



David Denning photo

# Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club  
 Newsletter  
 Autumn 2015



*In mid- July, Lorrie and I caught this site in the evening at Clearwater Lake public beach. Literally thousands of leopard frogs had emerged that same day. They were sharing the beach with squeamish swimmers, painted turtles honing in on the easy pickings, and a lone loon who preened along the shoreline for a half an hour. Photos by Gary Adams.*



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## President's Point of View

*Nieke Visser, President*

After the hype of entertaining over 200 Conference guests in May quietness has returned and slowly we are getting into the routine again. We had the Strawberry Fest on June 16, which was attended by 35 members who finished off all the available strawberries. They were purchased from Foxglove farm and were very sweet tasty. No wonder none were left to take home.

In June we said farewell to the last founder of the Club: Jean Holmes passed on at the age of 96. A celebration of life was organized by her family and I was invited to attend. It was a joyous celebration with many good memories of a life well lived. You can read my address in this issue of the Oystercatcher.

Since I have little to report on, I decided to give you an update on my neck in the woods. It is still July when I write this and the drought has made havoc in my garden. That may not be a surprise to you. I am sure your area is just as bone dry. Our water comes from a well that has never before let us down, but we have cut back in water usage as if we were on piped water. Hopefully our neighbours do the same as we all draw from

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](mailto:gafrad@shaw.ca))

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

## Calendar of Events

### Tuesday September 15 Blackberry Festival

The 2015-2016 hiking season begins with the Blackberry Festival at Ruckle Park. Bring your favourite blackberry dish to share and a dish and spoon! Short outings will be scheduled prior to the festival.

### Friday, October 2 J.B. MacKinnon Author of "The Once and Future World"

The SSI Conservancy and the Salt Spring Forum will be hosting author J.B. MacKinnon at ArtSpring. More details to come in September.

### September 19-20 (10 to 4) Jeanette Sirois

Two day course in botanical drawing with coloured pencils and graphite to be held on Salt Spring Island. Learn to depict the form, color & details of plants with live specimens found on Salt Spring. (This announcement is from SSI Visitor Information Centre.)

the same aquifer. The birds have a hard time because the ponds are dry. This has never happened since we bought this house in 2001. The other day there were three western tanagers checking out the situation and the male decided to take a bath in the pond as usual only to find very sticky mud. He turned into a black bird afterwards and was obviously not very happy with the result. We watched him trying to clean himself for at least 30 minutes if not longer. I



*Pileated woodpeckers, father (left) and son (right) on feeding lesson. Photos by Nieke Visser*

I keep a birdbath near the house that I top up every day. The tanagers finally discovered this alternative a couple of days after this mud bath incident. The smaller birds such as chickadees, nuthatches, goldfinches, and yes, Stellar's jays attend to themselves very well at the birdbath.

There is also a dispute going on between five northwestern crows and our resident ravens. When the ravens check their territory on the other side, the crows sneak in very quietly and raid our suet feeders, meant for the woodpeckers. When the ravens return, the crows are escorted out of their territory, northwards towards Ganges. Talking about woodpeckers, there is quite a parade of them visiting the suet. We have seen downy, hairy, and pileated stopping by with their young, first feeding them and a few days later bringing them back to encourage them to try the suet themselves. The pileated immature has a pink rather than a red coiffure.

Hiking season starts up again in the second week of September with the Blackberry Fest, if there are going to be any blackberries? Still, we like to gather in Ruckle Park to start up the 2015-2016 season. The date is September 15 at noon with the traditional short excursion before, to work up some appetite.

Don't forget that September is the month to renew your membership.

I will be away for most of the month of September. Kees and I are going to BC's northwest coast and interior to visit other BC Nature Clubs and have some sort of vacation in between. We have never been that far north in Canada and are looking forward to it.

And with this I wish you all a good start of the season. Hopefully some rain to ease off the drought and water shortage. Happy Trails!

## Celebration of Life for Jean Holmes, June 27, 2015.

### *Address presented by Nieke Visser, President*

I feel honoured to be invited today to speak at this celebration of life for Jean Holmes.

I feel even more honoured to receive on behalf of the Trail and Nature Club a substantial donation as per Jean's will.

I did not know Jean very well on a personal level. I joined the club in 2003 and became part of the Executive in 2004. By that time Jean had retired from active involvement. I met her couple of times at one of our

social events such the Christmas lunch or the AGM in January. So I dug through the archives stored in boxes in my basement and found some interesting documents.

Jean was one of the founders of the SS Trail and Nature Club. In January of 1973, a group of hikers and nature enthusiasts got together for its founding meeting. Jean was one of them and she dedicated these first years to exploring and identifying trails and locating owners of the properties involved to seek permission for the club to hike over the their land. In 1977, she became President on a two year term.

