



David Denning photo

Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club
 Newsletter
 Spring 2018



Red breasted nuthatch, waiting his turn at our porch feeder. Photo by Gary Adams.

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President's Point of View

Sue Lehmann

A new year and a new Executive!

Thank you to everyone who supported the club by attending the Annual General Meeting. I heard from several members that they had no idea the club was involved in so many different activities. If something piqued your interest, contact the appropriate coordinator and join the team.

Two executive members have left the Board, after many years of service.

Herb, the Trails Coordinator, was instrumental in developing our relationship with BC Parks to improve and map the trail networks and install signs in the parks on SSI. The signs along the trails in both Mt. Maxwell and Mt. Erskine Park are there because of the efforts of Herb and his team. Signage on the south shore of Burgoyne Park is expected to be installed this spring, completing the project. Jean, the Hiking Coordinator, filled the calendar with a variety of new and familiar hikes, recruiting new hike leaders and encouraging experienced leaders to lead new adventures.

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

Calendar of Events

Thursday March 15, 2018

SSTNC is pleased to co-sponsor with the Salt Spring Paddlers Club a speaker event on "Paddling North - Voices of the Inside Passage". It will be presented by Rebecca Grim and Leo Mahlke. from 7-9pm at the Salt Spring Sailing Club, 152 Douglas Rd. The two Salt Spring Women are planning a trip to Alaska to document environmental injustices and other threats along the way. A Small Donation for the journey would be appreciated.

Tuesday, March 22, 2018

All Over Ireland Trip

SSTNC welcomes Liz Bicknell, the current President of the Outdoor Club of Victoria (OCV), on Thursday March 22 at 7-9 p.m. at the Library. She will be speaking about the tour she organized for 20 people in Sept 2017. Being Irish herself, she knows the best hikes. She will also speak about the Vancouver Island Trail, the club is building. She sits on the VISTA board and will provide an update on the Vancouver Island Spine Trail.

Thursday April 19, 2018

7-9pm at the SSI Library. Mary Hoff from Cowichan Bay will speak on "Hiking in Guatemala" and a video on her climbing the Golden Hinde in Strathcona Park.

Tuesday, May 8, 2018

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 19, 2018

The 2017-2018 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. Remember to bring a dish and spoon! Short walks will be scheduled before lunch.

Welcome to the new members who have stepped up to fill positions. Gary Quiring is our new Trails Coordinator. He has probably hiked every single trail on SSI and is a passionate advocate for low impact public access to our local natural areas. Susan Fussel and Jan McIntyre will share the Hiking Coordinator position. Both are regular hikers and seamlessly took over the task of filling the hiking calendar. Kees Visser returns to the Board as our Secretary, taking over one of the roles previously done by Sheryl who was wearing two hats. In addition, we have nine executive members who continue to share their expertise and knowledge on the Board. To all of you, a big thank you from everyone in the club. The club could not function without you.

SSTNC Annual General Meeting

Sheryl Taylor-Munro; 2017 Club Secretary

This year's annual meeting occurred on January 25, 2018 at 12:30 in the Lions Hall.

With more than 40 members present, SSTNC President Sue Lehman called the meeting to order. Frauke Prys-tawik noted that two former members, Janet Anderson and Dick Pattison, passed away during 2017. A donation in their names will be sent to the Trans-Canada Trail Association. This year we presented Trailblazer Awards to Nieke Visser and Kees Visser for their many years of service to the Club.

After the annual reports of Directors and Coordinators (circulated in advance), Sue Lehmann gave updates on land acquisitions for trails and our membership in the Gulf Island Trails Society (GITS) as part of her President's Report.

As Treasurer, Sheryl Taylor-Munro reviewed the financial statements for 2017 which were approved by the members. She then presented a proposed 2018 budget (circulated in advance), including reasons for an increase in member dues effective September 2018 when our membership year begins. Sheryl explained the proposed separation of non-operating costs from the general budget with the placing of those items in a separate "projects" budget. Such items include the Purple Martin Recovery Project and Presentations, which are very popular but for which we do not ask an admission fee. Also, a separate amount of \$5,000 was included to approve the Club providing a sum to kick-start a public campaign attempting to raise \$100,000. The fund intends to purchase property to add to Mt. Erskine Park should that opportunity arise. The budget was approved including a revised membership fee of \$30 per person with a \$5 discount if paid by Sept. 30, 2018.

The following members were elected or re-elected.

