

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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In This Issue:

Of Pens and Cobs Placing Plants in the Ground, Before the Rains Come Down!
Oil to Heat Pump Incentive Program **Lead Steward Profile:** Judith Carder
Pulling Together Annual Recognition Event **Are You a Good Neighbour**
to Your Park **Urban Forest and Natural Areas** **Corner Events**



Of Pens & Cobs

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

With winter nipping at our heels, cold nights often find me snuggled deep into my down comforter. The downy feathers trap my body heat making me feel warm and cozy. This of course leads me to think about how down also helps many birds sleeping outside keep warm.

Despite our fairly balmy weather, especially when compared to the rest of the country, birds that overwinter here do need protection from the cold, often damp nights. One particular bird, the majestic Trumpeter Swan, makes its winter home in seasonally flooded wetlands and, with its thick layer of down, is almost impervious to the cold. They can in fact withstand long periods of time at temperatures as low as -30 degrees Celsius!

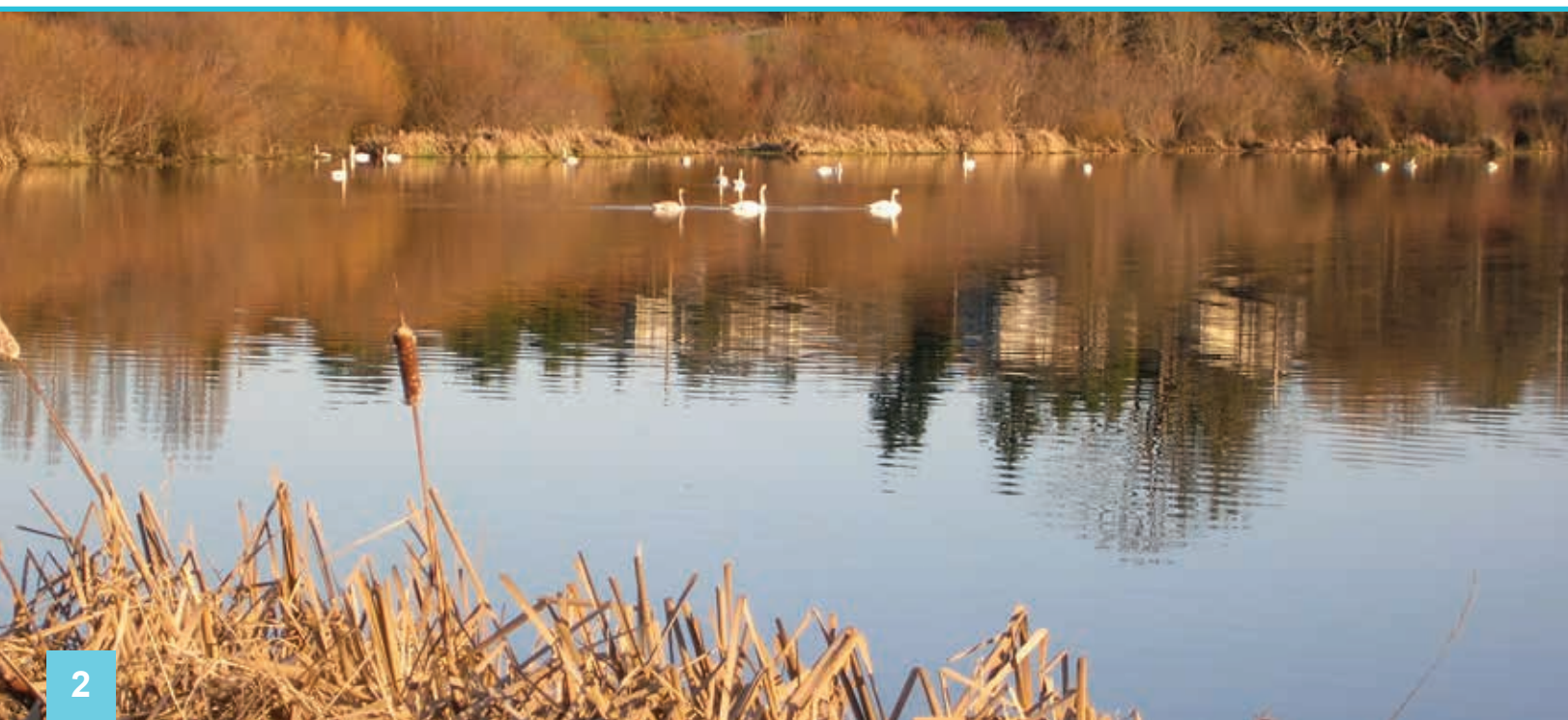
This large and handsome bird, with white feathers and black legs and feet, has a deep, resonant and yes, trumpet-like voice. The feathers on their head and the upper part of their neck often become stained orange from feeding in areas rich in iron salts. The average adult Trumpeter Swan may weigh 10 to 12 kilograms (the heaviest native bird in North America), stand 1.2 meters tall, and have a whopping 3 meter wingspan.

