

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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A Tale of Two Bumble Bees

By Claudia Copley
Royal BC Museum

Bombus occidentalis

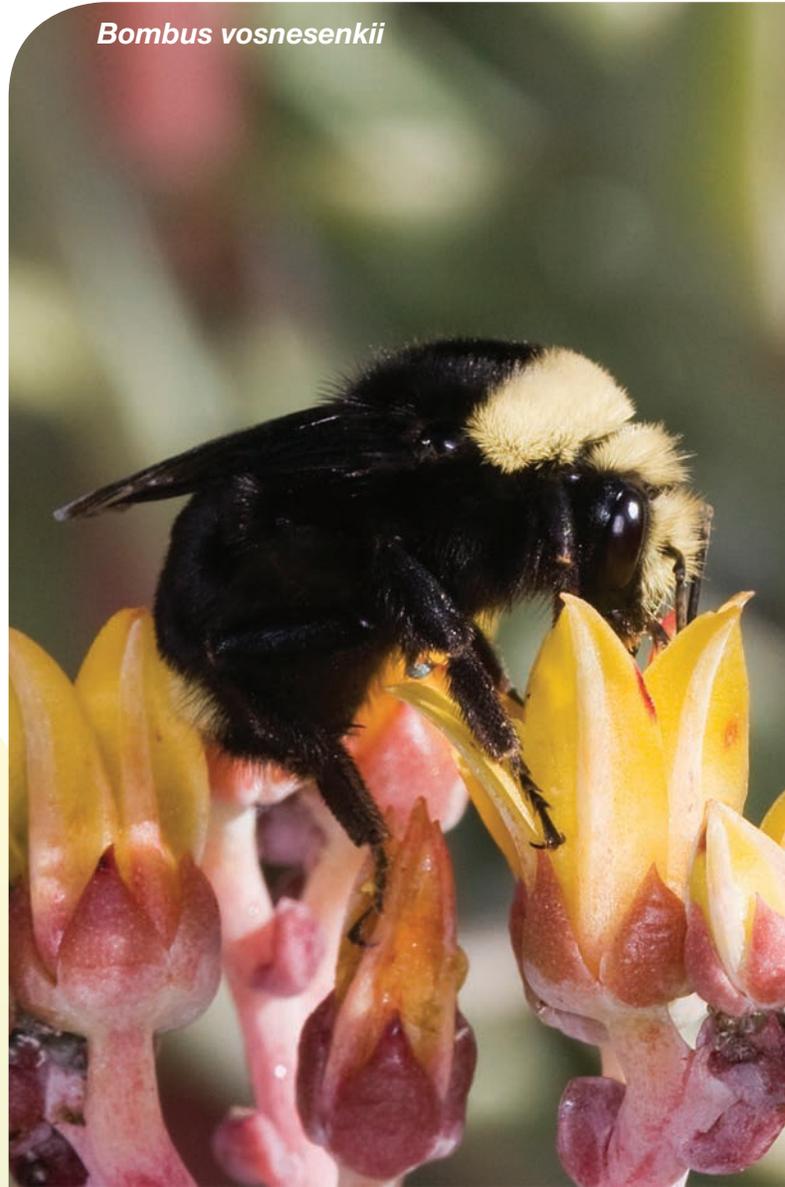
Western Bumble Bees (*Bombus occidentalis occidentalis*) used to be one of the most common bumble bees in British Columbia, but since 2014 it has been on our federal endangered species list designated as Threatened. Historically they lived where most people now live: on Vancouver Island, in the Lower Mainland, and the South Okanagan. Now, if you go to these places, you will have a very hard time finding a Western Bumble Bee.

The story of the Yellow-faced Bumble Bee (*Bombus vosnesenskii*) is the complete opposite story: this species was only known initially from a few specimens in Osoyoos in 1951, and it was even put forward in 1996 as a species that warranted a threatened or endangered status because of its severely restricted range in the province. However, since 2000, the species has undergone a significant and rapid range expansion and it has now become firmly established in many places in BC, including on southern Vancouver Island. When you see a bumble bee in Saanich now, it is very likely it will be a Yellow-faced Bumble Bee.

