search on that hashtag you will see a variety of tweets on that topic. They are often used for current events, be it an election or sporting event. When there is a conference, there will often be a hashtag assigned to it, and you can follow along with anyone who is live-tweeting, which means that you can follow along with the talks even though you can't be there in person. #yyj is sometimes used in tweets pertaining to Victoria.

DM is a direct message. This is an “offline” way of communicating but to do this, the two participants in the conversation have to be following each other.

When I started the twitter feed after there was a call for a volunteer, I also saw it as a way to learn about this new medium. Having a “purpose” to tweet was a great way to do it. I was caught off guard by how fun it has been, how much I have learned, and the connections I have made. There are conversations with other natural history groups, I have sent millipedes off to be identified by an expert in Arkansas, recruited a member, took part in the very fun #IAmANaturalist event, been retweeted by Margaret Atwood, identified birds and plants for people (with the help of @DavidFFraser!) and learned a whole lot about a swack of topics.

Varied Thrush—Species Profile

By Acacia Spencer-Hills

The Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) is a common winter resident in the Victoria area, and a welcome sight to any birder...because darn, they look sharp! A flash of orange and slate-grey is sure to brighten any dreary January day, and their clear and ringing song is hard to miss. The bird artist Louis Agassiz Fuertes beautifully described the call of the Varied Thrush “as perfectly the voice of the cool, dark peaceful solitude



Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*). Photo: Derrick Ditchburn

which the bird chooses for its home as could be imagined.” As they are most often found in the dark understory of humid evergreen and mixed forests, Fuertes’ description is very appropriate.

The Varied Thrush eats mainly insects and arthropods foraged from the leaf litter during the breeding season, and will switch to seeds and berries in the fall and winter. The female Varied Thrush gathers the materials for and builds the nest, with an outer layer of twigs, a middle layer of moss, mud or decomposing wood, and finally an inner layer of fine grass and moss. Clutch size is 1-6 eggs, with 1-2 broods produced per season.

During Rocky Point Bird Observatory’s Fall Migration Monitoring Program, at the Rocky Point site four new individual Varied Thrush were banded, with two being hatch-year birds (born in 2014) and two after hatch-year (born before 2014). At the Pedder Bay site, two new individuals were banded, both hatch-year birds.

Be sure to get out there and listen for that haunting call in the next few weeks, before they leave us for the breeding season!

Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Nd. *All About Birds: Varied Thrush* Available: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Varied_Thrush/id Accessed: April 1st, 2015.

Pomfret, B. 2014. *Migration Monitoring at Rocky Point Bird Observatory Fall 2014*. Available: http://rpbo.org/reports/migf_2014_rpad.pdf Accessed: April 1st, 2015.



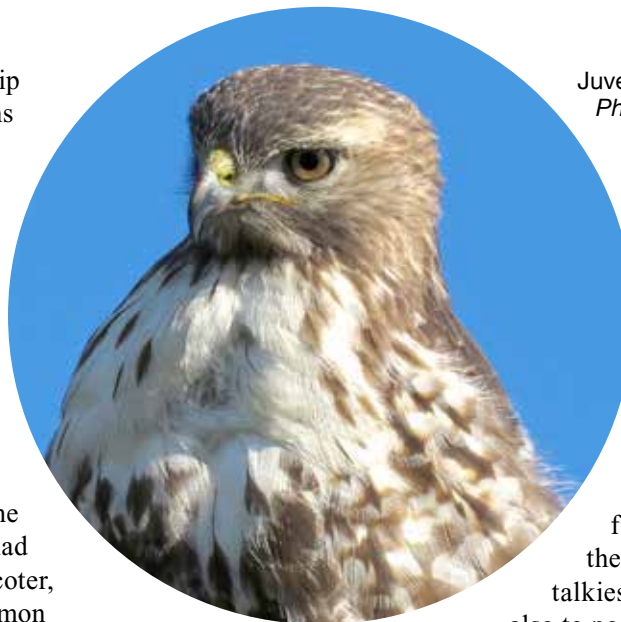
Boundary Bay and Reifel Bird Sanctuary

February 21, 2015

By Laura Gretzinger

I had wanted to attend this field trip for a very long time. I made plans to clear my schedule of family commitments, made sure I had wheels (so that there was room for me on the trip), and set my alarm clock. Actually there was no need for that - I get up early for so many of my kid's hockey practices!

