

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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Cedar Hill Students Restore Garry Oak Ecosystem

By Jill Robinson, Habitat Acquisition Trust Stewardship Coordinator
www.hat.bc.ca

Equipped with loppers in their hands and determination in their hearts, students from Cedar Hill Middle school tackled encroaching invasive plants to restore a beautiful Garry Oak habitat in their very own backyard.

This spectacular parcel of land, belonging to School District 61 and the District of Saanich features a woodland, rocky outcrop and remnant meadow with a variety of native plants including beautiful Camas.

A group of teachers committed to the long-term restoration of this site initiated an invasive plant removal project last year, and with unwavering enthusiasm they have pushed the project into its second year.



Their aim has been to engage their students in outdoor learning activities geared towards fostering an understanding and appreciation for endangered Garry Oak ecosystems and making positive ecological change in their own neighbourhood.

In early May, their hopes came to fruition through a collaborative partnership with Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT), the District of Saanich and the Directorate of Agencies for School Health (DASH). With the help of HAT, as well as dedicated community members and volunteers impressive gains were made as more than 40 students got their hands dirty in a multi-day restoration event.

With a little elbow grease, students battled carpets of English Ivy, Canada Thistle and Himalayan Blackberry to protect the native flora and fauna at this special site. Efforts to remove unwanted invaders will continue in upcoming weeks and ultimately, for years to come. Eventually native shrubs, flowers and grasses will be planted in their place that will provide habitat for important native pollinating bees and butterflies, as well as birds and other animals.

Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT), the non-profit regional land trust, supported this event through their free outdoor learning program, Green Spots; bringing hands-on natural science learning full-circle from outdoor experiences in park settings to outdoor classrooms on school grounds.



A Natural Partnership:

Victoria Natural History Society Donates \$75,000 to the Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary



By Claudia Copley
Victoria Natural History Society Director www.naturevictoria.ca

As nature-enthusiasts, members of the Victoria Natural History Society love being outside, no matter the season or the weather – there are always things going on outside that we are interested in. This nature appreciation gets us into every park and protected area in the region: some are visited regularly while others take more effort to experience.

The Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary is among those special places that our membership visits regularly - for some it may be as often as every day! It is a wonderful refuge filled with natural experiences for people whose senses are tuned into their environment. Just a few steps into this “natural heart of the community” and you know you have found a quiet retreat in which to experience nature. It has a pull we can't resist.

Because we are intensely appreciative of the sanctuary the Sanctuary provides, both for ourselves and for native species

in an increasingly urbanized community, the Victoria Natural History Society decided to contribute \$75,000 towards the total cost of upgrading those portions of the floating boardwalk most in need of repair. The lifetime materials that will be used means this is an investment for future generations of nature-lovers, and that is worth investing in!

The Victoria Natural History Society and the Sanctuary activities and interests have been intertwined for literally decades, and our membership cares deeply about the critical habitat that the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary protects. But everyone who uses the Swan Lake floating boardwalk knows that this upgrade is essential and we hope that they too, will consider supporting this important project.

Contact the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary if you would like to find out more about this project.
250-479-0211 | www.swanlake.bc.ca

Pulling Together Volunteer Program

Lead Steward Profile

Russ Pym

By Jenny Eastman Coordinator of Volunteers

Russ Pym is stuck in the past, and not just a few decades ago. He's much farther back, about 300 million years ago, when dragonflies and damselflies were even more common on the planet. Lead Steward with Saanich's *Pulling Together* Volunteer Program, Russ is intrigued with these creatures as a photographer and as a biologist. He gets a bit more modern with his other passion, Rithet's Bog – the last remaining peat bog on the Saanich Peninsula. Rithet's Bog and its unique sphagnum moss ecosystem came into being about 5000 years ago. In any case, Russ has got his eye on our ecological history and the puzzles it contains.

