

# Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club Newsletter Summer 2015



This issue's photo is a collaboration between Nieke Visser and David Denning, depicting a variety of clams found in Ganges Harbour on May 18, 2014 at one of the citizen science training sessions.

Far left, native littleneck clam (Leukoma staminea); top left, probably the Eastern soft shell clam (Mya arenaria) or maybe the gaper clam (Tresus nutalli); lower left, butter clam (Saxidomas gigantea); large clam in middle, horse clam, or fat gaper (Tresus capax): far right, bent nose clam (Macoma nasuta); lower right, another butter clam (Saxidomas gigantea).

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## **President's Report**

#### Nieke Visser

The much-anticipated 2015 BC Nature Conference and Annual General Meeting hosted by the SSTNC from May 7 through May 10 attracted 226 registrants, a record high in BCN's history. Delegates from 32 clubs attended including 42 SSTNC members. Twenty-five of these also volunteered as fieldtrip or workshop leaders, helped out at the registration desk, or as ushers, caterers, etc. We asked participants to fill out an evaluation form but, so far, the response rate is lower than expected. In general, the event was well received in most aspects. A few people had registered for a fieldtrip that did not suit their ability, others did not show up in time, but all was taken in good humour.

We experienced generous support from the CRD and the business community in terms of catering (Salt Spring Coffee, Thrifty, Country Grocer, Salt Spring Brewery, Salt Spring Vineyards, to name a few) and support from Apple Photo with printing and copying. Penny of Penny's Pantry did a fabulous job with the catering and the barbecue. Unfortunately, we cannot say the same of Harbour House's catering job. Since the event

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 was held only last month, we are still wrapping up and paying bills. A complete report will be submitted later, likely at the Strawberry festival in June.

A highlight of the conference was the BC Nature Club award presented to Jean Gelwicks for her work with Island Pathways. However, there was a twist to it: Jean felt she was not the only one to deserve an award; she requested that all members of Partner's Creating Pathways would be award nominees and that all would be named. Jean and Zeke Blazecka received the award on behalf of everyone involved, including the SSTNC. We extend thanks to David Denning and Deborah Miller who wrote up the nomination award request.

I met with Pierre Mineau, one of the instructors at the nature photography workshop at the conference. He offered a photography workshop for our members in the fall. He joined our club and is an active birder. In addition, I am looking into setting up a spring trip for 2016 to Denman and Hornby Islands. It is in a very early stage and needs more research. I think that after a drought of 4 years the time has come to organize one again. Bamfield is still on my mind as well, but that takes a lot of organization and may be too ambitious for me.

Finally, I attended both the BCN Director's meeting on May 7 (sitting in for David) and the AGM on May 9. The most prominent item on the agenda was the next 5-year strategic plan. It was approved at both meetings and at a later date I like to discuss with you some of the plan's goals that may be of importance to our club.

Some example targets include:

a. cooperation and sharing with other BCN member clubs and likeminded organizations in terms of presentation, overnight outings, excursions, etc.,

b. targeting younger age groups, e.g. family memberships including children and shedding the image of being a retiree outdoor club,

c. developing programs for students and school children on Friday (no school) and/or the weekends,

d. introducing social media,

e. introducing regular workshops,

f. introducing citizen science projects,

g. working with volunteers who are not members but are willing to do a job such as broom pulling, helping with improvements in the provincial parks, etc.

Some of these goals we already pursue, others need some careful consideration. Food for thought; maybe we should sit down and develop our own plan for the future.

## Salmon River – A Vancouver Island Treasure Waiting to Be Conserved

### Steve Housser, Nature Trust of B.C.

Although The Nature Trust of British Columbia has a significant number of conservation properties on Vancouver Island, it has been several years since we have added to our island portfolio.

