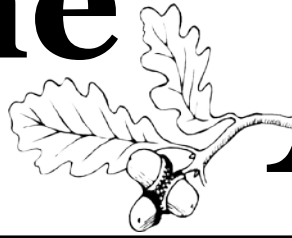


# the Acorn



The Newsletter of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy

Number 44, Spring 2010

## Bringing Back the Bluebird

### Western Bluebird Project 2009/2010

Imagine the thrill of bringing back to our island a bird that has been gone since the early 1990s. The western bluebird was once common throughout the Georgia Basin, but began to decline in the 1950s and was extirpated forty years later. Now, biologists and volunteers with the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, in partnership with the B.C. Ministry of Environment, are working hard to bring the bluebird back to Salt Spring. We are putting up nest boxes in the hopes that bluebirds, now breeding on San Juan Island, will find them and breed here again.

The western bluebird is one of the most colourful members of the thrush family, a family which also contains the American robin, varied thrush, hermit thrush and Swainson's thrush, species more familiar to islanders. The brilliant blue back and wings, ruddy chest and shoulders make the male easy to spot as it sings and displays around the nest site. Females are a more subtle pale blue, gray and brown. The only other "blue" bird commonly seen on the island is the Steller's jay, a member of the corvid family, which is much larger and more raucous.

Western bluebirds nest in holes, trees and bird boxes. Returning from their wintering areas to the south in late February and early March, they set up territories in fairly open habitats such as Garry oak meadows, pastures, roadsides, parks, open forest and grassy areas. They begin breeding in late March to early April. Females lay 4-6 powder blue eggs and both parents feed the nestlings with insects, which they detect from low perches and then swoop down and catch on the ground.

While it is unknown what caused the bluebird decline in southwestern B.C., experts suspect that loss of Garry oak meadows, cutting down of old trees used for nesting, declines in their insect prey due to pesticides and competition for nest holes with the introduced house sparrow and European starlings all contributed to the declines. Adding nest boxes has reversed some population declines in Oregon, Washington and in the interior of B.C. Western bluebirds have been reintroduced to the San Juan Islands and now successfully breed there. Recently, a few western bluebirds have been spotted in Victoria, the Cowichan Valley, and in the Fulford Valley and Mt. Tuam on Salt Spring, but no breeding has



Bluebird enthusiasts March Yawnie and Susan Hannon

been observed.

Here on Salt Spring Island we want to be ready when the bluebirds come back to breed. We are putting up nests boxes in appropriate habitats, away from areas where house sparrows reside. During the 2009 breeding season 71 bluebird boxes were available for use in the Fulford Valley, Mt. Tuam, Mt Maxwell, Andreas Vogt Nature Reserve and Burgoyne Bay Provincial Park. Unfortunately no western bluebirds used the boxes but 27 violet green swallow pairs and 14 house wren pairs nested in the boxes. Four were occupied by wasps.

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# President's Message

Fifteen years ago a group of seven women had the vision and the determination to start the SSI Conservancy. With the participation of many people who have served on the Board or who have volunteered in hundreds of ways, with the support of the generous donors and with the hard work of the dedicated staff it has grown to be the vigorous conservation organization we have today. Our mandate is focused on conservation work on Salt Spring Island and surrounding waters. We have enormous respect for the large national and provincial conservation organizations and we often work closely with them. However, small areas like ours cannot be their primary focus because they have so many diverse demands.

SSIC exists to be voice for the natural world on our island through all our work: acquiring and managing land, educating and assisting landholders, encouraging and inspiring our children, enabling protective covenants, bringing information and practical help through stewardship programs and our many other activities. Sometimes people are understandably confused by the names and the numbers of organizations working for environmental causes so we want to point out again that while our vision is broad, our work is focused on our island home. We are here for the long haul. We need the commitment and support of everyone who shares these values so that we can serve the community and the natural world for many, many more years.

~ Maureen Bendick



# Stewards in Training

The excitement of the diverse natural sights and sounds at Ford Lake experienced during volunteer training day continued when the school program returned there in April. The Canada goose first spotted by Maria Dammel was still sitting her nest, and her gander still keeping sentinel on the final day of the program. One student group witnessed the gander chase off a great blue heron that landed too close to the nest.

Male red-winged blackbirds continued with their songs and flights from atop a spiraea bush along the lake's margin or last summer's cattail upright in the marsh. The chorus of Pacific treefrogs was noticed daily by the students. The children heard the calls of the many violet-green swallows swooping past overhead and the barn swallows that had also returned. Last year a pair of tree swallows nested in a box by the lake, but the focus this spring was nearer at hand. With magnifiers for detail, students drew the flowering heads of timothy cast purple in the spring sunlight of late April, and already the seed heads of dandelions. And just as the caddisfly larva with their home-made house of pebbles amazed volunteers on training day, so they did for the young children gazing into the aquarium.

