



David Denning photo

# Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club  
Newsletter  
Autumn 2014



Collage of bald eagle photos by Ben Neufeld.

## Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club hosts the 2015 BC Nature Conference and AGM

*Nieke Visser; Chair of the 2015 BC Nature Conference and AGM Committee*

The organizing committee has worked very hard over the past few months. Here is an update on the progress. The theme we have chosen is: ***Living by the Salish Sea: Protecting our Ecoregion*** and will be reflected in the presentations and field trips throughout the duration of the conference.

On the Thursday preceding the conference, we will visit some of the other southern Gulf Islands as well: pre-conference day trips are going to either Pender, Mayne, or Galiano Islands. Workshops will be offered such as nature photography, Salt Spring Island geology (indoors in the morning followed up by a field excursion in the afternoon) and “Stewards in Training”, a hands-on nature education program for schoolchildren from Kindergarten onwards, entirely run by volunteers.

On Friday morning six speakers are lined up to present in two simultaneous sessions. There are more speakers on Friday and Saturday evening and we start off with a social and “cabaret” on Thursday evening.

Field trips on Friday afternoon and Saturday afternoon will cover most of the island as well as the ocean surrounding it: we will explore intertidal life, ocean wildlife, and on land unique habitats, wetlands, habitat reclamation, birding areas, as well as sustainable food production on the island.

On Saturday morning BC Nature will hold its Annual General Meeting in the ArtSpring Theater.

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**Editor's Notes.** This issue of the Oystercatcher was a close run thing. I was on the verge of sending an email to cancel the issue for lack of material. This is not the fault of any of our contributors. Sometimes things conspire against us. One complication this issue is that the PARC contribution has been dropped. The readers are probably aware that someone from the PARC office has been contributing regularly for about three years and our little newsletter actually scooped the Driftwood a couple of times. I, for one, will really miss them.

I must also mention that the group photo on page 2 of the last issue should read Mary Sylvander, not Sylvester.

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For information on the Board of Directors and weekly outings, please see our website: [www.saltspringtnc.ca](http://www.saltspringtnc.ca)

## Calendar of Events

### **Tuesday, September 9, 2014 Blackberry Festival**

The 2014-2015 hiking season begins with the Blackberry Festival at Ruckle Park. Meet at noon in the lower picnic area. Remember to bring your favourite blackberry goodie, a bowl and a spoon. Short walks will be scheduled prior to the festival on Tuesday, September 11, 2014.

### **Thursday, October 23, 2014 Wild About Plants: Traditional and Current Uses of Coastal BC Plants.**

The Program Room at the Library, starting at 7:30PM, we will have presentation by Genevieve Singleton, nature interpreter from the Cowichan Valley. She is excited about coming to Salt Spring to share her lifelong love of nature and love of the outdoors.

### **Thursday, November 20, 2014 Woodpeckers: Nature's Carpenters**

John and Heather Neville presentation by at 7:30 at the Lions Hall, co-sponsored by the SSTNC and the SSI Conservancy.

### **Date to be determined Birding trip to Boundary Bay**

As last year we will visit Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary and walk along the dike of Boundary Bay. Date and other details will be announced later. Watch the Driftwood.

Sunday will hold post-conference excursions in all directions to bid our guests farewell.

As members of the SSTNC you will have access to the conference too, of course. You can join for a single day, a single event or for the whole four days. Registration fees are reasonable and will be available in the winter issue of BC Nature Magazine as well as on our own website. When you offer to volunteer, there will be a discount.

How are we going to pull this off? Artspring Centre will be the main venue. As for accommodation, Salt Spring has plenty of smaller hotels, inns, resorts and countless B&Bs that are eager to welcome our guests and some are already lining up with attractive discounts. Most are within walking distance or a very short drive from Artspring. There are also campsites and marinas to choose from.

We hope to see many guests from on and off island at any time from May 7 through May 10, 2015, when we will show you what Salt Spring has to offer in terms of knowing nature and keeping it worth knowing.

## **The Travelling Birder**

*By Murray Coates*

In the fall of 2011, Habitat for Humanity assigned me to lead a trip to Cambodia. The best way to get there seemed to be to travel via Korea and through the resources of [Birding Pal](#); I lined up a birding tour out of Seoul. Additionally, I signed up to visit the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North And South Korea as a "must see" attraction in the Seoul area.