Russ was born and raised in Victoria and grew up on Cordova Bay Beach, with many hours spent exploring tide pools and the foreshore. This childhood lead him directly to a biology degree at UVic, and then to a career as an environmental scientist with the Capital Regional District, where he focused on water quality testing. Russ has sampled at outflow areas, Hartland landfill drainages, and other significant locations. Now retired, Russ pursues photography and volunteering, specializing in dragonflies, caterpillars, and Rithet's Bog. Russ and his wife Lori also spend time in Kauai and Arizona each year, hiking and pursuing natural history interests.



As president of the Rithet's Bog Conservation Society (RBCS) Russ and other volunteers care for this Saanich Conservation Area. Of his work with RBCS Russ says, "It seemed a natural fit. It's close to my home and part of my community, it has amazing biodiversity (especially dragonflies), and this ecosystem sure needs the support". For the past eight years Russ has been active with hands-on restoration at the bog – removals and plantings. Russ also works closely with Ducks Unlimited and Saanich Parks staff to plan for improved waterfowl habitat at the bog. Thank you Russ for keeping one eye on the past and one on the future of this rare ecosystem and its inhabitants.

For more information about the Rithet's Bog Conservation Society: www.rithetsbog.org

For more information about Saanich's Pulling Together Volunteer Program and ecological restoration in Saanich: www.saanich.ca/pullingtogether

Photo credits:

Volunteer Russ Pym by Lori Bradley

Four-spotted Skimmer by Russ Pym

Rithets Bog Conservation Society is the 2015 Winner of the Saanich Long Term Environmental Achievement Award!



Sounds of Summer

By Claudia Copley
Entomology Collection Manager at the Royal BC Museum

This is the time of year you should be lying in a hammock at every opportunity. And while there be sure to listen for one of my favourite sounds of summer: cicadas!

In BC there are nine species of cicada reported and all of them belong to two genera: *Okanagana* and *Platypedia*. These two groups sound very different, so even from your hammock you can identify which one you're listening to. Of the two, the genus *Platypedia* makes the softer gentler sound to better relax to- just a quiet tick tick tick tick tick often coming from a nearby Douglas-fir – maybe even the one your hammock is suspended from. It is the members of the genus *Okanagana*, named, you guessed it, for the Okanagan Valley, that make the loud (some say too loud!) sounds that are better known and much harder to miss.

Male cicadas make these sounds in an effort to find a mate, just as frogs or birds do. Most achieve the sound with noise-making structures under their abdomen and use the hollowness of their abdomen as an amplifier: essentially a one-man band. If you think they are loud you're not wrong. Males have to disable their own "ears" while singing to prevent damaging them!

The *Platypedia* found in our region is *Platypedia areolata*. It appears earlier in the year than members of the genus *Okanagana* and is quite different looking: narrower, smaller and with fewer lovely orange highlights. Although cicadas in eastern North America are famous for their incredibly long life cycles (13 or 17 years) *Platypedia areolata* has a four year life cycle and they never emerge in enormous numbers all at once. This genus "sings" by clicking its wings – it doesn't have the noise-making structures of its cousins.

Okanagana cicadas reported from our region include: *Okanagana bella*, *Okanagana occidentalis*, and *Okanagana rimosa*. The lifespan of these species appears to still be a mystery, but like most cicadas they spend the bulk of their lives underground feeding on the roots of trees and shrubs- out of sight and nice and quiet. It is only for the brief time they are adults that they get our attention: a sure sign summer has arrived.



Genus *Okanagana*

Understanding Saanich's Environmental Development Permit Area

by Carolyn Richman
District of Saanich Environmental Education Officer

Residents of Saanich know that we live in one of the most beautiful places in Canada. What may not be as well known is that many of the beautiful landscapes of our region are endangered, including one of the top three most endangered ecosystems in Canada. In Saanich our stewardship role is very important, protecting these remnant patches of natural ecosystems that once occupied much larger areas. The efforts of property owners to protect critically endangered Garry Oak and coastal Douglas-fir habitats will be vital to the persistence and potential restoration of rare species and ecosystems. Over time these remnant ecosystems will become increasingly valuable to the conservation of our local biodiversity for future generations.

In 2012, after research, mapping, and public process, Saanich Council adopted the Environmental Development Permit Area (EDPA) as a tool to protect and restore Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) as well as provide linkages or corridors in the landscape and important buffers. Development Permit Areas are considered the best tool to protect ecosystems on private land¹. The Streamside Development Permit Area is another good example.

