

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



Volume 20 | Issue 4 | Winter 2019/2020

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Thinking Optimistically, Acting Locally

Photo: Swan Lake

By Carolyn Richman
Saanich Environmental Education Officer

“Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history – and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely” (United Nations, 2019)¹

As we enter a new year, many folks take time to reflect and consider what they would like to accomplish. Globally there is much reflection on the current state of the environment – especially the urgent situation with a changing climate and massive declines in biodiversity. 2020 is the last year in the United Nation’s decade on biodiversity and we are leading into a UN decade for ecological restoration. According to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, we have 10 years to take serious action on climate change. All things considered, this is an excellent time to consider what we are doing in our region and in our lives to respond to urgent global issues.

When it comes to issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss, many people may think that the issues are too big for them as individuals to address, that these are issues for governments and larger organizations to deal with. These are very complex and difficult issues, to say the least, but considering that life on earth depends on these crises being addressed affectively – they should be of concern and interest to all.

Thinking about climate change and biodiversity loss can also bring up many difficult emotions for people, including hopelessness, anger, loss, fear and even depression. The former executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Christiana Figueres, believes in the importance of optimism: “nothing gets done without optimism”². “To Figueres, optimism means courage, hope, trust, solidarity, and the fundamental belief that we humans can come together and help each other to better the fate of humankind”². To me, that also means that each one of us has an important role to play in growing that optimism, that courage, to take action and to work together. What choice do we have?

If you are wondering what you can do in this region to be part of the solution, you’ve come to the right place (one of many). *Our Backyard* brings you stories of hope and action. We also want to share some of the many opportunities Saanich residents can be involved in. These actions might seem small sometimes, but they are important. Hopefully they also contribute to the optimism we need to keep moving forward, to contribute positively and find solutions!

In 2020, in celebration of the UN decade on biodiversity, and towards being “the change you wish to see in the world” (Gandhi), here are a few local opportunities:

- **Volunteer:** for restoration projects in your community, such as Saanich Pulling Together - <https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-culture/parks/natural-areas/volunteer-for-pulling-together.html> (and in this issue see page 4 for opportunities with Peninsula Streams and pages 8 & 9 for World Fisheries Trust projects)
- **Naturescape:** support native biodiversity on your property (and beyond) – see the Saanich Naturescape resources on our website www.saanich.ca/Naturescape
- **Saanich Climate Plan:** read the new plan and find out how you can contribute. Make a list: what individual changes and actions can you take in 2020?

As noted in Saanich’s new Climate Plan³, endorsed by Council January 29, 2020:

“We need to do this together”.

1. United Nations. (2019). UN Report: Nature’s dangerous decline ‘unprecedented’; species extinction rates ‘accelerating’. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>
2. Fessler, L. (2018). The woman behind the Paris Climate agreement: “Nothing gets done without optimism”. Retrieved from Quartz at Work: <https://qz.com/work/1192946/climate-leader-christiana-figueres-nothing-gets-done-without-optimism/>
3. District for Saanich. (2020). 2020 Climate Plan: 100% renewable and resilient Saanich: <https://www.saanich.ca/assets/Community/Documents/Planning/sustainability/2020-climate-plan-web-v13.0.pdf>



Photo: Uvic Students conducting Forage fish survey at Cordova Bay

The Peninsula Streams Society's 'Beach Education and Conservation of Habitat' (BEACH) Initiative



By Brian Koval, MSc., RPBio., Assistant Coordinator, Peninsula Streams Society

The residents of Saanich love their beaches: they provide places for recreation, socializing, and rest. These beaches are also essential habitats for a wonderful variety of terrestrial and marine life. But beaches are under threat from storm drain outlets, garbage, derelict boats, dog feces, trampling, sea-level rise, climate-related storm activity, overland flow erosion, and backshore development. In response, the Peninsula Streams Society (PSS) are now seeking volunteers who want to help their local beaches.

