



# Oystercatcher

Newsletter of the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club

Summer 2010

## President's Point of View

by Kees Visser

I am almost four months in my new position as President and this is my first full report to you. The new Executive has some new faces and they are all putting their best efforts in to make our Club enjoyable. Due to health reasons Brian Radford had to resign from his position as Trail Coordinator in April. I like to thank Brian for all his efforts for the trail work, as BC Nature representative and other volunteer activities he has done for the club over the years. I know we will continue to draw on his knowledge of the Mt. Maxwell trails. Fortunately Ashley Hilliard and Herb Otto are continuing to coordinate some of the trail clearing. Over the past months they have done work on Mt. Maxwell, Bold Bluff trail, Jack Foster trail and the Tsawout First Nation Reserve.

The end of April we had a very successful BC Nature Camp on Salt Spring; twenty four BC Nature



Harsh Paintbrush on Quarry beach trail near the beach. © Poh Chan

members participated, mainly from the Mainland. Outings and talks were organized and presented by member and non-member volunteers. I like to thank them for all their time and work, but mostly I like to thank the Organizing Committee (Nieke Visser, Zeke Blazicka and Richard Shead).

Without their considerable efforts over the last year the Camp could not have happened.

Mid May Nieke and I and three other members attended the BC Nature AGM in Kamloops. Nieke was nominated and accepted the position of Secretary of BC Nature. As a result her work for our Club will be reduced, and she will stop doing the Oystercatcher, so a volunteer will be needed to take over this job.

The executive also decided to partially fund a Park Interpreter for Ruckle Park this year, if K2 Park Management will find a suitable candidate for the position. In May the Executive has decided to donate \$500 to the

Long House of the Tsawout Nation; we are often hiking on their beautiful land and the donation represents recognition of our tie with the Band.

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For information on the Board of Directors and weekly outings, please see our website: [www.saltspringtnc.ca](http://www.saltspringtnc.ca)

The monthly presentations are now well attended, and we had nice shows on Iceland and Danube/Turkey. Niels Gerbitz, our new Vice-President, has some great stuff lined up for the rest of the year. We continue to co-work with the SS Island Conservancy in some presentations, such as the June 4 one on the Angus couple, who rowed from Scotland to Turkey over interior waterways.

On a more negative note I have to report that the walks and hikes are not as well attended as we would have liked. Sometimes the weather was not so cooperative. On the other hand, this is the We(s)t Coast, so occasional showers are to be expected and should not be a deterrent. In addition, coordinators continue to have some difficulties to find leaders for the weekly outings. Too often they have to draw from the same group of people. I know that the usual leaders are quite willing to co-lead and help with new people. Please don't be shy and contact our Coordinators Janice Dickie and Marcelle Roy. There are now packages available from the coordinators with instructions for new leaders.

I like to stress not to leave any garbage on the trails; this includes banana and orange peels. Although they will decompose in due time, they are not native here, and nobody likes to sit or walk amidst brightly coloured peels. We should only leave footsteps on the trails.

Finishing on a positive note, Janet Andersen is organizing a Fall trip (September 13 to 16) to Quadra Island. We were there before in 2005 and had fantastic hikes, walks and rambles. More on page 5 and on the website.

## **Palm Springs: new desert hikes**

*by Linda Quiring*

Since the late 1980's, Bill and I have spent January in the Palm Springs area, known for it's night life, casinos and movie stars. We take in the now world-famous Film Festival, but mostly hike in the California Desert. Palm Springs is right at the base of 10,000 ft Mt Jacinto, an hour to the north is Joshua Tree National Park, and an hour south is Anza-Borrego, California's largest park.

East are the Chocolate Mountains with Utah-like canyon lands. Last, but not least of course, are the well-known Palm Canyons where indigenous palms thrive in the rushing streams of snow melt from the Santa Rosa Mountains.

After all these years, we had hiked about every wash, canyon, and mountain trail around, some dozens of times. This winter, we were thrilled to discover two new park reserves, covering hundreds of acres which have just been opened to the public.

The first we hiked was Mission Creek Preserve, where a small band of Cahuilla Indians lived until a flood in the early part of the Century. Later, in the 1920's, cabins were built from local stone, and a private oasis created for movie stars and the rich and famous to get away in seclusion. We hiked a few miles up the wash (read seasonal river) between the foothills through native palms and cottonwoods, a really lovely warm day. Had we continued for about 8 miles, we would have climbed a low pass and into the wash of the Whitewater River, also seasonal. Here in the desert all the rivers, or washes as they are locally called, are seasonal.

