



David Denning photo

Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club
Newsletter
Summer 2014



Western
Tanager on Mt.
Erskine: Farley
Cannon Photo

Index

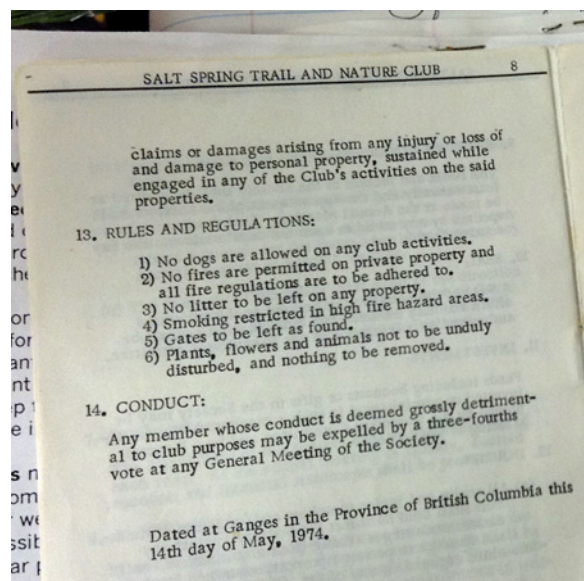
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Editor's Notes

I have a few notes and announcements this issue. First of all, see that gray box just above? As some of you may have noticed, I had been running a summary of the world's Oystercatchers in that box but I ran out of them with the last issue. I would like to use this spot in the future to highlight a nature photograph from the Island. We have some great photographers in the group and some equally impressive nature to photograph. Send me your favourite Salt Spring Island bird, mammal, flower, mushroom, or rock with an identification of the subject and its location and I will select at least one to feature on the front page of our journal.

Last issue we noted that we would like to know in what year the Club was founded. My thanks to Paul Way who found an early bylaw document at the archives that establishes the founding as 1974. Simultaneously, Nieke was contacted by some of our original members. Have a look at her report that follows. It makes me wonder if there are interesting photographs out there among the members that would make a good scrapbook of that history. So, what do you have folks? Write or email me with your potential contributions.

Over the past couple of issues, some new contributors have stepped forward to offer some very exciting material. This has reinvigorated the editor and I hope you find it as interesting and informational as I do. Thanks so much to those who make this newsletter possible.



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

Calendar of Events

Tuesday, June 17, 2014 Strawberry Festival

The 2013-2014 hiking season ends with the Strawberry Festival at Ruckle Park. Meet at noon in the lower picnic area, Tuesday, September 11, 2013

Tuesday, September 9, 2014 SSTNC Annual Blackberry Festival

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

President's Point of View

Nieke Visser

As announced at the last AGM, the bylaws have been amended recently to reflect our current needs. In a nutshell, the paragraphs dealing with governing the club have been changed; the make up of the board of directors has been made more generic, so that we do not need to amend them as frequently. You will receive the new version for your approval at the general meeting following the Strawberry Festival on June 17. We also updated the policy document that was last amended in 2006 and was due to a major overhaul. A policy document allows your executive to operate on a day-to-day basis, and can be changed by the executive as needed within the limits of the bylaws. By making the bylaws more generic, it is possible to change for example the duties of the directors without changing the bylaws and saving the club \$50 of legal fees. I want to thank Sue Lehmann for her insight and the leadership she showed working on the current version.

This brings me to the next topic: how old is our club? In the last issue, I mentioned a constitution booklet dated 1980 that I found in one of the archival boxes and I assumed cautiously that this might have been the first constitution. Was I ever wrong. I received a phone call from Loes Holland, one of the founders of the club and from Betty Kirk, a long time member as well. Betty, Loes, and I got together around the table in Loes' living room one morning. Loes had dug up some very early records: the idea of starting a club was conceived in 1973, and the first constitution was dated January 26, 1974. It can be argued that we missed the 40th anniversary of our Club, but heck, we did not miss the 40th anniversary of the constitution, a legal document with a date. For argument's sake, let's call this year our 40th anniversary. Should



Clockwise: Jerry Holland, Joy Newton, Jean King, Ruby Alton

Mary Sylvester, Loes Holland , Ruby Alton

we celebrate? In my humble opinion, the Strawberry festival is the right occasion to do that and we may do something extra to commemorate this milestone. As a start, I put together a collage of some of the founders of our club from pictures donated by Loes. There are other pioneers as well, such as Marg and Art Simons, Vera Perillo, Marc and Jean Holmes, Joanne and Arthur Milner, Lassie Dodds and Ted Brown. Unfortunately, I was not in a position to obtain pictures of everyone.

