



Photo by Ann Manson, Wikimedia Commons.

Oystercatcher

Newsletter of the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club

Winter, 2011

The African Oystercatcher or African Black Oystercatcher, (*Haematopus moquini*) is a large and noisy wader with completely black plumage, red legs and a strong broad red bill. This oystercatcher population of less than 5,000 adults breeds on the rocky coasts and islands of southern Africa

President's Point of View

Kees Visser

Time flies, and this will be my last point of view as President. In January 2012 I will have served this Club for 7 years as Hiking Coordinator, Vice-President and President, and it is time for others to step forward.

In January 2012 we need to fill five positions on the Board: Ramblers Coordinator, Walkers Coordinator, Hikers Coordinator, Vice President and President. At present we have not been able to find members to fill any of these positions and it is clear that if these positions are not filled, our club cannot continue in its present format. We will not have weekly organized activities, no talks, no outings, no luncheons, and no overnight trips. Although each position is different, I suggest that the time commitment will be about 4 to 5 hours per month (for about 9 months per year), so not really extensive. This includes time on the phone, e-mail and the monthly meeting.

The three coordinator positions are obviously similar:

- contacting leaders a month or so in advance, forward these our webmaster, Sue Lehmann, who compiles them for the Driftwood;
- attending monthly meetings (8 at the most) and

the AGM. There is no need for the coordinator to be present at all outings or to attend all meetings.

The Vice-President is in charge of all social activities such as the talks (6 per year) and organizing the Christmas Luncheon and the AGM. Also this position does not require being present at all functions and meetings.

The President is the "CEO" of the Club; he or she chairs the meetings, oversees the smooth running of the Club's affairs and is ultimately responsible for the Board, the membership and the finances. This sounds all very serious. However, except for some possible isolated problems, with a competent Board it is an easy task.

Having said all this, our Club is a charitable organization under BC law and is a member of BC Nature, the Federation of BC naturalists and the largest nature preservation advocate in British Columbia. We have a large membership of around 230 and are financially very sound. This year we have organized many rambles, walks, and hikes on and off the island. I am happy to report that a number of new weekly leaders have come forward to relieve some of the old-timers. In May we had a very successful trip to Tofino with fantastic activities on Flores Island, Meares Island and surrounding waters, watching bears, whales and birds. Unfortunately there was no fall trip, but I hope we will

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

have one next year.

A few teams were busy cleaning windfalls in Ruckle and in Maxwell the last few weeks: Brian and Marjie Radford, Lynn Thompson, Ashley Hilliard, Zeke Blazecka, Herb Otto and Ben Neufeld. Many thanks, but unfortunately two days later a big storm hit our island !

Coming back to the beginning of my address, I really hope we will have a new Board for 2012. Otherwise we will be looking at a different organization or no organization at all. I would like to thank Marilyn Harding, Janice Dickie, Marcelle Roy and Niels Gerbitz for their two years on the Board. It was an honour and a pleasure to be your President over the last two years, and I will continue as Past President to assist the new Board as much as I can.

PARC Piece

Kees Ruurs

Even though the weather may not be very inviting we do have many sunny days throughout the winter too. On one of those days it might be nice to go for a short hike in the Baker Ridge area. PARC just completed some major improvements to the Baker Road beach access stairs. The stairs were becoming undermined and we had to reconstruct the base to prevent the stairs from collapsing. If you park at the end of Baker Road, go down the stairs, turn right along the beach until you get to another set of concrete steps. Go up those steps, follow the trail and you end up on Quarry Drive. Turn right on Quarry Drive and at the end of the cul-de-sac you'll find the trail that leads you back down to Baker Road. The last section down to Baker Road is rather steep, so take it easy on the steps. The entire loop will take you 45-60 minutes, a perfect little hike on a sunny winter day.

