



# Oystercatcher

Newsletter of the Salt Spring Trail and  
Nature Club  
Summer 2013

We dedicate this issue to the Relationship between the Trail and Nature Club and the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, and to their current effort to acquire a portion of Blackburn Lake.



## Blackburn Lake: An Opportunity to Protect an Island Gem

*Christine Torgrimson*

*Salt Spring Island Conservancy Executive Director*

As you may know, our community is faced with an extraordinary opportunity right now: the chance to protect about half the land around one of the island's 7 major freshwater lakes: Blackburn Lake,

which is right in the center of the island. Ten organizations, including the Trail and Nature Club, as well as 15 businesses and over 200 individuals have now joined in the expanding effort led by the Salt Spring Island Conservancy to acquire the property at 265 Blackburn Road.

Many on Salt Spring have heartwarming stories about this place - whether as golfers, neighbours, or visitors. It is a much-loved and treasured part of the island. Many have longed to see it protected—because

### Index

Blackburn Lake Opportunity	1	President's Point of View	6
Calendar of Events	5	Newsflash on New Trails	7

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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)



of its natural beauty (it's gorgeous in every season), because of its critical importance in the Cusheon watershed, and because of its species richness.

In recent weeks, Conservancy scientists have led numerous guided walks on the property (public access only by permission of the landowner). Attendees have raved about the beauty of the property and the importance of protecting it. They also have expressed a strong desire to be able to walk there in the future, something the Conservancy is committed to allowing, once it owns the property and develops a thoughtful management plan.

Conservancy scientists have now located 12 provincially and federally designated Species at Risk on the property: Pacific sideband snail, band-tailed pigeon, little brown bat, great blue heron, peregrine falcon, barn swallow, belted kingfisher, common nighthawk, double-crested cormorant, red-legged Frog, black swift, and northern pygmy owl. Over 90 bird species have now been observed on the property. It is a cornucopia of biodiversity.

The property provides overwintering habitat for many species of waterfowl and wetland associated birds including: green-winged teal, ring-necked duck, double-crested cormorant, mallard, northern shoveler, lesser scaup, bufflehead, American widgeon, hooded merganser, great blue heron, American coot, and pied-billed grebe. This amazing place is also important breeding habitat for red-winged blackbird, marsh wren, common yellowthroat, Virginia rail, and wood duck, as well as many species of warblers, swallows, woodpeckers, and sparrows.



*Guided walk sponsored by the Conservancy on 3 May, 1913; Conservancy image*

The red-legged frog is a vivid example of the area's supreme natural values. Over 200 red-legged frog egg masses have recently been found in the ponds and land. That equates to over 200 female frogs there, as they each lay only one egg mass of about 100 eggs. This is the largest identified siting of this rare species on the island. In comparison, recent investigations at Roberts Lake (up the watershed from Blackburn) have identified only 6 red-legged Frog egg masses.

The wetlands and two streams on this 32.6 acre property play a fundamental role in keeping Cusheon Lake's water healthy, and provide critical habitat for many important aquatic and plant species. The property's location in the watershed provides wetland services that are fundamental to the health of Cusheon Lake.



*Red-winged blackbird: Conservancy image.*



*Townsend's warbler: Conservancy image.*



*Bewick's wren: Conservancy image.*





*Left, red-legged frog by Simon Henson (2013). Right, red-legged frog egg mass by L. Matthias.*

Again this spring, and in increasingly worrisome frequency, Cusheon Lake has been experiencing algae blooms, some of them toxic (cyanobacteria) and a threat to human health. The 2007 Cusheon Lake Management Plan says that 75% of the water arriving to Cusheon flows into it from Blackburn Lake. Almost all of that water comes into Blackburn via the streams and wetlands of 265 Blackburn Road. This Blackburn property is essentially the watery gateway to Cusheon Lake.

Ground disruption was named in the 2007 plan as the primary factor in phosphorous-loading in Cusheon Lake, which feeds the algae blooms. The ground at 265 Blackburn Road has fortunately been carefully tended for many years as an organic golf course. There is no guarantee that a future owner would do the same. The soils on the property—deep and rich—invite plowing and crop production. Historically the land was used for that, which long ago might not have been a serious problem for Cusheon Lake. However, the population density in the watershed has since mushroomed, with associated ground disruption and septic fields—all now posing serious consequences for the lake.

