

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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Snowberry's Secrets

By Claudia Copley

Entomology Collections Manager, Royal BC Museum

Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) is a native plant that seems to be regularly overlooked as a garden addition, even in "naturescaped" landscapes- those planted for both wildlife value and aesthetics. After spending time with snowberry, I think it isn't getting its due. In each season I have seen this plant providing food for a variety of gorgeous garden wildlife. I thought I would share these sightings so that snowberry will be given more consideration when you are creating a wildlife-welcoming garden.

Let's start in early spring, when our smallest perching bird, the Bushtit, and charming Chestnut-backed Chickadees can be seen foraging at the newly growing tips of the plant, easily removing the larvae of snowberry sawflies (*Blennogeneris spissipes*) that are tucked inside the galls they form on the plant. This provides important protein-packed morsels for these active little birds. Although everything gets harder to see as the leaves mature, our snowberry thickets always have small birds foraging in them for insect meals.

As the season progresses towards summer I hope you'll be lucky enough to see the caterpillars or adults of several large moths that feed on snowberry leaves as larva: the stunningly showy Elegant Sheep Moth (*Hemileuca eglanterina*), two large and dramatic sphinx moths: the Vashti Sphinx (*Sphinx vashti*) and Elegant Sphinx (*Sphinx perelegans*), and the impressive bumble bee mimic, the Snowberry Clearwing Sphinx (*Hemaris thetis*).

All of these moths are day-flying, making your chance of seeing them very good. The caterpillars of all of them are also attention-getting: the sphinx moths are large and have the typical "horn" projecting off their rear end, and the Sheep Moth caterpillar is dark coloured with plumose black and orange spikes sticking out in all directions.

You would have to look much harder to find the caterpillar of an interesting but small moth: the Montana Six-plume Moth (*Alucita montana*). The larva may be a leaf or flower miner, so well hidden in the tissues of the plant, and the small moth is plainly coloured so can easily be missed. When you do get a closer look at it you can see the source of the common name- their hindwing is made up of six individual plumes, a very uncommon wing form.

And, while seeking photographs of the moths mentioned above, several additional species were brought to my attention thanks to Libby Avis and Jeremy Tatum. These include six more lovely moths: *Pleromelloida conserta*, *Pleromelloida cinerea*, *Euceratia castella*, *Euceratia securella*, *Lygephila victoria* and *Behrensia conchiformis*, and as well as the caterpillar of another sawfly: *Abia americana*. No wonder there are so many birds foraging in there with all those possible caterpillar meals!

When snowberry starts to bloom in May and June the clustered pinkish bell-shaped flowers are very popular with the pollinator crowd: bumble bees and other native bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, and even warblers and finches make the effort to find the subtle flowers to gather nectar from them for quick energy. The bushes literally hum with the sound and activity of everybody that comes in for a sugary treat.

As the leaves fall the fruit that is the source of the name of this shrub are left on the stems, and, when mixed in with a wild rose thicket, the combination of the bright white and red fruits are a welcome patch of cheer during the grey winter months. Although the fruits are not edible to us and are obviously not a favourite with birds, they do eventually get eaten as the choices dwindle, providing forage at a time when most other fruits are long since eaten.





Elegant Sheep Moth and its caterpillar
 Photo: Adult moth: Jeremy Tatum, Caterpillar: Bryan Kelly -McArthur

Local entomological resources:

The Victoria Natural History Society's Invertebrate Alert (submit a photo and have ID'd, or look at what has been seen lately)
www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?cat=8

Butterflies and Moths of Southern Vancouver Island (look up a particular species, or all the things that eat a particular plant)
<http://facweb.furman.edu/~snyderjohn/tatum/>

E-Flora BC and E-Fauna BC (species accounts, photos, ID help, and local range maps/sightings)
<http://ibis.geog.ubc.ca/biodiversity/eflora/>
<http://ibis.geog.ubc.ca/biodiversity/efauna/>



Snowberry Clearwing Sphinx Moth
 Photo: Libby and Rick Avis

All of this and I haven't spent a minute to describe the plant itself! I found this description online and found it particularly apt:

"Snowberry bushes are attractive in spring and summer, having green leaf rounds that break sunlight into nickels and quarters that dapple the shade."

