

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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KNOTWEED ALERT

Knotweed Stalks resemble bamboo and are sometimes referred to as “elephant ear bamboo” (and other names).



Knotweed growing through concrete.



THE SAANICH KNOTWEED BATTLE

By Carolyn Richman
District of Saanich Environmental Education Officer

If there was an Invasive Species Olympics, Knotweed would likely take a gold-medal title on the world stage.... “and the all-a round winner in the invasive plant category with the highest economic impacts, the most destructive to human infrastructure, the hardest to manage and eliminate, the most damaging to riparian ecosystems... give it up for... KNOTWEEDS!”

In reality, without an Invasive Species Olympics, we can't say that Knotweed is THE gold medalist, but definitely ranks up there world-wide (top list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature) and in the top-10 invasive species for control in BC.

In our backyards, this plant may seem innocent and even beautiful. It looks like bamboo with big leaves. But consider the potential of it cracking into the foundation of your house and/or drainage system.

We have only to look to other areas, such as our neighbours up in Cowichan, where Knotweed has spread so thoroughly along the banks of the Cowichan River that the riparian ecosystem is severely damaged or even eliminated.

In our region, local governments and other partners saw this and understood that we need to act now to treat all the sites we possibly can while it is still manageable - before

we have widespread impacts and ecological damage. If you are a homeowner who has been participating in a Knotweed Treatment Program – thank you! It may not seem like you are making a difference, but every outbreak we eliminate helps us win the Knotweed battle here.

In Saanich, we appear to be an “epicenter” of Knotweed outbreaks in the region. Saanich Environmental Services and Parks have been working on treating Knotweed on both public and private lands since 2010.

To get rid of Knotweed, the very extensive rhizomes must be part of the treatment – which requires careful chemical treatment.

We ask homeowners not to dig the area because a small piece (as small as 0.6 cm) of severed rhizome can start a new outbreak.

Since 2010, we have found that many sites require 2-4 years of treatment, after which we monitor each year. Unfortunately, in some cases parts of the rhizome may survive and send up new growth after a few years. This year we treated quite a few sites that hadn't seen knotweed growth for a few years.

For our 2017 season, Saanich treated Knotweed at 116 private addresses, 8 public sites and monitored many others.

Saanich has a Pesticide Bylaw, so each address treated is part of a Pesticide Permit. This Bylaw requires that neighbours are notified whenever there is a chemical treatment and signs are posted at least 48 hours in advance of treatment. This has been a great way for Saanich residents to learn about this issue and to call in for any questions and concerns. Through these calls we were able, for example, to identify areas where beekeepers were concerned about impacts to their hives and adjust our treatments to address these concerns.

One interesting thing we saw with Knotweed growth this year were sites that had no growth in the summer. Then the rain came in September and Knotweed popped up again on a few sites. We continue to be surprised at the resiliency of this plant.

Hopefully in the world of Invasive Species Olympics we'll be able to knock this one out of the competition – at least in our region.



Darren Copley before he was sadly consumed by the stand of Knotweed.

MOUNT DOUGLAS SECONDARY RESTORATION PROJECT

By Amelita Kucher, Science Department, Mount Douglas Secondary

For many years the students of Mount Douglas Secondary School's Eco Club have removed invasives and worked to restore the Garry Oak meadows on Mount Tolmie under the guidance of Dave Lock and Kristen and James Miskelly. Students from grade ten science classes have designed and implemented a specialized restoration and mapping project.

A plot of degraded land has been used for testing restoration methods. After dividing this plot into four quadrants, students conducted a pre-treatment survey of the invasive plants. The restoration treatments included smothering, solarization and smothering, and transplanting natives. There was an untreated control plot. Results after the first year had the best growth of native seeds sown in November being in the smothered plot. Students will be planting a native seed mix again this year and smothered the control plot over the summer in hopes of more growth there. There are concerns about rabbits and deer eating the seedlings!