Aside from the potential impacts on the beauty and rich

biodiversity of the lake, the costs to the community of cleaning up the lake and watershed would be enormous, as we are currently experiencing with the recurring algae blooms at St. Mary Lake. The Salt Spring economy relies strongly on tourists, who aren't likely to be charmed by brown freshwater lakes.

Ever since the Conservancy received a call from the landowner last summer, we have been working hard to purchase and protect the property.

With the landowner, we commissioned a certified appraisal of market value, arriving at a fair transaction that included a considerable and generous contribution from the landowner and a September 2013 deadline.

We researched over two dozen grant sources. Most weren't applicable. We applied for several, received a couple, and are waiting to hear about two more. Late last year, we began researching potential donors and planning a thorough community campaign.

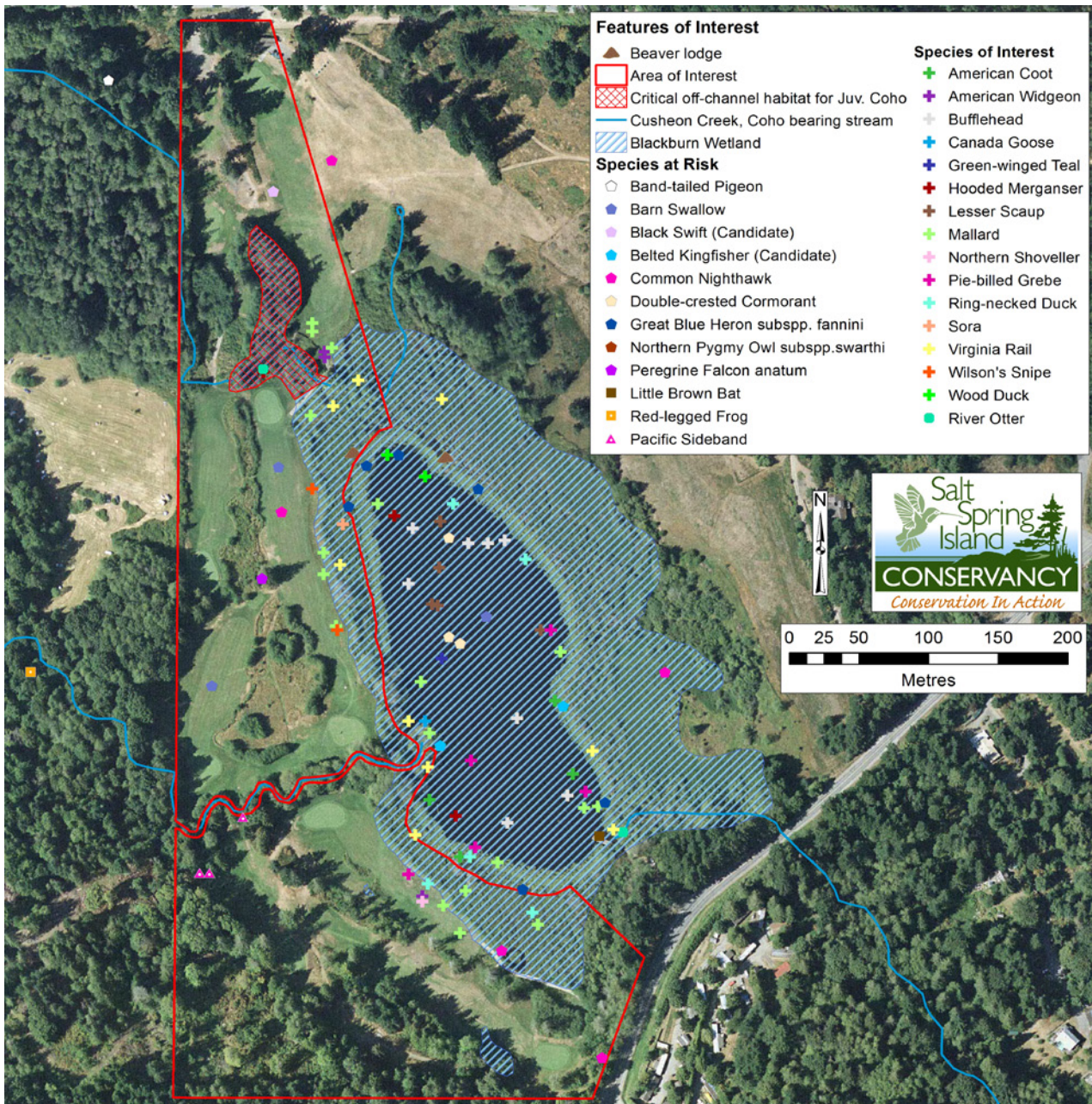
Early this year, we kicked off the campaign, including mailings, appeals to partner organizations and businesses, advertising, events, meeting presentations, guided walks and other activities. We've now mailed over a thousand requests, with partner organizations circulating almost another thousand.

