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Oystercatcher

Newsletter of the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club
 Winter, 2010

The (American) Black Oystercatcher, *Haematopus bachmani*, inhabits shorelines along western North America from the Aleutian Islands of Alaska to the coast of the Baja California. Its range does not overlap with that of other oystercatchers.



Hikers having lunch at the top of Mount Seymour, Quadra Island
 photo by Lorrie Storr

President's Point of View

Kees Visser

This will be the first Oystercatcher, edited by Gary Adams, who has offered to take over from Nieke Visser. Nieke has done a magnificent job over the last four years, editing and publishing 13 issues. I wish to thank her for this excellent work on behalf of every-

one. Having said this, Gary needs the same support as Nieke got, so keep those nature or hiking articles and ideas of interest flowing to him at (gafrad@shaw.ca).

Among others who are not in the Board but help us out with excellent support, I must mention Sue Lehmann, who keeps the website in good shape (www.sstnc.ca) and feeds our monthly information to

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This newsletter is published by the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club, PO Box 203, Ganges PO, Salt Spring Island, BC, V8K 2V9. Editor: Gary Adams (gafrad@shaw.ca)

For information on the Board of Directors and weekly outings, please see our website: www.saltspringtnc.ca

the Driftwood. Marjorie Redford and Ann King take care of the refreshments at the socials. Thanks to these volunteers too!

Our hiking season is in full swing again and so far, the weather has been cooperating. However, the elements may prove more challenging over the coming months. The coordinators will try to send information about cancelations by email on Tuesday morning by 9:00 am, but that will not always be possible. We all chose to live on the wet coast, so we like to do our activities, unless it is really pouring.

The Christmas Lunch will be December 14 and this year in the Anglican Church with a meal prepared by Chef Kelly. Tickets at the cost of \$25 will be available at the end of November from your coordinators and at Soapworks. Attendance for the Annual General Meeting has been declining over the last years, so we have chosen for a different format. On January 27, 2011, the AGM will take place at the Gospel Community Church Hall where we will serve a light lunch for about \$10. After the lunch we will have the AGM business and a presentation by well known bird expert and BC Nature President John Neville.

The Executive Committee has few members with deep club memories. For that reason it has been difficult to assess the contributions of members who have passed away and to decide for whom we are donating to the Trans Canada Trail. Therefore, we have decided that starting in January 2011 the Club will donate a single time to the Trans Canada Trail in an amount set in the annual budget. It will recognize all the members who passed away in the previous calendar year. Recognition will also be made in the Oyster-catcher and at the AGM.

At our monthly Thursday evening “socials”, we have had some excellent presentations the last few months on Lake Baikal, on hiking on Kauai and on lighthouses (coming up in November).

Last September we had a successful fall trip to Quadra Island, organized by Janet Andersen. The weather was not always cooperative but everybody enjoyed the great outings. Well done, Janet!

On that note, I have to finish in reminding our members that all our coordinators need people to lead activities. These will not happen otherwise. In addition, for next year we will be looking for organizers for the spring and/or fall trips.

Last month Herb Otto had agreed to join the Executive as Trail Coordinator, and he has already worked in Ruckle Park and other places to clean up the trails; some members, Ashley Hilliard, Charles Kahn and others have helped out as well, but Herb might contact you to help out.

Hope to see many of you at the Christmas Lunch and/or the AGM

Kees Visser, President

THE FUNGUS AMONGUS: The Chanterelle

Linda Quiring

I like to think of our local Chanterelle as Queen of the Forest. This year, She has appeared in huge numbers due to lots of warm rain early in September, a must for a great harvest.

Recently, amateur mycologist Bill Jones speaking at a Foxglove Farm workshop, said the name of our local *Cantharellus cibarius*, or Yellow Chanterelle has been changed to the Golden Chanterelle. DNA testing has shown that our local Queen of the ‘Shrooms is indeed different from others. This didn’t really surprise me.

Years ago, with a plethora of Chanterelles, I took a basketful to the lovely German lady next door... she screeched and quickly handed them back, saying they were too large to be Chanterelles! O.K. so they were about 8” across, when the books say 2-5” but it now seems we have our very own species here in B.C. Of course, they are much bigger than anywhere else.

Thinking back, Chanterelles were the first fungi I really picked, identified and ate. Actually, I



Cantharellus cibarius; Strobilomyces (Wikimedia commons)



Cantharellus formosus

think I had a good idea what they looked like, but one rainy fall day about ten years ago, Bill and I appeared at the Nordines' front door.

We'd picked about 25 pounds of big yellow 'shrooms but before I was going to eat anything that was so slippery and foreign, I wanted an expert opinion. Margaretha and Ron confirmed my find, and they still laugh about how excited we were. I promptly went home and spent hours cleaning, then dried them. Bad Move!

