



VALDES ISLAND CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

President's Message Warren Warttig



Warren Warttig with Western Screech Owl

Welcome to another annual installment of the VIC Newsletter. Along with our e-blasts (that from feedback, members are appreciating) the annual Newsletter is another way to update you on what we've been up to on your behalf.

I would first like to extend a thank you to our long-serving, detailed oriented, idea generating past President, Alexandra de Jong Westman. Alexandra guided the Conservancy along for over 4 years and worked to ensure that many of the required formal pieces for a functioning society were in place. Fortunately, Alexandra remained on the board as Vice-President, as I stepped in to fill her shoes at last year's AGM.

One of Alexandra's key contributions was serving as a catalyst for the generation of the Conservancy's strategic plan. The responsibility of any Board of Directors is to develop a Strategic Plan (usually every four years), and then work towards achieving that plan.

Here is the link to ours.

http://www.valdes-island-conservancy.org/uploads/5/6/1/8/5618893/strategic_planning_report_26aug16_final.pdf

Your present Board is made up of one mandatory committee (the Executive Committee made up of the President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary and Chair of the First Nation Committee), and seven appointed committees: Conservation and Education Committee, First Nation Committee, Lands and Trails Committee, Membership Committee, Legal Affairs Committee, and the Revenue Committee.

Since our August 6, 2017 AGM, the Board met monthly until November, and then we decided to try every two months for 2018. Four of our meetings (including the AGM) were in-person and two were via conference call. Most of our meeting content is guided by the strategic plan; however, we engage in other activities (like the safety committee) as long as there is no conflict with our Constitution. Meeting minutes are, as always, a matter of public record and are emailed to our members and posted on our website.

Since our last Newsletter we have:

- * organized another successful BioBlitz (attended by some Lyackson Council members and staff) in June 2017,
- * distributed the land access protocol at the behest of the Lyackson First Nation (this is a working document and the Conservancy will continue to update our membership as changes arise),

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Mission Statement

To conserve and protect the existing biological and cultural communities of Valdes Island and its environs.

Vision Statement

That Valdes Island be recognized for its globally-significant and locally-rare biological diversity.

BOARD MEMBERS

Executive

- Warren Warttig - President
- Alexandra de Jong Westman - Vice President
- Diane Burton - Treasurer
- Marja de Jong Westman - Secretary
- Doug Campbell - First Nation Chair

Members at Large

- Doug Cochran
- Allan Doolittle
- Janos Mate
- Anne Casselman
- Dan White
- Bill McElhanney

- * had communications with the BC government regarding the abandoned lots on Valdes and the concerns surrounding environmental pollution and public safety,
- * filed our application for registered charitable tax status,
- * developed carefully-researched reports and press releases regarding provincial proposals regarding oil spill responses; new freighter, tanker traffic and anchorages; and issues with the lack of log salvage which leads to build up of logs and severe damage to the island's intertidal areas each year,
- * conducted ecosystem assessment of red-and blue-listed ecosystems found in the Woodlot Licenses,
- * met with the Chief and Council of the Lyackson First Nation in October 2017,
- * sent a letter to the Treaty Commissioner communicating the mandate and role of the Conservancy as treaty negotiations continue,
- * considered natural history brochure formats which might work for the island's community trail network.

The Conservancy is regularly invited to attend workshops and participate in conservation working groups. As a volunteer Board, we are not always able to attend these events, but several workshops were attended by Board members representing the Conservancy, including:

1. Foreshore Restoration workshops held in Cowichan Bay and Thetis Island, (Marja de Jong Westman & Diane Burton),
2. a Rock Fish Conservation Area workshop at UVIC, (Warren Warttig),
3. a freighter/tanker traffic Anchorage Summit workshop in Duncan, (Warren Warttig).

All of these meetings afford the Conservancy the opportunity to gain contacts and share information with other groups in the Gulf Islands. This will help in our crafting and distribution of documents related to issues affecting us all. E-blasts, newsletters, and the AGM will be avenues of passing along the information and knowledge gleaned from these events.

Mark on your Calendars **June 16-17 for the 2018 BioBlitz** meeting in Starvation Bay and **September 1, 2018 at 11am** for the AGM at Doug Campbell's cabin, Noel Bay.



