

NANAIMO DISTRICT NATURALISTS

Published by the Nanaimo Natural History Society

General Correspondence to:

David C. Kerridge, President,
3397 Stephenson Pt. Rd.,
Nanaimo, B.C.

Publication Correspondence to:

Allan R. Hawryzki, Editor,
3330 Stephenson Pt. Rd.,
Nanaimo, B.C.

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DATES TO REMEMBER

- DECEMBER 15, 1973 - The Cowichan Bird Society have asked us to assist them in their annual bird count. If you can be of assistance contact Peter van Kerkoerle (245-2530).
- DECEMBER 29, 1973 - Our own bird count will be held on this date followed by a buffet dinner. Contact Peter van Kerkoerle for details. We would hope to have as many members out as possible---even if they don't know much about birds. They can help out in other ways while learning about species found locally from other members.



ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT

Balance as of October 31st, 1972 \$ 82.91

CREDITS

Dues Received	\$ 155.00
Silver Collection	11.95
Bank Interest	<u>1.04</u>
Total Credits	<u>167.99</u>

250.90

DEBITS

Coffee Urn	\$ 16.85
File Box	6.25
Federation of B.C. Dues	17.00
Audubon Society (bird count)	28.53
Beban House Rent	14.50
Barbeque	23.17
Cover for Bulletin	6.47
Christmas Cards	30.00
Coffee Supplies	13.37
Miscellaneous (phone calls, stamps, bird seed)	_____
Total Debits	<u>165.91</u>

Cash on Hand November 15th, 1973 Marg Kerridge, \$ 84.99
Secretary/Treasurer

CHRISTMAS CARDS ARE NOW AVAILABLE FOR THOSE
WHO ORDERED THEM AT A COST
OF \$1.25 A BOX

A FEW EXTRA PACKAGES ARE AVAILABLE FOR THOSE WHO
WISH TO PICK THEM UP
AVAILABLE FROM OUR CLUBS SECRETARY/TREASURER

NANAIMO DISTRICT NATURALISTS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Room 108 Malaspina College

8:00 P.M., November 23rd 1973

Agenda

1. President's report of the past year's activities.
2. Financial report.
3. Election of executive and selection of committees.
4. Discussion of coming events. i.e. Christmas Bird Count.
5. Coffee.
6. Slide presentation by club members.

PRESIDENTS ANNUAL REPORT

At our last Annual General Meeting the report given covered our activities from the beginning of the club in March through to November. This is the first Annual Report which encompasses a full years activities. It has been an exciting year and the club has certainly expanded---taking in a wide scope of activities.

On December 30th we completed our first Christmas bird count. With the help of the members of the Cowichan Bird Society we had a total attendance of 16 persons. It was a miserable day, but most successful, as we were able to log 80 different species and nearly 9,000 individuals. The day was brought to a warm ending at Miss E. Waddell's home where all enjoyed a buffet supper.

The speaker for our December 12th meeting was Mr. George Potts. He gave a most delightful slide show and talk on Ancient Mexican Architecture---as you remember, much of it by candlelight since the lights went out for a time.

Starting off our 1973 season we had our own Mollie Byrne give us a slide presentation on flowers on January 16th at Beban House. The following month, on February 20th, our Winnie Espitalier gave us an excellent program on the geology of the Nanaimo region. This was followed by a geology field trip on the following Saturday.

Our club was responsible for submitting a position paper to the Canadian Harbours and Port Planning Committee on January 25th concerning the proposed development in the mouth of the Nanaimo River Estuary. This paper was presented by Juanita Russell on behalf of the Naturalists. On March 20th we had a delightful presentation by Mr. Dave Stirling, of the British Columbia Parks Branch, on the birds of Australia. There were slides of other areas of interest to natural historians as well. This meeting was held at Malaspina College. As our regular meeting point Beban House was not large enough to handle the numbers that attended this program. On April 17th, we held our last indoor meeting for the Spring at Beban House. Our guest was Dr. John Kelsall of the Canadian Wildlife Service, and his presentation covered some of the work he had carried out in the Arctic on Caribou.