President	Sue Lehmann
Treasurer	Sheryl Taylor-Munro

Secretary	Kees Visser	Membership	Barry Spence
BC Nature	Kathleen Maser	Oystercatcher	Gary Adams
Presentations	Sharon Sullivan	Trails	Gary Quiring
Hike Coord.	Susan Fussel/Jan McIntyre	Walk Coord.	Robert Mason
Ramble Coord.	Frauke Prystawik	Webmaster	Ann King

The meeting closed with David Denning making presentations on two topics of interest to the club. His first topic, entitled “Are Sea Stars Coming Back?” summarized the results of volunteer survey work by Trail and Nature Members seeking to find evidence of sea star recovery following the monumental sea star wasting disease plague of 2014-2016. His second topic was “Protecting The Salish Sea”. He introduced a new window opening up for creation of the Southern Gulf Island Marine Conservation Area. He announced an ambitious campaign to take place this year on Salt Spring Island to help promote a National Marine Conservation Area through Parks Canada. It may be our best chance ever to protect the incredible heritage of marine life and the scenic coastal waters we call home.

The next Annual General Meeting will occur on January 24th, 2019

Eye to I

Janie Wray, BCWhales.org

What do you think as you look at me? Will you remember my face the next time we meet?’ These are the first thoughts that enter my mind as I look directly into the eye of a mother humpback whale.

This was not a chance encounter. She made the contact, bringing her young calf alongside our boat. In all the years – and there are many – that I have studied the behaviour of humpbacks, never have I experienced such an intimate moment with a whale.

It all started, as it often does, with a blow in the distance. Our research intern Nigel and I were on our way to the ferry at Hartley Bay. He saw the blow and pointed towards Fin Island to let me know I should slow down. I cut the throttle and tried to position the *Elemiah* at the perfect angle to take an identification photograph of both mother and calf. They dived before I could manage this, so I put the boat into neutral with the intention of waiting quietly until they returned to the surface to breathe. We were both startled when, less than 30 seconds later, the mother took a huge breath just inches from our hull. The 28-foot *Elemiah* suddenly felt very small.

In the still waters, the whale’s giant body gently touched the edge of our boat. This precious moment deserved all our attention; words felt out of place. The rapt silence was broken as she exhaled deeply, leaving a spray of warm moisture to settle on our skin and clothing. In this moment we were reminded of each other, the boat and our surroundings as we took a breath ourselves and began to giggle. I had forgotten how sticky and stinky whale blow can be.



Humpback whale. Photo by Janie Wray; BC Whales.

I may never understand why this mother had decided to introduce her calf to us, these two-legged creatures attached to a loud aluminium machine. I often wonder what whales perceive when curiosity sets in and they decide to research us for a change. How odd it must be for them to try to understand why we are not in the water; the sounds of our footsteps as we move excitedly from one side of the boat to the other; the sight of us as we hang over the edge of the boat with a camera as our eye; the ‘click click click’ sound as we seek to freeze this moment forever in our memories.

When she first arrived I had put the camera down in order to be fully present to such a special moment; to look directly into her eye – one species to another, one world to another – terrestrial and marine minds trying to understand one another. The entire encounter felt as though it had passed in seconds, but the reality was that she and her calf were with us for almost 40 minutes of pure bliss. The temptation to reach out and touch her during the times her immense head rose from the water, inching towards our searching eyes, was overwhelming. I was completely awestruck, unsure how to react to this incredible cetacean gesture.



Although the mother was completely focused on us, her calf eventually became restless. Perhaps after so much time he had become bored with us and wanted his mother’s attention. She ignored him as he swam impatiently from one side of the boat to the other. When he had had enough and breached just metres from our boat, I became a bit uncomfortable. It appeared she did as well. She moved towards her calf and we thought perhaps it was time to leave. But not quite yet. They were under the water for less than a minute before she appeared again, rolling to her side for one more look at our euphoric human faces. This time I did take a picture.

Still our encounter was not yet over as something astonishing began to unfold. While she was looking at me, I turned towards the bow of the boat where the calf had just surfaced. As I turned back towards her, completing a full rotation of my body, Nigel spoke up: ‘She’s turning too.’ By the time my eyes were back on her I was staring at her vast pleated belly. She had copied my rotation. Was she communicating to us with her body? By now the calf had had enough and, side by side, they went on their way. In the distance, heart-shaped flukes, one large, one small, disappeared into the sea.

