

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



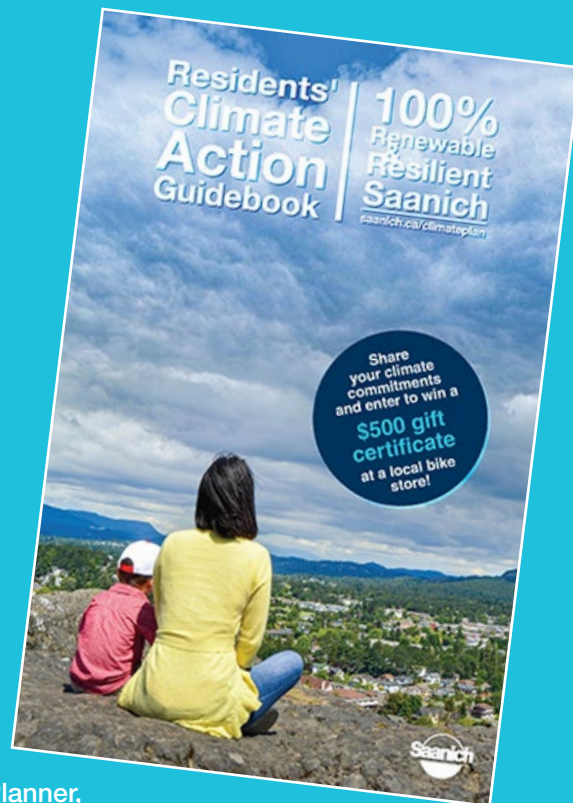
Volume 21 | Issue 2 | Summer 2020

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Saanich Residents are Taking Climate Action and Sharing their Stories

By Glenys Verhulst, Sustainability Planner,
the District of Saanich Planning Department



Are you part of the climate action momentum in Saanich?

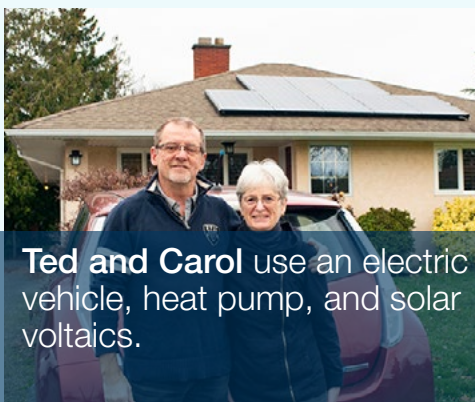
Visit the Saanich Climate Champions webpage to meet a few of your neighbours who are taking action on climate, and learn how to share your climate commitment too!



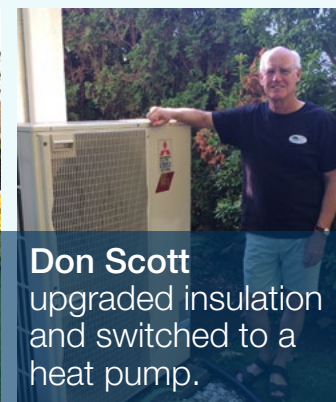
Tory Stevens cycles and drives an electric vehicle.



Wendy Smith upgraded from oil to a heat pump.



Ted and Carol use an electric vehicle, heat pump, and solar voltaics.



Don Scott upgraded insulation and switched to a heat pump.

If you're wondering how to get involved, check out the new Residents' Climate Action Guidebook (www.saanich.ca/climateplan).

The Guidebook helps you:

- learn about climate change and the new Saanich climate plan,
- identify the most effective things you can do,
- make a simple three-point personal climate action plan to reduce your climate impact and increase your resilience in a changing climate, and

- connect with the incentives and expert advice available to help.

Once you've done that, share your climate commitment with Saanich to be entered into a draw for \$500 at a bike store!

Visit www.saanich.ca/climateplan to get started!