We had an outing to Mr. Dixon's farm on April 28th and on May 13th a few members had an interesting trip to Gordon River to see the pink Easter Lilies. An evening expedition led by Mollie Byrne to a Beaver Pond on the Nanaimo Lakes Road was held on May 15th.

Our biggest and most successful field trip was the Low Tide excursion to Dodds Narrows. Kathy Mounce was our leader and after much playing around in the surf we all headed to the van Kerkoerle's for our Barbeque Picnic. Rhododendron Lake was visited on June the 10th while the flowers were in their full glory.

The summer was a disaster, mainly due to the fire closure which kept people out of the forests. The next get together was our September's indoor meeting at Malaspina College. This was held on the 28th of September. We had over 50 people attend the film 'High Country' by Chess Lyons and narrated by Ruth Stirling.

On October 20th a few hardy souls managed to brave the weather in order to visit Hamilton Swamp at Qualicum. Our indoor meeting held on October 26th was most successful as we attracted 85 people to Dr. I. Clark's slide presentation on the Wild Flowers of British Columbia.

This leads us to our Annual Meeting to be held at Malaspina College on November 23rd.

At this meeting we will elect a new slate of officers for the coming year. The entertainment will be furnished by slides presented by members of the club.

As your president, I would like to take the opportunity at this time to thank those members of the executive that have put so much into making this a successful year. They have been:

Miss Mollie Byrne (Plant director)
Mrs. Winnie Espitalier (Rock director)
Mrs. Barbara Graves
Mr. Allan Hawryzki
Mrs. Marg Kerridge (Secretary/Treasurer)
Miss Juanita Russell (Student director)
Mr. & Mrs. Peter van Kerkoerle (Bird director)
Miss Elaine Waddell (Convener)

We have been recently trying Friday evenings in an attempt to see whether or not we could attract a larger crowd to our regular meetings. They have appeared to be successful and we will continue to meet on Friday evenings unless we receive some criticism from the membership.

Our biggest venture this year has been the development of our own publication. It has taken the better part of the year to get it under way. We are most grateful to Peter van Kerkoerle for the cover design and find it most exciting as the Varied Thrush (our cover bird) has been put forward as the potential bird emblem of B.C. We will be the first group to make use of this emblem if it becomes recognized as our provincial bird.

Our membership has grown steadily this year and at present, we have 35 family or single memberships. The Friday night programs have developed a lot of interest and we hope to increase our membership through these.

Of immediate concern is our Annual Christmas Bird Count. We hope to make this even more successful than last year's so we need your help, expert or not. It will be on December 29th---so save that day.

I would like to thank you for having me as your president this year and supporting me the way you have. At times it has proven hectic, but we have managed to pull through. The very best for the year ahead to a

D.C. Kerridge

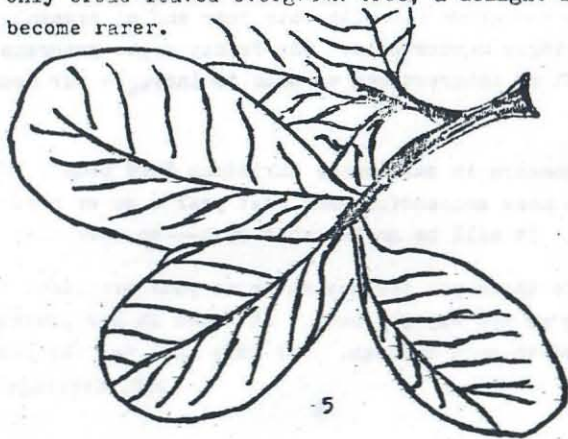
ARBUTUS (Arbutus menziessii Pursh)

Mollie Byrne

This tree, also known locally as the Pacific Madrone, shares our cover picture with the varied thrush and it must surely be a tree which we both love and curse. With faithful regularity through the year, it covers our gardens, sun-decks, carports, walkways and evestroughs with bark, or leaves or berries or combinations of these. Yet it is a tree which always intrigues visitors from other parts of the continent, or from overseas, for although the genus is represented elsewhere, (for example the Strawberry tree, Arbutus unedo, of Europe), our species is perhaps the most striking. In spring its large clusters of waxy flowers show clearly its relationship to the heathers, the blueberries, the salals, and the rhododendrons. The warty, orange fruits seen in October are edible, but scarcely worth it; strictly for the birds!

