



David Denning photo

Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club
 Newsletter
 Summer 2019



The article by Charles Kahn found within this issue inspired me to display this picture. It is a patch of *Monotropa uniflora*, variously known as ghost plant, ghost pipe, Indian pipe or corpse plant. A large patch of it appeared miraculously every summer in one of our flower beds for the first five years we were on the island. It emerged much like a mushroom patch and lasted for a month or two. It became a favourite site to watch for every year. However, with the onset of a series of drought years and watering restrictions, the patch has completely disappeared from our garden to my great disappointment. Gary Adams

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President's Point of View

Sue Lehmann

What does an organization require? Members of course! But just as importantly it needs an Executive Board – people to keep things organized and moving along. The Trail & Nature Club Board is a dedicated bunch, but many need to step away from their positions at the next AGM. Of the twelve positions on the Board, only two are held by someone serving their first one-year term while many of the directors have held positions for over five years. This is not healthy for an organization.

At the last AGM, I indicated that this is the last term for a number of members. These are not onerous jobs though some positions such as Treasurer and Membership have bursts of activity. We keep Board Meetings to a minimum, 4 to 5 times a year as needed. Most members say they spend an hour or so each month fulfilling their duties.

Six positions will be vacant at the next AGM. The incumbents of the other Board positions will likely continue for the upcoming year, although things could change.

We need you, the members to come forward or the club cannot function. Hope to see you on the Board!

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

Positions that need to be filled at the 2020 AGM:

President.

The president provides guidance to the membership and is responsible for supervising the other directors. The president presides over all meetings.

Treasurer.

The treasurer is responsible for receiving and banking monies, keeping accounts, preparing the Society's financial statements and filing taxes.

Membership.

The membership director oversees new and returning membership applications, maintains a list of current members, and conducts membership related business. See note below.

Website.

The club has a website that contains basic information on the Society, a regularly updated calendar of coming events, and is a repository of publicly accessible information. The website director will maintain and update this website as required. See note below.

Oystercatcher Editor.

The Oystercatcher is a web-based newsletter of the organization. It needs an editor to collect, edit, and produce stories and reports of importance to club activities or of interest to its members.

Hike Coordinator.

The hike coordinator is responsible to plan, schedule and monitor the Tuesday hiking group. The coordinator does not have to participate in the actual hike.

Membership Note. Barry, our long time Membership director, will no longer be available for support after the annual general meeting in January. For training and orientation purposes, it would be best to have a candidate available before the September rush of renewals and new members while Barry is here to mentor.

Website Note. This position is currently vacant. The duties of updating the website and submitting the monthly Driftwood article are being covered by other Board members who are wearing multiple hats. Anyone interested in helping out here can be appointed to the position and voted on as a director at the next AGM.

Enjoying Spring Flowers

Charles Kahn (all photos by Charles Kahn)

Each spring I try to visit favourite spots where I can see beautiful spring flowers and blossoms. Because of them spring is my favourite time of year. Unfortunately, because of our rampant and omnivorous deer population, there aren't as many wildflowers on Salt Spring as I would like.



Skunk Cabbage in the pond beside our new KDOL trail.

One of the first flowers to appear in March are Erythronium, the white fawn lilies that, with domestic daffodils, fill St. Mary's churchyard



St. Mary's Church and fawn lilies.

in Fulford each year. I try to remember to go by and see the wonderful display before they disappear as I know of no other place on our island where they are so prolific. Another flower that appears as early as March is skunk cabbage, and this flower is quite evident in wet, marshy areas all over Salt Spring. Blue-eyed Mary often appears fairly early in March and



Erythronium on Owl Island.

the little islets around Salt Spring, where the flowers are more abundant as the trees are scarcer. Owl Island beside Prevost right across from Beddis Beach is my favourite. Here you'll find more Erythronium than anywhere else and, especially on the rocky islet beside Owl. It is a wonderful combination of sea blush and blue-eyed Mary in a genuine Garry oak meadow. If you don't want to trespass on this private island, you can see the flowers from the sea.



Camas and buttercups in Playfair Park, Victoria.

