

Our Backyard

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A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH

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FROM THE

I really enjoy pulling these stories together for the newsletter, and being able to promote the great programs that are happening in our region. It's an effective way to keep in touch with our local community groups, and other departments within the District of Saanich.

In this issue you'll read about a new provincial program called Trees for Tomorrow, an initiative to support communities in the planting of millions of trees. Cory Manton from Saanich Parks, in partnership with local groups and two nearby schools, Pacific Christian and Glanford, used this funding to convert a weed-filled berm to a forested park, while teaching students and the community about the value of natural areas. I had the pleasure of working with classes from both of these schools to get them ready for the restoration project. We went on field trips to inventory what was at Baxter Park before the restoration, and also to look at our ultimate goal: the naturally-occurring ecosystems on nearby Christmas Hill. Another important part of this project is to get schools involved with natural areas that are within walking distance of the school. I learned a lot from these visits with the students, and I hope they did too.

A new year is coming up, and I'd like to improve this newsletter with more information on the natural history of our area, and as you can see, I've been inspired to highlight some of the great projects that our local schools are involved with. It would be great to get the newsletter out to an even larger audience, so please pass this issue on to others and suggest they subscribe.

Good News for the New Year!

Council voted in favour of adopting the pesticide bylaw and Integrated Pest Management Policy for Saanich. This means that, pending final reading in January, residential pesticide use will no longer be permitted for purely cosmetic purposes. Saanich Parks has already reduced the use of synthetic pesticides by 95% since 1994. To learn more about this initiative, please visit www.saanich.ca/resident/environment/naturalenv.html.



Saanich Community Members Get an Energy Efficiency Boost *By Paula Steele*

This year, thousands of Saanich residents and businesses showed their commitment to the environment by accessing energy efficiency grants and information through the Community Energy Manager Initiative. The pilot project, created through a partnership between BC Hydro, the District of Saanich, and City Green Solutions, consolidated resources to help make energy conservation easier and more accessible. This program helped meet the Saanich Official Community Plan goals by engaging the community and promoting community-wide emission reductions. Through this program:

REBATES		
Rebate Level		EnerGuide Level
30%	Built Green Platinum	82
	Power Smart Gold	80
	EnerGuide 80	80
	R-2000	80
	*Gold Renovations	80
20%	Built Green Gold	77
	Power Smart Silver	77
	*Silver Renovations	77
10%	Built Green Silver	75
	*Bronze Renovations	75

*some conditions may apply

- 1,557 people completed a first home energy assessment
- 43 small businesses received free BC Hydro lighting assessments
- 450 people learned about BC Hydro's Power Smart rebates
- 1070 people attended informative workshops

The following grant programs are still available!

- Up to \$5000 through the Federal ecoENERGY Program for home energy efficiency upgrades
- Up to 30% off your building permit if you 'build green' in Saanich (see chart)
- Product rebates and discounts when you join Team Power Smart on-line at BC Hydro

"Since the BC building code was set at EnerGuide 77 in Sept 2008, high quality builders are discovering that they are already building to 'green' standards," says Paula Steele. "These third party rating programs just verify the work that is being done well and gives recognition where recognition is due."

Visit www.climateaction.saanich.ca and www.citygreen.ca





The Gorge Waterway Discovery Centre -

By Brian Harvey & World Fisheries Trust

Come down to the old "refreshment stand" in Esquimalt-Gorge Park (formerly Kinsmen-Gorge Park), and re-experience the Gorge Waterway!

The Gorge Waterway Discovery Centre is an active learning centre that highlights the many unique features of the life and history of the Gorge Waterway. Located in the heart of Victoria's richest urban ecosystem, the new Centre provides hands-on learning, as well as a chance to visualize how "green" choices can actually affect life in the area. The young—and the young-at-heart—are all welcome to explore our interactive displays. Get an up-close and personal glimpse at the secret lives of marine creatures at the "touch tank" Seaquarium; wonder at the beauty and complexity of local plant and animal life using our microscope and other equipment; understand our impact on these lesser-known and under-appreciated plants and animals as you interact with our hands-on Gorge watershed model. Or just take some quiet time to browse in our library and discover our other resources. Our friendly staff and volunteers are there to guide you through the displays and answer questions. For a more in-depth experience, we also offer a wide range of educational programs tailored to the age and learning styles of school, daycare, and community groups.



We are open to the public every Sunday from 11am to 4pm, and for special events in the park. Public admission is by donation (suggested donation: \$1/child; \$2/adult during public hours), and program fees vary. Donations and fees help keep the Centre open, keep displays and resources up to date and provide new ones, and subsidize groups with financial challenges.