Lovely! With their delicate habit and year round benefits, I think snowberry is a great addition to a hedgerow or shrub thicket in your landscape, and wildlife will agree.



Elegant Sphinx Moth
 Photo: Scott Gilmore

To Bee or Not To Bee

By Coral Forbes, Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary Naturalist

Summer is a time for gathering with friends at the lake, barbecuing on the patio and...ouch...stinging insects! Most common culprits are bees and wasps but which is it?

Wasp is often used as a general term for what are usually Yellowjackets; as for bee, we'll focus on the social bees in Victoria that are most likely to sting: European Honey Bees. Bumble Bees can also give you a sting but are usually quite docile.

If you are able to catch a glimpse of the insect, notice the hair style: wasps are embarrassingly bald while bees are shaggy. Wasps also have more elongated legs and bodies with a somewhat pinched waist; bees are stouter.

However, if you are simply left with the swollen, painful sting and no one taking responsibility for it, then have a close look at the injection site. Is there still a stinger attached? If so, there is a dead bee nearby. Wasps, on the other hand, can sting multiple times.

Another way that wasps are different from bees is their life cycles. A queen wasp emerges from hibernation during early summer, fills herself on flower nectar and insects, and then begins her search for a suitable nesting site. She then constructs a small wood fiber nest by chewing up plant fibers and weathered wood to make a grey papery pulp. The queen initially

raises the first wasp eggs until enough female workers exist to maintain the offspring without her assistance. As the colony grows, the workers will construct a more elaborate nest.

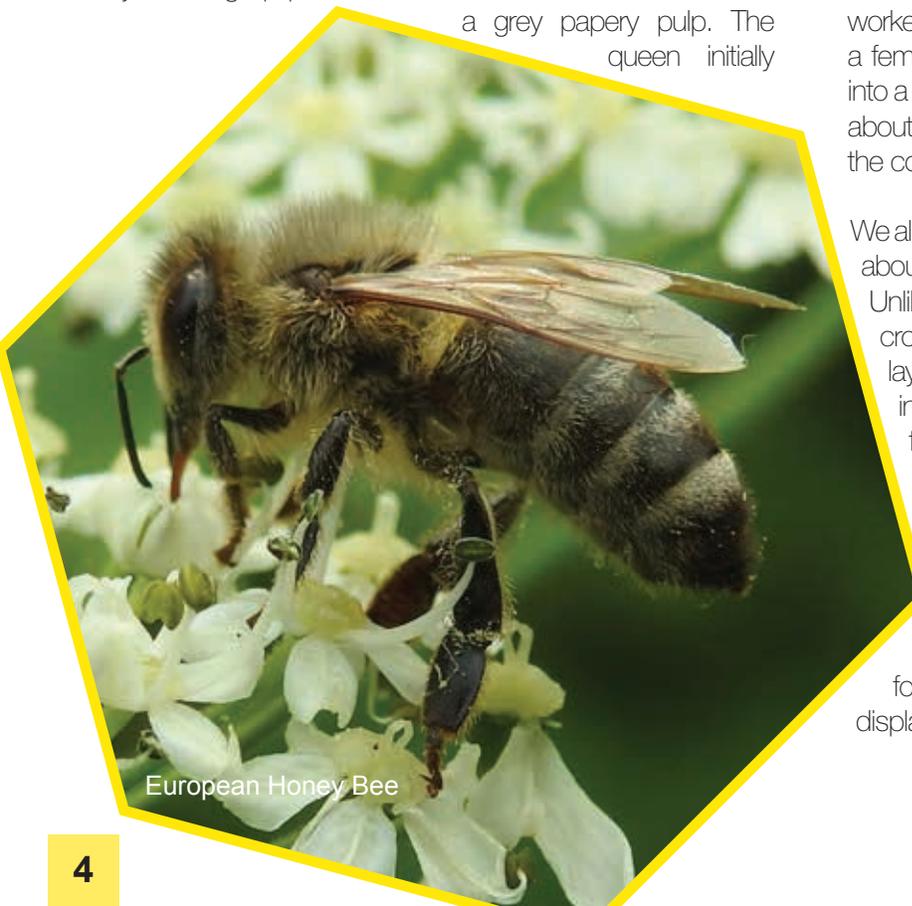
In late summer the wasp queen stops laying eggs after producing a few fertile females and males that develop in special cells. When they emerge, the male drones then fly away and find a mate while the young queens mate in the vicinity of the nest. The fertilized queens then crawl away into a hiding place under bark, in an old stump or under litter to spend the winter. The lives of the previous queen, workers and drones are now over and the nest will not be used again.

