

NPSG

MAY 2008



NATIVE PLANT STUDY GROUP

WILDLIFE AND TREES OF BC

Todd Manning, habitat forester wildlife ecologist, arborist, and co-author of *Wildlife and Trees of BC* (2006) helped us to answer the question “wildlife tree or firewood?” Long known as snags (and we’re not talking not new age sensitive guys!), dead or partially dead standing trees have traditionally been sought after as nicely cured firewood or considered “eyesores” that require prompt removal. However, scientists, naturalists and our provincial government have realized that these seemingly lifeless trees are, in fact, biological “hotspots” that contribute enormously to the diversity of a forest and the BC Wildlife Act has provided protection to them in some cases.

Many reasons contribute to the death of a tree but a common cause is from a wound that becomes infected with bacteria and fungi, which in turn attracts insects who encourage the softening of the heartwood, making it more easily excavated by woodpeckers. As disease and dying progress the trees provide food, nesting, roosting and denning sites and hunting perches to over seventy species of wildlife, many of which completely depend on them for some portion of their life. The larger the circumference and height of the tree, the more ecologically valuable it becomes. Mature Douglas-firs with strong, thick branches are preferred sites for bald eagle nests, larger diameter pines find favour with pileated woodpeckers and huge, hollow

cedar trees can offer den sites for bears and river otters. Characteristics of valuable wildlife trees include sizeable diameter and height, thick branches, loose bark, broken tops, heart rot and other decay. To determine if your tree is an active wildlife tree look for nests, signs of feeding (owl pellets, feathers, fur), denning holes, wood chips around base, claw marks or fur on bark, food caches or bat guano around or beneath loose bark..

Pileated woodpeckers and northern flickers are considered a keystone species (vital to the integrity of their ecological community) by their ability to create a large hole which in turn can be used by other species.

Primary cavity excavators are the birds which first excavate nest sites in a tree. In BC, these include twelve members of the woodpecker family, three nuthatch species and four species of chickadees, including our chestnut-backed chickadee. Secondary cavity users are animals which use holes left by the primary cavity excavators, such as owls, swallows, bluebirds, some ducks, falcons, squirrels, martens, fishers, clouded salamanders and bats. When primary cavity excavators cannot find suitable trees, secondary nesters are also denied suitable nest sites, which can have serious effects on the food web; their absence allows beetle and other insect species to expand rapidly.

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Open stick nesters such as osprey, bald eagles, hawks, larger owls and great blue herons require large, strong limbed trees with good branch structure; witch's broom and abandoned stick nests are often used by great horned owls and spotted owls will use a depression in the broken top of a large tree.

Douglas-fir and western larch are the two most important species for producing quality wildlife trees in BC. They are both very long-lived trees that attain large diameters. They are susceptible to heart rot which leaves them with solid bark on outside and decayed portions inside; the shell providing protection to species which use the decaying inside for food and shelter. Other species of particular value include: ponderosa pine, cottonwood, aspen, and cedars (with large hollow cavities). Because they decay quickly, often only standing twenty to thirty years, hemlocks and balsam firs are more likely to only provide short term habitat value.

Just as "no man is an island", a wildlife tree is more ecologically productive with a naturally vegetated buffer to protect the tree during storm and high wind events as well as provide a more viable environment for the wildlife that use the tree.

In the Pacific Northwest, some trees will remain standing for decades to hundreds of years after their death so careful consideration should be given before they are cut down as a "dangerous" hazard. Even after they come to their final resting place on the ground, downed logs continue to provide homes and food for smaller mammals, lizards, amphibians and insects, supply travel routes through the forest, act a "nurse" logs to young seedlings and finally contribute as nourishment to the soil.

If you are concerned about a wildlife tree for safety reasons, you can consider modifying them so that they retain some natural value. Remove the worrisome limbs or cut off the top (leave it as tall as possible) and if it is determined that the tree should be felled, leave it as a downed log rather than remove it entirely. If it is too obtrusive an eyesore, move the log into a forested area to decay.

