



# Our Backyard

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A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH

## WRAY CREEK DAYLIGHTING PROJECT *By David Polster*



Wray Creek has re-emerged, freed from a pipe running between West Saanich Road and the Interurban Rail Trail. This “daylighting” of the creek became a priority for Saanich because of the liabilities associated with the old wooden culvert, as well as an interest in restoring the environmental values of the open creek. In 2008 a two-phase plan was developed by Polster Environmental Services Ltd. The first phase (spring 2009) consisted of excavating the material for the new creek channel and re-vegetating most of the channel. The second phase is to be completed during the fisheries window, at a time when flow levels are low to minimize the amount of pumping that will be needed to keep the creek from getting muddy during construction. The new channel will consist of two small ponds connected by a meandering channel. The ponds will provide

habitat for a variety of aquatic organisms and will allow the stream to be transferred to the new channel in stages.

A new system of re-vegetation has been applied to the Wray Creek channel. The soils were prepared by leaving them rough and loose so that there is no fear of overland flow during rain events, but rather the rain soaks into the soil to supply the plants. Many of the plants that have been planted on the banks of the new creek were established from cuttings, allowing a dense planting to be achieved at minimal cost. This will prevent blackberry and other invasive species from establishing by creating a cover of woody trees and shrubs. In addition, a diversity of riparian species was included in the restoration design. Seeded grasses and legumes were not used as these tend to compete with the woody species and create a condition that fosters invasive species' growth. The restoration design was developed to minimize the need for future maintenance and to return the site to a natural condition as soon as possible.



## Milk Thistle

The City of Colwood has been wrestling with an unwelcome newcomer—milk thistle (*Silybum marianum*), which had spread in the Royal Bay gravel pit. This nasty invasive is lethal to cattle and sheep, and listed as a Class A noxious weed in King County, Washington. It forms dense, impenetrable stands that block out all other species. And it spreads fast—each plant can produce 6,000 seeds, which remain viable for up to nine years.

Given seedheads were ready to spread, rapid action was needed. With advice from the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, and under the supervision of the Coastal Invasive Plant Committee, Lehigh Hanson (Royal Bay owners) stepped up to the plate and cleared the thistle from the many infected sites, which are being burned to prevent seed spread. At the same time, Colwood city crews cleared the thistle and other invasives from adjacent parkland and roadsides. This is a multi-year problem, and Colwood and Lehigh will have to deal with follow-up treatment for several years into the future.

If you spot this in your neighbourhood—act fast! Advice from the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands is to mow or hand-cut plants, removing the taproot if possible. If the seedheads are already formed, cut and bag the seedhead before mowing the rest. Plants can re-grow from severed roots, and cut stems may still produce viable seed. The plants may have already banked seed in the soil, so ongoing monitoring and treatment of new plants needs to occur for many years.

*By Judith Cullington, Colwood Councillor*







Point Ellice House is a provincial heritage site located on the south shore of the Gorge Waterway in Victoria. The house and garden, dating from the 1870's, have been preserved and restored, but after years of neglect, the shoreline area has become heavily overgrown with invasive plants - primarily English ivy and periwinkle that invaded from the formal gardens.

Located on a diverse natural shore with pocket beaches and rocky outcrops, this site is a unique remnant of the natural arbutus, Douglas fir, Garry oak forest ecosystems that historically lined its shores. Many of the mature trees on this site are nearing the end of their life and the woodland understory is severely overgrown with invasive plants (mainly ivy, holly, spurge laurel and periwinkle), choking out most of the native shrubs, young trees and ground

cover. Dense stands of overhanging ivy at the water's edge crowd out marine marsh plants and significantly impacting the tidal fringe marsh that used to exist along the shore. Decades of unchecked invasive species growth has resulted in a loss of habitat diversity and has compromised the ecological functioning of the site.

In 2008, the Gorge Waterway Initiative (GWI), a collaboration of community groups and municipalities working on conservation issues along the Gorge Waterway, began work on the ecological restoration of a 90 metre section of this woodland shore. The restoration objectives are to:

- remove invasive plants
- replant native tree, shrub and ground cover
- improve the biodiversity and ecological functioning of the site.

Since the restoration began, the GWI and a dedicated group of volunteers have spent more than 1500 hours removing more than 12 tonnes of invasive plants! They have also planted more than 200 native trees and shrubs. If you are interested in joining the effort to restore this wonderful bit of shoreline, contact Jody Watson at [info@gorgewaterway.ca](mailto:info@gorgewaterway.ca) or 250-360-3065.