The Stewards in Training Program is made possible by an assembly of contributions. We thank our sponsors: Thrifty's Smile Card program, Mountain Equipment Co-op and the special Conservancy donors. We appreciate the opportunity provided by Ducks Unlimited to be on their lands, and the support of Mark Hughes who leases the land. The volunteers who make this program run with its unique brand of small student group sizes and mixed nature activities are invaluable. We are always in need of new recruits to volunteer, so if this calls to you, please let us know.

~ Cate McEwen



# Executive Director's Desk

"We have been here for 15 years, but we need to be around forever". You will hear that from me a lot this year! The occasion of this 15th anniversary year has had the Board and staff of the SSI Conservancy thinking hard about what we need to do make sure the Conservancy endures.

In April, the Board made the commitment to begin raising funds for a permanent endowment that would support the organization. Developing that kind of financial base is the next step in our maturity as an organization. Our aim is a solvent and stable future so that we can continue to care for the lands and conservation covenants we now hold. We also want to be able to secure other land that our community wishes to protect in future and to continue our popular public education and school programs.

An endowment fund for a non-profit organization works the same way as a nest egg that individuals lay aside to support their retirement. The goal is to collect a fund that is large enough to provide a permanent income source. For example: Say we raise \$40,000 every year from donors in our community. At that rate, in 10 years our donors would have given a total of \$400,000 and all of that money would have been spent as it came each year to keep core programs operating.

What if we could raise \$1 million in one year? If that money went to an endowment fund paying 4% per year, it would provide a yearly income of \$40,000, without depleting

the original nest egg, which would still be there in case of need. And that's where we want to be someday: in a position to guarantee a very long-term funding source, independent of government grant decisions that can change with the stroke of a pen.

For a donor, giving to an endowment fund is an ideal way to make sure his or her gift continues to benefit the organization long into the future. It is also an ideal place to direct bequests because those gifts become part of a permanent legacy--literally 'the gift that keeps on giving'.

If you are thinking about donating a gift, do investigate the tax benefits now available to donors of stocks and other securities. A few years ago the Canadian tax laws were changed so there are now excellent tax breaks for donating such securities to charities. You don't pay taxes on capital gains, yet you receive a tax receipt for the full value of the gift. This is also important for anyone who is thinking of leaving a legacy through a bequest in a will. For more detailed information see the article by Frank Arnold in the Winter 2010 Acorn or contact me for a copy.

As we roll out our capital campaign over the next few months, I urge you to think about what it means to you to have this active, local land conservancy working on your behalf in our community. As the fundraisers say: No donation is too large!

~ Linda Gilkeson



## There are many ways to donate to the SSI Conservancy and we appreciate every one.

**Donate online:** Click on the CanadaHelps button on any page of our web site: [www.saltspringconservancy.ca](http://www.saltspringconservancy.ca). You can also set up a monthly credit card withdrawal through the CanadaHelps link.

**Donate monthly:** Ask me for the forms to set up a monthly withdrawal from your bank account.

**Donate securities:** Ask me for our brokerage account number and contact information.

**US donors:** Ask me how to make a gift that qualifies for a US tax deduction.

For any type of donation, including a bequest, gift of land or other possibility, feel free to contact me any time. We can't act as financial advisors, but are happy to provide information on the range of options and make sure your gift is directed according to your wishes.

Linda Gilkeson: [ssic@saltspringconservancy.ca](mailto:ssic@saltspringconservancy.ca) 250-538-0318

**Legal Name: Salt Spring Island Conservancy**

**Registered Charity #: 89006-3977-RR0001**

**URGENT!!** We need volunteers to help produce a "kids and nature" 2012 calendar for the Conservancy. It has to be completed by the summer of 2011. It is a fun-filled project needing many talents. Call Bob Weeden at 250-537-5403.

# Living with Nature



Just as the spears of spring lilies were being unsheathed, a new booklet emerged from the fertile ground of the Conservancy's volunteer corps: "Living with Nature." It might well have been entitled "Building with Nature," its special audience being folks seriously planning their Island home or get-away. The booklet's subtitle says it all: "A Guide for New Property Owners on Salt Spring Island."