We've been pleased to be joined in the campaign by: Ducks Unlimited Canada, Trail and Nature Club, Islands Trust Fund, Water Preservation Society, Beddis and Cusheon Area Residents Association, Salt Spring Centre, Salt Spring Centre School, Cusheon Lake Stewardship Committee, BC Nature and the Salt Spring Rod and Gun Club. We've received great support from the Salt Spring Exchange (some free advertising) and the Gulf Island Driftwood (great advertising rates, a silent auction and generous news



*View of Cusheon Lake; Conservancy image.*





Map of Blackburn Lake showing Fulford-Ganges Road in lower right. The area outlined in red is the parcel that the Conservancy is attempting to acquire. Conservancy image.

coverage). The following businesses have also offered financial or in-kind support: Blackburn Heritage Farms, Ltd., Paul Burke Studio, Wolfe-Milner Surveying, Robert Bateman Studio, Salt Spring Air, Harry Bardal Graphic Design, Ganges Stationery, Hastings House, Elsea Plumbing, Bibby Communications, Island Escapades, The Fritz Cinema and Outdoor Visions.

We are incredibly encouraged by the outpouring of support, as a land purchase is a considerable effort. The budget for this acquisition is about \$1 million, including the appraised value, legal costs, a land management fund, staff and consulting costs and

other expenses. Utilizing existing Conservancy land acquisition funds, a generous gift from the landowner, grants and pledges from donor, we are now about two-thirds of the way toward realizing the fundraising goal.

For about 20 years, the community has been very fortunate that the owners of this property, who operated an organic golf course there, have been mindful of the land's natural richness and crucial wetland services. There is no guarantee that this careful stewardship would continue with a new private owner.

The Conservancy's primary objective, reflected in our constitutional purposes, is to protect the property as a nature reserve. We are committed to provide





*Blackburn Lake; Conservancy image.*

some level of public access to it, the extent of which will be determined once we acquire the land and develop a management plan. There will at least be a walking and bird-watching trail as well as periodic use by the Conservancy's Stewards in Training program, which provides a day of nature-based learning a year for every elementary student (some 700) on the island. Other possible uses might include a nature centre and interpretive kiosks, a freshwater research project in partnership with a regional university, and a home for the Conservancy. It is apparent, from the popularity of the property as well as recent trespassing incidents that we will have to have an ongoing presence there.

Now we are inviting the community to help us secure the healthy future of Blackburn Lake, protect its abundant species and help keep the Cusheon watershed safe and clean for salmon and trout, island visitors and the many hundreds of residents who drink its water. Currently, a network of approximately 1 km of trails meanders through the property.

If you haven't already pitched in, please make a financial pledge and help us preserve one of our island's exceptional places. We hope you'll join us in making a crucial investment in the healthy natural heritage of Salt Spring Island!

Editor's Note. For more information on the Salt Spring Island Conservancy and their projects, check out their web page at <http://saltspringconservancy.ca>. For more details on Blackburn Lake, read Issue 53 of the Acorn, available at; <http://saltspringconservancy.ca/wp/publications/acorn-newsletter/>

## Calendar of Events

**June 8, 2013**

### **State of the Oceans**

David Denning - recheck on conserv site

**June 11, 2013**

### **SSI Conservancy, Annual General Meeting**

Lions Hall at 7:00pm. All members are encouraged to attend.

**June 18, 2013**

### **Strawberry Festival at Ruckle Park**

Meet at noon in the lower picnic area to enjoy a scrumptious dish of strawberries and ice cream. Remember to bring a dish and spoon! Short walks will be scheduled prior to the festival.

**September 10, 2013**

### **Blackberry Festival at Ruckle Park.**

The 2013-2014 hiking season begins with the Meet at noon in the lower picnic area. Remember to bring your favorite blackberry goodie, a bowl and spoon. Short walks will be scheduled prior to the festival.

