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An important day across the Pass ~ Christa Grace-Warrick



Interpretive signs at Georgina Point on Mayne Island (above) and at Bellhouse Park on Galiano Island (below) now inform visitors about the internationally recognized Active Pass *Important Bird Area*, outlined in red on the map below.

Travelling on the ferries in the Southern Strait of Georgia, have you ever noticed flocks of birds wheeling low over the water, diving and swimming in the rips and standing waves, and perching on floating logs and the shores of Active Pass between Mayne and Galiano Islands?

The significance of Active Pass to avian life came into sharper focus on Sunday, October 30. Two ceremonies dedicating Important Bird Area interpretive signage were held; one north of the Pass at Bellhouse Park on Galiano and the other on the south side at Mayne's Georgina Point Lighthouse (part of the federal Gulf Islands National Park Reserve). The Mayne Island sign was designed by Parks Canada with input from steward group, Mayne Island Conservancy. The Galiano sign was commissioned by the other steward group, Galiano Conservancy, its original painted by Galiano wildlife artist Elizabeth McClelland.

Active Pass was designated an Important Bird Area (IBA) in 2001 because its rich tidal waters



Map showing the boundaries of Active Pass Important Bird Area.

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support a great diversity of bird species. The area is also key habitat for marine mammals and both migratory and resident fish species.

Over the winter, the IBA supports significant numbers of two waterbirds, the Pacific Loon and Brandt's Cormorant. The area also sustains populations of Bonaparte's Gull during their fall and spring migrations. Up to ten pairs of Bald Eagles nest along the shores of the IBA, and upwards of 100 eagles occasionally forage here in the winter months. In all, there are about 40 species of marine and marine-associated birds that regularly use Active Pass at some time in their annual life cycle.

For thousands of years, indigenous peoples used the waters for shellfish gathering, reef fishing and waterfowl netting. Nowadays, the IBA area provides recreational opportunities such as fishing, beachcombing, scuba diving, kayaking and nature watching.

On October 30, the ferry schedule was friendly to those wishing to participate in both ceremonies, the weather was kind and the fall colours superb. There was even time for lunch at the Springwater Lodge overlooking Active Pass; time for a new and deeper view of the waterway's significance.

Representatives from a number of participating agencies spoke to the gumbooted onlookers. Galiano's Mike Hoebel

and Mayne's Michael Dunn led the dedications.

In 2008, the two became the stewards of the Active Pass IBA for their respective conservancies and decided that the profile of the IBA needed raising. Through a grant from Vancity's enviroFund, local fundraising, and Parks Canada funding on the Mayne side, they embarked on a program to do both interpretive signs and beach access signs, and create a website and brochure. In addition, the program encourages shoreline stewardship by Mayne and Galiano residents and provides record-keeping training for participants. Stewards' data is also collated into an annual report.

At the Galiano dedication, Ed Andrusiak created interest by pointed out that the Active Pass IBA could be a very good reason for visitors to come to stay in the Southern Islands in wintertime, creating a new economic opportunity.

The International Important Bird Area Program, which began in the 1980s, has created a global network of more than 10,000 Important Bird Areas (IBA) in 200 countries. There are almost 600 in Canada and close to 90 in BC.

Other IBAs in the vicinity are Fraser River/Boundary Bay IBA in Delta, and Porlier Pass IBA. Find out more at: www.ibacanada.ca, www.conservancyonmayne.com, www.galianoconservancy.ca



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