



David Denning photo

# Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club  
 Newsletter  
 Winter 2016



*This small flock of surf scoters was photographed by David Denning. The bird winters along the coast. It is also called the "skunk-headed duck" after the patterning of white on its forehead and nape. It is the only scoter species that breeds exclusively on this continent.*

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## President's Point of View

### Linda Quiring

Autumn is my favorite time of year and this year the island has been blessed with record rainfall. For some, this may be depressing, but with the warm rains the forest comes alive and this year, finally, the fungi are out in full force. But, don't forget to check out anything you pick with two or three good books, and a local expert, of which there are several. The rains did not deter any of our ramble, walk or hike leaders from their appointed rounds. All sections of the Club were busy this fall, with high numbers of turn-out for all events.

In October, the Gulf Islands Driftwood did a feature on our Club in their Health and Wellness Guide and wondered why they hadn't done it before! An interview with Betty Ball and myself, amazing photos of local flora, and outings by Lynn Thompson, together with pertinent info about our Club was received with great enthusiasm. Perhaps even more new members will appear.

Last year at the local Film Festival, our club had a booth to hand out information about the Club, and the most common question was, "How can I join the Club and take part in its activities when I work during the week?" This, of course, comes usually from younger members of our community, but the issue comes up again and again. In future, we may try a few Sunday hikes and invite our leaders to volunteer for a trial project.

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

## Calendar of Events

**December 8, 2016**

### **BC's Peace River Highlights**

Talk at Salt Spring Public Library, 7:00 pm. Tim Burkhardt will present *Keeping the Peace: Conservation Challenges and Opportunities in Magnificent Northeast BC*. According to Global Forest Watch Canada, the Peace River Break is experiencing industrial-caused disturbances at rates that are greater than those found in Alberta's oil sands region. Oil and gas, coal, LNG development, forestry, mining, wind energy development, and the recently approved Site C hydro dam, act as barriers to wildlife movement and threaten the integrity of the landscape. These barriers could create a pinch-point that effectively cuts the Yellowstone to Yukon region in two. In partnership with Treaty 8 First Nations, local communities and conservationists, Y2Y is leading efforts to restore the Peace River Break to a healthy habitat that supports wildlife movement.

**December 13, 2016**

### **Christmas Lunch**

A reminder that this year's lunch is at Penny's (Glof Club) on Tuesday December 13th from 11:30 am to 2:00 pm.

### **Thursday, January 26, 2016 Annual General Meeting**

The Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club Annual General Meeting will be held at location TBA. Doors open at 11:30 am, with lunch at noon. Presentations to follow. The first 20 minutes by Peter McAllister will focus on the Purple Martin Initiative that is having great success. The second will be announced.

**Feb 16, 2017**

We are working on a presentation to be co-sponsored by the SS Kayak group

**April 20, 2017**

### **Hiking, Bicycling and Building**

Murray Coates will present on turning a Habitat For Humanity experience into additional outdoor adventures.

Herb Otto, who represents our Club with CRD Parks Trails Advisory Committee, and myself have been advised of new trails pending approval of local subdivisions, and the on-going work with the Bob Ball Trail will finally begin in the New Year. Gary Quiring, representing Saltspring Trails, has been working diligently with a plan to add new trails throughout a 160 acre private property in the South End that will be part of the future Cross-Island Trail, and a project to join the Gulf Islands Trail Society is in the works and will be discussed at our AGM in January for club approval. All the Southern Gulf Islands belong to the Society except for Saltspring and membership brings with it many benefits including liability insurance on private lands.

David Denning, our extremely creative Director of Projects and Presentations has presented several amazing and entertaining evenings of slides and talks at the Library which have been well-attended and we look forward to more of these exciting evenings in the dark and dreary days of winter to come.

Enjoy the wonderful rambles, walks and hikes to come in the next month or so, when our island comes alive with falling leaves, wet fern groves and hopefully, a bountiful harvest of 'shrooms!!

### **Annual General Meeting Elections**

At our Annual General Meeting on Jan 26, 2017, a new executive committee will be elected. All 11 positions are one year terms.

The Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club is a very active group of islanders over 100 strong who are involved in regular and special hikes/walks/rambles, the care and development of trails on the island, participating in BC Nature activities, presenting regular evening talks and events, and organizing special nature projects like the purple martin bird houses and shoreline monitoring.

New to the Club? Joining the executive committee is a good opportunity to learn more about our club. All members are eligible to serve as a director.

Please contact Sheryl ([staylormunro@gmail.com](mailto:staylormunro@gmail.com) or 250-537-4716) before Jan 5th if you are interested in being part of the executive.

## Letters to the Oystercatcher

### Please Help Me

I have noticed that hikers and walkers have problems with members falling during the wet, slippery months when the club is most active. Yes, we sign a waiver of liability (for what it is worth) but the group pressure to move along and cover territory means that we are all pushing the envelope and taking risks.

*"Please help me I'm fallin...."*

Perhaps you may remember this song sung by Bobby Darin? At least that is the voice my memory serves up to me now, but this fall it was all too true for me as I was hiking down a mountain. One of a long line of people scurrying down a steep, rocky, wet slope, I had just stopped to make sure that another hiker had not been injured in her fall when a few minutes later it was my turn to miss-step and plunge down a rocky slope onto my back.

I was up again in a moment, embarrassed to have fallen, only to soon find myself dizzy and struggling to negotiate an awkward ridge. Back over I went and struck my head this time. Two strong women turned me over and hauled me back on my feet. They propped me up, handed me back my hiking poles and off we went again and caught up with the leading section of the group. I sank to my knees to keep from dizzily falling once more and people then realized that I was still in trouble. They fed me sweets and water and eased me down to the road in the valley. I even got a drive home. Thanks everyone.

Now, having low blood pressure is a great thing to have in terms of longevity but it does have its problems, one of them being that I go into shock easily. After that first fall I should have stretched out on the ground until blood pressure returned. I was too aware of being in a group and unwilling to admit my frailty or hold up the line. As in the song, I should have asked for help sooner, not later. "Please help me, I'm falling."

Bill Gardam

### Daffodil Cottage

I liked your article about the older members, but noted your comment mourning the loss of certain hikes in our calendar.

The hikers visited what you call Daffodil cottage up to a year ago. We didn't go last year, once the Skywalker strata was finished and posted "no trespassing".

Once a year the hikers & walkers both go to Christie Falls. The Cowichan River Footpath and the Trans-Canada Trail are favourites.

The Calendar Archive is under Events on our website, if you want to see what we've been up to since 2009. We might not call them what you remember, but many are still enjoyed.

Sue Lehmann

## From an Habitual Broom Basher

*John Heddle*

As I continued to thin out the broom along the edge of the Powerline Trail, I took this picture of a broom in bloom. No sensible plant would bloom early in November with very few insects to pollinate its flowers and little sun to nourish the seeds. Of course, plants are not sensible in the human manner but they do sense the light and respond to its timing as the result of millions of years of evolutionary trial and error. Yet on the morning of November 5th of this year, numerous broom plants along the Powerline had one or a few flowers, hopelessly waiting for a passing bee. Perhaps one day, with the inevitable global warming, the flowers of November will be fertilized. Mind you, many legumes are self-pollinated and need not wait for any insect but they still need sun and warmth to produce viable seeds. Probably it is the frequent occurrence of unusual mutants or "sports", which were so avidly collected in all species by the Victorians, that contribute to the incredible success of this invasive species on our island and up and down the West Coast. As a geneticist, I think of this as a "mutator phenotype", a characteristic of the plants cellular reproductive mechanism that throws out a large number of mutations, most of them detrimental.



