



Wonders OF THE **SALISH SEA**

2026 webinar series

Photo: Marnee Pearce

2026 Newsletter 6

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Hello everyone,

Wonders of the Salish Sea (WSS) has wrapped up for another year. **We had our largest registration yet, with over 400 people from all parts of the Salish Sea, and friends from beyond.** The speakers were outstanding, as always, and the range of topics provided a rich, comprehensive understanding of the ecosystem as a whole. We are so fortunate to live in, visit, or admire from afar this uniquely biodiverse place.

Our deep appreciation goes to Beatrice Frank, Executive Director of Georgia Strait Alliance (GSA), for seeing the potential of this program and offering GSA as the 2026 host organization. Special recognition goes to GSA staff members Maithili Devadas and Rebecca Adams for going above and beyond, helping to bring WSS to its next chapter.

Currently, GSA is getting ready to launch two critical new campaigns that include:

- ❖ Partnering with WSÁNEĆ Hereditary Chiefs and the Herring Restoration & Conservation Society to defend herring—an essential species that supports the entire Salish Sea food web, from Chinook salmon to killer whales.
- ❖ Working with coastal communities to adapt to climate change and build resilience in the face of mounting environmental pressures.

You can keep up to date with all of GSA's activities and Calls to Action by subscribing to their [newsletter](#).



Georgia Strait Alliance



From Beatrice Frank: “We’re pleased to share that GSA will be back as the WSS host again next year—we’re already looking forward to another season of engaging talks, shared learning, and plenty of moments that make us see the Salish Sea a little differently.” Thanks Beatrice!

It has also been such a pleasure to partner with the Salish Sea Institute (SSI), part of Western Washington University. Cindy Elliser, SSI’s Associate Director, was an integral part in the planning and delivery of the program, as well as being one of this year’s outstanding speakers. Will we ever look at harbour porpoises the same way again??

To stay up to date with SSI’s upcoming news, publications, webinars, workshops and projects in the Salish Sea, you can subscribe to their [newsletter](#) as well.



**SALISH SEA
INSTITUTE**



Last, but certainly not least, our heartfelt thanks to all of you! Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to learn about this inland sea ecosystem. For those who attended the live sessions, your engagement in the Chat through questions, answers, recommendations, links, stories, and jokes—as well as your enthusiastic participation in the quiz—created a palpable sense of community in this virtual setting. For those of you who weren’t able to attend the live sessions, we hope you enjoy the recordings!

2. Keeping in touch

Follow WSS on Facebook and Instagram and check the [website](#) for updates.

Questions?? Email us at salish.wonders@gmail.com.

You can also sign up for the WSS “[Alumni](#)” [newsletter](#)”. You will receive 4 newsletters a year, we do not share addresses, and you can cancel anytime.



3. Feedback survey

We value your feedback! **[Please take a few minutes to complete this brief survey](#)**. All questions are optional, and your responses are anonymous. Your input is valuable information that helps us plan future programming.

4. 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](#).

5. Summaries of April 20presentations

Gulls: Far More Than Just A Seagull

David Droppers

David Droppers has spent years bringing the natural world to life, teaching courses that span everything from birds and butterflies to trees and even microorganisms. Whether in college biology classrooms or with non-profit environmental groups, his depth of knowledge is matched only by his contagious enthusiasm. In his WSS presentation, David turned our attention to a group many of us think we already know: gulls. But as he quickly revealed, these are “more than just a seagull!” With humor and insight, he guided us through the surprising diversity of gull species found in the Salish Sea, unpacking their migration patterns, feeding habits, and the remarkable variety you can observe in a single outing.

From eye-opening moments—like seeing a gull devour an entire sea star—to the nuances of hybridization and shifting plumage between breeding and non-breeding seasons, David made even seasoned birders look twice. He also shared a selection of excellent field guides and books for those eager to deepen their gull knowledge (and patience!). Above all, his talk reminded us how much

Three cheers for gulls!!!



there is still to learn about even the most familiar species—and how much joy there is in doing so. If you want a dose of pure delight—don’t miss the [“dancing gulls” set to music](#). It’s as charming as it sounds.