"Living with Nature" is packed with snippets of valuable information, beautifully enhanced with colour photos, about how to build your dream house in the real world of our Island. That reality, always fascinating and verdant, often includes rain you'd pay to get rid of in January and pay double to get back in August. It includes rocky rubble that laughs at green thumbs, stone outcrops that go all the way to China, and lenses of gummy clay that alternate with patches of loam eager for seeding.

Whatever the physical characteristics of your special acres, wild things already live there. As you build, some will move out, some will find changes to their liking. The Conservancy

## Stewardship Program Announces

### Early Funding for 2010

The Salt Spring Island Conservancy is delighted to announce the commitment of financial support from a number of generous funders towards the Habitat Protection and Stewardship Program in 2010. Financial support has been provided by Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, Canadian Wildlife Foundation, and British Columbia Transmission Corporation. Support from these funders provides partial assistance towards the overall Stewardship program, as the Conservancy is still waiting to hear from its major funder.

Pending financial assistance from our major funder, this year's focus will see efforts to secure long-term habitat protection for a number of properties with high conservation value. Staff will continue monitoring rare species, landowner contact regarding stewardship options and providing educational presentations and outreach materials to the public about Species at Risk. Focal activities will include enhancing habitat for the western painted turtle, surveying to find sharp-tailed snakes, amphibian monitoring, nocturnal owl surveys, and ongoing monitoring for a number of rare plant and bird species. Volunteers will continue assisting with nestbox programs for the western bluebird, barn owl, and western screech owl.

To view a list of Species at Risk on Salt Spring, please visit [www.saltspringconservancy.ca](http://www.saltspringconservancy.ca).

~ Laura Matthias



has compiled dozens of actions you can take in the ordinary pattern and time frame of property development to help you to be a good neighbour to wild things, whether plant or animal, abundant or rare. The booklet isn't an encyclopedia, but it does connect you to rich sources of relevant, practical information, some promising solid savings in time and money. To mix biologic and electronic metaphors, "Follow the lynx, catch your rabbit."

The guide is distributed through the Welcome Wagon, Chamber of Commerce, B & B's and other accommodations, real estate agents, the CRD Building Inspection Office, and the local Islands Trust.

Did we mention Conservancy volunteers? Enormous thanks to all of them for their expertise and patience in this long-incubation project: Gayle Baker, David Denning (again!), Charles Kahn, Maxine Leichter, Margery Moore, Peter Ommundsen, Arlene Richardson, Mark Starick, Bob Weeden. And miles above them all, Jean Gelwicks, enthusiasm embodied, persistence personified.



# Upcoming Events

## Julie And Colin Angus

### A Multimedia Extravaganza about Human-Powered Adventures across Oceans and Continents

A Vancouver Island couple, Julie and Colin Angus have very different family ethnic backgrounds, but both are seriously addicted to adventure. Julie's father is from Syria and Colin's parents are both from Scotland. So it just seemed sensible to them to travel all the way from Scotland to Syria in an adventuresome, human-powered way.

On Friday June 4<sup>th</sup>, at the Community Gospel Hall, Colin and Julie will present a dramatic and humour-filled account of their 7,000 km, 7 month, Scotland to Syria adventure by rowboat. Instead of rowing around Europe, they invented a pair of rowboat/bicycles and pointed the beasts directly at Aleppo, Syria from their starting place in Caithness, Scotland.

Crossing thirteen countries and seeking out every canal, river and lake they could find, they alternated rowing with towing to make a most unusual human-powered crossing of Europe. With dramatic photos and video, they piece together the exciting trip and many of the adventures and diverse cultures they encountered.

And if that adventure doesn't get your heart beating faster, the second portion of Colin and Julie's amazing multimedia presentation surely will. Did I mention that Julie is the first woman to row across the Atlantic Ocean? In

**June 4 (Friday) - Colin and Julie Angus.** (See article this page). Community Gospel Hall. 7 pm.

**June 15 (Tuesday) - SSIC Annual General Meeting.** Robin Annschild presents *Living in the Rarest Ecosystem in BC*. Lions Hall. 7 pm.

doing so she joined Colin for a key portion of his amazing circumnavigation of the earth entirely by human power. Two oceans, 17 countries, two years of travel, several brushes with death, and a healthy respect and new understanding of the environmental conditions of oceans and landscapes – these are the components of their 'Round the World by Human Power' presentation. Little wonder that in 2007, Colin and Julie were named National Geographic's Adventurers of the Year.

The event is co-sponsored by the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club, and Island Paddlers. Colin and Julie will have books about their adventures available for sale and signing at the presentation. Admission to the event is by donation (\$5 suggested). Incredible adventures, not to be missed!