Lichens, Mosses and More! Andrew Simon

Last year I made several trips to explore the floristic diversity of Valdes Island, beginning with the BioBlitz on June 24, 2017. These experiences were certainly eye opening! Not far away on Galiano Island I have been busy documenting the local biodiversity over the last seven years. Our species list for Galiano includes nearly 3,000 species—yet I found several species on Valdes that were new to me.

I count myself privileged to have had the opportunity to take part in the annual Valdes Island Conservancy BioBlitz. My gratitude was then redoubled at the opportunity to help Lyackson First Nation pursue inventory work on their ancestral lands through connections made at the Blitz.

During my time on Valdes Island I was able to study species along the island's community trail network as well as at Shingle Point and areas around Wakes Cove Provincial Park. Following

along, I hope you'll forgive my geographic disorientation, as the network of skidder trails is a mystery to me. So I'll pick up the journey where my wonderment first began—in the meadow slopes of the “Blue Trail”.

Knowing my lichenological interests, Marja de Jong Westman was keen to show me this place, which is no doubt treasured by island residents. You don't see many patches like these throughout the Gulf Islands—where the forests part and bedrock lies exposed, yawning beneath an open sky. Lichens, mosses and annual plants dominate these slopes, as there is not enough soil for trees to take hold. Of all that I saw on my visits to Valdes, these meadows stood out in exhibiting a unique assemblage of species, many of which are scarce within the Salish Sea region.

Care should be taken to preserve this precious fragment of Valdes Island's natural heritage.

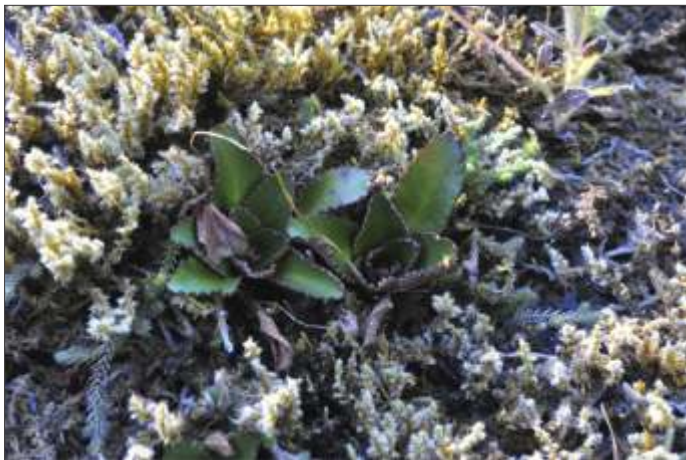
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While many of the plants had already begun to fade by the June BioBlitz, we were able to identify quite a few. Highlights were the fern *Aspidotis densa*, the orchid *Piperia unalascensis*, and the



Indian's dream, *Aspidotis densa*

Rusty-haired saxifrage *Micranthes rufidula*. This assemblage was fascinating to me as it is something typical of higher elevations, and also suggestive of the influence of igneous minerals.



Rusty-haired saxifrage, *Micranthes rufidula*

Among the reindeer lichens *Cladina rangiferina* and *C. portentosa* ssp. *pacifica*, I found an unexpected lichen that's typical of an alpine tundra environment. When I looked *Cladonia wainioi* up on the Consortium of Pacific Northwest Herbaria, I was amazed to see that it most commonly reported in Alaska and the Yukon, with the nearest BC record from Haida Gwaii. Yet here it was on Valdes Island!

The mosses found in this meadow community appeared to tell the same unusual tale. *Codriophorus acicularis* is boreal-montane,

suboceanic species, with many occurrences on Haida Gwaii. And then there was *Aulocomnium palustre*, or “bog moss”—a moss that I will let speak for itself.



An unexpected lichen typical of alpine heath
Wain's cup lichen, *Cladonia wainioi*

Also found present in the area was *Peltigera hymenina*, the Nebulous pelt lichen. This lichen is fairly uncommon in BC (S2 2010, red-listed in BC), so for me it was an absolute treasure to find. The Nebulous pelt is yet another oddity in the Salish Sea region, for according to historical records this species is typically found in hyper-maritime localities.