Quick's Bottom Park Wildlife Habitat

By Jillian Tuson, Natural Areas Practitioner,
the District of Saanich Parks Division

This past winter, Quicks Bottom Park received a considerable upgrade for native pollinators and wildlife. The Park entrance off of Wilkinson Rd was planted with more than 110 trees, 250 shrubs, and thousands of native forbs and grasses. This planting and habitat boost was made possible with funds from the Wilkinson Rd upgrades from Travino to Greenlea Drive, paired with a Re-greening Grant from BC Hydro for 2020.

The idea for this restoration was to enhance the Park's setting and create better habitat for local birds, bees, chorus frogs, and other native wildlife found in this corridor. The entrance to the Park is now lined with a lovely split cedar rail fence and incorporates many new native tree groves that will support local wildlife. Working with the lay of the land, the parks department created a number of distinct features that bring interest and purpose to the park entrance.

To the west side of the entranceway we used a 'rough and loose' restoration technique. The first layer of trees were planted with Western Hemlocks, Big leaf Maples,

Douglas-fir, and Western Redcedar. The understory layer was planted with traditional understory shrubs such as Indigenous Plum and Ocean Spray. The future forest floor and perimeter was planted with herbaceous plants like Wild Strawberry, Western Buttercup, Stinging Nettle, Self-heal, and Pacific Sanicle. There are three raptor perches in the planting zone and plenty of large woody debris that will serve as shelter for smaller animals, and food for decomposers.

The eastern side has a newly created retention pond that catches the flow of water off the berm and driveway, and a rocky creek bed that will direct the flow of water to the drainage ditch. The in-stream and marginal zones of the creek bed are planted with water-loving Trembling Aspen, Western Redcedar, Birch, and an assortment of sedges, rushes, and grasses where wildlife can hide. Additionally there is Canada Goldenrod, Field mint, Cooley's Hedge Nettle, Woolly Sunflower, Yarrow, Douglas Aster and more for pollinators to forage in.



PULLING TOGETHER

Volunteer Feature

Karen Stackaruk

By Katie Turner,
Park Stewardship Coordinator,
District of Saanich Parks

Small actions add up. Bit by bit, each time Karen Stackaruk volunteers, she improves habitat for bees and butterflies. When we meet, Karen is patiently pulling unwanted weeds from the pollinator garden she initiated at Vantreight Park while keeping a close eye on the very tall stinging nettle patch that towers above.

Two years ago, Karen began stewardship activities in Vantreight Park where she “makes small changes”, to “enhance our natural environment”. At first sight this community park looks like a mowed field, but a closer look reveals pockets of mixed habitat throughout the park. Karen was initially inspired by the David Suzuki Foundation’s Butterfly Project to plant a native plant pollinator garden, and after conversations with Saanich

