



Metchosin Muse

A N O N - P R O F I T C O M M U N I T Y P U B L I C A T I O N

Blue Birds Coming Our Way

Metchosin BioBlitz Finds Three Rare BC Species

BY KEM LUTHER

Local organizers of Metchosin BioBlitz, a twenty-four hour wildlife census, are tabulating results from the reports of sixty taxonomic experts who visited the district on April 30. The experts teamed with community residents and Pearson College students to track down about 800 Metchosin species in a dozen categories. The species tally includes:

- 315 vascular plants
- 110 birds
- 74 marine animals
- 74 mosses and liverworts
- 65 mushrooms
- 33 algae
- 37 insects and spiders
- 47 lichens
- 16 slugs and snails
- 6 amphibians and reptiles
- 5 mammals
- 2 worms

"The huge number of species we found tells us how special Metchosin is", says Metchosin Councillor Moralea Milne, who came up with the idea for the BioBlitz. "We have a great variety of ecosystems here. Some, such as our Garry Oak meadows, are among the rarest habitats in Canada."

Ten birders were up at the break of dawn to scour the landscape for birds and to note nesting activity. Later in the morning and in the afternoon searchers fanned out over Metchosin to find other groups of species, paying special attention to Witty's Lagoon, Devonian Park, Matheson Lake Park, the seashore at Taylor Beach, Pearson College lands, the Van der Meer nature preserve, and some private properties. One group of twelve taxonomists, led by biologist Hans Roemer, made a day-long trek to Sugarloaf Mountain at the northwest corner of Metchosin (and yes, they did find *Festuca roemeri*, named for Hans). In the evening the groups met at the District Office to look at snapshots of the day's discoveries. After the presentation a group of experts and guests visited three locations to listen for owl calls.

"Our focus during the BioBlitz was on recording as many readily observable species as possible", says Andy MacKinnon, an ecosystem scientist who was one of the organizers. "That, and having a fun day with fellow researchers, a competition against time and space. Discoveries of rare species are always a highlight of these kinds of surveys."

Among the finds of rare species was a sighting of a pair of Western Bluebirds that may have been building a nest. Bluebirds were common on Vancouver Island and mainland BC until the 1950s, says Ann Nightingale, co-ordinator of the birding teams. Then the numbers started to fall. The last known bluebirds to have nested on the Island were in the 1980s. There have been a few bluebird sightings since then, but not in breeding season. This discovery happens just as the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team is gearing up for a major attempt to re-introduce breeding bluebird pairs to the Island. The local birding community is excited about what was found at the BioBlitz. We'll be keeping our eyes on this pair.

Jeremy Gatten and Jamie Fenneman spotted the bluebird pair on private property in a northern area of Metchosin. "We were investigating a south-facing, open rock outcrop that had patches of conifers", says Jeremy, "and we heard a flying bird

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The male Western Bluebird spotted on the BioBlitz



The aptly named Blue-grey Taildropper



A Yellow Montane Violet, a rare inhabitant of Garry Oak meadows

DATES TO REMEMBER

- May 28Ryder Hesjedal's Tour de Victoria
- June 15.....APRM Property Assessment Presentation
- June 17.....Last day of school at West-Mont
- June 19.....Fathers Day
- June 21.....Summer Solstice/National Aboriginal Day
- June 26.....Haiti Fundraiser
- June 29.....Last day of school at Hans Helgesen

Blue Birds Coming Our Way

continued from cover



Led by biologist Hans Roemer (far right), these taxonomists spent BioBlitz on Sugarloaf Mountain

making calls. It sounded like a bluebird. The bird landed at the top of a nearby Douglas-fir and when I looked at it through binoculars I was astonished to see a brilliant orange wash to the chest. I called Jamie over and, while we were both trying to get photos of the male, a female with food in her bill flew in to join him." Later examination of the photos seem to show a band on the leg of the male bluebird. If so, the pair may have come from a population recently seeded on the San Juan Islands.

Also spotted in one of the CRD Parks on Saturday was a rare snail and a rare slug. The snail, the endangered Threaded Vertigo (*Nearctula*), is so small – barely a third of a centimetre – that it is easily overlooked. The slug was the Blue-Grey Taildropper (*Prophysaon coeruleum*). As the name suggests, it leaves behind its wiggling tail to distract predators. Three taildroppers were found crawling on mushrooms by Kevin Trim and Adolf Ceska, who were at the park to count species of fungi. Trim showed the slugs to Lennart Sopuck, a biologist who specializes in terrestrial gastropods. "They are juveniles of an endangered species", says Sopuck. "We've found only one other juvenile of this species and it was much larger than the ones found at the BioBlitz."

A fourth rare species to show up at the BioBlitz was the Yellow Montane Violet, *Viola prae-morsa*. A cluster of five plants was discovered by one of the birders, Ian Cruickshank, next to a trail in one of Metchosin's CRD Parks. This is the first verified sighting in Metchosin of this spectacular, once common, now rare inhabitant of Garry Oak meadows. The sighting record has been submitted to BC's Conservation Data Centre, which collects information on rare provincial species and develops conservation strategies. The clump of plants in Metchosin joins an exclusive club – there are about fifteen locations in southern BC where wild, self-seeding populations of this annual can be found.

"Birders finding plants, plant experts finding birds, mycologists finding snails. The breadth of natural knowledge in the science community of southern BC is astounding" says Kem Luther, another organizer. "This is the sort of synergy that happens at these events. I'm already looking forward to next year's blitz."

Lists of species are still being collected from participants. The findings and more pictures of the event can be found on the BioBlitz web site: <http://metchosinbiodiversity.com>.

Metchosin Hall Society Annual General Meeting Held

BY SHELBY QUISSY

The Annual General Meeting of the Metchosin Hall Society took place on April 19. Steve Gray is the President, Shelby Quissy is Vice President, Norm Norby is Secretary, and Wendy Pettillion will be taking on the job of Treasurer. In the last few years the Hall Society has re-shingled the roof, replaced the windows, and is currently replacing the hall light fixtures. The next plan is to replace the kitchen countertops. Thanks to Jazzercise goddess Mandy Webb, the kitchen sports a new fridge and microwave. The Hall Society meets at 7:30 on the third Tuesday of every month except July, August and December, upstairs in the hall. Everyone is welcome. Call 250-478-6424 for information. Leave a message and someone will return your call.

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