The Victoria NATURALIST

SEPTEMBER
OCTOBER
2015
VOL 72.2

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The Victoria NATURALIST

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

ISSN 0049—612X Printed in Canada

Editor: Gail Harcombe 250-652-3508
Production: Patrice Snopkowski, CGD
Distribution: Ken Sohm, Laura Gretzinger
Printing: Fotoprint 250-382-8218

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

SUBMISSIONS

Deadline for next issue: **October 1, 2015**

Send to: Gail Harcombe
7368 Veyaness Road, Saanichton BC V8M 1M3
Phone: 250-652-3508 e-mail: publications@naturevictoria.ca
[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.

7.5" (2 columns) wide 2250 x 1600 pixels
3.5" (1 column) wide 1050 x 800 pixels

If you supply hardcopies, once scanned and input, hardcopy materials will be returned to the sender if a stamped, self-addressed envelope is included with the material.

ADVERTISING GUIDELINES

We do our best to ensure your ad is produced accurately. Although hardcopy is accepted, we prefer print-ready high resolution digital files (PDF) as this decreases the risk of errors in reproduction of the material. Should we make an error, please contact us and a correction can be printed in the next issue. A charge is levied for typesetting. Minor alterations to existing ads cost $10.00. Add $15 per photo. Advertising fees are due and payable when copy is submitted. Please submit a cheque payable to *The Victoria Natural History Society*.

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

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

Submit advertising to:
publications@naturevictoria.ca
or phone: Gail Harcombe 250-652-3508
Thank you for your patronage.

Ask about receiving the magazine in a digital format to see the colour version.
Contact: dccopley@telus.net

Contents

Cover Photo: Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*). *Photo:* Jonathan Moran

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

When I was putting together the content for this issue, at first I thought it might be almost exclusively about birds or bird-related topics, but as more submissions arrived, including some great photos, it began to include items about butterflies, plants, landscapes and don't forget reptiles! I hope you enjoy the diversity of articles, ranging from simple to somewhat technical.

Speaking of birds—the article about stable isotopes is quite fascinating, and just the other day, I read a related article (Bird Studies Canada) about how birds tagged in Colombia passed through Indiana and Ohio on their northbound spring migration, and were detected by MOTUS stations operated by researchers from Texas Tech University and Southern Illinois University. Apparently one of the Gray-cheeked Thrushes detected travelled over 3200 km from Colombia to Indiana in just 3.3 days, meaning it flew an average of 986 km a day! How cool is that! Takes almost that long in an airplane (feels like it, anyway).

And still on birds—I spent 10 days in southern England this July (Cambridge and Worcester), and although it was not a birding trip (I was there with a choir, and yes, we did go punting on the River Cam in Cambridge), I managed some morning walks along rivers and near meadows and one day of hill-walking. Birds were not quite as plentiful (or not as visible) as I had hoped, but I did manage to see a fair number of species not seen here, including the English Robin, so different than ours, Jackdaws, and a flock of Long-tailed Tits (in the trees on the riverbank). I even managed to get my non-birder friends to start looking for birds, and when they started seeing ones like the big Buzzards on telephone poles, they agreed that birding (and stopping to look at plants and butterflies) can add another dimension to trips, even those that are in largely urban and/or altered areas. I am hoping that my enthusiasm will have rubbed off a bit and that they will keep their eyes open for the wonders of nature both at home and when they travel.

I hope you have all had a good summer, whether travelling or sticking closer to home, and that you look forward, as I do, with renewed energy and interest, to the start of our evening presentations. An abundance of very varied field trips is also on offer—hope to see you at one or more!

Gail Harcombe

P.S. Don't forget to join the fun at the annual BBQ at Hawk Watch in September (see ad p. 4).

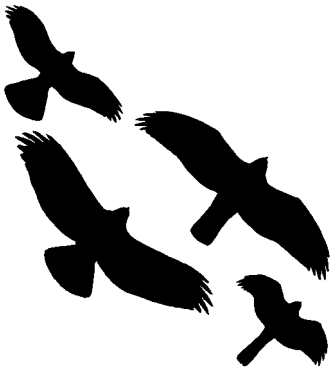
Gnomes in the Forest

By Nicole Chatel

Hemitomes congestum, the gnome plant or cone plant, is one of the rarest of the monotropoids (Family Ericaceae – previously Monotropaceae)—the group that includes Indian Pipe and the Snow Plant. You're lucky to see *Hemitomes* as it is quite rare... and small—only three or four cm tall when in flower.

This unusual small, fleshy, stemless perennial plant is native to the west coast of North America, from British Columbia to California, where it grows in the leaf litter of dense, dark forests. Lacking the green of chlorophyll, it can be white, yellowish, or reddish-pink in color. Little is known about the life cycle of the plant due to its rarity, but it is thought to obtain its nutrients by parasitizing fungi. It grows from a rhizome with fragile roots and is covered in sparse scales that are rudimentary leaves. The flowers (solitary to densely-bunched) that emerge from the soil on a thick stalk have ragged yellowish or pinkish petals and contain hairs and large, rounded yellow stigmas. The fruit is a fleshy white berry.

Gnome plant or cone plant (*Hemitomes congestum*) in the Sooke Hills near Bert Lake on June 7, 2015. *Photo:* Nicole Chatel



VNHS
September Social

Saturday, September 26, 3:00 p.m.
following Hawk Watch

You are invited!

Join CRD Parks and the Victoria Natural History Society for Hawk Watch and then join your fellow VNHS members for a BBQ get-together at Aylard Farm in East Sooke Park. Members are welcome to a free smokie (veggie option available), beverage, cake, and camaraderie! Bring a lawn chair.

To RSVP, email or phone Gail: 250-652-3508, g.harcombe@shaw.ca
before September 16, 2015

A reply is only necessary if you plan to come.
Please specify number of smokies and whether regular or veggie.

Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

By Acacia Spencer-Hills, RPBO

As the proverbial "bobble-heads" of the avian world, the Belted Kingfisher is certainly recognizable by its top-heavy physique. A member of the *Megaceryle*, or "crested" kingfisher genus, the Belted Kingfisher's aggressive territorial rattle call is a hallmark noise (aside from gull screech) at any marina, and watching them dive underwater for prey is an exciting sight on any given day.

Belted Kingfishers get their common name from the rusty-red band of feathers located on bellies of females of this species, which is an exception to the rule in the avian world since it's usually the male which has extra colour adornments. There are varying theories for why this is, ranging from habitat camouflaging factors to the need for quick mate/sex identification in this territorial species.

Adding to their uniqueness, these slate-blue birds build nest burrows in dirt banks near water, with the males and females alternating digging to angle the tunnels upwards; this is thought to keep water from entering the nest cavity at high tide by creating an air bubble. As well, these birds (and all kingfishers in general) have syndactylous toes, meaning the third and fourth toes are fused together which helps with the burrowing process.

At Rocky Point Bird Observatory in 2014, one juvenile Belted Kingfisher was banded at the Pedder Bay site, and in 2013 four were banded there. The Pedder Bay site includes a section of estuary and a marina (two favoured kingfisher habitats) in its direct vicinity, which provides a unique opportunity to passively capture these fantastic birds for banding.

Kek-kek-kek chrrrrrrrr!

Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Nd. All About Birds: Belted Kingfisher. Available: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Belted_Kingfisher/id Accessed: July 31, 2015.

Richie, D. 2011. Bird Watching Daily. Nd. Special Features: Mysteries of the kingfisher's belt. Available: http://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/featured-stories/mysteries-of-the-kingfishers-belt/ Accessed: July 31, 2015.

Pomfret, B. 2014. Migration Monitoring at Rocky Point Bird Observatory Fall 2014. Available: http://rpbo.org/reports/migf_2014_rpad.pdf Accessed: July 31, 2015.

