



@JJ Harrison www.wikipedia.org

Oystercatcher

Newsletter of the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club
Autumn 2013

The Sooty Oystercatcher (*Haematopus fuliginosus*) is endemic to Australia and commonly found on its coastline. Two sub-species are recognized. It is black except for its red eye, eye ring and bill and its pink legs. The females are up to 19% larger than the males, the greatest difference of any Oystercatcher species.

President's Point of View

John Heddle

Looking forward for the fall, the last of the regular evening Socials are planned, though the schedule is anything but regular and stable. More of that in a moment, but why "last"?

The last of our VPs, Niels, did an outstanding job organizing Socials but no one could be found to replace him and the position was abolished in the seemingly biannual constitutional revision. Now the responsibility falls generally on a reduced Executive, in practice on the President, currently one rapidly running out of ideas. Unless new ideas bubble up from you or elsewhere, there will be no Socials after November.

The Socials balance the two arms of the Club, Trail, and Nature, the trail activities otherwise being the overwhelming activity. Yet you, the members, have made it incontrovertible that Nature is a very important part of membership. So please, send suggestions to me, jheddle@YorkU.ca. Alternatively, nab me when next we meet, perhaps at the rescheduled Social on Wednesday the 19th to hear a reformed ornithologist's passion for plants.



Lunch break on a hike up Mt Maxwell to the Old Mine in the Gary Oak Grove. Photo by Herb Otto

The Oystercatcher

Gary Adams, editor

Many readers will remember that we raised some concerns about the Oystercatcher at the Strawberry Festival. As editor, I have been concerned for some time about the future of the newsletter. As we are all aware, newsletters were a necessity for small organizations in the days before we all plugged in to get all of our information off a screen. In recent years, organizations have had to rethink their whole publi-

Index

President's Point of View	1	Birds in my Backyard	5
The Oystercatcher	1	Calendar of Events	5
The Hope Hill Circuit	3	New Vice-President for BC Nature	6
New Trail Signage Project	4	Pender Island Field Naturalists Visit SSI	7
		Celebrating Kees Ruur's Retirement	8

This newsletter is published by the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club, PO Box 203, Ganges PO, Salt Spring Island, BC, V8K 2V9. Editor: Gary Adams (gafrad@shaw.ca)
For information on the Board of Directors and weekly outings, please see our website: www.saltspringtnc.ca

cation philosophy. I want our group to have a good handle on what their publications should do before I release the editorial work to someone else. In that vein, I will periodically add a column to the newsletter to ask the readership questions, propose ideas, and seek response to them.

One of my first concerns came through several comments from people who indicated that they read the newsletter less since getting it online. The bottom line is that less than 15 members receive the Oystercatcher in the mail and that number shrinks regularly. A quick survey at the Strawberry Festival revealed that about half the assembled members said they did read it. If that is consistent for the entire membership, then we have a strong readership. It also means that I will be looking at ways to make the publication more reader friendly to screen reading.

We also discovered that almost the same sample regularly read "The Acorn", Salt Spring Island's other nature newsletter. The executives of both the Conservancy and the SSTNC noticed that. Perhaps we need to do some future thinking on that.

In future articles, I would like to explore other issues related to the newsletter. We need a better idea of the focus for the content of the newsletter. Should it focus on club activities and issues? Should it be a nature magazine? Should it be a trail and travel document? A blend?

We also have to realize that this is a closed publication. It has about 200 potential readers. That does not make it easy to find contributors. I need access to contributions from the membership as well as outside.

I welcome comments on any of these issues. Thanks for your continued support.

The Hope Hill Circuit

Kees Visser

This hike is one of my favourites on Salt Spring, and I lead it as a club hike once or twice a year. Last time I did this, in early June, we had only 6 hikers, notwithstanding the blue skies.

This hike is well described in Charles Kahn's updated version of his 2011 hiking book, age 216 to 218. However, I will give you some extra information on footing and difficult points.