In 2018, PSS launched the 'Beach Education and Conservation of Habitat' (B.E.A.C.H.) Initiative, thanks to funding from the World Wildlife Fund and the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation. The purpose of the Initiative is to empower local citizens through the support that stewardship leadership can provide. Activities to date have included beach cleanups, beach nourishment by adding sand and gravel to beaches, and forage fish egg surveys.

'Forage fish' are super-abundant schooling fishes such as Pacific Sand Lance (aka Needlefish), Surf Smelt, Pacific Herring, and Eulachon. They connect food energy from zooplankton to their predators (salmon, Lingcod, and rockfish), which, in turn, are prey for larger animals, such as sea lions and orcas.

Surf Smelt and Pacific Sand Lance lay tiny eggs on pebble and sand beaches just below the high-tide line. Because our actions on and around these beaches can have an impact, we are surveying beaches to assess the current state of forage fish habitat. The presence of eggs on a beach can lead to better protection, conserving essential spawning habitat.

We are now seeking volunteers to help undertake beach surveys at Cordova Bay, Mount Douglas Beach, 10 Mile Point, and Cadboro Bay, among other beaches. We supply the equipment and the necessary training to confidently undertake these surveys. If you are interested in learning more about the program or in volunteering, please contact us at PeninsulaStreams@gmail.com. Let's hit the beach!



Photos: Above - Surf Smelt Alevin and Surf Smelt Egg
Right - Uvic Students conducting Forage fish survey at Telegraph Cove

PULLING TOGETHER

Volunteer Feature

Kathryn Bridge

Pulling Together Volunteer Program Lead Steward Hutchison Park

By Jenny Eastman
Saanich Parks Pulling Together Volunteer Coordinator

As she untangles a mat of English Ivy, Hutchison Park Lead Steward, Dr. Kathryn Bridge expects she may uncover clues about the past, as well as the sought-after root of the invasive plant. Kathryn and her active and dedicated team of volunteers have unearthed building bricks, old plates, dolls, bottles and more during their twice-weekly work parties to remove invasive species in this remnant Garry Oak ecosystem. The park has a rich history as the former home and property of well-known author and journalist, Bruce Hutchison, and earlier, was part of the Rogers family farm.

Kathryn is a fine fit for her volunteer role. As a freelance curator and historian, she has researched and written extensively about Emily Carr and other notable women in BC history, and she's skilled at untangling stories from the clues left behind. *"I've always been a bit nosy about the past and I've always liked getting muddy - both attributes needed as a Lead Steward!"* she notes. Her early curiosity about history led to a diverse career with the BC Archives and further work exploring many personal archives, including rare journals left by children in BC and Alberta's early settlement days. Now retired, Kathryn is busy with gardening, a grandchild and continuing with her research. She chose to give her time to Hutchison Park for a few reasons, she says, *"It's close to home, good exercise, and good people"*. We're glad to have Kathryn and her team caring for this ecologically and historically important park in Saanich.

To learn more about the *Pulling Together* Volunteer Program: <https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-culture/parks/natural-areas/volunteer-for-pulling-together.html>



What is your favourite childhood nature memory?



By Kathleen Burton, Executive Director
Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

One of my favourite childhood memories is of playing hide-and-go-seek in a lupine field with my brother and sisters. I can hear my sister counting to one hundred and my brother encouraging me to hide! I loved spending time outside watching the bees pollinate the flowers and, when the day was done; I would swing on my tree swing that hung under the giant willow tree in the front yard. This is but one of many memories that ignited my passion for nature.

I was fortunate as a child, to live on a wonderful property in the country where I was able to explore natural areas literally just steps from my family's front door. Living in Victoria, as an adult and raising young children, I did not have the same luxury. Thankfully, there is a magical place: *The Natural Heart of the City*, which shaped the course of my parenting and that of my children's childhood memories as they grew up. That place drives my motivation to foster the community's understanding and appreciation of nature today. Jacob and Jess benefited from the programming at the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary when they were just toddlers and they believe – as do I – that those early days in nature were instrumental in fostering their love of natural surroundings today.