~ David Denning



#### Captions Outrageous:

Simon Henson's photo of a bird on Andreas Vogt Nature Reserve (ACORN 43, page 6) was captioned "Ruffled grouse", but it wasn't a ruffed grouse, *Bonasa umbellus*. It should have read sooty grouse, *Dendragapus obscurus*. We discovered the error when David sent more photos. Our apologies. (ed.)

# Dire Scenarios



*Jean Gelwicks with April guest speaker, Gwynne Dyer*

A full house at Artspring heard the apocalyptic analysis of climate change by one of the English speaking world's most respected journalists, Gwynne Dyer. He pulled no punches. "Bad as you might understand it to be," he said, "it is likely worse." The data you've read is mostly from 2002 science - new reports are all grimmer. For instance, the 2002 data led to predictions of warming by 1.8°C to 5.4°C average rise by the end of the Century. Now it looks like a 4°C increase in half a century!

The World Bank supported a study showing that if our climate became warmer by 2°C on average (1°C over

oceans, 4°C over land), there would be a 25% reduction in food production in India, leaving a quarter of a billion people in India and Pakistan without enough food. Vanishing Himalayan glaciers would basically dewater the huge Indus River, which already dries from irrigation water withdrawals before it gets to the sea. And both nations have nuclear weapons! The same level of warming would mean that most of Mexico would become too dry to grow food, leaving 60 million people looking north for their next meal.

All of the countries with Mediterranean shores likewise would be unable to feed themselves. Many are members of the European Union, with supposedly free passage into the moist land to the north. The nexus of drought, famine, and desperate emigrations was, in fact, Dyer's main focus. He alerted the audience to several geo-engineering proposals to slow or reverse present warming trends, but their likelihood seemed so remote that they almost made the situation seem worse. Sure, by sending enough petroleum-burning aircraft into the sky we could seed the stratosphere with sulfur dioxide to reflect some incoming sunlight back into space - which could also either make the ocean surface so acid it wouldn't support life, or overshoot and cause us all to freeze (or both). And we could paint all roofs and asphalt surfaces white...

Dyer got a standing ovation, probably not because the audience got a jolt of hope but because one finally felt one was hearing some truths about a complicated topic that usually is spun faster than a child's top by ordinary sources.

~ Brian Hayward



## Go Ahead: Indulge Yourself

In medieval Europe a wealthy sinner could repent and pay a priest to make it right with the Boss. The money, used to help the poor, would offset the evil. One problem was that, while the evil was a done deal, the good was chancy and hard to verify.

Now we have a new guilt to assuage - putting carbon into the air - and a new system of indulgences - buying offsets. (Note Nigel Denyer's article in the last ACORN.) The new process waives the penance requirement and lets the fee be paid in advance. Going to warm beaches this year? Just pay the travel agent to pay a third party to plant enough trees to soak up an amount of carbon equivalent to your share of jet exhaust.

The Christian Science Monitor for April 26, 2010 ([www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com)) highlights the rubber crutches on which the system depends. There are few rules and fewer watchdogs. As CSM says, "There is little regulatory oversight of them in the US" (or anywhere), "no enforcement of requirements to

prove their environmental claims, no certain way of measuring the carbon savings sold, and no guarantees that planted trees or other projects will be finished or continued long enough to work." CSM quoted a forest conservationist and senior investigator for Greenpeace: "I think you are looking at 75 per cent of them as garbage, at least." Example: global companies pay a pittance to log tribal lands in Papua New Guinea, and while the trees are still falling the corporation markets carbon offsets on the assurance that trees will be planted in their place.

Perhaps the ultimate irony is that the Vatican, once the monopolistic seller of indulgences, fell victim to an offset scam. By 2007 the Vatican had succeeded in conserving enough energy to reduce its carbon emissions by 40 per cent. It bought offsets to neutralize the rest, paid the fee, and still awaits the first planted tree while chasing down the insolvent promoter.

~ Bob Weeden



# Getting Rid of Invasive Plants

Invasive plants are non-native plants that were introduced on purpose or accidentally and have spread into natural ecosystems where they compete with native plants and into human-disturbed areas where they cause economic and safety hazards. Many invasive plants are escapees from gardens. Some species planted to attract wildlife, such as butterfly bush, are now invasive. English ivy is a scourge when it escapes into natural areas, covering trees and other native vegetation. Other species were brought in by logging companies or highways departments to reseed cutblocks or stabilize banks.

Wondering how to get rid of those annoying invasive plants on your property? So were a hundred Saltspringer's who turned out on April 23 to hear Glenn Miller, Invasive Species Specialist from the Oregon Department of Agriculture, talk about "Managing invasive species in your own backyard". Glenn's visit was sponsored by the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, PARC, CRD and the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team.

