

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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SWEET SUMMER NIGHTS

By Renée Cenerini, Program Manager
Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary
swanlake.bc.ca

Ahh, those summer nights. The days are longer and warmer, making those evening BBQs and late night strolls all the more appealing. We humans aren't the only ones enjoying this time of year. Fellow animals such as bats, owls, and raccoons also take advantage of this time and have a host of adaptations that help them do so.

First of all, a clarification; while some animals are labelled as nocturnal, meaning they are primarily active at night, many animals are actually crepuscular, meaning that they are active primarily at twilight, usually at dusk and dawn. This is good for us as, being daytime creatures ourselves, our senses are not especially well developed for night-time observations, so dawn and dusk are better times for us to observe them.

Bats are a prime example of crepuscular creatures. These amazing mammals, the only mammals to have truly mastered the art of flight, are incredible insect hunters. Their wings are actually a modified hand with a double membrane of skin that stretches between the hand and finger bones and extends to the forearm, sides of the body and hind leg. Using their adaptation of echolocation (a series of super-sonic sounds that bounce back from other objects and are picked up by the bats), they catch and consume hundreds of insects per hour.



Photos: H. Masata

Raccoons are mainly nocturnal but are occasionally spotted wandering during the day and often at dusk and dawn. They feed mostly along sources of water such as streams and lakes and, being omnivores, eat almost anything available including fruits, nuts, grains, insects, bird eggs, frogs, and crayfish. These animals have adapted marvellously to living with human beings and have been known to use their dextrous fingers, and intelligence to access tasty morsels in unsecured garbage and compost bins.

Owls are chiefly nocturnal birds of prey; there are some exceptions, such as the mighty but small Northern Pygmy-owl that is usually active during the day. With their large heads and flattened faces forming facial disks, most owls have a distinct look that often strikes us as wise-looking. This group of birds are master hunters of the night, with enlarged eyes allowing for maximum light sensitivity and extremely accurate hearing. Their silent flight is made possible by feather specializations and their talons are capable of delivering a fatal grip to most prey.

There are a host of other creatures that come out at dusk, so take advantage of these warm, long summer evenings – you never know who you might spot!

Cuthbert Holmes Park

Great Horned Owls

By Dorothy Chambers
Cuthbert Holmes Park Steward

Cuthbert Holmes Park users have enjoyed watching the nest of the Great Horned Owls and their two babies. Closely observed and photographed, there was much discussion and searching when only one owlet was seen for many days.... The base of their tree was investigated, and notes compared as dates when both were last seen.

Recently, wildlife photographer Cheryl Redhead captured both fledged owlets in the same tree –Fantastic!

Today I learned, indeed one owlet had fallen out of the nest, and was retrieved by a concerned neighbour who contacted Wild Arc for help. After a brief stay in Metchosin, and a physical exam, our owlet was returned to the nest by Wild Arc volunteers.

The cover photo shows that one owlet has an eye injury.

Please support Wild Arc: sca.ca/locations/wild-arc

They have come to the rescue of our owls on a number of occasions.





Saanich Parks Restores South Ridge Trail

By Jillian Tuson, Saanich Parks Natural Areas Practitioner

For a number of years the South Ridge Trail in Mount Douglas Park has been the topic of mounting concerns. The trail had been degrading due to substantial foot traffic, paws a plenty, heavy seasonal rains and the nature of the sandy soils. Saanich Parks knew something had to be done to preserve the trail, and the habitat surrounding it.

Starting in the fall of 2016, Saanich Parks began to restore the trail. The work began at the top of the mountain. Water diverters were installed to help direct the flow of the runoff from rain off the trail. Below the rocky outcrops at the top of the mountain, there is a section that has sandy subsoil which washes out easily when the wet season arrives each fall. Constant wash outs were adding to the deep channeling of the trail and the erosion of the soil from the Garry Oak

grove alongside the trail. Once water issues on the trail were controlled, we were able to look at the issue of undesirable grades contributing to further erosion, and the path of least resistance for park users. Using the natural stone from the rock outcrop, we installed some simple stone stairs to make the transition down from the steep south face easier for foot traffic. These natural looking stone stairs also help retain the loose sandy soils that tend to erode down the mountain.

A beautiful cedar staircase was constructed to move people around some precarious terrain, and allowed us to backfill the exposed root zone of some Garry Oaks that were in decline. Some road crush was brought in to help construct the base for the stairs and small boulders and split rail fencing helped to complete and retain the new trail and flow of traffic. All of this work requires moving heavy materials in a sensitive and fairly inaccessible environment. Many materials such as split rail and wood were carried in by hand, and we were able to use a small motorized wheelbarrow to move gravel and soil.

