



# The Victoria **NATURALIST**

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# The Victoria NATURALIST

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## VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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

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**PRESIDENT:** Ben van Drimmelen 250-598-0570, ben@barristers4bears.com  
**VICE-PRESIDENT:** Phil Lambert, 250-477-5922, plambert@pacificcoast.net  
**TREASURER:** Gordon Hart 250-721-1264, gordh19@shaw.ca  
**SECRETARY:** Claudia Copley dccopley@telus.net

### Directors and Committees

Darren Copley dccopley@telus.net  
(*Membership, BC Nature representative*)  
Claudia Copley dccopley@telus.net (*Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary representative, BC Nature representative*)  
William Dancer 250-721-5273, w.dancer@telus.net (*Schools Program*)  
Gail Harcombe 250-652-3508, g.harcombe@shaw.ca (*Publications*)  
Phil Lambert 250-477-5922, plambert@pacificcoast.net (*Publicity*)  
*Directors at Large*  
Paige Erickson-McGee 250-588-1635, pericksonmcgee@gmail.com  
Vicki Metcalfe 778-433-2575 46metcalfe@gmail.com  
Stephanie Weinstein 250-598-3622 srweinstein2@yahoo.com  
Charlene Wood 778-679-5238 cwood@lgl.com

### Presentation/Field Trip Coordinators

Marine Night: Phil Lambert 250-477-5922, marinenight@pacificcoast.net  
Botany Night: Kristen and James Miskelly 250-544-0455, kristen.miskelly@gmail.com james.miskelly@gmail.com  
Natural History Night: Stephanie Weinstein 250-598-3622 srweinstein2@yahoo.com  
Birder's Night: Cohosts David Bird 778-351-7760 david.bird@mcgill.ca and Ann Nightingale 250-514-6450 motmot@shaw.ca  
Volunteer Coordinator: Vicki Metcalfe 778-433-2575 46metcalfe@gmail.com  
Field Trip Coordinator: Ben van Drimmelen 250-598-0570, ben@barristers4bears.com

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Send to: Gail Harcombe

7368 Veyaness Road, Saanichton BC V8M 1M3  
Phone: 250-652-3508 e-mail: [publications@naturevictoria.ca](mailto: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.

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Cover Image: Young Bobcat in local Harlingen Park,  
Texas. Photo: Kim Beardmore

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Happy New Year! It seems every time I write the note for the first issue of the year, I comment on how fast the previous year went by... 2016 was no exception...a year full of interesting and informative presentations and activities. The coming year starts off with lots of things to interest members—and friends, AKA, future members (see Calendar, page 21). Thank you to all who contributed to the newsletter over the past year(s)—the articles and photos you've shared have been interesting and informative, not to mention thought-provoking, humorous, and even inspiring.

On a different note, to pique your interest and set the tone for “discovering new things”, here are two things I found fascinating:

1. Harry Potter fans: a tiny (7mm) spider, newly discovered in southwest India, is named after the Hogwarts sorting hat...“This uniquely shaped spider [the shape and colour of the abdomen helps camouflage by blending in with dry leaves] derives its name from the fabulous, sentient magical artifact, the sorting hat, owned by the (fictitious) medieval wizard Godric Gryffindor, one of the four founders of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and stemming from the powerful imagination of Ms JK Rowling, word-smith extraordinaire...”

2. Scientists are increasingly convinced that modern-day birds are related to dinosaurs. In 2015, a piece of amber containing a feather was found in Myanmar. While not the first feather in amber, with the help of new technology, this particular feather tells us more about the “bird” it belonged to...99 million years old, it is thought to be a tail feather and the structure is closer to the birds of today. “The Mesozoic world was stranger than we ever imagined. It really was the Weird Feathered Thing planet. The biggest carnivores, with their nine-inch teeth, were more like roadrunners than lizards. The skies were full of pterosaurs, which were not dinosaurs, birds, or reptiles... Their wings were covered with fur or fuzzy feathers and they ranged from the size of a hummingbird to the wingspan, if not the weight, of a 747.” Interesting? I thought so...

Have fun making 2017 a year in which you take advantage of opportunities to get outdoors and to learn more about our natural world!

*Gail Harcombe*

1. <http://www.news.com.au/technology/science/animals/newly-discovered-spider-named-in-honour-of-hogwarts-sorting-hat/news-story/032db5acaf6db748831fa7c4433d14d5>

2. <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/they-had-feathers-is-the-world-ready-to-see-dinosaurs-as-they-really-were-2/>

# A Message from Your Board

**Y**our VNHS Board would of course like to first off wish you all a Happy New Year! For naturalists the start of a new year may not correspond all that well with calendars. For some the new year may feel like it starts in September, for others it is the return of the light after the December solstice, and for others it is the first signs of spring...But officially: Happy 2017!


We have a few items to update you on and three requests. The first request is that you consider joining the VNHS board. It really is a very minimal obligation and a necessary component of our organization. We will have at least two vacancies this coming April, when we will hold our Annual General Meeting (Tuesday April 11, 2017). The annual general meeting will also be important because of the changes the provincial government has made to the Societies Act. We have an obligation to make adjustments to our constitution and bylaws, and the membership needs to vote on these changes. Gail Harcombe and Ben van Drimmelen are the driving force behind this effort, so be sure to thank them for taking on this bureaucratic headache on our behalf next time you see them, and please come out for the AGM (Request #2). Request #3 is that

you consider nominating someone for a distinguished service award or honorary life membership—the deadline is February 28, 2017 (see next page for past award winners).


As for the updates, let's start with the Urban Sanctuaries Project. We first brought this to your attention in September—it is a collaborative effort being coordinated by the Bateman Centre that is meant to draw attention to the three federal Migratory Bird Sanctuaries in our region, and the need to value them more. All Buffleheads Day, an event celebrating one of the occupants of these bird sanctuaries, was held overlooking a portion of the Shoal Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary, established in 1931. Despite the wild weather there was decent turnout. The Saturday Morning Birding Group and the Victoria NatureKids were in attendance, among others, and Buffleheads were seen! A website for the Urban Sanctuaries Project is under development, and there have been some handouts that members of the Society have helped edit in advance of their publication. We look forward to their printing so we can help with distribution at our meetings and other events.

The Connecting Children With Nature program of the VNHS has had more than 1000 children participate this year already—a milestone that we have been looking forward to reaching. Congratulations are in order for co-organizers Bill Dancer and John Henigman, and all of the other VNHS volunteers who are asked to help out with these free field trips for school groups—what an achievement! We have never been exceptionally effective at publicising to schools but instead it has kept up its momentum through word of mouth—a real testament to how great the experiences are. For example, the executive director of the Bateman Centre is very enthusiastic about the incredible value the naturalist mentors from the VNHS membership bring to the junior sketching club that the Centre has been offering. And you were able to see letters of thanks in the last issue of your magazine, so you already know how much the children enjoy these outings.


And finally: many years ago the Society donated the user-friendly microscope that is available for visitors at the Goldstream Nature Centre—the “Microeye”. At the time the board was also interested in a similar display for the Swan Lake Nature Centre—one that promotes the VNHS while at the same time captivating visitors. The time has finally come for that plan to come to fruition: the Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary has been renovating and they hope to have a spot for the microscope and wall-mounted monitor. We hope to have space for back issues of our magazine and brochures for people to take home, as well as a display copy of our book—*Nature Guide to the Victoria Region*. With any luck people will get hooked on nature by seeing it magnified and consider becoming members so they can learn more.

