

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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Cover photo: Braefoot Park



Fundraising Success: Replacement of the Elk Lake Fishing Dock

By Mick Collins, Victoria Golden Rods and Reels Fishing and Social Club

Photos: Elk Lake Dock

Elk Lake is the most heavily fished lake on Vancouver Island; supporting 15,000-18,000 angler days annually. The old dock officially opened in 1996 and was installed by the Capital Regional District (CRD) Parks in cooperation with Victoria Golden Rods and Reels (GR&R). The 26 year-old wooden dock was declining in safety, prompting the Club to join Saanich resident Dirk Mitchell in a campaign to replace it with a safer, more accessible dock.

The CRD Parks budgeted \$125,000, 50% of the estimated \$250,000 replacement cost. GR&R agreed to coordinate raising the additional \$125,000, partnering with World Fisheries Trust and the Rotary Club of Saanich on three funding applications.

An application was submitted to Pacific Economic Development Canada (PacifiCan) by World Fisheries Trust on behalf of the partner organizations, and with support from Power to Be, Spinal Cord Injury BC, and the Rotary Club of Saanich. This application was approved, and the project received \$109,000 in funding from PacifiCan's Canada Community Revitalization Fund. Community support and the dock design package were important components in the application.

Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC (FFSBC) contributed \$25,000 and they continue to stock about 18,000 rainbow trout in Elk and Beaver Lake annually. The Rotary Club of Saanich also provided a \$1,000 donation bringing the total funds raised to \$135,000.

The new metal dock, manufactured and installed in September 2022 by Jenkins Marine Ltd., ensures many years of enjoyment. Fishing is an inexpensive way for people of all ages and abilities to connect with the outdoors. As spring approaches and the water warms up, come on down and join the welcoming anglers at the new dock.

The Club received the Saanich Environmental Award for volunteer organization in 2016 for its work in improving aquatic ecosystem health at Elk/Beaver Lake. You can learn more about GR&R at:

www.goldenrodsandreels.com





Bird Surveys and Nest Boxes in Cedar Hill Park

By Peter Haddon, <https://friendsofcedarhillpark.com/>

Photo: Nest Boxes

Birdlife International's most recent *'State of the World's Birds'* report found 49% of species in decline and one in eight under threat of extinction, so our communal efforts to increase the number and quality of protected areas, conserving remaining habitats, and restoring those that have been degraded are more important than ever. Climate change is also affecting bird populations. On a more positive note, the Greater Victoria Christmas Bird Count tallied 83,000 birds of 138 species. How can we ensure their health and continuing well-being?

Over the past five years, the Friends of Cedar Hill Park (FCHP) have undertaken a quarterly bird survey in the Park and, in 2021, worked together with Cedar Hill Golf Course and Parks staff and *Pulling Together* volunteers to build and install 16 new boxes for swallow, chickadee, and wren nesting. Although the entrance holes are designed to discourage the introduced House Sparrow from taking up residence, an industrious woodpecker worked over many

days to enlarge the hole in one of the boxes. These new additions to the Park have generated considerable interest among volunteers, staff, and park visitors young and old. Most boxes are hidden in the more densely forested corners of the park. However, a few are quite visible to people using the popular Chip Trail around the park. School age children have been keeping track of which boxes are being used and we will add more over time.

Friends of Cedar Hill Park's bird surveys are posted to their website for anyone interested. At last count (December 2022) there were 38 species and a total of 998 birds counted. If you would like more information, plans, installation instructions, and ideas please visit the District of Saanich Naturescape Page at: www.saanich.ca/naturescape



Restoration Spotlight: LAYRITZ PARK

By Maddy Litster, Natural Areas Practitioner, Saanich Parks

Photo: Garry Oaks at Layritz Park

Layritz Park may be known primarily for its sports fields, but just off the gravel path lies a small swath of Garry Oak woodland ripe with beauty and potential. Tucked within the oaks are vibrant purple pockets of Great Camas, a rocky outcrop blanketed in stonecrop, and a grand canopy of Garry Oak trees covered in lichen.

