

the Acorn

The Newsletter of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy Number 47, Spring 2011

April 30th was a fabulous day!



The Indridson family, SSI Conservancy staff and volunteers holding the new sign at the Alvin Indridson Nature Reserve.

...when we celebrated the dedication of the Alvin Indridson Nature Reserve with Alvin's family and many of our friends and supporters. A year and a half in the making, this 320-acre acquisition is the biggest land deal the Conservancy has ever done.

The new reserve is named after the late Alvin Indridson, whose family honoured his wishes to see the land kept as park land. Alvin was born in Manitoba, but lived most of his life in the Vancouver area. He loved the Gulf Islands and purchased the ex-forestry land that is now the reserve, in the late 1980's. Alvin and Sue intended to retire on the island but changed plans after Alvin's health became fragile in 1994.

The generosity of Alvin's family and their desire to follow his wishes were the source of the initial donation that made the project possible. We were very happy that three generations of his family were there to celebrate the event: his wife Sue, children Ian, Tracy and Vicky and grandchildren Vanessa, Bailey and Cameron.

After a presentation by staff biologist Robin Annschild on the ecological value of the land and some of the species that live there, SSI Conservancy President, Ashley Hilliard, thanked the many individuals and funding agencies who made the project possible. Local realtor, Gord Ellis, acted for the family throughout the project, finding the best way to carry out their wishes. Key early funds came from a bequest

by Lillian Hayden to BC Nature for use in protecting land. With the Indridson family's contribution, these funds enabled the Conservancy to apply for matching money from other sources. Over \$777,000 was received in October 2010 from the Nature Conservancy of Canada through the federal Natural Areas Conservation Program. Their local Coordinator of Conservation Projects, Katie Blake, attended the event and thanked the Conservancy for bringing such an ecologically valuable property forward for consideration. Ashley especially thanked the many private donors that gave so generously during the public fundraising campaign in December (it was great to see so many of you at the dedication). Last, but certainly not least, Kerry Hunt, Regional Manager for Shaw Communications, presented their generous cheque for \$235,300, which was the final boost of funding that made it possible for us to finalize

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“Si Monumentum Requiris, Circumspice”



President Ashley Hilliard presents photo of the Alvin Indridson Nature Reserve to Katie Blake, Nature Conservancy of Canada.

“If you seek his memorial, look around you” is the epitaph inscribed on the simple tomb of the English architect Christopher Wren in his masterpiece, St Paul’s Cathedral.

The same sentiment, I suggest, applies to the special places on Salt Spring Island that have been preserved for the benefit of nature and the enjoyment of visitors and residents alike through the foresight of generous donors. Salt Spring has a long tradition of donations of land to the community, including our community churches and halls. In the area of parks, examples that come to mind are Mouat Park; Peter Arnell Park; the Jack Fisher trail leading to the summit of Mount Erskine; and of course our Crown jewel, Ruckle Park, including the recent generous addition to that park made by Chris Hatfield.

Then there are the Conservancy’s own reserves and protected areas, starting with the Mill Farm, on Musgrave Road, now CRD park reserve land, the first project that the fledgling Conservancy undertook back in 1996. Each of our nature reserves, Andreas Vogt, Manzanita Ridge, Mount Erskine and North View, is the result of personal generosity of either one individual or of many, and each represents a tremendous gift to the island.

To the illustrious list of benefactors can now be added those who played a role in creating Salt Spring’s newest nature reserve – the 320 acre Alvin Indridson Nature Reserve.

We were fortunate to receive early support from a bequest of Lillian May Hayden, a Victoria resident. As reported in the fall 2010 edition of the magazine of BC Nature:

“Lillian May Hayden made a most generous bequest to BC Nature for land acquisition in the area of southern Vancouver Island. Lillian made the bequest to BC Nature’s Land for Nature program ... She loved nature and the outdoors.

“In May, BC Nature’s board of directors approved the distribution of Lillian’s bequest to two worthy land acquisitions identified by the Victoria Natural History Society and the Saltspring Trail and Nature Club.”

The all-important final funding for the reserve came from a most generous grant from Shaw Communications. I thank them and particularly, JR Shaw, the company’s founder.

The reserve is named in honour of long-time owner Alvin Indridson, whose wish that the land be preserved as a park his family made a reality.

The land stands as a visible and permanent memorial to these three families, as well as to all other donors, of whatever amount, whose generous support made this reserve possible. Thank you all.