A queen Honey Bee, however, lives a couple of years in her wax hive which is maintained by her hardworking daughters. Because bees stock their hive with honey, they are able to survive the winter, huddled together enjoying the sweet treat they worked all summer to produce. That is except the male drones. After fertilizing new queens from other colonies in the spring and lazing about all summer, the drone's life of leisure comes to an abrupt end when his sisters throw him out of the hive as the cold weather approaches and nectar and pollen become scarce.

If the hive becomes overpopulated, the queen will alert the workers to her imminent departure which triggers them to feed a female larva royal jelly thereby transforming a potential worker into a new queen. Once hatched, the young queen will reign over about half the population while her mother flies off with the rest of the colony to a new home; commonly called a bee swarm.

We all know how important bees are for pollinating plants, but what about wasps? Wasps serve an important ecological function. Unlike bees, they prey on many pest insects which eat our food crops. Many other types of wasps are parasitic; an adult will lay its egg on a living host (like a caterpillar) and as it develops into an adult it eventually kills the host, so they are important for controlling pests in our gardens. They also serve as food for many species, including bats, bears, birds, and insects and spiders. Also, although they do not specifically collect pollen as bees do, they do inadvertently pollinate many plants in their search for nectar.

Please visit the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature House for a peek at all of the activity in our newly renovate honeybee display hive.



European Honey Bee

Bird Banding

in the Blenkinsop Valley

By Ann Nightingale, Rocky Point Bird Observatory
250-514-6450 motmot@shaw.ca



Golden-crowned Kinglets are one of the smallest species encountered by the banding crew. This youngster is just out of the nest.

In the wee hours of June 3, a small group of people stealthily crept onto the fields of Madrona Farms in the Blenkinsop Valley, not to plant or harvest crops, but to capture birds. There was nothing nefarious about this activity, though. The crew were members of Rocky Point Bird Observatory, and were there to monitor survival and breeding success of the birds that nest on the property.

2016 marks the sixth year of this project at Madrona Farms—one station in a network of several hundred following the same protocol across North America. The program is coordinated by the Institute for Bird Populations and is called MAPS—Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship. Breeding birds and their offspring are carefully caught in mistnets, then taken to the banding table for identification, measuring, and determination of age and sex. Each bird is banded with a small, uniquely-numbered aluminum band, then released. In addition to banding the birds, the volunteers also note all of the species they see or hear during the six-hour shift.

The Blenkinsop Valley is home to many species of year-round resident birds as well as species that are only here during the breeding season. Songbirds are incredibly loyal to their breeding sites, and this has been confirmed for the Madrona site through recapture of birds banded in previous years. On the first of seven banding dates between June and August, the crew caught an Orange-crowned Warbler originally banded there in 2011. That means this bird has likely travelled to the Gulf Coast of the US or Mexico and back at least five times, returning each spring to build its nest in almost the exactly same place.

