



David Denning photo

# Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club  
Newsletter  
Spring 2017



Hooded Merganser looking for a nesting spot. Photo by David Denning.

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## President's Point of View

*Sue Lehmann*

"Really? The Trail & Nature Club is a charitable society?" someone said to me last fall. I suspect that most people in the community and even some of our members aren't aware of all the activities the club is involved in. We tend to stay within our own group, and don't venture into other areas.

The Directors represent the many facets of our club. Tuesday outings are organized by Frauke (Rambblers) and Robert (Walkers). Sadly, no one has come forward to replace Jean to coordinate the Hikers. I encourage you to check out all the Tuesday activities scheduled. Remember that group participation is not fixed and you may want to try a different group if they're going somewhere you've never been. Also look at the leader, the difficulty, and the time required and choose the activity that fits into your life that day.

Herb (Trails) and his crew have been working hard for the past few years, making signs and improving trails within BC and CRD Parks. We are beginning another initiative to increase the inventory of public trails through partnerships with private landowners and Crown Land and by promoting the acquisition of parkland. If you like to explore new trails, I encourage you to join this team.

Sharon (Presentations) organizes the evening presentations on diverse topics of interest to members. She's looking for ideas for talks for the fall.

SSTNC is a member organization of BC Nature and Kathleen (BC Nature) is our link between them. You will receive emails from her forwarding newsletters and invitations to participate in activities organized by BC Nature.

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 ([gafraud@shaw.ca](mailto:gafraud@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

**Thursday, March 9, 2017**

### **CRD Open House of Gulf Islands Regional Trails Plan.**

At Artspring from 3:30-6:30. The CRD will present a plan to identify a conceptual regional trail route on each of the main islands and provide direction for implementation.

**Tuesday, March 21, 2017**

### **Greening Our Travel for a Lower Carbon Footprint.**

David Denning will present the good story about Salt Spring Island carbon footprints and how we can do even better through measures to reduce our travel/transportation footprints. Salt Spring Library Program Room, 7:00 pm. (SSTNC cosponsored with SS Community Energy Group, Transition SS Ed, and SS Library.)

**Thursday, April 20, 2017**

Murray Coates will give a presentation on Habitat for Humanity, Global Village international work opportunities, and nature watching in Trinidad and the Grenadines (including the scarlet ibis and leatherback turtles) Salt Spring Library Program Room, 7:00 pm. Thursday September 19, 2013

**Tuesday, May 9, 2017**  
**Annual Broom Pull**

The annual Broom Pull will take place at a location TBA. All members are invited. Volunteers should bring pruners, loppers, small tree saws and any other tools they deem useful. Suitable work clothing and gloves should be worn.

**Tuesday, June 20, 2017**

The 2016-2017 hiking season ends with the Strawberry Festival at Ruckle Park. This year's event is being organized by the Walkers. Meet at noon in the lower picnic area to enjoy a scrumptious dish of strawberries and ice cream. Short walks will be scheduled before lunch.

The other members of the Board provide coordination and administrative functions. These Directors are Gary (Oystercatcher), Membership (Barry), Secretary/Treasurer (Sheryl), Ann (Website) and myself (President).

But what about the charitable status? As a charity, our club is able to accept donations and apply for grants, which have been used for trail improvements & signage and for special projects such as building Purple Martin boxes and conducting scientific surveys of Ganges Harbour. In addition, the society can be the sponsoring agency for fund-raising initiatives to purchase private lands to be incorporated into BC Parks.

There are lots of opportunities to be involved in the diverse activities supported by the club. It's your club, and I encourage to become involved.

## **2017 Annual General Meeting** *Sheryl Tylor-Munro, Secretary-Treasurer*

The Annual General Meeting on January 26 was a successful event that began with a catered sandwich lunch. I have summarized the meeting for those of you who couldn't make it. We elected a new Board of Directors:

- President = Sue Lehmann
- Secretary-Treasurer = Sheryl Taylor-Munro
- Membership = Barry Spence
- BC Nature Rep = Kathleen Maser
- Newsletter Editor = Gary Adams
- Presentations = Sharon Sullivan
- Co-ordinators -
  - Walkers = Robert Mason
  - Ramblers = Frauke Prystawick
  - Trails = Herb Otto

We still need a new Hiking Co-ordinator

At the Executive Board's first meeting in February the appointment of Ann King as Website manager was confirmed (Ann volunteered after the AGM).