Land development is considered the biggest threat to biodiversity and sensitive ecosystems. Saanich developed the EDPA to protect remnant sensitive ecosystems and rare species with the objectives to:

- Protect the areas of highest biodiversity within Saanich
- Require mitigation during development
- Require restoration to damaged or degraded ecosystems during development

The EDPA was developed using the Federal/Provincial Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory (2002), Red (endangered or threatened) and Blue (special concern) listed species and ecosystems identified by the BC Conservation Data Centre, Wildlife Trees identified by the Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program, District of Saanich mapping for wetlands and watercourses (2010), and the Saanich Marine Inventory (2000).

¹ A development permit area provides development regulations for a specific area and is part of the Official Community Plan Bylaw. Proposed building and subdivision within a DPA requires a development permit as well as other specified changes to the land. The authority to establish DPAs is provided through the Local Government Act (sections 919.1 and 920).

The EDPA Atlas was created to identify the affected areas, which can also be viewed using Saanich GIS mapping. The EDPA mapping may be corrected and refined by staff as needed, such as on specific properties where accuracy on the ground can be improved.

The District of Saanich is able to promote good land stewardship through tools like the EDPA, providing guidance and advice for environmentally sound development practices as well as supporting general stewardship practices. Some areas within the EDPA may not look like a sensitive ecosystems, but may be included as buffer areas where sensitive development may occur, or may be important for future restoration (and linking to other larger ecosystem remnants). Once land is developed, the potential for protection and restoration of these remnants is lost.

For landowners within the EDPA there are many exemptions so that most will continue to use their lands as they have always done such as gardening and agriculture, but may need to do a bit more planning to sensitively install pathways, fencing, etc. Development in the buffer will occur, but sensitively to protect the values on the adjacent land. Saanich staff are also very happy to assist people who want to steward the valuable elements of their property. Landowners can ideally enjoy and develop their properties surrounded by unique and sensitive ecosystems, which may add to the enjoyment of the property.

For more information
about the EDPA,
contact Saanich staff or
visit our website:
www.saanich.ca/edpa

Wetland Ecosystems

wet soils and moisture dependent plants



How much is left?

1.0%

of the land base in the CRD

Coastal Bluff Ecosystems

rocky shorelines, rocky islets, and coastal cliffs



How much is left?

0.6%

of the land base in the CRD

Terrestrial Herbaceous Ecosystems

open wildflower meadows and grassy hilltops



How much is left?

1.5%

of the land base in the CRD

Riparian Ecosystems

the margins of rivers, streams, lakes, and marshes



How much is left?

1.0%

of the land base in the CRD

Older Forest Ecosystems

an average tree age of 100 years or greater



How much is left?

8.0%

of the land base in the CRD

Sparsely Vegetated Ecosystems

spits, dunes, inland cliffs and bluffs



How much is left?

.01%

of the land base in the CRD

Woodland Ecosystems

Garry Oak, Arbutus/Douglas-fir, and Trembling Aspen



How much is left?

1.8%

of the land base in the CRD

New Educational Resources Encourage Students to Take Action on Watershed Stewardship

By Natalie Bandringa
CRD Watershed Specialist



Educators and elementary school-aged children across the capital region are taking advantage of free online educational resources that focus on discovering and caring for our local watersheds, creeks, and nearshore marine environment. Funded by an RBC Blue Water Project grant, the Capital Regional District (CRD) has created watershed stewardship educational resources to support learning and encourage action to help protect, clean, and enhance our local watersheds. "Supporting teachers with resources that inspire students to engage and foster strong environmental values in their community is what we want to accomplish with these CRD programs", said CRD Environmental Services Committee Chair and Saanich Councillor, Judy Brownoff.

