



Our Backyard

Volume 8
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Fall/Winter 2008

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH

Note from the previous editor of *Our Backyard*

I am writing to say thank you for all the contributions to *Our Backyard* over the years. I am truly amazed by the passion and knowledge that the residents of Saanich and the region have about our natural environment. Many of the projects that were included in *Our Backyard* have personally inspired me. Even though it is a long way away, I can only hope that I can be as active in my retirement as many of the regular contributors and volunteers!

Although I am not certain who will be assuming these editorial duties, I trust they will enjoy all of the wonderful project submissions and articles that I had the pleasure to include in this publication. I received wonderful feedback from Saanich staff, the community and Municipal Councillors. I encourage you to keep telling your stories; they are appreciated, they inspire others, and they build support for your efforts.

I have really enjoyed my delightful role editing *Our Backyard*. I thank the District of Saanich for offering such a unique publication, and I thank each and every one of you for your time and energy. I sincerely look forward to continuing to hear about all of your projects since I am now an *Our Backyard* subscriber!

Yours naturally,

Nathalie Dechaine



SOS – Save Our Society!

Rithet's Bog Conservation Society (RBCS) needs new members if it is to survive. Please support us and allow the good work to continue. After 18 years, RBCS is faced with the prospect of dissolving if we are unable to attract a new President and members who are willing to step in and become involved with the conservation of Rithet's Bog.

Without our Society, Rithet's Bog would gradually revert to a tangle of blackberry, broom, ivy and other invasive species

The purpose of the Society is to recognize the heritage value of Rithet's Bog and to carry out activities that will preserve its unique wetland ecosystems for the benefit of present and future generations. The commitment is not onerous. We have four meetings a year, members contribute talents voluntarily wherever they can be useful to RBCS, and there are no membership fees. The group has included writers, editors, artists, photographers, botanists, naturalists and others passionate about the conservation of Rithet's Bog. For those interested in physical work, there are volunteer parties throughout the year to remove invasive plants.

Rithet's Bog is a Saanich Conservation Area and RBCS has worked closely with Saanich over the years, advising on management of the wetlands. We partnered with Saanich Parks, Ducks Unlimited, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada in 2002 to undertake a wetland restoration project and weir installation. RBCS is also directly involved in recommending best management practices and responding to public concerns.

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Green Burial Coming To Royal Oak Burial Park

In October, Royal Oak Burial Park became the first urban cemetery in Canada to offer green burial.

Natural burial, also commonly referred to as green burial, is an environmentally sensitive alternative to more conventional interment practices where the body is returned to the earth to decompose naturally and be recycled into new life. The body is prepared without embalming and is buried directly into the ground in a biodegradable container or shroud made from sustainable, locally harvested wood, wicker, recycled cardboard or natural fibre. Irrigation is not used, nor are pesticides and herbicides applied to the grounds.

Royal Oak's green burial site, to be called *The Woodlands*, will complement the cemetery's existing forest ecosystem. An informal framework of trees and shrubs will be planted to divide *The Woodlands* into "forest rooms". As burials occur, 'Natural' markers can be placed on the graves and will include native wildflowers, shrubs and trees which will provide a living memorial and a protected wildlife preserve. The intent of a natural burial site is to restore, preserve and protect nature while establishing a dignified place where family and friends can visit and be at peace.

Natural burial preserves located within an existing cemetery will be protected - in perpetuity - from future development while the establishment of a conservation easement by the cemetery operator will prevent future operators from altering the original intent for these burial grounds. These protective measures are what permit natural burial preserves to function as a natural landscape restoration and conservation tool.

Green burial is a statement of personal values for those who seek to minimize their impact on the local and global environment. For people who are mindful of the cyclical nature of life, green burial is a spiritually fulfilling alternative to cremation or conventional burial.

For more information about the Royal Oak Burial Park and its green burial plans visit their website www.robpc.ca. The Royal Oak Burial Park was founded by the District of Saanich and the City of Victoria and is operated on a not-for-profit basis by the Board of Cemetery Trustees of Greater Victoria.



50 Years and Counting!

Participate in the Victoria Christmas Bird Count

Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the then budding Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds in the holidays rather than hunt them. So began the Christmas Bird Count.

This year's Victoria count will be on Saturday, December 20th. This is the 50th anniversary of the Victoria Count Area and the Victoria Natural History Society (VNHS) is hoping to make it a special count by breaking our previous participation record (196 field counters) so bring a friend (novices are welcome!) Counters under 18 years of age and *Bird Studies Canada* members are invited to participate at no charge. Other counters are asked for a \$5 tax-deductible contribution to offset the costs of the count and follow-up publications.

