



# Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club  
Newsletter  
Autumn 2018



*Here are some pictures I took this June of the violet- green swallows in one of our nest boxes. Nieke Visser*

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## President's Point of View

**Sue Lehmann**

Summer is a time when our club takes a break from regularly scheduled activities. Behind the scenes however, members continued their involvement. New Trail Maps are just about ready for installation on the south side of Burgoyne Bay. Hiking coordinators have been investigating a potential multi-day adventure. Talks are being organized for the fall and updates from BC Nature have been circulated. Several members have been checking out new and established routes for Tuesday outings. The newsletter coordinator has been putting together this edition of the Oystercatcher. Our Club could not exist, or be such a vital part of this community without the volunteer contributions of many members.

I look forward to a new season of club activities. The season starts with the Blackberry Festival in Ruckle Park. We all have our favourite patch to pick these tasty berries, enjoying them fresh, filling our freezers for the winter and baking scrumptious pies and other goodies.

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.saltspringtnc.ca](http://www.saltspringtnc.ca)

## Calendar of Events

### **Tuesday, Sept 11, 2018 Blackberry Festival**

The 2016-2017 hiking season begins with the Blackberry Festival at Ruckle Park. Meet at noon in the Group Campground. Bring your lunch and a favourite blackberry goodie to share. Don't forget a bowl and a spoon. Short walks will be scheduled before lunch.

### **Thursday, Sept 27, 2018 Bird Migration**

SSTNC welcomes Ann Nightingale to Salt Spring again. She will be speaking on Bird Migration at the SS Library, 129 McPhillips Ave., 7-9pm Ann has been president of both Rocky Point Bird Observatory and Victoria Natural History Society, Victoria Christmas Bird Count Coordinator. She is a regional coordinator for Southern Vancouver Island/ Gulf Islands BC Breeding Bird Atlas. She has been awarded the American Birding Association's Betty Petersen Award for Conservation and Community- and Governor General's Caring Canadian Award.

### **Sunday, November 4, 2018 Reconnecting to Nature: Building a Nature Inspired Culture**

A talk and film on nature-culture by ornithologist, author, and artist Rob Butler at Artspring. This event, a fundraiser for the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, will be followed by a potluck at the Blackburn Lake Nature Reserve. Bring your dishes made with delights grown or harvested in the Salish Sea area! Check with Conservancy for times and details.

## ***Hello Ramblers, Walkers and Hikers!***

Fall is in the air, the hiking, walking and rambling season is about to begin, and it's time to renew your membership in the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club.

Please complete and sign  
the 2018-2019 Membership Registration form  
AND

2017-2018 Assumption of Risk form  
and return BOTH with your membership fee to the Membership Secretary  
before the due date, September 30.

Membership fees are \$30.00 per person, and cover the period  
September 1, 2018 to August 31, 2019.

For members renewing a current (2017-2018) membership on or before the Due date, SEPTEMBER 30, 2018, fees are discounted to \$25.00.

Cheques are preferred. Your fees, accompanied by both completed forms, may be placed in the Membership envelope in the club box at the Visitor Information Centre in Ganges, or mailed to the Membership Secretary at the address printed on the Membership registration form.

Printed forms may be picked up from the blue envelope in the Club Box at the Visitor Information Centre, or you may download and print forms from the Club website, <http://www.saltspringtnc.ca>

Remember to complete and sign BOTH forms.

Happy Trails!

Barry Spence  
Membership Secretary

## **Dawn Chorus at the IOC: 'Beautiful sounds, research and storytelling'**

***Kathleen Maser***

*Note. The International Ornithologists' Union (IOU for short) has been organizing international meetings since 1884 when it first started with five meetings between then and 1910. In 1926 it began putting them on all over the world every four years (except for two missed meetings during and right after WWII). Dr David Bird calls them "the Olympics of bird study".*

This past Sunday, John and Heather Neville arrived home from the International Ornithological Conference, held in Vancouver, utterly exhausted but talking up a storm!

At the opening event Margaret Atwood appealed to the public to keep cats at home or on the leash in order to save declining songbird populations. To emphasize the point she was wearing a cat costume!