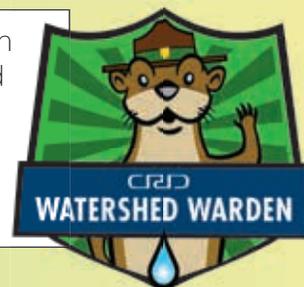
Taking a fun, action-orientated approach, Ollie the Otter, the CRD's Watershed Warden, encourages children to join his team by learning about watersheds and undertaking a stewardship activity. Children are invited to submit a drawing or a letter about what good work they have done to contribute towards a healthy watershed. Ollie, in turn, will mail a CRD Watershed Warden iron-on badge back to the child with a letter of congratulations.

"Ollie the Otter badge program, videos, and lesson plans, fit into various education platforms that are encouraging children to be active environmental stewards," continued Brownoff. "The watershed resources can be accessed and enjoyed by families, elementary school classes, homeschools, community clubs such as Guides and Scouts, and faith-based groups."

Educators from regional school districts can explore these and other water-related learning resources at educator training workshops and webinars. These sessions will focus on local drinking water, pollution prevention, and global water and sanitation, providing participants with tools to empower students to be active water stewards. For further information and to access resources, look for Ollie the Otter and the Educational Resources at: www.crd.bc.ca/watersheds

Hi Kids!

Ollie the Otter here, the CRD Watershed Warden. Have fun this summer and join my team to become CRD Watershed Warden. Tell me about what good works you are doing to take care of our environment, and I will send you an iron-on badge in the mail. Learn about watersheds and how to earn your badge at www.crd.bc.ca/watersheds.



Rolston Reclaimers



In February 2008, Heather Pass and a group of neighbours formed the Rolston Reclaimers after everyone had talked for ages about the state of the park. We were fourteen strong at the time.

Our area of Colquitz River Park is located between Rolston Crescent cul-de-sac and the McKenzie Avenue overpass, plus along the trail a bit towards Tillicum Shopping Centre

The mammoth task of reclaiming this area after many years of neglect and changing maintenance policies was started. As our area is sodden in the winter and hard-as-rocks during the summer, our volunteer season is April to October with other work-parties as desired. One morning each month, spring and fall, we have gathered to remove Himalayan Blackberries, English Ivy, thistle, English Hawthorn, Privet, etc. A meadow that had existed in earlier years re-surfaced, plus Indian Plum, Nootka Rose, Baldhip Rose, and Black Hawthorn. An active Thatching Ant nest proved interesting. It has been vacated since some critter attacked it in winter 2013.

