



2026 Newsletter 5

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Hello everyone,

It was great to “see” so many of you on Zoom on Monday. We had participants from Coquitlam, Duncan, the Sunshine Coast, Harrison Hot Springs, Parksville, Bellevue, Victoria, Sidney, Anacortes, Montreal, and Lummi, as well as Quadra and Salt Spring Islands—just to name a few! Plus, there was a whole gang at the Diving Locker in Vancouver (BC) watching the live Zoom together.

We’d like to acknowledge the [Shaw Centre for the Salish Sea](#) in Sidney, BC, for supporting their staff and volunteers to participate in WSS 2026. Twenty-five people from the Centre are taking part this year!



For those of you unable to attend on Monday, it was another fascinating evening! Please see the recording link below or [visit this page](#) where you will find all the recordings and newsletters.

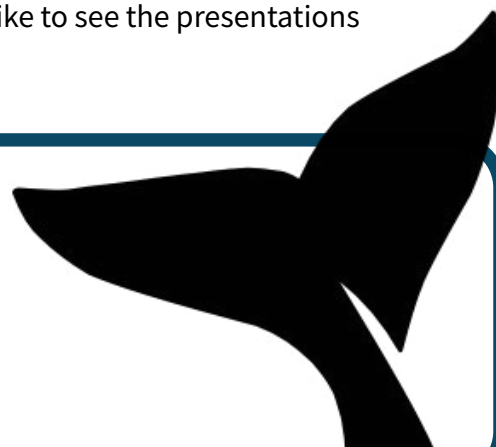
1. Recording Link

If you weren’t available to attend the live Zoom on Monday, or you would like to see the presentations again, here is the [RECORDING LINK](#).

Many thanks to [Georgia Strait Alliance](#) for hosting WSS 2026, in partnership with the [Salish Sea Institute](#) at Western Washington University.



SALISH SEA
INSTITUTE



Wonders of the Salish Sea takes place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples.

2. April 20 presentations

7:00 - 7:55 PM

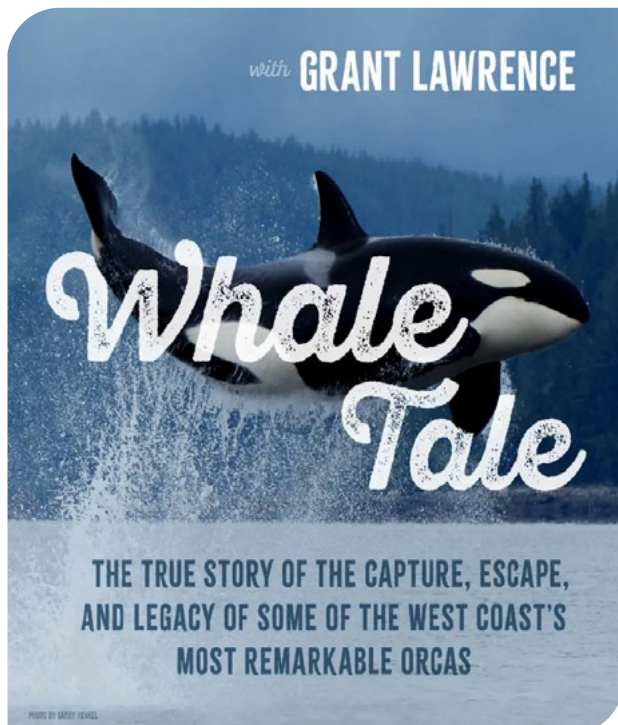
Gulls: Far More Than Just A Seagull

David Droppers

Gulls are an often misunderstood yet charismatic sentinels of beaches, and many other habitats. David will introduce you to a number of our PNW gull species, from travelers to residents. Why is it that birders fear learning them? What is the real reason why many civilians despise them? Let's look under the hood at a unique and unmistakable group of birds that is anything but ordinary!