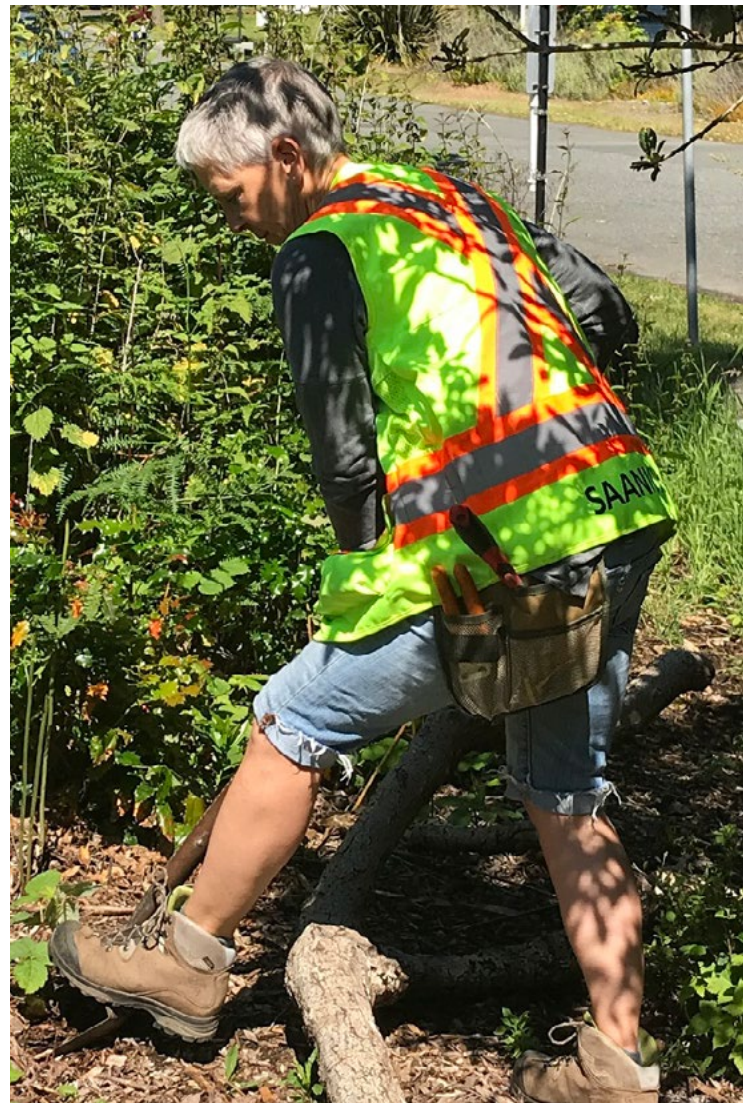
Parks, decided on a location in the park. What transpired was a small garden with big impacts.

Native pollinator- friendly plants such as Red-Flowering current, Yarrow, and Salmonberry were planted around an established cluster of Stinging Nettle.

Not only did Karen want to keep hummingbirds, bees, and other insects happy, but also “share this project with others in the community”.

Saanich Parks staff worked with Karen and organized a work party. Twenty neighbours, who previously didn’t know one

Did you know that stinging nettle is one of the most butterfly friendly plants of our region, with a couple species that seem to only lay their eggs on these nettles.



another, showed up to remove invasive plants, Himalayan Blackberry in particular, and eventually plant the pollinator garden. Karen reflects on this experience, and has observed that “visitors seem to care more about the park” when they see and experience community stewardship in action.

Towards the end of our visit, a neighbour sees us chatting by the pollinator garden, and asks what she can do to help. Small actions in Vantreight Park will feed and house thousands of essential pollinators, and as importantly, help to bring community together around this shared project. Thanks to Karen from the pollinators, from staff at Saanich Parks, and from the community for her volunteer contributions to the park.

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>

To learn about pollinator gardens, and other ways to actively enhance our natural world in Saanich: <https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/natural-intelligence.html>

Cuthbert Holmes Park Bullfrogs



By Karac Lindsay
World Fisheries Trust volunteer

Adult American Bullfrog

The American Bullfrog has often been termed “the most successful amphibian on the planet”. This title is not one of celebration, but instead a warning. Native to eastern North America, a demand for bullfrog meat in the early 20th century allowed the species to gain a foothold throughout the world and it has been spreading in parts of southern British Columbia for decades. Bullfrogs eat everything from native amphibians and fish to small ducklings and turtles, and carry chytrid fungus, a pathogen responsible for extremely high mortality rates in numerous amphibian populations worldwide.

Cuthbert Holmes Park in Victoria has been the site of a multifaceted wetland restoration project, leading to a successful rise in biodiversity in the area. In late May, one other volunteer and I were invited by Joachim Carolsfeld (Yogi), director of World Fisheries Trust, and Dorothy Chambers, environmental champion and long-time volunteer with *Salmon in the City*, to assist in the removal of “numerous bullfrogs” discovered in one of the area’s main storm-water runoff ponds. With the frogs’ breeding season around the corner, the recent increase in diversity was under threat.

