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# Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club  
Newsletter  
Spring, 2014

For those who keep track, this is the last member of the world of Oystercatchers. The Canary Islands Oystercatcher, (*Haematopus meadewaldoi*) was endemic to the Canary Islands, Spain. Very similar to the African Black Oystercatcher, it has a longer bill and shorter wings and did not migrate out of its homeland. It was declared extinct in 1913.

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## President's Point of View Nieke Visser

On January 23, 2014, our club held its annual general meeting presided by outgoing president John Heddle. About 55 members attended. Prior to the business meeting, attendees enjoyed an excellent lunch provided by Penny's Pantry. The 2014 president's report presented at the AGM is available for viewing on the website. The other item of importance is a change of board members, not very dramatic, but some positions changed hands: Nieke Visser (President), John Heddle (Treasurer), David Denning (BC Nature Director), and Kees Visser stepped down (Past President). I take the opportunity here to thank John for his efforts and accomplishments during his tenure as president. It was an interesting year with challenges that were solved with expertise and dedication and a year of accomplishments that will enrich our club. I also like to thank Kees for all his years on the board, serving as hiking coordinator, vice president, president and past president. Thanks John and Kees!

Following the meeting, we enjoyed a spectacular slide show on Salt Spring birds, put together by David Denning and presented by Susan Hannon. Our thanks go out to David and Susan and to Kees Visser who took care of the logistics of hall rental and lunch.

As incoming President, I announced at the AGM that our club was considering hosting the 2015 BC Nature Conference and AGM. An organizing committee had been struck in late fall and had started drafting a program and choosing a venue in January. ArtSpring is the choice of conference centre. At the last executive meeting, a motion was passed to inform BC Nature that the Salt Spring Trail & Nature Club would host the



Fox sparrow Photo by  
David Denning

### Corrections

Two errors got by me in the last issue and were reported. We won't discuss any that were not noticed.

1. Marjie Radford reported that we spelled her name wrong. So sorry Marjie.

2. The picture of an oriole in the Wilson article was a Bullock's oriole, not a Baltimore oriole.

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Salt Spring Island, BC, V8K 2V9. Editor: Gary Adams ([gafrad@shaw.ca](mailto:gafrad@shaw.ca))  
For information on the Board of Directors and weekly outings, please see our website: [www.saltspringtnc.ca](http://www.saltspringtnc.ca)

## Calendar of Events

### Thursday March 20, 2014 Hummingbirds of British Columbia

Nature Presentation by Alison Moran at 7:30 pm at the United Church lower level. Light refreshments provided.

Alison Moran coordinates the Hummingbird Project for Rocky Point Bird Observatory in Victoria. She obtained a PhD in molecular microbiology from the University of Glasgow in 1994 and is at present, a faculty member in the School of Environment and Sustainability at Royal Roads University. In 1997, Alison began volunteering on a hummingbird migration study headed by Cam Findlay and took over coordination of the project in 2009. She joined the board of RPBO in 2009. Alison is investigating habitat usage and range changes in Western hummingbirds. The project has participants throughout British Columbia and in Alberta.

### Friday March 21, 2014 The Life and Times of the Great Blue Heron (Conservancy Event)

7:00 pm Lions Hall, Susan Hannon, Avian Ecologist, will lead a presentation about herons. She will talk about their behavior and status. These birds have a rookery here on Salt Spring. Hannon will touch on the elementary school project which focuses on herons.

### Thursday, April 17, 2014 Citizen Science on the Shore

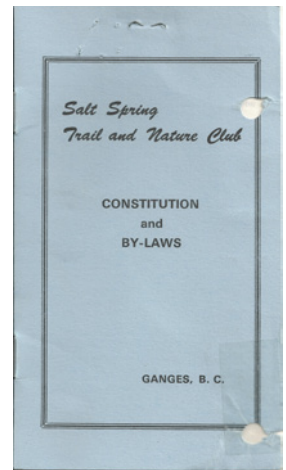
David Denning will make a presentation on the shoreline survey at the United Church lower level, 7:30 PM.