A week or so later, we hiked up the now dry wash of the Whitewater, where some enterprising entrepre-



© Linda Quiring

neur had many years before dug large ponds, filled them with trout and created a Sunday get-a-way where locals could bring the kids, have a picnic and fish for trout. Up the trail, we passed a marker for the Pacific Coast Trail, which crosses the Whitewater here. Further on, we would meet a trail which leads over the foothills and down to meet the Mission Creek Trail. Next year, we plan to actually do the round trip, which needs a couple of vehicles. Anyone want to come along?

We always stay in a small resort the stars cavorted in around the 50's and 60's, and the temperatures in January and February are usually a pleasant 70-80 degrees. One year, we had floods, but other years no rain at all. February is spring in the desert, the flowers are blooming and at night, the stars are out!

## Connecting to the Trans Canada Trail, Central, by John A. Heddle

In Kleinburg, Ontario, our Salt Spring Club is known as the western branch of the Humber Valley Heritage Trail Association because, after we moved here, I kept sending the HVHTA reports for their newsletter. To score a few points, I would include the odd photo: Mt. Baker in all its glory, snowdrops in January, or the view from Mt. Maxwell. Judy and I pulled up stakes and moved here almost five years ago now, but that was only two years after Joanne Nonnekes and I founded the Kleinburg Branch of the HVHTA so I felt somewhat traitorous and had a need to justify our departure. Kleinburg is a place where most Torontonians would love to live, not leave.

You might know Kleinburg as the home of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, the largest collection of Group of Seven art in existence or, perhaps, as the home of Pierre Berton. The village sits on a thin triangular plateau between two branches of the Humber River, which runs into Lake Ontario at the western end of Toronto. Kleinburg also lies on the Carrying

Place Trail which commemorates the first exploration of southern Ontario by Étienne Brûlé, one of Champlain's lieutenants. Brûlé was guided by the Hurons over their portage route from Lake Simcoe through Kleinburg and south on the Humber to Lake Ontario. This is one of the reasons for the Humber's historical designation as a Canadian Heritage River and, hence, the name Heritage in the HVHTA name.

The original objectives of the HVHTA did not include hikes, walks, or rambles. Rather it was to establish a walking-only trail in the valley of the Humber River near Kleinburg. This looked as if it would be easier than it has been, for the river valleys are under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Toronto Conservation Authority and no new houses are permitted in them. The Conservation Authority was created to control flooding after Hurricane Hazel drowned about 80 people in 1954, most of them just south of Kleinburg

in Woodbridge. Since the valley lands cannot be subdivided, developers typically donate them to the Conservation Authority to satisfy the required contribution to parks. Gradually the valleys are becoming public property and thus open to the creation of trails but progress is slow as the Conservation Authority has to approve every detail of the new trail. Also, Transport Canada continues to designate the Humber as a navigable river although only in the spring flood a canoe can go anywhere on it. This designation makes the establishment of a trail much more expensive as any bridges have to meet onerous government guidelines.

Currently, there is a wheelchair accessible trail from Kleinburg south for a few kilometers to the Kortright Centre where maple syrup is made and consumed each spring. A few kilometers north, the Bolton branch of the HVHTA has had a trail northwards to the Trans Canada Trail for some years. The municipality was considering a massive road-like extension of the trail system north to Bolton, but we wanted a footpath that would



**A view of the Humber River from along the section of the loop trail that is now completed at Huntington and Kirby.**

© Barry Westhead

keep the area as natural as possible. Part of the trail has now been established (see a photo) but it lacks links both to the north and the south, blocked in each direction by a few recalcitrant landowners. As a result, the Kleinburg club has been evolving into a club more like ours with regular "hikes". These correspond most closely to our walks, though the elevation changes are rarely more than 200 feet (why have we learned to give distances in metric yet still mostly use Olde English for elevations?). They are always on the weekends as most members are gainfully employed with children whom they bring along, often with their (horrors!) dogs. When the linkages are eventually completed, you will be able to walk the Trans Canada Trail from Vancouver to visit the McMichael Gallery with its west-coast cedar beams and Humber Valley overlook. But you will have to leave your dog outside.

