



Photo by T. Müller © Wikimedia.org

Oystercatcher

Newsletter of the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club

Autumn, 2011

The Eurasian, or Common Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, is the most widespread of the oystercatchers. Its three races breed from western Europe through Eurasia to the west coast of Korea. These obvious, noisy birds, have black and white plumage, red legs and strong broad red bills.

Ever seen a moth this big?

Nieke Visser

This fellow was taking a rest on our cork and bead insect screen in early morning, July 23. He had a 13 cm wingspan and 3 cm body length. We have encountered insects that big when we lived in the tropic, but never expected something like this in a temperate climate like here. I consulted Linda Gilkeson, the Salt Spring bug expert, and she identified it as a Polyphemus moth (*Antheraea polyphemus*)--one of two huge moths that are native here in this region (the other is the *Ceonothus* silk moth). Always a shock when people see the huge creatures! This one is a male. You can tell by the wide feathery antennae.

President's Point of View

Kees Visser

It is early August when I write this and finally summer is here. In my 10 years on this island, I have never experienced a wetter and cooler first half of the year. Actually talking about the weather, I have a weather station in my garden, and except 2003, every year has been cooler and wetter than the statistical average for the last 50 years on Salt Spring Island. Perhaps my location!

Nevertheless we all have been hiking, walking and rambling whenever the time is right. We live, after all, on the West Coast.

While I was away, backpacking the Skyline in Jasper NP with Lynn Thompson and Lise Fraser, Frank Richards passed away at 93. Old time club members have some very fond memories of Frank. He was an avid hiker, and as owner of the Driftwood, he actively encouraged us to advertise our monthly schedules at no cost. Mary Holmes and Mary Sil-

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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

vender worked closely with him on that. Frank was also very much involved with our AGM activities. He certainly supported and helped our club grow to the about 250 members we have at present.

During the summer we continued weekly hikes and 5 to 10 faithful souls showed up every Tuesday.

Our new season will start with the Blackberry festival on September 6 in Ruckle Park. Make your blackberry concoction and share it with other members. Usually we have a short activity in the morning and the lunch/blackberry will begin around noon.

We also have a number of Thursday evening talks lined up as well, starting with Anita Narwani, who will talk about alternatives to open net fish farming on September 29. Later we have talks about Birds in Tropical Mexico and Backpacking in Jasper.

Still far away, but mark your calendar for the Christmas luncheon on December 13. Many directors of our executive will reach the end of their terms coming January, so please consider one of these positions when you are tapped on the shoulder by our Past President.

VICE-PRESIDENT

Our Executive will be looking for a new Vice-President, who will start his job on January 26, 2012, after the AGM.

This position is great for a recent member or who is new to the island and likes to learn more about Salt Spring Island and its communities, but longer time members are also welcome. It will be a 1 or 2 year term, and total time commitment is usually not more than 6 hours per month, and not in July/August.

His duties include:

- Organizing talks (about 6 times/year).
- Organizing Christmas Luncheon and AGM Luncheon.
- Attending monthly meetings (usually 6 times/year, 2 hours/meeting)
- Act as President when President is absent.

The Vice-President usually, but not necessarily, becomes President after his term.

Please contact our Past President, Zeke Blazecka 653-4782, or our President Kees Visser 537-5443

Editorial

Gary Adams, *Oystercatcher* editor

I hope everyone is ready for the new hiking season. This is my first editorial since taking the reins of the newsletter. So far, it has been a real pleasure. However, I think it is an appropriate time to revisit the purpose and content of the *Oystercatcher*.

The newsletter, as we now produce it, is small, and aimed only at membership interests. That means that even with no advertising, it is inexpensive to publish and I can usually get it from mock-up to your hands in less than a week. Essentially, We have a closed circuit. Only club members benefit from it so club members must provide the content.