Contrasting with this meadow community were plants typical of the drier southwestern coast of the island. A notable example is poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*). Here's a photo of a swathe of this blue-listed (S3 2015) vine, covering the sun-soaked southwest-facing cliffs of Valdes, not too far from Wakes Cove.



Poison oak leaves, *Toxicodendron diversilobum*



Late in the season, poison oak can appear reddish, yet here it is seen as a splash of bright green.

Finally, returning to moister environs on my last day on Valdes, I came across the blue skullcap, *Scutellaria lateriflora*. This species is well known for its medicinal properties. I stumbled upon it along an ephemeral creek, amidst the deer fern (*Blechnum spicant*), foamflower (*Tiarella trifoliata*), and other wet-loving species that abound on trails behind Noel Bay.

During my three visits to Valdes Island I recorded 54 lichens, 34 bryophytes, and 131 plants, in addition to a number of fungi, birds, amphibians and even spiders—for a total of 233 species! I wonder how many more we might find this year?



Blue skullcap, *Scutellaria lateriflora*



BioBlitz 2017 and Planning for BioBlitz 2018!

Marja de Jong Westman

These weekend nature sweeps continue to inform and confirm what a biologically diverse spot Valdes Island is! The island's second growth forests, intact waterways and coastal bluffs, along with the small human footprint, support one of the best collections of flora and fauna of BC's rarest ecosystem...the Coastal Douglas-fir biogeoclimatic zone.

Highlights from last year's event included the discovery of Japanese earwigs under the logs at Starvation Bay, very rare meadow lichen communities, plentiful olive-sided flycatchers along the Blue Trail, and the usual marine bounty supported by the nutrient-rich waters of Trincomali channel at Blackberry Point.

Along with nature's wealth, the human component of last year's Blitz is well worth honouring. Participating islanders and resource biologists were joined by Lyackson First Nation Councillor Frank Conibear and Lyackson First Nation staff members, Gary Drouillard and Linda Aidnell. After a 20 km hike on the Saturday and the pot-luck dinner we not only knew the island better but each other as well.

And from my heart, the moment that captured all that Valdes Island has meant to me was being welcomed on the ancestral lands of the Lyackson people at Shingle Point by Frank Conibear. At a meeting in October with the Chief and Council, Frank again acknowledged the BioBlitz adventure and how he appreciated our passion and our knowledge of the island's natural history.



BioBlitzers gather to discuss the day ahead..

Continued from page 4...

After our birding, botanical and beach day we spent the second day ensuring that the purple martin boxes lovingly crafted by Emrys Prussin and his students were installed down at Porlier pass at Lynn Yamanaka's dock and up at North Lake. These boxes could not have been put up without the help of the Bateman and Noel men, along with Phyllis Haines from Starvation bay and her entourage of professional birders, Tony Westman's dinky and Gary Drouillard's navigational prowess on the pond.



Andrew Bateman installs a purple martin box assisted by Dan White.

So what is in store for this year's BioBlitz? The weekend of June 16 -17 will look something like this:

Planning night - June 15 at Westman's cabin, 7:00pm

Field days - June 16-17

Potluck dinner at Westman's cabin - June 16

Planned activities will be organized as separate events so that not everyone needs to complete the 20 km hike in one day.

Saturday:

- * Coastal waterbird survey (circumnavigate Valdes by boat)
- * Intertidal marine survey
- * Coastal bluff botany (Andrew Simon)
- * Evening bat monitoring

Sunday:

- * Morning – bird walk
- * Forage fish survey
- * Seaweed search and pressing (Daniel Zayonc)
- * Purple martin and blue-bird box checks (involves hiking)



Daniel Zayonc enthuses about seaweed!



Canada is home to 53% of the global breeding population of Olive-sided flycatchers (*Contopus cooperi*). Early morning summer walks through our community trail system will often offer up the chance to hear the call of this little bird. It seeks sites in coniferous forests that have open patches and wetlands, as these often afford them the insect prey they prefer. Despite their small size, their territories can range from 10-20 ha. New birders find their song one of the easiest to remember as it is captured as "Quick 3 beers".



Olive-sided flycatcher, *Contopus cooperi*

*Roses are red,
Orchard Bees are blue,
I cannot self-pollinate,
So, I really need you.*

For a second year I was invited to help out with the Valdes Island BioBlitz. I was able to collect a large number of insects as well as photographic records of insects that make up an important part of the biodiversity of the island. Once again, the weather was warm and sunny, as were the people of Valdes that served as hosts for the weekend.