The DMZ is one of the world's most militarized places and is a 4km wide, 260km long strip of undeveloped land running from coast to coast between the two Koreas. People don't go near this land because of the land mines and high security. However, an unintended side benefit of the current land use policy is that it has turned into a huge wildlife sanctuary with lots of birds, plus Asiatic black bears and Amur leopards.

On the way to the border viewpoint in the middle of the DMZ, we saw a field of cranes but I didn't have a Korean field guide. However, after further study I think they were white naped cranes (an endangered species which is known to live in the DMZ) We didn't see any other birds of note other than lots of Tilley hatted tourists. After an interesting tour led by a sergeant from the United States army, we returned to Seoul.

My birding guide and her driver picked up at 6.00 a.m. the next day in a new Mercedes. The driver turned out to be a doctor and avid birder with a probable future in motorsport. Another Canadian birder from Toronto joined us to complete the party. Our first stop was a wetland about 100km from Seoul. The



*Siberian Cranes. Photo from Wikipedia.*

Korean countryside is highly developed and agricultural drainage has had major impacts. Apparently significant pressures to do even more drainage, are putting the remaining wetlands in some jeopardy. To date over 40% of Korea's intertidal wetlands have been lost.

The East Asia/Australasia flyway, which channels birds between Siberia as far south as New Zealand passes through Korea. Given the time of year, it was expected we would see migrants heading south after summering in the north. Cranes and storks are the most sought after species in this area and we were fortunate to see the critically endangered Siberian crane.

We also saw lots of egrets, oriental white storks, hooded cranes, and some Baikal teal. By the end of the day we had seen about 40 species.

One notable thing about birding in Korea is that most people don't rely very much on optics like binoculars or telescopes for identification. The birders all use high-end SLR cameras equipped with big telephoto lenses. A few quick shots and the iPhone is then used to complete the identification.

The trip back to Seoul was an exciting contrast in speed variation. The first leg saw speeds of over 160 kph. However, it still took over 3 hours to do the 120 kilometers. As we got close to the city the reality of Korean traffic brought us down to an average speed of 5 kph.

Later the next day I flew on to Phenom Penh in Cambodia. I was about a week in advance of the Habitat build and was able to fit in a cycling trip. The 230km cycling trip took us from Phenom Penh to Sihanoukville over a period of 4 days. After the bike tour, I went on a birding trip to Prek Toal with another Habitat team member.

The Prek Toal Biosphere covers about 31,000 hectares at the northwest tip of Tonle Sap Lake and plays host to many rarely seen birds including the greater and lesser adjutant, black-headed ibis, painted stork, milky stork, spot-billed pelican, grey-headed fish eagle and many more.



*Feeding time by Murray Coates.*

We travelled to the sanctuary area in a fairly large traditional Cambodian boat, which was powered by a wicked looking propeller on a long shaft in a pipe from a power unit. This is a very effective craft for shallow water. The two of us had this 20-seat craft pretty much to our guide and ourselves except for the boat captain.

We passed a number of floating villages and saw some unique elements of village life, including a crocodile farm.



*Our guide lining up the scope. Photo by Murray Coates.*



*Asian open bill (stork) from Cambodia Tourism.*



*Lesser adjutants by Jon Hornbuckle.*

During our day at Prek Toal, we saw about 35 different species of birds. Our Cambodian birding day was arranged through Cambodia Cycling. They are cycle touring specialists for Cambodia and Vietnam but they also organize other tours such as birding. <http://www.cambodiacycling.com/Cycling-Tour.html>

## THE TREES AROUND US

*Bryan Adderley*

Pines are my favourite forest specie. When I see a young western white showing amongst the firs and hemlocks in the cut blocks along Musgrave Road, I get a great feeling, “they’re coming back”! British Columbia lost most of its western white pine to a fungus brought to Vancouver in a shipment of eastern white pine nursery stock imported from France in 1910 (P&M). There are some very large old growth pines along the Hope Hill trail on a portion I am sure was called the “White Pine Trail”. In the late 1940s and early 50s white pine 1x10 and 1x12 inch boards were commonly used for kitchen cabinets and wall paneling. We had a supply of it in the woodwork shops at school for class projects. If you have ever been in Fernie B.C. you must have smelled the high country pine scent in the air, and there is nothing to compare with the beautiful smell of a saw-mill, cutting pine.