On a different note: we enjoyed a very successful trip to Prevost Island in April. The hikers went around the whole island and the walkers made a shorter trip that finished on Sheila and Barbara's deck where tea or coffee and some wonderful baked goods were provided. The next (boat) trip is scheduled for June 24 and this time we go to South Pender Island. If you would like to come too, send me an email niekevisser@shaw.ca or phone me: 250 537 5443. Details are on the website as well as in this issue of the Oystercatcher.

The Shoreline Atlas project is on its way. A number of volunteers have been recruited to play the citizen scientist; they underwent an afternoon of training on the mudflats of Ganges Harbour behind Gasoline Alley. David Denning was our inspiring teacher. Others involved are Peter Mcallister and Leana Boyer. I was one of the hopefuls to become a citizen scientist. It always amazes me how many different critters live in the mud. I am sure David will keep you up to date as to the details and how the project progresses.

I hope to see you all at the Strawberry festival on June 17 in Ruckle Park, starting at noon and this year put together by the Ramblers!



Selected photos from our trip to Prevost by Lucille Adderley

Letter to the Oystercatcher

With a membership of over 200 it's a shame that the same few people have to do all the work.

Ann King & I have been looking after making coffee & tea & collecting goodies for the social meetings for several years. We are happy to keep doing this but once in a while we are unable to be there especially if the meeting is not on the 4th Thursday evening as it used to be. When we ask for someone to take our place the only people to offer is Adderleys (every time). There must be someone else who can turn up 1/2 hour early & make tea & coffee & put out cups & saucers? The same goes for donating a pan of goodies - it's always the same few who offer.

AND what about leading hikes, walks, & rambles?? The same leaders' names appear year after year. It's not difficult to learn a route & be the leader once a year.

Marjie Radford

Salt Spring Shoreline Survey Project

Progress Report 1:

Baseline Studies Now Underway

David Denning

Did you know that Goat Island, largest island in Ganges Harbour, has a healthy population of over 6800 common purple sea stars (*Pisaster ochraceus*)? The number was obtained by a meticulous count conducted at low tide by boat along the island's shores as part of the SS Trail and Nature Club's Shoreline Survey Project. A positive result of this initial survey was the finding that only 19 common sea stars out of more than 6800 individuals counted were afflicted with the sea star wasting disease - a mysterious condition that has decimated sea star populations all along the Pacific Coast this year.



Common sea star. Photo by David Denning.

The Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club is now assisting with this citizen-science-assisted study and other scientific studies of our coastal waters and intertidal areas. The studies are designed to provide a baseline assessment of the ecological health of our shores and the shallow waters directly offshore. These baselines are exceedingly important in the face of the pipeline/tanker expansion projects proposed for our area, and in the context of changing ocean conditions due to climate change, marine diseases, and invasive species.

The Shoreline Survey Project will involve volunteer Trail and Nature Club hikers working in teams to walk sections of the Harbour shoreline at the lowest tides of the year. Sections of one or two kilometers will be walked on several of the lowest tides in June and July. Observers will count key indicator species such as the common sea star as well as measure and map beds of sand dollars and eelgrass. Special populations of marine animals will be noted and mapped, and an overall index of ecological health will be assigned to our intertidal areas on the basis of the data collected. Two training sessions led by local naturalist, David Denning, have been carried out so far and shoreline surveys will be carried out during the low tide cycle around June 13 and later around the low tide cycle of late June.

If you are interested in participating in this citizen science initiative, please contact David Denning by email at ddenning@telus.net. Any Trail and Nature Club Member above the age of 15 can participate. Participants should be prepared for a rigorous walk over mud, boulders, and other intertidal surfaces.

