



MARCH/APRIL 2026

Valley Naturalist



Short-eared Owl in the Cowichan Estuary. Photo by Willie Harvie.

Letter from the President

Dear Nature Cowichan members,

Somehow our club carries on! Catherine has been amazing as club secretary and evaluating, answering and forwarding our webmail. Carol and Gail have managed to fill our twice monthly speakers' events for another season. Anna has continued producing this great newsletter. Many members help monitor Blue Bird Trails, keep doors open at the Estuary Nature Center and with Waterbirds and CBC Citizen Science. We continued to offer two \$750 bursaries to students, pulled broom... and yet. The current team of board members are tired out - especially the president!

There are numerous tasks that can easily be done by others of our 75+ members. Managing our FB page, Calendar, Membership List, Email Databases, Webmail and Publicity, taking a turn at a booth, evaluating bursary applications or acting bi-annually as Rep to BC Nature are all fairly quick, simple tasks that do not require board membership. Helping to prepare Agenda's and take Notes or as Treasurer on the board requires only a few hours once a month. As spring approaches, we draw ever closer to our May AGM, and there are some looming holes to be filled. But I'm hoping that some of you will step up sooner than that.

On another note, some members are interested in more field trips. Last year in the spring we held trips to Mt. Tzouhalem, Bings Creek, Owl Hill Park, Harewood Plains - mostly places of conservation concern, and mostly poorly attended. At the end of July, we gathered at Cowichan Station - a bit too late for the butterflies.

This year we are hoping to enjoy walks to see bees, wildflowers, birds, butterflies, mushrooms and a low tide. Perhaps with a bit of help organizing these, we could get the timing sorted more accurately this year! Send any other suggestions as well as weekday vs. weekend preferences to the club webmail cvns@naturecowichan.net. Speaking of timing, Herring are due to arrive soon, and timing for them is very tricky, so look out for a last-minute notice about a trip up island. Meanwhile check out Nature Nanaimo and Nature Victoria's offerings as well.

Bruce

Duncan Bird Count

By: Tania Tripp and JP Giroux

Notes from Tania Tripp

The weather was mild again this year with rain showers off and on and a few rainbows in-between. No snow or ice to be seen. Coverage of our circle was provided by 86 volunteers that walked a combined 93 hours over 122 km, drove 129 km, and one boat braved the waters to help count the birds. A total of 198 checklists were submitted that resulted in 114 species and a total of 32,265 birds on count day (compared to 116 species, 171 checklists and 35,294 birds for the 2024 count). An additional eight species were confirmed in the area during count week. Sadly, our Tufted Duck has not been seen this year at the sewage lagoons. Highlights for species included: Short-eared Owls, Western Bluebirds, Townsend's Solitaire, Ancient Murrelet, White-winged Scoter, Sora, and Swamp Sparrow. There were high counts of Green-winged Teal (1,134 vs 485 last year), Red-winged Blackbird (1,238 vs 433 last year), and Bald Eagles (259 vs. 168). For the swan and goose folks, Canada Goose numbers were 2,768 vs. 2,093 last year, Trumpeter Swans were 457 vs. 439, and Cackling Geese were 514 vs. 93, along with a few Greater-white Fronted Geese to keep us scanning carefully. Alas, no Tundra Swan this year and only a single Mute Swan.

Other birds that were clearly absent this year included: Pine Siskin (7 compared to 3,272 last year) and Red Crossbill (0 vs. 602 last year).

A special thank you to the many volunteers that drove here from out of town to help with the count, and to the organizers of the after count gathering.

Happy birding to all in 2026.



Wonderful bird counters!
Photos Gail Mitchell



Jan and Jana Kotaska.

Notes from JP Giroux

Although there was no TUVU (Turkey Vulture), Shrike or Tufted Duck this year, Danielle Lacasse, a rockstar, hiked up Maple Mountain to get us 7 Western Bluebirds. Despite low duck counts, species coverage of seabirds was solid (Ancient and Marbled Murrelets, Western Grebe and White-winged Scoter). We did well on owls - covering 11 Great horned, 1 Barred, 1 Pygmy owl, 3 Short eared owls and a Barn Owl.

