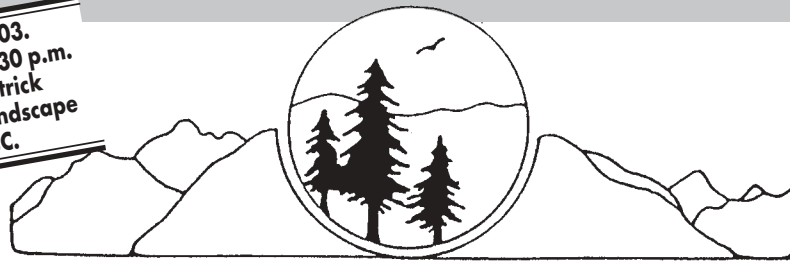


Next Meeting: April 8, 2003.  
Como Lake United Church, 7:30 p.m.  
Guest speaker will be Patrick  
Mooney who is a prof in Landscape  
Architecture from UBC.



# BURKE MOUNTAIN NATURALISTS

## SPECIAL RIVERVIEW ISSUE!

### Our Special Relationship with Riverview

By Joan Spira

In 1904, one thousand acres of land were purchased for The Essondale "Provincial Mental Hospital," now Riverview, including what is now Colony Farm. In 1913, the hospital was opened. The Present Riverview Lands comprise only 244 acres, because 170 acres were sold off in the 1980s without any public consultation for the housing development of Riverview Heights. The remainder of the lands now comprise the Forensic Institute at the end of Colony Farm Road and Colony Farm Regional Park.

Much has been made of the magnificent, exotic species of trees planted by John Davidson, first provincial botanist, in those early years, which now stand tall and magnificent on the spreading lawns, in the core of the lands. However, Burke Mountain Naturalists and others maintain that the entire site, including the native trees and the old field habitat of the former orchard, is essential also, to keep and protect the ecological integrity and the green belt, which links the Fraser River and Burrard Inlet. The lands are home to a great many birds, mammals and wild plants, and even salmon in the lower part of at least one of the many streams that flow through the site down to the Coquitlam River. Yet time and again we have heard reports or rumours that the province may sell off part of these lands for development. As yet they have no secure status.

BMN's first newsletter mention of the lands came in November, 1993 when Norma Gillespie thanked our members for turning out to the tree tour which the "Friends of the Riverview Trees" had scheduled. These "friends" became incorporated as the Riverview Horticultural Centre Society (RHCS), formed to save the lands; RHCS has since held over one hundred such public walks through the special trees, very often attended by BMN members. Some walks were set up especially for our members, particularly after Don Gillespie added on the "backyard" walks, through the wilder parts of the grounds.

September, 1995 saw the first "Festival of the Trees", inspired by the RHSC and sponsored by



Silver Maple in morning fog, Riverview.  
Photo by Kiyoshi Takahashi

the City of Coquitlam. It has been held every fall since then, with a name change to "Treefest", and has introduced the site to a great number of local and Vancouver residents. We have had a display tent at each year's event. Don Gillespie and Victoria Otton prepared a pamphlet called "Nature Walks at Riverview", which was distributed at the festival and was available at the kiosk on the grounds, along with RHCS tour of the exotic trees. The backyard walks always started from "Finnie's Garden" - a quiet space of flower and vegetable beds and rockeries first laid out by former staff member Albert Finnie, for the patients use and pleasure.

The history and the ecology of the Riverview Lands and a description of the trees are to be found in the book *The Riverview Lands*,

Western Canada's First Botanical Garden, (1994) edited by Val Adolph and Brenda Guild Gillespie, and available at our local libraries. In 1999, based on the observations of our member Kiyoshi Takahashi and others, Brenda Guild Gillespie produced a BMN brochure titled "Exploring the Riverview Lands", which featured its natural habitat values.

In November, 1995, the NDP provincial government established a Land Use Advisory Committee at Riverview. Joan Spira represented BMN, along with Norma Gillespie as alternate (Norma also being a rep from the RHCS). In April and May there were a public open house, where questionnaires were gathered, and a public forum. An on-site information centre opened. The consensus was that the public overwhelmingly endorsed the stand that the lands should remain intact, dedicated in perpetuity to mental health.

However, in September, the committee was put on hold; once more raising our fears. Everything remained in suspension — and suspense — until January 1998, when the Ministry of Health announced a revised plan, to spread mental health facilities throughout the province. For a long time there seemed to be nothing for Riverview. However, eventually a small new facility was built. The Advisory Committee quietly floated away into oblivion, along with its recommendations.

This new facility is the Connolly Lodge, which accommodates 20 patients who need supported living in a homelike setting, with 24-hour supervision. These are patients who are not yet ready to live independently in the community. This very fine building is the first of its kind in BC, and, we hope, the model for many more.

In 2001, BMN successfully petitioned all three local municipalities to pass resolutions calling for the preservation of the entire Riverview site and a strong continuing presence in the provision of mental health services at this site. In response to community pressure, BC Building Corporation (BCBC - the government body responsible for this public land) and the hospital administration agreed to establish an advisory stewardship committee to work with the hospital and BCBC. Elaine and Don represent BMN, while Norma and Sue Haberber represent the RHSC on the "Riverview Natural

Heritage Stewardship Group". The idea is to keep the communications open and to facilitate input from BMN and RHSC on decisions relating to grounds management. Our participation in this committee gives us the opportunity to keep up with what is going on.

Then just last summer we obtained permission and lobbied successfully for funds to carry out the mapping of all the streams, and undertake fish trapping on Riverview as well as at Colony Farm where the streams run into the Coquitlam River. The mapping data is going to be available on the City of Coquitlam web site.

Over the years we have time and again held letter-writing campaigns directed at the provincial government. We have talked to the sitting members of the Provincial Legislature, from the former and present governments, and to the local city councils. Never has the word come to us that the Riverview Lands will be saved. We hear rumours, and then they are squelched.

