



J.J. Harrison from Wikimedia.com

# Oystercatcher

Newsletter of the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club  
Winter, 2012

The **Pied Oystercatcher** (*Haematopus longirostris*) is native to Australia. It frequents sandy coastlines, feeding mainly on bivalve molluscs. Its characteristic 5–8 cm long orange-red beak, slender pink legs and black and white plumage, make the pied oystercatcher easy to recognize.

## President's Point of View

**Kees Visser**

It is December, and this will be my last President's report. Next year, on January 24, 2013, we will chose a new President.

On November 29 we had 41 engaged members show up to a special meeting to discuss the Club's organization. It became quickly clear that virtually everybody wanted the club to continue. This is no surprise, we are financially healthy and the membership is 200 plus, showing that a great interest exists in the activities offered by the club. However, this means that the membership has to contribute to running the club.

We had a good discussion on various topics and below are my some of my conclusions:

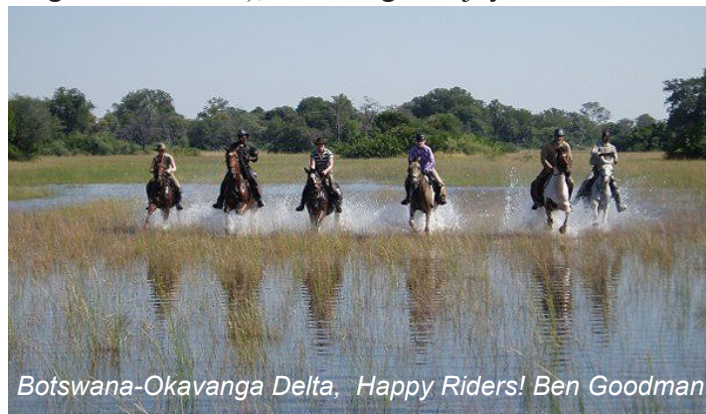
- The club remains a charitable non-profit Society. Although we do not solicit money ourselves, we help other organisations through our status.
- The club remains an affiliate with BC Nature. Their activities and newsletter are appreciated by many members. This affiliation allows us to have our liability insurance via BC Nature, but membership fees will be tied to this affiliation (presently \$25/year).

*Article continues on page 3*

## Hiking by Horseback

**Ben Goodman**

I know what you are thinking – this title doesn't make sense. And what is a "horsey" article doing in the Oystercatcher in the first place? The fact is, there are a lot of similarities between hiking and horseback trail riding. Both hikers and horseback riders (when at a walk) progress at about the same pace-3 miles an hour. Both activities are an ideal way to view the landscape, flora and fauna at a relaxed pace, enjoy the fresh air and get some exercise. That's probably why most of us hike. That's also why Judy and I ride. As riders, we also enjoy the partnership with the horse. To the extent that the partnership works (and that all depends on your training and preparation for long distance rides), the riding is enjoyable.



Botswana-Okavanga Delta, Happy Riders! Ben Goodman

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

Okay – so having convinced? you hikers that what follows may have some relevance in “your hiking world”, here’s a brief account of our riding, or “hiking by horseback” in Botswana.

“Hold tight, it’s only a mock charge” our lead guide signaled us. It’s hard to absorb the meaning of mock when six tons of bellowing elephant is charging towards you! As part of the introduction to the riders on the first day of our 2007 trip to Botswana’s Okavanga Delta, we were instructed on the protocols of horseback riding in areas where we were likely to encounter animals. This included silent riding, observing guide signals and most important - that we must collect and prepare to move off in a controlled quick manner when signaled by our guide. Of course our guide was quite correct in his reading of this elephant’s intentions; the young bull elephant will often feint a charge if he feels you may be invading the 15 or 20 feet of separation he insists be preserved between his herd and potential invaders. Over the course of our riding in Botswana, we gained a great deal of respect for the knowledge of the guides. Apart from their riding skills and horse knowledge, they easily responded to the most detailed questions on plants, trees, birds and animals.