For more information, please visit us at <http://worldfish.org/gwdc.htm>, call us at 250-380-7585, or email education@worldfish.org.

Help Save Madrona Farm:
Your Local Food Supply

The Land Conservancy of BC is working to purchase Madrona Farm, a 27-acre organic mixed vegetable farm located only 15 minutes from downtown Victoria. This special agricultural and ecological treasure provides produce year-round to over 3,500 homes in the Greater Victoria area.

To donate, please call 1-877-485-2422 or visit www.conservancy.bc.ca

THE RACE TO SAVE MADRONA FARM *By Heather Skydt*

People love food. And the fact that locally grown food simply tastes better than the alternative is just one of the many reasons why thousands of people have joined The Land Conservancy in the race to save Madrona Farm. A story waits behind each dollar donated. For some, the staggering rate at which agricultural land is disappearing and the resulting threat to food security motivates their donation. For others, their desire to protect farmland stems from the environmental impact of trucking food halfway across the continent. Sometimes the story is as simple as being able to chat with the farmer who grows your vegetables.

Since the campaign began in May 2008, the outpouring of community support has been incredible – making it clear that people are passionate about sustainable agriculture. Thousands of concerned citizens and businesses are stepping up to contribute to the cause, often finding creative ways of raising both funds and awareness. Local restaurants hold fundraising events, businesses display donation jars, chefs show their talent and love of local produce at the Annual Island Chefs' Survival event, artists hold auctions, and individuals donate in lieu of birthday gifts. In addition, a generous donation from the landowners, and a significant pledge from the Farmlands Trust has brought TLC a long way towards its goal of seeing this ecological and agricultural treasure protected forever. But the race continues. With almost \$800,000 still needed (at press time for *Our Backyard*) to meet the final deadline of January 14, 2010, TLC needs your help. Protecting Madrona Farm not only safeguards a

vital source of locally grown food, but also secures an innovative model for sustainable agriculture, encouraging young farmers to help keep our agricultural roots alive.

Most recently, Ed Johnson, Chair of the Farmlands Trust, issued a personal challenge to anyone willing to donate \$200,000 - he will match it. What a holiday gift for the campaign!

Join TLC and make your donation today at www.conservancy.bc.ca/madrona, www.madronfarm.com, or call 1-877-485-2422.

TREES FOR TOMORROW:

Baxter Park and Glanford Middle School

...the change they wanted to see in the world.