From Friday evening through Sunday afternoon, I was able to hike across the island from shore to shore and through the woods between. Sweeping my net as I went, I collected as many flying insects as I could see. My ongoing research interests also required me to comb through seaweed on Blackberry point and Starvation Bay. I was also able to set up a Malaise trap, a large mesh tent used to trap insects, at the home of Mark and Jane Bateman. By the end of the weekend, I had collected hundreds more specimens and had dozens more species records for the island.

Now that I have had a chance to prepare and identify all of the specimens, I can confirm a number of new species for Valdes. The total is now up to 14 orders and 83 families of insects and spiders recorded as part of BioBlitzes in 2016 and 2017.

One of the questions that I regularly get asked is “Why should we care about insects?” For me, the answer is inherently simple – insects are beautiful, ubiquitous, and important. For the people I meet, the ubiquitous part is clear but is not always a good thing. The beautiful part escapes many people, with the possible exception of butterflies and dragonflies. I rely mostly on the “important” label to explain my own research on insects. I usually try to avoid emphasizing the threatening role some insects play – disease vectors, invasive defoliators, and agricultural pests. These are good reasons to study insects, but do not help others to appreciate insects.

One of the easiest ways I have to get people to appreciate insects is their role as pollinators. I just have to tell folks that one in three bites of food is the direct result of insect pollinators and being an entomologist seems more valuable. Insects pollinate all sorts of plants all over the world. Many agricultural systems are built on using insect pollinators, but for wild plants insects can be even more essential.

Valdes Island is no exception in this important insect-plant relationship. Without a doubt, many of the diverse plants on the island rely on insects to pollinate them. Just considering flies and bees alone – fifteen families of flies and two families of bees that are suspected to be pollinators have been recorded on Valdes. Each of these families are represented by multiple species. For example, at least four species of Flower Flies (Syrphidae) have been collected on Valdes during the last two BioBlitzes. This family is suspected to be one of the most important pollinating fly families and many more species are likely awaiting detection.

Despite this encouraging success, much more is yet to be discovered on Valdes. There are further seven families of flies and four families of bees that have been shown to be pollinators, are likely to be on Valdes, but have not been recorded. Future BioBlitzes will help us to add these to our growing list. Another task is to add observations of which plants these insects are pollinating. Most pollinator-plant relationships are only suspected. More observations in the wild are needed to know exactly which plants are being pollinated by which insects. I’m looking forward to more Valdes Island BioBlitzes in the years ahead.



Close observation of plants on Valdes will help us determine plant-pollinator relationships.

Further Reading:

Larson BMH, Kevan PG, Inouye DW (2001) Flies and flowers: taxonomic diversity of anthophiles and pollinators. *The Canadian Entomologist* 133: 439-465.

Scott-Dupree CD, Winton ML (1987) Wild bee pollinator diversity and abundance in orchard and uncultivated habitats in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia. *The Canadian Entomologist* 119: 735-745.

Alexandra de Jong Westman

The lands, plants, and wildlife on Valdes Island are protected by a wide variety of municipal, provincial, and federal Acts and Regulations. A healthy natural environment is the foundation of BC's economy and the quality of life for all its residents. One of the biggest impacts to the sensitive ecosystems in the Southern Gulf Islands is development. At all levels of government (municipal, provincial, and federal), there are guiding documents, Acts, and Regulations, that serve to protect the natural environment while still allowing development to occur. With this in mind, we plan to have each annual newsletter highlight a practice relevant to Valdes. There is also much more detailed information available on the Conservancy website (www.valdes-island-conservancy.org).

For the first installment, I've chosen to highlight the federal *Migratory Bird Convention Act* (<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/showdoc/cs/M-7.01/en?page=1>).

This *Act* is applicable to all lands throughout Canada and applies specifically to those bird species who migrate seasonally... which is pretty much every species we encounter in BC. Some species we see only in winter (they migrate north to Alaska's North Slope for the summer), or some we see only in summer (because they winter in Latin or South America!). These are migratory species...like some of our cabiners!