## RiverSong: Life Along the Colquitz

RiverStones: a mosaic migration of pebbles along the pathway....

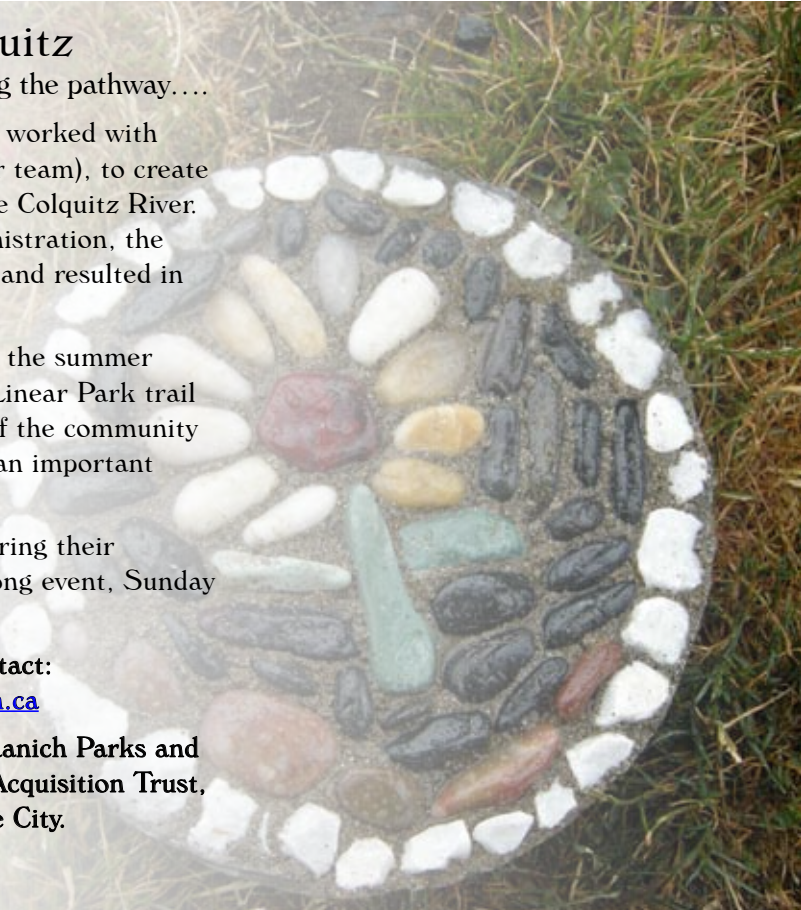
This spring, the students at Colquitz Middle School worked with artists, Carolyn Knight and Paula Jardine (and their team), to create pebble mosaics to mark the pathway that follows the Colquitz River. With the enthusiastic help of school staff and administration, the project engaged almost every student in the school, and resulted in the creation of 240 mosaics, or "stones".

The mosaics will be installed by Saanich Parks over the summer season. Their placement along the Colquitz River Linear Park trail will provide a physical legacy on of the connection of the community with the river, and evidence of human caring about an important community asset.

A public celebration of the stones students made during their workshop will take place at the 3rd Annual RiverSong event, Sunday September 27, marking BC Rivers Day.

**For information about RiverSong contact:**  
Diane Thorpe [diane.thorpe@saanich.ca](mailto:diane.thorpe@saanich.ca)

**RiverStones is supported by: BC Arts Council, Saanich Parks and Recreation, Saanich Legacy Foundation, Habitat Acquisition Trust, Colquitz Middle School and Mosaic the City.**







## Our Urban Forests

By Lisa Martin

Increasingly, planners and citizens are becoming aware of – and protective of – our urban green spaces. Research has proven what we all know intuitively: the presence of trees and vegetation throughout our community helps to reduce the stress of urban living.

An urban forest is more than trees – it includes the understory of shrubs and other plants as well as backyard fruit trees, urban parks and trail systems, Garryoak meadows, and treed boulevards. Urban forests improve soil conditions, air quality, water drainage, and wastewater management. They provide habitats for wildlife and shade for us on hot summer days. They are even good for the economy: there is a positive correlation between the presence of trees and real estate prices and even retail sales!

In March 2008, a report on Urban Forest Canopy Cover Mapping and Analysis in the Capital Regional district, British Columbia 1986 - 2005 was released. This study compared the presence and density of forested areas as well as changes to impervious surface areas. The urban forest study looked at a number of surface types, not only forested and impervious. These included: marsh, agriculture, water, exposed soil, grass, gravel, and shrub.