2015 AGM/Conference. I intend to give the membership a regular update of the progress that you will find in this newsletter starting with the summer issue. Incidentally, I discovered a copy of our constitution, dated January 29, 1980, in the one of the boxes with archival material that was handed over to me recently. Although, other material in the boxes suggests that the club originated in 1977, making 2017 our 40th anniversary, this is the oldest printed copy that I am aware of. Perhaps one of our early members can help fill in the gaps.

This year is going to be an interesting year in other aspects as well. In April, we are planning a trip to Prevost Island and are working with the Pender Island Field Naturalists to visit their island. A birding trip in the fall is also on the menu. Place and date will be announced later. Other items on the menu are our annual broom pull and repeat birding excursion in the fall, likely to another location. Our monthly presentations took off in February with the topic of sustainable food production. Attendance was larger than expected, taking into account that it was not on our regular 4th Thursday of the month. This may happen again in the future; it is difficult to get interesting speakers and if there is one available it may not be on our usual day of the month. Three more evenings, in March, April, and May are coming. Please check the calendar in this issue for more detailed information on these and other important events.

Recently, the Executive approved a project that came our way: gathering data on our island's shoreline. This is an exciting citizen science study undertaken by three of our members: David Denning, Peter Mcallister, and Leana Boyer. The purpose is to develop an inventory of the shoreline's ecological, geographical, and human influenced status in a high profile/high-use shoreline area of Salt Spring Island (i.e. Ganges and Fulford Harbour). It will become part of a planned larger Shoreline Atlas of the Island intended to increase public awareness about the ecological importance of shorelines and near-shore areas by engaging volunteers in ecological inventory development. Similar projects have been carried out along the shores of Mayne Island, on which Leana Boyer has worked, and the Saanich Peninsula. With availability of baseline data, ecological and environmental changes are more easily monitored and will be instrumental to raise public awareness of changes to our shores. Our club has received a grant from the BC Nature Foundation that partly covers the expected costs and more grants are applied for to cover the costs. The actual data gathering will start late April with the help of volunteers and continue throughout the spring and perhaps early summer. David will give a presentation on April 17 covering this particular project and the concept of citizen science projects in general.

A second project underway is a cooperation agreement with BC Parks. The agreement comes with a grant to pay for signage in Mt. Maxwell and Burgoyne Bay as well as an information kiosk at the latter park.



*Constitution of  
SSTNC, dated 29  
January 1980.*



Your executive has been asking for and even offered to pay for signage on Mt. Maxwell, so we are happy to see this wish being fulfilled at last.

Of course, our weekly activities continue to be the focus of our organization. Check the website or the Driftwood for details. I wish every one good season of being outdoors, learning about and enjoying nature

## **Salt Spring Nature Reserves: Mill Farm**

*Ashley Hilliard*

Hello, my name is Ashley Hilliard. I am currently the president of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, as well as being an avid hiker and member of the SSI Trail & Nature Club. Gary Adams, the esteemed editor of this newsletter, has kindly offered space for a periodic column describing some of the nature reserves on Salt Spring that the Conservancy has helped establish and that are open to the public.

In the columns, I will describe the features of the reserves and tell the story of how the Conservancy came to acquire or help preserve it. I will offer suggestions for visiting and outline the trails on the reserve as well as trails that link to adjoining parcels.

Though most of the land on Salt Spring is privately owned, we are fortunate to have many well-loved parks and areas of Crown land available for hiking. An important mission of the Conservancy is to add to those areas with other nature reserves.

One of the best ways to discover the nature reserves owned by the SSI Conservancy and other reserves is to join one of the regular Tuesday outings of the Trail & Nature Club, whether as hiker, rambler or walker. Trips to the reserves are scheduled regularly. The schedule is published monthly in the Driftwood as well as being posted on the Club's website.