Hours later, after I had dropped Nigel off at the ferry and was on my way home, this experience became real to me. My throat became so tight I could barely breathe. I stopped the boat, turned off the ignition and sat on the bow. The sun was shining down on me as the tears began to fall. That she would show such interest in us, and such vulnerability; that she would bring her calf alongside these beings that had hunted and killed her ancestors. I felt like I had just woken from a dream, that life was just beginning. We all have times in our lives when we ask if our chosen path is the right one. This extraordinary encounter reinforced to me that my work to protect these whales, and this extraordinary place they call home, is far from over. With her beautiful eye, that gentle ocean mother looked into my soul and spoke to me. “We are in this together, you and I”.

Fate of the Common Loon

Ron Hawkins

Disclaimer: Ron Hawkins shares this report as information. He has no personal expertise of the subject.

In 2013 scientists from Bird Studies Canada published the results of a Canada-wide analysis of the reproductive success of the common loon. In the breeding season loons feed themselves and their young almost

invariably on aquatic animals, fish and crustaceans from the lake where they nest. These birds are at the top of the aquatic food chain so their health and productivity reflects the overall health of a lake's ecosystem, particularly with regard to pollutants.

The most significant pollutants in our lakes Canada-wide, mercury and the components of acid precipitation (such as sulphur dioxide), are released from the combustion of fossil fuels, especially at coal-fired, power plants. Mercury persists in the atmosphere for a year or more and is transported all over the globe by winds and weather systems before returning to the surface. Mercury deposition is slightly higher in western than eastern Canada. Most mercury makes its way up the food chain as methylmercury, that is formed by the combination of mercury and acids from rain. The process is promoted by acidic (low pH) and warm lake water conditions. Although emissions of mercury and the acidic components of rain are declining, they were still well above the historic levels in 2013 and were still sufficient to endanger aquatic wildlife, including loons.

The link between methylmercury and loon health has been well studied. This compound is a potent toxicant causing adult loons to become slow and lethargic and to spend less energy defending territory and catching food for the chicks. Affected chicks have compromised immune systems. They ride their lethargic parents' backs less often so they spend more energy keeping warm, becoming more vulnerable to predators.

Study results show that average loon reproductive success declined 0.19 chicks/pair/year from 1992 to 2010. Reproductive success was highest in the west, declining, eastward. pH levels of 2013 stabilized in most eastern lakes is a determinant of pollutant migration. The study bears 95% confidence limits.

Other relations investigated reveal the following:

i) the effect of lake area and lake pH (acidity/alkalinity) shows that a pair of loons nesting on a 3000 ha. lake produces, on average, 0.22 chicks per year more than those nesting on a lake of 10 ha. (one hectare = 2.47 acres).

ii) Smaller lakes tend to be relatively shallow, have less input/output of stream water, and have less buffering (neutralizing) capacity than larger lakes, so they tend to be warmer and more acidic than larger lakes and to have higher levels of methylmercury. They also tend to have fewer fish.

iii) With regard to acidity, the results show that loon pairs on a relatively alkaline lake (pH of 9) produced on average 0.43 chicks / year more than those of a relatively acidic (pH of 5) lake.

iv) Scientists estimate that a productivity of 0.48 chicks/pair/year is required to maintain stable loon populations in northern North America. They then project trend lines of current productivity levels into the future to estimate when declining loon reproductive success would fall below this critical value. The trend line in British Columbia was projected to fall below 0.48 young/pair/year in 2016. However, this is a statistical date that falls within a range between 2009 and 2029 based on factors such as the stability or decline of entire loon populations by failure to establish a nesting territories.

The study concludes that lake health in Canada is not improving despite commendable and successful efforts in Canada and the United States to reduce mercury emissions and acid precipitation.

Reference

Tozer, Falconer and Badzinski, 2013: 'Common Loon Reproductive Success in Canada', Avian Conservation Ecology 8(1)'

Other Sources of Information include Bird Studies Canada and BirdWatch Canada

2018 Trailblazer Awards

For 2018, the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club awarded two Trailblazer Awards at the Annual General Meeting. The first award went to Nieke Visser and the second award is to Kees Visser. The following is a transcript of the presentation speech.



Common loon taking off. Photo by Gary Adams

“Everyone will agree that Nieke has been an extraordinary force within the club. Nieke and her husband Kees moved to the island in 2003, and must have joined the club before they even unpacked since Nieke was already Secretary in 2004! Since then, the only years when Nieke wasn’t a voting member of the Executive are 2009 and this past year. She was the editor of the Oystercatcher Newsletter from 2006 to 2010, and continued to contribute many articles after she passed over the editorial baton. Nieke was also the driving force behind off-island trips such as multi- day camps to Quadra Island, Tofino and Cathedral Lakes and day trips to Pender Island and Prevost Island. Perhaps her crowning achievements are the BC Nature Field camps she coordinated in 2010 and 2012 and the BC Nature AGM in 2015. Not only did our club and its members benefit, but they were very popular events with BC Nature members from around the province. Thank you Nieke. The club would be a very different organization without your commitment.

