



# Niagara Rhodo



*Newsletter of the Niagara Chapter, Rhododendron Society of Canada  
District 12, American Rhododendron Society  
Our website: [www.rhodonniagara.org](http://www.rhodonniagara.org)*

## *Recap of Haida Gwaii Presentation by Tom Laviolette - Special Edition!*

**Our Purpose:** We are a non-profit organization whose aim is to promote, encourage, and support interest in the genus *rhododendron*. Our goal is to encourage gardeners to grow and appreciate these plants by providing educational meetings with knowledgeable speakers, access to topical publications, and hosting joint meetings with other chapters.

**Word of Caution:**

By becoming a successful grower, the reader will be exposed to a contagion for which there is no cure. Once infected with an appreciation of rhododendrons and azaleas, most gardeners spend a lifetime collecting these most beautiful of all plants.

*H. Edward Reiley*

## *A Message from Your Editors*

### **Greetings, Members and Friends –**

Summer is come and gone, and we trust your summer was as enjoyable and delicious as possible. Some of you might say that this past summer was longer than normal, and that would be correct because higher temperatures started early during Spring.

Your Board is, as usual, trying to ensure that our Society's upcoming Schedule or Program will be interesting to all of our members and Rhodo friends.

Our most recent activity, a tour of member Sheila Hirsch-Kalm and husband Michael's garden culminated in a potluck enjoyed tremendously by those who attended. Needless to say, we sincerely thank Sheila and Michael again for opening their beautiful garden and home to us.

As promised in Nick's recent email, we will be sending a series of newsletters to remind all of our members and colleagues that we are back for the season, and we have lined up some exciting topics and events for the coming months. We will share these with you in our next newsletter.

For now, allow us to start with this Newsletter which recaps the presentation titled "Plants and animals of the land and sea of Haida Gwaii: Haida culture and their Natural Environment" given by Tom Laviolette in March, 2018.

Enjoy.

Angela Calixto and Nick Yarmoshuk

**(PS. We hope to see you at our next meeting on November 11, 2018, 2 PM, Rittenhouse Hall, Vineland Research & Innovation Centre, Victoria Avenue, Vineland Station, just north of the QEW )**

# Plants and animals of the land and sea of Haida Gwaii: Haida culture and their Natural Environment

(Tom Laviolette's presentation  
delivered to the Niagara Chapter on March 4, 2018)

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When the Niagara Chapter invited Tom Laviolette to be a speaker, he volunteered to talk about the trip that he and his wife Sharon took in July, 2017 to a region not frequently found on a traveler's bucket list – Haida Gwaii.

For Tom and Sharon, this 10-day adventure focusing on First Nations and Haida Art started in Vancouver where they stayed at Skwachays Lodge, which is considered as Canada's first urban aboriginal boutique hotel. This hotel provides a venue for native artists to show and sell their artwork, and each of the rooms in this lodge is uniquely designed by aboriginal artists, featuring original carvings and paintings.



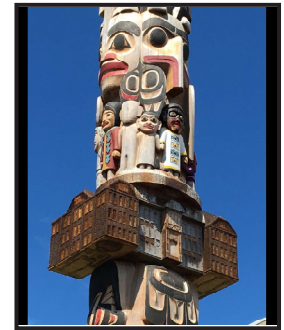
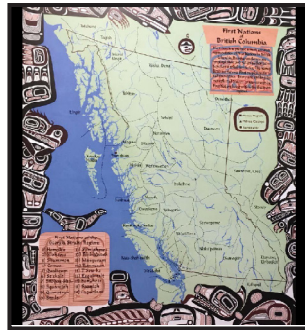
**Skwachays Lodge pictures**

Before heading to Haida Gwaii, there was also an appropriate visit to the University of British Columbia Anthropology Museum designed in 1976 by Arthur Erickson. This museum is known for bringing indigenous art into the mainstream and for its large and impressive Northwest Coast collections, including some of the finest works of Bill Reid, who is considered as one of Canada's finest sculptors. His renowned monumental masterpiece, *Raven and the First Men*, which was carved from a giant block of yellow cedar is housed here. This Museum also has the largest collection of preserved totem poles, acquired through Bill Reid, who assisted in the partial reconstruction of a Haida village in the Museum.

