

# Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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Front cover: A handsome male Purple Finch coming for a drink and a bath at a small flowing pond in a Saanich resident's backyard. Consider adding a water feature to your landscape and be amazed at what you will see using it.

# Catching the Rain - Growing the Veg

SAVE THE DATE!

SPRING  
PLANT SALE

IN HAEGERT PARK, FERNWOOD  
MAY 13 • 10-2PM • 1202 YUKON ST

Organic seedlings  
for your summer  
veggie garden!



By Kayla Siefried of the Compost Education Centre

As spring arrives in the region and makes way for summer, I'm hoping for more rain than Southern Vancouver Island has gotten this past winter. According to the Capital Regional Districts Integrated Water Systems Report, March saw just 50% of the average monthly rainfall. I'm hopeful we'll still have more rain drops falling on our heads before our regular summer dry season, and I'm finding it even more important to be wise with water: conserve and harvest water where possible (plant native plants, use mulch, harvest in rain barrels, in rain gardens, in rainwater cisterns, even in old garbage bins!) The Compost Education Centre (CEC) has a factsheet (#16 – available on our website <https://compost.bc.ca/>) that can get you going on rainwater wise landscapes and harvesting. Visiting the Compost Education Centre's demonstration garden is a rewarding foray into getting visual ideas for rainwater harvesting and conservation as well. We've got an engineered rain garden, an 1800L cistern, and various rain barrels capturing water from the roofs of our buildings. This, along with water wise gardening techniques such as drought tolerant native species, perennial plants that have lower water needs, and using plenty of wise irrigation and mulching techniques will lower water needs on annual plant beds.

Nothing feels better than watering vegetables (grown from saved seed), at the CEC gardens with rainwater. Something about it is incredibly empowering – closing loops, being sustainable and self-sufficient. The CEC is open Wednesdays through Saturdays for visitors, and we operate our phone and emails as a composting and gardening hotline! Coming up, we've got our annual Organic Plant Sale & Celebration 10:00am-2:00pm in Haegert Park, Victoria, right around the corner from our gardens. Come source some local organic plant starts from 10+ vendors - and happy rain-dancing!



# Tod Flats

## Bird Identification Workshop Opportunity

Photo credit: Lori James Derry

By Winona Pugh, Friends of Tod Creek Watershed and Darren Copley, Saanich Parks

The arrival of the Trumpeter Swans on Tod Flats in the fall is an event that is celebrated and looked forward to by the community. Trumpeter Swans are among the heaviest flying birds in the world and yet each year they leave their soon-to-freeze wetland breeding grounds in northern BC, Yukon, and Alaska and instead overwinter in the milder climate of southwestern BC. The Friends of Tod Creek Watershed, in partnership with 'Bird-friendly Saanich' (through Saanich Parks), are helping steward this important wetland by offering volunteers an opportunity to learn about the importance of these seasonally flooded wetlands in our region through a Bird Identification Workshop and Monitoring Program.

Tod Flats and the other seasonally flooded wetlands in Saanich (Panama Flats, Viaduct Flats, Rithets Bog, Hastings Flats, and Courtland Flats) are former wetlands that now only flood during the winter months. These areas provide critically important winter habitat for waterfowl such as Trumpeter Swans, as well as for shorebirds and birds of prey during specific times of the year, particularly as the number of natural wetlands has diminished. This workshop and future monitoring will help increase our understanding of the rich diversity of bird life that relies on these wetland ecosystems.

With funding from the James L. Baillie Fund of Birds Canada, a bird identification workshop and survey will be held Saturday, May 13 to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day. For those who have been interested in the birds that live on the Tod Flats, this will be a wonderful opportunity

to learn more about the many species and the habitat of the Tod Flats. Participants will be introduced to the free e-Bird, Merlin, and iNaturalist apps to aid in bird identification in any location. The workshop is open to beginning naturalists who would like to learn to identify the birds that make the Tod Flats home year-round or as a part of their migratory journey.

Participants are expected to commit to this community science project to develop an inventory of resident and migratory bird species found in Tod Flats throughout the following year. There is no cost for this workshop but space is limited, so you must pre-register (information below).