Their booth, Neville Recording, was present in the Expo hall amidst the top camera brand companies, birding travel companies such as Quest, Artists for Conservation including the Bateman Centre, First Nation artists (where the carving of a Thunderbird was in progress), costumed bird actors and talented musicians. Also present were booths for Nature Vancouver, Bird Studies Canada, Wildresearch, and Wildbirds Unlimited.

They got to attend a special presentation Thursday evening called “Birds as Peacemakers” which opened with 11 flutists around the room performing a concerto, composed especially for the event. Several professors and generals, from Israel, Jordan and Palestine, have got together to build nest boxes for barn owls around the diminishing Dead Sea. Farmers have stopped using pesticides and are being overrun by rodents. The program is proving to be very successful and a professor from Syria is hoping to join soon before extending the program to the rest of the Mediterranean. The presenters showed photos of barn owl nestlings, where the eldest and largest chicks were observed sharing and feeding their food with the younger, more vulnerable siblings. This conciliatory behavior is recognized as rare in the bird world, hence the nickname, “peace owl”.



In the Community Theatre on Saturday, many people appreciated John's presentation, entitled “Dawn Chorus”. He used recordings from England, Scotland, New Zealand and North America. The audience participated enthusiastically when asked if they were able to identify the songsters. Some of the birds featured were loons, boreal owls, nightingales, and locally recognized passerines such as hermit and Swainson's thrushes, and fox sparrow. John described territorial songs of the males as an “auditory fence” around the nest site. Females judge both the health and experience of males by the quality of their songs at dawn. Some birds have a special song only heard at that early hour! It is also the time of day when human noise is at a minimum. He illustrated one of the horrible exceptions when he played a recording of Lancaster bombers drowning out the exquisite song of nightingales during WWII.

Among the many attendees (20 000), and 1500 scientists, over the 5 days, the Nevilles made time to catch up with old friends, and to meet in person acquaintances from the other side of the world with whom they had previously only corresponded and exchanged bird song recordings. In four years time Australia will welcome these international bird lovers, and, the Nevilles hope to be there.

*Editor's Note. As the Oystercatcher goes to the printer, Susan Fussell and Jan McIntyre are attempting to organize a group adventure for the Club at Cathedral Lakes Provincial Park. To warm you up to the idea, we have two articles of recent experiences at Cathedral Lakes. Stay tuned for further information.*

## Cathedral Lakes

*Charles Kahn*

Just a four-hour drive from Vancouver, Cathedral Lakes Provincial Park has some of BC's most rugged, scenic hiking. In July 2018, I spent three days at Cathedral Lakes Lodge to walk most of the best trails.

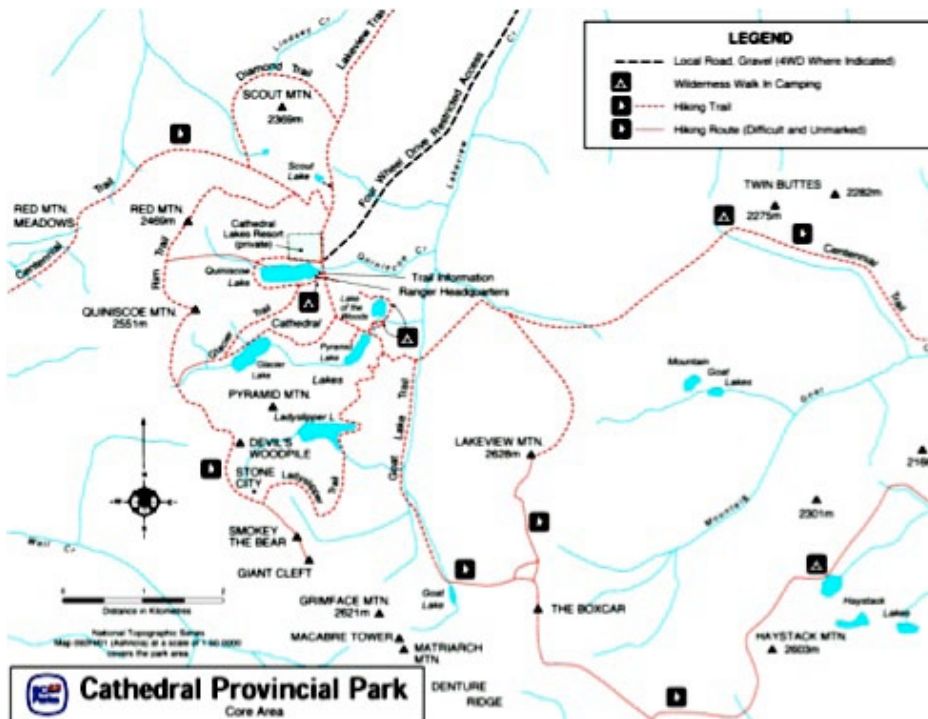
You can't drive up to the lodge, which is about 2072 metres (6800 feet) above sea level. Instead the lodge provides an army-style vehicle to take you up the twisty, narrow dirt road, while your own vehicle resides safely in a fenced and locked car park.