Every issue has about a quarter of its space dedicated to club business. That includes the president's report, calendar, notices, and executive reports. Another significant portion is currently fueled by some regular contributors; Nieke's *Birds in My Backyard*, Linda's mushroom series, Teresa's plant lists and Kees Rhur's PARC contributions. I will continue to search out articles and series but none of these much appreciated contributors will continue forever so we must find new items of interest. I am always open to suggestions or volunteers who wish to contribute articles or series.

What the newsletter needs most is contributions from its readers that will be of interest to the membership. That means you. I realize that very few of us consider ourselves to be writers but that is not really important. What we need are short, 300-800 word articles relating to hiking, nature study, and areas of interest to the club. To help you get started, I offer four topic areas for your consideration.

1. Humour of the Hike. Some of you have 20 years of hiking stories stored up in your memories. Why don't we start a series of amusing incidents from past hikes?

2. My Favourite Hike. I want people to identify favoured hikes in our regional territory. Try to note the critical components like how to get there, the length of the hike, and degree of difficulty. Then offer a paragraph on what it offers and a paragraph on why you liked it. I would like to add one new hike to every issue. Don't be afraid of unusual hikes. Walks around Cosco or along some country lane can be just as interesting as a defined trail.

3. Salt Spring Landmarks. There are many wonderful hiking destinations on the island. Think

of the rhodonite mine, the grandmother tree, or mill farm. If you have some information about a natural or cultural landmark on the island, why not spread that knowledge around. Write up a little article on the history of your favourite building, your treasured viewpoint, or your special landscape feature. Include a photo if you can.

4. Pictures, Pictures, Pictures. We can always use interesting pictures of hikers, nature or the Island.

Don't worry about the literary details. We can always help you through that. Have a wonderful season.

Birds in My Backyard

Nieke Visser

I had to pass my contribution for the summer issue as we started renovating late March, so I spent little or no time in the garden. With the renovations drawing to a close, the garden needing attention and the weather growing warmer, I now spend more time out. I am sometimes pleasantly and sometimes alarmingly surprised with what I find out there after my migratory friends returned.

On March 29, I spotted a male Rufous Hummingbird for the first time. He may have arrived earlier and I may not have noticed him. If that was not the case, then he was late. The inclement weather could be blamed for that. Even in California it was a tough winter that did not want to give way to spring as we experienced in February-March. The females arrived early April. There was an immediate competition between the resident Anna's Hummers and the Rufouses for the best spots at the four feeders. The Anna's had already taken care of rearing their young so there were a few extra. At present the Rufouses have added some young ones of their own. With the bees frequenting the feeders too, it is perhaps time to put up a ticket dispenser so they can take a number!

In May I received an email from a fellow birder, who lives close-by, telling me about a bird visiting her feeder that she had never seen before on Salt Spring. By the way she described him I suggested a Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) as the most likely one, but of course I could not be certain not having seen it. I had seen a male only

once at the feeder in 2009. A few days after receiving that e-mail, what did I see at our feeder? A Black-headed Grosbeak and his female partner! I also heard its song, no mistake about that! Both returned to the feeder on a regular basis but they never stayed long and their visits were unpredictable. Its song is often described as a Robin in training. To listen to its song, click on this link: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black-headed_Grosbeak/sounds. The female Black-headed Grosbeak may show some blackish colouring on her head and back during the breeding season, but

in general she appears rather inconspicuously grey and beige. They are rather uncommon on Salt Spring according to the SSI Conservancy birding checklist.

Near the end of May the Swainson's Thrush returned and he brought a relative: the

Hermit Thrush. The latter appeared less shy than the Swainson's and from time to time we saw him (or her) rummaging in the underbrush. Both Thrushes look kind of drab: the Swainson's can be identified by its olive brown back, its dark spots on the chest and its distinctive buffy eye ring and face. The Hermit

Thrush can be identified by its white (not buffy) eye ring, absence of the buffy face, and it has a rufous tail contrasting with the browner back. The best way to distinguish the two is identifying their song. To listen to their respective songs, go the following websites: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Swainsons_Thrush/sounds, and http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Hermit_Thrush/sounds. The Hermit Thrush has moved on since, or he stopped singing, because I only hear the Swainson's now.