Under the cover of darkness, armed with nets, fishing waders, and a few LED flashlights, we found and removed five bullfrogs in total. Only one of the frogs was female, but with egg clutches containing 1,000 -20,000 eggs, we were able to stop a potential outbreak. The increase in bullfrog populations throughout Vancouver Island puts hundreds of species at risk, and volunteerism has never been more important in stopping their spread. The hours spent tripping through the dark enduring numerous mosquito bites, bumps and scrapes was worth it: small victories like this are vital for the creatures that depend on these spaces in a natural world plagued by habitat loss, fragmentation, and overconsumption.



Maintaining Urban Trees With Wildlife In Mind

By Ryan Senechal
Saanich Resident, Arborist and Urban Forester

The inspiration for this article came when I returned home from my work to see a meticulously pruned Grand Fir (*Abies grandis*) a couple of doors down from my home. I had to hand it to the arborist that removed a senescing top back to live, healthy growth, as well as having removed every visible dead or dying branch in the entire crown. Grand Fir are quite stubborn to climb (for those that have had the chance), with small dead branches that are incredibly strong, making access to parts of the tree highly uncomfortable. Although Grand Fir in the region are noticeably declining and displaying concerning wood-strength loss not long after death in some cases, trees that are still living should be managed carefully to avoid excessive stress that might bankrupt a tree's resources.

Much of the tree care advice that is shared by professionals not only in this region, but throughout the modern tree care world is focused on removal of dead and dying tree parts (branches or whole trees). This focus is warranted if the tree poses a hazard to people and property. But managing trees by considering wildlife needs has come a long way, and, this may come as a surprise, the evidence is clear that the mechanical removal of dead and dying tree branches does not benefit tree health in most cases.

Dead and dying tree parts are a naturally occurring process that, depending on tree species, can be critical habitat for wildlife. Many other organisms co-evolved with trees and are dependent on the availability of dead and dying tree parts for part of their life cycle. Striking a balance between managing tree risk and retaining dead and dying tree parts is a growing capacity of arborists in the region, thanks to the Arboriculture, Wildlife Biology, Environmental Restoration and Research communities

collaborating to develop and share best practices. At the site level, effective wildlife enhancement techniques in urban and rural spaces is highly demanding on an arborist and requires a range of skillsets to balance tree safety with wildlife benefits. These skills include:

Regional species profile understanding – Some factors to consider in tree species profiles include how stable the tree parts are as they deteriorate and over what period of time, what fungi commonly colonize tree roots/trunk/branches and to what extent wood strength is degraded and over what period of time, and what insect populations might contribute to reduce wood strength over what period of time.

Wildlife utilization – What species of wildlife are reliant on what species of tree and what part of the tree? What function does that tree provide wildlife (nesting, perching, food source, protection, etc.)? What visual features catch the attention of wildlife? What physical dimensions are required for features (nesting hole entrances and cavity height/diameter), and what succession of species might utilize tree parts (primary cavity excavators, facultative excavators, non-excavating cavity-nesters, etc.)?

Tree risk assessment – Where trees and property intersect, an occupier of premises owes a duty that any person will be reasonably safe on or near the premises. A tree risk qualification is required for formal tree risk assessments in the Province of British Columbia, however, decisions to identify and mitigate tree risk may be made without a formal tree risk assessment in many scenarios by a qualified arborist that:

- a) complies with municipal tree protection bylaws;
- b) follows safe work procedures;
- c) meets industry best practices; and
- d) provides mitigation that effectively meets the property owner's risk tolerance.

Tree risk assessment done right will require an arborist that is trained, experienced, and qualified to estimate the likelihood of failure of a tree or its parts, the likelihood of those failures to reach people and/or property, and the significance of failure consequences.

Tree risk mitigation - Where identified risk is unacceptable for the property owner's risk tolerance,

Garry Oak primary branch failure remnants.





Brush stacks in winter and spring for forage and predator protection.

opportunities may exist for risk-reduction through modification of the tree or tree parts. This is where the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the technician can improve outcomes for tree risk management while retaining features that support local wildlife.