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# VNHS Awards: Call for Nominations

**V**NHS members contribute to the Society in many ways: writing articles for the Naturalist; leading field trips; or serving on the board or committees. Some go out of their way to ensure other members can continue to be a part of Society activities by visiting shut-ins or driving others to Society functions. The Victoria Natural History Society Board of Directors established the Distinguished Service Award in 1988. This prestigious award is meant to honour those members who have given freely of their time over a long period, in a variety of ways, for the Society. Any member of the Society can nominate any other member who in their opinion merits this honour. The VNHS Distinguished Service Award is given annually to members who have shown such dedication. The Society may also bestow Honourary Life Membership on a member whose involvement with VNHS has been exceptionally long and dedicated. Please consider nominating a member, and send your nomination to the Society's address, or give it to one of the directors. Nominations should be forwarded by February 28, 2017. All nominations must be in writing and should be signed by at least two members of the Society. A brief biographical sketch and a description of the contributions and achievements of the nominee, along with their address and telephone number, should be included. The Awards Committee reviews the nominations and makes recommendations to the Board of Directors, which grants the awards.

## VNHS Distinguished Service Award Recipients

1989 Lyndis Davis, David Stirling, Katherine Sherman  
1990 Anne Adamson, Charles Trotter, Robb Mackenzie-Grieve  
1991 Ed Coffin, Mark Nyhof  
1992 David Fraser, Margaret Mackenzie-Grieve  
1993 Giff Calvert, Harold Pollock  
1994 Kaye Suttill  
1995 Bryan Gates, Bruce Whittington  
1996 Gordon Devey  
1997 Michael Carson  
1998 No recipients  
1999 Tony Embleton, Dorothy Henderson  
2000 Tom Gillespie, Marilyn Lambert, David Pearce  
2001 David Allinson, Beverly Glover, Hank Vander Pol  
2002 Norm Mogensen  
2003 Bob Chappell  
2004 Oluna and Adolf Ceska

2005 Rick Schortinghuis  
2006 Phil Lambert, Tom Burgess  
2007 No recipients  
2008 Ann Nightingale  
2009 No recipients  
2010 Gordon Hart, Agnes Lynn  
2011 Claudia and Darren Copley  
2012 Bill Dancer  
2013 No recipients  
2014 John Henigman, Jeremy Tatum  
2015 Hans Roemer  
2016 No recipients

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# Gray Jay: Canada's Official Bird (Maybe)

By Val George  
Photo by author

Just over a year ago, *The Victoria Naturalist* (September–October, 2015) had an article by noted Canadian ornithologist, Dr. David Bird, in which he passionately promoted the Gray Jay as Canada's national bird if we were ever to get one. Since then the case for naming a bird as our official avian emblem has moved along quite substantially.

Most major countries in the world have a national bird. Some of these are spectacular species, such as the Andean Condor (Chile and Ecuador) and the Scarlet Macaw (Honduras); others are less spectacular, in fact almost drab, like the Clay-coloured Thrush which is Costa Rica's, or Turkey's Redwing (which, incidentally, many of our local birders had a passing encounter with when one showed up on Vancouver Island about a year ago as a mega-rarity). We don't have a national bird yet, but we might have one soon. The case is being strongly made that it would be appropriate to name an official bird next year for our country's 150th anniversary.

All the provinces and territories have provincial birds; B.C.'s is, of course, the Steller's Jay. So not having a national one is a glaring omission. The question now being debated is which species.

Earlier this year, the Canadian Geographic Society conducted a poll open to anybody in Canada to determine the species that would be most preferred by Canadians. Response was excellent—about 50,000 people voted. The top three choices were: Common Loon (13,995 votes), Snowy Owl (8948 votes), and Gray Jay (7918 votes). So the Gray Jay didn't win the popularity contest by a considerable margin. However, the Society, after much debate, has chosen to go with this friendly little guy as its recommendation. Though not particularly well known to many Canadians, most of us here on Vancouver Island have encountered it in places like Mt. Washington where it cheekily steals food from our picnic tables and even sometimes eats out of our hands.

Most birders I've talked to voted for the Gray Jay. The reasons are varied and very compelling from an ornithological point of view. Dr. Bird (with a name like that, perhaps we should name him our official "bird" and have done with it) lists these reasons in the excellent article referred to at the beginning of this article, so I won't repeat them. However, I will mention the two that mainly convince me.

The Common Loon and Snowy Owl are already provincial



A Gray Jay from Mt. Washington.

birds: the loon for Ontario and the owl for Quebec. So, apart from other reasons, it wouldn't be politically astute for our government to choose them. Furthermore, although both these birds are certainly two of our most conspicuous and spectacular birds, they don't belong solely—or even mainly—to us in Canada. Both have large ranges outside our country, from Alaska through Canada, and from Greenland to Europe in the case of the loon, and circumpolar in the northern hemisphere for the owl. On the other hand, the Gray Jay is a truly Canadian bird. Though its range does extend into some of the States, the centre of the range, and most of its population, is in Canada, where it is present in every province and territory.

The second reason is that the Gray Jay used to be known as the Canada Jay and its scientific name is still *Perisoreus canadensis*. If we designate it as our official bird, maybe we can get whoever decides such things to once again call it the Canada Jay.

A short anecdote to conclude. A few years ago I was giving a school talk about Vancouver Island birds to a class of teenage students. I had as the final slide in my powerpoint presentation a Steller's Jay. Before putting the photo up on the screen I asked the students to name our provincial bird. Only one of the thirty or so kids could tell me. Hopefully, when we get a national bird it will become better known to the general populace than our provincial bird seems to be.

# Rocky Point Bird Observatory— Another Successful Migration Season



By Jag Sekhon, Executive Director, RPBO



Chestnut-sided Warbler. Photo: Sharlene James



Black-throated Gray Warbler. Photo: Nancy Raginski

The 2016 fall migration season wrapped up on October 18th, bringing another successful monitoring campaign to an end. The two sites (Rocky Point on DND land, and Pedder Bay, at the Pedder Bay Marina) saw relatively good weather throughout the season, although the remnants of Typhoon Songda did have us closing the nets off and on due to wind and heavy rain. Overall we were able to band a total of 2761 birds at Rocky Point and 2921 at Pedder Bay.

Our dedicated staff did an amazing job of keeping things running smoothly and staying positive despite the incredibly early mornings. As usual there was a great variety of birds banded, from the tiny Rufous Hummingbird to a surprising Northern Harrier.

The banding season got off to a great start with a Chestnut-sided Warbler banded in the first week. The warblers were well represented with Wilson's, Yellow and Orange-Crowned appearing in good numbers. Our favourite, the Black-throated Gray Warbler, otherwise known as "the logo bird" made an occasional appearance.



Rocky Point shoreline. Photo: Ian Cruickshank

Pacific-slope and Willow flycatchers were abundant at both sites, with a single Dusky Flycatcher also showing up. White-crowned Sparrows were the most abundant bird at Pedder Bay, with 300 banded. Woodpeckers, vireos and thrushes were well represented, both in the nets and around them. We were happy to see the kinglets back in town near the end of the season, with Ruby-crowned Kinglet edging out the Pacific-slope Flycatcher as the most banded bird at Rocky Point—a total of 335.

Away from the nets, the variety of birds was even more exciting. Shorebirds, hawks and counting vultures kept us busy in between net rounds. Highlights from the season included a Brown Pelican off shore, two Palm Warblers, and some Golden Eagles. Non-bird related sightings included whales, otters, bears, elk and wolves. . .just to name a few.

The staff and volunteers were kept busy at the Pedder Bay location with many visits from school groups, bird enthusiasts and curious locals. It was nice to see people coming out for the Pedder Bay Bird Walks on Sunday and Thursday mornings, and we appreciated being able to share our passion for birds.

A successful migration season would not have been possible without the contribution of our amazing and dedicated volunteers, who collectively put in thousands of hours every migration season. Volunteers range from advanced birders who help with our daily census walks to those who are new to the bird world and help with general tasks at the banding site. Volunteers loved the one-on-one training they received this year from the banding staff. We are also very grateful for those who help out behind the scenes, from net mending to sewing bird bags.

We look forward to July 21st when our 2017 migration season begins. In the meantime, you will find us wandering aimlessly with binoculars in hand, in the deep throes of bird banding withdrawal. Thank you to everyone for an amazing season! For a more in-depth peek into our banding operations visit [www.rpboblog.blogspot.ca](http://www.rpboblog.blogspot.ca) . For volunteering opportunities please visit [www.rpbo.org](http://www.rpbo.org) .