We are ever vigilant, and will not give up.  
Joan Spira



Fence in "Finnies Garden", Riverview. Photo by Kiyoshi Takahashi

## BC's First Provincial Botanist (John Davidson) and the Botanical Garden at Essondale

By Victoria Otton

At a party last summer, I fell into conversation with another guest who said that he was a PhD student at UBC whose area of research was something called "human geography". He (David Brownstein) went on to explain that human geographers study the interactions between humans and their environment, and that his interest was the history of botany and silviculture in BC during the period 1880-1940. This period is of particular interest because it coincided with an important transitional time in science—when it moved from an era of scientific study carried out by well-educated (and usually well-off) hobbyists, to the time when science was conducted exclusively by degree-holding academics in universities. David went on to say that he was currently spending all his days and months in the Vancouver Archives studying the personal papers of a man called John Davidson, whose career spanned this transitional time. To David's astonishment, my ears immediately pricked up: never before had he met anyone who'd heard of John Davidson! We arranged to meet again to discuss this topic further, and the following is a brief summary of what I learned about John Davidson, BC's first Provincial Botanist and founder of western Canada's first botanical garden at Essondale (now known as Riverview).

John Davidson (1878-1970) was originally from Scotland, where he had received extensive training as a botanist through jobs as a botany assistant and later curator of the Botany Museum at the University of Aberdeen. Although he never had the opportunity to obtain university degrees<sup>1</sup>, he functioned as a fully-fledged professor of botany (teaching students and doing botanical research). However, when a Professor of Botany position became available at the university, Davidson's application was rejected on the grounds that he lacked the academic degrees that a university professor (now) required. This disappointment, along with health

problems, were possibly Davidson's incentives to emigrate to BC. Other incentives must have included the extremely rich flora of BC (which Davidson must have heard about, and which had not yet been subjected to any serious botanical study) plus the simple fact that BC was an academic backwater at the time. Not having the letters PhD after his name would not matter here.

The John Davidson that left Scotland around 1911 belonged firmly in an earlier era of nature study. He was highly knowledgeable about plant taxonomy, but his classification skills and general approach to botany were coloured by the "natural theology" of Victorian scientific pursuit. That is, plants and nature were studied as a means of knowing God better; botany was seen as a part of religion. (Davidson was a religious man — he started up 2 or 3 churches in Vancouver and one of his early articles was entitled "The Morality of Plants".<sup>2</sup> He was a Darwinist however, and was zealous in his attempts to revise the views his fellow churchmen).

Davidson arrived in BC armed with letters of reference from former botanical colleagues, which he used to convince the government of the need to establish the position of Provincial Botanist and to convince them further that he was the man to fill this job. In his First Annual Report for the year 1913 prepared for The Hon. Henry Esson Young (then Provincial Secretary, later also Minister of Education), Davidson wrote that prior to 1913, "...there was no official department in British Columbia which could supply information regarding the native flora. A representative herbarium of the flora of the Province was not to

be found nearer than Washington, DC, while the best collection of BC plants was to be found in Ottawa".<sup>3</sup>

Davidson saw that one of his first jobs as Provincial Botanist was to establish a collection of BC flora. In order to do this, he entered into correspondence with more than 50 people ("teachers, surveyors...and individuals who are to a large extent isolated and who have taken up the study of the flora as a hobby in their spare time" who were "enthusiastic correspondents...who are gladly cooperating by supplying specimens" <sup>3</sup>). These people, located throughout the province, sent Davidson plant specimens (dried and mounted for the herbarium, or live plants and seed for the proposed botanical garden). To assist his volunteer collectors, he even had the government set a special postal rate on botanical specimens. Very soon, he had 1000s of specimens stored in his Vancouver office. He



Early Botanical Garden, Riverview

needed somewhere to plant them, and he petitioned the government for land, which he was granted at the new site of Essondale in Coquitlam. He wrote<sup>3</sup>, "The Government reserved a piece of ground at the Colony Farm, Essondale, to be used as [a] botanical nursery for propagation of specimens of the native flora. Work on this nursery was commenced in the spring of 1913... During the season of 1913 about 600 species were established, constituting a unique collection of plants from the Coast, Dry Belt, and alpine regions of British Columbia... It is intended to establish a Native Arboretum<sup>4</sup> in connection with the Botanical Garden".

A gardener was hired that first year (Mr. I. Van der Bom), and in 1914, Davidson wrote that "The Botanical Gardener, in his report for this year, supplies the following data:

- 3,500 cuttings have been prepared of showy or rare species.
- 216 packets of seeds were sown....
- 10,000 young plants are being protected in frames during the winter.
- 7,650 plants are in the garden, numbering 600 species.
- 350 specimens in the collection of native trees (approximately 30 different species).
- 780 specimens were received from different parts of the Province; about 25 or 30 or these died.
- 425 permanent lead labels have replaced former wood ones.
- 53 habitats have been prepared for bog plants, and
- 47 habitats for Dry Belt specimens"<sup>5</sup>

There follows a detailed description of how the ground was prepared for plants requiring special habitats, including the statement: "This year one corner of the garden was too wet for Dry Belt species and had to be drained. This necessitated the digging of a ditch 372 feet long, in the bottom of which was laid a 1-foot box drain of cedar."<sup>5</sup>

Davidson's Second Annual Report of the Provincial Botanist<sup>5</sup> (for the year 1914) contained the following: "It is believed that one of the best ways of "boosting" (if I may be permitted to use a Western word) the climate of British Columbia would be by the establishment of a large public Botanical Garden devoted chiefly to the display of native herbs, shrubs, and trees. This... would give visitors from all parts of the world an opportunity of seeing at a glance the enormous variety of beautiful, curious, and useful plants indigenous to British Columbia. Probably no one would be more surprised than those who have made BC the land of their adoption. There are so many different environments between the Coast and the Rocky Mountains, and between the southern and northern boundaries – each particular environment supporting a vegetation peculiar to itself – that the majority of British Columbians are only familiar with the flora of their own immediate vicinity; many have not even reached that stage.