This year I cycled over to Victoria and went to see the rhododendrons in Playfair Park (off Quadra St., just south of McKenzie Ave.). To my surprise volunteers have fostered meadows of camas, which in late April were doing extremely well. I'll probably make an annual visit to see them, although they are as beautiful in Beacon Hill Park, Uplands Park, and elsewhere. And of course the rhodos in Playfair Park are as beautiful as ever, as they emerge over several months.

This year I've seen more Calypso bulbosa lady slipper orchids than ever before. I was pleased to find many of them growing in the dry brush of Channel Ridge where I live.

While there are many other spring wildflowers to talk about, the ones I've highlighted here are perhaps the showiest and among my favourites. You can find many more in a little booklet called Wildflowers of Salt Spring Island published in 1982 by the Book Committee of the Salt Spring Island Trail and Nature Club. (Does anyone remember the Book Committee?) The last copies I saw were in the Salt Spring Archives, and they might still have a few copies for sale. If you're interested, let me know and I'll see if I can get you a copy. They cost \$20 and the money goes to the Archives.

Shorebirds and Waterfowl at Gray's Harbour.

John Neville

April 17, 2018, we crossed the Juan de Fuca Strait on the M.V. Coho and headed south on Highway 101 East. It's quite a pleasant drive past recreation areas, parks, the Salish Sea and river estuaries. A turning to the right on Hwy 108 took us to Gray's Harbor County. The [Gray's Harbor Audubon Society](#) web site provided us with detailed routes, birding hotspots, rare sightings and more.

blooms for a couple of months. It's somewhat later in higher altitudes like Channel Ridge, where it often combines with yellow mimulus or monkey-flower. The yellow and blue flowers make a beautiful combination.

Sea blush comes a bit later, but blue-eyed Mary waits for it, as the combination of the pink and blue flowers is gorgeous.

I like to paddle to



Sea blush, blue-eyed Mary, and broad-leaved stone crop on Owl Island

Look for these flowers next year. They do a lot to make you feel positive about life and the environment in these testing times.

Editor's Note. I loved the concept of this article. It feeds both of the Club's mandates of getting out and enjoying nature. I would like to challenge other members to identify favourite flower patches that they have encountered on their hikes or in their neighbourhood.

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Lady slipper in my backyard.

Calendar of Events

Tuesday, June 18, 2019

Strawberry Festival

The hiking season ends with the Strawberry Festival in Ruckle Park. Meet at noon for lunch in the lower picnic area to enjoy a scrumptious dish of strawberries and ice cream. Remember to bring a dish and spoon! There will be a short walk in Ruckle Park before lunch. Car pool from ArtSpring at 10:00 a.m. or meet at the picnic area parking lot at 10:20 a.m.

Thursday, June 20, 2019

The Climate and Biodiversity Emergency And What We Can Do About It

This illustrated talk will be presented by local naturalist, science educator, and renewable energy activist, David Denning, and is co-sponsored by Salt Spring Community Energy, Salt Spring Ocean Stewards, Transition Salt Spring, Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club and the Salt Spring Public Library. The event will be held at the Salt Spring Public Library on June 20, starting at 7:00 pm.

Sunday, June 23, 2019

Book Launch

The Saltspring Conservancy is sponsoring a launch of the book *Love of the Salish Sea*. It is held at the Blackburn Lake Nature Preserve, 265 Blackburn Road from 4:00-6:30 pm. You will hear short readings by Briony Penn, Amanda Hale, Brenda Brooks, Christine Smart, Bob Weeden, Murray Reiss, Peter Haase, Maria Coffey, Mona Fertig, Maureen Moore, William Deverell, Daniel Cowper, Gary Geddes, Ann Eriksson, Diana Hayes, and Derek Lundy.



Dunlin and short-billed dowitcher, Ocean Shores. Photo by Heather Neville.

We tried Brady Loop Rd first: which was a mixture of wetlands and open fields. A farmer told us that the wintering trumpeter swans and snow geese had left the area 4 to 6 weeks ago. We did enjoy a harrier stooping for a mammal in the middle of a golden daffodil field. Savannah and white-crowned sparrows called in the grasslands while cottonwood trees provided nest sites for tree swallows. A male killdeer gave his typical calls as we drove slowly by and the female gave her high pitched trilling alarm call: we must have been very close to her scrape in the roadside gravel. The male flew away to distract us, but the female only moved a few metres.