Birding began right away—on the ferry deck as soon as it was light. I missed a few things due to a desperate need for coffee. By the time I ambled on deck, astute observers had seen Brant, Harlequin Duck, Surf Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, 35 Red-breasted Mergansers, 40 Dunlin, Marbled and Ancient murrelets, 25 Bonaparte's



Juvenile Red-tailed Hawk.

Photo: Sharon Godkin

Gulls, 80 Mew Gulls and 18 Glaucous-winged Gulls. I DID see the Pacific Loons and many Bald Eagles dotting the islands. And as we approached Tsawwassen, there were many Brant's, Pelagic, and Double-crested cormorants.

As soon as our parade of three vehicles disembarked from the ferry, we stopped along the causeway to obtain our walkie-talkies so that I wouldn't get lost, and also to point out birds along the way. At

the causeway we could see the Great Blue Heron rookery on the cliff, and many Bald Eagles soaring. On the shoreline, there were approximately 100 Brant and just as many American Wigeon.

The big excitement of the day was hearing about a Great Grey Owl at the Reifel Bird Sanctuary. Needless to say we headed there first, only to discover that it had not been sighted yet that day. What to do? We'd just go back later. But we did get a quick pit stop (there would be none later on) and a sneak peek at a Northern Saw-whet Owl under a cedar branch in the parking lot.

After a little debate we (Agnes) decided to try to track down a Western Scrub-Jay. It eluded us but there was always something else to see like five Mourning Dove, more Bald Eagles and sparrows.

Finally we were on our way to Boundary Bay and it was worth the wait. It is a wonderfully long ocean-side walk and it was heartening to know that it was preserved for all to enjoy. As we began to walk, we once again saw Northern Harriers and Rough-legged Hawks (seen previously that day during a few ditch pullovers). The harriers were swooping low and just perfectly for all those who dragged along their cameras. As you looked out to sea, there were over a hundred Bald Eagles dotting the shores or soaring overhead. Even a Western Meadowlark was spotted. But the excitement came further along when two Barn Swallows and two Tree Swallows were fluttering over the trail.

text continued on page 18

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Wood Duck. *Photo: Michael Newman*



(above) Black-capped Chickadee at Reifel Refuge. *Photo: Sharon Godkin;*
(left) Great-horned Owl.
Photo: Liam Singh



(above) Northern Shoveler. *Photo: Liam Singh;*
(right) Northern Harrier. *Photo: Kim Capson*



Boundary Bay and Reifel Bird Sanctuary

text continued from page 16

The day was coming near to the end and we flung ourselves back into our vehicles and headed back to Reifel. The Great Grey Owl had been found and we would have to wait in groups to approach it (Shhh!). Tucked into a tree, it gazed up and down and at us with bright yellow eyes. Time to view it was too short, but there were many more people clamouring to observe it. The sanctuary was bursting with families and nature enthusiasts. Well, that was done, now we could quickly explore the rest of the sanctuary and it did not disappoint. I was completely enthralled with the Black-crowned Night-Herons at the entrance. Along the trail we saw another Northern Saw-whet Owl and a Great Horned Owl, as well as the ever-present Black-capped Chickadee (my personal favourite for “Canada’s bird competition”). I’m not sure how I missed the 200 Snow Geese but I did (apparently you have to go to the top of the viewing tower). We had to hurry along now but I was one of the few that



Brown Creeper creeping! *Photo: Sharon Godkin*

quickly paid a visit to the Sandhill Cranes - but I didn’t get too close!