To access the trail, you drive about 3.5km from Isabella Point Road, on Musgrave Road. The last km or so you encounter a few steep curves on a

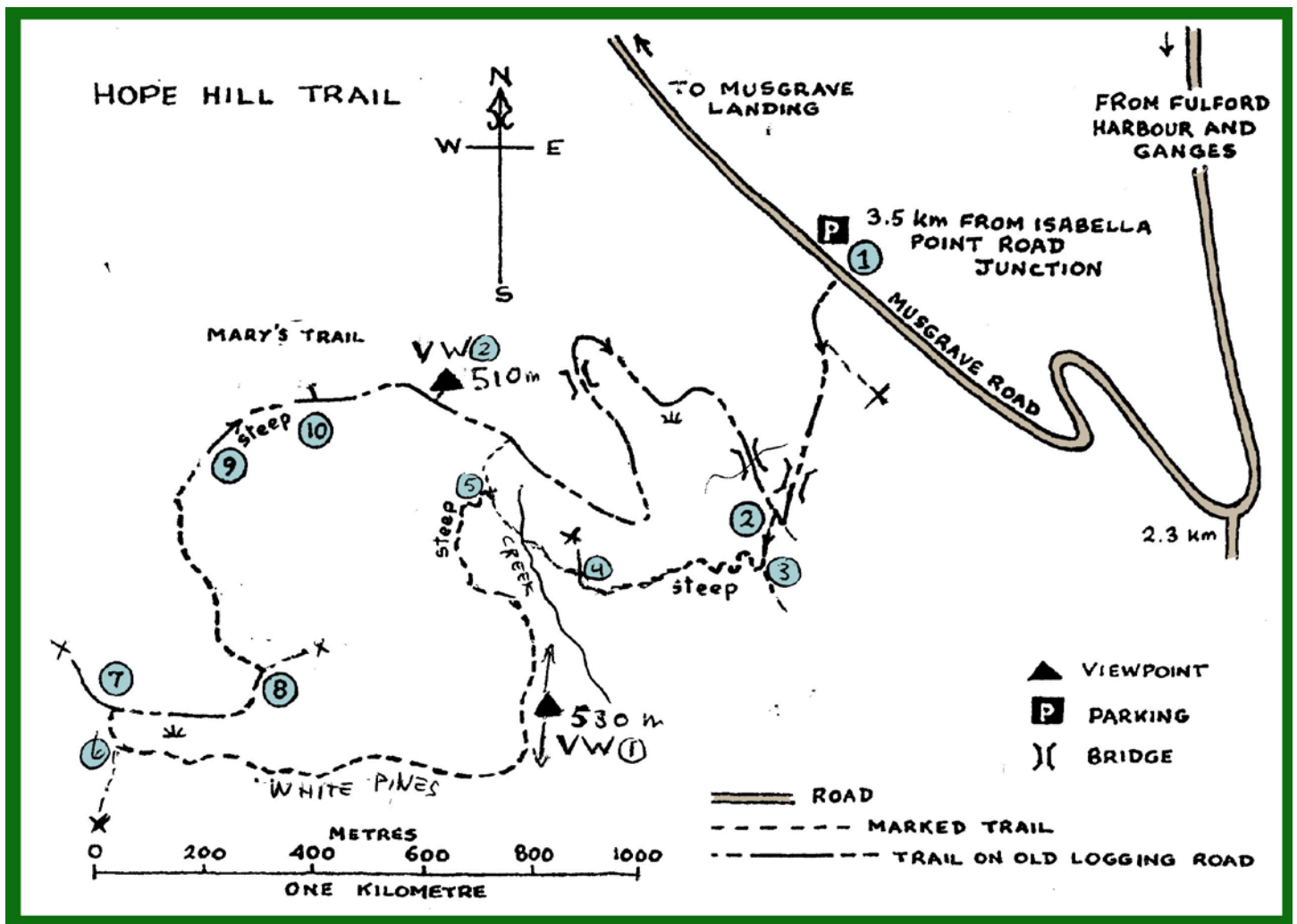
gravel road, but every two wheel drive should be able to handle this. On your right hand side you will see a clearing with a large white sign on a tree which states "No Fires" in red lettering. That is where you park.

