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Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club
 Newsletter
 Winter 2013

The Chatham Island oystercatcher (*Haematopus chathamensis*) is small with short, thick legs, black head and upperparts, and white underparts with smudgy border on chest. It has a long, thick red bill, orange eye-ring and pink legs. It is found only in the Chatham Islands, New Zealand, and its population of 300 is listed as endangered.

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President's Point of View

John Heddle

What is the name of our Club? If you look at our badges, you might well get it wrong!

Our letterhead, our badges, and the few caps we have left, too, all say Saltspring Island Trail & Nature Club, but that is not who we are. You might argue about Saltspring versus Salt Spring, knowing that the official geographical name of our beautiful place is two words: Saltspring Island, not three. Is it two or three words in our logo? It depends on the version! You might notice that the Post Office uses the official binomial as well. Our Club also uses a binomial, but not the official one. The name of our Club is "Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club", with no mention of its island characteristic. Luckily, Gary Adams has prepared a new logo for us, one with our actual name.

The new logo will appear on the signs that Herb Otto is commissioning for the Jack Foster Trail, signs thanking BC Nature and the Salt Spring Foundation for funding of improvements. There will also be a sign in memory of Edna Gatt, whose family contributed to the Club.

In addition, Herb is also working closely with BC Parks concern-



Calendar of Events

Tuesday December 10, 2013 Christmas Lunch

Lunch at Calvin's Bistro will follow short walks. Limited to 55 People Open at 11:30 for drinks (No host bar; cash only). Lunch at 12:30. Cost is \$ 25.00 per person with tickets available at SoapWorks until Dec 7.

Thursday, January 23, 2014 SSTNC Annual Meeting

Meeting will be held at the Gospel Community Chapel at noon and a light lunch will be provided. Business meeting starts at 1:00 pm.

Thursday, February 19, 2014 Dr. K. Mullinix Presentation

A Presentation by Dr. Kent Mullinix, Director, Institute for Sustainable Food Systems, Kwantlen Polytech University. Presentation will start at 7:30 in the United Church Hall.

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

ing signage for Mount Maxwell. The Executive Committee will be reviewing a mammoth legal document from BC Parks for this project and for a ten-year agreement that might pave the way for many more collaborative projects to improve trails and the associated signs on Saltspring/Salt Spring, whichever BC Parks prefers.

Another item on our agenda is to confirm an invitation from the Club to BC Nature to host its AGM here in 2015. This is the initiative of the indefatigable Nieke Visser who is forming a committee to run the event. The Executive has already approved this in principle, relying on Nieke's extensive experience and proven record of two very successful BC Nature Camps here.

Finally, a note about our next Annual General Meeting, the fourth Thursday in January (the 23rd), with lunch, a Treasurer's Report with recommended dues and other budgetary items for next year, an election, and a photographic talk by David Denning. Please don't miss it!

Nature Photography

Alan and Elaine Wilson



Baltimore Oriole



California Quail



Ring-necked Pheasant

Editor's Note: I encountered Alan and Elaine's website last issue when I used one of their images in the Oystercatcher. I was so impressed by the quality of their images and their website, that I asked them to introduce it to you.

It wasn't so long ago that you'd hear people say "If I'd only had a camera" after an outing where nature and a little serendipity coughed up a truly momentous occasion. Now mobile phones and other portable devices that we all tote around, house sophisticated hardware and software applications that easily outstrip photography products that came of age in the early moments of the digital revolution. Rapid technological change has certainly been a boon to even the most casual shutter bug. Although the pictures from cell phones can be quite good, it's not hard to crank it up a notch to start producing truly great images. It's simply a matter of understanding the "basics" of digital camera operation and applying them in a setting as close as your own backyard. We started when we retired and had so much fun that we developed a website to help beginners to quickly get past the mistakes we encountered early on in our learning process. And today it's even easier as modern camera bodies are more fully featured and the "digital darkroom" is equipped with software that makes image management and enhancement a breeze.