Our House Wren pair did not return to the nest



Above; Black-headed Grosbeak (female breeding) by Chuck Carlson: www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/ and below; Black-headed Grosbeak (male), Isaac Sanchez: www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/



Hermit Thrush. Ted King: www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/



Swainson's Thrush: Steve Arlow; www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/

box this year. In fact we did not see any House Wren. On the other hand, a Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) (non-migratory) has taken up residence in the Salmon bushes outside Kees' vegetable garden. He is usually a bit further up the road. The Bewick's is larger than the House or Winter Wren,

has a pointy bill, a long tail often cocked straight up, and distinct white supercilium (eyebrow stripes).

For the second year in a row we are hosts to two pairs of Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*). The Cowbirds arrived from Southern California, the Baja or Western Mexico in May. I have not seen their offspring yet, but that may still come.... Who knows which bird will be tricked this year into rear their young! Last year it was a Song Sparrow. They have a funny call: check it out: www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brown-headed_Cowbird/sounds.

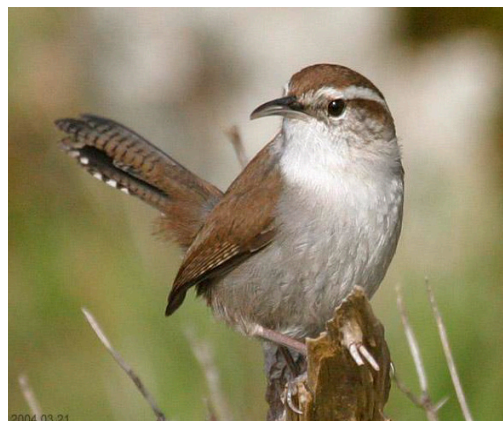
A little further along our road, I noticed a pair of Chipping Sparrows (*Spizella passerina*) feeding on the grass seeds beside the road. They also are migrating birds, wintering in the Baja and Western Mexico. I am led to believe that one or two stay behind and do not migrate. Over the last 3-4 years, I am getting consistent reports of sightings along Beddis Road from counters participating in the Christmas Bird Count. However, these reports are not added to the count because there is no confirmation in the form of a picture or sighting report by a second birder.

A pair of Western Tanagers (*Piranga ludoviciana*) is visiting my neighbourhood for the second year

in row now. They come from Central America to breed along the Pacific Coast and breed to nearly 60°N in the Northwest Territories, farther north than any other member of its mostly tropical family. The males are spectacularly coloured, yellow, red and black. The red pigment in the face of the Western Tanager is rhodoxanthin, a pigment rare in birds. It is not manufactured by the bird, as are the pigments used by the other Red Tanagers. Instead, it must be acquired from the diet, presumably from insects that themselves acquire the pigment from plants. The females are more subdued yellow and greenish. This pair breeds in a neighbour's yard, but they frequent our cherry tree. Talking about yellow birds, I almost forgot to mention the American Goldfinches (*Spinus tristis*). I see them every year. They too come from the south (southern California and around the Gulf of Mexico). They too breed and bring up their offspring on or near our property.

I have not seen the warblers that regularly come to our garden. We frequently used to see Orange-crowned Warblers foraging along the Huckleberry blossom in the spring (they have a sweet tooth) but not this year. Blossom may have been too late for them. Wilson's Warblers did not call at all this spring, or maybe they did when we were busy. They are usually on their way to their breeding grounds to the north of us. Only the odd Townsend Warbler came by once or twice to pick insects from the cedar leaves. But the most disturbing is the absence of our Violet-green Swallows. We have seen one or two go by but they did not stay. Certainly the numbers we saw when we moved here 8 years ago were not there anymore. At the time we had several pairs nesting under the cedar shingles of our roof. The shingles are still there, but no swallow nests anymore... Nesting has stopped about four years ago and since then they have been in decline rapidly.