## Birds (and more) in my backyard, *by Nieke Visser*

With the warmer weather, some birds moved to their breeding grounds and some came up from the south to raise their family here. Among the winter guests that left were the Golden Crowned Sparrows, the Varied Thrushes, and the Robins that wintered here. The first two species normally move to higher elevations, the Robins just move northwards and are replaced with the ones that arrived from their wintering places. Of course, many waterfowl and ducks have moved on too. Our property is near but not quite on the ocean, so I am not familiar with the water birds on a daily basis. From the times I have been near the water, I noticed the going of the Golden eyes, the Buffleheads, Widgeons and the Surf Scooters. These are regulars in the part of Ganges Harbour where I live.

Our summer guests include the American Gold Finch, Warblers such as the Orange Crowned, the Yellow-rumped and the Yellow Warbler. A few days ago, I heard the Swainson's Thrush. This bird usually arrives in May. Chances are you will not see it, but hearing is a different story. If the male is not displaying its song, you may hear the Swainson's call: it reminds me of my teenage years when the boys were whistling after the girls! Our Swainson hides in the shrubs and calls when I am working in the garden. He joined by the Spotted Towhee doing one of its many different songs. To learn to recognize bird songs and hone your skills, visit [www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/](http://www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/); this a great tool!

And of course the Rufous Hummingbird is back. This year we were greeted with a loud twitter on March 15. This little man quickly staked his territory by taking possession of one of the feeders, throwing off our Anna's Hummingbirds who had peacefully shared the feeders all winter. More

males Rufouses arrived during the next few days. The females came a couple of weeks later and our garden is now the scene of mating displays. The female sits quietly on a branch waiting for the male to impress her with visual and audio displays. The male makes a series of impressive deep arcing swoops in the form of a "J" to catch her attention. During display dives male's wings make a stuttering hum and a high buzzy trill at the tail of the "J". The sound is created by the airflow through its wings. The visual display is accentuated by flashing colours created by his "gorgets". The gorgets are flat iridescent feathers around the neck that flash brightly when the sun is reflected on them at certain angles. The

more he swoops and dives, the greater the number of angles the sun can catch the brilliant colours of his feathers. The better the show, the better the chances of catching the attention of the female. With the numbers of hummingbirds in our garden, this display is an almost continuous affair.

Last year we had a pair of house wrens nest in a box meant for swallows who apparently were not interested. This year I have seen the pair again while they were inspecting the premises. They put some twigs in the box, but for about a week now I did not see any further activity. I just hope for the best, and make detours around the nest box area to give them peace and quietness.

With the warm weather arriving, the Garter Snakes are also appearing from their wintering hide-outs. I have seen little ones and big ones

and even one in my compost bin. In all likelihood this one was hunting the red composting worms. Then on one particular warm morning, a North-western Alligator lizard sunned itself on a rock (see picture). We had seen this one before but the camera was usually out of



North-western Alligator Lizard



Orange-crowned Warbler

reach. This time I managed to go inside to retrieve the camera and take a number of shots. The North-western Alligator lizard is a smaller variant of the Northern Alligator lizard. An adult measures about 10 cm (body) and has a dorsal coloration of brown, tan, olive, or gray, usually with a row of dark spots down the middle of the back. This particular one looks more like a Shasta variant, but the Shasta does not occur in our region, so I assume it is just a more yellowish variant. Our region is the most northerly reach of its habitat. And it is well adapted to our cooler climate. Reptiles usually reproduce by laying eggs. This lizard, though, is live-bearing, with two to eight young, born between July and early September.

References:

1. www.natureinstruct.org/**dendroica**/ rufous hummingbird.
2. Alan St John: Reptiles of the Northwest; British Columbia to California; 2002.

Photo credits:

Lizard: Nieke Visser;

Orange-crowned Warbler: Glen Bartley, Bird studies of North America

**Announcing the S.S. Trail & Nature Club  
Fall Outing to Quadra Island -  
Sept. 13, 14, and 15th, 2010**

Accommodation at **Tsa- Kwa Lutén Lodge** at Cape Mudge

Preliminary reservations have been made for:

- 3 rooms with King bed
- 2 rooms with 2 double beds
- 1 room with 3 double beds (loft)
- 5 rooms with 1 Queen bed
- 5 two bedroom beachfront cottages

(Please note we must have 4 people in each cottage in order to get our special rate. One bedroom has a queen bed, the other has twin beds.)

All rooms in the Lodge have a balcony or patio, one bathroom, coffee maker, hair dryer, and spectacular views of Discovery passage and the mountains of Vancouver Island. Other amenities at the Lodge include hot tub, sauna, exercise room, internet kiosk, common room with TV and lounge.