Kees arrived on Salt Spring Island just in time to revitalize our club, which was floundering due to a lack of volunteers. This is something that is foreign to Kees as he has never had a period of inactivity and organizing is apparently a genetic trait of the Dutch. Kees showed up on a hike one day and the rest is history. He volunteered to lead hikes, became Hike Coordinator, later Vice President and then President of the club. He guided us through a period when questions were being asked about the dissolution of the club. Once the club was on sound footing again, he moved on to take the reins of BC Nature, first as Vice President and then President. Kees has remained active being a strong hiker. Some of us know how quickly his long strides can cover the ground and even a

40 pound backpack does not slow his pace. However, rest periods can be assured if one simply asks about the local geology.

His love of the outdoors is evident and we are all fortunate to have had him as a friend and fellow hiker. Mention of his name always elicits a warm smile from those who know him. Recognition of Kees as a Salt Spring Trail and Nature Trail Blazer is long overdue. You can rest assured that it will not lead to any inactivity or retirement from club activities as Kees is never one to rest on his laurels.”

New Hikes in the Gulf Islands

Charles Kahn

All images are taken from Hiking the Gulf Islands

As some of you already know, the 4th edition of Hiking the Gulf Islands is being published this year. What’s different? Well, this edition has much better maps, especially for the Salt Spring parks, as well as some terrific new hikes. Here are a couple of them, one on Quadra and the other on Galiano.

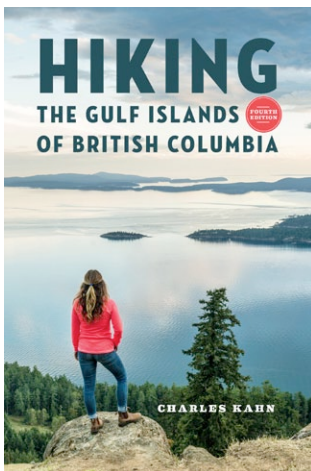
Maud Island Trail—Quadra Island

This 10 km, four-star hike connects with the Morte Lake Trail, which many of you will have walked in the past. If you hike only to Maud Island and back you’ll need about four hours, but if you combine it with the Morte Lake trails, you’ll spend a whole day exploring this part of Quadra Island.

The hike is quite varied with some steep bits, but most importantly, with good views over famous Seymour Narrows. I would classify it as “moderate,” but if you take the alternative route over bluffs shown in the accompanying map, it is definitely



The causeway connecting Maud Island to Quadra Island.



HONOUR ROLLS

HONOURARY MEMBERS

Bob Ball
Tony Pederson

TRAIL BLAZERS

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

“strenuous.”

The access to the trailhead is from Walcan Road (5.4 kilometres north of the junction of Hyacinthe Bay Road and Cramer Road). The detailed directions to the trailhead in the new book are somewhat complicated, so I won't repeat them or describe the hike in depth here. As well, the logging roads to the trailhead are rough, so the use of a high-set, four-wheel-drive vehicle is recommended. Once on the trail some flagging helps you find your way, but a compass and the accompanying map will be helpful.

In brief, the first part of the trail goes through lovely open pine and fir forest before a bit of a climb. One section is carved into a narrow rocky slope before ending up on an old hydro road, which takes you to the causeway connecting Quadra to Maud Island. Once on the island, follow another old road uphill to your right. A marked path will lead you to the viewpoint over Seymour Narrows.

The old logging road that forms part of the trail was used to bring in the equipment that blasted away Ripple Rock, a deadly hazard to shipping in Seymour Narrows in Discovery Passage until it was largely destroyed in 1958. If you time your arrival at Maude Island to coincide with a strong current, you will see the churning water caused by the current around the remainder of Ripple Rock far below the surface of the water. The current here can run at up to 16 knots. It's fun to watch small recreational fishing boats bobbing around in the turbulent water.