Opportunities to support biodiversity through keeping deadwood in-situ extend to the ground, although this is becoming increasingly challenged by generalized recommendations for prevention of wildfire risks at the wildland/urban interface. Fire Smart practices recommended by the Province of British Columbia create some clear conflicts for preserving dead and dying tree parts to decay over time in the canopy and on the ground, particularly within 10 m of occupied structures. Trunk sections left on the ground are broadly described as fuel in the fire prevention vernacular. This is an oversimplification in many cases that disregards key factors such as density and type of surrounding vegetation, species characteristics such as decomposition profile, presence of bark, and fire resistance characteristics, just to name a few. Where fire risks are low or moderate, retaining trunk sections standing with fine branches removed (wildlife snags) or on the ground not only stores carbon that might otherwise be burned for fuel or biomass releasing carbon dioxide



Douglas-fir dead tops: a raptor favourite.

and fine particulate matter, but also allows for gradual decomposition that supports wildlife and a myriad of other organisms, improves soil organic matter and soil nutrients, and can facilitate fungal networks that benefits ecological resilience.

Further to wildland/urban interface fire prevention recommendations made by the province, opportunities exist to support using fine branch material sensibly to benefit wildlife. I conduct much of the pruning at my home outside of the bird-nesting window and create brush stacks beginning in mid-winter that become structural protection from predators, and foraging areas for several species of birds. A period of drying usually occurs right outside the nesting period, which corresponds not only with the rising risk of fire but is also an off-peak time to haul all of the branches to the District of Saanich Garden Recycling yard.

Urban and rural trees are too often managed in a two-dimensional view, where aesthetics and low risk tolerances leave wildlife with fewer options to co-exist in built-up areas. Having regular visits from Bald Eagles, Cooper's Hawks, Northern Flickers, and Pileated Woodpeckers not only in Saanich natural areas and parks, but also in pockets of private urban forest is such a privilege that I hope can be maintained and improved upon for all of the community to benefit from.

Nature Therapy

in the Midst of a Pandemic



By Renee Cenerini, Education Program Manager, Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary has long been an oasis of calm for people of all ages. It was even more so during the last three months, when society at large was upended by the ramifications of a pandemic. The Sanctuary is more than a park and more than a not-for-profit. The staff, volunteers, many supporters, and visitors feel like family in this urban sanctuary. Swan Lake offers a little piece of nature right within the city.

During most of March through June, the Nature House was closed and all educational programs were temporarily suspended. This was hard for everyone involved with the Sanctuary since the Nature House is typically a hub for many visitors and families. Usually so full of life, the Nature House was eerily silent.

However, the land the Nature Sanctuary occupies continued on bursting with life. Birds kept on singing and raising their young, wildflowers kept blooming, and people continued to walk the trails around Swan Lake and up Christmas Hill to connect with nature and regain some sense of tranquility. The benefits of nature exposure are well documented and the trails of Swan Lake were certainly the setting for many sessions of nature therapy.

Operations are now gradually resuming with the Nature house currently open from 11 am to 3 pm Monday to Fridays and some educational programming restarting. We strive to continue our work to provide stewardship of Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, and to foster the community's understanding and appreciation of nature. And while for now, things are still a little different for the human visitors of the Sanctuary, it is still a place of calm that allows for connection with nature.



Saanich Pesticide Bylaw Update

The District of Saanich joined the majority of Canadian municipalities when the [Pesticide Bylaw](#) was adopted in 2010. The aim of the bylaw is to reduce the use of pesticides in residential areas of Saanich. The Pesticide Bylaw was updated in 2020 based on the provincial Integrated Pest Management Act to include more low-risk pesticides and to add clarity. Read the updated [Pesticide Bylaw Factsheet](#) at saanich.ca/pesticide.

The amended bylaw now has:

- An additional 22 pesticides that are considered safe alternatives for general residential use
- The removal of Rotenone from the list of safe pesticides to use
- An updated application form
- Clarifications and definitions to help interpret the bylaw

SAANICH'S PESTICIDE BYLAW

The Pesticide Bylaw was adopted by Saanich Council in 2010 and amended in 2020. This means that residential pesticide use is generally no longer permitted on lawns and gardens. Pesticide permits may be issued under special circumstances. The District of Saanich supports the "precautionary principle" regarding pesticides, being pro-active in reducing the possible threats to human health and the natural environment.

