

the Acorn



The Newsletter of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy Number 41, Spring 2009

The Importance of Outdoor Ed.



School children enjoy an outdoor learning experience at Ford Lake.

Today, the climate of free play outdoors is remarkably different than it was a few decades ago. Rather than venturing outside, children are spending an increasing amount of time indoors plugging into various technologies, including television, personal computers and video games. As more studies become available, it is evident that these changes are resulting in alarming health costs. More children are diagnosed with ADD and ADHD, as well as being prescribed anti-depressants, and childhood obesity and related health problems are at an all-time high.

Research shows contact with nature is as important to children as good nutrition and adequate sleep. Time spent outdoors correlates with increased physical activity and fitness and increases children's feeling of well-being and ability to focus on tasks. Children have shown a significant reduction in the symptoms of ADD when they are engaged in outdoor activities in natural settings. Besides this, early,

sequenced and repeated experiences in the outdoors develop in children a kinship with nature that can evolve into an informed, proactive and lifelong stewardship of the natural environment.

Teachers, parents and students know learning is more meaningful and effective when students can draw connections between their studies and the world around them. Place-based education involves tapping into the local community and environment to teach numerous curriculum subjects. This helps students connect to their communities and establishes a stronger commitment to being active and engaged citizens who are concerned for their environment. Evidence is mounting in support of connecting children with their local environments. Multiple research studies confirm that repeated visits to a natural place using different ways of knowing (historical, artistic, scientific, ecological) are influential in deepening connections with the environment. Teaching children about the positive aspects of their local environment also builds a sense of caring and connection to their local communities. This is what the Conservancy is doing with our Steward in Training School Program. We hope they will grow into adults who will love their natural environment and influence others to be respectful it.

The Conservancy's Stewards in Training School Program takes every student on Salt Spring (approx. 700), each year, on all-day nature field experiences into a variety of special places and ecosystems (Ford Lake, Burgoyne Bay, Cushion Cove, Andreas Vogt Nature reserve, etc.). The program teaches them about how to best take care of their environment and be good stewards of the land. This is done one class at a time. Students are involved in outdoor field experience, where

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<http://saltspringconservancy.ca/events>

The Trust and the Dream



Early this spring a member and enduring friend of the Conservancy wrote to me in great frustration. It is a feeling we've all felt: the never-lessening chasm between the implied promise of "preserve and protect" and the realities of local land use decisions.

What's happening, I think, is that we are re-enacting a myth thousands of years old, which in the Christian tradition is the Edenic dream. Somewhere, the dream promises, there is a land of wondrous beauty where we can live the perfect life forever. Its image shimmers in us all. Poets and painters show it to us: majestic trees, benign beasts, festooned flowers, distant mountains, people hand in hand.

Islanders of generations past saw brushstrokes of Paradise here in the Salish Sea. Even when their own lives were imperfect, when Eden rained more than it flowered, when inescapable change denied the promise of forever, they thought, "If only..." "If only" became the Trust. "Preserve and protect" became the magic wall behind which the good life would shelter.

Unfortunately, "preserve" has more to do with heavenly timelessness than Earthly change. Unfortunately, in Eden beauty is a gift given, but in the world it is for sale. And we bought it. Each of us decided that more of Paradise remained here than where we came from. Many of us hoped against all logic that change would stop when the building inspector approved our porch railings. It didn't, and we've resented the betrayal ever since.

"Paradise, Schmaradise!" you say. "Quit giving the Trust the excuse that their job is impossible. We'll settle for a decent give and take between environmental protection and

development. Just prove that environment can win once in a while."

That was the whole point, 35 years ago. Gulf Islanders saw what looked like a war to them, with developers occupying all the high ground. The Trust Act, they were assured, gave environment an amateur golfer's handicap: "When making decisions and exercising judgements, Trust Council (their Policy Statement asserts) will place priority on preserving and protecting the integrity of the environment and amenities in the Trust area." Lots of golf games have been played, and the handicap seems a bit low. Everywhere you look in the Act and Official Community Plans, ambivalent language enfeebles brave phrases. And the ponderous pachyderm in the parlour is the zoning the Trust inherited, promising rights to build on as many more lots on Salt Spring Island as have been developed so far. If there is a line in the sand marking a limit to growth, it won't be reached until our population has doubled.