The *Migratory Bird Convention Act* protects migratory birds and nests from indiscriminate harvesting and destruction (Government of Canada 1994). The Migratory Bird Regulations stipulate that "no person shall disturb, destroy or take a nest, egg, nest shelter, eider duck shelter or duck box of a migratory bird" (Section 6 [a]), and "no person shall deposit or permit to be deposited oil, oil wastes or any other substance harmful to migratory birds in any waters or any area frequented by migratory birds (Section 35 [1]).

Additionally, the Canadian Wildlife Service have placed restrictions on land activities during the migratory bird season, identified as the period between March 15 and August 15 of any given year. These restrictions speak specifically to the alteration of nesting habitats, whereby you cannot remove vegetation (trees, shrubs, or ground cover) during this period, as you would disturb nesting habitats, nests, nestlings, or fledglings of a migratory species.

So, the next time you are looking to clear some trees, clean up your property, or simply cut back the ever-invading salal bushes that seem to encroach on our trails each spring, please consider the birds and their homes, and do what you can to abide by the timing window outlined in the Act. It is therefore best to do the major clean-ups and clearings prior to March 15 or after August 15 of any given year. The birds will thank you!



Rufous hummingbird, *Selasphorus rufus*, feeding from black twinberry flowers. Photo credit: Robert Alexander

The Rufous hummingbird is a species that could be affected by our actions. Nests are built in the drooping branches of coniferous trees, such as Western Red Cedar and Douglas-fir about 30 feet off the ground. The females work solo to build the nests and use plant down often stitched together by spider silk. The nests are tricky to see because they are camouflaged with lichens and moss and only about 2 inches across. In a suitable area, there may be up to 20 nests. A nest built one year may be used the next but not necessarily by the same bird! And one more tidbit...these are not exclusively nectar eating birds. Rufous hummingbirds eat insects..even aphids off your garden annuals!

Even though this species is frequently seen during your summers on Valdes, populations declined by 62% across their range from 1966 to 2014. Apparently 100% of the population spends some chunk of their winter in Mexico before coming home to Canada to breed. They are known to arrive as early as February 25th (perscom, Robert Alexander).

References:

(https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Rufous_Hummingbird/lifehistory)



Anne Casselman

As head of UBC's Marine Mammal Research Unit, Andrew Trites has spent his career studying marine mammals. So when he gave a presentation at the Marine Mammal Symposium last November about mythbusting some common misconceptions about the Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW), you could hear the audience sharpening their pencils.

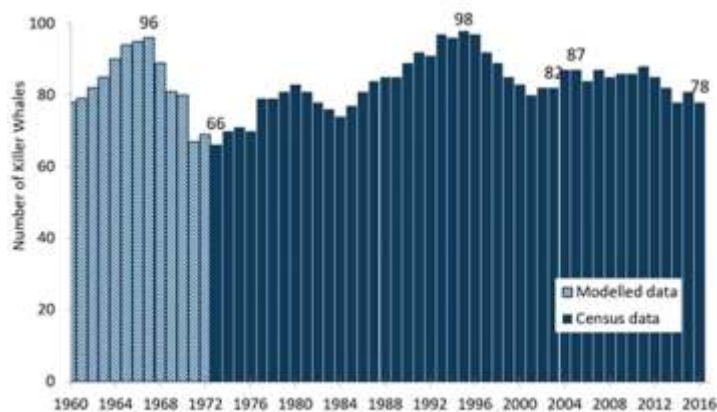
"What I've noticed however is that when people talk about Southern Residents and talk about how many there are and how we all want recovery, that there seems to be a fair amount of confusion about what are the facts," he told the crowd. By the time Trites had run through his list of common misconceptions about the Southern Residents, and explained what made them more or less true, I had a much more balanced view of this beloved group of 76 killer whales -- Whales that have the power to tilt ferries over as people rush on deck to catch sight of them. By sharing the most surprising misconceptions with the membership here, I hope you will too.



Southern Resident Killer Whales. Holly Fearnbach, NOAA

Statement #1: Southern Resident Killer Whales have been declining for 20 years. So is it true? Yes, technically, but it's not the whole picture.