Later, we learned cooking with them was impossible: they were like little strips of tough leather, and we finally blended them into powder and added them to soup. Now, we freeze them. They reconstitute just like fresh 'shrooms.

It's really hard to confuse them with anything else, especially, anything Poisonous! There is a somewhat look-a-like, the 'False Chanterelle,' but I'm not sure I've ever seen one here. It goes without saying, that you can get really sick eating strange fungi - so, get a book or two, and for sure, never eat anything until someone who's eaten it and is still around identifies it for you.

The part we eat is of course, only the fruit and the actual fungus, or mycelium, that felt-like mass of hairy threads remains below ground. It is spread by means of spores, which you can use to identify a 'shroom by placing one gills down on a clean sheet of paper, and checking the color. Finally, have someone who's eaten it repeatedly, identify it for you.

I have picked Chanterelles in mid-July, with lots of rain after a long dry spell. In a good

year, weather co-operating, you can pick and eat them for Christmas dinner. There are others, too; the large White Chanterelle, a small funnel-shaped one, the Pig's Ear (I don't eat it) and more.

Foraging for mushroom is an endlessly fascinating hobby, and this fall, with record rains, I have found things I've never seen in the woods before with the usual suspects in record numbers.

Birds (and more) in my backyard

Nieke Visser

In the last issue, I told you that the bird-house attached to the woodshed was apparently unoccupied. One morning, though, I noticed two house wrens checking out the premises but I could observe no further activity. Well, the activity started when the eggs hatched. The chicks were quite noisy and so were the parents. We had a load of firewood delivered and wanted to stack it to get it out of the rain. Forget it! The two anxious parents harassed us with grubs in their beak and all. Once we retreated, they continued with the feeding. This year I did not notice the fledglings leave their shelter, but silence has returned to that corner of the yard. I assume they are okay.

Lately another fledgling visited with one of his (foster) parents: a young Brown-headed Cowbird. He was being fed by a Song Sparrow (see photo). Originally, Cowbirds were limited to short-grass plains, as they followed the herds of buffaloes during their trek over the North American continent in a symbiosis of



Immature Brown-headed Cowbird and Song Sparrow; Nieke Visser



Male Pileated Woodpecker attacking a rotting stump just outside our fenced garden; Nieke Visser

feeding on the insects stirred up by their movement. Because of their lifestyle of being constantly on the move, cowbirds had little or no opportunity to raise their own young. Instead, they laid their eggs in other species' nests and left their brood for these other birds to raise as their own. This behaviour is called "brood parasitism". The Cowbird has widely dispersed since the demise of the buffalo while European settlement opened forests and homogenized the environment into the agricultural and suburban landscapes of today. Cowbird expansion has thus exposed native bird populations and new species to this "brood parasitism", and the pressure on such host populations can be substantial. Female cowbirds wander widely, overlap their breeding ranges, and may lay 40 (!) eggs per season. They have little respect for the size of the foster parent: in North America, over 220 host species have been reported as being parasitized (i.e. cowbird "victims"); 144 species have actually reared cowbird young. Cowbird hosts range in size from 10 g creepers, kinglets, or gnatcatchers to 150 g meadowlarks. The top 7 (with numerous records each) in our region include, in order of frequency: Yellow Warbler, Song Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, Common Yellowthroat, Red-winged Blackbird and Willow Flycatcher. So what I witnessed was not all that uncommon. Back to our garden: the begging for food was going on for days and we started to feel sorry for the Song Sparrow; the cowbird baby was about twice as

big as its foster parent and evidently had a voracious appetite.

This season is full of surprises. One afternoon I noticed something red bobbing up and down at neck breaking speed, just outside the fence: a male pileated woodpecker was working on an old stump and the wood splinters were flying everywhere. The show went on for about 15 minutes and I had all the time in the world to take a variety of pictures, most of them showing a blur as the fading light was insufficient for a very short shutter time. Then all of a sudden, he suddenly froze. My guess is something menacing flew over or went by. That gave me an opportunity to shoot good pictures. He never returned, so the place was either a poor restaurant or a dangerous place. Who knows!

The tent caterpillars were back this spring but I did not notice them until someone told me about them. By that time, I was too late to take action. As a result, they ate the cherry tree leaves, leaving most branches bare except for the cherries. The Ravens and the young, sparrow fed Cowbird, were having a ball eating half ripe cherries and ripping off the remaining leaves. I hope the tree will survive my neglect.