Cost per person is \$302 which includes 3 nights accommodation, 3 breakfasts, 3 dinners, 2 box lunches, taxes and gratuities. A room to yourself would be an additional \$115.

Reserve your room calling the Lodge at **1-800-665-7745**. Please book by August 1st and mention you are booking as a member of S.S. Trail & Nature Club. Please indicate what kind of accommodation you prefer. Accommodation is booked on a first come, first served basis. A credit card number will secure your booking, but you will not be charged at time of booking. Cancellation of 3 days prior applies according to resort policy.

At the same time, please let co-ordinator, Janet Andersen, know you are participating. E-mail [janetandersen@shaw.ca](mailto:janetandersen@shaw.ca); telephone 250-537-8720. This is essential in order to receive further announcements.

Please book as soon as possible.

**CALENDAR**

**May 27, 2010**

**PRESENTATION**

**Who:** Dru and Ulrike Nawani

**What:** Above the Beaten Path: Adventures in Flying

**Where:** United Church lower level

**Time:** 7:30 PM

**June 4, 2010**

**PRESENTATION**

**Who:** Colin and Judy Angus

**What:** Rowed trip

**Where:** Community Gospel Hall

**Time:** 7:00 pm

**Co-sponsored with the SSI  
Conservancy**

**June 6, 2010**

**Celebrate World Ocean's Day with  
a Tour and a Cruise!**

**What:** Shaw Discovery Centre Tour/  
Eco-Cruising, Sidney

**When:** Meet at Artspring parking lot  
at on June 6, at 8:50am (for 9:50 Fulford  
ferry)

Pre-register by May 6 (cruise space is  
limited)

Costs \$34

For more information, please email  
Teresa, at [tghitch@shaw.ca](mailto:tghitch@shaw.ca).

**June 15, 2010**

**STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL  
AND GENERAL MEETING**

**Where:** Ruckle Park lower picnic area

**Time:** Noon

Preceded by a short walk/hike to rev  
up your appetite. Bring a bowl and a  
spoon.

Watch the Driftwood or website for  
details.

# BC Nature Camp on Salt Spring Island

by Nieke Visser

Twenty four eager naturalists from all over the province descended on Salt Spring Island on Tuesday, April 27 for a six day exploration, courtesy of the SSTNC. After a welcome and settling in, we took them right away on an excursion to one of the many Gary Oak meadows here combined with views of the southern islands, ocean inlets and wild flowers.

Highlights of the adventure were the intertidal and the marine wildlife excursions. We were introduced to all kinds of low-tide critters (squids, crabs of all sizes, starfish, broke back shrimp, and many other crawlers, swimmers and mud diggers). Thanks to David Denning who made this day very memorable by sharing his extensive knowledge and his entertaining way of presenting. The marine wild life tour brought us to thousands of migrating Bonaparte gulls who were gathering in Active Pass, rhinoceros auklets, red throated loons, surf scoters, bald eagles, oystercatchers, pigeon guillemots, nesting cormorants, as well as harbour seals, Stellar and California sea lions. We did not see porpoises during the boat tour, but two of them showed up during our hike through Ruckle Park when we paused for a moment at Yeo Point. Such an unexpected treat!

We hiked up Mt. Erskine and Mt. Maxwell, went to Ruckle Park to study its farm history, and then took off on a shoreline hike to the park's recent 100 acres plus addition. We ended up at

Chris Hatfield's place. Chris is the present owner of the historic Bulman saw mill site and its "mountain" remnants of Japanese, Chinese and European labour forces. Those leftovers are dug-up, painstakingly put back together by Chris with the help of Giz Blazecka and then displayed in Chris' museum.

We enjoyed evening presentations by four of the many experts our island has to offer: John and Heather Neville showed us which birds to listen to and look for at this time of year at Ford Lake, Lynn Thompson took us on a virtual hike on our Salt Spring trails by showing the spectacular pictures he takes during our Club's regular outings, Jack Gunn introduced us to the local geology and took us on a field trip to see real life evidence in Ruckle park, and last but not least, members of the Historical Society walked us through some old time events that happened here some 150 years ago.

Local restaurants presented excellent food and the last night we enjoyed a barbecue with some of the volunteers who made this camp possible.

Some pictures you find in this issue of the Oystercatcher are contributions from camp participants. I like to thank Pho Chan and Cathie Barron for their willingness to share their photographs.

Also thanks to all volunteers who made this camp into an enjoyable and successful week. Special thanks to the organizing committee: Zeke Blazecka, Kees Visser, Richard and Alisha Shead and last but not least Muriel (Alisha's mom) for her beautiful artwork!