Funded by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure through mitigation funds, this one and a half acre Garry Oak woodland is the site of a ten-year restoration project at Layritz Park to remove invasive plants, plant a plethora of native species, and create an educational meadow buffer showcasing restoration techniques and an array of native wildflowers. To tie it all together, a new trail with post and rope fencing will be built along the meadow buffer to provide enjoyment of the meadow and perhaps hear the familiar cry of Red-tailed Hawks - one of the many species that call this woodland home.

Work has already begun to clear areas of Himalayan Blackberry, Common Hawthorn, and invasive grasses from the site. So far, 157 hawthorn trees and close to 350 m² of blackberry have been removed from the woodland.

A strange sight you may come across at Layritz are patches of black plastic laid across the ground. This is a restoration technique called smothering and is used to passively remove invasive grasses. Without sunlight, the grass and weed seeds cannot grow or germinate, leaving a bare site for the camas to grow unrestricted. Where invasives have been cleared, native plants like Great Camas have been seeded and planted.

Off-site, at the Saanich Parks nursery, Saanich's Natural Areas staff have been busy collecting seed from various species at Layritz, and propagating them to then plant back into the woodland. By collecting the seed from plants already at the site, staff help maintain the genetic diversity of the area and propagate plants that we know are well adapted to that environment. So far, twenty-four different species have been sown and await planting in the spring and fall.



Photos: 'Before' and 'after' invasive removals, during restoration work



Saanich Parks *PULLING TOGETHER* Volunteer Program

By Glenn Bartley (*Pulling Together* lead steward volunteer) and Katie Turner (Park Stewardship Coordinator), Saanich Parks

Photo: Glenn and his partner Ananda cleaning up after a work party

"Glenn Bartley and Ronna Woudstra are Pulling Together Lead Stewards in Browning Park. They are committed to restoring sites along Bowker Creek as it flows through the park, and have done an incredible job of engaging neighbours and working with Parks staff on this project!"

What do you enjoy most about volunteering with Saanich Parks?

For me it's mostly about trying to make positive contributions to our local environment. If we can create habitat for a few butterflies, birds, and bees it is all worth it! One of the fantastic side benefits of volunteering has been meeting so many more neighbours and getting to know them through *Pulling Together*. It is great to have more friends around the neighbourhood!

Tell us about one of your most memorable experiences volunteering?

At one of our first work parties we had a fantastic turnout with people from all ages (5 - 80) all working away together to remove invasives. While we were pulling away, an older couple walking by made sure to stop and tell us how much they appreciate the work we were doing

and that they have been walking through the park for 30 years!

Tell us a bit about yourself?

My day job is as a professional wildlife photographer. I specialize in photographing birds from all over the world and travel quite a bit (www.glennbartley.com). When I'm not on the road I'm usually working on my own native plant garden, fixing up my house, or building my next piece of furniture. I actually have a Master of Science degree in ecological restoration from UVic but have never worked in the field. So it is nice to be finally working on a restoration project!

Glenn and Ronna lead work parties and they welcome helpers. For more information about the Pulling Together Volunteer program [Volunteer for Pulling Together | District of Saanich](#) or to join a work party [Events Calendar | District of Saanich](#).

UNDER THE OAKS: Community-Based Ecological Restoration in Braefoot Park

By Katie Turner, (Park Stewardship Coordinator), Saanich Parks and all of those who helped with the project: Ryan Senechal, Ray Lett, Deborah Linelle, Bradly Cunningham, John Harris, Saanich Parks Natural Areas staff and the wonderful students of Braefoot and Reynolds schools

Most know Braefoot Park as a sports hub: cheering from the sidelines while teams battle it out on the soccer field or baseball diamond. These are important social activities that contribute to our healthy and vibrant community. Tucked into the corners of Braefoot Park is activity of a different kind. In several pockets of natural habitat you can hear bird song, see big trees and occasionally the bright vests of *Pulling Together* volunteers hard at work.

A recent project in Braefoot Park highlights how community based ecological restoration can restore ecosystem services and wildlife habitat while giving community volunteers an opportunity to improve their neighborhood greenspace and build meaningful relationships with the land and with each other.