Population data from the Centre for Whale Research out of Friday Harbor, Washington does show that yes, since the 90s, the SRKW population has dropped for the last 20 years. But if you go back another 25 years to the 70s you could also say that the population has been increasing over the past 45 years from a low of 66 individuals in 1972. In other words, if you look at the population of the SRKW over time, their numbers



Data Source - Centre for Whale Research, 2016

go up and down like a mountain range. "So maybe it's fair to say that they have been fluctuating for 57 years," says Trites. "Or do we say they've declined four times in the last 57 years?"

Interestingly, Trites reported that new genetics work indicates that the population of SRKW may have never numbered more than 100 in the past century. In our lifetimes, the highest the population ever reached was 98, with a long-term average population size of 83 (see chart below of the population's census data).

Conclusion: It's most accurate to say "Southern Resident Killer Whales have been declining for the past six years."

Statement #2: The whales are starving. Is this true? No.

"The fact is that they are not all starving," said Trites. "They do appear to be nutritionally stressed but they are not starving." Drone images of individuals in the pod showed dramatic before and after pictures of some of the whales having lost a lot of their weight. But as Trites pointed out, that is not necessarily because they are starving. A vet would see those before and after pictures and conclude that the animal is wasting from some kind of disease and would want to know the root cause. Could it be cancer? Or something else?

Conclusion: The whales are not starving but they appear to be nutritionally stressed.

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Statement #3: They are the most contaminated animal.
Well, no.

The SRKW do carry big contaminant loads but they are not the most contaminated marine mammal. That horrible honour goes to the transient killer whales, who feast on seals and other marine mammals. But those whales are increasing and in fact their numbers have been on a positive trajectory since they were first documented.

Conclusion: They are among the most contaminated marine mammals.

These myths cast aside, there is no question that the SRKW are facing some serious problems. As Trites put it "the crystal ball doesn't look very good for them." Their sex ratios are all messed up; too many males are being born and not enough females. And long term projections for chinook runs - their main food source - are not great, mostly because of warm water events in the Pacific from climate change. That said, public and stakeholder concern for the whales has never been higher. Understanding the real facts, albeit in all their complexity, is a critical first step to moving conservation goals for these incredible animals forward.



2018 Dates to Remember

April 13 Valdes Forest Fire Preparedness Training. Meeting at Bateman's cabin, Noel Bay. If you are interested, please contact Dan (danwhitevaldes@gmail.com) to confirm your attendance.

June 15 - 17 Annual BioBlitz. Planning session at Westman's cabin, Starvation Bay, evening of the 15th. Contact: Marja de Jong Westman, 604-921-3382, mdjw@telus.net

August 5 Valdes Day, Noel Bay. Theme TBA.

September 1 AGM, Saturday, 11:00am at Campbell's cabin, Noel Bay.

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Annual Membership Renewal by **August 30**, 2018. For information & payment contact: Diane Burton, 604-857-5700 diane.burton@ufv.ca

Rough-skinned newts? Red-legged frogs? Valdes Islands forests and waterways are home to both of these species of amphibians. Their presence on the island tells us that the island's forests and waterways have a good level of ecological structure and function. Red-legged frogs (*Rana aurora*) are the ones which often surprise you as you are stepping across creeks along the Blue Trail. You know which species of frog you are seeing when you get a hint of the red colouring on the underside of their hind legs. In Canada, they only occur in British Columbia.



Red-legged frog, *Rana aurora* photo:Kristiina Ovaska

The island's cool ponds and shallow, meandering streams are used as breeding sites. Unlike many other frog species, male red-legged frogs woo a mate by calling up to 1 metre underwater and they will start these underwater romances as early as January. Clusters of eggs (some with 680 in one mass) are laid on the fronds of aquatic vegetation and tadpoles can hatch from a fertilized egg after a month. The algae-eating tadpole stage may last up to 5 months. Froglets in the fern fronds of Valdes should be watched out for as early as July 1st through to Thanksgiving!

One of the key reasons Valdes is home to this provincially blue-listed species, is that we have contiguous riparian forests. These forests surround water bodies and provide the moisture, the protective layer of canopy vegetation and insect life needed for both young and meandering adults. Adult red-legged frogs can hover and hop about in the riparian area up to 4 km from a breeding pond. This shows the importance of the connections between our ponds, lakes, streams and forests.