Both Anna's and Rufous Hummingbirds feed and nest in the valley, and build their nests in the hedgerows and trees scattered amongst the fields. Other species regularly banded include American Goldfinch, Bewick's Wren, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Song Sparrow, and Spotted Towhee. Overhead, Red-tailed Hawks, Turkey Vultures, and several species of swallows also become part of the observation list for the day.

"The main value of these kinds of projects is the collection of long-term data sets," says Ann Nightingale, one of the RPBO volunteers. "We can see changes in the kinds of birds we capture and see, determine longevity of local species, and start to get a picture of the health of the habitat for bird reproduction and survival."

Rocky Point Bird Observatory has been monitoring bird populations on southern Vancouver Island since 1994. To learn more about their projects or to volunteer, please visit rpbo.org.



Age and sex of Rufous Hummingbirds can be determined by a close inspection of their tail feathers.

2016 Environmental Award Winners



Individual Citizen - William (Bill) Dancer

Bill received the award for his achievements leading nature programs and in volunteer stewardship. Since 2001 he has coordinated the Victoria Natural History Society (VNHS) Connecting Children with Nature program, which provided opportunities for almost 900 school age children last year alone. His environmental efforts in the community have included extensive involvement removing invasives in Haro Woods and Konuckson Park. Bill is described as a “stalwart volunteer for nature”, an ambassador to visitors (and children) of the region, his “cheerfulness unmatched” in his enthusiasm and stewardship for the natural world.



Volunteer Organization - Victoria Golden Rods and Reels Fishing and Social Club

The Victoria Golden Rods and Reels Fishing and Social Club was honoured for their achievements in supporting water quality research and stewardship at Elk/Beaver Lake. This volunteer organization has raised significant funds and put in over 2,000 hours of volunteer labour and supplied boats to support scientific work on water quality issues at the lake. The club's efforts have included hosting a Lake Stewardship Course, a public forum at UVic's Environmental Law Centre, supporting an intergovernmental steering committee and successfully working with the CRD towards a project coordinator position and new weed harvester. The long-term effects of their efforts and the increased health of the lake will benefit recreational activities as well as the aquatic ecosystems of Elk/Beaver Lake.



Business/Commercial - Saanich Native Plants

Saanich Native Plants, owned and operated by Kristen and James Miskelly, was honoured for achievements as the only local business dedicated to native plants, organic nursery growing practices and for extensive community support. Their work includes consultation to many different land managers and landowners about native plants and ecological restoration. Kristen and James donate more than 25% of their annual income as in-kind to other projects. Their volunteer efforts include community education, youth outreach, leadership on the Haliburton Biodiversity Project and hosting the Victoria Natural History Society's botany night. The business and volunteer work of James and Kristen Miskelly are supporting and enabling more restoration work in the region due to their efforts and making more local plants and seeds available.



Youth Group/School - Mount Douglas Secondary ECO Club

The Mount Douglas Secondary ECO Club received the award in honour of their achievement in supporting ecological restoration efforts at Mt. Tolmie Park. This group works tirelessly, averaging one restoration event every 10 days – after school until almost dark through the winter and during school breaks. The Lead Steward of Mt. Tolmie notes he has not seen a group this committed or engaged in the past 22 restoration seasons in the park. While their hands-on engagement makes meaningful connections with the science curriculum, their participation is essential to the success of controlling invasive plants and protecting this natural area.





Biodiversity Conservation - Purnima Govindarajulu

Purnima Govindarajulu was honoured for her achievements in biodiversity conservation, providing “countless” volunteer hours over and above her work as a specialist for the Ministry of Environment. Since 2007, she has been the inspirational volunteer leader of the Urban Biodiversity Enhancement and Restoration Project at Haliburton Farm in Saanich, which has created and restored ephemeral ponds and other habitats. Her work has left a legacy for rare and endangered species, including through the Amphibian Monitoring Program, BC Community Bat program and invasive Bullfrog outreach programs. Purnima mentors young girls as future biologists and sits on the boards of local conservation organizations.