Every organism, even the simplest, is a very complex thing with a vast number of interactions among its proteins which respond to the environment, light included, and interact with each other to produce life. Even a minor change in one of the proteins as a result of mutation can upset the applecart and kill the creature. As an analogy, imagine that you have an imperfect grandfather clock, one which loses one second a month. Evidently, it could run more accurately and lose only one second a year. Now open it up and make a random change in the mechanism:

what is the chance that it will be improved rather than wrecked? Likewise, the vast majority of mutations are lethal or, at least, hurtful. Obviously, the lethal ones do not reproduce but the detrimental ones often do, only less often than normal individuals, so that most mutations vanish from the population over time. Every now and then, nevertheless, one of the mutations is actually beneficial, commonly a minor improvement of some sort. Unlike the typical mutations which are gradually removed from the population, these advantageous mutations give the plant or animal a better chance of producing offspring than the rest of the population and so increase in number and frequency, especially in self-fertilizing plants. For an organism like our broom, which was introduced to a new and different environment when brought here, there was plenty of room for minor improvements and so having lots of mutations would be beneficial in adapting to the new conditions broom faced here on Salt Spring Island.

The much maligned and generally despised broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) is actually an admirable plant which was used by the English Plantagenet kings of the Middle Ages in their heraldry, and from this the very name Plantagenet originated (meaning sprig of broom, because broom was then called *planta genista*). It is a legume and has the characteristic root nodules that house bacteria which can fix nitrogen from the air and fertilize the soil. Only such bacteria among all organisms can do this naturally. Were it not for chemists, Fritz Haber in particular, who discovered another way to use atmospheric nitrogen to make ammonia and from it biologically available nitrogen, it is doubtful that the current human population could be fed.

Broom not only fertilizes the soil; it stabilizes banks and colonizes open spaces. True foresters dislike it for battling and shading out young trees, though the trees always win the war in the long run. Our repugnance to broom, its lovely spring flowers notwithstanding, is largely the result of our inherent view that what we grew up with and knew first is the way things naturally should be. We know and should remember, however, that all of the “native” plants were once invasive newcomers during the retreat of the glaciers and the evolution of our ecosystem. This evolution has not ceased. One day broom will seem as natural and native as Gary oaks, salal, and Douglas firs and may be fertilized by bees in November.



*Ebbing tide in the Booth Canal*

of our landforms, how complicated to understand let alone explain to non-geological walkers.

The foreign rocks and gravel are easiest to explain as remnants from glacial times or as sandstone falling down the steep slopes as the cliffs eroded. The sandstones are beauti-

## Walking Through the Distant Past

*Bill Gardam*

**The greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe - Love that, not man apart from that. - Robinson Jeffers.**

The walking group has zigzagged down the wooded slopes near Vesuvius and are now beginning a walk along the beach towards Booth Canal, that long muddy tidal channel that fills part of the low valley overlaying the fault line between the middle and northern parts of Saltspring Island. We are walking on thin, straight lines of almost vertically tilted shale beds that are themselves littered with sandstone and granite boulders. How interesting, but like most



*The Booth Canal*



*A sandstone boulder sits atop the beds of shale.*



*We stop for lunch.*

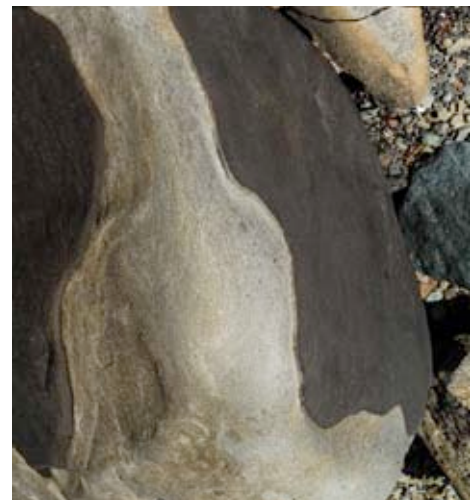
fully sea-sculpted in their turn and in some are the swirling marks from their own genesis on wave-marked ancient beaches. It is impossible to truly grasp how ancient all this for a species like our own that has lived for such a blink of geological time.