Last year, the provincial government introduced the new BC Societies Act. To bring our bylaws into conformity with new act, members discussed then approved the draft bylaws presented by Sue Lehmann. Sue had attended workshops on Salt Spring specifically organized for non-profit groups who all are facing this same need to amend their existing bylaws.

We owe Sue a great deal of thanks for the many hours she has spent studying the necessary changes, reviewing our old bylaws, and preparing the draft changes for this year's AGM.

The creation of new trails on Salt Spring was the focus of a presentation by Gary Quiring and Charles Kahn. While we will continue to work closely with BC Parks and CRD PARC with Herb Otto as our representative, there is also the possibility of making arrange-

ments with private landowners to have access to trails on their properties. The AGM approved the Club joining with other Gulf Islands as a member of the Gulf Islands Trails Society with a view to facilitate partnerships with private landowners for public access to trails.

Following the meeting, we enjoyed a slideshow and presentation by Peter McAllister, who with Tony MacLeod and Murray Coates, set about building and installing boxes to aid recovery of Purple Martins on SSI. To our delight, many boxes hosted martins and their fledglings in this our first year of the project.

Next year's Annual General Meeting will be held on January 25th, 2018.

## Gulf Islands Trail Society

### Gary Quiring

We have great news to share for trail lovers on Salt Spring Island.

After much leg work and a presentation by Charles Kahn and myself at this year's AGM, The Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club membership voted in support of a couple of groundbreaking initiatives that will improve and grow trail access on Salt Spring Island.

The first was to join the Gulf Islands Trail Society. This umbrella organization was created to share some common services among its member organizations, most notably to make available liability insurance that allows the creation of public trails on private land. The insurance applies firstly to private landowners to protect them against any liability resulting from mishaps on the trail. It also provides liability protection to the organization that maintains the trail. The Society has been in existence for several years.

Current members of the Gulf Islands Trail Society are the Mayne Island Path And Trails Society, Saturna Recreation Centre Society, Moving Around Pender and Galiano Trails Society. Salt Spring Island was the only island not represented in this great alliance and we are excited to have finally reached this important milestone.

Our membership in the Gulf Islands Trail Society makes possible our second announcement; a major new public trail, made possible by a generous private Landowner, will start planning and hopefully construction this spring/ summer. This type of public/private trail partnership is a giant step ahead for trail connections in areas outside of Provincial or regional Parks.

We hope to have more news on this trail soon.

Happy Hiking!

*[Editor's note: Gary Quiring has volunteered to be our co-ordinator for this activity]*

## Canada's National Bird – A Better Choice

### John Heddle

Perhaps you have heard: the gray jay has been proposed as Canada's National Bird? Preposterous. This nomination of the gray jay as Canada's national bird by the Canadian Geographic Society is ridiculous, although I respect and love both the bird and the CGS. To understand this paradox, ask your grandchildren: "Have ever seen a gray jay?". Give them a loonie if they have, it will rarely cost you one, for gray jays and Canadians live in different ecological zones. Most Canadians are suburban and live too far south for the gray jay which are forest birds and live too far north for most Canadians (though sometimes seen on Salt Spring Island and last recorded in the Christmas Bird Count in 1989) Furthermore the whiskey-jacks, as they are affectionately known, will be moving further north as the globe warms. The main distributions hardly overlap Canada's

## SSTNC Hike Coordinator Position

Know before anyone else the schedule of fabulous hikes both on and off the island. Talk to experienced leaders about the varied and beautiful destinations they have found and led us to. Encourage new hikers to take the lead on well-known trails. Work with the very active and positive SSTNC executive. The hike coordinator position is vacant. Contact Jean Attorp (fjattorp@shaw.ca) if you are willing to take on this very important role



Gray Jay, Camp Mercier in Laurentides Wildlife Reserve, Quebec, Canada. Photo by Simon Pierre Barrette, Wikimedia Commons.



largest cities. The gray jay is not found in Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, Hamilton, or London. Winnipeg and Quebec City are on the edge of the range. On Salt Spring Island, I have not seen one in a dozen years and suspect they are rare at best in Vancouver and Victoria. Why choose a bird unfamiliar to most Canadians and rarely seen by the majority? Familiar ones are not lacking: pigeons, sparrows, robins, geese, crows, and ravens. Your children surely know them all.