# 2016 Rio Grande Birding Festival

By Andrew Harcombe

Photos by Kim Beardmore

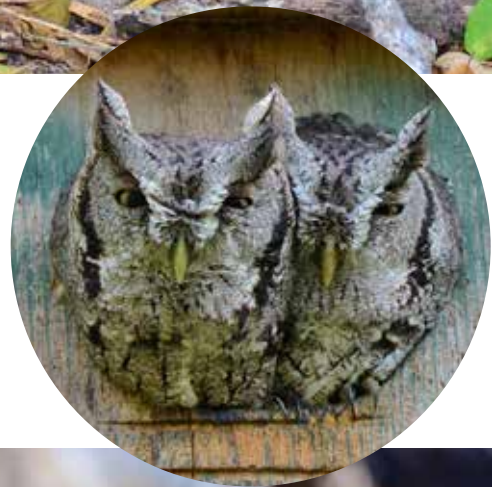


Well-camouflaged Common Pauraque.

A contingent of six Victoria birders attended the 2016 Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival in early November; our group was “led” by Ann Nightingale. The festival is set in Harlingen, Texas, and offers five action-packed days of expert-led field trips, seminars, and trade shows. For Kim and I, this was our first visit, whereas Ann has now attended six. We shared a large eight bedroom house, located on an oxbow lake, with three American birders. Our yard list included Wood Stork and Green Kingfisher. The Harlingen area is considered a birder’s paradise, with the possibility of encountering Mexican specialties just making it into the lower 48 states. Valley specialties include Green and Ringed kingfishers, Long-billed Thrasher (this year’s feature bird), Harris’s Hawk, Altamira Oriole, and Plain Chachalaca. Because we had a full day before the festival began, we went birding with Jim Danzenbaker (a festival leader) to a nearby state park called Estero Llano Grande, where we had beautiful views of the Eastern Screech-Owl (photo), Common Pauraque (they roost on the ground)(photo), Least Grebe and many others. This park has a lovely diversity of habitat accessed by a good path network, so the birding is varied, with some of the birds being very used to allowing birders to approach closely.

Kim and I started the festival with an excellent Valley

Pair of Eastern Screech-Owls.



Green Jay.





Greater Roadrunner.



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl.



Green dragonfly.



Roseate Spoonbill, White Ibis and American Avocet (winter plumage).

Raptor fieldtrip, led by the renowned Bill Clark. After getting lost and arriving late, we were delighted to find our bus still there; because daylight savings had not switched, we had extra dark hours to start the field trip. We saw 14 species of raptors that included the beautiful Aplomado Falcon, Swainson's Hawk, and the surprisingly common White-tailed Hawk; the latter were common finding rodents killed by the pre-harvest burning of sugar cane fields. We had great looks at Harris's Hawk pairs and triplets on telephone posts; Bill has been studying them in the valley for years.

Day two saw us attend a Birding by Ear trip, led by Michael O'Brien from the Cape May Bird Observatory. Among the species present at the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge was the Olive Sparrow, often heard but rarely seen. Neither Kim nor I could hear their high-pitched calls. Michael explained about becoming familiar with the pattern of bird calls, and then using habitat to narrow down one's choices. We heard several birds that remained unseen but saw many more, including a fine flyby by an American Bittern. The wetlands held a diversity of waders (see photo) including Stilt Sandpiper, Roseate Spoonbill, and Black-necked Stilt. Overhead soared Black Vultures. Later that afternoon, we attended a talk on Shorebirds By Impression by well-known

Kevin Karlson. He attempted to get us thinking about size, shape and posture rather than plumage when attempting to identify shorebirds.

Friday saw an early start on a bus trip to the Upper Rio Grande. There one looks across the river to Mexico, only a short swim away. We saw little Border Protection which surprised us, although the presidential election had not occurred until the day after we came home. Highlights were the Greater Roadrunner (photo), both Audubon's and Altamira orioles and Pyrrhuloxia. Otherwise, the day was surprisingly quiet for birds except for noisy Green Jay (photo). Later in the afternoon, we attended the very humorous talk by Neil Haywood on his Accidental Big Year (rumoured to cost between 40 and 50 thousand dollars). Neil grew up in England, and has a lovely accent to go with his amusing anecdotes. His talk comes with a warning: "Big Years can be contagious".

Our fourth trip was to the very large King Ranch (Norias Division) with Tom Langschield, who as a ranch employee in charge of Nature Tours could provide us with access to this private ranch (bigger than Rhode Island). Successfully seen target birds were the Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (photo) and Sprague's Pipit; the former responded well to call playback in the oak woodlands and the latter 'exposed' themselves



Green Parakeet.



Brown Pelican.

on wheel tracks across the open grassland. A bonus was a large flock of southwestern Wild Turkey seen at first light crossing the road in front of the bus.

Our final trip was to the ocean (Gulf of Mexico) at South Padre Island; we birded the shoreline around the Laguna Madre, often the last stop for southward migrating songbirds and a place for shorebird diversity when the tide recedes. The second part of this trip was a boat ride into the lagoon, where we saw four tern species, several waders and the fascinating Black Skimmer. When we returned to the dock, a group of begging Brown Pelican (photo) were there to greet us. Unlike a west coast pelagic trip, the water here was so flat one could use a spotting scope to see the Piping and Snowy plovers.

The entire festival was extremely well organized, while maintaining over 40 field trips. My personal list was 175 species observed—that did not include the young Bobcat, the wetland Nutria, the early-morning armadillo or the plethora of butterflies and insects (see photo) that enjoyed the 30 degree weather. Kim, who had never birded this far south, got at least 68 lifers—birds seen for the very first time—as well as taking enough amazing photos to make my job of selecting those for this article very difficult. We all vowed to return next year and encourage others to join us. You would get to meet some amazing birders and superb leaders and possibly be exposed to some new birds.



Swainson's Hawk.

## Odds and Ends

By Gail Harcombe

This past summer, Nature Conservancy Canada posted a wonderful “Nature Rx” on their website. They had weekly activities to get you away from your screen and connecting with nature. Many of the activities could be enjoyed all year-round, especially in the Victoria area. It was still on the site when last checked, so have a look at <http://tinyurl.com/NatureActivitiesRx>

Week One:

Try the nature crossword!

Week Two:

Take NCC’s adventure card on your next nature exploration!

Week Three:

Download a Colouring page for a rainy day.

Week Four:

Search for nature’s gold with our scavenger hunt.

Week Five:

Learn some fun facts about Canadian species to share with family and friends.

Week Six:

Listen your way through your next nature adventure with our soundwalk how-to.

Week Seven:

Learn to make delicious dandelion cookies with this wild recipe.

Week Eight:

Connect with nature through words with our how-to on haikus.

### Did you know...?

- That carnivorous animals will not eat another animal if it has been struck by lightning?
- That horses, rabbits and rats cannot throw up?
- That to a coyote, vomit from Turkey Vultures is like candy? They will sometimes provoke the vultures until they throw up to get what to any other animal would be anything BUT a treat!





# Victoria Natural History Society

## Nature Photo Contest!

VNHS members take great nature photos and we'd like to start the year with a photo contest to showcase the amazing nature in the southern Vancouver Island region. Winning photos will be featured on the covers of this year's issues of *The Victoria Naturalist* in various categories: mammal, bird, botany/fungi, invertebrate, marine/aquatic, and habitat/ecosystem.