In this first column, I would like to discuss the first reserve we were instrumental in preserving, the Mill Farm Regional Park Reserve. Indeed saving the Mill Farm property was the catalyst for the establishment of the Conservancy.

The property consists of a quarter section of land (160 acres) on Musgrave Road, on the west side of Mt Bruce. To access the reserve, drive south towards Fulford Harbour. Turn onto Isabella Point Road, and then right onto Musgrave Road (paved at this point). The drive climbs pleasantly through farmland. From where the pavement ends, it is approximately 9km to the Mill Farm Reserve. Though unpaved, the road is graded regularly and passable for most vehicles. The reserve is sign-posted. After the reserve, Musgrave Road continues approximately 4 km to its end at Musgrave Landing, a picturesque and historic cove at the far SW corner of Salt Spring, well worth including in any visit to the Mill Farm.

Three brothers from Lancashire, Arnold, Frank and Walter Smith homesteaded the property in 1919 and, at one point, built a millwheel on the stream that runs through the property. Hence the reserve's name. There are still a few remains of the wheel and home-stand. Here is a link to some information on Mill Farm from the Salt Spring Archives: <http://saltspringarchives.com/correspondence/MillFarm.html>

In the 1980s, a group of people bought the

**Tuesday, April 22, 2014**

**Prevost Island Hike**

See notice on page 6

**Thursday, May 22, 2014**

**Wildlife in East Africa**

Gwen McDonald and Curt Firestone will make a slide presentation at United Church lower level, 7:30 pm.

**Tuesday, June 17, 2014**

**Strawberry Festival**

**May 1-3, 2014**

**BC Nature Conference and AGM in Victoria**

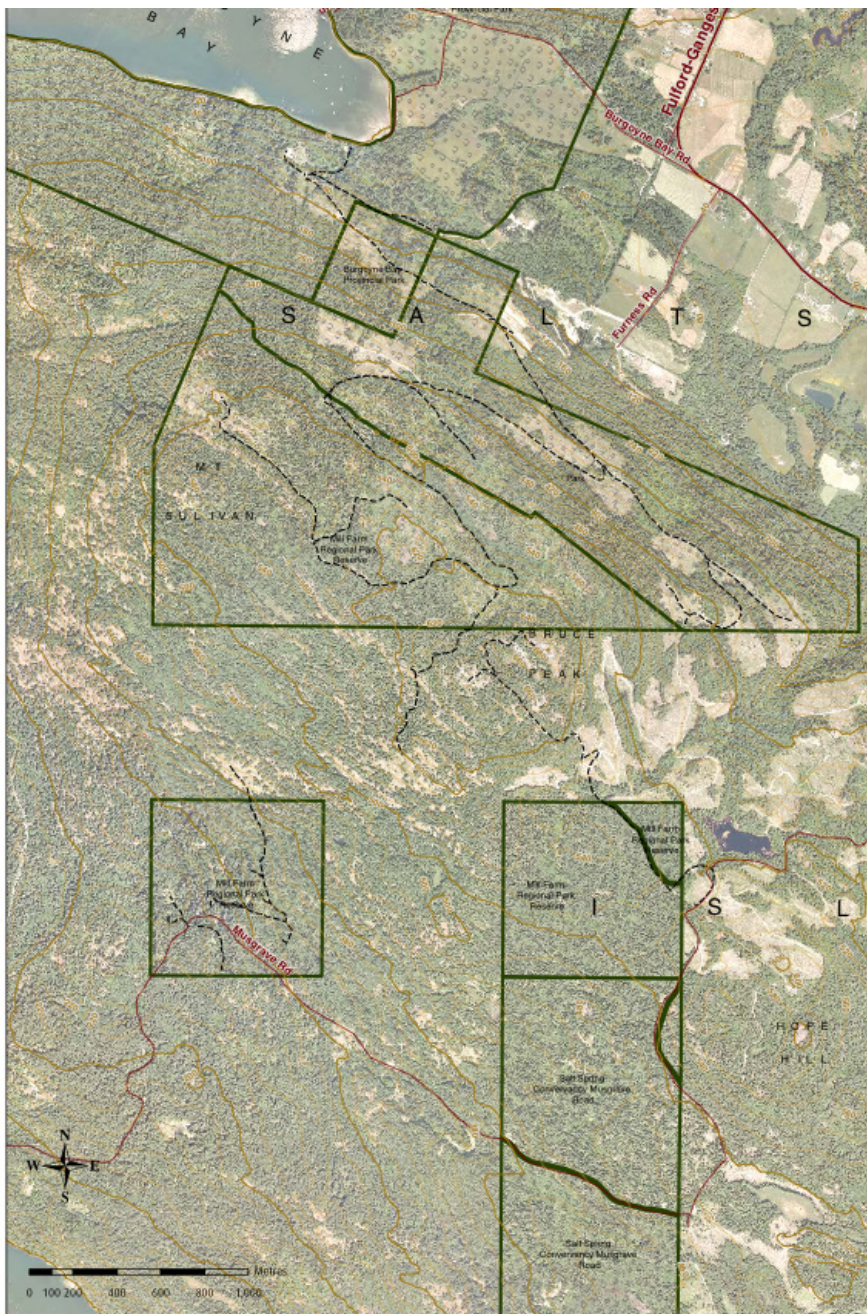
co-hosted by the Victoria Natural History Society and Rocky Point Bird Observatory. Details at

