



Thrush
1981

Nanaimo Field Naturalists Club

C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION

NANAIMO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT.....	1
BIRD WATCHING IN 1980.....	2
CATTLE EGRETS AT LANTZVILLE.....	4
YORK LAKE.....	5
DISPLAY FLIGHT OF ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD.....	7
WALKS IN THE NANAIMO AREA.....	8
BOWEN PARK NATURE DISPLAY.....	13
WALNUT CRACKING CROWS.....	14
POEM.....	15
BIRDS OFF THE B.C. COAST.....	16
LAMPREY OF THE WEST COAST.....	17
THE GRAY WHALE.....	20
BERRY GOBBLER.....	21
MARSHALL-STEVENSON SANCTUARY.....	22
SEA LION CRUISES.....	22

Published by:

The Nanaimo Field Naturalists Club,
P. O. Box 125,
Nanaimo, B.C.

THRUSH - 1980-1981 Vol. 1 (New Series)

Editor; Margaret Holm

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of The Nanaimo Field Naturalists' Club in 1972, Thrush has been the club's periodical. Now that the Club has grown in membership, and developed a series of successful annual events, the executive decided to modify the format to make Thrush an annual chronicle of the club's activities, as well as a digest of natural history information for the Central Vancouver Island Region. This is Volume I of the "new" Thrush. Those responsible hope you find something of note to further stimulate your interests.

For the club's year of September 1981 to August 1982, accounts of activities, articles and natural history notes are welcomed for Volume II. These should be sent to the editor as the year progresses.

Bill Merilees

EXECUTIVE 1980-81

PRESIDENTKim Goldberg
PAST PRESIDENT.....Dave Richards
VICE PRESIDENT.....Bill Merilees (President after March 81)
Secretary.....Marg Walker
 Beth Pepler
Treasurer & Membership...Gwen Johnston
PROGRAMS.....Chris Archibald
 Derek Connelly
PROMOTION.....Diane Daily
NEWSLETTER & MAILING.....Colen Henson
SOCIAL CONVENOR.....Anneke Van Kerkoerle

THRUSH EDITOR.....Margaret Holm

NANAIMO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Eighteen members of The Nanaimo Field Naturalists participated in the 1980 Christmas Bird Count on December 28th. The Count area was a 7 1/2 mile radius of the Nanaimo CPR dock. The day began with fog and a light drizzle which cleared in the afternoon. A total of 102 species was recorded, with 14,400 individuals.

Common Loon	42	Common Merganser	113	Downy Woodpecker	4
Red-necked Grebe	65	Red-br. Merganser	61	Stellar's Jay	45
Horned Grebe	95	Cooper's Hawk	5	Common Raven	44
Eared Grebe	6	Red-tailed Hawk	4	Northwestern Crow	1454
Western Grebe	306	Marsh Hawk	4	Ch-backed Chickadee	175
Pied-billed Grebe	10	American Kestrel	1	Bushtit	73
Dbl-crest. Cormorant	38	Bald Eagle	81	Red-brt. Nuthatch	1
Brandt's Cormorant	29	Peregrine Falcon	1	Brown Creeper	9
Pelagic Cormorant	56	Ruffed Grouse	3	Dipper	1
Great Blue Heron	74	California Quail	20	Winter Wren	22
Trumpeter Swan	114	Ring-necked Pheasant	13	Bewick's Wren	28
Canada Goose	310	American Coot	55	Long-b Marsh Wren	3
Mallard	538	Black Oystercatcher	12	American Robin	941
Pintail	19	Killdeer	8	Varied Thrush	6
Green-winged Teal	87	Black-bellied Plover	1	Gold-cr Kinglet	82
American Widgeon	217	Surfbird	110	Ruby-cr Kinglet	14
European Widgeon	1	Black Turnstone	20	Water Pipit	11
Gadwall	7	Common Snipe	1	Northern Shrike	1
American Bittern	1	Dunlin	2	European Starling	1032
Northern Shoveler	3	Glaucous-wing. Gull	14164	House Sparrow	8
Wood Duck	20	Herring Gull	7	Western Meadowlark	1
Ring-necked Duck	61	Thayer's Gull	1	Red-wing. Blackbird	6
Greater Scaup	13	Mew Gull	64	Brewer's Blackbird	41
Lesser Scaup	43	Common Murre	42	Evening Grosbeak	4
Common Goldeneye	134	Pigeon Guillemot	3	Purple Finch	35
Barrow's Goldeneye	114	Marbled Murrelet	14	House Finch	7
Bufflehead	102	Band-tailed Pigeon	105	Pine Siskin	631
Oldsquaw	15	Rock Dove	207	American Goldfinch	12
Harlequin Duck	67	Short-eared Owl	4	Ruf-sided Towhee	54
White-winged Scoter	17	Anna's Hummingbird	3	Dark-eyed Junco	296
Surf Scoter	384	Belted Kingfisher	19	White-cr. Sparrow	1
Black Scoter	16	Common Flicker	45	Golden-cr. Sparrow	9
Ruddy Duck	11	Pileated Woodpecker	6	Fox Sparrow	21
Hooded Merganser	40	Hairy Woodpecker	1	Song Sparrow	73

BIRD WATCHING IN 1980

by Derek Connelly

Christmas Count

101 species of birds were seen this year in the annual count, including 14,400 individuals. The total species seen was similar in number to last year, but there were a number of newsightings Peregrine Falcon, California Quail, Black-bellied Plover, Dunlin, and Thayer's Gull. Next year we hope to beat the Duncan group.

Unusual Sitings

Using Nanaimo's checklist and local birders' knowledge, the following birds were considered "unusual sitings" in the Nanaimo area for 1980-81:

Species	Location	Observer
Gray-crowned Rosy Finch	Piper's Lagoon	} B. Merilees
Cattle Egret	Lantzville	
Green Heron	Victoria Rd., Nan.	P.von Kerkoerle
Purple Martin	Nanaimo River estuary	D.Connelly
Virginia Rail	Buttertubs Marsh	R.Ikona
Golden Eagle	Cedar	P.von Kerkoerle

Bird Reference

THE NANAIMO RIVER ESTUARY-STATUS OF ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE TO 1976, by L.M.Bell and R.J.Kallman. Published by Environment Canada, Estuary Series No.5.

*Chapter 9, appendix 9.1 and the bibliography are very useful for the Nanaimo area. The appendix gives a list of birds found in the estuary.