Sustainability - Goldstream Volunteer Salmonid Enhancement Association

The Goldstream Volunteer Salmonid Enhancement Association was honoured for their achievements in providing salmonid hatchery support in creeks in Saanich. These volunteers oversee the egg to hatching, then provide coho and chum fry in different lifecycles to local creeks and to the Salmonids in the Classroom program. They have worked with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on transplanting fish carcasses from one watershed to another - the first permitted project in Canada. The hatchery runs 6 days per week year round powered by volunteers.



Long Term Achievement - Everett & Merle Peterson

Everett and Merle Peterson received this award in honour of their leadership and volunteer efforts in restoring the Goward House Woodlands. In the late 1980s, Everett developed concept plans that have guided ecological restoration work in the Goward Woodlands to the current day. Everett and Merle have been removing ivy at the site since 1990 and since 2004 have led weekly volunteer restoration activities at the woodlands and Haro Creek. They have created photo archives, led educational visits and presentations, pioneered new techniques and inspired volunteers with their knowledge and stewardship.



Garry Oaks for Our Future



By Judith Carder, Garry Oak Meadows Preservation Society Board

The Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society (GOMPS) is moving forward on its dream of providing our native Garry oaks at nominal cost to increase the rate of replacement of trees being lost, thereby enhancing natural habitats. Acorns have been gathered and seedlings potted that now await their move to the new GOMPS Nursery where they will acquire strength and fitness for their permanent homes while also beautifying our neighbourhoods.

Local citizens were so concerned by the rapid disappearance of original Garry oak meadow and woodlands due to land conversion that they formed GOMPS almost 25 years ago. Dedicated to the preservation, protection and restoration of these endangered trees and their associated ecosystems, GOMPS engages in educational activities, including promoting ecological sustainability to governments and their staff at all levels, as well as habitat restoration. With access to a network of experts and informational resources, plus collaborative efforts with other interested organizations such as the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team (GOERT) & Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT), GOMPS responds to all public and corporate requests often acting as a conduit and/or hub for issues concerning Garry oaks.

The GOMPS Nursery is one such collaboration with the City of Victoria and the Pacific Forestry Research Centre. With volunteer assistance, young trees from locally-sourced acorns will be nurtured to survival stature for planting in our urban forests, backyards and parklands, providing a sustainable framework for their threatened associated community of unique species to flourish. These plantings will be a boon as a proactive adaptation to the warmer, dryer climate southern Vancouver Island and nearby islands will experience in the future.

Anyone wishing to contribute to such a vital and worthwhile endeavour, please become a member (only \$15 for individuals), a volunteer, or supporter by contacting us through our website: <http://gomps.weebly.com/about-us.html>.



Upcoming Events

Saanich Recreation Trails & Treks

saanich.ca 250-475-5408

Weekend Walks (FREE Drop-In)

Sundays | 1:30 pm to 3:00 pm

Discover the beauty of the Saanich parks right in your backyard. These FREE guided hikes are open to adults of all ages. No registration necessary just drop in at the appropriate time and meeting place.

July 17 | Kentwood Park to Rithet's Bog

Meet near Lochside Elementary at Royal Oak & Lochside Drive

Aug 14 | Shady Trails of Blenkinsop Lake and Lower Mt Doug

Meet in the trailhead parking lot at end of Lochside Drive, off Cedar Hill X Road, just North of Monkey Tree Pub.

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.

July 21 | Glencoe Cove Park

Meet at Vantreight Park on Vantreight Drive

July 28 | Lambrick Park to Sierra Park

Meet at Gordon Head Rec. Centre entrance, 4100 Lambrick Way.