If supplies of characteristic plants from the regions in Kootenay, Columbia, Fraser, and Peace River Valleys, from the northern region east and west of Atlin, and from the Coast and islands were brought together, it would constitute one of the most unique and interesting

collections to be found on this continent. Yet this is what may be seen on a small scale in the Botanical Nursery at Essondale. Hundreds of specimens have been transplanted from most of the above regions, and are now thriving vigorously within twenty miles of Vancouver. The cactus, sage-bush, and milkweed of the hot, arid Dry Belt may be seen growing side by side with the Rocky Mountain anemone, yellow erythronium, and other plants from the regions of perpetual snow, or with the beautiful iris from the more northerly regions. Notwithstanding the distance, many visitors have gone to see the collection at Essondale, and practically all have expressed the wish that he gardens were nearer Vancouver and more accessible, so that more frequent visits could be made at different seasons in order to see the various plants in flower."

When UBC was established in 1915, the Essondale collection (which by then comprised 25,000 plants representing 9,000 species) was moved to Point Grey, and Davidson was appointed the first director of the UBC Botanical Garden, and Professor of Botany in biology department.

John Davidson's Annual Reports for 1913 and 1914 make fascinating reading, and reveal something of the man himself. He was not only a skilled taxonomist, but also a highly organized person (perhaps the two go hand-in-hand...) with seemingly boundless energy. In his first three years in BC, he did more than commence massive botanical surveys of province and establish a herbarium<sup>6</sup> and botanical garden: he also began the many survey and mapping trips of his own across the province; he established a school program promoting school gardens and herbaria; and he helped to establish a botanical section of the BC Mountaineering Club (which was later to become the VNHS). He also started his lifelong campaign of the BC Forest Service to incorporate conservation in their policies— especially the conservation of medicinal plants like cascara, which he recognized as a valuable resource.

*Author's Note: I am indebted to David Brownstein of the Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability at UBC for offering his time and resources for preparation of this article.*

*Footnotes:*

1 *The letters after John Davidson's name were F.L.S. (Fellow of the Linnaean Society) and F.B.S.E. (Fellow of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh), both obtained by election to these societies.*

2 "The Morality of Plants", J. Davidson. *The British Columbia Monthly* Vol XVII, No. 4, Parts I & II (1921).

3 *First Annual Report of the Botanical Office of the Province of British Columbia, 1913*, by J. Davidson, F.L.S., F.B.S.E., Provincial Botanist.

4 *The Second Annual Report states: "Dr. C.E. Doherty, the Medical Superintendent at Essondale, has given the use of a small ravine in which runs a small creek, so that it may be planted with various native plants. This will enable us to grow several aquatic species, which, through the lack of a suitable environment, we formerly had not proper facilities for. Two small lakes are being made, and it is proposed to use these as well as the banks of the creek for the establishment of such plants as require an aquatic environment"*.

5 *Second Annual Report of the Botanical Office of the Province of British Columbia, 1914*, by J. Davidson, F.L.S., F.B.S.E., Provincial Botanist.

6 *In the First Annual Report, Davidson describes how he designed specialized herbarium cases for the dried and annotated specimens, which comprised the herbarium collection: ("when each drawer is pulled out it causes no suction on the other compartments" 3).*

## Riverview Trees Star in great Tree Hunt

Last year the City of Coquitlam organized the GREAT TREE HUNT to make citizens aware of the many beautiful trees in their community. Four beautiful posters featuring photos of many entries are available from the Coquitlam Parks and Recreation Department. It will not surprise anyone who has visited the Riverview Hospital grounds to learn that eleven of the "poster" trees are located there. Several of these trees are unique and not seen anywhere else in British Columbia. The Riverview trees selected include: Snake Bark Maple (*Acer capillipes*), Weeping European Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* c v. *Pendula*) Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) Bauman Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum* cv. *Baumannii*), Camperdown Elm (*Ulmus glabra* cv. *Camperdownii*), Ginkgo Tree (*Ginkgo biloba*), Cutleaf Big-leaf Linden (*Tilia platyphyllos* cv. *Laciniata*), Scarlet Oak (*Quercus coccinea*) and Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*)

These and the other magnificent trees are the descendants of B.C.'s first botanical garden established in 1911 on the grounds of the Provincial Mental Hospital at Essondale (now called Riverview Hospital in Coquitlam). Two Scotsmen - Provincial Botanist John Davidson and Head Gardener Jack Renton - collected plants and planted the garden, drawing their inspiration from Kew Gardens in England. The patients in the Mental Hospital provided much of the labour and maintenance work.

*Excerpted from an article by Sue Habberger and Donna Crosby of the Riverview Horticultural Centre Society*

## Birding at Reifel

Every Sunday morning at 10:00am, there is a guided walk by John Ireland around the Reifel Bird Sanctuary in Ladner.

If you would like to do this as a group on April 6th contact Gill Richardson at 604.461.4873. We'll meet to carpool to the sanctuary at Toys R Us at 8:45am. Please let me know that you are interested as we won't go if the weather is bad.

# Announcements

## Wednesday, March 5th:

Port Moody Public Library will be displaying 20 to 25 of Kiyoshi Takahashi's wonderful photographs. The images will be mostly local nature and wildlife. The photographs will be on display till the end of March. Contact the Port Moody Public Library for library hours.

## Thursday, March 13 at 1 pm:

The Annual General Meeting of the PRAWN (Pitt River and Area Watershed Network) at Katzie First Nations Band Office in Pitt Meadows. Contact Co-Chair, Elaine Golds for details.

## March 14:

Deadline to submit comments to the provincial government on their working forest proposal – a plan to turn over 45 million hectares (i.e., half of our province) to multinational forest companies. Our provincial crown forests belong to all of us – in addition to being a source of timber, they provide critical habitat for wildlife, lands for public recreation and the opportunities to harvest other products such as mushrooms. The public, not corporate interests, should control our forests. Check details [www.wildernesscommittee.org](http://www.wildernesscommittee.org)

## Saturday, March 15:

BMN will host the FBCN Lower Mainland Regional Meeting in the Henry Esson Young Building on Riverview Hospital Grounds. Following the meeting (estimated to finish around 2 pm), BMN will lead FBCN members on a tour of some of the highlights of Riverview including the heritage trees, important wildlife areas and Finnie's Garden. BMN members are welcome to join us for this tour. Contact tour leader Don (942-7378) for details.