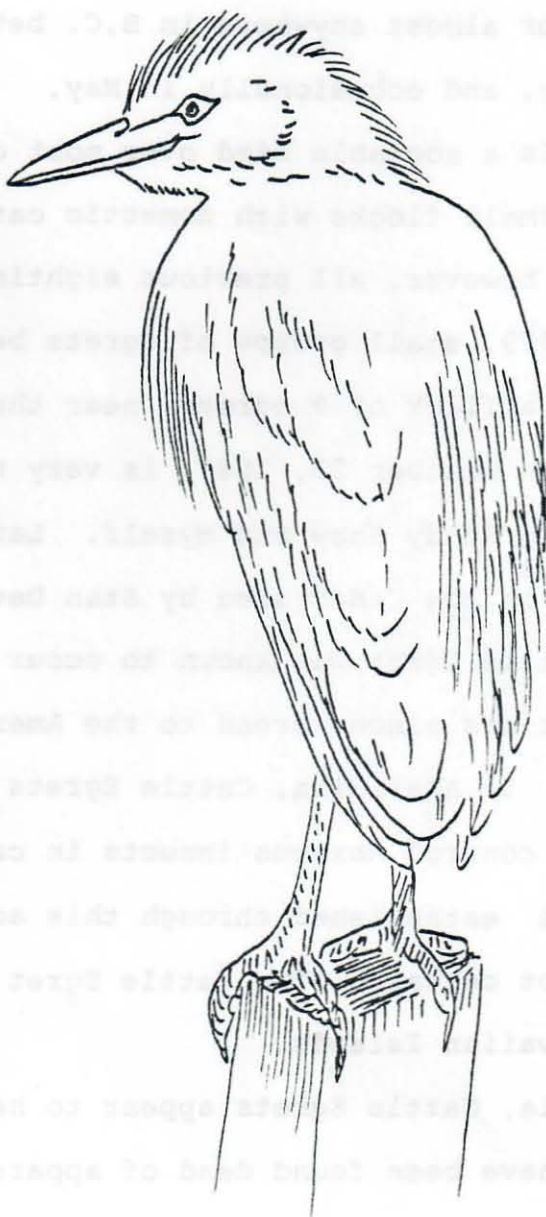
BIRD WATCHING TECHNIQUES

For the novice it may appear that birders are slightly "mad!"...but alas the many odd techniques employed by birders to see and hear birds, actually work. Psshing, and squeaking sounds are used by keen birders across North America to draw many types of birds out of the bush. This technique is excellent for small birds such as chickadees, kinglets, warblers and juncos. Simply stand at the edge of the bush or hedgerow and go, "pssh, pssh, pssh" then remain silent. Most birds quickly move closer to check you out. They may either call to you or quietly watch you from a better vantage point. Repeat this sound to bring birds in from greater distances.

...cont.

Other techniques include imitating calls and playing tape recorded calls. I find imitating the Swainson's Thrush one note call, will draw the bird out, while taped calls work well for bringing rails out of marsh areas.

Good luck in your birding! REMEMBER to report unusual bird sighting to the
BIRD HOTLINE: 758-4576 Mark Saunders, Kathy Best or Shane McClellan



Cattle Egret by
Bill Merilees

CATTLE EGRETS AT LANTZVILLE

William J. Merilees

Since the sighting of the first Cattle Egrets in British Columbia in late 1970, many additional sightings of this species have been recorded, particularly along this province's south-west corner. Observations indicate that this species can now be expected to occur almost anywhere in B.C. between early October and mid-January, and occasionally in May.

The Cattle Egret is a sociable bird over most of its range. It is usually seen in small flocks with domestic cattle or big game animals. In B.C. however, all previous sightings had been of single birds. In 1979, small groups of egrets began to appear. The presence of a flock of 9 egrets, near the Island Highway at Lantzville on October 25, 1980, is very noteworthy. These birds were seen by Sandy Shaw and myself. Later, as many as six birds were seen in the Cedar area by Stan Devereaux.

Originally the Cattle Egret was known to occur only in Africa and Eurasia, but has since spread to the Americas, Australia and New Zealand. In Australia, Cattle Egrets were introduced in an attempt to control noxious insects in cattle country. But whether they became established through this action or from natural dispersal is not certain. The Cattle Egret has also been introduced into the Hawaiian Islands.

In British Columbia, Cattle Egrets appear to have a difficult time as a number have been found dead of apparent natural causes. Greatly reduced body weights, and empty stomachs indicate that starvation may be the cause. Whether the Cattle Egret will become a breeding species in this province is uncertain, but their frequent presence indicates this possibility.

YORK LAKE COMMITTEE REPORT

Mary Barraclough and Joan Edwards

At the April 1980 meeting of the Nanaimo Field Naturalists, attention was drawn to the increasing number of migrating birds visiting in the York Lake and adjacent swamp areas, and the need to protect this area from hunting, vandalism and habitat deterioration. This area is bounded by the Cedar highway on the west (behind Ming's store), the Harmac highway on the north, and private land on the south.

The following motion was proposed and passed:

"That York Lake be protected as a sanctuary for migratory wildlife, and its habitat be preserved in a natural state."

A committee was formed consisting of Mary Barraclough, Joan Edwards and Nadia Angelski, all Cedar residents and member naturalists. With a map of the area the committee made a list of the property owners in the area, and began walking and exploring the area. A local neighbour drew attention to the swamp on the other side of Harmac Road, also being used as a resting area for migrating birds. This swamp has had fill, sawdust and woodchips dumped here in the past, and is presumably a write-off. This raises the point of rewording the land areas as defined in our original motion, to increase the area in the vicinity that we should seek to protect.

There are some problems in the area. Although it is a rural area, it is highly populated in the Harmac Road vicinity. Hunting is permitted except where signs are posted, and access can be achieved from the road, or from private land. "No Hunting" signs have often vanished. The swamp area once dried up in the summer-time but now retains its water level due to interference in the natural drainage system, believed to be caused by road construction. These are a few of the factors that concern the committee.

At the July 1980 meeting of The Regional District Planning Board, Joan Edwards, who is also the area's local representative, presented a resolution that the Regional District Board in their plan, give priority to safeguarding the York Lake area, as an established habitat for resident and migratory wildlife, and disallow hunting and further degradation through dumping, soil removal, landfill, etc.

There was a good response to this resolution. The Regional Board advised us to draw up a petition, and ask the local property owners for their endorsement. We followed through with a petition, and sought to encourage local interest in protecting the area, and preserving it as a sanctuary. We also looked for help and knowledge from the Naturalist Club in directing our efforts along the correct channels, and in contacting other organizations that share a concern for saving wetland areas for wildlife.

We canvassed the area, and the response was excellent, with the exception of two landowners who refused to sign the petition. The petition was given to our regional representative- Stuart Wright, and was presented to the Regional Board.

cont...

In November, two Trumpeter Swans were shot at the swamp. Kim Goldberg, the Naturalists Club President, contacted the Provincial Fish and Wildlife Branch. The local papers also covered this incident. Shortly afterwards, signs were posted warning that Trumpeter Swans rested in the area. The naturalists wrote letters to the federal and provincial government environment ministries, calling attention to this vandalism and seeking adequate protection from the Provincial Fish and Wildlife Branch.

We continue to receive local reports of, and have seen illegal shooting. We encourage the residents to report these acts to the authorities.

Our committee had a meeting with Stan Devereaux and Graham Turnbull of The Ministry of the Environment (Fish & Wildlife) where we made known our interest and concern. It was their feeling that there is adequate legislation in the books but the problem is in controlling acts of vandalism.

We have been told by our regional representative that a bylaw has been drawn up by the Regional Board, prohibiting the discharge of firearms within the boundaries of the York Lake and swamp areas. This by-law is in the process of being finalized. We also understand that it is being opposed by one of the landowners.