This year for the first time, I had Pine Siskins and Red Crossbills breeding on our property. The Purple Finches had a successful breeding season, as did the Towhees, Juncos, Chickadees, American Gold Finches, and the Hummingbirds. Both Rufous and the



House wren; Nieke Visser

Anna's immatures visited the flowers, the trees and bushes and the feeders. We did not see any House Finch immatures, although we have had House Finches visit occasionally. I did not hear their song either. Swainson's Thrushes were abundant this year. At one time I heard four singing at the same time; it was quite a competition! Hearing them sing is one thing, but actually watching them is another: I only saw a Swainson's once this year. They are very hard to discover among the bushes and the greenery. It takes patience and waiting until you see them move. And I have had little time to do that this year. In addition, these non-distinct birds fit the term Little Brown Bird (LBB) perfectly.

I have handed the editing baton over to Gary Adams, but I will continue to write about my feathered friends, if they provide me with material to write about, of course. In November, Project Feeder Watch will start up again, so I am confident something will happen during that time.

In this issue, below you'll also find the story of Hank the Eagle, whom we met during a visit to the Pacific Coast in Washington State this summer.

References:

Lowther, Peter E. 1993. Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/047>

The Trail Coordinator Report

Herb Otto

As a new resident of the Island, taking on the position for Trail Coordinator promises to provide me with a hands on introduction to the local flora and fauna, and indeed the human inhabitants. In this endeavor, a certain amount of assistance has been offered from members and has been very much appreciated. Still, I would like to solicit some additional suggestions and help on the clearing and maintenance of the trails on the Island. Many thanks go to Brain Radford, the past Trail Coordinator for all his efforts.

So far this year, a number of different members carried out some maintenance on their own before we officially filled the position of Trail Coordinator. In the spring, Alf Morgan and Richard Shead assisted me in clearing the trail around the south side of Burgoyne Bay towards Bold Bluff. Then, on October 18, Harold Kahn and I cleared some fallen trees in Ruckle Park near King's Cove.

Now the wind, the rain, and the snow have arrived and they promise to bring some new challenges to the maintenance of the trails. A number of members have provided their names and volunteer their assistance. However, any others who are interested can contact me by email at

Calendar of Events

December 14, 2010 Trail & Nature Club Christmas Lunch

The Christmas Lunch will be at the Anglican Parish Church, All Saints By the Sea, in the upper hall on Thursday, Dec 14. Come and enjoy a meal prepared by Chef Bruce Kelly. Lunch starts at 12:15 (doors open after hikes or at 12:00). Tickets \$25 can be purchased at Soapworks or from your coordinator.

Menu consists of grilled plank salmon, roasted root vegetables, green salad, veggie paella, an for dessert; carrot cake, tea and coffee. Beer and wine will be available at a cash bar.

January 27, 2011 Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be on Thursday, January 27. The meeting will follow a new format: light lunch, guest speaker (John Neville, bird expert) and a short meeting. The AGM will be at the Community Gospel Chapel at 12:00. Doors will open at 11:30

Notice to Members

The 2010 -2011 Membership Cards can now be picked up from the Trail and Nature Clubs box at the Village Cobbler in Ganges.

herbotto@shaw.ca so that I can add them to the list. Part of the challenge is to have a system of identification of the need for maintenance. In this regard, it would be very helpful to have members email or call me (250-931-1024) to report any problem areas. Also, following a Tuesday outing by the Hikers, Walkers or Ramblers, it would be helpful to have the leaders report any needed trail maintenance. On a trial basis, I will be calling the leaders on the day after their hikes – so be prepared. It has been suggested that some members bring clippers or collapsible limb saws with them on a hike to carry out minor maintenance as they go. I believe some already do so, but more would be helpful.

Finally, we are considering the concept to “Adopt a Trail”. The idea is that a member or members assume the responsibility for the maintenance of a designated trail. Should anyone wish to do so, this could be put into place on a case by case basis as members come forward, so let me know if you are interested.

The Trailblazer: Janet Anderson

Compiled by Lucille Adderley

Born and raised in Nanaimo, B.C., Janet Anderson attended the University of Victoria and chose teaching as a career. She has taught in Australia, England and mainly in Vancouver.

When she retired to Salt Spring, it didn't take long for her to get involved in many ways in the community. Volunteering at the Visitor's Centre has been one area of interest. Another pleasure has been as a member of the Garden Club. Working for many hours over the years, she has developed an attractive English style garden at her home. Other interests include basketry, weaving, and rug hooking. She has received a number of awards for her entries in the Fall Fair. Her love of travel and has taken her to Ireland, Australia, China, Mexico, Israel, and many other European countries.

She has two sons who live in the Vancouver area. Her two young granddaughters, Sophie and Isla, are a joy to her and she enjoys spending time with them and watching them grow.