## Saturday, March 15:

Lower Mainland Raptor Counts. Local sites include Colony Farm and Pitt River Dykes. Please contact Jude Grass for further details.

## Monday, March 17:

Deadline for submission of nominees to the City of Port Coquitlam for their 2003 Volunteer Recognition Awards. One of these awards is for environmental efforts; BMN will be submitting a nomination.

## Tuesday, March 18 at 7:15 pm:

BMN Education-Conservation Committee Meeting at Joan's. This committee needs new members – please phone Elaine if you want more information.

## Saturday March 22 - 7pm:

Come out and enjoy an evening of slides and snacks. Ian McArthur will present slides highlighting the past year of BMN and other hikes. Location will be the Henry Esson Young Building on the Riverview Lands. More information will be in the March newsletter or call Ian at 604-464-9255.

## Saturday, March 22:

World Water Day

## Saturday, March 22 at 9 am:

Join Larry Cowan and members of the Vancouver Natural History Society for a birding trip to DeBoville Slough up to Minnehada Park to view early spring migrants. Although this is scheduled as a VNHS trip, Larry especially invites interested BMN members to join them on this local outing. Meet at the intersection of Victoria and Cedar Drives. For further information, contact Larry at 604-942-0931.

## Wednesday, March 26 at 7:15:

BMN Executive Meeting at Victoria Otton's. Our meeting date was changed from the 25th to allow our members to attend the Open House.

## Thursday, March 27, 7 pm

at the Port Moody Inlet Theatre. The Port Moody Library presents Carole Rubin, author of "Get Your Lawn off Drugs" and "Get Your Yard off Grass". She will speak about environmentally-friendly landscaping. To register for this free event, please phone the Port Moody Library (604-469-4577).

## Sunday, March 30:

Heritage Walks at Riverview to Celebrate the 90th Anniversary of the Essondale/Riverview Hospital Official Opening. Walks go at 1pm & 2pm. Meet on the uphill side of the Henry Esson Young Building. This is the light coloured, high rise building, below the Firehall. From Holly Drive, turn up Oak Crescent, onto Kalmia. There is good parking available, or you can get a bus which goes through the grounds approximately every 30 minutes. (Ask to be let off at the old Tuckshop). The tours last for about 2 hours, depending on your choice. Wear suitable clothes for the weather, and comfortable walking shoes or boots. We go rain or shine.

## March 30-April 3:

Georgia Basin/Puget Sound Research Conference at the Westin Bayshore Hotel, Vancouver. Want to know more about ecosystem health issues in the Georgia Basin? Phone 604-713-9514 for more information or contact [www.wa.gov/puget\\_sound/](http://www.wa.gov/puget_sound/) for more details. Conference fees are \$420 for the four-day event but reduced rates for volunteers from non-governmental organizations may be available.

## Tuesday, April 8th at 7:30 pm:

BMN Monthly Meeting at Como Lake United Church in Coquitlam. Guest speaker will be Patrick Mooney who is a prof in Landscape Architecture from UBC. He will talk about "Landscaping for Nature".

## Saturday, April 12 at 10 am:

Join BMN member, Al Grass, for a 2 hour walk at Maplewood Flats Conservation Area in North Vancouver (2645 Dollarton Highway) to enjoy the rites of spring in the bird world. Meet at the Sanctuary office. Al requests no dogs, please. Check out the Wild Bird Trust Website at [www.wildbirdtrust.org](http://www.wildbirdtrust.org)

## Sunday, April 13 at 1 pm:

Riverview Tree Tour. Meet on the uphill side of the Henry Esson Young Building. This is the light coloured, high rise building, below the Firehall. From Holly Drive, turn up Oak Crescent, onto Kalmia. There is good parking available, or you can get a bus which goes through the grounds approximately every 30 minutes. (Ask to be let off at the old Tuckshop). The tours last for about 2 hours, depending on your choice. Wear suitable clothes for the weather, and comfortable walking shoes or boots. We go rain or shine.

## Tuesday, April 22:

Celebrate Earth Day. Earth Day started in 1970 in the USA and has now become a global event. Visit [www.earthday.net](http://www.earthday.net) to learn what you can do to lead a more sustainable way of life.

## Thursday, April 24 at 7 pm

at Port Moody City Hall: Author and solitary wilderness dweller, Chris Czajowski, will introduce her latest book, "Spotted Dick" which tells the story of the construction of her third cabin at Nuk Tessli in the mountains of BC. Please register for this free event by phoning the Library (604-469-4577).

## Saturday, April 26 at 8:30 am:

Celebrate Earth Day by joining Larry Cowan and other BMN members for a public nature walk in Port Moody's Shoreline Park. Discover why this tiny park is so important as critical wildlife habitat. This free event will be co-sponsored with the City of Port Moody. Shoreline Park has become so popular that good nature viewing (without continual disturbance from other people) can typically only be had during the less busy hours early in the morning.

## Sat., May 3: Fingerling Festival:

The Port Moody Ecological Society annual Fingerling Festival at the Noons Creek Hatchery and the Port Moody Rec. Centre, 300 Ioco Rd., Port Moody. Come and enjoy the interesting, informative and interactive displays showcasing Streamkeepers groups, naturalists and other organizations that work towards preserving our natural heritage. There will be a release of 35,000 Chum fry into Noons Creek as well as crafts, food and face painting. For more information or if your group wishes to participate by having a display contact Dave Bennie @ 604-942-8059, Kirsten Doucette @ 604-930-8653, or Noons Creek Hatchery @ 604-469-9106 (phone or fax).

## HELP WANTED

If you have some old (untreated) cedar fencing or boards hanging around, they could be put to good use as material for nest boxes. Once some wood is found, Don Gillespie will be looking for handy people to build and repair the boxes.

If you can help with either, give Don a call at 604-942-7378.

**Special Announcements: until May 4,** Bird on the Bay presented by the White Rock Museum & Archives and Friends of Semiahmoo Bay Society. Exhibition open until May 4, 2003. Boundary Bay together with Roberts Bank and Sturgeon Bank make up the Fraser River Estuary, the top-rated of 597 Important Bird Area sites in Canada. Boundary Bay is a major migration staging area for as many as 1 million water birds using the Pacific Flyway Corridor and an important wintering area for large numbers of waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls and hawks. More birds of prey winter in Boundary Bay than anywhere else in Canada. Three major Great Blue Heron nesting colonies are located in Boundary Bay's watershed.