A quick glance on February 8th, 1981, revealed; 40 Pintail Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads, Mallards, 9 American Coots, American Wigeon, Blue Heron, 3 Trumpeter Swans and 4 cygnets, and ten Canada Geese.

On February 21st, there were 9 Trumpeter Swans with 4 cygnets, with 6 more swans near the lake area. On one occasion, 22 swans were seen resting in the swamp.

ANIMALS AND BIRDS OBSERVED IN THE YORK LAKE AREA

Pintail Duck	Winter Wren
Ring-neck Duck	Long-billed Marsh Wren
Scaup	warbler species
Bufflehead	Bushtits
Mallard	Western Tanager
Canada Goose	swallow species
Trumpeter Swan	Stellar's Jay
American Coot	Chestnut-backed Chickadee
Blue Heron	Western Meadowlark
Red-tailed Hawk	Cedar Waxwing
Bald Eagle	Purple Finch
Ring-necked Pheasant	American Goldfinch
Common Snipe	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Crow	Morning Dove
Raven	Band-tailed Pigeon
owl species	Song Sparrow
Downy Woodpecker	Dark-eyed Junco
Pileated Woodpecker	Evening Grosbeak
Brown Creeper	Beaver
Rufous Hummingbird	Raccoon
Varied Thrush	Muskrat
American Robin	Mink
Swainson's Thrush	
Rufous-sided Towhee	Shrew
Red-winged Blackbird	salamander & frog species

DISPLAY FLIGHT OF THE ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD

Like many hummingbirds, our Anna's has a display flight, similar but different to the other species in our province. This spring, on six or seven occasions, I had the opportunity to observe and record the details of this flight. In total, there appear to be five distinct elements to this performance, characterised as follows: (see illustration)

1. From a nearby perch, the male Anna's flies out to a point high over the object of attention. (usually another small bird - often a rival male).

2. After a brief, fraction of a second pause, the bird power-dives towards the object of attention. This dive ends with a sharp loud EEEAK noise, very similar to the call of a Pika or alarm call of a ground squirrel.

3. The male then backs off 5 to 6 feet, facing the object of attention, and utters its ZUCK SWEE call twice.

4. The bird then does a steep back pedal climb 50 to 75 feet nearly straight up, again facing the object of attention, to near the original hover point. The sequence is then repeated as many as three times.

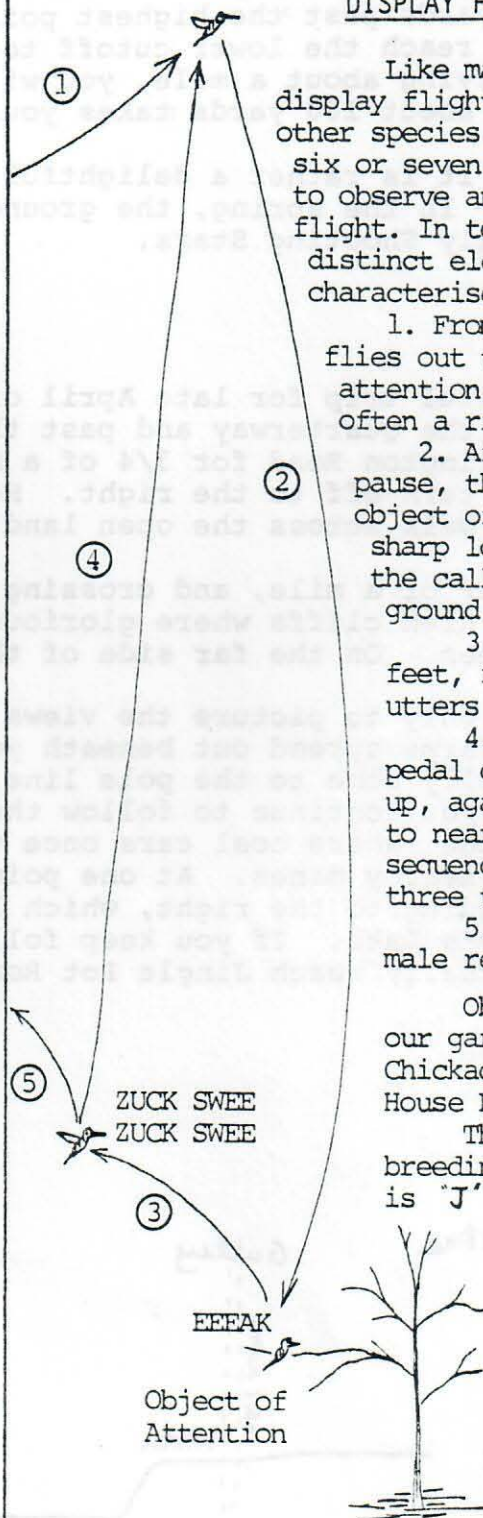
5. The sequence concludes, and the male returns to a nearby perch.

Objects of attention, observed in our garden include a Chestnut-backed Chickadee, a Golden-crowned Kinglet, a House Finch and a rival male.

The display flight of our other breeding species, the Rufous Hummingbird is 'J' in shape, where the male pulls out of his power dive with a loud whining noise and immediately ascends to begin the flight again.

Watching Hummingbirds is a popular and enjoyable recreation. Observing and understanding their habits is icing on the cake !!

Bill Merilees.



by Gwen and Angus Johnston

SPECTACLE LAKE

This is a trip for the spring, around May. Travel south on the Island Highway to about 100 yards past the highest point on the Malahat section. Before you reach the lower cutoff to Shawnigan Lake, turn right. After driving about a mile, you will reach the parking area, then a walk of about 100 yards takes you to Spectacle Lake.