The key threats to this species are loss of habitat and invasive bullfrogs (*Lithobates catesbeiana*), thankfully not on Valdes! To this end, several legal protocols are in place to ensure that the riparian areas of BC's

landscape are protected. RAR as it is known to both frogs and biologists stands for Riparian Areas Regulation. It was enacted under Section 12 of the Fish Protection Act in July 2004 and then the Fish Protection Act was re-titled the Riparian Areas Protection Act in 2016. RAR calls on all levels of government to protect riparian areas during any residential, commercial or industrial development.

How does this apply to Valdes? Our small community with its seasonal stamp simply needs to be reminded of what natural values we have on the island and know that riparian areas offer much to many species.

The rough-skinned newt, *Taricha granulosa*, is another Valdes Island riparian forest amphibian. Both juveniles and adults are carnivores, relishing slugs, worms and other amphibian's eggs and larvae! You might see groups of adults in the spring migrating to breeding ponds such as the old beaver pond up from South Bay or throughout the rest of the year in the damp litter of the forest floor. Their toxic surface keeps most predators away and allows this species to be active both day and night. However, the common garter snake is immune to the poison.



Rough-skinned newt, *Taricha granulosa*

References:

http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual_sara/files/cosewic/sr_red_legged_frog_e.pdf
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/fish/riparian-areas-regulation>

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/frogwatch/publications/factsheets/salamanders/roughskin.htm>



During the 2017 BioBlitz Warren Warttig, Doug Campbell, Andrew Bateman and Bruce Livingston (our skipper) completed another underwater drop camera survey (including video) to build on knowledge of four earlier surveys in Rock Fish Conservation Areas (RCA's). In 2016 we completed a marine survey off the NE end of Valdes between Valdes and Kendrick Island that extended down to the West Vancouver Yacht Club dock. Because of concern by the Lyackson over work proposed for the West Vancouver Yacht Club's outstation at Kendrick Island we focussed our attention once again in this area.



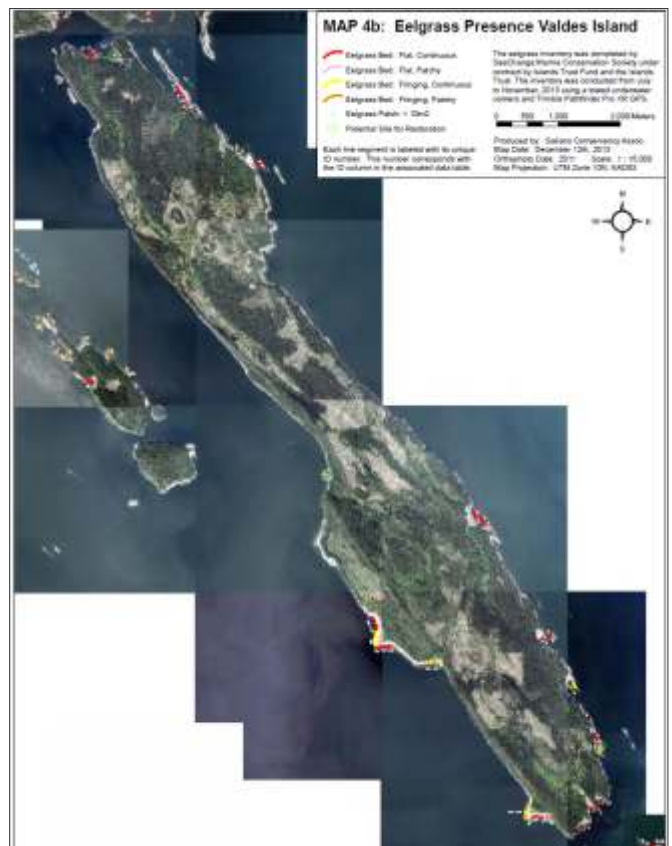
Similar to our survey in 2016, in 2017 we found little actual rock fish habitat. As the name would imply, rockfish like lots of rock with crevasses to hide in. From where we left off in 2016 we found an extension of the highly productive shellfish and crab habitat until about 120m SW of the yacht club docks. Here we unexpectedly found a lush and vibrant eelgrass forest. We were particularly excited by this because eelgrass forests are relatively rare and HIGHLY productive.