Photos: Mike Yip

Butterflies and Mt. Washington

By Val George
Photos by Author

Bill Katz photographing a butterfly on Mt. Washington.

Mosquitoes, wasps and other annoying, conspicuous insects tend to get swatted by outdoors people; butterflies are also, in the right conditions, very obvious when we're out in the field but, in contrast, are appreciated for their beautiful colours and graceful behaviour. Until recently, except for lepidopterists, most naturalists only casually noted butterflies when pursuing their other outdoors interests, usually not even wanting to know the species, let alone anything about their lifestyles or behaviours.

This has changed in recent years. Birders, botanists and other naturalists are now much more likely to want to identify the butterflies they see and will want answers to such questions as: why are butterflies attracted to specific plants (because most of their caterpillars can only feed on certain species); or why do they seem to fly continuously with no apparent purpose (to look for the plants on which to lay their eggs in the case of the females, or to look for the females in the case of males). Here in the Victoria area, some specific activities are organized by the Victoria Natural History Society to accommodate this increased interest.

Monthly butterfly counts for the Victoria area have been conducted from April to September for a number of years. Until two years ago, the counts were coordinated by James Miskelly (and prior to him Jeff Gaskin); this task has now been taken over by Aziza Cooper. The results are summarized at the end of the butterfly season, usually about September, because butterflies need warm weather to be active.

The butterfly counts are done during a specific week in the month, but sightings at any time can be recorded on the VNHS's Invertebrate Alert (managed by Jeremy Tatum). The Alert is a record for all invertebrates, but butterflies feature prominently in it. As well as simply recording sightings, with current capabilities of photographic equipment used by naturalists, most observers are able to post photos. This provides positive proof for species identification, but is also an invaluable tool for naturalists wanting to improve their identification skills.

Another VNHS activity that has generated increased interest in butterflies is the monthly butterfly walks that were started last year. Aziza also organizes and leads these. They're held the first Sunday of the month. The group meets at the summit of Mt. Tolmie and, after surveying the immediate area (which, incidentally, is one of the good areas for butterflies in the Victoria region), decides where to go for the remainder of the walk. Organizing these walks is somewhat more challenging than bird or botany trips because they are very weather-dependent. Butterflies are cold-blooded so they need to warm up before they become active—warm, sunny days are therefore needed for the monthly walks to be worthwhile.

This year it was decided that some butterfly searches further afield might be of interest to VNHS members, since many of the Vancouver Island species are not commonly

found in the Victoria area. About 60 species are on the Vancouver Island checklist, but only about half of these can reasonably be expected to be seen around Victoria. To find the others, trips to other parts of the Island are necessary. So on June 20, ten of us set out for Mt. Washington, a location known to be productive for several of the species not found in the Victoria area.

We started early in the morning with great expectations. The weather was warm and sunny - ideal conditions. Hopes remained high until we sighted our destination with clouds on the upper levels of the mountain. By the time we arrived at our starting point, the ski lodge, the weather was decidedly inauspicious, to put it mildly. It was clouded over and we were even getting sprinklings of rain; the cool temperature made some of us don the extra clothing we'd luckily brought. We wondered whether we were going to see any butterflies at all.

Two of our group were already on the hill when the majority of us arrived. They had found an Anna's Blue (*Plebejus anna*) near the lodge. With the cool temperature, we thought that the butterfly might not be going anywhere so we went to look for it. Sure enough, it was settled on the same flower where it was originally seen. This was one of the species we were looking for because we don't get Anna's Blues in the Victoria area.

The cool conditions did have some positive features because the insect didn't move, even on close approach, affording us great photographic opportunities. This advantage played in our favour several more times during the day and with other species.

As mentioned already, warm, sunny weather causes butterflies to move around, making them easy to find. Butterfly experts can usually identify them as they fly, but amateurs often have to see them settled to examine them with binoculars and, ideally, get a decent photo. This is especially true for two of the types of butterflies we were specifically looking for on Mt. Washington - the small Blues (Subfamily Polyommatinae), the Anna's being an example, and Fritillaries (Subfamily Heliconiinae).

Anna's Blue (*Plebejus anna*).

Western Meadow Fritillary (*Boloria epithore).*

Fortunately, the weather did improve during the day with the sun eventually making an appearance. We first wandered around the areas near the lodge and found several Western Meadow Fritillaries (*Boloria epithore*), another species we were hoping for because it, too, is not found in the Victoria area. We also saw more Anna's Blues before deciding to climb the hill to the top of the chair lift. During the climb we found several more of the two species we'd already seen, and we added sightings of Boisduval's Blue (*Plebejus icarioides*), Silvery Blue (*Glaucopsyche lygdamus*), and Hydaspe Fritillary (*Speyeria hydaspe*).

Hilltops are often good places to find certain species of butterflies (e.g., Mt. Tolmie and Mt. Douglas are good locations in the Victoria area) so we went as far as the top of the hill near the chair lift. This didn't produce any sightings, so we took the lift back down to the lodge.

One species that everyone had hoped to see was Great Arctic (*Oeneis nevadensis*) because some in our group had never encountered it before. Though we looked diligently where it could be expected on our climb up the hill, we didn't find any, so when we returned to the base of the hill at the end of the day, a few people went back up. This time they were successful in finding and photographing a single specimen.

Though the weather had not fully cooperated, we all still judged the trip a success. About 50 individual butterflies were seen, with six species being tallied. Better conditions would probably have produced several times the number of individuals and maybe four or five additional species. The members of our group all had other natural history interests, however, in addition to the butterflies, so the trip was greatly enhanced by the birds, flowers, and mammals of the subalpine and alpine habitats that we don't get to visit very often.

The Use of Stable Isotopes to Study Bird Migration

By Laura Cardenas-Ortiz, Biological Sciences MSc. Student, University of Saskatchewan

Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*). *Photo:* Glen Bartley

Does anybody know what a stable isotope is? And what the relationship to bird migration is? Who has not seen large flocks of birds migrating and wondered where they are going in such a hurry? Migratory birds fly thousands of kilometers every year, during the fall in order to survive during the winter, and again during the spring, toward the breeding grounds. Birds' bodies retain clues about where they have been and what they have eaten. These clues show up in naturally occurring elements we call "stable isotopes." By measuring isotopes of various elements in bird tissues, we can learn a lot about their secrets[1]: the areas they come from, the remote areas that they visit, and what they like to eat. Fascinating, right?

Now I bet you are curious about what isotope means. An "isotope" is basically a different form of an element like Hydrogen or Carbon, with the same number of protons but different numbers of neutrons. So, some isotopes are "heavier" than others. Within applied ecology and ornithology, researchers have mainly focused on using stable isotope measurements of the light elements C (Carbon), N (Nitrogen), H (Hydrogen), O (Oxygen) and S (Sulfur), because they are the principal components of animal tissues and vary widely in nature at different environmental scales (Hobson and Wassenaar 2008). If researchers know how isotope abundance varies regionally or across continents, they can use this information to trace a bird back to a previous location.

The analysis technique is based on a process that explains how the signatures of each isotope can change according to the latitude, altitude, or distance from the ocean. For example, the values of the stable isotopes of Hydrogen contained in precipitation show a general trend of decreasing abundance of the heavier isotope of hydrogen (^{2}H or "deuterium) toward northern latitudes. This is most pronounced in North America, with systematic declines in precipitation ^{2}H values from the Gulf of Mexico across the North American continent to higher latitudes in a northwesterly direction (Hobson and Wassenaar 1997). These same values of ^{2}H in rainfall during the growing season are fixed in plants, and then passed on to higher trophic level consumers like birds and other vertebrates, and insects (Cormie et al. 1994). In the case of migrant birds, the isotopic composition of feathers reflects diet exclusively during the period of growth (Hobson and Clark 1992). Taking into account that migrant songbirds breeding in North America grow feathers while on or close to their natal grounds before migration, the abundance of deuterium in their feathers are strongly correlated with those of growing season precipitation at the breeding site (Hobson and Wassenaar 1997). Based on this correlation, it is possible to determine where birds come from by using stable isotopes of Hydrogen.

