



Oystercatcher

Newsletter of the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club

Autumn, 2012

The 45cm long American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*) has a black and white body and a long, thick orange beak. It is found on both coasts of North America from New England to northern South America and the Pacific coast of Mexico, Central America and northern South America. They nest on coastal island beaches and feed on marine invertebrates, using their large, heavy beak to pry open molluscs.

Ticks and Lyme Disease

Reuben Kaufman

Whenever I answer, "I'm a physiologist who studies ticks," to the obvious question, outdoor people inevitably express concern about ticks and Lyme Disease (LD). When you search the web, often the information provided about ticks and LD refers to the eastern or southeastern US, and at least some of that information will not be valid for BC. Also, LD is only one of numerous pathogens that ticks can transmit, depending on the species of tick and the geographical location. A great resource for tick-borne pathogens in our part of the world is the Canadian Lyme Disease Foundation (CanLyme) at <http://canlyme.com/>.

Ticks are amazingly gluttonous. A mosquito probably doubles in weight during its minute of feeding. But ticks¹ increase their weight up to 100-fold during their week-long sojourn on the host (Figure 1). To imagine that increase in weight, think of the difference between a small rat and a large St.

Bernard dog! Awesome, eh!

First some good news:

1) The majority of tick species are not transmitters of LD (caused by the spirochaete bacterium, *Borrelia burgdorferi*,² [B.b.]). On the other hand, the most commonly found tick on Salt Spring (*Ixodes pacificus*, Figure 2) is a known transmitter.

2) The proportion of the tick population infected with B.b. is as high as 30-50% in parts of the eastern US. We do not have reliable statistics for Canada, but in BC the proportion is likely closer to 1-2%, and probably not greater than 10%.

3) Almost all tick-borne diseases are transmitted via the saliva. But salivation does not begin in earnest before 24-48 hours of attachment. So if after an afternoon

¹ Everything about ticks in this article refers to the female; for various reasons (none of them sexist) the males are innocent!

² The bacterium was named after its discoverer, Willi Burgdorfer. I'm proud to say that he and I once had lunch together in Switzerland back in the mid-1970s; I paid!

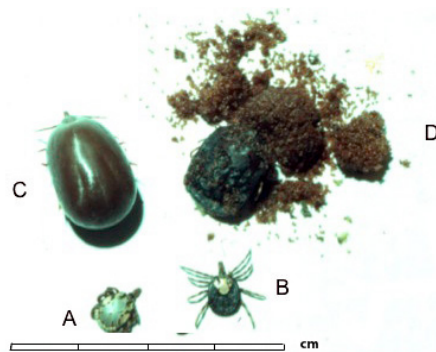


Figure 1: A very large African tick species (*Amblyomma hebraeum*) to demonstrate the gluttony of the female. (a) a male; it's not possible to tell from this image whether it is unfed or engorged! (b) an unfed female (c) a fully engorged female and (d) the purpose of the blood meal is to eventually lay a huge number of eggs for the next generation (after which, the female dies).

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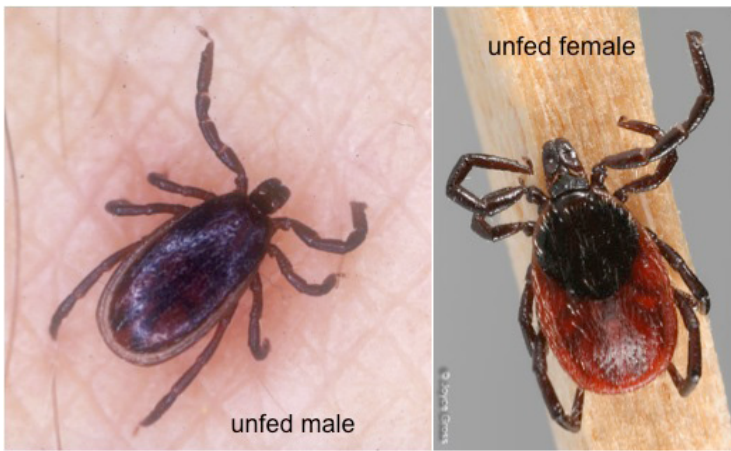


Figure 2: The local tick species on Saltspring, *Ixodes pacificus*. Figure of male, reproduced with the kind permission of Dr. Rick Vetter, U. California, Riverside. Figure of female reproduced with the kind permission of Dr. Joyce Gross, U. California, Berkeley.

of hiking, you had numerous ticks attached to you, and all of them were infected with B.b., but you removed them all when you got home, the chances for contracting LD are (theoretically at least) close to nil.