### Bird Identification Workshop and Field Study at Tod Flats

Date and time:  
Saturday May 13, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

For more information and to register:  
Winona at [winonapugh@shaw.ca](mailto:winonapugh@shaw.ca)  
(space is limited)

***The District of Saanich has worked in collaboration with Nature Canada and its partners to make our community a safe haven for wild birds earning Saanich a Nature Canada "Bird Friendly City" designation.***



Camrose group



Susan Bernhardt

# Pulling Together Volunteer Profile: Susan Bernhardt (Camrose Park)

By Susan Bernhardt (Pulling Together lead steward volunteer) and Katie Turner (Park Stewardship Coordinator)

*Susan Bernhardt is the 'Pulling Together' lead steward at Camrose Park. Susan has been the 'Pulling Together' Lead Steward since 2022 and is committed to continuing the legacy of volunteers before her who have also worked hard to manage invasive species in this small but unique Garry Oak habitat.*

## What do you enjoy most about volunteering with Saanich Parks?

I have always enjoyed being outside in natural settings and have a long-standing interest in native plants. Pulling Together offers the opportunity to combine those interests with working with a like-minded group, enhancing a sense of community.

## Tell us about one of your most memorable experiences volunteering?

Seeing the transformation of the park as invasives are removed. For example, this spring our Pulling Together group discovered a large patch of Fawn Lilies which only became visible after the English Ivy was removed. To bloom, they just needed a chance.

## Tell us a bit about yourself?

Partly for ecological reasons and partly to reduce the work of maintaining and watering landscaping, I wanted to have native plants at our home and was particularly interested in flowers that do not require constant watering. To improve my knowledge, I volunteered at the Royal BC

Museum native plant garden for five years with botanist Dr Ken Marr. This greatly expanded my understanding. The museum has staff able to answer almost any question!

Over time, I became more involved in propagating and nurturing the plants native to the Garry Oak habitat, of which Camrose Park is an excellent example. Ultimately, the success of Pulling Together volunteers in other parks inspired me to volunteer.

*Susan leads work parties on Friday mornings in Camrose Park.*

*For more information about the 'Pulling Together' Volunteer program:  
[Volunteer for Pulling Together | District of Saanich](#)*

*or to join a work party:  
[Events Calendar | District of Saanich](#)*

# Removing English Ivy Brings Calm and Awe to Haro Woods



Having fun while helping restore the land.

By Lindsay Coulter, Pulling Together Lead Steward in Haro Woods (and a dedicated mother of two, writer, naturalist, community catalyst, culture mayor, mentor, and equine enthusiast).



Using tarps to haul English Ivy away.

North of Sungayka, "meaning patches of snow" is Haro Woods. Sungayka was the village site of the Chekonein family, in the traditional territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations.

I feel great privilege to share my love for Haro Woods in Cadboro Bay with Saanich kids. Our living world is suffering, and we need all ages to help make beauty where ugliness has set in.

I lead work parties with children 3 years old and up. My volunteer teams come from Arbutus Grove Daycare, EPIC nature school, Frank Hobbs Elementary, Arbutus Middle School, and Mount Doug Secondary. That's right. If I can keep this up, a child may first to pull English Ivy as a preschooler and then help me multiple times until they graduate high school!

As a parent, I know youth are stressed, anxious, and experiencing stronger emotions. They are inheriting a wounded world. Unfortunately, our minds shrink when we're under stress and stress squashes our natural kindness and desire for connectivity. As a culture we're habitually distracted with the internet, and screen time fills our waking hours and even defines leisure time.

Taking youth into nature is important because it reminds them of our lasting connection to the living world and each other. Removing English Ivy (and Daphne Laurel, English Holly, Scotch Broom, and Himalayan Blackberry) from our local parks is an example of sane, local action. We all can help restore a world dying and in disrepair. Many kids comment after how calm they feel and show great pride in pulling a pile as tall as they are!

Experiences in nature promote a deep sense of well-being and may even put them in touch with spirit. We all need to be affected by our world and find more time to nurture wonder, find magic, seek beauty, and experience more awe.