Western white pine (*Pinus monticola*) has branches that look like you could clean a stove pipe with them. The leaves (needles) can be up to 10cm long, producing a branch cover up to about 20cm (8”) in diameter. The leaves are a light bluish green, in bundles of five. The cones are long, 10-25cm. The trees can grow over 40m tall, straight and beautifully symmetrical.

The other pine common on Salt Spring is the lodgepole (*Pinus contorta* and var. *latifolia*). *Latifolia*, I believe, can be found over much of the island in the higher areas, straighter, and can grow up to 40m tall (more ‘lodgepole’ than *contorta*) (P&M). Wilkie Way on Mount Belcher has a good selection, and along the connecting road, tying into Juniper Way subdivision, there are a lot of seedlings. *Pinus contorta* is often, short, small, twisted and near the ocean. There is a good example at Bold Bluff. Lodgepole pine branches are smaller in diameter than the western white, the leaves are deep green, shorter, 2-7cm long, in bunches of two. The cones are egg shape, 3-5cm long, and quite frankly, it is not as nice looking as the western white pine.



Western white pine seedling to left and lodgepole pine seedling to right. Needle bundles show western white on top. Photos by Bryan Adderley.

## Trails Coordinator Update

*Herb Otto*

There has been some activity over the summer in our relationship with BC Parks. The first is that we now have a signed agreement with BC Parks for any work we will be carrying out in any of the BC Parks on Salt Spring Island. This work could include trail clearing, trail upgrades, small projects such as boardwalks and stairs, and creating and installing signage in Mount Erskine, Mt. Maxwell and Burgoyne Bay parks. The agree-

ment is for a 10 year term but can be cancelled by either party with one months notice. The agreement will allow for the funding that BC Parks has already approved for the signage and opens up the possibility for additional funding in the future. The signage for Mt. Maxwell has been planned and now requires action on our part to be put in place, hopefully before the new year.

The second activity involves a request by Joe Benning from BC Parks for our cooperation in changing a trail route in Ruckle Park. The farm will be erecting a fence along its perimeter to reduce unwanted interaction be-



*Charles Kahn inspecting trail. Photo by Herb Otto.*

tween cattle and trail users. The east-west trail that currently connects Beaver Point with the trail that runs along the west side of the farm crosses the farm land. As a result, a new route has been explored and identified by Joe with the help of Charles Kahn and myself. It is anticipated that after the Conservation Specialist has reviewed the route selected, volunteers will be requested to assist BC Parks staff to create the new trail. You will be hearing from me.

## **A Newfoundland Odyssey - Part One**

### **Charles Kahn**

(This article was so rich in information and pictures, we thought that the readers would appreciate it more if we split it over two issues - ed.)

How do you sum up a trip like this or your perceptions of what life is like in any place, but especially a place like Newfoundland? It's obvious that a one-month trip can't possibly rep-

## **Letters to the Oystercatcher**

### **Hummingbird feeder feedback**

I have a comment on hummingbird nectar. We had Dr Alison Moran give a talk about hummers on Feb 20 this year. She is on the board of Rocky Point Bird Observatory and Coordinator of the hummingbird banding program and the hummingbird migration study since 2009.

At the end of her talk, Alison reiterated to the audience, apart from keeping the feeders clean, to keep the concentration of hummingbird nectar at 4 parts of water to 1 part of ordinary sugar. All other concentrations are doing more harm than good, according to her and many others. There is a controversial article supporting different concentrations that was published in 1993. Most birding organizations reject these findings.

It may explain the fact that your large number of hummers went down when they had their fill after their migration. But Anna's do not migrate..... So they would not need an "extra boost". We have always kept to the 4:1 solution and have many hummers on 4 feeders, both Anna's and Rufus.

In any case, I am worried about publishing this [stronger] nectar concentration that apparently is not beneficial for the hummingbirds.

Nieke Visser

### **Murmuration**

Enjoyed your last edition of the Oystercatcher, as usual. I'm not sure if you've ever included a "link" to another site in a newsletter, but you might consider referring to this one by "address" if you think it would be of interest to other members. This is a truly incredible sight of British starling murmurations. <http://www.youtube.com/embed/88UVJpQG88> . Keep up the good work.

Bob Rush

## **Membership Fees Due**

As the fall 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 Sept. 30.

