BCnature

Knowing nature and keeping it worth knowing

The Magazine of BC Nature

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BC Nature Awards - March 15, 2026

Scholarships Application - June 15, 2026

Cover Photograph
Photographer: Steve Rasmussen
"Large flocks of Dunlin reposition themselves after a male Northern Harrier enters their realm - shot in Roberts Bank during southern migration."

Objectives of BC Nature (Federation of BC Naturalists)

- To provide naturalists and nature clubs of BC with a collective voice on conservation and environmental issues.
- To foster an awareness, appreciation, and understanding of our natural environment, that it may be wisely used and maintained for future generations.
- To encourage the formation and cooperation of nature clubs throughout BC.
- To provide a means of communication among naturalists in BC.

We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, style, and clarity.

Articles and advertising in *BCnature* magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of all BC Nature members.

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We welcome your articles, photos, and letters. Please email them to *communications@bcnature.ca*

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All references that were submitted with the articles can be found in the e-version edition.

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Editorial

Thinking of Consequences

Submitted by Rick Gee

The last BC Nature magazine (winter 2025) contained an editorial commenting on the ethics of mushroom collecting. That got me thinking about what other effects we as naturalists have on what we value.

First, of course, is the effect of the vehicles we drive. Some BC Nature members use an e-bike or an electric vehicle of some kind, but many others undoubtedly use a diesel- or gas-powered vehicle. Wherever we drive, fossil fuel users emit carbon into the air. In my case, I want to reduce my emissions, so I try to combine several stops into one trip, I try to share rides with others as much as possible, and I try to limit my distance. But I still cover 20,000 km per year at an average gas consumption of 7.5 L/100 km. That translates to, according to different sources, between 4 and 6 tonnes of CO2 emissions. For those interested in the details, apparently, we emit just over 2.3 kg for every litre of gasoline burned and about 2.5 for every litre of diesel. Without a consumer carbon tax, what is the incentive to drive less?

But electric vehicle users do not get off as blameless. Tires wear away and shed particles into the environment. Other particles come from the road surface. Apparently, we release between one and four kg of "tire and road wear particles" into the environment each year. These particles often go into the water and affect animals and plants living there, as well as the water quality for those drinking the water.

Of course, the production of vehicles uses resources and produces waste.

Second, how do you heat or cool your home? I live in a small townhouse, heated by natural gas, with an on-demand water heater, and with a thermostat set lower than most. My natural gas provider tells me I used 23.8 GJ in the past year. Apparently 1 GJ of natural gas produces approximately 50 kg of CO2 when burned. My consumption represents approximately 1200 kg, just over a tonne. Heat pumps in BC may be a better solution as our electricity is generally "clean electricity".

Third, do you eat? A facetious question perhaps, but do you know how far your food has travelled? The 100 Mile Diet came out of BC. Do you follow it? I don't. I don't know how many tonnes of CO2 my food produces as it travels to me, but I do try to buy locally: fruit (fortunately I live in the Okanagan Valley), vegetables, dairy, fish, and meat.

Finally, do you travel by air? I haven't travelled by air for many years, but many naturalists do, whether chasing snow, sun, or birds. How much CO2 does such travel produce? Several sources report air travel produces 2.5% of global CO2 emissions. The website calculator provides a handy calculator for individual trips, although not all destinations are available. For example, a person travelling from Vancouver to London, UK, emits just under a tonne; a similar amount is produced by travel from Vancouver to Hong Kong. Another site that does these calculations, again for a limited number of destinations, is, a site that also allows you to purchase carbon offsets, which I discuss below.

Given that both provincial and federal governments have removed their consumer carbon taxes, how do I reduce the damage my emissions cause? Carbon offsets (also known as carbon credits) are one way. This involves paying someone else to do something positive to offset my sins. My favourite source of carbon offsets is the Coastal First Nations Great Bear Initiative. This group, through their website, will be happy to sell you carbon offsets which are used to preserve coastal BC's rain forests. The current rate is $25 per tonne that you wish to offset.

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President's Report

Submitted by Nancy Flood

These are scary times for naturalists—and anyone concerned about the state of B.C.'s ecosystems. The unpredictability (dare I say, hostility) of our southern neighbour has refocussed the attention of our provincial and federal governments on the economy, often at the expense of the environment. On June 26, 2025, Bill C-5, the "One Canadian Economy Act" (a.k.a. the Building Canada Act) received Royal Assent, after having made its way through both the House of Commons and the Senate. No doubt, many benefits will accrue from this act. But what are the costs? Ecojustice notes that "Bill C-5… gives sweeping and potentially unconstitutional pow-ers to the federal Cabinet to bypass environmental laws and legal safeguards. The Bill allows decisions to be made about 'national interest' projects with little public participation, without robust environmental impact assessments, and without the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples". Sounds risky to me.

Our province has moved in the same direction. At the end of May 2025, The BC government passed Bill 14, the Renewable Energy Projects (Streamlined Permitting) Act and Bill C 15 the Infrastructure Projects Act. On November 17, 2025, a private member's bill, M216, The Professional Reliance Act passed second reading—despite considerable outcry from a diverse array of opponents: professional engineers and architects, municipal governments, and many BC Nature clubs and members, among others.

All three B.C. bills, as well as Bill C-5, are designed to reduce red tape and fast track public and private projects deemed to be important to the economy. Again, I note that although benefits will accrue, there are also costs. Is environmental assessment of projects before they begin important enough to slow down the process? Clean energy, for example, sounds like a good thing, but are there better and worse ways to achieve it? Are there ways to mitigate the negative effects of wind turbines and hydroelectric projects? Most of us would agree that we need more hospitals, schools, and housing. But should they be built in ways and places that take the environment and biodiversity into account? My answer would be a resounding yes to these questions. And then there are the new mines, pipelines and LNG facilities that have been greenlit because of these legislative acts. LNG production and transport have effects on health and the health care system. And data suggest that "Pollution from approved LNG projects will cancel out climate action in all other sectors and will be equivalent to a third of B.C.'s total emissions." The effects of climate change on the physical environment and on biodiversity are undeniable.

Although many experts tout the income that will be generated by LNG sales, others are not so sure that these are real. Regardless of profit, neither Canada nor B.C. are now meeting their climate change commitments.

Producing LNG in B.C. involves fracking. The process of fracking has been shown to have numerous negative effects, including increased seismic activity in many of the places it occurs —in northeast BC, for example see this research. It also uses—and contaminates—enormous amounts of water. Can we afford that? Drought is an issue in many parts of B.C. and recent studies have shown that, in
fact, water supplies are becoming dangerously low worldwide (Global Freshwater Abruptly Declines - NASA Science).

Data centres—many of which are planned or already being built in many B.C. communities—can also use an extraordinary amount of water, as well as a lot of electricity. Artificial Intelligence has the potential to provide a lot of benefits to society—but clearly, it has drawbacks, both environmentally and socially. Do we need it—or do we need as much of it as planned?

Hmm. Spring will be on the horizon when you read this newsletter. I usually try to be upbeat and nonconfrontational in my reports. But this will be my last president's message, and I want to urge everyone to take a stand on whatever issue is closest to their hearts. Voice your opposition to things that you think put our ecosystems at risk. Write in support of funding for projects that protect and/or restore nature; the Liberals promised such funding in their election platform and research shows that investment in the restoration economy creates more jobs per dollar than funding for extractive industries.

Let's put our "Elbows Up" for Nature!

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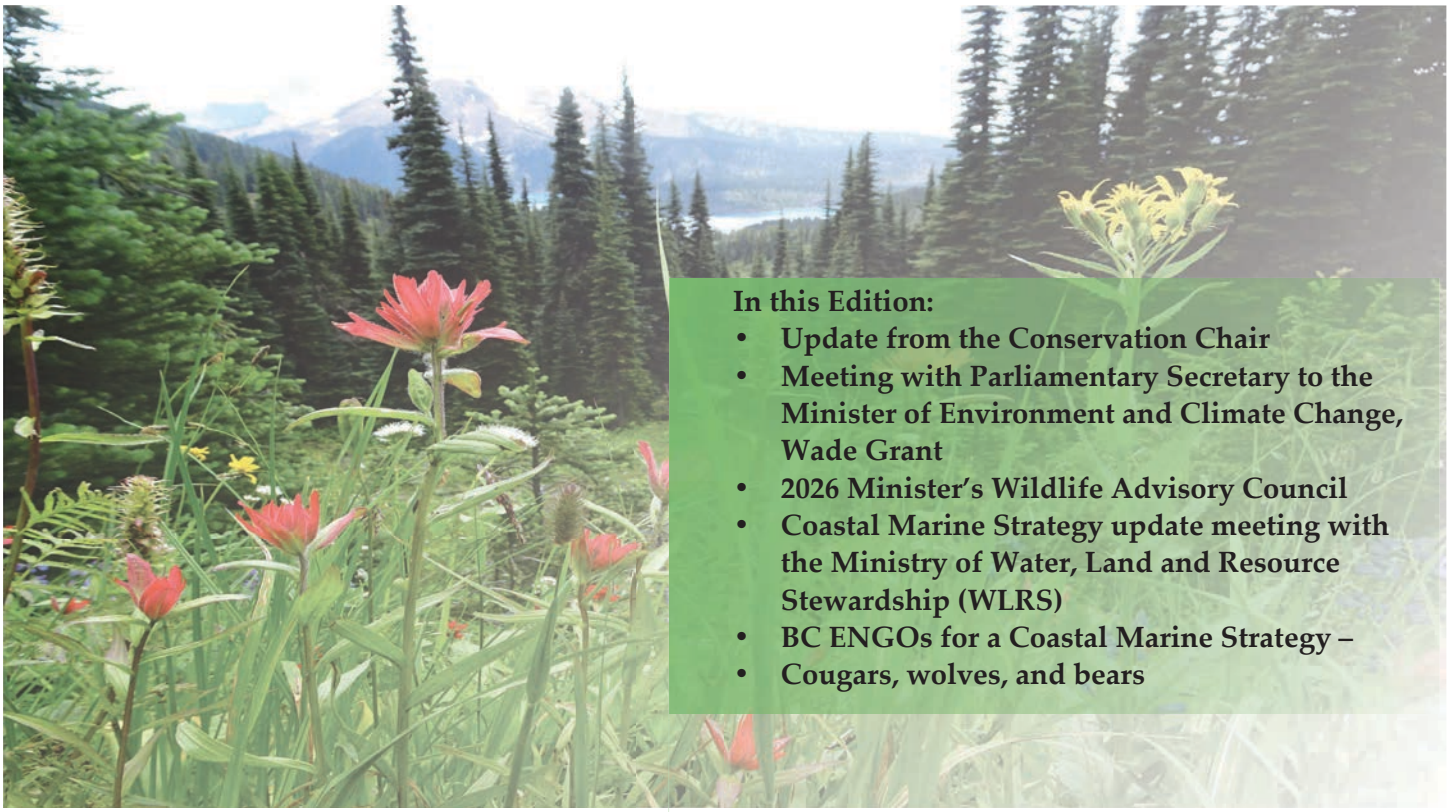
Conservation Committee Updates



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- **Meeting with Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Wade Grant**
- **2026 Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council**
- **Coastal Marine Strategy update meeting with the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS)**
- **BC ENGOs for a Coastal Marine Strategy –**
- **Cougars, wolves, and bears**

Updates from the Conservation Chair

Submitted by Jennifer Dowd

Website Updates: The Conservation Committee continues to update BC Nature's website to ensure conservation content remains current, accurate, and aligned with emerging policy and science. Recent updates have focused on improving clarity, consistency, and accessibility for members and the public.

Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS) Meeting: BC Nature met with WLRS to discuss habitat concerns related to salmon, Marbled Murrelet, and Caribou. The meeting was productive, and the Minister expressed interest in supporting solutions where possible. We are awaiting a detailed written response and have been referred to by the Minister of Forests for further follow-up on several issues. Related backgrounders are available on the BC Nature website.

Backgrounders and Letters: The Conservation Committee prepared backgrounders and submitted letters on a range of current conservation issues. Recent topics include the proposed expansion of Black Bear hunting, old-growth logging, Fraser River floodplain impacts on salmon habitat, Goldstream–Malahat highway widening, Marbled Murrelet habitat protection, the northwest tanker ban, Pacific Herring conservation, and Southern Caribou habitat. Backgrounders are available on the BC Nature website under "Advocacy For Nature" tab.

Nature Canada: Critical Distance & Incubator: Ben and Jennifer attended Nature Canada's Critical Distance evening at the Royal BC Museum, where we participated in a virtual reality experience highlighting the impacts of vessel traffic on Orcas in the ocean. Ben also spoke during an Incubator session, sharing perspectives and lessons learned with other participants. More information on these programs is available on Nature Canada's website.

BC Nature YouTube Channel
The Conservation Lens: BC Nature has launched a YouTube channel featuring a new video series, The Conservation Lens, which explores current conservation issues through an educational and accessible lens. Members and supporters are encouraged to subscribe; it's free to stay informed and engaged. The first video is planned for March 2026.

Advisory Consultation List: On January 14, a call was sent to all BC Nature clubs to help build an advisory consultation list of members with expertise relevant to conservation issues. To date, 14 people have joined the list. Members interested in participating can email *conservationchair@bcnature.ca*, and a short information template will be provided.