If you would like to consider your own conservation legacy, I invite you to look into our planned giving program. There are many ways to contribute, including gifts in a will of money, securities, real estate or personal property. A well-planned charitable gift benefits both the Conservancy and the donor (or their estate) and offers tax advantages. We encourage you to consult with your legal and financial advisors to discuss what is best for you. We would be pleased to work with your independent advisors to help you in making your decision.

One of our goals is to build up our Acorn Fund, a permanent endowment fund designed to be a source of stable funding for the Conservancy. The Acorn Fund will ensure that we are here over the long-term to protect our existing nature reserves and, we hope, future ones on our special island. A gift to our Acorn Fund could be a fitting legacy for the future. For more information on planned giving, please visit our website at www.saltspringconservancy.ca.

We have prepared a brochure “Giving for the Future” that outlines the many options for planned giving and one that describes our Acorn Fund. We would be pleased to put copies of this material in the mail to you. Just call us at 250-538-0318, or drop by our office during office hours (10 a.m to 3 p.m, Tuesday through Thursday).

~ Ashley Hilliard



Conservation in a Changing Climate

By Peter Ommundsen

Conservation efforts on Salt Spring have in past focused on public education, purchase of land, preservation of biodiversity, and the protection of particular ecosystems. With a changing climate however, there may be a need for additional initiatives, some of which are discussed below.

Forecasting

Climate change requires anticipating how the environment may look years from now. If sea level rises, there will be a shift in intertidal zones and coastline vegetation. If there is a general rise in summer temperatures, as predicted by the Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium, there will be shrinkage if not extinction of some island ecosystems. Drought-tolerant species elsewhere may be headed to Salt Spring as they expand their ranges. Although large scale regional climate forecasting is plagued with uncertainty due to local variation in topography and moisture transfer patterns, prudence dictates that we monitor trends as best we can. And we need to watch for “tipping points,” when a threshold is reached and a sudden, massive change occurs.

Triage planning

A triage plan diverts aid away from species unlikely to persist or recover in the face of climate change. Not only is this a tough call scientifically, but triage planning may also have a negative public relations impact, resulting in loss of patronage and loss of funding. Nevertheless, triage planning is increasingly under discussion in other jurisdictions.

Refugia protection

A refugium is a habitat that avoids significant climate change effects, where vulnerable plants and animals may have the best chance of survival. If such sites can be identified now, they can be protected as future conservation reserves. For example, the Canadian Center for Climate Modeling and Analysis predicts that the future climate will be inhospitable for western redcedar on much of Salt Spring. To avoid excessive loss of western redcedar habitats, it may be possible now to identify the most likely refugia and protect those sites.

Invasion management

Native species, when climate-stressed, are more vulnerable to replacement by exotic invasive species, and invasion management is increasingly an activity of the conservancy. On Salt Spring we have already been invaded by broom, gorse, ivy, carpet burweed, hogweed, Himalayan blackberry, rabbits, coypus, bullfrogs, and a host of others.



Alvin Indridson with grandson Mitchell Reynolds

Conservation of environmental services

If native biodiversity declines, conservation must focus on preserving natural cycles. This is “function-based” as opposed to “place-based” conservation. Examples are managing water availability, maintenance of pollination, fire protection, and planting of trees for carbon sequestration. In some cases it may be necessary to assist the migration of new species to the island to replace those being lost, or to create novel ecosystems.

Conservation for climate change mitigation

Land use decisions can incorporate consequences, as various habitat features may interact with climate. Forest reserves and marine blue carbon habitats lock up carbon that otherwise might be in the atmosphere accelerating global warming. Land surface properties can determine cloud formation and local weather events. For example, plant cover composition determines surface reflectivity (albedo) and water conductance to the atmosphere, and habitat roughness influences convective heat transfer.

Cooperative financing

Climate changes can place extraordinary demands on the budgets of conservancies. In some cases protection of carbon stores has been funded by polluters as a means of offsetting their carbon emissions. (Land acquisition financed by offsets must meet the test of “additionality,” meaning that the forest must store more carbon over a 100-year period than if the transaction had not occurred. The test that is missing is “avoidability,” that is addressing lifestyle changes required to

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Hope for our Future

As a volunteer and new coordinator of the Stewards In Training Program I often hear professionals talking about the dire situation of our planet. With the recent earthquakes, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in Japan, many people on Salt Spring take these events as further proof of our impending doom.