We traveled on about 65 km to Ocean Shores. The main hotspot for us in this area was the ocean beach, which we approached from Chance a la Mer Rd. Vehicles are allowed to drive on the beach. The wind carried the rich aroma of crab as the roaring waves crashed on the shore. People were harvesting razor clams but our interest was the



Perkins Lake at dawn. Photo by Heather Neville.

birds! Western/Glaucous-winged hybrids were the norm, locally known as Olympic gulls. The highlight was a swarm of about 2000 shorebirds. As far as we could tell they were all least sandpiper, western sandpiper, and sanderling. All three species foraged along the surf line. We were allowed to stand just a few metres away without interrupting their feeding. On a second visit there were semipalmated plover and dunlin amongst the swarming flocks. On the third visit, we spotted a short-billed dowitcher using its bill like the needle on a sewing-machine to probe for food in the shallow water.

Another hot spot for us was Perkins Lake near the end of the Ocean Shores peninsula. Just before dawn, deer were still asleep on front lawns. The lake water was perfectly calm, but the low roar of the ocean could be heard in the background. The Pacific tree frogs were noisy until dawn broke. A statuesque great blue heron stood poised, waiting for breakfast to arrive. A silent common loon stayed in the middle showing off his black and white plumage! The distinct “wah-wah” call of a hooded merganser came across the lake. A belted kingfisher circled the lake, being careful to avoid the bank where we stood. A raucous mob of about 50 crows collected on a power line by the lake before dispersing to parts unknown. A male mallard came and went several times, calling incessantly. Like a burst of wind or a jet landing, a flock of sanderling rocketed by. More leisurely chevrons or V formations of snow geese honked, as they flew by. There were three lesser scaup on the water, the male in breeding plumage. A song sparrow was mimicking a Bewick’s Wren, which also had a territory in the salal.

The Great Trail

The Great Trail regularly puts out articles on a variety of trail related topics. The article “[Discovering the Beauty of Victoria... With Your Dog](#)” grabbed my attention because it had both hiking and dogs in a nearby location.

We used the campground in the state park. For a treat we enjoyed breakfast out with razor clams, shrimp and crab omelettes. Then another day at lunch, seafood pie at the Irish pub, yum!

The local Audubon Society has a shorebird festival at the end of April each year. You can find maps, routes, hot spots, rarities and more, at: [Gray’s Harbor Shorebird and Nature Festival](#). There’s also an info center at Ocean Shores, but we relied on the website and our shorebird books. Above all, the presence of shorebirds, snow geese cleaving their way north, and longer days all proclaim, that spring is with us again.

Elton Anderson Award Recipient 2019 - Kees Visser

Kathleen Maser

At the banquet of BC Nature’s conference in Duncan, attendees from our club were thrilled to see Kees Visser called up to receive the Elton Anderson award.

The nominators, John Neville and Fred McMechan wish to recognize his service promoting the causes of BC Nature all around the province. An excerpt here from their submission encapsulates their choice.

With great energy and dedication, Kees ‘has emulated, to a profound degree, the dedication, devotion and energy exhibited by former President Elton Anderson.’

Previously, Kees was a dynamic President of the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club 2010-2013 and led club trips to Quadra, Lund and Savory Islands, Cathedral Provincial Park, Tofino, Flores, Saturna and Prevost Islands.

In 2013 he was elected Vice President of BC Nature and in 2014 he was elected President. During his two-year term he visited many clubs to promote the activities of BC Nature. For the last three years Kees has been a very active Past President serving as Chair of the Governance Committee and leading a BC Nature Field trip to Cathedral Lakes amongst other things.

Kees is also noted for his assistance and support to others in BC Nature when needed. In addition to all that, Kees has allowed his name to stand again in 2019 for the position of President of BC Nature for a one-year term.