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Chestnut-backed Chickadee

SOS – Save Our Society! ...Continued from page one

Environmental monitoring, removal of invasive weeds and habitat restoration are also important functions of RBCS, because Saanich Parks has limited funding to undertake these activities. Without our Society, Rithet's Bog might gradually revert to a tangle of blackberry, broom, ivy, and other aggressive invasive species that would out-compete native plants. Native birds and other animals rely on native species for food and shelter. If restoration practices cease, the balance will be lost, and the Conservation Area will lose many of its important biological functions. Don't let this happen: Please support us and allow the good work to continue!

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Diane Mothersill at 250-658-5107 or dmothers@shaw.ca

50 Years and Counting! ...Continued from page two

You don't have to be an expert birder to participate. Novices will be teamed up with more experienced counters. Anyone can help out by acting as a tally person or as a spotter. There are a few "keeners" who go out looking and listening for owls in the pre-dawn hours, and a few teams of boating birders who check out the offshore waters, weather permitting and suitable boats available. Feeder counts can be reported via the VNHS website.



Barred Owl

If you are curious, interested, would like to see lists and pictures of the region's winter birds, or just need more information, please check out the VNHS website (www.vicnhs.bc.ca/cbc/) and the Christmas Bird Count site (www.birdsource.org) or contact Ann Nightingale at 250-652-6450 or by email at motmot@shaw.ca for the Victoria count. There will also be a presentation on Victoria's Winter Birds on Tuesday, December 9 (see calendar), and several field trips that can be used as training or tuning up for the count.

This year's post-count gathering will again be a Crock-Potluck. It will be held at the Gordon Head United Church, 4201 Tyndall Ave at 5:00 pm on the 20th. We're asking attendees to register and indicate what they will bring: a salad, dessert, crock-pot item, or \$7 to go to the purchase of other items. You can register for the Crock-Potluck here: <http://vicnhs.bc.ca/cbc/postcount.html>. I could also use a volunteer or two to help out with the pot luck.

Ann Nightingale
Victoria Christmas Bird Count Coordinator

RiverSong: Sing the Salmon Home BC River's Day, Sunday, September 28, 2008

Riversong: Sing the Salmon Home is part of the larger project "RiverSong: Celebrating Life Along the Colquitz" led by professional artists Paula Jardine and Carolyn Knight. It is a community arts project that supports community stewardship and links us to the natural environment and to each other

At the second annual B.C. River's Day event in Cuthbert Holmes Park on Sunday, September 28, 2008, more than 70 people celebrated the plants and animals that live along or in the Colquitz River. In brilliant sunshine, families, dog walkers, singers, volunteers, environmental advocates, and local residents were welcomed at the Tea Tent to learn more about this unique urban green space right beside the Tillicum Mall. The recently installed mosaic stepping stones, created by participants in the Garth Homer *ArtWork Program* in collaboration with the RiverSong Artists, were applauded as another way to connect community to the Colquitz River.



At the Tea Tent area, there was information about the "Friends of Cuthbert Holmes" coordinated by Julian Anderson and the interpretive park map compiled by Wayne Thom, hands-on fish printing with artist Cat Thom, and the interactive Gorge Waterway Model, created by Gorge Watershed Initiative. Todd Carnahan of Habitat Acquisition Trust led an interpretive walk and singer-songwriter Carolyn Knight led the SongCircle by the estuary. As part of the inaugural Eco Doc film program, Nathan Ambrose filmed and produced the documentary *Down By the River: Capturing the Colquitz*.

We acknowledge the support of the Province of British Columbia through the British Columbia Arts Council. As well as support from Saanich Legacy Foundation, Friends of Cuthbert Holmes Park, and Saanich Parks and Recreation.

Learning to Heal the Landscape: UVic Students Focusing on Campus

University of Victoria students are receiving academic credit for creating a greener, and more sustainable, campus.

Eric Higgs is the director of UVic's School of Environmental Studies and also the instructor for Environmental Studies 341—a one-term course on ecological restoration that is required for all major and minor students in the school. "In this course, students learn about the importance of healing landscapes," Higgs explains. "When we damage something we have a duty to repair it and by doing so we honour our obligations to ecosystems and human communities."



Director of the school of Environmental Studies Eric Higgs & third year student Heike Lettrari

And so the 50 students in the course have their mandate - to break into teams of five, pick from Higgs' list of 10 campus projects, and design a plan that identifies the problems and poses possible solutions. Higgs is assisted by graduate student, Ryan Hilperts, who coordinates the student design projects. This fall marks the first time all of the projects have been campus-based.