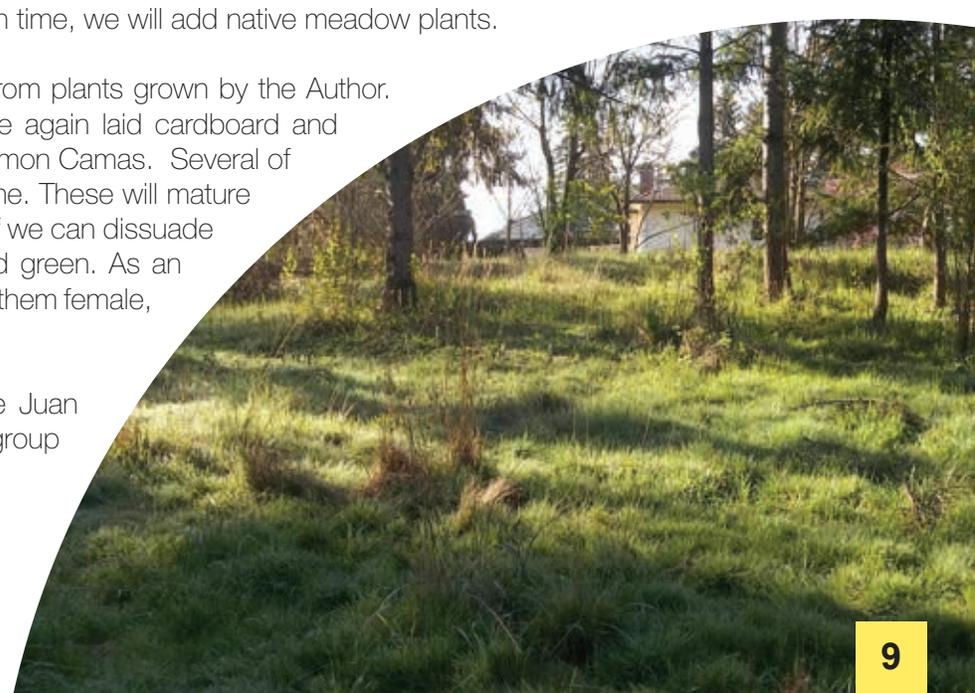
By Heather Pass,
Rolston Reclaimers

Winter 2009, two men laid cardboard and spread mulch as the start of a Garry Oak Meadow. The weather was awful. They deserved a medal. The next spring (2010) wee Garry Oak plugs were planted in groups of three and thrived without irrigation. In early 2014, the smallest was cut off at ground level, leaving the other two trees to grow with less competition. Eventually, a second will be removed, leaving the last to grow into a great tree.

Roemer's Fescue has since been planted there. In time, we will add native meadow plants.

In spring 2012, a Camas Meadow was started from plants grown by the Author. They should compete well with the horsetail. We again laid cardboard and mulch, planted bulbs and scattered seed of Common Camas. Several of the bulbs managed to produce tiny blooms in June. These will mature into full stalks of flowers with the passage of time if we can dissuade the rabbits and deer from using them as a salad green. As an added bonus, a row of Indian Plum shrubs, one of them female, has emerged as a background for the camas.

Signs for these two areas were donated by the Juan De Fuca 55 Plus Activity Center's woodworking group members.



Right: New Camas bed site

Rolston Reclaimers Continued

In July 2011 we did the cardboard and mulch procedure around several trees along the riverside trail. Plans are for these areas to become native plant areas.

In November 2012, ten native Black Hawthorn seedlings were planted in areas where the invasive English Hawthorn now grow. The tree guards have protected them well from the weather. Eventually the English Hawthorns will be removed and their wood harvested to create rustic fences for our restoration areas.

December 2012, Salal was planted under a small group of Douglas-fir trees. Sadly, they did not survive the winter.

Some of you may recall the 2012 mineral spill that happened in Colquitz River. Remediation work started in July 2013, causing quite a change in our area. Our reclaimed meadow became the staging/storage area for this work. The park trail was re-routed until October 2013. Fortunately, all in-river work was completed within the "fisheries window".

We managed a work-party in September 2013. While Orchard Grass and other invasive species had overtaken the Gary Oak meadow, the oaks were still healthy.

There was also a second remediation event. However, both restorations have enhanced our area.

In 2014, students from Colquitz Middle School's Sustainable Resources program started volunteering with us. It is a joy to work with these students.

Understandably, more volunteers are always welcome. Contact 250-475-5522 or : www.saanich.ca/pullingtogether if you wish to join our group.

Right: Gary Oak seedling
Below: Protected Black Hawthorn seedlings



Upcoming Events

Saanich Recreation Trails & Treks

www.saanich.ca 250-475-5408

Weekend Walks (FREE Drop-In)

Sundays | 1 pm to 3:00 pm

Discover the beauty of the Saanich parks right in your backyard. These FREE guided hikes are open to adults of all ages. No registration necessary just drop in at the appropriate time and meeting place. Please wear sturdy and supportive footwear. Carry drinking water. Walks go rain or shine.

July 19 - Royal Oak to Rithet's Bog

Meet on Lochside trail by Lochside Elementary School, intersection of Royal Oak Di and Lochside Dr

Aug 16 - Shady Trails to Summit of Mt Doug

Meet at washrooms in main parking lot at Shelbourne & Ash Rd

Gentle Walk & Talk (FREE Drop-In)

Thursdays | 9:30 am to 11 am

Enjoy beautiful scenery, a friendly chat, and gentle exercise as we walk through our parks & trails. Suitable for all walking abilities, but wear suitable footwear. Dogs not permitted.

July 23 - Gorge Waterway

Meet on Gorge Waterway, near Canoe Club just off Tillicum Rd

July 30 - Swan Lake - Reynolds - Playfair

Meet at end of Nelthorpe, off McKenzie

Aug 6 - Cadboro Bay to Mystic

Meet at Cadboro Bay Gyro Park, end of Sinclair Rd, by washrooms

Aug 13 - McMinn to Doris Page

Meet at McMinn Park, beside tennis courts, off Maplegrove St.

