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The Victoria NATURALIST

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[Subject: VNHS newsletter submission]

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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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Contents

A Message from the Board	4
Lucky Lager & a Cast of ‘Commensal’ Characters <i>By Bill Merilees</i>	6
Is THE BLOB to blame? <i>By Pauline Davis</i>	9
Good Reads.....	9
Welcome to New VNHS Members	9
What Some Folks Will Do for Valentine Fun <i>By Alan MacLeod</i>	10
Habitat Acquisition Trust Community <i>By Josh Tanasichuk</i>	11
Common Lichens of Victoria— Outing February 2016 <i>By Agnes Lynn</i>	12
Island View Beach Draft Management Plan	13
BC Field Ornithologists Young Birder Award	13
Species Profile: Rhinoceros Auklet: <i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i> <i>By Penny Lancaster, RPBO</i>	14
International Migratory Bird Day 2016	15
Day Trip to George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary and Boundary Bay <i>By David Dahl</i>	16
Butterfly Coordinator to Change <i>By Agnes Lynn</i>	19
Bulletin Board.....	20
Letters	20
Calendar	21

Cover Photo: *Cladonia bellidiflora*, one of many lichen species found in Francis/King Regional Park.
Photo: Val George.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Hello and Happy May!

The Message from the Board in this issue informs us of the activities of the society in the past year...pretty impressive. Help us make the coming year(s) equally or more impressive by letting us know your ideas for conservation and education/outreach projects and activities so we can continue working toward the goals of our society.

For those of you who still get the printed (black and white) newsletter rather than the PDF, the front cover of this issue will be “pretty” and “different”, but for those of you who receive the PDF—wow! Who knew that lichen could be that colourful? Not only subtleties of texture but of colour and shades...perhaps a good incentive to switch to the PDF?

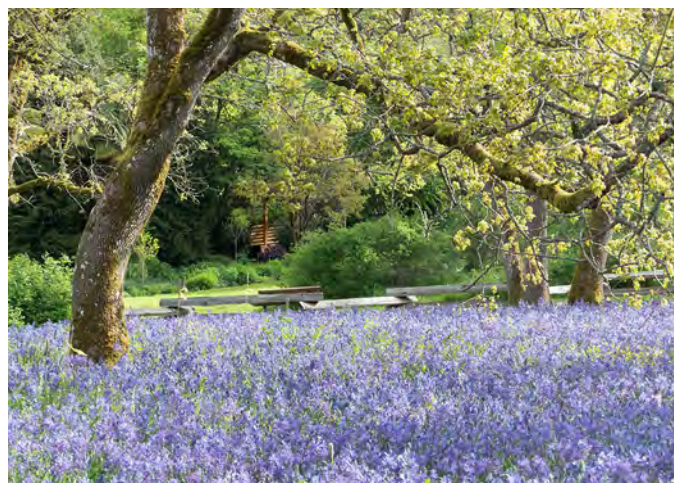
I would personally like to thank outgoing president Darren Copley for his many years as president of the VNHS. His commitment to the goals of the society and to conservation overall have helped guide the society well. Thank you, Darren!

(Hmmm...could this be a lucky escape?)

Speaking of lucky escapes...how about Inky the New Zealand Octopus? Seems this particular cephalopod is a bit sneakier (?), more intelligent (?), devious (?) than anyone guessed. Imagine being able to wiggle (ooze?) your way out of your tank, move across the “wide open spaces” to a drain hole, and then work your way into and down that drain to freedom! Apparently he got bored...

Way to go, Inky! “So long, suckers!”¹

Gail Harcombe



Common camas (*Camassia quamash*) at Playfair Park. Photo: Patrice Snopkowski

¹ www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/so-long-suckers-inky-the-octopus-makes-amazing-escape-1.2858586

A Message from the Board

This message provides a summary of what the Society has been doing for the past year, on the strength of volunteer time commitments (and your membership fees).

Membership is currently 564 households (779 adults).

DONATIONS

- Scholarships and Science Fair: The Society contributes approximately \$7000 annually to University of Victoria, Royal Roads University, and Camosun College through scholarships and bursaries for undergraduate and graduate students, and we support the regional Science Fair competition.

New in 2015 was the establishment of the “VNHS Dennis and Lyndis Davis Scholarship” totally \$2400 annually. Lyndis Davis’ donation and a matching contribution from an anonymous donor associated with the university made this possible.

Also new in 2015, thanks to the contribution from Lyndis and a bequest received, the amount of each scholarship was increased to \$1000 annually to better reflect the modern-day costs of attending post-secondary education.



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- Swan Lake: Since Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary was established in 1975, VNHS has been gifted the Sanctuary \$4000 annually. In 2015, we gave the Sanctuary an additional 75,000 to try to help re-invigorate their boardwalk campaign with a major contribution. Still \$800,000 needed to finish it!
- Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team: The Bringing Back the Bluebirds project is an important initiative begun by the VNHS decades ago and reinstated a few years ago by the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team. In 2015, your Society contributed \$10,000 to the effort—\$5000 from the VNHS’ Conservation Fund and \$5000 from Lyndis Davis’ donation to the Society.
- Habitat Acquisition Trust received \$5000 from the VNHS for covenant surveying.
- The Ancient Forest Alliance received \$1000 from the Society for the Avatar Grove Boardwalk, a project that ensures this ancient ecosystem is much more accessible to our membership and the general public.
- Metchoshin BioBlitz was supported with a \$200 donation from VNHS to help cover the minimal costs of this event.

FUNDRAISING

- Bird Checklist and Book Sales totaled 100 books sold and 261 checklists in 2015. The checklist was reprinted but as a limited run because of the need to update it as soon as possible. A lot has happened since 2013 when it was last updated.
- Annual Valentine’s Day Couples’ Bird Count (Valentine Birdathon): This event has been ably coordinated by Alan and Jan since it began almost 20 years ago. All of the participant fees go into the VNHS Conservation Fund (see page 10).
- Bequests in 2015: The VNHS received two bequests in 2015. The first was \$5000 from the estate of Louise Elsie Frances Druce, which was earmarked for scholarships. The specific allocation of this bequest was, in part, the motivation needed to confirm increasing the annual scholarships/bursaries to \$1000 each. The second bequest was from the estate of Dorothy Coombes (\$167,975), which has been added to the VNHS Conservation Fund.

EVENTS/OUTREACH

- Each year we participate in a number of events, some of which we cohost, including Camas Day. This year was our 25th year collaborating with the Friends of Beacon Hill Park. Another co-hosted event is the CRD and VNHS Hawk Watch, followed by our BBQ Social, meant for members to feel appreciated and meet other members. Join us again this year in September.

