

Our Backyard

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A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH

EDITOR

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FROM THE

Thanks for reading this Fall issue of Our Backyard; Saanich's newsletter for promoting the natural environment. As you may know, this newsletter also aims to increase the profile of community stewardship projects and environmental education in, or relevant to, the District of Saanich.

One such organization that I am very involved with is the Victoria Natural History Society (VNHS), which has been a part of our community since 1944. When I first joined (almost 25 years ago now) there were fewer environmental organizations around, and the Society had committees that looked at parks and conservation, field trips, children's programs, etc. Since then many other groups have formed, as a visit to the Conservation Connection website will attest (www.conservationconnection.bc.ca).

Some of these organizations are focussed on very specific projects (such as Madrona Farm or the Rithet's Bog Conservation Society), while others are providing benefits to the entire region (land trusts such as Habitat Acquisition Trust and The Land Conservancy). The District of Saanich also partners with many of these great organizations on local projects and we would like to thank their volunteers.

If you are interested in learning more about the different conservation and stewardship organizations working in the Capital Regional District be sure to visit the Conservation Connection website. Hopefully this on-line network will provide you with a local group or conservation project that interests you. Remember that it really helps out to become a member since this helps fund their core operations. It also provides more of a voice in our region if they have a large membership!



Welcome!

This past July, Saanich Parks hired Marian McCoy as the new Natural Areas Technician. As the NAT, Marian is responsible for coordinating Saanich's Integrated Pest Management Program, training and coordinating volunteers working on ecosystem restoration and invasive alien plant management in Saanich parks, and working with staff to develop best management practices for maintenance activities in park natural areas, among many other tasks.



Cory Manton (Natural Areas Manager) and Darren Copley welcome Marian McCoy

Marian has a background in invasive species management, restoration planning, environmental assessment, paleoecology, and biogeography. Prior to coming to Saanich Parks, she worked for Parks Canada, and as a contractor to GOERT, Invasive Plant Council of BC, and others preparing various technical materials. Her Master's thesis focused on reconstructing the fire and vegetation histories of coastal Douglas-fir and Garry oak ecosystems in our region. She serves on GOERT's Restoration and Management group, and Invasive Species Steering Committee.

Marian's been spending the last couple of months meeting volunteers and staff, and reading a lot. She looks forward to spending more time wielding loppers and getting her hands dirty in Saanich's many wonderful parks. Look for her in a neighbourhood near you! Contact Marian at marian.mccoy@saanich.ca

Knotweed - when plants go *Bad*

by Kitty Lloyd

Years ago, while living in Bamfield, I remember my neighbour planting a fast-growing bamboo-like plant that quickly grew tall and spread all along their roadway. They were looking for a plant that would fill in a recently cleared area, and they got that in spades! Now I realize what they unwittingly introduced to the area was knotweed, a plant that many people are now battling to get rid of throughout the Pacific Northwest. Since being introduced here from Asia, ostensibly to help with soil erosion, it has now spread along many waterways and overwhelmed native riparian ecosystems. We now know that despite extremely vigorous rhizomes that form a deep, dense mat, knotweed provides poor erosion control, and like many other invasive non-native plants, it does far more harm than good.

What makes knotweed such a pest?

Aggressive behaviour:

- Extremely aggressive, persistent and fast-growing; able to survive severe flooding and quickly colonize scoured stream banks.
- Re-sprouts from root, rhizome, or stem fragments as small as 1cm.
- Knotweed's tiny seeds (up to 100,000 per stem) disperse via small winged fruits (achenes) that are often carried along waterways where they colonize downstream areas. Seeds can remain viable for up to 15 years.
- Known to emerge through 5cm of asphalt or concrete.
- Rhizomes extend up to 18m from parent plants, and roots go down 2m or more.