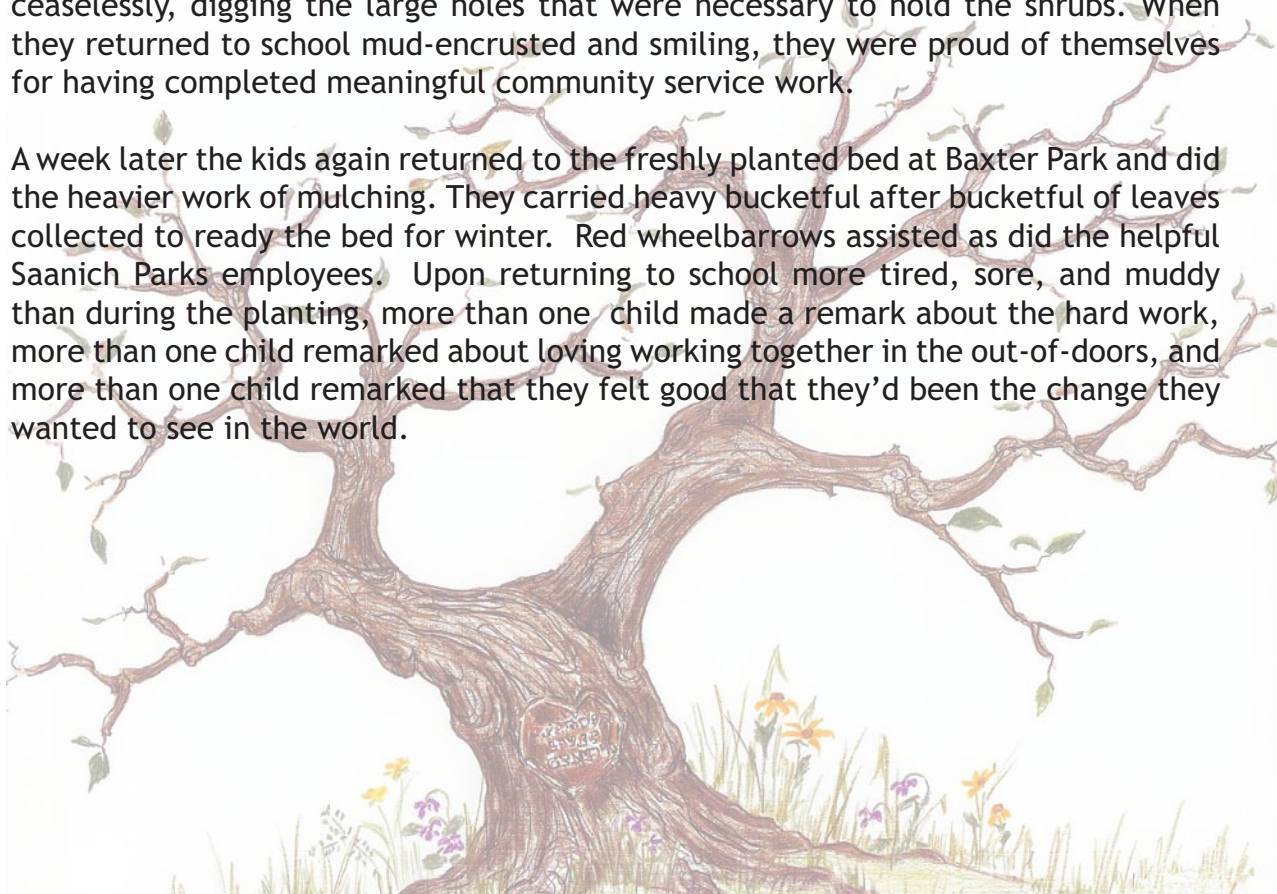
By Sherri Norbury

How many times in your life do you get to help build a new neighbourhood park? Well, recently, two classes from Glanford got out their identification guides, shovels, work gloves, buckets, muscles, and did just that.

Guided autumnal adventures to nearby wild spaces helped ready the curious students with names of native flora and fauna. Did you know that the earthworms we see in our gardens are not a native species? Did you know you can test which acorns will sprout by immersing them in a bucket of water? (hint... get rid of the floaters!). Favourite plants were the plentiful and unsavory-berried snowberry, Indian-plum, tall Oregon-grape, and Garry oak with his rough and ridged bark. The Red-tailed Hawk that spied the kids from atop a Douglas-fir, was spied on back through plenty of Bushnells.

In November, with the beds machine-dug and readied for planting, the learned Glanford students returned to Baxter Park in gumboots and wet-weather gear. Their job was to plant the entire under-storey of the large Garry Oak bed - pot after pot. Of the three large park beds, this one was closest to Glanford School. They worked ceaselessly, digging the large holes that were necessary to hold the shrubs. When they returned to school mud-encrusted and smiling, they were proud of themselves for having completed meaningful community service work.

A week later the kids again returned to the freshly planted bed at Baxter Park and did the heavier work of mulching. They carried heavy bucketful after bucketful of leaves collected to ready the bed for winter. Red wheelbarrows assisted as did the helpful Saanich Parks employees. Upon returning to school more tired, sore, and muddy than during the planting, more than one child made a remark about the hard work, more than one child remarked about loving working together in the out-of-doors, and more than one child remarked that they felt good that they'd been the change they wanted to see in the world.



BAXTER PARK November 8, 2009
From Saanich Parks



The District of Saanich received a grant from the Ministry of Community and Rural Development 'Trees for Tomorrow' program to plant 150 trees in celebration of BC's 150th birthday as a province. The event, held at Baxter Park, was attended by more than 100 adults and children from local Scout and Girl Guide troops, as well as neighbourhood schools. Bigleaf maple, Douglas-fir, arbutus, red alder, trembling aspen and Garry oaks were planted in shrub beds that were recently prepared for planting.

The weather turned out to be beautiful, and Minister Ida Chong and Mayor Frank Leonard mixed with the public and had a turn at planting a bigleaf maple tree to celebrate the event. Later in November, school children from Pacific Christian Secondary and Glanford Middle School,

with help from Saanich Parks, added an additional 1000 native shrubs as well as a protective layer of leaf mulch. Thank you to all who turned out for this greening effort and continue to watch and help tend to these new additions to the neighbourhood.