Complementary to the SS Trail and Nature Club's shoreline project that involves mapping the shoreline above the zero tide line occurring on Salt Spring Island, another project is going around the shores of the Island just below the zero tide line. A team of people circumnavigating Salt Spring Island at kayak pace in a power boat seems like the worst example of Sunday driving until the reason comes clear. They are towing a camera lens that reveals the view under water. The crew is looking for eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) as they travel. The eelgrass mapping is the 3rd year of an Islands Trust Fund effort to establish where this particularly important habitat is located among the island within the Islands Trust Area. Eelgrass serves as a nursery for many young species, serves up food, and provides shelter for 85% of commercially important fish species at some point in their lives. It reduces wave energy to help keep those low-lying beaches intact. Moreover, it sequesters carbon even better than forests. When the green shoots appear on the monitor, the crew records GPS points at frequent intervals. Once the points collected are put on a map with the guidance of information recorded on a data sheet, a line shows where eelgrass was seen. Eelgrass maps produced over the last two years can be viewed on the Islands Trust Fund web site under Ecosystems Maps.

List of Resources

Ecosystems Maps, Islands Trust Fund: www.islandstrustfund.bc.ca

The Travelling Birder

Murray Coates

During the past few years I have had the opportunity to travel to some pretty interesting places, both on vacation and as part of my volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity. I always try and look for opportunities to do some birding on these journeys as I have a pretty low tolerance for museums and historic sites.

Recently I led a Habitat trip to Ethiopia. The entry point was through Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This location does not readily come to mind for birding, but it surprised me with a guided birding activity available through ABC Tours of Dubai.

On the chosen day, they picked me up at my hotel and delivered me to a hide at the local sanctuary site that is likely one of the very few UAE wetlands. The path to the air-conditioned hide was enclosed with a bamboo fence. Loaner optics available to visitors in the blind included Leica binoculars and telescopes. Once in the blind, we saw reef, grey and striated herons, whimbrels, red-wattled lapwings, spoonbills, various egrets, and other interesting species. A visit to a second blind provided a look at a huge flock of greater flamingos. These magnificent birds apparently recently arrived from Iran. I managed to identify 23 species during a relatively short birding tour.

The next stop before leaving for Ethiopia was in Qatar. Qatar has a falcon souk selling birds up to \$30,000 US each. Falconry is a cultural tradition in the Middle East and apparently the birds are raised rather than wild caught.

The next destination was Ethiopia via a four hour flight from Dubai to Addis Ababa. The first bird seen near the airport parking lot was the rather unusual thick-billed raven, which is almost like a cross between a common raven and a toucan. Ethiopia is apparently a very good birding destination and people on dedicated bird watching tours can expect to identify lots of different species. However my main responsibility was to the Habitat build so birding had to be a secondary activity. A 90-minute bus ride from Addis took us to our Habitat build destination in Debre Berhan. A garbage-processing site behind our hotel served the scavenger population including fantailed ravens, pied crows, black kites, and lots of vultures.



Path to the blind. Photo by Murray Coates.



About to be turned over to a customer. Photo by Murray Coates

Our ad hoc Habitat bird committee had some identification challenges but the final conclusion was that there were lots of hooded vultures and some lappet-faced vultures enjoying the offerings in the back yard. The pied crows added interest by tag-teaming the vultures to steal their food.

Ethiopia yielded only 19 species but many were interesting sightings. On one tour of the countryside, highlights included wattled ibis, speckled pigeons, silver-cheeked hornbills, and African pied wagtails. However, the big event was a fresh road kill site where our group saw Africa in all its wild glory. A cow, hit and killed by a vehicle, bore the results of the vulture telegraph message.

Iran was the last stop and an exciting destination but not from a birding perspective. I was only able to

sight three more species on this leg including Eurasian magpies, hooded crows, and the ever-present Indian mynahs.

My final overall species total was 45 and most of them were life birds. Birding while travelling can really add to the overall experience. A good birding resource to get advance information about a travel destination is BirdingPal <http://www.birdingpal.org>.

Update on the 2015 BC Nature Conference and AGM on SSI

Nieke Visser, Organizing Committee Chair

The theme of choice is “Living by the Salish Sea; Protecting Our Ecosystem”.

The dates of the conference are May 7 through May 10, 2015. We expect around 120 people from off island to come to the conference, but a 150 people or even more, could be heading our way.

The organizing committee has been working very hard to secure the venues: the main venue will be the entire ArtSpring building with speakers on two simultaneous sessions, one in the theater and one in the galleries. In addition, some the events will be held in Harbour House, and the meeting rooms in the library are going to be involved as well. We also secured plenty of hotel/B&B accommodation whose owners have agreed to a discount for conference participants. Some of these discounts are substantial.