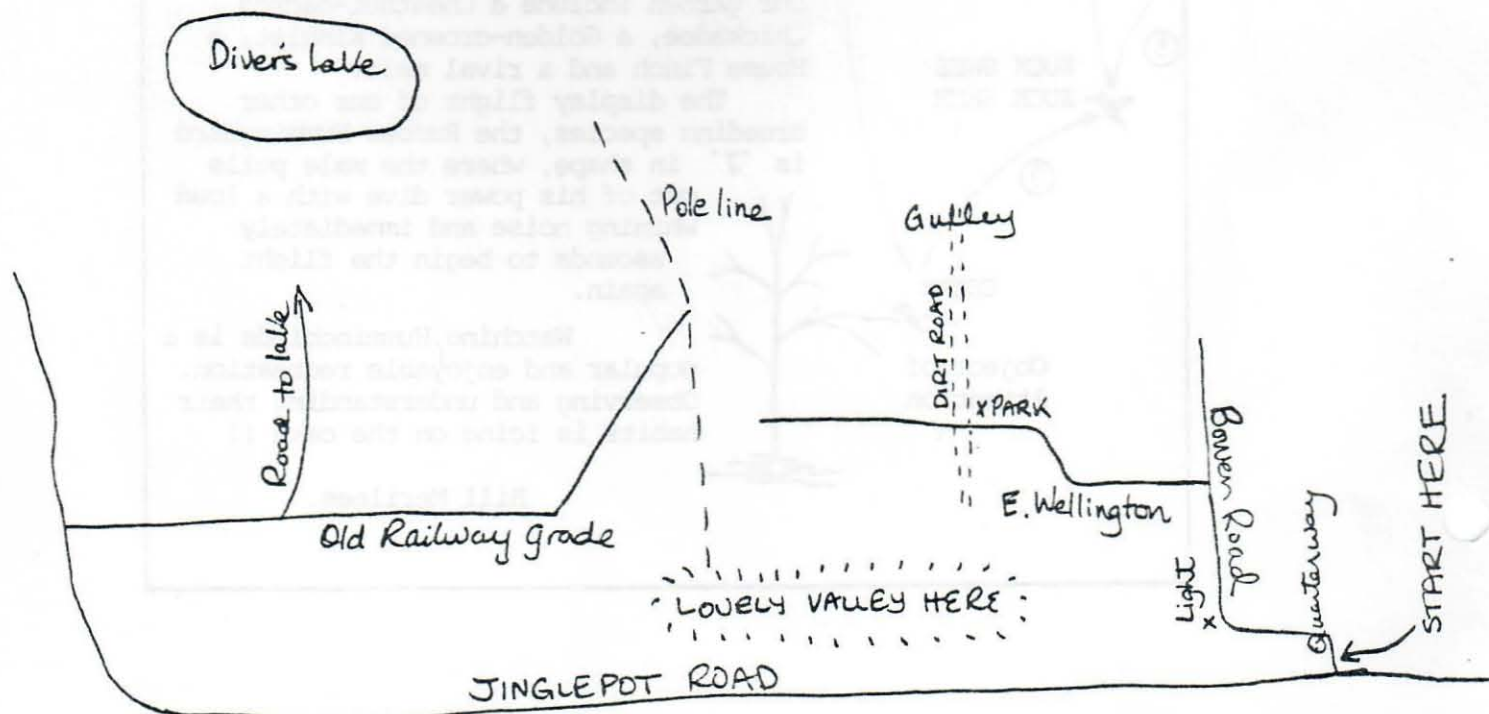
It is not a large lake, but it is rather a delightful one, and there is a good trail around it. In the spring, the ground is carpeted with wild flowers, especially Shooting Stars.

TRIP OFF BOWEN ROAD

This is an easy, but delightful trip for late April or May. Travel north on Bowen Road, past the Quarterway and past the light, then turn left down the East Wellington Road for 3/4 of a mile. When you see a narrow dirt road, turn off to the right. Here you can turn your car and park, then walk across the open land where you will find many wildflowers.

After walking about a quarter of a mile, and crossing a little gully, you will find yourself on high cliffs where glorious views of the valley below, are to be seen. On the far side of the valley is Jingle Pot Road.

It is well worth a visit if only to picture the views from the cliffs, with the valley and its farms spread out beneath you. If you walk far enough, you will eventually come to the pole line, and here you are close to habitation. If you continue to follow the trail, it continues on an old railway grade, where coal cars once travelled, carrying the products of the two nearby mines. At one point on the trail you will come to a road leading to the right, which leads to the houses that lie back of Diver's Lake. If you keep following the railway grade, you will eventually reach Jingle Pot Road, some distance out of Wellington.



HAREWOOD AREA

Drive south on Howard Avenue and turn right, up the hill on Harewood Mines Road (also 7th St.). Turn left on Western Acres Road, then right on Shorthorn Crescent. At the top of a hill, to the left of a house, a path leads into a man-made lake which was formerly used by Colleries.

The path takes you part-way around the lake, and leads to a pole line. If you climb the hill to the right, and then turn left, you may find some old petroglyphs on the flat rocks of an old roadbed.

At one side of the lake you may cross on a concrete spillway, and the path leads on to the top of the rock bluffs to give you a lovely view of the lake.

EXTENSION

South of Nanaimo, turn right at the Chase River cutoff onto Extension Road. Drive past the Cinnibar Valley Subdivision, and you will see a path on the left hand side of the road which leads in on an angle (an old railway grade from coal-mining days). In early April there are many white Fawn Lilies and Trillium, as well as the rare pink Calypso Flower. In May, the banks are covered with Camas, Sea Blush and Mimulus.

The path leads into the woods for approximately 1 1/2 miles and ends at a gravel pit. If you turn off approximately 1/2 mile along the path, a side road leads to an old shingle mill.

YELLOWPOINT AREA

MICHEAL LAKE

Turn off at the Cedar cutoff south of Nanaimo, and drive through the Cedar area to the Yellowpoint cutoff. Follow the main road about 10 miles. You will see the lake when you reach Doole Road, but drive about a mile further until you see a subdivision sign-board. Turn left, then turn left again in about 100 yards. An access path leads in alongside the lake, but the area is fairly heavily treed.

LONG LAKE

Follow the Yellowpoint Road approximately 10 miles, just before you go downhill, turn left at Long Lake Road. Drive almost to the end of the road where the trail leaves out on the left hand side. Follow for about an 1/8th of a mile, and turn right on the downhill trail which crosses a marsh and leads on to Long Lake. The trail will also lead to Priest Lake a few miles further on.

SOUTH WELLINGTON- Marsh & Beck Lakes, old coal mining town

About 5 1/2 miles south from the centre of Nanaimo, turn right on the South Wellington Road and drive into the main part of the village. Cross the E&N railway line, and park your car near the tiny railway station. Walk the tracks north past the rail station, for about 1/4 of a mile. A new fence on the left parallels the tracks. When the fence ends, turn left down the path along side the fence.

At the bottom of the hill, turn right along a well-defined path which follows along a marsh area. The path will take you almost as far as Chase River.

From the same starting point you can walk south from the station to old coal slag heaps. Climb up to the top, to a view of the valley and Beck Lake.

THE MORDEN MINE

Drive south from the centre of Nanaimo approximately 5 miles, then turn left on Morden Road. Drive in about 1/2 mile until you see the remains of the old pithead works dating from 1913.