I took the 10:00 a.m. shuttle to the top and arrived just in time for the lodge's hot lunch - soup, sandwiches, salad, fruit, cookies and more. It changed every day and most of it was available in the morning to take along on your hike. As I had only a half day, I decided to walk the diamond trail around Scout Mountain (see map). This 7 km walk proved to have the prettiest alpine meadows full of flowers. I decided to add a bit of the Rim Trail around Red Mountain and then return by the Quiniscoe Trail. Unfortunately, I lost the trail at one point and ended up hiking for five hours (12 km). I hadn't noticed that the map legend shows the Quiniscoe Trail as “difficult and unmarked.”



*The lodge with its access vehicle (centre bottom). All photos by Charles Kahn.*





The main problem is that this trail, well above the tree line, often crosses scree or, worse, very large rocks, which you have to climb over. This makes it difficult both to walk and to discern exactly where the trail is supposed to be. Although the park has erected many cairns to help the hiker follow the “easiest” path, I required more guidance, especially when circumnavigating a large ice patch that covered the designated trail. So I got lost for a while and made my way down the slope much of the way on ledges, all the while being tormented by the mosquitoes and other biting insects that covered my naked legs and arms. Was I having fun? Well, the scenery, when I dared to look at it, was sensational.

I finally returned at 6:00 p.m. just in time for dinner. Dinners at the lodge were quite good. There were always lots of vegetables, often prepared in interesting home style ways. Meats were straightforward. The menus were always posted, but I often forgot to read them, concentrating instead on the food in front of me.

I had a full day on my second day at Cathedral Lakes, so I decided to climb Glacier Trail to Rim Trail and follow it the identified landmarks—the Devil’s Woodpile, Stone City, Smokey the Bear, and Giant Cleft. As with other named natural things such as celestial bodies, I found that my imagination couldn’t adjust to that of the people who’d come up with these exotic names.

The walking was somewhat easier once I got up to the Rim Trail. The views were terrific as you are really on the edge here. I continued to where the Giant Cleft was located, but didn’t go quite far enough as the terrain got increasingly precipitous and my thighs were still sore from my ordeal on the ledges the day before.

I returned to the lodge on the Ladyslipper Trail, which started as a steep, edgy descent on scree and wound around the mountains quite a bit as it dropped down to the exquisite lake. I stupidly misread the arrow on a sign (I must have been getting very tired) and walked down to the Goat Lake Trail instead of returning to



*Large snow patches obscure the trails and necessitate detours. Note the cairn on the edge of the snow. Trying to walk across the snow was not at all safe.*



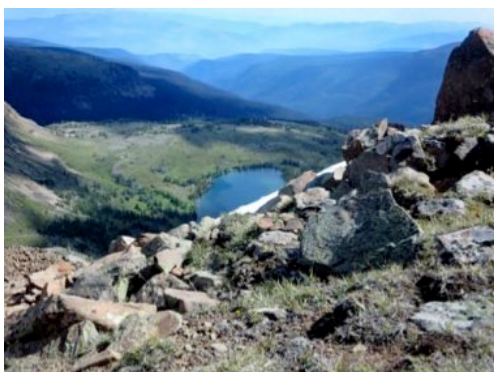
*Large rocks to be traversed on the Diamond Trail. Despite the many cairns (centre below the trees), these kinds of “trail” are often hard to find.*



*Lupins, paintbrush, cinquefoils (look like buttercups), and others embellished meadows on the Diamond Trail around Scout Mountain.*



*The Devil's Woodpile on the Rim Trail. The pattern in this outcrop was more interesting than the photo shows. The rim trail allows the hiker to see in both directions as you're on a ridge.*



*View from the Rim. This trail has fantastic views including lakes, mountains, rocks, snow, and green meadows below.*



*Ladyslipper Lake. The lakes are very pretty.*

the lodge. This added an hour to my already long walk so that my 12+ km walk became a 15+ km walk with an overall elevation gain of about 300 metres (can that small amount possibly be right?). I had left the lodge at 8:30 and got back around 5:00 p.m.