Those lines of shale, we prance so blithely over, originally formed in muddy layers beneath a sea many miles away from their present place of residence. How did horizontal layers get tilted up like this? What forces crumpled them up like layers of cardboard pushed from both ends? Possibly one need only look to the collision of island bits that formed the Booth Canal valley. Nearly all of our province formed from stray bits and pieces of islands, and Vancouver Island, the Strait of Georgia and the Coast Mountains are a larger series of similar humps and hollows, layers of twisted and eroded rock.

It was a lovely day for a walk, the sun is breaking through and huge cumulus clouds tower up into the blue above us, but we stopped once more at a cliff face which showed the tilted rock beds off beautifully. Beautiful is an appropriate response that can live comfortably alongside all this rock history. Too much geology and too little love can skew our minds. What we instinctively feel with our hearts will serve us well along with the science of the world.



*We chatter about our lives. An essential part of these walks.*



*Where shale met Sandstone years ago and their love keeps them together still.*

## Time Forgotten and Revered

Ron Hawkins

One of the many submissions making the Fall 2016 Oystercatcher such an outstanding collection of stories celebrating the land was Linda Quiring's *Ian Fraser and Daffodil Cottage*. In it, Linda recalls memories of hiking to Daffodil Cottage on Mt. Tuam with Ian Fraser, well-regarded emeritus member of our club now. Ian knew some of its history. It had been built in the 1920's near some wetlands. Linda and Ian set out again in 2016 attempting to rediscover Daffodil Cottage thirty years later. Many changes in the developed landscape around and over Mt. Tuam had occurred since they had last seen it. Practically unfindable, Linda's exquisite description as they finally succeeded announced:

*"You won't believe it," I had told Ian. "When I spotted it, I thought I was hallucinating." So did Ian. The Daffodil Cottage in the middle of a subdivision? "Well," he said, "if it's the cottage, there should be a small out-building right about here!" There it was. A pile of old lumbers collapsed on itself....*

*Later, I marveled at the treasure our founding fathers, (and mothers) in the Hiking Club have shared with us. Hundreds of hours of dedication, discovering new trails, leading hikes, walks and rambles, serving on our executive."*

The spirit of time past, change, what was, and is no longer, gone, that from which flows a spirit reverence for me, for what is and what was. A deep caring, remembering, all that was before, which by degree is our common story, a legacy we too will leave by degree in our own dust.

Who chose to build and live in the 1920's on the slopes of Mt. Tuam? A time almost before cars and roads existed on Salt Spring, when life was rural, scattered, slow, hard, life coastally-oriented by and large, demanding, relatively demanding.

When such a spirit comes calling I find poetry the voice most capable of expressing its message. So I turned to *Taking the Names Down from the Hill* by Philip Kevin Paul. Philip (b.1971), a Salish writer, was raised in his WSA, NEC homeland of Brentwood Bay. His book *Taking the Names Down from the Hill* won the Dorothy Livesay BC Book Prize for Poetry in 2004. Here is the poem.

Where does all this leave me? Everywhere, everyday, history is ongoing, an unfolding record of the human story. History is now, and always. A record of change, a record without a plan, it seems, without an over-arching intelligence guiding its destiny. Things come, and go, we all do, often without much regard for what is. 'The Daffodil Cottage' and

## Taking the Names Down From the Hill Philip Kevin Paul

What is Saanich to me now?  
Merely the sheer promise  
of Matthew before his death,

merely my father's suffering fight  
against his own death,

merely the painful pierce of doubt  
through to my mother  
before her death,

and forever the wisdom  
we need and will continue to need  
rotting out in hollows  
in Uncle Gabriel's bones,  
under pounds of earth.

It pleases me to be angry,  
to be angry and to speak and to write it.  
I'm glad, finally,  
to have shrunk down Saanich  
---what I imagined to be Saanich---  
and put it away.

What I imagined was my only home  
lost forever under tons of concrete  
and vulgar electric houses humming  
the sickness into us.

What I imagined to be the only rightness  
worth striving for or dying for and making  
their deaths right.

Sorrow was pathetic and laden  
with a silence so vast that  
the drummer could not wake us.

The people went into the hills.  
They went there together as one body  
knowing who they were  
to bring the names home.