**A full program of events are planned until May 4, 2003. Contact the White Rock Museum & Archives, 604-541-2222, for event schedule details and late additions. Registration is required for presentations and field trips. Register early as space is limited. Field trips and presentations cost \$5 each or \$35 to attend 7 or more activities. Museum hours: Tues – Sundays, 10am – 4pm and during programs.**

March Spring Break, 18th – 20th, Mini Family Fest, presentations and hands-on activities for all ages, registration required, details tba

March 26 Wednesday, 7 pm – Migration around Boundary Bay - where and when to look for our spring migrants, from Rufous Hummingbirds to Gray Whales -slide presentation with Kyle Elliott, author of Vancouver Birds, registration required.

March 30 Sunday 9 am – 12pm: Sea ducks and Shorebirds—morning bird walk along the Boundary Bay shoreline with Kyle Elliott, who has completed monthly waterbird surveys here since 1996, reg. req.

April 5 Saturday, 8:30 am - Birds and Flowers at Campbell Valley Park with June Cleghorn, local Naturalist & Park VIP, reg. req.

April 12 Saturday, 1:30 pm – Shorebirds And Waterfowl, meet at 12th Avenue Lagoon Parking Lot.

April 12 Saturday, 7 pm –Boundary Bay, a stop on the Pacific Flyway- presentation by Dr. Robert Butler, author and noted research scientist, copies of Dr. Butler's books will be available for signing, Pre-registration essential.

April 13 Sunday, 10 am –Telescope Bird Viewing Fun with Patricia & Walter Jahnke, local Naturalists, reg not req.

April 19, Saturday – Sandpipers and other Shorebirds, walk with local naturalist; call for details, reg. req.

April 26 Sat – See the visiting Western Sandpiper & other Shorebirds with ornithologist - walk 1 with JoAnn Mackenzie at Blackie Spit; walk 2 at 12th Avenue Lagoon, reg. req.

April 27 Sun, 2 pm – Birds of Boundary Bay - Slide presentation by Mr. Simon Liao, vice-chairperson, BirdLife International, reg. req.

May 4 Sunday, 9 am – Birds, Carnivorous Plants & Wildlife in Burns Bog – fieldtrip with David Tsang, Burns Bog Society and Brian Self, ornithologist, reg. req.

# Christmas Bird Count C.B.C. 2002 - Birds of Merit

by Mike Griffin and Al Grass

## No 9 Song Sparrow SOSP

Total Count 237 - Seen by 12 field teams with a team high count of 60 by Doug Charles's group at Colony Farm West.

For comparison:

Count in 2001 – 279

2002 – 129

1990 – 155

## Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*)

The Song Sparrow is one of three species of the genus *Melospiza*, along with Lincoln's Sparrow (*M. lincolni*) and the Swamp Sparrow (*M. georgiana*). Erlich (1988) comments that it (the Song Sparrow) is the 'most' variable sparrow in North America. Beadle and Rising (2002) state that 29 subspecies are commonly recognized North of Mexico. Song Sparrows occurring in Alaska are said to be 25% larger than the 'average', and Mexican subspecies are said to be 10% smaller than 'average'.

The Song Sparrow derives its name from the fact that it is one of our most accomplished songsters (*Melospiza melodia* (melodia = Greek/Latin for melody, i.e. melodius). Chris Fisher (Birds of the Rocky Mountains) says that "the Song Sparrow's drab, heavily streaked breast, doesn't prepare us for its symphonic song..." It is interesting to note that Song Sparrows learn to sing in two basic ways 1) by listening to their fathers, and 2) by listening to rival males. Apparently, even individuals raised with songsters such as canaries, remain faithful to their Song Sparrow songs. (There are as many as twenty-one different songs and calls are commonly recognized by ornithologists.) The basic song has been interpreted in various ways. Perhaps the most interesting (and most often quoted) is Henry David Thoreau's "Maids! Maids! Maids! Hang up you tea kettle—ettle—ettle" (such an interpretation is often referred to as a 'renderings').

The Song Sparrow has interesting breeding habits such as the practice of polygyny where one male will breed with more than one female (but the female with only one male). The nest may be placed on the ground or commonly in a low shrub. Erlich (1988) notes that the Song Sparrow, along with the Yellow Warbler, have the 'dubious' distinction of the species most heavily parasitized by the Brown-headed Cowbird.

Habitats utilized included forest edges, bushy areas, marshes and backyards. It is a common feeder bird, attracted to millet, and prefers to feed on the ground, sometimes scratching like a "Fox Sparrow (with which it is most commonly

confused). Fox Sparrows are much more vigorous scratchers, practicing a habit known as 'double-scratching'. The 'rusty' colour of a Song Sparrow can be misleading; Fox Sparrows generally have a yellow lower mandible and a different look (posture). In addition to a variety of seeds, Song Sparrows also consume fruit, insects, mollusks and spiders. It is an accomplished hawk (perch hawk), snatching insects such as mayflies and damselflies from mid-air.

The Song Sparrow is perhaps one of our most studied passerines. The classic study (and one of the most widely cited) was by Mrs. Margaret Nice. It is an excellent species for anyone interesting in learning basics of bird behaviour (courtship, territory, feeding, etc.) to study (refer to the new Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behaviour).



Song Sparrow at Burnaby Lake. Al Grass

## Did You Know?

- Its scientific name *Melospiza melodia* means: 'melos' from the Greek (song) 'spiza' from the Greek (finch) 'melodia' from the Greek/Latin (a pleasant song) from Bob Walton Feeding Winter Birds in British Columbia
- Its favourite winter habitat in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia is blackberry (Himalayan) thickets. It commonly feeds on the dried, mummified fruits. Often associates with Spotted Towhees, White-crowned, Golden-crowned, and other sparrows (winter flocks).