(Editor's Note: This insert may be of interest to our readers.) According to website <https://www.billreidgallery.ca/pages/about-bill-reid>, "Bill Reid (1920-1998) was an acclaimed master goldsmith, carver, sculptor, writer, broadcaster, mentor and community activist. He was born in Victoria, BC to a Haida mother and an American father with Scottish German roots, and only began exploring his Haida roots at the age of 23. This journey of discovery lasted a lifetime and shaped Reid's artistic career. . . He infused Haida traditions with his own modernist aesthetic to create both exquisitely small as well as monumental work that captured the public's imagination, and introduced a timeless vocabulary to the modern world . . . Reid became a pivotal force in building bridges between Indigenous people and other peoples. Through his mother, he was a member of the Raven clan from T'aanuu with the wolf as one of his family crests. Raven is known as a mischievous trickster, who also plays an important part in transforming the world. Many of these traits matched Bill Reid's personality. In 1986, Reid was presented with the Haida name Yaahl Sgwansung, meaning *The Only Raven*. . . The Bill Reid Gallery of Northwest Coast Art was created in 2008 to honour his legacy and celebrate the diverse indigenous cultures of the Northwest Coast." The Bill Reid Museum is a stop not to be missed.

## **Totem Poles**

It seems unavoidable to not talk about totem poles when the focus is Haida Art and culture. These tall structures, carved from large straight red cedars are sometimes painted with muted colours. Each pole portrays individual family stories and status within the Haida culture. Some poles are memorial poles. There are six basic types of



**University of British Columbia Anthropology Museum pictures**



The Raven and the First Men, Bill Reid \$20 Bill from 2004-2012  
Yellow Cedar *Cupressus nootkatensis*

totem poles, the Mortuary pole being the most rare. It includes a recessed back on the upper portion of the pole to hold a grave box, where the ashes or the body of the deceased person is placed.

The other types are Family or House Post, House Frontal, Memorial, Welcome, and Shame/Ridicule poles.

In April, 2017, a special 17-metre tall "Reconciliation pole" was put up at

the University of British Columbia to represent the victims and survivors of Canada's residential school system. It was carved into an 800-year-old cedar tree, has faces of children with spirit figures protecting them, and Haida people in their native costumes representing aboriginal people getting their strength back together. Above, a canoe and a longboat travel over water, symbolizing a people moving forward. The pole has thousands of copper nails representing the number of forgotten Indigenous children who died while in the system. Survivors of residential schools along with their family members participated in the emotional process of hammering the nails.

At the Haida Museum in Skidegate, they were greeted with a Watchman Pole, the significance of which is to honour watchmen literally welcoming guests to the community or watching people that come into the village, and alert its owner of events he should know about, e.g. approach of an enemy. It is symbolized by three human figures wearing high hats and situated on top of the totem pole. The Haida people believed that it was necessary to protect the Moresby region, also known as Gwaii Haanas, to maintain and protect the Haida culture.

Meetings about distribution of wealth and notable gift-giving celebrations were marked on Potlatch Poles, a symbol for status and wealth.