Third year student Heike Lettrari and her team are adding a layer of restoration projects to UVic's community green map project—an online map of the campus (<http://mapping.uvic.ca/geobrowser>) that will help the university in its continued efforts towards a sustainable campus. While the students are compiling the past, present, and future planned restoration projects on campus, the vision for the larger university-wide project is that it will lead UVic towards assisting projects in the Capital Regional District and contributing to national and global community mapping and sustainability planning.

"ES 341 has been integral to creating a foundation of ecological literacy, and for how to undertake restoration that will make a difference," Lettrari says. "The green map project is our way of realizing this. It's energizing to be collecting a wide variety of knowledge from different people, who then lead to other people, and more information, and putting it all together. It's making these connections that helps build sense of place and caring—both of which, for me, are true to the goals of restoration and community mapping."

Additional projects include designing a long term plan for the wetland gardens in the courtyard of the Social Sciences and Mathematics Building, restoring the Bowker Creek headwaters stream situated by the University Club, and planting vegetation that would honour the First Nations house post located outside the Student Union Building.

"There is a lot of talent in these classes," says Higgs. "These students are incredibly motivated people who want to make a difference. It's very exciting to think we now have an ever increasing base of knowledge to work from that over the next five to ten years we'll have a lot of lovely projects underway that will contribute a great deal to the campus."

Maria Lironi, UVic

Submissions and subscriptions can be sent to the editor:
Darren Copley, Environmental Education Officer, District of Saanich
770 Vernon Avenue • Victoria • V8X 2W7 • P: 250-475-5579 • F: 250-475-5430 • E: darren.copley@saanich.ca



Upcoming events & announcements

Gorge Waterway Initiative's Point Ellice House Shoreline Restoration Project.

Below is a regular schedule for ivy removal this fall. Work will be taking place every Sunday from 9am-1pm at 2616 Pleasant Ave (first street that crosses Bay St., on the east (downtown) side of the Bay Street/Pt. Ellice Bridge) until Dec. 14th. See www.gorgewaterway.ca for more information.

Sun. Nov. 23 & 30, 2008: spread mulch over cleared and "rooted" areas; continue ivy and root removal.

Sun. Dec. 7 & 14, 2008: continue root removal from cleared areas.

You don't have to be there for the entire four hours. We appreciate any amount of time and effort that you can spare. We would also appreciate it if you could spread the word, friends and family, as many hands make light work! Hope to see you over the coming weeks and thanks again for being such a dedicated and hard working crew!

Critter Crafts

Sunday November 30, 2008, 1 to 3 pm

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

Create crafts for the critters: a decorated bird feeder, grassy pop-can people for cats, doggie bag holders or something else. Give your family home-made gifts: a Swan Lake calendar, a picture frame, a pine-cone critter or ??? \$5 for supplies.

Contact Margaret Lidkea at 250-479-0211

We're looking for a few good naturalists!

CRD Parks is seeking outgoing, friendly volunteers who have a passion for sharing nature with the public. We provide training, support, a fascinating and beautiful work environment, and a great deal of appreciation. You provide your knowledge, talents, and creativity in one of our Nature Houses (Witty's Lagoon, Francis/King, and Elk/Beaver Lake Regional parks) for a four-hour shift, once every three weeks for a year-long commitment. Duties include opening and closing the facility, noting visitor statistics, greeting our visitors and inspiring them to fully enjoy the amazing natural history and geography of our Regional Parks.

Interested? Want to know more? Please contact us at: 250-478-3344 or email parksvolunteer@crd.bc.ca

'Futureproofing' Your Home or Business with Energy Efficiency

The District of Saanich is promoting the following initiatives to support building and home owners ready to make energy efficiency upgrades:

- More than \$5000 in grants for windows, doors, heating, insulation, solar hot water and more through the ecoENERGY/LiveSmart BC grants programs for single detached homes, row townhouses, and mobile homes.
- Free 'Lighting Audits' through BC Hydro's *Product Incentive Program*, for small-to-medium office and multi-unit residential buildings and access to lighting rebates.
- Free *GreenStart* consultations for homeowners, builders, developers and business owners wanting to access grants and other resources to increase their building's energy efficiency. Contact Paula Steele at 250-381-9995.
- Up to 30% off the cost of new construction building permits for projects that receive third-party green rating standards through the *Saanich Green Building Rebate Program*.
- Free community workshops on energy efficiency being held at UVic. No cost, but space is limited. Please register with Jayne Rossworn at 250-381-9995 or community@citygreen.ca.