[www.rpbo.org/bcnatureagm.php](http://www.rpbo.org/bcnatureagm.php)



*Machinery at Mill Farm. Photo by Lynn Thompson.*





property and some built cabins on various parts of the property. When this group decided to sell in the mid-1990s, the property attracted the interest of loggers due to the presence on the property of a significant stand of old-growth Douglas-fir.

A group of dedicated island women got together to lead a campaign to save the Mill Farm, and founded the SSI Conservancy. We call them our founding mothers. The Conservancy raised approximately \$150,000 from the community, and persuaded the Capital Regional District (CRD) and the province to purchase the land. The land, together with another 160-acre parcel nearby, forms the Mill Farm Regional Park Reserve, the core of what, according to the CRD master plan, will eventually be a regional park in the southwest part of Salt Spring. It connects to other crown land right through to Burgoyne Bay Provincial Park. To the east, trails lead to the summit of Mt Bruce and link to the Conservancy's 320-acre Alvin Indridson Nature Reserve.

The best guide to the trails on the Mill Farm reserve is Charles Kahn's *Hiking the Gulf Islands of British Columbia*, 3rd edition, 2011. This fine book is indispensable for the serious Gulf Islands hiker. The Mill Farm and adjoining trails are described at pages 218-223.

Besides the old homestead site, the most interesting features of the Mill Farm Reserve are the magnificent stands of old growth fir, and the fine views from the

upper reaches of the reserve. Here is a link to a You Tube video for an armchair tour: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AeMvG6domxk>.

Allow about two hours to tour the reserve, plus driving time, more if you plan to hike through to adjoining property.

As mentioned, the Salt Spring Island Conservancy was formed to help the community preserve natural habitats on the island. Its core functions are acquiring and managing ecologically valuable land, holding conservation covenants, helping landowners become good land stewards, and public education.

Since 1995, we have helped buy or protect over 3400 acres on Salt Spring Island. In the process, we have built strong partnerships with other conservation groups and government agencies. If you are a member, I thank you. If not, I invite you to join us. It is easy and inexpensive. You can download a membership form here: <http://saltspringconservancy.ca/wp/what-you-can-do/become-a-member/>

Together we can be a strong force for nature on Salt Spring.

In the next edition of the Oystercatcher, I'll discuss another reserve. Until then, see you on the trail!



# THE TREES AROUND US

*Bryan Adderly*

Trees are like people; they hug best when you recognise them and can call them by name.

The next few issues of the Oystercatcher will have short articles on the trees around us, mainly on Salt Spring Island (SSI). I will try to encourage you to see the trees around you as friends you can touch, feel, get close to and smell.