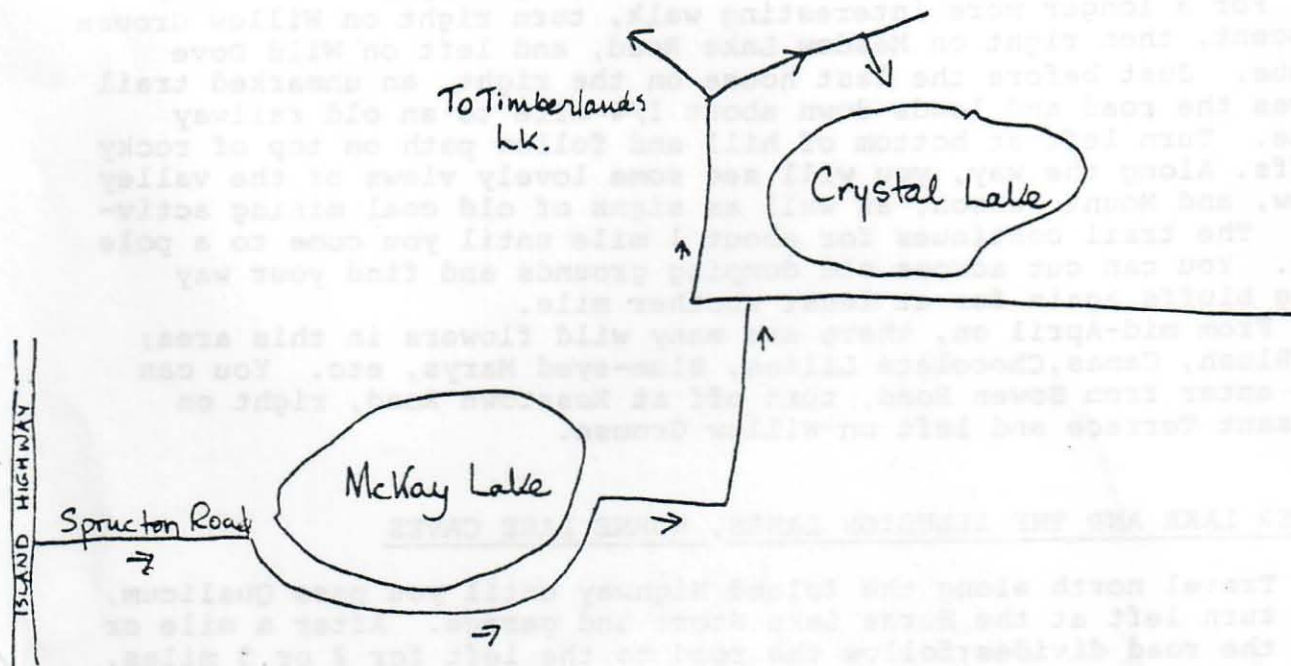
Park your car here, and walk straight ahead until you come to the remains of an old bridge. It is still passable on foot. Just after crossing the bridge, look for a rather overgrown path on the left side. Follow this path to a stream where you will notice an old slag heap. Just beyond the heap, the trail (which is an old railway grade) continues for about 1/4 of a mile to the Nanaimo River.

Turn right along the river bank until you meet a wider path leading out to other pathways (100 yards). Turn back and you will circle back to the starting point. Turn left and you arrive at further points along the river. This takes you for another mile or so until you find a gate (sometimes locked), if the gate is unlocked you can continue along the riverbank.

In April, lovely Fawn Lilies and Trilliums grow in abundance along the riverbank.

THE NANAIMO RIVER

This is a nice easy hike, and a chance to see many spring wild flowers. Turn in at Fry Road, just before reaching the Nanaimo River Bridge on the Island Highway. Follow the dyke down the river for a mile or more. On leaving the dyke, the trail goes through some timbered land. In a short while you will come to an area, that in Spring- is carpeted with wild flowers.

McKAY LAKE, CRYSTAL LAKE, TIMBERLAND LAKE

Drive south on the Island Highway for approximately 7 1/2 miles, turn right on Spruction Road, (just on the North side of Haslam Creek Bridge), The road is paved for approximately 6 miles, at the end of the paved road, you will sight McKay Lake and an old mill sight. Park your car here, or drive around to the far side of the lake. You will find a pathway where the roadway starts to go uphill, just opposite ^{an intersection road} on the right (which leads to a scout camp). The pathway is overgrown in places. Follow it for over 1/4 of a mile until you reach a logging road. Follow the logging road to the right, for approximately 1 mile to an intersection. The road right leads downhill to Crystal Lake. The road to the left leads on about 1/2 to 3/4 mile to Timberlands Lake. There is a path that leads part way around the lake.

HART LAKE, LADYSMITH AREA

Drive south of Ladysmith to Coronation Square Shopping Centre. Drive up Davis Road from the shopping Centre, and turn right on Battie Drive. At the top of the hill you will see a dirt road going up hill. Turn right along the pole line, after a few hundred yards there is a rough road to the left. Follow this road for 1-1 1/2 miles, where the trail leaves to climb up to the lake.

Stocking Lake (water supply), is in the same area as Hart Lake, to the left.

DIVER'S LAKE AREA

There are several ways to enter this area. From the highway, turn off at the overhead at the corner of Jingle Pot Road. Drive past the school, then turn left on Labieux Street. A short way along you will see a sign indicating Diver's Lake Park, which has a parking area and short trails around old slag heaps.

For a longer more interesting walk, turn right on Willow Grouse Crescent, then right on Meadow Lake Road, and left on Wild Dove Avenue. Just before the last house on the right, an unmarked trail leaves the road and leads down about 1/4 mile to an old railway grade. Turn left at bottom of hill and follow path on top of rocky bluffs. Along the way, you will see some lovely views of the valley below, and Mount Benson, as well as signs of old coal mining activity. The trail continues for about 1 mile until you come to a pole line. You can cut across old dumping grounds and find your way along bluffs again for at least another mile.

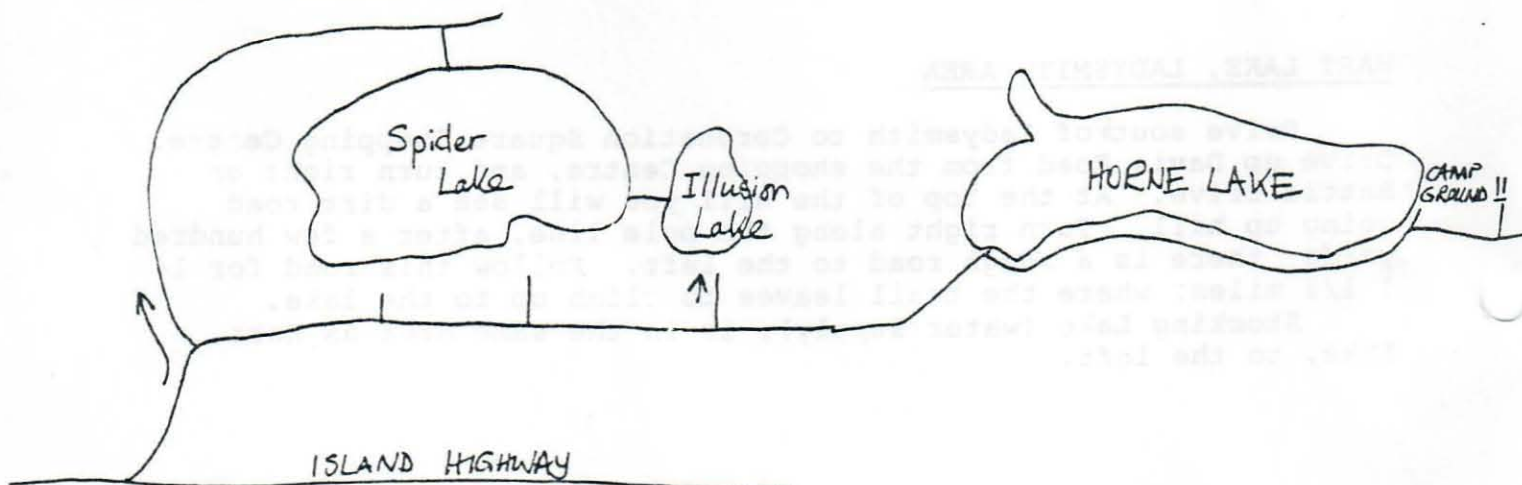
From mid-April on, there are many wild flowers in this area; Sea Blush, Camas, Chocolate Lilies, Blue-eyed Marys, etc. You can also enter from Bowen Road, turn off at Rosstown Road, right on Pheasant Terrace and left on Willow Grouse.