### **Geographical Location of Haida Gwaii (Source: [www BC Tourism promotion](http://www.BC Tourism promotion))**

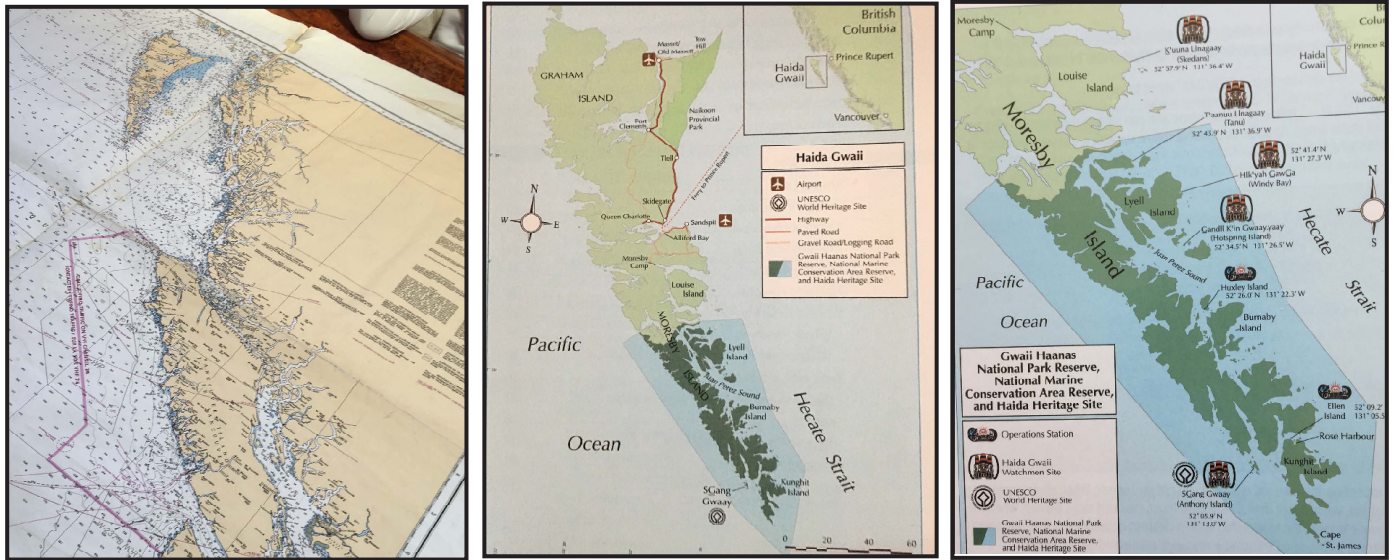
"The moody, misty islands of Haida Gwaii, previously called the Queen Charlotte Islands, are 300 km (180 mi) long and located 100 km (60 mi) off the northwest coast of British Columbia. The two main islands, Graham Island in the north and Moresby in the south, are divided by Skidegate Channel and separated from mainland BC by Hecate Strait.

The islands (populated by Haida peoples for over 10,000 years) have developed in isolation from the rest of the province and were spared the effects of the ice that covered the rest of BC until 10,000 years ago. As a result, the coastal rainforests, wetlands, sand dunes, beaches, rugged mountains, streams and lakes of Haida Gwaii nurture an extensive population of plants and animals that exist nowhere else on earth. In fact, because so many unique life forms have developed, the islands are sometimes referred to as Canada's Galapagos. The endless opportunities to experience the unique wilderness of Haida Gwaii include ocean kayaking, scuba diving, flight seeing, birding, wildlife observation, traditional canoeing, Llama trekking, cycling and hiking."

A flight from Vancouver took Tom and Sharon to Sandspit, where the largest airport on Haida Gwaii is located. Sandspit is at the northeast tip of Moresby Island, the main island in the south. It is considered the gateway to the UNESCO World Heritage Site and the Gwaii Haanas National Park. To the west of Sandspit are sheltered calm inlets. To its east is the wild inhospitable Hecate Strait which separates Haida Gwaii from mainland British Columbia. Because of its shallow depth and its susceptibility to violent weather, Hecate Strait is considered one of the most dangerous bodies of water in the world for boaters.



The calm inlets as well as the Strait are hosts to a rich marine life including enormous amounts of phyto plankton, which provide food for diverse plants and animals. (In February 2017, the presence of Glass Sponge Reef earned parts of the Hecate Strait a Marine Protected Area status, i.e. the area is protected from damage by commercial fishing.)