From the parking spot (1 on map) you cross Musgrave Road, go left for 20m and follow an old, gradually rising, logging road. At about 100m you will see a junction with another logging road to the left. Ignore that one, continue right, cross a wooden pole bridge until you reach, after about 300m a junction marked with a red metal arrow and ribbons (2). The old logging road continues on, but I suggest you go left, following a narrow trail (often somewhat overgrown). When you have finished the circuit, you will return at this junction coming down from the logging road.

The narrow trail widens somewhat. There is often a bit of deadfall here, but after about 5 minutes, 100m or so, keep an eye out for an orange-red marker on the right, which points you to a narrow trail, which goes steeply uphill (3). After a few switchbacks you reach the top, and you will see on your left a barren down cut area for Tuam Estates (4). Luckily, this was never built, and has been like this for least ten years. The trail follows the edge of the forest, and you should keep your eyes peeled for the orange markers. The trail is sometimes vague, but if you pay attention you should be able to follow it. The trail is fairly flat with a few up and downs. After about 500m there is a well marked left turn (5). Do not go straight over an obvious old logging road. The sometimes vague trail continues very slightly uphill, crosses a small creek and after another 300m, you will encounter a junction. The right path goes back to the old logging road which you will finally follow on your way back after the second viewpoint.

I suggest you go left and very soon you will have a very steep uphill section, which can be slippery and a bit tough to negotiate, because dirt bikes have smoothed and eroded this trail badly. Once at the top, you can easily follow a fairly flat path, until suddenly you emerge out of the trees, and you will have before you one of the nicest viewpoints on Salt Spring Island. You will be looking over Fulford all the way from the Vancouver North Shore Mountains to Mount Baker and beyond. This would be itself worth the hike, but there is more to come.

You follow the edge of the viewpoint over a somewhat unclear trail towards the south, until you



Map of Hope Hill Trail by Kees Visser. Coloured numbers are referenced in the article.

see the trail drop into the trees again. Ignore a trail marker, halfway along this viewpoint, going west; it points to a trail that existed once, but it peters out now after a few 100m.

You follow the south going trail, which meanders its way, slightly up and down through nice forest, along swampy areas, sometimes presenting a brief view of the Tuam Estates destruction for about 1 km. The trail is easy to follow, but you will have to pay attention to the markers here and there. You will see the largest stand of White Pine on Salt Spring Island. They were very stressed last June, and I hope they have recovered somewhat. When you walk through the white pines, you are walking over a geological dyke, a metamorphosed quartz ridge, and is much harder than the rock, a gneiss tha the dyke has intruded into

After about 1km you will encounter a T-junction (6); and you will go right here for about 100m. This area had a huge windfall a few years ago, and there is a lot of sweat here from Lynn Thompson,

Simon Rook and myself, in cleaning all this up. You then will enter an old logging road and go right (7). The left side is blocked with windfall.

You follow this old logging road for about 800m; it curves slightly leftward. On your right hand side you will pass a few ponds and swamps, where lots of deer congregate in the dry summer, this being one of the few places where there is always water. After about 800m, you have to look out for a red marker on the left hand side (8). This marker points to the right, but you should go left and hike uphill, following a faint trail. I know this might be tricky, but if you miss it, and follow the old logging road, you will soon find that would soon become almost impassable.

The trail uphill continues over a number of rocky knolls, is faint in places, but you should be able to see the red markers and ribbons, indicating the trail. On the highest knoll you will see the transmission tower of Hope Hill itself, on the left hand side. It is situated on private property.

On this high knoll, you will have to look for red sign/ribbon on the farthest northeast corner, where the trail becomes very clear and is going slightly downhill (9). This trail is very rocky with rolling stones. After about 12 minutes you will see a sign “Mary’s Trail”. It is overgrown and uninteresting, so ignore it (10). After another 10 minutes over the rocky trail and slightly downhill, you will see a lot of wind-fall on your left hand and a trail going uphill on your left. This trail is only 50m, but steep, and ends in the second superb viewpoint (a bit lower, and the view more towards the north over Fulford, but magnificent).