SPIDER LAKE AND THE ILLUSION LAKES, HORNE LAKE CAVES

Travel north along the Island Highway until you pass Qualicum, then turn left at the Horne Lake Store and garage. After a mile or two, the road divides; follow the road to the left for 2 or 3 miles. Take the first turn to the right and you will reach Spider Lake with in a few hundred yards.

To reach Illusion Lakes, turn to the right when the road first divides, after you have turned up from the highway. Pass two roads turning off to the left, then turn off on the third one. After going a short distance in, park your car and a hike of about 3/4 mile will bring you to the large illusion lake.

Another interesting place to explore is the caves at Horne Lake. Follow the signs to the campground at the end of the lake, and continue up along a dirt road near the campground entrance. Take the road to the left and park your car near two logs that cross a river. After crossing the river by balancing on the log, follow a well defined path up a slope to the caves. Once you squeeze yourself past the initial 10 yards, you will be able to explore inside the fissures for about 1/4 of a mile until you reach a small waterfall inside. Bring a flashlight!



BOWEN PARK NATURE DISPLAY

Kim Goldberg

Most local naturalists are familiar with Bowen Park and its lively duck pond, but how many have looked across the parking lot and noticed the six-sided shelter -- home of the future nature display?

Three Nanaimo artists are busily painting their 4' x 8' sheets of plywood, illustrating many of the common birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, trees, shrubs and flowers of Bowen Park.

Robin Harris, Geography student at Malaspina College, has already completed two of the six nature boards. Her work includes a map of Bowen Park and a diagram of the Bowen Park Ecosystem. The Ecosystem board has a large portion left empty so that the Nanaimo Field Naturalists can maintain a rotating display.

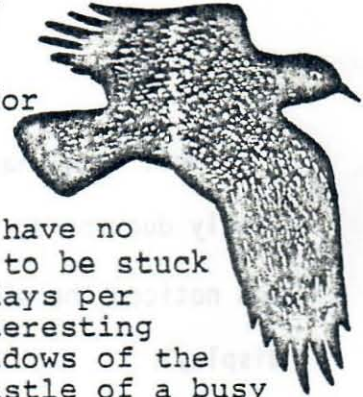
Our club will need to appoint one member to perhaps form a committee to be responsible for the rotating display board. In addition to our monthly newsletter and posters advertising upcoming club activities, this display board could feature special plants, animals or naturalist issues each month such as: the Vancouver Island Marmot, Grey Whales, endangered wildflowers, etc.

As for the remaining nature boards, the trees, shrubs and flowers of Bowen Park are being illustrated on two boards by Margaret Archdekin and Mark Briggs, Biology student at Malaspina College, is illustrating the birds of Bowen Park.

The board on mammals of Bowen Park is currently looking for an artist.

Anyone wishing further information or interested in assisting this project should phone me at 753-3855.

I hate having to be cooped indoors!! With onerous work I usually have to secrete myself away where I cannot be tempted or distracted by the world outside. Otherwise I get to looking, watching and pondering - sometimes to be 'lost' for hours.



Possibly the most onerous task that has confronted me in recent years was the six months of training in our 'other' official language. I have no quarrels with the policy or with the program but to be stuck in a 5th floor room on West Pender Street, five days per week - heaven forbid. Thank goodness for the interesting things that appeared from time to time in the windows of the Holiday Inn, across the street, the hustle and bustle of a busy inner harbour and the noon sharp departure of the Nanaimo ferry, signalling our one hour lunch break.

Perhaps I am biased, but much more interesting than even the rear windows of the Holiday Inn were the antics of the pigeon plucking seagulls. Readers of a previous Discovery may recount the story of Glaucous-winged Gulls nailing Rock Doves in mid air over downtown streets. Numerous times I saw the feathers fly as a gull struck a pigeon. Sadly however I never witnessed a 'kill', my language training was abruptly terminated before this event was witnessed.

Thinking back I vividly recount some pointed criticism from my instructor, in french of course. Possibly my lack of efficiency in this tongue impeded my understanding of the message? Anyway interesting things were still noted from the view windows of our classroom.

Now I am back on the coast where my office is located in downtown Nanaimo. Parks Branch work is far from onerous, it's rather exciting actually but I still from time to time peek out our slit like windows.

The Tire Shop is a far cry from the Holiday Inn, and there are no pigeon plucking seagulls, but there are Crows.

Crows are clever birds. In Nanaimo in recent weeks they have been on a Walnut binge. The still green fruits, golf ball in size are being dropped on the Tire Shop roof. Often I have witnessed similar actions done with clams on our coastal beaches. The shock of landing often splits or cracks the object dropped exposing the meat inside.

Twice now I have watched a walnut laden crow fly up and drop it's load but on these occasions the walnut missed the roof. Instead the fruit landed on the very steep incline of Wentworth Street and then bounced and rolled all the way to the Island Highway, a block and a half away.

What this tells us I do not really know but amongst the asphalt and concrete of our city it provided an amusing moment. Maybe the message is that no matter where one lives or works a window can bring a little joy at an unexpected moment.

As I write this, late in the evening in a quiet house, another sense tells me that carpenter ants are very busy in the timbers above my desk. Thank goodness this is a rented house!

William J. Merilees
September 24, 1978

THE DESTRUCTION OF A CREATURE

by Mark Campbell
Age 13

IT ALL BEGAN LONG YEARS AGO
WHEN THE FOAM ON THE SEA STILL LOOKED LIKE SNOW.
THE MIGHTY CHIEF WITH SPEAR AND ROPE
SET OFF TO HUNT WITH FAITHFUL HOPE

THE ANIMAL THAT WAS HIS GAME,
WAS HIS BROTHER, OR NEAR THE SAME.
THE WHALE WAS BIG AND IMMENSELY STRONG,
BUT THE INDIAN WAS SMART, AND HIS SPEAR WAS LONG.

AS USUAL THE WHALE WAS KILLED
BECAUSE THE CHIEF WAS VERY SKILLED.
BUT AT LEAST THE WHALE'S LIFE WAS NOT WASTED,
AS IT HAS BEEN WHEN WE'VE CHASED IT.

THE INDIANS STILL, AND ALWAYS WILL,
RESPECT THE LIFE THAT IS THEIR KILL,
WHILE THE WHITE MAN OF TODAY
THROWS HIS USELESS THANKS AWAY.

THE ONES TO WHOM WE ALWAYS PLEAD
ARE THE ONES WHO KILL WITHOUT A NEED.
AND IF OUR PLEAS ARE TO NO AVAIL,
THEN I PITY THE LONELY WHALE.

Over the past year I have had three opportunities to go to sea on research cruises with the Fisheries Department. Since most of the time at sea was spent between 10 and 40 miles offshore, I was able to see many species of birds that are only rarely seen on the mainland.