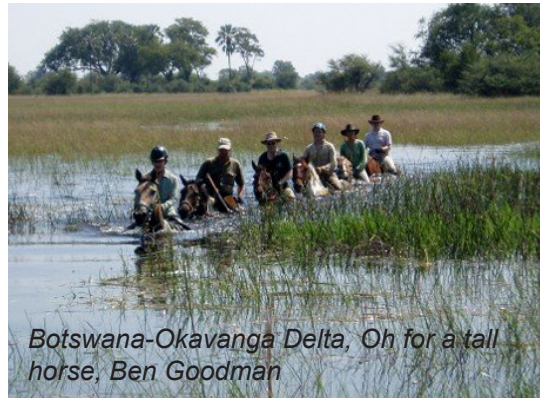


Botswana is a land-locked country in southern Africa bordered by Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. It has a population of 2.1 million, is about the size of Alberta (also with a large resource-based economy) and is relatively stable both politically and economically. We have enjoyed three riding trips to this fine country.

Our days started with a 5a.m. wake-up call from West, bringing us our choice of morning beverage. We wanted to get out on the trail by 6:30 at the

latest so to ride in the coolest part of the day. Sounds onerous but it worked well. We stopped riding at around 1, for lunch and an afternoon siesta. The evenings offered other activities. The camping is quite comfortable with full headroom tents and raised single beds with sheets and pillows, hot showers and all the comforts you really need. Food was all cooked over an open fire – simple breakfasts, good sized lunch and fine dinners with drinks and wine.

The riding was excellent. Good opportunities for canters and gallops, many “water canters” which provided thrilling fast rides through 10 to 15 inches of



water over solid surfaces – we got quite wet! In some areas, we waded through deeper water, at times up to

the bottom of the saddle. Each time we stopped for a brief break, our guide would caution us to collect and remain in the saddle until he had circled around our stopping area to check it out for animals. This then provided a safe spot for us to dismount. Each of the 3 staff riding with us had distinct responsibilities. The lead guide chose the route for the day, determined the riding gait changes, tracked game and was responsible for the overall safety of the group. The backup guide rode at the rear of the group, and supported the lead guide, advancing to the front at any time there was any potential confrontation with game (both were armed). The scout ranged through the group of riders helping with any tack adjustments, indicating presence of game sightings, and always at the ready to lead the riders out of harm’s way if the lead guide so indicated. These three staff operated efficiently, were always in control and conscious of the surroundings. The riding was both safe and exciting.

The next part of our riding was in an area quite different from the Okavanga Delta. This was in the Limpopo River area in the northeast of Botswana called the Tuli Block. Our favourite sightings were the elephants and the giraffe. The elephants are huge, particularly when seen from the perspective of horseback. Giraffe are easier to get close to and seem not to





*Botswana-Tuli Block, Very approachable beasts ready to play. Ben Goodman*



*Botswana-Tuli Block, A Gathering of Families. Ben Goodman*

be disturbed by the horses. They are very elegant animals. On one memorable occasion, we had the chance to canter alongside two giraffe, about 50 feet parallel to them. When they got ahead of us, they stopped, looked back and seemed to be waiting for us to catch up. When we did, we all cantered off again. This happened about 3 times – a thrilling experience!

On one day, we were just finishing a canter across a wide-open grassy meadow, and were approaching a small treed coppice. Suddenly, a rhino emerged, not too pleased to be rudely awakened by our cantering horses. Rather than take off as is their usual response, this grumpy bull decided to teach us a lesson and turned towards us with intent. So, we turned and thundered back over the same field with “grumpy” in pursuit. He eventually got tired of the chase and retired. Our guide handled the situation calmly and with professional spirit. This bit of excitement along with a standoff with a Cape Buffalo, some spooks when Warthogs and Antelopes darted out in front of our horses, were all indicators that exploring wide-open space and interaction with game by horseback can be action packed. Having done two previous horse safaris, we were not surprised. On several evenings we did some game drives in a vehicle, so could make comparisons. While you may get closer to game in a vehicle, you don’t have the same sense of adventure as you do when riding a horse through this country. We have come to recognize that perhaps the appeal for us is that horseback safaris are not a “spectator sport” – you are the action!

