

THE THRUSH

Published by the Nanaimo District Naturalists

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VOLUME 6 NUMBER 1

SPRING 1978

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

David Richards

Dear Fellow Naturalist,

I hope that you enjoy this edition of the "Thrush". It's the first one in some time and Kim Goldberg is to be congratulated for taking time off from her studies to put it together. Kim is planning another one for early summer or early fall and would appreciate hearing your comments and suggestions.

On Saturday, March 4, our project members put on a slide show in Campbell River for representatives of all the Island clubs. The show was a summary of the work they had done as well as work that they were planning to do. I'm pleased to report that the show was very well received and I was asked several questions by other clubs afterwards. Our project is in high gear now and our workers will be extremely busy visiting the schools and parks until next November. They plan to put on a show for us at one of our spring meetings so that the other members can see what is happening.

Looking into the future a bit, I see a number of trends developing. Our "hard-core" birders are out regularly on short Sunday morning hikes. These hikes make no concessions for non-birders and are for real enthusiasts only. On the other side of the coin our regular hikes are well attended only if they appeal to the ordinary all-around naturalist. These hikes must not be overly strenuous and must be held at reasonable hours. In spite of protests to the contrary, Sunday hikes are far better attended than hikes held on any other day.

Finally, as a club we must take stands on various environmental issues. However, members do not want our club to become an activist group and want the executive to emphasize the entertainment side of the outdoors. Thus our speakers are chosen with an eye to their entertainment and educational expertise rather than to inform us on critical issues.

It is important that members let us know their feelings on various issues and policies. Our club has an enthusiastic executive, but they need your guidance if the club is going to be a reflection of your interests and ambitions.

Sincerely yours,

Dave Richards

## THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Kim Goldberg

We're quite pleased to report that this year's Christmas bird count was one of the best yet. We spotted more species here than in any preceding year -- 114 species all total, and some were quite unusual for the area. One Virginia Rail, one Yellow-billed Loon, and one Swainson's Thrush (uncommon here in the winter) were among our unexpected sightings. The total number of birds sighted was 17,610. We attribute much of our success this year to the excellent weather conditions that day. The count took place on Dec. 31, and although the temperatures were low (ranging from  $-4$  to  $3^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), we watched and counted under blue skies and sunshine following Nanaimo's previous spell of cold, rainy weather. This unanticipated sunshine seemed to bring out the birds and bird watchers alike.

As usual Peter van Kerkoerle was the organizer and data compiler. We had a total of 22 bird watchers working in 7 different groups and we covered the areas by car, on foot, and by boat. The total area covered was the same as in previous years -- a circle of a  $7\frac{1}{2}$  mile radius with its center at the CP ferry docks.

Some of you may be surprised by a few of our sightings. Actually, our three Anna's Hummingbirds are not that unusual. These small birds spend their summers in Arizona, but winter all along the northwest coast, and have been sighted as far north as Alaska. They are usually first seen in Nanaimo around October or even September, and anyone who puts out a hummingbird feeder will probably attract them and help sustain them through the winter. These hummingbirds

are not the same as our summer visitors. Those are Rufus Hummingbirds which are slightly smaller and differently marked.

We were even able to include four Screech Owls in our list of sightings thanks to Ken Knowles' owl tape. Ken and Peter spent the middle of the night before the count trudging through the woods with tape recorder in hand, and it certainly paid off. This is truly a legitimate sighting because the actual counting period extends over 24 hours, not just the 8 hours that we go out in organized groups.

Bird counts everywhere have become serious business; they are no longer merely enjoyable pastimes. The results from our local count are sent to the U.S. Audubon Society where they are compiled with similar information coming in from all across Canada and the U.S. Although once scoffed at by the scientific community, the data from these bird counts have become very important recently. Declines in certain winter bird populations have shown a strong correlation to the use of DDT. Most notably these have been the Osprey and Bald Eagle in the U.S., and both the Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawk along with a serious drop in the Peregrine Falcon population. Another noteworthy relationship is the significant increase in the Osprey population since the DDT ban. Such findings have raised the importance of our annual bird counts.