But I beg to differ. Yes, we are on a slippery slope; there is no denying that. However, the young people I've met lately are choosing to get involved in the Conservancy's schools program and are giving me hope for the future.

Recently, I had the pleasure of talking to the Grade 8 students at Salt Spring Island Middle School about Dead Zones in our oceans. To be honest, I knew very little myself about these increasing areas of our oceans where life can no longer exist, largely due to excessive nutrients being put in our waters, causing algae blooms. When the Schools Committee chose this topic for our grade 8 program, St. Mary Lake was still a low oxygen lake that was safe to use.

Little did we know how local the topic of Dead Zones was going to be in less than a month's time. One class discussed the future of this issue with some reluctance, until one voiced that with knowledge comes action. Now that they had the knowledge that Dead Zones exist in our oceans and even in our own lakes, they could begin to make changes in their behaviour and ask questions about the topic to community members.

It's not just this one program that has given me hope for our planet in the hands of the next generation. It's the High School students as well. Several students at Gulf Islands Secondary involved in the high school's EAGER (Environmental Action Group Encouraging Responsibility) volunteered to lead younger students in our April program taking grades 6 and 7 to Ford Lake, rearranging class schedules and jobs. Not only do these students act as mentors for the younger students, but the younger students see the enthusiasm the EAGER students have for our environment. The high school students' own curiosity and fascination with nature sparks those very characteristics in the younger students.

The high school students not only make caring for the environment significant for these younger students, but they have a way of showing them that the future is not bleak. It's a responsibility. And like it or not, kids want more responsibility, they are being given one of the most important things we have to be responsible for, care of our planet.

David Denning shared a thought with the eighth grade classes that I continue to share with the students I meet. The generation before mine felt the planet was a garden of Eden. Everything we could possibly want or need was there for us to take. My generation quickly realized that wasn't true: we are using our planet's resources more quickly than it can replace them. The generation that our Stewards In Training program targets now has the responsibility to choose what we do about it. Seeing our youth in action, first hand, I know they will make the right decisions.

~ Kris Fullbrook



Job Opportunity

Executive Director, SSI Conservancy

After four years, our current ED, Linda Gilkeson, is retiring at the end of 2011. To learn more and apply for this interesting, rewarding and challenging position (never a dull moment!) see the job description posted on our home page: www.saltspringconservancy.ca



Kerry Hunt, Regional Manager for Shaw Communications presents their gift to President Ashley Hilliard.

Funding Reinstated

The BC Government's Gaming Commission eliminated all funding to environmental organizations a couple of years ago. However, they still have emphasis on children and this year they have reinstated our funding. We are breathing a huge sigh of relief and thanking them profusely.

This year we also received funding from Ducks Unlimited, the Hamber Foundation, Thrifty's Smile Card Program, and the SSI Foundation. The SSI Foundation has given us funds to help add a Kindergarten / grade one program to our program. We will be starting this program in June and are looking for volunteers. There will be games, singing, lots of action and lots of fun. If you are a kid at heart, this is the program for you.

This spring we have delivered our water studies program to the grade eights in March. In April we ran our Wetland Program at Ford Lake with the Grade 6 and 7's – using their senses in the marsh, learning a bunch about beavers and beaver ponds, looking at invertebrate adaptations, and studying the health of a stream. In May we will be working with grades 4 & 5 at Burgoyne Bay doing our Marine Studies Program and then in June we will introduce our new Pilot Project Kindergarten/grade one program.

We are looking for any adults who would like to spend time with young people in nature to act as volunteers to help us deliver our program. We cannot run this program without our wonderful volunteers. Call 250-653-9870 kris.fullbrook@yahoo.ca if you are interested in volunteering. We will train you.

~ Jean Gelwicks

School Program Committee Chair



Arbutus Seasons

Songs to a Tree

By Wendy Hilliard

I

How do I love thee?

*In spring they shake loose
small pale flowers
like scattered pearls
or miniature porcelain pots
that roll across the moss -*

Each day I rediscover you -

*Today it is the rain sliding down
your glossy stems*

*each one a tiny baby tooth
such as a woman finds
in the bottom of her jewel box
and holds in her palm,*

*limbs bright and slick
with sky and cloud and wind,*

*bronzy skin rinsed,
cool beneath my hand -*

*tender with the passage
of children, flowers,
this radiant day in May.*

Are you merely a tree?