With much of our riding time at a walk, we had many opportunities to witness the trees, flowers and animals making these rides truly a nature lovers dream. One area we rode through had a large growth

of wild sage. The aroma created by the horses hoofs tamping down the sage was quite special, so we did have time to “stop and smell the roses” as we rode through the country. Since the Limpopo River area is very dry, we were able to get out in the evenings on bush walks, a different way to experience the landscape and view the animals.

“Oh give me land lots of land and the starry skies above, don’t fence me in.” This refrain, from a 1930’s song about the “old west”, aptly characterizes the appeal of riding in countries like Botswana – the wide open spaces, combined with the uniqueness of interacting with game at home in their own territory. As long as you respect that it is “their territory”, you can stay out of trouble.

## **President’ Point of View** *continued from first page*

However we do need someone, who will be contact person for BC Nature (i.e. BC Nature Director).

Sue Lehmann pointed out to me that the club really exists of three groups, the pure hikers/walkers/ramblers, the community oriented members and the nature oriented members; of course there are some overlaps. I feel that everybody in these groups can have a place in our club.

Some hikers preferred to have an ad hoc organisation, such as the Island Paddlers, with no Board, but email communication about upcoming activities. There appeared to be a consensus that this approach can only work in a smaller group, but will not work in a large group with wide ranging interests, like our club.

I realize that we have members who are only interested in walks in the wood, and there is a place in the club for these members, but this means that they

have also to take responsibility in leading these events. We cannot continue to rely on only 3 or 4 leaders. I know for sure that all the present leaders are very willing to share their experience. A large number of options were brought forward at the meeting of how to possibly improve on this.

With your input of last week, the Board is working on reorganising the Board. There seems to be agreement on the following: (However keep in mind that the Board meeting still have to take place)

- The Board will be smaller. Only four or five Officers: President, Treasurer, Secretary, Past President and possibly another one to make an odd number.
- The three activity coordinators, trail coordinator, membership secretary, BC Nature Director, Website coordinator and Oystercatcher editor will be invited to the meetings and if present, will have a vote.
- Number of meetings per year will be reduced to four from seven at present and email will be used more often to address some issues.
- The annual membership form and formality will be simplified.

Having said all this, the fact remains that we need members to take up positions, and for 2013, we need a President, a Treasurer, a Secretary and a BC Nature Director. See elsewhere in this issue, some more information. There were 40 plus concerned members present, so some of these forty should be able to do these jobs. The time commitment is minimal, 6 to 8 hours/month. These positions are very good for members new to the island, as board members are quickly exposed to a large number of people. But also some old timers, even if you have served 1 or 2 years in the past, should step forward.

Although I did not say this explicitly at the meeting, if nobody steps forward, we will be thinking about a motion to dissolve the club.

On another note, we were not able to finish the stairs to the beach at the end of the Jack Foster Trail, but we will be committed to do this construction before June 1, 2013. Thanks to the Salt Spring Island Foundation we have Funds for this project .

Also, we have entered into a co-op agreement with Parks and Recreation. This agreement provides us with a University of Victoria Student who will be working with P&R in 2013 (see article by Lorraine

Brewster in this issue). P&R will provide and support all financial, insurance and liability issues. As Trail and Nature Club we are interested that we can continue to do our “walks in the woods” and hence we were willing to support this project

Our last hike/walk/ramble in 2012 will be December 11, just before the Christmas lunch. Our lunch is at Calvin’s; tickets (\$20) are going fast and by the time you read this, they might be gone..

