



# The Oystercatcher

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Editor - I.C. Shank.  
Associate Editor - J. King.

Report on Autumn General Meeting of the Federation  
of British Columbia Naturalists. Grand Forks, B.C.

Mr. and Mrs. I.C. Shank attended the above meeting, which was held at Grand Forks, B.C. on October 22nd. There were some 40 official representatives present and approximately 20 guests.

I.C. Shank gave a brief report on the current activities of the Trail & Nature Club. This included the involvement of the Club with the fencing project taking place at the Ecological Reserve on Mt. Maxwell. He also mentioned the Heritage Trees project proposed by the Book Committee. Incidentally, considerable discussion took place on the role the Federation should pursue in respect to the provincial Ecological Reserves but no definite conclusions were reached at this time.

In the discussions, there was an evident undercurrent sense of apprehension over the 'privatization' of services in provincial parks by the provincial government. It was felt that these changes might result in the deterioration of the environment and/or services. However, as government policies were not known or in place no conclusions could be determined at this time.

There will be a special meeting of the Executive very soon to consider ways and means of additional funding for the Federation. This might include a per capita increase in membership fees and other forms of fund raising. The next issue of the Naturalist may indicate the direction that will be followed next year. However, any such decision would require approval at the next Annual Meeting to be held in Comox-Courtenay in April or May.

The Horizons Book Committee donated 30 copies of the "Wild Flowers of Salt Spring Island" to the Federation. This should eventually yield \$60.00.

## BIRD NOTES

Diane Richardson reports that a pair of Pied-billed Grebes were seen several times during the spring and summer on Ford Lake. She also reports seeing several Black-headed Grosbeaks along with the more common Evening Grosbeaks in the same area.



Tony Farr saw a pair of Killdeers on the local golf course in mid-August, so it appears that these Plovers are not as rare on the Island as first surmized.

by the Editor.

THE BIRDHOUSE by Eleanor Marshall

We have discovered that in building a small home for ourselves, we are also providing an excellent habitat for many birds.

Our home is very much in the building stage. The carport ceiling is lined with fibreglass but as yet, the plastic to cover, has not been stapled in place. My husband works in the sheltered area of the carport. Besides myself and our dog, his other observer in early August was a mother Wren. Daily, she was seen in an upside down position peeking out of the fibreglass at us.

One day, Don spotted a wee baby wren on the concrete floor. That's when, on looking more closely into the insulation, we spotted a nest. Like a child pushing a skooter, the baby wren pushed with one leg, getting nowhere. What to do? Very simple - call Anne Marie. She came over and I watched with fascination as she picked up the tiny bird, cradling it in her gentle hands, assuring me, the fast beating heart was slowly becoming more regular.

The bird was placed in a berry basket lined with Kleenex, and carefully placed on a moss covered log, protected, but still in view with the hope that mother wren would find her offspring. It wasn't very long before the baby wren managed to get out of the basket, and make its way along the log until it fell off amongst the rocks. My hand was too large to retrieve it. The baby was sheltered, protected, but would the mother find it? The next day, I looked, no little bird.

Our house is bolted post and beam construction - perfect for perching birds. There is proof under each nut and bolt. They are chickadees, pecking at the cedar boards, gently, not like a woodpecker. At night, our interior lights produce six or eight little beady spots of light - more chickadees perching on the window sills for warmth.

Now we are into November and little sparrows are tucking themselves into the fibreglass insulation for warmth and comfort. Ironically, inside, we're doing much the same thing.

NATURE BOOKS by I.C. Shank

I, occasionally, receive enquiries for reference books on plants and animal life in our area. I highly recommend the following books, which are well illustrated with color pictures, and moderately priced as well:

Plants and Animals of the Pacific Northwest by Eugene Kozloff.  
Published by J.J. Douglas Ltd., Vancouver.

Exploring the Seashore. A guide to shorebirds and intertidal plants and animals by Gloria Snively. Published by Gordon Soules Book Publishers Ltd., Vancouver/London.

Guide to Western Mushrooms by J.E. Underhill. Published by Hancock House, Surrey, B.C.