About the Speaker

David Droppers has been teaching courses on topics from birds to butterflies to trees to microorganisms for a variety of groups, including college biology courses and non-profit environmental groups. He has put his expertise to work for the National Park Service, Forest Service, University of Washington, and Woodland Park Zoo, among many others. He is ecstatic about sharing his passion for the natural world with others who wish to learn. His enthusiasm is said to be contagious!



8:05 - 9:00 PM

Whale Tale: The True Story of the Capture, Escape and Legacy of Some of the West Coast's Most Remarkable Orcas

Grant Lawrence

We end WSS 2026 with bestselling author and award-winning broadcaster Grant Lawrence sharing the incredible true story of the "Pedder Bay 5," a unique family of transient orcas (then an unknown sub-species) captured in 1970 off the southern tip of Vancouver island, a pod that included the ultra-rare white orca, nicknamed "Chimo." This is a story of tragedy and triumph: of humans and whales, heroes and villains, exploitation and activism, and a lasting wild legacy that lives on to this day in the waters of the Salish Sea.

About the Speaker

Grant Lawrence grew up spending weekends and summers—mostly against his will—at an off-grid cabin in Desolation Sound, the northern edge of the Salish Sea. Those early experiences shaped his life in deep and unexpected ways. Today, Grant is an award-winning author, and his Salish Sea adventures are among his most beloved works. In 2025, he hosted, edited, and produced *Whale Tale*, the gripping true story of a unique family of West Coast orcas, which he will share with us in this presentation.



Grant is also a musician, broadcaster, and live event host. His four best-selling books for adults are *Adventures in Solitude* (2010), *The Lonely End of the Rink* (2013), *Dirty Windshields* (2017), and his latest bestseller, *Return to Solitude* (2022), in which he “interweaves the rich and harrowing history of the Desolation Sound area with his own experiences of life on the coast,” (Harbour Publishing). Grant’s second children’s book, *Adventures in Desolation Sound*, was released in 2024.

3. Summaries of April 13 presentations

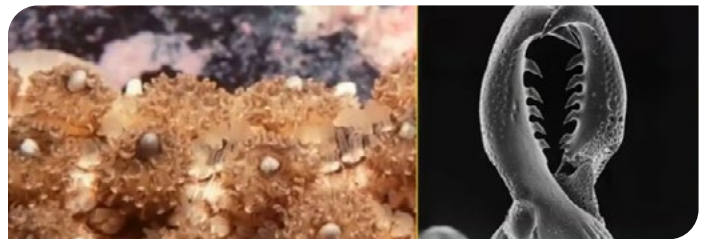
Sea Stars of the Salish Sea

Philip Lambert

The first talk this evening drew us into the strange and fascinating world of sea stars. Expert Phil Lambert provided a wonderful overview of sea star anatomy, ecology, and interesting fun facts for 21 of the 69 species of sea stars that are found from Southeast Alaska to Puget Sound.

Sea stars are part of the taxonomic Phylum Echinodermata, also known as echinoderms (which means spiny skin). This phylum also includes brittle stars, sea urchins, sea lilies and sea cucumbers. It was amazing to learn how much more diversity of echinoderms there is here compared to the Atlantic. In the Pacific there are 83 species of echinoderms in 11 degrees of latitude, compared to only 68 species in 22 degrees of latitude in the Atlantic!

Sea stars are radially symmetrical as adults, though their larvae are often bilaterally symmetrical. They



have a lot of unique anatomical structures like the water vascular system—a hydraulic system using sea water to fill their tube feet that allows them to walk and help capture prey; catch connective tissue that allows them to freeze their arms in position without muscles; and pedicellariae—small pincer like appendages they use for defense and capturing prey. They also don’t have a heart or brain—but don’t let that fool you. They are voracious predators with many unique foraging behaviors.

They can eat items much larger than their mouth, but how? First they may use their pedicellariae (on top of their body) to grab on to prey but then must do some body contortions and use their tube feet to move the food to their underside where their mouth is—they would probably be really good at yoga, or



the game twister. Then they extend their cardiac stomach outside of their body (through the mouth) and digest the prey there, before consuming it. They eat a variety of prey including clams, polychaetes (worms), snails, detritus (dead organic matter), and even other sea stars!