Again, we can perhaps blame the cold weather that may have prevented a timely insect hatch and they may have stayed farther south. Perhaps, it is



Bewick's Wren: Ralph Hocken: www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/

Calendar of Events

Tuesday, September 6, 2011

Blackberry Festival

The 2011-2012 hiking season begins with the Blackberry Festival in Ruckle Park.

Tuesday September 13, 2011

Excursion - Pacific Northwest Raptors Ltd.

Meet at Portlock Park at 9:30 a.m. for carpooling to Duncan. Bring your lunch, binoculars, and the admission fee of \$12 adults/\$10 seniors. Depending on numbers, interest, and availability of a guide, there may be an optional guided tour for an extra \$2 per person.

September 17-18, 2011

Salt Spring Fair

Be sure to check out the Field Crops exhibit.

Thursday, September 29, 2011

Alternatives to Open Net Fish Farming

Anita Narwani, PhD

United Church, lower floor at 7:30 PM. Dr Narwani looks at open net-pen salmon farms that can threaten wild salmon populations due to the high density of sea lice that farmed fish can carry and to the waste from salmon production directly into the environment. She will discuss the potential to create a 'closed loop' fish grow-out facility with a goal to recycle fish waste in order to support high plankton productivity. This plankton production can then be used to feed fish, effectively closing the loop thereby reducing the risk that salmon farms pose to the environment.

Tuesday, December 13, 2011

Christmas Lunch

something else that I cannot explain from where I am.

If you like to learn more about birds in general, the All About Birds website (www.allaboutbirds.org/) shows pictures and provides information in a very informal and concise way. Meanwhile, happy birding!

A Trip to Sidney Island

Helen Hinchliff

We were five eager adventurers for last July's Sidney Island trip: Teresa, Lynda, Audrey, Lynn (Audrey's sister from Toronto), and Helen. Lynda and I were especially eager because we'd been waiting for an opportunity to visit the island for just about one-

quarter of a century! What on earth took us so long?

When we gathered in the ArtSpring parking lot we were concerned about the weather (it was overcast, but rain wasn't predicted until about 5 p.m.). We decided that Audrey's compact van was the most convenient form of transport that also made for the smallest ecological footprint. Once in Sidney, Lynda directed us to a free parking lot on the south side of the Anacortes ferry terminal. A lovely stroll along a landscaped sidewalk (just below a series of condos) took us to the dock at the bottom of Beacon Avenue. Along the way, we looked east toward Sidney Island in the near distance and the rest of the Southern Gulf and



Lynn, Audrey, Lynda, Helen and Teresa.

San Juan Islands beyond. Lynda drew our attention to a couple of bronze statues along the waterfront—one of an old fisherman, "There's always a flower in his hand," she told us. We lowered our voices and moved on quickly as we became aware that a woman was praying with him. The other statue was a sprightly Captain Hook complete with pegged leg.

Armed with pack lunches, water, cameras, binoculars, and more water (there being none on the island), we gingerly made our way down the gangway (which seemed almost vertical, because of the extreme low tide). It took twenty-five minutes to be ferried across and, as we disembarked, we found ourselves walking past several notice boards alerting us to purple martin nest boxes along the way.

Sidney Island is a part of the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve with amazing variety in topography for an area comprising only 400 hectares. Its main feature, Sidney Spit bar, seems to stretch for miles. Of course, we saw much more of it than usual because Teresa had timed the venture for an exceptionally low



tide. She'd warned everyone to bring footwear for sloshing around in tidal pools, but Lynda and I didn't have any. Content to stay on dry land and sit on a log, we watched as Teresa pointed out the distinguishing features of eelgrass and some slimy, thread-like seaweed that lay nearby. As Teresa led Audrey and Lynn farther and farther out to sea, we kept track of them with binoculars and then started pecking away at our lunches, it being well past noon. Lynn especially enjoyed the tidal pools and came away with a souvenir photo of two colourful starfish.