A special thanks to all our partners for this event including:

Don Mann Excavating (donation of excavation work), Island View Nursery (discount on trees and shrubs), Pacific Forestry Center (seedlings), Thrifty Foods (donation of food and drinks for event participants), Ministry of Community and Rural Development (grant for 150 native trees and 1900 native shrubs), Victoria Natural History Society (education program for schools), Significant Tree Committee (organization of media release and delivery of food and drinks) and to all of the volunteers who participated in this event.

MT. DOUGLAS PARK November 8, 2009

By Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society www.mountdouglaspark.ca

We celebrated Tree Appreciation Day in Saanich this year by planting riparian vegetation along the length of Douglas Creek in the area where we had done habitat improvements in August. Rob Hagel at Pacific Forestry Centre grew rooted plugs from seeds we had collected from Douglas Creek in the late summer and fall of 2008. He is a master grower – plants he grows for us are the finest that can be found anywhere.

The event was organized on the large scale by a subcommittee of the Significant Tree Committee, and hosted by the Saanich Parks Department. Twenty adults and nine children volunteered, along with five Saanich staff, to plant approximately 600 shrubs and trees: red-osier dogwood, Nootka rose, mock-orange, Pacific ninebark, Indian-plum, bigleaf maple, Douglas maple, oceanspray and thimbleberry. The remainder will be planted during the Christmas break.

This is always a great time of year to be in the forest along the creek. The day was ideal, sunny weather blended with autumn coolness as the leaves drifted down and the shrubs were tucked into their new homes. Thanks to everybody who took part—Saanich Parks, the Pacific Forestry Centre, the Significant Tree Committee, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, and the volunteers from the Friends of Mount Douglas Park.

As the event was winding down, an excited phone call came: salmon had been spotted in the lower reaches of the creek! This is the first sighting of salmon in Douglas Creek in three years. The return of salmon is rewarding to all those who've worked so hard over the last few years restoring more fish-friendly pools and riffles to the much-maligned Douglas Creek. We hope the salmon are here to stay. The new plants will help stabilize its banks and provide shade for these fish and other wildlife.