While there was significant variation across municipalities, overall, they discovered that there was a 13.2% increase in impervious surfaces over this 19-year period, while the amount of high density forest cells (defined as a hectare with more than 75% tree cover) decreased by 16.1%. This does not necessarily mean that trees were replaced by impervious surfaces (for example, in Metchosin, forested areas were largely replaced by agriculture) but it does indicate general trends.

Why is this important? The population of the CRD is expected to grow by one-third over the next twenty years. The development (residential, commercial, transportation infrastructure) that will be needed to accommodate this additional population will have a tremendous impact on planning and land management in order to ensure that changes to urban forests and impervious surfaces are carefully considered.

## How Does Your Garden **GROW**

By Norm Mogensen

Climate change is causing increased droughts in some important food-growing areas around the world, and this will continue to intensify, increasing the price and reducing the certain availability of many foods here. Our seriously belated efforts to reduce climate-changing greenhouse gasses means there is more to be done in less time, if we are to succeed in retaining a liveable planet. Those efforts must affect the farming and transportation industries, which will further put downward pressure on food availability. We can't afford to continue to defer remedial action to the next generation, as we have always done, because conditions will only get worse. When we are no longer able to rely on the global economy's trading system to supply food that is affordable, what are we going to do?

We had better start, right now, to conserve every scrap of arable land within a short range of where we live. There may come a day when you will have to walk or cycle to your food source. We all must learn to grow and preserve sufficient quantities of the right foods for a balanced, healthy diet. Unfortunately suburban sprawl and our overpopulation of what has always been a very limited agricultural land base, has placed us in a position whereby we simply can't feed our regional population of 350,000 people, from the 17,000 hectares of arable land that remains within the Capital Regional District. Accordingly, we need to develop a comprehensive plan for how we can assemble enough urban and rural land and water to feed ourselves as climate conditions tighten our external food supply noose.



Consider your back, front, side yards, balconies, rooftops, adjacent boulevards, and neighbourhood parks and public places in this context. Plan the food types and quantities of what you need to eat to survive for a year and where you can grow or buy and store it locally. Talk to your neighbours and form and participate fairly in a cooperative community gardening program. Remember animal products require at least ten times the amount of land area for each kilogram of food produced, so if you must eat meat, milk or eggs, you live in the wrong area.

Tune into this issue while there is still some time for us all to prepare for it.



## 2009 Saanich Environmental Awards

Congratulations to the winners and many thanks to all our dedicated volunteers, citizens & companies that help to improve the natural environment in Saanich.



### INDIVIDUAL CITIZEN Dick Battles



Since 2001, Dick Battles has volunteered over 2000 hours in Mt. Douglas Park, removing English ivy and other invasive species from the forest understorey. He has singlehandedly removed ivy from large areas and piled it up for the Parks' workers to collect. Dick is a major contributor to the health of Mt. Douglas Park and has served to increase public understanding and appreciation for the value of native plants and natural areas. He is an exemplary ambassador for our parks and richly deserves recognition for his many years of environmental stewardship in Saanich.



### VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION

#### Glendale Gardens Native Plant Garden Group



Since 1997, this group has been working to create a natural rehabilitation area in Glendale Gardens in the area known as the Western Woods. In 1999 they began the creation of a native plant demonstration garden. Since then they have stripped invasive species, created paths and plantings of native plants, dug a bog, removed lawns, installed mason bee boxes and nest boxes, and created a meadow for camas wildflowers. The group is committed to demonstrating the beauty of, and uses for, native plants. They have the long-term in mind, finesse innovation on a limited budget, and are not adverse to change. The Native Plant Garden will provide a place to teach others about the richness and diversity of our own 'homegrown' plant varieties and their uses in the garden.

### BUSINESS/COMMERCIAL EY Properties



EY Properties is undertaking an environmentally sensitive subdivision (Oceanwood) in Saanich at 4705 Cordova Bay Rd. Ernie Yakimovich paid constant personal attention to all planning aspects and to the careful execution of the subdivision servicing and road work. Density was sacrificed to preserve natural areas and important trees on site. Large nature-scape areas and wildlife corridors were protected. In addition, the builder, Citta Construction, is committed to building all 17 homes on the site to Built Green Platinum standard, which will make it the first subdivision in Saanich to meet such a high level of energy, water, and materials efficiency. Four homes have now been completed, with one more under construction, and all have achieved Built Green Platinum ratings.