WiTS or Wildlife Tree Stewards is a stewardship program of the Vancouver Island Region of the Federation of BC Naturalists (FBCN). The goal is to create, coordinate and assist a network of community stewards committed to conserving coastal wildlife tree habitats through volunteer monitoring, landowner agreements, and community education along the Strait of Georgia. If you are interested in their program, contact their website.

Save the firewood cutting for smaller diameter trees, they're easier to haul and chop anyways. Enjoy your wildlife trees; find a hidden spot from which you can watch the daily and seasonal wildlife dramas that unfold.

The Life Cycle of a Wildlife Tree:

- live, healthy tree provides nesting, roosting and perching opportunities
- live unhealthy tree with decay or growth deformities, provides nesting, roosting and habitat for strong primary excavators (woodpeckers, sapsuckers, nuthatches, chickadees) and nesting platforms for bald eagles, etc
- dead tree with strong heartwood, provides habitat for bats, brown creepers and insects under loose bark and in cracks
- dead tree with soft heartwood, provides homes for cavity nesters:

many birds, small mammals and amphibians

- fallen dead tree, provides territory for small mammals, insects, reptiles and amphibians; provides travel routes for small creatures; nourishes and replenishes soil

The Native Plant Study Group meets on the third Thursday of the month from Sept through May except Dec at 7 at the MacLaurin Building, UVic. Please join us. Membership fees are \$15.00 annually or a \$2.00 charge for drop-in. Check Room Schedule for new meeting locations.

For UVic events: New parking policy--pay parking is in effect 24 hours a day. You must purchase a \$2 parking permit for the evening.



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EVENTS AND OUTINGS

For information on many environmental activities in our area check the Green Diary from the EcoNews website at <http://www.earthfuture.com/greendiary/>

Check the CRD parks website for detailed information on their many programs; wear appropriate clothing for the weather and sturdy footwear for all outings: www.crd.bc.ca/parks

For all VNHS activities, please contact Agnes at 721-0634 or email her (thelynns at shaw.ca) if you need more information. No pets please. Bring a lunch and plenty to drink for the all day outings. Check the VNHS website for more details: vicnhs.bc.ca

Mon May 19 VNHS A Natural History Cycling Tour of the Galloping Goose Trail (Sooke Potholes to Leechtown) Join Rick Schortinghuis on a cycling tour into the Sooke Hills. We will enjoy the flowers, birds and scenery along the way. Meet at the Galloping Goose parking lot 2.3 km up Sooke River Road at 8:00 a.m. Bring a cool drink and a lunch. Call Rick at 652-3326 for more information. No pets please.

Sat May 24 VNHS Piers Island Exploration

This is a new adventure to a private Gulf Island just near the Swartz Bay Ferry. There should be lots of birds and wildflowers as well as beaches to explore. We will take a specially scheduled ferry over to the island at about 10 a.m. and return about 3 p.m. No pets please. You must preregister for this event. Cost is about \$10.00 for the ferry. Space on the ferry is very limited and the trip will only happen if we get a minimum of 10 people confirmed a week before the event. It is dependent on good weather, as high winds would cancel the outing. VNHS members will get preference. Contact Agnes at thelynns@shaw.ca or 721-0634 to register or for more info.

Sat May 24 CRD Parks Francis King to Thetis Lake 10-2 Here's your chance to hike two parks in one! We'll start this moderately-paced hike in Francis/King Regional Park, and then follow the Pan Handle Fire Trail to Thetis Lake Regional Park. Meet at the Nature Centre off Munn Road.

Sun, May 25, NPSG will make a trip to an area west of Shawnigan Lake where there is a natural grove of our native Rhododendron macrophyllum. We will meet at the

Helmcken Park & Ride at 10:00 a.m. to carpool. We access the area from the junction of West Shawnigan and Renfrew roads and drive along a logging road to the rhododendron site. Bring a lunch. For more info call Jean Forrest (658-5740) or Pat Johnston (595-5600).