**Saanich Parks is grateful for Lindsay's incredible commitment as a Pulling Together Lead Steward volunteer who engages a whole family of a schools in meaningful ecological restoration work at Haro Woods.**

# HAT celebrates WEXES New Moon (Moon of the Frog) with Power to Be

By Max Mitchell, Habitat Restoration Coordinator at  
Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT)

Volunteers remove broom from meadow

An important part of HAT's work is to support Indigenous-led stewardship action and education projects across the region. One such project is the 13 Moons Event Series led by HAT Team member ŚW, XELOSELWET Tiffany Joseph. The goals of this event series is to:

- Host guests of WSÁNEĆ territory and provide opportunities of learning through the reciprocity of restoration (invasive removal)
- Ground restoration work through respect of the land, plants, and animals, and grounding activities in a lunar cycle akin to WSÁNEĆ peoples' lunar cycle-based activities
- Care for the land and for community
- Build community between HAT and the Peninsula communities
- Create more space and opportunity for building capacity of anti-racism
- Build awareness and engagement around the concept of the WSÁNEĆ 13 moons and its connection to seasonal changes within the conservation community

- Strengthen understanding about applying the above concept to existing knowledge of natural world and diversify such knowledge with Indigenous ways of knowing and being on WSÁNEĆ territory

In WSÁNEĆ culture the frog represents the beginning of a period of change, the time of year when you start to wind down winter's activities, and head back outside again in anticipation of the arrival of spring. Due to the recent snowfall and unusually cold temperatures that our region has been experiencing this year, it would be fair if you didn't really feel like spring was on the horizon. This speaks to the sense that traditionally observed weather patterns are increasingly challenging to predict, which is a relatively modern feature of the era of climate change that we are now living in.

It can be instructive to look to the observations represented across the 13 moons of the WSÁNEĆ lunar calendar to see how the natural ebb-and-flow of the seasons is being disrupted by our societies' behavior. It is also important, however, not to become

disheartened by these disruptions, but to recognize the importance of consciously reconnecting to the landscapes that you are a part of so that you can enter into a healthier, reciprocal relationship to the land. To do this, it helps to become more in tune to the way that the landscape changes over the course of the year.

On Tuesday, February 21st we celebrated the arrival of WEXES (the Moon of the Frog) with our colleagues at Power to Be. Tiffany Joseph then shared with the group the significance of WEXES in **WSÁNEĆ** culture, as well as the history of the relationships between the many different nations who inhabit these territories, examining this history through the lens of the unique artistic traditions that each nation has developed.

Power to Be's Prospect Lake site is located on the site of a former golf course, and as such the natural ecosystems and the native plants which would have once called it home have been radically displaced. However, great efforts have already been taken to begin stewarding these lands once again with the creation of a native plant garden and with the

removal of some of the most problematic invasive species. Our goal was to perform maintenance work in an area that had once been completely enveloped in Scotch Broom. Past volunteers had removed a huge amount of mature Broom from the site, but due to the long-lived seed bank it was now time to do another pass; removing the emerging Broom by hand before it has a chance to go to seed.

Before closing for the day, Tiffany shared with our group the **SENĆOŦEN** names for many of the plants and animals that can be found across Coast Salish territory, particularly in our local native ecosystems – highlighting the critically important connection between language and stewardship of the land.

As we closed out the day together folks shared their reflections of an afternoon spent caring for the land out in the rain, and despite the cold temperatures outside there was certainly a feeling of warmth and rejuvenation amongst the group. It didn't hurt that a couple members of our group did manage to actually spot a tree frog as well, signaling that, despite the present cold, that there would be warmer days coming soon. **HÍSWŪKE** to all those who braved the rain and cold to join us out on the land.

Tiffany Joseph (left) shares about WEXES Moon



# Make the Switch:

## How upgrading from natural gas to a heat pump has cut costs and carbon pollution for BC homeowners.

By Maggie Baynham, Saanich Senior Sustainability Planner

If you're looking for another reason to switch out your aging natural gas furnace for a heat pump, here it is: Not only will a heat pump keep your home cozy in the winter and cool in the hot summer, odds are good that it will also save you money.