The evening began with identification of plants brought in by Salt Spring residents. These included Scotch broom, gorse, giant hogweed, Canada thistle, oxeye daisy, English holly, Himalayan blackberry, Daphne (spurge laurel), purple deadnettle (henbit), English ivy and Japanese knotweed. Following this, winners of the "broom busters" poster competition for Salt Spring students was announced. Winners were Eden Kaminsky and Hannah Martens, both in grade 7, and Brianne Hetherington (grade 9) and Julius Muellner (grade 11).

Glenn had three main messages. First, it is impossible to eradicate common invasive plants such as blackberries, scotch broom, English ivy and thistles. We need to control them as best as we can so they do not impact the natural values of our nature reserves and properties and economically impact agricultural and forestry lands. Perseverance is required: it often takes many years to get invasive plants under control.

Second, we must educate ourselves to recognize common and new invasive plants. He suggested that we recruit plant identification experts on our island to report new species. We then need to learn the best methods to remove invasive plants. Lots of websites describe how to do this (see below) and information will be posted on the Conservancy website.

Third, when a new invasive species is detected, jump on it! It is much easier to eradicate them in this early phase than to wait until they cause damage. Recent invaders to Salt Spring include garlic mustard, clematis vitalba and giant hogweed.

Oregon lists many invasive species as noxious weeds and bans them from being brought into the state. B.C.'s

"Weed Control Act" lists noxious weeds in the province and imposes a duty on all landowners to control them. Not all invasive species are on this list. We need to push nurseries, garden clubs, industry and governments to avoid introducing new invasive species into British Columbia.

What can you do? Educate yourself on what species are invasive, do not plant them, remove them from your property and ask your local nurseries not to sell them. Given the looming water crisis on the Gulf Islands, you may want to explore planting native species (obtained from qualified nurseries) or drought tolerant non-invasive species. The Invasive Plant Council of B.C. has a wonderful brochure called "Grow Me Instead" that gives a list of beautiful non-invasive plants for your garden. Do not dump garden refuse in natural areas or along roadsides- many an invasive species has been spread this way. Find out the proper way to dispose of invasive species. Finally, report new invaders to the Invasive Plant Council of B.C.

See our new broom pamphlet at [www.saltspringconservancy.com](http://www.saltspringconservancy.com).

## Other resources include:

**Invasive Plant Council of BC:** [www.invasiveplantcouncilbc.ca](http://www.invasiveplantcouncilbc.ca) (phone 1-888-WEEDSBC to report new invasive plants in your neighborhood).

**Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team:** [www.goert.ca](http://www.goert.ca). This website has detailed instructions of how to remove and dispose of a number of common invasive species.

## Coastal Invasive Plant Committee:

[www.coastalinvasiveplants.com](http://www.coastalinvasiveplants.com) has a number of resources for our area.

**Broom busters:** [www.broombusters.org](http://www.broombusters.org). A group of volunteers on Vancouver Island dedicated to stopping the spread of broom.

**B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands:** [www.agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/weedguid/weedguid.htm](http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/weedguid/weedguid.htm). This has pictures and descriptions of species designated as noxious weeds in B.C.

~ Susan Hannon



Do you have an orange dot on your Acorn? If so, it's time to renew your membership. We don't want to lose you!

# Brian Smallshaw:



Brian Smallshaw is the first recipient of the Conservancy's coveted "Champion Broombuster" Award. Brian was given the recognition at the April 23 Invasive Species event, and was awarded a t-shirt emblazoned with the Conservancy logo and the words "In the campaign to control invasive species, the wearer of this shirt is outstanding in our fields."

While the Conservancy award is certainly not meant to focus only on Scotch broom, Brian's work in the invasives campaign has had its greatest impact on broom and it's even-nastier European colleague, gorse. These two species present significant threats to our endangered Garry oak ecosystem, and for many years Brian led and inspired the campaign to remove both species from Garry oak meadowlands such as the Andreas Vogt Reserve. For many years Brian was the 'keeper of the broom pullers' the tool long considered to be most effective in broom and gorse removal. Brian spent huge amounts of his time and skills getting the pullers out to individuals and groups for 'broom/gorse' eradication. He also taught and inspired a great number of people, including the students of the Conservancy's Stewards In Training program, about the techniques and benefits of broom/gorse removal.

Over the last several years, Brian has been an outstanding campaigner and Conservancy volunteer. Among the many tasks he took on in addition to the invasives campaign, Brian edited and published several editions of the Acorn, sat on the Board, and along with Rachel Ogis was instrumental in starting, and then building and maintaining the Conservancy's web site.