The official count of species for people in our car was 77, and I was amazed at the app that our species counter had on her phone. It had species lists, GPS, maps, life lists, etc. It was a wonderful day spent with a great group of people, and by the afternoon I was able to shed two of my five layers of clothing...then quickly put them back on as we approached the ferry with perfect timing (thanks again to Agnes). Come along next time, I’ll be driving!



Black-crowned Night Heron. *Photo: Kim Capson*

LETTERS

I would like to thank you for the Alice M. Hay Scholarship that I recently received. This scholarship is greatly appreciated, and will help me in my studies as a PhD student in Biology at the University of Victoria. My PhD research concerns the links between the diet, growth and ultimate survival of British Columbia salmon stocks. I am particularly interested in looking at how inter-annual differences in ocean conditions can affect shifts in diet of juvenile salmon.

I grew up on Vancouver Island, where yearly trips to salmon-spawning streams got me interested in the status and conservation of these species. After doing my undergraduate degree in Biology at the University of Victoria, an interesting opportunity opened up at the University of Victoria for me to pursue research on the ecology of salmon in British Columbia. The project was of particular interest to me as the research that I am performing can be applied to do forecasting of survival rates of different stocks. After my PhD, I ultimately hope to teach and perform research at a university.

Your bursary will be put to excellent use; bursaries and scholarships are very limited and I truly appreciate your support. Thank you again.

Sincerely,
Eric Hertz

.....
Thank you for your contribution towards another successful Sustainability Day!

Camosun Students for Environmental Awareness
.....

Student awards are a critical component of making UVic the institution it is as they allow us to attract the best and brightest students to our campus. For the students, an award is an obvious financial help, but it is also so much more. As Connor, a UVic Business student, says:

“The scholarship was much more than money: it was encouragement. Upon receiving my scholarship, I felt the wind at my back—knowing that there was someone out there who wanted me to strive for more, to learn with commitment and passion, truly gave me strength and courage to move forward with enthusiasm and excitement.”

On behalf of the entire UVic community, and for all of the students, past, present and future your award has touched or will touch, thank you. Your generosity is making a difference.

Sincerely,
Cory Rabourn
Donor Relations Manager



International Migratory Bird Days 2015

SATURDAY, MAY 9 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

BEAVER LAKE NATURE CENTRE at ELK/BEAVER
LAKE REGIONAL PARK

- Guided Bird Walks at 9:15 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.
- Bird Banding Demonstrations
- Informative Displays
from a Variety of Local Organizations
- Live Birds of Prey • Children's Activities



Jessica Baynton and friend, from The Raptors.

SUNDAY, MAY 10 at 9 a.m.

OUTERBRIDGE PARK

Meet at the parking lot off Royal Oak Drive
near Lochside School

- Guided Bird Walk • Big Sit Count Circle
- Live Birds of Prey Display
- Photography Contest



Photos: Daniel Donneck



BULLETIN BOARD

Camas Day

Saturday, May 2, 2015

24th Annual Camas Day! For information, check the Friends of Beacon Hill Park Society website <http://friendsofbeaconhillpark.ca>, email info@friendsofbeaconhillpark.ca, or call 250-592-6659.

International Migratory Bird Day

Saturday, May 9, 2015

VNHS is teaming up with CRD Parks and Rocky Point Bird Observatory to host IMBD 2015. This year's theme is "Restore Habitat, Restore Birds". The event will take place at the Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park Nature Centre (at the Beaver Lake Parking Lot), 9 a.m.–1 p.m. For more information, visit www.rpbo.org (see ad page 19).