The full force of economics and growth politics has pushed against the Trust for its entire existence. You could liken the Trust to a bell buoy tugging at anchor against a race tide, making noise periodically and forcing a bit of water to go around it, but stopping nothing.

Is the Trust better than nothing? You'd better believe it! For one thing, it has been an unwitting leader in a massive re-education of society that brings "environment" back home. For another, its presence nags us continually to wrestle with the question, "What makes our community so special?" And in my case it reminds me how closely the Island still resembles an ancient dream I once had.

~ RW



Annual General Meeting of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy on June 5th

This year our AGM will be held on Friday, June 5th at 7:00 pm, the Lion's Club Hall (103 Bonnet Ave.). After the short business meeting, we have a special speaker, biologist David Denning, who will present "The Secret Seashore: Intertidal Life on Salt Spring".

Business at the meeting will include voting for new Board members, an amendment to the constitution (see text of the Special Resolution, below), brief committee reports and the usual housekeeping resolutions.

A note for members: Everyone is welcome, whether or not they are currently a member, so spread the word to your friends — better yet, bring them along!

Director's Desk

Special Resolution to be voted on at the Annual General Meeting.

In accordance with the BC Societies Act, notice of a resolution to change the constitution of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy is being given 14 days in advance of the Annual General Meeting. The Special Resolution as approved by the Board of Directors proposes to add public education to the purposes of the Society. This would become number #6 under Purposes, and the existing #6 would be renumbered #7. With this change, the Purposes (Section 2) of the Constitution would then read:

2. PURPOSES The purposes of this Society are exclusively charitable, and include:

(1) To promote and initiate the formation of natural habitat preserves on Salt Spring Island.

(2) To hold, manage or administer natural habitat preserves, and conservation covenants on Salt Spring Island for the benefit of this and future generations.

(3) To restore, if deemed necessary, natural features and processes of lands held by the Society where such lands have been modified by human activities.

(4) To facilitate public access to these lands for research, education or recreation as consistent with the natural features and processes where deemed appropriate.

(5) To raise money, acquire funds, accept bequests and other assistance, and to own, by purchase, donation or otherwise, real or personal property, and to maintain and manage such property or to sell, exchange, let, lease, or develop the same for the aforesaid purposes of the Society.

(6) To encourage protection of natural habitats on Salt Spring Island through public education.

(7) To do everything incidental and necessary to promote and attain the foregoing purposes.

Wording of Special Resolution: It is agreed to amend the Constitution of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy by inserting the following wording as number #6 under Purposes: "To encourage protection of natural habitats on Salt Spring Island through public education" and to renumber the former Purpose number 6 as number 7.

Benefits of Membership

Why, you wonder, am I writing about the benefits of membership in a newsletter for people who are already members? Aside from the fact that non-members do pick up the Acorn at events or see it on the web site, I thought it would be good to review for members just what we offer. But first, I want to let you know how important members are to us as an organization. While membership fees alone do not cover our operating expenses, they are a significant source of income. Of greater importance, however, is the value of a large membership in giving us a bigger voice in defence of conservation on our island and in the wider world. Members are supporters -- and where there are a large number of supporters, there is greater influence and greater long-term stability.

Members know that they receive three issues of the Acorn each year. Along with our web site, this is where we keep you informed about our many projects. Members are also invited to participate in several guided nature walks and birding forays each year. Members have free use of our broom pulling tools and are welcome to use our library of field guides and natural history references in the office. There are many interesting volunteer opportunities for our members, from participating on our Board and committees to working with the Stewards-in-Training school program or helping out with projects protecting habitat for species at risk. SSIC biologists and the stewardship committee also support our members to become good stewards on their own properties.

That was just some of the benefits of memberships in the SSI Conservancy--and why we are working to increase our membership.

I hope that those of you that were given gift certificates to pass along during the spring membership drive have taken advantage of that offer. The offer is good any time, so if you haven't given away that gift certificate yet, please do bestow it on someone who will enjoy it.

Gift Memberships

Giving a membership to the SSI Conservancy is a thoughtful way to involve family and friends in conservation on Salt Spring while providing your lucky recipient with a year of interesting newsletters and events. With their membership package, we will send each recipient a beautiful card acknowledging your gift.

Simply send us a membership form filled in with the name of your recipient with your payment and note that it is a gift -- we will do the rest!



Alphabetical Futures

Reviews: Plan C, Pat Murphy (New Society Pub., 2008); Hot, Flat, and Crowded, Thomas Friedman, (Farrar, Straus and Geroux, Inc., 2008).