Images need to be taken in the southern Vancouver Island and surrounding area (including the Gulf Islands), be high resolution—a minimum of 300 dpi (large size must be available for cover shots 2250 x 1600 pix), and have nature as the focus (please no man-made subjects). Deadline Monday, January 16th, 2017. Maximum 10 photos submitted per member, please. To submit, email your photo to [vnhsnatphoto@gmail.com](mailto:vnhsnatphoto@gmail.com) or upload your photo to our social media:

Flickr: add to our group pool, tag with VNHSnatphoto [www.flickr.com/groups/vnhs/](http://www.flickr.com/groups/vnhs/)

Twitter: upload your photo with #VNHSnatphoto @VictoriaNHS

Facebook: write post/share photo on the Victoria Natural History Society page #VNHSnatphoto @vicnhs

Please include a photo credit and short caption with each photo. Note: the VNHS may wish to use submitted photos in future publications/materials (with photo credit). Please let us know if you have photo license restrictions or if you would like to use a pseudonym and have your name withheld.

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# Marmot Recovery in Strathcona a Bumpy Ride

By Adam Taylor, Executive Director, Marmot Recovery Foundation



Vancouver Island Marmot, "Hollis".

The news this past spring out of Strathcona Provincial Park wasn't what the Vancouver Island Marmot recovery crew was hoping for. At least 36 marmots in the region had died since the previous year – disappointing news for the recovery of this Island endemic and critically endangered species. Yet those who have worked the longest with the marmots continue to be optimistic about the recovery, and they point to Mount Washington and Nanaimo Lakes to explain their positive outlook on the future of their favorite rodent.

"Obviously, it wasn't what we were hoping to find," says Cheyney Jackson, a biologist who has been working on marmot recovery for over 10 years. Jackson leads field work for the Marmot Recovery Foundation, and she was on the front lines of the monitoring that revealed the sharp decline. "At first, you think maybe some of the marmots are just still in hibernation. It is disheartening as you go out again, only to discover that these marmots have indeed died." The deaths were a result of a combination of activity by predators and a poor year for overwinter survival following a severe drought the fall before. "You always know that predators are going to eat a number of marmots. That's part of nature," says Jackson, "but the poor overwinter survival was a surprise." But after putting in another summer of field work, and looking at the data she and her field crew gathered, Jackson's optimism returned.

"Despite these challenges it is still important to maintain a proper perspective, even when you're working so closely with these animals," says Malcolm McAdie, wildlife

veterinarian for the recovery project for almost 20 years. "You care for each of them and know most of them by name. It can be hard when you hear bad news. But when you look at where we are today, and some of the challenges we've faced over the years, you begin to realize that this is part of the process of recovery, and that we are on the right track. Our ultimate goal is to build the wild population to the point where it is resilient enough to withstand periods of increased predation pressure or poor weather without our help."

By the late 1990s, marmots had disappeared from the many of the Island's mountains, and by 2003 fewer than 30 marmots remained in the wild, including 10 at Mount Washington. That same year, the first captive bred marmots were released. Initially efforts focused on the

more southern population of marmots in the Nanaimo Lakes region and the colony at Mount Washington. "Outside of Mount Washington, marmots had been completely extirpated from the Strathcona region," explains McAdie, "so we made the decision to support the remnants of the southern population and Mount Washington first and try to get these into better shape before turning our attention towards Strathcona."

In the south, the marmot recovery was going well. In less than 10 years, the population grew to nearly 100 marmots. The team was enthused, and ready to take on the challenge of bringing marmots back to Strathcona.

At least, that's how it seems in hindsight. As McAdie recalls, things felt a little different at the time. "We had the same kinds of setbacks in the Nanaimo Lakes during those years that we had in Strathcona this year," recalls McAdie. "Looking back, it's easy to forget the hard times, when marmots didn't make it through hibernation, or when predation pressure was higher than usual. There were, and still are, challenges and recovery in the south isn't complete either. Working with a critically endangered species, you have to accept that it's going to be a bumpy road. The important thing is to look at the trend line."

By 2008, the Nanaimo Lakes colonies were in better shape, even if the path to recovery there had been challenging, and would continue to pose challenges. However, there was space for attention to turn to recovering the marmots in Strathcona Provincial Park. "Recovering the Strathcona population was always a goal for us," says Jackson. "It is historical marmot habitat, it's almost all protected as parkland.



In the long-run, we think it might be the best Vancouver Island Marmot habitat there is.” But the short-term, the team knew there would be challenges. “The problem was that outside of Mount Washington, there were no marmots left at all. Marmots are social animals, and with no survivors on the landscape, we knew it would be harder to re-introduce marmots successfully.”

The team looked for ways to help the marmots cope in harsher conditions, and their eyes quickly turned to Mount Washington Alpine Resort. “The ski hill has always been exceptionally good for the marmots. We suspect that having people around helps keep away predators,” says Jackson. In fact, by 2011, reproduction on the ski hill was so strong that the team began to think about moving some of the offspring into Strathcona Park. “When marmots are two or three years old, many naturally move away from their birth colony and search for a new colony to join. We decided to save them some time and effort, and started flying these ‘teenagers’ out by helicopter with the captive-bred marmots.”

The combination of moving wild-born marmots and supplementing with captive-bred marmots resulted in significant growth in the Strathcona population. From zero marmots, the population grew to as high as 84. Then came news of the setback this past spring. “I have to remind myself that this happens when you’re working with endangered species. It’s happened before, and honestly, it’ll probably happen again,” says Cheyney. “The population is still recovering, but even with this setback, it’s still heading in the right direction.”

The positive impact of the work put into the Strathcona colonies was observed this summer when field crew spotted pups-of-the-year. Despite the challenges of the past year, marmots in Strathcona Park were still breeding and producing litters of healthy pups. The whole recovery crew had been hoping for just this evidence that the marmots were still recovering in their historic home.

The team continues to search for ways to help the marmots survive in their sometimes challenging habitats. One technique being explored is ‘pre-conditioning’, where captive-bred marmots are released to Mount Washington for one winter, to teach them about life in the wild, before moving them into the Park. But they are cognizant of not over-taxing the Mount Washington colony itself. “This colony’s been a lifeline for us in Strathcona. We don’t want to jeopardize that,” says Jackson.

## What You Can Do:

If you see a marmot, especially if it’s in an unusual spot, please let us know! Email [marmots@telus.net](mailto:marmots@telus.net) or call 250 390-0006.

If you are in Vancouver Island’s alpine and sub-alpine with your pets, please keep them on leashes. Dogs in particular will chase marmots, depriving them of important feeding time.

Your generous support makes recovery of the marmot possible. Make a gift through the Marmot Recovery Foundation’s website at [www.marmots.org](http://www.marmots.org) or by calling (250) 390-0006.



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# Rocky Point Bird Observatory's Field Trip Season: Migration Monitoring in Rain or Shine

By Andrea Neumann, Lead Educator, Rocky Point Bird Observatory  
Photos by author



The “Birdy Bits Table”—an affectionate nickname for our collection of wing, skull, feet, egg, and nest specimens.

On southern Vancouver Island, there is a special opportunity each fall for local students to witness long-term ecological monitoring in action while getting to know their local bird species. Rocky Point Bird Observatory's Pedder Bay field trip program, available September–October, allows local schools the opportunity to be in the field with our staff and volunteers at our publically-accessible bird banding station at the Pedder Bay Resort and Marina. Since its inception in 2013, this program has blossomed, and 2016 was our biggest year to date. We accommodated a record number of 175 participants ranging from grades one to five, as well as a senior's group.