- Our table was set up at numerous other events as well: Seedy Saturday, Ocean's Day at Gorge Park, Swan Lake Native Plant Sale, Creatively United for the Planet and International Migratory Bird Day. These are great ways to let people know about Victoria's nature club but also help distribute information about conservation initiatives.
- Without Ann Nightingale we are not sure the annual Christmas Bird Count would even happen, but we are sure it would not be the success it is. This past year our other annual counting effort, the Victoria Butterfly Count, was taken on by Aziza Cooper. To help build participant confidence and to enjoy beautiful locations in the sun, Aziza led butterfly walks in the region as well.
- Two VNHSers co-coordinate our extremely successful Connecting Children With Nature program: Bill Dancer and John Henigman. These free school programs are designed to get kids of all ages outside and into a nearby greenspace to learn about nature. Almost 900 children of all ages participated in these in 2015, and Bill's goal is to reach 1000 in the coming years.
- More than 100 field trips occurred in 2015, including the weekly Saturday and Tuesday birding trips; all thanks to volunteer leaders and Agnes Lynn and Bill Dancer's coordination (Tuesday Group).

- VNHS presentations, 30 monthly presentations each year, were on a variety of topics from the microscopic to the massive, near and far. These evening presentations are open to anyone who wishes to attend, so come on out and bring friends.
- Six issues of the naturalist Magazine are published annually and are mailed to members or sent as a full colour pdf. Currently 251 copies are emailed.
- Your Society is represented or involved in many ways in the community including being on committees like the Viaduct Flats Committee and Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative, and we have cross-representation with various other organizations: Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, Rocky Point Bird Observatory, Habitat Acquisition Trust, BC Nature, and now NatureKids (aka the Young Naturalists Club).
- In 2015, the VNHS Distinguished Service Award went to Dr. Hans Roemer—botanist extraordinaire!

As a final note, it is time to thank all of the directors, those remaining on the board and past directors (in August, Melissa Frey left the board for a job in Seattle), and to introduce you to the three new board members: Vicki Metcalf, Stephanie Weinstein and Charlene Wood. Welcome and thank you for "coming on board" (see page 2 for list of current directors).



***We will keep it natural.
For you, for them.
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Lucky Lager & a Cast of 'Commensal' Characters

By Bill Merilees

In June of last year, two cases of Lucky Lager, Vancouver Island's beer of choice, were exchanged for two bags of frozen hermit crabs 'in the shell'. Bob Fouracre of Victoria, a Spot Prawn fisherman, and his crew were the recipients of the beer while the author got the crabs. This was a bonanza of very interesting material along with a surprise or two!

This quest began during a visit to Tsehum Harbour, near Swartz Bay, where it was mentioned that local prawn boats were getting a considerable by-catch of large hermit crabs. Enquiries lead to Bob Fouracre and, thanks to Bob, this sample of 246 snail shells came into my hands.

Bob was trap fishing in Haro Strait to the east of D'Arcy Island at a depth of between 44 and 57 fathoms (80 to 104 metres). Like the prawns, hermit crabs also were entering his traps to feast on the bait provided. Due to the depth and rough bottom spot prawns prefer, this habitat is very difficult for naturalists to sample. Only commercial fisher folk or institutional scientific monitoring programs, with



PHOTO 1: The Alaskan Hermit (*Pagurus ochotensis*).

appropriate gear, ever get to sample what's in these deep water habitats.

Examining, sorting and identifying this material took some time, but the results were remarkable: three species of hermit crabs, nine species of large snail shells, four species of living snails including some slipper limpets, and more than 100 large commensal worms.

The Hermit Crabs

During the harvesting procedure, a considerable number (28%) of the hermit crabs were apparently distressed to the point that they deserted their shells leaving their 'homes' behind. When the remaining occupied shells were sorted according to their occupants, these three species showed marked preferences for the 'homes' they had selected.

The relationship between a hermit crab and its snail shell is not a commensal one, because the shell is dead. The relationship observed here is known as metabiosis; where "the mode of life in which one organism so depends on another that it cannot flourish unless the latter precedes and influences the environment favourably" (Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary 2016).

The common names used below are from Lamb and Hanby 2005.

The Alaskan Hermit (*Pagurus ochotensis*) (Photo 1): This species is among the largest of our west coast hermit crabs with a carapace length up to 5 cm (2"). Seventy-six of the 79 crabs of this species preferred the larger moon snail shaped shells of *Euspira* and *Cryptonatica* which have a large interior space. Even though *Nucella* and *Ceratostoma* are large, they are differently proportioned with their interior space being narrower and more confined.

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PHOTO 2: The Bluespine Hermit (*Pagurus kennerlyi*)



PHOTO 3: The Widehand Hermit (*Elassochirus tenuimanus*).

The Bluespine Hermit (*Pagurus kennerlyi*) (Photo 2): with a carapace that can reach 3 cm (1¼”) was the smallest of the hermit crabs in this sample. Despite their smaller size, 49 of 62 individuals preferred the longer, heavier and narrow aperture shells offered by *Nucella* and *Ceratostoma*.

The Widehand Hermit (*Elassochirus tenuimanus*) (Photo 3): with a carapace up to 4 cm (1½”) and a gigantic right pincher, is a very striking hermit crab. When threatened it can withdraw into its shell and use this pincher as a shield in a similar manner to a snail’s use of its operculum (Photo 4). Thirty-five of 36 Widehand individuals preferred the shells of *Euspira pallida* or the smaller shells of *Cryptonatica* for their residence.

The Snails

Nine different species of snails (gastropods) were occupied by these hermit crabs (Table 1). Many of these individuals were badly corroded and/or encrusted by barnacles, hydroids, sponges and other marine life. A small number of individuals that were in pretty good shape are illustrated in Photo 5.



PHOTO 4: The Widehand Hermit showing the use of its large pincher as a shield.



PHOTO 5: Top row: (left to right) *Euspira pallida*, *Cryptonatica aleutica* (2), the scallop—*Chlamys rubida*, & *Ceratostoma foliatum*. Bottom Row: *Neptunea lyrata* (2), *Fusitriton oregonensis*, *Nucella lamellosa* (2)—frilled & smooth individuals.

The Worms

The big surprise from this collection came from the presence of a large commensal nereid worm found living in 52 % of the shells examined. These worms were ‘tucked up’ in the space of the spire behind the hermit crab’s abdomen (the ‘tender’ portion of the crab’s body that the shell protects). The largest of these worms was just over 17 cm in length (7”) (Photo 6). Thanks to some sleuthing by Sheila Buyers and Rick Harbo a very interesting reference came to light of an observation made in Puget Sound in the 1890’s (Harrington 1897).

Through dredging Harrington collected four species of hermit crabs and when [supposedly put in an aquarium], “these crabs slowly advanced from their retreats, one or two or sometimes threes beautifully striped Nereids will emerge from the opening of the shell, and, if the crab be feeding, will proceed to the mouth parts of the latter and share the feast”. From his observations Harrington then proceeded to



PHOTO 6: The Red-and-white-banded Sea-nymph, *Cheiloneris cyclurus*. Note: The colour of this specimen is quite different from that illustrated by Lamb & Hanby AN47. This may be due to it having been frozen?

discuss the nature of this worm's commensal habits and formally described *Nereis cyclurus* (now known as *Cheiloneris cyclurus*—the Red-and-white-banded Sea Nymph of Lamb & Hanby 2005). Note: The specimens from this collection do not illustrate this red and white banding, possibly due their being frozen?

Question: Would this commensal relationship not make for a fascinating exhibit at the Vancouver Aquarium in Stanley Park???