Rhinoceros Auklet

© Cathie Barron



© Nieke Visser

# Glendale Gardens Excursion

by *Gwen McDonald*

The SSTNC and the SSI Garden Club joined forces on Sunday, April 18 for a delightful off-island adventure to the Saanich peninsula. The group consisted of Bill and Marilyn Harding, Myra Bourne, Gwen McDonald, Angie Mills, Margaret Ann Taylor, and our excursion organizer, Teresa Hitch. Boarding the Fulford ferry at 9:50 AM we found our way first to Glendale Gardens near Sidney where we were given a tour of the gardens by the gracious and knowledgeable Jane Tice. In addition to her wealth of information regarding the plants and the gardens, she was generous with practical gardening advice... "When in doubt, repeat"; "plantings look best in groups of 3, 5, 7, and 9" and so forth.

Glendale Gardens is a "gardener's garden", over 100 acres subdivided into smaller theme areas designed so there will be something of interest in bloom in every season. Plants are well-identified allowing the browser to make notes as one goes. Starting only ten years ago, the garden has been transformed from neglected Crown land. One of the most interesting walks was down a woodland forest trail which looked like it had



been there forever yet was built from scratch by bringing in downed trees, moss covered stumps and mature forest plantings. What looked like one of the most natural areas in the gardens was, in fact, one of the most heavily developed. Glendale's rare plant sale was full of tempting treasures (and souvenirs), including Pleonie Formosana orchids in bloom.

Finding these rare native orchids was a highlight. A delicious lunch of organic food was served in the sunshine on the patio ... clearly a highlight of the day.

The next stop was Swan Lake, with a serendipitous stop on the way to take advantage of a native plant sale sponsored by the Swan Lake volunteers. Most of us came away with a treasure or two such as a Saskatoon



berry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) sapling. The walk around Swan Lake was an invigorating 2.5 km hike through a wetland bird sanctuary where we caught glimpses of marsh wrens and lots of ducks, swimming in and out of the marsh grasses.

We ended our day at the Victoria airport to see the famous 2010 Olympic Kunamokst Mural, *Coastal Inspirations*, featuring 180 artists including our very own Teresa Hitch, tour coordinator extraordinaire, who was able to give us the inside scoop on how the mural was developed.

We arrived back on Salt Spring on the 5 PM ferry, tired and happy from a lovely day's adventure.

## Wanted: newsletter editor

I have put together the Oystercatcher newsletter since the fall 2006 issue. So after four years, I think it is time to step aside and let someone else take the reins. I realize that there are some editing and design skills required. When I started I did not have any of those skills, but I listened to people in the know and I learned along the way. So I am calling on those of you who are willing to give it a try. If so desired, I will assist the brave soul who comes forward to put together the fall issue over the summer. If you are interested, contact me at [niekevisser@shaw.ca](mailto:niekevisser@shaw.ca) or call 537-5443.

## BC Nature AGM and Conference 2010

by Nieke Visser



The BC Nature Annual General Meeting and Conference was held in Kamloops from May 13 to 16, 2010. Five SSTNC members attended, including myself. Grasslands were the focus of the conference in all its forms and conditions and predicaments. On Friday, I signed up for an excursion to Lac du Bois Provincial Park, where we were shown how the grassy hills were kept in perfect state thanks to controlled rotational cattle grazing by the neighbouring ranches. This ensures the grasslands stay grasslands and eliminates the invasion of trees. Spring flowers were abundant and

reminded me of the flowering prairie grasslands in Alberta: old men's whiskers, larkspur, arrow leaved balsamroot were in bloom at this time.

Saturday was meeting day. I attended the Director's meeting followed by the AGM. A few things of importance were dealt with:

1. the installation of the **Executive** is as follows:

John Neville: President

Vice President position: vacant

Bev Ramey: Past President

Treasurer position: vacant

Secretary: myself

Regional Director for Vancouver Island: Sue Loveless

2. **Insurance fee** will increase by 15 cents for 2011.

3. **BC Nature Foundation:** the foundation manages bequests, endowments and donations for BC Nature and is a significant source for funding. Each year the foundation transfers a lump sum to BC Nature based on the proceeds of its investments. BC Nature then allots grants to clubs that have applied for money for projects. The foundation has a board of directors and members. It likes to expand its membership by adding one member from each federated club. This person can be just a member at large. Meetings are conducted by conference calls, so no travel is involved. If you like to be involved, please contact me at 537-5443.



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