4) Even if you have been infected with B.b., a course of antibiotic treatment is generally highly effective, especially during the early stage of infection. For more information on treatment, see: <http://canlyme.com/just-diagnosed/treatment/>

Now some not-so-good news:

1) The adult *I. pacificus* is not large (~ 2.5 mm long), but that's not too difficult to see if you're looking for it. The nymph however is about one-third that length, and so rather harder to notice. The myth that it is the nymph, rather than the adult, that transmits LD arises only because it is far more likely that you will notice (and remove) an adult than a nymph. Both are capable of transmitting LD.

2) It is not easy to diagnose LD. The reasons for this are beyond the scope of this article, but you can learn more at: <http://canlyme.com/just-diagnosed/>

Some practical advice:

Obviously, prevention is always better than a cure. You can find a lot of valuable advice at: <http://canlyme.com/lyme-prevention/>.

Although the best prevention is to avoid areas where ticks are, CanLyme says that ticks favour moist, shaded environments - - especially leafy wooded areas and overgrown grassy habitats. "Reuben, hello" (I hear you all shout in unison), "We are the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club; "leafy wooded areas" are the exact type of habitat that we like exploring!" Agreed,

agreed! So how about this instead (also from the latter link):

- Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts. Tuck your pants into your socks to inhibit ticks from getting to your skin.
- Check your clothes for ticks frequently.
- Wear light coloured clothing to make it easier to spot ticks.
- If possible, avoid low-lying brush or long grass.
- Apply insect repellent to your skin and clothing.

However, if, at the end of the day, you find a tick attached to you, how do you remove it safely? First, take comfort in Good News #3 above. Second, keep a pair of fine tweezers in your hiking kit, and use those to remove the tick. For full details on how to, and how NOT to, remove a tick see: <http://canlyme.com/lyme-prevention/tick-removal/>.

A final word: although outdoor people should be aware of the potential risks posed by ticks, there is no reason to harbour an exaggerated fear of them, and certainly no reason to avoid the beautiful countryside we are blessed with on Salt Spring, just because we may occasionally encounter a tick. Just take reasonable precautions as outlined on CanLyme's website. Along with your tweezers, include a snap-cap vial in your hiking kit to bring home the tick(s) you have removed. First, someone can determine whether it is a species that is capable of transmitting LD. Second, there is also the possibility of having the tick tested for a B.b. infection if you should happen to develop some of the early symptoms of LD. Finally; it's now one tick fewer in the countryside for others to encounter!

A Note From the Editor

While I try to show my appreciation to all contributors, it is important for the readers to know how I rely upon them. I would especially like to note that Dr. Kaufman's article is an important contribution and I have to thank him and Teresa Hitch who provided the contacts. Also, Nieke's regular musings regularly comprise a large portion of the newsletter and, as she notes this is her last "Backyard" article, she will be sorely missed.

President's report

Kees Visser, President

As I write this, it is almost September, so our new season is almost here. We will kick off with the blackberry festival in Ruckle Park on September 11.

Have a short hike and bring your blackberry concoction and bowl/spoon/fork.

The summer started in earnest only in July, after a very long cool winter and spring on the West Coast. This is the third year in a row that this happened here, while the rest of North America seemed to bake. Some climate people call this “reverse warming”; George Orwell would have approved of this term. Early in August, club members, Susan Hennon, Lise Fraser, Lynn Thompson and myself hiked virtually all the alpine trails in Lake O’Hara, in great weather and losing a lot of moisture.

Herb Otto and a crew of 12 made a start to improve the Jack Foster trail. The work crew was predominantly female which puts us males a bit to shame, but we can make up for this in September. The first part was a boardwalk over a swampy section that we finished, and we thank BC Nature for providing the money for this project.

Herb will contact members in September, and we probably need a few more for the stairs to the beach. Thanks to a donation of the Salt Spring Island Foundation, we will be able to do this.