Tom's and Sharon's expedition in Haida Gwaii was carried out by sailing on a sixty-nine foot vessel along with a small group of ten other travelers intent on learning about the Haida People while exploring nature. This mode of transportation allowed them to go into places not reachable by land, and was supplemented with inflatable boats which could come closer to the shoreline. There are no roads here, only waterways.

Tom's presentation included pictures of incredibly beautiful sceneries reminiscent of places untouched by humans. There were miles and miles of rugged rocky shorelines and isolated sandy beaches, majestic mountains surrounding tranquil waters, piles of logs on shorelines, Steller's sea lions basking under the sun atop their own private rocky hill. The journey not only gave the travelers plenty of time wildlife watching as they encounter pods of orcas, a humpback whale, sea lions, varieties of seabirds and fishes, etc., it also provided the exciting opportunity to fish (and truly catch!) on waters accessible to only a very few.



The audience were mesmerized with photographs taken in the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site. The wild rainforest gets about 55 inches of rain per year and is populated with magnificent sky-reaching ancient trees, too tall (like one of a 700-year old Western Red Cedar, *Thuja plicata*) to be entirely captured by the camera. The forest grounds are naturally carpeted by thick layers of sphagnum and other mosses and ferns. Rotting nurse logs (cedar and hemlock among them) that provide ecological benefits to the area are abundant. Original totem poles in varying degrees of decay still exist.

Among the pictures taken in the forests were those of scarred trees. Logs of Red Cedar or "Tree of Life", as the aboriginal people call it, were used for making totem poles, canoes, long houses, and masks. To test the cedar's soundness, Native Peoples would cut a rectangular hole into a tree before cutting it down, especially if it is being used to make a canoe or totem pole. Hollow or rotten trees could not be used for this purpose. Scarred trees that pre-dates 1846 are known as culturally-modified trees and are considered archeological sites, protected under the Heritage Conservation Act.





**Scarred tree**



**Nurse log**

Land trips to the five Haida Gwaii uninhabited ancient villages they visited were equally amazing. Remains of longhouses built along the shorelines, each one identified with a house frontal totem pole, tell a story of natural existence. Shorelines provided access and escape for canoes. The longhouses were made of cedar logs and planks, and some were large enough to accommodate as many as 80 residents, consisting mainly of immediate relatives. The United Nations has recognized the cultural value of these sites and designated SGang Gwaay as a "World Heritage Site".

Haida Gwaii is home to a plethora of species and sub-species that are unique to these islands. There is a theory that Haida Gwaii escaped the last Ice Age that blanketed Canada and United States some 10,000 years ago, creating ice-free areas that allowed these plants and animals of the island to adapt characteristics totally different from their counterparts in the mainland. Tom circulated a list of plants and animals they saw on the trip, a copy of which are on pages 8 and 9 of this issue. (Note: Your Editor thought readers may likewise be interested in viewing photos of plants at Haida Gwaii at

<https://www.inaturalist.org/lists/461132-Haida-Gwaii-plant-list> )

Included among the many pictures taken of plants and trees are non-native Giant Hogweed, Heracleum, Apiaceae; non-native Genista in full bloom; Salal, Gaultheria shallon, Ericaceae; Step Moss, Hylocomium splendens; Single Delight Wintergreen, Moneses uniflora, Ericaceae; Skunk Cabbage, Symplocarpus foetidus; Basket Grass - Sedge; Deer Fern, Blechnum spicant; False Azalea,