During those critically important early-learning years, I saw the looks of wonder on my children's faces as they experienced the Nature House and its exhibits for the first time. Jacob learned that if he had spider legs he could taste things with his feet and, Jess explored what it would be like to have the night vision of an owl. Nearly twenty years later, thankful for their time growing up at Swan Lake, Jess and Jacob are giving back the best way they know how, by allowing me to share their story with you.

Since its inception in 1975, Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary Society has been fostering the community's understanding and appreciation of nature through direct experience. My children are but two of the tens of thousands of children that have taken part



Kathleen Burton, with her sons' Jacob and Jess

in educational programs offered at this wild oasis in the heart of an urban landscape.

It warms my heart to have my children, now grown, care deeply enough about nature and about Swan Lake to put themselves in front of a camera for this article and for the Sanctuary. They understand it remains a living classroom; fostering an understanding and appreciation of nature through direct experiences and they want that for you and your children too. They are living proof that the Sanctuary builds deeper connections with the environment. And just as my children have; you, your children and the community's children have the opportunity to build a connection with the environment and learn something profound. Experiences they will take with them throughout their entire lives and encouraging responsibility for the care and protection of the natural environment.

Such transformational learning is miraculous!

To learn more about our programming or contribute, please visit our website at swanlake.bc.ca

SAANICH ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS Nominations Opening March 4th

We grant seven environmental awards every year. Since 2000, we've recognized over 150 people and organizations that contribute to the natural environment in Saanich. The Awards are an initiative of the Saanich Environment and Natural Areas Advisory Committee (ENA).



Nominations open March 4 - April 15, 2020 at 4 p.m.

SAANICH.CA/ENVIROAWARDS

Wilson's Snipe at Cuthbert Holmes Park

I went for a walk behind the fish fence in Cuthbert Holmes Park in October 2019 to look for birds. As I was tramping through the grass, a bird suddenly flew up and let off a winnowing sound. It flew off and I didn't see it again. But I suspected that it was a Wilson's Snipe. The next day I went to the park again and this time at what is known as "the Point" at the Colquitz estuary I encountered the same situation, except that this time it flew up and landed on the opposite shore. I raised my camera and scanned along the shore where I saw it land. After several passes I suddenly saw an eye. Since snipes stay very still and let their camouflage protect them, I was able to get a few photos of this very elusive bird. Since then, a couple of snipes have been seen at one time.

Wilson's Snipes are medium-sized, stocky, shorebirds. Patterned with buff and brown stripes, they are very well camouflaged in the grasses. Their habitat is wet ground, including marshes, bogs, flooded fields, and margins of

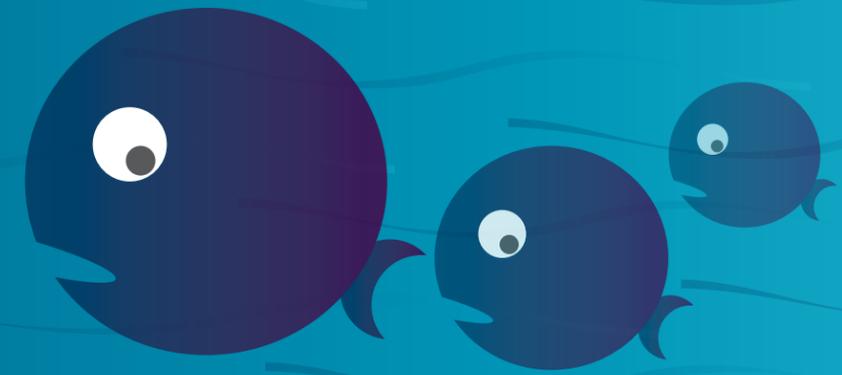
ponds and streams. They forage for insects, worms, and other organisms by probing mud and shallow waters. Their eyes are set well back on the sides of the head so that they are able to watch their backs while probing for food.