A recent survey of homeowners in Southwest BC found that, on average, those who swapped out their natural gas furnace or boiler for an electric heat pump are now paying 10% less on their utility bills than they did before their switch.

This report, which collected the real before and after energy bills of participants, is helping to debunk the myth that using natural gas is the cheapest way to heat your home.

Go to [saanich.ca/maketheswitch](https://saanich.ca/maketheswitch) to read more about the study findings and hear what some of the participants had to say about their switch to a heat pump!



By switching to a **heat pump**, Erin lowered her household energy bills 26% while cutting her carbon footprint by **69%**



It also uncovered the following tips to minimize the operating costs of your new heat pump:

- ✓ use an experienced and qualified contractor to properly size and install your system;
- ✓ avoid using supplementary heating sources such as natural gas fireplaces or space heaters to heat your home; and,
- ✓ improve the efficiency of your home with added insulation or air sealing.



# A Noteworthy Douglas-Fir in the New Urban Forest of Goward Park

By Everett Peterson, former lead steward, Goward Park

This Douglas-fir is noteworthy because it was the first tree transplanted during recent ecological restoration initiatives to establish a new urban forest in Goward Park. It was transplanted by Dr. Robert van den Driessche in 2010. This seedling, about 2 meters tall at the time of transplanting, was obtained from the research nursery of the Pacific Forestry Centre, Canadian Forest Service, along with several other Douglas-firs and Arbutus. Dr. van den Driessche is pictured in 2016 beside this Douglas-fir six years after its establishment in Goward Park. At the time he was a retired forest research scientist, Research Branch, Ministry of Forests. In 2011 and 2012, from his own nursery stock, he also planted several western red cedars which are now well established in Goward Park. By 2023, the new recent trees in this urban forest contain a biodiverse mixture of planted Western Redcedar, Douglas-fir, Grand Fir, Shore Pine, Arbutus, and Garry Oak, Plus Naturally Regenerated Black Cottonwood and Red Alder.

Robert's original 2010 Douglas-fir transplant was re-photographed on 14 March 2023 at which time it exceeded 8 meters. This rapidly growing tree can be identified by hikers on the woodland footpaths by a blue ribbon marker that has been temporarily placed at eye level on its approximately 9 cm diameter stem.



Dr. van den Driessche is pictured in 2016 beside this Douglas-fir six years after its establishment in Goward Park.

## **Let's Pull Together for Goward Park**

### *Seeking a Lead Steward volunteer at Goward Park*

- *Join a community of park stewards.*
- *Learn about ecosystem restoration.*
- *Plan guide and monitor restoration activities.*
- *Lead work parties and welcome new volunteers.*

*Please contact Saanich Parks Stewardship Coordinator [katie.turner@saanich.ca](mailto:katie.turner@saanich.ca) to learn more.*



Robert's original 2010 Douglas-fir transplant was re-photographed on 14 March 2023 at which time it exceeded 8 meters.

# Spring Salmon at the Nature Sanctuary



SFH and Wren with Clay Salmon



Salmon eggs



Fry close-up



Salmon in bag

By: Madi Haller, Community Educator at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

## Everyone is feeling the magic of spring!

This spring is another magical one for us as we are once again honouring.... salmon! Did you know that the Nature Sanctuary raises and releases Coho Salmon?

Salmon are talked about a lot on Vancouver Island – especially in the fall and winter seasons as their spawning events draw visitors from near and far. But did you know that salmon behaviour in spring, though admittedly less theatrical, is just as extraordinary?

First - the hatching! From each tiny egg an alevin breaks free. Though alevin will one day travel thousands of kilometres, at this stage, they are rather poor swimmers. They have a huge yolk sack attached to their underside which is their food source as they hide and gain strength.

It is not until this yolk sac is entirely used (called **'buttoning up'**) that these salmon can swim up,

begin to find their own food, and have a chance of escaping from predators. At this stage, we call them fry.

Coho fry spend a whole year in their spawning stream before they head to the ocean. When they reach the area where fresh water meets salt water (the estuary), the salmon go through astounding physiological, physical, and behavioural changes as they adapt to live in salt water. We call salmon in this stage smolts.