Pauliina Saarinen got an elusive Dipper at Bright Angel Regional Park. David Aldcroft found us a Solitaire on Fairbanks Road. Blair Dudeck got a couple of Soras in Westholme fields, along with 4 Greater White-fronted Geese. Jody Wells managed a Ruddy Duck on Quamichan Lake. Daniel Donnecke found a Swamp Sparrow on the Beverly Street Dike trail.

Jennifer Armstrong's crew found the only White-throated Sparrow of the day around Quamichan Lake residential area. Two Golden Eagles, one near Bird's Eye Cove farm and the other near Mays Road were added to our list. The estuary crew also turned up an Orange-crowned Warbler!

Visit the eBird Trip Report here:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/454356>

Summary sheet below.



JP Giroux, Tania Tripp and Carol Milo.

2025 Duncan Christmas Bird Count - Summary Sheet

Date: January 3rd, 2026 (ALL ZONES and Checklists (200 checklists in total))

Observers (in field) 86 Leader Tania Tripp and JP Jiroux Phone _____
 Temp low of 6 to high of 8 C Wind N/S/E/W (from the West in the a.m. switching to ESE after lunch with Velocity average of 10km/hr and gusts to 20km/hr Time Start 7:19 a.m. Finish 11:18 p.m.
 partly clear cloudy foggy
 Snow 0 inches A.M. light heavy rain snow P.M. light heavy rain snow Still Water partly open frozen Moving partly open frozen

Observer Hours Enter distance for your whole group. **Observer distance**
 Please report totals here for your entire count team # hours (on foot) 92.9 distance (on foot) 122.3 km
 Minimum # of parties 22 # hours (by car) 27.7 distance (by car) 128.9 km
 Maximum # of parties 34 # hours (by boat) 3.5 distance (by boat) 20.0 km
 # hours (owling) 1.83 distance (owling) n/a

(*) Field Notes Required

	#		#		#
Greater White-fronted Goose	4	Red-tailed Hawk	40	Common Raven	663
Snow Goose	0 (not in week)	Golden Eagle (*)	2	Sky Lark	0 (not in week)
Cackling Goose	514	American Kestrel	10	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	916
Canada Goose	2768	Merlin	11	Bushtit	164
Mute Swan	1	Peregrine Falcon	2	Red-breasted Nuthatch	60
Trumpeter Swan	457	Ring-necked Pheasant	0 (not in week)	Brown Creeper	117
Tundra Swan (*)	0 (not in week)	Virginia Rail	5	Bewick's Wren	80
Wood Duck	61	American Coot	114	Pacific Wren	140
Gadwall	45	Black-bellied Plover	0 (not in week)	Marsh Wren	11
Eurasian Wigeon	5	Killdeer	26	American Dipper	1
American Wigeon	1198	Black Oystercatcher	14	Golden-crowned Kinglet	643
Mallard	2358	Greater Yellowlegs	0 (not in week)	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	143
Northern Shoveler	262	Spotted Sandpiper	0 (not in week)	Townsend's Solitaire	1
Northern Pintail	562	Black Turnstone	count week	Hermit Thrush	3
Green-winged Teal	1134	Surfbird	0 (not in week)	American Robin	1748
Canvasback	0 (not in week)	Sanderling	0 (not in week)	Varied Thrush	96
Redhead	0 (not in week)	Rock Sandpiper	0 (not in week)	European Starling	2885
Ring-necked Duck	399	Dunlin	count week	American Pipit	1
Greater Scaup	15	Wilson's Snipe	5	Cedar Waxwing	2
Lesser Scaup	662	Short-billed Gull (Mew)	1060	Orange-crowned Warbler	1
Harlequin Duck	count week	California Gull	count week	Yellow-rumped Warbler	count week
Surf Scoter	500	Herring Gull	12	Townsend's Warbler	0 (not in week)
White-winged Scoter	7	Iceland Gull (Thayer's)	46	Spotted Towhee	368
Black Scoter	0 (not in week)	Western Gull	0 (not in week)	Savannah Sparrow	0 (not in week)
Long-tailed Duck	0 (not in week)	Glaucous-winged Gull	1567	Fox Sparrow	103
Bufflehead	636	Glaucous Gull	0 (not in week)	Song Sparrow	211
Common Goldeneye	136	Common Murre	0 (not in week)	Lincoln's Sparrow	9
Barrow's Goldeneye	58	Pigeon Guillemot.	count week	Swamp Sparrow	1
Hooded Merganser	111	Marbled Murrelet	2	White-throated Sparrow	1
Common Merganser	494	Ancient Murrelet	2	White-crowned Sparrow	103
Red-breasted Merganser	42	Rhinoceros Auklet	0 (not in week)	Golden-crowned Sparrow	451
Ruddy Duck	1	Eurasian Collared-dove	34	Dark-eyed Junco	1940
California Quail	122	Rock Pigeon	515	Red-winged Blackbird	1238
Red-throated Loon	count week	Mourning Dove	0 (not in week)	Western Meadowlark	count week
Pacific Loon	8	Barn Owl	1	Brewer's Blackbird	267
Common Loon	13	Western Screech-Owl	0 (not in week)	Brown-headed Cowbird	1
Pied-billed Grebe	12	Great Horned Owl	11	Purple Finch	36
Horned Grebe	45	Northern Pygmy Owl	3	House Finch	383
Red-necked Grebe	4	Barred Owl	1	Red Crossbill	0 (not in week)
Eared Grebe	0 (not in week)	Short-eared Owl	3	Pine Siskin	5
Western Grebe	13	Northern Saw-whet Owl	0 (not in week)	American Goldfinch	29
Brandt's Cormorant	11	Anna's Hummingbird	201	Evening Grosbeak	1
Double-crested Cormorant	167	Belted Kingfisher	29	House Sparrow	474
Pelagic Cormorant	16	Red-breasted Sapsucker	7	Band-tailed Pigeon	5
Great blue Heron	66	Downy Woodpecker	54	Sora	2
Turkey Vulture	0 (not in week)	Hairy Woodpecker	27	Bonaparte's Gull	188
Bald Eagle (adult)	Total BAEA	Northern Flicker	178	Western Bluebird	7
(immature)		Pileated Woodpecker	7		
(unaged)	259	Northern Shrike	0 (not in week)	Unidentified duck	281
Northern Harrier	7	Hutton's Vireo	2	Unidentified Accipiter	4
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	Steller's Jay	97	Unidentified passerine	50
Cooper's Hawk	28	American Crow	281	Unidentified Gull	901

