



Oystercatcher

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2009

Social evenings may need re-thinking

by Kees Visser

By the time you read this, another year of monthly social events will have passed. Usually we have six events per year, on the fourth Thursday of October, November, February, March, April and May, and we use the United Church as our venue by default. This past year we had four events in the United Church with very interesting speakers and topics, from Nature in Cuba, to various topics (Wildflowers, Hiking and Geology) of Salt Spring Island. When you read this, the May Social is still to come. Please mark your calendar: Jack Gunn will speak on Geology of Salt Spring on May 28 at 7:30 pm, United Church.

Some time in the fall, the Church told us on a very short notice that we could not use their venue in November and February. However, we were able to move these evenings to the Harbour House Hotel. The

topics were Antarctica and Hiking in Scotland. The Harbour House evenings were very well attended, both attracting about 50 to 60 people, but the United Church socials, especially the March one, were sometimes poorly attended notwithstanding the fact that they were widely advertised and were open to non-members.

Since there are costs associated with organizing these events (hall rental, projector, and sometimes a honorarium for the speaker) the Club pays up to \$400 per year to run these events. However, the attendance does not always seem to warrant the costs. Although we request a small donation to help us to cover our costs, the yield is often minimal. At this point we would like your feedback:

◆ should we continue these events as part of a Club ef-

fort?

- ◆ should we charge an admission or donation to cover the cost, as the Conservancy does?
- ◆ or should we only organize events with other like-minded organizations such as the Conservancy or the Paddlers? In March and September 2008, we had two co-sponsored events with the Conservancy; both were very well attended and we were able to cover our costs for that year.

Perhaps the name "Social" is a misnomer; the evening

really consists of a slide presentation followed by only a short time of coffee and cookies. The subject of the presentations include topics on nature, hiking, and other activities in the wilds, which can be on Salt Spring, in Canada or anywhere in the world. It can be as diverse as wildflowers, hiking in Scotland or rafting on



Yellow Montane Violet in Somonos Marsh Nature Reserve, Duncan

the Colorado river. So I propose to rename the Social "Monthly Trail and Nature Presentation". Please phone or email our President, Zeke Blazecka (653-4782 or zekegiz@saltspring.com) or myself (537-5443 or cnvisser@shaw.ca) to voice your views.

On a different note, both Christmas and pre-AGM luncheons were held in Harbour House. Both were well attended and food and atmosphere was excellent.

Due to space constraints in the Oystercatcher there will be no geology article on mining as promised. The plan is to include this in the Fall 2009 edition.

I like to close thanking all our speakers for giving their time and effort, and Marjorie Radford and Ann King for the coffee/cookie organisation.

Birds in my backyard

by Nieke Visser

Hummingbird update

The two female Anna Hummingbirds that spent the winter in our cedars managed to raise some offspring after a male visited several times. We are not sure how many little ones there are, but we have seen at least two at the same time. Around mid-March, the Rufous arrived in droves. We counted eight at one time and they are all still here! Contrary to what we were told, the Anna does not seem to be overly intimidated by their southern cousins. Indeed, we noticed some “social” get-togethers, however only at dusk: five or six of both species feeding at the same time, some even sharing one spout (see picture below).



One evening, an Anna peaceful gathering was rudely disrupted by a male and two female Rufous (on the right). The Anna on the far left was quite disturbed by them and stayed in this position for quite a while as if in shock.

Another “accident” happened

Hummingbirds are not the only ones using our garden as their nursery. We have numerous birds, likely attracted by the wide variety of native and non-native flowering bushes and perennials in the garden as well as the presence of four ponds and waterfall. More about how to attract local birds in your garden in one of the next issues.

Sometimes accidents happen, as the picture top right testifies. I found this Robin’s nest on top of a juniper under one of the cedar. It was still upright and holding one (cold) egg. We think the nest was dislodged by the wind that preceded a hailstorm the day before. If it would have been raided, it would probably not have been in this perfect condition still holding an egg. Later I found two more eggs under the same juniper. The nest was freshly made, indicated by the still green leaves of rock cress that grows



abundantly in my garden. It was tucked in between the twigs together with some moss on the outside. Inside the builder had lined the nest with dead grass of an ornamental variety that I recently had cut short. It was a wonder of ingenuity. I felt sorry for the robins: they had to start from scratch again, if they ever would consider that.