At the banquet Kees appeared very moved by the carved wooden wolverine, and after examining it closely for some time, suddenly leapt up and carried it back up to the lectern. Waiting in line as other awards were given we wondered what was he going to say to the assembled company of over 100 nature enthusiasts. Finally at the microphone, Kees read out to us all the names on the ‘plaque’ wishing to bring attention to their

accomplishments. It was a history lesson of course, badly needed for many new members but more than anything epitomized the humility of this Salt Spring islander who continues to give so much to preserving and celebrating nature in this province.



Kees Viiser receiving Elton Anderson Award. Kees is flanked by Marg Cuthbert, Awards Committee and past BC Nature President, Alan Burger. Photo by Genevieve Singleton.

Social Trees?

John A. Heddle

Trees are certainly interesting, important, long-lived, and beautiful, but are they social? We know many live in clusters with others of the same species but few would call that being social. Social species are neighbourly, considerate of the young, and helpful to others. Nothing in my education as a biologist suggested any of these things apply to trees or any other plant. Rather, I thought that they were fierce competitors, especially for light but also for nutrients in the soil and water, too. New research shows, however that this wrong. Indeed, trees are social organisms. Moreover, their distant cousins, small flowering plants are family oriented as well. Recent experiments reported in the prestigious journal *Science* have demonstrated this.

The sociality of trees is a relatively new finding in which Dr. Suzanne Simard at UBC played a crucial role. The first part of this story was recounted to the Salt Spring Island Trail and Nature Club by BC's Chief Forester a few years ago. Professor Simard had discovered an extensive network of roots in the forest that connected trees of both the same and of different species. Now it is clear that this is a highway for communications among trees and that these communications in the form of food (sugars for energy and construction, and amino acids to make proteins) is facilitated by fungi growing on the roots. My, now outdated, view of fungi was that

they were scavengers, decomposing the leaves and twigs for their own use. So they probably do, but they have other activities as well.

Careful studies with isotopically tagged molecules show that the fungi and the trees live in mutual co-operation, each helping the other, more than mere commensalism as previously supposed, rather a true symbiotic relationship. The fungi gather nutrients from the soil and pass them to the tree roots. These can be nitrogen, which the trees cannot “fix” from the air themselves, minerals like magnesium and calcium, and water. Some of these plant nutrients come from decomposition in which the fungi do play an important role as long thought. The tree roots reciprocate, returning sugar and amino acids to the fungi that they can use for energy and for construction of proteins, respectively. Not that the fungi cannot manufacture the amino acids, which surely they can do, but it would require energy to do so. Sugars, however, can only be obtained by decomposition of large molecules, such as cellulose, lignin or by photosynthesis which is impossible underground. The fungi can, and do, pass on the sugars into the roots of a different tree, thereby providing a channel of communication among trees.

Large trees can supply sugar, and perhaps amino acids and other important biological building blocks, to a shaded sapling which would otherwise die – effectively of starvation. Moreover, the trees favour others of their own species over members of other species. This is not exclusive as members of other species also get help in the form of sugars, just to a lesser extent than kin get. Simard views the forest as a neighbourhood in which the neighbours cooperate. You can see her in a You-Tube video called [Intelligent Trees](#) that is a trailer for a webseries.

These results are important for the forestry industry as logging practices might be altered to permit a “mother tree” to remain to feed the seedlings as the forest regrows.

More recent studies of small flowering plants also show interactions between plants, and not merely competitive struggles for space and light. Plants of different species were found to invade each others territory, the traditional Darwinian struggle. But when the neighbouring plants were of the same species, each plant restricted itself to a smaller space. The congregated family of such kin also tended to flower together. This, too, is a discovery with an important Canadian connection. Dr. Susan Dudley, a botanist and ecologist at McMaster says, “We need to recognize that plants not only sense whether it’s light or dark or if they’ve been touched, but also whom they are interacting with. According to another article in *Science*”¹. Her studies on kin recognition in plants got many other researchers started. Again, these fundamental studies sparked by curiosity alone, have practical applications. Rice, for example, has been reported to grow better when planted with kin. Many other species have been shown to recognize other members of the same species and to respond in ways that are helpful to them. Not all scientists are yet convinced but as time goes on, the doubts are diminishing and the disagreements are becoming more like semantic quibbles than serious objections.