Nowadays there are several kinds of technology used to track bird migration in order to determine wintering or stopover sites. For example, satellite tracking or weather radar can be used to follow migrants or identify areas of migratory concentrations and stopovers, and more recently, the development of geolocator or Global Positioning System (GPS) tags have been miniaturized enough to deploy on small birds (>10g) (Bächler et al. 2010; DeLuca et al. 2015; Stutchbury et al. 2009)[2]. In addition, the creation of receiver tower arrays like the MOTUS system in North America will provide important new information on movements of small passerines[3]. However, such exogenous[4] markers suffer from a number of problems. They are typically expensive, need to be recovered from the marked bird, and can only feasibly be applied at a relatively small scale. They are also biased regarding choice of sampling sites (typically on the breeding ground). In contrast, the advantage of stable isotopes analyses of avian tissues (as endogenous[5] markers) to study bird migration is that it is reasonably precise for North American grown tissues, relatively inexpensive, and requires only a single capture (Hobson and Wassenaar 2008).

Despite decades of research and banding efforts, little is known about where the birds we see during the winter reside during the breeding season. So another advantage in the use of stable isotopes is that it allows researchers to describe migratory strategies and establish bird connectivity patterns. "Migratory connectivity" is a term that explains the degree to which individuals from the same breeding

1 See http://vtecostudies.org/projects/global-reach/stable-isotopes/

2 See Simmons, M., and A. Nightingale. RPBO Project: Tracking Fox Sparrows to their Breeding Territories. The Victoria Naturalist. Vol. 69.6 (2013).

3 See http://www.birdscanada.org/news/secrets-of-bird-movements-revealed and http://www.birdscanada.org/organization/bscnews.html

4 External to the organism

5 Originating or growing within an organism or tissue

Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*).
Photo: Jonathan Moran

grounds migrate to the same wintering areas. Establishing patterns of migratory connectivity of species (linking their breeding areas with specific wintering grounds) enables scientists to not only describe their migratory strategies but also to design conservation plans to protect them (Hobson et al. 2014).

The design of projects focused on bird conservation must be complemented with various monitoring and analysis techniques that can produce as most knowledge as possible. For instance, in Victoria, B.C., Rocky Point Bird Observatory has been running a migration monitoring project banding birds in different banding stations in order to better understand the ecology of migratory and resident birds. This project has recently been complemented with the addition of a new project - the stable isotopes analyses focused on Northern Saw-whet Owl. Although the species is not at risk, relatively little is known about the migration in saw-whets because of their nocturnal and reclusive behavior. Therefore, it is important to define and connect their breeding areas with their respective wintering sites. After the analyses, the researchers will hopefully discover where this amazing species has its breeding origins and will gain important information regarding its ecology of migration.

References

Bächler, E., Hahn, S., Schaub, M., Arlettaz, R., Jenni, L., Fox, J.W., … Liechti, F. 2010. Year-round tracking of small trans-Saharan migrants using light-level geolocators. PloS One 5(3), e9566.

Cormie, A.B., Schwarcz, H.P., and Gray, J. 1994. Relation between hydrogen isotopic ratios of bone collagen and rain. Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta 58.

DeLuca, W.V, Woodworth, B.K., Rimmer, C.C., Marra, P.P., Taylor, P.D., McFarland, K.P., … Norris, D.R. 2015. Transoceanic migration by a 12 g songbird. Biology Letters 11(4):20141045.

Hobson, K.A., and Clark, R.G. 1992. Assessing Avian Diets Using Stable Isotopes II: Factors Influencing Diet-Tissue Fractionation. The Condor 94(1):189–197.

Hobson, K.A., Van Wilgenburg, S.L., Faaborg, J., Toms, J.D., Rengifo, C., Sosa, A.L., … Brito Aguilar, R. 2014. Connecting breeding and wintering grounds of Neotropical migrant songbirds using stable hydrogen isotopes: a call for an isotopic atlas of migratory connectivity. Journal of Field Ornithology 85(3):237–257.

Hobson, K.A., and Wassenaar, L.I. 1997. Linking breeding and wintering grounds of neotropical migrant songbirds using stable hydrogen isotopic analysis of feathers. Oecologia 109(1):142–148.

Hobson, K.A., and Wassenaar, L.I. 2008. Tracking Animal Migration with Stable Isotopes. Terrestrial Ecology Series. Vol. 2, p. 182.

Stutchbury, B.J.M., Tarof, S. A., Done, T., Gow, E., Kramer, P.M., Tautin, J., … Afanasyev, V. 2009. Tracking Long-Distance Songbird Migration by Using Geolocators. Science 323 (February).

Biography

Laura Cardenas Ortiz is a Colombian Biologist and MSc. student at University of Saskatchewan (supervisor Dr. Keith A Hobson, Ph.D. Avian Ecology, Canadian Wildlife Service). She is using isotope analyses to determine geographic breeding origins of a group of 12 neotropical migratory species; thesis title: Origins and factors influencing the arrival time and body condition of neotropial migrants during fall migration through the Darien region of Colombia. Laura has volunteered as bander at both Rocky Point Bird Observatory and Tatlayoko Lake Bird Observatory (TLBO).

Editor's Note:

RPBO member Jonathan Moran published a paper on this same topic in the Journal of Ornithology (citation below), Results of the analyses include isoscape mapping showing estimated winter ranges for Rufous Hummingbirds by breeding site.

Moran, J.A., L.I. Wassenaar, J.C. Finlay, C.H.L.A. Isaac, S.M. Wethington. 2013. An exploration of migratory connectivity of the Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*), using feather deuterium. J. Ornithol. 154:423–430.

The Gray Jay for Canada's National Bird

By David M. Bird, PhD, Emeritus Professor of Ornithology at McGill University

There are movements afoot in Canada to select a National Bird as part of the 2017 Canada celebrations for its 150th year of existence. Currently we have the maple as our official tree and for better or worse, the beaver as our official mammal. So why not an official bird? Many countries have one, the U.S. with its bald eagle being a prime example. I strongly believe that we should choose the Gray Jay, formerly known as the Canada Jay. In no order of importance, here are no less than SIXTEEN compelling reasons why it would be a great choice:

1) Found in all thirteen provinces and territories; it is only barely found in the U.S., in the Rocky Mt region and Alaska.
2) A member of the corvid or crow family, arguably the smartest birds on the planet.
3) Extremely friendly toward humans like all Canadians, easily coming to the hand for handouts.
4) Very hardy like all Canadians, having highly adapted itself to living in very cold regions.
5) Figures strongly in First Nations folklore, also called the Whiskey Jack.
6) Is not an endangered species and thus, not at a serious risk of disappearing.
7) Figures prominently in the boreal forest ecological zone, constituting a vast portion of our country worthy of protection and under pressure from clear-cutting and oil and gas development.
8) Not a hunted species, so it is not shot by Canadians.
9) Not an official bird species for any of the ten provinces and recognized territories nor any other country (Common Loon is Ontario's bird; Snowy Owl is Quebec's bird).
10) Formerly called the Canada Jay by ornithologists for 200 years; its French name is still *mésangeai du Canada* and its Latin name is *Perisoreus canadensis*!
11) Stays in Canada year-round.
12) Not flamboyant in its appearance, best representing the conservative nature of Canadians!
13) Not regarded as an obnoxious or nuisance species (like the Canada Goose which is culled in the U.S.!)
14) Cannot be confused with any other bird species (99.6% of Canadians cannot tell the difference between a raven and a crow!)
15) Not a circumpolar species, i.e., not found in other northern countries (as is the Snowy Owl and Common Raven)

16) Does not look like any other Canadian bird species and thus, cannot be misidentified.