Volunteers and Saanich Parks staff planned the project together. Preparation by staff involved turf removal and mulching, while volunteers assisted with invasive species management. On a snowy November day, volunteers, students from Braefoot Elementary and Reynolds Secondary, and Parks staff gathered to plant and install a bat box.

Gratitude to John Harris for reminding us of the importance of acknowledging our ancestors and the traditional territories that we live on, and for sharing the teaching Uy'skwuluwun - a Hul'q'umi'num' term emphasizing the relationship between our minds and hearts - or Eyē? Sqā'lewen (pronounced Eye. sh-KWAW-leh-win) - a Lkwungen term shared by Elder Elmer George that refers to a "good heart, good mind, and good feelings" - the experience we hope to achieve in our work together.



Photos: Ecological restoration at Braefoot Park

"I was really impressed by the hard work of all involved in the Braefoot Park restoration project last Tuesday. The Saanich crew, volunteers, and the two school groups did an outstanding job to help establish the protected area around the Garry Oak. Also, my thanks to John Harris for our gathering before work began to remind us of the importance of respecting our ancestors & the traditional land we live on. Thanks again - Ray (*Pulling Together* lead steward volunteer)



"I'm still riding the waves of such an uplifting day. Thanks again to everyone for making this so fun for everyone involved, including the Saanich Natural Areas staff that got in ahead of us with all those preparations. It was a pleasure to meet you John and Debbie and I hope we might collaborate again sometime soon. I've attached a few photos as well including the obligatory before/after shot".
- Ryan (*Pulling Together* restoration volunteer)



Before and after shots (thanks to Ryan Senechal *Pulling Together* restoration volunteer). There will be more plantings to come.

Like many natural areas within urban landscapes, there is always work to be done managing invasive species and restoring native biodiversity. In line with the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2020-2030), Saanich Parks is committed to working with community to restore habitat biodiversity, including habitats adjacent to identified mature Garry Oak trees. Not only is this work restorative for ecosystems but it helps reestablish our human connection to the land that sustains us.

To learn more about ecosystem restoration in Saanich Parks and how you can help, visit:

<https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/natural-areas.html>

Check out the new Saanich Naturescape booklet ([saanich.ca/naturescape](https://www.saanich.ca/naturescape)) to learn how to restore native biodiversity and wildlife habitat at home.



MeadowMakers: Community Creating Habitat



By: Lora Morandin and Kristen Miskelly

After great success in 2022, the MeadowMakers program is continuing into its second year. MeadowMakers is a partnership project between Satinflower Nurseries: Native Plants, Seeds & Consulting and Pollinator Partnership Canada. It is designed to help people restore areas to native plant meadows and pollinator havens. Native plants are fundamental in ecosystem health and conserving local genetics, making them the backbone of ecological restoration. By transforming biologically degraded areas - like lawns - into biodiverse patches, habitat can be created that supports wildlife. Collectively, these areas form corridors that support local wildlife, including pollinators. Gillian, a 2022 Meadowmaker, said *"I never dreamt I would be able to create a meadow on this scale."* MeadowMakers are making a true impact on ecosystem health within our community!

The course is taught by Lora Morandin from Pollinator Partnership Canada and Kristen Miskelly of Satinflower Nurseries. Starting March 5th and ending June 25th, Meadowmaker participants will experience Spring with a fresh perspective. Through a suite of interactive lectures (in person and virtual) and field trips, MeadowMakers learn about the importance of native plants and pollinators within the urban context. Participants receive practical information such as how to prepare and plant sites, what species are appropriate to their area,

pollinators and their needs, invasive species control, how to grow native plants, and long-term project maintenance.

In-person sessions are being held at the beautiful Horticulture Centre of the Pacific (HCP) starting March 5th. The first MeadowMakers session of the four-month program will be a dynamic session where MeadowMakers will meet and learn from other MeadowMakers. Attendees will learn how making meadows is important for conserving local ecosystems and pollinators on Southern Vancouver Island and the southern Gulf Islands.