In June we also made a donation to Salt Spring Island Conservancy’s Stewards in Training Program. As a result we sponsored their Stewards in Training 2013 Nature Calendar, soon to be on sale.

I wish you a very good rambling, walking and hiking season and I did not even mention that we need a President, Vice-President and Secretary in January 2013.

Birds In My Backyard

Nieke Visser

There is always something to report and this spring and summer were no exception. A few years ago, Kees constructed two nest boxes meant for swallows. They were placed under the eaves as our helpful website, but there was no interest in our advertised real estate; that is to say, not by the swallows. One nest box never received any interest at all. We moved it to another spot, also without success. The other nest box was occupied right away. For two years, a pair of house wrens reared their young and hissed at us when we tried to sneak by on our way to the tool shed. (See the 2009 fall edition of the Oystercatcher). After two successful breeding efforts, the wrens moved on.

The other nest box never attracted any interest apart from a squirrel that one day tried to enlarge the opening. We chased the squirrel off, took that nest



Violet-green swallow by Nieke Visser

box down, and checked it (it was clean as a whistle). Kees tried to make the opening smaller again by adding a little piece of wood. The books tell you that openings have to be of a certain diameter if you want to attract potential occupants. We had no real hope

that Kees’ quick fix would help to attract any swallows. Still, the box was placed under the eave at the front of the house, facing southeast. To our surprise, about 6 or 7 violet-green swallows came by to check out this piece of real estate (a real “fixer-upper”) and low and behold, two of them eventually moved in. The box was near our deck furniture but our presence did not seem to bother them at all. Thus we watched the parents feed and rear four chicks while we were having breakfast or lunch right below their “house”. The chicks left the nest one by one over a period of about 10 days. To view my video, go to this YouTube site: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSAUyF8FY5M>.

At the same time, we noticed movement at the other box where the house wrens had been a couple of years ago. This time a pair of Bewick’s wrens had moved in. To get you up-to-date on Bewick’s breeding behaviour: both parents take part in the process, but each has a specific task. The male chooses the site and sings its heart out to attract a female. They both prepare the nest site and then the female sits on the nest continu-



Bewick wren by Nieke Visser

ously until the eggs hatch while the male brings her food. Our male has a funny way of leaving the nest after delivering a meal to his mate: he sticks his head out and scans his surroundings for a minute or so; then he turns upside down and clambers up to the eave of the woodshed and hoists himself up to the roof. There he gives a few songs before he hurries off to find more food. As I write this, the nest is still occupied. We are wondering if this is a second clutch. Bewicks are year round residents in our region and a pair may breed two clutches per season. Residents will breed their first clutch starting some time in April and the second, if any; will start in June, so we figured that we are witnessing a second clutch with this pair. We never saw the fledglings leave the box, but they were gone one day and were busy pestering their parents for food in the nearby hedgerow of oceanspray and thimbleberries.

One day a pair of turkey vultures decided to roost in the top of a Douglas fir close by our house. We could see only one at first, who had its wings spread



Turkey Vulture by Nieke Visser

like a cormorant (see picture above). We thought that was odd, but when consulting Sibley's (the birder's bible) we learned that turkey vultures often spread their wings when roosting, so it was not that unusual. When they flew away, we noticed there had been two vultures sitting in that tree.

Other "newcomers" in our neighbourhood were a pair of red-tailed hawks who moved in early in the spring. They built their nest on the bluff west of Beddis Road. I could hear the young hawks make a racket begging for food whenever I walked along Beddis but unfortunately, I could not locate the nest. One day in mid-June, one of them sat down at the top of a cedar and stayed there for at least 30 minutes. We were wondering if they did not trespass the bald eagles' territory that nest at the end of Rourke Road. However, he was never bothered by the eagles but was certainly

not popular with the robins who dive-bombed him when he came to visit. Hawks go after rodents so the recent invasion of rabbits in our neighbourhood may have lured them to this area. Eagles are more drawn to seafood and smaller birds, in particular if they can steal it from others. Last year we watched this eagle pair commit pure highway robbery: an osprey was trying to take a fairly large fish back to its nest when he found himself chased by one of our resident eagles. The other eagle sat waiting in a tree waiting for the osprey to fly by. The osprey was slowed down by its catch and with one eagle on its heels and the other one waiting to ambush him, he decided to drop it and get out there as fast as he could.