Total Number of Birds	32305
Total Species	114

A good start to the year

By Gail Mitchell

We have had some excellent gatherings already this year.

The "apres Christmas Bird Count" on January 3rd at the Fish Health Building was a chance for the hard-working counters to get warmed up, have some good food and share their results (see previous pages).

On January 6th, Bernie Juurlink gave us an excellent presentation on local Bats and how they "see" the world. He outlined the amazing technology that allows for identification of bats through their echolocation signals and spoke of the Bat Monitoring project that CERCA has undertaken.



Bernie Juurlink



Helen Davis

On February 2nd we had a full house for Helen Davis' presentation on her long research centered around the den requirements of Black Bears. The loss of old-growth trees has made this a serious concern. We encourage you to write to your MLA to stress another reason to stop logging old growth.

If you missed the talk, you can watch it on YouTube "A Bear's Necessities" by Hakai Magazine. Link: [A Bear's Necessities - YouTube](#)

A Postcard from Kenya

By Hilary Emberton

KENYA: Masai Mara National Park, February 2007

As our open-sided Mercedes truck lumbered along dirt roads, smaller safari vans were stuck at dizzy angles. Drivers and guides worked to free wheels from muddy quagmires. Later, the Little Tractor That Could had to extricate our truck. It was unseasonably rainy and green, and not my expectation of Africa. But, arriving in the Masai Mara the vista opened to classic savannah. Stunning valley views of grass, bush or the occasional lone acacia tree, were revealed between rounded hills. The brilliant red plaid wraps of the Masai people punctuated this soft landscape.

In just a few hours we had viewed an impressive array of wildlife; impala, warthog, water buffalo, elephant, giraffe, and even a distant leopard. The highlight was two sleepy lionesses, draped in a tree, tails dangling. We felt lucky to be so near.