Finally, the existing trail leading up to Southridge from Harrop trail was redirected to allow us to fix some of the aggressive undercutting of a mature Oak and preserve it while giving the degraded surrounding habitat time to heal. Because of the different stages of planning and implementation for this project we were able to keep the trail open to the public while making improvements, and have now completed restoring the Southridge trail for visitors to enjoy.

Of note is that the trail held up very well during the recent wet winter and we have seen many visitors out enjoying it. Our next big trail restoration project in Mount Douglas Park is underway on the Upper Glendenning Trail. It has similar serious erosion challenges.

New Pilot Project

Park Ambassadors at Mount Douglas Park

By Megan Sim – Student Park Technician

Saanich Parks is excited to partner with the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society to deliver a new Park Ambassador Pilot Project! Having been launched in May, the project will run through September. We currently have 14 trained and oriented volunteer Park Ambassadors, aged 6 years old to older adults – including a family.

The aim of the project is to enhance visitor experience and improve the condition of this regional gem of a park. Park Ambassadors are easy to identify in their black safety vests, Saanich volunteer ball hats, and backpacks full of supplies to assist park visitors. Do you want to know a species of plant? What about where the nearest waste disposal bin is? Or how you and your dog can help protect the plants and critters that make this such a special place? These keen volunteers are roaming Mount Douglas Park seven days a week and will try their best to answer any questions you may have.

The new team is incredibly enthusiastic about our parks and are eager to share their passion. Throughout the summer, the Park Ambassadors will be collecting data about park visitation, frequently asked questions, safety concerns, and commonly observed behaviour. Saanich Parks will use this valuable information to work toward improving our services and finding ways to best care for the park and meet the needs of visitors.

We hope that you get a chance to meet and chat with one of our new volunteers this summer in Mount Douglas Park. We welcome any feedback you might have. Please let us know your thoughts about the project by contacting us at parks@saanich or 250-475-5522.



Park Ambassador assisting a park visitor.
Photo: Megan Sim

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD WINNERS 2018



Individual Environmental Achievement - Audrey Barnes

Audrey received the individual environmental achievement award in honour of her leadership and volunteer achievements to help protect and restore local ecosystems. Audrey has contributed significant time and leadership with community groups in the Tod Creek Watershed area. She works weekly on restoration projects, especially at Whitehead Park, but including East Lake Park and the native plant garden at Prospect Lake Elementary. In addition, Audrey provides leadership for environmental monitoring initiatives, education, and fundraising and is an environmental steward of her own 5 acre property.

Honourable Mention: Cathy Carolsfeld for her work in bringing the Seaquaria program to many schools and students in Saanich.

Volunteer Organization - Friends of Bow/Brodick Parks

The Friends of Bow/Brodick Park were recognized with the Volunteer Organization award for their achievements in restoring and protecting native ecosystems and species at Bow/Brodick Park. Since 2006, this group of volunteers has invested almost 4800 hours in persistent removal of invasives and replanting of native vegetation in these parks as well as the Feltham Trail. They have worked over a 6-7 hectare area of primarily Garry Oak ecosystems and wetland habitats, including fighting prickly blackberries and their massive root systems with mattocks and shovels. Their work now includes monitoring of a blue-listed plant species and stewardship of installed nest boxes that has resulted in one of the largest wintering population of wood ducks in the region.

Business - McCall Gardens

McCall Gardens was recognized with the Business Award for their achievements in building a facility that honours and enhances the natural environment in Saanich. After 90 years of service to the Victoria area, McCall Gardens developed a vision of a new facility in the Royal Oak area combining modern technologies with a connection to nature. The facility that was developed is a green building, built in harmony with the creek and natural landscape on the property. Their site includes a rainwater collection system from the roof and parking lot which naturally filters the water before draining into the salmon-bearing Normandy Creek. Native plants fill the gardens, a natural theme is reflected within the facility, bringing nature and a sense of harmony for those dealing with loss.

Youth - Charlotte Brady, Anastasia Castro & Grace Poole

Youth award winners this year were Charlotte Brady, Anastasia Castro and Grace Poole, being honoured for their achievements and tireless efforts to raise awareness and advocate for banning single-use plastic bags. Over the last 4 years, these students have made presentations and attended Council meetings in the region, led a petition, have spoken publically about the dangers of plastics and micro-plastics in our oceans and have worked on beach clean-ups with the Surfrider Foundation. The results of their efforts so far have included the adoption of a new bylaw and strategy in the City of Victoria, interest in the initiative around the region and of note, Anastasia was a winner of a National Science fair for her project on plastics. These students have presented to the Saanich Environment and Natural Areas Committee and Saanich Council. They recently spoke to the Vancouver City Council about their efforts in this region, met with the Provincial Environment Minister and are coordinating with two local MPs on a national strategy.