Where are the ancestors  
we keep calling ourselves?

And while the roadways were being imposed,  
the crowns were cast aside and tangled  
and will never be brought home  
and never properly given.

However, sorrow has had its time.  
The mourning must break

at last. I will tell you  
what they really left us.

‘Taking the Names Down From The Hill’ bring our attention to the now, which strangely in a way, can only be remembered in the before, -- and woefully inadequately. Can we learn from history? Such a rhetorical question.

Saanich and Tuam. Both Salish words defining neighbouring promontories separated by water. Originally Chuan (mountains each end) was pronounced Tuan after European contact and later Tuam (Chuan Drive (Vesuvius) got it right!). Saanich is the land of the original people living on S.E. Vancouver Island that also circumscribed parts of Salt Spring, Mayne and Pender & Portland Islands. Hence the connection of Daffodil Cottage to Taking the Names down from the Hill. Brenda Guiled informs us the original English interpretation of Salish people was ‘Hands Up’, alluding to their tradition of greeting by raising hands upwards.

As I re-read Taking the Names Down From The Hill it really begins to dawn on me the absolute bond in which Saanich people hold their ancestors and the land, honouring that bond, respecting it, sacred. We kabloona may not share or understand this ethos well, but there are many things that cultures don’t share, understand, or are even aware of. In his thesis, Coast Salish Senses of Place: Dwelling, Meaning, Power, Prosperity, and Territory in the Coast Salish World, Brian David Thom attempts to appreciate a sense of place from a Coast Salish perspective. This thesis is available on line at [http://www.web.uvic.ca/~bthom1/Media/pdfs/senses\\_of\\_place.pdf](http://www.web.uvic.ca/~bthom1/Media/pdfs/senses_of_place.pdf)

## An Editor’s Trials

### Gary Adams

#### What’s in the Name?

Once I had resolved and published my policy on common names for species, I just had to tackle another editing puzzle. Is our island spelled Salt Spring or Saltspring? Before anyone gets too wrapped up in the arguments, the official SSTNC spelling is Salt Spring – two words. My concern was the newsletter.

Most readers probably know that the island and parts of it carried a number of Cowichan and Salish names long before whites arrived and several names floated about in the early years of exploration.

The local salt springs, located near Salt Spring Spa, intrigued Captain Walter Colquhoun Grant to label the island Saltspring Island on a map included in his 1856 “Description of Vancouver Island.” Grant was the first settler to purchase land on Vancouver Island in 1849<sup>1</sup>. Shortly after that, the Hudson’s Bay Company documents referred to the island as Salt Spring and the double name seemed to stick locally. Concurrently, the British Navy was busy adding its stamp to the Gulf Islands and

They left us  
magic in everything,

the beautiful way  
in everything. But what  
we truly own has never left us:

magic in word,  
magic in thought,  
magic in song,  
magic in touch,

and, yes, magic in the breath  
that joins them.

I went to the hills alone  
with what I’d shrunk Saanich to  
in a few measly pores of the lifeline  
of the palm of my hand.

From there,  
where it was unceremoniously cradled,  
I blew it out over the cobwebbed underbrush  
four paces off the footpath  
and felt that my work was done  
without even singing a song.

On the way back down I stopped  
and touched the road but twenty paces  
from someone’s house,  
someone I’ve never even met  
and breathed out Saanich,  
this is Saanich.

I began to dance. I danced  
at least as foolishly as a Scotsman  
gone Indian, naked in the woods!  
(Or an Irishman for that matter).

I named and renamed everything  
that I spied with my little eye:  
Saanich. And my dance?

When I figure I had it down,  
that I had it just right, I knew  
it was time, as it is for us all.

So by the gift of this  
old unapologetic magic  
I called it the Dance of Forever,

our newest tradition.

*I am grateful to [Nightwood Editions](http://www.nightwoodeditions.com), 2003, [www.nightwoodeditions.com](http://www.nightwoodeditions.com) for permission to use “Taking the Names Down From the Hill” by Philip Kevin Paul, from the book “Taking the Names Down From the Hill (2003).”*

the surveyor Captain Richards named it Admiralty Island in 1859 after Rear Admiral Robert Lambert Baynes<sup>2</sup>.