Where you stand determines what you see. That's why we climb hills, literal ones and the heights of accreted experience. On top, we still can't see very far, not clearly. We make our guesses. Reason bent by hope leads into the near future, hope salted with reason then takes over.

Pat Murphy and Thomas Friedman stand on very different hills. Murphy is a building contractor, engineer and computer scientist who now runs the non-profit "Community Solutions." Judging from his dedication of Plan C to Noam Chomski and Wendell Berry, he's a lot more, too. A subversive, for one.

Friedman is a journalist with 28 years on the New York Times staff. The Times funded constant travels dense with meetings with ambassadors, top scientists, CEOs, renowned economists and history makers of all sorts. In return he gave all of us Pulitzer Prize books, prize-winning essays by the dozen, and intelligent columns by the hundreds. When you read in *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* his own description of his bedrock principles – globalization is great, economies must grow, capitalism is the only way forward – you think "Aha! Establishment!" But wait! The book is really about saving the biosphere because we absolutely have to. Where did that come from? Clue: he dedicates the book to his wife, Ann, a director of Conservation International, devoted to saving living things. No doubt Friedman himself is receptive to things green, but I'll bet persuasive spousal discussions were involved.

What do the two authors see from their separate hills? As we all do, war and the seeds of war. Climate heating up, trouble already here and a lot more to come. Species going extinct at rates the Earth hasn't experienced for millions of years. A world economy that can't be uncoupled ahead of the clatter of dominoes. A general rise in material standards of living but a widening chasm between the few rich and many poor. Alienation of local communities from big-city power, of individual from community big or small.

Murphy and Friedman agree fairly well on the big obstacles, but argue very different solutions.

Plan C sets up the favored choice by offering worse ones. Plan A is business as usual. Hangover? Hair of the dog. Plan B involves a brush and a big bucket of green distemper. Biofuels will keep cars on the road forever. Burning coal is fine: just sequester the carbon afterward. Etc. "D" is for Die-Off and Disaster. Build your own shelter, then duck. If we chose either A or B, Murphy says, we'll soon be at D.

Plan C is basically curtailment and localization. First and urgently, we in developed countries must buy less, use

less, waste less, want less. Not just convenient conservation, Murphy emphasizes, but radical curtailment. Second, reverse the centuries-old drift toward cities and urban power, and the more recent embrace of globalization, by shifting initiative and power to small communities: localize. Murphy, a practical guy, spends at least a third of Plan C offering mostly feasible ways to curtail and localize. I'll only mention one prominent example, the strategy of regional-community choice of renewable energy development. Tailor energy management to different cultural and geographic conditions. Unhook from the global grid.

I don't know whether Murphy sees the elephants still loose in his landscape, but he dodges their dung-piles anyway. The whole arena of life other than *H. sapiens* is ignored. The terms "diversity" and biodiversity" aren't even in Plan C's index. And the huge question of world demographics is finessed. He seems to accept the implications of a graph taken from Cobb's "The History and Future of World Energy," which shows human population rising in synchrony with oil production, peaking in 2030, then both falling fast enough that by 2100 world population is 5.7 billion. No discussion. If alternate energy sources, benign or bad, fuel continued population growth (which Friedman banks on, by the way), would Murphy still be able to put over half of us in small rural places?

Economics and energy are the meat in Friedman's stew. Here's how he makes it.

The absolute priority is to avert the really bad parts of climate change ("global weirding," he calls it). To do this, deep conservation is the quickest way to see results, achieved through citizen action and serious government commitment to regulation, incentives and tax policies pushing business toward energy efficiency and innovation. (Friedman: "If you take only one thing away from this book, please take this: We are not going to regulate our way out of the Energy-Climate Era. We can only innovate our way out, and the only way to do that is to mobilize the most effective and prolific system for transformational innovation and commercialization of new products ever created on the face of the earth – the U.S. marketplace." This isn't a throw-away line, it is a theme of the whole book. "Hug shareholders, not trees," he entitles a section pointing out that the greenest bottom line can be the best. In another section he shows how computer metering in a "smart" machine of almost any kind can reduce energy use dramatically and profitably. And so on.)

Acknowledging the cumulative damages to our entire biosphere from four hundred years of industrial Hoopla and the warning shots of global warming, Friedman stands solidly behind a rapid shift toward a new level of ecological stewardship. He sees governments and corporations, as well as NGOs and individuals, in this enormous partnership.