THE NIGHTHAWK by Alison S. McKerrow

Just before dawn in the August loveliness of summer, one of the first bird sounds to be heard on our hill-top is the plaintive 'peeent' of the Common Nighthawk, *Chordeiles minor*. He is up there partaking of



a light breakfast of mosquitoes and other flying insects, before spending a languorous summer day perched lengthwise on a stout branch, a ledge, or on the ground. His short legs, weak feet, and boat-shaped body need the additional support of the bough, and make the usual way of perching somewhat impracticable.

Last summer we camped near Walhachin by the Thompson River. We lazed beneath a stand of pine trees and tall juniper bushes, and quite suddenly I recognized one of these well camouflaged birds lounging on a wide pine limb just above me, the beautifully blending and complicated pattern of his plumage rendering him invisible to the casual eye. Looking further, we spotted many more, all with eyes closed as if in deep sleep. The click of my camera shutter as I took a photograph of a particularly handsome specimen, caused him to stir, reluctantly it seemed, and he peered at me implacably with his sloe-like dark eye, and then closed it again.

Then as the evening wore on and long shadows spread across the river bank, all the nighthawks slid silently and unobtrusively from their roosts and suddenly the sky was alive with the spectacular diving, booming and 'peenting' of these most interesting birds. Their long pointed wings look as if there is a bullet hole in each slender tip, the characteristic white patch shows up so dramatically in flight. The booming is produced by the wings as the bird zooms up out of a steep dive, and some reports give this as the male aerobatic display, but this is hard to corroborate as the sex of the high flying birds is almost impossible to determine.

They are, of course, not hawks at all, nor do their relatives, the goatsuckers, suck the milk of goats as was originally supposed. They build no nests, simply laying their two eggs and rearing the young on the bare ground or on the flat roofs of buildings. They are valuable to us; as many as 500 mosquitoes have been found in the stomach of one bird, and it is therefore illegal to harm them in any way. Large numbers of nighthawks can often be seen in August above the highway south of Campbell River, and these congregations could be pre-migratory, or possibly due to the flying of the termite ants at that time of year. They winter in South America, and come north to breed all across Canada.

You can safely leave your mosquito repellent in your tent when you hear that familiar and nostalgic 'peent'!

### NOTICE

Trail and Nature Club annual

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

will be held on Tuesday

December 13th

12.15 (noon)

FULFORD INN.

HERITAGE TREES - by A.M. Dahlke

At the Annual Meeting of the Horizons Book Committee, in October, it was proposed to establish a list of Heritage Trees growing on the Gulf



Islands. The aim is to protect these living monuments of natural and human history.

How are trees designated for the Heritage list? Chiefly, on the recommendation of concerned citizens:

- 1) Known history of a tree or group of trees.
- 2) Trees planted in parks, school grounds or cemeteries to commemorate certain events.
- 3) Trees of unusual size or colouring.
- 4) Rare or unusual species.

With the assistance of a member from the Heritage Tree Group of the Victoria Horticultural Society, and Ruby Alton, a number of unusual trees were identified along Isabella Pt. Road, St. Mary's Churchyard and on the grounds of the Ganges Elementary School. A start has been made on documenting these trees by recording their known history, species, etc.

Following is a list of the trees identified to date:

Several Douglas Firs - *Pseudotsuga menziesii*

2 Broadleaved Maple - *Acer macrophyllum*

2 English Walnut - *Juglans regia*

1 Tulip Tree - *Liriodendron Tulipifera*

1 Western Yew - *Taxus brevifolia*

4 English Oak - *Quercus Robur*

If anyone knows of a tree that might qualify as a Heritage tree please contact Ruby Alton or Ann Marie Dahlke.

#### A YOUNG BIRCH

The birch begins to crack its outer sheath  
 of baby green and show the white beneath,  
 As whosoever likes the young and slight  
 May well have noticed. Soon entirely white  
 To double day and cut in half the dark  
 It will stand forth, entirely white in bark,  
 And nothing but the top a leafy green -  
 The only native tree that dares to lean,  
 Relying on its beauty, to the air.  
 (Less brave perhaps than trusting are the fair).  
 And someone reminiscent will recall  
 How once in cutting brush along the wall  
 He spared it from the number of the slain,  
 At first to be no bigger than a cane,  
 And then no bigger than a fishing pole,  
 But now at last so obvious a bole  
 The most efficient help you ever hired  
 Would know that it was there to be admired,  
 And zeal would not be thanked that cut it down  
 When you were reading books or out of town.  
 It was a thing of beauty and was sent  
 To live its life out as an ornament.

by Robert Frost

submitted by A.M. Dahlke.