If you are out hiking any of the other trails on the island please let us know if you encounter anything that does not look right. The PARC trails are for non-motorized use only so if you see a dirt bike or ATV on the trail, do not try and stop the person but see if you can remember a description of



Ruckle Park walk, Tuesday Oct 4th. Photo sent by Renaldo Norman.

the vehicle and person and call out office (250 537 4448). We have a Bylaw Enforcement Officer whose duty it is to handle these situations.

Winter storms sometimes bring trees down on our trails. If you see a tree down across a trail and you can move it to the side please do so. If it is too heavy, call us and we'll get our crew to go out and take care of it.

Every year we have numerous volunteers who help us keep the trails passable, who remove invasive species from our parks or do other volunteer type activities. If you and/or a group of people is interested in helping to keep our parks beautiful and safe give me a call and we will gladly sign you up as a volunteer, even give you some tools and training to do some work in a park or on a trail.

The trail crew almost finished a new trail between Blackburn Road and Frazier Road this fall. Next season we will finish that trail and we plan on developing more new trails, such as one through the western part of Mouat. The Juniper area will likely see a new trail and a connecting trail between Dean Road and Drake Road should be completed. Another major project we will complete this winter is getting all the



Rambler walk on Nov. 15 with Jean Gelwicks of Island Pathways. Photo sent by Jean Gelwicks.

Trans Canada Trail News

Tuesday, September 27

The Kinsol Trestle on Vancouver Island's Cowichan Valley Trail was officially opened by their Excellencies Governor General David Johnston and Mrs. Sharon Johnston before 100 trail enthusiasts, donors and volunteers. The multi-million dollar restoration of the trestles involved all levels of government, volunteers and the Trans Canada Trail organization.

trail maps uploaded to our website and the development of a hard copy trail brochure.

Last but not least we wish to thank all the hikers and park users out there who have been so helpful in giving us ideas and suggestions for improvements to the system. Thank you and I hope to meet you on the trails.

Meet The Prince

Linda Quiring

If the lovely Chanterelle is Queen of the Fungi, then surely the Prince must be ... well, The Prince.

I find the Prince, or *Agaricus augustus*, to be rather elusive. He used to show up mostly in August, whenever we had a sudden rain after warm, dry weather. This year ... no rain for most of August and September and I have only seen one this season. I found it when I went to water an old rose at the corner of the fence I hadn't looked at for months. There, snuggled in the corner of the fence, so that it actually had two square corners, was The Prince, himself ... he was a little old.



Mature Agaricus augustus. Photo by George Chernilevsky, Wikimedia.

A few years ago, I found my first one at the corner of Banana Joe's driveway. The next year he (the Prince) had moved to the corner of North End and Whims Road. Then, last year, he appeared at the corner of MY driveway so you might say he is elusive AND solitary. He is also a big guy, up to 17" wide! The cap is a lovely warm brown and this 'shroom can be distinguished by a lovely almond odor.

The Agaricus family is probably one of the best known, and a relative of the Prince is the common small supermarket mushroom, *Agaricus bisporus*. The 'shroomers Bible, *Mushrooms Demystified*, by David Arora, lists 76 Agaricus, while my favorite book for local 'shrooms *The New Savory Wild Mushroom* by McKenny & Stuntz, lists the 8 most common in our area. Four are edible; The Prince, the Meadow Mushroom, The Snowy Cap and the Woolly-Stemmed. Two edible with caution and two are poisonous.



Emergent Agaricus augustus. Photo by Nathan Wilson Wikimedia

So, how to tell the difference? I think because it is easy to confuse with similar looking shrooms that are NOT good to eat, you should check out the web; 100's of pictures online, buy a book or two to help in identifying fungi, or show it to someone who's eaten it. The Prince is easy to identify after you've seen one or two. And Stuntz calls it, "One of the most desirable of edible mushrooms, meaty and of fine flavor". He also cautions, "be careful to distinguish this mushroom from *Agaricus praeclarisquamosus* and *Agaricus hondensis* which cause severe gastrointestinal poisoning in most individuals."