Upcoming Events

Once again, corporations loom big in his vision, and he is persuasive.

Speaking of “looming,” Friedman discusses China and India at great length. Imagine, he says, that the sum of all consumption and pollution from 300 million Americans is one “Americum.” The combined output and consumption of Europe is another Americum. The entire remaining world altogether may amount to a third Americum this instant, but China and India, growing in material standards as fast as they are now, would push the world to the equivalent of eight or nine Americums in a decade or two. (At which point we would change the measurement to “Chinums.”) That, he says, is absolutely intolerable. He offers a solution that totally by-passes the “fairness” argument. Let America go full speed toward Code Green, his word for a strategy toward green innovation and economics based on government incentives and corporate innovation. China (and co.) will look around in a few years and see that, while they wallow in deadly pollution and deep shortages of minerals, water, energy, etc., the U.S. is cleaner, healthier, and richer. They aren’t dumb: they’ll compete by trying to out-green the West.

I’ve said that Friedman advocates globalization, and he does. But to his great credit, he recognizes that (his words) “All conservation is local.” Ecosystems and species can only be saved by a million Noahs with a million arks. He sees a big role for global sources of investments in arks and their management, and includes national policies prominently in his practical strategy for conservation of diversity, but at heart it is local people who take charge and make it work.

By the way, dear citizen of every country other than the United States of America, Friedman is a booster of the notion that the US is and can remain the leader of the world. What can I say, he’s got the disease. Get angry if you wish, but don’t let it keep you from opening your mind to what he offers.

He said something that instantly made my biceps tense in case his nose was close. “There is only one thing bigger than Mother Nature,” he asserts, “and that is Father Profit.” His nose wasn’t nearby, and in seconds I began to laugh. I could picture him writing that zinger and smirking as in his mind’s eye he saw people like me getting red. “Ignore him,” I thought. “Comedians hate that.”

Murphy and Friedman have a lot of worthwhile perspectives and proposals. However, there are letters still available for your own plan. Use “Z;” you’ll have the last word.

~ RW



May 8th (Friday) - Endangered Butterflies or Butterflies as Indicator Species for a Healthy Environment. Patrick Lilley, BC Ministry of Environment will give an illustrated talk. Lion’s Hall. 7 pm.

May 9th (Saturday) - Butterfly Walk. 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. Please register with the SSI Conservancy Office. Cost \$10.

June 5th (Friday) - SSI AGM. Features: The Secret Seashore, Intertidal Life on Salt Spring by David denning. Everyone welcome! Lion’s Hall. 7 pm.

June 6th (Saturday) - Beach Walk with David Denning. 10 a.m. Please register by calling the SSI Conservancy Office. Cost: \$10 for adults.

School program: continued from Page 1



they are exposed to a variety of fun, hands-on, curriculum based, outdoor learning experiences (learning while doing). Students are learning about the outdoors...outdoors.

These nature field experiences start in March of each year and run to the beginning of June. There is also a program in Sept/ Oct. This adds up to approximately 30 field trips a year...a huge undertaking. We are always looking for new volunteers. We will train you. If you can help, please contact the Conservancy ASAP.

Once again we need to thank the BC Government, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, Nature Canada Parks and People program and Thrifty’s Smile Card program for supporting this crucial program for 2009.

~ Jean Gelwicks



Spring Birding at Ford Lake



Varied thrush

The marshes, fields and woods around Ford Lake are among the most exquisite places for birding in all of the Gulf Islands. Ambling along a wooded path or just sitting at the edge of a meadow with your eyes closed, you feel blessed. Every sense is stroked by sun-warmed zephyr, pungence of marsh, call of lamb and bird, and whisper of lives being lived deep in the shadow of frond and blade.

Ducks Unlimited, Canada (D.U., or just “Ducks”) owns most of the Lake and over 100 acres of marsh and rising uplands. D.U.’s mission here is broader than quacks. The entire 158 acres is a jewel of wildlife habitats and an active farm with roots deeper than a century. D.U. hopes that farming will continue to provide a good part of a family living, and that good care will maintain the rich mix of farmed, half-wild and left-alone habitats that comprise the landscape today. When regulated public use can be offered without jeopardy to farm or wildlife, Ducks makes room for it.