Janet is an avid reader, is involved in church



Janet Anderson on the ferry to Quadra Island; Lucille Adderley

life and if you ask her for a game of lambsie or tile dominoes, she's right there.

She has been active in the Trail and Nature Club for years. She has acted as Secretary, Walk co-ordinator, and has led numerous walks. Recently, she co-ordinated the Fall Trip to Quadra Island. Her organizational and leadership skills were evident as she arranged the details of the event so that everything ran smoothly.

Project FeederWatch

Nieke Visser

On November 13, the 2010-2011 FeederWatch season has started its 24th season. But it is never too late to join; the project will go on until the April 8, 2011. Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada.

Can you distinguish a towhee from a junco, a chickadee from flicker? Then you could be a valuable contributor to FeederWatch. The project is conducted by people of all ages, skill levels, and backgrounds. Thousands of volunteers in Canada and the United States count the birds at their feeder(s) or special designated sites for two successive days on a weekly basis and submit their data to the project's scientists either via the BSC's website or by mail if you do not



Fox Sparrow; Nieke Visser

have access to a computer. The data thus collected help to study:

- long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance
- timing and extent of winter irruptions of winter finches and other species
- expansions or contractions in the winter ranges of feeder birds
- the kinds of foods and environmental factors that attract birds
- how disease is spread among birds that visit feeders

What sets FeederWatch apart from other monitoring programs is the detailed picture that FeederWatch data provide about weekly changes in bird distribution and abundance across the United States and Canada. Importantly, FeederWatch data tell us where birds are as well as where they are not. This crucial information enables scientists to piece together the most accurate population maps. Because participants count the number of individuals of each species they see several times throughout the winter, FeederWatch data are extremely powerful for detecting and explaining gradual changes in the wintering ranges of many species. In short, FeederWatch data are important because they provide information about bird population biology that cannot be detected by any other available method.

You pick your own days and your time. For each species, you report only the highest number of individuals that you see in view at one time. By fol-

lowing this procedure, you are certain to avoid counting the same bird more than once. I normally spend between 30-60 minutes counting from a convenient spot inside the house. Your data will also include information on your counting site, the weather and the prevalence of sick birds. Anyone with an interest in birds can participate. When you sign up, BSC will send you a package with all the necessary information. For more information visit BSC's website at <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/> and click on "get involved" to go to the FeederWatch page.

In appreciation of your participation in Project FeederWatch and to help you with bird identification, the Project's staff arranges to provide you with complete access to the entire Birds of North America Online database at no charge beginning November 1, 2010, and lasting through January 31, 2011. Birds of North America Online is recognized as the preeminent source of life history information on the 700+ breeding birds of the US and Canada. For each species, you will find a comprehensive summary of life history information including information about behavior, food preference, preferred habitat, breeding, migration, and conservation.

To sign up for FeederWatch, visit Bird Studies Canada's website at <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/> or phone 1-888-448-2473. There is a \$35 fee to defray program expenses (participation is free for Bird Studies Canada members).

Membership

We welcome the following new members for the 2010-2011 year

Shirley-Ann & Dietrich Bertz
 Robert & Anke Bosmen
 Chien Yu (Edward) Chen
 Judith A. Cooke
 Audrey Denton
 Helen & Jack Gunn
 Kim & Karen Laidlaw
 Fang (Julia) Liao
 Wendy Mcclean
 Bill McMahan
 John & Heather Neville
 Melissa Nibley
 Marion & Manfred Pape
 Brenda Scotvold
 Gillian Watson

Good Luck Turns Bad for a Bald Eagle



Hi, Hank here.

Just made a fantastic kill: a juicy young gull! Had a few bites myself. Very tasty. Never mind the screaming mother overhead. She'll get over it.



I like to take it home to my wife. She is looking after the teenager in the nest. And boy, that guy is hungry. Eating like there is no tomorrow. I am sure she would like some lunch too. Bringing up kids is no picnic, you know.



There is a slight problem, though. The darn gull is too heavy to carry. I tried to take off with it, but I cannot even get off the ground. The tide is coming in too. Another 15 minutes and then it's bye-bye to the family lunch. Do you have a suggestion?



Yah right, I could eat some more. But have you ever tried taking off with a full stomach? Let alone flying all the way home! Really, that is not an option.



On the other hand, what other options do I have? If I leave it here, the ocean will "eat" my hard earned catch. And sharing does not occur in its dictionary. If I only could drag it above the high tide line.



But that is way over there where the people are. Look at them! They are even taking pictures of me. As if I am some sort of a circus attraction. Oh, forget it, I am giving up.



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