I wish you all a merry Christmas and happy hiking in 2013

## Trailblazer 2012 - Zeke Blazecka

The Board is very pleased to announce Zeke Blazecka as the 2012 trailblazer.

Zeke is from Slovakian descent, but he has never been there. Graduating with a civil engineering degree, he chose a career with the military. He retired as captain with the Air Force in Edmonton. During his career he spent considerable time overseas as part of Canadian peacekeeping efforts, mainly in Cyprus



Zeke hiking on Mount Erskine

and Turkey. Fortunately for us, Giz, his spouse, chose Salt Spring to retire. Retiring may not be the right term as he still is very active in a large number of organizations: Search and Rescue, Island Pathways, Artspring, and the Salt Spring Visitor Centre to name a few.

Zeke joined the SSTNC Board of Directors in 2006 as Vice-President. He followed this up as President in 2008

and Past President in 2010, totalling 6 years. Zeke has lead and still leads many hikes, mainly in the south end. He started the B&B (beer and bratwurst) hike from Armand Way and up Mt Maxwell that has become the traditional first hike of the season in September.

Zeke’s sunny personality, is always ready for a joke. On hikes he keeps himself busy, clearing trails and moving objects out of the way. This unrelenting



“busyness” makes Zeke happy even if it drives others nuts. He continues to lead hikes and we hope he will keep on doing it for many years to come.

Congratulations to Zeke and hopefully we will continue to enjoy his enthusiasm in the Trail and Nature Club.

## Lake O’Hara Hike Photo Story

*Lynn Thompson, photographer*

Four of our members spent Aug. 8-11, 2012 hiking in the Lake O’Hara area of Yoho National Park.



*Lise Fraser on one of the climbs, Kees overlooking Lake O’Hara area.*



*Short-tailed weasel*

## Calendar of Events

**December 7, 2012**

### **The Joys of Watching Nature: Tips and Tricks for Observing Wildlife on Salt Spring Island**

Lion’s Hall, Bonnet Avenue, Salt Spring Island from 7 to 9pm. Briony Penn, Mike Grandbois and David Denning will give short (20 minute) illustrated presentations on such diverse topics as “fish finding by flashlight,” “eagle eyes and gull gullets” and “the path to enrichment,” and then answer questions from the audience.

**December 11, 2012**

### **Trail & Nature Club Christmas Lunch**

The Christmas Luncheon will be at Calvin’s on December 11. Price will be \$20 for a 3-course meal. Seating will be limited to 50 members. Tickets are available from Soap Works but cut-off (only a few left) will be at 2:00pm Saturday December 8. Start gathering at 11:30 to eat at noon.

**January 8, 2013**

### **New Hiking Season Begins**

Check the web page or The Driftwood for details of upcoming hikes, walks, and rambles.

**January 24, 2013**

### **Annual General Meeting**

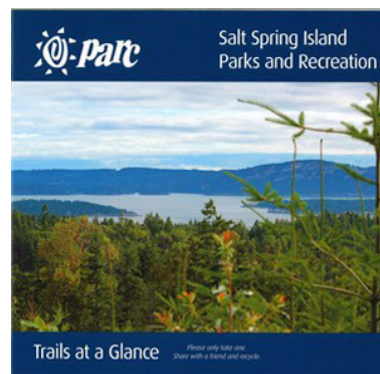
Community Gospel Chapel. Lunch will be provided. Doors open at 11:30, Meeting will start at 12:15, and presentation around 13:00. A presentation by Lynn Thompson will be on Lake O’Hara, Yoho National Park.





Susan Hannon, Lise Fraser, Kees Visser, Anita Garland (friend of Marjolein from Calgary) and front Marjolein Visser, Lynn Thompson

Hiking the trails on Salt Spring Island is good heart health! Launched this fall, PARC produced “Trails at a Glance” brochure that features all of our trails! The brochure provides 19 trail systems with a locator map on the back page. Each trail description provides information about the trail, length, use, and trail level rating. Please provide us with your comments, as we will be revising the brochure on a yearly basis. The trail brochure is available at the



PARC office. We ask that you only take one copy, share with a friend and recycle.