Farm leaseholders Mark Hughes and Lynne Denton and D.U. have hosted Conservancy visits almost from the moment of purchase in 2000. From 2002 I’ve had permission to guide a dozen birders there twice each May. Everyone has had a broader grin after the walk than at its start – and not only because it was a more civil time of day. These walks give us lots of practise in identifying birds by sight and sound, when spring courtship and migration are at their peak. We don’t try to count individual birds; we do tally every species identified each trip. Rocket science it isn’t, but the string of 13 counts from 2002 and 2008 reveals some things I found interesting.

One disclaimer is important. Our path does not take us to a high point from which we could ‘scope out birds on or over the Lake itself, which means that several common spring ducks or grebes are missed, and species like great blue herons and belted kingfishers show up only if they fly past us on the way to or from the Lake.

Our trips all took place between May 1 and May 21. Many overwintering fox sparrows, golden-crowned sparrows and varied thrushes have left by then. On the other hand, common nighthawks, willow flycatchers and other summer species aren’t there yet.

Our 13 day-lists tallied between 33 and 51 species (merged total, 77). Walks in the first 15 days in May averaged fewer species (38) than walks in the third week of May (44). Eleven birds turned up on every trip. Turkey vultures inspected lambs and gray-headed birders with equal hope. Violet-green and barn swallows practiced Olympic aerobatics, while Townsend’s and orange-crowned warblers loudly converted bugs to testosterone to song. (I missed that equation in Chem. 1.) Mallards, robins, and song sparrows – well, aren’t they everywhere always? Red-winged blackbirds were never far from every cattail on the farm. Pacific slope flycatchers sneezed just out of sight on every trip. I was a bit surprised that red-breasted sapsuckers were among the clan of dependables.

Altogether, 25 of the 77 species were as predictable as “Late!” notices from Revenue Canada. Another 24 were seen only once (11 species), twice (3) or thrice (10) out of 13 walks. Some of these are local residents you just don’t find often (owls, daytime raptors, grouse) or birds early to leave or late to get here.

It’s dry stuff, but you can find the results of all counts on our Conservancy website. Avid birders who couldn’t be there, or sceptics who were there but want to make sure I didn’t cheat, are welcome to browse. For most of us, memories are better. Remember the dozen dainty downies trying to keep up with Ms. Aix Sponsa as she threaded her way among drowned logs at the beaver pond? Memories: roll your own.

~ RW

Good Steward Profile: Paul Linton

Volunteer Warden for Mount Maxwell and Mount Tuam Ecological Reserves and SSIC Volunteer.

Paul Linton has generously contributed a great deal of his time and energy to numerous projects for the Salt Spring Island Conservancy over the last few years. Here are some of the projects that he contributed to in 2008:

Barn Owl Box Program

Paul constructed and installed barn owl boxes in a number of barns on the island with Conservancy biologist, Laura Matthias. These boxes will help to provide needed habitat for the barn owl populations on the island.

Western Bluebird Nestbox Program

Paul has worked with a number of other dedicated volunteers and biologists in building, installing, and monitoring western bluebird boxes on the island, in an effort to re-establish this once common songbird on Salt Spring.

Rare Plants

Paul has worked extensively with Conservancy biologist, Robin Annschild, to help count and identify a number of new populations of rare and endangered plant species on Salt Spring Island, such as yellow montane violet, coastal Scouler's catchfly, and Grey's desert-parsley.

Sharp-tailed Snakes

Through our long-term monitoring of Sharp-tailed snakes on the island, Paul has been an active assistant in many ways. He has helped to install snake boards in numerous locations in order to identify new snake locations. He has also participated in habitat restoration projects for the sharp-tailed snake.

Western Painted Turtles

During our surveys for western painted turtles, Paul was a great help in paddling around island lakes to search for turtles and nesting sites.

Paul Linton is a tireless volunteer for nature, both in his role as warden of the Ecological Reserves and through his support of so many Salt Spring Conservancy programs over the years.

He also makes great wine -- which he has donated to Conservancy events!

Thanks Paul!



The School Program needs volunteers now.
Please call 250-538-0318.

Paul Linton at work

Volunteer Thank You: David Denning



The man does it all with apparent ease

There are so many things I cherish about living on Salt Spring and having intelligent, creative, community-minded islanders is certainly one of them. David Denning is at the top of my list and it is high time we thanked him for being one of the best Conservancy volunteers ever.