The spread of the Yellow-faced Bumble Bee coincided with the decline of the Western Bumble Bee, so the former may have naturally expanded its range at the same time as a niche was becoming vacant. But the reasons for the rapid expansion of one bee and the rapid decline of another are still unclear. It has been suggested that Western Bumble Bee may be more vulnerable to diseases such as *Nosema*, brought in through the use of commercial bumble bee colonies and European Honey Bees. It is possible that the Yellow-faced Bumble Bee is not as susceptible to these same diseases.

Bombus occidentalis image by Jeremy Gatten
Bombus vosnesenskii image by Kevin Cole

Bombus vosnesenskii



Garry Oak Conference 2019

By Darren Copley
Environmental Education Officer, District of Saanich



The 14th annual Garry Oak Conference was held on April 29th at the Cedar Hill Golf Course. Co-hosted this year by the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team (GOERT) and the District of Saanich, the event is meant to highlight current work being done in the field of restoration of Garry Oak ecosystems.

Collectively, Garry Oak and associated ecosystems are among the most endangered in Canada, with less than 5% of these ecosystems remaining in near-natural condition. Most of the remnants of Garry Oak and its associated ecosystems are in isolated, fragmented communities that have no connection to other Garry Oak communities, thereby reducing migration of populations or mixing of genetic material of species from one area to another. Because so much habitat has been lost or degraded, more than 100 species of plants, mammals, reptiles, birds, butterflies, and other insects are officially listed as “at risk” in these ecosystems.

The event was sold out to capacity, with 100 people in attendance. Presentations highlighted restoration projects in the Gulf Islands, Oak Bay, Metchosin, and Cowichan, as well as research projects such as the impacts of invasive earth worms. Participants also toured Cedar Hill Park with Saanich staff, GOERT members, and community volunteers. Dr. Nancy Turner, Emeritus Professor, Freeman of Saanich, and one of the founders of GOERT, joined participants to lead a ‘walk and talk’.



It was also the 20th anniversary of GOERT, an organization dedicated to the recovery of Garry Oak and associated ecosystems in Canada and the species at risk that inhabit them. To celebrate, Saanich Councillor Rebecca Mersereau (previous Executive Director of the GOERT Society), former Saanich Councillor Vicki Sanders, and Metchosin Councillor Andy MacKinnon served anniversary cake to conference attendees (*top image*). Another highlight was Genevieve Singleton being awarded the Acorn Award for her successful efforts to protect rare habitat at Eagle Heights. This was presented to her by GOERT co-chair Dave Polster (*bottom image*).

Conference abstracts will be collected and shared on the GOERT (www.goert.ca) website in the near future.

LIFE, LOVE, and MONEY...

(the benefits of trees)

By Jillian Tuson
Natural Areas Practitioner
District of Saanich Parks Division

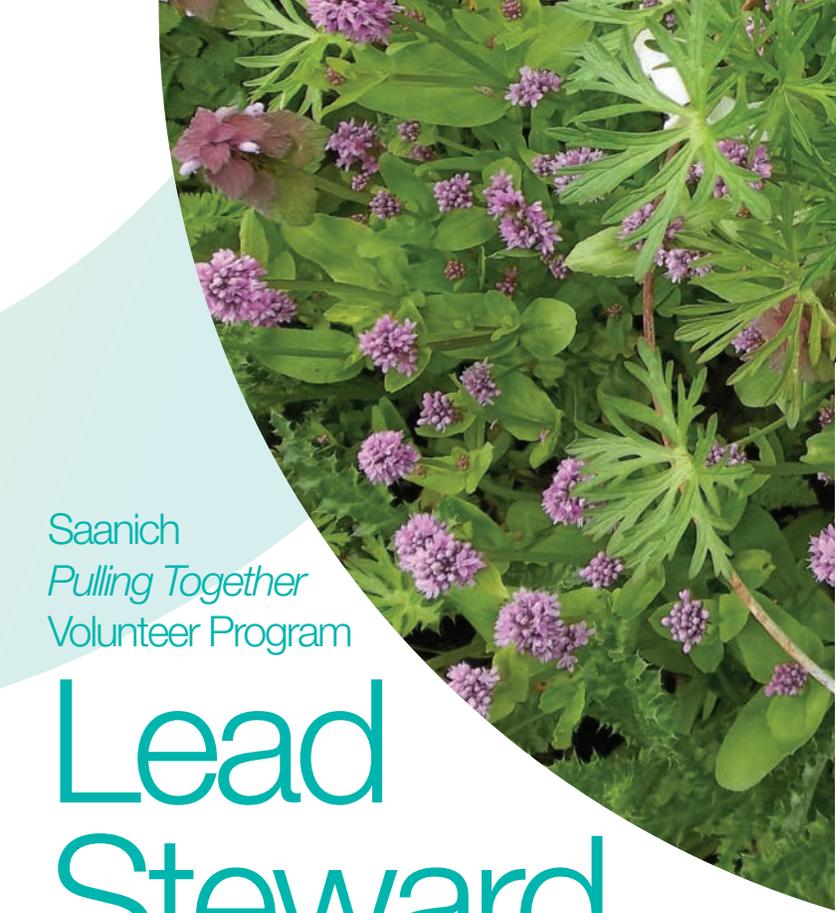
Sometimes it is easy to step outside and take for granted the many positive effects that trees have on our lives. Have you ever stopped to consider what even one tree can do for you? Trees can provide habitat for wildlife, beautify a vast landscape, and produce oxygen for us to breathe, and trees that are native to the area provide even greater habitat value. Below are some of the commonly known benefits of trees in the urban environment.