**October 24, 2013**

### **Salmon Enhancement experiments in the Okanagan.**

A Thursday talk will be presented by Dr Donald McQueen. Watch for details.

**November 28, 2013**

### **Raptors**

John Neville will talk about raptors, co-sponsored by the Salt Spring Conservancy.



*Trail near Blackburn Lake; Conservancy image.*

## President's Point of View

*John Heddle*

The Club has been busy. You will have noticed the steady progression of rambles, walks, and hikes, of course, seemingly inevitable but in reality, the result of considerable effort of your coordinators and leaders. You will have noticed, I am sure, the Blackburn campaign and our closer co-ordination with the Conservancy. But you may not be as aware of the progress on the Bird Group and the Jack Foster Trail, both of which I will tell you a little more about. Certainly, you will be unaware of the trials and tribulations of your Executive Committee/Board. Finally, a note about the fun I had at the BC Nature AGM.

I will start with a brief note about the weekly outings. The attendance has been more or less as normal, from what I hear, but the variety has increased a bit. Leaders are always needed and anyone, anyone at all, with an idea for a new and different route or venture should contact their coordinator. The Hikers, in particular, are having an especially good time, so much so that they refused to give up their planned outing in favour of the broom-pull, and demanded a choice of events. Nevertheless, some attended the broom pull at Burgoyne Bay, which started at the daffodil field where vast devastation was wrought on the blooming broom. Then a few stalwarts proceeded along the coast inwards and destroyed a number of the enemy's outposts for a considerable distance. Finally, the group congregated at a dense patch on the main trail and left it in a giant heap, taller than Herb Otto, the battle commander, for PARC to recover and remove. You will have a chance, no doubt, to join in the campaign there next year.

Your Club has been working more closely with the Salt Spring Conservancy this year, particularly to help with the Blackburn Lake campaign to which it has donated \$1,500 and co-sponsored three talks. You may have heard splendid presentations by Bob Bateman and Susan Hannon at ArtSpring or the incredibly fascinating talk on BC plants, fungi, and the past and future effects of Climate Change by Andy McKinnon at the Community Gospel Church. If you missed these, too bad. Consider supporting this endeavour. You can use the form found here.



*Shoreline of Blackburn Lake; Conservancy image.*

You may, I hope, get another chance to see the gorgeous bird photographs taken by a Grade 12 GISS student, Farley Cannon (with a few by his mentor David Denning) that were shown at the Lion's Club. If so, don't miss them. You will see the birds as you have never seen them before. Using a Canon Powershot SX50 HS camera that he was given only at Christmas this year, Farley showed us many of the local birds we know, up close and personal. A hummingbird with its throat feathers displaying individual laser-like glowing rubies in individual feathers; the giant feet of a coot; the astonishing colours of a wood duck seen up close, and the beautiful lacey brown feathers of the chestnut backed chickadee among others. The camera is a marvel – I went out and bought one yesterday – zooming to the equivalent of a 4 foot lens (1200 mm) on a traditional 35 mm SLR, whose camera body alone would outweigh it – but the truly astonishing photographs were more the result of great patience, persistence, and knowledge of the subjects. It was a lesson on what can be accomplished and an art show, too.

Another word about birds. The Bird Group has been initiated with Tim Marchant of the Village Cobbler as moderator. To join, email Barry Spence ([sspence@telus.net](mailto:sspence@telus.net)) where you can send out to members of the groups interesting sightings and events. The group will decide what is and is not acceptable to its members as communications as it goes forward and Tim will enforce the rules.

The Jack Foster Trail is operational! Well, it always was, but with a nasty slippery last slide to the beach moderated by a low-hanging rope on the way down and counter-acted by the same rope on the way up. No more. Last year, a group of female carpenter apprentices under the guidance of our Trail Coordina-





*Herb Otto and his nemesis, Burgoyne Bay broom. Photo by John Heddle.*

tor, Herb Otto, built a causeway over a wet area with the financial assistance of BC Nature. This year, with the help of the Salt Spring Foundation, Herb designed and supervised the construction of steps down that last steep incline to the beach. The slide has been left for the otters. From the steps, whose banisters are not quite complete (but very functional), a magnificent view over the Trincomali Channel is now evident. This has taken several days of work by a varying group of 5 or so club members each time, to hack a new trail, carry in materials, cut wood to size, bolt, nail, screw, cut, and swear. You will be impressed: it is a great walk and now with a much drier and easier access to the broad, sunny, and silent beach.