In the archives I found a handwritten President's report prepared by Jean for the AGM in January 1978. It was her first AGM after she had become the club's third President in 1977, after Ruby Alton and Mary Sylvander. An interesting read as today the executive and I still face the same challenges as Jean did in 1977/78: identifying and maintaining trails, cooperation with PARC and BC Parks, organizing the Christmas Bird Count, and getting people out on the trails to explore and appreciate nature. The only difference is that the number of overnight excursions has dwindled over the last few years. It is time to get this going again.

Another interesting item she mentions in her address could have happened now: she writes that the club was asked to prepare a brief for the West Coast Oil Ports Inquiry to be held in Ganges. The inquiry was cancelled at the last minute. We are still facing oil port problems today. One wonders what happened between then and now.

Jean also mentioned the relationship of the T&N club with the Federation of BC Naturalists (now BC Nature) and the Pender Island Field Naturalists. These bonds still exists today and last month our club hosted the Federation's spring meeting and AGM.

And last but not least I found a short history of the club written by Marc, her husband, and published in the Club's newsletter of 1989. It mainly deals with the very early years of the club's existence and names many people that have since passed on, just recently Loes Holland, to name another founder.

Jean's legacy was well established. Some other long-time members still mention her from time to time.

For all her efforts and dedication Jean received an honorary membership. I could not find a date of that event, but the fact that she was recognized as one of the founders and creators of this club speaks for itself.

Thank you.

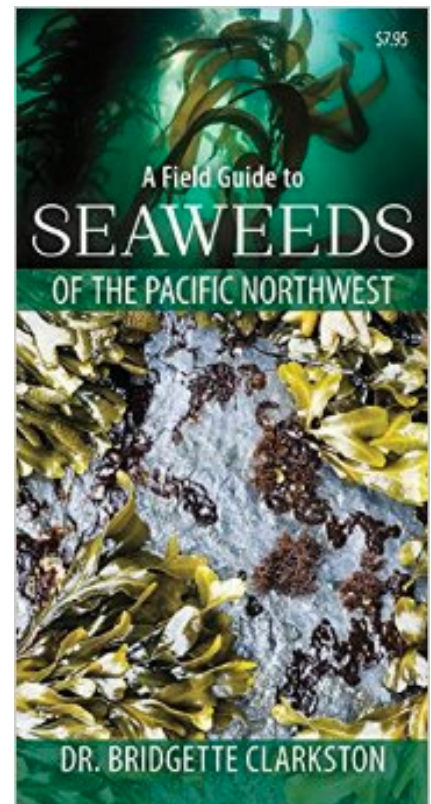
## New Seaweed Field Guide

### *Dr. Bridgette Clarkston*

I'm a seaweed biologist and I spent most of 2014 teaching at the Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre on Vancouver Island where I was frequently asked if such a guide could be found. Therefore, I decided to write one. I've just published a pocket *Field Guide to Seaweeds of the Pacific Northwest*. It has over 40 of the most commonly-encountered seaweeds—I took most of the pictures at low tide around Vancouver Island, either Saltspring, Bamfield, Tofino, Ucluelet, Tahsis or Comox. Its format is a little waterproof, foldable guide, perfect for beach walks or when guiding. A summary provided by my publisher, Harbour Publishing, provides some more details and a portion of it follows.

Rich in nutrients, used in products from cosmetics to fertilizers and vital to our coastal marine ecosystems, seaweeds can be found on any rocky shore or beach. Whether you want to identify seaweeds, to better understand their role in the ocean, forage for food, or are just curious, *A Field Guide to Seaweeds of the Pacific Northwest*, by seaweed biologist, Dr. Bridgette Clarkston, is your ultimate source for casual phycollogical fun.

Dr. Clarkston describes over 40 of the most important and interesting seaweeds commonly encountered on the West Coast. She explains



which seaweed are more closely related to microscopic phytoplankton than they are to other seaweeds, what distinguishes a seaweed from a seagrass and what type of seaweed is commonly used for food (hint: the food is sushi).

[It] includes beautiful photographs, body, shape, habitat, and distribution for each seaweed described, as well as an indication of whether or not they're edible and scientific names for easy look-up.

## Hawaii the Big Island, Birds, Botany and Volcanoes (Part 3)

*Nieke Visser*

### Plants and their uses

In this segment, I will attempt to describe how the Hawaiian people used their plants. Some plants were native to the Hawaiian Islands, but others were introduced.