This year was great, but we're hoping that next year will be even better. So all you birders be sure to make it out!

## BUILDING YOUR BIRD HOUSE

Peter van Kerkoerle

Bird houses can be built at home with little bits of left-over plywood or planks. Another good material is sawmill waste in the form of slabs with the bark still attached. A hollowed-out log is also very attractive to birds.

The three most important things to watch in building your bird house are: 1) the size of the entrance hole, 2) the distance this is set above the cavity floor, and 3) the amount of floorspace. Last year in early spring bluebirds were seen in the Cedar area, and I have asked some people out there to provide a few bird houses in case they are around this spring too.

Bird houses should be cleaned out after use. This prevents a build-up of parasites. For this reason it is wise to have bird houses with hinged tops. Some people are interested in watching the young birds develop, and for this an easily removable top is a must. However, disturbance should be avoided as much as possible.

Descriptions and blueprints of bird houses are a waste of time. Anyone who has a little skill with a hammer and saw is able to put a house together in 10 minutes or more.

Species	Floor Space (Inches)	Depth of House (Inches)	Entrance Hole Above Floor (Inches)	Diameter of Entrance (Inches)	Height Above Ground (feet)
Bluebird	5 x 5	8	6	1½	5 - 10
Chickadee	4 x 4	8 - 10	6 - 8	1 and 1/8	6 - 15
House Wren	4 x 4	6 - 8	16	1 - 1½	6 - 10
Tree Swallow	5 x 5	6	5	1½	10 - 15
iolet Green wallow	5 x 5	6	5	1½	10 - 15
Parling	6 x 6	10 - 12	8	2	10 - 15
Ticker	7 x 7	16 - 18	14 - 16	2½	6 - 20
airy woodpecker	6 x 6	12 - 15	9 - 12	1½	12 - 20

## SPENT PELLETS - A DEADLY POISON

Elizabeth F. MacDonald

There is one facet of the after-effects of hunting which is unknown to many of us. This is the danger facing many waterfowl from the pellets, or "spent" shot which falls into shallow waters or on the ground following the discharge of guns. These pellets containing lead, zinc, and copper are picked up by waterfowl which feed among the aquatic vegetation or by those feeding among grasses on the land. It makes no difference which species ingest the pellets; once they are in the bird's crop that bird is doomed. Among the various waterfowl who fall victim to this deadly poison is a supposedly "protected" species, namely the Trumpeter Swan who stops over on many of our small lakes during migratory flights.

One such lake in the Yellowpoint area, known as Michael Lake, provides an ideal resting place for migratory waterfowl, among which are Trumpeter Swans, White-fronted, Canada, Cackling, and a few of the rare Aleutian Geese. The property adjoining this beautiful lake belongs to Dan Wilson who is deeply concerned and interested in the welfare not only of these birds, but also of those he raises on his own property. Hunters holding legal licenses trespass illegally on his (and others') land, sometimes shooting the birds he is raising. Those pellets from the discharged guns then become the source of lead poisoning.

This past spring five Trumpeter Swans were lost due to the effects of ingested lead pellets. Mr. Wilson had these birds under surveillance, as their actions indicated they were ill. Three of the birds went off into the woods and died; a fourth entangled her wings in a fence and was captured. The fifth bird was found dead some two weeks later.

The complications resulting from ingested pellets are many, leading to a prolonged and agonizing death. There is no sudden demise such as that caused by strychnine; a bird will linger for several months as the poison breaks down and destroys various parts of the organism.

As the wildlife branch in Nanaimo was somewhat skeptical about the swans succumbing to lead poisoning, Mr. Wilson took both birds to the governmental Veterinary Laboratory in Abbotsford for autopsies, and this involved two separate trips. The first bird, received at the lab on Mar. 25, 1976, was a three-year-old female Trumpeter Swan that had been feeding among the potatoes. She had been off the pond the previous day, had been passing green fluid, and getting weaker. This is the bird that became entangled in the fence. Mr. Wilson administered Terramycin because of suspected pneumonia, but to no avail. The post mortem on this swan reads as follows: "This was a swan in a reasonable state of nutrition. Bird had had diarrhea and its tail feathers were badly soiled. There was a marked air sacculitis. Lungs were congested and pleura thickened. Liver was extremely congested. The digestive tract was almost completely empty. Tissues were taken for Bacteriology, Histopathology, and liver for Toxicology for lead.