A roadside lunch was prepared. As we were finishing, a young male lion sauntered out of the bush, heading directly for us. Was he looking for lunch himself? Our guide barked orders to pack up NOW! Tables, chairs, dishes, and food were stowed in the truck in record time, the side door closing just as the lion arrived. He flopped in the shade next to the vehicle, so near that with a good stretch, I could have reached down and tousled his mane. I alternated between gazing agog and shooting volleys of photos. At intervals he looked up, his penetrating amber eyes staring at us intently. His nose bore the scars of many battles. Simultaneously it was unnerving and enthralling. Eventually we had to depart and as the engine started he reluctantly rose and ambled directly to the shadow of a nearby van. So he didn't want to eat us after all, he just needed respite from the intense African sun.



Photo: Hilary Emberton

First Pair of the Season?

By Jacquie Taylor



Photo: Pauliina Saarinen

This Valentine's Day, a pair of bluebirds was sighted on a property where there has been nesting for several years in a row! Did the lovely sunny day have them thinking thoughts of romance? Did someone tell them it was Valentine's? Normally our pairs start showing up late March or April so we are delighted to see them already! Time will tell if this is just a brief visit to their breeding territory or if they have settled in for the season.

We don't have pictures of the couple or bands to identify them yet but here is a photo of the pair that nested there last year taken by Pauliina Saarinen

Winner!

Emma Cinnabean
Cinnabean Art

Winning photo of her entry for Division 21, Section 1, Class 4 - Biodiversity. at this year's Cowichan Exhibition.

Nature Cowichan provided funding for two prizes at the event (photo of Roosevelt Elk featured in last newsletter).

"Thank you for sponsoring the Cowichan Exhibition, and thank you for my prize winnings!" - Emma



Rainforests

By Linda Hill



Costa Rica Rainforest Canopy. All photos: Linda Hill

Deep in the rainforest of Costa Rica's Corcovado National Park, Harvey, our guide, was teaching our small group of 5 eco-tourists to listen and sniff instead of straining to see. "Do you smell a faint musky scent?" he whispered. Sniffing the air helped my eyes focus on a small herd of pig-like peccaries snuffling their way across the path. As soon as the last juvenile peccary scampered across the path to catch up to his mother, the herd disappeared back into the jungle. We walked on.

Less than a minute later, Harvey stopped and turned to face us with his finger to his lips - his signal for us to stop in our tracks. Within the still silence, a faint swishing rustle on the forest floor called our eyes to hone in on a troop of about fifty monkey-like coaties emerging from behind the bioluminescent camouflage.



Corcovado National Park Primary Forest.

In this jungle that National Geographic describes as “the most biologically intense place on the planet,” my eyes had become strangely useless. The flickering patterns created by the interplay between water, darkness and light wove dense, tightly woven camouflaging cloaks that were much more opaque than the loose warp and weft of the temperate rainforest I am used to. In this tropical rainforest, surrounded by these draping curtains of camouflage, my senses of touch, temperature, hearing, movement and smell became much more important than my senses of sight for noticing the wildlife hidden beyond the leafy veils. When I tried to rely on my eyes, I saw nothing. But when I put what Harvey was teaching us into practice, my other senses were more able to tune into the smells, sounds and movements of wildlife moving through the trees.

What a mystical, optically illusive experience to stop in my tracks and watch the flickering patterns of light and shadows magically shift in shape, change in form and materialize into one or more of the thousands of birds, mammals and lizards that live in a tropical ecosystem.

All rainforests in the world are perpetual fountains of bioluminescent shades of brilliance. Up in the sky, a mixture of sunlight and water constantly sprinkles and sometimes pours down upon the treetop canopy where most of the sun’s radiance and most of the water is immediately absorbed into the dark depths of the epiphytes, leaves, mosses, lichens, branches, trunks, roots and fungi to nurture the plants and animals living in the overstory.

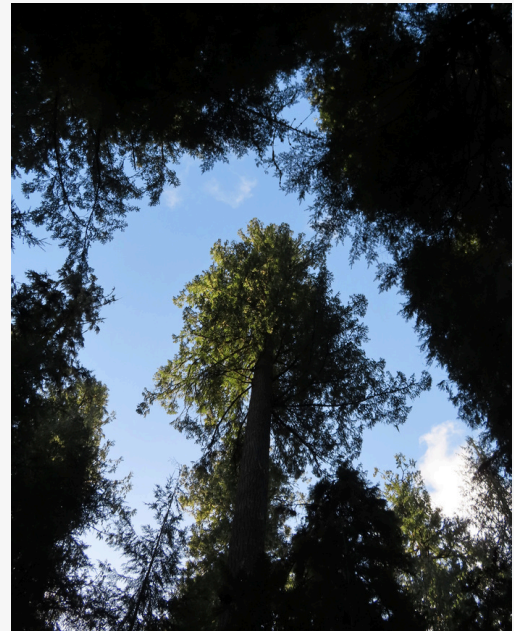


The understory is almost lifeless compared to the lush life living overhead.