Tod Creek Flats Integrated Management Plan

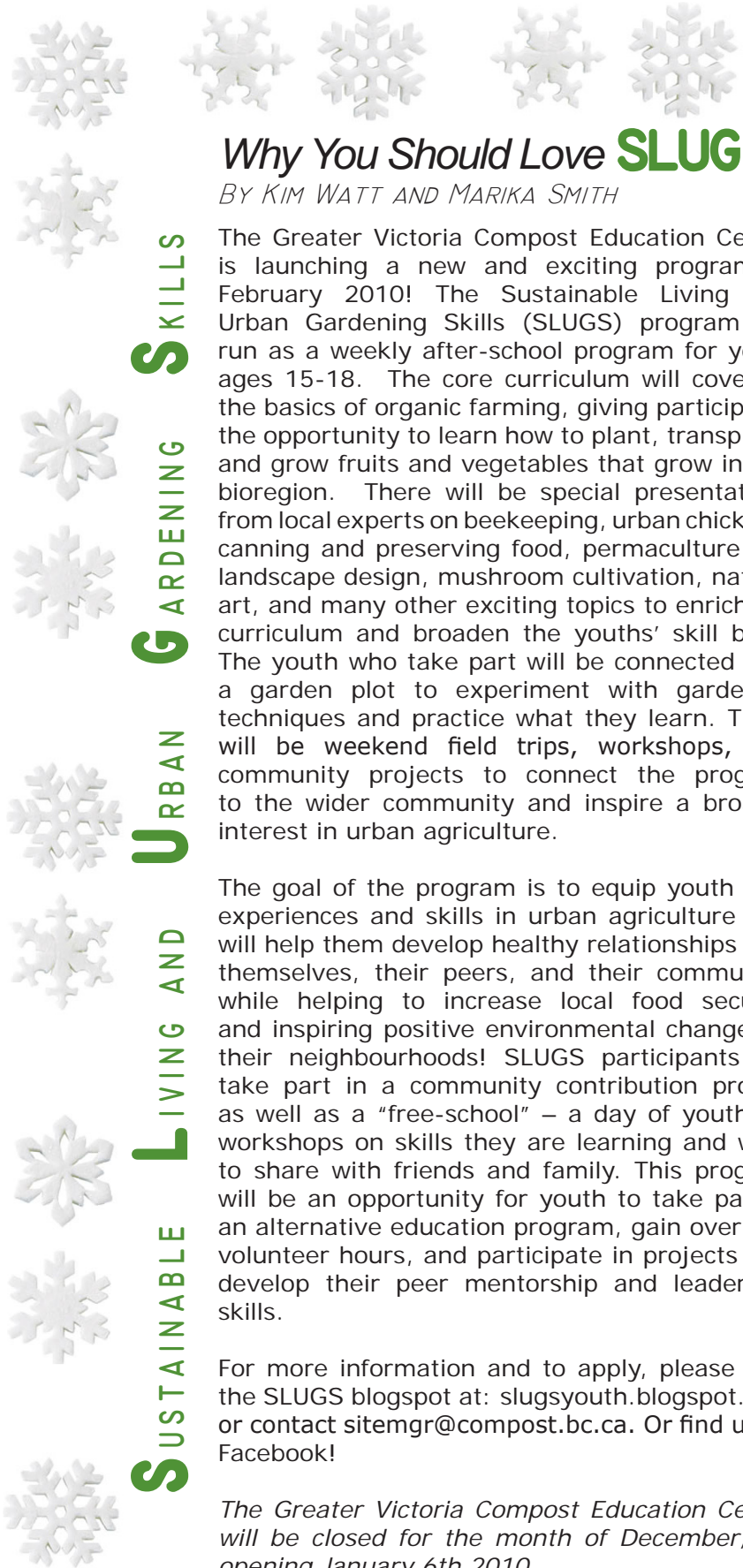
By Mary Haig-Brown

The Tod Creek Flats Integrated Management Plan (IMP) has been completed by Scott Murdoch of Murdoch de Greeff Inc. The plan was funded by an Infrastructure Planning grant received by the District of Saanich and prepared for the District of Saanich and The Friends of Tod Creek Watershed. The purpose of the project is threefold: to enhance agriculture, to restore Tod Creek and its riparian area for fish and wildlife and to retain the flood plain capabilities of the flats.

The IMP explains the evolution of the landscape and outlines its history, including historic drainage patterns, First Nations use, and settlers use of the land. The most dramatic change in the watershed is the reduction of historic wetlands, estimated to be 85%. This results in extended flooding of the flats, shortage of water in summer, and degradation of water quality.

Using the information garnered by Scott, and with the help of Tom Biebighauser and Adriane Pollard, the landowners held a design charrette in June. From this brainstorming activity, two options for improvements to the area which would enable us to meet our original goals were developed.

Next steps include choosing which of these options we will pursue, and developing plans for the necessary work. There will no doubt be many steps and refinements as we work toward putting a plan into place and actually seeing the work carried out. We are delighted to be this far and look forward to moving ahead.



Why You Should Love **SLUGS!**

BY KIM WATT AND MARIKA SMITH

The Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre is launching a new and exciting program in February 2010! The Sustainable Living and Urban Gardening Skills (SLUGS) program will run as a weekly after-school program for youth ages 15-18. The core curriculum will cover all the basics of organic farming, giving participants the opportunity to learn how to plant, transplant, and grow fruits and vegetables that grow in this bioregion. There will be special presentations from local experts on beekeeping, urban chickens, canning and preserving food, permaculture and landscape design, mushroom cultivation, natural art, and many other exciting topics to enrich the curriculum and broaden the youths' skill base. The youth who take part will be connected with a garden plot to experiment with gardening techniques and practice what they learn. There will be weekend field trips, workshops, and community projects to connect the program to the wider community and inspire a broader interest in urban agriculture.

The goal of the program is to equip youth with experiences and skills in urban agriculture that will help them develop healthy relationships with themselves, their peers, and their community, while helping to increase local food security and inspiring positive environmental changes in their neighbourhoods! SLUGS participants will take part in a community contribution project as well as a "free-school" – a day of youth-led workshops on skills they are learning and want to share with friends and family. This program will be an opportunity for youth to take part in an alternative education program, gain over 100 volunteer hours, and participate in projects that develop their peer mentorship and leadership skills.

For more information and to apply, please visit the SLUGS blogspot at: slugsyouth.blogspot.com or contact sitemgr@compost.bc.ca. Or find us on Facebook!

The Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre will be closed for the month of December, re-opening January 6th 2010.

Upcoming events & announcements

Volunteers Needed -

Garry Oak Restoration Project

Saturdays, 9:30-11:30am

Jan 9, Mount Doug Summit Work Party

Jan 16, Mount Tolmie Park

Jan 23, Little Mount Doug Park

For more info please visit www.gorp.saarich.ca or contact Jenny: 250-744-1710.

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary www.swanlake.bc.ca 250 479-0211

This winter the Nature House is undergoing a seismic retrofit. Trails are still open, but be prepared for the occasional nature house closure. Check the website for updates.