In 1910, the island's official name was reverted to Saltspring Island by the Geographic Board of Canada, the official arbiters to the use, spelling, and application of place names since 1897. Interestingly, all names were finalized in Ottawa until 1961, when the authority was transferred to the provinces<sup>3</sup>.

Despite this proclamation, or possibly because of it, given our island's culture, local residents continued to use the two-name variant to this day. The Post Office takes both names without comment. The Department of Highways, to avoid confusion, labeled my street "Salt Spring Way" west of Fulford-Ganges Road and "Saltspring Way" to the east.

All this delving into historical document has led me to the conclusion that I will accept both names in manuscripts unless it discusses the club in which case Salt Spring will be the correct spelling.

### **A Hike by Any Other Name**

For the past few years, your editor has been increasingly disturbed by his lack of a good term for our group \_\_\_\_\_. (You will see in a second why I left a blank). Every Tuesday, we have hikers who hike, walkers who walk, and ramblers who ramble but what term do you use to talk about the collective activity? If I could start at the beginning, I would have chosen "hike" as the collective name as it is commonly used that way and carries little baggage. Given our current name choices though, I am left with either trying to dodge the issue or use words like tramp, trudge, rove, traipse, or footslog. Would any of you be happy with any of those? Now if any of you have a good word to help fill in that blank, let me know.

1. (<http://saltspringarchives.com/PlaceNames.htm>)

2. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salt\\_Spring\\_Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salt_Spring_Island))

3. (<http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/earth-sciences/geography/place-names/about-geographical-names-board-canada/11084>)

## **The Travelling Birder: Romania and the Balkans**

### **By Murray Coates**

My Habitat for Humanity build this year was in Romania so I went a few days early to indulge two of my other travel passions (trains and birding).

The Balkan countries, remnants of Yugoslavia, came into being with the collapse of the Iron Curtain.

Most travellers to this region focus on the Adriatic coast, including such places as Dubrovnik and Split. My plan was to stay inland and take trains from Ljubljana in Slovenia through Croatia, Bosnia and Montenegro ending up in Belgrade, Serbia. The train option from Belgrade to Bucharest, Romania proved to be too time consuming for my schedule, so I ended up doing the last leg on Air Serbia.

Birding opportunities were in scarce supply during this initial part of the journey but we did see evidence of one of the area's most popular birds. Even from the train, nests of the white stork could be seen in the trackside villages and towns. Apparently some of these nests are centuries old and people treat the return of the storks as cause for celebration.

The most spectacular part of the train journey

## **HONOUR ROLLS**

### **HONORARY MEMBERS**

Bob Ball  
Tony Pederson

### **TRAIL BLAZERS**

Janet Anderson  
Bob & Betty Ball  
Owen Benwell  
Zeke Blazecka  
Nancy Braithewaite  
Ian Fraser  
Ashle Hilliard  
Bill Harrington  
George Hignell  
Nancy Holcroft  
Charles Kahn  
Ann King  
Betty Kirk  
Fred Powell  
Dick Pattinson  
Linda Quiring  
Brian Radford  
Marjie Radford  
Beth Ranney  
Alan & Rita Robertson  
Simon Rook  
Lynn Thompson



*View from the train to Belgrade*



through the Balkans is from Podgorica to Belgrade. It is apparently one of the world's great train journeys and the schedule describes it as taking 10 hours but I am told this objective has never been met. The total trip is 296 miles, with 254 tunnels and 435 bridges. Having experienced train rides in lots of places, I can give a rating of 10 out of 10 for spectacular scenery, but the washrooms were also extremely memorable.