Granted the scientific name of the whiskey-jack has Canada in it (*Perisoreus canadensis*) but few know it by that name. Of the other familiar birds most have some deficiency as the National Bird: pigeons are annoying, the common urban sparrows are a nuisance, robins are properly called American robins, the Canada goose is widely disliked for its slippery leavings, and the more properly named American crow only just makes it across the border to our country.

It is the raven, the largest of the crow family, that is truly the ubiquitous Canadian, inhabiting all provinces and territories from east to west and north to south. Ravens are the largest of the crows and one of the longest lived of birds. They fly with spectacular swoops and dives and can fly even upside down. Ravens, effectively the Canadian crow, are omnivorous like their urban cousins and clean our towns and countryside of refuse. Although accused of overturning garbage cans, they are merely tidying up after those rascally racoons. Similarly, accusations that they damage crops are balanced by their consumption of agricultural pests. Their worst characteristic may be their ability to recognize and remember human faces, as crows do, and to pass the knowledge of whom to abuse to their offspring for several generations. A researcher on the University of Washington campus in Seattle who had the temerity to band a few of them decades ago is regularly bombarded with trash whenever he walks about the campus, although thoroughly disguised and masked – even by young crows. Well known to our aboriginal peoples as a trickster and, on the West Coast, as the original giver of the Sun and distributor of salmon to the many streams, Raven is already revered by some and well known to many. It should be the first choice as our Canadian national bird. Tell your MP, please or don't complain that your grandchildren don't know their national bird.



Common Raven, St. John's, New Brunswick. Photo by Judy Gallagher, Wikimedia Commons.

*Editor's note: while editing this article, I had considerable trouble with name "gray jay" and "whiskey-jack". I chose to leave the names in that form because the Canadian Geographic Society spelled it that way as do many of the birding sources. Note, however, that the equally authoritative CBC took them on with alternate spellings<sup>1</sup>. Both grey and gray are equally acceptable but grey is the British spelling and gray the American. The International Ornithological Congress World Bird List has adapted the grey spelling convention for all birds with this term in their common name. It is also the spelling of the Oxford and Canadian Oxford Dictionaries and of Wikipedia. In a response to this very question, the National Geographic Society wrote "We wholeheartedly agree that the Canadian/British spelling of "grey" would be preferable, but this is the species' official name, and recognized as such by the American Ornithologists' Union and other international bodies. As a journalistic publication, we must honour proper names of birds and other animals even when they conflict with Canadian spellings. What we'd most like to see, actually, is "gray jay" changed back to "Canada jay" (as it was known for some 200 years) by the same association that switched it in 1957. And this, we understand, is not an impossibility<sup>2</sup>. Clearly, they knew about the alternative and considered it but they erred in saying gray was official."*

*Whisky is even more interesting. The spelling whisky is Scottish and whiskey is Irish. The use of the term is basically identified by nationality. The Irish and American liquor companies use the extra "e" in their spellings while the Scots, British, Canadian and Japanese brands, all choose the simpler spelling. The Canadian Geographic Society notes that "the common moniker 'whiskey jack' has nothing to do with the grain-based al-*

cohols, but is rather an anglicization of the Cree Wisakedjak<sup>3</sup>.” However, that does not change the fact that the anglicization used the word whisky. It seems to this editor that it would be more correct and patriotic to have our national bird contender called the grey jay/whisky-jack. The confusion also creates another argument for John to use in advancing his choice of bird. Does anyone else out there have a candidate for this honour?

1, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/grey-jay-national-bird-spelling-style-1.3861909>

2, 3 <https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/meet-our-national-bird-gray-jay>.]

## A Small Island Treasure on Salt Spring’s Doorstep

*Peter B. McAllister*

### **Preface to the 2015 Owl Island Botanical and Archaeological Report**

OWL ISLAND, a small masterpiece of natural beauty and archaeological richness in the southern Gulf Islands, is currently listed for private sale and at risk of being developed. Two acres in size, it is located on the west side of Prevost Island, just north of Secret Island, near the entrance of Ganges Harbour.

Ecologically, Owl Island offers a rare glimpse of the past and the richness of the region’s natural beauty.