Many species of sea stars are still recovering from the devastating wasting disease that began in 2013. The original cause was thought to be a densovirus, however recent research has found that it is due to the bacteria, *Vibrio pectenicida*. Millions of sea stars have literally disintegrated, including sunflower stars that lost 90% of their population. Interestingly the species with rough aboral (top) surfaces are more susceptible than those with smooth skin (like the leather or blood stars). You can learn more about the story here: [Sea star murder mystery: What's killing a key ocean species?](#) by Nicola Jones (Thanks Jackie!). If you have photos of healthy, diseased, or no sea stars (all data is important to better understand the issue) submit them here: <https://marine.ucsc.edu/research/sea-star-wasting> and help with ongoing research!

Phil shared more interesting facts about the species and research being conducted than we can summarize here, be sure to check out the video recording to learn more. It was a wonderful mix of science, fun facts and storytelling about these amazing and unique creatures.

~Cindy

Feeding the People, Caring for the Land: Indigenous Food Systems of the Salish Sea

Jared Qwustenuxun Williams

Introduction: The second talk of the night by Jared Qwustenuxun Williams began with a thought-provoking question: How many First Nation restaurants do we know? He reflected on how food systems on the West Coast of Canada are often shaped by globalized diets rather than the foods traditionally rooted in this land. As he shared, “If we look after how we used to eat on this land, we could help ecosystems thrive.”

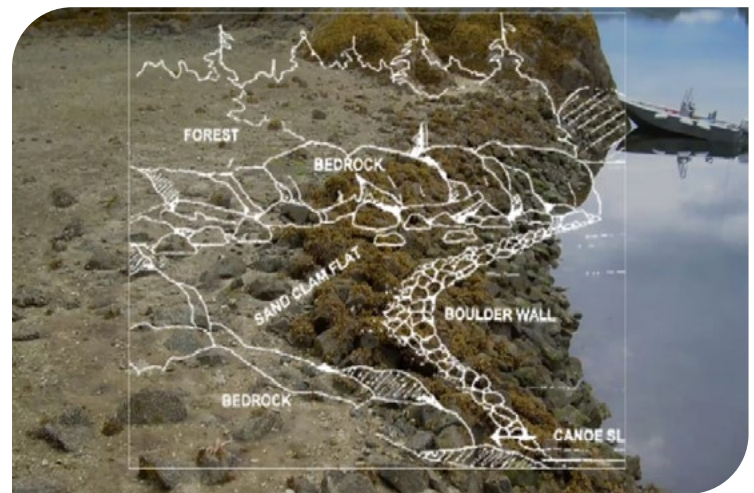
Jared spoke about his mixed ancestry and the influence of both Indigenous and European worldviews, emphasizing how languages we speak help shape our worldview. Coming from a family that speaks Hul’q’umi’num’, SENĆOTEN, English, and Dutch, he highlighted the importance of acknowledging ancestry when speaking about knowledge, recognizing that ideas, technologies, and food systems are passed down through generations. He also stressed intergenerational learning and the role of Elders, reminding us that “if everybody leaves home, we leave so much at home.”

Economy of generosity: Traditional systems were grounded in abundance, responsibility, and deep relationships with land and sea, where food systems formed the basis of governance, economy, and social

structure. Large gatherings—marking events such as marriages, name-givings, and land transfers—served as living archives of history, where communities hosted, fed, and gifted thousands of visitors. These practices ensured wealth was continuously redistributed, often described as an “economy of generosity,” where knowledge, responsibility, and resources circulated across families and Nations over time.

Place names: Traditionally, lands were named after 1. what was harvested there, 2. what it looked like and, 3. the legend that happened on the land. These names also reflected how specific areas were used and cared for by different families and house groups over time, embedding land and water within systems of responsibility and food gathering. For example, Long Harbour on Salt Spring Island is known as Stsa'tx, meaning “halibut,” showing how place names directly describe ecological relationships and resources.