In short, I cannot think of a more Canadian bird!!! If Canada adopts this species as its national bird, we might even be able to convince the Nomenclature Committee of the American Ornithologists' Union to rename it the Canada Jay. Steps are already being taken in this regard.

The only thing going against it is that many Canadians do not see this bird in their backyard every day. But lots of states and provinces, as well as other countries, have official birds that the public does not see on a regular basis and may in fact never see them as a live wild bird. The fact is that once the Gray Jay is chosen, we can promote the bird so that Canadians make an effort to visit our boreal forests to become more familiar with it and indeed, be proud of it as our National Bird.

Other Comments

A few years ago, a raptor organization called The Canadian Raptor Conservancy (CRC) in Ontario started promoting a national bird for Canada, but they have been doing it mostly by

Photo (top): Rejean Turgeon
Photo (left): Gord Belyea

using an internet vote. I worry about their process because there are species on their list of candidates which would be a disastrous choice. For instance, the Canada Goose is an obnoxious bird that is much hated in the U.S., U.K. and elsewhere to the point of being culled. The Common Loon is Ontario's bird, not likely to be a popular idea with the other provinces, especially its arch-rival, Quebec. And the same can be said for the Snowy Owl, which is Quebec's official bird. Another leading candidate in the CRC poll, the Red-Tailed Hawk, is even more common in the U.S. than in Canada, so it is not very distinctive. Fortunately, the Gray Jay is one of the candidates in their poll.

Recently, the Canadian Geographic Society initiated a similar online survey, a much more serious effort, for the general public to weigh in on this matter. Forty candidates have been nominated, including the Gray Jay, but currently the front-runners are the Common Loon, the Snowy Owl, and gasp…the Canada Goose. Personally, I would like to see some intelligent discussion and debate about such an important matter as opposed to just letting the public make some inane choice. Years ago, I recall running a popular vote to select an official bird for the city of Montreal and we ended up with the American goldfinch only because the children who ended up being allowed to vote thought that it was the prettiest bird. The Peregrine Falcon, for which the city is famous in the bird world, would have made much more sense! And recently, the city of Vancouver went with the Black-capped Chickadee as an official "bird of the year" —another democratic decision that did not make any sense among Canadian ornithologists.

I am seeking help from all quarters to facilitate the selection of the Gray Jay as Canada's National Bird. It is a very prominent bird in our provincial forests and I call upon all British Columbians to support this cause and pass around the word! To see how delightful these birds are, take a peek at a recently produced YouTube video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_V3VMIxTuU and to cast your vote for it, go to http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/nationalbird/.

While the current polls will not ultimately determine our National Bird, they have indeed initiated much intelligent debate and will certainly serve as a sounding board to whichever political party holds the reins in the years to come, especially in terms of organizing events and happenings to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday in 2017. Let us hope that establishing the Gray Jay (or Canada Jay!) is one of them!

VNHS Field Trip to Nanoose's Notch Hill and Nanaimo's Harewood Plains

By Agnes Lynn

Despite the season being very advanced, we still managed to enjoy our trip on Sunday, June 14. We were joined by Pam Helem from Nanoose and Kent Anders from Nanaimo. It's great to go with people who are familiar with the area. They started by showing us a cooler and much easier route up the Hill. Birds were our focus at Notch Hill, and we did enjoy many, but the highlight was the butterfly. Val managed to get a photo of a rare Dun Skipper. Apparently this is one of the few areas where you can find it.

Our target flower at Harewood Plains was the Bog Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus pinnatus*) and it was still in bloom. Dave managed to get us a picture of that. Kent spends a great deal of time at Harewood Plains so showed us many of the rare plants in this sadly unprotected area just south of Nanaimo. Many plants were still flowering but past their best. We'll go another year to see if we can catch them at their peak. Just as we were leaving, we spotted a lovely *Collomia grandiflora*. It was a tricky one to identify and we initially called it a Comandra. Watch for a return trip perhaps next year.

Large-flowered Collomia (*Collomia grandiflora)*. *Photo:* Val George

Bog Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus pinnatus*). *Photo:* Dave Lynn

Dun Skipper (*Euphyes vestris*). *Photo:* Val George

Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 10 new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our Welcome column.

Marcia and John Woods
Revelstoke
birding, hiking, and all natural history topics

Anita Lahey
Victoria
Learning about local birds, bees, butterflies, flora

You are cordially invited to

Nature Canada's Annual General Meeting

&

Cocktail Reception

Join us as we celebrate our 75th Anniversary

At the Mary Winspear Centre in Sidney, BC
2243 Beacon Ave. W. V8L 1W9

September 25, 2015

4:30 PM - AGM

5:30 PM - Cocktail Reception

Reception featuring special guest **Robert Bateman**
and presentation of the Douglas H. Pimlott Award

RSVP by September 14, 2015 to Marie du Plessis
by phone 1-800-267-4088 ext. 298
or email mduplessis@naturecanada.ca

75years Nature CANADA Your Voice for Nature

Open Meeting
Nature Canada and BC Nature
Mary Winspear Centre
2243 Beacon Ave. W. Sidney, BC V8L 1W9
September 25th, 2015

DRAFT AGENDA

1:00 PM Welcome and Introduction
- Richard Yank, Chair of Nature Canada
- Kees Visser, President of BC Nature

1:10 PM Nature Canada and BC Nature collaboration on Northern Gateway and TransMountain Pipelines
With Guests:
- Chris Tollefson, Executive Director, UVic Environmental Law Centre
- Anthony Ho, Hakai Litigation Associate, UVic ELC

2:00 PM Connecting Children to Nature
With Guest:
- Kristine Webber, Executive Director of Young Naturalists' Club of BC

3:00 PM BREAK

3:30 PM Engaging Policy Makers in Environmental Issues
With Guests:
- Spencer Chandra Herbert NDP MLA, Official Environmental Critic
- Liberal Party MLA (invited)
- Green Party representative (invited)

4:30 PM Annual General Meeting (AGM)

5:30 PM Reception with Nature Canada members and other guests
- Remarks by Robert Bateman
- Presentation of Pimlott Award

Alligator (Lizard) in Victoria!

By Jody Wells

Photo: Todd Carnahan

I have lots of the introduced European Wall Lizards running around my West Saanich property. But I was moving some lumber on the weekend and found the biggest Alligator Lizard I have ever seen. Like eight inches long! I let my grandson see it and then we let it go together… hoping it continues to prosper. It did look particularly "rotund" and healthy.

A week later, my grandson was again out to visit (a week after the first pictures). We were hanging out near a pile of wood chips when suddenly he exclaimed, "Alligator Lizard!" and threw himself at the pile. He came up with a lizard —which, based on the patterning on the head (and a tick) was almost certainly the same large lizard. "If he had his eyes shut I wouldn't have seen him—he was very still and camouflaged and blended in" was the excited pronouncement. In the photos you can see the lizard seems to be enjoying the warmth of my grandson's arm, although we were keeping the handling very low key and as stress-free as possible before we released it. The BC ministry website says they grow to a maximum of 20cm…this one has obviously passed that threshold.