Aug 20 - Mt. Douglas Park to Glendenning

Meet at washrooms in main parking lot off Cordova Bay Rd at Ash Rd

Aug 27 - Tod Inlet

Meet at access on Wallace Dr, opposite Quarry Lake, south of Benvenuto.

Victoria Natural History Society

www.naturevictoria.ca

Saturday Morning Birding (most Saturdays)

Meets every Saturday morning, usually between 7 and 8 a.m., rain or shine. Check the Calendar page of the VNHS website (www.vicnhs.bc.ca/website/index.php/calendar) on the Thursday/Friday before to find out the week's location. Novice and experienced birders welcome. Non-members can participate up to three times.

Dragonfly Field Trip at Elk/Beaver Lake

Sun, August 23

Elk/Beaver Lake Park

Part of a series of six walks over six months to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the first nature walks led by Royal BC Museum staff. This walk will be guided by Claudia and Darren Copley, and CRD Park interpreter, Katie Turner. This field trip will be limited to 25 so you must pre-register. Call CRD Parks at 250-478-3344 by August 21 for registration and meeting location details.

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary

www.swanlake.bc.ca

250-479-0211

Guided Bird Walks (Drop-In)

Every Wednesday and Sunday | 9:00 am

Bring your binoculars and meet in the parking lot for this walk around the lake. Donations are appreciated.

Reptile Day (Drop-in Event)

Wednesday, July 22 | 12 pm to 3 pm

Scales, slithers, snakes and smiles! Come and join us for our annual reptile celebration as we learn about all those who are scaly. Observe our fabulous reptile friends, play games, make crafts, and get your face painted.

Animal Grossology (Drop-in Event)

Wednesday, August 5 | 12 pm to 3 pm

Are you oozing to learn about the disgusting science of animal grossology? Find out about slug slime, owl pellets and even the scoop on poop.

Astounding Amphibians (Drop-in Event)

Wednesday, August 19 | 12 pm to 3 pm

Who breathes through their skin, swallows using their eyeballs, and hatches from gooey eggs? Discover the wonders of amphibians through games, displays and a puppet show.

CRD Parks & Environmental Services

www.crd.bc.ca/parks-events 250-478-3344

Our naturalists lead guided walks, hikes, canoeing, and drop-in events for all ages. Most are free, all are fun!

Going Batty! (Drop-in Event)

Tuesday, July 21 | 11am to 2pm

Francis/King Regional Park (Saanich)

Drop in to the Nature Centre and join in a batty world! Enjoy a 'bat walk' through the park at 11:15am or 1pm.

Going Buggy (Drop-in Event)

Thursday, July 23 | 11am to 2pm

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Saanich)

We love 'em, we hate 'em. They're fascinating, finicky and fabulous! Drop by the tents at the main Beaver Beach between for a close-up look at some of our buggy friends and foes.

Bejeweled Dragons (Guided Walk)

Saturday, August 1 | 1-2:30pm

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Saanich)

Join a CRD naturalist for an up-close and personal look at the amazing world of dragonflies as they zig and zag in search of their prey. Nets and field guides will be available. Meet at the Retriever Ponds kiosk off Beaver Lake Road.

Snake Day (Drop-in Event)

Thursday, August 6 | 11am to 2pm

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Saanich)

CRD Regional Parks has teamed up with Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary for this slithery event: watch snake shows, hold a snake, play a snake game and more. Drop by the tents at the main Beaver Beach.

Discussion with grade 6 student at Cedar Hill: Chris Hartley

Why do you think this project is important for your community?

Its important because species like Himalayan Blackberry are out-competing native species like camas. What we are trying to do is create an environment where other species can grow.

What have you learned about nature in this project?

I have learned that we need to take care of nature. As a community we need to treat our ecosystems better.

Do you think you'll try to remove invasive species in your backyard at home?

Yes. I have a blackberry bush in my backyard and i am going to try and take it out. I don't want it to take over my beautiful garden.



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