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REPORT ON THE SPAWNING OF OPAL SQUID IN FULFORD HARBOUR JUNE 1983

- by Nancy Wigen

On Monday, June 13 there was considerable excitement at Fulford dock. A small crowd of people was watching in fascination a school of opal squid which were spawning on the sand and shell beside the Government Public dock. Hundreds of them had already deposited their eggs on an area about 6 - 8 feet which had somehow been "swept clean" by the squid, and a glistening translucent white clump of egg capsules approx. 2 feet by 3 feet was in the centre of this cleared area. The bottom by the dock tends to be rather a murky, muddy, seaweed strewn area and the cleaned off part was very obvious. June 13 had the lowest tide of the year, - 0.8 feet, and as the tide continued to recede the egg mass began to be exposed. Still, some squid remained trying to spawn, joining their little finger size egg clusters to the main mass. As they became stranded I went down and gathered up 30 or 40 and put them in deeper water. They did not appreciate this service and I was liberally sprayed with ink for my efforts. Their smooth taught little bodies (average about 6 inches long) were not unpleasant to touch but their tentacles felt very repulsive rasping and sticking if they grabbed me. One squid was dead and I gave it to the grade 2 class from Deep Cove School who had fortuitously come to Fulford that day for a picnic and beach outing and biology lesson combined. The egg mass was above the 2 foot tide level and so the eggs were exposed for hours on such a low tide. The day was mostly cloudy and not too hot, but I got a very large cardboard carton and covered them. Later I covered them with clean seaweed at low tide on warm days. I thought crows and seagulls would eat them but this was not so and the birds did not eat them at all. A few large red rock crabs had been around the new eggs before the tide receded and at least one had been seen running off with a cluster of squid eggs in its grasp. This type of interest by other creatures soon stopped in subsequent days and nothing seemed to eat the squid eggs. I wondered what deterred them. Perhaps squid eggs taste nasty.

Long time residents of Fulford said that once before, about 25 years ago, squid had spawned in a similar way in the harbour and had been stranded as the tide went out. People had gathered the stranded squid and taken them home in buckets, to eat or use as bait for fishing. Some people "jigged" squid from the dock as they came in to spawn this time, and told me they were very tasty fried in butter. Although squid can be seen near the dock from time to time it seemed spawning in this manner was most unusual. I phoned the biological station in Nanaimo to report the event and ask if the eggs should be moved to below zero tide level. The man I talked to, Rick Harbo, said "No, it might do more harm than good". He sent me a report. The name of it was "Preliminary Report on the Potential Commercial Squid of British Columbia" by F.R. Bernard, Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans, Nanaimo, B.C. and it was dated May, 1980. I will share part of it here. This report states that 17 or more species of squid frequent our coast and 4 of these could potentially be harvested commercially. The most important and numerous of these is *Loligo Opalescens* Berry or Opal Squid. This is apparently the one which spawned in Fulford Harbour. Description from the report (page 8) "Total length to 35 cm., in B.C. rarely exceeding 20 cm. Body cylindrical, translucent, with opalescent areas and brown maculations. The colour may abruptly change to dark brown. Fins narrow and only slightly lobed. Arms without hooks. Tentacle clubs with 4 rows of small suckers, the inner ones lined with horny rings. Eyes below a transparent streamlined



cover". . . . . and about Opal Squid the report said "it is the most frequently seen squid in B.C. as it occurs in very shallow water and congregates at night near lighted areas. It is present from the inter-tidal zone to 250 meters and ranges from the southern part of the Gulf of Alaska to Cedros Island, Mexico". It is called "Market Squid" in California and is highly esteemed as food. Some is exported to Greece and the Philippines canned or frozen.

"Juveniles (squid) are an important element of the food web and form part of the diet of various commercial fish including salmon. The adult squid in turn become predators of juvenile fish and other small planktonic organisms." Squid feed in daylight or moonlight seizing prey in their arms and tentacles, holding it against their beak and tearing it into small pieces to eat it.

"Extended spawning seasons appear to be characteristic of the genus Loligo where (in B.C.) some sexually ripe individuals may be collected throughout the year. Spawning schools may include a high proportion of immature individuals and the mature animals may differ considerably in body length."