It is the annual cyclic changes of bark on the smooth turgs and young trunks that are perhaps, the most fascinating feature of the tree. In midsummer, the old foliage turns yellow and begins to fall, and at about the same time the tough bark curls up and peels off, revealing a beautiful green underbark, which is destined to turn gradually to a cinnamon colour on the bare smooth limbs. On dead trees the branches and turgs reveal the details of their geometry, with unique curves and angles which make them useful as decorative items.

The wood itself; hard, strong, close-grained and heavy is too rare for general use, but is attractive for craft work. Let us hope that Canada's only broad-leaved evergreen tree, a delight in our landscape, will not become rarer.



THE VARIED THRUSH

Peter van Kerkoerle

When the first frosts of autumn have turned the maples a golden yellow and the dogwoods are dressed in mantles of red and salmon hues, we might hear during a walk in nature a strange flute-like sound coming from the bush. It is just one note held for a few seconds, somewhat off key and a bit quavering, as if the singer was not too sure of himself. Then it is quiet for a minute or so and again it repeats itself a little higher or lower in scale. The singer sure has an odd song. Careful listening reveals that the sound, which seems to come from far away actually originates from a bird sitting only 60 feet away in a cedar.

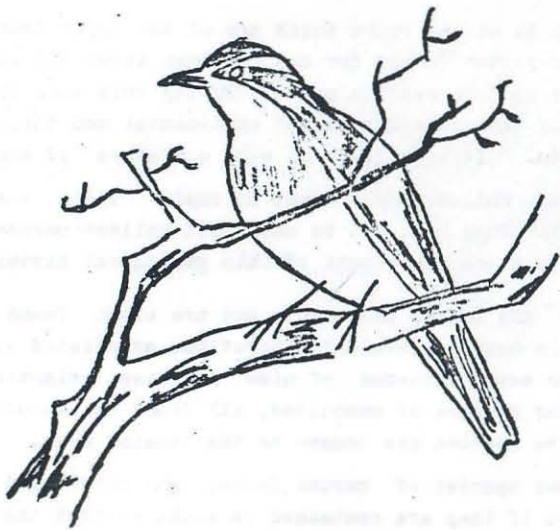
It is robin size or a little smaller with orange breast and a dark band across it and a light stripe above the eye. Wings and back are darker with some small light dots on the wings. This is the varied thrush, a true Western bird.

It's range stretches through nearly all B. C., parts of Alaska and south through the mountains to northern California. It nests in the moist forests on mountain slopes mostly at higher elevations. In fall during migration it is found at sea level. It can then be seen even in the gardens of our cities. Here it acts shy and out of place. As all thrushes it is a ground feeding bird, but on our lawns it does not compete with the robin. It seems to eat small grubs from between the grass while the robin eats earthworms on the lawn. The varied thrush keeps its body close to the ground, always alert for dangers from above. It is never really at home here. During the fall season a good place to find them is in Arbutus trees with berries. Here they will gorge themselves on these miniature oranges and are then mostly found in the company of robins. In flight with robins one can recognize them by the somewhat shorter tail, particularly when they fly high overhead.

In summer the varied thrush nests in swampy forests on mountain slopes. The nest is made of twigs, grasses and moss, and set from 5 to 15 feet above the ground in a tree. There are 3 to 4 blue eggs with some dark spots. Migration starts during September.

The varied thrush during winter is a very quiet and unobtrusive bird.

When in February a sunny day calls out the first bees to the crocusses and an early butterfly flutters across our path we might hear that strange whistle again. And when there are several birds calling all in a little different key and the listener is in the right mood, he might imagine himself standing in a deep forest on a mountain slope. The trees are moss covered and dripping wet----fog is obscuring their tops. The half darkness is moody and silent except for this strange choir. Then he will sense that in the right surroundings these eerie sounds may form a beautiful concert that greatly enhances the scene and that this shy bird is very much a part of our great North West.



