



# Mayne Island Conservancy News

Spring, 2017



*Article by Rob Underhill,  
photo by Mick Thompson*

## Housing Shortage Hits Mayne Island

You may have heard about the current housing shortage on Mayne Island. As the inventory of homes for sale has decreased, so has rental availability. This has created a challenging problem for our community that will require us to work together to solve. There is another housing shortage happening on Mayne you may not have heard as much about.

Many of our forest-dwelling non-human neighbours also struggle to find suitable housing. Species such as Western Screech Owl, Northern Saw-whet owl, multiple species of bats, wrens, woodpeckers, and amphibians require special habitats found more commonly in old forests. The problem is 88% of the existing forests on Mayne Island have been logged in the last 100 years! As a result, many characteristics associated with old forests such as dead and dying trees, snags, large fallen trees and branches are scarce.

The good news is you can do something about this housing shortage. In fact, all you have to do is nothing! If we let them, our young forests will mature and naturally acquire these special micro-habitats. If we allow dead and dying trees to naturally decompose we can provide valuable habitat for these species. If you have a dead tree that poses a danger to a structure or high-use area, you can reduce the height of the snag, removing the hazard, while still providing valuable habitat. Avoid raking fallen twigs and branches from the forest; these help build soil and are required for a healthy forest. Nature can be messy—learn to love it! We all like to clean up the yard and many of us are used to living in the manicured landscapes of urban centres. Now that you're on Mayne it's time to put away the rake, kick up the feet, pour a drink, and offer a cheers to that woodpecker digging for grubs in the fallen tree.

*By Malcolm Inglis*

## Welcome to the new look of our newsletter!

This revamping, and the electronic newsletter we recently began sending more or less monthly, follow our recent survey seeking your opinions of the Conservancy. We learned that you value the environmental work we do; the information we provide on the natural world; our workshops, films and other social events; and hearing about the many initiatives we undertake. You also let us know that most of you like to get information by email, many through Facebook, and that a significant number do like to get one or two paper newsletters each year.

We're heartened to learn that our environmental work is so appreciated, and we're committed to keeping it up. We've also learned that we can tell you about it a little differently. We've pared down this paper newsletter to make it more readable (we hope!) and put more emphasis on features about the natural world, with news about major initiatives like the Save St John Point campaign. And we'll try to keep you more up to date on our projects and events through our email newsletters, along with seasonal features about our plants and critter neighbours.

So thank you for helping us tune our communications, to make them work better for you. They will continue to evolve as we hear more from you, so email your thoughts to [info@conservancyonmayne.com](mailto:info@conservancyonmayne.com), drop by our office upstairs at the Rootseller in downtown Miners' Bay, or strike up a conversation with me or any director when you see us around the island.

## Birds: To Feed or Not to Feed

*Article by Michael Dunn*

Annually, fifty million North Americans feed birds and go through one million tons of seed doing so. The perennial question is whether this practice is good or bad for birds. Here are some of the known and suspected issues with bird feeders:

- Feeders contribute to the transfer of diseases among birds and between bird species.
- Feeders have changed the behaviour of predators of birds.
- Feeder seed waste attracts unwanted animals.
- Feeders contribute to or support artificial range extensions of bird species

How significant might these effects be on bird populations as a whole? Project FeederWatch, a continent-wide program, looked for trends in the 30 years of records on 98 feeder bird species. The key finding was that all the feeder bird populations were either stable or increasing and there were no significant differences between this group of birds and those that were infrequent feeder users. Despite this finding, it is estimated that feeders may only provide 25% of a bird's food needs. Feeders alone will not support healthy bird populations. Birds require adjacent habitat to meet the rest of their food needs. The planting and growing of native plant species that produce fruits, attract insects and produce a variety of seeds is a positive way to assist in the larger needs of birds. Some tips to help with some of these issues:

Clean and sanitize your feeders at least twice a season and do not let seed sit in wet conditions. Some molds are toxic to wild birds.

Research the types of seeds/foods specific species of birds found in your area like. Use quality seeds and have separate feeders for each seed type some distance apart. This way you reduce interspecies interactions and reduce disease transfer. Some folks suggest waiting at least a day between taking down an empty feeder and putting out the full one. This forces the birds to clean up the spilled seed on the ground before having another full feeder.



## Save St. John Point

By Helen O'Brian

I was out on the point the other day and witnessed exciting signs of spring, albeit somewhat late this year - a single fawn lily, the leaves of *Calypso bulbosa* (Fairyslipper), Alaska rein-orchids and Rattlesnake-plantain along with perky little blue-eyed Mary, stonecrop sedum and monkey flower. Then, tucked under a weathered fallen arbutus, I spotted a few large mushrooms of the bolete family. And, as spring advances, it's just going to get better and better. Returning along the northeast shoreline several eagles and turkey vultures were finishing the last morsels of a dead sea lion washed up on the shore a couple of weeks ago.