It's a little late for the Prince this year, but look for him next spring; never in the forest, and usually in the compost or along trails or roads. And enjoy the delectable, meaty flavor of this Big Guy.



Indridson Trail Crew Back row l-r, Ben Goodman, Kim Laidlaw, Kees Visser, Charles ?, Tony MacLeod and Ashley Hilliard. Front row : Dan Dickmeyer and David Paine plus Lou. Photo by Robin Annschild.

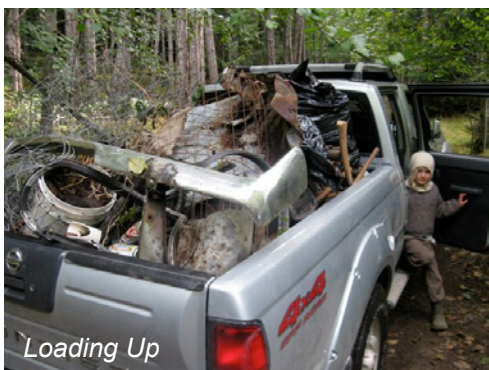
Salt Spring Island Conservancy's Newest Nature Reserve Gets a Cleanup

Ashley Hilliard

On October 14, seven members of the Trails and Nature Club joined Robin Annschild and her son Lou of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy for a cleanup of the newly acquired Alvin Indridson nature reserve. The Reserve was made possible through a generous donation from the Indridson Family, who envisioned protecting the property in perpetuity.

In a six hour, fall clean-up event the crew collected more than 590 kilograms of garbage from the 129-hectare property, along with five abandoned vehicles.

Several local riders who had participated in the off-road vehicle community forum earlier this year



were invited to help with the cleanup. Students from the Middle Years Shared Ecological Education Community also assisted. Large pieces

of metal and other piles had already been located on GPS, making the cleanup faster.

Along with a cleanup of the Alvin Indridson Nature Reserve, the Conservancy has undertaken an extensive hydrologic restoration within the property. In consultation with ecosystem restoration specialists, they are working to restore a significant amount of disturbed habitat back to its natural state, by removing culverts and restoring compacted soils to allow the forest to proceed through its succession to a mature forest. Culvert removal will help to reconnect the wetlands and restore the natural flow of the

watercourses on the property. Loosening the compacted soils will allow red alder trees to grow more easily and improve water infiltration on the land. Alders are nitrogen fixers, enriching the soil and preparing it for a healthy succession into a mature forest. Douglas fir and western hemlock will eventually dominate. The new reserve is home to a number of rare species and has significant wetland and mixed forest habitat.

There are plans for trails to be installed within the nature reserve in the future as well. The conservancy notes that the habitat restoration project could not have happened without the significant financial support from Wildlife Habitat Canada. The author will be leading a hike in this area with Charles Kahn on November 29.

NANCY BRAITHEWAITE - TRAILBLAZER

Andrea Rankin

Nancy Braithwaite, well known personality in our community, has distinguished herself in pretty well everything she has undertaken. She was one of the founding members of our flourishing Salt Spring Conservancy and can be seen attending all of their events, while simultaneously enjoying a concert at Artspring. How does she do it? She seems to possess the secret of omnipresence and inexhaustible energy. Many are the community organizations that have

learned that she can always be called upon to do her stint as a cheerful, reliable volunteer.

We in the Trail and Nature Club, have been lucky enough to be on the receiving end of Nancy's efforts since the early 80's. Not only has she been an active hiker and walker, for many years she was our Nature Representative, attending AGM's and summer camps of the B.C. Nature Federation and providing us with cogent, interesting reports about the activities of our provincial federation. With her organization of nature outings, she made sure the "Nature" part of our club was not neglected.