Photo: Jody Wells

The Quiet Protectors of the Land

By Jill Robinson, Stewardship Coordinator, Habitat Acquisition Trust
Photos by Author

HAT
Creating Conservation Legacies

Tucked precariously between a fallen log and a large rock, I lower my head and peer bravely through a maze of twigs and fallen branches. A green haze of new growth inhibits my vision, and I strain to track a group of unfamiliar faces walking with purpose along the well-beaten trail. "I think they've been here before" I mutter. It appeared this group knew exactly where they were headed and why they were headed there. The adults seemed to all be dressed in similar attire: heavy pants, long-sleeved plaid, and wide-brimmed hats. Some were equipped with binoculars hanging loosely around their necks. Shifting ever so slightly, I struggled to get a better look, hoping my whereabouts wouldn't be found out by this unsuspecting group. "They appear to be armed!" I whispered hastily to my younger sister, hunkered down beside me. I motion her to stay low. They wore leather gloves and on their belts hung sharp clipping tools that I had seen my mum use before in the garden. Many of them carried large bags and some held shovels and odd-shaped tools I'd never seen before. They certainly looked prepared for some kind of a battle, but whom or what they were battling, I couldn't yet tell.

When I think back to my childhood in Ontario, some of my first and favourite memories bring me right back to the forest. I can close my eyes and easily imagine myself nestled comfortably on the damp forest floor behind my house. I fondly remember all of those sweet, familiar sights, sounds and smells I had always known so well. As a youngster, this was where my sister and I spent most of our time. We would build hideouts between the trees and watch from our outdoor headquarters as members of the community strolled through the winding pathways in the neighbourhood forest. My sister and I would go into stealth mode, quietly collecting information on any unusual forest-going activity and reporting all findings back to mum. We eventually concluded that in our very own backyard, there was a battle taking place.

But this was a quiet battle, the kind that took place behind the scenes. This was an ongoing fight between nature-loving members of our community and the encroaching invasive plants that threatened the vitality of the forest we loved so deeply. We came to realize that these people we had watched cautiously from afar were noble protectors of the forest. They routinely gathered with their sharpened clippers, loppers, and shovels to fend off unsavory invaders from taking over our neck of the woods.

Twenty years later, living and working in Victoria as the Stewardship Coordinator for Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT), I have come across a number of similarly passionate

people that are fighting the same fight, just on different turf. I was recently particularly inspired by the determination of a tireless group of volunteers that meet every Wednesday morning to do just that, at parcel of land in Esquimalt. The Matson Conservation Area, owned and managed by HAT boasts spectacular ocean views and is one of the last remaining Garry Oak habitats on Victoria Harbour. While it is teaming with wildlife, supporting a number of rare plants and animals, this one hectare of land is also in danger. From the tiled walkway that borders the upper slope of Matson, the landscape appears vibrant, full of beautiful sights and sounds; full of promise...but, there is trouble afoot.

This native habitat is under attack from aggressive alien plant species. The usual suspects at Matson include English ivy, Himalayan blackberry, daphne and Scotch broom. Native vegetation is being strangled out by intersecting vines of ivy as thick as tree trunks, wrapping around tired, outstretched arms of old Garry oak trees that gasp for light. Carpets of this relentless killer slowly suffocate everything in its wake, drowning out a forest ecosystem that once thrived here. The native rattlesnake plantain orchid shivers in the shadows of the looming daphne, threatening to take over the shady understory. The hooked canes of unforgiving blackberry create a thorny wall closing off light to the forest floor below and leave their mark on any creature bold enough to step within its crooked reach.

And yet, there is hope. The unwavering efforts of this

Continued on page 16

Continued from page 15

small group of volunteers, fending off the invasive species at their Matson battle grounds, have begun to make headway. Their weekly tasks include striping down tangled heaps of ivy from the trunks of the majestic Garry oaks, pulling up noxious daphne and cutting paths through stands of blackberry. These efforts are not for the weak. It takes commitment, dedication and a thick skin to tolerate prickly thorns and sharp branches. Behind the scenes, this team of unrelenting volunteers removes piles of invasive plants, working diligently without praise to do a job they feel is important and necessary.

I have now met with Allan Reid, long-time Matson volunteer, a number of times and am incredibly impressed by his dedication to this cause. He has spearheaded this volunteer group, directing removal activities and acting as a steward of the land, alongside the many other compassionate community members. Three to six people meet every week, mostly people from local residences, including the Swallows Landing apartments that look over the conservation area. They are a keen and hard-working group of individuals, and I've seen the wounds on their arms to prove it. They work without complaint under the hot sun in an effort to make that special hectare of land a much better place for years to come.

I recently organized a restoration event at the Matson Conservation Area to encourage more people within the community to engage in this challenging but satisfying task. We were joined by some members of the regular Wednesday morning group, as well as a number of keen volunteers that wanted to lend a hand in someone else's' neighbourhood. It is always so inspiring and encouraging to me to continually meet so many people that take a few hours out of their day to protect natural areas that they believe are important.

Each person has their own reasons for being there. Whether it's for the exercise, the fresh air, the opportunity to meet new people or to see a new place, or just for the pure satisfaction and joy we gain from making a positive difference in our community. It isn't easy work, but it always ends up being a lot of fun. Through our shared love for protecting wild places and being in the great outdoors, we develop a camaraderie that ignites a positively contagious spirit for protecting and enhancing our own backyards.

Looking back again, I reminisce about that forest behind my house. The brilliant sun percolating through a canopy of leaves, scattering its light across a hummocky forest floor below. The layers of brown leaves piled high from last year's fall. The sound of the trees creaking and trembling under a brisk breeze, leaves dripping with early morning dew. And most important, I remember those armed, plaid-wearing protectors of my sacred forest. For me, these memories have left a lasting impression and played a role in shaping who I am and what I do today. My early days spent in that forest developed my long-standing connection and compassion for wild places, and those people have inspired me to take an active role in protecting the land I live in. I've learned from my own volunteer experience at restoration events across the CRD, that while these activities are often brief, they are meaningful. They build friendships, encourage happy and healthy outdoor living and make a difference in our community by improving the ecological integrity of the land that we love.

So, next time you're walking along a wooded trail or open meadow, keep an eye out for these heroes in the background. These are the dedicated people that spend hours battling to protect our precious ecosystems and instilling an appreciation for nature. At Habitat Acquisition Trust, our hats are off to these incredible individuals! And if you happen to get the itch, I encourage you to join in. Slip on your work gloves, sharpen your tools and press your plaid button-down, because it's time for battle. You too can revel in the quiet noble fight to protect the land we all love.

Odds and Ends

By Gail Harcombe

In case you either don't receive the Cornell Lab (of Ornithology) eNews, or happened to miss the last few issues, here are a few items that might be of interest... they certainly were to me!