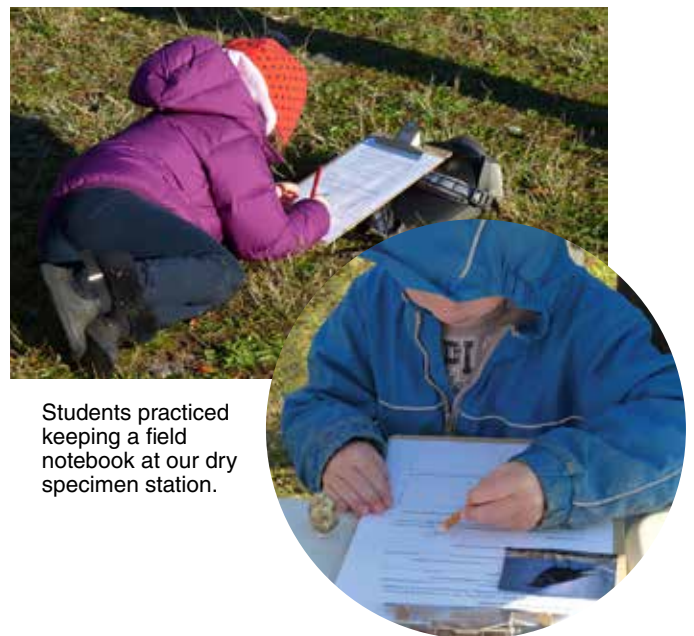
The Pedder Bay field trip program was developed to introduce students to fall passerine migration monitoring methods, as well as to facilitate memorable outdoor learning experiences. The general itinerary of the program is to divide the students into three smaller groups and rotate them through three activity stations: a mock-census bird walk, a bird banding demonstration, and a “Birdy Bits” dry specimen study and field notebook station. The benefits to this arrangement including minimizing the number of visitors at the banding station as to create minimal stress for the birds and banders, as well as to facilitate small group hands-on learning experiences for students at the other two stations.

Basic avian knowledge ranged greatly between students. Personally, one of my favourite moments was interacting with a preschool-aged boy attending a field trip with his older sibling. When presented with a replica crow's egg, he asked with astonishment, “But... how does the bird get in the egg?” Meanwhile, older children were drawing connections between the standardized procedures used to study

“The Great Banana Experiment” in their classroom, and the standardized protocols shared by bird banders across the country.

Our largest group required some special modifications. While we normally only permit one class at a time to keep group numbers down, we made an exception for a local Montessori school, with 47 grade four to six students. We set up some separate net lanes and a pop-up banding station for them to experience the bird banding process without disrupting our regular banding station staff. Though it was a slow morning, each and every student still experienced seeing a bird “in the hand,” either a Fox Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, or Ruby-Crowned Kinglet. As with the rest of the field trips, this event would not have been possible without the skilled labor of many dedicated volunteers. It was uplifting to see a community of educators and nature lovers come together to make the event a success.

This year's season was especially rainy, with 27 of the 31 days in October seeing some rainfall, breaking the previous record of 24 rainy days. Despite this wet month, only one field trip was canceled due to weather, with the rest of the students braving wind and rain to experience their field trips with some slight weather-induced modifications. On a particularly breezy day, the “Birdy Bits” dry specimen table was set up on some blankets in a small stand of trees near the parking lot, creating a sheltered, woody classroom. Another group learned the various grips used by bird



Students practiced keeping a field notebook at our dry specimen station.





A bird banding station is an ideal outdoor classroom.

By using plasticine models, students learned how bird banders safely handle birds.



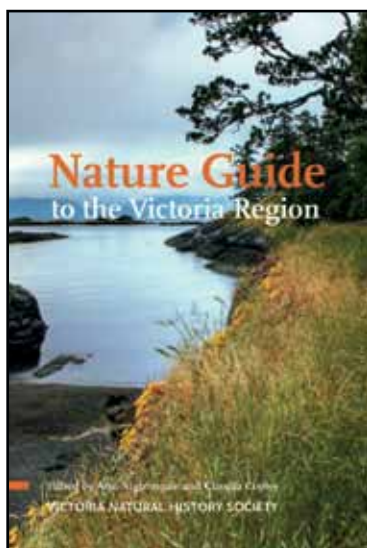
banders by practicing on Plasticine model birds when it was too rainy to safely open the mist nets to catch the real thing.

In all, the field trip season was a huge success. Many of the teachers who participated enjoyed the program thoroughly, and expressed interest in booking early September dates next year. The willingness of these teachers to book in early September speaks to the value they see in this unique opportunity, as planning outings in the first few weeks of the school year is no easy logistical task.

While our field trip season is over until next fall, we offer year-round modified school-based programs which bring as much of the banding process as possible into the classrooms of teachers unable to schedule a field trip. Though we can't catch live songbirds inside a classroom, students still enjoy many hands-on learning opportunities, including unraveling an old mist net, measuring band size on preserved feet

specimens, and celebrating local biodiversity by exploring nest and egg specimens from local species.

Birds have the unique characteristic of being observable in virtually any outdoor environment – from a remote bird banding station, to a school yard, to a student's own backyard. As such, birds make an excellent starting point for any budding naturalist. Rocky Point Bird Observatory's Pedder Bay Field Trip is just one way of getting students excited about their natural world.



## Nature Guide to the Victoria Region

Edited by Ann Nightingale and Claudia Copley

With chapters by David Stirling, Alan MacLeod, James Miskelly, Robert Cannings, Bryce Kendrick, Philip Lambert, David Nagorsen, Anna Hall, Gavin Hanke and Leon Pavlick.

*Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned naturalist, this book will give you the knowledge you need to get the most out of your explorations of southeastern Vancouver Island.*

\$15 at Society evening presentations. Look for them in your local bookstores!

# October's VNHS Mini-pelagic Trip

By Aziza Cooper



Glaucous-winged Gull enjoying our chumming.  
*Photo: Cathy Reader*



'Granny' J2 is estimated to be 105 yrs old this year, making her the oldest KNOWN Orca in the world. She is a sweetheart, sometimes seen babysitting some of the youngsters while their mothers go off and forage for salmon. *Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy*

Hi, Wildlife Watchers,

We had sunshine and hardly any wind for most of the four-hour cruise. We went out past Race Rocks, then west past Rocky Point to Beechey Head, finishing up well offshore in the strait before turning back.

Very notable sightings of whales! Three whale-watching boats reported a giant gathering of 86 Orcas. The whales were feeding, so submerged most of the time, but surfaced all around the area constantly. Several came right toward us, then underneath the boat for fantastic close views.

On the way to and back from Race Rocks we saw Humpbacks—two breaching in the distance, one resting on the surface, and another huge back as we headed back to the harbour.

Two Ancient Murrelets were with gulls very soon after we left the harbour, and one more was off Rocky Point. Not too many birds were out on the strait, but we saw seven Red Phalaropes along a line of debris. Other shorebirds flew past, i.d.'d as Dunlin. Surf and White-winged Scoters, vultures and hawks above Rocky Point, one Western and a Herring Gull on Race Rocks and another Herring Gull following the boat were good sightings. A big flock of 100+ Bonaparte's Gulls flew east along the Rocky Point shore. Two pairs of adult Bald Eagles were at the entrance to Becher Bay.

Several of the group briefly saw the Sea Otter drifting between two rocky islands at Race Rocks. The sea lion show was amazing as always, and two Elephant Seals put on a wonderful display of mock fighting—twining necks and wrestling.

Thanks to Ian, Ann and Agnes for their good guiding and organizing efforts. It's always a joy to get out on the water for a chance at the offshore wildlife.





Elephant Seal at Race Rocks—two very active individuals sparring, most likely young males. Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy



Bald Eagles.  
Photo: Cathy Reader

Steller and California sea lions use Race Rocks as one of their favourite 'haul-outs.' Hundreds of them congregate there throughout the fall and winter. Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy



Common Murres. Photo: Cathy Reader



# NatureKids BC: Nurturing the Next Generation of Naturalists

By Stephanie Weinstein, Volunteer Leader, NatureKids Victoria

*Passion does not arrive on videotape or on a CD; passion is personal. Passion is lifted from the earth itself by the muddy hands of the young, it travels along grass-stained sleeves to the heart. If we are going to save environmentalism and the environment, we must also save an endangered indicator species: the child in nature.*

— Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, 2005

**D**ear Readers:  
When did you discover your love of nature and fascination in the natural world? I think most of us naturalists can recall memorable outdoor experiences from our childhood that strongly influenced our adult lives. (For me, there was a pivotal moment when I was five years old and I held my first snake. Which led to an innocent childhood fantasy to either become a snake or to marry one. Which eventually led to a more realistic, “adult” goal to become a biologist.)