My first trip was off the southwest coast of Vancouver Island in June, 1980. It wasn't long before I had my first "lifer" - the black-footed albatross. Throughout most of the trip there were five-~~h~~-ten of these large graceful birds following the boat. Flocks of shearwaters were very common with pink-footed, slender-billed, and sooty shearwaters being the most abundant. Fork-tailed petrels continually circled the boat, swooping and picking at bits of fish offal floating on the surface. Northern fulmars surprised me with their aggressive nature, often coming right up to the side of the boat to get at a fish and chasing away all other birds including the much larger albatrosses. The beautiful black-and-white Sabine's gulls were a pleasant change from the ubiquitous glaucous winged gulls. Among the alcids seen were Cassin's auklets, common murrelets, and rhinoceros auklets. These species were usually seen a fair distance from the boat and did not follow us in search of food. On several mornings there was a flock of red phalaropes close by, each bird swimming in tight circles feeding on plankton. On two occasions, very tired-looking warblers landed on board: one Wilson's and one Townsend's. They must have been blown out from land, and after mournfully hopping about the boat for an hour or so they took off.

My second trip was off the northern tip of Vancouver Island in the southern part of Queen Charlotte Sound, August, 1980. Again I saw many black-footed albatrosses, but this time also a rather rare Laysan albatross. The fishermen call this latter species the white gooney bird and they see them regularly but never in any great numbers. The usual flocks of shearwaters were seen, including one new species, for me, the pale-footed. For the first week of the trip, the only petrel I saw was the fork-tailed petrel. Then on a stormy night a large number of small brown birds started landing on the boat, apparently attracted by the ship's lights. They were Leach's petrels and appeared wet and confused as they tried to hide in any nook or cranny they could find. I started taking them inside the cabin to dry out, but after doing this with ten birds I realized there were far too many for me to deal with. The birds recovered well once they were dry, and all the next day petrels would periodically come crawling out of the most unlikely little crevices. Since these birds nest in burrows on land, this probably explains their fondness for hiding in such small, tight places. According to the fishermen, such an event is not uncommon on stormy nights and on occasion the petrels are literally feet deep on the deck. Other birds seen on this second trip were tufted puffins (seen flying in the distance), rhinoceros auklets, one skua, and one pomarine jaeger.

The third trip was in June, 1981, in southern Hecate Strait, between Queen Charlotte Islands and the mainland. I was rather disappointed on this trip because of the relative scarcity of birds - the only species new to me was the ancient murrelet which was abundant. Other birds seen included albatrosses (both kinds), fork-tailed petrels, Sabine's gulls, ^{and} tufted puffins. The fishermen agreed that there weren't many birds in Hecate Strait and said that Dixon Entrance at the northern end of the Queen Charlotte Islands is a much better area for birds.

The average landlubbing bird watcher essentially has to charter a boat to get far enough away from land to see these different kinds of birds. The B.C. ferries running from Prince Rupert to Vancouver go down the inside passage and so do not get more than a few miles from land.

Dick Beamish
Pacific Biological Stn.

LAMPREYS OF THE WEST COAST

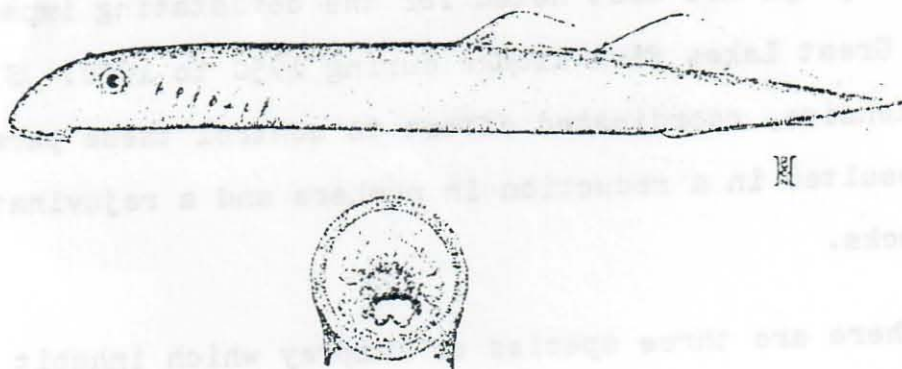
Lampreys are most noted for the devastating impact they had on the Great Lakes fish stocks during 1950 to 1970. Since then an intensive, coordinated effort to control these parasitic fish has resulted in a reduction in numbers and a rejuvenation of fish stocks.

There are three species of lamprey which inhabit the coastal streams and offshore waters of British Columbia. The river lamprey (Lampetra ayresii) and the Pacific lamprey (L. tridentata) feed parasitically on other fish during the adult period of their lifecycle. The brook lamprey (L. richardsoni) is nonparasitic and completes its lifecycle in its natal stream. A freshwater parasitic derivative of the Pacific lamprey (L. macrostoma) has been identified, however its distribution appears to be restricted to the Lake Cowichan watershed.

Lamprey spend the first 3 to 7 years of their life as larvae (usually referred to as ammocoetes), living a rather sedentary existence burrowed in mud-sand substrate of streams. During this period ammocoetes are filter feeders, consuming mainly algae and detritus.

The end of the larval period is marked by a radial^c metamorphosis which results in many morphological and physiological changes, most notably the development of eyes and an oral sucking disc lined with teeth.

Lampetra tridentatus (Gairdner in Richardson 1836)



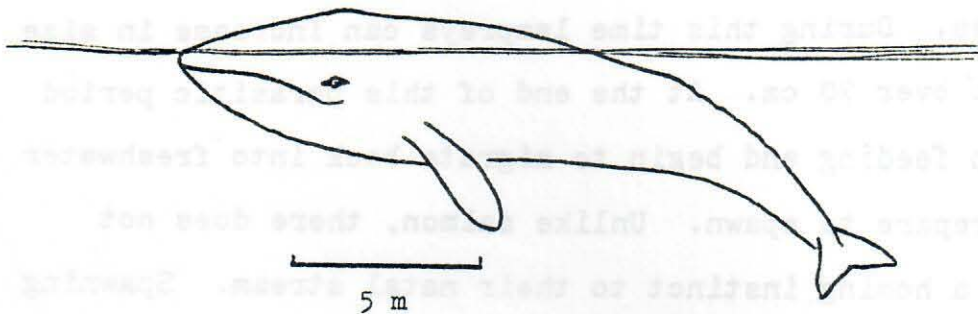
After completion of metamorphosis, the anadromous parasitic species leave the streams and migrate to sea at which time they commence feeding on fish such as salmon and herring.

The adult period can last from 1 to 3 years depending on the species. During this time lampreys can increase in size from ^{about} 13 cm to over 70 cm. At the end of this parasitic period lampreys stop feeding and begin to migrate back into freshwater streams to prepare to spawn. Unlike salmon, there does not appear to be a homing instinct to their natal stream. Spawning activity occurs the spring following migration. It is during the spawning and migration periods that lamprey are most likely to be observed in shallow pools of streams.

In the Nanaimo area lampreys are known to inhabit Millstone Creek, Haslam Creek, Departure Bay Creek as well as the Nanaimo River and several of its tributary creeks. As a point of interest, brook lamprey collected from the Millstone River as well as Holmes Creek near Duncan were used as paratype specimens for the original description of this species.