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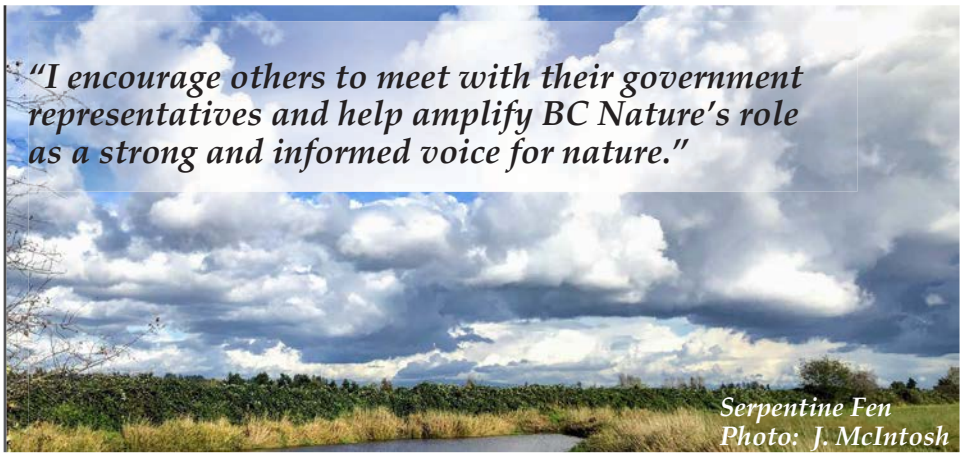
Meeting with Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Wade Grant

Submitted by Peter Ballin

On December 19, 2025, I met with Wade Grant, my local MP, presenting myself as both a constituent and a representative of BC Nature. I emphasized our shared connection to the land—something he, as a Musqueam, deeply understands. I reiterated President Nancy Flood's message from Nature on the Hill: that Canada must invest in and protect nature as a fundamental pillar of our economy and society.

I raised the importance of coordination across all levels of government to effectively implement policies set out in the federal Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, as well as B.C.'s Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework, Coastal Marine Strategy, and Old-growth Strategy. I stressed that the federal government should continue to mandate the removal of open-net pen fish farms and play a strong role in shaping a positive and effective wild salmon strategy for B.C.

Due to time constraints, we were unable to discuss several additional priorities, including the Together for Wildlife Strategy; watersheds and wetlands; species and ecosystem restoration; the development of a watershed security strategy; and progress toward the 30 x 30 conservation target.



Serpentine Fen
Photo: J. McIntosh

I also questioned the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Alberta and the federal government regarding the proposed northern bitumen pipeline, particularly its implications for climate change and the potential threats to B.C.'s coast. As time was running short, MP Grant shared his response to the Conservative opposition motion related to the MOU, which can be summarized as follows:

- the need to bolster and diversify the economy
- the importance of simultaneously protecting the environment and Indigenous rights
- advancing climate change targets through collaboration across all levels of government
- Alberta's agreement to advance clean energy projects and reduce emissions
- the goal of achieving a net-zero electricity grid in Alberta
- enabling a "one project, one review" impact assessment process
- strong emphasis on Indigenous rights

In my view, MP Grant's remarks largely reflected the party line and, as a response to a Conservative motion, did not directly address the environmental consequences of developing a new pipeline.

In closing, I asked for clearer and more proactive communication from government—specifically, helping the public understand how new policies meaningfully address environmental and climate concerns. I encourage others to meet with their government representatives and help amplify BC Nature's role as a strong and informed voice for nature. ❁

Steller Sea Lions in Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site
Photo: S. Rasmussen

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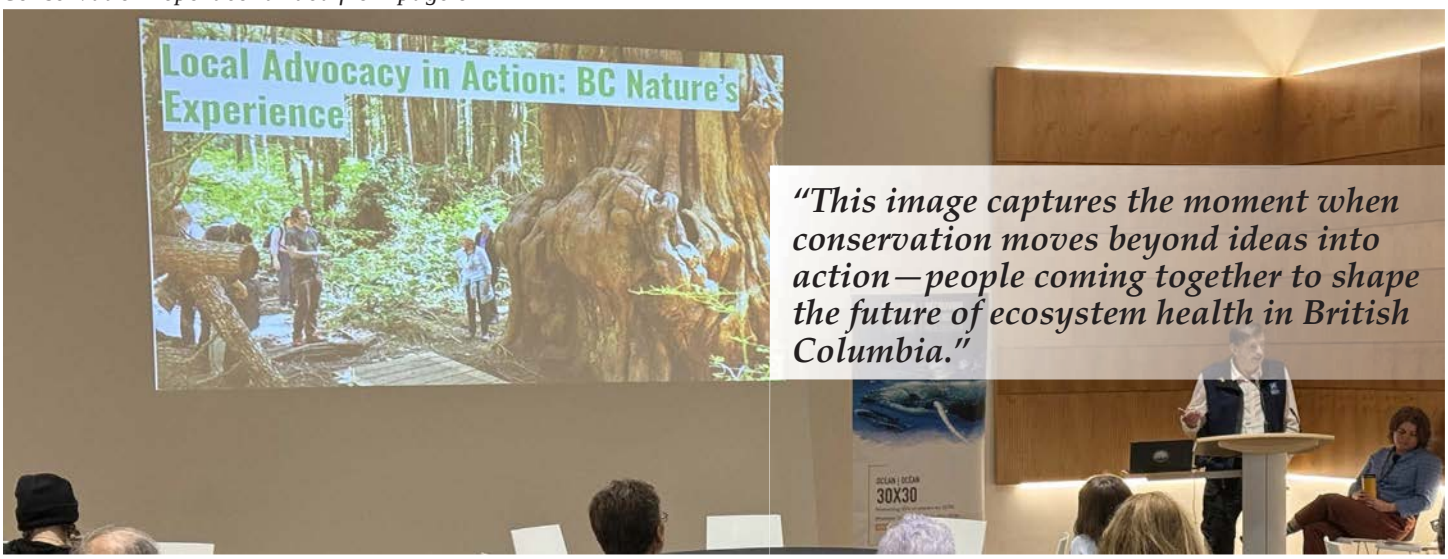

"This image captures the moment when conservation moves beyond ideas into action—people coming together to shape the future of ecosystem health in British Columbia."

2026 Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council

By Ben van Drimmelen and Peter Ballin

On February 4, 2026, BC Nature attended the 2026 Wildlife Advisory Council meeting with the B.C. Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship and approximately 60 stakeholders.

Minister Randene Neill reaffirmed her ministry's commitment to the 2023 Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation, the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework (BEHF) and ongoing updates to the Wildlife Act as well as land-use planning and continued efforts toward restoration and reconciliation.

The Minister noted that the BEHF's ecosystem-health-first approach has recently been reinforced by the Forestry Advisory Council's report, *From Conflict to Care: A New Stable System for Communities, Economies and Ecologies,* which recommends managing lands for long-term ecological sustainability rather than focusing solely on harvest volumes. She acknowledged that successful implementation will require strong public support.

Retiring Council co-chair Nancy Wilkin highlighted both progress and ongoing challenges, including the need to effectively deploy the Water Sustainability Act and the constraints imposed by limited government resources. Clear communication and broad public engagement were identified as essential to advancing the Council's priorities.

In small working groups, participants emphasized the importance of measurable ecosystem-health objectives, clear accountability, prioritizing restoration in the most degraded ecosystems, mandatory habitat protection across resource uses, and monitoring and publicly reporting restoration outcomes. Wildfire management was also identified as a critical tool for effective habitat restoration.

BC Nature's continued engagement with the Wildlife Advisory Council and the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship remains essential to sustaining momentum and achieving shared conservation goals.

A Yellow-bellied Marmot photographed along the Tsawassen beach trail. Photo: S. Berger

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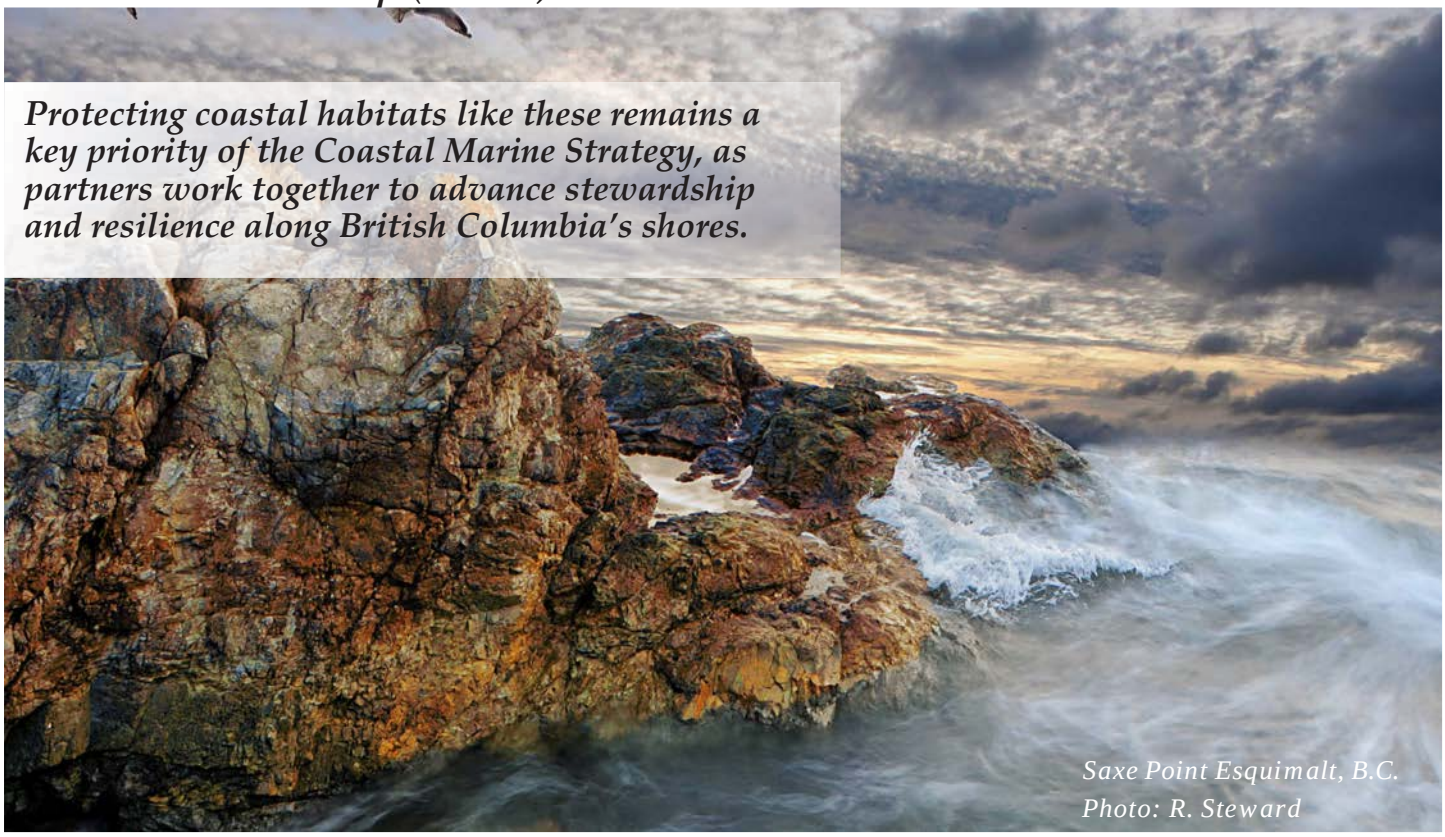
Coastal Marine Strategy Update Meeting with the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS)



Protecting coastal habitats like these remains a key priority of the Coastal Marine Strategy, as partners work together to advance stewardship and resilience along British Columbia's shores.

Saxe Point Esquimalt, B.C.
Photo: R. Steward

Submited by Peter Ballin

I attended the Coastal Marine Strategy (CMS) update meeting on January 20, 2026, which brought together 69 participants representing a wide range of stakeholders. The CMS has now entered its im-plementation phase, working with coastal First Nations and local governments to identify feasible priorities and initiate near-term actions. These efforts are taking place within the constraints of government spending cutbacks and staff reductions. Despite these challenges, ministry staff expressed strong commitment to advancing the strategy's goal of balancing cultural, ecological, and economic values within a complex, multi-jurisdictional marine governance landscape.

Progress reported at the meeting included the development of a monitoring protocol for coastal habitats and initiatives to address marine pollution, particularly from polystyrene. Aquaculture policy development is underway, and First Nations input has helped identify eight additional opportunities for implementation.

Additional topics discussed included:

- community-driven projects to enhance food security and restore ecosystems
- shoreline stabilization
- sea-level-rise adaptation
- protection of glass sponge ecosystems

I raised the challenge of effectively communicating coastal issues to the public in order to build understanding and support. Convenor Charles Short acknowledged the difficulty of keeping the public informed and noted that efforts are underway to improve communication. Karen Topelko of WLRS indicated that a public communication strategy is being developed, including social media posts highlighting CMS successes, and welcomed ideas for outreach.

I also emphasized opportunities to involve volunteers through organizations such as BC Nature and its member clubs, citing examples including green crab monitoring in Boundary Bay (Friends of Semiahmoo Bay) and oyster monitoring in English Bay (Nature Vancouver) initiatives. Charles indicated he would explore ways to expand public engagement and volunteer participation in coastal stewardship, including invasive species monitoring.

Following the meeting, retiring council co-chair, Nancy Wilkin, noted a significant omission: the absence of discussion regarding recent federal reductions to marine spill response capacity. According to the Green Party, experts responsible for responding to toxic marine spills affecting wildlife were laid off in January. Readers are encouraged to raise this issue, along with other coastal concerns, with their government representatives—particularly those readers living in coastal communities.