Single Delight Wintergreen  
Moneses uniflora  
Ericaceae



Sphagnum Moss

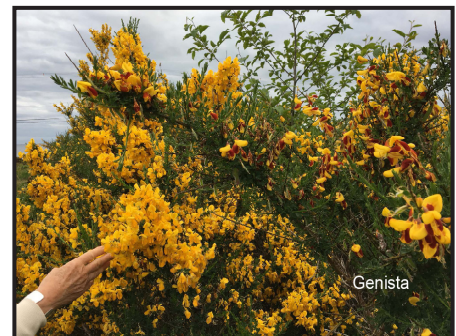


False Azalea  
Menziesia ferruginea  
Rhododendron menziesii



Skunk Cabbage  
Symplocarpus foetidus

### **Some plants at Haida Gwaii**



Genista

Menziesia ferruginea, Rhododendron Menziesii; Stinging Nettle, Urtica dioica, Urticaceae (used for making fishing nets); Foxglove, Digitalis purpurea, in full bloom (this plant is not native here); Western Hemlock, Tsuga heterophylla; Red Alder, Alnus rubra, the bark of which was used by aboriginal people for dyeing and its wood for smoking meat. Incidentally, Red Alder has a more important use in that it returns nitrogen back into the soil, getting the soil ready for other trees and plants to grow.

Marine life pictures shared with the audience included green giant anemone, pelagic gooseneck barnacle, mussels, red and purple sea urchins, etc. each with a line or two of story. There were also photos of dense bull, giant, and feather boa kelp "forests", an ecosystem which provide habitat and food for hundreds and hundreds of other marine species. Nowadays, kelp is rarely harvested from natural seaweed forests but often grown in aquaculture operations. First Nations people used dried kelp stipe to make fishing lines.





**Old Totem Poles**



**Moss**



**Giant kelp**

Evenings in the moored boat provided time to further take in the day's activities by reflecting, sketching, and journaling events. Sometimes, it included guitar and song music provided by the Captain.

For show and tell, Tom brought an original art piece from their journey, a beautiful highly decorative Haida Bentwood box made out of red and yellow cedar. Although other types of wood can be used, red cedar is preferred for making Bentwood boxes because it is the most versatile. The boxes are made from a single plank, which is steamed until pliable, then bent and the two ends are pegged together.

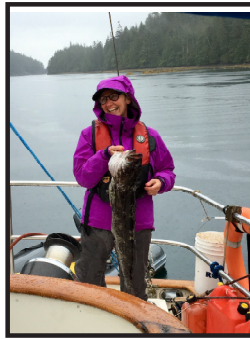
Sadly, the shorelines of Haida Gwaii are not exempt from receiving unwelcome plastic debris from several sources around the world, and Tom and party opted for including some cleanup duties before they left the islands.

What an incredible and unforgettable journey shared with all 55 members who attended that afternoon! Nature at its best – untamed, rich, awesome, humbling, amazing, spectacular!

## LET THESE PHOTOS TELL YOU MORE







**Haida Gwaii Species List**  
(Bluewater Adventures aboard SV Island Odyssey)  
July 4 - 11, 2017

**Common Name by Grouping**

**Fungi**

Unidentified mushrooms  
Chanterelle Mushroom  
Bracket Fungus

**Green Algae**

Sea tubes (*Ulva intestinales*)  
Sea Lettuce

**Brown Algae**

Rockweed (*Fucus* spp.)  
Oar Kelp (*Laminaria* spp.)  
Giant Kelp  
Feather-boa Kelp  
Bull Kelp

**Red Algae**

Laver or Nori (Japanese name)  
Turkish Towel  
Bleachweed (*Prionitis* sp.)  
*Gracilaria* sp.  
Coralline algae (Crustose and articulated)  
*Lithothamnion* spp.  
*Corallina vancouverensis*  
*Bossiella* spp.

**Lichens, Mosses, Liverworts & Ferns**

Black Maritime Lichen (*Verrucaria maritima*)  
Orange Lichen (*Xantharia* sp.)  
Step Moss  
Sphagnum Moss  
Freckle Pelt  
Frog Pelt  
Lungwort  
Many unidentified mosses and liverworts  
Deer Fern  
Sword Fern  
Wood Fern  
Maiden-hair Fern  
Licorice Fern  
Leather Fern  
Horsetail (*Equisetum* sp.) (oddball)

**Seagrass**

Eelgrass  
Surfgrass

**Trees, Shrubs & Herbaceous plants**

Red Osier Dogwood  
Lodgepole Pine  
Western Red Cedar  
Sitka Spruce  
Red Alder