Aug 4 | Lochside Trail to Beckwith Park

Meet on Lochside Trail parking by Don Mann (McKenzie @ Borden)

Aug 11 | UVic Alumni Chip Trail

Meet at Henderson Rec. Centre entrance, 2291 Cedar Hill X Rd

Aug 18 | Tod Inlet

Meet at Tod Inlet access point on Wallace Dr., opposite Quarry Lake

Aug 25 | Panama Hill Park

Meet at Hyacinth Park parking lot, off Marigold at Interurban

CRD Parks & Environmental Services

crd.bc.ca/parks-events 250-478-3344

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

Going Buggy (Drop-in Event)

Thursday, July 14 | 11am to 2pm

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Saanich)

We love 'em, we hate 'em. They're fascinating, finicky and fabulous! Drop by the tents at the main Beaver Beach between for a close-up look at some of our buggy friends and foes.

Busy Beavers (Guided Walk - 10 & under)

Sun, July 17, Tue, Aug 9 | 10am to 11:30am

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Saanich)

See an active Beaver lodge & learn about this amazing mammal and its marvelous adaptations. Meet at the grassy area adjacent to the picnic shelter in the Filter Beds parking lot.

Bejewelled Dragons (Guided Walk)

Saturday, July 23 | 1-2:30pm

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Saanich)

Join us for an up-close look at the amazing world of dragonflies. Nets and field guides will be available. Meet at the grassy area adjacent to the picnic shelter in the Filter Beds parking lot.

Snake Day (Drop-in Event)

Wednesday, August 3 | 11am to 2pm

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Saanich)

CRD Parks has teamed up with Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary for this event: watch snake shows, hold a snake, play a snake game and more. Drop by the tents at the main Beaver Beach

Evening Bats (Drop-in Event - 8 years+)

Friday, August 12 | 7:30pm to 9pm

Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Saanich)

Come explore the wonderful world of bats and hopefully see them swooping through the air for insects. Meet at the grassy area adjacent to the picnic shelter in the Filter Beds parking lot.

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary

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.

Wild for Water (Drop-in Event)

Wednesday, July 13 | 12 pm to 3 pm

Learn who needs it and how we can best protect it. There will be crafts, a giant watershed model, pond dipping and games!

Reptile Day (Drop-in Event)

Wednesday, July 27 | 12 pm to 3 pm

Observe and interact with our fabulous reptile friends, play games, make crafts and get your face painted.

Mighty Mammals (Drop-in Event)

Wednesday, August 10 | 12 pm to 3 pm

Check out the marvelous variety and adaptations of mammals with specimens and help solve the latest mystery at the Lake.

Birds of a Feather (Drop-in Event)

Wednesday, August 24 | 12 pm to 3 pm

Learn how to figure out who's who in the bird world. Hands-on exploration, birdwatching, crafts, songs, and games.

Creatures of the Summer Night (Event)

Friday, July 22 or August 19 | 8 pm to 9:30 pm

Check out the nightlife of Swan Lake! Look for owls, bats, and other nighttime creatures and see how these animals are adapted to their nocturnal life. Suitable for 6 years+. \$4/\$6 Members/Non-Members. Pre-registration required

Christmas in July! (Drop-in Event)

Saturday, July 9 | 10 am to 11:30 am

Share the magic of Christmas Hill on a guided hike. Listen to the bird chorus while checking out the view from a spectacular vantage point. Suitable for 6 years+. Bring a water bottle.

Victoria Natural History Society

naturevictoria.ca

Saturday Morning Birding (most Saturdays)

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

Hawk Watch (Drop-in Event)

Saturday, September 24 | 11 am to 2 pm

East Sooke Regional Park (East Sooke)

Have you ever seen Turkey Vultures and other raptors migrating? There will also be live raptor demos and experts with spotting scopes at the viewpoint. This 20-minute trek up a steep, rocky trail requires hiking shoes. Bring binoculars, water, and a lunch to the Aylard Farm parking lot (Becher Bay Road).

Garry Oak Meadow Planting Project

By Heather Pass, Lead Steward, Rolston Reclaimers

2015 was not a good year for establishing new native plantings. The summer was hot and dry. Fall had many days of pouring rain or howling wind. But often there is simply no choice. As the Lead Steward of Rolston Reclaimers I had delayed ordering plants during the summer, hoping Fall weather would be kinder. The native plant order was delivered in the midst of nerve-wracking rains and winds of December 2015 and I put out an urgent call for volunteers.