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B.C. ENGOs for a Coastal Marine Strategy

Submitted by Peter Ballin

I attended two meetings of the B.C. environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) held on November 27, 2025 and February 12, 2026, hosted by the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS).

The purpose of the meetings was to coordinate efforts over the coming months to build support for, and advance the implementation and resourcing of British Columbia's Coastal Marine Strategy (CMS).

Participating organizations shared updates on their CMS-related work and explored opportunities for collaboration. Topics discussed included concerns about the province rescinding the expedited permitting process for shoreline restoration projects; municipal outreach efforts led by West Coast Environmental Law (WCEL) and CPAWS-BC; outreach to industry to build coalitions for restoration projects; collaboration with BC Marine Trails and its network of approximately 1,500 volunteers to collect marine debris data; leasing Crown land through the Stewardship Centre of BC, and the federal tanker ban.

WCEL and CPAWS-BC, together with the City of Langford and the District of Saanich, brought forward a resolution to legislate the BC Coastal Marine Strategy at the 2025 Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) convention.

This effort was successful: on December 3, 2025, the UBCM Executive Council endorsed Resolution NR69, Legislating the BC Coastal Marine Strategy (pages 168–169). A formal response from the Province is now anticipated.

Collective next steps identified at the meeting included seeking greater transparency and better communication from the Province, such as biannual or quarterly progress reports on CMS implementation. Participants also noted that many ENGOs and partner organizations already have projects and programs contributing to CMS goals. To better understand cumulative impacts and support informed decision-making, there was agreement on the need for a centralized tracking mechanism to monitor these activities.

For BC Nature, potential next steps include assembling a tracker of marine conservation projects led by member clubs and increasing awareness of the Coastal Marine Strategy among coastal clubs. In 2025, BC Nature sent five letters on marine issues, which are available on BC Nature's website. *https://bcnature.org.*

British Columbia has approximately 25,000 to 29,000 kilometres of rugged Pacific coastline, including the mainland, deep fjords, and 6,000 to 40,000 islands. While the straight-line distance is less than 1,000 km, the deeply indented shoreline—spanning from the U.S. border to Alaska—results in this extensive total length, representing roughly 10% of Canada's total coastline.

Photo: H. Crozier

Cougars, Wolves, and Bears

Some Key Facts About BC Cougars:

Physical Traits: Males can weigh up to 70–91 kg, while females weigh 41–54 kg. They can reach lengths of up to 190 cm (nose to tail).

Hunting & Diet: They are "stalk and ambush" hunters that can jump 5 to 6 metres in a single leap. They mainly eat deer, elk, and, less frequently, small mammals and livestock.

Habitat: They prefer rocky, brushy areas and forests. While found throughout BC, they are most common in the southern part of the province.

Submitted by Jacqueline Sherk

Cougars: Cougars are solitary and elusive animals that generally avoid people and prefer to remain out of sight. However, as human populations grow, forests are increasingly converted into neighbourhoods, and people and Cougars are sharing more of the same landscapes. The development of parks, trails, and wooded urban areas has increased the likelihood of occasional encounters with wildlife, including Cougars.

Trail cameras and residential security cameras regularly record Cougar activity, sometimes revealing how close these animals live to human communities. Research and wildlife agencies consistently note that Cougars in human-influenced landscapes tend to be more active at night, likely as a way to avoid people. While their primary prey consists of wild ungulates such as deer, Cougars may occasionally prey on domestic animals, particularly pets, when these are left unattended outdoors.

Close encounters between people and Cougars remain rare but do occur. In a report from last summer, the CBC described a Smithers man who encountered a Cougar at close range and defended himself during the incident. Such encounters are uncommon and not representative of typical Cougar behaviour.

As these shared landscapes expand, it is increasingly important to learn how to coexist with Cougars in ways that protect people while respecting the species. In areas where human activity overlaps with Cougar habitat, small children and pets should be supervised outdoors. Keeping pets indoors at night reduces the risk of contact with Cougars and other wildlife. Conservation goals are best supported through public education, clear communication, and calm, evidence-based approaches that avoid fear-driven responses or discrimination against an entire species.

Black Bears: In January, the B.C. Government released a public survey proposing to extend the provincial Black Bear hunting season by one additional month to include August. The proposal would apply to non-urban, private land in regions including the Lower Mainland, Whistler, Squamish, Pemberton, and Powell River, and would align with existing season structures in parts of the Okanagan. According to the survey and accompanying materials, the proposal responds in part to concerns from agricultural producers regarding crop damage and would also increase hunting opportunities.

Wildlife experts and advocates have raised concerns about the timing of the proposed extension. August coincides with the peak of hyperphagia, a biological phase during which Black Bears increase food intake to accumulate fat reserves in preparation for winter dormancy. During this period, bears are more active and range more widely in search of food. At the same time, human outdoor activity—including hiking, camping, and recreation—also increases, raising the potential for human–bear interactions.

Currently, the provincial spring and fall Black Bear hunting seasons run from April 1 to June 15 and from September 10 to November 30, respectively, for a total of approximately 96 days. Adding an August season would extend the annual hunting period by an additional 31 days. Under existing regulations allowing up to two bears per licence, critics have expressed concern about the cumulative impact of increased harvest pressure.

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British Columbia's Black Bear population has not been comprehensively surveyed since 2001, when estimates ranged between 120,000 and 160,000 animals. More recent harvest data indicate that more than 20,000 Black Bears were killed by hunters between 2019 and 2023. These figures do not include bears destroyed by the B.C. Conservation Officer Service in response to human–wildlife conflict or habituation. At the same time, bear habitat continues to be affected by logging and expanding development across the province.

Protection for Black Bear denning habitat is limited in B.C., with formal protections in place only in Haida Gwaii and the Great Bear Rainforest. Den sites are critical for reproduction, as female Black Bears give birth and nurse their cubs while denned. Several First Nations have expressed interest in stronger protections for bear dens, particularly in old-growth forest areas and on their traditional territories.

Although Black Bears are not listed as threatened or endangered, they are widely recognized as a keystone species due to their ecological roles, including seed dispersal and nutrient cycling. Ongoing discussions about Black Bear management highlight the need for up-to-date population data, habitat protection, and policies that balance ecological, cultural, and social considerations.

Grizzly Bears: Wildlife, including Grizzly Bears, are known to use human-made corridors such as railway tracks to move across landscapes. Rail corridors can provide relatively unobstructed travel routes, particularly in winter when tracks are cleared of snow. Animals may also be attracted to spilled agricultural products, such as grain, along rail lines. When wildlife–train collisions occur, carcasses can further attract scavengers and carnivores, increasing the risk of additional strikes.

Freight trains travel at high speeds and require long distances—often up to two kilometres—to come to a complete stop, making it difficult to avoid collisions even when train operators sound whistles. Investigations by *The Narwhal*, in collaboration with CBC News, have documented that wildlife–train collisions in British Columbia have been a known issue for decades, with records indicating that large numbers of animals have been killed or injured by trains over time.

Under the B.C. Wildlife Act, individuals are required to report accidental wildlife deaths or injuries. However, *The Narwhal's* investigation found that collision reporting by rail companies has often been incomplete or inconsistent, and that government agencies have faced challenges in working with rail operators to obtain accurate data and implement effective mitigation measures. In some cases, animals are not killed outright but suffer severe injuries that later require euthanasia. In remote areas, delays in reaching injured animals can prolong suffering.

Research cited in the investigation includes observations by biologist Clayton Lamb, who conducts wildlife monitoring along rail corridors. Lamb has noted that animals struck by trains may attempt to flee by running along the tracks rather than off them, increasing the likelihood of being overtaken. He has also emphasized that train-related mortality can have disproportionate impacts on Grizzly Bear populations due to their low reproductive rates and relatively small population sizes.

Conservation Committee Note: The information presented in this report reflects the research and perspectives of the Conservation Committee and does not necessarily represent the official positions of BC Nature. The Committee strives to conduct due diligence and to provide fact-based, well-sourced information to inform discussion and decision-making. All sources/references provided can be found in the e-version online.

Counting B.C. Interior Swans and Eagles: A Half-Century of Citizen Science

Submitted by Megan Duchesne

On a cold January morning, I was one of many bird enthusiasts across B.C. carrying on a half-century-old tradition of counting swans and eagles. The Rick Howie B.C. Interior Swan and Eagle Count is organized annually by naturalist clubs, with people participating from Osoyoos to the Cariboo.

Standing shoulder to shoulder with students and retirees, we traded quiet greetings while looking out at the South Thompson River in Kamloops, where the first Count occurred in 1974.

A flock of Trumpeter Swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) flew almost ceremoniously above where we'd gathered, and with that, the Count began. Our convoy set off, following the road winding along the South Thompson. We scanned the river for flashes of white, and appraised figures perched on power poles and trees for eagle-like qualities. "The counting has been conducted in the same way for the past 52 years for swans and 32 years for eagles." remarked Richard Doucette, a Kamloops-based biologist who has organized the Count since 2022.

A whopping 107 Bald Eagles were observed during the Kamloops portion of the Count, a significant increase from last year. Roughly half were counted at the Mission Flats Landfill, which often provides a winter food source, supporting the local population.

Consistent with recent counts, no Tundra Swans (*Cygnus columbianus*) were observed along the South Thompson. Their absence in the region over the past few decades is not believed to reflect population declines, but rather a shift in winter distributions potentially influenced by food competition with an increasing population of Trumpeter Swans, whose recovery was aided by conservation efforts in the late 20th century. We counted 160 Trumpeter Swans, which is comparable to what was observed last year.

A whopping 107 Bald Eagles were observed during the Kamloops portion of the Count

Photos: M. Duchesne

Like the Christmas Bird Count, the count takes place on a single day each winter, and bird distributions in any given year can be influenced by environmental variability, such as food availability or ice cover on the South Thompson. As a result, the goal of the Count is not to estimate population size precisely each year, nor to explain year-to-year fluctuations. Instead, "the power in long-term studies like this is what the dataset can give you over time," explained Doucette. With half a century of Count data, researchers can detect long-term trends and monitor change. "Without this dataset, we wouldn't have such strong evidence of changes in the winter distributions of Tundra and Trumpeter Swans," added Doucette. "You can't see change over time if you're not monitoring it."

The inception of the count was prompted by the conspicuous flocks of Tundra Swans wintering along the South Thompson and was formalized through the efforts of the late biologist Rick Howie, who went on to organize it for more than four decades. As the count grew from a small group in Kamloops to hundreds of participants across B.C., its purpose expanded beyond its original focus. Over the decades, citizen scientists inadvertently documented the appearance of the Trumpeter Swan, which was first observed wintering in the region in 1983 after being hunted to near extinction early in the 20th century.

Taking place in mid-January, the Count offers a unique opportunity to understand the distribution of swans along Interior waterways during the non-breeding period. "The number of swans documented along the South Thompson in past surveys warranted its designation as an Important Bird Area," explained Doucette. Additionally, seemingly declining wintering eagle populations along the coast in the early 1990s suggested eagles could be occupying habitat elsewhere in B.C., prompting Count participants to begin systematically recording eagles alongside swans in 1995.

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The Count demonstrates how citizen science strengthens both science and community. "Each year, volunteers contribute their time and local knowledge, creating a reciprocal exchange," smiled Doucette. It is a fun opportunity for naturalist clubs to bring together like-minded people, whether experienced naturalists, aspiring birders, or students interested in careers in natural resources. "It's an opportunity to connect with nature, learn from one another, and take part in a long-running tradition of stewardship."

If you're interested in getting involved in your local Count, reach out to your local BC Nature Club in the Kootenay and Thompson Okanagan Shuswap areas.

The Great God Woodpecker

Submitted by Dave Manning

This and other names including Great Black Woodpecker, Carpenter Bird, and Logcock, have been used to identify the Pileated Woodpecker, the second largest woodpecker in North America, assuming the Ivory-billed is not extinct. A ten-year study on the Ivory-billed ending in 2022, Project Principalis, concluded, "It is clearly premature for the species to be declared extinct." Very good news for bird lovers! We can hope.

The Pileated Woodpecker is a common resident across the forest areas of B.C., although absent from Haida Gwaii. They frequently talk back and forth across the forest, 200-300 metres apart. Both sexes drum, usually on some resonant piece of wood. They have fluid-filled cushions in their heads to help protect their brain. Their flight appears powerful and slightly undulating with that spear-like bill leading them on. They often tolerate human presence - sometimes I stop to watch them close at hand as they work away on a dead log, seemingly oblivious to me. Or curiosity finds them playing hide-and-seek on a tree, occasionally peeking around the trunk at me, from one side, then the other.

Their diet consists mostly of ants; one dissected stomach contained 2600 ants! They are responsible for those large rectangular excavations, often on Western Redcedar, where they have been seeking food. Their barb-tipped tongue can extend three times their bill length. My wife and I were delighted to see a male standing on our porch railing, comically plucking grapes from a vine, fruit being a significant dietary item as well.

Likely mating for life, they maintain a year-round pair bond and a large territory of several hectares. The male reportedly chooses the nesting tree, often near water, and begins the excavation. The female helps out as they excavate a new nest cavity each spring. Although there are records of a pair re-using a nest, I have not yet witnessed such behaviour. I was amused one day watching wood chips come flying out of a nest cavity under construction, only a bill being exposed with each toss out. I have seen several nest hole excavations, some only partially completed, but with no sign of Pileated usage. Perhaps they were simply practicing their skills.