Nancy was one of the original Wardens of the Mill Farm which necessitated regular visits to the site, come rain or shine, over the sometimes almost impassible road. An ardent birder, she took over the Bird Count from Glen Moore in the mid 90's, a most time-consuming task in itself.

Nancy's schedule overlooks no one, not her old friends nor her new, not her neighbours nor the members of her poetry club, not her friends in Scottish Country Dancing nor her cousins and their children – she has time, respect and a pleasant chat for all. And all of this steadfastly without a computer or e-mail. Astonishing! And yet, she is more aware of current events than most of us. Nancy is a phenomenon, a true country gentlewoman, well-bred and elegant in knickers or shawl, knowledgeable, competent and available for any task – one of our truly revered Trailblazers.

HONOUR ROLLS

HONORARY MEMBERS

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

TRAIL BLAZERS

Nancy Braithewaite
Lynn Thompson
Bill Harrington
Paul & Beth Ranney
Owen Benwell &
George Hignell
John Myers
Ian Fraser
Bob & Betty Ball
Dick & Chris Pattinson

Betty Kirk
Brian Radford
Charles Kahn
Simon Rook
Jim Barber
Alan & Rita Robertson
Janet Anderson

NEW MEMBERS

Mei Hua Cameron
Wendy Ehlers
Helen Hinchliff
Bobbi Janowiak
John Wiskel
Laura Klein
Frank Marrek
Patricia Marrek
Randall Norman
Mary Vaughn
William Curtin
Doreen Fenton

Calendar of Events

December 13, 2011

Trail & Nature Club Christmas Lunch

Lunch will be served at the Golf Club Restaurant. Members will assemble anytime after 11:45 AM. A cash bar will be open. Lunch will be served buffet style at about 12:15 PM. As a special treat, Lynn Thompson has assembled a slideshow running in the background and Arthur Black has kindly agreed to speak and entertain us. Tickets will be available at the Soap Shop (now located next to the library construction site) starting December 1st, 2011.

January 26, 2011

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be on Thursday, January 26 at the Community Gospel Chapel at 12:00. Doors will open at 11:45. Following a light lunch of sandwiches, the annual meeting will begin at 12:15

February 23, 2012

National Parks in Utah

The Thursday, February 23rd talk on the lower floor of the United Church will be presented by David Denning on the National Parks of Utah. Program starts at 7:30pm.

March 22, 2012

Skyline Hike

On Thursday, March 22nd, 2012, lower floor United Church at 7:30 PM, Lynn Thompson will offer a presentation with photographs of the Skyline Hike he and several members of the club accomplished last year.

March 9, 2011

Wade Davis

"The Acorn" announced that Wade Davis, world renowned ethnobotanist and photographer will be at Artspring.

April 6, 2012

Karen Barry

From "The Acorn". Karen Barry, Bird Studies Canada. Community Gospel Hall.

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

Birds in my backyard and more...

Nieke Visser

Early October I attended a BC Nature Conference in Tsawwassen. The theme of the conference was migration, not only of birds but also of sea mammals (whales), salmon, and people too. Today I will focus on birds and their migration habits of three very common birds that use our region either to winter, to breed or both.

Why do birds migrate? What triggers these long treks from one end of the globe to the other? The annual cycle of migration must be timed in such a way that an abundance of food is and other environmental factors that have a critical effect on reproduction are optimal. Thus, the length of the journey dictates leaving wintering grounds and the optimum food supply in the breeding area; not whether or not food supplies run out or climate becomes unfavourable. Similarly, if birds wait until the climate is no longer tolerable to begin preparations for fall departure it would be too late to gain the necessary energy allowing for the required physiological changes associated with migration. Therefore, the stimulus for development of migration must be related to the eventual prospect of suitable environmental conditions to reproduce or survive the winter¹.