Brian remains active in the campaign against these invaders, and on several days of the week he heads off for his early-morning South-end walk with a 10-kilogram broom puller over his shoulder. For the time being, Brian's neighbourhood Garry oak meadow ecosystems have some relief from the invaders. Thanks again Brian, for your example and service.

Note: If you know of someone who has been especially active in the campaign against invasive species, and who you feel should be recognized for her or his work, please notify the Salt Spring Conservancy office.

~ David Denning



## Sting

A bee, bronze and velvet  
lands on my bare foot,

begins to arrange  
its coat of pale dust,  
powdery blossom-life,

washes its face,  
entire bushy head  
with rapid black swipes,

brushes its furry  
belly and flanks  
with spikey hind legs –

my foot moves slightly in the sun.

the bee takes no notice, waves  
an antenna, conducts  
with its forearm  
a final sweep  
over the back of its head.

I wonder  
where it sheltered in the night,  
where it now stashes its bounty -

It tilts a glossy eye,  
reflects a small sun into mine.

I feel abashed –  
its trust and ease  
so close to my looming self.

Then it lifts off,  
a humming node of light,  
taking its sweetness  
to smack hard  
against the glass wall of my balcony,

makes it over on the third try  
to vanish into dark trees -

I think of the yellow bird I found  
hollowed by ants beneath my window,

the snake on the road  
twisted flat and dry.

~ Wendy Hilliard



# How to Reduce Window Bird-kill

We are all saddened when a bird is killed by hitting a house window. Large numbers also collide with towers, glass skyscrapers, power lines, and even the new windmills. As a cause of disappearing species and dwindling numbers of birds, these collisions might be second only to habitat destruction. (Bird-kills by domestic and feral cats are probably about equal to deaths by collision – that is another whole story.)

Bird deaths at house windows are estimated to be at least 300 million a year in the USA. For all collisions with buildings and towers, a conservative estimate is one billion birds per year, according to Dr. Daniel Klem who studied this for 34 years. The estimates are confirmed by data from Project Feeder Watch. One house in the USA was documented with 33 strikes per year. These astonishing numbers represent at least 800,000 birds killed per day by house windows in North America.

For comparison, the oil spill from the Exxon Valdez, 21 years ago, has been called by news media “a world-class environmental disaster”. Birds were the most notable victims and some 300,000 were killed. However the North American slaughter from house windows is equivalent to more than two of those oil spills each and every day! That receives almost zero coverage in the media, and most people are not aware of how serious it is.

About three-quarters of birds that collide with windows die. Half of them die quickly, almost always from head trauma and internal bleeding (not from broken necks). The others seem to recover and fly away, but studies show that every second one dies later of internal causes. (We heard a similar thing in 2009 when a famous actress fell while skiing in Quebec, seemed okay, but died a week later from internal bleeding in the head.)

**The problem.** Birds are accustomed to zooming through narrow openings in the woods, but they are not prepared for invisible barriers. The glass kills by (a) reflection and (b) transparency. In certain lights, birds see sky reflected in the window, or maybe a tree as shown in the photo. That signals suitable habitat so they go full speed ahead. In other lighting conditions, the glass is invisible. Windows on opposite sides of a house might look like a short-cut “tunnel”, but instead there is invisible glass.

People with computer connections can get more details of collisions and remedies from the Toronto organization FLAP ([www.flap.org](http://www.flap.org)) or the American Bird Conservancy ([www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/collisions](http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/collisions)).

**Remedies.** The only answer is to make glass visible to birds. There are several ways, and it depends on how much decoration you can tolerate on your windows, and how many dollars you think birds are worth. First of all, identify the windows with greatest problems, and apply remedies to them.



Some supposed remedies fail. Those black silhouettes of hawks, or patterns with marking pens just don't work. In general, such things inside the window do not solve the problem of outside reflections. Other demonstrated failures are owl decoys, blinking lights, or a single hanging plant or set of wind chimes on the outside.

## Layout and Design

- If you have bird feeders, birdbaths or nest boxes, **put them either very far away or very close to windows.** Research shows that deaths increase with distance, up to at least 10 metres away, so use more than 10 metres. Or instead, place the attraction **within** a metre of the window -- a bird seldom builds up enough momentum for injury.

- Don't plant a lot of trees or bushes close to big areas of glass.

- White cloth drapes or blinds help. They stop birds from seeing a pathway through, but they might not cure the outside reflection and they only work when closed.

