

Native Plant Study Group

Zostera marina
Photo by Dr. Jennifer Rhode Ward

March 2011

Eelgrass meadows among the world's most productive habitats

By: Anne Hansen

Nikki Wright gave a captivating presentation at the February meeting of the Native Plant Study Group. Nikki is our local Rachel Carson, and a tireless champion for the shoreline habitat that she refers to as the "salmon highway" – a vast, interconnected pathway of food and shelter for migrating fish and birds.

For more than 30 years, Nikki has focused her efforts on awareness and restoration of marine habitats. She is a passionate advocate for environmental restoration, having seen first-hand how these projects strengthen both biological and human settlements. Nikki says BC communities are "the local eyes and ears of the coast."

For the past 18 years, Nikki has been Executive Director of SeaChange Marine Conservation Society based in Brentwood Bay. She is also Co-Chair of the Seagrass Conservation Working Group, an umbrella organization of conservation groups, scientists, consultants, and public agencies working together to protect and conserve seagrass meadows in BC. She has organized community eelgrass mapping for 23 coastal conservation groups on the BC coast.

Some time ago, Nikki discovered her calling, while co-teaching high school students with a Coast Salish woman who grew up in Deep Bay. The students, from all over Canada, were part of the Leadership for Earth (LIFE) Program. They were told of a time when herring was "so thick that they looked like glass that you could walk upon," and were shown how cedar bows are put in the water, on which the fish lay their eggs. In First Nations communities, eelgrass is used for seeds, medicine, a pottery sealant, cooking, insulation, and a nurturing anchor for fish eggs.

This field trip compelled Nikki to think about "what we can do to give back to the ocean for everything she gives us." It was then that Nikki concluded that re-planting eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) in places where it historically grew seemed like a worthy project in order to boost the herring population.

Eelgrass is not seaweed; nor should it be confused with surf grass, which requires a rocky, wave-swept habitat. Eelgrass is found near the low tide line, is a bright green ribbon-like grass that produces roots, flowers, and seeds. Unlike surf grass, eelgrass has a preference for a gentle flow and a mixture of salt and fresh water. It thrives in the muddy sediments of sheltered bays along more than a quarter of BC's coast.

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Zostera marina
Photo by Kristian Peters



E elgrass meadows... continued

Eelgrass meadows are among the world's most diverse and productive habitats, and serve as a nursery for marine life, including salmon, the icon and staff of life of BC. Not only do eelgrass habitats produce oxygen, they are a vital feeding ground and protective space for fish and birds. More than 100 species of micro algae grow on eelgrass blades. These algae feed crabs, snails, and shrimp, which in turn further fuel the food chain.

Nikki described Rath Trevor Beach Provincial Park near Parksville as the "largest eelgrass habitat imaginable." Brant geese, one of the few bird species that feed directly on eelgrass, graze on the beaches of Rath Trevor and Craig Bay during their migration to and from the north. Other significant eelgrass habitats include Roberts Bank near Tsawwassen, Sidney Island in the southern Gulf Islands, southern Clayoquot Sound, and Massett Inlet on Haida Gwaii.

Closer to home, Nikki reports that there are 80 hectares of eelgrass in The Gorge and Portage Inlet, which comprises 80% of all the eelgrass in the Capital Regional District harbor.

Like Rachel eelgrass is a health. Healthy mitigate erosion action. some pollutants sediments to

Unfortunately recreational, placing The "Protecting Nikki handed eelgrass, fertilizer log booms, the shore, and

However, Nikki growing over the years.

cursed as "the stuff that gets caught in my prop," its protection now draws crowds who are eager to participate in restoration efforts.

What else can we do?

- Grow trees and shrubs to stabilize the shoreline;
- Do not use toxic household products;
- Avoid walking through eelgrass habitat; and, among other things
- Do not anchor boats in eelgrass meadows.

You can also join Alicia Donaldson, a UVic grad student, on her "Exploring the Natural History of Esquimalt Gorge Park" field trip with the Victoria Natural History Society on March 20th.

Finally, if you are a kayaker who gets inadvertently caught in an eelgrass meadow, "walk through it like you are drunk," recommends Nikki Wright, so as not to encourage a beaten path through the precious salmon highway.

To learn more about Nikki Wright and SeaChange, visit them at www.seachangelife.net.



Carson's songbirds, our good indicator of ecological stands of this species help by slowing down wave Eelgrass also helps to filter and causes suspended settle.

however, our residential, and industrial practices are eelgrass meadows at risk. Eelgrass" pamphlet that out lists other threats to including sewage and discharge, boat propellers, beachcombers trampling climate change.

is encouraged by the awareness she has seen Where eelgrass was once



Volunteer Opportunities

Brodict/Bow Park

West of Univ. Heights shopping centre
off of Cedar Hill Rd

Invasive species removal and site
restoration. Training and tools provided.