Outerbridge Park Bird Walk

Sundays, May 10 & June 14, 2015

Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO) hosts bird walks at Outerbridge Park in Saanich on the 2nd Sunday of each month. The walks begin at 9 a.m. at the parking area off Royal Oak Drive. This is an easy walk and suitable for people with mobility concerns. On May 10, the day after International Migratory Bird Day, in addition to the regular guided walk, join us for a Big Day Count Circle, live birds of prey display, and more (see page 19).

Fort Rodd Hill BioBlitz

Friday & Saturday, May 22 & 23, 2015

Details at <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/bc/fortroddhill/activ/activ2015.aspx#Bioblitz>

Celebrate World Oceans Day with the Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre! Sunday, June 7, 2015

This free event takes place from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. in Beacon Park on the Sidney waterfront. Entertainment, food and an array of government, private and non-profit organizations hosting interactive and educational displays! For more information, visit www.oceandiscovery.ca

Metchosin BioBlitz

Friday & Saturday, June 12 & 13, 2015

This will be Metchosin's sixth BioBlitz—an intense 24-hour census of wildlife populations in a given area. On Saturday, June 13, diverse teams of taxonomic specialists will fan out over Metchosin to count, count, count. Members of the public are invited to join (you don't have to be an expert to be on the teams – you can learn as you go). Meet at the Mel Cooper cabin / Boys and Girls Club (3900 Metchosin Rd) at 8:30 a.m. and/or 1:00 p.m. Note the Birding group starts earlier at 6:00 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. (same location). Join us also on Friday night June 12 at 7:00 p.m. at the Metchosin Council Chambers (4450 Happy Valley Road behind the fire

hall) for slide presentations on Metchosin species. For further information and maps, see <http://metchosinbiodiversity.com> or contact Moralea Milne at moraleamilne@gmail.com or 250-478-3838.

Swan Lake Guided Bird Walks

Every Wednesday and Sunday at 9:00 a.m., bring your binoculars and walking shoes for this informal and informative walk around the lake area. Walks are generally led by Victoria Natural History Society members. Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary is at 3873 Swan Lake Rd, off Ralph St.

Call for Submissions —

Ecology of Vancouver Island's Lakes

Information on the ecology of local lakes is needed for an upcoming edition of the Secret Lakes of Southern Vancouver Island Guidebook. The new edition will cover the recreation, nature and local history of 100 lakes from Victoria to Port Renfrew and the Cowichan Valley. Help us make a better book for naturalists by contributing your observations, experiences and photographs. Contact Adam Ungstad at info@secretlakes.ca or visit www.secretlakes.ca.

Advance Notice for Hawk Watch

September 26, 2015

Join us for Hawk Watch and our annual member appreciation BBQ social at Aylard Farm in East Sooke Park. Members are welcome to a free smokie (veggie option available), beverage, cake, and camaraderie! To RSVP, email or phone Gail: 250-652-3508, g.harcombe@shaw.ca before September 18. Please specify number of smokies and whether regular or veggie. Don't forget your lawn chair!

LETTERS

Hi,

My name is Dianne Young. I am from Saskatchewan and recently made a trip to Victoria. Before I left home I joined your Nature Society. I thought it would be a good way to get some guided birding tours while I was there. And I was so right!

Thank you to all the members and guides who were so welcoming and helpful. I got photos of many bird "firsts" and once I go through them and load to them my blog, I may send you a link so perhaps some of your members could verify that I get the IDs right.

Victoria and area is beautiful! Thank you again. I'm already making plans to come back next year and will certainly be renewing my membership in your excellent organization.

Dianne Young
Martensville SK

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/website/index.php/calendar> and is updated regularly. PLEASE NOTE: EVENT DETAILS ARE ACCURATE AT TIME OF PUBLICATION BUT CHECK THE WEBSITE FOR ANY CHANGES OR ADDITIONS.

Remember that if you want to do a talk or know someone who might, please contact one of the presentation night coordinators. If you have an idea for a field trip or wish to volunteer as a leader, please contact any board member—contact information on page 2. Many of you do interesting things either for fun or for work, and it would be great to share!