*Why does your presence
startle me,
stop me on the path,
take away my breath?*

*They push off from cliffs,
spiral up to the light
like divers spinning
to the surface,*

*My eyes follow your sinuous line -
inner elbow
rising spine
twist of muscle
hollow of knee -*

*ravenous for air -
Leaves break against clouds
in glinting waves.*

more creature than tree.

*High branches flare lace fans
edged in ivory bloom,
stitched with bees,
jewelled hummingbirds,
yellow swallowtails.*

*Limbs flow along air,
skin brushing wind - -*

*Leaves are clappers
in the blue bell of sky.*

*Glazed with spring rain,
she lifts her body to soft light,
yearns from earth to sky -
sunlight moves from cloud
to lick her shining leaves.*

Upcoming Events

Friday, June 3

Ticking Oceans - A Naturalist's look into Ocean Waters and What's in their Future. Ocean's day presentation by David Denning. Get up close and personal with some of the most important micro-life surrounding our island, observe the marine life that makes ocean ecosystems tick, and explore implications of changing climate and human endeavours along our coast. Community Gospel Hall. 7 p.m.

Saturday, June 4

Beach Walk with David Denning. Explore the mysteries of the beach. \$20. Preregister with SSIC. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

<http://saltspringconservancy.ca/events>

Ed. apology: We omitted the last line of Wendell Berry's poem In the Peace of Wild Things on page 5 of the Winter ACORN. It reads: "I rest in the grace of the world, and am free." RBW

(Ed. Note: Wendy Hilliard permitted us to reproduce the introduction and first section of her poem in this ACORN. We plan to print the rest in the Fall. RBW)

Report on the Western Bluebird Project 2010/2011

If you see a flash of iridescent blue, please take note! You may have seen a Western Bluebird. This colourful member of the Thrush family used to be common on Salt Spring Island, but in the 1950's its numbers began to decline.

By the mid 1990's Western Bluebirds were no longer breeding in southwestern BC. Early declines in this species were likely caused by loss of nesting habitat as logging and urban development accelerated. As populations dwindled, other factors such as reductions in their insect prey due to pesticide application, and competition for nest holes with the introduced House Sparrow and European Starling, made it harder for them to breed.



Male nestling Western Bluebird on San Juan Island



Nest of Western Bluebird on San Juan Island

However, there is hope that Western bluebirds may some day make Salt Spring their home again. Within the last five years, transient birds have been spotted in the south end of the island and bluebirds have been reintroduced to San Juan Island, a mere 30 km away. In 2010 bluebirds were breeding on 12 territories on San Juan Island and 84 nestlings were produced, the most to date. I visited the island last June and spent a couple of days working with the recovery team and observing breeding bluebirds and the sorts of habitats they like. One of the recovery team members, Gary Slater, visited Salt Spring in April and told us that our habitat is very good and that we should be able to support a population of bluebirds. This spring, a pair from the San Juan Island population was found setting up territory on Lopez Island, 11 km away.

The big news is that a pair of bluebirds seen in Metchosin in late April included a banded one, likely from the San Juan population. Thus, we feel there is an excellent chance that bluebirds will eventually find their way over to Salt Spring.

Biologists and volunteers with the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, in partnership with the Gary Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team and B.C. Ministry of Environment, are working hard to bring the bluebird back to Salt Spring. We continue building and erecting nest boxes for bluebirds. During the 2010 breeding season 155 bluebird boxes were available for use in the Fulford Valley, Mt. Tuam, Mt Maxwell,

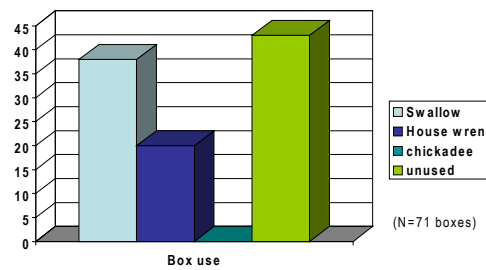
Andreas Vogt Nature Reserve, Reginald Hill, Beaver Point Rd area and Burgoyne Bay Provincial Park. This was more than double the number of boxes that were available in 2009. Unfortunately no Western Bluebirds used the boxes but 47 Violet Green Swallow, 1 Tree Swallow, 40 House Wren and 3 Chestnut-backed Chickadee pairs nested in the boxes. As in 2009, about 40% of the boxes were not used by birds. So, we have some free boxes for bluebirds to use when they make it to the island.