A male Pileated Woodpecker looking to see who's there
Photo: D. Manning

In the spring, Pileated pairs were busy excavating their oval-shaped nest holes and incubating eggs, preparing to raise a family, a process that considerably interests me. Of the several nests I have discovered here on the coast, most have been in dead Red Alder snags, one in the trunk a live Douglas-fir and another in a dead branch of a live Arbutus tree. The hole is always a little wider at the bottom than top. Each bird also makes and uses its own roost cavity.

The male, with that scarlet "moustache," incubates the 3-5 white eggs overnight and part of the day while the female

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Nest cavity - Photo: D. Manning

does the other hours. After approximately 18 days, the chicks hatch and are brooded for up to ten days. I have observed both parents feeding them via regurgitation, inserting their bills into the throats of the young. When old enough, the young poke their heads out of the cavity and voice a continuous churring sound while awaiting food deliveries. I have heard a parent communicating with a youngster that is peeking out, both talking back and forth across some distance. After the nest cavities are abandoned, other birds will use them—tree-nesting ducks, Western Screech-owl, and many other critters.

After fledging, the young may remain with their parents for 2-3 months, learning the ways of being a woodpecker. I occasionally see the parents teaching their young ones how to forage on dead snags and logs, hacking away with those big bills.

We are so fortunate to have these magnificent woodpeckers as our neighbours. I am sure many of you have had a special experience with one. Never take it for granted—watch it at length whenever you encounter one as this stunning bird is ours to enjoy. On a recent walk I saw a male hammering away on a Western Redredar, the tree riddled with foraging holes, obviously a favourite tree. Two hours later when I passed by again, he was still at the same redcedar tree, working on a new hole. He must have been hungry, having found a source for a good long meal.

Fortunately, their populations have steadily increased in the past 50 years. Hopefully, this dazzler will continue to withstand the advances of civilization. The Dodo, Great Auk, and Passenger Pigeon did not.

Pileated Woodpeckers drum slowly, accelerating and then trailing off at the end, distinguishing them from most other woodpeckers that drum at a steady rate. They can drum close to 17 beats per second and will perform 10 to 30 beats before they take a break.

Fred Never Stops Giving to Scout Island

Submitted by Sue Hemphill

Many of you know of and remember Fred McMechan. He has a long history of both volunteering and giving to BC Nature, the Williams Lake Field Naturalists (WLFN), and to Scout Island. Recently, I found documents that Fred had signed in 1979, as President of WLFN, and the "management" of Scout Island Nature Centre by WLFN. This was the start of WLFN becoming the main source of volunteers for our treasured Scout Island Centre.

So much of what Scout Island is today is a result of years of volunteer time by Fred (and many others). Today, Scout Island is the place Fred asks to come to whenever we can organize a van to transport him to the centre.

On a recent outing to Scout Island, we wheeled Fred around the trails, and we pointed out the new trail sign that one of the other members of WLFN (Lara) had made. It gave him much pleasure that someone else had taken over this long-time task of his. On another trip, we used the new access trail to the Nature House that now allows him to enter the centre to see who is there and to share a cup of coffee. Sometimes, with help from his caregiver, he works on putting bluebird boxes together. It was Fred and Jim Sims that originally built the hundreds of boxes used for the Williams Lake Bluebird Program, which was started by Anna Roberts in the 1980s. This successful program continues today under the guidance of Loyd Csizmadia and, when able, Fred enjoys participating in this long-running program.

It is no surprise that when it came time to sell his house and all its contents a year ago, he decided that all proceeds from the sale of the contents should go as a donation to Scout Island. It was a very generous donation and has been used to pay for staff time. Fred knows this expense is the most difficult to raise funding for and requested that it be used that way

Fred (front right) at the March 2025 Williams Lake Field Naturalists AGM along with (left to right) Margaret Waring, Ordell Steen, Lubna Khan, and Lara Roorda

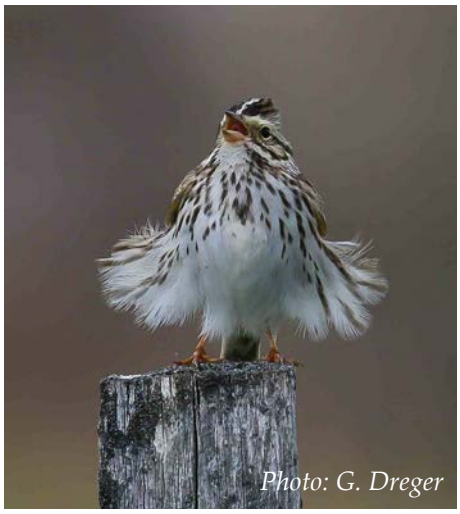
If you have time, stop in and visit Fred at the Seniors Village in Williams Lake. He is always up for a visit and a good conversation. If it happens to be a sunny day, take him out in the sun and perhaps he will have some observations on local nature to share with you. You can contact me through BC Nature email *info@bcnature.ca* if you would like further information on Fred and how to facilitate a visit.

Key Biodiversity Areas Updates

Submitted by Liam Ragan

As conservationists we face a daunting road ahead as the sustainability funding landscape becomes increasingly fraught. Thankfully, with the help of our community and key partnerships, such as the BC Conservation Fund, BC Nature remains committed and able to fulfil the work required to designate KBAs by 2030. In the coming months, our priorities are:

- Expand the volunteer Caretaker Network, particularly for new KBA sites, so that our community is poised to respond to biodiversity threats regardless of funding.
- Strengthen our partnerships with Indigenous communities, who continue to be on the front lines of safeguarding biodiversity.
- Enable our community of conservation partners, from naturalist clubs to First Nations, to monitor, promote and protect our province's most critical places for wildlife through KBA surveys, outreach and advocacy.



Vesper Sparrow

If you, like me, are concerned about the natural environment and ready to step up, consider volunteering as a KBA Caretaker. We will be providing much more information in the months to come, but for now go to *kbacanada.org/explore/map-viewer/* and click "Candidate KBAs" to see if there's a KBA near you that you'd be interested in getting involved in. Additionally, donations to BC Nature and our KBA work are needed now more than ever. As always, I am eager to hear from our community and answer any questions you may have, and you can reach me at *lragan@bcnature.ca*. Thank you, and I'll see you in the field!

Natural Justice

A Sham Society

Submitted by Ben van Drimmelen

If a group of people is concerned about the local government's decision on an environmental matter and wants to challenge such a decision, they may decide to form a registered society. Submissions by a society can be more persuasive than those of individuals, as presentation by a society implies that a broader public is equally concerned.

That was the situation when the owner of a vacant lot adjacent to a municipal park applied to their local government for a minor variance to reduce the rear yard setback by seven metres. A local environmental protection society went to court to oppose the variance, saying that the variance was going to damage oak trees on and adjacent to the property.

Five individuals, including two directors of the society, had previously sent a letter to the local government opposing the variance. The Society had also sent two letters in opposition. Several individuals subsequently made presentations at the variance hearing. However, the local government issued approved the variance. The Society went to court to have the approval set aside.

The court tried to determine whether this just a dispute by a few adjacent property owners. Or did the existence of the society indicate a broader community concern? The court investigated the nature of The Society.

The Society claimed to have broad purposes and activities, such as advocating to preserve and improve the ecosystem in which the park lay, organizing work crews to remove invasive species from the park and publishing a newsletter about issues affecting the park, but provided no evidence that it had actually carried out any of its claimed activities. It had been formed just one month before the variance hearing. It had three directors, but two of those were owners of adjacent properties and the third owned property nearby. Although one director claimed that the society had 50 members, another director gave evidence that there were more than 60. Of the two letters sent by the society, one was signed by four individuals – but three of those were a father, his 6-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter. The other letter was purportedly signed by five "directors", although only three were directors of the society. When two of the directors spoke at the variance hearing, they did not identify themselves as directors of the society; in fact, they had made no mention of the society at all. Another person, speaking in support of the variance, pointed out that allowing the variance would improve the ecosystem in which the park lay; society directors were ironically advocating to the detriment of the ecosystem, contrary to the society's asserted purpose.

The court concluded that the reason behind the incorporation of the society was simply to give the impression of widespread public opposition to the variance. The society was more of a "busybody", and that was not a tactic to be encouraged. The society was not allowed to appeal the variance approval.

The lesson: If one wants to involve a society in challenging an environmental decision, don't use a sham organization.

Back to Basics

Aspens - Trees with Many Trunks

Submitted by Terry Taylor

Trembling Aspens are one of the dominant and iconic trees of British Columbia. They are a conspicuous feature throughout most of the province, as well as across Canada, and are especially beautiful in the autumn due to their yellow foliage. To sit within an aspen grove on a sunny summer afternoon, with an ever so slight breeze is also a memorable treat. The fluttering sound you hear is due to flat stalks. [Flat stalks, scientifically known as "fasciation" or cresting, are a rare condition where a plant's growing tip (apical meristem) becomes elongated rather than cylindrical. This results in flattened, ribbon-like, or twisted stems, flowers, or fruits caused by genetic, bacterial, environmental, or hormonal factors.]

Aspens are members of the willow family, and there are some fascinating things about them, that set them apart from other trees. One of those things is the tree's growth pattern, and how it originates. They usually grow in extensive groves. The trees in a grove are genetically all the same. The founding tree of the grove started from a seed. Since aspens are short-lived trees, in most groves, the founder is no longer alive. Aspens produce shallow horizontal roots, and suckers are produced along these roots. Those suckers produce new trees. Very few aspen trees grow from seed. Almost all of them are from suckers. So, a grove of these trees is a clone, essentially a single tree. The difference from one grove to another is not readily apparent. But in spring and fall this can sometimes become clearer. In spring, different groves may come into leaf at slightly different times. In the autumn, different groves may have slightly different shades of yellow. One uncommon form, sometimes called *Populus tremuloides* var. aurea has leaves that turn orange, so easily distinguished from the normal var. *tremuloides*. Both the Latin and English species epithets refer to the

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Trembling Aspen leaf
Photo: T. Taylor

trembling part of this poplar's name. The "oides" means "like". The North American ones are like the closely related European *Populus tremula*. Probably the most impressive aspen area is the northern prairies aspen parklands.

Some aspen groves are early successional trees that are replaced by conifers, but others can last a long time. Single aspen trees seldom reach a century in age, but the groves can be very ancient. The oldest known at present is in Utah. Estimates of its age are about 10,000 years, although it is very difficult to measure the age of very old groves. There are also claims that it is the heaviest tree in the world. There may be other groves that are heavier and older. How many aspens have been studied this way? Other botanists claim that some *Posidonia* sea grass clones are the largest plants in the world. And the mycologists point to a mushroom that is larger than any plant. It is a honey mushroom (*Armillaria ostoyae*) in eastern Oregon that is estimated to be 2,000 years old. It is a genetically identical clone of a parasitic fungus that covers a forested area twice as large as Stanley Park. This species of honey mushroom is common in our forests. Do we have any clones like this? That can only be ascertained via expensive genetic sequencing.

Although aspen groves are common in the Interior of British Columbia, they are largely absent from the coast, with only a few notable exceptions. Small, scattered stands occur in the lower Fraser Valley and along the east coast of Vancouver Island, though they do not form the extensive groves seen inland. Their presence in these coastal locations reflects climatic conditions at the end of the last ice age. Between about 10,000 and 6,000 years ago, during a warm, dry period known as the Hypsithermal Interval, Interior-like conditions extended westward. These drier conditions allowed aspen to spread down the Fraser Valley and establish isolated populations that have persisted in suitable pockets on Vancouver Island and nearby coastal areas.

Honouring an Environmentalist

Submitted by Walter Thorne

We, at BC Nature are proud to announce that one of our environmental brethren, Peter Hamel has been posthumously awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal.

This is a great honor for one of BC Nature's keenest ornithologists. The award also recognized Peter's tireless work for Indigenous Rights and Social Justice. Peter was a lifetime leader who lived decades on Haida Gwaii and was a founding member of the Delkatla Wildlife Sanctuary in Masset. He was a passionate advocate for nature and lived his life to the fullest.

Why donate to the BC Naturalists' Foundation?

Submitted by Stephen Partington, Past President, BC Naturalists' Foundation

"Closing in on half a million dollars' worth of grants and scholarships"

That's right – you did read the headline correctly: Since the formation of the BC Naturalists' Foundation in 1990, we will soon surpass $500,000 in total grants to BC Nature for its Club Support Grants program, its two scholarships, its special projects and its administration.

That's a lot of "unrestricted" coin.

For the BC Nature Club Support Grants program, the BC Naturalists' Foundation has funded 205 grants. Consider for a moment just how many people this funding has benefitted. A fair assumption is that, on average, at least eight people are involved with each project. Sometimes there are fewer people involved with a specific project, but oftentimes there are many more. Therefore, well over 1,600 BC Nature members and their projects have directly benefitted from funding provided by the BC Naturalists' Foundation for the Club Support Grant program.

From whence came this largesse?
All of this grant money has come strictly from earnings generated by the BC Naturalists' Foundation's conservative, multiplier portfolio. Every single dollar that has been donated to the Foundation is still in that portfolio. In fact, every single donated dollar, in addition to being protected and preserved, is indexed to inflation at a rate determined by the Government of Canada. These indexed dollars are the capital core of the BC Naturalists' Foundation. The capital core generates some of the grantable money that can be disbursed for Club Support Grants, but a large contribution comes from earnings-on-earnings generated by a continuous re-investment of interest, dividends and capital gains within the portfolio. Since the inception of the BC Naturalists' Foundation in 1991, the annual payout has increased more than eight-fold, an average rate of more than 24% per year.