Codes for Field Trip Difficulty Levels: LEVEL 1—Easy walking, mostly level paths. LEVEL 2—Paths can be narrow with uneven terrain. LEVEL 3—Obstacles in paths or steeper grades, requiring agility. LEVEL 4—Very steep, insecure footing, or longer hikes requiring good physical condition. **Please—no pets on VNHS field trips.**

NB. While evening presentations are open to the public, field trips are designed for members. Guests may join if invited by members for up to three trips, after which they are expected to join the Society.

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDING

Meets every Tuesday at the foot of Bowker Ave on the waterfront (off Beach Drive) at 9:00 a.m., rain or shine. Birding activities take place at various locations around Greater Victoria. For more information call Bill Dancer at 250-721-5273. Novice and experienced VNHS members all welcome. Non-members can participate up to three times, after which they are expected to join the Society.

SATURDAY MORNING BIRDING

Meets every Saturday morning, usually between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m., rain or shine. Check the Calendar page of the VNHS website (<http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/website/index.php/calendar>) on the Thursday/Friday before to find out the week's location. Novice and experienced VNHS members all welcome. Non-members can participate up to three times, after which they are expected to join the Society. For more details, contact Rick Schortinghuis at 250-885-2454 or Agnes Lynn at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634.

MAY

Saturday, May 2

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

24th Annual Camas Day at Beacon Hill Park

This annual event will include guided walks about birds, wildflowers, mosses, archaeology and First Nations. The walks are about 1–2 hours each. Walks start from the flag pole atop Beacon Hill. Check <http://friendsofbeaconhillpark.ca> closer to the date. Jointly sponsored by VNHS and Friends of Beacon Hill Park Society. Contact Roy at (250) 380-5023 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday May 3

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Monthly Butterfly Outing

Join Aziza Cooper on our monthly Butterfly outing. This event is weather dependent. It needs to be warm and sunny to make it worthwhile. We will meet near the top of Mount Tolmie (off Cedar Hill Cross Rd) and decide where to go from there. Meet at 1:00 p.m. at the main parking lot just north of the summit. Contact Aziza at 250-516-7703 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Saturday, May 9

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Early Birding Walk on International Migratory Bird Day

The VNHS Saturday Birding Group will be joining in with the International Migratory Bird Day events planned for this day at Beaver Lake. We will check out the trails and the lakeshore to see what migrants have joined the resident birds in this productive area. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the main parking lot at Beaver Lake. Your leader will be Mike McGrenere. 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. Afterwards you may wish to join in the other drop-in events planned for the day from 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. See more details elsewhere in the Naturalist or on the VNHS web site. Contact Rick at 250-885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information on this early bird tour.

Sunday, May 10

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Scramble up the Back of Mount Douglas

Join us in birding and botanizing Mount Douglas. If the weather is sunny, it is also a great spot for butterflies. We should get a good number of warblers. Also Western Tanager, House Wren and

Chipping Sparrow are likely. The late wildflowers such as wooly sunflower (*Eriophyllum lanatum*) may 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 8:00 a.m. at the new parking lot to the right off Blenkinsop Rd just north of Lohbrunner Road on the left. Contact Rick at 250-885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Saturday, May 16

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Birding the Power Line off 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 7:30 a.m. Contact Rick at 250-885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Sunday, May 17

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Beach Walk at Macaulay Point

In celebration of the 125th anniversary of the first field trips organized by the Natural History Society of British Columbia, the Royal BC Museum in partnership with VNHS, is leading a series of nature walks (Field Trippers - 125 years and Counting). Join past and present RBCM curatorial staff, as we travel with and among the wondrous natural history curiosities found along our shoreline. Come dressed in your favourite 1890s fashion (dress code not required). Meet at 9:00 a.m. at base of boat ramp (parking located off Munro St. near Lampson St.). Contact Melissa at 250-383-2836 for more information or visit <http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/events/field-trippers-125-years-and-counting-2/>

Monday, May 18

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

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 lunch. Contact Rick at 250-885-2454 or email Agnes at thelynns @ shaw.ca for more information.