1. Pennisi, E., *Science*, January 4, 2019.

Eager Birders in Burgoyne Bay

Kathleen Maser (photos by Peter McAlister unless credited)

We are having a wonderful time out there, in Burgoyne Bay, on Thursday mornings. In spite of the foliage being increasingly heavy on the trees and bushes, the little elusive warblers, vireos and flycatchers somehow pop out onto a dead branch or a tree top, sing heartily. They even manage to ignore the eager crowd below stumbling over each other to point out the bird and help others find this tiny creature. This isn’t easy, but we are all getting better at spotting. How amazing that we can turn up at 6 a.m. and a full two hours later leave beaming with pleasure and satisfaction. For the past two weeks, thinking we’ve all had enough of getting up at 5, I’ve asked: is there anyone



Thursday morning gang by Bernadette Mertens-McAllister.



Wilson's warbler.



Yellow warbler.



Black-throated grey warbler.

who wants to come next Thursday? A resounding chorus of yeses, and, I'll be there!

Peter and Ren have found us the nest of an olive-sided flycatcher, a songster that many of us know from his 'whip three beers!' We have been watching the female forage for small sticks and a particular kind of lichen, *Usnea*, known to many as old man's beard. There's a red-breasted sapsucker's nest and another belonging to a creeper. A red-tailed hawk was seen carrying a rat. The great horned owl could be heard from Mt. Maxwell hooting out his last call before calling it a 'day', no, one moment, I mean 'night'. Alluding us for the longest time was the Pavarotti singer, the black-headed grosbeak, but we've seen it! Hallelujah!

Warblers, such as the Wilson's, the yellow and the common yellowthroat offer no end of excitement, such is the intensity of their



Black-headed grosbeak.



Willow flycatcher.

Editor's Comment

I was taken by Kathleen's use of alliteration in the title of this report and used my on-line thesaurus to see if I could find a suitable substitute for "eager. No luck there but in the process, my thesaurus reminded me to be sure that I was using the right word. I found the following quite entertaining and enlightening.

EAGER, KEEN, ENTHUSIASTIC or AVID

- Someone who is **eager** wants to do or have something very much and there is excited pleasure at the prospect of it (*small, eager faces looked up and listened / he was eager to see her again*).
- **Keen** also suggests intense interest and enjoyment but without the connotations of bubbly anticipation. A keen person's interest in what they do results in commitment and concentration (*he is a keen golfer*). **Keen** can also be used to indicate that someone is anxious to do something, typically because they think it will be advantageous (*Tom is keen to partner up with Bill for bridge*). To be keen on something can just mean to like or approve of it (*I'm not that keen on the food here*).
- Someone who is **enthusiastic** about something shows great enjoyment of or approval for it (*make it clear that you are enthusiastic about the proposal*). An enthusiastic person does things with gusto, energy, and dedication (*an enthusiastic supporter of jazz music*).
- **Avid** derives from the Latin word meaning "greedy/hungry". Someone described as avid enjoys something so much that they can never have enough of it (*I am an avid reader of the newsletter / she was avid for information about the environment*).

So, what kind of birder are you? See if you can classify your group members on the next outing.

yellow colouring in the early morning light. I dare not forget the star of the show, the elusive western tanager suddenly popping out with his spectacular red head, stunning the group below.

New to most of us are the willow flycatcher, the western wood peewee, and the black-throated gray warbler, not so colourful but just as thrilling. Apparently there is a Nashville warbler we must look out for this coming Thursday. Now what does this mystery bird look like?



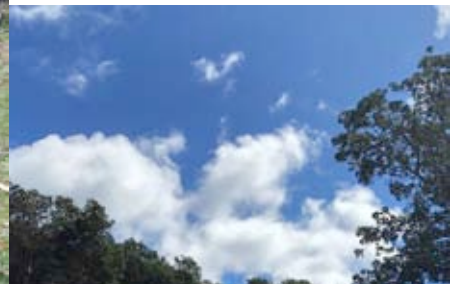
Warbling vireo.



View from along the new KDOL Trail. Photo by Gary Quiring



A fine group of volunteers who came out to work on the new KDOL Trail. Photo by Gary Quiring.



Hard at work. Photo by Gary Quiring.