ŪW, XELOSELWET Tiffany Joseph will be opening the day, and Tseycum artist Sarah Jim, Sarah Jim Studio will share about her process making the MeadowMakers logo and guide MeadowMakers on a fieldtrip through the W̱SÁNEĆ Ethnobotany Trail & Restoration Project at HCP.

Other fieldtrips include a propagation workshop at Satinflower Nurseries where MeadowMakers will gain hands-on native plant growing experience and a field trip to Uplands Park, learning from plant and butterfly experts in this large-scale tract of relatively intact Prairie-Oak habitat. On the last field trip, MeadowMakers will tour the Fort Rodd Hill Garry Oak Learning Meadow with Aimee Pelletier, Parks Canada. She will guide MeadowMakers through the history of the site, the Indigenous partnerships and collaborations involved in the restoration, ongoing use of the meadow, and site preparation/maintenance.



Photos: MeadowMakers Working Together

Extra perks of being a MeadowMaker include a membership card, a meadow habitat sign, and discounts for plants and consultation services at Satinflower Nurseries. Lectures will also be made available virtually even if individuals are unable to make in-person modules.

We are so thankful for the passion, dedication, and devotion MeadowMakers have shown for habitat restoration. We are excited to see the 2022 projects unfold and all the projects to come. Meadows, large or small, contribute to ecosystem health. As quoted by Nathan, a 2022 MeadowMaker, *"Private lands are essential*

to maintaining species and their recovery." Thank you, MeadowMakers, you are making a real difference!

If you want to join the 2023 MeadowMakers program visit the Satinflower Nurseries website (<https://satinflower.ca/pages/meadowmakers-2023>).

Photo: Boulevard Plants



Registration is still open!

What does COMMUNITY mean to you?

By Madi Haller, Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary,
Community Educator



Photo by Robert Fraser: Barred Owls Snuggling



Photo by Rob Campbell: Swan Lake Preschooler

Here at the Nature Sanctuary we strive to foster community for everyone. That's why we now offer Community Programs for all age groups! Whether you and your grandchild want a nature-filled adventure, or you are a lifelong lover of learning - we've got you! The Nature Sanctuary is an incredible place to learn, share your own knowledge, and surround yourself with nature.. and community!

Our **youth programs** are designed for youngsters to step into nature, guided by themes of stewardship, exploration and ecology. The activities in these programs are awesome, covering everything from hands-on turtle habitat restoration, dressing up in costumes to learn about animal adaptations, and finding invertebrates in our lake to help measure the water quality! Our Youth Community Programs include:

- **Big & Little** (Ages 3-5, plus a guardian)
- **Homeschool Science** (Ages 5-12)
- **Junior Stewards** (Ages 5-12)
- **A Closer Look**
(All ages, guardians must accompany children)
- **Pollinator Party** (Coming back this spring! All ages, guardians must accompany children)
- **Wetland Waterkeepers** (Coming back this spring! All ages, guardians must accompany children)

Our **adult and senior programs** range in style and content - from learning about ecology, biomonitoring and history, to diving into nature-based wellness, these programs are relaxed and fascinating! Our adult programs include:

- **A Closer Look** (All ages)
- **Wellness Wednesdays** (Adults 17+)
- **English as a Foreign Language Sanctuary Tour**
(For EFL groups, 18+).
- **Seniors Programs** (For 55+ groups)
- **Pollinator Party** (Coming back this spring! All ages, guardians must accompany children)
- **Wetland Waterkeepers** (Coming back this spring! All ages, guardians must accompany children)
- We would love to have you join our community here at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary! Learn more details about all of our Community Programs here: www.swanlake.bc.ca



Shiny Geranium & Lesser Celandine Invasive Species Alert

By Rick Hatch, Saanich Parks, Supervisor Natural Areas Supervisor

Invasive species management is a year-round task for the Natural Areas section in Saanich Parks and our Saanich *Pulling Together* volunteers. Generally this is a quiet time of the year for our invasive program but some of our most prolific and time-consuming species are starting to emerge as winter turns to spring.

Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) is a low growing, herbaceous perennial from the Buttercup family and Shiny Geranium (*Geranium lucidum*) is a low-growing annual to biennial forb. Both invasive species can produce dense groundcover infestations that eliminate native plants and impact wildlife. Lesser Celandine is also toxic to most mammals. Both species can spread quickly, dispersing seeds using animals and water as vectors. Lesser Celandine goes dormant with warm spring weather and can be spread via its roots, tubers, and bulblets if the soil is disturbed or transported. Please DO NOT dispose of either of these species through home composting as this will likely increase their spread.

Both invasive species have been found in public parks, public boulevards, and on private property. Survey crews may not capture all of the populations in Saanich so we are dependent on private property owners and *Pulling Together* volunteers to help with locating unknown populations.

Please call the Parks office at 250-475-5522 or email parks@saanich.ca with any new sightings: staff will respond to all calls. Although herbicide treatments are often the best way to manage most populations of these two species (dependant on size, distribution, ecosystem types, native plant co-domination, etc.), staff and volunteers use other methods like hand-digging, smothering, and some non-chemical spray as well whenever possible.

The invasive species program at Saanich Parks is rapidly expanding and resources are limited. To help with prioritizing, we will survey all known sites of both Shiny Geranium and Lesser Celandine to determine an appropriate treatment program based on sound Integrated Plant Management ([Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\) | District of Saanich](#)).

The Saanich Alert Sheet on Lesser Celandine and the Provincial Invasive Species Alert on Shiny Geranium can be found on the District of Saanich's website:

[Community / Natural Environment / Invasive Species, Noxious Weeds & Wildlife / Invasive Resources / Invasive Brochures & Resources](#)

[Shiny geranium weed alert Mar2020.pdf](#)
[Celandine-alert-web.pdf](#)

EVENTS



Saanich Recreation Trails & Treks

<https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/events-in-park/trails-treks.html>

Any questions please call Alison 250-475-5408 or email alison.chamberlain@saanich.ca

Easy Walks (FREE)

Mondays | 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm

One-hour, easy-paced social walks on pavement and groomed trails through parks and interesting neighbourhoods. Where possible routes avoid steep hills. Most walks start near bus stops. Please wear supportive shoes.

Feb 13 | Swan Lake and Area

Meet/park at end of Nelthorpe Str., off Mackenzie Ave.

Feb 27 | McMinn Park and Sunnymead

Meet/park by entrance to McMinn Park, on Maple Grove St

Mar 6 | Hyacinth/Glanford/Panama Flats

Meet in Hyacinth Park parking lot, Marigold Rd.

Mar 13 | Lambrick/Fairburn

Meet near main entrance of Gordon Head Recreation Centre

Mar 20 | Cadboro Bay/Queenswood

Meet/park by washroom block, Cadboro/Gyro Park, Cadboro Bay.

Mar 27 | Layritz/Glendale Loop

Meet in Layritz Park parking lot, Layritz Ave

Apr 3 | Shelbourne/Camosun

Meet in NE corner of Hillside Centre parking lot

Apr 17 | Marigold/Garden City

Meet in Marigold Park, Iris Ave., off Grange Rd.

Apr 24 | Royal Oak/Colquitz Trail

Meet at entrance to Royal Oak Shopping Centre on Viewmont Ave.,

Walk & Talk 55+ (FREE)

Tuesdays and Thursdays | 9:30 am to 11:00 am

Enjoy beautiful scenery, friendly chat, and gentle exercise as we walk through Saanich parks and trails. Walks follow mainly chip or gravel trails but may have some steep sections. Sorry, dogs not permitted.

Feb 14 | Vantreight Park to Tyndall Park

Meet at Vantreight Park, on Vantreight Rd, off Ferndale Ave

Feb 16 | Colquitz to Hyacinth Park

Meet at Colquitz Creek Park sign near Silver City Theatre

Feb 21 | Hampton Park to Gorge Park

Meet Hampton Park parking lot; 225 Hampton Road, off Burnside Rd. W, beside Les Passmore Centre

Feb 23 | Lambrick Park to Sierra Park

Meet at Gordon head Rec Centre , 4100 Lambrick Way

Feb 28 | Claremont Park to Seaview Park

Meet at Lochside School parking lot; 1145 Royal Oak Drive

Mar 2 | Mt. Doug to Glendenning (some hills)

Meet at in parking lot by washrooms off Cordova Bay Rd at Ash Rd.