The Mystery of Beautiful Males—Explained
Test how well you know which gender is fancier in a variety of species – super images and a few unexpected results. Discover the upper limits of extravagance—and the reasons for it—with All About Fancy Males http://biology.allaboutbirds.org/features/fancymales/

Need help with bird ID? Two new options are available:

Merlin Bird Photo ID: Just upload a photo, click on the bird's bill, eye, and tail, and let computer vision help you ID the bird. It currently recognizes 400 common North American bird species. http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/photo-id/

A new Warbler Guide app gives you some tricks you won't find in a book—"Rotate a warbler in 3D, distinguish similar-sounding songs with spectrograms, or identify a warbler using clues from plumage and song at the same time. With this new app from The Warbler Guide authors Tom Stephenson and Scott Whittle, ID tips leap off the page onto your mobile device in a whole new way." http://press.princeton.edu/titles/10416.html

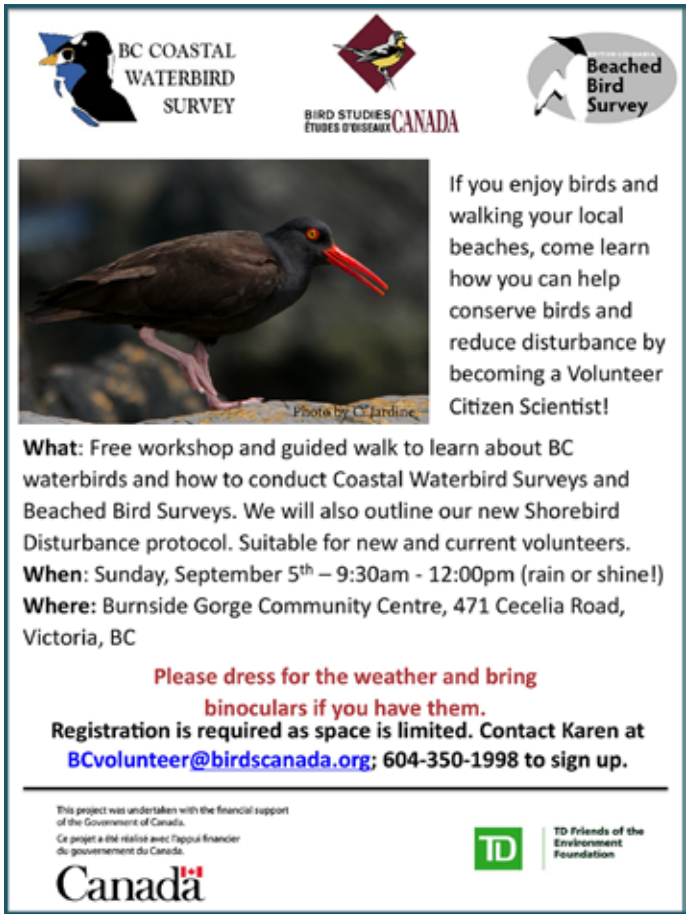
A New Hummingbird Species Revealed
The American Ornithologists' Union has named a new hummingbird species, the Inaguan Woodstar. A member of the Bee Hummingbird group, it was formerly lumped with the similar-looking Bahama Woodstar. Found in backyards in the Bahamas, differences were found in song, behavior, physical measurements, and DNA sequences suggesting that the species have been separated genetically for half a million years. http://www.allaboutbirds.org/one-backyard-hummingbird-species-becomes-two/

Herring roe and varnish clam shells on the beach at Parksville. *Photo:* Dave Lynn

And if you are thinking about going to any of the bird festivals happening in the next few months, check out the map (and list) at http://www.allaboutbirds.org/page.aspx?pid=2452 Everywhere from Colorado to New York, Texas to Maine...Georgia...Florida...good excuse for a holiday?

And from Bird Studies Canada's BirdWatch Canada magazine:

- The Spring 2015 edition of BirdWatch Canada (No. 71) includes a special report on Gray Jay biology and behaviour – interesting to read this along with the article in this newsletter re "Gray Jay for Canada's National Bird". See this and more at http://www.bsc-eoc.org/about/index.jsp?targetpg=birdwatch
- Visit Bird Studies Canada's new Swifts and Swallows webpages http://birdscanada.org/volunteer/ai/index.jsp?lang=EN to learn about aerial insectivores and how you can help these birds. You can help efforts to address knowledge gaps, and identify high-priority sites to conserve swifts and swallows and their habitats across Canada by submitting your observations, detailed nest reports, or roost site information to the new Swifts and Swallows data entry portal. http://www.birdscanada.org/birdmon/ai/main.jsp



LETTERS

7 July 2015

Dear B.C. Breeding Bird Atlas donors, volunteers, partners, supporters, and wider family:

We are delighted and proud to present you with the first installment of the online publication of British Columbia's very first Breeding Bird Atlas – the most comprehensive bilingual wildlife Atlas on the web! Take a moment or two to explore the website at www.birdatlas.bc.ca. We think you will enjoy this fabulous new conservation resource.

Thank you most sincerely for your contribution. Whether you are a volunteer atlasser who spent days, weeks, or months in the field, a financial supporter who invested in the project to advance informed environmental decision-making, or one of the many in-kind contributors who helped on the ground or who saw the value-added in sharing your company's information, we hope this first installment of the final product makes you proud of your investment. And thank you for your patience with the delay in publishing all texts as we adapt to the requirement to publish entirely bilingual products. Be assured that the data and maps are complete and final!

The Atlas has greatly increased the information base for well over 60% of bird species breeding in the province, and is already making conservation impacts. Information is being applied to recovery planning and actions for Species at Risk, like critical habitat identification for Lewis's Woodpecker and conservation easements for new Western Screech-owl locations. Expect designations for several at-risk provincial species to change as a result of the new information generated. The Atlas dataset is among the most comprehensive in western Canada, informing species assessments by COSEWIC, the national body that determines Species at Risk status. We process approximately 100 requests a year for Atlas data, some for research into issues including climate change, and many to inform federal and provincial environmental impact assessments, and assist risk management under regulatory frameworks. With over 16,500 records of rare or sensitive species, the Atlas is a must-acquire database for any proposed development project!

The authors and editors have made rough comparisons with the period prior to 1990-2001, when The Birds of British Columbia was published, and initial indications are that ranges of more than 65% of species are stable, while 25% are increasing and less than 10% are decreasing. Some of the stories in this first volume of species accounts include:

- Contrasting fortunes for Peregrine and Prairie falcons: Peregrines continue to recover from the DDT era, but perhaps at the expense of Prairie Falcons, now down to just three nesting pairs in BC.
- Long-billed Curlew, another at-risk species, appears to be doing very well and expanding significantly northwards in areas with mixed native grassland, hayfields, and alfalfa cultivation.
- Trumpeter Swan populations continue to expand thanks to directed conservation management following near-extinction in 1935.
- The first published breeding of Black-legged Kittiwake and Parasitic Jaeger in British Columbia, and the southernmost breeding locales in western North America for these far northern birds. The kittiwakes are in an unprotected and potentially vulnerable site, the jaegers in the remote Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Wilderness Park, which may support several more new breeding species for British Columbia, more characteristic of the Alaskan arctic!
- Conservation concerns for grebes breeding on southern interior lakes. Several species appear to be vacating former breeding sites perhaps now subject to higher disturbance or pollution.
- Several 'eastern' species are expanding westward in northern and central British Columbia, including Broad-winged Hawk, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Expect more on this theme as the Atlas is completed.
- The introduced "super-colonizer," Eurasian Collared-Dove, has exploded across the province in the past decade in areas of suburban development and also agriculture. Its impacts are yet to be understood, but are not currently thought to be a serious concern.
- Some birds of the warmer, drier southern interior valleys like Lazuli Bunting and Gray Catbird are pushing slowly north into central regions, and west into the rain shadow of the Coast Mountains.

We will keep you updated as major batches of new bilingual texts are made ready. We're excited to be making the final push to secure the resources necessary to finalize translation and publication. Should you wish to make a tax-deductible donation online to support this stage, please go to https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/bird-studies-canada/ and select "Breeding Bird Atlas-BC".

Please enjoy this first "volume." Thank you again for making this eagerly awaited, important conservation resource possible.

With conservation in mind,

Pete Davidson

Managing Editor, Atlas of the Breeding Birds of British Columbia and Senior Advisor, Bird Studies Canada, on behalf of the B.C. Breeding Bird Atlas Steering Committee and editors

LETTERS

The Metchosin Biodiversity Project
4542 Rocky Point Road
Victoria, BC V9C 4E4
http://metchosinbiodiversity.com

June 19, 2015

Dear VNHS:

On June 13, 2015, the Metchosin Biodiversity Project carried out the fifth annual census of Metchosin species. We have discovered through our counting that we share our Metchosin home with at least 2150 different kinds of plants, animals, fungi, and lichens. Forty of these species are listed by British Columbia as rare or endangered.