Trying new tastes

Sometimes you may see Northern Flickers searching for food on the ground: they have a taste for ants! And Orange-crowned Warblers can be seen checking out the tiny flowers of the Red Huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*) for nectar; they have a sweet tooth and appreciate the extra energy at this time of year. House Finches too have cravings for sweetness: it is not unusual to see them trying to get at the syrup inside a hummingbird feeder.

Male House finch on hummingbird feeder



URGENTLY NEEDED

PHOTO JOURNALIST

Job description: (1) Collecting, saving, and digitalizing recent club photographs.
(2) Organizing a picture archive.

Requirements: Computer literacy.

Interested?: Call Zeke Blazecka at 653-4782 or Arleen Sadler at 653-9235 for more information.

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PRESIDENT'S POINT OF VIEW

by Zeke Blazecka

Get your mind off the normal Tuesday outings for a moment! In the coming year you will be given the opportunity to share your island outlook and experience with other local organizations. Read on.

Already in the calendar (look at 7 June) is the visit to the White Rock and Surrey Naturalists. This first-ever Club exchange has a long but interesting schedule that you should have seen by now; the exchange will be completed when the Naturalists come to Salt Spring during our Apple Festival (4 October). If you want more information about either part of the exchange or if you want to help out, contact our Nature Coordinator, Teresa Hitch (250-538-0978).

Another unusual event takes place next month when our Club will be providing hiking and walking leaders for the Outdoor Club of Victoria during their visit to Salt Spring 22 – 26 June.

Leaders are already earmarked. Thanks for those who volunteered. As a result of the assistance we are providing, the Outdoor Club has invited our members to join in the activities on Tuesday 23 June - a hike from Burgoyne Bay to the summit of Mt Maxwell, and a walk up the less steep side of Mt Erskine, starting at Toynbee. These activities are included in the Driftwood schedule and on our website. See also page 7 of this issue for more detailed information.

Finally, for your long-range planning calendar you may want to note that our Club will be hosting a BC Nature Field Camp on Salt Spring 27 April – 1 May 2010. Nieke Visser is taking the lead in organizing the event, which will include hikes, walks and nature outings by local experts. We are expecting 24 participants from all over BC. There will be more details to follow, once the planning has progressed a bit more.

Just a bit of tantalizing information for your planning calendar!



Summer 2009:

There are **no organized club outings** during the months of July and August. However, if you show up shortly before 9:45 am at Artspring, chances are there are people waiting for you to go on a hike or walk. The destination will be decided at hoc, weather permitting of course. Off-island hikes will be announced on the website and via the Google group email because of the different time and meeting location.



NEW MEMBERS

Peter Lamb
Wendy Webb
Susan Hannon
Mary Morden
Bobbi Janowiak
John Wiskel

HONORARY MEMBERS

Bob Ball
Loes Holland
Tony Pederson
Jean King
Joan Lott
Eleanor Lloyd
Jean Holmes

PAST TRAIL BLAZERS

Lynn Thompson
Bill Harrington
Paul and Beth Ranney
Owen Benwell and George Hignell
John Myers
Ian Fraser
Bob and Betty Ball
Dick and Chris Pattinson
Betty Kirk
Brian Radford
Charles Kahn
Simon Rook
Jim Barber
Alan and Rita Robertson
Fred Powell

In the last newsletter, Nieke Visser told about birds colliding with windows, sad events that happen to most of us. Houses vary, but one in the USA was documented with 33 strikes per year.

We all know of mortalities from hitting windows, towers, glass skyscrapers, power lines, and even the new windmills. This is second only to habitat destruction as a cause of disappearing species and dwindling numbers of birds. A conservative estimate is one billion dead birds a year from collisions with buildings and glass in the USA, according to Dr. Daniel Klem who studied this for 34 years. The estimate is confirmed by data from Project Feeder Watch. This astonishing number represents 3 million per day; we can take it as an estimate for North America.

Perhaps you heard publicity in March about the 20th anniversary of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, which the media have called “a world-class environmental disaster”. Birds were the most notable victims and some 300,000 were killed. However there is almost zero media coverage of the much greater slaughter from window collisions. To equal window-kills during the 20 years since the Exxon Valdez, it would take some 67,000 similar oil spills. And of course, collision deaths continue.

About three-quarters of birds that collide with windows die. Half of the victims die quickly, almost always from head trauma and internal bleeding (not from broken necks). The other half fly away or seem to recover, but studies show that every second one dies later of internal causes. (We heard a similar thing in March of 2009 when a famous actress fell while skiing, seemed okay, but later died from internal bleeding in the head.)