Wed. Nov. 26, 2008 - Business Energy Efficiency

Thu. Dec. 4, 2008 - Alternative Energy

Sat. Dec. 13, 2008 - Residential Energy Efficiency
energuide@citygreen.ca

Builders of the Pacific Coast

Thursday November 27, 2008, 7 to 9pm

UVic, Social Sciences and Mathematics Building Room 110

Join author, photographer and pioneer of the green architecture movement Lloyd Kahn as he takes us on a tour of homes throughout the Pacific Northwest that exemplify natural materials, environmental design, and innovation. Lloyd's captivating slideshow will feature sheds and shacks, domes and zomes, and huts and hogans, all the way from northern California to Vancouver Island.

Book sale, slide show, and reception

This is a free event, but you must reserve a seat by emailing swebb@uvic.ca

For more information visit www.uvic.ca/sustainability

For full schedules and program details, please contact the appropriate agency directly

Upcoming events & announcements

Learning with Ed: The Path to Eco-Conscious Living

Public Lecture with Ed Begley Jr.

Saturday January 31, 2009, 7:30 pm
University of Victoria Farquhar Auditorium
Tickets: \$30 Adults. \$10 Students.

Few television stars head for the bike racks rather than valet parking when they arrive at celebrity events. Actor and activist Ed Begley Jr., however, walks the talk when it comes to sustainability, regularly turning up to Hollywood functions with bike helmet in hand.

Begley will be speaking and signing copies of his new book at the University of Victoria. He will also be providing insights on the challenges and opportunities of going green, and using real examples of how people are doing things differently in order to reduce their impact on the environment. A great gift for anyone who wants to tread a little lighter on the planet!

To purchase tickets, visit the UVic Ticket Centre website at www.auditorium.uvic.ca or call 250-721-8480.

For more information, contact UVic Sustainability Coordinator Sarah Webb at 250-721-6678 or swebb@uvic.ca.

Proudly sponsored by the District of Saanich.

Native Plant Study Group Presents:

Members' Presentation Night

Thursday January 15, 2009, 7:00 pm
UVic, MacLaurin Building, Room D-116

"Borrowing a Root": Transplanting Practices of British Columbia Indigenous Peoples

Thursday February 19, 2009, 7:00 pm
UVic, MacLaurin Building, Room TBA

Indigenous peoples of northwestern North America are typically regarded as minimally influencing native plant distribution. Yet there is significant evidence from indigenous elders that transplanting useful plants from one location to another was often undertaken, and probably has been going on for centuries. This talk, by Dr. Nancy Turner of the University of Victoria, presents actual accounts and examples of indigenous transplanting practices and the implications of such practices.

www.npsg.ca

Victoria Natural History Society Presents:

Marine Night (every last Monday of the month) Evolution, Natural History, and Diversity of King Crabs

Monday, November 24, 2008, 7:30 pm
University of Victoria's Fraser Building, Room 159

King crabs (family *Lithodidae*) likely evolved from a hermit crab ancestor in the Northeast Pacific within the last 20 million years. Will Duguid, a graduate student at the University of Victoria, will introduce these characters to us and provide a primer on the evolution and biology of this group.

Birders' Night (every fourth Wednesday of the month) Members' Night

Wednesday, November 26, 2008, 7:30 p.m.
University of Victoria's Fraser Building, Room 159

Have you been taking lots of pictures or maybe video of birds during the past year? We would love to see them and members' night is the best place to show us your stuff! Call Ed Pellizzon for more information at 250-881-1476. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend and a coffee cup!

www.vicnhs.bc.ca

Natural History Presentation (every second Tuesday of the month)

Winter Birds of Victoria

Tuesday, December 9, 2008, 7:30 p.m.
University of Victoria's David Strong Building, Room C103

Are you participating in the Christmas Bird Count this year? Feeder watch? Or maybe you would like to learn which species of birds call Victoria their home during the winter? Bring a friend and a coffee cup!

Botany Night (every third Tuesday of the month) Rare Plants of Salt Spring Island: Research and New Discoveries

Tuesday, January 20, 2009, 7:30 p.m.
Swan Lake Nature House

Robin Annschild, Staff Biologist, Salt Spring Island Conservancy, is conducting a research project on the impact of grazing by sheep on the endangered Yellow Montane Violet, and recently discovered a new population of Scouler's Catchfly. Admission free, everyone welcome. Bring your friends.