## **YOUTH/SCHOOL GROUP** **Royal Oak Middle School**



In 2008, Royal Oak Middle School, a school of 600 students and 60 staff, set the goal of zero waste production. Now, one year into the project, the school has replaced almost all of its garbage cans with composters and plastic recycling. Every student in the school is involved with waste collection and sorting. Garbage pickups have been reduced by one half and the school is determined to reduce it again to once every three weeks. Congratulations to these young people and their teachers for providing an excellent waste reduction model for all schools and institutions in Saanich.

## **YOUTH/SCHOOL GROUP** **Honourable Mention** **Colquitz Middle School**

The Colquitz Environmental Renaissance is a committed group of 24 students and their teacher-sponsor from Colquitz Middle School, who have set a goal of making their school more environmentally friendly. These passionate students have approached their task through activities which engage their peers on an everyday basis. Waste reduction, alternative transportation, energy savings, and habitat stewardship are all issues they have tackled. There is no doubt that these young people will make a big difference to the future of their school and our community. Well done.

## **BIODIVERSITY** **CONSERVATION** **Native Plant Study Group**



The Native Plant Study Group has met once a month since 1993 to raise awareness about the beauty and values of native plants. The participants include gardeners, horticulturalists, botanists, and others, all share a passion and curiosity for native plants. Their sessions are open to the public and they regularly schedule tours of gardens, field trips, and social events. They also coordinate a volunteer native plant salvage program in the CRD and participate in restoration projects around the CRD and in Saanich. The many educational and “in the ground” activities of the group help to protect and restore regional biodiversity and ecosystems.

## **LONG TERM ACHIEVEMENT** **Rob Hagel**

Rob Hagel, who works during the day at the Pacific Forestry Centre, also volunteers with many native plant groups and community efforts. He is the Chair of the Native Plant Propagation Steering Committee, with the Garry Oak Ecosystem Restoration Team, where he assists with raising rare Garry oak plants for recovery efforts. He is an expert plant propagator, and has done research to find techniques that are easy and accessible to others. Rob has published a CD with the information and made it available to community groups and agencies. Rob encourages members of the community to collect Garry oak acorns in the fall to increase genetic diversity of this regionally significant tree. The trees he raises are given back to community events such as Tree Appreciation Day.


## **SUSTAINABILITY** **Royal Oak Burial Park**



The Royal Oak Burial Park has established the first Natural or ‘Green’ Burial site at its Saanich Cemetery. Natural burial is an environmentally - sensitive and sustainable alternative to conventional burials. Natural or ‘green’ burials will be the only type of burial available in Royal Oak Burial Park’s wooded areas in the future. These areas, which will have no headstones or markers, will be restored with native trees, shrubs, and flowers grown without pesticides. Community reception and support for this concept has been tremendous and Royal Oak Burial Park is leading the way in offering this service in Saanich.







## Dogs and Wildlife Conservation Don't Mix

By Gabriella Goliger

The people at the Swan Lake/Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary love dogs. Honest, they do! They love to see dogs bounding happily after sticks and balls in designated off-leash parks. But they just can't allow all that lovely canine exuberance into Swan Lake's fragile wildlife environment. That's because those trampling paws and unleashed doggy impulses can swiftly undo years of painstaking work at restoring habitat and luring wildlife into the oasis Swan Lake provides. As fast as you can say: "Rover, get back here!" a mother wren can be frightened into abandoning her nest, or a clump of rare wildflowers can be crushed.

A municipal bylaw has prohibited dogs in the Swan Lake area for many years. Nevertheless, dog owners and their pets – often unleashed – come anyway. Some people may be unaware of the no-dog rule. Others may simply ignore it. If they knew how much damage their four-footed friends were wreaking, perhaps they'd reconsider. Of course, everyone thinks his or her pet is the paragon of doggy virtue: gentle, obedient, perfectly behaved. "My Molly would never harm a soul." And that's probably true – most of the time and in a controlled environment. But Molly, bless her button nose, is still a creature of nature with animal instincts. Put her into a natural environment and those instincts come joyfully alive. Gone, the trained inhibitions. Suddenly Molly wants nothing but the chase. A real duck, quacking in consternation at water's edge, is infinitely more enticing than her squeaky-toy imitation.

Even if Molly is on leash, she gives off vibes that make wild creatures nervous – perhaps nervous enough to disrupt their life cycles. Spring, when creatures are giving birth to the next generation, is an especially fragile time at Swan Lake. A number of birds build their nests on or close to the ground: wrens, juncos, towhees and mallard ducks. All these can be easily disturbed by a canine presence. Plants too are highly vulnerable. Delicate stems can be broken. Soil compacted by feet and paws can prevent seeds from germinating. Dog pee and poo disrupt the chemical balance of the soil and the scent disturbs wild animals.

