

## **Trustee Susan Yates – January 2023 Report**

At today's Islands Trust Conservancy Board meeting, I was appointed as the Conservancy liaison for the Financial Planning Committee of Trust Council.

I welcome members of the public to discuss any issue relating to the Gabriola Local Trust Area, or the Islands Trust generally, during my first 'office hours' session at the Islands Trust northern office on Gabriola, on Thursday, February 9, 1-4 pm.

### **Link Island – a celebration of generosity and visionary thinking**

On January 20 I was fortunate to attend a 3 hour event in Nanaimo celebrating the transfer of Link Island, a 21.45 hectare gem between DeCourcy and Mudge Islands, from the Swift family to the Islands Trust Conservancy (ITC), after several generations of careful stewardship of the island's ecology by the Swift family.

Collaboration and strong support from the Nanaimo Area Land Trust (NALT) and the Gabriola Land and Trails Trust (GaLTT), with the ITC, along with the conservation values and ethics of Betty and Ward Smith, and their 3 children (Barbara, Hally, and Ted) and their families, mean that the varied and rare sensitive ecosystems of Link Island have been, and will be preserved in perpetuity.

The conservation covenants placed on Link Island ensure that this ecological treasure trove will remain untrammelled natural habitat for many species, and an ideal place to study the impact of climate change on species ranging from the saprophytic ghost pipe to the endangered and iconic (huge yellow eyes and endearing stare) Western screech owl. The terrain and foreshore of Link Island include all of the threatened micro-habitats typical of the Coastal Douglas fir biogeoclimatic zone, from wetlands to cliffside, alder and willow to arbutus and Nootka rose.

Learning about the Swift family's dedication to conservation, since the early 1900s in California and moving northward to Washington State, was profoundly moving. Barbara Swift described her mother Betty as someone whose 'conservation DNA' goes back a long way and is still the guiding hand for Barbara, Hally, Ted, and their families. The Swift family's long held land ethics are akin to those espoused by conservationists like Aldo Leopold, whose abiding respect for nature rose far above the colonial practices of buying, extracting, partitioning, and turning land into commodity without respect for its ecology and relationship to all living beings.

Before Betty Swift passed away in 2021, after having placed a conservation covenant on Link Island in 2018, she asked that it be transferred to the ITC, with the condition that her children and grandchildren maintain right of use for the duration of their lives. After listening to Barbara, Hally, and Ted talk about their respect for conservation and their vision for a future that may not include them but instead honours the ecology and ongoing life of 21+ hectares in the Salish Sea, many of us in the room were blinking back tears of gratitude.

For 3 solid hours, I felt the weight of climate grief lift from my heart, and I saw, heard, and felt what this lasting legacy means to the pigeon guillemots, peregrine falcons, pileated woodpeckers, otters, red-legged frogs, camas, stonecrop, and so many other flora and fauna species whose existence is threatened everywhere by human impacts and climate change. Link Island is the most valuable donation ever received by the Islands Trust Conservancy, and its new status as a Nature Reserve endows it with a lasting ecological value that cannot be measured.