The squid which I observed seemed to be almost all the same size or almost the same size. The report said that after mating females may delay depositing eggs for some time, but the squid I saw went into the egg cluster in pairs to deposit the egg capsule, the male (I presume) with tentacles wrapped around the female's body. They seemed to chase off other squid who would have disturbed the spawning. This was not always successful and sometimes the spawning couple were driven away from the egg cluster repeatedly until they separated and disappeared among the group. Some egg capsules were scattered around randomly on the seaweed and mud and gravel near the main egg cluster. Some were attached to a crab net and its rope which were nearby.

"While small spawnings may occur sporadically from Dec. to Sept., two major ones occur in our waters - in March or around July". Spawning occurs 'usually on flat bottoms of sand or mixed sand and mud, in sheltered bays and inlets in 5 - 40 meters of water with maximum activity at 15m. The eggs are packed in an elongated transparent capsule which is attached to a hard object" . . . . . "heavy concentrations occur in limited locations favoured year after year." This indicates a local population distinct to this area. Reports of development time before hatching in our waters ranged from 70 - 90 days. "The young squid emerge from the capsule and survive for several days on the yolk sack then start to feed on small planktonic crustaceans." The young gather in schools and stay together in such groups as they grow and mature the report said, but when about 5 cm. long they scatter and go their own way, living near the bottom until they are 7 - 8 cm. long, at which time they begin joining schools of larger more mature squid. The report says that squid live about 1 - 3 years and die after spawning once, but I found only one dead squid near the egg mass in Fulford. I did not see any washed up on the shore during my numerous visits to the area during the next few weeks. But during the latter part of the spawning which occurred June 22nd some of the squid seemed to have white patches on their bodies and tentacles. There were about 60 squid near the egg mass that day and about 10 of them had white on them. I did not see any more squid spawning after June 22nd. On June 23rd I measured the egg mass and it was 113 - 74 inches, also there were two smaller clusters about 20 inches across and numerous individual egg capsules for several yards around the main egg mass. Most of these were in the shallow (3 or 4 inch deep) depression or tide pool or beach run-off area in which the main egg mass was situated. Each egg capsule contained about 100 eggs and there were



by now many thousands of capsules. A rough estimate would be that there were perhaps 10 million squid eggs in that small area. The nearest thing I can compare squid eggs with is frogs eggs but the squid egg capsule is firmer and generally uniform in shape and the eggs, (unlike frogs eggs which are dark and easily seen in the jelly) are translucent, almost like the jelly which surrounds them. The glistening translucent white of newly laid eggs soon changed to a duller appearance and the egg capsule enlarged somewhat to perhaps double its newly laid size. Individual eggs in the newly laid capsules were neat and round - the next day they had changed in shape and the capsules were larger. Soon a brown film formed on the outer membrane of the egg capsules and after a few weeks they seemed to be the same colour as the seaweed and surrounding bottom. The capsule had an outer membrane which protected the eggs inside, and despite their exposed location they were developing.

By July 21, if I cleared away the outer film, I could see tiny pairs of black eyes and little squid bodies inside the eggs. We left next day on holidays for 2 weeks in the interior. Before we returned the weather turned hot and again the tides were very low. I had hoped the squid would hatch before this happened and perhaps some of them did, but many didn't. The little white dead embryos could be seen in the disintegrating egg clusters and the smell of putrefaction was quite apparent when we returned August 8, 1983. Most of the huge egg mass disintegrated during the next week but some egg capsules remained mostly around the edges, and some appeared to still have live embryos. I was told by a man who was on the beach fixing his boat that there had been a small egg cluster in Fulford Harbour last summer, about 200 yards from this years spawning and a bit farther down the beach, perhaps about at the 1 foot tide level. I couldn't help but wonder if that cluster had produced the parents of this lot. And that makes me wonder if we'll see them again next year. I certainly hope so, but next time I hope they give themselves a better chance by spawning in a bit deeper water.

At the same time as squid were spawning here they also spawned in Esquimalt harbour and there the salmon were feeding on them for about 10 days. My son caught an average of one salmon per day from his 8 foot row boat during that time, the smallest was 12 lb and the largest 30 lb.

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The Editor, on behalf of the  
Horizons Book Committee,  
would like all our readers  
to have a  
MERRY CHRISTMAS  
and  
HAPPY NEW YEAR.

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