A RARE FIND

by David C. Kerridge

The Vancouver Island Marmot (Marmota vancouverensis) is the rarest of our marmots or woodchucks and one of the largest of the four species found in British Columbia. Not only is it of interest because of its position on the 'rare and endangered species list' but it is probably the most likeable member of this group as it is extremely restricted in its range to the higher alpine and sub-alpine meadows of Vancouver Island---out of man's way. It is also a very quiet animal---much quieter than its relative, the Hoary Marmot or Whistler (Marmota caligata) which is found throughout the remainder of B.C.

With this in mind, it was with real excitement that we pushed our way through the fringe of trees onto the little alpine meadow in hopes of sighting and photographing our first marmots. The area had been visited several times before but at these times the marmots were reposing in their warm burrows for the long winter period---they are said to sleep from about mid-September through to early May and here it was well into October. The fire restrictions, being extra long this year, had not permitted earlier access into this area.

As we moved out onto the wind-swept meadows, a hawk was seen drifting back and forth over us looking for any movement which might indicate the source of its next meal. The view was spectacular---the meadow in its late fall colours with butterflies everywhere and the surrounding vista of trees, mountains and water looking so clear from this altitude. Wisps of mist drifted through the valleys below.

As we moved across the meadow looking for a good rocky outcropping to use as a vantage point for our observations, we were ever on alert for any movement or sign which might direct us to our first marmot. The location of the burrows was known from previous visits and they lay just over the knoll; across a shallow gully ahead.

As we came up over the rise, all glasses were in action scanning the meadows in every direction. It took some time before we spotted our first marmot, a young of the year, and so dark as to be almost black. It came out of its burrow and stretched itself out in the sun on a rock.

This never lasted for very long until it was seen to bounce down and burrow about 20 feet away.

At this time, the camera was set up in a spot that gave a wide range of vision and lunch was started. It was most interesting trying to eat and yet keep the binoculars scanned upon the meadows.

We were extremely fortunate during the duration of that day since we saw 4 or 5 separate animals, most of them adults. This was wonderful as they should have been considering hibernation by now. We found that they were not easily frightened but were timid. The closest we were able to approach was about 50 feet.

Their favourite pastime was lounging on the top of a rocky outcropping which allowed good visibility as well as reflecting the warmth of the autumn sun.

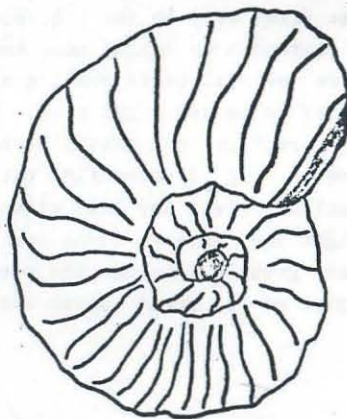
Most of them were very dark, almost black, with a small white splash between the eyes. They were very well groomed and shiny with an indication of a mantle across the shoulders as seen in the Hoary Marmot---a most delightful animal.

The day proved a great success with many pictures gathered. We wished so much to stay but the day was almost at an end. As we departed we were lost in thought; gaining a true feeling for these animals while wondering whether or not they would receive their needed protection---or possibly even become more endangered?



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FOSSIL HUNTING IN THE NANAIMO AREA Winnie Expitalie



Nanaimo would certainly not have been established as a settlement as early had our geology been different. It was the discovery of coal around 1849 which really got things started. Geologically speaking, we are sitting on a basement of altered basic volcanic rocks; altered sedimentary rocks and a few small granodiorite bodies, over which we have a cover of surficial materials, a mixture of glacial and non-glacial environments.

All around us we see rocks which are of the Upper Cretaceous age. The Cretaceous period (named for chalk) began about 135 million years ago and lasted some 70 million years. During this time there was a major advance of the sea and a mixed continental and marine sedimentation took place. It has left us with a mixture of conglomerates, sandstones, shales and lenses of coal. Today the coal has been pretty well mined out, but we can still collect marine fossils and land plants which are a part of this geological history.

Ammonites are fairly plentiful and are often found well preserved embedded in hard, spheroidal concretions associated with shales. Specimens have been recorded of nine families, eighteen genera and thirty-four species of ammonites, all found on Vancouver Island. Of this twelve species are common to the Nanaimo area.

Among other species of marine fauna, gastropods and pelecypods are found, but if they are contained in rocks without the concretionary shield, when exposed, these shells usually disintegrate, leaving only the internal mould behind. Impressions of cephalopods are found, but difficult to collect.