Membership fees for the period September 1, 2014 to August 31, 2015 are \$25.00 per person. Current (2013-2014) 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.saltstpringtnc.ca>.

resent what it is like to live here, and the real pleasures of travel in the province are totally weather dependent and season dependent. We experienced Newfoundland at the best time of year with perhaps the best weather we could expect; though often cold (as low as 3°C), it was mainly dry with only 4 days of rain so we have returned with a very rosy image of the island.

Visitors share many memories in common of this distinctive island: the piles of very neatly stacked firewood along the roads, the kitchen gardens in the middle of nowhere on the road allowance, the uniform, barrel-shaped, wooden garbage containers presumably built to keep animals out, clothes hanging on clotheslines in the wettest and coldest weather, the uniform rectangular homes



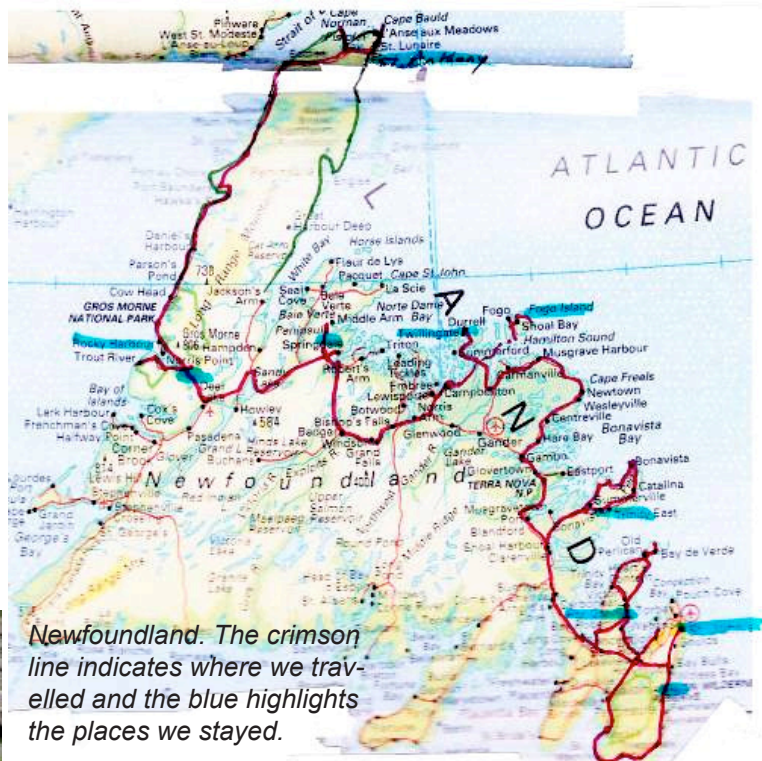
*Firewood for the winter. Apparently, locals pay \$24 for a permit to cut 10 bush cords of wood per year. They often leave it by the side of the road and transport it as needed in the sleigh-like containers pictured here.*

roadside.

On our trip we drove over 5,100km in almost a month. Here is where we went and what we saw. Our travels began in St. John's, arriving at Cantwell House late in the evening. There was no one to greet us and no other guests so we made ourselves tea and enjoyed a Purity jam cookie. (Purity is a bakery of packaged biscuits which has been part of the Newfoundland scene since 1924.) Even with the benefit of the 4.5 hour time difference, we were happy to be in bed by 11.

St. John's is an unremarkable city, but it has several highlights, which we enjoyed in our two days there. Top of our list was The Rooms, a relatively new, architecturally fascinating, state-of-the-art museum where we learned a lot about Newfoundland, pronounced Newf-en-lind by most locals. The Rooms is also the provincial art gallery, and we were treated to a stimulating show.

As we climbed famous Signal Hill on our second day, we discovered the Johnson Geo Centre and Geo Park. The underground centre is a geologist's dream, with extensive exhibits on Newfoundland's ancient rock, the oil industry and the Titanic. We watched several IMAX-style films, including Snowball Earth, which predicts the next ice age. We also walked some of Signal Hill's many trails with their interesting historic plaques. Our third highlight was picturesque Quidi Vidi Village, which we reached by foot from Signal Hill. This



*Newfoundland. The crimson line indicates where we travelled and the blue highlights the places we stayed.*

following the shoreline of each bay or cove, the weathered sheds and possibly abandoned buildings almost hidden along the shore, icebergs in season, and moose caution signs or in the flesh along the