The problem. Birds are accustomed to zooming through narrow openings in the woods and flying around obstacles, but they are not prepared for invisible barriers. Glass kills for two reasons, reflection and transparency. In certain lights, birds see sky reflected in the window, or a tree as shown in the photo. That signals a suitable habitat so they go

full speed ahead. In other lighting conditions, the glass is invisible. Two windows meeting at a corner look like a short cut. Windows on opposite sides of a house might look like a “tunnel” through the obstruction. Birds might even see a big potted plant behind the window, and head for it.

People with computer connections can get more details of this topic from the Toronto organization FLAP (www.flap.org).

Remedies. The only answer is to make glass visible to birds. There are several ways, and it depends on how much decoration you can tolerate on windows, and how many dollars you think birds are worth. First of all, identify the windows with greatest problems, and apply remedies to them.

Some supposed remedies fail. Those black silhouettes of hawks just don't work. You can draw patterns with marking pens, but in general, things inside the window do not solve the problem of outside reflections. Other demonstrated failures are owl decoys, blinking lights, or a single hanging plant or set of wind chimes.

Layout and Design

- If you have bird feeders, birdbaths or nest boxes, **put them either very far away or very close to windows.** Research has shown that deaths increase with distance, up to at least 10 metres away, so use more than 10 metres. Or instead, place the attraction **within** a metre of the window -- a bird seldom builds up enough momentum for injury.
- Don't plant a lot of trees or bushes close to big areas of glass
- White cloth drapes, or blinds, have been shown to help. They stop birds from seeing a pathway through, but they might not cure the outside reflection and they only work when closed.
- In design phase, substitute skylights or

glass bricks for some windows. Commercial tinted glass is not suitable – it reflects. Slant glass panels downward as much as 20° instead of vertical, so they reflect the ground instead of sky. (We did that when glass was required around our deck – it may be of some benefit.)



A collection of victims after colliding with windows; courtesy New York Audubon Society.



Tree reflection in window.

Film on the glass. A most elegant and effective remedy (but pricey) is a special film called *CollidEscape*. It is applied on the outside of glass to reduce reflections and transparency. The appearance from outside is like sandblasting. However, thousands of small perforations allow light to pass, so you still enjoy the view (see photo). Indeed, you can observe birds at a close-in feeder without startling them.

Its life-span is probably much longer than five years. Cost is \$3.00 US per square foot if you refer to FLAP. Expensive but worth it, and maybe needed for only a few windows. To investigate, visit www.lfdcollidescape.com.



Window with film

Screens outside the glass can be completely effective. Cheapest is *Easy Deer Barrier* at Foxglove -- black plastic netting in one-inch squares. We stretched it on nails outside the glass panels of our deck, and the most dangerous windows. I tied on short lengths of string to increase visibility; not pretty, but we can still see out. A similar plastic netting at the hardware store is *Bird d-Fence*. Soccer netting might be more visible. The B.C. government lists suppliers of netting for fruit crops (www.agf.gov.bc.ca/berries/publications/document/suppliers.pdf).

The best would be *Ross Tree Netting*, a fine-gauge diamond-pattern black nylon net. Not offered in Canada, packages are sold on many U.S. web sites such as www.rachelsrobin.com in Michigan. Outward view is apparently excellent and a bird-artist in Ohio reports that she even takes good photos.

Birds will see any of these nets, and if they are held out from the glass, even unwary birds will bounce off like a trampoline, and continue flying. The Ohio woman held the netting 25 cm out on frames of painted one-inch PVC. An excellent, complete assembled kit is offered for \$ US 29 at www.birdscreen.com. Screening is held out from

Window with screen



the window by hooks or suction cups. Vision out is little affected, according to the manufacturer (see photo). [I am ordering a couple of these to replace our crude netting.]

Stuff hanging outside the glass works but you might not want it. Ribbons, decorative ropes or strings of ornaments have to be 5 centimetres apart for the full width of the glass, obscuring the view. There are also ready-made commercial items called *Wing Chimes* (www.flap.org) and *Feather-Guards* (www.featherguard.com) which are poultry feathers stuck cross-wise on a string. Shimmering reflecting coloured decorations or old CDs are other options. Some items might have short lives, and would be rather annoying during our windstorms.