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Some good places to hunt might be Nanaimo River, Haslam Creek, Elkhorn Creek, Brannan Creek, Maple Bay area and Saltspring Island. There are other locations north of us, and of course; Hornby Island. One also finds about 92 species of fossil plant remains in the Nanaimo Group, well as some fossil wood.

If any of you would like to do some reading with good illustrations there are two publications:

"Ammonite Faunas of the Upper Cretaceous Rocks of Vancouver Island"

by J.L. Usher, Geological Survey Bulletin 21, and

"Flora of the Upper Cretaceous Nanaimo Group of Vancouver Island"

by W.A. Bell, Geological Survey Memoir 293.

You could request them from the Library on Fitzwilliam Street.

One type of fossil which we do not find are remains of animal, bird or reptile life. One explanation is that our area did not have suitable conditions for their life style for any great lengths of time.

So.....interesting field trips can be made hunting for these relics of the past.....granted they are not alive or very beautiful, but good specimens are interesting and quite durable when collected carefully and displayed in a safe place.....and what better excuse to go out for a ramble on a winters day when there are no flowers to photograph or mushrooms to collect?

COOKING

CORNER

Shaggy Mane (Coprinus comatus) pictured at left is probably one of the most easily identifiable of the local edible mushroom species. Nevertheless; the beginner ought to consult someone more knowledgeable about the subject to confirm its identity. They are commonly found during late summer and fall, and should be collected when very young, before the gills darken and liquefy. Common methods of preparation include frying, stewing, creaming, or pickling.

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BIRDS - BIRDS - BIRDS

Marg Kerridge
(A club members discovery of our local bird population)

I have been bitten by the bird-watching bug this past few months and have taken full advantage of living both near sea and forest to learn more about our feathered, flying friends. Armed with binoculars and bird book my sons and I have made our way down to the beach at Stephenson Point for an hour almost daily, weather permitting.

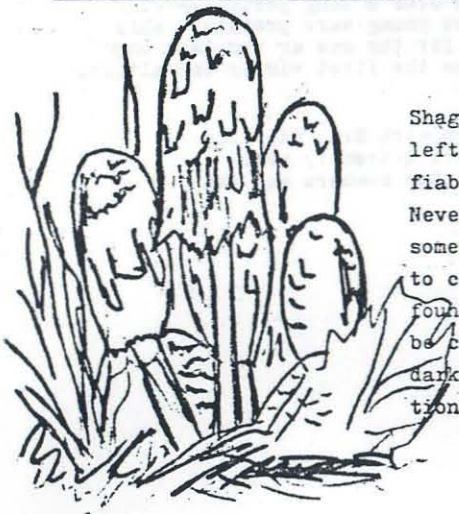
Regular visitors on the water have been the: Common Loon, Western and Horned Grebes, Brandt's Cormorant, Bufflehead, Harlequin, Common Surf, and White-winged Scoters; Common Merganser, Barrow Goldeneye, Oyster-Catcher, Black Turnstone and Glaucous-winged, Herring and Mew Gulls. Along the upper rim of the beach, amongst the bush and tall trees, many species of land birds can also be sited. This fall there has been an abundance of Robins along with the regular numbers of Chickadees, Bush-tits, Juncos, Nuthatches, Flickers, Kinglets, Pine Siskins, Towhees, and Song Sparrows. For two weeks 30 Waxwings were on the point-----Cedar or Bohemian, I am not quite sure. On a good day I have seen as many as 23 species within only an hours viewing time.

The boys have also enjoyed some of the larger birds that they can themselves identify. A pair of Pileated Woodpeckers have been working on old trees, including the wood pile near our house, while an immature Red-Tailed Hawk has been attracted by our Bantam chicks. Unfortunately for us; he killed two of them.

One afternoon Anneke van Kerkoerle took us over to Pipers Lagoon to check out that area. One exciting find was a Red-necked Loon. On another occasion both our families explored the Nanaimo River Estuary and in addition to the more commonly noticed species we found one Short-eared owl and two Black-legged Kittiwakes-----a real find!