<u>TOXICOLOGY:</u>	<u>Lead</u>	<u>Cadmium</u>	<u>Copper</u>	<u>Zinc</u>
<u>Liver:</u>	25.0 ppm	0.59 ppm	203.5 ppm	70.0 ppm
<u>Kidney:</u>	19.0 ppm	2.25 ppm	8.9 ppm	28.0 ppm

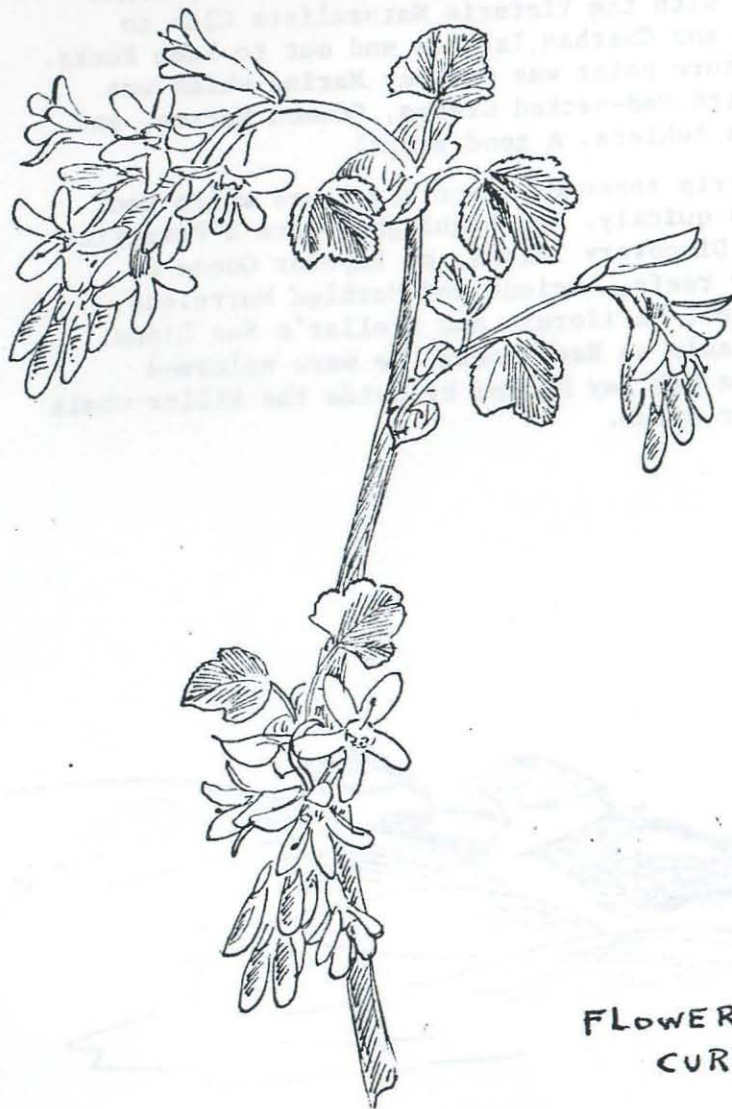
COMMENT: Both lead and copper levels are within the toxic range.

DIAGNOSIS: Lead and copper toxicity."

(End of this report which was signed by E.W. Gilchrist, Veterinary Pathologist.)

The reason for presenting this article is not due to any special antipathy against hunters, but to emphasize the ensuing aftermath on birds ingesting the discharged pellets. It is a tragic and distressing thing to realize that hundreds upon hundreds of waterfowl perish in a like manner. In the above instances the birds, being swans, were on the "protected" list. In my estimation there is little value in having a species placed on this list when its known migratory haunts are open to hunters, thus leaving the birds wide open to the hazards of fatal poisoning produced from ingested pellets. ALL KNOWN STOPPING POINTS INVOLVING SWANS SHOULD BE CLOSED TO HUNTING!