Our log was long enough for all five to eat our lunches, and we were warmed by the sun that suddenly appeared. Still, it was a bit breezy, so we continued to wear our jackets until later in the day. Concerned about the incoming tide, we walked out along the spit for perhaps a mile, looking across the strait to identify other islands with our maps. A variety of birds flew overhead, but most were incognito. A driftwood log lean-to someone had made looked more impressive at a distance than on closer inspection.

For a change of scene, we climbed the bluff and, after taking photographs of the view, we decided to hike the loop trail through an old growth forest, past a fenced-in area filled with ferns (to show us a forest without the contingent of fallow deer that are serving as overly eager weed whackers). Suddenly, our trail opened out into a meadow with marvelous views across to the Saanich Peninsula with what looked distinctly like rain showers over the distant hills while we were still basking in

filtered sunshine. For me, this was the best part of the whole trail, in part because it was so unexpected.

Then it was back to the ferry with Lynda leading the way at double time (she's a hiker!), Audrey and Lynn struggled to keep up with her, while Teresa and I lagging badly behind. But we made it clear to the others that we'd been taking time to study all the informational signs about the brick making foundry that got started in 1905 with the discovery of clay on Sidney Island. At first, it was dug out by hand and later by bulldozers. It wasn't much of a return—\$8 for 1,000 bricks—for what must have been a lot of hard work. The whole establishment went bankrupt in 1925. If not for the few broken pieces of brick strewn around, you'd never know it had been there.

We sailed back to Sidney on the 3 p.m. ferry and then walked briskly to our vehicle, taking time to warm our hands by stroking the bronze, but oh-so-lifelike, fisherman and to visit the facilities. Then it was on to Swartz Bay to make sure we boarded the 5 p.m. ferry and beat the rain. It started spitting just a few minutes before boarding time. We all agreed that five was the perfect number for such an adventure: we could peel off into twos and threes, each having a chance for an intimate chat with one another about books we've read, travels abroad, previous careers, men we've known, and how perfect the whole day had been.



PARC Past and Future Projects

Kees Ruurs

In the summer edition of the Oystercatcher, I mentioned that the trail in Bryant Hill as well as the

trails in Peter Arnell and the connecting trail between them had been completed, but that the signage was not installed. I can now report that all signage has been installed and you will have a hard time getting lost on those trails. Over the last couple of months the PARC trail crew has been busy upgrading and maintaining other trails too. Have you ever tried the short trail that connects Churchill Road and Long Harbour Road? Or the Dunbabin trail, between (401) Stark Road and Robinson Road? Have you ever been up Reginald Hill trail that starts at the end of Morningside Road? What about Fern Creek trail off of Isabella Point Road? Do you know about the new trail that was constructed down to Madrona Bay from Long Harbour Road (go up Long Harbour 1 km and you'll find it on the right hand side of the road). At the end of Armand Way is a trail that connects to Mt. Maxwell Provincial Park. The Duck Creek trail system saw major improvements this summer too. A new connecting trail was developed from across Mountain Park Drive down into Duck Creek Park. Have you ever hiked from the end of Desiree Drive along a PARC trail into Mt. Erskine? Did you know PARC has a small park just beyond the Long Harbour ferry terminal up Scott Point Drive on the right hand side, it is called Welbury Park and allows you a short hike down to the water's edge.

The Trail crew has worked on all these trails (and some) this summer. There is a little bit of crew time left this fall before winter sets in and we are planning to start the development of a trail through the western part of Mouat that will connect the existing trail system with Rainbow Road near Pallot Way. Another new trail that is still on the books to be developed lies between Blackburn Road and Frazier Road. If time allows we will also expand on the trail system that got its start this spring up on Trincomali Heights.