If you'd like to get on board, we encourage you to visit www.naturespicsonline.com for an introduction to bird, wildlife and natural landscape photography. Our blog begins by distilling the full gamut of nature photography into a basic "nut shell," honing in on key concepts and terminology. We then help you to choose equipment by recommending the essential features you'll need in a decent camera and lens. Once you head out, we'll show you the importance of positioning for light and background, providing several techniques that will ensure you capture the best exposures and compositions possible. Finally, you'll learn how to manage and enhance digital image files and to create prints and less demanding Web graphics.

Don't be daunted if computers are the bane of your life. The concepts are simple and easy to implement. Unlike film, digital is a creative medium that provides instant feedback, allowing you to review results and correct mistakes in no time.

To get started, try attracting birds to your yard, setting up a simple perch that can be used in much the same way as a studio portrait is taken. Our blog will show you how to do it. Add a little greenery for effect. We do this for Ring-Necked Pheasants, California Quail and other residents and migrants that frequent our property. It's fun and a wonderful pastime. If you decide to take the plunge, read our Ethics synopsis as it's important to ensure that you protect nature and treat inhabitants in a non-stressful and respectful manner.

Changes at Two Popular Parks

Lorraine Brewster, PARC

Duck Creek Park

Over the Christmas holidays, take a hike on one of Salt Spring Island's most popular trail systems, Duck Creek Park Trail. Duck Creek Park's compact trail system has over 2km of trails that meander through the heavily treed valley bottom of Duck Creek as well as on top of the bank through the adjacent meadow. When you are hiking through the trail system, you will experience native alder, huckleberry, Oregon grape, bigleaf maple, coastal Douglas fir, grand fir, skunk cabbage, sword ferns, and elderberry.



Access to the trails is available from Sunset Drive as well as Broadwell, each with a small parking area. Trailhead signs are located at the entrances to the park. Starting at the Sunset entrance follow the trail until you get to a junction take the right path over the bridge with a gradual climb up a hill to the meadow and go through the meadow until you reach the new bridge and follow the trail alongside Duck

Creek and you will come upon the new trail that has been developed. The new bridge is made from untreated Douglas fir and cedar so there will be no interference with the salmon in the creek. The new section of the trail was developed with a sustainable shell base material that is receiving good reviews from park visitors.

Take the new trail that meanders through a beautiful lush area with lots of sword ferns and beautiful trees as the trail wraps along the creek until you reach the meadow. Once you have reached the meadow, you can hike back through it, to the Sunset parking area in approximately 20 minutes.

Mouat Park

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club, in partnership with the Parks and Recreation Commission is in the final stages of the Interpretive Signage project. Signs have been placed in Mouat Park to educate park

Jack Foster Trail

Herb Otto, Trail Coordinator

It is a great day and a relief to announce the completion of the new stair access to Trincomali Channel at the end of the Jack Foster trail. Although the stair has been in use all summer, there was still a day's work needed to install some of the mid rails on the balusters and to apply the expanded mesh on the treads. 4 volunteers worked hard to complete this work and to gather up and remove the left over lumber.

A special thanks is extended to the neighbours to the north, Brian and Giselle McDermott who made it possible to bring in and remove materials across their property. In addition, they provided power for our tools.

Many thanks again to the Salt Spring Foundation for the grant of \$1200 for the materials to build the stair. As we were constructing it, hikers passing by were very appreciative of this improvement. For all those who were able to help, my thanks.



Jack Foster staircase from beach.
Photo by Herb Otto.

visitors on history, ecological, health, and park stewardship. Park your vehicle at the main entrance on Seaview Drive, and take a hike on the lower trail through Coastal Douglas-fir Biogeoclimatic zone, one of BC's most diverse ecosystems. As you meander through the lower trail you will experience the bigleaf maple which is an important tree in this zone. The bigleaf maple is an integral part of the ecosystem because it creates many microenvironments for other plants and animals in the park. As you walk on the trail, you will also notice licorice ferns growing in moss mats on the bigleaf maple trees. You can do a complete loop on the lower trail and experience the new interpretive signs! Please provide some feedback on the signs; we would like to hear from you!