Hugh Johnson, in his beautifully illustrated book “[The International Book of Trees](#),” identifies a tree as “a woody plant (capable of) growing 20 feet high and tending to have a single stem (though it may have more). Pojar and MacKinnon (P&M) in their book “[Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast](#)” say “trees are single stemmed, woody plants greater than 10 m high when mature”.

I like Hugh Johnson’s caveat, “I am not a botanist, nor a forester, nor even (except in my own garden) a gardener, but a writer who has found in trees a point of contact with creation, a source of wonder and satisfaction which has the inestimable advantage of growing almost everywhere”.

The trees we shall look at are Douglas Fir, Grand Fir, Pacific Silver Fir, Western Red Cedar, Western Broadleaf Maple, Western Hemlock, Shore Pine, Western White Pine, Lodgepole Pine, Western Yew, Yellow Cedar, Red Alder, Black Cottonwood, Bitter Cherry, Arbutus, Garry Oak, Western Flowering Dogwood, Juniper, Sequoia, Ponderosa Pine and Eucalyptus. There are many other species that have been brought from the outside into our area. Some of you may have a favourite that you would like to tell us about.

Two common conifers found on SSI are Douglas-fir and Grand-fir.

## Douglas Fir

(*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) is not related to the true firs (Abies). It was first described by naturalist-surgeon Dr. Archibald Menzies and named after the explorer-botanist David Douglas. The Latin name comes from pseudo (false) and tsuga (hemlock). (P&M)

Douglas-fir leaves are needle like, 20-30 mm long with pointed tips, one groove on the top and two white bands of stomata (a minute pore in the epidermis of a leaf) on the bottom. The leaves are flexible, giving a soft feel when sliding a branch through your hand.

## Grand Fir

(*Abies grandis*) is classed as a “true fir”. It was named “Grand” by David Douglas because of its great height and diameter. Abies is a genus of evergreen trees comprising some 40-50 species. The generic name occurs in classical Latin referring to some kind of fir tree, although not necessarily a species of Abies. (P&M) & (The Oxford Encyclopedia of “TREES OF THE WORLD”)

Grand-fir leaves are flat, arranged in two opposite rows on the branch, with alternating long and short leaves. They are dark green on the top with a groove. The end is rounded with a notch and the bottom is light green with two white lines of stomata.

## The Mysterious Club Bench

*John Heddle*

Old-timers will know about the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club’s memorial bench but there may be other newcomers,



*Douglas fir. Photo by Bryan Adderly.*



*Grand fir. Photo by Bryan Adderly.*

## Prevost island trip 2014

For members only

**DATE:** 22 April 2014

**TRANSPORTATION:** Water taxi. Maximum capacity: 48 passengers.

**DEPARTURE:** 9:00 am sharp from the dock behind Mouat; be there at 8:45 am for boarding.

**RETURN:** 2:00 pm from Prevost Island sharp; be at the dock at 1:45 pm. Arriving in Ganges approximately. 2:45 pm

**COSTS:** \$30 per person; cheques only; NO CASH!!

We have accepted an invitation from Sheila Wowchuck and Barbara De Burgh to spend the day on their island on April 22. This a good time for birding too, so bring your binoculars!

As during previous trips, the excursions are on two levels:

1. A walk/ramble led by Sheila Wowchuck around the farm which will be limited in length and followed by tea at the farm house. This will be suitable for walkers and strong ramblers.

2. The other activity will be longer and may cover most of the island, suitable for strong walkers and hikers. For this group there will no time for tea unfortunately. There will be no other activities on April 22.

If you are interested, please contact Andrea Rankin to register:

telephone: 250-537-1904 or email: [lone-arranger@telus.net](mailto:lone-arranger@telus.net)

Please provide Andrea with you name, telephone number, and email address.

Your registration will be confirmed when your payment has been received by Andrea.