This brochure is only a summary of the Pesticide Bylaw. To view a copy of the bylaw in its entirety and learn about permits, pesticide alternatives, and more, visit www.saanich.ca/pesticide.

THE PESTICIDE BYLAW APPLIES TO:

- lawns, trees, shrubs, flowers, and other ornamental plants.
- single family homes, duplexes, townhouses, apartment buildings, and condominiums.

THE PESTICIDE BYLAW DOES NOT APPLY TO:

- the management of pests that transmit human diseases.
- agriculture (including residential areas of farms) or forestry.
- the inside of buildings.
- commercial, institutional, or industrial properties.

WHICH PESTICIDES CAN I USE WITHOUT A PERMIT?

- The full list of low-risk pesticides (Schedule "A" of the Pesticide Bylaw) is available on the District's website. If it is not on this list, a permit is required. More options for low-risk pesticides are now available.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR A PERMIT?

A person may apply for a permit for the use of pesticides that are not on the permitted list:

- to protect a sensitive ecosystem; reduce serious economic loss; or
- to control a noxious weed or an invasive species;
- when following the principles of Integrated Pest Management; and
- if the person applying the pesticides is a certified pesticide applicator.

www.saanich.ca/pesticide

WHAT ARE PESTICIDES?

"Pesticide" is a general term for any substance designed to prevent, destroy, repel, or mitigate unwanted organisms.

This includes insecticides (for insects), herbicides (for plants), and fungicides (for fungal diseases).

HOW IS THE BYLAW ENFORCED?

The use of pesticide products (unless listed in Schedule "A" of the bylaw) is not permitted on residential lawns and gardens. The first approach to bylaw infractions is educational. A second offence results in a warning ticket, and subsequent infractions will result in a fine. A person who commits an offence is liable to a minimum fine of \$250 and a maximum fine not exceeding \$10,000.

REPORTING AN OFFENCE:

If you are concerned about the possible application of a pesticide in a residential area, contact the District of Saanich Bylaw Office at 250-475-5456.

HOW CAN I AVOID USING PESTICIDES?

Be sure you have properly identified the pest and why the pest has become a problem. Think about:

- drainage (over watering, under watering, pooling)
- soil composition and nutrients
- proper lawn care (aerate, de-thatch, mow high, leave clippings on lawn)
- air circulation, spacing, pruning, thinning
- using native plants, located in the right place
- insect predators like birds and bats
- pulling weeds, installing weed barriers, landscape mulch and seeds, applying mulch, landscape

DISPOSAL OF PESTICIDES AND CONTAINERS:

ALWAYS

Transport pesticides in their original containers, with lids securely fastened and unmixed with any other product. There is no charge for dropping off pesticides at the depots listed in the column to the right (Alpine Recycling, Ellice Recycling, Hartland Landfill).

NEVER

Never flush pesticides down your toilet, sink, or storm drains. Do not put pesticides into the garbage, or septic systems, eventually leach out of the landfill, or your backyard, and contaminate the natural environment.

PERMITTED PESTICIDES

Product Name	INSECTICIDE	HERBICIDE	FUNGICIDE	FEEDBACK	OTHER
Alpine Group	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ellice Recycling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hartland Landfill	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

SAANICH ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
770 Vernon Avenue, Victoria BC V8X 2W7
250-475-5471 | planning@saanich.ca
www.saanich.ca/pesticide

ALPINE RECYCLING
1045 Dunford Ave • 250-474-5145
www.alpinegroup.ca

ELLICE RECYCLING
524 David St • 250-386-4342
www.ellicerecycle.com

HARTLAND LANDFILL
#1 Hartland Ave • 250-727-3331
www.ad.bc.ca

June 2020

The Pesticide Bylaw regulates that "no person may apply or otherwise use pesticides for the purpose of maintaining" the following: Outdoor trees, shrubs, flowers, ornamental plants, or turf, and the bylaw applies to both private and public lands. The bylaw does not apply to agricultural lands, inside buildings, commercial, institutional, or industrial properties.

