

# FOR WHALES' SAKE

By Jackie Hildering



Paradise? Here? While I, like so many, sit stinging from the last winter storm? Winds screamed relentlessly, snow dumped persistently, phone lines still crackle, the television is down, my car is in a snow bank and, of course, there's always rain on the way.

Yes – PARADISE! I state this emphatically having recently returned from a visit to the Netherlands where I had lived for 14 years. How wonderful to soak in the culture and history of such a vibrant, cosmopolitan and aware European country but how powerful to be reminded of why I left 8 years ago.

Almost 16.5 million people reside in the Netherlands that, at 41,526 sq km (which includes inland water), is only 1.3 times bigger than Vancouver Island. In the Netherlands, the equivalent of ½ Canada's population is living in an area less than 0.4% its size.

Not surprisingly, therefore, where you can find Nature in the Netherlands, it is very "cultured" and park-like and (especially in the west of the country) it is insanely busy and the epitome of urbanization. Understandably, the average Dutch person is somewhat distanced from Nature. The Dutch do have great empathy for Nature and strong environmental practice but, in such an urbanized



country, fashion, trends, popular media and further "culture" are the predominant stimuli. Hence, they are more susceptible to the urban narcotic of working hard to buy "stuff" at the cost of time and

## *Living in Paradise*

well-being.

This is why I left the Netherlands. I wanted to be where Nature rules with an exclamation mark. I wanted to learn from Nature and not speak of it as if it were somewhere else, far away. I wanted the daily awareness that Nature is not something theoretical, far away, something to be academically reflected upon. One trip to Northern Vancouver Island, and I found – home.

Nature is at our front doorstep. She is in the call of the eagles and loons; the blows of the whales; the iridescent blue of the mountains; the flash of a hummingbird; the surge of the waves; the spawning of wild salmon and yes, in the relentless precipitation that falls upon us.

Yes, I know this is paradise because I know what is not. However, I am left questioning – do the keepers of paradise know they are in it?

Further whale and conservation related information can be found at [www.econauts.org](http://www.econauts.org).

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