**NOTE:** No payment, no go, no exceptions.

**HOW TO PAY:** Make a cheque payable to SS Trail&Nature Club and drop it off in the cobbler's box (inside the shoe store in Ganges). PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE CASH IN THE COBBLER'S BOX.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** cancellations accepted and fees returned up to 7 days before departure (15th of April). If you have to cancel after the 15th of April, there will be NO REFUND, but if you can find a person to take your place, notify Andrea and arrange payment with the person who takes your place.

Form more information: call Andrea Rankin (250-537-1904) or Nieke Visser (250-537-5443)

like me, who don't. To see it you have go along the Channel Ridge trails to the Salt Spring Island Water

Preservation Society Lands and thence to "The Outlook".



These days it is not hard to do without getting lost in the mesh of interlocking trails because PARC has put up maps at several entrances and numbered sign posts along the way. The trails are heavily used but even so you, like me, might not have been up there recently and thus would be surprised at the quality and extent of the work. Of the two outlooks shown, the bench is at the southern one near an information kiosk put up by the Water Preservation Society. It is worth a visit and if you go you can sit on the mammoth bench and enjoy the view of St. Mary Lake from on high. A picture of the plaque is shown here.

A group of cubs was there, earning badges and eating their snack on the bench. Curious about this memorial to a single member of our Club, I asked Betty Kirk if she knew what it was about, and this is what she told me:

"Joy Newton was tragically killed by a speeding young motorist in Vancouver when she was going across a road with her daughter and grand daughter, in a stroller, while using a crosswalk. She had been a very active member of the T&N Club and we all felt the loss deeply. It was decided to place a memorial bench with a commemorative plaque at the Channel Ridge outlook. A few of us were tasked to suggest other



*Dedication of bench made by Ian Fraser & Co. Photo from Betty Kirk archive collection.*



names that could be added to Joy's. However, we felt that singling out special people was not a good idea and requested, as we do now, to remember all members and former members who have passed away every year in a memorial book. More recently, they are remembered with our donation to the Trans-Canada Trail.

All the necessary forms for permission to place the bench with plaque were obtained and a massive volunteer effort was launched, including transporting redi-mix concrete by wheelbarrow down the trail. We had a little ceremony when it was in place. ... At times the bench is removed for re-furbishing which causes great consternation among older members until the reason is revealed."

If you go, the shortest entrance is from Merganser Place or from Canvasback just up the hill from Merganser place. However, the longer the walk, the more you will enjoy the view. If you should see anyone on a mountain bike or an ATM, take their picture and send it to the RCMP, as there are reports of a lot of damage in the area from these forbidden intruders.

## Varied Thrush

*Contribution by Tim Marchant and David Denning*

*The 25 member strong Birder group of the SSTNC keeps in contact by email, to spread breaking news and discuss birds. I suspect anyone on the island who feeds birds noticed all the varied thrushes this year. Tim sent me a few of his emails regarding them.*

Feb. 08

Okay, what's with the Varied Thrush this week? In twelve years I rarely see them around our house (altitude 500 feet) or on the way to town. Then this week I am seeing dozens of them along the roadside as I drive from the south end (Beaver Point Road) to Ganges (via Stewart Road). Has the cold brought them down from higher up on Salt Spring? Where do they normally hang out at this time of year?

Feb10

How's this for varying? A year ago at the Christmas Bird Count (Dec 2012) not one Varied Thrush was counted anywhere on Salt Spring, while this year (Dec 2013) we counted a total of 173.

Robins have some pretty big ups and downs too:

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<i>American Robin</i>	749	454	1671	485	4800
<i>Varied Thrush</i>	132	104	370	0	173

## News Release

### Off Road Vehicle Legislation

#### Government of British Columbia

VICTORIA - Bill 13, the Off Road Vehicle Act introduced February 24, 2014, promises certainty, safety and regulatory structure for thousands of off-road enthusiasts. It replaces the 40-year-old Motor Vehicle (All Terrain) Act with a modern management structure, designed to align with existing regulatory regimes at minimal cost.

