



Oystercatcher

Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club
Newsletter

April 2020

President's Words of Wisdom

As our club no longer has a newsletter and we're not hiking, walking, or rambling with a group, I thought I would share some of the things that have been happening since your new board took office. First, I would like to assure you that your new president looks forward to the day when he doesn't have to cancel everything.

One of the new board's great achievements was to relieve the previous board of the responsibility of signing cheques. This took over three months to accomplish! Island Savings requires all four co-signees to sign their forms before it will allow any two of us to sign cheques. With people away and the onslaught of the virus, this became difficult to achieve. Then, just when we thought we'd won, Island Savings decided that two of us had missed a spot on their forms despite our having gone into the branch separately and signed where we were told to sign. So this is one of the ways we've kept busy.

Someone asked if we would refund membership dues because of the cancellation spring activities. Unfortunately, this is not possible as most of our membership dues has already gone to BC Nature to pay for our membership and insurance. As well, since we've been hiking since September, members have had almost seven months of hiking already—and we might be back before summer!

Despite the current COVID-19 crisis, it's still possible to hike, walk, or ramble in some of our beautiful CRD parks, nature reserves, and Crown land. Many places on the island are now radiant with wildflowers, and Peter Arnell and Channel Ridge are among them.



Lady slippers, monkey flowers, and saxifrage in Channel Ridge. This is the time to really appreciate nature.

Photos by Elaine Senkpiel

Treasures on Our Website

Sue Lehmann has added all the *Oystercatchers* she could find to our website (<http://saltspringtnc.ca/index.php/newsletter/>), and they go back almost 40 years. They contain ideas for armchair travellers, off-island trips, weekly hikes, as well as many natural history articles. If you have any editions that Sue missed, please let her know.

Trail Maintenance and Exploration

Before the limitations caused by the virus, some of our members did some work on trail maintenance in the parks. Murray Coates was very busy both with his trusty chainsaw and in his workshop. He cut through a large tree that had been blocking Mt. Maxwell's trail #1 for several years and also built and installed five signs that had been vandalized in Mt. Maxwell and Burgoyne Bay Provincial Parks.



Murray is wondering where the block he cut rolled.



Installing replacement signage in the provincial parks. Murray made the new posts, and we carried them into the parks. Nigel Denyer then installed the you-are-here map signage.

In anticipation of a spring hike on our new KDOL trail at the Buddhist Retreat Centre, we installed signage so that hikers couldn't miss the trail. Unfortunately, we have been unable to schedule this hike because of the virus. Hopefully we'll manage it before the end of the season.

Many of you contributed to the improvements to the Jack Foster Trail, including the fine new bench built by Donald McLennan and installed in the memory of Herb Otto. Many volunteers worked on the various components of this project and the trail looks great right now. As nothing stays the same for long, you should go see the trail while it's still at its best.



We've also been exploring some new trails on private land that we might develop as we did with KDOL. All of this has been a great deal of work but it has also provided us with a great deal of fun. And of course this was all accomplished before we were forbidden to gather!

In COVID Times Bird Stories Abound

Gathered by Kathleen Maser

Our birders are being led, virtually, by Ren Ferguson and Peter McAllister. Here are but a few of their stories of what they've seen.

John and Heather Neville: Most likely Snow Geese! We have counted five or six flocks in the last few days high in the sky heading north over Trincomali Channel. Their yelping calls are the easiest way to recognize them.

Sarah Belknap: This afternoon there was a long narrow raft of Western Grebe stretching about a nautical mile in Captain's Passage. They rode the incoming tide toward the southwestern tip of Prevost Island. I have seen them there in years past—too many to count.

Peter and Bernadette McAllister: As we left the Sailing Club dock this morning at 8:00 to count all those Western Grebes, we poked into Walter Bay to see if the Brazilians (Purple Martins) had returned to their Salt Spring vacation homes. Three greeted us from atop a sailboat mast overlooking their condos on the dock at the end of the spit. The Western Grebes had vanished. But the Rhinoceros Auklets didn't disappoint us. We tallied 24 pairs spread out all over the outer harbour. Heading toward Nose Point we picked up the first of about 750 Bonaparte's Gulls spread out in big flocks all across Trincomali Channel where they had followed the tide line.



Rhinoceros Auklets (Peter McAllister)



Bonaparte's Gulls (Peter McAllister)

Ren Ferguson: As things slow down for us humans, birds are on the move. I had my first of the year Townsend's Warbler and Cassin's Vireo yesterday here at our place on Isle View Drive. It has been fun to watch the activity as well, with

Pine Siskins eating the stamens out of the bigleaf maple flowers and an Anna's Hummingbird collecting the down from the cattails I put out for the birds. There are many more yellow-rumps and orange-crowned warblers about as well. It is like welcoming old friends with each and every one.

John Sprague: A couple of weeks ago, I put out chopped peanuts every morning in a feeder on our deck. Sometimes before adding them I hold some in my hand by the feeder, and usually get 8 or 10 visits from chickadees snatching a bit of food. One morning I forgot to add to the feeder. A little later, a chickadee landed on the deck railing. It hopped closer. It hopped onto my sleeve. Message received; I put out some peanuts.



Dark-eyed Junco
(Eric Scott)



Northern Flicker
(Eric Scott)



Purple Martins
(Peter McAllister)

An Idea for the Future

Please send us short accounts, possibly with photos, of your walking or hiking experiences during your COVID isolation. We might then put together another issue made up entirely of your stories. And we're still looking for someone to edit the *Oystercatcher* and for other articles for future issues. Are you interested?