Fish weirs: Jared also shared Elders’ teachings of abundant salmon systems, where fish weirs (shxetl’) were used not simply as harvesting tools but as long-term ecological management systems. Some of the oldest weirs in the region date back over 6,500 years, representing thousands of generations of sustained salmon return and management. These systems helped regulate abundance—guiding selective harvesting, reducing overcrowding, and supporting healthy reproduction cycles. Over time,



they contributed to immense ecological productivity, where salmon nourished entire ecosystems across rivers, forests, and coastal zones.

Clam gardens: Clam gardens, estimated to be at least 4,000 years old (with undiscovered ones under sea level), transformed rocky shorelines into highly productive intertidal habitats. Through carefully constructed rock walls and long-term tidal action, sediment accumulated to create ideal conditions for shellfish growth. Often owned by women, these systems produced exceptionally large and abundant clams and supported extensive trade networks across the region.

Here are some links that were shared in the chat for more information: <https://wsanec.com/high-impact-clam-garden-restoration-project-continues-into-2026> and <https://www.clamgarden.com>.

Herring rafts: Herring spawning systems, including kelp and branch rafts, reflect a sophisticated form of ecological stewardship and cooperation. Ancestors designed floating structures where herring would spawn naturally, allowing communities to harvest eggs while also supporting regeneration. The roe was often dried or smoked as an important seasonal food source.

These systems also supported restoration between Nations. In areas with low herring returns, spawning materials or rafts could be traded from regions with

abundant runs. The idea was that herring would return to where they were spawned, helping rebuild depleted populations over time.

Camas: Camas, connected to Garry oak meadow ecosystems, is a powerful example of Indigenous agriculture and land stewardship. Camas was compared to a “potato” as a major carbohydrate, and was a foundational food source that was carefully harvested and tended over generations. Rather than simple wild harvesting, it reflects intentional ecological management and enhancement. In some contexts, including estuarine environments, camas may have been supported or adapted to tolerate different conditions, including salt-influenced areas. Camas was part of a wider interconnected food system where estuaries linked clams, crabs, salmon, herring, and plant foods into a highly productive

landscape. These systems were not accidental; they were actively shaped and maintained to support long-term abundance.

Overall, the talk challenges the idea that Indigenous peoples lacked agriculture or advanced food systems, instead revealing deeply sophisticated ecological knowledge and land management practices developed and sustained over thousands of years and hundreds of generations. It ultimately calls for a shift toward local, regenerative foods that support ecosystems—recognizing that what we eat can actively shape the health of the land and water.

Here’s another resource for learning: [Wild Cultivation: Traditional Plant Management Systems](#).

Nancy J. Turner

~Maithili



4. Program Evaluation

We value your feedback! After the program, you will receive an email from Eventbrite with a short survey about certain aspects of the program. You will also receive a separate evaluation form from the WSS 2026 Planning Committee. These two surveys collect different information, and both are brief.

Please consider completing both forms; it helps us greatly with future planning. Thank you!



5. Chat Discussion and Quiz

On April 13, we discussed, “What is the most interesting or unique plant or animal you’ve come across in the Salish Sea?”

Responses included: “A fin whale blow - too far to see the actual whale (a fin whale has been visiting Salish Sea waters recently, [more info here](#)); a [northern alligator lizard](#); a grey whale feed close to the shore in Ucluelet!; a bald eagle capture a swimming seagull and flap its wings swimming it to shore for lunch; [basket stars](#) that look like “exotic coral”, and the tiny, translucent ghost shrimp (learn more below), although that choice was updated to ‘all sea stars’ after Phil Lambert’s otherworldly presentation!

Prizes

On March 30, a mother-daughter team were the quiz winners and received the book *Coastal Fishes of the Pacific Northwest* by Lamb & Edgell.

On April 13, there were two prizes! The fill-in-the-blank question was: “Instead of blood, sea stars use _____ for circulation.” The answer: water!

The fourth and eighth correct responses each won a choice of: *A Field Guide to Sea Stars of the Pacific Northwest* by Neil McDaniel, and *Luschiim’s Plants: Traditional Indigenous Foods, Materials and Medicines* by Luschiim (Arvid Charlie) and Nancy J. Turner. Congratulations to our winners!