Over the past year, 50 new boxes were built, thanks to the able carpentry skills of Tony MacLeod. Thirty-one new boxes were erected and we replaced 6 old ones to be ready for the 2011 breeding season. Thanks to Tony MacLeod, Paul Linton, Donna Martin and Rodney Poldman for helping with nest checks and putting up boxes and to the 22 landowners who host bluebird boxes on their land.

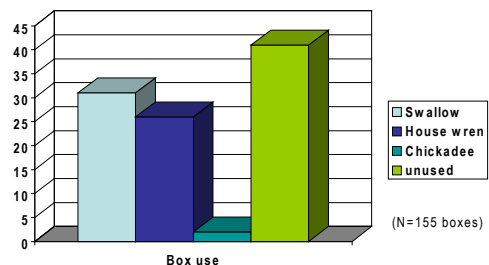
~ Susan Hannon



Bluebird Box Use (%) 2009



Bluebird Box Use (%) 2010



Corvids: In the Company of Hunters

Blue Lake, Washington Pass, North Cascades. Trees here find excuses not to grow. We have found an opening where the mid-October sun warms the mat of bearberry and *Luetkia*. Our packs are open, lunch spreads from them to our knees. On soft wings four Gray Jays surround us. We share. We see our own image in their jetty black wild eyes. Wire-thin toes curl and grasp, there is the scaly feel of reptilian feet, the prick of sharp toenails.

Gray jays, Canada jays, whiskey-jacks, camp robbers: lots of noms de plumes. They perched on our tent at Cathedral Lakes Provincial Park, lunched with us on a fog-shrouded Strathcona ridge, met us at our car in Tweedsmuir Provincial Park. For three decades they were at every creekside family picnic in Alaska's Interior, the beggar-emissaries of wildness at every campsite from salmon stream to timberline. They always caught our interest. We always remarked how clever they are.

In fact, Gray Jays are smart. It runs in the family – the corvid clan of magpies, nutcrackers, jays, crows and ravens. I've often wondered why, and I guess there are several reasons. For one thing, they all are omnivores, which means carrying many images in the mind about food and where it can be found. Most of them cache food, forcing memory neurons to do push-ups. Corvids are highly social, too, with strong family or clan bonds, and different roles for young and old, males and females, leaders and followers in the super-organism families and flocks comprise. The social beast needs to recognize group members and know strangers when it sees them. Communication gets complex. Among corvids, something very close to language is achieved. One more wrinkle: many corvids follow predators, betting their energy coins that there will be a kill and scraps. They have to know a predator when they see it, and judge its behaviour cunningly. When we humans see jays and their kin applying their natural mental abilities to us, they seem – and are – clever indeed.

Corvids are omnivores, for sure, but many of them rely on a special food that carries them through lean seasons. The big, rich, seeds we call nuts do the job for jays wherever the climate favors mast production. The bond between Clarke's Nutcrackers and pines with fat seeds is a thing of legend. Blue Jays of the hardwood regions of North America forage for beech, oak and hickory nuts – either fresh or cached – for months every year. Steller's Jays south of Canada, and Scrub Jays everywhere, follow suit. Nuts are available just as a growing season ends and a skimpy season begins, they are portable and rot-resistant. And talk about power bars! Little wonder that these birds have honed their seek-store-recover

skills to a keen edge.

Things are different in the North. No mast crop. A smothering blanket of snow conceals all during long winters. (As Alaskans say of an arctic year, with an implied boast, "Eleven months winter, one month damn late in the fall.") Gray Jays, carcass gleaners and scrap foragers extraordinaire, survive handily under the frigid continental high-pressure cells of the interior. They are known to every villager, trapper, and suburban householder from Newfoundland to Nome as thieves of dog food, relentless nippers at game hung outdoors, and tyrants of the bird feeder. Possibly Aladdin's rub did bring a Geni from the lamp, but northerners know that the



Steller's Jay by Laura Martens, age 10

touch of whetstone on knife blade brings jays.

Ravens, too, are master foragers and followers of big predators. Lions and leopards in the semi deserts of Somalia glance skyward at White-necked Ravens, wolves have their ebony-feathered entourage of Common Ravens. Everywhere, ravens follow human hunters, an association that has lasted 2 million years and counting. I was an actor in this ancient play for the 20 years I hunted caribou and moose for our winter meat. Climbing through the thinning boreal forest to timberline, then along alpine ridges, I would hear the rhythmic bellows-whoosh of raven wings overhead and know I was being watched. Hours might pass before a distant belling call or raucous shriek proved their continuing attention. Let a shot hammer from hill to hill, and ravens would be overhead again, or become dark, humpy silhouettes at the skyline. When I finished packing out my prize (10 loads for most moose, 5 for a caribou if I saved an especially glossy hide) they would make a confirming inspection. Oddly, I thought, they often didn't bother the remains until the next morning, but come they would, and within a week ravens, jays, weasels, wolves and foxes would finish all but hoof, hide, and heavy bone.