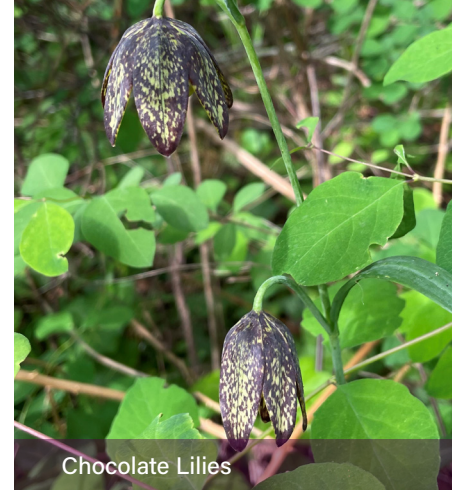
From here, the salmon head to the ocean and grow into adults, eventually returning to their home stream to lay eggs and begin the cycle again. Check out a salmon spawning river to see if you can spot any fry this spring! We will release our fry into Swan Creek where it has been beautifully remediated by the Friends of Swan Creek, the District of Saanich, Peninsula Streams, Satinflower Nurseries, and many, many, wonderful volunteers!



Bearded Owl Clover



Mushroom Forest



Chocolate Lilies

# Take a Quiet Walk with Mother Nature

By Rick Hatch, Supervisor of Natural Areas, Saanich Parks

Saanich Parks has so many wonderful natural state parks full of Mother Nature's delicate and delightful beauty. A decade deep into working at Saanich Parks, I'm still discovering many breathtaking sights: moss-covered, rocky outcrops with Sea Blush in full bloom, trailside Chocolate Lily's poking through Snowberry, log-covered Chocolate Tube Slimes, patches of tiny Bearded Owl Clover, and amazing displays of camas. My new discoveries often take place during a walkthrough with some of the Pulling Together Lead Stewards and volunteers that spend 16,000 plus hours each year removing invasive plants to help restore and enhance the incredible diversity we have in our parks. The removal of English Ivy, and other invasive plants, is creating growing space for native plants that have been patiently waiting for decades to show their colour once again.

Early in 2022, after 35 years working in forestry and Saanich's Natural Areas section, I finally slowed down and started absorbing the intimate beauty of Mother Nature; it seems odd to say, but I truly fell in love with nature once again.

What might have sparked my deeper appreciation for nature was supporting Saanich's Natural Intelligence initiative, *"Respecting nature's gifts helps grow your Natural Intelligence. By giving back to nature, nature takes care of you."* With the stresses of "life", I needed a way to escape and absorb and enjoy a new love of something that I had trudged through quickly for most of my career, Mother Nature. I was fortunate to have a new nature/fitness/stress coach in my life early last year, a beautiful East German Shephard pup by the name of Medea; she loves to sniff and sniff and sniff (I love when it snows so I can see all the animal tracks and pee that she enjoys so much). Her endless sniffing forced me to slow down, open my eyes, and start enjoying the beautiful diversity of native plants throughout our wonderful Saanich Parks. Instead of texting on my phone, I started collecting photos, lots of close-up, intimate photos of everything that caught my curious eye. A simple water droplet on a Satinflower is so beautiful, the inviting bits of a flower, Fawn Lily's hugging, a thumbs-up Trillium fairy, fruiting bodies, ripening berries, a fuzzy Bee, so much to see. By growing our Natural Intelligence, we respect nature's gifts and adjust our habits to be in more tune with nature. Slow down, soak it in and fall in love with nature, it's a love that will always give back to you.



Licorice Fern



Chocolate Tube Slime



Thumbs-up Trillium Fairy

# EVENTS



## Saanich Recreation Trails & Treks

For information on meeting locations, please visit:

<https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/events-in-park/trails-treks.html>

Any questions please call Alison at 250-475-5408 or email [alison.chamberlain@saanich.ca](mailto:alison.chamberlain@saanich.ca)

### Walk & Roll Around the Park (FREE)

**Mondays | 11:00 am to 12:00 pm**

(Spring to Fall Only): Join Penny for a social walk and roll around a different Saanich Park. The pace and distance is up to you. Make your way around each park multiple times or take the whole hour to do one loop. Featured parks have multiple benches for rests and wide walkways, with paved or level gravel surfaces. Feel free to bring walking sticks, poles, rolling walkers, wheelchairs, or other mobility aids. All welcome!