Sat May 31 CRD Join us for a ramble 'round the lake, far from the sounds of urban traffic, with lunch at a scenic viewpoint. This little gem of a park is rich in cultural and natural history. Bring a snack and water, and wear sturdy hiking shoes. Meet in the parking lot at the end of Matheson Lake Park Rd. 10:30 - 1:30

Sun June 1 CRD Join us as we explore the tracks and traces of the plants and animals that make Coles Bay their home. Meet at the info kiosk in the parking lot off Inverness Road, off Ardmore Drive. 1:00 pm

Sat, June 7 VNHS Enjoying the Last of the Season at Eagle Heights. Visit an area northwest of Shawnigan Lake that needs protection for its unique habitat. It has interesting native grasses and other late wildflowers. Meet at Helmcken Park and Ride at 9:00 a.m. to car-pool. Approximately 5-hour outing. Contact Agnes at thelynns@shaw.ca or 721-0634 for more info.

June 11-15 The Land Conservancy: The first of four farm Conservation Holidays runs from Participants will rub elbows with esteemed farmer, author and artist Michael Ableman of Foxglove Farm on Salt Spring Island. With 20 years of experience as an organic farmer, Ableman will talk about sustainable farming techniques that can be used in your own backyard. Participants will also gain knowledge on how food makes it to the dinner plate as they will harvest and prepare the bounty from a satisfying day's work on the farm.

Other farm Conservation Holidays are offered in July and August on farms located in Victoria (Madrona Farm, July 6), on Salt Spring Island (Duck Creek July 23-25), and in the Cowichan Valley (Keating Farm, August 22- 24). For more info or to book your farm conservation holiday, please visit www.conservationholidays.ca or call 1-888-738-0533

Sun June 15 CRD Follow a naturalist through mixed woodlands to the summit of Mount Maguire. The hike is strenuous and steep in sections, so sturdy hiking shoes are a must. Meet at the info kiosk in the Anderson Cove parking lot off East Sooke Road. 11:00 - 2:00 Adults only

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Sat, June 21 VNHS Butterflies in the Duncan area
Join Derrick Marvin in looking for butterflies in the Duncan area. Meet at the Helmken Park and Ride at 9:00 a.m. to car pool. Others can meet Derrick at Somenos Marsh at 10:00 a.m. Bring a lunch and a drink; we are going to take up most of the day. Call Derrick at 250-748-8504 if you would like more info.

Sat June 21 and Sun, June 22
VNHS Victoria Butterfly Count
We are always looking for keen-eyed volunteers so get out your field guide! James Miskelly is the count coordinator; give him a call at 477-0490.

Fri June 27 and Sat June 28
Grassland Ecology and
Grass Identification Workshop
with Don Gayton at Wasa Lake
BC just north of Fort Steele in the
Southern Rocky Mountain
Trench. \$125.00 for non-members
Contact the NPSBC at
www.npsbc.org for info and registration.

Sun June 29 High Jordan River
Bogs. We plan to investigate the
area high above Jordan River.
Checking out the fascinating
bogs around Jordan Ridge will
probably take up the whole day.
Be prepared in case of cold or wet weather and bring high rubber boots (hiking boots not good enough). You must pre-register for this trip after June 1 due to transportation limitations. Guaranteed spot if you are willing to bring your high-clearance or 4-wheel drive vehicle for carpooling! We will probably meet at Helmcken Park and Ride at 8:00 a.m. to car-pool. Contact Agnes at thelynns@shaw.ca or 721-0634 to register or for more info.