By Angela Wyatt, Wildlife Photographer

PICI Colquitz Minnow Trapping Project

By Thomas Cinnamon - World Fisheries Trust, Environmental Research Technician



The Portage Inlet Cutthroat Initiative (PICI) is a collaborative community project started in 2018 and is comprised of several angling/stewardship groups who share a concern with the degradation of Portage Inlet and its watersheds.

Coastal Cutthroat Trout are a unique species found in the Pacific Northwest. Genetic and environmental conditions can determine whether a cutthroat is an anadromous

fish (i.e., born in freshwater, migrate to sea, spawn in freshwater) or a resident fish (i.e., stay in freshwater their whole lives). Unlike salmon, cutthroat do not die after spawning and can live to 15+ years.

Cutthroat trout have spots covering most of their bodies and often have a red to orange slash under their jaw. Freshwater Cutthroat are dark with a coppery or brassy sheen, while sea-run individuals become silvery and often

have distinct lemon bellies. The presence of Cutthroat in Colquitz River is a sign that there is still some good habitat capable of supporting salmon, however the Cutthroat and Coho Salmon populations in the Colquitz have drastically declined since the 1960's due to urbanization, habitat destruction, and pollution.

In 2019, PICI conducted a minnow trapping project on the Colquitz to identify each species' distribution and

habitat use. Over the summer, Gee Traps were used to capture juvenile Coastal Cutthroat Trout, Coho Salmon, and several other species. These data will help highlight species trends over time, guide future monitoring programs, and inform restoration activities.

For more information on PICI, to get involved, or to donate, visit our webpage <https://worldfish.org/portage-inlet-cutthroat-initiative/>

Local

Coastal Cutthroat Trout
Notice all of the spots and the yellowish fins on this juvenile cutthroat. They often have a red-orange slash under their jaw but this may be missing in sea-run fish.

Local

Coho Salmon
Often spawn in smaller streams in the fall. Be sure to stop by the fish counting fence on Colquitz during spawning season for a chance to see some beautiful adult fish!

Gee Traps
Trap juvenile fish and can provide an indication of habitat preferences, behaviours, species and populations trends.

Local

Three-spined Stickleback
This small fish is native to most northern inland coastal waters. Typically they operate in pairs when foraging.

Local

Prickly Sculpin
Can be mottled dark brown, olive-green, or grey. Is one of the largest of the freshwater sculpins – growing up to 15cm.

Local

Signal Crayfish
The only native crayfish in BC is identified by its uniform brownish colour and its smooth carapace and claws.