David also shared that—like the gulls—he has a passion for potato chips! His favourite, Old Dutch Ketchup Chips, isn’t available in the U.S. So, if any BCers are planning a trip to WA, consider taking a few dozen bags of these treasured chips with you. Rumour has it that David will meet you anywhere in the state to pick them up!

More questions for David? You can contact him at Lycaenid@gmail.com.

For upcoming education opportunities with David, which include field trips and lectures via Zoom, visit [Birds Connect Seattle](#), [Eastside Audubon Society](#), and [Pilchuck Audubon](#). David typically teaches a gulls class for these groups in October when gull diversity peaks in the Salish Sea.

In the meantime, you can learn all about “Moths” in David’s recent presentation, [Moths: A New Frontier](#), hosted by Camano Wildlife Habitat.

~Beatrice

Gulls: Misunderstood Majesties of the Salish Sea

David Droppers



Photo (left): Zak Pohlen



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

Grant Lawrence

Grant Lawrence, award-winning broadcaster, musician, and author, brought his Whale Tale podcast to life in this presentation about a very specific group of Transient (aka: Bigg's) killer whales. His fascination with this particular family began with a few sightings that included one individual with a unique dorsal fin. In discussion with the coordinator of Straitwatch, a branch of CETUS Conservation that does on water boater education and direct intervention in the presence of whales, just a brief description of that unique dorsal fin led to the identification of the T002C family and the story of their ancestors, known as the Pedder Bay 5.

Grant then took us back to the capture era of the early 1970s, when Bob Wright, owner of the Marineland of the Pacific Aquarium in Victoria, used crude nets to confine a group of 5 killer whales that had entered narrow Pedder Bay. No one knew much about killer whales at the time, or that there were different populations, or ecotypes, that fed on different prey items. The Pedder Bay 5 were transient killer whales, that feed exclusively on marine mammals. Two of the individuals were moved to the Aquarium in Victoria, including a unique, almost white individual. Those two eventually learned to eat fish. The 3 left in the net pen never did eat fish, and

one died of starvation. So how did the T002C family descend from this group? An anonymous person, or persons, set the remaining two whales free! The mystery of who-dun-it has never been solved.

This is the story of just one family of Transient killer whales that survived and thrived as humans ceased shooting at them, capturing them and harvesting their prey. This ecotype of killer whale is showing positive population growth and their future looks promising. To get the full, fascinating story, watch or re-watch the recording of the finale of Wonders of the Salish Sea 2026.

Grant's love for the Salish Sea and all its inhabitants – finned and otherwise – was evident throughout his presentation. He emphasized that the ecosystem is in a renaissance period for certain species, such as seals, sea lions, transient and northern resident killer whales, and humpbacks. He also brought



attention to the serious concerns about critically endangered southern resident killer whales, sunflower sea stars, and other species at risk, while recognizing there is hope for the ecosystem overall. See the Chat discussion below, where participants shared what gives them hope about the future of the Salish Sea.

~Joan



Photo: Gary Henkel

Here is a list of the books on whales suggested in the Chat:

Endangered Orcas: The Story of the Southern Residents, by Monika Wieland Shields. A deep dive into that particular population.

Orca: How We Came to Know and Love the Ocean's Greatest Predator, by Jason Colby. A non-fiction work examining how human perception of killer whales shifted from feared monsters to beloved icons. It chronicles the history of orca captivity in the Pacific Northwest and its impact on conservation.

How to Speak Whale, by Tom Mustill. Includes native oral traditional stories of orcas hunting in cooperation with humans.

Listening to Whales, by Alexandra Morton. A great read that changed my life.

And, of course, all the books by Grant!—[find them here](#).