## References:

- Erlich, R. D. Dobkin, and D. Wheye. 1988. *The Birder's Handbook – A Field guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*. Simon and Schuster, New York. 783 pp.
- Sibley, D. 2001. *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behaviour*. A Knopf, New York. 587 pp.
- Stokes, D. 1979. *Guide to Bird Behaviour, Vol. 1. Little and Brown, New York. 336 pp.*

Can you guess or remember what bird came in at No.8? See April's newsletter!

# Education-Conservation Report

By Elaine Golds

**M**y report this month will be brief as we want to focus on Riverview in this newsletter. Please see my report in an upcoming newsletter for an update on the nest box cleaning – and thanks to all the wonderful volunteers! The DFO-initiated jet boat meeting that caused me to miss the last BMN meeting will only be the first of several, it seems. At any rate, DFO has brought together stakeholders from both sides in hopes that we will be able to come to some agreement during our monthly meetings and not have to “fall back” on new regulations. However, it seems to me that regulations may be required. The ever-increasing use of jet boats (which can enter very shallow areas and destroy salmon eggs) as well as jet skis is causing increasing damage to aquatic habitat. Their use on water is following the same trend as the use of ATVs on land; the lack of regulations in both instances is having negative impacts on fish and wildlife habitat.

## Protecting West Noons Creek

We had a final meeting with Parklane Homes and the City regarding adequate protection of West Noons Creek as Heritage Mountain is developed. The new plan presented by Parklane represents a slight improvement over their original plans. West Noons Tributary #1 will still be completely culverted but there is now a plan to create fish habitat where it enters West Noons. A fish channel will be located along the BC Gas Right of Way which, I fear, will be dry most of the year. However, it will apparently be redesigned to require less removal of mature conifers (we were presented with no plans to verify this). Additional surveys were carried out and tailed frog larvae were found further upstream. We were assured that Parklane's contractors would take great care to capture larvae from the site where they intend to replace the culvert. West Noons Tributaries 2 and 3 (red-legged frog habitat) will receive partial protection but I am still waiting for the City to agree to dedicate additional parkland here. The cofferdam on Noons Creek just below Panorama will be removed. Parklane will apparently hire a representative from the Ecological Society to be present on site so that we will have assurances with regard to how the work will be done.

We also received verbal assurances that Parklane would present all new residents with a Living Green calendar which would help them to understand how to protect water quality in Noons Creek. We also offered to meet with residents and do a presentation to them to help them to understand why it is so important to protect fish and wildlife habitat in the Noons Creek watershed. Everyone agreed that our proposal to enhance salmon habitat just above Heritage Mountain Bridge was an excellent idea – but Parklane didn't want to do it because it was “outside their area”. Of course, they had earlier indicated they would plant trees at Hoy Creek to compensate for habitat lost in the Noons Creek watershed and they didn't seem to have a problem with that being “outside their area”. Although we requested it, we were given no information on what the effective impervious areas (EIAs) would be in this new development

and what innovative approaches would be taken to ensure more water would be returned to ground. I was left with the impression that we will have only minor improvements and that, if we had begun to meet with them months earlier, we would have been able to come up with a far superior plan than this one to preserve habitat. On our side, we had strong support from some Councillors. Nonetheless, I am especially disappointed with the lack of leadership from the City in this initiative.

## DeBoville Slough

Regarding DeBoville Slough, we have had two very frustrating meetings. First, we met on site with a DFO official and 2 Coquitlam City staff to discuss the stream buried last summer plus the recent trespass by the farmer who has planted blueberries on the Crown buffer set aside for wildlife habitat. We learned, firstly, that apparently no action had been taken by the City last summer when I reported the buried stream to them. Secondly, DFO misidentified the stream last summer but found another more minor stream on the same property that had also been buried. I guess when a stream is buried it becomes hard to find - but I did send DFO a map clearly indicating the location and offered to accompany them on a site visit! At any rate, our response from the City and DFO was much improved this time. I understand the City is now investigating both of our concerns and DFO is now investigating two buried streams on the Purewal Farm property.

Mike Griffin and I also met with an official from BC Land Water (formerly Crown Lands) so that we could request on behalf of BMN that they contact the farmer regarding his trespass and blueberry planting. To our great astonishment, this official was unable to locate any file regarding the Crown buffer! Of course, no action can be taken until the file has been located and our concerns verified. After this meeting, I spent several hours going through our old files on DeBoville to assemble and provide government with as much useful information as I could locate (government file numbers, etc.). I have since had an email from BCLW indicating that, on the basis of information received, they are now requesting government files from “off site” locations. I am left with grave concerns that, given the lack of staff to deal with such matters, the “loss of institutional memory” because of severe staff cutbacks plus the constant changing of duties and responsibilities that appear to be causing great stress to the remaining provincial staff, it will be many months before BCLW takes action on this trespass. Follow-up letters and a visit with our local MLA are urgently required. I will get to them as soon as I can.

These latest incidents again point out the need for a Sloughkeeper Group. However, we cannot undertake this initiative effectively if we do not have some volunteers come forward to participate. I think I sometimes feel as stressed as government officials these days – my work load as a volunteer only seems to increase and I feel eternally chained to the computer. It has been extremely helpful to have Mike Griffin

working with me on the DeBoville Slough issue. A Sloughkeeper Group would include BMN plus local residents and other groups such as the Hyde Creek Streamkeepers and Pitt River Boat Club. Do we have BMN members who live nearby or visit the Slough regularly who would be willing to help form a Sloughkeeper Group? If we are able to resolve the issue regarding trespass into wildlife habitat, a kickoff project for the Sloughkeepers could be to re-establish wildlife plantings on the buffer sometime in this fall.

## Nature & Feeder Watch March '03

by Rozanne Thomson

**O**n February 17th, Liz Thunstrom sent the following note. “My granddaughter noticed some unusual behaviours in male Goldeneye at Como Lake - the birds were throwing their heads back along the body, beaks pointing upward, then thrusting them forward. It appeared to be some sort of threat display to another male. They then took off in flight with the head and neck stretched out, but held lower than the body. This, too, seemed to be threatening. Neither Doug or I had seen this behaviour before. Along with the Goldeneye (commons), there are several pairs of Buffleheads which are visible underwater when they dive near shore.”