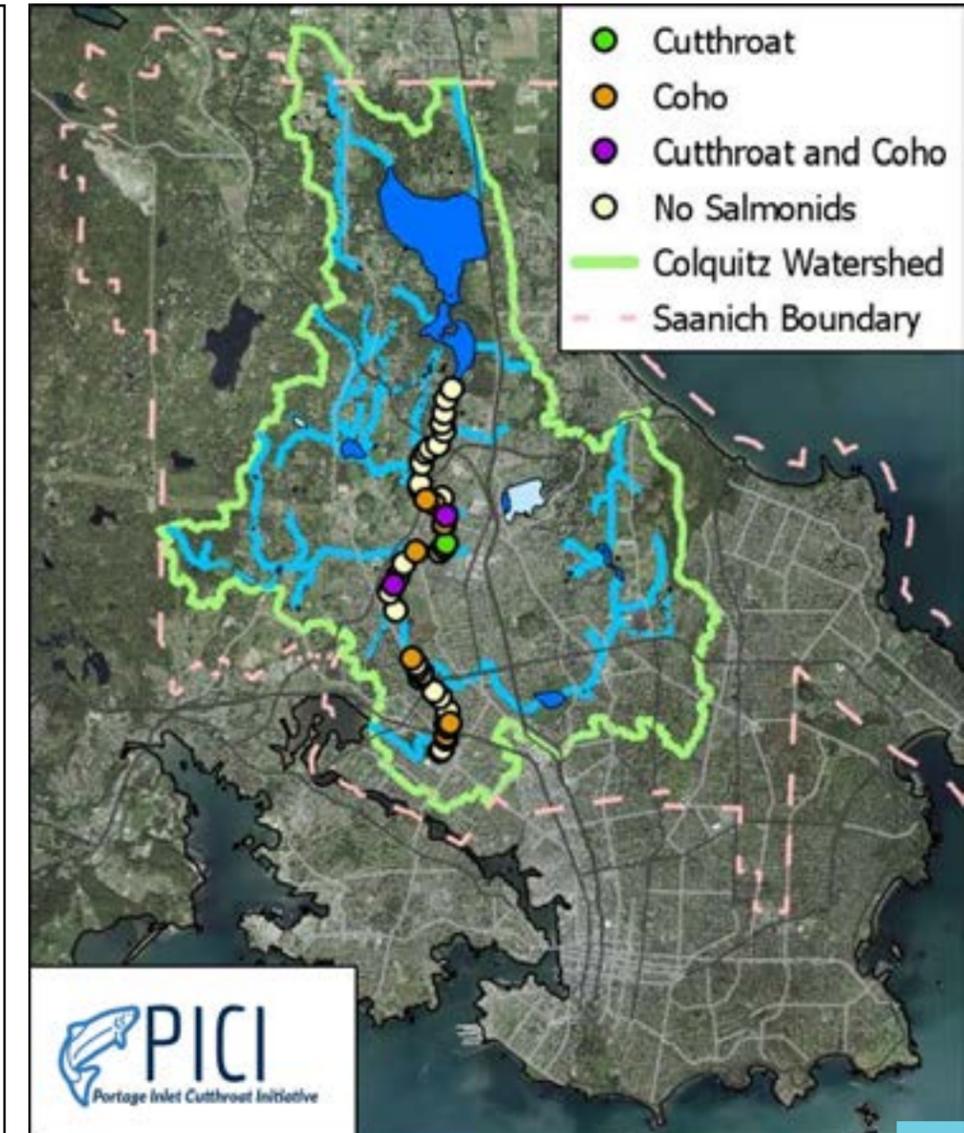
Invasive

Pumpkinseed Sunfish & Yellow Perch
Both these species were introduced from central or eastern Canada. They can prey on small local juveniles and compete with local species for food.

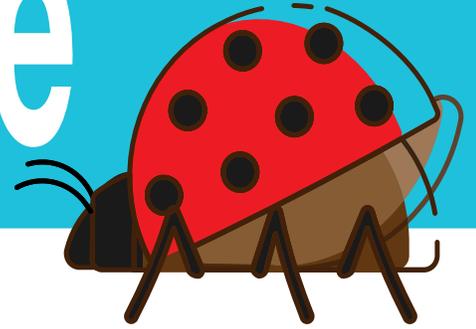
Invasive

Oriental Shrimp
Normally found in the ocean however lower reaches of coastal stream often have a large tidal influence.

PICI
Portage Inlet Cutthroat Initiative



Lady Bird, Lady Bird: Fly Away Home



By Claudia Copley, Entomology Collection Manager at the Royal BC Museum

The winter issue of this newsletter seems like a strange time to be highlighting an insect, but the habit of this species to overwinter in our homes made me want to highlight it.

Happily, ladybird beetles (also known as lady beetles: Family Coccinellidae) are a group of insects that are not as universally loathed as are some others. I'm not sure if it is their bright colours or their fame as a beneficial insect that endears them - probably a bit of both. In general this family is beneficial – most species feed on aphids and other plant-feeding insects, and they do this as both adults and larvae, but especially as larvae. Additionally, many lady beetles are brightly coloured with red and black markings. This serves as warning colouration to possible predators that they taste bad, which they do.