Laura-Lyn Helton and her students answered the call, even though Colquitz Middle School was in wind-up and exam mode before the Christmas break. Fortunately, the weather became kind, giving two sunny days.

On a chilly, sunny winter morning, 56 students and several adults turned out to plant 95 native plants, plus two planters of Spring Gold donated by Fort Rodd Hill Restoration Project, in the Garry Oak Meadow of the Rolston Reclaimers area of Colquitz River Park. Laura Gretzinger, Lead Steward of Saanich's Marigold Park Pulling Together Volunteer team, was one of the adults, escorting the students from school to park and back, plus giving extra time that afternoon. Jenny Eastman also gave of her valuable time for this project.

First, the plants in 10 cm. pots were pre-planted into paper bag pots with good Garry Oak leaf compost before being moved to the Garry Oak Meadow to be planted in the ground, then surrounded with a newspaper pad and topped by more compost for weed suppression. The compost in the paper bag would give the new plants a head start before competing with other vegetation. All plants were then covered with a protective cage.

Native planting were Yampah, Spring Gold, Shooting Star, Monkey-Flower, Small-flowered Blue-eyed Mary, Sea Blush, and California Brome.

This work entailed moving compost from the heap to the bagging table, then more wheel barrowsful to the Garry Oak Meadow. Thank goodness for strong, eager students. Surplus compost was spread under three fir trees for a future project.

The student volunteers were amazing in their attention to learning this process and carrying out instructions.

The following day I returned to the area to check the work and fine tune it a bit. All the work of the previous day had been accomplished in just three hours...quite a feat considering that the students had to walk back and forth from Colquitz Middle School. They can be very proud of their efforts.



before



after



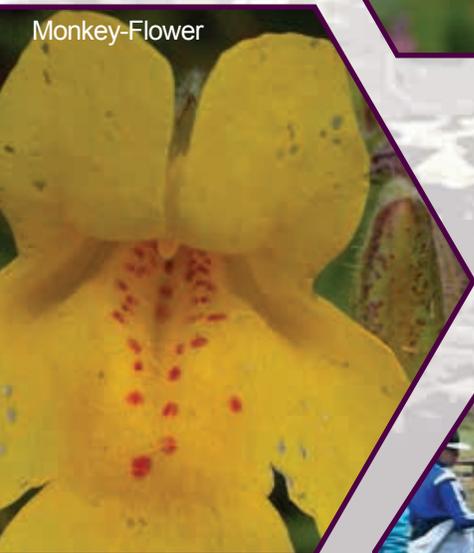
Small-flowered
Blue-eyed Mary



Shooting Star



Sea Blush



Monkey-Flower

Colquitz River Park Fall Work Party

By Heather Pass, Lead Steward, Rolston Reclaimers

This was the Rolston Reclaimers annual work party with the Victoria Green Team's Amanda Evans and Colquitz Middle School students. Approximately 75 students plus several adults arrived at the Rolston Reclaimers area of Colquitz River Park.

After a chat from Amanda and giving instructions, we divided into teams. Some weeded and spread wood chips in the Garry Oak Meadow. Others removed blackberries from a pan-handle slope edging this area, then planted Tall Oregon Grape seedlings. Hopefully, in the future these should provide food for birds.

Another group stripped the thorns from these blackberry vines for their wreath project. Eventually, the classes raised \$100 in sales.

Before each class returned to the school, they received thank-you gifts from Green Team via Amanda Evans. This was a pleasant surprise for all of them.

As lead steward for this area, I appreciate the time the Green Team and Colquitz Middle School Students volunteered in this area.





Cover: Elegant Sheep Moth at Rithet's Bog.
Photo: Jeremy Gatten

Back: Nectar-rich Snowberry flowers are popular with pollinators. *See page 2-3 for an article on who is attracted to this often overlooked native plant.*

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

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