Mar 7 | Gordon Head Parks – South

Meet at Gordon Head Rec Centre entrance, 4100 Lambrick Way

Mar 9 | Cadboro Bay to Mystic (some hills)

Meet at Cadboro Gyro Park end of Sinclair Rd. by washrooms

Mar 15 | Hampton Park to Swan Creek Trails

Meet Hampton Park parking lot; 225 Hampton Road, off Burnside Rd. W, beside Les Passmore Centre

Mar 16 | Hyacinth Park and Colquitz Trail

Meet at parking lot off Marigold Rd by tennis courts

Mar 21 | Gorge Waterway

Meet at Gorge Waterway Park; at Canoe Club, 349 Gorge Rd W.

Mar 23 | Cedar Hill to Peacock Hill (steep hill)

Meet at Cedar Hill Rec Centre

Mar 28 | Cedar Hill Park to Rutledge Park

Meet Cedar Hill Rec Centre parking lot; main door

Mar 30 | Lochside Trail to Beckwith Park

Meet on Lochside Trail in parking lot by Don Mann Excavating

Apr 4 | Gordon Head Parks – North

Meet at Gordon Head Rec Centre entrance, 4100 Lambrick Way

Apr 6 | Mystic Vale (hills and unpaved trails)

Meet at Cadboro Gyro park end of Sinclair Rd. by washrooms

Apr 11 | Tillicum Parks

Meet at Hampton Park parking lot; 225 Hampton Road

Apr 13 | Bowker Creek

Meet at Cedar Hill Rec Centre

Apr 18 | Portage Inlet

Meet at Helmcken Centennial Park; 27 Kingham Place parking lot

Apr 20 | Ten Mile Point (some hills)

Meet at Arbutus Rd at Wedgewood Park

Apr 25 | Braefoot Park to Lambrick Park

Meet at Braefoot Park parking lot; 1359 McKenzie Avenue

Apr 27 | Mt Douglas to Majestic Park (some hills)

Meet at washrooms in parking lot off of Cordova Bay Rd. at Ash St.

Sunday Walks (FREE)

Sundays | 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Discover the beauty Saanich Parks on our Sunday Hikes, open to walkers of all ages. Please wear sturdy footwear and bring drinking water. Routes may include steep, rough trails.

Feb 26 | Gorge Waterway Full Loop

Meet at main parking lot for Gorge Park, Gorge Road West

Mar 26 | Beckwith Park /Christmas Hill/Swan Lake

Meet at Beckwith Park 857 Beckwith Ave. No dogs please.

Apr 23 | Hyacinth Park to Knockan Hill

Meet at Hyacinth Park, on Marigold Rd.

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary

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

Guided Bird Walks (Drop-In)

Every Sunday | 9:00 am to 10:30 am

Bring your binoculars and walking shoes and dress for the weather. Meet in the large parking lot for this informal walk around the lake area. Donations are appreciated.

Victoria Natural History Society

Visit www.naturevictoria.ca for more programs

Saturday Morning Birding (most Saturdays)

Check the Calendar to find out the week's location and time

http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1518 All experience levels welcome. Non-members can participate up to three times.

Natural History night (every 2nd Tuesday)

Freshwater jellyfish in BC | Tues, Feb 14, 7:30 pm

Polar Bears of Churchill | Tues, Mar 14, 7:30 pm

http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1518

Botany Night (every 3rd Tuesday)

TBA | Tues, Feb 21, 7:30 pm

TBA | Tues, Mar 21, 7:30 pm

http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1518

Birder's Night (every 4th Wednesday)

4-year Bird Walk along Canada's Great Trail | Feb 22, 7:30 pm

TBA | Mar 22, 7:30 pm

http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1518

Marine Night (last Monday of the month)

Transient Killer Whales Off Oregon Coast | Feb 27, 7:30 pm

TBA | Feb 27, 7:30 pm

http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1518



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Cover photo: Braefoot Park