Location & Time:

Schedule and location may vary every
Mon. 10-12pm

Contact Judy Spearing | T: 250-472-0515 |

jandd_spearing@shaw.ca |

www.mountdouglasspark.ca/calendar.do

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary:

3873 Swan Lake Road, Victoria

Swan Lake has a wide range of volunteer
opportunities involving plants: nature

interpretation, gardening with native
plants, and removal of invasive plants.

Contact Robyn Burton | T: 250-479-0211
| volunteer@swanlake.bc.ca

Glendale Gardens Native Plant

Demonstration Garden:

505 Quayle Road, Saanich
Snow, rain or shine! Before coffee we
work in the Western Woods restoration
project and after coffee we work in the
native garden. Volunteers welcome.

Time:

Every Wednesday morning

Contact | T: 250-658-5740

World Fisheries Trust

How to conduct a plant survey and
establish a monitoring program
I am looking for people who could lead a
group of volunteers through a training
session on how to conduct a plant survey
and establishing a monitoring program of
the fairly recently (2007) daylighted Gorge
Creek in Esquimalt Gorge Park.
This is part of a larger community
monitoring effort that we are trying to build
around the Gorge Waterway.

Contact Alicia Donaldson | |T: 250.380.7585
| [Alicia\[at\]worldfish.org](mailto:Alicia[at]worldfish.org)



Asteroidea, Echinoidea and Zostera marina
Photo by crd.bc.ca

The Native Plant Study Group
meets on the third Thursday of
the month from September
through May at the MacLaurin
Building, UVic.

Please join us!
The NPSG gratefully
acknowledges the
support of the Restoration of
Natural Systems (RNS) program
at UVic in securing the use of
the rooms and facilities.
UVic parking policy--pay parking
is in effect 24 hours a day. You
must purchase a \$2 parking
permit for the evening.
Save yourself the trouble by
riding your bike or taking the
bus!

<http://www.bctransit.com/region/s/vic/>



Events and Outings

Friends of the Ecological Reserves –

Annual General Meeting

Friday March 25th

"From Wall Lizards to Wolverines" by Dave Fraser, UVic

This will be an insightful lecture about the biodiversity of BC, and some of the trends and thinking inside of government. It is a good opportunity to gain insight on conservation from a long time senior government biologist. All are welcome!

Location & Time:

Room C-118, David F. Strong Building, University of Victoria @ 7:30pm

Victoria Natural

History Society (VNHS)

Sunday March 27th

FIELD TRIP - Satin Flowers and Others at Juan de Fuca

For those of you who are not up to the strenuous walk up Mount Wells, this outing is another chance to see masses of satin flowers (*Olsynium douglasii*) as well as other early spring flowers without the effort. The shooting stars (*Dodecatheon hendersonii*), blue-eyed mary (*Collinsia parviflora*), spring gold (*Lomatium utriculatum*) and fawn lilies (*Erythronium oregonum*) will be starting to show. Plus it is an excellent place to check. Joy Finlay will be your guide. Sturdy boots are recommended and you might wish to bring a walking stick. Bring a snack and a drink if you wish. No pets please.

Location & Time:

1767 Old Island Highway @ 10am

Contact Agnes Lynn | T: 250 721-0634 | thelynns[at]shaw.ca

There are several other great Botany Trips through the VNHS website.

Visit <http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/calendar.html> and search for the March and April calendar.

Everyone welcome!

Land Trust Alliance of BC

Friday April 1st - Sunday April 3rd
Annual Conservation and Stewardship Seminar Series

Join BC's land trusts, naturalists, stewardship, conservation and land use organizations and agencies for this three day conference. Includes: Site visits to Madrona Farm, Island View Beach and other beautiful Victoria areas.

Full and half day workshops on: Innovative Conservation Financing, Building Sustainable Board and Governance Structures, Renowned Plenary Speakers: Story Clark and Richard Hebda, Plus 15+ Seminars on conserving, sustaining and stewarding BC's natural and cultural diversity.

Location & Time:

345 Quebec St from 930am-12pm

Contact Cassie Holcomb | T: 250 477-4766 | info@landtrustalliance.bc.ca

City of Burnaby

Saturdays, April 2nd, 9th, and 16th
'Cut It Out' Invasive Plant Workshop Series in Burnaby

The City of Burnaby is having a three part Invasive Plant Workshop series, featuring presenters from the Greater Vancouver Invasive Plant Council (GVIPC), as well as Evergreen and The Land Conservancy of BC. Learn how to ID Burnaby's top invaders, how to get rid of them and how to create an urban garden that won't "leak" into our surrounding natural areas. Space is limited, so please register early.