Is this growth of unrestricted funding enough? The answer to this question lies with you.

- Do you want the Club Support Grants program and scholarships to at least be indexed to inflation?
- Should grants and scholarships be more generous regardless of inflation?
- Should there be more grants and scholarships?

Beyond grants and scholarships, can the naturalist community commit to building the BC Naturalists' Foundation to a level that generates a steady stream of unrestricted funding? Such support would provide BC Nature with the financial independence needed to sustain its core operations and secure its future.

Want to bankroll the future of BC Nature and the

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naturalists community?

Believe in your future and invest in the BC Naturalists' Foundation! Use the Charitable Registration **#11891-392 RR0001** when setting up your legacy gifts.

Nickels, dimes, quarters, loonies, toonies, fins, tenners, hundos, grands, racks, bricks, mils, yards, terabucks …

Any amount of cash, stocks, bonds, insurance policy benefits, bequests … by cash, cheque, e-transfer … one-off, monthly, annually, incidentally …

Everything goes into the kitty....compounding magic happens.....then - abracadabra - out pop unrestricted funds

… and the fun begins!

Migration: A Rare Visitor and the Instinct to Move

Submitted by Penny N. Lim

News travels throughout the local and international birding community. A Taiga Flycatcher — the first ever recorded in Canada — has arrived in Vancouver.

This tiny traveller, a small round ball of feathers barely larger than a hummingbird, was blown far off its expected migratory route. Normally, it would leave its breeding grounds in the boreal forests of Siberia and migrate south to warmer regions of Asia, where food and shelter are abundant. Instead, guided by instinct and necessity, it found refuge near the Aquatic Centre at Sunset Beach in Vancouver, British Columbia. There, among coniferous trees, shrubs, and evergreens, it discovered what all migrants seek: safety and sustenance.

Weighing just over 11 grams and measuring about 13 cm in length, the Taiga Flycatcher is small but remarkably resilient. With its fine beak, it captures insects on the wing, darting with speed and precision. Like other passerines — perching birds adapted with a long hind toe for gripping branches — it rests in trees, conserving energy between feeding and vigilance.

Migration demands extraordinary preparation.

Birds strengthen their hearts and flight muscles and accumulate fat reserves to sustain journeys that may span thousands of kilometres. Many migrate at night, when cooler temperatures reduce energy loss, winds are calmer, and predators are fewer. They navigate using the sun, moon, and stars, as well as geographic landmarks and subtle environmental cues. Their vision allows them to detect distant movement while focusing precisely on tiny insects nearby.

Because birds maintain higher body temperatures than mammals, their metabolic demands are immense. Small birds may consume up to half their body weight daily to fuel flight and survival. Every gram matters. Their bodies are adapted for efficiency, enabling endurance across vast distances.

To witness this rare visitor at Sunset Beach is a privilege. The Taiga Flycatcher, normally seen high in forest canopies, appears here at eye level, moving quietly among branches. Birders gather respectfully, sharing sightings, stories, and quiet excitement. There is a sense of camaraderie — strangers connected by wonder. From near and far, dedicated birders travelled solely to see this rare visitor. I was joined by birders from out-of-town and province (Hamilton, Ontario), international birders from Washington state, and a life-long birder from Pennsylvania who blogs and travels the world, camera in hand. We return often, drawn not only by rarity but by the story this bird carries: one of resilience, instinct, and survival.

Migration is one of nature's most extraordinary phenomena. Birds undertake these epic journeys not for adventure, but for life itself — to find food, reproduce, and endure. Among the most remarkable migrants is the Arctic Tern, whose annual journey from the Arctic to the Antarctic and back again spans from 30,000 -50,000 kilometres. In doing so, it experiences two summers each year, living in nearly constant daylight. Its tireless flight represents the farthest known migration of any animal on Earth. Yet migration is increasingly perilous. Habitat loss, climate change, pollution, and human development disrupt ancient pathways. Migratory birds depend on intact ecosystems across continents. Their survival requires continuity — safe breeding grounds, reliable stopover sites, and healthy wintering habitats.

This instinct to move is shared across the natural world. Wolves, too, migrate when circumstances demand. A

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lone wolf may leave its pack and travel great distances in search of food, territory, and a mate. Movement becomes essential to survival.

The wolf's journey, like that of the Taiga Flycatcher, reflects a deeper truth: life persists through adaptation and motion. Migratory species remind us that ecosystems are interconnected and that survival depends on freedom of movement across landscapes.

The Taiga Flycatcher's unexpected arrival in Vancouver is more than a rare sighting. It is a symbol of endurance and vulnerability, and a reminder of the remarkable journeys unfolding above and around us. To witness it is to recognize migration for what it truly is — life, in motion, sustained by instinct, resilience, and the fragile continuity of the natural world.

BC Nature Board Opportunities

Submitted by the BC Nature Nominating Committee

BC Nature has long played an important role in British Columbia, representing the interests of nature, conservation, and the province's network of naturalist clubs. This work depends on the dedication and commitment of volunteers, and we are fortunate to have benefited from the efforts of many outstanding individuals over the years. The strength of BC Nature lies in its members—both individuals and clubs—whose knowledge, passion, and service sustain our mission.

As we begin a new year, we invite interested naturalists to consider joining the BC Nature Board. Several appointments will be made at the upcoming Annual General Meeting in May, and we are seeking individuals who are willing to contribute their time, skills, and perspectives to support BC Nature's goals and activities.

If you are interested in serving in one of these roles, or if you know someone who would be a good fit, please contact BC Nature at *info@bcnature.ca*

Vice-President - The Vice-President plays a key leadership role within BC Nature. Responsibilities include assisting the President and acting in their place when necessary. The Vice-President also chairs the Human Resources Committee and may lead other committees or special projects at the discretion of the Board. In addition, the Vice-President helps prepare Board meeting agendas and supports the effective functioning of the organization's leadership.

Director-at-Large - Directors-at-Large are full members of the Board who contribute to discussions and decisions on all matters affecting BC Nature. While the role does not have fixed duties, Directors-at-Large often take on specific responsibilities based on their expertise and interests. They typically serve on one or more standing committees, such as Governance, Finance, or Human Resources, helping ensure that BC Nature operates effectively and responsibly.

Regional Coordinator (Vancouver Island) - The Regional Coordinator serves as an essential liaison between BC Nature and its member clubs on Vancouver Island. This role includes participating as a full Board member, organizing regional meetings, and maintaining communication with local clubs on issues of concern. The Regional Coordinator helps share information between clubs and the Board, prepares correspondence related to regional conservation issues, and may assist with media outreach. Additional responsibilities include serving on the Awards Committee, submitting regular reports to the Board, encouraging regional contributions to *BCnature* magazine, and supporting regional science fair award programs.

Serving on the BC Nature Board is an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to conservation, natural history education, and the strength of our province's naturalist community. We encourage members who are passionate about nature and committed to stewardship to consider becoming part of BC Nature's leadership.

Volunteering on BC Nature's Board rewards through learning and conserving nature. PLUS the inspiring payback that arises from friendships with naturalists in the many clubs throughout BC, who share their dedication and commitment to local nature at conference field trips.

Bev Ramey, Past President

Serving as President of BC Nature was a privilege and a responsibility. Our Board ensures that we are truly knowing nature and keeping it worth knowing.
If you care about conservation in British Columbia, your voice belongs at this table.

Kees Visser, Past President

BC Nature Camps

I am looking to partner with another member(s) to resurrect BC Nature "Nature Camps".
It's been a few years since we have held a camp and I for one, miss them!
I am prepared to do the "heavy-lifting" (registration, accomodation/catering negotiations etc.,) but need ideas on locations and outings and may need assistance in getting qualified speakers/leaders for whatever location is chosen.
Please email me at communications@bcnature.ca

Thank you, Betty Davison

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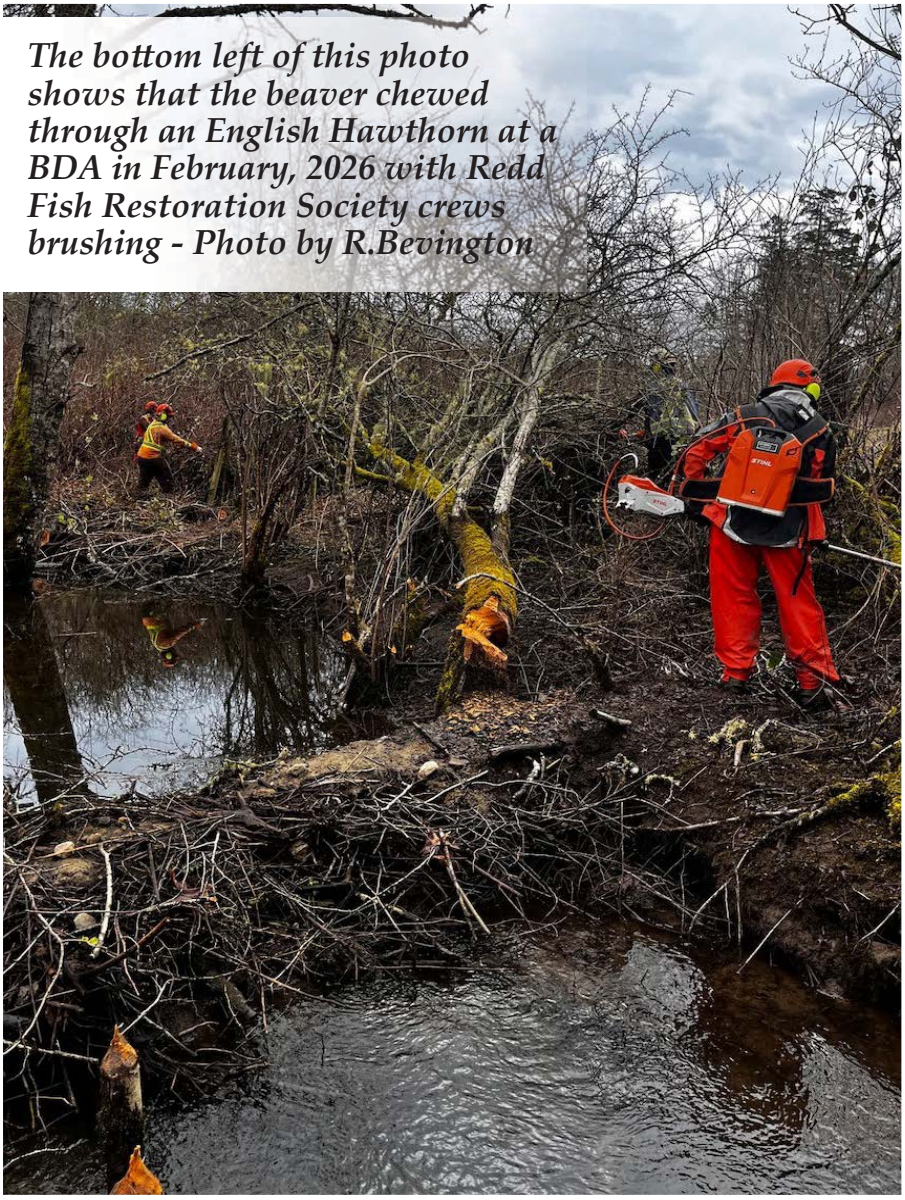
A Live Beaver Appears at a Xwaaqw'um 'Beaver Dam Analogs' Project'

Submitted by Rachel Bevington MSc. RPBio.

Stqeeye' Learning Society has been restoring Lee Creek in Xwaaqw'um, Salt Spring Island, for the last two years. Xwaaqw'um is a traditional village site of the Quw'utsun peoples. Partnering with Cowichan Tribes, BC Parks, and Redd Fish Restoration Society, crews and volunteers have added Beaver Dam Analogs (BDAs) to the meandering creek that flows through a small valley. The wetlands restoration project has added 6.5 hectares of wetland habitat uphill from the two fish-bearing streams in the valley. This project is addressing climate change and land disturbance that is threatening the salmon and trout habitat in this important place.

The 564-hectare Burgoyne Bay area including the ocean, and Burgoyne Bay Provincial Park has 40 hectares of unused agricultural fields, a relic of early settlement in the Gulf Islands, when Salt Spring was the fruit basket of the province. When the farm and adjacent mountain slopes became a provincial park in 2004, the farm fields fell into disrepair. Settler drainage had drastically changed the way water moved through the lowlands, causing deeply incised watercourses to rush with water each winter, but dry out each summer. This drying trend threatens resident Cutthroat Trout and Coho Salmon. Stqeeye' and Redd Fish came together to make deliberate changes to the way water moves down Lee Creek.



The bottom left of this photo shows that the beaver chewed through an English Hawthorn at a BDA in February, 2026 with Redd Fish Restoration Society crews brushing - Photo by R.Bevington

By adding BDAs to the narrow stream, the watercourse widens, causing water to be caught behind the BDA and remain in place for longer. A BDA is designed to mimic what a beaver would naturally do, since beaver are woefully missing from most of their traditional habitat. Restoration groups use BDAs to try to undo some of the effects of industrial logging, agriculture, and mining.

In our case, we were planning the BDA and Post-Assisted Log Structures (PALs), for autumn installation last year, when we did a stream survey and found a natural beaver dam. It was so exciting, and it answered a key question. Would beavers come back? Yes, they were already coming back to the park. We added 12 BDAs and PALs to the upper floodplain of Lee Creek in August 2025, where the

Caught in the act! Trail cam shows evidence of a beaver hard at work

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land is gently sloping and the channel is very narrow. The idea is to cause water to spread out, fanning across the channel and causing more wetting to the historic riparian area.