- They provide shade on a hot summer day, not just to be enjoyed as a break from the sun, but this also helps cool the surfaces of infrastructure. This can result in lower carbon footprints of cities for cooling and heating buildings.
- Trees can reduce noise pollution in urbanized environments. They help reduce the sounds of traffic, construction, and the city scape by absorbing or deflecting some of the sounds.
- The root systems of trees can prevent soil erosion. This can help stabilize banks of creeks, rivers, and our beaches. In turn this can help with the reduction of water pollution.
- The presence of trees is known to increase property values.
- Many health benefits are related to the existence of trees. They are credited to reducing stress, aiding patients in recovery from illness, and are attributed to evoking positive emotions and enhancing moods. Did I need to mention that a large canopy tree can also produce enough oxygen to support up to four humans?
- Trees provide an aesthetic value to our parks and landscapes. Not only do they add texture and color for us to appreciate, they bring enjoyable smells too.
- Native trees enhance our urban environments by providing habitat and food for wildlife. This allows us to enjoy and interact with many other species that we share this beautiful earth with.
- Street and park trees are an asset to any urban centre.

Saanich Parks offers a Partnership Tree Program for residents of the District of Saanich who wish to help enhance the urban canopy. Any property owner in the District of Saanich may apply to host a municipal tree on their public boulevard space. Home owners may apply for this tree any time of year, although planting is only done in the cooler, wetter months (typically Nov-March) of each year. There are nearly 40 trees to choose from and many opportunities to plant in each Saanich neighbourhood. Please find more information and the required forms for the Saanich Partnership Tree Program on our web page at <https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/community/natural-environment/trees/partnership-tree-planting-program.html> or contact the Parks Office at 250-475-5522.

For more information on the positive effect of trees visit the Tree Canada website at <https://treecanada.ca>





Saanich
Pulling Together
Volunteer Program

Lead Steward Profile

Heather Pass
Lead Steward Colquitz River Park

By Jenny Eastman
Volunteer Coordinator, District of Saanich Parks

Always clever and forever figuring out new gardening gadgets and work-arounds, Lead Steward Heather Pass has used her ingenuity and hard work to create a Garry Oak meadow on a pile of clay. All this, under a highway overpass. When Heather and her family moved into their home on Rolston Crescent, she created a garden oasis, but soon her thoughts shifted to the Colquitz River Park that surrounds her home. “It sort of chose me”, she says, “I saw invasive species moving in and wanted to do something”. After meeting with Saanich Parks staff and registering as a *Pulling Together* volunteer, the idea of working toward a Garry Oak meadow emerged. As a longtime member of the Native Plant Study Group, Heather well knew of the beauty and ecological value of Garry Oak meadows and she was keen to have one close to home. She says, “The challenges were the heavy clay soil and the need for volunteers to get the project going”. Heather engaged her neighbours, and staff and students from Colquitz Middle School and, eight



years later, several Garry Oaks stand tall, with a range of native grasses and flowers below.