Sun June 29 CRD This vigorous hike takes us from marshy lowlands to rugged rocky outcrops. Celebrate summer on top of the world or at least on the highest point on the Saanich Peninsula. Wear sturdy hiking shoes. Meet in the parking lot off Ross-Durrance Road, off Willis Point Road. 10:00 - 1:00 Adults only

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

-Every Saturday at 1:30 pm: Tour of Merve Wilkinson's Wildwood Forest, Ladysmith. Jay, 250-245-5540
www.ecoforestry.ca/WildwoodMap.htm
-The Anti-ivy League of Cadboro Bay is fighting an on-going battle. Is your warrior spirit ready to tackle the soul-sucking expanse of this pernicious weed? Contact Agnes at

721-0634 or thelynns@shaw.ca for more info.

- Hospital Rock: Contact Agnes as above

- Volunteer at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary
For further details contact Joan at 479-0211 or email
volunteer@swanlake.bc.ca.

- Beacon Hill Park Ivy Pull, Saturdays (except long weekends), 9 am-Noon southeast woods near Cook and Dallas. Bring gardening gloves. No dogs. Volunteers welcomed. Call Cornelia, 920-3556 or kacy@islandnet.com .

- Oak Bay Native Plant Garden meet every Fri. morning from 9-11, weather permitting. Corner of Beach Drive and Margate Avenue. New members welcome.

- Brighton Avenue Walkway Restoration. Removal of invasives and re-planting of native species in a Garry Oak rocky outcrop situation. Work each Sun.

9:30 - 11:30. Meet at Hampshire and Brighton, 2 blocks south of Oak Bay.

- Garlic mustard removal at Mt Doug park. Contact Judy Spearing at 472-0515 or email to jandd_spearing@shaw.ca

MEMBER NEWS

After years of dedicated service, Catherine Fryer is resigning as treasurer of the NPSG. Thank you for all your efforts in the decidedly unglamorous but necessary task of watching over our finances Catherine! Best wishes for your future endeavours.

For early members of the NPSG group, Brenda Costanzo, who chaired the group for many years, is now the Sr. Vegetation Specialist in the Ecosystems Branch (Wildlife Science Section) of the Min. of Environment.



FAWN LILY

Erythronium oregonum

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JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The COASTAL INVASIVE PLANT COMMITTEE (CIPC) is announcing a contract opportunity for the Coordinator position with the non-profit Society.

The Coordinator position with the CIPC holds many wonderful benefits and exciting challenges such as:

- Working closely with multiple diverse stakeholders from government and non-government agencies, private industry, landowners, conservation organizations and community members (we have over 600 members!)
- Expanding professional development through the attendance of numerous workshops and conferences throughout BC
- Travelling and working with different communities on Vancouver Island, Gulf Islands and parts of the Mainland Coast
- A fulfilling position; collaborating with stakeholders in the challenging field of invasive plant impacts, education and management

The CIPC continues to grow and successfully enhance invasive plant management and education in our region.

For more information and a detailed Job Announcement and Description please contact: Wendy Tyrrell at info@coastalinvasiveplants.com or 250-857-2472

SWAN LAKE NATURE SANCTUARY is seeking a Manager of Administrative and Volunteer Services at the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary. This is a full time permanent position. Competition closes on May 25, 2008. The posting can also be found on their web site - www.swanlake.bc.ca/contactus.htm

GARDENING WITHOUT PEAT

Bogs are a finite resource, that are home to a specialised community of plants and animals: sundews, butterworts, bogbeans, deer-cabbage and bunchberry, various blueberries and raspberries, amphibians and dragonflies. Plants and animals, unique to bogs and wetlands are threatened with extinction as their habitats are depleted. Plants living on the surface - such as sphagnum mosses, bog cotton and heathers - don't rot when they die because the ground is waterlogged. They form peat. Bogs carry on growing for thousands of years and are home to many rare dragonflies, butterflies and birds.