The most recognizable Hawaiian flower is the hibiscus. However, the well-known species have been introduced from as far as India and China, Tahiti and New Zealand. Only a few are native to the Hawai'i islands and all are endangered in the wild. The kokio ula (*Hibiscus kokio*) (Fig 1) can only be found in the wild on Kauai near the Waimea Canyon. There are other native plants too, albeit none on the Big Island, Kauai. A white hibiscus (*H. waimea*) also occurs on Kauai, while a closely related species (*H. arnottianus*) occurs only on O'ahu and Moleka'i. Unfortunately, other native species have disappeared. The juice from hibiscus leaves and buds was used to treat constipation, acting as a gentle laxative. Extract from the flowers reportedly serve as an astringent, while the root contains a mucilage that is used for its soothing effect on the respiratory and digestive tracts<sup>1</sup>.



Fig. 1. Waimea hibiscus (*H. kokio*) or Kokio Ula

An imported hibiscus species grows mostly near the ocean and hence bears the name of beach or sea hibiscus (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*), known to the Hawaiians as hau (Fig. 2). This is a tree native to the tropical shores of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, but today has naturalized throughout the world's tropical and subtropical regions. It may well have been there when Hawaiians first arrived, as the debate of being an import or native shrub had not yet ended. If Hawaiians migrated with it, they had good reason

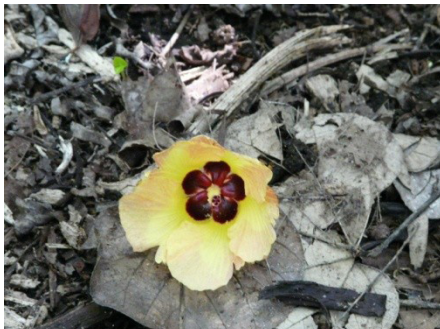


Fig. 2. Beach hibiscus (*H. tiliaceus*) or hau

## Membership Fees Are Due

Fall is in the air, and it's time to get back to the trails. It's also time for a reminder that Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club memberships expire August 31 each year. Membership fees for 2015-2016 are due by September 30.

Fees for 2015/2016 are \$25 per person. Current (2014-2015) members renewing on or before the due date (September 30, 2015) receive a \$5 discount on their fees, and pay only \$20.

All new and renewing members (including honorary members) are requested to fill in NEW Registration and Assumption of Risk forms for 2015-2016. These forms may be downloaded from the club website ([saltspringtnc.ca](http://saltspringtnc.ca)) and printed at home. Or you may pick up pre-printed copies from the SSTNC box, now located at the Visitor Information Centre in Ganges.

Please remember that BOTH forms require signatures.

Forms and fees may be returned by mail to the address on the membership registration form, dropped off to the Membership Secretary's envelope in the Club Box, or delivered by hand to the Membership Secretary or other executive member at any club activity. Payment by cheque is preferred for ease in tracking payments.

Barry Spence, Membership Secretary

to do so. A slimy, juicy sap found in the flower bud and in the bark was used as a mild laxative. While the flower buds were used for babies and young children, the small white dome-shaped bump inside the bottom of the flower petals was used for adults and older children. The buds were also chewed and eaten for dry-throat. Slime from soaking the bark of the stems was medicine for congested chests. The lubricant quality of the inner bark was of value as an enema or could assist in the passage of a baby at childbirth. Hau is also used to cool fevers and soothe coughs (leaves), treat dysentery (bark), ear infections, and abscesses (flowers)<sup>2</sup>. Seeds were also planted by the settlers of the post-Cook era to yield a lightweight, tough, white wood with a brown heart.



Fig. 3. Tree fern or hapu'u (*Cibotium menziesii*)

The *hāpu'u* fern (Fig. 3) can be found all over the east side of the Big Island. This fern grows up to 8 m. There are two species: the *hāpu'u pulu* (*Cibotium menziesii*) has soft, silky, yellowish-brown hairs or wool, while *hāpu'u i'i* (*Cibotium glaucum*) has coarse, stiff, reddish brown or black bristles. The *hāpu'u pulu* grows in moist rain forests (300 to 1850 m) and in drier damp forests up to 1850. Medicinally, it is used as a "blood purifier" and for returning loss of appetite. The trunk's pith is combined with roots of several other plants to treat weakness and chest pain. Numerous other body ailments (stiff muscles, etc.) are treated with heated pulu. The starchy core was cooked and eaten only during famine. The fawn-colored silky hairs were used to fill the body cavity of deceased people for burial preparation because it would absorb the body fluids. Use of pulu in traditional pillows is mentioned as well but not substantiated. A bin for growing purple yams was constructed from the trunk of a large *hāpu'u*. The other species, *hāpu'u i'i*, provides shade for other plants in many gardens but has no medicinal or other value.