Thus; I have enjoyed this fall season tremendously since I have learned to identify many more members of our bird population than ever before. Perhaps this year I will be able to name more of the inhabitants of our earths skies rather than just one (like last year at our Christmas bird count).

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FOR CHRISTMAS GIVING

"Wild Flowers of British Columbia"

by Lewis J. Clark

Erays Publishing Limited
Sidney, B.C., Canada, 1973.

Price: \$24.95

Even at \$24.95 this book is a bargain & contains 573 superb colour plates supplemented with botanical and historical information on 792 species and subspecies of flowering plants.

"Nature West Coast"

ed. by K.M. Smith, N.J. Anderson, K.I. Beamish
Compiled and illustrated by members of the
Vancouver Natural History Society

Discovery Press
Vancouver / 1973
Price \$ 7.95

Although this book is subtitled, 'As Seen In Lighthouse Park', most of the species are also common to Vancouver Island.

This is a general text written by members of a fellow natural history society about birds, plants, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and marine life in our area.

Membership in the Canadian Nature Federation:

Membership means: receiving Nature Canada, one of the world's most beautiful and informative popular magazines, national representation on environmental issues, special prices on books and records from their National Bookstore, plus many other items.

Regular Individual & Family memberships for a year are \$ 8 & \$ 10 respectively.

Copies of membership applications available from the editor.

FALL NOTES

PLEASE SEND NOTES ABOUT INTERESTING SITINGS OF BIRDS, ANIMALS, PLANTS, ROCKS, ETC. OR ANY OTHER NATURAL HISTORY OBSERVATIONS C/O THE EDITOR

Red cross-bills were very numerous this year during late August and September.

Many Sparrow hawks migrated through areas in September and could be seen hunting grasshoppers on broken land. Several pigeon hawks were also seen near the Harmac mill.

Cougars on Stephenson Point road???

Goshawks were seen several times chasing flocks of wild band tail pigeons.

Aug. Parsley swallowtail laid + 15 eggs in our garden. We raised - 5 caterpillars which have pupated. (P. van Kerkoerle)

Snowy owls from the arctic were spotted in the Jinglepot and Lantz ville areas during the second week of November.

The heavy, early snow was nicely predicted by some enormous flocks of Siskins. One flock + 600 strong the day before the snow.

Some young Barn owls near Cassidy were still heard begging for food from their parents until the last evening before the snowfall. As owls lay eggs over a long period-----the eggs: from the first one on most young were probably able to fend for themselves, except for the one or two last ones hatched. These will probably be the first winter casualties.

Both fall meetings, with Mrs. Stirling and Dr. Clark, were extremely well attended by both club members and the general public.

NANAIMO NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
EXECUTIVE OFFICERS 1973

President	Mr. D.C. Kerridge	758-9727
Plant Director	Miss M. Byrne	758-9773
Rock Director	Mrs. W. Espitalier	758-7606
	Mrs. B. Graves	390-4750
	Mr. A. Hawryzki	758-9355
Secretary/Treasurer	Mrs. M. Kerridge	758-9727
Youth Director	Miss J. Russell	390-4110
Bird Directors	Mr. & Mrs. P. van Kerkoerle	.245-2530
Convener	Miss E. Waddell	758-7485

MEMBERSHIPS

There are three types of memberships available
in the Nanaimo Natural History Society:

- \$5.00/year - Family
- 4.00/year - Single
- 2.00/year - Students & Old
Age Pensioners

All new memberships and renewals are payable
to the Secretary/Treasurer.

EDITORIAL

OUR FIRST ISSUE

I would like to thank all those individuals who contributed towards
this issue which will hopefully become the first in a series of
quarterly publications delineating the activities of our organization.

Future issues, I anticipate, will have submissions from a broader spec-
trum of the membership and there are several ways in which you can
participate. You may write a feature article about some species of
interest to yourself---for example the presentation by Mollie Byrne on
the Arbutus. You may wish to tell us about some experiences you have
had in noting some aspect of our living environment. Mrs. Kerridges
article is a good example of this. Even short tid bits of information
concerning activities of various organisms in season would be appreciated
for inclusion on the subsequent issues WINTER NOTES page or anything else
which you may think of interest to the general membership. I'm always
looking for ideas and YOU should be able to provide some good ones.