6. Field trips

Intertidal Exploration at Vancouver’s Stanley Park. Saturday, April 18 | 12:30–2:30 pm

There’s still room!

The intertidal area off Figurehead Point in Stanley Park is submerged for part of the day, but as the tide recedes, surprising species are revealed. The exposed intertidal area becomes a stressful environment where only well-adapted species can survive. Who are these species, and what environmental conditions support their unique adaptations?



Join us at Figurehead Point in Stanley Park as we unravel the mysteries of life in the intertidal zones. We will search for sea stars, snails, crabs, clams, worms, seaweeds, and whatever else catches our eye! This is the 10th year that WSS has offered this intertidal excursion to Stanley Park. In that time, some species have thrived while others have struggled to survive. What will we see this year? [Register here](#).

Our guides are Sheila Byers, Reg. Prof. Biologist and author of *The Rocky Shore at Stanley Park* field guide; Sharon Adelman and Leesa Watt, both long-time volunteers with the Vancouver Aquarium; and Rebecca Hansen, a marine biologist, ecologist, and researcher at the University of British Columbia. Rebecca was also a WSS speaker in 2025 on Intertidal Ecology. You can watch that presentation [here](#), beginning at the 40:45 minute mark. A great way to prepare for this field trip.

Field trip in Anacortes with Cindy Elliser. Friday April 23, from 1 – 3 pm



PACIFIC MAMMAL RESEARCH

Join Cindy from Pacific Mammal Research, (PacMam) for a field trip in Anacortes, WA. The trip will start with a 10 min easy/moderate hike on a primitive trail to the field site, where we will sit for 2 hours. We then hike back out on the same path. Please wear layers; you will need good hiking shoes. Binoculars can be helpful but not necessary. Email cindy.elliser@pacmam.org to save a spot and she will send you more information, including directions.

7. Did you know?

Why do some gray whales detour into Puget Sound during their annual spring migration to Alaska? A group known as the “Sounders” (about 22 whales) takes advantage of the shallow inland waters to feast on [ghost shrimp](#), fueling up for the long journey north.

How do they find these burrowing critters? Grey whales roll onto their side, scoop up mouthfuls of mud and sediment, then use their [baleen](#) to filter out the water and debris, swallowing what remains: an abundance of highly nutritious ghost shrimp. Pretty smart, eh?

Learn more about the “Sounders” in [The Case of the Wandering Whales](#) video by [SeaDoc Society](#), and at [Cascadia Research Collective](#).

8. UPCOMING EVENTS

- ❖ **April 17, 6:30 PM.** [Snorkelling against climate change](#). Snorkellers of BC Monthly Meet-up. COAST Ocean Innovation, Hub. 517 Herald St. Victoria, BC. Registration required.
- ❖ **Saturday, April 18, 10 AM - 2 PM.** [Earth Day on Whidbey Island!](#) Join in on the activities, immersive experiences, volunteer opportunities, and other ways to get involved in your island home. Free, family friendly, and open to all! Camp Casey, 1276 Engle Rd., Coupeville, WA.

Victoria people!

- ❖ **April 22, 2026**, the multi award-winning film, [The Rewilders](#), will be shown at [Glenlyon Norfolk School](#). “Fierce and passionate individuals are taking audacious measures to save a planet in crisis. The Rewilders is a visually spectacular short (67 minutes) documentary that follows pioneering conservationists on three continents, working to rewild iconic species like jaguar, elephant, bison and Pacific salmon.” Burnaby BC’s Mark Angelo, an internationally-celebrated river conservationist, writer, speaker, teacher and paddler, is the film’s executive producer.

More about Mark Angelo: [Rewilding with purpose: How Mark Angelo turned applied learning into global impact](#). Long before rewilding became a global movement, Dr. Mark Angelo was already thinking about restoration. Amy Chen. BCIT News. March 26, 2026.