Strips of outdoor tape down the glass will also work, but would really spoil the view. Tape must be outside and contrasting. Vertical tape 2 cm wide must be no more than 10 cm apart (or 1-cm tape 5 cm apart). If horizontal, strips must be 5 cm apart. Insulating tape and non-reflective adhesive tape (e.g. Scotch Magic 810) offer good protection but do not last very long. BirdLife Switzerland sells tape called *Birdstripes* (rolls of 10 metres for 10 Swiss francs) if you are willing to purchase online in French (www.birdlife.ch/f/service_shop.html) or write to them at SVS/BirdLife Switzerland, P.O. Box, Wiedingstrasse 78, CH-8036 Zürich (svs@birdlife.ch).

John Sprague is a SSTNC member who recently completed four years as editor of the technical journal *British Columbia Birds*. Contact him if you want sources of information for this article. (tel.: 537-0760 or e-mail: sssprague@shaw.ca).

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OUTDOOR CLUB OF VICTORIA VISITS SSI

In the last week of June, the OCV visits our island for a week of hiking. The SSTNC helps out by leading hikes and walks. On Tuesday, June 23, members of the SSTNC are invited to come along and on June 24 they are invited for an evening potluck.

Below you find the provisional program:

Tuesday June 23:

Strenuous hike up Mt Maxwell from Burgoyne Bay: 1
Leader: George Slain

Moderate walk up Mt Erskine from Toynbee
Leader: Linda Quiring

Wednesday June 24:

Potluck at the Ganges Campground at 6:30 pm and a talk on SSI history by Chris Amett.
Watch the Driftwood or our website for more details.



This is a two day, hands-on, field and lab course for anyone interested in learning more about our fascinating local aquatic life. On the first morning, we will investigate a local pond, making collections of interesting pond life. We'll have a 1-hour lunch break and then convene to a small laboratory to explore our collections with microscopes and other scientific equipment.

One week later we will start with a field trip to a seashore location for one of the year's lowest tides, and then again return to the laboratory to investigate our collections. In the lab we will use aquariums, microscopes and sophisticated video equipment to learn about the great diversity of aquatic life—exploring both the easy-to-see organisms and those virtually hidden by their small size.

Requirements for this fun and engaging course are a curious mind and a pair of rubber boots. There are three identical courses, each consisting of a pond day and a seashore day. Total instruction time per course is 10 hours. **Limit for each course is 8 participants.** Course fee: \$110. Courses take place on Salt Spring Island.

Course Instructor: David Denning

Course 1
Two Saturdays
Limit 8 people

Day 1: June 13: 10 am to 4 pm.
Day 2: June 20: 9 am to 3 pm.
With one hour break for lunch each day.

Course 2
Two Sundays
Limit 8 people)

Day 1: June 14: 10 am to 4 pm.
Day 2: June 21: 10 am to 4 pm.
With one hour break for lunch each day.

Course 2
Two Mondays
Limit 8 people

Day 1: June 15: 10 am to 4 pm.
Day 2: June 22: 10am to 4 pm.
With one hour break for lunch each day.

PONDS AND SEASHORE COURSE REGISTRATION

Name _____ Address _____

Postal Code _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Choose which course you want: Course 1 _____ Course 2 _____ Course 3 _____

Print this page, complete this registration form and send with a cheque for \$110 to:
David Denning, 156 Harrison Ave., Salt Spring Island, V8K 2N3
For more information: Phone 250-537-0664 or email: ddenning@saltspring.com.

BC Nature Report on the Director's meeting and AGM Duncan, BC, May 1 - 3, 2009.

by Nieke Visser

I attended the BC Nature Conference and AGM in Duncan. Seven SSTNC members were present. On May 1, the morning was dedicated to presentations. The afternoon was spent on field trips to various locations. I had hoped to be able to visit Stoney Hill, but that outing was cancelled, as the owner of the private property adjacent to the area was unwilling to grant access. In stead, I went to the Somonos Garry Oak meadow to admire, among other wildflowers, the Yellow Montane Violet (see page 1) among numerous other wildflowers, and a Great Horned Owl as unexpected bonus .

The morning of May 2 was set aside for the Director's meeting. There were about 20 Directors present from all over the province, as well as the executive of BC Nature (BCN). Items of interest to our Club: waivers, and the Vancouver Island Regional Director (or better the prolonged lack thereof). In addition, we had a brainstorming session on a new 5-year plan. Due to time constraints the finalization was left for the fall general meeting.