Now retired, Heather worked in a local native plant nursery where she was first introduced to native plant gardening and began to get more experimental in her gardening. “I’ve always had to be creative to out-smart deer and birds and figure out challenges using what I had on hand” she states, and examples include ingenious fencing and plant protection made of umbrella skeletons, laundry racks, plus planters created from shoes and other salvaged pieces. As well as volunteering in her park, Heather pursues Chinese brush painting, photography, and travel with her husband. There is always something new to see in Heather’s yard and restoration site – either a new plant, or a new way to address a restoration challenge – and most of them, like Heather, are one of a kind.

Nonprofit Dedicated To Finding Solution for Amphibian Roadkill in CRD

By Ashlea Veldhoen
Community and Development Coordinator, Habitat Acquisition Trust

Last fall, Habitat Acquisition Trust held an introduction to creating ideal habitat for frogs using native plants. This free workshop was led by Kristen Miskelly, owner of Saanich Native Plants Nursery and Consulting, who shared her knowledge and expertise on plant species that provide habitat for amphibians in a variety of wetland sites. The workshop was part of HAT's **Good Neighbours Project**, which works with residents who want to develop functional and attractive landscapes that work with nature, rather than against it.

Saanich, with its many wetlands, creeks, ponds, lakes, and forested areas, provides wonderful habitat for amphibians including three species of native frogs, and six native salamanders. These populations are at risk due to wetland drainage, road mortality, and modification of important habitat. The Northern Red-legged Frog and Wandering Salamander are both on the Provincial Blue List and designated as a species of Special Concern in Canada (COSEWIC), and the Western Toad is now locally extirpated.

For Saanich residents wanting to understand how to steward and protect these species, HAT's second frog-friendly

gardening workshop held at the Gardens at HCP on April 22 highlighted the importance of incorporating frog-friendly habitat on every property, taking advantage of the active spring breeding season for amphibians by encouraging participants to improve existing habitat for them on their properties.

To help our native amphibians, please report sites where there are concentrations of amphibian road-kill or dead amphibians. If you have a pond or forest on your property, join HAT's Stewardship Program to learn how you can support amphibian-friendly habitat and be a part of the solution. To contact HAT and become a volunteer, member, or learn more reach out to: email hatmail@hat.bc.ca, call 250-995-2428 or visit www.hat.bc.ca.

Photo credit for images (left to right) 1: Planting native plants in riparian habitat. Photo: Kathleen Cathcart. **2:** A charismatic Wandering Salamander by Kristiina Ovaska. **3:** A Northern Red-legged Frog in its natural environment. One of the seven different species found during HAT's road-kill surveys.



Critter Catching Consequences

By Coral Forbes, Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary and Purnima Govindarajulu, BC Ministry of Environment

We know that releasing non-native invasive species into the environment is a bad idea. But did you know that collecting reptiles and amphibians from their habitat not only threatens the individual but also the entire population?

If you have illegally collected an animal (including tadpoles!) without a permit, please return it immediately to where you found it. Releasing it in a different area adds stress to those who already live in the area due to increased competition for space, food and shelter.

If you find an animal, such as a salamander or frog, in the 'wrong place' please put it nearby where it will be safe (for example, from your patio to a green space nearby). As for injured animals, the best option is to contact Wild ARC, the BC SPCA Wild Animal Rehabilitation Centre located in Metchosin.

The only exception to the 'release it where you found it' rule, is if the animal has come into contact with pet store or aquarium products. Pet stores and aquariums are common vectors for disease transmission and any animal that has been exposed to pet

store/aquarium food or supplies cannot be released back into the wild and risk infecting the entire population. In this case, please contact bcfrogwatch@victoria1.gov.bc.ca for information on how to proceed. The BC Frog Watch program is a provincial initiative through the Ministry of the Environment and deals with any concerns about all reptiles and amphibians in the province.

Sadly, the days of catching and collecting tadpoles and snakes are over. Our reptile and amphibian populations are small, fragmented and over half of these species in the province are at risk of becoming endangered. Therefore, it is imperative that every individual remains healthy and a part of the breeding population. Please do your part and leave the wildlife where it is, as it was meant to be.