I like to discuss three examples of migratory habits of birds that regularly visit our property. Let's start with the Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*). This bird is a typical long distance north-south migrant. It breeds in western and northern US and Canada and winters from southern Mexico all the way to northern Argentina. It migrates widely throughout North and Middle America, but migration routes differ between western and eastern populations. It departs its wintering grounds in early March and moves through Central America in April as observed at birding stations in Panama. The eastern migration route heads for the Atlantic coast, crossing the Gulf of Mexico and stopping over at the migratory "refueling" areas in southern Louisiana's Mississippi delta. Most birds arrive at their breeding ground in New York State and

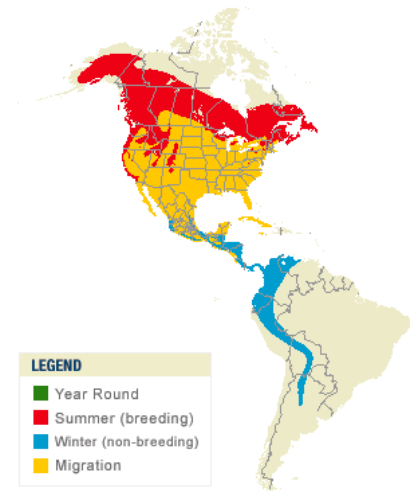


Vermont in late April to mid May. The central migration route via Texas and Oklahoma brings them to their breeding areas in Wisconsin and Ontario from mid April to mid May when the bugs (their main diet) are plentiful. The western route goes via San Diego and mid California arriving in

BC around mid May. In general, these thrushes raise one clutch of young between mid May and the end of June. The eastern route seems to be more popular than the central route during the migration southwards. It also seems to be more protracted: from mid July to October. In west North America, movement starts late August to mid September through BC. The western birds take the same route back to their wintering grounds.

The Swainson's Thrush migrates at night. Telemetry data suggest individuals depart shortly after sunset in clear conditions but later when overcast, and maintain constant heading regardless of wind conditions, cloud cover, or landmarks. Scientists discovered that they reach a ground speed of 15 to 96 km/h and that their flight altitude varies between 65 and 2,000 metres above the ground, with lower altitudes during fog or rain. They may follow wind directions when crossing the Gulf of Mexico².

Our next example, the American Robin is a well-known migrant. Its scientific name, *Turdus migratorius*, indicates already that this is a wandering bird with a complex migratory habit. Massive seasonal migrations occur across large areas of Canada, the U.S., and Mexico as individuals respond to the seasonal availability of soil invertebrates in the spring and of fruit in the fall. Conspicuous migratory flocks appear in early spring on lawns in temperate climate zones. In general, robins breeding in Alaska and the northern interior of Canada and the US winter in the southern U.S. and Mexico. But robins breeding in southern Mexico and southern Baja California are non-migratory, and many birds in British Columbia, California, and Newfoundland find winter resources in forested slopes and valleys apparently near their breeding sites.

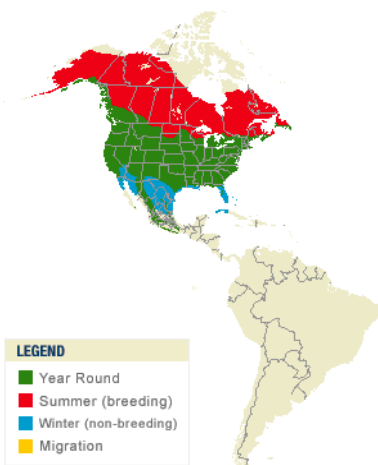




Wintering numbers may vary significantly from year to year in many (especially northern) areas.