There are six endemic species of hala pepe. Some of the most distinctive features among the Hawaiian species of hala pepe are found in leaf length, width, and shape, and in the characteristic perianth, the portion of the flower that has petals and sepals. Some hala pepe that prefer the dryer forests resemble the Joshua tree in the southwest United States, others prefer the wetter conditions of the east coast of the Big Island. The species in Fig. 4 was growing in Kalopa Native Forest State



Fig. 4. Hala pepe (*Chrysodracon auwahiensis*)



Fig. 5. Ohelo'ai (*Vaccinium reticulatum*)

Reserve.

Early Hawaiians applied the hala pepe leaves in bathing and steam baths for chills, headaches, fever, and to stop burning temperature or sensation. The soft whitish to reddish wood was used by early Hawaiians to make idols (*ki'i*) and to decorate altars. At present, the plant's leaves and flowers are used in lei (garland) making<sup>3</sup>. It is also popular as garden plant.

The native Hawaiian blueberry species, *ohelo'ai* (*Vaccinium reticulatum*) (Fig. 5) grows abundantly in Volcanoes National Park. The very tasty berries are likened to sweetened cranberries. It makes excellent jellies and jams



Fig. 6. Ti or Ki (*Cordyline fructicosa*)

but one is not supposed to pick fruit in a national park. The Nene (or Hawaiian Goose) likes this berry too and they are welcome to take their fill<sup>4</sup>.

Ti or ki (*Cordyline fructicosa*)(Fig. 6) is an evergreen flowering species of the Agave family known by a wide variety of common names depending on the country where it is growing. Introduced by the Hawaiians, it is known as ti or ki. Hawaiians use this important plant's leaves, called luau, to wrap foods for cooking. The leaves remain the namesake for the traditional Hawaiian feast and are for wrapping for laulau, the Hawaiian lunch box. A laulau is an authentic Hawaiian entree. It is made usually with pork shoulder, or sometimes chicken, and vegetable filling often with a little bit of rich and flavourful salted butterfish. Each laulau filling is then individually wrapped in 6 to 7 taro leaves, a kind of Hawaiian spinach. Once bundled in its many layers, the laulau is firmly wrapped and tied inside two ti leaves to form a pouch that seals the moisture and flavours of the taro leaves, fillings, and seasonings. Then laulau is cooked in a steamer oven or, in the old days, in an imu (underground oven). When eaten, you have to remove and discard the outer ti leaves, as they are only used in the process of steaming the laulau. We

ate this traditional food at the Laupahoehoe music festival, a Hawaiian outdoor fest with lots of music, dance, and traditional foods. We found this particular luau (food or dish accompanying a festivity) a bit bland but were happy to have tasted this traditional dish.

Last but not least: kuku'i also known as candlenut (*Aleurites moluccana*)(Fig. 7). Kuku'i nuts grow inside a leathery walnut-like husk (see inset). In some Malaysia and Indonesia areas, these nuts are used in cooking and known as kemiri. In ancient Hawaii, however, kuku'i nuts were burned to provide light. The nuts were strung in a row on a palm leaf midrib and lit at one end. One burned every 15 minutes or so. This led to their use as a measure of time. One could instruct someone to return home before the second nut burned out. Hawaiians also extracted the oil from the nut and burned it in a stone oil lamp called a kukui hele po (light, darkness goes) with a wick made of kapa cloth (made of the bark fibers of certain trees). Hawaiians also had many other uses for the tree, including: leis (garlands) made from the kuku'i shells, leaves, and flowers; ink for tattoos from charred nuts. Fishermen would chew the nuts and spit them on the water to break the surface tension and remove reflections, giving them greater underwater visibility. They made red-brown dye made from the inner bark for kapa cloth and aho (Hawaiian nettle cloth). A coating of kuku'i oil helped preserve fishing nets. The seats and gunwales of outrigger canoes were made from the wood of the candlenut tree<sup>5</sup>. The trunk was sometimes used to make smaller canoes used for fishing<sup>6</sup>. Kuku'i was named the state tree of Hawaii on 1 May 1959<sup>7</sup> due to its multitude of uses. It also represents the island of Moloka'i, whose symbolic color is the silvery green of the kuku'i leaf.



Fig. 7. Kuku'i (*Aleurities moluccana*); Insert: fruit of the Kuku'i

There are many more plants, shrubs and trees that had or still have uses in Hawaiian culture. Having visited only the Big Island where many Hawaiians make their residence, we were exposed to these botanic uses and became curious. An excellent bookstore in Hilo helped a lot too. There are many books written about this

subject, but I will leave it for now. In the next and final segment, I will tell about the volcanic activity that has shaped this fascinating archipelago.