In the subarctic or arctic winter, incidentally, corvids can use only game that has been freshly butchered by bear, wolf or person. Many a caribou dying of drowning, disease, or the bullet of a hunter who lost the wounded runaway, remains untouched until deep spring, encased first in its undamaged hide, later frozen solid.

Ravens that follow hunters get food but give something in return. Throughout the vast sweep of the circumpolar and circumboreal lands hunters use ravens as their eyes in the sky. From craggy perches and at normal flying elevations

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What Good is It?

Birds fall from Kauaian skies on cloudy October nights. They are fledgling Newell's shearwaters on their first flight from mountain burrows beneath uhule ferns. Instinctively they keep stars above and darkness below, but now the lights of towns and resorts confuse them. Naive and bewildered, they fall or land clumsily onto roads. Unable to fly from flat ground, they fall prey to cats and cars. People sometimes rescue them.

Lihue's high school football field, alight on autumnal Friday game nights, has been tough on shearwaters. In 2005 the US Fish and Wildlife Service, responsible for endangered bird protection, advised the County of Kauai to shield the lights so they aimed only downward. "Too expensive," said the County. "Well," suggested the FWS, "how about playing football on Saturdays in daylight?" "Too hot," said players and fans. "Play soccer: shorts are cooler." "Wrong game," was the reply. The uproar was loud. Change didn't begin until, in 2010, the Justice Department threatened action. Some games were switched to daytime. Shields will be in place for the 2011 season, officials promise. County funds are in an escrow account to cover fines if birds fall on the field in the future.

Behind all this is a question asked millions of times by folks immersed above their eyeballs in the industrial and post-industrial world: What good are they? What good, indeed, is a foot-long seabird, rarely seen even by birders, nesting in its few remaining hundreds only on one or two Hawaiian islands? It ain't pretty, it can't sing, and you can't eat it: forget it.

It has been 2400 years since Protagoras tossed off his one-liner, "Man is the measure of all things." We act today as if we were disciples. We drag outlandish things into our weighing room – the one with dollar signs on the door. What is a view worth to a homeowner? A snowstorm to a Winter Games organizer? A bee to an alfalfa grower? A twinkle-winged bat to a verandah rocker? A severed leg? Bacteria after an offshore oil spill? Beauty anywhere?

Why not ask what nature does for us? We are, after all, our main concern. Nothing else even has the capacity for concern, we assume so conveniently.

A couple of reasons: One is that of the millions of forms life takes, we have a bare inkling of how only a tiny fraction relate to us. Take bats, for instance, creatures we know comparatively well. Ugly, clingy, smelly things they are, prone to drinking blood and entangling in hair and stinking in unused fireplaces. Maybe they eat a few mosquitoes, but not enough to say so. Maybe they do pollinate a lot of tropical and subtropical plants, maybe they are good long-distance dispersers of forest fruits, but these are vague and unquantified alleged "goods." But there is more news: scientists have discovered that big bats are phenomenally long-lived; maybe they harbour clues to the mysteries of

human aging. As well, we now know that bats are carriers of bacterial and viral diseases, but rarely show symptoms. If we knew why, would we learn crucial things about human immune system failures?

No, I can't tell you what good Nooksack River dace or snail darters are, or Vancouver Island marmots or yellow montane violets or any of millions of other living things. What I do know is that scores of revelations of nature's practical worth to us are in the news monthly, year after year. An article in the January 18 (Victoria, BC) Times Colonist caught my eye as the paper aimed toward the recycle bin. A young BC scientist, reading that Costa Rican morpho butterflies use patterns of ultra-tiny holes to create the species' hallmark blue, decided to mimic the idea as a counterfeit-proof way of identifying passports, banknotes, etc. He has pitched to the technique to the Bank of Canada and the US Federal Reserve Bank.

The best answer to the "What good...?" question is that we don't know, yet.