- ❖ **April 27, 2026, 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm.** Sea star wasting disease: the sunflowers of the sea and the pathogen that kills them. Virtual. [Nature Victoria's Marine Night](#). Melanie Prentice, Research Scientist at the Hakai Institute.

One of the largest and fastest sea star species recorded, the sunflower sea star (*Pycnopodia helianthoides*) was historically also one of the most abundant species you would find roaming the Pacific Coast of North America. Since 2013, however, an epidemic of unknown origin caused populations to collapse with billions of sunflower sea stars disappearing rapidly. Melanie will describe the research behind the recent identification of the pathogen responsible. [Pre-register to receive the Zoom link](#).



- ❖ **April 28, 5:00 - 6:00PM.** Nudibranchs! (Virtual) Feiro Marine Life Center and Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary are pleased to invite you to join their 2026 Speaker Series. More information [HERE](#) or email jordan@feiromarinelifecenter.org.
- ❖ **May 7, 2026 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM PDT.** Although not Salish Sea, here's an opportunity to learn more from Janna Nichols! [Flabbergasting Flounders](#). Virtual. Registration required. and Pacific salmon." Burnaby BC's Mark Angelo, an internationally-celebrated river conservationist, writer, speaker, teacher and paddler, is the film's executive producer.

Do you have an upcoming education event to share? Send the information to salish.wonders@gmail.com and we can add it to the next newsletter.

Connect with us & learn more!

Thank you for being part of this year's Wonders of the Salish Sea series. To keep learning and stay connected, follow Wonders of the Salish Sea on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and visit wondersofthesalishsea.com for more information, and to explore past presentations.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at salish.wonders@gmail.com

Follow us!



9. IN THE NEWS/READ/WATCH

- ❖ [Federal government puts out \\$412.9M to renew Pacific Salmon Initiative](#). The federal government is spending \$412.9 million over five years to renew the Pacific Salmon Strategy in a plan to protect and rebuild wild populations. Chuck Chiang, The Canadian Press. April 7, 2026.
- ❖ [Little Squalicum Estuary project models successful coastal habitat restoration](#). The City of Bellingham completed construction on the Little Squalicum Estuary in spring of 2024, transforming a solid grassy beachfront park into a vibrant coastal hub for animals and plants alike, including endangered Chinook salmon and eelgrass. Eli Voorhies. Salish Current. March 19, 2026.
- ❖ [Update from Musqueam regarding Rights Recognition Agreement](#). Musqueam is encouraged to see all the interest in the recent Musqueam Rights Recognition Agreements with the Government of Canada. These agreements effectively support Musqueam's long-established role as stewards of the Fraser River and create work groups and advisory committees focused on important issues including emergency marine management, spill response, environmental protection and fisheries. Musqueam, A Living Culture. March 2, 2026.

Read

- ❖ [Twelve Daring Grays' enter the Salish Sea](#). A children's book by Nora Nickum. New children's book tells the true story of a few gray whales who make a detour into the Salish Sea for a risky but rewarding meal. Salish Current. April 7, 2026.

Watch

- ❖ [Protecting the Salish Sea](#). Western Washington University. Recorded on March 23, 2026. Kaylee Galloway, Whatcom County Council member; Austin Rose, Resources Specialist. This WWU Environmental Speaker Series is free and open to the public. Talks are held each Thursday at 4:30pm in Academic Instructional Center West, room 204. Join us at WWU or online on Zoom!
- ❖ [SEATALK: HERRING SCHOOL](#). Briony Penn & Connie Crocker. A powerful conversation exploring the decline of Pacific herring Pacific herring—a foundational species that supports the entire marine food web. Briony Penn & Connie Crocker share the latest scientific findings, how this research aligns with Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and why the W̱SÁNEĆ Hereditary Chiefs are taking these findings to court. At the heart of this effort is a vision: that rebuilding herring populations can help restore ecological balance and cultural vitality across the Salish Sea. Part of Saturna Island Marine Research and Education Society (SIMRES) [Sea Talk series](#).

See you on April 20th for our last session of 2026!

Deborah on behalf of Cindy, Joan, Liz, Maithili, and Rebecca