After arriving in Bucharest, several of us took a 2-day tour to Eastern Romania intending to visit the Danube Delta at the edge of the Black Sea. The Danube River flows close to 1800 miles from its source in Germany to the Black Sea where it creates a huge 2200 square mile delta. This vast network of rivers, canals, marshes, tree-fringed lakes and reed islands is considered to be a wildlife viewing paradise. According to Romania Tourism, the delta contains 300 species of birds, 43 types of mammals as well as 136 kinds of fish. Many of the local residents make their living as commercial fishers and guides. People are gradually transitioning from wildlife harvesting to an economy of wildlife viewing.

We started our tour with Buzz Travel of Bucharest by taking a minibus ride from Bucharest to Tulcea Harbour, on the edge of the Delta area. (Our driver showed his Formula One potential.) Tulcea dates back to the 3d century and it was an important trade centre and fishing community. After an authentic fish based lunch including carp and cabbage, we left on the final leg of the trip to Murighol.

The town of Murighol is the last community in the delta and is the port of entry for tours into the wetlands via one of the three main river channels. We checked into a local resort, and then drove to the harbour to



*A typical cross channel*



*Black tailed godwit.*

catch our tour boat. The boats used for wildlife tours are flat bottom shallow draft vessels.

The accompanying map gives a bit of an idea of the number of channels and cross channels in the delta, but it is a total maze which could not be navigated without a local guide.

The Danube Delta is the home base for over 60% of the world's population of pygmy cormorants (*phalacrocorax pygmeus*), 50% of red-breasted geese (*branta ruficollis*) and the largest number of white pelicans (*pelecanus onocrotalus*) and Dalmatian pelicans (*pelecanus crispus*) in Europe.

We were expecting to see large colonies of pelicans but apparently we were just a few days late and they had left for their wintering grounds to the south. However we did see pygmy cormorants, grey herons, glossy ibis, little bitterns and a black tailed godwit (these were life birds for me). In addition there were lots of great egrets, carrion crows, hooded crows, Eurasian coots and magpies. In our brief boat trip we probably saw 20 species.

The spring migration period might be a more rewarding time to be in this area but it was an interesting place to visit. We saw lots of people out on the water who were probably living the way people have for centuries (except for the outboard motors). Our guide took us through a narrow channel out into a large shallow lagoon and we were all pleasantly surprised about the clarity of the water.

The next day we continued our tour of the region. An interesting feature of agricultural life in this and other parts of Romania is the ancient practise of livestock herding. Shepherds take on responsibility for herds of livestock including sheep, goats and some cattle for the entire grazing season. We saw quite a number of managed herds grazing their way through the countryside accompanied by herding dogs and one or two shepherds. This persists in a few other countries in the world now, including Iran and Scotland.

We visited Roman ruin and a well-preserved Ottoman fort , then embarked on the most exciting part of the tour. There is one freeway in Romania and our driver/guide demonstrated what a well-tuned Mercedes van could do on this excellent road. Needless to say, no roadside birds were identified along the way.



*One of many wandering herds of sheep*

## **The Genius of Birds, by Jennifer Ackermann**

### ***Review by David Denning***

I've been watching and enjoying birds for many years, but my observations took a giant leap forward about three years back when I bought a Canon SX-50HS super-zoom camera. Suddenly, I had a tool in my hands with the power of binoculars, but one that provided me a way to quickly review and confirm my observations. The new camera increased my bird observing time and skills immensely.

The best part of my enhanced focus is not finding new bird species (although it helped) but seeing behaviours I had previously missed. For example, on a recent visit to Roche Harbor, San Juan Island, we observed double-crested cormorants perching in trees above the resort. Having not observed this sea bird in trees before, I wondered what they were up to. A few minutes with camera and binoculars revealed a fascinating array of display behaviours including males (I think) holding up small boughs of the Douglas fir tree to impress nearby females, or those flying in. Of course, this is just my interpretation – and that brings me to the purpose of this writing, to encourage bird enthusiasts like myself to catch up on the latest research about bird behaviour with Jennifer Ackermann's new book – *The Genius of Birds*.

*The Genius of Birds* is a 260-page book followed by 60 pages of notes and references. This book makes accessible much of the recent research on bird behaviour that is otherwise hidden in the scientific literature. Ackermann summarizes a tremendous volume of scientific research into a highly readable series of chapters about different aspects of bird behaviour that hint at their genius.