In spring it boasts one of the most spectacular arrays of wildflowers in the Gulf Islands, a rarity today where grazing and browsing by deer have annihilated many of the wild flower gardens long nurtured by the First People. Flanked below by the white crushed shell beaches of the tombolo, the fawn lilies, camas, sea blush and other blossoms paint a scene of perfection. Another rarity is the Garry oaks of varying ages regenerating with a thriving understory of seedlings. A number of extremely old junipers command the shoreline while the interior holds evidence of long term occupation written in the culturally modified ancient Douglas fir snags. Over countless years, eagles have maintained a nest of indestructible quality well hidden in the canopy.



*Owl Island tombolo and Islet looking towards Ganges Harbour:  
photo by P. McAllister.*

In 1974, a small portion of Owl Island was recorded as an archaeological site (DeRu-141), a small shell midden deposit, which is protected under the Heritage Conservation Act. Further, provincial records indicate that there is a “high potential” for discovering additional archaeological sites on the island. Indeed our cursory archaeological forays have identified highly probable burial cairn sites and additional cultural evidence dating back perhaps thousands of years.

With no record of any archaeological visits done in the last 40 years, further study is long over-due. However, the Archaeology Branch of the Provincial Government does not require a developer to conduct an archaeological study prior to sale of a property. This raises very serious concerns, especially in light of the recent situation on Grace Islet.

This small island treasure could well be the poster child of the Salish Sea and none are more deserving of protection. Let’s seize this wonderful opportunity for First Nations, the public, land conservancies, the Islands Trust and the Federal and Provincial Government to collaborate on a plan and ensure that the spring time flowers and the cultural heritage of Owl Island are protected forever.

### **Current Protection Actions**

The Tsawout First Nation have notified the Federal Government, the BC Provincial Government, the Archaeology Branch and the Islands Trust that Owl Island is a sacred burial island. Archaeologically and ethnobotanically exceptional, it is eminently deserving of being returned to the guardianship of the Coast Salish





*Owl Island fawn lilies and sea blush: photo by Peter McAllister*

People.

Our small group of Salt Spring friends of Owl Island have been quietly working with the Tsawout Band to gain support from the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Nature Trust, the Land Conservancy, the Islands Trust Fund and the CRD in a search for acquisition options anchored in conservation. Our efforts to lobby the Provincial Government with considerable help from MLA Gary Holman have resulted in their forthright acknowledgment of the values of the island and it is apparent they recognize the mistakes involving Grace Islet.

Parks Canada is another potential ally we are pursuing as Gulf Islands National Park Reserve contains holdings on nearby Prevost Island. Considering Canada's 150th anniversary, what a gift Owl Island would make to honour nature and the Coast Salish cultural history in the Gulf Islands.

In respect for the privacy of the island and in appreciation of the long-term stewardship of the owner in keeping the island in its natural state we have purposely avoided making Owl Island an aroused public issue. The fragile nature of the magnificent carpets of wild flowers and the rich cultural heritage of Owl Island ought to be honored with the reverence bestowed on a great masterpiece of art, to remain untouched and admired from a distance.

Your letters to Parks Canada and the Hon. Minister Steve Thomson and the Hon. Minister Mary Polak requesting its protection would be great reinforcement.

## **Salt Spring's 16/17 Christmas Bird Count: A surprising success!**

*Tim Marchant and Kathleen Maser*

Neither snow nor cold shall bench the binocular bunch announced Tim Marchant, Salt Spring's Christmas Bird Count leader, after analyzing this year's results! He is impressed that we had nearly as many counters as last year, proving that we are a dedicated crowd.

In actual fact it is often the favourite time of year for many birders across Canada. The count started in 1900 as an alternative to the holiday shooting of birds, which were subsequently laid out in a line and counted, as easy as pie!

It is now North America's longest-running Citizen Science project with counts happening in over 2000 localities throughout the Western Hemisphere. The information collected by thousands of volunteer participants forms one of the world's largest sets of wildlife survey data. This data provides both Bird Studies Canada and the National Audubon Society with a crucial snapshot of our native bird populations during the winter months.

The results are used daily by biologists and naturalists of many conservation organizations to assess the population trends and bird distribution, such as chronicling the effects of climate change.

## Salt Spring's Count

Here on Salt Spring Island, the two Townsend Solitaire's sightings (one north, one south) are the "new bird" of the year. They have been counted before, but many years back - 1991, 94, 98. Apparently they do show up on the Islands regularly.