They say it takes a community to make things happen and they are indeed happening with the campaign to Save St. John Point. The goal to raise \$2 million from the Mayne Island community has climbed to over \$1.6 million - very impressive for this small island. Besides the pledges and donations that continue to come in the Mayne Island Brewery has a 'tip jar' producing revenue for the project. Nomadic Essentials has a soap, Rocks and Moss, specially created for the campaign with all proceeds going to the campaign. Al Maxwell and Bill Duggan ran a very successful on-line marine auction that raised over \$1,500. Astrid's Kitchen, with help from Tim and Brendan Hurley, have hosted three delicious and successful Supper and Soiree evenings with two more planned. Guided walks to the point have been very popular, introducing this beautiful property to many Mayne Islanders and friends. Artists on the Point will take place May 6/7 and 13/14 when the point will be available to artists of all disciplines to create works inspired by the point which they can donate, if they wish, to an auction the weekend of July 28/29. And, there are more fun events on the way so be sure to keep an eye on the website, <http://sjp.conservancyonmayne.com>.

To everyone who has donated or pledged to this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, we thank you so very much. The community support for this BIG project has been totally amazing.



## Return of the Rufous

One of my favourite rituals of spring is to seek out the very first flowers of the salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*). Once I've found a good patch of blooms, I settle in and listen for quick, low humming sound whizzing by my ears. There! A rufous hummingbird, hovering for salmonberry nectar. Winter is over.

The rufous hummingbird spends its winter months in Mexico, making its way northward as spring approaches. That's an awfully long haul for such a tiny bird. In fact, if you measure in body lengths, the rufous hummingbird has the longest migration in the bird world.

Having two homes, however, comes at a cost. And to survive a long and dangerous migration, timing is everything. One doesn't want to arrive too early; lack of blooming flowers (not to mention freezing spring temperatures) can be fatal. On the other hand, the more hesitant types may find all the good territories snapped up by the time they arrive. So there is strong pressure on the birds to time their arrival with the earliest of the nectar flowers in bloom. Around here, those are the salmonberries. Nowadays, mind you, a walk around our island's residential areas reveals dozens of exotic flowers that bloom before the salmonberries. Are the hummingbirds arriving earlier to take advantage of them? Well, not the rufous, at any rate. That niche seems to have been filled by the Anna's hummingbird, originally a bird of the south-western US that has moved into BC over the last fifty years.

Call them old-fashioned, but the rufous hummingbirds still keep to their traditional calendar, honed by trial and error over the millennia.



Article and image by Don Enright

Article and image by Karen Robinson

# Take a Walkabout

Having joined the Mayne Island Conservancy the spring after I purchased my property on Beechwood Drive, I immediately took advantage of the Conservancy's Walkabout program in order to learn more about both the native and invasive species on my land.

Biologist Rob Underhill and Conservancy Executive Director Michael Dunn met with me on a sunny May morning. Rob had brought a tree core sampler and he offered to determine the age of the tree of my choice. I had more than a few to choose from, but the Garry oak that grows up through the deck of my cabin was an easy winner. Rob took the sample, and when he saw how close together the lines were he told me he would have to count them under a microscope and get back to me on the tree's age.

The Walkabout was a valuable educational experience. The most visible invasive species on my property is the very aggressive Scotch broom. Rob pointed out other less obvious invaders, such as English hawthorn and English holly. We also discussed what is important for native species to thrive, particularly the Garry oaks, which are a key species in an endangered ecosystem.

Besides the educational benefits of the Walkabout, I got to know two like-minded people who are passionate about restoring native habitats on Mayne Island. Rob and Michael were knowledgeable and eager to help me get to know my property. Recently, Rob met with three of us neighbours on Beechwood to talk about stewardship of our land, particularly when it comes to eradication of the (\*&#!) broom.

And of course, later on the day of the Walkabout, Rob phoned to inform me that the Garry oak growing through my deck is well over 200 years old!



As part of the Priority Ecosystems Restoration Project, property owners sit with Biologist Rob Underhill to create a natural areas management plan that will span four properties.

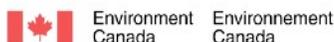
# Got Bats?

If you have bats roosting on your property we would love to come in June to identify and count them! No one knows exactly which species of bats live on Mayne Island—let's find out! Call us at 250-539-5168 or email at [info@conservancyonmayne.com](mailto:info@conservancyonmayne.com)



P\_Erickson-McGee, Habitat Acquisition Trust

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