#### **Calendar of Events**

#### Saturday, June 6, 2015 Saltspring Conservancy 20th Anniversary and Grand Opening.

Join the Celebration! from 2-5 pm at 265 Blackburn Road/ Enjoy nature walks, the grand opening of our new building, music. a kids' scavenger hunt, snacks and drinks

#### Saturday June 6, 2015 International Trails Day

Post your trail pictures and comments on Trans Canada Trail's Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram telling them how you are celebrating on the TCT nearest you!

#### Sunday June 14, 2015 Sea to Sky Marine Trail Opening

Squamish, BC. A second opening in Gibsons will occur on June 29.

#### Tuesday June 16, 2015 Annual Strawberry Festival

Meet at noon in the lower picnic area to enjoy a scrumptious dish of strawberries and ice cream. Remember to bring a dish and spoon! Short walks will be scheduled prior to the festival.





This is about to change. The Nature Trust is working to acquire an exceptional 165 acres of private land along the lower Salmon River and estuary south of Sayward, BC.

This significant coastal wetland habitat is a perfect fit with the Salmon River properties we already own. It complements 257 acres secured by The Nature Trust and its conservation partners since 1978. This new acquisition will allow a larger, contiguous area of protection at the Salmon River estuary and along its banks.

This strategic opportunity will enhance critical habitat for numerous species of fish and wildlife including great blue heron,

marbled murrelet, northern pygmy owl, Roosevelt elk and all species of Pacific salmon: coho, chinook, chum, pink and sockeye. The area is also home to sea run cutthroat trout, Dolly Varden char and it boasts the largest steelhead in BC!

Now all we have to do is take advantage of this fabulous opportunity. That means a targeted fundraising campaign for this Vancouver Island treasure. Our goal is to raise \$162, 500 by June 26, 2015. We are asking for support from all individuals and groups who love the great outdoors and want to save critical habitat for future generations.

Please consider contributing to The Nature Trust of BC. To make a donation or for more information, please visit our website: www.naturetrust.bc.ca or call our office toll free at 1-866-288-7878.

## **SSTNC Website**

#### **Gary** Adams

As anyone who was at the 2015 SSTNC annual meeting will remember, Sue Lehmann passed out a questionnaire to gauge membership views on the nature of the SSTNC Website. Sue and Gary Adams compiled and analyzed the data from that questionnaire and wrote a report. The report was discussed at a recent executive meeting so I thought it would be a good time to tell the rest of the members of its results.

The first question was designed to determine what sorts of information were important to you. Unsurprisingly, information about the weekly hikes, walks, and rambles was most important, followed by the Oystercatcher (thanks folks), social events, and the evening presentations. Trail development and BC Nature information was important to about half the respondents, while BC Nature Newsletters and birding group information ranked below half.

The next two questions sought to identify how people preferred to get that information. It is important to note here that only 14% of the members do not use the web and only 7% do not have email. This means that most people are served well by sending information by email or web postings. The responses indicated both were equally used and people preferred both when the information was important to them. There were also comments that the members relied on the Driftwood for information as well.

The rest of the questionnaire sought to determine if there were new directions that the club should be pursuing on the Internet. The results were very much aimed at the status quo. Three-quarters of the respondents wanted no change in the way the newsletter is published. There was little appetite for a members-only section of the website. There was also no strong response to the ideas presented for a more public oriented web.

These results have led the executive conclusion that there is no need to launch into any major changes in communications strategies at this time. This does not preclude changes that respond to new needs but the majority of the members are currently content with the communications mechanisms

## Peter Arnell Park: A Little Gem

#### Nieke Visser

Where Steward Road makes a 90-degree bend on top of the hill is a little known park that I have watched for the past 12 years. I discovered it when looking for a nice short walk for the dog and myself. In the first few years, I took my hiking buddy, Ollie, there almost every day. The park was more or less a single loop

with a "short cut" over a bluff of arbutus and young Douglas fir. It offers no ocean views but the undulating terrain varies in habitat. Twelve years ago there was not an abundance of wildflowers, but it was good enough for an afternoon hike of about 45 minutes. The SSTNC maintained the park by clearing deadfall and removing broom. One day, two more short cuts appeared and trails were added on the north perimeter of the park. It went "unnoticed" but I enjoyed the diverse trails until PARC took over a few over years ago and made some major improvements. Some of the added trails are now off-limit, but the park is big enough for me and my present dog as neither of us cares so