When I took off my boots, I found a small diamond-shaped stone and a bloody cleft in my left index toe (is there such a thing?). So I decided to take it easy on day 3. I walked along the Lake of the Woods trail to Pyramid Lake and then foolishly continued downhill once again toward the Goat Lake Trail. As my left foot felt somewhat sore, I returned to the lodge and took a canoe out on Quiniscoe Lake for a lovely hour before lunch. After lunch, I went up to my room and crashed.

The hiking in Cathedral Lakes Park is spectacular and challenging. I'm glad I did this trip, but I did discover that I prefer hiking below the tree line. I'm rather fond of green.

Information on the lodge is available on websites for: [Cathedral Lake Lodge](#) and at [Cathedral Lakes. Destination B.C.](#)

## **B.C. Nature's Cathedral Provincial Park Camp** **Mary Masiel and Kees Visser**

In mid July, Mary Masiel, John Henry (both from Princeton, the Vermilion Forks Naturalists) and I lead some hikes at Cathedral Provincial Park, south of Keremeos.

We stayed at the Cathedral Lakes Lodge, which is at 2000m altitude. Facing two-and-a-half days with some trepidation, we finished the hikes with an absolute high! It was a fantastic experience. The setting as usual was awesome, but the participants were absolutely wonderful. We have found that whenever we have participate in a BC Nature event, we make a strong connection with other naturalists. We care about the environment and about all aspects of nature. Mentally and physically, we are activists. We all seem to enjoy such activities like hiking, cycling, walking, skiing, and travelling.

We had to get at least 25 people interested in attending this camp; and we limited the number to 37 for a total of 40. We were to all stay at the resort with full room and board and transportation (by open Unimog, 1 ½ hr rough uphill trip) there and back. The camp was fully booked in two hours!

Before continuing, let me say that the service at the lodge was great and so were the meals! On our arrival the first order of business was to have lunch, then 2 short hikes were organized. John led one around Quiniscoe Lake and up to Quiniscoe Falls. Kees led another to Scout Lake.

After dinner the participants signed up for the hike they were interested in doing the following day. John had a group of 16 who accompanied him up to Lakeview Mountain (2600+m) and back, a total of 8 hours. My group of 16 went up to Glacier Lake, then on to the rim also 2600m), coming back by way of Ladyslipper Lake. Theirs was a 7 hour hike. Mary had 5 ladies from White Rock and we went up to Glacier Lake, down to Pyramid Lake and up to Ladyslipper and back. We took 5 hours. Her group went slowly and stopped often to photograph and identify flowers. At the end of the day each group was happy with their accomplishment.





*Kees's group crossing the ice.*

The following day, John took 18 ladies up to the Rim and went past Stone City to view Smoky the Bear and the Giant Cleft before returning by way of Ladyslipper Lake. Kees's group went up to the Centennial Trail to connect with the Rim Trail and then to Red Mountain. Mary's group (18 of us!) did the Diamond Trail. Walking along a trail with 18 people is quite interesting. Mary warned everyone who signed up that my group would go slowly and stop often to take photos of flowers. The

response was "Yeah! that's what I want. "

Diamond Trail is a moderate trail; it meanders through a treed area, eventually arriving at an alpine meadow. It soon became evident that we were hiking around the back of Scout Mountain. When the top of the col is reached one is treated to a spectacular view. This area is nothing but rock but with its charm and to the side is an awesome view of Lakeview Mountain, the Boxcar, Macabre Tower, Grimface Mtn., and even the Giant Cleft. The view is so enjoyable that you don't want to come down. The trail down is quite steep, but you have that wonderful view to look at whenever you stop for a rest. We arrived half an hour after Kees's group, but John's group arrived 3 hours later. John said that they were moving very fast to make it back by 6:00 and supper time.



*Glacier Lake*

The Cathedrals Lakes Camp was an interesting, enjoyable experience. Many of the wildflowers were just starting to come out often appearing as miniatures of the ones at lower elevations. Plentiful plants of Trapper's Tea abounded. Temperatures in the morning and evening were decidedly cool but the days were great for hiking. Hiking the trails at the Cathedral Provincial Park is highly recommended.