The Trumpeter Swan was hunted and harassed to such a point that by 1933 only 77 breeding pairs were left in Canada. Today their populations have rebounded considerably with over 16,000 individuals in the wild. They are now a familiar, and eye catching sight in wetlands and flooded farmer's fields, where they are engaged in one or other of my personal favorite activities, feeding or resting.

Feet are an important feeding mechanism for the swans. They use the powerful churning action of their webbed feet to free submerged roots and tubers from the mud. They have even been accused of creating bathtub sized craters in farmer's fields from this particular activity. Their feet also help maintain their balance while they are feeding up-ended in wetland habitats.

Here at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary, the swans usually make their appearance in December and January. Typically, during the early parts of winter the swans are often widely dispersed in both freshwater and estuarine wetlands but should temperatures drop to freezing they will congregate in the estuaries where the salt water and tides prevent freezing.

Oh and to those of you still wondering about the title – male swans are referred to as cobs and the females as pens. So next time a family member makes a particularly loud honking noise while blowing their nose be sure to tell them that they sound like a cob, or a pen!



Placing Plants in the Ground, Before the Rains Come Down!

By Jill Robinson, Habitat Acquisition Trust
www.hat.bc.ca

Hard-working grade six students have been diligently preparing the soil at Cedar Hill Middle School in order to welcome native flora back to the beautiful site surrounding their school. The thorny walls of Himalayan Blackberry that once towered over students and stunted the growth of native plants have been enthusiastically brought down. Through weekly efforts led by dedicated teachers, the students have pulled, plucked, and yanked out pesky English Ivy and Himalayan Blackberry root crowns that plagued the forest floor. Now, a clean slate has been created following the wake of students armed with shovels and snippers, presenting a hopeful future for native flora and fauna.

This parcel of land near Cedar Hill Middle School belongs to School District 61 and the District of Saanich and features a woodland, rocky outcrop, and remnant meadow with a variety of native plants species including Camas. A group of teachers committed to the long-term restoration of this site initiated an invasive plant removal project in 2014. With unwavering enthusiasm they have pushed the project into its second and now third year.

The aim of this project is to engage students in outdoor learning activities geared towards fostering an understanding and appreciation for endangered Garry Oak ecosystems and making positive ecological change in their own neighbourhood. Last spring and summer a number of efforts were made to remove the majority of invasive plants, and these continued with a new cohort of students in the fall.

Through a collaborative partnership with Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT), The District of Saanich, and the Directorate of Agencies for School Health (DASH), this new group of eager Cedar Hill students will begin the next stage of the restoration plan - planting!



With the guidance of Jill Robinson from Habitat Acquisition Trust, new pathways have been developed that weave through this Garry Oak restoration site with a dream of a thriving community of Camas, White Fawn Lily, and Sea Blush in its future. With additional help from native plant experts Kristen and James Miskelly, 40 grade six students will place seeds, bulbs and small shrubs into the fertile soil. All hands are on deck with further help and support of this community effort coming from The District of Saanich's *Pulling Together* volunteers. Together this team of passionate individuals will work to provide students with lessons on proper planting techniques, best practices for invasive removal, and best of all, a love and appreciation for natural habitat in their own backyard.

Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT), a non-profit regional land trust, supported this event through their free outdoor learning program, *Green Spots*, bringing hands-on natural science learning full-circle from outdoor experiences in park settings to outdoor classrooms on school grounds.



Oil to Heat Pump Incentive Program Making an Impact in Saanich

By Mark Boysen, Sustainability Coordinator, District of Saanich

Saanich residents are taking action by upgrading from oil heating to efficient electric air source heat pumps through the Oil to Heat Pump Incentive Program. The program offers \$1,700 in funding from the B.C. Ministry of Energy and Mines' Innovative Clean Energy (ICE) Fund and is administered by City Green Solutions, a non-profit energy efficiency organization. Saanich and the CRD have added an additional \$300 to the incentive, providing Saanich residents with an incentive opportunity of \$2,000 to help lower their heating bills and reduce household greenhouse gas emissions.

Saanich already has the greatest number of participants in the program so far, which is great as it is estimated there are 6,000-8,000 oil tanks in the Municipality. Up to 20% of Saanich homes still use heating oil to heat their homes. Now heating oil tank owners are looking for alternatives due to the potential for oil leaks to homeowner properties and the environment, and the high carbon footprint of heating oil.

When there is a leaking oil tank, Saanich Public Works are there to help residents stop the spill and assist with the clean up when it reaches the environment. Spill response contractors are available to assist with cleanup on private properties. Over the last four years there have been numerous spill events, which costs the homeowner and the Municipality. "An oil to heat pump upgrade is one of the most important

things we can do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from existing homes. Participating homes' typical carbon reductions will be better than taking a car off the road for 15 years," explains Glenys Verhulst, Oil to Heat Pump Program Manager.

"Heat pumps are very efficient home heating systems because they use only a small amount of electricity to move a large amount of heat, to provide comfortable temperatures in the home year-round. An oil to heat pump upgrade will reduce a typical home's energy bills by \$1,300 to \$2,700 every year, and will eliminate the risk of costly damage to air, soil, and waterways from home heating oil leaks," adds Verhulst.

To qualify, homeowners must install a qualifying central or mini-split heat pump and remove their oil tank and oil heating system. Incentives are available on a first-come, first-served basis while funds last.

To learn more, or to register for the Oil to Heat Pump Incentive Program, visit www.oiltoheatpump.ca or call 1.877.545.6247.



Oil to Heat Pump

INCENTIVE PROGRAM



Additional Top-Ups
for residents of the
CRD and Saanich.
Learn more at
www.crd.bc.ca/oil-to-heat

Upgrade from Oil Heating to a Heat Pump

Access Incentives

- » Up to \$1700 per home
- » Plus additional \$150 top-up for CRD residents
- » Plus additional \$150 top-up for Saanich residents

Save Energy and Money

- » Shrink heating bills by 40% to 75%
- » Affordable heating and cooling

Better For The Environment

- » More greenhouse gas savings than not driving your car for 15 years!
- » Reduce the risk of your oil tank leaking into the soil and water bodies

About

The Oil to Heat Pump Incentive Program is funded by the Ministry of Energy and Mines' Innovative Clean Energy (ICE) Fund and is administered by City Green Solutions. In 2016, the CRD is offering 125 additional first-come, first-serve Top-Up incentives of \$150 each to CRD residents participating in the Provincial program to help them avoid costly oil spills and save energy. The District of Saanich is offering an additional \$150 incentive to Saanich residents.

What's a Heat Pump?

Heat pumps provide clean and affordable comfort year-round. Heat pumps efficiently and effectively heat your home because they only use a small amount of electricity to move a large amount of heat into your home. They also work in reverse in the summer to provide cooling by removing heat from inside your house.