I was introduced to David eight years ago when his partner, Deborah Miller, volunteered him to help on the Conservancy sponsored Walk Through Time. (Every step taken on the walk equaled a million years on a journey past an exhibit of 90 panels of text and illustration telling the story of life's five-billion-year evolution). David trained all the volunteers who acted as tour guides to the "universe's story". He and his tour guides made the story come alive for the 700 students and many of the 600 adults who took the Walk during the 4-day event. I was absolutely impressed by his knowledge, dedication, enthusiasm, and willingness to jump into a project wholeheartedly -- and did I say knowledge? The information that is stuffed into David's head is beyond my comprehension. David knows SO much about the small critters of the sea (where all life comes from) and he makes it all so brilliantly spellbinding. I can listen to him for hours.

Knowing a good thing when I saw it, I persuaded David and Deborah to join the education committee of the Conservancy. Now they practically run the show....literally. Deborah chairs the Education committee and David is her right hand man. David does all the beautiful posters (often using his own photography), writes the alluring articles for the Acorn and Driftwood that bring in the large audiences, sets up the projector (he is a computer geek and movie maker), and more often than not introduces the speaker, as he generally knows them personally. This leaves little for the rest of us on the committee to do.

David is good at so much and he makes it all look easy. He helped to start the Stewards in Training school program and still is a valuable volunteer instructor. He worked on the Calendar Committee and Newcomers' Guide as a writer and designer. He just completed a fun series on Grossology at the

library where he presented two programs: one on slugs, and one on analyzing animal poop! He never says no to giving a talk on a variety of subjects, but especially on Marine Biology. If you have ever joined David on a beach walk, you will never forget it. The beach comes alive. The man does it all and with grace. I do not know how we could do it all without him.

David was born on the west coast of the US and spent his summers hanging out at the beach in San Francisco. He completed a chemistry degree at Reed College where he started a life-long love of mountaineering. There he also worked with his former biology teacher in a small micro and macroscopic educational video business and later helped develop the company to a national mail order success. When he was a young adult in the 1960s, he saw the light from the north and he moved up to Canada. Here he worked on a chemistry degree but then went off to find out what the real world was like. He tree-planted a while, and climbed many mountains, including Denali in Alaska. He also worked in the Kootenays creating audio-visual materials for Selkirk College, and always continued his early love for natural history.

Most of his work and study since then has been in the natural history area including continuing with the film company, making films for the National Film Board and teaching. One film he made on intertidal life was used in schools for many years. Recently he has done film work for CBC and independent companies, including being part of the film crew for *Living Things We Love to Hate*, based on a book by Des Kennedy.

His teaching degree came after the chemistry, followed by a Masters degree in Education. His thesis was on an innovative interactive museum technique with the Royal British Museum. His high school and university teaching career started at Simon Fraser as a TA and continued at Bamfield Marine Station where he was the Field Trip coordinator for several years. He co-taught an Ecology course at UVIC with Dr. Rick Kool. He has been the onboard naturalist for the Island Roamer and for the Darwin Sound, vessels that take groups of people up and down the BC coast and sometimes to other countries. He has taught at all levels but his two favourites are with university students and with local elementary age students. He is a gem. Thank you, David, for all your time and energy.

Now for the really good news -- we are all going to get to see David once again as he is the Conservancy's guest speaker at our AGM, June 5th at the Lions. His talk/slide show is entitled *The Secret Seashore – Intertidal Life on Salt Spring Island*. Doors open at 6:30 and refreshments will be served. This will be a real treat.

~ Jean Gelwicks



Tips for Members

How to Make a Small Monthly Donation Really Add Up

We can now accept monthly donations through a pre-authorized debit program. This is an easy way to arrange regular automatic withdrawals from your account. By donating the value of just one deluxe coffee a week your donation could add up to \$250 per year -- enough to catapult you into the ranks of our *Conservation Friends*. Just contact the office to set up an authorized withdrawal or download the agreement form on our website, fill it in and mail it in or drop it off at our office. No gift is too small -- and even a few dollars a month will add up to a valuable (and greatly appreciated!) contribution over a year. Once a year we will issue a charitable tax receipt for the total amount of your annual donation.

Conservation 'Fiends' are Friends Indeed

Last fall we initiated our *Conservation Friends* program for everyone who donates a total of \$250 or more in a year. This group of dedicated supporters is steadily growing! Once a year, we invite our Conservation Friends to an appreciation event. This includes a lunch hosted by the Directors and staff of SSIC, presentations on our latest projects and on island ecosystems and wildlife, followed by a field trip to a local nature reserve.