The club usually has its lunch at this spot. From here you return to the trail and go left downhill, and it quickly becomes an old logging road. You will follow this for about 1km, cross over another wood pole bridge and a steep creek bed , before reaching the junction mentioned at the start of the third paragraph..

From there you will be back at your car in 10 minutes. The trail is about 7 km and with breaks and lunch should take you 3 to 4 hours.

I think it is one of the nicest trails on the island and with some attention and common sense, quite doable for reasonable fit people. Of course you can also do this in the opposite direction.

Tuam Estates has tried on a number of occasions to get access to some of the logging roads, but so far we and the Friends of Salt Spring Parks have managed to put a stop to it. CRD Parks has this Crown Land in their “future” Park plan, but so far this has not happened. Motorized dirt bikes sometimes frequent this area, and when this happens at the height of the summer drought, my heart cringes.

Don’t do this in heavy rain or when there is snow on the ground; some sections can become very slippery. I hope you will try this unique hiking circuit.

New Trail Signage Project

Herb Otto, Trail Coordinator

Our club has been a participant in a committee organized by PARC that meets on a monthly basis called the Trail Advisory Committee. Members of the committee include representatives from several groups and individuals who are interested in helping PARC improve the trail network on Salt Spring Island. This endeavour involves trails that occur on lands owned and controlled by a multitude of public and private bodies, including BC Parks’ treasures, Ruckle Park, Burgoyne Bay Park, and Mt. Maxwell Park.



Blub members clearing fallen trees from the Gary Trail on Mt. Maxwell in the spring. photo by Herb Otto.

As most members know, we have been helping BC Parks clear and maintain trails in these Parks for many years in a partnering relationship. What is less known is that many of the trails on Mt. Maxwell and some in Burgoyne Bay Parks have not been recognized by BC Parks. Hence, there has been a lack of signage identifying the trails or any information posted for wayfinding. This deficiency has been recognized by the club for some time, but with the assistance of members of the Trail Advisory Committee, has been brought to the attention of BC Parks in a meeting held in May of this year.

At this meeting, an open and constructive discussion took place about this dilemma, with the result that an agreement was reached to embark on a partnership venture to improve the recognition of the existing trails and the support of BC Parks to create, at this point at least, temporary signage in these two parks. To assist in this venture, The Trail and Nature Club was encouraged to apply for funding under a BC Parks administrated program called BC Park’s Park Enhancement Fund. This was done in May and on June 28; we received confirmation that we would receive a \$1,000 grant towards material to create the signage that would help identify the trails. Club volunteers, similar to the stairs installed on the Jack Foster Trail, will provide the labour.

A task group has been set up under the umbrella of the Trail Advisory Committee to work with BC Parks on this project over the next year or two, and the partnership with BC Parks on this project and others promises to be a long term one with possibilities for addition funding in future years.

Birds in My Backyard

Nieke Visser

Here I am, back in the writer's corner. I had figured that after a few years of quarterly reports on the Rourke Road bird population, people would like to read something different. But I was wrong in my assumptions. At the Strawberry festival in June members indicated to me that they would like more of the same. But by all means, if you feel you had enough, please let me know.

Spring of 2013 was a special one. We noticed an increase in the variety of feathered friends that visited my humble property. For the first time, a group of about ten red crossbills squabbled over who got the first pickings at the feeders. We see them occasionally in the winter, but these guys were going to stay a while. They took a bath under the water fall in the pond. Never seen any other bird using the waterfall, by the way. They were always together and announced their arrival at the feeders by their typical gyp-gyp-gyp call. Between eating sessions and bathing they hang out in the cedars or made their rounds through the neighbourhood.