Today’s youth spend far more time connected to electronics than to nature. But NatureKids BC (formerly the Young Naturalists’ Club of BC) is working hard to connect kids to nature and to nurture the next generation of naturalists.

## NatureKids BC

NatureKids BC is the Nature Exploration Club for Families. We are a province-wide network of volunteer-led nature clubs for children ages 5-12 and their families. We help

children to get outdoors to explore, play, learn about and take action for nature. Our vision is that through their participation in NatureKids BC, children develop a love of nature, a lifelong connection to the natural world, and have the environmental literacy and skills to take action for nature.

NatureKids members have monthly Explorer Day adventures with local experts, learn about BC’s native plants and animals in NatureWILD Magazine, and take part in environmental actions to protect their habitat with Stewardship Projects and an Action Awards. All of this for only \$25 a year for the whole family. NatureKids is a registered charity, powered by passionate volunteers, members and donors. Join the Club! Become a member, subscribe to NatureWILD, or make a donation today. <http://www.naturekidsbc.ca>

## Help Support Victoria’s Local NatureKids Club!

**NatureKids Victoria seeks adult with a big heart & love of sharing the outdoors with children**

### Wanted! Club Co-Leader

NatureKids is currently recruiting for a volunteer co-leader for the Victoria Family Club to help organize monthly outdoor ‘Explorer Day’ field trips. You don’t need any special qualifications and can lead Explorer Days yourself or find a Nature Mentor in the community. I have been a volunteer leader with the Victoria Club for three years and can assure



NatureKids Victoria Club after planting native plants at Uplands Park. Photo: Michele Hibbins



you that this is a fun and very rewarding volunteer position! There is nothing like dreaming up an Explorer Day and then seeing excited kids as they play in, learn about and help to protect the special places in Victoria.

Contact Tammy Keetch, Clubs Coordinator at [coordinator@naturekidsbc.ca](mailto:coordinator@naturekidsbc.ca); [www.naturekidsbc.ca](http://www.naturekidsbc.ca)  
References required.

## **Wanted! Nature Mentors to Lead Explorer Days in 2017**

Do you enjoy being with children? Do you have a special interest or skill that you would like to share with kids? Consider volunteering an hour or two of your time on a weekend as a volunteer nature mentor to help inspire the next generation. Activities should be interactive, hands-on, and appropriate for children ages 5-12. Contact NatureKids Victoria Volunteer Leader Stephanie Weinstein at [victoria@naturekidsbc.ca](mailto:victoria@naturekidsbc.ca).

### **Some of the NatureKids Victoria Club's recent past Explorer Days include:**

- “Stinky Salmon Walk” at Goldstream Provincial Park
- “Caution! Amphibian X-ing”, FrogWatch- road surveys for amphibians
- “All Buffleheads Day”, at Roberts Bay, with Nature Canada, Friends of Shoal Harbour and VNHS
- “Hawk Watch” with VNHS

- “Explore the Gorge” with World Fisheries Trust
- A Visit to Haliburton Community Organic Farm and Saanich Native Plants

Thank you, VNHS, for your ongoing support of the NatureKids Victoria Club.

Look for updates on the club's activities in upcoming issues of *The Naturalist*, and please let me know if you are interested in the volunteer opportunities above.



Frog Watch—Road Surveys. Photo: Michele Hibbins



## **ANNE HANSEN:** *A different species of wildlife artist*

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[www.oystercatchergirl.blogspot.com](http://www.oystercatchergirl.blogspot.com)

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## BULLETIN BOARD

### Your Society is seeking new board members!

We will have at least two vacancies at the AGM this year, which will be held Tuesday April 11, 2017 at 730 pm in Fraser Room 159, University of Victoria. The one two-hour meeting per month from September through April is the only confirmed time commitment, but of course the Society runs on volunteers, so any additional effort is welcomed and appreciated!

### Great Backyard Bird Count – Save the Dates for the 20th GBBC!

The Great Backyard Bird Count team at Audubon, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Bird Studies Canada want to remind you to mark your calendars for the 20th GBBC, coming up February 17 through 20, 2017. And...at any time, you can sign up to participate in Project Feedwatch. Info and details: <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/> and <http://feederwatch.org/>

### Olympic Peninsula Birdfest, April 7–9, 2017

Enjoy guided birding trips, boat tours, live auction & raffle, gala banquet, and more. Our featured speaker: noted nature photographer Bonnie Block. Join our festival pre-trip: a

three-day, two-night birding/sightseeing cruise of the San Juan Islands, April 4–6, 2017. Register separately at [www.pugetsoundexpress.com/audubon](http://www.pugetsoundexpress.com/audubon). Extend your festival with our Neah Bay post-trip on April 9–11, 2017: two days exploring northwest coastal Washington. BirdFest registration at [www.olympicbirdfest.org](http://www.olympicbirdfest.org).

### A Traveller's Guide to Feathers

Glen Chilton is a professor of biology at James Cook University in Australia, and author of the bestselling *The Curse of the Labrador Duck* and *The Attack of the Killer Rhododendrons*. Glen writes a weekly column concerning recent advances in the field of bird biology under the title *A Traveller's Guide to Feathers*; these can be found on his website: [www.glenchilton.com](http://www.glenchilton.com). Each piece describes the highlights of a recently-published paper from a scholarly journal. Glen's writings are meant for bird enthusiasts who are curious about the latest advances in the field. The studies are global in scope, and consider birds of all types. From penguins on Bouvet Island to snake-eagles in Israel, *A Traveller's Guide to Feathers* provides all of the content with none of the jargon.

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## Welcome to New VNHS Members

Our Society grew by 13 new members since the last issue and the following have agreed to have their names published in this Welcome section.

**Bill Huot**  
VICTORIA  
*Various*

**Judith Owen**  
VICTORIA  
*Birding, hiking*

**Katie Tribe**  
VICTORIA  
*Botany, geology, nature*

**Valerie Howe**  
SIDNEY  
*Birding, nature conservancy*

**John Jesseau**  
Ladysmith  
*Birding*

**Jessica Meier**  
VICTORIA  
*Everything in the natural world*

**Judy Nault**  
VICTORIA  
*Botany, Habitat protection*

## Leave a Lasting Gift

Donate to The Nature Trust of BC in your will to help conserve the natural diversity of wildlife, plants and their critical habitats for future generations.

For more information, contact Deb Kennedy at [debkennedy@naturetrust.bc.ca](mailto:debkennedy@naturetrust.bc.ca) or call 604-924-9771 or 1-866-288-7878

[www.naturetrust.bc.ca](http://www.naturetrust.bc.ca)





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# 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 the Field Trip Coordinator Ben van Drimmelen. Many of you do interesting things either for fun or for work, and it would be great to share! See page two for email addresses and phone numbers.*

**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 participate 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@shaw.ca](mailto:thelynns@shaw.ca) or 250-721-0634.

## JANUARY 2017

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### Sunday, January 1

#### LAST OF THE 2016 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DAYS *Duncan area*

Everyone is welcome! You don't have to be an expert birder to participate. Novices will be teamed up with more experienced counters. Check out the VNHS website ([www.vicnhs.bc.ca/archive/cbc/](http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/archive/cbc/)) and the Christmas Bird Count site ([birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count](http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count)) for details.

### Saturday, January 7

#### FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

##### *Birding Esquimalt Lagoon*

You are welcome to join the VNHS Saturday Birding Group for a trip to Esquimalt Lagoon and the surrounding area. It's a great area to get

a good leg-up on your New Year List (if you keep one) or to simply enjoy the amazing diversity of water birds and passerines that this area provides this early in the year. We have got counts in the 70s of species in past years. This trip will cover the ocean birds along the lagoon and will go into the fields back behind the lagoon to provide a variety of birds. Meet at 8:00 a.m. near the bridge. Esquimalt Lagoon is on Ocean Blvd, off the Old Island Highway. Call Rick at (250) 885-2454 or email Agnes at [thelynns@shaw.ca](mailto:thelynns@shaw.ca) for more information.