Slipper Limpets

The other commensal relationship that was present in this collection was the presence of slipper limpets, (also known as slipper shells) (Photo 7), living attached to the snail shells just inside, on the roof, of the aperture. Testing their DNA through the Pacific Biological Station in Nanaimo, revealed them to be *Crepidula williamsi*—not *Crepidula perforans* ?? as had long been thought! Slipper limpets were found in 4.5% of the snails examined.

Incidental Live Molluscs

In addition to the mollusc species mentioned above the gastropods *Calliostoma annulatum* (2), *Amphissa reticulata* (3) and *Ceratostoma foliatum* (1) and the scallop *Chlamys rubida* (2) were also found in this sample.

Conclusion

Being able to sample new habitats is a stimulating experience that expands one's knowledge providing opportunities to share these findings with others

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank: Bob Fouracre of the "Just in Time II" and his crew for



PHOTO 7: The Slipper Limpet, *Crepidula williamsi*. For a long time, this species was known as *Crepidula perforans* until DNA work done at the Pacific Biological Station, Nanaimo, by Magalie Castelin determined it was *C. williamsi*.

their interest and assistance in collecting this sample; Sheila Buyers and Rick Harbo for locating Harrington's 1897 article; Magalie Castelin, Pacific Biological Station Nanaimo, for her identification of the slipper limpet; Greg Jensen who kindly confirmed the hermit crab identifications; and Rick's always helpful comments and editing of this article.

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Table 1: Gastropod Species occupied by Hermit Crabs and their Commensal Inhabitants.

		With	Without	With Commensal	
Species	Number	Hermit Crabs	Worms	Slipper Limpets	
<i>Cryptonatica aleutica</i>	129	87	42	84	4
<i>Euspira pallida</i>	37	29	8	17	0
<i>Ceratostoma foliatum</i>	36	24	12	9	3
<i>Nucella lamellosa</i>	28	26	2	8	1
<i>Fusitriton oregonensis</i>	6	5	1	7+	2
<i>Neptunea lyrata</i>	6	3	3	2	0
<i>Euspira lewisii</i>	2	2	0	2	1
<i>Neptunea tabulata</i>	1	0	1	0	0
<i>Latisipho cf hallii</i>	1	1	0	?	0
Totals:	246	177	69	129	11

Is THE BLOB to blame?

By Pauline Davis
Photo by author

On a recent December 2015 trip to Alaska we observed a strange wildlife phenomenon. A small flock of Common Murre was seen flying upstream along the Susitna River and then floating down with the rapid current in search of food. These pelagic birds are normally found out in the North Pacific but have been observed inland in South Central Alaska starving and unable to fly. Grounded birds have been found on busy highways, on sled dog trails and next to houses. These birds are built for water takeoffs and once on the ground they are unable to fly again. Local wildlife rehabilitation centres are inundated with birds brought in by residents. The Bird Treatment and Learning Centre in the

Common Murre on the
Susitna River.



Susitna Valley has taken in 60 murrees and released 35 since October. Biologists speculate that intense storms in late December with 100 mph winds have been driving the birds which are already leaving the ocean in search of food. Seabird die-offs in coastal Alaska were first reported in March probably because of shortages of squid and krill. The best option for setting free the rehabilitated birds seems to be at Point Woronzof since dead birds have been reported at Seward, Whittier, Sitka and Homer. At least these birds have a second chance.

Good Reads

By Ken Sohm

Among the Islands; Adventures in the Pacific by Tim Flannery is a hugely entertaining and informational read. It is an account of a decade—in the 1980's and 90's—of biological study and mammalian collecting in island chains of the S.W. Pacific Ocean, from close to New Guinea east and south as far as Fiji and New Caledonia. Flannery says that as expedition leader he “had the best job in the world.”

Those of you who watch Knowledge Network, particularly the Coasts program, will be familiar with Flannery. In this book we meet a considerably younger naturalist working for the Australian Museum in Sidney, just starting out, brimming over with enthusiasm and, by his own admission, over-confident. The first forays were financed by generous members of the Australian Museum society; the later expeditions, termed the Scott Expeditions, were funded by a large bequest from a

Miss Winifred Scott, the last survivor of 7 siblings—all single and all with savvy investments; in effect the legacy was the sum of all seven portfolios.

The book is rich in character studies, from eccentric museum curators to Dutch born skippers. Not to forget The Supreme Rat Trap Company of Sidney where Flannery buys his traps and watches, transfixed, as an ancient Heath Robinson contraption spits out a trap, number 23,735,492.

We learn about the differences between evolution on the Australian continent and the islands and why the island species are so vulnerable. The searches for bats, rats, snakes, take the teams through difficult terrain, sometimes menacing; the Solomon Islanders are not too friendly. Though only 10 mammal species previously unknown to scientists were found, Flannery points out that such research is of inestimable value to those wanting to know how evolution works on islands. Reports were made to The International Union for the Conservation of Species and the various island governments.

This 2011 book had many favourable reviews, a small snippet from one by Simon Winchester saying “Seldom have I been so captivated by a book.” It is still in print and I picked up a copy from a local bookseller; the library also has copies.

Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 20 new members since the last issue. The following agreed to have their names published in our Welcome column.

Benj Youngson
Uchuelet
nature stuff

Mike Legge
VICTORIA

Ian and Mary Cameron
BRENTWOOD BAY

Alastair Kerr
VICTORIA

Christina Cutbill
DUNCAN
*Birding, nature, field trips,
natural history, conservation,
bird surveys*

Britt Buirs
VICTORIA
*Marine biology, acoustics,
ethology*

What Some Folks Will Do for Valentine Fun

By Alan MacLeod
Photos by Author



The 2016 field: top row, l-r: Jerry and Gladys Anderson, Alan MacLeod, Joanna and Mike Preston, Andrew and Gail Harcombe, Barb and Mike McGrenere; front row: Susan and Daniel Donnecke, Jan Brown, Courtney and Matt Cameron, David and Agnes Lynn.

Some people think the best way to celebrate Valentine's Day is to sleep in, have a late and lavish breakfast, pig out on a big box of chocolates. Others—admittedly a small minority—think a better option is to get up at 5:30 a.m., go outside on what could turn out to be a very rainy day, and proceed to bird their brains out.

Sixteen individuals did that very thing on February 14 then got together at Swan Lake to talk about how much fun they had had. The 19th annual VNHS Valentine Couples Birdathon went ahead regardless of a forecast that promised volumes of rain. It turned out the rain was not nearly as bad as predicted, and the birding was just fine. Participants paid \$10 per couple for the joy of engaging in the friendly competition. The money raised goes entirely to VNHS conservation efforts.

The big winners in this year's event were Matt and Courtney Cameron. They counted 85 species from 6 a.m. to noon, and their names will be inscribed on the Anderson Trophy. The race was close: defending champions Mike and Joanna Preston were just two species in arrears of the Camerons, at 83 species, and the Prestons were just a single species in front of Daniel and Susan Donnecke. Any time a tally of 82 is only good for third place, well, that's a measure of a pretty good day.