Increased use of quads, snowmobiles and other ORVs has helped British Columbians get out and enjoy the beauty of the province's backcountry. Bill 13 will help ensure these vehicles are driven in a safe and environmentally responsible manner. Currently, an estimated 200,000 ORVs are used in the province. While snowmobiles have been registered in British Columbia since the 1970s, it is the last province in Canada that does not require registration of off-road vehicles.

If passed, the act will establish a one-time registration system specifically designed to integrate with the pre-existing structure of the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia's vehicle registry, reducing implementation costs. ORVs will have to be registered and display a clearly visible number plate before they can be operated on Crown or other public land. It will allow the development of regulations on the rules of operation (such as wearing helmets), safety standards and conditions of use for a wide range of modern ORVs, including snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles or "quads", dirt bikes and utility terrain vehicles. It will assist in identifying stolen or abandoned ORVs. Finally, it will provide officers with more effective enforcement tools to target the small number of irresponsible ORV owners that endanger others or damage sensitive habitat. This bill increases the maximum fine for offences from \$500 to \$5,000.

Included in the proposed ORV legislation is an amendment to the Special Accounts Appropriation and Control Act establishing the ORV Trail Management Sub-account. This will ease the process of providing future investments directly into developing and maintaining trails, delivering lasting benefits to the ORV tourism industry in rural communities.

The proposed ORV Act is the result of extensive consultation, and represents a fair compromise for all user groups. Implementation, including registration provisions, is anticipated in the fall of 2014. BC Nature has long lobbied to pass this legislation.

Learn More:

To view a copy of the bill and view its progress through debate, visit: [their web site](#).

Media Contact:

Greig Bethel, Media Relations, Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations  
250 356-5261

Feb11

A 13-year-old Checklist of Birds of Victoria and Southeastern Vancouver Island by the Victoria Natural History Society shows the Varied Thrush dropping from “common” in Dec, Jan, Feb to “fairly common” for the other nine months March-November. So that is a bit of a drop but they should still be around . . . but as Nieke says, I don’t know where they go . . . so it is time to dig into The Birds of British Columbia, the massive four volume set.

According to The Birds of BC, the coastal sub-species of Varied Thrush (browner/buffer than the greyer interior sub-species) spends the winter in the Georgia Depression, typically from October to April.

From April to October they either move up the mountains or north to the Queen Charlottes. Nesting in the South Coastal area is from sea-level up to 1,500m, and in mature or 2nd growth coniferous forest (“dense coniferous forest where moss blanketed the ground and draped branches of the small conifers chosen for the nest sites.”)

So, some of our winter guests will head north toward the Charlottes, and some up the mountains of Vancouver Island. Given Salt Spring’s generally forested and mountainous character, I would expect to find a few of them still on-island in summer, but instead of being down where we humans reside, they would mostly be up in the higher mountain forests of the south-end.

Unseen, although still around, for the summer, they would come back into our yards in winter. “Birds” also notes that in bad weather or later in the winter as the berry supply is exhausted they may be seen more frequently at bird feeders.

### Editor’s Note

I had a little more material this issue than would fit neatly within the 8-page format with space for Canada Post. Since only 10% of our readers get the newsletter by mail, I let my content spill into the postage space as added benefit for the email recipients.

### Did you Know?

The SSTNC maintains a set of links to hiking and related maps on its web. Members can go there to gain access to maps of various parks and properties. It is also a good place for members to put GPS information on trails if they have it mapped out. Consider using or contributing to it. To get you started, I have just added two new links. The first is to a map of surficial geology of the island complete with explanatory texts. The second is a general information map of the island that can be found on the Salt Spring Design web page. It is a good source of general, mappable information. Check us out at: <http://www.saltspringtnc.ca/links.php>



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**Local Lore:** What kind of tree is this and where is it? Photos by Gary Adams. Last issue - nursery tree, Gwen’s Beach, Ruckle Park.