Biodiversity Conservation - Julian Anderson

Julian Anderson received the Biodiversity Conservation Award, honouring his leadership and achievements in protecting and restoring ecosystems, and enhancing biodiversity at Cuthbert Holmes Park. Julian has been a tireless volunteer and advocate for this park since the 1980's, creating the Friends of Cuthbert Holmes Park in 2005 and serving as the Lead Steward of the park. He has spent countless hours in the park monitoring, cleaning up, removing invasives, planting native vegetation, preserving fish spawning grounds and native biodiversity. His commitment has included taking UVic's Restoration of Natural Systems program to increase his work in the park, leading many different groups in restoration activities, partnering with other agencies and community groups and providing public presentations. More recently his work has expanded to include monitoring the impacts of the McKenzie Interchange construction, advocating for the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Sustainability - Linda Geggie

Linda Geggie is this year's Sustainability award winner, recognizing her leadership and achievements in building sustainable food systems in Saanich. Linda's early work led to the establishment of Lifecycles in 1994 and from there the development of a network of organizations providing sustainable food services. This network eventually became the Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiatives Roundtable to develop healthy, equitable and sustainable food systems in the Capital Region. Linda's vision and leadership have served this and other local organizations, contributing to many services, initiatives and partnerships. Recently, Linda's efforts contributed to the development of the Saanich Food and Agriculture Security Plan.

Long Term Achievement - Shelagh Levey

Shelagh Levey is the 2018 winner of the Long Term Achievement award, honouring her accomplishments as a leader and educator to protect the environment in Saanich. As a Gordon Head resident in the 1960's, Shelagh pioneered the first recycling program in Western Canada, adopted and further expanded by Saanich. As a teacher she led Gordon Head Elementary School to achieve Earth School status through 1000 environmental projects. Over the years Shelagh has led and participated in many community initiatives to protect the environment in Saanich, especially at Prospect Lake and within the Todd Creek Watershed. Currently, Shelagh works on ecological restoration at Sayward Hill Park and dedicates her time as an advocate of local, provincial and national environmental issues

Saanich Council recently committed to becoming a 100% renewable energy community, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050, and to continue preparing for a changing climate. A public engagement process is underway to develop a new Climate Plan to deliver on this commitment and we would like your help.

Take the Climate Survey!

Saanich residents, businesses and visitors are invited to complete a survey to help shape the new Climate Plan for Saanich.

Surveys may be completed online by visiting saanich.ca/climateplan, or on paper by contacting the Saanich Sustainability section at sustainability@saanich.ca or visiting Saanich recreation centres and Saanich community festivals on select dates this summer.

Read the Climate Backgrounder Series

Wonder what a renewable, low-carbon future could look like in Saanich, or what the projected climate will be like in 2050? Want to learn about renewable energy and climate initiatives happening already in your community and around the world? Are you curious about where our biggest sources of climate pollution are in the community and what actions you can take to make a big difference? Read the Climate Backgrounder Series to learn more at www.saanich.ca/climateplan.

Join the One Planet Saanich Initiative

We are recruiting Saanich businesses, schools, community groups, and organizations to join the One Planet Saanich Initiative. One Planet Living is the vision of a world in which people enjoy happy, healthy lives within their fair share of the earth's resources, leaving space for wildlife and wilderness. Get support to become more sustainable, gain recognition, and make a difference in your community. Learn more and apply at www.oneplanetsaanich.org.

Access Rebates for Climate Action

Did you know that there are rebates available for shrinking your climate impact at home and on the road? Visit saanich.ca/rebates to learn more.

By Glenys Verhulst, Sustainability Planner, District of Saanich

Survey,
Backgrounders,
and More:
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Things soon will be **buzzing** along the Lochside Trail

By Francesca Loro, Stewardship Coordinator, Peninsula Streams Society and Lora Morandin, Pollinator Partnership Canada

If you've biked or walked along the Lochside Regional Trail past the Monkey Tree Pub and north of Cedar Hill Cross Road, you may have noticed the grassy field on your right. This weedy patch, situated next to Blenkinsop Creek and owned by BC Hydro, will be the site of a Garry Oak meadow restoration project this year, led by local stream and habitat restoration group Peninsula Streams Society.

Restoring the area with native plants will create a vibrant Garry Oak meadow full of pollinators such as butterflies and native bees that will benefit gardens, local agriculture, and the environment. In addition, this project will result in creation of a beautiful oasis of nature in the heart of the city, demonstrating how humans can interweave conservation within urban areas.