And what were the best of the birds? The Camerons were happy with a trio of species they found in the Martindale valley—Greater White-fronted Goose, Tundra Swan and American Pipit—as well as the brace of owls, Horned and Barred, they had at Swan Lake. The Prestons liked the Black Scoter spotted at Patricia Bay and the waterbird haul scored at Cattle Point: Long-tailed Duck, Western Grebe, Rhinoceros Auklet. The Donneckes were understandably delighted with the two star finds they had at Hyacinth Park: Orange-crowned Warbler and White-throated Sparrow. David and Agnes Lynn had a good day too, tallying 69 species, including Red-breasted Sapsucker on their own street and Peregrine Falcon at Panama



Matt and Courtney Cameron, Anderson Trophy winners for 2016.

Flats. Given injuries sustained from a bike tumble just a day or two before the birdathon, Mike McGrenere was pleased with 63 species in just four hours of counting with Barbara. They did well at Mallard Avenue above Martindale: Mourning and Eurasian-collared Dove, as well as Merlin and Northern Harrier. Andrew and Gail Harcombe did their birding by a combination of driving and walking. They counted the Northern Shrike they found at St. Michael's Road as their bird-of-the-day.

Jerry Anderson, not just a bird-carver extraordinaire and the artist who produced the Anderson Trophy, is also, with spouse Gladys, someone who has participated in the birdathon since it began in 1998. Jerry and Gladys made a leisurely start at 9 a.m., counting 51 species including one they haven't seen in their own backyard in years, Bushtit. Calculated on a species-per-hour basis, the Andersons' outing may have been the most productive of all.

Event hosts, Alan MacLeod and Jan Brown, did as they usually do: they simply walked out their James Bay door at 5:30 in the pre-dawn dark and listened for owls. They heard none but were entirely content with the 55 species they found, entirely on foot, in James Bay and Fairfield. The MacLeod-Brown team were particularly pleased with the Merlin spotted in Ross Bay Cemetery and the Red-breasted Sapsucker found in a boulevard tree on Cook Street.

The aggregate total of species counted in this year's birdathon was 108, a bit low by comparison to previous high counts (three at 118, one at 119). Almost as much fun as counting the 'good' birds found in the valentine count is contemplating the big misses—the species that ought to have been seen but weren't. The most surprising blanks this year were California Quail, Sanderling, Savannah Sparrow and Red Crossbill.

Don Wuest of Wild Birds Unlimited came through as he always does. Don donated three colourful hummingbird glass sculptures (by Mark and Jane Bateman) for the winners and first and second runners-up. The organizers and birdathon participants are grateful for Don's continuing and enthusiastic support of this event.

If you have never participated in a couples birdathon but happen to know one of the couples who shared in this year's event, do yourself a favour: ask how much fun it was—and mark your calendar for next year.

Habitat Acquisition Trust Community

By Josh Tanasichuk



Camas Hill Restoration Day. *Photo: HAT*

I sat on the tailgate of a faded moss green pick-up truck, surrounded by five or six others. Their faces were creased and, to an eight-year-old, they looked as old as humankind. Their skin sagged, chins like rocks in deflated balloons, their hair was shades of grey, sometimes white, wispy like cotton candy. The blinding afternoon sunlight brought their hands to their brows and their faded rain jackets crinkled as their arms fatigued. Some wore hats, faded and blue or brown. Behind me, 15 or 20 wood-handled shovels lay on top of one another. Lazy, over-worked arms had thrown them into the box of the truck so many times, it was scored with a mosaic of silver and dull greyish green. My Father stood in the middle of the group. They were all too sore and weary for anxieties. They sputtered words to each other, laughed, and their old faces smiled with creases at the edge of each eye, cheeks high and round. They were volunteers for the Nanaimo and Area Land Trust, just having finished a day of restoration work at Neck Point Park.

Eighteen or nineteen years later, I walked into the Habitat Acquisition Trust office. I met with Jill Robinson, the organization's Executive Director for an informational interview. We spoke about travelling and work and aspirations and I asked her how I could work for a place like HAT and she told me what I might do.

A few weeks after meeting with Jill, I entered the office again to meet with Jake and Alf, volunteer co-ordinators of monthly restoration projects at HAT land covenants. After expressing interest in restoration work to a few HAT employees, they got me in touch with Jake and Alf by e-mail. We described our personal backgrounds, ultimately leading

to job delegation for the upcoming restoration project. I said almost nothing, trying to absorb as much as I could. Jake and Alf explained to me the event organization process, simultaneously revealing to me their dedication to HAT. Every HAT employee and volunteer holds this dedication. The HAT community is welcoming, tight knit, and passionate. I believe this sense of community is what keeps volunteers coming back, excited and ambitious.

The Camas Hill restoration day, on March 5th, was my second restoration event—the second I had a hand in organizing, and the second I'd attended for HAT. On the morning of the 5th, we met with about 15 other volunteers, all surprised and jolted by the early-March sunshine. Our group of restoration new-comers and veterans was a community for a day. We set out to remove Scotch Broom, we hiked for ten or fifteen minutes down moss-covered rocks like a glowing green lava flow, and we pulled Broom. Each volunteer shared a story, each lost their mind while gazing at the view of Sooke ahead, and each basked for at least a passing moment in the March sudden sunlight like a Sharp-tailed Snake on a warm rock.

I didn't know how HAT would shout back to the old days of helping my Father and his friends at NALT, but they are remarkably similar—the community, the camaraderie, the dedication. As a volunteer with HAT, I've learned at least one thing—working with an organization like this isn't solely about helping our environment and our local ecosystems, it's just as much about community, camaraderie, and collectively uniting for our own health, and the health of those around us.

Common Lichens of Victoria—Outing February 2016

By Agnes Lynn

After trying for a couple of years to find someone who knows their lichens and would take us on a field trip, we finally organized an outing. Hans Roemer, assisted by his colleague Ryan Batten, spent a pleasant afternoon with us at Francis/King Regional Park. We had such a great response that we had to limit the attendance to 19 people. (We wanted everyone to have a chance to see what Hans was talking about and we did not want so many people that we destroyed the delicate habitat where they grow.) Hans, as he often does, produced a very informative pamphlet on lichens for us to study ahead of time. He described lichens, told us about the main types, gave us a few names to practice, and provided a few references. The pamphlet was very much appreciated. The hard part with lichens is that they rarely have common names, so we get lots of practice with our Latin. We didn't have to go far into the park to find several good examples of lichens right at the side of the path. Farther in, we investigated an open knoll covered in lichens and mosses. We carefully tip-toed around as Hans described what we were seeing. He noted that these precious knolls are disappearing as more vegetation crowds out the light, and the increasing number of people using the park also contributes to the degradation of the delicate areas. It was hard to absorb everything about the lichens while trying to identify the many mosses as well. We had had good practice with mosses during our mosses trip with Kem two weeks before. After our brains were frazzled with all the names and lichens to examine, we meandered back along the muddy path to the parking lot. Fortunately several people had time to take some excellent photographs. As this was just a beginner's peek at lichens, we hope to convince Hans to do another lichen outing soon.