On behalf of ourselves and our 2150 companions, we thank you for your generosity. This year your gift of $200 helped us to feed, outfit, and entertain an army of about seventy volunteers for our one-day count.

In about a month, a full report of our event will be available on our website (web address above).

Sincerely yours,
Kem Luther

———————————————

To the Victoria Natural History Society,

As the recipient of your 2015 Camosun bursary, I would like to thank you from the bottom of my yeart for your generosity and support towards my education and future career. Aside from offering bursaries, I admire and respect your society's passion and initiatives taken towards environmental awareness and conservation, by bringing like-minded local citizens together. I plan on using this bursary toward my 3rd yr of the Environmental Technology program at Camosun College. So far the program has been amazing, and has assisted me to gain the skill set required to implement my passion of environmental conservation. In particular, I'm interested in conducting field work for fisheries conservation, and hope to be placed in a Co-op work term this summer that will give me experience in that area!

Sincerely,
Megan Sakuma

———————————————

May 19, 205

Dear Mr. Hart,

On behalf of the Camosun College Foundation, we would like to thank you for your ongoing commitment to student bursaries.

We want you to know that your annual gift is sincerely appreciated and makes a tremendous difference to our students, many of whom are struggling financially. As you may already know, 100% of your generous contribution goes directly to helping students.

For your interest, I am pleased to enclose the name and program of the student(s) who benefitted from your gift this year.

- Megan Sakuma, Environmental Technology – 2nd year
- Colette Taggart, Environmental Technology – 2nd year

Thank you for your continued generosity. The Camosun College Foundation remains committed to working together with you to support Camosun and our communities.

Sincerely,
Angie Bowles
Advancement Manager

Karen Whyte
Advancement Manager

BULLETIN BOARD

Western Bird Banding Association—2015 Conference "Banding Across Borders"

The Vancouver Avian Research Centre (VARC) is pleased to host the 2015 Western Bird Banding Association's (WBBA) annual meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada September 4 – 7. The meeting theme, Banding across Borders, signifies the power of partnerships across cultures and countries to leverage our collective expertise to affect bird science, conservation and land management. In addition to participants from Canada and the USA, we hope to see people from our partner countries in Latin America. Great talks from WBBA members, a keynote address from John Reynolds of Simon Fraser University (SFU), and a Special Session within the scientific program: The use of bird monitoring data in making sound land use and management decisions. For more information and to register, see http://birdvancouver.com/wbba.html

Photo Credit: Suzanne Huot

All Buffleheads Day October 2015

Nature Canada's Shoal Harbour NatureHood launches during a three day event—All Buffleheads Day—October 15-17. All Buffleheads Day is an annual event that celebrates the return of a most punctual duck, the Bufflehead. A variety of activities are planned to reach a wide range of community members—beach walks, birding tours, conservation forums, beach cleans, citizen science monitoring and children's events. The Friends of Shoal Harbour Sanctuary Society oversee this NatureHood that encompasses the Shoal Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary situated in Sidney/North Saanich. NatureHood's goal is to connect people of all ages to nature right where they live, which in Canada, increasingly means urban centres. NatureHood inspires urban residents to connect with nature through innovative programming, celebratory events and stewardship activities set in urban green spaces and Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas. Through strong partnerships with grassroots naturalist clubs across Canada, NatureHood promotes nature awareness at the local level and exposes a new generation of naturalists and citizen scientists to nature all around them. For up-to-date information on events and activities, follow Shoal Harbour NatureHood on Facebook and Twitter (@NaturehoodFOSH). For more information, contact naturehoodfosh@gmail.com.

Coastal Waterbird & Beached Bird Surveys

(see ad page 17)

Bird Studies Canada (http://www.birdscanada.org/) is looking for volunteers to participate in two coastal monitoring programs in the Victoria area. If you enjoy observing waterbirds or walking your local beaches and are looking to gain new skills or participate in bird conservation, this is the perfect opportunity.

BC Coastal Waterbird Survey: This program involves conducting bird counts at fixed sites at high tide on the second Sunday of each month. The observations are used to assess long-term trends in waterbird distribution and abundance (ducks, loons, grebes, cormorants, shorebirds, gulls and other seabirds). Volunteers should have good bird identification skills and own or have access to binoculars or a spotting scope.

BC Beached Bird Survey: This program involves walking a specific beach during the last week of each month, looking for carcasses that have washed up on shore. It may sound grim, but this information is key to understanding causes of seabird mortality, and identifying which species are most vulnerable to events such as oils spills and fisheries bycatch. Birds are not always found, however, "zero data" provides important baseline information. No special skills are required to participate and it's suitable for all ages. All the survey equipment and data forms are provided.

If you have any questions or would like to sign up for the workshop, contact Karen Devitt at BCvolunteer@birdscanada.org or 604-350-1988.

Native Plant Group

If you are interested in learning more about native plants, why don't you check out www.npsg.ca? Perhaps stop by one of the interesting meetings on the 3rd Thursday of the month starting up again in September. As well as a great speaker about native plants, there is a chance to win native plants in the draw; you can also have your questions about native plants answered plus much more. Drop-in fee is $5.00 until you become a member. See website if you want to sign up to get emails all about native plants in Victoria.

Seaweed Pocket Field Guide

Seaweed biologist, Bridgette Clarkston, has just published a Pocket Field Guide to Seaweeds of the Pacific Northwest. It includes over 40 of the most commonly-encountered seaweeds, complete with pictures from around Vancouver Island and Saltspring —Bamfield, Tofino, Ucluelet, Tahsis and Comox. This small waterproof and foldable guide is perfect for beach walks or when guiding. You can find the guide online from Harbour: http://www.harbourpublishing.com/author/BridgetteClarkston

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 Agnes Lynn at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634.

SEPTEMBER 2015

Saturday September 5
FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)
Waterfront Birding

This is a good time to check out the waterfront for birds. **Marie O'Shaughnessy** will be your leader. Meet at Cattle Point (Beach Dr between Rutland Rd and Dorset Rd) at 7:30 a.m. We will wander around Cattle Point and make a few stops between there and Clover Point. Finally we'll end up at the Ogden Point Breakwater. There will be birds on the water as well as shorebirds to watch for. Contact Marie at 250-598-9680 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday September 6
FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)
Monthly Butterfly Outing

Join **Aziza Cooper** on our monthly Butterfly event. This outing 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 Road) and decide where to go from there. Meet at 1:00 p.m. at the main parking lot just north of the summit. The meeting time may change. Check website for updates. Contact Aziza at 250-516-7703 or email her at skylarkbc123 at gmail.com for more information.

Tuesday, September 8
NATURAL HISTORY NIGHT
On Safari to Kenya

Join **Brooke Clibbon** and **Eric Tull** for a fascinating evening. Brooke took video on a bird safari to Kenya. The presentation shows many of the birds and animals that they encountered, and the video format shows many of the interactions among the various wildlife species, such as crocodiles attacking a hippo carcass, or vultures and jackals at a kill. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Free! Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Saturday September 12
FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)
Pedder Bay Birding

Come join the VNHS Saturday Birding Group at Pedder Bay

Marina. To reach Pedder Bay Marina, take Rocky Point Rd and left on to Pedder Bay Rd. There is a big sign for the marina. We will meet at 8:00 a.m. at the grass parking lot behind the RV registration kiosk on the right. Rocky Point Bird Observatory operates a banding station there and several interesting birds have been reported recently. We will walk around the area for a couple of hours and then you will have an opportunity to visit the banding station if you are interested. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 for more information.