## **Purple Martin Steward's Overbuild**

*Peter Mcallister*

A windfall of finely crafted nesting boxes constructed by Jay MacAulay helped spur us on to add a few more purple martin sites. New locations include Southey Bay at the north end, more boxes at Fernwood, Vesuvius, and at the end of the Fulford ferry terminal public dock. But again, like last year a few stretches of poor weather in the spring hampered foraging. We ended up with generally smaller clutches and some empty nesting boxes. Not so for the 5 nesting boxes across from the Sailing Club on Walter Bay Spit. Averaging close to 5 nestlings per box the martins lived up to their reputation as brood champions three years in a row and this summer they



*Purple Martin chicks in a small Bluebird nesting box. Photo by Peter Mcallister.*



*Tony MacLoud, Kathleen Maser, and Rob Mason up on deck checking on fledglings with a periscope in a hard to reach site off of Hamilton Beach. Photo by Peter Mcallister.*



outdid themselves. A bluebird box we put up next to the martin houses for violet-green swallows was also occupied by a pair of martins. It's half the size of our martin boxes with a smaller hole to squeeze through but that did not deter them from producing a few chicks. So much for our religious adherence to meticulous construction specifications.

## Salt Spring Citizens Survey Seashores For Science

*David Denning*

Healthy seashores should be a hallmark of a healthy BC coast. But how can we tell if the biological communities along our shores are really doing that well? One approach would be to monitor an indicator animal – a kind of “canary in a coalmine” species that should thrive along our shores under favourable conditions.

Since 2014 the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club has received grants from both BC Nature Foundation and the CRD Grants-In-Aid to look at the health of our Island's seashores and to involve citizen science techniques. The “Canary on the Coastline” species chosen was the common shoreline purple sea star (‘sea star’ is the newer more accurate common name for ‘starfish’), known scientifically as *Pisaster ochraceus*.

To make matters more interesting, Nature threw a curve ball at us in 2014 in the form of a terrible plague that affected 19 different sea star species, and decimated vast numbers of purple sea stars along the entire Pacific Coast from Baja to the Bering Sea in Alaska. Our early surveys around the shore of Goat Island revealed that less than 5% of our *Pisaster ochraceus* survived this Sea Star Wasting Disease plague.

As a result, our questions about healthy seashores necessarily changed: “Will sea star populations recover?” “Is the wasting disease plague continuing?”

This year I developed a new citizen science initiative to explore these questions and set about looking for volunteer citizens to participate. I hoped for maybe 20 volunteers to undertake the difficult task of looking for juvenile sea stars that are small, cryptic, and usually hidden under rocks in the low intertidal zone.



*Phil Bysher doing a sea star survey near Fernwood dock. Photo by David Denning.*

To my great and pleasant surprise, over 90 people signed up as Citizen Science volunteers! Each of the volunteers was asked to spend over an hour at a shoreline training session learning how to carefully survey for both juvenile sea stars, and to measure and count adult sea stars, keeping watch for signs of the Wasting Disease.



*Fernwood registration. Photo by David Denning*



*Jan Slakov, Bryn Jenkinson, Kathleen Maser, and Robin Jenkinson searching for juvenile sea stars on Baker Beach. Photo by David Denning.*

Three different training sessions were held. Each trained about 30 citizen science volunteers to follow the precise protocols and data collecting techniques for the survey.

As a result of this enthusiastic concern for our shorelines, we were able to carry out about 50 juvenile recovery/adult wasting disease surveys along the shores of Salt Spring during a 4-day “BioBlitz” this August! The survey forms are still coming in, and the data analysis is a larger job than anticipated, so I cannot report the scientific results of the surveys just yet, but look to the Driftwood and the next Oystercatcher for a full report.

At this point I can say that the BioBlitz was a huge success and that Salt Spring citizens care deeply about our shoreline biological communities. The feedback I received was unanimously positive, and as the photos on this page reveal, this BioBlitz was fun, informing, and stimulated even greater appreciation of our remarkable seashores. Thanks to all our citizen science volunteers!



*Bryn Jenkinson measures adult sea stars on Baker Beach. Photo by Robin Jenkinson.*



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