Biggest Winner of the Meadow Marathon: Garry Oak Ecosystems

By Travis Muir

Conservation and Engagement Coordinator, Nature Conservancy of Canada

www.natureconservancy.ca/bc | www.conservationvolunteers.ca

The Garry Oak Meadow Marathon has finished for its second year and it certainly was quite a feat. Throughout February and March, 11 parks and conservation groups ran 52 events across Southern Vancouver Island and Salt Spring Island to raise awareness about our globally endangered Garry Oak ecosystems. Even with February seeing the most snow since 1941, a total of 400 volunteers took part.

“For me volunteering is a way to engage with my community, meet people from all walks of life, learn new things, and do something useful in the process,” said Uplands Park volunteer Felicity Bradley. “I especially enjoy the fresh air and exercise I get being part of the important stewardship of such a beautiful location.”

Throughout the marathon, volunteers planted 170 native trees and shrubs and removed more than 80 cubic metres of invasive species. Several experts lead workshops and nature walks, teaching first-time and veteran volunteers historical knowledge and new skills.

“I love working in nature and trying to allow what is naturally here a chance to flourish again,” explained Margaret How. “And I do see progress, so it’s all worth it.”

Hard work may be its own reward, but the organizers of the Garry Oak Meadow Marathon want to give a huge shout out to those volunteers who put in extra effort by coming out to at least three events during the marathon. These volunteers were entered into a draw for some excellent prizes. Congratulations to all 16 of this year’s winners!

“I have been volunteering for years! I watched the logging that took place before the Nature Conservancy of Canada took over the Cowichan Garry Oak Preserve, and I like to see that we’re making progress,” said Susan Smith. “I do a lot of different environmental activities, but volunteering at the Cowichan Garry Oak Preserve is one that is very close to home for me. I enjoy chatting with the other volunteers as we do our weeding and planting.”



The race may be over but there are still many ways to get involved with Garry Oak ecosystems.

Continue to volunteer with Nature Conservancy of Canada and our partners:
CRD Regional Parks,
Friends of Uplands Park,
Greater Victoria Green Team,
Habitat Acquisition Trust,
Haliburton Farm,
Parks Canada,
Saanich Parks,
Salt Spring Island Conservancy,
Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society,
Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

Images (clockwise from top)

- 1: Jesse Binnersley with Daphne (Greater Victoria Green Team)
- 2: Candice Chappel with Daphne (Greater Victoria Green Team)
- 3: Volunteers with ivy pile at Uplands Park (image: Wylie Thomas)

Great Horned Owllet Falls from Nest in Cuthbert Holmes Park

By Dorothy Chambers
Salmon in the City Project
Colquitz River, Cuthbert Holmes Park volunteer

Recently, a baby Great Horned Owl was found on the ground at the bottom of a known nest tree in Cuthbert Holmes Park. Volunteers had been monitoring this nest for a month. The baby lay motionless for two hours, and was observed by a wildlife photographer, who thought it had died in the fall.

Then suddenly: it was on its feet and making baby owl noises and moving about! The owllet was then transferred to Wild ARC, the wildlife rehabilitation center in Metchosin. The owllet was assessed, fed, and found to be in good condition.

Two days later, a tree climber that volunteers for Wild ARC, Jeff Krieger of Alternative Wildlife Solutions (<http://www.alternativewildlifesolutions.com/>), returned the baby owl to a nesting site very close to the original nest. The basket the owllet was put in was lined with vegetation from the forest floor. Following the owllet's return in its new basket nest, both owl parents were seen close by and attentive.

Great Horned Owls do not build their own nests, but rather take over abandoned nests of other birds, or use the tops of broken off wildlife trees. Often these nests are in disrepair, which can result in a chick falling out. This was definitely the case with this nest, 60 feet up a Douglas-fir tree. It was so thinly woven together, you could see the sky through the nest branches.

The evening after the baby was returned saw both parents near the new nest, and it is hoped they will feed and rear all three chicks from the two locations. This baby owl is ankle banded, so if photos are taken of a banded bird, or the body of one is found, please contact me so we can follow up on the history.

To learn more about Great Horned Owls, <http://hww.ca/en/wildlife/birds/great-horned-owl.html>.