Harmonia axyridis, whose various common names include the Harlequin, Multicolored, or Asian Lady Beetle, is among the most common species you will see in our region, and this is intensified in the winter when the adults aggregate in homes and other artificial structures. When you see an aggregation it is easier to understand how they ended up with a common name like “multicolored”: these beetles vary from predominantly black with just two red spots to completely red with no black spots, and every combination in between.

Another of its common names, Asian Lady Beetle, gives away the fact that this species was introduced to North America and that its native range in eastern Asia extends from the Altai Mountains to the east coast and includes Japan. This was an intentional introduction with unintentional consequences: now when you see a lady beetle it is far more likely to be a non-native species than



a native one, and these invasives are implicated in the declines of the lady beetle species that evolved here. In British Columbia we have 91 species of lady beetle. At least six of these are introduced, and two species are recognized to be of conservation concern at the federal level: the Nine-spotted Lady Beetle (*Coccinella novemnotata*) and the Transverse Lady Beetle (*Coccinella transversoguttata*).

So here is an introduced species whose original “home” is Asia and now we find them making a “home” in your home when they aggregate in the walls or attics to overwinter as adults. It certainly adds a new twist to that old nursery rhyme: **Lady Bird, Lady Bird. Fly away home.**





UPCOMING EVENTS

SAANICH RECREATION TRAILS & TREKS

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

Sunday Weekend Walks (FREE drop-in)

Sundays | 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Discover the beauty and nature of Saanich parks. Please wear sturdy footwear and bring water. Walks go rain or shine. Leashed, well-socialized dogs are welcome unless specified.

- Feb 23** Rediscovering Bowker Creek
Meet at parking lot of former Sears Garden Centre, Hillside Mall, on North Dairy Road. Bus: 4, 8, 9, 27, 28
- Mar 29** Knockan Hill and the Parks of Strawberry Vale
Meet at Marigold Park on Iris Ave, off Grange Rd. Bus: 22
- Apr 19** Swan Lake to Playfair Park (no dogs this walk please)

Gentle Walk & Talk (FREE drop-in)

Thursdays | 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.

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.

- Feb 6** Lambrick Park to Sierra Park: Meet at Gordon Head Rec, 4100 Lambrick Way. Bus: 27, 28, 39
- Feb 13** Lochside Trail to Beckwith Park: Meet on Lochside Trail in parking lot by Don Mann Excavating, off McKenzie at Borden. Bus: 26
- Feb 20** McMinn to Kentwood - Outterbridge: Meet McMinn Park at 4820 Maplegrove St at Lochside Dr. Bus: 32, 39
- Feb 27** Glencoe Cove: Meet at Vantreight Park, on Vantreight Rd, off Ferndale Ave. Bus: 27
- Mar 5** Mystic Vale: Meet at Cadboro Gyro park end of Sinclair Rd. by washrooms. Bus: 11
- Mar 12** Prospect Lake Centennial Trail: Meet at Whitehead Park at Prospect Lake Rd & Goward Rd. Bus: 83
- Mar 19** Sayward Hill: Meet at Lochside Park, off Cordova Bay Rd, past Mattick's. Bus: 32
- Mar 26** Swan Lake: Meet at end of Nelthrope, off McKenzie. Bus: 26
- April 2** UVic Alumni Chip Trail: Meet at Henderson Rec Centre, outside main door. Bus: 4, 9, 14
- April 9** Cadboro Bay to Queen Alexandra: Meet at Cadboro Gyro park end of Sinclair Rd. by washrooms. Bus: 11
- April 16** Bow Park: Meet at Gordon Head Rec Centre lobby, off Feltham. Bus: 27, 28, 39
- April 23** Cedar Hill to Peacock Hill: Meet at Cedar Hill Rec Centre main doors. Bus: 8
- April 30** Swan Lake, Reynolds, Playfair Parks: Meet at end of Nelthrope, off McKenzie. Bus: 26