Another problem is that human welfare is a moving target, a will-o-the-wisp on steroids. To First Nations people of the North American plains, bison were the basis of life itself. Ranchers of the invading wave of Europeans knew bison as a plague and an abomination. Now, with the monoculture of annual grains, the pride and folly of agribusiness, in serious trouble, scientists are trying to design an alternative polyculture of perennial grains in which grazers like bison, well adapted to prairie living, could convert some of the production to meat. Re-inventing the prairie, you might say. What good are bison? It depends...

We are clever and powerful but short-sighted and me-centered, not a good combination in a world in which extinction is forever. "The first rule of intelligent tinkering," Aldo Leopold wrote, "is to save all the pieces."

Finding practical value in wild creatures helps save them. So much the better if their value is immediate, direct, and monetarily measurable. But we aren't trying very hard to look, and a universe of ignorance faces us. What else might save the pieces?

One answer is love. (E.O. Wilson called it "biophilia," but love will do.) Many of us do love nature, certainly the particular facets of it with which we have had vivid, exhilarating, addictive encounters. Such feelings need no practical justification. I stood one July day in my orchard, watching bumble bees visit hawkweed in bloom. A dozen bees roamed a hundred flowers. At each solid landing the yellow flower nodded. Glancing over the whole patch at once, I saw a congregation giving thanks. I did not calculate the contribution made to the bee's survival by the flowers, nor the consequent benefit to me next spring when fruit trees needed pollination. It wasn't a transaction, it was a gift.

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**Notice of Annual General Meeting of the
SSI Conservancy
Friday, June 17, 2011
Lion's Hall, 103 Bonnet Ave.**

7:00 Business Meeting: Reports on our exciting year; resolutions to be passed and a proposed change to the Constitution (see below).

7:30 Special presentation: New Discoveries: Rare Species on Salt Spring by Robin Annschild, Senior Biologist. Robin will talk about the newest species found on the island and provide the latest results of work with landowners protecting Sharp-tailed snakes, Western Painted Turtle and amphibians.

Change to the SSI Conservancy Constitution

The national Ecological Gifts Program of Environment Canada has instituted new requirements for organizations to be eligible recipients for EcoGifts (a tax benefit program for people who donate land to registered land conservancies). They are concerned about the possible disposition of EcoGift properties in the event a recipient organization ceases operations. While our Constitution has the standard clause providing for such an eventuality, Environment Canada is making it a requirement that an additional sentence be added to that clause.

Paragraph #5 of the SSIC Constitution currently reads:

In the event of dissolution of the Society, the assets of the Society remaining after the satisfaction of its debts and liabilities shall be given or transferred to such organization or organizations promoting the same or similar purposes of this society as may be determined by the members of this Society at the time of dissolution, provided that such organization is a registered charity recognized by the department of National revenue as qualified as such under the provisions of the Income Tax Act of Canada or such provisions now in effect or subsequently amended.

The proposed change is to add the following sentence at the end of this paragraph 5:

In the case of assets that are ecological gifts received by the society pursuant to the Ecological Gifts Program, such assets shall be given or transferred to one or more eligible Ecological Gifts Program recipients, before or separate from any payment of the organization's debts.

Conservation and Climate Change

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avoid the pollution in the first place.) It seems clear that the scale and complexity of climate changes will require a new or redirected stream of tax dollars at all government levels, as well as private expenditures.

Root cause management

Conservation organizations in past have often failed to advocate management of social and economic factors that drive climate change, a phenomenon termed the "Nero syndrome." One example is human population growth. Each hour some 8,000 people are added to the planet in excess of those that die, overwhelming efforts to reduce fossil fuel emissions and accelerating the need for land clearing. The Canadian birth rate is about fifty percent higher than the death rate, the fertility rate is rising, and a strong ecological case can be made to advocate a Canadian family size of one child or less. Had conservation organizations engaged politicians, commentators, health care workers, and curriculum designers on such issues over past decades, we might now have a sustainable population size.

Educational priorities

Natural history education, including modified conservancy school programs, can attune the attention of young people to climate issues. Students in the field can be asked to plot simple food chains using life forms around them, trace carbon through its natural cycle, and anticipate the climate effects of a simple carbon budget. They can be asked to rank the relative climate impact of various lifestyles using simple work sheets. All such activities might encourage climate-friendly behaviour from a new generation of citizens.

Further Reading

Hagerman S, et al. 2010. Expert views on biodiversity conservation in an era of climate change. *Global Environmental Change* 20: 192–207

Murtaugh, P.A. and M.G. Schlax. 2009. Reproduction and the carbon legacy of individuals. *Global Environmental Change* 19:14-20

Peter Ommundsen is a Stewardship Committee member and was the Conservancy representative on the Climate Action Council.