Please remember, Wild ARC has come to our Great Horned Owl rescue many times now, and they depend on donations to continue their important wildlife work. They are a branch of the SPCA, and you can support their work here: <https://spca.bc.ca/programs-services/wildlife-rehabilitation/about-wild-arc>

Images (top to bottom)

1: Brian Rundle, 2: Cheryl Redhead, 3 and 4: Dorothy Chambers



Blessed (or not) with Milk Thistle

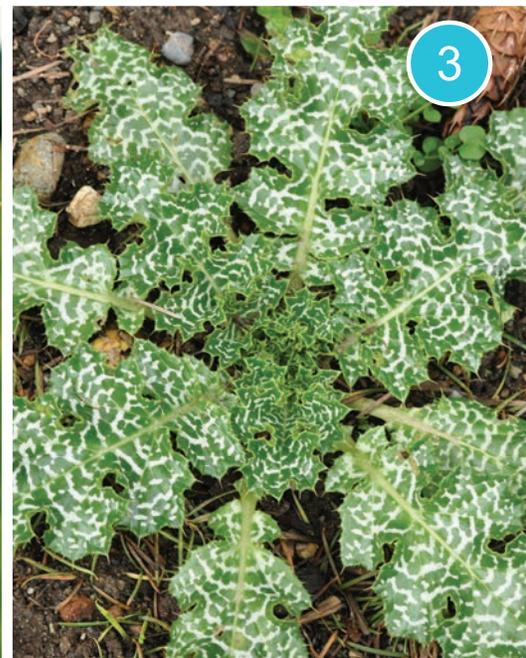
By Carolyn Richman
Environmental Education Officer, District of Saanich

As a gardener or homeowner, it is pretty frustrating to purchase some new soil and spruce up your yard – only to find yourself with an outbreak of some kind of nasty invasive plant. One such problem in this region has been soil infected with Blessed Milk Thistle, a priority invasive plant. If you have been (*cough*) “blessed” with the arrival of this plant, you likely can’t miss it. This is good, because quick action is the next step.

Blessed Milk Thistle, *Silybum marianum*, is a spiny invader that not only impacts local ecosystems but is also toxic for cattle and sheep. It spreads quickly and forms dense stands; impacting landowners, agriculture and natural areas. Before it flowers, you will see a rosette of shiny green leaves with white marbling and spines along the leaf edges. From spring to fall it will flower into a large pink-purple thistle flower surrounded by large very spiny bracts. If you come into contact with this plant, you will know!

The good news is, if you do find yourself with an outbreak, if you carefully remove all the plant including the taproot – and don’t allow it to go to seed – it is entirely possible to eliminate this plant fairly quickly. If it does go to seed, each flower produces around 6,000 seeds that stay viable in the soil for approximately nine years. At that point, you would have a much bigger challenge. So, quick and thorough action to remove all Blessed Milk Thistle is definitely the way to go.

**Photo credit for images below 1: C. Richman.
2: Jan Samanek, Bugwood.org. 3: C. Richman.
4: King County Noxious Weed Control Program.**



**Hot off the press.
See your new and improved
Blessed Milk Thistle alert sheet.**

**Visit saanich.ca/invasives
under “Invasive Resources”**

If you are one of those frustrated folks who have purchased infected soil – we highly recommend going back to the company you purchased it from to make them aware. That said, you can also send information about infected soil to Saanich via carolyn.richman@saanich.ca (or outside Saanich but in the CRD – to jenny.eastman@crd.bc.ca). Local governments in our region have been trying to work with the province and industry on this issue.

Managing invasive species is a tough job and there are not resources to manage all invaders. This means prioritizing species (new, high risk invaders) and spaces (such as rare and sensitive ecosystems). Blessed Milk Thistle is a priority species in this region and in the province. If you find any outbreaks, reporting is a great way to help - such as through the provincial reporting system at reportaweedbc.ca (which includes a reporting app).

For Blessed Milk Thistle reports in Saanich you can also contact:

Parks and Saanich Boulevards

Saanich Parks: 250-475-5522 or parks@saanich.ca

Private and other lands

Saanich Environmental Services: 250-475-5471 or planning@saanich.ca

Upcoming Events

Saanich Recreation Trails & Treks

<http://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-culture/active-living-guide.html> 250-475-5408

Weekend Walks (FREE Drop-In)

Sundays | 1 pm to 3:00 pm

Discover the beauty of Saanich parks & nature in your backyard. Guided walks are open to adults of all ages. No registration necessary. Please wear sturdy footwear and bring drinking water. Walks go rain or shine.