## Home Sweet Home For a Great Blue Heron



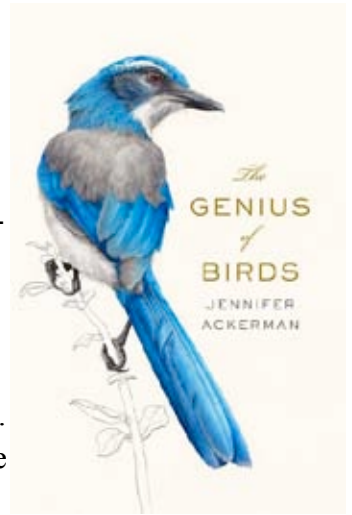
David Denning submitted several images to the Oystercatcher. Among them was this wonderful collection showing domestic life at a great blue heron nest.

I found three of the chapters particularly inspiring: one on bird sounds and song, one on their abilities to use mental maps, and another on my favourite bird group – the bowerbirds. The writing summarizes both the broad studies involving populations of birds in a species, as well as anecdotes from studies of individual birds. The latter approach gives insights into the ‘personalities’ of birds, such as 007, a New Caledonian Crow that was able to solve an 8-stage puzzle problem that including creating a hook at the end of a wire to lift a latch inside a tube, that would then allow access to food.

Some birds are capable of an astounding repertoire of sounds and calls such as the mockingbird, Honey Child, that (or should I say, who?) was monitored at nine months old for 16 minutes. The count – 143 calls and songs from 24 different species.

As far as mental maps, it’s a challenge to investigate how some birds can store such complex information in their brains. Clark’s nutcrackers, for example, can hide as many as 30,000 seeds in a territory of dozens of square kilometers, and then retrieve them, as they are needed throughout the winter.

The Genius of Birds is well written, but it is not an ‘easy read’. It’s not the kind of book most readers would sit down and read through from cover to cover. It is packed with so much information, and so many examples, that I found it necessary to read and digest in fairly small chunks. That said, I recommend it to anyone who loves birds or nature in general. It’s a window into all of the knowledge about the brains of birds; knowledge that shows their different levels of genius and make our lives much richer in the understanding.



## Project Feederwatch

*Gary Adams*

Every so often, someone in the club promotes Project Feederwatch to us. The program, administered by [Bird Studies Canada](#), asks citizen observers to count and record bird activity at their feeders for two days

a week from November to April. They provide lots of useful materials to help you do this and make it easy to submit all recordings by computer.

We joined the program about five years ago but I am not going to make a pitch to you for the sake of the birds. We thought that you should know that this is a perfectly fine activity for purely selfish reasons. We are not major birders or active wildlife researchers so when we moved to Saltspring, we knew very little about the region's bird species. We have always put out feeders anyway so we decided to join Project Feederwatch for a couple of years to provide motivation to learn species identification. We made rapid gains using our trusty bird book and the program materials. After a few years, we could identify most of the common visitors, though the house, purple, and Cassin's finches still give us headaches. So there you have it. The first reason to join is to learn who resides in your yard. Second, by regular observations of our resident species, irregular or infrequent visitors attracted our attention. We learned to notice them and head back to the reference material. Tough ones could take several visits before we had the confidence to add them to our list but solving the mystery is fun.

That takes me to the final reason to join. It is fun. You have to spend time watching the feeders and, consequently, your local domain. You see the first blossoms of spring, notice the standing water after a rain, and identify critters of all kinds who avail themselves of your bounty. You recognize specific individuals with unusual markings or behaviours and you learn how various species have different patterns. One year, the nut-hatches brought their fledgling to our patio to show them off. We watch the highly suspicious pileated woodpeckers flit about craning their necks for ten minutes before settling in to feast. We see greedy jays, plucky chickadees, and fearless hummingbirds all showing off for us. The bird watching has become an integral part of our weekend activities. We look forward to it and take great pleasure in it. So if you are looking for something both educational and fun, consider joining Project Feederwatch.



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