Other unusual visitors came to rear their young around our property: a pair of black-headed grosbeaks. They serenaded frequently around the house, staking out territory and we enjoyed the beautiful melodious songs. Both male and female black-headed grosbeaks sing, and both sexes often do so from the nest. Apparently, the male sings primarily to defend his territory. Female song is generally a simplified version of male song and



Red Crossbill, photo by Nieke Visser



Black-headed grosbeak, photo by Nieke Visser.

Calendar of Events

Friday, September 6, 2013

Blackburn Benefit, Saltspring Conservancy

If the weather cooperates, the Blackburn Benefit will be at 265 Blackburn Road. If it's cold or rainy, Lions Hall is our backup. The event will run from about 5 to 8 or 9 pm, with admission by donation, a potluck dinner, music and nature walk (led by Bob Weeden). We'll provide iced tea and finger desserts. And we'll also have a silent nature art auction in the golf shed that evening, as well as unveil Nicola Wheston's oil painting of Blackburn Lake (to be silent auctioned throughout September).

Tuesday, September 11, 2013

SSTNC Annual Blackberry Festival

Meet at the Ruckle Park parking lot at noon after some exercise with your group.

Thursday September 19, 2013

Susan Hannon Talk

The Trail and Nature Club Social has invited Susan Hannon to make a presentation entitled, "From seed to snag: the life and times of a Garry oak meadow". It is held in the lower floor United Church at 7:30 PM,

Mid to Late October

Boundary Bay Birding Trip

Trip is being planned by Anne Murray, birding expert with the Delta Naturalists to watch migrating shore birds and possibly, Snowy Owls. Plans are to leave SSI on the afternoon sailing from Long Harbour, staying overnight in Tsawassen. The following day will be spent at the Boundary Bay and Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, returning on the Queen of Nanaimo evening sailing. Pencil this in while waiting for additional information.

Thursday, October 24, 2013

Dr. Donald McQueen Talk

Trail & Nature Social starting at 7:30 in the United Church Hall. Dr Donald McQueen will present "Salmon Enhancement research in the Okanagan".

Thursday, November 28, 2013

John Neville Talk

John Neville will present "Raptors" starting at 7:30 in the United Church hall. This social is co-sponsored by STNC and the Salt Spring Conservancy.

appears to function in communication between mates and in maintaining family groups once the young fledge. One interesting feature of the black-headed grosbeak is that males do not attain definitive breeding plumage until their second season and vary in appearance from female-like to adult-male-like in their first potential breeding season. Our grosbeaks were around for a good 6-7 weeks and then, suddenly, they were gone.

Where do they migrate to? Black-headed grosbeaks can be found from SW Canada to Mexico and the Baja. The population in central Mexico may not migrate at all, but those breeding in our region winter in the Baja. The more easterly populations will follow riparian corridors and winter on the east and west coast of Mexico. In spring they have been recorded to arrive early to mid May. The trek north takes place in relatively short time span, but the migration to the south is more widespread. Males depart in July and August, but females and yearlings may stick around a little longer¹.

In May, numerous violet-green swallows came to check out the nest boxes Kees had put up against the house. Last year we had a pair breeding in one of the boxes. This time they had chosen a brand new one, and in June we were pleased to hear the first faint calls coming from the box. For about four weeks we again witnessed the coming and going of the parents and the growth of their offspring. The biggest chick will stick its head out of the hole and will be fed more frequently. After a while it fills the hole completely and we were wondering if the other chicks would now be short of fresh air. And then the day comes that number one leaves the box.

First he was quite unsure about this whole adventure and made a U-turn back to the box, but by mistake he dived into the vacant box that nobody had wanted. There was no nest, of course, so he fell to the bottom and was unable to get out of this predicament. Fortunately he had very caring parents and one of them returned to rescue him. The parent also entered the empty nest box, pushed the clumsy fledgling upwards to the hole and out he went, followed by the parent. Mean-while, the next biggest chick in the other nest box was screaming for food, so the parents were not off the hook yet. A week later, that one also left the box, without any incidents this time. And so went number three when his time came. But the parents had

still another one to take care of. Number four appeared to be a real runt. Very small and very helpless. Still grey underneath and his cries were very soft. With the other three circling around begging for food, mom and dad were not all that motivated anymore, but he was fed from time to time.