If you would like to become part of this special band of supporters, it just takes \$250 a year. This could be spread over a year through monthly instalments, either by providing post dated cheques or through our new pre-authorized debit program for monthly withdrawals from your account.

Join the growing number: watch for an event planned for May 31st.

We have a NEW E-mail Address: ssic@saltspringconservancy.ca

On April 7th we switched our internet service to Shaw. Our new e-mail address for SSIC and to reach the Executive Director (Linda Gilkeson) is now: ssic@saltspringconservancy.ca. Our old office e-mail address will continue to work for the next year, but now is a good time to start updating your address books.

Here are our other staff e-mail addresses:

Susan Dann: office@saltspringconservancy.ca

Robin Annschild: robin@saltspringconservancy.ca

Laura Matthias: laura@saltspringconservancy.ca

The School Committee would like to thank all those people who supported the Stewards in Training School Program by buying 2009 Calendars.



David gets a moon snail to say 'cheese'

Attracting Western Bluebirds



The western bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) was once a common migratory songbird in our region. With no known breeding pairs since the early 1990s, the bird is considered extirpated from our coastal island region, known as the Georgia Depression Population. Habitat fragmentation, loss of suitable nesting cavities, competition from European Starlings and other introduced species, as well as climate change, have been suggested as some of the reasons for their disappearance.

The western bluebird breeds at low elevations across the southern part of British Columbia, preferring habitats such as farmlands, meadows, orchards, and forest edges. Garry oak ecosystems are known to be important habitat to these birds.

The western bluebird is a member of the thrush family, closely related to the eastern bluebird and the mountain bluebird. Often the male western bluebirds will arrive early in February to claim their territories, and the females follow shortly thereafter, as they breed earlier than most other songbirds. Cold spring weather can therefore lower the success rates of these early nesters.

Western bluebirds require nest cavities already excavated by other species of birds. They readily use nest boxes of the appropriate size. The bluebirds lay 4-6 pale blue to white eggs, with the female incubating them for a couple of weeks before hatching. Both the male and female take part in rearing their young on a diet primarily of insects and some fruits.

In some areas, such as in Fort Lewis, Washington, the western bluebirds have been making a comeback due to extensive nest box programs, which have increased the nesting pairs from four in the 1980s to over 200 pairs at present. More recently on the San Juan Islands, attempts have been made to reintroduce pairs of western bluebirds from Fort Lewis, WA.

Salt Spring Island has highly suitable habitat for the western bluebirds. There are a variety of conservation options available for private landowners on Salt Spring Island who wish to protect their land in perpetuity. Protecting existing habitats and restoring degraded habitats, particularly our endangered Garry oak ecosystems, is of great importance. Leaving older trees intact that have nest cavities in them can provide nesting sites for the western bluebirds and many other of our native cavity nesting birds. Installing and monitoring nest boxes in suitable habitats can also be beneficial. The Salt Spring Island Conservancy is working with landowners to establish a network of western bluebird boxes in areas with suitable habitat. Many landowners are participating in the project, hoping to attract the bluebirds back to our island. The Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team (GOERT) is also hoping to reintroduce pairs of the western bluebirds back to our island in the future.

Attracting the western bluebird back to our island would help to restore an important component of our rare Garry oak ecosystems, which are home to over 100 species at risk. Reestablishing breeding bluebird pairs would help to revitalize the Georgia Depression population on the Gulf Islands, increasing the connectivity to additional suitable habitat in other areas for dispersing birds. It also allows our community to be involved in the recovery and monitoring aspects of this beautiful songbird.

If you have seen a western bluebird, passing through or nesting, or if you would like more information on landowner conservation options, please contact the Salt Spring Island Conservancy at 250-538-0318 or email us at info@saltspringconservancy.ca. You can visit our website at www.saltspringconservancy.ca for more information on western bluebirds and other species at risk on Salt Spring Island.

~ Laura Matthias, Staff Biologist



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Anise swallowtail

photo by David Borrowman

The Acorn is the newsletter of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, a local non-profit society supporting and enabling voluntary preservation and restoration of the natural environment of Salt Spring Island and surrounding waters. We welcome your feedback and contributions, by email to ssiconservancy@saltspring.com or by regular mail. Opinions expressed here are the authors', not subject to Conservancy approval.

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