It is important to note that despite recent changes to provincial legislation, Saanich does not permit residents to apply glyphosate themselves. A Pesticide Permit is needed and a Certified Pesticide Applicator must do the treatment.

Visit saanich.ca/pesticide for more information.

Understanding Yellowjacket Wasps

By Claudia Copley
Royal BC Museum Entomologist



This is the time of year when yellowjacket wasps (family Vespidae: subfamily Vespinae) become more apparent for a combination of reasons: we are eating and drinking outside more frequently, and, because they are social insects, their nests are getting larger and that means more larval wasps to feed.

It is easy to feel frustrated by these unwelcome guests at your picnic but it is important to keep a few things in mind:

- Yellowjacket wasps are predators - they feed their young the caterpillars and other insects that they capture, so they should be considered a beneficial insect in terms of keeping insect pests in check.
- A few species also eat carrion, which is why they are so keen when you are having a bbq. But there are approximately a dozen species of yellowjacket wasps in British Columbia, and the majority go after live insect prey.
- The sweet tooth that is also a hallmark of yellowjackets at a picnic is a bit more common - the adult workers use nectar (or sweetened drinks) for energy to go off hunting and this can be troublesome.

The familiar aerial nest made of paper is only typical of a couple of species in the region; most yellowjacket wasp species nest underground (or in other enclosed places) but still build a paper nest inside the enclosed area. It is only when we get too close to a nest that an alarm is sounded and the sisterhood of workers mount a united defence of their home, their queen mother, and the young wasps inside.

Wasps have no interest in people and are not aggressive towards us, so away from the nest, getting stung by a yellowjacket takes much more effort on our part. Stinging is a defensive response to being threatened in some way, so we do need to take care around them since they are well-armed! But if you can put aside your fearfulness and take time to watch them, you may witness them flying slowly back and forth looking for prey in your garden, or chewing off bits of wood to make paper for the nest. They are fascinating, beneficial, cooperative within the hive, and beautifully and dramatically colored to serve as a warning that they can protect themselves if need be.

Are Rats Worth the Poison?

By Adriane Pollard
Manager of Environmental Services

Spring seems to be the time of year when residents notice more rats lurking near sources of food and cover in our neighbourhoods. While 2020 may be The Year of Rat, Covid-19 may also play a role in this year's proliferation of rodents. There are local reports of rats venturing further afield due to fewer scraps generated by the food service industry. Piles of garden waste may also be a factor as municipal drop offs were temporarily closed.

Whatever the cause, managing the rat population in Greater Victoria will always be a reality and a responsibility of land owners. Urban rats are here because they arrived with humans from Europe and Asia. They are very successful at scavenging, surviving, and spreading. They are doing what they do best but it isn't always appreciated. The first line of defence is to change or get rid of what is attracting the rats on your property. But, despite your best efforts, you may find reducing their population is necessary.

Finding a method that is humane as well as safe for pets and wildlife is important. Humane standards for rat control do not include glue traps, poison, or other home remedies. Whether it is set up by yourself or a professional, a spring trap is the most humane and safe option but it is very important to ensure that wildlife, pets, and people are not inadvertently snapped. Tubing, locked boxes, confined spaces, and other methods are available.

As a society, using fewer pesticides (which includes rodenticides) has been identified as an important goal. Did you know that owls can be poisoned by eating a dying poisoned rat? Even if the product says it does not contain enough poison to effect wildlife, the poison can accumulate in the predator's body or cause symptoms that lead to the death of wildlife. Ironically, owls are very successful predators of rodents that should be encouraged—not poisoned. Other raptors, native wildlife such as Raccoons, and even our pets can become inadvertently poisoned.