Our limited knowledge of the distribution and abundance of lampreys prevents numerical assessments of lamprey populations which precludes the estimation of damage to commercially important species of fish. Research dealing with these problems is either currently underway or in the planning stages, however information pertaining to lampreys such as stream sightings, captures or scarred fish could contribute to understanding of the biology of these fish. Information can be passed along to the Pacific Biological Station, in Nanaimo.

THE GRAY WHALE



Gray whale - Eschrichtius glaucus

Common names: Pacific gray, California gray, scrag, devilfish, musseldigger

Dimensions: body length 15 m
tail width 4 m
baleen 4 m
pectoral fin 4 m
weight 30 tons
life span 60-80 years

Reproduction: sexual maturity 8 years old
gestation period 13 months
female gives birth once every 2 years

Food: marine invertebrates, seaweed, and small bottom fish

Vocalization: low groans, grunts and clicks

Swimming speed: 2-5 km/hr cruising
10 km/hr maximum

In late winter/early spring, the gray whale migrates to the Arctic Ocean, feeding along the way. The migration starts from the wintering grounds and breeding/calving lagoons off southern California and Mexico. The adults are accompanied on the journey by newborn calves; these calves are 3-5 m long at birth weighing about 1 ton and gaining 25 kg a day from mother's milk.

Gray whales are the only whales that feed on the ocean floor. They do this by gulping huge mouthfuls of mud, sand and water and then straining the mixture through their baleen filter-plates, swallowing worms and other small invertebrates that remain behind in their mouth.

Unlike killer whales, gray whales do not have teeth and their baleen or whalebone 'food strainers' are actually modified horny plates extending down from the roof of the mouth.

All whales are warm-blooded mammals and must breathe air. The nostrils are on the top of their head. That's how they blow!

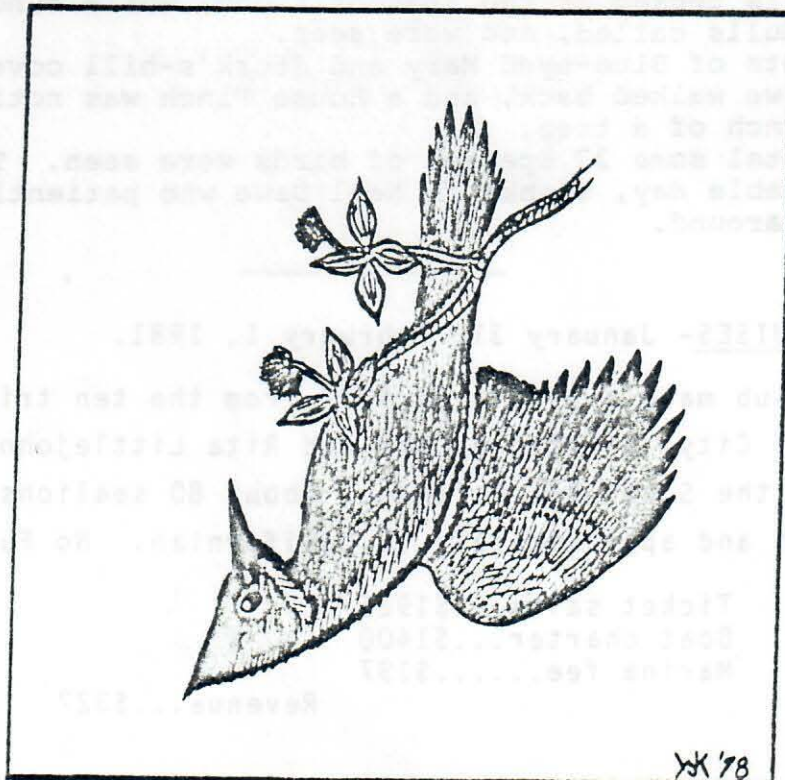
NANAIMO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB,
P.O. BOX 125,
NANAIMO, B.C.

A GANGLY BERRY GOBBLER

On October 1st, 1978 the Dogwood trees in the Nanaimo area were ripe with seed. On a morning stroll through our neighbourhood I noticed a Pileated Woodpecker busily feeding in a clump of these trees. Quite normal I suppose, but seeing a Pileated Woodpecker suspended chickadee fashion from the end of a slender Dogwood branch was quite amusing. Amid great flapping and considerable commotion this large gangly bird first selected, then nimbly picked the ripe red berries and popped them down its gullet.

Over a period of at least fifteen minutes I watched this red-crested giant systematically strip berries from the Dogwood's lower branches. A most enjoyable and happy observation - a most amusing moment.

Bill Merilees



JK '78

MARSHALL STEVENS WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Sunday April 20th, dawned a beautiful, clear day when a group of 22 Nanaimo naturalists met to tour the Canadian Wildlife Service, Marshall Stevens Wildlife Sanctuary near Qualicum. At Qualicum, a flock of Savannah Sparrows was noticed moving about on the logs at the water's edge. In the distance, rafts of Surf Scoters and Scaup floated and bobbed on the surface of the clear blue water, as a warm north wind blew across the straits.

At the sanctuary, we were met by Neil Dawe, the resident biologist who toured us around the estuary which encompasses 85 acres of woodland, and 125 acres of estuary. Most of the area was donated by the Marshall family, who still live next to the estuary. To date over 300 species of birds have been observed in the sanctuary.

The tour began with a short walk through the woods where we came upon a very tame Columbia Black-tail Deer. The doe was curious but calm as she watched us trample through her domain. Vanilla Leaf, False Lily-of-the-Valley and Trillium grew in clumps throughout the woodland. Overhead kinglets, chickadees, Pine Sisken, Ravens and Robins could be heard. A Brown Creeper was seen running up a tree trunk, and Neil showed us a West Coast Snail.

In the meadow area a Rufous Hummingbird was spotted sitting on the top-most branch of a bush. Red-winged Blackbirds were singing and zipping about, along with Orange-crowned Warblers, White and Golden -crowned Sparrows.

Along the beach about 1000 Black Brant were in residence. Further out to sea were a few Surf Scoters and Red-breasted Mergansers. The estuary contained several Common Mergansers and Green-winged Teal. A Bald Eagle kept soaring over the rafts of brant, causing them to rise in fright. A couple of Glaucous-winged Gulls pecked at the head of a cod, while hundreds of Bonaparte's Gulls called, and were seen.

Carpets of Blue-eyed Mary and Stork's-bill covered the ground as we walked back, and a House Finch was noticed singing on the branch of a tree.

In total some 37 species of birds were seen. This was a most enjoyable day, thanks to Neil Dawe who patiently toured us around.

SEALION CRUISES- January 31, February 1, 1981.

The Club made a profit of \$327 from the ten trips made by The Bastion City, piloted by Bob and Rita Littlejohn-from Schooner Cove to the South Ada Islands. About 80 sealions were present, 65 Northern and approximately 15 Californian. No Fur Seals were seen.

Ticket sales...\$1925
Boat charter...\$1400
Marina fee.....\$197

Revenue...\$327