This will be my last contribution of "Birds in my Back Yard". But before I bow out, I like to take a moment to emphasize how important it is for the public to engage in nature observations and report findings to an agency like the Cornell Lab (US) and Bird Studies Canada. If we would leave observational studies to scientists alone, results of their findings would be inaccurate. Let me explain why.

Like most scientists, ornithologists have to apply for grants to do their research. The amount of money they receive is maybe sufficient for a few weeks of observations and data recording. It is easy to understand that such observations made over a short period could result in skewed results compared to observations that are made frequently over a number of years and in a widespread area by a large number of people. The first person who started this way of compiling observations was the American ornithologist, Frank Chapman. Prior to the turn of the century, people engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt": They would choose sides and go afield with their guns; whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won. Conservation was in its beginning stages around the turn of the 20th century, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, Frank Chapman, an early officer in the then budding Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition-a "Christmas Bird Census"-that would count birds in the holidays rather than hunt them... So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Frank Chapman and the enthusiasm of twenty-seven dedicated birders, twenty-five Christmas Bird Counts were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto to Pacific Grove in

California with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied around 90 species on all the counts combined.

This effort signaled the birth of the “Citizen Science” movement. With tens of thousands of observers all over North America, data are gathered either year round, during certain periods, or on specific dates (such as the Christmas Bird Count) in a myriad of locations. These observations are arguably not always accurate since the knowledge of the amateur observers is not always verifiable. In general, the rule is if you do not know or are not sure; do not report your observation. Admittedly, errors will occur. However, such errors are mitigated with the increase in observations. So rather than have a group of scientists observe for only a few days or weeks, now we are able to obtain data year round over many years, thus giving us a far more accurate idea of what is going on in the bird or plant world. The concept of Citizen Science has taken an enormous flight with the introduction of Internet supported data gathering and the use of GPS for exact geographical observations. Websites such as e-bird (<https://ebird.org/>), Project Feeder Watch (<http://watch.birds.cornell.edu/PFW/CheckUserLogin>), or plant watch (<http://www.naturewatch.ca/english/plant-watch/>) are helping scientists to put together a clearer picture of what is going on in our world.

I hope you all enjoyed my not so scientific observations and that these articles inspired you to look at birds a little closer and with some more interest. Keep a pair of binoculars handy and happy birding!

Hiking for Health

Lorraine Brewster, PARC

Hiking is Salt Spring Island’s most popular outdoor activity and no wonder, with so many amazing trails on the island. This summer, the PARC trail crew has been busy developing and maintaining trails including the new Blackburn Road Trail. The crew spent a number of weeks developing this link between Frazier Road to the north and Blackburn Road to the south. The construction was challenging for our trail crew, Xavier Smith and Justin Byron, as it is a linear access, which is 3m wide, and approximately 730m long with a change in elevation of about 110m. There is an undeveloped park that swings out to the east in the middle of the trail. The vegetation is coastal Douglas fir, western red cedar, big leaf maple, and

Calendar of Events

September 11, 2012

Blackberry Festival

The 2012-2013 hiking season begins with the Blackberry Festival in Ruckle Park. Meet at noon in the lower picnic area following morning activities. Bring your favourite blackberry dish to share and a bowl and spoon!

arbutus near the top. You will also experience salal, sword fern, oceanspray, and Oregon grape.

As you hike this trail, you may notice the materials used for the stairs. The trail crew was very resourceful and used the shrub oceanspray to complete the long staircase. After researching oceanspray, the crew found that this plant was commonly called ironwood, a name reflecting the hardness and strength of its wood. The Coastal First Nations used it for tools including digging sticks, spear and harpoon shafts, bows and arrows, and before in the use of nails, as pegs in construction.

There was no shortage of oceanspray along the trail, so the trail crew used a combination of oceanspray pegs, rocks and logs to complete the 730m long staircase without resorting to any outside materials. Though the construction materials are not conventional, the trail crew believes this trail will be durable in the long term and has a natural aesthetic appeal.