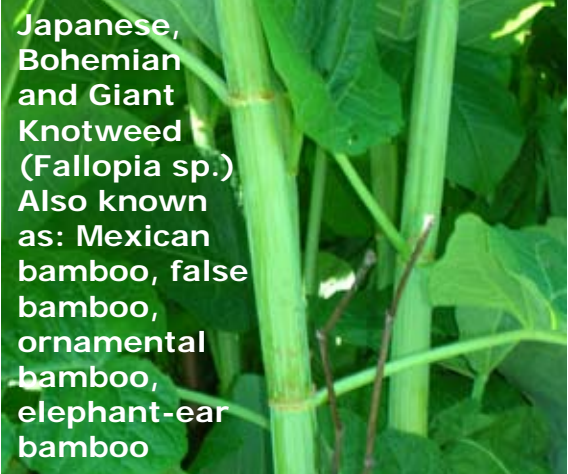
Does not play well with others:

- Forms dense stands that crowd out all other vegetation; very difficult to eradicate once established.
- Can cause soil erosion in riparian areas.
- Clogs waterways and degrades wildlife and fish habitat.
- Prefers open habitats but tolerates a wide range of temperature, moisture and light conditions, acidity, soil types, and nutrient regimes. Knotweed is found along roadsides, waterways, neglected gardens, and unused areas, where it thrives and quickly becomes established on freshly disturbed soils.

We can beat this baddie:

Knotweed is very difficult to eradicate – a vigilant approach is required, best accomplished through collaboration between municipal staff (Saanich is here to help!) and community volunteers on public lands, and homeowners where it occurs on private property.

In Saanich, knotweed is now found near Cecelia Ravine and Blenkinsop Creek, and there are infestations in other areas of the Capital Regional District. Please join the knotweed vigilantes and keep a sharp eye out for this pesky plant.



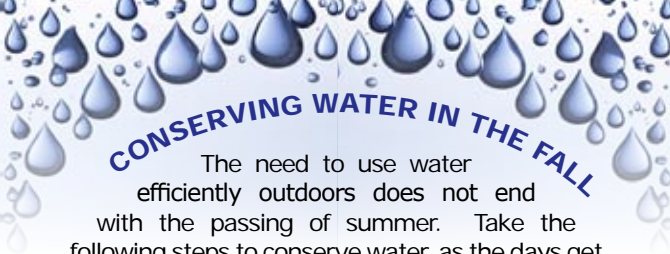
Japanese,
Bohemian
and Giant
Knotweed
(*Fallopia* sp.)
Also known
as: Mexican
bamboo, false
bamboo,
ornamental
bamboo,
elephant-ear
bamboo

What should you do?

- Contact Saanich Environmental Services (250 475-5471 / plansec@saanich.ca) for positive identification and to learn about Knotweed and other invasive species removal efforts in your area.

Visit the Saanich website
www.saanich.ca to learn more about
invasive species, and how to remove them.





CONSERVING WATER IN THE FALL

The need to use water efficiently outdoors does not end with the passing of summer. Take the following steps to conserve water, as the days get cooler and shorter. These fall maintenance steps will also ensure you have a healthy lawn and garden when spring returns.

Watering

- ◆ Plants, lawns and gardens usually require little or no water beyond rainfall in the fall and winter months.
- ◆ If conditions require supplemental watering, remember to follow CRD Stage One Watering Schedule, which are in effect until September 30th.

Irrigation Systems

- ◆ Make sure your irrigation system and controller are working properly. Fix all leaks and broken heads.
- ◆ Replace batteries in irrigation controllers.
- ◆ Winterize your irrigation system.

Weeding

- ◆ Remove weeds by pulling or digging them up. Be sure you get the entire weed root.

Mulching

- ◆ Topping up or adding mulch to your flowerbeds is especially effective during the early fall.

Mowing

- ◆ Mow only when needed during the fall months. Raise your mower blades to a height of 7.5 cm (3 inches). Remove no more than one third of the grass blade.

Remove Thatch

- ◆ Remove the thatch from your lawn with a rake, a thatching attachment on your mower or a thatching machine.

Overseeding

- ◆ The month of September is usually the best time of year to overseed. Apply grass seed to thicken the lawn and crowd out weeds.

Aeration

- ◆ Aeration allows water, oxygen flow and fertilizer to reach the grass's root zone. Depending on the size of your lawn, you can aerate with a pitchfork, aerator shoes or an aeration machine.

Nutrients

- ◆ During the Spring and Fall your lawn may need to be replenished with some nutrients to encourage growth and general health of the grass. Use compost to enhance the biodiversity of the soil and greatly increase its water holding capacity or use organic based fertilizers.