Flowers of Peter Arnell Park. From top, clockwise, few-flowered shooting star (**Dodecatheon pulchellum**), harvest brodiaea (**Brodiaea coronaria**), small-leaved montia (**Montia Parvifolia**), Alaska Rein orchid (**Platanthera unaluscensis**). Pictures by Nieke Visser.

much about long hikes anymore. The well-marked trail system totals about 2 kilometers that can be a bit technical in places if you are not very steady on your feet. Parking is behind the concrete barrier where the road curves.

Over the years, I noticed that more and more wild flowers gradually emerged, especially on the bluff. It started out with one or two coral root orchids along the trails. Then one year there were some calypso orchids, and another year there were Alaska Rein orchids along another trail. I cannot find any predictable appearance of the orchids. Some years, like last year, you "trip" over them but this year I found just one western coral root and one tiny spotted coral root, no calypsos and no Rein orchids. The bluff, however, mimics to some extent, Gary oak habitat, in spite of the fact that there are no Gary oaks, only arbutus. The first flowers to appear are the shooting stars, but they are soon followed by the common camas and meadow death camas, and the harvest brodiaea later in summer. Slowly but surely other flowers also decided to make it to Peter Arnell: starflower is everywhere as is narrowleaved montia. The park is not very heavily used and deer seem to avoid it as well. In all those years, I have come across iust one!

Just across the road there is another part of Peter Arnell Park. There you will find a memorial to the person after whom the park was named. Peter Arnell was a land surveyor and volunteer firefighter, tragically killed in a hunting accident while working on Galiano Island in 1968. His projects included the planning and design of Centennial Park. This part of the park offers an older forest where in the summer you can find twinflowers along the trails.

## **Report on Activities from Trail Coordinator** *Herb Otto*

#### Park Trail Signage

It has been a very active time for work on trails on Salt Spring Island over the last two months. First of all, the signs for Mt Maxwell and the north side trails of Burgoyne Bay have now been installed. No excuse to get lost now! This has been the culmination of two years of work involving many volunteers both of this club and others outside the club with similar interests. A total of 190 volunteer hours has been spent on this project alone. Now we are looking forward to proceeding with the next phase which is signage for the south side of Burgoyne Bay all the way up to Mt. Sullivan. So don't feel left out if you missed participating in the first phase. There is more to come. BC Parks has indicated that funding for this phase has been set aside.





#### Annual Broom Pull

On May 12, 8 volunteers descended on Burgoyne Bay Park to remove broom. It was a small but dedicated group that worked very hard at eradication as you can see from the photos below. Not to be intimidated

by some of the broom's seemingly strategic inaccessible location, Peter resorted to mountain climbing. This part of the park near the parking lot is now quite clean so we can proceed to another location next year.

#### **Ruckle Park**

The fence around the north end of the farm is almost complete, which has meant a push was needed to complete the relocation of the trail that currently runs through the farm. Joe Benning of BC Parks had requested our help to create the new trail. Over three days with volunteers from the club the new trail is now virtually completed, only requiring tie in at either end and new signs at the new junctions. The trail is very pleasant since it takes you through a lovely meadow and follows a ridge overlooking the lower farm area. Thanks to those who helped this effort.