At the time of this writing I understand that Michael Lake and surrounding areas have been closed to hunting.



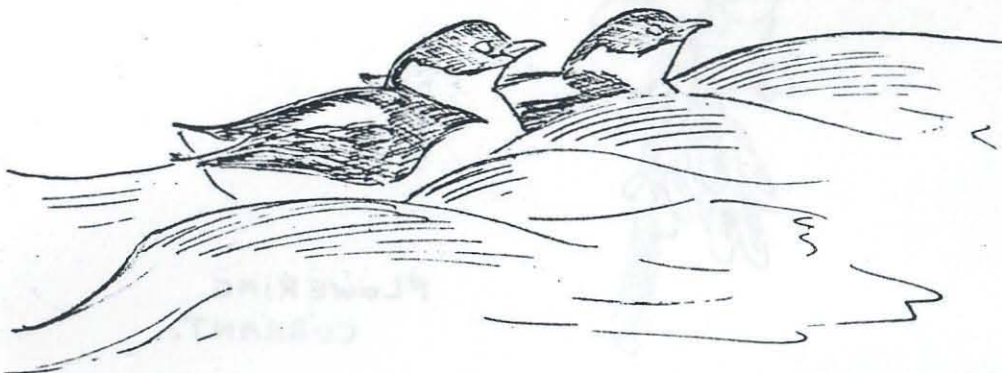
FLOWERING  
CURRANT.

## IN SEARCH OF PELAGIC BIRDS

David R. Denis

Feb. 11 dawned clear and sunny for Ken and Gloria Knowles and myself as we began our pelagic bird trip with the Victoria Naturalists Club to Discovery and Chatham Islands and out to Race Rocks. Our departure point was Oak Bay Marina which was crowded with Red-necked Grebes, Common Murres, and Rhinoceros Auklets. A good start!

Our trip consumed about six hours which went by all too quickly. The highlights were a Peregrine Falcon on Discovery Island, an Emperor Goose on the nearby reefs, Ancient and Marbled Murrelets, Arctic Loons, California and Stellar's Sea Lions, and Hair Seals on Race Rocks. We were welcomed back to the Oak Bay Marina by Haida the killer whale blowing her spout.



## TASTY BANQUETS FOR YOUR BIRDS

Coral Denis

### FINCH FRIES

Raw beef suet  
1 Cup millet  
1/2 Cup bread crumbs  
1/2 Cup Am. cheese cubed  
Sand for grit

Save tuna or cat food size cans. Spoon into four of these a combination of 1 cup millet, 1/2 cup bread crumbs, and 1/2 cup Am. cheese cubed. Sprinkle each with a pinch of sand for grit. Put suet through meat grinder then melt down in double boiler. Set aside to cool and harden slightly. Reheat. While in liquid form, pour in enough suet to fill tins. Refrigerate to harden. Nail to trees with six inch nails. Be sure to tape exposed end of nail to insure a safe perch.

### CHICKADEE CRUNCH

Raw beef suet  
Sunflower seeds  
Pine cones  
Millet seed

Put suet through a meat grinder, then melt it down in a double boiler. Set aside to cool and harden slightly. Reheat. Take pine cones with string or wire attached and spoon warm suet over them until well coated. Sprinkle immediately with millet, then push sunflower seeds under scales. Spoon warm suet over pine cones again, building up suet and securing sunflower seeds. Refrigerate until firm and then hang from tree branches.



## BATMAN KNOWS BEST

Kim Goldberg

What's furry, flies at night, and is often associated with Count Dracula? Some of you will identify this as a member of the order Chiroptera, but the rest of us will recognize it to be a bat of course. At our February meeting ex-president Dave Kerridge gave a fascinating presentation on these widely misunderstood creatures. Dave has done extensive research on them and was able to bring along a bat skeleton, preserved bats, and some good slides to illustrate what he was talking about. He has made this and other similar presentations not only because he's personally interested in the subject, but also to educate the public about the true nature of these intriguing animals.

