

# NATURE ALERT

May 1986



A number of plants distinct from any others on the planet flourish on BC's Queen Charlotte Islands. The 156 islands which make up the archipelago are home to several disjunct species - plants which grown nowhere else but in one or two of the exotic and distinct places one dreams of visiting some day: Borneo, southern Ireland or the Himalayas. But there is more to the Charlottes' natural splendour than pleases the eye.

The undisturbed ecosystems on the islands are of enormous importance for scientific investigation. Paleobotanist Calvin Heusser's discovery in the 50's of pollen grains nearly 11,000 years old revealed that some areas of the Charlottes had escaped glaciation. In these refugia, plants - perhaps even animals, fish, insects and birds - survived that last ice age.

University of BC botanist Dr. Wilf Schofield has found a number of tiny, elusive mosses - ancient throwbacks which escaped the glaciers here and nowhere else. The botanical importance of the Queen Charlottes' endemic mosses has until now lacked any real recognition. "If they were animals," Schofield says, "it would be like finding a native monkey in the Charlottes; people would be extremely excited!"

Exactly what other forms of life survived the ice sheet in the Queen Charlotte refugia is still a matter of speculation. Stickleback fish, tiny sea fleas and many of the woodland birds are likely candidates. Even the shrew, martin and ermine are distinct from their mainland cousins. Did the refugia play a part in their separate development, within the evolutionary eye-blink of 10,000 years?

Biologist Bristol Foster, former head of the BC Ecological Reserves Unit, calls the Charlottes an evolutionary showcase. They have also been dubbed the Canadian Galapagos. Yet today resource extraction is advancing with the same thundering relentlessness as once did the great ice sheet. Will the Queen Charlottes survive this next onslaught?

(The above information was taken from the CNF Nature Alert. The Save South Moresby Caravan is over and was a big success, but the fight is a long way from being over. The BC government has not yet been convinced that South Moresby must be protected, and the effort must continue. If you wish to make a tax deductible donation, please make payment to:

Save South Moresby Fund,  
Canadian Nature Federation,  
Suite 203, 75 Albert St.,  
Ottawa, Ontario, K1P 6G1

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During 1987, Canadians will have a unique opportunity to focus activities on wildlife and celebrate a century of conservation in Canada. One hundred years ago on June 8, Sir John A. MacDonald designated the first Migratory Bird Sanctuary in Canada at Last Mountain Lake south of Saskatoon.

In July 1985, The Canadian Nature Federation took the initiative and submitted a proposal to the Honorable Tom McMillan, Minister of the Envir-