The Community Mapping Project worked to raise awareness about invasives in residential areas surrounding Mount Douglas Secondary. Groups of students identified invasive plants present on the front lawns of houses. These invasive surveyed were Daphne Laurel, English Ivy, Himalayan Blackberry and Scotch Broom. To inform the residents about the impact of invasive plants, students delivered notices to houses with invasives.

Eco Club students wish to continue the restoration project, as well as propose a school native garden. Donations of soil, soil trays, and suggestions for places to grow native seeds would be greatly appreciated.

Alternatively, if you would like to come share your expertise, we welcome guest speakers to our meetings. Please contact Brecken Sales (brecken.sales@gmail.com) or Amelita Kucher (agkucher@sd61.bc.ca), the sponsor teacher at Mount Douglas Secondary.



URBAN GORGE OYSTERS



By Ben Pearse, World Fisheries Trust

The Olympia Oyster, BC's only native oyster, is making a comeback in the Gorge Waterway. Once a staple in the diet of the Lekwungen First Nations peoples, it had been almost wiped out by the 1920's due to overharvesting during the Gold Rush. The Olympia Oyster population on the BC coast has never fully recovered, and the species is considered "at risk" by federal legislation. There are still remnant populations of the native oyster on the BC coast, including, amazingly enough, a thriving one in the Gorge Waterway, in the centre of urbanized Capital Regional District.

Attempts to restore this species to other sites in Victoria waters, has taken the form of creating a natural hatchery for the Olympia Oyster using reef balls. Reef balls – made of concrete – act as artificial reef habitats where oysters are safe to grow and breed. Once oysters are established within the balls, they will be removed from the Gorge and safely placed in the outer harbour of Fisherman's Wharf. As part of the ocean's natural filtration system, transplanting Olympia Oysters to other locations will help clean the inner harbour, while simultaneously helping to restore native oyster populations to other areas.

On July 19th, three reef balls were successfully dropped into the Gorge waterway near the Craigflower bridge while a small gathering of people from the newly formed Greater Victoria "Naturehood" listened as Maryann Thomas of the Esquimalt Nation sang blessings in her traditional language. "This is a real delicate day," says Thomas, "we'll be able to use our beaches the way we used to. The work our brothers here are doing, it's really big."

Olympia oyster is British Columbia's only native oyster (top photo inset). The shell is somewhat smooth and circular. The lower valve is deeply cupped, while the upper one is flat and fits inside it. The Pacific or Japanese Oyster (bottom right) was purposely introduced for aquaculture, and is the species most often seen on our beaches. It can be twice as long as the native oyster.

