

FIRST PACIFIC WATER SHREW NEST FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Locating the nests of small mammals, especially shrews, is a chance happening and a rare event for a field naturalist. On 18 June 1957, a day was spent exploring the Mahood (Bear) Creek area of Surrey in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia. The habitat along the creek was typically riparian with an open young forest of red alders (*Alnus rubra*) scattered with paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*). Dense tangles of forest-edge shrubs included willows (*Salix* spp.), red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*), salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*), and thimbleberry (*Rubus parviflorus*).

While scanning the forest for plants and animals, an all-dark brown shrew was observed leaving a Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*) cavity on the side of a fallen red alder snag that was lying on the ground. The large shrew, identified as a Pacific Water Shrew (*Sorex bendirii*), made its way to the nearby creek and vanished into a shallow pool. The side of the alder cavity was carefully opened with a pocket knife to reveal its contents. A ball-like nest was found composed of dry grasses and mosses with some softer paper birch bark strips mixed into the nest. Through a small opening in the nest ball, six small, naked young shrews were counted, all with traces of fur on them. The small piece of wood removed to examine the nest was replaced and secured tightly with string before leaving the area.

The breeding biology of the Pacific Water Shrew in British Columbia is unknown as there are no breeding data (Nagorsen 1996). This observation, the first active nest reported for British Columbia, provides insight into the nest site and breeding chronology for the species in the province and documents a known litter size.

In Oregon, Maser et al. (1981) note that “sexually active males have been collected as early as

February and as late as August ... and sexually active females have been trapped in May, June, and July” suggesting the breeding season for this rare mammal occurs during that period. Verts and Carraway (1998) give a litter size for three females in Oregon between five and seven young.

Literature Cited

Maser, C., B.R. Mate, J.F. Franklin, and C.T. Dyrness. 1981. Natural history of Oregon coast mammals. United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, General Technical Report PNW-133, Portland, OR. 496 pp.

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About the Authors

Glenn has been observing and recording wildlife throughout British Columbia for the past 64 years. He lives in the Fraser River valley where he continues to search and explore new habitats.