Therefore, as you can see, the Club is functioning well in general, but the Executive is having problems, I am sorry to say. The plan to meet less frequently is running into problems. Rather than bolstering attendance at meetings, it may have promoted absenteeism and it is uncertain if a quorum can be obtained for the next meeting at which some impor-

tant items are to be considered. Most important is the future of the Oystercatcher. Should it continue, and in what form? You, I must conclude, are reading it, but how many others do? Does the email version get read? Should we go back to print? Is it worth the effort? The Editor, Gary Adams has raised these questions because he doubts the answers are happy ones. Doubtless, we will be soliciting your opinions but you need not wait: email Gary ([gafrad@shaw.ca](mailto:gafrad@shaw.ca)) or me ([jheddle@yorku.ca](mailto:jheddle@yorku.ca)) now or call me (537-2672).

Finally a note about the BC Nature AGM in Abbotsford. It was delightful. No work for me, as Nieke Visser is the Club Representative, so I just went out on the early morning birding expeditions with the most expert birders imaginable and on the outings on the Fraser River and along its banks. There is a huge effort underway to make the river accessible with trails on both sides from the delta to Hope, to restore as much as possible of the natural landscape, to record its history, and to moderate the destructive impact of modern human impact. The presentations were very good, most particularly one by Ken Mullinex on sustainable agriculture. I hope we can get him to come to Salt Spring next year, either to the Salt Spring Forum, as I have suggested, or to one of our Socials. If you have ever considered going to one of the AGMs, I suggest you act on it next time. There will be a September meeting in Cranbrook and the spring AGM will be in Victoria and so quite easily accessible. Details at [www.bcnature.ca](http://www.bcnature.ca).

## Newsflash on New Trails!

### Lorraine Brewster PARC

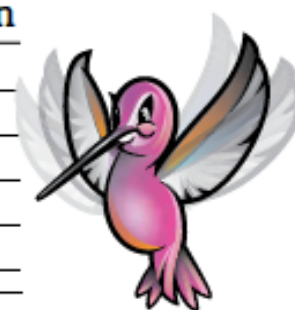
As we are approaching the long days of summer, the trail crew are busy developing new trails to our fantastic system. One of the projects for 2013, is the development of the western portion of Mouat Park.

## YES! I want to support the Blackburn Lake acquisition



- |                                  |                                   |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,500  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$500   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other   |                                   |

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
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Please mail to: Salt Spring Island Conservancy, PO Box 722 Salt Spring Island, BC V8K 2W3  
 We'll collect pledges later and issue tax receipts then.

Mouat Park is located in the downtown core and the park offers a network of hiking trails that are easily accessible to all. To build on this existing trail system, the trail crew will be scoping a new trail that will eventually connect to Rainbow road and Atkins road. This will provide a valuable loop in the downtown core for walkers and hikers.

For the development of the trail, the crew will be working with the information that was collected from a report prepared by biologists Laura Matthias, Karen Ferguson and Carrina Maslovat. The report identified plant communities in the park, species at risk, and the ecosystems. The park is remarkably biologically diverse and there is a wide spectrum of species present.

The scoping of the trail will commence late August and the construction of the new trail will be made as low impact as possible. There are a number of wet areas and the trail crew is looking at various options for bridging or boardwalks. The completion of the western portion of Mouat will provide a recre-

ational hike close to the centre of Ganges and will be suitable for all ages.

### **Coming soon-Dean/Drake Trail**

This summer check out the Dean/Drake trails system. To access this trail, park at Bishop road and experience moderate ravines with new bridging. If you take the north end of the trail, this will connect with Mouat Park. With the completion of this new trail system, it provides a great route to the downtown core walking through forest and nature. Once you are downtown, drop in to one of the many coffee shops for a beverage!

Kees Ruurs, our Senior Manager, is retiring the beginning of July. He was instrumental in developing and implementing our fabulous trail system throughout the PARC system. His vision of a comprehensive trail system has been such a wonderful asset to the community. He will be missed but once he is retired, he can be out enjoying the many hiking options in the community. Many thanks to his great leadership!



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