Many people have an irrational reaction to bats ranging from fear to hate. It's all quite unwarranted and most of it has its shaky foundations in the horror stories of vampire bats, those notorious blood-sucking consorts of Count Dracula. There are indeed three species of blood-lapping bats, but unfortunately for Hollywood they're only about three inches long and none of them inhabit the Old World, home of the infamous Transylvania. They range instead from Mexico to northern South America.

Bats are the only true flying mammal, and they do have all of the mammalian attributes: warm-blooded, fur-covered bodies, bear live young, and nurse these young. They also have the interesting feature of echo-location, (except for the Fruit Bat). By emitting bleeps and then listening to the echo of these bleeps they are able to locate objects in complete darkness. They also have quite functional eyesight, and so the adage "blind as a bat" indicates another common myth about these animals. They use their eyesight chiefly in large-scale navigation, such as locating land masses.

One of the largest bats is the Fruit Bat (sub-group Megachiroptera) where a wing-span of five feet is not uncommon. This is also the most primitive bat and has no means of echo-location. You won't see one around here (except in a zoo) but in many tropical cultures these bats are a staple source of protein. Not only are the mature ones used for the main meals, but the small ones are caught by children and toasted over the fire like marshmallows.

Here on Vancouver Island we have about 10 species of bats, which is rather surprising because the Island is otherwise quite lacking in mammalian species. The largest here is the Big Brown Bat which weighs in at 25 grams (a little less than 9 ounces for those of you running to your sliderules). This species, and most species north of Mexico, are insectivorous. They can be thought of as "night-flying swallows". Due to their high metabolic rate (a trait of all flying animals) they must eat at least 3/4 of their body weight in insects every night. For our friend the Big Brown Bat this could add up to several hundred mosquitoes each night, so we should think twice before wishing him ill. And even more remarkable, he may return with a full load after just 1/2 hour - 1 hour of foraging.

There are several other interesting bat species. The fish-eating bats cruise over water surfaces and with their long legs and toes they're able to gaff fish under the surface when they notice a ripple in the water. In southwestern US there's an intriguing symbiotic relationship between a nectar-eating bat and the giant Saguaro cactus. This cactus depends entirely upon the bats for pollination, and in return these bats use their long tongues to dine on the nectar, pollen, and sometimes even the flowers of these cacti.

I found Dave's talk very informative which is why I wanted to share some of my notes on it with those members who weren't able to attend. Bats are an animal that most of us know surprisingly little about, and it's unfortunate that they're so often the object of senseless fears.

## DEVASTATION

Midge Offerhaus

Murderers!

These!

Who, with weapons

Cut down trees!

Then leave them lying

Grotesque and bare.

To die!

It is not fair

That man, unthinkingly,

Should take the life of any tree

What right has he?

"My need is great", men say,

"For shelter and for warmth".

Take then, what you need,

But let there be some dignity

Some creed ...

To hold back wanton greed!

Despoilers!

Leave not your culls

The upturned roots

Exposed,

Unwanted,

Bare ...

Leave them to suckle nature's breast

Where ...

Nurture for their verdant foliage lies.

And strength is gained to press against

The skies ...

Of every season.

How cruel!

How senseless!

Oh how cruel!

That man, with one great monstrous tool

Can push a forest giant to his knees

And never hear his anguished cry ...

... the pleas ...

For mercy!

... Oh hurry little birds!

... Come quickly, quickly ...

Make haste!

Bring seed pods to hide this wanton waste.

... Your forest friend has fallen to his foe,

... Cover him quickly with little things to grow.