### Tuesday, January 10

#### NATURAL HISTORY NIGHT WITH A DIFFERENCE!

##### **MOVIE & ACTION NIGHT:** *Toad People*

*Toad People* is the story of inspiring individuals and communities committed to saving species at risk across B.C. It features the western toad as an example of the many other imperiled creatures. British Columbians know that we have remarkable wildlife—where else can you find killer whales (*Orca*), Grizzly Bears, Barn Owls and Badgers

—but many are shocked to find out that B.C. doesn't have its own endangered species legislation. This movie and action night is part of our province-wide mobilization tour. After the film, Campaigner **Joe Foy** will speak about endangered species mismanagement in B.C. and the need for a stand-alone law. We'll send you home with an action kit to support you in engaging with your local candidates, media and community members to speak out in favour of endangered species legislation in B.C. It's nearly election time, the perfect opportunity to let our decision makers know we want strong protection for wildlife in the form of an endangered species law. For more information about the film, go to [www.toadpeople.org](http://www.toadpeople.org). We meet at 7:30 p.m. in Rm. 159 of the Fraser Building, UVic. Everyone welcome! **Note: UVic parking is \$3.**

## Tuesday, January 17

### BOTANY NIGHT

#### *Bavarian Spring Flowers*

On a 2015 trip to southern Germany, **Hans Roemer** re-visited the spring flowers of his childhood. In just two weeks he was lucky to encounter and photograph nearly the full complement of attractive native plants that flower in the deciduous forest, on dry hillsides and in wet meadows. He even managed to capture the first flush of flowers on alpine pastures. Hans will explain the ecological settings within which these plants occur and have survived through the centuries. Many of the species and genera will be familiar to the audience from gardens or, if they grew up in the UK or Europe, from their own experience. Others will be of interest as additional members of widespread plant families. Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Everyone welcome.

## Sunday, January 15

### FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 1)

#### *Birding via Gulf Island Ferry*

We are going to do a day trip on a Gulf Island Ferry and spend about four hours birding by boat. There are usually a lot of birds on the water at this time of year, so we should get a good look at the water birds that we generally strain to see from land. We will leave on the 9:35 a.m. ferry and return to Swartz Bay at 1:15 p.m. The ferry will stop at Pender, Galiano, Mayne and again at Pender before returning to Swartz Bay. We don't get off the ferry at the stops. Bring a lunch as food services are minimal on the ferry. Don't forget your binoculars and dress warmly as we will be outside most of the time. Fare is \$13.45 for a foot passenger. Contact Agnes at thelynns at [shaw.ca](mailto:shaw.ca) or (250) 721-0634 to confirm attendance or for more information.

## Saturday, January 21

### FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

#### *Birding Saanichton Bay Park*

You are welcome to join the VNHS Saturday Birding Group for a trip to Saanichton Bay Park. As this is a birding hot-spot for wintering waterfowl, we should see loons, grebes, diving ducks and dabbling ducks. It is also a good area for passerines. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the parking lot off Mount Newton Cross Rd, just a short distance past the all ways stop with Lochside Drive. Watch for the Central Saanich Park sign on the left. Call Rick at (250) 885-2454 or email Agnes at thelynns at [shaw.ca](mailto:shaw.ca) for more information.

## Sunday, January 22

### FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

#### *Common Mosses of the Victoria Area*

Our trip leader **Kem Luther** has stated that if we learn just 20 of the common mosses in the area that we will have covered about 95% of

the total number of mosses in the Victoria area. Kem will show us most of the twenty at Matheson Lake Park to get us started. You are encouraged to bring a hand lens if you have one. Meet at the main parking lot at 1:00 p.m. To reach the park, take Happy Valley Road to Rocky Point Road. Watch for the park sign on the right. Number of participants will be limited to minimize damage to the fragile habitat so register early. Contact Agnes at thelynns at [shaw.ca](mailto:shaw.ca) or 250-721-0634 to register or for further information.

## Wednesday, January 25

### BIRDERS' NIGHT

#### *The Song Sparrows of Mandarte Island*

Mandarte Island, known to locals for its breeding seabirds, is home to a resident population of song sparrows that has been well studied for more than 40 years. Studied by Frank Tompa in 1960, and Jamie Smith in 1975, research has continued under Peter Arcese since the 1980's. The Mandarte song sparrow dataset is unique for its longevity and comprehensive monitoring protocols that have enabled us to understand the fate of all birds on the island, as well as their relatedness to one another. Recent Master's graduate **Merle Crombie** is a former field assistant on Mandarte and investigated a suite of factors that influenced nest success over 39 years. She'll be discussing how cowbirds, inbreeding, climate, maternal age, breeding densities, and the spread of invasive vegetation have influenced nest success in this population over the long-term. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in Rm. 159 of the Fraser Building, UVic. Everyone welcome! Come early to socialize! **Note: UVic parking is \$3.**

## Monday, January 30

### MARINE NIGHT

#### *Small Scale Fisheries in Myanmar (Burma): Challenges in time of change*

**Dr. Kenneth MacKay** is a fisheries biologist with extensive experience in small scale fisheries in South East Asia and the South Pacific. His talk will focus on the fisheries in Myanmar with particular focus on the Gulf of Mottama, a dynamic estuarine system. The people of Myanmar have one of the highest rates of fish consumption in the world. Issues include absence of management by government, lack of knowledge and research, illegal fishing using poisons, and small mesh 1-3 mile long nets, all resulting in a 50-90% reduction in catch. In spite of this and partially due to the elected government, positive changes are occurring. We meet in Room 159 of the Fraser Building, UVic at 7:30 pm. Everyone is welcome. **Note: UVic parking is \$3.**

## FEBRUARY 2017

## Saturday, February 4

### FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

#### *Birding Saxe Point and Macaulay Point Parks*

Join the VNHS Saturday Birding Group at Saxe Point Park and Macaulay Point Park. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot at the end of the road in Saxe Point Park. To reach the park, turn south off Esquimalt Rd on to Fraser St which ends in the park. We can enjoy the ocean birds as well as some that are tucked away close to shore in protected waters. There are also some good bush birds, and we often see the resident Cooper's Hawk. Macaulay Point is more open and surprises there have included Spotted Sandpiper and a Meadowlark even at this time of year. One challenge is to find the California Quail who hide in the thickets. Call Rick at (250) 885-2454 or email Agnes at thelynns at [shaw.ca](mailto:shaw.ca) for more information.



## Sunday, February 5

### FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 2)

#### *Common Lichens of the Victoria Area*

Lichens are something that most of us don't know that well and here is your opportunity to have **Hans Roemer** and **Ryan Batten** help us to learn them better. There are many lichens in our local area, but we will start with the easy ones. Luckily most lichens look their best in the winter months. You are encouraged to bring a hand lens if you have one. We will meet at 10 a.m. at Francis King Park Nature House (Prospect Lake Road to Munns Road). Number of participants will be limited to minimize damage to the fragile habitat so register early. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or 250-721-0634 to register or for further information.

## Sunday, February 12

### EVENT

#### *19th Valentine Couples Birdathon*

Here's an opportunity to enjoy a carefree half day out in nature with your valentine, counting birds, forgetting all about Donald Trump and what he means for our collective future. In this annual event birder couples seek to find as many bird species as possible between the hours of 6:00 a.m. to noon. Couples can walk, ride or drive to their heart's content anywhere within the Victoria checklist area. Participants meet at the Swan Lake Nature Centre afterwards to share war stories: the highs and lows, the great finds, the hard-to-believe misses. An array of attractive prizes are typically on offer, capped by the honour of having one's name inscribed on the cherished Anderson Trophy, featuring Jerry Anderson's beautifully carved pair of snuggling mourning doves. The cost of the event is \$10 per couple, the proceeds of which go entirely to VNHS conservation efforts. To register, or to request copies of the event rules and checklist, contact Alan MacLeod: bigadore@gmail.com.