The Garry oak meadows around the Nature House and on Christmas Hill belong to one of the most endangered ecosystems in Canada. Vanishing habitat and invasive species have put some 100 different plants, mammals, reptiles, birds, butterflies, and other insects in these ecosystems at risk. They need all the help they can get.

Wildlife aside, there's another reason to keep dogs away from Swan Lake. Troops of very young schoolchildren sometimes walk along the trails on educational field trips. Dogs hot on the scent of some animal may frighten or even hurt the kids, too.

Swan Lake/Christmas Hill forms a rare and precious natural environment right in the heart of urban Victoria. The sanctuary is relatively small, but rich in native species of all kinds. The society that manages the sanctuary works to ensure the right balance of human and wildlife activity so that people can enjoy the area to the fullest without harming the habitat. Unfortunately, dogs can't be part of the equation. But the Nature House has a book for sale to help dog owners: *50 Best Dog Walks/Hikes Around Victoria and Southeast Vancouver Island* by Leo Buijs.

So enjoy the outdoors with your dog. Just not in wildlife preserves.

***Gabriella Goliger is a writer from Ottawa, wintering in Victoria. She owns a Cairn/Scottie dog called Sheba who would just love to be allowed to wreak havoc at Swan Lake.***





## 30TH ANNIVERSARY

The Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, otherwise known as the Glendale Gardens & Woodland, is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. A

day of celebrations is planned for Saturday, July 18th, here at the Gardens, and admission is free.

The focus of the 30th anniversary is to try to implement the vision the original founders of the organization had when they created the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific. In their vision, this was an international educational centre which would focus on food production, resource conservation and renewal, and energy demand and alternative energy.

It is this vision we hope to realize in the coming years. The Glendale Gardens & Woodland is 42 hectares (103 acres) of demonstration gardens, including vegetable gardens and woodland, that is being returned to its original sustainable status.

On July 18th, we will have educational displays ranging from pruning a bonsai tree through building a cob house to stonewall building. All of the participants seek to reinforce the original founders' vision of an educational centre focused on global sustainability.

So come and join us and discover how visionaries and volunteers have transformed a potato field into gardens as glorious as those of Butchart Gardens. And don't forget our annual Arts in the Garden, which takes place three weeks later on August 8 & 9.



Photo Credit: Barry Ford

## MADRONA FARM

**Awake! There's trouble on the land.**

The beautiful Madrona Farm, a 27-acre ecological and agricultural treasure in Victoria's Blenkinsop Valley, is in danger of being lost.

The young farmers, David and Natalie Chambers, have only until the end of July to raise \$300,000 towards the reduced cost of \$1.7 million to pay David's two uncles, who own the farm with his father and who need to sell.

The land is zoned Agricultural Land Reserve, but that carries no requirement that it will remain in food production. Once sold, it could easily become a hobby farm or gentleman's estate.

David and Natalie are true eco-farmers, who – as well as providing fresh produce for 3,500 homes in the Greater Victoria region (over 100 varieties of vegetable, 12 months a year) and training young people in sustainable farming methods – have gone out of their way to integrate farming with the natural environment, protecting Douglas fir and Garry oak ecosystems, and a wooded wildlife corridor to Mount Douglas Park.

When the land is bought, The Land Conservancy will own and protect it in public trust for all future generations.

Do you know a large-hearted person who might help create a gift that could last a thousand years? And might you help Madrona with a donation yourself? See [www.conservancy.bc.ca/donatetomadrona](http://www.conservancy.bc.ca/donatetomadrona) and [www.madronafarm.com/site.php](http://www.madronafarm.com/site.php)

To learn more about the wildlife of Madrona Farm, come to the Victoria Natural History Society Presentation on Tuesday September 8, 2009 at 7:30 pm in the new Uvic Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A120

*This article originally appeared in Newsletter #193 - July/August 2009 of Guy Dauncey's EcoNews and is reprinted with permission.*

## Upcoming events & announcements

### Garry Oak Restoration Project Work Party

**Saturday, August 8**

**9:30 - 11:30 am**

**Chatterton Hill Park**

*Removing English hawthorn, Himalayan blackberry, Scotch broom, various other weeds. All tools and refreshments provided. More info: Jenny 250.744.1710 or [www.gorpsaanich.com](http://www.gorpsaanich.com)*