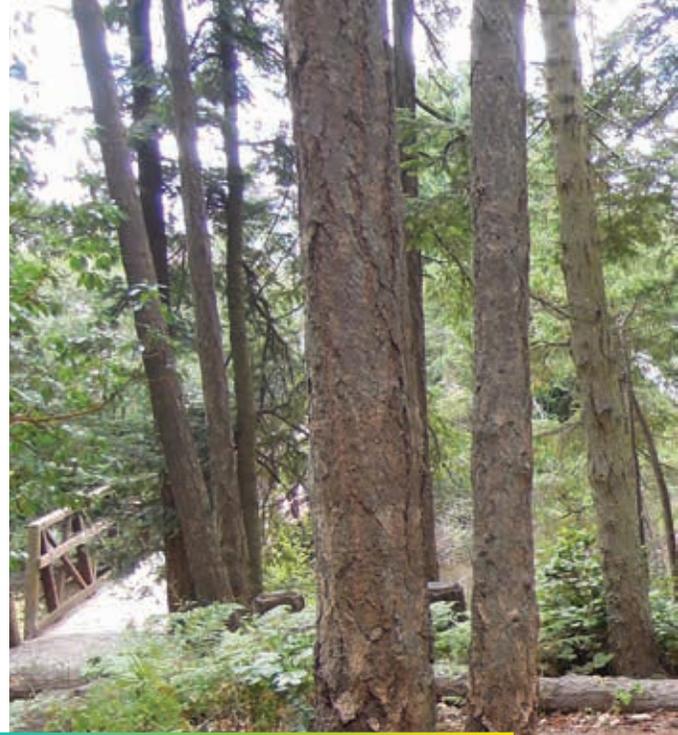


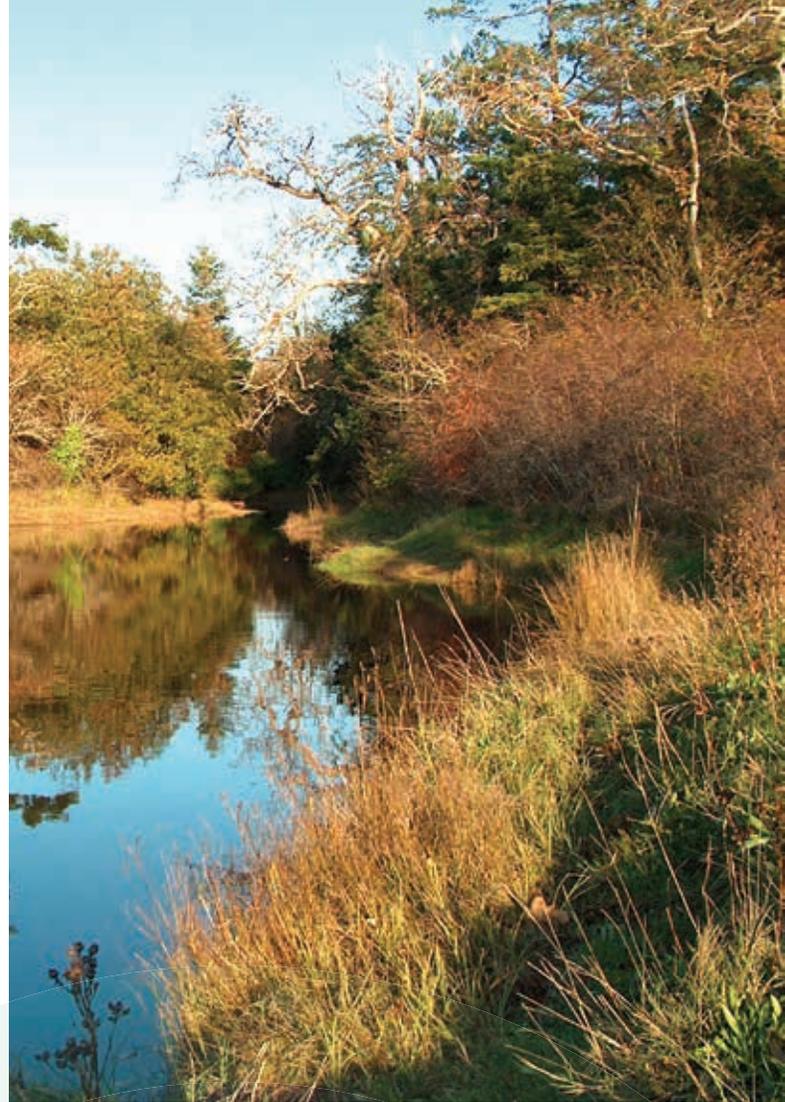
Lead Steward Profile

Julian Anderson
Cuthbert Holmes Park

By Jenny Eastman, Pulling Together Volunteer Coordinator and Julian Anderson, Cuthbert Holmes Park, Lead Steward

Julian Anderson has a quarter-century connection with Cuthbert Holmes Park. As a child, he passed the Tillicum Drive-in Theatre and what was to become the park on his way to Tillicum School. He grew up on the bank of the Gorge Waterway in the era of free-range youth, and the many parks and natural beauty of the area left a lasting impression. Soon after the park's creation, Julian and friends began clearing Scotch Broom – the only invasive species they knew at the time – from the park.





In 2002, Julian enrolled in UVic's Restoration of Natural Systems program thinking he'd learn better ways to pull broom, but instead learned much about planning, and especially the importance of community involvement in ecological restoration. Whenever the courses allowed, he would do his studies and reports about Cuthbert Holmes Park.