The riparian area is 30 metres out from each side of the high-water mark of a fish-bearing stream. In this case, the agricultural fields were maintained right up to the edge of the stream, with heavy wire cattle fencing installed immediately beside the 'ditches', with arsenic treated posts. Invasive species took over the riparian area after farming stopped, and the stream started to look like a prickly hedgerow. No one could see that it was a stream anymore, and water sluiced out of it like a rushing drainpipe to the sea.

When Redd Fish and Stqeeye' started the work, cutting back invasive English Hawthorn and Himalayan Blackberry was step one. Deciding where to put the BDAs was step two. Step three was building them with found materials and untreated wooden posts. A team of eight built the dams with sticks and clay. The minidams are built to the highwater edge of the land, to encourage flooding out onto the floodplain around them. Then, step four was to wait for the rain to come and fill them up. We had to wait a long time in 2025; the first heavy rainfall was November 28th. They filled up by the middle of December, and our resident beaver took an interest.

Stqeeye' team member, Noel Bevington, monitored our wildlife cameras and determined the beaver is a female. Something unique about the beaver at Xwaaqw'um is that she is using the plants at hand. That means she is using invasive hawthorn and blackberry in her dam! She immediately came upstream and cut down two large hawthorn trees and started to add to one of the BDAs. Normally, beaver require their favourite foods such as aspen, willow, cottonwood, and alder. However, in Xwaaqw'um, those species are in short supply. The ability to use and eat what is present in the park is a good sign that this species can adapt to climate change and less-than-ideal habitat conditions.

Step five was completed in February 2026, where a team of ten from Redd Fish and Stqeeye' cleared a wider area along the riparian zone and planted some of the beaver's favourite foods. Willow, alder, cottonwood, Red Osier Dogwood, Saskatoon Berry, and Salmonberry were all planted along the restored length of stream. Five hundred trees were planted, including Western Redcedar, Grand Fir, and Douglas-Fir. These young trees will grow up and create shade, a critical part of bringing fish back to this section of the stream.

Stqeeye' team members Tony George, Makayla Joe-George, Noel Bevington, and Tyee Joseph, along with more than 70 volunteers planted many of the twelve thousand plants that we have added in this restoration project. Many of these plants will create habitat for some of the 24 Species at Risk that occur in Xwaaqw'um. This Indigenous-led restoration project is an important part of climate change adaptation for the very dry Gulf Islands.

Stqeeye' Learning Society is excited to have a partner in the beaver, where the important keystone species is signalling to us that the restoration work is helping. By re-wetting the creek for a longer span of time during the summer drought, we hope to help support her starting a family. With all the new wetland habitat created around the creek, we hope to bring enough food plants to the beavers so that they can transition back to their favourite foods. However, if this squl'ew', or beaver in Hul'q'umi'num', wants to keep eating invasives and removing them from the park with us, we are happy for the help!

AVOCET TOURS

UPCOMING TRIPS in 2026/2027

- Southern BC Coast in Fall
- Saskatchewan ~ Cranes & Geese
- Alberta ~ Rockies and Prairies
- Southeastern Brazil

Black-backed Woodpecker © Chris Charlesworth

Southern BC Coast in Fall ~.Sept 1 to 5, 2026. Price: **$3150 CAD,** from Vancouver, BC. Leader: Chris Charlesworth. Explore BC's Lower Mainland & southern Vancouver Is, excellent for shorebirds, seabirds, & fall migrants. Surfbird, Black Oystercatcher, Heermann's Gull, Rhinoceros Auklet, Marbled Murrelet, & more.

Saskatchewan in Fall ~ Sept 30 to Oct 5, 2026. Price: **$3000 CAD** from Saskatoon, SK. Leader: Chris Charlesworth. On this short, action-packed tour, expect to see thousands of migrating geese, including Snow, Ross's, Gr. White-fronted and Cackling. Huge flocks of Sandhill Cranes await, and we aim to find one of Canada's rarest birds, Whooping Crane. Boreal forest birds like Spruce Grouse and Boreal Chickadee are possible, along with an array of mammals.

Alberta. Rocky Mtns & Prairies ~ June 21 to 28, 2027. Price: **$3700 CAD,** from Calgary, AB. Leader: Chris Charlesworth. Great trip for birds & mammals alike. In the Rockies, we'll look for Elk, bears, Moose & more. Foothill birds include Great Gray Owl, Cape May Warbler, Le Conte's Sparrow. On the prairie, we'll search for Chestnut-collared & Thick-billed longspurs, Sprague's Pipit, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Loggerhead Shrike, Ferruginous Hawk & Burrowing Owl.

Southeastern Brazil ~ Oct 21 to Nov 7, 2026. Price: **$9999 CAD,** from Rio de Janeiro. Leaders: Avery Bartels & local guide. Join our tropical expert, Avery, in the rainforests of se. Brazil, home to many regional endemics, such as Saffron Toucanet, Blue-bellied Parrot & Black-capped Piprites. Expect loads of hummingbirds, inc. Violet-crowned Plovercrest, Saw-billed Hummingbird & Brazilian Ruby. Night birds could include Long-tailed Potoo & Tawny-browed Owl.

*All prices in Canadian dollars***

Atlantic Puffin © Chris Charlesworth

WWW.AVOCETTOURS.CA

Conservation Works – When People Get Involved!

Submitted by Candace Ross

Canadians who have spent some years outdoors in British Columbia may have noticed a change in these last few years. Spring mornings feel quieter. Familiar birds show up less often at feeders. Species that once seemed common are becoming harder to find. With so much negative environmental news, it can be difficult to know whether individual actions still matter.

Again, conservation shows us that they do. When people understand how their everyday choices affect wildlife, they are willing to act. While global conversations about climate change often focus on governments and large-scale policy, meaningful progress also depends on individual behaviour. Small changes, repeated across communities, can make a measurable difference.

Community-based organizations like the Vancouver Avian Research Centre (VARC) work at the intersection of research and public action, using birds to help make environmental change visible. Their work highlights the urgency of the situation. The American Robin has declined by 50% in the Lower Mainland, and insect-eating species such as the Bank Swallow have declined by as much as 98% across Canada.

To combat these trends, there are three simple, immediate steps every individual can take to help protect breeding and migratory birds.

Keep Cats Indoors - In North America, free-roaming domestic cats are the leading source of human-related bird mortality, second only to habitat loss. Cats kill an estimated four billion birds each year.

Globally, cats have contributed to the extinction of at least 36 bird species. In Canada, roughly 25% of regularly occurring bird species, including 23 Species at Risk, are vulnerable to cat predation.

The solution is clear: keep cats indoors. Domestic cats are an introduced predator in North America, and even well-fed cats hunt wildlife. Owners who wish to provide outdoor access should use leashes or enclosed outdoor spaces known as catios.

Choose Organic Products - Pesticides and insecticides affect birds both directly and indirectly, through poisoning and the loss of vital food sources. In North America, an estimated 70 to 80 million birds die each year from direct exposure, such as mistaking pesticide granules for seeds. In Canada, the impacts are clear in long-term trends, with grassland bird populations declining by 67% since 1970.

Insecticides also reduce the abundance of invertebrates, which are essential for birds during the breeding season. Most land birds rely on insects to feed their young, and when these food sources disappear, nesting success declines and chick mortality increases. Herbicides further compound the problem by eliminating seed-producing plants and nesting cover, leaving birds more vulnerable to predators and harsh weather.

Photo: VARC

Schools Day at Van Dusen Gardens

Choosing organic food helps reduce demand for these chemicals and supports farming practices that are healthier for birds and other wildlife. This includes not only fresh produce, but also packaged foods, where pesticide use is often less visible to consumers.

Make windows bird-safe day and night - Most of us have heard it. A sudden thud against the glass, followed by a stunned bird on the ground below. Sometimes it flies off. Sometimes it does not. Window collisions are one of the leading causes of bird mortality in North America, second only to cat predation.

Although the issue is often associated with office towers, nearly all bird window collision deaths occur on buildings under four storeys. In other words, homes account for most of these fatalities simply because there are so many of them.

The injuries caused by window strikes are not always obvious. Birds may suffer internal trauma or head injuries, and even those that appear to recover and fly away often die later from their injuries.

The good news is that these collisions are highly preventable. Applying special tape or films to the outside of windows helps birds recognize glass as a barrier. Feeders can be placed either very close to windows to reduce impact speed or far enough away to avoid direct collisions. Turning off unnecessary lights and closing blinds during migration periods also reduces risk.

The challenges facing birds are complex, but many solutions are surprisingly straightforward. When individuals are given clear information and practical ways to respond, they are often willing to act. By combining research with their Schools' Program, public education and community involvement, organizations such as the Vancouver Avian Research Centre show that conservation works best when people are part of the solution.

Featured Key Biodiversity Areas

Witty's Beach

Featured species: Contorted-pod Evening-primrose, *Camissonia contorta*

Submitted by Ian Adams, BC KBA Coordinator

Contorted-pod Evening-primrose, Camissonia contorta ***found only in a few seaside locations. Photo: P. Lawn***

This site is within the traditional territory of Lekwungen-speaking people represented by the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations. It is also within the traditional territory of the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, represented by the WJOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), BOḰEĆEN (Pauquachin), SṮÁUTW̱ (Tsawout), W̱SIḴEM (Tseycum) and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations.

Coastal dunes are among the harshest environments in which to make a living. Constant change is the rule of thumb as storms bring waves, sand, and debris far inland on high tides. These shifting sands make finding a foothold for plants difficult. Newly-germinated seeds must quickly extend roots through well-drained loose gravel to find a steady source of moisture to feed the young plant. Times are tough.

Witty's Beach on the Metchosin coastline of southern Vancouver Island is a marvelous example of such habitats. Overlooking the Juan de Fuca Strait, the beach is part of the larger Witty's Lagoon Regional Park, managed by Capital Regional District's Parks Department (CRD Parks). The beach is also a Key Biodiversity Area, in recognition of one of the park's prized residents: Contorted-pod Evening-primrose, *Camissonia contorta*.

The Evening-primrose is one such plant well adapted to the harsh life on sandy dunes. In Canada, the flower is found in only a few seaside locations in southern Vancouver Island and adjacent islands like James and Sidney, as well as Savary Island at the north end of the Salish Sea. In all, it is known from fewer than 10 localities in Canada.

Even in its core range of California, Contorted-pod Evening-primrose is restricted to loose, sandy soils. Not necessarily the ocean-front properties where it's known in B.C., but throughout much of California the same sandy, disturbed soils are its preferred home. This slender annual plant grows to a gangly 40 cm long from a single taproot. In B.C., it blooms in early May, a four-petalled, lemon-yellow flower dramatically set against a red stem. At first glance, it appears fragile, its toehold clinging to the shifting sands. But any plant that thrives in this environment is anything but fragile.

So, it's a tough little plant, perhaps, but not without trouble. Invasive plants, particularly Scotch Broom, are a significant threat to Contorted-pod Evening-primrose and other native species. The broom overshadows these small pioneers and brings unwelcome stability to dunes and other sandy ecosystems. Unwitting trampling by people and dogs enjoying the beaches is another major threat.

Luckily, land stewards at Witty's Beach and elsewhere are taking steps to protect the dunes and their inhabitants. The Metchosin Biodiversity Project has been a local champion for restoration of this dune habitat, and CRD Parks has installed a tasteful split-rail fence at Witty's to steer traffic away from the sensitive areas. Truckloads of invasive broom have been removed from the site, and the native plants have shown their

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appreciation.

From a mere 99 plants in 2021, more than 3200 plants were observed in May 2023. By 2025, the number dropped to 1485 after storms over the winter of 2024-25 dumped sand onto the beach, burying much of the annual seed. However, the restoration efforts have left the evening-primrose in good shape to rebound quickly.

The broom-removal work has yielded other surprises. Provincially red-listed Howell's Triteleia (*Triteleia howellii*) was discovered after broom removal with 14 plants observed in 2025. Other listed species are known from the area as well.

As a Key Biodiversity Area, Witty's Beach now has national and international recognition as a site of high conservation importance, highlighting the value of the dune ecosystem and rare species such as Contorted-pod Evening-primrose. If you visit, you are encouraged to add any bird sightings at this KBA to eBird or records of all species via iNaturalist. Just don't step on the plants!

More information on Canada's Key Biodiversity Area program is available at *https://kbacanada.org/* For more information on Witty's Beach KBA is found at *https://bit.ly/4kFKLdr*

Migration in the Storm

Submitted by Margo Hearne

Migrant birds start to arrive in Haida Gwaii in late March, and by early April, Sandhill Cranes call from the Sanctuary and robins sing from the bushes. Tree Swallows flash white and dark blue as they zip through the air. They have returned, unerringly, to the tree cavity they used last year. On the beach, insects hover over the beds of storm wrack where the shorebirds feed.

On one of our many stormy ferry trips to the mainland a few Aprils ago, a friend pointed and shouted, "Look, look! There's a tiny bird. Not a seabird!" We turned to see a Townsend's Warbler land on deck. Then another. For the rest of the crossing, thrushes, sparrows and more warblers flew alongside the ferry in the storm and wind. Some landed on the ferry and sat quietly in a corner, including a Dark-eyed Junco, the common winter feeder bird, and a bright Savannah Sparrow. Others hid behind the lockers on deck and stayed there for the rest of the journey.