So at first glance there seems to be no rhyme or reason to the robin's migration pattern: some move to places to

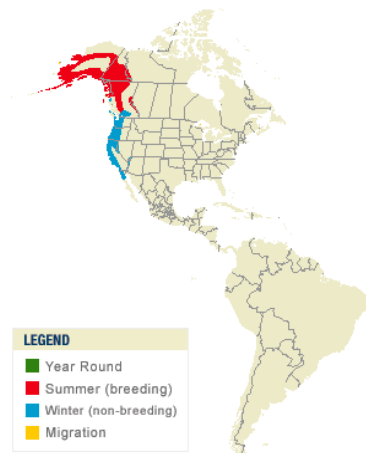
winter where others had been breeding while again others are stationary or seem to be. However, scientists have been able to distinguish some sort of a migration pattern. To give an example, we'll stick to western Canada and the US. In the fall, birds from Alaska and northern BC start migrating in early to mid-Aug and peak on Vancouver Island in November and early December where they tend to stay. Meanwhile, individuals breeding on Vancouver Island leave in July and August for the mountains of the southwestern U.S., Mexico, and perhaps as far as Guatemala. Migrants from montane and alpine forests join lowland winter residents in October. In the spring, birds that wintered in Mexico and Central America move northward through California in February, while many that wintered in coastal rain forests in Washington and British Columbia arrive in Alaska and northern BC in April³.



appear to migrate from Alaska, Yukon Territory, and British Columbia to low- and mid-elevation sites in western BC, Oregon and California. They leave their breeding grounds between August and mid September

and arrive on wintering grounds from mid-September through October where most remain until April or May. This bird migrates in flocks in both spring and fall and often forages with the White-crowned Sparrow. Flocks are sometimes large, up to 300 birds. These birds too migrate at night. Several observations suggest that they fly at high altitudes: a plane collided with a Golden-crowned Sparrow almost 3,000 m above ground (away from mountains) on 31 Oct. 1957 in California; frozen birds in spring plumage have been found above 4,000 m on Mt. Shasta, in California and Mt. Rainier in Washington⁴.

For most birds, migratory behaviour, distances, and times of departure and arrival are still a mystery. Banding and recently more technologically advanced methods have shed some more light on this miracle. Migration is driven by the need to eat. Why would



Christmas Bird Count 2011

Once again, Wild Birds Canada and the Audubon Society are running their annual wild bird count. Last year's December 27th count of 12,121 birds of 96 species. This year's count will be earlier, on Sunday, December 18th. As always, the twelve area counting leaders can use one or two additional pairs of legs and binoculars - so if you have wondered what this is all about, e-mail or call me and I can answer questions and put you in touch with one.

You can decide how long you want to be out, some count for an hour and some count all day (I counted for an hour last year :-), so have no fear and give it a whirl. Last year, Salt Spring had just over one hundred counters of varied experience from neophyte to PhD, but we know that with more counters on the roads and on the beaches we will be able to push our species total over one hundred.

If you have any questions, e-mail (tim@villagecobbler.ca), call (home 653-2356, shop 537-5015) or drop in to the Cobbler shop Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday (10:05-4:30).

Happy Birding
Tim Marchant

a bird like the Swainson's Thrush come all the way from Argentina to raise its young here? The answer is the availability of plenty of food and a suitable nesting habitat. It takes a lot of energy to make a yearly trek of ten thousand kilometres. It has been estimated that birds lose up to 30% of their body weight during migration. So, parents and young birds as well need to fatten up to prepare for the long journey. Only a well provided smorgasbord would help these creatures to refuel and rear their young.

And last but not least: for an amazing video on migratory birds, click on the link at the bottom of the article or copy and paste it into your browser:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56eU3KLIKZo&feature=channel_video_title&utm_source=Cornell+Lab+eNews&utm_campaign=9fd3ba100c-Cornell_Lab_eNews_2011_10_2610_26_2011&utm_medium=email

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¹www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/birds/migration/

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³Sallabanks, Rex and Frances C. James. 1999.

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⁴Norment, C. J., P. Hendricks and R. Santonocito. 1998.

Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*), 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/352>

Maps and pictures: Vancouver Avian Research Centre.



Now wasn't that a lunch. Photo taken at the Blackberry Festival by Connie Hardy.



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