And then, one day when we got up in the morning he was still there, but a minute later he was gone. We were sure he went before he was ready and we were a bit concerned about him. Later that day, something out of the ordinary happened. I suddenly noticed a lot of activity at the nest box. I stopped



Violet-green swallow, photo by Nieke Visser

what I was doing and witnessed that the parents had brought the little one back to the box. But he did not wish to go back in again, although it looked that his parents wanted him to do that. Instead he sat on the roof for about for 2 -3 hours (see picture), while the others were flying around and catching insects. They did not feed him. So he must have figured out that if he was to survive, he had to get his own food. He finally went, and a few days later the whole family took off. We hope they will return again next year .

1. Ortega, Catherine and Geoffrey E. Hill. 2010. Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*), *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/143>

New Vice-President for BC Nature John Neville, BC Nature President

At the July 16th Executive Meeting of BC Nature Kees Visser was unanimously elected Vice-President . This



is no mean task for a volunteer and we wish him every success. Later, at the same meeting, Kees agreed to undertake reviewing the 2010 Strategic Plan and taking the project forward to drafting a new 2015 Strategic Plan for BC Nature. Kees name will be presented for the position of President of BC Nature at the AGM Victoria May 1, 2014. Please be there to give him your support.

National Geographic Magazine 10 Best Trails

National Geographic maintains a spectacular web site with lots of photos, photo contests, and articles. Recently, they promoted a feature called the [10 Best Day Hikes found in American National Parks](#).

That led me to their whole section entitled [ADVENTURE](#). The site offers all kinds of ideas for trails and adventures around the world.

Click on either of the topics above to check them out.

Pender Island Field Naturalists visit SSI.

Nieke Visser

On Wednesday, June 19, nine naturalists from Pender Island came over to look at Gary Oak habitat on our island. Kees Visser took them to Burgoyne Bay and hiked with them along the bottom of Mount Maxwell as far as was possible. After lunch on the ridge of Jennifer Road (for the spectacular view), I joined them for a tour of the Andreas Vogt Nature Reserve (picture left) where not only the oaks were admired but also the many wildflowers, such this Fool's Onion (inset) and these Monkey Flowers (right).

The group's leader and organizer of this excursion, Gerald McKeating, suggested to me that members of our club should pay a visit to Pender Island. We could easily do that taking the school boat in the morning and hitch a drive back

after the kids have been dropped off in the afternoon. On Pender, members of the Pender Island Field Naturalists will take us to interesting places on Pender. Food for thought.....

Membership Fees Are Due

Fall is in the air, the hiking, walking and rambling season is about to begin, and it's time to renew your membership in the /trail and Nature Club.

Please complete and sign the current Membership Registration form AND the current Assumption of Risk form and return BOTH with your membership fee to the Membership Secretary prior to the due date, September 30.

Membership fees are \$25.00 per person, and cover the period September 1, 2013 to August 31, 2014. Fees for current (2012-2013) members renewing within 30 days of the Due date are discounted to \$20.00.

Cheques are preferred. Your fees, accompanied by both completed forms, may be placed in the Membership envelope in the club box at the Village Cobbler, or mailed to the Membership Secretary at the address printed on the Membership registration form.

Printed forms may be picked up from the Cobbler's Box, or you may download and print forms from the Club website. <http://www.saltspringtnc.ca>. Remember to complete and sign BOTH forms.



Celebrating Kees Ruurs' Retirement.



Along with all the good food and company, the Club used the Strawberry Festival as a venue to celebrate the retirement of Kees Ruurs from PARC and to thank him for all of his support over the past years. The photo (by Margriet Ruurs) shows Kees receiving a few tokens of our appreciation from Herb Otto. We all wish him the best in his retirement and hope he will join us on some of the trails he has improved.



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

Publications mail agreement
No. 40049783