Birdwatching for Beginners (workshop)

Wednesdays, April 3-24 | 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Our expert birders will introduce you to the basics of birding: identification, sounds, and great birding locations. Each week features a different location. Registration required (4/\$45: #29903)

HORTICULTURE CENTRE OF THE PACIFIC

505 Quayle Rd, Saanich <http://hcp.ca> 250-479-6162

Meadowscaping for Biodiversity

Sunday, April 5 | 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Are you interested in creating a native wildflower meadow in place of lawn or field? Join Kristen Miskelly to learn how, including which native species to use, how to prepare and plant your area, and how to keep it thriving for years to come. Must preregister. Members \$45, Non-Members \$60.

CRD PARKS & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Our naturalists lead guided walks, hikes, canoeing, and 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

SWAN LAKE NATURE SANCTUARY

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

Guided Bird Walks (Drop-In)

Every Sunday | 9 a.m.

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

Wild for Wetlands (Drop-in Event)

Sunday, February 23 | 12 to 3 p.m.

What makes a wetland such a great place to enjoy and protect? Find out with hands-on exploration, pond dipping for live wetland creatures, crafts and games. Admission by donation.

Spring Break at Swan Lake (Drop-in Event)

Monday, March 23 | 12 to 3 p.m. Snakes Spectacular
 Tuesday, March 24 | 12 to 3 p.m. Swan Lake Trails Discovery
 Wednesday, March 25 | 12 to 3 p.m. Bird Bonanza
 Thursday, March 26 | 12 to 3 p.m. Christmas Hill Wildflower Walk

Games, crafts, songs, & hands-on activities; fun for the whole family! Live animals featured during the Snake Spectacular event. Trails Discovery and Wildflower Walks feature outdoor guided walks on uneven terrain (wear sturdy shoes, bring a water bottle and snack).

Egg-cellent Adventures (Drop-in Event)

Sunday, April 26 | 12 to 3 p.m.

Find them in tree-top nests, burrows, rock-faced cliffs, and even underwater! All animals begin as eggs! Games, activities & crafts; this egg-hunt explores lifecycles of different egg-laying creatures.

Intro to Mindfulness: Meditation in Nature (Workshop)

Sundays, March 1 to April 5 | 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Saturday, March 28 | 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Learning to cultivate the skill of mindfulness meditation in nature enhances our ability to connect with nature, supports stress reduction and inner healing. This course helps to cultivate the practice and attitudes of mindfulness meditation by learning from the wisdom of nature. 10 participants. \$350 for members/\$385 for non-members.

VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Visit www.naturevictoria.ca for more programs.

Saturday Morning Birding (most Saturdays)

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

Natural History Night (every 2nd Tuesday)

All About Bats | Tuesday, February 11, 7:30 p.m.
 AGM and Mesocarnivores Project | Tuesday, March 10, 7:30 p.m.
 UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Botany Night (every 3rd Tuesday)

The curious case of rare plants on southern Vancouver Island
 Tuesday, February 18, 7:30 p.m.
 TBA | Tuesday, March 17, 7:30 p.m.
 Swan Lake Nature Centre

Birder's Night (every 4th Wednesday)

Birding Southern Ecuador | Wednesday, February 26, 7:30 p.m.
 TBA | Wednesday, March 25, 7:30 p.m.
 UVic Fraser Building, Rm 159

Marine Night (last Monday of the month)

Underwater Noise & Arctic Marine Mammals
 Feb 24, 7:30 p.m.
 TBA | March 30, 7:30 p.m.
 UVic Fraser Building, Room 159



2020 ANNUAL NATIVE PLANT SALE

Saturday and Sunday,
April 18 & 19
9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

Over 4,000 plants and more than a hundred species.
Pre-orders over \$50 available.
Parking is limited; please carpool if possible.

Please see our website for pre-ordering
details, plant list, and additional
parking places. swanlake.bc.ca/

Photo: Blenkinsop Lake

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