Tuesday, September 15

BOTANY NIGHT

Restoration of Playfair Park's Garry Oak Meadow

Since 2010, **Colleen O'Brien**, Volunteer Lead Steward, has been actively engaged with rescuing a population of Yellow Montane Violet and other native plants in Playfair Park from the clutches of dense alien grasses. Along the way she has changed the mind-set of both park users and Parks staff with regards to the importance of the meadow, figured out a method to control annual grass and herbaceous weed seedlings without using herbicides, and uncovered another endangered species which had been so suppressed by grasses it had escaped discovery. Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Free! Everyone welcome.

Sunday September 20

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

6th Field Trippers Nature Walk—Esquimalt Lagoon Birding

Field Trippers is a series of six walks over six months to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the first nature walks led by Museum staff. This 6th (and last) walk will be guided by Entomology Collections Manager **Claudia Copley** and Bird and Mammal Preparator **Darren Copley**. Starts from Esquimalt Lagoon at 9:00 a.m. Contact Claudia and Darren at (250) 479-6622 or dccopley at telus.net for more information or visit http://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/events/field-trippers-125-years-and-counting-6/

Wednesday, September 23

BIRDERS' NIGHT

Getting There: Bird Migration and Southern Vancouver Island

Ann Nightingale, past-president of Rocky Point Bird Observatory and VNHS, will give a slide-illustrated talk on seasonal avian visitors to our area and how we're learning more about bird migration and conservation through monitoring and the use of new technologies. Learn about tools you can use in your own back yard—or even at your own computer to see what the birds are doing on these autumn nights. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Free! Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Saturday, September 26

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Hawk Watch

The VNHS Saturday Birding Group will join the combined VNHS and CRD Hawk Watch event at East Sooke Park. To come to the vantage point above Beechey Head to watch for raptors, meet at the Aylard Farm parking lot at the end of Becher Bay Rd at 9:30 a.m. (earlier than when the crowds appear!). Ann Nightingale will lead the way up to the lookout (although the route is marked if you wish to come later) and she will be available up there to help you find those illusive raptors till about 3 p.m. The hike up to the viewpoint requires sturdy footwear and a 20-minute trek up a steep and rocky trail. Bring binoculars, water and perhaps a lunch if you plan to stay for the day. You can stay as long as you like and then return to the parking lot whenever you wish. If you do not want to make the trek up to the hill, there are good opportunities in the field near the parking lot to look for raptors as well. After 11:00 a.m. there will also be live raptor demonstrations and other activities and displays right near the parking lot as well. You may wish to stay for the BBQ for VNHS members following the main event at 3 p.m. but please pre-register for this (see ad page 4 for details on BBQ).

Monday, September 28

MARINE NIGHT

Rockfish Conservation Areas: Conservation without compliance?

Darienne Lancaster, a recent Masters student in the School of Environmental Studies at UVic, studied recreational fisher compliance within Rockfish Conservation Areas. Recreational fishers are often overlooked in studies on marine conservation areas; however, they can have large impacts on vulnerable species like rockfish. Darienne used surveys with fishers and trail cameras set up on shore to determine how much fishing is going on in these Conservation Areas and why people aren't following the rules. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Free! Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

OCTOBER 2015

Sunday October 4

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Monthly Butterfly Outing

Join **Aziza Cooper** on the last of the season's monthly Butterfly events. This outing 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 Road) and decide where to go from there. Meet at 1:00 p.m. at the main parking lot just north of the summit. The meeting time may change. Check website for updates. Contact Aziza at 250-516-7703 or email her at skylarkbc123 at gmail.com for more information.

Saturday, October 10

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Juan de Fuca Pelagic Birding

We have once again hired the boat Fantasea II to go from

Victoria Harbour out into the Juan De Fuca Strait and towards Race Rocks to find some of the pelagic species that feed there. We repeat this popular tour each year as it always turns up something to keep us interested in going again. We will follow the tide debris line that occurs between Victoria and Race Rocks as the currents cause an upwelling of nutrients from the bottom, resulting in the best feeding spots for the birds. Possible birds include shearwaters, murrelets, auklets, jaegers, Northern Fulmar, many species of gulls, phalaropes and other pelagics. We are generally able to go through Race Rocks to see close-up the variety of sea lions and seals who laze on the rocks there. We are sometimes treated to whales if they are in the area. There is room for 20 people. The cost is $70.00 per person for VNHS members, $90.00 for non-members. The trip is 5 hours (9:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.). Please book as soon as possible, by Sep 26 at the latest. First contact Agnes to reserve your spot. Then pay through PayPal (details when you register) or you can pay by cheque. Send cheque to VNHS, Box 5220, Victoria BC, V8R 6N4. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 to reserve or if you need more information. See more details about the trip at http://vicnhs.bc.ca/fantasea.html.

Tuesday, October 13

NATURAL HISTORY NIGHT

Black Bear denning habitat: can we create new dens?

Coastal Black Bear require dens to survive through the winter and reproduce. Dens are generally in or under old growth structures: large hollow trees and stumps, logs and root wads. What happens when forest harvesting removes these structures? Can we create dens in natural structures and will bears use artificial structures? Come see what researcher **Helen Davis** has been doing in the Jordan River to test these ideas! Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Free! Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Sunday, October 18

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

Juan de Fuca Pelagic Birding

See October 10 for details. Please book as soon as possible, by Oct 4 at the latest.

Tuesday, October 20

BOTANY NIGHT

Myxogastria: The secret world of slime molds

Some people called them fungi, some people called them animals; we now know that slime molds and amoebas really comprise a 'sister group' to fungi and animals, having origins placing them in their own category. For many people, these organisms are secretive and cryptic, living under damp logs and in odd places; when they do venture out into plain sight, they startle with their variety of colours and forms, and their ability to suddenly form large 'plasmodia' in the most unexpected places. **Richard Winder** will cover the taxonomy, life cycle, and ecology of these creatures, show how researchers are using them to explore a wide variety of natural phenomena, and help you gain a better appreciation for their diversity. Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Free! Everyone welcome.

Monday, October 26

MARINE NIGHT

The Fish Eye Project

Mike Irvine recently completed his Masters degree by holding his final oral exam underwater! He is continuing the work of connecting people with the ocean through the Fish Eye Project, a not-for-profit group that he co-founded. Come and learn about this interesting project. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Free! Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Wednesday, October 28

BIRDERS' NIGHT

How Birds Do It!

Ever wonder how birds are equipped to produce those warm, fuzzy chicks in the nest? Not all is as it seems. Join **Dr. David M. Bird** (Emeritus Professor of Wildlife Biology and Director of the Avian Science and Conservation Centre of McGill University in Montreal, Quebec) as he takes you on a humorous "bird's eye-view" of the seemingly indecent world of avian reproduction involving the Mile-High Club, incest, homosexuality, sex changes, divorce, and infidelity. It simply puts television soap operas to shame! You may never look at birds the same way again. Meet at 7:30 p.m. in room 159 of the Fraser Building, University of Victoria. Free! Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend.

Swallowtail Butterfly seen at Sidney library. *Photo:* Bob Orchard

ADVANCE NOTICE FOR NOVEMBER

Sunday, November 1

NON-VNHS EVENT

South Vancouver Island Mycological Society Annual Mushroom Show

A fungophile extravaganza: information, displays of almost every local mushroom, cooked samples to taste, experts on hand to identify your mushroom and answer your questions – amazing! Free admission but donations appreciated. Open 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Swan Lake Nature House, 3873 Swan Lake Rd, off Ralph St.

The Victoria NATURALIST

P.O. Box 5220, Stn. B.,
Victoria, BC, V8R 6N4

Publication Mail Commercial Sales
Agreement Number 40045722

Bee on Coneflower. *Photo:* Bob Orchard