### Swan Lake

**Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary**

[www.swanlake.bc.ca](http://www.swanlake.bc.ca)

**250 479-0211**

### Fabulous Frogs

**Thursday, July 30, 12 – 3pm**

*Long sticky tongues, breathing through their skin and webbed feet! Discover even more about what makes frogs so fabulous. Join us for a puppet show, hands-on displays, live animals and froggy crafts. Shows at 12:30 and 2pm.*

### Snake Day at Elk/Beaver Lake

**Thursday, August 6, 11am – 3pm**

*Snakes, snakes, and more snakes! We've teamed up with CRD Parks and the UVic for this slithery event. Watch snake shows, hold a snake, play a snake game and more. Drop-in at the CRD Parks tents at the main Beaver Lake Beach. By donation.*

### Creatures of the Summer Night

**Friday, August 7, 7pm – 9pm**

*Sharpen your night senses with owl prowling and raccoon trailing. Suitable for families with children over 6 years old. Please pre-register.*

### Christmas Hill Hike

**Thursday, August 13, 10am -12 pm & 2 – 4pm**

*Join us for a great summer hike! Get your glacial groove on with this exploration of the rocky oak-forested Christmas Hill. Suitable for all mobile ages.*

### Guided Birdwalks

**every Wednesday and Sunday.**

*Meet at the Nature House at 9 am.*

### SUMMER NATURE CLASS

*Biology Buddies for 4 – 6 year olds; Junior Nature Explorers for 7 – 10 year olds; Big and Little for adults and their young friends 4 – 6 years old. For more details please contact Swan Lake at 250-479-0211, or [www.swanlake.bc.ca](http://www.swanlake.bc.ca).*

### Madrona Farm Tours

[www.madronafarm.com](http://www.madronafarm.com)

Saturdays at 9:30 am sharp

### Madrona Farm Volunteer Days

Starting in April, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9-11 am

### Victoria Natural History Society

[www.vicnhs.bc.ca](http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca)

### Mandarte Island Seabird Colony and Sidney Spit Sunday, July 26

*Tour around Mandarte Island to check out the seabird colony, and then go to Sidney Spit for some more great birding. Check the VNHS website for more details and costs. Call Rick Schortinghuis at 250-885-2454 to register.*

### Hurricane Ridge Alpine Flowers Sunday, August 2

*This bus tour takes us up the hill to the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Centre in Washington's Olympic National Park to enjoy the high elevation species of alpine flowers at their peak. Check the VNHS website for more details and costs. Call Rick Schortinghuis at 250-885-2454 to register.*

### Discovery Island & Chain Islands Ecological Reserve Birdwatchers Kayak Tour Saturday, August 8

*A Mecca for sea kayakers and nature enthusiasts, the area presents many opportunities for viewing wildlife including numerous nesting sea birds. Check the VNHS website for more details and costs. To register phone 250 361-9365.*

### Tufted Puffins, Sea Otters and Archaeological Museum Sunday, August 16

*Join us for a field trip on the Olympic Peninsula to Cape Flattery and the First Nations Cultural Center with a good chance of seeing Tufted Puffins. Check the VNHS website for more details and costs. Call Rick Schortinghuis at 250-885-2454 to register.*

### Natural History Night

**The Natural Side of Madrona Farm**

**Tuesday, Sept. 8, 7:30 pm**

*UVic's Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A120 Come learn about the wildlife that call Madrona Farm home, and how the farmers are trying to protect both the agricultural and natural values of this precious area.*

### Botany Night - TBA

**Tuesday, Sept. 15, 7:30 pm**

**Swan Lake Nature House**

*Every second Tuesday of the month.*

### VNHS Birder's Night - TBA

**Wednesday, Sept. 23, 7:30 pm**

*UVic's Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A120 Every third Wednesday of the month.*

### VNHS Marine Night - TBA

**Monday, Sept. 28, 7:30 pm**

*UVic's Social Sciences and Math Building, Room A120 The last Monday of every month.*

### UBC Blue Whale Workshop Open House

**Saturdays: July 25, August 8 and 22,  
11am to 3pm**

**Thursday August 13, 5pm to 8pm**

211 Harbour Road, Victoria

*The Island community is invited to a series of Blue Whale Workshop Open Houses, where researchers are working to prepare a 25-meter long whale skeleton for display at UBC's Beaty Biodiversity Museum. See the biggest bones on earth, and learn about blue whale evolution and conservation. Free!*