Currently, local governments like Saanich do not have a role in regulating the sale or use of rodenticides, this has to happen at the provincial level. Saanich can, however, review our own practices and raise awareness about the issue of rodenticides. On Monday July 13 of this year, a unanimous council decision supported a ban on the municipal use of anticoagulant rodenticides and asked staff to educate the community on their harmful impacts. For more information on controlling rats both humanely and without risking wildlife, please visit these websites:

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/getting-rid-rodents>

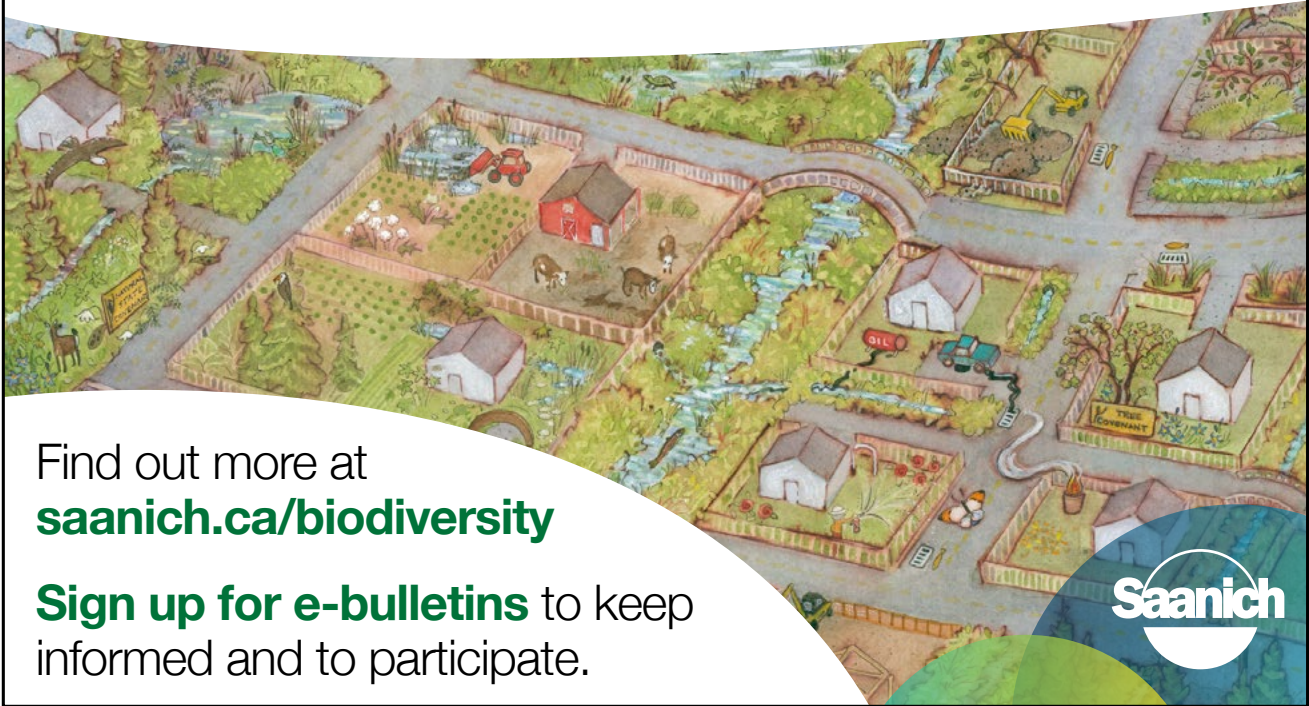
<https://spca.bc.ca/ways-to-help/take-action/urban-wildlife/humane-rodent-control/>



DISTRICT OF SAANICH

RESILIENT SAANICH

Saanich is developing an Environmental Policy Framework “*Resilient Saanich*”, which includes a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy.



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Keep 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. To subscribe, please send your contact information to the editor or visit saanich.ca/ourbackyard

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Photo Credit: Karac Lindsay. Mating Green Darners (*Anax junius*) at Cuthbert Holmes Park.