## Hawaii the Big Island, Birds, Botany and Volcanoes (Part 2) Nieke Visser

#### Botany

In Part 1 of this Hawaii Island's nature series, I told you about some of the indigenous birds. This time I will deal with indigenous plants found on the Big Island. When the first humans arrived in Hawaii is unknown but estimates range from 1000 to 1500 years ago. Assumingly, they migrated back and forth in their double hulled canoes from the Polynesian archipelagoes in the southern hemisphere until about 1500 AD. They brought plants, birds, and animals for the production of food and settled initially at lower elevations, clearing vegetation for agricultural purposes. When the Europeans came, followed by people from other Pacific areas such as Japan and China, low lying lands were eventually stripped of their native vegetation, give or take a few areas that were "not in the way for food production" and thus changing the ecosystems of most of the lower elevations. The casual visitors however will be unaware of this since most people from more temperate climates find tropical vegetation very exotic and sometimes quite overwhelming. Many tourists are not aware of the impact of this changed habitat and most do not care. Some, though, would like to learn about the original habitat and indeed there are pockets where it still can be enjoyed. I sought out walks and hikes to study native plants, shrubs and trees during my visits to Hawaii. I do not claim to be a botanist, let alone an expert; I am just a curious visitor who, with the help of literature, both printed and online, tries to understand plant life on an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. When looking for indigenous plants, the obvious place to go to is Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (HVNP). It provides a wealth of information as well as walks and hikes to experience it all. In this episode, I will mention some of the indigenous flora that are easy to find and interesting to learn about.

#### Trees

The Ohi'a lehua (Fig. 1) is the most common indigenous tree. It belongs to the large family of Myrtles. The genus of *Metrosideros* is mainly found in the southwestern part of the Pacific, but there are five native Hawaiian species of which the polymorpha is the most common. Evidence of this tree's origin lies in its DNA that is closely related to the SW Pacific varieties; and seeds were likely transported by the trade winds or by ocean currents or both, who knows? They artablished themselves large hafere merilind arrived on the inlands or

established themselves long before mankind arrived on the islands so one can only speculate how they got there. It is difficult to tell the five species apart; so the Hawaiians refer to all of them as Ohi'a<sup>1</sup>.

The Ohi'a is one of the first to sprout in new lava flows. It is not surprising to see abundant evidence in the HVNP where first growths in the Kilauea Crater appear along the Byron Ledge trail as knee high shrubs or towering adult trees in the many Kipuka's ("islands" of vegetation spared by the lava flows) along the Saddle Road. An interesting feature is that in the national park's Kipuka puaulu, many Ohi'a trees died off recently. The park's naturalists explain that they have only a certain lifespan and since this kipuka has not encountered any lava flow for many, many years, the trees just died of old age.

Ohi'a trees often display all forms of propagation: the flower bud, the flower, and the fruit all found on the same tree. This can be seen on many tropical shrubs and trees. I am not sure if this phenomenon is climate



related: with little variation in seasons and temperature, all stages of propagation could indeed exist at the same time but I will trade in this theory for a better one. The literature I consulted did not mention an explanation.

The indigenous Koa tree (Fig. 2) displays two growth forms. New and juvenile plants have leaves that are finely divided, almost fern-like, and light green. As the tree grows, the dissected leaves are replaced by mature, crescent shaped leaves, darker in colour and stiff, as in Fig. 2. The Koa is thought to be originally from Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean. The species on Mauritius is the most closely related, DNA-wise, to the Hawaiian one. Amazing what ocean or air currents can accomplish!



Another major native tree is the Mamane tree (*Sophora chryso-phylla*)(Fig. 3), characterized by bright yellow flowers and drooping seed-pods. It is a major forest tree in the subalpine areas on Maui and Hawaii. The Sophora family consists of over 50 species most of which flourish in tropical and subtropical regions but only one species occurs on Hawaii. It likely relates to a Sophora species from New Zealand. I mentioned this tree in connection with an almost extinct finch-like bird called Palila in the Pu'u La'au Reserve (see part 1). This species also shows its flower bud, flower, seedpod, and seed stages at the same time.