6. Chat Discussion and Quiz

Our Chat discussion question was: “What keeps you hopeful about the future of the Salish Sea?”

Answers included: “The enthusiasm of the younger generation to know more about nature keeps me inspired and encouraged!!;” “What keeps me hopeful about the future of the Salish Sea is that it continues to invite us into relationship—and that there is still time to listen more closely, care more deeply, and do better;” “I am hopeful because there are so many interested people attending these sessions!;” “Passion like those giving talks here at Wonders - the passion people have for their topic gives me hope!” “I am hopeful because of passionate people like we have here and the amazing environmental NGO’s in this part of the world.,” “This group, Elizabeth May, David Suzuki, Paul Watson, the late Farley Mowat and all the others who have been fighting for and educating us about the environment for years.” Thanks everyone!



Quiz

The quiz question was, “What gull has a bright red, black-tipped beak?” **The answer:** Heermann’s gull. The lucky prize winner gets to choose from one of [Grant Lawrence’s many wonderful books](#). Congratulations!

Photo: courtesy of [CornellLab, All About Birds](#).

7. A field trip to Stanley Park for intertidal exploration

April 18, 2026, Vancouver, BC

On April 18, 2026, sunny weather welcomed 20 of us—total beginners to avid beach explorers—to the intertidal area at Figurehead Point in Stanley Park. We started by walking out to the exposed rocks, with a plan to start there at low tide and gradually move to the mid and high intertidal zones as the water came in. However, a few hours later, we were still out on the rocks, as the rising tide lapped at our ankles, our heads down, marvelling at the sea life there.

Many thanks to our guides, Rebecca Hansen, Sharon Adelman, Leesa Watt, and Sheila Byers, for explaining how these diverse marine species struggle, survive, and thrive by adapting—in the strangest of ways—to the challenges of living both submerged and exposed to the elements on a twice daily basis.

One thing we noticed right away, was a plethora of red rocks crabs. Usually, at low tide, you tend to find empty crab shells, as gulls and other predators have taken

advantage of the easy pickings. But these large crabs, most hiding in the sand, were everywhere and, aware of our presence, they started mobilizing towards the rising shoreline. Some went the wrong way, so, those of us who know how to pick them up safely, returned them to the ocean. Don't try this if you don't know how – red rock crabs have very strong claws and are not afraid to grab onto your fingers!

The WSS 2026 presentations really prepared us for this excursion as

Guides share information about Burrard Inlet and this biodiverse intertidal area.



California sea cucumber



Orange sea cucumber



Mottled star and a scale worm



Hermisenda nudibranch



Mottled sea star and iridescent chiton. Lined??

we saw ‘fish in the shallows’ (high cockscomb, tidepool sculpin, and gunnels), and tons of healthy sea stars, mostly ochre, leather, and mottled. A big highlight was finding two kinds of nudibranchs: the Hermisenda and the Monterey Sea lemon. Beautiful seaweeds covered the rocks: lots of sugar kelp (*Saccharina*

latissimi), and baby bull kelp (*Nereocystis luetkeana*), positive signs for the health of these waters.

About an hour into our field trip, attendees from the UBC Symposium on “The Ecology of Our Changing Shores” arrived and we slowly became one large

group of enthusiastic intertidal explorers, respectfully learning about the amazing biodiversity in this urban park.

A more detailed scientific report of this field trip will be posted on the Nature Vancouver website.