Liz goes on to say: “I have been lucky enough to have several Bushtits who have taken to visiting the bonsai trees on my porch. The size of the birds is just right for the tiny trees, and no doubt they have a few overwintering bugs on them.”

I too have had the little flocks of Bushtits visiting too, but they prefer the suet prepared for the woodpeckers and other insect eaters including the chickadees and occasionally the finches. Speaking of suet feeders, I have been able to deter the squirrels from it by using only suet and not prepared lard-mixtures, especially ones with raisins or seeds, which is what attracted the squirrels. Thanks to the proprietor of our birding store for that tip.

Rock doves are everywhere, aren't they? But where did they originate? I found the following information in the Kingfisher pocket guide, *Birds of Britain and Ireland*. Apparently there are true flocks of wild Rock doves in cliffs in the farthest reaches of Scotland and the Hebrides. All other Rock doves are feral doves, having thrived upon release by keepers of racing pigeons or other pigeon fanciers and interbred with genuine Rock doves. The feral Doves have gone on to populate most urban centres across Europe and now of course in North America as well.

Please pass on information and sightings for this column to me by email: Rthomson@bcit.ca, phone me at 421-5292, or see me at meetings.

## Letter of the Month

# All of Riverview Lands Must Remain in Public Trust

by Elaine Golds

As we celebrate the 90th Anniversary of the Opening of the First Building (West Lawn) at Essondale, we should not forget that the future of Riverview is very much undetermined. The site is owned by the province and managed by BCBC (BC Buildings Corporation). All users of the site (e.g., Riverview Hospital) pay a fee for services and grounds management. The multiple uses of the site combined with the significance of the arboretum have always presented a challenge for its management. The position of our Society and that of our 'partners in preservation', the Riverview Horticultural Centre Society, is that the lands must be preserved in public trust, the arboretum and significant natural areas must be protected and that caring for the mentally ill should remain as the key service provided on site. Other appropriate uses should enhance these care services, provide an interface with the broader community, support mental wellness and protect the arboretum and the lands. The site is remarkably gracious and beautiful. A contemplative walk around it certainly enhances anyone's mental health.

The community received a commitment from the previous provincial government to protect and preserve Riverview. We have solicited and received supportive resolutions from our three local municipalities so we have strong community support. Riverview Hospital provides jobs for many in our community. When Gordon Campbell was Leader of the Opposition in 1999, he was

given a tour of the site and promised to protect it. Since that time, his government has brought forward a dizzying array of changes in how government operates along with a consistent and dramatic downsizing of the services it provides. Health care in the province has been totally re-organized; we are still waiting for the dust to settle regarding the provision of mental health care. Throughout these troubling times, we have been meeting with BCBC and the Riverview Hospital Administration through our Riverview Natural Heritage Stewardship Group to keep the lines of communication open between the two land stewardship groups and management. We keep inquiring as to provincial plans for the site and we keep being told that nobody seems to know. Plans are to downsize the number of patients on site but where they will go is far from clear. Some buildings are already closed. Services for site management will be contracted out. Keep in mind that developers view the site as ideal for housing. A large portion of Riverview was sold for housing without public consultation in the 1980s. Another portion (the "vacant lands" on the south end) was almost sold in the 1990s but was stopped, in part, because of our diligence. A rapid transit corridor along the Lougheed Highway is under discussion again which would make these lands even more desirable for housing. How the government plans to use what is likely to

become an "emptier" site is far from clear. Nobody seems to know, except possibly, the Premier. That is why he should receive a letter from you asking him to keep the Riverview Lands in public trust, to respect the wishes of local communities for a continuation of mental health care facilities on site and to protect and preserve Western Canada's most significant arboretum along with the site's significant natural features. Remind him that, as we celebrate nine decades of the provision of mental health care facilities at Riverview, that we want this to be only the first 90 years. Remind him also of the considerable economic potential of the arboretum and surrounding lands if the site is managed properly to attract tourism dollars. You should also point out the lack of logic in maintaining this unique site as simply any other BCBC lands. Management of the priceless collection of the trees at Riverview should merit its own special budget. You should also point out that the heritage trees are located throughout the entire site and are not located only in the lawn area by the highway. Ask for his assurance of public consultation if any dramatic changes are to be considered for Riverview. Remind the Premier of his visit to Riverview in October 1999 and his promise at a reception in Port Moody City Hall to preserve these lands. Please write to The Honorable Gordon Campbell, Premier, Room 156, Parliament Bldg., Victoria BC V8V 1X4. As an alternative, fax him 250-387-0087 or send an email to <premier@gov.bc.ca>. We suggest that you also write to your local MLA or send them a copy of your letter to the Premier. Your letter is very important – remember it's the squeaky wheel that gets the grease – and we need to continue to "squeak" about Riverview!

## Early "EdCon" Days at Essondale with John Davidson

by Elaine Golds

John Davidson has been a hero of mine ever since I learned that, as President of the Vancouver Natural History Society, he was the leader of the first successful campaign in the 1920s to stop logging in Vancouver's watersheds. (It's almost a truism, isn't it, that each generation must sometimes re-fight the battles won by previous generations.) I feel that BMN is very much following in some of his footsteps not only by having been a leader in stopping logging in our drinking watersheds in the 1990s but also in our campaigns to protect Colony Farm and Riverview Hospital, i.e., the former Essondale site which John Davidson established in the early part of the 19th century. I was fascinated by my brief reading of Davidson's first three Annual Reports that he started in 1913. Davidson clearly had the vision of an "EdCon" man. He created numerous opportunities for teachers and others to learn more about the province's marvelous botany, led educational tours at Riverview and believed in the value of establishing gardens of native plants in school yards. From his description of travels to

some of the best natural sites in BC (the mountain meadows at Garibaldi, Botanie Valley near Lytton, Savory Island, the Gulf Islands (Mayne and "Curlew"), the Skagit Valley and site of the future Manning Park), it is clear that he had a true ecologist's perspective on the forces that shaped the flora of our province.