Jun 23 - Glanford and Panama Flats Ramble

Meet at Hyacinth Park parking lot on Marigold Road.

Jul 21 - Lambrick Park to Glencoe Cove

Meet outside of entrance to Gordon Head Recreation Centre

Aug 18 - Shady Ramble Lower Mt Doug

Meet by washroom in main parking lot, off Cordova Bay 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.

Jun 6 - Mystic Vale

Meet at Cadboro Gyro park end of Sinclair Rd. beside washrooms

Jun 13 - Gorge Waterway

Meet at Gorge Waterway Park near Canoe Club off Tillicum Rd

Jun 20 - Lower Trails Mount Doug

Meet in main parking lot at Ash and Cordova Bay Road

Jun 27 - McMinn-Kentwood-Outerbridge

Meet McMinn Park at 4820 Maplegrove St at Lochside Drive

Jul 4 - UVic Alumni Trail Meet at Henderson Rec Centre, outside main door, 2291 Cedar Hill X Rd.

Jul 11 - Tod Inlet Meet at Tod Inlet access, on Wallace Drive opposite Quarry Lake, just south of Benvenuto

Jul 18 - Swan Lake

Meet at the end of Nelthrope, off McKenzie Avenue

Jul 25 - Mt. Tolmie and Finnerty Gardens

Meet at Henderson Rec Centre, main entrance parking lot

CRD Parks & Environmental Services

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

The Parks Nature Outings and Events brochure can be found here: www.crd.bc.ca/parks-events 250-478-3344

High Ridge Hike (Guided Adult Hike)

Sunday, June 9 | 10 am to 12 pm

Francis/King Regional Park

Have you ever wanted to explore more of the fabulous forest at Francis/King? Join a CRD Regional Parks naturalist to hike one of this park's hidden treasures: the High Ridge Trail. Bring a snack, water, and wear sturdy hiking shoes. **There is no fee for this program but you must pre-register by June 5.**

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary

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

Guided Bird Walks (Drop-In)

Every Sunday | 9:00 am

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

Terrific Turtles (Drop-in Event)

Sunday, June 30 | 12 pm to 3 pm

Nesting season is upon us. Learn about these scaly wonders with games, crafts, and visits with our biggest celebrity, the live Western Painted Turtle, Wrinkles! Admission by donation.

Summer Special events: (Drop-in Events)

Wednesday July 10 | 12 pm to 3 pm | Incredible Inverts

Wednesday July 24 | 12 pm to 3 pm | Reptile Day

Join in every 2nd Wednesday this summer for a nature celebration filled with hands-on activities, games, crafts and more!

Outerbridge Park Bird Walk

Sunday June 9 | 9 am

Rocky Point Bird Observatory hosts guided bird walks at Outerbridge Park in Saanich on the 2nd Sunday of each month. The easy walks, suitable for people with mobility concerns, begin at the parking area off Royal Oak Drive. For dates and details, see <http://rpbo.org>

Haliburton Wetland Birthday Party

Saturday, June 29 | 10 am

<https://www.facebook.com/HaliburtonBiodiversity/>

The constructed wetland at the Haliburton Community Organic Farm (741 Haliburton Road) is turning 10. Tours and activities will show how a hole in the ground has evolved into a thriving wetland. There will be birthday cake.

Victoria Natural History Society

Visit www.naturevictoria.ca for more programs

Saturday Morning Birding (most Saturdays)

Meets every Saturday morning, usually at 8:00 a.m., rain or shine. Check the Calendar page of the VNHS website (www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1518) on the Thursday/Friday before to find out the week's location. Novice and experienced birders welcome. Non-members can participate Free up to three times.





Cover: Garry Oak meadow stewards of private land enjoying the results of their efforts. Russ (retired Director of Planning for the District of Saanich) and Star Fuoco have protected this beautiful land in neighbouring Metchosin.

Back Page: This Garry Oak meadow in Playfair Park is a great example of the many restoration sites in Saanich which are stewarded by dedicated volunteers.

Photo: Colleen O'Brien

Join the *Our Backyard* mailing list!

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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