Funded by:



Get Started Today

oiltoheatpump.ca
1.877.545.6247
info@oiltoheatpump.ca

Lead Steward Profile

Judith Carder

Lead Steward Chatterton Hill

By Jenny Eastman, Coordinator of Volunteers
Saanich Pulling Together Volunteer Program

Growing up in Cordova Bay, Judith Carder remembers Rithet's Bog, but not Chatterton Hill, which was isolated when the Pat Bay Highway was established near the bog. After graduating with a BSc. in Biology, she began her career with the provincial government, returning to UVic to complete a diploma in Restoration of Natural Systems. Encouraging a collaboration between Saanich and UVic, she became a Site Steward for Chatterton Hill Park. It has now been fifteen years that Judith has studied and worked at this park. The results are dramatic.

Initially, the park was covered in dense Scotch Broom and Himalayan Blackberry, but now an open Camas meadow, wildflower bluffs, and Garry Oak groves prevail. "Working in partnership with Saanich has been beneficial. I value the sense of belonging and place I receive from working at Chatterton Hill. Every visit instills marvel and connectedness."

Judith volunteers for many organizations including: Early Music Society of the Islands, Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society, Ancient Forest Alliance, and Aboriginal Neighbours. Judith credits her parents for a love of the natural world along with compassion for others. "We went for a walk in nature every Sunday with my Dad (agrometeorologist and big tree expert, Al Carder)", she recalls. "He showed us the intricacies of nature, taught us to appreciate the beauty and understand our part in it". Judith also spent five years working in Chiapas Mexico, supporting social justice work before and after the Zapatista uprising. She is also an avid traveller, exploring new places and always mindful of the degradation of earth's natural landscapes and how fortunate we are to have intact wilderness in BC.

As an agrologist with the Provincial Invasive Plant Program, Judith's life is filled with work and volunteering that supports the ecosystems she cares about and allows her to express her gratitude for the natural places that sustain us all. Says Judith, "Chatterton Hill has long been in my life, but now I am directly connected to it, enhancing my life with wonder and learning!"



Annual Recognition Event

By Jenny Eastman, Coordinator of Volunteers
Saanich *Pulling Together* Volunteer Program

Thank you Volunteers! In November, 70 *Pulling Together* Volunteer Program volunteers met at the Cedar Hill Golf Course to be recognized and thanked for the more than 13,000 hours they gave toward park ecosystem restoration in 2015.

Volunteers of all ages and abilities are involved in ecological restoration in more than 45 parks in ecosystems ranging from creeks, Garry Oak outcrops, bogs, Coastal Douglas-fir forests and more.

Volunteers heard presentations by:

- Kristen Miskelly of Saanich Native Plants: Restoration at Haliburton Organic Farm
- *Pulling Together* Volunteer Colleen O'Brien: Restoring the Garry Oak meadow at Playfair Park.
- *Pulling Together* Volunteer Dave Lock: Engaging Schools in Restoration in Saanich parks.
- Eva Riccius: Saanich Parks, Senior Manager delivered thanks to the volunteers.

Staff also gathered input from volunteers about how the *Pulling Together* program can best support their work and future directions for the program.

Our heartfelt thanks to our volunteers who share their valuable time with Saanich Parks. For more information about volunteering in the parks you care about visit us at saanich.ca/pullingtogether

Are you a Good Neighbour to your Park?

By Jenny Eastman, Coordinator of Volunteers
Saanich *Pulling Together* Volunteer Program

When your neighbour is a park, you can't drop off cookies to show you care. How can neighbours help care for the parks and natural areas in Saanich?

In more than 45 parks in Saanich, staff and volunteers with Saanich's *Pulling Together* Volunteer Program are at work caring for park ecosystems. Some neighbours come lend a hand at *Pulling Together* work parties, some stop by and ask what we're up to and offer encouragement. Read on to learn what you can do to help your neighbouring parks (with thanks to Habitat Acquisition Trust).