The other main project we have for this winter is to create trail maps for all these trails and to not only have those available at the office, but also on line for anyone to access. We have most of these individual trails mapped and if you drop in at our office at Portlock Park and ask for a copy of a map to be printed from our computer we should be able to accommodate your request.

Please let us know what you think about our trail work, where we need to improve trails or where we might be able to develop new trails. We can be reached at 250-537-4448.

SSI Trail And Nature Club

General Information

The Salt Spring Trail & Nature Club features weekly Tuesday outings September through June at three levels of ability as well as special hikes. The monthly schedule of outings and events appears in the Driftwood on the last Wednesday of the month and on our website at www.saltspringtnc.ca.

Ramblers (10:00 am to about 1:30 pm) enjoy walking without pressure with frequent time-outs to take pictures, to examine nature, or sample local restaurants.

Walkers (10:00 am to about 2:00 pm) move at a more relaxed pace along 8 km or less outings. They try to avoid difficult hikes and will stop to catch their breath along the way.

Hikers (9:45 am to 2:30-3:30 pm) keep fit with long, adventurous and occasionally quite strenuous hikes, and like to gain a bit of altitude.

On the fourth Thursday of most months, 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.

Hike Information

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.

Waivers: All participants need to sign a waiver form. For overnight and out of area excursions, a separate waiver is required.

Footwear: Wear boots appropriate for the terrain; sandals or clogs are not acceptable on any trail.

Dogs: dogs are not allowed on any club activity.

Conduct: Pack-out what you pack-in. Please pick up litter found along the trail and dispose of it appropriately. Leave plants, animals and trees undisturbed.

Leadership: The leader of the outing is ultimately responsible for the trip and has the final word on any change of plans. Under no circumstance should the group split up without the leader's consent. The leader determines: a) the destination, and b) where and when

to stop for lunch. The leader has the responsibility to make sure that no one is left behind. Counts should be held BEFORE and AFTER the excursion. A pocket-size guideline booklet on leading field trips available from Nieke Visser. Call 250-537-5443.

Missing Persons: Sometimes a few people get separated from the main group. When people are missing, the leader appoints a search party. Others stay in one spot with the leader. If after an initial search the missing person(s) is (are) not found, the leader notifies the RCMP by any means while the search is continued. The leader needs to make a report of the incident to be filed with the Secretary. Incident forms are available.

Accidents: In case of an injury:

- Evaluate the victim's condition and decide whether outside help is required. If not, the leader offers first aid.
- If help is needed, dial 911 on a cell phone.
- If a cell phone cannot be used, send at least two people with coinage and details of the accident to find a telephone or cell phone service area.
- Make the victim as comfortable as possible and provide shelter if needed.
- An incident report needs to be filled out by the leader and filed.

It's Renewal Time!

Barry Spence, Membership Secretary

Your SSTNC membership expires August 31 each year. Membership fees are due by September 30.

Fees for 2011/2012 are \$25 per person. Current members renewing their membership within 30 days of the due date get an early payment discount of \$5. So if you renew your membership before October 30, you pay \$20 per person; after October 30, the fee is \$25 per person.

Remember that separate signatures are required for the Membership Registration and for the Assumption of Risk (Waiver of Liability) form. All new and renewing members (including honorary members) are required to complete and sign both new forms for the 2011-2012 membership year.

Forms and fees may be returned by mail to the address on the form, dropped off to the Membership Secretary's envelope in the Cobbler's Box, or delivered by hand to the Membership Secretary or other executive member at any club activity. Payment by cheque is preferred. I will have printed copies of the forms at the Blackberry Festival. You may also download these forms from the Membership Info page of the Club's website at www.saltspringtnc.ca. Please use both sides of a single sheet of paper when printing the downloaded forms.



Box 203, Ganges PO
Salt Spring Island, BC
V8K 2V9

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