When describing the park Julian says, "It's a rich oasis for nature. A few years ago, the park was home to the largest Great Blue Heron colony on Vancouver Island, with 67 nests. The Colquitz River meanders through and it has a wild salmon run with up to 1,500 Coho in recent years. There are also River Otters, Harbour Seals, American Mink, and Raccoons. It is also a hotspot for birdwatching, with Cooper's Hawks, Bald Eagles, and owls. We're lucky to have such a place in an urban environment and we need to protect it from continuing encroachment."

Julian created Friends of Cuthbert Homes Park in 2005 and has since led schools, churches, community groups, and individuals from the community in removing invasive species and advocating for the park. "I see myself as a link between Saanich Parks and the wider community, with the goal of protecting and restoring the park."

An informed citizen and voracious reader, Julian always has engaging books to recommend, many on in-depth conservation topics. Julian also finds time to work for the provincial government and to play softball and hockey and support the Vancouver Whitecaps and Toronto Maple Leafs. He also keeps a watchful eye on all developments that impact the park, most recently the new highway interchange

When asked what he likes about volunteering with "Pulling Together", Julian notes, "I like the training, the camaraderie with like-minded people, and the support for our projects. Registering as a volunteer was a way for me to formalize what I was already doing to try to care for the park. It is a way to multiply the forces of good for the benefit of the park. The amount that people can get done together is greater than the sum of their individual efforts."

Julian's 25 years of exploring, understanding, and advocating for this park give him a unique view. His long time connection has resulted in great expertise in understanding this park, this river, and this natural refuge in the midst of our community.

What Became of Your Donated Garry Oak Acorns?

By Judith Carder, Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society

They are happily growing in the GOMPS (Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society) Volunteer Nursery!

During the last year, your donated acorns have been planted and subsequent seedlings moved to GOMPS Volunteer Nursery where they have been transplanted to larger pots and are now acquiring strength and fitness for their permanent homes in years to come.

Your acorns will beautify our urban forests, backyards and parklands, providing a sustainable framework for their associated community of unique species to flourish.

Volunteers are needed to continue the enjoyable work of weeding and repotting. The area is a pleasant work space with snacks, wildlife (quail, gold finches, hawks), and rural sounds.



Anyone wishing to contribute to this vital and worthwhile endeavour please visit our website to learn about becoming a member: www.garryoak.info

Please contact Judith Carder at judeathome@shaw.ca to volunteer.

Ewww...That's Weird

By Renee Cenerini

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

Here at Swan Lake we do lots of nature education programs for children. They range from pre-schoolers to middle schoolers but all our programs have one common goal: to make nature relevant and interesting to them all. To a nature enthusiast like me this seems obvious, of course nature is interesting! But I've come to discover that sadly, not everyone feels the same way, at least not initially.

Reactions, especially from pre-teens and teenagers, can range from fear to boredom to ewww!!! The last one is the one that I like best as it can open the door to fascination. Fear too can be overcome with patience, role-modeling, and a lot of emphasis on the weird and wonderful. Boredom can be tough, but usually getting the rest of the peers on board goes a long way to making nature a lot of fun.

My latest incident of "Ewww...that's weird" involved a pre-teen refusing to do a cheek swab of her own cells to look at under the microscope. When I asked what was weird about it she couldn't really say, just that it was too weird! Funnily enough, when the rest of the class started ooohing and aaahing over their own cheek cells, she did decide that it was worth at least a quick peek in the microscope, if only to confirm for herself how gross it was.

It seems funny to me that we live in a time where many of us have gotten used to a sanitized version of nature, including in our own bodies. Little kids are innately fascinated by the gross and disgusting; trust me, comments about poop and pee are always a hit! Death and decomposition are also a topic of fascination, partly, I think because it is just not something that is discussed in our society. But all these things do belong to nature, as do the beautiful, fragrant, and adorable.