Birds in My (Extended) Backyard

By Nieke Visser

In this issue, my backyard extends to the other side of the Salish Sea: Reifel National Migratory Bird Sanctuary and Boundary Bay. In mid October 10 Salt Spring Trail & Nature Club members and 9 Pender Island Naturalists took the ferry to Tsawwassen, where we stayed overnight. The next day, under the expert guidance of both Gerry McKeating and Brian Self we spent a day watching migratory as well as resident birds. In the morning, on our way to Reifel we noticed flock after flock of lesser snow geese. The clouds were still very low as the morning fog was slowly lifting and we heard them approaching before they came out of the clouds: in a period of about two hours we must have witnessed 1000 to 1500 birds arriving from eastern Siberia. Mindboggling that these birds tackle such a distance in one go!



Snow Geese at Reifel, photo by Nieke Visser

Reifel is a the most rewarding birding area. You cannot go wrong there; even if you are not such an expert birder, there is always something that catches the eye. The park is a pleasure to stroll through and the admission fee is a mere \$5 for adults and \$3 for seniors. At one point you may want to know what kind of birds you see, so before you know it you're hooked! Also a great place to bide your time when you arrive too early for the ferry!

Not long after we had arrived at the watchtower in Reifel, four sandhill cranes, two adults and two immature ones, made their way over to us up to point that we could have touch them (not recommended, though, their beaks are mighty long). They must have been resident cranes, judging from their behavior. This fellow on the left is one of the immature cranes, in all likelihood born this year at Reifel. He still has some of the juvenile coloring along his wings and on top of his head, but the red marking on his head is already showing. His parent (could have been mom or dad; gender is not obvious) was close by. Young cranes stick with their mother to learn the tricks of adulthood. In the wild, juveniles stay with their parents for the 9 to 10 months (usually within a few meters) to learn all the tricks of adulthood, such as migratory routes and places to stop for refueling during the trek. Independence usually occurs 30 to 60 days before the parents' next clutch. Juveniles begin associating within a subadult or non-breeder flock soon after leaving their parents. They remain in these flocks until pairing begins¹. Unfortunately, the parents of this young crane teach their offspring that people will provide food.



Immature crane, photo by Nieke Visser

¹Tacha, T. C., S. A. Nesbitt and P. A. Vohs. 1992. Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*), *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/031>



Boundary Bay and Mount Baker, photo by Nieke Visser

This may be the result of Reifel’s policy to sell bird feed to visitors, especially those with children. Thus, mallards are (no wonder) very abundant. Fortunately, most other duck species, except the odd one perhaps, do not go for the human handouts.

I have visited Reifel many times at all seasons and wood ducks were usually a rarity to spot. Lately, however, I noticed it had become much easier to see them. I was told that at the moment 10 pairs call Reifel home. So, what was this male wood duck in the picture thinking? Did he try to figure out how to get to the seeds? Or was he trying to get out of the way of a group of approaching visitors? At the back of the feeder was his mate, who was far less daring and took off before I could get a picture of her. But this guy had no problems with all the clicking cameras around him. We had lunch at the warming hut where we had a good view of a group of greater yellowlegs and dowitchers (we could not agree on whether they were long- or short-billed).

The afternoon was dedicated to Boundary Bay, one the world’s most important (migratory) birding areas. It is a very large shallow bay or rather an estuary, where sediments were once deposited by the Fraser River. Tsawwassen was still an island then, long before the Fraser’s deposits eventually connected the island with the mainland. Presently two smaller streams still add to the deposits: the Nicomekl and Serpentine rivers. The tide brings in a smørgasbord of different critters favoured by a wide variety of shore birds and waders, thus attracting thousands of migratory birds that use the Pacific Flyway to and from the subarctic and arctic breeding grounds. They stop here to refuel, while some birds also stay a little longer to go through their molt that may compromise their ability to fly long distances. The northern pintail in the picture to the right is in the process of molting so he does not look at his best: his head looks a bit ruffled and he his nice pointy tail is absent. And the raptors must have a field day with so many “sitting ducks”!