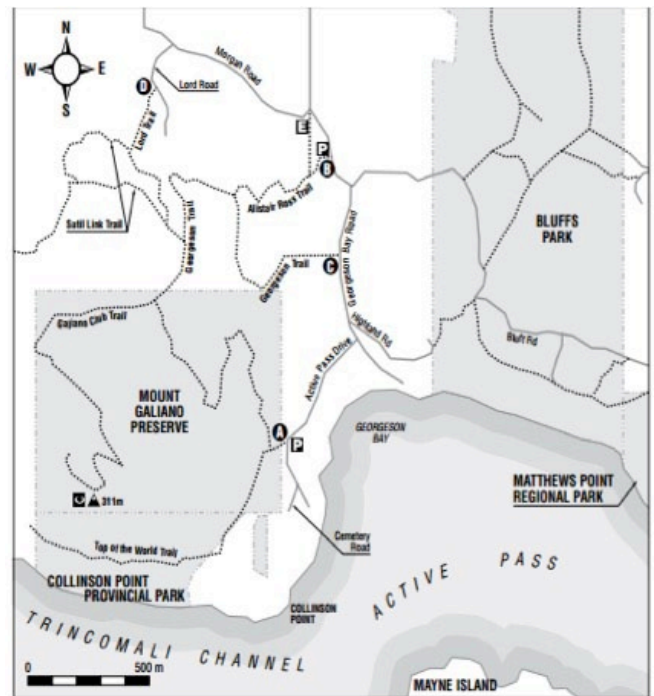
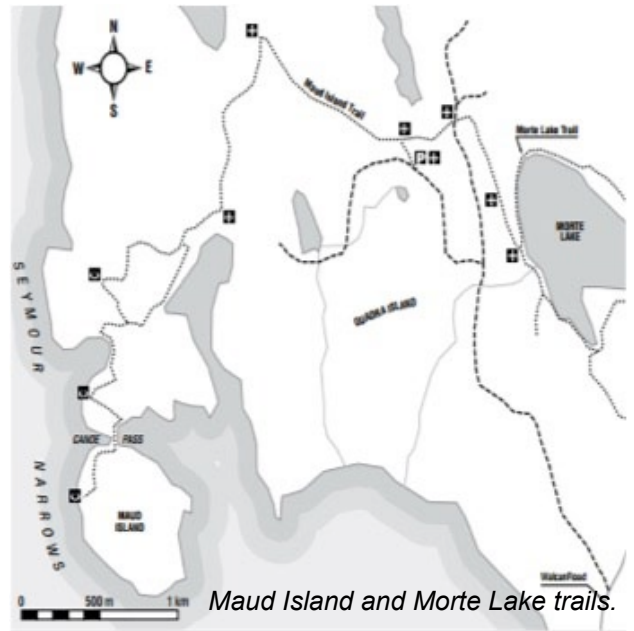
Top of the World Trail from Mount Galiano

On Salt Spring's neighbour, Galiano, the relatively easy trail to the “Top of the World” provides some breathtaking views of Trincomali Channel. Much of the trail is on public land, and most of it is in Collinson Point Provincial Park. You'll find the trailhead at the Mount Galiano parking lot on Active Pass Road, where the trail first crosses a short section of private land, permitted by an agreement for public access with the Galiano Trails Society.

You will see several offshoot trails, but these lead to private land or lesser viewpoints. You might want to check out all of them, but the one you want is just before the provincial park's western boundary (see the accompanying



A view from the promontory at the “Top of the World” in Collinson Point Provincial Park.



Mount Galiano Trails Network

- Roads
- ⋯ Trails
- - - Park boundary
- ⌂ Entrance
- P Parking
- ▲ Peak
- ⊙ No access
- ⊞ Viewpoint

map). This isn't a long hike as it probably takes only 40 minutes or so to get to the viewpoint. Although the sky was overcast and the view was limited on the day I did the hike, it was still spectacular. When you get to the viewpoint, walk out along a narrow promontory to the edge of the cliff face overlooking Trincomali Channel just west of Active Pass. If you look down the sheer drop, it's literally breath-taking.

Mount Galiano Trail network. The "Top of the World" trail is on the map's bottom left.

So that's a sample from the new Hiking the Gulf Islands. As usual, I had a great deal of pleasure visiting the other islands and meeting other keen hikers who were eager to share their newest trails with me. I hope you'll feel the same pleasure as you read through the book. There's no doubt that we live in one of the most beautiful places in the world.

SSTNC on Facebook

We have a Facebook page [https](https://www.facebook.com/sstnc) that can be used by club members to broadcast messages, send out pictures, or start conversations. If you are a member of Facebook, simply search for "Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club" in the search box you can find in the blue banner. Click on the suggested site. You can tell it is ours because our administrator astutely placed the logo in the profile picture. Once you are on the site, I suggest that you click on the "Follow" button. That way, every time someone posts to the site, it will show up in your personal news feed. You can then post news, ask questions, send pictures, or comment on other people's material. It would be nice if all of our Facebook subscribers started to follow and contribute to the site. To get us started, I will be posting a few small items from past newsletters for your perusal.



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