Hypogymnia enteromorpha with apothecia.
Photo: Pauline Davis



(above) *Cladonia crispata*. Photo: Val George

(left) *Ramalina farinacea*. Photo: Val George



Island View Beach Draft Management Plan

The park and surrounding habitat are under a great deal of pressure from a variety of users. CRD Parks has drafted a compromise management plan that sets aside some of the park for nature, but still maintains a large area for recreation activities and dog use. **It is crucial that the CRD hears from people who value the wildlife and support renaturalizing the park as they prepare a final version of the plan in the coming weeks.**

The draft plan can be found at <https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/parks-pdf/island-view-beach-regional-park-draft-management-plan.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

There are many positive elements to this plan:

1. The park is designated a conservation area.
2. The vision includes the larger coastal landscape, responding to rising sea levels, and a commitment to protect and restore ecosystems.
3. The environmental protection zone is 68.6% and the natural environment zone is 24.8% of the park's 48.7 ha.
4. There is a commitment to create an enclosed off-leash area for dogs with the remainder of the park becoming on-leash.
5. Collaboration with the Tsawout in managing lands adjacent to the park.

However, problems remain when it comes to implementation.

1. **Recreation of a dynamic sand ecosystem:** Zoning the dunes for protection does nothing to restore the dynamic processes that create and maintain them. Construction of the berm in the 1930s interrupted the supply of sand to the dunes. As long as the berm exists, the rare plants, insects and animals that depend on the dunes will continue to disappear. A scientific approach is needed for the management of sand dune ecosystems, coastal marshes and sea level change (See <https://www.crd.bc.ca/docs/default-source/parks-pdf/>

[island-view-beach-management-plan-public-participation-process-step-2-summary-report.pdf?sfvrsn=4](#) Page 53).

2. **Species at Risk:** There is a legal obligation on all land owners to manage for species at risk. This includes CRD Parks. Species protected under Federal legislation include the many bird species using the park as a migration stop, for over wintering, and for nesting. All are threatened by disturbance by pets. The Museum discussion noted the increase in species and numbers of wildlife at Goldstream Park when Quiet Zones that excluded people and dogs were created in sensitive areas. The same could be done at Island View Beach.
3. **Island View Beach is a regionally significant ecosystem and the park should be expanded:** This ecosystem cannot continue to be managed as just another outdoor recreation park. The park is too small to accommodate the current 384,000 annual visits and restore environmental quality. The park needs to be expanded by incorporating adjacent lands owned by Central Saanich, the foreshore owned by the Province, and acquiring private lands to the north-west and south of the park. More effective use of the park could also be made by transforming the camping area to a day use area as suggested in the plan.

It is vital for the decision-makers to hear and consider the thoughts of those who value Island View Beach Park as a valuable refuge for many rare birds, plants, and arthropods. We encourage you to let your voice be heard by writing letters expressing your thoughts to CRD Chair Barb Desjardins, Central Saanich Mayor Ryan Windor, and CRD Parks staff—contact information at <https://www.crd.bc.ca/about/contact-us>

Please consider taking a few minutes to express your views on this draft plan so that the wildlife may be properly protected for generations to come.

BC Field Ornithologists Young Birder Award

In the last 13 months, four VNHS members have been the recipients of BCFO's Young Birder Award. In 2015, Emma and Rebecca Reader-Lee were recognized by BCFO for their accomplishments in birding, bird photography and volunteerism, and in March, Liam Singh and Leo Donneck were among this year's recipients. All four award winners have actively contributed to birding in the community by leading field trips, sharing their knowledge and skills with others, and assisting at Rocky Point Bird Observatory. We are very fortunate to have such competent and considerate young birders in our organization, and extend congratulations to the award recipients and gratitude to their families for supporting their birding endeavors.

Species Profile: Rhinoceros Auklet

Cerorhinca monocerata



By Penny Lancaster, Rocky Point Bird Observatory



Rhinoceros Auklet. Photo: Mike Yip

The Rhinoceros Auklet is a common marine bird that breeds off the coast of B.C. and may be seen on local waters year-round. Though called an auklet, these birds are actually more closely related to puffins. What is more fitting to the name however is the horn-like protrusion at the base of the bill during breeding season which resembles that of a rhinoceros.

With a breeding range around the Pacific Rim from California to Japan, B.C. is home to 50% of the worldwide population, and 73% of the North American population. The Rhinoceros Auklet finds remote, uninhabited islands to nest on, with many nesting sites along the south and west coasts of Vancouver Island to the north along the coast to Haida Gwaii. Notable local nesting sites are located at Mandarte Island (near Sidney) and Mittlenatch Island (near Campbell River). Birds winter from southern B.C. to California, with the highest numbers off the coast of California.

When it comes to diet, the Rhinoceros Auklet feeds on a variety of small fishes and invertebrates. Sandlance and herring are the main prey fishes, though a wide variety of other epipelagic schooling fishes have been documented as prey when preferred species were less abundant. This bird is a skilled diver and forages most successfully in the upper 20 or 30 metres of the water column. A study done by Alan Burger of University of Victoria in 1993 showed that as many as four fish species could be grasped in the bill at once, and that 73% of fishes caught were captured from below, as indicated by bite marks on prey.

The breeding behavior of these birds is highly secretive. Rhinoceros Auklet nest colonially in burrows on forested and non-forested islands. Trips to and from colonies occur only in darkness. This is thought to be an adaptation in response to kleptoparasitism (stealing of food by other birds)

and predation by gulls and raptors. Burrows may be located under hummocks of grass, moss or bare soil, covered by canopy or in the open. Males and females use their bills and claws to dig nesting burrows that can be several meters long. Pairs lay a single egg which is incubated for approximately 45 days. Peak hatching occurs from early June to early July. The chicks are fed small fish in their burrows, and fledge after about 50 days.

Due to the secretive colonial behavior of this species, overall population estimates are rather unreliable. However, North American sites are showing a slight increase in numbers. Even so, many threats to this species exist, including but not limited to introduced predators, commercial fishing (the most common species caught in salmon gill-nets off the B.C. coast), and oil pollution. Many breeding colonies have been extirpated because predators (mostly rats) have been introduced to nesting islands. On Langara Island, on the northwest tip of Haida Gwaii, five species of burrow-nesting seabirds were wiped-out by rats by the late 1980s. In 1995, efforts by the Canadian Wildlife Service were able to successfully eradicate rats within two years by using an anticoagulant toxicant. Nesting seabirds have since been recovering at these locations. Raccoon and mink have also been known to be significant nest predators.

With the significant local population and breeding habitat, British Columbia has a high global responsibility in the conservation of this bird. Though the population is currently stable, environmental changes in the ocean can be highly detrimental, as well as vulnerability to predators or habitat destruction on breeding islands. For best observation of this species, individuals will be seen closer to shore during breeding season, and farther out at sea when not breeding.