Brian Self of the Delta Naturalists was our guide and he took us to the Delta Air Field where we parked the cars and climbed up the dyke. The fog had lifted earlier that morning and sun was out. Mount Baker hovered over the Bay, adding to the scenery.

The tide was still out. We came for the shorebirds, but they were still some distance away. So we started walking north over the dyke to

HONOUR ROLLS

HONORARY MEMBERS

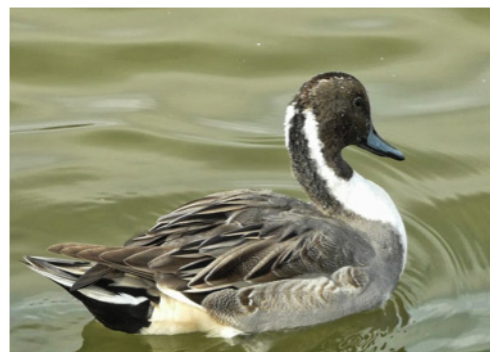
Bob Ball
Loes Holland
Tony Pederson
Jean King
Joan Lott
Eleanor Lloyd
Jean Holmes

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
Linda Quiring
Fred Powell
Janet Anderson
Zeke Blazecka



Wood duck by Nieke Visser



Pintail duck by Nieke Visser

Trailblazer Award, 2013

This year the Executive decided to break with tradition and award two Trailblazer Awards. When you learn who the award-ees are, you will understand. The award is for service to the Club, service that has traditionally been as a member of the Executive and active in many other ways. This tradition, too, has been broken, or more accurately bent, as the awardees have not been on the Executive but certainly have been active in the Club for many, many years and in many ways.

This year's Trailblazers are Margie Radford and Ann King. They have been a dynamic duo in the Club for more than 15 years with their husbands, Brian and Hu', in close support. For the last several years, they have been organizing the refreshments at the Socials, which they took over from Heather Rook. But before that they, typically working together, organized several off-island hikes, sometimes with help from other long time Club members, including Fred Powell and Lynn & Betty Thompson. Destinations included Naramata, Princeton, Strathcona, Anglemont, and Port Alberni. Please congratulate them and thank them, when next you see them, probably at the next Social.

New Members

Tom Cartwright
W. James Crawford
Mary Lou Cuddy
William Goddu
Barbara Mugridge
Jane Petch
Christine Torgrimson

where we thought the birds were closer to the shore. Patience however paid off as over the span of two hours the tide came in and the birds came closer to where we were. Apart from ducks such as American widgeons and northern pintails, there were black-bellied plovers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, western sandpipers, some dunlins and dowitchers, various gulls and a lone great blue heron. Over the fields on the other side of the dyke, northern harriers on the hunt as well as bald eagles and a red-tailed hawk. All in all, we counted 60 species that day, the highlight being a northern shrike. We took the evening sailing of the Queen of Nanaimo home after a fabulous day.

Club Bird Group

Tim Marchant

In May of this year, Barry Spence created a new Google Group for our bird-watching members. The group, "birds-SSTNC", now has 21 members but is open to the entire Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club, and we would like to see many more members.

Bird Talk

Help with bird identifications seems to be the most popular topic so far with the group. Gulls, ducks, and others have come up - and photographs really help if you are so equipped. Take a look at the following picture of two birds photographed on Salt Spring this summer, and note how similar their shape and neck bands are.



On your left, in gray, the Band-tailed Pigeon, long a resident of Salt Spring, and on your right, in beige, the Eurasian-collared Dove, a new arrival as of the last Christmas Bird Count. Same profile, same markings, and unless you get a good solid look at them, or you see them side-by-side, it is hard to know which you are looking at . . . and if you're not sure - that's what the Bird Group is for.