#### Shrubs and plants

Low scrubs and plants abound at the same altitude. One recommended walk is the Devastation Trail in the national park, an easy trail of about one mile one-way. Most of the numerous plants found here belong to a group known as pioneer species. Pioneers are among the first to colonize newly established habitats. One example is Kupaoa (*Dubautia scabra*). This low, scrubby plant with small white flowers often has a mass of dead plant material around the base (Fig, 4).



Another pioneer is the Hawaiian variant of the blueberry (*Vaccini-um reticulatum*) or Ohelo. The berries are edible and the Nene (Hawaiian goose) loves them. New growth on the plant shows red leaves (visible on the right in Fig. 5) while the flowers look quite familiar to the Vaccinium plants in our climate (Fig. 6).

A pioneer fern may not be a surprise. Kupukupu (*Nephrolepis ex-altata*), a sword fern variety, is plentiful along the Devastation trail but as well as in Kalapana at sea level in the Puna District. In 1990, the Kilauea lava flow devastated most of that town and new lava kept on coming

down from Kilauea until the lava flow took a totally different route in 2014. Once the new lava had cooled, this fern rather quickly invaded the area, settling in cracks or a hole where a tree had stood. Fig. 7 shows rope lava near Kalapana and sprigs of Kupukupu growing in the fissures. Nearby we discovered a young Ohi'a tree (Fig. 8). The National Guard in conjunction with the National Park operates a lava viewing platform about half a mile up the lava flow. In 2012, the flow had either slowed down or taken a different route because we did not see anything substantial in that direction. Apparently, at night, you could see the glow against the sky, but we never

made the drive there in the dark.

An interesting plant is the Hawaiian Cotton that I found above the beach of the Pu'ukohola Heiau. a fortification used by the Hawaiian kings, now a National Monument along the Kohala beach on the dry northwest end of the island. The site appeared not accessible at the





time, so our visit was short and the cotton plant was way more interesting. Locally known as Ma'o, Gossypium tomentosum (Fig. 9), the Hawaiian Cotton is endemic to the Hawaiian Islands. It inhabits low shrub lands at elevations from sea level to 120 m. The bush is rather uninteresting apart from the reddish brown seedpods. These seed hairs (lint) are short and brown, unsuitable for spinning or twisting into thread<sup>2</sup>. Genetic studies indicate that Hawaiian Cotton is related to American species of Gossypium, with its closest relative Gossypium hirsutum. Its ancestor may have come to the islands from the Americas as a seed on the wind or in the droppings of a bird, or as part of floating debris<sup>3</sup>.

I like to mention two more plants: Puliawe (*Styphlia tamaiameiae*) and the A'ali'i (*Dodonaea viscosa*). Both are sub-alpine inhabitants and can be found in the Bird Park (Kipuka puaulu), along the Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa Trails, and in the vicinity of the Volcano Observatory.

Pukiawe is one of Hawaii's abundant indigenous species, easily found along the Bird Park trail. The flowers are tiny but the fruits range from white to pink or red and are easy to spot (Fig. 10). The small leaves were used with the fruit in making lei (Hawaiian garland). Smoke from burning Pukiawe was used to smudge high-ranking chiefs who wished to mingle with the common folks.

Aiali'i has rather non-descriptive flowers but the fruits make up for that (Fig. 11). This plant belongs to the Dodonaea family consisting of about 65 species mostly native to Australia. The Hawaiian species is pan-tropical and occurs on all of the main islands. Male and female flowers are very tiny and occur on different plants. The fruits are the most attractive part of the plant and appear in various shades ranging from red to brown or almost purple. Fruits and leaves were used in lei making.

In the next episode, I will talk about plants and their traditional uses.

- 1. D. Bruce A. Bohm: Hawaii's Native Plants. Mutual Publishing; 2004.
- 2. http://www2.hawaii.edu/~eherring/hawnprop/gos-tome.htm.
- 3. http://data.bishopmuseum.org/ethnobotanydb/ethnobotany.php?b=d&ID=mao\_G.



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Publications mail agreement No. 40049783