### Exciting Updates on our Trail System

Our trail crew has completed most of the trail system on Dean-Drake road. However, two ravine crossings still need to be completed in March 2013. When the trail crew started on the new trail, they were surprised to discover deep ravines and a large area of invasive species. One ravine crossing has been completed. The pictures provide a snapshot of the trail work.



On the Blackburn

Park Trail, the crew installed a bridge and trail head signs. If you haven't hiked this trail, get ready for a challenging up hill workout! The trail length is 745 m and the trail level is difficult. The location is at the very end of Frazier road and the other access to the trail is near the corner of Blackburn and Sunrise road. This trail is not included in our new brochure but will be added in the update.



## 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  
Zeke Blazecka

### NEW MEMBERS

Maureen Ballantyne  
Tudor Davies  
Gwenlais Davies  
Lisa Earl  
Basil Franey  
Suzie Gagnon  
Jean Gelwicks  
Peter Lamb  
Garry Gray  
Jane James  
Brian Lawson  
Jenny Meyer  
Jackie Somers  
Linda Steager  
Gwyn Strike  
Ken Strike  
Margo Zak

## Healthy Trails, Healthy People

### Lorraine Brewster PARC

Parks are part of our healthcare system. More and more evidence supports the link to green spaces and solving hypertension, anxiety, depression, and diabetes. The more time people spend outdoors, the less likely they will suffer from mental or physical disorders. A few scientists are doing innovative research trying to capture the data on healthcare and parks.

## New Interpretive Signage Project at Mouat Park!

The Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club, in partnership with the Parks and Recreation Commission will be having a cooperative education student from University of Victoria to take the lead in the consultation and creation phase of an interpretive signage initiative, piloted in Mouat Park in Ganges. The student will collect and describe park visitor interests to evaluate how their experiences can be strengthened. The student will use this study to develop interpretive sign messages. It is our intent to create messages that improve visitor knowledge in three areas; the health benefits of park visits, the environmental benefits of parks, and the cultural significance of the land and ecosystem. We will use Mouat Park as a pilot site to evaluate the effectiveness of the new messages on the visitors' understanding and behaviour. As we succeed, we will expand the initiative to other parks and trail systems on the island.

The health impacts of public green spaces have been well documented including opportunities to engage in physical activity, as well as connect with nature. Parks and green spaces can provide learning opportunities and the intent of this project is to create messages that resonate with visitors' experiences and interests, and stimulate public understanding of parks' and trails' values to health, environment, and culture.

Be sure to pick up a new trails brochure and keep hiking this winter. Please let us know if you notice any maintenance issues on the trails. We can be reached at 250-537-4448.

## Christmas Bird Count

*Nieke Visser*

Mark Sunday December 16 on your calendar for the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) this year. An early one but it may suit quite a few people who otherwise are unable to participate because of family obligations at Christmas time. So dust off your binoculars, get together with friends and family and go to your favourite park, walking trail, beach or hill, or watch your feeder in your backyard to see how many birds you can find.

Last year's bird count was held on December 18 on a sunny, albeit breezy day. The favourable weather conditions brought out 107 counters in total, many of them SSTNC members. Together Salt Springers recorded 14373 birds over 92 species. I am keeping track of the counts since 1999 and this was an

average counter turnout, an average number of birds as well as bird species. Some results warrant attention: for example, the number of western grebes have declined from 500-700 in the period 1999-2003 to a pitiful 15-20 during the period of 2008-2011. Long-tailed ducks seems to have gone the same way: in 1999, 98 were counted, and 38 in 2000, while the following years they disappeared from the scene but for 5 or less in some years to none at all in other years. Buffleheads on the other hand were counted in record numbers last year

(704) as were red-breasted mergansers (244) and Americans widgeons (775). And so were the Anna's



hummingbirds: first recorded at the 2004 CBC (3 Annas for the whole island) to 89 in 2010 and 87 last year. The statistics also show variation in numbers of species: the number of robins, siskins, juncos, chickadees, for example, can vary widely from year to year.

The Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club has sponsored this event for the past 25 years by paying the \$5 fee for its participating members. Non-members had to pay the \$5 fee and this may have deterred some people from participating. Speaking from experience, for zone coordinators collecting the fee from non-members was a pain in the neck. This year the fee has been abolished, but participants are invited to donate what they can spare to Bird Studies Canada to offset costs and sponsor research projects that use this extensive data base. The Trail and Nature club has decided to answer the call for a donation and will support this year's count with a \$100 donation.

### A bit of history and background

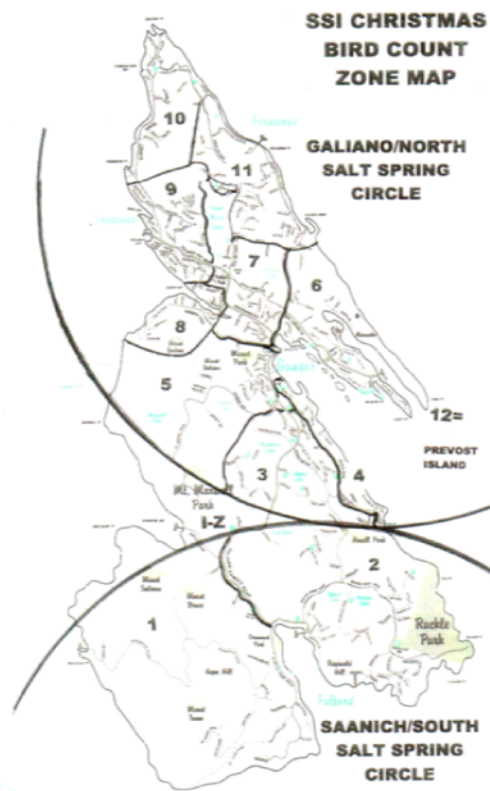
In 1900, American ornithologist Frank Chapman asked birders across North America to head out on Christmas Day to count the birds in their home towns and submit the results as the first "Christmas Bird Census", now called the CBC. This annual data collection provides important information for bird conservation. For example, these data were used in assessment reports that added Western Screech-Owl,



Rusty Blackbird, and Newfoundland Red Crossbill to the Species at Risk Act lists, and the general database was used extensively in the recent State of Canada's Birds report.

### How the CBC is organized

In general, CBCs are conducted on any one day between December 14 and January 5 inclusive. They are carried out within a 24-km diameter circle that stays the same from year to year. Salt Spring Island is, unfortunately, divided over two circles: the north end is part of the circle that also includes Galiano Island, the south end is part of the Saanich Peninsula circle (see map). The Bourgoyne Bay/Sheppard Hills area falls in between the two main circles. To facilitate the local count, Salt Spring is



also divided into 12 zones covering the two main circles as well as Bourgoyne Bay. Each zone has a Zone Coordinator who collects the counts from participants in his or her zone and sends the results to the North or South Coordinator. The compiler for the North Circle is John De Haan who is responsible for zone 3-11. For the south circle Karen Ferguson takes care of zone 1 and 2 as well as Bourgoyne Bay. If you like to participate in this year's CBC, please contact either John (250-537-8329) or Karen (250-537-2831) to learn who your zone coordinator is. Participants will receive the results of the annual count in the form of the summer issue of the Bird Studies Canada's magazine. One can also look at the count results online at [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc) or [www.bsc-eoc.org/national/cbcmain.html](http://www.bsc-eoc.org/national/cbcmain.html). These websites give you also more information on the CBC.

Happy birding!



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