Back to the freaked out pre-teen; by the time we had progressed through the weirdness of onion skin cells to the really amazing microscopic creatures in a drop of Swan Lake water, I felt like we had made real progress. Whether or not this will translate into a lasting engagement with nature is not something I can predict, but at least I feel like that nervous, grossed-out student had a glimpse into the amazing biological world that surrounds us and makes up the essence of who we are.



Upcoming Events

Saanich Recreation Trails & Treks

www.saanich.ca

Sunday Walks (FREE Drop-In)

Sundays | 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Discover the beauty of Saanich parks and nature in your backyard. Guided walks are open to adults of all ages. Please wear sturdy footwear and bring water. Walks go rain or shine. Leashed, well-socialized dogs are welcome unless specified.

Dec 3 | Rural Ramble through West Saanich

Meet at parking lot of Prospect Lake Elementary School on Prospect Lake Road, off Interurban Road

Jan 21 | Kentwood Park to Lohbrunner Park

Meet at Lochside Elementary School at intersection of Royal Oak Drive and Lochside Drive

Feb 18 | Around the Gorge

Meet at Gorge Park parking lot by playground, Gorge Road West, off Tillicum Road

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.

Nov 30 | Prospect Lake Centennial Trail

Meet at Whitehead Park (intersection of Prospect Lk Rd & Goward Rd)

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary

www.swanlake.bc.ca 250-479-0211

Guided Birdwalks (Drop-in Event)

Every Sunday | 9 am

Bring your binoculars and walking shoes and meet in the parking lot for this informal walk around the area. Donations are appreciated.

Winter Wildlife (Drop-in Event)

Sunday, January 28 | 12 pm to 3 pm

When the cold winds blow and you're knee deep in snow, critters have a warm place to go! Join us as we discover how our winter wildlife deal with this challenging time of year through games, crafts, and hands-on exploration. Fun for the whole family! Admission by donation.

CRD Parks & Environmental Services

Our naturalists lead guided walks, hikes, canoeing, and events for all ages. Most are free, all are fun! The Parks brochure can be found here: <http://crd.bc.ca/parks-events> 250-478-3344

Bear Hill: Winter Ascent (Adult Hike)

Saturday, December 16 | 11 am to 1 pm

Bear Hill Regional Park

Great views await you, exploring the forest along with a CRD naturalist, on the way to the summit of Bear Hill. You must pre-register by December 13 as space is limited.

New Year, New Beginnings (Adult Hike)

Saturday, January 6 | 10 am to 2 pm

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park

Discover the fascinating cultural and natural history of this park on a 10 km walk around the lakes. Bring lunch, water, and wear sturdy footwear. You must pre-register by January 3.

High Ridge Hike (Adult Guided Hike)

Saturday, February 3 | 10 am to 12 pm

Francis/King Regional Park

Have you ever wanted to explore more of this fabulous forest? Join a naturalist to hike one of this park's hidden treasures: the High Ridge Trail. Bring a snack, water, and wear sturdy hiking shoes. You must pre-register by January 31.

Moss Landscapes of Vancouver Island (Adult Guided Hike)

Saturday, February 17 | 10 am to 12 pm

Francis/King Regional Park

Join guest CRD Regional Parks naturalist, Kem Luther, to discover the strange lives of mosses. Learn how to identify the most common species. \$7/person + GST. Pre-register by February 14 as space is limited.

Victoria Natural History Society

Visit www.naturevictoria.ca for more programs

Saturday Morning Birding (most Saturdays)

Check the Calendar page to find out the week's location and time (www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1518). Novice and experienced birders welcome. Non-members can participate up to three times.