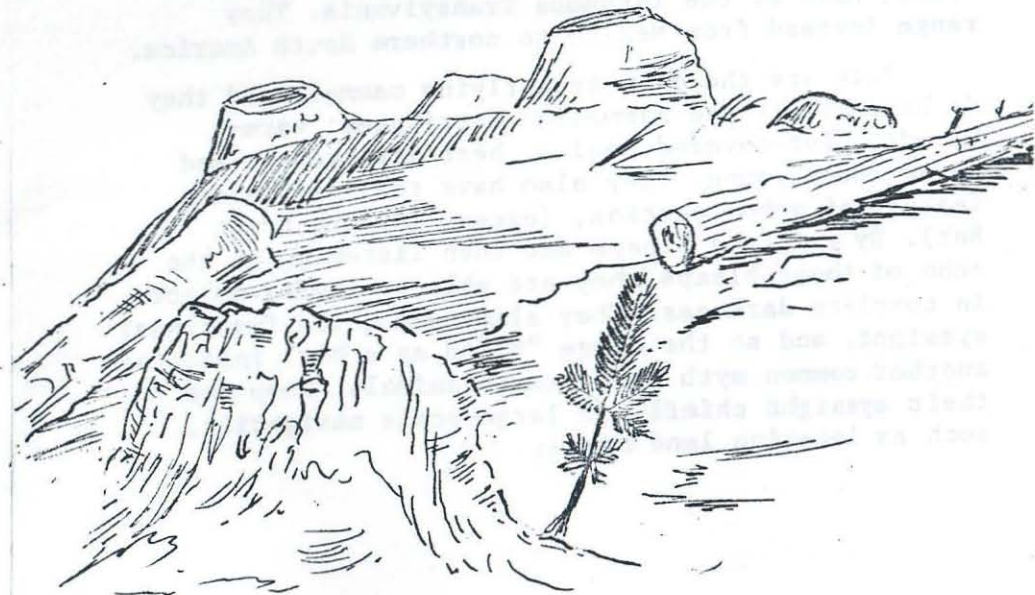
For as he slowly, slowly rots

And is left alone to die

Perhaps his progeny then ...

... Will someday grow ...

And touch the skies!



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## OUR OWN PRIORITIES

Ken Knowles

Recently on a television special Jacques Cousteau made the rather profound statement that that there they were in the Antarctic with the most modern of devices at their disposal attempting to determine the best method for preventing the extermination of one particular species of penguin, when in the very same geographic area a race of primitives has all but been eliminated by the white man. This brings up the question of where our priorities as naturalists lie. Do we save endangered species of wildlife while many peoples of the world are starving to death or being outrightly murdered as are some of the natives of the Amazon region?

It appears to me lately that naturalists on the whole are perhaps a bit too narrow minded and tend to miss out on the whole picture. Perhaps it is time for us to reassess our values and adjust our goals accordingly.

Perhaps it is a lack of sensitivity on our parts during these times of political and financial unrest. These are problems we have to overcome ourselves. This showed up particularly lately when the Beban Park situation was an issue. People were voting "no" due to their lack of confidence in the local politicians, and not as to whether our community needed such a facility. Here was a general lack of sensitivity towards the young people who would be using it, the same people we hope some day will become dedicated naturalists. Small chance of that happening if they are left free to run the streets and wander off the straight and narrow. An exaggeration you say. Hardly! Just ask naturalists about their upbringing; I dare say you won't find many graduates from Brannen Lake.

The question also arises of our use, or should I say misuse, of our natural resources. We are the first to complain about excessive logging, but recently at a club outing the waste by members of our club was disgraceful. I watched paper and plastic cups being burnt when they could have been washed and reused, (well enough for picnics). After asking about this waste, I was given the answer that they were acquired free of charge and therefore why save them.

It all stems from our affluent society. And yet regardless of our wealth we are all responsible for the consumption of our natural resources. How many trees would be saved if all brown bags were eliminated from supermarkets and we carried our own containers as they do in Europe? Then again, how many of us can be bothered? Perhaps it's time we became bothered. Perhaps it's time we take stock again and decide if our role as naturalists shouldn't be reassessed and our own priorities re-established.

(Editor's note: I would welcome any response to Ken's article, as well as any comments on other issues related to our group. Let YOUR opinions be known in the next "Thrush" !)

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NOTES