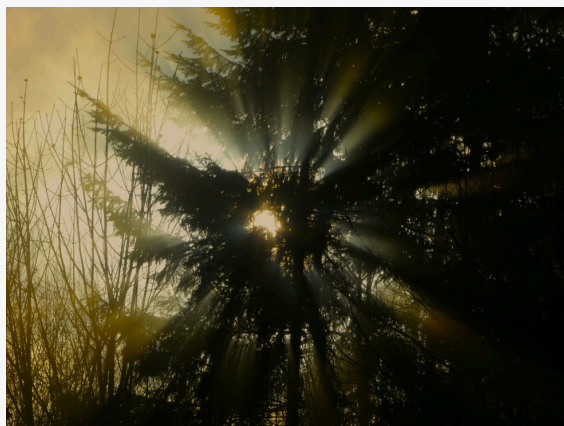
The remaining light merges with the multitudes of microscopic water droplets waiting in the leaves to begin a slow, wet, percolating descent through the leaves and branches all the way down to the understory below. When the moist, microscopic flecks of light eventually reach the forest floor, the evaporating air, and the forces of capillary action in the dense systems of roots work together to suck and pump the moisture back up to the tops of the trees and beyond in perpetual cascades of life-giving hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and carbon.

I have been sauntering through the magical liquid sunshine of temperate rainforests since the day I was born. I grew up in Beaver Cove on Vancouver Island, the upper reaches of Bute Inlet in the Coastal Mountains, and then the community of Deep Cove at the base of Mount Seymour.

The Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island, where I have lived most of my adult life is also part of the Pacific Temperate Rainforest ecosystem. On my daily walks through my neighbourhood forest, I love stepping off the path to stand knee deep in the composting leaves beneath the deciduous trees that grow alongside the cedars and the firs.



Looking up through the ancient old growth Temperate rainforest on the ancient tree trail (off Renfrew road).



East coast of VI Temperate Rainforest.

With feet firmly rooted in the decomposing blossoms, fruits, leaves and peat, I tilt my head way back until my eyes can look straight up through the branches and leaves of the alders, cottonwoods and maple trees at the brilliant greens, golds, oranges, and blues of dust-like mist swirling, shimmering, and sparkling through the Old Man's Beard, the lichens, the leaves and all my relations.



Xwulqw'selu (Koksilah)

WATERSHED & WATER SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Community Open House

Event Details:

- Date: Wednesday, March 11, 2026
- Time: 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM (drop-in)
- Location: The HUB at Cowichan Station, Duncan, BC

Join us for a drop-in Open House to learn about the Xwulqw'selu (Koksilah) Watershed and Water Sustainability Plan. Speak with the planning team and share your input on key topics like new water use regulations, water storage, conservation, and watershed restoration.

**STAY ENGAGED!
SCAN HERE TO TAKE THE SURVEY**



Visit <https://www.koksilahwater.ca/>

Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

By Moira Hawk

Upcoming Events at the Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre

Spring is a busy time at the Nature Centre with the arrival of migratory birds and of course, we are looking forward to welcoming the Herons back to their rookery. Stay tuned for our Heron Cam which will be going live within the next month.

We are partnering with CVRD Parks & Trails on **Sunday, March 15th** to host a park clean up in Hecate Park. Clean up is from 10am – 12pm, followed by a talk from speakers Genevieve Singleton and Siilh'na'mut Ken Elliot at the Centre from 12pm – 2pm. There will be light refreshments served. This is a family friendly event.

Our Salmon eggs have arrived. We are hosting roughly 100 Coho Salmon eggs. The babies are still developing, and we are waiting patiently for the sac fry (alevins) to emerge.

We are looking for two board members who bring experience in one or more of: Technology, Human Resources, Legal & Regulatory knowledge, and Governance.

Our AGM is scheduled for **Thursday, May 21st** @ 5:30 at the Centre.

Keep an eye out for our announcements for our low tide day event in May!

What I Saw...