Natural History Night (every 2nd Tuesday)

Prairie Sunset: A Story of Change | Tues, Dec 12, 7:30 pm

Fabulous Fossils: from Cliff to Cabinet: | Tues, Jan 9, 7:30 pm

LEO Network: Sharing Unusual Natural Events | Feb 13, 7:30 pm

UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Botany Night (every 3rd Tuesday)

Member Night | Tues, Dec 19, 7:30 pm

TBA | Tues, Jan 16, 7:30 pm

TBA | Tues, Feb 20, 7:30 pm

Swan Lake Nature Centre

Birder's Night (every 4th Wednesday)

Bring Back the Bluebirds Update | Wed, Nov 22, 7:30 pm

What We can Learn from Forgotten Bird Journals | Wed, Jan 24, 7:30 pm

Birds of Paradise of Papua New Guinea | Feb 28, 7:30 pm

UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Marine Night (last Monday of the month)

DFO on Robinson Crusoe Island? | Mon, Nov 28, 7:30 pm

Microplastics in the Ocean | Mon, Jan 29, 7:30 pm

Rockfish conservation in the Salish Sea | Mon, Feb 26, 7:30 pm

UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Christmas Bird Count (Drop-in Event)

Saturday, December 16 | all day

Greater Victoria Area

The Victoria Christmas Bird Count is here again. Everyone is welcome! You don't have to be an expert birder to participate. Novices will be teamed up with more experienced counters. If you are curious, interested, or just need more information, please visit: www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1425 or www.audubon.org/join-christmas-bird-count.

Island Pollinator Initiative

By Lora Morandin,
Western Canada Program Manager
Pollinator Partnership Canada

Did you know pollinators are essential for natural ecosystems and food production?

In fact, pollinators, mainly bees, are needed to produce about 1/3 of the food we eat! Those bee-pollinated crops also happen to be the foods that supply us with most of our vitamins. Without bees, we wouldn't have foods like blueberries, apples, strawberries, squash, broccoli, and tomatoes.

Honey bees weren't always here pollinating our crops. They were brought to North America a few hundred years ago and are managed by beekeepers. Until recently, the 850+ species of native bees in Canada did almost all the pollination. They are not aggressive at all, and are mostly solitary. These days, managed honey bees are important crop pollinators in areas without a lot of natural habitat. But, native bees are the best pollinators of most crops and need to be conserved in urban and agricultural areas. Both honey bees and native bees are having health problems and in some cases, are in decline. Honey bees have been experiencing high winter losses in the last decade and are harder than ever before to keep healthy. Native bees also are in trouble, mainly because of loss of habitat, exposure to pesticides, climate change, pests and diseases, and invasive species.

But it's not all bad news for bees! Honey bees have seen a health improvement in the last few years. And, more and more people are learning the importance of native bees and that the best way to help bees is to plant bee-friendly plants. The Island Pollinator Initiative (IPI) is a newly formed coalition of 12 non-profit conservation, beekeeping, and government organizations that are working together to protect pollinators on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. We are focused on educating the public and land managers on the important, positive impact they can have for bees and other pollinators. A few simple steps such as planting native and garden plants that bees and other pollinators like, and reducing pesticides make a huge difference for pollinators. Lots of exciting things are planned for the next year including talks, workshops, bee walks, habitat restoration, and more. Bee part of the solution! If you'd like to join listserv and receive email updates on pollinator related events and information, email Lora at lm@pollinator.org. And follow the IPI facebook page [facebook.com/IslandPollinatorInitiative/](https://www.facebook.com/IslandPollinatorInitiative/)



To see what plants are great for bees and other pollinators in our region go to www.pollinator.org/ guides and scroll down to the Eastern Vancouver Island Ecoregional Planting Guide.

Bumble bee (*Bombus* sp.): Photo credit: Tyson Harrison Photography.

Male mason bee (*Osmia* sp.): Photo credit: Tyson Harrison Photography.





Take the **150** Challenge
Naturescape
saanich.ca/naturescape

To celebrate Canada 150, we are aiming to have 150 participants in the Naturescape Challenge. There are so many ways to create habitat on your property. You may already have a native tree or a water feature--so what can you add? If you would like to participate, visit our website, and take the pledge to start Naturescaping!

Cover: Tall Oregon Grape "grapes" are very popular with fruit-eating birds like Cedar Waxwings

Back: A couple of beautiful fall mushrooms: the orange Lobster Mushroom and a Grisette.

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Be kept up to date on local community stewardship projects and environmental issues. Subscriptions to this quarterly newsletter are free and available in electronic or paper version.

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