To extract peat, the bog is drained and the surface stripped of vegetation, a process which kills the bog. In addition, the records of our history, of past climates, animals, plants and our ancestors are destroyed and lost forever. Peat mining

destroys an area of bog 20 times the size of Monaco in Ireland each year.

Why damage fragile ecosystems that provide natural water filtration, house rare plants and wildlife and help mitigate global warming?

Here's what you can do:

-Buy only peat-free composts
 -Recycle garden/kitchen waste to make your own compost
 -Ask for plants grown in peat-free compost in garden centres and other
 -Support conservation groups working to save bogs.
- There are many alternatives to peat moss, some of which are cheaper (often free) and may work better. In fact, the use of peat in horticulture is almost completely unnecessary. Peat is often used as a soil improver but other materials perform better, since peat has little or no nutrient value. Wood-waste, spent mushroom compost, composted garden or green kitchen waste, leaf mold or well-rotted farmyard manure are more effective and less expensive soil enrichers. Peat is a poor mulch, tending to dry out and blow away. There are many other more suitable materials available. You



SWAMP GENTIAN *GENTIANA DOUGLASIANA*

could try chipped bark, shredded tree prunings, straw, cocoa shells (a byproduct of the chocolate industry,) spent mushroom compost, composted garden waste or leaf mold.

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As a growing medium, commercial nurseries are finding that alternatives like leaf mold compost or coir work well and are even better than peat in some circumstances. Coir (pronounced "koi'er") is the fibrous outer husk of a coconut that is used to make rope and mats. During the fiber stripping process, the pulp surrounding the coir fibers is removed as a waste material. And it is now being satisfactorily used as a replacement for peat moss. Unfortunately, coir must be transported from places like Sri Lanka and the Philippines where it is produced, so it's better to look for things that are more local.

A company in Washington State called Organix Inc. has developed another peat substitute originating in the dairy industry. It takes dairy fiber from an anaerobic digester at a dairy biogas plant and converts it into a high value peat moss substitute designed for the horticulture industry.

Plagiarized from:

www.life.ca/n118/asknlpeat.html

<http://www.ipcc.ie/index.html>

Links:

Victoria Natural History Society: www.vicnhs.bc.ca

Native Plant Society of BC: www.npsbc.org

Swan Lake Nature House : www.swanlake.bc.ca

South Van. Island Mycological Society: www.svims.ca

Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team: www.goert.ca

Please visit our lovely website: www.npsg.ca

Designed and maintained by NPSG member Valerie Elliott, co-owner of the design company iD2 (id2.ca)



ROUND-LEAVED SUNDEW *DROSERA ROTUNDIFOLIA*

NATIVE PLANT STUDY GROUP

(Sub-group of the Victoria Horticultural Society)

The NATIVE PLANT STUDY GROUP is a non-political group dedicated to learning about B.C. native plants, as wild populations and in garden settings, and to supporting conservation of native plants and their habitats. The group is guided by a volunteer steering committee. Members are encouraged to volunteer for this committee. Participation in outside events, by the group, or by individual members using the NPSG name, is dependent on approval of the steering committee or, where indicated, by the at-large membership. Activities requiring funding must receive approval by the general membership.

Chair: Angela Deering

Co-chair: Valerie Elliott

Speakers... Moralea Milne

Treasurer: Catherine Fryer

Newsletter: Moralea Milne

Plant Rescue: Todd Doherty

Field Trips: Jean Forrest

Pat Johnston

Membership: Agnes Lynn

Publicity: Valerie Elliott

Room Set-up: Pat & Wayne Robertson

Plant Raffle: Heather Pass

List-serve: Linda Beare & John Olafson

Refreshments: Pat McMahon

VHS Liaison: Heather Pass

Native Plant Study Group members are required to become members of the Victoria Horticultural Society. Fees are \$25.00/yr and help pay for insurance to cover field trips. Send \$ to Box 5081 Stn. B, Victoria, V8R 6N3

The NPSG Newsletter is written and produced by Moralea Milne