Friday, May 22

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birding Mount Newton

Join us on this leisurely loop on the south side of Mount Newton looking for 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 7:30 a.m. Contact Rick at 250-885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Sunday, May 24

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Salt Spring Island Botanical Adventure

We enjoy the local birds but sometimes it is nice to just venture a bit farther afield to see what hangs out on our nearby Gulf Islands. Karen Ferguson, a local resident on Salt Spring, will join us. Some of you will know Karen from her reports to BCVIBIRDS or her work with the Salt Spring Island Conservancy so it will be a treat to check out some of her favorite haunts. It is a bit late for most of the wildflowers but we'll keep an eye out for them as well. Please note some trails may be steep and challenging but will be taken at a leisurely pace to enjoy the habitat. We will carpool to catch the 9:00 a.m. ferry, returning around supper time. Participants will be expected to share in transportation expenses. Bring a lunch and drinks. You must register for this event to assist in planning. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 to register or for more information.

Saturday, May 30

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Observatory Hill (Little Saanich Mountain) Birding Walk

Join us on a birding walk up and around Little Saanich Mountain. Flycatchers, Western Tanagers, House Wrens and a variety of woodpeckers are some of the birds we might find. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the bottom of the road leading up the mountain (5071 West Saanich Road). Contact Rick at 250-885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Sunday May 31

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

Birding the Power Lines and the 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 place to hear or see most of our warblers, vireos and flycatchers. 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 Munn Road. Contact Rick at 250-885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

JUNE

Saturday, June 6

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. As well as beat the bushes for all the fresh migrants, we will scan the ocean and the shoreline. We never know what might be out there. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Helmcken Park & Ride to car-pool. Bring a lunch. Contact Rick at 250-885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Sunday, June 7

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Duncan Area Butterflies & Birds

For our monthly butterfly outing, we will venture farther afield to the Duncan area this time and combine it with some birding. The morning will mostly be spent birding, starting with an enjoyable walk along the productive Dock Rd and then we will try to find a nearby Red-eyed Vireo plus other warblers, vireos and flycatchers. Bring a lunch and we will spend the afternoon searching for the amazing array of butterflies in this area. It needs to be sunny to make this part worthwhile. Otherwise we'll continue birding in other areas nearby. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Helmcken Park & Ride to car-pool or at 7:45 a.m. at Cowichan Bay Dock Road (north of the intersection of Cowichan Bay Road and Tzouhalem Road). Contact Aziza at 250-516-7703 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Saturday, June 13

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Early Birding Walk at Metchosin BioBlitz

The VNHS Saturday Birding Group will be joining the Birding segment of the Metchosin BioBlitz this week. Meet at the Mel Cooper cabin (3900 Metchosin Rd) at 7:30 a.m. You will fan out with a group from there for the morning. You may also wish to continue in the afternoon starting about 1:00 p.m. Or perhaps you might wish to take part with another segment such as with the botanists, mycologists or any of the other specialty groups. See more details about the Metchosin BioBlitz in the Bulletin Board section as well as on the website <http://metchosindiversity.com>. Contact Ann Nightingale at motmot at shaw.ca or 250-514-6450 for more information about the birding.

Saturday, June 13

NON-VNHS FIELD TRIP

Boat trip up Haro Strait

The Pender Island Field Naturalists have planned a chartered boat trip up Haro Strait from the Victoria Inner Harbour as far as the seabird colony on Mandarte Island, leaving Victoria around 9.30 a.m. Enroute we will be watching for a variety of birds on and around the various islets. With luck, some marine mammals could also be seen. Our boat, the Fantasea, is well equipped, sheltered, has good viewing and a marine toilet. Godfrey, our captain, is excellent and is well-experienced in hosting naturalist outings. Leaders for this trip are Gerry McKeating and Stuart Scholefield, both experienced naturalists. Numbers are limited to 18 plus the 2 leaders. Several spaces remain and we invite VNHS members to participate. Based on non-profit but cost recovery, the cost per person is \$80. For further information or registration, email pifn@shaw.ca.