For more information about these fall maintenance practices contact CRD Water Services at 250-474-9684 or go to our web site at www.crd.bc.ca/water

CRD and Multicultural Environmental Education Program Welcome Newcomers

by Rosalyn Cua

In the midst of a heat wave in late July, a group of newcomers gathered at Beaver Lake Park as the nearby beach buzzed with parents and children looking for a way to stay cool. Thanks to a partnership between the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre and CRD Parks, the group was gearing up for a 1.5-hour canoeing experience around the lake. After a crash course on basic canoeing skills, two CRD guides led the group and explored the many plant and animal species that make Beaver Lake their home. The group's age ranged from under 10 to almost 60, and spanned the globe from Japan, Korea, England, Turkey, Guatemala and the Philippines.

The outing was organized by the Multicultural Environmental Education Program of the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society. Now in its second year, the goal of the program is to bring together and support newcomers and the wider multicultural community in making sustainable choices for a healthy planet. This involves introducing newcomers to the beautiful natural environment of the capital region and giving them the opportunity to access information and have experiences that may not otherwise be readily available to them.

In addition to workshops and outings, the program also offers a multilingual action tips resource with easy lifestyle tips that encourage people to take small steps toward environmental action. The tips are available online and in print, and they will also be aired on local community and multicultural radio.



For action tips, workshop schedule, newsletter and more, visit their website at www.vircs.bc.ca/environment/main.php



Watch for Death Cap Mushroom in Victoria

by Adolf Ceska



A large population of Death Cap/Deadly Amanita (*Amanita phalloides*) has been found in Uplands Park, growing in association with linden trees (*Tilia* sp.). This mushroom is DEADLY poisonous and,

according to David Arora in his book "Mushrooms Demystified", it causes serious poisonings and one or two deaths every year in the San Francisco area. This mushroom is not native to North America - it was introduced into California with ornamental trees from Europe. In the Victoria area, it is also known from Government House and the Fairfield/Moss Street areas.

Although it usually appears in the fall, watering of street boulevards created favourable conditions for the fruiting of Deadly Amanita in Uplands park. It first appeared at the beginning of July and it has been coming up ever since. There is an assemblage of mushrooms growing in this particular site and there are even some choice edible mushrooms among them. Since mushrooms accumulate harmful chemicals from fertilizers and herbicides, ALL MUSHROOMS growing on street boulevards should be avoided.

Warn your friends and spread this warning around. People who do not know mushrooms could mistake it for the Prince (*Agaricus augustus*) or any other edible agarics. Please watch for it and let me know if you find it (aceska@telus.net). If you have other fungal questions, please check out the calendar for programs provided by the South Vancouver Island Mycological Society, including the annual Swan Lake Wild Mushroom Show (Sunday, Oct. 25) where you can bring in specimens for identification.

At the Victoria Natural History's Botany Night, Tuesday, October 20, Larry Evans, one of the two lead characters of the "Know Your Mushrooms" movie, will talk about the movie and his mushroom hunting adventures in the Pacific Northwest and in Central America.



Food Security and Community Gardens

by Norm Morgensen

Norm is the recipient of the 2007 Saanich Environmental Lifetime Achievement Awards and has been a tireless member of many local Associations and Committees. He is currently working to promote community gardens and local food production.

With the legitimate concern of climate change, and the rising costs of food as it travels here from afar, it is important that we turn to local food sources. One way is to support our local farms, and the other is to grow your own food, provided you have the space. Another option that many people are involved with is allotment gardens which can enliven a spirit of community and mutual support.

The best community gardens are close enough to where people live that they need not be dependent on automobiles to access them, and can walk to them in 10 minutes or less. Soil quality is important, but good soil can be created incrementally from marginal land in just a few seasons through composting and mulching. Access to a reliable water supply is crucial in our semi-arid climate. One allotment garden should be about 7 x 15 metres in area, so a community garden needs to be several times larger than that. Nonetheless, every option should be considered.

Do you know of any publicly owned land in your vicinity that is close to where a lot of people live, that might be appropriate for consideration for development into a community garden? If so, please contact Norm Mogensen at nmorgensen@shaw.ca for help in evaluating it and presenting it to the appropriate approving authority.



The Friends of Knockan Hill Park are pleased to announce the launch of their new website, which can be found online at:

www.knockanhillpark.ca

The Friends expect that the website will help to attract new members, provide greater access to information, and act as a useful resource for the community at large.