*Roadside gardens. We saw many roadside gardens in the middle of nowhere. As good growing land is scarce everywhere in the province and as most home lots are quite small, establishing a squatter kitchen garden on a fertile highway allotment makes sense.*



*Newfoundland symbols, puffins and sea arches.*



*St. John's from Signal Hill. The downtown is an untidy mixture of industrial, commercial and residential buildings. Here you can see The Rooms (centre top) with the Basilica of St. John the Baptist to its right, colourful houses, with government buildings and the industrial harbour in the foreground.*

is the home of the Quidi (pronounced Kiddy) Vidi Brewery, whose products are proudly sold throughout the province. I became very fond of a dark brew called 1892 in memory of the devastating St. John's fire of that year.



*Quidi Vidi village.*

Even in St. John's you can see aspects of the distinctive nature of Newfoundland and its people:

- The barrenness of the subarctic tundra, softened by all the spring flowers, in bloom on our visit, is visible as you climb Signal Hill.
- Local restaurants serve traditional delicacies like cod tongues and cheeks, fish and brewis (dried cod, soaked hard bread or hard tack and scrunchions—fried

salted pork fat), figgy duff (a raisin pudding boiled in cheesecloth or a can), toutons (fried bread) and moose stew and sausage.

- St. John's residents ("townies") don't have the strong Newfoundland accent, but they share the vocabulary of the rest of the province, largely influenced by the islanders' mostly Irish ancestry, such as the use of "me" for "my" ("This is me boat"), "bes" for "is" ("The meal bes ready"), or "b'y" for "boy."

From St. John's we travelled south into the Avalon Peninsula, to self-contained Blue House Cottage in Bauline South, a coastal cottage community with no amenities but access to beach and ocean. It lies south of Tors Cove on the East Coast Trail. En route, we visited Cape Spear Lighthouse at North America's most easterly point, where we saw a beautiful collection of icebergs

The next day's short walk led to the abandoned village of La Manche on the East Coast Trail. Much of the spectacular rocky shoreline trail was on boardwalk and across a lovely new suspension bridge. We had our first view of a surviving outpost when we visited nearby Brigus South. The rest of the day, we toured the Irish Loop, which included a stop at Ferryland, where mouth-watering sandwiches and sweets are served at the lighthouse. The area is also an important archaeological site of Lord Baltimore's 1621 colony.

The island revealed a variety of topography here and elsewhere. Groundwater is visible everywhere. Newfoundlanders call almost all of this "ponds," although many are big enough to be lakes. *La Manche suspension bridge.*



Often these ponds are quite shallow with lots of exposed rocks. Large sections of the surrounding land are scrubby and bare with lots more rock and few trees. This land is usually quite boggy and the vegetation is that of subarctic tundra. In some places the vegetation is lush with small trees.



*Witless Bay Ecological Reserve. Puffins to the left and gannets on the right.*

On another day we took a boat trip out of Bay Bulls into the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve, where we could see thousands of birds on the isolated nesting islands. As a bonus, we also saw humpback whales. After the boat tour we walked Mickleleens Path, a beautiful 8km of the East Coast Trail from Bay Bulls to Witless Bay.

Our next habitation was in Rothesay House in Harbour Grace. En route we stopped at Brigus, one of our two favourite Newfoundland towns. (The other was Trinity.) Brigus has many 19th-century buildings in good repair. Most of them are being used as country homes for city dwellers. Here we visited Hawthorne Cottage, Bob Bartlett's home. Among other accomplishments, Bartlett took Peary to the North Pole.

We spent a very pleasant day exploring the Baccalieu Trail, which follows the coast north of Harbour Grace. We were rewarded with 50 or more humpback whales in Grates Cove, as they fed on capelin, a small smelt-like fish at the bottom of the food chain. On another day out of Harbour Grace, we headed south to Bay Roberts and walked the Mad Rocks shoreline trail, perhaps our most enjoyable walk despite intermittent drizzle.



*Brigus*

## ***Bird Songs of Canada***

My name is John Neville, I am the Birdsong Man, nature recordist and creator of Bird Songs of Canada, Chants d'oiseaux du Canada, a 4 CD set produced by Neville Recording of which I am a partner.

Copies can be obtained through:

Neville Recording

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Phone: 250-537-4121

Email: [songbird@saltspring.com](mailto:songbird@saltspring.com)

Website: [nevillerecording.com](http://nevillerecording.com)

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