How to be a Good Neighbour to a Park:

- Dispose of yard & garden waste in a compost bin, or at the Saanich yard (never dump in the park).
- Protect and plant native species, provide a water feature, extend the habitat of the park into your yard.
- Help out at work parties in the park to remove invasive species and plant native ones.
- Learn more about your green space and spread the word about protecting habitat.
- Remove exotic invasive plants and animals from your property.
- Practice efficient irrigation and drought-tolerant planting.
- Eliminate the use of synthetic fertilizers, and compost and mulch fallen leaves and twigs.

So what is in it for you as a landowner?

Living adjacent to a natural area can do wonderful things for you, your health, and your property values. Here is a sampling:

- Increase property values.
- Boost your health on many fronts.
- Cool in summer, provide windbreak/insulation in winter.
- Absorb air and noise pollution.
- Relax us with the sights and sounds of nature.

Everyone is welcome to join in at *Pulling Together* Volunteer Program work parties. And yes, we'll provide cookies for you. To find out if volunteers are active in your park, or for more information visit us at saanich.ca/pullingtogether

Urban Forestry & Natural Areas Corner

By Andrew Burger, Saanich Parks

Tree Appreciation Day 2015 A Great Success!

On November 8th 2015 Saanich Parks partnered with the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society, Capital City Allotment Association, and the Friends of Swan Creek to plant more than 1200 native shrubs and trees in two restoration areas in our parks.

With the great work of more than 110 volunteers from the partners, general public, and a strong showing from Camosun College's Environmental Technology program, all 1200 plants were in the ground and mulched in less than two hours. The plantings were within creek improvement projects on both Douglas Creek and the section of Swan Creek that runs through the allotment gardens.

The plantings were part of larger projects to enhance the habitat quality and stormwater capacity of the creek systems. The extensive work also helps to improve the health of the creeks and prevent future bank erosion.

As the saying goes, many hands make light work! Thanks to all who were involved to make this event a great success and help improve Saanich's natural areas.



Volunteers making a difference in Mount Douglas Park



Volunteers hard at work on Swan Creek at the Capital City Allotment Gardens

Barrie Road Tree Replacement Project Update

Following the removal of hazardous and inappropriate tree species along Barrie Road in Gordon Head, Saanich Parks replanted a total of 56 trees using more suitable species in improved locations. Adhering to the principle of planting the right tree in the right place, smaller growth boulevard trees were planted beneath the BC Hydro power lines while medium and large size trees were strategically planted adjacent to the lines to avoid any future conflict. High-quality, large-stock specimens were used to provide an immediate impact to the look and feel of the road.

The trees were planted in groupings to blend in with the existing canopy and boulevard landscapes. The new trees range in size, color and texture to give a balanced appearance to the new streetscape and provide a strong prominence of conifers; maintaining the heritage country look of the area.

All trees were planted with mulched tree wells, and staked according to Saanich and British Columbia Landscape & Nursery Association standards. This will help maintain the structural integrity and healthy growth of the trees. All affected areas of the boulevard were landscaped with new topsoil, graded, and over seeded with Saanich's boulevard grass mix to re-establish the lawn areas.



Upcoming Events

Saanich Recreation Trails & Treks

www.saanich.ca/parkrec/parks/trails/index.html
250-475-5408

Sunday Hikes (FREE Drop-In)

Sundays | 1 pm to 3:00 pm

Discover the beauty of the Saanich parks right in your backyard. These FREE guided hikes are open to adults of all ages. No registration necessary just drop in at the appropriate time and meeting place. Please wear sturdy and supportive footwear. Carry drinking water. Walks go rain or shine. Leashed, well socialized dogs are welcome unless indicated nature sanctuaries.

Jan 24 - Cadboro Bay to Ten Mile Point

Meet at Cadboro Bay Gyro Park parking lot, end of Sinclair Rd.

Feb 21 - Lochside, Colquitz, & Swan Creek Trails

Meet on Lochside Trail, behind Saanich Municipal Hall, end of Darwin

Mar 20 - Lambrick Park to Bow Bark

Meet at Gordon Head Rec Centre, main doors, off Feltham Rd.