One of these trips was to Dryas Island, a bar in the Fraser above Hope. He had learned from residents that, before the great flood of 1894, the Island had been covered in trees including "giant" (i.e. western red) cedar and large-leaved (i.e. big leaf) maple. Davidson's botanical names were, of course, correct but common name usage has changed over time. The historic flood of 1894, caused by a cold late spring followed by a heat wave, turned all rivers into over-swollen torrents which ripped out bridges and flooded much of the lower Fraser Valley. Davidson noted that all of the existing vegetation on Dryas Island was removed with the exception of the balsam poplar (cottonwood) and that, in its place a number of dry-belt or alpine species became established from seeds carried along by

floodwaters. These included yellow pine (ponderosa pine). He also commented on the role played by boulders and debris in helping to trap sediments that subsequently allowed plant life to become re-established. His comments reminded me of the lovely ponderosa pine stand in Chittenden Meadows at the mouth of the upper Skagit River. These pines are clearly a little out of their "ecological" place but they have thrived in this relatively dry coastal valley. From Davidson's description of Dryas Island, I could easily imagine how that same flood, or perhaps, an earlier one could have carried ponderosa pine seeds from the headwaters in the dry interior to the more coastal floodplain of the upper Skagit.

While today we acknowledge Davidson's vision in establishing at Riverview what is still western Canada's most significant arboretum of trees collected from all around the world, he clearly also truly valued our nature flora. He felt it was important to establish a Native Arboretum in conjunction with the Botanical Garden at Essondale and especially valued many native trees such as the arbutus and flowering dogwood. Through the efforts of our club to keep the Riverview Lands in public trust, assure the continuation of the arboretum, protect natural habitat and enhance Riverview's streams, we are simply carrying forward into the 21st century John Davidson's original vision for the site.

# Vancouver Natural History Society Raptor Workshop

Saturday, March 22, 2003 at George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Delta from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. You are invited to attend a workshop, hosted by the VNHS Birding Section, with Wayne Campbell and Mike Preston of Wild Bird Trust of BC's Wildlife Data Centre. The agenda will include

Basic Raptor Identification, Hawks and Owls Sharing the Habitats, The Importance of Raptor Surveys in the Fraser Valley and Lower Mainland, Recording Forms, Maps and Data Collection, Reifel Walkabout for Raptors with Wayne Campbell, Mike Preston, and John

Ireland (Sanctuary Manager) for a two hour walk in the Sanctuary. Bring your lunch, refreshments provided. If you have any questions please contact Jude Grass at [jgrass1@telus.net](mailto:jgrass1@telus.net) or via cell phone 604 219 2043 (evenings and weekends).

Please RSVP to Jude either at the email or cell number listed above. This will help us coordinate the refreshments and seating which is limited. Thank you. The workshop is free but for the walk there is an admission fee of \$2.00 per person (group rate) for non members of the BC Waterfowl Society.

## Upcoming BMN Hikes



Wendy Thompson Hut, north of Whistler. Photo by Ian McArthur

### Sunday March 16 -

The first hike of the year is a little more strenuous than past years, but still is an easy hike. The destination will be Norvan Falls in Lynn Headwaters Regional Park. The trail follows Lynn Creek on a slight uphill grade, gaining about 150 metres (500ft.). The return distance will be 14 km (8.7 mi.) on a well maintained trail. Meet at the Toys R Us Park and Ride at 8:30 am Return 4:30 pm. For more info call Ian (604-464-9255) or Mark (604-552-0727).

### Saturday April 12th -

The BMN Hikers will be leading a trip on the Fisherman's Trail in the Lower Seymour Conservation Reserve. This is a chance to explore the Seymour River Valley and a good opportunity to see some of the North Shore's past as we will pass several old homestead sites. Several of the North Shore Mountains can also be seen from this area. This easy hike will be approximately 12kms (7.5 mi.) with minimal elevation gain. Carpool from the Toys R Us Park & Ride at 8:30 am Return 4:00 pm

### BMN Hikers 2003 Schedule

#### Sunday March 16th - Norvan Falls

#### Saturday April 12th

- Fisherman's Trail & LSCR

#### Saturday May 10th UBC

- Research Forest

#### Sunday June 8th - Coquitlam Lake View Trail (Trail Maintenance)

#### Sunday July 20th - Henriette Lake

#### Saturday August 23rd

- Burke Mountain Summit

#### Saturday September 13th

- Mount Ford

#### Saturday October 4th - Alder Flats

Detailed information in April Newsletter. Any questions call Ian 604-464-9255.

The Burke Mountain Naturalists was formed in January 1989 and is a member club of the Federation of British Columbia Naturalists (F.B.C.N.) BMN is a registered non-profit Society with charitable income status.

#### Our objectives are:

- to promote the enjoyment of nature
- to foster an interest in, and an appreciation of, our environment
- to actively pursue the conservation and preservation of the natural world
- to promote the accessibility and maintenance of natural areas, particularly local areas.

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Members: Don Gillespie, Mike Griffin,  
Ian McArthur, Victoria Otton

#### BMN Publications:

- **Monthly Newsletter**, except July
- **Natural History Brochures**
  - Miller Park Ravine
  - DeBoville Slough
  - Exploring the Riverview Lands
  - Coquitlam River Corridor
- **Bird Brochures:**
  - Colony Farm
  - DeBoville Slough
  - Minnekhada Reg. Park and Area
- **Plant Brochures:**
  - Colony Farm
  - DeBoville Slough
- **Trail Maps:**
  - Burke Mountain
  - Widgeon Valley
- **Burke Mountain-Widgeon Valley-Pinecone Lake Park Proposal flyer**
- **Wildlife Inventory of the Shoreline Park System**, by Christine Hanrahan et al, 1994, 121 pages, available at the Port Moody Library
- **Our Backyard Wilderness, A Park Proposal**, by Mark Haddock, 1992, 23pgs. plus Appendices, available at Coquitlam Poirier Library

THE DEADLINE FOR APRIL BMN NEWSLETTER IS SATURDAY, MARCH 25TH, 2003.

Newsletter printed on 100% post consumer, 100% non-deinked, non-bleached paper, Sandpiper Paper