A section where members can share photos and words about something they've recently experienced in nature, celebrating the beauty and wonder of the world around us.

Seen by Bruce on February 10th. Jade Lee, our local, budding Melittologist I.D.'d it as a queen *Bombus vosnesenskii* alias "yellow faced bumblebee"



Seen by Anna Scouten on February 19, snow up Mt. Prevost!

Harlequin Ducks were seen at Neck Point (Nanaimo) on January 23rd by Willie Harvie.



Calendar of Events

Please visit naturecowichan.net for more information on upcoming events.
Invite friends. Everyone is welcome!

Morning CoffeeHouse Programs

In person or via Zoom (email cvns@naturecowichan.net for the link)

March 2nd at 9:30am at the Fish Health Building (1080 Wharncliffe Road)

Dave Manning will speak on **Bald Eagles**.

April 6th at 9:30 am at the Fish Health Building (1080 Wharncliffe Road)

The Flora and Fauna of the Canadian Arctic and Antarctic Region

Join us for an audio-visual presentation by retired ship captain, Don Feil, to share his observations of the flora and fauna from voyages through the Northwest Passage, Falkland Islands, South Georgia and Antarctica.

Evening Programs

Via zoom (the link will be sent out to members prior to the presentations)

March 17th at 7:30pm

Amorina Kingdon will speak on her book ***Sing Like Fish*** - underwater sounds, and the effects of anthropogenic sound on sea life.

April 21st at 7:30pm

Christine Lowther will speak on her book ***Blockade*** - a history of forest activism, and the attempts to save the last of the old growth, especially on the West Coast of Vancouver Island.

NATURE COWICHAN: With Nature, For Nature

Naturalists live in the midst of a global environmental crisis. Not surprisingly, new definitions are being forged for the 'modern' naturalist who must now take part in conserving the species and habitats he or she enjoys observing. They must take their knowledge of the natural world beyond just a personal interest and interpret it for the politicians and the public so that conservation may become a guiding principle rather than an afterthought.

Evening meetings are the third Tuesday of the month from September to June.

Morning CoffeeHouses are the first Monday of each month, October to May.

For our programs are held via Zoom, links will be sent out ahead of time.

The newsletter is published five times a year.

Next issue: May/June 2026

Submission Deadline: April 20th, 2026

Email submissions to: anna.scouten@gmail.com

Advertising rates: Business Card: \$30.00 per year. Half page: \$60.00 per year (5 issues).

Executive for 2025/26

President: Bruce Coates 250-732-6235

Vice President:

Secretary: Catherine Waddell

Treasurer: Judy Wilson

Past President: Gail Mitchell 250 746-9916

Membership: Bruce Coates 250 732-6235

Directors: Sierra Harvey 250-589-2139

Jacquie Taylor 250-889-1892

Carol Milo 250-416-0031

Joy Emmanuel

Contact persons:

Birding: Dave Aldcroft

Bluebirds: Jacquie Taylor

Botany: Genevieve Singleton

Bursary: Catherine Waddell

Coffeehouse: Jim/Lyn Wisnia

Conservation:

Speakers: Carol Milo

BC Nature: Bruce Coates

Marmots: Sally Leigh-Spencer

Newsletter: Anna Scouten

Outings:

Publicity: Gail Mitchell

Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society: Sarah Mullock

Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable: Genevieve

Singleton

Cowichan Community Land Trust: Bruce Coates

Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre: Sierra Harvey

Life Members: Linda Hill, Dorothy Marshall, David Aldcroft, Genevieve Singleton and David Polster, Gail and Steve Mitchell, Sheila Sanders, Val George

Nature Cowichan Membership Application

Name _____ Email _____

Address _____ Town/City _____

Postal Code _____ Telephone _____

New member? Yes _____ No _____

Rates:

Individual \$30.00/year

Family \$45.00/year Children under 16 _____

Donation \$ _____ **(Receipts issued for donations greater than \$25)**

Hardcopy newsletter \$ _____ \$5.00/year for mailed newsletter (instead of emailed)
(One per household)

Total \$ _____

Interests _____

Please E-transfer to cvns@naturecowichan.net and email this form separately
or mail your cheque and this form to: CVNS, 6 – 55 Station Street, Duncan BC V9L 1M2
or pay by cash or cheque and submit this form at an in-person meeting