**Trees, Shrubs & Herbaceous plants - continued**

Crabapple  
Skunk Cabbage  
Nodding Onion  
Beach Rye Grass  
Basket Grass (Actually a sedge, not a grass.)  
Sea Asparagus  
Scotch Thistle  
Yellow Monkey Flower (*Mimulus guttatus*)  
False Azalea  
Cow Parsnip  
Sea Watch  
Douglas Aster  
Yarrow  
Single Delight  
Thimbleberry  
Red Huckleberry  
Salal

**Introduced plants**

Foxglove (*Digitalis* sp.)  
Stinging Nettles  
Giant Hogwort (*Heracleum* sp.)  
Dandelion  
White Clover  
Common Groundsell  
Veronica  
Black Medic  
Yellow Iris

**Land Invertebrates**

Sow bug  
Wood Bug  
Spit Bug  
Cyanid Millipede  
Red Centipede  
Banana Slug  
Mosquito

**Marine Invertebrates**

Yellow sponge  
Red Sponge  
Short Plumose Anemone  
Giant Green Anemone  
Aggregating Anemone  
Fried Egg Jellyfish  
Lion's Mane Jellyfish  
Moon Jelly  
Aequora Jellyfish  
Serpulid Tubeworm  
Spirobid Tubeworm



## **Marine Invertebrates - Continued**

Scaleworm  
Mossy Chiton  
California Mussel  
Butter Clam  
Native Littleneck Clam  
Whelk eggs  
Moon Snail (& egg collars)  
Periwinkles  
Whelks  
Sea Butterfly (Corolla spectabilis)  
Thatched Barnacle  
Acorn Barnacle  
Pelagic Gooseneck Barnacle  
Isopods (Idotea sp.)  
Ghost Shrimp  
Brachyuran Crab Larvae  
Dungeness Crab  
Red Rock Crab  
Common Shore Crab  
Kelp Crab  
California Sea Cucumber  
Orange Sea Cucmber  
Common Shore Star (Ochre Star)  
Leather Star  
Bat Star  
Red Sea Urchin  
Purple Sea Urchin  
Salps

## **Vertebrates - Fish**

Blue Shark (unconfirmed)  
Pacific Herring  
Pacific Salmon (Coho fry and smolts)  
Pacific Salmon (Chum and Pink fish traps)  
Black Rockfish  
Yellow-eye Rockfish (Red Snapper)  
Quillback Rockfish  
Tubesnout (egg masses)  
Lingcod  
Prickleback  
Mola mola  
Sandlance  
Halibut  
Shiner Perch  
Pile Perch

## **Birds**

Sooty Shearwater  
Northern Fulmar  
Black-footed Albatross  
Harlequin Duck  
Red Breasted Merganser  
Surf Scoter  
White-winged Scoter  
Pacific Loon

## **Birds - continued**

Pelagic Cormorant  
Bald Eagle  
Red-necked Phalarope  
Sandhill Crane  
Belted Kingfisher  
Glaucous-winged Gull  
Mew Gull  
Tern (species not confirmed)  
Common Murre  
Pigeon Guillemot  
Marbled Murrelet  
Cassin's Auklet  
Tufted Puffin  
Rhinoceros Auklet  
Belted Kingfisher  
Common Raven  
Northwestern Crow  
Varied Thrush  
Swainson's Thrush  
Hermit Thrush  
Barn Swallow  
Purple Martin (unconfirmed)  
Song Sparrow  
Fox Sparrow  
Flycatcher (Pacific Slope?)  
Golden-crowned Kinglets  
Pacific Wren  
Red Cross-bills  
Chestnut-backed Chickadee

## **Mammals**

Field Mouse  
Red Squirrel  
Mink  
Marten  
River Otter (Scat - evidence of )  
Black Bear (Haida Gwaii sub-species)  
Steller's Sea Lion  
Harbour Seal  
Harbour Porpoise  
Dall's Porpoise  
Humpback Whale  
Killer Whale

## **Introduced Mammals**

Raccoon  
Black-tailed Deer