The conference will stretch over 4 days: Thursday May 7 will be devoted to workshops and visits to three other Gulf Islands. For Friday morning, May 8, we lined up 6 speakers and in the afternoon, a wide variety of 3-hour excursions will be offered to conference participants. The same excursions are offered on Saturday morning. The afternoon is dedicated to the BC Nature’s AGM with a banquet in the evening in Harbour House Hotel with an awards ceremony and a keynote speaker. Sunday is dedicated to get everyone on their respective ferry on the way home with stops along the way: plans are to visit Prevost island, Sidney Spit or Hort Hill, and Tzouhalem nature reserve to name a few. The program is still in draft form and a lot of fine-tuning is needed. By November, the program needs to be in place for publication in the winter issue of BC Nature Magazine. It will also be available on BC Nature’s and our own website. In the mean time, I will keep you informed of the progress.

Of course, we cannot pull this off without the help of volunteers. It is still a long way till May 2015 and closer to that date I will circulate specific jobs that need to be filled. However, it is never too early to offer your help so if you like to be part this, please contact me.

Nieke Visser

Ph. 250-537 5443

email: niekevisser@shaw.ca



White-backed vultures. Photo by Murray Coates.



Osprey fishing. Photo by Farley Cannon.

The Trees Around Us

Bryan Adderley

I came across a picture of a 3200 year old Giant Sequoia and could not resist telling you about it. This tree is 247 feet high and twenty seven feet in diameter. The image has a red dot near the tree top, a yellow dot in the middle, and another red dot at the base. These are men working on it. The original photo was taken by Mike Nichols of National Geographic Society by shooting 126 separate images and stitching them into one. You can see the image and a video of how it was made at <http://www.neatorama.com/2013/01/24/photographing-a-Giant-Sequoia>. There are many Sequoias on Salt Spring Island; at least thirteen on the golf course. The Giant Sequoia below is at Foxglove Farm & Garden Supply. I know of only one Redwood on SSI.

Last issue included a photo of a Grand Fir (*Abies grandis*). Since then, I have found what I believe are two Pacific Silver Fir branches (*Abies amabilis*) (*amabilis* means "lovely" [P&M]); one on Bryant Hill, the other on Channel Ridge. Both branches caught my eye because of their silvery light underside which was exposed. The leaves were flat and blunt with some notched at the tip. The bottom and side leaves were spread horizontally and the leaves on the top were flat against the twig and pointing forward, unlike the Grand Fir which have leaves in two opposite rows alternating one long and one short (see photos). Both of these true firs form their cones erect and hold onto them until they disintegrate and spread their seeds, unlike the Douglas Fir and Western Hemlock which drop the cones with seeds attached.

Trees

Joyce Kilmer 1886-1918

*I think that I shall never see
a poem lovely as a tree.*

*A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
against the sweet earth's flowing breast;*

*A tree that looks at God all day,
and lifts her leafy arms to pray;*

*A tree that may in summer wear
a nest of robins in her hair,*

*Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
who intimately lives with rain.*

*Poems are made by fools like me;
But only God can make a tree.*



Sequoia



Grand Fir



Pacific silver fir

Sequoia located at Foxglove Nursery. Photos by Bryan Adderley.

Hummingbird Heaven

Gary Adams

Since I was a little short on content this issue, I thought I would tell you about our new record. Never, have we had so many hummingbirds at our feeders. As near as we can tell, our two feeders were nourishing at least 28 birds at the height of the rush. The numbers seem equally divided between Anna's and rufus and they reached their peak about mid-May. They fought over the feeders all day long but just after dusk, all thoughts of territory dispersed and they share politely.



A few years back, the club had a talk from a visiting ornithologist (whose name I cannot remember). In one of his bird vignettes, he discussed how his hummingbird feeder research concluded that they liked a 50-50 mix of water and sugar best. He made no claim as to what was best for them but when we tried the higher concentration, we sucked all of the birds out of the neighbourhood and into our yard.

That, in itself, does not explain the concentrations we have encountered this year, but it might have helped.

Get off my head. Hummingbirds on feeder just before dark (hence the poor quality photo by Gary Adams)



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