Upcoming events & announcements



Gorge Waterway

Cleanup

by Gillian Rowan

This year's 9th annual Gorge Waterway Cleanup was held on Saturday September 19th. This event, hosted by the Burnside Gorge Community Association, is part of an international initiative aimed at cleaning up shorelines around the world.

Local residents, businesses, schools, non-profit organizations, and hundreds of volunteers work together to make this event a huge success each year. Our cleanup stretches from the Bay St. Bridge to the Tillicum St. Bridge, and this year we had more volunteer participation, cleaned up a longer stretch of shoreline, and retrieved more debris than ever before (we filled the 40 ft bin to the top). Two elementary schools, six middle schools, two high schools, one esl school and Camosun College all joined us with teams. We had well over two hundred volunteers including twenty five scuba divers. Our community really worked together to make a difference to the Gorge Waterway!

Wildlife and the greater community have all benefited from our efforts. We are proud of the results; a cleaner stretch of land and ocean, a healthier habitat for a wide variety of species, and a more beautiful area for those utilizing the Galloping Goose Trail.

Thank-you to our title sponsor, Tim Hortons, for their ongoing generous support of the Gorge Waterway Cleanup, and to the numerous other businesses and organizations that are among our community partners, and especially to all those who volunteered.




Burnside Gorge

Garry Oak Acorn Campaign For Restoration Projects

Rob Hagel at the Pacific Forestry Centre has confirmed that he welcomes viable acorns (do the float test and discard the acorns that float). Double plastic bag the good acorns and label with the collection locality. Acorns can be delivered to the GOERT office at 606 Courtney Street or Rob Hagel at the Pacific Forestry Centre on Burnside Road (rhagel@pfc.forestry.ca; (250) 363-0764).

The Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team AGM Wednesday, Sept. 30, 5 - 9 pm Pacific Forestry Centre

GOERT turns 10 this year, so come celebrate with us at this great event featuring special guest speakers Briony Penn and Guy Dauncey. Join us for a delicious buffet dinner, a walk down memory lane, and the annual Acorn Awards! \$15 includes your membership fee, appetizers, and a buffet dinner! Register online at www.goert.ca donate or call us at 250-383-3447.

RiverSong: Life Along the Colquitz 3rd Annual BC Rivers Day Event Sunday, Sept. 27, 1 - 4pm Colquitz River Linear Park (opposite Colquitz Middle School)

Walk along the Colquitz River Trail and celebrate the many delightful pebble mosaics created by Colquitz Middle School students. Light refreshments served.

For information or to volunteer: (250)475-5557
www.saanich.ca/resident/recreation/events/featured/riversong.html

Goldstream Nature House Art Show The Nature of Vancouver Island Artists Sept 19 - Oct. 12, 10 - 4:30 pm

This event provides a chance to meet some great artists, and view amazing artwork. It is also one of Goldstream's biggest fundraisers to offset the cost of interpretive programs offered during the school year. Volunteers are needed to assist visitors, monitor the artwork, and "meet and greet" anyone who comes to the show. Please contact Judith Parish (250-382-1026).

Playfair Park Ivy, Daphne, and Blackberry Removal Saturday, Nov. 14 & 21, 9:30 - 11:30 am

Meet at the entrance off of Judge Place. Bring gloves and pruners. Contact Pam Sinclair for info: 250 382-0032

South Vancouver Island Mycological Society www.svims.ca

The Miniature Beauty of Fungal Microscopy Thursday, Oct. 1, 7 pm Pacific Forestry Centre

Oluna Ceska will show us the fascinating beauty of fungal samples under the microscope and explain their identification features.

Medicinal Mushrooms Thursday, Nov 5, 7 pm Pacific Forestry Centre

Richard Winder will take us to the forefront of knowledge about medicinal mushrooms and their applications.

Upcoming events & announcements

Madrona Farm

www.madronafarm.com

2nd Annual Island Chefs' Survival Challenge

Sunday, Oct. 4, 12 - 6 pm

A Culinary Arts Performance and Music Festival to Protect Local Farmland. Cost: Tickets \$75, and on sale starting at Madrona Farm veggie stand, Wednesdays to Fridays, 11 pm to 2 pm and at Hemp and Company, 547 Johnson Street, Victoria.