Clearing weeds and planting will begin in late summer 2018 under the guidance of native plant experts from Saanich Native Plants. Plants will be chosen that attract native bees and other pollinators, many of which are in serious decline. Native bees and other native pollinators rarely sting, are solitary (unlike non-native honey bees), and are essential for crop pollination and ecosystems. Stewards, including students from nearby Reynolds High School, will help monitor bees and other pollinators into the future, under the guidance of pollinator specialists from the Pollinator Partnership Canada. Maintenance, periodic mowing, weeding, watering and potential plant additions will be undertaken in subsequent years of the project.

Project support has been provided by the North Quadra Community Association, and funding from BC Hydro, the Province of BC, Victoria Real Estate Board, Donn Mann Excavating Ltd., Habitat Conservation Trust Fund (PCAF) and Greater Victoria Savings & Credit Union Legacy Fund.

For more information, to volunteer to the project:
<http://peninsulastreams.ca/blenkinsop> 250-363-6480
PeninsulaStreams@gmail.com



ON Meadowview Street



Carolyn Richman, Environmental Education Officer, District of Saanich

If you are reading *Our Backyard*, it may be that you have a young person (or a few!) in your life who might appreciate the children's storybook *On Meadowview Street* by Henry Cole (available at the Greater Victoria Public Library). This book embodies so many of the messages and projects highlighted in *Our Backyard* and is a joy to read for young and old.

The book's summary:

"Caroline lives on Meadowview Street. But where's the meadow? Where's the view? There's nothing growing in her front yard except grass. Then she spots a flower and a butterfly and a bird and Caroline realizes that with her help, maybe Meadowview Street can have a meadow after all."

I knew before I picked up the book what it was generally about, but I wasn't prepared to be so delighted by this story and how it unfolded.

Caroline's wonder and quiet stewardship starts with one flower in the otherwise monoculture lawn of her new home and quickly grows from there, illustrated with lovely watercolour images that bring to life the tone of the story. The exciting part of the book to me was how Caroline's project and yard inspired one neighbour after the other until Meadowview (formally sterile rows of mowed lawns) truly became a meadow-view neighbourhood, teeming with biodiversity.

Saanich Environmental Services saw first-hand over this last year how keen young Saanich residents are in the ideas brought to life in this book. We put together an interactive display for young people for a Canada 150 celebration Naturescape challenge – and it has been a big hit, sometimes with line-ups of children waiting to build their own naturescapes. Hopefully experiences like this and books like *On Meadowview Street* will continue to appeal and inspire families to consider what is possible in their own yards!

You can view a fun reading of the story via youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhy8SvmM6Vs>

THE BLACK AND YELLOW MUD DAUBER

(*SCELIPHRON CAEMENTARIUM*)

By Claudia Copley
Entomology Collection Manager at the Royal BC Museum

As an entomologist, I regularly hear about how scary people find animals like wasps and spiders. In fact, it would be difficult for me to say which group people dislike more. So I decided it was time to introduce everyone to a wasp that looks fearsome but will never bother you while you're having a barbecue and instead uses spiders exclusively to feed its young. Take that, spiders!

You may have already encountered Black and Yellow Mud Daubers; they are relatively common in urban areas and are widely distributed over their native range in North and Central America. They have also been accidentally introduced to many other regions of the world. They are solitary wasps that build nests out of mud that they attach in sheltered locations, including under the eaves of buildings.

While adult wasps drink nectar for energy, the larvae eat only spiders. The female wasp constructs mud cylinders, and in each tube of mud she lays a single egg at the far end. After the egg is laid, she goes hunting for spiders. When she

captures them, she only paralyzes them with her sting so that they remain fresh but harmless for the wasp's larvae to eat while it is growing inside the tube. Amazing! Each tube may have as many as 15 spiders in it, and the female wasp can construct as many as 25 tubes. That is a lot of spiders! The larva pupates inside the tube, and the next generation of spider hunters emerge.

Because these wasps only really use their venom to paralyze spiders rather than defend a communal nest, they have very weak stings. In truth, I have never met anyone who was stung by one.

You may value spiders as much as I do, but if you are in the other camp and want to encourage these spider-seeking wasps, then providing a bit of a muddy area in your landscape is the key. This has other garden benefits as well: the Blue Orchard Bee (also called Mason Bee) and many other native pollinators need a bit of mud to make their nests. Many birds also use mud to build their nests, and butterflies often "puddle" to obtain nutrients from the soil.



Cover: Great Horned Owl nestling. These owls are our largest common owl. They usually nest in very old Douglas-firs that have a broken top.
Photo: Cheryl Redhead

Back Page: Black and Yellow Mud Dauber collecting mud for nest (inset). The female wasp lays a single egg at the far end of each mud cylinder, and fills tube with as many as 15 paralyzed spiders.
Photo: Sean McCann



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