For hikers looking for a good workout, the Blackburn Trail has 194 stairs!

After finishing Blackburn, PARC started working on a new trail. The Dean Drake Connector Trail will connect Dean Road to the Drake Road school reserve. The linear park is about 300m in length, of varying width, and a level topography. Three small creeks intersect the park at the bottom of deep and steep ravines. Invasive species are prevalent through this area and removal is necessary to maintain the natural environment. Invasive species are the second greatest driver of biodiversity loss globally, preceded only by habitat loss. This trail will require some environmental rehabilitation efforts. Completion is expected at the end of September.

Stretch your legs and try out our new trails! Please contact PARC if you see any maintenance issues on the trail system.

Jack Foster Trail Boardwalk

Herb Otto

On July 9th and 10th, members of the Club prepared and installed 44 feet of new boardwalk on the Jack Foster Trail. For many years, trail users had to cross a very wet and muddy low area in the middle of the trail on their way to a beautiful beach at the other end. Winter and spring were particularly difficult, often requiring waterproof footwear to get through. During last winter, the Club applied for and received a grant from BC Nature to purchase materials to build the boardwalk.

The first day's cutting crew, including Lynn Thompson, Harold, Stuart and Herb, prepared the wood for the next day's installation. The installation crew included Cheryl Taylor Munroe, Laura Klein, Richard Shead, Kees Visser, Janet Haigh, Audrey Denton, Suzie Gagnon, Gary Adams, Lorrie Storr, and Herb.

The project went off smoothly with no injuries and no missing parts (of the boardwalk, of course). We thank BC Nature for the funding that made it possible to purchase all the materials for the boardwalk. A small sign will be posted in recognition of this assistance.

Phase 2 for this project is even more ambitious. The club will construct a set of access stairs to the beach at the end of the trail. This is planned for the fall when assistance will again be required. We will be looking for someone with access to a utility boat or skiff to transport materials and/or people to the construction site by water.

The Fungus Amungus: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly!

Linda Quiring

We had a prince for dinner the other night! No, not William or Harry.... it was *Agaricus augustus*... The Prince, the mushroom David Aurora chose to grace the cover of the 'shroomers bible; Mushrooms Demystified. Buy it now if you really want to hunt



and eat fungi this fall!

Out for a walk in the woods with the new dog, I spied something near a small stream, under salal, the last place you would normally find a prince. I think the super-dry conditions this year were just right. The Prince usually shows up around roadsides, driveways and compost heaps, almost never in the woods. But, deemed, "one of the most desirable of edible mushrooms, meaty and of fine flavor," says my favourite guide, *The NEW Savory Wild Mushroom* by McKenny and Stuntz.

My favorite mushroom - the Chanterelle, or *Cantharellus cibarius*, is one of the best-known and best-liked mushrooms in the West. Tender and of good quality, says The New Savory. Bill loves the Oyster, or *Pleurotus ostreatus*: it fries up crispy and nice.

Other locals you can eat: lobsters, shrimp, hedgehogs, boletes, and good luck if you can find a morel or pine mushroom on Salt Spring. We've also begun eating shaggy *Lepiota*, described as "Edible with Caution". This leads me to, "The Bad!"

We found a huge fungus while cycling the Goose, near the path in a pile of manure! Of course I took it home to identify. It looked scary so I just dumped it...but next spring, it showed up in the greenhouse when I began to water. After a few years of spreading around, I tried to identify it again, and sure enough, it was the shaggy *Lepiota*...or *Macrolepiota rachodes*! It is "one of the best edible mushrooms" says The New Savory. They add a caution: "Some in-

dividuals develop gastric upset from eating it.

Also is quite similar to the poisonous *Chlorophyllum*, in fact, it is very difficult to tell the difference!" No



Macrolepiota rachodes by Jean-Pol Grandmont at Wikimedia Commons

wonder I was scared but I was curious and ate just a small amount the first time, and little more, then found we can eat it - no problem! There are others in this 'questionable' class including some *Russulas*, some *Agaricus* etc. Careful with this bunch!