Join 15 of Victoria's finest chefs as they show you just how far they will go to protect the farms that fuel their restaurants. Each chef arrives on the farm with three bags, utensils, condiments, and a piece of meat. Their mission is to retrieve their supplies, find the map of Madrona Farm, battle the obstacles and race to find the food they will use to cook their two masterpieces, which will be auctioned off by world famous chef and mentor David Mincey. Enjoy an afternoon of great food and some amazing local music.

All proceeds go to protect Madrona Farm forever with The Land Conservancy of BC. For more information, please contact: madrama@telus.net.

Madrona Farm Tours - Sat.'s at 9:30 am sharp

Madrona Farm Volunteer Days - Wed.'s and Fri.'s from 9-11 am

Swan Lake

Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

www.swanlake.bc.ca

250 479-0211

Native Plant Sale

Saturday, Oct. 17, 9 am - 3 pm

We'll have a great selection of plants (many species not available at our spring sale) and display booths. Members receive a 10% discount. Admission: members/non-members Free/\$2

Wild Mushroom Show

Sunday, Oct. 25, 10 pm - 4 pm

The South Vancouver Island Mycological Society will have a huge variety of fungus on display. Bring your specimens for identification.

Going Batty: a Halloween Spook-tacular

Saturday, Oct. 31, 1 - 3 pm

The bats come out of hibernation for this spooky, Halloween event. Are they as scary as we hear or do they just need better press. With activities, exhibits, crafts, stories and song we'll discover the REAL world of bats. Admission by donation. \$3 charge for craft supplies

Native Plant Workshop

Oct. 5, 18, 26, 3 or 3, Nov 8

Hosted by Swan Lake and CRD Water, these 3 hour workshops will teach you how to incorporate native plants into your garden, which plants suit which environments and how native plants help to conserve water. Free, but you must pre-register 250-479-0211.

Guided Birdwalks

every Wednesday and Sunday.

Meet at the Nature House at 9 am.

Victoria Natural History Society

www.vicnhs.bc.ca

Birding at Whiffin Spit, Sooke

Saturday, Oct. 3

Meet at 7:30 am at the Helmcken Park and Ride to carpool or at Whiffen Spit 8:30 am.

Looking at the Rocks on the Saanich Peninsula

Sunday, Oct. 4, 10 am

Island View Beach Parking Lot (south end) Rick Hudson will lead an all day trip investigating the geology of Saanich Peninsula. No pets please. More info on website.

Natural History Night (every 2nd Tuesday)

Ivvavik National Park, Yukon

Tuesday, Oct. 13, 7:30 pm

UVic Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A120 Artist Joanne Thomson provides photos and reflections about the British Mountains, the MacKenzie Delta, the Firth River, and the beauty of the people, the rocks, daylight, bones, wildflowers, lichens and insects of the area.

Juan De Fuca Pelagic Birding

Saturday, Oct. 17

Cruise through the Juan De Fuca Strait to Race Rocks and to some of the best feeding spots for pelagic birds. Marine mammals, including whales, are also possibilities. Pre-register on the VNHS website which has more details and costs.

Botany Night - (every 3rd Tuesday)

Know Your Mushrooms

Tuesday, Oct. 20, 7:30 pm

UVic Elliot Building, Room 168

Larry Evans, one of the two lead characters of the "Know Your Mushrooms" movie, will talk about his mushroom hunting adventures in the Pacific Northwest and in Central America.

Marine Night (last Monday of every month)

Code Blue: Marine Rescue and Resuscitation

Monday, Oct. 26, 7:30 pm

UVic Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A120 Dr. Colin Campbell, and Ana Simeon will deliver a unique take on global warming, highlighting marine species that inhabit the Pacific Northwest.

Birders' Night (every 4th Wednesday)

The Birds and Ecology of Boundary Bay

Wednesday, Oct. 28, 7:30 pm

UVic Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A120

Anne Murray will be presenting a slide show on Boundary Bay, which is rated the top Important Bird Area in Canada.

Glendale Gardens

www.glendalegardens.ca

Backyard Winter Birds

Saturday, Nov. 7, 1 - 5pm

Ann Nightingale will show you the backyard winter birds of Victoria through a slide-illustrated talk and you'll also learn what to feed your wintertime guests and put together a suet feeder to take home with you. Members \$38/\$58. Please call (250) 479-6162 to register.