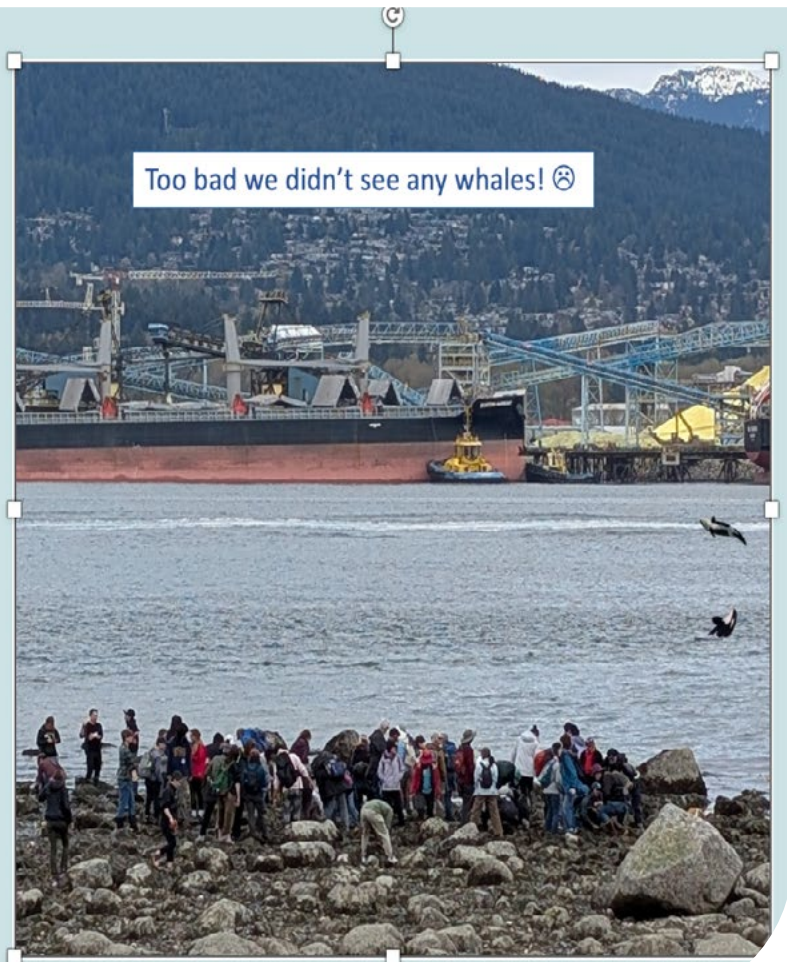


Red rock crab well hidden but watching what is going on.

Purple star (*Pisaster ochraceus*) with sugar kelp



Pedicellariae with miniscule pincers.



9. Did you know?

Did you know? You can keep up to date with whale visits to the Salish Sea through Orca Network, Center for Whale Research, Southern Gulf Islands Whale Sighting Network, Howe Sound Cetacean Sightings Group, and the North Coast Cetacean Society, to name a few!

8. Summary of UBC symposium “The Ecology of Our Changing Shores”

On Saturday April 18, 2026, a panel of ocean experts shared their knowledge with a room of eager listeners at UBC. Among these speakers was Dr. Chris Harley, Tara Bruder, Georgia Hall, Dr. Veronica Farrugia Drakard and Carl Ng. These discussions preceded a lunch and afternoon intertidal exploration at Stanley Park with Varoon P. Supratya.

Tara Bruder began the panels by discussing the impact of the climate on the intertidal zone; how temperature, salinity, rising sea levels and CO2 impact our intertidal neighbours. Following this, Dr. Chris Harley got specific about how these changes impact marine organisms in the intertidal zone as well as delving into the brackish (a mixture of fresh and sea water) nature of the waters of the Salish Sea. Georgia Hall spoke about ocean acidification and its impacts on mussel and oyster growth, health and longevity, guiding us through her research on Quadra Island. Carl Ng spoke about the effects of marine heatwaves on Dungeness crabs, teaching us about their life stages and how these life stages are monitored through light traps. And finally, Dr. Veronica Farrugia Drakard went into the current state of kelp, the importance of kelp forests and the efforts that are being made to restore kelp forest ecosystems.



Thanks to WSS Planning Committee member (on leave), Niamh Burns, for sharing some of the highlights from this timely and information-packed symposium.