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Saturday, May 14, 2016

9AM-2PM

Beaver Lake Nature Centre at Elk/Beaver Lake Park

- Guided bird walks (9:00, 10:00 and 11:00am)
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 - Live birds of prey
 - Children's activities

International Migratory Bird Day 2016



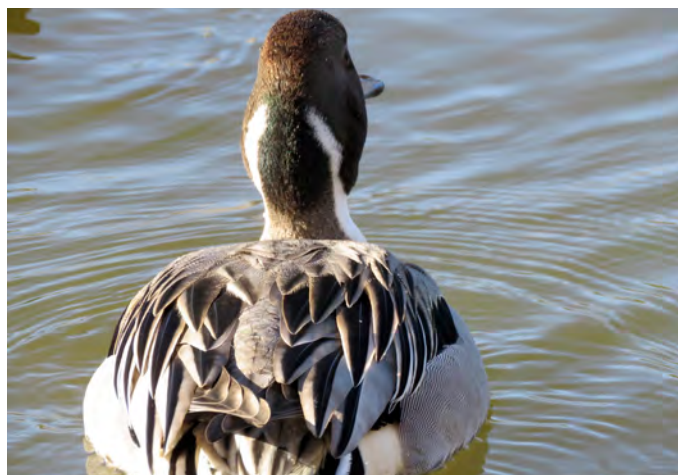
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Day Trip to George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary and Boundary Bay

By David Dahl



Sandhill Crane. *Photo: Ron Matthew*



Northern Pintail. *Photo: Jannaca Chick*

In the early hours of the 20th of February, 18 members of the VNHS assembled in darkness at the Swartz Bay ferry terminal, shortly before the dawn of a gloriously warm and sunny late winter's day. We did a seven-hour, whirlwind tour of Tsawwassen and Delta (including Ladner), to look for birds—with a focus on raptors, waterfowl and shorebirds. Nearly all of our birding took place within the Boundary Bay—Roberts Bank—Sturgeon Bank (Fraser River Estuary) Important Bird Area (see <http://www.ibacanada.ca/site.jsp?siteID=BC017> for information).

Arriving at Tsawwassen a few minutes before 9:00, we took secondary roads en route to George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary (Reifel). Satellite images of the area confirm the dominance of agriculture in land use; the flat land of this part of the Fraser River delta is a patchwork of rectangles in hues of green. This circumstance determines the identity of birds to be found: winter vegetation on muddy fields invites waterfowl; small rodents in flat, open fields attract some of the raptors.

Not long after we began the drive, we were treated to sightings of five species of raptors: Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk and Northern Harrier. Bald Eagles were by far the most plentiful, of course. My estimate for the day, likely on the conservative side, was nearly 130 Bald Eagles while we were in the Lower Mainland. In transit toward Boundary Bay, we spotted more than 30 eagles arranged concurrently in several high, distant kettles. At that point, I made the unusual decision to stop distinguishing between adult and immature eagles in my count.

We proceeded to Reifel, situated on Westham Island, at the end of the Fraser River delta and the edge of the Strait of Georgia. As we approached Reifel, waterfowl became more prevalent. Mallard and American Wigeon were most abundant;



Ring-necked Duck. *Photo: Michael Newman*



Female Wood Duck. *Photo: Michael Newman*

we also saw Trumpeter Swans (two groups totalling 24 individuals), and a similar number of Canada Geese. Shortly beyond the entrance to Reifel, the two duck species were joined by several Wood Ducks.

Reifel is a wonderful location to see wild birds up close, as they are numerous and extremely habituated to people. Waterfowl, several songbird species and Sandhill Cranes especially walk or fly directly towards people—most of the birds looking for hand-outs, of course. The cranes were not at all aggressive; they were clearly serene walking amid people. It was stunning to be face-to-face with these elegant creatures, which for millennia have inspired symbolism and mythology in many human cultures.

As well as good luck with weather, we had excellent fortune with lighting. For much of the day and most of our best finds, the brilliant sunshine was on our backs. For this reason and the habituated condition of the birds at Reifel, our photographers captured many excellent images. We studied closely the fine markings of species such as Lesser Scaup and Ring-necked Duck. The gorgeous chocolate markings of the male Northern Pintail never looked more spectacular; the outrageous beauty of male (see photo back cover) and female Wood Ducks was cranked up to the maximum. We saw the faint, copperish-coloured ring around the neck of the Ring-necked Duck. Although it's seen only in the most favourable conditions, we confirmed with our eyes that it's not fictional.

We added three more raptor species at Reifel. A Great Horned Owl was seen resting for the day. Hiding not far away from that great owl were two Northern Saw-whet Owls, which are always crowd-pleasers. Further along the trail, an adult Cooper's Hawk flew through the area. While the accipiter provoked the expected commotion from songbirds, its talons also incited nervousness amongst waterfowl that were close enough to feel the breeze of its fly-by.

The star of my day, however, was not the graceful crane, nor the ducks of spectacular plumage, nor the formidable birds of prey. The subject of my most memorable moments of the day



Saw-whet Owl. Photo: Ron Matthew

was a little icterid, with dazzling red epaulets and no fear of investigating six-foot-tall primates for the prospect of finding a meal. Of Reifel's songbirds, Red-winged Blackbird is one of the most habituated. These individuals are as acclimatized to feeding from human hands as Black-capped Chickadees. Since being a novice birder at eight years old, I have been quite familiar with this species, its vocalizations, nesting habits and other behaviour, but I never experienced one landing on my hand. At close range, the great volume of its song was remarkable.

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Red-winged Blackbird. Photo: Michael Newman

If Reifel had been our only destination, the day would have been pleasant enough, but we still had more ground to cover. Onward to Boundary Bay!

We added only a few more species at Boundary Bay; most notable were a male Eurasian Wigeon, a male Green-wingedXCommon Teal hybrid (its ID called out by one of the foremost experts on the trip, Liam Singh), Dunlin, Short-eared Owl and Northern Shrike. As anticipated, Boundary Bay also padded our total of Bald Eagles.

As we walked along the dyke, we came across an incident of aerial piracy, as an adult Bald Eagle harassed a Northern Harrier. We concluded the harrier had prey that the eagle coveted. The two raptors used their skills to best advantage: the harrier, its superior maneuverability; the eagle, its size and speed.

For several minutes after we arrived, the harried harrier gamely tried to hold on to its meal. Eventually, however, the harrier grew too weary to hang on to its quarry, and dropped what appeared to be a deceased mouse or vole. From a starting point above the harrier, the eagle immediately dropped like a stone and plucked the rodent from the air.

Not all conflict had been resolved, however. As soon as the adult eagle won the prize, an immature eagle made its move, and tried in turn to become a thief. The adult would tolerate no such nonsense, and shrugged off the young interloper as mere *Haliaeetus non grata*.

Late in the afternoon, we saw an enormous murmuration of shorebirds: a single flock of thousands of Dunlin seen distantly across the bay. The consensus was that they numbered in the ballpark of 10,000.

Our last stop of the day provided one of many highlights. As four Short-eared Owls hunted, their mothy flight drew expressions of admiration and awe from observers. It was a delightful way to cap off an extraordinary day of birding.

Given the number of raptors in the region and their status at the top of the food chain, as well as the attendant health hazards that can entail, the specific agricultural practices of the area have special significance. We have seen how these mighty predators can become extremely vulnerable to toxins in the environment. Let's ensure that recent history does not repeat itself, and safeguard the future of these birds, which fill a crucial ecological niche.

We returned to the ferry terminal at Tsawwassen, well in advance of the 5:00 p.m. sailing. The day had already been a long one, and there was not a single unsatisfied birder in our group.