## Tuesday, February 14

### NATURAL HISTORY NIGHT

#### *Your Brain on Climate Change: Story as a Way In*

Humans have evolved to ignore danger that isn't clear and present. Issues surrounding climate and water security fit that description, and yet—a good story, well told, helps us understand these top threats to public safety and environmental health. In this Valentine's Day presentation, scholar and author **Rebecca Lawton** shares insights from her field research on northern California streams and her work as a Fulbright scholar in Alberta that will help demonstrate the power of story to connect our brains and hearts to action. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in Room 159 of the Fraser Building at the University of Victoria. Everyone is welcome. Please feel free to bring a friend. **Note: UVic parking is \$3.**

## Saturday, February 18

### FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 3)

#### *Boundary Bay and Raptors*

Join us for a trip to Boundary Bay in Vancouver. We can expect to see large flocks of wintering waterfowl and shorebirds as well as visit some of the best wintering habitat for raptors in western Canada. There should be time for a trip to Reifel Bird Sanctuary as well. Bring a lunch and drinks as we will not be stopping for refreshments. Dress warmly as it can be windy near the water. We go rain or shine. Participants will carpool from in front of the Elk-Beaver Lake Regional Park Sign on Elk Lake Drive at 5:45 a.m. for the 7:00 a.m. ferry sailing. We plan to return on the 5:00 p.m. sailing. Limited number of participants. You must pre-register by contacting Agnes. First 9 people to sign up have the option of coming in her van. Others to carpool by pre-arrangement.

Cost to come in the van or carpool with others will be about \$70 for the day from Victoria. Contact Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca or (250) 721-0634 to confirm attendance or for more information.

## Tuesday, February 21

### BOTANY NIGHT

#### *New plant discoveries from northern BC Alpine*

**Ken Marr** presents an illustrated presentation about the flora of northern BC including images of the landscapes, rare plants, common plants, a pseudoflower, a puzzling gap in the distribution of several species and what we are learning from DNA markers about the migration of several species. Lots of images of flowers! Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House, 7:30 p.m. Everyone welcome.

## Wednesday, February 22

### BIRDERS' NIGHT

#### *Birding Attu and the Aleutians*

**John Puschock**, of Zugunruhe Birding Tours, began running expeditions to the Aleutians with his first visit to Adak in 2004. Six years later, he found a way to get to Attu, famed island of North American Big Years, and since then has been taken groups there in spring migration. Since the closure of the military base on the island, Zugunruhe is the only company still taking birders to this remote and legendary island. John will talk about the history of birding in the Aleutians, his experiences, and the birds to be found there. We meet at 7:30 p.m. in Rm. 159 of the Fraser Building, UVic. Everyone welcome! Come early to socialize! **Note: UVic parking is \$3.**

## Saturday, February 25

### FIELD TRIP (LEVEL 4)

#### *Birding Elk Lake and Beaver Lake*

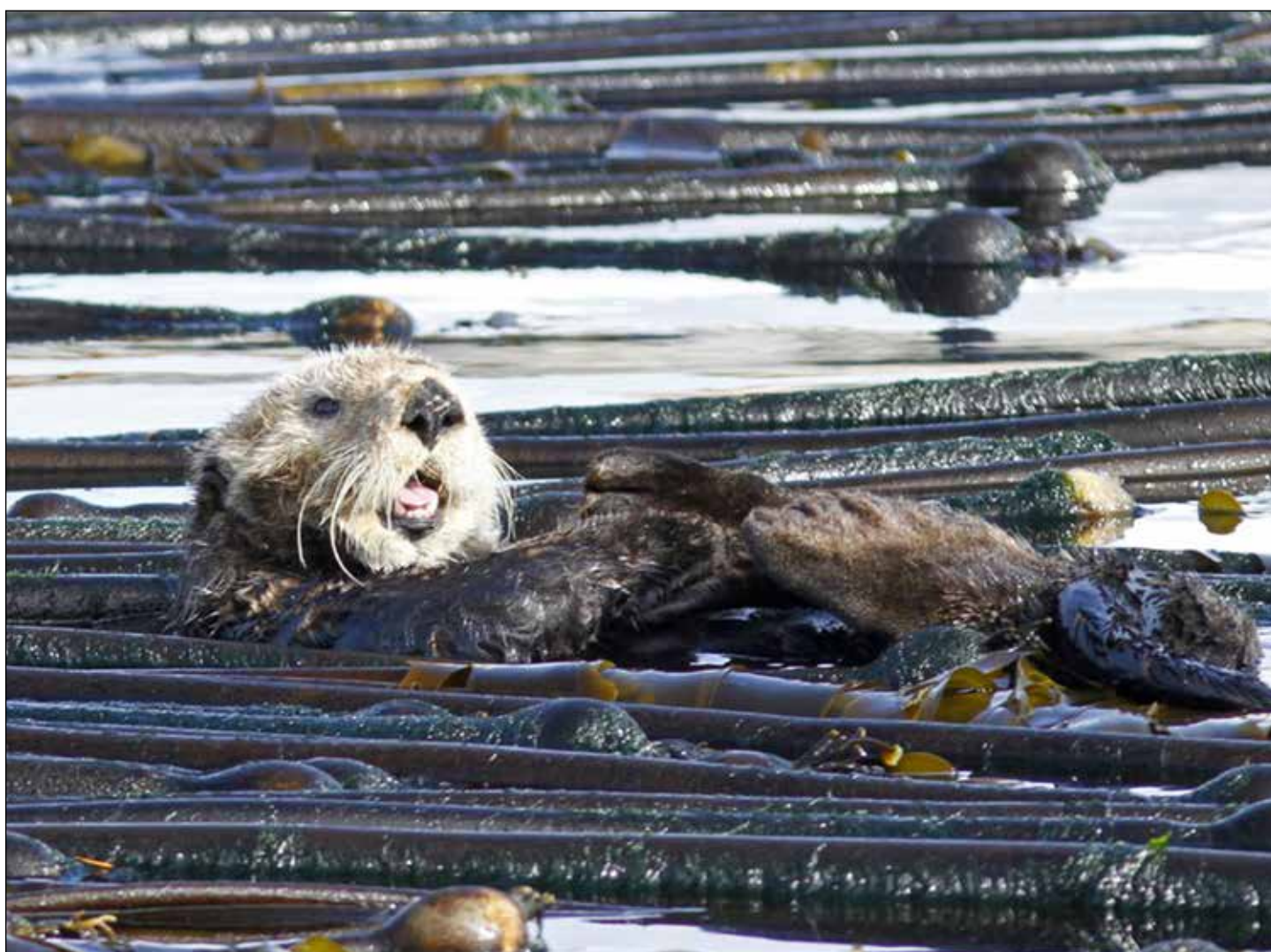
Come join the VNHS Saturday Birding Group for birding on the 10 km loop around Beaver and Elk Lake. We can make arrangements for some attendees to only go part way around if they wish. Elk Lake is a great place to potentially see Canvasbacks, Redheads or Ruddy Ducks in the winter. Meet at the main parking lot at Beaver Lake at 8:00 a.m. To reach this parking lot, turn on to Beaver Lake Road off Elk Lake Drive (parallels the Pat Bay Highway). There is a large Elk-Beaver Lake Regional Park sign at this intersection. Call Rick at (250) 885-2454 or email Agnes at thelynns at shaw.ca for more information.

## Monday, February 27

### MARINE NIGHT

#### *Ecology of Salmonids in Estuaries Around the World*

Biologists have long marvelled at how anadromous salmonids—fish that pass from rivers into oceans and back—survive, as they migrate between these two very different environments. Based on his recent book published by UBC Press, **Colin Levings** will present an overview of our current knowledge of how salmonid species around the world are adapted to estuaries. He will also discuss the wide diversity of estuary types found on many continents. His book will be available for sale. We meet in Room 159 of the Fraser Building, UVic at 7:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome. **Note: UVic parking is \$3.**



A Sea Otter seen in Race Rocks kelp beds. *Photo: Marie O'Shaughnessy.*