10. Call to Action!

- ❖ **Public Comment - 1000m approach distance for Southern resident orcas. Closed** on April 21, 2026. Thanks to all of you who add your voice to this important call for action.
- ❖ **“How will my menu affect my great grandchildren?”** From Jared Qwustenuxun Williams’ WSS presentation on April 13, 2026.

“After a century of global cuisine based on ingredients from around the world it’s time to start thinking locally and how our recipes and food systems will affect the generations to come.” Seek out and support Indigenous-run restaurants whenever possible!

Here are some suggestions from participants to get you started:

- ❖ [Schi:ya Cafe](#), Sq’ewqel Band, Harrison Hot Springs. BC
- ❖ [Haida House](#), HAIDA GWAI, BC
- ❖ [Salmon n’ Bannock](#), Vancouver and Richmond, BC
- ❖ Kekuli Café, [Kamloops](#), and [Merritt](#), BC,
- ❖ [Skipper Otto](#), Community Supported Fishery, supporting small-scale, independent fishing families in coastal and Indigenous communities.
- ❖ [8 Native American-owned Restaurants in the Seattle Area](#)

11. UPCOMING EVENTS

❖ **April 27, 2026, 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm.** [Sea star wasting disease: the sunflowers of the sea and the pathogen that kills them.](#)

Melanie Prentice, Research Scientist at the Hakai Institute.

One of the largest and fastest sea star species recorded, the sunflower sea star was historically also one of the most abundant species roaming the Pacific Coast. Since 2013, however, an epidemic of unknown origin caused populations to collapse. Melanie will describe the research behind the recent identification of the pathogen responsible. Nature Victoria Marine Night (Zoom Only). [Pre-register to receive the Zoom link.](#)

❖ **April 30, 2026, 7:30 to 9:00PM.** Online. **Biodiversity Galiano: What an Island Has Learned About Its Biodiversity After a Decade of Systematic Study.** Andrew Simon

Nature Vancouver. Non-members of Nature Vancouver are welcome. To register for the Zoom link, email: zoom-request@NatureVancouver.ca between April 24 to 29.

May 2, 2026, 11:30 - 1:30. [Beach Life Discoveries.](#) Join NatureKids BC for a family-

oriented intertidal exploration at Vancouver's Stanley Park. Along with our guides, we'll learn all about the many fascinating plants and animals that have adapted to living both underwater and exposed to the elements. You'll be amazed!

❖ **May 30 – June 8, 2026.** [Ocean Week Victoria](#) (Capital Region District)

Ocean Week Victoria is a collaboration among local community organizations to help people learn and care about our big blue backyard. Events include educational and recreational activities that explore and interact with the ocean.

❖ **June 8 - 14, 2026,** [Sunshine Coast Ocean Festival.](#) The Sunshine Coast Ocean Festival is a vibrant annual celebration that brings together our coastal community to honour and protect the ocean that sustains us. It's a week of celebrating ocean biodiversity and conservation with activities hosted by the [Sunshine Coast Conservation Association](#) (SCCA), including a [community celebration](#) on World Oceans Day: More about the festival [here](#).



- ❖ **Jun 8, 2026, 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. PDT. [Leatherbacks in BC](#).** Join Marine Education and Research Society (MERS) for a FREE Ocean Day webinar for elementary schools about Leatherback Sea Turtles—the largest reptile in the world!—with sea turtle expert, Lisa Spaven. This endangered species comes all the way from Indonesia to feed on jellies off our coast. Their adaptations are astounding! Adults also welcome!
- ❖ **August 2026, [Vancouver Kelp Fest 2026](#).** More information coming on Instagram, [vankelpfest](#).