Thanks to Agnes Lynn for her proficiency at organizing the event, Dave Lynn for being an ever-reliable chauffeur, and Rick Schortinghuis for being our guide.

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Butterfly Coordinator to Change

by Agnes Lynn

After looking after our Butterfly Outings and collecting Butterfly Count data for some time, Aziza Cooper is passing along the tasks to other folks as she plans to do some traveling. With some arm-twisting, Gordon Hart has agreed to keep up the Butterfly Counts records, with Jeff Gaskin assisting. You can contribute to this data gathering by watching in the Naturalist Calendar of Events for the notice regarding the count dates. After your count, go to the VNHS web site and fill in the form. Gordon will gather the data and look for interesting sightings to pass along. Browse through the form for possibilities. If you do not know your butterflies well. There are photos and guidelines regarding when you would typically see them. If you usually watch for butterflies in a certain area, such as near your home, let Gordon know that you would like to cover that area. If you would like to be part of this count but are not sure where to count, you could contact him to find an area. Contact Gordon at butterflies@vicnhs.bc.ca.

Butterfly outings are on the first Sunday of each month (there will be a notice in the Naturalist). Most times we meet on Mount Tolmie at 1:00 p.m., and then decide where to go. (I will make sure that I am there or will have someone else meet the group.) I do not know my butterflies well enough to do this without the help of those who do know them. Jeremy Tatum has agreed to come as often as possible, and we need other knowledgeable folks to join us. If you have a specific destination in mind, feel free to email me ahead of time with your ideas. And watch the Events Calendar on the VNHS web site, as occasionally we need to make changes. And of course, if the weather is crummy, don't

bother coming out as the outing will be cancelled.

Hopefully you all know about the VNHS Invertebrate Alert. Check the VNHS web site for the link.

If you have any photos or wish to report any Butterflies, send them to invertalert@naturevictoria.ca. If you need a butterfly or moth identified, send it along. Jeremy Tatum will add the reports to the site.

One further note, please remember that data you send to the Invertebrate Alert does not get copied to the monthly Butterfly Count so if your interesting sighting occurs during the Butterfly monthly reporting time period report them in both places. And vice versa—if you see something special while doing your monthly count, send the report to the Invertebrate Alert as well. Gordon may pick it up and report it in his Monthly Reports but you would be able to do so in a timelier manner. The special ones often don't stay around in any area that long.

If you are new to Butterflies, you are most welcome to come on the outings as it is a group where lots of learning is happening. We wish Aziza well on her travels and thank her for all her work. Let's hope the new team will be able to keep up the pace.



Purplish Copper.
Photo: Aziza Cooper



ANNE HANSEN: *A different species of wildlife artist*

Find Anne's art cards at
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www.oystercatchergirl.blogspot.com
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anitabike@gmail.com

BULLETIN BOARD

Annual Native Plant Garden Tour, Sunday May 1, 2016

10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tour public and private gardens artfully designed to include nature and native plants. Perfect for plant lovers, gardeners, photographers, and families! Volunteers and sponsors needed. Contact alanah@hat.bc.ca for more details and locations.

Canadian Botanical Association Annual Meeting, Victoria, Sunday-Tuesday, May 15-18, 2016

The plenary lecture by Professor Karl Niklas of Cornell University—entitled Forty Years of Teaching Botany, or Why I love Physics—is free to the public, on Sunday May 15, at 7:00 p.m. in Bob Wright A104, University of Victoria. Dr. Bryce Kendrick will give a public lecture on mushrooms at 8:00 p.m. on Monday May 16 (room tba). Questions, contact Patrick von Aderkas, Professor, UVic Centre for Forest Biology, 250 721 8925. For information, see <http://www.uvic.ca/cba2016/>

Outerbridge Park Bird Walk, Sunday, June 11, 2016

Rocky Point Bird Observatory (RPBO) hosts bird walks at

Outerbridge Park in Saanich on the 2nd Sunday of each month (Join us at International Migratory Bird Day at Elk/Beaver Lake on May 14 instead). 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.

Member Appreciation Luncheon, June 16, 2016

12 p.m. to 2 p.m. Become a member of the Habitat Acquisition Trust by calling 250-995-2428 or going online to www.hat.bc.ca for an invite to this exclusive event.

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary Guided Bird Walks

Every Sunday 9:00 a.m. Bring your binoculars and walking shoes and meet in the parking lot for this informal and informative walk around the lake area. Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary is at 3873 Swan Lake Rd, off Ralph St. Donations are appreciated. For more information, see <http://www.swanlake.bc.ca/adult-programs.php> Download a copy of the sanctuary bird checklist http://www.swanlake.bc.ca/images/small_images/On-line%20bird%20checklist%208.5X11.pdf

LETTERS

On behalf of Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team (GOERT) we thank the Victoria Natural History Society, and if you have an opportunity on our behalf, the family/estate of Lyndis Davis, for the generous donation to support the Bluebirds. I had not previously seen the article and found it a delight to read.

The Bluebirds in the Cowichan Valley are showing real promise. Many of the translocated birds are returning each year, and the numbers of new broods continues to expand. The funds will be put to good use this spring when the Bluebirds return to nest.

Again on behalf of our Board, many thanks.

Stuart Prescott, GOERT, Treasurer

Naturekids Seeks Adult with a Big Heart & Love of Sharing the Outdoors with Children!

NatureKids (formerly Young Naturalists) is currently recruiting for a volunteer co-leader for the Victoria Family Club. This is a fun and rewarding volunteer position helping to organize monthly 'Explorer Day' field trips, outdoors as much as possible. You don't need any special qualifications, and can lead Explorer Days yourself or find a Nature Mentor in your community, e.g., retired biologist, keen birder or local bee keeper! NatureKids is designed to get children aged 5–12 years old and their families outside exploring nature! Contact Tammy Keetch, Clubs Coordinator at coordinator@naturekidsbc.ca; www.naturekidsbc.ca References required.



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.

Despite our best efforts to schedule events in advance, changes are inevitable. Please check the website close to the date for any changes. We sometimes also schedule additional events due to unexpected opportunities. Please be sure that VNHS has your up-to-date email address to receive these changes or notice of additional events. If you do not use the internet, team up with someone who does to keep up with changes.

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 for up to three trips, after which they are expected to join the Society.

SATURDAY MORNING BIRDING

Meets every Saturday morning, usually at 8:00 a.m., rain or shine. Check on 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 for up to three trips, 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 2016

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Sunday, May 1

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Spring Migration at Witty's Lagoon

Join **Dannie Carsen** and **Gordon Hart** for a foray around Witty's Lagoon. There will be good ear-birding, and perhaps a warbler fall-out depending on the weather. Vireos, flycatchers, spring shorebirds, raptors and other spring visitors should be there in good numbers as well. Meet at the main parking lot off Metchosin Road at 7:00 a.m. Bring a snack and a drink to have while enjoying the ocean views. Contact Gordon at (250) 721-1264 or gordh19 at shaw.ca or Dannie (250) 544-2117 or dannie at birdsandwine.ca for more information.