Eel grass (a flowering plant not an algae!) communities are critical refuges and nursery grounds for many marine species. Some 80 percent of commercial fish and shellfish species depend on eelgrass habitat at some point in their lifecycle. (www.sccp.ca/species-habitat/eelgrass) And, some invertebrate organisms live exclusively in these marine forests, such as the eel grass isopod.



Eel grass isopod, *Idotea ressecata*

In an effort to ensure the conservation of eel grass beds, Valdes Island Conservancy board members participated in two workshops this spring sponsored by the Nearshore Habitat Recovery Project which brought together representatives from many of the Gulf Islands. Valdes is known to have some of the best representatives of undisturbed eel grass beds in the Gulf islands (see map). Many eel grass meadows have been lost in boat basins where boaters repeatedly drop anchor. Fortunately, those on Valdes island suffer little disturbance as most cabin dwellers tend to use permanent anchor buoys.



The VIC membership has shown a keen interest in Valdes Island history. The following information is directed towards this interest.

For a number of years, Mr. Eric McLay, who is a renowned Archaeologist, has worked with the Lyackson First Nation to direct an archaeological inventory of Valdes Island to assist the development of a community heritage management plan for archaeological sites within the First Nation's traditional territory. The plan can be used to recommend educational and economic opportunities, promote First Nation heritage on Valdes Island, including potential directions for academic research, public education efforts and avenues for cultural tourism.

As a feature of this process, on behalf of the First Nation, Mr. McLay has written a story in response to the Province's Wake's Cove Management plan. For our greater understanding, and for the benefit of the VIC's developing relationship with the First Nation, by the specific permission of the First Nation, the story is as follows:

Leeyqsun (Valdes Island), including Wakes Cove Park, is the homeland of the Lyackson First Nation and within the territory of the Central Coast Salish Hul'q'umi'num-speaking First Nations of Vancouver Island, Gulf Islands and Lower Fraser River.

Leeyqsun, translated as "Douglas-fir point" refers to a Hul'q'umi'num origin story about a great tree that once reached to the skyworld. When, according to Coast Salish oral traditions, it fell to the ground and its top broke from its tall trunk, which today forms what is known as Valdes and Galiano Islands.

In the historical period, Lyackson First Nation settled at three winter villages on the island at T'eet'qe', Tth'exul, and Tth'hwumqsun, located, respectively at Shingle Point, Cardale Point and Porlier Pass.

On the north end of the island, Wakes Cove Provincial Park is the location of several large ancient First Nation settlement sites, which form a nearly continuous perimeter around the shoreline

of Gabriola Passage. The archaeological settlement at Dogfish Bay, for instance, extends over one and a half kilometers in length, and represents one of the longest archaeological sites recorded in the Southern Gulf Islands. Gabriola Passage and its rich tidal stream environment was an important place historically settled by Coast Salish First Nations and intensively utilized for fishing, shellfishing, sea mammal hunting and other harvesting, as well as being an important sojourn used during peoples travelling by canoe between the Gulf Islands and Lower Fraser River. Preliminary archaeological evidence indicates the earliest First Nation settlement at Wakes Cove Provincial Park dates over 2,700 years ago.

At the time of First Nation reserve establishment in 1876, Indian Agent I. W. Powell wrote a letter to the Joint Reserve Commissioners on behalf of Lyackson First Nation expressing concern with Captain Baldwin Wake's pre-emption claim at Wakes Cove, which he described as an "old settlement". In 1877, the Joint Reserve Commission met the Lyackson community at Shingle Point, where the Lyackson community clearly expressed their title to the land: "The Indians received the Commissioners well and were not long in telling them that they wished to possess the whole island". The Joint Reserve Commissioners upheld Captain Wake's pre-emption claim and established three reserve lands for Lyackson First Nation on Valdes Island, which comprised approximately one third of the island.

Lyackson First Nation currently manages three land reserves that comprise a third of the island. Lyackson community members and other Hul'q'umi'num peoples continue to engage in traditional use practices on the island and its surrounding waters. As their ancestral homeland, the Lyackson First Nation continues to protect their long-term ecological and cultural values on the island, as well as explore new economic opportunities and partnerships to preserve and maintain their connection to these lands. For instance, the Lyackson First Nation manages the forested Crown land adjacent to Wakes Cove Park through an agreement with the BC ministry responsible for forestry.