Registration opened Feb. 7, 2011 and these workshops do fill up so sign up soon!

Cost: \$5 per person, per workshop. Register using WebReg at: www.burnaby.ca/webreg

Location & Time:

Burnaby Village Museum & Carousel in the Discovery Room | 6501 Deer Lake Avenue from 10am-12noon

Contact: T: 604.294.7690 | [invasiveplants\[at\]burnaby.ca](mailto:invasiveplants[at]burnaby.ca)

Swan Lake

Saturday, April 16th and Sunday, April 17th

Native Plant Sale

For details and the 2011 plant list see: <http://www.swanlake.bc.ca/plant-sale.php>

Be sure to check out other events that are going on at Swan Lake this spring by visiting www.swanlake.bc.ca

For all VNHS events: No pets please. Bring a lunch and drinks for the all-day outings. Wear appropriate attire and footwear.

Contact Agnes | 250-721-0634 | [thelynns\(at\)shaw.ca](mailto:thelynns(at)shaw.ca) | www.vicnhs.bc.ca



Reoccurring

Events

Victoria Natural
History Society
Botany Night
3rd Tuesday of each
month
Go to www.vicnhs.bc.ca
to become a member
and support our local
Natural History Society!

Location & Time

Swan Lake Nature
Centre at 7:30pm

Contact| Adolf Ceska |
aceska(at)telus.net |
<http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca>

Rithet's Bog
Conservation
Society

Work Parties
1st Sunday of each
month

Everyone is welcome at
our monthly work parties
as described on our
website.

The Rithets Bog
Conservation Society is
asking the nature loving
public to show their
tangible support for the
bog by purchasing a \$10
tax deductible annual
membership.

Location & Time

Work parties are between
1pm-3pm, but meeting
site varies, depending on
the work we are
undertaking.

Contact Karen Towne |
ktowne[at]telus.net

Or

Russ Pym |
rpym[at]shaw.ca |
www.rithetsbog.org

Native Plant Nurseries in Victoria

Cannor Nurseries 4660 Elk Lake Drive 250-658-5415 www.cannor.com	GardenWorks- Colwood 1859 Island Highway 250-478-2078 www.gardenworks.ca
GardenWorks- Saanich 4290 Blenkinsop Rd 250-721-2140 www.gardenworks.ca	Island View Nursery (wholesale) 2933 McIntyre Road 250-544-4802
Lochside Nursery Lochside Drive 250-544-3100 www.csl.ca/lochside.html	Marigold Nurseries 7874 Lochside Drive 250-652-2342 www.marigoldnurseries.com
Thousand Summers Environmental Design 250-727-0229 thousandsummers@shaw.ca	Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary 250-479-0211 www.swanlake.bc.ca
Nature's Garden Seed Co. Victoria, BC V8P 5S2 250-595-2062 www.naturesgardenseed.com	Russell Nursery 1370 Wain Road 250-656-0384 www.russellnursery.com

Nursery information found at:
<http://www.goert.ca>

Collinsia parviflora
Photo by www.sfu.ca





Do you have something you would like to see in the NPSG Newsletter?

Please send submissions to Ilana Kronick at [ilanakronick\[at\]yahoo.com](mailto:ilanakronick[at]yahoo.com) no later than the second Thursday of each month.

What's going on next month?

Our members will be presenting to the group next month!

Agnes Lynn will make a presentation to the group about local wildflowers and then Jenny Suttan will teach us how to turn our lawns into a native garden!

If you have a good idea for a presentation, come to the meeting prepared to present! We'd love to hear what you have to say.



Castilleja thompsonii
Photo by Doug Skilton



Gentiana calycosa
Photo by Virginia Skilton

NATIVE PLANT STUDY GROUP (NPSG)

(Sub-group of the registered non-profit Native Plant Society of British Columbia and is guided by a steering committee)

The NPSG 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. 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.

Co-Chair	Valerie Elliott co-chair@npsg.ca
Co-Chair:	Nathalie Dechaine co-chair@npsg.ca
Speakers:	Hilary Stead
Treasurer:	Joan Varley
Newsletter:	Ilana Kronick Hilary Stead
Plant Salvage Coordinator:	Todd Doherty
Membership:	Agnes Lynn
Publicity:	Valerie Elliott
Room Set-up:	Pat & Wayne Robertson
Plant Draw:	Heather Pass
List-serve:	Linda Beare & John Olafson
Refreshments:	Pat McMahon
Archivist:	Brenda Pilon
Sustain Supporters Liaise:	Christine Nykiforuk
NPSBC Liaise:	Moralea Milne

Native Plant Study Group members are members of the Native Plant Society of BC.