Sunday May 1

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Monthly Butterfly Outing

Join us on our monthly Butterfly outing. We are dependent on

participants who can identify our local butterflies for this event to be a success so please come out and help if you know your butterflies. Novices also welcome. 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 coordinator Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Saturday, May 7

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Beach Walk at Macaulay Point

Phil Lambert will lead a walk to investigate the flora and fauna of the rocky intertidal zone on the shores of Macaulay Point, Esquimalt. We will meet at 9:00 a.m. in the parking lot at the Fleming Beach boat launching ramp at the foot of Lampson Street in Esquimalt and walk the short trail to the west side of the Point. The walk will go rain or shine so footing can be wet and slippery. For more information, call Phil at (250) 477-5922.

Saturday, May 7

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Birding Royal Roads and Esquimalt Lagoon

Join **Ann Nightingale** for a birding walk around Esquimalt Lagoon. We should see a good variety of migrating shorebirds and passerines. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the south end of Esquimalt Lagoon by the washrooms. This is a five-hour walk. Bring a drink and a snack. Contact Ann at (250) 652-6450 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

Sunday, May 8

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Mount Prevost Glacier Lilies

Mount Prevost is just north of Duncan. It's an excellent area for plants, birds and butterflies but this trip is planned for us to see the yellow Glacier Lilies (*Erythronium grandiflorum*) that should be in bloom at this time. Normally these plants are found at much higher elevations in the subalpine areas and appear just after snow melt. The population found here and in other parts of the Cowichan Valley are probably a separate subspecies or even a separate species. Experts are arguing this one out! These flowers are very short compared to the ones found at high elevations. If time permits on the way back, we will stop at the Somenos Garry Oak Preserve to check out the wildflowers there. Bring a lunch. You might also bring binoculars. Meet at Helmcken Park & Ride at 9:00 a.m. to carpool. Contact Agnes Lynn at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Saturday, May 14

COHOSTED EVENT—VNHS AND RPBO

International Migratory Bird Day

Rocky Point Bird Observatory and VNHS cohost this event at Elk/Beaver Lake. It is a day of celebration with bird-friendly displays and activities, banding demonstrations and educational booths. Appropriate for all ages and abilities (see info page 15). www.RPBO.org

Saturday, May 14

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 7:00 a.m. at the main parking lot at Beaver Lake. Your leaders will be **Mike & Barb 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 Mike or Barb at (250) 658-8624 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information on this early bird tour.

Sunday, May 15

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. We can always hope for a Lazuli Bunting singing above us in the trees as we slowly climb to the top. The late wildflowers such as Woolly 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.

Friday, May 20

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 7:00 a.m. Contact Rick at (250) 885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Saturday, May 21

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. Turn right at Stewart Mountain Road and meet at the mailboxes at 7:00 a.m. Contact Rick at (250) 885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Saturday, May 21 to Sunday May 29

VICTORIA BUTTERFLY COUNT WEEK

We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers to submit butterfly records. If you would like to participate, please contact Gordon Hart (count coordinator) at (250) 721-1264 or butterflies@vicnhs.bc.ca if you would like to help out.

Sunday, May 22

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Birds, Blooms and Butterflies on Mount Tolmie

Early in the morning, we have a good chance of enjoying some special spring migrants on Mount Tolmie. Expect to enjoy hearing warblers and flycatchers as your reward for getting up so early on this long weekend. Western Tanagers are possible and occasionally a Western Kingbird might show up. After the birds quieten down, we can spend some time checking out the last of the wildflowers. Bring a snack to eat while we wait for it to warm up and then we may be able to enjoy some of the Butterflies who enjoy the hot dry habitat. Take the turnoff from Cedar Hill Cross Road and park at the main parking lot just north of the summit. Meet at 7:00 a.m. to catch all the best birds singing. Contact Rick at (250) 885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Monday, May 23

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

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

Join **Rick Schortinghuis** on a cycling tour into the Sooke Hills. We will enjoy the flowers, birds and scenery along the way. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Galloping Goose parking lot 2.3 km along Sooke River Road (off Sooke Road). Bring a lunch. Contact Rick at (250) 885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Saturday, May 28

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 7:00 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.

JUNE 2016

Saturday, June 4

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

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

Join us for a walk along the power lines that border Francis/King Regional 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 Munns Road. Bring a drink and a snack. Contact Rick at (250) 885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Sunday, June 5

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Monthly Butterfly Outing

Join us on our monthly Butterfly outing. We are dependent on participants who can identify our local butterflies for this event to be a success so please come out and help if you know your butterflies. Novices also welcome. 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 pm at the main parking lot just north of the summit. Contact coordinator Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Sunday, June 5

NON-VNHS EVENT

World Oceans Day

Join the Shaw Centre for the Salish Sea, formerly the Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre, to celebrate World Ocean's Day, Sunday June 5, 11-3. The free celebration will take place in Beacon Park on the Sidney waterfront. Entertainment, exhibitors, family-friendly activities focused on marine science, technology and conservation. This year's event aligns with a negative tide—come explore the great rocky shore below the fishing pier. We'll have naturalist guides to talk about some of the fun finds—nudibranchs, clingfish, crabs, and more! For more information, contact oceaneer1@oceandiscovery.ca or visit www.oceandiscovery.ca

Monday, June 6

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

Beach Walk at Whiffin Spit

The extensive intertidal zone on the exposed side of Whiffin Spit at the mouth of Sooke Basin has some great examples of west coast marine flora and fauna. **Phil Lambert** will lead this walk, starting from the parking lot at the end of Whiffin Spit Rd. right beside the Sooke Harbour House at 9:00 a.m. From downtown Sooke travel west on West Coast

Rd about 2 km then turn left onto Whiffin Spit Rd. Level 3 refers to the treacherous footing on the seaweed covered rocky shore. For more information call Phil at (250) 477-5922.

Saturday, June 11

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

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 12

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2/3)

Rhododendron Lake

There are few native rhododendrons growing on Vancouver Island if you don't count those formerly in the genus *Ledum*. This area near Nanoose Bay is one of only two known sites on Vancouver Island where the pink Pacific Rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*) grows even though it is quite common in Washington state. The area surrounding the lake where these plants grow is quite boggy and, surprisingly, the plants growing with them are more like one would find in a high elevation bog. We usually think of rhododendrons requiring well-drained soil but these plants look very healthy despite their soggy surroundings. The timing of the trip should find them in bloom in a very scenic location. Bring a lunch for the all-day outing. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Helmcken Park and Ride. Note that the road into the area is a logging road so cars with good clearance are necessary. You must pre-register for this event. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 to register or for more information.

Saturday, June 18

FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

Duncan Area Butterflies & Birds

We will venture farther afield to the Duncan area this week to do some birding and perhaps enjoy some of the area's butterflies. 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 time in the afternoon searching for the amazing array of butterflies that are around the Duncan area. It needs to be sunny to make this part worthwhile. Otherwise we'll continue birding in other spots 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 Rick at (250) 885-2454 or Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 for more information.

Saturday, June 18 to Sunday, June 26

VICTORIA BUTTERFLY COUNT WEEK

We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers to submit butterfly records. If you would like to participate, please contact Gordon Hart (count coordinator) at (250) 721-1264 or butterflies@vicnhs.bc.ca if you would like to help out.



Wood Duck at Reifel Refuge. *Photo: Liam Singh.*