The poster for the 'Leatherbacks in BC' Ocean Day webinar features a dark blue background. At the top left, it says 'Leatherbacks in BC' in yellow, followed by 'They're out there, you know!' and 'FREE webinar for schools'. To the right is an illustration of a leatherback sea turtle with the text 'To 2 m long - 450 kg'. Below this is a photo of a leatherback swimming. On the right side, it says 'Ocean Day' in yellow, followed by 'Monday, June 8' and '1:30 to 2:15 pm PDT'. At the bottom left is the MERS logo and the text 'With sea turtle expert Lisa Spaven! Registration' with a QR code and the website 'www.mersociety.org/courses-events'. On the bottom right is a photo of Lisa Spaven.

12. IN THE NEWS/READ/WATCH

- ❖ **[Sooke researcher says public awareness key as rules expand for endangered orcas](#).** The federal government is strengthening protections for southern resident killer whales, introducing new vessel management measures that expand minimum approach distances and tighten navigation rules across B.C.'s southern coast, including waters around Sooke and the Juan de Fuca Strait. Nikhil Nikhil, Victoria News, April 21, 2026
 - ❖ **[Sea lions pack Seattle docks, signaling shift in Puget Sound ecosystem](#).** Sea lions are back in big numbers, crowding docks across Ballard and causing quite a raucous. Marine experts say the chaotic scene could point to something much bigger happening beneath the surface. Joe Gaydos with the SeaDoc Society says their size alone makes an impression. Lauren Donovan, Fox 13 Seattle, April 21, 2026.
 - ❖ **[Landslide mitigation to protect salmon habitat begins on Vancouver Island](#).** A First Nation on Vancouver Island has partnered with an environmental group to try to mitigate the harms of a massive landslide — known locally as “Big Bertha” — on salmon-bearing streams in the area. (Canadian Press), April 16, 2026.
 - ❖ **[How seals’ whiskers make them master underwater hunters](#).** A harbor seal sports about a hundred whiskers — which are more than just for show. They provide the animals with key intel on their surroundings. Ari Daniel, KUOW, April 16, 2026.
 - ❖ **[Ottawa’s renewed salmon funding spawns both hope and skepticism](#).** Sonal Gupta, National Observer, April 14th 2026.
- Ottawa’s \$412-million salmon recovery program offers a lifeline to BC’s struggling fisheries — but comes at the same time budget cuts are

dismantling monitoring systems conservationists, experts and First Nations say are essential to protect them.

- ❖ [Watershed Security Fund: \\$6 Million supporting 26 community-led watershed projects across BC.](#)
The Watershed Security Fund (WSF), a partnership

between the First Nations Water Caucus (FNWC), the First Nations Fisheries Council (FNFC), and the Real Estate Foundation of BC (REFBC), is thrilled to announce the recipients of the WSF Grants Program. Water Canada, April 14, 2026

Watch

Related to Grant Lawrence's presentation this week!

- ❖ [The Return of Humpbacks - Howe Sound/Atl'kitsem.](#) Bob Turner. ~2020.

From Nature Vancouver's Marine Biology Section speaker series:

- ❖ [The Taming of the Spew: Decoding whale physiology from fecal and blow samples.](#) Sheila Thornton. April 9, 2026.
- ❖ [Knock-Knock, Who's There?](#) Investigating Rockfish Vocalizations. Darienne Lancaster. March 12, 2026.

- ❖ [The Journey to Finding a Cause of Sea Star Wasting Disease.](#) Alyssa Gehman. February 12, 2026.

Read

- ❖ [A Community's Quest to Document Every Species on Their Island Home.](#) Naming leads to knowing, which leads to understanding. Residents of a small British Columbia island take to the forests and beaches to connect with their nonhuman neighbors. A 2022 article about the dedicated work of Andrew Simon on Galiano Island. See information regarding Andrew's April 30, 2026 presentation in the Upcoming Events section.

The WSS '26 Planning Committee—Cindy, Joan, Liz, Maithili, Rebecca and Deborah—wishes you a wonderful year of exploring, discovering, protecting, conserving, and enjoying the Salish Sea. We look forward to seeing you again next year!



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