Native Plant Workshops

Jan. 26, Feb. 22, Mar. 14, 30

Hosted by Swan Lake and CRD Water, these 3 hour workshops will teach you how to incorporate native plants into your garden. You must pre-register.

Biology Buddies Jan. through Mar.

For young naturalists 4 - 6 years. Sessions of four, two hour classes are available Wed. and Fri. mornings/afternoons.

Nature Explorers for children 7 to 11

Saturdays, Feb. 13 until Mar. 6, 9:30 - 11:30 am

Nature explorers examine a different theme each week: Clever Crows and Ravens; Rowdy Raccoons; Life in the Trees; Mysterious Snakes.

Marine Birds Starts Feb. 15, 7 - 9 pm

James Clowater offers this fun course over five classes and two Sunday field trips. Please call to register.

Love Among the Feathers

Sunday, Feb. 14, 3:30 pm

James will also examine the romantic adventures of our local waterbirds. Please call to register.

Who Gives a Hoot?

Sunday, Feb. 28, 12 - 3 pm

Exhibits, hands-on artifacts, crafts and music – a Swan Lake style 'hoot'-enanny.

CRD Regional Parks Winter Programs www.crd.bc.ca/parks 250 478-3344

Saturday, January 2 | 10am-2pm

Turkey Trek

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park
A 10-km trek around the lakes. Bring a lunch and water, and wear sturdy footwear. Meet at the Beaver Lake Nature Centre.

Sunday, January 10 | 1-2:30pm

Nuts about Squirrels

Francis/King Regional Park
Find out what squirrels are up to at this time of year. Meet at the Nature Centre off Munn Road.

Sunday, January 24 | 1-2:30pm

Nature CSI

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park
Investigate animal traces and cast an animal track. Meet at the info kiosk in the main Beaver Lake parking lot.

Sunday, January 31 | 1-2:30pm

Rotten Luck

Francis/King Regional Park
Join in on this winter walk in the woods. Meet at the Nature Centre off Munn Road.

Saturday, February 6 | 10am-12pm

High Ridge Hike

Francis/King Regional Park
Bring a snack and water, and wear sturdy footwear. Meet at the Nature Centre off Munn Road.

Friday, February 19 | 11am-2pm

Going Batty (Special Drop-in Event)—Ages: All ages

Francis/King Regional Park
Welcome the bats back. Drop in any time for exhibits, games and baty crafts. Meet at the Nature Centre off Munn Road.

Sunday, February 21 | 1-2:30pm

Ugh! A slug! (Guided Walk)—Ages: All ages

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park
Banana or licorice, slimy or ticklish, these misunderstood creatures are way cool! Meet at the Beaver Lake Nature Centre.

Wednesday, March 10 | 11am-2pm

The Amazing Race (Special Drop-in Event)

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park
Register at the meeting place, grab a race sheet and test your powers of observation. Win prizes! Drop in at the Beaver Lake Nature Centre.

Thursday, March 11 | 11am-2pm

The Buzz about Bees (Special Drop-in Event)

Francis/King Regional Park
Join us for bee songs, bee crafts and some bee spit to taste. Meet at the Nature Centre off Munn Road.

Victoria Natural History Society www.naturevictoria.ca

Natural History Night (every 2nd Tuesday)

Caribou of BC

Tuesday, Jan. 12, 7:30 pm
UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Botany Night (every 3rd Tuesday)

New Alien Invasive Grass in BC

Tuesday, Jan. 19, 7:30 pm
Swan Lake Nature House

Marine Night (last Monday of the month)

Antarctic University Expedition 2009

Monday, Jan. 25, 7:30 pm
UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Birder's Night (every 4th Wednesday)

Birds of Botswana's Desert and Delta

Wednesday, Jan. 27, 7:30 pm
UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Natural History Night (every 2nd Tuesday)

Fire and the Mountain Pine Beetle Epidemic

Tuesday, Feb. 9, 7:30 pm
UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Botany Night (every 3rd Tues.)

Seeking the Shade in Saguaro National Park

Tuesday, Feb. 16, 7:30 pm
Swan Lake Nature House

Marine Night (last Monday of the month)

Erosion and Climate Change

Impacts in Pacific Rim

Monday, Feb. 22, 7:30 pm
UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Birder's Night (every 4th Wednesday)

The Bird Community of Southern Chile

Wednesday, Feb. 24, 7:30 pm
UVic Fraser Building, Room 159