Gentle Walk & Talk (FREE Drop-In)

Thursdays | 9:30 am to 11 am

Enjoy beautiful scenery, a friendly chat, and gentle exercise as we walk through our parks & trails. Suitable for all walking abilities, but wear suitable footwear. Dogs not permitted.

Mar 3 - Cedar Hill to Peacock Hill

Meet in Cedar Hill Parking Lot outside front entrance

Mar 10 - Gorge Waterway Park

Meet at Gorge Waterway, near Canoe Club, end of Tillicum Rd

Mar 17 - Hyacinth Park & Colquitz Trail

Meet at Hyacinth Park parking lot, 900 Marigold Ave off Interurban

Mar 24 - Beckwith to Maltwood to Stoneywood

Meet at Beckwith Park parking lot, on Beckwith, off Quadra

Mar 31 - Bow Park

Meet at Gordon Head Rec Centre, 4100 Lambrick Way, off Feltham

CRD Parks & Environmental Services

<http://crd.bc.ca/parks-events> 250-478-3344

Our naturalists lead guided walks, hikes, canoeing, and drop-in events for all ages. Most are free, all are fun! The Parks Nature Outings and Events brochure can be found on the website.

Grow a Native Plant Garden Workshop

Saturday, January 30 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

Saturday, February 13 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

Sunday, February 21 12:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Saturday, March 12 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

Wednesday, March 30 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

Swan Lake Nature House (3873 Swan Lake Road)

Residents of the Capital Region are invited to participate in a FREE workshop on gardening with drought-resistant native plants. Instruction on native plant identification, their benefits, and how to use them will be covered. Pre-registration is required by calling 250-479-0211.

Certified Irrigation Technician Level 2 Landscape Course – (Course)

March 16 & 17 - Full 2-day course

Capital Regional District, Victoria, BC

In an effort to promote water conservation and the design and installation of efficient irrigation systems, the CRD in partnership with the Irrigation Industry Association of BC are offering contractors in the Capital Regional District the IIABC's Certified Irrigation Technician - Level 2 Landscape Course. Pre-requisite is CIT Level 1. Please contact the IIABC for course information www.irrigationbc.com 604.859.8224

Moss Landscapes of Vancouver Island (Guided Adult Walk)

Saturday, February 13 | 10am to 12:30pm (18 years+)

Francis/King Regional Park Nature Centre (Saanich)

Join guest CRD Regional Parks naturalist, Kem Luther to learn how to identify the most common species. \$7/person + GST.

Pre-registration required by February 11. Call 250.478.3344.

Going Batty! (Drop-in Event)

Friday, February 19 | 11am to 2pm

Bear Hill Regional Park (Saanich)

Drop into the Nature Centre between 11am and 2pm and discover the world of bats! Enjoy a "bat walk" through the park at 11:15am and 1pm with CRD Regional Parks naturalists.

Compost Education Centre

1216 North Park Street

compost.bc.ca 250-386-WORM (9676)

Grow Your Own Oyster Mushrooms

Saturday, January 30 | 2 pm to 4 pm

This workshop will offer an introduction to the amazing world of mushrooms and cover what you need to know to grow your own mushrooms where you live. We'll each inoculate a gallon bucket of oyster mushrooms to take home.

Composting Basics (FREE)

Saturday, February 6 | 10 am to 12 pm

Saturday, March 5 | 10 am to 12 pm

Learn all the basics of composting and discover which system is right for you!

Native Pollinators

Saturday, February 27 | 2 pm to 4 pm

Learn about the diversity of our native pollinators, and why they are superior pollinators for our native flora. Once you know how native bees behave and their life-cycles, you will learn about the type of nesting and foraging habitat that will encourage them in your area.

Worm Composting (FREE)

Saturday, March 12 | 10 am to 12 pm

Everything you need to know about vermicomposting, starting up and maintaining a worm bin compost system.