- In design phase, substitute skylights or glass bricks for some windows. Commercial tinted glass is not suitable -- it reflects. Slant glass panels somewhat downward instead of vertical, so it reflects the ground instead of sky. (We did that when the building code required glass around our deck – it might be of some benefit..)

Film on the glass. A most elegant and effective remedy (but pricey) is a special film called *CollidEscape*. It is applied on the outside of glass to reduce reflections and transparency. The appearance from outside is like sandblasting. However, thousands of small perforations allow light to pass, so you still enjoy the view (see photo). Indeed, you can observe birds at a close-in feeder without startling them

Its life-span is probably much longer than five years. Cost is \$3.00 US per square foot if you refer to FLAP when you order; expensive but worth it, and maybe needed for only a few windows. To investigate, visit [www.lfdcollidescape.com](http://www.lfdcollidescape.com).

Screens outside the glass can be 100% effective. Cheapest is “Easy Deer Barrier” at Foxglove -- black plastic netting in one-inch squares. We stretched it on nails outside the glass

*Continued on page 10*

## Birdkill

*Continued from page 9*

panels of our deck, and on the most dangerous windows. I increased visibility by tying on short lengths of string. It is not pretty, but we can still see out, and it works. A similar plastic netting at the hardware store is “Bird d-Fence”. Soccer netting might be more visible. The B.C. government lists suppliers of various nettings for fruit crops ([www.aff.gov.bc.ca/berrie/publications/document/suppliers.pdf](http://www.aff.gov.bc.ca/berrie/publications/document/suppliers.pdf)).

The best would be *Ross Tree Netting*, a fine-gauge diamond-pattern black nylon net. Although not offered in Canada, packages are sold on many U.S. web sites such as [www.rachelsrobin.com](http://www.rachelsrobin.com) in Michigan. Outward view is apparently excellent and a bird-artist in Ohio reports that she even takes good photos.

Birds will see any of these nets, and if they are held out from the glass, even unwary birds will bounce off like a trampoline, and continue flying. The Ohio woman held the netting 25 cm out, using frames of painted one-inch PVC.

An excellent, complete assembled kit is offered for \$ US 29 at [www.birdscreen.com](http://www.birdscreen.com). Screening is held out from the window by hooks or suction cups. Vision out is little affected, according to the manufacturer (see photo). [Be cautious. This manufacturer will not ship by mail, and couriers sometimes charge huge broker’s fees to get an item across the border.]

Stuff hanging outside the glass works but you might not want it. Ribbons, decorative ropes or strings of ornaments have to be 5 centimetres apart, all across the glass, obscuring the view. There are also ready-made commercial items called FeatherGuards ([www.featherguard.com](http://www.featherguard.com)) and Wing Chimes ([www.flap.org](http://www.flap.org)) which are poultry feathers stuck cross-wise on a string. Shimmering coloured decorations or old CDs are other options. Such items might have short lives during our windstorms.

Strips of outdoor tape down the glass will also work, but would really spoil the view. Tape must be outside and contrasting. Vertical tape 2 cm wide must be no more than 10 cm apart (or 1-cm tape 5 cm apart). If horizontal, strips must be 5 cm apart. Insulating tape and non-reflective adhesive tape (e.g. Scotch Magic 810) offer good protection but do not last very long. BirdLife Switzerland sells such tape (rolls of 10 metres for 10 Swiss francs) if you are willing to do an online purchase in French ([www.birdlife.ch/f/service\\_shop.html](http://www.birdlife.ch/f/service_shop.html)) or write to them at SVS/BirdLife Switzerland, P.O. Box, Wiedingstr. 78, CH-8036 Zürich ([svs@birdlife.ch](mailto:svs@birdlife.ch)).

~ John B. Sprague



[ This article is reprinted with permission and some revision, from the summer 2009 *Oystercatcher*, newsletter of the Salt Spring Trail and Nature Club. John Sprague was recently editor of six volumes of the technical journal *British Columbia Birds*. Contact him if you want the sources of information (250-537-0760 or [sssprague@shaw.ca](mailto:sssprague@shaw.ca)). ]

## Western bluebirds

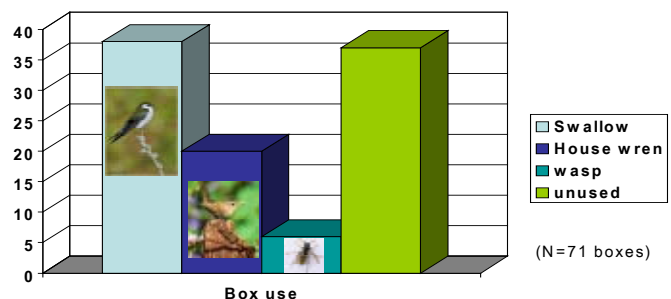
*Continued from page 1*



While it is disappointing that no bluebirds nested here, the boxes did provide habitat for other native bird species.