How to Join

Any SSTNC member can join the bird group by sending an email to Barry (sspence@telus.net) or to myself (tim@villagecobbler.ca). Once

we have added you to the membership list, you will receive an email notification of each posting to the bird group, plus you will be able to make your own postings to discuss any bird-related topic you like.

Group members can participate either through email by reading postings and replying to them in their email program, or they can use their web browser to log into the group at www.groups.google.com and search for “birds” or “SSTNC.” People logged-into Google can also look for “MyGroups”. I expect there may be other cunning ways to participate, but those three options should work for us mere mortals.

Our Work With BC Parks

Herb Otto, Trails Coordinator

The partnership venture with BC Parks and the Trail and Nature club is continuing to progress. BC Parks and the Club are entering into a long term agreement to cooperate on this and any other projects they may develop in the future. This includes Ruckle Park, Mt. Erskine Park, Mt. Maxwell Park and Burgoyne Bay Park. This will be a far reaching agreement which will include funding for projects such as the signage for Burgoyne and Mt. Maxwell Parks which has received an initial donation of \$1,000 this year. Other projects to improve trails and facilities in the Parks will also be eligible for funding and assistance.

The signage advisory group has convened a number of meetings so far and has done a preliminary reconnaissance of the trails on Mt. Maxwell to determine the extent of the signage that will be required. A photo record and catalogue of the various intersections of the many trails is being generated which will form the basis for a proposed inventory and budget for the signage. This will require BC Parks approval, but the intent has already been approved including which trails will be permitted to be signed.

This will be a fairly ambitious project. Mt. Maxwell trails will require at least 30 signs on the trails not counting markers along the way. A kiosk similar to the one at the top of Mt. Maxwell will be required adjacent to the Burgoyne Bay parking area, providing information on the trails in both parks. Volunteers will be required to carry posts and install them at the intersections and the beginnings and ends of the trails. Let's look at it as a productive way to get good exercise!

Depending on the budget and the ability to do the volunteer work, the project will be phased. This may take a few years to complete, but the end result will be very rewarding and helpful to our members as well as visitors and tourists to our wonderful island.



Nigel Denyer and Charles Kahn taking notes on Mt. Maxwell trails, photo by Herb Otto.

Christmas Bird Count

Tim Marchant

Bird Studies Canada (<http://www.bsc-eoc.org>), in association with the Audubon Society, is once again organizing the annual Christmas Bird Count, now in its 114th year. The Americas are broken down into circles, each 24 kilometres (15 miles) in diameter. Each circle organizes a group of counters who tally as many birds as they see or hear in one chosen day.

Last year 13,000 counters participated across Canada in 418 circle groups. Counts take place across the United States, Mexico, Central America, and now parts of South America as well. They have produced a significant historical record of bird populations that is used by scientists and environmentalists.

Salt Spring organizes into twelve zones. Our Island total is around one hundred counters each year. Each counter or small group agrees in advance with their zone coordinator which road or beach they will cover. Each also sets its own schedule. Counters spend anywhere from an hour to a number of hours counting with friends and marking their checklists. Some counters stay home and do a backyard “feeder count”.

This year, for the third year, the day chosen is December 15th, the third Sunday in December. Each year some counters can’t participate due to schedule conflicts, and each year we welcome new counters.

If you would like to help count on Sunday the 15th, then please send an email to me at tim@villagecobbler.ca or leave a note at the Cobbler shop in Ganges with your name and contact information. All of our zones north, central, and south could use another hand or two.

Participating costs nothing and is open to all. Beginning counters are paired with more experienced counters to help them build their confidence and experience, so don’t be shy, it is always fun. Blank checklists are provided, and great experiences are shared.



Local Lore: What is this picture and where on Salt Spring is it? Photo by Lorrie Storr.



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