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## The Travelling Birder – South Texas

### Murray Coates

This past winter, we decided to try a different destination for our winter getaway to experience some new activities. South Texas is a popular place for many western Canadians as well as people from the northern USA and we were able to rent a condo in Laguna Vista for the month of February.

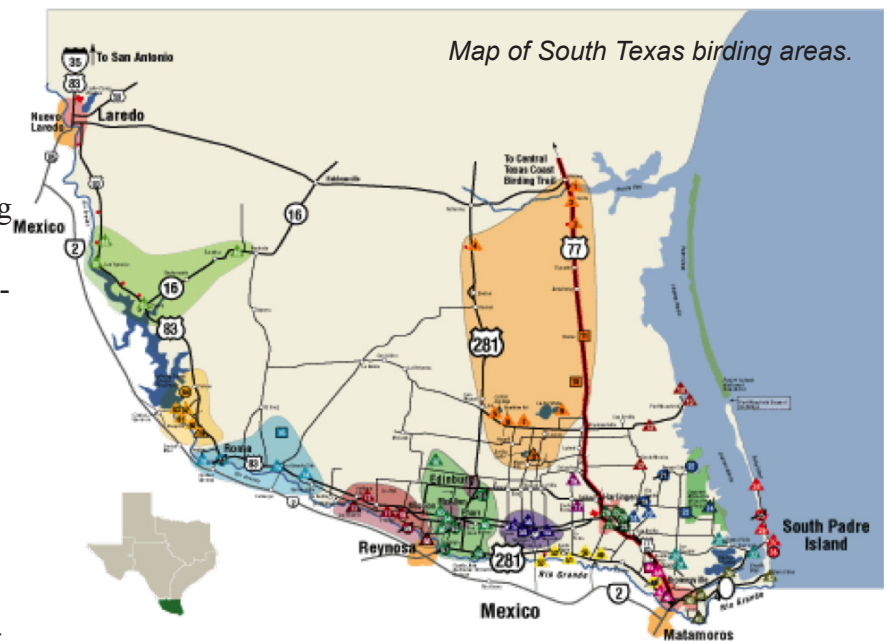
Laguna Vista, a small suburb of Port Isabella, is on the way to South Padre Island. It is a "golf" community, primarily stocked with winter visitors in February. It boasts an active social committee plus a number of specialist organizations including the Laguna Vista Birders.

After settling in, we perused the bulletin board at the gym/community centre. While my wife focused on the tennis opportunities, I checked out the birding. It seemed that there were birding excursions every Thursday so I made contact with the president and registered my intent to participate.

One of the great features of life in the Rio Grande valley of Texas is the major focus that the state puts on wildlife areas. The Lower Texas Birding Trail map shows all the popular birding spots. The state governor at the time of publication (George W. Bush) signed our version of this map.

Some birding sites are found in national wildlife areas and others are state, city, or Audubon Society Parks.

I visited several of the areas close to where we were staying, either on my own or with the Laguna Vista birders. The various areas usually have guided bird walks. They are so popular that reservations are needed. Over the 30 days we spent in Texas, I visited Laguna Atascosa NWR, Resaca dela Palma State Park, Fronterra Audubon Park, Quinta Mazatlan City Park, and the South Padre Birding Centre.



Another option to look at in the area is a marine tour out of Rockport to see the whooping cranes. We went with Rockport Birding and Kayak Adventures and saw the cranes plus lots of other shore and water birds.



*Crested Caracara and Black Vulture. Photo by M. Coates*

A very interesting place to visit was the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. Its 25-mile loop is closed to automobiles but you can take a trolley excursion with a guide. Optionally, you can tour on your own by bicycle. We did it twice and saw lots of wildlife and there is always the chance of seeing an ocelot.

I also saw a few interesting birds while driving to the various areas. The two birds in Fig. 3 were sharing a carrion site near the road. All together, I saw about 137 species of birds over the month, including several lifers. Texas is a worthwhile birding destination because you are getting birds from both North and South America.

I would also highly recommend a visit to the South Padre Birding Centre. They have created a shoreline wetland with the settling ponds from the water treatment plant. In addition to the numerous water birds, there is also a resident alligator. The young alligators were spread out the mother alligator's back during one of our visits.

If anyone is looking for information on birding in the Rio Grande valley, please feel free to contact me. I could lend you my George Bush birding trail map.



*Mother Alligator with her brood enjoying the sun. Photo by M. Coates*



Box 203, Ganges PO  
Salt Spring Island, BC  
V8K 2V9

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