We continue building and erecting nest boxes in the hopes that bluebirds will be attracted from the San Juan Islands. The population there is doing very well: nesting has been successful and adults and young from previous years have returned (this year in early February). In addition, western bluebirds are rapidly expanding their range in northwestern United States, pushing northward into areas where nest boxes have been erected. Thus, we feel that there is an excellent chance that bluebirds will find their way back here.

### Bluebird Box Use (%) 2009



Over the past year, 130 new boxes were built, thanks to the able carpentry skills of Paul Linton, John DeHaan and Bill Griffiths. So far with help from Simon Henson and Donna DeHaan we have put up 90 of the new boxes, expanding the geographical coverage to Reginald Hill, the Meyer Road area, Trinity Western field station and other sites close to Beaver Point Road. A successful Adopt a Bluebird Box program initiated by Donna Martin before Christmas raised money to buy materials for more boxes and support our monitoring efforts. Our hope is that one day Salt Spring springs will be enlivened again by the flash of brilliant blue and the happy chirps of the western bluebird.

~ Susan Hannon



# Special thanks to our funders:

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The Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship  
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John Lefebvre  
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## SSIC Annual General Meeting

**Tuesday, June 15, 7 p.m.**  
**Lions Hall, 103 Bonnet Ave.**

With special presentation:  
**Living in the Rarest Ecosystem in BC.**

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 [ssic@saltspringconservancy.ca](mailto:ssic@saltspringconservancy.ca) or by regular mail. Opinions expressed here are the authors', not subject to Conservancy approval.

<p>Salt Spring Island Conservancy                  #201 Upper Ganges Centre,                  338 Lower Ganges Rd.                  Mail: PO Box 722,                  Salt Spring Island BC                  V8K 2W3                  Office hours: Tues/Wed/Thurs                  10 am - 3 pm                  Phone: 250-538-0318                  Fax: 250-538-0319  <a href="mailto:ssic@saltspringconservancy.ca">ssic@saltspringconservancy.ca</a>  <a href="http://www.saltspringconservancy.ca">www.saltspringconservancy.ca</a></p> <p>Executive Director: Linda Gilkeson</p> <p>Board of Directors:                  Maureen Bendick (President)                  Paul Burke                  Robin Ferry (Vice President)                  Jean Gelwicks (Secretary)                  John de Haan                  Susan Hannon                  Ashley Hilliard (Treasurer)                  Donna Martin                  Maureen Milburn                  Deborah Miller                  John Sprague                  Bob Weeden (Past President)                  Doug Wilkins</p> <p>Acorn Layout: Elizabeth Nolan</p>	<h3>Membership Application</h3> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Youth (Under 16)</td> <td>1 yr @ \$15 __</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Senior or Low-Income:</td> <td>1 yr @ \$20 __</td> <td>3 yr @ \$60 __</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Regular Single</td> <td>1 yr @ \$25 __</td> <td>3 yr @ \$75 __</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Regular Family</td> <td>1 yr @ \$35 __</td> <td>3 yr @ \$105 __</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Group/School</td> <td>1 yr @ \$35 __</td> <td>3 yr @ \$105 __</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Business</td> <td>1 yr @ \$55 __</td> <td>3 yr @ \$165 __</td> </tr> </table> <p>Name: _____                  Address: _____                  _____                  Postal Code: _____                  Phone: _____                  Email: _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This is a renewal for an existing membership</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Please send me the Acorn via email.                  (We NEVER give out members' email addresses to anyone!)</p>	Youth (Under 16)	1 yr @ \$15 __		Senior or Low-Income:	1 yr @ \$20 __	3 yr @ \$60 __	Regular Single	1 yr @ \$25 __	3 yr @ \$75 __	Regular Family	1 yr @ \$35 __	3 yr @ \$105 __	Group/School	1 yr @ \$35 __	3 yr @ \$105 __	Business	1 yr @ \$55 __	3 yr @ \$165 __	<h3>Donations</h3> <p>In addition to my membership fee above, I have enclosed my donation in the amount of:                  \$50 _ \$100 _ \$250 _ \$500 _ \$1000 _                  \$2500 _ \$5000 _                  Other _____</p> <p>Become a Conservation Friend with a donation of \$250.</p> <p>Tax receipts will be provided for donations of \$20 or more.</p>
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