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary

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

Guided Bird Walks (Drop-In)

Every Wednesday and Sunday | 9:00 am

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

Duck Day (Drop-in Event)

Sunday, January 31 | 12 pm to 3 pm

Some dabble on the surface, some dive for their food – we'll explore the amazing adaptations ducks have for living on the lake and discover who's who in the duck world.

Raccoons are Wild (Drop-in Event)

Sunday, February 28 | 12 pm to 3 pm

Discover the world of this masked bandit. Are they really bandits or just wonderfully adapted for living in our urban environment? This event will feature the "Way Cool Raccoon School" puppet show, crafts and hands-on exploration. Admission by donation.

Victoria Natural History Society

Visit www.naturevictoria.ca for more programs

Natural History Night (every 2nd Tuesday)

Urban Deer | Tues, Feb 9, 7:30 pm

UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Botany Night (every 3rd Tuesday)

Paleo-environments of SW BC | Tues, Jan 19, 7:30 pm

The biodiversity of Pink Mountain | (Tues, Feb 16, 7:30 pm)

Swan Lake Nature Centre

Birder's Night (every 4th Wednesday)

Bhutan Birding | Wed, Jan 27, 7:30 pm

Conservation of Marine Birds | Wed, Feb 24, 7:30 pm

UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Marine Night (last Monday of the month)

Resurrecting a Bird Sanctuary | Mon, Jan 25, 7:30 pm

Marine Citizen Science & Climate Change | Feb 29, 7:30 pm

UVic Fraser Building, Room 159

Saturday Morning Birding (most Saturdays)

Meets every Saturday morning, usually between 7 and 8 a.m., rain or shine. Check the Calendar page of the VNHS website (www.vicnhs.bc.ca/website/index.php/calendar) on the Thursday/Friday before to find out the week's location. Novice and experienced birders welcome. Non-members can participate up to three times.

Valentine Couples Birdathon (Everyone is welcome!)

Sunday, February 14

What better way for bird-loving couples to mark Valentine's Day than to get outdoors for a half-day of fresh air and good birding in the annual VNHS Valentine Birdathon. This friendly competition is open to couples of all skill levels; participants can go about their business by car, bicycle or on foot. The \$10-per-couple entry fee goes entirely to supporting VNHS conservation projects. To register for the event contact Alan MacLeod at bigadore@gmail.com.

The Native Plant Study Group

www.NPSG.ca 250-598-1999

The Native Plant Study Group meets at the University of Victoria, the third Thursday of each month (except December). Join us for dynamic speakers and discussions relating to native plants of our area. (No experience required, just an interest in native plants and their habitats!)

Enlichenment

Thursday, January 21, 7 pm

UVic, MacLaurin Bldg, Rm D116

Enlichenment will explore the many forms and uses of lichen through the years. Kiersten Brookes will identify lichen, how and where they grow, and explain their importance as air quality indicators. Strawberry Vale School has been home to this study since 2012 and has resulted in grade five student photographs being used on UBC's eFlora website. Expect to see many varieties of lichen on display. Non-member drop-in fee: \$5. Students: FREE.

INVASIVE SEASON BEGINS

If you started wondering where all those weeds in your garden suddenly came from, you are not alone. It means it is the season to start watching for and dealing with high priority invasive species in the region. The public's help is needed at this time of the year to report and help deal with these invaders.

Lesser Celandine

One of the earliest priority invaders is Lesser Celandine, which starts to grow in late winter in our region. It forms a dense groundcover eliminating native plants and impacting wildlife. It is toxic to most mammals and can be dangerous for livestock.

Check out the alert sheet to help identify Lesser Celandine as it begins to flower in February. This alert sheet is one in a series that help identify some of our priority invaders in the region and can be found at www.saanich.ca/invasives.





Trumpeter Swans arrive in big numbers in November and remain until March. About 500 spend the winter in the Greater Victoria area at locations like Viaduct Flats in Saanich. Cover Photos Marie O'Shaughnessy

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