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the birds see a bigger area, and with more acute vision, than trudging hunters. Spotting game, ravens call in a particular way and fly over the animal repeatedly, often doing half-rolls as they pass. "Emptying their basket of good luck," hunters of northern Alaska say. Long association of bird and hunter make the meaning of call and tumbling flight crystal clear, links in the same cooperative plan that African badgers (ratels), honey-guides (birds) and Bushmen developed to secure the golden prize of honey for all.

Inevitably, ravens have become fabulous in the human imagination. "In the Dark Time," say the legends of First Nations people of North America's Northwest, "Raven stole a box from an old man. He opened it, and discovered that it contained Light that made Earth incredibly lovely. Flying off, Raven dropped his treasure. The box broke, and pieces of ricocheting light became the moon, the sun, the stars." "Long ago," Beringian First Nations relate, "a man came to Raven the Creator for help. An evil spirit in the form of an unpredictable wind had entered homes, keeping all awake with its constant moaning. 'O, Woe, O Woe; No Hope, No Hope; Yes-No, Yes-No; O Woe.' Raven turned this uncertain spirit into the first shaman, who gave predictions and advice as Yes-No; everyone respected him because he was always right."

Among the Cherokee, Raven-Mocker is the worst evil spirit because it steals years from people and adds them to its own life. Raven priests are drawn on Lascaux cave walls. Celtic bards sang of Raven. Australian aboriginal paintings from the Dreamtime depict them. And so on, wherever Raven flies, even onto the bust of the goddess of wisdom in Edgar Allen Poe's study.

Make prayers to the Raven.
Raven that is,
Raven that was,
Raven that will always be.
Make prayers to the Raven.
Raven, bring us luck.

~ Bob Weeden



Cover story continued

the acquisition.

Ashley then asked all of the Indridson family members to come up to be thanked by the community (to much clapping and cheering) and to be presented with commemorative photographs of the new reserve. Sue Indridson and grandchildren Bailey and Cameron then unveiled the permanent sign that will be placed on the property. To conclude the event, Sue was presented with an original sculpture of a red-wing blackbird by local artist, Paul Burke. This turned out to be more fitting that we could have imagined as she told the audience that it was one of Alvin's

What Good is It? continued from page 8

Love is enormously powerful in human society, but seems, in politics, to go to ground. From a half-century of environmental activism I can vouch that it is a rare advocate for nature who even tries to win a fight with arms of passion. We did not often say, though in our hearts we felt it, that "Clayaquot Sound is beautiful. I love it. Stop logging." Rather, we talked of the economic dependency of First Nations people on the products of the natural forest, the dependence of commercial fishers on healthy streams and lakes, the tourists' dislike of stumps. It may be, as critics have written, that in choosing the language of pragmatics modern environmentalism has carpentered its own ceiling and walls, granting to others the more expansive field of deep human values.

Love may not be a stand-alone alternative to utility as means of saving nature, but why not as half of a partnership? Love and pragmatics both have weaknesses. Narrowly defined and badly informed "practicality" can make us careless, losing things we later want back. Love that is no more than thoughtless sentiment can prevent us from acting toward wild things with wisdom. Bambi did us no favours. Yet just as surely as love can buy time while we find our full pragmatic interest in nature, discovering the usefulness of a species can buy time until we can love it for what it is.

~ Bob Weeden



Sue Indridson and grandchildren Bailey and Cameron Istace unveil the Alvin Indridson Nature Reserve sign.

favourite birds.

So what's next? We will be continuing the biological surveys and working on a management plan for the reserve this summer, also removing debris, such as abandoned vehicles and junk from illegal camping. Once trails on the property are established, they will be open to the public for recreational hiking. Our warden for the reserve is Doug Wilkins and he will be building a team of volunteers to help with trail maintenance and restoration activities.

~ Linda Gilkeson



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A tiny acorn sprouts a song

The poem entitled 'Home for Supper' by Bob Weeden appeared in the October 2008 issue of the Acorn as part of his reflections on Earth Day. Anke Smeele was so taken with the words that she commissioned Sheila Hilton Johnson to compose the musical accompaniment for the Salt Spring Singers. The song had its 'world premier' when it was sung at their concert on May 7 and 8.

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 or by regular mail. Opinions expressed here are the authors'.

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