Our total count for this year is the same as last year, more-or-less, at 12,125 by 126 counters. Last year tallied 12,399 by 133 counters. This is surprising given the colder weather than last year, and the snow troubles that affected our travel plans as well as the wind that kept Peter McAllister's boat inshore.

Tim's annual analysis shows that things change every year "below the surface" - even when the total count remains the same.

- Chickadees are down from the previous year, but the previous year was pretty high (above average).

- Towhee's are up, right back to their average now.

- Junco's are up, also now at average after lower numbers for a couple of years.

- Pacific Wren (winter wren) doubled the previous year and set a new ten-year high. Good for them!

- Kinglets definitely down from an above average year last year to half of average. It is interesting that both chickadees and kinglets are down.

- Robins went from 272 last years to 1,369 this year . . . but the 272 was a 28-year low. There were 4,800 two years earlier and 1,369 is now close to average.

- As a group, ducks stayed the same this year over last, not bad for such stormy weather. Grebes & cormorants were both down but they were above average last year and are closer to average this year and week-to-week, the numbers change as the weather changes during storm season.

- Anna's Hummingbirds remained constant (176 this year vs. 164 last) on count day, Dec 18, however a week before the count (Dec 7-12) dozens of them were emptying feeders at houses near Beddis Road. Most left as the storm approached, and zone 4 (Beddis) reported only 12 birds for the whole zone.

Some years there is more food - so migrating species don't move as far south for the winter. This happened with the robins after the bountiful summer of 2013 - berries everywhere, and that fall, robins everywhere - 4,800 counted.

Today, participation is even more important than it was over 100 years ago. Counts are open to birders of all skill levels, including rank beginners. Please consider joining us next year!



*Townsend's solitaire photo taken by Peter McAllister from his deck, on Sky Valley Road, Jan. 15, 2017.*

### Townsend Solitaire

This is a bird most commonly seen in the interior (the Okanagan and the Thompson Plateau), gobbling up juniper berries and defending its patches with intense vigor.

About as large as a robin, it's soft hues of grey are most pleasing and as distinct as it's white-eye ring. It embraces its namesake of being of a solitary nature, happily, cavorting about in clusters of arbutus trees on our Island. Quite charming, it likes to nab insects on the wing or suddenly drop to the ground to pounce on bugs. During our two sightings of the Townsend's, in December and January, we unfortunately did not hear its sweet jumbling song, which John Neville alleges is a great song and can be heard throughout the year when and if the sun comes out. If you are lucky enough to spot one take your time to set up a camera, it's in no hurry to move off.

Summary of Christmas Bird Count for Salt Spring Island (from analysis by Tim Marchant)

Red-throated loon	3	Goldeneye species	6	Pacific (winter) wren	205
Pacific loon	1	Hooded merganser	58	Marsh wren	1
Common loon	9	Common merganser	584	Townsend's solitaire	2
Loon – species	1	Red-breasted merganser	197	Golden-crowned kinglet	286
Pied-billed grebe	5	Bald eagle	50	Ruby-crowned kinglet	20
Horned grebe	54	Sharp-shinned hawk	3	Hermit Thrush	4
Red-necked grebe	3	Cooper's hawk	7	American Robin	1369
Western grebe	41	Red-tailed hawk	1	Varied thrush	119
Brandt's cormorant	10	Merlin	1	Belted kingfisher	26
Double-crested cormorant	107	California quail	45	Red-breasted sapsucker	22
Pelagic cormorant	69	Virginia rail	1	Downy woodpecker	30
Great blue heron	17	American coot	42	Hairy woodpecker	25
Canada goose	234	Killdeer2		Northern flicker	81
Mute swan	9	Black oystercatcher	7	Pileated woodpecker	23
Trumpeter swan	16	Black turnstone	14	Hutton's vireo	10
Eurasian widgeon	2	Mew gull	49	Steller's jay	22
American widgeon	727	Ring-billed gull	1	Northwestern crow	197
Mallard293		Herring gull	16	Common raven	147
Green-winged teal	13	Western gull	2	Chestnut-backed chickadee	675
Ring-necked duck	220	Glaucous-winged gull	258	Bushtit	82
Harlequin duck	34	Gull species	112	Red-breasted nuthatch	142
Surf scoter	231	Pigeon guillemot	3	Brown creeper	23
Long-tailed duck	15	Marbled murrelet	14	Bewick's wren	17
Bufflehead	558				
Common goldeneye	206				
Barrow's goldeneye	93				



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