Waivers:

There was no real news from that front, as we have already made the changes. However, the group that took it upon themselves to dig into this subject and hire a lawyer (the Kamloops Naturalists) now pointed out that, according to this lawyer, a combined membership/waiver form (such as ours) may not stand in court in case of a lawsuit. In stead, a sheet of paper with the membership info on one side and the waiver on the verso will stand in court.

Vancouver Island Regional Director:

After a lengthy absence of regional representation, the Vancouver Island Region just recently welcomed its new Regional Director in the person of Donna Monty of the Nanoose Naturalists.

AGM

In the afternoon members gathered for the Annual General Meeting. The decisions made at the Directors Meeting were conveyed to the members. In addition, all but one resolution (recommending the installation of a Life Bank to preserve DNA of species at risk) were adopted. A motion of thanks to one of our Club's members, Hu' King, was accepted. Hu' had stepped down as Foundation Director and Secretary after three years of service. In addition, our Club's intention to organize a BC Nature Field Camp was announced. This field camp will be held from April 27 to May 2, 2010. The logistics are momentarily being under review and will be soon available, likely in the next issue.

Small-leaved Woodland Star in Somonos Marsh Nature Reserve , Duncan



Calendar

Thursday May 28

Social evening with Jack Gunn. Presentation: Salt Spring Geology
Time 7:30 PM. Place: United Church. Coffee, tea, and snacks.

Sunday May 31, 2009

Nature outing

Spring wildflowers of Harewood Plains (Nanaimo) with wildflower expert, Kent Anders. Meet at Portlock Park at 8:30 am for 9 am ferry.

June 7, 2009

Club exchange with the White Rock / Surrey Naturalists;

Please register to be on the waiting list for our trip to White Rock/ South Surrey, if you are interested in this trip. Members who have signed up, please let Teresa know if you need to cancel your reservation, at your earliest convenience, so other members may attend. Contact Teresa for more information 250-538-0978, tghitch@telus.net or visit the website.

June 16, 2009

Strawberry Festival

At Ruckle Park, starting at noon. Organized by the walkers. Short pre-festival outings will be organized, watch the Driftwood or the website.

June 23 - 24, 2009

Outdoor Club of Victoria visits Salt Spring Trail & Nature Club

Watch the Driftwood for more details or call the organizer Mary Hof at 250-743-4074. See also the box on page 7.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Salt Spring Trail & Nature Club features Tuesday outings September through June at three levels of ability. The monthly schedule of outings and events is published in the Driftwood on the last Wednesday of the month and on our website at www.saltspringtnc.ca. On the fourth Thursday in October, November and February through May, the Club meets at 7:30 pm at the lower hall of the United Church. The Club is affiliated with BC Nature and Nature Canada.




Ramblers enjoy walking without pressure with frequent "time-outs" to take pictures, to examine plants, flowers, rocks, fossils, and from time to time sample local restaurants. Members of any level of fitness are welcome. Ramblers start at 10:00 am and usually end by 1:30 pm.

Walkers move at a more relaxed pace. They usually try to avoid long steep climbs and will stop to catch their breath along the way. Outings generally cover 8 km or less and end by 2:00 pm.



Hikers like long, adventurous and occasionally quite strenuous hikes, and like to gain a bit of altitude. They need strong boots and a good but not excessive level of fitness. Hikes usually start at about 10:00 am and end between 2:30 to 3:30 pm.



Nature excursions are normally organized every month except December led by an expert naturalist and are open to all levels. 

Membership: Annual dues are \$20 per person. All members must sign a waiver annually. Send completed membership and waiver forms with your cheque to the Membership Secretary, PO Box 203, Salt Spring Island, BC, V8K 2V9, or drop them off at the Cobbler's box, attention Barry Spence.

Taxi fare: Members are encouraged to carpool during outings and reimburse the driver as follows:

On-island trips: North of Duke Road: \$2 per passenger; South of Duke Road: \$3 per passenger; Ruckle Park and non-paved roads: \$4 per passenger.

Off Island trips: \$0.30 per km per vehicle plus ferry costs.



Spring/Fall trips: No club policy.

Moving? Change of email address? Please let your Membership Director know a.s.a.p. Email: sspence@telus.net; telephone: 537-2332.

Your comments or contributions are welcome. Please email them to Nieke Visser: niekevisser@shaw.ca or leave them in the Cobbler's box.



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