It was the first time we'd seen positive proof that forest birds migrate north up Hecate Strait in spring. Presumably, they do the opposite in fall. They also migrate at night. Crew members told us about the birds that land on deck, particularly on stormy nights when visibility is poor. The ship's lights attract them and, exhausted, they stay on deck overnight. Many of these birds winter in California, Mexico, and farther south. Why do they take such dangerous journeys in possibly the stormiest time of year?

According to Cornell Labs: All About Birds 'they have a better chance of finding food and raising young. We learn for all birds, one of the principal driving forces behind migration is food scarcity. If all birds were to stay in the same tropical regions year-round, food would become scarce and breeding would be less successful. But as food sources are regenerating in the north each spring, millions of birds migrate to those areas to take advantage of the abundance.' It seems such a long shot, particularly in such rough weather when the ice might not yet be off the lakes in the northern tundra.

Shelter from the storm - Photo: M. Hearn

One year, more than 2,500 Lesser Canada Geese landed on Haida Gwaii. They were also going north and flowed down the airways to land on a local airfield. They were persistent in remaining where they were and when disturbed would move off to the ocean nearby, then ten minutes later return to where they had been before. The birds were tired and hungry, and in the wide-open field they could see all around as they fed. Geese like short grass so they can see approaching predators and once settled, will often stay settled.

When planning airports or airfields on the migratory highway, we forget that birds were there first. Their survival patterns are 'locked in' so where they fed before they will return to feed again. They know where to find food to sustain them and will stay around until either the ice is off the north or they are strong enough to continue their journey. Constant disturbance depletes their energies; they can die on arrival at their nesting grounds. The saying for pilots "Take care, we share the air" still holds, and building airport runways beside known bird use areas is not good planning on the Pacific flyway.

Naturalist's Mentor

Alan and Donna McKenzie

Submitted by Viktorija Juciūtė

Alan and Donna McKenzie have been deeply involved in the Vancouver birding community for a long time. For years, they have been leading the same area of the Vancouver Christmas Bird Count, creating an exceptionally welcoming and supportive environment for birders of all experience levels. Their leadership consistently helps new participants feel included while also engaging seasoned birders and helping build mentorship ties between the two. Each year, they host a lunch for participants in their Christmas Bird Count circle: a tradition that has become a highlight for both first-time and returning birders, and a reflection of their generosity and community spirit.

Beyond the Christmas Bird Count, they actively mentor and support younger and newer community members. Their support spans so many areas: from helping with bird identification walks to giving advice to contributing to the building and maintenance of the banding hut at Iona Beach. Alan is also known for his hands-on role in building and maintaining numerous bird boxes across the Lower Mainland.

Their sustained dedication to growing a caring, connected birding community through kindness, initiative, practical help, and encouragement has made a lasting impact. ***Thank you, Alan and Donna.***

...they actively mentor and support younger and newer community members.

What Is a Naturalist's Mentor?

A naturalist's mentor is someone who helps another person learn to truly see and understand the natural world. More than simply teaching names of species, a mentor shares the skills of careful observation, curiosity, and ecological awareness.

Mentors help others notice patterns—why a bird is found in one habitat and not another, how plants change with the seasons, or what animal tracks reveal about unseen lives. They pass on practical field skills, but also something less tangible: patience, attentiveness, and a deeper way of relating to nature.

Many naturalists trace their lifelong passion to someone who took the time to walk with them, answer questions, and encourage their interest. In BC Nature clubs, mentors are often found on field trips, quietly sharing knowledge and helping others build confidence in their own observations.

Mentorship ensures that knowledge, stewardship, and wonder are passed from one generation of naturalists to the next.

A Small BC Village's Big Impact: When KBAs and MPAP Converge

Submitted by Andrew Banks, BC Nature Project Manager, MPAP.

Photo: W. Wood

There are an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 Wolverines in British Columbia.

While these numbers suggest a relatively stable population in the province compared to other parts of Canada, they are still considered a species of "special concern" due to their low reproductive rates and vulnerability to habitat fragmentation.

It is both rewarding and exciting when BC Nature's key conservation initiatives, the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) program and the Municipal Protected Areas Project (MPAP), converge to protect the wild places we love. While each program has a distinct focus, their meeting point in the West Kootenays demonstrates that the quality of protected biodiversity is just as important as the number of hectares on a map.

KBAs are a science-based tool designed to identify the most critical wildlife habitats on Earth. These areas are selected because they support rare or threatened species, unique ecosystems, or essential natural processes. At BC Nature, our KBA team has worked to make British Columbia a national model for identifying and monitoring these high-priority sites.

Complementing this is the MPAP. This initiative is a collaborative partnership between Nature Canada, Ontario Nature, Wildlands League, the Alliance of Canadian Land Trusts, and BC Nature. The MPAP is inspired by Canada's international commitment to conserve 30% of its lands and waters by 2030 (the "30x30" commitment). Because local government protected lands are historically underreported in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD), the BC Nature MPAP team assists municipalities in assessing and registering their biodiversity-rich areas to ensure they are recognized in the national record.

Spotlight on the Village of Nakusp

The Village of Nakusp, a friendly community nestled on the shores of Upper Arrow Lake and surrounded by the Selkirk and Monashee Mountains, recently became a shining example of this convergence. With support from the MPAP, the Village of Nakusp has taken a leadership role in biodiversity conservation by contributing 92 hectares to the CPCAD.

This contribution is particularly significant because it overlaps with the Central Selkirks KBA, a region of immense ecological value for the Woodland Caribou

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(Southern Mountain population). This KBA provides a vital stronghold critical habitat for the species, supporting approximately 2% of Canada's endangered Southern Mountain Caribou population. Beyond its importance for caribou, the region serves as a sanctuary for a diverse array of other species at risk, including Grizzly Bear, Wolverine, and endangered Whitebark Pine. Furthermore, the newly registered lands encompass hot and warm springs that serve as important ecological features.

By registering their biodiverse lands in CPCAD, Nakusp has demonstrated that even a small B.C. village can make a meaningful contribution to national biodiversity targets.

The convergence of KBAs and the MPAP with the Village of Nakusp highlights that conservation value is not only always about the quantity of hectares protected, but the quality of the biodiversity preserved.

Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park: Restoration and Enhancement Efforts in 2025

Submitted by Harold Sellers, North Okanagan Naturalists Club

If you have visited Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park in Vernon since early November—or even earlier—you may have noticed new features and changes to the grasslands and riparian areas. These improvements are part of ongoing restoration and enhancement efforts led by the North Okanagan Naturalists Club (NONC) and its partners.

Since 2020, NONC has been fortunate to receive generous financial support for restoration work at Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park. Key funding partners include the North Okanagan Conservation Fund and the Greater Vernon Trails & Natural Spaces Grant, both administered by the Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO). Additional support has been provided by BC Nature and the BC Naturalists' Foundation, which was established as an endowment to assist naturalist clubs in conservation work and Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation. NONC has also contributed financially, supported by donations from club members and the community. The club is deeply grateful to all of these partners for their continued commitment to habitat restoration and conservation.

Previous restoration milestones included construction of a viewing tower and installation of an Osprey nesting pole, along with several years of native plantings. In 2025, restoration efforts continued with both infrastructure improvements and habitat enhancement.

The year began in March with installation of two stone benches along the grasslands loop trail, providing resting places for visitors. The approximately $5,000 cost of purchase, delivery, and installation was shared equally by

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The University of Victoria's Restoration of Natural Systems program offers diploma and certificate pathways designed for people who want to make a real impact. This hands-on program blends ecological theory with field-based practice, giving you the tools to restore and conserve natural systems across diverse environments.

Looking for something introductory and self-paced?

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Introduction to Biology and Natural History

This online self-study course is for people looking to gain foundational, scientifically sound, knowledge in biology and natural history.

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Now accepting applications for summer and fall. Courses can be taken individually year-round.

Offered in partnership with the School of Environmental Studies.

University of Victoria

continuingstudies.uvic.ca/ecology

Future naturalist taking full advantage of the Swan Lake Viewing Tower.

Perching Pole

RDNO and NONC, with additional support from club members.

In April, volunteers gathered for a cleanup workday to remove agricultural debris left behind from the park's past use as hay fields. Wood, metal, and plastic materials were collected and taken to the landfill, helping restore the natural landscape and improve safety for wildlife and visitors.

Planting efforts resumed on October 2, when 63 volunteers came together for a major planting day. Partners from the Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society (OSSS) collected native plants from Sagebrush Nursery near Oliver and delivered them to the park. Volunteers—including NONC members, OSSS staff, employees from Associated Environmental Inc., and students and teachers from the Awaken Inquiry Adventure Okanagan program at Fulton Secondary School—planted trees, shrubs, flowering plants, and four experimental plots of native grasses. These grass plots will be monitored to determine their success and suitability for future expansion.

This year, a deliberate decision was made not to water plantings from previous years. Although supplemental watering had been necessary during the dry conditions of 2024, the goal now is to encourage plants to establish naturally and develop drought resilience. Their survival and growth will be assessed in spring 2026.

Throughout the year, ongoing maintenance was essential. Volunteers staked young plants, installed protective guards to prevent animal damage, and controlled competing vegetation through mowing and brush cutting. This maintenance is especially important near the riparian zone, where invasive Reed Canary Grass can grow taller than an adult and overwhelm native species. A battery-operated brush cutter purchased in 2024 has proven invaluable in managing these invasive plants.

New monitoring tools were also introduced. OSSS installed four photopoint stations throughout the park, allowing visitors to take photos from fixed locations using their cell phones and upload them to the OSSS website. Over time, these images will create a visual record of vegetation growth and restoration progress, helping track long-term ecological change.

The final volunteer workday of the year took place on October 31. NONC volunteers installed eighteen bird perching poles to provide habitat for raptors and other birds, erected a tower with two bat houses, removed additional debris and old barbed wire fencing, and cleaned the viewing tower. These efforts improve habitat quality while enhancing the visitor experience.

As winter slowly turns to spring, restoration work will shift into a monitoring phase, with volunteers observing

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plant survival and planning future improvements. Additional restoration projects are anticipated in 2026, pending continued funding and community support.

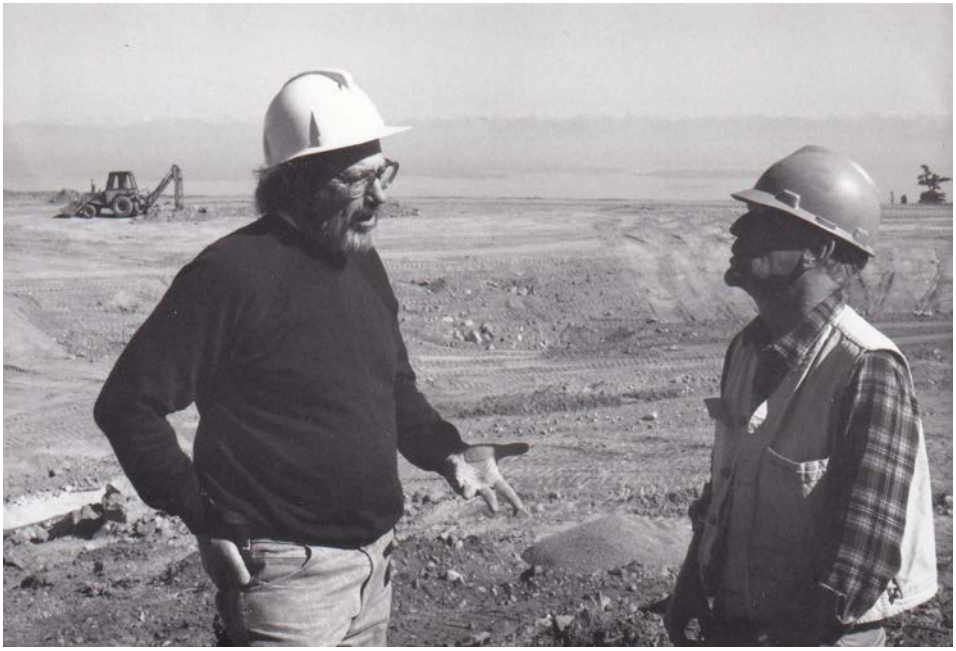
The restoration of Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park demonstrates the power of partnerships, volunteer stewardship, and sustained investment. NONC sincerely thanks the Regional District of North Okanagan, North Okanagan Conservation Fund, Greater Vernon Trails & Natural Spaces Grant, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society, BC Nature, and the BC Naturalists' Foundation for their financial and collaborative support. These combined efforts are helping restore native ecosystems and ensure Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park remains a thriving natural area for wildlife and people for generations to come.

Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park lies at the south end of Swan Lake, one of three lakes bordering the City of Vernon. Established in 2010, the park encompasses 122.7 acres (49.7 hectares) of land purchased from a local family after generations of agricultural use. Today, the park is jointly owned by the Regional District of North Okanagan and Ducks Unlimited Canada.

Father Charles Brandt North Island Research Grant for Graduate Research

Submitted by David Innes, President, Comox Valley Nature

In one lifetime, a few remarkable people have the dedication to save one river; fewer yet come to save two. Father Charles Brandt was known as the reclusive hermit priest who saved two of the Comox Valley's major rivers: the Tsolum River and the Oyster River. A founding member of the Tsolum River Restoration Society and the Oyster River Enhancement Society and a long-standing member of BC Nature, his lifelong commitment to Vancouver Islands' birds and salmonids and historic environmental causes brought him numerous environmental awards. In 1989, the Steelhead Society of BC gave the Cal Wood Conservation Award, for his work on the Tsolum River. This was all part of a lifetime dedicated to caring for the environment which culminated in 2017 with the BC Community Achievement Award.