**May 15 | Rutledge Park**

**May 22 | Victoria Day NO WALK**

**May 29 | Glanford Park**

**June 5 | Lambrick Park**

**Jun 12 | Copley Park West**

**Jun 19 | Majestic Park**

**Jun 26 | Brydon Park**

### Easy Walks (FREE)

**Mondays | 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm**

One-hour, easy-paced social walks on pavement and groomed trails through parks and interesting neighbourhoods. Where possible routes avoid steep hills. Most walks start near bus stops. Please wear supportive shoes.

**May 15 | Playfair/Cedar Hill Golf Course | Loop 1**

**May 22 | Victoria Day NO WALK**

**May 29 | Gordon Head West**

**Jun 5 | Swan Lake/Cloverdale**

**Jun 12 | Royal Oak Ramble**

**Jun 19 | Bowker Creek/Saanich Panhandle**

**Jun 26 | Gorge: Upper Waterway**

### Walk & Talk 55+ (FREE)

**Tuesdays and Thursdays | 9:30 am to 11 am**

Leader: Tuesdays | Dianne, Thursdays | John  
Enjoy beautiful scenery, friendly chat, and gentle exercise as we walk through Saanich parks and trails. Walks follow mainly chip or gravel trails but may have some steep sections. Sorry, dogs not permitted.

**May 16 | Playfair Park to Rutledge Park**

**May 18 | Lower Trails of PKOLS (Mount Doug) (steep, unpaved)**

**May 23 - Braefoot Park to Lambrick Park**

**May 25 | Beaver Lake**

**May 30 | Copley Park West to Quick's Bottom**

**Jun 1 | McMinn to Kentwood - Outerbridge (hills, unpaved trails)**

**Jun 6 | Rithet's Bog Park to Donwood Park**

**Jun 8 | Bow Park**

**Jun 13 - PKOLS (Mount Doug) Park Lower Trails**

**Jun 15 | Cadboro Bay to Queen Alexandra**

**Jun 20: Cuthbert Holmes Park & Colquitz Trails**

**Jun 22 | Glencoe Cove (some hills)**

**Jun 27: Layritz Park to Hort. Center Pacific**

**Jun 29 | Mt.Tolmie & Finnerty Gardens (steep hills)**

### Sunday Walks (FREE)

**Sundays | 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm**

Discover the beauty Saanich Parks on our Sunday Hikes, open to walkers of all ages. Please wear sturdy footwear and bring drinking water. Routes may include steep, rough trails.

**May 28 | Layritz/Mountain Road Forest**

**June 25 | Campus to Cove**

### Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary

[www.swanlake.bc.ca](http://www.swanlake.bc.ca) 250-479-0211

### Guided Bird Walks (Drop-In)

**Every Sunday | 9:00 am to 10:30 am**

Bring your binoculars and walking shoes and dress for the weather. Meet in the large parking lot for this informal walk around the lake area. Donations are appreciated.

### Victoria Natural History Society

Visit [www.naturevictoria.ca](http://www.naturevictoria.ca) for more programs

### Saturday Morning Birding (most Saturdays)

Check the Calendar to find out the week's location and time ([http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page\\_id=1518](http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1518)). All experience levels welcome. Non-members can participate up to three times.

### Rocky Point Bird Observatory

Visit [www.naturevictoria.ca](http://www.naturevictoria.ca) for more programs

### Outerbridge Park Sunday Bird Walks

**May 14 and June 11 at 9:00 am**

Rocky Point Bird Observatory hosts guided bird walks at Outerbridge Park in Saanich on the 2nd Sunday of each month. These easy walks, suitable for people with mobility concerns, begin at the parking area off Royal Oak Drive. For dates and details, see <https://rpbo.org/who-we-are/places/>  
Download the ebird list <https://ebird.org/canada/printableList?regionCode=L2600845&yr=all&m=>

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