Now the Ugly part! Any of these mushrooms can be confused with other look-a-likes! It seems every single one of them has a very similar and sometimes indistinguishable look-a-like, which I guess is what makes 'shroom hunting so exciting! Rumour went around a few years ago that there were NO poisonous 'shrooms on Salt Spring! Not So! Apparently, an expert had told someone there are no poisonous boletes; there are some REALLY REALLY SCARY ones out there! Don't Eat Them! These would include the lovely, white and innocent-looking *Amanita virosa*, or destroying angel or its cousin *Amanita phalloides* or the death cap. You get the idea....

So, go to any 'shroom walks you can find. I usually do one in the fall and there are several on the big island. Buy a good guide; one or both of the above. Go out with someone knowledgeable and never, ever eat one until someone else identifies it who has eaten it! Even then, be cautious.

Best of all, we may finally have a kind of amateur Salt Spring Mycological Society here this fall. Keep in touch and pray for some early, warm rains - like in '98, the last great 'shroom year. It rotted all the squash, but we had Chanterelles to last a year!

2012 BC Nature Camp on Salt Spring: a Success Again

Nieke Visser, BC Nature Director

Salt Spring Island must have a magical ring to most people who do not live here. Or perhaps we

residents just take the island for granted. In any case, it was no big deal to fill the 2012 Camp. Registration started on January 15 at 9:00 am and could be done by email or by telephone. What happened next was beyond anyone's expectation: the camp filled within one minute. It was embarrassing to tell those who emailed or phoned only a minute or two later that they were already on the waiting list. Thus, on Monday, June 4, 24 lucky ones boarded the ferry for a 4-night/ 5-day Salt Spring experience. Following room assignment and check-in at the Cusheon Lake Resort, the first outing took them through Andreas Vogt Nature Reserve, a Gary Oak/Arbutus habitat (the Douglas Firs had been logged in the 1980's), presently managed by the SSI Conservancy. Lately, Conservancy biologists have fenced two large areas of this habitat to keep the deer (and feral sheep!) out and pray the flowers that would normally carpet the ground below the oaks will return. At the entrance to the reserve, a beautiful interpretive sign has been erected explaining the many features of this special area.

We also explored the newly acquired Alvin Indridson Nature Reserve in the southwesterly part of the island, adjacent to Mill Farm Nature Reserve. Another park we visited was Ford Lake, under management of Ducks Unlimited and presently still an active sheep farm. Ford Lake is only accessible with special permission that was granted the camp for two days. This wetland's presence ensures an abundance of birds. Some of the Camp participants used this opportunity to add their observations to the BC Breeding Atlas. Well done!

Other excursions included a hike up Mt. Maxwell for some breathtaking views and Zeke's B&B treats, and a loop through the Tsawout Band's Reserve. The Band, principally located on the Saanich Peninsula, used this area as a summer residence for clam fishing.

The group explored the ocean both on the water and along low tide line. The killer whales did not show themselves and neither did the porpoises, but a squabble between a large group of turkey vultures and a bunch of bald eagles over a carcass on a beach sufficiently made up for that. We also came across a few lingering Stellar sea lions and a group of oystercatchers breeding on a rocky island in Plummer Sound. Of course, geology was on the menu as well. Under the expert guidance of Jack Gunn and John Moore, the group was introduced into the secrets of how rocks be-

came what they presently are. Dinner was enjoyed at three Salt Spring restaurants. The fourth dinner was a catered meal at the resort. This camp was a success on all fronts. Here are some of the comments we received:

“A wonderful, well-organized and enjoyable camp; the weather was excellent, the program was awesome, and the food fabulous!”

“A very interesting and definitely informative program”

“Great to have speakers explaining the excursion the evening before”

“Superior to many other camps, smooth organi-



zation and lovely accommodation”

“Very well-organized and interesting camp; I had a wonderful time”

“I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to be hosted by such knowledgeable and gracious people.”

“Great birding!”

Last but not least, I want to mention everybody involved in this camp: Ashley Hilliard, Susan Hannon, Zeke Blazecka, Richard Shead, and Kees Visser (SSTNC and/or the SSI Conservancy), David Denning, Karen Ferguson and Robin Anshild (SSI Conservancy), Ian Gidley (Outdoor Visions), and Jack Gunn and John Moore (geologists). Thank you all! Without your enthusiasm and expertise, this camp would not have been such a success!



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