Father Charles Brandt (left) at the remediation work site on the abandoned copper mine at Mount Washington, Oct. 2008. With permission from the Brandt Oyster River Historical Society. Link: http://bit.ly/4rNPz2O

Father Charles Brandt passed away on October 25, 2020. In his will, Father Brandt made generous gifts to the various environmental organizations in the Comox Valley and Strathcona which he had been part of since his arrival in 1964. The intent of these gifts is that beneficiaries will use the funds to perpetuate his memory by undertaking or supporting environmental causes dear to Father Brandt's heart.

Brandt set out on a spiritual quest, just as he finished his degree in ornithology at Cornell and published an early scientific article on acoustic ecology. His mentor, Thomas Merton encouraged him to go to Headquarters in 1964 to join "The Hermits of St. John the Baptist," on Vancouver Island.

Father Brandt was deeply interested in nature and conservation. He was very concerned that the North Island was being butchered and destroyed at unprecedented rates. What struck many when Brandt set out to save the Tsolum was that Brandt was not just a nature lover, or a devout person, but a scientist and priest.

The North Island was always close to Father Brandt's heart, but he often publicly decried the heavy impacts of logging and mining. A missing piece of the puzzle in defending the environmental interests of this region is the absence of hard data and environmental research. For an enduring legacy to honour Charles Brandt, Comox Valley Nature (CVN) established The Father Charles Brandt North Island Grant for Graduate Research, an annual $5000 research grant for honours or graduate-level research on environmental science projects in the North Island. The funds and grant selection are

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handled by a committee of CVN members with experience in graduate studies.

While it would be valuable to see more research carried out on the North Island, it is noteworthy that the Comox Valley already attracts researchers from a broad geographic area. Much excellent recent work of interest to CVN has been conducted here by scholars from other provinces and countries, including local students who pursue their studies outside British Columbia. Students working with Dan Strickland in Strathcona Park, for example, have come from several Canadian universities, including the University of Guelph, Trent University, Simon Fraser University, the University of Waterloo, and the University of Oregon. This represents some of the finest ornithological research currently being conducted in Canada, and Father Brandt would have been delighted to be associated with it. Last year, a local student joined the Strathcona Wilderness Institute from Mount Allison University, and another came from the University of Alberta through a Bryophyte Association scholarship, supported by a researcher at the University of Victoria.

CVN will develop its approach to handling the trust held by The Vancouver Foundation. We advertise through Biology and Earth Sciences departments across Canada, to see if we can establish a network of contacts and work with a large variety of universities. The Father Charles Brandt North Island Grant for Graduate Research offers a one-time $5,000 grant.

Comox Valley Nature welcomes all inquiries about this grant. We have currently received a large number of high-quality applications and greatly desire to allocate funding for multiple grants annually. Therefore, all donations to this programme are welcome and will be used exclusively to support much-needed conservation and restoration research on the North Island.

Donations can be made at:
https://cvnature.ca/donate/
CVN Father Brandt Memorial Committee:
brandt@cvnature.ca

Thomson Marsh Park Viewing Platform in Kelowna, B.C.

Submitted by Douglas J. Graham, Central Okanagan Naturalists' Club

The Central Okanagan Naturalists' Club (CONC) set out in 2022 to build a two-storey observation platform at Thomson Marsh Park in Kelowna, BC, an urban marsh known as one of the better birding sites in Kelowna. Swans feed in adjacent fields every spring and it is an excellent location for waterbirds and raptors. It is one of the most heavily visited parks in Kelowna, so also offered an excellent opportunity for environmental education and for boosting the name recognition of both CONC and BC Nature.

CONC submitted a Partners in Parks Grant application to the City of Kelowna on November 30, 2022 and was awarded a $20,000 grant on January 27, 2023. CONC subsequently committed $35,000 to the project from internal funds and an additional $16,000 was generously contributed to the project by an anonymous donor through BC Nature.

After designing a potential viewing platform structure, a site selection study was carried out and the preferred site within the Thomson Marsh Park boundary was selected on April 30, 2023. An archaeological study was conducted and the site was found to be acceptable.

Over the summer months of 2023 a contract was issued to conduct a structural analysis of the proposed design and produce the necessary drawings and schedules. A Riparian Rehabilitation Plan was prepared by the CONC team and accepted by the City of Kelowna. The redcedar lumber needed for the platform was

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Wildlife viewing platforms offer a wide range of ecological, economic, and socio-psychological benefits.

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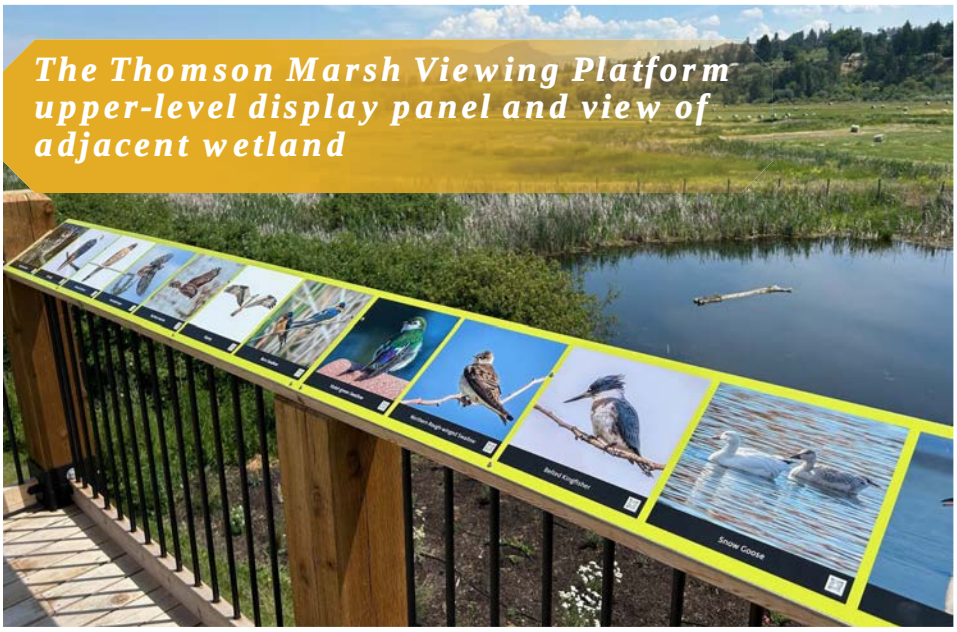

The Thomson Marsh Viewing Platform upper-level display panel and view of adjacent wetland

generously donated by Downie Timber of Revelstoke. Costs continued to rise, in particular for the expensive work needed to carry out geotechnical studies. Eventually in 2024, the City agreed to take on the responsibility for providing additional funds needed to complete the structure and to take over the management of construction, in close collaboration with CONC.

The platform was completed in June 2025 and will be owned and managed by the City of Kelowna. CONC is very grateful for the timely funds provided by the BC Nature, which were critical in putting together a funding package sufficient for the City to allow the project to go forward and to inject the needed additional funds to complete it.

Within CONC, an entire team collaborated to manage the project, the largest single investment in CONC's history. The overall manager was Mike Howard; additional team members were Archie MacDonald, Bruce Kennedy, Douglas Graham, Les Gyug, Vivian Manning, Lisa Rae, Roy Sinden, Wayne Wilson from Central Okanagan Land Trust as well as Riparian Rehabilitation volunteers Sabine Gyug, Simon Pethick, Fred Bowes, and Jen Matthews. ❁

Wildlife viewing platforms offer a wide range of ecological, economic, and socio-psychological benefits by managing human-wildlife interactions and to promote conservation, tourism, public education, and personal well-being.

Benefits for Wildlife and Conservation

***Minimizing disturbance**: Platforms help protect sensitive habitats and species by concentrating human activity in specific, well-defined locations, reducing overall impact on the surrounding ecosystem.*

***Habitat preservation**: The economic value generated by platforms (through tourism) creates strong incentives for governments and local communities to protect natural habitats, such as wetlands and forests, as valuable assets.*

***Funding for conservation**: Revenue from paid access or related tourism can provide a direct funding stream for essential conservation work, including species protection, habitat restoration, and anti-poaching efforts.*

***Facilitating research and monitoring**: Viewing platforms can serve as cost-effective, static locations for researchers to collect data on wildlife distribution and behavior, and the impacts of human behaviour, contributing to scientific papers and effective management strategies.*

***Supporting rewilding efforts**: Imaginative and well-designed viewing platforms can help generate significant finance and local stakeholder engagement for rewilding projects by offering unique, controlled viewing experiences*

BC Nature 2026 Annual General Meeting and Conference in Kamloops, B.C.

Submitted by the Kamloops Conference Committee

BC Nature's 2026 Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Conference will be hosted by the Kamloops Naturalist Club and held at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops from May 22–24, 2026.

This year's AGM will take place immediately following the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (ORCBC) Conference, which is also being hosted in Kamloops from May 20–22. Holding these events back-to-back provides an opportunity for shared participation among organizations and individuals committed to outdoor recreation, conservation, and stewardship in British Columbia. Members who attend the ORCBC conference may wish to extend their stay and take part in the BC Nature AGM and field trips.

In keeping with current organizational capacity and resources, this year's AGM will be a scaled-down conference compared to previous years. The formal components will include the Annual General Meeting and the Council of Club Representatives meeting, both offered in a hybrid format to allow participation either in person or online. In-person attendance will be limited to approximately 50 participants.

In addition to the meetings, a selection of field trips will be offered in the Kamloops area. These outings will provide opportunities to explore the region's diverse grassland, river, and upland ecosystems, and to connect with fellow naturalists in the field. Participants who wish to attend field trips only are welcome but must register in advance using the online registration form and select the "field trips only" option.

We respectfully acknowledge that Kamloops and the campus of Thompson Rivers University are located on the unceded land of Tkemlúps te Secwépemc, within Secwepemcúl'ecw, the traditional territory of the Secwépemc people. We are grateful for the opportunity to gather on these lands and to learn from and about the natural heritage they sustain.

The AGM provides an important opportunity for members and clubs to participate in governance, share knowledge, and help guide BC Nature's ongoing work in conservation, education, and stewardship. Whether attending online, in person, or in the field, we look forward to bringing together our community of naturalists in Kamloops this May.

BC NATURE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING REGISTRATION FORM

Hosted by Kamloops Naturalist Club - May 22-24, 2026

Thompson Rivers University - ***"Where the Rivers Meet"***

Online Registration: https://bcnature.org/2026-agm-kamloops/

Campus parking is free after 5:00 pm Friday and all-day Saturday and Sunday

Name:		Club:	
Address:		City:	
Postal code:	Phone:	Email:	
Participation for BC Nature Members only. Sign up with a local club or join BC Nature as a Direct member: https://bcnature.org/join-a-bc-nature-club/		**Amount**	**Amount Paid**
Full registration – all presentations, field trips, meetings and banquet		$ 150.00	
OR Saturday Only - includes breakfast and lunch		$ 60.00	
OR Field Trips only		$ 10.00	
Banquet ticket only or second banquet ticket		$ 90.00	
Saturday Banquet • Number of people attending the banquet ( ) • Vegetarian/Vegan Yes ( ) No ( )			
Payment: e-transfer to: info@naturekamloops.ca **OR** cheque to: Kamloops Naturalists Club - PO Box 625, Kamloops, B.C. V2C 5L7		**Amount due**	

Field Trip options (All Field Trips Easy)	
Friday May 22	
Field Trip 1 - Tour of Conservation Areas at Lac du Bois, Birding and Owling	Check the box for the field trip(s) of your choice ☐
Field Trip 2 – Observing Bats	☐
Saturday May 23	☐
Field Trip 3 - Restoration and Ecology of the Tranquille River Floodplain	☐
Sunday May 24	☐
Field Trip 4 - Birding Along the River's Trail	☐
Field Trip 5 - Birds and Turtles of Pineview	☐
Field Trip 6 - We Got a Park, Now What?	☐

Schedule

May 22 Friday

Check in: 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm, Campus Activity Centre, 2nd Floor Rotunda

Dinner on your own

Field Trip #1 - 7:30 pm to 10:00 pm (Or Midnight Extended Owling Option).

Field Trip #2 - 8:40 pm to 10:20 pm

May 23 Saturday

Check in: 6:30 am to 10:30 am, Campus Activity Centre, Mountain Room

Field Trip #3 - 7:00 am to 9:30 am

9:45 am to 10:15 am Light breakfast provided, Campus Activity Centre, Mountain Room

10:30 am to 12:00 pm. Council of Club Representatives meeting. Room TBA

12:15 pm to 1:15 pm: Lunch provided, Campus Activity Centre, Mountain Room

1:30 pm to 3:30 pm: Annual General Meeting, Campus Activity Centre, Mountain Room

Social: 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm Social hour. Cash bar available, Campus Activity Centre, Mountain Room

Banquet: 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Banquet and BC Nature Awards, Campus Activity Centre, Mountain

May 24 Sunday

Field Trip #4: 6:00 am to 9:00 am

Breakfast on your own.

Field Trip #5: 10:10 am to 12:15 pm

Lunch on your own.

Field Trip #4: 6:00 am to 9:00 am

Breakfast on your own.

Field Trip #5: 10:10 am to 12:15 pm

Lunch on your own.

Field Trip #6: 12:40 pm to 3:30 pm

Signed Waiver required for all participants.
https://bcnature.org/2026-agm-kamloops/

Campus parking is free after 5:00 pm Friday and all-day Saturday and Sunday

https://bcnature.org/donate/

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