Sunday, June 14

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Harewood Plains & Notch Hill

We plan to combine two trips in one by visiting Notch Hill in Nanoose Bay followed by Harewood Plains near Nanaimo. We visited both these areas years back but it is time for a return visit. We hope to be joined by some up-island members. When we have been to Notch Hill, the woods have been filled with the chatter of

warblers and such so the steep hill will not be so bad with frequent stops to search out the birds. It's late for most of the wildflowers but we can still enjoy seeing part of the largest population of cacti on the BC coast and may see some of the rarer plants such as a couple of uncommon onions and some rare plants that may be found in the vernal pools that should have dried up by now. Bring a lunch so we can minimize our stops. In the afternoon, we will visit Harewood Plains, an area on the south edge of Nanaimo that is badly damaged by ATVs and dirt bikes but contains an amazing selection of wildflowers that may still be in bloom due to the wet soils. Nanaimo City is trying to get some form of protection for the area but I am not certain of current progress although they now call the rare bog bird's-foot trefoil (*Lotus pinnatus*) the city's official flower emblem. The potential of seeing this in bloom was how the date for this trip was chosen so we'll just have to cross our fingers. Meet at Helmcken Park & Ride at 7:00 a.m. to car-pool. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 to register or for more information.

Sunday, June 14

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Beach Seine at Willows Beach

In celebration of the 125th anniversary of the first field trips organized by the Natural History Society of British Columbia, the Royal BC Museum in partnership with VNHS, is leading a series of nature walks (Field Trippers - 125 years and Counting). Join past and present RBCM curatorial staff, as we travel with and among the wondrous natural history curiosities found in the shallows along our shoreline. Come dressed in your favourite 1890s fashion (dress code not required). Meet at 9:00 a.m. at north end of Willows Beach (parking located off Beach Dr. on Esplanade). Contact Melissa at 250-383-2836 for more information or visit <http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/events/field-trippers-125-years-and-counting-3/>

Sunday, June 21

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Saanichton Spit—a Rare Coastal Dune Ecosystem

This spit is one of the best examples of an intact dune system in the province. Despite it being an excellent birding spot, we will concentrate this visit on the plants that are especially adapted to grow in this fragile environment. Also, maybe we'll see the rare Sand Verbena Moth while we are examining the patches of yellow sand verbena that the moth must have to survive. We hope to have Bryce Kendrick with us. He is well known for his many talents but he still takes the time to be part of a team of volunteers who has been working to remove the invasive species such as Scotch broom from this site. Not long ago, there was a significant project conducted to investigate the current status of the spit and determine guidelines as to how to best protect the natural environment as well as respect the Tsawout Nations traditional use of this land. You might wish to do some preliminary reading about this project (7.3MB PDF) at <http://tsawout.com/files/Lands/TIXEN%20-%20Rare%20plant%20report.pdf> We will meet at 10:00 a.m. Out of respect for the Tsawout Nations whose lands we must go through to reach the spit, contact Agnes for access details. We will carpool to the site. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for this information closer to the date.

Restore Habitat,



YARDS	MANGROVES	TROPICAL FORESTS	WETLANDS	GRASSLANDS
				
Rufous Hummingbird	Yellow Warbler	Blue-crowned Motmot Black-and-white Warbler	Northern Pintail Northern Harrier	Eastern Meadowlark

Restore Birds

**INTERNATIONAL
2015 MIGRATORY
BIRD DAY**

Join us at Elk/Beaver Lake for International Migratory Bird Day, Saturday, May 9, 2015 (see ad page 19).